

Report on the Workshop: Critical Approaches to Militarisation and Space

The workshop “Critical Approaches to Militarisation and Space “ took place on 20th and 21st March 2024 in Leipzig and was organised by the Institute for Regional Geography (IfL) and our EEGA Research Affiliate Bettina Bruns (RA 1) in cooperation with Kathrin Hörschelmann of the University of Bonn and Linda Ruppert of Freiburg University.

The first day started with coffee, a warm welcome by the three organisers and a round of introductions where the participants got to know each other by presenting the person seated next to them, their research interests and a fun fact about them.

The first Paper Session was initiated by a thought-provoking presentation by Elena Racheva (University of Oxford) on the relations between war veterans, the Russian state, and society. She explained how the state narratives about Russian veterans shifted from criminals to defenders of the homeland and how this patriotic instrumentalization fuelled the narrative of a ‘never-ending war’ as well as school-based educational approaches, however not the veterans’ quality of life.

Linda Hart (Laurea University of Applied Sciences, Finland) followed, speaking about “Infrastructures of Sustenance in Civilian Preparedness Training for Women in Finland”. The insightful talk on how these material infrastructures and preparations enhance civic social skills sparked a lively very exchange on materiality and its consequences for civic culture.

Hana Cervinkova (Maynooth University, Ireland) who reflected on Militarization and Cultural Intimacy in Post-Socialist rounded up the first session by recounting her fieldwork in Czechian military bases in the early 2000s. This made her realize that post-socialist Czech military officials were melancholically hanging on the material and non-material past of their work life, while on contemporary Czechia was overcoming post-socialism by high-speed militarization of politics, society and culture to become part of the West.

A rich and delicious vegan lunch by Vleischerei (vegan butcher) strengthened the participants’ forces to get back to Paper Session 2.

Uszula Markowska-Manista (University of Warsaw) presented her substantial work on the practices of the militarisation of childhoods as well as young people’s voices from Ukraine and Poland, showing an extensive collection of how Ukrainian children expressed their wartime experiences creatively. She also spoke about how “Difficult Knowledge” is being taught in Polish schools to familiarize children with these topics, prepare them for eventualities and prevent insecurities in their knowledge.

Håvard Bækken (Norwegian Institute for Defence Studies, Oslo) shared his insights on Military Patriotic Education in occupied Ukraine, explaining how militarizing patriotism in Russia started already in the pre-Putin era with the Great Patriotic War, but intensified over the last two decades with Putin’s conservative turn, merging past wars and the full-scale invasion of Ukraine to one ‘continuous’ war. As part of Russia’s border expansion strategy, this Russification of the youth especially can now also be seen in Russian-occupied Donbas where letters to Russian soldiers show the St.-George-Z and resemble replicates of World War II propaganda.

Victoria M. Basham (University of Cardiff) concluded the second Paper Session with an interesting talk on inter-generational injustice and war preparedness, presenting three ideas for spatio-temporal research projects. She focused on diverging military compensations that result in social disparities and hierarchies, the implications of intergenerational memory and trauma for the preparedness for war, as well as ecological implications of warfare for future generations.

Each of the presentations of Paper Session 2 sparked lively debates and queries, which were continued during a coffee break, before Timothy Williams (Bundeswehr University München) reflected upon the first day. He identified four interconnecting elements that could be found in all of the six presentations. Firstly, cultural contexts are of importance when it comes to where militarization happens. Secondly,

agents and their agency are relevant for discussing whose perspectives are being thought of as well as their intergenerational impact. Thirdly, narratives and the roles that are attributed to actors cannot be lost out of sight in the context of militarization when speaking about responsibility and copability. And lastly, militarization happens in social spaces e.g., in post-socialist spaces, in the context of patriotism, regarding in- and outgroups as well as within threat constructions.

A successful and thought-provoking first day was rounded off at Restaurant Alex with interesting conversations and inspiring debates.

The second day was initiated by Linda Ruppert (Freiburg University) who presented her research on the geopolitics of technological futures, investigating warfare technologies and future battlefields that are being discussed in German security debates. She argued that shifting geopolitical imaginaries including AI and Hyperwar imply technological changes which in turn effect normative visions and leitmotifs of future warfare as well as socio-technological realities on the battlefields.

After an engaging debate on the future of warfare, as in where battlefields will be located and what type of combatants will be involved in the war, we reached the last but not the least presentation of the day. Katharine Hall (University of London) presented her archival research on British Drone Experiments in Iraq in the Interwar period, shaping militarism and future weapons testing in the UK. By thinking through the experimental, she seeks to explain the geographies of laboratories, the persistent narratives and the relationship between science and warfare.

The closing discussion of the day was led by Frank Stengel (Kiel University) who summarised the two-day workshop with his impressions on ethical aspects of and critical approaches to researching militarisation and space. While the presentations differed in terms of conceptualizing "militarisation" as well as in the prevalence of ethical and normative issues, all speakers stressed the importance of Spatio-temporality, as in the historic origins, the future implications and the intergenerational relations of militarisation. Moreover, the participants realized the importance of materiality, be it in civilian preparedness for war in Finland, educational adaptations in Poland and Ukraine or technological warfare innovations in the UK, Germany and the Czech Republic.

The workshop has been informative, inspiring and nurturing and can be deemed a success: connections have been established and strengthened, plans for a Special Issue with reflections on the workshop's results have been made and future meetings have been planned.

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