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Civility. An interdisciplinary and comparative approach

Sociologists, philosophers, historians, and anthropologists met at the Social Science Center (WZB), Berlin, to discuss possibilities for an interdisciplinary and comparative investigation of the notion of âcivilityâ in the modern era. The workshop consisted of six thematic panels as well as the presentation of a prospective project on civility that is being prepared by the convening researchers. In his opening remarks DIETER GOSEWINKEL (WZB) outlined the main problems and prospects of research on the concept. He discussed the problems of defining the âcivilityâ and finding the adequate fields for empirical research. Gosewinkel stressed the ambivalences inherent to the concept, e.g. the tensions between the universal pretentions and the exclusionary practices connected to it. Ideas about civility not only justified the expansion of individual rights; they also served as the ideological motor behind âcivilizing missionsâ in European colonies and, as Norbert Elias famously asserted, imposed means of constraint on the individualâs manners. Depending on the perspective âcivilityâ might thus be viewed as a disciplinary force or as a means to broaden the individualâs rights. Additionally, the role of the state both as a driving force behind civilizing processes as well as a destroyer of civilian norms needs further exploration. Thus, a whole range of both empirical and theoretical questions about âcivilityâ need to be addressed.

The workshopâs first panel explored the history of the concept. HOLGER NEHRING (Sheffield) pointed to the ambivalent effects of the civilizing process in Europe. In the tradition of Elias, he views âcivilityâ rather as a process than as a state of affairs. Nehring emphasized the connections between civility, violence, and the legacies of war and colonial rule. He portrayed civility as a concept constantly challenged â not the least through the citizen/ soldier who needs to be re-civilized after times of violent conflict. KONRAD H. JARAUSCH (ZZF Potsdam / Chapel Hill, NC) picked up the criticism of the American concept of western civilization. He then focussed on the process of re-civilizing of (West-) Germany after National Socialism. Jarausch notes the resurgence of etiquette in the Federal Republic as one way of re-establishing moral order â a regime of civil norms that was promptly questioned by the generation of 1968. Whether âcivilityâ or âhuman rightsâ is the more auspicious concept for further research remains an open question for Konrad Jarausch. Additionally, JENNY WÃSTENBERG (Chapel Hill) presented her PhD-project on civil activism and democratic memory in West Germany during the 1970s. In his commentary BERND WEISBROD (GÃ¶ttingen) stressed that âcivilityâ should be examined as a learning process, as the making and unmaking of liberal politics. The discussion pointed to the fact that civility itself may also be seen as the foundation of legitimate violence.

The second panel dealt with the connection between civility and social rights. JEANNETTE MADARÃSZ (WZB) presented a paper written by herself and MARTIN LENGWILER (Basel) which examined the German tradition of the welfare state, including its ruptures during decades of dictatorship and its continuities throughout political systems. MadarÃ¡sz and Lengwiler see the

welfare state as a complex system of individual and collective rights which doesnât easily relate to the notion of âcivilityâ with its universal claims because the welfare state is still essentially a national institution. PAUL ANDRÃ ROSENTHAL (Paris) explored the relationship between state sovereignty, social welfare and migrantâs rights in 20th century Europe. Rosenthal can show that from its very beginnings the welfare state was challenged by workerâs migration across borders. He discussed how social protection for migrants was either granted or denied and which lines of arguments were used in the struggle for equal social rights. In his commentary, JAMES HOLSTEN (Berkeley) pointed to the limited dependence between civility and social rights. Holsten claimed that social welfare may be seen as a system of incivility. He advocated to rather study the concept of âcivilityâ within the framework of âcitizenshipâ.

HELMUT DUBIEL (Giessen) and MERVYN FROST (Kingâs College London) explored the connection between civility and human rights on the third panel. Dubiel elaborated his idea of the negative universalism of human rights. He sees the concept of human rights as inseparably linked to the catastrophies of the 20th century. Mass-killings by the regimes of the radical left and right on an unprecedented scale have laid the foundation for a humanistic consciousness that transcends geographical, national or ethnic borders. According to Dubiel, the utopian vision of a universalistic validity for human rights is grounded in the horrific experiences of totalitarian rule. Mervyn Frost sees the concept of civility in international relations as an area which is thus far understudied. From a British perspective, Frost outlined the inherent meanings of being civil, potentially restraining oneâs emotions and thus acting inclusively towards everyone. In his commentary STEFAN-LUDWIG HOFFMANN (ZZF Potsdam) raised the question how we can explain the popularity of the concept of human rights in the 1990s. While western civilization served as a point of reference during the Cold War, human rights became a key term after the collapse of communism. It is noteworthy, that some of the major wars fought after 1989 were waged in the name of human rights.

The fourth panel focused on the relationship between civility and citizenship. Presenters ANDREAS FAHRMEIR (Frankfurt am Main) and CATHÃRINE COLLIOT-THÃLÃNE (Rennes) explored the subject from historical and philosophical perspectives. Fahrmeirâs presentation focussed on political protest and incivility in Britain and France at the dawn of the modern age. From the 18th century well into the 1850s a carnevalesque and often violent form of protest against established authority was widespread on the streets of London. Fahrmeir interpreted these rough rituals in the public space of the street as a contrast to the elitesâ civility on the rather secluded corridors of power in parliament. When most male adults were included in the political nation through the extension of suffrage from the 1850s onwards, the need for such spectacles diminished. Thus, Fahrmeir made a strong case for the civilizing effects of parliamentary representation while at the same time pointing to the ongoing discussion about the role of the âcrowdâ and the âmobâ â the uncivilized â in European history. In a comparative perspective the author could show that civil treatment of citizens was broader and less class based in Britain than in early modern France. Fahrmeir stipulated that a peculiar British notion of civility which dates back to the early modern period needs further exploration. CathÃ©rine Colliot-ThÃ©lÃ¨ne discussed the specific meaning of civil disobedience in contemporary France. She outlined the differences between the Anglo-Saxon tradition as formulated by Henry David Thoreau, Hannah Arendt and others to the French idea of legitimate order based on Rousseauâs volontÃ© gÃ©nÃ©ral. Once again, her paper illustrated how much notions of civility differ even within the context of western and central Europe.

On Saturday the workshop convened for two final discussions on civility and social behaviour and a concluding panel on theories of the concept. Panel five consisted of papers on the anthropology of civility by CHRIS HANN (Halle an der Saale) and notions of civility in everyday life by FERDINAND SUTTERLÃTY (Frankfurt am Main). Hann discussed recent contributions from the anthropological field to the study of civility. He emphasized that he sees Italy as the heartland of civility (civilitÃ) and pointed to recent field research has led him to the conclusion that incivility rose in Eastern Europe after the fall of communism â a result that runs contrary to common findings of political and historical research. Chris Hann pointed out that post-socialist conditions â especially the rise of liberal market economies â have hindered the development of civility between central Europe and Siberia. Ferdinand SutterlÃ¼ty gave a paper on the results of his study of hotspots of urban development in the west of Germany. He focussed on the relations between citizens of Turkish and German origin and their conflicts. He elaborated on the paradox that the quest for equality between different ethnic groups might enhance rather than acquiesce conflicts in the local realm. In neighbourhoods under investigation, the counter reactions against the en-

forcement of equal rights uncut the norms of civility.

The final panel discussed two contributions to the theory of civility. FRANKLIN ADLER (Malcalester College) discussed questions of immigration and identity in contemporary Europe. He outlined the sometimes problematic consequences of multiculturalism in the age of globalisation and pointed to the shortcomings of modern sociology that hinder our understanding of these ongoing processes. WILHELM HEITMEYER (Bielefeld) tried to explain why uncivil behaviour exists in certain parts of modern societies. He argues that incivility is found wherever basic norms of respect and equality are challenged. Heitmeyer uses a concept of social disintegration to understand the perceived rising threat to civility. According to his model, the loss of civility is closely connected to the social agenda of modern societies. Those denied recognition and material success are most likely to turn to violent modes of self-expression. Heitmeyer pointed to recent killing sprees and school shootings as examples of social disintegration which led to violence. In his commentary on the two papers GÃNTHER FRANKENBERG (Frankfurt am Main) outlined a scheme of operationalization for civility research. Frankenberg concluded that it would be necessary to clearly define the issue, name the conflicts and to analyse cultures of conflict in a thick description.

During the final discussion, the conveners and their distinguished guests elaborated on different roads that could be taken in future research. Among the approaches discussed were the historical dimension of the concept dating back to Scottish enlightenment, thick descriptions of every-day life, the relationship between civility and community as well as civility, citizenship and democracy. Overall, the workshop was characterized by open discussion that transcended the various disciplines represented. Clearly, the concept proved to be a stimulating one which opens new perspectives on the history of modernity. âCivilityâ â explored from a interdisciplinary as well as comparative perspective â poses a both difficult and challenging perspective for the historical and the social sciences. The feedback from the discussion as well as the complexity of the issue has convinced the conveners to continue their investigation of âcivilityâ from both a historical and sociological perspective. The relationship between civility and violence, the relationship interrelation between legal rights and norms of everyday civility, the integration of non-western traditions both into the history of the concept âcivilityâ and into empirical research on institutions are among the challenges waiting to be met in future discussion and research.

Conference Overview

Welcome speech
Dieter Gosewinkel

Panel I: Civility â History of the Concept
Chair: Dieter Gosewinkel

Holger Nehring âCivility. Some observations on the history of the conceptâ
Konrad Jarausch âGerman civility? Conceptual pitfalls and exemplary processesâ
Jenny WÃ¼stenberg âCivil activism and the making of democratic memoryâ
Discussant: Bernd Weisbrod

Panel II: Civility and Social Rights
Chair: Wilhelm Heitmeyer

Jeannette MadarÃ¡sz / Martin Lengwiler âCivility and social rights in the modern welfare stateâ
Paul-AndrÃ© Rosental âState sovereignty, social welfare and migrantsâ rights?â
Discussant: James Holston

Panel III: Civility and Human Rights
Chair: Jan C. Behrends

Helmut Dubiel âCivility as self-restraintâ
Mervyn Frost âConstituting human rightsâ
Discussant: Stefan-Ludwig Hoffmann

Panel IV: Civility and Citizenship
Chair: GÃ¼nter Frankenberg

Andreas Fahrmeir "Civil rioters: Managing citizensâ violence in nineteenth-century Britain"
Catherine Colliot-ThÃ©lÃ¨ne âCivil disobedience between civility and citizenshipâ

Panel V: Civility and Social Behaviour
Chair: Konrad Jarausch

Chris Hann âFrom civiltÃ to vigilant citizens: Some recent anthropological contributionsâ
Ferdinand SutterlÃ¼ty âNegative classification and ethnicity: Norms of civility in everyday urban lifeâ

Panel VI: Civility â Theory of the Concept
Chair: Dieter Rucht

Franklin Adler: "The hermeneutics of civility"
Wilhelm Heitmeyer âSocietal disintegration, civility and violenceâ
Discussant: GÃ¼nter Frankenberg

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