

Rethinking Aftermath Studies: Conceptualizations, Terminologies, and Realities of the Holocaust

Is the Holocaust a history without end, i.e. an event that has never stopped developing consequences, as Claude Lanzmann suggests in his cinematic masterpiece *Shoah*? If we agree with Lanzmann that we are still implicated in the situation that brought this radical event about, we need to rethink existing descriptive categories of the Holocaust and its aftermath. The way we conceptualize and define an event has consequences for empirical research and the writing of history. Our understanding of an event also influences what we remember of it as well as how we remember it. It seems that the engagement of survivors, survivor scholars and representatives of the survivor communities with the “negative radicality” (Dan Diner) of the Shoah and the Nazi crimes is specific in that for them the past is not past but forever present. According to Imre Kertész, “the Holocaust recedes ever more into distance, into history, the more memorials to it we construct.... The unbearable burden of the Holocaust has over time given rise to forms of language that appear to talk about the Holocaust, while never touching the reality of it.

The papers of the panel will address fundamental differences of perspective on the Holocaust and its consequences, focusing in particular on the validity of established conceptualizations. Presenting cases studies from Poland, Germany, and the Netherlands, the papers are guided by the over-arching question of whether there can be an aftermath of the Holocaust if we conceptualize it as an event without end.