

Beyond National Character? Identity Formation in the Context of Postwar Reeducation

Virtual Workshop of the Research Project “Reeducation Revisited: Transnational and Comparative Perspectives on the Post-World War II Period in the US, Japan, and Germany”

(funded by the German Research Foundation/DFG)

November 5-6, 2020 (hosted by FAU Erlangen-Nürnberg, Germany)

Notions of identity and national character have been key to the theoretical foundations of US-American reeducation efforts in the postwar years – from Erik Erikson’s early work on identity to Richard Brickner’s diagnosis of a severe collective paranoia that had affected the Germans to Ruth Benedict’s classic work on the Japanese character. Our workshop seeks to address the complex processes of identity formation in the transatlantic and transpacific spheres after World War II beyond the US-American perspective and beyond a national scope. African American soldiers, for example, who served in a segregated military and became highly visible agents of liberation and reeducation in Germany exposed the double standard of US democracy. Their racialized identities signaled Americanness to Germans and were crucial to constructions of German whiteness in the postwar years. Considering the transpacific sphere, notions of Afro-Asian solidarity had to be negotiated anew vis-à-vis Japanese imperialism and Japan’s role in World War II. Okinawan/Ryukyuan identities, to name another example, were constructed along racial and ethnic lines, in contrast to Japanese mainland cultures, and, especially after World War II, in their proximity to US-American culture. The Ryukyu islands were situated at the center of a “transpacific colonialism” (Annmaria Shimabuku) that involved Japanese as well as US-American strivings for hegemony and (racial) superiority. Social standing and class similarly were reconfigured in the changing landscape of labor, (un)employment, and exploitation of the postwar years. And, in both, Germany and Japan, relations with the Allied Forces were conceived of in gendered terms which – albeit in slightly different registers – tended to masculinize the US and its allies and feminized their former enemies. The workshop sets out to examine identity formations in the context of reeducation with an eye to their subnational, and transnational dimensions and with a focus on the intersections of nationality, race/ethnicity, class, and gender.

Contributions will be pre-circulated among participants as either written papers or pre-recorded lectures (approx. 30-40 min.). The virtual workshop sessions will be dedicated to responses to and discussions of the papers. Topics to be discussed may include the racial dynamics of reeducation in the transatlantic and transpacific contexts, the changes in labor markets and workers’ identities effected by reeducation policies, and the re-negotiation of national identities in the aftermath of World War II. We welcome contributions from different disciplines, such as Literary and Cultural Studies, History, Media and Communication Studies, or Social Sciences.

The workshop is organized by Katharina Gerund (katharina.gerund@fau.de) and Akino Oshiro (akino.oshiro@fau.de).

For further information on the project, please see: <https://www.reeducation.phil.fau.de/>