

Editorial

Many approaches in the field of global history are based on the hypothesis that it is not so much the processes within societies that explain historical change, but rather the encounters and interactions between societies. This thesis is in conflict with Maximilien Robespierre's famous doubt as to whether revolutions can be successfully exported or whether every society must wait for the moment when it is ready for radical change. Both positions have their supporters and the latter was not by chance emerging during the French revolution when the very concept of society in its national form was born. Since unanimity is not to be expected on this question, the pondering answer suggests itself that it all depends. But on what? And how can these factors be determined?

Heike Paul and her colleagues, who have contributed to this issue on re-education, have opted for a triangular constellation which, although obvious in previous research, has nevertheless been largely neglected. They compare the efforts of the US-military and administrators in Japan and Germany to initiate a society freed from fascism and on its way to democracy. But was the American presence only a supportive factor for already existing tendencies towards democratic behaviour and attitude or had the US-army to create something from scratch? How to conceptualize the project of re-education: in terms of a decided diffusion of values or as an impulse for the self-healing of a society ready for democratization after the collapse of the Nazi or the Tenno regimes?

Parallel processes such as the shaping of cultural relations between the (here primarily American) occupying power and the inhabitants and authorities of Japan and Germany as war-loser states can apparently be compared well in a global-historical setting. Thus, ideas about more general trends coalesce from case studies, which can then be matched with overarching explanations and narratives on macro processes. But the very different terms in which these relationships are described also point to the recalcitrance that the material shows towards this procedure. Why is it called in one (the German) case "re-education" and for the other (the Japanese) "democratization" and "modernization"? These terms indicate, as the articles in this issue demonstrate, a direction in which the process was conceived – returning or advancing to a desirable state. And that, in turn, says much more about the positioning of those who wanted to re-educate (or cure, as Richard Brickner suggested in his 1943 book "Is Germany incurable?") or modernize,

as it was thought in relation to Japan, which obviously had not yet had its future behind it as the Germans did with the Weimar Republic. The fact that rhetorical figures (and practices such as land dispossession on the island of Okinawa) of the civilizing mission from colonial contexts were not far behind is shown by Akino Oshiro's contribution on the transformation of Okinawa into a huge American military base. In the German context, it is rather the contradiction in the re-education policy between the goal of the greatest possible capacity for democracy and the distrust of incurable Germany that is expressed. The fact that this contradiction did not disappear with the occupying troops, but continues to shape the debate on democracy in Germany to this day, is one of the legacies of the re-education period.

As contradictory as this period was, it cannot simply be reduced to a global moment with only slight variations in its manifestations in different places. Rather, we observe a wide spread of constellations that could be observed at about the same time at different ends of the Eurasian complex in confrontation with the USA, which had become the global power and the role-model for democracy. In this respect, the comparative procedure here rather leads to the identification of considerable differences with some similarities on the surface of events and thus forms a barb to a history of linear progressive convergence through global processes.

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