Cultural History of the Political: Germany in Europe, from the Enlightenment to the Present

The **Canada Research Chair in German and European Studies** affiliated with the Département de littératures et de langues modernes and the Centre canadien d'études allemandes et européennes (CCEAE) within the Faculté des arts et des sciences is located at the intersection between history, literary studies, as well as German and European Studies. My research activities focus on three areas: "Democracy and Intimacy after Genocide: The Politics of Memory in Western Europe, 1945-2005," "Visions of the Family and Political Order in Postwar West Germany," and "Cultures of Diversity in Nineteenth- and Twentieth-Century Europe."

As holder of the Chair, I aim to develop a new research program to contribute to the writing of a cultural history of the political with an emphasis on the history of civil society, diversity, and democracy in Europe since the French Revolution. To speak of the "political" as opposed to "politics," is to direct attention to power and law, boundaries and nation, equality and justice, identity and difference, citizenship and civility. It is to speak, as Pierre Rosanvallon has argued, "of everything that makes up a polity beyond the immediate field of partisan conflict for power, governmental conflict from day to day, and the ordinary activity of political institutions." This shift of scholarly curiosity from politics to the political coincides with attempts to develop a non-essentialist and historical understanding of the political, attempts that resonate across a vast array of disciplines in the humanities and social sciences.

This burgeoning field of inquiry has developed in tandem with a renewed or continued interest in the insights of scholars as diverse as Alexis de Tocqueville and John Dewey, Hannah Arendt and Carl Schmitt, Isaiah Berlin and Michel Foucault. What these thinkers share with feminist and postcolonialist critiques of narrow conceptions of politics and of political history, is their insight that we need to look beyond the state in order to explore the web-like nature of power relations and the ambivalent, contested, and fragile nature of civil society, pluralism, and democracy. As Canada Research Chair in German and European Studies, I, thus, aim to promote a broad understanding of the political, to historicize the boundary between the private and the public, and to explore the nexus between political ideas and agency in the public sphere. Although these questions are particularly pertinent to German and European history in the nineteenth- and twentieth centuries, my research program contributes to global discussions about the possibility of writing a history of democracy, pluralism, and civil society that addresses what seems to be a growing uncertainty about the viability of a liberal democracy. On a methodological level, it engages larger theoretical questions of framing that speak to the commonalities and differences of history and literature, and the efficaciousness of their elective affinities—questions that are especially relevant to an interdisciplinary program in the humanities. To explore key episodes in the cultural history of the political in modern Europe, I propose three distinct areas of inquiry, the relationship of democracy and violence in the "Age of Extremes," the fragile and contested renaissance of democracy in postwar Western Europe, and the tension between equality and difference since the Enlightenment.

Democracy and Intimacy after Genocide: The Politics of Memory in Western Europe, 1945-2005

Twentieth-century Europe oscillated between two extremes: The descent into war and genocide, on the one hand, and the return to peace and democracy, on the other. Throughout much of the 1920s and 1930s, democracy, the rule of law, and liberalism seemed outdated to many all over Western Europe as well as in the United States. In his brilliant interpretation of twentieth-century European history, Mark Mazower has argued that the idea of democracy "was virtually extinct" in the late 1930s. Building on the large body of scholarship that has contributed much to our understanding of how

Europeans got into fascism, Nazism, war, and genocide, I want to take seriously Dan Diner's argument that postwar German and European history is an era after a "rupture with civilization". Against this background I want to explore the social and cultural history of how Germans and Europeans freed themselves from the experiences of mass murder and mass death, and of how they came to embrace democracy as a way of life. I am less interested, in short, in revisiting the political effects of the "economic miracle" or of American military and economic presence, than in opening up new avenues for studying the unexpected "political miracle" of western Europe's "democratic moment." It is in this context that I am engaged in two closely related research projects that explore the renaissance of democracy in Europe in the shadow of violence, one on gender history, and the other on the politics of memory.

In the first project, "Intimacy and Democracy: The Family, Sexuality, and Religious Politics in Germany and the Postwar West, 1945-1975," I collaborate with Dagmar Herzog of the City University of New York's Graduate Center. My aim is to bring a transnational perspective to bear on the complex historical relationships between the trajectories of religious and political developments and the evolution of family life and sexual mores in postwar Western Europe. My particular interest lies in investigating the unique place of post-Nazi West Germany in comparison with the trajectory of other nations in the Cold War West. I am concerned with exploring the reciprocal impact of processes of democratization, the initial re-Christianization followed by accelerated de-Christianization of social and political life, and the erosion of patriarchal family policies and of sexual conservatism.

By deliberately contrasting nations with divergent political traditions in the 1930s and 1940s (democracy versus Nazism versus occupation/collaboration) and with divergent religious traditions (Protestant versus Catholic versus mixed), and by exploring the effects of such phenomena as mass death and/or enmeshment in Nazism, anti-Semitism, and genocide on the various postwar cultures, I hope to be able to challenge assumptions about such inadequately theorized but frequently invoked notions as "Americanization," "Cold War culture," or "youth rebellion." The contrasts between post-Nazi Austria and West Germany with France's ambiguous relationship to Nazism and with British and Swiss democracy, will do much to clarify the extent to which Nazism and the World War shaped postwar developments, and thus to rethink the relevance of the divide of 1945. I also take Jeffrey Herf's idea seriously who argues that the post-1945 era saw "multiple restorations"—not only forms of Christian and ex-Nazi conservatism, but also social democratic and liberal democratic impulses whose roots were internal to Western Europe and to Germany itself.

In researching the histories of the intimate realms of family and sexuality across these three crucial postwar decades, I hope to shed fresh light on the notable political stability of postwar Western Europe in an era of economic prosperity and the much-noted ascendance of consumer and leisure culture. With regard to the 1940s to 1970s, Martin Conway has gestured to the crucial role of gender in securing this stability, but much more remains to be explored. By highlighting such matters as masculinity, parenting, sexuality, the balance of power between genders and generations in the domestic realm, and habits of deference to authority in both private and public life, I expect to be able to offer new models for thinking about the intersections between gender history and other fields in history. More generally, however, I hope to generate methodological discussions about the possibilities for bridging the gulfs that still exist between political history, cultural history, and the history of everyday life (*Alltagsgeschichte*).

My longstanding interest in the relationship between history and literature is at the center of the second interrelated research project "Democracy in the Shadow of Violence: Narratives of the Private in West Germany's Postwar, 1945-2005." This interdisciplinary collaboration with Daniel Fulda (Institut für Deutsche Sprache und Literatur, Universität zu Köln), analyzes the question of how a

democratic culture could emerge after mass murder and genocidal warfare from the vantage point of both historiography and literary studies.

Through an analysis of literary family stories of the war and postwar years—a genre currently flourishing all over Europe, and especially in Germany—the project traces the search for peace and democracy after the shock over the involvement in violence, war, and genocide. Themes within these narratives include the language of defeat, the shift in ideals of the father-figure from patriarch to "partner", the nexus between controversies on sexuality and the politics of memory, as well as the ways in which children of the war generation construct and memorialize these changes as part of their biographies. The project spans the time-period from the immediate postwar years to the present as a moment that seems to generate a wave of literary family narratives. Research is undertaken through a collaboration between scholars from history and literary studies. This approach yields a two-fold perspective, as the sources are interpreted both as historical documents and as interventions in the politics of memory—both provocatively demonstrating the need to be analyzed through questions of narrative. Thus, I interrogate the transition from Nazism to democracy within the context of literary studies and historical scholarship.

The project starts from the methodological premise that the historiographical re-construction of West Germany's search for democracy cannot be separated from the culture of memorialization envisioned by the current wave of generational narratives in literature. History and literature are entangled neighbors, in the sense that they mutually presuppose and precondition one another. Historians of the Federal Republic work against the background of a texture of memories that is currently being shaped by the genre of "autobiographical family stories." The specific accomplishments of literary family narratives, in turn, only emerge in contradistinction to historiographical interpretations. This combination of literature and history does not only allow for a more nuanced understanding of West Germany's search for democracy, but also encourages methodological self-reflexivity in both disciplines.

Visions of the Family and Political Order in Postwar West Germany

In addition to these collaborative research projects, I am also working on a monograph, tentatively titled *Bringing Democracy to Daddy. Changing Conceptions of Paternal Authority in West Germany, 1945-1970*. In this study, I am particularly interested in the nexus between the re-Christianization and the democratization of West German society in the 1950s and the early 1960s. The search for new forms of fatherhood was, I argue, not only often couched in religious terms but also central to the cultural and political transformations in Germany between the early 1950s and the mid-1960s. A decade before "1968," men and women rejected authoritarian fatherhood and began to embrace what contemporaries labelled "democratic fatherhood," a softer and more emotional form of masculinity that would provide the basis for both a democratic family and a democratic society. The context in which I place my analysis is the renaissance of democracy in postwar (West) Germany after the catastrophe of National Socialism and genocidal warfare. In light of Germany's "Shattered Past" (Michael Geyer), it is astonishing, then, that within barely two decades, West Germans not only came to accept a "thin" conception of democracy, i.e. as formal system of governance, but increasingly embraced a "thick" conception of democracy as way life. Conceptions of fatherhood occupy a key site within a history of how a democracy came about in a German society whose citizens were emerging from a murderous past and trying to navigate the tensions between democracy and authority in order to construct a better polity.

Arguably, an analysis of the more conservative and religious spectrum of West German popular culture is probably the best measure of how dramatic conceptions of paternal authority had changed

by the mid-1960s. My focus is less on the well-known nexus between conservative politicians and the church hierarchy that often supported patriarchal conceptions of the family until well after Vatican II. Instead, I am primarily interested in the wide range of Catholic, Protestant, or ecumenical family associations, as well as in Catholic and Protestant family experts, be they theologians and clergy, or sociologists and psychologists loosely affiliated with the churches. Many of these lay Catholics and Protestants were remarkable for the way in which they reconciled their religious identities with creative and sometimes sophisticated critiques of a patriarchal gender regime. 1950s to the mid-1960s West Germany can perhaps be understood as a society in which a challenge to patriarchy was connected to the public presence of religious rhetoric. Especially left-wing Catholics and Protestants who began to question what they considered patriarchal conceptions of the family in the early 1950s, were the catalyst for the conceptual and intellectual agitation which began to develop among mainstream Christians and dovetailed with the increasing laicization of Catholic and Protestant organizations since the late 1950s.

Within the search for a "democratic family," debates about fatherhood occupied a critical place because the "father" had embodied the idea of authority both within the Judao-Christian tradition and nineteenth-century liberal conceptions of patriarchy. Given the experience of National Socialism and the Holocaust, West German political culture of the 1950s and 1960s was intensely concerned with the question of "authority," and the father soon occupied an emblematic status within these debates. It is, of course, tempting to interpret the importance of "authority" as an indication that West Germans remained reluctant democrats until the anti-authoritarian moment of 1968. Yet such a reading of West German political culture misses the fact that the meaning of authority changed between the early 1950s and the mid-1960s. A hierarchical conception of authority based on tradition and the spirit of order and obedience gave way to an idea of authority based on trust embedded in egalitarian social relationships. A focus on governmental family policies, arguably, misses the significance of the transformation of the family in the two postwar decades. Government attempts to restore a patriarchal gender order ultimately failed because federal family legislation and policies were increasingly at odds with developments within society at large.

Cultures of Diversity in Nineteenth- and Early Twentieth-Century Europe

In another area of research in Modern European History, I explore the interplay of difference and diversity, the tension between universalism and particularism, and analyze interethnic relations in conjunction with identity formation and transculturation. I have been working on the place of Jews within a kaleidoscope of European differences for more than a decade. My first book, *Juden und andere Breslauer*, aims to reconstruct everyday relations between Jews, Protestants, and Catholics in a German city between 1860 and 1925 in the context of Jewish history, European history, and recent debates about multiculturalism.

My current work in Jewish history responds to conceptual issues raised in my previous scholarship and is carried out in close collaboration with the Leo Baeck Institute in London. I am working on a book tentatively titled "Jews and the Ambivalences of Civil Society in Central Europe, 1800 to 1933," in which I explore languages of diversity in nineteenth- and early twentieth-century. I structure the book around a series of analyses of key concepts that purport to represent the universal: the nation and Europe, mankind and citizenship, equality and civility, virtue and masculinity. My aim is to situate notions of diversity within the very language of universalism; not to distill the abstract essence of the universal but to bring out its fluid and contested meaning. This allows me to analyze civil society's fundamental duality: its simultaneous tolerance and intolerance, its inclusive potential and its oft-contested exclusions.

In the course of this project, I rethink familiar territory: debates on Jewish emancipation between the late eighteenth century and the 1870s, the revolutions of 1848 as a turning point in modern Jewish history, controversies at rabbinical assemblies, the *Kulturkampf* of the 1860s and 1870s, the Berlin Debate on Antisemitism, Jewish responses to the rise of antisemitism and *völkisch* nationalism, and problems of church-state relations. I also venture into lesser-known areas such as the debates about domestic and militaristic conceptions of masculinity in which Jews served an emblematic function and played a significant role as participants. In addition, I examine the prominent role of Jews in local politics and the myriad forms of middle-class sociability in German-speaking central Europe. The project takes a deliberately transnational stance. Its geographic span is not limited to those territories that became the German nation-state in 1871, but extends to German-speaking regions and cities of the multi-national Habsburg empire.

This project engages a growing body of scholarship on the relationship between the particular and the universal, between specific groups and the common space in which they negotiated their terms of coexistence. The gradual establishment of the rule of law opened the public sphere, the state, and the nation to contestation and debate. These became ever-changing arenas in which competing claims of communities were articulated and possibly, but not necessarily accommodated. No less than Jews or Catholics, members of the Protestant middle class, and others whom we might consider as bearers of true civic virtue or nationhood, asserted a right to be different. In relation to the public sphere, the state, or the nation, in other words in relation to the universal, all communities were 'minorities'— even if some minorities were 'more equal' than others. Just as the particular is not a fact but rather a production which is never complete, the universal may best be conceived as an ever-changing arena that is produced in the "articulation of difference" (Homi Bhabha). Arguably, the history of Jews in modern Europe is best understood within transcultural emplotments of nineteenth- and twentieth-century European history that employ concepts such as diasporas, borderlands, and hybridity.

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