Writing Post-1970 History: Conceptualizing the Late Twentieth Century in German and American Historiography

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The times when the 1970s were believed to be a decade when „nothing happened" are definitely over. Quite the contrary, the 1970s and the subsequent decades have evolved into a major field of research for historians and social scientists alike during the last few years. Yet the question of how to conceptualize and to „label" this period still remains open and highly debated and is further complicated by the international scene. Comparing the current historiographies of the United States and Germany, Ariane Leendertz and Daniel T. Rodgers detected two different discourses—two histories, as it were—accompanied by two different sets of vocabulary. These differences were the starting point for this workshop, which aimed to establish a dialogue on how to write post-1970 historiography by bringing together German and American historians and social scientists as specialists on their countries and providing a setting for fruitful exchanges.

The first panel dealt with the „Impact of the Global on Post-1970s Society and History." In the first presentation, „The Parochialism of Global Power: American Historians and American Globalism from Bemis to Bender," DAVID ENGERMAN (Waltham) argued that American diplomatic historians were not in fact affected by the „shock of the global" (Niall Ferguson et.al.) but remained focused on American policies and governmental sources without participating in the intellectual transformations of the 1970s and 1980s. Only recently has this „parochialism of global power" yielded to new topics and new approaches. Social scientists of the 1970s, by contrast, very much took global developments into account when assessing contemporary changes. In her presentation, „Discovering Social 'Complexity' in the 1970s and 1980s." ARIANE LEENDERTZ (Munich) drew attention to „complexity" as a key concept. Its rise during the 1970s indicated uncertainty about the future and a loss of confidence in the face of social transformations and a changing international environment. Although both politicians and social scientists maintained that politics would have to adjust to a more complex and more interdependent world, neither group had resolved the question of how this was to be realized remained an open question until the late 1970s. The 1970s also marked the eclipse of modernization theory, as HOWARD BRICK (Ann Arbor) pointed out in his talk, „From Modernization to World/Global Analysis." In the late 1960s (and thus long before the concept of globalization came up), modernization theory began to be superseded by a „world turn." Theories such as Immanuel Wallerstein's „world-systems analysis" challenged prevalent notions of „core" and „periphery" and hinted at the limits of modernization theories by rejecting teleology and linearity. While these new theories emerged from discourses on colonialism and imperialism during the 1960s, economic transformations contributed to the rise of „globalization" as yet another concept.

The second panel addressed the topic of „Values in Transition." In a truly German-American comparison, UWE SCHIMANK (Bremen) analyzed different views of individualism in Germany and the United States from the 1970s onwards. Proposing a scheme of four modes of individualism—liberated, excessive, embedded, and endangered individualism—he explained how sociologists of both countries held very different views on which mode of individualism was desirable and which one was seen as a threat to society. Depending on the origin of sociologists, talking about individualization therefore had very different implications. The session continued with SARAH IGO's (Nashville) presentation on „postmodern privacy," in which she identified the late 1960s and early 1970s as a period of profound change in this area. Technological and bureaucratic developments but also political events such as the Watergate scandal transformed the way Americans thought about privacy. The emergence of

databanks, in particular, led to a new consciousness about information privacy for both citizens and courts. Yet this period also saw the rise of a „confessional culture" of public self-exposure. Both developments, Igo suggested, can be seen as part of a greater shift in individuals' encounters with the public sphere.

In the panel's third presentation, CHRISTOPHER NEUMAIER (Mainz) took contemporary statements of value changes in Western societies as a starting point to set up a „triangle of value change" consisting of institutional settings, codes of practices, and values. He adapted this model to family values and discourses on divorces, stating that changes in social practices such as a rising divorce rate can lead to changes in institutional settings as was the case in the reform of the West German divorce law in 1976. The „Values in Transition" panel continued with a presentation by BETHANY MORETON (Athens), who focused on the interrelationship of family and market values, thus connecting shifts in religion and in sexual morality to shifts in the economic order. The newly emerging New Christian Right and the rising post-Fordist economic order shared a common view of the key categories of reproduction and service. In this logic, women were to provide social services without pay, while the state presented itself as a good place for investment with low costs for social provisions. ANDREAS WIRSCHING (Munich) continued the session's focus on gender and work by looking at life courses as indicators of change. During the last third of the 20th century, the Fordist life course regime eroded in Western societies. Contesting prevalent assumptions, Wirsching interpreted the Fordist life course regime as part of a bourgeois model dating back to the late eighteenth century which was characterized by a standardization of family structures and gender roles and the emergence of male industrial work. From the late 1960s onwards this life course regimen changed: female labor force participation rose while male labor force participation decreased, and family ties lessened. Whereas these changes clearly indicate economic and social changes, it remains to be seen what the new standard life course will look like.

In the third panel the workshop turned to „Economies and Crises." WENCKE METELING (Marburg) started with an investigation of „The Debate about the German Economy" of the 1980s and 1990s, which revolved around the key concept of Standort. This debate on Germany's ability to assert itself as an important economic nation in times of change, she argued, was part of an overall narrative of decline. With Germany facing strong international competition, many feared that factors hitherto seen as assets would become disadvantages. ALICE O'CONNOR (Santa Barbara) then turned to the United States, economic crisis, and the politics of the late twentieth century as a period of growing inequality. Emphasizing the significant role of narratives for shaping policies, O'Connor explained how right-wing politicians and economists hijacked economic debates in the United States from the 1970s onwards. As an example, she highlighted how conservatives regarded the Community Reinvestment Act of 1977 as a major factor in the Great Recession of 2008—despite all evidence to the contrary. Yet even during and after the crisis of 2008, American progressives failed to establish counter-narratives. Narratives remained important during the last paper given by MARTIN GEYER (Munich). He focused on „Security, Risks, and Narratives of Modernity since the 1970s." In this period, Geyer stated, optimism faded and expectations of the future changed, so the impetus for reform policies shifted as well. The future was reinvented as a set of risks, with risk-management viewed as a way to manage the future. In consequence, modernization theory had to adapt to ideas of security and risk, and it became a defensive concept with different and rivaling concepts of modernity emerging.

The papers and discussions of this workshop confirmed Rodgers's and Leendertz's initial notion that there are two different historiographies of the post-1970s period in the United States and in Germany. Whereas historians in both countries quite often focus on similar topics, their perspectives and interpretations differ from each other. The workshop engendered intense debates on differing approaches and concepts such

as „value change“ (Germany) and „cultural wars“ (United States) as ways of interpreting the 1970s, but these proved to be extremely fruitful. The question of how to write post-1970 history will probably continue to be much debated for some time, along with the question of just how important a turning point the 1970s really were—another topic that participants vigorously discussed. But the German-American meeting at the CAS presented many promising methods for investigating this time period, whether it is viewed as a starting point for new developments or as an end to processes that shaped previous decades.

Conference Overview:

Ariane Leendertz (LMU Munich), Daniel P. Rodgers (University of Princeton): Introduction

I. The Impact of the Global on Post-1970s Society and History

David Engerman (Brandeis University): The Parochialism of Global Power: American Historians and American Globalism from Bemis to Bender

Ariane Leendertz (LMU Munich): Discovering Social „Complexity“ in the 1970s, or The Brief Moment When Reality Evaded Theory and Politics Had to Catch Up

Howard Brick (University of Michigan): From Modernization Theory to World / Global Analysis

II. Values in Transition

Sarah Igo (Vanderbilt University): Postmodern Privacy: Information, Identity and Intimacy in a Post-Watergate, Post-Database Age

Uwe Schimank (Universität Bremen): Excessive and Endangered Individualism: German and American Views in Comparison

Christopher Neumaier (Universität Mainz): Value Change: A New Paradigm of Social Sciences beyond Differentiation and Individualization?

Bethany Moreton (University of Georgia): Family Values and Market Values, or What is Milton Friedman Doing in Bed with Jerry Falwell?

Andreas Wirsching (Institut für Zeitgeschichte, Munich): Gender, Work, and the De-Standardization of the Life Course, ca. 1970-2000

III. Economies and Narratives of Crisis

Wencke Meteling (Universität Marburg): Securing the Country's Future by Keeping it Competitive: The Debate about the Standort Deutschland, 1990s to the Present

Alice O'Connor (University of California Santa Barbara): Narrating the 'Great Recession': Economic Crisis and the Politics of Late 20th-Century Economic Reform

Martin Geyer (LMU Munich): Security, Risks, and Narratives of Modernity in Germany since the 1970s

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