

CONSTRUCTING IDENTITIES AND DEFINING THE NATION:

GERMANY SINCE 1949

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A THESIS

Submitted to
The College of arts and Sciences

at

West Virginia

in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Master of Arts

in European History

Department of History

Morgantown, West Virginia

1998

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ABSTRACT

Not long after Germans began the historic task of dismantling the Berlin Wall in 1989, their country was again reunited after forty-five years of division. For the second time in less than a century, a majority of Europe's Germans were brought together under the banner of a single political sovereignty. As the enlarged Federal Republic psychologically reorients and physically reconstructs itself, the event is likely to have continued European and worldwide implications. Understanding the new Germany's internal development and its evolving self-perceptions is to conceive of the country's role now and in the years ahead; central to understanding Germany today is its postwar history. The predominant element which dictated German identity, or loss of identity, in the past half century was the painful political partition imposed from beyond German borders following the Second World War. This remarkable experiment conducted by the world's postwar superpowers attempted to recast separately organized polities into discrete nations of socialists and democrats. During the decades of coexistence, Germans on either side of the Iron Curtain lived very different lives under opposing social and political structures. The result was a real and observable diverging evolution, the effects of which persist in the post-unification era. While the respective groups, the East Germans and West Germans, were exposed to varying influences, the postwar separation left its mark on the whole German countenance.

This thesis will argue that, while political, social, ideological, and economic forces indeed reshaped the lives of East and West Germans in very different ways, the self-definitions constructed in the postwar era only added a new dimension to the

dormant, but still extant, national identity of the Germans; they did not engender two distinct nations. This discussion will follow the course of German coexistence, examine the influences which formed the contours of identity, and attempt to gauge popular responses to the challenges of the postwar partition. Additionally, an effort will be made to demonstrate the conflicts of post-unification society as consequences of the division.

This thesis will offer an explanation of the most severe problems in Germany since 1990 as symptoms directly linked to a new crisis of identity, one which has beset the reunited nation and prevented little more than formal unification, by elucidating their meaning in a broader social historical context. It will also suggest a solution to the ostensibly impassable problem that plagues Germany by identifying the less-celebrated, but promising, foundations of a stable future. The goal of this research will be to gain a greater understanding of the dissociation and conflict that have followed the optimism of the seemingly auspicious revolution. Although most literature separately addresses the disruptive events in German society and seeks to expound them individually, evidence shows that they are interrelated and that they may be interpreted as explicitly associated to this central, underlying problem of identity. A close look at German society reveals what may be needed to resolve this confusion and where it may be found. However, attention should first be given to traditional German concepts of national identity before examining society's three most vexing matters for the nation's sense of self in the new era. This facilitates a more accurate interpretation of contemporary events and an awareness of the possible solution, which is likely to entail reclaiming the common heritage of both East and West Germans.

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank the West Virginia University Department of History for the financial support it provided during my enrollment in the graduate program. I would also like to extend my appreciation to the parents of the late Professor Dennis O'Brien for establishing a memorial scholarship in their son's name. In the summer of 1998, this award allowed me to travel to Germany and attend a language program at the University of Bamberg. This invaluable learning experience was a memorable introduction to the nation, which in 1996 became, rather naturally, the focus of my education.

It is with special gratitude and respect that I acknowledge the individuals who most directly influenced this work. Dr. Robert Blobaum, who has guided me since the beginning of my M.A. studies at West Virginia University, served as the principal advisor to this thesis. His impression on my approach to history has been the greatest and will no doubt prove indelible. Dr. Jürgen Schlunk of the Department of Foreign Languages, who arranged and directed my time in Germany in August, shared with me his cultural insights to his native land. His enthusiasm for my work was tremendous encouragement. Dr. Katherine Aaslestad, whose expertise in nineteenth-century Germany informed a much needed historical background for this thesis, never hesitated to discuss at length with me recent historiography and issues of identity. I only regret that her arrival at the university did not coincide with my own. Finally, I want to express my thanks to my mother, from whom I inherited my fascination with history, for her unwavering moral support during this endeavor.

ABBREVIATIONS

| | |
|------|------------------------------------|
| CDU | Christian Democratic Union |
| FDJ | Free German Youth |
| FRG | Federal Republic of Germany |
| GDR | German Democratic Republic |
| KPD | Communist Party of Germany |
| NATO | North Atlantic Treaty Organization |
| RAF | Red Army Faction |
| SED | Socialist Unity Party |
| SMAD | Soviet Military Administration |
| SPD | Social Democratic Party |

CHAPTER 1

Introduction

In May 1945, the Thousand-Year Reich of Adolf Hitler's Germany lay in ruins, decimated by a coalition of the world's strongest armies. The apocalyptic end of the Nazi dictatorship marked the beginning of a new chapter in German history. The moment's significance was encased in the term 'zero hour,' the point at which the old Germany vanished. Women cleared rubble from the streets of the bombed capital in the absence of healthy, young men; the country's wartime leaders awaited trial for unspeakable crimes against humanity; and a new group of individuals stepped forward to guide the powerless country, bowing before the Allied victors. The political rebirth of Germany four years after the zero hour came in the form of two separate states divided by what would become a fortified inner-German frontier, the Elbe River. It was perceived by Germans as an artificial partition, the result of occupation and international politics, but it signaled a new start nonetheless. Indeed the division of Germany was imposed by external powers, but in one sense it was perhaps less unnatural than initially believed. The 'belated nation' had only entered the European scene in 1871 when the Iron Chancellor, Otto von Bismarck, soldered together his empire. Until then, the Germans had known nothing but political fragmentation. Still, in the broken pride of a once confident, powerful, and united country, a profound hope for reunification attended the new disarrangement.

For four decades, the two Germanies existed side by side, their individual borders etched separately into the map of Europe. It seemed a necessary situation in the minds of

European and American statesmen, the only way to stabilize the continent and ensure its restive peace. The divided Germany would preclude renewed German aggression and balance the ambitions of the world's new superpowers. The strategic value of their truncated and split homeland would keep seventeen million Germans east of the Elbe River from fifty million of their former countrymen indefinitely. The segregated populations would live their postwar lives always aware of the line drawn by politicians and cartographers through their country.

Years passed, new Germans were born, and lifestyles, political values, and attitudes all reflected the consequences of division. East and West Germans, it seemed, were growing apart. Some observers worried about the existence of the nation in the severed fatherland. Historian Gebhard Schweigler, for one, concluded in 1975 that the national question had been solved: the Germans had become two separate peoples, each with its own national consciousness predicated on the new political sovereignties.¹ Schweigler had recently witnessed a series of treaties between the two states, ostensibly solidifying their political division; he was likely convinced by the West's apparent acquiescence and the strengthening policy of separation in the East at the time, which seemed to concede the permanence of partition.

The environment for detached development would continue. Thereafter, the influences became increasingly great. The East German Revolution in the next decade could not be imagined. When it came, though, it seemed inevitable, a matter of fate. How then could two states of opposing social orders and political structures, on apparently diverging paths, and in the process of separate development suddenly and eagerly reaffirm their old bonds and jump headlong into rapid reunification? In the aftermath of

forty years of division, a peaceful people's revolution, and an unexpected merger, this question begs an explanation. Konrad Jarausch has attempted to make sense of this astonishing reversal by examining the East Germans' increasingly visible dissatisfaction with and reaction to the Socialist Unity Party regime in the late 1980s, their mounting attraction to the West's freedom and prosperity, and the discourse of the reunification process itself.²

When the Berlin Wall lost its function as the most definitive Cold War symbol of a divided Germany on 9 November 1989, it seemed at last that unification could be achieved. Universal optimism and inspired alacrity within the two countries compelled the hurried pace of uniting, while politicians spoke of the rare and historic opportunity to reestablish what had been ruefully separated at the end of World War II. Soon, it became clear that the intervening years had not passed without change in the two Germanies, but initially, the extent of their diverging evolution was greatly miscalculated. During the euphoria of 1990 while unification was being negotiated, an article in *Newsweek* magazine, entitled "The Myth of German Unity," warned that "the Germans are ignoring a little secret. The new Germany will be one nation but two peoples." The author, Michael Meyer, foreshadowed the troubles that awaited by adding, "They believed that only an artificial border has divided them."³ The process of uniting the two Germanies has proved more formidable than expected, and its attendant difficulties have illustrated that a wide fissure does indeed exist. The nature of this lingering separation has been the subject of great concern. In the light of reunification's unforeseen psychological barriers, questions have been raised once again about the endurance of the nation. The distinctions formed during estrangement have been sharp enough to make East and West Germans at

least appear incompatible. Recent history's developments are irreversible, though, and Germans now share a single republic. The search for a corresponding national identity has begun in earnest, probably because the new country's progress, prosperity, fulfillment, and stability are known to depend on a united people. But this search has just begun, and uncertainty persists. Confusion over the new German identity has become the legacy of the Cold War division; locating this identity has become the challenge of the post-*Wende* era.

THE NATIONAL QUESTION IN THE ZERO HOUR

The situation that would characterize German life in the postwar era had its earliest inception in the minds of the Allied heads-of-state a year and a half before the war's end. When the leaders of the Big Three Powers met in Teheran at the end of November 1943, Hitler's military was in retreat, and with American entry into the war, German capitulation finally seemed nearer. At the conference, Churchill, Roosevelt, and Stalin consequently discussed for the first time their plans for the treatment and possible arrangement of Germany once the Nazi regime had been defeated. The ultimate reflection of the growing East-West standoff, the eventual outcome would appear different from the plans formulated in Teheran or any other conference of the Allies. In 1943, while the atmosphere of cooperation still existed between the Western governments and the Soviet Union, it was agreed that the United Nations would control certain areas of Germany, that German territory in the east would be ceded to Poland as indemnity, and that the former Reich would be reconfigured into a constellation of autonomous states. These ideas were

solidified when the European Advisory Committee drew up the Protocols on Zones of Occupation in the autumn of 1944, which defined the future fragments of the defeated country.⁴

At the Yalta Conference in February 1945, the three leaders made further decisions concerning Germany's future. They therefore expected the establishment of a control council, sought confirmation of the protocols on the proposed occupation zones, and accepted France as an occupying power, in addition to requiring unconditional surrender, demilitarization, disarmament, and war reparations.⁵ With the end of the war in sight, the victorious leaders tightened their grip on the vanquished country. In taking such a strong hand collectively in Germany's postwar rearrangement, the four powers found themselves face to face at the center of the European continent. Soon, their diverging expectations and competing geopolitical strategic concerns would place considerable strains on their working relationships. The Cold War was approaching, and its consequences for Germans would be inescapable. The German national question would be placed in a new context; it would become more a matter of the intercontinental struggle for power than the search for stable self-determination for the German people.

Before the escalating tensions between East and West redirected the course of German postwar development, Germany was still seen as the greatest threat to European peace. Twice in half a century world wars had erupted with the Germans at the center of the turmoil. For some, it seemed the only obstacle to lasting peace in the new era was a solution to the German question. Thus, suggestions were made in the hope of settling the problem which historically had precluded German fulfillment and disrupted European stability. One such offered solution was the Morgenthau Plan of 1944, named for the

American Secretary of the Treasury, Henry Morgenthau. In the closing years of the war, this radical proposal of enforced pastoralization gave greater weight to achieving European peace than to satisfying German interests. It envisioned the new country as a large agrarian state at the continent's center. According to the plan, Germany would be thoroughly demilitarized and politically decentralized as well as stripped of any industrial capacity. It also outlined a new set of borders for what would be a fragmented, crop-raising nation. Though the Morgenthau Plan was not the selected approach for managing postwar Germany, some of its recommendations were enacted in the US zone.⁶ The plan is telling in that it represents the kinds of sentiments that existed during these years. In the eyes of those who supported the proposition, Germany was the deviant force at the center of Europe which needed to be restrained. For this reason when the war ended, the future of Germany entered the hands of its conquerors. The German national question became a European priority for maintaining peace; the nation would not be left alone to reconstruct itself. This would have serious implications for Germans, their country, and their sense of national identity when the relationship between the prevailing powers changed and Germany became the battleground of the Cold War.

As early as 1946, the conflict between the West and the Soviet Union already appeared imminent. At the Paris Council of Foreign Ministers, which convened in April, French representatives introduced their proposals for the Saar and Ruhr regions in addition to the scheme to deindustrialize the rest of Germany. The Soviet Foreign Minister, Viacheslav M. Molotov, however, rejected the offer, calling instead for increased German industrial productivity. Molotov also refused the Western plan to merge the four zones of occupation, but insisted on the creation of an all-German

government.⁷ The Soviets, who expected to benefit materially from rebuilt German industry and intended to influence political events in the new Germany, became increasingly less accommodating to Western aims.

Discussions on the future of Germany continued in the following year when the widening rift became ever more apparent. Meetings of foreign ministers in Moscow and in London in 1947 produced more obvious signs of tensions. At these talks, the US, Britain, and France proposed the formation of a federative organization of government for the new country, but the Soviet foreign minister insisted on a centralized one. Molotov also accused the Western Powers of breaking with the agreements made at the first postwar conference in Potsdam in 1945 in response to American and British efforts to unify the economies of their zones of occupation. American General George C. Marshall, who had declared that previous agreements between the major powers were misinterpreted by the Soviets, similarly criticized their attempts of economic reform in the eastern zone. The issue of war reparations, too, became a point of contention when Molotov demanded a revision of reparations percentages which had been decided upon in January 1946. The London Council of Foreign Ministers in the winter of 1947 marked the end of Western efforts to cooperate with the USSR.⁸ Thus began the period of accepted estrangement, which led eventually to hostile alienation. Diplomacy broke down, and the Cold War commenced. Germany became the focus of international discord.

The proclaimed differences between East and West culminated for Germany in 1949 in the creation of dichotomous political states, each representing the ideological order of its occupiers and each attesting to the polarized world which had emerged since the end of the war. The German zones of occupation had gained strategic value in this

new environment. Accordingly, the Western Allies pulled West Germany into its sphere of influence, braced it with American foreign policy toward the USSR, and prepared to secure the Western world from the perceived threat of communism.⁹ Likewise, the Soviets viewed East Germany as the point at which the extension of Western imperialism would be halted, and perhaps turned on its heel, and fortified the German Democratic Republic (GDR) with their own ideology and ambitions. Even as the partition was being formalized, though, it was generally believed among Germans that the situation was only temporary. The nation would soon be reconnected, it was assumed.¹⁰ In the early years, there was little reason to fear that the ideological rift between the superpowers would effect a change in identity or recreate Germans in separate forms. But it would take over forty years to restore unity, and during the uncertain age, concern for the nation's endurance would eventually rise. The question of a divided nation in the heart of Europe, however, would continue to represent, first and foremost, the greater continental and global separation.

For nearly half a century, divided Germany served primarily as a fulcrum for sustaining a precarious international balance of power. Its occupiers perhaps considered the possibility of reunification but would only accept such a drastic change in the equilibrium if it would prove to be advantageous for themselves in the political standoff. In reality, there existed little commitment to German concerns, like reunification. One early postwar historian commented in 1953 on the country's status and its function: "What we see in Germany is a greater drama than that of Germany alone, extending far beyond the particular situation of German politics or the fact of German recovery, which seem in comparison almost provincial Germany is the laboratory in which . . . the

democratic experiment and the totalitarian experiment are being tested”¹¹ In the new world, the German question would remain unanswered, its leaders incapable and its occupiers unwilling to solve the problem. And so for the second half of the twentieth century, national unity, a stable government, peaceful self-determination, and a territorially integrated country eluded the German nation as they had in previous centuries.

A NATION'S IDENTITY

Searching for a nation's identity presents the historian with a particularly difficult task. Identity is an elusive concept which cannot be examined in the same manner as a decisive military campaign or pivotal diplomatic breakthrough. It is nearly impossible to describe national identity directly. Rather, the most successful approach may be to investigate the events which have affected an entire nation. This technique, describing not the object but the things which surround it, may yield the clearest image of national self-perceptions. Still, when taking this course, fundamental questions about national identity can arise, the most potentially disarming one being 'does such a thing exist?' Is it possible for a politically organized people with a common cultural heritage and common historical memories to share a collective identity? Scholars began looking for the answer to this characteristically post-Cold War question after the second 'Springtime of Nations' set free the different nations of East Central Europe from the control of the Soviet Union

in 1989. Defining exactly what a national identity is has remained daunting, however, perhaps because the sources of this kind of identity are not so obvious. Perhaps, it is because identities are intrinsically vague and shifting and are susceptible to socioeconomic and environmental changes. Clearly, Central European identities before and after the collapse of communism have been subject to tremendous influences during this century. Given the especially unique postwar arrangement of the two Germanies, searching for a German national identity could appear foolhardy. But, because identities are constructed over time and shaped immeasurably by historical events both past and present, the historian has some advantage in the quest to uncover an identity's origins and possibly reveal its substance.

Under the rubric of history, it is possible to examine the events which have redrawn the lines of national identity. It is also possible to measure the extent to which identities have changed over the course of time as a result of national experiences. In his valuable 1991 work on the topic, British sociologist Anthony D. Smith presented what he believed to be the five fundamental features of national identity. They are indeed crucial in the formation of identity and include a historic homeland, common historical myths and memories, a mass public culture, common legal rights for all members, and a common economy.¹² Interestingly, all of these indicators of identity underwent change in Germany after 1949. None were unaffected by the Cold War partition. It can be safely assumed that the national identity of the postwar Germans was reconfigured according to these influences of the age, and the identity of Germans today has in part been molded by these factors as well. Being so essential to identity, each of Smith's features provides a focal point for research. Equally important, politics and ruling governments have a place

in the study of Germany's postwar layers of identity. Elections seemingly reflect the will of the people, offering clues to their thoughts, and the legal institutions of a country are given the responsibility of defining the values of a people, expressing either traditional or appropriated customs. The thesis presented here addresses these aspects of Germany since 1949 in an attempt to understand the German experience and the recently reconfigured question of identity.

If it can be said with certainty that nations exist, does it follow that each nation possesses its own corresponding and distinct identity, or any identity at all? In the last two centuries, Europe's nations have experienced different historical evolutions, created individual cultural vocabularies, struggled with unique internal crises, and at times, considered themselves separate from all others. These distinctions appear as the most indisputable evidence that nations are not all the same. Each nation has been shaped by the course of its own development. Though adhering more or less to the general themes of modern European history, the Germans, like the French or Poles, have experienced that history according to their own pattern in the last two hundred years. The result has been a nation as individual as its history. Knowledge of national, historical evolution is central to the existence of national identity. It imparts uniqueness. But identity must be more than an awareness of history. Anthony D. Smith has also stressed the importance of the process of self-definition in the creation of identity.¹³ This is critical, because when people in the present define themselves with a knowledge of the past, they not only seek to understand themselves, but also incorporate their inherited identity, adding another dimension. National identity consists of this accumulation. Though it is often debated,

national identity is an assemblage of self-assessments and self-definitions commonly held and embraced by the members of a nation.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND HISTORIOGRAPHICAL PROBLEMS

In assessing the consequences of the postwar division, which is the aim of this thesis, the search for a single German national identity is the search for a single German nation. Locating one distinct national identity would reveal the endurance of the German nation despite separation and prove the cultural and psychological limits of the Cold War political partition, because identity is formed through the culture and consciousness of an existing nation. The issue of German identity has for this reason elicited debate and discussion among scholars in the years since reunification. The list of titles on the subject is growing daily. Much of this work has centered on the dilemma of the new Germany, but historians have also begun examining identity in the divided years as well. Surprisingly, few works were produced on the topic before 1989, and nearly no mention is made of German identity in periodicals, journals, or books prior to the early 1970s. Only after the watershed Basic Treaty in 1972 did scholars give it any attention at all. Gebhard Schweigler's notable *National Consciousness in Divided Germany*, published in the mid-1970s, was the first to directly address the matter, but it was prematurely conclusive. Henry Kirsch in 1985 produced *The German Democratic Republic: The Search for Identity*, but it focused on the SED's efforts to form a separate sovereign state and achieve international legitimacy and failed to assess the perceptions of GDR citizens.¹⁴ Among the more recent work, a consensus has been reached: East and West

Germans had formed their own identities before 1989. Mary Fulbrook, who has written much on the topic, has perhaps come closest to understanding the depth of German identity's postwar development. She has conceded some growth of separate East and West identities but limits their evolution.¹⁵ Others have claimed that East and West Germans have become irreversibly separated from one another. However, such definite assessments of the infinitely complex national self-perceptions fail to explain the enthusiastic drive toward unity in 1990 or the lingering commitment to the abstract concept of nationhood before the 1989 Revolution, which appears to have a uniquely important place in the German mentality. While much has been written about the problems of social and cultural reintegration, the existing literature does not adequately explain the psychological development of the German population before or after the fall of the Berlin Wall. It also fails to examine in integrated analysis the various influences on identity to recreate a full account of the causes of Germany's post-unification identity crisis. Though some commentators have accurately determined what is required to resolve the present crisis, specific examples of this solution are scarce. Recovering the shared past seems to be the answer, but the most obvious ways of achieving this have been overlooked in existing literature. These deficiencies necessitate a better explanation of the present predicament, its postwar origins, and its possible solution.

This thesis will argue that, while political, social, ideological, and economic forces indeed reshaped the lives of East and West Germans in very different ways, the self-definitions constructed in the postwar era only added a new dimension to the dormant, but still extant, national identity of the Germans; they did not engender two distinct nations. This discussion will follow the course of German coexistence, examine

the influences which formed the contours of identity, and attempt to gauge popular responses to the challenges of the postwar partition. Additionally, an effort will be made to demonstrate the conflicts of post-unification society as consequences of the division.

This thesis will offer an explanation of the most severe problems in Germany since 1990 as symptoms directly linked to a new crisis of identity, one which has beset the reunited nation and prevented little more than formal unification, by elucidating their meaning in a broader social historical context. It will also suggest a solution to the ostensibly impassable problem that plagues Germany by identifying the less-celebrated, but promising, foundations of a stable future. One goal of this research has been to gain a greater understanding of the dissociation and conflict that have followed the optimism of the seemingly auspicious revolution. Although most literature separately addresses the disruptive events in German society and seeks to expound them individually, evidence shows that they are interrelated and that they may be interpreted as explicitly associated to this central, underlying problem of identity. A close look at German society reveals what may be needed to resolve this confusion and where it may be found. This perspective facilitates a more accurate interpretation of contemporary events and an awareness of the possible solution, which is likely to entail reclaiming the common heritage of both East and West Germans through renewed appreciation for the country's historic architecture, its natural landscapes, and its national history.

CHAPTER ONE NOTES

¹ For Gebhard Schweigler's analysis, see *National Consciousness in Divided Germany* (London: Sage Publications, Ltd., 1975).

² For Jarasch's account of the forces that propelled revolution and reunification, see *The Rush to German Unity* (New York: Oxford University Press, Inc., 1994).

³ Michael Meyer, "The Myth of German Unity," *Newsweek*, 9 July 1990, 37.

⁴ Walther Hubatsch, et. al., eds., *The German Question* (New York: Herder Book Center, 1967), 18-19.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 19-20.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 19.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 24.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 26-27.

⁹ Eleanor Lansing Dulles, *One Germany or Two?: The Struggle at the Heart of Europe* (Stanford: Hoover Institution Press, 1970), 101.

¹⁰ Hans Mommsen, "History and National Identity: The Case of Germany," *German Studies Review* 6 (October 1983): 560.

¹¹ Norbert Muhlen, *The Return of Germany: A Tale of Two Countries* (Chicago: Henry Regency Company, 1953), 296.

¹² Anthony D. Smith, *National Identity* (London: Penguin Books, 1991), 14.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 17.

¹⁴ Henry Krisch, *The German Democratic Republic: The Search for Identity* (Boulder: Westview Press, Inc., 1985).

¹⁵ For Fulbrook's analyses, see "Nation, State and Political Culture in Divided Germany, 1945-1990," in *The State of Germany*, John Brueilly, ed. (London: Longman Group UK Limited, 1992); *The Divided Nation: A History of Germany, 1918-1990* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992); and "Aspects of Society and Identity in the New Germany," *Dædalus* 123 (Winter 1994): 211-234.

CHAPTER 2

Historical Background: German National Unity before 1945

When in 1792 the citizens of France removed King Louis XVI from his throne in Paris, they were not only sounding the death knell for the *ancien regime*, but were also bringing to an end the old world order, which for centuries had shaped the lives of Europe's inhabitants. The ideals which had ignited the great, epoch-making revolution were passed to neighboring countries in succeeding years. The consequences of the French Revolution would pervade the continent, reshaping social and political structures and recasting the fates of millions. In the century that followed, the revolution of 1789 determined the course of historical evolution quite profoundly. The social and ruling institutions against which the people rebelled had been long-lived and stable. At the center of European monarchical states and empires stood divinely chosen families; societies viewed their monarchs as enduring focal points whose lives symbolized continuity and permanence. Providing a sturdy theological foundation, religion too played a vital role. God, at the center of the prevailing worldview, was everlasting. Additionally, the understanding of human history had remained relatively unchanged for centuries. These ideological structures were responsible for shaping common perceptions; they were, in short, responsible for giving human lives significance and purpose. But the explosion of revolution cracked the old solidity these forces had created and announced the beginning of the modern era.

At the birth of the new age, the collapse of traditional ideological and social structures coincided with the emergence of powerful, new influences in European society. These rising forces would transform people's perceptions of themselves and their places in society, which would itself be reconsidered. Inchoate industrialism was reorganizing

economies; the advances of science were realigning human knowledge of the universe, diminishing the role of God while reducing man's former prominence in the natural order; and the development of communications was rearranging interaction between people. Another particularly important precondition for the awakening of national communities has been revealed in the insightful discussion of Benedict Anderson in *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. The evolution of print technologies, Anderson explains, led to a wider dissemination of printed language, and thus was a crucial determinant in the formation of national consciousness and the rise of the nation as an abstract concept. In popular books and magazines among the increasingly literate populations of nineteenth-century Europe, printed language provided a national and understandable vocabulary for people of varying dialects. Print helped people define who were the members of a given "language field,"¹ that is, a given nation. This, Anderson maintains, was central to imagining the nation. It became possible to conceive of affinities between people who had never interacted but nonetheless belonged to the same linguistic and cultural group.² From Anderson's useful discourse of national consciousness in relation to cultural developments and social change, it is possible to proceed through the nineteenth century and examine early expressions of incipient national identity.

THE NINETEENTH-CENTURY GROWTH OF NATIONAL IDENTITY

When members of student organizations and fraternities participated in a relatively small festival at the Wartburg castle in 1817, they had gathered to celebrate the German cultural nation. Though they numbered only a few thousand, their meeting was significant. For the first time, a crowd had been brought together as an expression of German unity. Their activities were a reaction to the realities of political and social fragmentation, but the students' vision and interpretation of the nation is telling. They were inspired by the literary and artistic currents of Romanticism, which had emphasized national traditions, a shared

culture, and a glorified medieval past. The students consciously chose the site of their demonstration. The ruined medieval castle where Martin Luther had translated the Bible into German was the setting of their celebration of German cultural inheritance.³ They wore ancient Germanic dress, formed a torchlight procession, and sang and chanted.⁴ Language, as Benedict Anderson points out, did much to define the boundaries of a particular cultural sphere in the minds of nineteenth-century Europeans. This is evident in another important element of the German romantic idea of the nation seen at the festival: linguistic and cultural uniqueness. Students made nationalist speeches and burned books they deemed un-German.⁵ However, the Wartburg festival was modest in size and should not be mistaken as representative of popular perceptions.

In fact, after the Wartburg gathering, public celebrations of the nation were not held at all until the French revolution of 1830 again stirred the German populace.⁶ In what has been called by one historian “the first mass festival inspired by the aspiration of national unity,” some thirty thousand people assembled at another ancient ruined castle, this time in Hambach on the Rhine in 1832.⁷ A gathering not only of students but also burghers, artisans, and peasants, the Hambach festival was steeped in symbolism. The mood of romantic nationalism prevailed. Flags, ancient dress, and the other symbols of Wartburg were present. Here they served to convey to an even larger crowd the continuity of the nation and to bind the festival’s actors with nationalist sentiment. The main speaker, Johann August Wirth, called for freedom, nationality, and popular sovereignty for all Germans. Historian Hagen Schulze has noted that it was the concept of German nationhood which was responsible for uniting these disparate groups of varied political and socioeconomic backgrounds who took part in the celebration.⁸

From 1832 national identity grew among the population. The 1840s saw the building of national monuments and the formation of various professional associations and patriotic societies,⁹ which linked Germans from around the country. However, the liberal Revolution of 1848, paradoxically, disrupted national priorities. The imminent

reorganization of the political structure, which was likely to redistribute political power among the German states, forced on people a decision of loyalty. It was believed that for some states power would be curtailed or lost altogether, while some states could become stronger, more influential, even dominant, in certain regions. At the moment of dramatic political change, local and regional allegiances stepped in, hindering the revolution and forestalling national unity.

After a decade of dormancy, the centennial anniversary celebrations of Schiller's birth provided the basis for national cultural revival in 1859. Nationalist societies, festivals, and literature reminiscent of the *Vormärz* period reappeared. Processions were carried out in Hamburg, Stuttgart, Berlin, and Frankfurt by workers, students, and bourgeois. Schiller, the symbol of freedom and common culture for many Germans, was the appropriate focal point around which to declare national unity.¹⁰ Irrespective of the ambitions of the German populace, unity, in the form of a political state, was approaching.

In the first half of the nineteenth century, common economic interests among the politically fragmented Germans led to a customs union. The *Zollverein* attempted to unify the economy of the German lands, alleviating internal tariffs and promoting growth. At the same time, it provided protection from the exploitative treatment of surrounding countries. Despite its clearly economic aims, the *Zollverein's* arrangement under Prussian leadership was not without political implications. In its struggle for hegemony in Central Europe, Prussia gained an increasingly stronger position *vis-à-vis* Austria. While Prussia was indeed the custom union's dominant player, other German states benefited as well, and by the 1830s, most were enjoying unrestricted trade with their neighbors. However, many port cities in the north, dependent on international trade, considered the duties imposed on imports by the *Zollverein* too great a detriment to their own local economies and refused to join, another example of regional interests superseding national ones. Though it is likely that the exclusion of cities like Hamburg, Hanover, and Lübeck affected its overall success, the customs union presented an early image of a formally unified Germany. Its eventual

failure, though, was hastened by preexisting conditions in the center of Europe. Without a central government in the German lands, infrastructure, communications, and commerce had not been developed on a regional rather than national scale. The political and economic regionalisms, which consequently formed, could not be overcome by the *Zollverein*.¹¹

On 18 January 1871, the Second Reich was formally proclaimed before defeated French dignitaries in the palace of Versailles at the end of the Franco-Prussian War. There was at last a politically unified German nation-state, but it had been forged by a Prussian politician with the aid of an army and not created by the will of the German people. Nonetheless, it was a long-awaited political sovereignty in the eyes of Otto von Bismarck, the result of his own efforts of state formation, which would promote economic growth and ensure formidable military might.

In an attempt to collect support for the new empire, the government undertook a range of policies designed to foster nationalism in its citizens. Public celebrations were now guided and decreed by the ruling conservative power. Military parades in which people were relegated to the sidelines now honored the state,¹² whereas in earlier years public celebrations expressed the desires of the people. In the name of protecting the state, Bismarck attempted to ban the Social Democratic Party (SPD) in 1878, vilifying socialists as *Reichsfeinde*, but his proposal to do so was not sanctioned by the *Reichstag*. He did manage to pass the 'Law for Combating the Criminal Aims of Social Democracy' before 1880, which forbade socialists' meetings and provided the police with excessive power in dealing with them.¹³ This anti-socialist legislation began a decade of official persecution of the SPD because of the perceived threat the party presented to the empire. Catholics and Poles, too, in Germany were subject to state harassment, the effects of Bismarck's *Kulturkampf*. His purely political aim was "to persuade all Germans to identify with the new state and involve themselves in its struggles."¹⁴ For many, however, Bismarck's imperial Germany did little to satisfy the spiritual longing for German unity.

In response to the Iron Chancellor's divisive politics and thoroughly pragmatic structural unification, a new nationalism emerged. Appealing mostly to lower middle-class Germans, *völkisch* nationalism was the late-nineteenth-century successor of romantic nationalism. Its proponents sought to retreat from Bismarck's faceless, industrial Germany in traditional concepts of the nation. Their idealization of rural peasant life, glorification of the past, and rejection of "modernity" signaled their disaffection. While much of *völkisch* nationalism was borrowed from the precepts of romanticism, it had gained a characteristic unique to its industrial age. From the pseudo-scientific legitimization of racial theory, it became increasingly centered on ethnic identity.¹⁵ These were compelling ideas to a number of Germans, because they felt the disunity of Bismarck's unification and opposed his government's attempts to construct an artificial, state-sponsored national identity.

In the end, the government's efforts to stoke nationalist feelings were less successful than the popular nationalism with which it competed. Still, when the chancellor's reign was ended by the new Kaiser in 1890, Germany was perhaps more divided than it was when he entered office in 1863. Wilhelm II, therefore, set out to build a national identity himself through festivals, monuments and other national symbols, and through the teaching of national history to the country's youth. International events in the early twentieth century would, for a brief time, help bridge the existing divisions by uniting the citizenry against external foes. Though national unity proved elusive in the nineteenth century, a growing awareness of a national identity was at the core of most efforts to achieve it.

Six years after Wilhelm II's ascension to the throne in 1888, a Saxon architect, Clemens Thieme, was given the responsibility of gathering financial support for a proposed national monument to commemorate the historic Battle of Leipzig. It was to be another highly visible expression in a series of efforts by the new Kaiser to cultivate conservative nationalism among the populace. Since 1890, the Kaiser's campaign to inspire national pride in his empire was omnipresent; public, visual representations of the nation abounded.

In 1894, Thieme organized the *Deutschen Patriotenbund* to collect the necessary funds for the monument's completion.¹⁶ Initially, the plan was to raise money from schoolchildren, but this proved insufficient. In time, contributions were drawn from various parts of German society. Fraternities, male choir societies, sharpshooting societies, and a trade union of commercial employees took up the cause and made donations.¹⁷ The city of Leipzig itself granted the land on which the monument would be built.¹⁸ Other cities from around Germany were expected to join the endeavor as well. Additional funds were raised through popular subscription, making the construction of the *Völkerschlachtdenkmal* a national effort.

Work began in the 1890s according to the designs of Bruno Schmitz. The monument, an enormous stone creation nearly four hundred feet tall with a massive base, was completed in time for the battle's one hundredth anniversary in 1913. On 18 October thirty-eight thousand people convened in the surrounding open spaces for its unveiling. In the same fields where eighty thousand men had been killed or wounded a century earlier in the Battle of Nations,¹⁹ those groups which supported the construction participated in the festivities marking the event at which Napoleon's army was defeated and the grip of foreign rule over Germans released. Because of its significance, the land around the monument was to be held as sacred; oak trees were to be planted as a memorial to the fallen soldiers and other great Germans of the past. Open areas, too, were incorporated into the design as the site for future gymnastic competitions among the youth and national festivals of the masses, which were thought to demonstrate the physical energy and spiritual vibrancy of the nation.²⁰

Inscribed on the huge, roughly hewn stone pedestal are the words *Gott mit uns* in six-foot letters.²¹ This clear reference to the nation by its use of the collective pronoun included contemporary Germans and was as much a message about unification as it was about the battle of 1813. Through heavy visual symbols the past was given particular attention. High above the sacred German soil, around the monument's crown, stand twelve

Teutonic knights forming a ring. A visitor to the monument might have felt that the knights, looking out in all directions, were watching over the German lands. In a solemn inner chamber, more knights stand guard around an eternal flame. Inside, visitors confront eight giant eyeless masks, which heighten the quiet gravity of the memorial.

The monument, however, served another purpose, one of greater relevance for Germans in the early twentieth century. It relayed a second message through its eclectic forms and its imagery. George Mosse writing in the 1970s noted traces of Roman architecture and even the Pyramids;²² a contemporary periodical, reporting the unveiling in 1913, as well commented on its combination of “Ultra-modern” and ancient Assyrian styles.²³ A peer of Thieme and Schmitz prescribed at the time of construction that such national monuments be designed to function as places of spiritual reflection, as churches once had. They could serve to join men in a “higher, cosmic community.”²⁴ The mountainous statue of the *Völkerschlachtdenkmal* and its allusion to the ancients reinforced the eternal endurance of the twentieth century community, the nation. Not only through its architectural classification did it recall the distant past. More directly, the presence of medieval knights conveyed the important message. The role of these giant figures was not to remind visitors of the war with a nineteenth-century dictator, but rather the long history of the German people. This evocation of historical memory helped define the nation and legitimized it by linking the present with the fabled past.

While the message of the *Völkerschlachtdenkmal* was not uncommon in the memorials, festivals, and romantic ideology of the nineteenth century, this monument presents an important distinction. Being the last of the great monuments built in the *Kaiserreich*, it was presented to the German people after several years of the Kaiser’s campaign to imbue his people with self-confidence. When the question of financing the national monument arose, donations from across the country were made. More so in the efforts to build it than in its significance after 1913, the monument removed ordinary Germans from their daily lives; it placed them in the nation. In their contributions, they

volunteered and participated. At the turn of the century, Germans were constructing the *Völkerschlachtdenkmal* and their nation as well.

THE *BURGFRIEDEN* OF 1914

In the years before 1914 social and political divisions persisted. Adding to the tensions was the changing face of Germany. The country was becoming urbanized; its economy was expanding and its population growing rapidly. Better hygiene and health care, including a program of immunization, had caused a noticeable fall in infant mortality rates. In the 1880s, immigration to North America slowed as well, and the growing masses found themselves more and more living in towns and cities. By 1907, Berlin had become home to 2 million people, 60% of whom had been born in the provinces. The cities swelled and changed to accommodate the swarms of new denizens. Electric trams, bicycles, telephones, department stores, plumbing, and other urban improvements transformed daily life. Exodus to the cities also meant more Germans were working in factories than on farms. Correspondingly, workers' organizations grew. By 1912, the Social Democratic Party, which championed workers' rights, was the largest political party in the Reich. The changes in Germans' lives were dramatic, and most everyone felt at least some anxiety because of them.

There was widespread dissatisfaction with the social order among the middle classes, notably visible in its youth. The members of youth movements, disenchanted as they were by German society, sought to form their own *Volksgemeinschaft* where the state failed to do so. In nature outings and communal activities, groups like the *Wandervogel* celebrated rural life and the German landscape. This was a reaction against Germany's rapid industrial transformation which, it was believed, had taken a spiritual toll on the nation. Many worried about the effects of modernization, modernity, and cosmopolitanism on the traditional German character. In this restive society, some wondered if the cult of

national unity, long promoted by the government, had ossified in the minds of the masses. The feeling of community among the diverse and growing population seemed problematic.²⁵

When international crises climaxed in July 1914, the diplomatic breakdown became a catalyst for German nationalism. An unprecedented sense of unity grew quickly in the gathering storm that would become the great European conflagration. Germany's perceived encirclement by the British, French, and Russians encouraged fear and hatred of national enemies. Consequently, the appeal of German solidarity grew. The new nationalism, produced from the rising tensions, acquired a definite character. It was considered in the heady days of imminent confrontation "a matter of instinct rather than reason, based on the fundamental ties between man and the soil of his country."²⁶ Kaiser Wilhelm, addressing a large and enthusiastic crowd in Berlin on 1 August, proclaimed, "Germans are all one now All differences are forgotten. As brothers we will achieve a mighty victory."²⁷ The *Burgfrieden*, or civic unity, he pronounced indeed existed, at least for a time. The war was welcomed by a majority of Germans and viewed as a defensive, national struggle. Jubilant masses gathered in the streets of German cities, singing patriotic songs when war was declared on Russia on the first day of August and then on France three days later.

In this highly charged climate, traditional divisions were bridged as evinced by the response of organizations which advocated the rights of women, gays, and Jews. Such groups, which represented German society's disenfranchised and marginalized minorities, joined the national cause with perhaps equal excitement and devotion. Even the historic rift between Catholicism and Protestantism was transcended. In a symbolic, open-air, interdenominational service in front of the *Reichstag* on 2 August, members of both faiths worshipped together. Even the leaders of the opposition SPD abandoned socialist internationalism and advocated war.²⁸ Preparation for the war also necessitated mobilization of the populace, the economy, and civil society for a concentrated effort. This could only be achieved through general cooperation and consensus.

The mounting international tensions prior to the war and the failure of diplomacy in the summer of 1914 unleashed zealous nationalisms in many European countries. In Germany, this development had special significance. A study of the search for internal unity finds the *Burgfrieden* of August to be the first instance of a truly national expression of solidarity in German history. But the conditions which created this previously unparalleled sentiment were fleeting, and coalescence proved short lived. The public's alacrity for war met the realities of modern warfare, and the national mission lost its importance. During the hardships of war, political leaders tried unsuccessfully to recreate the spirit of 1914 to revive the people's commitment to the war effort. Inflation, food shortages from Allied blockades, the unanticipated length of the war, and especially the high casualties from a brutal new battlefield effectively dissipated Germany's brief *Burgfrieden* experience.

The Battle of Verdun, which began in February 1916, marked the end of German unity on the homefront. The tremendous human losses quickly took their toll on the attitudes of the German citizenry. One of three major battles in 1916, Verdun represented a shift in military strategy; it came to define the nature of modern warfare. With the advent and acceptance of the intentional war of attrition at Verdun, the Great War entered a distinct phase of fighting, one of hopeless, mutual punishment. The British counter-offensive in the summer at the Somme further added to the number of casualties, which between the two campaigns then totaled 800,000 for the Germans.²⁹ Fighting continued at Ypres that year, and by 1917, the old romantic view of war, along with Germany's fleeting national unity, had passed.

The war left an indelible imprint on postwar society. Two million dead and four million wounded soldiers by 1918, the abdication of the monarch, a struggle for political control, and a devastated economy further burdened by war reparations precluded concern with national unity. As the country was saddled with the consequences of a terrible war, it became increasingly divided both politically and socioeconomically; the prewar divisions in

German society had resurfaced as the *Burgfrieden* of 1914 vanished. Until one war veteran's vision of a national community, predicated on perceived racial uniqueness, was supported by a willing German polity in the 1930s, the German national experience was more fragmented and divisive than united.

NATIONAL SOCIALISM'S *VOLKSGEMEINSCHAFT*

When the National Socialist German Workers Party came to power in 1933, Adolf Hitler's racial ideology was the chief ingredient in the Nazi view of the nation. A series of racial and social initiatives aimed at the general population were meant to achieve the ethnically homogenous and classless state the *Führer* had long envisioned. Through official policies, Hitler promoted and attempted to create a society based on the racial heritage and ancestry of the German people, touting the intrinsically superior characteristics of the Aryan race. He dreamt of a *Volksgemeinschaft*, 'a people's community.' But bringing the populace together in a racially defined and unified state required overcoming centuries-old religious, regional, and class divisions, which for generations had prevented German unity. Hence, Nazi propaganda regularly encouraged people to put 'the community before the individual' in the quest to win national unity.³⁰ For Hitler, who believed any 'pure' German regardless of class standing or occupation had some claim to equality,³¹ a new Germany would be all inclusive. For the first six years of his rule, in fact, domestic policies would do much to instill genuine feelings of unity within the once fractured nation. By 1936, unemployment, had ebbed, national confidence had recovered from the failures of Weimar, and it seemed the Nazi vision of a *Volksgemeinschaft* had been accepted by a people longing for solidarity.

To achieve the heightened national awareness of *Volksgemeinschaft* over traditional loyalties, the Nazi government employed persuasive propaganda measures. Through overt indoctrination and the transformation of everyday life, the new state shaped people's views

of the nation and their places in it. Radio, newspapers, posters, and other mass media eulogized the accomplishments of the regime and its plans to resurrect the country. Parades and rallies were a common function of the party, because of their visible and participatory nature. The party message was voiced, and the citizens were drawn into the celebrations. Even more effective were the social public gatherings, which nonetheless engendered the sense of community. State-sponsored social occasions, like cultural festivals and sporting events, symbolized a leveling of class differences and encouraged the homogenization of society.

The regime's need for social conformity also led to relief plans for the less fortunate members of the national community affected by economic hardship. The 'winter help' and 'one pot' programs promoted the feeling of belonging to the *Volksgemeinschaft* by appealing to the people's generosity and willingness to help their national comrades, *Volksgenossen*. Donating money, food, and clothing for distressed families was meant to develop personal connections to the larger community.³² Nazi efforts to consolidate the people were perhaps most notable, however, in the restructuring of the workplace and the lives of the workers. When the German Workers' Front (DAF) was formed in May 1933, the stated mission of the DAF was to replace the long-standing conflict between labor and management in German industry. In reality, the workers lost much of their negotiating power. Disagreement was to be overcome by trust and cooperation in the name of the *Volksgemeinschaft*; the needs of the community superseded the needs of the individual worker or factory owner, it was proclaimed. On the 'National Day of Labor,' workers and employers paraded together throughout Germany in an expression of German solidarity. The worker became an idealized, even glorified, member of the nation; and Hitler was espoused as the 'first worker of the nation.'³³

The working classes were given more than words, however, to earn their support for the regime and acceptance of the *Volksgemeinschaft*. Consumer goods were subsidized by the state to allow workers to enjoy what had previously been the exclusive pleasures of

the upper classes. The ‘Strength through Joy’ program promoted health and well-being and made it possible for workers to take vacations abroad and to eventually purchase automobiles. In the workplace, ‘Beauty of Work’ initiatives gave workers the freedom to enhance their environments.³⁴ While wages remained low, factories were given sports facilities, showers, nurseries, even gardens were added. In general, working conditions improved as a result of the Nazi government’s policies. All these benefits for the masses of Germans who composed the working classes were intended to place people in the ‘factory community,’ a component of the national community.

Between 1933 and 1939, Hitler succeeded in rebuilding German confidence and the feeling of togetherness, which had long eluded the nation. The Nazi efforts to cultivate a *Volksgemeinschaft* had forged German unity. It was a unity predicated on the notion of a common ethnic identity and reinforced by radical nationalism. It was successful because, “for most the appeal to German nationalism and the sense of renewed power and purpose reawakened old hopes. Germans were once again a nation to be reckoned with. Hitler seemed to assuage the wounded pride”, as Fritz Stern has noted.³⁵ Its fulfillment, however, would not last.

When Hitler’s plans of aggressive expansionism led to the declaration of war against Poland in September 1939, the national will lost much of its enthusiasm; content in their new pride and prosperity and mindful of the devastation of the First World War, the German people did not share their leader’s desire to fight. Already in the 1930s, Nazi family and racial policies had encouraged national self-realization by identifying and glorifying racially pure Germans, while attacking the so-called alien Jewish presence in their midst. The increasing radicalization of Hitler’s racial program, however, as well as the realities of another world war, broke down the cohesiveness of the *Volksgemeinschaft*, because the start of war marked the beginning of an inward migration for many Germans. Though their passivity and participation aided Hitler’s genocidal objectives, national unity during the war years eroded. Less than six years later, the *Führer* was dead, the country

destroyed, and the nation defeated. The victorious Allied forces divided the German fatherland into powerless zones of occupation, and the Germans began the painful task of reconstructing the nation in an era which would challenge the notion of a single German national identity.

CHAPTER TWO NOTES

- ¹ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1983), 44.
- ² *Ibid.*, 36.
- ³ George L. Mosse, *The Nationalization of the Masses: Political Symbolism and Mass Movements in Germany from the Napoleonic Wars through the Third Reich* (New York: Howard Fertig, 1975), 34.
- ⁴ *Ibid.*, 77.
- ⁵ *Ibid.*, 77.
- ⁶ Hagen Schulze, *The Course of German Nationalism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 60.
- ⁷ Mosse, *The Nationalization of the Masses*, 83.
- ⁸ Schulze, *The Course of German Nationalism*, 62.
- ⁹ *Ibid.*, 67.
- ¹⁰ Max Baeumer, "Imperial Germany as Reflected in Its Mass Festivals," in *Imperial Germany* edited by Volker Dürr, Kathy Harms, and Peter Hayes (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1985), 64-65.
- ¹¹ On the *Zollverein*, see Theodore S. Hamerow's classic work, *Restoration, Revolution, Reaction: Economics and Politics in Germany 1815-1871* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1958), 10-16.
- ¹² Baeumer, "Imperial Germany as Reflected in Its Mass Festivals," 65.
- ¹³ Peter Pulzer, *Germany, 1870-1945: Politics, State Formation, and War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 30-37.
- ¹⁴ Michael Hughes, *Nationalism and Society: Germany, 1800-1945* (New York: Edward Arnold, 1988), 149.
- ¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 142-147.
- ¹⁶ "The Battle of the Nations Monument," *The Independent*, 30 October 1913, 215.
- ¹⁷ Mosse, *The Nationalization of the Masses*, 66.
- ¹⁸ "The Battle of the Nations Monument," *The Independent*, 30 October 1913, 215.
- ¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 215.
- ²⁰ Mosse, *The Nationalization of the Masses*, 65.
- ²¹ "The Battle of the Nations Monument," *The Independent*, 30 October 1913, 215.
- ²² Mosse, *The Nationalization of the Masses*, 65.
- ²³ "The Battle of the Nations Monument," *The Independent*, 30 October 1913, 215.
- ²⁴ Mosse, *The Nationalization of the Masses*, 67.
- ²⁵ Robert Wohl, *The Generation of 1914* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1979), 44-47.
- ²⁶ James Joll, *The Origins of the First World War*, 2d ed. (New York: Longman, 1992), 215-216.
- ²⁷ Modris Eksteins, *Rites of Spring: The Great War and the Birth of the Modern Age* (New York: Doubleday, 1989), 61.
- ²⁸ *Ibid.*, 61-63.
- ²⁹ *Ibid.*, 185.
- ³⁰ David Welch, *The Third Reich: Politics and Propaganda* (New York: Routledge, 1993), 53.
- ³¹ *Ibid.*, 56.
- ³² *Ibid.*, 60.
- ³³ *Ibid.*, 56.
- ³⁴ Mary Fulbrook, *The Divided Nation: A History of Germany, 1918-1990* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), 80.
- ³⁵ Fritz Stern, *Dreams and Delusions: The Drama of German History* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1987), 171-172.

CHAPTER 3

The Cold War Political Context

For forty-five years of the twentieth century the fate of Germany was tied in a seemingly unalterable connection to the global standoff between the world's two superpowers in a conflict which, for decades, divided Europe at its center. For a country in ruins with a defeated dictatorship and a discredited national ideology, this future was determined by the Allies at the Yalta Conference in 1945, months before the end of the Second World War. Held responsible for the European catastrophe and living at the continent's center, Germans would be more deeply affected by the victors' decisions and the ensuing Cold War than any other nation. As a result of the widening rift between the United States and Soviet Union, Germany, unlike any other country, became territorially split between East and West. Not simply relegated to one side of the Iron Curtain or the other, the two halves were separately reconstructed according to the prescribed political, social, and economic doctrines of the respective, occupying powers. The international tensions of the postwar era developed with the partitioned Germany at the heart of the East-West conflict.

While the major powers asserted their control over the course of political evolution in the subsequently formed states, the ideological distinctions between socialism and capitalism became starkly obvious, and indeed adversarial. Germans in the West were taught the virtues of democratic government; in the East, the state was shaped by Marxist-Leninist precepts. Less than a month after Germany's unconditional surrender, the Soviet Military Administration in Germany (SMAD) was assembled in June 1945 with Marshal Zhukov, leader of the Soviet military forces during the war, as commander-in-chief. Its purpose was to facilitate Moscow's military, political, and economic objectives in the

eastern zone of occupation. For the Soviets, who envisioned occupation as lasting for decades, SMAD became the main tool for applying their policies to everyday German life. It supervised the surrender, administered internal affairs, and implemented Allied decisions. Over the course of occupation, SMAD officers gradually relinquished control of zonal institutions to communist German cadres.¹ The military administration was dissolved when the new East German state was formed but not before building the framework for the newly installed communist government. The Federal Republic of Germany (FRG) and the German Democratic Republic were inventions of two separate spheres of influence. And so it was that the two Germanies represented the Cold War confrontation. As one West German politician summarized in 1987, “The division of Germany is the division of our European continent.”²

THE COURSE OF INTER-GERMAN RELATIONS

The formal division of Germany was completed in 1949 with the creation of oppositional states. On 23 May, the Basic Law Constitution was adopted, and the Federal Republic was established in the image of the West. In response to the appearance of a capitalist and democratic state in the western zones of occupation, the Soviets quickly formed the German Democratic Republic from the eastern zone on 7 October, and Germans on both sides of the new border began rebuilding. Six years later, in May 1955, West Germany was admitted into the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) after the signing of the Paris Treaties the previous autumn. Entry into this alliance system, which had been formed in 1949 to join the US and Canada to West European countries, signaled both the process of West Germany’s integration into the West and the West’s strategic, political concerns in Central Europe. In the same month, countries of the Eastern Bloc, including the GDR, were brought together under the leadership of Russia into the Warsaw Pact.³

With entrance to these alliances, the two Germanies were entrenched on different sides of the global divide.

Because the FRG, the larger and more populous of the two states, had claimed in its constitution to be the soul of the severed nation and saw as its mission to work toward eventual reunification, its leaders were determined to prevent the other Germany from gaining international political recognition. Following the precepts of the Hallstein Doctrine, West Germany threatened to break diplomatic ties with countries recognizing the Socialist Unity Party (SED) regime in an attempt to undermine GDR legitimacy.⁴ The hope was that, through hostile treatment of the GDR, its leaders would be compelled to join the western half of Germany. Adopted in the 1950s, this ‘policy of strength’ would obstruct inter-German relations for over a decade. Meanwhile, the SED government also proclaimed the goal of unification but envisioned the merger in the form of a larger socialist Germany. At the same time, it faced the task of stabilizing its economy, particularly onerous because of Soviet reparations, taken in the form of East German materials and machinery. In response to the burdens of emigration to the FRG and capitalist influence from the West, barricades were assembled through the center of Berlin on 13 August 1961. Construction of the Berlin Wall stemmed the westward exodus, which had involved a total of 3 million people since the war’s end.⁵ From that point onward, the SED began deemphasizing national bonds between its people and the citizens of the FRG. The Wall came to symbolize the increasingly strained nature of the national question.

The end of 1966 brought a shift in West German politics, which would redefine relations between the two Germanies. In December of that year, the Social Democratic Party joined the conservative Christian Democratic Union (CDU) in a Grand Coalition government. With the election of Willy Brandt, the former mayor of West Berlin, as chancellor in the following year, the Social Democrats were squarely in control. Brandt sought change of the situation through rapprochement, reversing years of hostility toward the GDR. The new efforts of his *Ostpolitik* allowed a thaw in relations in the early 1970s.

One result, in 1972, was the signing of the Basic Treaty, which accorded East Germany *de facto* recognition by the Federal Republic. For Western politicians, the motive in acknowledging the existence of the separate state lay in the hope of “enlisting the aid of potentially reformist forces within its government to promote change from within.”⁶ In the recently installed Honecker regime in the GDR, the diplomatic breakthrough of *Ostpolitik* translated domestically into new confidence. Feeling this new certitude, the SED promoted its own policy of *Abgrenzung*, or demarcation, seeking to widen the ideological break between East and West. Additionally, Honecker reinforced his government’s ‘lasting friendship’ with the Soviet Union. These steps were taken to make more pronounced still the inter-German border, international acceptance of which assured the regime’s continuance.

By the early 1980s, inter-German relations had reached an unprecedented level of stability. The years of *Ostpolitik* had afforded each state with benefits, and each was motivated to maintain and protect the newly formed relationship for its own reasons, which were, obviously, quite different. When the Polish Solidarity movement was suppressed in 1981 during Chancellor Helmut Schmidt’s visit with General Secretary Erich Honecker, tensions were again mounting between the US and the Soviet Union after a brief period of détente. Despite the gathering international storm around them, the two leaders seemed committed to maintaining inter-German cooperation.⁷ West Germany continued to persuade the East German government to allow for greater contacts through generous financial incentives; the East German leadership, of course, accepted the aid unabashedly. A credit of DM950 million, for example, was given to the GDR by the Federal government in 1984.⁸ Increased communications between the SED and the West German Social Democrats also strengthened the new relationship. Between 1983 and 1988, SPD parliamentary leader Hans-Jochen Vogel met annually with Honecker to discuss issues of mutual concern, such as limitations on chemical and nuclear weapons.⁹

For West Germany, improving relations supported its claim of a single German nation and provided, at last, a basis for reunification. In the East, however, the new relationship between the two German states was viewed in a different light. While increased trade with the more prosperous Germany brought badly needed currency into the GDR, the more significant, political asset was added legitimacy for the SED regime. Honecker believed that normal relations between the two Germanies brought further validity to his government in the eyes of citizens and positioned it in the international community. The credibility gained through official relations, it was thought, stabilized the regime and gave a measure of permanence to the state. When Honecker was formally welcomed by Helmut Kohl's conservative government in 1987, his long-awaited trip to the FRG seemed to confirm East Germany's role in the world.

The politics of the Cold War were a pervasive element in the evolution of the two German polities; neither East nor West Germans could ignore the international conflict, because it was likely to determine the resolution of their national problem and encouraged internal consciousness. Forty years of inter-German relations, or lack thereof, witnessed the turn from mutual disapproval to careful cooperation. When the unanticipated revolution of 1989 ended the duality of German existence, the vital political issue of reunification which had persisted since the beginning of the postwar period remained unsettled. It took the will of a divided nation to solve the reunification question, but this issue too, had undergone change in the intervening years.

THE REUNIFICATION QUESTION

The constitutions drafted in 1949 by each German state naturally made reference to the issue of reunification; the newly imposed division could not be passed over without acknowledgment. In the charters, both states avowed to work toward unification, but the new governments took differing views of this national goal. In the East, the SED's

commitment to the pledge would prove to be questionable, while the FRG's enduring, first chancellor, Konrad Adenauer, in assessing the likelihood of reunification, would devise only a long-term and indirect plan for achieving unity. Whatever the governments' approaches to the matter, subsequent economic, social, and political developments would, to a greater degree, affect popular sentiments. Changing attitudes on the topic of reunification reflected a growing acceptance of division and the beginnings of separation.

In the early years of the German Democratic Republic, the promises of the SED to make efforts to reunify with the West were revealed to be empty. Offers were loudly made to the Bonn government, but because they were so clearly unacceptable, refusals could almost be assumed. These proposals dictated that the SED retain its powerful role in the formation of a unified state. The Federal Republic's leaders, viewing the SED as a regime without democratic approval, could not concede a prominent position for the party in any future Germany, and thus uniformly rejected these entreaties.¹⁰ In the face of mass emigration and growing doubts about the survival of German identity under socialism, East German officials were forced to show some commitment to national unity, but their gestures were not substantive.

The West German stance on reunification was determined by Konrad Adenauer, who for the first fourteen years of the FRG served as its chancellor. The reigning Christian Democrat believed division to be unavoidable in the new European order and understood that Soviet entrenchment in the eastern territories, once it happened, would be difficult to displace. Given the situation, Adenauer hoped only to draw East Germans to the West over time by making the FRG free and prosperous. His rejection of Joseph Stalin's offer for a unified but neutral Germany in the Spring of 1952 illustrated another of his motives. He firmly maintained after the catastrophic war the moral need for German integration into the West and the embracing of Western values.¹¹ Stalin's proposed Germany would be unaligned and without the West's guiding principles, which he believed were so badly needed. Adenauer's tenure as chancellor was coterminous with the first phase in West

German sentiment on the issue; at the time of his resignation in 1963, public attitudes were nearing a transition.

In the early postwar years, German devotion to unity was unambiguous in West and East alike. Politicians as well as public opinion expressed the strong desire for reunification in unequivocal and sometimes surprising terms. A 1953 poll of East Germans speaks to this passion; 60% of those asked responded that they were ready to support the use of force to win reunification if all other means failed.¹² The riots of industrial workers in over 270 East German cities and towns against the SED's increased labor quotas that same year provided West Germany with its only national holiday, which became an official protest of the country's division. On 17 June no fewer than 300,000 workers throughout the GDR revolted in response to the government's order for further productivity. In Berlin, despite police efforts to prevent the involvement of West Berliners in the conflict, many residents of the western sectors of the city made their way to the East to take part in the demonstrations.¹³ The 'Day of Unity,' commemorated in the FRG every year thereafter, honored the uprising but also expressed the popular longing for reunification.

On the sixth anniversary of the historic day of unrest in East Germany, West Berlin's mayor, Willy Brandt, proclaimed "We Germans will never cease to strike for our great national aim: restoration of national unity. . . ." ¹⁴ When the Federal Republic's president, Heinrich Lübke, gave his inaugural address on 15 September 1959, he made it clear before members of the *Bundestag* and *Bundesrat* that the issue of reunification would not fade away. "The world shall see," he proclaimed, "how vital and dynamic today and in the future are our concepts about unity and right to our homeland. In this vital question our persistence and patience will never lag."¹⁵ Frustration over division led another West German official to vehemently challenge the drive toward Western integration: "Is this the price--the abandonment of Berlin, of East Germany, of all hope of reunification--is this the price of Western European union?"¹⁶

Emotional attachment to the idea of reunification in part found its origins in familial ties. In 1962, 40% of West German citizens had blood relatives in the East, and it was estimated that 80% or more of East Germans had bonds of kinship in the FRG.¹⁷ These numbers were due in part to the mass migrations of East Germans to the West before the building of the Berlin Wall. With such immediate and personal effects as the separation of families, it is little wonder the hope for a single Germany survived.

The second half of the 1960s, however, brought a measurable change in public expectations. A decade and a half of economic reconstruction in West Germany had resulted in real, material prosperity; standards of living had risen dramatically since the birth of the new state. Political stability, too, had finally been achieved; democracy had earned credibility. Growing contentment with the *status quo* was the result of economic progress and ideological acceptance. This led, it seemed, to a reordering of priorities. A West German election analyst interviewed in *Newsweek* in 1970 reflected on the shift in voter interest since 1965 from foreign to domestic affairs, confirming an obvious change in the concerns of West Germans.¹⁸ At least one scholar interpreted this as undeniable and conclusive. Gebhard Schweigler asserted its meaning as the loss of an all-German national consciousness by the West Germans, believing that at this point the FRG found its own separate identity. Schweigler supported this view by citing two polls, one done in 1971, the other in 1967. The first showed the dwindling importance of reunification in the minds of West Germans, only 3% of whom believed it was the most important political issue at the time, compared to 45% in 1965.¹⁹ The second survey measured the growing resignation to division among West Germans; between 1956 and 1967 the number of people who admitted to becoming “used to division” had grown by 21%.²⁰ These figures indeed showed that in West Germany in the second half of the 1960s a change had occurred. However, to assume that this tendency to accommodate division represents in and of itself the formation of a separate West German identity was to overvalue the significance of political outlooks. These attitudes showed only an understanding of the

international standoff and the perceived permanence of the German predicament. These beliefs would crystallize in the 1970s when the Basic Treaty between the two Germanies was signed. After this landmark document in inter-German relations, most West Germans thought unification no longer possible. In symbolic admission, the Federal Government in 1974 decided to drop the 'Day of Unity' as a holiday. On the eve of the twenty-first anniversary of the workers' uprising, 53% of West Germans agreed that the holiday should no longer be observed as a protest to division.²¹ Commitment to the national cause of reunification had staggered.

The development of East German attitudes is more difficult to gauge during this period; unfortunately, the closed society behind the Iron Curtain was rarely observed by Western scholars. However, having located the influences that provoked change in the FRG, it may be asked if similar forces could have affected Eastern attitudes. Growing material comfort, ideological acceptance, and general resignation are known to have acted on West German thinking, and it is likely that they produced an effect on East Germans as well, though at a pace different than in the West.

First, East Germany made its own strides in economic performance, but this fact is often overshadowed when comparisons are made to the West. Among Eastern bloc countries, however, East Germany had the strongest and most stable economy of all. Its leaders, in response to praise frequently afforded to the Federal Republic, termed their own achievements "Economic Miracle--GDR." Particularly under Honecker, when the availability of consumer goods increased and housing construction rose, East Germans took pride in their economy's accomplishments.²² Secondly, though it never wholeheartedly accepted Soviet ideology, the East German populace did come to adopt the basic tenets of socialism. Social and cultural values were shaped by the people's respect for equality, modesty, and solidarity. The third potential factor, acceptance of division, would almost certainly have occurred in the GDR where resignation had become a natural response of a people living under communist rule. Given the course of political and economic events

in the GDR, the loss of interest in reunification probably happened later than it did in the West. It is likely that East Germans in the mid-1970s were undergoing the change which the West Germans had experienced in the previous decade.

The SED did what it could to hasten psychological division; the regime's very existence depended on it. In 1974, after following its policy of *Abgrenzung* in the quest for a separate, socialist identity, the SED rewrote the constitution, formally abandoning the goal of reunification and, further still, omitting all references to a German nation. The 1968 constitution, which strove "to overcome the split of the German nation" as it declared, was replaced by the revised charter with the unanimous approval of parliament. In this revision, the SED was trying to assert that the German nation no longer existed, but clearly, it could not be dissolved simply by governmental decree. The action of the FRG in granting *de facto* recognition in the Basic Treaty to the GDR likely did more to remove the thought of reunification from the minds of East Germans than did the SED's revision of the constitution.²³ Still, it is noteworthy that the pledge to work toward unification was publicly forsaken by the government of East Germany.

Despite all the professed disinterest of West Germans after 1965 in the prospect of unification and the SED's efforts to separate East and West Germans, a 1985 poll revealed a lingering connection to the idea. Seventy-two per cent of West Germans surveyed believed that the Basic Law should continue to call upon all German people to achieve unity.²⁴ Inter-German relations in the early 1980s had no doubt improved, but this alone is insufficient for explaining this presumed upsurge in nostalgia for a united Germany. It seems more plausible that the hope for unification never really disappeared. Instead, preoccupation with domestic affairs was a psychological adjustment in response to political realities.

CHAPTER THREE NOTES

¹ Norman M. Naimark provides a comprehensive study of the immediate postwar years in the eastern zone in *The Russians in Germany: A History of the Soviet Zone of Occupation, 1945-1949* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995).

² Foreign Minister Hans-Dietrich Genscher quoted in Timothy Garton Ash, *In Europe's Name: Germany and the Divided Continent* (New York: Random House, Inc., 1993), 19.

³ A James McAdams, *Germany Divided: From the Wall to Reunification* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), 21.

⁴ On the restructuring of the Soviet Zone of Germany in the immediate postwar period according to the communist model, see Gregory W. Sandford, *From Hitler to Ulbricht: The Communist Reconstruction of East Germany, 1945-46* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983). For the initial formation of the GDR's ruling party, the SED, in the eastern zone of occupation, the party's policies for a socialist Germany, its internal development, and the challenges it faced, refer to Martin McCauley, *Marxism-Leninism in the German Democratic Republic: The Socialist Unity Party (SED)* (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, Inc., 1979).

⁵ Henry Ashby Turner, *Germany from Partition to Reunification* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), 88.

⁶ McAdams, *Germany Divided*, 67.

⁷ Edwina Moreton, ed., *Germany between East and West* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 4.

⁸ Garton Ash, *In Europe's Name*, 629.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 628-632.

¹⁰ Turner, *Germany from Partition to Reunification*, 64.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 117-118.

¹² Schweigler, *National Consciousness in Divided Germany*, 113.

¹³ Arnulf Baring, *Uprising in East Germany: June 17, 1953* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1972), 52 and 88. Baring provides a complete, but condensed, account of the day's events as well as the reasons for the demonstrations and the international responses to them.

¹⁴ "Germans Mark Anti-Red Rising," *New York Times*, 18 June 1959, 4.

¹⁵ Heinrich Luebke, "Germans Know Only One Germany," *Vital Speeches of the Day* 26 (15 October 1959): 19.

¹⁶ George Bailey, "Germany: Two Dreams and a Cruel Choice," *Reporter* 26 (4 January 1962): 19.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 18.

¹⁸ "One Nation--Divisible," *Time*, 30 March 1970, 40.

¹⁹ Schweigler, *National Consciousness in Divided Germany*, 168.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 169.

²¹ "Berlin Won't Mark East's '53 Rising," *New York Times*, 13 June 1974, 10.

²² Robert Gerald Livingston, "East Germany between Moscow and Bonn," *Foreign Affairs* 50 no.2 (January 1972): 304.

²³ "East Germany Formally Drops Reunification as National Goal," *New York Times*, 28 June 1974, 6.

²⁴ 1985 Allensbach Survey cited in Elisabeth Noelle-Neumann, "Do the Germans Have a 'National Character'?" *Encounter* 68 no.3 (March 1987): 71.

CHAPTER 4

Manufacturing Identity in the German Democratic Republic

THE SED'S PROMOTION OF SOCIALIST SEPARATENESS

For the Socialist Unity Party, the emergence of a separate East German identity was of special importance. Among the party elite, it was believed that only a distinct East German populace, cast as a socialist nation, would give its unwavering support to the regime. The government's legitimacy and stability would indeed be strengthened by the development of a socialist identity among the GDR's citizens. Therefore, the party set out to instill a sense of self-awareness in the people and foster identification with the state, but often by artificial and ineffective means. However, they were not entirely without effect.

Throughout their attempts to reshape the citizenry, party leaders steadfastly maintained that the German national question had been resolved; two peoples had been born from the postwar division. The success and endurance of the GDR, along with that of West Germany, confirmed this, they insisted, but in the age of improved inter-German relations, SED officials frequently found themselves reacting to the words of West German politicians, notably Willy Brandt, who spoke of reunifying what "belonged together." On one occasion, the former secretary of the *Volkskammer* Committee for German Unity, Albert Norden, tried to diffuse Western claims of commonality. There was no longer a German nation, Norden alleged; there were instead "two nations in states of different social orders."¹ Because the national question, if it remained open, would cast doubt on the need for separate German states, the SED did what it could to close it while its own state still existed. The West's attempts to keep it open were seen as potentially undermining the GDR and viewed with contempt.

Of course, unification was the publicly announced mission of the SED in the state's early years. While defending the need for demarcation, Walter Ulbricht's government also supported unification, though gestures to that effect were largely idle. After Erich Honecker assumed power in 1971 and unification was dropped as the national goal, the drive to create a new identity picked up speed. Along with his other efforts, Honecker sharpened the distinction between East and West Germany by reinforcing the GDR's political, economic, and ideological ties to the Soviet Union. This was done formally with the signing of the Treaty of Friendship, Cooperation and Mutual Aid in October 1975.²

Honecker, who replaced Walter Ulbricht as First Secretary³ of the SED in May 1971, had been a committed communist since his youth in Weimar Germany. Born the son of a coal miner in the Saarland in 1912, he joined the youth organization of the Communist Party of Germany (KPD) at the age of ten and entered the party ranks at 17. His underground work for the KPD during the Third Reich landed him in the Brandenburg prison in 1937 where he remained until the end of the war. In 1945, Ulbricht appointed him head of the SED's youth organization, the *Freie Deutsche Jugend* (FDJ), a position he held for ten years. Honecker became a full member of the Politburo in 1958, after which his political career developed and he became the favored candidate to replace Ulbricht.⁴

Though efforts to separate the people from the West were more pronounced under Honecker, the first attempts to redefine the East German identity were initiated in the last years of Ulbricht's regime. In February 1967, the *Volkskammer* passed a revised citizenship law. The new law tried to end the widely held notion, which had been endorsed by the GDR's own 1949 constitution, that all Germans whether in East or West were members of a common nation. By order of this law, the people of East Germany became exclusively GDR citizens.⁵ The intent of the parliamentary decision was clear, but its impact on people's self-perceptions would prove to be minimal. Nonetheless, the government had hoped to impart a distinct definition of the East German.

Reinforced connections with the Soviet Union and even the citizenship law of 1967 could exist without reminding the people of their separate socialist identity. Parades, however, were highly visible events; they celebrated the solidarity of socialist countries and revealed the countenance of the GDR. May Day and the state's anniversaries provided the occasions for huge celebrations. Though they no doubt intended to send messages to the West through the predominant shows of military power, parades were also communal events, not unlike public festivals of the nineteenth century, at which people gathered in the name of the nation.

The twentieth anniversary of the founding of the GDR in 1969 was just such an event in Berlin, where 150,000 German youth from across the country convened in the days before 7 October. On one evening, members of the FDJ marched in a torchlight procession through the heart of the city. The sounds of trumpets and pounding drums, the uniforms and banners, and the searchlights tracing through the night sky were likely a compelling experience for the young participants. All around flags hung from the windows of homes; public buildings were dressed with giant banners of communist red and the German tricolor. The youth sang: "Our love/ Our loyalty and our strength/ The Socialist Fatherland/ The German Democratic Republic."⁶ The young people would easily have felt pride in themselves and their state in this atmosphere. Still, the possibility that the 20-year-old state could supplant a centuries-old, all-German identity seems preposterous, particularly in light of events two decades later.

The SED's attention to young East Germans was also seen in the early establishment of youth organizations. Children between the ages of six and fourteen were encouraged to join the Pioneers and, after reaching fifteen, to enter the *Freie Deutsche Jugend*. Participation was not obligatory, but by 1982 combined membership totaled 3.6 million. The Pioneers did little more than provide state-approved leisure activities and promote early socialization. The FDJ, though, performed a more significant political function. Composed of students, army officers and enlisted personnel, skilled and unskilled workers, and farm

laborers, this organization brought young people from a range of backgrounds together, fostering East German unity and cooperation among new generations. Through political involvement, its members gained experience which prepared them for service in the SED. The FDJ ensured ideological consistency and a continuity of cadres for the ruling party.⁷

Other, more symbolic, measures were made by the government to distinguish between the GDR and West Germany in the 1970s in the climate of *Ostpolitik*. In 1971, the words of the East German national anthem alluding to the German fatherland were removed. To expunge other all-German references, many state organizations were renamed. The National Front of Democratic Germany became the National Front of the GDR; the *Deutschlandsender*, East Germany's major radio station, changed to the Voice of the GDR; and the German Academy of Sciences turned into the Academy of Sciences of the GDR.⁸ To encourage the association with socialism, Berlin streets underwent a massive renaming operation first in the 1950s. New names often honored German communist heroes of the past, such as Ernst Thälmann and Rosa Luxemburg. This practice was then revived under Honecker and intensified in 1974 in an effort to shape popular thinking.⁹ The SED was also effective in spreading its ideology through its newspapers, *Neues Deutschland*, aimed at a general readership, and *Junge Welt* at the youth.¹⁰

Throughout the existence of the GDR, but particularly after 1967, the East German population was exposed to the SED's official program to set it apart from the West Germans. The objective was to form a distinctly socialist identity in the people, but the government's policies could have only a limited impact. A substantive national identity would require time to evolve and would have to permit popular negotiation and participation to become deeply rooted; it could not be dictated solely by the acts of government. Because of this prerequisite, the East German people themselves would play a part in the formation of identity. Though their role in this negotiation seems marginal in comparison to the population's place in the free West, East Germans retained their bonds of kinship with Germans outside the GDR, their nonsocialist German cultural inheritance, and

their connections to pre-division German historical traditions. For the SED government, in its brief existence and questionable validity as an imposed regime, these aspects of the populace would at times decide the direction of initiatives to instill identity; the socialist state and the socialist identity, which it promulgated, could not entirely neglect the Germanness of its people.

THE LIMITATIONS OF DISSENT AND ACCEPTANCE

In the strictly controlled society of the GDR, the voice of dissent was seldom heard before the heady days of Autumn 1989. The SED ruled without being popularly elected and effectively suppressed criticism of the party-state in order to maintain its authority. Opponents of the regime existed, however, and their critiques of the government came most typically from two perspectives. Marxist dissenters, like Wolfgang Harich, Robert Havemann, and Rudolf Bahro, found fault in the SED's version of socialism, which they believed was tainted by Stalinism and misguided by the backwardness of Russia's historical development. They called for a German socialism based on Marxism-Leninism and political democracy. From another angle came literary and artistic protest. The cultural intelligentsia expressed its dissatisfaction with the state's oppression and censorship,¹¹ very real hindrances despite the party's trumpeted promotion of artistic freedom. Both critiques challenged the SED's ordained image of the East German citizen.

For ordinary citizens, whose own discontent had no well-publicized outlet, the Protestant Church provided in the 1970s and 1980s a protected, alternative political forum. The Church had gained a measure of independence from the state after being assailed by the Communists in earlier years. The eight provincial churches of East Germany were organized under the *Kirchenbund* in 1969, but this league was not recognized by the state until two years later. The limited autonomy of the religious institution was perhaps won from the SED with its pledge in 1971 not to work against or alongside socialism but to exist

within it. Only after 1973 did the ideological standoff with the government begin to cool.¹² In a unique capacity, it served as refuge for citizens with dissenting views on a wide range of topics, such as the environment, nuclear arms, and peace initiatives. Behind sacred church walls, people could assemble legally and exchange ideas comparatively freely. Not surprisingly, even people without spiritual affiliation to the Church used it in this way, attesting to its importance and uniqueness as a public platform of opposition. However, even in the 1980s, when under the auspices of the Church dissent grew, its expression remained relegated to this sanctuary. Expressions of opposition beyond church walls were made at the risk of violent repression and imprisonment. This, despite the cover of the Church, did much to prevent constructive disagreement with the state.

Aside from intimidation, the SED possessed another tool for subduing criticism. Because the FRG's government was willing and eager to grant immediate citizenship to East Germans who made their way to the West, party leaders in the GDR had their hand on what has been aptly described as a 'safety valve' by historians.¹³ Volatile GDR citizens could be effectively expatriated, thereby removing them from East German society. The highly publicized case of musician Wolf Biermann illustrates the SED's use of the safety valve. Given permission to perform in concert in West Germany in 1976, Biermann's citizenship was revoked by the government while he was in Cologne, and he was denied permission to reenter the GDR. In the long run, this practice backfired on the SED; once in the West opponents had a greater audience and their ideas a broader dissemination. Eventually, their views reached East German soil. Still, for many years the SED's ability to expel citizens deemed undesirable also served to delimit the amount of dissent and reduce its visibility in East German society.

While the government confined dissent, the East German people placed their own limits on their approval of the new socialist identity repeatedly espoused by the SED. The greatest detriment to establishing a solid identity in the East was the obvious lack of a legitimate national base, for the GDR could never claim to be a complete nation-state. The

imposed government, which represented the concerns of only a minority, and the GDR's status as a partial nation were constant reminders of this deficiency.

A contemporary observer claimed that East Germany's economic performance was beginning to foster identification with the state in the early 1970s.¹⁴ Recent scholarship has revealed this juncture to be a significant transition in the SED leadership's economic expectations in connection to the national question. At this time, many state officials, in opposition to First Secretary Ulbricht, were accepting socialism's inability to exceed Western capitalism's economic capacity. Because Ulbricht had struggled in vain for years to attract West German workers to the East and threatened to bankrupt the GDR in the process of trying, Honecker abandoned his predecessor's objective of winning German unity under socialism through economic triumph over the West. In fact, as party leader he abandoned unity altogether. Though Honecker's new economic initiatives had some measure of success, his efforts to form East German state consciousness based on "a qualitatively different socialist life-style" would fail because comparisons with the West's accomplishments were continually made, not in government analyses, but in the minds of East Germans.¹⁵ As in the FRG, economic achievement could have been only an inadequate basis for national identity. The example of East Germany illustrates the limits of economics in forming a stable identity. The infiltration of Western media and culture after ratification of the Basic Treaty disrupted the formation of a separate identity. Renewed contacts with the West, which had been almost prohibited in the 1960s, reminded East Germans of the common language, social traditions and history they shared with West Germans. Awareness of the *Kulturnation* gave East Germans the option of retaining their all-German identity. This, in effect, meant that the people of East Germany could not only consciously withhold national legitimacy from the GDR, but that they could also decide their own level of acceptance of GDR identity.

In a 1972 article in *Foreign Affairs*, Robert Gerald Livingston noted an incipient "positive loyalty and a sense of a separate East German national identity,"¹⁶ but its growth

would never be complete. Writing at the opening stages of renewed inter-German contacts, he could have only speculated on the human consequences of *Ostpolitik*. The absent national underpinning and the continued notion of the German *Kulturnation* would thwart the early development Livingston witnessed. East German economic performance alone could not fill the void left by the former; the unleashed influences of the West recalled the existence of the latter. The pull of common nationality would sway East German attitudes after the improvement in state relations to the extent that it would prevent the adoption of an East German national identity: 71% of workers polled in the early 1970s considered Germany, not the GDR, their homeland.¹⁷ Subsequently, a 1975 questionnaire proved the continued weakness of GDR identity; less than 33% of respondents believed the FRG a separate country.¹⁸ These figures reflect the limited acceptance of GDR national identity among the people of East Germany.

STATE-SANCTIONED HISTORIOGRAPHY

In modern German society and culture, history has held an important place in molding public opinion and shaping public discourse. Perceptions of the past in Germany have traditionally shaped popular views of contemporary times and aided national self-understanding. Not surprisingly, then, history played an especially vital role in the search for new German identities during the postwar division. Perhaps no other device was as instrumental in the SED's efforts to manufacture identity than historiography; certainly no other was so directly aimed at remodeling the public's views of itself and at justifying the existence of the socialist government and its ideology. After the state's founding, the party wasted no time in subordinating scholars in the GDR to their cause. At the first conference of historians in the GDR in 1952, the head of the SED's Central Committee department of propaganda, Kurt Hager, insisted that East German historians adopt the study of Marxism and direct their research according to the precepts of historical materialism.¹⁹ First

Secretary Ulbricht himself expected the work of historians to be partisan, to bolster the state's principles. Demonstrative of the early ideological convictions of many East German scholars, members of the *Deutsche Historiker-Gesellschaft*, the professional association of historians, declared the advancement of socialist education and the growth of a socialist consciousness among its most important priorities.²⁰

The government subsequently established research institutes, which it controlled, for the purpose of training historians and coordinating research. The German Academy of Sciences in East Berlin, the Institute for Marxism-Leninism, and the Institute for Social Sciences reoriented East German historians to the Marxist view of history. In 1964, a department was added to the Academy of Sciences to supervise research plans, initiate discussions on ideological questions, and encourage collaboration between Soviet and East German scholars. The connection between state objectives and historiography were visible in the assignment of research topics according to a *Zentraler Forschungsplan*, which gave direction to historians' work in alignment with the political and social needs of the GDR.²¹

The cooperation of party officials and scholars was founded on their shared ideology. Guided by the lessons of history, both groups worked toward a common goal, and the state sponsorship of historiography proved to be mutually beneficial. Obviously, the promotion of socialist history in schools and universities was an added pillar of support for the SED regime, one which the party hoped would add historical legitimacy to the state. The critical political function of Marxist historiography was therefore highly valued by the government and its practitioners were compensated with higher pay and better appointments. While the party leadership used history for its purposes, historians in turn received tremendous funding. This allowed many to concentrate solely on research without the added duty of teaching; this led to a greater amount of scholarship produced than in the West.

The SED called on historians to reinterpret the past to confirm the GDR as the sole, legitimate representative of the German people, while fostering the population's

identification with socialism. The work of GDR scholars presented the course of German history as a sequence of progressive events from which socialist ideology naturally developed. Through revolutions, wars, and rebellions, the masses, particularly the working classes, made steady advancements against aristocratic and bourgeois forces. Indeed it was a chief purpose of Marxist historiography to explain the valuable role that common men have played in history. The goal was to connect people to the revolutionary tradition which, as the narrative went, had culminated in the founding of the GDR. The state was depicted not only as anti-fascist and culturally superior to the West, but also as the embodiment of all progressive and genuinely German trends in history; it was the result of centuries of German efforts. This view of history was meant to place contemporary East Germans in the developmental timeline of a socialist Germany to strengthen their confidence in the ideological standoff with the West. In *Central European History*, Alan Nothnagle reflected in 1993 on the meaning of East German historiography. He labeled it a kind of historical myth-building which gave greater emphasis to messages and context of presentation than historical accuracy.²² It was a means of propagating identity.

Having history serve a political function, however, was not concealed; East German historiography was not a project of collusion between party leaders and collaborating historians. It was instead the stated intention of the Marxist approach to appraise the past for its present day relevance. It was believed that from this position East German historiography gained greater validity over the work of Western scholars. Employing historiography to solve the social and political problems of the GDR, moreover, had tremendous influence over research methodology and choice of topics. Because of the changing needs of the state, particular periods and events varied in their suitability for historical attention. The struggle of the communists in the Second World War, for example, was frequently praised as the fight against fascism. This subject was given attention to promote the communist image of liberator and rightful leadership of the new Germany.

This version of history also fostered anti-Western feelings and a negative identification with the FRG, which was vilified as the continuation of imperialism.

East German history, however, was not sedentary, and interpretations of the past, like the political climate, were subject to change. The Marxist approach allowed for and encouraged reappraisal. The pliability of historiography was evident in exhibitions at the Museum for German History in East Berlin, where a permanent display was housed and temporary exhibits routinely shown. The standing display, created between 1962 and 1967, presented the period of 1789-1949 and portrayed the ongoing class struggles which defined historical development in this age. This show was fluid and ideologically seamless, but by the mid 1970s it did not reflect the rise of identity politics that had taken place.²³ The temporary exhibits did, however, indicate such changes. Assembled in an atmosphere of Cold War diplomacy, they showed the state's attempted modifications to identity. Until the early 1970s, these displays expressed the SED's still extant desire for German unification under socialism. After this phase, though, as unification lost its value, GDR solidarity with other members of the communist world became the prevailing message. Mirroring the SED's politics, exhibits at the museum illustrated the regime's reactionary search for a separated national identity and the shifting nature of East German historiography, which the party used to create its revised identities.

In a speech at the 9th Party Congress in 1976, Erich Honecker called on historians to reexamine all periods of German history causing a flood of new literature. The General Secretary's intention, in the period of new confidence, was to build on regime-sponsored identity. The reappraisal which he ordered would prove the flexibility of Marxist interpretation in the succeeding years. A resurrection of famous Germans of the past who had once been denigrated by the state began. Frederick the Great, Bismarck, and Martin Luther were among the notable figures who were rehabilitated; Luther's new treatment was especially telling. Long denounced as a servant to the counterrevolutionary forces of the aristocracy, the party had wished "to bury the memory of Luther" and only begrudgingly

allowed the Church to celebrate the 450th anniversary of the monk's ninety-five theses. A state historian speaking at the dampened festivities in Wittenburg in 1967 informed listeners that the Reformation was a revolution led by social forces, not Luther's ideas.²⁴ Because the reformer's life was not entirely consistent with socialist progress on which East German national identity was to be based, the SED tried to dilute the importance of Luther in the minds of its citizens.

By the 1980s, the party had relaxed its views on Martin Luther in time for the 500th anniversary of his birth. Many huge celebrations in the GDR were in fact planned by the state; even some prominent West Germans were invited to attend.²⁵ Particularly when compared to the earlier observances, the festivals of the 1980s showed the SED's new embrace of Luther's memory. A standard seventh-grade level history textbook published late in the decade also illustrates this. It introduced the reformer and his ideas to young socialists as central to the growth of opposition to the Roman Catholic Church, which according to the Marxist narrative was the dominating, imperialistic force of sixteenth-century Europe. It was explained that Luther's ideas were important in inciting the popular uprising against the ruling power. Luther was enthusiastically supported by the masses, and his words evoked their heroic call for "an open revolution against Rome." The aristocracy, too, was prompted by Luther to free itself from Rome's exploitation, the school text stated. The episode's socialist significance was conveyed by its title, the *Volksbewegung*.²⁶

The religious revolt was essentially another class struggle, which in its revised interpretation presented in the history textbook found Martin Luther in a crucial, leading role. This patent reversal, initiated by Honecker's 1976 directive, was predicated partly on the growing confidence of the SED leadership and partly on the need to broaden the basis for East German national identity. The regime was seeking to appropriate more of the German past for its plans. The changing interpretation of Luther and other historical figures may also have signaled the SED's state of crisis; thirty years of socialist rule had yielded

little devotion among the populace and the GDR's economic situation was steadily worsening. Reclaiming more of the past, because it was not entirely congruent with the Marxist view of history, appears to have been a desperate last effort by the party to win the citizens' allegiance. Luther's rehabilitation at the very least illustrates historiography's subservience to SED politics and its malleability as a tool in prescribing identity.

CULTURAL EXPRESSIONS OF AN INCOMPLETE IDENTITY

There were genuine efforts to form and understand identity in the GDR among the country's culture-makers, whose ideological convictions were strong but whose party loyalty was not detrimental to the quality of their work. One especially notable literary contribution by a prominent East German intellectual, Christa Wolf, is the semi-autobiographical novel *Kindheitsmuster*, published in 1976.²⁷ Though in the course of her story Wolf retrieved from her own childhood her memories of Hitler and the war years and recalled the subsequent rise of the postwar communist leadership, she was simultaneously examining the unique experience of many East Germans in their abrupt transformation as subjects of, and believers in, the Nazi regime to members of the socialist state. Wolf's personal transition to socialism paralleled East Germany's political reformation. After participating in the *Bund Deutscher Mädel* (League of German Maidens) as a young girl in the lost eastern territories, Wolf became a committed socialist when, as a university student, she encountered the writings of Karl Marx. Thereafter, she never questioned the ideological or moral superiority of the GDR. Only in 1989 did she resign from the SED, shortly before the party's own dissolution. However, as she confronted the issue of East German socialist identity in *Kindheitsmuster* in the 1970s, her recollections of the past and her professed devotion to Hitler in her earlier life challenged the party's ordained version of history and questioned the origins of the state.

The sudden replacement of the inculcated worldview of Wolf's childhood by the equally demanding postwar moral code of the communists created a conspicuous estrangement from the past, a break promoted by the SED. Wolf was aware of this obvious historical rift because of the personal discontinuity she suffered. As other GDR writers of her generation were proclaiming their resistance to the Hitler regime in the last years of the war, she realized that the anti-fascist portrayal of the GDR's origins was only a myth. In her native town of Landsberg, she witnessed neither her childhood peers nor any other eastern Germans combating Hitler's 'imperialism' before May 1945, despite the tales of her contemporaries. This simply was not her experience, she admitted in a 1983 interview in *The German Quarterly*. Wolf went on to explain the presumed inheritance of the East Germans and dismissed their false birth:

From the middle or end of the Fifties under the influence of the Cold War, one said about us: Our recent history is not that of fascism. We delegated fascism to the Federal Republic. Our immediate past was the antifascist tradition. . . . But the people [in the GDR] were naturally the same as in the Federal Republic. *Kindheitsmuster* attempted to show, by describing the daily routines from the earlier time and from today, that the people are indeed the same who lived then and live now. . . . Before and after the *Stunde Null*, the same people exist.²⁸

Christa Wolf's acceptance of the truth, that the vast majority of East Germans were willing followers of Hitler and not hostile opponents to him, necessitated the self-exploration of *Kindheitsmuster* in a society which tried to manipulate actual historical events. Wolf set out to fill the gap this reinterpretation of the past created by investigating her own personal development. She has considered it a "therapeutic process," finding self-knowledge through remembrance, but she has confessed that her certainty about many things diminished in the course of this introspection.²⁹ Her self-examination speaks to many East Germans by salvaging the past. The fabric of memory Wolf weaves is fraught with holes, however, as the thoughts of her former self and her GDR self were never

integrated. The novel attempts to grasp the meaning of being East German, of being wrenched from one set of self-definitions to being ingrained with another. At the center of Wolf's story is the need to comprehend the unexpected and unsolicited reeducation and its effects on the individual. *Kindheitsmuster* searches for the origins and location of GDR identity, engaging history to find its meaning.³⁰

CHAPTER FOUR NOTES

¹ From Norden's 3 July 1972 speech quoted in McAdams, *Germany Divided*, 101.

² Roger Woods, *Opposition in the GDR under Honecker, 1971-85* (New York: St. Martin's Press, Inc., 1986), 9.

³ In 1976, the official title of the SED's party leader was changed from 'First Secretary' to 'General Secretary.'

⁴ Turner, *Germany from Partition to Reunification*, 191-192. On the eve of his government's total collapse, Honecker resigned on 18 October 1989, Garton Ash, *In Europe's Name*, 636. With the end of the SED and the reunification of Germany, criminal charges were brought against the former leader for his role in the deaths of citizens killed trying to flee East Germany. However, his trial was suspended for humanitarian reasons, and the aging Honecker was flown to Russia by the Soviet military on the night of 13 March 1991, reportedly for urgent medical care, Charles Maier, *Dissolution: The Crisis of Communism and the End of East Germany* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), 319. After a brief stay in the USSR, Honecker, along with his wife Margot, left for Chile to evade prosecution in the new Germany. He died there in May 1994 at the age of 81, Wolfgang Saxon, "Obituary," *New York Times*, 30 May 1994, 40.

⁵ "East Germany: End of a Concept," *Time*, 3 March 1967, 37.

⁶ Lawrence Fellows, "Torchlight Parade a Highlight of Day," *New York Times*, 7 October 1969, 3. For additional descriptions of May Day and anniversary parades in the GDR, see "Thousands March in East Germany," *New York Times*, 8 October 1964, 3; "East Germans, Alone in Soviet Bloc, Display Arms," *New York Times*, 2 May 1969, 12; and "East Germans Display Might in Big Parade," *New York Times*, 8 October 1979, 12.

⁷ Henry Kirsch, *The German Democratic Republic: The Search for Identity* (Boulder: Westview Press, Inc., 1985), 154.

⁸ McAdams, *Germany Divided*, 101.

⁹ Maoz Azaryahu, "Street Names and Political Identity: The Case of East Berlin," *Journal of Contemporary History* 21 (1986): 590-600.

¹⁰ Mary Fulbrook, *The Divided Nation: A History of Germany, 1918-1990* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), 296.

¹¹ Kirsch, *The German Democratic Republic*, 130-133.

¹² Prior to 1973, the Church faced considerable pressures from the state. The *Kirchenbund's* progenitor, the Evangelical Church of Germany, which was allowed to exist in the 1940s and 1950s, had its official recognition abrogated by the SED in 1958. The crucial phase in the development of church-state relations (1968-1974) is closely examined by Robert F. Goeckel in *The Lutheran Church and the East German State: Political Conflict and Change under Ulbricht and Honecker* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990). In particular, chapter Seven concerns the increased rapprochement in the years 1973 to 1978, which allowed the Church to assume the role it played as civic forum in the years that followed.

¹³ See David M. Keithly's description of the 'safety valve' in *The Collapse of German Communism: The Year the Wall Came Down, 1989* (Westport: Praeger Publishers, 1992), 77.

¹⁴ Livingston, "East Germany between Moscow and Bonn," 304.

¹⁵ Jeffrey Kopstein, *The Politics of Economic Decline in East Germany, 1945-1989* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1997), 66-72. Kopstein's recent contribution has explained the political responses of the SED leadership to the continuous economic crisis of the GDR. He sets out to prove that it was the centralized economy itself which was the greatest obstacle to East German progress. He claims that the GDR was the communist country most capable of achieving financial stability on account of its people's "cultural predisposition to successful technocratic authoritarianism," but failed nonetheless, he argues, because of the flawed system.

¹⁶ Livingston, "East Germany between Moscow and Berlin," 304.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 304.

¹⁸ Keithly, *The Collapse of East German Communism*, 33.

¹⁹ Andreas Dorpalen, *German History in Marxist Perspective: The East German Approach* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1988), 49.

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- ²⁰ Ibid., 59.
- ²¹ Ibid., 51.
- ²² Alan Nothnagle, "From Buchenwald to Bismarck: Historical Myth-Building in the German Democratic Republic, 1945-1989," *Central European History* 26 no.1 (1993): 94.
- ²³ Glenn H. Penny, III, "The Museum für Deutsche Geschichte and German National Identity," *Central European History* 28 no.3 (1995): 347-358.
- ²⁴ "Angry Anniversary," *Newsweek*, 13 November 1967, 60.
- ²⁵ Laurence H. McFalls, *Communism's Collapse, Democracy's Demise?: The Cultural Context and Consequences of the East German Revolution* (New York: New York University Press, 1995), 40.
- ²⁶ Dr. sc. Adolf Laube et. al., *Geschichte: Lehrbuch für Klasse 7* (Berlin: Volk und Wissen Volkseigener Verlag, 1989), 16-17.
- ²⁷ For an English translation of *Kindheitsmuster*, see Christa Wolf, *A Model Childhood*, trans. Ursule Molinaro and Hedwig Rappolt (New York: Farrar, 1980).
- ²⁸ "Documentation: Christa Wolf," *The German Quarterly* 57 (Winter 1984): 91-92.
- ²⁹ Ibid., 95.
- ³⁰ Judith Ryan, *The Uncompleted Past: Postwar German Novels and the Third Reich* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1983), 141-145.

CHAPTER 5

Inventing Identity in the Federal Republic of Germany

WESTERNIZING THE STATE

From the very beginning of the FRG, social and political integration of Germany into Western Europe was the understood objective of the Western Allies and West German leaders. In the aftermath of a self-destructive war of aggression, the FRG turned westward looking for economic aid for reconstruction. Help was provided in the form of the Marshall Plan, and after economic stability was achieved, measurable financial prosperity soon followed. In the absence of popular sentimental connection to the new Republic, the miraculous economic progress of the 1950s and 1960s, the West German *Wirtschaftswunder*, became the most important ingredient in the new state's legitimacy and the most prominent feature of its problematic new identity. Recently acquired wealth, a rising standard of living, and material well being, all dependent on a thriving national economy, became defining elements in the West German self-perception. Economic strength was a palliative for the problem of a dislocated national identity, but it was superficial and dangerously vulnerable because market economies inevitably fluctuate. Though never tested by real economic crises, identity tied to the *Wirtschaftswunder* was an illusory construct incapable of truly sating the social, psychological needs of the new Germans.

The emerging Cold War confrontation between democracy and communism sent West German leaders seeking ideological safety in the free West. To the new politicians, Stalin's communism appeared as a threatening totalitarian cousin of National Socialism. Democracy, to be learned through introduction to Western Europe, was the best way to prevent the sins of the recent past from recurring, it was thought. West European social,

cultural, and political values were believed necessary for reshaping the society which had so recently fallen into “barbarism.” Ten years after the founding of the Federal Republic, the country’s first chancellor, Konrad Adenauer, still maintained the need for increasingly closer ties to the West to ensure the survival of democracy in Germany.¹ West German leaders, therefore, positioned the new state, the partial nation, to receive influences from Western Europe in the hope of redefining German identity.

More than any other statesman of the Federal Republic, Adenauer worked for Western integration, motivated by his devotion to the ideals of democracy and a pragmatic desire for a stable and healthy Germany. As chancellor between 1949 and 1963, he rebuilt diplomatic relations with Western countries and worked toward a unified Europe. His commitment to forging a new West European community of nations was a personal consequence of the First World War and would be further deepened by the experience of the second great European conflict that followed. Earlier in his political career, while serving as Chief Mayor of Cologne during the interwar period, Adenauer first proclaimed the diplomatic need for European interdependence. Future conflicts, he proclaimed in 1923, could be avoided through stronger economic bonds between the countries of Western Europe, among which he counted Germany.² To Adenauer, a native son of the Rhineland, Germany was geographically and culturally very much a part of Western Europe and far removed from the Asiatic Soviet Union. In his view, Germany’s place in the postwar arrangement was naturally in the West. After rising to the position of chancellor in the new West German Republic, Adenauer’s efforts at statecraft would always reflect these deep-seated beliefs.

When Adenauer died in April 1967, the 91-year-old former chancellor was honored by tens of thousands of Germans and a delegation of foreign dignitaries in a solemn funeral service at the Cologne Cathedral. Heads of state from the US, Great Britain, France, and Canada and representatives from the European Economic Union, the West European Union, the European Parliament, and NATO gathered to pay respects, attesting to the spirit

of reconciliation with the West for which Adenauer strove. At the hour-long state ceremony, he was eulogized as a “great European” and a “great Democrat.” Afterwards, Adenauer’s body was taken by boat up the Rhine to a burial site near his home. Symbolic of the FRG’s occidental posture, the Rhine was the central player in the final ceremonies venerating the Republic’s principal founder.³ It was perhaps only coincidental that the FRG would have as its first chancellor a Rhinelander who hoped the river of his home region would become a symbol of European friendship, but it was fitting that a native of the country’s westernmost region would lead the new state.

Despite the certitude of men like Adenauer, officially sanctioned efforts to cultivate identity in the FRG were absent; political elites seemed less concerned with dictating a West German character to the populace through overt gestures or symbolism than their Eastern counterparts. There were no politically aligned youth organizations to persuade young minds, no parades to display state power, no holidays to celebrate the FRG’s founding, and no programs of ideological inculcation as there were in the GDR. West German youth were free to participate in sub-cultures and private activities; the *Bundeswehr*, organized in the mid 1950s, was not employed to promote the power of the Federal government in public celebrations; and state anniversaries were not occasions to praise the government or the ruling party.

While the GDR’s tenth birthday was marked by festivities in the center of Berlin, the same milestone in the Federal Republic was scarcely noticed by its citizens. In fact, according to one press account “the idea of giving a school holiday was considered [by the federal government]. But it was pointed out that the children had just returned from the week-long Whitsun holiday, and it was decided that they ought not miss another day of studies.”⁴ This apparent indifference to shaping the thoughts of West German youth through identification with the state suggests that West German consciousness, if it indeed formed, was certainly not the result of calculated forces. Since it is likely that some sense of identity formed, incomplete though it was, it was the result of a more natural

development than Eastern identity. Capitalism had provided material well being for many, and democracy had created political stability and allowed nearly unrestricted expression of ideas. These factors had generated greater overall acceptance of the new identity offered by the government, but the very process of building identity necessitated something more.

DISSENSION IN A PLURALISTIC SOCIETY

Unlike the situation in the GDR, where opposition was punishable as a crime, nearly all dissenting views of the government in the Westernized state were permitted. In the spirit of democracy, the pluralistic political system of the FRG allowed views which challenged the state, though some provisions were made in the Basic Law to prevent forms of opposition which threatened to overthrow the federal government and abolish the system. Within the range of permissible disagreement, there were discordant voices from various sources, Left and Right. In disputing the government's authority, as these opponents did, they were contesting the principles on which the new identity was grounded.

On the right of the political spectrum, a number of neo-Nazi parties were allowed to participate in the postwar system. The National Democratic Party (NPD), which during the recession of the late 1960s won noticeable electoral support in state elections, and the Socialist Reichspartei both carried the Nazi banner in the early years of the FRG. Later, the *Republikaner*, gaining prominence in the 1980s, and the *Deutsche Volkunion*, formed in 1987, leveled the radical Right-wing nationalist criticisms of the CDU-led government. These parties, small as they were, represented a new extremism produced from the postwar predicament; they rejected Germany's new borders and fomented racial hostilities toward Germany's new minorities, primarily Turkish guest workers. Neo-Nazism was indeed a reaction to the postwar crisis of identity. This is evident by the large numbers of disaffected young men born after 1945 who were drawn to the Nazi successor parties; the parties were not composed solely of former SS officers and other anachronistic characters. These groups

had only limited direct political power, but their presence did reflect an existing public sentiment, which could have presented a very real problem for the West German system of government and the new German identity for which it stood had social and political conditions been less stable.⁵

The uncertain decade of the 1960s in which the NPD experienced some success was also a time of growing Leftist criticisms. In an age of youth culture, a generation gap was becoming apparent as young Germans questioned the government's commitment to democracy and the perceived materialism of the conservative, older generation. Their discontent climaxed in student demonstrations in 1968. Concurrently, revived Marxist intellectual activities expressed similar concerns. Neo-Marxist writers attacked the capitalist motivations of the FRG and complained of the government's repressive character which they believed lay hidden behind a facade of superficial democratic freedoms.⁶

It would later be claimed by conservative politicians and social theorists that the Marxist intellectuals' assaults on the federal government in the 1960s was the impetus for a wave of terrorism unleashed in the following decade. Throughout the 1970s, West Germany's prominent businessmen were the targets of a radical left-wing terrorist group calling itself the Red Army Faction (RAF). Formed in 1970, the RAF's bank robberies and murders in its fight against capitalist materialism quickly made newspaper headlines. The group was commonly referred to as the Baader-Meinhof gang after its two leaders, Andreas Baader and Ulrike Meinhof. The organization, whose membership was actually quite small, varying between six and thirty, claimed a connection to the nonviolent Leftist movements, but leaders of those latter groups denied any such affiliation. Still, the RAF's well-educated, middle class members were in tune to the Marxist criticism of modern capitalist society and carried out bombings and assassinations for the better part of the decade, hoping to reveal the same oppressive regime the intellectuals tried to expose through their writings. In the process, the RAF received considerable media attention. In 1972, the weekly periodical *Der Spiegel* published a continuous series of articles over the

entire year on the terrorists, which on more than one occasion was featured as the news magazine's cover story.⁷ The RAF's most recent activities were chronicled and the leaders' statements transmitted to the general public. The popular press effectively, even if unintentionally, disseminated the gang's anti-capitalist message while reporting its crimes. *Der Spiegel*, a liberal publication, informed its readers that the RAF's "declaration of war, which was contained in its manifesto, makes it unequivocally clear that it is against the system, not the people who serve in it,"⁸ and at times, didn't seem altogether reproachful.

When *Das Bild* reached the newsstand two days before Christmas 1971, its frontpage headline read "Baader-Meinhof Gang kills again."⁹ The tone of this story from the more conservative publication of media mogul Axel Springer angered and concerned the well known novelist Heinrich Böll who responded to the article with his own contribution to *Spiegel's* uninterrupted coverage of events. After recapitulating the RAF's anti-system views, Böll began to critique and then rebuke *Das Bild's* treatment of the latest story and the implicitly anti-democratic message it was sending to its readers. Böll, who realized the broader significance of the RAF's actions, became worried that *Das Bild's* conservative reaction to the crisis further destabilized what he believed to be "an extremely threatening situation for the Federal Republic of Germany." He claimed that the sensationalist vilification of the Baader-Meinhof gang in *Das Bild* promoted a "Lynchjustiz" mentality among millions of readers. The tacitly encouraged concept of justice based on instinct was in direct opposition to the legal principles on which West Germany's *Rechtsstaat* had been founded, and Böll was alarmed. "It is a time," he wrote, "which shouts out national emergency. It is an emergency of civil consciousness which, through publications like '*Bild*,' has become heightened."¹⁰ Böll perceived that the conservative popular press response to the RAF was as much a challenge to West Germany's adopted values as the effects of terrorism.

The violence of the Baader-Meinhof gang likewise evoked a response from the government, the severe nature of which also appeared to be endangering the democratic

ethos of the Republic. Before the threat of the RAF arose, the government had been considering controversial new legislation which aimed at increasing the state's power in dealing with opposition. The proposed laws were perceived by some as threatening the freedom which they were meant to safeguard. Clearly, it was, and remains, a difficult issue to resolve, but given the fate of the Weimar Republic, the actions of the RAF provided the support required for ratification of the new laws. The governmental initiatives, however, were reproached by the citizenry. The *Radikalenerlass* of 1972, in effect restricted the freedoms of civil servants; a series of laws written later revoked many basic rights from those accused of committing terrorist crimes. Punishment of convicted terrorists as well seemed unjustly harsh.¹¹ The government's exaggerated response to extremism came to be seen as excessive itself by the public. Many worried that in its attempt to protect freedom, the federal government was infringing on civil rights. The state's reaction to the problem of terrorism appeared to be dismantling the values upon which it had been founded.

The arrival in the western zones of occupation of expelled Germans from the eastern territories of Silesia and Pomerania at the war's end would also throw into doubt the viability of a new West German identity. The earliest waves of refugees to enter Germany proper had fled their homelands to escape the vengeful brutality of the advancing Red Army in 1944. It was perceived by Germans as a temporary emergency evacuation; with the return of peace in Europe, they would return home. But at the Yalta conference the following year, the Allies would agree on an officially sanctioned population transfer to completely empty the eastern lands of their German inhabitants and make way for new Polish settlers. Stalin had guaranteed his Polish communist cadres that all Germans would be removed from the territory east of the Oder-Neisse line, land which would be under their administration in the postwar arrangement. Because of the Soviet coordination of an international communist community in Eastern Europe, those expellees who landed in the Soviet zone of Germany would be forced to surrender any claims to their lost homes.¹² Such demands to return to the east would challenge the borders between the new socialist

states, threaten Stalin's eastern bloc order, and were therefore not permitted in the GDR. Agreements were signed in June and July 1950 by the communist leaders of East Germany, Poland, and Czechoslovakia finalizing their common frontiers.¹³

Though the issue had been formally laid to rest in the GDR, dislocated Germans in the Federal Republic organized politically into a special interest group, the Association of Expellees, and exerted a degree of influence over politicians, especially conservative ones. As the representative body of expellees, the organization voiced claims to their rights of self-determination and their homelands. In the summer of 1950 as the new eastern borders were being ratified in Warsaw, the Association issued its Charta of Expellees in Stuttgart. This document stated their demands for the old homelands and pledged their support for peaceful reconciliation between all peoples of the region. Western politicians, unlike their eastern counterparts, responded to the concerns of the German expellees. A decade after the expellees' declaration, Federal Republic president Heinrich Lübke would maintain the legitimacy of their requests, saying that a final resolution of the issue was still forthcoming.¹⁴ Even in 1990, Helmut Kohl did not readily concede the lost territories east of the Oder-Neisse line to Poland when the Federal Republic was enlarged to include all the land west of the frontier rivers. The undying claims of expellees would continually challenge the FRG's borders, an important precondition for its political sovereignty. More significantly, they would question the definitions of Germanness.

Because the spatial concept of the political community is involved in the formation of national identity, a nation must possess territory, its own special territory, to develop a complete sense of self. It is only a specific land, though, that qualifies as national territory. It is the historic homeland to which the people are connected. For the expellees, Silesia and Pomerania were those traditional homelands and *Heimat* regions. They were part of national territory, because in the minds of these displaced Germans, the eastern landscape had significance, like the Rhine River or the Bohemian Forest, as being German. The land held national, historic memories; it was the home of their forebears. Through time and

association, territory became a sacred, nationalized landscape embedded in the national memory. Land is a necessary ingredient in national identity. The loss of territory, then, can be equated to the loss of a complete identity. Expellees were a constant reminder of those German lands which were not included in the new German states. Without this former region in the east, the country was not whole and the nation's identity was only partial. The FRG's legitimacy as the sole representative of the German nation was in this way challenged by the expellees.

Dissension in the pluralistic society of the FRG continually challenged the concept of a Westernized identity while many West Germans were gradually accepting it. Growing identification with West European political values of democracy was an incremental process made possible because opposition to prevailing ideas was allowed. Having survived criticisms, the new self-definitions appeared more valid, more acceptable. Only when the freedom to challenge identity was denied did the state's notion of a Westernized identity become really threatened. Cautiously permitting dissenting views of West European integration, capitalism, and even democracy eventually legitimized these guiding principles and, no less importantly, created an environment in which the very difficult task of locating national identity could proceed naturally.

THE HISTORIKERSTREIT

As was the case in the GDR, history in the Federal Republic was given considerable attention in the search for self-understanding, though at first acute sensitivity to the immediate past blocked all thoughts on the topic. Through the period of consolidation and physical reconstruction, Germans concentrated solely and intently on the political and practical issues with which they were faced, avoiding the painful memories of National Socialism by means of collective amnesia. Eventually, though, the need to validate the officially appointed identity of the FRG's citizens forced open the discussions of the past.

Trying to revive the historical consciousness of the people, Helmut Kohl's government in the 1980s sought to organize a museum which would remind Germans who they were through rediscovery of their history. From the initial plans for the museum, a passionate debate was ignited, demonstrating the still unsettled condition of West German identity. The appeal to memory was, however, necessary because as it was noted at the time of the *Historikerstreit*, the future of Germany and German identity required coming to terms with history.

A proposal was commissioned in 1981 by the Federal Republic's president, Richard von Weizäcker, for the museum, which would be located in the erstwhile capital, the divided city of Berlin. A year after being given the assignment, the four historians, Hagen Schulze, Eberhard Jäckel, Michael Stürmer, and Harmut Boockman, presented their ideas pointing to the national priority they perceived. The historians encouraged the creation of a museum that would help Germans regain national consciousness. Three years later, in 1985, Chancellor Kohl announced the function of the proposed museum scheduled for completion in 1987, the year of Berlin's 750th anniversary. It would help Germans understand who they were, he said, and where they were going.¹⁵ The museum of history would become an instrument for examining and reclaiming identity.

From the beginning, the museum was a project of the conservative CDU government, leaving members of the liberal opposition feeling excluded from its planning.¹⁶ Consequently, from the Left came allegations of historical inaccuracy and political partisanship. A common fear was that Kohl's government was planning to establish a museum which would represent the views of a small, elite group of historians whose opinions corresponded to the conservative CDU politicians who had selected them. The government, it was believed, was attempting to use history to legitimize not only the FRG, but also the ruling conservative party and its politics.¹⁷ The ensuing debate was a fight over contemporary political issues as well as historical interpretation.

Through a perceived connection between conservative historians and politicians,

liberal opponents recognized a conspiratorial design to invent a new German history which intentionally downplayed the horrors of Hitler's Nazi state. The outspoken leader of this group, social philosopher Jürgen Habermas, believed it was an attempt to manufacture a new identity based on the Federal Republic's alliance with the West but without full recognition of the Nazi period. Such an identity, he insisted, ran the risk of renationalization. Stürmer and his colleague, Ernst Nolte, particularly, were the targets of Habermas's accusations. Stürmer, who saw no reason for Germans born after the war to feel personal responsibility or the guilt of history, promoted the achievements of the FRG as central to identity; Nolte's comparative analysis of the Holocaust found precedent in the genocidal crimes of Stalin's Soviet Union, thereby exonerating Germans from some form of unique evil. He suggested leaving it behind as a shameful, but passed, phase in Germany's long and ongoing history. Despite the claims of Habermas, these neo-conservative historians were attempting only to structure a positive identity, not revive an extremist one. The accusations of Habermas were in reality misdirected. Filling the postwar void of identity with the accomplishments of the FRG, namely freedom and democracy, would indeed be an important ingredient in the solution, and neither camp disputed this. However, disagreement persisted on the role of history and its interpretations in shaping the new identity. The stances taken and the criticisms put forward during the *Historikerstreit* represented not only the conflict in trying to recover an acceptable national identity, but also the importance of historical consciousness in that endeavor.

More than the museum itself, the *Historikerstreit* which resulted from its inception was a critical self-examination, the first in fact in nearly twenty years. Not coincidentally, the players in the debate were the new Germans, Germans "blessed with the grace of a late birth," to use Helmut Kohl's words. While West Germans assuaged themselves with economic performance and their government wrestled with the politics of reunification, the real German question had been neglected for decades. The historians' controversy of 1986/87 made this evident by broaching fundamental questions about the nature of the

national community. It went beyond the talk of boundaries and division to consider the ties which bind a people; ethnicity, culture, geography, and of course, history. History in this case was that of the Third Reich. In attempting to overcome the burden of the Nazi legacy, those historians accused of revisionism tried to reclaim the right of nationhood for Germans, which had been consciously and unconsciously denied since the end of the war. Because nationhood is a prerequisite of national identity, this was necessary for the recovery of identity. Historians have long legitimized national identities by their articulation of the past. The debate of the late 1980s proves that the development of identity in the FRG was far from complete at the time of reunification; it also showed that a nation's historical consciousness, its memory, and its interpretations of its history, none of which provided solace or expressed a consensus in postwar Germany, could not be ignored if identity was to be fully reconstructed.

THE PAINTINGS OF ANSELM KIEFER

The search for identity was also expressed in the cultural activities of the FRG with a particular emphasis on deciphering an unmanageable history. While many social taboos persisted and limited the extent of discussions, coping with the Nazi past eventually became unavoidable. During the days of student demonstrations in the late 1960s, the post-1945 generation began asking about their parents' roles in the years of the Third Reich. However, the radical Leftist movement faded shortly thereafter. But in the conservative 1980s, when interest in national identity arose around the *Historikerstreit*, the country's experience with fascism again captured the population's interest.

From the earliest examinations of the past, one young student would become fixed on Germany's dark history and its implications for his own self-knowledge as a postwar German. The paintings of Anselm Kiefer, more incisively than the work of any other contemporary artist, would confront the horrible memories of a nation reluctant to

remember. Born in Bavaria in March 1945, Kiefer had studied law at the University of Freiburg until 1966 when a desire to express himself artistically redirected his education. In 1970, he entered the Düsseldorf Academy of Arts where he came under the influence of Joseph Beuys, a prominent Conceptualist who would later help found the West German Green Party. Beuys's own work tried to address Nazism but was far surpassed by his pupil's capacity for introspection. Kiefer's first solo show in Cologne in 1973 was followed by a major exhibition four years later at Amsterdam's Galerie Helen Van Der Meij. In these years, Kiefer's career advanced, and in 1980, he gained sudden notoriety when he displayed his work at the Venice Biennale.¹⁸ Propelling him into public discussion, the themes he had been facing for a decade abruptly became relevant to the growing debate on the nation.

Not strictly a painter, Kiefer's art has taken many forms and has employed various media. He has used enormous canvases and crafted handmade books. The works are a synthesis of painting, photography, sculpture, and linguistic devices often smeared with shellac, glazed in molten lead, wrapped with copper wire, glued, stapled, and scorched. His choice of materials deliberately recalls the heavy machinery of Hitler's armored divisions, the desolated landscapes left in their wake, and the brutal depths of the crematoria. The ponderous quality of his art portrays the destruction of the world war in a physical sense and conveys the less visible anxiety of its emotional consequences. Feeling burdened by the guilt of his forbears, Kiefer directly confronted the bleak inheritance of the Third Reich.

In 1969, Kiefer began his exploration with a book of photographs entitled *Occupations*. The self-portraits showed the artist in well known locations throughout Europe dressed in riding pants and jackboots, his arm outstretched in the legally forbidden Hitler salute. This largely misunderstood project, though less sophisticated than his later work, attempted to ridicule Nazi arrogance through satirical images of a single, tiny figure before such grand monuments of Western civilization as the Roman Coliseum among

others. Another book, created in 1975 and titled *Cauterization of the Rural District of Buchen*, is a striking and more mature product of Kiefer's imagination. Illustrating a devastated landscape resembling the flat plains of the eastern territories, charred pages of paint-covered photographs were themselves torched. The depiction of vast, open fields recurs in Kiefer's art frequently. His thoughts linger on the ruined German fatherland, the metaphor for the nation. The book's title hints at the glimmer of hope Kiefer found among the historical carnage. The seared landscapes he shows have been prepared for new growth. Depicting the moment of Germany's total collapse in May 1945, Kiefer implies that from the blackened fields of the zero hour, a new nation could grow, and it would spring from the German soil.

The depravity and violence of the Holocaust were treated by Kiefer in *Your Golden Hair, Margarete* (1981) in which the ideal German female is juxtaposed against the less perceptible remains of a Jewish woman. Both are represented only by their hair amidst another sullen landscape receding quickly to a distant point. While the Jewish woman, a victim of the crematorium, is depicted by the gray, colorless ash worked into the artist's paint, Margarete is characterized by straw glued to the surface of the canvas. This natural material, grown in the romanticized countryside, is an allegorical device suggestive of another connection of identity and the landscape. Lamentation of the most baleful crime of extermination in Kiefer's mind accompanied the desire to find an identity which like the land had been decimated in the war.

Responses to Anselm Kiefer varied, and in the early years of his career, the newness of his historical discourse startled and worried many art critics who interpreted his ambiguous iconography as nationalistic, even fascist. One American reviewer warned it would be a mistake to ignore Kiefer's subtext. The 1988 retrospective, she confessed, "set alarm bells ringing in my head."¹⁹ Some observers recognized the need for Kiefer's moral task. Kiefer's art, for all its uneasy explicitness, did not solve the postwar crisis; it merely reflected it openly. In these cultural products, Kiefer voiced the repressed disquietude of

the West Germans who were unwilling or unable to explain the past. This, he believed, was a dangerous abstention. Steven Henry Madoff, interviewing Kiefer in 1988 for *Artnews*, summarized the importance of history and the role of Kiefer's art in the development of national identity: ". . . his art was a call to memory. What he and the German people ought to remember, he suggested, was a terrible part of themselves--but not as terrible as pretending that the events of the war were just *history*, never to be spoken of, better to be ignored."²⁰ Kiefer sought to unearth that history and repossess German identity.

CHAPTER FIVE NOTES

¹ “Adenauer Stresses Need of Tie to West,” *New York Times*, 9 September 1959, 17.

² Gordon A. Craig, *From Bismarck to Adenauer: Aspects of German Statecraft* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1958), 126-138. For additional information on Adenauer’s perspectives on West Germany’s place in postwar Europe and on his role in forming the new republic, refer to William E. Griffith, *The Ostpolitik of the Federal Republic of Germany* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1978), chapter Two.

³ “Adenauer Buried on Rhine; Allied Leaders Pay Tribute,” *New York Times*, 26 April 1967, 1-2.

⁴ “Constitution Day is Marked in Bonn,” *New York Times*, 24 May 1959, 9.

⁵ Fulbrook, *The Divided Nation*, 280-289.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 283.

⁷ Nearly every issue of *Der Spiegel* in 1972 (vol. 26) includes information on the Baader-Meinhof gang. Earlier and later issues as well reported on the group’s activities

⁸ Heinrich Böll, “Will Ulrike Gnade oder freies Geleit?” *Der Spiegel*, 10 January 1972, 54.

⁹ “Baader-Meinhof Bande Mordet Weiter,” *Das Bild*, 23 December 1971, 1.

¹⁰ Heinrich Böll, “Will Ulrike Gnade oder Feies Geleit?” *Der Spiegel*, 10 January 1972, 55.

¹¹ Fulbrook, *The Divided Nation*, 285.

¹² Hubatsch, et. al., *The German Question*, 308-312.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 177.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 308-311.

¹⁵ Charles S. Maier, *The Unmasterable Past: History, Holocaust, and German National Identity* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988), 121.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 127-128.

¹⁷ Beatrice Heuser, “Museums, Identity and Warring Historians--Observations on History in Germany,” *The Historical Journal* 33 no.2 (1990): 424-425.

¹⁸ Paul Taylor, “Painter of the Apocalypse,” *New York Times Magazine*, 16 October 1988, 80 and 102-103.

¹⁹ Kay Larson, “Bonfire of the Calamities,” *New York*, 31 October 1988, 101-102.

²⁰ Steven Henry Madoff, “Anselm Kiefer: A Call to Memory,” *Artnews*, October 1987, 128, emphasis original.

CHAPTER 6

Reunification: Searching for the New German Identity

THE QUESTION OF CITIZENSHIP

Since unification, Germany has experienced a tremendous increase in the number of immigrants and asylum-seekers crossing its borders. In 1990 people east of the Oder River entered in search of economic betterment after the collapse of their communist economies, and following the disintegration of the former Yugoslavia, hundreds of thousands have fled to Germany to escape genocidal warfare in the Balkans. Aside from the practical problems of accommodating such vast numbers, immigrants have complicated the process of defining the nation in reunified Germany. In a time of economic uncertainty and social discord between East and West, the presence of foreigners has forced Germans to reevaluate the liberal and unrestricted right to asylum guaranteed by Article 16 of the Basic Law.¹ This also raised questions about citizenship and reflects the anxiety indigenous Germans feel about the withering of ethnic identity in an increasingly multicultural society. Because many perceive ethnicity and citizenship as interdependent and believe them to be among the few links remaining between disparate German peoples, the citizenship status of immigrants has become an especially sensitive topic.

For over eighty years Germany's basis for citizenship has been the Imperial Naturalization Law of 1913 which dictates "that citizenship be passed by descent from parent to child." This law, based on the legal principle of *jus sanguinis*, was created to obstruct foreigners from becoming citizens earlier in this century when many Germans believed their cultural identity threatened by scores of immigrants from the East.² It would later provide expatriated Germans living outside the country with the opportunity to reclaim

their long lost citizenship. This, too, has had implications for contemporary German identity and society and will be addressed below.

The country's 6.5 million foreigners have unduly received the blame for many of the country's problems since unification.³ Though crime and unemployment have been attributed to them, these problems are the unavoidable results of unification and are more credibly assigned to the entire population. While it may seem that German prejudice toward foreigners is fueled by competition for limited economic resources, a convincing study by Jerome S. Legge, Jr. presented in the *Journal of Politics* provides an alternative and more accurate explanation for the common anti-foreigner temperament. Legge's research disproves the assumption of economic motives with a "symbolic theory" of prejudice, the result of "early political and value socialization." He does this by assessing the level of economic satisfaction and finds no necessary correlation in the case of Germany. In an authoritative conclusion, Legge admits that "the least fortunate finding is that German identity . . . is much stronger [than economic status] in accounting for hostile attitudes toward foreigners."⁴

The arrival of new immigrants in rapidly growing numbers in the early years of unification contributed to a revival of feelings which engendered the citizenship law of 1913 and has produced a comparable result. Immigration reached its peak in 1991 when a total of 256,112 foreigners entered the distressed country.⁵ To its credit, Germany has admitted more politically repressed and economically destitute people than any other European nation. It has accepted 79% of all Europe's immigrants.⁶ In September 1996, the *Economist* was able to report that Germany had received 320,000 endangered Bosnians from the turmoil of their homeland, while France and Britain cared for only 15,000 and 13,000, respectively.⁷ But the strain became apparent in 1991 as popular sentiment began to shift. Sixty-nine per cent of those surveyed in a public opinion poll in September of 1991 favored utterly rescinding the right of asylum to those who tried to enter their country.⁸ The perceived threat became so great that in the following year, 56% believed the

issue of asylum-seekers was the most important problem facing the country; 74% felt that limiting the number of asylum-seekers was the most paramount task facing the government.⁹

Public attitudes directed a series of political events and government assertiveness which mirrored the changing mood of the people. In October 1991, the Federal Constitution Court struck down an unusually progressive law in Schleswig-Holstein which had been enacted in 1989 and enabled foreigners to vote and hold local political positions.¹⁰ Little more than a year later, in November 1992, the liberal Social Democratic Party agreed to proposed amendments to Article 16 during a special congress.¹¹ The amendments restricted the number of asylum-seekers entering Germany to 220,000 per year beginning 1 January 1993. This unprecedented modification, however, did not satisfy the public; 70% wanted further restrictiveness. This majority of the population found a political proponent of their cause, Oskar Lafontaine, and was later successful in reducing the newly decreed quota.¹² Lafontaine, who established his career promoting left-wing causes, such as environmentalism, has displayed a thoroughly pragmatic view of the unification process.¹³

Only two years after the drastic change to Article 16, the number of immigrants reaching German soil was a relatively scant 10,000 per month.¹⁴ The influx of asylum-seekers and the political tensions their presence created has produced considerable pressure in German society at a time when Germans are perplexed by their lack of identity and trying to recover and reaffirm their sense of national consciousness based on the traditionally important role of ethnicity.

Concern over immigration has had deadly consequences for some of Germany's foreigners since unification. The character of the debate on the country's asylum laws in 1992 fostered eerily familiar acts of xenophobic violence which caught the attention of the world. Racist rhetoric of right-wing politicians and the negative images transmitted by the media encouraged the prevailing lack of tolerance toward non-Germans. However, the Right was not the exclusive source of undemocratic dialogue. Moderate Christian

Democratic Union politicians spoke of the “‘ghettoization’ of Germany” and “societal ‘degeneration’.” Even *Der Spiegel*, which consistently offers criticism of the government from the Leftist point of view, took a pitiless stance toward the plight of immigrants.¹⁵ Despite international fears of reviving extremism and aggression, similarities between Hitler’s Germany and post-unification Germany are only superficial, and equating the two is to misunderstand contemporary events and the current dilemma. Historian Laurence McFalls, who has provided valuable insight into the mood of the nation, has attributed these problems to “the ambiguities of German national identity and especially the conflict between East and West German (political) cultural values,”¹⁶ not resurgent nationalism. Nonetheless, unification’s concomitant crisis of identity has had shocking results.

Limited previous experience with foreigners, particularly on the part of East Germans, and unacceptance among West Germans has heightened the effects of their presence. In the former GDR, only 1.2% of the population were non-Germans, invited by the socialist government to work for a specified length of time. These people, less than 200,000, were segregated from society in isolated work camps, leaving East Germans psychologically ill-prepared for at least one aspect of the Reunification Treaty which was negotiated in 1990, which mandated that 20% of Germany’s new immigrants be sent to the Eastern *Länder*.¹⁷ But in the West where foreign populations in some cities, such as Frankfurt-am-Main and Offenbach, were greater than twenty per cent, assimilation has still been elusive.¹⁸ A study conducted in the early 1980s revealed that 49% of West Germans had antagonistic feelings toward foreigners residing in the FRG. Anxiety caused by the sudden appearance of foreigners in the East after unification and attitudes established earlier were expressed in a 1991 public opinion survey when respondents sympathized with right-wing parties promoting “action against foreigners.”¹⁹ This percentage indicates more than simply a rising perception of minorities as unwelcome competitors for jobs.

Around the time of this 1991 survey, these feelings began to manifest themselves as support for right-wing parties in the West and anti-foreigner violence in the East. In the

state elections of April 1992, extremist parties, openly campaigning against foreigners, increased their representation in the government. The *Republikaner* earned 10.9% of the vote in Baden-Württemberg, while *Deutsche Volksunion* gained 6.2% in Schleswig-Holstein.²⁰ As political endorsement for extremism grew in the western states, frustration over identity was expressed through racist violence in the East where the population has been less politically active.

An arson attack on a reception center for foreigners in the Saxon town of Hoyerswerd on 17 September 1991 was the first most widely noticed incident of this brand of violence in the new Germany. Assaults on foreigners, some of whom had lived in Germany for decades, climaxed in 1992 in Rostock, Mölln, and Solingen and continued the following year, most frequently in the East. By January 1994 as the violence subsided, 19,000 anti-foreigner crimes, including 30 murders, had been recorded by police.²¹ Michael Ignatieff, narrating *A Nation Returns: Germany*, a 1994 film about this ominous problem, correctly assessed the motives of the unsettled East Germans who were wrestling with the equivocation of their new role: “For a people who felt stripped of their old identity, it was the easiest way, the oldest way, to say ‘we’re German’.”²² Self-identification as Germans relied on the definition and destruction of non-Germans. While bystanders sympathized with skinhead assailants and didn’t intervene, typecast youths vented the confusion and anxiety of a confounded people. It was not the superiority of a confident new German nationalism, because in Germany this certitude did not exist. These adolescents, most of whom are under the age of twenty, may be guided by extreme racist ideology, but in a way they are representative of Germany as a whole; they are disoriented, unrooted, and suffering from low self-esteem.²³ In this light, xenophobic violence can be seen as “an extreme response of a small number of East and West Germans in the society-wide search to overcome the East-West conflict of values and interests.”²⁴

When the Basic Law was drafted after World War II, the defeated Germany was a fractured nation, both politically and geographically. A far-sighted hope of those creating

the new constitution was that an intact Germany would one day be reestablished. They believed this required not the acquisition of lost territory, but the coalescence of the German people, even those who lived well beyond Germany's prewar boundaries. This conviction determined the citizenship rules adopted regarding those living outside the country's new borders. They aimed to restore the complete nation by striving for an all-inclusive, but strictly German, citizenry. Article 116, based on the 1913 law, reserved the right of full citizenship for ethnic Germans abroad and bestowed upon them all the social and economic benefits provided by the government. The ethnocultural character of this clause continued the traditional German equation of ethnicity and nationality. Douglas Klusmeyer illuminates the effects of this long-standing view on the development of the constitution: "By singling out the shared racial inheritance of the German 'stock' as a criterion for repatriation, the framers invoked a distinctly biological conception of Germanness."²⁵ This idea of hereditary belonging has added to the befuddled condition of national identity.

Since the late 1980s well over a million *Aussiedler*, or ethnic Germans, returned to their ancestral home from Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union, most of them settling in the wealthy western *Länder*, North Rhine-Westphalia and Baden-Württemberg. It is estimated that there are another 3.5 million in these distant regions.²⁶ In the year of unification alone, 400,000 arrived. This tremendous number has strained local resources and created temporary shortages in housing. This concerns some, but *Aussiedler* are typically younger than the average West German and will likely contribute more to the economy and the social security system than they will draw from them.²⁷ As well, they are filling a need in the economy by accepting unwanted menial jobs. Still, they are no longer being encouraged to return home by the federal government. More significantly, they are resented by indigenous Germans when they do arrive in the FRG. The sour welcome given to ethnic Germans is not principally because their arrival has caused problems at an inconvenient time. The claims to citizenship by so many *Aussiedler*, based on remote

ancestral ties, has added to the national question of German identity by challenging the faith in ethnicity as well as its legitimacy.

Since Germany has been inundated by these Germans, whose forefathers left home centuries ago to resettle in the East, indecision has grown. These displaced people return usually with idealized notions of life in Germany but with no knowledge of the language. The physical appearance and lifestyles of most *Aussiedler* evinces their adopted culture, not German heritage. In fact, there is little about them to suggest they are German. This has affected the perception many native Germans have of them; many wonder if they are truly German. A 1988 survey showed that only 38% of people in West Germany were certain *Aussiedler* are German.²⁸ The ambivalent status of *Aussiedler* in the minds of Germans born on German land reveals the pervasive disquiet of identity, and it suggests that the romanticism of ethnicity may be fading.

IMBALANCE OF POLITICAL POWER

When the Federal Republic's constitution was written in 1949, it provided a legal measure for its replacement in the event of reunification. Article 146 of the Basic Law required that at such a time a permanent constitution be created and democratically approved by an all-German consensus. The development and acceptance of a new, truly national, constitution would expectedly entail constructive public debate and healthy participation in the spirit of democracy. However, when forty years elapsed and the time came to employ Article 146, the GDR was facing economic crisis and the Soviet Union, whose approval was needed for the restoration of full German sovereignty and removal of Soviet troops from the occupied country, was experiencing its own historic and destabilizing transformation.²⁹

Such domestic and international circumstances added unforeseeable pressures and threatened the very progress of unification because of the undoubtedly lengthy deliberations

that were likely. Sensing these obstacles to formal unification, West German politicians sought a quicker path to uniting the countries, and on 23 August 1990, the East German *Volkskammer* conceded to the decision to integrate by means of the less appropriate Article 23 of the Basic Law. The true purpose of this clause was to allow for “the accession of new territories organized as federal *Länder* into the existing constitutional order.”³⁰ It was clearly not intended for unification of the equally sovereign Cold War countries, but it unwittingly provided a legal alternative to the obligations of Article 146. Because Article 23 was employed, the creation of an approved constitution was not legally required, therefore, public participation was not elicited. The German people, particularly the East Germans, were, in effect, barred from the process of negotiating a constitution for their new country.

Because the German people so overwhelmingly approved the decisiveness, if not political cunning, of their elected officials retroactively, the implications for national identity were not apparent. While it is true that few East Germans questioned the wisdom of rapid unification, even as their economy reached its lowest ebb in 1992, the process lacked mutual consideration and thoughtful exploration of the new German role. A national debate on the composition and philosophy of a new German constitution would have facilitated the establishment of common political values and contributed to a greater understanding between the two ideologically disparate peoples. The rush to unify prevented this thoughtful search and formed a political divide that exists today in place of the former inner-German border.

Helmut Kohl, the man responsible for the expediency of Germany’s reunification, ascended to the post of Chancellor in October 1982 after an abortive campaign six years earlier. The selection of the 52-year-old moderate conservative of middle class origin to lead the country marked the nation’s shift to the political Right. An active member of the Christian Democratic Union since the age of 17, Kohl held his first political office as a parliament deputy in his home state, Rheinland-Palatinate, and eventually served as its minister-president between 1969 and 1976. His performance in the CDU throughout the

1970s, which won him the support of his fellow party members, ultimately earned him the party's nomination for Chancellor.³¹ With an eye on the past, this doctor of history sought to establish a return to normalcy in international relations for Germany through his political career; he showed a firm commitment to the integration of the European Community and German membership in the North Atlantic Treaty Organization.³² His leadership and decisiveness during the reunification process rewarded him with a 50% approval rating among Germans and helped him gain reelection in 1994 despite the country's economic recession.³³ In the election of 27 September 1998, however, Kohl was voted out of office by a polity dissatisfied with the country's lingering economic stagnation and the government's conservative posture, ending the longest tenure of any Federal Republic Chancellor.

The undemocratic character of unification set a precedent for the political domination of the East Germans by West German political parties. It was the first example of the limited political power East Germans have experienced since joining their Western brethren. This outcome has led some to believe that the hopes of the 1989 Revolution were never realized. Instead of gaining freedom and equality, East Germany was simply annexed by the FRG, obliged to accept its legal system, and forced to assume its identity. This produced resentment among East German intellectuals, like playwright Heiner Müller who considered unification "a colonization process,"³⁴ and has proven detrimental to social integration in the years since. The Federal Republic's perceived irredentism did not completely escape judgment by its own citizens either. The apparently imminent eastward advance of West German capitalism into the "first socialist state on German soil" provoked a violent response from one notorious segment of the populace. The Red Army Faction, dormant since the 1970s, was reawakened by the West's ostensible victory over communism. In the first week of December 1989, the chief of the giant West German Deutsche Bank, Alfred Herrhausen, who had been planning and promising investment in the East since the breaching of the Berlin Wall, was killed when an RAF bomb attached to

his limousine detonated.³⁵ This assassination, unlike those two decades earlier, did not presage a series of deadly attacks on the capitalist system, but it did revive fears of terrorism and express an extreme rejection of the nature of the approaching merger.

Because East Germany was merely incorporated into the FRG and without much consideration, there exist today two different identities in the now territorially whole country. This situation has naturally precluded the establishment of a new identity. For this to change, indigenous East Germans need to participate more in the legal and political spheres, assert their worthwhile contributions, and influence the future of the new nation. This may be expected to occur gradually over time, but in these early years of unification, East Germans have actually been removed from positions of power and influence by West German media and political forces, while the citizens of the five new *Länder* become more separated from national political decisions.

East Germany's leading politicians have been forced out of office as a result of accusations of involvement with the old communist regime's secret police, the *Stasi*, or collaboration with its ruling party, the SED. By 1995, only one native East German remained as Premier of any of the new states. Manfred Stolpe has retained his post in the state of Brandenburg, because his constituents presumably recognized their dwindling representation and continued to support him.³⁶ On 12 July 1992, awareness of the social and economic injustices endured by East Germans as a result of unification compelled Eastern politicians Gregor Gysi and Wolfgang Diestel to call for the creation of Committees for Justice to counter these iniquities.³⁷

After leading the people's revolution against the communist regime in 1989, New Forum combined forces with Democracy Now and Initiative for Peace and Human Rights on 7 February 1990 to form *Bündnis 90*, but was quickly overpowered by a newly assembled Eastern arm of the brawny West German Social Democratic Party.³⁸ The Eastern Social Democrats subsequently won a majority vote in the first free elections in East Germany on 14 March 1990, supplanting the home-grown coalition and seizing

control. The small, feckless *Bündnis 90* has since merged with the West German Green Party. Perhaps to the surprise of some, the only East German-born party to attract members is the postcommunist Party of Democratic Socialism, successor of the extinct SED. Its recovery is due, in part, to the poor impression made by the democratic Western parties and the seemingly obtuse political system they represent. Still, the levels of East German membership in political parties are well below those in the West.

The reasons for Western dominance and Eastern political immobility are clear: the Western parties were quick and thorough about advancing their organizational support and money to gain membership in the East and successfully blocked the emergence of modest rival parties of Eastern origin; the current ambivalence of East Germans is probably rooted in the popular retreat from political life experienced by many East Europeans in the 1970s and 1980s; because the losses suffered as a result of unification have varied in extent and form depending on region, generation, and gender, there has been no concentrated Eastern volition to perform in the political arena. It must also be realized that the events of 1989 produced no prominent revolutionaries to whom East Germans could look for leadership in the post-revolutionary world. Unlike Poland and Czechoslovakia, East Germany had no preeminent figures of its own, and so they were supplied by the West.

Western command over political development in East Germany was also felt in academia. In what students and faculty at East Berlin's Humboldt University called "ruthless state interference," the West Berlin senate began dissolving entire departments, dismissing many teachers, and requiring others to prove their worth through academic competition. The purpose of this purge was to eliminate the teachings of socialism to East Germany's young people; Marxism-Leninism was a required course for all fourth-year students and sought to lay the ideological foundations of the socialist society. Because of this influence, the departments of law, philosophy, history, economy, and education were dismantled. Along with their restructuring, massive restaffing has also changed the face of the university. Many faculty members who owed their positions to party loyalty were

replaced, in some cases by professors from the West. At Humboldt University approximately six hundred contracts were canceled as a result of the transformation.³⁹

While the advantages brought to young scholars by the collapse of the GDR are tremendous, such as intellectual freedom and international participation, the reconfiguration of the country's universities was perceived as an attack upon Eastern values, evident from the protests of teachers and students it incited in January 1991. Even after the unification, widespread faith in the virtues of socialism remains among East Germans; a 1992 public opinion survey showed that 57% of East Germans believed that, despite being poorly implemented in their country, socialism was "a good idea."⁴⁰ A similar study by *Der Spiegel* revealed East Germans were convinced of its merits and, still, five years after unification not willing to abandon it.⁴¹

Like the actions of West German political parties which quickly entered East Germany in 1990 and dictated the political choices of the people, the changes forced upon universities symbolized Western efforts to have East Germans conform to their own set of values. Given the level of enthusiasm in the East, this was a likely West German reaction in the wake of communism's demise, but it lacked the pluralistic sentiment for which the East Germans had struggled. Rather than thoughtful consideration for East German perspectives, the West strove to incorporate only East German territory and population into an unqualified Federal Republic. Unification was an opportunity to blend the two German states, but at least politically, it assumed the character of annexation. East Germans have reacted with resentful affirmation of their own individuality and created an atmosphere unlikely to produce cooperation in the search for national identity.

A CLASH OF CULTURES

During the Revolution of 1989, the people of the GDR were compelled by their desires for freedom and material betterment to affect social, political, and economic reform

in East Germany. In the quick and auspicious drive to unify the two existing German states which followed their successful protests, social and political equality with the West Germans was a reasonable expectation. But, this endeavor was sidetracked when the disparaging realities of unification changed the ideas East and West Germans had about one another. Very quickly the roles were assigned and tensions arose. In Berlin the wealthier, more urbane residents of the western part of the city derided unsophisticated East Berliners for speaking their coarse, working-class *Berlinerisch* dialect. To those living in the east, it seemed West Berliners wanted no part of their side of the city.⁴² This displays the social division that has persisted throughout the country and predictably hampered the formation of an aggregate national identity while shaping the East German view of capitalism and the West German view of socialism.

To be sure, forty years of life under opposing ideological and economic systems fostered profound social dissimilarities. The distinctions were readily apparent, especially to East Germans whose guiding socialist structure was so rapidly replaced by a very different set of free market principles. Economic integration, which preceded constitutional reunification, opened new markets to Western businesses in 1990, thereby introducing East Germans to the unscrupulous salespeople, exploitative employers, and disreputable business partners who rushed in seeking profits. Being the first and only personal contact with the West for many East Germans, this shaped lasting and unfavorable opinions. Three years after unification, many showed concern for the West's preoccupation with materialism, its sensationalist tabloids, the trivial partisanship of its politicians, and its indifference to social inequity. Entirely absent from the GDR, these foreign standards seemed to them provoked by West Germany's competitive climate, which they dubbed the "elbow society."⁴³

Capitalism's perceived aggression and self-concern have been particularly unpalatable to the East Germans and have elevated their sense of separation from the West, because as Laurence McFalls points out, modesty, equality, and solidarity were the values

promoted by the GDR's socialist society and revered by its people.⁴⁴ The regret some feel for the lost sense of community has been heard: "Our life was more personal, more relaxed, a lot friendlier."⁴⁵ A 1992 poll showed that 47% of East Germans hoped the united Germany would find a new path, combining the economic advantages of a free market with the humanist virtues of socialism.⁴⁶ This finding shows the East German disjunction with the West.

Before unification, West Germans had their own conception of life on the eastern side and believed Germans there to be essentially much like themselves. Perhaps this is because in 1949 the founders of their constitution formally proclaimed that the FRG's democracy was established "also on behalf of those Germans who were prevented from participating."⁴⁷ This official sentiment, which was voiced by several politicians in the intervening decades and continued until its goal was realized in 1990, rested on the hope of eventual national re-consolidation and guided popular opinion. Consequently, most West Germans in 1989 believed their estranged cousins deserving of full citizenship in the Federal Republic and were willing, if not happy, to extend their democratic principles and economic well-being to the residents of the five new *Länder*. This posture of irredentism assumed that any cultural distinctions formed during the GDR's existence were only superficial and would naturally dissipate as East Germans became reacquainted with the larger German populace. Additionally, it was supposed "that a political and intellectual vacuum would be progressively filled by the West."⁴⁸ But, former citizens of the GDR who initially relinquished their old bonds in favor of new ones, have since reclaimed their unique past out of disenchantment and in reaction to their treatment by *Wessis*. This East German hesitation was unanticipated in 1990 and has given renewed pertinence to Hans-Magnus Enzensberger's assessment, "Our identity is so irremediably lost that one may wonder if we can still speak of a German nation,"⁴⁹ made decades ago when unification was little more than a distant dream.

Soon West Germans developed an unflattering opinion of their new compatriots which supported growing doubts about previously accepted inter-German affinities. In the workplace, West Germans observed to their dismay a lack of diligence and efficiency, traits that are widely recognized as intrinsically German and requisite of the German worker. Under the planned economy of socialism, however, these qualities were not inspired by the system. Some complain that East Germans adhere “to an entitlements mentality developed under 40 years of Communism.”⁵⁰ It has also been asserted that socialism stunted the growth of the people leaving them with “little will, small desire and limited ideas of how to participate effectively in an unplanned, process-oriented, ‘less helpful’ society.”⁵¹ Indeed, work practices did evolve differently from those in the FRG, and to West Germans who have founded their individual sense of self, in part, on the perseverance that enabled their country’s economic miracle in the 1950s and 1960s, this disparity is unbridgeable. These attitudes have produced a condescending tone among West Germans which has advanced each group’s irritation with each other. The unexpected disappointments, added to the burden of financing the problematic merger, have produced a resentment among West Germans that has fomented social division, erased previous notions of similarities, and dissolved the early optimism of 1989.

Along with the sour welcome of West Germans, people in the East began witnessing unfamiliar social ills, the inescapable aspects of a capitalist society. The crime, homelessness, and unemployment that were becoming part of East German life were not what East Germans had envisioned in 1990, and many began to regret the absence of socialist compassion. Even though *Der Spiegel* claimed in 1994 “The economy is healthy again”⁵² and *Business Week* declared in 1995 “The Worst Is Finally Over in Eastern Germany . . . the region’s economy is booming,”⁵³ lamentation for the old system has continued. The *New York Times* reported on 1 September 1996 that a full 20% of East Germans would return to communism if given the chance.⁵⁴ The remaining socialist moral code opposite West German values has contaminated efforts at social and political unity. It

also suggests that a distinct East German identity, shaped by forty years of separate evolution, is more deeply rooted than had been suspected. Realizing this themselves, they have begun to reevaluate their past, to reconnect with it, and even take pride in it.

This has been precipitated not only by ubiquitous social disparity and ideological differences, but also by the inferiority commonly felt among East Germans in the new nation. Unification has been, as East German intellectuals assert, an unbalanced process, a dominant culture enveloping a small, timid one. An East German pastor interviewed by Stephen Kinzer for the *New York Times* believed his people's dignity was lost because their suggestions for building the new Germany were disregarded by the West.⁵⁵ The immediate effect of this was demoralizing, disrupting the sense of worth many had of themselves. Within East German society, women face their own problems of self-perception. In the GDR, they were highly-valued, well-trained, contributing, and nearly equal members of society, where they composed 50% of the workforce. Now 80% of them are without jobs, making up two thirds of the East's unemployed. They were the first to lose their jobs and are the least likely to be reemployed as the eastern *Länder* are reoriented to the free market economy. As well, they have lost their former government's generous maternity benefits, guaranteed child-support in cases of divorce and the right to free and legal abortions. The extent of this debasement on the psyche of women is difficult to calculate, but it has caused an identifiable drop in marriage and birth rates,⁵⁶ proving the far-reaching effects of these changes on the lives of more than just East German women.

The early eagerness of the East Germans for unification implied they were ready to adopt Western values. In the fall of 1989, they were peacefully toppling their communist regime, and a year later, they were happily taking part in the consumerist tradition of pleasure shopping. But in the modest society held together by esteemed equality, a certain personality was born. It was "imbued with collective thought and behavior," encouraged by the state from the beginnings of the educational development of its children.⁵⁷ This cultivated a population easily led and noticeably dependent upon its state. This disposition

has been one of the factors which has made transformation difficult for East Germans. However, unobstructed contact with the West has exposed them to individualism and pluralism which in time will likely affect a new temperament. For now the choices and necessities of democracy have incited a cultural backlash, not cautious absorption.

The difficulty of integration, a less stable economic situation, and the new, internal East-West political tensions have left many West Germans mourning the loss of their quiet, dependable, secure Bonn Republic. Though during its existence it was often subject to criticism, its favorably revised image has come to represent in the minds of many West Germans what they have had to sacrifice in the course of the arduous process of reunification. Since 1990, West Germans have had to forfeit their old comfort and stability as they have shouldered much of the reunification burden. Their concessions have prompted the shift in popular memory of the erstwhile Rhenish government. Their wistful reappraisal has been matched, and perhaps outdone, by the East Germans, who have also reconsidered their former lives.

Since 1994 a wave of nostalgia has swept across the former GDR for the era of socialism and the regime that provided a measure of warmth and security for its people. Stores have begun specializing in Eastern goods; people have returned to their old favorites after mimicking West German preferences in food, wine, and even travel destinations; when traveling abroad many have used their GDR passports despite their new citizenship. The tone of some of the observances helps clarify their meaning. The *New York Times* in the summer of 1994 described such events:

Celebrations of the East German past are meant as satire, like the theme parties that are increasingly popular at night clubs and colleges. At these parties, giant photos of Erich Honecker and other deposed communist leaders hang on the walls. Visitors are often admitted free if they wear the blue blouses that once marked them as members of the Communist youth groups.⁵⁸

Certainly, the wish is not to return to the political oppression of the former system. Rather, this reminiscing symbolizes a growing self-confidence, or at least a growing solidarity, in the face of Western disdain and a desire to retain, instead of delete, forty years of their lives.

In the wake of revolution, a rapid and thorough effort to assimilate Eastern culture into the Federal Republic began, forcing East Germans to redefine themselves. In an especially probing study of this identification process for the journal, *Diogenes*, Matthias Middell states that identity formation is “a calculated crisis management which avoids risks . . . led by the safety rope of a comprehensive identity that is geared to normalcy.”⁵⁹ Because it has been nearly concomitant with overall economic improvement, it seems this Eastern emphasis on the separate past is not entirely the result of financial hardship, and it is not solely in response to Western ridicule. To many, the old state now represents stability, security, and the modest comfort they had proudly achieved. East Germans have begun to recognize themselves as more closely related to one another probably in order to fill the void of an absent greater German identity with the safest option, their defunct and idealized former lives. But as East Germans bask in their reinterpreted history, national cohesiveness becomes more distant; and the complex issue of national identity has been further complicated.

CHAPTER SIX NOTES

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- ⁴ Jerome S. Legge, Jr. "Antiforeign Sentiment in Germany: Power Theory Versus Symbolic Explanation of Prejudice," *Journal of Politics* 58 (May 1996): 525.
- ⁵ Klusmeyer, "Aliens, Immigrants, and Citizens," 98.
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- ¹¹ Derek Lewis and John R. P. McKenzie, eds. *The New Germany: Social, Political and Cultural Challenges of Unification* (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 1995), 325-326.
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- ¹⁶ Laurence McFalls, *Communism's Collapse, Democracy's Demise?: The Cultural Context and Consequences of the East German Revolution* (New York: New York University Press, 1995), 143.
- ¹⁷ Hagemann, "Passages: East-West by North-South," 148-149.
- ¹⁸ Alun Jones, *The New Germany: A Human Geography* (West Sussex: John Wiley & Sons Ltd., 1994), 93.
- ¹⁹ Klusmeyer, "Aliens, Immigrants, and Citizens," 92-102.
- ²⁰ Ibid., 103.
- ²¹ Oppenheimer, "Compassion Versus Nationalism in Germany," 11.
- ²² *A Nation Returns: Germany, Nationalism: Blood and Belonging*, written and directed by Michael Ignatieff, 50 min., Films for the Humanities and Sciences, 1993, videocassette.
- ²³ Fulbrook, "Aspects of Society and Identity in the New Germany," 226.
- ²⁴ McFalls, *Communism's Collapse, Democracy's Demise?*, 148-155.
- ²⁵ Klusmeyer, "Aliens, Immigrants, and Citizens," 85-99.
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- ²⁷ Klusmeyer, "Aliens, Immigrants, and Citizens," 102.
- ²⁸ Ibid., 100.
- ²⁹ McFalls, *Communism's Collapse, Democracy's Demise?*, 156-160.
- ³⁰ Ibid., 157.
- ³¹ Henry Ashby Turner, Jr., *The Two Germanies Since 1945* (Binghamton, 1987), 192.
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- ⁵⁰ Gail E. Schares, Karen Lowry Miller, Deborah Wise, and William Jo Holstein, "Germany: Is Unification Failing?," *Business Week*, 15 November 1993, 49.
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CHAPTER 7

Conclusion

SYMBOLIC EFFORTS TO RECLAIM GERMAN NATIONAL IDENTITY

Shortly after the fall of the Berlin Wall, when unification of the two Germanies seemed not only possible but indeed likely, it became obvious to those from the West who traveled to the GDR that intensive efforts would be required to revitalize East German cities and towns which had been neglected during the era of communism. Western observers considered the situation to be urgent, given the advanced state of decline. As a result, two industrious plans for urban renewal, giving particular attention to the restoration of historically and culturally significant sites, were drafted in the first half of 1990; the second one being even more ambitious than the first. These programs, created by the West German Federal Ministry for regional planning and city development in cooperation with the East German government, provided DM770 million to over 700 East German towns. Subsequently, governments at the state level devised and enacted their own plans. The first to do so was Mecklenburg-Vorpommern in 1991 and again in 1992 and 1993. Though these plans dealt with the modernization of population centers, considerable resources were consistently afforded to the protection of historic structures. In its 1993 budget alone, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern dedicated DM52 million to preserving the historic monuments in nineteen of its cities and towns. Similarly, in each of the new *Länder* special attention was given to the valuable symbols of the past: Wittenberg's town center in Saxony-Anhalt, Goethe's Weimar in Thuringia, Chemnitz's Theater Platz in Saxony, and Brandenburg's Old Quarter in the state of Brandenburg.¹

There is, of course, economic incentive for repairing the idyllic image of a medieval Germany, but the promise of tourism conceals the potential importance of architectural

preservation. If the country had averted its crisis of identity and if economic reward had quickly followed unification, the value of historic restoration would have been determined only in regards to the success with which it attracted visitors. However, as economic disappointment set in and social division lingered, the refurbished symbols of the past could acquire unexpected importance in helping Germany define itself, a problem with arguably greater consequences for its long-term development than economic growth.

Today, many towns showcase brilliant examples of architectural heritage and memorials to revered civic leaders to remind their residents of a national tradition that precedes this age of unification and the Cold War division. Their presence reinforces the continuity of the German *Kultur*, the cultural linkage that has been kept alive for centuries despite political turmoil and has helped define the boundaries of the German world while holding it together. Promoting it now is likely to adjust the level of national pride and encourage a desire for unity based on spiritual rather than economic needs. Although restoration in East Germany began several months before unification, when no one foresaw the current crisis of identity or the role architectural conservation might play in solving that problem, it offers a highly visible basis on which to rebuild national identity.

Throughout the 1970s and 1980s as the Green Party garnered popularity and political stature, environmental issues gained great importance in the minds of West Germans. Public opinion polls in the years preceding the revolution have illustrated the extent of their growing conviction. Among national concerns, the environment is often given priority over all others, including unemployment. These polls indicate that as many as 75% of Germans consider themselves environmentalists.² Through public awareness and political action, the FRG has succeeded in establishing one of the world's strongest systems of environmental protection.

Not surprisingly, West Germans accepted the responsibility for correcting the grave environmental situation when the collapse of communism exposed the severity of East Germany's industrial pollution. In the first year of unification, the West German federal

government allocated DM1.4 billion for emergency cleanup efforts; a year later 462 projects were under way. For East German environmental standards to reach West German levels, it will take an estimated ten years. This optimistic goal is encouraged by aggressive plans for land reclamation and energy plant reform. Land once mined in Saxony for brown coal, an especially filthy yet common fuel in the socialist state, is being converted for agriculture and forestry use; new East German factories are now required to meet Western standards, while existing plants undergo 10-year cleanup plans.³

In addition to this endeavor, there are great efforts to preserve the large blocks of land that were formed by the collectivization of small, individual holdings by the socialist government. The diversity of plant and animal life of these lands, particularly in Mecklenburg-West Pomerania, is unique to Germany. The distinctiveness is seen in the variety of animals and plants, rare elsewhere in Europe, that inhabit the fields and forests.⁴ Despite the capital worth of these natural resources, the land's relevance to national culture has been recognized and has inspired the creation of five new national parks and three new nature parks (privately owned, federally protected land) as well as hundreds of smaller protected areas in the Eastern *Länder* since unification, preserving over 13,000 square kilometers.⁵

The German devotion to environmental protection may seem to be simply a progressive attitude in an era when many of the world's industrialized countries are reorienting their policies with enlightened regard for the natural world. However, it could also have special consequences for reviving national identity. In a 1994 article for the journal, *Dædalus*, Mary Fulbrook succinctly defined the important relationship between man and his physical world: "A sense of identity--personal, social, national--is very closely tied with the landscape in which one lives and moves."⁶ This has been especially true in German history as centuries of literature and art have produced idyllic images of ancestral Germans frequently associated with primal forests of untamed landscapes. *Germania; or, On the Origins and Situation of the Germans* by the first-century Roman historian,

Cornelius Tacitus, portrays the barbarians who inhabited the dark and seemingly unbounded Hercynian Forest as culturally sylvan and ethnically discrete because of it; during the German Renaissance of the fourteenth century, the paintings of the renowned artist, Albrecht Altdorfer, depicted prehistoric forests as symbols of noble German values in opposition to the perceived debauchery of urban Italian life in that age.⁷ Today near the East German village of Ivenack, a federally protected stand of thousand-year-old oaks is a living testament to the mythical forests in which ancient Germans dwelt. Through their cultural associations and physical conservation, such places could continue to inspire historical introspection. The cultural history of the German landscape has helped narrate identity and character through the ages, and now in conjunction with environmentalism, it could serve as the spiritual foundation for the new Germany.

Politicians of the imminently uniting countries wasted no time reinstating the erstwhile distinction of Germany's old capital. The Treaty between the Federal Republic of Germany and the German Democratic Republic on the establishment of the unity of Germany was signed on 31 August 1990. Article 2 states that "the Capital of Germany is Berlin"⁸ but left the practical challenges of moving the government to be dealt with at a later date. The initiative to transport the federal government back to that city set off lengthy and earnest deliberations during which considerable dissent was voiced. In a debate at the *Bundestag* on 20 June 1990, nearly one third of its 662 members submitted oral or written statements on the subject.⁹ Those typically in favor of the move were older, more conservative or Eastern politicians, while mostly young Westerners fought to keep the Rhenish capital, Bonn.¹⁰ Among them, the Social Democrats and the Greens argued that the financial cost, an estimated DM20 million, was just too high given the FRG's slowing economy and the onerous task of subsidizing unification.¹¹ Still other opponents of the move claimed that Berlin represented the militaristic past with which West Germans had separated themselves to become prosperous and dependable practitioners of Western democracy.

The political struggle to reinstall the federal government in Berlin is representative of one of unification's obstacles and was predictably more pronounced in younger politicians whose personal memories are limited to the existence of the FRG. Their apprehension signaled a resistance to leave behind their state's forty-year-old individuality in the quest for an unknown Germany. This anxiety marked the lack of cooperation that has made integration so difficult. In the end, the decision was narrowly sanctioned; 337 approved.¹² Even after the *Bundestag* verdict, new lobbying aimed to block, or at least stall, what seemed to be a very abrupt move. Even Chancellor Kohl showed concern for the speed of the move. On 12 October 1993, the long-delayed final decision was announced; the federal government will be reseatd in Berlin by the end of the twentieth century.¹³ In actuality, only ten of eighteen ministries will be transferred, but a symbolic gesture was made with the decision to move them.¹⁴

Moving the government to Berlin has necessitated an utter revision of the city's center. Derelict spaces and disregarded remnants of buildings bombed in the Second World War attest to the citizens' preoccupied tensions during the Cold War when the city seemed the global dividing line between East and West. After formal reunification, the local and federal governments held an anonymous competition for plans to develop 150 acres of neglected land along the Spree River adjacent to the *Reichstag* parliament building and received 835 entries from around the world. Though a Berlin architect's plan was the winner of the "Spreebogen International Competition for Urban Design Ideas," the matter of specific architectural style and the eventual choice were not without intense circumspection.¹⁵

In rebuilding the capital, Berlin was given the opportunity to express its self-image at this juncture and its intentions for the future. Questions inevitably emerged regarding its previous role and produced poignant discussions on the topic. That such a debate was included proves there is a strong wish for a stable new beginning. A common fear was that, while many favored Neo-Classical and Neo-Baroque models for Berlin's new

structures, recreating the city in its former image or even preserving and reusing its historic buildings, such as the *Reichstag*, may evoke the character of its bellicose past. Though this criticism is likely to influence the new designs to some degree, it overlooks the value of recalling collective heritage for the nation's spirit. Berlin's new appearance will however openly incorporate traditional elements, and this, despite the city's stage for infamous activities a half century ago, will have a nurturing affect on the nation's sense of self. Moving east has also signaled the government's commitment to unity, an encouraging gesture to the Germans in the surrounding Eastern provinces who are most likely to feel neglected. Like Axel Schultes' plan for the city's new government center, which links East and West by twice traversing the river at the *Spreebogen*, Berlin creates an existing, physical connection between the otherwise disconnected societies.

In the weeks before Christmas 1990, the last remnants of the Berlin wall, except sections which will remain as a memorial, were removed from the cityscape of the renewed capital, but another barrier, a psychological one, quickly replaced it, making reunification a more difficult goal to achieve than had been assumed. If the attendant problems of unification have been surprising, it is because the effects of outside influences on the segregated halves of Germany were underestimated; forty-five years of division and of incorporating adversarial ideologies were certain to engender differences. These persistent disparities after the removal of the Wall have proven the depth of their divaricated lives. Since unification, some Germans have claimed that a figurative wall still exists in the minds of their countrymen. This lasting obstacle represents the lingering social, cultural, and political values which evolved in express opposition of one another. The recovery of a suitable, fulfilling, and inclusive identity will be needed to overcome this acquired disunity. In the broader perspective of German history, however, the Cold War partition, in its political and physical aspects, represents a brief, albeit doleful, period in a long series of political instabilities and social divisions. This extended view of the past also defines the limits of those powers whose influences have ended.

Lasting stability, which is essential to the health of a nation, has proven evasive in Germany throughout its history. The meaning of citizenship, the imbalance of political power, and the discrepancies of two sets of values have complicated the process of rediscovering nationhood and prevented meaningful reconciliation. The age of unification is young, however, and within the millennial heritage of all Germans is a quiescent but well defined identity waiting to emerge. With origins predating the tragic, self-destructive rise of National Socialism as well as the imposed postwar division, it has been nurtured and idealized over centuries by the culture's notion of *Volk*, and it could prove to be the answer to easing the tensions of reunification. It may provide a psychological foundation on which to rebuild. Because reclamation of the shared past could be a method for mending the Cold War separation, the country should selectively choose positive facets of German history if it is to be beneficial. At this precarious juncture, dealing with demons of the past may serve to harm the nation's sense of sense of self, rather than restore it. A greater vision of an older Germany, discernible in the country's architectural heritage, its treasured landscapes, and in the historical distinction of its 750-year-old capital could replace present day confusion. Reclaiming this common past could dissolve Western aloofness and palliate feelings of alienation in the East, thereby clearing the way for genuine reunification. Germany's successful future as a united nation is dependent upon reaffirming the shared experiences of its people's history.

THE ENDURING NATION

A close look at postwar society in the two Germanies reveals a number of indisputable discrepancies between East and West. Disparate lives, societal pressures, political cultures, and social values resulted from living for forty years under very different conditions. As the trials of reunification have illustrated, East and West Germans developed distinct and conflicting characteristics before 1989. It may even be concluded from the

unification experience and from an examination of postwar evolution that separate identities emerged among Germans. But identity, personal or national, is a multi-layered self-definition constructed from social mores, economic experiences, cultural values, and intellectual currents.

Neither government in the two Germanies succeeded in resolving the problems surrounding identity, establishing a partial one and maintaining the all-German one. Despite their efforts, which were typically artificial and ineffective, political leaders were unable to evoke strong identification with the state. Even after the intensified campaign to foster separateness in the 1970s and 1980s, the citizens' approval was merely passive. The very nature of national identity in its complexity and many dimensions prevents it from being quickly induced in a population. By less intentional means, however, something did form. More the result of unpredicted social, political, and economic influences than state initiatives, two varieties of German identity emerged. Labeling these identities, then, becomes the key to understanding them and the significance of the postwar development.

The political arrangement of the fractured nation was not unprecedented. In fact, national fragmentation emerges as the German model in the long view of history. The combined years of the *Kaiserreich*, the Weimar Republic, the Third Reich, and the new Germany represent only a briefly unified existence. Two unintegrated German states under different, often competing, rulers resembled more closely the dominant historical pattern, like the traditional north-south divide forged from another ideological confrontation, the conflict of Protestantism and Catholicism. In earlier, religiously charged ages, an understanding of the greater community, however splintered, could supersede theological convictions. Through the centuries of disconnectedness, concepts of the German nation persisted, defined by culture, history, and ethnicity rather than political sovereignty. Alongside this all-encompassing vision of the *Kulturnation*, regional loyalties, formed from personal connection to an individual's *Heimat* or some greater region, composed one of many layers of German identity. The forty-five-year reversion to the old model of a

segmented nation reshaped regional identities, creating an East-West distinction within a greater whole.

Geography, too, has played a role in identity formation for the Germans and consequently imbued ethnicity with still greater importance. Living for centuries at the continent's center, the Germans have historically been bordered on all sides by various ethnic groups. At times, foreign ethnic groups have also existed within German boundaries, as they do today. Because of the geographical position to which the Germans have traditionally perceived themselves confined and because of the presence of different ethnic groups, defining the nation has often relied on ethnic identification. Such distinctions have offered a form of marking, which on a crowded continent of migrating peoples has been necessary for describing and retaining a collective identity. Anthony D. Smith has called this identity basis the "ethno-genesis of nations,"¹⁶ and it has figured prominently in the German notion of identity. Since the nineteenth century, devotion to the ethnic origin of the nation has been expressed in cultural and *völkisch* nationalisms, the Pan German and National Socialist movements, and a still extant 1913 citizenship law.

The ethnic community to which these popular sentiments, political parties, and legal concept spoke has been assigned certain essential requirements by Anthony D. Smith. Among them are a collective proper name, a myth of common ancestry, shared historical memories, one or more differentiating elements of common culture, and an association with a specific homeland.¹⁷ Each of Smith's features of the ethnic community remained in postwar Germany. Attachment to this ethno-national community did not vanish at the zero hour. In truth, the resonance of the ethnic origins of the nation gained a new value during Germany's division. Throughout the decades of separation, this commitment provided an incontestable reminder that "all Germans, regardless of whether they lived in East or West Germany, shared the same nationality," as it was stated in the GDR's 1949 constitution.¹⁸ When geopolitics split the German nation for a time in the twentieth century, the belief in

common ancestry and a single, shared ethnicity shielded German national identity from the country's political turmoil.

Separate identities did form in postwar Germany, but not mutually exclusive or closed national ones. The depth of these identities will be proven by time, but however strong, they did not supplant identification with the German nation, which for a time seemed to disappear from view. In spite of the partially constructed, regional identities created over the course of four decades, common history, a sense of the national community, and the will to remain a nation allowed Germans to sustain their essential links. German national identity transcended the postwar division.

CHAPTER SEVEN NOTES

- ¹ Jones, *The New Germany: A Human Geography*, 131-134.
- ² Susan Stern, ed., *Meet United Germany, Perspectives* (Frankfurt-am-Main: Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung, 1991), 161.
- ³ Jones, *The New Germany: A Human Geography*, 141-150.
- ⁴ Chris Bogliano, "Free Market Threatens Eastern German Forests," *Audubon*, January-February 1996, 22.
- ⁵ Jones, *The New Germany: A Human Geography*, 141-142.
- ⁶ Fulbrook, "Aspects of Society and Identity in the New Germany," 214.
- ⁷ Simon Schama, *Landscape and Memory* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1995), 81-100.
- ⁸ Adam Daniel Rotfeld and Walther Stützle, eds., *Germany and Europe in Transition* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991): 183.
- ⁹ Ellen Posner, "Hell's Capital," *The Atlantic Monthly*, July 1994, 93.
- ¹⁰ Konrad Jarausch, *The Rush to German Unity* (New York: Oxford University Press, Inc., 1994), 208.
- ¹¹ "To Berlin or Not to Berlin," *Economist*, 28 September 1996, 63.
- ¹² Posner, "Hell's Capital," 93.
- ¹³ Stephen Kinzer, "Germany to Move Capital Back to Berlin by 2000," *New York Times*, 13 October 1993, 8(A).
- ¹⁴ Stephen Kinzer, "Opposition Slows Move of Capital to Berlin," *New York Times*, 24 March 1996, sec. 1, p.4.
- ¹⁵ Posner, "Hell's Capital," 94.
- ¹⁶ For a description of the 'ethno-genesis of nations,' see Anthony D. Smith, *National Identity* (Reno: University of Nevada Press, 1991), 19-28.
- ¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 22.
- ¹⁸ "East Germany: End of a Concept," *Time*, 3 March 1967, 37.

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