



FOOD, WAR, AND GERMAN HISTORY,
1762–1992
ROGER CHICKERING

Roger Chickering was educated at Cornell University and Stanford University, where he took his Ph.D. in 1968. He has taught at Stanford University (1967–68), the University of Oregon (1968–94), and Georgetown University (since 1993), where he holds the chair in Modern History in the BMW Center for German and European Studies. He has held research fellowships from the Guggenheim Foundation, the Institute for Advanced Study in Princeton, the Woodrow Wilson Center in Washington, and the National Humanities Center in North Carolina. His publications include *Imperial Germany and a World Without War* (Princeton UP, 1975); *We Men Who Feel Most German* (London, 1984); *Karl Lamprecht* (Atlantic Highlands, NJ, 1993); *Imperial Germany and the Great War, 1914–1918* (Cambridge UP, 1998, 2004; German: Beck, 2002); *The Great War and Urban Life in Germany* (Cambridge UP, 2007; German: Schoenigh, 2009); and *Krieg, Frieden und Geschichte: Gesammelte Aufsätze über patriotischen Aktionismus, Geschichtskultur und totalen Krieg* (Steiner, 2007). – Address: BMW Center for German and European Studies, Georgetown University, Box 571035, Washington, DC 20057-1035, USA.
E-mail: chickerr@verizon.net

Unlike most of my fellow Fellows, who had well-articulated plans for the year, I arrived at the Wissenschaftskolleg not so much with an agenda as with intuitions, a set of broad questions and few answers. Mine was a new project. For most of the past two decades my interests and energies had been riveted on the history of a German city, Freiburg im Breisgau, during the First World War. This work had drawn my attention to the central importance of food in the urban experience of war. I learned that war unsettled the Ger-

man food supply profoundly, drawing labor and animals from farm to fighting front, distorting demand, and depriving German agriculture of basic but imported resources, such as fodders and fertilizers, whose shortage soon seeped into every dimension of farm production. These pressures required the mobilization of the food supply by political command, a vast bureaucratic campaign to stimulate the production and regulate the distribution of food more effectively and equitably than the market mechanism. The effort failed. The result was an all-pervasive administrative nightmare, which did not relieve the structural sources of Germany's food shortage. Regulation was neither effective nor equitable; it left producers angry and consumers hungry. Insofar as it undercut morale on the home front, it figured centrally in the exhaustion of the German war effort.

Because the political administration of food was such a salient feature of this war, I became interested in the broader dimensions of the problem in German history. I decided to study the political mobilization of German agriculture, to undertake a broad survey that, unlike anything I had written before, would span two centuries, from the eve of the French Revolution to German reunification. Even a cursory reading of the standard literature revealed that food had never been the object of market forces alone, if only because the triumph of these forces was itself a recent and contentious phenomenon. I quickly concluded that the food supply was a matter of intense political interest and debate, as well as the object of pervasive political intervention, in peace and war, throughout the modern era. I also concluded that in order to analyze these processes, I would have to work out a concept of "political mobilization" that was broad enough to comprehend not only the state's efforts to increase and regulate the food supply, but also the efforts of agricultural producers to shape these same efforts.

These were in any case the inchoate assumptions and designs with which I arrived last fall in Elysium. In circumstances that left nothing to be desired, I have spent the last ten months reading in the history of German agriculture in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, piecing themes together, reflecting on big issues. Because the literature is vast, I began by trying to define the basic historiographical contours, as well as to determine whether I had anything original to say. With virtually every title I needed available to me with a click of my keyboard, I then focused on developments in the nineteenth century, where I spent more time than I had anticipated as I located what I believed to be a pivot of the story. This was the radicalization of farmers' improvement societies. These groups, which had originally been founded on the initiative of the state, mobilized at the end of the century into intransigent and aggressive lobbies of farmers' interests. These lobbies

did not even shy from opposition to the state, as they effectively unified the political voice of farm producers and generated a broad political consensus on the need to protect German agriculture in the interests of national security. The result was a campaign to promote agricultural self-sufficiency by means of massive public subsidies, primarily in the form of protective tariffs on most basic farm products. I am prepared now to argue that the politics of the food supply, the attempt to increase both productivity and self-sufficiency, linked critical moments in Germany's modern history – the great reforms of the revolutionary era, the commercial consolidation of the nation-state after 1871, the German experience in both wars, including the National Socialist designs on European hegemony, the collectivization of agriculture in East Germany, and the West German decision to join the Common Market after the second war.

My labors have so far resulted in no published pieces of scholarship, although several are in gestation. I can point principally to the colloquium that I presented first to the Wissenschaftskolleg in May, then in a revised version to several groups of German historians. A more intangible but significant product of my work is the confidence that the project is innovative, feasible, and worth pursuing into my retirement, which awaits me in another year. This confidence reflects support that I have received from friends and colleagues, primarily in historical seminars in and around Berlin. Within the halls of the Wissenschaftskolleg, where my interests have made me a more eccentric figure this year, the lone Fellow in modern German history, my contacts have yielded rich personal friendships, as well as intellectual horizons that have broadened into areas, such as speciation, robots, Dutch businessmen, and Senegalese slaves, about which I knew practically nothing (about self-deception I knew rather more). These contacts have also nurtured my humility, as well as my gratitude that I have worked among such a distinguished group of scholars.

Regular weekend trips into the Mark Brandenburg, Mecklenburg, Silesia, Saxony, and Thuringia could be masked within my interests in agriculture (Templin and Boitzenburg more easily than Dresden and Weimar). Several additional projects, which have grown out of my longstanding occupation with the history of warfare, could not; so they must count as distractions. I presented a series of public lectures. My book on Freiburg in the First World War was published in a German edition in May – in Freiburg, where my presence was required. Another portion of my time at the Wissenschaftskolleg has been claimed by the fourth volume of the forthcoming *Cambridge History of War*, a project of global dimensions, of which I am an editor as well as the author of a chapter, completed on Wiko time, about “The Rise of Militarism, 1850–1914”. In April I returned to the US

to participate in the annual Transatlantic Doctoral Seminar in German History in Washington, which I have organized for the past fifteen years.

What could be better? Two questions, both of which attend the Wissenschaftskolleg's aspirations to serve an international, interdisciplinary community of scholars, might reward additional reflection among those who guide the institution's affairs. The first has to do with language. The attempt to foster linguistic diversity at the Wissenschaftskolleg has been noble, its results modest. These could be read from the attendance and levels of participation at the colloquia in which English was not the idiom. Absent a more systematic and effective effort to promote the German language, the question is worth pondering whether English, a language that is now comprehended and spoken by a large majority of the Fellows (and their partners), might, for practical reasons alone, be encouraged as a *langue de la maison*, a medium of communication at the weekly colloquia. Another question has to do with interdisciplinary communication among the Fellows. There was little. One wonders whether efforts might not be organized, as a matter of course, to make us more conversant with the diverse methodological assumptions that impede or complicate scholarly communication among us.

These are quibbles. My wife and I have had a wonderful year. The Wissenschaftskolleg has afforded not only an ideal ambience for my scholarship, but also a home away from home for both of us amid a warm circle of friends. Berlin has provided an inexhaustible font of interest and excitement. We wish we could do it all again.