The American Impact on Western Europe:
Americanization and Westernization in Transatlantic Perspective

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Transatlantic Exchange and Interaction –
The Concept of Westernization
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Section 1
The influence of the United States on Europe, and on Germany in particular, is one of the enduring leitmotifs of post-1945 contemporary history. Without America's pivotal intervention in liberating Europe militarily from the Nazi yoke, without the ensuing occupation of Germany, and without the economic recovery orchestrated by the Marshall Plan, we would not have "transatlantic exchange and interaction" in the form we are accustomed to practicing today. In this conference, we will be targeting American influence on postwar western German society and considering western Germany in the context of overall western European developments. In so doing, our aim will be to contribute to the new research track captured in the phrase "intercultural transfer."¹ Our interest will focus on the gradual transformations to social structure, to constitutional practice, to political culture and public life, to (this not least) lifestyle and material culture. In all these domains, the years after 1945 saw the onset of developments which, over the next two decades from 1950 to 1970, resulted in traditional orientational bulwarks in politics and society receding ever more into the background, though part of German life since Wilhelmine times. Democracy became the social principle, thereby slowly chipping away at the tradition of the authoritarian state, without however entirely removing it. The state was no longer seen as transcending society; rather society increasingly saw itself as the shaping element, influencing and altering the institutions of state. Democracy as a social principle gradually undermined powerful polarities in society deriving from traditional class consciousness, that looked on working and middle class interests as irreconcilable.

Nor was this complex development restricted by any means to the Federal Republic of Germany:
it also occurred in the other western European countries – though the accentuations there were not necessarily the same, in line with the idiosyncrasies of national tradition. Generally, it expressed social transformations driven by the economic boom after World War II and by the process of European integration starting in the fifties. In Germany one finds this development very clearly profiled, its ramifications more clearly traceable there than in, for example, Holland or France. This was due to the fact of German capitulation – political, military, and moral – and the collapse of the Nazi dictatorship. Germany had unconditionally surrendered; it was occupied and administered by the victor powers. Recovery in the political, economic, and educational domains the Germans undertook in close liaison with the occupying powers. And among the latter, it was the Americans who brought to bear the most sustained influence on society, economy, and state.

American occupation policy had various priorities: it was aimed, on the one hand, at denazification and reeducation of the population; on the other, it sought to restructure the economic order and its boundary conditions as well as to revive the rule of law, the democratic parties, and the parliamentary system. Right from the start, American occupation policy was attended by indirect influences from the physical presence of American soldiers in Germany. The lifestyle of the GIs became an everyday influence on the Germans, affecting the way young people behaved in public, the clothes they wore, and their social conduct. America became for many people the great model in the postwar era. This was expressed, in the fifties, by a gravitation to consumerism on the part of ever wider circles of German society. Even cursory inspection reveals a striking contrast to the sartorial patterns and behavioral syndromes that had characterized the German populace in the Weimar Republic and the Third Reich.
American occupation policy was no less attended by a public debate on the cultural orientation of Germans to the west; on the need for social progress after the collapse of Nazi rule, including what direction it should take. This debate was conducted, from the end of the forties, by intellectuals who either had a decided orientation to the USA, or had emigrated during the Third Reich and subsequently returned to Germany (or to Europe), or had grown up in the USA and then worked with the military authorities in Germany as cultural attachés.

Nevertheless, it would be wrong to refer the American impact on West Germany solely to the occupation policy as practiced by OMGUS and HICOG. For the occupation policy was, itself, only one strand in a secular process first launched before World War I; directed at propagating "America's mission," it was essentially opposed to what had been the cultural self-understanding of the German Reich since Wilhelmine times.² In the post-1945 era, this process can be monitored on two planes of action; though in some aspects closely interlinked, for purposes of scholarly analysis they should be clearly distinguished from each other. In our studies at Tübingen University we have grouped these two planes under the headings "Americanization" and "westernization."

**Americanization** is when a society undergoes transformation in economic, political, and socio-cultural respects. In this highly complex process, impulses originating in the USA are taken up by another country and integrated, in clearly discernible form, into e.g. top-level/élite practice in the economy and in politics³ or else in everyday life.⁴ Here our research has concentrated on the
transfer of political and economic conceptual frameworks, and also of cultural patterns, which make their way, very much as one-way traffic, from the hegemonic power America to other countries.

"Americanization" therefore means cultural transfer (in the broadest sense). Along with art and entertainment, it embraces politics and economy as well as social codes of conduct. One thing fairly stands out: cultural transfer is unidirectional – it flows from the USA to western Europe, and indeed elsewhere around the globe. It is an element in the hegemonic practice of the world's paramount power, distinctly apparent and concretely discernible in its manifestations. Just how thoroughgoing the impact of Americanization was on a Germany stripped of its bearings after the Nazi collapse, will surprise no one.

The other plane of action we have dubbed westernization. This implies a timeframe longer that the twentieth century alone; as an analytic category, it delineates political and intellectual influence and intercultural transfer of an entirely different kind. Notwithstanding – and this makes the matter somewhat complicated – in the Cold War era from 1945/47 to the mid-1960s both terms, "westernization" and "Americanization," show broad parity of overlap.

What are we to understand by "westernization"? It is the emergence of a shared value framework in the societies straddling the North Atlantic. This framework developed over a period of almost two centuries, starting with the European enlightenment and continuing to our own day. Over these two centuries arose a number of rival political and social conceptions, whose reciprocal
links were to be tension-fraught. In brief, these were the European enlightenment, English pragmatism, and liberalism in its various European and American incarnations, from which subsequently derived, in the twentieth century, a self-perception by "the west" that it represented at once a community of shared values and a political constellation. In reaction to this professed identity emerged the counter-enlightenment, especially the Romantic movement and the intellectual currents this produced. In Germany's case, this meant idealism and political romanticism, philosophies which were to crystallize, by now intensely politicized, as the "ideas of 1914." The impact of World War I and the challenge posed by Germany's drive for hegemony led to the ideological homogenization of "the west" as a political configuration comprising the Allied powers: Great Britain, France, and the USA. Prior to 1914, it had been the differences between the three countries that loomed largest: Britain exemplified parliamentarianism in all historical singularity; France the tight knot between republicanism and the bourgeoisie; and the USA the ideological equivalence of democracy and egalitarianism. Till then, the only common ground between the three societies had been a liberal conceptual framework.

This newly fashioned community of "western" values – directed against Germany, against the "ideas of 1914", and against Bolshevism – exhibited the following traits: in the political sphere, parliamentary democracy based on political parties, a representative system of government, and social pluralism; in the economic sphere, the socially anchored claims of individuals to equal opportunity and the free market; in the cultural sphere, individualism and the postulate of freedom in art and science. "Western" consensus over these determinant sociopolitical principles was based on overlap in respect of how social interaction was conceived. And so, besides the
political ideologies, religion and science were also fitted into this self-perception, thereby creating a nexus from which traditions and a sense of intellectual community were able to develop across national borders.

Right from the outset, the USA within the west struck out on its own, achieving a liberal society free from party-entrenched conservatism; free too of any socialism of political significance for national development. On the other hand, American society had succeeded, by the end of the nineteenth century, in amalgamating the various European influences at work within it, among which the British contribution was clearly ascendant. This explains the Anglo-American coloring of the Atlantic-European intellectual nexus. After 1917, the USA slipped into the role of core western hegemonic power; unmistakable influences were now transmitted to the European countries and their social orders. At the same time, emigration from Europe – in the wake of the Bolshevik Revolution and the Nazi takeover – ensured that political and social conceptual frameworks derived from the European modernization process (these in themselves a reaction to advanced industrialization) increasingly found their way across the Atlantic, where they became particularly conspicuous in the social sciences. With the ending of World War II, such elements then made the return journey to Europe in the guise of American-mediated "westernness," as it were; at the same time, there was no letup in the impulses from Europe being beamed to America. Westernization is therefore an intellectual transfer construed as an ongoing exchange; its trademark is the continuous recycling of ideas: from Europe to America, and back again.

This temporally unbounded, general definition of "westernization" is the one deployed in our
research. Referred to the Cold War era, the following point deserves stressing. Lasting from 1945 to the end of the 1960s was a phase of the twentieth century characterized by a massive, indeed dominant, transmission of American intellectual impulses to the countries of Europe. That is why, in the years 1945-1970, the planes of Americanization and westernization so heavily overlapped. But for the historian one significant difference stands out: Through this shared experience of imbibing orientational patterns of lifestyle, consumerism, and mass culture, all of these washing over from the USA to Europe, by the end of the 1960s the sociopolitical structures of the western European countries had drawn palpably nearer to each other. This is what we mean by Americanization. In contrast, it can be observed that while the intellectual integration of western Europe, including Germany, was inaugurated by American influences, the protagonists, in what had by now become a consensual self-perception cutting across all societies in the western bloc, were themselves Europeans and quite overwhelmingly so. With the Americans they shared an interest in shoring up the west, during the Cold War years, against influences from the eastern bloc. This process went hand-in-hand with another – the installation and consolidation, qua political organization, of the transatlantic alliance system, a process lasting from the announcement of the Marshall Plan to the onset of détente – and which was finely enmeshed with it.

For West Germany the term "westernization" has a resonance of its own. After 1945 West Germans opened themselves up, in the main, to western value horizons. In politics, culture, and society the sense of dissociation from the west gradually vanished that had weighed heavier than ever with Germans after 1914, and had then reached its apogee during the Nazi years. To be sure,
at the beginning of the fifties West Germany was primarily an object acted upon from without; at that time, the western conceptual framework was experienced as alien and ill-suited to German traditions. But under the banner of the Cold War, under that of political and conceptual bloc formation against eastern Europe, the path to acceptance was eased somewhat.

Here it went without saying that Germans, in the years of recovery after 1945, first sought a foothold in their own national traditions. The political parties, as well as the governments of the states in the western occupying zone, located this in the liberal-democratic values of the German National Assembly of 1848/49; then too, they held to the principles of the German social state; and finally – this as an economic-political approach of their own – they pursued what was called "ordoliberalism." The political practice of the Social Democrat Party and the Catholic Center Party before 1933 served initially as an orientational yardstick. With the founding of West Germany westernizing influences first began to take root; change at first was slow, but from around 1957 it gradually gathered pace and culminated in the Grand Coalition. From that point on, political and social change in West Germany pursued a similar course to that in the United States or the western European countries, and was subject to comparable constraints.

Our research on the westernization of West Germany has focused, on the one hand, on the protagonists of the abovementioned process of change – among these were certain groupings within the trade union movement or those intellectuals from the USA, Germany, and western Europe that participated in the Congress for Cultural Freedom. On the other hand, we have also studied how westernization played out in those social contexts in which, from Wilhelmine times,
German national traditions were strongly articulated – for example, in Protestantism;\textsuperscript{22} in a segment of the conservative press;\textsuperscript{23} and among constitutional jurists.\textsuperscript{24} As our theses and findings on these topics will be presented during the conference itself, my task here is simply to indicate how the winds of westernization made themselves felt in German society. This sketch will generalize from our case study findings and refer them to West German society as a whole. To be sure, the following remarks represent provisional theses only.

Three areas will be singled out:

I. In the ideological self-assurance of Germans, westernization was expressed as an incremental, but ultimately thoroughgoing, repudiation of a certain historical understanding rooted in the philosophy of idealism: one that had, from the founding of Imperial Germany, come to be directed ever more sharply against the west. Its spectacular culmination had been the "ideas of 1914." Throughout the 1950s, the national-conservative majority of German historians were still largely shaped by this historical understanding. Gerhard Ritter, the most influential of the leading German historians of the first postwar decade, a man who had had close links to the anti-Nazi resistance, formulated these ideas in a 1955 speech before the German Parliament, commemorating the popular insurrection in East Germany. Here is what Ritter said on that occasion:

There has been an autonomous development of German ideals of freedom, uncoupled from the west. . . . The state is more than a roof protecting the private egoism of individual
citizens, freedom something other yet again, and better, than the right to pursue one's private interests undisturbed. The state is the political community of the people, which must prove itself as an ethical community comprised of free members of the people; freedom is voluntary commitment to the task of serving such a community." ["Es gibt eine eigene, dem Westen gegenüber selbständige Entwicklung deutscher Freiheitsideale. . . . Der Staat ist mehr als ein Schutzdach des Privategoismus der einzelnen Staatsbürger, Freiheit noch etwas Anderes und Besseres als das Recht, ungestört seinem Privatinteresse nachgehen zu können. Der Staat ist politische Volksgemeinschaft, die sich als sittliche Gemeinschaft freier Volksgenossen zu bewähren hat; die Freiheit ist freiwillige Hingabe zum Dienst an solcher Gemeinschaft."]

In West Germany this historical understanding was pushed ever further into the background. This process reached its zenith in the so-called "Fischer controversy" after 1961, which lasted throughout the 1960s. At stake in this controversy was the extent to which Imperial Germany bore responsibility for the outbreak of World War I. The historian Fritz Fischer was the first to formulate the thesis that the extent of German guilt was indeed considerable, that the elites in state, economy, and society had wanted war. This questioned the positive view of Imperial Germany's history then prevalent, while toppling from its pinnacle the concomitant historical understanding. The controversy was to induce a profound change in the way Germans saw their history, even as it generated new academic methodologies. The new paradigm, which we in Germany call the historische sozialwissenschaft paradigm, was an element in international discourse, the participants being, on the one side, American social scientists; on another, German-
American historians who had emigrated to the USA; and not least, younger German historians who had received some of their education in the USA.\textsuperscript{28}

This partial turning-away from the received national historical image and the radical repudiation of the "ideas of 1914" were no isolated phenomena confined to academic historians; rather they represented a change that swept through western German society from the end of the 1950s to the beginning of the 1970s. In our research work, case studies on the "Kronberg Circle" ["Kronberger Kreis"] in western German Protestantism and on the Axel Springer Verlag were able to illuminate the overall social dimensions.

2. One westernizing influence that calls for particular mention is the increasing acceptance of "liberal democracy" in western German society, together with (and even more so) a commitment by society to this framework in the wake of such acceptance.\textsuperscript{29} The predominantly formal understanding of democracy still entrenched at the start of the 1950s gradually yielded to its reception as a existential plank of society.\textsuperscript{30} Whereas "democracy" at the outset primarily meant bolstering the institutions of state against totalitarian influences, communism of course being at the top of the pile, this gave way in the 1960s to a stance where democracy was construed as a conceptual framework underwriting the social order. The legislation passed by the Social Democrat/Liberal coalition after 1969 served clear notice that political concern was now to be focused on extending "freedom and law" from the state level into larger society. A comparison of the political motives and interests behind the emergency laws passed up to 1968 on the one hand, and the laws passed by the Social Democrat/Liberal coalition on the other – which in 1970 and
1971 addressed such matters as the legal status of illegitimate children and their mothers or lowering the voting age – shows this trend at work.\textsuperscript{31}

3. Transformations in political thought, coupled with the declining significance of ideological faultlines in society, finally deserve mention as reflecting the inroads of westernization. This affected the political parties, the various associations, and the political public to an equal extent. Polarity between the social classes largely vanished as a category from political thinking. While in the years up to 1957 the two dominant parties, the Christian Democrats and the Social Democrats, would inject slogans from the class struggle tradition into their election campaigning, by the time of the Great Coalition some ten years later this conflict had been quite overcome. In the public debate of the time, it is no surprise to find Daniel Bell's thesis of "the end of ideology" playing a key role. In a parallel development, it became more and more apparent that the goal of policy was now to generate in society, in place of the received ideological side-taking for the one or the other political grouping, an unpolitical mass loyalty of the broadbased kind. The coalition switches in the 1960s – from the Christian Democrat/Liberal coalition via the Grand Coalition of Christian Democrats and Social Democrats to the Social Democrat/Liberal coalition – symbolize this process, which was first played out in people's minds before emerging to inform day-to-day politics. Our two case studies, on consensus capitalism and the Congress for Cultural Freedom respectively, have focused closely on this problematic.

\textsuperscript{1} On the context of this research track cf. Johannes Paulmann, "Internationaler Vergleich und interkultureller Transfer. Zwei Forschungsansätze zur europäischen Geschichte des 18. bis 20. Jahrhundert," \textit{Historische Zeitschrift}


7 For the German example see Frank Trommler, ed., Amerika und die Deutschen: Bestandsaufnahme einer dreihundertjährigen Geschichte (Opladen, 1986).


10 Richard Pells, Not Like Us: How Europeans Have Loved, Hated, and Transformed American Culture Since World War II (New York, 1997). The author cannot ultimately refute this thesis; indeed he only confirms it – by bringing out just how significant the American-dominated intercultural transfer actually was.

11 Peter Coleman, The Liberal Conspiracy: The Congress for Cultural Freedom and the Struggle for the Mind of Postwar Europe (New York/London, 1989); Pierre Grémion, Intelligence de l’Anticommunisme: Le Congrès pour la liberté de la culture à Paris, 1950-1970 (Paris, 1995); at the present conference, this problem will be treated by Julia Angster (Section II) and by Michael Hochgeschwender (Section IV).


13 Cf. a remark by the Lutheran Bishop of Berlin-Brandenburg, Otto Dibelius, which was made to an American occupation officer in August 1945: "Democracy will not take root in Germany because it is a foreign ideology." Quoted in Clemens Vollnhals, Evangelische Kirche und Entnazifizierung: Die Last der nationalsozialistischen Vergangenheit (Munich, 1989), 19.

14 Volker Otto, Das Staatsverständnis des Parlamentarischen Rates: Ein Beitrag zur Entstehungsgeschichte des Grundgesetzes für die Bundesrepublik Deutschland (Düsseldorf, 1971); Michael F. Feldkamp, Der Parlamentarische Rat 1948-1949: Die Entstehung des Grundgesetzes (Göttingen, 1998).


16 Christine Blumenberg-Lampe, Das wirtschaftliche Programm der 'Freiburger Kreise': Entwurf einer freiheitlich-

17 Werner Sörgel, Konsensus und Interessen: Eine Studie zur Entstehung des Grundgesetzes für die Bundesrepublik Deutschland (Stuttgart, 1969); Karlheinz Niclauss, Demokratiegründung in Westdeutschland: Die Entstehung der Bundesrepublik Deutschland von 1945-1949 (Munich, 1974).

18 Anselm Doering-Manteuffel, Wie westlich sind die Deutschen?

19 Taking as one's source the empirical study by Ronald Inglehart, The Silent Revolution: Changing Values and Political Styles among Western Publics (Princeton, N.J., 1977), there are clear indications that West Germany was seen by now in the circle of western societies as an integrating partner. At the beginning of the 1960s this was still far from the case, as is shown in the book by Gabriel A. Almond/Sidney Verba, The Civic Culture: Political Attitudes and Democracy in Five Nations (Princeton, N.J., 1963).

20 Angster, Konsenskapitalismus und Sozialdemokratie.

21 Hochgeschwender, Freiheit in der Offensive.

22 Sauer, Westorientierung im deutschen Protestantismus?

23 Kruip, Das 'Welt'-'Bild' des Axel Springer Verlages.

24 Frieder Günther, German Constitutional Lawyers between Tradition and Change. See this author's conference paper in Section III.


30 Cf. Ralf Dahrendorf, Gesellschaft und Demokratie in Deutschland (Munich, 1971).

31 Schildt/Siegfried/Lammers, eds., Die 60er (Kopenhagen-Konferenz) (Hamburg, 2000).