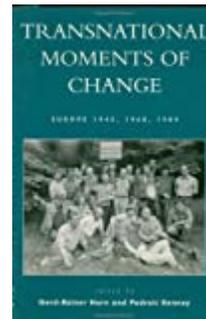




Gerd-Rainer Horn, Padraic Kenney. *Transnational Moments of Change: Europe 1945, 1968, 1989.* Manham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2004. 243 S. \$100.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-7425-2322-7.



Reviewed by Holger Nehring

Published on H-Soz-u-Kult (February, 2006)

G-R. Horn u.a. (Hgg.): *Transnational Moments of Change*

This volume assembles papers from a conference held at the Rockefeller Foundation's Bellagio Centre in 2000. In their introduction, the editors define their mission as the examination of transnational "moments of change" understood here as "moments of opportunity and crisis". They define such moments as characterised by "rapid and far-reaching changes" (p. XV) whose significance went beyond the nation state. Horn and Kenney single out three such moments in post-1945 European history: "1944-1945" as the years of liberation, "1968" as the events and processes connected to the student protests in the mid- to late 1960s and "1989" as the end of the Cold War in Europe. Throughout, the contributions attempt to bridge the Iron Curtain by systematically incorporating Eastern and Western Europe into their analyses.

The first four contributions examine "1945" as a moment of change. Aldo Agosti explores reactions amongst European communists, in both east and west, to the period of liberation. He examines the ways in which communist parties sought to impress their version of "democracy" on European political systems, bolstered by the parties' organisational explosion and by a widening of

their social bases in the immediate post-war period. In a fascinating essay, Patrick Pasture approaches one aspect of these debates. He discusses the question of labour unity in Western Europe. Pasture argues that the demand for labour movement unity was, since the 1920s, an "expression of a lack of democratic respect" (p. 44) and was never really a grass-roots demand. Ironically, it was only the unity achieved in the former Axis countries, namely Italy and Germany, which allowed a heightened degree of pluralism in post-war Western Europe. In her comparative local history of two liberated zones in northern Italy and southeastern France, Anna Balzarro emphasizes how similar the experiences of war and liberation were in two European countries. In the fourth chapter, Juan José Gómez Gutiérrez shows the transnational influences of socialist realism in Italy during the immediate post-war period.

The topic of the volume's second section is "1968", which the contributors regard as a cipher for more far-reaching political, social and cultural processes rather than as a single historical event. Arthur Marwick illustrates these processes in transnational perspective

during what he calls 'the long Sixties' (c. 1958 - c. 1974). The following contributions focus on three debates which these socio-political changes entailed. Gerd-Rainer Horn makes a convincing case for taking the working class seriously in the events of 1968 and highlights the labour movements' contribution to novel ways of democratic participation and forms of representation in Italy, France and Czechoslovakia. In a highly stimulating essay, Paulina Bren examines the ways in which Czech activists perceived the events in Western Europe. Kristina Schulz traces the importance of 1968 for the development of women's movements in the Federal Republic and in France, focusing mainly on the history of movement organisations rather than political discourse.

The book's last section contains approaches to 1989 as a transnational moment of change. In a rather impressionistic essay, Jarle Simensen seeks to establish 'the global context of 1989' by arguing that the European 1989 has to be interpreted in the context of a 'third wave of democratization' across the globe (p. 158), especially in Africa and Latin America. It remains unclear, however, what exactly, apart from the timing, connects the events in these different geographical locations. Miroslav Vanek explores the role of international contacts for the development of a conservationist/environmentalist movement in pre-1989 Czechoslovakia. Patrick Burke charts the debates about a trans-European approach within the British European Nuclear Disarmament (END) campaign in the early 1980s. Padraic Kenney traces the role of transnational diffusion for opposition networks in the revolutions of 1989 in order to explain the simultaneity of the events for which a purely structural approach cannot sufficiently account. A very helpful bibliographic essay, which cites works in English, French, German, Polish and Czech, concludes the volume.

As the editors admit in their introduction (p. XV), the twelve essays assembled in this volume demonstrate the variety of approaches - connective, comparative, transfer-orientated, socio-structural - which can be labelled 'transnational'. Hence, the approach encapsulated in this volume shows the great value of pragmatism as opposed to the theoretical debates which have, for example, dominated German historiography in the last few years. Equally important is the editors' assertion, against many current trends in the field, that the term 'transnational' only makes sense if we do not entirely forget the national dimension of politics. For a similar approach cf. the special issue of *Contemporary European History* 14,4 (2005) on transnational history.

Therefore, the volume's most interesting contribution is not methodological. It concerns the reading of contemporary European history which most of the essays convey. It seeks to highlight the character of 1945, 1968 and 1989 as historical junctures at which structures and processes which encompass Eastern and Western European history reveal themselves. Unfortunately, however, not all of the essays adequately address this interplay between events and structures, and some key issues, such as the precise mechanics of the imposition of Soviet rule in Eastern European countries, was not explored.

Moreover, there are problems with the methodological assumptions behind the three dates chosen for these studies. The editors define all three 'moments' as characterised by 'rapid and far-reaching changes' (p. XV). Yet almost all examples chosen here were, in Western Europe, histories of failures: communist groups in 1945 could hardly realise their immediate aims, nor is it clear how students and workers saw their aims materialise. One also wonders why the editors appear to have connected 'change' so closely to the hopes and aspirations of the political left. One might, therefore, have wished for a more thorough exploration of why these dates were chosen rather than others. Moreover, the thematic variety of the contributions does, at times, come at the cost of a lack of coherence.

These critical remarks are, however, proof to the volume's great intellectual qualities and give rise to important questions which deserve more attention in contemporary European history.

It encourages us to transcend the framework of Cold War politics and assess the history of European politics in both East and West in diachronic perspective. Moreover, taken together, the essays provide snapshots into the contemporary history of notions and practices of 'democracy' in Europe. Despite the attempt by: Eley, Geoff, *Forging Democracy. The History of the Left in Europe, 1850-2000*, Oxford 2002 this topic still awaits its historian. Cf., however, the stimulating remarks by: Buchanan, Tom; Conway, Martin, *The Politics of Democracy in Twentieth-Century Europe*, in: *European History Quarterly* 32,1 (2002), 7-12; Conway, Martin, *The Rise and Fall of Western Europe's Democratic Age, 1945-1973*, in: *Contemporary European History* 13,2 (2004), 67-88; as well as the remarks in: Buchanan, Tom, *Europe's Troubled Peace, 1945-2000*, Oxford 2005. In their introduction, the editors themselves admit that their exploration is only a first step into unknown territory. This

stimulating volume should, therefore, serve as an incentive to explore in more detail the meanings of democracy in the whole of Europe since 1945.

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Citation: Holger Nehring. Review of Horn, Gerd-Rainer; Kenney, Padraic, *Transnational Moments of Change: Europe 1945, 1968, 1989*. H-Soz-u-Kult, H-Net Reviews. February, 2006.

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