

BOOK REVIEW

5 *Prussians, Nazis and Peaceniks: Changing images of Germany in international relations*, edited by Jens Steffek and Leonie Holthaus, Manchester, Manchester
Q1 University Press, 2020, 256 pp., ISBN: 978-1-5261-3571-1

10 What role has Germany played in Western thinking about international politics? This is not a new question and great work has already been done on the importance of German émigrés for IR realism or the role of Germany as a test-case for 1990s IR theorising. Yet, no one has examined the entanglement between external images of Germany and the fundamentals of international thought in such a systematic and multi-faceted manner as this collection edited by Jens Steffek and Leonie Holthaus. *Prussians, Nazis and Peaceniks* presents a remarkable intellectual achievement that should be read by
15 anyone interested not only in German political thought, but also historical sociology of international relations in general.

The aim of the collection is twofold, ‘to analyse and compare external perceptions of Germany during the twentieth century’, and ‘to use the German case as a prism to refract Western conceptions of international affairs more generally’ (Steffek and Holthaus,
20 p. 1). Throughout the book, mostly German authors discuss these problems in a variety of contexts, including the development of liberal internationalism, realism, geopolitics, and international law. Despite their disciplinary, conceptual, and empirical breadth, the individual contributions speak to each other very well. This makes for a coherent volume that deserves to be read in its entirety.

25 While the standard is high across the chapters, I was particularly impressed by the contributions of Leonie Holthaus, Lucian M. Ashworth, and Felix Rösch. Holthaus demonstrates how British liberal internationalism was based on an ‘othering’ of German political thought. Blaming ‘a so-called German theory of the state’ (p. 46) for the politics of imperial Germany, British liberals painted an essentialised caricature that served as a foil for their construction of a supposedly civilised and liberal Britain. Similarly, Ashworth traces the evolution of US political geography’s relation to German geopolitical tradition, from its initial admiration for Friedrich Ratzel to its later contempt for Karl Haushofer. Like Holthaus and many others in the volume, Ashworth uncovers a range of ‘misunderstandings and misreadings’ (p. 76) between the Germans and their
30 interpreters. For Rösch, such misunderstandings even played a creative role, as it is partially through failures in communication between languages and intellectual styles that scholars like Morgenthau made their imprint on US academia. His historical account of the uneasy integration of German émigrés into American universities presents another highlight of the book.

40 The most important contribution of *Prussians, Nazis and Peaceniks* is in putting knowledge about international relations back to the historical contexts of its emergence and showing that Germany and Germans played an important role in its creation – as models, caricatures or enemies. The book also repeatedly highlights the ambiguity and fluidity of ‘Germany’, both as a country with changing borders, political
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regimes, and identities, and as a conceptual idea used by different people for different purposes. A limit of the collection is its acknowledged Anglo-centrism. This leaves the reader wondering about how much more could be said by looking at Russian, Chinese, Polish or Namibian images of Germany. That would probably make for a whole new book, for which this volume would undoubtedly serve as a high benchmark.

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<https://doi.org/10.1080/09644008.2020.1823764>

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