

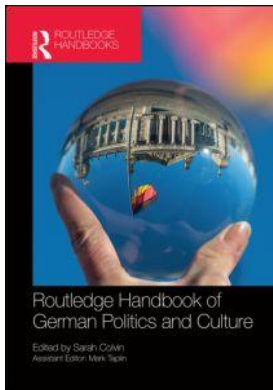
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Part I

Pathways to contemporary Germany

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1

The history of a European nation

Ute Frevert

Translation: Mark Taplin

What is a European nation?

This chapter's title might come as a surprise, and it does raise some questions. What is a European nation? What makes contemporary Germany into one? And how far back does the concept of a 'European nation' go, in the German case?

We could look for easy answers. A European nation is a nation in Europe, and geography tells us that Germany is placed firmly in the centre of the European continent. We could go on to write contemporary German history as one that starts at the end of World War II, with the division of the continent and the nation into two antagonistic parts. And we could finish with reunification and its aftermath, using Willy Brandt's famous quote of 10 November 1989 as a leitmotiv: 'Jetzt wächst zusammen, was zusammengehört' (what belongs together will now grow together). We could even present reunified Germany as a model or case study for what has happened in Europe at large: East and West moving towards each other and striving to overcome the rift created by the Iron Curtain during the Cold War period.

But that is not how the history of Germany as a European nation will be told here. For Germany to be called a European nation demands more than geographical evidence: it calls for a deeper and more complex understanding of what Europe actually means. Is there anything like a common understanding of a nation's Europeanness? Has Europe been a national point of reference, and if so, in what way? Has it been used as a historical or political argument, in a strategic or legitimising sense? And have there been attempts to turn Europe into more than an argument by, for example, fostering institutional ties on a decidedly European level? Has Europe been a realm of experience (Koselleck 1989), and has it set the horizon of expectations for German citizens?

Focusing on contemporary Germany, all these questions might easily be answered in the affirmative: yes, today the Federal Republic does consider itself part of a European project defined in political, economic, and cultural terms; yes, politicians and public opinion constantly refer to Europe as a frame of reference and as an argument; yes, there are strong institutional ties on all levels and in many spheres, ranging from student exchanges and city twinning arrangements to financial policies, a common currency, and infrastructural support. Much of this is channelled through the organising power of the European Union, which has developed into a supranational

structure integrating close to 30 European nation states. While the FRG (Federal Republic of Germany) was one of six founding members of the EU's forerunner, the European Economic Community (EEC), it is now widely seen as the Union's most important and powerful member state, at least when it comes to economic and financial issues.

That said, contemporary Germany appears as a clear case – even a showcase – of a European nation. As early as 1949, the preamble to the Basic Law (Germany's constitution) stated that the German people not only wished to preserve (or rather, regain) national and state unity, but also strove to support world peace as a 'gleichberechtigtes Glied in einem vereinten Europa' (an equal member of a unified Europe). Germany's new postwar identity and politics were thus clearly situated in a European context. In 1992 parliament added a clause that confirmed the Federal Republic's status as a member state (*Bundesstaat*) of the European Union. Taking a similar, though semantically restricted stance, a Supreme Court judgment from 2009 saw the Basic Law as authorising policies to contribute to and develop a European association of states (*Staatenverbund*).¹ And when asked about their country's Europeanness, German citizens overwhelmingly testify to their affinity for Europe. In an opinion poll published in December 2013, 84 per cent of Germans answered the question 'Is your country today European or not European?' in the affirmative, compared with 59 per cent in France and just 40 per cent in the UK.²

History and memory

How do we explain the striking attachment to Europe – the European identity, even – of the Germans and of Germany today? What experiences lie behind it, what aspirations are linked to it, and what interpretations of history have fed into it? I argue that history is of key importance in helping us to understand Germany's relationship with Europe. By history, I mean not so much the past per se as the ways in which it is interpreted. Two examples will serve to illustrate the point.

Example 1: Commemorating the Battle of the Nations in Leipzig

On 18 October 2013, a ceremony was held in Leipzig to commemorate the bloody battle fought out near the city, over three days, between the army of Napoleon and his allies and their opponents exactly 200 years earlier. In Napoleon's ranks were not just Frenchmen but soldiers from Italy and the Confederation of the Rhine, made up of various German states, while the opposing forces included Russians, Prussians, Austrians, and Swedes. In total, almost 600,000 men took part in the engagement, in which around one soldier in six was either killed or wounded. The battle continued to be remembered not just because of its gigantic scale, but because of its outcome – a decisive defeat for the French Emperor, halting his triumphal progress – which assured it a prominent place in the European history books. In Germany, it represented the culmination of the so-called wars of liberation, which in the 19th century came to be seen as an important factor in the process of German nation-building. Veterans' associations celebrated its anniversary and boasted of their contribution to national unification. At the start of the battle, Prussia had confronted Bavaria and Saxony as enemies, yet by the end the Saxons and Bavarians, too, had gone over to the coalition against Napoleon.

The events of 1813 seemed to prefigure the national unification eventually achieved following the victories at Wissembourg and Sedan in 1870. The date was commemorated as a 'feast day' on which – as the propagandist Ernst Moritz Arndt proposed as early as 1814 – all citizens would assemble for a 'großes deutsches Volksfest' (great festival of the German people)

in honour of the ‘erste große Gemeinsame, das uns allen angehört’ (first great collective event to which all of us can lay claim). Alongside this national festival, which was to become ‘ein starkes und mächtiges Bindungsmittel aller Deutschen’ (a strong and powerful unifier of all Germans), Arndt planned a national ‘Ehrendenkmal’ (memorial) near Leipzig, which he envisaged as ‘groß und herrlich’ (large and magnificent), ‘wie ein Koloß, eine Pyramide, ein Dom in Köln’ (like a colossus, a pyramid, or Cologne cathedral) (Arndt 1814: 8–9, 18, 20–1).

But it took time for the colossus to become a reality; its official opening was delayed until the 100th anniversary of the battle, in 1913. At 91 metres high, the monument towered over the flat surrounding countryside and was visible from miles around. It may have been built using modern materials (concrete), but its iconographic scheme was highly traditional. Guarding the entrance was a supersized image of the archangel Michael, patron saint of all soldiers. The circular interior housed a crypt, which served as a symbolic tomb for the fallen and contained four statues, each almost 10 metres high: the *Totenwächter* (Guards of the Dead) representing the four virtues of the German people during the wars of liberation, namely courage, faith, national vigour, and self-sacrifice. The monument was financed through private donations; neither the state of Saxony nor the German Empire (nor the Kaiser himself) was a major contributor. Instead, a patriotic association drummed up support by mobilising the network of sports clubs, singing clubs, shooting clubs, and veterans’ associations scattered across Germany. It was, therefore – just as Arndt had intended – an initiative from below, a ‘volkstümliche That’ (act of the people) through which donors affirmed the ‘Geburtstag des deutschen Volkes’ (birthday of the German people) in the ‘Volkskrieg’ (people’s war) against Napoleon (Spitzner 1897: 12–13, 33). The project can be seen as a manifestation not just of bourgeois self-confidence, but of the rampant nationalism to be found throughout Europe during this period. The flip side of pride in one’s own ‘national vigour’ was contempt for other nations, especially the French. Even former allies, whose crowned heads attended the opening ceremony in 1913, found themselves sidelined in the iconography for this ‘purely German’ monument (Poser 2003).

By 2013 all trace of this nationalist reading of history had vanished. This time the celebration was for a double anniversary, commemorating both the battle of 1813 and the unveiling of the memorial 100 years later. And it was organised with a critical eye to history. For many decades, this monumental colossus had been commandeered for national or nationalist purposes. During the Nazi period, huge parades had been staged there, while later, under the German Democratic Republic (GDR), it was the place where new recruits to the East German army (NVA) were sworn in and initiated into the tradition of brotherhood in arms with the Soviet Union (Bauer 1988: 57–9; Johnson 2008: 37–8). Now, however, the dominant theme was European unity. Even back in the 1990s, the director of the Leipzig historical museum (Stadtgeschichtliches Museum) had proposed that it take its place in a ‘Verbund von Friedensdenkmalen’ (chain of peace memorials) extending from Spain (Guernica) to Russia (Stalingrad). The symbols that commemorated and bore witness to wars waged within Europe were to be reconstituted as monuments to peace, as befitted the self-image of the new Europe, united within the European Union, as a zone of peace. In this context, the city fathers and mothers of Leipzig were able to throw a party for the whole of Europe, with the ‘Ball of the Nations’ as its climax. There were performances by European choirs and a re-enactment of the battle of 1813 by 6,000 people from both Germany and other countries; services of reconciliation were held in the churches, while young people from 11 European nations read out a message of peace. In his speech for the occasion, the President of the European Parliament, Martin Schulz, described the monument as a European place of memory, and expressed delight at the fact that ‘fortunately, we in Europe have managed to overcome the ultranationalist mentality’ expressed in its original design (*Frankfurter Allgemeine Sonntagszeitung* 2013; Keller 2012).³

Example 2: World War I

Although the phrase ‘ultranationalist mentality’ is perhaps too strong and does not fully reflect the political complexity of the original Leipzig ceremony in October 1913, it is understandable that today people should want to link the event to the world war that broke out only a few months later. However, those present for the unveiling of the colossus could not have known that this was taking place ‘am Vorabend des Ersten Weltkrieges’ (on the eve of the First World War), as the President of the European Parliament put it. It was possible to make such connections only in hindsight – and even then there has been an excessive tendency to see outcomes as preordained. In 1913–14 the people of Europe were not, in fact, clamouring for a new war or doing all they could to bring one about. Every country had its nationalist fanatics, there was the odd journalist ranting on about war as a cure for decadence and feminisation, and some young students were anxious to prove their manhood in the heat of battle, but these groups did not set the tone for society at large. As late as July 1914, anti-war demonstrations in Germany and France were attended by many hundreds of thousands of people. In the following month, we find evidence of a surge of enthusiasm for the war, but the phenomenon seems to have been confined largely to the cities – and even there it did not last long (Verhey 2000; Ziemann 2006). It was this that led the warring governments to set up propaganda departments, which inundated citizens with an unprecedented stream of images and texts. The propaganda they produced, in which the enemy was painted in the blackest colours, seems to have been most effective on the homefront. Many serving soldiers, by contrast, tended to dismiss such caricatures, despite – or, indeed, because of – the direct contact they had had with the enemy (Schmidt 2006; Lipp 2003; Reimann 2000: 178ff.).

Experiences of and discourses about the war also played a crucial political role, especially once the great slaughter had come to an end. The Weimar Republic experienced political fragmentation and social militarisation in which the memory of the war – and the losses suffered by Germany as a consequence – acted as a driving force. Before the war, Germans had felt surrounded by enemies jealous of their country’s success; after 1918, this feeling turned into a cast-iron certainty. The Treaty of Versailles, which labelled Germany as solely to blame for the war and used this to justify the imposition of massive reparations, was regarded as shameful victors’ justice by politicians of all stripes. The country’s political ostracisation, in the form of exclusion from international organisations (the League of Nations, academic associations, etc.) and events such as the Olympic Games, was also universally resented. The humiliating occupation of the Ruhr by French and Belgian troops in 1923 served only to reinforce the sense that Germany was being isolated and treated like a pariah. In the first half of the 1920s, the country was further from being a ‘European nation’ than at any other time.

Fast-forward to 2014, when a huge round of commemorations was scheduled to mark the 100th anniversary of the start of the war. Events were planned in almost all European countries, not just in capital cities and at major battlefields but at a local level, in both towns and rural districts. Even before the ceremonies had got underway, the memory of the war was being invoked for the sake of domestic political interests. In November 2013, France’s embattled and much-criticised President, François Hollande, used a formal address in honour of the victims of the world war to call on his compatriots to come together. Echoing the appeal in 1914 to the *union sacrée* of the French people, transcending political, social, and religious differences, Hollande emphasised the need for national solidarity, even though in 2014 the battles to be fought and won were economic rather than military. By remembering their victory in the world war, the French people could gain the self-confidence they desperately needed to overcome their current economic plight (Hollande 2013).

However, Hollande's choice of battle imagery was far from apposite. International economic competition, unlike war, is not about shedding blood or about weakening or even destroying one's opponent. Hollande also risked creating the impression that once again France saw its enemy as lying east of the Rhine, in the economic superpower that is Germany – a country with which, moreover, it is allied within Europe. The French President sought at once to dispel this impression, repeatedly stressing his country's commitment to the project of European unification and to its close relationship 'with our German friends'. What is more, he invited the German Federal President to Paris for 3 August 2014, the 100th anniversary of the start of the war.

In doing so, Hollande was continuing a political tradition that had begun in the 1980s. In September 1984, Federal Chancellor Helmut Kohl and President François Mitterrand made a joint visit to the battlefields of World War I. For the first time, a French president set foot in a German military cemetery and, together with the German Chancellor, laid a wreath in memory of the dead. Afterwards they travelled together to the ossuary at Douaumont, home to the mortal remains of 130,000 fallen soldiers of different nationalities. When the Marseillaise was played, Mitterrand suddenly took Kohl's hand. There could be no more powerful way of sending out the message, 'We are reconciled. We have come to an understanding. We are friends'.⁴

While politicians committed themselves to reconciliation, mutual understanding, and friendship over the graves of the fallen, academics worked on a reappraisal of World War I designed specifically to exclude narrow nationalist readings. In the mid-1980s, planning began for a new museum at Péronne on the Somme, where more than a million French, German, and British soldiers were killed or wounded, went missing in action, or were taken prisoner within five months during the summer of 1916. The museum, opened in 1992 as the Historial de la Grande Guerre, looked at the war from the perspective of social history and the history of mentalities, highlighting the close parallels in mindset and attitudes between the warring nations. Rather than focusing on the course of the war and the experience of battles and military combat, it placed the everyday lives of soldiers (and civilians) centre stage: issues such as diet, hygiene, and health care, but also the soldiers' grief at the loss of comrades and the atmosphere before an attack. The philosophy behind both the research centre linked to the museum and the exhibition itself was internationalist. Thus the exhibition was organised by topic rather than by country, while all the items on display had accompanying captions in English and German as well as French. The large number of visitors attracted to the museum, including many families, school-children, and young people, were presented with an image of the war that, without erasing the different histories of the nations involved, sought to bring out the elements of shared experience. These included an intensive and far-reaching campaign of 'intellectual mobilisation' that saw the population supplied with mental 'arms' in the form of nationalist posters, postcards, and cartoons, and enlisted in the struggle against a barbarised foe.⁵

On seeing this prewar and wartime propaganda, no visitor to the Historial could fail to be struck – if they were not aware of it before – by the distance separating them from World War I, even though its traces were all about in the surrounding battlefield landscape. This new era, in which old enmities are gradually fading away, has also had an impact on the way in which battlefield tours are organised and conducted. When I accompanied German history students on a trip to Verdun and Péronne in July 2000, everywhere we went we came across evidence of the war being commemorated across national boundaries. At British war cemeteries we found tokens of remembrance left by German visitors, and vice versa. In the crater-strewn countryside around La Boisselle on the Somme, where on 1 July 1916 nearly 60,000 British soldiers were mown down by German artillery, among the many poppy wreaths laid by British tourists I found one dedicated to Ernst Jünger, a German writer who took part in World War I as a

young lieutenant and later wrote militaristic books about his experiences. French and English translations of these books, which appeared as early as 1929 and 1930, found an enthusiastic readership even among non-German participants in the war (and among later generations, including some of those laying wreaths in 2000). Clearly Jünger had used a language and form of narrative that reflected soldiers' experiences and how they understood them, regardless of nationality.

A hundred years after the start of the Great War, as it is still known in France and Britain, the old stereotypes prevalent before, during, and long after the war have lost much of their potency. Since the 1980s, the war has been commemorated at a European level, and this is reflected in the events to mark its 100th anniversary. For the historian Joseph Zimet, director of the Mission du Centenaire established by the French government, it is essential that Germany and France remember the war in partnership. Even though World War I plays nothing like the same role in Germany's collective memory that it does in France or Britain, having been quickly overshadowed by the losses and experiences of World War II, Zimet sees a *centenaire* without German involvement as impossible: 'Europe cannot commemorate the First World War without Germany'. Rather, in both France and Germany remembrance is 'very closely linked to the idea of Europe' (*Weltweit vor Ort* 2013).

This idea of Europe was also in the background, no doubt, when Mitterrand and Kohl symbolically held hands in 1984, just as it was the inspiration for the researchers, museum experts, and politicians involved in setting up the Historial at Péronne. Yet in 1984 it was clearly still too weak to allow the other 'great war' to be commemorated as a European event. The German Chancellor was not invited to the ceremony marking the 40th anniversary of D-day, the Allied landings in Normandy. Even 10 years later, on the 50th anniversary, the French President did not feel able to ask his friend Helmut to attend. There was also no German representative at the ceremony staged by the British in Portsmouth – the point of departure in 1944 for many of the ships involved in the D-day operations – to witness heads of state and government from countries as far apart as Norway and Greece, Belgium and Canada, and Poland and France celebrate their nations' history of brotherhood in arms. Only with the dawn of the new millennium did it become possible to commemorate World War II, too, in inclusively European terms. On the 60th anniversary of D-day, in 2004, the German Chancellor Gerhard Schröder was finally allowed to take his place alongside other leaders. Unlike his predecessor Kohl, who had waited in vain for this symbolic gesture, he received an official invitation to Normandy from Mitterrand's successor, Jacques Chirac. Chirac added to the symbolism by welcoming Schröder with an embrace and explicitly mentioning Schröder's father, who had been killed in the war and whose son had never had the chance to get to know him.

The history of commemoration of the two world wars, which brought both massive destruction and fundamental change to Europe during the 20th century, bears witness to a slow but sustained process of rapprochement and reconciliation between former wartime opponents. This did not unfold automatically or 'naturally', but rather as the product of political will and within an institutional framework. The presence of delegations from France, as well as former allies in the resistance to Napoleon, at the ceremonies marking the 200th anniversary of the Battle of the Nations, and the fact that in 2014 the 100th anniversary of the outbreak of World War I is being commemorated in the spirit of 'European integration' (Zimet), while German statesmen are able to celebrate the liberation of Europe from Nazi rule alongside representatives of the country's former enemies, are inconceivable without people's experiences of 'Europe' since the 1950s. For Germany, the effect of those experiences has been particularly dramatic and profound. That is the main reason why today such a high proportion of German citizens – twice as many as in Great Britain – describe their country and themselves as 'European'.

Europe as will and representation

If a similar poll on the issue of European consciousness or identity had been conducted in the 1920s, it is very likely that it would have yielded different results. We cannot even be sure that people would have understood the question. After World War I, people throughout Europe were busy mourning their own dead and caring for veterans who had returned from the war with severe psychological and physical injuries. Each nation was preoccupied with its own suffering, and each manufactured its own interpretations of the past to honour the victims and justify their sacrifice. This process was particularly difficult for states on the losing side, which also had to cope with serious losses in territory and economic and political power.

Not until the mid-1920s were there signs – slow and cautious at first – of a change in mood; the era of national navel gazing seemed to be coming to an end. At the Locarno Conference in 1925, Germany, France, and Belgium concluded an arbitration agreement and guaranteed the inviolability of their respective borders. This was accompanied by treaties between Germany, Poland, and Czechoslovakia that created a mechanism for the peaceful resolution of all disputes, although these did not extend to a permanent settlement on borders. In 1926 Germany joined the League of Nations and the ban on German academics attending international conferences was lifted.

At the same time, clearly pro-European movements and ideas were starting to gain ground. Those who used Europe as an argument and point of reference in political discourse did so essentially for two reasons. For some, the war and experience of the war were the key factor. They dreamed of establishing a strong and solid ‘European community’ to prevent any further ‘fratricidal wars’. For the liberal academic Arnold Bergsträsser (1896–1964), and others of his generation, ‘the war had made Europe a reality for the first time’; according to Bergsträsser, the ‘Kameradschaft à l’ombre des épées’ (comradeship in the shadow of swords) he had experienced placed him under an obligation to campaign for the ‘Einheit unseres abendländischen Kontinents’ (unity of our Western continent) (Müller 2001: 262; see also Conze 2005). For others, geopolitical considerations were paramount. The weakening of Europe brought about by the war led them to reflect on the means by which it might recover its strength. In 1924 Heinrich Mann predicted, ‘Bevor Europa Wirtschaftskolonie Amerikas oder Militärkolonie Asiens wird, einigt es sich’ (Before Europe becomes an economic colony of America or a military colony of Asia, it will unite) (Mann 1987: 100). If Europe’s decline was to be halted and then reversed, the antagonism and rivalry between European states would have to end. Only a political federation could reinvigorate Europe and equip it for its role as global leader. A supranational construct of this kind would bring with it considerable economic benefits, as it would mean the creation of a large single market and the consolidation of industrial production capacity (Stirk 1996: 26ff.; Ambrosius 1996: 67ff.).

Many different bodies launched initiatives in support of European integration *avant la lettre*. The League of Nations set up a commission of inquiry ‘for the European Union’, which met several times (though to no avail) (Wilson and van der Dussen 1993: 101ff.; Orlic 2000). In its 1926 party programme, the German Social Democratic Party (SPD) backed the ‘aus wirtschaftlichen Ursachen zwingend gewordene Schaffung der europäischen Wirtschaftseinheit’ (creation of a European economic union, for compelling economic reasons) and pushed for the ‘Bildung der Vereinigten Staaten von Europa’ (establishment of the United States of Europe). The most enthusiastic advocate of a political federation of European states (though without Britain and Russia) was the Pan-European Union, under the energetic leadership of the Austrian Count Richard Coudenhove-Kalergi. The union had the support of leading figures in politics, science, and the arts (including Konrad Adenauer, Albert Einstein, and Thomas Mann)

and campaigned for the ‘spiritual unification of Europe’ on the basis of ‘Western’ traditions and the achievements of European high culture (Ziegerhofer-Prettenthaler 2004; Schöberl 2008). And indeed, it was the European arts and music scene that took the lead in reforging the connections severed by the war. The ‘golden ‘20s’ saw a lively exchange of ideas, styles, and people between Berlin, Paris, Milan, Barcelona, and Moscow. Men and women from many nations worked together at the Bauhaus school in Weimar and Dessau, and the architects of the modern age were all in close contact.

There were signs of tentative progress even with regard to treatment of the war dead. The Treaty of Versailles had placed a duty on all governments to treat war graves with respect and ensure that they were kept in good repair. Requests for the repatriation of remains were to be honoured, where possible. However, there were significant obstacles to implementing these provisions in practice. The first discussions between the French war graves service and the German War Graves Commission (Volksbund Deutsche Kriegsgräberfürsorge) did not take place until 1926. Henceforth the commission had a say in the layout and maintenance of German military cemeteries in France, where it was able to develop its own distinctive designs and symbols, although it took until 1937 for a meeting of all the countries concerned to be organised. Only then did the international cooperation first enjoined back in 1919 finally begin to take shape.

By that point, the national socialist regime in Germany had already rechristened the national day of mourning introduced in the 1920s as ‘Heldengedenktag’ (heroes’ memorial day), infusing it with a triumphalist spirit: it now became a ‘Tag der Erhebung’ (day of uprising) and ‘Hoffens auf das Aufgehen der blutigen Saat’ (hope that the seed sown in blood will rise forth anew) (Behrenbeck 1996: 293; Kaiser 2010). This seed did indeed rise forth, with even bloodier consequences than in World War I. From 1939 onwards, Germany plunged nearly the whole of Europe into war. At first the Nazi regime tried to give the impression that it sought only a revision of the terms of Versailles, but the seizure of Prague and Warsaw in 1939 made clear that it had much more expansionist ambitions. Such a policy could not be accommodated even within classic models of a German-dominated *Mitteleuropa*, which had been the subject of ongoing debate since the end of World War I. It was clear that this was no attempt to modify the outcomes of that war; this was a new Napoleonic-style landgrab, designed to transform the whole of Europe and to turn Germany into a ‘European nation’ of a very particular kind.

Europe was surprisingly important as a theme in Nazi arguments. Clearly the impact of the debate on Europe during the 1920s had been sufficiently profound and far-reaching that even the hypernationalist Nazi regime felt the need to continue it. Of course, the annexation of land in the east, in particular, in order to create ‘Lebensraum’ (living space) for the German people was in no one’s interests but Germany’s, but there were attempts to give the policy a European gloss. ‘Soviet Russia’ was portrayed as the biggest danger to the Western world, and Germany as charged with protecting that world, and with it ‘Europe’, from ‘bolschewistischen Angriffen’ (Bolshevik attacks). Talk of a European ‘mission’ was not confined to Adolf Hitler; Franz Justus Rarkowski, the ‘field bishop’ or senior Catholic chaplain to the German military, used similar language, placing the invasion of the Soviet Union in 1941 in the medieval tradition of eastward colonisation by military orders of knights and hailing Germany as the ‘Herzvolk’ (nation at the heart of Europe) that was again, ‘wie schon oft in der Geschichte’ (as has been the case many times in the past), acting as the continent’s saviour and vanguard (Michalka 1985, vol. 1: 188–9; vol. 2: 145). At the same time, the regime’s minister of propaganda, Joseph Goebbels, noted the popularity in Spain’s Francoist press of the image of a ‘crusade’ by the Christian West against godless Bolshevism: ‘In Europe something like a unified front is taking shape. Ideas of a crusade are starting to appear. We can make use of them’ (Fröhlich 1987: 713).

Also useful as propaganda were the ideas concerning the ‘Europa-Frage’ (European question) developed by the German Foreign Ministry as a means of attracting support. Although the ministry left no doubt that the survival of ‘das künftige Europa’ (the future Europe) would depend on ‘einer voll durchgesetzten Vormachtstellung des Großdeutschen Reiches’ (the total supremacy of the Greater German Reich), the key principles for the establishment of a European union of states submitted by its European committee in 1943 were enticing inasmuch as they placed great emphasis on federal structures and a ‘Gemeinschaft souveräner Staaten’ (community of sovereign states). But Germany had long since begun creating facts on the ground through its economic policy. Since 1940, it had been working to construct a ‘europäische Kontinentalwirtschaft unter deutscher Führung’ (continent-wide European economy under German leadership), in which the national economies of the countries under occupation were made totally subservient to the needs of the Greater German Reich. This exposed the contradiction between Germany’s determination to rule over and dominate other European countries and its promise to uphold their sovereignty, severely limiting the appeal of what Goebbels termed Germany’s ‘Europaparole’ (message on Europe) elsewhere (Michalka 1985, vol. 2: 151–2, 155–7, 141; Fröhlich 1987: 738).⁶

Nonetheless, German and Allied propagandists clashed repeatedly on the issue of the re-ordering of Europe after the war. There were also many plans and projects in circulation among groups active in the resistance and in exile. The ‘White Rose’ student resistance group wanted to create a ‘neues geistiges Europa’ (new spiritual Europe). The participants in the plot to assassinate Hitler on 20 July 1944 called for the establishment of a European union of states dominated by neither Germany nor any other power, and in which borders between European countries might become less and less significant. In documents produced by the dissident group known as the Kreisau circle, there was talk of setting up a political order that respected the individual states and operated with the free consent of all the peoples concerned. The Buchenwald manifesto proposed a European community of states to renew Europe’s cultural mission in the world (‘Europas kulturelle Mission in der Welt’). Collaboration between Germany and both Poland and France, as well as Germany’s entry into the Anglo-Saxon cultural sphere, were seen as the preconditions for a new pan-European consciousness (‘europäisches Gesamtbewußtsein’) that was the only means of safeguarding peace between nations (Michalka 1985, vol. 2: 355, 359–60; Lipgens 1968: 153–5; Mommsen 1994; Schilmar 2004; Bailey 2013).

But the definitive plans for the future of Germany and Europe were drafted not in Berlin, Munich, Kreisau, or Buchenwald but in Tehran, Yalta, and Potsdam, where the postwar European order was hammered out between the ‘Big Three’: the USA, Great Britain, and the Soviet Union. After its surrender, Germany was the object, not the subject, of political decisions. The country lost its sovereignty and was divided into four Allied occupation zones and spheres of influence. It was only the start of the Cold War between the Soviet Union and the English-speaking powers that led to the establishment, four years after the end of the war, of two new states. The three former western zones combined to form the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG), while the eastern zone became the German Democratic Republic (GDR). One of the conditions of statehood was that both entities be bound into their respective power blocs. In 1950 the GDR joined the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance (Comecon), set up the previous year, and in 1955 it signed the Warsaw Pact on ‘Friendship, Cooperation and Mutual Assistance’, which set out the Eastern bloc’s common defence policy. This step was mirrored by the Federal Republic’s accession to NATO in 1955. Previously the three western zones had been involved in the establishment of the OEEC (Organisation for European Economic Cooperation) and had benefited from reconstruction assistance under the Marshall plan (Kleßmann 1982).

Two nations, two Europes

So what became of Germany as a ‘European nation’? The question can be answered only in the context of Europe as a whole. No European nation experienced the division of Europe after 1945 more intensely than Germany. The Iron Curtain ran right through the middle of the country, from the Baltic to the Bavarian forest, as well as through the middle of its former capital, Berlin. In 1961 the GDR sealed off its border with the Federal Republic and West Berlin with a wall, barbed wire, and a heavily guarded ‘death strip’ to halt the flood of refugees from East to West. Despite their public commitment to reunification, both German states settled down more or less comfortably in their respective halves of Europe. From Bonn, the new federal capital on the Rhine, people looked to the West; from East Berlin, the capital of the GDR, eyes were trained on the East. Both the Federal Republic and the GDR became more and more entrenched – politically, economically, and militarily – in the ‘alliances’ of which they were members. As a result, they belonged to different ‘Europes’, into which they became increasingly integrated over time.

Of key importance for Western Europe was the fact that its protector – or ‘big brother’ – was located outside Europe. Whereas in World War I the USA intervened at a late stage, only to withdraw swiftly from the settlement process after 1918, after World War II it established a permanent presence on the European continent. The USA had emerged from what Ernst Nolte describes as the 30-year European civil war as indisputably the world’s strongest country. After 1945 Europe’s loss of power, which in the 1920s had still seemed reversible, was a fact all European nations had to come to terms with in one way or another.

This was less of a problem for Germany than for France and Britain, which also had to deal with the loss of their colonial empires after the war. Until recently, Germany had been an extremely strong and successful country – in military, technological, and economic terms – so shifts in the centre of gravity within and outside Europe paled into insignificance compared with its own total, devastating loss of power. The fact that it had now surrendered its leadership role to a non-European country – whose support, along with every ounce of its own energy, was needed if it hoped to match the Soviet Union – was less of a blow to national self-regard than the moral ‘chasm’ (‘Abgrund’) that, as Hannah Arendt wrote to Dolf Sternberger in Heidelberg in 1948, ‘seit Beendigung des Krieges zwischen Deutschen [. . .] und anderen Völkern geöffnet hat’ (has opened up between the Germans and other peoples since the end of the war) (Arendt 2013: 79).

The Cold War provided a welcome bridge over this chasm. Although it served to consolidate and entrench the division of Germany, which had initially been seen as temporary, it also made it easier for the two German states to reinvent themselves as loyal allies of their respective ‘protectors’. By taking on the role of buffer states and adopting a mutually antagonistic stance, they quickly managed to earn political credit and to emerge from the shadow of the ‘Third Reich’. While the Bonn Government cultivated a close relationship with the USA, its counterpart in East Berlin strove to win recognition from the Soviet Union by behaving as a model pupil. While the GDR outdid other Eastern bloc countries in its zeal and eagerness to conform to the Soviet model, the Federal Republic was among America’s most loyal allies.

America’s influence was felt not just politically and militarily but in economic and cultural terms. It was an influence that proved impossible to resist, and some longstanding reservations and prejudices against America that had only recently been reinforced under the ‘Third Reich’ were thereby neutralised and overcome.⁷ In the 1920s, there was still massive resistance to what went under the heading of ‘Americanisation’, but after 1945 there was no alternative in the West to the American model of modernity. Economically, the Marshall plan set its beneficiaries

on a clear capitalist course, and from the 1950s onwards large sections of the West German population came to see the USA's consumer society, which was more advanced than that of Europe, as a hugely attractive prospect. When the Federal Republic was admitted to NATO in 1955 and then permitted to set up its own army, the new uniforms were modelled on those of the American military; the only protest came from a small number of right-wing politicians who thought this shameful and undignified. Most citizens had been won over by an American charm offensive that began with GIs handing out chocolate, continued with the 'raisin bombers' (*Rosinenbomber*) that carried out the dramatic airlift to West Berlin in 1948, and culminated in the formal declaration with which General Eisenhower exonerated the soldiers of the Wehrmacht in 1951: 'The German soldier fought bravely and honorably for his homeland' (Frevert 2004: 260–1). Henceforth serious criticism of the USA was almost non-existent in the Federal Republic; even during the Vietnam War, the political establishment refused to disown its great friend and 'big brother'. That task was left to young left-leaning students, who, rather than resort to crude anti-Americanism of the traditional variety, did so by expressing solidarity with the anti-war movement both internationally and in the USA itself.

The student movement of the 1960s and 1970s provides a vivid illustration of how westernised the Federal Republic had become. For the 'Kinder von Marx und Coca Cola' (children of Marx and Coca Cola) – as the subtitle to the German version of Jean-Luc Godard's film *Masculin, Féminin* (1966) put it – it was natural to look westwards, not just to Paris and Milan but to Berkeley and New York (della Porta 1998; Schmidtke 1998; Davis *et al.* 2010; Horn 2008; Gildea *et al.* 2013; Doering-Manteuffel 1999). Even the New Left did not model itself on the Soviet or East German version of Marxism, drawing inspiration instead from Rosa Luxemburg, Antonio Gramsci, or Herbert Marcuse. Politically and ideologically it was much closer to 'eurocommunism', which had its origins mainly in Italy and Spain, than to the 'actually existing socialism' on the other side of the Iron Curtain.

This affinity with the West (both Europe and America) was not confined to politics. It was also about more than just the economic integration of the Federal Republic of Germany, France, Italy, and the Benelux countries, a process that had been gaining momentum since the establishment of the European Coal and Steel Community in 1951. Eventually this would develop into a comprehensive blueprint for Europe, with far-reaching consequences, but in the short to medium term cultural influences and contacts had a much more profound impact. In Bonn, Munich, and Frankfurt, people wore fashions designed in Paris, Milan, or London; they listened to music imported to Hamburg from Liverpool, and ate the gyros, pizza, spaghetti, and paella introduced to Germany by Greek, Italian, and Spanish *Gastarbeiter* (guest workers; see Chapter 12). The works of French existentialists were read in West German schools, while plays by Ionescu and Beckett were staged in West German theatres. Visits and exchange programmes took young people to the UK, where, like Karl Heinz Bohrer in 1953, they came to know and value British institutions, the British way of life, and especially kindness, that 'untranslatable English quality' ('unübersetzbare englische Eigenschaft') (Bohrer 2012: 284). From the 1960s onwards, the Franco-German Youth Office (Deutsch-Französisches Jugendwerk) arranged exchanges for millions of German and French young people – often hosted by local families – that allowed them to practise their language skills and learn about the culture of their neighbours over the border. Twinning arrangements between municipalities brought both local politicians and ordinary citizens into contact across national boundaries. Students jumped at the chance to spend a year or a semester at a university in another European country, a trend boosted by the introduction of the Erasmus programme in 1987.

All these experiences helped strengthen West Germans' sense of themselves as Europeans. In polls carried out in the late 1970s and the 1980s, around two thirds of those surveyed agreed

with the idea of Europe as a 'Vaterland' (homeland); 67 per cent were 'entirely' or 'mostly' proud to be Europeans. Among younger people, in particular, national pride was outweighed by pride in European identity: in 1984 only 56 per cent of 16 to 29-year-olds reported that they were 'entirely' or 'mostly' proud to be German (Weidenfeld and Piepenschneider 1987: 26–31). This reflected a widespread suspicion of national, patriotic, and, especially, nationalistic affirmations and symbols. After the excessive nationalism of the 'Third Reich', people were extremely cautious about the use of flags, public declarations, and anthems. For many, the *Verfassungspatriotismus* (constitutional patriotism) advocated by Dolf Sternberger and Jürgen Habermas seemed more appropriate to a democracy than identification with an ethnically or historically defined nationality. As German history afforded few positive points of reference, it made more sense to commit oneself emotionally to the values and institutions enshrined in the *Grundgesetz* (Basic Law) than to membership of some mythical German 'Volk' (Sternberger 1990; Habermas 1992: 632–60; Müller 2010).

This created space for a 'European' sense of identity that found expression not just in polls on people's attitudes towards Europe but in high levels of support for European unification. In this context, 'Europe' usually stopped at the Elbe: when asked whether the eastern European states and the Soviet Union should be included in a united Europe, in 1984 the vast majority of people answered no. Older people, who had lived through the 'hottest' phase of the Cold War, were particularly resistant to this idea, but even those aged between 30 and 50 were for the most part unwilling or unable to contemplate a partnership extending beyond the countries of Western Europe. Also, the more the existence of two German states seemed set in stone, the less people saw (western) European unification as an obstacle to German unification, which now seemed a very distant possibility (Weidenfeld and Piepenschneider 1987: 28, 38). In the 1950s, the German Social Democrats had bitterly resisted the integration of the Federal Republic into the West on the grounds that it would entrench the division of Germany, but 30 years later such hopes or fears were a thing of the past.

West Germans had made a success of life in their part of Europe and felt increasingly at ease there. Looking back, Hans Magnus Enzensberger observed that the idea of Europe had provided them with 'eine zweite, entlastende Identität' (a second, liberating identity) (Enzensberger 1994: 501), offering them the prospect of a bright future in which the things that bound Europeans together would count for much more than their differences. Against this background, it became possible to take a more critical look at the nation's past. In the 19th century, if not earlier, it was argued, Germany had deviated from the standard Western European course of development, with disastrous consequences; what Friedrich Meinecke dubbed the 'deutsche Katastrophe' (German catastrophe) was the result of having taken this 'special path' ('deutscher Sonderweg'). The task now for Germany was to complete its long, all too frequently interrupted and abandoned 'Weg nach Westen' (journey to the West; Heinrich August Winkler) and to touch down safely in the Western democratic camp – and, if possible, to blaze new trails for democracy beyond the narrow bounds of the nation-state.⁸

But what was happening in the GDR, the second of the two German states founded after the war? What ideas and behaviours linked the citizens of the GDR to 'Europe'? How closely was the state integrated into the eastern European economic and military alliances laid down by the Soviet Union? What cultural influences and connections were at work in this part of Europe? And how did the GDR understand its own history and relationship with 'Europe'?

In eastern Europe, the situation was different in one striking respect: unlike the West's 'protector', the USA, the Soviet Union was geographically part of Europe, although it also included areas east of the Urals that extended far into Asia. It was literally close by, sharing borders with Poland, Romania, Hungary, Czechoslovakia, and the Baltic States, then under

direct Soviet rule. This allowed it to impose a political and military hegemony that prevented the countries of eastern Europe from enjoying any sort of autonomy or pursuing an independent course. The nature of these relationships was reflected in political language. When in the GDR people talked about their socialist ‘Bruderstaaten’ (brother states), they meant to include the Soviet Union only in a limited sense. Rather, the Soviet Union was, in Stalinist parlance, the ‘fatherland of all workers’, or the ‘motherland and advance guard of socialism’ (*Neues Deutschland* 1963).⁹ Regardless of whether it was termed a father or a mother, the Soviet Union was seen as an authority figure that was owed obedience and gratitude by its ‘sons’. At official level, the notion of friendship served to gloss over the dependence and subordination this entailed. With 6 million members in 1985, the Society for German–Soviet Friendship (founded in 1949, the successor organisation of the *Gesellschaft zum Studium der Kultur der Sowjetunion* of 1947), was one of the largest mass-membership bodies in the GDR, organising study visits, holiday camps for children, and cultural encounters. Yet such programmes had only limited appeal. The propaganda effort that went into promoting them was out of all proportion to the success they enjoyed at grass roots, among the general population.

Even less successful were the many other friendship societies and committees that made up the *Liga für Völkerfreundschaft* (International Friendship League). The GDR had loose ties, at best, with its ‘brother states’ in eastern Europe. GDR citizens did visit the ‘befreundetes sozialistisches Ausland’ (allied socialist countries), spending their holidays on Lake Balaton in Hungary or at the Bulgarian Black Sea coast. Even work-related migration was not unheard of in the Eastern bloc states, which were at different stages of development, but it occurred at levels well below those achieved in Western Europe. The ‘brother states’ of Comecon were much more cut off from one another economically, socially, and culturally than the countries of the EEC; right to end, they remained more ‘national’ – and nationalist – societies (Wilson and van der Dussen 1993: 156ff.; Stirk and Weigall 1999: 182ff.; Judd 1996: 64).

This was especially true of the GDR, which – precisely because its political system was in competition with that of the Federal Republic – went to great lengths to reinvent itself as a socialist German state. The East Berlin Government set much greater store than its counterpart in Bonn on rituals and symbols that both reaffirmed the GDR’s sovereignty and connected it to positive aspects of the German past. Patriotic tub thumping of a sort that hardly ever featured in the Federal Republic was de rigueur in the GDR. It could be seen at the military parades staged to mark national holidays, at flag-raising ceremonies and in banner displays, and in the goose-stepping of the guards at the Neue Wache, the main memorial in East Berlin to the victims of war and fascism. The GDR quickly developed a view of history that placed it on the side of the victors; unlike the Federal Republic, it did not see itself as the legal successor of the ‘Third Reich’ and refused to accept any responsibility for the consequences of Nazi policies. Instead, its leaders endlessly repeated the mantra that, thanks to Soviet help, imperialism, capitalism, and militarism had been eradicated root and branch, leaving the GDR free to confront the challenges of the future unburdened by Germany’s ‘dark’ past.

At the same time, the GDR sought to cobble together a ‘bright’ past it could be proud of – and that could be usefully deployed against the rival German state. While the Federal Republic was seen as the embodiment of everything nasty and contemptible in German history, the GDR assumed the mantle of Germany’s ‘progressive’ traditions, from the Peasants War of the early 16th century, now characterised as an ‘early bourgeois revolution’, through German classicism, down to Karl Marx and the 19th-century socialist workers’ movement. Proclaiming itself the rightful guardian of this ‘legacy’, the GDR used it to strengthen its sense of national identity (Assmann and Frevert 1999). Political legitimisation of the GDR, in competition with the Federal Republic, was central to its positive reappropriation of German history: the new socialist state

wanted to present itself to its citizens not as a Soviet import, but as the triumph and fulfilment of the best German traditions.

This self-understanding was one of the main drivers for the GDR's peaceful revolution of 1989. When Easterners changed their slogan from 'Wir sind *das* Volk' (We are *the* people) to 'Wir sind *ein* Volk' (We are *one* people), they were evoking a sense of historical shared identity that had almost disappeared in the Federal Republic. At the same time, their call for reunification reflected the continuing appeal of West Germany, which – as East Germans could see every day on television – was able to offer a far higher standard of living, greater freedoms, and a more cosmopolitan outlook. The inhabitants of Leipzig, Magdeburg, or Rostock had always paid much more attention to developments in the West than to those in the East. After 1990, they looked not just to Hamburg, Frankfurt, or Munich, but to Amsterdam, Brussels, and Paris as well. Russian, which had been a compulsory subject in the GDR, was cast aside as they began to learn and speak English, the lingua franca of the late 20th and 21st centuries.

Conversely, in the old West people began to take a much closer look at what was happening in Warsaw, Prague, and Budapest. After the fall of the Wall and the Iron Curtain, the newly unified Germany lobbied enthusiastically for the eastwards expansion of the European Community. By embracing closer European unity as laid down by the Treaty of Maastricht (1992), the Federal Republic also sought to dispel any remaining doubts about its commitment to Europe and European identity. Having just become the largest, most populous, and most economically powerful nation state in Europe, dominating the heart of the continent, it was anxious to demonstrate that it had no intention of once again going it alone or taking a 'special path'. Quite the reverse: the Federal Republic chose to act as an engine of European integration. It was even prepared to give up its only true national symbol, the German Mark, as a confidence-building measure (Küsters and Hofmann 1998: 638).

There is no doubt that Germany has benefited – and continues to benefit – hugely from this positive approach to Europe. German exports have soared thanks to both the opening up of eastern European markets and the adoption of the euro as a common currency. However, in recent years attitudes towards 'Europe' have become more ambivalent, and eurosceptic movements are now on the rise. The louder the clamour from foreign observers for Germany to take on a leadership role in the financial and euro crisis that began in 2008, the more reluctant the federal government has been to do so. The austerity that it has promoted in Italy, Cyprus, and Greece may reflect German experiences and sensibilities, but it has stirred up anti-German feeling – with the German Chancellor being branded 'Hitler Merkel' – and exposed political and intellectual fault lines in the European project that were thought to have long since healed (Garton Ash 2013; Minton Beddoes 2013). In the current crisis, the tendency throughout Europe is for people to want to revert to national models and traditions and to lick their own wounds. For a 'European nation' such as Germany, which has carefully cultivated an international sense of mission over a long period, a return to nationalism of this kind is harder to contemplate than elsewhere. Yet Germany cannot resolve the European crisis on its own. To quote Timothy Garton Ash, one of the leading foreign experts on Germany, 'Only together can we generate the policies and institutions, but also that fresh breeze of poetry, to get the European ship sailing again'.

Yet 'visionary leadership', accompanied by 'pulse-quickening oratory', is not necessarily the only way to generate the 'breeze of poetry' Garton Ash seeks. An alternative approach – possibly with more lasting results – is through historical memory that avoids the pitfalls of national chauvinism and provincialism and uses the dramatic conflicts, enmities, and catastrophes Europe has suffered as a reason and incentive to seek peaceful, continent-wide solutions to problems. This can take a variety of forms, from official commemorative ceremonies of the sort planned

for 2014, large-scale popular celebrations like those to mark the bicentenary of the Battle of Leipzig, and the naming of cities as European capitals of culture, through to Europe-wide history competitions such as those run by *eustory*, the history network for young Europeans, since 2001. Unsurprisingly, this project is the brainchild of a German institution, the Körber Foundation.¹⁰

Notes

- 1 See www.bverfg.de/entscheidungen/es20090630_2bve000208.html (accessed 6 December 2013).
- 2 See <http://opinium.co.uk/sites/default/files/opin-inouteurope.pdf> (accessed 13 December 2013).
- 3 For the German text of Schulz's speech, see http://www.europarl.europa.eu/the-president/en/press/press_release_speeches/speeches/sp-2013/sp-2013-october/html/leipzig-1813-1913-2013-jubilaum-v-lkerschlacht-und-v-lkerschlachtdenkmal-rede-von-martin-schulz-prasident-des-europaischen-parlaments (accessed 11 February 2014).
- 4 See www.volksbund.de/kriegsgraeberstaette/consenvoye.html (accessed 17 December 2013).
- 5 See the Historical's website, www.historical.org (accessed 17 December 2013), and the many works published by its research centre (e.g. Harel 1998; Huss 2000).
- 6 On its positive reception by the Vichy regime in France, however, see Bruneteau (2003); Mazower (2009): 553–75.
- 7 Although traces of these attitudes remained, as events from 2003 onwards were to demonstrate. When Germany opposed American foreign policy for the first time over the Iraq war, the pleasure that it took in dissociating itself from the US was unmistakable; anti-American stereotypes and clichés were also quick to resurface.
- 8 On the long debate concerning the German 'Sonderweg', see Kocka 1999 and Schulze 2002.
- 9 *Neues Deutschland* was the official mouthpiece of the ruling Socialist Unity Party and the GDR's most important and influential daily.
- 10 See www.koerber-stiftung.de/en/education/eustory.html (accessed 31 December 2013). The 'Report on Historical Memory in Culture and Education in the European Union', drafted by a committee of the European Parliament in August 2013, argues that historical 'memory, nurtured among other things by educational activities and cultural events, will reinforce genuine reconciliation between nations and authentic European integration'. See www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?type=COMPARL&reference=PE-516.702&format=PDF&language=EN&secondRef=01 (accessed 31 December 2013).

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