

‘Worldviews/Weltanschauungen. The German Past and the Contemporary World: The Domestic and Foreign Politics of Memory’.



The research project was hosted by the **Institute for German Studies**, 2013-2014. Supported by the DAAD.

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Core research group: Dr. Felix Heiduk (IGS), Dr. Isabelle Hertner (IGS), Dr. Sara Jones (IGS), Dr. Julian Pänke (IGS), Josefin Graef (IGS, project assistant and PhD researcher), Dr. Patricia Hogwood (U of Westminster).

## Project report for 2014

2014 was the second and final year of the IGS's Worldviews/Weltanschauungen project. The project was led by a core research group with specialist knowledge across disciplines. It was supported by a project assistant (Josefin Graef) who was simultaneously writing her PhD thesis in a related field.

The two main aims of the Worldviews/Weltanschauungen project were (1) to bring together eminent international researchers working on the role of memory in contemporary German politics, thus promoting interdisciplinary exchange and a fuller understanding of the continued impact of 20th-century history on 21st-century political decision-making, and (2) to strengthen the IGS's ties with the worldwide network of DAAD German Studies Centres as well as with German universities, to foster future international collaboration, and to showcase UK German Studies to partners at home and abroad.

In 2014, the research project was structured around two research visits by eminent scholars from the DAAD German Studies Centres in North America, each accompanied (as a key part of our commitment to *Nachwuchsförderung*) by postgraduate students. The scholars have used their time at the IGS to build closer research collaborations with researchers working in UK German Studies and present their work at the University of Birmingham. Each scholar from the North American DAAD German Studies Centres will produce a chapter to be included in a special journal issue that will emerge from the project (to be edited by Sara Jones and Patricia Hogwood).

In January 2014 the IGS was host to Professor Eric Langenbacher (Georgetown University, Washington). Professor Langenbacher was accompanied by Matt Eckel, who is a PhD candidate in the Department of Government at Georgetown. The visit included a very productive workshop, in which members of the IGS and Department of Modern Languages discussed theoretical and methodological approaches to memory studies with the visiting scholars. On 29 January, Matt Eckel gave a talk entitled 'Materialist Antecedents of Elite Nationalism: The Role of Inequality' at the POLSIS Doctoral Colloquium and, on the 30 January, Eric Langenbacher presented his paper – 'Does Memory Still Influence German Foreign Policy?' – at a public seminar organised by the IGS. Dr Eric Sangar from the University of Stuttgart acted as discussant for Professor Langenbacher's paper, which provided the opportunity for lively debate about recent shifts in Germany's approach towards international relations and the role that an ongoing preoccupation with 'working through' the National Socialist past might play.

In May 2014, the IGS was host to Professor Marc Silberman (University of Wisconsin-Madison). Professor Silberman was accompanied by Justin Court, who is a PhD candidate in German Studies at Wisconsin-Madison. On 20 May, both scholars spoke at a well-attended public seminar organised by the IGS under the title 'Ethics and the Holocaust'. At this event, Professor Silberman gave a paper with the title 'The Ethics of Teaching Holocaust Violence' and Justin Court presenting under the heading, 'The Ethics of Viewing Holocaust Violence'. Dr Helmut Schmitz from the University of Warwick and Dr Isabel Wollaston from the Department of Theology and Religion (UoB) acted as discussants for the papers. Once again, the visit also included a very productive workshop, in which considerable progress was made in

developing a theoretical framework for the project that will later serve as the basis for the introduction to the special journal issue.

In addition to the two research visits, the IGS organized two public workshops/seminars. First, in October 2014, the Institute hosted a workshop marking the fall of the Berlin Wall and aiming to assess shifts in representations of the GDR since 1990. Six international scholars of the GDR were invited to speak about different facets of cultural and social remembering: Dr David Clarke (University of Bath); Prof. Hope Harrison (George Washington University); Prof. Karen Leeder (University of Oxford); Prof. Alison Lewis (University of Melbourne); Dr Debbie Pinfold (University of Bristol); and Dr Sara Jones (IGS, University of Birmingham). The event was very well attended with over 60 registrations, including a number of undergraduate and postgraduate students from across the UK, and resulted in lively discussions around such topics as the commercialisation of memory, the dominance of a 'Western' perspective on the GDR and what constitutes "victimhood". The workshop was linked to the launch of Sara Jones's new monograph *The Media of Testimony: Remembering the East German Stasi in the Berlin Republic* (Palgrave, 2014).

Second, in December 2014, the IGS organised a public seminar as part of the Worldviews/Weltanschauungen project. Under the title: 'The Dark Side of EU-rope: 'Imperium EUropaeum'?', Professor David Engels (Université Libre de Bruxelles, ULB) presented the main ideas of his recent book, *Auf dem Weg ins Imperium*, praised by the *Süddeutsche Zeitung* and the NDR as the best non-fiction publication in September 2014. In his book and his talk, Professor Engels argued that the European Union is on the verge of turning into an empire – like the late Roman Republic. Thus, David compared various symptoms of crisis in the EU and the late Roman Republic, identifying a number of disturbing parallels: population decrease and migration issues, materialism and globalization, deteriorating values and fundamentalism, bureaucracy and political disaffection. The seminar was well attended by students and colleagues from various disciplines at the UoB, including a number of postgraduate students from across the UK. Julian Pänke chaired the following discussion, which welcomed the unusual historical perspective on the European Union in questioning its perceived role as unique actor in international relations. The event highlighted the added value of genuine interdisciplinary approaches within the Worldviews/Weltanschauungen project.

### **Planning and publicity**

The project was planned and monitored in regular meetings of the core research group. The Worldviews/Weltanschauungen logo was developed for the project publicity flyer by project assistant and IGS PhD candidate Josefin Graef, who has been actively involved in developing our publicity for the project, which includes an IGS Facebook page and regular e-mails to the IGS's extensive network of scholars and practitioners.

### **Report from the Worldviews project PhD Student (Josefin Graef) 2014**

My research looks at the right-wing extremist group “National Socialist Underground” (NSU) in Germany and investigates the social dynamics behind processes of narrating and re-narrating criminal acts of violence across time. Between July and September 2014 I collected my empirical data by doing archival work in the Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin. The text corpus of nearly 2,000 newspaper articles from four different publications now forms the basis of my data analysis, which I will complete in spring 2015. I also further developed the theoretical and methodological sections of my thesis, now provisionally entitled ‘The Dynamics of Narrating Criminal Violence: The *National Socialist Underground* and the (Re-) Negotiation of Germanness’, and linked the first empirical results to the arguments made in these two chapters.

In March 2014 I presented a research paper entitled ‘Attack on Germany: (Re-) Negotiating Self-Images in Response to NSU Terrorism’ at the 21<sup>st</sup> International Conference of Europeanists, organized by the Council for European Studies, in Washington, DC. I presented a second paper entitled ‘November 2011 als Wendepunkt? Eine Analyse medialer Erzähldynamiken zum Nationalsozialistischen Untergrund’ at the 2014 Interdisciplinary Conference of the DAAD Centres for German and European Studies in December in Berlin. In June 2015, I will take part in a workshop on the NSU and right-wing extremism in Germany at the University of Cambridge as part of their DAAD-funded project ‘Reading violent politics: transnational and interdisciplinary approaches to political extremism in Germany since 1968’.

Until October 2014, I was also the Co-Chair (Events) of the Graduate Centre for Europe, a postgraduate-led interdisciplinary initiative at the University of Birmingham. In this capacity I was the lead organiser for the 8<sup>th</sup> annual conference “‘Travelling Europe’’: Interdisciplinary Perspectives on Place and Space’ that took place in March 2014. Around 13 postgraduate students from across Europe gave papers at this conference. The keynote speech was given by European Policy and Urban Affairs Adviser Patrick Willcocks, on ‘The Future of European Cities: Challenges and Opportunities’. The conference proceedings will be published in 2015 by Cambridge Scholars Publishing.

#### **Report from the Worldviews project MRes Student (Alex Brown) 2014**

I began the MRes in Modern Languages in September 2014. As part of the course, I have undertaken modules in ‘Reading Russian for Researchers’ and the ‘History of Intellectual Subversives from the Enlightenment to the Digital Age’. As part of the latter, I am writing an essay on the reception of Friedrich Nietzsche in the GDR and the transition to an enlarged FRG. I have also been undertaking research methodology training in the University’s Graduate School.

My dissertation for the MRes is entitled “The Red Resistance? Communist Opposition in the Early GDR”. This project looks at key GDR oppositional figures both within and outside the party up to the building of the inner German border in 1961. I have been conducting a literature review and doing the groundwork for a research visit to German archives in Berlin and Ludwigshafen in Spring/Summer 2015.

**We thank the DAAD for the generous funding of the Worldviews/Weltanschauungen project. It was highly productive and set a very positive precedent for our new research project, '(Not) Made in Germany? Imagining Germany from the Outside'.**

**For the 2013-2014 budget: see enclosed Excel sheet.**