

Producing evidence, narrating violence: translating genocides and their remembrance

The global mediatization of events dealing with the aftermath of exterminatory mass violence has – at least in some parts of the world and mainly since Adolf Eichmann’s trial in Jerusalem in 1961 – taken on an unprecedented pace. New media technologies play a prominent role in this process. This observation aligns with an ongoing trend, which has many different causes and motives, making the horrors of past and present state violence subject to various political, legal, scientific, and aesthetic articulations and interventions. A huge number of emerging institutionalized practices constitute a powerful response to past genocidal and mass violence and, at the same time, produce new kinds of evidence.

In the practical field of dealing with mass atrocities as well as in contemporary genocide studies several kinds of experts have elaborated protocols for different forms of evidence such as survivor witness, expert witness, narrative testimony, documentary and visual testimony, forensic evidence, and mass grave analyses in order to establish and produce increasingly more robust evidence. This evidence has become so ubiquitous that it shapes the historical consciousness of different populations. Although aesthetic representations like images or literature are powerful tools in coming to terms with the past, solid facts are often perceived as the strongest device to pave the way for better futures, where different modes of interpretation of political and social constellations are respected while the protection of universal human rights and individual human dignity are guaranteed at the same time.

The project seeks to investigate how evidences are produced, used and communicated in different settings. The role of technologies and mediatizations are of particular interest here. At the same time, the study examines how original sites are represented and contextualized, and how narratives merge with different forms of evidence, political and legal claims, historical interpretations, art history and visions for the future. In this way, the it aims at exploring how these practices and technologies constitute acts of translation that transform the meanings of past violence and, thus, become productive for the design of futures. We consider the presenting of evidence to be inseparable from developing a narrative plot, as vice-versa narratives of the past always implicate the generation of evidence. This, in turn, necessarily leads to the making of specific futures. Thus, the project claim that evidentiary practices are located in techno-scientific infrastructures, storytelling and legal and political parameters.

On a general level, the work program deals with the question of how the production of evidence of genocidal and mass violence as well as the hope for a better future relate to each other. It attempts to analyze the strategies utilized to transform testimonies, forensic findings and historiography into strong narratives and, subsequently, into strategies of future making. Distinguished parts of the study will engage with the production and communication of evidence and narratives associated with genocidal and mass violence, offering answers to questions such as: How is evidence produced in forensic and juridical procedures? How are works of art translated into and disseminated as evidence? What kind of infrastructures are established and used in these procedures? How is the relation between memory and evidence of concrete instances of genocidal and mass violence established and how is this related to the global circulation of models for dealing with atrocities? What are the analytical frameworks and/or approaches that underpin and inform the assumption that strong evidence of past atrocities prevents future atrocities?