Durham Research Online

Deposited in DRO:

30 June 2008

Version of attached file:

Published Version

Peer-review status of attached file:

Peer-reviewed

Citation for published item:

Wittlinger, R. (2004) 'Perceptions of Germany and the Germans in post-war Britain.', Journal of multilingual and multicultural development., 25 (5-6). pp. 453-465.

Further information on publisher's website:

http://www.multilingual-matters.net/jmmd/025/jmmd0250453.htm

Publisher's copyright statement:

Perceptions of Germany and the Germans in Post-war Britain

Ruth Wittlinger
Department of Politics, University of Durham, UK

Although Anglo-German relations since 1945 have by and large been friendly at the level of the political elite, on a wider scale British perceptions of Germany and the Germans are for the most part negative and still dominated by images of the Third Reich and the Second World War. It has even been suggested that 'kraut-bashing' is the only form of racism in Britain which is still considered socially acceptable. Going beyond the simplistic but commonly expressed view which dismisses these negative British perceptions of Germany as envy of Germany's post-war economic revival, this paper will argue that there is a range of other reasons which help to account for the negative perceptions British people hold of Germany and the Germans such as the legacy of the Second World War and post-war challenges to British national identity, the nature of the Holocaust and the way history and languages are taught in Britain.

Anglo-German Relations Since 1945

According to Wright (1996: 26), the bilateral relationship between (West) Germany and Britain since 1945 has been a 'curious mixture of harmony and tension'. Especially during the early years, it was characterised by its hierarchical nature with (West) Germany quite willingly accepting its position of subordination. In 1953, Adenauer expressed this in no uncertain terms:

> We Germans should be clear, that we do not count for very much in world history at the present time. If you see the power of America and also what far-reaching, great connexions [sic] Great Britain still has in the world in all areas, then we Germans are really not in the same class. (Quoted in Wright, 1996: 29)

Within this set-up, in the early years, Anglo-German relations were, by and large, complementary and harmonious and to some extent even uneventful reflecting 'the fact that neither side expected too much of the other. One might say that relations were generally excellent because they were not primary to either' (Wright, 1996: 27).

Hence, from a position of relative strength – in comparison with Germany at least – Britain was by and large supportive of those bilateral relationships which were crucial to West Germany's stability and security in the post-war period, i.e. those with France and the USA.

Economically and in terms of domestic politics, West Germany recovered remarkably well from its military as well as complete moral defeat in 1945. Its

surprisingly positive post-war economic performance, the *Wirtschaftswunder* ('economic miracle'), and the resulting widespread affluence contributed to a wider and more profound acceptance of the democratic institutions of the relatively new state which in turn resulted in a growing confidence at home and abroad. The defeated nation of 1945 had – within a relatively short space of time – turned into an affluent, by and large stable democracy which managed to cope with internal challenges such as the student protest movements of the 1960s and the terrorism of the 1970s. German Chancellors like Willy Brandt and Helmut Schmidt enjoyed considerable respect in the UK with the latter even playing an active role in the context of Britain's entry into the European Economic Community (Paterson, 2001: 203).

Although the discourse in West Germany itself regarding the political stability of the new republic was still characterised by a very cautious note, with some being satisfied by the formula that Bonn was not Weimar and others identifying a crisis of legitimacy, internationally West Germany seemed to move even further towards rehabilitation when British political scientists started to suggest that it could be seen as a model (Paterson, 2001: 202).

The fact that West Germany had increased its economic and political power considerably by the time Margaret Thatcher came to power in 1979 led to 'perceptions of partnership beginning to be displaced by feelings of challenge' in the 1980s (Paterson, 2001: 203). There was a distinct feeling in many quarters that Britain might have won the war but 'lost the peace'. As Margaret Thatcher noted in *The Downing Street Years*, although Britain did well, Germany and other countries were doing better: 'But if we never had it so good, others – like Germany, France, Italy, Denmark – increasingly had it better' (Thatcher, 1995: 7). In addition to this, she was deeply distrustful of Germany's multilaterist approach to foreign policy and its keen 'Europeanness', especially regarding developments which went beyond mere economic integration.

Although Thatcher (1995: 34) 'soon developed the highest regard' for Chancellor Schmidt even though he was a Social Democrat, she could not accept the viability of the West German social market economy because it went so much against her own neoliberal approach to economic policy (Paterson, 2001: 208). Clearly demonstrating her dislike, she summarises the social market economy, or what she refers to as '*Sozialmarktwirtschaft*' as the antithesis of Thatcherism: 'There [in Germany] it had become a kind of corporatist, highly collectivized, "consensus"-based economic system, which pushed up costs, suffered increasingly from market rigidities and relied on qualities of teutonic self-discipline to work at all' (Thatcher, 1995: 751).

International developments towards the end of the 1980s, however, put the most severe strain on the post-war Anglo-German relationship yet. The collapse of communism in Eastern Europe and the fall of the wall which unexpectedly opened up the possibility of unification was understandably not received very enthusiastically by Germany's neighbours, least of all by Margaret Thatcher. Her frantic if unsuccessful efforts to stop German unification from happening, the seminar at Chequers to discuss 'the German national character' and the Ridley affair not only damaged the Anglo-German relationship but also contributed to an atmosphere in which

references to Germany's Nazi past and alleged traits of 'the German national character' were freely aired in the public discourse thus reinforcing these images in the collective consciousness. What started to become very apparent is that – as Krönig (1999b) has succinctly put it – only the divided Germans were the good Germans. The very different, openly hostile climate in Anglo-German relations at the end of the 1980s was furthermore not alleviated by President Bush's 'partners in leadership' offer to the Germans which was perceived as a threat to the 'special relationship' of Britain with the USA. As I have argued elsewhere, the potential loss of the 'special relationship' must have seemed regrettable enough but losing it to Germany, of all countries, must have been a particularly distressing threat to Margaret Thatcher (Wittlinger, 2001: 39–40).

However, as Klein (1996) has shown, Britain's position towards German unification was not as clear-cut as the audibility of Margaret Thatcher's anti-German discourse might suggest. Having examined what she calls 'public and published opinion' as well as debates in both Houses of Parliaments, Klein argues against the notion of Britain being the 'no-saying' nation with regard to German unification and suggests that there was 'a constructive stance on German unity and a substantial and real contribution of British diplomats to the Two-plus-Four process' (1996: 404). Although this argument clearly has some validity, it does not alter the fact that the voice of the Prime Minister was the one that was clearly heard in the public sphere which seemed to lend legitimacy to anti-German sentiments being expressed on a larger scale. Although Nicholas Ridley resigned over his anti-German remarks, it was widely recognised that he was merely reiterating what Margaret Thatcher thought but was too shrewd to put it quite so bluntly.

German unity was a major caesura in Anglo-German relations the impact of which several years after its realisation is still very difficult to measure (Glees, 1994: 79). Helmut Kohl's suggestion that German unity and European integration were 'two sides of the same coin' is of particular interest in the context of Anglo-German relations in the 1980s. Towards the end of the 1980s, Margaret Thatcher had quite clearly achieved about as much European integration as she was prepared to accept for the economic benefit of Britain. In complete contrast to her own preference, German unity added further momentum to the European integration process which – by that time – she was so keen to stall. In short, she did not like either side of Kohl's coin.

Since the last of the major crises in Anglo-German relations, the ERM crisis of 1992, the atmosphere seems to have changed for the better again. William Paterson (2001: 220) describes the new Anglo-German relationship as exercised by Tony Blair and Gerhard Schröder as very different to that of the late 1980s and early 1990s, albeit implying the continued existence of British ambivalence towards united Germany:

> British ambivalence about the Berlin Republic is therefore much less marked than at the time of German unity. The two governments are of similar though by no means identical political complexion and the two leaders' formative experiences were in the 1960s rather than the 1940s.

Although the impact of the joint paper to stimulate the modernisation of social democracy in Europe, which Schröder and Blair presented in London in June 1999, is debatable, it certainly demonstrated the two leaders' commitment to joint initiatives and co-operation. According to a press release by the German Embassy in March 2000 on the occasion of the jubilee Königswinter Conference Tony Blair and Gerhard Schröder proclaimed that British–German relations were the 'best ever' (Embassy of the Federal Republic of Germany, 2000). As far as it is possible and desirable to pass judgement already, the relationship does not appear to have suffered even after Schröder's refusal to participate in the war against Iraq.

This most recent improvement in the bilateral relationship between Britain and Germany is particularly significant in terms of its potential impact on public opinion formation. As the next section will show, on a wider scale British perceptions of Germany and the Germans are for the most part negative and still dominated by images of the Third Reich and the Second World War.

Representations of Germany and the Germans

With regard to Anglo-German relations on a broader scale, there have been numerous efforts on both sides to foster good relations between Britain and Germany since the end of the Second World War. There are a number of initiatives and associations the main aim of which it is to improve communication and understanding between the two countries. Examples include the *Deutsch–Britische Gesellschaft* which aims to further an understanding of Britain in Germany. The most famous event of the *Deutsch–Britische Gesellschaft* is the *Königswinter Conference* which – on an annual basis since 1950 – invites high-profile speakers from the world of politics, the media and business and finance from both countries to speak on issues which are of common concern to Britain and Germany such as European integration, for example.

The *Anglo-German Foundation for the Study of Industrial Society* was initiated by the British and German governments and established in 1973. Again, its main aim is to enhance mutual understanding. It provides funding for bilateral research projects and tries to disseminate good practice between both countries.

Another association which aims to enhance the understanding between the two countries but which in effect seems more concerned with the promotion of Germany and the Germans in Britain is the *British–German Association* whose declared aim is the strengthening of understanding and friendship between the peoples of Britain and Germany. It seems to be aimed at a fairly wide target group, promoting the learning of German in schools, school twinning and exchange visits. *The Voyage*, a British–German youth portal, is another initiative aimed at the wider public. The website offers information for young people in particular, about language learning, youth exchanges etc. Similarly, the *British–German Forum* promotes co-operation at all levels between the two countries. Furthermore, there are those institutions which were not set up to improve communication and understanding between Britain and Germany

specifically but which make a significant contribution to this aim such as the *British Council*, the *Goethe Institute*, the *Chamber of Commerce* etc.

In spite of all these efforts, however, survey data seem to indicate that British perceptions of Germany and the Germans are far from positive. A survey carried out by the Goethe Institute in 1996 in Britain and Ireland tried to find out how much knowledge and what kind of image British school-children had of Germany and the Germans. The most important – albeit hardly surprising – result was that those children who had actually been to Germany and were learning or had learnt German displayed more knowledge as well as a markedly more positive attitude towards Germans. Particularly revealing are the answers to the question which asked the pupils to write down the names of ten famous Germans living or dead, apart from the German Chancellor (who has already been referred to in a previous question). The famous Germans most often mentioned were: Adolf Hitler 68%, Jürgen Klinsmann 47%, Boris Becker 40%, Steffi Graf 37%, Michael Schumacher 33%, Ludwig van Beethoven 16%, Lothar Matthäus, Albert Einstein 11%, Michael Stich 9%, Joseph Goebbels 9%, Hermann Göring 8%.[1]

This list indicates quite clearly that the majority of famous Germans are connected to two very different areas: Germany's Nazi past and German sports personalities. In view of one pupil's comment, however, this observation should perhaps not be given too much weight: 'Hitler, Klinsman [sic!], Mataus [sic!]. Don't know any other footballers.'

Interestingly, even Tony Blair refers to Germany's Nazi past albeit from a different perspective. When asked in an interview which German figure, past or present, he admires the most, he answers: 'Dietrich Bonhoeffer, the German priest who spoke out against the Nazis and died in a concentration camp in April 1945' (2003).

A more recent survey conducted by the British Council and the Goethe Institute suggested that the Nazi past and national sport still occupy a central place in the minds of young British people when they think of Germany and the Germans. This is encapsulated in one respondent's comment about his/her attitude towards Germany: 'Starting two world wars and their football team' (Quoted in Vasagar, 2003).

As Antony Beevor (1999) has suggested: 'Football, certainly for the politically confused yob tendency, became an extension of the second world war by other means'.

The following headline illustrates particularly well how the two completely different areas became explicitly interconnected on the front page of *The Daily Mirror* on 24 June 1996:

> Achtung! Surrender. For you Fritz, ze Euro 96 Championship is over.

In more general terms, there is no doubt that popular culture and what Krönig (1999a) fittingly calls 'the British postwar folklore' rely heavily on stereotypical representations of Germany and the Germans as well as Germany's National Socialist past and the Second World War to provide material for films, jokes, newspaper columns and commentaries, commercial adverts and TV comedies.

The contexts in which stereotypes and references to Germany's Nazi past are employed vary but give some idea concerning their function.

In the following, I have chosen examples from various contexts. The list is obviously not exhaustive. As Jürgen Krönig (1999b) has pointed out it is neither possible nor probably desirable to detect all the malicious references to Germany and the Germans.

In many instances, these images are used in a humorous way for entertainment purposes. For instance, a commonly used theme is that of German tourists on holiday alongside British tourists, with the Germans beating the Brits to the sun loungers every morning and reserving them for the rest of the day by putting their towels down. This particular stereotype and image has provided the motif for a multitude of jokes and cartoons and is deeply anchored in British folklore and popular culture.

Along similar lines but combining stereotypes about the Germans with explicit references to the Second World War, the Fawlty Towers episode revolving around German guests in Basil Fawlty's hotel is one of the great examples of British comedy.

In addition to the entertainment value of these images, however, they provide constant reminders of the same theme, i.e. Nazi Germany and the Second World War. This ensures that the theme remains part of Britain's collective memory and can be drawn upon in order to further arguments in different contexts.

As already mentioned, the connection between football and war against the Germans is frequently made. Ian Kershaw (2003) has suggested that

> victory in war over the Germans . . . provides, through yobbish football chants, a form of compensation for lack of success (until recently, at any rate) against 'the enemy' on the football pitch. Moronic as such trivialisation is, it is an indication of how deeply embedded the Second World War is in the psyche of this country, in generations far too young to have experienced it.

A Carling Black Label advert from 1989 which was voted one of Channel 4's 100 best TV adverts 11 years later provides a good example of how references to the Second World War and Britain's heroic part in it have been used in a commercial context. The advert shows 'bouncing bombs' being used in the dambuster raid bouncing towards a dam with a German guard leaping up and down trying to catch them like a goalkeeper. Watching the efforts of the German guard, one of the aircraft crew comments 'Bet he drinks Carling Black Label'. Jonathan Glancey (2003) summarises the message of the advert in terms of its Britishness combined with national victory in the Second World War: 'It neatly associated lager drinking with football, British humour and, in a self-deprecating way, reminded us that we can win when we try.'

The Dambusters theme is furthermore frequently expressed at football matches between England and Germany when English fans with outstretched arms mimic the aircraft attacking the dams la-lahing the tune of the Dambusters March.

In addition to this, negative British perceptions of Germany and the Germans find their expression on an individual level when Germans living in Britain are exposed to what has been referred to as 'kraut-bashing', for example, when a 19-year-old German watches the film 'Saving Private Ryan'

in a British cinema and the audience cheers or claps every time a German is shot (Beevor, 1999) or when German children living in Britain experience huge problems with their peers because of their German nationality (Krönig, 1999b).

Furthermore and probably most importantly in terms of their long-term impact, references to the German past are used in arguments against further European integration by evoking the threat of German dominance in Europe via the institutions of the European Union. A cartoon first published in *The Times* on 23 October 1997 in the context of the debate on the European single currency illustrates very well how the perceived danger of German dominance in the EU has been instrumentalised in this context. The caption reads 'Evolution of head of state's coin portrait' and the cartoon shows three portraits of the Queen as she grows older since her coronation in 1953. The fourth and final portrait in the evolution of the head of state's coin portrait shows a caricature of Helmut Kohl referring quite clearly to the frequently expressed fear that Germany would dominate the European Monetary Union.

In 2003, an advert which marked the launch of the anti-Euro campaign caused widespread protest because of the way it featured the comedian Rik Mayall as Hitler promoting the Euro with the words 'Ein Volk! Ein Reich! Ein Euro!' accompanied by the Nazi salute, obviously playing on the Nazi rallying cry – 'Ein Volk! Ein Reich! Ein Führer!' Although this high-profile case provoked an outcry from various directions, it also produced some very revealing reactions of a different kind. Boris Johnson, for example, a Conservative MP commented that he could not see anything wrong with this 'harmless, light-hearted commercial' and even commended it for pointing out that the euro 'has everything to do with Hitler'. The Labour MP Kate Hoey went even further by saying that anyone who did not find the advert funny should 'get a life'. Resorting to the suggestion that whoever does not find this funny lacks a sense of humour is a fairly commonly employed strategy in this context. Considering the alleged German trait of lacking a sense of humour it is a very opportune strategy. Furthermore, as Krönig (1999b) has pointed out, it is very useful because it means that a particular point can be made and when challenged it is possible to hide behind the claim that it was only a joke.

Apart from this fairly high-profile case, the tabloid press habitually uses anti-German headlines to warn of the dangers of Germany's aspirations for hegemony in Europe via further integration. The following headlines from the tabloid press provide evidence for this:

> The Gauleiters of Europe who want to rule our lives.
> (*The Daily Mail*, 27 November 1998)

> Is THIS the most dangerous man in EUROPE?
> (*The Sun*, 25 November 1998 after Oskar Lafontaine had suggested the harmonisation of direct taxes in EU member states)

> Is Germany trying to succeed where it failed in two wars?
> (*The Sun*, 4 January 1999)

Keeping the Third Reich and the Second World War alive in British collective memory is by no means a prerogative of the tabloid press. On the occasion of Edmund Stoiber's visit to Britain, Simon Hoggart (2002) in his column in *The Guardian* produced a piece of writing that included references to the Third Reich such as 'goosestep', 'Nazi uniforms', 'Ah, Herr Brown! And how is your lovely wife Eva?' and a multitude of other hints and allusions to the Third Reich and the Second World War. Putting his own contribution into a wider context, he explains the anti-German discourse as a national characteristic of British people: 'We are not particularly anti-German these days, but we are just hard-wired to make German jokes. We can't help it. We make German jokes in the same way that cats kill small birds. It is the result of a deep, primal, atavistic urge.'

Gary Younge (2002) has summarised the singularity of the anti-German discourse in terms of its acceptance as follows:

> Voicing anti-German sentiments may be the last 'acceptable' prejudice. The confidence that Britons have, even in the company of strangers, to articulate their disdain for an entire nation without fear of contradiction or contempt is both staggering and intriguing. Otherwise liberal types, who would struggle over whether to call someone mixed-race, black or dual-heritage choose freely between the Hun, Boche or Kraut.

Understandably, these recurring negative perceptions of Germany and the Germans in Britain have started to worry political and diplomatic elites, not least because of their potential economic implications. In 1999, the departing German ambassador to Britain, Gebhart von Moltke, accused the British of 'profound ignorance' about modern Germany blaming the history curriculum which seemed to end with the defeat of Hitler ('German ambassador decries UK "ignorance"', 2003). Similarly, in the context of the 50th Königswinter Conference in March 2000, Schröder was asked about his opinion of some of the British press coverage of Germany: 'Well, we seem to have something of a time lag sometimes. I like to see reporting on the Germany of today, not on a Germany that does not exist' (Embassy of the Federal Republic of Germany, 2000). In the same way, Michael Naumann, then Germany's minister of culture, also expressed his view that Britain's image of its European partners is stuck in the 1940s (Quoted in Beevor, 1999). Likewise, the current German ambassador to Britain, Thomas Matussek, has expressed his regret that there does not appear to be much interest amongst young British people either in Germany or the German language.

Explaining the anti-German discourse in Britain

The most commonly expressed explanation for the anti-German discourse in Britain is the economic argument which explains the cause of negative British attitudes as being Germany's economic success and Britain's relative decline in the post-war period. Although this argument certainly has some validity and will be examined first, this section will also argue that there are several other, equally important reasons which help to account for the negative British perceptions of Germany and the Germans.

Britain's relative post-war economic decline versus the 'economic miracle'

One of the most popular reasons which has frequently been put forward to explain the predominantly negative British perceptions of Germany and the Germans can be found in the different economic developments in the two countries after 1945 with (West) Germany, the defeated nation – soon outperforming Britain, one of the victors of World War II leading to feelings of envy on the British side. This has been summed up in the phrase that Britain 'won the war but lost the peace'.

As Wright (1996: 39) has put it, as the relative decline started to be felt in Britain, in some instances this gave way 'to a tone of aggressive resentment towards a state which had so obviously out-performed Britain'.

Sympathetic early British reactions to the misery of the Germans immediately following the end of the Second World War – at a time when the awareness of the brutality of the Nazi regime would be expected to be very present – seem to support the thesis that it was the relative decline of Britain and the economic success of Germany that shaped negative British perceptions of Germany and the Germans. Michail (2001) describes the British change of attitude towards the Germans immediately after the war as follows:

> Reports on the devastating conditions on the territories of the defeated Reich quickly reached the British press. This offered the outside world an alternative image to counterbalance the one that represented Germans as evil and abnormal. The images of misery and desolation emanating from Germany gradually softened the attitude of the British public, which saw itself as morally superior to the vengeful Germans (. . .)

Weidenfeld (1999: 57) goes even further and suggests that German suffering did not find a similar level of sympathy anywhere else in the West as in some British circles. Similarly, it has been suggested that negative perceptions of Germany and the Germans are predominantly held by those who have no living memory of the war. This seems to suggest that resentments are due to post-war developments rather than the nature of the Holocaust and the Second World War:

> Perhaps the most significant point made by Germans in London is that the crashing remarks and ignorant jokes are not usually made by those who lived through the war, but by the middle-aged and, particularly, by the young. This in itself is disturbing. It strongly suggests that the British are not trying to keep a flame of memory alive, so much as fostering national stereotypes based on a lamentable ignorance. (Beevor, 1999)

Consequently, it has been suggested that the recent economic decline of Germany and the improved economic situation in Britain has led to an improvement in British perceptions of Germany and the Germans. Paterson (2001: 220), for instance, has emphasised the growing self-confidence of Britain

as a result of its revitalised economy: 'Even more important, however, is the palpable growth in British self-confidence. The employment record is good and the new Labour government is much more in tune with its largely centre-left in other leading democratic states.'

Although possibly accounting for some of the feelings towards Germany and the Germans, it would be simplistic to reduce the complexity of the issue to the economic dimension alone. There is no doubt that part of the explanation must lie with the historical period which is so often evoked in this context.

World War II and challenges to British post-war national identity

An important reason for the negative perceptions of Germany and the Germans can be found in the context of British identity formation. Every construction of a national identity relies heavily on a common past and, more importantly, a collective memory of that past. The Second World War was 'an occasion' where the two national pasts of Britain and Germany became deeply intertwined. Considering the fundamental challenge to British national identity through the post-war loss of its status as a world power, this is particularly important. The Second World War provided both a deeply unifying experience for the British nation as well as its last 'finest hour' as a victorious major world power. In this sense, events and experiences which relate to the Second World War play a particularly crucial role in the collective memory of contemporary Britain.

The collapse of communism, the fall of the wall and the unification of Germany have further aggravated the problem of Britain's declining status, with the position of Germany within the international system changing from being an ally against a perceived Soviet threat to – at least according to some observers – presenting the new threat due to its economic and political power in Europe after unification.

As Paterson (2001: 203) has pointed out, Britain had reached a particularly vulnerable point in its history around the time of German unification because 'German unity coincided with and amplified an intense and unprecedented debate about Britain's institutional framework and sharpened anxieties about Britain's place in Europe.'

In this sense, Britain's own historical experience as a nation has a considerable impact on current perceptions of Germany and the Germans.

The nature of the Holocaust

Considering the presence of the Nazi past in British perceptions of Germany and the Germans, another reason which can put forward lies in the singular nature of the Holocaust. After all, the presence of Germany's past is not restricted to British popular culture and folklore. Ian Kershaw (2003), for instance, has recently examined the question of 'why we are still obsessed with Hitler'. The reasons he identifies lie to a large extent in the nature of German fascism between 1933 and 1945 and the magnitude of Hitler's historical legacy, for example in the fact that 'no other dictatorship has spawned both a world war (which produced the greatest explosion of blood-letting and violence the

world has yet known) and the worst genocide in history to date'. According to Kershaw (2003), another reason for 'our continued fascination' can be found in the threat of a recurrence:

> While there is no fear of Stalinism ever regaining any popular appeal, there are many reminders in today's world that some, at least, of the idiocies and illusions that went into inter-war fascism are by no means dead. Even here, the implicit worry is less of a recurrence of the brand of fascism associated with Mussolini's Italy, but of a revitalisation of the racism, anti-semitism, and imperialist aggression associated with Nazi Germany.

Furthermore, Kershaw suggests that various anniversaries in the 1990s of major events of the Second World War have 'reasserted the centrality of the titanic struggle against Nazi Germany in public consciousness'.

The widespread interest in the Holocaust and the accompanying commercial aspect furthermore promotes more and more representations of it, in the form of historical research or TV documentaries and feature films which in turn leads to an even wider dissemination and presence of the theme.

History and language teaching in Britain

The results from the most recent survey by the Goethe Institute suggest that those young British people who have some knowledge of Germany also hold more positive perceptions. The widespread emphasis on Nazi Germany coupled with an ignorance of modern Germany has been blamed on the history curriculum in Britain which, it is argued, ends with 1945. There has even been talk of a 'Hitlerisation' of the curriculum. Accordingly, an evaluation of the curriculum has shown that pupils in secondary schools in Britain learn more about the Holocaust than about all other historical events taken together (Hitlergruß für deutsche Lehrerin, 2003).

Michael Byram's demands (1993: 202) for more integration of language and culture in textbooks is also of relevance in this context. Having compared foreign language learning text books in Britain and Germany, he comes to the conclusion that there is less cultural context in German language text books used in Britain as opposed to those used for learning English in Germany (196−7). Similarly, he points out that the development of GCSE has furthermore led to an emphasis on linguistic skills at the expense of cultural learning (199). In view of the findings of the Goethe Institute surveys that more knowledge of Germany and the Germans leads to more positive attitudes, curriculum content and teaching material have a particular responsibility in this context.

Conclusion

At governmental level, Anglo-German relations have been largely friendly in the period between the end of the Second World War and the late 1980s. The unification of Germany and the frantic efforts of Margaret Thatcher to fight it not only caused a deterioration in elite level relations between the

two countries at the time but also gave new impetus to the anti-German discourse at the public level. This was facilitated by the fact that British popular culture and folklore have a fairly large armoury of stereotypes about Germany and commonly known references to Germany's Nazi past at their disposal.

The reasons for the negative British perceptions of Germany and the Germans are many and diverse. Although the differing economic developments in the two countries can account for the British dislike of the Germans to some extent, it cannot fully explain it. The significance of the Second World War in British collective memory is just as crucial for an adequate explanation of negative references to Germany and the Germans through images of the Third Reich and the Second World War as are post-war challenges to British national identity.

In addition, the horrendous nature of the Holocaust also contributes considerably to the continued presence of historical references to this period in the British discourse about Germany and the Germans. In this context, I would like to agree with Krönig (1999b) that it is a self-inflicted wound. Attempts to claim victim status within the context of this anti-German discourse in Britain would mean a highly questionable role reversal.

It is not easy to be optimistic with regard to any change for the better in the near future. Changes to the history curriculum and the inclusion of more cultural content in German language textbooks might have a positive effect on the way Germany and the Germans are perceived in Britain. In addition to this, attempts to promote German language learning more assertively and to improve Germany's image in Britain through 'nation-branding' might also prove fruitful to change perceptions. At the same time, however, evoking images of Germany's past and using stereotypes about Germany and the Germans offer too many possibilities which opponents to further European integration in Britain are only too happy to exploit for their own agenda.

Correspondence

Any correspondence should be directed to Dr Ruth Wittlinger, University of Durham, Department of Politics, 48 Old Elvet, Durham DH1 3LZ, UK (Ruth.Wittlinger@durham.ac.uk).

Note

1. I would like to thank the Goethe Institute for kindly supplying me with a copy of the results of the survey.

References

Anon (2003) *German ambassador decries UK 'ignorance'*. On WWW at http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk_politics/472798.stm. 4 July.

Anon (2003) Hitlergruß für deutsche Lehrerin. *Spiegel Online* (9 July 2003). On WWW at http://www.spiegel.de/unispiegel/studium/0,1518,256435,00.html

Beevor, A. (1999) Tommy and Jerry. *The Guardian* 16 February.

Blair, T. (2003) The German–British Forum Interview, 16.6.2003. On WWW at http://www.gbf.com

Byram, M. (ed.) (1993) *Germany: Its Representation in Textbooks for Teaching German in Great Britain*. Frankfurt/Main: Diesterweg.

Embassy of the Federal Republic of Germany (2000) British–German Relations are the 'Best Ever'. Press Release, 27 March.

Glancey, J. (2003) Bombs away. *The Guardian* 6 May.

Glees, A. (1994) The diplomacy of Anglo-German relations. *German Politics* 3 (1), 75–90.

Hoggart, S. (2002) Hard-wired to be beastly to the Germans. *The Guardian* 17 May.

Kershaw, I. (2003) The thing about Hitler. *The Guardian* 29 January.

Klein, Y. (1996) Obstructive or promoting: British views on German unification 1989/1990. *German Politics* 5 (3), 404–431.

Krönig, J. (1999a) The mass media in the age of globalisation: Implications for Anglo-German relations. Annual Reuters Lecture. 29.4.1999. On WWW at http://www.ukc.ac.uk/history/conferences/Kronig.html. 11 April 2000.

Krönig, J. (1999b) Krauts. *Die Zeit* (Nr. 40). On WWW at http://www3.zeit.de/print/199940.t-briten.html. 29 September 1999.

Michail, E. (2001) After the war and after the wall: British perceptions of Germany following 1945 and 1989. *University of Sussex Journal of Contemporary History* Issue 3, September. On WWW at http://sussex.ac.uk/Units/HUMCENTR/usjch/emichail3.html. Accessed 24.1.2003.

Paterson, W.E. (2001) Britain and the Berlin Republic: Between ambivalence and emulation. *German Politics* 10 (2), 201–223.

Thatcher, M. (1995) *The Downing Street Years.* London: HarperCollins. [Original hardback edition published in 1993].

Vasagar, J. (2003) Don't mention the war to the Germans . . . the Gulf war. *The Guardian* 4 July.

Weidenfeld, G. (1999) Englisches Deutschlandbild. *Die politische Meinung* 44, 55–62.

Wittlinger, R. (2001) Representations of Germany in the context of European integration in Margaret Thatcher's autobiographies. In A. Musolff, C. Good, P. Points and R. Wittlinger (eds) *Attitudes Towards Europe* (pp. 23–43). Aldershot: Ashgate.

Wright, J. (1996) The role of Britain in West German foreign policy since 1949. *German Politics* 5 (1), 26–42.

Younge, G. (2002) Bet you won't be shouting for his lot on Sunday. *The Guardian* 28 June.