

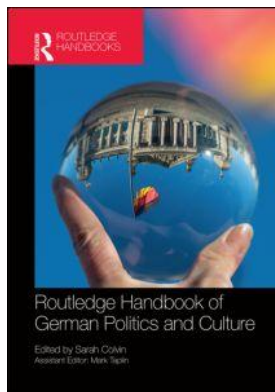
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Legacies of a significant past

Regimes, experiences, and identities

Mary Fulbrook

A distinguishing feature of contemporary Germany is a widespread public concern – one might even say, an obsessive concern – with the past. And not just with any past, nor indeed with any single past, but with multiple difficult pasts. No day goes by without a story – whether headline news, or inner pages paragraph, or cultural supplement review – dealing with some aspect of Germany’s past: and, more specifically, with the two contrasting dictatorships, the Third Reich and the German Democratic Republic (GDR). The debates about these regimes are at times heated, stirred up by a particular incident, exhibition, anniversary, and at times muted, a background chorus of local scandals or specific discoveries. But these two dictatorships represent, to adapt the controversial phrase applied by the conservative German philosopher Ernst Nolte, ‘pasts that will not pass away’: pasts that refuse to become ‘history’ (Nolte 1986).

One reason why these dictatorships continue to fascinate and irritate, to have emotional reverberations even decades after their demise, is because the people who live in Germany today are still intrinsically affected by them. They have not yet become ‘history’ in the sense of a primarily cognitive, non-emotional body of knowledge about a particular past: a past that is interesting, even possibly emotive and engaging on a personal level, but not of direct personal significance. Nor, however, are these pasts for the most part a matter of ‘memory’, certainly no longer for the more distant decades. Those who have personal memories of the Weimar Republic and even of the Third Reich are ageing and becoming a tiny minority of the population; the ‘death of the eyewitness’ has been bemoaned many times, well before the actual physical demise of those who can remember these times, as though a crucial lifeline to the pre-1945 past is being gradually severed. And while the GDR is still very much a matter of living memory, there are already generations coming to adulthood who have no direct memories of this far more recent past. However far back, these pasts remain in some sense ‘live’, with a continuing salience way beyond the chronological end-dates of their defunct regimes or the inexorable decline and disappearance of the eyewitness generations. The German regimes through which people lived over the last century were more than just political forms; and they continue to shape identities and perceptions in the present.

The massive regime transitions of 20th-century German history need little rehearsal. Defeat in World War I was accompanied by the collapse of the Imperial system in November 1918 and its replacement by the short-lived experiment in democracy, the Weimar Republic. Barely

had this established a precarious stability, having weathered the acute political and economic crises of the early 1920s, than it was overwhelmed and eventually swept away by political radicalisation in the economic depression following the Wall Street Crash of 1929. From his appointment as chancellor in January 1933 until his suicide at the end of April 1945, Adolf Hitler presided over a genocidal dictatorship responsible for unleashing World War II, costing more than 50 million lives worldwide, and organising the mass murder of some 6 million people on ‘racial’ and political grounds. Following four years under Allied administration, two new German states were formed in 1949: in the Western zones of occupation, the democratic, capitalist Federal Republic of Germany (FRG), often now called the ‘Bonn Republic’ in light of the location of West Germany’s ‘provisional’ capital in the Rhineland; and, in the Soviet zone of occupation, the communist German Democratic Republic (GDR), which, even though Berlin remained nominally under four-power control, had its seat of government in East Berlin or, as the East German Government liked to call it, ‘Berlin, capital of the GDR’. While West Germany was the beneficiary of American Marshall Aid and basked in the ‘economic miracle’ that provided the basis for the stabilisation of the democratic system, East Germany’s fate within Soviet-dominated eastern Europe was less fortunate. Berlin, a divided city, was notoriously at the frontline of the Cold War; its Wall, erected in 1961 to stem the flow of refugees to the West, became a symbol of the division of Europe. Despite achieving international recognition and some measure of domestic stability in the early 1970s, East Germany faced economic decline and domestic political challenges within a changed international situation in the 1980s, heralding the end of the Cold War. Following the collapse of the communist regime and the breaching of the Berlin Wall in November 1989, a process was inaugurated that culminated in the absorption of the newly recreated regional states or *Länder* of the former GDR into an enlarged Federal Republic of Germany on 3 October 1990. Within a few years of unification, the capital relocated to the now unified Berlin, giving rise to the appellation ‘Berlin Republic’ for this latest manifestation of the Federal Republic of Germany.

The political history of these states is related easily enough. Far harder to grasp are the ways in which the different regimes affected generations of people whose lives could not so neatly be pigeonholed into one or another regime, but rather spanned the decades across regime transitions. Social identities were constrained, shaped, and reshaped, as people faced the challenges posed by radical historical transformations and rapid transitions from one system to another. Even so, the acute instability, unrest, and violence that characterised the first half of the century eventually gave way to a degree of stabilisation over much of the latter half. The early periods of radical upheaval and violence have captured public attention to such a degree – and for quite understandable reasons – that it often seems as if the 13 years of Weimar democracy, or the 12 years of Hitler’s rule, lasted far longer than the 40 years of the two German states in the period of division. Moreover, the fact that one of these two states ultimately collapsed and was absorbed into the other has led to a degree of teleology in recounting its history, as though the end were built in from the very start. Yet viewed from the perspective of individual lives, the stretches of time take on a quite different appearance. The passage of generations is key to understanding how different the latter half of the 20th century was from the previous 30 or more years of almost incessant involvement in violence both abroad and at home.

People do not just inhabit the present, they also incorporate the past: they are shaped by the past and live with the lingering consequences and continuing significance of that past. Yet we are still searching for adequate approaches to interpreting the complexities of our being within time. In what follows I will distinguish between ‘communities of experience’, defined as those who actually lived through key events or periods, and ‘communities of connection and identification’, referring to those who are affected by the impact of a significant past on people

with whom they are closely connected (such as family or friends), or on a wider collective to which they feel they belong (such as a nation or a religious, political, or ethnic group) or with which, whatever their own background, they come to develop a strong sense of identification. The structures of postwar states and their changing locations within a wider international political context and transnational cultural system filter and transform the interrelationships among these different communities.

Whichever way these questions are addressed, Germany today is pervaded by a sense of having a particularly significant past, and one that raises political and moral questions of continuing and far broader relevance.

The transformation of identities under Nazism

Identities are not simply given; they are formed and reformed, constantly reshaping under changing historical conditions. This is far harder to capture than are the outlines of the historical events themselves. Who, then, are ‘the Germans’ whose history we seek to recount?

A major way in which social identities were transformed during the Third Reich was in the everyday application and enactment of ‘racial’ theories, alongside Nazi practices of terror targeting communists, socialists, and other political opponents. It was made clear from the very start, with the boycott of Jewish shops at the beginning of April 1933, and the law that followed a few days later excluding Jews from professional occupations, that there was to be, as so many phrased it, no future for people of Jewish descent in Nazi Germany. With extraordinary rapidity, everyday racism was enacted; people of Jewish descent were identified and degraded, and friendships broken up well before the Nuremberg Laws officially turned Jews into second-class citizens. Even in the ‘peacetime’ years, brutality and murder were tools frequently deployed by the Nazis, most visibly in the November pogrom of 1938 (*Kristallnacht*) and in the horrendous experiences of the adult male Jews arrested en masse after this and forced into the increasingly overcrowded concentration camps of Dachau, Sachsenhausen, Buchenwald, and elsewhere. Other groups, too, were rapidly victimised in the ‘racial state’. Some 400,000 people held to be carrying supposedly hereditary diseases, including even alcoholism, were subjected to compulsory sterilisation; homosexuals were at risk of severe penalties, including incarceration in conditions such that around 10,000 did not survive; those carrying out abortions were severely punished; Jehovah’s Witnesses, Sinti and Roma, and many others eventually suffered imprisonment and murder.

With the outbreak of war in 1939 the violence against civilians intensified. Mass murder of civilians was not a later development coming only after the invasion of Russia in 1941. Special killing squads, or *Einsatzgruppen*, whose activities in the wake of the army’s invasion of the Soviet Union have become so notorious, were coordinated already in mid-August 1939, and were active following the invasion of Poland at the beginning of September. In occupied Polish territories in the early weeks of autumn 1939, synagogues were set on fire, and Jewish civilians – in total probably several thousands, although the figures are not exact – were burned alive in places of worship and in their own homes and other buildings. Members of the Polish elites – civilian professionals as well as army officers – were captured, imprisoned, and in some infamous cases massacred. Among ‘Aryan’ Germans, those deemed to be ‘lives unworthy of living’ by virtue of physical or mental disabilities were put to death in the misnamed ‘euthanasia’ programme that started on an order of Hitler dated September 1939 and, despite its official termination following widespread protests two years later, continued unofficially until the end of the war, claiming some 200,000 lives.

While people were stigmatised both officially and informally, those doing the discriminating themselves changed; racism affected the identities of members of the ‘master race’ as well as its

victims. ‘Ordinary men’ became perpetrators in police battalions and army units on the eastern front; people on the home front mourned their losses of sons, brothers, husbands, fathers in stereotypical terms, seeking solace in reassurances that they had ‘fallen for the *Führer*, *Volk*, and Fatherland’.¹ Others, by virtue of political commitments or religious or moral qualms, remained impervious to Nazi ideology or even became resisters, ultimately often also becoming victims of the regime of terror. The Nazi era was a maelstrom that makes nonsense of any generalisations about ‘the Germans’. There were many different communities of experience during this period, which left its mark on all who lived through it in ways that could not be ignored in the aftermath.

In the early years after World War II, there was not only widespread relief that a period of suffering had finally come to an end, but also a degree of anguish in facing the uncertainties of the postwar world. Many victims of Nazi persecution were only now, on liberation, able to register the extent of their diminution and, in a still weakened state, to agonise over the loss of loved ones, the difficulties of the present and the challenges of trying to make a new life. The anguish of those who survived Nazi persecution has been largely written out of the script of ‘German’ history: they become ‘survivors’, ‘Jews’ who left for other shores, ‘communists’ who sought to institute a new dictatorship on the ruins of the old, or homosexuals, whose activities were still criminalised until the late 1960s. The notion of ‘Germans’ was paradoxically (in light of the history) even after the war still implicitly restricted to those who had been included in Hitler’s ‘ethnic community’. And their primary concerns and sympathies were not with the victims of Nazi persecution, of the slave labour camps and the death marches, but rather with their own missing and dead, their own hunger, their sense of powerlessness and dislocation; the fates of refugees and expellees from lost territories in eastern Europe, of prisoners of war and missing soldiers, took precedence over the fates of survivors.

There had emerged, in short, quite different, distinct, communities of experience. However shocked and appalled many Germans professed to be on watching films of concentration camp footage, such as the American-produced ‘Death Mills’ (*Todesmühlen*, 1945), the majority treated denazification procedures – in all the zones of occupation – with a degree of pragmatic cynicism, reorganising their life stories and acquiring credentials (often dubbed ‘Persil certificates’ as part of the general whitewash) to ensure the most beneficial classification on the five-point scale from ‘major offenders’ to ‘exonerated’. The trials of prominent Nazis carried out under the auspices of the Nuremberg International Military Tribunal in 1945–6 and the successor trials carried out by the Allies, again shocking in what they revealed of Nazi crimes, were widely disregarded as ‘victors’ justice; and putting the major Nazis on trial only served to confirm the convenient postwar myth that just a handful of individuals at the top had been responsible for the evils of Nazism. Through the later 1940s and 1950s, German ‘war stories’ were ones that focused on individual heroism and survival, excluding almost entirely any uncomfortable questions concerning widespread involvement in Nazi crimes.

The notion of German victimhood, sometimes seen as developing more than half a century later, was certainly alive and widespread in the early postwar years, which many Germans both at the time and later considered to be the worst years of their lives. The ‘myth of silence’ on the part of the victims, too, was born at this time (see e.g. Cesarani and Sundquist 2012). While many survivors in Displaced Persons (DP) camps talked incessantly about their experiences among themselves, and had their stories actively elicited by the (eastern European-born, Jewish) American Professor David Boder, who conducted the earliest tape-recorded interviews with victims of racial persecution, they lacked an audience across the borders of other communities of experience (see Rosen 2010). Bound up in their own concerns, Germans on the other side of the now persisting ‘racial’ divides simply did not want to listen at this time. Nor was there much of a sympathetic audience for those who left the DP camps and sought to return to former

homes or to relocate to other countries: neither in newly communist-dominated Poland, where anti-Semitism flared up again very soon after the war, nor in France, where the Gaullist myth of national resistance conveniently papered over the gulf between different groups, nor in many parts of the USA, where even Jewish relatives often proved uncomprehending, nor even in Palestine/Israel, where Zionist heroism seemed incompatible with sympathy for downtrodden victims. And very soon, the Cold War posed new challenges in an era of a divided world and a divided nation.

'Reckoning' with the Nazi past in divided Germany

For those who remained on German soil, the postwar moment meant not only rebuilding from the rubble, mourning, awaiting news of loved ones who were still missing, or dealing with the return of often physically and psychologically wounded former prisoners of war, but also – in different ways in East and West – building up new states and societies under the pretence of a 'return to normality'. Part of this pretence was the construction of a sense of domestic stability, understood in terms of a 'private life' with a home, a family and secure employment, leisure, friends, hobbies, and holidays, unhampered by the unwelcome intrusions of 'History' in the form of major social and political events, whether revolution, violence on the streets, economic depression, war, expulsions, air raids and mass bereavement. Part of it also was a reckoning with the past, in order to demonstrate that those who had been responsible for recent aberrations and atrocities had been brought to justice; at the same time, the desire to 'draw a line under the past' was a recurrent refrain.

The first postwar chancellor of the Federal Republic of Germany, Konrad Adenauer (1876–1967), initially set the parameters in the West for a public culture of responsibility – and hence shame – without much admission of guilt. He had a distinct preference for adopting the passive mood, as in his 1951 speech declaring that 'unspeakable crimes have been committed in the name of the German people', as though very few Germans had been actually involved in perpetrating these crimes. He was concerned for West Germany's international reputation: political ends were well served by his 1952 agreement to offer 'reparations' to Israel as well as the FRG's belated expressions of sympathy with the victims of anti-Semitism. Moreover, this stance was accompanied by a practical policy of reintegrating former Nazis and providing a broad amnesty for large numbers of people who had been complicit in the murderous regime. In the FRG of the 1950s, tens of thousands of civil servants who had faithfully served Hitler's state returned to their jobs or were awarded full pensions; local and regional government, the judiciary and the police services, hospitals, universities, and schools were staffed by innumerable people who had implemented Nazi policies only a few years earlier. Even Adenauer's chief aide in the Chancellery, Hans Globke, had been involved in writing the official commentary for Hitler on the Nuremberg Laws. It was not difficult for East German communist leaders to find ammunition in their campaign to portray the Bonn Republic as a home for former Nazis. Prominent targets of GDR propaganda campaigns included Adenauer's Minister for Refugees, Theodor Oberländer, who was a former convinced Nazi, an expert adviser on Hitler's 'Germanisation' measures and ethnic cleansing policies in Poland, and controversially associated with a military unit involved in massacres in Ukraine. A determination on both sides to appear the 'better Germany' in terms of 'overcoming the past' meant that pursuit of former Nazis could never come off the agenda. The international position of both German states remained key to domestic developments in this area.

The particular community of experience that was dominant in West Germany had a sympathetic understanding of those who had gone along with the Nazi regime, and gave priority,

in matters of welfare and compensation, to the millions of Germans who had suffered in the postwar upheavals and expulsions. The 1952 Equalisation of Burdens Law (*Lastenausgleichsgesetz*) was a public expression of the privileged voice given to this significant constituency of voters, providing compensation for those who had lost their homes and livelihoods as a result of the war. Although this included survivors of the camps, the vast majority of beneficiaries were ‘ethnic Germans’ who had resettled in the Federal Republic after having fled or been expelled from lost eastern territories. In contrast, for decades there was no recognition of any need to compensate those who had suffered in slave labour camps or as forced labourers in Germany, or victims of Nazi sterilisation policies, or homosexuals who had been imprisoned. The policies enacted by the politically dominant elites were thus broadly in line with, indeed responded to, views prevalent among broader circles of society, even where there remained distinctions between tales told in the privacy of the family and public expressions of shame. People’s own experiences, whether at the front or at home, or on the move, were for most individuals more significant than the ‘Nazi crimes’ allegedly committed by others; and anti-communism took precedence over dealing with the legacies of Nazism.

It took the interventions of key individuals from a quite different community of experience, that of resistance and victimhood, to change the course of developments in West Germany. But these individuals, representative only of a minority, were able to act as catalysts of change because of the relatively open political system in the West. By the later 1950s attempts to prosecute former Nazis were flagging. From 1958, however, the newly founded Central Office of the State Judicial Authorities for the Investigation of National Socialist Crimes (*Zentrale Stelle der Landesjustizverwaltungen zur Aufklärung nationalsozialistischer Verbrechen*), based in the small south-west German town of Ludwigsburg, began to coordinate the efforts of different Länder. Following the capture of Adolf Eichmann, whose trial in Jerusalem in 1961 aroused international interest and controversy, Nazi crimes were back in the spotlight. Much of the impetus for the Frankfurt Auschwitz trial of 1963–5 came from two men who, as far as communities of experience are concerned, were drawn from the side of the victims. Fritz Bauer, the Attorney General of the West German Federal state of Hesse, was a committed socialist of Jewish descent. He had lost his professional position under Hitler’s Law for the Restoration of a Professional Civil Service (*Gesetz zur Wiederherstellung des Berufsbeamtentums*) in April 1933, and was forced to flee Germany during the war, first for Denmark and then for Sweden. He had played a role in tracking down Eichmann in South America before making it his mission to bring to trial in Germany a handful of those responsible for crimes committed at Auschwitz. Against considerable opposition, in the midst of a legal profession pervaded by former Nazis, Bauer and his associate, the Auschwitz survivor Hermann Langbein, ensured that a credible trial could be mounted. For the first time in West Germany the voices of victims were heard in public; more than 200 survivors came to bear witness, often speaking out for the first time to a wider audience, in the face of hostile questioning from lawyers for the defence of the perpetrators.

Despite ambivalent responses at the time, a new era had opened: the desired line under the past could not easily be drawn. Even as legislation to lift the statute of limitations for prosecution of murder was being hotly debated, wider groups became involved: younger historians, students, and others began to explore more proactively the crimes of the Nazi era. Those who by family ties or sense of national identity felt a connection with the perpetrators began increasingly to identify with the victims, as West German political culture was transformed from the later 1960s onwards.

Over the following decades, despite growing knowledge and attention, older West Germans clung to the defence of having ‘only followed orders’ or having ‘known nothing about it’. Even in autobiographical writings and oral history interviews towards the end of the century, this

community of experience tended to respond in pre-emptively defensive terms that bore traces of the challenges of public debates and wider discourses of self-justification. Meanwhile, younger West Germans came to adulthood who had been brought up with a complex sense of personal connection with members of their parents' generation and wider identification with what was presented as a 'German nation' persisting across time, an imagined community with a particular burden of responsibilities for the past. They learned that they should 'be ashamed' of their nation's past. For many, this brought with it a heightened sensitivity, an identification and empathy with experiences of the victims, and a commitment to engage with an uncomfortable past.

The same situation did not obtain in the GDR, where open discussions of the Nazi past were constrained by official parameters and formulae, and where the new state refused to take responsibility for the consequences of crimes committed by the Nazi regime. The founding fathers of the GDR, drawn from Germany's pre-1945 left, were – with good reason – profoundly distrustful of the majority of their compatriots. Many Germans had gone along with Hitler's murderous regime, and former Nazis and fellow travellers still harboured anti-communist sentiments whipped up by Hitler and exacerbated by brutal treatment at the hands of the Red Army. The politically dominant community of experience in the GDR – those who had been opposed to Nazism – tended to marginalise the suffering of those who had been persecuted on 'racial' or religious grounds, portraying them as passive victims rather than 'antifascist resistance fighters'. It is striking that, even during the very early postwar period, people who had suffered under Nazism sought to constrain their self-representations into the newly dominant mould; people who had been persecuted on grounds of 'race', for example, were already somewhat defensively adding that for this reason they had not been able to be as politically active as they might have liked; others, who had been politically active, were downplaying their own suffering as victims or indeed the plight of close relatives on 'racial' grounds.² But they too were a tiny minority. The broader community viewed the new regime with scepticism and widespread dislike.

Former perpetrators were pursued proactively through the East German judicial system, at times clearly for political effect – as in the trials and sentencing *in absentia* of prominent Nazis who had fled to quieter havens in the West – but also simply in order to ensure their prosecution and punishment, a fact often underplayed in the secondary literature. Few East German trials captured international attention in the way that those in the West did, but former Nazis were still being hunted down, put on trial and harshly punished, even where there was little publicity, right through the 1980s. Often individuals who had played comparatively minor roles in the Nazi system received severe sentences, in contrast to the staggering leniency of sentencing in comparable cases in the West. But the GDR leadership also provided ways of exonerating former Nazis and 'fellow travellers' if they were prepared to commit themselves to the new state, and sought to foster a wider sense of pride by propagating the myths of antifascist resistance and 'liberation' rather than defeat.

The political instrumentalisation of the past, along with the GDR's refusal to represent itself as the successor state to Nazism, meant that younger East Germans did not develop a strong sense of connection with this past as part of a persisting 'national community'. There was often some awareness of dissonance between stories told at home and the official version of history propagated in schools, in youth groups, and on visits to former concentration camps such as Buchenwald, which became something of a GDR political shrine. But the Nazi past was far less of an issue than were the challenges of the communist present. A culture of shame about being German was not developed and transmitted across generations in the same way as in the West. Nor, incidentally, did comparable developments take place in Austria, where the

convenient ‘myth of innocence’ was only really challenged with the Waldheim affair of the 1980s. Thus the acute emotion of shame experienced among younger West German communities of connection and identification was not paralleled in the GDR and Austria. Nor, arguably, was it paralleled among Germans who had moved abroad.

There was also, in the later 20th century, a broadening of transnational cultural currents. This was arguably more significant for developments in West Germany, where such phenomena were widely discussed, than in the GDR. If earlier generations could claim that they had ‘not seen’ and ‘knew nothing about it’, this was not the case for those living in an age of mass media with global reach. Again, it was individuals drawn from communities of experience and connection with the victims, and often located outside Germany, who were significant catalysts of change in the cultural sphere: Gerald Green’s *Holocaust* (1978), Claude Lanzmann’s *Shoah* (1985), and Steven Spielberg’s *Schindler’s List* (1993), for example, portray very different perspectives on the past than does Edgar Reitz’s *Heimat* (1984), and all three externally produced depictions arguably had a major impact on growing public identification with victims.

There was, in fact, increasing willingness to give victims a hearing, in ways not possible when post-Nazi communities of experience still dominated the West German landscape of public discourse. In a post-Vietnam era of sympathy for individuals suffering from the newly defined post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), victimhood became an acceptable rather than a derided status, and ‘victims’ transmogrified into ‘survivors’ who had ever-widening audiences for their stories.

In the GDR, the Nazi persecution of the Jews had been more widely discussed and presented in memorial sites and educational materials than is generally realised; but these developments, while registered and ‘known’ at a cognitive level, appear not to have been of much immediate personal significance to younger East Germans.³ The official myth of the ‘antifascist state’, entailing a lack of collective responsibility for the Nazi past, meant that younger East Germans did not feel a strong sense of identification with a national (imagined) community persisting across time and over the divide of 1945 in quite the same way as younger West Germans were made to do. At the same time, their own experiences of accommodation with the demands and constraints of the Socialist Unity Party (SED) dictatorship rendered them far more likely to be sympathetic to the ways in which their parents and grandparents had participated in the structures of the Third Reich. The level of identification within the family, while acknowledging the crimes of the rejected Nazi regime, thus played out rather differently in East Germany than in the West.⁴

The explanation of these shifts is complex and cannot be adequately addressed here. But a key element has to do with shifts in the imagined communities of those with whom one feels a sense of empathy. For most East Germans, the predominant concerns of the day were with a difficult present that was overwhelming in its demands. Failure to identify fully with the ‘antifascist state’ was accompanied by a degree of understanding for relatives who were former Nazi fellow travellers, and widespread lack of emotional involvement in the fate of the victims. In West Germany, among those who had been adults during the Third Reich, there was also relatively little interest in the experiences of victims of Nazi policies; even former perpetrators or fellow travellers were already casting themselves in the role of victims of war and expulsion, and were primarily concerned with (and often overwhelmed by) their own problems. Yet here the state was more aligned with popular concerns, and thus the expressions of continuing responsibility for the past fell on more receptive ears. There was then a growing willingness among later West German communities of connection and identification to give a sympathetic hearing to the problems of victims. By the 1980s, victims were not so much ‘given a voice’ – this they had always had – as given a wider audience. At the same time, those survivors who

had been young at the time of the Holocaust were now entering retirement and old age; their personal concerns had shifted from building a bearable present for themselves and their families to a concern with revisiting the past for purposes of educating for the future.

'Building a better Germany': East and West German identities

On each side of the Iron Curtain the new states were created with an eye to creating a better future.

In West Germany, the Nazi dictatorship was replaced by a parliamentary democracy, its constitution informed by the perceived shortcomings of the Weimar Republic. The multiparty system slowly shook down, following further reforms to the voting system, into one where two major parties, the conservative CDU/CSU and the social democratic SPD, vied for the support of the small (and in many respects right-wing) liberal party, the FDP. Over the 40 years of division, the political colour of the West German Government changed only as a result of the shifting support of the FDP, which notably switched to support the SPD in 1969, and swung back to the CDU in 1982 (see Chapter 6).

The capitalist economy continued to develop in the West, now reframed in terms of a 'social market economy', and characterised by a corporatist system brokering deals between managers and workers. The FRG was at the forefront of moves towards closer European integration as well as playing a role in Western international alliances at the frontline of the divided Cold War world – both also conveniently part of Adenauer's strategy for re-entering the community of acceptable nations. Despite major continuities, with an ever more affluent middle class benefitting from the Marshall Plan and the 'economic miracle', there were key social changes. Women, who had been drawn into Hitler's war effort, were persuaded back into the home, and only began to raise their voices in favour of 'emancipation' in the era of social movements from the late 1960s onwards. Expellees and refugees from lost territories in eastern Europe made up around a fifth of the FRG's population by the early 1960s. When this flood dried up, the continuing demand for cheap, mobile labour was met by the 'guest worker' (*Gastarbeiter*) programme, drawing in an infinitely less privileged group of foreign nationals who, having no citizenship entitlement or vote in West Germany, were more readily exploited, their concerns more easily ignored (see Chapter 12). Workers from Mediterranean countries – predominantly from Italy at first, but increasingly from Turkey – took up the lowest paid and most menial jobs. By the 1970s and 1980s, when other European economies were challenged by the oil crises and recession, West Germany's affluent democracy appeared to stand as a model for all. Despite continued controversies over attempts to 'normalise' the past in the 1980s, a now thoroughly discredited nationalism appeared (at least among articulate left-liberal elites) to be displaced by 'constitutional patriotism', a term proposed by the philosopher Jürgen Habermas. Whatever people made of this concept, and it was far from generally accepted, life in the increasingly urbanised, politically stable, and affluent West was relatively easy for many.

The transition for those who found themselves on the East German side of the 'Iron Curtain' dividing Europe was far more challenging. Under the communist-dominated Socialist Unity Party, backed by Moscow, there was a major social revolution. Landed estates of more than 100 hectares were expropriated in September 1945 and redistributed among small peasants and landless labourers; waves of agricultural collectivisation followed, such that by the early 1960s the vast majority of East German agriculture was run under the auspices of collective farms (*Landwirtschaftliche Produktionsgenossenschaften* or LPGs). Industry and finance were nationalised, with a gradual squeezing-out of capitalists and independent tradespeople, leaving only a tiny minority of enterprises in private hands by the start of the 1970s. The working classes now

found themselves nominally the new ruling class in the ‘Workers’ and Peasants’ State’ (*Staat der Arbeiter und Bauern*), although conditions of work in the new ‘People’s Own Enterprises’ (*Volkseigene Betriebe*, VEB) often seemed little different from in earlier decades; with lack of adequate investment, equipment and machinery became ever more rusty and outdated. Formerly bourgeois occupations were transformed: independent managers of industry gave way to loyal communist functionaries running the new economic combines; doctors gave up independent practices and collaborated in work-based polyclinics; teachers, journalists, and lawyers became servants of the new communist state. Women were proactively recruited into the workforce, for pragmatic reasons to do with labour shortages as well as an ideological commitment to emancipation. Many found combining production and reproduction to be a ‘double burden’, but there was nevertheless a transformation in gender roles. While East Germany did not urbanise as rapidly as the West, housing shortages were tackled by a combination of prestigious new towns and building projects as well as the construction of cheap high-rise estates. The socialist new town of Stalinstadt, later renamed Eisenhüttenstadt, on the border with Poland near Frankfurt an der Oder, and East Berlin’s Stalinallee, renamed Karl-Marx-Allee in 1961, stand as prominent examples of the former; the housing ‘silos’ so evident on the outskirts of many of eastern Germany’s cities bear lasting testament to the latter.

Within these reshaped physical landscapes emerged a quite different form of social and institutional landscape. The State Security Police (*Staatssicherheitspolizei*, or Stasi), formally established in February 1950, was expanded after the unsuccessful uprising of June 1953 and continued to develop thereafter, playing a significant role in suppressing potential unrest in 1968. Many people learned to live in the shadow not only of the Stasi but also of the more visible fortified inner-German border and the Berlin Wall, erected in August 1961 to stem the population haemorrhage to the West. Following the accession to power of Erich Honecker in 1971, replacing Walter Ulbricht as SED leader, and with key developments in the early 1970s (international recognition, new social and economic policies, a policy of ‘no taboos’ in socialist culture, the Helsinki Declaration on Human Rights), many East Germans harboured hopes for continued improvements in the future, even despite continuing frictions and constraints in the present. But the Stasi grew exponentially in the 1970s and 1980s, following the recognition of the GDR by the FRG in 1972 and the growth of Western influences with greater mobility of both people and media.

The ‘1929ers’, born in the declining years of the Weimar Republic, were arguably the cohort most widely experiencing a personal sense of shame with respect to the Nazi era; and they became the most committed to the East German system. They took advantage of the new educational and professional opportunities for those of modest social backgrounds and appropriate political standpoints, and benefitted from the upward social mobility of the 1950s and 1960s. They became the key functionaries of the new regime; and, once within the system, they were somewhat trapped within its parameters. Those a few years younger, born during the Third Reich, were the most sceptical, the most distanced from any form of politics. The postwar cohorts ‘born into’ the GDR, educated by the state and socialised in the Free German Youth (FDJ), were – unlike their contemporaries in the West – relatively unconcerned with the legacies of Nazism, increasingly seen as a matter of official rhetoric and political ritual. Organised in collectives in workplaces, participating in state-controlled political, social, and leisure organisations, learning the new rules of the game, younger East Germans developed very different attitudes and outlooks from those who had lived under previous regimes. They faced far more immediate challenges dealing with the communist present; they became the GDR’s most explicit critics as early idealism gave way to disillusion.

A period of cultural clampdown in the GDR in the later 1970s was accompanied by growing economic and political crises. The roots of popular discontent had been laid down earlier, but new dissident and reform movements were able to grow under the partially protective umbrella of the Protestant churches, which achieved a degree of recognition in the Church-State agreement of March 1978. The economic troubles following the second oil crisis of 1979, and the renewed Cold War with the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan and debates over stationing of nuclear missiles on German soil, contributed to heightened tensions in the early 1980s. The accession to power in the Soviet Union of Mikhail Gorbachev in 1985 gave hope to reformers and precipitated the series of events in eastern Europe that ultimately led to the collapse of communist regimes in 1989–90.

Topographies of past and present in united Germany

A striking feature for anyone arriving in Berlin, capital of the contemporary Federal Republic of Germany, is the sheer extent of memorialisation (see Chapter 11). Associated with the extraordinary scope is the distinctive character of the representation of the past in united Germany. Berlin is possibly the only capital city in the world to display and indeed ‘celebrate’ (if this is not an inappropriate word) not pride in the nation but rather shame. The Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe stands at the heart of the capital, next to the Brandenburg Gate. Even beyond the capital, in every corner of the Federal Republic, there is memorialisation of Nazi crimes: there are the ubiquitous small ‘stumbling stones’ (*Stolpersteine*) dedicated to victims of deportation and murder, huge signs listing former concentration camps headed ‘sites of terror that we may never forget’, small monuments or plaques commemorating the sites of former synagogues or of places of round-ups and deportations. Absence is made present.

These are phenomena produced by distinctively West German communities of identification. The experiences and legacies of the GDR, the ‘second German dictatorship’, also fed into the ways in which the past continued to play a significant role after unification in 1990, under the auspices of an expanded West German political system. But physical sites of memory still differ across the former inner-German border, where the old politically dominant community of ‘antifascist resistance’ visually predominates. In Buchenwald, for example, the massive statue designed by Fritz Cremer celebrating communist resistance and self-liberation towers over the hillside, providing a somewhat distorted framing narrative for the camp. In Sachsenhausen, a block has been reserved for displaying GDR exhibits, traces of the recent past within the broader exhibit of the Nazi dictatorship. There have been fierce debates over how to deal with the ‘double legacies’ of some sites, including the postwar Soviet Special Camps based in the former Nazi concentration camps of Buchenwald, Sachsenhausen, and Ravensbrück. Attempts to commemorate victims of Stalinist terror are complicated by the fact that many (though far from all) of these victims had themselves formerly been Nazi perpetrators; survivors were horrified that their former persecutors could now be remembered in the guise of victims. The highlighting of communist distortions of the Nazi past has partially deflected attention from earlier aspects of the politicisation of the past in pre-unification West Germany, where – despite the later proliferation of memorial sites – memorials had been far slower to emerge and had frequently been the subject of furious contests, against strong local opposition to any physical, visible reminders of the Nazi past.

However contested the memorialisation of the Nazi past might have been, approaches to the legacies of the GDR are more ambivalent. Nor do they attract the same level of international interest as do the legacies of Nazism: the comment that the GDR was merely ‘a footnote in

German history', however offensive to those who lived through it, has been partially enacted in memorialisation. The remnants of the Berlin Wall, the former Stasi prison at Hohenschönhausen, and other museums and exhibitions of the peculiar combination of repression and accommodation that marked the East German dictatorship attract many visitors in Berlin; elsewhere, however, attempts to portray GDR life, as in the Museum for Everyday Life in Eisenhüttenstadt, have attracted insufficient interest and public funding. The afterlife of the GDR is secured, more visibly but also problematically, in media debates over the Stasi, and in films and works of literature that have sometimes castigated the repressive dictatorship, as in Florian Henckel von Donnersmarck's *The Lives of Others* (2006), but more frequently demonstrated an ironic, humorous approach, as in *Good Bye Lenin!* (2003). All these developments have played a role in the continuing, if changing, tensions between people from eastern and western areas of Germany.

Little noticed, but closely connected, are changing conceptions of German citizenship – of what it means to be a citizen of Germany today (see Chapter 8). Citizenship is a contested concept. It establishes a relation between states and individuals, regulates principles of inclusion and exclusion, bestows rights and obligations, according to criteria that vary across different times and places. It may carry with it associations that are not inherent in citizenship itself, but become emotionally attached to it; it may embody less well-articulated assumptions, which become explicit only when they are suddenly challenged or perceived to be under threat.

It is possible to distinguish between quite different concepts of citizenship in modern nation states. Although there are always qualifications, two general principles are readily identifiable: that of *ius sanguinis*, the right to citizenship by virtue of descent or 'blood'; and *ius soli*, the right to citizenship by virtue of the 'soil', the ground on which a person was born. The latter principle has been predominant in Germany's western neighbour France: those born on French soil can become French citizens. Since the Reich Citizenship Law of 1913, the former principle, that of descent, has been of major significance in Germany. This law was intended as a means of ensuring that all those who held citizenship in one of Imperial Germany's constituent states would also automatically be citizens of the Reich; it was not originally ethnically exclusive, since it included, for example, people of Slavic descent in Prussia's eastern territories. Under Hitler, in the Nuremberg Laws of 1935, notions of German citizenship assumed an explicitly ethnic tone and excluded those designated by the Nazis to be 'racially' inferior by virtue of Jewish descent. Hitler's racist restrictions were lifted after the war, but there were problematic legacies. In West Germany, three generations of 'guest workers' or *Gastarbeiter* were denied easy access to citizenship; this situation changed only in the decade after unification.

At the same time, with the public culture of shame about the past, conceptions of citizenship had strongly moral overtones and associations. Even though many East Germans did not and do not share this sense of 'national shame', having quite different emotional relationships with the Nazi past, it has continued to dominate the memorial and imaginative landscape of what it means to be 'German' in unified Germany. But what does this mean for those who have acquired, or feel they should be entitled to acquire, German citizenship in more recent years, and whose parents or grandparents did not live through the Nazi Third Reich? They have no personal connections with the imagined community of post-Nazi Germans persisting across time. Young Germans of Turkish descent may well feel, as members of the human race, that a common humanity demands empathy with the sufferings of Jews at the hands of Hitler – but also that this should be no different for them, as holders of German passports, than for holders of any other passport in the world, and that they need not participate in the public culture of shame that is so prevalent among West German communities of connection and identification.

The continuing emphasis on the moral responsibilities of Germans in the post-Holocaust era is, ironically, perpetuating an essentially ethnically defined notion of citizenship in a way that runs counter to the practical opening-up of the category since the mid-1990s.

There are several possible ways in which this may develop – and there is much evidence of conflicting processes. The resurgence of active racist attacks in the early 1990s gave way to a more emphatic insistence on developing new ways of thinking about multiculturalism and tolerance of diversity, precipitating the reform of citizenship laws. Yet repeated controversies demonstrate just how readily the Nazi era continues to resonate. One possibility is that communities of identification and empathy will shift and broaden: not only self-identifying ‘Germans’ should feel they have heightened moral responsibilities arising from humanity’s violent past. Another, alongside this, is an arguably growing dissociation of formal citizenship entitlement from a personal sense of identity: passports may increasingly be seen as a pragmatic means to rights of residence and employment, irrespective of questions of descent or constructions of ‘national identity’. An instrumental, rather than affective, relationship may be developing between citizens of an increasingly mobile, global, cosmopolitan world and the identity papers they require to travel, to settle, and to make a living. Citizenship, even in Germany, may ultimately come to be disassociated from Germany’s troubled history, as the new identities and experiences of the 21st century finally displace the reverberations of the old. In the meantime, the legacies of the past continue to resonate, feeding into and echoing the tensions of a later date.

Conclusion

All this has made ‘history’ a particularly painful process for many in Germany over the last century – painful not only in the obvious sense of experiencing war, destruction, bereavement, and even a continuing fear and uncertainty in the era of national division, but also in the sense of dealing with questions of personal identity as well as a now doubly challenging past. These uncertainties and challenges have been far higher at some periods than others, and for some people than others; but they have stamped their mark on the ways in which people interacted with one another, and the ways in which ruptures in the past repeatedly reverberated in a later present. Reckoning with the past could never be purely a matter of cultural representations and political debates over particular issues; it was about far more than that.

Notes

- 1 The term ‘ordinary men’ derives from Christopher Browning (2001); see also Fulbrook (2011).
- 2 I have explored this in further detail in ‘East Germans in a post-Nazi state: Communities of experience, connection and identification’, in Fulbrook and Port 2013.
- 3 My remarks are partly based on findings of a study carried out by the Leipzig Institute for Youth Research in the late 1980s: Bundesarchiv (BArch) DC 4/305, Zentralinstitut für Jugendforschung, Dr Wilfried Schubarth, ‘Zum Geschichtsbewusstsein von Jugendlichen der DDR’.
- 4 This area is still relatively under-researched. For recent relevant contributions see, for example, Jensen 2004; Moller 2003.

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