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Hawkers, Imperialists, Secret Role Models: England and America

An Example in Stereotypes and Identity Policies

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The following article is intended in the sense of fictional dialogue publications of the Early Modern period. It reflects my delightful visits to Christoph's mill, where we used to discuss everything and anything.¹

Introduction

Christoph and I used to discuss a wide range of topics. Rarely, we shared every detail in opinions on this and that. But even when we only agreed to disagree, there was deep mutual understanding for the reasoning of the other one. The following considerations derive from of a book of mine that has just been published. I would have liked to discuss its topic with Christoph.

This is about self-images and images of others. It is about views and attributions of German ideas of identity; it is about stereotypes, about figures of thought coagulated in time. Auto-stereotypes (of oneself) as well as hetero-stereotypes (of others) simplify our views of the world; they are efficient “pictures in our head” (Walter Lippmann). Stereotypes take advantage of mental inertia; they are long-lasting, stable, and acquired from earliest socialization on. Due to the use of stereotypes, we do not need to grasp every detail. Stereotypes support self-affirmation; commonly shared preconceptions enable any society to mutual and efficient self-understanding; the errors of stereotypes, however, have destructive effects.

First, on the positive side of stereotypes: if we tried to comprehend the world, complicated as it is, we could not make any decision. We would be overwhelmed by the feeling of being – more or less helplessly – at the mercy of an accelerated development of world affairs. We feel the coercion of information overload. Schemata and stereotypes exist in order to reduce the world's complexity. Stereotypes depend on time; their basis is continuous repetition. Stereotypes are *tessera* of both, national self-images and images of other nations. Schemata and stereotypes belong to the (analog) compression algorithm, which casts the overabundant flow of information into a form that makes it possible for us to comprehend the complicated world. Stereotypes and schemata facilitate both, the pragmatic coping with everyday life and the formation of identity.

¹ In terms of content, this text echoes some of the thoughts I expressed and verified in *Deutschland-Bilder: Spiegelungen nationaler Identität* (Bremen, edition lumière, 2023).

And now, on the negative side of stereotypes: they are supposed to reduce cognitive (individual and collective) stress. However, this strategy only works momentarily because any simplifying interpretation can be false; it then has to be corrected, and this later becomes time-consuming and expensive. The war in Ukraine demonstrates this in an existential way. Buzzwords, slogans, and stereotypes condense, shorten and thereby make all the complexities of the context invisible. This works thanks to repetition: the more often stereotypes are repeated, the more effective they become. Thus, the complexities of reality are over-simplified. Buzzwords, slogans and stereotypes influence the schemata of (individual and collective) action. Repetitions condense into rituals and narratives. Then again, many believe the most obvious lies to be true. The most outlandish rituals become “sacred” acts. If preconceptions are strongly ideologized and societies run on “autopilot,” then everything becomes possible. Hitler and Goebbels already knew this, not just the populists of present times. Whether they are right or wrong is no longer decisive; the stereotypical historical image has an identity-forming effect either way.

So, let’s look at an example: at German preconceptions of Britain, the British, the US, and the US-Americans.

The Example

The British had been Prussia’s allies since the Seven Years’ War. Frederick II’s state, junior partner in this relationship, was Britain’s “continental dagger.” Johann P. Palm’s pamphlet of 1806 exclaimed: “Europe [remains] in slavery unless England breaks its bonds.”² British naval power and British resources were regarded as the only protection against the French: the wealth of the trading nation and British naval power were supposed to put Napoleon in his place. The “naval hero Nelson” had shown this in the then recent past. That offered some hope for the Germans. At Waterloo, the combined forces of Wellington and Blücher decisively defeated the French Emperor. According to Blücher, the battle was mostly called the “Battle of Belle Alliance” in German history books, especially by Heinrich von Treitschke. Napoleon set up his headquarters at the inn “La Belle Alliance”; Wellington and Blücher supposedly met there on the evening of the battle. More importantly, Belle Alliance, the good alliance, gave the British-German alliance a more positive frame than the neutral place name “Waterloo” that is in use today. Since then, Waterloo has been a cipher for heavy defeats; the positive connotations have gotten lost.

² All translations of German primary texts from German to English are my own.

Thus, at the beginning of the nineteenth century, anti-English stereotypes barely existed. At least, they were less common than in later decades. Jonas Ludwig Hess, who had spent some years in exile in London, lauded the British:

A nation is more closely related to the North Germans: The British emerged, as it were, from them [the North Germans] and the Scandinavians. The British confirm very clearly the assertion that the North of Germany has preserved the old Germanic independence more faithfully than the southern parts of the vast lands of German-speaking peoples. This mongrel people consists of Britons, Saxons, and Normans; in the spirit of its laws, this nation has interwoven its great empire with the highest esteem of freedom and independence; this nation for centuries has set an example of monarchical republican government which has not yet been equaled by any other great monarchy.

Hess praised the “merits of the English state constitution,” its “freedom of writing and speech,” the “equality before the laws,” and Britain’s “sovereignty of laws.”

In the 1840s, Hoffmann von Fallersleben wrote in a mixture of condescension and hope:

You great grocer nation,
You richest country in the poor world,
You sing of freedom, of freedom in a jubilant tone,
And yet you only have money on your mind. . . .
O would you were what you could be,
Freedom’s shield and guardian,
Ah, for Europe alone!
All the universe, all the universe would sing to you:
Rule, Britannia, Britannia great and noble!
Thanks to you, land and sea are singing thanks to you.

From the perspective of a liberal democrat, everything seemed to be possible: England just would have to renounce its hucksterism; on that condition even the Germans would like to submit themselves to Britain’s (moral) supremacy. Prior to 1848, Wilhelm von Kügelgen, a constitutional liberal, regarded the well-balanced English political system as a role model. The adaptation of the English system would prevent two extremes which were equally bad: mob rule (democracy) on the one hand and despotism on the other. But it would be necessary to bring about reforms in time: “Where is the throne more secure than in England? By freedom, the educated today understands guaranteed rule of law, and this rule of law, however, has developed historically in England.”

The stereotypes of America initially sounded similarly positive. America, usually a cipher for the United States, offered an alternative to the cramped and oppressed conditions in Germany. Political hopes were combined with economic aspirations. Everyone sought “unlimited opportunities” (America’s promises) for themselves. “America, you have it better” and “America, the land of unlimited

opportunities” were two positive colloquial associations. Goethe had poetized “To the United States” in his *Zahme Xenien*:

America, you have it better
Than our continent, the old,
You have no decayed castles
and no basalt rocks.
You are not disturbed from the inside
Or in lively time
By useless remembering
And futile strife.

The poem was written after 1815, first published in 1823. As the German anthology of quotations *Büchmann* (from 1864) proves, Goethe’s first line entered the proverbial vocabulary of the Germans. The “decayed castles” are a metaphor for an aristocracy that had become obsolete; the “basalt rocks” are a synonym for petrification and stagnation. Thus, America was utopia and projection: but only the first line condensed into Germany’s collective memory. The other lines were soon forgotten; the other lines actually were political, although Goethe himself was an advocate of the old Germany, and, therefore, an opponent of mass politicization. The first line, on the other hand, was ambivalent and innocuous. “America, you have it better” suited the German mood in the nineteenth century. Mainly, it was to be understood as a promise of economic prosperity. Because no one emigrated without necessity. Another phrase, “America, the land of opportunities [*Gelegenheiten*],” became a standing expression. The authorship of that phrase is uncertain. In the nineteenth century, the ambiguous phrase was very common.

In 1840/41, August Heinrich Hoffmann von Fallersleben wrote *Unpolitische Lieder* (*Apolitical Songs*). This is one of the most political anthologies of poems ever published. Von Fallersleben listed all the things a German emigrant should take with them to America:

Many Bundestag’s minutes,
Many a budget and many a tax roll,
A whole load of templates
For government proclamations – . . .

Swagger sticks and other beautiful canes,
A hundred thousand three-score servants’ coats,
National cockades, colorful caps,
Ten times a hundred thousand buttons with coats of arms – . . .

Chamberlain’s keys and many wallets,
Pedigrees and family trees in thick packages,
Rapier sheaths a thousand loads,
Medal ribbons in a hundred thousand boxes – . . .

Sloppiness, wine bottles and wigs,
Privileges, easy chairs and crutches,
Ceremonial titles and conduct lists
Hundreds of thousands of chests – . . .

Confirmations of taxes, clearances, births, baptisms, marriages and deaths,
Passports and travel books, big and small ones,
Many a hundred censorship instructions,
Police mandates, three million
Otherwise in the New World
The German will be discontent.

The “souvenirs” reflected on the image of Germany inversely: the Bundestag’s minutes and swagger sticks are allusions to the *auto-da-fé* at Wartburg Castle in 1817. Wigs are symbols of the oppressive nobility; keys are insignia of state officials; wallets are a synonym for material advantages; the saber (rapier) is a metonym for the military. Hoffmann von Fallersleben criticized the lack of freedom of movement; he mocked a bureaucracy that was as inefficient as it was rampant. In sum, the enumeration evokes images of unfreedom in Germany and freedom in America. One may assume that Hoffmann von Fallersleben and his readership shared similar associations.

Adolf Glasbrenner introduced a narrator of peep-box shows (*Guckkästner*) as a propagandist for emigration:

Here you are presented the magnificent city of Philiadelphia [!] in North America; in the background you see beautiful mountains and flourishing landscapes; all around the city there is freedom and there the inhabitants feel happy. The people, whom you may notice in the foreground, are German emigrants; they left their fatherland, because they could no longer feed themselves and were oppressed.

People wanted to escape poverty, firstly; but additionally, emigration for political reasons played an important role before and after 1848: America was promising; America possessed the power of the youth; America was a synonym of progress; Germany and Europe did not provide anything, just stagnation and starvation. Thus, Glasbrenner put it into the mouth of a politicizing have-not: “we do not need to look far to notice among us a kind of Asian obstinate insistence to stagnate; the youth of America already peeks out of Europe’s decrepitude.”

After the revolution had failed, Adolf Glasbrenner had his *Guckkästner* take a look back. For once, the narrator did not comment as stupidly and half-educatedly (indicated by the mispronunciation of Philadelphia) as he usually did:

That’s the trouble with it. Because, look, California happens to be in America, and no American state is lending money for the suppression of the peoples, as European states usually do. Not a single silver coin! That’s because . . . the Americans don’t use their money to feed courtiers and nobility and thousands of useless civil servants. They don’t spend so many millions on police and gendarmerie and couriers and the like; they don’t

waste so many hundreds of millions on useless armies; the people there govern themselves; they use their savings for their own benefit and pursuit of happiness.

The idealized image of America (with budget control, efficient use of funds, a frugal civil service and diplomatic apparatus, and no military power) was, like Hoffmann's, the antithesis of the *Anciens Régimes* in Europe.

While democrats usually placed high hopes in America, the monarchists otherwise recognized America's political freedom as a sign of rebellion and revolution. But even the moderate forces rejected US democracy as too radical: Wilhelm von Kugelgen wrote before 1848: "In America, public opinion is everything, regardless of its immediacy and crudeness – just as the Russian monarch is." After the Revolution, he judged democracy even more negatively; he became a supporter of constitutional monarchy. In the Restoration, Gustav Freytag had Mr. Friedrich von Fink, a protagonist of his famous novel *Soll und Haben* (*Debit and Credit*), philosophize positively about the unsentimental, energetic, optimistic Americans:

There I praise what you call the American's lack of spirit. He works like two Germans, but he will never fall in love with his hut, his fence or his draft animals. What he owns has to him just the value that can be expressed in dollars. Very mean, you will say with disgust. I praise this meanness, which thinks every moment of how much and how little a thing is worth. For this meanness has created a powerful free state. If only Germans had lived in America, they would even now be drinking their chicory instead of coffee; they would endure any tax that a cozy government from Europe would impose on them.

Freytag's von Fink has the appearance of the "tough Yankee" himself. Freytag usually characterizes any person by outward appearances. In doing so, the characterization is as unspecific as it is descriptive. However, von Fink is the white raven in the novel. Therefore, von Fink's sentiments are not equal to those of common Germans.

Karl May divides the world into good and evil even more than Freytag. Mostly, May charted a rather positive picture of US Americans and Englishmen. Americans, usually referred to as "Yankees," were smart and fearless; they possessed a certain toughness and were quite intent on their advantage. May's colportage technique did not vary much: "He was . . . a real Yankee, had a sharply protruding nose, mirror-bright eyes without guile or deceit, a broad, sharp mouth, a square chin, and yet, despite the good-naturedness that was apparent in him, could perhaps be a little mischievous and cunning when he thought it well serving."

May described a sailor by the words: "Everyone said unanimously that, despite his good Spanish name, he was an American, a real Yankee, who did not care about the devil." A third one is portrayed as such: "He was a 'real Yankee . . . of that sort whose cunning has become proverbial.'" Americans worked hard and always thought about business.

Karl May's typical Englishman was quite different; even readers at that time must have noticed that May's Englishman really could not be typical. May's stereotypical Englishman was a nobleman – very often a lord. His (stereotypical) lord had an incredible amount of money; the lord did not have to work for money; he could spend it liberally on educational and adventure travel. His lord cultivated his quirk. Particularly, one characteristic trait distinguished May's stereotype of the Englishman from the others that circulated in Germany of those years: May's Englishman was an "honest soul," true to his word; he stood by his friends and even the most dangerous consequences would not hinder him. Old Shatterhand met the Lords in the Wild West, Kara ben Nemsi traveled with them through the Orient. Germans and Englishmen were good friends in East and West:

The good, honorable Sir John was an Englishman in the extreme. He was an owner of an immense fortune and he had never thought of marrying; but he was one of those taciturn, buttoned-up Englishmen, who scour all corners of the earth, make even the most distant countries unsafe; they endure the greatest dangers and adventures with infinite equanimity. Finally, they return home tired and sated; they just want to make monosyllabic remarks and share the travel experiences with their fellow members of some famous travel club. Sir John had the quirk in such a degree that his long, lanky, but extraordinarily powerful personality showed only in very rare moments a small touch of enjoyability. Nevertheless, he possessed a very good heart, which was always gladly prepared to compensate for the small and large oddities in which he tended to please himself. . . . I had joined him because of his experiences and connections. They could be of great use to me, and I had become so dear and friendly to him that, in spite of his apparent aloofness, he displayed a truly brotherly affection for me.

In the novel *Der Schatz im Silbersee (The Treasure of the Silver Lake)* May says: "Either he is out of his mind or really an English lord with five yards of quirk and ten hectoliters of liver troubles."

When Kara ben Nemsi meets his later friend, Lindsay, an English lord, the following dialogue unfolds:

"May I ask your name?" "Lindsay, David Lindsay – title not, no need – say Sir Lindsay." "You really intend to go to the Euphrates and Tigris?" "Yes. Have steamboat – go up – get off – steamboat waiting, or back to Baghdad – buy horses and camels – travel, hunt, excavate, give British Museum, tell Traveler club. Do you come along with me?" "I prefer to be independent."

Later, Lindsay and Kara ben Nemsi travel together, anyway. They separate and find each other once and again; occasionally they rescue one another from great and imminent danger.

The parallel stereotype to the downright obscenely rich British lord became the "rich uncle" from America. Rich uncles were emigrants who had made their fortune "over there." Lion Feuchtwanger disparagingly dubbed rich Americans "dollar shitters." Feuchtwanger put the same word into the mouths of different people

– the factory owner Reindl, the engineer Pröckl (= Bert Brecht), and Johanna Krain (= Marta Feuchtwanger). One may assume that “dollar shitter” was a generally understood synonym for the Americans in the 1920s; at least the synonym flourished during the inflation in the early 1920s. The stereotype of the “rich uncle” from America reached its last peak after World War II – due to the Marshall Plan and the care packages. The image of the rich uncle conjured up an inferior, poor Germany. Since the German perception of a crisis of the “American Dream” more recently, the notion “land of opportunity” has acquired a rather ironic connotation.

Preconceptions of individual political freedom and personal happiness joined political stereotypes. As Heinrich Heine wrote in *Deutschland. Ein Wintermärchen* (*Germany: A Winter's Tale*):

French and Russians own the land,
The sea belongs to the Britons,
But we own the “airy kingdom” of the dreams.
That rule is undisputed.

This was as ironic as it was self-deprecating. In the Crimean War (1853-1856) between France and Great Britain on the one side and the Tsarist Empire on the other, Prussia had maintained neutrality. In the wars of unification since 1864, the United Kingdom did likewise. Initially, there were no occasions for negative images of England. However, Bismarck repeatedly faced “English” opposition at court and believed himself threatened by a liberal “Gladstone Ministry.” He indulged in anti-English jibes in his memoirs. Among Bismarck’s hard-core supporters, such passages may have fostered or at least reinforced anti-English resentment. After Bismarck’s resignation, the resentments increased further.

At the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth centuries, the image of England became darker. Resentments in both countries intensified reciprocally, fueled by the nationalistic press in both countries. Heinrich von Treitschke had evoked the “perfidious boasts of the English press,” long before the slogan of the “perfidious Albion” circulated in World War I. Heinrich Mann had Diederich Hessling rant in *Der Untertan* (*The Loyal Subject*): “Just as I hate England; Frederick the Great hated this nation of thieves and merchants. That is a word from His Majesty, and I subscribe to it.”

The catalyst for negative evaluations became the Boer War (1899-1902). The British colonial war in South Africa reinforced collective attitudes across all party lines. Hardly any political decision has been criticized more harshly by historians of later times than Wilhelm II’s grandiose telegram to “Ohm Kruger.” Hardly any other decision was received with greater enthusiasm in contemporary Germany. England’s political class and the public saw themselves diplomatically snubbed.

Among German contemporaries, on the other hand, the dispatch was very popular. A Hamburg policeman noted in 1899: “You would think it quite nice of the German Kaiser to have sent a dispatch to President Kruger of his own accord.”

The German media reported atrocities and “concentration camps.” The German public accused the British of contempt for humanity, cruelty towards the defenseless and unchivalrous action against civilians. For this reason, Wilhelm II’s trip to England in November 1899 was very unpopular: the trip was criticized as a lack of commitment to the Boers. Furthermore, the German press condemned the emperor’s refusal to grant “Ohm Kruger” an audience.

Even a hundred years later, there were some references to the Boer War. A derivative stereotype is the “invention of the concentration camp” by the British. Günter Wallraff noted from a conversation of workers:

Alfred: “Listen, who started KZ? Now let’s be honest.” And he gives himself the answer (aloud): “The Englishman.” Udo: “The Yank, the Yank started it.” Alfred (insists): “The Englishman did it, the Englishman. That Churchill . . . – in the colonial war he was a first lieutenant, yes, so sergeant [!].”

The uncertainties in matters of military rank indicate the workers’ lack of education. More importantly, the stereotype of the “British” invention of concentration camps has not disappeared from populist discourses. It regularly pops up in social media.

The atrocities of the Boer War may have had a strong impact on the image of England in Germany. Structurally, the change of German perceptions had more to do with the German-British competition in different spheres: in the colonial, the power-political, and, last but not least, the economic-industrial sphere. Therefore, behind the widespread stereotypes, colonial and naval politics highlighted the lines of conflict.

Before World War I, German Fleet Propaganda appealed to deeply rooted convictions of law and justice. It probably fell on fertile ground: why should Germany be denied the place that other nations had long since taken? A quote by Bernhard von Bülow, State Secretary for Foreign Affairs, became proverbial. In the *Reichstag*, he demanded a “place in the sun” for Germany and received great applause for this:

Finally, we are willing to take into account the interests of other great powers in East Asia; [that will be taken into account] in the certain foresight that our own interests will also find the appreciation we deserve. (Bravo!) In a word, we do not want to outshine anyone, but we also demand our place in the sun. (Bravo!) In East Asia as in the West Indies, we shall strive . . . to safeguard our rights and our interests. (Loud applause.)

The relationship with Great Britain was a matter of economic and colonial rivalry. Before World War I, the district president in the Lüneburg government thought

it was quite “remarkable . . . that the bellicose, even hostile mood is directed far more against England than against France.”

So, an attempted policy of *détente* only temporarily improved the negative perception of the English. Baroness von Spitzemberg offered a political explanation: “the hatred of the German people is directed primarily against this country [Great Britain], because this country stiffens France’s back and it is insolent beyond measure in its speeches against us.”

The quote may be partly the Baroness’ distorted perception, partly deliberate misinformation. Later, Thomas Mann interpreted the balance of power more psychologically: from the German perspective, the English were the “master race” (*Herrenvolk*); the Germans wanted to step beside them: “you were under the envious compulsion to copy England . . . ; it was your dream to outdo it and to put yourselves in England’s place; not only a *Herrenvolk* – *the* *Herrenvolk* you wanted to be.”

Although written more than four decades later, Mann’s psychological explanation showed some similarity with Karl May. The Yankee of May’s adventure novels is in a similar position to the Germans. In contrast, the Englishman always appears as the master of the world. Due to their wealth, May’s lords and sirs had unlimited resources. On the other hand, the “unlimited opportunities” of America depended on hard labor. Mann’s ambiguous perception followed that of May, Freytag, Glaßbrenner, and many other authors.

The National Socialists pronounced their “*Herrenvolk*” claim instead of the English. Mann’s explanation fits well with Hitler’s “monologues” in the Führer’s headquarters: “The Englishman is superior to the German because of his self-confidence. Self-awareness only exists in those who can command. . . . For the English ruling class, the advent of Germany was the misfortune.”

Later Hitler repeatedly expressed his conviction in a similar way: “It is natural by itself: through colonial wealth England has become a master nation. . . . The Englishman, but also the Russian, they have the self-confidence that depends on large spaces. I hope we get that now!”

So, Hitler framed his aggressive war of conquest in the East as an educational tool for the Germans. He wanted to create unlimited opportunities and provide endless resources for Germany. Consequently, a new biography of Hitler imputes an “Anglo-centric perspective” to Hitler: Hitler launched the invasion of the Soviet Union only as a secondary consequence of his primary goal. Hitler’s main objective was targeted against the “Anglo-Saxons,” in whom he saw the “real master race.” This causality that is turned on its head must be disputed. The “Anglo-centric” thesis has been criticized as “peculiar” and “exaggerated.” Nevertheless, it did exist: a connection between Hitler’s criticism of capitalism and his anti-

Americanism and his anti-Semitism. Furthermore, the stridency of anti-Soviet and anti-Anglo-American Nazi propaganda differed little. The “Herrenmenschentum” is compatible with Hitler’s ultimate goal of world domination. At first, Hitler’s Germans had to win the final victory over the Anglo-Americans.

Obviously, some perceptions possessed great stability – both over time *and* across social differences. Once again, quotes of Thomas Mann may underline the continuance. In his *Betrachtungen eines Unpolitischen (Reflections of a Nonpolitical Man)*, written in World War I and published soon after, Mann criticized America: the “New German spirit,” the “German lifestyle” is subject to “Americanization” and a “clumsy [kind of] corruption.” The Englishman only wants to “rant.” Thomas Mann wrote: “It is a tragic oddity that each of the great European nations in its own way forms a doom for all Europe – (Germany no less than others).” He added: “England, however, does it in a particularly selfish, unconscious, cold, imperturbable and clever way.”

Mann reproached the English for having “conducted the war [from the first day on] in the most radical way.” Later, in his World War II exile novel *Doktor Faustus (Doctor Faustus)*, Mann cites pre-war discussions of fellow students. The discussions provide abundant negative stereotypes of England. Mann’s exile novel cites points of view that once had been his own.

In contrast, many US stereotypes were ambiguous. Nazi propaganda attributed the most contradictory characteristics to the United States: on the one hand, the United States was “highly capitalistic,” on the other it was “infiltrated by Bolshevism.” On the one hand, the US was a potent economic power, on the other hand, unemployment and mass poverty flourished. In Nazi propaganda, the US had feet of clay. Its economy and culture were “Jewish,” “racial chaos” prevailed. Shallow culture, film kitsch, “trash and filth” and organized crime rounded off the Nazis’ negative picture. It must remain uncertain which of these stereotypes were shared by most Germans in wartime. It is difficult to judge which effect the Nazi propaganda against the Jewish-dominated “plutocracy” had on the German people. The propaganda about wonder weapons and retaliation created mainly cynical jokes. The propaganda had a rather counterproductive effect. Many Germans remembered well the US’s entry into the war that changed the course of World War I. Nazi propaganda just seemed to be effective with regards to America’s “lack of culture.”

The Anti-Anglo-Americanism did not vanish after 1945. On the one hand, the Berlin Blockade, the Marshall Plan and the Cold War promoted pro-Anglo-American attitudes. In particular, the US was seen as a protector (thanks to military strength), reconstruction helper (investors and sales market) and provider of bread and butter (care packages). On the other hand, a continuity of prejudices existed. Former Nazis greeted each other with “Friend of the USA” after 1945.

The greetings did not indicate a change of opinion. Instead, USA was a cipher for “Unser seliger Adolf” (Our blessed Adolf).

The cabaret artist Wolfgang Neuss performed a sketch about the atomic bomb tests on Bikini Atoll in the Pacific:

The English are fine people, by all that is right and fair. . . . They go to the Bikini Atoll with their ships. They have pigs on them. And, of course, Englishmen. And here it comes: First they throw the pigs into the water. Then, they throw the atomic bomb. Do you know what happens? Some of the pigs go down, the other pigs go home.

The effects of the atomic bomb were to be tested on the pigs in the water. The pigs who went home referred to the (Anglo-American) military personnel. The military staff left ground zero before the atomic detonation. Crude jokes like this provoked laughter in 1950s West Berlin. Remember, West Berlin depended on the guarantee of the Western Allies.

The post-war clash between Germans and Americans produced clichés galore. Helmut Käutner’s film *Schwarzer Kies* (*Black Gravel*) drew a double image of the Americans and the Germans. The film is about the construction of an airbase in the Hunsrück region: the Americans are in charge, interested in cheap amusement in their leisure time. The Americans are efficient and pragmatic when on duty; they snatch up the most beautiful women; they offer the women security and prosperity. The Germans either serve this need for amusement, or do black market business, or they are auxiliaries to the Americans (as labor force, in administration and police). The film flopped at the box office in 1961. The negative stereotypes of the Germans explain the flop sufficiently. In the early 1960s, the Germans did not like to recognize themselves in such a way.

The connection between anti-Americanism and anti-militarism was given a boost by the Indochina Wars from the mid-1960s onwards. The Vietnam War, which the Americans had inherited from the French, motivated student protests around the world, including in Germany. These protests combined a mixture of diverse attitudes, not only anti-American ones. Although the movement of 1968 lacked open anti-Semitism, it shared distorted images of Uncle Sam and nourished critical attitudes towards America’s capitalism. This fatal combination reminded some observers of the recent Nazi past. Loyal friends of America heard the tone become “similar to that of the ‘Völkischer Beobachter’.” “German Vietnam protests” sounded “unpleasantly self-righteous.” It seemed like “retaliation,” an FAZ-journalist wrote.

The bridge across ages is further illustrated by Siegfried Lenz’s *Deutschstunde* (*The German Lesson*). *Deutschstunde* was published in 1968. Its story is set in World War II. Various people comment on Americans:

Americans. Everything is a job for them, . . . even war. – They don't know any attachment; . . . to them, an inner mission is unknown; they feel at home everywhere. – They eat only cotton candy and drink colored lemonade. . . . American life: living on revocation, without permanent commitment. For the time being. Let's put it this way: in a covered wagon. – [They are] Civilians, . . . all civilians, even in uniform.

The novel's protagonists express accumulated invectives. Thereby, the author implicitly distanced himself from the anti-American resentments of his protagonists.

Even in a completely different area, subliminal animosities shone through. An ARD live report on the launch of the moon rocket Apollo 11 in July 1969 at Cape Kennedy explained: The US commercialism was producing strange effects. The children played with "tiny astronauts." The sentimentalized toys are examples of a lot of "souvenirs according to American taste." The disparaging characterization of the US-Americans was countered by the positive image of Germany: "Wernher von Braun was a German. . . . We did everything that is humanly possible, says the man who developed the moon rocket, Wernher von Braun."

The commentary certainly corresponded to the expectations of the German television audience. On the one hand, there is a certain feeling of superiority over the allegedly cultureless, commercial- and kitsch-oriented average Americans. On the other hand, the German TV reporter expressed his national pride in Wernher von Braun. Neither did he address von Braun's SS past, nor did he mention that von Braun had developed the V 2 rocket. The V 2, demonstrably, was the only weapon that killed more people by its production than by the bombshells of the rockets themselves. Instead of the atrocities of war, the live report referred to Braun's composure and skill. The moon-shot project had been tackled with German thoroughness. To put it bluntly: without German ingenuity, the Americans would never have made it to the moon.

In the present, the German image of America is overlaid with economically motivated criticism of globalization. Under President Barack Obama, the criticism of US policy was more quiet and anti-American reservations less vocal. The criticism returned all the louder after Donald Trump took office and became quiet again after the start of the Ukraine war.

Final Remarks

The phil-Anglo-American biases and anti-Anglo-American stereotypes discussed here were merely examples. Some biases are more serious, especially the anti-Semitic ones. Nevertheless, similarities obviously refer to the two groups of stereotypes: on the meta-level, all stereotypes follow a certain comprehensible logic; it is the laziness of thought. In this respect, many hetero-stereotypical perceptions of the foreign are fundamentally the same: they have a formative

effect on identity. However, as Edmund Husserl, who was a descendant of a German-Austrian-Jewish family, laconically stated c.1900: “Identity is absolutely indefinable.” What cannot be defined positively, however, can quite easily be defined negatively: in opposition to others. Particularly, anti-Semitism follows this logic of efficiency; it follows the human inertia of thought. While it is difficult to define a German positively, negative definitions come more easily: when Germans are perceived as the opposite of non-Germans all the problems of (racial) definition are solved. Of course, that is a strategy of lazy thinking: the *topos* that a German is “non-Jewish” and any German is the opposite of any Jew (or Semite) provides a fine example of this strategy of simplification. One could just as well define the Germans as “anti-English,” “anti-French,” “anti-Russian,” or the like. Therefore, not every preconception leads into a genocide; nevertheless, antithetic stereotypes are the core of any national self-perception and any nation’s identity.

Auto-stereotypes (of oneself) as well as hetero-stereotypes (of others) simplify. It doesn’t matter if they are right or wrong. Attributions develop a life of their own; they create a reality *sui generis*. Sometimes, false ideas are even more powerful than true ones: it does not matter, for example, whether the Germans were “decent;” it only matters that they thought they were (and many still think they are). Ideas construct identity. The constructs of identity have two aspects: one is procedural, and one is substantive. Procedural: stereotypes shorten even the most complex contexts. At their core, they are based on buzzwords and slogans. Auto-stereotypes (of oneself), hetero-stereotypes (of others), and meta-stereotypes (about the stereotypes of others) expand on catchphrases and slogans. They may or may not result in complex narratives or myths. Myths coated in historical varnish and current narratives reduce complexity. They tell more of a story than the precursors (catchphrases, slogans, stereotypes) do. They combine their storytelling into a coherent and plausible identity construction. They sort many details into a pattern.

If patterns are recognized where they do not exist, we do have conspiracy theories. Slogans, catchphrases, stereotypes, myths, and narratives (including conspiracy theories) follow one another in the process of condensation and consolidation like onion skins; every skin is very similar to the other ones. The Anglo-American example is one of many substantive identity markers. As it was said, the Anglo-American example did not have the most fatal effects. It was chosen for Christoph’s memorial volume for obvious reasons.

I would have liked to discuss this topic and its implications with Christoph. Especially, I would like to hear his opinion on the résumé of my reasoning: that is, any use of stereotypes is as understandable as potentially dangerous; especially if it is part of a larger framework of identity policies – regardless of which color. Maybe,

there is a time to come when we can discuss the matter. Maybe, we will discuss it in his mill; of course, not the one in Upper Palatinate, but that in Elysium.

The first draft of this contribution was translated with www.DeepL.com/Translator (free version). For proofreading of the second draft, I owe thanks to Holger Müller, lecturer in Communication Science at the University of Bamberg and once one of Christoph's students. For further proofreading I owe thanks to the editors of this volume. Any error concerning the wording is up to me.