

## *Preface*

*A*N OP-ED PIECE BY HENRY KISSINGER on tensions within NATO appeared in several American newspapers on 10 February 2003. In it, Kissinger criticized France and Germany for opposing United States–led efforts to disarm Iraq by force, arguing that the likely result of such opposition will be to “confirm the fundamentalist view of the West’s psychological collapse” and wreak lasting damage on “the Western alliance.” The language is striking, both for its casual assumption that the United States and the countries of Western Europe belong to a community anchored by a common culture (and that they have been attacked by “fundamentalists” on this basis) and for its injured tone at what is understood to be a betrayal of that community by the Europeans. “Alliances do not function because heads of state consult their lawyers,” Kissinger declares; “they thrive precisely when they involve moral and emotional commitments beyond legal documents.” And “the West,” for Kissinger, encapsulates commitments of this sort.

How did notions of community like this become so firmly entrenched in international politics that commentators could deploy them quite unself-consciously? The existence and rhetorical currency of a notion like ‘Western Civilization’ is far from obvious, considering that the twinned principles of sovereignty and anarchy continue to structure world politics to a significant degree. Despite globalization, sovereign states, acknowledging no higher authority than themselves, continue to claim a monopoly on the legitimate use of force and to reserve to themselves the right to make final decisions about the distribution of resources and the overall shape of global authority. The supposed existence of a community like Western Civilization flies in the face of this traditional notion, and also contradicts the neoliberal assertion that the globalized world is now a world of firms and consumers. The world envisioned by the language of ‘Western Civilization’ is different from both the world of sovereign states in anarchy and the world of global markets, and the persistence of this language in the face of the manifest institutional realities of these two worlds remains puzzling.

Thinking about the issue historically raises a second puzzle, since the language of ‘Western Civilization’ has only been current in political debates for about a century. This raises problems for the assertions by scholars that the West is an ancient cultural community: if the community is so ancient, why has it only been noticed recently? Further problems are raised by the fact that those using the notion do not seem to agree on the *content* of the community to which they refer; the precise geographical boundaries of the West, along with the normative foundations of the community, seem to vary from speaker to speaker. A particularly striking example of the ambiguous boundaries of the West can be seen in the case of Germany, which was a dire enemy of the United States and much of Western Europe in the first part of the twentieth century but emerged as a staunch Western ally after the Second World War. The language of ‘Western Civilization,’ although powerful, is also historically and strategically pliable.

In this book I undertake an exploration of this strange rhetoric, and in particular its implication in the construction of the “postwar settlement” following the Second World War. I concentrate on the reconstruction of Germany for both historical and more contemporary reasons. For one thing, existing accounts of the postwar settlement in both international relations (IR) and diplomatic history do not take public rhetoric seriously. They therefore fail to explain why German reconstruction occurred, why it took place in the way that it did, and why it placed the new West German state on something of an equal footing with its former enemies in a relatively short amount of time. I argue that the *rhetorical* construction of the postwar world and Germany’s role in it plays a *causal* role in producing and sustaining the reconstruction of Germany. As I shall demonstrate, the rhetorical commonplace of ‘Western Civilization’ is central to this construction. ‘Western Civilization’ functions in both the German and the American contexts as a discursive resource for delegitimizing policy options opposed to Germany’s incorporation into American-led military and economic institutions. Hence, the *occidentalism* of these postwar reconstruction policies is a critical element of their successful implementation.

My focus on discourse and public rhetoric garners a number of significant analytical advantages over existing approaches. Unlike accounts focusing on military security, I do not have to read the stability of the later Cold War backward into a very confusing and in many ways indeterminate historical period; instead of simply regarding the bipolar division of the world as inevitable, my account elucidates the causal mechanisms whereby this division was produced and naturalized. Unlike accounts focusing on economic interests, I need not reduce human social action to a more or less determinate response to material positionality; agency remains central to my account of events. And unlike many existing IR constructivist works dealing with culture

and identity, I refrain from reducing culture to unobservable beliefs inside of heads, or reducing identity to some kind of (social) environmental compulsion; I concentrate on intersubjective, observable articulations that shape possibilities rather than exhaustively determining them. The account that I offer explains postwar German reconstruction without having to adopt such questionable theoretical positions.

In this book, I focus on the public rhetorical contests over the boundaries of legitimate action both in the United States and in the western zones of occupied Germany. I closely examine the debates surrounding the passage and implementation of the two major pillars of postwar German reconstruction—the European Recovery Program (ERP, informally and publicly known as the Marshall Plan) and NATO—with an eye to questions about whether and to what extent a reconstructed German state should participate in these economic and military endeavors. Especially in a democracy, the availability of public rhetorical commonplaces that can be utilized so as to render a given policy acceptable is an indispensable part of the process of public policy-making, particularly for a set of policies as massive as postwar reconstruction. Enormous flows of resources and reconfigurations of political practice require justification, and absent the rhetorical deployments that I analyze, it is unlikely that the resulting policies and institutions would have taken the form that they ultimately did. My account highlights the room for maneuver exploited by various actors, as they took advantage of the inherently ambiguous character of public rhetoric in their efforts to assemble sets of publicly acceptable reasons for their preferred courses of action; the outcome of clashes between various public deployments explains the course of postwar German reconstruction.

Central to my account is the rhetorical commonplace of ‘Western Civilization,’ the notion that the United States, Canada, and Western Europe participate in a common cultural community with millennia-old roots in classical Greece. The irony that this notion was first voiced in the nineteenth century by conservative German academics was entirely lost on the American liberals who seized on the notion in the early postwar period as a way of delegitimizing the unilateralist proposals of their domestic opponents. Conservative German politicians also seized on the notion as a way of advocating *Westbindung* (which involved close, institutionalized cooperation with the United States, Britain, and France, even at the cost of a temporary acceptance of the division of the country in two) and delegitimizing the alternatives that were offered by their Social Democratic opponents. In effect, a coalition of liberal Americans and conservative Germans joined forces around a common commitment to preserve a civilizational community; this transnational alliance made postwar German reconstruction possible.

Aside from these historical considerations, there are also more contempo-

rary reasons for reconsidering postwar German reconstruction. The splits between the former allies that culminated in the Cold War were first rehearsed in occupied Germany, as an organized system overtly intended to promote four-power cooperation became the arena for a number of controversies. Germany became the flash point of the postwar world for the simple reason that it was the place where the victorious Allies first proclaimed their institutional solidarity, and hence the place where subsequent tensions and clashes between them were largely played out. There is no better lens for examining the postwar settlement than German reconstruction, as policies enacted in and around Germany set the tone for global relations between the various parties. The occidentalism of German reconstruction was replicated elsewhere, helping to stabilize what we only later came to think of as “the Cold War.” Thus an examination of the arena in which these debates were first fought out will enhance our understanding of what we might call the conceptual infrastructure of international politics over the last half century. Inquiring into the origins of the Cold War in this way reveals a startling conclusion: viewed in terms of public legitimation, the Cold War *already was* a “clash of civilizations.” This raises profound questions about what kind of order might succeed the Cold War.

The book proceeds in eight chapters. Chapter 1 discusses the recent return of “civilization” and “civilizations” to the conceptual lexicon of mainstream social scientists and argues that although this literature succeeds in putting civilization(s) back on the agenda, it commits a grave theoretical error in treating notions like “Western Civilization” as though they referred to concrete entities with dispositional essences. Instead, we should focus on the *language* of ‘Western Civilization,’ sidestepping any questions about what the West “really is.” In this way, we can begin to appreciate the kind of shaping effect that public debates about identity have on specific policy initiatives, such as those involved in postwar German reconstruction.

Chapter 2 introduces my alternative, a *transactional social constructionism* that concentrates on public rhetoric as an adequate cause of outcomes. I draw on Weber and Wittgenstein as a way of developing the general position and utilize recent work on national identity and social movements to isolate three key causal mechanisms at work in legitimation contests: *specifying*, in which one party tries to redefine a previously introduced rhetorical commonplace; *breaking*, in which one party attempts to disrupt their opponent’s position by highlighting inconsistencies in the opposing position; and *joining*, in which one party tries to undermine their opponent’s position by linking a central commonplace of the opponent’s position to an arrangement pointing in a different policy direction. I argue that the outcome of a legitimation contest is largely a function of how these mechanisms combine in particular public debates.

Chapter 3 begins the empirical analysis of postwar German reconstruction with a sketch of the “rhetorical topography” of the debates in question. I identify the central rhetorical commonplaces in play and show that the opposing sides in the struggles over public policy were largely constituted by different arrangements of similar commonplaces, such as ‘the preservation of liberty’ and ‘anticommunism.’ I illustrate the presence and key role of occidentalist appeals to ‘Western Civilization’ in both the American and the German debates, showing how this commonplace was a central component of legitimation strategies pursued on both sides of the Atlantic. In chapter 4, I engage in genealogical process-tracing in order to show two things: where this commonplace came from (ironically, ‘Western Civilization’ in its present form came from nineteenth-century debates in the German academy) and how it made its way into the public realm so that it could be deployed by politicians in the early postwar period (the “Western Civ” course that became a prominent part of undergraduate education in the early part of the twentieth century, and the prominence of public intellectuals such as Oswald Spengler, are central pieces of this story). It is the widespread dissemination of the commonplace that makes possible the arguments about defending and acting on behalf of Western Civilization that figure prominently in the postwar debates.

Having thus established the presence and prominence of ‘Western Civilization’ in the postwar debates, I then engage in a three-chapter account of how the commonplace was deployed in particular rhetorical clashes. Chapter 5 begins with the postwar planning debates in the United States in 1944 and proceeds through the early discussions in the western zones of occupation about the formation of new political parties and clashes in the four-power administrative structure established to run the country; it continues up through Secretary of State James F. Byrnes’s famous speech at Stuttgart in September 1946. ‘Western Civilization’ plays some role in all of these debates but does not really emerge as a dominant theme until the subsequent period and the debates surrounding the ERP and the inclusion of Germany in it; this turning point is the focus of chapter 6. Chapter 7 shows how the justification of the ERP in occidentalist terms, and the use of occidentalist language to deal with German territorial issues such as the Saar problem, laid the rhetorical groundwork for the subsequent formation of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, as well as legitimating eventual German participation in the organization as an armed member.

Throughout the empirical narrative, I pay close attention to the historically plausible alternative courses of action present in the policy debates: the so-called isolationist option of defending the continental United States without stationing troops in or giving immense economic aid to Western Europe, the “neutralist” option for Germany pursued by Kurt Schumacher’s opposition Social Democratic Party, and the various plans to continue wartime coopera-

tion between the United States and the Soviet Union in some form. All of these alternatives, advocates of which were actual participants in these debates, were importantly delegitimated by the use of occidentalist language by those committed to a transatlantic alliance of 'Western' democracies. Considering these alternatives allows me both to demonstrate the causal importance of occidentalist language and to avoid the trap of reading historical outcomes backward into a period of great ambiguity and contestation.

By reminding ourselves of the historical contingency of the Cold War, and of the historical contingency of concepts like 'Western Civilization' that were institutionally enacted as part of it, we may be able to correct one of the central intellectual mistakes of our times: the temptation to take the social world for granted, as though it were immutable. There is no inevitability to the role that 'Western Civilization' played in postwar German reconstruction, and no necessary reason why we should use it now or in the future in evaluating transatlantic relations. Whether or not we wish to base policy on this occidentalist basis is a normative and political question, and is not answerable through mere empirical study. However, empirical study can, and should, serve to remind us that any decision about deploying occidentalist rhetoric cannot be justified on historical grounds alone: just because people once spoke of the United States and Western Europe as belonging to "the West" is not itself a reason that we should continue to do so.

Accordingly, chapter 8 turns to the present day and explores several possible futures for 'Western Civilization,' illustrating both the continuities and the differences involved in the contemporary rearrangement of the conceptual infrastructure forged in the wake of the Second World War. Ultimately, whether 'Western Civilization' endures is contingent on the forms of agency that we exercise, and whether our actions tend to reproduce 'the West' or proceed in a rather different direction.

Before we accept or reject 'the West' as a principle upon which to base political and social relations, we should *linger* over what is assumed in Kissinger's argument, and take time to reflect on the practical and ethical consequences of an occidentalist stance. This book hopes to contribute to that reflection.