

Zeitschrift: Traverse : Zeitschrift für Geschichte = Revue d'histoire
Herausgeber: [s.n.]
Band: 16 (2009)
Heft: 1

Buchbesprechung: Rationalitäten der Gewalt : Staatliche Neuordnungen vom 19. bis zum 21. Jahrhundert [Susanne Krasmann, Jürgen Martschukat]

Autor: Winter, Yves

Nutzungsbedingungen

Die ETH-Bibliothek ist die Anbieterin der digitalisierten Zeitschriften auf E-Periodica. Sie besitzt keine Urheberrechte an den Zeitschriften und ist nicht verantwortlich für deren Inhalte. Die Rechte liegen in der Regel bei den Herausgebern beziehungsweise den externen Rechteinhabern. Das Veröffentlichen von Bildern in Print- und Online-Publikationen sowie auf Social Media-Kanälen oder Webseiten ist nur mit vorheriger Genehmigung der Rechteinhaber erlaubt. [Mehr erfahren](#)

Conditions d'utilisation

L'ETH Library est le fournisseur des revues numérisées. Elle ne détient aucun droit d'auteur sur les revues et n'est pas responsable de leur contenu. En règle générale, les droits sont détenus par les éditeurs ou les détenteurs de droits externes. La reproduction d'images dans des publications imprimées ou en ligne ainsi que sur des canaux de médias sociaux ou des sites web n'est autorisée qu'avec l'accord préalable des détenteurs des droits. [En savoir plus](#)

Terms of use

The ETH Library is the provider of the digitised journals. It does not own any copyrights to the journals and is not responsible for their content. The rights usually lie with the publishers or the external rights holders. Publishing images in print and online publications, as well as on social media channels or websites, is only permitted with the prior consent of the rights holders. [Find out more](#)

Download PDF: 04.04.2026

ETH-Bibliothek Zürich, E-Periodica, <https://www.e-periodica.ch>

die Zukunft ausrichtet, wird in der permanenten Ausnahme der *Policey* verstetigt. Die Ausnahme ist damit ein Ort der Normenbildung und Teil der Verschiebung des politischen Terrains. Wie auch Michaela Hokamp in ihrem Beitrag aufzeigt, erlaube gerade die öffentliche Formlosigkeit politischer Macht jenseits der tradierten Rituale solche Transformationen.

Die Texte von Andreas Eckert und Gadi Algazi fügen der politisch-institutionellen Lesart des Ausnahmezustandes und seiner Transformationsmacht eine weitere aufschlussreiche Facette hinzu. Mehr als die anderen Beiträge fokussieren sie auf entgrenzte politische Gewalt als Teil eines spezifisch kolonialen Machttypus. Andreas Eckert erinnert daran, dass der britische Kolonialismus in Kenia das Arsenal staatlicher Gewalt und die Aufhebung der Grundrechte bis zum Exzess praktizierte. Diese Exzesse gehörten zu einer Ökonomie der kolonialen Macht, die keine Mittel und Ressourcen hat, um im gesamten Territorium präsent zu sein, und deshalb auf Informalität und strategische Gewalt als Teil ihrer selbst setzte. Gadi Algazi wählt ebenfalls den Kolonialismus als Rahmen. Ihr geht es allerdings nicht um das koloniale Afrika, sondern um die politische Machtform, die hinter der Verstetigung des israelischen Ausnahmezustandes seit 1948 liege. Das Selbstverständnis, eine *colonial frontier* zu bilden, führe zu der Weigerung, territoriale und normative Grenzen eindeutig zu definieren und die Einschränkung des Rechts gelten zu lassen. Die konflikthafte Anbindung an die Siedler als ausgelagerter aber instrumenteller Teil dieser kolonialen Formation mache die Fragmentierung und Auslagerung von Kontrollpraktiken zum Herzen einer niemals einheitlichen politischen Maschine. Gerade die Willkür, die an den mittlerweile 546 Strassensperren, Pforten und Checkpoints walte, sei Teil einer Kontrolle, die nicht mehr die Verantwortung für ihre

Folgen übernehmen muss. Es handele sich, so der spekulative Ausblick, vielleicht um eine neue territoriale Macht, die mehr mit *containment* als mit Regierung zu tun hat.

Insgesamt ist die thematische Vielfalt der Texte diese Bands bereichernd und aufschlussreich. Die Untersuchung historischer Präzedenzfälle sowie die Analyse unterschiedlichster politischer und kultureller Kontexte zeigen auf, dass Ausnahme und Gewalt Teil der modernen Normalität ist, die eine Herausforderung für die historische und soziologische Analyse bedeutet. An dieser Normalität lässt sich etwas über die Machtformen und ihre möglichen politischen Kontrollen lernen. Das Anliegen dieses Bands, den Ausnahmezustand nicht in erster Linie als rechtliche Konstruktion zu begreifen, ist in diesem Sinn erhellend – aber sie enthält auch die Aufgabe, den Anschluss an die schon bestehenden Debatten zu politischer Gewalt und Macht deutlicher zu suchen. Dieser Umstand wurde sicherlich nicht ausreichend reflektiert. Davon unabhängig lassen sich die Beiträge mit Gewinn lesen.

Ute Tellmann (Basel)

**Susanne Krasmann,
Jürgen Martschukat (Hg.)
Rationalitäten der Gewalt
Staatliche Neuordnungen
vom 19. bis zum 21. Jahrhundert**

Transcript, Bielefeld 2008, 294 S., € 26,80

One of the legacies of the Enlightenment in modern political and legal theory is the common view that violence and reason are categorically opposed. Thus, violence is customarily associated with the passions and contrasted with reasoned debate and public discourse. The volume under review contests this premise in its very title: *Rationalities of Violence. Reorganizations of the State from the 19th to the*

21st Century. By casting this collection as an inquiry into *rationalities* of violence, Susanne Krasman and Jürgen Martschukat argue that the analysis of state violence ought not to remain on the level of diagnosing pathologies, but should instead investigate violence as functional for and constitutive of political order. Reasoning from an explicitly Foucauldian perspective, the editors suggest that political order cannot be presumed as given, but instead is continuously produced by everyday practices, including mechanisms of violence. Thus, the volume asks what kinds of rationalities are entangled with practices and representations of state violence.

The assembled essays explore a wide range of formations of state violence: legal violence, torture, imperial violence, sexual and gendered violence, the death penalty, homeland security and counterterrorism, the visualization of violence and warfare in film and media. One of the strengths of this book is its multi-disciplinary perspective. The contributors include philosophers, literary scholars, historians, sociologists, anthropologists, and political scientists.

Judith Butler's contribution investigates the violence of the law through a close reading of Walter Benjamin's *Critique of Violence*. She argues that positive law cannot serve as a ground for a critique of violence, and that a genuine critique needs to distance itself from juridical discourse and from the kind of legal subject the law produces. Butler's Benjaminian suspension of the law is tacitly presupposed by the other essays to the volume, which is why it is fitting that her careful philosophical analysis inaugurate the book. From a different angle, Andrew Neal explores the suspension of the law in a Foucauldian interpretation of Guantánamo and the state of exception. Neal contends that Guantánamo exhibits a regime of disciplinary power imbued with archaic and revitalized forms of spectacular sovereign power.

The exception is also the starting point for Susanne Krasmann's article on recent attempts to legitimize torture. Even though arguments for the legitimacy of torture are usually articulated in terms of a logic of an exception, Krasmann suggests that the often-cited theorists of the exception, Carl Schmitt and Giorgio Agamben, offer only partially adequate explanations of this discourse. She makes a compelling case that contemporary torture is not a sovereign act that momentarily suspends the law, but a radical erosion of the principles of the rule of law in the name of a rationality of security. The link between practices of torture and imperial warfare has a long and complex history that is often ignored in contemporary debates. Frank Schumacher provides a much-needed historical perspective on this debate, in his insightful essay on the use of torture in the Philippine-American War of 1899–1902. The political rationalities of colonial and imperial violence are also the focus of Christian Geulen's contribution. He investigates the social Darwinist discourse about race in German East Africa as biopolitical rationality and technology of government and points to some structural continuities in contemporary political discourses.

Ruth Stanley and Anja Feth examine the representation of sexualized violence in the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina in the mid-1990s. Part of the growing literature that looks critically at how feminist arguments are used to legitimize wars and military interventions, the essay effectively contests conventional views that regard the media focus on rape in ethnic wars as a success and a vindication of feminist struggles. The co-authors contend that the media representation of sexualized violence is a standard topos of war propaganda and reproduces dominant organizations of gender by reinforcing the stereotypical representation of women as needing protection by men.

Günter Riederer and Sven Kramer both approach the question of violence through the medium of film. Riederer's essay investigates the visualization of warfare and the production of images of war through a reading of Harun Farocki's film *War at a Distance [Erkennen und Verfolgen]*. Sven Kramer interprets David Cronenberg's *A History of Violence* within the framework of US discourses on homeland security. Both Kramer and Riederer's thoughtful and provocative essays are among the highlights of this volume.

Alf Lüdtke discusses the violence of the state through a series of theoretical vignettes structured around the love of the state. The relation of citizens to the state is also at the center of Klaus Weinhauer's article, which carefully examines counter-terrorist practices and discourses in Germany during the 1970s. Chronicling the media perceptions of the state's counter-terrorism activities, Weinhauer shows how the Orwellian surveillance and policing practices encountered a limit of legitimacy and credibility, opening the possibility for critical social movements.

The death penalty in the United States is the theme of Jürgen Martschukat's and David Garland's articles. Martschukat intervenes in the debate on the racial dimensions of the death penalty and investigates the relation between lynchings of alleged criminals by the mob and the organization of capital punishment by the state around 1900. He argues persuasively that, while violence remained the instrument through which racial boundaries were marked and reproduced, the rationality of capital punishment relies in the methodical, neat, orderly, and supposedly painless form of killing, quite unlike the bloodthirsty spectacles of lynchings. This difference is also at the heart of David Garland's essay, which turns to theoretical explanations for the death penalty in the US. Critically probing the Foucauldian account, according

to which capital punishment represents an archaic holdover from a pre-modern rationality of sovereign power, Garland contends that the emphasis on spectacularity fails to capture the ways in which juridically organized, highly institutionalized, and meticulously managed killing works to mask and conceal its operations.

While most of the articles in this volume are interesting and engaging, as is to be expected in a collection of essays, not all redeem the editors' promise of thinking through *rationalities* of violence. Thus, the book only partially succeeds in delivering on the claim that formations of violence are *constitutive* of the modern state and the political order it guarantees. This shortfall, however, is more than offset by the insightful contributions. They span an impressive breadth and diversity of themes and approaches. There are two obvious drawbacks to this breadth of coverage. First, despite the editor's insistence on examining rationalities of violence in their historical specificity, the book might disappoint those who expect historical coherence. In this respect, the historical gesture of the subtitle may mislead. Second, even though some of the essays briefly venture outside the Euro-Atlantic space, the volume focuses almost exclusively on Germany and the United States. This geographical limitation is not surprising, given how such volumes usually come about (in this case, the book is the result of an interdisciplinary conference in Hamburg). However, the reader is left to wonder how an inquiry into the rationalities of violence of postcolonial states would have inflected the book's arch. Despite these misgivings, the vast majority of articles are provocative, thoughtful, and accessible to a multi-disciplinary audience, which makes this a highly engaging book that is exceptionally pertinent to the contemporary political conjuncture.

Yves Winter (Berkeley)