

‘Europe’ is a continent with unclear borders, a space of trade links and human exchanges, and now, in the form of the European Union, also a highly institutionalized political entity. This Europe has been imagined in multiple ways and used and abused for contradictory political objectives. Its different economic, political, and cultural aspects and connotations have been reported and commented on in public discourses including in the media. The two books by Florian Greiner and Ariane Brill focus on this latter dimension: interpretations (‘Deutungen’) of an ‘imagined continent’ in the press in (Western) Germany, the United Kingdom, and the United States in two periods of the twentieth century, from the start of the First World War to the end of the Second World War in the case of Greiner’s book, and from 1945 to 1980 in the case of Brill’s.

The two books are Ph.D. theses prepared within the research programme ‘Lost in Translation: EuropabilDER und ihre Übersetzungen’, which was funded by the German Federal Ministry of Education and Research from 2009 to 2012. Both authors contributed to part project C of the larger research programme, on press reporting, mutual perceptions, and possible resulting transformations of discourses about Europe. This project was headed by Frank Bösch, a leading contemporary historian of media and communication, who, since 2011, has been co-director of the Zentrum für Zeithistorische Forschung in Potsdam.

For his quantitative and qualitative discourse analysis Florian Greiner chose a combination of three times two newspapers covering the period from 1914 to 1945. For Britain he analysed reporting of European themes in the more conservative *Times* and the left-liberal *Manchester Guardian*. For the USA he used the *New York Times* and the pro-Republican *Chicago Tribune*, which was also highly isolationist. While choosing two newspapers with different political orientations
is a standard approach in media history research, Hitler’s usurpation of power in 1933 clearly complicates the story for Germany. Here, the author used the *Kölnische Zeitung*, which continued to exist until April 1945, but adjusted its reporting entirely to the ‘principles of National Socialist ideology’ (p. 29) after 1933. In addition he chose the liberal *Vossische Zeitung* until its closure in 1934, and for the period after 1934 the *Frankfurter Zeitung*, which enjoyed some independence because of its international status, but lacked a ‘European orientation’ until it was taken over by the National Socialist Eber-Verlag in 1939. The progressive *Gleichschaltung* of the press in Germany nonetheless does not seem to constitute a methodological problem for the author in ascertaining ‘German’ imaginations of ‘Europe’.

In his introduction to the book, Greiner competently covers the major developments in German comparative social (and cultural) history since the 1960s, from the Bielefeld School to the new cultural history and new political history, which has fostered research on the cultural history of politics, or the history of political culture in Germany in the last fifteen years or so. Somewhat surprisingly, in light of the project’s overall focus on cultural translations, Greiner effectively asserts the primacy of the comparative over the transnational perspective, which, according to him, lacks conceptual and methodological sophistication. He develops a general notion of the ‘constructed’ character of images of ‘Europe’ and highlights the importance of ‘alterity’, and the perception of others, for identity constructions. However, the apparently central question of perceptions and interaction among the analysed newspapers and any resulting transformations in their reporting of European themes is already marginal to the introduction, and largely gets lost in the translation from the analysis to the writing-up of the thesis. It mainly features in chapter 3 with a focus on transatlantic dimensions of images of Europe, which follows chapter 2 on Europe as a continent of the ‘second thirty years war’. The third substantial chapter (ch. 4) addresses Europe as a ‘space of progress’ and moves from economic and political themes to infrastructure connections and communication across borders as well as sport and tourism.

Relating to recent research on transnational social and cultural aspects of the history of technology, Greiner in this last chapter brings out clearly the often optimistic reporting of such forms of integration. This is true, for example, of increasing railway integration
and plans for a European motorway system launched before Nazi Germany embarked on its national programme after 1933. Air transport was another new sector which was integrated and facilitated fast transnational travel. Similarly, Europe as a communicative space, according to Greiner, also became denser in the way in which newspapers reported developments in other countries. In addition, radio and telephony created new means of communicating content with a European scope.

In conclusion, Greiner makes the point that the analysis of newspaper reporting does not corroborate what he sees as the prevalent view in the historiography of European ideas, namely, that the interwar period was characterized by a perception of European crisis, as in Oswald Spengler’s demise of the Abendland narrative. Instead, it also served as an economic and political ‘Hoffnungsträger’ (p. 457). Images of Europe did not develop in linear ways, but depended on changing historical context. Reporting even of some national events regularly took place within a broader European horizon. Transnational themes became more prevalent in newspaper reporting than they had been in the nineteenth century, and included more aspects of ‘lived Europe’ (p. 463), such as tourism, sport, epidemics, or the weather, for example, than before. The ‘Europeanization’ of forms of perception, spatial images, and everyday experiences, Greiner argues, did not begin with the end of the Second World War.

In her project sequel to Greiner’s book, Ariane Brill covers the period from the end of the Second World War to 1980. Why 1980? Brill claims (without substantiating this odd claim) that this was a Wendehjahr in Europe’s political development, between the first direct elections for the European Parliament in 1979 and Greece’s accession to the European Communities in 1981. As this choice indicates, Brill’s approach is connected somewhat more closely to material developments in European integration after 1945 than Greiner’s could be. Her four main chapters focus on questions of ‘security and threats’, ‘Europe as a political and economic project’, ‘cultural Europe’, and ‘the continent from the perspective of travelling journalists’. This last chapter is quite different from the others, and from those in Greiner’s book. Here, journalists who actually write newspaper articles feature more prominently as agents in the history of imaginations of Europe.

At 293 pages, Brill’s book is not only substantially shorter than Greiner’s at 520 pages; it is also conceptually and methodologically
more reductionist and appears to be pragmatically geared towards obtaining a Ph.D. rather than contributing substantial new knowledge to the historiography. Bizarrely, in view of the project’s constructivist approach, she claims not to be very interested in ‘political evaluations’ of Europe and European developments, when one might expect the world views of editors and journalists to be one major factor influencing how they define editorial policy and write about Europe, or any other theme for that matter. Not being interested in such political worldviews entails the major practical advantage, however, that Brill can reduce her discourse analysis to just one newspaper per country. She studies the Times and the New York Times and, for Germany, the Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung except for the period up to its foundation in November 1949, for which she uses the more liberal Süddeutsche Zeitung. Why she does not use the latter for the entire period remains a mystery, but is probably a result of the FAZ’s digitization, which makes it, like the English-language newspapers, more easily searchable.

For obvious reasons, Brill has to discuss European integration. Her newspaper analysis confirms that ‘federation’ was a widely used term in the first few years after the war in reporting on plans for integration, and often advocated as a panacea against the recurrence of national strife, ideological confrontation, and war. However, the newspapers were not very sophisticated or detailed (p. 108) in reporting on the various groups and plans for European integration. They did not pick up any fundamental differences between ‘federalists’ and ‘unionists’ with more intergovernmental preferences for integration, for example. Apart from that, Brill admits that newspaper reporting was ‘quite disparate’ and probably shallow, too. She refers to only two articles in the Times and the New York Times from different years—1950 and 1956—to argue that both newspapers shared the view that European integration was not comparable to US federalism. ‘The German press’ is even less comparable with British and American perceptions and reporting, first because the Süddeutsche Zeitung was so thin and had little space to report anything and later because the Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung showed limited interest in the European movement. From the failure of the European Defence Community in 1954 onwards, Brill explains, reporting shifted very strongly to economic issues of integration including, in the early 1960s, the fragmentation of Western Europe into the Sixes and
Sevens, or the newly created European Economic Community and the European Free Trade Association, an issue that naturally concerned British and German newspapers because of its economic and political implications for both countries (p. 121).

In conclusion, Brill argues that newspaper reporting was ‘largely synchronic’ in its focus on major events. The British Times, however, increased its reporting of European themes after the United Kingdom’s accession to the European Communities in 1973 (p. 265). Taking up a major theme from the project and Greiner’s thesis, she claims that perceptions of the ‘other’ were important for self-perceptions of Europe and Europeans as reflected in the analysed newspapers. In the Cold War the Soviet Union and communism constituted the most significant ‘other’, of course. For the German and British newspapers, the USA was a largely positively perceived ‘other’ that had brought democracy and political stability to Western Europe. ‘The European people’ (p. 268) featured much more in reports about culture, sport, and tourism, but these topics nevertheless remained underreported compared with security, and economic and political issues of cooperation and integration in Western Europe.

The two books combined add a lot of detailed knowledge about press reporting of European themes beyond political ideas of ‘Europe’ or actual institutional integration. However, despite their apparent conceptual sophistication (especially in Greiner’s introduction) they suffer from significant weaknesses. The first of these concerns the choice of countries and, in the case of Brill’s book, newspapers. The combination of countries purports to integrate one external perspective (USA), one peripheral (UK), and one from ‘core Europe’. In fact, Brill describes the Federal Republic of Germany as from the ‘centre of Europe’, which seems more informed by the present-day experience than the situation in 1949, except if the term is used merely as a geographical descriptor. But why integrate Germany into a study which extends across the regime change of 1933, when the choice of one conservative and one liberal newspaper makes no sense any more, even if the Gleichschaltung of the press was not completely systematic from the start? Why not compare press reporting in pluralistic democracies like France, for example; or, for that matter, in dictatorships? If the actual choice was the result of the language skills, or lack thereof, of the researchers, then this should be admitted as a limitation of the research design. The same is true for the com-
comparison within each country, between newspapers with different worldviews, which largely disappears in Greiner’s narrative when his favoured adjective becomes facettenreich; in other words, newspaper reporting is fragmented, covers all sorts of topics, and cannot easily be subsumed under particular headings or types of interpretation.

Both studies also engage in bland generalizations. Brill, in particular, constantly speaks of ‘the German press’, when all she has ever looked at for any one year between 1945 and 1980 is one, admittedly important, quality newspaper. Her design does not even allow for the importance of worldviews of editors or journalists for perceptions of Europe. For example, one might expect the Frankfurter Rundschau to have had a different view of the USA as the ‘other’ in the 1960s and 1970s. Similarly, the British tabloid press may well have conveyed different images of Europe, or other Europeans (especially the Germans), than the Times. Several of the larger findings of both studies are equally superficial. One wonders, for example, why we need to know that newspapers report about major events at about the same time, as Brill concludes (p. 265). Why should they, one might ask, report the signing of the Treaties of Rome in March 1959 instead of March 1957? In the end, both studies largely replicate the methodological problems of older research in the style of ‘in the light of the British press’, which basically ends up reporting what newspapers reported about what happened in the world. Conceptual ideas that different forms of reporting result from ‘alterity’, for example, look superimposed on the actual discourse analysis. Platitudes abound, including Brill’s conclusion that Europe ‘always remained an unfinished project’ (p. 267).

Some of the deficiencies of both books actually derive from the traditional comparative conceptual approach. It would, of course, have been extremely interesting to learn more about how imaginations of Europe in one national press might have been perceived, transformed, and reproduced in a different context elsewhere. Both books have very little to say on this because they are largely restricted to a discourse analysis of the printed newspapers. They are not very sensitive to, and have almost nothing to say about, those who actually perceive, imagine, and write for newspapers. We learn next to nothing about the newspapers’ owners, editorial policies and, most importantly, the home-based journalists or foreign correspondents who actually wrote the articles. Did they read the local press...
regularly; did they move in transnational circles of friends including other journalists, which might have facilitated the exchange of ideas and notions of Europe; how did they ‘translate’ imaginations of Europe from one cultural context into another? In short, it would have been wonderful if the authors had discovered the role of actual people in producing and disseminating news—something that would have resulted in a different and arguably far more productive research design.

In part, the deficiencies of both books also reflect those of the German ‘system’ for producing Ph.Ds. For one, it is clearly crucial for both authors to relate to national German discourses in German about conceptual approaches to history which help them locate their work in a particular ‘school’, although this school may now be far more fragmented than it was twenty years ago. The authors’ knowledge of the international historiography is far more limited. For example, the claim in Greiner’s book that historians of European ideas have always conceived of inter-war Europe as a continent caught in a permanent mental depression is based on the reading of only one book (by Carl H. Pegg) published in 1983. Similarly, Brill displays very little knowledge of the more recent historiography of postwar European integration, and largely cites German textbooks for it.

Both books are also written in less than elegant German. Thus, to give but one example, Greiner defines ‘mass public’ as ‘eine sich durch einen dynamischen Austausch prozessual ausbildende, nach innen medial durchaus plurale und heterogene Sphäre gewachsener kommunikativer Strukturen und Prozesse’ (p. 391). Brill’s narrative, in contrast, is characterized more by the use of simplistic categories such as ‘the European people’, whoever this may be (p. 268). In both books, too much detail obscures the findings, even if the results are not terribly surprising or exciting. In short, both books would have benefited from a clearer focus on the main findings, less detail, and a more accessible narrative.

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PRESS REPORTING AND DISCOURSES ON EUROPE