

Don't Mention the War or the World Cup

A Report on a British-German IR Conference

1. British, German or American IR?¹

In the past, German IR has been compared to a Mercedes: »The technical standard is high, the results are solid, its arguments are smooth, and what would be loud hysterical debates in other parts of the world are reduced to softly growling grumbles« (Goetze 2005: 4f). And, members of that community are content Mercedes drivers who speed along the autobahn without taking notice of what is going on around them. Although some of that criticism does have a point, the car metaphor holds badly if we apply it to the British IR community. British IR would then have to be compared to a Rover, one of the last British car manufacturers and one that has a reputation for producing fairly average cars and which in fact went bankrupt in 2005. Maybe sport provides a better metaphor for the state of the individual disciplines. From a British perspective German IR is a bit like German football: it used to be rather dull and uninspiring, then it started to innovate and to perform in a more appealing way. There is now more cutting-edge theory behind it, but one cannot escape the feeling that the theory is in danger of restricting and compromising the attractiveness of the game. From a German perspective British IR would have to be cricket, as nobody other than those involved actually knows what is going on and what the rules are.

On a more serious note, when we compare different IR communities around the world we tend to always draw a comparison to the United States and one is left with the question of whether there are distinctive national perspectives on International Relations or whether IR is (still) an American social science? A number of authors have discussed these questions, most famously Stanley Hoffmann (1977) who argues that International Relations was born and raised in the United States. In 1986 Kalevi Holsti supported some of Hoffmann's assumptions by demonstrating the dominance of American scholarship in the discipline. While some reject the idea of national perspectives on IR (Porter 2001), others such as Ole Weaver (1998) conclude that the American discipline is simultaneously national and global. As Chris Brown, one of the organisers of the conference, has pointed out:

»IR is an American discipline in the sense in which Coca-Cola is an American drink and McDonald's hamburgers are American beef patties; although lots of people in the rest of

1 We would like to thank Mathias Albert and Chris Brown for organising the conference as well as the participants of the event for giving us a copy of the presented papers for this report. We also thank Columba Peoples for proof-reading our manuscript and for his comments and suggestions.

the world ›do‹ IR, it is American IR that, for the most part, they are doing, just as McDonald's are American burgers, even when ingredients, cooks, and consumers are all drawn from another continent. As with McDonald's franchise, the relevant standards are set in the United States in accordance with prevailing American notions of what constitutes scholarly work in the field. Put more precisely, the field itself is largely delimited by the American understanding of IR« (Brown 2001: 203).²

Without doubt the American understanding of what social science in general and IR in particular is has great influence on the discipline as a whole (Krippendorf 1987). It is generally accepted that IR constitutes »a North Atlantic, disproportionately Anglo-American, preoccupation« (Crawford 2001a: 1). While not rejecting the notion of US domination, a number of scholars have pointed out that there are a variety of different national perspectives on International Relations different to mainstream American IR (Gareau 1981; Zürn 1994; Jørgensen 2000; Wolf/Hellmann 2003; Friedrichs 2004).

In the case of Germany, members of that IR community in the mid to late eighties argued that the subject was in a poor state and that it was dominated by and dependent on other countries, and especially the US IR community, for its innovation (Czempiel 1986; Albrecht 1987; Rittberger/Hummel 1990). While some at the time accepted this plight and argued for almost a total submission to the American way of doing IR (Hellmann 1994), others have been more sceptical of idealising the American approach and have called for a more independent German style of IR scholarship which adapts the strengths without emulating the weaknesses of mainstream IR in the United States (Zürn 1994). And, in fact, since the mid 1990s IR in Germany has started to evolve (Weaver 1998) and represents something which could be considered a distinctly German kind of IR (Wolf/Hellmann 2003). In the case of Britain, and going by practical British foreign policy, many outside of the discipline of IR would probably assume that British IR generally follows the lead of the United States, and without doubt there are similarities, for example the use of the same (or at least similar) language (Lyons 1986). However, »British IR is not simply ›little America« (Jørgensen/Knudsen 2006: 149) and according to some there are vast differences between British and American International Relations (Smith 2000; Crawford 2001b).

It is these national perspectives on IR that the first »British-German International Relations Conference« wanted to probe into.³ However, this was to be achieved not by making this theme the central reference point of each paper, but by drawing out similarities and differences in the panel discussions and in the informal individual discussions and chats during lunch or over a beer at the end of the day. Above all, the conference sought to strengthen the communication between the IR communities

2 However, we are unsure whether »food« is really the best metaphor for the discipline of IR especially considering the stereotypical understanding of British food in Germany to consist predominantly of fish and chips, mint sauce and the occasional deep-fried Mars Bar. We hasten to add that German IR would fare little better on this score: the stereotype of German food in Britain and elsewhere would certainly include such Bavarian delicatessen as sausage, sauerkraut and cold beer in enormous quantities.

3 The conference was held on the 16-18 of May 2008 at the *Evangelische Akademie Arnoldshain*.

in Great Britain and Germany and give an insight into what is going on on the other side of the foggy channel.

So, as there was no substantive overarching theme to the conference other than research being conducted in Germany and Britain, it is hard to come up with a thread to follow in the conference report. We therefore will focus on some of the similarities and differences between IR in the UK and Germany which struck us as noteworthy. As there is not enough space to adequately discuss all or even most of the roughly forty different papers of the conference we have decided to pick out examples which highlight certain aspects of what we take to be representative of British or German IR.⁴ The first part of the report will examine some of the different theoretical and epistemological assumptions which dominate the IR landscape in both countries, while the second will briefly sketch a »typical« German and »typical« British explanation/interpretation of why there are such differences between the two IR communities

2. *Theory and Epistemology in British and German IR*

A recurrent theme of the conference which was set by Nicholas Rengger's plenary lecture dealt with the approaches of British and German IR to international relations theory and to related issues of epistemology. Put pointedly, that theme revolved around why it is that German IR never yielded a distinct »German school« comparable to the »English school« of International Relations. Whereas the latter is a well-established brand name in current IR which is nourished in numerous conference panels and edited volumes, the German IR community has not engaged in similar efforts at developing a unique theoretical profile of its own. Characteristically, the one tradition of German IR which would have offered itself as a vantage point for such an endeavour, i. e. the classic realist works of German-language scholars like Hans Morgenthau, John Herz or Reinhold Niebuhr, is widely discredited or ignored in the German debate (Hellmann 1994: 76-81).

These different trajectories of British and German IR reflect different strategies of self-assertion at the academic »(semi-)peripheries« (Friedrichs 2004: 7) of an American-dominated discipline. Whereas the British approach to international relations theory is marked by its dissociation from the American mainstream, the German approach is more attuned to tying in with American scholarship.

The sense in which British IR theory promotes itself as an alternative to American IR theory is first and foremost epistemological. British IR has never subscribed to an exclusively positivist or strictly »scientific« model of theorising international relations (Crawford 2001b: 224-226). It has not followed the turn of American positivist IR to rational choice theory but has in response moved in the opposite direction towards post- or anti-positivist theorising. Thus, British IR scholars have largely dis-

4 This does not mean that we consider the papers which do not get an explicit mention in any way inferior to those included.

pensed with explanatory theory and have instead focused their efforts at developing interpretative IR theory (Brown 2001: 215-218). With regards to methodology, it follows that British IR has little room for rigorous hypothesis testing and quantitative methods but places an emphasis on historical understanding and contextualisation. Leading post-positivist IR journals based in Britain like the *Review of International Studies* or *Millennium* both reflect and reinforce these predispositions of British theorising on international relations.

Corresponding to its epistemological orientation, British IR theory has been highly receptive to poststructuralist thinking. As Gerard Holden points out in his contribution to the conference, it is largely for this reason, for example, that the aesthetic turn in IR has resonated strongly among British scholars but hardly at all in the German IR community. Along these lines, Columba Peoples' paper on the connection between Critical Security Studies and the Critical Theory of the »Frankfurt school« also speaks to the epistemological leaning of British IR towards post-positivist theories. What is more, the paper points to one of the rare cases in which originally German-based theorising has been taken up by scholarship in Britain.

A second and related sense in which the profile of British IR theory is distinct from American IR is its proclivity to straddle disciplinary boundaries. British IR scholarship tends to discount the notion of IR theory as an academic field that is autonomous from neighbouring disciplines. It is one of the hallmarks of the »English school«, after all, that it takes on board insights of political philosophy, diplomatic history and international law (Friedrichs 2004: 89-104). The interdisciplinarity of British theorising on international relations has its equivalent in the efforts of German IR scholars at introducing the works of German sociologists like Jürgen Habermas' theory of communicative action (see Risse 2000; Deitelhoff/Müller 2005) or Niklas Luhmann's systems theory (see Albert 1999) to IR theory.

It is probably no exaggeration to say that the emphasis of British IR on its distinctively post-positivist and interdisciplinary approach to theory has succeeded in carving out a niche in global IR for British scholarship as a prominent and well-reputed centre of interpretative theory (Brown 2006: 685). Given the status of English as the *lingua franca* of worldwide IR as well as the far bigger size of the British IR community compared to the »small world« (Holden 2004: 452) that is German IR, however, the strategy of deliberate dissociation from the American mainstream would have been far less promising in the German than in the British case.

Rather than following the British example, German scholars with some success sought to make their voices heard in global IR by linking up to the leading segments of American scholarship. They took up and advanced research programs that were salient in American IR and took care to ensure the compatibility of their work with the American discourse (Rosenau/Czempiel 1992; Hasenclever et al. 1997; Haftendorn et al. 1999). As a matter of course, these efforts had to be conducted in English if they were to stand a chance of being recognised in the global IR community and thus did nothing to raise the international profile of German-language scholarship (Albert 2004: 283). With respect to both theory and epistemology, in turn, the majority of high-profile German IR displays a strong tendency of staying clear of the

extremes of spectrum and holding the middle ground. It is the building of bridges between different theoretical and epistemological perspectives for which German IR is best known (Risse 2004: 290).

The predominant theoretical orientation of German IR scholarship can be described as broadly neo-institutionalist, with a shade of moderate social constructionism. To name but two, the conference papers of Frank Schimmelfennig on the normative dynamics behind the democratisation of the EU and of Matthias Hofferberth on the influence of norms on multinational corporations make for excellent examples for innovative research that should broadly fit this general categorisation. Epistemologically, the theoretical orientation of German IR generally goes with an undogmatic and soft positivist outlook that avoids both the unbridled positivism in some quarters of American IR and the stark anti-positivism of poststructuralist and post-modern scholarship (Zürn 2003: 24f). Quite in contrast to British IR, this rather pragmatic approach to epistemology, however, appears indicative above all of the lack of interest among German scholars in debating the epistemological foundations of their work (Mayer 2003: 89f).

As with all generalisations, this sketch of the dominant patterns in German IR theory cannot do justice to the entire breadth of German scholarship but is rather meant to highlight some notable differences between the approaches to theorising international relations favoured in Germany and Britain. The poststructuralist paper of Dirk Nabers on European identity, for example, is but one reminder of the existence of German scholarship beyond the neo-institutionalist and softly positivist middle ground. What is more, the conference program is also evidence for the fuzziness of the dividing line between German and British IR in a second sense: a substantial number of German-language contributors to the conference are actually based in Britain, and the research presented by them tended to be at least as representative of the British as of the German approach to IR theory. Among the prime examples in this regard are Beate Jahn's construction of a Lockean ideal type of liberal internationalism and Holger Stritzel's interdisciplinary and post-positivist take on international threat dynamics.

Beyond the idiosyncrasies of British and German approaches to IR theory, the conference debates have confirmed a trend of convergence between the two IR communities with respect to the overall status of theory and theoretically guided research. Both for British and German IR that trend is towards a higher standing of theorising international relations within the discipline. Whereas the rise of theory and theorists has been diagnosed as a long-term development which can be traced over the last 30 years in the case of British IR (Brown 2006: 677f), German scholarship has only rather recently caught up on this score. While inventories of the state-of-the-art in German IR regularly deplored the lack of the field's theoretical foundations until the mid-1990s, it is today praised as one of the most theoretically informed disciplines of political science in Germany (Zürn 1994, 2003). Theory-guided research has certainly become the largely undisputed norm for leading IR German scholarship (for a critique though see Hacke 2003). One might even argue that its focus on »applied theory« has become the most important aspect in current

German IR as it has so far generally avoided the detachment of highly specialised theorists from the rest of the discipline for which British IR has been criticised (Brown 2006). Be that as it may, the shared interest of German and British scholars in theoretical issues as well as their rather different perspectives on theory should be seen as a promising opportunity for debates and cross-fertilisations between the two IR communities. The British-German IR conference in Arnoldshain was one of the rare venues for such exchanges.

3. *Why is there an English but no German School of IR?*

So here we are left with one of what the German IR community likes to refer to as »puzzles« and what the British would probably simply call an »interesting question«: Why is there an English – but no German School of IR? Or more generally, why are there such theoretical differences between German and British IR? This was also the central theme of the conference round table with Christopher Daase, Mathias Albert, Chris Brown, Alexej Behnisch, Colin Wight and Antje Wiener. Reflecting on this debate, we want to briefly sketch how the theoretical understandings prevalent in the German and the British IR communities could influence the way in which such a »puzzle-question« is explained or interpreted (Brown 2006).⁵

A typical German institutionalist »explanation« (Zürn 2003: 24) of the state of German and British IR would likely focus on the structure and organisation of the two communities. Here one could begin with noting the different institutional size of these communities (Rittberger/Hummel 1990: 38). Size clearly does matter and has an influence on the range of theoretical perspectives which can flourish in a community of scholars. Since British IR is much larger than German IR, it can be expected to be more diverse and to accommodate a greater variety of approaches to theorising international relations (Jørgensen/Knudsen 2006: 149). Also, an institutionalist account could point to the way IR departments and ultimately universities as a whole are run in Germany and Britain. It has been suggested that the hierarchical structure of the German university system in which a small number of mainly home-grown professors set the agenda and decide about who gets the small number of fixed term positions has an influence on the way IR is conducted. The argument being that a lack of alternative permanent vacancies in academia other than professorships limits the field of research and restricts diversity (Goetze 2005). British academia, in contrast, offers its scholars a far greater number of career opportunities beyond professorships including a variety of lecturer and research posts.

Another closely linked institutional »variable« which could be partly held responsible for the differences between German and British IR is their relationship to political science as a whole. While most universities in Germany only offer degrees in Political Science, it is possible in Britain to only study International Rela-

5 We are aware that the following account is strictly illustrative and rather speculative. Others have dealt in far greater detail with the question of if, how and why there are national perspectives on International Relations (c.f. Weaver 1998; Holden 2001, 2002).

tions. Whereas one does not come across IR departments in Germany, they are a common feature of university life in the UK. Connected to this, one also has to consider the institutional setup of the respective professional associations (Weaver 1998; Smith 2000). While the British International Studies Association (BISA) is fairly independent of the Political Studies Association (PSA) and holds large annual conferences, the IR association in Germany is »only« a section of the general political science association DVPW albeit the largest and most active. German IR in contrast to British IR thus displays close institutional links to Political Science and is in many ways subsidiary to the latter.

Finally, an institutional account of the current state of affairs in German IR could explore the role of the *Zeitschrift für Internationale Beziehungen* (ZIB), still the only theory-oriented IR journal in Germany. On the one hand, the ZIB has contributed to a more professional approach to IR in Germany, above all by introducing the practice of double blind peer reviews (Zürn 2003). It has established a »culture of international standards« (Albert 2004) and has thereby made Germany IR scholars more competitive on the world stage (Risse 2004). Importantly, it has given German IR a kind of profile and »Corporate Identity« (Müller/Hellmann 2004: 280). Compared to the vast number of IR journals in the UK, on the other hand, it could also be argued that the quasi-monopoly of the ZIB in Germany has narrowed down the diversity of German scholarship. The ZIB managed to create a German IR identity but had to sacrifice plurality in pursuit of it. While it clearly has socialised German IR, it is unclear whether it has also disciplined it (Müller/Hellmann 2004: 280). In any case, the fact that intra-community communication among German scholars is for the most part restricted to one major journal without doubt has an important impact on the way of doing IR in Germany.

From a British perspective an »interpretation« of the different trajectories of German and British IR would probably examine the historical context in which the two communities have evolved and in which they exist today. Although we have been warned in *Fawlty Towers* not to do so, we cannot avoid mentioning the War.⁶ Surely the historical experiences of Nazism and defeat in the Second World War had and still have an effect on the discipline of IR in Germany. The loss of influence of Germany in world politics after the War and the thoroughly discredited notion of an active role for German foreign policy may have led to a certain disregard for IR theory as a means of explaining and predicting international politics in German academia. Certainly, the policy relevance of German IR scholarship for German foreign policy was something not worth worrying about at the time. In this regard, however, the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 can be said to have re-enhanced the self-esteem both of German IR and of German foreign policy. The confident optimism in German IR and its increasing sense of policy relevance reflects and is to a certain extent constituted by the more pro-active and assertive stance of the new »Berlin Republic« on the international stage (Wolf/Hellmann 2003: 578). Most obviously, there appears to be some link between the multilateral style of German foreign policy,

6 Fawlty Towers, Series 1, Episode 6, »The Germans«, 1975.

which excels at exerting its influence by working within and through international organisations, and the dominance of institutional theory in German IR.

Along these lines, a historical contextualisation of the state of British IR could point to the loss of the British Empire and Britain's declining role in world politics. As Chris Brown has pointed out it seems

»very plausible that the decline in status of Britain as a world power has had an impact on the way we study IR. To put the matter bluntly, in the 1950s and 60s, policy-orientated, applied theory, produced by theorists who were capable of talking to policymakers, reflected the fact that British policymakers occupied positions of genuine, though declining power and influencing their thinking could actually have an effect on the world« (Brown 2006: 683f).

As for today, it has been argued that the policy relevance of British IR scholarship has become a far less important concern and maybe is now seen more critically as »a distraction that can threaten the intellectual freedom necessary to the development of an academic field« (Crawford 2001b: 238). Similar to the central role of institutions in German IR and for German foreign policy, the British idea of »muddling-through« (Lindblom 1959) in international politics may be reflected in the diverse theoretical perspectives which manifest themselves on the Island.

4. *Results of Bridging the Foggy Channel*

To return to the car metaphor mentioned at the beginning of this report, we believe that the first British-German IR Conference was far more successful than the BMW-Rover merger. It was an occasion for reflecting on our differences and more importantly on our similarities in doing IR and begs for repetition and institutionalisation. Given the leaning of German IR towards building bridges we are tempted to see the conference as a way of bridging the small stretch of water which divides German and British scholarship. But maybe we should update our metaphors and view the conference as a first attempt at building an IR-Channel Tunnel to avoid storms on the open sea and facilitate calm and reasoned communication, thereby reducing stereotypes and permitting the debate of IR in a friendly atmosphere. And we promise no one will mention the War or the World Cup, and even if anybody did hopefully nobody would mind.

Conference Papers

- Albert, Mathias/Stetter, Stephan/Diez, Thomas* (University of Bielefeld/University of Birmingham): Cycles of Intervention: The European Union and Conflicts in World Politics.
- Berenskoetter, Felix* (London School of Economics and Political Science): Who is Afraid of the Hard Core? On the Purpose of Theorizing »World Politics«.
- Berger, Lars* (Salford University, Greater Manchester): From Tornado to Whiff – US Democracy Promotion in the Middle East and the War in Iraq.
- Boehmelt, Tobias* (University of Essex): The Effectiveness of Tracks of Diplomacy Strategies in Third-Party Interventions.

- Brabandt, Heike* (University of Bremen): Gender Mainstreaming and Asylum Laws and Policies in the UK and Germany: Examples of Successful Policy Diffusion?
- Brühl, Tanja/Rosert, Elvira* (Johann Wolfgang Goethe University, Frankfurt): Testing Global Governance: New Governance Modes in the UN System.
- Freyburg, Tina/Richter, Solveig* (Swiss Federal Institute of Technology, Zurich/German Institute for International and Security Affairs, Berlin): National Identity Matters: The Limited Impact of EU Political Conditionality in the Western Balkans.
- Hasibovic, Sanin* (University of Vienna): Media Assistance in Bosnia-Herzegovina – Twelve Years of Failure?
- Herborth, Benjamin* (Johann Wolfgang Goethe University, Frankfurt): Being Really Critical? Critical Theory and the Problem of Technocracy.
- Hofferberth, Matthias* (Johann Wolfgang Goethe University, Frankfurt): Norms and Multinational Corporations – Ideational Motivation for CSR Initiatives?
- Holden, Gerard* (Johann Wolfgang Goethe University, Frankfurt): Different in Different Places: On the Intellectual History of Aesthetic IR.
- Jahn, Beate* (University of Sussex): John Locke, Liberalism, and International Relations.
- Kessler, Oliver* (University of Bielefeld): The Paradoxical Bases of Constructivist Thought: or – Is Logic of any Relevance for Understanding Politics?
- Kleinschmidt, Jochen* (Ludwig Maximilians University, Munich): Social Theory, Spatial Structures and Violence in World Politics.
- Koivisto, Marjo* (London School of Economics and Political Science): IR as a Social Science: Assessing the Challenge of the New »Relational-Pragmatist« and »Critical Realist« Approaches.
- Liese, Andrea* (Humboldt University, Berlin): Liberal Democracies, Wars against Terrorism, and the Contested Meaning of the Prohibition of Torture and Ill-Treatment.
- Munoz, Katja* (Berghof Research Center for Constructive Conflict Management): The Interplay of Violent and Nonviolent Means While Striving for National Liberation.
- Nabers, Dirk* (University of Stuttgart): Poststructuralism, Identity and the European Union.
- Nölke, Andreas/Taylor, Heather* (Johann Wolfgang Goethe University, Frankfurt): The Theoretical Implications of the Rise of Multinationals from Non-Triad Economies: A Varieties of Capitalism Perspective on Indian Multinationals.
- Oppermann, Kai* (University of Cologne): Media Coverage, Issue Salience and the Domestic Constraints of Foreign Policy.
- Peoples, Columba* (Swansea University): After Emancipation? Critical Theory, Violence and Resistance.
- Pilster, Ulrich/Boehmelt, Tobias* (University of Essex): When Do Groups Underprovide Public Goods? A Quantitative Analysis of International Environmental Regimes.
- Puetter, Uwe/Wiener, Antje* (Central European University, Budapest/University of Bath): Contested Norms in International Relations: A Framework for Applied Research.
- Rengger, Nicholas* (St. Andrews University): Plenary Lecture: On German Realism and British Idealism – and Vice Versa.
- Rosenberg, Justin* (University of Sussex): Anarchy in the Mirror of »Uneven and Combined Development«: An Open Letter to Kenneth Waltz.
- Ruggeri, Andrea/Schlipphak, Bernd* (University of Essex/University of Freiburg): Regional Governance.
- Schimmelfennig, Frank* (Swiss Federal Institute of Technology, Zurich): The Normative Origins of Democracy in the European Union: »Democratization« Beyond the Nation-State.
- Schlag, Gabi/Herborth, Benjamin/Hellmann, Gunther* (Johann Wolfgang Goethe University, Frankfurt): Secur(itiz)ing the West: The Transformation of Western Order.
- Schmitt, Daniella Christova* (University of Tübingen): Do Transnational Administrations Fail? A Comparative Study of the Kosovo and East Timor Experiences.
- Schwellnus, Guido* (Swiss Federal Institute of Technology, Zurich): The Domestic Contestation of International Norms: The Development of Minority Rights in Poland.
- Stammes, Eli* (Norwegian Institute of International Affairs): Peacebuilding and Emancipation.

- Stritzel, Holger* (London School of Economics and Political Science): International Threat Dynamics as Translation: On the Politics of Circulating Organised Crime.
- Venzke, Ingo* (Max Planck Institute for Comparative Public Law and International Law, Heidelberg): Discourse in the Legal Tongue: The Discourse on »Enemy Combatants« as an Illustration of Hegemonic Contestation.
- von Franqué, Friederike* (Global Media Research Institute, Frankfurt): Media Intervention by State Actors – Influencing Foreign Communication Space.
- von Staden, Andreas* (Princeton University): Assessing and Explaining the Execution of the Judgments of the European Court of Human Rights.
- Warkotsch, Alexander* (King’s College, London): Non-Compliance and Instrumental Variation in EU Democracy Promotion.
- Wastl, Florian* (London School of Economics and Political Science): The End of the Cold War as a Moment of Complexity.
- Zelli, Fariborz* (University of East Anglia): Regime Conflicts in Global Environmental Governance: A Framework for Analysis.
- Zimmermann, Hubert* (Cornell University): Controlling the Locusts: Germany and the Global Governance of New Financial Markets.

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