

## Against the 1989–1990 Ending Myth

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**ABSTRACT.** This article aims to temper the fetishization of the events of 1989–1990. It explores how the historical framing of the Federal Republic transforms when 1989–1990 becomes peripheral, and argues that the force of 1989–1990 as a mythic ending relies on two interpretive paradigms: on a temporal sensibility based on a belief in the progressive development of politics and society, and on a conception of identity and difference understood in terms of a Cold War global order. The article highlights how these twentieth-century paradigms guided the historiography that made 1989–1990 the climax of the history of the Federal Republic. The precondition of any new master narrative for the Federal Republic is the recognition that these paradigms have lost their purchase. Viewed instead through the new temporal sensibility of presentism and the lateral power politics of globalization, 1989–1990 assumes a new position amid longer arcs of historical change that do not hinge on the fate of the Berlin Wall.

Dieser Aufsatz zielt darauf ab die Fetischisierung der Ereignisse von 1989–1990 abzuschwächen. In diesem Sinne wird untersucht, wie sich der historische Rahmen der Bundesrepublik verändert, wenn 1989–1990 an die Peripherie gerückt wird; dabei wird argumentiert, dass die Kraft von 1989–1990 als ein mythisches Ende auf zwei interpretativen Paradigmen beruht, nämlich zum ersten auf einer temporalen Sensibilität, die auf einem Glauben an eine fortschrittliche Entwicklung von Politik und Gesellschaft beruht, und zum zweiten auf einem Konzept von Identität und Unterschiedlichkeit, das auf der globalen Ordnung des Kalten Krieges fußt. Der Aufsatz hebt hervor, wie diese Paradigmen des 20. Jahrhunderts die Historiographie bestimmten, die 1989–1990 zum Höhepunkt der Geschichte der Bundesrepublik gestaltete. Die Vorbedingung eines jeden neuen Masternarrativs für die Bundesrepublik ist somit die Erkenntnis, dass diese Paradigmen ihre Kraft verloren haben. Wenn man 1989–1990 dagegen vom Blickwinkel der neuen temporalen Sensibilität des Presentismus und der lateralen Machtpolitik der Globalisierung betrachtet, nimmt es eine neue Position ein: eine Position inmitten längerer historischer Veränderungsprozessen, die nicht vom Schicksal der Berliner Mauer abhängen.

**H**ISTORIANS of the contemporary can be a morbid sort, fascinated by the recent deaths of institutions, movements, and eras. Directly on the heels of World War I, Oswald Spengler, for example, forecasted the tragic finale of Western civilization. In 1935, George Dangerfield analyzed the “strange death” of liberal politics in Britain just two decades earlier. In 1940, Marc Bloch—a medieval historian by training—analyzed the recent failure of French leadership to recognize that World War I had consigned conventional European warfare to the grave. The conservative intellectual Arnold Gehlen drew in the 1950s from the French philosopher Antoine August Cournot to argue that the philosophy of history that had

I would like to thank Frank Biess, Astrid M. Eckert, Stefan-Ludwig Hoffmann, Terence Renaud, the participants in the “New Narratives for the History of the Federal Republic” seminar at the 2016 German Studies Association Conference in San Diego, California, the members of Der Kreis at the University of California, Berkeley, and the editor and anonymous reviewers at *Central European History* for their helpful comments on drafts of this article.

reigned since the Enlightenment had come to an end. This concept of “posthistory” reappeared in various guises over the next three decades, particularly as the disappointments after 1968 prompted the radical Left to reassess the power of Marxist orthodoxy. In 1960, Daniel Bell, a sociologist writing about contemporary historical change, famously pronounced that ideology—which had, for centuries, propelled Western revolutionaries to seek alternatives to the status quo—had reached a “dead end.” And, on the eve of the new millennium, Russell Jacoby argued that an age of apathy had destroyed the human tendency to dream utopian dreams.<sup>1</sup>

In contemporary histories of the German lands, the events of 1989–1990 have attracted this kind of attention. The Berlin Wall opened, the German Democratic Republic (GDR) self-destructed, Germany reunified, and Europe witnessed the rapid de-escalation of the Cold War, which formally ended with the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991. Among historians, this brief period was met with mixed emotions. Triumphalist historians celebrated the end of state socialism, the end of Germany’s *Sonderweg*, and the country’s final “arrival in the West.” They highlighted the carnivalesque process by which Easterners upended the relationship between state and society. And they applauded the subsequent consummation of the Federal Republic’s democratic credentials.<sup>2</sup> Melancholic historians, by comparison, mourned the loss of social and political alternatives that the dissolution of Communism—at least in its idealized form—seemed to signal. Europe had become “spiritually roofless.”<sup>3</sup> Most historians have fallen somewhere between these poles. After weighing the balance sheet between ideal and reality, success and failure, they have responded with varying degrees of cynicism. They have emphasized Europe’s growing uniformity, for example: institutions made for a Cold War order were often simply carried over into a world redrawn along new lines, regardless of how well those institutions suited that new global order. They have noted that reunification pushed Germany’s social welfare state into crisis. They have argued that the continent’s political pluralism has not been an unqualified success. And they have pointed to the entrenchment of neoliberalism, the climax of Germany’s Western integration.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Oswald Spengler, *The Decline of the West: Form and Actuality*, trans. Charles Francis Atkinson (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1926); George Dangerfield, *The Strange Death of Liberal England* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1997); Marc Bloch, *Strange Defeat: A Statement of Evidence Written in 1940*, trans. Gerard Hopkins (New York: Norton, 1999); Lutz Niethammer and Dirk van Laak, *Posthistoire: Has History Come to an End?*, trans. Patrick Camiller (London: Verso, 1992); Daniel Bell, *The End of Ideology: On the Exhaustion of Political Ideas in the Fifties* (Glencoe, IL: Glencoe Free Press, 1960), 393; Russell Jacoby, *The End of Utopia: Politics and Culture in an Age of Apathy* (New York: Basic Books, 1999).

<sup>2</sup>See, e.g., Axel Schildt, *Ankunft im Westen: Ein Essay zur Erfolgsgeschichte der Bundesrepublik* (Frankfurt/Main: Fischer, 1999); Heinrich August Winkler, *Germany: The Long Road West, Vol. 2*, trans. Alexander J. Sager (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007); Konrad Hugo Jarausch, *After Hitler: Recivilizing Germans, 1945–1995*, trans. Brandon Hunziker (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006); Padraic Kenney, *A Carnival of Revolution: Central Europe 1989* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2002); Timothy Garton Ash, *The Magic Lantern: The Revolution of ’89 Witnessed in Warsaw, Budapest, Berlin, and Prague* (New York: Vintage, 1999).

<sup>3</sup>On despondent Leftism after 1989, see Enzo Traverso, *Left-Wing Melancholia: Marxism, History, and Memory* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2017), xiv.

<sup>4</sup>See, e.g., Eckart Conze, *Die Suche nach Sicherheit: Eine Geschichte der Bundesrepublik Deutschland von 1949 bis in die Gegenwart* (Munich: Siedler, 2009); Andreas Rödder, *21.0: Eine kurze Geschichte der Gegenwart* (Munich: C. H. Beck, 2016); Mary Elise Sarotte, *1989: The Struggle to Create Post-Cold War Europe* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2014); Gerhard A. Ritter, *Der Preis der deutschen Einheit: Die Wiedervereinigung und die Krise des Sozialstaats* (Munich: C. H. Beck, 2007); Gale Stokes, *The Walls Came*

The diversity of its reception notwithstanding, the moment of 1989–1990 undeniably marks a world-historical caesura.<sup>5</sup> After two hundred years, the ostensible triumph of democratic principle over oligarchy ended the long Age of Revolutions.<sup>6</sup> When Germany left behind the trial and catastrophic error of totalizing political programs, 1989–1990 ended the short twentieth century, or what Eric Hobsbawm called the Age of Extremes. And, when the battle between the two global hegemonies drew abruptly to a halt, a reunified Germany arguably ended its postwar chapter. It helped midwife the birth of a “New Europe.”<sup>7</sup> In the historiography of contemporary Germany, 1989–1990 often operates analogously to Germany’s first “zero hour” of 1945.<sup>8</sup> Much as German capitulation, the collapse of the Nazi regime, and the beginning of the postwar order have led historians to hail 1945 as “the cradle of our present,” the events of 1989–1990 have similarly served as a kind of historical reset button.<sup>9</sup> This brief period has marked the end or the beginning of countless monographs, edited volumes, articles, and conferences.<sup>10</sup>

If historians periodize in this way in order to produce a clearer, more streamlined historiography that emphasizes one constellation of changes over others, German history begins to seem peculiar.<sup>11</sup> Rather than a growing interpretive consensus, the field has witnessed the proliferation of competing interpretations of the Federal Republic. On the occasion of the fiftieth anniversary of its founding and the tenth of the fall of the Berlin Wall, Axel

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*Tumbling Down: The Collapse of Communism in Eastern Europe* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993); Vladimir Tismaneanu, *Reinventing Politics: Eastern Europe from Stalin to Havel* (New York: Free Press, 1992); Philipp Ther, *Europe since 1989: A History*, trans. Charlotte Hughes-Kreutzmüller (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2016). For a much earlier critic, see Ralf Dahrendorf, *Reflections on the Revolution in Europe* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 2005 [1990]).

<sup>5</sup>For a survey of scholarship on 1989 as radical rupture, see Sarotte, 1989, 220–21, note 1.

<sup>6</sup>The peculiarity of 1989, Timothy Garton Ash has argued, was that it was a “non-revolutionary revolution”: it jettisoned a two-hundred-year-old classical revolutionary model. See Garton Ash, *The Magic Lantern*, 162–63. See also Jürgen Habermas, *Die nachholende Revolution* (Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1990).

<sup>7</sup>Tony Judt, *Postwar: A History of Europe since 1945* (New York: Penguin Press, 2005), 1.

<sup>8</sup>Historians who treat 1989–1990 as a kind of zero hour tend to do so without employing that language explicitly. Alongside journalists and politicians, scholars of literature have proven more willing to use the phrase. See, e.g., Stephen Brockmann, *German Literary Culture at the Zero Hour* (Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2004), 241–62; Alisa Kasle, “Everyday Stories of Hope and Despair in Eastern Germany: Kerstin Hensel and Ingo Schulze Write about Life after the Wende,” in *Textual Responses to German Unification: Processing Historical and Social Change in Literature and Film*, ed. Carol Anne Costabile-Heming, Rachel J. Halverson, and Kristie A. Foell (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2001), 131–49; Iris Radisch, “Die zweite Stunde Null,” *Die Zeit*, Oct. 7, 1994; Frank Schirrmacher, “Hetze? Die zweite Stunde Null,” *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, June 18, 1990; Freimut Duve, “Böses Erwachen in der Stunde Null,” *Die Zeit*, March 16, 1990.

<sup>9</sup>Stefan-Ludwig Hoffmann, “Kriegsende 1945: Ins Freie fallen,” *Die Zeit*, May 14, 2015.

<sup>10</sup>Though examples are too numerous to list with any real degree of thoroughness, a cross-section of recent work that uses 1989–1990 as a bookend includes Thomas Großbölting and Christoph Lorke, eds., *Deutschland seit 1990: Wege in die Vereinigungsgesellschaft* (Stuttgart: Franz-Steiner-Verlag, 2017); Ther, *Europe Since 1989*; Sina Fabian, *Boom in der Krise: Konsum, Tourismus, Autofahren in Westdeutschland und Großbritannien 1970–1990* (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2016); Michael Rauhut, *Ein Klang—zwei Welten: Blues im geteilten Deutschland, 1945 bis 1990* (Bielefeld: transcript, 2016); Andreas Wirsching, *Demokratie und Globalisierung: Europa seit 1989* (Munich: C. H. Beck, 2015); Sophie Gerber, *Küche, Kühlschrank, Kilowatt: Zur Geschichte des privaten Energiekonsums in Deutschland, 1945–1990* (Bielefeld: transcript, 2015).

<sup>11</sup>On the need to periodize, see Martin Jay, “1990: Straddling a Watershed?,” *Salmagundi* 160/161 (2008): 31–38.

Schildt proposed five modes of reading contemporary German history: as a history of success, a history of failure, a history of modernization, a history of burdens, and a history of Western integration.<sup>12</sup> Seven years later, Edgar Wolfrum offered a slimmer proposal consisting of three readings: the stabilization, pluralization, and internationalization of the Federal Republic.<sup>13</sup> Historians of the Federal Republic appeared to be shedding what Konrad Jarausch called the “corset of master narratives” and donning instead the cloak of a skeptical pluralism.<sup>14</sup> The effect is an accumulation of interpretive frameworks. Many of these do share some common ground. They often underscore the success of the Federal Republic, for example, building on Schildt’s analysis.<sup>15</sup> But others merely coexist while their proponents talk past one another. This accretion has gradually become unwieldy. As the title of one recently published volume of essays insists, chronicling contemporary German history requires “more than one narrative” (*mehr als eine Erzählung*)—in this case, at least twenty-six.<sup>16</sup> Insofar as efforts to treat 1989–1990 as a watershed have not yielded a durable master narrative for the history of the Federal Republic, 1989–1990 has failed to serve the same heuristic function as modern Germany’s other historical moments of rupture: 1918, 1933, 1945, and, to a lesser extent, 1967–1968.<sup>17</sup>

The contingencies of 1989–1990 may be to blame. Little of Germany’s first zero hour was the product of mere coincidence. The pivotal events of 1989–1990, by contrast, often unfolded by accident. The massive Leipzig demonstration of October 9, 1989, which inspired a powerful wave of protests across East Germany, took place without precipitating the use of force against demonstrators, even though police were armed to the teeth and had resorted to violence just days before. Politbüro member Günter Schabowski publicly improvised an interpretation of a policy that relaxed border crossings out of the GDR. Overwhelmed guards at the Bornholmer Straße checkpoint yielded to the crowd and simply opened the gates on November 9, 1989. East Germans voted favorably for the Christian Democratic Union (CDU)—and, by extension, for Helmut Kohl’s program of rapid reunification—in the first free elections of the GDR when, only weeks before, pollsters

<sup>12</sup>Schildt, *Ankunft im Westen*. Schildt’s categories have appeared in various reprints over the past two decades. Among them, see Axel Schildt, “Fünf Möglichkeiten, die Geschichte der Bundesrepublik zu Erzählen,” *Blätter für deutsche und internationale Politik* 44 (1999): 1234–44. More recently, see Axel Schildt, *Annäherungen an die Westdeutschen: Sozial- und kulturgeschichtliche Perspektiven auf die Bundesrepublik* (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2011).

<sup>13</sup>Edgar Wolfrum, *Die geglättete Demokratie: Geschichte der Bundesrepublik Deutschland von ihren Anfängen bis zur Gegenwart* (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 2006).

<sup>14</sup>Konrad Jarausch has actively advocated such pluralism for making sense of postwar German history. See Konrad Hugo Jarausch, “Die Krise der nationalen Meistererzählungen. Ein Plädoyer für plurale, interdependente Narrative,” in *Die historische Meistererzählung: Deutungslinien der deutschen Nationalgeschichte nach 1945*, ed. Konrad Hugo Jarausch and Martin Sabrow (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2002), 162. A year later, he consummated this perspective in Konrad H. Jarausch and Michael Geyer, *Shattered Past: Reconstructing German Histories* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2003).

<sup>15</sup>See, e.g., John Shannon Brady, Beverly Crawford, and Sarah Elise Wiliarty, eds., *The Postwar Transformation of Germany: Democracy, Prosperity and Nationhood* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1999).

<sup>16</sup>Frank Bajohr, Anselm Doering-Manteuffel, Claudia Kemper, and Detlef Siegfried, eds., *Mehr als eine Erzählung: Zeitgeschichtliche Perspektiven auf die Bundesrepublik* (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2016).

<sup>17</sup>Eckhart Conze nevertheless insists on its continued heuristic value. See Conze, *Die Suche nach Sicherheit*, 12.

had anticipated a victory for the Social Democrats.<sup>18</sup> All of these events defied expectations. The aftermath of the collapse of communism and the consummation of the Western political and economic program, however, saw their retroactive rationalization. They became historically necessary. And this *post hoc* logic of necessity has been invoked to control historiographical interventions ever since. It encourages the substitution of one Cold War watershed for a proximate alternative. Leipzig's unexpectedly peaceful demonstration on October 9, 1989, for instance, could supplant the opening of the Berlin Wall on November 9, 1989, as the real "day of decision" or point of no return.<sup>19</sup> And it endorses the rereading of a familiar chronology through newly fashionable lenses: consumerism, energy politics, gender, economic inequality, the crisis of the welfare state, etc.<sup>20</sup> These reassessments certainly add nuance to the history of postwar Germany. Whether they can offer a durable paradigm for interpreting the history of the Federal Republic is more doubtful.

This article explores the benefits of applying to 1989–1990 an approach akin to that of historians who have increasingly read across the 1945 caesura.<sup>21</sup> I propose treating 1989–1990 as an "ending myth": an invented narrative of collective transition.<sup>22</sup> Much as founding myths provide massaged origin stories for a particular political and cultural teleology, ending myths confirm the validity of that historical teleology. They announce its grand finale and the birth of a new order. In what follows, I aim to temper the historiographical fetishization of the 1989–1990 ending myth by reading in tandem two separate trends in historical scholarship.

My analysis begins with an account of how two interpretive paradigms catapulted 1989–1990 to the heart of the Federal Republic's historiography. Dominating these readings was, first, a temporal sensibility based on a belief in the progressive development of society and, second, a conception of identity and difference understood in Manichaean, Cold War terms. This article explores the ways recent scholarship has begun to acknowledge that these two paradigms have lost their purchase and have yielded to two new historiographical frameworks. It highlights research that argues that our modern temporal regime has shifted from a conception of time oriented progressively—toward the future—to a

<sup>18</sup>See Charles S. Maier, *Dissolution: The Crisis of Communism and the End of East Germany* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1997), 138–46, 159–60, 209–14; Konrad Hugo Jarausch, *The Rush to German Unity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 80, 115–17.

<sup>19</sup>Matthias Boucebci, "Un prélude à la réunification allemande: Retour sur la manifestation du lundi 9 Octobre 1989 à Leipzig," *Guerres Mondiales et Conflits Contemporains* 1, no. 237 (2010): 109–24; Ekkehard Kuhn, *Der Tag der Entscheidung: Leipzig, 9. Oktober 1989* (Berlin: Ullstein, 1992). See also Maier, *Dissolution*, 142–46.

<sup>20</sup>See, e.g., Fabian, *Boom in der Krise*; Gerber, *Küche, Kühlschrank, Kilowatt*; Großbölting and Lorke, eds., *Deutschland seit 1990*; Ritter, *Der Preis der deutschen Einheit*; and many of the contributions in Konrad H. Jarausch, ed., *United Germany: Debating Processes and Prospects* (New York: Berghahn, 2015).

<sup>21</sup>The rereading of 1945 has its roots in the 1980s, when historians began to prioritize the period of upheaval between the 1943 defeat at Stalingrad and the currency reform of 1948. See Martin Broszat, Klaus-Dietmar Henke, and Hans Woller, eds., *Von Stalingrad zur Währungsreform: Zur Sozialgeschichte des Umbruchs in Deutschland* (Munich: Oldenbourg, 1988). For more recent work that bridge 1945, see Keith Lowe, *Savage Continent: Europe in the Aftermath of World War II* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2012); Richard Bessel, *Germany 1945: From War to Peace* (New York: Harper Perennial, 2009). In the French context, Philip Nord has referred to the imperative of looking beyond the rupture of 1945 as the "transwar" perspective. See Philip G. Nord, *France's New Deal: From the Thirties to the Postwar Era* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2010).

<sup>22</sup>For a similar stance, see Martin Sabrow, "1990: An Epochal Break in German History?," *Bulletin of the German Historical Institute* 60 (Spring 2017): 31–42.

conception of time oriented imminently—toward the present. And it engages with research that claims the binary power politics of the Cold War have given way to more intricate networks created by decolonization and globalization.

The precondition of any new master narrative for the history of the Federal Republic is a similar willingness to let go of both the temporal sensibility of the twentieth century and the identity politics of the Cold War. Stripped of these two powerful interpretive paradigms, 1989–1990 begins to lose its hegemony over contemporary Germany history. When the history of the Federal Republic is viewed instead through the new lenses of presentism and globalization, it appears increasingly to follow a trajectory less rigidly dictated by the Berlin Wall's fate. Without denying that 1989–1990 altered Germany's political, economic, and social topography, this article examines how the historical framing of the Federal Republic transforms when this moment does not play a leading role in the national, continental, and global shifts in which we understand Germany to have participated.

### From Progress to Present

At the heart of histories that spotlight 1989–1990, one tends to find the notion of progress. Its hegemony dates to the Enlightenment, when the modern world transposed Christian eschatology into a secular key.<sup>23</sup> The conviction that society had commenced a steady, incremental, and inexorable march toward an ideal form became *the* dominant idea in the West. Buoyed by the Darwinian concept of evolution, the belief in progress fueled an expectation of teleological macro-change. The West anticipated a political, social, and economic metamorphosis on a global scale.<sup>24</sup> Progress increasingly served as the lens through which other important ideas like equality, freedom, social justice, and popular sovereignty came into focus.<sup>25</sup> And the future came to symbolize the promise of their achievement. The prioritization of the future, then, endowed the modern Western world with its intelligibility.<sup>26</sup>

For many historians of the Federal Republic, that future was the end of Germany's peculiar path to modernity.<sup>27</sup> As Ralf Dahrendorf famously argued, Germany was not England; that is, it had modernized economically but had remained socially and politically stunted.<sup>28</sup> The persistent question for decades asked when Germany would commit to those ideas of democracy, mass politics, and civil society first consecrated in the *Sattelzeit* period that

<sup>23</sup>See Robert A. Nisbet, *History of the Idea of Progress* (New York: Basic Books, 1980), 171–316, esp. 171–78. See also Karl Löwith, *Meaning in History: The Theological Implications of the Philosophy of History* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1949); Leo Strauss, "Progress or Return? The Contemporary Crisis in Western Civilization," *Modern Judaism* 1, no. 1 (1981): 17–45; Frank Edward Manuel, *Shapes of Philosophical History* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1965). Many have subsequently criticized this secularization thesis. See, e.g., Christopher Lasch, *The True and Only Heaven: Progress and Its Critics* (New York: Norton, 1991), 40–52.

<sup>24</sup>On Charles Darwin's influence on notions of macro-change, see Penelope J. Corfield, *Time and the Shape of History* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2007), 57–65.

<sup>25</sup>See Nisbet, *History of the Idea of Progress*; Gabriel A. Almond, Marvin Chodorow, and Roy Harvey Pearce, eds., *Progress and Its Discontents* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982).

<sup>26</sup>François Hartog, *Regimes of Historicity: Presentism and Experiences of Time*, trans. Saskia Brown (New York: Columbia University Press, 2015), xviii.

<sup>27</sup>On the debates about the German *Sonderweg*, see David Blackbourn and Geoff Eley, *The Peculiarities of German History: Bourgeois Society and Politics in Nineteenth-Century Germany* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984).

<sup>28</sup>Ralf Dahrendorf, *Society and Democracy in Germany* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1967).

bridged the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.<sup>29</sup> Though the postwar era inaugurated a new cynicism about Germany's historical development, historians read 1945 as offering an opportunity for Germany to chart a new course.<sup>30</sup> The experiences of moral collapse, total defeat, and Allied occupation after World War II seemed to reset the clock on Germany's progressive potential. The promise of a more durable allegiance to *Sattelzeit* principles and, at long last, the confluence of Germany's path with that of the rest of the Western, liberal, democratic world became the Federal Republic's founding myth.

Allied occupation, however, had rendered the Federal Republic only a kind of "provisional" republic. West Germany faced the task of confirming its democratic credentials not simply in word but also in deed.<sup>31</sup> A consensus among historians *that* this process took place, though, has not led to a consensus on *when*. Some have located it in the democratic new beginning heralded by both the Adenauer administration and postwar intellectuals.<sup>32</sup> Others have found it in the messianic complex of the '68ers.<sup>33</sup> Some have pointed to the Schmidt government's victories over domestic and international terrorism that ended the German Autumn.<sup>34</sup> Still others underscore the social-liberal reformism of the New Social Movements, which transformed the Federal Republic into a global leader in fields as diverse as environmentalism and memory politics.<sup>35</sup> For many, however, 1989–1990 represented the climax of this process of inner democratization. As Jarausch has argued, it marked "the last ... step toward the recovery of civilized normalcy."<sup>36</sup>

To historians seeking evidence that the Western project had triumphed, the political cataclysm of 1989–1990 seemed finally to punctuate the long sentence of Germany's political development. They observed Germans on both sides of the Iron Curtain no longer content merely to "dare more democracy," as Willy Brandt had demanded in 1969. Instead, democratic volition replaced an occupation-era politics of democracy-by-fiat. The true miracle of

<sup>29</sup>Reinhart Koselleck, *Critique and Crisis: Enlightenment and the Pathogenesis of Modern Society* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1988). See also Jan-Werner Müller, "On Conceptual History," in *Rethinking Modern European Intellectual History*, ed. Darrin M. McMahon and Samuel Moyn (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 74–93.

<sup>30</sup>Particularly heated was the controversy that grew out of Fritz Fischer, *Germany's Aims in the First World War* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1967 [1961]). For the arguments of Fischer's key critic, see Gerhard Ritter, "Eine Neue Kriegsschuldthese? Zu Fritz Fischers Buch 'Griff nach der Weltmacht,'" *Historische Zeitschrift* 194, no. 1 (1962): 646–68.

<sup>31</sup>Schildt, *Annäherungen an die Westdeutschen*, 11.

<sup>32</sup>See, e.g., Norbert Frei, *Adenauer's Germany and the Nazi Past: The Politics of Amnesty and Integration*, trans. Joel Golb (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010); Sean A. Forner, *German Intellectuals and the Challenge of Democratic Renewal: Culture and Politics after 1945* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014); Udi Greenberg, *The Weimar Century: German Émigrés and the Ideological Foundations of the Cold War* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2014); Noah Benezra Strote, *Lions and Lambs: Conflict in Weimar and the Creation of Post-Nazi Germany* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2017).

<sup>33</sup>Hans Kundnani, *Utopia or Auschwitz? Germany's 1968 Generation and the Holocaust* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009); Wolfgang Kraushaar, "Denkmodelle der 68er-Bewegung," *Aus Politik und Zeitgeschichte B* 22–23 (2001): 14–27; Axel Schildt, Detlef Siegfried, and Karl Christian Lammers, eds., *Dynamische Zeiten: Die 60er Jahre in den beiden deutschen Gesellschaften* (Hamburg: Christians, 2000).

<sup>34</sup>Karrin Hanshew, *Terror and Democracy in West Germany* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

<sup>35</sup>Sabine von Dirke, *All Power to the Imagination! The West German Counterculture from the Student Movement to the Greens* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1997).

<sup>36</sup>Jarausch, *After Hitler*, 17.

the postwar recovery, Ulrich Herbert has argued, lies less in Germany's rapid material renewal than in its "fundamental liberalization" of politics and society.<sup>37</sup>

A wave of attacks on foreigners shortly after the fall of the Wall—Hoyerswerda in 1991, Rostock and Mölln in 1992, and Solingen in 1993—threatened to undermine this assessment. The Kohl government, however, framed these outbursts as the aberrations of disaffected young people or small circles of extremists, empowered by the crisis of reunification. It forecasted that this violence would be brief, as Germans internalized the new norms of an enlarged Federal Republic and the crisis of reunification subsided.<sup>38</sup> Historians and other social scientists have since recapitulated Helmut Kohl's stance.<sup>39</sup> As the Federal Republic increasingly made clear that democracy had become permanent practice, not mere pronouncement, it became, for many, "*Modell Deutschland*."<sup>40</sup> Even conservative critics of the post-Wall welfare state have acknowledged that Chancellor Kohl's promise of "blossoming landscapes" (*blühende Landschaften*) has materialized, even if not always consistently across Germany.<sup>41</sup>

But the Federal Republic's political vista has also invited from historians charges of stagnation.<sup>42</sup> Margaret Thatcher's uninspiring *bon mot*, that "there is no alternative" to capitalism and liberal democracy, has seemed compelling when read, for example, against the post-reunification decline of what was arguably *the* representative of politics-done-differently in late divided Germany: the Green Party.<sup>43</sup> The Greens' remarkable rise in the early 1980s was matched only by the party's precipitous fall a decade later, after it found itself on the wrong side of the reunification debate. Nearly ousted from parliament just as suddenly as it had entered, the Greens ensured their salvation only by joining Gerhard Schröder's government in 1998 to form a Red-Green coalition. Historians have underscored this choice of coalition and compromise over utopian dogmatism as a catalyst in the return to the parliamentary entrenchment that had characterized West Germany until the 1980s.<sup>44</sup> Beyond cementing a commitment to environmentalism in German politics, Germany's most promising postwar political alternative appeared to have accomplished little more than to remind

<sup>37</sup>Ulrich Herbert, "Liberalisierung als Lernprozeß. Die Bundesrepublik in der deutschen Geschichte—eine Skizze," in *Wandlungsprozesse in Westdeutschland: Belastung, Integration, Liberalisierung 1945 bis 1980*, ed. Ulrich Herbert (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2003), 7. See also Frank Biess, "Thinking after Hitler: The New Intellectual History of the Federal Republic of Germany," *History and Theory* 51, no. 2 (2012): 222.

<sup>38</sup>Jeffrey K. Olick, *The Sins of the Fathers: Germany, Memory, Method* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2016), 406.

<sup>39</sup>See, e.g., Jan Herman Brinks, *Children of a New Fatherland: Germany's Post-War Right-Wing Politics* (London: Tauris, 2000); Rainer Erb, Hermann Kurthen, and Werner Bergmann, eds., *Antisemitism and Xenophobia in Germany after Unification* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997).

<sup>40</sup>Thomas Hertfelder and Andreas Rödder, eds., *Modell Deutschland: Erfolgsgeschichte oder Illusion?* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2007).

<sup>41</sup>Rödder, 21.0, 209–11.

<sup>42</sup>Ingo Schulze, "1989: How We Lost Political Alternatives," *Bulletin of the German Historical Institute* 52 (Spring 2013): 75–91.

<sup>43</sup>Silke Mende, *Nicht rechts, nicht links, sondern vorn. Eine Geschichte der Gründungsgrünen* (Munich: Oldenbourg, 2011).

<sup>44</sup>E. Gene Frankland, Paul Lucardie, and Benoît Rihoux, eds., *Green Parties in Transition: The End of Grass-Roots Democracy?* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2008); Margit Mayer and John Ely, *The German Greens: Paradox between Movement and Party* (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 1998); Andrei S. Markovits and Philip S. Gorski, *The German Left: Red, Green and Beyond* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993); E. Gene Frankland and Donald Schoonmaker, *Between Protest and Power: The Green Party in Germany* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1992).



the Social Democratic political establishment of its own mandate.<sup>45</sup> Reactions to the reconstitution of the Grand Coalition of Social Democrats and Christian Democrats after the 2017 federal election reiterated this assessment of political alternatives in the Berlin Republic. Both left and right have argued that grand this coalition is not.<sup>46</sup>

In all these ways, historians have used 1989–1990 to anchor the Federal Republic in the world of liberal democracy and signal the denouement—uplifting or not—of Germany's narrative of progress.<sup>47</sup> Despite its popularity, however, this reading was untimely. It clashed with a renewed critique of the idea of progress that had been growing steadily since the early twentieth century. The foundational premises of modern progress had come under fire when philosophers like Georges Sorel, Oswald Spengler, Claude Lévi-Strauss, and Michel Foucault revisited a critical stance as old as the Enlightenment itself and objected to the individualism and empty rationalism of modern Western culture.<sup>48</sup> The basic principles of progress suffered at the hands of the literary prophets of decay like T. S. Eliot, W. B. Yeats, and James Joyce. They unraveled when economists like Joseph Schumpeter and sociologists like Daniel Bell predicted the decline of capitalism, when theologians like Reinhold Niebuhr condemned the faulty moral compass of secular messianism, and when theorists like Theodor Adorno denounced the resilience of religious and racial hatred in the *Rechtsstaat*.<sup>49</sup> Since the late 1950s, historians have similarly taken up a more tempered analysis of what Georg Iggers called the “anthropocentric hubris” underlying faith in progress.<sup>50</sup>

<sup>45</sup> Andrei Markovits and Stephen Silvia have argued that, when it comes to environmentalism in Germany, “everybody has become a Green on this issue.” See Andrei S. Markovits and Stephen J. Silvia, “The Identity Crisis of Alliance ‘90/The Greens: The New Left at a Crossroad,” *New German Critique* 72 (1997): 127–28.

<sup>46</sup> Criticism of the Grand Coalition has appeared frequently in the media. See, e.g., Jakob Augstein, “Große Koalition: Festhalten! Rechtskurve!,” *Spiegel Online*, March 19, 2018 ([www.spiegel.de/politik/deutschland/grosse-koalition-kaum-im-amt-blinkt-sie-schon-nach-rechts-kolumne-a-1198779.html](http://www.spiegel.de/politik/deutschland/grosse-koalition-kaum-im-amt-blinkt-sie-schon-nach-rechts-kolumne-a-1198779.html)); Damien McGuinness, “Germany’s Marriage of Convenience,” *BBC News*, Feb. 7, 2018 ([www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-42983013](http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-42983013)); Yannick Haan, “SPD: Lehnt diese große Koalition ab!,” *Die Zeit*, Jan. 15, 2018.

<sup>47</sup> Timothy Garton Ash has read 1989 as an analogue to—and, because of its success, also as the opposite of—the revolutions of 1848. See Garton Ash, *The Magic Lantern*, 163. Scholars and public intellectuals from a range of disciplines and geographies echoed the interpretation that 1989–1990 marked a caesura in the long Age of Revolutions. See, e.g., François Furet, *The Passing of an Illusion: The Idea of Communism in the Twentieth Century*, trans. Deborah Furet (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1999 [1995]); Joachim C. Fest, *Der zerstörte Traum: Vom Ende des utopischen Zeitalters* (Berlin: Siedler, 1991).

<sup>48</sup> See Georges Sorel, *The Illusions of Progress* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1972 [1908]); Spengler, *The Decline of the West*; Claude Lévi-Strauss, *The Savage Mind* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1966); Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, trans. A. M. Sheridan Smith (New York: Pantheon Books, 1972); idem, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1970). On the longer history of critiques leveled against the Enlightenment’s most fundamental principles, see Isaiah Berlin, *Three Critics of the Enlightenment: Vico, Hamann, Herder*, ed. Henry Hardy (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000); Darrin M. McMahon, *Enemies of the Enlightenment: The French Counter-Enlightenment and the Making of Modernity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002).

<sup>49</sup> Joseph Schumpeter, *Capitalism, Socialism, and Democracy* (New York: HarperPerennial, 2008 [1942]); Daniel Bell, *The Cultural Contradictions of Capitalism* (New York: Basic Books, 1976); Reinhold Niebuhr, *Faith and History: A Comparison of Christian and Modern Views of History* (New York: C. Scribner’s Sons, 1949); Theodor W. Adorno, et al., *The Authoritarian Personality* (New York: Harper, 1950).

<sup>50</sup> Georg G. Iggers, “The Idea of Progress in Historiography and Social Thought Since the Enlightenment,” in *Progress and Its Discontents*, ed. Gabriel Abraham Almond, Marvin Chodorow, and

By the end of the twentieth century, the Western world clearly voiced its disillusionment with idealized visions of the future prioritized at the expense of the present. In response, it gradually inverted its relationship to time, or what the French historian François Hartog has called its “regime of historicity.”<sup>51</sup> The principal feature of this new temporal paradigm—variously called catastrophic time, emergency time, and presentism—is its tendency to cannibalize all time beyond the present.<sup>52</sup> The modern world endows that present with a kind of extraordinary urgency by stripping it of historical context.<sup>53</sup> It then valorizes immediate action. But it no longer uses an idealized past or imagined idealized future as the normative rubric to guide those interventions; it operates for the sake of the urgent here-and-now.<sup>54</sup> The moment scholars turned to 1989–1990 to signal the climax of the Western progressive narrative, in other words, coincided with their abandonment of precisely the future-oriented temporal paradigm in which this reading of 1989–1990 made sense.

It is possible, however, to work with the grain of presentism to avoid this paradox. Attention to the ways presentism has altered both historians’ investments and the investments of their more contemporary subjects offers several ways to reassess the Federal Republic’s economic and political development—what Charles Maier calls its “structural narrative”—in ways that cut across the prime meridian of reunification.<sup>55</sup> Maier is, admittedly, an unlikely proponent of presentism. Skeptical of treating shifting temporal sensibilities as the scaffolding of a new historiographical paradigm, he claims that the perception of an “acceleration [of historical time] is not a sufficient criterion for ascribing some epochal quality” to contemporary history.<sup>56</sup> Instead, he foregrounds a global transformation in the notion of territory. Spaces with clear borders no longer serve as the linchpin in economic organization, political security, and identity. Rejecting the historiographical tendency to stress sudden transformations like that of 1989–1990, Maier’s pioneering article views the interval roughly between the late 1960s and the turn of the millennium as “one of the axial crises of the modern era.”<sup>57</sup> This transition

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Roy Harvey Pearce (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982), 63. For postwar historical reassessments of progress, see Lasch, *The True and Only Heaven*; Manuel, *Shapes of Philosophical History*; Georg G. Iggers, “The Idea of Progress in Recent Philosophies of History,” *Journal of Modern History* 30, no. 3 (1958): 215–26.

<sup>51</sup>Hartog, *Regimes of Historicity*.

<sup>52</sup>Christopher Dole et al., eds., *The Time of Catastrophe: Multidisciplinary Approaches to the Age of Catastrophe* (London: Routledge, 2015); Craig Calhoun, “The Idea of Emergency: Humanitarian Action and Global (Dis)Order,” in *Contemporary States of Emergency: The Politics of Military and Humanitarian Interventions*, ed. Didier Fassin and Mariella Pandolfi (New York: Zone Books, 2013), 29–58; Henry A. Giroux, *The Abandoned Generation: Democracy Beyond the Culture of Fear* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 1–15; Hartog, *Regimes of Historicity*.

<sup>53</sup>Helga Nowotny, *Time: The Modern and Postmodern Experience*, trans. Neville Plaice (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2005), 45–74; Hartog, *Regimes of Historicity*, xviii.

<sup>54</sup>Stefan-Ludwig Hoffmann, “Human Rights and History,” *Past & Present* 232, no. 1 (2016): 304.

<sup>55</sup>Charles S. Maier, “Consigning the Twentieth Century to History: Alternative Narratives for the Modern Era,” *American Historical Review* 105, no. 3 (2000): 807–31.

<sup>56</sup>In the same breath, Maier points to Henry Adams at the beginning of the twentieth century and Reinhart Koselleck near its end as proponents of this changing relationship to time. Elsewhere, he also presents Michel Foucault as similarly supporting this stance. See *ibid.*, 811, 825.

<sup>57</sup>*Ibid.*, 810, 823. Although Maier makes clear that this transition began in the late 1960s, he offers a fuzziest answer regarding when it concludes. In a later comparison of these transformations in the West and the East, Maier offers both the late 1980s and 2001 as possible endpoints. See Charles S. Maier, “Two Sorts of Crisis? The ‘Long’ 1970s in the West and the East,” in *Koordinaten deutscher Geschichte in der Epoche des Ost-West-Konflikts*, ed. Hans Günter Hockerts and Elisabeth Müller-Luckner (Munich: Oldenbourg, 2004), 60–62.

to a “post-territorial” era involved a crisis in the organization of industrial society that had reigned since the 1860s. And it slowly ushered in a new, globalized form of capitalism.<sup>58</sup> Maier’s work laid the groundwork for a lively historiography of the Federal Republic that redirects its attention toward the 1970s—or, to use the term popularized by one particular volume, the period “after the boom”—as the fulcrum of the contemporary world.<sup>59</sup> Despite Maier’s objections to treating presentism as a motor of these historical changes, he never quite manages to escape its influences. It is no coincidence that he closes one study of these themes by arguing that historians can follow this mostly economic narrative via the transformation of social values. And those values that had come under fire were, in fact, the “virtues of sacrificing for the future” and “the acceptance of the meta-narratives of modernization.”<sup>60</sup>

If not via territoriality, one might reconsider the history of the Federal Republic through a longer and more diverse genealogy of political alternatives. A politics of presentism encourages historians to deemphasize the content of the particular futures that alternative political programs envisioned. Instead, it invites historians to focus on the methods used to approximate those futures in the present. The postwar New Social Movements provided blueprints for many of these methods.<sup>61</sup> They sought, somewhat ironically, to redistribute political agency, for example, by shifting the locus of parliamentary politics out of the parliament building itself and into local communities. The Greens became a clearinghouse for this new postwar plebiscitary politics. After their choice to enter a coalition with the Social Democrats in 1998 left the party at the mercy of the same iron law of oligarchy it had tried to resist, it became clear just how many others had also taken up the mantle of grassroots democracy. Versions of this enthusiasm for local populism and the practices of direct democracy have appeared in the programs of the satirical Die Partei (est. 2004), Die Piraten (est. 2006), the Freie Wähler (est. 2009), and even Alternative für Deutschland (est. 2013).<sup>62</sup>

A longer lineage of alternative political practices in Germany can also link the alternatives of the Left since the 1980s with the more recent appearance of a Euroskeptical, xenophobic, organized Right populism. The brand of reactionary conservatism voiced today by groups like Alternative für Deutschland and PEGIDA (Patriotic Europeans Against the

<sup>58</sup>See Maier, “Consigning the Twentieth Century to History,” 807–831; idem, “Two Sorts of Crisis?,” 49–62.

<sup>59</sup>The tendency to periodize beginning “after the boom” acquired a catchphrase from a 2008 monograph of the same title: Anselm Doering-Manteuffel and Lutz Raphael, *Nach dem Boom: Perspektiven auf die Zeitgeschichte seit 1970* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2008). The book generated a wave of scholarship that has continued through the present. See, e.g., Konrad Hugo Jarausch, ed., *Das Ende der Zuversicht? Die siebziger Jahre als Geschichte* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2008); Thomas Raithel, Andreas Rödder, and Andreas Wirsching, eds., *Auf dem Weg in eine neue Moderne? Die Bundesrepublik Deutschland in den siebziger und achtziger Jahren* (Munich: Oldenbourg, 2009); Frank Bösch, *Zeitenwende 1979: Als die Welt von heute begann* (Munich: C. H. Beck, 2019).

<sup>60</sup>Maier, “Two Sorts of Crisis?,” 61.

<sup>61</sup>See von Dirke, *All Power to the Imagination!*

<sup>62</sup>See Die Partei Bundesverband, “Programm des Bundesverbandes der Partei,” July 31, 2004 ([www.die-partei.de/programm/](http://www.die-partei.de/programm/)); Piratenpartei Deutschland, “Bundestagswahlprogramm 2009” ([wiki.piratenpartei.de/Bundestagswahl\\_2009/Wahlprogramm](http://wiki.piratenpartei.de/Bundestagswahl_2009/Wahlprogramm)); Freie Wähler, “Für die Zukunft unserer Heimat. Programm zur Landtagswahl 2018” ([https://www.freie-waehler-bayern.de/fileadmin/user\\_upload/Dokumente/FW\\_Broschuere\\_Wahlprogramm\\_A6\\_v2\\_WEB.pdf](https://www.freie-waehler-bayern.de/fileadmin/user_upload/Dokumente/FW_Broschuere_Wahlprogramm_A6_v2_WEB.pdf)); Alternative für Deutschland, “Programm für Deutschland. Wahlprogramm der Alternative für Deutschland für die Wahl zum Deutschen Bundestag am 24. September 2017” ([https://www.afd.de/wp-content/uploads/sites/111/2017/06/2017-06-01\\_AfD-Bundestagswahlprogramm\\_Onlinefassung.pdf](https://www.afd.de/wp-content/uploads/sites/111/2017/06/2017-06-01_AfD-Bundestagswahlprogramm_Onlinefassung.pdf)).

Islamization of the West, est. 2014) seemed to appear abruptly. It certainly sits uneasily with the narrative of the Federal Republic's inexorable march toward democracy.<sup>63</sup> But it has methodological analogs in the alternative political practices used to overcome a much earlier sense of stagnation in West German politics. Much like the Left alternatives of the 1980s and 1990s, New Right activism frequently engages communities in their own spaces to enable a broader participation in the political programs of the Right. And it invites participants not only to voice their criticisms—of the welfare state, the multicultural state, and the European Union—but also to put their grassroots refusal of the status quo into immediate practice. It is important to emphasize that these analogies between Left and Right alternative political practices are not new. Postwar citizens' initiatives lobbying for peace, conscious consumerism, or a new memory politics, for example, shared political tactics with citizens' initiatives that emerged in the 1980s to oppose foreign immigration, e.g., groups like *Bürgerinitiative Ausländerstopp* (Citizens' Initiative for a Moratorium on Foreigners) or *Liste für Ausländerstopp* (List for a Moratorium on Foreigners).<sup>64</sup> Though its goals have differed greatly, the methods of the New Right place it squarely (and, for those on the Left, uncomfortably) in the company of the New Social Movements and subsequent left activism.

Journalists and political analysts have been quick to recognize this methodological kinship.<sup>65</sup> Here, historians have an opportunity to frame the Federal Republic in terms of its tendency to nurture alternative political parties on both Left and Right with a commitment to the practices of grassroots democracy. Read across 1989–1990, Germany's alternative political landscape reveals a remarkably consistent affinity for radical localization of political decision-making since the early postwar period.

The politics of presentism can push historiography in new directions by altering the values historians bring to their research: a prioritization of historical practices over historical ideas, for example. But it can also produce new histories by illuminating how the values of historical subjects have changed as well. Historians have already begun to explore how a strengthening political culture of presentism influenced the Federal Republic's international diplomatic priorities. Instead of emphasizing 1989–1990, it argues that the real caesura came a full decade later when Germany yielded to a new politics of emergency and overturned a half-century-long commitment to military nonintervention.<sup>66</sup>

These histories recognize that the National Socialist past weighed heavily on the Kohl and Schröder governments as they faced the first Gulf War, the Somali famine, and the Yugoslav

<sup>63</sup>For recent work on the contemporary politics of the Right, see Michael Wildt, *Volk, Volksgemeinschaft, AfD* (Hamburg: Hamburger Edition HIS, 2017); Volker Weiß, *Die autoritäre Revolte: Die Neue Rechte und der Untergang des Abendlandes* (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 2017); Heike Kleffner and Anna Spangenberg, eds., *Generation Hoyerswerda: Das Netzwerk militanter Neonazis in Brandenburg* (Berlin: be.bra Verlag, 2016); Gideon Botsch, *Die extreme Rechte in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland 1949 bis heute* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 2013).

<sup>64</sup>See, e.g., Gunther Jürgens, *Direkte Demokratie in den Bundesländern: Gemeinsamkeiten—Unterschiede—Erfahrungen. Vorbildfunktion für den Bund?* (Stuttgart: Boorberg, 1993), 195, 213–15.

<sup>65</sup>See, e.g., Nils Fröhlich and Lisa Peyer, "Partei für Arbeit, Rechtsstaat, Tierschutz, Elitenförderung und basisdemokratische Initiative," *bpb.de*, June 5, 2017 ([www.bpb.de/politik/grundfragen/parteien-in-deutschland/kleinparteien/208418/die-partei](http://www.bpb.de/politik/grundfragen/parteien-in-deutschland/kleinparteien/208418/die-partei)); Michael Schlieben, "Piratenpartei: Die neuen Grünen," *Die Zeit*, April 4, 2012; Shara Fatheyana, "Freie Wähler: Bürgernähe als Programm," *Frankfurter Rundschau*, Sept. 7, 2017; Martin Klingst, "AfD-Parteitag: Die AfD bleibt eine Grenzgängerin," *Die Zeit*, May 2, 2016.

<sup>66</sup>See Kerry Longhurst, *Germany and the Use of Force* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004), 70.

wars in the 1990s. The legacies of this past presented them with a conflict: the hard-won postwar lesson of “never again war” (*Nie wieder Krieg*) and the considerable German constitutional red tape limiting military engagement abroad ran up against the imperative “never again Auschwitz” (*Nie wieder Auschwitz*) and the mandates of human rights.<sup>67</sup> The ethics of defending the Kurds, feeding starving Somalis, and preventing ethnic cleansing in Bosnia—i.e., the project of preventing mass death—gradually chipped away, however, at Germany’s military “culture of restraint” (*Kultur der Zurückhaltung*).<sup>68</sup> Shortly after Gerhard Schröder assumed the chancellorship, the ethnic cleansing of Albanians in Kosovo demanded a clearer response from his young administration. His foreign minister, Green party member Joschka Fischer, endorsed the 1999 NATO-initiated intervention, against the protests of his party and many others.<sup>69</sup> Historical analyses of this moment acknowledge not only the irony that it took a coalition of Social Democrats and pacifist Greens to launch the Federal Republic into a new postwar era of global military involvement, but also the irony that precisely the justification for antimilitarism during the Cold War was now being mobilized to the opposite end.

Kosovo was not a conventional war waged in defense of the rights of states, however. It was fought, rather, in the name of a global normative program of human rights that operated in response to a humanitarian emergency. Stefan-Ludwig Hoffmann has argued that states bear a different temporal relationship to these crises: they “demand a reaction here and now (and not in the distant future).”<sup>70</sup> Germany overturned its postwar stance on international military engagement on account of its new presentist politics. The Federal Republic, Jeffrey Olick has argued, had become “both too big and too powerful, and world events too complicated, for old formulas.”<sup>71</sup> The negotiations over the Federal Republic’s new diplomatic and military principles took place concurrently with its efforts to manage reunification. But the changes brought about by 1989–1990 and the narrative of progress in which they are often framed offer less potent explanations for Germany’s new willingness to intervene in conflicts abroad. The politics of emergency prove much more illuminating. And they have arguably continued to shape German policy through the present.<sup>72</sup>

<sup>67</sup> On memories of National Socialism and the pressures they placed on German policy, see Olick, *The Sins of the Fathers*.

<sup>68</sup> Heinz Loquai, *Der Kosovo-Konflikt. Wege in einen vermeidbaren Krieg: Die Zeit von Ende November 1997 bis März 1999* (Baden-Baden: Nomos, 2000); Anja Dalgaard-Nielsen, *Germany, Pacifism and Peace Enforcement* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2006), 71–77. On the ongoing critique of Germany’s culture of restraint, see Jörg Bong, “Deutsche Leitkultur: Wir sind viel zu zurückhaltend,” *Spiegel Online*, May 7, 2017 ([www.spiegel.de/kultur/gesellschaft/leitkultur-wir-sind-viel-zu-zurueckhaltend-gastbeitrag-a-1145962.html](http://www.spiegel.de/kultur/gesellschaft/leitkultur-wir-sind-viel-zu-zurueckhaltend-gastbeitrag-a-1145962.html)).

<sup>69</sup> For Fischer’s own take, see Joschka Fischer, *Die rot-grünen Jahre: Deutsche Aussenpolitik—vom Kosovo bis zum 11. September* (Cologne: Kiepenheuer & Witsch, 2007).

<sup>70</sup> Hoffmann, “Human Rights and History,” 296. The significance of Germany’s new geopolitics was lost on few. See, e.g., Jürgen Elsässer and Joschka Fischer, eds., *Nie wieder Krieg ohne uns: Das Kosovo und die neue deutsche Geopolitik* (Hamburg: Konkret, 1999); Günther Joetze, *Der letzte Krieg in Europa? Das Kosovo und die deutsche Politik* (Stuttgart: DVA, 2001). In his memoir, Schröder reflected on both this sense of urgency and the irony that a Red-Green coalition would become trailblazers of twenty-first-century German military engagement. See Gerhard Schröder, *Entscheidungen: Mein Leben in der Politik* (Hamburg: Hoffmann und Campe Verlag, 2006).

<sup>71</sup> Olick, *The Sins of the Fathers*, 403.

<sup>72</sup> Angela Merkel’s policies toward the Eurozone crisis and the refugee crisis have provoked a robust conversation about the need for practical solutions over lofty visions. See, e.g., Thomas Assheuer, “Jürgen

Historians who study the recent past risk writing teleological histories if they lose sight either of the command that 1989–1990 has exercised over interpretations of the Federal Republic or of the roots of that hegemony.<sup>73</sup> The prioritization of progress as the structuring principle of the modern Western world encourages reading this history as a closed epoch, capped by a moment whose currency relies on an outdated conceptual paradigm. But the contemporary historian has an alternative. Rethinking the history of the Federal Republic in terms of the exigencies of the present demands a turn away from narratives of ends: the final triumph of the Western political project or the end of a German *Sonderweg*. It encourages historians to focus less on the historical resolution of old problems and more on what Hans Günter Hockerts has called the “prehistory of contemporary problems.”<sup>74</sup> This stance frees historians to examine the more nuanced evolution of economic infrastructures, the viability of political alternatives, or the recent transformation of Germany’s international diplomatic investments, for example. These analyses deemphasize 1989–1990 as a radical caesura and offer a launching point for a new political and economic narrative for the Federal Republic.

### The Cold War Is Over

German historians might also rework the master narrative of the Federal Republic by reconsidering the position of 1989–1990 in histories of identity and difference. In 2013, Fritz Stern published his memoir, *Five Germanys I Have Known*. Near the end of the book, the German-born historian reminisced about his sense of responsibility to Germans in the East shortly after the fall of the Berlin Wall. He remarked wistfully that he could have traveled to the former East

to teach, to help students grapple with the realities of their past and present, to challenge the distorted simplicities they had inherited. ... I may not have understood enough about the economic deficits of the GDR, but I did know about its deficits in the historic-intellectual realms. I thought it would be thrilling (and useful) to help East German students grasp the complexity of their history. ... East Germany’s self-image was one of heroic exceptionalism, of being the embodiment of all that was progressive in German life, and this myth had to be corrected.<sup>75</sup>

Once erstwhile pupils of a Western system of sociopolitical mores, the ageing members of what Dirk Moses has called the “Forty-Fiver Generation” had become the tutors.<sup>76</sup> Even at a quarter century’s remove, however, Stern failed to see the stunning hypocrisy of his own myth of heroic exceptionalism.<sup>77</sup> His reflections are symptomatic of a powerful mode of thinking about identity and difference in the historiography of the Federal

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Habermas: Die Spieler treten ab. Kerneuropa als Rettung: Ein Gespräch mit Jürgen Habermas über den Brexit und die EU-Krise,” *Die Zeit*, July 9, 2016.

<sup>73</sup>For warnings against the temptation of teleology in contemporary history more generally, see Rüdiger Graf, “Die Unkenntnis der Zukunft und der Zukunftsbezug der Zeitgeschichte,” in *Die Zukunft des 20. Jahrhunderts. Dimensionen einer historischen Zukunftsforschung*, ed. Lucian Hölscher (Frankfurt/Main: Campus Verlag, 2017), 304–5, 308.

<sup>74</sup>Hans Günter Hockerts, “Zeitgeschichte in Deutschland: Begriff, Methoden, Themenfelder,” *Historisches Jahrbuch* 113 (1993): 124.

<sup>75</sup>Fritz Stern, *Five Germanys I Have Known* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2013), 465–66.

<sup>76</sup>A. Dirk Moses, “The Forty-Fivers: A Generation Between Fascism and Democracy,” *German Politics & Society* 17, no. 1 (1999): 94–126. See also idem, *German Intellectuals and the Nazi Past* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

<sup>77</sup>Reinhart Koselleck has reflected on the tendency of the victorious to exhibit such myopic bias. See Reinhart Koselleck, *The Practice of Conceptual History: Timing History, Spacing Concepts*, trans. Todd Samuel Presner (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2002), esp. 76–83.

Republic. The Cold War established two dominant measures along which normative boundaries of identity in the Federal Republic could be drawn: what counted as German in the Federal Republic was, first, that which was not Nazi and, second, that which was not communist.

Though many historians of the Federal Republic have argued that the events of 1945 enabled a “constructive renewal” that prohibited a reprisal of fascism, the fear of a resurgent Nazi identity nevertheless dogged the Federal Republic long after the war.<sup>78</sup> Contemporaries recognized the administrative continuities between the Nazi state and the Adenauer era.<sup>79</sup> West Germans drew analogies between the Weimar and Bonn Republics in order to accuse their political opponents of undermining the Federal Republic’s democratic project.<sup>80</sup> And some considered their state to be a conservative “restoration republic” that, at its worst, harbored an affinity for illiberal politics and authoritarian structures.<sup>81</sup> The only escape from such destructive interpretations of the young Federal Republic was to offer an irrevocable collective repudiation of the experiences of the Third Reich.

Analyses of West German attempts to do so have often awarded the events of 1989–1990 a pivotal position. Moses, who has chronicled postwar German intellectuals’ uneven engagement with the Nazi past, emphasizes that the debates over Germany’s relationship to National Socialism are ongoing. He nevertheless treats 1989–1990 as an important transition in light of the assessments of contemporaries. To more conservative intellectuals, reunification finally catapulted the Federal Republic out of “an abnormal provisional period of *halbsouveräne Vergangenheit* [semisovereign past].” It marked Germany’s “second chance” at the pursuit of “enlightened self-interest.” To others, it revealed the Federal Republic’s new double bind: reunified Germany had to balance its role as an important and “normal” player in international politics with its continued responsibility to its history of violence.<sup>82</sup> Whether reunified Germany was to become a proponent of democratic constitutionalism committed to human rights, demilitarization, and multilateralism, or a “new colossus,” whose own weight threatened to crush its headway in these areas, remained unclear.<sup>83</sup> What was evident, however, was that 1989–1990 changed the stakes of the conversation.

<sup>78</sup>Konrad H. Jarausch, “The Federal Republic at Sixty: Popular Myths, Actual Accomplishments, and Competing Interpretations,” *German Politics and Society* 28, no. 1 (2010): 11. The rhetoric of renewal received a significant boost from the 1985 speech given by the president of the Federal Republic, Richard von Weizsäcker, on the occasion of the fortieth anniversary of the end of the war. See Andreas Wirsching, “Primärerfahrung und kulturelles Gedächtnis. Richard von Weizsäcker und die Erinnerung an den Nationalsozialismus” in Bajohr et al., *Mehr als eine Erzählung*, 114–15.

<sup>79</sup>See Frei, *Adenauer’s Germany and the Nazi Past*; idem, *Karrieren im Zwielicht Hitlers Eliten nach 1945* (Frankfurt/Main: Campus Verlag, 2002). Where Frei explores continuity among the German elite, others have traced what the historian Lutz Niethammer has called “popular continuity” (*Volkskontinuität*). See Axel Schildt and Detlef Siegfried, *Deutsche Kulturgeschichte: Die Bundesrepublik 1945 bis zur Gegenwart* (Munich: Hanser, 2009), 46; Lutz Niethammer, ed., “Die Jahre weiß man nicht, wo man die heute hinsetzen soll.” *Faschismuserfahrungen im Ruhrgebiet. Lebensgeschichte und Sozialkultur im Ruhrgebiet 1930 bis 1960*, vol. 1 (Berlin: Dietz, 1983), 8.

<sup>80</sup>Moses has called this tendency the “Weimar Syndrome.” See Moses, *German Intellectuals and the Nazi Past*, 47–50. For an account of the positive legacies the Bonn Republic found in the Weimar Republic, see Greenberg, *The Weimar Century*.

<sup>81</sup>This interpretive framework began to gain traction shortly after the war. See, e.g., Dahrendorf, *Society and Democracy in Germany*; Eugen Kogon, *Die restaurative Republik. Zur Geschichte der Bundesrepublik Deutschland* (Berlin: Beltz Quadriga, 1996).

<sup>82</sup>Moses, *German Intellectuals and the Nazi Past*, 220–22, 250, 254.

<sup>83</sup>*Ibid.*

Reunification signaled the real triumph of antifascism. It opened up new avenues for exploring what Norbert Frei has called the “post-history of National Socialism” (*Nachgeschichte des Nationalsozialismus*).<sup>84</sup> Though Heinrich August Winkler has stressed the open, unfinished nature of Germany’s modern political project, he has nevertheless also interpreted reunification as a vote for a “truly normal” Germany. And, by “normal,” he meant that Germany had finally learned “to live as a nation state within a unified and democratic Europe.” It has, at long last, consummated its participation in “the West.”<sup>85</sup> Meanwhile, the rest of Europe proved receptive to tempering its anxieties about German intentions, increasingly treating both Germany’s domestic crises, as well as international crises in which Germany is involved, as situational rather than as the product of a reactionary German essence.<sup>86</sup>

If National Socialism had become the Scylla of German identity politics, communism was its Charybdis. Here, too, the events of 1989–1990 played a pivotal role. They demonstrated that Germany had finally accomplished what had long seemed impossible, namely, that it had steered safely between the two. If any ambiguity about the promise of state socialism remained, 1989–1990 dealt it a final blow. Historians have used 1989–1990 to emphasize the international political savvy of the Federal Republic’s project of Western integration (*Verwestlichungsgeschichte*).<sup>87</sup> They have mobilized it to mark the beginning of a new memory politics that discredited socialist mnemonics, began to remake Germany’s memory landscape, and validated the perspective that Germans had suffered under not one but two dictatorships.<sup>88</sup> Historians have pointed to 1989–1990 to demonstrate the birth of a new politics toward the Middle East.<sup>89</sup> And they have employed it to underscore Eastern alterity by reading residual allegiances to the East in terms of an unrepentant nostalgia.<sup>90</sup>

For many, in other words, 1989–1990 offered a final verdict on the Federal Republic’s two-part narrative of biographical rupture. It drew a temporal distinction that separated

<sup>84</sup>Norbert Frei, “Marscherleichterung. Die ‘Last der Vergangenheit’ sieben Jahrzehnte nach Kriegsende,” in Bajohr et al., *Mehr als eine Erzählung*, 235.

<sup>85</sup>See Dylan Riley, “Metaphysicking the West,” *New Left Review* 113 (2018): 137; Adam Tooze, “After the Wars,” *London Review of Books* 37, no. 22. (2015): 15–17. Both Riley and Tooze base their assessments not only on Winkler’s two-volume *Germany: The Long Road West*, trans. Alexander Sager (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006–2007), but also on his four-volume *Geschichte des Westens* (Munich: C. H. Beck, 2009–15).

<sup>86</sup>The European debt crisis has proven to be an exception to this trend, however, with many countries holding Germany responsible for its trajectory. See, e.g., Andrew Walker, “Is Germany Dragging down the Eurozone?,” *BBC News*, Feb. 12, 2016 (<https://www.bbc.com/news/business-35551876>); R. A., “Why Not Blame Germany?,” *The Economist*, Oct. 20, 2011.

<sup>87</sup>Germany’s thoroughgoing Westernization marked the final turning point in what Konrad Jarusch has called the “triple revolution” of 1989–1990. See Jarusch, *The Rush to German Unity*; see also Sarotte, 1989.

<sup>88</sup>Stefan Berger calls this a process of “renationalization.” See Stefan Berger, *The Search for Normality: National Identity and Historical Consciousness in Germany since 1800* (Providence, RI: Berghahn, 1997). See also Bill Niven, *Facing the Nazi Past: United Germany and the Legacy of the Third Reich* (London: Routledge, 2002); Jeffrey Herf, *Divided Memory: The Nazi Past in the Two Germanys* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997); Anna Saunders, “The Ghosts of Lenin, Thälmann and Marx in the Post-Socialist Cityscape,” *German Life and Letters* 63, no. 4 (2010): 441–57.

<sup>89</sup>Jeffrey Herf, *Undeclared Wars with Israel: East Germany and the West German Far Left, 1967–1989* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2016).

<sup>90</sup>Daphne Berdahl, “‘(N)Ostalgie’ for the Present: Memory, Longing, and East German Things,” in *On the Social Life of Postsocialism: Memory, Consumption, Germany*, ed. Matti Bunzl (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2010), 48–59.



Germans from the barbarians of the past. And it drew a spatial distinction that separated retrograde *Ossis* from good European *Wessis*. Historians have understood this moment as precipitating a kind of civic restoration in which the values, practices, and institutions of bourgeois liberalism have become common currencies for all Germans. Charles Maier has interpreted 1989–1990 as “redeeming” civil society.<sup>91</sup> Jarausch, more controversially, calls it the climax in the “recivilization” of Germans after National Socialism.<sup>92</sup> In this interpretive framework, the Federal Republic finally delivered on the promise that it could become a so-called normal nation unlike either the Nazi state or the GDR. Though the Cold War has long since ended, the anti-totalitarian consensus it nurtured has enjoyed an active scholarly afterlife.<sup>93</sup> It has become the second paradigm that renders 1989–1990 a mythic ending.

New attitudes toward global power relations, however, have encouraged historians to reassess their treatment of identity and difference in the Federal Republic. Recent research has paid particular attention to the agency of historically marginalized communities both within Germany and in relationships between Germany and the world. This work amplifies the voices of groups largely written out of the history of the Federal Republic, including, among others, ethnic minorities, asylum seekers, foreign guest workers, and their descendants. These histories tend to suggest that National Socialism and Communism no longer serve as the primary points of orientation in contemporary German identity. By repositioning Germany within a world not drawn simply along Cold War lines, this work has revealed genealogies of difference that cut across the political and social transformations of 1989–1990 and propose a new paradigm within which to analyze postwar Germanness.

Among the more compelling historiographical reconsiderations of difference to have emerged in the past few decades—indeed, before reunification—is what Christoph Kleßmann has called a “systematic comparison,” or a “history of entanglement” (*Verflechtungsgeschichte*).<sup>94</sup> Here, historians reject the Manichaean logic of difference bestowed by the Cold War and refuse a preemptive separation of East and West German histories. Instead, they acknowledge the analogies, convergences, and shared conceptual frameworks between the Federal Republic and the German Democratic Republic.

This method nevertheless has its blind spots. It risks presupposing the merger between East and West: at what point does entanglement simply become unity? Histories of entanglement possess few safeguards against assuming reunification as the endpoint in their periodization. Recent attempts at *Verflechtungsgeschichte* tend to avoid this dilemma, however, by exploring localized relationships. Frank Bösch, for example, has called for a study of

<sup>91</sup>Maier, *Dissolution*, 185–95.

<sup>92</sup>Jarausch, *After Hitler*, 238.

<sup>93</sup>See Andrew H. Beattie, “A 1950s Revival: Cold War Culture in Reunified Germany,” in *Cold War Cultures: Perspectives on Eastern and Western European Societies*, ed. Annette Vowinckel, Marcus M. Payk, and Thomas Lindenberger (New York: Berghahn, 2012), 299–320; idem, *Playing Politics with History: The Bundestag Inquiries into East Germany* (New York: Berghahn, 2008), 194–227.

<sup>94</sup>See Christoph Kleßmann, *Die doppelte Staatsgründung: Deutsche Geschichte, 1945–1955* (Bonn: Bundeszentrale für Politische Bildung, 1982); idem, *Zwei Staaten, eine Nation: Deutsche Geschichte 1955–1970* (Bonn: Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung, 1988). The call to write “entangled history”—in French, *histoire croisée*—has roots in French social historians’ reassessment of comparative history. See Michael Werner and Bénédicte Zimmermann, “Vergleich, Transfer, Verflechtung. Der Ansatz der *Histoire croisée* und die Herausforderung des Transnationalen,” *Geschichte und Gesellschaft* 28, no. 4 (2002): 607–36; Michael Werner and Bénédicte Zimmermann, “Beyond Comparison: *Histoire Croisée* and the Challenge of Reflexivity,” *History and Theory* 45, no. 1 (2006): 30–50.

the history of the mundane majority. Such a project shares a mandate with efforts to write the history of everyday life (*Alltagsgeschichte*) popularized in the 1980s. But, where first-wave *Alltagsgeschichte* circled around Germany's Nazi history, Bösch proposes research on the broader postwar context. He qualifies this method as *Geschichte der Mitlebenden*—loosely, the “history of contemporaries,” as in those who live together contemporaneously. Bösch has drawn this expression from Hans Rothfels, who preferred it to the foreign phrases of “contemporary history” or “*histoire contemporaine*,” to what he saw as the historically burdened phrase “*zeitgenössische Geschichte*” (contemporary history), or to the possessive-sounding “*Geschichte unserer Zeit*” (history of our time).<sup>95</sup> While Rothfels intended *Geschichte der Mitlebenden* to reveal longitudinal experiences of the Cold War, more recent applications have used it to look beyond Cold War periodizations. Explorations of the banal in postwar life, Bösch has argued, can help historians avoid instinctively cataloguing German experiences under division or reunification. Instead, this kind of history promises to deconstruct the shifting political axes of the three Germanys by revealing the incremental, uneven, and nonlinear adjustments that constituted the everyday lives of their citizens.<sup>96</sup> Hester Vaizey has similarly championed what she has called “history with a sideways dimension.” She uses that phrase to signal histories that explore the impact of ordinary individuals on one another rather than in relation to centralized institutions of power.<sup>97</sup>

Against Willy Brandt's post-Wall projection that Germans would “grow together,” lateral histories are equipped to address the ways in which they did not and perhaps even could not. These histories have uncovered the cultural processes that encouraged the initial disaggregation of eastern and western Germans and revealed the mechanisms that governed the resilient “wall-in-the-head.”<sup>98</sup> They have exposed the inadequacies of the formal institutions and policies of reunification. They have dissected the sense of disenfranchisement that has developed among eastern Germans in reunified Germany. And they have examined the informal behaviors of western Germans that perpetuate social fracture.<sup>99</sup>

By drawing on longer historical arcs like the decline of classical industry, rising unemployment, the prioritization of the idea of freedom, and disillusionment with the state, such histories easily elide with research on the process of globalization ascendant since the 1970s. Bösch criticizes the tendency among such studies to turn globalization into an actor in itself and to award it responsibility for the era's many crises. The force of the globalization-as-crisis interpretation enables a kind of myopia. But, for Bösch, the problem lies less in histories of globalization writ large, than in their inclination to ignore globalization's generative quality. In areas like popular consumer culture, media culture, and religion, it has facilitated

<sup>95</sup>Hans Rothfels, “Zeitgeschichte als Aufgabe,” *Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte* 1, no. 1 (1953): 2.

<sup>96</sup>Frank Bösch, “Arbeit, Freizeit, Schlaf. Alltagspraktiken als Perspektive der bundesdeutschen Zeitgeschichte,” in Bajohr et al., *Mehr als eine Erzählung*, 301–13.

<sup>97</sup>Hester Vaizey, “East German Perspectives on Continuity and Change across the Caesura of 1989,” in *Rewriting German History: New Perspectives on Modern Germany*, ed. Jan Rieger and Nikolaus Wachsmann (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 200.

<sup>98</sup>See Edith Sheffer, *Burned Bridge: How East and West Germans Made the Iron Curtain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011); Sagi Schaefer, *States of Division: Border and Boundary Formation in Cold War Rural Germany* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014).

<sup>99</sup>See, e.g., the ongoing project of Kerstin Brückweh, “Die lange Geschichte der ‘Wende’. Lebenswelt und Systemwechsel in Ostdeutschland, vor, während, und nach 1989.” This project aims to chart a “social history of transition” (*Gesellschaftsgeschichtes des Umbruchs*) that reveals the lifeworlds of eastern Germans across the 1989–1990 threshold.

new growth, not simply deterioration. Though histories of the experiences of the majority of society (*Mehrheitsgesellschaft*) risk missing the proverbial forest of the master narrative for the trees of quotidian minutiae, they have, Bösch emphasizes, the capacity to foreground the coexistence of this growth alongside reigning interpretations of decline.<sup>100</sup> This kind of juxtaposition promises to underscore the fragile, contingent, and conflicted nature of reunification. In these histories, 1989–1990 does not signal the radical birth of a new German identity. It represents one moment in an ongoing experiment whose outcome, in practice, was (and remains) uncertain.<sup>101</sup>

Legal histories similarly decenter 1989–1990 by disclosing the conditions under which postwar immigration patterns and shifting legal paradigms have challenged the boundaries of Germanness. Contrary to the longstanding claim that Germany is not a land of immigration (*Einwanderungsland*), its history of political persecution under the Nazis made the constitutional right to asylum a key component of the Federal Republic's postwar legal order.<sup>102</sup> After the dust settled from the massive migration crisis following World War II, the early postwar period brought relative equilibrium to immigration patterns. Workers tended to arrive as part of guest-worker programs serving reconstruction efforts. Numbers of asylum seekers remained low. And emigration tended to balance out immigration. Policies of openness to refugees, like those proffered by the Greens in the early 1980s, remained sustainable when features like these defined the Federal Republic's immigration landscape.<sup>103</sup>

Amid the global conflict of the 1980s, however, migrants and refugees increasingly tapped into the opportunities offered by German asylum law. As a result, the decade between 1983 and 1993 saw a twenty-fold increase in asylum seekers.<sup>104</sup> Certainly reunification marked a change in this history. It became considerably more difficult for the Federal Republic to insist on an ethno-national principle of citizenship after the borders of Central and Eastern Europe had opened. And it meant that these formerly West German problems became *German* problems. But, as the legal history of the Federal Republic makes clear, the more significant watershed was less conspicuous and could not be reduced to the tidy punctuation mark of 1989–1990.

The real rupture unfolded more slowly, with the gradual arrival in the Federal Republic of sizeable communities whose members did not share the language, culture, history, religion, or political institutions of their new home: the Turks, Sri Lankans, now Syrians, among others. Joyce Mushaben has analyzed the ways that “disparate opportunity structures”

<sup>100</sup>Frank Bösch, “Boom zwischen Krise und Globalisierung: Konsum und kultureller Wandel in der Bundesrepublik der 1970er und 1980er Jahre,” *Geschichte und Gesellschaft* 42, no. 2 (2016): 354–58.

<sup>101</sup>Martin Sabrow and Alexander Koch, eds., *Experiment Einheit: Zeithistorische Essays* (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2015), esp. 9–25.

<sup>102</sup>This self-description continues to occupy a prominent place in German politics, though it came under increasing fire in the context of the refugee crisis. See Andrea Dernbach, “Wir sind kein Einwanderungsland,” *Der Tagesspiegel Online*, Dec. 6, 2006 ([www.tagesspiegel.de/politik/wir-sind-kein-einwanderungsland/783936.html](http://www.tagesspiegel.de/politik/wir-sind-kein-einwanderungsland/783936.html)); Roland Preuß, “Deutschland ist zum Einwanderungsland gereift,” *sueddeutsche.de*, Dec. 10, 2014 ([www.sueddeutsche.de/politik/fluechtlingspolitik-deutschland-ist-zum-einwanderungsland-gereift-1.2260517](http://www.sueddeutsche.de/politik/fluechtlingspolitik-deutschland-ist-zum-einwanderungsland-gereift-1.2260517)).

<sup>103</sup>See, e.g., the article by Lauren Stokes in this special issue.

<sup>104</sup>Jarusch, *After Hitler*, 247–49; Ulrich Herbert, “Ausländer—Asyl—Pogrome. Das hässliche Gesicht des neuen Deutschlands,” in Bajohr et al., *Mehr als eine Erzählung*, 146–47. See also Ulrich Herbert, *Geschichte der Ausländerpolitik in Deutschland: Saisonarbeiter, Zwangsarbeiter, Gastarbeiter, Flüchtlinge* (Munich: C. H. Beck, 2001); Rita Chin, *The Guest Worker Question in Postwar Germany* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

have generated long-term challenges in integrating different cultures and identities.<sup>105</sup> Analogous obstacles have surfaced even in efforts to integrate former East Germans, who share a language and now also a set of legal, political, economic, and social institutions. But East Germans constitute just one of these communities of difference. The collective struggle over the politics of social integration began a new chapter in the process of defining German identity.<sup>106</sup>

Much of the friction in these debates originated in German citizenship law. From the creation of the Federal Republic in 1949 through the end of the century, West Germany determined citizenship based on the citizenship of one's parents.<sup>107</sup> The exclusion from the civic body of those without German lineage meant the exclusion not only of immigrants who had committed their lives and labor to the Federal Republic, but also of their descendants, born and raised in West Germany.<sup>108</sup> On the first day of the new millennium, however, German citizenship law slackened its commitment to *jus sanguinis*. It awarded citizenship automatically to those born on German soil and made a path to citizenship more accessible to foreign nationals. Only then did it become possible to incorporate these communities officially into the German civic community.

The politics of identity and difference in the Federal Republic, in other words, resist attempts to foreground 1989–1990. Instead, they underscore the long-term arbitration of German national identity along political, legal, and social lines. Eastern migrants, guest workers, and asylum seekers fundamentally reweave the fabric of German society. If the Left's turn toward multiculturalism did not make that evident, then the Right's turn toward xenophobia certainly did. This process began with the postmodern dismantling of old social paradigms. Diversity and a culture of inclusion became normative forces. The politics of multiculturalism, however, failed to deal in substantive ways with the problems of integration.<sup>109</sup> Despite the liberalization of immigration and nationalization laws, negotiations over postwar German identity remain strident. Postwar immigration and asylum policy in the Federal Republic gradually forged not only a new sense of self but also a clear new enemy that was neither Nazi nor communist. Reunification constitutes only one point on this much longer arc.

Analogous negotiations have considered German identity in relation to the rest of the world. Earlier explorations of the postwar period's transnational dimensions tended to revolve around a Cold War binary of competitive systems (*Systemkonkurrenz*).<sup>110</sup> This

<sup>105</sup>Joyce Marie Mushaben, "From Ausländer to Inlander: The Changing Faces of Citizenship in Post-Wall Germany," in *From the Bonn to the Berlin Republic: Germany at the Twentieth Anniversary of Unification*, ed. Jeffrey J. Anderson and Eric Langenbacher (New York: Berghahn, 2010), 161, 163. See also Joyce Marie Mushaben, *From Post-War to Post-Wall Generations: Changing Attitudes toward the National Question and NATO in the Federal Republic of Germany* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1998).

<sup>106</sup>See Rita Chin, Heide Fehrenbach, Geoff Eley, and Atina Grossmann, *After the Nazi Racial State: Difference and Democracy in Germany and Europe* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2009).

<sup>107</sup>The Federal Republic's stance toward citizenship was based largely on the German Empire's 1913 citizenship law (*Reichs- und Staatsangehörigkeitsgesetz*). See Rogers Brubaker, *Citizenship and Nationhood in France and Germany* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992), 114–20, 165–69.

<sup>108</sup>Mushaben, "From Ausländer to Inlander," 163.

<sup>109</sup>Rödder, 21.0, 105–8. See also Rita Chin, *The Crisis of Multiculturalism in Europe: A History* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2017).

<sup>110</sup>Udo Wengst and Hermann Wentker, *Das doppelte Deutschland: 40 Jahre Systemkonkurrenz* (Berlin: Ch. Links, 2013).

scholarship usually privileges Europe and North America, as well as the structure of the nation-state. It has the effect of essentializing the international system of nations. It also preserves the peripheral position of historical subjects in the Global South.

With the growing popularity of the global turn, however, historians have begun to critique the myopia of the *Systemkonkurrenz* framework.<sup>111</sup> In a nod to the question Goethe and Schiller once posed about Germany's location, a recently published volume asks, *Where Is the Federal Republic? (Wo liegt die Bundesrepublik?)*.<sup>112</sup> The international geopolitical constellation in which the book's myriad contributors embed the Federal Republic is not one whose North Star is the Cold War. As Young-Sun Hong has noted in her book on the "global humanitarian regime," local histories of the postwar period cannot always be distilled to the ideological and geopolitical antagonism between the Cold War superpowers. Hong insists on the value of adopting a new spatial imaginary. She demands that historians award a more prominent position not only to the entanglements of the three Germanys but also to those between the Germanys and the Global South. Much like Vaizey but on a global register, Hong sees this method as uncovering the lateral dimensions of international history, where "local histories inventing and implementing global designs meet local histories, the space in which global designs have to be adapted, adopted, rejected, integrated, or ignored."<sup>113</sup> Hong ends her book before the end of the Cold War; one never learns how reunification affected Germany's role in what she calls the "new global humanitarian regime." She does make a case, however, that the humanitarian institutions and discourses that developed in the 1950s and 1960s not only defined Germany's relationship to the Global South, but also "generated specific forms of political power and authorized specific forms of global governance" that became central to the Federal Republic.<sup>114</sup>

Contemporary histories of identity and difference in the Federal Republic require a wider lens than the identity politics of the Cold War provided. The historical foils of the Nazi and the Communist have offered the Federal Republic relatively little guidance as to how it should understand itself vis-à-vis the communities of otherness, whose importance it increasingly recognizes: ethnic minorities, immigrants and their descendants, and the Global South as a whole. To make sense of the ways these communities have challenged the boundaries of Germanness requires a new periodization. By resisting the instinct to make 1989–1990 a key turning point in these narratives, historians can advance a fresher set of debates and use them to guide a new master narrative for the Federal Republic.

### Thinking Beyond the Myth

The tendency among historians to regard the events of 1989–1990 as a kind of sacred cow in the history of the Federal Republic risks fostering an unfortunate nearsightedness in contemporary German historiography. To fetishize 1989–1990 is to obscure the evolution of

<sup>111</sup>Frank Bösch, "Geteilte Geschichte: Plädoyer für eine deutsch-deutsche Perspektive auf die jüngere Zeitgeschichte," *Zeithistorische Forschungen* 12, no. 1 (2015): 98–114.

<sup>112</sup>Sonja Levsen and Cornelius Torp, eds., *Wo liegt die Bundesrepublik? Vergleichende Perspektiven auf die westdeutsche Geschichte* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2016).

<sup>113</sup>Here Hong quotes Walter Mignolo, *Local Histories/Global Designs: Coloniality, Subaltern Knowledges, and Border Thinking* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000), ix; see Young-Sun Hong, *Cold War Germany, the Third World, and the Global Humanitarian Regime* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 2. The emphasis is hers.

<sup>114</sup>*Ibid.*, 3.

conceptual paradigms for treating time and difference since 1945. The future-oriented temporal sensibility that emphasized progress toward a Western liberal democratic and market capitalist order has been displaced by a new emergency politics of the present. And where the Cold War once dictated the two most inviolable boundaries of Germanness in the Federal Republic—a Nazi identity and a Communist identity—new frontiers of German identity and difference have gradually taken precedence. These paradigm shifts have relocated the goal posts in the history of the Federal Republic.

One has reason, however, to be sanguine about the historiographical status of 1989–1990. Over the past decade, historians have become increasingly invested in treating 1989–1990 as one date in a series of longer trajectories, rather than as the primary lens through which those trajectories should be viewed. This work asks what political, economic, social, and cultural changes the year roughly between the opening of the Berlin Wall and German reunification actually precipitated and how these changes nest within larger historical transformations. The moment of 1989–1990 is becoming part of a periodization that resists its fetishization.

In the popular press, this mindset crystallized on June 16, 2017, when former Chancellor Helmut Kohl died at the age of eighty-seven. The German press, of course, diligently covered his passing. Striking, though, was the relative balance of its coverage. Fairly soon after news of his death broke, headlines about the architect of German reunification were replaced by candid portraits of Kohl as a terrible father.<sup>115</sup> They echoed some of the less flattering sentiments published six years earlier in his son Walter Kohl's memoir.<sup>116</sup> Kohl's children—his literal children, but also the figurative children of the Kohl era—now hold the pens that write his history. And they have demonstrated their willingness to criticize the paternity of the Federal Republic. Much ink has been spilled about the importance of generations and generational change in the study of modern Germany.<sup>117</sup> Without oversimplifying, one might point, in this context, to the ascent of a new generation of historians of contemporary Germany. Less fully socialized into either of the paradigms that prop up the 1989–1990 ending myth, they have the resources to undertake its demystification.

To make sense of the advantage they possess, one might consider another vignette from Fritz Stern, a representative of one of the older generations of Cold War German historians. Stern used an encounter with an East German border guard at Checkpoint Charlie in Berlin

<sup>115</sup>See, e.g., Thorsten Denkler, "Kohl und seine Familie—eine öffentliche Tragödie," *sueddeutsche.de*, June 17, 2017 ([www.sueddeutsche.de/politik/altkanzler-kohl-und-seine-familie-eine-oeffentliche-tragoedie-1.1687107](http://www.sueddeutsche.de/politik/altkanzler-kohl-und-seine-familie-eine-oeffentliche-tragoedie-1.1687107)).

<sup>116</sup>On Walter Kohl's life in the shadow of his father and on his subsequent pursuit of autonomy and reconciliation, see Walter Kohl, *Leben oder gelebt werden: Schritte auf dem Weg zur Versöhnung* (Munich: Integral, 2011).

<sup>117</sup>The "problem of generations" has enjoyed a prominent place in scholarship on German society, certainly since Karl Mannheim, "Das Problem der Generationen," *Kölner Vierteljahrshefte für Soziologie* 7, no. 2/3 (1928): 157–85, 309–30. Literature both on the generation as an analytical category and on individuals or groups of generations spans a wide range of themes and covers Germany's twentieth-century. See, e.g., Hans Jaeger, "Generationen in der Geschichte. Überlegungen zu einer umstrittenen Konzeption," *Geschichte und Gesellschaft* 3, no. 4 (1977): 429–52; Detlev Peukert, *The Weimar Republic: The Crisis of Classical Modernity*, trans. Richard Deveson (New York: Hill and Wang, 1992), esp. 14–18; Peter Gay, *Weimar Culture: The Outsider as Insider* (New York: Harper & Row, 1968); Michael Wildt, *Generation des Unbedingten. Das Führungskorps des Reichssicherheitshauptamtes* (Hamburg: Hamburger Edition, 2003); Moses, "The Forty-Fivers"; Harald Welzer, Sabine Moller, and Karoline Tschuggnall, *Opa war kein Nazi: Nationalsozialismus und Holocaust im Familiengedächtnis* (Frankfurt/Main: Fischer Taschenbuch, 2002); Olick, *The Sins of the Fathers*.

to explain what he understood to be an essential obligation of the historian. Having been asked if he had brought arms, munitions, or newspapers with him to the East, Stern described the question as

a gift to someone like me, who had grown up with [Heinrich] Heine's mockery of Prussian douaniers searching for contraband, bijouterie, and forbidden books: Fools, he thought, you search in vain. My contraband is in my head, a whirl with dangerous ideas and explosive books, and when I unpack that baggage, it will hurt you. Here in East Berlin, more than a century later, I was encountering the same old Germanic fear of contraband ideas that mock tyrannical power and exult in freedom. Heine was right—or it is our job to prove him right. No border guard, no wall, can forever shield repressive regimes from the power of subversive ideas, from the lure of freedom.<sup>118</sup>

Appropriate though Stern's reflections may once have been, a new generation of historians might now turn his words back upon him. They might use those words to confront a body of historiography that raised a regime it now, ironically, seems reluctant to subject to the same kind of dangerous ideas. But the era of the ending myth of 1989–1990 appears to be waning. If we wish to craft a new pathbreaking master narrative of the Federal Republic, we, too, must keep Heine's mandate of demystification in mind.

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<sup>118</sup>Stern, *Five Germanys I Have Known*, 343.