



Semantic Struggles in the Face of Crisis: ‘The West’ as Contested Key Concept in West German Parliamentary Debate (1973/74)

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RESEARCH

HUP HELSINKI
UNIVERSITY
PRESS

ABSTRACT

This article suggests to read West German parliamentary debate on the first oil crisis as a semantic struggle on the concept of the West. Drawing on latest research, the West is considered to be a narrated concept with its meaning being negotiated upon when being evoked. Even though the West does not refer to any empirical reality, it is not an arbitrary concept either. Rather it repeatedly presents itself in three ideal typical narrative forms: being the civilisational, the modern and the political narrative. As shown by the analysis of the parliamentary protocols of the winter 1973/74, West German parliamentarians applied all of these narratives. However, with the civilisational narrative being referred to only marginally and the modern narrative applied with consent, it was foremost the political narrative that led to parliamentary dispute. Whereas the conservatives interpreted the political narrative in terms of the Cold War geopolitics, the social-liberal government under Chancellor Willy Brandt tried to renegotiate the political narrative by shifting focus to the European integration process. In West German parliamentary debate, the oil crisis of 1973 henceforth functioned as a catalyst for expressing different interpretations of the concept of the West, and above all, the political West. Against the background of the Cold War, these different interpretations of the political narrative of the West reflected the domestic struggle on German identity.

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KEYWORDS:

West; concept; oil crisis; parliamentary debate; West Germany; 1970s

TO CITE THIS ARTICLE:

Rabenschlag, Ann-Judith. 2021. "Semantic Struggles in the Face of Crisis: 'The West' as Contested Key Concept in West German Parliamentary Debate (1973/74)." *Redescriptions: Political Thought, Conceptual History and Feminist Theory* 24(2): 150–165. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.33134/rds.353>

In October 1973, against the background of the Yom Kippur War, the Organization of Arab Petroleum Exporting Countries (OAPEC) radically raised the oil price and imposed an oil embargo on several Western industrial states. The consequences of these decisions for world economy and world policy have gone down to historiography as the ‘first oil crisis’, the ‘oil shock’, and ‘the 1973 crisis’ (Bini, Garavini & Romero 2016; Gfeller 2012; Hohensee 1996; Venn 2002). Contemporaries, too, have described these events as drastic rupture of daily politics and life. The experience of crisis in the affected countries was intensified due to the fact that the threat was coming from actors outside of the political West. Suddenly, the United States and the European Community (EC) were confronted with their economic dependence on non-Western countries. The Occident seemed to be depending on the Orient – a situation that many Westerners experienced as humiliating. Research has therefore argued for calling the first oil crisis as a ‘crisis of the West’ – an assessment expressed likewise by contemporary key players (Bini, Garavini & Romero 2016, 2; Böhm 2013, 45; Graf 2014, 393; Miard-Delacroix 2013, 54; Venn 2002, 204).

Although this description appears to be a catchy term at first, it proves, however, to be rather vacuous when reflecting on it more thoroughly. For what did political actors actually refer to when talking about a ‘crisis of the West’? What exactly was considered to be in crisis in late 1973? These questions can be tackled properly only by a semantic analysis of the concept of the West. This task is addressed in the following empirical analysis with West German parliamentary debate as case study. The main source material consists of parliamentary protocols on the debates on the first oil crisis taking place in German *Bundestag* between October 1973 and April 1974. In these debates, both members of the governing parties and the opposition pointed out ‘the West’ to be in crisis. In some cases, parliamentarians used exactly the specific term ‘the West’. In other cases, they applied different signifiers such as ‘the industrial states’, ‘the Western world’, or ‘the oil consuming countries’. As the following analysis assumes that meaning is constituted not in concepts themselves but within the context of their articulation formulations like these are included in the source material.

In the following, ‘the West’ is considered to be a ‘concept in action’ the meaning of which is struggled and negotiated upon (Leonhard & Steinmetz 2016, 45). To analyse ‘the West’ as a ‘concept in action’ implies to look beyond its function as linguistic signifier. As Margrit Pernau has pointed out, historical semantics are closely linked with social history because historical semantics are ‘both factor and indicator’ for the material world (Pernau 2018, 28). In this article, the concept of the West is therefore not only understood as part of a system of representation but also as a political tool used by members of West German parliament to shape the social reality. Concepts are ambiguous by nature and combine different historical experiences that might be overlapping in some aspects but contradictory in others. Furthermore, concepts include expectations in regard to future developments, which means that concepts do not only signify political and social contents but are anticipating and shaping them, too (Koselleck 2015, 120). With that in mind, the debate on the oil crisis in West German parliament was not a mere description of a critical status quo. Instead, parliamentarians who diagnosed the West to be in crisis articulated expectations with regards to future political developments in accordance with their own political views.

Research within the field of qualitative linguistics has established the expression of ‘semantic struggles’ taking place concerning the connotations of key concepts. Key

concepts can be considered as ‘containers’ compressing complex political programs and world views. In public discourse, and not least in parliamentary debate, key concepts are constantly negotiated upon with different speakers trying to establish and naturalize different understandings of the same key concept (Böke 1996, 42; Gustafsson & Brylla 2012, 103). In this article, the West is considered to be such a key concept. In the following, the parliamentary debates on the oil crisis in German *Bundestag* are seen as a burning glass where ‘the contingent, controversial and temporal quality of politics’ intensified (Palonen 2019, 4). In other words, against the background of the oil crisis West German parliamentarians were negotiating on the concept of the West. Different political actors tried to naturalize different interpretations of the West implying different visions of Germany’s political future.

The theoretical interest of this article lies with the concept of the West, not the concept of crisis. Rather, the concept of crisis helps specifying the time frame of the analysis and to thereby limit the source material. Andrew Simon Gilbert states that the concept of crisis functions as ‘a kind of semantic anchor, around which a plurality of political narratives [compete] for discursive space’. Hence, the experience of crisis intensifies and condenses political debates (Gilbert 2019, 2). Exactly this was the case during the debate on the first oil crisis in West German parliament. In this article, the oil crisis is understood as a result of a dialectical interplay between an economically problematic situation and a crisis discourse. Processes of semantic change and non-linguistic shifts are mutually influencing each other. Only this interplay can explain the political and societal impact of crises in general, and of the first oil crisis specifically (Klammer 2019, 453). As the oil crisis of 1973 was experienced as a crisis of the West, parliamentary debates during this period can be read as intensified semantic struggle on the concept of the West.

Drawing on latest research, this article considers the West to be a narrative concept with its meaning being negotiated upon when being evoked. Even though the West does not refer to any empirical reality, it is not an arbitrary concept open to any interpretations either. Rather, the West repeatedly presents itself in three ideal typical narrative forms, being the civilisational, the modern and the political narrative (Lehti, Pennanen & Jouhki 2020, 5f). Whereas the civilisational narrative traces the existence of the West back in history, identifies specific roots in Greek and Roman antiquity and in Christianity, and thereby assumes Western distinctiveness, the modern narrative focuses instead of ‘ruptures with pre-modern structures’, connects the West with the ideas of enlightenment and scientific breakthroughs but also with capitalist expansion (Ifversen 2008, 239). The political narrative refers to the Atlantic alliance resulting from World War II headed by the United States. The narrative of the political West dominated political discourse during the Cold War and thus during the oil crisis (Ifversen 2008, 241).¹ As the civilisational, the modern and the political narratives are ideal typical constructions, in parliamentary debate these narratives are, of course, often combined or overlapping. However, as to be shown, the political narrative was not only intertwined with the civilisational and modern narrative but also interpreted differently by different political actors.

In German political language, the concept of the West took roots against the background of a general spatialisation of political thought at the turn from the

1 Trautsch comes up with similar features of the West, adding ‘whiteness’ as fourth feature. With regards to this article, however, the author considers Ifversen’s three narratives to be more relevant (Trautsch 2017).

eighteenth to the nineteenth century (Bavaj & Steber 2015, 9). Throughout the twentieth century, the idea of the West was negotiated upon in conflict with other ideas on the spatial belonging of the Germans, such as Reich, Abendland and Europe (Conze 2005). Today, the Federal Republic of Germany is clearly situated in the political West and the metanarrative of Germany's successful *westernisation* is prominently represented not only in politics but also in historiography.² In a historical perspective, however, the affinity between Germany and the West is rather young. At the time of the first oil crisis, less than 30 years had passed since both Germans and non-Germans had considered West Germany to be a part of the cultural and political West. Before 1945, German politicians and intellectuals had thought Western civilisation to be incompatible with German culture, and proudly defended the German 'ideas of 1914' against the Western 'ideas of 1789'. Instead, many hoped for a close cooperation with the political East, which was to help extinguish the 'poison of modernity' and to make Germany more Prussian again (Doering-Manteuffel 2015, 84; Koenen 2005, 9 and 58; Rabenschlag 2019; Wippermann 2007, 51). For the German Federal Republic founded in 1949, however, the political, economic and cultural cooperation with the political West headed by the United States represented nothing less than the basis for its right to exist. Cold War politics cemented the existence of two German states, and in the eyes of the Western allies West Germany served as bulwark against the threat of communism from the political East. Furthermore, West German *Wirtschaftswunder* would have been unthinkable without the Marshall Plan aid. Against the background of this specific relation between Germany and 'the West', the parliamentary debate on the first oil crisis must be seen as semantic struggle both on the West and on German identity at a time when West German society thought itself to be 'in crisis'.

THE 1970S AS CRITICAL TURNING POINT

Put in a broader historical context, the oil crisis of 1973 has been considered a peak, but nevertheless just another example of an entire century of crisis representing a turning point in Western post-war history with its seemingly unstoppable growth of capitalism and its society of consumerism. Eric Hobsbawm has spoken about 'the Golden Age' ending in the mid-1970s, then followed by an era of 'instability and crisis', Jean Fourastié has coined the expression of the end of the 'trente glorieuses', Anselm Doering-Manteuffel and Lutz Raphael have diagnosed a 'structural break' taking place in the 1970s, not least in West Germany, leading to a new historical era 'after the boom' (Doering-Manteuffel & Raphael 2008; Fourastié 1979; Hobsbawm 1994; Möller 2013, 11). The events of late 1973, indeed, only triggered a global economic crisis already in the making. The prosperous post-war years in the political West had been financially based on the Bretton Woods system. After its collapse, free-floating currency exchange rates took its place bringing along instability for the entire global economy. The famous report by the Club of Rome of 1972 on 'The Limits to Growth' can hence be read as both summary of the status quo and prognosis for what was still to come (Graf 2014, 51, 58, 87; Hohensee 1996, 62, 109; Kershaw 2018, 264f; Meadows 1972). Bösch has argued for downplaying the critical character of the 1970s and pointed out that Western consumer society expanded even more rapidly after this so-called decade of crisis (Bösch 2016). Seen from a longer perspective, this is

² Most clearly, this narrative is told in Winkler (2000) and Winkler (2009–2015), but also in Schildt (1999) and in Doering-Manteuffel (1999). For further reflections on the narrative of Germany's westernisation, compare references Rabenschlag (2019), Levsen & Torp (2016), Bavaj & Steber (2015) and Gassert (2001).

an important argument. It does not, however, change the fact that contemporaries, and thus West German parliamentarians, experienced the 1970s and the oil crisis as critical rupture of daily life. To them the 'oil price shock' represented a historical caesura (Klammer 2019, 307).

The growth of post-war Western economies up until the 1970s was based not least on cheap and reliable access to petroleum. The Western demand of petroleum supply, however, was increasingly covered by countries in the Middle East and the Soviet Union, whereas the US-American share of world oil production strongly decreased (Painter 2014, 187, 190, 194; Venn 2002, 2). Heavily relying on oil import, West Germany belonged to those Western industrial countries that were severely affected by OAPC's oil policy. In Fall 1973, West German public debts rose dramatically and the number of unemployed doubled within only a year (Herbert 2014, 895). To reduce the oil consumption, the government introduced driving bans, closed motorways and shut down gasoline stations. Many Germans experienced these decisions as a drastic political intrusion into their private life. Restrictions on traffic and on the possibility to use one's own car felt especially harsh since the private car was the most relevant symbol of West German *Wirtschaftswunder* (Miard-Delacroix 2013; Nye 1997). Non-mandatory recommendations on how to save energy, such as the request to stores to switch off Christmas lights and illuminated advertising, added to the feeling of a state-of-emergency (Maßnahmen 1973, 1499).

During the winter of 1973/74, West German mass media did not always adequately report on the actual situation of oil supply. As Hans Mathias Kepplinger and Herbert Roth (1979, 293) have shown, the usage of the term 'crisis' peaked in late November 1973, and thus at a time when oil supply had been stabilised again. In German-speaking research literature, the events of late 1973 are therefore usually denominated as *Ölpreiskrise* (oil price crisis) rather than *Ölkrise* (oil crisis) since oil supply as such was never threatened in the Federal Republic. However, despite the attempt of West German government to spread this information and to calm down public fears, hamster purchases were carried out. German media were stirring up panic questioning whether oil reserves would suffice to supply the German population with heat and light during the upcoming winter (Hohensee 1996, 112f). It is against the background of this setting parliamentary debates on the oil crisis and a semantic struggle for the West took place in German *Bundestag*.

THE WEST AS CAPITALIST POST-WAR SOCIETY

Already in January 1970, experts on oil within the OECD warned their respective governments against upcoming supply problems since both the amount of oil imports, especially imports from the Middle East, and the amount of oil consumption had risen drastically (Graf 2014, 51, 58; Hohensee 1996, 62, 109). Nevertheless, in the beginning of October 1973, the political tune in West German debate was still rather calm. To be sure, the federal government admitted it to be risky that the nation's oil supply depended on a rather small number of countries that were thought to be unreliable business partners. Nevertheless, the government considered German energy supply 'well structured' (Deutscher Bundestag 1973, 3, 5). When the Yom Kippur War broke out on October 6, 1973, however, this assessment rapidly changed. Syria and Egypt attacked Israel attempting to regain the territory, which had been occupied by Israel six years earlier. As one result of the ongoing war, the OAPC decided to continuously reduce oil extraction by 5% per month until Israel would have left all territories

occupied in 1967 and legitimate rights of the Palestinian people would have been restored.³ Furthermore, the OAPEC countries raised the oil price until it had quadrupled in January 1974. The United States, the Netherlands and Portugal, which the OAPEC considered to be especially Israel-friendly, were banned with a complete oil embargo (Mäckli 2009, 190; Venn 2002, 8).

On October 23, 1973, Helmut Schmidt, future German chancellor, and by that time minister of finance in the cabinet of Willy Brandt, mentioned in parliament a growing crisis-awareness in German discourse. People were becoming 'aware of the fact that energy actually can present a supply problem'. Schmidt's assessment was shared by the opposition (Schmidt 1973, 3432; Russe 1973, 3833). Three weeks later a feeling of crisis was already dominating public discourse. 'Consequence of the Oil Crisis: The End of the Affluent Society', pranked on the front page of the political weekly *Der Spiegel*. The oil crisis, the magazine concluded, severely affected mass consumption and the lifestyle of the ordinary man. Many Germans were predicted to suffer from higher costs of living and unemployment. 'The West', *Der Spiegel* concluded, 'will need at least one decade in order to be independent from the Arabic oil blackmailers' (Folge Ölkrise 1973, 1, 29). In this formulation, the civilisational narrative of the West stands out, presenting the West as opposite to an immoral and criminal Orient.

Although the members of West German parliament avoided such outspoken anti-Arabic statements, they, nevertheless, shared the *Spiegel's* hypothesis of 'the end of the affluent society'. Particularly, representatives of the governing coalition of social democrats (SPD) and liberals (FDP) interpreted the oil crisis as a sign that the golden years of capitalism in the political West were over. By them, 'the West' was referred to as the capitalist post-war society, which had been enjoying welfare and abundance thanks to a stable economy, but which was now threatened 'from the outside' (Friderichs 1974, 4539; see also Ahrends 1973b: 3969; Brandt 1973b: 3908; Friderichs 1973, 3839; Grabert 1974, 5679; Graf Lambsdorff 1974, 6238; Grüner 1974a: 4945; Grüner 1974b: 5679). The argument is clearly dominated by the modern narrative of the West, and – since West Germany's economic success in the post-war era was largely owed to the United States – indirectly applying the political narrative, too. However, the reference to a threat 'from the outside' also appeals to the idea of Western cultural distinctiveness and thereby to the civilisational narrative.

In order to tackle the crisis, Hans Friderichs, Minister for Economy in Brandt's cabinet and member of the liberal party, asked for a drastic change in lifestyle. The people needed to accept 'that not everything is accessible at any time and on exact those terms as everybody wants it', Friderichs concluded (Friderichs 1973, 3839). He was supported by Horst Ehmke, social democratic Minister for Research, Technology and Mail. 'Our goal in the future may not be abundance, but the prevention of waste', Ehmke claimed. 'We have to learn to budget natural resources economically and responsibly' (Ehmke 1974, 4564; see also Arndt 1973, 3555; Ehrenberg 1973, 3926; Graf Lambsdorff 1973a: 3930; Zywiets 1973, 3972).

Members of the conservative opposition, too, pointed out the severity of the 'crisis'. However, instead of asking for the reduction of energy consumption, CDU/CSU suggested to further stimulate the domestic energy sector and to approach a higher degree of economic autarky. The oil crisis, the conservatives argued, revealed nothing less than fundamentally different approaches to economic policy. Accusing the

³ Some research literature falsely points out OPEC as actor. However, only the Arab countries within OPEC, to be abbreviated with OAPEC, were involved (Painter 2014, 190).

government to perform a dirigiste economic policy, the conservatives urged to hold on to the principles of free market economy and to overcome the status of scarcity by new investments. In this line of argumentation, 'the West' was foremost connected with the idea of economic growth and capitalism and thus with the modern narrative. Both government and opposition considered large investments in nuclear energy to be a necessary step out of the dependency on oil. While the government, however, suggested to combine such investments with the reduction of the domestic oil consumption, to the conservatives this was not an option. To them, such economic sanctions resembled Soviet state socialism and were therefore not considered compatible with the idea of 'the West' as capitalist post-war society (Birrenbach 1973, 3714; Lenzer 1974, 4599; Müller-Hermann 1973, 3941; 1973b: 4267; Strauß 1973, 3921). Against the background of the Cold War, all statements on economic questions and references to 'capitalism' or 'dirigiste economy' are, of course, to be understood as political statements, too, and thereby as references to the political narrative. As to be seen in the following, however, the political narrative appears even stronger in the context of foreign policy.

THE WEST AS TRANSATLANTIC PARTNERSHIP

Whereas both government and opposition considered the first oil crisis to be a crisis of the West in the sense that it presented a threat to capitalist post-war society and its lifestyle of consumerism and abundance, this was not the only way how West German parliamentarians interpreted the events in the winter of 1973/74. Another dominant pattern in parliamentary rhetoric was to address the oil crisis as a matter of foreign policy. In this regard, government and opposition differed widely. As shown hereafter, this disagreement is reflected in and can be explained by different understandings of the political narrative of the West.

Due to the interference of both the United States and the Soviet Union not least in form of weapon deliveries, the Yom Kippur War proved to be a global conflict from the very beginning. While the Soviet Union delivered rockets and tanks to Egypt and Syria, the United States supplied Israel with all necessary military equipment. In fact, the extent of American war supply for Israel was so high that the Israeli Prime minister Golda Meir retrospectively considered American military support to have been decisive for Israel's victory (Steininger 2015, 173, 176f). The geopolitical background of the oil crisis was a political reality well known to all members of West German parliament. However, while the oil crisis was described as a crisis of Western lifestyle by representatives of all political parties, the line of argumentation focusing on geopolitics was exclusively driven by the conservative opposition (CDU/CSU). The argumentative pattern articulated by the conservatives contained two parts – first, the critique of the social-liberal government to have neglected the political friendship with the United States, and, second, the critique of the government to cooperate with the Soviet Union too closely.

Rainer Barzel, leader of the opposition, strongly urged the social-liberal government to nourish the political friendship with the United States since West German security, freedom, and welfare were depending on this alliance. According to Barzel, the federal government had endangered these fundamentals of German politics. 'Has the government pursued West policy [Westpolitik] with the necessary priority, with the necessary carefulness, with the necessary respect, with regards to what is possible and what is not possible amongst friends?', Barzel rhetorically addressed parliament and immediately

answered in the negative (Barzel 1973, 3843). Franz Josef Strauß, member of CDU's Bavarian sister party CSU and outspoken transatlantic, supported Barzel's accusations as he, too, considered the government's crisis management to have endangered the transatlantic alliance. West Germany, Strauss declared, had 'failed to stand side by side of the greatest of our allies, upon which our security still depends almost exclusively, and all this in a crisis which might be about death for all of us', thereby hinting at a possible nuclear confrontation between the two global superpowers (Strauß 1973, 3922f). Also Karl Carstens, a member of the CDU and the future federal president of West Germany, showed himself upset about the government's crisis management. 'In the Middle East conflict, during the climax of crisis, the Federal government dissociated itself openly from its American ally', Carstens stated retrospectively in January 1974 (Carstens 1974, 4781f). What was the background of these strong accusations by conservatives against the social-liberal government?

Against the will of the Nixon administration, West German government had declared a neutral position in the Yom Kippur War from the very beginning. The domestic opposition disapproved accusing the Brandt cabinet for neglecting Germany's historical responsibility towards Israel and the Jews (Barzel 1973, 3843f; Todenhöfer 1973, 3537).⁴ After an UN resolution to cease fire in the Middle East had been passed on October 22, 1973, the West German government asked the Americans to immediately stop all weapon exports to Israel from German soil. When West Germany learned, however, that the United States had ignored their demands and that Israeli ships loaded with US-American weapons had left the German port Bremerhaven heading towards Israel, West German government protested strongly. Not only did the German Foreign Office summon the American ambassador. The social-liberal government also decided to inform the German public about the diplomatic tensions with the United States – a decision that both the US government and West German conservatives considered to break with all rules of diplomatic courtesy. The social-liberal government, so the accusation of CDU/CSU, had publicly humiliated Germany's most important ally (Carstens 1973a: 3851; Graf 2014, 272; Hoeres 2013, 495). Research has claimed that the oil crisis of 1973 intensified trans-Atlantic tensions due to a different valuation of the 'crisis' by the United States and the Western European states, respectively. Whereas the United States mainly experienced the oil crisis as power-political challenge by the O(A)PEC, Western European states were foremost concerned about national economies and hence more willing to negotiate with the oil producing Arab states (Türk 2016, 63). With regard to West Germany this result must be differentiated: The same conflict of interests divided also the members of West German parliament, with the conservatives defending the US-American point of view and the social democrats and liberals the European one. Considering the concept of the West, this conflict can therefore be read as a conflict on the political narrative.

The fact that West German conservatives framed the oil crisis as a threat to the political West and the system stability of the Cold War was, however, not exclusively an affirmation of the US-American point of view. Barzel's accusation against the social liberal government to have neglected *Westpolitik* (Barzel 1973, 3843) must be read against the background of domestic politics, too. To German conservatives, 'the West' was considered to be in crisis both due to threats from abroad and at home, and to them the debate on the oil crisis offered an opportunity to critically address

⁴ Behind the curtains, West German government slightly deviated from clear neutrality when agreeing with the American decision to transport military equipment based on German soil to Israel (Institut für Zeitgeschichte, 2004, 1561).

Neue Ostpolitik (New Eastern Policy) – one of the most pressing and controversial questions in domestic political discourse during the 1970s.

In the eyes of the conservatives, the government's decision to compensate missing deliveries of Arab oil by oil imports from the Soviet Union, just meant replacing one evil with another. 'Considering foreign policy, the [government's oil] program is so naïve as the world is always in order according to our foreign minister', Franz Josef Strauß fulminated on November 29, 1973. 'The danger that – besides the dependency of Arab and African countries – there also might occur dependencies regarding the supply from countries of the Warsaw Pact during an unfriendly political situation is not taken seriously at all' (Strauß 1973, 3920). Given the conservatives' deeply rooted mistrust against the Soviet Union, Strauß' concerns were consistent. For, as the German social historian Bernd Faulenbach has stressed, Brandt's *Neue Ostpolitik* only partly aimed at easing up the tensions between the Federal Republic and the GDR. Instead, the chancellor's main ambition was to improve West German relations with the states in Eastern Europe, which had suffered so severely under German occupation. An enduring order of peace in Europe needed to include Eastern Europe. This, however, could only be achieved in cooperation with the Soviet Union and by accepting Soviet hegemonic status in Eastern Europe (Faulenbach 2011, 87).

In the parliamentary debate on December 12, 1973, the speaker of the opposition, Karl Carstens, explicitly linked the oil crisis with the government's economic policy towards the Eastern bloc. Carstens showed himself concerned that the social-liberal government planned to grant high loans to Eastern European states. 'We are confronted with the threat of an Arab oil boycott', Carstens summoned and concluded: 'What is the political background of these threats concerning an oil boycott? It is obviously a fact that the Arab states are politically backed up by the Eastern European states including the Soviet Union' (Carstens 1973b: 4258). Otto Graf Lambsdorff, a member of the liberal party and the future minister of economy in the cabinet of Helmut Schmidt, firmly criticised Carstens' attempt to link the oil crisis with *Neue Ostpolitik*. 'You have made an extraordinarily daring move when connecting Russian support of the Arabs with the Eastern loans [Ostkredite]', Lambsdorff addressed the conservative opponent. 'If we wanted to hinge our relations to our Eastern neighbors on their acting in every part of the world and to adjust them accordingly, it would mean that we were unable to pursue any *Ostpolitik* at all' (Graf Lambsdorff 1973b: 4263). Members of the opposition, on the other hand, repeatedly tried to present the Soviet Union as unreliable and dangerous business partner. During question time in parliament on February 13, 1974, CDU politician Carl-Otto Lenz insinuated that the Soviet Union had deliberately failed to meet oil deliveries to West Germany, an assertion that was denied by the government. Walter Becher (CSU) called it irresponsible to make business with a state representing an atomic threat to the political West. Strongly, he criticised German investments into nuclear power stations in the Soviet Union. A favour in return, Becher dramatically pointed out, 'might be cancelled with a single politically or strategically motivated touch of a button' (Becher 1974, 4980; Lenz 1974, 4978).

THE WEST AS EUROPEAN INTEGRATION PROCESS

Both political blocks discussed the oil crisis in terms of foreign policy and thereby paid great attention to the political narrative of the West. However, while the conservatives were articulating the oil crisis of 1973 in terms of the Cold War tensions, the social-liberal government used the parliamentary debates on the crisis to highlight an issue

most central to their very own political vision – the process of European integration. To the cabinet of Willy Brandt, as to be shown in the following, ‘the crisis of the West’ manifested itself not least in Western Europe’s failure to meet the political and economic challenge by OAPC unanimously. Thus, the social-liberal government referred to the political narrative, too, but aimed at renegotiating its meaning.

Despite the fact that the social-liberal coalition and specifically Willy Brandt is commonly associated with the concept of *Neue Ostpolitik*, an intensified cooperation between the member states of the EC represented a major political goal for the German chancellor. According to Brandt, the concept of *Neue Ostpolitik* had to be considered as an integral part of an all-European policy, and the process of European integration had to be accelerated, not least with regard to foreign policy. National conflicts of interests had to be put aside in favour of a joint European appearance (Hiepel 2014, 91). The oil crisis of 1973, Brandt argued, offered such a challenge and opportunity at the same time. When Brandt, on November 13, 1973, as the first German chancellor, spoke in front of the European parliament he explicitly linked the oil crisis with his expectations in regards to the European project. ‘The European Union will come’, Brandt proclaimed and predicted ‘the nation state of classic character’ to have outplayed its role. ‘What is happening in this tormented neighbour region’, Brandt referred to the Middle East, ‘is directly affecting us. Therefore, Europe has to contribute [...] to a solution of the problem. This is only possible when cooperating most closely’ (Brandt 1973a, 1457f).

A close European cooperation, however, proved difficult due to the fact that the oil policy of OAPC did not affect all EC member states in the same way. The Netherlands, for example, was confronted with a complete oil embargo. France and Great Britain, on the other hand, continued to receive oil deliveries to the usual extent. West Germany found itself in between these extremes, being spared a complete embargo but not the reduction of oil deliveries and the heavily raised prices (Hohensee 1996, 81f; Weingardt 2002, 229). On November 6, 1973, the European Council passed a joint declaration stating ‘that the forces of both sides in the Middle East conflict should return immediately’ to the positions they had occupied before the war. Furthermore, the member states of the EC declared themselves ‘ready to do all in their power to contribute to that peace’ (Declaration 1973). Research has referred to this declaration as a breakthrough in the evolution of a joint European policy (Ginsberg 2010, 73; Möckli 2009, 204).

In the eyes of the German social-liberal government, however, the declaration by the EC was nothing but a lame compromise. Disappointed that the declaration had not turned out to be more straightforward, the social democrat Karl Ahrends urged the EC member states ‘to make clear to the oil countries, that their attitude, their acting and their embargo will not dissuade us from a policy of European balance towards the problems in the Middle East’ (Ahrends 1973a: 3841). German conservatives, too, connected the issue of European integration with the recent events in the Middle East. With regards to the tensions between Israel and its Arab neighbours, however, they criticised the European position and emphasised to strive for a Middle East policy ‘in the tradition of Konrad Adenauer’ (Barzel 1973, 3843). Thereby, the conservatives referred to the fact that Adenauer’s policy of *Westintegration* and the unquestioned loyalty to the United States had automatically included a pro-Israeli position (Weingardt 2002, 74). Considering Adenauer’s engagement for the French-German relations, this was, of course, a rather one-sided reference to the idea of *Westintegration*. However, in this context, this reference served its purpose to clearly connect the political narrative

of the West with a focus on transatlantic relations. Following this argumentation, defending Western interests would have meant to clearly choose side for the United States and to give up the neutral European position in the Middle East conflict in favour of Israel.

Whereas the neutral position of the social-liberal government in the Middle East conflict provoked the United States, Willy Brandt and his cabinet hoped for progress in the process of European integration with the help of France. These hopes were well founded. First, France was the country in Western Europe that was shaken most by Europe's political weakness during the Yom Kippur War and the oil crisis. Being upset that Washington and Moscow seemed to make decisions on the peace process on their own, President Georges Pompidou saw his best chance to have a saying in Middle East politics in a joint European appearance (Möckli 2009, 208f). Second, Brandt's concept of *Neue Ostpolitik* had raised concerns in France that West Germany might politically drift too far eastwards towards the Soviet Union. In an intensified cooperation within the framework of the EC, France saw the possibility to prevent this from happening (Gfeller 2012, 6). Having met President Pompidou at the end of November, Brandt showed himself pleased with the negotiations with the French concerning a joint European standpoint in the oil crisis. On November 29, 1973, the German chancellor declared in parliament that Pompidou and him had been mainly discussing 'the question of energy', and that the French president had shared his appeal to European solidarity (Brandt 1973b, 3908). Explicitly connecting the oil crisis with the process of European integration, Brandt concluded: 'The energy question will demonstrate what the European Community is actually worth' (Ibid. 3911). Hence, also Brandt articulated the oil crisis as a crisis of the political West. In contrast to the conservatives, however, he geographically situated the political West not only in the United States, but also in Western Europe.

Two months later, however, on January 19, 1974, it was, of all EC member states, France, undermining the process of European integration. The French government announced its withdrawal from the so-called 'snake' – a forerunner of the European Monetary System to be founded a couple of years later – and to float its currency (Möckli 2009, 250). West German conservatives reacted deeply critical. 'This development demonstrates the desolate condition in which the [European] community is today', Rudolf Sprung (CDU) declared and called the situation 'an obvious setback for Europe'. 'Where', the conservative asked, 'Is the frequently praised European solidarity?' (Sprung 1974, 4738f). The social democrats disagreed with the French decision, too. However, in contrast to the conservatives, they articulated their critique more cautiously, eager to save what was left of a joint European spirit and hence, of the socio-liberal version of the political West. The social democrat Rainer Offergeld admitted that the French decision proved 'that the European Community does not work the way yet how it would be necessary and desirable' and clearly expressed his wish for an 'economic and monetary union and a stronger common political process' not least in regards to energy policy. Nevertheless, Offergeld emphasised that the European integration 'is and remains one of the foundations of German politics' (Offergeld 1974, 4740). When parliament met again already the following day, on January 24, 1974, Willy Brandt tried to bridge the conflict the conservatives sensed with regards to the political narrative of the West: 'The monetary situation, and above all the energy crisis [...] have shown that the European Community needs to achieve a situation in which we do not only speak with one voice but also have something to say', Brandt further stressed the European role. Furthermore, Western Europe needed 'to redefine meaning and

purpose of the cooperation in the [transatlantic] alliance'. The chancellor, however, emphasised that such a process did 'not mean that Western Europe is going to part with America or will allow to be parted from it. The role of the United States remains decisive for joint security and the peace-keeping power of the alliance' (Brandt 1974, 4770). Thereby Brandt suggested a reading of the political narrative of the West, which combined the transatlantic partnership with a strong European appearance.

The conservatives, however, were not willing to join the social democratic chancellor in this rhetorical balancing act. Unconditional loyalty with the United States remained their central guideline in foreign politics, in dealing with the oil crisis and in interpreting the political West. After Brandt's speech, the word was passed to the conservative Karl Carstens. Carstens left no doubt that he considered a joint European policy in the oil crisis to have failed and that West Germany should have collaborated with the United States instead: 'In the Middle-East-crisis [...] Western Europe appeared undecided and weak and showed a regrettable lack of solidarity', the conservative stated. 'It gave away the chance to – side by side with the United States of America – make a constructive contribution to restore peace in this region' (Carstens 1974, 4781). To the conservatives, defending 'the West' would have meant to downplay the European approach in the Middle East and to fully support American Middle East policy.

CONCLUSION: NEGOTIATING THE WEST IN WEST GERMAN PARLIAMENT DURING THE OIL CRISIS

In latest research, the oil crisis of 1973 has been interpreted as a crisis of the West. The analysis of contemporary parliamentary discourse in West Germany confirms that also contemporaries experienced the events during the winter 1973/74 as critical caesura. However, while members of parliament agreed on the existence of a crisis, they did not regarding the crisis' nature. This article has suggested to read the different assessments of the oil crisis in West German parliament as different understandings of the concept of the West. As shown in the analysis, it was foremost the semantics of the political narrative of the West which government and opposition struggled upon.

During the debates on the oil crisis, West German parliamentarians mainly referred to the modern and the political narrative. While the orient-occident divide was applied in the media, neither the social-liberal government nor the conservative opposition discussed the oil crisis as a clash between Christian and Muslim states. Even though the civilisational narrative was touched upon, it did not represent an issue of parliamentary dispute. Neither did the modern narrative since both government and opposition agreed that the oil crisis represented a threat to the lifestyle the industrialised, capitalist world had enjoyed since the end of World War II. The semantic struggle on the West concerned therefore foremost the political narrative. Discussing the wider political consequences of the oil crisis, government and opposition applied conceptualisations of the political West which differed clearly. West German conservatives interpreted the oil crisis as a threat to the Western bloc and the system stability of the Cold War and considered it necessary to demonstrate unquestioned loyalty with the United States. As the social-liberal government, in their eyes, had failed to do so, conservatives used the parliamentary debates on the oil crisis as opportunity to generally question Willy Brandt's *Neue Ostpolitik* as it represented a new interpretation of the political narrative of the West. The social-liberal government, on the other hand, took the oil crisis as an opportunity to stress

the importance of intensifying the process of European integration. To them, the crisis of the (political) West was represented in a crisis of European solidarity. In West German parliamentary debate, the oil crisis of 1973 henceforth functioned as a catalyst for expressing different interpretations of the concept of the West, and above all, the political West. Furthermore, against the background of the Cold War and the division of Germany into two different states, the different interpretations of the political narrative of the West reflected the domestic struggle on German identity.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I gratefully acknowledge the financial support of the Swedish Research Council for my research on the concept of the West of which this article is a result of. I would like to thank Friedemann Pestel and Peter Tietze for their comments on the manuscript.

COMPETING INTERESTS

The author has no competing interests to declare.

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TO CITE THIS ARTICLE:
 Rabenschlag, Ann-Judith. 2021. “Semantic Struggles in the Face of Crisis: ‘The West’ as Contested Key Concept in West German Parliamentary Debate (1973/74).” *Redescriptions: Political Thought, Conceptual History and Feminist Theory* 24(2): 150–165. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.33134/rds.353>

Submitted: 23 June 2021
 Accepted: 20 October 2021
 Published: 16 December 2021

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Redescriptions: Political Thought, Conceptual History and Feminist Theory is a peer-reviewed open access journal published by Helsinki University Press.