

The Perception of Germany in the UK Media - a case study of World Cup 2006 coverage

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In a dispatch to mark the sixtieth anniversary of the end of the Second World War, the German writer Matthias Matussek summed up all that was wrong with Britain's image of Germany. The British, Matussek wrote, were only interested 'in Nazi Germany'. They had 'zero interest in the new Germany'. According to this 'primitive image' of Germany cultivated by the British, the Germans were either 'frozen-faced engineers' or 'Nazis'. And yet the aim of this paper is to argue that the 2006 World Cup hosted by Germany this summer transformed the British media view of Germany. After decades in which Germany's portrayal by the British press was often linked with the Third Reich era, coverage of Germany during the tournament was surprisingly positive. The study intends to examine why. The paper argues that several factors contributed to the change – including a new, more comfortable patriotism among Germans, especially young Germans; the positive experience of the thousands of England fans who visited Germany in June and July; and a sense among tabloid executives that the old clichés about Germany had become boring.

In the years before the tournament, most German observers were doubtful, however, that Britain's perceptions of Germany would ever improve. In his 2005 Spiegel article Matussek asserted that Britain's view of Germany, Europe's most populous nation, was 'totally divorced from reality'. He went on: 'It (the British view of Germany) has nothing whatsoever to do with the Germans and everything to do with the British. Across the Channel it fuels important narcissistic functions in a national inner monologue which the insular English sustain at all costs.' Matussek quit Britain in disgust after just two years as London correspondent for Der Spiegel magazine.

He is not the only German observer to have complained about Germany's negative portrayal in Britain. His brother Thomas Matussek, Germany's former ambassador to the UK, who left earlier this year, has been another vocal critic. Thomas Matussek has lamented the lack of interest in both Germany and the German language among young Britons. In 1999 his predecessor, Gebhart von Moltke, spoke of Britain's 'profound ignorance' about modern Germany, Britain's long-standing NATO partner and ally. According to von Moltke, this was due in part to Britain's Hitler-obsessed history curriculum, which ended with the Führer's defeat, and completely ignored the economic and political achievements of the post-war federal republic.

Senior German politicians have had little doubt as to who has been responsible for keeping alive this dismal stereotype: the British media. In March 2000 Gerhard Schröder, Germany's Social Democrat chancellor, was asked about 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,' he observed dryly. During a visit to London two years ago, Joschka Fischer- Germany's then foreign minister and Schröder's coalition Green Party colleague – made the same point. His

generation had no idea how to perform a ‘goose step’, he said bitterly. He added that he was dismayed by the fact that British television showed so many Second World War films. Matthias Matussek sought to explain Britain’s apparent perennial hostility towards Germany on the grounds of post-war envy. After winning the Second World War the British had to hand ‘back their colonies...and withdraw to a small island in the North Sea.’ Britain went steadily downhill ‘to a state of economic ignominy that lasted well into the 1980s’. Germany- the war’s big loser- became the world’s ‘no 3 economic force,’ Matussek asserted . Matussek’s advice to newly arrived German diplomats in London was blunt. It was ‘futile’ to moan about Germany’s ‘primitive image’ on the island. The Brits were not going to change, he asserted. ‘German officials would do well to grasp this fact. They would spare themselves much frustration, and many a boring buffet to boot.’

This study examines why media stereotypes of Germany – more often than not invoking the Second World War - have lingered for so long. But it seeks to examine what factors contributed to the overwhelmingly positive, and at times even gushing, press coverage of Germany this summer by British newspapers. By the end of the tournament The Times published an important leader arguing that the World Cup had helped to restore ‘ancient’ bridges between Germany and Britain. Following England’s quarter -final World Cup exit at the hands of Portugal, thanks to another bungled England penalty shoot-out, the Daily Telegraph took the unlikely step of urging its readers to support the German team. In an interview with Germany’s Sunday tabloid, Bild am Sonntag, Tony Blair also noted that most England fans had decided to support Germany in the wake of England’s exit – something, the prime minister noted, that would have been ‘scarcely thinkable’ in the past. The German government, meanwhile, also grasped the unique opportunity offered by the World Cup to re-brand the country’s troubled international image. It launched an unprecedented media campaign under the slogan "Germany – Land of Ideas". At the same time, Germany itself discovered a normal, more relaxed form of patriotism that saw millions of Germans – especially those under 30 – waving the black, red and gold German flag for the first time. Many commentators noted that the World Cup transformed Germany’s gloomy self-image - even if, as Die Welt pointed out three months later (2 October 2006), the euphoria gave way to more familiar pessimism about the economy and the country’s bickering grand coalition. . During the tournament, two million foreign visitors - including more than 300,000 England fans - traveled to Germany. Many had never been there before. This too appears to have played a role in demolishing old stereotypes. Finally, the passionate style of football displayed by a young, charismatic German side under coach Jürgen Klinsmann appears to have laid waste old stereotypes. The Germans – and German football – were no longer regarded as being effective but dull.

In the months before the tournament, though, the omens were inauspicious. British press articles in April and May 2006 suggested that UK coverage of Germany would default to clichés deployed in previous major football competitions – most notably the 1996 European Championships. Here, the Germans were portrayed as Nazis. It was in 1996 the Daily Mirror ran its notorious front-page headline: ‘Achtung! Surrender! For you Fritz ze Euro 96 Championship is over’, next to photos of two England players in tin helmets. (In fact, the helmet worn by the England player Paul Gascoigne dated from the First World

War, suggesting the Mirror was groping back even further than the Nazi era.) The headline appeared on the eve of England's semi-final match against Germany. England lost on penalties. The Daily Mirror's jokey Germanophobia backfired, provoking condemnation from rival newspapers, a public backlash, and a ticking off from the Press Complaints' Commission. The commission ruled the Mirror's coverage – together with the Daily Star – had been 'shrill and poorly judged'. The Mirror's editor, Piers Morgan, abandoned a plan to drop copies of the paper by Spitfire over the German team's HQ. Morgan had also considered sending a tank to the office of Germany's Bild newspaper. He was later forced to resign after publishing hoax photographs of British soldiers beating up an Iraqi.

In the run-up to the 2006 World Cup few observers expected much better. Initially, they were right. On March 10, 2006, The Sun reacted badly to news that Geoff Hurst, the architect of England's famous World Cup victory over Germany in 1966, was to star in an advertising campaign by the German government. Some 130,000 placards featuring Hurst were put up on the London underground. They urged British tourists to visit Germany for themselves. The Sun pieced together what it called 'Hurst's England Elf', christening members of the England squad with 'German names'. Inevitably, the German names devised by The Sun did not include the kind of Germans the Germans themselves revere. There was no Willy Brandt, Germany's famous Social Democrat chancellor, and the architect of West Germany's Ostpolitik, or Konrad Adenauer, West Germany's post-war chancellor voted Germany's greatest German. Most of the names were puns of leading Nazis. They included 'Paul Rommelson' and 'Sven Goering Eriksson' - England's Swedish coach - alongside 'Merkel Owen' – a reference to Germany's first woman chancellor, Angela Merkel - and 'David Beckhambauer'.

Just over a month later, The Sun put the boot in again, this time publishing paparazzi photos of Frau Merkel's bottom as she got changed next to a swimming pool on a holiday in southern Italy. Under the headline: 'I'm big in the Bumdestag,' The Sun declared: 'German leader Angela Merkel has pulled up her country's economy – now she's pulling up her pants.' Bild, Germany's biggest-selling popular newspaper, responded with outrage. On 21 April 2006, the paper's star columnist Franz Josef Wagner (in his column 'Post von Wagner') attacked 'whisky-faced' Sun journalists, and noted that for the British: 'We're always the Nazis'. The previous day, Bild had reported the story with the headline: 'The English scorn our chancellor.' The paper asked rhetorically: 'Where does this hate come from?' With weeks to go until the tournament began, it seemed that tabloid Anglo-German rivalry, which Bild and The Sun have turned into a game of ping-pong, would continue tediously throughout the summer.

Thomas Kielinger, the veteran London correspondent of the centre-right Die Welt newspaper, examined the British press on the eve of the World Cup. He found few encouraging signs. Writing on May 30, 2006, Kielinger noted that the Sun's recent translation of the national anthem, God Save Our Gracious Queen, into German had used the wrong verb. 'Gott Speichern Unsere Liebenswürdige Königin.' (Speichern – to save, can only be used in the context of saving data, rather than monarchs.) Kielinger concluded that the British press was unable to write about Germany without touching on

the Third Reich. 'It is not possible to talk about Germany without mentioning Adolf,' he wrote. Kielinger did, however, have a word of praise for the 'enlightened' Guardian, which published a pre-World Cup special Germany edition in its G2 features section. The Guardian front-page carried the German flag and the headline in German, 'We love you Germany, really.' Inside several German commentators- including the Anglophobic Matthias Matussek- wrote on aspects of contemporary Germany. Other writers turned their attention to German food, fashion and comedy. The author of this paper wrote a first-person account of German manners, based on his experiences of family life in Berlin – and dwelling, perhaps excessively, on the German love of nudity.

But within days of the World Cup's opening match in Munich, which saw Germany trounce Costa Rica 4-2, British press coverage of Germany performed a U-turn. The Sun and Bild shed their mutual hostility to conduct their first-ever joint interview – with no less than Tony Blair. Blair met The Sun's political editor David Wooding and Bild's reporter Florian von Heintze at Waterloo Station, ahead of a meeting in Paris with the French president Jacques Chirac. Some of the interview proved ephemeral – including Blair's wildly inaccurate prediction that Germany would reach the World Cup final only to lose to England. But other parts of Blair's interview are more interesting:

Bild: How do you explain the regular attacks of the English press against the Germans and the often war-like language?

Blair: You should hear what they call me. They simply insult everybody. There isn't any difference. You can't take it personally.'

Bild: How do you see the relationship between Britain and Germany?

Blair: Naturally it's not totally uncomplicated for well-known historical reasons. On the other side many Germans work here in England. And the largest number of tourists who come to Berlin are British. Politically we are very close.'

Bild: When you go on holiday you normally go to Italy. What about Germany?

Blair: 'True, I've never been on holiday to Germany...'

The interview makes several good points. Blair is right that at an official, or elite, level relations between (West) Germany and Britain have – despite ups and downs – been good throughout the post-war period. Blair also addresses the regular German complaint that British newspapers are Germanophobic by pointing out that the British tabloid press is universally vicious. It is not just rude about Germans, but also about politicians, celebrities and the French. (The Sun famously depicted France's president Jacques Chirac as a worm.)Finally, Blair's last answer touches on a more general cultural problem: that while the British middle-classes are happy to holiday in Spain, Italy, or France, they less frequently bother to visit Germany.

Intriguingly Bild ran an article next to the interview reminding its readers of the generally hostile coverage of Germany by the British tabloids. The papers' resentment could be explained by the fact that the German football team consistently outclassed England during virtually every major tournament- and during most encounters between the two great football nations, Bild said. Germany had won the World Cup three times – in 1954, 74 and 90- while England had won it only once – in 1966. The Sun's sports reporter David Kidd was quoted in Bild as admitting that The Sun's 'Let's Blitz Fritz' headline during Euro '96 had been a mistake. 'It went too far. We simply overdid it,' he told the

paper. His colleague David Wooding confessed: 'The headline war is over. We had our fun, but now it's time to play football.'

In London, meanwhile, Germany's newly appointed ambassador to the UK, Wolfgang Ischinger, detected a subtle shift in British tabloid sensibilities. Unlike his predecessor Thomas Matussek, Ischinger decided that complaining about hostile British media coverage of Germany was counter-productive. Instead Ischinger gave dozens of media interviews ahead of the World Cup, including two to The Sun. The ambassador told the paper that he wanted 'to show that the clichés and stereotypes of the old days are no longer relevant.' He told Britain's best-selling daily tabloid: 'The tournament gives us the perfect opportunity to present a new image of our country.' 'No country likes to see itself presented in such a negative way. It's going to be my mission to do our best to change that and show a different image of Germany.' Afterwards, Ischinger said that The Sun had reported his comments 'fairly and accurately'. He said he had 'no complaints'. So far during his time as ambassador the British press had dealt with Germany fairly, he said. In a conversation two weeks after the interview appeared, he recounted how he had asked The Sun sports journalists why he had not tried to 'make fun' of him as Sun journalists had done in the past with other long-suffering German envoys. 'Even at The Sun, we believe that these clichés are becoming slightly old,' Ischinger quoted the journalist as telling him. It seemed that Fleet Street had finally grasped that the enduring tabloid image of Germans as goose-stepping Nazis was becoming a bit boring.

On the pitch England performed badly. The England team captained by an out of form David Beckham secured mediocre wins over Paraguay (1-0, June 10) and Trinidad and Tobago (2-0, June 15), and a 2-2 draw against Sweden (June 20) after a terrible second half. But by the mid-June the British press was almost unanimous in its praise for the World Cup's German hosts. Journalists took their cue from the thousands of England fans enjoying the party atmosphere and the sunny German weather. Ahead of the tournament Germany's 2006 World Cup organizing committee had taken the unprecedented decision ahead to erect 'Public Viewing' areas in major towns and cities across Germany. These allowed fans unable to secure World Cup tickets to watch the games for free on giant screens. They could drink beer, eat German sausages, and mingle with supporters from all over the world. The biggest Public Viewing area in Berlin stretched from the Brandenburg Gate through the German capital's leafy Tiergarten. The BBC's main studio was just next to the Brandenburg Gate, in the new academy of arts, and in front of the capital's 'fan mile'. As reporters delivered pieces to camera, fans could be seen milling around in the background enjoying the party. Many British journalists, meanwhile, spent the summer encamped in Baden-Baden, the affluent if geriatric spa resort in the south-western German state of Baden Württemberg, close to the French border. It was here in Bühlerhöhe hotel on the edge of the Black Forest that the England team had its World Cup HQ, and nearby training camp. Baden-Baden itself was home to the team's wives and girlfriends, whose party-going antics earned them the name WAGS.

In Germany an astonished press began to report on the growing pro-German mood among England fans. Under the headline: 'The winner is: Germany', the left-wing daily Die Tageszeitung – known in Germany as 'taz' – observed that England supporters

appeared to have buried their ancient prejudices against the Germans. They were having a great time, the paper said. Its strap-line read: 'In the past the English regarded us as ugly, humourless, and earnest – with a Nazi lurking behind every corner. Suddenly the English love the Germans- thanks to football, partying, and women ('dank Fußball, Feiern und Frauen').' Asking 'What's happened to the English?' the paper pondered whether the sudden improvement in British sentiment towards Germany was a result of the fact that many British football fans were visiting Germany for the first time. The paper cited glowing comments on the BBC's website. Rick Smith wrote: 'Before I went to the World Cup I was under the impression from the British media that the Germans were humourless, super-serious and didn't know how to party. That's rubbish. I love the Germans. Their women are beautiful.' Another fan Roger Franklin added: 'The Germans have already won, regardless of how far their team goes. I think that this World Cup will be a turning point in the British-German relationship.' Even the previously hostile Mirror ran photos of England fans dancing in the streets with German policemen, 'taz' noted. Other British bloggers praised Germany's efficient methods of street cleaning- and suggested that Britain could learn from Germany's green recycling schemes. There was only one conclusion, Die Tageszeitung suggested – Britain was now on a 'Kuschelkurs' – literally a 'cuddle course' - against its one-time foe.

Other England fan groups also took pains to acknowledge Britain and Germany's wartime history while communicating a positive message. On June 23, 2006, Mark Perryman of the London England Fans group organized a joint visit by England and Germany fans to Dachau concentration camp, near Munich. The purpose of the trip, he told Der Tagesspiegel, was not just to remember the war but was also to encourage England fans to recognize that Germany had 'understood the worst chapter of its history' and had done everything it could to ensure that 'the gas chambers belong for ever to the past.' Asked how the British press had shaped the relationship between German and England fans – and whether it had been helpful, Perryman suggested that 'something' had finally changed. 'It's a serious problem that our tabloids keep on mentioning the war. But they appear to have understood that this was 60 years ago. During the World Cup things seem finally to be changing. The Sun recently ran the headline: 'Love is in the Herr. England-fans love the Germans.'

Germany's own efforts to present itself in a new, more sympathetic light were succeeding. Ahead of the tournament the German government, together with German business launched a cross-political initiative designed to present a 'positive image' of Germany- under the slogan 'Germany, Land of Ideas.' The campaign's most visible symbols were a series of giant sculptures erected across Berlin celebrating Germany's car industry, the football trainer, music, pharmaceuticals, and the theory of relativity. Initially, the sculptures were greeted with skepticism. Soon, however, they formed the backdrop to World Cup reports beamed by the 12,000-15,000 foreign and German journalists reporting on the tournament. "Germany, Land of Ideas" ran a poster campaign starring the German supermodel Claudia Schiffer wrapped in a German flag. The posters appeared on the London underground outside Bank station. They invited British visitors to 'Come on over to my place' and to 'Get your hands on a German supermodel.' The

campaign even attempted a bit of gentle self-mockery. 'You don't have to spell *Mittelstandsförderungsgesetz* to profit from it,' one message read. By the middle of June the campaign was working. The Financial Times Deutschland (FTD) website analyzed 400 English-language newspaper reports in the first six months of 2006, and found that the word 'friendly' appeared in association with Germany relatively late. By June and July – as foreign journalists crisscrossed Germany, shuttling between 12 World Cup cities – the words 'party' and 'pride' topped the list of World Cup adjectives, toppling 'safe' and 'successful.' Mike de Vries, the chief executive of FC Deutschland GmbH, later claimed that with 3.5 million 'contacts' and more than 14,200 articles his campaign had succeeded where previous German attempts at nation branding had failed. 'It was the most successful image campaign in the history of Germany,' he boasted.

In fact, "Germany Land of Ideas" was only part of a much bigger, and more culturally significant, change. This had more to do with demography, football and the popular mood than it did with advertising. As the World Cup got underway, millions of Germans began flying the German flag – from their cars, balconies, and bicycles. Germany's president Horst Köhler was spotted carrying a German scarf. Young fans bought Germany wigs. Others painted Germany flags on their faces or on their dogs, while teenage girls wrote 'Poldi' and 'Schweini' – the abbreviated names of Germany's striker duo- on their navels. The terraces during Germany's matches echoed with a chant that captured the country's new-found self-confidence and patriotism- 'Steht auf, wenn ihr Deutsche seid... ' (Stand up if you are a German). Less than a week after the tournament began, *Bild* – whose topless models were by now also wearing German colours, if not much else - posed the question: 'Where does our new lovely national feeling come from?' Inevitably, it was the ubiquitous Matthias Matussek who provided the answers, telling the paper that the World Cup offered Germany a 'unique chance to repudiate all the prejudices against us, and to show that there is nothing dark or sinister about national feeling, but something natural, even light and dancier-ish.' Asked why Germans had discovered this long-hidden patriotism now, he said: 'I think people realize that a very long time has past since the Second World War. They know that Germany has acknowledged and worked through its guilt like no other country.'

This sudden and spontaneous wave of national feeling prompted an enormous debate among Germany's intellectual class. Most agreed it was a good thing. Jürgen Krönig writing in *Die Zeit* described the new patriotism as 'a part of normalisation' and agreed that Germans had become less 'uptight and neurotic about national symbols and patriotism.' Writing in the same paper, Ulrich Dehne recounted how during a skiing trip to Poland the previous winter he had been asked his nationality. Admitting being German had left him and other German guests with 'the feeling that we'd been caught cheating'. This now 'struck us as absurd,' he wrote. According to *Der Spiegel* the 'embarrassing fatherland' of the past had disappeared. 'That was earlier,' the magazine said. Even the usually sober German chancellor Angela Merkel was swept away by the new mood, observers noted, leaping out of her VIP seat when Germany scored in the dying minutes against Poland, winning the group stage match 1-0. A survey by the opinion pollsters, Allensbach, revealed that 22 per cent of Germans believed their country's history should stop them from showing off German flags. Some 58 per cent felt national symbols were

now acceptable, however. Among the under-30s the figure rose to 68 per cent. The 'Patriotismusdebatte' or patriotism debate was largely an internal German affair. But foreign journalists reporting on the tournament could hardly ignore the good-natured and friendly German crowds who decked themselves out in German flags, hung banners from their balconies, and gathered to watch Germany matches on giant screens. Writing in the International Herald Tribune, Roger Cohen described the tournament as having a 'miraculous air... a kind of sudden summer's inebriation in the spell-casting German woods.' After a 'catharsis six decades in gestation' Germany had reached what Cohen called 'this festive moment'. It was fitting that documentary maker Sönke Wortmann, who accompanied the German team with a hand-held camera, titled his World Cup film "Deutschland: Ein Sommermärchen" - Germany, a summer fairy tale. England fans appear to have been swept up by the same intoxicating mood. The Germans were no longer tormented self-loathing peaceniks, or European federalist bullies, but fun-loving hedonists – in other words, the kind of people you might want to share a beer with. During the World Cup Germany had - in the words of one political scientist – 'outed' itself as a 'normal European state.' The Germans were now 'cute', a US commentator remarked.

In fact, the World Cup appears to have played a unique role in redressing the cultural imbalance between Germany and Britain. The declining lack of interest in Germany among the British has been a recurring motif in Anglo-German relations, especially in the field of education. Currently twice as many German students study in British universities as opposed to the other way round. At the same time, some 2,500 German academics work in British universities- more than any other international group. Among British teenagers, there has been an alarming decline in the study of German as a language since the government decision taken four years ago to make languages non-compulsory after 14. Since 2001 entries in GCSE French have fallen by 110,818 to 236,189. The number of students taking GCSE German has fallen by 44,822 over the same period to 90,311. The education secretary Alan Johnson has ordered an inquiry into the state of foreign language teaching, headed by Lord Dearing. And yet the World Cup appears to have provoked a resurgence of interest in Germany among Britons who – back in the 1930s – would have thought nothing of going on a honeymoon in Bavaria. Many England fans who visited Germany this summer expressed an interest in coming back. Since the World Cup the number of online bookings for holidays in Germany has gone up by 25 per cent. A huge majority of fans who visited would also recommend the nation as a travel destination, a survey commissioned by the German national tourist board showed.

At the same time, some German observers feel that the lop-sided nature of the Anglo-German relationship is not entirely Britain's fault. Thomas Kielinger, Die Welt's London correspondent, believes that much of the blame lies with Germany, which in recent decades has failed to offer up an interesting narrative about itself. It has instead stagnated, he believes. 'Germany needs to offer a new narrative that fires the imagination. Since German re-unification we have really sat on our laurels. It started with Kohl who did nothing for eight years, and left us with structural problems that are still unsolved,' Kielinger said, adding: 'We have not developed a more vibrant story of a rejuvenated country.' Not surprisingly, Germany's current ambassador disagrees. Wolfgang Ischinger

claims that under Angela Merkel – Germany’s first woman chancellor and the first German leader to have grown up in the former communist East – Germany has made a new start. He cites the EU summit at the end of 2005, which saw Angela Merkel take on a crucial mediating role between France and Britain. Mrs Merkel rescued the EU’s budget summit and saved her new friend Tony Blair, the EU’s rotating president, from humiliation. ‘There were a lot of good vibrations coming out at the beginning of the Merkel chancellorship,’ Ischinger asserts.

To some extent, the British press has taken its queue in its depiction of Germany from Downing Street. Margaret Thatcher’s opposition to German reunification is well known, as is the resignation of her secretary of state for trade and industry Nicholas Ridley after an extraordinary attack on ‘the Germans’. But it was in the post-Thatcher 1990s under John Major that press coverage of Germany become even more vitriolic, with Germany increasingly portrayed by right-wing Conservative MPs as the leader of a federalist plot to take over Europe. When Britain was ignominiously forced to leave the exchange rate mechanism in August 1992, John Major swiftly blamed Germany and the Bundesbank for his own government’s failings. This led directly to ‘a revival of a Germany discourse rooted in World War Two.’ Under Tony Blair and Gerhard Schröder relations between Britain and Germany improved – at least to begin with. But the two leaders attempts to forge a new Third Way for like-minded European Social Democrats were soon forgotten, as Britain and Germany fell out over the Bush administration’s plan to invade Iraq. By the end of Chancellor Schröder’s spell in office in the autumn of 2005 he and Tony Blair were scarcely on speaking terms.

The World Cup ended on July 9, 2006, when Italy dramatically beat 5-3 France on penalties after extra time finished in a 1-1 draw. The match at Berlin’s Olympiastadion was memorable for Zinedine Zidane’s spectacular dismissal after he head-butted an Italian defender who allegedly insulted his sister. Germany came third. Sven-Goran Eriksson, England’s manager, resigned after yet another poor England performance. But the consensus among British commentators was that the popular image of Germany had changed. Writing in *The Times* Alastair Campbell, Tony Blair’s former spin doctor, claimed that the clichéd vision of Germany in Britain had been sunk forever. ‘A number of myths have had to be revised. The idea of the Germans as insular, humorless and not the kind of people you want at a party: that one’s gone forever. This has been one of the best parties of all time.’ Campbell recounted how England fans on their way home had swapped football shirts with German supporters on station platforms. Sir Peter Torry, Britain’s ambassador to Germany, also pointed out to disbelieving German readers that the British press had ‘showered’ Germany with positive reports. England fans had, for the most part, behaved well. The majority of fans had reacted positively ‘to the overwhelming hospitality they experienced in Germany,’ he wrote. Denis Macshane, the British MP and former Europe minister, went even further. In an article for the *Financial Times Deutschland* he claimed: ‘Pro-Germans were a silent minority among the British public. Now we belong to a large majority.’

By the end even the harshest, most doubting critics appear to have been won over. In the latest edition of the *British Journalism Review* Nicky Campbell – the Radio Five live

presenter and Guardian columnist - described how when he arrived in Germany to report on the 2006 World Cup he had been 'a pile of prejudice.' His antipathy towards the Germans, he admitted, was deep-rooted – and inherited, in part, from his 'parents' generation'. 'I am unavoidably burdened with the sometimes blatant, sometimes deeply-submerged cocktail of obsession, fascination, discomfort and guilt at all of the above which stem from a series of unfortunate events in the first half of the last century... Blame the water torture of propaganda. Blame The Dambusters and Colditz, Hogan's Heroes and 'Allo 'Allo,' he conceded. During the tournament, however, Campbell underwent a sort of Damescene conversion. The presenter discovered that the Germans were nice. As the German team progressed, Campbell noted miraculously, 'the excitement grew' and 'the most joyous momentum took hold.' 'There was a blossoming of inclusive pride,' he wrote. Even Germany's most antagonistic tabloid enemies came round to his happy view. Campbell is worth quoting here in full:

'For the majority of decent fans the World Cup was a watershed. I lost count of the England supporters who said they never expected the Germans and Germany to be so far removed from the traditional tabloid image. I bumped into Stuart Higgins, the former editor of The Sun at the Trinidad game. Shortly after he got home he sent me an astute email: 'I just wonder if there is a serious assessment to be made of new Anglo-German relations, everything brilliantly organized, friendly people, good value hotels, free Metro etc... Very interesting how a World Cup has proved to be a catalyst for a new relationship and understanding.' The ugly England fans who insisted on singing 'Ten German Bombers' had missed the point', Campbell wrote, concluding: 'Forget about the idiots. Specially the ones on the pitch.'

In his final interview with Bild am Sonntag, Tony Blair also claimed that the real winner of the 2006 World Cup had been Germany. After England's defeat millions of England fans supported Germany in its quarter-final encounter against Argentina, Blair claimed - not entirely remarkable given the Falklands war, but interesting nonetheless. 'I know many England fans decided to repay their friendly reception (in Germany) with good spirits and good behaviour,' the prime minister told the paper. He went on: 'This was certainly – alongside the passionate style of playing by the German team – one reason why an astonishingly large number of England fans supported Germany after England had gone out. Earlier this would have been scarcely thinkable.' The Daily Telegraph also reached the same conclusion. Its leader 'The war is over' asked whom fans should support now that England had been knocked out. Despite close, historic links with Portugal, the right-wing Telegraph claimed there were 'better reasons to cheer for our old adversaries, the Germans.' 'On the pitch, they have displayed the qualities we most admire: stoicism and pluck (compare their coolness on Friday with the crybabies of Argentina). Off it, they have been brilliant organizers and generous hosts. Above all the tournament has allowed Germans to wave their flag without awkwardness,' the paper said.

Conclusions

The 2006 World Cup was a defining moment in Germany's post-war journey towards normalization. It also changed popular British perceptions of the Germans. It is too early to say whether the new, more positive image of Germany will endure or whether tabloid newspapers will revert to the old clichés of Hitler and the Second World War. Over the past half-century Anglo-German relations have moved in virtuous - and less virtuous - cycles. Nonetheless, there seems to be an intuitive understanding among British journalists that stereotypes about goose-stepping Nazis no longer have the same efficacy they once did. At the same time the World Cup appears to have transformed Germany's self-image – even if normal life, and normal difficulties, have resumed. For many of the young Germans who dressed up in German colours during the World Cup the fall of the Berlin Wall is a distant historical event. The Nazi era belongs to an even more remote past. Germans on the left and right now appear to accept that the historical burden of being German does not prohibit them from enjoying the kind of healthy patriotism that other European states take for granted. This is especially true when Germany – unlike the hopeless England team - plays inspiring and dazzling football. Finally, national attempts at re-branding can work, given the right circumstances. Previous World Cups in Mexico and Argentina have brought the host nations favourable publicity. But the transformation of attitudes towards Germany in the British press this summer feels increasingly like a watershed moment. It has most to do with the fact that British journalists – and England fans - visited Germany this summer in large numbers. They liked what they saw; and they wrote about it. If nothing else, this proves that journalists do on occasion try to tell the truth.

Acknowledgements

I am very grateful to the Reuters Foundation for awarding me a Fellowship to research this essay. I would also like to thank Paddy Coulter, Director of Studies at the Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism at Oxford University, as well as Sarmila Bose, John Lloyd and Prof Anthony J Nicholls, the founder director of the European Studies Centre at Oxford University and Emeritus Fellow at St Antony's College, Oxford. Without their help and kind advice this paper would not have been possible.

Thanks also to Phoebe Taplin, Heathcote Williams, Henning Hoff, Jonathan Grix, as well as to Jonathan Brenton, the former press attaché at the British Embassy in Berlin, and Michael Fluegger, press attaché at the German Embassy in London

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