German images of 'the West' in the 'long nineteenth century'

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'The West' has been a prominent concept of research in twentieth-century German history. However, little is known about its conceptual evolution and the historical multiplicity of images of 'the West'. What exactly was meant by 'the West' in different historical contexts? Which political, economic and socio-cultural phenomena did the term evoke at different times? These questions and more formed the basis of a conference held at the German Historical Institute London from 2 to 4 June 2009, with the aim of providing a conceptual analysis of 'the West' reaching back to its beginnings in the nineteenth century. Following the concept of *Begriffsgeschichte*, the conference set out to analyze the development and shifting semantics of the term from the early nineteenth century onwards. It sought to scrutinize the spatial dimensions reflected in German images of 'the West', as well as the ways in which they were used politically. It engaged with the transnational rationale behind constructions of 'the West' and tried to identify caesuras in its conceptual history. Four panels focused on the nineteenth century, while one panel examined receptions of nineteenth-century notions of 'the West' in West German discourse after 1945.

A first panel discussed the formation of German images of 'the West' in the early nineteenth century. CHRISTOPH BAUER (Bochum) took his cue from Hegel's contention that 'world history goes from East to West, for Europe is simply the end of world history, just as Asia is its beginning.' Hegel constructed a contrast between East and West that set a precedent for subsuming European history within a larger, single, self-contained historical evolution. What was to be realized in the movement from East to West was a process of universal human history. In particular, Bauer discussed the antagonistic structure of values central to 'Western modernity' such as liberty and equality, and Hegel's suggestion as to how to resolve these troubling 'value antagonisms' through mediation.

JOHANNES ROHBECK (Dresden) evoked the Hegelian and Rousseauian roots of Karl Marx's thought to shed light on the role of 'the West' in his philosophy of history. In particular, he stressed the importance of the Enlightenment's notion of 'the West' for Marxian thought. For Marx, the West was 'the motor of modernity', the space where the universalities of modernity were situated and thus the space in which revolution was ripe to happen. This space of an expected revolution was broadly defined against Russia which was considered to be not far along enough on the process of world historical development to be counted in the space of imminent revolution.

Amidst the Pandora's Box unleashed by the French Revolution and Prussia's vacillating territorial boundaries before and after the Revolution, MICHAEL ROWE (London) explored contemporary debates over locating and defining what it meant to be Prussian during the reform era. Rowe stressed the fluidity of geographical and geopolitical concepts at a time when established ideas of a European North-South divide and new ideas of a European East-West divide were competing in contemporary discourse. In discussions on Prussian identity, however, 'the West' did not figure particularly prominently, he argued. Rather, the Prussian reformers thought in categories of 'old' versus 'new' Prussia and followed the conceptual framework of great power politics. As it seems, a significant shift occurred in the 1830s when the East-West dichotomy became prevalent following the November uprising in the former Polish territories, a theme which was later taken up by Benjamin Schröder (Berlin).

In the first keynote lecture, ALASTAIR BONNETT (Newcastle) reflected on 'the West' as a 'crisis concept'. Drawing largely on British discourses of 'the West' from the early decades of the twentieth century, he discussed the Janus-faced nature of 'the West' which either figured in narratives of decline or offered ways of triumphantly transcending inner contradictions. In particular, he argued that the idea of 'the West' gathered momentum

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as a powerful rhetorical commonplace in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries when it helped resolve some of the problematic and unsustainable characteristics of 'white supremacism', namely the 'failed attempts to marry social elitism with racial solidarity'. 'The West', so his argument went, proved to be a much more flexible idea than 'whiteness'.

The second panel scrutinized German images of 'the West' in political discourse between 1848 and 1918. CHRISTIAN JANSEN (Berlin) focused on German liberals' perceptions of Great Britain after 1848/49. Their image of Britain was initially based on Romanticism and *Vormärz* ideas that the two nations were bound by cultural-literary ties and a racial affinity between Germans and Anglo-Saxons. This affinity was mainly pitted against the South and the Mediterranean. After 1848/9, when Great Britain became the main destination for liberal and revolutionary refugees from the German lands, the perception became more differentiated. In particular, the British public sphere served as a substitute for an oppositional German one. Most importantly, Britain was increasingly seen as a role model and ally, especially given the perceived complementary British and German strategic concerns about Russia and France. As it seems, images of 'the West' only featured marginally in liberal thought. For the most part, they were rather fuzzy and loosely influenced by Hegelian ideas. In the wake of 1848/49, of course, it seemed as if 'Eastern' absolutism was threatening to overrun 'the West'. This changed again with the Crimean War, Jansen argued, when 'Western powers' were thought to fight against 'the East'.

THOMAS ROHKRÄMER (Lancaster) contested the view that Germanness in the late nineteenth century (especially from the 1860s to the 1880s) was primarily defined by a 'Western other', be it the 'abstract' French or the 'pragmatic' British. Rather, he claimed that conservative cultural critics at the time were far more concerned with the 'other' within Germany. Anti-Semitism in particular, he pointed out, was a much more widespread phenomenon than any anti-'Western' feeling. Cultural critics could not assert any German superiority over 'the West', as this would have suggested the achievement of an ideal state of affairs yet to be realized in Germany itself: through the unification of all 'true Germans' in a single communal faith. Thus, the true targets of German cultural critics were Socialism, Ultramontane Catholicism, and above all the Jews.

In analyzing German political discourse during the First World War, MARCUS LLANQUE (Augsburg) identified the year 1917 as a significant caesura. The war had intensified classical stereotypes and turned Germans against 'Russian barbarism', 'French decadence' and 'British imperialism'. However, 1917 took the Tsarist enemy out of the equation to be replaced by the democratic United States of America. The '*sinngebende Kriegsgegner*' could now be crystallized as 'the West'. During the war, 'Western democracy' became a rhetorical commonplace on all sides of the conflict: While France, Britain and the U.S. wholeheartedly embraced the concept, Germany conceived itself as the West's 'Other'. This, of course, confused those German intellectuals who could still remember the critiques of mass democracy as articulated within 'Western' countries prior to the war. Perhaps most importantly, however, all those who wanted to democratize Germany were now facing the dilemma of not appearing anti-German when arguing in favour of 'democracy'.

More often than not, notions of 'the West' were intertwined with perceptions of the United States. The third panel highlighted this relationship both in structural and ideological terms. Unfortunately, Jürgen Zimmerer had to cancel his paper on 'Karl May and the „Wild West" as the Land of Opportunities'. SUSANNE HILGER (Düsseldorf), however, presented concrete examples of the experiences of large German enterprises coming to terms with the rise of the U.S. as the world's leading industrial power in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. America and its business practices proved to be a blueprint, a market and a competitor, leading to an intricate process of transfer and adaptation in industrial production within the context of an ever growing Atlantic space of social interaction. Interestingly, however, 'the West' was largely absent in the realm of perceptions.

The fourth panel analyzed 'images of „the

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West" in the context of German federalism'. Following on from the preceding paper, SIEGFRIED WEICHLEIN (Fribourg) discussed perceptions of the 1787 American Constitution by German liberals. Weichlein was particularly interested in the relevance that German liberals saw in the American Constitution for their own debates over an envisioned German *Bundesstaat*. It seemed an ideal reference point for republicans, since its federal structures reassured both those concerned with freedom and those concerned with the unity of the nation. While 1848 began with the hope of realizing a Federated Republic and constituted the high point of the federalist reference to the U.S., the final assertion of the constitutional-monarchical principle in the Paulskirche meant the collapse of the republican *Bundesstaat* utopia. In its place, democratic leftists increasingly embraced the model of the central state and used the example of the American Constitution to advocate the principles of the *Rechtsstaat* and *Grundrechtstheorie* instead. As prominent as the U.S. featured as a point of reference in political discourse and as a concrete model around 1848, it was not yet seen as part of a larger – politically deployable – spatial entity called 'the West'.

EWALD FRIE (Tübingen) set out to locate 'the West' on the mental map of nineteenth-century Prussia and argued that the rhetorical deployment of the term 'the West' was consciously avoided in Prussian political discourse. Since 'the West' was understood as encapsulating the universal values of the Enlightenment – as could be gathered from a couple of sources stemming from Otto von Bismarck and Theodore Fontane –, the awareness that the still fragile Prussian state structurally belonged to both 'West' and 'East' led to a relative silence on the issue. After all, the project of creating a unified Prussia was still ongoing at the time. Only the foundation of the *Reich* allowed for a framework, a new 'middle', in which Prussians East or West of the Elbe could take a clear stand: distancing themselves from 'the West' and subsuming themselves into a German identity.

CHRISTIAN MÜLLER (Münster) examined images of 'Western' constitutional developments which German contemporaries perceived and used in daily politics. Specifically, he focused on German perceptions and adaptations of English, French and American constitutional and political developments from 1848 to 1890 – namely, the French constitution from Bonapartism to the Republic, the English constitution and the reception of Mill and Bagehot, the discussions about Proportional Representation, and the fears of an 'Americanization' of politics. As Müller pointed out, 'the West' did not play any distinct role in these debates. Instead, it was the individual nation-states and their respective political cultures that mattered to contemporaries.

The potentially ambiguous position of Germany between 'West' and 'East' was explored by BENJAMIN SCHRÖDER (Berlin) in his study of Rhenish and Badenese liberals during the Vormärz. Prussian-Rhenish liberals especially were able to see the internal differentiation in political and economic development by contrasting the Rhine Province to the East Elbian heartland, while more powerfully realizing that Prussia and Germany as a whole were behind their 'Western' neighbours. Indeed, it was only the extremely negative picture of the 'despotic East' that allowed these liberals to locate themselves and Germany in 'the West'. Furthermore, it eclipsed notions of a North-South divide which had been dominant before. The imperatives of the varied strands of nationalist thought meant that, while 'Western' neighbours could function as examples for progress along similar 'Western' lines, liberals desired a specifically German path towards their constitutional goals which rendered the notion of the 'middle' attractive.

Delivering the second keynote lecture, ANSELM DOERING-MANTEUFFEL (Tübingen) explored the historical processes that influenced the changing relationship between Germany and 'the West' in the twentieth century. The 'crisis of liberalism' in the wake of the First World War led to an irreconcilable contrast and conflict between the two during the era of National Socialism. However, many of those intellectuals and artists who emigrated during the 1930s experienced 'the West' firsthand and subsequently became prominent advocates of 'Westernization' after the war: thus laying the groundwork for a fundamental redefinition of Germany's relationship

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with 'the West'.

Following on from DOERING-MANTEUFFEL'S keynote lecture, the last panel investigated 'German images of „the West" after 1945 and their origins'. DOMINIK GEPPERT (Berlin/Bonn) opened the panel with an analysis of 'homeless left-wing' intellectuals who, in the years preceding the foundation of the Federal Republic, advocated for post-war Germany to function as a bridge between 'West' and 'East'. Voicing their views in publications like *Der Ruf, Frankfurter Hefte,* and *Ost und West,* they hoped to claim a space wherein the excesses of both capitalist democracy as embodied by the U.S. and totalitarian communism as practiced in the USSR could be overcome. Their alternative was a Germany, and for many a united Europe, as defined against both 'West' and 'East' and rooted in 'socialist democracy', 'socialist humanism', or 'socialism of Christian responsibility' that would renew Germany's traditional role as a *geistiger Vermittler*.

RICCARDO BAVAJ (St Andrews) examined one of the major representatives of a particularly powerful image of 'the West' in the Federal Republic: the rémigré political scientist Ernst Fraenkel. While Fraenkel's experience of American political culture and his engagement with the constitutional history of the US influenced his image of 'the West', it was only in the early 1960s that he became obsessed with the term 'Western democracies'. Bavaj argued that Fraenkel's frequent usage of that term was part of his art of persuasion geared towards a fundamental transformation of West Germany's political culture. The interesting conflation of a spatial concept and a keyword of political thought allowed him to anchor the Federal Republic firmly in the realm of pluralist democracies: a supposedly homogenous political space called 'the West'.

Although the German conservatives' political decision of integration in 'the West' after 1945 was a determined one, appropriation of 'the West's' ideological model was far less so. It posed a considerable challenge to the Conservative politicians and intellectuals, since at its core it demanded a positive stance towards liberal democracy. MARTINA STEBER (London) analyzed the manifold Conservative adaptations in the 1960s and 1970s, which witnessed an intensified debate about what it meant for the Federal Republic to be part of 'the West'. Although essentially contemporary models of liberal democracy were appropriated, the references were drawn from nineteenth-century political theory, more precisely from the works of Alexis de Tocqueville. For the 1950s to the 1970s she identified four discursive arenas, each specifically bound to a certain interpretation and time and shaped by a specific group of intellectuals and politicians. Generally, the emphasis shifted from appreciation of the 'prophet of the age of the masses' to acknowledgement of de Tocqueville's warning against the dangers of an untamed democratization process. As a matter of fact, the reception of de Tocqueville mirrors the appropriation of democracy by West German conservatism under the flexible roof provided by the concept of 'the West'.

The concluding discussion raised a number of questions. First, it was discussed whether images of 'the West' could be examined without reference to other spatial constructions, particularly 'the East'. Apparently, 'the West' was often pitted against an Eastern 'other' which, from the late eighteenth century onward, was associated with the autocracy and 'barbarism' of Tsarist Russia. Moreover, 'the West' seems to have been referred to when the conceptual framework of the nation state was deemed insufficient to articulate universal values and Enlightenment traditions. Furthermore, the question of periodization was discussed in greater detail: While a number of papers suggested that 'the West' first surfaced as a recognizable image in the 1830s, it underwent significant conceptual transformations from the 1860s onward well into the twentieth century. Thus, rather than hanging on to Eric Hobsbawm's concept of the 'long nineteenth century', the idea of a second *Sattelzeit* was posited, between the 1890s and 1930s, during which 'the West' developed as a key reference point in politics, economics and culture. As a basis for further investigation, the organizers advanced the concluding hypothesis of a convergence of *Struktur-, Handlungs-* and *Wahrnehmungsraum* to explain the emergence of 'the West' as a powerful rhetorical commonplace from the late nin-

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eteenth century onward. Prior to this convergence, which clearly crystallized during and after the First World War, 'the West' often proved elusive. Nonetheless, the term did appear at decisive historical junctures and periods of crisis such as 1830, 1848/49 and the Crimean War, working as a relational concept that carried notions of progress and modernity (*Zukunftsargument*). In methodological terms, it was argued that the intricate relationship between mental maps, political concepts and spaces of social interaction would be an exciting field of future research.

Conference overview:

Christoph Bauer (Bochum): Der Weltgeist auf dem Weg nach Westen? Hegels Philosophie der Moderne

Johannes Rohbeck (Dresden): Die Idee des Westens in der Geschichtsphilosophie der Aufklärung bis Marx

Michael Rowe (London): East or West? The Prussian Reform Movement and Contested National Values

Alastair Bonnett (Newcastle): The West as a Crisis Concept

Christian Jansen (Berlin): Liberale und demokratische Bilder des „Westens" nach 1848/49

Thomas Rohkrämer (Lancaster): Images of 'the West' in German Cultural Criticism

Marcus Llanque (Augsburg): Der „Westen" im politischen Diskurs während des Ersten Weltkriegs

Susanne Hilger (Düsseldorf): 'Model or Market?' 'Der Westen' in der Wahrnehmung deutscher Unternehmer im 'langen 19. Jahrhundert'

Jürgen Zimmerer (Sheffield): When the 'East' became the 'West' became the 'East': Karl May and the 'Wild West' as the Land of Opportunities

Ewald Frie (Tübingen): Der „Westen" auf preussischen Mental Maps des 19. Jahrhunderts

Siegfried Weichlein (Fribourg): Der „Westen" in der deutschen Bundesstaats-Diskussion des 19. Jahrhunderts

Christian Müller (Münster): The West as Political Argument: German Perceptions and Adaptations of English and French Constitutional Transformations, 1848-1914

Benjamin Schröder (Berlin): Deutschland im europäischen Mächtesystem: Verortungen insbesondere rheinischer Liberaler 1830-1848/49

Dominik Geppert (Berlin/Bonn): Bridge over Troubled Waters: Left-Wing Intellectuals between 'East' and 'West'

Riccardo Bavaj (St Andrews): Germany and 'Western Democracies': Liberal Remigré Scholars and their Image of 'the West'

Martina Steber (London): Born Merely of 'Reason and Necessity'? The Transformation of Conservative Images of 'the West' in the 1960s and 1970s

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