CIVIL SOCIETY AND DICTATORSHIP
IN MODERN GERMAN HISTORY
THE MENAHEM STERN JERUSALEM LECTURES

Sponsored by the Historical Society of Israel and published for Brandeis University by University Press of New England

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Contents

Foreword by Shulamit Volkov vii

I. Introduction 1

II. Bourgeois Culture and Civil Society:
   The German Case in a European Context 7
   The Opportunities of Semantic Ambivalence / 9
   Bürgertum: Bourgeoisie Defined by Its Opponents
   and Its Culture / 10
   Civil Society: The History and Definition of a Concept / 15
   Universal Claims versus Exclusive Realities
   in the Nineteenth Century / 20
   Bourgeoisie and Civil Society during the Kaiserreich / 22
   A Short View on the Twentieth Century / 28

III. Comparing Dictatorships:
   Toward a Social History of the German
   Democratic Republic 33
   Why a History of the GDR? / 35
   The Political Construction of a New Society / 40
   Social Blockades and the Limits of Political Control / 48
   1949–1989: Four Periods of GDR History / 54
   The GDR in Comparative Perspectives / 56
IV. Dealing with Difficult Pasts:
   Collective Memories and Politics in Germany after 1945 and 1990 67
   How West Germans and East Germans Dealt with Their Nazi Past, 1945–1990 / 70
   Remembering the GDR after Unification:
      Different Layers, Controversial Debates / 82
      Memories Compete and Reinforce One Another / 88

V. Historians, Fashion, and Truth:
   The Last Fifty Years 99
   History: A Changeable Discipline/ 101
   An Example: Changing Views of World War I/ 103
   Five Major Trends/ 108
   The Productivity of Fashion and the Attainability of Truth: History as a Profession/ 111

Notes 117
Index 159
Foreword

It is virtually impossible to approach any subject related to German history of the past two centuries without coming across one of Jürgen Kocka’s books or essays. Indeed, his voice has been heard throughout all the crucial turning points of the previous four decades, carrying the weight of his scholarship and introducing a note of moderation, of balanced and thoughtful consideration. For much of this time, I too have benefited from his insights into questions that reside at the center of our joint preoccupations as historians, admiring his learning as well as his theoretical and methodological refinement. I then also enjoyed (this too for more years than I would like to admit) his close personal friendship. It was thus a particular pleasure for me to greet him on the occasion of his visit to Israel in 2001 as guest of the Historical Society of Israel, invited to give its annual Jerusalem lectures in memory of Menahem Stern.

Jürgen Kocka’s first steps as a historian took him into the emerging field of social history. By the early 1960s, the limits of both old-style Ideengeschichte after the fashion of Friedrich Meinecke’s work and of the grand political-diplomatic history in the style of Ludwig Dehio seemed unsuitable to the task of dealing creatively with the main historical issues at hand. The Nazi past was still very close and it quickly became apparent that new approaches were needed if one wanted to deal with it in a fruitful way, offering convincing explanations and pointing towards the lessons that ought to be drawn from them. At the same time, both long-term explanations, common to many
of the Anglo-American historians such as William Shirer or A.J.P. Taylor, and short-term ones, often applied by some of the more conservative German historians, seemed inappropriate to the task. Concentrating upon socioeconomic themes or social-class studies, while leaning upon the theory and practice of the social sciences, became the order of the day, and the period from the second half of the nineteenth century until World War I provided an obvious chronological middle ground. Kocka’s first book was published in 1969. Dealing with white-collar employees in the Siemens concern between 1847 and 1914 and subtitled On the Relationships between Capitalism and Bureaucracy during the German Industrialization, it became a model for all those who were then seeking their way upon the new historiographical terrain.

The transition that followed, aptly characterized by Eric Hobsbawm as “from social history to the history of society,” likewise found an exemplary execution in Kocka’s work, especially in his book Facing Total War: German Society, 1914–1918 (1973). This was a general social history of World War I in Germany, a kind of small-scale exercise in turning older social-historical conventions into an overall narrative, no longer eschewing politics or even diplomacy, while still placing the main burden of explanation on economic circumstances and the social-class structure of the society under investigation. This book dealt with the tensions between workers and entrepreneurs, the so-called polarization of the lower middle classes, and the interrelations between such societal developments and politics. While the earlier, less ambitious type of social history sought to treat topics that had been previously neglected, the new Gesellschaftsgeschichte applied the principle of the primacy of domestic policy to the overall panorama, revising the old historical narratives in a radical way and offering an alternative.

By then Kocka’s methodological and theoretical interests
were becoming forcefully apparent. In terms of subject matter, he was expanding the canvas to include the lower classes on the one hand and the capitalist employers or entrepreneurs on the other hand. But in parallel he was concentrating, in numerous books and essays, on the implications and the didactic balance of the new approach, becoming one of the central critical and self-critical voices in all matters relating to the meaning and role of history in postwar Germany — history in general and social history in particular.

At about that same time, the Sonderweg thesis, pointing out the uniqueness of German developments in comparison with the other major countries of the West — an inseparable part of the social history project from its inception — came under fire from various sides. A new generation of historians contested the assertion that a significant deficit in liberal faith together with a particularly backward civil society had been caused by the weakness of the German bourgeoisie. As this was a major pillar of the Sonderweg approach as a whole, the matter clearly required further elaboration. Characteristically, Kocka set out to decide the issue by initiating a wide-ranging international study on the nature of the European bourgeoisie. It was not a matter of speculation, ran the subtext of this project, but of precise theoretical clarification together with detailed historical research. In this manner, studying the bourgeoisie — and in particular the German bourgeoisie — was added to Kocka’s list of interests and it has preoccupied him for many years.

Once again, theory and method required rethinking and innovation beyond the particular subject matter of research. The old Fragestellung, dictated by social history, was no longer sufficient, and while studying the bourgeoisie Kocka was gradually embracing some aspects of the new cultural history, adding anthropology to the social sciences relevant to the historian and widening the canvas of the good old Gesellschaftsgeschichte to include, ever more prominently, issues related
to the linguistic and symbolic sides of the past. His numerous publications of that time are of the greatest importance, indispensable for all students of modern German history. During this period, his voice was heard on matters of method and substance alike. His efforts to correct the Sonderweg thesis without completely discarding it demonstrated his unique sense of proportion and turned him into a true leader among contemporary historians.

By then, however, world events were changing his agenda. In the years following the fall of the Berlin wall and the collapse of communism, Kocka’s intellectual alacrity and flexibility stood out among his peers. He immediately realized the need for rethinking old historical truths in view of the dramatic events of the present and turned his attention and skills to the questions aroused by German unification. Mountains of new material were now available for the study of what he then often called “the second German dictatorship” in the German Democratic Republic, and a new research institute, established and headed by him, set out to do the job.

As a result, Kocka’s focus shifted from the nineteenth century. From then on, he became a historian of the twentieth century, most particularly of Nazi Germany and GDR communism. Like previous changes in subject matter, this shift too entailed a methodological expansion. Comparative history, always part of Kocka’s toolbox, now became still more crucial. He compared—and encouraged others to compare—the two German dictatorial regimes, the Germans with the East Europeans, and Germany’s performance with that of the other Western states, past and present.

Kocka was now capable of bringing to bear his immense knowledge of the nineteenth century on issues that emerged in the study of the twentieth, but also—in the manner of all great historians—of using problems faced by Germany in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries to illuminate the historiogra-
Foreword

In 2001 he published a masterly overview of that century in the Gebhardt Handbuch der deutschen Geschichte, under the title: “The Long Nineteenth Century: Work, Nation and Bourgeois Society,” followed by a flood of articles and essays on his various fields of interest—separately and together.

It was at this point that we managed to win him for our lecture series in Jerusalem. Unexpectedly, these lectures became the ground upon which he could achieve a sort of summary of his historical career to date. They discuss the history of Germany’s bourgeoisie and civil society from the beginning of the nineteenth century until the end of the twentieth. They set out the problem of a divided Germany after World War II, the peculiarities of the Bundesrepublik and the GDR, their complex entanglement with each other, and their place in the global history of our time. Above all, they expose the mind of a historian contemplating the nature of his profession, its ways of advancing, the chances and pitfalls along the road. This book is a unique document and I feel that we were privileged to have provided the opportunity for its composition.

Shulamit Volkov

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I Introduction
he descriptions and explanations that historians offer change over time. Certainly, they are based on evidence, and they follow the rules that define the historical profession. But they deal with moving targets, and they vary with the historians’ viewpoints and questions, which are constantly reconstituted and reformulated, under the impact of the developing challenges and opportunities of the present time. History is not identical with the past, nor with a photography of the past. History is rather a relation between past and present, open to the future. Historians are searching for truth, and frequently they find it, since they are well equipped for this task. But their truth, by necessity, contains elements of construction that are historical in themselves: changeable, context-related, and in need of interpretation.

This is a leitmotiv of the following chapters. They deal with traditions and innovations in historical research. They also deal with the reconstruction of collective historical memories. They show how changing historical perceptions—both inside and outside the profession—interrelate with the changing historical structures and processes that they try to grasp and of which they are part.

On the other hand there is much continuity in what historians and their audiences find worthwhile to investigate and to study. Take Germany as an example. The relation between democracy and dictatorship continues to be a central problem
whenever one deals with the basic lines of nineteenth- and twentieth-century German history in Europe. The breakdown of democracy, two very different dictatorships, and the “second chance” [Fritz Stern] Germans got after 1945 and 1989 to rebuild democratic institutions in the context of an increasingly civil society were decisive experiences of the twentieth century, which have left their stamp on the intellectual maps Germans have in their heads when they write and read history. The catastrophe of the Nazi dictatorship, the world war it triggered, and the genocide it carried out remain focal points of interpreting modern German history, particularly for the generation of historians to which this author belongs.

It is true, step by step the German record has been put into broader European contexts, and most recently global ramifications have received much attention. Comparative approaches have gained much ground, increasingly in combination with growing interest in transnational interactions and interrelations. The questions, topics, and findings of historical research and writing have multiplied. Social history, cultural history, and a new brand of political history have led us into new directions and have succeeded in discovering new territory far beyond—and below—national history. But interest in the history of democracy and dictatorship—frequently related to the history of civil society and barbarism—continues to be something like a disquieting basso continuo in the modern history of Germany and Europe. This is certainly true for the following chapters.

The history of the Bürgertum—bourgeoisie or middle class—has been a field in which German historians have invested much and produced many innovations over the last two to three decades. In this field a productive combination of social and cultural history has taken place. Owing to semantic particularities of the German language—Bürger stands for “bourgeois” and “citizen” alike—the history of the bourgeoisie was
soon extended into and amalgamated with the history of civil society, its culture and institutions. Concepts, approaches, and insights were thus developed that allow new interpretations of German history in its European context, from the late eighteenth century until today. This is the topic of chapter II.

The breakdown of state socialism and the end of the German Democratic Republic (GDR) have had an important impact on the interpretation of twentieth-century German and European history. The history of the GDR became a boom field for historical research. It became very common to speak of the “two German dictatorships” of the twentieth century—Nazi Germany and the GDR—and to compare them (also with other dictatorships). In such a comparative perspective, the historical understanding of the GDR has gained salience and substance, and the history of modern dictatorships has been enriched. The dictatorships of the twentieth century appear as outright negations—or enemies—of civil society. But in the long run they have contributed to its rebuilding and revival. This is the topic of chapter III.

Chapter IV summarizes how Germans in the West and the East have dealt with their National Socialist past over the decades. It compares how differently the first and the second German dictatorships were perceived, debated, dealt with, and turned into elements of collective memories after they had ended. It deals with the competition between and the reinforcement of different memories in present-day Germany. Again the emphasis is on civil society, which needs and encourages this type of remembrance and historical endeavor. The history of collective memory can serve as a lead-in to the history of civil society, its changes, failures, and achievements.

In all this historians have played their role. There is an overlap as well as much tension between history and memory, between what historians study and what cultures—or groups of people—prefer to remember. At the same time historiograph-
ical trends are influenced by cultural needs. This partly explains the tremendous changes that have been occurring in historical research and writing internationally in the last fifty years summarized in chapter V. It argues that fashion plays a role in changing the preferences and practices of historians, and makes the point that this is not necessarily harmful. The truth of the historians is itself a historical phenomenon.

The chapters of this volume have been thoroughly revised, augmented and updated recently. I am grateful to Arnd Bauerkämper, Gunilla Budde, Oliver Janz and Ralph Jessen for their suggestions. Morgan Schupbach Guzman has compiled the index and Heike Kubisch has helped with the editing work. But the text is based on the Menahem Stern Lectures I had the honor to deliver in Jerusalem in 2001. Other obligations have prevented me from preparing them for publication earlier. I am grateful for having had this opportunity, and I want to express my thanks to the colleagues who made this possible in one way or another: Shulamit Volkov, Michael Heyd, Fania Oz-Salzberger, Moshe Zimmermann, Yosef Kaplan, Maayan Avineri-Rebhun, and the Historical Society of Israel.
II Bourgeois Culture and Civil Society: The German Case in a European Context
The Opportunities of Semantic Ambivalence

It is the aim of this chapter to bring together two lines of argumentation and two bodies of historical research that are separate in most languages, including English: the history of civil society and the history of the bourgeoisie. Such an attempt is in a way natural for German-speaking historians, owing to the ambivalent meaning of the German concept Bürger. With respect to the late eighteenth, nineteenth, and twentieth centuries, Bürger refers to those who belong to the Bürgertum, a small social formation including businessmen, entrepreneurs, capitalists, managers, and rentiers as well as lawyers, judges, academically trained civil servants, ministers, engineers, and scientists, that is, persons of property and education. At the same time, Bürger means “citizen” and refers to all members of a community regarding their rights and duties. With respect to this second meaning, the corresponding adjective bürgerlich can be translated as “civil” or even “civic,” bürgerliche Gesellschaft as “civil society.”

1 The double meaning of Bürger is present in the language of the sources that historians of the modern period study. As a Breslau philosopher and translator, Christian Garve, wrote in 1792: in German, the concept Bürger possesses “more dignity” than the French bourgeois, since it refers to two matters that have two different names in French. On the one hand, Bürger refers to every member of a civil society (bürgerliche Gesellschaft), that is, citoyen in French. On the other hand, it means
a nonnoble inhabitant of a town (or a city) who lives off a trade, that is, *bourgeois*. The double meaning of *Bürger* is reflected upon and made use of by a large part of the recent scholarly literature produced by German-speaking historians with respect to the history of the bourgeoisie or the middle class in modern times. Research and writing about this topic have expanded in the last twenty-five years. One should take this semantic ambivalence seriously. Does it have structural causes related to a more or less hidden similarity between the bourgeoisie and civil society in German-speaking central Europe? How has the relation between the bourgeoisie and civil society changed over time? Does the combination of these two concepts permit a comparative view on the history of European societies and particularly the German case in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries? I want to explore these questions, but first the two concepts—and the phenomena they refer to—must be introduced in a slightly more thorough way.

*Bürgertum: Bourgeoisie Defined by Its Opponents and Its Culture*

Historians have dealt with the history of the *Bürgertum*—bourgeoisie or middle class—for a long while. One type of studies concentrated on the *Bürgertum* as a legally and culturally specific group within European towns and cities, including master artisans, merchants, shopkeepers, and similar categories. This research focused on the early modern period but continued into the nineteenth century. Another type of research dealt with the bourgeoisie as a class vis-à-vis (and in conflict with) other classes, frequently inspired by Marxist categories. In this view, the wealthy merchants and bankers, the rising industrialists, managers, and capitalists (*Wirtschaftsbürgertum*), their economic interests and political influence took center stage from the eighteenth to the twentieth centuries. In the con-
text of the history of education (Bildung) and professionalization, other historians dealt with other types of middle-class persons, from the study of the seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Enlightenment through the history of academic professions to research on science and its institutions in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. In this context historians dealt with the educated and academically trained parts of the bourgeoisie (Bildungsbürgertum), and it was in this area that the social history of the bourgeoisie connected, early on, with the history of culture and with the history of gender relations. In the 1980s, historians intensified research on the Bürgertum. As far as this work was conducted in German, attempts toward clarifying definitions took place that owed a lot to the rise of cultural history on the one hand, Weberian conceptual influences on the other.

On the one hand it became accepted that both merchants, manufacturers, bankers, and other businesspeople as well as professionals, university professors, higher civil servants, and other administrators should be seen as belonging together to the eighteenth- through twentieth-century Bürgertum (bourgeoisie, middle class), while nobles, peasants, manual workers, and lower-class people in general were outside its boundaries. Master artisans, retail merchants, innkeepers, and the like had certainly belonged to the group classified as the burghers of the early modern towns. But toward the end of the nineteenth century and later they were—together with lower-ranking civil servants and the growing mass of salaried employees (Angestellte)—mostly classified as Kleinbürger or Mittelstand (lower middle class). In other words, they were distinguished from the Bürgertum proper, which continued to be a small though slowly growing minority, with their families they accounted for around 5 to 8 percent of the population in the nineteenth century.

On the other hand, it became clear that such a heteroge-
neous formation was not really a class in any strict (e.g., Marxist) sense, since it included both self-employed and salaried persons, that is, people occupying different market positions. Nor did it qualify as a corporate group \( \textit{Stand} \), since it had no specific legal privileges—in contrast to the burghers of the medieval and early modern towns. What then kept these different categories under the label \textit{Bürger} together? What were their common denominator and their \textit{differentia specifica}? Two compatible answers emerged, one relational, the other cultural.$^5$

\textbf{RELATIONAL}

In general, individuals are more likely to form social groups with some cohesion, common understanding, and potential for collective action if some tension or conflict exists between them and other social groups. It is well known from the history of classes, religions, and ethnicities that an identity is acquired by setting oneself apart from others. The same holds true for the European bourgeoisie as it emerged as a postcorporate, supralocal social formation in the second half of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Merchants, entrepreneurs, and capitalists, professors, judges, journalists, ministers, and high-ranking civil servants differed from one another in many respects, but they shared a sense of social distance from the privileged aristocracy and, on the continent, from the absolutist monarchy. By stressing the principles of achievement and education, work, thrift, and self-reliance, many members of the middle class supported the emerging vision of a modern, secularized, postcorporate, self-regulating, enlightened order that would eventually become reality and be distinguished from the privileges and autocracy of the ancien régime.

This self-differentiation was a complicated and multifaceted process with many exceptions. Still, the various subgroups of the emerging bourgeoisie were to some degree united.
by their common opponents: the nobility and unrestricted absolutism and religious orthodoxy. In opposition to them they acquired common interests and experiences, a certain degree of shared self-understanding, and common ideologies. In this way, the bourgeoisie constituted itself as a social formation that encompassed various occupational groups, sectors, and class positions.

In the course of the nineteenth century, this line of distinction (vis-à-vis the old elites) lost part of its structuring power but did not altogether fade away. The blurring was due to the gradual abolition of the nobility’s legal privileges in most parts of Europe and the gradual rapprochement between the upper grades of the middle classes and parts of the nobility. Simultaneously, another line of demarcation came into play, which, although it had not been completely absent around 1800, became more prominent during the second third of the nineteenth century. The boundary that set the bourgeoisie apart from the lower strata (the emerging working class and “small people” in general, including the “petite bourgeoisie,” the lower middle class) was becoming sharper. In spite of their differences, late nineteenth-century industrialists, merchants, and rentiers, lawyers and higher civil servants, professors, high school teachers, and scientists shared a defensive and critical distance from “the people,” the “working class” and the labor movement, and this perceived social front had a significant influence on their self-understanding, social alliances, and political commitments.

Cultural

While developing cohesion in opposition to people above and below, the bourgeoisie defined itself by a common culture and common values. Families from various parts of the bourgeoisie shared a respect for individual achievement, on which they based their claims for rewards, recognition, and influence.
They, at least the male part of the bourgeoisie, shared a positive attitude toward regular work, a propensity for emotional control, and a fundamental striving for independence and autonomy, either individually or through their associations and initiatives. They emphasized the value of education (more than of religion). General, usually classical education (*Bildung*) served as a basis on which they communicated with one another. *Bildung* distinguished them from those who did not share it. Scholarly pursuits were respected, as were music, literature, and the arts.

In bourgeois culture, a specific ideal of family life was essential: that of the family as end in itself, a community held together by emotional ties and fundamental loyalties. Strictly differentiated by sex and dominated by the paterfamilias, it was meant to be a haven protected from the world of economic competition and materialism, from politics and the public. It was a sphere of privacy (although not exclusively, and not without servants, whose work made it possible for the bourgeois mother to devote sufficient time to family life, transmitting “cultural capital” to the next generation).

Bourgeois culture could flourish only in towns and cities. Communication was central. There had to be peers with whom one could meet in clubs and associations, at feasts and at cultural events, in numbers that a rural environment could hardly provide. If one sees the cohesion and the specificity of the *Bürgertum* as defined by its culture and its *sociabilité*, one appreciates the importance of symbolic forms in middle-class daily life, of bourgeois table manners and conventions, of quotations from classical literature, titles, customs, and dress codes.

Bourgeois culture was exclusive, but it claimed universal recognition. In contrast to aristocratic or peasant cultures, it had a built-in tendency to expand beyond the social boundaries of the *Bürgertum* and to imprint the whole of society. The *Verbürgerlichung* of other social groups was a dynamic
element built into bourgeois culture. The school system, the workplace, the army, the media, theaters, concert halls, and museums were the most important arenas in which bourgeois culture could express its hegemonic ambition and its attractiveness. But in order to participate in the practices of bourgeois culture adequately, one needed a secure economic status, well beyond the subsistence minimum: means, space, and time. This excluded large, though slightly decreasing, majorities of most populations from becoming truly bourgeois.

I have to add a word on semantics. Because it includes professionals and other persons of higher education, the German word Bürgertum is broader and less exclusive than the German word Bourgeoisie, which tends to concentrate on capitalists, entrepreneurs, employers, and other persons of property and wealth, and which is frequently used in a polemical, conflict-oriented way (frequently in a Marxist tradition). By not (fully) including the masses of modest self-employed persons—small businesspeople, Mittelstand—the German term Bürgertum is narrower and more exclusive than the English term middle class. In English, neither the narrow term bourgeoisie nor the broader term middle class(es) is fully equivalent to the German term Bürgertum, whose scope puts it somewhere in the middle between the two English terms. But both terms are actually used in order to translate the German Bürgertum into English. In this book I usually translate Bürgertum, Bürger, and bürgerlich as “bourgeoisie” and “bourgeois,” but in some cases “middle class” appears to be more adequate.6

Civil Society: The History and Definition of a Concept

The concept “civil society” has had a remarkable career since the 1980s.7 In many countries it is widely used: in the social sciences and history as well as in public debates. It carries dif-
ferent meanings in different contexts. It is frequently used in normative ways, usually in a positive sense. If one wants to use it for scholarly purposes, one has to trace the history of the concept and offer a definition.

The term civil society has a long history: it can be traced back to societas civilis in the Aristotelian tradition. For centuries it has been a central concept in European thought about politics and society. Its connotations have varied, but it has almost always dealt with social and political life beyond the domestic sphere of home and family. It has usually referred to issues of community beyond the purely particular: that is, to the general and the political. It was often normative and emphatic in nature.

The term civil society, société civile, Zivilgesellschaft, or Bürgergesellschaft assumed its modern meaning in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, largely in the works of Enlightenment writers: John Locke, Adam Ferguson, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Baron de Montesquieu, the Encyclopedists, Thomas Paine, Immanuel Kant, and many others.

Civil society had a positive connotation in the Enlightenment. The term stood for what at those times was a utopian project for a future civilization in which people would live together in peace: as private individuals in their families and as responsible citizens in public. They would be independent and free, cooperating under the rule of law without being spoonfed or repressed by an authoritarian state. There would be tolerance of cultural, religious, and ethnic diversity but without great social inequality, and certainly without the traditional corporative (ständische) inequality on an ascriptive basis. Civil society (in German bürgerliche Gesellschaft or Bürger gesellschaft) came to be defined in contrast to the state (more on the continent than on the British Isles); at the time this largely meant the absolutist state. In other words, the idea of civil society was antiabsolutist. At the core of this antiabso-
Bourgeois Culture and Civil Society

lutist, anticorporative “plan” for a future society, culture, and politics was the notion of social self-organization by individuals and groups. The project “civil society” was critical of the status quo; it was utopian, and way ahead of its time.

Under the influence of capitalism and industrialization, the definition changed in the first half of the nineteenth century—for example, in the works of Hegel and Marx. Civil society became even more clearly distinguished from the state. It became understood as a system of needs and work, of the market and particular interests, in the sense more of a bürgerliche Gesellschaft of the bourgeoisie than of a civil society made up of citizens (Bürger). In German the terms Zivilgesellschaft and Bürgergesellschaft, which traditionally had implied a positive connotation, were superseded by the term bürgerliche Gesellschaft, which was still used in the late twentieth century mostly in a critical and polemical way. The traditional, positive meaning was retained longer in English and French, for example by Alexis de Tocqueville. On the whole, however, the term civil society receded into the background in most languages, playing only a marginal role until roughly 1980—with some exceptions, Gramsci among them.

Around 1980 the term civil society experienced a dazzling comeback. It was used in the context of antidictatorial critique, especially in central Eastern Europe—in Prague, Warsaw, and Budapest, where dissidents such as Václav Havel, Bronislaw Geremek, György Konrád, and Iván Szelényi used similar terms to speak out against one-party dictatorships, Soviet hegemony, and totalitarianism, and for freedom, pluralism, and social autonomy. Corresponding movements could also be observed, in some cases even earlier, in Latin America and South Africa. The term is now used around the world—always with a positive connotation—in various political contexts, by political centrists and, on the left, by liberals, communitarians, and antiglobalization activists, as well as by social scien-
tists such as John Keane, Ralf Dahrendorf, Shmuel Eisenstadt, Charles Taylor, and Jürgen Habermas. In German one uses \textit{Zivilgesellschaft} and \textit{Bürgergesellschaft} synonymously (rather than \textit{bürgerliche Gesellschaft}, which stays in the semantic vicinity of \textit{bürgerlich} in the sense of “bourgeois”). Eighteenth-century ideas evidently assumed new relevance at the close of the twentieth century. The concept \textit{civil society} became attractive again in the successful struggle against dictatorship, which can be seen as the most egregious negation of civil society in the twentieth century.

But in the nondictatorial world, the term has been fitting into the general political and intellectual climate, too. First, it emphasizes social self-organization and individual responsibility, and thus reflects a skepticism toward being spoon-fed by the state, a skepticism that has grown in the last decades. Many have come to believe that the interventionist welfare state, by regulating too much and thus becoming overburdened, is approaching its limits. Secondly, \textit{civil society}, as the term is used by today’s antiglobalization movements, for example, promises an alternative to the unbridled capitalism that has globally gained dominance, in spite of much criticism and crisis. The logic of civil society, characterized by discourse, conflict, and agreement, promises solutions different from those of the market, which is based on competition, exchange, and the optimization of individual benefits. Finally, civic involvement and efforts to achieve common goals are an integral part of behavior in civil society, no matter how differently the goals may be defined. In highly individualized and partially fragmented modern societies, civil society promises an answer to the pressing question of what, if anything, holds these societies together. In many countries, the debate about civil society is about the need to redefine the relationships between politics, society, and the market, and about the moral foundations of politics
and the community. This explains why the term is so attractive and highly charged in many public discussions today.⁹

Against this background we can offer a working definition of *civil society* with two closely related dimensions.¹⁰ First, the term refers to a specific type of social action. This type of social action is oriented toward conflict, compromise, and agreement in the public sphere; it stresses individual independence and collective self-organization; it is nonviolent; it recognizes differences and plurality as legitimate; it is related to general issues, frequently oriented toward something like the “common good,” even though different actors hold different opinions about what specifically constitutes the common good. Second, *civil society* refers to a social sphere in which the aforementioned type of social action is dominant. It encompasses “a complex and dynamic ensemble of legally protected non-governmental institutions that tend to be nonviolent, self-organizing, self-reflexive, and in permanent tension with each other,” a social space occupied by clubs, associations, social movements, networks, and initiatives. It is related to but distinguished from government, business, and the private sphere. Both as a type of social action and as a sphere of social self-organization, *civil society* either presupposes or requires an institutional framework including decentralized economic power (usually in the form of a market economy) and limited government permitting civil society actors to exert political influence (usually a system of constitutional government with some sort of parliamentary mechanisms, democratic elements, and the rule of law).¹¹

Understood this way, civil society is an ideal type. It has never been identical to real, existing societies, which always also include other elements, such as violence, chaos, and other uncivilized manifestations. Societies can be distinguished according to the degree to which and the manner in which they
have implemented the principles of civil society. There is a large task here for comparative historical and social science studies to tackle.12

**Universal Claims versus Exclusive Realities in the Nineteenth Century**

In principle, the project of civil society, when it emerged in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, claimed universal applicability. It aimed at freedom, equal chances, and participation for all. The rights, duties, and principles that it formulated should be valid for all [grown-up] human beings, whatever their socioeconomic status, nationality, religion, and even sex. In that it reflected its inspiration by ideas of the Enlightenment.

However, in reality, the project of civil society was, when it emerged and during much of its history, tied to small social groups that promoted and profited from it, much more than others. In Germany of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, the project was closely connected with the bourgeois milieus in the towns and cities, described above. These milieus were in principle open to those who brought with them the appropriate qualifications to enter. They were not organized by ascriptive criteria. But in reality these milieus were small and exclusive, clearly differentiated from the masses below. It was in those social milieus—frequently enriched by some aristocratic and some lower-middle-class persons—that in the eighteenth and early nineteenth century reading societies, clubs, lodges, and circles, friendship and correspondence networks, and later on liberal associations, local self-government bodies, and voluntary organizations with social, cultural, and political purposes developed, all of which articulated and supported those ideas and practices out of which the project of a civil society consisted. In other words: this
project emerged in the milieu of the rising urban bourgeoisie because there existed a basic affinity between the principles of the project and bourgeois culture based on education, self-reliance, achievement orientation, intensive communication, and systematic conduct of life. It was a specific type of culture that the project of civil society needed in order to gain plausibility.

On the other hand bourgeois status (in social and cultural terms) was very helpful if not indispensable in order for a person to fully qualify as a citizen, that is, as a fully entitled subject of civil society. In order to participate fully as a citizen one needed personal autonomy, education, and some social skills. Such qualifications were much more likely to exist in the urban middle (and perhaps upper) classes than in the lower classes or among peasants, rural laborers, and lords in the countryside.

Citizenship and bourgeois status were intrinsically interwoven. Along the same line: full citizen status was withheld on the basis of sex. Women were not allowed to vote, their right to join political associations was severely curtailed throughout the nineteenth century, and their legal status was minor in many respects. This gender-related discrimination with respect to citizenship was also anchored in social inequalities specific to bourgeois culture as institutionalized in the bourgeois family. A third case in point, along the same line: in most German territories the legal emancipation of the Jews was a long and protracted process with many steps. Jews, as members of a minority group, were denied full citizenship status in the first two-thirds of the nineteenth century (though to a decreasing extent and with regional variations). It is interesting to see that many contemporaries—Jews and others—saw Verbürgerlichung (the gradual attainment of a bourgeois way of life in social and cultural terms) as a precondition or at least as very helpful for accelerating emancipation (i.e., gaining citizenship): again an indicator for the intrinsic interrelation-
ship between middle-class status and full acceptance in civil society.\textsuperscript{13}

During the nineteenth century the project of civil society was actively supported by and beneficial for minorities. However, given its universal claims, it was a promise not fully kept. This discrepancy between its universal claims and its limited realization did not go unnoticed. Under the influence of critical intellectuals and an increasingly lively public opinion it was turned into an open contradiction and translated into demands and protests. The demands and protests were brought forward by liberal and democratic reformers, by the emerging labor movements and women’s movements, particularly in the 1840s, the revolution of 1848/49, and again in the 1860s/70s. The historical reality of protests, revolutions, and reforms was complex. But the core mechanism was this: the critiques, the protests, and the reformers referred to the promise that, as they knew, was built into the civil society program, and demanded its realization. They took its universalistic claims seriously. The tension between claims and reality thus became a powerful motor of change.\textsuperscript{14}

\textit{Bourgeoisie and Civil Society during the Kaiserreich}

1. In Germany, the second part of the nineteenth century was a period of accelerated industrialization, spreading capitalism and fast urbanization. This socioeconomic change was carried on by bourgeois capitalists, entrepreneurs, and managers mainly, and it increased their numbers, their wealth, and their reputation and influence. Within the business communities factory owners and industrialists, together with bankers, gained status relative to merchants, who had been the leading group earlier. Managers rose alongside and in close contact with owners. On the other hand, the school system was dras-
tically expanded and intensified, largely under the influence and control of (bourgeois) bureaucrats. The rise of academic education since the beginning of the nineteenth century—itsel itself a first-rate middle-class achievement—made itself felt. It strongly contributed to the upgrading and expansion of the academic professions. The doctors, lawyers and judges, ministers, professors and scholars, professional administrators, and civil servants gained in number and status, soon followed by engineers, scientists, and academic experts of different kinds. In the German-language research literature one distinguishes between *Wirtschaftsbürgertum* (the economic middle class) and *Bildungsbürgertum* (the educated middle class). These two bourgeois fractions were increasingly intertwined, owing to marriage and kin relations, an increasingly similar educational background, common culture, and common political attitudes.\(^{15}\)

It is true that middle-class influence in society, culture, and politics remained limited. The line of distinction between *Bürgertum* and nobility continued to be neatly drawn, more sharply than in France or in England. Aristocratic background remained important for being recruited into top positions at the court and in the army, in government, and in the rural power structure, particularly in the East. The Catholic Church proved remarkably resistant to being penetrated by bourgeois values. Very early, already by the 1860s, a separate, autonomous social democratic labor movement had emerged that became a massive bloc of antibourgeois politics, based in non-bourgeois working-class cultures—in spite of accepting and cultivating *some* middle-class values like discipline, the work ethos, career orientation, and high respect for education. The limits of social and cultural embourgeoisement were obvious and more narrowly drawn than in Western Europe.

But in contrast to older theses, recent research has not confirmed the view that the bourgeoisie of the German Empire
was generally weak and crippled. In contrast to the older “feudalization thesis,” it has been shown that aristocratic influence on the German bourgeoisie—through marriages and lifestyle imitation—was limited, probably more limited than in France and England. The influence of bourgeois culture percolated into many social milieus and spheres of life, even in the countryside and the better-off layers of the proletariat. Remarkable achievements in economic as well as in academic life, in the sciences and the arts, in city planning, public health, and social welfare were due to bourgeois persons, their ambitions, work, and achievements. Particularly on the highly important local level, in city and town governments, bourgeois influence on politics was remarkably strong and decisive. Here, on the local level, traditions of bourgeois liberalism survived even in the Wilhelmine period.¹⁶

Still, on the whole, the German middle class became less liberal toward the end of the nineteenth and the start of the twentieth centuries. Bourgeois lifestyles became more exclusive than they had been at the beginning of the nineteenth century. Setting oneself apart from the masses below became more important than distinguishing oneself from the old elites. For the most part, the German bourgeoisie had made its peace with a political system that, after national unification under Prussian hegemony, maintained strong authoritarian traits (besides some liberal concessions and democratic elements). It became common to give support to a kind of nationalism that increasingly moved to the right, with imperialist aggression and chauvinistic radicalization. Racism and antisemitism gained ground within the bourgeoisie and, particularly, the lower middle classes. Faced by an ever-growing oppositional, social democratic labor movement on the left, large parts of the bourgeoisie became more defensive. In important ways, bourgeois support for the universalistic elements of civil society weakened.¹⁷
2. In Germany, a civil society emerged in three and a half stages between 1800 and the early 1870s. Certainly, there had been preparations in the eighteenth century: capitalism had slowly advanced in both agriculture and industry, and some administrative and legal reforms had taken place, in Prussia for example in 1794. But it was in the period between 1800 and 1815 that the feudal order in the countryside and the corporate order in the towns were either brought to an end or severely weakened. This laid the legal ground for the dynamics of capitalism in the coming two centuries. Far-reaching educational reforms institutionalized the importance of education, which—besides capitalism—became the other great dynamic force of the time to come. Administrative reforms were enacted. Constitutional reforms remained limited but were not altogether absent; they provided for the eventual political participation of the emerging bourgeoisie and others afterward. A national movement began. Directly or indirectly, French influence was decisive. Basically, these were reforms “from above,” planned and implemented by those in power; popular movements played only a marginal role.

In contrast, popular movements were important in making liberal demands for constitutional reform partly successful in some German regions in 1830/31. A similar constellation—though more dynamic and socially more heterogeneous—appeared in the revolution of 1848/49, which, although largely unsuccessful, did not just end in total defeat but advanced the cause of civil society: by accelerating the still-unfinished business of agrarian reform, by making economic policy more favorable for industrialization, and by establishing constitutional government (though of a rather conservative nature) in the two leading monarchies of the German Federation, in Prussia and (temporarily) in Austria.

It was the decade from the early 1860s to the early 1870s that brought the decisive breakthrough. Legal reforms deliv-
ered the final blow to the surviving remnants of the feudal and corporate order, and loosened the government’s encroachment on society; administrative controls and checks were weakened; economic change and social mobilization accelerated. The industrial revolution quickly advanced, social conflicts sharpened, and labor movements emerged. A German national state was put together under Prussian hegemony, under Bismarck’s guidance and with the help of three wars—something the revolution of 1848/49 had sought in a different way but in vain. And the constitutional question was decided: against full parliamentarization as demanded by the liberals and, in effect, maintaining much of the power of the old elites and old institutions; but also against the reactionary demands of many conservatives and in favor of a constitution with some liberal elements. Universal manhood suffrage in national elections—rather democratic for the period—added a further element that was meant by Bismarck to be a weapon against the liberals. This compromise sharply distinguished the German constitutional history of the following decades from the West European model of parliamentary government. Again, radical change had been guided “from above,” but in contrast to his 1800–1815 predecessors, Bismarck had to come to terms with an active sociopolitical movement, the liberals, whose conflict and cooperation with the government deeply influenced the decisions and results of the decade.

By the 1870s, the core elements of a civil society had been established, in a special state-centered way. They were further developed in the phase of the empire (1871–1918): a capitalist economy, highly dynamic, innovative, increasingly industrialized, and growing; a relatively liberal system of law regulating essential elements of civil society, namely civil rights, private contracts, and family life; a functioning arena of public debate; a huge number of voluntary associations, clubs, and citizens’ initiatives; a growing tradition of volunteering and
endowments for social and cultural purposes; a dynamic system of education and science; competing parties and constitutional government. On the other hand, the Kaiserreich was definitely not a parliamentary system. Much political power and cultural influence stayed with the old elites, the nobility, the bureaucracy, and the army. Everyday life and public culture were tainted by social militarism and civil bureaucratization. Nationalism grew, became more aggressive, and moved to the right, in close association with growing illiberal moods and movements, including racism and antisemitism. On the national level at least, liberalism severely declined. Constitutional reforms got stuck. It took a war, a humiliating defeat, and another revolution to realize parliamentarization, against stiff resistance. The Kaiserreich, on the whole, turned out to be a deeply ambivalent and unstable compromise on the difficult path toward civil society in Germany.\(^{18}\)

3. It should be obvious by now that the structural deficits of bourgeois culture and of civil society clearly corresponded. In this sense, the history of the bourgeoisie and the history of civil society continued to be closely related, throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. But two qualifications should be added. On the one hand, bourgeois support for and identification with the program of civil society (and particularly with its universalistic claims) became much weaker in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries than it had been in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth. This does not appear to be a specifically German phenomenon: the bourgeoisie became more established, exclusive, conservative, and defensive in other countries as well. On the other hand, as time went on, the program and promises of civil society gained (new) support from social quarters until then excluded or marginalized, from the better-qualified workers and artisans, from newly emerging groups of clerical employees and experts, from
women and feminist movements. With its demands for political reform, social justice, and economic redistribution the social democratic labor movement became one of the most important propagators and—in the Weimar Republic—one of the few defenders of the civil society project (without using this term). The history of the bourgeoisie and the history of civil society, so closely linked in the beginning, started to move apart.

During this transition, the program of civil society changed. It had been born in a predemocratic period; in the late nineteenth and twentieth century it was gradually democratized. In the early period its bourgeois progenitors had not been very explicit on social reform. Under the impact of industrialization it was supplemented by social welfare aims. Its later proponents also learned to emphasize women’s rights more than before. These changes contributed to making the project less congenial and less acceptable to the bourgeoisie.

A Short View on the Twentieth Century

The wars of the twentieth century weakened the bourgeoisie and deeply damaged what previous decades had achieved along the way toward civil society. The radical movements on the extreme right and the extreme left, which emerged from World War I, were postbourgeois. With their totalitarian claims and violent practices they were outright enemies of civil society. But they had been made possible by previous democratization and by the existence of a public sphere that they could use. Weimar Germany offers disturbing examples of how the mechanisms of civil society, including NGOs and social movements, can be used in a way that contradicts the substance of civil society and undermines its basis. At least the type of civil society that then existed turned out to be helpless against its enemies on the right and on the left.
The Nazi dictatorship was brought to power with the help of important parts of the bourgeoisie. Once in power it contributed to the further decline and disintegration of the bourgeoisie, as well as to a fundamental destruction of civil society. The second German dictatorship, the state-socialist German Democratic Republic (GDR) in the East, was brought to power without the help of the bourgeoisie. During the forty years of its existence it reduced the bourgeoisie on its territory to nearly nothing and simultaneously destroyed civil society in most respects. In other words: the history of the bourgeoisie and the history of civil society continued to be parallel and intertwined in these twentieth-century periods in which both of them experienced decline and destruction. Still, it is worthwhile to ask which residuals of civil society survived the dictatorships. One can argue that a deep violation and near extinction of civil society during the dictatorships of the twentieth century started a basic reevaluation and reaffirmation of the project in the end. The relatively successful development of civil society in Western Europe after the defeat of fascism seems to support this view. So does the sympathizing rediscovery of its substance by dissidents in Poland, Hungary, and Czechoslovakia in the 1980s. To the extent that civil society is successful in the post-communist countries of Eastern Europe, it is a civil society without a strong bourgeoisie (but with much transnational support).

In the Federal Republic of Germany the principles of civil society have been more clearly realized than in any previous period of German history, although the results are far from perfect, as one can experience and observe every day. One needs to reflect on what it means that the West German civil society emerged from extremely uncivil antecedents, a bloody war and an extremely murderous dictatorship. The meaning of civil society has changed remarkably over the last half century. Gender issues have become centrally important, and ecologi-
cal concerns demand its further reworking. The media have gained much importance, systems of communication have been revolutionized, and public space continues to be restructured under the impact of the electronic revolution.\textsuperscript{22}

The relationship between civil society and the nation-state has undergone constant redefinition and continues to do so. Between 1945 and 1990 Germans did not live under the roof of a nation-state, but in a divided country. This did not at all prevent the reintroduction of principles and practices of civil society, quite the contrary: for the first time, they became stable and effective, solidly anchored in West German society. Unification extended the still-evolving system of West German civil society to East Germany, where it is slowly developing roots. European integration raises the question to what extent and how civil society can be established on a level beyond the nation-state.

While in the GDR the reduction of the bourgeoisie and the destruction of civil society went hand in hand, the reconstruction of civil society in West Germany was paralleled by a certain revival and reaffirmation of the bourgeoisie. But compared with the bourgeoisie of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the bourgeoisie of the Federal Republic is fundamentally different in structure and culture. Together with its basic pillars—family structure and unequal gender relations—the bourgeoisie has lost its major opponents, a radical working class and a class-conscious nobility. It has thus lost a large part of its coherence and identity. It has been deprived of its Jewish component, which had been of outmost importance during the nineteenth and first third of the twentieth centuries. In contrast to its beginnings more than two hundred years ago, the project of civil society is no longer tied closely to one specific social milieu, but is broadly supported by different groups. Maybe this explains its stability and relative success today.\textsuperscript{23}

This chapter started with the semantic ambivalence of our
key concept. Indeed the German language uses one and the same word, *Bürger*, for “citizen” and “bourgeois.” I have tried to show that this ambiguity has been more than a semantic accident. In the German case the ups and downs and reconstructions of the *Bürgertum* were linked to the rise, decline, and revival of civil society. But the linkage has been loosened in the long run. The social basis of civil society has broadened far beyond the bourgeoisie. Bourgeois culture has deeply changed and partly evaporated. It should not be impossible to have a strong civil society without a distinctive bourgeoisie in the future.
III Comparing Dictatorships: Toward a Social History of the German Democratic Republic
Why a History of the GDR?

Johann Gustav Droysen, historian and philosopher of history in nineteenth-century Germany, refused to accept *Zeitgeschichte* (contemporary history) as a legitimate part of the discipline. His reason was not the fear that *l’histoire du temps présent* would still be too near and raise too much passion so that an objective historical evaluation would still be impossible. Nor was he afraid that the relevant sources would not yet be sufficiently available, for historical research proper must be based on archival sources. Rather, he did not regard the most recent developments as a legitimate topic of historical research because it was not yet clear where they would go and how they would end, for a good historical narrative could only be written, according to Droysen, if the results and the consequences of past phenomena could be taken into account.¹

In early October 1990, the German Democratic Republic, the socialist GDR, which a year before had celebrated its fortieth birthday, ceased to exist. Its history became a quickly expanding field of scholarly research. After all, the subject matter to be studied had ended; the result seemed to be clear; and ample sources were made available to historians, since the “second German dictatorship” did not leave mountains of dead behind like the first, the Nazi dictatorship, but instead mountains of files and dossiers. The most secret and the most trivial, the most delicate and the most normal facets of the perished regime became accessible as far as they had found their ways
into written documents of any sort. The history of the GDR became a boom field, with much public interest.²

Three expectations guided historical research on the GDR in the early 1990s. First, nearly everybody had been surprised by the fast and smooth way in which the GDR had been overthrown, dissolved, and merged into the Federal Republic, which thus had expanded its territory to the east and increased its population from 63 million to 80 million, but had not changed much of its structure. One knew of course that social and cultural unification had barely begun and that difficult times could lie ahead, particularly with respect to the economy. But the expectation was that the process of adjusting what was left of the GDR to the enlarged Federal Republic would continue fast. It was widely expected that the GDR would soon be a quickly fading memory while becoming part of our common history, debated of course but increasingly distant.

Second, West German conservatives and East German dissidents, very different in most other respects, had a common political aim when they practiced or supported the study of GDR history, namely the retrospective delegitimization of the GDR in moral and political terms. The aim was a fundamentally critical history of the GDR, from which one would set oneself apart while reconstructing it.³ Yet there were also deep rifts and active fronts, particularly between West and East but also between the minority of East German dissidents, who had actively supported the nonviolent revolution of 1989/90 and demanded historical recognition, and those in the mostly silent East German majority, who had supported or accepted the old system and now felt they had lost but did not give up their claim for a meaningful and even dignified past. All this influenced the way in which the scholarly reconstruction of the GDR history began.

Third, the need was felt to place the history of the GDR in broader contexts. The collapse of the SED [Socialist Unity
Comparing Dictatorships

Party system was obviously part of the breakdown of communism in Europe and beyond, a global caesura that would lead Eric Hobsbawm among others to speak of the “short twentieth century,” starting with World War I and ending with the dissolution of the Soviet Union. How were historians to interpret the history of East Germany in the context of the history of communism? How relate it to the history of the other German state, the Federal Republic of Germany, and to German history in general? Seen in such contexts, how important would these forty GDR years turn out to be in the long run—perhaps not more than a mere footnote to world history, as the East German writer Stefan Heym sarcastically remarked in March 1990?

One way in which historians reacted to such expectations was by conceptualizing the GDR as a dictatorship, sometimes as a totalitarian dictatorship. The rulership of party and state was seen to have been central, all-pervasive, and decisive, while social and cultural processes were regarded as products and outcomes of dictatorial rule. East German society was seen as politically constituted in a fundamental way, as a function of politics rather than as a sphere with a logic of its own. One implication was that social relations, the economy, cultural patterns, mentalities—indeed the very life of the people—would quickly change once the dictatorial rule of the communist state and its dominant party had been removed.

Now, about two decades later and after a huge amount of scholarly research, this view has not been completely reversed. Conceptualizing the GDR as a dictatorship has become widely accepted, while the meaning of the concept dictatorship varies. Massive evidence has been collected that proves the repressive, undemocratic, illiberal, nonpluralistic character of the GDR regime and its ruling party. It is clear and has been shown in much detail that the GDR government intervened in all spheres of life with the aim of controlling them, with
instruments ranging from the unequal distribution of welfare through mass propaganda and a vast apparatus of control to brutal force if necessary.\textsuperscript{7}

But after twenty years, it has become clear that the adjustment of the former GDR to the enlarged Federal Republic has not progressed in a linear way. The dissolution or self-dissolution of the GDR into unified Germany has not worked as was expected right after unification. With respect to economic strength, social life, party politics, and mentalities differences between East and West Germany continue to exist. In the East, the memory of the GDR has not faded away but instead has been revived, sometimes with a slightly nostalgic touch and as a basis for a common and distinctive East German identity \textit{post factum}. Things are complicated and contested, but, clearly, as a specific culture within unified Germany, the GDR has survived much better than had been expected in 1990, when the East German State ceased to exist.\textsuperscript{8}

Droysen had a point. The historical treatment of past phenomena is influenced by our knowledge of the consequences to which they have led or are going to lead. The long-term consequences of the GDR were not yet that clear when the GDR disappeared as a state in 1990. Nor are they totally clear today. This makes the history of the most recent period, \textit{l’histoire du temps présent}, a bit unstable and insecure, but at the same time interesting and intellectually challenging.\textsuperscript{9}

The reasons behind this unexpected survival of the GDR as a culture and as a memory are partly to be found in decisions, developments, and new cleavages produced by the process of reunification itself. On the other hand, this remarkable survival of the GDR as a culture and as a memory leads historians to reconsider their viewpoints and approaches. Maybe East German society has always been more than just a function of dictatorial rule from above? Maybe the dictatorship’s rule was
Comparing Dictatorships

actually more limited than assumed by theories of totalitarianism? How should one see the relation between political history on one side, social and cultural history on the other, in this dictatorship? What was the GDR after all? The relation between political rule and social plus cultural dynamics is central for any history of the GDR, especially if seen from a social historical point of view. The relation between dictatorial rule and social developments will be the empirical center of the first part of this chapter.

In a second step the history of the GDR will be put into three different comparative perspectives, in order to discuss it in a broader analytical framework. It can be productive to compare the two German dictatorships of the twentieth century, that is, Nazi Germany and the GDR. But in this case it is particularly important to understand that comparing does not mean equalizing but, rather, searching for similarities and differences. As a rule historians are particularly interested in the differences.\(^\text{10}\) It can be even more productive to compare the history of the GDR in the East with the history of the Federal Republic of Germany in the West, and to analyze the many interrelations and interactions between the two Germanys. Comparative history and entangled history belong together.\(^\text{11}\) It is even more of an intellectual challenge to compare the GDR with other state-socialist systems in east-central, southeastern, and farther eastern Europe. Among them the GDR was the most advanced economically. How did dictatorial state socialism do under relatively modern conditions compared with the constellations of relatively backward conditions farther east?\(^\text{12}\) The second part of this chapter will explore all three comparative perspectives. But its major aim is to use comparison to understand and explain better the peculiarities of the GDR itself.
The Political Construction of a New Society

Historians debate what type of dictatorship the GDR was. They use different adjectives to characterize it: authoritarian, totalitarian, post-totalitarian, or “late-totalitarian.” Some speak of a socialist or a communist dictatorship with a short Stalinist and a long post-Stalinist phase. Others speak of a “modern dictatorship” or a “welfare dictatorship,” and some postcommunist writers refer to the “dictatorship of the proletariat,” a Marxian concept used by GDR spokesmen for self-classification. Consensus has not yet emerged.¹³

But few historians if any would question the GDR’s dictatorial character as such. By contrast with the ideal type of the liberal, constitutional state—including due process of law, a pluralistic society, and functionally defined subsystems governed by their specific logics—one can see that the GDR system of government was set up with some basic traits that it kept through the following decades, and that defined it as a dictatorship: it was a slightly disguised one-party rule by the Socialist Unity Party (SED) without party competition and democratic elections, and without legitimate opposition. Marxism-Leninism became the institutionalized ideology with hegemonic claims and no legitimate challengers. Political power was not limited by a working constitution, an independent judiciary, and due process of law. Autonomous intermediary institutions did not exist, with one partial exception, the churches. The GDR used specific methods of mass mobilization and control with the help of centralized media, a huge bureaucratic apparatus, and different forms of repression including violence against dissidents and other “enemies” of the socialist state. “Democratic centralism” was the concept used for official self-description.¹⁴

It was a modern dictatorship insofar as it aimed at the political steering, penetration, and control of the economy, so-
Comparing Dictatorships

Comparing Dictatorships

ciety, and culture. It explicitly denied institutional differentiation between functionally defined subsystems. It prevented them from working according to their own, subsystem-specific sets of logic. Vis-à-vis the economy, education, the arts, the judiciary, or other subsystems, the primacy of SED-controlled politics was claimed. The aim was the building of a new postbourgeois, socialist, finally communist society and the formation of a new personality (neuer Mensch) by political means, particularly in the early period.

Historians take these claims seriously. They study how the GDR government formulated and reformulated these aims, very radically in the beginning, rather lukewarmly and in a ritualized manner at the end. They study the steps by which the government tried to reach these aims: the collectivization of property rights, expropriation without compensation, the replacement of the market by a centrally administered economy, a radical reform of the education system, the building of huge bureaucracies with diversified functions. Most of these steps were taken between the late 1940s and early 1960s, against much resistance, with a lot of force and the decisive support of the Soviet occupation power.15

On the one hand, historians study the personnel, the structure, the everyday routines of government intervention into society, frequently under the heading “dominance as social practice” (Herrschaft als soziale Praxis).16 On the other hand, they are interested in the social effects of dictatorial rule. I want to summarize some findings with respect to these two fields of research.

The apparatus and the personnel responsible for steering, penetrating, and controlling life in the GDR was steadily expanding, immense, expensive, and—in spite of increasing professionalization—badly in need of coordination itself. Mary Fulbrook has used the octopus metaphor to illustrate this situation, for which the Secret Service, the Stasi, can serve as a
good example. In the mid-1980s, this service employed one informant, one informal part-time agent, per each 120 inhabitants! The Stasi was huge and ubiquitous, and responsible for many tasks, from the outright repression, persecution, and psychological disintegration of suspects and “enemies” to what one can call preventive social engineering and control with the help of continuous communication, bargaining, and assistance with respect to individual problems. The Stasi also served as an espionage organization abroad. It was used to mobilize information in a system without a self-regulating public space, but—one of several paradoxes of the East German dictatorship—the massive amounts of information it provided overcharged the central leaders for whom it was mainly prepared.

The agencies and functionaries in charge of penetrating and controlling economic, social, and cultural relations followed procedures that were sharply distinguished from the rules and practices of classic bureaucracies as they were analyzed by Max Weber. Central principles of modern bureaucracy were continuously violated by politics, by the “primacy of the party,” principles such as limiting the power of the administration by legal norms and codified procedures, selecting personnel according to criteria of qualification, and maintaining a separation between official and private life. In case of doubt, the arbitrary decision of a party secretary was more important than laws and rules. This is why it would be not altogether correct to describe the SED regime as a bureaucratic dictatorship. It was partly because of the unbureaucratic character of this system of power that its decisions could penetrate very deeply and in unforeseen ways into the everyday life of its subjects.

The offices for literature and publication, that is, the agencies responsible for censorship, can serve as examples. They did not just set and implement rules, check manuscripts and decide about their publication, identify and persecute offenders. All this they did, but in addition they acted proactively:
they tried to communicate with prospective authors, gave advice beforehand, established contacts with the world of writing, and participated in shaping trends of literary production. Self-censorship by authors became more important than direct control by the authorities. Censoring agents could serve as intermediaries between authors and the authorities.  

In this example we can identify a more general pattern: ultimately the central authorities at the top had an unchallenged monopoly on decision making and executive power. Disobedience, deviant behavior, and political opposition were severely punished. But most of the time the relation between the authorities and functionaries on the one hand, and the citizens, subjects, families, neighborhoods, and work units on the other hand, was not a relation of pure command and obedience but of asymmetric symbiosis, at least in the lower ranks and in everyday context. There was less of a clear-cut dichotomy between a bureaucracy regulated by laws and rules on the one hand, and clients, subjects, applicants, or citizens on the other. Rather, between both sides emerged a network of arrangements. Public and private spheres mixed: the political entered the more or less private niches, while private concerns made their way into the lower ranks of the segmented authority structure.  

The practices of local police—Volkspolizei—can serve as another case in point. Similar patterns governed the relation between managers and workers in the plants and the relations between political authorities and scientific personnel in the institutes of the Academy of Science. It is this complicated mixture of pressure, support, and adjustment; reciprocal dependence and instrumentalization; order, obedience, and some autonomy that historians try to capture with the concept Herrschaft als soziale Praxis (dominance as social practice). But I should stress that this is more the picture of the 1970s and 1980s than of the 1950s and 1960s, when this pattern was still being set up—with much conflict and compulsion, resistance and adjustment.
As to the effects of these policies: I take demographic change and social mobility as two related examples. It was mainly due to political interventions that between 1949 and 1961 about 2.7 million persons left the GDR and moved to the West, that is, one-seventh of the population. East German society lost its bourgeoisie, the overwhelming part of its upper and middle strata, who went away and started a new life in the Federal Republic. On a general level, Albert O. Hirschman has described this process and its long-term effects convincingly as one of two alternative strategies people use to cope with repression and deprivation: “exit” instead of “voice.” It is easy to see that the constant brain drain to the West not only transferred a large number of talented, qualified, and energetic persons into the Federal Republic but also diminished the potential of critics and dissidents within the GDR. So the mass migration during the 1940s and 1950s from the SED’s point of view had a double-edged effect: it strengthened the regime by reducing its opponents, but it also weakened its position in the competition between the two German societies.

The case of the East-to-West migration shows that the dictatorial policy of the SED and the reaction of the people concerned could reinforce each other—with stabilizing effects in the short run and destabilizing effects in the long run. This becomes clear when the political regulation of careers is recognized as one of the important causes of the exodus from the GDR. The SED and the state bureaucracy practiced a conscious recruitment policy that discriminated against the offspring of upper- and middle-class families and punished political abstention or opposition, while it rewarded political loyalty and privileged working-class and lower-middle-class youngsters, particularly those from workers’ and later on from functionaries’ families. This biased policy of sociopolitical selection and promotion was thoroughly pursued, particularly in the 1950s. With this policy, the SED could partly build on traditional ideas.
of social justice as cultivated in the German labor movements of previous decades. The SED also justified its highly selective recruitment and promotion policy as a measure designed to “clean” society from the burdens of its fascist past. In reality it closely followed Soviet models.27

This policy of recruitment and promotion fit into the changing pattern of social inequality that could be found in all communist dictatorships, although with various modifications: inequality on the basis of difference in ownership was effectively reduced, owing to the thorough expropriation of the owners of private capital and large fortunes. When the GDR was founded in 1949, much of the private business sector, particularly the larger businesses, had already been expropriated without compensation. Small and middle-size businesses continued to exist in the 1950s and 1960s under increasingly unfavorable circumstances and unsympathetic supervision by the authorities. They were collectivized in the early 1970s. This undermined and destroyed a large part of the bourgeoisie as a social group. It marginalized economic autonomy as a social resource and a factor of social differentiation.28

The break in agriculture was even more radical than in industry. The land reform of 1945 expropriated the large landowners, including the noble rural elites if they had not already been expropriated and driven away by the Soviet occupation during the last weeks of the war. More than 200,000 new peasants were settled, some of them refugees or expellees from the eastern territories of the former German Reich, now becoming part of Poland or the Soviet Union. But this new class of smallholders had no real future in the emerging socialist society. Since the beginning of the 1950s the SED promoted collective forms of rural labor and economy. Finally the compulsive collectivization of the late 1950s transformed nine out of ten self-employed peasants into more or less dependent agricultural employees of cooperatives and collectivized farms. In the
economy as a whole, the percentage of self-employed persons went down from 20 percent in 1950 to 2 percent in 1988.\(^{29}\)

Since economically autonomous positions were largely destroyed, with most private businesses expropriated and institutions such as universities rigidly controlled, opportunities for upward social mobility on the basis of careers were largely restricted to publicly financed and politically controlled elite positions. The only exception was offered by the Protestant church. It is not accidental that during the 1970s and 1980s it became a haven for those who were politically dissatisfied and dissenting.\(^{30}\)

As a consequence of all that, massive upward mobility from the ranks of workers and the lower middle class into the upper echelons and leading positions took place until the mid-1960s. The systematic selection by social and political criteria enlarged the proportion of students with working-class background, by the end of the 1950s, to a historically unprecedented 53 percent.\(^{31}\) After some delay this politically initiated redistribution of social opportunities made itself felt among the academic elites as well. Before World War II only 4 percent of German university professors came from a working-class background. In the GDR the percentage climbed to 13 percent by 1954 and skyrocketed to 39 percent by 1971.\(^{32}\) Similar evidence could be given for the leading ranks in politics, the media, the economy, and elsewhere.\(^{33}\) This was, indeed, a radical exchange of elites within a short period of time, unprecedented in German history, even though the social distance between those near the top and those further down narrowed, and the society as a whole became more equal.

In other words: the GDR experienced a radical and fast exchange of elites, but only during its early years. At the same time the shape and the content of elite positions thoroughly changed. Consequently, the pattern of social inequality was restructured. This had deep consequences for the relations be-
Comparing Dictatorships

tween society and state. Three of these consequences should be mentioned.

First, the overall competitiveness of the GDR, compared with West Germany and other countries, probably suffered, while the acceptance of the regime by the GDR population must have increased. The generation of those who benefited as young men and women from the SED affirmative action policy seems to have developed a particularly sustainable loyalty to the political and social order of the GDR.34

Second, it was partly because of these structural changes that the GDR developed a “culture of the ordinary people” (Kultur der kleinen Leute), with distrust of too much wealth and competition; with stress on equality and safety, not at all eccentric, fashionable, or enterprising but usually solid; and with stress on virtues like discipline, orderliness, and obedience—a bit gray and boring. Among the many differences between Westerners and Easterners in the period of division, there was always a difference of class and rank. Among the many problems of unification since 1990, there are also the problems resulting from the confrontation and mixing of people from different classes, ranks, and cultures, and with different social habits.35

Third, it was the policy of party and state authorities that decided about access to schools and careers, about success or failure to be promoted, and thus about social mobility. This experience left sustainable vestiges in the mentalities of those concerned. It helped to create and confirm attitudes according to which one expected much from the authorities, the system, the state. We can read this pars pro toto: the SED regime not only collectivized the economy and socialized the elites; it also pursued the project of a “socialist welfare state,” which was meant to protect, patronize, and equalize the life chances of its citizens with the help of voluminous transfers and distributions of resources as well as with the creation of close
networks of social institutions—from the Kinderkrippe (preschool) to the Feierabendheim (for retired persons, who in the GDR were not well cared for). The German-American historian Konrad Jarausch coined the word Fürsorgediktatur (welfare dictatorship), while the East German author Rolf Henrich spoke of the vormundschaftliche Staat (the state as guardian). In the long run, the project of a socialist welfare state accelerated the decline of the GDR, since the expanding costs overburdened the system and drove the state near bankruptcy.

The government did not dare to correct this disastrous course, since this would have meant frustrating widespread elevated expectations, which party and state had nourished and encouraged in previous years. It was in the line of old German traditions of Staatsgläubigkeit (belief in the strength of the state) that East Germans expected very much from their authorities, much more than the authorities could deliver. This pattern of high state-oriented expectations has survived the collapse of the GDR and imprints East German mentalities to this day.

Social Blockades and the Limits of Political Control

Many other examples could be given for the making of a new, in a way artificial society by political means, but here I will stop and reverse the perspective. Now I want to show that there were clear limits to the political construction of East German society, which was always more than a mere function of dictatorial politics. Owing to three factors or mechanisms, the dictatorial political penetration of society met resistance and remained very incomplete.

First, there were older traditions that survived and proved to be resistant to dictated change. Just one example: the Protestant church, with its more or less bourgeois ministers, their families, and their nonsocialist culture in the Protestant Pfarrhaus. As mentioned earlier, the church was not integrated
Comparing Dictatorships

into the realm of party-controlled institutions but enjoyed a remarkable degree of internal autonomy as well as autonomy in the training and recruitment of its ministers. Because of this peculiar situation there was much intergenerational continuity in this small group, which helped to preserve residues of the educated middle-class culture (Bildungsbürgertum) in a social environment that was trying to break with its middle-class or bourgeois past. Part of this milieu offered protection to dissident groups in the 1980s. It provided a proving ground out of which several East German leaders emerged in the 1990s—hardly discredited by the ancien régime, with some experience in public life, committed to general purposes beyond the private sphere. Although the social milieu of the Protestant church has been unique in its cohesion and homogeneity, elements of social, cultural, and mental continuity also played a role in other branches of society. For instance, “nonpolitical” academic professions, particularly in fields like medicine, science, or engineering, preserved much of their traditional social profile, some professional autonomy, and even a few elements of an elitist esprit de corps.

Second, there were institutions and social spaces that enjoyed a certain amount of autonomy vis-à-vis politics so that they were able to serve the internal needs of a modern society. For instance, the SED government needed, wanted, and supported modern research, and hoped to reach world-class standards in this field. But that implied the necessity of limiting political interventions and granting scientists the degree of autonomy that they needed in order to achieve internationally recognized results. At least in academic fields like physics, chemistry, biology, or mathematics—rather useless as a source of ideology but very important for economic modernization and international reputation—a universalistic model of science and scientific truth remained valid in the GDR.

Third, in many areas and ways the regime had to cope with
unintended limits of domination. Mostly the means, the tools, the procedures of political planning and control were just not good enough. The state-controlled economy in particular was an endless story of inefficiency, lack of competence, and undefined responsibility. Detailed studies have shown how difficult it was for central administrators to monitor and steer the performance of managers who were responsible for single plants, units, and organizations. The available information was not sufficient and frequently distorted by made-up reports. The monitoring instruments had weaknesses. Managers counteracted the intentions of central planning, for instance by hoarding raw materials, tools, and labor. There was a huge gap between the world of the plan and the reality of the economy.\footnote{41}

Another example: government and party never managed to really control the life and the views of the young generation. Although the official youth league of the communist party, the Freie Deutsche Jugend, organized almost every teenager, its leaders notoriously complained about their clients. Blue jeans and beat music from the West turned out to be much more attractive for youngsters than the blue shirt of the FDJ uniform and homespun propaganda songs. Neither repression against westernized youth culture during the mid-1960s nor selective acceptance of some symbols of fashionable lifestyle like jeans since the beginning of the 1970s could bridge the gap. Internal surveys of the 1980s alarmed those in charge because they showed that large parts of the young generation had drifted away, oriented themselves toward the West, and were skeptical or cynical about the promises of socialism. Even if the vast majority of the youth in the GDR remained calm and well integrated into the official institutions, the party lost its moral and political credibility the longer the regime remained in power.\footnote{42} This lack of confidence on the one hand reflected a basic lack of legitimacy of the SED dictatorship; on the other hand it was a consequence of the very special dilemma of the GDR at the
Comparing Dictatorships

borderline between East and West. The SED regime never managed to really control the influx of information. West German TV transcended the fortified border, and mutual visits between East and West multiplied after Willy Brandt’s New Ostpolitik in the 1970s.43

The family can serve as another example of both the reach and the limits of dictatorial intervention into society. In the GDR the family lost several functions it had held in previous periods. Under socialism the family largely ceased to be the major channel through which wealth was transmitted from one generation to the next. Schools and preschool institutions were government sponsored and widespread. Consequently the family became less significant in transmitting knowledge, skills, and “cultural capital” from one generation to the next. The high female participation in the labor force reinforced this effect. On the other hand, the family gained new importance with respect to informal ways of organizing access to scarce goods and services not accessible on the market, in the emerging networks of informal relations, and sometimes as a haven into which one could retreat from organized social and political pressures. With respect to recruitment into upper positions, families regained some importance toward the end of the GDR: during the 1970s and 1980s sharply rising rates of self-recruitment among academics indicated that the transmission of cultural capital and status increasingly depended on family-based career strategies. The bottom line: political control of the family remained limited and had paradoxical effects.44

The complex and somehow contradictory way that the functions of the family changed under the impact of the socialist environment points to a more general aspect of East German social history. There was something like a dialectical relation between attempted political control of society by the state and developments that counteracted and limited this control. The situation at the workplace is an example. In the GDR the Be-
trieb, the plant and the office, had many functions, including cultural and social functions besides the economic ones. For the workers, experts, and managers, the Betrieb was not just a place to work and make money but also a place to socialize, develop collective identity, and get entitlements like vacation lodgings at a resort. The official policy encouraged the formation of workers’ organizations (“socialist brigades”), which were meant to serve officially defined aims but which actually served also as platforms for self-regulated communication among employees. As a consequence—also owing to the constant labor shortage in this labor-intensive and not very efficient economy, and because of rights granted to labor in this, after all, socialist system—the position of labor in the GDR plants and offices was rather strong. The uprising of 17 June 1953 had taught the rulers to be cautious. Workers could resist instrumentalization, as individuals they could protest against being pushed around, and they could informally bargain and develop positions that set limits to intervention and control by those above.45

But the strength and bargaining power of workers on the shop-floor level was only one example of how official and unofficial structures, formal and informal modes of action, were intertwined in the GDR economy. The GDR was full of informal networks that emerged either in reaction to dictatorial pressures or with the aim of compensating for deficits and gaps that the official structures left open. Because of the built-in insufficiencies of central planning, the neglect of market incentives, the lack of competition, and the weight of bureaucratic impediments, socialist economies were “economies of shortage” [Janós Kornai], at least in comparison to those of the West. In addition these were economies that emphasized supply and production over sale and consumption. Both the disfunctionalities of centralized planning and the neglect of consumer needs led to compensatory arrangements, to a shadow economy, an
informal economy in which personal relations, barter, and gift giving played a much more important role than in functioning market economies. The rise of these compensatory informal mechanisms further weakened the formal economy and added to its burdens, in a parasitic way.\textsuperscript{46}

The GDR was a dictatorship with a command economy, but in everyday practice contradicting aims and unintended consequences of political measures counteracted a clear-cut domination from above. Much in this state-organized economy looked more like a chaotic and inefficient muddling through than like a well-ordered party-state.\textsuperscript{47} Informal relations and modes of action were a product of dictatorial politics. But they developed a logic of their own that limited the dictatorial steering and control of society, tending to weaken the formal structures of the socialist economy and polity while indirectly supporting them by making them more bearable. In the long run, this contradiction undermined the system.\textsuperscript{48}

A last example illustrating the self-destructive effects of dictatorial social control in the GDR: massive and selective upward social mobility was certainly a result of conscious policy decisions and their implementation, yet this policy contributed to the system’s undoing. At first, in the 1950s and 1960s, the upward mobility helped to broaden the basis of legitimacy on which the GDR system rested, as mentioned above. But seen from a long-term perspective, the huge waves of social mobility in the first two postwar decades proved to be a matter of one generation. Once the new elites, recruited from the lower ranks of society to a remarkable degree, had replaced the “bourgeois” experts, the process of social mobility nearly came to a halt. Starting in the early 1960s the proportion of students with a working-class background began to go down again, and in the 1980s it was smaller in the GDR than in West German universities. Members of the winner generation of the 1950s, who had moved into the numerous newly established or force-
fully vacated upper positions, now locked up those attractive positions for a long time. In addition, they managed to secure for their own offspring privileged access to academic training and attractive careers. At the same time, job chances diminished for young men and women who did not come from families of the newly established elite. For them the GDR became a closed society. This blockage of mobility contradicted the official promise of a “just society.” It contributed to the erosion of loyalty that accelerated in the 1980s and became part of the breakdown of the GDR. 49

1949–1989: Four Periods of GDR History

The social history of the GDR cannot be separated from the history of its political system. Dictatorial rule deeply penetrated and fundamentally constituted East German society. Still, the society of the GDR was always more than a mere product of political rule. Some of its elements were much older than the GDR. Social, economic, and cultural processes possess a logic of their own and could not be fully controlled by political means. Planning and control from above frequently triggered counter-tendencies. The gaps and deficits of the system gave rise to compensatory reactions. Informal networks and arrangements emerged that set limits to dictatorial rule, partly contradicted it, and undermined the system in the long run. Influences from West Germany also played a role.

At first glance, the short period between 1945 and 1948 appears to have been a still-open phase in between dictatorships. The Socialist Unity Party (SED), a product of merging the Communist and the Social Democratic parties in 1946, was on its way to becoming a Stalinist mass party, but it still had competitors and had to accept a minimum of political plurality—at least for tactical reasons. But it would be misleading to over-emphasize the degree of freedom that existed in the immedi-
ate postwar years. Major decisions were taken by the Soviet occupation forces. Behind the official rhetoric of “democracy,” “antifascism,” and “freedom” the Soviets paved the way for the new regime. Fresh evidence shows more limitation than openness in the postwar situation.\(^{50}\)

A second phase lasted from the founding of the GDR in 1949 to the closing of the western border in 1961. It was a period of fast change and thorough transformation put through “from above,” with severe repression, heavy conflict, and a massive exodus to the West. A deep reshuffling of the social structure took place. The dictatorship became firmly established, but at the same time it derived some support, energy, and hope from the bottom up—by left-wing intellectuals for instance and the younger generation, profiting from the turnover of the social hierarchy.\(^{51}\)

A third phase lasted from 1961 to the early 1970s. The mass exodus had been stopped brutally by erecting the wall, yet what followed was not a wave of repression but a period of consolidation and adjustment. Basic reforms were attempted, for example in the “New Economic System,” which aimed at the introduction of some market elements into the overall bureaucratic structure in order to strengthen its dynamics and prevent petrification. They failed. After 1968 and the suppression of the Prague Spring uprising, reformist energies faded out, and the change from Ulbricht to Honecker in 1971 marked the beginning of a status quo–oriented phase of GDR history.\(^{52}\)

It lasted from the early 1970s to 1989. A new stress on social policy and consumption was meant to solidify waning support in the population. But the domestic products could usually not compete with their Western models. The system of surveillance was expanded, but control now frequently worked in an indirect way, with less severe and open repression than in the first two phases. Growth and change of all kinds slowed down. Tendencies toward petrification became paramount: in
The GDR lived beyond its means. It got deeper and deeper into an economic impasse. Now political governance and social developments moved far apart, while popular dissatisfaction reached a new peak. From hindsight it is clear that a crisis built up that became an important presupposition of the crisis of 1989, which the GDR did not survive.53

The GDR in Comparative Perspectives

TWO GERMAN DICTATORSHIPS

What was specific to the GDR? Different comparisons highlight different traits of the system. One frequently speaks of the two German dictatorships and compares the GDR with the Nazi Empire. This is part of the public debate, widespread but controversial, always full of political overtones, offensive to some, evident to others, and particularly important when it comes to the question of how the Germans have dealt with their different dictatorial experiences once they were over: after 1945 and after 1989/90.54 Such comparisons between the two German dictatorships have been made by professional historians as well, frequently with the help of the concepts totalitarian and totalitarianism.55 If one compares the two systems as manifestations of totalitarianism, much depends on which aspects of totalitarian rule are stressed. Measured by the extent of systematic, ideology-supported terror and the ruthless dynamics it produces, there can be no doubt that the Nazi dictatorship was by far the more totalitarian. But if one emphasizes the degree to which totalitarian rule systematically penetrates and
Comparing Dictatorships

imprints all of life and social organization, the GDR appears as the more totalitarian one.\textsuperscript{56} The usefulness of such comparisons may be limited. But they help us to recognize important differences between “modern dictatorships,” which—and this is what they have in common—differ sharply from liberal, democratic, pluralist systems.

The closer we look, the more the differences between the two German dictatorships become paramount, ranging from the fact that the GDR produced nothing like the Holocaust or the Second World War to less obvious differences, such as the different role of charismatic leaders in both systems (important in the Nazi case, virtually absent in the GDR) or the different impact of both systems on gender relations—reemphasizing inequality in the Nazi case (at least before the war redefined the needs of the system), in contrast to the GDR, whose policies contributed to more equality between the sexes in theory but also in practice. The two systems also differed with respect to their popularity among the general population, and in the way they came to an end. A large majority of Germans was ready to support Hitler’s regime right into World War II and, in spite of some erosion during the latter part of the war, until the bitter and bloody end. By contrast, East German popular support for the SED regime has been much more ambivalent, less enthusiastic and more reluctant, changing over time, and dwindling toward the end. The GDR imploded without a bloody war but under the impact of the vanishing support of the Soviet Union, internal protests, and a peaceful offensive by the West toward the end of the Cold War. The Third Reich preserved the essentials of the capitalist market system; the GDR eliminated them.

Finally, how German was the second German dictatorship, after all? The homegrown character of the Nazi dictatorship is beyond any doubt. The comparison between the two German dictatorships draws one’s attention to the fact that the creation
of the GDR depended heavily on Soviet power. The tiny group of German communists who returned from exile in Moscow to Berlin in 1945 would not have had any chance to make their will felt had they not been supported by the Soviet military government whose instructions they implemented. The presence and support of the Soviet troops remained a necessary condition of the survival of the GDR. This became particularly clear in June 1953, when it was the Soviet military and the violence of their weapons that kept the SED regime in power against a quickly growing popular uprising, starting with a protest of Berlin workers against reduced wages and unsatisfactory work conditions and developing into a formidable and broadly supported fight for social reforms, freedom, democracy, and even unification. The GDR’s dependence on Soviet support became dramatically clear when it was withdrawn, under Gorbachev in 1989, which decisively contributed to the collapse of the East German state.

It would be misleading to see the GDR exclusively as a Soviet satellite and an element of the Soviet Empire, as a price the Germans had to pay for their defeat in a war they had started and carried into the Soviet lands, with tremendous devastation. The GDR had an important endogenous history, too. In spite of the popular uprising of 1953, the building of the wall in 1961, and the antidictatorial mass demonstrations contributing to the collapse of 1989/90, the GDR was remarkably stable and void of open conflict (in contrast to Poland, Czechoslovakia, and Hungary) over long phases of its history. This stability cannot be sufficiently explained by repression, including the pressure and the guarantees of Soviet political and military power. There was also a lot of support, acceptance, adjustment—and indifference—in large parts of the population, a mixture that changed over time. But the mix between endogenous factors and determinants from outside remains an impor-
tant research problem, relevant for the question of historical responsibility.\textsuperscript{58} It also marks an important difference between the GDR and the Nazi Empire.

The first German dictatorship lasted twelve years, the second one more than forty. The communist dictatorship in the GDR had much more time, it used much more systematic energy, and it had more clearly defined strategies for renewing and restructuring the economy, society, and culture. But it controlled only a part of German territory and reshaped only a fraction of the nation. It did not lead Germany and Europe into catastrophes comparable to the devastation brought by the Nazi regime. Those are probably the main reasons why the Third Reich, though much more short-lived and less penetrating in the field of social and economic restructuring, will remain a much more important element in our collective memory than the GDR.

EAST AND WEST GERMANY

Comparison between East and West Germany, between the GDR and the Federal Republic, has been deeply built into the self-awareness of both Germanys throughout the decades of German division. Self-comparison with the other Germany defined the identity of both, in different ways and with different emphases: an asymmetric, intensive interrelationship. Comparisons between East and West Germany have been undertaken by historians as well.\textsuperscript{59} Such comparisons usually emphasize differences between East and West, summed up under the headings “dictatorship versus democracy” and “different degrees of modernization.” Both viewpoints are legitimate; each has its problems, not to be discussed now.

It is not difficult to enumerate differences between the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG) and the GDR: parliamentary democracy versus communist party dictatorship; a market
economy with welfare state modifications versus a centrally directed and administered economy without (much) private property; in the West a transition from an industrial society to a postindustrial service society with strong dynamics, in the East an artificially preserved industrial society with much stagnation; a pluralist media structure with much open discussion versus intensive control of public opinion by the monopolistic state party; here a political culture in which civil society standards have become more and more influential, there a welfare dictatorship directed by an ever-present state; Westernization versus self-isolation and provincialism. This is a comparison out of which the FRG always emerges as a winner, whether one applies normative or functionalist criteria. That result is well supported by evidence, but one wonders after a while how interesting and useful it is, beyond the purposes of legitimizing the West German and delegitimizing the East German order. Here I offer five perspectives that may lead the West German–East German comparison beyond what is obvious.

First, it would be interesting to further historicize the comparison and find out exactly how similarities and differences changed over time. It is likely that one would discover asynchronous developments, lags and divergences, not just parallels. The political system differed early and fundamentally between West and East; economic developments took longer to diverge; patterns of urbanization, gender relations, and mental dispositions remained similar over longer periods of time.

Second, one can explore to what extent West German successes, with respect to modernization and Westernization, were facilitated by the divergent developments in the East. The West profited not only from the mass emigration of Easterners; having to set itself apart from the East and being confronted with threats from the East also motivated and facilitated the resolute Western orientation of the FRG.\textsuperscript{60}
This draws our attention, thirdly, to the methodological opportunities that are opened up if one combines comparative history (looking for similarities and differences) with entangled history (looking for relations, interactions, and transfers between the units of analysis). In spite of divisions and contradictions between them, West Germany and East Germany remained heavily interconnected and intertwined, for example by family relations, by the impact of radio and TV, and later on by growing cross-border travel and economic exchange as well as by common language and history. Particularly the GDR, against its will, remained economically dependent on the FRG (but in other ways as well).61

Fourth: while major differences between West and East are overwhelmingly clear, it is worthwhile to investigate the similarities between the two Germanys. Unification was accepted if not always badly desired by an overwhelming majority of Germans once it became possible in 1990. There must have existed a solid stock of national identity and shared emotions, including the notion of belonging together. One might also explore the hypothesis that both German states stood in a long tradition of state-centered welfare policy, a shared disposition that became even more manifest because the welfare state was faced by new challenges, not only in the East but also (though differently) in the West.62

Finally, both German states and societies shared one and the same preceding history, within which the Nazi period looms large. How did the two Germanys deal with this past? How did they build on it or try to escape from it? Which of the two German postfascist systems managed a more thorough departure into the future? Which one stayed more closely linked to older German traditions sometimes critically discussed under the heading of Sonderweg? The answers are less obvious than one might think.63
DIFFERENT STATE-SOCIALIST SYSTEMS

Finally a word on comparing the GDR with other state-socialist countries, with its East European or east-central European neighbors, a comparison rarely made. Here I want to emphasize only two aspects. First, such a comparison can draw attention to the fact that the GDR was a highly industrialized and a relatively modern country, the most advanced one of all the socialist systems. This difference had far-reaching consequences. On the one hand it appears that the highly developed economic structure within the GDR made state-socialist centralized planning particularly difficult. It is easier to run a mine or a foundry in an early stage of industrialization under a state-socialist system than to develop, under state-socialist control, a high-tech electronics industry in the era of the communication revolution. On the other hand one can argue that the Soviet state-socialist model may have contributed to the modernization of the less advanced regions of Eastern Europe. Removing residues of feudalism that still survived, setting up for the first time a system of mass education, developing streets and electrification, and facilitating social mobility would be cases in point. In the GDR the state-socialist system did not have such modernizing effects. Here those steps of modernization had been already taken. On the whole it becomes clear that the Soviet type of state-socialist system corresponded relatively positively to an early stage of modernization but became less than functional as development continued.

Second, comparisons with other socialist countries draw attention to the fact that the GDR was not a national state, while Poland or Hungary were. This had important consequences: the lack of a clear-cut national identity—the GDR was, after all, one of two German states—helps to explain why internal opposition and political dissent were relatively weak in East Germany. The dissidents in Warsaw, Prague, and Budapest could positively relate themselves to older national identities,
in the name of which they criticized Soviet domination and socialist dictatorship while stressing the right of their country to be an independent, self-determining state. East German critics could not, particularly for three reasons. On the one hand the appeal to national traditions would have easily questioned the very foundations of the GDR as a separate state, its autonomy vis-à-vis West Germany, its raison d’être. The national argument was, consequently, not available to East German reformers and dissidents as long as they did not want to question the pure existence of the GDR. Until November 1989 it played hardly a role among them.67 On the other hand, owing to the Nazi past, national values had lost much legitimacy and emotional power in both postwar Germanys. After World War I, claims for the “lost territories” and the restoration of national honor had fueled a widespread revisionist mobilization. After the horrors of Auschwitz the credibility and self-evidence of the national argument was severely weakened, although both East and West Germany claimed sole representation of the German nation-state.

Finally there is a third point: the East German communists were particularly vehement defenders of Marxist-Leninist principles, and they practiced dictatorial rule more rigidly than their comrades in Poland and Hungary. This had something to do with the GDR’s desire to set itself apart from a challenging neighbor state with which it shared the same nationality. The lack of a national state did not hinder the successful development of a civil society in the West German Federal Republic, quite the contrary. The lack of a national state did, however, contribute to the particular rigor and inflexibility of the dictatorial syndrome in East Germany. Here again the comparative view leads to the discovery of entangled histories.

Comparing the GDR with its eastern neighbors will lead to the discovery of many similarities, for example with respect to their economic problems, their political instability, their de-
pendence on the Soviet Union and the Soviet bloc. In order to evaluate the merits and costs, the strengths and weaknesses, the rise and fall of the so-called socialist experiment in twentieth-century history, one has to broaden the view and include several socialist countries.

The GDR and other post-1945 socialist dictatorships in east-central and Eastern Europe had prehistories distorted by right-wing dictatorships and autocracies, which is to say prehistories that had already deeply damaged the principles and practices of civil society. In many respects, the GDR and other socialist dictatorships continued this trend, though with different contents, from the left. These were all systems that tried to integrate and stabilize themselves through a particularly active role of the state, through governance from above, through activities from the top instead of unleashing the dynamics of civil society and hoping for cohesion and coherence to develop from that. They deeply contradicted the principles of civil society. But, toward the end of these dictatorships, in the 1970s and 1980s, the idea of civil society went through a formidable period of renaissance, in Prague, Warsaw, and Budapest if not in East Berlin.

The breakdown of the state-socialist regimes of east-central and Eastern Europe from 1989 to 1991 has not only accelerated globalization and the victorious spread of capitalism. It has not only given a boost to market/liberal ideologies and transnational networks. It also testifies to the strength of civil societies, whose logic distinguishes them both from capitalist markets and from state-controlled bureaucracies. The last two decades have favored ideas and policies that build on the strength of civil society, its dynamics and cohesiveness, its freedom and solidarity—not just on markets nor only on states and their interventions in social, economic, and cultural affairs. Such a perspective has guided the preceding interpre-
tation of the rise and fall of the GDR. It remains to be seen whether the economic crisis since 2008 is changing the intellectual framework that influences the dominant interpretations of recent history. As Droysen knew, the interpretation of recent history is not independent of its consequences, which frequently take decades to emerge.
IV Dealing with Difficult Pasts: Collective Memories and Politics in Germany after 1945 and 1990
The two German states, the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG) in the West and the German Democratic Republic (GDR) in the East, were strikingly different: one with a market economy, a pluralist society, a parliamentary democracy, very much part of the Western camp under the leadership of the United States; the other with a state-socialist economy, a thinly disguised one-party dictatorship with Marxism-Leninism as an obligatory state ideology, very much part of the Eastern bloc under Soviet hegemony. But the two states also had some things in common, for example a common past. Both were postfascist systems. How did they relate to their National Socialist past? — Nazi Germany and the GDR were very different, but one can see them as the two German dictatorships of the twentieth century. From this perspective, it becomes interesting to study in a comparative way how the two systems were remembered and dealt with after they ended: Nazi-Germany after 1945 and the GDR after 1990. Comparing, of course, means looking for similarities and differences. Usually, historians find differences more interesting.

First I shall discuss how West Germans and East Germans dealt with their fascist past between 1945 and 1989. Then I shall compare the post-1989/90 memories and remembrance strategies with the post-1945 ones. I shall end with some remarks on the situation today and offer some general conclusions.
How West Germans and East Germans Dealt with Their Nazi Past, 1945–1990

When the Westphalian Peace Treaty brought the Thirty Years War to an end in 1648, it prescribed what many political settlements have stipulated before and thereafter: eternal forgetting and amnesty for all the offenses, cruelties, and crimes committed during the previous war. It was forbidden to debate them in public, for fear that they would create new tensions and conflicts.4

The documents that ended the Second World War held the opposite message. They required that the crimes of the war and the guilt of the losers be openly dealt with. This had something to do with the nature of World War II: The denazification and democratization of Germany had been one of the declared war aims of the Allies. In contrast to wars in previous centuries, the Second World War had been defined, conducted, and legitimized as a total war, implying a fundamental fight over values and worldviews. It had been a war justified as a moral crusade and a defense of civilization by the Allies.5 It followed that, after 1945, war crimes and war criminals had to be discovered, exposed, and punished—as revenge, as a contribution to justice, and as a strategy for making the former enemy and the world “safe for democracy,” although the victors were committed to very different concepts of democracy.

The ways in which Germans have dealt with their Nazi past have deeply changed. To a minor extent, these shifts were due to new results of historical research and changing historical knowledge. To a much larger extent, they resulted from the changing constellations within which Germans in West and East related to their past in order to meet the changing challenges of their present. At any time different and conflicting ways of remembering, forgetting, and repressing the past, of evaluating and interpreting the Nazi period, coexisted and
Dealing with Difficult Pasts

influenced one another. There was always much heterogeneity. Still, with respect to how Germans in the West and the East dealt with their Nazi past, one can try to distinguish four different periods: 1945–1948, from the late 1940s to the late 1950s, the “long 1960s,” and the years from the mid-1970s until 1989/90.6

POSTWAR YEARS

In the immediate postwar period, between 1945 and 1948, the main driving forces behind most efforts to expose the atrocities and the guilt of National Socialist Germany were the victors, who now held power in occupied Germany. The domestic forces behind the “denazification” of 1945–1948 were less important, but they also existed. There were small antifascist committees, composed of Germans on the left; there was an early confession of guilt by the Protestant churches right after the war. Moreover, there were German leaders like Konrad Adenauer and Kurt Schumacher in the West or Walter Ulbricht in the East who had returned from exile, from prison, or from a marginalized position, who had suffered under the previous regime, and who now took a clear moral stand against it.

The large majority of Germans, however, remained indifferent, cautious, disoriented or defensive, and, from a national point of view, defiant. While the polls showed majorities in favor of removing and punishing the main perpetrators of the previous years, there was not much commitment to this cause. Opinions varied. There was the tendency to locate responsibility for the war, the defeat, and the atrocities in a small group of leaders. Rather than seeing themselves as perpetrators, many Germans thought of themselves as victims of war and defeat, expulsion, and occupation. In those early years after 1945, only small minorities reflected and accepted, with a feeling of guilt or shame, the deep German involvement in and responsibility for Nazi crimes. Up to the 1950s majorities said that National
Socialism had been basically a good idea that was just badly implemented.

Both in the Western zones and in the Soviet zone of occupation, some hundred thousand Nazi activists and related categories were removed from power and office. Many of them were put into internment camps for months or years, in the Soviet Zone up to 1950. Media-supported campaigns were started to expose Nazi crimes. Reeducation campaigns were started in the schools and in civic life. In the East, basic changes of property rights were enacted, first in agriculture, then in industry. They were declared to be steps toward removing the social causes of fascism.

Bringing perpetrators to the courts, exposing their guilt in detail and making them known to the public, judging and punishing them with the authority of old or new laws—this became the major avenue for dealing with Nazi crimes and Nazi perpetrators in those early years. The famous Nuremberg trials took center stage, starting November 1945; they led to a large number of condemnations, and, well publicized, they exposed what Nazi Germany had done.

In the East about thirteen thousand persons were condemned because of fascist war crimes and crimes against humanity; in the West, about five thousand. Of these five thousand roughly eight hundred were sentenced to death, five hundred of whom were actually executed.

Even below this level on which activists and leaders were sentenced in numerous trials, massive denazification was taking place between 1946 and 1948, particularly in the Western zones. It was initiated and started by the occupation authorities, but the implementation was handed over to thousands of decentralized German juries. Thirteen million detailed questionnaires had to be filled out in the American zone alone. This was part of an attempt, with the help of testimony by others, to measure each person’s individual involvement in the
Dealing with Difficult Pasts

Nazi dictatorship in order to punish the most severe cases, remove from public functions those who were severely discredited, and relieve the others from further accusation and suspicion. But it turned out to be difficult to reach justice this way. The authorities were flooded by testimony that was far from being accurate and true. Evidence was distorted. Frequently, in spite of enormous efforts, heavily bureaucratic procedures, and unpleasant screenings, the outcome depended more on the friends one could mobilize against the foes on hand than on what one had really done or suffered in the preceding years. The whole process of denazification became tremendously unpopular in nearly all political camps.

By 1948/49 the Nazi system had been destroyed, Nazi ideology had been delegitimized, and new forms of government were emerging, with significant differences between West and East, under the control of the occupation powers, which were increasingly at odds with one another. The Nazi elites had been replaced, most clearly in the political sphere, less clearly in the economy, the media, the universities, and other spheres. In most respects the denazification of personnel was more thorough in the East than in the West, but in fact even in the East it was much less radical than had been thought until the 1990s, when more detailed research on the early years in the East became possible. Everywhere purging remained very limited below the leadership level. Previous crimes frequently became known and visible, but denazification became increasingly unpopular, increasingly interpreted as a revenge of the victors. The large majority of Germans concentrated on surviving in a difficult time. Worrying about and working for the immediate future appeared to be more important than reflecting on and reworking the past. There was much confusion, disorientation, and obstinacy, but certainly not a general atmosphere of guilt or shame.
THE 1950S
In 1948/49 a second phase began. The Cold War started. The growing tension between East and West radically redefined the situation. The active phase of denazification ended. The trials were largely stopped. Both in the West and in the East, the newly established German authorities, with the active consent of their respective occupation powers, made their peace with the mass of former small and not so small Nazis.

In the East the theory of Marxist-Leninist antifascism became the official creed. According to this view German fascism had largely been a plot, an instrument, the responsibility of capitalist and military elites, while the people at large had been partly seduced and partly repressed victims, not really responsible. Obviously, the socialist GDR had freed itself from those elites and removed the structural conditions of fascism, while the same elites and the old structures were said to be still alive and powerful in the Federal Republic. This was the East German view, an East German ideology and at the same time a Cold War propaganda tool to be used against the FRG.

This ideology made it possible to honor those who had resisted National Socialist rule (particularly on the left) and to take a basically critical position vis-à-vis the Nazi dictatorship stressing its socioeconomic roots, its class basis, its repressive character, and its anticommmunist thrust—its war against the Soviet Union and the world. According to this view, National Socialism was not a product of the people, of ordinary Germans, who had rather been seduced and instrumentalized by those above. According to this view, the GDR and its historical roots had little to do with German fascism. Rather, the GDR and its leaders belonged to those who had suffered from fascism and helped to defeat it. On the basis of such assumptions, memorial sites and monuments were already built in the 1950s that commemorated opponents of fascist rule and—some of—its victims. This view remained basically dominant until
Dealing with Difficult Pasts

the end of the GDR in 1989/90. To the extent that it entered
the thoughts and the feelings of normal East Germans, and to
some extent it did, East Germans never learned to say “we”
when talking about Nazi crimes.8

Such a self-congratulatory, self-exculpating theory of anti-
fascism was absent in the West. Here the decade between the
late forties and the late fifties was contradictory. On the one
hand this was, as far as the Nazi crimes were concerned, a de-
cade of relative silence. The philosopher Hermann Lübbe has
interpreted this widespread silence of the 1950s, this silence
about responsibility for the crimes and atrocities of the Nazi
dictatorship, as a helpful strategy, as a healing period, in a so-
ciety in which many had been involved and become guilty in
one way or another.9 This strategy included pardoning many
of those who had been condemned in the previous period of
denazification, and taking back civil servants and others who
had been removed from office because of collaboration with
the Nazi dictatorship. In this period of the Cold War the front
against communism and the perceived Soviet threat became,
in West Germany, more important than developing a sober and
self-critical account of one’s own fascist past. The 1950s, by
and large, were a period of relative silence about and denial of
the Nazi past.

At the same time, however, the Adenauer government and
the political elites stood firm against any institutional or ideo-
logical revival of Nazism. A small right-wing party with neo-
Nazi inclinations, the Sozialistische Reichspartei, emerged but
was quickly declared anticonstitutional in 1952 and forbidden.
Against some internal resistance, and with the help of the So-
cial Democratic opposition, Chancellor Konrad Adenauer, a
Christian Democrat, put through parliament an agreement
with major Jewish organizations and a treaty with the Israeli
government under Ben Gurion for the restitution or compen-
sation of those expropriated and damaged by the Nazis. Pay-
ments to Israel and to Jews started in the 1950s. In the long
run, they were to reach a then unexpected volume—roughly
160 billion German marks by the late 1990s. Foreign policy
considerations were involved. For Adenauer this was a step to-
ward West Germany’s regaining international recognition and
entering the network of Western policy making then clearly
dominated by the United States. Still, there was also a strong
moral dimension implied, publicly confessed, and debated
(e.g., in parliament).

There were other steps taken in the 1950s that do not re-
ally fit the overall picture of silence about and repression of
the Nazi past, allegedly dominant in the 1950s. There was the
founding of the Munich Institute of Contemporary History in
1950 with the task of doing research particularly on the period
from 1933 to 1945. There was also a gradual change in attitude
toward Stauffenberg’s and other officers’ attempt to take Hit-
ler’s life on 20 July 1944. Gradually, this act of resistance was
accepted as a moral decision, as a brave attempt and a posi-
tive tradition for the newly formed West German army and
the Federal Republic at large. This reevaluation took place in
the 1950s.10

Still, while the decade saw a clear stabilization of West
German democracy and West Germany’s turn to the West,
the country’s relation to its National Socialist past remained
largely distorted and repressed. Victims were scarcely heard,
and they were not asked to speak out. Germans talked much
more about what they had suffered than about what they had
done. By the late 1950s German collective memory had started
to diverge between East and West, and in both parts the pre-
vailing views of the Nazi past were far away from any honest
account of what had really happened.11
THE “LONG 1960s”
In the late 1950s a third period began, which lasted about two decades, but it was limited to West Germany and absent in the GDR. It was the dynamics of civil society that now set into motion, both intellectually and practically, a process of critical reevaluation of the Nazi past. Now it was no longer primarily a process conducted from above or induced from outside, but a process largely generated from inside the country, from the middle of society and its public discourses, its media and its institutions. Inside the Protestant and the Catholic churches German guilt during the war and dictatorship became a topic of self-critical discussion, particularly on the Protestant side. Influential novels and dramas appeared that helped to shape a self-critical consciousness vis-à-vis the pre-1945 past: Heinrich Böll’s Wo warst Du Adam (a forerunner in 1951), Günter Grass’s Blechtrommel (1959), and Rolf Hochhuth’s Der Stellvertreter (1963)—to mention just three. Historians, social scientists, and intellectuals of the “1945 generation” (e.g., Jürgen Habermas, Hans-Ulrich Wehler, Martin Walser) helped to develop a new interpretation of German guilt and responsibility, self-critical and forward looking at the same time. Scandals emerged when a new brand of critical journalists discovered that many former Nazis had returned to positions of power and influence. The Ludwigsburg Centre for Judicial Inquiries and Research on Nazi Crimes was established, and it produced evidence to be used in the trials that were reopened in the late 1950s. The famous Frankfurt Auschwitz trial took place in 1963. It was widely publicized, and so had been the Eichmann trial of 1961 in Jerusalem. The impact on public opinion, on a new generation of Germans, was remarkable.12

Soon the conflict of generations played a role and was played out in public—in West Germany, not in the GDR. The radical youth movement associated with an outburst of protests
throughout Western Europe in 1968 expressed its distrust of the older generation and the system it had built up after 1945 (or “restored,” as the young radicals preferred to say). Protesters inside and outside the universities revealed suppressed memories of Nazi crimes, accusing those involved as well as those who had so long been silent about them. The issue of collective memory became, for the first time, central to a social movement, but the Nazi crimes were more exposed than deplored. They were revealed and ascribed to a generation of the past and to a system that was already widely condemned, anyway. In the rhetoric of the protesters, it was not “we” but “they” who did it. Still, a painful and dramatic process of historical reassessment was on the way, and it was not limited to protesting youngsters. It took place inside important institutions as well, in parliament for example. Several controversial and honest parliamentary debates took place on whether Nazi capital crimes should fall under the statute of limitation (Verjährung) or not. Those debates, which took place in the 1960s and 1970s, gave a new quality to the public recognition of Nazi—of German—guilt.\textsuperscript{13}

In other words: the media, the courtroom, the streets, and parliament—these were the arenas in which the identity of the Federal Republic was, in a way, renegotiated in the 1960s and 1970s by changing its collective memories, its relation to the Nazi past. This relation continued to be controversial and painful, there continued to be much denial of guilt and involvement, but from now on this debate became a central element of West German self-understanding. Nothing like that could happen in the GDR. It was the difference between an increasingly civil society in the West and a relatively closed society under dictatorial rule in the East that accounted for these contrasts in dealing with the Nazi past.\textsuperscript{14}
FROM THE LATE 1970S TO THE LATE 1980s
This process of critical self-revaluation has had its limits, its ups and downs, but in principle it has continued—against countertendencies and opposition—through the succeeding decades. Additionally, in the late 1970s a fourth period began in the West German history of collective memory of the Nazi past, and this period did have a parallel in the GDR.

In the preceding period, in the 1960s and early 1970s, many Germans had dealt with their history in a rather distanced and critical way, exploring causes and consequences, discussing structures and processes, and discussing German guilt in a rather rational and sometimes abstract way. The aim was to learn from the past. People dealt with history in order to liberate themselves from it. In this respect, something changed in the mid-1970s. “Dig where you are” became a slogan. “Roots” were sought. It was only now that “memory” (Erinnerung) became a central concept. Interest in memorial sites began to grow. History became interesting again, not just as an object of study and a resource for learning, but as something to be internalized, as a basis of identity. Whatever the reasons for this change, it was combined with new expectations toward one’s own history, which became more interesting and even moving. In the 1980s, large exhibitions on regional history, on the ruling dynasties of previous centuries, on Prussia indicated a new public attitude toward one’s past in a broad sense. Comparable trends were visible in the GDR, where a new debate on “heritage” and “tradition” opened the way toward a broader, slightly less ideological, more positive view of national history. Both Germanys competed in this process of rediscovering national history as a basis of identity.15

The relation toward the Nazi past changed again. On the one hand the Nazi crimes appeared even more horrific. As individuals turned to their own history in order to internalize
it, this criminal system was bound to become even more of a stumbling block than before. On the other hand people now became interested in action, experience, and perception, in the subjective dimensions, in the internal side of history. Betroffenheit, “concern,” became a central word. It became more acceptable to speak of “we” when speaking about Nazi crimes.

It was only now that the mass murder of the European Jews moved into the center of the commemoration of the Nazi past.

The 1979 showing in Germany of the American TV series Holocaust was an important step. What it showed had been known and discussed before, but now it was shown in a way that made the public betroffen (concerned). Victims and perpetrators appeared on the screen. During the following years the concept Holocaust was adopted by everyday language and scholarly literature. While the number of people who could testify about the Holocaust from personal experience quickly decreased, the memory of the Holocaust, its victims and perpetrators, became more concrete, frequently visualized, and moving. Besides the media and exhibitions, memorial days started to play a central role, for example in 1983, the fiftieth anniversary of the Nazi seizure of power, with a public debate in the Berlin Reichstag building.16

In 1985, on the occasion of the fortieth anniversary of Germany’s unconditional surrender in 1945, a widely publicized speech of Richard von Weizsäcker, president of the Federal Republic, made the West German relation to the Nazi period, its crimes, and its guilt clearer than ever before. For him the eighth of May 1945 was primarily a day of liberation, only secondly a day of defeat. No previous president would have been able to say this. Weizsäcker knew how to find a language that combined knowledge with mourning, recognition of German guilt with a new sense of dignity.17

Controversies did not die out. An outstanding example was
Dealing with Difficult Pasts

the so-called historians’ debate—*Historikerstreit*—of 1986. Commemorating the Nazi period and the Nazi crimes did not stop being painful, but in spite of the increasing passage of time, memories and commemorations did not diminish. Toward the end of the 1980s the Nazi past was more present in the German collective memory than ever before. It continued to be a burden, but a productive one. Over the decades the memory of the Nazi period has served as a stimulus for many Germans to commit themselves in one way or another to help building a better Germany that would not allow similar catastrophes to happen. In the 1980s and 1990s, the memory of the Nazi past even became something like a dark background against which the achievements of the Federal Republic were assessed with some satisfaction and pride. The memory of the Nazi dictatorship has become an essential ingredient of West German identity.

This was much less the case for the Germans in the GDR because of the reasons already mentioned. Still, even there, in the 1980s people became more willing to face their own Nazi past in a more concrete way, including the crimes against the Jews (which, until then, had been largely ignored in the GDR). It was on the ninth of November 1988 that the antisemitic Pogrom of 1938 was officially commemorated in the GDR for the first time. Until then 9 November had been the day to commemorate the beginning of the Revolution of 1918. East German authorities supported rebuilding the synagogue in East Berlin’s Oranienburger Straße. For that they had different motives, the hope for additional international recognition among them. After the March elections of 1990, when the GDR still existed but for the first time with a freely elected parliament, this parliament, the Volkskammer, began its official work by issuing a declaration in which it acknowledged and accepted its heritage of German guilt during the Nazi period, particularly for the crimes against the Jews.
Remembering the GDR after Unification: Different Layers, Controversial Debates

One cannot expect that the commemoration of the GDR after 1990 would resemble the commemoration of Nazi Germany after 1945. After all, the differences between the two German dictatorships were overwhelming. The so-called Third Reich had brought about the Holocaust, racist repression, and a terrible war in which it finally disappeared, bloodily by defeat from outside, stubborn and with support from its population until the end. The GDR had not generated anything like genocide, nor had it started a war. It was not brought to an end by a bloody defeat but by implosion and the force of a popular uprising from within. It had not disappeared after twelve years like Hitler’s Third Reich but had existed for forty years. So it had had time to mitigate the initial rigor of its repression and to temper its early revolutionary energy. It had left its Stalinist totalitarian phase behind and became a post-Stalinist and—in a way—post-totalitarian dictatorship in the 1970s and 1980s. Whereas the Nazi dictatorship was very much homegrown and German, the GDR was to a large extent the product of defeat and occupation, of Soviet decisions and support. It disappeared when the Soviets were no longer willing—or able—to fully support it. Hitler ruled over Germany as a whole (and soon over other parts of Europe), whereas the SED regime was restricted to one part of Germany. The GDR was always only one of two German states, the much smaller and weaker one. This was reflected by the way the GDR ended. It was absorbed by the West German Federal Republic, which extended itself farther east. Whereas after 1945 Germans had to deal with a dictatorial past that, in principle, was the past of them all, it was different after 1989/90. Now Germany dealt with a dictatorial past that was the past of only one of its parts and of a minor proportion of all Germans.
All this reduces not only the similarities to be expected but also the comparability of the breaks of 1945 and 1989/90.\textsuperscript{20}

Still, comparing the post-1945 and the post-1989 eras with respect to how Germans dealt with the legacy of their two different dictatorships became a major topic of political debate and of scholarly discourse right after 1989/90. Different positions were taken. On one end of the spectrum were conservative West Germans and East German civil rights activists who, together, stressed the dictatorial character of the GDR, denounced it as an example of totalitarianism, stressed its similarities with the Nazi dictatorship, and claimed that the replacement of East German elites and the rejection of whatever was left of the GDR did not go far enough. On the other end of the spectrum were ex-citizens of the GDR who had identified themselves with their state and its principles. They deeply resented its being compared to the Nazi dictatorship, and they stressed that the GDR had been established as an antifascist system with a sharp front against the Nazi Empire. For them the incorporation of the GDR into the enlarged Federal Republic and the delegitimization of the GDR by historical discourses under West German hegemony went much too far and amounted to nothing more than an intellectual “colonization” of the former GDR by the new masters in the West. There were, and there still are, many positions in between these two poles.\textsuperscript{21}

There were no internment camps for GDR activists after 1989/90, nor were any of them sentenced to death. While the Nazi party had been outlawed in 1945, the SED—the state party that had ruled the GDR—was transformed but continued to exist with a new program, a new leadership, and a new name: the Party of Democratic Socialism (PDS). [In the meantime, the PDS has become the major part of a new left-wing party—Die Linke—which has gained support in the Western states of Germany as well.] It is true, most of the basic eco-
nomic and social policy decisions of the previous forty-five years in the East were reversed after 1989, but not in every respect. As an example one can mention the property of the large agricultural estates that had been taken away from their owners, many of them noble, without compensation right after the end of the war under Russian occupation. Those families did not get back, after 1989, what they had lost.

Still, the political system of the GDR was as thoroughly destroyed in 1990 and after as the Nazi system had been dismantled in 1945 and the following years. The economic order and the political system of the Federal Republic were extended to the East without any serious modification. The political elite of the GDR was removed and replaced at least as thoroughly as the Nazi elite after 1945. There are many sectors—for instance the universities—where the replacement of the leading personnel has been more radical in the East after 1989/90 than it had been in the West after 1945.

Certainly, there were no foreign occupation powers after 1989/90. The GDR’s unification with the Federal Republic and its self-dissolution by this act was supported by a large majority of East Germans, as became clear in the elections of 18 March 1990. But, later on, many East Germans perceived the West Germans, who came over to rule, finance, and transform the East according to their criteria, as something like an occupation power. In some respects this was true. West Germans presided over the radical institutional change and thorough leadership replacement in the East. West Germans initiated trials against selected GDR leaders, who were now found guilty and responsible for the shooting and killing at the East German border. These were highly publicized acts, which were also meant to delegitimize the former regime in the eyes of the population but which sometimes led to opposite reactions, to resentment against the victors and their legal administration, against what was sometimes called Siegerjustiz (“victor’s law”).
The fundamentally asymmetric relation between West and East deeply influenced the way in which the GDR was remembered and its history was dealt with after its collapse and accession to the FRG in 1990. There was no period of silence and merciful amnesia, no phase of unscrupulous repression of facts and guilt as there had been after the end of the first German dictatorship until the late 1950s. After 1989/90, active minorities both in the West and in the East, with different motives, led drives and campaigns of exposure and research, of critical reflection and moral judgment, which targeted guilt and failure, perpetrators and victims, crimes and repression within the former GDR. A large agency was founded, under the leadership of Joachim Gauck, formerly a dissident minister in the GDR, that had to investigate and publicize the distressing legacy of the East Germany State Security (Stasi). In contrast to the situation after 1945, there was now much public accusation and defense, exposure and debate. After all, the [Western] majority of Germans in the reunited country had little to fear and to lose from such exposure and soul-searching, quite in contrast to the majority in Germany after 1945. The media were eager to serve as amplifiers and contributors to this process of controversial commemoration. Those attacked because of their support for and collaboration with the old system could also use the media for defending themselves. All this was very different from the years after 1945, when the media were less powerful and not all-pervasive.22

As a consequence, the history of the GDR is now very well known. Particularly its dictatorial, repressive, illiberal sides have been thoroughly exposed, with special emphasis on its early decades. History as an academic discipline has contributed its share. For nearly twenty years the history of the GDR has been a booming field of historical research. The resulting literature is abundant. At the initiative of former East German civil rights activists, the parliament decided to install two
commissions of inquiry, which have worked for years. They produced a huge mass of sources, analyses, and interpretations before they were transformed into a stable endowment with related tasks. Exhibitions, TV programs, talk shows, movies, and novels have dealt with various aspects of life in the GDR.23

Resistance against revelations has usually been weak. The passions of revealing and exposing, of accusing and defending have been remarkably strong and widespread. In all these respects, dealing with the second German dictatorship after 1989/90 has been fundamentally different from dealing with the first one after 1945. At the same time, patterns of thought, language, and action that had been developed in the debates about Nazi Germany over the decades deeply influenced the way in which the memory and the legacy of the GDR were treated after 1989/90. Comparing the two systems — sometimes stressing the differences, sometimes the similarities — has become a major strategy of commemorating and interpreting both of them, of dealing with their legacies, and of positioning both in sharp contrast to the Federal Republic with its liberal, democratic, postdictatorial, “post-totalitarian” order. Elements of an antitotalitarian consensus emerged, which rejected both types of twentieth-century totalitarianism in which Germany had played such leading roles.24 This comparative element seems specific to the way the communist regime is remembered and its legacies are dealt with in Germany, quite in contrast to the ways in which the communist regimes and their legacies are remembered and dealt with in Poland, the Czech Republic, Hungary, and the other postcommunist countries of east-central and Eastern Europe. This helps to explain why the communist legacies have been more clearly exposed, scrutinized, rejected, and reworked in Germany than in most other former Eastern bloc countries with a communist heritage.25

The emerging view of the GDR is not homogeneous. There are former citizens of the GDR who, in retrospect, stress the
achievements, the “normalcy,” the safety of life in the GDR, qualities that they contrast with the aggressive competition, the hectic speed, the pronounced inequality, the risks, and the “Americanization” of present-day Germany. Nostalgic glances into what is remembered as a better past are not altogether absent. Other voices—in literature, the movies, and public debate, but also in academia—emphasize that life in the GDR was not fully controlled by the dictatorial regime but was full of paradoxes and private niches.

Still, public commemoration of the GDR concentrates on its repressive elements as well as on the victims of its dictatorial rule and repression. At least 620 memorial sites existed in Germany in 2007 commemorating aspects of communist rule and its victims in the Soviet zone of occupation and the GDR, nearly all of them erected after 1990. Compared with this, attempts to establish a less critical, more positive tradition of remembering worthwhile elements of the socialist GDR past have remained futile, marginal, or restricted to some quarters of the political left, for example in the context of the tradition of Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht. A deeply critical view of the GDR has become dominant, which, with good reason and a growing mountain of evidence, depicts the GDR as a dictatorship: less democratic and liberal, less efficient and successful, less viable and valuable than the West, ultimately a failure, ultimately a blind alley, an aberration, or simply a “state of injustice” (Unrechtsstaat). But the debates continue. Competing and controversial interpretations are part of public discourse in the present time and intrinsically related to the controversies between political groups and positions as well as their competition for recognition and power. These debates have become even more heated and more visible in the public arena recently. The twentieth anniversary of the 1989 breakdown of communist rule has contributed to the revival of public interest in the GDR after it had slightly declined since the late 1990s.26
Memories Compete and Reinforce One Another

The collapse of communism, the dissolution of the GDR, and reunification have helped to make 1989/90 a major turning point of German and European history. It has been perceived as a dramatic break and, increasingly, as product of a revolution, and it continues to be interpreted as one of the major caesuras of the twentieth century. It was frequently feared in the early 1990s that the historical weight of 1989/90 would soon overshadow the memory of 1945, that other decisive caesura of the twentieth century, particularly since a major result of World War II, the political division of Germany and Europe between East and West, was now to be revised and corrected. It was feared that the memory of the second German dictatorship (the GDR) and its dramatic dissolution would weaken the memory of the first German dictatorship (the Nazi Empire), its crimes and its victims. It was feared that the increasingly vivid remembrance of Stalinism would relativize the remembrance of Nazism.

Indeed, there have been instances that nourished this suspicion. Competition of memories has played a role and continues to do so. I shall come back to this problem at the end of this chapter. But first of all it should be emphasized that remembering dictatorships does not necessarily follow the rules of a zero-sum game. Gaining recognition on one side does not have to mean loosing it on the other. The increasing knowledge and memory of communist persecution has not reduced the knowledge and memory of fascist crimes. Quite on the contrary, it seems that dealing—in public debates, collective remembrance, and symbolic politics—with the second German dictatorship (GDR) has had the effect of vitalizing and sharpening consciousness of the first (Nazi Germany) simultaneously. At least in the public arena topics related to the history of the Third Reich, World War II, and the Holocaust have not been moved to the background since 1990. They are more present than ever.
In the 1990s films like Steven Spielberg’s *Schindler’s List*, best sellers like Daniel Goldhagen’s *Hitler’s Willing Executioners*, and numerous TV documentaries that heavily relied on oral history and personal testimony brought a new concreteness to the public remembrance of Third Reich–related topics. Victims and perpetrators, their sufferings and their crimes, took center stage instead of structures, processes, and constellations. Emotions were taken seriously and openly incorporated into public recollections. Authenticity sometimes became more important than explanation—a problematic development. Questions of morality and guilt, responsibility and human failure were publicly addressed, though less in the spirit of accusation and defensiveness that had permeated the controversies of the 1960s and 1970s. *Erinnerung* (remembrance) became a central concern, an aim in itself. Giving the past the recognition it deserves, and giving a voice to the victims, became matters of historical justice.28

In 1999, a large and multipartisan majority of the German federal parliament decided to build, in the center of Berlin, a very visible monument commemorating the mass murder of the European Jews. This decision brought to an end an intensive and controversial debate about the desirability and the form of such a monument, a public debate that had lasted more than ten years. The monument was inaugurated in 2005. Another example: an exhibition dealing with the crimes of regular soldiers of the German army (*Wehrmachtsausstellung*), initiated by a nongovernmental organization, was shown in many German cities over several years. It triggered public protests, and since it exaggerated some of what German soldiers had done, it had to be revised and corrected. But its basic critical and sobering message remained intact and powerful, and it reached a broad public. There was also a long and painful debate about employing “slave labor” in factories and other enterprises during World War II, usually foreigners who were
brought to Germany against their will and were compelled to work for German employers for a very low wage and frequently under repressive conditions. Surviving victims and their families filed suits against German corporations in American courts. They were partly successful. Finally a joint initiative of business and government collected several billion German marks in order to pay indemnities to the surviving victims and their families.\(^{29}\)

In contrast to frequently expressed hopes or fears, this part of the German past has not faded away. It has remained a highly sensitive subject of public debate and sufficiently hot to produce scandals when unexpected revelations appear, as in the case of Günter Grass and his early affiliation with the ss, or when a public figure seems to move outside the established consensus. This was, for example, the case in 2007 when the powerful prime minister of Baden-Württemberg, Günther Oettinger, at the memorial service for Hans Filbinger, one of his predecessors, attempted to present him as an anti-Nazi, in contrast to what he had been (which was why he had had to leave office roughly thirty years earlier). Oettinger became a target of heavy public criticism until he distanced himself from his statements. When the German pope Benedict XVI recently condoned and reinstated a British bishop who had a record of denying the Holocaust, he was heavily criticized even by the German chancellor, who is usually reluctant to jump into public controversy but found it necessary in this case to take a public stand and admonish the Vatican. “It appears that Hitler and national socialism are already stirring up the ‘third generation.’ Measured by the media output, interest in these subjects is continuing to grow,” wrote Norbert Frei in 2005, and he stated: “Soviel Hitler war nie.”\(^{30}\)

Nevertheless, things have changed in the last two decades. I want to emphasize the institutionalization of memory on the one hand, its diversification on the other. More than sixty
Dealing with Difficult Pasts

years after the end of World War II and the Holocaust, the number of victims, perpetrators, and other persons who were directly involved one way or another has become small. It would be wrong to say that personal concern with German guilt and Nazi atrocities has faded away. But the remembrance of the Nazi past is now much less a matter of direct communication and personal recollection than in earlier decades. It has become a topic of the media and a duty of political representatives more than ever before. It has been turned into an institutionalized affair, in connection with memorial sites, memorial days, memorial institutions, specialized staff, and public events. The institutionalization of collective memory guarantees its survival, but changes its nature and leads to nonintended consequences.

The recent quest for eyewitnesses and authenticity, which was mentioned above, can be seen as a reaction to the increasing formalization and standardization of remembrance rhetoric in the public sphere. There may be an increasing gap between what is publicly commemorated and what is talked about in the private sphere (e.g., within the families). Now and then one can hear and read—clearly outside the rightist political camp, in which German guilt continues to be denied in national conservative or neofascist milieus—subtle and less subtle expressions of reservation and even protest against the massiveness of institutionalized and depersonalized waves of collective remembrance.

The impact of victims’ organizations has grown. Certainly, victims have always been part of the process of demands and denials, negotiations and conflicts, that underlie collective commemoration. But in the early period surviving victims were rather quiet. They were reluctant to raise their voices, and they were hardly urged to do so. Up to the 1980s, they did not play a dominant role in the developments sketched above. Since the 1990s, however, organized claims for public recognition have
become the most important force behind further institutionalization of collective memories in official symbols and representations, also in the conflicts over restitution and recompensation.\textsuperscript{35} Related to this is a certain selectiveness of collective memory. In the 1980s the Holocaust gained the central place in the collective remembrance of the Nazi period (in the West, not so much in the East) and has maintained this central place ever since, very much at the cost of other aspects of Nazi terror, war, and dictatorship. To mention just one example: what German troops and civilians did to the Poles, the Russians, and other Slavic population groups between 1939 and 1945 is much less present in the collective memory (although in this respect differences continue to exist between East and West Germans).\textsuperscript{36} Certainly, the unevenness and selectivity of public commemoration are partly due to the different degrees to which victims’ organizations can make themselves felt.

So much for the institutionalization of historical memories of Nazi crimes and victims and some of its consequences. On the other hand, a pluralization or diversification of collective memory has taken place and continues to take place in the present. Here we come back to the relation between the two German dictatorships as references for collective remembrance. As far as the collective memory of the second German dictatorship is concerned, personal memories, direct communications, and testimonies of victims, perpetrators, and observers are still numerous and influential. Many of those who lived then are still around and speak out. Nevertheless, attempts to institutionalize collective memories are actively pursued, in controversial debates about memorial sites and memorial days, in controversies about the distribution of financial resources, institutional arrangements, and symbolic acts. Again, victims’ organizations play a major role—and compete with each other.\textsuperscript{37}

As mentioned above, the public memory of the GDR and
Dealing with Difficult Pasts

of Stalinist terror did not, as a rule, lead to marginalizing the memory of the Nazi dictatorship and of fascist crimes. On the contrary, dealing with the second German dictatorship put the first one on the agenda, too, in a comparative way. This way, both memories tended to reinforce each other. But in other respects, they tended to compete. When, for example, former camps like Buchenwald (near Weimar) and Sachsenhausen (near Berlin), which had been used as concentration camps by the Nazis until 1945 and by the Soviets as “special camps” (Speziallager) right after 1945, were to be designed or restructured as public memorial sites, difficult debates about the correct presentation of both types of persecution and both categories of victims (and about the relation between them) emerged. Something like a competition of memories and memory politics became manifest. When political decisions were sought about “comprehensive concepts” of commemorating the victims of both dictatorships, for instance in the federal parliament in June 2004, the debates led to controversies and to concerns such as those expressed by Jewish speakers who warned against the danger of leveling out and minimizing the specific inhumane quality of the Holocaust. Such debates have taken place in Germany but also on the European level, as when the former Latvian foreign minister, on a public forum in Leipzig 2004, described “Nazism and communism as equally criminal,” which led to a harsh protest by Salomon Korn, who spoke for the Central Council of Jews in Germany. Victims of communism and Stalinism in particular—and their organizations—feel less recognized in the German “culture of remembrance” than the victims of fascism and National Socialism and their organizations. They do have a point. The difficult comparison between different types of mass crimes and their victims continues and fuels public debates. Comparisons between Stalin’s and Hitler’s terror, between communist and fascist dictatorships, have long ceased to be taboo, while those
who look on them with accuracy and responsibility continue
to stress the differences between them and the outstanding
particularity of the Holocaust.38

The ongoing diversification of collective memory has yet
another dimension. In the last decade it has become much
more common and accepted to publicly commemorate
Germans—not persecuted by the Nazis—as victims, that
is, German victims of World War II. The destruction of Ger-
man cities like Dresden by Allied bombing raids has become
a major topic covered by best-selling books and the media.
The fate of German Pows has raised new interest. The expul-
sion of millions of Germans from Poland, Czechoslovakia, and
other countries around 1945—no doubt a huge act of ethnic
cleansing that changed the central and Eastern European set-
tlement pattern in a decisive way—receives much more pub-
lic remembrance and discussion than in previous decades, par-
ticularly since ethnic cleansing became a major topic of public
debate and general condemnation with the Balkan Wars of the
1990s. There are controversial debates about how to commem-
orate the suffering of Germans expelled from their homelands
around 1945, and these debates have affected Germany’s rela-
tions with Poland and the Czech Republic. When the Red
Army occupied East Germany, German civilians, no doubt,
became victims. People were killed, women were raped, men
were deported or put into camps whether they had been guilty
of war crimes or not. All this was not unknown during recent
decades. But now it is much more a topic of novels, media re-
ports, tv series, and public discussions than it was ten, twenty,
or thirty years ago. Victims, that is, mostly the offspring of vic-
tims along with their organizations, play an important role,
particularly expellees’ organizations. They fight for the pub-
lic recognition of previous suffering and, as others do, for the
institutionalization of collective remembrance, such as in the
form of a “Center against Expulsions,” centrally located in Berlin. Such a center will probably be established soon.  

When reviewing this trend toward the pluralization of collective memory, one must not forget that there exists a long and problematic tradition of superficially equating “red” and “brown” dictatorships. It is equally important to know that emphasizing the German victims of World War II, their sufferings through defeat, expulsion, and occupation, has been part of a long and even more problematic tradition of right-wing thought and politics in which German losses were counted up against German crimes (by overstressing their similarities), in which German responsibility for the National Socialist crimes was relativized and anti-Western resentments were cultivated. The categorical distinction between the Allied air raids and the Holocaust must remain clear: the former a cruel, devastating, and morally questionable part of a strategy meant to accelerate the defeat of an enemy within the context of an increasingly total war, the latter the senseless and criminal mass murder of millions of persons exclusively on the basis of what was seen as their race, without any justification as a strategy of improving the military chances of winning and ending the war. In addition it is necessary to be clear about cause and effect, responsibilities and consequences. Certainly, the destruction of German cities and of parts of those cities’ populations, the mass expulsion and ethnic cleansing, as well as the suffering of German civilians under the troops of occupation, resulted from decisions for which the victors—or some of them—bore responsibility. At the same time they were consequences of a war of aggression, destruction, and annihilation that Germany had waged. The passions of remembrance must not obscure the historical realities in which responsibilities are, in this case, clearly and unevenly distributed.

As long as such caveats are respected and boundaries main-
tained, the observable diversification of memory is nothing to be feared or deplored. In a time in which the public commemoration of victims has gained much ground nearly everywhere and has become a central concern in many political cultures, certainly in Germany and Israel,\textsuperscript{42} it is neither surprising nor unavoidable but a matter of historical justice (and of political influence) that victims of war, defeat, and occupation as well as victims of Stalinist terror and communist dictatorship—including those who were born later but see themselves standing in these traditions—speak out and want to be recognized as such, besides and in relation to victims of fascist terror and others. Historical memory tends to spill over; it is a process that cannot be neatly departmentalized, restricted, or withheld. As a consequence, memories in a community or a culture must be related to one another, compared, contextualized, and reworked. They are not the sole property of their specific claimants but are of concern to the community as well. This is where historians can be of help. While historical memories have frequently motivated and triggered historical studies and research, the methods of the historical discipline are indispensable for assessing, criticizing, and contextualizing historical memories.\textsuperscript{43}

As a rule, memory exists in the plural form. Memories aiming for public recognition and claiming public resources may compete with one another, particularly as far as they relate to actors or victims, achievements or sufferings, for which singularity and perhaps even incomparability are claimed.\textsuperscript{44} But with respect to intensity and truth, the existence of different memories may strengthen each of them as long as they are not proclaimed in splendid isolation from but entangled with each other, in processes of public commemoration, and in compatibility with the principles of historical research and its findings. Here the role of historians—and of a functioning civil society with a public space—continues to be highly important. This
is what the recent experience with commemorating two different types of dictatorship in Germany and Europe has shown. It is not impossible that the recently intensified remembrance of Germans as victims of war and defeat, expulsion, and occupation can be brought into a similarly productive relationship with the remembrance of the victims and perpetrators, the sufferings and responsibilities under both German dictatorships. In these regards, comparison is a central operation. It deals with similarities and particularly with differences.

This chapter has dealt with pasts and with memories mainly in a national framework. It is about Germany. No question, this is legitimate. National Socialism was, first of all, a German affair. The GDR was a German dictatorship, although it could not have existed without Soviet power and support. Collective memories of the past are important for the collective identities and responsibilities of the present. Our collective identities, responsibilities, and capabilities to act continue to be defined, to a large extent, in national terms. This is why it continues to be meaningful and desirable to reflect on the history and the memories of a nation or a nation-state and share collective memories in national frameworks.

But, increasingly, research is revealing transnational dimensions of our pasts and memories. Increasingly, our identities, responsibilities, and political actions transcend the framework of nation-states. Increasingly, Europe is becoming a reality, and globalization proceeds. In addition to comparing national pasts and memories, it is meaningful to study their interrelations. In what sense do we have common European pasts and common European memories, however heterogeneous, conflicting, and contested? They differ a lot; one should not be surprised. But can they be made compatible? The transnationalization of memory has only begun.45
V Historians, Fashion, and Truth: The Last Fifty Years
In 1901, the English author and scholar Samuel Butler noted: “It has been said that though God cannot alter the past, historians can.” Again and again, historians have been commended or mocked for producing new pasts. More recently the Czech novelist Milan Kundera added a particular twist to this discussion, when he wrote with irony and exaggeration: “The past is full of life and eager to irritate us, provoke and insult us, tempt us to destroy or repaint it. The only reason people want to be masters of the future is to change the past.”

Indeed, with astonishment, irony, or respect, observers from outside the historical profession frequently note the quick change of historical interpretations over time. No doubt they have a point. Any survey of twentieth-century historiography shows that the thematic preferences within the profession have remarkably changed, and so have the questions and answers asked and given with respect to single themes. The mood, the methods, and the products of the discipline have changed much more deeply and swiftly than I expected when I started as a social historian in the 1960s.

How are we to describe and account for this dynamic change? Since Georg Simmel’s “Sociology of Fashion” (1904/5), at the latest, there has developed an interesting literature on fashion and change. From this point of view, fast change is normal, and we see change occurring in waves. According to the laws of fashion, old views and patterns fade away or are marginalized,
although they are not falsified or proven useless. New departures are valued highly as such, as long as the new does not appear to be merely the idiosyncratic preference of just a few individuals but possibly the indicator of a trend. According to the laws of fashion, change is driven by individuals’ needs for distinction and recognition, but it occurs in parallel ways among members of a population owing to the phenomenon of herding. Both the wish to be different from others and the wish to imitate others play an intricate role.³

But is such a fashion-related approach adequate for explaining the changing agenda of a scholarly discipline, which, after all, has something to do with the search for truth in one way or another? From a truth-oriented perspective one would have to ask whether the observed changes within the discipline can be seen as advancement, as approximation to a better understanding of historical reality, to a fairer interpretation of complex relations, to more valid theses with an intersubjective reach—as “progress” according to the discipline’s rules.⁴

Perhaps there is a third way of accounting for developments in the discipline of history, namely by seeing the changing questions and answers historians come up with as responses to changing needs of the times in which they are living, as acts of communication with the changing cultures to which they belong.⁵

How should one account for the observable changes within the discipline: as mechanisms of fashion, closer approximations to truth, or dynamics of communication between the historians and their environment? Instead of discussing this in an abstract way, I want to take one example: research and writing about World War I, particularly about World War I from a German perspective.⁶ I am not interested in the specifics of historical research on this topic, but I use it as a case for illustrating major changes within the discipline.
An Example: Changing Views of World War I

Historical debates about World War I began before the war had ended. Up to the late 1950s political, military, and diplomatic studies dominated. It is true there were other approaches evident as early as the 1920s and 1930s, as documented by the Carnegie Endowment series called the Social and Economic History of the War. But clearly, the great powers’ responsibility for the war, the question of war guilt, the causes, mechanisms, and consequences of diplomatic and military actions, took center stage; they were debated with passion, on the basis of ever-mounting volumes of sources. World War II changed the political and intellectual mood but not the basic approach.7

A major change started in the late 1950s, continued throughout the 1960s, and reached its climax in the early 1970s. It was connected to the stormy rise of social history. Different things happened in the historiography about World War I.

On the one hand, historians learned (or at least tried) to explain foreign policy moves—including military decisions and conflicts—in terms of domestic developments, by relating changes in the international arena to the interests and strategies of the elites, the passions of the people, the conflicts within the societies of the countries that competed and struggled with one another in the international arena. This represented a turn toward the primacy of internal factors even though international conflict and responsibility for the war remained the main explanandum. In Germany this paradigmatic change was fought through in the highly controversial Fritz Fischer debate around 1960, which received much public attention, shook the profession, and initiated a mighty stream of new, revisionist, productive research.8

On the other hand, and a little later, historians learned to turn their lenses fully around and ask what the war meant for
internal developments, how the war affected constitutional change as well as social relations and economic development. Historians researched the changing relations between social groups as well as between them and the state—take Gerald D. Feldman’s *Army, Industry and Labour* as an example. And historians moved, to quote Eric Hobsbawm, from social history to the history of society, discussing the changing relationship between a war economy, class society, and an increasingly authoritarian but overburdened state in a period of almost total war. Marxist ideas played a role. Such studies could gain additional intellectual leverage by exploring long-term continuity and change: Did the war accelerate societal trends already long on the way, such as the emancipation of women? Did it reverse past trends, such as the long-term rise of living standards (which was turned back by the war)? Did it bring in new factors, such as the brutalizing of social relations? What did the war mean for the history of democracy and dictatorship in the following decades? The mood of this social historical turn was highly structural, macrohistorical, and analytical.  

But there was a third bundle of changes, in the 1970s and later, that made social history less structuralist, more experience- and action-related, and more friendly to microhistory. One input came from women and gender historians, the other from everyday history (*Alltagsgeschichte*). These new developments of the 1970s and 1980s did not explode or transcend social history, but they reshaped and enriched it after hot debates and controversy—by starting to integrate the long-neglected gender dimension, by emphasizing subjective aspects of history, and by bringing agency back into the historical narrative. Research on World War I reflected this by investigating, for example, how hunger and scarcity, fear and mobility were experienced by women and men, by young and old; how families came under stress; and what all that meant for changing patterns of life, for the political culture, and for the weakening
of the social fabric when the war dragged on, defeat loomed, and revolution broke out.\textsuperscript{10}

But in certain respects the \textit{Alltagsgeschichte} of the 1980s did offer alternatives to the social history of the previous years. Whereas the social historians of the 1960s and 1970s had experimented a lot with social science concepts and theories like “class formation” or “modernization,” historians of everyday life usually rejected such approaches as too mechanistic and hegemonic; they rather tried to study historical phenomena “from within” and “from below,” using “thick description” and the language of the subjects whose experiences they wanted to recover. Whereas the rise of social history in the 1960s and 1970s had helped to make the discipline more analytical, everyday historians were less interested in the definition, discussion, and use of explicit concepts; they rather helped to make history more “narrative” again. It is true, everyday historians took seriously what the social historians of the 1960s and 1970s had frequently neglected: the \textit{meaning} of social phenomena to those who perceived them, while acting on them or suffering from them. No doubt, this was a gain. But everyday historians frequently paid for this gain of increased complexity by neglecting broader contexts, such as patterns of social inequality, relations between the state and the economy, or the political system under pressure of war.\textsuperscript{11}

In these respects the everyday historians of the 1980s anticipated what became dominant in the 1990s, when cultural history—in one way or another—carried the day, or rather the decade. Cultural history has deeply changed our views of World War I.

On the one hand, by emphasizing and exploring meanings—the construction, symbolic framing, the transmission of meanings—cultural historians brought back into focus what had really been central to the war but was neglected or marginalized in much previous research: the practice of killing,
the experience of death, the mutilation of bodies, physical and mental suffering, speechlessness after a shock, the rituals and practices of mourning and sorrow, bonding and comradeship in and behind the trenches, the terror of the battlefield. By emphasizing such dimensions of the war experience they cast a relativizing light on the social, political, and economic consequences of war so eagerly studied by previous social (and economic) historians.\textsuperscript{12}

On the other hand cultural historians took seriously the symbols and rituals, the images and myths, that the contemporaries constructed or adopted in order to cope with the war experience—by trying to make sense of the war, by mourning their losses, and by celebrating their victories. From there it was—finally—only a small step toward investigating the symbols and rituals, the images and myths, that people later on, after the war, constructed and shared in order to commemorate the war and its victims, losses, defeat, and national shame as well as victory, heroism, and national triumph. Historians of memory and remembrance reconstructed the ways in which the war was commemorated in different decades, in different countries and cities, within different social milieus, and for different purposes. This has become a major field for comparative research. Sometimes it seems that historians are now more interested in the way the war has been remembered than in the way it was—which raises problems. But this historiographical trend is well suited to the widespread interest in World War I–related \textit{lieux de mémoire}, the memorial sites and memorial days that have become more frequent and impressive over the years and which are mostly situated and celebrated in Western Europe—while in central and Eastern Europe memories of World War II and the Holocaust have acquired a central position.\textsuperscript{13}

What is new in the field? The short answer is a border-crossing, transnational point of view, sometimes a global per-
Historians, Fashion, and Truth

spective—and, related to this, a renewed interest in entanglements, structures, processes, and interrelations, clearly beyond microhistory and beyond thick description.

It has been discovered and emphasized, for example, that the two decades preceding the war were decades of accelerated globalization, hand in hand with rising levels of aggressive nationalism. Will this lead to new interpretations of the war and its causes? Technologies of globalized warfare and related logistics, compulsive population transfers across borders, the beginning of “ethnic cleansing” at the eastern and southeastern peripheries of Europe, the related breakdowns of the three large multinational empires at the end of the war, the changing perceptions of Europe in India and China in the aftermath of the war—these are some topics for transnational comparative and entangled history of a global scope.\(^\text{14}\)

Maybe historians will finally take seriously the fact that this is the first war that has survived in the textbooks under the label “World War,” although the different world regions varied a lot as to the degree they were involved in and shaken by this war and its consequences. This is a time when the national frameworks of historical studies are not being abandoned but are becoming perforated, widened, and relativized by comparative approaches and the investigation of transnational relations.

Related or parallel to this spatial widening of analytical frameworks and leading questions, one can presently observe a widening of the time frame as well. It is becoming more frequent to compare World War I and World War II. There are other approaches that bring World War I and World War II closely together. Some authors see them so closely related that they speak of the “Thirty Years War” of the twentieth century. The long-term consequences of World War I have become topics of interest again, for instance its place in a global history of violence or in a global history of human rights. Various au-
thors have suggested that we should consider the “short twentieth century” as a conceptual time frame, implying that an integral era of causes and consequences began with World War I and ended with the breakdown of communism. It remains to be seen whether this chronology will survive, but it testifies to the huge importance ascribed to World War I by many who have adopted a world historical perspective. In the light of such considerations some of the questions historians used to concentrate on half a century ago have become relatively marginal.

Five Major Trends

So much for research and writing about World War I in recent decades, from a German perspective. Certainly, the developments in other fields, such as in European medieval history or in the history of other parts of the world, were not identical. Historians differ from one another; different paradigms coexist; the discipline is full of debates, conflicts, and fragmentation. German developments were specific in many ways. Still, the changing views of World War I can serve as an example. They illustrate five general trends that have shaped historical studies over the last half century.

1. Historians have become more numerous; the volume of historical research has grown; the degree of specialization has been further advanced.

2. There continue to be national differences in history more than in sociology, economics, or physics. To a higher degree than practitioners of other disciplines, historians are part of their national cultures and languages. History as memory has to do with collective identity. History as a scholarly discipline does not fully escape this constellation, which, after all, has
made possible its rise as a mass phenomenon. But there are, increasingly, transnational entanglements and mutual influences across national borders. There is also some convergence, within Europe and beyond. The rise of English as the new lingua franca of scholarship is supporting this trend, and so are the new communication technologies.

3. In the second half of the twentieth century, cross-disciplinary contacts between historians and practitioners of neighboring disciplines have been numerous, more numerous than in the first half of the twentieth century or in the nineteenth. But one cannot see a linear increase of cross-, inter-, or transdisciplinarity. In spite of increasing internal diversification and frequent contacts across discipline boundaries, history continues to be a clearly identifiable discipline distinguished from others.

4. With respect to methods, the discipline continues to be syncretistic. In the 1960s and 1970s, the discipline became more analytic. Systematic approaches gained ground; in some areas quantitative methods found broad application. This trend has not been continued but reversed. Hermeneutic approaches and narrative forms of presentation have regained prominence. Quantitative approaches and systematic analysis continue to be practiced in narrow subfields such as historical demography and economic history.

5. On a very general level one can perhaps distinguish four periods of historiographical development since 1945, but these periods were heterogeneous and overlapping.

- A period in which political history continued to dominate, in different forms, until about 1960.
- The 1960s and 1970s, perhaps a bit longer, when social history moved to the front, when an analytical turn took place,
and when structures and processes were regarded to have more explanatory power than events and actions.

- The 1980s and 1990s, when different variants of cultural history took the lead, hand in hand with a powerful constructivist turn and, consequently, the rise of memory as an object of historical studies. The rise of cultural history was frequently connected with an antistructuralist thrust. By preferring to talk about what and how people perceived, experienced, acted, and suffered, and less about conditions and consequences, this type of history could sometimes acquire a somewhat voluntaristic touch.

- Finally, the most recent period. Many of the previous developments continue and coexist; new areas of interest are emerging or receiving renewed emphasis, such as the history of religion, while other areas have become marginal, such as the history of labor. Particular attention is being paid to transnationalization in different forms, especially Europeanization and globalization. Transnational approaches fascinate the youngest generation of historians. Here we presently find the most promising challenges and opportunities. More clearly than ever historians are moving beyond the national historical frameworks that have guided their interpretations for so long, at least in modern history. The usually asymmetric relations between the history of the West and the history of other parts of the world are receiving more attention. Among historians in the West, the history of China, India, or parts of Africa is acquiring more relevance. Large-scale comparison on the one hand, entangled histories (histoire croisée, Verflechtungsgeschichte) on the other, are becoming major approaches. They are fully compatible with each other.
There has been much change in the discipline, and change will continue. How should we account for it, how interpret its meaning? I return to the initial question: how do change in the discipline, fashion, and truth interrelate?

The Productivity of Fashion and the Attainability of Truth: History as a Profession

Disciplines, scholars, and projects are usually not happy to be called fashionable. A German encyclopedia of 1909 defined fashion (Mode) as a type of quick and conformist change, determined neither by tradition nor by compelling reason but by capricious moods (wechselnde Tageslaunen). Applying the concept fashion to the sciences and the arts, the entry continues, implies criticizing them, since in these fields reason and aesthetic criteria should govern, not fashion. In his “Sociology of Fashion” of 1904/5, Georg Simmel arrived at similar conclusions. More recent voices have followed the same line.17

But there can be no doubt that the thematic preferences of history students and scholars change in waves (not randomly) and frequently without clearly recognizable reasons. The same holds true with respect to methods, though here change is slower. Historians cluster, and the clusters change over time. Topics, approaches, and interpretations are given up or moved to the background, frequently not because they are exhausted, rejected, or proved useless but because they become uninteresting, dull, and old-fashioned. It happens that approaches disappear and insights are forgotten. New approaches, topics, and theses are often welcomed because they are new, as long as they are not too crazy or idiosyncratic, and it helps if they appear to fit a new trend. This is exactly how fashion works in other spheres of life.

One should not be amazed to discover that, to some extent,
change within the discipline of history follows the patterns of fashion. On the one hand, innovation, newness, discovery are highly valued qualities and one might even say requirements in modern scholarly work, not only in the natural and technical sciences, but also in the humanities and social sciences. In this world, trying out something new is normal and needs less explicit justification than mere repetition and continuation. On the other hand, historians do not work in isolation from one another; mutual recognition by peers is the most important method for determining quality, success, and failure. Take both together—the quest for innovation in the field and the collegial other-directedness of its practitioners—and you get the likelihood of fast but slightly standardized change without special justification, that is, change in the form of waves and according to the patterns of fashion.

One should not be alarmed by this observation. On the one hand, the elements of fashion within the profession are effectively balanced by other mechanisms. First, the discipline is governed by rules and customs that secure continuity, thoroughness, and respect for tradition, for instance the methods in which historians are trained, their passion for footnoting, and the rule that any good piece of new research has to start with a thorough review of previous research on the topic by “predecessors.” Second, there are nonfashion-based mechanisms of change effective inside the discipline, change on the basis of explicit criticism and rejection of received theses as well as through critical discussion and explicit justification of alternative choices. Third, there are the stubborn individuals who take their pride from consciously defying observable trends and from keeping apart from programmatic debates about the state of the art and its further development because they are passionately devoted to a splendid idea and a specific project in the long run. They do their professional work in a highly individualized form and despise fashion. So far the institutional
conditions under which historians work permit such a choice. It is important to preserve such spaces of professional freedom. Given all this, it is not likely that the discipline will yield more than a small extent to the rule of fashion.

On the other hand, elements of fashion within the discipline are not so detrimental to the finding of historical truth as they might appear to be at first glance, owing to the specific nature of truth in the realm of history.

Certainly, historians should not avoid making claims of truth. As scholars, as practitioners of an empirical discipline, historians are of course committed to searching for truth, and frequently they find it. In order to be accepted as true, historical statements must meet several established—though debatable—epistemological and methodological criteria related to the handling of empirical evidence and to the structure of critical discourse among them. But it is worthwhile to remember—following Max Weber\textsuperscript{19}—that truth in history is always selective and relational. What historians offer and accept as true, valid, and meaningful necessarily depends on the questions they ask, which in turn vary with the viewpoints and perspectives they have, themselves related to the problems of their specific time. In this complex relationship, the category “meaning” (\emph{Bedeutung}) is central.\textsuperscript{20} Times and problems are changing, and with them the questions asked by historians. This is why historical truth has to change as well—within limits, however, controlled by methods, debates, and mutual criticism.

In the complicated processes of finding dynamic and relational truth, fashion can help. As Walter Benjamin wrote: “Fashion has a flair for the topical, no matter where it stirs in the thickets of long ago; it is a tiger’s leap into the past.”\textsuperscript{21} In other words: fashion may contradict the rule of scientific rationality; it may lead astray. It needs to be controlled by other cognitive processes of which history as a discipline is rich. But
within these limits and respecting these caveats, fashion may serve as a scout in the search for historical findings that are both true and meaningful, and changing.

If one looks more closely at the historiographical changes sketched above, one will discover losses. In Germany at least, economic history belongs to the losers, which is strange in a world increasingly stamped by a globalized economy. Analytical rigor has been lost in the revival of narrative. Sometimes historians are too easily satisfied with reconstructing “discourses” without probing into their nondiscursive conditions and consequences.22

On the other hand, the gains are immense. We know now much more about World War I than was known fifty years ago; we understand better; we are aware of dimensions unknown or neglected in the 1950s.

But at least as important is this: the deep changes of the discipline over the decades have helped to make its products more relevant in changing times. The social history of the 1960s and 1970s—its analytical mood, its social commitment, its critical thrust, its belief in the power of structures—fit well into that period of accepted and accelerated modernization, turning away from a catastrophic past, full of passionate rejection of parts of the past, but also full of hope and optimism as to the opportunity of emancipation and progress.

Something changed in the 1980s and 1990s. More urgently than before, history was now expected to fulfill other functions as well. In a period of accelerated change and after experiencing new disappointments, people got interested in their roots—“dig where you are”—and in history as a source of identity. Cultural history responded to these changing expectations.23

Then, in the 1980s, a period of accelerated globalization set in, which defines the present era more than anything else. Once the Cold War was gone and the wall had fallen, instead of the East-West conflict of the previous decades the relation be-
tween “the West” and other world regions moved center stage. Crossing borders became a mass experience. A new type of border-crossing biography became more frequent, particularly among experts, intellectuals, and young scholars. The need for entangled argumentations gained strength. It is in this situation that transnational global approaches—partly in the spirit of postcolonialism—are inspired and offer relevant answers to present needs.

The interrelation between changing cultural needs and changing historiographical trends is difficult to analyze. It is always ambiguous and never plain, since it is up to the individual historian to decide what appears to be on the top of the intellectual agenda, and in what way he or she wants to respond to this in his or her own work. Different historians draw different conclusions as to what is interesting, timely, and urgent. To be untimely, old-fashioned, and out-of-date is always an available and respectable choice, frequently compatible with original scholarship of high quality.

On the other hand, historical scholarship can be inspired and stimulated by the pressing questions and characteristic problems of one’s time, while historians can help to clarify and solve them if they relate to them, though usually in indirect ways. Relevance in this sense does not hinder professional quality, nor does it impede the search for truth. In order to achieve these objectives, an element of fashion can be of help.
Notes

II. Bourgeois Culture and Civil Society

1. There is a third meaning of Bürger, in the sense of urban burghers of the late medieval and early modern periods, a corporate group with specific legal privileges, lifestyles, and status, which set itself apart from the other townsmen and the rural population. This I leave aside. Cf. Mack Walker, German Hometowns: Community, State and General Estate, 1648–1871 [Ithaca, N.Y., 1971].


6. Both concepts are treated as exchangeable, as one and the same, in a book title: David Blackbourn and Richard J. Evans, eds., The German Bourgeoisie: Essays on the Social History of the German Middle Class from the Late Eighteenth to the Early Twentieth Century (London, 1991). The conceptual “morass” around the phrase “middle class” is deplored in Pamela M. Pilbeam, The Middle Classes in Europe, 1789–1914: France, Germany, Italy and Russia (London, 1990), 1.

7. The next paragraphs are based on Jürgen Kocka, “Civil Society in Historical Perspective,” in John Keane, ed., Civil Society:


11. The quote is from Keane, Civil Society: Old Images, 6. Sometimes the term civil society is closely related to terms such as third sector or nonprofit sector. Cf. Helmut K. Anheier, “Der Dritte Sektor im internationalen Vergleich,” Berliner Journal für Soziolo-
According to the definition proposed here, organizations, initiatives, and networks of the third sector should be considered to be part of civil society only if and to the extent that they correspond to the aforementioned type of social action. Neither all third-sector groups nor all self-organized associations belong to civil society in the sense of this book. Violent, fanatical, or intolerant organizations, movements, and initiatives may belong to the third sector but do not qualify as belonging to civil society. A different view in Sheri Berman, “Civil Society and the Collapse of the Weimar Republic,” *World Politics* 49 (1997), 401–429.


16. This amounts to a partial revision of the Sonderweg thesis, which has emphasized the weakness of the German Bürgertum relative to those of other Western countries. This historiographical thesis, its lively debate and partial revision, are summarized in Jürgen Kocka, “Asymmetrical Historical Comparison: The Case of the German Sonderweg,” History and Theory 38 (1999), 25–39; idem, “Bürgertum und Sonderweg,” in Lundgreen, ed., Sozial- und Kulturgeschichte des Bürgertums, 93–110.


20. See chapter III below with respect to the social impact of the two German dictatorships of the twentieth century.

21. See chapter IV below.


III. Comparing Dictatorships


2. On research and problems of interpretation: Mary Fulbrook, The People’s State: East German Society from Hitler to Honecker (New Haven/London, 2005); Helga Schultz and Hans-Jürgen Wagener, eds., Die DDR im Rückblick. Politik, Wirtschaft, Gesellschaft, Kultur (Berlin, 2007), 9–25, 323–326; Arnd Bauerkämper, Die Sozialgeschichte der DDR (Munich, 2005); Rainer Eppelmann et al., eds., Bilanz und Perspektiven der DDR-Forschung (Paderborn, 2003); Corey Ross, The East German Dictatorship: Problems and Perspectives in the Interpretation of the GDR (Oxford, 2002); Beate Ihme-Tuchel, Die DDR (Darmstadt, 2002); Mary Fulbrook, The Two Germanies, 1945–1990: Problems of Interpretation (London, 1992); also see the titles in chap. IV, nn. 21, 22, and 23 below.

3. Rainer Eckert et al., eds., Wer schreibt die DDR-Geschichte? Ein Historikerstreit um Stellen, Strukturen, Finanzen und Deutungskompetenz (Berlin, 1995). During the 1990s political debate and scientific research about the history of the GDR were sometimes closely intermingled, for instance in the Enquete-Commission of the Bundestag. Deutscher Bundestag, ed., Materialien der Enquete-Kommission “Aufarbeitung von Geschichte


Notes to Pages 54–56


ker, eds., Das letzte Jahr der SBZ. Politische Weichenstellungen und Kontinuitäten im Prozess der Gründung der DDR (Munich, 2000); Monika Kaiser, “Wechsel von sowjetischer Besatzungspoli-
tik zu sowjetischer Kontrolle: Sowjetische Einflußnahme und ost-

51. Manfred Wilke, ed., Anatomie der Parteizentrale. Die KPD/ SED auf dem Weg zur Macht (Berlin, 1998); Dierk Hoffmann, Die DDR unter Ulbricht: Gewaltsame Neuordnung und gescheiterte Modernisierung (Zürich, 2003); Dorothee Wierling, Geboren im Jahr Eins. Der Jahrgang 1949 in der DDR. Versuch einer Kollek-
tivbiographie (Berlin, 2002).

52. Hans-Herrmann Hertle et al., eds., Mauerbau und Mauerfall. Ursachen-Verlauf-Auswirkungen (Berlin, 2002); Rolf Stein-

men der SED-Diktatur in Konflikt situationen 1962 bis 1972 (Ber-


53. From the abundant literature on the end of the GDR cf. for

54. Cf. chapter IV below.


56. This is the view of Sigrid Meuschel, “Überlegungen zu einer Herrschafts- und Gesellschaftsgeschichte der DDR,” *Geschichte*


61. Cf. nn. 10 and 11 above for methodological references. The interrelations between East and West are emphasized by Konrad H. Jarausch [n. 22 of chapter II above]. See also Peter Bender, Deutschlands Wiederkehr. Eine ungeteilte Nachkriegsgeschichte 1945–1990 (Stuttgart, 2007).


63. Cf. chapter IV below; Jürgen Kocka, “Ein deutscher Sonder-


70. Cf. Kocka, “Civil Society in Historical Perspective.”

IV. Dealing with Difficult Pasts

1. See chapter III above.


3. Cf. Jürgen Kocka and Heinz-Gerhard Haupt, “Comparison and Beyond: Traditions, Scope and Perspectives of Com-


Note to Pages 77–80


16. Broszat et al., eds., *Deutschlands Weg in die Diktatur*; Peter Märtesheimer and Ivo Frenzel, eds., *Im Kreuzfeuer. Der Fernsehfilm Holocaust. Eine Nation ist betroffen* (Frankfurt/Main, 1979);


23. Jens Hüttmann, *DDR-Geschichte und ihre Forscher. Akteure und Konjekteuren der bundesdeutschen DDR-Forschung* [Berlin 2008]; also the titles cited in nn. 2 and 3 to chap. III above.

24. See the discussions in Deutscher Bundestag, ed., *Materialien*, vol. 9, 588–598, 686–694 [e.g. the statement by Jürgen Habermas, who called for an antitotalitarian consensus rejecting both dictatorial experiences]. Also Jorge Semprún, Dank, in *Friedenspreis des Deutschen Buchhandels 1994* [Frankfurt, 1994], 51 [stressing the obligation and the opportunity of Germans to come to terms with both Nazism and Stalinism as parts of their history]. Also see the controversial debate about the “Black Book of Communism” published by Stéphane Courtois et al. in 1997: Horst Möller, ed., *Der rote Holocaust und die Deutschen. Die Debatte um das “Schwarzbuch des Kommunismus”* [Munich, 1999].


Notes to Pages 90–91


31. This has been analyzed as a transition from “communicative” to “collective memory.” Cf. Assmann, Der lange Schatten. Cf. Ulrike Puvogel et al., Gedenkstätten für die Opfer des Nationalsozialismus, vol. 1, 2nd ed. [Bonn, 1996]; Stephanie Endlich et al., Gedenkstätten für die Opfer des Nationalsozialismus, vol. 2 [Bonn, 1999].


34. One example is Reinhard Koselleck, “Der 9. Mai zwischen Erinnerung und Geschichte,” in Robert Traba, ed., Borussia. Kultur, Historia, Literatura 38 [Olsztyn, n.d. [2005]], 25–32: Koselleck held that Erinnerung (memory) in the full sense of the word could only be individual. He questioned the status of “so-called collective memory.” He also held that silence might be a more adequate form of remembrance than continuous talking (p. 21). Martin Walser’s protest against being permanently “enlisted” in a more or less compulsive “remembrance service” [Erinnerungsdienst] should be seen in a similar context. On Walser’s controversial speech in the Frankfurt Paulskirche 1998 and the ensuing public debate cf. Frank Schirrmacher, ed., Die Walser-Babis-Debatte. Eine Dokumentation [Frankfurt/Main, 1999].


As to literature about the destruction of cities and city populations, particularly by British and American bombing raids, cf. W. G. Sebald, Luftprieg und Literatur [Munich, 1999], and Jörg Friedrich, Der Brand. Deutschland im Bombenkrieg 1940–1945 [Berlin, 2002].


Naimark, The Russians in Germany. There has been a lively debate and no consensus about the causes and the meanings of this re-intensification of public remembrance of German suffering, a public remembrance that had been strong in the early years after 1945. Cf. Robert G. Moeller, War Stories: The Search for a Usable Past in the FRG [Berkeley, 2001]; concerned about the apologetic implications: Frei, 1945 und wir, 16–18; a good and balanced interpretation: Assmann, Der lange Schatten, 183–204. Cf. Dagmar Barnouw, The War in the Empty Air: Victims, Perpetrators, and Postwar Germans [Bloomington, Ind., 2005].

This was a central issue in the so-called historians’ debate of the mid-1980s. Cf. n. 18 above. However, Ernst Nolte’s misleading provocation was not his comparison between the Nazi genocide and other genocides per se, nor his attempt to put the history of the Holocaust in a broader transnational framework, but his overemphasis of the similarities of Bolshevist and fascist terror, and particularly his thesis that the latter reacted to the former. This was a statement on “causal nexus” that has not stood up against empiri-
cal examination and that grants more historical understanding and meaning to the Holocaust than is justifiable.

41. Very much in this tradition: Klaus Rainer Röhl, *Verbotene Trauer. Ende der deutschen Tabus* (Munich, 2002). I do not see Jörg Friedrich’s *Der Brand* in this tradition. But, unfortunately, the author’s choice of language puts him into this intellectual neighborhood. See the quotes in Assmann, *Der lange Schatten*, 188.

42. One can doubt whether this remarkable upsurge of historical memory, remembrance, and commemoration—with particular emphasis on victims and victimization—has only productive effects on our present identities, cultures, and abilities to shape our future. But there can be no doubt that the need for historical memory with emphasis on victims and victimhood is a defining element of the present time, more than of previous decades and centuries. Memory has replaced progress as a reference point for collective orientation and identity formation, at least in Germany. This is discussed in Sabrow, “‘Erinnerung’ als Pathosformel der Gegenwart,” 15–21. Also cf. Avishai Margalit, *The Ethics of Memory* (Cambridge, Mass., 2002). Christian Meier, *Vierzig Jahre nach Auschwitz. Deutsche Geschichtserinnerungen heute* (Munich, 1987); Benjamin Z. Kedar, “Massada: The Myth and the Complex,” *Jerusalem Quarterly* 24 (1982), 57–63.


45. Cf. Großbölting and Hofmann, eds., *Vergangenheit in der Gegenwart*; Rudolf von Thadden and Steffen Kaudelka, eds., *Er-

V. Historians, Fashion, and Truth


12. Cf. for example Bernd Hüppauf, ed., *Ansichten vom Krieg. Vergleichende Studien zum Ersten Weltkrieg in Literatur und Gesellschaft* (Königstein, 1984); Scott D. Denham, *Visions of War: Ideologies and Images of War in German Literature before and after the Great War* (Bern, 1992); George L. Mosse, *Gefallen für das Vaterland* (Stuttgart, 1993); Gerhard Hirschfeld et al., eds., “Keiner fühlt sich hier mehr als Mensch. . . .” *Erlebnis und Wirkung des Ersten Weltkriegs* (Essen, 1993); Rainer Rother, ed., *Die letzten Tage der Menschheit. Bilder des Ersten Weltkriegs* (Berlin, 1994); Reinhard Koselleck and Michael Jeismann, eds., *Der politische Toten-


Notes to Pages 113–115

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Index

Adenauer, Konrad, 75–76
amnesia/denial, 75, 78, 85, 91
antisemitism, 24, 27
aristocracy. See nobility

Benedict XVI, 90
Benjamin, Walter, 113
Bismarck, Otto von, 26
capitalism, 17–18, 22, 25, 64
Catholic Church, 23, 77
citizen/Bürger, 4, 9, 17, 21, 31
civil society/bürgerliche
Gesellschaft, 4–6, 9–31, 120–2111; and bourgeoisie, 10,
17, 22–31; and capitalism, 17–18, 22, 25; and collective
memory, 5, 96; defined, 9, 19–20; in the Federal
Republic of Germany, 29–30, 63, 77; and gender, 11,
21–22, 27–28; in the German
Democratic Republic, 30, 64;
history of concept, 15–19;
industrialization and, 22–24,
collective memory, 76–81,
86; and civil society, 5, 96;
diversification of, 92–97;
in the Federal Republic of
Germany, 76, 78–81, 86; and
the German Democratic
Republic, 59, 76, 79–81, 92–
93; and the Holocaust, 92;
institutionalization of, 90–92;
and the Nazi dictatorship, 59,
76, 78, 79–81; pluralization
of, 95; and Stalinism, 88, 93,
96; transnationalization of,
capitalism, 17–18, 22, 25, 64
Catholic Church, 23, 77
citizen/Bürger, 4, 9, 17, 21, 31
civil society/bürgerliche
Gesellschaft, 4–6, 9–31, 120–2111; and bourgeoisie, 10,
17, 22–31; and capitalism, 17–18, 22, 25; and collective
memory, 5, 96; defined, 9, 19–20; in the Federal
Republic of Germany, 29–30, 63, 77; and gender, 11,
21–22, 27–28; in the German
Democratic Republic, 30, 64;
history of concept, 15–19;
industrialization and, 22–24,
collective memory, 76–81,
86; and civil society, 5, 96;
diversification of, 92–97;
in the Federal Republic of
Germany, 76, 78–81, 86; and
the German Democratic
Republic, 59, 76, 79–81, 92–
93; and the Holocaust, 92;
institutionalization of, 90–92;
and the Nazi dictatorship, 59,
76, 78, 79–81; pluralization
of, 95; and Stalinism, 88, 93,
96; transnationalization of,
97, 106–9; and unification,
Index

82–87; and World War II, 57, 70, 89, 94–95. See also commemoration

commemoration, 91–92, 96; of the German Democratic Republic, 82, 85, 87; of Nazi past, 80–82


Cultural history, 105, 110, 114

Czechoslovakia/Czech Republic, 29, 58, 86, 94

denazification, 70–73, 75
dictatorship, 3–6, 37–38, 40; and bourgeoisie, 29; and civil society, 18, 29; and collective memory, 88, 93, 97; comparing the German Democratic Republic and Nazi Germany, 5, 56–61, 69, 82–88, 92–93, 95, 97; and democracy, 3–6; German Democratic Republic as, 5, 35, 37–65, 82–88, 93, 97; Nazi dictatorship, 73–76, 81; totalitarian dictatorship, 37

Droysen, Johann Gustav, 35, 38, 65

East Germany. See German Democratic Republic

economic history, 103, 109, 114

education/Bildung, 11, 14, 21, 23, 25, 27

Eichmann, Adolf, trial of, 77

elites: and bourgeoisie, 13, 24, 27, 53; and civil society, 26–27; in the Federal Republic of Germany, 75; in the German Democratic Republic, 45–47, 74, 83–84; in Nazi Germany, 73, 84

entangled history/ histoire croisée/Verflechtungsgeschichte, 39, 61, 63, 96, 107, 110, 115

family, 14, 16, 21, 30, 51

fashion, 6, 101–2, 111–15

Federal Republic of Germany:
civil society in, 29–30, 63, 77; and collective memory, 76–81, 86; compared to the German Democratic Republic, 36–39, 53, 59–65, 69–71, 74, 83–86; elites in, 74; immigration to, 44, 60; and unification, 36, 82–84; youth in, 77–78

Frankfurt Auschwitz trial, 77

Frei, Norbert, 90

Freie Deutsche Jugend, 50

Fritz Fischer debate, 103

Fulbrook, Mary, 41

Garve, Christian, 9

Gauck, Joachim, 85

gender, 11, 21, 29–30, 104

German Democratic Republic (GDR), 5, 35–65; anti-fascism in, 72, 74; bureaucracy in, 42–44; censorship and controlling information in, 42–43, 50–51; collectivization and land reform in, 45–46, 84; compared to the Federal Republic of Germany, 39, 59–65, 69–71, 74, 83–86; compared to the Nazi dictatorship, 5, 35, 37–65, 82–88, 93, 97; compared to other state socialist countries, 39, 62–65; delegitimization of, 36, 65, 83–84; elites in, 45–48, 74, 83; emigration from, 44, 60; family and gender in, 51, 57; limits on control, 48–54; Marxism–Leninism in, 40, 63,
Index

69, 74; Protestant church in, 46, 48–49; relationship with Federal Republic of Germany, 63; social inequality in, 45–46; social mobility in, 46–47, 53–54; Soviet influence on, 45, 57–58, 63–64, 97; and unification, 30, 36–38, 58, 84; welfare state in, 40, 47–48, 60–61; working class in, 44, 46, 53; workplace in, 51–52; young generations in, 47, 50, 54–55. See also collective memory; dictatorship
global history, 106–7, 110, 114–15
globalization, 64, 106–7, 110, 114 Grass, Günter, 90 Gurion, Ben, 75

Henrich, Rolf, 48 Heym, Stefan, 37 Hirschman, Albert O., 44 historians’ debate/Historikerstreit, 81, 150–51
historical methods, 61, 111–15
history, changes in the discipline, 101–15
Hitler, Adolf, 57, 76, 82, 90; assassination attempt on, 76 Hobbsawm, Eric, 37, 104 Holocaust, 80, 88–95 Hungary, 29, 58, 62–63

Imperial Germany/Kaiserreich, 22–28 industrialization, 17, 22, 28, 62

Jarausch, Konrad, 48 Jews, 21, 76, 80–81, 89, 93

Korn, Salomon, 93 Kornai, Janós, 52 Kundera, Milan, 101

Lübbe, Hermann, 75

memory. See collective memory; commemoration

middle class. See bourgeoisie/Bürgertum

narrative history, 104–5, 109, 114

nationalism, 24–27, 107 National Socialism, 35, 70–73, 75, 78–81, 88–89, 91–93, 95. See also collective memory; commemoration; dictatorship

nobility, 12, 13, 23, 30

Nuremberg Trials, 72

Oettinger, Günther, 90

Party of Democratic Socialism [PDS], 83

Poland, 29, 58, 62–63, 86, 94 political history, 4, 39, 109 Protestant church, 46, 48–49, 71, 77

Secret Service [Stasi], 41–42, 85 Simmel, Georg, 101, 111 social history, 4, 11, 51, 54, 103–5, 109, 114 Socialist Unity Party [SED], 40, 54–55 Sonderweg, 61, 123


total war, 70, 95 transnationalism, 110, 115

trials, 72, 77, 143–144 truth in history, 3, 6, 96, 102, 111–13

unification, 30, 36–38, 82–87
victims, 74–75, 80–90, 94; collective memory and, 96–97, 151n42; Germans as, 71, 94, 150n39; organizations of, 90–92, 94; and perpetrators, 80, 89

Weber, Max, 42, 113
Weizsäcker, Richard von, 80
West Germany. See Federal Republic of Germany
working class(es), 13, 23–24, 30, 44, 46, 53
World War I: memory of, 63, 106; historiography of, 102–10
World War II, 70, 88. See also collective memory