

Kaelble, Hartmut: *Sozialgeschichte Europas. 1945 bis zur Gegenwart*. München: C.H. Beck Verlag 2007. ISBN: 978-3-406-54984-7; 437 S.

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How should Europe during the second half of the 20th century be conceptualised? As decline? As re-establishment and progress? Furthermore, what *is* Europe? These big questions constitute the point of departure of Hartmut Kaelble's impressive social history of Europe since 1945. Kaelble not only refines social macro perspectives on Europe, which so far only Göran Therborn has developed – in his path-breaking „European Modernity and beyond. The Trajectory of European Societies 1945–2000“ (London 1995)<sup>1</sup> –, but also goes beyond Therborn. There are common points with another recent macro history of Europe, Tony Judt's „Postwar. A History of Europe Since 1945“ (London 2005)<sup>2</sup>, but the difference is obvious: Judt's focus is on the political history of the European integration and unification project after World War II, whereas Kaelble focuses on European social history. He goes beyond the EEC/EU in time as well as space. Kaelble does not choose between Europe as decline and as progress but combines these perspectives. Neither does he choose between convergence and divergence of the European diversity. He combines these views by discerning different trends for different social fields.

Kaelble is keen to emphasise that a social history today can no longer be the matter of a social history solely based on the category class. He broadens the theme to include family, work, consumption, values, religiosity, and the practices and mentalities of and in the welfare state. His social history does not only discern structural dictates but also scopes of action for historical agents. The question of social inequalities does not only focus on classes and social environments, but also considers other forms such as gender inequalities and inequalities between immigrants and native populations, between generations, and in terms of individual oppor-

tunities provided by public education, urban planning and health politics. Kaelble goes beyond the history of structures and analyses also debates on the social issue, and the role of symbols, rites and myths. His social history does not recognise any sharp borderlines to cultural history but rather allows for overlappings and entanglements.

The conclusions are empirically well underpinned. The banal statement that all European societies have been transformed fundamentally since 1945 through a sequence of social changes is relativised by the conclusion that there is no evidence of acceleration of social change or visions of the social in public debate. In these respects the transformation was often faster during the 19th century. Kaelble discerns a sequence of époques: the immediate post-war period, the period of economic prosperity in the wake of the reconstruction boom, the period after the prosperity in the 1970s and the 1980s, and the period after the historical rupture of 1989/90.

The book particularly emphasises four kinds of European divergences. The most fundamental one is the one between Eastern and Western Europe since the end of World War II. Political oppositions spilled over on society and culture, family life, work, migration and social security. These differences did not simply disappear with the collapse of the Soviet system. For instance the dramatic de-industrialisation, which had begun earlier and was slower with stronger social guarantees in Western Europe, happened in a faster and more brutal way in the East. A second divergence exists between the rich early industrialised centre of Europe and the agrarian-oriented peripheries. This difference declined slowly during the second half of the 20th century. A third divergence exists between those countries heaviest hit by the war, such as Poland, the Soviet Union and Germany and those countries which stayed outside the military operations. The fourth divergence shows between groups of countries regarding various social fields such as labour market organ-

<sup>1</sup> German translation: *Die Gesellschaften Europas 1945–2000. Ein soziologischer Vergleich*, Frankfurt am Main 2000.

<sup>2</sup> German translation: *Geschichte Europas. Von 1945 bis zur Gegenwart*, München 2006.

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isation, family life, gender inequalities, welfare state developments, and so on.

The patterns of convergence result from the fact that the divergences were time-specific. The divergences caused by the war lost relevance and post-war reforms were not restricted to a few countries but were more generally implemented. At the end also the initially growing East-West differences slowed down and declined. The national development trajectories, in which Great Britain, France, Spain, Poland, Scandinavia, Switzerland and Germany had developed specific patterns of normative approaches, value orientations and political implementations of the social question, finally also began to converge. In his analysis of the question of convergence Kaelble identifies as driving forces the political unification of Europe and the role of the EU and its predecessors as well as global processes towards the convergence of social structures, everyday practices and transactions across Europe.

Europe in a global perspective is characterised by the structure and the role of the family, the organisation of work and labour markets, value orientations and the role of religion, attitudes to violence, transgressions of class borders and social mix, the shift from a continent of emigration to one of immigration, and the development of the welfare state.

With this volume Kaelble documents his established reputation and position as the leading social historian of Europe. One of the many strengths of the book is the fact that it puts Europe in a global context. Kaelble goes beyond Europe as the EU and thereby discerns other patterns than those which concentrate on the political crisis of today's European Union. In doing so he also puts the EU in perspective. However, in Kaelble's understanding of Europe, both Russia and Turkey are obviously excluded. Here one might have wished a more explicit discussion of the grounds for this exclusion.

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