



A TIME OF OPENNESS AND POSSIBLE OUTCOMES NEW PERSPECTIVES ON “POSTWAR” EUROPE, 1944-1950s

Call for Paper
Center for History at Sciences Po Workshop,
November 15-16, 2018, Paris

The workshop aims at gathering young researchers who address in their work the political, social and cultural transformations of the “postwar moment” in Europe. The periodization scheme of the second thirty years’ war imposed 1945 as a clear historiographical divide and watershed after the Holocaust. Consequently, 1945 and the aftermath of the war have long been featured as either prequel for what was to follow or as an extension of the history of World War II. But is it possible to take for granted the existence of a social and political caesura in 1945, or can we deduce a broader transition?

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RATIONALE

The most recent historiography on the postwar period has adopted the category of “transition” to define the transition from dictatorships to democracy. But can this term really help us to understand the overlapping of continuities and discontinuities of the postwar period? Historiography has underlined the absence of a broad consensus on the meaning of democracy among political élites in the immediate post-war period. It is difficult to deny the idea of a “Stunde Null” on the level of everyday experiences (Cabanes and Piketty, 2009), but also on the level of memory and history of trauma (Bessel and Schumann, 2003). Yet, the notion of transition masks important continuities on the level of social relations and structures (Stone, 2012). It highlights discontinuities and often assumes a linear historical process with a natural and foregone outcome that includes parliamentary democracy, corporatist stabilization, mass consumer society, the overcoming of nationalism, European integration, Cold War internal fault lines and universalist welfare states. Another trend considers the postwar period in Europe as a moment of lost promise, irreparably undermined by Cold War divides (Mazower, 2011).

We rather consider the postwar period as a distinct historical moment of crisis, opportunity, and conflicts between different solutions and alternative models of political and social development (Biess, 2010). We aim to underline the plurality of solutions and situations of this period, analyzing the inconsistencies of historical processes and their dialectic of persistence and innovations (Zahra, 2011). This period of openness and contradictions could be approached through a social history of politics, able to focus on social participation and on the reconstruction of the links between the individual, civil society and the State. By connecting political developments and the social practices of pre-war and postwar (Geyer and Tooze, 2017), we consider the postwar period as the trigger of different political, cultural and social developments, some of which resulted in the broader social transition occurring in the fifties and sixties (Eley, 2008).

The conference will bring together different case studies in both Eastern and Western continental Europe countries concerned by Nazi rule during the war (Austria, Belgium, Czechoslovakia, Denmark, France, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Netherlands, Luxembourg, Poland, Romania). Transnational approaches will be especially welcomed, and papers are sought to address at least one of the following lines of enquiry, at the crossroads between political, social and cultural transformations.



1. Reconstruction from below

Research limited to the reconstruction agendas in Europe after 1945 underestimates the complexity and intricacy of political commitments in the postwar period. We aim at examining the reconstruction from below emanating from different actors of the civil society, proceeding on the assumption that politics is not to be seen only as the process of making decisions. The notion of political commitment aims at broadening the perspective of “political participation” and at considering different means of political commitment, not only votes, but also associative movements, riots, etc. To what extent did the war modify the general structure of political life? How did new and old actors conceptualize social justice, reconciliation and national recovery?

We also encourage papers that focus on specific groups of people strongly marked by the experience of war (refugees, Jewish and non-Jewish displaced persons and expellees) and which address the dialectic between continuities and discontinuities between the pre- and postwar years. The study of Jewish Displaced Persons shows, for example, that the continuation of some prewar battles was a search for normalcy to defy the rupture of the Holocaust (Grossmann, 2007). But, at the same time, these groups were moved into action precisely by this rupture, as were expellees and refugees in general. Following Jessica Reinisch (2011) who advises to “look at the many different kinds of people and problems in the same context” we encourage papers on all relevant groups of people and activists, often very different in terms of composition, war experiences, political and social aims.

2. The transformations of citizenship

The study of the interactions between grassroots levels, collective mentalities, and institutional developments could enlighten issues relating to the transformations of citizenship. We consider citizenship as a three-level concept that encompasses the sense of belonging to a political community, the objective rights and duties that are connected with that status, and the subjective use the citizen can make of these rights (Tilly 1996). Citizenship is an historical notion rather than a normative one: what were – in 1945 – the tools, the policies, and the demands, aimed at rebuilding citizenship? How did political groups and developing associations seek to stress the political bonds between citizens and state and to enhance the political and social inclusion of all those who had been victimized during the war or who had renounced to take sides until the Liberation? How did the problems of homelessness, urban destruction and food-rationing connect with new social demands for a new coherent system of entitlements, duties and political participation?

3. The politics of social and economic reconstruction

What were the new concepts and policies of the postwar period? How did states deal with problems such as the legacies of war and Nazi occupations, the heritages of the national, political and class characters of the war, the social disintegration and the need to rebuild social bonds? Studies on the re-composition of statehood after the War have stressed the problem of the monopoly of the legitimate violence (Lagrou, 2011); but in which areas and through which dynamics did the state reassert and enlarge its other monopolies and policy instruments? What were the effects and the long-term legacies of the warfare state and of the latter's failures? How did administrative authorities address transnational problems, such as health epidemics, widespread destructions, general lawlessness, the movement of refugees, labor regulations, and the transition from rural to urban life? (Reinisch, 2013).

APPLICATION PROCESS

We invite proposals of 350-450 words from young researchers (PhD students, post-doctoral and early career researchers). Prospective participants should send an abstract alongside with a short CV **no later than July 18, 2018** to cj2018.chsp+cfp@gmail.com. Notifications of acceptances will be received at the end of July.

The conference will take place at Sciences Po, Paris, over a day and a half: November, 15th afternoon and November, 16th, 2018. Selected proposals will be divided into panels with commentary throughout the two days. Papers (1500-3000 words) shall be submitted in English, and they will be circulated a month in advance in order to foster discussions and exchange between participants. The dinner of the first day and the lunch of the second will be offered to the participants. Travel expenses of the selected participants will be covered on a flat-rate basis.

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