



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”
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organized by FAU Erlangen-Nürnberg (Katharina Gerund & Akino Oshiro)
November 5-6, 2020 via ZOOM

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. 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. 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. 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 papers and presentations discussed at the workshop set 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.

As a pre-workshop event, ANNMARIA SHIMABUKU (NYU) presented her book *Alegal: Biopolitics and the Unintelligibility of Okinawan Life* (Fordham UP, 2018) and discussed the liminal status of Okinawa between the absence and presence of sovereignty. She specifically addressed the unintelligibility of Okinawan life as not only a condition of oppression but also as a threat to sovereignty through new forms of community. The lack of a sovereign voice, the “void”, then is no longer a negative space of exclusion but rather emerges as a site of a legality that potentially disarticulates sovereignty from within. Focusing on Okinawan women and their mixed-race children as well as base town workers, Shimabuku elaborated on their status of a legality and the challenges of identity formation in the context of Okinawa’s double status of (post)coloniality in relation to mainland Japan and the US.

After a brief conference opening, the first of two panel sessions began with the discussion of WENDY MATSUMURA’s (UC San Diego) paper which highlighted the conditions and limits of knowledge-production on Okinawa by taking up a critical perspective on US-American academia, and her own home institution specifically, and its treatment of Okinawan Studies. She revealed how the anti-imperial (and anti-capitalist) critique that was central to early English-language scholarship on Okinawa has given way to the field’s absorption into the neoliberal University and its ambivalent diversity politics, which forces Others into its structures and strictures. Matsumura’s intervention questioned the possibilities of doing anti-imperialist and anti-capitalist work from within the institutional binds of contemporary academia and imagined the abolition of Universities to allow for other forms of knowledge to be considered. In doing so, her contribution also engaged with the postwar developments in (higher) education and their long-term consequences in the transpacific sphere.

Further extending the workshop's focus on Okinawa's complex position within the geopolitics of the postwar world, AKINO OSHIRO (FAU Erlangen-Nürnberg) presented her ongoing PhD project, which traces the development of Okinawan economy throughout the US occupation up to the reversion of the Ryukyu Islands to Japan. She outlined the structural transition from agriculture to base economy and its effects on the identity of the farmers-turned-base-workers. Drawing on a post-colonial perspective, Oshiro read these workers as "surplus population" and situated them within the force field of three political actors – US, Japan, and Okinawa.

Turning towards the transatlantic sphere but also with an eye to reeducation's long-term effects on national and regional identities, BIRGIT BAURIDL (U Regensburg) scrutinized the re-use of specific sites in Bavaria by the American occupying forces, esp. the Grafenwöhr Military Training Area and Flossenbürg Concentration Camp. She drew on reeducation as an analytic category, rather than a descriptive term for the official US policies in postwar Germany, to show the changes of ideology at Flossenbürg in their complex interconnection with its (pragmatic) re-use and establishment as memorial site. Her detailed reading of the Grafenwöhr-Flossenbürg-region, its history, and the diverse actors and agendas that turned it into a transnational space of memorial culture and ideology formation, also exposed the limits of reeducation as it revealed those opportunities of (un)learning missed or (mis)appropriated.

FABIAN SCHÄFER (FAU Erlangen-Nürnberg) concluded the first panel with a comparative perspective on the postwar years in Germany and Japan. Schäfer showed how the (cultural) reeducation and the unlearning of fascist patterns during the US-occupation was conceptualized based on rather new academic disciplines (e.g. psychotherapy or anthropology) and that it heavily relied on mass media. In his presentation, he analyzed the transfer of participatory radio formats

as well as the introduction of the concept of public opinion and opinion survey methods (based on US communications research) in Japan. These rather “playful” and participatory ways of ideological reorientation in parts worked to resolve the paradox of a top-down imposition of freedom, democracy, and individualism. Primarily focusing on occupied Japan, his talk hinted at the possible parallels and interrelations with Germany, especially with regard to the practices of reeducation as well as the role of journalists, opinion, pollsters, and academics in this intercultural encounter.

The second panel session featured three papers that examined questions of race and racial identities within the context of reeducation ranging from the situation of the Korean minority in Japan to African American soldiers in Germany. DEOKHYO CHOI (U of Sheffield) centered his presentation on the so-called Kobe Incident in April 1948, i.e. the declaration of a ‘state of limited emergency’ by the US commander of Kobe base in response to mass demonstrations by Korean residents that were aggressively struck down by Japanese police forces backed by African American soldiers. This event served as a critical site to discuss the intersecting logics of decolonization, US racial politics, and the Cold War as they emerged in occupied Japan in relation to the treatment and situation of the Korean minority. His paper revealed the transnational interconnections regarding Cold War politics in Japan and Korea as well as the racial policies in the transpacific sphere.

KATHARINA GERUND (FAU Erlangen-Nürnberg) continued the discussion on racial policies by turning to the US military and its investment in whiteness as an unmarked signifier of (national) identity. Reading military documents that showcased African American soldiers and contrasting these official narratives with the soldiers’ own perspectives, she traced the struggle of the US

military to mobilize African Americans for the war efforts and to manage their labor without destabilizing the whiteness of the US military (and by extension the US nation). Some propaganda materials and manuals can be understood as inadvertent, if not accidental reeducational tools that – regardless of their actual effects – promoted racial tolerance, equality, and (un)learning of racism to white audiences. They also bespeak a shared ‘sense of whiteness’ in the transatlantic sphere that was challenged e.g. by the presence of African American soldiers but still facilitated the quick reconciliation and postwar alliance between Germany and the US.

Finally, NADJA KLOPPROGGE (U of Gießen) examined the racialized politics shaping the image of German women in the postwar years. Based on NAACP case files dealing with “soldier troubles” (esp. rape) and news coverage by African American correspondents in occupied Germany, Klopprogge traced the depiction of white German women from the “Nazi-Belle” to the “Fräulein.” While the former activated the effects of stereotypical depictions of black men in a transnational context and thus prevented claims to equality, the latter came to represent the liminal moment of possibility following World War II when black soldiers and white Fräuleins seemed to interact freely and in defiance of racialized (and gendered) norms.

The concluding discussion highlighted some of the main issues discussed over the course of both days. It framed postwar reeducation as an ambivalent endeavor with unintended effects and consequences and emphasized its history of unfulfilled potentials, failures, and appropriations that many of the papers had revealed. Participants also discussed the benefits and pitfalls of a broad understanding of reeducation as process of ideological (un)learning that runs the risk of becoming less specific while widening the scope of investigation. Ultimately, the discussion showcased the complexities of regional and transnational identity formation in the postwar world

and pointed towards some of the parallels and differences between US occupation of Germany and Japan/Okinawa especially with regards to racial policies, gendered interactions, and strategies of cultural reeducation.

Conference Program

November 5, Thursday

Part I

12:30 PM-1:30 PM (Germany)

11:30 AM-12:30 PM (UK)

3:30 AM-4:30 AM (USA West Coast)

7:30 PM-8:30 PM (Japan)

Lecture & Discussion

Annmaria Shimabuku (NYU): Alegal: Biopolitics and the Unintelligibility of Okinawan Life

Part II

5:00 PM-9:00 PM (Germany)

4:00 PM-8:00 PM (UK)

8:00 AM-12:00 PM (USA West Coast)

12:00 AM-4:00 AM (Japan)

Workshop Opening

Discussion of Pre-circulated Papers/Lectures (45 minutes for each discussion)

Wendy Matsumura (UC San Diego): Okinawa after Area (Studies), or Writing Okinawa from the Neoliberal University

Akino Oshiro (FAU Erlangen-Nürnberg): From Farm to Base: The Culture, Politics, and Identity of Okinawan Workers from 1945 - 1972

Birgit Bauridl (Universität Regensburg): Re-Use as Re-Education: Trans/national Memory between Concentration Camp and Military Training Site

Fabian Schäfer (FAU Erlangen-Nürnberg): Quizzes and Questionnaires: Playing Democracy under US-Occupation in Japan and Germany

November 6, Friday

Part III

5:00 PM-9:00 PM (Germany)

4:00 PM-8:00 PM (UK)

8:00 AM-12:00 PM (USA West Coast)

12:00 AM-4:00 AM (Japan)

Discussion of Pre-circulated Papers/Lectures (45 minutes for each discussion)

Deokhyo Choi (University of Sheffield): Containing Korean Diasporic Nationalism: The Cold War and Transnational Racial Politics in US-Occupied Japan

Katharina Gerund (FAU Erlangen-Nürnberg): Reeducation and the Construction of Whiteness: Race in the Postwar World

Nadja Klopprogge (Justus-Liebig-Universität Gießen): The Nazi-Belle and the Fräulein - The Historical Constellation of the Inbetween

Concluding Remarks

