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The American Impact on Western Europe:

Americanization and Westernization in Transatlantic Perspective

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Commentary

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Section IV: Political Culture

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My remarks will concentrate on two aspects: First I will try to evaluate the historical findings of the papers presented in this section on political culture on the basis of the conceptual presentations of Anselm Doering-Manteuffel, Volker Berghahn and Kaspar Maase. In a second step I will point out some problems concerning the methodological and analytical approaches of the papers under scrutiny here.

According to Anselm Doering-Manteuffel, Volker Berghahn and Kaspar Maase there exist – at least – three conflicting interpretations of the phenomenon of cultural adaptation that European societies experienced during the 1950s and 1960s: Americanization – Westernization – Modernisation. The papers by Raimund Lammersdorf, Michael Hochgeschwender and Thomas Sauer argue unanimously and without really thematizing the conflicting interpretations offered by the organizers of this conference that during the 1950s we face a process of "Westernization". This unanimity is surprising and needs to be scrutinized, especially since the papers cover a broad range of different subjects: the question of collective guilt, the "ideology" of the Congress for Cultural Freedom and the ideational background of the Kronberger Kreis.

In my reading there exist only two real differences between Anselm Doering-Manteuffel's concept of "Westernization" and Volker Berghahn's concept of "Americanization". The first

difference is the aspect of ideas being exchanged back and forth *and* influencing both sides of the Atlantic, which is a characteristic of "Westernization". The second point is that Westernization has to be understood as a process that can be traced back to the late 19th and early 20th century and that encompasses influences from British and French traditions as well. Americanization on the other hand is a process during which "a society undergoes transformation in economic, political, and sociocultural respects. ... 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 politics or else in everyday life."[1] Or to put it in the words of Volker Berghahn, Americanization means "a process by which ideas, practices, and patterns of behavior that were first developed and widely spread on this side of the Atlantic ... aroused the interest of some Germans. ... Not America as a whole, but America in this limited way, became to them a model to be emulated".[2]

The three papers presented in this section concentrate their historical research on the post-war period and on the German experience. Their primary focus is the change and the adaptation of specific authoritarian traditions in German political culture to a Western, i.e. more liberal concept of the "Political" during the 1950s and 1960s. They do not so much take developments on the other, i.e. the American side of the Atlantic into account but they instead demonstrate how Americanization according to the definition presented by Anselm Doering-Manteuffel and Volker Berghahn worked. Only the paper of Michael Hochgeschwender traces the two way process of intercultural exchange with regard to its impact on American society by referring to the philosophical and intellectual traditions of the 19th century. He argues that the ideas and values offered by the Americanizers, like consensus liberalism, consensus capitalism, social engineering, individualist notions of liberty and human rights, were a new value mix for both sides, for the Germans and the Americans. "These concepts differed as much from European etatist traditions as from the classical republicanism of the Jeffersonian-Jacksonian tradition. ... the aim was to create the intellectual preconditions for a broader

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[1]   Anselm Doering-Manteuffel, Transatlantic Exchange and Interaction - the Concept of Westernization, p. 4.

[2]   Volker Berghahn, West German Society and the Problem of Americanization, p. 2.

European-American consensus... [providing] a foundation for U.S. hegemony and European integration".[3]

Raimund Lammersdorf and Thomas Sauer mention the existence and relevance of transnational activities in the interwar *and* postwar period, but they concentrate their analysis on the postwar period; the inter-war period is only marginally dealt with. Michael Hochgeschwender, however, shows how the pragmatist or progressivist *Sonderweg* theory resulted from World War I propaganda. He suggests that this theory has to be understood as part of the progressive movement towards intellectual independence from European idealist traditions. He convincingly shows that the protagonists of this *Sonderweg* theory had an enormous influence on the normative or ideological message of "Der Monat". However, he concentrates his analysis on the philosophers and does not include e.g. the intellectual offers of American sociology, although sociologists as well participated actively in political discussions during the interwar period and after World War II.[4] In order to be able to fully grasp the influence of pragmatist philosophy on the intellectual underpinnings of "Der Monat" a comparison with the influences of American sociology would be interesting, if not necessary. Talcott Parsons seems to me to be of special relevance here. He studied Max Weber, even translated this German thinker into English and adapted a couple of Weberian thoughts in his own action theory. Especially the anthropological premises of Parsons theories which influenced his view on the possibilities of "reeducating" German society after World War II can be interpreted as a perfect blend of German and American intellectual traditions. Hence, Parsons might be an example of how German or European and American traditions were exchanged back and forth and finally blended into an intellectual framework that enormously influenced not only scholarship in the political and social sciences but politics as well and this on both sides of the Atlantic during the 1950s and 1960s.

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[3] Michael Hochgeschwender, The Intellectual as Propagandist: Der Monat, the Congress for Cultural Freedom and the Process of Westernization in Germany, p. 15.

[4] See e.g. Uta Gerhardt, Talcott Parsons and the Re-education Policies of the American Military Government for Germany, in: Schweizerische Zeitschrift für Soziologie, vol. 24:1 (1998), p. 121-152; Bryan S. Turner, Talcott Parsons, universalism and the educational revolution: democracy versus professionalism, in: The British journal of sociology, vol. 44:1 (1993), p. 1-24

All three papers demonstrate on a broad empirically basis what Volker Berghahn pinpointed in his definition of Americanization, i.e. the important role of the Americanizers, "those who were convinced that what they saw and scrutinized was transferable" and who than "began to import these ideas and practices".[5] All three papers show how the "Americanizers" worked. The Americanizers constituted "epistemic communities" which were able and capable of changing central elements of the "politische Deutungskultur"[6] in post-war Germany. This fact makes the intellectual groups analyzed in the three papers so important. According to Karl Rohe changes on the level of "politische Deutungskultur" are a prerequisite for any changes on the level of "politische Soziokultur" which refers to those elements of political routine that shape and influence political behavior of larger social groups. All three papers demonstrate how the intellectual groups analyzed, picked up and blended American ideas, practices and patterns of behavior into existing ones. But again, one crucial point that accompanied this process is missing and that is the impact of those who have always been critical vis-à-vis American ideas and the "American way of life". What was their influence on the development of Anti-Americanism in German society? How was the co-existence of Americanization and Anti-Americanism possible? How did this co-existence function socially and politically and what were its social and political consequences? Translated into the language of sociology all three papers would need to analyze the dialectic of coupling and decoupling processes more explicitly. Implicitly all three papers show that the copying of externally defined identities and the adaptation of an exogenously developed value system promoted profound decoupling of general values from practical action. This decoupling is demonstrated vividly by Axel Sauer with regard to German Protestantism's efforts in helping to institutionalize liberal democratic principles in Germany in the 1950s, and it is shown maybe most obviously by Raimund

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[5]   Volker Berghahn, Calling a Spade a Spade, p. 2.

[6]   Karl Rohe, Großbritannien: Krise einer Zivilkultur?, in: Peter Reichel (ed.), Politische Kultur in Westeuropa. Bürger und Staaten in der Europäischen Gemeinschaft, Frankfurt/New York 1984, p. 167-193; Karl Rohe, Politische Kultur und der kulturelle Aspekt von politischer Wirklichkeit. Konzeptionelle und typologische Überlegungen zu Gegenstand und Fragestellung Politischer Kultur-Forschung, in: Dirk Berg-Schlosser und Jakob Schissler (eds.), Politische Kultur in Deutschland. Bilanz und Perspektiven der Forschung, Opladen 1987, p. 39-48; Karl Rohe, Politische Kultur und ihre Analyse. Probleme und Perspektiven der politischen Kulturforschung, in: Historische Zeitschrift 250 (1990), p. 321-346.

Lammersdorf with regard to the German-(Protestant) reaction to the "Schuldfrage". What is left as an open question is how and when these decoupling processes were eventually overcome by the acceptance of the presumed blend of the new and the old value system.

To close this point with an analytical summary of the empirical facts presented in the papers, I would like to pinpoint the following: After the end of the Second World War Germany without any doubt depended on exogenous models for its future development. This dependency was coupled with the fact that these models were organized as cultural principles and visions not strongly anchored in local circumstances, as the analysis of the authoritarian tradition of German Protestantism illustrates. The cultural principles were promoted fervently by the new political hegemon, the United States. This constellation demanded and generated expansive structuration in the context of Germany society, i.e. the formation of explicit, rationalized, differentiated organizational forms. This structuration process was again very much influenced by exogenous forces, like the U.S. military government, U.S. propaganda and U.S. information policy. The questions of why this structuration process was so successful and what factors were essential for its success makes German and American history of the 1950s so fascinating. I would plea for further historical research working with the concept of Westernization, taking the historical dimensions and the factor of intercultural transfer into account.

Reading the papers with the perspective of learning something about political culture two problems came to the fore: the *first problem* concerns the territorially or geographically defined concepts of political culture, the German political culture on the one hand and Western political culture on the other hand. The *second problem* refers to the levels of analysis used in the papers and the way the different levels are linked or not linked.

Taking a look at the literature on political culture we soon have to realize that since the study of Gabriel Almond and Sidney Verba it has become common place to deal with the phenomenon of political culture in a geographically defined way, i.e. according to the territorial limits of the modern nation state. Hence, we talk about English, American, German or French

political culture, although Almond and Verba and later on Lipset also offered systematic terms to differentiate between various types of political culture.[7] The papers presented in this section use this well-established research strategy of defining political cultures according to the geographical limits of nation states without any critical remark, although the concepts of Westernization and Americanization offer several conceptual levers for criticizing this approach. I would e.g. argue that the differentiation between "German" political culture and "Western" values neglects the fact that the "West" as an ideational and normative system is itself the product of a historically developed, multinational or multicultural blend of the interpretations and adaptations of "European" traditions of Christianity and the ideas of European enlightenment. This normative blend influenced via German immigration to the United States the formation and institutionalization of its religious, social and political structures during the 18th and 19th century. This blend which in the 20th century was referred to as the "American" political culture and value system then came back to Europe and Germany in the post-war period. Hence, the territorial confines of the modern nation state, understood as a cultural system, were transcended numerous times from the colonial period onward. This is why I would argue that geographically defined concepts of political culture are of only limited value for the understanding of the character of different value systems and its effects on political behavior.

The second problem refers to the levels of analysis used implicitly in the papers. All three papers analyze phenomenons on the micro-, i.e the actor-level *and* the macro-, i.e. the level of political culture looked upon as an institutionalized value system. They do, however, not explicitly link the two levels. They do not conceptualize, how and why certain elements of political culture influenced the individual decision-making process and the outcome of policy formulation processes. Just to give an example: Axel Sauer's concept of the "double integration" of Germany, namely internationally into the political, economic and ideational

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[7]   Gabriel A. Almond, The Intellectual History of the Civic Culture Concept, in: Gabriel A. Almond, Sidney Verba (eds.), The Civic Culture Revisited, Boston 1980; Gabriel Almond, Sidney Verba, The Civic Culture, Political Attitudes and Democracy in Five Nations, Princeton NJ 1963; Seymour Martin Lipset, The First New Nation. The United States in Historical and Comparative Perspective, London 1963.

frame of the Western camp and domestically, the integration of antagonistic groups by the institutionalization of a common value system, suggests that the selection of certain norms and values by American policymakers was the result of political and economic interests and constraints. He shows, however, in the same paper that the adoption of the idea of the "compromise" by Eberhard Müller was the result of preexistent, institutionalized norms and values. So we have both levels here, the micro or individual level and the macro or institutional level that influenced world views and behavior. With regard to our endeavor to explain what happened during the 1950s and 1960s in German society and in the German political and economic system and to understand what Americanization or Westernization did and how it worked and works the circular logic of individual action influencing the structure of certain institutions and of institutions "acting" back by influencing individual behavior seems to me to be crucial. Again, we need further research that explicitly links the actor and the institutional level of the processes of Americanization or Westernization. When we talk about political culture and its impact on social, political, and economic behavior or the formation of political institutions, the link between individual selection processes and the interests and preferences influencing these processes on the one hand and the influence of institutionalized values, norms and ideas on human behavior on the other hand is central.

The conceptual differences between "Westernization" and "Americanization" as put forward by Anselm Doering-Manteuffel and Volker Berghahn have a lot to do with the not explicitly articulated preference of the authors for one of the two levels of analysis. Whereas Maase and Berghahn refer to the micro- or actor-level arguing that the actors involved pursued their interests and were the main thriving force for change, Doering-Manteuffel prefers the macro-level as the starting point for explaining German history in the post-war years. He underlines the importance of institutionalized behavior and its repercussions on social, political and economic change. To explicitly differentiate between the micro- and the macro-level and to tackle the question of how these two levels are linked is hence not only a conceptual and an empirical plea for future research but it is also the point where endeavors of conceptual integration of the three conflicting approaches have to start. However, I would like to warn against an overemphasis of the role of the individual. Yes, it is plausible to argue that dominant

actors directly shape culture. However, it is not plausible to argue, that institutionalization and change occur solely through the purposive action of constructed actors. The European nation state in general, and Germany specifically, are with regard to their cultural, economic and political underpinnings more or less exogenously constructed entities. The many individuals both inside and outside the state who engaged in state formation and policy formulation during the crucial period of the 1950s and 1960s are enactors of scripts rather more then they are self-directed actors. Therefore it is necessary to analyze collective actors as products of their own history and internal forces and not only concentrate on individual interests and preferences.