

The Other Alliance: Political Protest, Intercultural Relations and Collective Identities in West Germany and the United States, 1958-1977

Veranstalter: VW Project Heidelberg / Rutgers University (Detlef Junker, Wilfried Mausbach, Martin Klimke, Belinda Davis, Carla MacDougall), Heidelberg

Datum, Ort: 19.05.2005-22.05.2005, Heidelberg

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The conference „The Other Alliance: Political Protest, Intercultural Relations and Collective Identities in West Germany and the United States, 1958-1977“ took place at the *Internationales Wissenschaftsforum* in Heidelberg, Germany on May 19-22, 2005. It was funded by the Volkswagen Foundation with additional support from the Heidelberg German-American Institute, the Hamburg Institute for Social Research, and the Foundation of the University of Heidelberg. The conference marked the high point of a three-year transatlantic project that is funded in its entirety by the Volkswagen Foundation and titled „The Other Within Us: Collective Identities, Intercultural Relations, and Political Protest in West Germany and the U.S. during the 1960s and 1970s.“ This project is a joint endeavor between the History Departments of the University of Heidelberg, Germany (Wilfried Mausbach and Martin Klimke) and Rutgers University, NJ (Belinda Davis and Carla MacDougall) and is under the general direction of Prof. Dr. Detlef Junker (Heidelberg).

The conference brought together 14 speakers and 25 participants (a combination of junior and senior scholars, graduate students, and former „1968“ activists) from Germany, the United States, the Netherlands, Canada, Denmark, Switzerland and the UK. The explicit aim of the conference was to provide a forum to address the transnational dimension of social and countercultural protest movements in West Germany and the United States during the 1960s and 1970s. The participants came together to discuss the intercultural exchanges between these two movements and the degree to which these exchanges contributed to the construction of collective identities on both sides of the Atlantic. The presentations and discussions reflected a variety of methodological considerations and approaches to the topic originating from the different concerns of diplomatic, social, and cultural history,

literature, and sociology.

The presentations were arranged in seven thematic sessions. The first panel, „Intellectual Histories“ (moderator, Detlef Junker) opened with a paper from Thomas Wheatland (Cambridge, MA), who took Herbert Marcuse as his subject of inquiry. Wheatland revealed a pattern of reception in America that is markedly different from what has traditionally been assumed. He called for a re-examination of Marcuse's relationship or connection with the American New Left and challenged the common assumption (propagated by the contemporary mainstream press) that Marcuse was the 'guiding spirit' and/or trendsetter of student rebellion. In fact, as Wheatland argued, by the end of the 1960s Marcuse was a better observer of the Movement than he was a mentor. Wheatland finally suggested a reassessment of the role Marcuse played in the 1960s as an attempt to loosen Marcuse's social theories from the specific context of the 1960s and to explore how his thought could help make meaning of the world we live in today. Detlev Claussen's (Hannover) paper focused on another member of the Frankfurt school, who unlike Marcuse, did return to his native Germany in the postwar period. Claussen shed light on Theodor W. Adorno's role as a transatlantic institution. He argued that the idea of „Adorno in America“ has become dominated by clichés, and if we re-examine Adorno's work and time in America, it can be seen as a highly significant example of intercultural exchange. Claussen argued that only through the mediation of America could Adorno have become the kind of institution and thinker that brought intellectuals together from both sides of the Atlantic.

The second panel initiated a discussion of the place of violence in political and social protest movements. The session titled „Subversive Traditions“ was opened by Ingrid Gilcher-Holtey (Bielefeld), who cautioned against fixing violence unproblematically to the movements of 1968. She argued for the continued significance of the determination of „violence against things, not against people“ (and, if the latter, only in direct self-defense), and insisted on the seriousness and discretion with which contemporary activists considered violence. Furthermore, she argued against the appropriateness of imputing ineluctable violent results from the rhetoric of those activists. Sara Hakemi (Bochum) took a different approach to the question of violence and challenged the divi-

de between physical and other kinds of violence by applying Foucault's notion of subjugated knowledge to her analysis of the first generation of the West German RAF and the American Weather Underground. Her starting point was to differentiate the concept of violence by contextualizing it with a tradition of (neo-)avant-gardist discourses, which profoundly affect the construction of individual and „other“ identities.

In the third panel, titled „The Past as Present“ (moderator, Roman Luckscheiter) both Susanne Rinner (Washington, D.C.) and Wilfried Mausbach (Heidelberg) explored the relationship between history and collective and individual memory. Rinner's paper examined the representations of the sixties student movements in contemporary German literature. She gave a close reading of three post re-unification novels (Frühstück mit Max by Ulrike Kolb, Der Vorleser by Bernhard Schlink, and Eduard's Heimkehr by Peter Schneider) and argued that the narrators' memories of their involvement in 1960s student protest movements are intimately connected to the memories of the National Socialist past. Rinner underscored the narrators' construction of the United States as an important geographical location as well as an imaginary space that allows for a critical examination of the recent German past. Mausbach's analysis focused on shared imaginations (in this case the Holocaust) and how they helped shape an important element of a collective identity between the student protesters of the 1960s in West Germany and the United States. Mausbach sees the 1960s as a decisive period in the transnationalization of the Holocaust. He argued that the student protest against the war in Vietnam in both countries mirrored and promoted this process. An important aspect to his argument is that globalization in the post-WWII period has allowed for the importation and appropriation of the history of others, in this case the Americanization of the Holocaust and the so-called Germanization of the Vietnam War.

Karrin Hanshew (Chicago) opened the fourth panel, „Resistance, Freedom, and Activism“ (moderator, Manfred Berg), returning to the question of violence, or rather non-violence, with her examination of the West German protest movement prior to its radicalization in 1967. She argued that in the early stages of the movement, despite the discourse of civil disobedience adopted from the early American civil rights movement, there was a significant absence of non-violence that is worth

noting. West German activists, she argued, did not dismiss violence on principle. Hanshew, therefore, pointed not to the commonalities in both movements, but rather to an aspect that failed to transfer and its implications in understanding protest forms in the 1960s. Belinda Davis's (New Brunswick, NJ) examination of the „everyday“ activists of 1960s and 1970s West German protest movements, rather than the „stars,“ shifted the focus away from the dominant narratives of how 1968 is remembered and discussed, and instead, to a much broader understanding of the „sixties“ as a historical phenomenon. While challenging contemporary stereotypes concerning activists that still surface in the scholarly literature, Davis demonstrated a common emphasis among activists at all levels and from varied backgrounds on the significance of „intercultural“ contacts, reflecting a critical opening up to a wider world that consistently challenged their perspectives and informed their activism.

The fifth panel, in contrast, turned to an examination of the concerns of the „establishment“. Martin Klimke (Heidelberg) opened the section „Protest and Power: Observing the Other Alliance“ (moderator, Philipp Gassert) with a discussion of the role youth protest played in considerations of 1960s American foreign policy. Using the example of the West German student movement, he demonstrated the institutional and strategic impact the global dimension of youth unrest had on U.S. foreign policy in the 1960s and 1970s. Focusing particularly on the interplay between the State Department and local mission officials, Klimke illustrated the variety of challenges West German youth posed to American foreign policy makers, especially in light of the country's geopolitical significance in Cold War Europe and its long-standing relationship with the United States. Jeremy Suri (Madison, WI) explored West German student protest and placed the students' political activities solidly in the context of the Cold War. He argued that sources of global unrest in the 1960s were intimately connected to the Cold War. In his paper he examined how the Cold War shaped the founding of institutions of higher education (e.g., the Free University in West Berlin) and the trajectory of the West German student movement and how, in turn, the events of the protest movement triggered a conservative turn in West German foreign policy in the form of Brandt's Ostpolitik.

In the sixth panel of the conference, titled „Culture and Meaning: Racism and Widerstand“ (mo-

derator, Madeleine Herren-Oesch), Maria Höhn's (Poughkeepsie) paper discussed how a shared opposition to the Vietnam War helped bridge the gap between West German students and African American soldiers stationed in the Federal Republic. She explored this 'unusual alliance' between white West German students and African American GIs in their shared opposition to the Vietnam War and U.S. racism and places their acts of solidarity in a larger context of opposition to capitalism and U.S. imperialism. She took as her case study the West German based Black Panther Solidarity Committee and its newspaper the Voice of the Lumpen to reveal the ways in which the group's actions served to alert large sections of German society to the plight of African Americans in the U.S. and abroad. Karin Bauer (Montreal) explored the meaning of Widerstand more specifically, and the rhetoric of the militant left more broadly in her paper on „The Uses and Abuses of Resistance.“ She traced the appropriation of the slogan „from protest to resistance“ on both sides of the Atlantic, but with a particular interest in the various uses of this concept of resistance by Ulrike Meinhof and the RAF. She showed how the concept of resistance functions differently in different cultural and political contexts.

George Katsiaficas (Boston) opened the last panel of the conference titled, „Radical Identities“ (moderator, Uta Gerhardt), and focused the discussion on the politics of the first person. His paper outlined the evolution of autonomous movements appearing at the end of the cold war era and argued for a phenomenon he understands as the „eros effect“ as central to the emergence of massive social movements capable of transforming civil society. He related both the politics of the first person and the „eros effect“ to the global nature of the movement(s). Carla MacDougall's (New Brunswick, NJ) paper examined the politics of the first lesbian-feminist center in West Germany (LAZ West Berlin) and argued for a re-conceptualization of feminist politics in the 1970s as depoliticized, using the LAZ as a case study. She suggested that West Berlin feminists consciously rejected certain trends set by their American „sisters“, and this helped to demonstrate how ideas and political actions become transformed or outright rejected in their transfer from one national context to another.

A unique feature of this conference was the invitation extended by the conference co-conveners to former West German SDS and American SDS

activists. The conference provided a venue for a reunion of sorts for the activists, many of whom were meeting again for the first time in 30 years. A highlight of the weekend was the Saturday evening discussion moderated by Bernd Greiner (Hamburg) and appropriately titled „SDS meets SDS“, between two former West German SDSers (K.D. Wolff, Frankfurt and Michael Vester, Hannover) and two former American SDSers (Bernadine Dohrn, Chicago and Tom Hayden, Boston). An additional feature of the conference was the evening film series that was open to the public, which served as an important space for former activists, the general public, and scholars to mingle. The films shown were *Viva Maria!*, followed by a discussion with Rainer Langhans (Munich), *Rebels with a Cause*, followed by a discussion with Helen Garvy and Robert Pardun (Los Gatos, CA) and *The Weather Underground*, followed by a discussion with Bernadine Dohrn.

Detlef Siegfried (Hamburg/Copenhagen) set the tone for the concluding discussion with his astute summation of the conference's papers. He raised a number of important themes and outlined areas for future work. Central to his summation, and a question frequently asked, but not yet adequately answered, was to return to a query posed during the first session, that is, what made “1968” an international or global revolution? Another central remark was the question of whether the concept of alliance is an adequate one; Siegfried proposed instead, that future research focus on intercultural weaving not confined to the relationship between two particular countries.

Tagungsbericht *The Other Alliance: Political Protest, Intercultural Relations and Collective Identities in West Germany and the United States, 1958-1977*. 19.05.2005-22.05.2005, Heidelberg. In: H-Soz-u-Kult 21.08.2005.