

## REPORTS ON CONFERENCES, SYMPOSIA, SEMINARS

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### RECONSTITUTING PUBLIC REALMS: ARCHIVISTS, LIBRARIANS, AND JOURNALISTS IN POSTWAR GERMANY

GHI-sponsored panel at the 118th Annual Meeting of the American Historical Association, Washington, DC, January 8–11, 2004. Moderator: Christof Mauch (GHI). Panelists: Astrid M. Eckert (GHI), Michaela Hönicke Moore (University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill), Peter A. Kraemer (Indiana University, Bloomington). Commentator: Christina von Hodenberg (University of California, Berkeley).

What are the hallmarks of an open, democratic society? Modern democracies are typically associated with open access to diverse sources of information through institutions such as libraries, archives, and independent news media. Recent setbacks to this ideal should serve to remind us that on the eve of the United States' entry into World War II, President Franklin D. Roosevelt identified freedom of speech and expression as the first of "Four Freedoms" upon which a democratic and peaceful postwar world would be built.

The papers presented at this panel described various attempts to restore or create such free institutions as part of an open public realm in postwar Germany. The year 1945 was clearly not a *Stunde Null* at which German archivists, librarians, and journalists broke cleanly with National Socialism. Both as individuals and as members of professional associations, the men and women who built important components of the institutions that were to help guarantee freedom of speech and expression in postwar Germany did so in the shadow of the recent past. The protagonists in the panel's papers worked within a mental framework that was characterized by a tension between national identity and foreign imports. "The West," specifically the United States, was an ever-present influence in the process of institution-building and reconciliation with the past, whether as the power that implemented denazification, as a supplier of financial patronage, as an imagined role model for modernity and democracy, or, negatively, as the specter of mass society and loss of culture.

In her paper "The History Makers: German Archivists in the Immediate Postwar Period," Astrid M. Eckert looked at how (West) German

archivists in the immediate postwar period dealt with their role under National Socialism. Archivists have traditionally been considered an unpolitical lot, quietly preserving a country's written legacy but not generating historically relevant records themselves. However, this perception overlooks the archivists' power to shape the historical record by deciding what to preserve and whom to allow to use it. During the National Socialist period, German archivists played an even more overt political role by incorporating confiscated Jewish archival material into their collections; by providing staff for (looting) missions into and administration of German-occupied territories; by setting up the NSDAP party archives, thus ensuring the possibility of rewriting history from the Nazi perspective; and by conducting genealogical research to provide essential data to prove "Aryan" descent (the so-called *Ariernachweis*). This latter service involved them squarely in the core elements of Nazi rule: its racism and anti-Semitism. Although German archivists cannot be considered major perpetrators to the same extent as members of the *Einsatzgruppen* or the Reich Security Main Office (RSHA), for example, they played their specific part in the machinery that ensured the functioning and longevity of the system, as did every professional group at the time. Eckert therefore argued that German archivists would have had plenty to think about after Germany's collapse in 1945 if they had openly tried to assess their share of guilt and political responsibility. Instead, leading archivists of the Prussian Archival Administration (Preußische Archivverwaltung) devised strategies to bypass denazification procedures and to preserve the profession intact, i.e. with the least possible interference from the Allies. With only a few 'victims' of denazification, the profession managed the transition into the early Federal Republic, where strong continuity of personnel marked the reestablishment of the archival scene.

Noting continuity of personnel, however, is not a surprising result for the German context and, indeed, can be shown for nearly every professional group. In a next step, therefore, Eckert distinguished between short-term transition (denazification) and long-term transformation of the archival profession during the first decades of the Federal Republic. Applying Ulrich Herbert's concept of "liberalization," she provided some tentative explanations for the transformation of the archival profession into what can now fairly be described as supportive of a democratic, pluralistic society, both in the individual outlook of its members and in the professional attitude of the profession as a whole.<sup>1</sup> This transformation is all the more remarkable because German archivists had been mostly conservative and traditional in outlook, had actively purged themselves of their liberal, democratic elements after 1933, and were largely in denial about their role during National Socialism. As explanatory factors, Eckert named the archivists' unwaivering allegiance to the

state; the generational shift in the profession that occurred in the early 1970s; and the Allied-imposed access clause for files on the history of National Socialism. These files had been part of the captured German records that were returned by the Western Allies in the late 1950s and early 1960s under the provision of open access for international research.<sup>2</sup>

Peter A. Kraemer turned the panel's attention to a unique project of transatlantic cultural negotiation and public-private philanthropy. His paper "Children's Crusade: American Philanthropy and the International Youth Library in Germany" told the story of Jella Lepman's idealistic endeavor to establish a children's and youth library in Munich as part of an individually conceived contribution to reeducation.<sup>3</sup> Lepman, born in 1891 as the daughter of a Jewish clothing manufacturer in Stuttgart, fled to Great Britain in 1935. When she returned to her native land in 1945, she did so in the uniform of the U.S. Army Advisor for Women's and Youth Affairs. An ardent observer, Lepman identified not the material scarcity of the *Trimmergesellschaft* as the most pressing need but rather the lack of nourishment for children's minds. She was a woman of canny political views who aggressively sought out scarce material resources to realize her vision of an International Children's Book Exhibition. These books should serve both as a model for possible future publications in German children's literature, and as a sobering reminder of how much Germany had isolated itself under National Socialism. The success of the endeavor encouraged her to turn the temporary traveling exhibition into a permanent youth library. For this, however, she needed financial support. Kraemer skillfully showed how Lepman's resolute personality intersected with the nascent political and philanthropic postwar agenda of the Rockefeller Foundation. In 1947, the New York-based foundation announced its ambitious Program for European Recovery to assist the reconstruction of West European universities and research institutions devastated by war. Lepman successfully tapped into the foundation's resources and received a travel grant to go to the United States to raise money and materials for her project. In 1952, the International Youth Library celebrated its fifth anniversary in Munich. The library was admired by Germans and Americans alike, from author Erich Kästner and Federal President Theodor Heuss to Eleanor Roosevelt, and was praised by its patrons at the Rockefeller Foundation as one of their most significant contributions to (West) German reorientation and world peace. The Rockefeller Foundation's support of the International Youth Library represented a unique moment in its own history when it extended its mandate beyond the patronage of pure scholarly and scientific research. For her part, Jella Lepman never allowed the Foundation to dictate her actions, however. Instead, she adapted and rejected, reshaped and manipulated her patron's attempts to influence her cause, making her story and that of the International Youth

Library in Munich less a story of "Americanization" than one of selective borrowing from American ideals.

Michaela Hönicke Moore shifted the debate toward another influential group in the public realm: writers and journalists. She examined the role that "America" as a theme and imagined entity played in the political publications and private musings of a group of prominent German commentators in the 1940s and 1950s, and offered a typology of intellectual transformations from the Third Reich to the Federal Republic. Drawing on a complex heritage of glorifying, ambivalent, at times even openly conflicting attitudes toward "America" and "the West," Germany's political and intellectual elites after the war engaged themselves yet again in the question of what the United States stood for. They delivered reflections and portrayals of the United States as victor, world power, and "land of promise," thereby playing a key role in Germany's thorny process of democratization and Westernization that unfolded against the backdrop of the American occupation and within the parameters of the ideological antagonisms of the Cold War. West Germany's transformation from an authoritarian-dictatorial to a liberal-democratic political culture was characterized by an acute tension between national unity and traditions on the one hand, and foreign imports and impositions on the other. Pragmatic recognition of American political-military supremacy coexisted with passionately voiced feelings of cultural superiority, now expressed as part of a Eurocentric concept of the "occident."

The protagonists of Hönicke Moore's paper were Margaret Boveri (1900–1975) and Dolf Sternberger (1907–1989). For both writers, the 1930 observation by a German literary critic holds true: "Our identity was characterized by where we stood in relation to America." And they stood at different ends of the spectrum. Boveri, with an American mother, well traveled and cosmopolitan, never wavered in her allegiance to Germany. She worked as a journalist during the Third Reich, and wrote a series of derogatory articles about American statesmen, including a compromising piece on "Jews in America," for Goebbels's newspaper *Das Reich*. In 1946, Boveri published her *America Primer for Grown-up Germans*.<sup>4</sup> The book was widely distributed and brought her praise as a contributor to German-American reconciliation. Under the guise of "value-free" presentation, however, her German readers easily recognized the entire panorama of familiar anti-American clichés. Only one American reviewer openly called the *Primer* what it was: an anti-American treatise.

Sternberger, on the other hand, had drawn different lessons altogether. For years, he tried to "write between the lines" and engage in "soft resistance" at the formerly high-quality newspaper, the *Frankfurter Zeitung*, while all along protecting his Jewish wife. During the last two years of the war, he withdrew, and worked as an industrial sociologist.

As the editor of the postwar political magazine *Die Wandlung*, he rejected nationalism and its rhetoric, embracing the idea of universal human rights and working to prepare his readers for democracy. In Boveri's eyes, his acceptance of Western political concepts and openness toward American political ideals bordered on collaborationism.

What, then, were readers to make of such contrasting stances, of such a clash between defiance and advocacy for democratic change? Hönicke Moore carefully argued that despite their differences, Boveri and Sternberger may have been complementary forces in postwar German society. Like their readers, both writers suffered from a lack of political orientation and both found themselves in what contemporary lingo termed a state of "spiritual-moral confusion." As they worked their way through the intense impressions of defeat, occupation, and confrontation with the murder of European Jewry, they brought their readers along with them on their intellectual journey. Boveri's writings resonated more with nationalistic feelings. She offered a confirmation of national identity and intellectual resistance to the occupier, thereby allowing her readers to release part of their own pressure. Sternberger, however, was more demanding and challenging, and ultimately represented the voice of the future. As Hönicke Moore concluded, both were "bridge-builders" in their own ways.

It was left to commentator Christina von Hodenberg to pull the various strings together and connect them to current scholarship on postwar Germany. Democratization of political culture, liberalization of attitudes, cultural transfer, Americanization, Westernization, and "coming to terms with the past" were the buzz-words of the presentations. Hodenberg encouraged the panelists to reexamine the usefulness and explanatory potential of the terms, and to explore ways to sharpen their meaning for the respective contexts touched upon in the three papers. With much work already done on the short-term transition from war to occupation to the establishment of the Federal Republic, new studies now concentrate on the processes of long-term transformation. They address continuities, reach back into the 1920s (and earlier), and carry the narrative through to the 1960s. This evolution of West Germany into a liberal, Western society was a complex process. Hodenberg reminded the audience that historians have not yet reached a consensus regarding its driving forces. But she argued that there seems to be growing evidence that one way to approach long-term change is to look not at politics and institutions but rather at people and professions. By doing this, otherwise abstract processes like "liberalization" and "Westernization" might be rendered more accessible. The individual adaptations, conversions, re-inventions, and denials after 1945 show us how circuitous the route to inner democratization really

was, and how many contradictions, ambivalences, and conflicts were part of it.

*Astrid M. Eckert*

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Ulrich Herbert, "Liberalisierung als Lernprozeß," in: Herbert (ed.), *Wandlungsprozesse in Westdeutschland. Belastung, Integration, Liberalisierung 1945–1980* (Göttingen: Wallstein 2002), esp. 8f., 14–19.

<sup>2</sup> Astrid M. Eckert, *Kampf um die Akten. Die Westalliierten und die Rückgabe von deutschem Archivgut nach dem Zweiten Weltkrieg* (Stuttgart: Steiner 2004), 429–456.

<sup>3</sup> Peter A. Kraemer, "Germany Is Whose Problem? American Philanthropy and the German Question, 1944–1963" (Ph.D. diss., Indiana University, 2004).

<sup>4</sup> Margeret Boveri, *Amerikafibel für erwachsene Deutsche. Ein Versuch Unverstandenes zu erklären* (Berlin: Minerva Verlag, 1946).