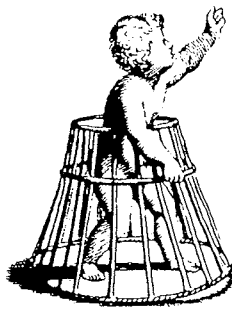


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The Journal of Psychohistory

Psychohistory: Creating a New Discipline

***Psychohistory in the
Classroom***

***Dangerous Japanese
Women***

***Jewish Fears of
Infanticide***

***The European-American
Psychosis***



The Journal of Psychohistory

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Some Thoughts on Psychoclasses and Zeitgeist

James J. Sheehan, *Where Have All the Soldiers Gone? The Transformation of Modern Europe*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2008.

Sheehan is the first author to provide an overarching narrative about recent European history seen as a process of civilization from a garrison state toward a civil society. During the period of ready-made national states from 1880 to 1945, general and almost universal conscription socialized men into citizens whose primary civic responsibility was to sacrifice themselves to defend the sovereignty and borders of their national body politic. At that time, public spending was mainly channeled for the military. States were born out of wars and existed for war.

Since the end of World War II, defense budgets in Europe have been shrunk and universal conscription generally replaced by a guard of professional "firefighters." States have legitimated their existence by providing welfare and equality; the major part of public spending is devoured by social security. And if the states are now service-providers for their citizens, so the citizens no longer define themselves as interchangeable parts of a superhuman collective but care first and foremost about their self-actualization. Sacrificing oneself in a remote war for national glory sounds now absurd for most Europeans.

Robert Kagan notices here a crucial difference separating the spoiled welfare state citizens of the European Union from Americans, who still face politics with violent means everywhere in the uncivilized world. Whereas the Europeans can afford under their U.S. coverage to live in a post-historical paradise, Americans cannot escape realities into any idealism. But even Kagan cannot help the situation: The post-war change seems to be irrevocable.

Sheehan explains the *fait accompli* by saying that Europeans, unlike Americans, know by experience how it feels to be under bombardment, shiver in trenches under arbitrary grenade fire, lose families in mass evacuations, or starve. World War I was enough to pacify the participants of mass slaughter, but institutional forms were still needed to end the senseless rivalry of hegemony between European states. The idea of the EU, created by French foreign minister Robert Schuman in 1950 to integrate rising West Germany into European order and to prevent eventual revanches, proved to be a decisive solution to the hegemony question that had prevailed through modern history.

Trust began to replace mutual suspicion, violence distanced bit by bit. As Michail Gorbachov faced the demise of his communist state, he, unlike all his predecessors, did not resort to increased repression or paranoid-schizoid defenses: He let things take their course, because he could personally survive changes.

We have here real evidence of the psychological change, evident in collective mentalities or *Zeitgeist*. Sheenan deserves praise for taking it as a storyline of the age of the extremities. But he does not go into the mechanisms by which the experiences in the trenches or ruined cities are converted into next-generation pacifism. Theories concerning traumatizations could also make us believe that the undigested experiences could be violently restaged! So did a minority of front men after the WWI. But what about the majority? West Germany changed culturally since the youth revolution in 1968 even if the children of soldiers still were reared in authoritarian ways by spanking and the repetition compulsion should have had to continue. Which factors intervened and ended the repetition?

Some associations come to our mind. For the first time in history, since the late 1950s, the working majority could easily fulfill their basic needs. So, individual choices and preferences became really possible. Because personal life was now seen as project, wasting it for some higher cause in order to achieve meaning and immortality would have been senseless.

During the 1960s, long-haired androgynes replaced traditional warriors as collective self-ideals. This influence filtered through to the Eastern block to undermine school and conscription militarism, the official ideology of communist states since the war. Masculinity or autonomy were defined anew.

Childhood security and empathy by the caregivers are crucial factors in developing a new psychoclass, but these factors do not emerge in a vacuum: Material security and cultural values that accept individuation are the preconditions for a new child-rearing modus. The results of the new modus then affirm cultural values and fuel prosperity on their part.

At last, women and children were finally treated as persons in their own right, not as appendixes of a family ruled by a patriarch. The authority of fathers had already been hollowed out by their absence in war, and the restoration of the one breadwinner model after the war failed in the long run. Women were no longer dependent on the incomes and mercy of their husbands but could divorce. Recently, women have in many areas superseded men in the upscale labor market while male industrial laborers are losing their positions.

Even though these processes have gone through all Western societies, Americans may still partially be from Mars and not from Venus, just as Lloyd deMause's theory of the simultaneous existence of all possible psychoclasses claims. Personal existence of women and children combined with the deteriorating labor market position of men without college backgrounds have channeled the anxiety caused by post-Fordist cut-throat competition into moral panic about the dissolution of the families—which actually is demanded by labor-market flexibility. The backlash against the 1960s is accompanied by paranoid-schizoid fundamentalism, operating with concrete lines of division instead of a depressive sense of one's own lacks. At the same time, post-post-Vietnam patriotism is propagated.

Europeans no longer appreciate Americans as pioneers of the modern world, as was the case during the post-World War II years and during the 1960s and 1970s, as American popular culture set trends about how to be young and fashionable. Now the Bushite born-again seem and sound like those mediaeval "Islamofascists" against which they are crusading: People who have not lived through the differentiation of politics, economics, science, art and religion in their separate systems of meaning-giving but cling to the premodern "enchanted" world. And this strange image will be completed by the economic polarization into robber barons and proletarians, by social Darwinism (the populist William J. Bryan once opposed it rather than natural science in itself), and wide-spread denial of the collapse of our common climate.

However, the regression has not wholly succeeded in changing modern America into militant theocracy: Americans show human sacrifices of their own breed more than before. In World War II, Americans were already known for the fact that they did not proceed on land if the enemy did not retreat after massive aerial bombardments, whereas Germans and especially the Soviets did not hesitate to use their human material, as Sheehan shows among many others. The demonstrations in campuses against the Vietnam War practically ceased after the removal of general conscription. Now, the victimized boys in Iraq are under-class mercenaries without any

choice to obtain decent pay and a college education other than in the army. Consequently, one cannot avoid the superficial associations that most Americans still prefer Venus—if they only can afford it.

The simultaneous presence of regression and progression in the U.S. indicates not necessarily a closing-down apocalypse. European pacification did not proceed as an unilinear success story but was marked by fears and anxieties. History results seldom from conscious strategies.

Children born in Europe in the 1950s very often had parents that in one or the other way had experienced World War II and sometimes grandparents that had been through and survived both World Wars. In many cases both parents were traumatized either by being victimized or as an aggressor. People in the losing countries, especially Germany and Austria, experienced a third trauma: Even if they were not sympathizing with the Nazi regime, with one stroke in 1945, much of what was seen natural until then was under question or simply became worthless. The fundamentals of common habits were shaken.

Civil life during the war was in many regions carried out without men who had been gathered into diverse armies. When the surviving males returned home, either being released from military duties or from being imprisoned as POWs, they swiftly took over the jobs the women had had during their absence. The so-called “baby-boomers” had to start a complete new life, very often accompanied by a radical turn around in their ideological mind-set. If any sympathies for the Nazis and their values and behavioral patterns were left, they in no way could be spoken or acted out. Even until today this is considered a crime. So the traumata in the aftermaths of the war were usually overcome by denial and simply “not talking about it”, not looking back (avoidance), but into the future saying “everything has to be done so a war never will happen again”, and towards their children: “Go and study so you will have a better life than we have had.” If anybody spoke of personal experiences in the war it often was the grandparents. But the stories were all about World War One; sometimes blissful and mystical tales from another world—and the children listening fascinated as to fairy tales. World War II was not mentioned.

As all the considered, important, and behavioral patterns were smashed by the end of the War—they were blamed for causing it—a new behavior had to be created, not without letting the order patterns shine through shakily like a shadow that from another time. Childrearing was now mainly driven by love and support, often alternating with sudden backlashes into harsh discipline and older measures for hardly any reason, restaging the parents’ own childhood trauma. Definitely the degree of freedom of children

was increased. They were able to follow their will and interests more than ever before. But they were also told to be prudent and modest. Most parents still thought that it was important to always have the pantry full of basic foods (if another shortage would come up). Meat was only to be served on Sundays and often conflicts between the mother and the father broke out over the expenses for "unnecessary" goods. Going to high school and afterwards attending a university was welcome, but there rarely was a free choice in what to study. The parents usually decided what was the right thing for their kids, e.g. to be a lawyer or a doctor were preferred, becoming an artist or to study philosophy was seen rather critically. But their authority was weakened due to the break down of the old discipline and order system and the children mostly won the conflict with their parents. One of the first habits they gave up was to store food. The new economy provided everything needed and the fear that times of food shortage might come back disappeared. The Z-generation was the first in European history that grew up without the shortage of nearly everything one needs to survive.

Between 1945 and 1955, Germany and Austria were occupied by the armies of France, England, the U.S., and the Soviet Union. The ones who happened to end up in the zones of one of the Western nations considered themselves lucky compared to those who had to stay in the zones controlled by the feared Soviets. More or less everything that came over from the other side of the Atlantic Ocean was seen as progressive and the ideal to achieve—a new ideology to follow after having had to throw the old Nazi world overboard completely. Although peace and peacefulness was now taught to be the most important issue, many of the leaders of institutions were in fact former Nazis and opportunists. But their authority was weekend. When older, their children read Kant and Nietzsche, who became icons in a teen movement which emerged as the student revolts in the late 1960s, protesting against the generation of their parents. Their authoritarian behavior was blamed for being the real cause for violence and wars. In solidarity with the US protesters against the Vietnam War, young people were using elements of Marxist theories as a counterpart for what was until then seen as the absolute ideal, the US policies. The U.S. was now seen as an egoistic, greedy, and consumer goods driven society that did not hesitate to use force to get what she wanted.

The Z-generation got caught in a dilemma: Neither the U.S. model nor the communist Soviet Union or China models provided lasting ideals. It was more a tumbling than a straight forward strategy to find their own way, based on what their war-traumatized parents had imprinted in them: "Try to find a way of resolving conflicts in a way that will preserve peace

and prevent violence." Another question was the one of identity. Nations and nationalism? No! They had had enough after all that had happened. Of course Europeans still live in nations and have national passports, but the meaning has drastically declined. It is only during sporting events, when nations fight nations, that the national flag can be seen in public—only to disappear again once the games are over. Religion and God as sponsor of identity? No! Europe has become the most secular continent in the world. Except for Poland, its nation provide churches with continued losses of members without the hope of a turn-around. The Z-generation, which was told by their parents that they should have a better life than they had, takes this message literally: We shall have a good life while we live and not follow some salvation promise in a transcendent world we do not even know exists.

Thus the Z-generation has started an irreversible process: The demographic picture shows that regardless of how many newborns there will be in the future, the population of Europe will eventually die out. Equal rights for women who do a great job on the labor market and a tightening economic situation that makes it more and more difficult to keep up the highest living standard ever achieved in history make bringing up children an expensive and time-consuming project when the standard of child-rearing should be continued and improved.

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