



Cold War Culture. The Global Conflict and its Legacies in Germany since 1945. Freiburg im Breisgau: Freiburg Institute for Advanced Studies (FRIAS), 19.09.2012-21.09.2012.

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Cold War Culture. The Global Conflict and its Legacies in Germany since 1945

The conference “Cold War Culture. The Global Conflict and its Legacies in Germany since 1945” was the fourth in line of a DAAD funded conference cycle in the context of the “Germany and the World in the Age of Globalization” programme. Held at the Freiburg Institute for Advanced Studies (FRIAS) from 19th to 21st September, 2012, its goal was to analyse and discuss cultural and mental manifestations of the Cold War within the two Germanies. As soon became clear, the common dichotomic view of a divided Cold War world must be questioned and differentiated, especially in regard to culture, economy and everyday life.

One of the main, heavily argued problems was the explanatory power of the Cold War paradigm: Could the depicted phenomena be explained by Cold War patterns, or were they rather part of other processes and mental frameworks – a problem raised already in ULRICH HERBERT’s (Freiburg) introductory remarks. The Cold War, Herbert emphasised, was not only the confrontation of two superpowers and their vassals to gain influence and power, but also the socially founded confrontation of two worlds of ideas, two world orders, both claiming universality, and, in the first place, a conflict of economic orders, finally settled by the USSR’s economic agony and shaped by the permanent nuclear threat.

STEPHEN SCALA (Fairfax) set the tone for the conference by highlighting interaction between East and West German foreign policy experts and its impact on both sides of the Iron Curtain, thus questioning the prism of division and divergence. The Marxist-Leninist foreign policy doctrine of Cold War bipolarity in the GDR be-

came strongly challenged by an intensive set of cooperation between GDR and FRG experts after the 1972 *Grundlagenvertrag*. The SED leadership, who feared that the exposure to the West might delude the ideological integrity of its foreign policy experts, engaged in this new, non-dogmatic understanding of external policy as part of an advertising strategy “to sell the GDR abroad”.

As RÜDIGER BERGIEN (Potsdam) subsequently argued, not only the GDR doctrine of class struggle and *Abgrenzung* was challenged during the early 1970s, but also its anti-imperialistic friend or foe dichotomy. Bergien stated that, while anti-imperialism was the dominating ideological glue within the country’s *Macht-sicherungseliten*, the concept became challenged after 1972. The 1970s saw the emergence of more accessible concepts, such as anti-colonialism and anti-Americanism. The abandonment of anti-imperialism can thus be seen as an important factor for change in the GDR’s political culture, because it abolished the ideological foundation for the group identity of the *Macht-sicherungseliten*.

WILLIAM GRAY (West Lafayette) then turned to economic history, showing that while global rivalry certainly had formative economic impact on West Germany, it can be insightful as well to consider the limits of the Cold War as a framework for West German economic history. West Germany, Gray argued, participated in Cold War structures without compromising too much, giving priority to the stability imperative, uncoupling *Ostpolitik* from *Osthandel* and promoting consumer’s industry instead of arms industry, thus saving important sums on

development and research.

MARTIN ALBERS (Cambridge) focused on the West German China policy and demonstrated that China policy as an element of *Ostpolitik* was welcome as long as it did not interfere with détente by compromising relations with Moscow. The dilemma of economic potential vs. political considerations was solved by concentrating on scientific and technological exchange, excluding cooperation that went beyond symbolic cooperation, such as arms exports and subsidised government loans.

RICHARD EVANS (Cambridge) concluded the first day with his keynote address about the different answers Allied occupation powers gave to the question of how to reshape German culture after the war. While the French pleaded for deep cultural change, aiming to implant French cultural values – free thinking, taste, finesse – as an antidote to German ones, the British did not equate Nazi values with ‘genuine’ German values and tried to revitalise the “Good Germany” of Goethe and Mann. The Soviets, not surprisingly, introduced the concept of Soviet realism of an art linked to the people and depicting its everyday life. The Americans, for their part, selected and emphasised those elements of German tradition that they considered most compatible with American values. Along with the Western Allies’ attempts to reconnect German culture with the ideals of the West came the question of what exactly “Western values” were, and whether they were better portrayed through elite or through popular culture.

The third panel focused on questions of law and criminology, which, as the papers showed, went to the heart of the Cold War Culture, as they touched problems of German identity and self-perception, as well as general ideas of state, authority and legitimacy. SEBASTIAN GEHRIG (London) discussed the question of how the 1967 East German citizenship law reform affected inter-German relations. The East German “reclaim” of all former GDR citizens living in the West, Gehrig showed, was seen as a “general attack on the West German constitution”, while the East, operating with UN terminology, invoked the much discussed idea of “self-determination”.

In his paper about criminology experts in East and West Germany, TOBY SIMPSON (Cambridge/London) explored the affinities and contrasts between criminology of the Federal Republic and the “socialist criminology” of the GDR. His paper reflected the importance of new technologies as a historical driving force in the struggle for international recognition of the GDR. It also revealed, however, that while new paradigms in the de-

bate about crime emerged – paradigms such as juvenile delinquency, the role of victims or the concept of social rehabilitation –, the expert debates reflected a process of internationalisation and new technocratic approaches, made possible in a new climate of liberalisation in the Federal Republic.

THOMAS BEUTELSCHMIDT (Potsdam) opened the fourth panel about mass media, focusing on GDR television. He showed that GDR television producers managed to keep the balance between future-oriented claims and backward-looking consciousness, making GDR television become a dominant and influential medium. By mixing political propaganda and (west-oriented but self made) entertainment shows, it gained identity-sustaining, educational, and artistic meaning.

SVEN GRAMPP (Erlangen) then went to the other side of the Iron Curtain, exploring the West German TV news coverage of the 1969 moon landing from a media-science perspective. He showed that, while Cold War dichotomies and patterns of competition were brought up implicitly and explicitly during the 16 hours of ARD news coverage, they were at the same time subject to irony and dissociation. The Nazi past was almost completely absent from the broadcast, which, as Ulrich Herbert pointed out, makes it telling for the specific historical circumstances of the late 1960s.

The fifth panel concentrated on art, popular culture and consumerism. BODO MROZEK (Berlin/Potsdam) started by analysing the so-called “spy craze”. The GDR copied Western models of spy fiction in its *Kundschafterfilme*, where it tried to construct a counter narrative by presenting western agents as ruthless and corrupt. But was the Cold War paradigm actually part of the spy fiction phenomenon? While the hero in most popular West German spy novels or films was American or British and the enemy an international super villain, the tension of the novels was, nevertheless, derived from the basic setting of nuclear threat and uncertainty, and their plots were based on bipolar structures of good vs. evil.

KATRIN SCHREITER (Philadelphia) then presented her study on aesthetic convergence between East and West Germany in the field of interior design. Schreiter argued that after the 1986 *Kulturabkommen*, Bonn and East-Berlin attempted to strengthen links and reinforce cultural roots by cultural accords, cultural exhibitions and other modes of state-run cultural exchange – a sort of “mini-détente” via the medium of aesthetics as “lingua franca”. The problem, however, whether the area of design was a driver or rather a reflection of political change,

whether it anticipated or reproduced political trends, was controversially discussed in the following debate.

The last contributor of this panel, PHILIPP BAUR (Augsburg), investigated the relations of pop, politics and protest by means of the West German anti-nuclear movements and its pop-cultural expressions in the first half of the 1980s. Drawing on popular festivals, songs and novels from the early 1980s, Baur illustrated central topics of the protest and stressed that the protest was not merely anti-American, but also held the East accountable for the end of the world scenarios it depicted. Baur eventually demonstrated that the nuclear pop culture was not only a reflection of dominating fears or hopes, but became itself part of the public debate, by mirroring societal self-understanding.

The last panel spotlighted reflections about the global phenomenon of decolonisation and development policies in the context of the Cold War. CORINNA UNGER (Bremen) explored the case of West German business interests and foreign aid in India. She showed that development aid as a soft power weapon during the Cold War was highly contested, for it combined economic and financial interests with geopolitical and strategic ones. In their attempt to export the West German success story of a strong middle class, West German development experts oftentimes became quite exasperated with the cultural clash they experienced in India, contrary to their expectations of development aid as a “culture-free”, neutral process. The developing nations, on the other hand, while interested in industrialising as quickly as possible, must also be seen as active players, able to play off the West against the East.

YOUNG-SUN HONG (Stony Brook) then concluded the panel by turning to the larger question of how to evaluate the relationship between decolonisation and the Cold War altogether. Hong promoted the analysis of Western development and humanitarian discussions as part of a discourse strategy, taking into consideration its elements of constructivism, as well as its racist and Cold War based connotations. In the following discussion Hong’s thesis was challenged by pointing to the absence of controversial Third World debates in the West German public during the 1950s and 1960s. The question was also raised whether it was legitimate to presume that Western development experts were driven only by selfish or racist interests – was there not also a real desire to see the South grow?

The final discussion centred on several questions and on analysis categories for future research related to the

three axes of the conference – divided Germany, the Cold War, and culture. First of all, it highlighted the fact that the GDR must not be overrated as an independent political actor. West and East Germany did not have the same scope of action, the same expert cultures or the same cultural autonomy. Investigating East Germany is, however, instructive by its specific role in the bipolar system – being just a small player, it was nevertheless a model case and, in many regards, also an exception. Insights about the specificity of Cold War culture in East Germany can, therefore, probably best be gained by comparing it to other Eastern block countries, instead of comparing it to West Germany. The same is valid for the Federal Republic and the Western block.

Ulrich Herbert pointed out the frequent use of the expression “mere rhetoric”, when it came to Cold War concepts – a risky expression, for it suggested a dichotomy between “mere” Cold War propaganda and pragmatic or rational actions and convictions, thereby underestimating the influence of ideologies on actions.

The conference, and especially the contributions about mass media, pop culture and consumerism, also provoked extensive debate over the potential and the limits of cultural history. BERND WEISBROD (Göttingen) called for a closer interconnection of cultural history and history of political culture, and advised against pursuing cultural history only as genre history. He argued that culture, when considered as a reflection, manifestation or representation, cannot be studied separately from the reality it refers to. However, one political driving force of the Cold War, that must not be underestimated and played an important part in many of the conference papers, was the factor of fear and perception of constant threat. This close interconnection of “hard” Cold War phenomena, such as militarisation and overspending on weapons, with “soft”, cultural ones, such as fear, makes it imperative to question the traditional differentiation between “soft” and “hard” factors.

Conference Overview:

Opening Remarks: Ulrich Herbert (Freiburg)

Panel I: Experts and Elites

Stephen J. Scala (Fairfax): Intellectual Change through Rapprochement? Interaction between East and West German *Außenpolitiker* and the Challenge to Cold War Bipolarity

Rüdiger Bergien (Potsdam): Antiimperialismus und der Kampf um die gesellschaftliche Hegemonie. Kommu-

nistische Machtsicherungseliten in der „Cold War Culture“ der DDR

Comment: Helke Rausch (Freiburg)

Panel II: Economy

William G. Gray (West Lafayette): *Stability First: How the Bonn Republic Avoided Cold War Economic Dictates.*

Martin Albers (Cambridge): *Business with China, Détente with Moscow: The Federal Republic of Germany and China during the Second Cold War, 1978-1982*

Comment: Jörg Arnold (Freiburg)

Keynote Address

Richard Evans (Cambridge): *The Cold War and the Rebuilding of German Culture*

Panel III: Law and Criminology

Sebastian Gehrig (London): *Cold War Identities: Constitutional Reform and Citizenship between East and West Germany, 1967-1975*

Toby Simpson (Cambridge/London): *Crime and Culture in the Cold War Germanies: The Impact and Legacy of Criminology, 1949-1990*

Comment: Arvid Schors (Freiburg)

Panel IV: Mass Media

Thomas Beutelschmidt (Potsdam): *Zwischen Ost und West. Das DDR-Fernsehen im Spannungsfeld der Cold War Culture*

Sven Grampp (Erlangen): *Space Pens und sowjetische Bleistifte im luftleeren Raum: Die Live-Berichterstattung über die erste bemannte Mondlandung im westdeutschen Fernsehen*

Comment: Ulrich Herbert (Freiburg)

Panel V: Culture and Consumerism

Bodo Mrozek (Berlin/Potsdam): *Secret Agents, Pop, and the Politics of Censorship: The Spy Craze in divided Germany during the 1960s*

Katrin Schreiter (Philadelphia): *From Competition to Cooperation: Cold War Diplomacy of German Design*

Philipp Baur (Augsburg): *Populärkultur und Nachrüstungsdebatte der 1980er Jahre*

Comment: Richard Bessel (York)

Panel VI: Development and Decolonization

Corinna Unger (Bremen): *Exporting Development: The Nexus between West German Business Interests, Foreign Aid, and the 'German Question' in the Context of the Cold War*

Young-Sun Hong (Stony Brook): *The Third World in the two Germanies: An Entangled History of the Cold War and Decolonization*

Comment: Boris Barth (Konstanz)

Final Discussion

Concluding Remarks: Ulrich Herbert (Freiburg) and Bernd Weisbrod (Göttingen)

If there is additional discussion of this review, you may access it through the network, at:

<http://hsozkult.geschichte.hu-berlin.de/>

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