

EUROPEANIZING GERMAN HISTORY

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We are all in Ute Frevert's debt for a bold and imaginative lecture. I should also like to begin on a personal note. When I fly to Germany (and today it takes me less time to fly to Germany from the United States than it did thirty years ago to travel to Germany by train and ferry from England), my destination is often the city of Mainz. So my German cultural stereotypes are different from those of Ute Frevert's students: not fast cars, but the constant chug of river traffic on the Rhine; not *Oktoberfest* but *Karneval*; not sausage, but *Saumagen*. But if this small corner of the Rhineland has a distinctive culture and history, it is also part of a larger history. It forms one of those "contact zones" to which Ute Frevert referred. Mainz sits astride east-west trade routes. Its cultural and political exchanges with France form a chapter in modern European history. Its river links Germany with Switzerland, France, and the Netherlands. Historically a center of Italian immigration, the city accommodated its share of East Prussians and Silesians after 1945; now the immigrants are more likely to be Turkish.

Draw a cross section through German history at any geographical point, and you find something both smaller and larger. Teasing out the implications of that is, in many ways, the story of German (but not only German) historiography over recent decades. Just as the nation-state has been challenged by subnational and supranational claims, so the focus of historians has shifted to units of inquiry both smaller and larger than the nation. This double shift has opened our minds to that bracing intellectual exercise the French historian Jacques Revel called the "play of scales."¹ Interest in the micro- and the macrolevels has, of course, been driven by distinctive concerns. The turn to the local, the regional, and the microhistorical realm of everyday experience was a reaction against social-science history along the lines of Charles Tilly's *Big Structures, Large Processes, Huge Comparisons*.² The emphasis on local knowledge and the human dimension belongs to a well-known shift of historical attention from structures to meanings, from social aggregates to particular cases. The turn to the transnational came later, and had its own causes. These include current debates about globalization and cross-border movements, as well as the deepening process of European integration, all of which have affected how historians think about the past.

Yet concern with the local and the transnational are also two sides of the same historical coin. Both have been driven by an interest in identities, especially the multiple, overlapping identities that are such a hallmark of modern historiography, sometimes to the point of self-caricature. The local and the transnational perspective both allow us to question an apparently stable German identity. For example: What did it mean around 1900 to be a German who was also a Pfälzer and a (reluctant) Bavarian, the more so when you lived on the French border, probably had family members who had settled in the Banat two centuries earlier, and had an uncle in Milwaukee?³ Which brings me to a second common thread that links the local and transnational perspectives: a growing interest in space as the other essential historian's dimension along with time.⁴ I mean space here in both the figurative sense of mental topography, and the literal, geographical sense. It sounds so obvious. But for too long the spatial dimension of German history has been lost or buried, perhaps because of the ghosts of Friedrich Ratzel and Karl Haushofer. Anyone who has looked at geopolitical literature of the 1930s or National Socialist planning documents of the early 1940s is familiar with those maps of Europe, filled with huge dynamic arrows that usually pointed east.⁵ That is an indelible aspect of the history of Germany in Europe. But it should not inhibit us from turning—or returning—to a more geographical conception of history. The Europeanized German history of the future will, I believe, have more maps (it could hardly have fewer than the standard modern histories of Germany), and that is something our visually-oriented students will thank us for, if they do not in fact demand it.

A generation ago, "Europeanizing" German history meant taking Germany and comparing it with other nation-states. How did its economic development, or its political evolution, measure up against those of other nation-states like Britain or France? Or it might be a particular class, or political movement, that was compared across national boundaries. I am sure Ute Frevert and I would agree that there are still strong arguments for a comparative history of this kind, although preferably across a wider range of nations and subjects and with an awareness (very apparent in some recent comparative studies) that the entities being compared are less stable than we once imagined them to be. But Ute Frevert is doing something different: tracking movements of people and ideas across borders. She refers to "webs of communication and interaction," and I want to pull out that word "web." It reflects the impact that anthropology has had on history over the last generation: how Clifford Geertz has encouraged us to look at culture as "webs of significance."⁶ But it also reminds us that, at the opposite end of the spectrum, it has been a watchword of historians who advocate really big history. I think here of the recent global history by William H. and John McNeill, *The*

*Human Web.*⁷ The idea of the web seems to me to fall somewhere between a metaphor and a universal paradigm of human history. Call it a heuristic device—at any rate, a useful idea to think with, and one that has the great virtue once again of connecting history at the small and the large scales.

When it comes to the temporal scale, I think Ute Frevert is right to question currently popular notions of European integration, which present a foreshortened version of the present while projecting a timeless tableau of European heritage onto the past. The draft preamble to the European constitution springs to mind, of which it has also been rather unkindly said that requiring Europe's school students to read it would contravene the ban on cruel and unusual punishment. Europeanization is indeed a long story, and a dynamic one. The medievalist Robert Bartlett refers to the "Europeanization of Europe" in the centuries before 1300, a process to which German speakers made a large contribution.⁸ In some ways our medieval and early modern colleagues have had a sharper eye than we moderns for the movements that stitched Europe together (although also causing new divisions), whether flows of commodities, the spread of architectural styles, or religious explosions with a pan-European reach. Merchants, mendicants, and mercenary armies had moved across Europe for centuries before the modern age of nation-states with which Ute Frevert is concerned.

What, if anything, made that age distinctive, other than the fact that it was an age of nation-states? One answer is that those who lived in it were very conscious of being (or at least self-conscious about not being) modern. And one reason for that was the way those connecting webs thickened with the arrival of new means of communication, surely a key element if we are looking to Europeanize any national history of the modern era. It is not just that the railway, steamship, telegraph, telephone, internal combustion engine, and airplane arrived on the scene. From Heinrich Heine in the 1830s to the writers who celebrated a "wonderland of technology" in the 1920s, these modern marvels prompted reflection about Europe becoming smaller or its national borders less relevant.⁹ For most Germans, new means of communication altered perceptions of time and space. This web was more like an iron skeleton—although it was also, perhaps, part of Max Weber's "iron cage."¹⁰

This was the material undergirding, and sometimes the subject matter, of the networks and exchanges we heard about in the lecture. Ute Frevert's arguments pointed to the rich research possibilities. Her examples suggest the value of trying, for example, to combine a biographical or prosopographical approach with one based on particular bodies of academic or professional knowledge. Could one reconstruct patterns of exchange by linking personal connections to institutional networks, such as professional organizations and their gatherings, the election of honor-

ary foreign members, journals and the expanding world of print culture, perhaps common efforts to standardize knowledge or training? In some areas—medicine, say, or forestry—Germans enjoyed high prestige: in others, like civil engineering, less so. Another rather unruly body of professional expertise, still in its infancy in the early twentieth century but decidedly nonnational in scope, linked people concerned about the environmental effects of economic and technological change: airborne and waterborne pollution, the threat of “invasive species,” and the decline of highly valued indigenous species. Pan-European efforts to save the salmon of the Rhine went back to the 1840s, although they grew more sustained as the problem worsened in the years 1869–85.¹¹

Alternatively, one might look at the mutual traffic in cultural practices or ideas between just two countries. Consider Germany and Britain in the nineteenth century as an example. There was the huge impact of German musical culture in Britain (in Manchester, capital of the Industrial Revolution, both the Halle Orchestra and a vigorous choral culture were “Made in Germany”). Or think of the uneven but still notable impact of German philosophical ideas, from Carlyle and George Eliot to the Edwardians. German local government was admired in Britain; and there, as elsewhere, the German university model helped to transform the indigenous species, especially outside Oxford and Cambridge. The traffic flowing in the opposite direction would include the enthusiastic German reception of Darwin (and of post-Darwinian eugenicists like Francis Galton), the Garden City Movement, the English domestic house architecture taken up by Hermann Muthesius, and the spread of British sports like soccer, rugby, and horse-racing.

These British originals were appropriated, much as an earlier generation turned Shakespeare into a German. Put these borrowings together with other European cultural influences on Germany in the period around 1900—French art, Scandinavian literature, the Tolstoy-cult and the occult currents that flowed strongly from Russia—and they suggest the peculiarly eclectic, hybrid modernity of the late Kaiserreich.¹² (And hybridity will surely be a key category of a Europeanized, as of a globalized, German history.) Berlin, as Ute Frevert notes, was a center of this nervous experimentation with cultural forms. Hybridity of another kind was on display in a number of places that established Germany as the center of a truly European travel and leisure culture, places like Wiesbaden and Baden-Baden where one could (in the words of Sir Horace Rumbold) hear “the clatter of a thousand tongues in a dozen different languages.”¹³ In the great German spas, the tennis and golf were English, the *croupiers* French, the tenors Italian, and the *femmes fatales* Russian.

There was, of course, a darker side to all this. Just as the expansion of trade led to a demand for tariffs and “protection of national labor,” so the

cultural traffic across German borders fostered resentment, resistance, and negative stereotypes. Hugo von Tschudi, after all, was sacked as director of the National Gallery in Berlin for acquiring French Impressionist paintings (although he was promptly hired in Munich). A large body of work on cultural conservatives, radical nationalists, and morality campaigners has shown how extensive this kind of backlash was.¹⁴ There was also a dark side to another chapter of German history that can only be written in European (and global) terms: the history of migration. By 1914, there were around one and a quarter million foreign workers in Imperial Germany: Dutch, Italians, and above all Poles and Ruthenes from Tsarist Russia or Austrian Galicia. Anxiety and contempt underlay the reactions of educated middle-class Germans to this “Slav flood,” and immigration gave birth to a regime of regulation and medical examinations designed to protect the German “national body.” These controls were especially stringent on the eastern border; so were the procedures designed to prevent “Eastern Jews,” who were crossing German soil en route to the New World, from staying in Germany.¹⁵ In the same years, German historians and popular writers began to write in ominously chauvinistic terms about German settlements in central and eastern Europe during earlier centuries, constructing a heroic narrative about a German “civilizing mission” across its eastern “frontier” lands that drew a dramatic contrast between the “new green of German industriousness” and the “swamps and marshes” of Slavic peoples.¹⁶ We can, of course, argue about the degree to which these things foreshadowed the European catastrophe of the twentieth century: genocides, forced labor, “settlement” plans, and mass expulsions in which Germans were in turn perpetrators and victims.

That brings me to the most provocative part of today’s lecture: the part devoted to that special form of cross-border movement we call war. War has prompted many historians to write counterfactually; it has led Ute Frevert to think counterintuitively. And it *is* counterintuitive: war as marriage mart, armed conflict as the pursuit of European understanding by other means. War, the great catalyst or midwife—pick your metaphor—produces unintended consequences like nothing else in human history (except the long-term effects of the changes we make to our environment). Years ago, Marc Ferro’s book on the Great War included a chapter on “war, the liberator”: the intoxicated popular sense in 1914 of being freed from the suffocating constraints within Old Europe (if I may use that phrase).¹⁷ Those hopes were soon mocked for millions of men and their families. Educational commonalities among European elites now mattered little. Chancellor Bethmann Hollweg’s son (a Rhodes Scholar) and Prime Minister Herbert Asquith’s son were both educated at Balliol

College, Oxford. The two young men were killed on the Western Front within a year of each other.¹⁸

The German pacifist Alfred Fried argued in 1914 that war would advance the cause of peace. This was supremely optimistic, but turned out to be true in the long run.¹⁹ Now, we know what John Maynard Keynes had to say about that: In the long run, we're all dead. But that is too easy a response as well: Future generations can reap the unintended, perhaps undeserved rewards of earlier destruction. Ute Frevert's arguments are disturbing and important. History is not the outcome of what actors intend. It proceeds dialectically; it often happens behind our backs. Some of the most incisive illustrations of that came at the end of today's lecture, when Ute Frevert argued that the *idea* of Europe was really born, then reborn, only after two twentieth-century wars had so completely undermined what many Europeans liked to think of as their civilized values. And at both of these historical junctures, the idea owed much to Europeans defining themselves against others—Americans, Russians, colonial peoples—in relation to whom Europe had been weakened by war. Not the least provocative aspect of the lecture is the way it requires us to compare as well as contrast the position of Germany in Europe after 1918 and 1945.

Ute Frevert has offered us a bold prospectus. She sets out some of the opportunities presented by a transnational approach, makes us think again about the trajectory of modern German history, and raises questions about the shadings of light and dark in that history. Let me end by underlining three fundamentals where we are in full agreement. First, European integration owes much to informal connections that long predate the European Union and its predecessors. Second, as European citizens (which both of us are), we do best if we reject the comforting pabulum of European civics and try to uncover the more complex historical dynamics of Germany in Europe. And finally, for historians, the promise held out by "Europeanizing" (and indeed "globalizing") German history is enormous.²⁰ Thank you again for showing us all how we might start to realize that promise.

Notes

¹ Jacques Revel, *Jeux d'échelles: la micro-analyse à l'expérience* (Paris, 1996).

² Charles Tilly, *Big Structures, Large Processes, Huge Comparisons* (New York, 1984).

³ Celia Applegate, *A Nation of Provincials: The German Idea of Heimat* (Berkeley, 1990). On the larger movement of Germans and other Europeans across the continent and the oceans, see Klaus J. Bade, *Europa in Bewegung: Migration vom späten 18. Jahrhundert bis zur Gegenwart* (Munich, 2000).

⁴ See David Blackbourn, *A Sense of Place: New Directions in German History. The 1998 Annual Lecture of the German Historical Institute London* (London, 1999); Jürgen Osterhammel, "Die

Wiederkehr des Raumes," *Neue Politische Literatur* 43 (1998): 374–97; Reinhart Koselleck, "Raum und Geschichte," *Zeitschichten: Studien zur Historik* (Frankfurt am Main, 2000), 78–96.

⁵ Examples in Mechthild Rössler and Sabine Schleiermacher, eds., *Der "Generalplan Ost": Hauptlinien der nationalsozialistischen Planungs- und Vernichtungspolitik* (Berlin, 1993).

⁶ Clifford Geertz, "Thick Description: Towards an Integrative Theory of Culture," in Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York, 1973), 3–30.

⁷ John R. McNeill and William H. McNeill, *The Human Web: A Bird's-Eye View of World History* (New York, 2003).

⁸ Robert Bartlett, *The Making of Europe: Conquest, Colonization, and Cultural Change, 950–1350* (Princeton, 1993), 269–91.

⁹ Heinrich Heine, "Die Nordsee," *Werke*, vol. II, part 3 (Frankfurt am Main, 1968); Hans Dominik, *Im Wunderland der Technik. Meisterstücke und neue Errungenschaften, die unsere Jugend kennen sollte* (Berlin, 1922).

¹⁰ I have used this familiar rendering of Weber's famous metaphor from *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, although the original "stahlhartes Gehäuse" would be more accurately translated as "shell hard as steel." See Peter Baehr, "The 'Iron Cage' and the 'Shell as Hard as Steel': Parsons, Weber and the 'stahlhartes Gehäuse' Metaphor in *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*," *History and Theory* 40 (2001): 153–69.

¹¹ Götz Kuhn, *Die Fischerei am Oberrhein* (Stuttgart, 1976), 58.

¹² See David Blackbourn, *History of Germany 1780–1918: The Long Nineteenth Century*, 2d ed. (Oxford, 2003), 293–303.

¹³ Horace Rumbold, *Recollections of a Diplomatist*, vol. II (London, 1902), 228.

¹⁴ It includes Fritz Stern, *The Politics of Cultural Despair* (Berkeley, 1961); R. J. V. Lenman, "Art, Society and the Law in Wilhelmine Germany: The Lex Heinze," *Oxford German Studies* 8 (1973–4): 86–113; Gary D. Stark, *Entrepreneurs of Ideology: Neoconservative Publishers in Germany, 1890–1933* (Chapel Hill, 1981); Roger Chickering, "We Men Who Feel Most German": *A Cultural Study of the Pan-German League* (London, 1984); Peter Jelavich, *Munich and Theatrical Modernism* (Cambridge, Mass., 1985), 236–84.

¹⁵ Wolfgang Wippermann, "Das Slawenbild der Deutschen im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert," in *Slawen und Deutsche zwischen Elbe und Oder. Vor 1000 Jahren: Der Slawenaufstand von 983* (Berlin, 1983), 69–81; Bade, *Europa in Bewegung*, 221–31; Jack Wertheimer, *Unwelcome Strangers. East European Jews in Imperial Germany* (New York, 1987). On the tightening of western German borders, see Frank Caestecker, "The Transformation of Nineteenth-Century West European Expulsion Policy, 1880–1914," in *Migration Control in the North Atlantic World*, ed. Andreas Fahrmeier, Olivier Faron, and Patrick Weil (New York, 2003), 120–37.

¹⁶ Max Beheim-Schwarzbach, *Hohenzollernsche Colonisationen*, vol. I (Leipzig, 1874), 423–4, 426. This is one of the central themes in my forthcoming book, *The Conquest of Nature: Water and the Making of the Modern German Landscape*.

¹⁷ Marc Ferro, *The Great War, 1914–1918* (London, 1973), 3–8.

¹⁸ Paul Kennedy, *The Rise of the Anglo-German Antagonism 1860–1914* (London, 1980), 390.

¹⁹ Roger Chickering, *Imperial Germany and a World without War* (Princeton, 1975), 324.

²⁰ On transnational history beyond the European dimension, see Jürgen Osterhammel, *Geschichtswissenschaft jenseits des Nationalstaates. Studien zu Beziehungsgeschichte und Zivilisationsvergleich* (Göttingen, 2001); Sebastian Conrad, "Doppelte Marginalisierung: Plädoyer für eine transnationale Perspektive auf die deutsche Geschichte," *Geschichte und Gesellschaft* 28 (2002): 145–69; David Blackbourn, "Das Kaiserreich transnational: Eine Skizze," in *Das Kaiserreich transnational: Deutschland in der Welt 1871–1914*, ed. Sebastian Conrad and Jürgen Osterhammel (Göttingen, 2004), 302–24.