17 – Contemporary European Society and Culture

Wars not only reorder the balance of power and diplomatic structures, they also work major changes in society and culture. This truism applies to the period following World War II. Pent-up demand for products and the need for reconstruction fed an economic miracle, especially in Western Europe. Prosperity, in turn, promoted a population increase, consumerism, and technological advance. Most governments committed themselves to a more active role in economic regulation and ensuring a social welfare system. Renewed prosperity and the specter of the Cold War also worked a downside. Numerous outsiders-students, feminists, environmentalists, terrorists-offered various critiques of European society in the years after 1945. Culturally, experimentation flourished in the postwar intellectual climate but also revealed divisions between traditionalists and modernists, and even postmodernists. Following World War II, Europe's problems are increasingly seen in a global context.

The Economic Miracle and Its Consequences

Europe's amazing recovery from the destruction of the Second World War produced a higher standard of living and increased life expectancy but also negative side effects. In this section, we examine the social changes provoked by the changing European economy and the advance of technology.

The Baby Boom and After

The Great Depression and World War II dampened European birth rates. After 1945, the western world underwent a steady increase in the birth rate, known as the Baby Boom. Governments encouraged the trend in an effort to replace lost population from the war and also to allay a labor shortage in the period. State policies of neonatalism subsidized additional births, infant nutrition, and day care. Also aided by an influx of immigrants, Europe's population increased by 25% between 1945 and 1970. With the onset of artificial means of contraception, particularly the birth control pill, the birth rate trended downward after the mid-1960s. The Baby Boomers born in this interval and who grew up amidst prosperity and consumerism benefited from the increased standard of living but also came to criticize it, along with their parents' values.

Since the 1970s, and especially since 1990, the population of many European nations has stagnated. In some states, like Germany and much of Eastern Europe, populations have already begun to decline. This trend affects politics for two reasons. Government provision for generous retirement benefits must be funded by taxes from the young. When these programs were first implemented, 20 workers funded the benefits of one retiree. That ratio has decreased to between 3-5 workers per retiree, creating a potential entitlements time bomb in the next few decades. Europe's prosperity also attracts immigrants from Asia, the Middle East, and elsewhere. Greater ethnic diversity has increased social tension and led to the growth of nationalist and anti-immigrant political parties. With the decline in religious observance among European Christians, some estimate that Muslims will outnumber Christians during the 21st century. It is likely that this demographic shift will be attended by increased conflict, as witnessed by recent violence over publication of cartoons satirizing Muhammad (Denmark, 2006; France, 2011 and 2015) and the assassination of Theo Van Gogh in 2004 in response to his (Dutch) film critical of Islam. Such tensions have arisen not only due to conflicting religious loyalties but more fundamentally over the status of religion in state and society and the growing divide between secularism and religiosity.

• THEME MUSIC

We are said to live in an age of globalization, with the easy transmission of goods, information, and people. As such, events in the non-European world have exercised growing influence on the Continent. A recent global trend affecting Europe has been the refugee crisis, with victims of war and state collapse from the Middle East (and other regions) seeking refuge in Europe. Such large population movements rarely occur without conflict or contest, as is apparent in Europe today.

Growth of and Challenge to the Welfare State

Western and Eastern governments both significantly expanded welfare benefits (known as cradle-to-grave) following World War II. In Eastern Europe, this trend coincided with the establishment of Marxist governments dedicated to social equality and providing the basics for all of their citizens. In the West, the trend was driven by the dominance of Keynesian economic theory and fears about socialist exploitation of class conflict. Western nations provided old-age pensions, unemployment, and disability insurance; subsidized or socialized medical care; and redistributed income through progressive taxation. For the most part, this social safety net proved popular, though it

came under increasing criticism during the stagnant 1970s and 1980s.

The late 1970s and early 1980s witnessed a resurgence of conservative political parties in several nations, such as Great Britain and the United States. Leaders like British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher and President Ronald Reagan criticized the overregulated economy and bloated government bureaucracy as causing the high inflation and unemployment of the period. Even Socialist François Mitterand of France was forced to abandon the more ambitious elements of his social reform program by the mid-1980s due to budget deficits and stagnating productivity. Supply-side economists argued that economic productivity would result from a reduction of taxes, regulation, and government spending on the welfare state. Supply-side policies did produce growth in the 1980s and early 1990s, but leftist groups believed the costs too high in poverty, inequality, and decline of organized labor.

Consumerism and Its Critics

Postwar prosperity brought a flood of new consumer goods. Pent-up demand from two decades of retrenchment during the Depression and WWII burst open with a spree of kitchen appliances, television sets, automobiles, and clothing fashions. Mass marketing techniques grew in sophistication, employing TV spots and computer technology to sell the good life. Images and sounds of blue jeans and Coca-Cola were beamed across the Iron Curtain to demonstrate the superior abundance of Western society. Marketers often employed sexuality to sell products, a fact condemned both by religious conservatives and some feminists who decried the objectification of women. The Western economies (including the United States) began a shift away from traditional heavy industry toward services and information processing. While this postindustrial economy created new opportunities and wealth, it also gutted jobs from older industrial areas, such as the Midland cities of Britain-Leeds, Liverpool, Manchester, and Sheffield.

Many across the political spectrum-from traditionalists to socialists-found the new consumerism shallow and extravagant. Environmentalists objected to the waste of nonrenewable resources and levels of pollution. Socialists found confirmation of theories for Marxist alienation in Western society's high levels of crime, suicide, and social dislocation. British economist E.P. Schumacher (1911-1977) argued for balancing society's need for efficiency and productive centralization with humanistic values of community and the dignity of labor. In his famous work *Small Is Beautiful* (1973), Schumacher argued for sustainable development that would take into account the needs of future generations and the impact of production on the health of the planet.

Technological Advances

Continued scientific progress marked the postwar era. Major advances in medical care almost doubled life expectancy during the 20th century. Antibiotics cured formerly deadly infectious diseases. Medical personnel first used penicillin widely during the Second World War to fight infections following surgeries and amputations. In addition; vaccines also helped curtail a number of other dreaded diseases; Jonas Salk in 1955 pioneered an easily administered vaccine against polio. Safe and effective surgery, including organ transplantation, became common after the 1970s. Due to worldwide public health efforts, often sponsored by the United Nations, smallpox was eradicated by the 1970s. However, the threat of global pandemics, such as AIDS (acquired immunodeficiency syndrome) and avian flu, have intensified with the further development of global trade and travel.

Much scientific research in the postwar period has been funded by governments. With the onset of the Cold War, both superpowers invested huge resources in obtaining a technological edge 'over the other-in rocket technology, nuclear power, and the space race. The space race produced the first moon landing by America's Apollo program in 1969. Not all applauded these advances. In his farewell address, Presid.ent Eisenhower warned of the political dominance of a military-industrial complex, comprising large, bureaucratic armed forces, arms manufacturers, and corporations, all of whom held an interest in the continuation of the arms race or even war. A new class of technocrats – engineers, managers, scientists – seemed to wield authority out of proportion to their numbers and outside democratic political processes. Moreover, many European nations adopted **nuclear power** as a beneficial side effect of the Cold War nuclear arms race. Currently, France supplies more than 75% of its energy needs via nuclear power. Opponents feared that reliance on nuclear power would lead to environmental problems, such as waste disposal and nuclear meltdowns, as occurred at Chernobyl in 1986 and almost occurred at Three Mile Island, Pennsylvania, in 1979.

Critics and Outsiders in European Society

Despite renewed economic prosperity, many Europeans felt either left out or alienated by postwar society. These groups offered critiques of consumerism, conformity, and inequality that often crossed the political spectrum.

Youth Revolts and the Generation Gap

The postwar Baby Boom generation was the first to attend college in large numbers. However, universities became a victim of their success in attracting students. Classes tended to be large and impersonal, and the professors distant. Students criticized living conditions in the dorms and demanded the addition of more up-to-date and relevant courses and programs in psychology, sociology, and women's studies. Youth criticisms were not unique to Europe; the years 1967-1968 saw worldwide protests against repression and bureaucratization. European protests began in Italy and Germany before spreading to France; these **revolts of** '68 evolved into the most fundamental critique of postwar society and nearly brought down President De Gaulle's government.

French students considered De Gaulle an elderly and distant figure, more interested in foreign affairs than domestic reform. In addition, many students and those sympathetic to leftist ideologies, such as Maoism and Trotskyism, opposed America's involvement in Vietnam and other Cold War colonial conflicts. Many students were attracted to the New Left critiques of neo-Marxist thinkers like Herbert Marcuse (1898-1979), whose *One-Dimensional Man* (1964) condemned both the bureaucratic centralism of Soviet ideology and the rampant consumerism of Western society in favor of a culture of protest and rebellion.

In May 1968, the University of Paris exploded with student unrest. Students seized control of campus buildings and battled police, demanding better conditions and a more open and less bureaucratic society. Workers initially supported the students with a nationwide general strike. When it looked as if De Gaulle's government would collapse, he defused the situation by co-opting the workers with wage increases and by ensuring the support of the army for his government. Now isolated, the students eventually settled for concessions such as input into university governance and relief of overcrowding. Though the students' more ideological demands were not met, their actions highlighted growing divisions within European society.

Young people often conflict with parents as they establish autonomy. However, some have referred to a "generation gap" to describe the widely divergent experiences of parents who grew up in the Great Depression and World War II with their children who experienced Cold War pessimism and economic prosperity. Youth culture embraced themes of rebellion, symbolized by the slogan "sex, drugs, and rock 'n' roll." Postwar European governments decriminalized gay and lesbian relationships and abortion, and made birth control widely available. The resulting sexual revolution sought to separate sexual expression from family and commitment. Many young people embraced premarital sex and open sexuality as acts of rebellion against a society they perceived as rigid and conventional. During the 1960s, the recreational use of drugs such as marijuana and LSD grew as a way to experiment with new states of consciousness. Postwar music also expressed themes of rebellion. The Beatles' long hair, irreverent attitudes, and drug references introduced a generation to rock 'n roll music. American protest music from Bob Dylan and Janis Joplin linked social consciousness with popular culture. Fittingly, the children of the Boomers launched their own musical rebellion in the 1980s with punk and alternative.

Feminism

Militant feminism began as a transatlantic movement and coincided with the push for civil rights in the United States during the 1960s. Now that women had gained the vote in almost all European nations after World War II, this Second Wave Feminism turned toward economic and cultural criticism. Women's liberation was inspired by several key works. First, French philosopher Simone de Beauvoir (1908-1986), in *The Second Sex* (1949), demonstrated how gender represented a social construction of expectations and attitudes rather than a biological category. Throughout history, de Beauvior argued, women have been treated as the Other, that is, a deviance from the "default" male gender, rather than beings in their own right. American Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique* (1963) encouraged women to battle subtle oppression that limited women's entrance into leadership positions in academia, business, and government.

Indeed, women in Eastern and Western Europe entered the workforce in larger percentages than ever before. Moreover, many women attained high political office during the postwar era. Scandinavian legislatures claim close to 50% of seats held by women. Several famous women were elected for the first time in modern history as heads of government or state, such as Margaret Thatcher in Britain, Angela Merkel in Germany, Golda Meir in Israel, and Indira Gandhi in India. Feminists advocated for reproductive rights, such as access to birth control and legalized abortion, as essential to this progress. Worldwide, Europe led the way for the liberation of women, and European feminists have proven instrumental in pushing the United Nations to develop programs for female literacy, contraception, and universal rights in those developing regions where women often suffer the brunt of oppression and poverty.

Environmentalism

• THEME MUSIC AND EXAMPLE BASE

For the examples in this section, consider how they help flesh out your understanding of the Individual and Society (IS) theme. More than ever, the lives or individuals were shaped by forces – economic, environmental, technological-beyond their control. You will notice that people will often form groups, such as reform movements or political parties, to address issues of concern.

Postwar economic growth created a host of environmental problems, such as pollution, acid rain, and global climate change. American zoologist Rachel Carson (1907-1964) spawned the global environmental movement with her investigation of the effects of pesticides on the food chain in *Silent Spring* (1962). Environmental groups sprung up in response and agitated for ecological protections, the more radical of which demanded a complete reassessment of the nature of global, consumerist capitalism. The fall of communist states in Eastern Europe revealed that socialist economies could despoil the environment as much as capitalist ones; in fact, much of the cost of German reunification has involved bringing the former East Germany up to similar ecological standards as the rest of Germany. In the 1980s Green parties sprung up in Central Europe, advocating for sustainable development and supporting other leftist causes, such as social justice and pacifism. Germany's Green Party has proved most successful, having served in coalition with the Social Democratic Party from 1998 to 2005. Environmentalists often combined forces tactically and philosophically with feminists and the antinuclear movement in the 1980s and 1990s.

Most industrialized nations now support at least some of the environmental agenda. In 1992, 178 nations sent representatives to the first Earth Summit, held in Rio de Janeiro, to address concerns over global warming. Science has confirmed that human burning of fossil fuels (anthropogenic climate change) has increased global temperatures and reduced the ozone layer. To address the issue further, 150 nations signed the Kyoto Protocol to halve so-called greenhouse gases by 2010; however, the largest producer of such gases, the United States, has of this date declined to ratify the agreement. Another issue of concern for the environmental movement has been world population growth. At the beginning of the 20th century, the Earth's population stood at 1.7 billion; as of today, it stands at over 7 billion.· Much of this growth has occurred in the developing world, often complicating global problems of poverty, illiteracy, and lack of infrastructure. Controversy over measures to address this issue, such as promotion of birth control, often provokes controversy among differing cultural and religious traditions.

Guest Workers and Immigration

During the economic boom times of the 1950s and 1960s, Europe allayed its labor shortage by enticing immigrants from southern Europe, Africa, and the Middle East. As with the United States today, these *Gastarbeiter* (as they are called in Germany) often performed jobs that local populations were reluctant or unwilling to assume. Moreover, governments often refused to extend citizenship or state benefits to these workers. When the European economy slowed in the 1970s and 1980s, local populations urged the guest workers to leave. When the fall of the Berlin Wall led to increased unemployment in the former East Germany, anti-immigrant parties and neo-Nazi groups urged their expulsion, or worse, attacked ethnic enclaves. In France, Jean-Marie Le Pen's National Front Party called for an end to immigration and supported economic nationalism; Le Pen polled enough votes in the 2002 presidential election to force a run-off before losing. An heir to the pan-German nationalist parties of the 19th century, the anti-immigrant Austria Freedom Party won almost 27% of the 1999 legislative vote, before falling back in subsequent elections. Issues of immigration and refugees (from the Middle East) highlight the growing diversity of European culture in an age of global capitalism and the challenges of successfully integrating new groups and redefining what it means to be European.

Domestic Terrorism

Indigenous European terrorist movements took root in the 1970s and divided basically into two

groups: leftists and nationalists. Leftist groups arose out of the violent youth movement of the late 1960s, especially among those influenced by Maoist and Trotskyite ideologies. The Red Brigade used armed violence to force (unsuccessfully) Italy's withdrawal from the Western alliance. Most famously, it kidnapped and assassinated Prime Minister Aldo Moro in 1978; its influence has declined since the late 1980s. Germany's Baader-Meinhof Gang also employed assassinations and kidnappings of public and business officials, most famously in the so-called German Autumn of 1977. Since the collapse of communism, the influence of the group has decreased.

Ethnic separatist movements in Northern Ireland and Spain have used tactics similar to leftist groups. The Troubles in British-ruled Northern Ireland began in 1968-1969 with communal clashes between Protestants wishing to remain in the United Kingdom and Catholics wishing to unite with the Republic of Ireland. The Irish Republican Army (IRA) campaigned against the British presence with car bombs, assassinations, and hunger

strikes. *Not* until 1998 had the two sides worked out a power-sharing agreement; in late 2005, the IRA announced that it had abandoned all of its weapons. Similarly in Spain, the ETA has agitated with assassinations and bombings for a separate socialist government representing the Basque people, the oldest ethnic group in Europe and one of the few not speaking an Indo-European language.

Intellectual and Cultural Trends

The experience of two world wars has fomented experimentation in the arts and reevaluation in the realms of philosophy and religion.

• SKILL SET

From the rubble of 1945, many Europeans reevaluated their civilization. As a focal point, consider the following interpretation (lNTR): To what extent and in what ways was the Second World War a turning point in European intellectual and cultural life? To practice the skill of Periodization (PER), try writing a focused thesis paragraph in response.

Modernism and Postmodernism

We often use the term "modem" simply to mean contemporary. Modernism, however, is associated with the Enlightenment project-that is, the effort to discover the laws of nature and of human society, and thereby reach objective knowledge of the world. Once humans possess objective knowledge, they can harness nature for their flourishing and achieve progress. These notions define developments in ideas, economics, politics, and culture from the 18th into the 20th centuries. The wrenching experiences of the two world wars and disgust over the crimes of absolutist ideologies like Nazism and communism have produced a movement in opposition to modem assumptions of objective knowledge, a movement known as postmodernism.

Postmodernism's roots lay in the 19th-century ideas of Friedrich Nietzsche and Danish philosopher Søren Kierkegaard (1813-1855), both of whom emphasized the lack of objective values in the world and the importance of subjective experience. In the postwar intellectual world, postmodernism has exercised a significant influence on literary criticism, philosophy, the writing of history, architecture, and film. Postmodernists aim to deconstruct texts-fiction and nonfiction-to find the underlying sociopolitical structure of gender, class, and race embedded in the authors' works. All ideas carry the baggage of their creator's biases and drive for power. As Thomas Kuhn (1922-1996) argued in his *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (1962), not even science possesses objective authority, instead representing a series of paradigm shifts that deal only with fact and theory, not truth. Postmodernists express interest in how knowledge is constructed rather than its correspondence with truth, since the latter does not exist. In art, postmodernists employ irony and satire and promiscuously blend traditional and modem styles.

Existentialism

Existentialism dominated the postwar intellectual world. The philosophy arises out of humanity's modern predicament – our feeling of angst amid a world of dizzying economic and technological change, the decline of traditional religious values, and the horrors revealed of humanity during the 20th century. Most but not all existentialists began with Nietzsche's premise "God is dead." If this is so, then man must "create himself." As a movement, existentialism took hold among French intellectuals wrestling with the agonizing issues of resistance or collaboration during the Nazi occupation of France. Jean-Paul Sartre (19051980) was captured by the German army during World War II and later founded a resistance movement. Sartre argued that for humans, "existence precedes essence," meaning that we "turn up on the scene" without choosing to exist; because we have no creator, our essence must be defined by our own choices and values. As is demonstrated in Albert Camus's (1913-1960) novels *The Stmnger* (1942) and *The Plague* (1947), humans must face the absurdity of existence by making life-defining choices alone and with incomplete knowledge of their surroundings. Human experience is thus subjective, and because no objective values exist for us to draw on, we must accept our radical human freedom and act with authenticity-without self-deception and by accepting responsibility for our choices. Existentialism significantly influenced the arts (see below), and with its emphasis on subjectivity and criticism of modem society, it helped lay the foundations for postmodernist thought.

Art, Theater, and Music

Signifying the increasingly important role of the United States in European affairs, the center of the Western art world shifted to New York City following World War II. Two styles dominated art in the contemporary era: abstract expressionism and pop art. In abstract expressionism, the artist does not portray anything, but instead uses the canvas and paint to express an emotional attitude or mood. American painter Jackson Pollock (1912-1956) popularized the style with his drip technique of pouring and splashing paint on immense canvases lying on the floor. Pop art is associated with both the rise of consumerism in the postwar Western world and also the irony and satire of postmodernism. Artists such as American Andy Warhol (1928-1987) and Roy

Lichtenstein (1923-1997) employed advertising, celebrities, and comic books in their art to comment ironically on the artificiality of consumer capitalism. When contemplating Warhol's Campbell's soup cans or Lichtenstein's comic strips, the line between advertising and artistic creativity becomes blurred;

The ideas of existentialist Albert Camus directly influenced the so-called Theater of the Absurd. Whereas traditional drama concentrates on the development of plot and character, absurdist drama provokes the question, "What is happening now?" Along with the characters, the audience attempts to ascertain the significance of what is occurring on stage. Perhaps the most famous absurdist drama is Irish playwright Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* (1954), in which two tramps arrive on stage and discuss waiting for a figure named Godot; Godot never shows, but the audience is never told why this person is important. In Tom Stoppard's *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead* (1967), two characters from Shakespeare's *Hamlet* discuss their upcoming fate but seem unable to prevent their untimely deaths – a play within a play.

While popular music incorporated rebellion and consumerism, composers of avant-garde (cutting edge) music experimented with serialism. Serialist composer Arnold Schoenberg (1874-1951) employed a 12-note scale and used mathematical series of tone rows to create a more abstract sound than standard tonal and melodic music. Pioneering American composer John Cage (1912-1992) experimented with chance music, where elements of a composition occur randomly. Most famously, Cage "played" his composition "4'33"" in concert, a piece consisting of not a single note; Cage simply timed the composition and then closed the piano cover. In conclusion, perhaps many of these works strike the reader as far-fetched, ridiculous, or nonsensical; with postwar culture, it may very well be that the point is that there is no point:

Religion in the Modern World

• THEME MUSIC

How relevant is organized religion in an age of technological and Intellectual pluralism? There are no easy answers to this question. Before responding, draw on what you've learned from the role of religion throughout the relevant themes of the course-in shaping views of the world (OS), influencing political life (SP), and affecting society (IS).

As noted, religious belief in Europe declined markedly in the postwar period. Nonetheless, religious developments continued to playa role in European culture after 1945.·For the Catholic Church, the most important development has been the ecumenical movement, or the effort to reach out and establish common ground with other, particularly Christian, religions. Since the Council of Trent (1545-1563), the Church had generally been on the defensive against modern ideas and culture. When Pope John XXIII (r. 1958-1963) called the **Second Vatican Council** (1962-1965), it signaled the willingness of the Catholic Church to update doctrine and practice more in keeping with modern developments. John opened dialogues with different faiths and called on wealthy nations to support social justice and work toward human rights. His successor, Paul VI (1963-1978), continued the work of Vatican II but sparked controversy 'with his encyclical *Humanae Vitae* (1968), which condemned artificial means of birth control.

Paul's death in 1978.opened the door for a historic change in the Church, the election of the' first non-Italian pope since 1522 and the first Slavic pope ever. John Paul **II** (1978-2005), often considered the first postmodern pope, lived under both Nazi and Soviet oppression in his native Poland. This experience shaped John Paul's concern with what he later called the 20th century's "culture of death." As pope, John Paul supported the Solidarity movement in Poland and worked toward the end of communist oppression in Eastern Europe but also condemned the nuclear arms race and the excesses of consumer capitalism. John Paul's long reign also witnessed his many efforts to reconcile the Catholic Church with its past, apologizing for the Crusades, Galileo's persecution, and the failures of the Catholic Church during the Holocaust. Though progressive on economic issues, John Paul adhered to a conservative line on Church dogma, upholding bans on contraception, female and married priests, and abortion. Though it will likely take decades, if at all, for radical changes to occur in Catholic doctrine, Pope Francis (2013-) has worked to humanize the Church further, with a humble style and a more accepting rhetorical stance toward the above-mentioned divisive issues.

Most European Protestant denominations have reconciled themselves to modern biblical scholarship and have adapted their faiths in keeping with modern science. Nonetheless, Protestant theologians like the Swiss Karl Barth (1886-1986) took reformed Christianity back to its roots in biblical revelation. Barth held that divine revelation stood on its own feet, without the possibility of being judged by human reason. The European Protestant experience has differed markedly from that of the United States since 1945. Evangelical Christianity along with a renewed fundamentalism has experienced widespread growth in America, trends that have not generally touched Europe. Formerly communist Eastern Europe suffered under religious persecution, which effectively killed religious belief in several nations. This unchurched

Europe often conflicts with United States when it comes to issues like Darwinian evolution and foreign policy.

Globalization

Since the beginning of this course, Europe's plate in the world has been a recurring theme. More than ever, the issues confronting the world today reflect those facing Europe. With global communication developments, such as cell phones, the Internet, and social media, it is no longer possible for one region of the world to wall itself off from the rest. Recognition of past mistakes in this regard is already apparent with postwar efforts to build a common European identity through economic and political integration. In some ways, Europe has renewed its power and prestige after the horrors of the 20th century, yet it continues to struggle with its role and place in the world, as seen in the belated response to the Balkan conflicts of the 1990s, recent struggles over the euro currency and EU, and conflicts with shifting religious diversity. As confirmed by history since 1945, many Europeans seem to recognize that their continent functions increasingly within a global context.