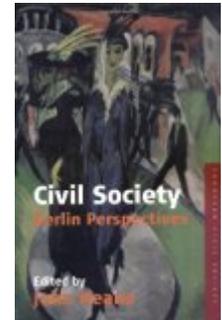




John Keane. *Civil Society: Berlin Perspectives.* New York: Berghahn Books, 2006. X + 262 S. \$80.00, cloth, ISBN 978-1-84545-064-9.



Reviewed by Daniel Levy

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This book is a timely entry into an ongoing debate about the potential formation of a European public sphere. As part of a series on European civil society edited by Dieter Gosewinkel and Jürgen Kocka, this volume offers an important corrective to largely normative debates. Rather than dealing with the vague notion of identity, numerous challenges facing Europe are refracted through the analytic prism of the "civil society" concept. The series editors remind us that it serves as a leitmotif to analyze whether and how far the renewed interest in the concept can contribute to the gradual evolution of a larger European civil society. By approaching civil society as "a project with socially and geographically limited origins and universalistic claims which changes while it tends to expand, socially and geographically" (p. vii), this volume seeks to recast and ultimately de- or perhaps rather re-territorialize a concept that is, historically and conceptually, closely bound to the formation of the nation-state.

To accomplish this task, one of the leading figures in the field of civil society studies, John Keane, edits this volume. He brings together

scholars from various disciplines, who apply the civil society lens to social, cultural, political, and economic dimensions, while simultaneously providing invaluable insights into the complexity of the concept itself. By drawing attention to its limitations and potentialities, this volume makes noteworthy conceptual contributions to how social scientists and historians can deploy the term "civil society" in transnational contexts.

The range and depth of this volume is impressive, as evidenced in Keane's excellent introduction, which extends from the philosophical foundations of civil society to its historical antecedents. Much of his discussion revolves around the political and cultural salience of the city for the consolidation of civil society. The city functions simultaneously as the epicenter of modernity, the seedbed of the nation-state, and the source for a cosmopolitan outlook. This urban focus also provides one *raison d'être* for the inclusion of Berlin in the title of the book, though both Berlin and urbanity remain rather tangential in most of the other chapters. Ultimately, the Berlin connection is largely metaphorical (referring to general

urban features of dynamism and heterogeneity) and biographical (scholars who were born or currently live there).

While Keane is correct to point out that metropolitan features can provide insightful avenues to thematize important features of contemporary civil societies, the presence of migrant enclaves and the complexities of multicultural societies in Berlin receive only marginal treatment in the volume. Rather than viewing this as a deliberate omission, it is more likely a conceptual blind spot historically tied to the (middle-) class-specific genesis of civil societies. Kocka's insightful historical overview largely confirms this supposition. In his concise reflections on the changing meanings and deployments of the civil society category, Kocka highlights the vicissitudes and frailty of civil societies, with respect to their past and future transnational potential. If civil society emerged as a bourgeois project that thrived on capitalism, current manifestations are frequently organized around its stance against neo-liberalism. Kocka is skeptical about the prospects for a European public sphere, if only because in the absence of a shared language, multilingual Europe lacks an important feature of civil society: unhampered communication.

Susanne Sophia Spiliotis shifts the attention from private associations to the issue of corporate social responsibility. Corporations are perceived as important actors who are effectively producing an additional dimension to the public sphere, namely the formation of a "Corporate Civil Society." Spiliotis recognizes that corporate citizenship is also motivated by business considerations: the preemption of lawsuits and the legitimacy conferred through socially responsible actions. Notwithstanding, she shows that state apologies for past human rights abuses are complemented by various forms of corporate apologies frequently accompanied by measures of restitution. Corporate assumptions of public responsibility, Spiliotis contends, contribute to the emergence of "hybrid

forms of governance." Here the defining fault line of civil society, between the private and the public, is realigned.

Paul Nolte's contribution takes up another formative dualism by pointing to the inherent tension between the "bourgeois" origins of civil society and the lasting implications for matters of social inequality. According to Nolte, "precisely this bourgeois form, with its exclusive and hierarchical characteristics, worked against the realization of an inclusive and egalitarian civil society" (pp. 71-72). The stratifying impact of civil society is further compounded by a discursive shift from issues of social inequality to apprehensions of social cohesion. Rather than viewing this conflict as an aberration, Nolte persuasively shows how this discrepancy is an inherent facet of civil society.

This transposition towards considerations over social capital at the expense of economic inequality is also reflected in Herfried Muenkler's contribution. He is well aware that welfare retrenchment imposes strains on civil society. However, if Nolte focuses on the structural contradictions of economic inequality that inhere in the formation of civil society principles, Muenkler seems more optimistic in drawing attention to collective agency as a potential remedy for the social dysfunctions of neo-liberal policies. His suggestions echo the resilient strains of Toennies's *Gemeinschaft* and a grassroots tradition of *Buerg-erinitiativen* (citizen initiatives), when he urges displays of social solidarity and the need for civic engagement.

Hans Joas and Frank Adloff subject this communitarian strand to empirical scrutiny. They cast doubt on the alleged decline of community spirit, since their data indicate no overall decline in associational life. Rather, civic participation is strongly correlated with higher income, religious commitment, formal educational qualifications, and life-cycle status. Does this leave civil society as a largely middle-class affair? Joas and Adloff resist this conclusion. Instead, they suggest that "so-

cial milieu" offers a better explanation. The authors raise an important matter about the assumed unifying function of civil society. If the coffeehouse served as the symbolic site of an idealized nineteenth-century public sphere, where status barriers were broken down and conflicts civilized, a milieu-centered analysis points to a more fragmented conception of civil society.

Moving away from its homogeneous bourgeois origins, the pluralization of societies requires a reassessment of how they operate and resolve conflicts. This query assumes even greater urgency when we consider Sven Reichardt's convincing claim that conflict is not extraneous to but an integral part of civil society. Here, violence is not antithetical to civil society but frequently serves as a prerequisite for its emergence. The need for violence in defense of civil society or the constitutive role memories of violent catastrophes have for democratization and transitional justice are just two examples.

Claus Offe concurs with this assertion about violence and memories when he states that Europe's distinctive civilization trait consists of the "self-critical appreciation of the wrongs that have been committed by Europeans in their own history... This inclination to self-revision and self-doubt has no parallel" (p. 179). This "negative identity" is matched by a long list of historical constraints Offe enlists to cast doubt on the prospects for a European civil society. Among them is the important recognition that European unification, in the deeper cultural sense, is further complicated by an East-West divide, both in actual policy divisions as well as in a protracted "clash of memories." New member states from the East seek to garner legitimacy for their own experiences and memories. For instance, they disavow the centrality of the Holocaust in favor of pointing out their own victimhood under Stalinism.[1] Even one of the current manifestations of Europeaness, namely that of being non-American, is subject to the East-West divide.[2] For Offe,

gloomy prospects for a European civil society are also the product of institutional limitations. The European Union has neither the will nor the means of "making Europeans" with measures like those the Italians or Germans took toward populations under their territorial control at the end of the nineteenth century. Nor does any medium provide the indispensable foundations for (re)imagining a European community.

Like many other skeptics, Offe raises the question of solidarity and the alternative forms of collective identification that serve as substitute for nationhood. Different motivations give rise to this skepticism, ranging from conservative attachment to the nation (which none of the authors in this volume seem to be afflicted by) to concerns about a "democratic deficit" and the threat that post-nationalism (or usually a caricature of its features) poses to the welfare state. Paraphrasing Jürgen Habermas, one is tempted to speak of a "Eurochauvinism" being channeled through a social (democratic) model which itself perhaps is the most distinctive trait of "European" civilization—especially when considering that neither religion nor culture provides a unifying narrative any longer (and possibly never did).

Yet Europeaness becomes more plausible when we consider the possibilities of thin solidarities along the more conventional assumptions of thick attachments. A fine empirical example of a broadening of solidarity both in territorial scope and boundary transcending civil society engagement is provided by Dieter Rucht's analysis of social movements and their organizational strategies. The globalization of a neo-liberal market agenda has generated a backlash of protest that has spawned the growth of transnational social movements. Rucht stresses that these movements display a cross-border mentality, as activists no longer perceive their political work as confined to a bounded community. Local and national attachments are complemented by a cosmopolitan viewpoint that constitutes a foundation for a European

outlook and the strengthening of global civil society.[3]

The absence of a sustained engagement with the global potential of civil society or its analytic purchase in the volume is somewhat surprising given that John Keane has written an important book on the subject.[4] Lacking attention to the global is also notable in conjunction with a second emerging category: namely methodological cosmopolitanism,[5] especially since Keane refers to cosmopolitanism in his introduction when he suggests that "the local and the beyond are interrelated recursively, through power-ridden processes of entangled pasts and presents" (p. 8). This is no marginal observation but at the core of the struggles to form a European public sphere and its cosmopolitan potential to realize them in the context of transnational trends and the persistence of an East-West divide.

Shalini Randeria's contribution directs our attention to the significance of cultural transfers and the contingencies of their political appropriations. Her detailed discussion of India and its complex relationship with colonizing powers and de-colonization not only matters for that case, but also underscores how civil society deals with otherness. Randeria's in-depth look at European colonization, which, in turn produced a strong universal foundation for the pursuit of independence, underscores that civil society conceptions are "entangled phenomena." As such, they cannot be reduced to their western origins, but need to be approached in relational terms.

Randeria's account of the multidimensional foundations of civil society mirrors Europe's relationship with its domestic "others." The near absence of Europe's large migrant population and the perceived challenge multicultural societies pose to the unifying perception of civil society is the only shortcoming in this volume. Here, Berlin could have served both as metaphor for an ethnically diverse metropolis and a social laboratory to explore whether civil society has the capacity to

incorporate (migrant) communities that are excluded from the public sphere. Or, as some scholars (and many polemicists) have shifted the burden of civic participation onto minorities, migrants are now increasingly depicted to reside in allegedly self-segregated communities, so-called parallel societies.

How much our understanding of civil society is shaped by the respective political-cultural context within which it is addressed is illustrated by Ralf Dahrendorf's exploration of why certain European intellectuals were able to resist the lure of totalitarianism. For Dahrendorf the answer lies in their commitment to liberal virtues standing in elective affinity with the requirements of a vibrant civil society. However, as the excellent case studies in this volume demonstrate, open societies are a necessary but not a sufficient condition for the project of a European civil society. It seems that European societies currently share a strong resurgence of the Hobbesian state. This affinity involves an increasing reluctance to admit migrants (which in public rhetoric is usually conflated with the problem of integrating those already in Europe), essentially reproducing their exclusion from civil society. The other post-civic stance revolves around a unified front in the fight against terrorism, which frequently implies the strengthening of executive powers. Paradoxically, what unifies Europeans then also comprises the potential antidote to the project of a European civil society.

The prospects for a European civil society are far from certain and this volume reminds the reader of the contingencies it encounters en route to a new model of political organizations and cultural identifications. By providing such a rich canvas of case studies and by illuminating the immanent tensions civil societies contend with, this book will become a standard reference for those interested in Europe and for scholars more generally engaged in state-society relations and the growing field of global studies.

Notes

[1]. For a discussion of the politics of memory in post-Cold War Europe see Tony Judt, *Postwar: A History of Europe Since 1945* (New York: Penguin, 2005).

[2]. The "European Manifesto" of Jürgen Habermas and Jacques Derrida is a case in point. For an overview of the debate their manifesto spurred see Daniel Levy, Max Pensky, and John Torpey, eds., *Old Europe, New Europe, Core Europe: Transatlantic Relations after the Iraq War* (London: Verso, 2005).

[3]. There is a burgeoning literature on the subject of a cosmopolitan Europe. A good survey is provided by Chris Rumford, ed., *Cosmopolitanism and Europe* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2007).

[4]. See John Keane, *Global Civil Society?* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

[5]. A good discussion of Europe's political transnationalization and its cosmopolitan implications can be found in Ulrich Beck and Edgar Grande, *Cosmopolitan Europe* (London: Polity Press, 2007).

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