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On German Identity

GERMANY'S REUNIFICATION OR UNIFICATION—as the Germans prefer to call it—took place at a time when, following eight years of sound economic growth, the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG) seemed able to bear the anticipated financial burden. It also came after more than forty years of estrangement. Two states and two bureaucracies, two economic and social systems—two kinds of Germans—had developed, rendering more difficult the merging of Eastern Germany into the Western mold. While state authority had stifled individual initiatives and social organization in the former German Democratic Republic (GDR), making the East Germans dependent on West German imports and influences, the Federal Republic had become one of the liveliest democracies in the world, open to worldwide trends, largely closed to influences from the East. While East Germans yearned for a greater Germany, most West Germans forgot their Eastern brethren.

Nations, past and present, were and are the product of mobilization from above or from below, violent or pacific. Today, in Germany, little mobilization is at work, and the very notion of common interest seems to split up into a mosaic of particular interests. Is the lack of a clear German identity responsible for this?

Questions about a German identity are not new; they were pondered by nineteenth and twentieth-century intellectuals and politicians: In a country where borders and institutions changed dramatically over time, the *Volk* (people) became a mythical element of permanence, purportedly defining identity. In postwar Germany, divided into two states, questions about identity were common:

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East Germans longed for a reunited nation; West Germans wavered between a European identity as a makeshift for Germanness and a quest for identity, for roots and things German. The West German identity could be described as markedly democratic and open, an intertwining of identities: local, German, European, predemocratic, democratic, and postmodern. Will German unification alter this combination? Will the addition of the East German *Länder* to the Federal Republic increase fragmentation, and will this open the door to a *völkisch* definition of identity? Or will it, on the contrary, blend into a *Verfassungspatriotismus,* a democratic identity made up of various elements?

A NATIONAL REVOLUTION?

The revolution that brought down both the East German regime and the state in the autumn of 1989 founded a single German identity in two ways. First, on a symbolic level, it happened under the banner of unity, particularly after the Wall was opened on November 9, 1989. Whereas those who had called for democracy during the ceremonies celebrating the fortieth anniversary of the GDR in October sought to transform the regime while preserving an East German state and identity, those who took to the streets in November and December demanded nothing less than the demise of the GDR and Germany's unification. The former, democrats, claimed to be the people, the *Volk*: "*Wir sind das Volk*"—the demos, the *volonté constituante,* those peasants and workers whose state the GDR was supposed to be. The latter, also democrats, wanted to become citizens of the Federal Republic. For them, however, democracy was to be achieved through national unity, through the recreation of a German entity embodying one German people, one *Volk*—"*Wir sind ein Volk*"— stressing ethnic filiation.

Second, the East German revolution brought about German unity not only symbolically but actually; unification took place with the demise of communism and of the East German state. Once the Wall was opened under the pressure of those who wanted to reform or transform the state, to establish democracy in this part of Germany,[1] the GDR as an independent entity was doomed. The East German elites, the so-called communist reformers or opponents of the regime, did not provide any sensible political program to revamp

politics, economics, and society; the East German population did not structure itself into an independent body.

The East German revolution, as the founding element of German unity and of a single German identity, appears today a highly ambiguous event. Four years after unification, the German nation—the body politic, society, political culture—remains divided; unity, especially in the economic realm, only slowly bears fruit. Moreover, the nature and purpose of the East German revolution is a subject of controversy, dividing intellectuals and politicians, the Right and the Left, both in the East and in the West.

Ever since the opening of the Wall and the first demonstrations in favor of reunification, Germans, particularly German intellectuals, have wondered whether Germany's national revolution and unity were the product of nationalism, understood as an ethnic and cultural bond, or a strategy designed to catch up with Western standards of living: in other words, whether the yearning for national identity was of a "primordial," fundamentalist quality or of a "situational," utilitarian one.[2] For a number of politicians, mostly conservatives and a few Social Democrats such as Walter Momper, the Mayor of Berlin, and Manfred Stolpe, Minister-President of Berlin-Brandenburg, the East German revolution betokened the Germans' will to live together. Meanwhile, many intellectuals, including radicals like Bärbel Bohley, one of the principal actors in the October revolution in the East, or Otto Schily, a former member of the Green party in the West, looked down on the November revolution as a search for goods—for the deutsche mark and for bananas, the quintessential symbol of consumption. Disdaining the German revolution both for its national features—unity—and its practical purposes— consumption—they showed contempt for those who approved of unification.

Most advocates and opponents of unification erred, however, in the same way: instead of contrasting national and liberal options, they should have taken heed of the close interconnection. Unity was supposed to provide the means to achieve a better world, both at the micro- and the macrolevels: liberalism, economic and political, was to be extended to the Eastern part of Germany, thereby improving the living conditions of its inhabitants. Those, both in the East and in the West, who scornfully criticized the East Germans' lust for riches—for consumption—ignored the fact that wealth

and democracy often do go hand in hand. The so-called economic miracle of the 1950s ingrained democracy in West German minds, opening up minds and spirits, providing for social mobility and integration in a Western, cosmopolitan world. Some West German intellectuals, critics of the critics, like Brigitte Seebacher-Brandt or Thomas Schmid, argued that those who despised the East Germans' reach for wealth shunned the very nature of the West German democracy.[3] Both Seebacher-Brandt and Schmid resented in particular the expression "*DM-Nationalismus*" which did no justice to the unification process.

Jürgen Habermas, who coined the phrase, did not ignore the twin character of unification: as a prepolitical process, it aimed at the reconstitution of national unity; as a democratic process, it allowed the East Germans to take part in a "politically happier and economically more successful development."[4] The expression "*DM-Nationalismus*" misled some because it focused on a kind of libidinal lust for the deutsche mark, passing over in silence its democratic component. Nonetheless, it pointed to the twofold nature of the East German revolution: national *and* democratic.

The quest for national unity and the assertion of national identity were not simply strategies intended to improve conditions. National unity and identity had been sustained for more than forty years in the Eastern part of Germany. In communist Germany surrounded by the Wall, the Federal Republic became the obsessive measure of all things—acts and ideas. As the East Germans were made prisoners of their restrictive borders, the Federal Republic was the only foreign country to provide them with visitors, goods, news, and values. As a public space, a civil society was not allowed to emerge, stifled as it was by Party control on the one hand and privacy on the other (the so-called *Nischengesellschaft*[5]); West German images, information, values, and standards invaded East Germany. They nurtured both the culture and the counterculture. The latter would not have existed without West German support, both material—books and photocopy machines—and immaterial—standards and values.

Paradoxically, the counterculture could not flourish because of West German pervasiveness. A broad opposition could not take shape so long as those who opposed the regime were expelled to the Federal Republic and those who simply disagreed with the regime

either sought to emigrate or continued to dream of reunification. Those opponents of the regime who managed to gain strength in the 1980s could only build upon West German foundations or withdraw into a bastion of socialist creed, the last one in Central Europe. In the absence of a structured civil society, the East Germans reacted in two ways when the Wall opened in the autumn of 1989. A majority wanted to appropriate those West German structures that had pervaded their lives. A tiny minority rejected this approach and pleaded for a socialist Germany, imagining that the only way to withstand West German standards lay in socialism.

As a result, the national question and the constitutional question became intimately intertwined.[6] As the communist regime had aimed at creating a *new* state and a *new* man, it had tried to sever the political and national ties which had linked the two parts of Germany. But by surrounding its subjects with a wall, stripping them of their rights, it undermined the independence both of state and society, and East Germany relied increasingly on a West German contribution. The Federal Republic became East Germany's exclusive opening to the world. Instead of consolidating an independent state, the Wall kept the national question afloat.

Most German intellectuals did not perceive the dialectic relation between the national question and the constitutional question. This misunderstanding reflects the aversion most German intellectuals have for such categories as nation, national identity, and national unity. For them, the "nation" is to be understood solely as a prepolitical phenomenon, not as a democratic one.[7] This perception is rooted in the fact that national reunification puts into question the very premises on which the two German states were based, as political and ideological constructs. In the case of the GDR, having lost its legitimacy, according to a majority of East Germans, it had to disappear as a state. And even though the Federal Republic acquired over time a strong legitimacy of its own, its ideological foundations—from 1949 till 1990—were necessarily premised on the existence of a second German state: it was not and could not be a nation-state.[8]

As the unification process continues, the national question is again raised. The new Republic has to redefine its future as a nation-state *and* recover both the East German past and the past common to both states. In other words, unification entails the

coupling, however uneven, of two ideological visions, two political and cultural projects, two different kinds of legitimacy and logic. It requires also the recovery of a common past. If the constitution of a national identity involves a common past and a common culture shared by those inhabiting a common territory, Germany's unification brings with it the need to redefine German identity.

TWO PASTS WHICH NEVER DIE

The two German states were created as mirror images of each other, though both rested on ambiguous foundations. The Federal Republic, in claiming to embody the Reich from a legal point of view, sought to recover the territories lost to the communist regimes; politically and constitutionally, it wished to break with the Nazi past. The East German regime pretended to be an entirely new state, though it claimed to embody all the progressive forces in German history. Both, in fact, became the opposite of what they were supposed to be. The Federal Republic broke more radically with the past than did the GDR; it opened itself to liberal, cosmopolitan influences. The East German regime surrounded its society with a wall and anchored itself in illiberalism. With the disappearance of the GDR, the project, or the vision it was supposed to achieve, foundered. Yet, it lingers in certain ways.

First, the socialist ideal is still cherished by those few, mostly East German intellectuals, who deem socialism reformable. They continue to entertain an opposition between socialism and capitalism, between *Kultur* and *Zivilisation,* believing in a better German state even if their dream clashes with the reality of the GDR as it once existed. Heiner Müller for instance, the famous playwright, epitomizes those for whom

> the so-called German "reunification"...happens to be a colonization process. The former Federal Republic—a civilization economically overdeveloped and culturally underdeveloped—attempts to eradicate, by means of contempt and of bureaucracy, the culture which once flourished in the former GDR in opposition to Stalinist colonization.[9]

Second, the GDR existed as a counterproject, a reality outside rather than against the official political project, an apolitical

Nischengesellschaft, a *Gemeinschaft* (community) rather than a *Gesellschaft* (society). This GDR is thought to have drawn its virtues from a certain modesty of those who lived in that community, from a certain equalitarianism, a kind of moral superiority which echoes virtues the socialist project was supposed to embody.[10] Its raison d'être as an apolitical community, protecting individuals against state control and providing them with necessary goods—material and immaterial—is vanishing in the new, open, competitive Germany. Still, it provides a kind of self-protection, even if only temporary, against the harshness of open competition.

One may wonder what remains of the political past: the socialist dreams, the societal reality. "This greatest sham on earth," as one prominent writer and opponent of the regime put it, may well have been all pretense and lies.[11] Eventually, the political heritage of the communist regime may require a tracking down of lies if the past is to be understood. "*Begreifen, was gewesen ist*" ("To understand what happened"): this is the plea a number of former opponents of the regime put forward in asking for a tribunal to be set up, to evaluate not only the nature of the regime but also the role of its victims, of all the ambiguous relations that existed.[12] A parliamentary commission, under the leadership of Reiner Eppelmann, was established to serve this end. Yet, as different pasts linger on in Eastern Germany, the task threatens to tear the former GDR apart, opposing, for instance, those who today support Manfred Stolpe, a former consistory President of Berlin-Brandenburg, who played a key role in defining church policy in the 1980s, and those who accuse him of having collaborated with the *Stasi.* Those who would distinguish between the regime and its victims confront those for whom such distinctions are blurred. To track down lies, to look for truth, may turn out to be impossible, at least in this generation.

In these various East German realities, past projects and present memories, the national dimension remained—and still remains—more or less unreflected while looming large on the horizon. The so-called socialist regime appealed to national feelings after the partition of Germany: in the 1950s, it sought to mobilize all national forces in both parts of the country to promote its own version of reunification. Later, it aimed at creating a new German nation, socialist as opposed to the capitalist one of Western Germany. In both cases, its purpose was to alleviate the rigors of socialism, to

rally the East German population, appealing to such notions as *Heimat, Vaterland* or *Patriotismus*. Despite these efforts, many East Germans saw reunification as an alternative to partition and socialism, either because they deemed geopolitical transformations still possible, or because they considered individual emigration as a makeshift reunification.

In any case, the notion of nation had a positive connotation in the GDR. The regime certainly meant to break with fascism, but not with nationalism. Most communists who fought against German fascism did so under the banner of the German nation. They did not hold the nation responsible for Nazi crimes; Nazism, a mere variant of fascism, was dehistoricized (*enthistorisiert*).[13] Its essence was never revealed to the East German population. They felt exculpated, all the more so as they were themselves victims to history, to the arbitrary partition of the country, having been on the wrong side of the Iron Curtain. In the eyes of most, a socialist present was seen as a redemption from a Nazi past. For all these reasons, an undemocratic past survived in Eastern Germany; the country recalled a previous Germany that the West had more or less erased. Many in both East and West Germany, and elsewhere, felt it to be "the more German" of the two states.

Far from being considered as the source of evil, the nation was looked upon as a panacea, a cure for all miseries. For those who thought themselves prisoners of a regime they rejected, the nation was the road to democracy and the free market, the chief symbols of the West. National reunification and Westernization became synonymous. Surrounded by a Wall, some East Germans enjoyed their national dream; it served as an escape from a dreary reality but it also meant that most East Germans chose not to confront the past—an undemocratic past which still lingered on.

In the Federal Republic, a new political culture crystallized after the War under the influence of the victors and of those Germans, like Adenauer, who meant to ingrain democracy in the Western part of the divided country. They more or less discarded nationalism, brushing aside the very notion of nation. Though the FRG pretended to embody the Reich, its successive governments claiming to be the sole legitimate power on German soil, committed to recovering territories lost to communist regimes, it was also recognized to be a departure from the past. This contradiction was

tenable so long as reunification seemed within reach, and democratization and reunification did not oppose one another. As reunification vanished from the realm of probabilities, the contradiction became obvious. Lest a united Germany follow a *Sonderweg,* shunning democracy, Adenauer chose to anchor the Western part of the divided country in the Atlantic alliance and in the European Community, opening German minds to Western influences. As a result, the Federal Republic became a "system" rather than a nation-state, a democratic state, not a nation, an evolution underlined by Dan Diner.[14]

While reunification certainly remained a possibility, though a remote one for some West Germans, others increasingly discarded it. West Germans, living in an open and mobile society, part and parcel of the Western world, subject to democratic influences and global trends, looked upon the GDR as another world, closed and stale, with which they had few affinities, if any. In the early 1960s, the celebrated author Hans-Magnus Enzensberger stressed that "our identity is so irremediably lost that one may wonder whether we can still speak of a German nation. For someone who lives in Frankfurt am Main, New York is close whereas it is a psychological, political, and geographical expedition to go to Frankfurt an der Oder."[15] More than twenty years later, Patrick Süsskind, a member of the younger generation of West German writers, echoed his elder's remarks: "Otherwise we looked towards the West or the South. What could we be looking for in Leipzig, Dresden or Halle? Nothing, and for everything in Florence, Paris or London."[16]

Yet, a number of West Germans traveled to the GDR, searching for familiar roots, hoping to recover a German past, especially after the establishment of quasi-diplomatic relations between the two states, as the question of German identity came to the fore.[17] They saw the antiquated industrial and urban landscapes dating back to the beginning of the century which were, for them, ointment on a "wound named Germany."[18] A greater number, however, looked away, seeking comfort in the Western world. The East could never provide the sources of excitement available in the West. At best, it offered a hint of the past, precisely what some West Germans searched for, but what most shunned.

The West forged a counterpoint to Auschwitz, offering a modern and flawless present, a democratic and cosmopolitan social and

political body, removed from the national past. The new Germany—the Federal Republic—was devoid of asperity and national celebrations; it was smooth, odorless, colorless. In the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s, many of the young claimed to be European; intellectuals toyed with the idea of emigrating. Hans-Magnus Enzensberger and Peter Schneider took up residence in Italy, Lothar Baier in France. Later, postmodernism and postnationalism became fashionable. Radical intellectuals came to believe that a postnational era was making headway in Europe, in the Federal Republic first and foremost.[19]

For both the general public and intellectuals, there was a denial of historical continuity, though the Federal Republic claimed to embody the Reich. As a new democratic state, the Federal Republic offered more than a guarantee against the past; it provided, in a new sense, an escape from it. The past was confronted through reeducation programs and self-questioning. Public opinion rejected the past, pushed it aside to the periphery, but for most intellectuals, and not only Habermas and Günter Grass, the new Republic was the sole conceivable answer to Auschwitz, calling for a radical departure and the founding of a new state.

OLD QUESTIONS SET ANEW

Reunification must alter the nature of the Federal Republic. The united state is no longer a system, another form of government on German soil. It is a nation-state. Hence, its exceptional character as a radically new construct is mitigated. This change raises two questions. First, what is the nature of the new Germany? If it is not a system, is democracy now at risk? Second, what kind of filiation links the new state to any number of former German constructs? Is historical continuity being restored?

These questions, which shake the security progressively installed in forty years of division and bipolarity, are disconcerting to many intellectuals, but also to those West Germans who fear the consequences of unification. It is a mistake to imagine that West German public opinion resents unification only because of the economic costs involved. A part of West German public opinion—certainly among the better educated members of the middle class—shares some of the fear advanced by leftist intellectuals: that democracy

will be endangered, or at least altered, that Germany as a Western, open, modern (or postmodern) society will change its character. Because of their undemocratic past, East Germans are likely to be tempted to tamper with it. The problems they confront are redolent of questions which the West Germans imagined they had resolved decades ago.

Unification is a merging of a community whose sole aim is to become a modern society, economically and politically, with a society which believed, to some extent, at least, that it was postindustrial and postmodern.[20] The comfortable expectations of yesterday—of a West German middle class, and of its intellectuals—are questioned: unification brings the Federal Republic back to the 1950s and 1960s when it was a less democratic society, striving to modernize. To put the matter bluntly, the East Germans appear to be the West Germans of yesterday. Yet, according to certain prominent intellectuals, democracy may itself be endangered, principally because of what they perceive to have been the undemocratic character of the unification process itself. While some East German writers—Heiner Müller and Christa Wolf, for example—see the process as sheer colonization, Jürgen Habermas, in the West, deplores the failure to sanction the change by a new constitution. A vote of all Germans, East and West, would have signaled the democratic will; it would have symbolized a democratic departure.

The fear of the traditional democracy being tampered with points to certain ambiguities in the attitude of some West Germans who, paradoxically, are reconciled with their own (Western) state at precisely the moment when it is being altered. As Seebacher-Brandt stresses:

> Those very commentators who did not know what to do—at least what to do in a positive way—with the Federal Republic as late as September 1985, discovered in September 1992 that they had a liking for this "dull, small, unloved, and practical state, the Federal Republic of Germany."[21]

Intellectuals who decry unification may be weeping, however discreetly, over the GDR. Though that regime never represented another reality for most West Germans, including West German intellectuals, it symbolized the fact that some other form of govern-

ment might exist on German soil, that the Federal Republic was not the ultimate answer.[22] For those, in the East and the West, who deplored its death, the GDR was regretted less for what it was and more for what it might have been. Its demise symbolized the end of utopia, the end of other possibilities, the end of that "other, better Germany" that haunts German history. The Federal Republic becomes in a way the *real existierendes Deutschland.*

Unification raises questions also about historical continuity and discontinuity. For such a prominent opponent of unification as Günter Grass, the constitution of a single, national state means the return—"*eine Neuauflage*"—of history, the reemergence of a threatening power at the core of Europe:

> There would be no gain apart from an excess of power swollen by an increasing desire for more power. . . .A reunited Germany would be a complex colossus which would stand both in its own way and in Europe's way.[23]

Curiously, the Grass argument echoes one made by conservative historians. Grass appears to blame Nazism on geopolitics, choosing to ignore how institutions and ideology played their part in the rise of illiberalism. There is no mention of the fact that the new, democratic nature of the Federal Republic may provide a guarantee against the "return" of history.

Inevitably, the question of how to deal with the Nazi past again comes to the fore with the Federal Republic's incorporation of the GDR. Germans in the Eastern part of the country are obliged to confront it for the first time in fifty years. Yet, they risk overlooking it as they tackle the complex issues of unification. The Ravensbrück affair—the decision to build a supermarket on land bordering a former concentration camp — showed insensitivity. The rooting out of *Stasi* collaborators is, for many, taking precedence over denazification. In their desire to overcome or erase forty years of communism, Germans in both parts of the country may be tempted to establish a continuity between precommunist and postcommunist times, however questionable that may be. Some, for instance, who favor the reconstruction of the Berlin castle, blasted by the communists after the war, resort to arguments that ignore history. The publisher and essayist Wolf Jobst Siedler advocates its reconstruction on the ground that other cities and buildings—Warsaw and the

Campanile in Venice, for example — are mere trompe-l'oeil ("*Die Baugeschichte Europas ist eine Geschichte von Falsifikaten*"), putting on the same level natural catastrophes, the destruction of Warsaw by Nazi invaders, and the course of German history.[24]

While East Germans have to reflect on their past, communist and Nazi, the West Germans face a double, contradictory task. They have to stay aloof *and* at the same time incorporate the East German past into their own. Allowing the East Germans to ponder the nature of the communist regime and of East German society without interfering, while at the same time putting their own history into question on the ground that both federal institutions and West German society shaped the course of East German evolutions will prove a daunting undertaking. Though West Germans ought to refrain from judging East Germans, they have given the East Germans the means to understand and judge themselves, not least in (West) German courts. Inevitably, they intervene in the process. Yet, wishing to avoid painful self-doubt may lead them to behave as spectators, to skew their attitude towards East Germans, failing to question their own past attitudes and policies.

Thus, *Ost-* and *Deutschlandpolitik* remain, to some extent, a taboo subject: the West German public debate comes down to very little. There is an unwillingness to bare the ambiguities of a policy which relied on proximity to communist regimes, thereby fostering changes within both East German and East European societies and political systems (according to the formula "*Wandel durch Annäherung*"), while consolidating the status quo.[25] A parallel debate raging in East Germany on whether the Church stabilized the regime or promoted gradual changes, whether Manfred Stolpe, for example, or a prominent writer like Christa Wolf collaborated too closely, does not trigger self-analysis among the principal political parties in West Germany. Instead, there is a kind of cheap revision of history. The East German regime is denominated a dictatorship, a notion that all but vanished from the West German vocabulary after 1960. It is a way of pretending that the West German government and opposition always kept their distance. The West German political parties would rather not ponder the premises of their former policies towards the GDR: The Left wishes to blur the fact that it lost sight of reunification as the ultimate aim of

Deutschlandpolitik; the conservatives pretend that they always believed in reunification as a historical necessity.

DOES GERMANY NEED A NATIONAL IDENTITY?

As long as different pasts, real or imaginary, linger in Germany, there will be no single national identity. As long as the present and immediate futures do not merge, an East German identity will continue to loom large. While it seemed to vanish in the wake of the national revolution, it reemerged very quickly. Though 76 percent of East Germans looked upon themselves as such in November 1989, about the same percentage (73 percent) subscribed to the idea of there being a single German identity in April 1990.[26] Monetary, political, and legal unification produced surprising results. A year after the deutsche mark was introduced in the GDR, nine months after unity was proclaimed, 51 percent of those interviewed claimed to be East German while a minority (40 percent) proclaimed their German identity, though few regretted the demise of the GDR.[27] According to a 1993 poll, only 22 percent of West Germans and 11 percent of East Germans say they have a common identity.[28] As a rational strategy and an emotional construct, the idea of German identity, as opposed to East German identity, seemed initially to open access to West Germany and its goods, material as well as immaterial. As this perspective receded into a more or less distant future, as it became obvious that two types of Germans had been molded by forty years of democracy in the West and communism in the East, a greater number of East Germans insisted on their difference.

An East German identity became a symbol of defiance hurled at the West Germans; "*eine Trotzidentität,*" an identity of defiance, as Jens Reich, one of the fathers of the East German revolution, put it.[29] As East Germans could not instantly become (West) Germans, they fell back on what they had been, stressing their differences from other Germans. Prominent East Germans, Manfred Stolpe and Katrin Krabbe, for example, rallied others; their previous actions, right or wrong, seemed irrelevant. An East German identity may be looked on as a sort of refuge, an illusory compensation, one might say "*eine Trostidentität,*" an identity by default, an apolitical nostalgia, a utopia, what West Germany had been as a dream, for

over forty years. The difference, however, is that West Germany was a social and political reality which structured East German aspirations; East Germany is the past, and an East German identity is not today politically articulated. A "committee for justice," created in 1992, which assembled politicians from various groups, does not seem to have taken root for many of the same reasons that a structured opposition could not develop in the former GDR.

In the old *Bundesländer,* a comparable though different process has been taking place. Some West Germans, like Patrick Süsskind, for example, became fully aware of their attachment to the Federal Republic at the very moment it was subjected to change through unification. Was it a kind of West German patriotism, gratitude for the state and its institutions that had provided a democracy, or was it an attachment for things German? Was it a democratic preference or a prepolitical affect? Did it refer to a West German or to an all-German identity? It may have been more complex, West German and German, prepolitical and democratic, and, among the Left particularly, postnational, at least rhetorically.[30] In any case, it is a stable identity compared with the East German one; it is politically structured. Defiance, however, is not totally absent, both towards Germans in other parts of the country and towards foreigners, inside and outside Germany.

In both parts of the country, identity channels hatred, particularly among those who feel excluded from the political, economic, and societal system. In their eyes, a prepolitical notion of German identity becomes synonymous with a kind of national preference: as Germans, they feel that they ought to enjoy the benefits now shared with foreigners. They turn against Gypsies and Turks—and against those democrats who support the latters' rights—to underscore the fact that they are not the Gypsies and Turks of the better-off brethren. For them, bonds of kinship must prevail over the political, economic, and social links that the Federal Republic has made with immigrants. A *völkisch* notion of nation is preferred to the democratic principle of de facto integration.

While violence has flared up against foreigners less as a consequence of unification itself than of the social upheavals and redefinitions which the merging of two asymmetrical social bodies has produced, one may wonder whether Germany's role in Europe and in the world at large is indeed affected by this process. There is a

danger in pointing too quickly at what is thought to be a revival of German nationalism in world affairs.[31] The German's understanding of their role is, nevertheless, colored by their understanding of their past and their identity. For a number of conservatives, unification is a return to normalcy: united, Germany is no longer exceptional; it is a country like others, which has to fulfill obligations, including those prescribed by the UN Charter. Others, on the Left, deny such normalcy, which they fear would erase the exceptional character of Auschwitz.[32] The greater part of the political establishment, both Left and Right, interpret German history as a *Sonderweg,* the very particular path Germany is said to have taken from the middle of the nineteenth century till 1945.[33] The consequences flowing from this interpretation do not, however, oppose Left and Right; rather, they draw a dividing line within both Left and Right. For moderate conservatives as well as for some Social Democrats and Left intellectuals, such as Wolf Biermann or Hans-Magnus Enzensberger, the rejection of a *Sonderweg* requires the Federal Republic to integrate within the Western community, to fulfill its international obligations, including military ones. For national conservatives, however, self-assertion is said to take precedence over integration. For a greater part of the Left, the Federal Republic is asked to stay away from all military involvement: Germans are said to know what war means.

In order to ease Germany's integration of all Germans into a single society and the integration of the country in the post-Yalta world, some say that a new patriotism is needed. As the historian Christian Meier puts it, "What is at stake is the constitution of a broad *volonté constituante* which cannot be left to politicians alone," though he goes on to ask how such a task can be tackled at the end of the twentieth century: "How is it possible to create a new nation at the end of the twentieth century? What is meant by that?"[34] While nationalism as an ideology papers over differences among people it seeks to unite, the kind of enlightened patriotism that Christian Meier, Dieter Buhl or, in a somewhat different way, Jürgen Habermas advocate may not be powerful enough to promote the kind of integration fostered, for example, in the nineteenth century.

In any case, patriotism cannot be thrust upon a people if it is not to remain a dead letter or become antidemocratic, denying popular

sovereignty. For an identity to emerge in a united Germany, all Germans will have to share a common past and future. This will take time. The past will need to be analyzed and its present consequences reinterpreted, in accordance with a future vision, which will be democratic. The law on German citizenship, for instance, will have to be revised, since it is presently based on a historical rationale that is no longer valid. The jus sanguinis prevailed, first, because Germany over many centuries was a country characterized by uncertain borders and ever-changing institutions; second, because it had to include German populations fleeing communist regimes after World War II. It lost all relevance in post-1989 Europe because borders opened up, because the democratic bonds that linked German society to foreigners living on its soil were thought to have precedence, a request actually put forward by all those who demonstrated in Germany's major cities in the second half of 1991.

As democracy strengthens, past and future will be seen to be both one and multiple. They cannot be linear, deprived of all asperity and controversy. Different interpretations of past and future will coexist, just as there will be numerous circles of complex identities, German and East German, regional and European. Germany will be integrated when most Germans are recognized to have access to multiple choices. The task is more daunting than it was a century ago; democracy today is certainly not the mobilizing force nationalism was. The aim—the pursuit of democracy—makes the effort both worthwhile and necessary.

ENDNOTES

[1]And once, of course, the international situation—i.e., the evolution in the Soviet Union, Poland, and Hungary—allowed it.

[2]On the concept of national identity and its different meanings, see Anthony D. Smith, *National Identity* (London: Penguin Books, 1991), especially 20.

[3]Brigitte Seebacher-Brandt, *Die Linke und die Einheit* (Berlin: Corso bei Siedler, 1991), 27. One should note that Seebacher-Brandt, an academic and the last wife of the late Willy Brandt, is a maverick within the Left. In this pamphlet, she harshly criticizes the Social Democratic Party (SPD) for ignoring the national question. See also Thomas Schmid, "Die Eingeschlossenen von Jalta," *Kursbuch: Deutschland, Deutschland* (Berlin: Rowohlt) (109) (September 1992): 149–60.

[4]"*Nachholen will man, was den westlichen Teil Deutschlands vom östlichen vier Jahrzehnte getrennt hat—die politisch glücklichere und ökonomisch erfolgreichere Entwicklung,*" in Jürgen Habermas, "Nachholende Revolution und linker Revisionsbedarf. Was heißt Sozialismus heute?," in Jürgen Habermas, *Die nachholende Revolution* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1990), 181. See also Jürgen Habermas, "Citoyenneté et identité nationale. Réflexions sur l'avenir de l'Europe," in Jacques Lenoble and Nicole Dewandre, eds., *L'Europe au soir du siècle. Identité et démocratie* (Paris: Editions Esprit, 1992), 19.

[5]Günter Gaus, *Wo Deutschland liegt: eine Ortsbestimmung* (Hamburg: Hoffmann und Campe, 1983). Günter Gaus was the first representative of the Federal Republic to the GDR after the signing of the German-German treaty in 1972.

[6]Few have underlined this interconnection as clearly as the philosopher Dieter Henrich who stated that "*Die Forderungen nach der Einigkeit und nach der einen Währung gehen nämlich in ungebrochener Motivationslinie auf den Ruf nach Freiheitsrechten zurück.*" In Dieter Henrich, *Eine Republik Deutschland* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1990), 21. See also Seebacher-Brandt, *Die Linke und die Einheit* and Schmid, "Die Eingeschlossenen von Jalta."

[7]As Jürgen Habermas puts it, "*. . .die nationale Frage (gerät) wieder einmal in Gegensatz zu Fragen republikanischer Gleichheit und sozialer Gerechtigkeit.*" Cf. Jürgen Habermas, "Nochmals: Zur Identität der Deutschen. Ein einig Volk von aufgebrachten Wirtschaftsbürgern?," in Habermas, *Die nachholende Revolution,* 215.

[8]All the more so as the Federal Republic was supposed to be a transitory state, a *Provisorium,* to disappear in a greater, reunified Germany.

[9]Heiner Müller, "Bautzen oder Babylon," *Sinn und Form* (4) (1991): 664; quoted by Horst Domdey, "Feindbild: BRD," *Kursbuch: Deutschland, Deutschland* (109) (September 1992): 67.

[10]As the West German historian Christian Meier correctly underlines: "*Da berief man sich auf die eigene Bescheidenheit, die relative Gleichheit, die 'Abschaffung der Macht des Geldes'. . .die bessere Moral, die Überlegenheit der Leidenden; oder man berief sich gut deutsch darauf, dass im Osten der Geist, im Westen dagegen nur das Geld sei. . . .Dazu gehört der—ja nicht unberechtigte—Stolz auf das Leseland DDR,*" in Christian Meier, *Die Nation die keine sein will* (Munich: Carl Hanser Verlag, 1991), 56.

[11]Günter Kunert, "Das Gespenst auf der Schulter," *Die Zeit* (21) (17 May 1991).

[12]Cf. J. Gauck, F. Schorlemmer, W. Thierse, W. Ullmann, R. Höppner et al., "Begreifen, was gewesen ist: Plädoyer für ein Tribunal," *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung,* 23 January 1992.

[13]Domdey, "Feindbild: BRD," 68.

[14]"*Beide deutsche Staaten definierten sich, wenn auch gegensätzlich, so doch auf der Grundlage politischer und gesellschaftlicher Wertbezüge. Jedenfalls nicht national. . . .Die Bundesrepublik—das in der Bezeichnung des Gemeinswesens nachfolgende 'Deutschland' entfiel im politischen Vokabular des Alltags nicht zufällig—war vor allen Dingen ein Verfassungsstaat.*" Dan Diner, *Der Krieg der Erinnerungen und die Ordnung der Welt* (Berlin: Rotbuch Verlag, 1991), 51–52.

[15]Hans-Magnus Enzensberger, *Deutschland, Deutschland unter anderm. Äußerungen zur Politik* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1967), 9.

[16]Patrick Süsskind, "Deutschland, eine Midlife Crisis," *Der Spiegel* (38) (1990): 116–25.

[17]Cf. Anne-Marie Le Gloannec, *La nation orpheline: Les Allemagnes en Europe* (Paris: Calmann-Lévy, 1989 and Pluriel, 1990), chaps. 2 and 3. See also Karl-Rudolf Korte, *Über Deutschland schreiben: Schriftsteller sehen ihren Staat* (Munich: Verlag C. H. Beck, 1992).

[18]*Die Wunde namens Deutschland: Ein Lesebuch zur deutschen Teilung* is the title of a book edited by Hedwig Walwei-Weigelmann (Freiburg: F. K. Kerle, 1981).

[19]As the philosopher Peter Sloterdijk puts it: "*Es wollte aussehen, als sei die deutsche Frage für immer suspendiert; eine Endform von Vorläufigkeit schien erreicht; die Stabilität in der Abstumpfung fand den Konsensus der meisten.*" In Peter Sloterdijk, *Versprechen auf Deutsch, Rede über das eigene Land* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1990), 11.

[20]As Michael Weck puts it: "*Dem Westen drohe unter dem Druck des autoritären Ostens die 'Verwilderung' seiner durch Verwestlichung 'gezähmten' politischen Sitten.*" Cf. Michael Weck, "Der ironische Westen und der tragische Osten," *Kursbuch: Deutschland, Deutschland* (109) (September 1992): 133.

[21]Seebacher-Brandt, *Die Linke und die Einheit,* 65. See also the exemplary article by Süsskind, "Deutschland, eine Midlife-Crisis," to which Seebacher-Brandt explicitly refers.

[22]Seebacher-Brandt again correctly underlines this point: "*Mehr noch, die Ressentiments gegen das eigene westliche Deutschland gediehen erst vor dem Hintergrund des Gegenbildes. Warum sonst wäre, als das Ende eingeläutet war, auf der Linken so sehr nach Hinterlassenschaften der DDR gesucht worden.*" Seebacher-Brandt, *Die Linke und die Einheit,* 64. See also Thomas Schmid, "*Ich glaube, man ist rücksichtsvoll, nachsichtig und milde mit der DDR umgegangen, weil man sie als imaginären Fluchtpunkt brauchte. . . .Sie stand für die exterritoriale, im Wortsinne u-topische Idee des staatlichen Strebens nach dem Guten,*" in Schmid, "Die Eingeschlossenen von Jalta." On Germany as a utopia, see Le Gloannec, *La nation orpheline,* chap. 3.

[23]Günter Grass, *Deutscher Lastenausgleich. Wider das dumpfe Einheitsgebot. Reden und Gespräche* (Frankfurt am Main: Luchterhand, 1990), 8, 11.

[24]Wolf Jobst Siedler, "Berlin kommt um den Wiederaufbau des Schlosses nicht herum," *Die Zeit* (10) (5 March 1993). See on the same page, Ulrich Greiner's answer: "Weshalb Berlin um den Wiederaufbau des Schlosses herumkommt." See also previous articles and readers' letters, i.e., Manfred Sack, "Das Berliner Schloßgespenst," *Die Zeit* (52) (18 December 1992) and letters to the editor, *Die Zeit* (3) (15 January 1993).

[25]A few lone voices put *Ost-* and *Deutschlandpolitik* into question. See, for example, Seebacher-Brandt, *Die Linke und die Einheit.* See also Gesine Schwan, "Vom schwierigen Handeln in der Grauzone," *Die Zeit* (18) (24 April 1992).

[26]These polls were conducted by the Zentralinstitut für Jugendforschung, *Quo vadis Deutschland* (Berlin: Herbert-Quandt-Stiftung, May 1990). Quoted by Werner

Weidenfeld and Karl-Rudolf Korte, *Die Deutschen. Profil einer Nation* (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1991), 188.

[27]Elisabeth Noelle-Neumann, "Aufarbeitung der Vergangenheit der Stasi. Selbstgespräch und Wir-Gefühl in den neuen Bundesländern," *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 6 August 1992.

[28]Poll conducted by the Institut für Demoskopie, Allensbach, and quoted by Marc Fisher, "For Germans, a New Lesson About Walls," *International Herald Tribune*, 28 June 1993.

[29]Quoted in "Distanz, Enttäuschung, Hass," *Der Spiegel* (34) (17 August 1992).

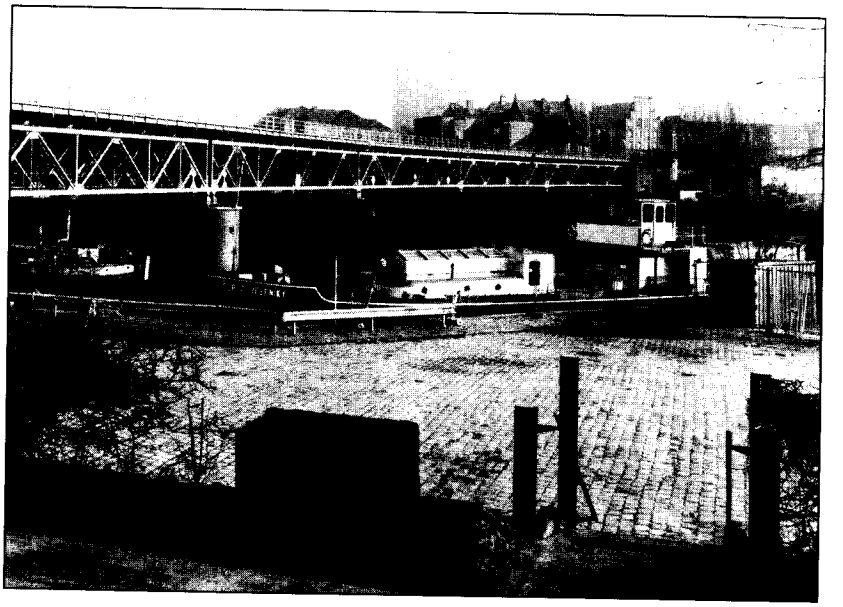
[30]The historian Christian Meier underlines, however, that the Federal Republic was not a postnational construct precisely because it was on the verge of becoming a nation. Meier, *Die Nation die keine sein will*, 36.

[31]A certain public distrust in Germany of European integration or German foreign policy in the Balkans is accounted for by many different explanations.

[32]See Jürgen Habermas, "Die zweite Lebenslüge der Bundesrepublik: Wir sind wieder 'normal' geworden," *Die Zeit* (51) (11 December 1992).

[33]A notion widely accepted by the political establishment while it is being increasingly put into question by historians.

[34]Meier, *Die Nation, die keine sein will*, 12, 29. See also the controversy opposing Robert Leicht, "Ohne Patriotismus geht es nicht," *Die Zeit* (5) (9 January 1993); Dieter Buhl, "Keine Angst vor dem P. Wort," *Die Zeit* (7) (12 February 1993); and Thomas Schmid, "Ein Vaterland der Bürger," *Die Zeit* (10) (5 March 1993) to Gunter Hofmann, "Patriotismus—nein danke!," *Die Zeit* (6) (5 February 1993).



Thomas Struth, **Am Lehrter Bahnhof, Berlin, 1992.**
Courtesy Marian Goodman Gallery, New York.