

Call for Papers

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Elites and the Critique of Elites from the 19th to the 21st Centuries

In the decades after the Second World War, elites had a rather good image. They were attributed high qualifications, namely the capacity for leadership and a high performance capability. In the Western world it even became a widespread view that elites are indispensable for democracies and can be brought in line with the equalizing tendencies of the modern welfare state. In the recent age of globalization, however, elites have increasingly fallen into disrepute. In current debates, right-wing populists, in the name of the »real« people, present political elites as out of touch with reality and only in pursuit of their egoistic interests. Leftist anti-capitalists identify those among the elites who profit economically from globalization as well as the »super-rich« as forces that obstruct the realization of their ideals of justice.

In political and social discourse, the term elite is thus connected with questions about the organization of power and with far-reaching ideas about social order and political designs for the future. In this perspective, elites are a promising field of inquiry also for historical research. Historians use the term elite – comparable to sociologists – as an analytical or descriptive category. Elites are hence understood as groups within the upper strata of society who occupy leadership roles in different fields of the state, society, politics or culture, and who have a crucial role in decision-making processes. A social history of elites promises insights into fundamental social structures of society, into the distribution and legitimation of power and into the chances for political participation in the process of societal changes since the late eighteenth century.

We invite historians and scholars who work in cultural studies and the social sciences from a historical angle to reflect on the social history of elites from the nineteenth to the early twenty-first century. We anticipate studies on elites from different fields in the economy, society, politics and culture: for instance, but not exclusively, members of the aristocracy, entrepreneurs, high-level clerics, managers, intellectuals, upper-level civil servants, but also politicians, party functionaries and leading artists. The focus should be on questions about recruitment patterns of elites in a socio-historical perspective. From the vantage point of cultural history, mechanisms through which influence is exerted, self-perceptions and legitimization strategies of elites can be analysed. Of high relevance are also studies of the

critique of elites, which allow to understand the formation and the patterns of agency among elites. We do also welcome contributions on the history of theories of elites in sociology and cultural studies insofar as they help to inform historical research into elites. We envisage contributions that connect with one of the following four major themes.

Performance or Domination? Functional Elites and Power Elites

Central questions within the social history of elites are: how does the formation of elites occur? How open are they? Do they predominantly rely on mechanisms of self-recruitment or is there space for social risers and those who excel through their individual performance? This approach is particularly relevant for traditional elites, for instance for the European aristocracy in the long nineteenth century, which had to compete with the ascending urban bourgeois economic and educated elites. This topic provides an entry point for social historians of both the aristocracy and the middle classes, allowing to probe into the social strata from which elite members originated, into typical trajectories of their education and subsequent careers and into marriage policies they pursued; in short: inquiries into the reasons why certain people belonged to the elites whereas others did not. In this context, historians can adopt different categories and conceptual frameworks from the social sciences, for instances the distinction between functional elites – typically recruited on the grounds of performance – and power elites (C. Wright Mills) that rather resemble cliques and to seal themselves off from competition to stabilize their own hegemony. Inquiries in this vein can be relevant for the new emerging research into the wealthy as well for a history of parties that focuses on recruitment and the role of political leadership groups. The spatial dimension is another relevant aspect of research into elites, as the can constitute themselves on the local, regional and national level as well as in inter- and transnational contexts. Another potential topic in this perspective are the elites of the Socialist and Communist International and elite formation in the context of early twenty-first century globalization.

Social and Cultural Practices of Elites

Analysing the social history of elites requires to scrutinize their specific patterns of agency and their relation to non-elite groups, those who are often lumped together as the »masses« in a rather undifferentiated fashion. Which assumptions about those who belonged to the elites were prevalent in different social strata, which self-conceptions can we identify? Relevant are also the specific forms of sociability, i.e. clubs, associations, secret societies and salons in which members of the elite mingled, as well as marriage patterns, mentalities or social practices which allowed them to emphasize their distance to the »common folk«. A range of different elites can come into view here, entrepreneurial and trade union elites, in addition to lower ranking elites such as members of works councils in factories or activists in anti-globalization movements. Relevant are also administrative elites whose members – as Pierre

Bourdieu has emphasized for the French case – did not only have to achieve educational qualifications but also required a specific »habitus« and tried to distinguish themselves socially through a distinctive »taste«. Gender historical questions come into play here as well. To what extent were elites dominated by men, and what was the role of women in elite formation? Male bonding in »Männerbünde« is a potential topic, as are the elites of the women's movements and feminist groups of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

Continuity and Change among Elites

In principle, elites were keen to cement their position in enduring fashion. However, since the late eighteenth century we increasingly see a change, a substitution and a transfer of elites. Why was the continuity of established elites broken, and how did the rise of new elites occur? The epoch of the French Revolution from 1789 is a classic field of research in this context, as the Revolution led to the ascendancy of new bourgeois elites. Another facet of this approach is the question whether periods of national unification, as in Germany after 1871 or in Italy during the Risorgimento, ushered in changes in elites. Yet also the formation of new elites during the process of decolonization throughout the twentieth century could come into view. In a focus on German contemporary history, caesuras as those of 1933 and 1945 as well as the collapse of the GDR and German reunification could be relevant for the circulation of elites.

Legitimization Strategies and the Critique of Elites

Elites are not only trying to distinguish themselves from the »masses« through specific habitualized practices. They also try to justify their eminent position in society through discursive strategies. Inequality in capitalist societies is always stabilized, as the economist Thomas Piketty has argued recently, by political means, via ideologies of legitimization that the ruling classes produce. Which specific legitimization strategies can we identify? What form did these elite discourses take and how were elite concepts tied up with blueprints for societal order? What was the role of the »scientization of the social« throughout the twentieth century in this context, for instance the sociology of elites that, among others, Gaetano Mosca and Vilfredo Pareto developed?

Legitimization strategies by the elites always responded to a public critique of elites. It does suffice to mention the critique of the aristocracy in the early nineteenth century or the trenchant criticism of the trend towards an oligarchy, the lack of democracy and the proliferation of »leaders« who silenced the »masses« in socialist labour movements around 1900. The general question arises which justifications a critique of elites relied upon: was it embedded in visions of social reform, or linked to demands for democratization? Finally: can we distinguish specific periods in which a critique of elites proliferated across the long-term, from 1800 to the early twenty-first century? Did the form of any criticism of the elites change

in the late twentieth century after the demise of the Cold War and in the context of increasing globalization?

We are planning to organize an authors' workshop at the premises of the Friedrich Ebert Foundation in Berlin on 29/30 October 2020 to discuss individual article contributions, thematic ideas and shared questions that relate to the thematic focus on elites for the *Archiv für Sozialgeschichte*, volume 61 (2021). In case that it might not be possible to hold a face-to-face workshop in October due to continuing restrictions in regard to social distancing, we will devise another forum for the discussion of these topics among the contributors to the volume. We invite interested scholars to submit abstracts that sketch out a potential contribution **by 30 June 2020**. These abstracts should not exceed 3,000 characters. Abstracts, presentations at the authors' workshop and subsequent article manuscripts can be held and submitted in either German or English. The editors of the *Archiv für Sozialgeschichte* will select those contributions that will be included in volume 61 (2021). The deadline for the finalized article manuscripts with a length of about 60,000 characters is 31 January 2021.

The *Archiv für Sozialgeschichte* is edited by Kirsten Heinsohn, Thomas Kroll, Anja Kruke, Philipp Kufferath (managing editor), Friedrich Lenger, Ute Planert, Dietmar Süß and Meik Woyke.

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