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"Family Values": Discourses and Policies in Postwar Austria

Introduction

I will start my presentation by outlining the development gender relations took in the aftermath of WW II in a country like Austria. As a second step I will shortly describe the discourses on "family" becoming dominant in the public during the period of re-construction. Finally I will look for the traces these discourses left within politics. I will point out who the actors and groups were taking part in the formulation of specific policies aiming at "families". I hope to make clear to you their different approaches, the moral values which informed the policies they proposed and wanted to put through as well as the framework which structured the political decision making. I hope that all this will become visible to you at least to an extent allowing to discuss some provisional conclusions which can be drawn from our comparison of two societies.

First, however, I will point out some theoretical and methodological implications. Forgive me, if you feel that my remarks are a little redundant at times. I think, however, it is important to define the ground from which I am arguing:

Talking about "family", the crucial issue of my presentation, I want to stress that I am refering to a very specific kind of social setting. The family-model of the postwar era was based in those bi-polar gender characteristics developed in modern history. Therefore they are often refered to as "traditional" ones endowed with a nearly nature-like force and in-escapebility. In order to de-naturalized and historize "family" I want to define what I mean using this term--a social group with a heterosexual couple, man and women, at its center. They live together and cooperate (according to a rather fixed, not at all open and arbitrary gendered division of labor) in taking care for their (mostly one to three) children. For the period of time we are talking about the respective norms are based on the "breadwinner-caretaker-model". A "family" in that sense is viewed as an incomplete one without at least one or two children who are raised by their caretaking mother and their breadwinning father.

Though "family" often stands as **the** icon of the private realm, people do not form "families" according only to their private and individual needs and wishes: State laws define how "families" have to be, how they are established and dissolved. Respective social norms are defined, defended, enforced by social policies aimed at "families". From that point of view I will analyse the postwar processes in developing a new set of social policies later on.

Family therefore can be described as a unit which is situated right at the intersection of the private and the public. Much could be and much was in fact said about the devide of the private and the public Habermas above all elaborated on. Most of the abundant critique concerns Habermas' negligence of the gender and power implications of his separated-spheres-model. I agree with most of the criticism. I think, however, the private-public scheme can be useful if the innerconnectedness and hierarchical relationship of both spheres is taken into account: It is in the public sphere where the limits of the private and regulations for private personal behaviour are defined (see, e. g., Hoff

1991, 36).

Analyzing family as a historical phenomenon I have also gained much from Foucault's concept of the "bio-power" aimed at the production and reproduction of humans. (Foucault 1990, 25) These modern power techniques are geared towards each individual, i. e. his or her sexual behaviour, which became both the object of analysis and the target of regulatory intervention (Foucault 1990, 26). The "family" is one of the most or **the** most crucial of social settings which is shaped by those power relations on the one hand and is vice versa shaping and defining these power relations.

Finally, talking about "family values" means also talking about norms with respect to how people should behave. These norms are always gendered ones, as feminist research has shown. At least as a nontheless very powerful subtext, these gendered norms are negotiated and re-negotiated in discourses on "family" in a norm-definition and re-definition process.

Gender relations after World War II

It is common wisdom among gender and women's historians that World War II caused a serious crisis in gender relations. Most men were absent during the war and afterwards as soldiers and as prisoners of war. Women had taken over many of the functions formerly performed by males. They had entered therefore professional fields unknown to them before, thus gaining, willing or not, a relative independence. They had learned to organize their households, their lives with children and other relatives. "Entmaennlichung" (Burghardt 1946), translated something like "De-Masculinization", a term coined in the postwar-era shows how the contemporaries experienced that shift in gender relations.

After WW II many private relationships had dissolved, couples had separated, women, whose partners were missing had engaged in new relationships. The men's return, often after years of absence, caused also conflicts because men and women had experienced totally different realities and lives during the war. Furthermore, men returning to their homes and families were often strangers to their children born during their absence. When these soldiers returning from war or some prisoner camp were weakened, ill or disabled by the war they often became very much of an additional burden to their already exhausted wives.

Often the men's expectations towards their wives had not accommodated to changed circumstances, a fact which led to a high of divorce rates after the war, reaching a peak in 1948. On this statistical level dropping birth rates might also be seen as a result of a universal social crisis, the crisis in gender relations being a substantial part of it.

It is important to state, however, that this "forced autonomy" of women and wives in general did not enable an active appropriation of space for own self-determined activity. In fact, the result of war and its aftermath was exhaustion rather than emancipation (Schoeffmann 1996, 205).

More important for our topic than the details of the crisis of gender relations due to war and aftermath, however, are their immediate consolidation in the postwar era. The enormous disruptions--with respect to participation in the labor force, societal division of labor, coping with postwar everyday life, private relationships--were followed by a nearly ubiquituous presence of the

nuclear family with its bi-polar, complementary gender roles. This development eventually led to what an Austrian sociologist, Rainer Muenz, called "the golden age of marriage and child bearing" (Muenz 1985, 12). Whereas up to then family and children had been a privilege of certain groups they became a nearly universal social norm during the fifties: both in the descriptive and the normative meaning of the word.

The cohort which was going to be the parents of the baby-boomers became the most marrying generation on record: about 90% of those born between 1930 and 1945 actually married. Almost all of them had children. Furthermore people married at a lower age and had their children earlier, thereby reversing a long-term demographic trend of falling birth rates.

The baby-boom of the early 1960s was the climax of a phenomenon many historians have called the "renaissance" of the family. I want to argue, however--together with Elaine Tyler May--and I quote: "The legendary family of the 1950s [...] was not, as common wisdom tells us, the last gasp of 'traditional' family life with roots deep in the past. Rather, it was the first wholehearted effort to create a home that would fulfill virtually all its members' personal needs through an energized and expressive personal life." (May 1988, 11)

I agree that the models which laid at the basis of the family of the 50s where familiar ones, they emerged--as already mentioned--during modern history. Their overall-dominance though was part of a historically new standardization within society which resulted in an exclusion or at least marginalization of different, deviant ways of life. In respect to the repertoire of possible roles women could play publicly this meant a general "housewife-ization" of women after WW II. To be a wife and mother taking care of the family home became in nearly all post-war discourses on family the innate "nature" of women irrespective of their social status.

It is important to note that I am talking here only about public representations: in newspapers, in magazines, in commercials, in the speeches of politicians for example. If you take a look at statistics it becomes clear, that employed work was an everyday experience of many women--even married ones, even women with dependent children. No matter if before or after WW II: about 35% of all women were part of the labor force, 60% of them being not married, but 40% were. Despite this statistical evidence and the everyday experience the work of females outside their households was an anatheme of the time. This nearly uncontested gap between public representations and individual lives, individual realities seems highly remarkable to me.

Very significant in that respect is the character of the "single woman", which haunted postwar discourses in the late 1940s. The "single woman" is a person, who is not able to find a male partner, due to the death of more men than women during WW II. Her life was described as without hope, dull and meaningless. These women were refered to as "social problems", as they had to earn their living on their own, they needed an apartment of their own, they needed to be offered a new meaning in life which they lacked: They would not have children (and a husband), the only reasonable meaning in a woman's life.

Without being able to go more into the details I would suggest that we interpret the discoursive phenomenon of the "single woman" as the other side of the coin "housewife-ization". If somebody was not able or willing to fulfil the social expectations towards women this could only be thought of as a personal disaster, as a personal suffering. As the natural destiny of every woman was to be the care-taker for her own family, it could only result in distress if not doing so.

To add a few more aspects to the picture maybe I should mention the unsuccessful women's emancipation movement after WW II until the late 1960s. Any efforts by social democratic or communist party women to take up pre-war traditions failed not only due to male resistance, but also because of lack of interest on the women's side. I only want to point at a minor, but--as I think--very symbolic conflict in the 1950s: Every spring the Austrian women's movement of the interwar era used to celebrate the International Women's Day devoted to claims for women's emancipation within the labor force and in personal relationships. The authoritarian "Staendestaat" after 1933 put this tradition to an end. After 1938 National Socialism promoted "Mother's Day" according to its racist and pro-natalist population policy also in now "Ostmark", the former Austria. At the Nazi's defeat their efforts, however, had made "Mother's Day " an important celebration day for women in spring. A kind of competition emerged between both events, and though the activists in the post-war women's movement tried hard to revive the emancipatory tradition and to cling to the International Women's day, Mother's Day made its way to become a generally accepted holiday. The international women's day did not regain its former importance until the women's movement of the 1960s.

Finally I want to tell you a last anecdote in order to make clear the extent of the "housewife-ization" of females: During the late 1950s the City of Vienna, before the war model of social democratic efforts for sexual and lifestyle reform, conducted a specific campaign geared at little girls: The social democratic city-administration distributed dolls among girls in public kindergartens and schools. The girls were told to take care for their foster dolls, in order "to awaken responsibility and the desire to protect their offspring" as a city official said. After a year of probation with monthly inspections the mayor or his deputy and a city councellor honored the so called "doll mothers", the little girls, in a public ceremony with a certificate of adoption and a diploma for being good "mothers" to their dolls. (Mesner 1994, 170ff)

So, in order to sum up: After the faults and disruptions in gender relations which occured during and after WW II, the forties and fiftes in fact experienced a ubiqitousness of "family"-discourses. These were accompanied and followed by a nearly universal enforcement of "family" as a normative lifestyle giving no room to alternative ways of living.

Asking for the reasons of this outstanding success of the family-model I want to start at the defeat of National Socialism, which meant also a break-down of prior ruling patterns, ideologies and sets of norms. New concepts had to be found or old ones revived. An analyses of postwar discourses, which I cannot carry out now in detail, shows that this re-conceptionalization fell back on familiar patterns. Thus, the already known family-model became the guarantor for a safe re-construction process and for the restoration of calculable, steady circumstances.

I don't want to pretend that there was only one undisputed trend which was wholeheartedly embraced by everybody, without any frictions: Women, for example, did not always retreat absolutely voluntarily from the work-places they had entered during the war, when returning men claimed them. The withdrawal into the households was also due to post-war shortage of employment and social pressure aimed at married couples who were both earning. All in all, however, there is no contra-indication, that the housewife-ization and family-ization was not appreciated by the overwhelming majority of Austrians. It seems as if most of the women who had to clear away rubble after WW II were happy to escape their "forced matriarchy", as two Austrian historians, Irene Bandhauer-Schoeffmann and Ela Hornung, put it (Hornung / Schoeffmann 1994, 242).

The Invention of "family policies"

Coming to the political field where the new paradigm of "family policy" was conceptionalized in the 1950s I think it is useful to point out a few features of the Austrian political culture which are different from let's say U. S. politics. For the time considered the Austrian political system was very unitary and focused on--mainly two--political parties, those being nearly the only channel to the political decision making process. Compared to American parties, their Austrian counterparts are centralized, strong institutions which decide autonomously about candidate nomination. Furthermore, they are not very open to political groups and claims from outside their organizational framework. During a long period of the postwar in the so-called Second Austrian Republic parties functioned as representatives of historically grown, socially and culturally different constituencies. They actually formed the centers of these social sub-systems. Up to the 1970s parties had almost a monopoly in their function as "transmission belts" (Ebbinghaus 1976, 26) between the needs of certain constituencies and groups and the executive or legislative branches of the state.

From 1947 to 1966 Austria was governed by a coalition of its two big parties: a catholic conservative one which held the majority of the mandates, and a socialdemocratic party which might be better described as "liberal" or "progressive" in U. S. political terms. The way the decision making process was structured meant that political decisions could only be made if both parties agreed on an activity, measure or law. Negotiating, trading and compromising was therefore the most common way of decision making.

Your may wonder why I refer only to political parties, party structures, and party functionaries when talking about political culture and the political field in a meaning drawn from Bourdieu. I think it is justified in the case of postwar Austria. Political parties were the only institutions to provide the space where political claims could be made, negotiated, and maybe transformed into a policy.

Though the crisis of the gender relations seemed to be settled within the private realm of the family home, some of its results challenged the political decision makers. Mainly two issues concerning families dominated the political agenda. The first one was a further decline of birth rates at the end

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of the forties. In conservative scenarios this statistical evidence became a threat to the society as a whole. It was seen as the result of family destroying forces, which were attacking the "people"--in German "Volk"--as a whole. These fantasies were--only a few years after the defeat of National Socialism-- not free from rascist and xenophobic allusions: A permanent deficit in births would lure alien influence into the country and thereby endanger the Austrian "Volk" and its particular nature, incrementally taking away all the resources and means of subsistence. After having survived the mortal danger of war, the war-trauma resulted in the postwar-fantasy of a dying out Austrian people.

The second issue was intrinsically interwoven with the lamenting over low birth rates: The Austrian marriage regulations dated back well into the monarchy, stating that the husband was the head of the family, wife and children had to obey his will. Needless to stress that this rule had important implications for the custody of children and the right of a wife to take up a profession. The women's movement during the interwar-era had already demanded to change those regulations into more egalitarian ones. The discussion on law reform was taken up again after WW II with the claim that marriage should be based on partnership more than on domination and obedience.

In the ensuing conflict the women's claim for more equality taken up by the social democratic party was countered by conservatives with the picture of the threatened people and the threatened family. And it was the set of norms called family which was to rescue the "threatened" people. "Families" and the respective gender norms, which were seen as based in "nature" now became kind of "ramparts" against the problems of social change. Family was described as "the last fortress of our people and thereby the last remaining strong fortress of Western culture" (Paunovic 1950, 4). I do not have to mention that we are in the first years of the cold war and Austria was still a country occupied by the United States, Great Britain and France as well as the Soviet Union. The allusion to Western culture has to be understood also within that framework.

The success of the economic re-construction process, the re-construction of a national identity was seen as based on the existence of "real" families. As the hierarchical family was "natural" any change of the legally fixed hierarchy could be denounced as unnatural and therefore harmful. Given the fact that the political decision making process was based on compromise it soon became obvious that a reform of marriage law could not be put through.

Instead "family policies", social policies aimed at families, offered a more convenient and less frightening solution in this framework. Starting from the low birth rates it was argued that Austria needed more families ready to have and to raise children. It could not be denied however, that many people could not afford to have a family with two children on only one income. Conservative and liberal-progressive proposals how to react on the tensions that emerged from that situation differed: The conservative-catholics proclaimed the "family wage": They wanted wages for (always male) family-breadwinners to be high enough for the living of a family, so that the family's mother need not take up any job in order to earn extra-money. If it was part of the natural world order that women stayed at home with their children then it was the duty of politicians to enable them to fulfil their natural destiny. "Family wage" became a wide spread slogan during the late forties and the fifties. I

do not know, however, any elaboration on how this could work. Thus, I suggest to interpret this slogan as a highly symbolic one, meant only to state the moral claim concerning family values.

From the social democratic point of view caretaking mothers staying at home with their children had become also an indisputable aim during the fifties. I take the abandonment of alternative life-style models the social democratic movement had held during the interwar era as an additional proof of the prevalence of the family-model after WW II. Accepting, however, the fact that most of the social democratic constituency were not able to afford a living on only one bread-winner's income the Social Democrats proposed the "mechanization of the household" as a solution for the burden wage-earning mothers had to cope with. By promising working mothers the reduction of the time they had to spend on their household chores the familiar division of labor could remain untouched. But of course, all the new appliances featured in magazine-ads and shown in up-to-date movies cost money in the economically strained re-construction period.

This was the background of the process which led to a new paradigm of social policies: "Families" became the target of financial transfers from the state for the first time in Austrian history. In fact there were NS-precedents, although in a very different quality. For reasons I am not able to explore in detail now I think that there was no NS-model for Austrian post-war family policies.

Specific and historically new concerning Austria was the fact that the financial support for families was given without taking into account the social status and the neediness of the recipients. The transfer did not occur from richer people to poorer ones, but from people who did not have children to people with dependent children. In 1950 a postwar-related nutrition aid for those in need was transformed into an allowance for all parents with children. In 1954 the pro-natalist bias of family policies became manifest also in the legal regulations: The allowances varied in amount according to the number of children a couple had: That meant that the sum paid for the first born child was lower than let's say for the third one. From 1956 on people got also a single payment on the occasion of a childbirth. Furthermore, in 1959 a law was passed that offered a maternal leave of one year to mothers with newly born children.

Though single mothers were not excluded from these benefits, they were not the primary addressees. That can be concluded from the discourses which accompanied and prepared the implementation of the new social policies. Single mothers were never mentioned in the debates--excluded from public representations like everybody who did not fit into the family-picture. Furthermore the support and the allowances provided by the new regulations were not designed to meet the needs of single mothers. The allowances were not high enough to substitute even the lowest income by wage and offered therefore no living. "Family policies" were simply not aimed at solving the problems of single mothers, but were implemented to honor and reward a very specific conduct of life, called "family", which single mothers did not or could not match.

Annotations

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