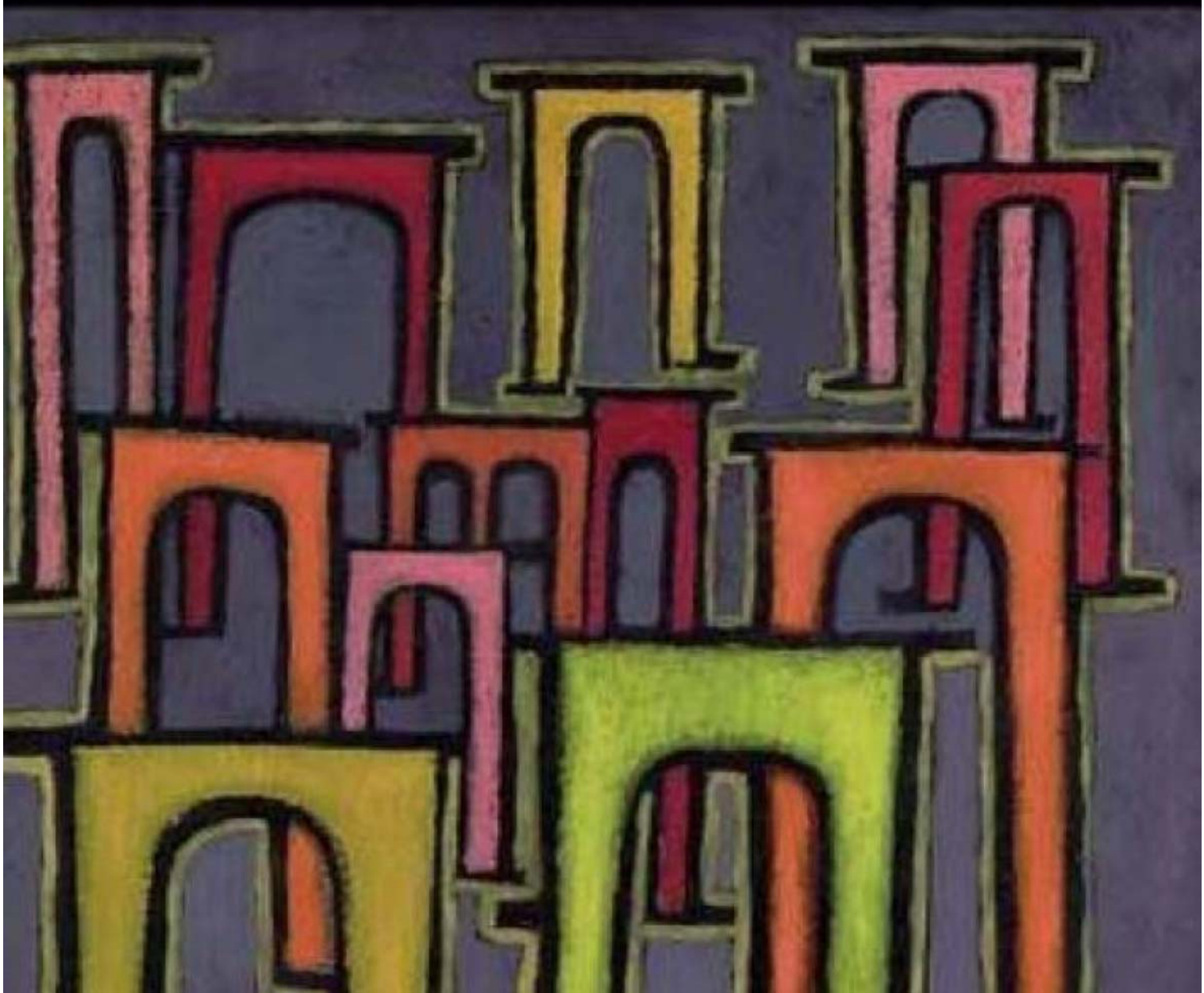
Uses of the West

Security and the Politics of Order

Edited by Gunther Hellmann
and Benjamin Herborth



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Security and the Politics of Order

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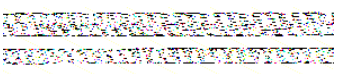

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Uses of the West

The notion of 'the West' is commonly used in politics, in the media, and in the academic world. To date, our idea of 'the West' has been largely assumed and effective, but has not been examined in sufficient detail. *Uses of the West* combines a range of original and topical approaches to evaluate what 'the West' does, and how it is being used in everyday political practice. This book examines a range of 'uses of the West', and traces how 'the West' works in a broad array of conceptual and empirical contexts, ranging from the return of geopolitics – via a critical review of the debates surrounding Samuel Huntington's 'clash of civilizations' thesis – to the question of the future of the West. Analysis extends further to the repercussions of the war on terror on Western democracy and the processes of delineating the Western from the non-Western, as well as observations on the institutional transformations of Western order.

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1 Introduction
Uses of the West

Benjamin Herborth and Gunther Hellmann

The notion of 'the West' is ubiquitous in both scholarly and political discourse. Yet, it remains surprisingly undertheorized. As if we always already knew what we are talking about when invoking it, 'the West' seems to operate as a taken-for-granted presumption, making superfluous any further interrogation. Curiously, thus, the West is ubiquitous, undertheorized, and taken-for-granted at the same time, and it is precisely this combination of attributes that seems to render it politically effective. It is also precisely this unique combination of attributes that constitutes the study of the West as an intellectual challenge.[1]

In everyday political language 'the West' is usually understood to refer to a grouping of states and societies in Europe and North America, which share a few characteristics, are tightly connected among each other, and have amassed the overwhelming bulk of military capabilities, economic power, and cultural attraction. Defying geographical common sense, however, Australia, New Zealand, and possibly even Japan are widely considered to be 'Western' outliers in the Pacific. While the idea of 'the West' as well as the array of images, practices, and institutions associated with it did originate in Western Europe, today the imaginary dimension of 'the West' has taken on a life of its own. As Stuart Hall contends, 'the *idea* of "the West", once produced, became productive in its turn. It had real effects: it enabled people to know or speak of certain things in certain ways. It produced knowledge. It became *both* the organizing factor in a system of global power relations *and* the organizing concept or term in a whole way of thinking and speaking' (Hall, 1992, p. 278). Western states and societies define themselves in terms of a shared form of socio-political organization, which sets them apart from a non-Western 'Rest' and warrants a special kind of relation.[2] Hence, 'transatlantic

[1] The editors would like to thank the Research Cluster 'The Formation of Normative Orders' at Goethe University Frankfurt and the Johns Hopkins SAIS Bologna Center for generous support of this volume.

[2] Importantly, the geographical dislocation of the idea of 'the West' opens up the possibility of the entire world becoming 'Western'.

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relations' commonly refers to relations among Europe and the US, while, to the complete befuddlement of any studious reader of a world map, relations between, say, South Africa and Brazil are not usually classified as transatlantic.

The terms employed to describe distinctly Western similarities characteristically entail advanced liberal democracies and market-oriented or capitalist economies, and secularized societies. References to their interconnectedness typically point to common historical experiences as well as dense networks of political, economic, and societal exchange.[3] In addition, in a global perspective the 'Western' world is usually viewed as having assumed a dominant position for many centuries – a position which it still occupies to the present. What history books usually consider to be the world's major wars have largely been fought *in* the West and *among* Western states. Here, the concentration of wealth was by far the highest and the political regime of popular sovereignty considered to be most advanced. The longstanding (obviously Western) distinction between 'developed' countries on the one hand and 'developing' countries on the other captured this sense of Western superiority most clearly. In the loose sense in which the remaining states were grouped in this narrative according to the other cardinal points of the compass, 'the South' and 'the East' were relegated to secondary roles at best.[4] In a nutshell, there was little room for doubting who was *dominating* and who was *being dominated*.

The collapse of the Soviet Union and the Warsaw Pact seemed to mark one of those historical junctures with the potential for far-reaching upheavals. In the beginning, Western triumphalists were clearly dominating the debate. Francis Fukuyama famously summarized the alleged 'triumph of the West, of the Western *idea*' in the following way:

> What we may be witnessing is not just the end of the Cold War, or the passing of a particular period of postwar history, but the end of history as such: that is, the end point of mankind's ideological evolution and the universalization of Western liberal democracy as the final form of human government. This is not to say that there will no longer be events to fill the pages of *Foreign Affairs'* yearly summaries of international relations, for the victory of liberalism has occurred primarily in

[3] Initially the pun 'From Plato to NATO' served well primarily for European History courses, as a quick search on the internet shows. By the 1990s it also reached the cover of academically inspired books about the identity of 'the West'; see Gress, 1998.

[4] In recent centuries 'the East' only played a dominant role approximating that of 'the West' when it was understood as the Eastern part of a bipolar 'North' grouped around the Soviet Union. Tellingly, 'the North' has essentially disappeared from the global political compass after the demise of the Soviet Union and the collapse of the Warsaw Pact – and with it 'the South' has vanished as a playground for the geopolitical maneuvering of Northern powers.

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the realm of ideas or consciousness and is as yet incomplete in the real or material world. But there are powerful reasons for believing that it is the ideal that will govern the material world *in the long run*. (Fukuyama, 1989, p. 4)

When one moves closer to the present, the 'emerging powers' (most prominently China, India, and Brazil, as well as a resurgent Russia) are all (more or less) rising in 'the East' and 'the South' – and their rise is often accompanied by diagnoses of crisis at the very heart of the 'developed' West. Moreover, the 'case against the West' has been made ever more explicitly from the East with charges that it (i.e. 'the West' collectively) has become 'the world's single biggest liability' (Mahbubani, 2008). Although neither Fukuyama nor Mahbubani were (or are) representative of a broader discourse at the respective point in time, they certainly expressed an underlying mood – if in an exaggerated way.

Apparently, the concept of 'the West' not only entails a distinct 'set of images', it also provides us with a way of drawing boundaries, establishing differences, and demarcating political and social spaces. 'The West' gains significance only in contradistinction to 'the Rest' (Hall, 1992). It seems well-justified and only consequential, then, that most of the attempts to come to terms with the West focus predominantly on Western domination, repression, and silencing of non-Western voices, in short the whole array of hierarchies brought about by the West/Rest distinction. However, the ensuing story, if it merely inverts the hierarchicalization of 'the West and the Rest', all too easily reproduces static and fixed images of both the West and the Rest. The problem is most clearly articulated by Edward Said, in a 1994 post-scriptum to his seminal study of *Orientalism*:

Let me begin with the one aspect of the book's reception that I most regret and find myself trying hardest now (in 1994) to overcome. That is the book's alleged anti-Westernism, as it has been misleadingly and rather too sonorously called by commentators both hostile and sympathetic. This notion has two parts to it, sometimes argued together, sometimes separately. The first is the claim imputed to me that the phenomenon of Orientalism is a synecdoche, or miniature symbol, of the entire West, and indeed ought to be taken to represent the West as a whole. Since this is so, the argument continues, therefore the entire West is an enemy for the Arab and Islamic or for that matter the Iranian, Chinese, Indian and many other non-European peoples who suffered Western colonialism and prejudice. The second part of the argument ascribed to me is no less far reaching. It is that a predatory West and Orientalism have violated Islam and the Arabs. (Note that the terms "Orientalism" and "West" have been collapsed into each other.) Since that is so, the very existence of Orientalism and Orientalists is seized upon as a pretext for arguing the exact opposite, namely, that Islam is perfect, that it is the only way (*al-hal al-wahid*), and so on and so on. To criticize Orientalism, as I did in my book, is in effect to be a supporter of Islamism or Muslim fundamentalism. (Said, 1995, p. 330f.)

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Against such 'caricatural permutations', Said (1995, p. 331) insists on the explicitly anti-essentialist thrust of his work.

> Nevertheless, *Orientalism* has more often been thought of as a kind of testimonial to subaltern status – the wretched of the earth talking back – than as a multicultural critique of power using knowledge to advance itself. Thus as its author I have been seen as playing an assigned role: that of self-representing consciousness of what had formerly been suppressed and distorted in the learned texts of a discourse historically conditioned to be read not by Orientals but by other Westerners. This is an important point, and it adds to the sense of fixed identities battling across a permanent divide that my book quite specifically abjures, but which it paradoxically presupposes and depends on. (Said, 1995, p. 336)

In order to avoid re-essentializations of this kind, this volume explicitly refrains from imposing a shared understanding of the West, or a shared framework of analysis on the individual contributions.[5] We do not ask what the West *is* but what it, the word, *does*, and *how* it is being used in everyday political practice. The 'self/other nexus' is not to be misunderstood as a structuralist formalism where history and politics are relegated to the secondary role of filling in preconstituted positions. On the contrary, it is only in the contested *Uses of the West*, where politics is at play, that the positions of 'the West and the Rest' are constituted.[6] We thus focus deliberately on uses of the West inside the West and by Westerners (or, in the case of Ted Hopf's chapter, potential Westerners), not in order to denigrate the importance of non-Western articulations of the West, but, very much in line with Stuart Hall and Edward Said, in order to shed light on the internal complexity and multifacetedness of references to the West inside the West.

Such a focus on everyday practices of using the West inevitably yields a multitude of different uses. An inquiry into the transformation of Western order thus confronts us with more than the empirical challenge of meaningfully weaving together a coherent account of a complex macro-social process in the light of abundant and heterogeneous pieces of evidence. It also confronts us with the theoretical challenge of how to conceptualize the West in the first place. Traditionally, theories of international politics assume a starting point where conceptual problems of this kind are already rendered unproblematic. From such a perspective, grasping

[5] The chapters by Gabi Schlag, Christian Weber, and the editors are the product of a joint research project 'Secur(itiz)ing the West' funded by the research cluster on the Formation of Normative Orders at Goethe University Frankfurt.

[6] See esp. Iver Neumann's *Uses of the Other: The East in European Identity Formation* (1999), and Alastair Bonnett's *Occidentalism: The Uses of the West* (2006), which served as inspiration in choosing the title for this volume; see also Neumann, 1996; Hansen, 2006; the contributions to Hall and Jackson, 2007; Browning and Lehti, 2010; and Katzenstein, 2010.

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the intricacies of international conduct seems possible only to the extent that we start from a relatively fixed understanding of who the relevant actors are and what they are up to. Then the ordeal of cooperation under anarchy may begin. The various turns IR theory has taken in recent years have responded to this constellation by attempting to gradually unpack what is taken for granted in the image of states as unified, rational actors pursuing national interests. However, writing against the background of a discipline that still draws a hard and fast line between the domestic and the international, analyses of the contingent, historical, and contentious construction of national interests, state preferences, or identities have, for the most part, still presupposed a fixed unit of analysis – i.e. something like a specific grouping of Western states to which we can attach actor-like qualities. Reflexive analyses of contentious processes of identity formation have gained legitimacy as a distinct type of scholarship within IR precisely because they accepted, in return, a fairly conventional understanding of international order. Constructivist, post-structuralist, and broadly reflectivist scholarship has profoundly (and fruitfully) changed our understanding of what states or international and non-governmental organizations do. Only on rare occasions, however, has it tackled the question of how political spaces, i.e. spaces where political authority is exercised, come into being in the first place.[7]

One of the primary objectives of this volume is to *theorize* the West in a manner that, contrary to the interpretive routines sketched earlier, does not presuppose a fixed understanding of the West as a preconstituted political space, ready-made and waiting for social scientific inquiry. The West, we contend, is one of the elusive phenomena in international politics, which do not have 'phone numbers' – to recall one of Henry Kissinger's complaints about an ineffectual European partner. 'The West' indeed is an elusive concept, yet its elusive nature has not seemed to hamper its historical success. On the contrary, it might be precisely the integrative catch-all nature of the idea of the West that has made it attractive in many different ways and contexts.

In seeking to explore a broad range of uses of the West, the volume is organized into three sections. The first section is entitled *Theorizing the West*, but this is not meant to imply that the chapters collected here provided an authoritative framework for what is to follow, let alone that

[7] The burgeoning literature on global governance, which has pointed to the emergence of new forms of regulation beyond the nation-state, runs into a similar problem. Starting from the observation that there is governance beyond the nation-state, it has been taken for granted that post-, trans- or supranational spaces have already emerged. Here, too, the question of how such political spaces are constituted in the first place receives little attention.

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there are no distinctly theoretical efforts in the subsequent chapters. On the contrary, the broadly reconstructive approach implicit in focusing on practical uses of 'the West' requires each and every chapter to engage in both conceptual and substantive research at the same time. Similarly, that the second section is entitled *The West in Use* is not meant to imply that these were the only chapters engaging in the reconstruction of specific uses of the West, much as the focus on *Transformations of the Western Institutional Order* is not exclusive to the chapters collected in the third section. Still, the relative emphasis of these respective concerns is distributed unevenly across the chapters, and this is all we mean to highlight by proposing such a categorization.

Specifically, *Stefano Guzzini* addresses the question of how 'the West' operates as a 'geographic imaginary within a context of geopolitical thought'. Theorizing 'the West' here boils down to tracing specific (and contested) articulations of what the West may stand for within different national discursive contexts. *Ole Wæver* moves beyond national spaces by asking whether 'the West' will be 'a powerful category in the future' in contrast to competing (and overlapping) 'other We's'. Posing the question in this fashion suggests a theoretical approach which culminates in a prediction. For Wæver a mixture of polarity analysis and foreign policy outlook of major powers forms the basis for 'predicting future discourses' in which 'the West' (at least as a category) is declining. Whereas 'the West' is either multiply applied in diverse national geopolitical discourses, as in Guzzini's contribution, or seen to be in decline overall from a macro-analytical perspective, as in Wæver's chapter, *Harald Müller* theorizes the West as a universalist ideology which is deployed to justify and perpetuate the powerful global position of states located mainly in the North Atlantic space. In particular Müller castigates the normative impulses feeding liberal interventionism. He pleads for a rehabilitation of state sovereignty and non-intervention in order to reinstate basic rights of self-determination to the non-Western 'rest' of the globe. *Patrick Jackson* shares with Harald Müller an outlook on 'the West' which conceives it primarily in terms of a universalist (and, presumably, fairly coherent) set of ideas. Yet in examining the rise and fall of 'Western civilization' discourses in the context of Samuel Huntington's book on 'The Clash of Civilizations', Jackson shifts the focus back to the discursive level. He shows how 'the West' was linked to the discourse of 'containment' and how it gradually vanished after the mid-1990s, especially after 9/11. Different as they are in their substantive outlook, all three chapters share a particular mode of interrogating the West. Theorizing the West is *not* a quest for absolute foundations, forging a master definition meant to trump all others, but rather an

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ongoing inquiry into the performative consequences of its uses in political practice.

Brent Steele starts off the second section on *The West in Use* with an analysis of 'self-interrogative imaging', a set of practices that thrives on the difference between an aesthetically idealized US Self and the harrowing experience of being exposed to images thwarting such idealizations. Taking the 2004 Fallujah incident as an example, Steele shows how the idealized image of the US as the 'standard-bearer' of Western values was at the same time actualized and called into question. It is precisely because aesthetic self-images can never be fully stabilized, Steele concludes, that they remain open to critique and counter-power. *Benjamin Herborth* shares Steele's concern for the ramifications of the post-9/11 war on terror on democratic practice. The discursive salience of a 'terrorist threat to the West', he argues, triggers an ongoing securitization spiral gradually submerging what is hailed as the normative core of 'the West' in the name of its defense. In an analysis of the notorious *Torture Memos*, Herborth shows how such a logic of securitization then gradually transforms into a technocratic logic of risk, which works to exempt practices of torture and extraordinary rendition from political accountability.

While Steele and Herborth focus on the dangers of 'de-Westernizing the West' and the ensuing tension between the fragility and tenacity of democratic practice, which typically remains situated at the level of the nation-state, the chapters by Schlag and Weber interrogate dynamics of securitizing and desecuritizing the West at a higher level of aggregation. *Gabi Schlag* focuses on the reconstitution of NATO through the performative enactment of a securitized politics of identity, which can be tracked from the earliest stages of the alliance to the most recent efforts to redefine its operational scope. Casting itself as the primary institutional embodiment of 'the West' and its first line of defense, Schlag argues, NATO has displayed a creative array of practices of self-authorization, which ensured that it would remain safely in business after the end of the Cold War. *Christian Weber* moves beyond the internal institutional organization of the West to an even higher level of aggregation, namely that of great power rivalry. In dealing with China and Russia, the prime candidates for the role of a rivaling great power, Europe and the US are found to project a strong sense of moral superiority. The display of 'Western universalism', however, turns out to be paradoxical even on the inside, for the vibrant public endorsement of shared commitments to universal values, at closer scrutiny, tends to conceal a more complex and multifarious discursive landscape encompassing both securitizing and desecuritizing dynamics. A complex and multifarious ensemble of references to the

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West lies also at the center of *Ted Hopf's* chapter. Where Weber focuses on Western and, in particular, transatlantic policies towards China and Russia, Hopf delves into Russia's struggles to situate itself vis-à-vis the West to uncover a disjuncture between an elite-centered move towards neoliberal adaptation and a 'strategy of selective disengagement with the West and non-participation in its hegemonic order'. The tension between these alternatives, Hopf shows, plays out not only at the level of alternative common senses, but also in confrontation with Russia's material power base, which remains distinctly semi-peripheral. All five chapters thus start from concrete empirical sites in order to interrogate how the West is being used, and more specifically how it serves in different ways to constitute, shape, and constrain horizons of political possibility.

The two chapters in the final section share a perspective on material *and* ideational dimensions of 'Westernness' with a focus on transformative dynamics. *Gunther Hellmann* focuses on classical security issues and concentrates his analysis of the transformation of 'the West' on one of its prominent theatres, Europe in general and the European Union in particular. Observing a gradual shift from traditional notions of 'national security' to 'transnational security' in European security discourse, he finds striking differences in references to 'the West' between the EU and the US based on a comparative reading of European and US security doctrines. Instead of defending a classical 'transatlantic West', Europeans are gradually shifting to a redefinition of 'Westernness' in terms of a globally engaging 'Europe'. *Matthew Evangelista* examines the transformation of the 'end of the Cold War'. His interest in explaining 'how the "End of the Cold War" ended' is driven by two curiosities: (a) the rise and fall in Russia of 'the West' as an appealing set of ideas *and* as a coalition of states which might serve as a partner in a project of de-securitization, and (b) the different ways in which international relations as a discipline tried to come to grips with the 'end of the Cold War'. Evangelista argues that two sets of causes were feeding into each other: first, a preoccupation with domestic concerns in the US and an accompanying lack of empathy for the internal struggles and perceptions of 'Western' alternatives within Russia, and, second Russian disillusionment with 'Western' solutions to domestic as well as international transformation, which in turn stimulated a search for distinctly Russian alternatives.

Both chapters engage most directly with what is commonly associated with 'the West' in everyday political language, namely its manifestation in both formal institutions and broader configurations of global order.

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They do so, however, without ascribing the attribute 'Western' and its implicit normative hierarchicalizations to a particular institutional setting in advance, thus opening up the possibility of a problem-based turn in discussions of global order, which benefits from a focus on contested uses of the West in concrete institutional settings.

In the concluding chapter, *Lene Hansen* examines 'what "the West" does' in the individual chapters. In a 'strategic summary reading' she highlights differences at the ontological, epistemological and methodological level and asks what these differences 'tell us about "the West"'. In Hansen's view this diversity of approaches can be reconstructed as an overarching research agenda of 'the West' in terms of an 'ontology in material/discursive action'. Rather than seeing a material-ideational 'front line', she finds that a 'loose analytical framework that theorizes "the West" as made up by institutions, collective "we"-concepts, and values could be said to unite the book's contributions'. Thus, rather than defining the task of 'theorizing' as one which ought to reduce complexity, the chapters as a whole can be read as a plea for building up and rendering intelligible the complexity of the phenomena at hand. This, Hansen concludes, nicely fits the task of 'de-monolithicizing "the West"', which, normatively speaking, could be a major task for how the 'inside' of 'the West' might be tackled in future research projects.

It is precisely in the service of such a 'de-monolithicization' that we have opted to refrain from imposing a single, overarching theoretical framework on the volume, which would then reduce the task of individual chapters to a mere application of what has been theoretically stipulated in advance. The conceptually and theoretically pluralist structure of the volume thus corresponds directly to an understanding of the West itself as multi-faceted, at times even paradoxical. Individual uses of the West may often appear to operate as moves towards political closure. A strong universalization of all things Western implies a tendency to remove alternatives from sight. In the light of the manifold and often contradictory uses of the West that we find in political discourse, however, such a closure can never be fully successful, and it is precisely due to the impossibility of such a closure that the concept of the West, contrary to the surface implications of its dominant deployments, remains a site of discursive struggle and contestation. This is not the place to go on theorizing. We do hope, however, that lines of arguments such as these may serve as an example of how 'the West', though interesting in and of itself, can be understood as a site through which broader debates on ordering the global can be opened up to inquiry and contestation.

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The notion of 'the West' is commonly used in politics, the media, and in the academic world. To date, our idea of 'the West' has been largely assumed and effective, but has not been examined in sufficient detail. *Uses of the West* combines a range of original and topical approaches to evaluate what 'the West' does, and how it is being used in everyday political practice. This book examines a range of 'uses of the West', and traces how 'the West' works in a broad array of conceptual and empirical contexts, ranging from the return of geopolitics – via a critical review of the debates surrounding Samuel Huntington's 'clash of civilization' thesis – to the question of the future of the West. Analysis extends further to the repercussions of the war on terror on Western democracy, the processes of delineating the Western from the non-Western, as well as observations of the institutional transformations of Western order.

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