



International Conference

The Ambiguous Semantics of “Reeducation” in Transnational and Transhistorical Perspective

Conference Venue: Amerikahaus Munich, Germany

Conference Date: February 16–18, 2022

The international conference entitled *The Ambiguous Semantics of “Reeducation” in Transnational and Transhistorical Perspective* takes as its point of departure an examination of US-American reeducation policies in Germany and Japan after World War II from a comparative and transnational perspective. Organized by an interdisciplinary research consortium at FAU Erlangen-Nuernberg, it aims to broaden the focus beyond this specific geographical constellation and beyond the period of the immediate postwar. What does “reeducation” entail in different cultural and historical scenarios? Can we conceive of “critical reeducation studies” as an interdisciplinary field of study? What would such a field look like?

Accordingly, this conference is an occasion to problematize and discuss the concept of “reeducation” in a broader sense including a rigorous investigation of power differentials and a nuanced analysis of intercultural encounters in occupied territories as well as in colonial and postcolonial settings. “Reeducation,” viewed in this light, describes various, at times incommensurable, ideas, norms, and practices. The latter can include strategies of democratization, emancipation, and empowerment but also involve, more often than not, different forms of violence (both physical and epistemic) and the use of force in occupation settings in order to control an indigenous population. Hence, the ambiguous and changing semantics of “reeducation” will have to be discussed as they appear in different functional areas of society – as part of political communication, as mass media phenomena, as institutional creeds, and as programmatic rhetoric appropriated by different actors and groups in civil society and military and para-military institutions. Studying “reeducation” can shed light on multidirectional influences and ramifications as well as point to the overt or more subtle paradoxes that the prescribed or voluntarily enacted (un)learning processes may entail. The focus on processes indicates that “reeducation” in its different shapes and guises is itself often both a vehicle and a product of transitions.

We invite contributions to the conference which address the topics and guiding questions of one of the three suggested panels:

Panel 1: Colonization and Reeducation

This panel examines reeducation strategies in a diachronic perspective: it seeks to address the (often dark) pedagogy of “reeducation” (“top-down”) as part of agendas of colonization. This includes forms of internal colonization as well as measures taken in the context of territorial annexation and occupation by European, Asian, or US-American Empires. As a second aim, this panel has as an objective the validation of resistance to hegemonic regimes of (un)learning in these colonial or quasi-colonial scenarios (“bottom-up”), which range from manifestations of “colonial mimicry” (Bhabha) to open insurgency.

Panel 2: The Global Entanglements of Post-World War II “Reeducation”

This panel zooms in on the post-war as a particularly prominent moment of “reeducation” which can be identified on an almost global scale. The so-called allied occupation of Europe and East Asia after World War II produces very different settings in which “reeducation” can mean all of the following: punishment and punitive measures, societal reform, gender emancipation, the abolition of hierarchies as well as the erection of (new) hierarchies or the re-introduction of old ones, depending on the region and the occupational policy. Next to Germany and Japan, attention will be on other European and Asian countries, such as Italy and Korea.

Panel 3: “Reeducation” in Contemporary Postcolonial and Post-Conflict Settings

The aim of the final panel is to apply the framework of “comparative reeducation studies” to more contemporary sites and scenarios. The term “reeducation” has prominently re-emerged, for instance, in US policies concerning Afghanistan and Iraq (often also prompting a comparison with post-war Germany and its ‘successful’ democratization) but it also appears in less optimistically inclined articulations of neo-colonial violence and control – and is used as thinly veiled propaganda. Today, as in previous decades and periods, the term “reeducation” cannot be severed from its complicity with specific ideologies and power structures. For this and other reasons, it calls for historical context and synchronic comparative work.

To apply, please send short proposals (500 words max.) and a one-page CV to jana.aresin@fau.de no later than September 1, 2021. Successful applicants will be notified by October 1, 2021.

The conference is organized by the FAU research consortium:
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For more information, see the project website: <https://www.reeducation.phil.fau.de/>