

Making Moral Citizens – Democracy, Maturity and Authority in Postwar Western Europe

Veranstalter: Sonja Levsen, University of Freiburg/ Breisgau; Till van Rahden, University of Montreal

Datum, Ort: 10.05.2012–11.05.2012, Freiburg im Breisgau

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After the experience of World War II, genocide and the collapse of states, the post-war years were an age of anxieties over how best to raise future citizens. Such fears coalesced in a widespread „moral panic“ regarding the youth in many Western European States. In the process of rebuilding the European nations, „youth“ became a symbol for hopes and fears. Numerous activities were undertaken both on public and private levels to ensure or restore political, social and cultural order. If and how this process could be described as the emergence of democratic cultures or merely as an expression of re-emerging authoritarian tendencies, was the subject of the international conference „Making Moral Citizens – Democracy, Maturity and Authority in Postwar Western Europe“ which took place on May, 10th–11th 2012 at the Freiburg Institute for Advanced Studies (FRIAS). It was organized by Sonja Levsen (Freiburg) and Till van Rahden (Montreal).

The fact that Western Europe's post-war period was a time of moral diversity, of contradictory values, and competing discourses on citizenship was outlined by the composition of the first panel „*Making Citizens in War and Peace*“. Whereas the discourse on youth seemed to be marked by moral concerns in many national contexts, RICHARD IVAN JOBS (Forest Grove) presented a more optimistic picture in his discussion of European debates on the benefits of youth travel and hostelling for international understanding. Adults promoting youth mobility in the post-war era emphasized the role of young people as ambassadors for democracy and European unity, herewith endowing them

with sometimes idealized expectations. The personal encounters on the individual level had, according to Jobs, wider implications: Youth mobility and hostelling were regarded as a means of fostering West European integration, including the inclusion of Western Germany in the European community of democratic states. In contrast to this mission of the post-war youth as peacemakers, the paper of LUDIVINE BANTIGNY (Rouen) argued that in France of the 1950s and 1960s a different, patriotically and martially charged myth of youth prevailed. This was promoted by the French Army during the Algerian War through the training of soldiers and initiation rites. The „manly education“ of the draftees aimed at fostering loyalty to the French nation that corresponded with practices of exclusion on the basis of ethnicity. Through the (psychological) preparation and the extreme experiences of the Algerian war, young soldiers of the „generation Algeria“ were equipped with a concept of citizenship that contradicted the republican understanding of citizenship.

The second panel „*Teenagers into Citizens – Visions and Measures in Postwar Europe*“ focused on discourses and practices in the civic education of youngsters, in which struggles over the meaning of morality, delinquency, and society were central. LOUISE JACKSON (Edinburgh) specified the relation between private, in most cases paternal, authority and state authority in post-war Britain. Jackson used the term „policing“ to describe a broad range of strategies that created a regulatory complex including different contexts like family, community, citizenship and morality. In Britain the debates on juvenile delinquency and moral decline triggered a plethora of Christian „moral welfare“ initiatives from 1945 onwards. Their inability to adapt to cultural change and a new „climate of permissiveness“ which emphasised self-realisation, individual freedom and choice undermined Christian influence in the sixties.

EFI AVDELA (Crete) explored Greek discussions on youth delinquency as an example for the „international moral panic about youth“ in post-war Europe. According to Avdela, „youth“ served as a metaphor for national regeneration in Greece after the war. The transformation of potentially anti-social

minors into useful members of society became a major concern for all political stakeholders in post-war Greece and led to a range of practical measures for the moral rehabilitation of the young. The following paper by CHRISTINE KRÜGER (Oldenburg/Freiburg) treated an example for such a practical initiative for civil education in Western Germany. She emphasized that until the mid-1960s, youth community services such as the Year of Voluntary Social Work („Freiwilliges Soziales Jahr“) were promoted as a remedy against moral decline and as a means of fostering the values of „service“ and „sacrifice“. Krüger showed how the concept of volunteering and the meanings connected to it changed in the 1960s, when democracy came to be emphasized as one of the main learning objectives of youth community services, representing a core value of Western Germany in contrast to the undemocratic East.

Subsequently, the outcomes of the first two panels were critically taken up by two commentators. MARTIN CONWAY (Oxford) summarized the specificities of post-war European discourses on democracy, maturity and authority and highlighted open questions to be discussed. In particular, Conway recommended a focus on the question whether the discourses were a common phenomenon in Western Europe or in how far they were marked by national specificities, traditions and war experiences. MICHAEL GEYER (Chicago), pointed out that in order to understand the contradictory discourses on democracy, maturity and authority of the post-war years it might be useful to take into account continuities from the first half of the twentieth century, instead of viewing 1945 as a „Zero Hour“. In fact, the post-war years were not only a period of peace and democratization, but also a time of continuing violence and suppression, of „hot“ and Cold War and of strong public anxieties.

The second day explored the different negotiation processes of maturity, citizenship and the ideal of the democratic nation state in different European and also colonial contexts. TILL KÖSSLER (Bochum) juxtaposed the two concepts of intelligence and aptitude (‘Intelligenz’ and ‘Begabung’) and underlined their importance as paradigms for larger debates

not only over the establishment of a new rational democratic order in West Germany after National Socialism but also more generally on social justice and social order in the early years of the Federal Republic. By refusing older concepts of intelligence which reduced intelligence to questions of work performance, educational and psychological experts in the 1950s began to emphasize emotional and social notions of intelligence like creativity and independent thinking. This development, however, increased the demands on parents, teachers and the educational system as a whole as claims for a better education and a more scientific approach were raised.

DANIELLE DORON (Hamilton) shed light on the heated debates on how to rehabilitate Jewish children and youths after World War II and the Shoah on the one hand and rebuilding the French nation on the other hand. Child welfare experts throughout Europe firmly rooted the psychological reconstruction of war-damaged children in national identity. In France, however, the debate boiled down to the question which nation would be most therapeutic to troubled youth. In housing all unfortunate French children together, regardless of religion or race, non-Jewish professionals saw a prerequisite for reconstructing a national identity which included Jewish children and youth. In contrast Jewish child welfare experts and organizations insisted on the particularity of the recent past and present. Placing the children in Jewish settings would therefore help to treat them and heal their wounds.

MARC DEPAEPE (Leuven) discussed the role and education of the so-called *évolués* during the colonial and postcolonial era in Congo. Colonial administrators used the French term „*évolué*“ to describe native Africans who had „evolved“, through education and/or assimilation, and embraced European values and patterns of behavior. Depaepe underlined the ambiguity of this concept. Rather than fostering autonomy or even inducing processes of emancipation, Belgian administrators tried to keep the native middle class in a „distant nearness“ concentrating on moralization and evangelization instead of knowledge acquisition and independence. In this context especially catholic mis-

sions played a leading role while initiatives for higher education, like the University of Lovanium (Léopoldville), fizzled out or had only weak effects for the Congolese population.

During the final debate Michael Geyer and Martin Conway reminded the audience how diverse and contested concepts of democracy and practices of democratization were in postwar Western Europe. While Geyer saw the postwar years as a period of individual self-assertion through meritocracy, he emphasized that historical research should clarify what kind of „progression“ from 1920/30s to 1970s there was. The crucial issue in this context remains the changing relationship between inclusive and exclusive aspects of postwar democracies. In his concluding remarks to the conference Geyer underlined that the process of Enlightenment always implies its alternative. Martin Conway stressed this rather „dark side of democracy“ in his comments. Drawing on the findings of the papers he emphasized that the search for democracy in twentieth century Europe should not be mistaken for a linear, let alone teleological process of liberalization that led to ever greater individual liberty. Democracy often implied exclusive, repressive and authoritarian aspects. Moreover, initiatives to promote democracy or to restore authority were not undertaken by the state alone, but there existed a multiplicity of coalitions between public and private institutions, such as churches, welfare organizations, scientific experts and educational professionals. The insightful papers and stimulating discussions showed that a micro-perspective on educational policies and moral concerns in the postwar societies helps to shed light on these entanglements of authoritarian control between the private and the public sphere as well as on the ambivalences of the concept of democracy.

Conference Overview:

Welcome and Introduction

Sonja Levsen (Freiburg im Breisgau), Till van Rahden (Montréal)

Panel 1: Making Citizens in War and Peace

Chair: Monika Wienfort (Berlin)

Richard Ivan Jobs (Forest Grove): Democratic Stability through Transnational Mobility: The Travel of Youth in Postwar Western Europe

Ludivine Bantigny (Rouen): Making Soldiers and/or Making Citizens? The French Army and Youth during the Algerian War

Panel 2: Teenagers into Citizens – Visions and Measures in Postwar Europe

Chair: Martin Geyer (Freiburg/ Munich)

Louise Jackson (Edinburgh): Policing Youth in Postwar Britain

Efi Avdela (Crete): Youth 'in Moral Danger': Constructing a Social Category in post-Civil-War Greece

Christine Krüger (Oldenburg/Freiburg): Education for Service and Sacrifice. The Debate about the Introduction of Youth Community Service in West Germany, 1945–1965

Comment: Martin Conway (Oxford) and Michael Geyer (Chicago)

Discussion

Panel 3: Maturity, Democracy and the Nation

Chair: Peter Itzen (Freiburg)

Till Kössler (Bochum): Intelligence, Selection and Democracy. Psychological Debates after 1945

Daniella Doron (Hamilton): Rehabilitating Children and Rebuilding Nation: Jewish Youth in Postwar France

Marc Depaepe (Leuven): The Education of the So-called 'Évolués' in the Colonial and Post-colonial Era in Congo. Democracy, Maturity, and Authority in Times of Paternalism and Cultural Hybridity

Panel 4: Comment and Final Discussion

Chair: Cornelius Torp (Freiburg/Halle)

Comment: Martin Conway (Oxford) and Michael Geyer (Chicago)

Final Discussion

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Tagungsbericht *Making Moral Citizens – Democracy, Maturity and Authority in Postwar Western Europe*. 10.05.2012–11.05.2012, Freiburg im

Breisgau, in: H-Soz-Kult 19.07.2012.