

**Identity Creation and the Culture of Contrition:  
Reconfiguring National Identity in the Berlin  
Republic**

**Karl Wilds**

**Thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy**

**Department of Germanic Studies**

**University of Sheffield**

**June 2000**

# Contents

Abstract	1
Acknowledgements	2
<b>1. Introduction: Reconfiguring Identity at the “End of History” and “Beyond the Nation State”?</b>	<b>3</b>
1.1 National Identity in Flux	4
1.2 Neoconservatives, Left-liberals and Identity	9
1.3 Aims and Limitations of the Thesis	19
<b>2. Salvaging the Past: Neoconservatism, Compensation and National Identity</b>	<b>25</b>
2.1 A Crisis of Values	25
2.2 Identity versus Emancipation	38
2.3 The Need for Patriotism	49
2.4 Confronting the Past	57
<b>3. The Emancipation from the Past: Critical History and <i>Vefassungspatriotismus</i></b>	<b>75</b>
3.1 The “Refounding” of the Federal Republic	75
3.2 The <i>Sonderweg</i> Thesis and Emancipation	85
3.3 Radical Democracy and Emancipation	95
3.4 Post-Traditional Patriotism	104
<b>4. <i>Westbindung</i> and Nation</b>	<b>117</b>
4.1 Victory of the <i>Westbindung</i> ?	117
4.2 “Hard Times” and Identity	127
4.3 The Continuities of <i>Geopolitik</i> ?	135

<b>5.</b>	<b>The ‘New Right’ and the End of Emancipation</b>	<b>148</b>
5.1	The Renaissance of the Nation	148
5.2	<i>Historisierung</i> and Modernisation	161
5.3	Race, Class and Mass	171
5.4	The End of Emancipation	182
<b>6.</b>	<b>The “Westernisation” of the German Nation</b>	<b>192</b>
6.1	The Endangered Republic?	192
6.2	Transcending the Dichotomy between Nation and Republic	199
6.3	“Emancipation” and Post-National Social Solidarity	218
<b>7.</b>	<b>The Culture of Contrition and the Reconfiguration of National Identity</b>	<b>232</b>
7.1	History as <i>Dementi</i>	232
7.2	Learning the “Lessons” of the Past	241
7.3	The <i>Holocaustmahnmal</i> and “Broken Identity”	249
7.4	“Ordinary Germans” - Then and Now. The “Goldhagen Controversy”	263
7.5	Power Politics between <i>Sonderbewußtsein</i> and <i>Sündenbewußtsein</i> ?	272
<b>8.</b>	<b>Concluding Remarks: National Identity: Compensation, Emancipation or Contrition?</b>	<b>279</b>
<b>9.</b>	<b>Bibliography</b>	<b>292</b>

## ABSTRACT

The thesis examines the reconfiguration of concepts of national identity in post-unification Germany in three broad sections. Section one examines the discourse of identity of neoconservatives and critical thinkers between the 1960s and 1980s. Neoconservatives advocated a return to conventional national identity based upon the patriotic identification with indigenous national traditions. Critical thinkers argued for a post-national Constitutional Patriotism based upon the critical reflection of national traditions. Both these approaches are located within the context of conflictual attitudes towards the concepts of “compensation” and “emancipation” in past and present and towards the experience of the National Socialist past.

Section two examines the reception of unification within the liberal conservative and *neue Rechte* milieu. Liberal conservatives sought to synthesise the technocratic Westernisation of the post-war FRG with a traditional national concept. *Neue Rechte* conservatives rejected “Western” values and perceived in the collapse of Communism the discrediting of both the “utopia” of radical social alternative and also of the *Kleinutopie* of civil society. The post-Cold War constellation signified for these thinkers the opportunity for a return to pre-1945 traditions of German nationalism and offered an opportunity to relativise the national socialist past.

Finally, section three offers an analysis of the reconfiguration of national identity which synthesises the concern for “national” identity with the left-liberal concept of “post-national” identity. The “Westernisation” of the concept of the German nation perceived positive antecedents in the bourgeois emancipation movements of the pre-national nineteenth century. The final chapter elaborates the thesis of a “culture of contrition” for the national socialist past which formulates a radical, “post-national” identity with emancipatory aspirations. The thesis perceives in this latter discourse of “broken” identity an attempt to reconfigure a sense of national “normality” in the present which is predicated upon the acknowledgement of “abnormality” in the past.

## **Acknowledgements**

Many people have helped me in numerous ways to complete the following project. You know who you are. Thankyou. Three people deserve special mention at this point for their encouragement, support, faith and not least patience over many years: My Grandad Jack, Julia and Moray McGowan. My deepest thanks to you all.

## 1. Introduction: Reconfiguring Identity at the “End of History” and “Beyond the Nation state”?

But we cannot picture to ourselves a world that is essentially different from the present one, and at the same time better. Other, less reflective ages also thought of themselves as the best, but we arrive at this conclusion exhausted, as it were, from the pursuit of alternatives we felt had to be better than liberal democracy.<sup>1</sup>

Der nationalstaatliche Rahmen für die Implementierung von Menschenrechten und Demokratie hat, über die Grenzen von Stämmen und Dialekten hinweg, eine neue, abstraktere Form der sozialen Integration möglich gemacht. Wir stehen heute vor der Aufgabe, diesen Prozeß mit einem weiteren Abstraktionsschritt fortzusetzen.<sup>2</sup>

In the following, I wish to examine the reconfiguration of German national identity within the broader parameters delineated by the above two positions. Francis Fukuyama perceived in the collapse of the Soviet Union the exhaustion of the modernist dialectic of social transformation and progress represented in Hegelian and Marxist concepts of social transience. We can, for Fukuyama, no longer imagine a future alternative social-historical form which is better than the present, only worse. For Fukuyama, the pinnacle of human social form appears represented in the liberal, democratic Free Market society of the United States. Jürgen Habermas, on the other hand, remains committed to the ongoing “modernist project” and the values of universalism, reason and human emancipation.<sup>3</sup> For Habermas, whilst the nation-state has been exhausted as a cohesive social form, the modernist project which created the nation must be continued after its demise into the “post-national constellation”. Habermas seeks to rescue the republican core of the nation-state and the radical project of the post-war social state upon the supra-national level of Europe and ultimately a universal cosmopolitan world order. Whilst both these thinkers pursue different political and philosophical projects, these arguments appear, in their essence, to express two constitutive perceptions of the present: the exhaustion of both the classical concept of human social progress and of the classical form of the nation-state.

---

<sup>1</sup> Francis Fukuyama, ‘The End Of History And The Last Man.’ Penguin Books, London.1992.p.46.

<sup>2</sup> Jürgen Habermas, ‘Die postnationale Konstellation.’ Suhrkamp. 1998. p. 36.

<sup>3</sup> Jürgen Habermas, ‘Die Moderne - ein unvollendetes Projekt. Philosophisch-politische Aufsätze 1977-1992.’ Reclam. Leipzig. 1992.

Whilst the collapse of the Soviet Union strengthened a conservative social outlook which can countenance no alternative social form to Free Market society, throughout the 1990s the traditional nation-state appears compromised as the prime unit of identification in political culture.<sup>4</sup> In this context, one might perceive, with Eric Hobsbawm, that the present constellation is characterised by the eclipse of the conventional points of orientation through which left and right have gained definition since the French Revolution.<sup>5</sup> Whilst the “party of progress” has conventionally been defined by its commitment to human emancipation and alternative social forms, the “party of order” has conventionally orientated itself towards the nation as the ultimate focus of collective loyalty and social regulation.

More specifically, I wish to examine the development of a post-unification discourse of identity with recourse to distinct conservative and left-liberal approaches to the German national past and present which emerged in the 1980s in West Germany. I attempt to pursue this development by a critical reception of the left-liberal discourse of “critical history” and *Verfassungspatriotismus* as media of political “emancipation” and conservative concepts of *Historie* and national identity as media of political “compensation”. I contend thereby that whilst during the 1980s these discourses existed in a dichotomous relationship with one another, during the 1990s they have undergone an uneven and open-ended process of synthesis. The unification of the two German states clearly exercised a profound impact upon such discourse and offered a material context for the articulation of the seemingly abstract debates of the 1980s over national identity. Yet at the same time, these debates themselves have not evolved in a vacuum and have themselves been transformed. In particular I am interested in examining the changing role played by reflections of the National Socialist past as a media of national identity creation for both the “party of progress” and the “party of order”.

### 1.1 National Identity in flux

Despite the claims of conventional “national identity”, both the nation state and “national consciousness” are neither eternal in character or of fixed meaning throughout history. In order to assess the characteristics of varieties of national thinking and identity construction

---

<sup>4</sup> c:f the collection of essays in John Dunn (ed.) ‘Contemporary Crisis of the Nation State?’ Blackwell. Oxford. 1995. Paul Kennedy, ‘Preparing for the Twenty-First Century.’ Harper-Collins. London. 1993. esp. pp. 122-134.

one must first recognise that such phenomena evolve within a historically and socially specific context which is involved in a dynamic process of change. This perspective enables us to consider the specifics of particular formulations of national consciousness within a dynamic framework and to recognise that the social and political values expressed in particular varieties of national discourse can change both substantially and formally over time.

Sophisticated treatments of the development of nationalist thought and practice since the early nineteenth century relate the emergence of national identity to the process of nation-building. Such readings stress the emergence of nation states and nationalism as a part of the broader process of social, economic and political modernisation in the West charted by the transformation from agrarian to industrial society. Different authors have stressed the importance of factors such as the process of socio-economic modernisation<sup>6</sup>, the development of print capitalism<sup>7</sup>, demographic changes and the universalisation of a distinct “High Culture”<sup>8</sup>. Common among such treatments of the theme is the realisation that nationalism is a distinctly modern phenomenon and a reaction to forces of social and economic modernisation and political transformation rather than a derivation of innate human need which exists outside of history. Thinkers such as Gellner, Hobsbawm and Anderson stress the character of the nation as an artifice or an “imagined” community which must be understood within the context of the great social and cultural transformations which ushered in the “modern age” in Western society.

Of particular importance in the evolution of national identity is the transformation in the terms of legitimacy between the state and the civil society which it regulates. John Breuilly has noted the manner in which nationalist politics emerged as a legitimising discourse for universalising the economic and political claims of an increasingly powerful “civil society” against an unrepresentative monarchical state.<sup>9</sup> In the age of the revolutionary nation state, sovereignty was no longer mediated by the notion of a divine right of the monarchy, but by

---

<sup>5</sup> Eric Hobsbawm, ‘The New Century’ Little, Brown and Company. London. 2000. p. 98.

<sup>6</sup> cf Ernest Gellner, ‘Encounters with Nationalism’. Blackwell. Oxford. 1994. Also cf the recent collection of critical assessments of Gellner’s approach in John A. Hall (ed.) ‘The State of the Nation. Ernest Gellner and the Theory of Nationalism.’ CUP. Cambridge. 1999.

<sup>7</sup> Benedict Anderson, ‘Imagined Communities. Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism.’ Verso. London. 1983.

<sup>8</sup> Charles Taylor, ‘Nationalism and Modernity’. in Hall. (ed.) op. cit. 1999. pp. 193-4.

<sup>9</sup> John Breuilly, ‘Nationalism and the State.’ MUP. 1993. pp. 367-372.

the democratic rights of the people.<sup>10</sup> In the wake of the enlightenment and the French Revolution, traditional perceptions of how to regulate the relationship between the state and civil society were profoundly undermined by the force of rational, human centred and democratic principles.<sup>11</sup> Breuille considers the development of the social purchase and aspirations of nationalist politics during the nineteenth century from denoting a political medium which cohered social elites behind the project of creating a nation state to representing an ideological tool to cement the legitimacy of the newly created states and hence bolster the status-quo.<sup>12</sup> Rogers Brubaker distinguishes in this vein between “state-framed” and “counter-state” nationalism.<sup>13</sup>

Whilst the nationalism which emerged around the late eighteenth early nineteenth century tended to project a forward-looking challenge to the status-quo, the national identity of established late nineteenth century nation states aimed to legitimise the often newly created social order.<sup>14</sup> By the end of the nineteenth century, the earlier universal and progressive values articulated by national politics had largely been replaced by a focus upon national particularism and the historical derivation of the present. Such studies recognise the importance of social and historical context in explaining the role of nationalism at the level of effective politics. This perspective avoids the separation of nationalism as an “idea” from the social structure which it seeks to reflect.<sup>15</sup> For the Marxist historian Miroslav Hroch, approaches which regard a particular type of nationalism as the prime mover relegate nationalism to a “state of mind” which is not accessible to historical investigation.<sup>16</sup> Against this, Hroch understands the relationship between “the nation” and “national consciousness”

---

<sup>10</sup> *ibid.* p. 374.

<sup>11</sup> Habermas. *op. cit.* p. 185. Eric Hobsbawm, ‘The Age of Revolution. 1789-1848.’ Mentor. New York. 1962, p. 84.

<sup>12</sup> Breuille. 1993. *op. cit.* p. 380.

<sup>13</sup> cf Rogers Brubaker, ‘Myths and misconceptions in the study of nationalism.’ in Hall (ed.) *op. cit.* 1999. p. 300.

<sup>14</sup> cf Frank Furedi, ‘Mythical Past - Elusive Future. History and Society in an Anxious Age.’ Pluto. 1990. esp. pp. 132-158.

<sup>15</sup> cf Smith, ‘Theories of Nationalism.’ Dudeworth. 1971. pp. 5-6 for Smith’s “methodological” justification of this separation and pp. 264-67 *ibid.* for his defence against Gellner’s criticism that he emphasises idealist over structural forces. Smith still remains orientated, it must be stated, to the importance of the processes of modernisation in assessing nationalism. A similar emphasis upon the ultimate “primacy” of “ideas” as a motivation for human action also runs through James Joll’s treatment of the origins of the 1914-18 World War, cf James Joll, ‘The Origins of the First World War.’ Macmillan. London. 1990. p. 187.

<sup>16</sup> Miroslav Hroch, ‘Real and constructed: the nature of the nation.’ in Hall (ed.) *op. cit.* 1999. pp. 92-3. Whilst Hroch concurs with Gellner’s emphasis upon the ‘social transformations during the transition to modernity’ he is critical of the view that the nation represents a mere “myth” and of “global” explanations of nationalism as an all-purpose explanation. *ibid.* p. 104.

as one of “mutual and complimentary correlation” rather than one of “mutual derivation” and considers arguments over which is “primary” as ideological or philosophical sophistry.<sup>17</sup>

In recent years, arguments which imply nationalism as a state of mind or as a prime mover of social activity appear to have gained a certain currency. This assumes perhaps its most common form in the description of “Western” and “Eastern” variants of national sentiment which are frequently conflated with concepts of “civic” and “ethnic” nationalism.<sup>18</sup> From this perspective, the schism which runs through East and West is no longer formulated in terms of the capitalist - communist confrontation but in terms of the civility of indigenous national traditions. Conceptions of “romantic” and “civic” nationalism play a role in defining the contemporary political identity of the post-Cold War West. The eclipse of relatively effective post-war international and domestic social, economic and political arrangements has stimulated a search for new media of regulating international relations and the terms of domestic legitimacy. Discussion of varieties of “ethnic” and “civic” nationalism play an important role in reconfiguring political authority in the post-Cold War age at both a European and national level.

Many thinkers in the West during the 1990s have been concerned to develop a political and intellectual model which could help provide a positive definition of concepts such as “Western civilisation” in the absence of the anticommunist certainties of the post-war period. In the immediate wake of the collapse of the Soviet Union, Fukuyama formulated the new major division in the world as running along the lines of those nations still “caught in history” and those which had progressed into a “post-historical” condition.<sup>19</sup> Ernest Gellner sought to define the distinctiveness of the Western nations in the form of a “Consumerist Unbeliever International” which was perfectly entitled to “gang up with each other” against threats from Islam or terrorist states and which effectively represented a “world government”.<sup>20</sup> Whilst the radical social philosopher Jürgen Habermas rejects any notions of “world government” he perceives in the “states of the First World” the only reliable representatives of the “Western” emancipatory legacy of enlightenment political traditions.<sup>21</sup>

---

<sup>17</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>18</sup> cf Anthony D. Smith, ‘National Identity and the Idea of European Unity.’ in Peter Gowan and Perry Anderson (eds.) ‘The Question of Europe’. Verso. London. 1997. p. 324.

<sup>19</sup> Fukuyama. 1990. *op. cit.* pp. 276-8.

<sup>20</sup> Gellner. 1994. *op. cit.* p. 181.

<sup>21</sup> Jürgen Habermas, ‘Die Einbeziehung des Anderen. Studien zur politischen Theorie.’ Suhrkamp. Frankfurt./M. 1996. p. 215.

An important sentiment of such reconfigurations of Western civilisation is the notion that the contemporary West is united in its rejection of traditional ethnic nationalism. For Habermas, a central, defining experience of the collective Western European states is the one of having happily overcome nationalism.<sup>22</sup> All of the above arguments seek to reformulate a sense of what constitutes the political boundaries of the West and how this particular culture is distinguished from the rest of the globe. What is significant about the above commentaries is that they attempt to recast divisions between the West and the rest of the globe in terms of values or ideas of nationalism. The picture which emerges is of a Western world which has happily made the break with its chauvinistic or ethnic nationalist past in contrast to the parts of the globe where such forces apparently remain strong.

Within this context it appears useful to remember the importance of the social and historical forces which shape the expression of nationalism of both ethnic and civic character. Considering various types of nationalism as the prime mover and locating these within particular cultural or political boundaries appears equally capable of reproducing a similar hierarchy of humanity to that performed by classical ethnic nationalism.<sup>23</sup> Commentators have emphasised that no such neat distinction between Eastern and Western nationalisms is tenable<sup>24</sup> and that the salience of extreme nationalism in the former Eastern Bloc is hugely overstated.<sup>25</sup> From this perspective, divisions between ethnic Eastern and civic Western nationalism appear to reflect more the search for new definitions in the West than genuine understanding of the contemporary world. The reconfiguration of the particularism of “the West” within a global context is reproduced at the national level. Upon this level too, the notion of an abandonment of old ethnic nationalism or romantic national traditions in favour of a pluralist and tolerant civic nationalism plays a central role.

In the case of post-unification German national identity these developments play a particularly important role. In the post-war German context, discussion of ethnic or romantic nationalist traditions was understandably dominated by the experience of the National Socialist regime and the Holocaust. In the post-war Federal Republic, the National Socialist experience served not only to discredit romantic traditions of national discourse but rather

---

<sup>22</sup> cf Jürgen Habermas, ‘Reply to Grimm.’ in Gowan and Anderson. (eds.) 1997. op. cit. p. 264.

<sup>23</sup> Adam Burgess, ‘Divided Europe. The New Domination of the East.’ Pluto. London. 1997. p. 195.

<sup>24</sup> *ibid.* pp. 9-12, p. 121.

<sup>25</sup> Brubaker. in Hall (ed.) 1999. op. cit. pp. 283-4. Brubaker finds more evidence of similarity between East and West in the form of a more general cynicism towards politics and parties.

more to undermine the articulation of nationalist sentiment *per se*. Indeed, the post-unification discussion over national identity has been significantly shaped by the question of whether the return of the German nation state would signal a return to romantic and chauvinist traditions of nationalism. In this context, discussion over the distinction between ethnic and civic nationalism assumes the form of a direct confrontation with the indigenous past and above all with the National Socialist period. In other words, in order for contemporary Germany to cultivate a sense of positively endowed national identity, a fundamental break is necessary with traditional romantic concepts which emphasise ethnicity as the key to nationality. This break with tradition involves, however, much more than the distancing from overtly racial definitions of nationality and takes in a wider post-war West German political confrontation between neoconservative and left-liberal intellectuals and politicians. It is within this longer-term West German political context that the thesis examines the reconfiguration of post-unification national identity. Before considering the post-unification transformation of not only romantic and civic nationalism but more fundamentally of central tenets of the left-right political divide, it is necessary to discuss the thinkers and positions examined in the thesis in closer detail.

## 1.2 Neoconservatives, Left-liberals and Identity

The distinction in the thesis between neoconservatives and left-liberals is orientated towards the political and historiographical confrontation which polarised discussion of the concept of national identity during the 1980s. The well-documented *Historikerstreit* of 1986 involved more than a dispute over the singularity of the Nazi Holocaust, as important as that was, but rather more served as a public forum within which conflictual and distinct perceptions of contemporary West German society clashed. The primary distinction between neoconservative and left-liberal positions during the 1980s gained definition from a reflection of two central experiences: on the one hand the political legacy of tradition-consuming modernist political culture represented in the enlightenment and French revolution of 1789. On the other hand, in terms of more direct political experience, neoconservative and left-liberal approaches divided in their general attitudes towards the counter-culture of the 1960s and the reformism of the social-democratic state. Both of these factors played a central role in the articulation of distinct neoconservative and left-liberal interpretations of the political identity of the Federal Republic during the 1980s.

In turn, it can be stated that the emergence of a heated debate over the concept of national identity itself was a symptom of changing perceptions of emancipatory politics and the post-war social state consensus. The concern with national identity only became a substantial point of public-political debate in the context of the exhaustion of both the confessional and technocratic conservative streams associated with the Adenauer period of reconstruction and also the emancipatory energies contained in the 'New Left' and social-liberal reformism. Perceptions of a *Tendenzwende* or political U-turn to the right in the wake of the 1960s were strengthened by the return of a conservative coalition in 1982 which placed the promotion of a sense of national identity as a political priority.<sup>26</sup> The *Historikerstreit* was initiated by the perception among left-liberals that the right was robustly engaged in a rehabilitation of conventional nationalism and discredited romantic, anti-modernist political traditions.

The neoconservative position which emerged during the *Historikerstreit* can be summarised with reference to three main factors. Firstly, neoconservatives understood conventional national identity as a source of meta-political values which could forge an emotional bond between the state and citizenry in a reading of the national past. For the historian and former consultant to Chancellor Kohl, Michael Stürmer, patriotism's social role was that of a secular religion which commanded loyalty and authority in meta-political terms.<sup>27</sup> The benefit of conventional national identity was that it did not rely upon rational, conscious political debate but rather invoked a pre-political essence which shaped the nation as a community of fate.

Secondly, for neoconservatives, history and the past played a vital social role in the present. For the Zurich philosopher Hermann Lübbe, the constant dynamic of social and economic change in modern society undermines our sense of identity by destroying traditional values.<sup>28</sup> From the cultivation of historical consciousness, via the promotion of a museum and preservation culture, Lübbe believes that the present can draw compensation for the dislocating effect of socio-economic modernisation. Whilst neoconservatives remain

---

<sup>26</sup> cf Holger Czitrich, 'Konservatismus und nationale Identität in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland. Der Konservatismus, seine Theorie und Entwicklung im Spiegel der Diskussionen über das Selbstverständnis der Bundesrepublik Deutschland seit Mitte der siebziger Jahre.' Peter Lang. Frankfurt/M. 1989. pp. 63-72.

<sup>27</sup> Michael Stürmer, 'Kein Eigentum der Deutschen: die deutsche Frage.' in Werner Weidenfeld (Hg.) 'Die Identität der Deutschen.' Carl Hanser Verlag. München/Wien. 1983. p. 86.

<sup>28</sup> Hermann Lübbe, 'Der Fortschritt und das Museum. Über den Grund unseres Vergnügens an historischen Gegenständen.' The 1981 Bithell Memorial Lecture. Institute of Germanic Studies. University of London. W.S Maney and Son LTD Leeds. 1982. pp.1-6.

positively inclined towards the modernisation of Free Market mechanisms, they take exception to the process of political modernisation in the sense of democratisation and claims for equality. Notions of the political benefits of national identity are thus predicated upon a positive attitude towards the national past. The past serves both as a source of pride and affirmation and also as a reminder of the rootedness of the present in particular historical traditions. This is necessarily disrupted by the National Socialist experience which clearly hinders an uncomplicated assertion of the organic continuity between past and present or the plea for conventional patriotism.

This brings us to the third aspect which was represented in the contribution of the Berlin historian Ernst Nolte who sought to shift the causality of National Socialism and the Holocaust from German history and onto the Bolshevik revolution of October 1917 and Soviet Union.<sup>29</sup> This corresponded to the common perception articulated by neoconservatives that an overemphasis upon the National Socialist past had both disrupted the relationship between state and society and also the emotional bond between past and present. In Nolte's argument, an anticommunist or totalitarian approach was employed to both confront the discrediting of the national past and also to bolster the status of the contemporary West German state as a member of the Free West.

The neoconservative position essentially understood History as a source of ultimate, meta-political values which were transmitted through national identity. Historicism provides the ideological basis of nationalism in this perception. This orientation towards a positive past which invited imitation was necessarily compromised by the National Socialist experience which led neoconservatives to stress non-German factors and relativise the Holocaust. This position was confronted by left-liberal intellectuals who likewise addressed similar themes to their conservative colleagues.

The foremost left-liberal intellectual in the Federal Republic is arguably Jurgen Habermas. Habermas contested the plea for a return to conventional national identity and argued that such a concept represented a threat to West Germany's commitment to the West.<sup>30</sup> For Habermas this commitment to the West implied an orientation towards the tenets of Western

---

<sup>29</sup> Ernst Nolte, 'Vergangenheit, die nicht vergehen will. Eine Rede, die geschrieben, aber nicht gehalten werden konnte.' In, 'Historikerstreit.' op. cit. p. 45.

<sup>30</sup> Habermas, 'Eine Art Schadensabwicklung' in, Historikerstreit. 1987. op. cit. p. 75-6.

political culture deemed antithetical to traditional German nationalism. This led Habermas to argue the case for a form of *Verfassungspatriotismus* which adopted and substantially altered a concept articulated by the liberal conservative Dolf Sternberger in 1978. Both Sternberger and Habermas argued for a form of social solidarity and loyalty which was based upon pride in the constitutional arrangements of the Federal Republic. Yet for Sternberger the commitment to the constitution was complimented by an attachment to the concept of the German nation.<sup>31</sup> For Habermas, however, the attachment to *Verfassungspatriotismus* was inextricably linked with a celebration of the post-national basis of West German democracy. In Habermas, the concept of *Verfassungspatriotismus* is derived from republican-democratic traditions of sovereign will formation in a society of free and equals and a commitment to the principles of reason and universalism.<sup>32</sup> Habermas represents in many respects a highly interesting figure in the critical engagement with neoconservatism as he remains as committed to the modernist project as neoconservatives were to attack this tradition. Likewise, a central aspect of *Verfassungspatriotismus* is a celebration of the refounding of the Federal Republic during the 1960s. For Habermas and other left-liberal intellectuals, West Germany only really substantially broke with national traditions and joined Western political culture after the democratising impulse of the 1960s counter-culture.

The concept of a progressive refounding of the FRG during the 1960s was based upon a critical reading of German national history. For the pioneer of the critical-historical social science approach, Hans-Ulrich Wehler, the history of the German nation and the collapse into National Socialist barbarity testified to a *Sonderweg* to modernity which significantly deviated from the path of Western democracies.<sup>33</sup> The role of critical history comprised the investigation of the repression of emancipatory forces in national history and the critique of authoritarian and antidemocratic continuities in contemporary West German society. The critique of national history is thus understood as enabling the emancipation from tradition and as breaking the link between historicism and nationalism.

These approaches combined with a critical reflection of the National Socialist regime which placed the Third Reich firmly within longer-term national political and ideological traditions.

---

<sup>31</sup> cf Berger. 1997. op. cit. p. 83.

<sup>32</sup> cf Jürgen Habermas, 'Die Moderne - ein unvollendetes Projekt.' in Habermas. 1992. op. cit. pp. 32-55.

<sup>33</sup> cf Hans-Ulrich Wehler, 'Bismarck und der Imperialismus.' Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht. Göttingen. 1969.

In response to the neoconservative call for drawing a line under the NS past in order to articulate a more conventional form of national identity, left-liberal thinkers derived moral-political authority for the concept of post-national democratic *Verfassungspatriotismus* from a critical focus upon the Nazi past. From this perspective, the German nation state had been eternally discredited either as a practical organisatory principle or as an ideological rallying-call in West Germany. Critical reflection of the National Socialist past was understood, in the words of the director of the Munich-based Institute for Contemporary History, Martin Broszat, one of the best forms of *moralisch-politische Gesittung* in West German society.<sup>34</sup> For left-liberal thinkers, remembrance of the National Socialist past thus represented not only decent respect for the victims but also played a key role in politically civilising West German society against regressive trends towards a renationalisation of political culture.

Thus during the 1980s one could discern a dichotomy between neoconservative and left-liberal approaches to the concept of national identity. One commentator speaks of a divide between “national conservatives” such as Stürmer and “radical modernists” such as Habermas.<sup>35</sup> Neoconservative thinkers argued for a rehabilitation of conventional patriotism from which an emotional, supra-rational bond between state and citizenry was expected as well as a form of compensation afforded by consciousness of the historical derivation of the present. This approach was predicated upon a playing-down or relativisation of the National Socialist past and the regime’s specific roots in German national political culture. Left-liberals argued for a form of post-national *Verfassungspatriotismus* which was based in the historical departure from the nation state in 1945 and in the intellectual break with authoritarian traditions in the 1960s. This approach centred upon a critical self-reflection of the National Socialist past which was understood as a powerful moral-political argument for a post-national orientation in terms of social organisation and political identity.

Whilst neoconservative and left-liberal positions existed in a conflictual relationship to one another in terms of the form of identity sought and the conceptualisation of the social use of history, it would be misleading to imply that they represented homogenous and antithetical blocs of political opinion. Both orientations displayed inner heterogeneity and also elements

---

<sup>34</sup> Broszat, ‘Wem gehört die deutsche Geschichte?’ in Broszat, ‘Nach Hitler. Der schwierige Umgang mit unserer Geschichte.’ DTV. München. 1988. p. 310.

<sup>35</sup> cf Anton Leist, ‘Nation und Patriotismus in Zeiten der Globalisierung.’ in, Christine Chwaszcza, Wolfgang Kersting (Hrsg.) ‘Politische Philosophie der internationalen Beziehungen.’ Suhrkamp. Frankfurt. /M. 1998. p. 402.

of congruence with one another. Thus the neoconservative stance incorporated liberal-conservative and *deutsch-national* currents of right-wing politics. Whilst both currents were orientated towards a romantically conceived concept of conventional national identity, they diverged in their assessment of the role of nationalism in contemporary West German society. Whilst liberal conservative such as Stürmer argued for the renaissance of conventional national identity as a means of bolstering the social hegemony of the Federal Republic, *deutsch-national* thinkers such as Bernhard Willms understood nationalism as a potential challenge to the Cold War status-quo. For Willms, the case for conventional national identity involved a challenge to the divided status of *Mittleuropa* and raised the prospect of breaking out of the East-West deadlock and unifying the two German states.<sup>36</sup> Whilst such positions remained marginal in conservative discourse, both pro and anti-Western right wing thinkers conceived national identity in anti-modernist, romantic terms and sought to suppress the critical memory of the National Socialist past.

Left-liberals too cannot be considered a homogeneous coterie of modernist thinkers. There are important differences in the arguments advanced by left-liberal thinkers even if they largely shared Habermas political critique of neoconservatism. Left-liberal, post-national thinkers included right wing social democrats such as Heinrich August Winkler, critical historians such as Wehler and radical modernists such as Habermas. Habermas argument for post-national identity came under criticism from left-liberal historians such as Broszat, Lutz Niethammer and Detlev Peukert who argued from a defence of critical *Alltagsgeschichte*. Broszat noted the pro-western attachments of Stürmer and questioned whether he was deserving of Habermas criticism that his position undermined the bond with the West.<sup>37</sup> Lutz Niethammer criticised the conceptual premises of the instrumentalisation of history for simplistic identity constructs and argued the case for an orientation towards subjective *Erfahrungsgeschichte* rather than an objectifying national reference point.<sup>38</sup> Against such identity politics, pro-*Alltagsgeschichte* historians argued that a critical history from below approach challenged uncritical assertions of a *Stunde Null* in 1945 by emphasising the

---

<sup>36</sup> Bernhard Willms, Paul Kleinewefers, 'Erneuerung aus der Mitte. Prag - Wien - Berlin. Diesseits von Ost und West.' Busse und Seewald GmbH. Herford. 1988. p. 300.

<sup>37</sup> cf Martin Broszat, 'Wo sich die Geister scheiden. Die Beschwörung der Geschichte taugt nicht als nationaler Religionsersatz.' in 'Historikerstreit.' 1987. op. cit. p. 193.

<sup>38</sup> cf Lutz Niethammer, 'Erinnerungsgebot und Erfahrungsgeschichte. Institutionalisierungen im kollektiven Gedächtnis.' in Loewy. 1992. op. cit. pp. 21-34.

continuities which stretched into the post-war period.<sup>39</sup> Also from a history from below perspective, Detlev Peukert perceived unintentional apologetics in the critical concept of the *Sonderweg*: firstly this notion cast the roots of later barbarism in terms of a “deficit of modernism” which, however, had now been successfully overcome in the Federal Republic.<sup>40</sup> For Peukert, talk of a *Zivilisationsbruch* in 1933-45 down-played the intimate relationship between modernism and barbarism in the broader process of Western civilisation.<sup>41</sup> For this group of critical historians, the real issue of the *Historikerstreit* was not merely the confrontation between progressive and conservative formulations of identity but rather more the question of how to structure the necessary *Historisierung* of National Socialist.<sup>42</sup>

Despite the criticisms from advocates of a critical *Alltagsgeschichte* or from left-liberal intellectuals who criticised Habermas’ moralisation of history<sup>43</sup>, it must be recognised that they shared significant common ground particularly in their rejection of historiographic nationalism and their commitment to emancipatory forms of history writing.<sup>44</sup> Likewise, whilst it was certainly the case that Stürmer and Habermas shared an orientation to the Western-integrated Federal Republic, the political visions which filled this concept for right and left diverged significantly. In the context of West Germany during the 1980s, perceptions of romantic and civic patriotism were intimately related to distinctive left and right attitudes towards the legacy of political modernism, attitudes towards the counter-culture of the 1960s, notions of the social use of history and approaches towards the National Socialist past.

Whilst definitions of neoconservative and left-liberal approaches to the question of identity in West Germany contained certain limitations, they nevertheless reflected a broad orientation along the lines of Hobsbawm’s distinction between the parties of order and progress. Post-unification debate of these themes displays a process of transformation in the

---

<sup>39</sup> Lutz Niethammer, ‘Normalisierung im Westen. Erinnerungsspuren in die 50er Jahre.’ in Diner. (Hrsg.) 1987. op. cit. pp. 153-184.

<sup>40</sup> cf Detlev Peukert, ‘Alltag und Barberei. Zur Normalität des Dritten Reiches.’ in Diner. (Hrsg.) *ibid.* pp. 52-3.

<sup>41</sup> *ibid.* pp. 59-61. This argument in greater detail in Peukert, ‘The Weimar Republic. The Crisis of Classical Modernity.’ Penguin. London. 1993.

<sup>42</sup> Thus Wolfgang Benz, ‘Die Abwehr der Vergangenheit. Ein Problem nur für Historiker und Moralisten?’ in Diner. (Hrsg.) 1987. op. cit. p. 18. also cf Diner in *ibid.* ‘Einleitung des Herausgebers.’ p. 8.

<sup>43</sup> cf Helmut Fleischer, ‘Die Moral der Geschichte. Zum Disput über die Vergangenheit, die nicht vergehen will.’ in ‘Historikerstreit.’. 1987. op. cit. p. 124.

<sup>44</sup> Thus Berger. 1997. op. cit. p. 80.

definitions of neoconservative and left-liberal approaches to the question of national identity. Above all, discussion of post-unification national identity has been dominated by the suggestion that the collapse of the Cold War has heralded a renaissance of romantic nationalist traditions and has restored the bond between historicism and nationalism.<sup>45</sup> The thesis considers this perspective within the context of an examination of substantial changes in both neoconservative and left-liberal formulations of identity which display an uneven synthesis between conventional left and right wing conceptions of the relationship between historical consciousness and national identity.

Firstly, the thesis considers the relative ideological unity between liberal conservative and *deutsch-national* formulations of a romantic-inspired national identity as no longer tenable in important respects. Liberal conservatives such as Stürmer and Hildebrand continue to argue for a merging of the *Westbindung* with the national idea. For these thinkers, contemporary Germany assumes a form of synthesis between the Westernisation and democratisation pursued under Adenauer and the national sovereignty and foreign-political influence of the *Bismarckreich*. Whilst during the period of division, liberal conservatives sought to “nationalise” the political culture of West German democracy, in the post-unification period, this approach has assumed the form of an attempt to democratise or Westernise aspects of the historic German nation state. Whilst these thinkers perceive 1989 as heralding a return to “normality” this does not entail a return to pre-1945, antidemocratic traditions of German nationalism. This latter position is adopted by the thinkers of the *neue Rechte* or “New Right”.

This brand of right wing conservatism assumes the mantle held during the period of division by *deutsch-national* conservatives who perceive in the unification of the nation state, the end of the dominance of “Western” values in Germany and the return to a traditional canon of romantic-inspired nationalism and the international power-politics of the “autonomous” nation state. For historians such as Rainer Zitelmann<sup>46</sup> and Karl-Heinz Weißmann,<sup>47</sup> the collapse of the Eastern Bloc heralded the death of traditional radical politics and antifascist approaches to National Socialism in particular. This constellation held for the “New Right”

---

<sup>45</sup> cf Berger. 1997. op. cit. p. 23.

<sup>46</sup> cf Rainer Zitelmann, ‘Adenauers Gegner. Streiter für die Einheit.’ Straube. Erlangen-Bonn-Wien. 1991.

<sup>47</sup> Karlheinz Weißmann, ‘Der Weg in den Abgrund. Deutschland unter Hitler 1933 - 1945.’ Propyläen Verlag. Berlin. 1995. p. 10.

the potential for a confrontation with the National Socialist past (or more specifically with the perceived left-wing bias of interpretation) which not only sought to neutralise the contemporary political charge of this discredited past but which perceived “positive” aspects of the regime in its programme of social and economic modernisation. As one commentator observed, these thinkers are neither drawn towards the Western conservatism associated with Adenauer, nor with the Prussian power-state created by Bismarck but with the pre-fascist traditions of the Conservative Revolutionaries who polemicised against liberal democracy during the inter-war period.<sup>48</sup>

Clearly there remain significant overlaps and differences between liberal conservative and ‘New Right’ positions. Liberal conservatives concur with New Right thinkers in the perception that post-war West German left-liberal *Volkspädagogik* must be defeated and the fixation with the National Socialist past and the *Sonderweg* must be finally dropped.<sup>49</sup> In this vein, both currents drew confidence from the collapse of the Eastern Bloc and the trend to identify the GDR as Germany’s *zweite Diktatur* and hence relativise the singularity of the Third Reich. Also, both streams positively assess the possibilities of a cultivation of the *Mittellage* in Central Europe with the increased international authority of the unified state. Yet despite such common ground, an irresolvable point of contention between liberal conservatives and New Right thinkers remains perceptions of “Western” values and the quality of nationalism desired. Whilst liberal conservatives endorse the *Westbindung* of Germany and affirm the commitments of the contemporary nation state to the Western community, New right intellectuals attempted to rehabilitate a more traditional, and anti-Western, ethnic brand of nationalism which necessarily entailed a direct confrontation with the legacy of National Socialism. It appears at this point in particular - the defence of romantic nationalist traditions - that liberal conservatives and New Right thinkers part ways. Whereas a significant section of liberal conservatism has dropped the embarrassing commitment to ethnic definitions of nationality and has achieved a certain rapprochement with left-liberal formulations, New Right thinkers seek to free such interpretations from the stigma of National Socialism. Whilst during the early 1990s it appeared to many commentators that the New Right was making significant inroads into political culture, the course of the decade has seen such positions pushed to the margins of serious discourse.<sup>50</sup>

---

<sup>48</sup> Thomas Assheuer, ‘Das Deutschlandspiel.’ in *Die Zeit*. Nr.37. 03. 09. 1998.

<sup>49</sup> cf Berger. in Berger, Donovan, Passmore (eds.) 1999. op. cit. p. 256.

<sup>50</sup> *ibid.* p. 260.

Left-liberal perspectives of national identity have also undergone significant change in post-unification society. On the one hand a significant section of left-liberal thinkers have sought a rapprochement with the German nation and staked a claim for the cultivation of a democratic nationalist concept of identity which remains critical of the historic German nation state and yet seeks to foster authority for the new Western nation state. Figures such as Winkler<sup>51</sup>, Otto Dann,<sup>52</sup> Wolfgang Mommsen<sup>53</sup> have significantly altered their anti or post-national affiliations and argue for a synthesis between “Western” values and the concept of the “German nation”. Such authors seek democratic-nationalist, or civic nationalist antecedents for the contemporary nation. Interesting in this transformation is not only the rapprochement with the nation but equally the consensual nature of such discourse which appeals to both left-liberals and liberal conservatives to construct a democratic national identity. Liberal-conservative and left-liberal discourses of identity merge in a form of mutual rapprochement which fuses a “Westernisation” of the concept of the German nation with a “nationalisation” of *Verfassungspatriotismus*.

Even more remarkable than the convergence over the need for a democratic, “Westernised” national political culture appears the rapprochement over the issue of the National Socialist past. It is in this moment - characterised as a culture of contrition - that the thesis perceives the most important development of the post-unification discourse of national identity. This represents far from a new consensus over the historical and political antecedents of National Socialism which understandably remains contested ground. The element of convergence takes place at the level of interpretations of the contemporary social value of historical perceptions of the Third Reich in lending authority to a concept of reconfigured national identity. The basis of this change lies founded in two important trends: on the one hand with the collapse of the East, totalitarian approaches to National Socialism experienced a fillip. Yet on the other hand, the course of the 1990s has shown that this has not led to a rehabilitation of traditional terms of nationalism. On the contrary, a dominant motif of national identity constructs in post-unification society is that romantic nationalism must not be allowed to resurface. Above all, it has become clear that post-unification concepts of

---

<sup>51</sup> cf Winkler, ‘Seperatismus auf Filzlatschen. Der Marxismus-Leninismus ist tot, und der Weg nach Europa führt über Berlin.’ in *Die Zeit*. Nr. 43. 15. Oktober. 1998.

<sup>52</sup> Otto Dann, ‘Nation und Nationalismus in Deutschland 1770 - 1990.’ Verlag C.H Beck. München. 1993.p. 325.

national identity have not led to the drawing of a line underneath the National Socialist past but rather more are predicated upon a critical reflection of this period. Thus, whilst unification appeared to strengthen the totalitarian reflex, this has not resulted in the marginalisation of the National Socialist experience in political culture. Rather, serious interpretations of National Identity across the political spectrum emphasise the need to base contemporary post-ethnic concepts of national identity within the context of self-critical reflection of German fascism and the Holocaust in particular. Thus contemporary discussion of national identity finds itself in a peculiar and unique situation whereby the right appears to have won the argument for a concept of national identity and yet the left appears to have won the argument over its political historical points of reference. It is now necessary to consider the major aims and limitations of the project.

### 1.3 Aims and Limitations of the Thesis

The main focus of the thesis is formed by an investigation into the development of the type of “critical” and “post-traditional” concept of national identity articulated in the post-unification work of the radical social philosopher Jürgen Habermas. Habermas is selected above all as he represents the most sophisticated articulation of the broader trends identified towards a reconfiguration of national identity which explodes the unity between nationalism and historicism. Habermas appears in many respects as the philosophical expression of the transformation of left-liberals in post-unification Germany. Whilst Habermas formally remains critical of the nation as a basis for either social organisation or political identity, his concept of *gebrochene Identität* represents a sophisticated reformulation of national identity rather than its transcendence.

For Habermas, the defining characteristic of the contemporary West is described in the phrase of the “post-national constellation”.<sup>54</sup> This involves two processes of reconfiguration: Firstly Habermas contends that in the present globalised world the political and economic authority of national governments are severely weakened. In this context he argues for the development of a European federation which could create a new, supra-national forum for the continuation of the “modernist project” and the social state compromise of the post-war

---

<sup>53</sup> cf Wolfgang Mommsen, ‘Der autoritäre Nationalstaat. Verfassung, Gesellschaft und Kultur im deutschen Kaiserreich.’ Fischer. F./Main. 1992. p. 7.

<sup>54</sup> Habermas. 1998. op. cit.

period. Secondly, Habermas contends that traditional, ethnic-based or romantic nationalism was fundamentally discredited by the National Socialist experience. Far from signalling the rehabilitation of such traditions, the eclipse of the Cold War constellation has displayed the bankruptcy of conventional formulations of national identity based upon a mystification of the indigenous past into a glorious antecedent.<sup>55</sup> It is within this context that the concepts of *Verfassungspatriotismus* and “critical history” have undergone change.

In answer to the post-national constellation, Habermas argues for the transformation of Constitutional Patriotism into a *Weltinnenpolitik*. This retains the orientation towards the universal values of republican democracy which he seeks to realise on the supra-national level of a European Federation. The universalism derived from a form of solidarity mediated by the law and constitution appears to Habermas as a useful means of breaking the link between nationality and citizenship which characterised traditional nationalism. For Habermas, it is hence the task of *Verfassungspatriotismus* to adopt the role formerly performed by nationalism.<sup>56</sup>

In this context, Habermas argues that the “national public” created by the emergence of nation states in the late eighteenth - early nineteenth century should now be transcended onto the level of a European “Public” which shares a supra-national communicative context within which the sovereign will of the European “civil society” should find an effective voice. The concept of *Weltinnenpolitik* serves as a mechanism for the realisation of a genuinely cosmopolitan order as it not only ruptures the intimate relationship between citizenship and nationality, but it also serves as a means whereby particular states may intervene for “humanitarian” purpose in the affairs of a state which oppresses its people. For Habermas, cooperation and solidarity between people is mediated at the abstract level of “universal moral consciousness” which exists above and beyond the national loyalties of the citizen. From this perspective, Habermas argues that the boundaries between a humanist universalism at the level of “moral consciousness” and the cultural particularism of laws bound by nation states must be relativised. The role of law creation is extremely important to this discourse and Habermas contends that only when “universal moral consciousness” finds

---

<sup>55</sup> Helmut Dubiel, ‘Niemand ist frei von der Geschichte. Die nationalsozialistische Herrschaft in den Debatten des Deutschen Bundestags.’ Carl Hanser Verlag. München/Wien. 1999. p. 292.

<sup>56</sup> Habermas. 1996. op. cit. p. 143.

codification in international law can the basis for a truly cosmopolitan order be established.

57

As during the 1980s, Habermas concept formally eschews the couching of political authority in a discourse of particularist national identity. Yet as Habermas remained committed to the Federal Republic during the 1980s and hence fell back upon an - albeit "critical" - formulation of post-traditional identity for the West German state, so in the 1990s he is compelled to articulate his emancipatory political vision via a radical concept of *gebrochene nationale Identität*.<sup>58</sup> Habermas argues that at the end of the twentieth century not only have radical politics been discredited but that also traditional right wing political and historical approaches have been equally discredited. Habermas expresses scepticism towards both the "utopian" philosophy of history associated with Hegel and later Marx as well as the form of "historicism" developed by Borussian nationalist historians in the nineteenth century and defended by neoconservatives up to the present. In place of conventional historical-political approaches to the questions of progress and order Habermas develops a case for the internalisation of history as *Dementi*.<sup>59</sup> For Habermas, both "utopian" and "historicist" approaches to past and present are mistaken in their optimism and need to be supplanted with a concept of history that is born from the experience of defeat and catastrophe. History does play a central role in defining Habermas concept of radical identity and this assumes the form of an internalisation of the insight that we only learn from the mistakes of the past. In the National Socialist experience Habermas perceives the historical collapse *par exemple* and hence the concept of "broken identity" is based neither upon the vision of a positive, alternative social form nor is it derived from an identification with a positively endowed national past. Thus in response to the discredited couplet of historicism and nationalism, Habermas offers the combination of history as *Dementi* and a self-critical *gebrochene Identität*.

The thesis considers Habermas transcendence of the couplets of "nationality and citizenship" and "historicism and nationalism" into the concepts of the European Public and *Weltinnenpolitik* and "broken identity" based upon an appreciation of history as *Dementi* as a

---

<sup>57</sup> Jürgen Habermas, 'Bestialität und Humanität. Ein Krieg an der Grenze zwischen Recht und Moral.' *Die Zeit*. Nr. 29. April 1999.

<sup>58</sup> Thus Habermas in a contribution to the debate over the Berlin *Holocaustmahnmal*, 'Der Zeigefinger. Die Deutschen.' *Die Zeit*. Nr. 14. 31. März. 1999.

<sup>59</sup> Habermas. 1995. op. cit. pp. 9.18.

sophisticated response to the problems of defining progress and order at the “End of History” and “Beyond the nation state”. Whilst Habermas remains formally committed to the continuation of the modernist project and the realisation of emancipatory social forms, his approach appears undermined by a prioritisation of order above freedom which leads him back to the confines of “identity politics”. The thesis seeks to investigate the manner in which Habermas argument reflects a more consensual mood among left and right wing thinkers regarding the interplay between the critique of the National Socialist past and the articulation of national identity in the present. The motif of “contrition” appears well suited to summarise these developments in which the expression of remorse for the NS past ceases to delegitimise the plea for national identity and rather more transforms into its moral-political centre. The act of contrition involves not only the expression of remorse for past transgressions but simultaneously implies the willingness to “learn” from past sins and to “do better” in the future. The fusion of this motif with the concept of national identity appears to offer a form of remorse which no longer serves as a critique but as an act of legitimacy creation and a willingness to “do better” which contemplates the abuse of national sovereignty in the name of realising a “humanitarian” world order. In this radical form of “post-national identity”, the particularism of the Germans appears formed by the experience of having overcome National Socialism and conventional romantic nationalism. Furthermore, this discourse of national identity relies heavily upon the power of an emotive past to confer the moral-political authority of “history” and contemporary political values. It is from this perspective that the thesis adopts a critical attitude towards national identity constructs of both romantic and radical provenance.

The limitations of a thesis of this nature are considerable. Firstly I understand the discourse of national identity as grounded in the specific socio-political and historical context in which it is generated. Furthermore, I understand national identity as a response to broad perceptions of breakdown of previous political and social models in times of rapid historical change. It would explode the confines of a thesis to provide an exhaustive account of these processes and their independence and relationship with one another. In this sense, the thesis has been compelled to assert these factors without going into the detail to which any full account must in truth aspire.

More specifically, in terms of the debate within the German context the thesis is also restricted. Thus there is no real discussion of the potential to construct identity on the sub-

national regional or federal level. Similarly, whilst the development of a relative economic independence on the level of the regions has progressed in post-unification Germany, I do not perceive these in competition with the concept of an over-arching concept of national identity. National identity seeks to define the collective values which cohere a society in terms of its fundamental social and political norms. I do not perceive a conflict between this project and the “Sinatra doctrine” of relative regional independent economic development.<sup>60</sup> Also, there is no chapter solely on the experience of the GDR or indeed on the post-unification reflection of the social problems derived from the West German “annexation”<sup>61</sup> of East Germany and the phenomena of *Ostalgie* among sections of the former East German population. Limitations of space play a role in this as does the fact that I do not consider such discourse as a species of “national identity” but rather more a form of sub-national *Trotzidentität*.<sup>62</sup> It would be against the grain of the thesis to contribute, however unintentionally, to the post-unification marginalisation of the East German “voice”.<sup>63</sup> It appears to reflect the marginalisation of the East German “voice” that the only contribution to the reconfiguration of national identity offered by the GDR is as a wholly negative counterfoil to West Germany in the form of Germany’s *zweite Diktatur*. It is also clear that perceptions of a transformation from ethnic to democratic terms of patriotism play a role in establishing divisions between not only the nations of the West and the rest of the globe but equally between West and East German citizens.<sup>64</sup> The vision of the “East German skinhead” has become a popular, and largely unquestioned stereotype in the new Germany which fosters notions of a distinct culture of “Eastern” and “Western” values. The Dutch journalist Ian Buruma reported a popular reaction of West German liberals towards their Eastern compatriots in the notion that “uncivilized” East Germans represented a form of Wildean “portrait in the attic” of how the Germans used to be.<sup>65</sup> Such divisions would appear to

---

<sup>60</sup> c:f Charlie Jeffries, ‘From cooperative Federalism to a “Sinatra Doctrine” of the Länder?’ in Charlie Jeffries (ed.) ‘Recasting German Federalism. The legacy of unification.’ Pinto. London 1999. pp. 329-342.

<sup>61</sup> Thus Andre Brie, ‘Europapolitische Wendepunkte: eine linke Position.’ in Axel Lochner (Hrsg.) ‘Linke Politik in Deutschland. Beiträge aus der DDR und BRD.’ Galgenberg. Hamburg. 1990. p. 73.

<sup>62</sup> Formulation of Daniel Hough. PhD student at IGS Birmingham.

<sup>63</sup> Thomas A. Baylis, ‘East German Leadership after Unification: The Search for Voice.’ in Merkl. (ed.) 1999. op. cit. pp. 135-145.

<sup>64</sup> Thus one West German commentator articulates what appears to be an equally popular as it is irrational fear that although similar percentages of East Germans as West declare an allegiance to the principles of liberal democracy this does “not necessarily mean” that they are as “able as West Germans to act democratically.” cf, Robert Rohrschneider, ‘Visions of Democracy.’ in Merkl. (ed.) *ibid.* p. 77.

<sup>65</sup> Ian Buruma, ‘Wages of Guilt. Memories of War in Germany and Japan.’ Vintage. London. 1995. p. 28.

represent more products of the course of unification than reflect genuine, age-old distinctions.

Despite the importance of reflection of the former GDR and of East-West divisions in unified Germany, the major focus of this research project is the reconfiguration of German national identity within the political, philosophical and historical parameters of the neoconservative and left-liberal positions of the 1980s. These approaches are pursued in the post-unification context in which, so the thesis contends, they find themselves in a process of mutual reconfiguration and uneven synthesis. More specifically, the thesis is concerned to examine the post-unification development of Jürgen Habermas and his reformulation of conventional national identity in the form of *gebrochene Identität* founded in a concept of history as *Dementi* in particular. The thesis perceives in the work of this outstanding intellectual, the most sophisticated formulation of a discourse of identity which reflects both the exhaustion of conventional left and right wing approaches to past and present.

The thesis examines the changing discourse of identity in three broad sections. Section I (chapters 2 and 3) examines the discourse of neoconservative and critical concepts of identity which emerged over the period between 1960s and 1980s. In this section I wish to highlight the *dichotomy* between conservative and critical concepts of identity and reflection of the National Socialist past. Section II (chapters 4 and 5) concentrates upon the post-unification development of conservative discourse of national identity within the context of perceptions of the *re-nationalisation* of German political culture. Finally section III (chapters 6 and 7) considers the emergence of an uneven synthesis between left-liberal and conservative approaches to past and present in the process of a *reconfiguration* of the concept of national identity via the plea for a “Westernisation” of the German nation and in the terms of a culture of contrition towards the National Socialist past. Finally in the conclusion (chapter 8) I wish to tie together the strands of the thesis and problematise the culture of contrition.

## **2. Salvaging the Past: Neoconservatism, Compensation and National Identity**

In the following chapter I wish to examine the conservative discourse of identity which emerged in the 1970s - 80s in the wake of the counter-cultural revolt of the 1960s. Firstly I wish to examine the perception on the right during the 1960s - 1970s that contemporary West German society was afflicted with a crisis of values. The chapter examines perceptions of a crisis of values in society and relates these to the call for a sense of identity against the disruption of emancipatory politics and the value transience of modern society. This was often formulated as a need for patriotism, the lack of which was deemed a fundamental weakness of West German society. Finally the chapter considers the approach to the national socialist past adopted by Nolte in an attempt to relativise the contemporary political charge of this compromising past.

### **2.1. A Crisis of Values**

It has been observed that the emergence of a forceful discourse of what constitutes society's "basic values" indicates that these have become far from self-evident and frequently betrays a profound confusion and state of value crisis in society.<sup>1</sup> During periods of relative stability where social interests, values and aspirations are regulated by and gain definition through functioning political and economic structures, the question of "identity" appears as a rather academic concern. Up until the 1970s, various paradigms shaped West German political culture. The cohesive potential of concepts such as "Western democracy", the "economic miracle", "anticommunism" and "social reformism" was generated by their congruence with the grain of public expectation and experiential basis in contemporary material reality.

Taking stock of the state of contemporary society, invariably directly or indirectly mediated through perceptions of the NS past, was a common characteristic of post-war governments in West Germany of all political shades. Declaring the "end" of the post-war period remained a common feature of successive West German governments throughout the Cold War until the actual end of the post-war period in 1989-90. In 1953 Adenauer perceived a definitive "new start" with the construction of Western style

parliamentary democracy in 1949.<sup>2</sup> Similarly, his successor Ludwig Erhard had contended *Wir sind wieder wer* upon the success of the economy in the 1950s and likewise posited the end of the post-war period upon his assumption of the chancellorship in 1963.<sup>3</sup> Willy Brandt's governmental declaration of 1969 was also informed with a sense of departure from the post-war years which was based in the programme of social reform and the contention that the democratisation of West German society had only really begun in earnest with the election of the social-liberal coalition.<sup>4</sup> Whilst all these declarations corresponded to distinct political perceptions and programmes, a common factor shared by them is that the perception of socio-political direction was predicated upon specific political, social and economic achievements or programmes of government. Adenauer, Erhard and Brandt's perceptions of the political orientation and social solidarity of West Germany are all based upon what one may term "hard foci" of political identity; the system of parliamentary democracy, economic success and a social programme of progressive state intervention and democratic reform.

The emergence of neoconservatism during the 1970s and the accompanying discourse over which values should enjoy authority in the political culture of West German society is often brought into conjunction with the broader flux of established political values during the 1960s and 1970s. In particular, many commentators locate the development of a distinct "neoconservative" stream of conservatism during this period within the context of a broader rethinking of the ideological and political tenets of conservative thought in the wake of the exhaustion of the "pragmatic" conservatism of the *Adenauerstaat* and the challenge emanating from the "new Left" paradigm which developed during the 1960s. Neoconservatism resulted from the abandoning of the post-war "technocratic-pragmatic" approach based upon impressive economic growth rates and the successful organisation of the state and institutions which lead to the

---

<sup>1</sup> Martin und Sylvia Greiffenhagen, *Ein schwieriges Vaterland. Zur politischen Kultur Deutschlands*. Fischer Taschenbuch Verlag, Frankfurt/M. 1981, pp. 132-137.

<sup>2</sup> Helmut Dubiel, *Niemand ist frei von der Geschichte. Die nationalsozialistische Herrschaft in den Debatten des Deutschen Bundestags*. Carl Hanser Verlag, München/Wien. 1999. p. 45.

<sup>3</sup> *ibid.* pp. 91-2.

<sup>4</sup> cf *Regierungserklärung von Bundeskanzler Brandt vor dem Deutschen Bundestag 28. 10. 1969*. in Irmgard Wilharm (ed.) *Deutsche Geschichte 1962-1983 - Dokumente in zwei Bänden/Bd. I*. Fischer Taschenbuch. Frankfurt/M. 1985. pp. 27-32.

development of an “ethical-normative” conception of conservatism.<sup>5</sup> The second constitutive element of this ideological reconstruction was the critical engagement with the neo-Marxist political movements and social theories which had blossomed during the late 1960s - early 1970s. The critique of the “emancipatory” politics of the “New Left” played a central role in politically defining the reconfiguring of conservative thought during this period. The conservative counter-critique of the 1960s “emancipatory” political paradigm developed during the 1970s and is often associated with the notion of a *Tendenzwende*. The concept of the *Tendenzwende* derives from a 1974 meeting of the *Bayrische Akademie der schönen Künste* and counted the historian Golo Mann and the philosopher Hermann Lübbe among its founders. The *Tendenzwende* has been understood as a conservative counter-critique to the perceived political hegemony of the neo-Marxist left.<sup>6</sup> As such, this intellectual “U-Turn” was a response to the “counter-culture” of the 1960s and, in particular, the discourse of social emancipation and reform associated with the “New Left”. Whilst the actual influence of the *Tendenzwende* in shaping West German political culture is open to debate<sup>7</sup>, it formed an important ideological moment of a broader process of reconstitution of the right which became synthesised in the emergence of “neoconservatism”.

### 2.1.1 Corrosive Values

In the blossoming of the neo-Marxist paradigm during the late 1960s-70s, many conservative intellectuals and politicians perceived the rebirth of an ideology which they had always rejected. Yet whilst many tenets of the romantic inspired critique of the concepts of reason, universalism and progress play an important role in the conservative counter-critique of the late 1970s - 80s, neoconservatism does not reject the technological-industrial growth which characterises modern society. The basic political

---

<sup>5</sup> cf Holger Czitrich, *Konservatismus und nationale Identität in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland. Der Konservatismus, seine Theorie und Entwicklung im Spiegel der Diskussionen über das Selbstverständnis der Bundesrepublik Deutschland seit Mitte der siebziger Jahre*. Peter Lang, Frankfurt/M. 1989. pp. 63-72.

<sup>6</sup> cf Hans J. Hahn, *The Concept of the Tendenzwende as seen in the Sontheimer - Habermas Controversy*. in Hans J. Hahn/Eva Kolinsky (eds.) *Germany In The Eighties. Modern German Studies. Association For Modern German Studies. (AMGS) Aston University, Goethe Institute London*. Number 2. October 1986. (ISSN 0268-5930) p. 1-6.

<sup>7</sup> Gerhard Hertel, *Der Weg zur “Wende”. Die Bundesrepublik Deutschlands in der Ära Schmidt*. Bd. I: 1974-1980. S. Roderweg Verlag, Regensburg. 1988. pp.122-128. Hertel argues here that the *Tendenzwende* represented more a barometer of political change rather than acting as a catalyst.

orientation of this stream of conservatism to liberalise the Free Market and simultaneously “de-liberalise” the political culture of society has been understood as indicative of a schizophrenic attitude towards the concept of modernism. “Neoconservatism” promotes “modernisation” in terms of technological-economic advance whilst simultaneously striving to roll back the influence of “modernist” attitudes in the political culture of society.<sup>8</sup> Citing liberal intellectuals as the culprits of contemporary “cultural crisis”, neoconservative intellectuals set about constructing counter-values around traditional themes such as the nation, religion, historical consciousness, secondary virtues etc. The common denominator of these ideas is their perceived ability to operate in a therapeutic, compensatory manner for the disorientating chaos of the modern age.<sup>9</sup> Thus the apparent modernist paradox of neoconservatism - unifying “modern” and “anti-modern” elements - results from the concern to cultivate a set of values capable of legitimising or neutralising the disruptive consequences of economic liberalisation. Czitrich offers the following understanding of the relationship between these two elements in the conservative discourse of national identity

In der Bundesrepublik, so ist als These für die Entwicklung des Konservatismus und für dessen spezifische Beiträge des Diskurses über nationale Identität festzustellen, gehen die Konservativen aller Strömungen davon aus, daß der rein neo-liberale Versuch, der Revitalisierung des Kapitalismus ohne sinnstiftende Stützung gescheitert ist.<sup>10</sup>

Neoconservatism extracts technological-economic processes from the arena of value creation, on the basis that they are unreliable or redundant foci of social loyalty and simultaneously detaches the cultural system from the experience of progress.<sup>11</sup> In this manner, “antimodernist” cultural-political values can be fostered as a means of absorbing the socially disruptive effects of economic-technological “modernisation”. The need for “compensation” results from the actual social dislocation engendered by economic restructuring and from the belief that progress and emancipation are at best illusory utopias and, at worst, the catalysts of social breakdown. As such, neoconservatism anticipates the endurance of present material problems into the future and hence prioritises the cultivation of political values which could potentially absorb or

---

<sup>8</sup> Claus Offe, *Die Utopie der Null-Optionen. Modernität und Modernisierung als politische Gütekriterien.* in, Peter Koslowski, Robert Spaemann, Reinhard Löw (Hg.). *Moderne oder Postmoderne ? Zur Signatur des gegenwärtigen Zeitalters.* Civitas Resultate Band 10. Acta Humaniora, VCH Verlagsgesellschaft mbH. Weinheim. 1986. pp. 157-9.

<sup>9</sup> Martin Greiffenhagen, *Von Potsdam nach Bonn. Zehn Kapitel zur politischen Kultur Deutschlands.* Piper Verlag. München. 1986. p. 73.

<sup>10</sup> Czitrich. 1989. op. cit. p. 78.

<sup>11</sup> Greiffenhagen. 1986. pp. 72. ff.

neutralise the socially disruptive consequences. The development of neoconservative thought formed an important influence on the shaping of a discourse of national identity which after the return of a conservative coalition in 1982 became elevated to a governmental priority.

Helmut Kohl, like his predecessors, also perceived his election victory as a turning point in West German history. Interesting in Kohl's perception are the terms in which the idea of a "new beginning" was articulated. The incoming conservative lead coalition conventionally presented its policies over the economy, international relations, internal security and the welfare state as the better alternative to the social-liberal coalition which had clearly run into serious difficulties since the mid 1970s. Combined with the understanding of representing a more competent political-economic programme, Chancellor Kohl was keen to couch the political mission of the Union in the sacred terms of a *geistig-moralische Wende*. This phrase has become as strongly identified with Kohl's conservative coalition as the slogan *mehr Demokratie wagen* is with Brandt's social-liberal administration. The contrast between the two is significant and reflects not only the contrasting programmatic intent of the two governments but also two distinct approaches to social cohesion. A central pillar of Brandt's government was the programme of social reform and democratisation through which, it was contended, the creation of a more equitable society could be achieved. In Kohl's formulation of the *Wende*, however, the emphasis is placed upon the cultivation of a set of values deemed deficient in the spiritual-moral make-up of West German society. Commenting on the condition of the Federal Republic at the time of his assumption of power, Kohl presented the following retrospective diagnosis

Es war nicht nur eine wirtschaftliche und außenpolitische, sondern auch eine geistig-moralische Krise, und diese war das Resultat einer Verunsicherung im Verhältnis zur Geschichte, zu vielen grundlegenden ethischen Werten und sozialen Tugenden, zu Staat und Recht - und letztlich auch einer Verunsicherung im nationalen Selbstverständnis der Westdeutschen.<sup>12</sup>

For Kohl, the spiritual-moral crisis of West German society during the early 1980s arose primarily as a consequence of alienation from a set of traditional values. From this perspective, a core corpus of "ethical values" and a historically founded sense of national identity act as the spiritual adhesive of society and it is the absence of these

---

<sup>12</sup> Helmut Kohl, *Ich wollte Deutschlands Einheit*. Dargestellt von Kai Dieckmann und Ralf Georg Reuth. Ullstein Buchverlag GmbH, Berlin Propyläen Verlag. 1996. p. 26.

essential components of social order which explain the malaise of contemporary West German society. Whilst he makes reference to the role played by economic instability and the intensification of the Cold War, Kohl perceives the prime cause of contemporary social decline in cultural-political terms. The perception of moral crisis remained a central ideological tenet throughout Kohl's administration. The government policy declaration of 1987 also emphasised the need to develop a "proper moral attitude" and social consensus over the country's "basic values" describing the cultivation of a sense of culture and history as the "national task" for the future.<sup>13</sup> During the 1980s, the project of cultivating moral norms and a sense of historically conditioned national identity became important features of governmental policy. Both the nature of the values identified as in crisis and the perceived cause of this malaise provide insight into the political character of this critique.

The emphasis upon "spiritual-moral" themes emphasises value creation as primarily a cultural-political phenomenon distinct from the socio-economic sphere. Frequently, such perceptions were underpinned by scepticism towards the ability of economic or political moments to secure social consensus in their own right. From this perspective, the "spiritual-moral" values articulated in a conventional sense of national identity are understood as an imperative social adhesive in the face of socio-economic dislocation and the resulting conflict of interests and values in society. The basic question of national identity as to which shared experiences and values constitute the basis of contemporary social consensus and collective solidarity immediately suggests that these are in a state of flux and hence no longer self-evident. The purpose of this concept is to establish points of social consensus which could serve as a buffer against the experience of heterogeneity and as such this represents a claim made in favour of a particular set of political values.

A starting point of this formulation of values, as witnessed in Kohl's *Wende*, is the identification of a crisis of values. This perception reflects both concern for the broader condition of contemporary society and also, more specifically, for the status of conservatism within the political culture of society. Throughout the West, during the 1960s, established tenets of right wing ideology came under criticism. The experience

---

<sup>13</sup> Helmut Kohl, *Preserving Creation, Mastering the Tasks of the Future*. Government Policy

of fascism, world conflict and the Holocaust was invoked by anti-Vietnam protesters, “third World” liberation movements and the “New Left” in all Western nations during the counter-culture of the 1960s and reflected the broader discrediting of the superior claims of the West through the experiences of the first half of the twentieth century.<sup>14</sup> In West Germany, the critique of conservative positions and ideology was, understandably, lent a particularly highly charged character by the experience of the fascist past. As one conservative intellectual deduced to his irritation in 1972

Konservativ gilt in weiten Kreisen als gleichbedeutend mit reaktionär, reastaurativ, vergangenheitsfixiert und, in letzter Konsequenz, mit antidemokratisch, faschistisch oder doch “faschistoid”.<sup>15</sup>

The indignation articulated in the above sentiment was indicative of the immense difficulties which the national socialist past presented the formulation of a traditional conservative perspective in West Germany. The 1960s radical critique elicited various responses on the right in a process of ideological reconfiguring of the basic tenets of the West German conservative approach. Whilst some maintained the correct response lay in the form of a more open attitude towards reform and the protest culture<sup>16</sup>, others asserted the need for a return to traditional conservative values in politics and society.<sup>17</sup> During the 1970s, it appeared that the latter tactic, of a more open rehabilitation of “traditional” values and critique of reformist and progressive politics enjoyed greater currency. Disturbed by the positive social purchase of concepts associated with *Utopie*, *Revolution* and *Planung* and the converse decline of traditional values since the 1960s, conservative intellectuals began to stake a claim for the rehabilitation of the discredited conservative topics of *Tradition*, *Kontinuität*, *Autorität*, *Organik* and *Hierarchie*.<sup>18</sup> Conservatives perceived the alleged permissive liberalism of the 1960s as a basic cause of social heterogeneity and value pluralism during the decades which succeeded it and

---

1987-1990. Press and Information Office of the Federal Government. 1987.p. 35.

<sup>14</sup> Frank Füredi, *Mythical Past, Elusive Future*. History and Society in an Anxious Age. Pluto. London. 1992. p. 130.

<sup>15</sup> Gerd-Klaus Kaltenbrunner, Vorwort des Herausgebers. in Kaltenbrunner. (Hg.), *Konservatismus in Europa*. Unveränderte Sonderauflage des Buches “Rekonstruktion des Konservatismus” für die Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung. Verlag Rombach + CO GmbH, Freiburg. 1972. p. 13.

<sup>16</sup> cf Norbert Blüm, *Reaktion oder Reform. Wohin geht die CDU?*. Rowohlt Taschenbuch Verlag GmbH. Reinbeck bei Hamburg. 1972. Here, this representative of the “social” wing of the Union stakes a claim for integrating moderate elements of the reformist and critical culture of the late 1960s into the Christian ethos of the CDU-CSU.

<sup>17</sup> Published in the same year, see the volume edited by Kaltenbrunner. op.cit. The tenor of the majority of contributions in this work sways between eulogies to “traditional” values and a neo-romantic critique of modernism.

this perspective shaped the intellectual framework within which attempts to rehabilitate “traditional” values were formulated. In this vein, former CDU *Bundestagspräsident* Karl Carstens offered the following assessment of the disintegrative influence of progressive politics which continues to afflict the Federal Republic in the late 1980s

Unter dem Einfluß einer philosophischen Denkrichtung wurde in den sechziger und siebziger Jahren die Forderung nach Emanzipation, nach möglichst weitgehender Beseitigung aller Bindungen, vor allem jeder Form von Herrschaft, erhoben. Damit einher ging die Negierung vieler tradierte Werte und Tugenden wie Fleiß, Pflichterfüllung, Opferbereitschaft, Zuverlässigkeit, Wahrhaftigkeit, Treue und Tapferkeit.<sup>19</sup>

For Carstens, an entire generation had been corrupted by the “false teachings” of critical educationalism and was now irrevocably alienated from the redemptive powers of religious faith and patriotic spirit.<sup>20</sup> As elsewhere in the West during the 1970s and 1980s, the plea for a return to “traditional” values was influenced by the critique of “emancipatory pedagogy” in schools and higher education which was perceived as promoting the alienation of the younger generation from established social mores and institutions. This represents a common belief among conservative commentators that the real roots of contemporary “moral decline” and social malaise are to be ascribed to the influence of “treacherous” intellectuals and educationalists. The tactic of criticising educational reformers for their unwillingness to internalise prescribed traditional values rather than considering the changing status of such values in a dynamic socio-historical context confuses cause and effect. In such interpretations, the political critique and social conflicts of the 1960s did not enter the universities with academics and students from *society*, but rather more, the young generation of “new Left” influenced academics which developed at the time of the expansion of education had disrupted the consensus of the republic. Thus for Ernst Nolte, the primary root of the “value-crisis” of the early 1970s was to be found in the progressive reform of the universities

So wurden die Universitäten durch feierliche Verfassungsgarantie gerade als die Stätten geschützt, wo die Linien und die Zusammenstöße der politischen Welt im Forschen und Denken zu sich selbst Abstand gewinnen sollen, durch eine undurchdachte Reform zur falschen Zeit in Konzentrate des politischen Aktionismus verwandelt.<sup>21</sup>

---

<sup>18</sup> Thus Gerd-Klaus Kaltenbrunner, *Der schwieriger Konservatismus in*, Kaltenbrunner. op. cit. 1972. pp. 20-23.

<sup>19</sup> Karl Carstens, *Zur deutschen Zukunft*. v. Hase & Koehler, Mainz. 1989. p. 23.

<sup>20</sup> Carstens. *ibid.* p. 24-5.

<sup>21</sup> Ernst Nolte, *Deutschland und der Kalte Krieg*. (1974). Ernst Klett Verlag. Stuttgart. 1985. p. 549.

Thus, not only are the universities cast as the ring-leaders of social political disruption, but as having committed the sin of mixing *Wissenschaft* and politics. This reading also flirts with the image of (left wing) academics as the demagogic-ideological “seducers” of the young, educated bourgeoisie.<sup>22</sup> Yet despite the often asserted criticism of the merging of *Wissenschaft* and politics, conservative thinkers seek precisely the influence which they critically ascribe to “progressive” educationalists, teachers and academics. Whilst opinions differ over the question of whether the problems of the 1960s - 70s derived *primarily* from the “university”,<sup>23</sup> conservative thought is in agreement that the influence of “progressive” pedagogy had been detrimental to the social-political coherence of the Federal Republic. Also widely consensual is the notion that this situation demands the cultivation of a counter paradigm which is largely defined by its orientation towards “traditional values”.

### 2.1.2 “Traditional” values

An example of the values in question can be found in the nine theses towards a *Mut zur Erziehung* drafted by Mann, Lübke, fellow philosopher Robert Spaemann and the Baden Württemberg Minister for Culture, Wilhelm Hahn, during an educational congress held in Bonn in 1978. The critique of the theses is aimed against the reforms of emancipatory pedagogy and advocates a return to “secondary virtues” in education

Wir wenden uns gegen den Irrtum, die Tugenden des Fleißes, der Disziplin und der Ordnung seien pädagogisch obsolet geworden, weil sie sich als politisch mißbrauchbar erwiesen haben. In Wahrheit sind diese Tugenden unter allen politischen Umständen nötig. Denn ihre Nötigkeit ist nicht systemspezifisch, sondern human begründet.<sup>24</sup>

Despite the surface assertive tone of the “theses” there is an unmistakable defensiveness evident in this promotion of “traditional” values which indicates the enduring stigmatisation of core conservative beliefs through the NS experience. Thus, the authors

---

<sup>22</sup> Ernst Nolte. *ibid.* p. 502. Thus the influence of the Marxist historian Wolfgang Abendroth is described in terms of his powerful ability to emotionally ignite the critical sentiments of young students.

<sup>23</sup> cf Hermann Lübke. *Zwischen Trend und Tradition. Überfordert uns die Gegenwart ?* Edition Interfrom. Zurich. 1981. p. 70 Lübke contends that it is a fundamental error to cast the universities as the primary motor of contemporary political alienation which he understands as a characteristic of the modern experience as a whole. He still, of course, considers the critical paradigm of the 1960s-70's, especially in relation to the question of the NS past, a perfidious influence.

of the theses seek to counter the compromised legacy of “traditional” values by casting them as essential, anthropological “Truths”. This is an argument frequently advanced in an attempt to deflect the radical critique of conservative values as irredeemably compromised by the experience of national socialism. In this reading, the work ethic, discipline and order are elevated into the realm of absolute Truths which exist independent of systemic context. Given their enhanced status as anthropological Truths, the absence of such core values is necessarily cause for profound concern and appears indicative of an abnormal condition of human affairs. It is also, of course, a condition for which conservative discourse can offer the optimal antidote.<sup>25</sup>

For the right, the socio-political turmoil of the 1960s and 1970s was evidence of the consequences of the failure to respect traditional values. Reformist educational policy was made responsible for a range of social problems including the extremist left wing terrorism of the RAF during the 1970s. Reactions to the RAF movement of the 1970s played a significant role in shaping the conservative critique of progressive politics and the protest movement. As the term “fascist” was used as a criticism of authoritarian politics, so conservatives began to draw parallels between the radical student movement, the APO and the RAF and the NSDAP. Drawing parallels between the protest movement and national socialism upon the basis of their violent radicalism, conservatives could both reassert the older idea that Weimar was destroyed by “extremist” forces outside the centre and simultaneously seek to delegitimise the counter-culture.<sup>26</sup> For conservative commentators the influence of emancipatory pedagogy and progressive politics had brought the Federal Republic dangerously close to repeating the “extremism” of the inter-war years. Thus during the 1970s, the emerging discourse of a crisis of values was given credence by the “civil war” atmosphere invoked principally from the right over the issue of left wing terrorism. The undeniable ideological connection of the RAF and various *K-Gruppen* of the 1970s with the student protest movement and the “ideas of 1968” could appear to conservatives as evidence of the socially disruptive consequences of “progressive” and anti-authoritarian pedagogy.

---

<sup>24</sup> cf Martin und Sylvia Greiffenhagen. 1981. op. cit. pp. 177-180.

<sup>25</sup> Thus Kaltenbrunner maintains that conservatism represents the political articulation of such anthropological “Truths”. in Kaltenbrunner. 1972. op. cit. p. 26.

<sup>26</sup> cf the parliamentary debates in response to the RAF terrorism of 1970s documented in Dubiel. 1999. op. cit. pp. 139-160.

Such formulations could also imply an assault upon the reformist, democratic programme of the social-liberal coalition. In this vein, and with the 1976 elections in view, Franz Josef Strauß suggested to CSU functionaries behind closed doors at Sonthofen that their election propaganda should intimate that the SPD and FDP were “abandoning the state to criminals and political gangsters”.<sup>27</sup> In slightly more diplomatic language CDU leader Helmut Kohl also questioned the ability of the SPD to defend the interests of the state and intimated that both dissenting voices within the SPD and the terrorists of the RAF could be related by their common scepticism towards authority

Leider müssen wir feststellen, daß *bestimmte Kreise innerhalb der Sozialdemokratie* immer noch ein *gestörtes Verhältnis zur Ausübung rechtsstaatlicher Macht* haben, die notwendig ist, um diesen Staat seine Zukunft zu garantieren.<sup>28</sup>

Given the *de facto* alliance between CDU and SPD over the issue of combating the RAF, however, it is perhaps more accurate to perceive the significance of this issue for both left and right beyond the narrow parameters of party-politics. Reactions to left-wing terrorism profited the right rather more by providing a dramatic context within which a witch-hunt against left wing intellectuals could be carried out<sup>29</sup> and the plea for “traditional” values could be forcefully articulated. At the height of the *deutscher Herbst* in 1977, shortly after the storming of the *Landshut* aircraft at Mogadishu and the collective suicides of the RAF cadre in *Stammheim*, the right wing conservative CDU member of parliament, Alfred Dregger, offered the following understanding of recent events

Jetzt gilt es, etwas von der sittlichen Kraft wirksam werden zu lassen, die in den Anfangsworten unserer Verfassung ihren Ausdruck gefunden hat, wo es heißt: Im Bewußtsein seiner Verantwortung vor Gott und den Menschen hat das deutsche Volk dieses Grundgesetz der Bundesrepublik Deutschland beschlossen. . . Meine Damen und Herren, auf dem Bewußtsein der Verantwortung vor Gott und den Menschen beruht das Glück, und auf dem Frevel seiner Mißachtung beruht das Elend der Völker. (Beifall bei der CDU.) Hätten die heutigen Terroristen etwas weniger von Emanzipation, Konfliktpädagogik und antiautoritärer Erziehung und etwas

---

<sup>27</sup> cited in Marion Dönhoff, *Foe into Friend. The Makers of the New Germany* from Konrad Adenauer to Helmut Schmidt. Weidenfeld and Nicholson. London. 1982. p. 166.

<sup>28</sup> cf Helmut Kohl, *Vorsitzender der CDU, zu den Ursachen und dem geistig-intellektuellen Umfeld des Terrorismus.* (Debatte über die Regierungserklärung, 20. 4. 1977.) in Wilharm. op. cit. p. 146.

<sup>29</sup> Notably the reactions against “sympathisers” of the RAF movement intimated a wider left wing culpability for terrorism as demonstrated by the attacks on Heinrich Böll after his appeal to Ulrike Meinhof, *Will Ulrike Gnade oder freies Geleit?* cf Stefan Aust, *Der BaaderMeinhof Komplex.* Goldmann. München. 1998. pp. 226-7.

mehr von ihrer ganz persönlichen Verantwortung vor Gott und den Menschen erfahren, dann wäre ihnen und uns vieles von dem erspart geblieben, was wir heute beklagen.<sup>30</sup>

Dregger's diagnosis of the problem and his prescription of the cure are both informed with an understanding of the importance of pre-political values embodied, in this instance, by religious faith mediated through authoritarian pedagogy. For this conservative politician, the ascension of the progressive paradigm had corroded the authority of traditional values and thus led West German society to the brink of civil war. Whilst Dregger may well be a political maverick and the ease with which he links reformism with terrorism be particularly defamatory, the connection between emancipatory politics and social chaos is inherent to the conservative imagination.

A perception common to both the nine theses and Dregger's comments on the RAF terror is that the contemporary state of social disorientation derives from a lack of "meta-political" values which claim absolute authority. Thus, the understanding of the worth of traditional values is founded not only in the quality of the particular elements themselves but also in the conviction that they represent a superior category of value. The primary benefit of "traditional values" is that they lay claim to unconditional loyalty or faith. Thus contemporary social malaise results not merely from the ignorance of particular "traditional values" but from the critical rejection of unreflected, naive categories of unconditional faith of either religious or secular provenance. Absolute values which claim to reflect an essential human or spiritual condition are not open to rational enquiry or indeed critique and thus enjoy unquestionable legitimacy and authority. Herein appears to lie the appeal of such formulations for conservative thinkers interested in cultivating social hegemony and limiting value pluralism in society. An important element of the appreciation of a crisis of values is contained in the perceived decline of such unconditional faith and the rise of the culture of "critical rationalism" associated with the "New Left".

These themes are illuminated by the conservative philosopher Robert Spaemann in a cultural critique of modern society. For Spaemann, a characteristic of modernist political culture is the dominance of hypothetical postulates over unconditional faith which he rightly perceives as undermining the concept of absolute, irrefutable Truth.

---

<sup>30</sup> Cited in Dubiel. 1999. op. cit. p. 155.

Given the dominance of the hypothetical paradigm, Truth in the classic philosophical sense of a *Wesensaussage* no longer exists and the concept of indispensability or uniqueness (of things or people) merely enjoys the status of one refutable hypothesis among others

Unbedingte Überzeugungen sind in einer durch funktionales Denken gekennzeichneten hypothetischen Zivilisation ein Fremdkörper, unwiderrufliche Bindungen ein Anachronismus. Die Philosophie der hypothetischen Zivilisation ist der "kritische Rationalismus", der Falsifizierbarkeit zum Kriterium gehaltvoller Aussagen macht und davon auch moralische Normen prinzipiell nicht ausnimmt. Auch sie sollen ständig daraufhin überprüft werden, ob sie dasjenige begünstigen oder nicht, was man "rationales Problemlösungsverhalten" nennt.<sup>31</sup>

What Spaemann appears to find so distasteful about the alleged *a priori* of "critical rationalism" is that it leaves no room for the form of absolute, unconditional faith which can exert an authoritative, moral claim on its subject which need not be justified by recourse to rational scrutiny. Particularly disturbing for this philosopher is the fact that even moral or ethical questions are passed through the filter of critical rationalism which likewise are then robbed of their ability to command absolute authority. For Spaemann, the notion that "critical rationalism" serves as a protective buffer against totalitarian rule is erroneous and he contends that it can in principle serve the legitimisation of despotic rule via the perception of totalitarian society as a form of long-term social experiment. The only form of resistance which is genuinely capable of criticising totalitarianism is the form of unconditional faith which he perceives as eroded through the modernist cult of rationalism

Echter Widerstand hingegen speist sich immer nur aus dezidierten Gegenüberzeugungen mit unbedingten Wahrheitsansprüchen. Für Hypothesen stirbt man nicht.<sup>32</sup>

This appears as the fundamental problem of critical-rational enquiry for Spaemann, that it does not generate the enthusiasm, conviction and loyalty required in order, if necessary, to bring about the ultimate sacrifice. Once more, we learn that the only values capable of commanding such authority are of a meta-political nature and embodied in religious, moral or artistic terms of unconditional faith.<sup>33</sup> The conservative understanding of the political necessity of cultivating absolute values reflects the desire for social cohesion at a time of perceived disorientation and heterogeneity.

---

<sup>31</sup> Robert Spaemann, *Ende der Modernität ?*. in Koslowski, Spaemann, Löw. 1986. op. cit. p. 28.

<sup>32</sup> Spaemann. 1986. *ibid.*

<sup>33</sup> Spaemann. 1986. op. cit. p. 36.

From the perspective of absolute values, evidence of value pluralism is cause enough for the identification of a crisis of values. Value pluralism, by definition predicated upon the absence of “absolute” values, is a cause of serious concern for conservative commentators who perceive this as a threat to social hegemony. Against the background of economic and social change, value pluralism is understood as a presage of social disintegration and collapse. Writing in the early 1980s, the conservative historian and occasional political consultant to Chancellor Kohl, Michael Stürmer, describes the underlying conservative concerns about value pluralism

In Wahrheit geht es um die Frage, aus welchen Werten Konsens kommen soll und innerer Friede. Der Pluralismus der Werte und Interessen, wenn er keinen gemeinsamen Boden mehr findet, durch Wachstum nicht mehr entschärft, durch Schuldenaufnahme nicht mehr gedämpft wird, treibt früher oder später zum sozialen Bürgerkrieg, wie am Ende der Weimarer Republik.<sup>34</sup>

Stürmer’s perception of the socially disintegrative potential of value pluralism is founded in the understanding that economic success represents a precarious and unreliable focus of social consensus. In this context, social consensus must be achieved by recourse to alternative foci which are perceived independent of socio-economic structures. It is within this conceptual framework that conservative commentators deduce the necessity of national identity as a means of fostering consensus in society. The conception of a crisis of values is founded in the impression of value transformation at a time of socio-economic upheaval and as such this discourse relates to more fundamental attitudes towards the experience of ideological and structural change in society. In the following, I wish to consider the role of attitudes towards “modern society” in the cultivation of the conservative discourse of “identity” as a counter to the alienating consequences of “emancipation”.

## 2.2 Identity versus Emancipation

The perception of social breakdown formed an important context in which attitudes towards the concept of progress could reflect distinct philosophical and political points of social orientation. Writing in the early 1970s, the “secretary of post-war conservatism”, Armin Mohler,<sup>35</sup> presented the following understanding of the essential

---

<sup>34</sup> Michael Stürmer, ‘Kein Eigentum der Deutschen: die deutsche Frage.’ in Werner Weidenfeld (Hg.) ‘Die Identität der Deutschen.’ Carl Hanser Verlag. München/Wien. 1983. p. 84.

<sup>35</sup> Dirk von Laak, ‘Gespräche in der Sicherheit des Schweigens. Carl Schmitt in der politischen Geistesgeschichte der frühen Bundesrepublik.’ Akademie Verlag. Berlin. 1993. p. 261. The Swiss

distinctions between left and right which, in the context of social crisis, were increasingly compelled to display their true colours

Und neuerdings hat die schon nicht mehr schleichende Selbstaflösung der westlich-liberalen Gesellschaft eine Situation geschaffen, in der die beiden politischen Grundhaltungen elementar und nackt zu Tage treten: der Rechte sucht Bindung und Halt, der Linke will Befreiung und Ungebundenheit; für die Linken sind der Mensch und die Welt im Prinzip vollkommene Gebilde, ihre reale Unvollkommenheit eine Schuld der Umstände, die deshalb verändert werden müssen - der Rechte glaubt nicht an diese Perfektibilität, für ihn geht durch Welt und Mensch eine tragischer Zwiespalt, der nicht aufgehoben werden kann, aber bestanden werden muß.<sup>36</sup>

For Mohler, the key to establishing the fundamental differences between left and right are two distinct approaches to the experience of social change. According to this reading, the contemporary condition of social disintegration elicits two responses: whilst the right reacts by stressing the need for rituals, customs, institutions etc. which could secure social integrity, the left appears as the agent of change driven by the conviction that that the lot of humanity can be improved by conscious, progressive intervention. The ascent of the progressive paradigm of the "New Left" in politics and academia exercised a formative influence upon the development of neoconservative positions between the 1970s and 80s. The emancipatory motif of the neo-Marxist New Left invigorated the concept of "social progress" within West German political culture and provided it with an identifiable political definition. The conservative political historian Werner Weidenfeld remarks how that during the late 1960s and early 1970s the ideas of progress, democratisation, rapprochement, social justice and reform reflected the broad horizons and aspirations which characterised politics and society.<sup>37</sup> In 1969, the conservative intellectual Arnold Gehlen noted with scorn that the progressive idiom had even penetrated organised protestantism citing the attempts of the *Evangelischer Kirchendienst (EKD)* to reinvigorate itself with the, secular, faiths of enlightenment social-reformism and socialism.<sup>38</sup> For Mohler, the coincidence of social crisis and the perceived dominance of the progressive idiom have created the opportunity for a

---

national Mohler was an important figure in the post-war right-wing West German conservative spectrum, had volunteered for the Waffen SS during the war, was influential in the CSU under FJ Strauß and between 1964 - 1985 headed the right wing Carl-Friedrich von Siemens Stiftung.

<sup>36</sup> Armin Mohler, 'Im Schatten des Jakobinismus. Die "Konservativen" und die "Rechte" in Frankreich.' in Kaltenbrunner. 1972. op. cit. p. 276.

<sup>37</sup> Werner Weidenfeld, 'Geschichte und Politik. in, Werner Weidenfeld (Hg.) *Geschichtsbewußtsein der Deutschen. Materialien zur Spurensuche einer Nation.*' Verlag Wissenschaft und Politik. Berend von Nottbeck. Köln. 1987. pp.24-5.

<sup>38</sup> Arnold Gehlen, 'Religion und Ethik.' in Merkur. *Deutsche Zeitschrift für europäisches Denken.* XXIII. Jahrgang. Heft 10. Oktober 1969. p. 912.

conservative counter-critique. The image of a social dynamism which the left seeks to accelerate and the right to brake displays a negative reception of the experience of social change. Mohler's understanding of human interaction with the social environment appears to derive from the perception of an inherent dichotomy between humanity and the social relations of human existence. If the world is, by its very nature, imperfect, then the project of social emancipation becomes an illusion. This betrays a perception of society as ultimately a pre-political phenomenon whose natural limitations restrict the scope of human agency. Negative features, such as social inequality can thus be presented as merely reflecting an essential *conditio humanum* and cannot therefore be transcended. Thus, the status-quo, whilst susceptible to minor adjustment, ultimately represents a naturalist order which cannot, and indeed should not, be radically tampered with. In this context, the progressive project of social emancipation predicated upon social transformation is challenged by an understanding of social progress as ultimately restricted by definitive, natural limitations. In the modern age, this impasse needs to be bridged via recourse to the cultivation of values and beliefs which may act in a "compensatory" manner for the experience of disorientating change and the futility of progressive, social emancipation. In this context, conservative discourse commonly asserts the cohesive potential of "historical consciousness" against the dynamic, revolutionary project of historical progress.

A useful example of the understanding of the interplay between progress and historical consciousness can be found in the writings of the Zürich philosopher Hermann Lübbe. For Lübbe, the experience of rapid civilisational change, which characterises modern society, undermines our established points of orientation and promotes the emotional alienation of modern civilisation from itself. In a world of rapid change, we are increasingly losing a sense of familiarity with our broader environment and heritage which exercises a corrosive effect upon our sense of identity.<sup>39</sup> It is within this context that Lübbe perceives a popular renaissance of the museum and the cult of the past. Not only does he perceive a quantitative growth in the number of museums in Switzerland and West Germany but also notes the broadening of their object of interest from the

---

<sup>39</sup> Hermann Lübbe, 'Der Fortschritt und das Museum. Über den Grund unseres Vergnügens an historischen Gegenständen.' The 1981 Bithell Memorial Lecture. Institute of Germanic Studies. University of London. W.S Maney and Son LTD Leeds. 1982. pp.1-6. also cf Lübbe. 1981. op. cit. p. 9.

more traditional archaeology and art history all the way through to local history and hairdressing. For Lübbe, the museum represents more than a place of nostalgic contemplation of the past and serves an essential social function as an institution which acts in a compensatory manner in the face of rapid social change. The cult of the past, which he identifies as a definatory feature of modern society, reflects much more than a nostalgic leisure pursuit and rather more is understood as an expression of unease in the face of the rapid pace of change which characterises modern, industrial-technological society. In this reading, contemporary alienation ultimately derives from the inevitable processes of rapid change which characterise modern social existence.

Lübbe identifies two fundamental responses to the experience of alienation from the present: *Nostalgie* and *Utopie*.<sup>40</sup> The renaissance of both concepts, in the form of a cult of the past and the blossoming of “alternative” movements is evidence of a widespread disaffection with the present and the ceaseless process of change. The problem of contemporary society does not result from our inability to *emancipate* ourselves from the limitations of tradition but from the political disorientation engendered by the *decline* of the status of tradition in shaping the political culture of society.<sup>41</sup> The destruction of the concept of tradition is considered particularly disturbing as traditions provide a sense of continuity and orientation through past, present and future. Refuge from the ceaseless process of change can only be provided by “nostalgia” which offers the *psychischer Ruhepunkt* afforded by a sense of *entlastende Vorgestrigkeit*.<sup>42</sup> The increasing status of the museum represents, for Lübbe, the more fundamental attempt to rescue elements of recognisable familiarity and identity which may serve as a buffer against the ravages of social and technological progress

Jenseits ungewisser Grenzen unterliegen wir unter Bedingungen eines sich beschleunigenden sozialen Wandels der Gefahr einer temporalen Identitätsdiffusion. Das historische Bewußtsein hält die fremdgewordene Vergangenheit als eigene Vergangenheit aneignungsfähig beziehungsweise als Vergangenheit anderer anderen zuschreibungsfähig. Es konfrontiert uns mit dieser Vergangenheit im Museum. Die bündelnde Formel für diese Struktur lautet: Durch die progressive Musealisierung kompensieren wir die belastenden Erfahrungen eines änderungstempobedingten kulturellen Vertrautheitsschwundes.<sup>43</sup>

---

<sup>40</sup> Lübbe, 1981. op. cit. p. 12.

<sup>41</sup> Lübbe. *ibid.* p. 14.

<sup>42</sup> Lübbe, 1981. op. cit. p. 13.

<sup>43</sup> Lübbe, 1982. op. cit. p. 18.

Thus, for this conservative philosopher, historical consciousness, as represented in the cult of the past and the museum, serves an important social function as a buffer to the ravages of progress and social change. In this perspective, the past is positively evaluated against the present and future in an attempt to stem the self-alienation of culture which accompanies the increased tempo of change in the present. As the social project of attaining a future “utopia” is regarded as a part of the problem and as the present finds itself in an endless process of alienating change, then the past appears here as the only refuge. Underlying Lübke’s concept of the modern experience is an understanding of the historical subject in inherently *passive* terms. In this reading, “modernism” and all its negative side-effects appear as an existential condition which extends beyond human intervention. Humanity is cast in a reactive role to the seemingly anonymous forces of change from which only flight into the cultural and historical certainties of the past can offer refuge. Thus for Lübke, the only rational behaviour left to those living in the present is the construction of a positive present (in turn cultivated from historical consciousness) that may serve as a “positive past” to future generations.

Conflicting perceptions of the role of historical consciousness in fostering a sense of identity in the present formed a central point of contention during the *Historikerstreit* of 1986. Although, on a surface level, the *Historikerstreit* resulted from the contentious, if not novel, interpretation of national socialism as inspired by the experience of Marxism and the Soviet Union, this was inextricably linked to a discourse of *contemporary* West German society. The ultimate philosophical and political bone of contention between latter day “enlighteners” and “government historians”<sup>44</sup> was characterised by the argument over the desired orientation of the Federal Republic towards “progressive” or “traditional” political principles in the 1980s. Hence attitudes towards the concept and status of “progress” formed an extremely important subtext of the historical fracas of the mid 1980s. During the *Historikerstreit* Stürmer summarised the conservative perception of the relationship between interpretations of the past and value creation in the present as follows

---

<sup>44</sup> cf Jürgen Habermas, ‘Eine Art Schadensabwicklung. Die apologetischen Tendenzen in der deutschen Geschichtsschreibung.’ in ‘Historikerstreit.’ op. cit. pp. 62-76 and Klaus Hildebrandt, ‘Das Zeitalter der Tyrannen. Geschichte und Politik: Die Verwalter der Aufklärung, das Risiko der Wissenschaft und die Geborgenheit der Weltanschauung. Eine Entgegnung auf Jürgen Habermas.’ in *ibid.* pp. 84-92.

Orientierungsverlust und Identitätssuche sind Geschwister. Wer aber meint, daß alles dies auf Politik keine Wirkung habe, der ignoriert, daß in geschichtslosem Land die Zukunft gewinnt, wer die Erinnerung füllt, die Begriffe prägt und die Vergangenheit deutet.<sup>45</sup>

Similar to Lübke, Stürmer identifies a blossoming of history, museums and a general interest in the past. For Stürmer, this signals both the return to “normal” cultural traditions and also the search for orientation in a present which can no longer orientate itself towards a positive vision of the future.<sup>46</sup> The perception of social crisis in the present and scepticism towards the project of future progress redirects social and intellectuals energies onto the past as a source of value creation. Mastery of contemporary malaise is predicated, in this reading, upon the successful cultivation of identity whose authority is grounded in “history”. Criticising both the “progressive strangulation” of history by the left and its “technocratic underestimation” by the right, Stürmer argued for a conception of historical consciousness which could foster social consensus in the present by providing intellectual coherence to the concept of national identity. This understanding of the role of national identity founded in history appears paradigmatic of the broader change in attitudes towards the progressive idiom in political culture between the 1970s and 1980s.

### 2.2.1 Pessimism towards the Future

Over the course of 1970s - 1980s, under the impression of the RAF terror wave and problems of the social-liberal coalition, the generally positive reception of the progressive idiom within both revolutionary and reformist currents underwent a critical re-examination. Thus whilst the ascendancy of the critical-progressive position associated with the counter-cultural rebellion formed a focus of the neoconservative critique, perceptions of its steady decline since the late 1970s played an equally important role in shaping the conservative discourse of national identity. From this perspective, the widely identified “cult of the past” across West German society was often interpreted as signalling the decline of the progressive idiom and hence providing an opportune moment for the return to a more traditional orientation in society and

---

<sup>45</sup> Michael Stürmer, ‘Geschichte in geschichtslosem Land.’ Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung. 25. April 1986. in, Historikerstreit. *ibid.* p. 36.

<sup>46</sup> *ibid.*

politics. Writing three years prior to the *Historikerstreit*, Michael Stürmer had already observed with satisfaction

Der späte Fortschrittsglaube, aus dem 19. Jahrhundert täuschend unbeschädigt in die sozialliberale Ära gerettet, ist gegangen wie gekommen.<sup>47</sup>

The political consequences of the decline of “progressive politics” assumed diffuse forms and influenced a variety of political opinion beyond the neoconservative right. Hence the perceived defeat of the “ideas of 1968” also impacted upon radical thinkers and influenced the development of postmodern and Green thought and politics. These two aspects of “environmentalism” and “postmodernism” form important political and intellectual currents which are considered in more detail in subsequent chapters. Although these discourses draw different social and intellectual conclusions than conservatism, all three streams operate from an understanding of the destructive or deceptive quality of human progress. A common assertion of both Green and neoconservative thought is that progress in human affairs is circumscribed by natural limits. Whilst the Greens (founded in 1980) absorbed broad sections of the counter-culture and their environmental position was cast in an “anticapitalist” hue, the underlying perception of human limitation and the critique of human progress is one basically shared by conservatism. As such, these social movements run a risk which conservative thinkers happily enter: the danger of relapsing into “natural” or pre-modern, and therefore pre-emancipation models of thought.<sup>48</sup>

An instance of the proximity between these positions, over the issue of human progress, is displayed in Spaemann’s interpretation of the crisis of modernism. Spaemann contends that the progressive human domination of nature has finally reached its limits and that we must assume these to be definitive. For Spaemann, dwindling resources have generated the feeling that we are now living off the “capital” rather than the “interest” which leads him to the following observation

Dieses Gefühl löst den traditionellen Zusammenhang des Fortschrittgedankens mit so etwas wie Hoffnung auf. Der Pro-Kopf-Verbrauch der Industrieländer an Energie und Rohstoffen ist parasitär, denn es wäre mit den Überlebensbedingungen der Menschheit unvereinbar, wenn alle Menschen dieses Niveau erreichen würden. Damit ist die Marx’sche Utopie der endgültigen Beseitigung des Gerechtigkeitsproblems durch Entwicklung von Überfluß definitiv tot.<sup>49</sup>

---

<sup>47</sup> Stürmer in Weidenfeld. 1983.op. cit. p. 86.

<sup>48</sup> cf Offe in Koslowski, Spaemann, Löw. 1986. op. cit. p. 161.

<sup>49</sup> Spaemann. op. cit. p. 31.

In this reading, the notion of progressive emancipation from inequality is not only rejected as illusory but is considered an existential threat to the future survival of humanity. Thus, the project of a revolutionary transformation of the present into an emancipated future, associated with both Marxist and enlightenment thought, has been overcome by the definitive constraints placed upon human agency by nature. Significant in Spaemann's interpretation is not so much the standard conservative critique of progress but rather more the manner in which this anti-modernist reading is so easily blended with the "alternative", even "emancipatory" language of environmentalism. During the 1980s, the perceived decline of progressive politics inspired conservative intellectuals and politicians with the confidence to argue for the rehabilitation of a particularist concept of collective identity as the backbone of social consensus.<sup>50</sup> A characteristic of this discourse is the notion that the closure of avenues of future emancipation has reopened the past as a source of orientation and identity creation in the present.

### 2.2.2 A Positive Past

Historical consciousness is important in the development of the conservative concept of collective identity as it prioritises the supposed rootedness of contemporary collective in tradition over its transcendence and transformation into an emancipated, and uncertain, future. Under the concept of *Gemeinschaftsbewußtsein* Werner Weidenfeld understands the primary social function of collective identity as the neutralisation of conflicting interests which result from the experience of change and dynamism in modern society. For Weidenfeld, like most conservative commentators, the root cause of contemporary disorientation is to be found in the rapid pace of social, cultural and technological change in modern society. Whilst pre-modern society enjoyed the certainties of fixed identities, the high level of mobility, pluralism and differentiation of the modern world acts to corrode all certainties and robs the concept of identity any hope of permanent status. This condition describes the "pathology" of modern man which consists in the perpetually unsatisfied need for orientation. The most effective means of fulfilling the modern need for orientation is offered in the concept of collective identity which, if

---

<sup>50</sup> Spaemann. op. cit. p. 39.

successful, can neutralise potentially disruptive conflicting social interests and aspirations

Der Ausgleich unerfüllbarer, widerstreitender Ansprüche, die Integration unterschiedlicher Interessen, die Regelung von politischen Konflikten - dies alles ist oftmals nicht aus sich selbst heraus begründbar, sondern man benötigt als Kriterium den Bezug auf eine gemeinsame Lebensgrundlage. Das Gemeinschaftsbewußtsein wird damit zu einem wesentlichen Fundament politischer Problemlösung. Dieses Gemeinschaftsbewußtsein spiegelt nicht zuletzt unser Verhältnis zur Vergangenheit wider. Geschichte leistet damit einen zentralen Beitrag zur Orientierung.<sup>51</sup>

Important in this understanding is the connection drawn between conflicting or unattainable claims and interests and the cultivation of historical consciousness. This response to social aspirations and claims appears characterised by the underlying assumption that the conflict arising from the inability of modern society to realise such claims is inevitable not because of any fundamental flaw in the socio-economic order but because inequality remains an inevitable experience of human existence. Thus the concept of a *gemeinsame Lebensgrundlage* does not seek to resolve various social conflicts but rather more to neutralise them and defuse their potentially disruptive political charge.

The problem facing such an approach, however, lies founded in the fact that conflicts arising from social disparities can rarely be justified on rational grounds or in their own terms as this would logically imply action which aimed to act upon the social order in order to address the problem. It is through the construction of an alternative set of values that can potentially compensate the experience of conflicting interests that conservative discourse promotes the notion of collective identity. Thus the cultivation of a sense of higher, collective loyalty as a means of legitimising the existing social order. The perceived inability to resolve serious social problems in the present or foreseeable future, leads to the retreat into the past as a potential instance of collective experience. Thus one conservative commentator presents the primary value of historically founded identity thus

Vergegenwärtigung der Vergangenheit, Geschichtsarbeit, wenn man so will, dient der Selbstvergewisserung deshalb, weil sie und sofern sie es fertigbringt, kollektive Identität trotz aller Verschiedenheiten, trotz aller Interessenzusammenstöße, trotz all des Schlimmen, das die

---

<sup>51</sup> Werner Weidenfeld, 'Geschichte und Politik.' in, Weidenfeld (Hg.) 1987. op. cit. p. 26.

Angehörigen einer Gruppe, einer Nation, eines Volkes einander und anderen angetan haben, hervortreten zu lassen.<sup>52</sup>

The option for the past is appealing to the conservative imagination, in this context, as it can be instrumentalised to evoke the sense of a solidaristic community of equals which is so patently absent in the present. This reading suggests that the contemporary experience of inequality and conflicting interests can be neutralised by a concept of “equality” defined by the shared fate of national historical continuity. In essence, von Bredow’s argument rests upon the assumption that the reference to collective identity may act in a compensatory manner for any actual social, political, economic differences, interests and conflicts in the present. There appears a distinct air of fatalism inherent in this reading which implies that society is a form of pre-political community of fate which precedes and shapes the contemporary subject and succeeds it into the future. As such, it is impossible to “escape” from one’s (predefined) “History” or “Identity” which appears to exist independent of historical context (either in the past or future) and thus appears beyond the grasp of the contemporary historical agent. Von Bredow states that the concept of national identity would be misguided to attempt a total homogenisation of society which is not realisable.<sup>53</sup> Heterogeneity is accepted, however, only to the extent which is considered bearable for the cohesion of society, beyond which point, pluralism becomes a threat to social stability and must be reigned in under the concept of collective identity. In this sense, national identity appears as the “bottom line” of social cohesion.

This reading is characterised by a basically positive evaluation of the past which can justify the continuation of particular traditions etc. in the present. Whilst past iniquities are acknowledged by von Bredow, they are considered subsumed under the positive historical continuity of collective identity. That the past is viewed in a positive light is a basic premise of conservative discourse of identity during this period. This results from the appreciation of a sense of continuity in German history which is based upon the handing down through tradition of a recognisable set of orientational norms and values between the generations from past into future.<sup>54</sup> In this sense, one may only speak of

---

<sup>52</sup> Wilfried von Bredow, ‘Geschichte als Element der deutschen Identität.’ in Werner Weidenfeld (Hg.) 1983. op. cit. p.102.

<sup>53</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>54</sup> Weidenfeld. 1987. p. , Lübke. 1981. pp.14-25.

“identity” within the context of historical continuity. Rudolf Vierhaus describes this connection thus

Es ist also nach Einheitlichkeit, nach Elementen und Entwicklungen zu fragen, die Einheitlichkeit gestiftet haben, nach Kontinuität, also nach Zusammenhängen und Traditionen, in denen die Deutschen noch heute stehen oder doch zu stehen meinen, auf die sie sich, zu Recht oder Unrecht, berufen; auch nach solchen, die sie vergessen haben und aus denen sie austeigen möchten.<sup>55</sup>

This notion of identity is thus based upon a fundamentally positive perception of the past as a basis for contemporary political identification and social orientation. Although Vierhaus acknowledges that not all these continuities can be considered “positive” instances of national pride, the total experience of shared historical continuity acts as a higher bond which fosters a sense of particularist, national collectivity. Whilst “negative” past experiences need to be “explained”, this is an academic enterprise which is primarily motivated by the desire to strengthen the legitimacy of the concept of national identity. For Vierhaus, the main task of politics and political pedagogy is the cultivation of identificatory elements of the German past in contemporary historical consciousness in order to resolve the “difficult” relationship with national traditions.<sup>56</sup> In place of dynamic change, the conservative approach emphasises the concept of recognisable, and, optimally, positive continuity in historical development as a basis of political authority.<sup>57</sup> The construction of a sense of identity based upon the impression of a form of continuity in history prioritises the investigation of whence society has evolved from as opposed where to it can develop to and thus places a premium on the past in evaluating contemporary society. From this perspective, contemporary social relations are essentially the *result* of the past<sup>58</sup> and draw upon “historical consciousness” and the attention to tradition as a source of contemporary orientation. The authority of such claims ultimately rests upon the perception of positive continuities between past and present which continue to shape the present and implied future. “Historical consciousness” thus appears as the intellectual synthesis of those elements of the past which appear useful to the present.<sup>59</sup> The necessary transmission of traditional values through generations is afforded by a concept of historical consciousness which thus

---

<sup>55</sup> Rudolf Vierhaus, ‘Historische Entwicklungslinien deutscher Identität.’ in, ‘Die Frage nach der deutschen Identität.’ Schriftenreihe der Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung, Band 221. Druck- und Verlags-Gesellschaft mbH. Darmstadt. 1985. p. 12.

<sup>56</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>57</sup> von Bredow. in Weidenfeld. (ed.) 1983. *op. cit.* p. 106-7.

<sup>58</sup> Bernard Willms. 1988. *op. cit.* p. 101.

understands how to combine elements of the past with the concerns of the present and fears of the future.<sup>60</sup>

In this discourse of “identity” and “historical consciousness” attitudes towards the concept of progress in human affairs played a key role in shaping commentators’ political evaluation of contemporary society. In prioritising the rootedness of society within a historical continuity of traditions, the conservative approach displays a political orientation towards social stasis over social transformation. The stability of contemporary society should be cultivated by the solidarity induced by collective, historical experience over the discourse of social emancipation into a transformed future. Identity represents more than the mere reference to history but places a claim of loyalty upon the subject based upon its supposed status as a concept which transcends sectional social interests. The concept of whole needs to command the social authority to act as a superior category of solidarity in the face of change and as a media of the type of unconditional faith championed by neoconservative thinkers. Thus, in short, in order for the continuities suggested to contribute to social cohesion they need to engage the hearts and minds of the citizens of the Federal Republic. For conservative thinkers, no other value of the modern age has as successfully resolved these questions of legitimacy than the concept of patriotism which is intellectually cohered by “historical consciousness”. From the concept of patriotism, conservative thinkers hope to find a “higher authority” of the abstract collective, national community which overrides “fractional” interests in society and can offer a common point of consensus. Inherent in the conservative discourse of national identity during the 1980s was the identification of a basic inability of the Federal Republic to generate this necessary sense of collective loyalty without recourse to a concept of the “nation”. In this sense, the concept of the “German nation” formed the ideological-political focus of the neoconservative approach to both contemporary West German society and also German history. Before moving on to examine responses to the discrediting of the national past and concept of German nation through the experience of national socialism, it is useful to consider the concepts of “nation” which neoconservative thinkers advocated for the FRG during the 1980s.

### 2.3. The Need for Patriotism

---

<sup>59</sup> Greifenhagen. 1986. *op. cit.* p. 79.

<sup>60</sup> Weidenfeld. 1987. *op. cit.* p. 29. Jeismann in Weidenfeld. p. 35-9.

The conservative discourse of national identity formed the intellectual forum in which the concerns towards social hegemony considered thus far were politically articulated. Conventional patriotism proved rather unconventional in German political-historical debate during the 1980s and provoked radical contradiction from left-liberal circles. In contrast to formulations of social loyalty founded upon economic prosperity, Western democracy or *Verfassungspatriotismus*, neoconservative discourse championed the “nation” as the *a priori* focus of collective identity. That is not to say, of course, that intellectuals and politicians refrained from couching formulations of pride and identity in the above mentioned concepts which remained central tenets of West German political culture and conservative discourse. Yet a wide range of diverse conservative commentaries on the subject of national identity during the 1980s considered the “German nation” a superior media of identity to that afforded by the Federal Republic alone. In the enduring problems with the concept of the “nation” in the post-fascist, divided context of the German states right wing thinkers perceived a dangerous latent weakness of the Federal Republic and most would probably agree with the diagnosis made by Carstens in 1989

Zu den Mängeln der deutschen Demokratie im ausgehenden 20. Jahrhunderts rechne ich weiter die Schwäche der Bindungen an Nation und Vaterland.<sup>61</sup>

Interesting in this perception is that the absence of conventional national identity is presented as a deficit of democratic society and thus the critical perception of a dichotomy between the German nation and democracy is inverted by Carstens. For Carstens, modern democracy is weakened by the absence of the “nation”. In this discourse, the concept of the “nation” is considered a higher form of authority and legitimacy *in ideological terms* than the institutions of the post-war West German state. Evidence of economic difficulties and alienation from the political institutions of the FRG helped sharpen the perception that the need for identity could best be fulfilled by the national idiom. Two currents of thought have been identified in the neoconservative discourse of national identity of the 1980s in the form of *deutsch-national* and *liberal-konservativ* approaches to the national idea.<sup>62</sup> Whereas, *deutsch-national* positions perceive in national identity the intellectual justification for the transcendence of the Federal Republic in the practical political reconstruction of the nation state, more

---

<sup>61</sup> Carstens. 1989. *op. cit.* p. 27.

*liberal-konservativ* streams understand the primary benefit of national identity in the stabilisation of West German society. Yet, whilst these two currents operate from differing perceptions of the pragmatic political application of the national idea, the ideological lines between these two streams are blurred as both approaches share basically the same political conception of the essence of the nation. A characteristic of the neoconservative national discourse of the period is the conceptualisation of the nation in the neo-romantic terms of a *Kulturnation* based in the pre-political, particularist categories of shared language, historical descent and culture. In the neoconservative rehabilitation of particular tenets of classical romantic conceptions of the nation we may perceive the appeal of a national concept which was both directed against the progressive political approach and which also could be asserted despite the experience of national fragmentation.

Whilst *deutsch-national* currents may appear to take the romantic discourse of nationality more literally, this tradition also shares an important intellectual framework with more *liberal-konservativ* conceptions of the essence of the nation. For the right wing conservative intellectual Bernhard Willms, the Napoleonic epoch which first generated a discourse of the “German Nation” bears resemblance to the period of Cold War division. Above all, the experiences of national fragmentation, foreign military occupation and cultural domination provide the point of interface between the early nineteenth century idea of the nation and national discourse in divided Germany during the Cold War. For Willms, the nation is principally constituted by the ethnic concept of *Volk* which has developed and retained its particularism through history, language and culture.<sup>63</sup> In this reading, the concept of the nation is released from its historically specific context of development at the end of the eighteenth - early nineteenth century and appears as the transcendental, organic *a priori* of collective human existence in past, present and future. Willms traces the development of the idea of the nation to its origins at the end of the eighteenth century and rightly contends that the nation gradually replaced confessional and dynastic loyalties and became the central point of reference for the individual. Yet Willms does not have in mind the democratic-revolutionary concept of nation of 1789 but rather more orientates his political approach towards the

---

<sup>62</sup> Czitrich. 1989. op. cit. pp. 74-88.

<sup>63</sup> Bernhard Willms / Paul Kleinewefers, ‘Erneuerung aus der Mitte. Prag - Wien - Berlin. Diesseits von Ost und West.’ Busse und Seewald GmbH. Herford. 1988. p. 300.

“German” concept of nation. Whilst the revolutionary genesis of the nation state in France championed the principles of “Freedom - Equality - Fraternity”, Willms contends that the German concept of the nation was driven by the principles of unity and freedom. These two principles ensure that the (German) concept of the nation has an important role to play in transcending the Cold War order in the present and it is in this point that the value of nationalism in Willms reading comes to fruition.

Whilst this author concurs with mainstream conservative thought that it would be a fatal mistake to throw the baby of national consciousness out with the bathwater of belligerent national imperialism,<sup>64</sup> the national idea is a principle which demands concrete political action in the present. For Willms, this essentially implies the reunification of the German nation and the (re)construction of the Central European *Mitteleuropa* between the Cold War Superpowers in the present. In this reading, the essence of national identity is only fulfilled when historical consciousness ceases to be an object of intellectual, historical or sentimental study and transforms into an inspirateur of political action in the present.<sup>65</sup> These observations bring Willms and Kleinewefers to the following conclusion

Insofern die Nationen vor allem historisches Schicksal sind, verlangt die Idee der Nation die Identität mit der eigenen Geschichte. Insofern die Idee der Nation von der Freiheit ausgeht, verlangt sie auch hier Identität, was bedeutet: Freiheit des einzelnen ist nur wirklich in einem freien - selbstbestimmten - Ganzen. Die Nation als Idee verlangt also die Einheitlichkeit des Bezugssystems und das ist für die Deutschen das ganze Deutschland im konkreten regionalen Aufbau und vor allem: in Unabhängigkeit. Mitteleuropa-Politik bedeutet, daß die Dynamik dieser zweifachen Identität der Idee der Nation geltend gemacht werden müßte: Die Übereinstimmung vor allem des Freiheitsanspruches des einzelnen mit der Freiheit seiner Nation.<sup>66</sup>

In the above excerpt we may discern an important distinction between *deutsch-national* and *liberal-konservativ* conceptions of the nation and its political function. For these authors, the historical roots of the national idea in the concept of freedom demands identity and it is in this moment where the national idea is elevated into the realm of concrete political action. As the individual's fate is presented as synonymous with the fate of the nation, the realisation of individual freedom is predicated upon the freedom

---

<sup>64</sup> Willms / Kleinewefers. 1988. *ibid.* p. 94.

<sup>65</sup> *ibid.* pp. 85-7, 99-100,

<sup>66</sup> *ibid.* p. 97.

of the nation which, in the Cold War context, demands the transcendence of the division of Central Europe and Germany. Thus, in contrast to the argument forwarded by Lübke et al that historical consciousness may serve as a form of “compensation” in the Federal Republic, for Willms and Kleinewefers the loss of sovereignty cannot be offset by the promotion of museum culture

Wirkliche Geschichtsbewußtheit macht sich politisch geltend. Es ist der Sinn dieser Erinnerung an unsere prägende Ideen, zu aktiver Politik aufzufordern.<sup>67</sup>

The authors make a distinction between *bloßer Restauration* and the *lebendige Aktualisierung der unentrinnbaren geschichtlichen Prägung*. Thus the actualisation of “Central Europe” appears as a pre-determined act of historical fate which requires the input of the “historically conscious” politician in order to achieve the future realisation of this specifically German historical legacy. Thus for this current of conservative national discourse, the development of “national consciousness” is a means of challenging the status quo and correcting the founding “myth” of the Federal Republic that the loss of national sovereignty in 1945 represented a liberation for the Germans.<sup>68</sup>

It is interesting to compare the ideas expounded by Willms and Kleinewefers with more mainstream conservative discourse on national identity. For more *liberal-konservativ* thinkers, the cultivation of the national idea is understood as a means of securing rather than transforming the status quo and it is within this respect that the idea of national identity is developed. The cultivation of a conventional sense of national identity during the 1980s necessarily implied a concept of national consciousness which had been abstracted from the concrete political form of the nation state. This exercise reflected the paradox created by the adherence to the nation as the most effective focus of collective identity and the enduring facticity of national division. Thus in Stürmer’s words

In der Wirklichkeit des geteilten Deutschland müssen die Deutschen ihre Identität finden, die im Nationalstaat nicht mehr zu begründen ist, ohne die Nation aber auch nicht.<sup>69</sup>

In this sense, one conservative commentator remarks how that as the formal call for the actual reunification of the two German states became an increasingly abstract,

---

<sup>67</sup> *ibid.* p. 100.

<sup>68</sup> *ibid.* pp. 291, 294.

<sup>69</sup> Michael Stürmer. in Weidenfeld. 1983. *op. cit.* p. 98.

unrealistic political aim, the importance of the concept of national identity increased.<sup>70</sup> Hence this appears as a definition of nation which exists in and is sustained by the realm of “consciousness” rather than the tangible structures of political reality. This definition of nation was articulated by Kohl in the 1987 Policy Statement as follows

The German nation continues to exist, sustained by the consciousness of Germans in East and West. It derives its strength from the common history and culture and from the responsibilities that the Germans share for the future.<sup>71</sup>

Despite the recurrent oaths sworn by conservatives on the aim of the Basic Law to strive for the reunification of the German states, the practical realisation of national unity hardly appears to have been a motivational political concern of the Kohl administration until the very last. In contrast to post-unification explanations by Kohl which imply reunification as a major tenet of his political programme<sup>72</sup>, as late as 1988 the former Chancellor believed that he would not live to see reunification of the two German states.<sup>73</sup> Yet no other West German government placed so much political energy into publicly promoting the concept of national identity as Kohl’s conservative coalition. The answer to this apparent contradiction is to be found in the concern for social consensus which we have considered thus far. Conservatives identify a crisis of values within society which threatens social hegemony. This condition and the challenge from “emancipatory” politics is met with the notion of identity based upon the historical continuity of the nation. It is the combination of this approach to the challenge of social heterogeneity with the specific conditions of post-war Germany that shaped West German conservative discourse on the nation.

Whilst some conservatives deduced from this dichotomy the necessity of the reunification of the German nation, most conservative thinkers perceived the strength of the national idiom in securing the *existing* order by fostering a sense of identity. In this vein, Karl Rohe presents the case for cultivating national identity as a form of necessary political and ideological ballast for West German democracy achieved by its insertion into German national traditions. The present dichotomy between the concept of the

---

<sup>70</sup> Günter C. Behrmann, ‘Volk, Verfassung, Staat, Kultur, Geschichte und Nation. Das nationalpolitische Orientierungsfeld der Deutschen im Wandel.’ in, Karl-Ernst Jeismann (Hg.) ‘Einheit - Freiheit - Selbstbestimmung. Die Deutsche Frage im historisch-politischen Bewußtsein.’ Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung. Bonn. 1987. p. 87.

<sup>71</sup> Helmut Kohl. ‘Policy statement.’ 1987. op. cit. p. 36.

<sup>72</sup> Kohl. 1996. op. cit. p. 10-11. In this, not uncommon, formulation, Kohl suggests a (CDU-CSU) continuity of striving for national unity via the *Westbindung* spanning Adenauer to Kohl.

German nation and the facticity of the Federal Republic undermines, for Rohe, the legitimacy of the West German state. Rohe describes the problem as follows

Die im internationalen Vergleichsmaßstab extrem schwach ausgebildete Fähigkeit der bundesrepublikanischen Gesellschaft, Konzepte, Werte und Maßstäbe an die nächstfolgende Generation zu vermitteln, die zwar einerseits kulturelle Innovationen begünstigt, andererseits aber zu einer bedenklichen Fragmentierung der politischen Kultur in der Zeit führt, hat eine ihrer entscheidenden Ursachen zwar nicht in der Teilung Deutschlands, wohl aber in der fehlenden Einbettung der bundesrepublikanischen politischen Kultur in eine übergreifende nationale Tradition, die dieser erst Halt, Selbstachtung und Verankerung zu geben vermag. "Verfassungspatriotismus" in einer "post-nationalen Demokratie" ist wohl doch nur so etwas wie ein Schönwetterkonzept.<sup>74</sup>

Rohe's analysis draws together many familiar elements into the plea for a sense of collective identity based in the continuity of national traditions. Rohe proceeds from the observation that the Federal Republic is marked by an, internationally anomalous, inability to establish a continuity of norms and values through successive generations which has fragmented the political culture of West Germany. Thus he begins with the perception of value crisis in society which ultimately derives from the perceived alienation of the Federal Republic from the consensual influence of national traditions and historical continuity. Writing a year after the *Historikerstreit*, Rohe is keen to counterpoise the stability engendered by a sense of long term, national continuity in history to the "fair-weather" concept of Constitutional Patriotism advocated by "post-national" thinkers. The implication of this line of thought is that the social body requires deeper roots than those offered by post-national readings if periods of social turbulence are to be overcome. This common line of argumentation resolves the perceived dichotomy between "democracy" and the "nation" by subsuming the former under the historical continuity of the latter.

A frequently asserted objection to Constitutional Patriotism is that it lacks the capacity to engender the *emotional* loyalty of its citizens which proves an essential bond particularly in times of crisis.<sup>75</sup> In this sense, in a contribution to the *Historikerstreit*, the historian Hagen Schulze criticised the "critical" opposition between national identity and Constitutional Patriotism as a dangerous game. Drawing a parallel with the Weimar

---

<sup>73</sup> David Marsh. 'Germany and Europe. The Crisis of Unity.' Mandarin. London. 1994. p. 26.

<sup>74</sup> Karl Rohe, 'Die deutsche Einheit als Problem der politischen Kultur in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland.' in Jeismann (Hg.) 1987. op. cit. p. 116.

<sup>75</sup> Carstens. 1989. op. cit. p. 33.

Republic, Schulze warned of the dangers of having nothing to counter the powerful emotional appeal of the extreme nationalists.<sup>76</sup> For this thinker, mainstream political culture should foster the emotional bond of the nation in order to prevent the “usurpation” of the powerful force of nationalism by the extreme right. The implicit assumption of this reading is that the legal codification of liberal democracy represents a somewhat insipid focus of social loyalty which requires the particular sense of attachment which only the nation can inspire. In this manner, Schulze unites a historical perspective on the collapse of the Weimar republic with a critique of contemporary “post-national” discourse in the Federal Republic. In the capacity of the national idiom to stimulate an emotional bond between citizenry and state, conservative thinkers perceive a powerful argument for the rehabilitation of national identity in the Federal Republic. A typical line of argument implies that whilst constitutional arrangements may well be a fine thing in modern, Western democratic society, the social cohesion afforded by the heart outweighs that of the head

Eine vom deutschen Nationalgedanken abgekoppelte Bundesrepublik Deutschland allein in einem “Verfassungspatriotismus” verankern zu wollen, unterschätzt die mit der Nationalbildung verbundene, tiefe Einbindung in Emotionalschichten. Ein solcher Befund ist nicht mit dem Etikett “irrational” in Altertumsschubladen abzulagern, er muß ernst genommen werden.<sup>77</sup>

The conservative discourse of national identity places a premium upon emotion over reason as a higher media of collective consciousness. For neoconservative thought the neo-romantic approach appeared to offer the political-philosophical basis for a concept of nation which remained intact beyond political-territorial division, which could counter the progressive paradigm of the New Left and “critical history” and which could satisfy the need for meta-political values of unconditional faith. In this concept of the “nation”, conservative thought perceives the socially cohesive potential of an idea which claims a “higher authority” than that represented by “mundane”, economic, political or social concerns. A cogent expression of this sentiment is provided by Stürmer who offers the following case for the cultivation of conventional patriotism in the Federal Republic

Ist der Staat organisiert wie eine große AOK, mächtige Bürokratie über betreuter Unmündigkeit?  
Oder bedarf er, da er Opfer fordert, der sittlichen Begründung? Kann er sich darauf beschränken,

---

<sup>76</sup> Hagen Schulze, ‘Fragen, die wir stellen müssen. Keine historische Haftung ohne nationale Identität.’ *Die Zeit*. 26. September. 1986. in ‘Historikerstreit.’ op. cit. p. 149.

<sup>77</sup> Erich Kosthorst, ‘Die Frage der deutschen Einheit im Spannungsfeld politischer Optionen und historischer Traditionen.’ in Jeismann (Hg.) 1987. op. cit. p. 33.

Legitimität durch geregeltes Verfahren herzustellen, oder bedarf er jener höheren Sinnstiftung, die nach der Religion bisher allein Nation und Patriotismus zu leisten imstande waren? Nirgendwo gilt so stark wie im geteilten Deutschland der Einwand, daß der Patriotismus in zwei Kriegen und den Greueln des Völkermords starb. Nirgendwo aber hat auch der Verlust der Geschichte und die Teilung des Landes eine so tiefe Unsicherheit hinterlassen.<sup>78</sup>

The theme which occupies Stürmer here is the question of how the state can cultivate the social legitimacy required in order for it to exercise its political authority without contradiction. The values which are capable of sanctioning the state's social authority must represent a claim for a higher authority than legal process or the bureaucratic rationality of the health service. In the modern age, this requirement has only ever been met by the secular faith of patriotic nationalism. Yet, due to the experience of national socialism this naturally remains a highly discredited concept in the German context. The dilemma facing conservatives is thus formed by the impasse resulting from the clash between the desire for social hegemony and consensus on the one hand and the insight that the only media capable of achieving this were morally and politically compromised by the experience of the NS past on the other. This is considered doubly problematic because the resulting "loss of history" and division of the nation has left behind an unparalleled state of social unease and disorientation. In this reading, the loss of the cure also forms part of the original problem. If a successful concept of conventional national identity were to be developed during the 1980s, then the legacy of national socialism needed to be addressed and its compromising effect upon the articulation of "conventional" national sentiment relieved.

#### 2.4. Confronting the Past

During the 1980s, conservatives pursued a more confrontational approach to the national socialist past which sought to redress the "damage" done to the national concept during the 1960s counter culture. This was ostensibly characterised by a rehabilitation of themes which had shaped political culture during the 1950s. In the post-war years, conservatives emphasised a culture of amnesia towards the national socialist past and a concentration upon the tasks of the *Wiederaufbau*. Kiesinger expressed the common sentiment in 1954 when he stated

---

<sup>78</sup> Michael Stürmer, 'Kein Eigentum der Deutschen: die deutsche Frage.' in Werner Weidenfeld (Hg.) 'Die Identität der Deutschen.' Carl Hanser Verlag, München/Wien. 1983. p. 86.

Aber eine wichtige Aufgabe dieses Parlaments ist es auch, diese Wunden mit heilen zu helfen und nicht bei jedem Anlaß die kaum vernarbten Wunden wieder aufzureißen. Wir haben in den letzten Jahren viel über die europäische Integration gesprochen, und sie ist wahrhaftig nötig, wenn wir mit dem Leben davorkommen wollen. Aber es gibt auch eine innerdeutsche Integration. Wir dienen Europa nicht und wir dienen dieser Volke nicht, wenn wir nicht alles daransetzen, diesen Integrationsprozeß voranzutreiben uns aus diesem immer noch gespaltenen und blutenden, unsicheren und verwirrten Volk endlich wieder ein gesundes Volk zu machen.<sup>79</sup>

As Dubiel comments, this is essentially the form of *kommunikatives Schweigen* which Hermann Lübke favourably compared during the 1980s to the critical engagement with the NS past on the part of the student movement.<sup>80</sup> This approach to the past found expression in the solidarity with POW's,<sup>81</sup> the "honour" of the German soldiers<sup>82</sup> and the reintegration of former Nazi civil servants under the 131 Law<sup>83</sup> with reference to the need for "experts" in the reconstruction. In this vein, one commentator remarks that the development of the *Bundeswehr* into the late 1960s was characterised by a general paradigm of "restoration" in which the internal leadership's bureaucratic emphasis upon the formal constitutional regulation of the *Bundeswehr* served as a substitute for the cultivation and consolidation of the more substantial concept of the armed forces as *Bürger in Uniform*.<sup>84</sup> Frei perceives in this combination of amnesia and solidarity with the *Wehrmacht* officers and men a form of secondary confirmation of the *Volksgemeinschaft*.<sup>85</sup> This approach found historiographical congruence in the writings of Ritter who contended that national socialism was primarily a problem of the fanatical "masses" which since the "demagogy" of the *Großdeutsch* liberals of 1848 had asserted an ever increasing influence in political culture and denigrated the "classic age" of the great statesmen.<sup>86</sup> During the 1960s this approach was challenged by both the New Left

---

<sup>79</sup> cited in Dubiel. 1999. op. cit. p. 64.

<sup>80</sup> Hermann Lübke, 'Es ist nichts vergessen, aber einiges ausgeheilt. Der Nationalsozialismus im Bewußtsein der deutschen Gegenwart.' (1983) in Reinhard Kühnl (Hg.) 'Streit ums Geschichtsbild. Die "Historiker-Debatte" Dokumentation, Darstellung und Kritik.' Pahl-Rugenstein. Köln. 1987. p. 15.

<sup>81</sup> cf Frei. 1997. op. cit. p. 78.

<sup>82</sup> Barzel. in 'Verhandlungen des Deutschen Bundestags.' 4. Wahlperiode. Stenographische Berichte. Band 57. 170. Sitzung. Bonn. Mittwoch, den 10. März 1965. p. ibid. p. 8532.

<sup>83</sup> Frei. 1997. ibid.

<sup>84</sup> cf Detlef Bald, 'Von der Wehrmacht zur Bundeswehr. Kontinuität und Neubeginn.' in, Werner Conze, M. Rainer Lepsius (Hg.) 'Sozialgeschichte der Bundesrepublik Deutschland. Beiträge zum Kontinuitätsproblem.' Ernst Klett Verlag. Stuttgart. 1985. p. 397.

<sup>85</sup> Frei. ibid. p. 304.

<sup>86</sup> Gerhard Ritter, 'Das Bismarck Problem' (1950) in Hallmann. 1972. op. cit. p. 169., Ritter, 'Europa und die deutsche Frage' (1948) in Hallmann. ibid. p. 82. Ritter's distinctly "Prussian" perspective of the German Reich was, in terms of the role of the "masses" and liberals of 1848 interestingly matched by the work of the South German Catholic historian Franz Schnabel cf

student activists and also young left-liberal academics whom we shall consider in the subsequent chapter. It was largely in response to this counter-culture that conservatives in the 1980s attempted to recover ground lost to the left.

Werner Conze notes the transformation of perceptions towards the historical *Reich* in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Comparing the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Bismarck's birthday on 1 April 1965 with the centenary commemoration of the *Kaiserproklamation* in Versailles on 18 January 1971, Conze remarks that although in both celebrations the symbol of the, now divided, nation state played a central role, attitudes towards Bismarck differed starkly. In 1965, Erhardt could claim that Bismarck should not be cast as the historical enemy of democracy and that through the act of honouring Bismarck West Germany was affirming its commitment to a positively endowed national history. Heinemann's commentary from 1971 was reluctant to include Bismarck and concentrated upon the *Schwarz-Rot-Gold* democratic social forces *defeated* by Bismarck in 1866-7 and who again emerged in the drafting of the peace resolution of 1917 and the formation of the Weimar Coalition of 1919.<sup>87</sup> The transformation described by Conze reflected the change in perceptions of the German past in accord with a changing contemporary political paradigm and in particular perceptions of "democracy". Michael Stürmer noted that during the 1960s, the New Left's interest in "radical democratic" politics and critique of the SPD lead to a historical interest in the *Rätebewegung* of the immediate post 1918 years and the interpretation that the coalition forged between MSPD and OHL sowed the seeds of later collapse.<sup>88</sup> This connection between shifts in the political culture of the present and interpretations of the past centres, in conservative discourse, upon the critique of the progressive paradigm of the New Left in the 1960s-70s. Conze locates the shifting paradigm of the past within the expansion of the universities and the development of social-historical science which superseded more traditional historiographical approaches and fused sociology, politics and history into a "critical" approach. Conze is particularly

---

Franz Schnabel, 'Das Problem Bismarck' (1949) in, Heinrich Lutz (Hg.) 'Franz Schnabel. Abhandlungen und Vorträge 1914 - 1965.' Herder. Freiburg im Breisgau. 1970. p. 205. *ibid.* p. 197-200 and Franz Schnabel, 'Otto von Bismarck.' 1965. *ibid.* p. 349.

<sup>87</sup> Conze. 1979. *op. cit.* p. 44-5.

<sup>88</sup> Michael Stürmer, 'Weimar oder die Last der Vergangenheit - Aufstieg und Fall der ersten Republik als Problem der Forschung.' in, Stürmer (Hg.) 'Die Weimarer Republik. Belagerte Civitas.' (1980). Athenäum Verlag. Königstein/Ts. 1985. pp. 13, 27.

critical of the “emancipatory” conceptions contained in the neo-Marxist paradigm of the early 1970s

Gesteigert wurde aber auch der politische Antrieb bis zur Forderung, daß die Frage nach dem Warum “pädagogisch” gewendet wurde. Der Historiker sollte nicht nur fragend analysieren, sondern mahnen, daß es keine politische Rückfälle geben dürfe. Die Geschichte als “Gesellschaftsgeschichte” sollte dazu dienen, den Sinn für “emanzipatorisch” begriffene historische Prozesse der Vergangenheit und Zukunft zu wecken.<sup>89</sup>

It is precisely this emancipatory thrust of critical history which conservative thinkers object to most strongly. For Conze, the critical notion of a reactionary German *Sonderweg* to modernity had permeated the education system and weakened the sense of national identity particularly among the young.<sup>90</sup> Whilst during the 1950s, the question of continuity largely focused upon the relationship between the *Reich* and national socialism, under the influence of the “emancipatory” paradigm, the critique of the West German present was powerfully fused with the critical appreciation of the German past. Under the influence of the greater public-political and legal engagement with the Holocaust during the 1960s, questions as to the treatment of the recent NS past in the immediate post-war years and embarrassing scandals of personal continuity between NS and FRG created serious problems of legitimacy for the FRG.

In this context, Hermann Lübke identified the popularity of the *Verdrängungsthese* since the 1960s with an increasing critical distance from the Federal Republic and its social institutions. For Lübke, the thesis of a suppressed social memory of national socialism is a straw-man constructed by radicals in the present who instrumentalise the NS past as a means of undermining contemporary society and arguing for the revolutionary overthrow of the capitalist *Schoß, aus dem das kroch*.<sup>91</sup> Adding that this is the version fed to students across a variety of academic disciplines, Lübke draws out the connection between contemporary social critique and critical engagement with the NS past. For Lübke, the period of the *kommunikatives Schweigen* during the 1950s represented an essential condition of social consensus which was disrupted by the radical theories and student protest movement of the 1960s which, in turn, he understands as a symptom of the more general alienation induced by modern society. Stürmer also links the critical

---

<sup>89</sup> Conze. 1979. op. cit. p. 60.

<sup>90</sup> Werner Conze, ‘Staats- und Nationalpolitik. Kontinuitätsbruch und Neubeginn.’ (1983). in Engelhardt/Kosselleck/Schieder. 1992. op. cit. pp. 440-41.

<sup>91</sup> Herman Lübke. 1981. op. cit. p. 36-7.

engagement with the NS past with a radical questioning of the legitimacy of the West German present observing

Je mehr das Grauen der Vergangenheit einer von ihm verschonten Generation fernrückt, je mehr sozialwissenschaftliche Abstraktion die Realität des Nationalsozialismus auflöst bis zu dem Punkt, da alles zu Kontinuität zusammenschießt und umfassender Faschismusverdacht wuchert, desto nachdrücklicher gerät die Bundesrepublik unter einem Rechtfertigungszwang, der nicht Bestand, als das Schrecken noch die Erinnerung besetzt hielt.<sup>92</sup>

The perceived relationship between contemporary political analysis and historical interpretation articulated in the paradigm of “critical social history” led many conservative thinkers to cast this *neue Orthodoxie* as a form of *Treitschke revidivius*<sup>93</sup> and contended that it played a similar role for the contemporary New Left as traditional Historicism had for the national liberal bourgeoisie of the *Kaiserreich*. Such objection to the “politicisation” of historical “science” formed a common theme of conservative thought which, however, revealed more an aversion towards the premises and conclusions of critical history than the actual practice itself. Conservative arguments for a sense of national identity and a salvaging of the national past also clearly operated from an understanding of the political value of historical interpretation.

In the conservative discourse of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* of the 1980s we can discern the central role played by the concept of anticommunism in dealing with the negative German past and the attempt to salvage the discredited nation. Also evident was the attempt to solidarise with the soldiers of the *Ostfront* who in the last days of the war had fought the encroaching Red Army in Eastern Prussia.<sup>94</sup> Whilst this approach was reminiscent of the conservative discourse of the 1950’s which urged solidarity with an “honorable” *Wehrmacht*, it nevertheless constituted more than a simple return to immediate post-war approaches to the past. Neoconservative thinkers were compelled to address the critical insights of the progressive paradigm in theories of both contemporary politics and historical analysis. In this sense, the anticommunism of the 1980s represented a synthesis of some of the themes which we have considered thus far, comprising principally: a) the attempt to cultivate a contemporary sense of political

---

<sup>92</sup> Stürmer. 1985. op. cit. p. 17.

<sup>93</sup> Nipperdey. 1979. op. cit. p. 389.

<sup>94</sup> Thus the general drift of Andreas Hillgruber’s suggestion that contemporary sympathies should lie with the *Wehrmacht* soldiers who “defended” the German population of the Eastern territories against the *Racheorgien* of the encroaching Red Army. cf ‘Historikerstreit.’ 1987. op. cit. pp. 232-242.

orientation within the context of the Cold War, b) breaking the asserted link between the German nation, capitalism and National Socialism and c) articulating a critique of modernist political culture. These themes are particularly well represented in the work of perhaps the most controversial figure of the *Historikerstreit*, the Berlin historian Ernst Nolte.

#### 2.4.1 Relativising the Past

Whilst Nolte expends little energy in developing a concept of “national identity” or in establishing a set of positive “German traditions”, his approach and academic output is central to the broader conservative discourse of identity during this period. Since the early 1970s, Nolte has devoted his intellectual energies to explaining the rise of fascism in Europe during the inter-war period. Although he does not explicitly address the phenomenon of identity creation, his thesis on European and in particular German fascism has been extremely influential in studies of the period and sparked the explosive controversy of the *Historikerstreit*. The chief characteristic of Nolte’s approach is the rejection of the thesis of various shades of Marxist and Marxist-influenced thought that fascism and capitalism were inextricably linked. In place of this critical approach he contends that the principal causal factor was formed by the ideological and political interplay between *Marxism* and fascism. From the comparison with the inter-war Soviet Union, Nolte sought to relativise the specific German national context of National Socialism under the broader concept of “totalitarianism”. Nolte’s main objection to the NS past which refuses to “pass away”, is its disruptive effects upon contemporary West German political culture. In comparison with the study of other historical epochs, the engagement with the National Socialist past has purposefully retained a high political charge and thus has not passed into a theme of “objective” historical study. For Nolte, the NS past continues to hang above FRG society not as a “model” from the past but as a “nightmare” which impedes the cultivation of the past for contemporary identificatory purpose. In the endurance of this past, Nolte also perceives the attempts of successor’s of the survivors to retain a sense of “privileged status” in the present. It is worth repeating Nolte’s main contentious argument of the *Historikerstreit* in full

Vollbrachten die Nationalsozialisten, vollbrachte Hitler eine “asiatische” Tat vielleicht nur deshalb, weil sie sich und ihresgleichen als potentielle oder wirkliche Opfer einer “asiatischen” Tat betrachteten ? War nicht der “Archipel GULag” ursprünglicher als Auschwitz ? War nicht

der "Klassenmord" der Bolschewiki das logische und faktische Prius des "Rassenmordes" der Nationalsozialisten ? Sind Hitlers geheimste Handlungen nicht gerade auch dadurch zu erklären, daß er den "Rattenkäfig" nicht vergessen hatte ? Rührte Auschwitz vielleicht in seinen Ursprüngen aus einer Vergangenheit her, die nicht vergehen wollte ?<sup>95</sup>

Hence, for Nolte, the racial genocide perpetrated by the SS can be understood as a reaction to the "class genocide" of the Red Terror and Stalin's Cheka, symbolised in the, mythical, "rats cage" of Lubjanka. Thus, beyond his declared intention of considering various forms of "mass murder" in the interests of historical objectivity or *Wissenschaft*, Nolte's thesis contains an inherently political reevaluation of the genocide of European Jews which places the ultimate historical-political responsibility onto the Soviet Union. Thus he not only "compares" the political violence of both regimes but ascribes historical causality to the Soviet Union in explaining the development of radical German fascism and its programme of racial genocide. Anticipating critique of his position, Nolte complains that the political climate of the Federal Republic unfairly considers such attempts at relating the "whole picture" as evidence of anticommunism born from contemporary Cold War considerations.<sup>96</sup> Nolte's approach was indeed criticised as contemporary anticommunism and whilst this certainly appears a valid observation, his approach is as much directed against the domestic, "New Left" radical critique of West Germany as against the contemporary Soviet Union.

Nolte's contention that fascism was essentially a reaction to the Marxist and socialist movements of the late nineteenth-early twentieth century was a theme which he had worked upon for some years before the *Historikerstreit*. In a critique of the antifascist theory of the "New Left" during the early 1970s Nolte formulated his basic position as follows

Wenige Sätze sind während der kurzen Blütezeit der Neuen Linken häufiger zitiert worden als die These, die Max Horkheimer 1939 aufstellte: Wer nicht vom Kapitalismus reden wolle, solle auch vom Faschismus schweigen. Mit dem gleichen Recht könnte man sagen, wer nicht vom Marxismus sprechen wolle, verfehle den Begriff des Faschismus schon im Ansatz.<sup>97</sup>

Nolte derives the post 1918 radical fascist movements from the threat to the bourgeoisie from the radical left and traces Marxism back to the enlightenment and genesis of

---

<sup>95</sup> Ernst Nolte, 'Vergangenheit, die nicht vergehen will. Eine Rede, die geschrieben, aber nicht gehalten werden konnte.' In, 'Historikerstreit.' op. cit. p. 45.

<sup>96</sup> Nolte. *ibid*.

<sup>97</sup> Ernst Nolte, 'Kapitalismus - Marxismus - Faschismus.' in Merkur. Deutsche Zeitschrift für europäisches Denken. XXVII. Jahrgang, Heft 2. Februar. 1973. p. 111.

modernism at the end of the eighteenth century.<sup>98</sup> For Nolte, Marxism represented the loose synthesis of older ideas which essentially centred upon the opposition between rich and poor and the objection to inequality. In the diffuse strands of enlightenment egalitarian thought Nolte perceives the genesis of the concept of “class war” as this discourse provided the poor with a voice for the first time.<sup>99</sup> On a philosophical level, Nolte perceives the persistence of the “modernist”, “rational” and “universal” moments of the enlightenment in the discourse and movements of socialism in the early twentieth century, and indeed in the New Left of the 1960s.<sup>100</sup> Nolte’s rejection of the Marxist argument that the anarchy of the Free Market can be transcended by planning in order to satisfy need and want is based in the familiar conservative contention that the supposed anarchy of the market is merely a reflection of the natural, unplannable nature of human need. A central thread running through Nolte’s critical engagement with socialist thought is the association of the negative human emotions of hatred and the will to destruction with Marxist politics, philosophy and practice. This is an important component of Nolte’s analysis as it lays the basis for his claim that radical fascism later emerged as the bourgeois reaction to the “class genocide” of the Soviet regime. Thus we learn that the “central thought” of Marxism is that of “extermination” and its “central will” is described as the identification with the historical process and its exterminatory tendency.<sup>101</sup>

Having established the inherently destructive implications of Marxist philosophy, Nolte contends that the essential political link in the causal chain between Marxism and fascism was formed by the experience of the First World War and the maturation of Marxism through the mediation of Leninism developed in the October Revolution. The world conflict of 1914-18 split the socialist movement between “reformist” and “revolutionary” Marxists, the latter who were to succeed in Russia. Nolte is sensitive to the national peculiarities of the economically and socially backward imperial Russian state which demanded a “development dictatorship” and which, at the latest after the Kronstadt uprising and the defeat of the Left Opposition, resulted in defusing the inner explosive force of Marxism. Thus, for Nolte

---

<sup>98</sup> Nolte. *ibid.* p. 117.

<sup>99</sup> Ernst Nolte. 1985. *op. cit.* pp. 39-40.

<sup>100</sup> Nolte. 1985. *op. cit.* pp. 573-574.

<sup>101</sup> Nolte. 1973. *op. cit.* p. 118.

Das Resultat ist bekannt: Eine Entwicklungsdiktatur, deren Ziel zunächst ein ganz unMarxistisches "Einholen" war, trat mit dem vollen Anspruch einer Sozialreligion auf. Die Vernichtung des schwachen russischen Bürgertums wurde für die kommunistischen Parteien in Europa zum Paradigma und für das europäische Bürgertum zu einem Trauma.<sup>102</sup>

Thus, in this reading, the basic philosophical orientation of Marxism towards the destruction of the bourgeoisie was radicalised by the experience of the First World War and politically implemented in a backward state necessitating the ruthless implementation of a developmental programme which assumed the air of a fanatical social religion. The resulting traumatisation of the European bourgeoisie is considered a foundational motivation of the development of radical fascism in Italy and Germany during the inter-war years. It is this constellation of forces which Nolte invokes in order to understand the development of National Socialism and, ultimately, the genocide of European Jews. For Nolte, such developments necessarily stimulated a reaction on the part of the bourgeoisie and the Russian revolution, of course, elicited anti-Marxist sentiment in all the Western nations who, in the midst of war, were quick to dispatch armed forces in an attempt to crush the revolutionary regime. Yet this response was of a diffuse nature and Nolte is interested in understanding fascism as the *specific* response to the Bolshevik revolution which sought to counter the radicalism of the Bolsheviks with a "revolution" from the right. Thus, according to Nolte

Eben dies ist der Faschismus: nämlich ein Antimarxismus, der den Gegner durch die Ausbildung einer radikal entgegengesetzten und doch benachbarten Ideologie und die Anwendung von nahezu identischen und doch charakteristisch umgeprägten Methoden zu vernichten trachtet, stets aber im undurchbrechbaren Rahmen nationaler Selbstbehauptung und Autonomie.<sup>103</sup>

In this, Nolte operates from the understanding of National Socialism as a *revolutionary* movement and hence rejects the left interpretation of the NSDAP as essentially representing a counter-revolutionary force. The revolutionary status of national socialism is witnessed, for Nolte in the development of a fanatical ideology and the application of radical, brutal methods of realising the aims of this ideology. In this interpretation Hitler radically countered revolutionary Marxism with an equally revolutionary and quasi-religious fascist ideology. This understanding rejects the "myth of the good revolution" along the lines of 1789 and 1917<sup>104</sup> and suggests the image of

---

<sup>102</sup> Nolte. *ibid.* p. 121.

<sup>103</sup> Nolte. 1973. *op. cit.* p. 122.

<sup>104</sup> cf Karl-Dietrich Bracher, 'The Role of Hitler: Perspectives of Interpretation.' in Walter Laqueur, 'Fascism. A Reader's Guide. Analyses, Interpretations, Bibliography.' Wildwood House. Hants. 1988. p. 219.

Hitler as a form of “German Lenin”.<sup>105</sup> In this manner, national socialism is detached from the causal context of a national-historical *Sonderweg* and the political activity of national elites in the Weimar Republic, and is associated with the radical left. In this reading the modernist understanding of the historical and potentially future emancipatory capacity of revolutionary social progress, revived by the New Left during the late 1960s-1970s, is not only rejected as an illusion but is retrospectively identified as part of the original problem.

Nolte argues for an “empirical” concept of revolution which refers to a deep alteration of society which is, however, free from the moral or political considerations ascribed to the “normative” revolution associated in progressive thought with 1789 and 1917. Rainer Zitelmann accepts Nolte’s line of argument and expands his conceptualisation of revolution with the notion of the “fundamental revolution” inaugurated by the process of social modernisation and industrialisation.<sup>106</sup> For Zitelmann, Hitler stood beyond the categories of left and right and sought to draw from the extremes of both currents in order to provide an authoritarian solution to domestic class war and at the same time modernise German society and industry. He was, thus a reactionary exponent of social revolution, the kernel of which was “modernist”.<sup>107</sup> In such readings, the concept of modernity is stripped of its progressive, emancipatory political associations and related to the process of industrial-technological modernisation. In this light, neoconservatives often appear to reveal as much about their own concept of modernism as Hitler’s and that of the NS state. In this discourse of the past, one may note the fusion of contemporary political conceptions and historical interpretation which is frequently identified as a perfidious characteristic of the New Left. The social programme of pursuing technological-industrial modernisation whilst at the same time compensating the resulting socio-political alienation with recourse to “anti-modernist” or pre-emancipatory values describes as much contemporary neoconservative social theory as National Socialist ideology. Whilst this does not lead serious thinkers to identify with the NS programme, the basic agreement that emancipatory politics should be decoupled from technological-industrial modernisation and the notion that in this manner

---

<sup>105</sup> Rainer Zitelmann, ‘Hitler. Selbstverständnis eines Revolutionärs.’ Berg Hamburg/Leamington Spa/New York. 1987. p. 3.

<sup>106</sup> *ibid.* p. 10-11.

<sup>107</sup> *ibid.* p. 459.

Hitler “modernised” German society often gives the impression that neoconservatives seek to evaluate the objectively “positive” aspects of the regime against its obvious political “negatives”. The notion of Hitler as a revolutionary moderniser is employed also to assert its relatedness to Marxism and also its distance from “conventional” conservative streams who, for Zitelmann, offered the most effective resistance to Hitler.<sup>108</sup> Inherent in Zitelmann’s argument is a positive evaluation of Hitler’s *social-industrial* modernisation programme against the KPD’s, Stalinist version, of political emancipation and social transformation. We shall return to these idea in more detail in chapter five.

Ambiguous sympathies are also evident in Nolte’s understanding of the emergence of radical fascism as a form of radical self-preservation instinct of occidental culture. Nolte understands the radicalism of the NSDAP as the inverse reaction to the radicalism of the communist movement and contends that few observers of German society during the 1930s would have doubted that the KPD represented the more radical of the two parties. For the German bourgeoisie, communist victory would have resulted in the potential physical destruction of the German middle-classes, large agrarians and (bourgeois) Jewish population. The growth of radical German fascism also resulted from the fact that these classes were stronger than their equivalents in Imperial Russia and yet not strong enough to ensure “normal relations” in German society. It is thus not surprising that given these conditions, a powerful and radical German fascism was able to assume power in crisis-ridden liberal German democracy as a form of bourgeois “self-defence” movement. Writing after the *Historikerstreit* Nolte thus defended his argument as follows

Die historische Betrachtung läßt daher Raum für das Auffinden von Fehlern und Versagen; sie darf nicht dahin gelangen, die Tatsache zu leugnen, daß die Selbstverteidigung jener Klassen auch radikale Formen annehmen mußte und daß selbst diese radikalen Formen nicht einfach im historischen Unrecht waren, sofern man nicht behaupten will, daß die westliche Welt sich seit 70 Jahren in einer Fehlentwicklung befindet.<sup>109</sup>

Nolte’s line of argument is interesting and highly contentious. Despite his earlier protestations that he is not interested in cultivating contemporary Cold War

---

<sup>108</sup> *ibid.* p. 460.

<sup>109</sup> Ernst Nolte, ‘Die epoche des Faschismus - Voraussetzungen und Auswirkungen.’ in Thomas M. Gausly (Hg.) ‘Die Last der Geschichte. Kontroversen zur deutschen Identität.’ Verlag Wissenschaft und Politik. Berend von Nottbeck. Köln. 1988. p. 79.

anticommunism, as the above extract displays, his line of thought clearly implies a form of anticommunist continuity in the West since the Bolshevik revolution of October 1917. The retrospective historical justification for the emergence of radical German fascism is predicated upon the continuity of “self-defence” against the communist threat which, seventy years later, continued to play a central role in defining the political culture of the Federal Republic. Although Nolte on no account seeks to justify the political activity of national socialism, his defence of German fascism’s “historical justification” implies that this movement represented an, albeit radical, form of occidental self-preservation. Thus adherents of the West in the present must, for Nolte, recognise the historical legitimacy of national socialism even if they reject its racialist ideology and belligerent imperialism. This line of argument contradicts Nolte’s central thesis and his contention that fascist parties represented the armed wing of the bourgeoisie during a period of social-economic crisis ironically undermines his attempt to sever the relationship between capitalism and fascism.

In explaining the Nazi policy of genocide, Nolte again turns to the “model” of the Soviet Union and the “ideologues” Lenin and Stalin who sought to identify the human agents of the ills of the world. In place of the bourgeoisie, Hitler identified the Jews as the root of the ills of modern society and thus countered the “class genocide” of the Bolsheviks with the racial genocide of the SS. Whilst acknowledging the singularity of the Nazis “transcendental-biological” programme of racial genocide, the Shoah was *als Massenvernichtung die Kopie eines älteren Originals*.<sup>110</sup> Thus Nolte returns to his original, provocative contention of the *Historikerstreit* that the Soviet “Red Terror” transformed for the Nazis from *Schreckbild* into the *Vorbild* of mass extermination. In the final section of this article, Nolte turns his attention to the *Historikerstreit* and the issue of the value of the NS past in the contemporary political culture of the Federal Republic. Nolte perceives two distinct camps in the historians’ dispute which divides between those interested in the furtherance of academic knowledge and those who promote a set of moral values.<sup>111</sup> It contains little surprise that Nolte considers himself, and fellow conservative thinkers, as agents of *Wissenschaft* and his critical detractors as essentially moralists camouflaging their intent in the name of intellectual endeavour. For Nolte, the critical attitude towards the historic German nation state and the

---

<sup>110</sup> Nolte.1988. *ibid*.

contended antecedents of national socialism in German history are essentially instances of moral engagement which is antithetical to scientific investigation

Wissenschaft ist vor allem durch Distanz charakterisiert. Das bringt sie in einen Gegensatz zum unmittelbar moralischen Impuls des Leidens, der Trauer und der Anklage.<sup>112</sup>

The “pseudo-moralism” evident in the approach of critical thinkers and historians is thus anathema to the objective historical scientist who should seek to identify the connections between phenomena and hence relativise that which lays claim to absolutes. With such absolutes, Nolte essentially has in mind approaches which seek to understand historical phenomena in their totality and, in particular, the critique of capitalism in favour of socialism.<sup>113</sup> Nolte’s reasonable objections to the role of “moralism” in the study of historical is undercut by his falsification of the arguments of critical thinkers which reveals his underlying motive. During the *Historikerstreit*, critical objections to Nolte were primarily concerned with illuminating the specific German historical-political antecedents of national socialism and investigating the relationship between the crisis of German capitalism during the inter-war years and the rise of radical fascism. Thus whilst his explanation of the events of the inter-war years rests upon the notion that they represented the “epoch of fascism” and hence a phenomenon which extended beyond the territorial boundaries of the German nation state, he argues in such a way that suggests that this broader European context of fascism somehow relativises the historically specific socio-political context which generated national socialism

Wenn damit die verbreitete Auffassung zurückgewiesen wird, das außerordentlichste Verbrechen des Jahrhunderts sei auf “die Deutschen” zurückzuführen, dann ist das Motiv nicht ein “nationalpolitisches Bedürfnis”, sondern die schlichte Einsicht, daß es sich um ein ideologisches Verbrechen handelte und daß eine Nation in der großen Mehrzahl ihrer Angehörigen viel zu durchschnittlich ist, als daß sie ideologische Verbrechen begehen oder auch nur bejahren könnte.<sup>114</sup>

Nolte’s argument, repeated here again from the *Historikerstreit*, that it is illegitimate to condemn “the Germans” for the crimes of national socialism in the manner of theories of collective guilt<sup>115</sup> appears, at first glance, a sober and rational point of order in a heated debate. Yet, his approach is, again, somewhat disingenuous as he confuses the

---

<sup>111</sup> Nolte. 1988. *ibid.* p. 85.

<sup>112</sup> Nolte. 1988. *ibid.* p. 81.

<sup>113</sup> *ibid.* p. 82.

<sup>114</sup> *ibid.* p. 83.

<sup>115</sup> cf Nolte in ‘Historikerstreit’, *op. cit.* p. 41 his (in my view legitimate) objection that those who hold “the Germans” responsible for national socialism employ the same ideological-political constructs as did the Nazis themselves.

critical indictment of the German *state* and its social, political and economic elites with the metaphysical charge that the “Germans” as a people were responsible. Critical thinkers, more than most, proved sensitive to avoiding irrational categories of thought based upon the notion of “national character”. Furthermore, the reason he presents for rejecting such an approach reveals an underlying elitism in his own political conceptions as he appears to suggest that the mediocrity of the masses prevented them from understanding the call of an ideologically founded national mission let alone enabling them the ability to translate such a theoretical position into practical political reality.

In the arguments of Ernst Nolte we find the synthesis of many of the neoconservative objections to the critical historical “emancipatory” paradigm of the New Left. Thus Nolte rejects the association between capitalism and fascism and also rejects the rootedness of national socialism in German historical political culture. In identifying the revolutionary Marxist movement of the inter-war period and the Soviet Union as the catalysts for the development of radical fascism in the West, Nolte successfully shifts the focus of critical attention from inter-war German society and the crisis of capitalism onto an ideological enemy who endures into the present.

Characteristic of the ideas forwarded during the *Historikerstreit* is that they found ready supporters and detractors in the realm of politics and perhaps this is nowhere so evident than in the public political engagement of chancellor Kohl during the 1980s. The return of a conservative coalition in 1982, under the banner of a *geistig-moralische Wende*, provided an opportunity to translate the discourse of tradition, history and identity into political practice. Whilst Kohl was keen to stress the importance of West Germany’s *Westbindung* into Western Europe and the Atlantic Alliance, he also played a leading role in the attempt to defuse the political charge of the NS past and cultivate a sense of historical consciousness. In this sense, one may perceive in Kohl, the political representative of the *liberal-konservativ* stream of conservative intellectual discourse on the nation and identity. Nevertheless, this approach necessarily entailed a more confrontational engagement with the NS past which proved highly controversial.

The Chancellor’s 1984 state visit to Israel provided an early example of this. Whilst Kohl declared the necessity of remembering the horrors of the death camps as a part of

German history, his approach suggested that these events should be ‘historicised’ and in a sense effectively laid to rest. His visit provoked controversy for two main reasons: Firstly the contentious inclusion in his team of the right wing publicist and president of the *Deutschland Stiftung* Kurt Ziesel who as a young man had been a convinced Nazi. Secondly, Kohl’s contention that those generations which had not consciously experienced National Socialism as adults, and he perceived his own as the first, enjoyed a *Gnade der späten Geburt* implicitly suggested that it was high time to draw a line under this compromising period of German history. Thus, whilst Kohl, unlike many conservatives, appeared ready to admit the NS past into the annals of German history, this was predicated upon the belief that it was a past which had now been historicised and as such its political charge had been defused. Writing twelve years after his trip to Israel and discussion with members of the Knesset, Kohl complains that his intentions have often been maliciously misinterpreted. Yet his explanation still rests upon an appreciation of the good grace of fortune and the accident of birth. For Kohl this simultaneously absolves successor generations from guilt, if not a metaphysically founded “responsibility”, and interestingly also denies them the moral right to condemn the generation of perpetrators.<sup>116</sup> An interesting tone, which led to outrage among the opposition during his report of the visit in the *Bundestag*, is discernible in Kohl’s understanding of the inescapable duty of contemporary Germans to assume such responsibility

aber es ist wie in der eigenen Familie: ob man mit all dem einverstanden ist, was die, die vor einem waren, getan haben oder nicht, man kann sich nicht lossagen. . . Man trägt das Blut der Familie, die Erbanlagen in sich.<sup>117</sup>

Kohl’s understanding of contemporary Germans’ responsibility to remember the national socialist past operates from a pseudo-organic, biological concept of nationality. This does not, of course, testify to any neo-fascistic tendencies of Chancellor Kohl but rather more displays the degree to which conventional conservative concepts of the nation were politically compromised by the experience of national socialism. Kohl’s numerous public interventions and the ensuing political controversies resulted from the necessary confrontation with this legacy and the attempt to neutralise its contemporary political charge. The fortieth anniversary of the German capitulation of the 8 May also provided a commemorative context for addressing the Nazi past. Commenting on the

---

<sup>116</sup> cf Helmut Kohl, ‘Ich wollte Deutschlands Einheit.’ 1996. op. cit. p.240.

<sup>117</sup> cf Dubiel. 1999. op. cit. p. 203.

historical significance of the 8 May in February 1985, Kohl offered an understanding of the German capitulation which relativised the liberatory quality of the collapse of the NS dictatorship stating that whilst the 8 May was a day of liberation, it did not bring liberation for all.<sup>118</sup> Kohl thus paid lip-service to the concept of ‘liberation’ whilst simultaneously qualifying this by reference to the fate of the *Vertriebenen* and the occupation of Eastern territories by the Red Army. Kohl’s recourse to anti-communism effected a relativisation of the NS past via comparison with the Soviet Union. This perception was strengthened by his decision to commemorate the end of the war with President Reagan at the military cemetery in Bitburg on the 5. May which appeared to suggest that contemporary Cold War anticommunism could be employed to both bolster the contemporary status of the FRG as a reliable partner of the Free West and simultaneously relativise the NS past. Thus Kohl insisted that Reagan lay a wreath at the cemetery, which contained the graves of 47 members of the *Waffen-SS*, in an act of rapprochement between two former adversaries now united in the fight against Communism. In the light of criticism from the US Congress and Jewish organisations, Chancellor Kohl threatened with the fall of his government and, in the event of cancellation, foresaw a “serious psychological effect” on the friendly sentiments of the German people towards the US and the Reagan administration.<sup>119</sup> The relativisation enterprise appeared to enjoy the paternalistic endorsement of the US government as Reagan had claimed in discussions with journalists prior to his visit that *those young men* buried in the cemetery were victims of National Socialism *just as surely as the victims in the concentration camps*.<sup>120</sup>

Kohl’s interpretation of the end of the war in Europe was subjected to indirect contradiction three days later by Federal President Richard von Weizsäcker on 8 May. In a firm departure from the familiar conservative understanding of the German capitulation, von Weizsäcker interpreted this day as an *unqualified* liberation from the National Socialist regime. Von Weizsäcker’s insistence on an unhierarchical remembrance of the victims of National Socialism including groups which had

---

<sup>118</sup> cf Norbert Seitz, ‘Die kalte Revision. Zur Aktualität der 8.-Mai-Rede Weizsäckers.’ in, *Neue Gesellschaft-Frankfurter Hefte*. Mai 1995/5. p. 389.

<sup>119</sup> cf Jeffrey Herf, ‘Divided Memory. The Nazi past in the two Germanys.’ Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts. 1997.pg 352.

<sup>120</sup> cf, ‘Remarks of President Reagan to Regional Editors’, White House, April 18. 1985. in Geoffrey H. Hartman (ed.) ‘Bitburg in moral and political perspective.’ Indiana University Press. Bloomington. 1986.p. 240.

previously been marginalised such as Sinti and Romany Gypsies, homosexuals and the mentally ill as well as his commemoration of organised working class and communist resistance also marked his speech as a watershed in West German official commemoration of the end of the war.<sup>121</sup> Von Weizsäcker's speech was admired by left-liberal commentators.<sup>122</sup> The hostility displayed towards von Weizsäcker from within his own party, however, would indicate that his approach represented an anomaly of conservative *Geschichtspolitik* during the 1980s which was more typically represented by the attempt to establish contemporary West German 'normality' via a relativisation of the damaging legacy of the NS past. This impression was reinforced by the *Historikerstreit* which sought to claim academic and political legitimacy for the project of neutralising the past and rehabilitating national traditions under the motif of anticommunism.

The employment of "totalitarian" theory during the 1980s could have suggested a return to the early paradigm of the Federal Republic during the 1950s. Yet, the discourse which emerged during the late 1970s - 1980s was clearly distinct. Above all, this discourse was shaped by the response to both the New Left counter-culture student rebellion and the emergence of a group of left-liberal young academics in the universities. Whilst the former perceived continuities between the National Socialist regime and the contemporary West German establishment, the latter traced the historical antecedents of radical German fascism to the *Sonderweg* of the German nation state formation in the nineteenth century. Furthermore, in comparison to the 1950s, the anticommunist discourse of the FRG during the 1980s was articulated in a period which had witnessed the breakdown of economic or confessional expressions of identity. The combination of contemporary value crisis and the waning of the progressive political idiom after the 1970s inspired neoconservatives to cultivate a concept of conventional national identity which after the *Wende* of 1982 was elevated into a governmental priority. Above all, this concept of national identity was predicated upon separating the historic "German nation" from the phenomenon of German fascism and, in present political culture, relativising the crimes of national socialism via recourse to Cold War

---

<sup>121</sup> cf 'Speech by Richard von Weizsäcker, President of the Federal Republic of Germany, in the Bundestag during the Ceremony Commemorating the 40th. Anniversary of the End of the War in Europe and of National Socialist Tyranny', May 8, 1985. in Hartmann 1986. p. 263.

<sup>122</sup> cf Jürgen Habermas, 'Defusing the Past: A Politico-Cultural Tract.' in Hartmann.1986. p.49.

anticommunism. The primary motivation of this enterprise was the desire to recapture the national past as a source of potential collective pride in the present and as a counter to the emancipatory paradigm of transforming the present into a liberated future. Despite arguable success in shifting the political culture of the republic to the right and forcing the issue of national identity and the “German nation”, the legacy of national socialism and the facticity of contemporary division remained formidable obstacles to this project. As the *Historikerstreit* displayed, the question of the “German nation” and the NS experience remained extremely contentious themes and were challenged by the “post-national”, left-liberal discourse of *Verfassungspatriotismus* and critical history. Before progressing to an investigation of the impact of reunification upon both these discourses, it is, of course, necessary to consider the “New Left”, critical paradigm which developed during the 1960s and formed the basis of the post-national *Verfassungspatriotismus* argued by left-liberal thinkers during the identity debates of the 1980s.

### 3. The Emancipation from the Past: Critical History and *Verfassungspatriotismus*

In the following chapter I wish to examine the left-liberal discourse of *Verfassungspatriotismus* which emerged in the 1980s as a counter to the plea for a return to conventional national identity on the right. Here, I wish to consider perceptions of a “refounding” of the Federal Republic in the 1960s, the development of the *Sonderweg* thesis, reflections of the social state as vehicle of emancipatory politics and finally the concept of “post-traditional” identity.

#### 3.1 The “Refounding” of the Federal Republic

Die Bildung eines deutschen Nationalstaates war, wie die Dinge im 19. Jahrhundert lagen, unvermeidbar. Aber das Reich von 1871 ist an den Deutschen selbst gescheitert. Angesichts der Rolle, die Deutschland bei der Entstehung der beiden Weltkriege gespielt hat, kann Europa und sollten auch die Deutschen ein neues Deutsches Reich, einen souveränen Nationalstaat, nicht mehr wollen. Das ist die Logik der Geschichte, und die ist nach Bismarcks Wort genauer als die preußische Oberrechnungskammer.<sup>1</sup>

Heinrich August Winkler’s above contribution to the *Historikerstreit* in 1986 expressed a recurring sentiment of left-liberal opinion in the Federal Republic. Particularly characteristic is the causal role played by a critical perception of the historical German nation in establishing the rejection of the contemporary conservative plea for a return to conventional national identity. Also characteristic appears the quiet confidence in the continued facticity of national division, if not the metaphysical content of the notion of the “logic of history”. Winkler’s concept of contemporary West German society is informed with a critical appreciation of German national history from which a fundamental antagonism between the concepts of the “German nation” and “Western democracy” is derived. This sense of dichotomy between the concepts of the “German nation” and “Western democracy” runs through critical and left-liberal discourse during this period and was forcefully articulated in response to the provocation of the “Historians’ dispute” during the mid-1980s. In this discourse, the concepts of “German nation” and “Western democracy” feature as antagonistic phenomena, the flourishing of the one only at the expense of the other.

---

<sup>1</sup> Heinrich August Winkler, *Auf ewig in Hitlers Schatten? Zum Streit über das Geschichtsbild der Deutschen.* (1986) in *Historikerstreit.* 1995. op. cit. p. 263.

Critical and left-liberal intellectuals perceived in the neoconservative discourse of national identity an attack on the philosophical-political foundations of the Federal Republic. This perception revealed both a broader orientation towards the epoch of political modernism and in experiential political terms, towards the social state of the 1960s. The social historian and former director of the Munich Institute for Contemporary History, Martin Broszat, understood in the national revisionism of the right a threat to the Federal Republic's political-cultural integration into the Western community. For Broszat, the turn to the West in the post-war period was predicated upon the abandonment of national-political continuities in German history and thus the call for a rehabilitation of national traditions is considered with deep suspicion

Es geht um den zeitweiligen deutschen Sonderweg in der Neuzeit, damit aber auch um die Staatsidee der Bundesrepublik, die darin gründet, daß mit diesem Weststaat und seiner Westintegration nicht nur erfolgreiche Allianzen und Kooperationsverhältnisse entwickelt wurden, sondern nach dem Irrweg deutsch-nationalen Sonderbewußtseins wieder eine Rückbindung an die universalistischen Prinzipien des westlichen freiheitlichen Rechtsstaates stattfand. Gerade unter diesem Aspekt macht die amtliche Förderung des Interesses für nationale Geschichte auch manchen zwiespältigen Eindruck.<sup>2</sup>

Broszat's critique of the call for "traditional" values is informed with an appreciation of the conflictual content of the concepts of German nation and Western democracy. For this thinker, "Western values" are primarily derived from the progressive political emancipation movements of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century. In the Federal Republic, this reattachment was predicated upon the collapse of the German nation and the intellectual break with its cultural-political traditions. From this perspective, attempts to argue the "normality" of the German nation and the *Mittellage* challenge the conviction that Germany may never again "go it alone" in international affairs.<sup>3</sup> For Habermas, the form of *deutsch-national eingefärbte Natophilosophie* propagated by right wing advocates of *Westbindung* also represented a serious threat to the Federal Republic's openness to the political culture of the West.<sup>4</sup> The fundamental distinction between liberal-conservative and left-liberal perspectives of "Western integration" was summarised as follows by Habermas in 1987

---

<sup>2</sup> Martin Broszat, *Wem gehört die deutsche Geschichte?* (1986) in Broszat. 1988. op. cit. p. 309.

<sup>3</sup> Hans-Ulrich Wehler, *Entsorgung der deutschen Vergangenheit? Ein polemischer Essay zum "Historikerstreit"*. Verlag C.H. Beck. München. 1988. pp. 174-189.

<sup>4</sup> Jürgen Habermas, *Eine Art Schadensabwicklung. Die apologetischen Tendenzen in der deutschen Zeitgeschichtsschreibung.* (1986) in *Historikerstreit*. 1995. op. cit. p. 75.

Gewiß, auf beiden Seiten wird die Orientierung der Bundesrepublik nach Westen emphatisch verteidigt; aber die eine Seite läßt sich eher von einem machtpolitischen Konzept der Westbindung leiten und denkt in erster Linie an das militärische Bündnis und an die Außenpolitik, während die andere Seite die Bindung an die Aufklärungskultur des Westens betont.<sup>5</sup>

Habermas thus offers a substantial reading of the *Westbindung* which supersedes the formal question of the legal, military, economic and political alliances with Western Europe and the US. Whilst Habermas offers a radically different concept of contemporary West German political culture, this remains a political vision which is orientated towards bolstering the status-quo. For Habermas, the attachment of the FRG to “Western political culture” represented its insertion into the progressive philosophical and political culture associated with the late eighteenth century bourgeois emancipation movements. The turn to the West was predicated not only upon the historical departure from the German nation but importantly upon the political-intellectual break with German national traditions during the cultural revolt of the 1960s. The notion of a second, ideational, *Westbindung* of political culture during the 1960s rests upon an appreciation of the cultural-political changes inaugurated during this period and in particular the critical engagement with the national past. We may note that it is precisely this period and intellectual milieu which conservatives cite as the root of contemporary social problems. Broszat offers the following description of the final synthesis of the formal and substantial moments of the post-war *Westbindung* which was achieved first in the 1960s

Tatsächlich ist diese ideelle Legitimation der Bundesrepublik, die Begründung von Weststaat und Westintegration als epochale Rückwendung zur vernationalstaatlichen politische-kulturellen westeuropäischen Gemeinsamkeit, nach den Verirrungen deutscher Sonderwegsideologie seit der Romantik, während der Adenauerzeit kaum schon bewußtseinsbildend artikuliert worden. Das geschah in stärkerem Maße erst seit den späten sechziger Jahren, als man nicht nur auf den Erfolg des Wirtschaftswunders, sondern nach dem gelungenen Machtwechsel auch auf eine erfolgreiche Demokratiestabilität zurückblicken konnte, und es außerdem galt, das seiner selbst sicherer gewordene Staatswesen Bundesrepublik gegen den utopischen Systemveränderungswillen der neuen Linken zu verteidigen.<sup>6</sup>

This left-liberal formulation of the legitimacy of the Federal Republic is predicated upon the conscious political-cultural break with national traditions which, for Broszat,

---

<sup>5</sup> Jürgen Habermas, *Geschichtsbewußtsein und posttraditionelle Identität. Die Westorientierung der Bundesrepublik.* (1987) in, Habermas, *Die Moderne - ein unvollendetes Projekt.* Philosophisch-politische Aufsätze 1977 - 1992. Reclam. Leipzig. 1992. p. 160.

<sup>6</sup> Broszat. 1988. op. cit. p. 288-9.

was only fully realised after the successful transition of governmental power to the social-liberal coalition at the end of the 1960s. Broszat, like Habermas, is clearly ambivalent about the student protest movement and yet welcomes the liberating impact of the revolt upon post-war German political culture. Left-liberal thinkers clearly have a qualitatively different Federal Republic than neoconservatives in mind when defining the substantial content of the concept of “Western democracy”. The programme of the social-liberal coalition of domestic democratisation and reform and of foreign-political rapprochement via *Ostpolitik* clearly represented a change of political paradigm in West Germany. The waning of the legitimacy of the CDU’s hard-line anticommunist policy, in the face of the gradual thaw in relations between the US and Soviet Union, finally culminating in the recognition of the GDR in the *Grundlagenvertrag* of 1972 appeared to testify to the practical irrelevance of the “national question”. Yet for left-liberal thinkers the transference of governmental power in 1969 represented more than a change of governmental paradigm. For Habermas, the post war social state succeeded where the other twentieth century “utopias” of Soviet communism and fascism failed because it alone could internalise the progressive legacy of the nineteenth century bourgeois emancipation movements and the model of the democratic constitutional state.<sup>7</sup> This is a legacy which, for critical thinkers, reached its apogee in the election of Heinemann to the office of Federal President and the social-liberal coalition under Brandt. Habermas perceives the greatest service of Brandt’s social-liberal coalition in the concessions it made to the democratising demands of the student activists.<sup>8</sup> Whilst Habermas remained critical of radical student elements, perceiving evidence of *Linksfaschismus* in Frankfurt in 1967,<sup>9</sup> with hindsight he ascribes to the anti-authoritarian revolt liberatory, democratising influence

Diese Jahre zwischen 1960 und 1967 sind die Inkubationszeit, in der kulturelles, in der geistige Impulse, nicht institutionalisierte öffentliche Meinungen ein politisches Gewicht gewonnen haben. Die Studentenbewegung war dann die von niemandem vorausgesehene Explosion von ein, zwei Jahren - eine Revolte, auf die, eigentlich bis heute, die von Rancune und Ressentiment gespeiste Konterevolution gefolgt ist.<sup>10</sup>

---

<sup>7</sup> Jürgen Habermas, *Die Krise des Wohlfahrtsstaates und die Erschöpfung utopischer Energien*. (1984) in Habermas. 1992. op. cit. p. 111-112.

<sup>8</sup> Habermas. 1990. op. cit. p. 26.

<sup>9</sup> Frank Wolf, Eberhard Windaus (Hg.), *Studentenbewegung 1967-9. Protokolle und Materialien*. Peter Stern. Frankfurt/M. 1977. pp. 120-121.

<sup>10</sup> Jürgen Habermas. 1990. op. cit. p. 22.

For critical thinkers, the political catalyst for this liberation of an emancipatory political culture primarily derived from the critical engagement with the national socialist past. It is this critical engagement, which stimulated both a critical attitude towards the German national past and West German present, which also stimulated (and continues to stimulate) hostility from the right. Thus the critical engagement with the national socialist past forms an essential role in stimulating the break with “German” political culture and the turn to the West. The perception of a democratic “refounding” of the Federal Republic during the 1960s provides the experiential political basis for the construction of a progressive “identity” during the 1980s. This perception contrasts, however, with the critical perception of West German democracy generated by the *neue Linke* which legitimised arguments for social change of both radical and reformist provenance via reference to the continuity of German authoritarian traditions. Before returning to the question of post-national *Verfassungspatriotismus*, it is necessary to consider the development of critical perceptions of the relationship between the engagement with the national socialist past and the construction of contemporary West German democracy.

During the 1960s West German political culture experienced, as elsewhere in the West, the turmoil of the student protest movement. During this period the claims to democracy of the anticommunist West were challenged by the post-war generation. Writing a decade after the events of 1968, and the attempt on his life, the radical student leader Rudi Dutschke observed the following on the broader historical context which bore the emergence of the “New Left” during the 1960s

Bei unserem Einstieg in die Geschichte begann das herrschende System an ideologischer Glaubwürdigkeit in der Sache der Demokratie und Freiheit zu verlieren. Die amerikanische Armee warf Bombenteppiche auf Vietnam und sprach von der Verteidigung der Freiheit; die Herrschenden in Amerika, bei uns in der BRD, West-Berlin usw. sprachen von Demokratie, Forschung und Lehre, meinten aber die alten Vorrechte und die Herrschaft über uns.<sup>11</sup>

The perception expressed by Dutschke of the questionable democratic credentials of the West German political system, parties and ideologies was, in its time, strengthened by the authoritarian manner with which the authorities responded to the phenomenon of the student protest movement. The post-Godesberg SPD played an inadvertently formative role in the emergence of the APO via its purging from the party of left-wing elements,

most importantly the *SDS* in 1961, in the wake of the 1959 Conference and formal turn to the concept of the *Volkspartei*.<sup>12</sup> The APO formed a melting pot of socially critical movements and ideas which, after the dissolution of the *SDS* in 1970, influenced the political culture of 1970s in such phenomena as the feminist and ecology movements, radical social-liberal reformers, revolutionary *K-Gruppen*, the anarcho-terrorism of the RAF, the *Spontis* and *Autonomen* scene and the peace movement.<sup>13</sup> The broader revolt against the restoration of the post-war reconstruction was lent explosive moral-political force in the Federal Republic in the perception of enduring anti-democratic continuities between national socialist and West German state. The impression of enduring authoritarian attitudes fuelled the perception that post-war developments had signalled more of a “restoration” than a new beginning in German society.<sup>14</sup> In contemporary West German democracy the philosopher Karl Jaspers perceived a system which essentially sustained older continuities of the *Untertan*<sup>15</sup> and hindered the development of a democratic political culture of *citoyen*.<sup>16</sup> Charting a potential social development from *Parteioligarchie - autoritärer Staat - Diktatur - Krieg*, Jaspers perceives the danger of a relapse into the authoritarian traditions which had resulted in two world wars and the Nazi dictatorship.<sup>17</sup> Jaspers’ contemporary critique is focused upon the discussion over internal security in the *Notstandsgesetze* (finally passed in May 1968) and the lack of any effective political opposition to the “party oligarchy” of the Federal Republic (a perception reinforced after the formation of the Grand Coalition in 1966). In these two aspects, Jaspers focuses upon themes central to the broader anti-authoritarian revolt of the 1960s. Jaspers’ perception of continuity between NS and FRG Germany at the level of the judiciary, military, police, professional classes and indeed of political culture lends his critique a power moral-political compulsion and legitimacy.

Das Fortwirken der alten Nationalsozialisten ist ein Grundgebren der inneren Verfassung der Bundesrepublik. Alle verdammen sie Hitler, alle behaupten, nicht eigentlich Nationalsozialisten

---

<sup>11</sup> in Gretchen Dutschke-Klotz, Jürgen Miermeister, Jürgen Treulieb (Hg.) Rudi Dutschke. *Wurzeln und Spuren eines Aufbruchs*. Rowohlt. Reinbeck bei Hamburg. 1983. p. 152

<sup>12</sup> The Marxist historian Wolfgang Abendroth was expelled from the party in 1959 after his critique of the Godesberg resolution as an accommodation to the existing system along with the *Konkret* faction which since 1957 had been highly critical of the SPD’s *Deutschlandpolitik* and rearmament policy. c:f Christiane Bachmeier, Thomas Fischer, Alexander Ewald, Sabine Norton, *Mythen Knacken. 40 Jahre Westdeutsche Linke*. Alexander Horn Verlag. Darmstadt. 1989. pp. 84-5.

<sup>13</sup> c:f Langguth. 1983. op. cit. pp. 234-262.

<sup>14</sup> Kurt Sontheimer *Die verunsicherte Republik*. 1979. *ibid.* p. 77.

<sup>15</sup> Karl Jaspers, *Wohin treibt die Bundesrepublik?* Piper. München. 1966. p. 146.

<sup>16</sup> Jaspers. 1966. op. cit. p. 178.

<sup>17</sup> Jaspers. *ibid.* pp. 128-174.

gewesen zu sein. Die Amerikaner sagten 1945 spöttisch: In ganz Deutschland ist kein Nationalsozialist zu finden. Wie kleinlaut waren sie 1945! Sie rechtfertigten sich, sie seien mißbraucht worden. Wie beschieden und vorsichtig noch 1948! Seitdem wurden sie mit der Macht der Wirtschaft und der neuen Geltung des Staates in der Welt immer selbstbewußter als Mittlenker einer scheinbar wieder aufrückenden Großmacht.<sup>18</sup>

Jaspers' perception of the endurance of anti-democratic elites reflected a perception current among critical sections of West German society. The emphasis during the Adenauer years on "inner-German integration", the rehabilitation of "experts" in the process of reconstruction and the dubious past of several political figures became a source of explosive political controversy during the 1960s. The formation of a Grand Coalition under the Chancellorship of the former NSDAP member Kiesinger, appeared to confirm critical perceptions of anti-democratic continuities and SPD complicity.<sup>19</sup> This widespread perception that the present authorities largely comprised the generation responsible for the National Socialist regime lent student protest moral-political authority and served to radicalise rebellious opinion. Thus in the words of the young Gudrun Ensslin in the wake of the death of Benno Ohnesorg on the 2 June 1967: *Dies ist die Generation von Auschwitz - mit denen kann man nicht argumentieren*<sup>20</sup>. Perceptions of system continuity found perhaps their most destructive expression in the RAF's declaration of "urban guerrilla warfare" on the "pre-fascist" West German state.<sup>21</sup>

In the context of perceived continuity of both right wing authoritarianism and SPD complicity, models of radical, anti-capitalist democracy loosely based upon the *Rätebewegung* of 1918-19, which had rejected both the Soviet and Social Democratic positions of the period, became an important historical-political orientation for the SDS.<sup>22</sup> In this context, inter-war, non-orthodox Marxist analyses of fascism underwent a

---

<sup>18</sup> Jaspers. 1966. op. cit. p. 183-4.

<sup>19</sup> A perception which, for Kiesinger, resulted in a slap in the face from the student Beate Klarsfeld who had travelled from Paris in order to bring home the chancellor's NS past to young Germans in particular. For this exercise of a more direct form of *Vergangenheitspolitik* she received a sentence of twelve months without bail. c:f Walter von Goldendach, Hans-Rüdiger Minow. 1994. op. cit. p. 318.

<sup>20</sup> Stefan Aust, *Der Baader Meinhof Komplex*. Goldmann. München. 1990. p. 60.

<sup>21</sup> c:f formulation of the notion of the "urban guerrilla" from 1971 in Rote Armee Fraktion. *Konzept Stadtguerilla*. in Redaktion Diskurs. (Hg.) 1991. op. cit. pp. 264-269. Here a distinction is made between the reformist social democratic government which had absorbed the protest potential of the APO and was essentially buying time until the return of "fascist" rule in a CDU-CSU government which would then destroy the left.

<sup>22</sup> c:f Gerd Langguth, *Protestbewegung. Entwicklung - Niedergang - Renaissance*. Die Neue Linke seit 1968. Berend von Nottbeck. Köln. 1983. p. 39-40.

certain rehabilitation particularly in academic circles.<sup>23</sup> Rejecting both conservative “totalitarian” explanations of German fascism and East German vulgar Marxist approach, the new left was theoretically influenced by radical non-Stalinist émigrés and in particular the Frankfurt School. Adorno and Horkheimer’s understanding of the totalising tendencies of capitalism and its production of mass culture<sup>24</sup> could resonate with the baby boomer generation born into the unique age of consumer capitalism. Wilhem Reich’s analysis of authoritarian structures in the bourgeois family also offered an understanding of fascism as a psychological aspect which, however, was contained within a broad socio-political analysis of National Socialism and capitalism.<sup>25</sup> In distinction to both communist and social democratic currents of the left, the new left was marked by a social and political alienation from the working class. In this context, the émigré Herbert Marcuse gained influence among this milieu and, in contrast to Adorno and Habermas, celebrated the students as a new revolutionary class of liberators. For Marcuse, pre-empting later theories of proletarian “embourgeoisement”, the revolutionary potential of the working class as *die bestimmte Negation des Bestehenden* had been exhausted. The working class was, for Marcuse, now a social group which had supported the US war in South-East Asia, the police and state against counter-culture radicals and had elected Nixon into office.<sup>26</sup>

This perspective denied the radical student movement a genuine social basis in the working class which could have lent their demands political weight. Dieter Ruch suggests that, although the student protest movement could actually record few direct institutional gains, it exercised an important effect upon the longer-term political culture of the Federal Republic in terms of repealing rigid anticommunism of the post-war years, the strengthening of grass-roots participation models and heightening critical

---

<sup>23</sup> Thus the volume edited by Abendroth, originally published in 1967, contains the work of “unorthodox” Marxist theoreticians from this period which, in addition to Rosenberg, featured contributions from Otto Bauer, August Thalheimer and Herbert Marcuse. c:f Abendroth. 1972. op. cit.

<sup>24</sup> Max Horkheimer, Theodor W. Adorno Dialektik der Aufklärung Philosophische Fragmente. Fischer. Frankfurt/M. 1998. pp. 128-176.

<sup>25</sup> Wilhelm Reich, Massenpsychologie des Faschismus in Reinhard Kühnl (Hg.) Texte zur Faschismus-diskussion. Positionen und Konroversen. Rowohlt. Reinbeck bei Hamburg. 1979. pp. 30-50.

<sup>26</sup> c:f Herbert Marcuse’s lecture to students at the University of Frankfurt, 28. June 1974, Bemühungen zum Verhältnis von Theorie und Praxis. in Redaktion diskurs (Hg.) Küß den Boden der Freiheit. Texte der Neuen Linken. Aurora Verlagsauslieferung. Edition ID-Archiv im internationalen Institut für Sozialgeschichte. Amsterdam. 1991. pp. 172-176.

awareness of the discrepancy between democratic ideals and political practice.<sup>27</sup> For critical thinkers of the 1980s, the greatest impact of the student protest movement was its radicalising effect on political culture which, for Habermas, reached its highest expression in the election of the first social democratic Chancellor since Hermann Müller in 1930.<sup>28</sup> The narrow election victory of the social liberal coalition was presented by Brandt in terms of a democratisation of West German society. The social-liberal coalition proposed a raft of reforms in society, politics and economy, which were famously formulated in Brandt's phrase of *mehr Demokratie wagen*. Brandt's governmental declaration was characterised by the powerful evocation of a democratic new beginning and suggested that the process of genuine democratisation of West German society could only now begin in earnest

Meine Damen und Herren, in den letzten Jahren haben manche in diesem Land befürchtet, die zweite deutsche Demokratie werde den Weg der ersten gehen. Ich habe dies nie geglaubt. Ich glaube dies heute weniger denn je. Nein: Wir stehen nicht am Ende unserer Demokratie, wir fangen erst richtig an.<sup>29</sup>

Although Brandt belonged to the older political generation, his assumption of the office of Chancellor evoked a symbolism of progressive departure derived, to a large extent, from his particular biography as a resistance fighter expatriated by the Nazi authorities. In comparison to the compromised figures of Globke, Kiesinger, Carstens and the like, Brandt appeared to politically symbolise the break with undemocratic political and personal continuities and the overdue ascension to power of the "Other Germany". Brandt combined a sense of departure from unsavoury continuities and the dawn of a new democratic era with a plea for integration into and loyalty to the "new" state from the younger generation.<sup>30</sup> In this, Brandt combines perhaps the two major phenomena of the 1960s, which seriously undermined the authority and social legitimacy of the West German state in the perception of continuity between NS and FRG Germany, and the related radical critique articulated by the counter-culture. Brandt implies sympathy with the critique of compromised, authoritarian elites and combines this with an attempt to reconstitute the social legitimacy of the state in terms of its democratic credentials and break with traditions. Brandt is attributed a major role in effectively stemming the tide

---

<sup>27</sup> Dieter Ruch, *Protestbewegungen*. in, Wolfgang Benz (Hg.) *Die Geschichte der Bundesrepublik Deutschlands*. Band 3. Fischer Taschenbuch Verlag. Frankfurt/M. 1989. p. 320.

<sup>28</sup> Habermas. 1990. *op. cit.* p. 26.

<sup>29</sup> *Regierungserklärung von Bundeskanzler Brandt vor dem deutschen Bundestag*. 28. 10. 1969. in Irmgard Wilharm (Hg.) *Deutsche Geschichte 1962 - 1983*. p. 27.

<sup>30</sup> Brandt. 1969. *ibid.*

of youthful protest of the APO which had emerged over the decade, and the dissolution of the SDS in 1970 and the rise in SPD membership among the under 30s between 1969 and 1973 lends credence to this perception.<sup>31</sup> Clear from Brandt's address is his concern to repair the broken bond between state and critical social groups. Different from other conventional propositions, Brandt's claim to legitimacy and authority is predicated upon an open sense of more democracy. The notion of a new "social-democracy" was not exhausted by the formal inclusion of the younger generation and the programme of social reform, as important as these were, but also implied a change in the substantive concept of democracy itself, which also reflected the changes in West German political discourse over this period. Brandt's concept of "daring more democracy" complemented the series of progressive state interventions in society and the economy and advocated a more open or "republican" understanding of the relationship between state and society

Die Regierung kann in der Demokratie nur erfolgreich wirken, wenn sie getragen wird vom *demokratischen Engagement der Bürger*. Wir haben so wenig Bedarf an blinder Zustimmung, wie unser Volk Bedarf hat an gespreizter Würde und hoheitsvoller Distanz. Wir suchen keine Bewunderer; wir brauchen Menschen, die kritisch mitdenken, mitentscheiden und mitverantworten. . Wir sind keine Erwählten; wir sind Gewählter. Deshalb suchen wir das Gespräch mit allen, die sich um diese Demokratie mühen.<sup>32</sup>

Once more, a contrast is evoked between established governmental practice and the new beginning, which seeks to bridge the chasm between state and society via the media of a more open concept of modern democracy predicated upon the active engagement of the citizenry in the political process. This is hence a reading which seeks to absorb political critique and perceives this process more as testimony to a healthy democratic culture rather than the state of emergency so frequently evoked by conservative commentaries of this period. The themes raised by Brandt in his 1969 governmental address are components of a concept of socio-political reform which keyed into a longer-term discourse in which the critique of contemporary West Germany was fused with the critical engagement with the NS past. As early as 1972, the *Radikalerlaß* appeared to contradict the notion of a "critical" democracy and this impression was strengthened by the witch-hunts against the left during the 1970s over the engagement with the left-wing terrorism of the Baader-Meinhof group. Brandt's concept of open, critical democracy drew heavy criticism during the 1970s from both CDU-CSU and indeed own party in form of Schmidt's subtle attack on the responsibility of "intellectuals" for fostering a

---

<sup>31</sup> Norton. (Mitverf.) 1989. p. 94.

critical climate in which RAF could develop and engender broad sympathies among the young, counter-culture milieu.<sup>33</sup> Whilst the APO was largely absorbed by the social-liberal coalition and this reformist programme itself ran into serious problems in the 1970s, the enduring influence of this period appears to have been the transformation in perceptions of the national socialist past. It is primarily this development which left wing intellectuals celebrated when casting a nostalgic eye over the 1960s. Before progressing to a consideration of the role of critical perceptions of the German past in the post-national identity of Constitutional Patriotism in the 1980s, it is necessary to consider the development of critical history in the 1960s.

### 3.2 The *Sonderweg* Thesis and Emancipation

During the 1960s, established historical positions on NS and Imperial Germany came under attack within academic history and gave way to more critical considerations of indigenous history. Perspectives of National Socialism within the broader course of German history formed a fulcrum of paradigm change. Both Marxist and non-Marxist thinkers had addressed the question of the role of National Socialism in the longer term continuity of German history prior to the 1960s. The Hungarian Marxist Georg Lukács published *The Destruction of Reason* in 1953, which built on his earlier notion of Hitler as the political manifestation of Nietzsche's philosophical standpoint and extrapolated a continuity of a German *Sonderweg* of anti-enlightenment, irrationalist philosophy throughout the Imperial period. For Lukács, Hitler represented the "demagogic synthesis" of irrational German philosophy which was fused with the techniques of American advertising.<sup>34</sup> In 1945, AJP Taylor had perceived in National Socialism "the course of German history" which he related to longer term developmental tendencies in modern German history.<sup>35</sup> The US radio-journalist and former Berlin correspondent William L. Shirer observed in his treatment of National Socialism published in 1959 that Hitler and the Third Reich in fact represented the "logical continuation of German history".<sup>36</sup> Such positions from non-German thinkers represented the "myths" against

---

<sup>32</sup> Brandt. 1969. *ibid.* p. 32.

<sup>33</sup> Schmidt. *Sten Ber.* 1977

<sup>34</sup> Lukacs, *The Destruction of Reason.* Merlin. London. 1980. p. 76.

<sup>35</sup> AJP Taylor. *op. cit.* 1965. p. 263.

<sup>36</sup> William L. Shirer, *The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich. A History of Nazi Germany.* Book Club Associates - Secker & Warburg. London. 1971. p. 90.

which Gerhard Ritter polemicised in his defence of Bismarck.<sup>37</sup> The comfortable severance of the history of the *Kaiserreich*, and in particular Bismarck, from the later NS dictatorship articulated by established post-war historians in the West was challenged above all by fellow German historians who began to develop on conceptions of continuity in German history which, however, were not motivated by simplistic arguments of “German character” or notions of “collective guilt” often discernible in non-German treatments.<sup>38</sup>

The controversy unleashed in the wake of the publication of Fritz Fischer’s research on the origins of the First World War in the *Historische Zeitschrift* in 1959 centred on a continuity of economic, political and military interests of elite groups developed in Wilhelmine Germany.<sup>39</sup> For Fischer, the outbreak of war in 1914 corresponded to a set of annexionist interests represented in the highest echelons of the military and state which existed in a longer continuity reaching back to the 1890s and the declaration of *Weltpolitik*, the construction of a Naval Fleet and the belligerent interventions of William II. For some important establishment historians such as Ritter, Fischer had reopened the question of German War Guilt which had occupied Weimar historiography, which had acquitted Imperial Germany of any particular responsibility for the First World War.<sup>40</sup> Thus Ritter perceived Fischer’s work as a rearming of the Versailles *Kriegsschuldthese* and rejected the contention that the German military sought to fulfil longer term plans for continental hegemony between 1914-18.<sup>41</sup> What was perhaps so explosive about Fischer’s thesis, and what upset conservatives such as Ritter, was that, if correct, this destroyed post-war totalitarian readings of National Socialism which posited Hitler and the clique around him as solely responsible for the

---

<sup>37</sup> c:f Ritter. 1948. op. cit.

<sup>38</sup> c:f Taylor’s ideas on “German character” as “barbarians” and “civilisers” or Wilhelm II as personification of Germany. Taylor. 1965. op. cit. 157.

<sup>39</sup> c:f Fritz Fischer, *Deutsche Kriegsziele, Revolutionierung und Separatfrieden im Osten 1914-1918*. in, *Historische Zeitschrift*. Herausgegeben von Theodor Schieder und Walter Kienast. R. Oldenbourg Vlg. München. Band 188. Heft 2. Oktober 1959. pp. 249-310. also Fritz Fischer, *Kontinuität des Irrtums. Zum Problem der deutschen Kriegszielpolitik im ersten Weltkrieg*. in *Historische Zeitschrift*. Band 191. Heft. 1 August 1960. pp. 83-100.

<sup>40</sup> c:f Holger H. Herwig, *Clio Deceived. Patriotic Self-Censorship in Germany After the Great War*. in Keith Wilson (ed.) *Forging The Collective Memory. Government Historians through Two World Wars*. Berghahn. Oxford. 1996. p. 114.

<sup>41</sup> Gerhard Ritter, *Der Anteil der Militärs an der Kriegskatastrophe von 1914*. in, *Historische Zeitschrift*. Band 193. Heft 1. August 1961. pp. 72-91. and Ritter, *Eine neue Kriegsschuldthese? Zu Fritz Fischers Buch “Griff nach der Weltmacht”*. in *HZ*. Band 194. Heft 3. Juni 1962. pp. 646-668.

military campaign of the Third Reich. The thesis that the global conflict of 1914-18 had been willingly pursued by various elites in Imperial Germany in the pursuit of continental, and ultimately global, power exploded readings of National Socialism as a historical accident. Ritter's campaign against Fischer was not restricted to academic exchanges. Ritter's, together with Karl Dietrich Erdmann's, advice that a planned lecture tour of Fischer's in the US would constitute a "national tragedy" if permitted urged foreign minister Schröder to rescind Goethe Institute funds for the tour, which was only finally permitted upon the insistence of a dozen American scholars.<sup>42</sup>

The suggestion of longer term continuities which reached way back into the Imperial period seriously undermined the legitimacy of the German nation as defended by the more traditional "historicism" of historians such as Ritter, who clearly remained intellectually and emotionally attached to the German *Reich*.<sup>43</sup> This traditional approach gave way during the 1960s to a more critical paradigm of historical investigation which rejected the "totalitarian" explanation of fascism and communism and focused attention instead upon the relationship between capitalism and fascism as first articulated by inter-war Marxist interpretations.<sup>44</sup> This conception of a critical social history was often fused with a distinct perspective on contemporary society which was characterised by a faith in the capacity of a rational direction of the dynamic process of social change. This positive evaluation of the possibility to progress in our comprehension of both past and present was a constituent component of the "critical-historical social science" which developed in the Federal Republic in the 1960s. The veteran social historian Jürgen Kocka provides the following retrospective understanding of the relationship between historical paradigm and perception of the present in an edition dedicated to the 65th birthday of one of the most significant figures in the development of "critical social history" Hans-Ulrich Wehler

Es war eine besondere intellektuelle Atmosphäre, die das ermöglichte: eine allgemeine Stimmung der Kritik an hergebrachten Traditionen, das Vertrauen in die Machbarkeit von Reform und

---

<sup>42</sup> c:f Herwig. in Wilson. 1996. op. cit. p. 114.

<sup>43</sup> Thus, Ritter, in his critique of Fischer in the *Historische Zeitschrift*, refers to *unseres Reich* and *unsere Militär* displaying an attachment to and identification with imperial Germany which was anathema to the later "critical" school of younger historians. c:f Ritter. 1961. op. cit. p. 91. and 1962. op. cit. p. 646.

<sup>44</sup> Frei. 1997. op. cit. p. 406.

Verbesserung, und das alles vor dem Hintergrund einer institutionellen Expansion im Universitätssystem, die besonders für die Jüngeren neue Möglichkeiten eröffnete.<sup>45</sup>

this captures the political climate in which critical social history developed which was shaped by a diffuse faith in the possibility of social reform and or social transformation. This perception of change in the present was reflected in examinations of the German past with reference to the dynamism of social development. Writing in the early 1960s, Hans Mommsen characterised the notion that historical movements are essentially driven by longer-term processes of social change as “constitutive” of the new generation of social historians.<sup>46</sup> this concept of critical history invoked a neo-Marxist appreciation of history as Mommsen explained

Ähnlich wie in der Marxistischen Geschichtsphilosophie, sofern die dialektisch, nicht im Sinne eines positivistischen Entwicklungsautomatismus, aufgefaßt wird, der die ökonomischen Faktoren absolut setzt, erscheinen hier die innerhalb der Gesellschaft und zwischen den gesellschaftlichen Systemen aufbrechenden Spannungen und Konflikte als die eigentlichen Triebkräfte der Geschichte.<sup>47</sup>

Whilst Mommsen clearly distances critical social history from vulgar Marxist economic determinism, the notion that Marxism represented a “philosophy of history” betrayed a theoretical misunderstanding which found historiographical expression in the thesis of the German *Sonderweg* to modernity. Both Marx and Engels had argued against any concept of a universal “philosophy of history” as contradictory to the principles of historical specificity developed in historical materialism.<sup>48</sup> Whilst Marx and Engels emphasise the importance of studying social development within its historical specificity, critical historians held a normative concept of modern capitalist democracy. Yet whilst Mommsen and Wehler invoked a neo-Marxist concept of history which concentrated upon the transience of social relations and the role of class conflict as a dynamo of history, this openness was restricted by normative concept of “modernist”

---

<sup>45</sup> Jürgen Kocka, *Annäherung und neue Distanz. Historiker und Sozialwissenschaftler seit den fünfziger Jahren.* in, Manfred Hettling und Paul Nolte (Hg.) *Nation und Gesellschaft in Deutschland. Historische Essays.* C.H. Beck. München. 1996. p. 16.

<sup>46</sup> Hans Mommsen, *Sozialgeschichte.* in Hans-Ulrich Wehler (Hg.) *Moderne Deutsche Sozialgeschichte.* Neue Wissenschaftliche Bibliothek. Kiepenhauer und Witsch. Köln.Berlin. 1968. p. 33.

<sup>47</sup> *ibid.* p. 30.

<sup>48</sup> c:f Marx’ *Brief an die Redaktion der Otetschestwenje Sapinski* in Karl Marx Friedrich Engels Werke Band 19. Dietz. Berlin. 1962. pp.111-112 and Friedrich Engels *Anti-Dühring Herr Eugon Dühring’s Revolution in Science.* Lawrence and Wishart. London. 1969.pp. 10-25, 47-50.

political culture.<sup>49</sup> As Wehler commented retrospectively in the wake of the *Historikerstreit*

Die Kritik am Kaiserreich seit den 1960er Jahren hat in seiner obrigkeitsstaatlichen und vorparlamentarischen Struktur, in seiner gesellschaftspolitischen Status-Quo Verteidigung und repressiven Durchsetzung von Klassenegoismen eine "konfliktverschärfende Belastung" der Gesamtpolitik, insbesondere ein nur schwer überwindbares Hindernis "liberaler Demokratisierung in Deutschland" gesehen. Dem lag die (selbstredend normativ besetzte) Zielvorstellung zugrunde, daß ein parlamentarisch-demokratisches Gemeinwesen dank der Flexibilität seiner Institutionen am ehesten der Bewältigung seiner inneren und äußeren Probleme, auch der Korrektur der eigenen Fehler, gewachsen ist - am ehesten auf Dauer die lebensnotwendige politische Lernfähigkeit besitzt.<sup>50</sup>

This normative perception of modern social development was reflected in critical attitudes towards both the German Imperial past and the West German present of the social state. Central to Wehler's thesis of the *Sonderweg* is the belief that, in the age of late capitalism characterised by the development of monopolies and cartels, the state must intervene in an organisatory capacity.<sup>51</sup> This must be accompanied, for Wehler, by a process of socio-political modernisation which enables the development of emancipatory and democratising forces in society.<sup>52</sup> This is a perception based upon an appreciation of both the democratising tendencies of capitalism in the late eighteenth - early nineteenth century as well as the post-war social state. The essential *Sonderweg* of the *Kaiserreich* was formed by the apparent incongruity of industrial-economic modernisation which was cohered by an anti-modernist, reactionary political framework.<sup>53</sup> For Wehler, the coincidence of an arch-conservative political culture with a broader process of socio-economic change formed a developmental paradox which contained inherently destructive potential

---

<sup>49</sup> This despite Wehler's formal recognition of the principle of historical specificity in understanding social development for historical materialism. c:f Hans Ulrich Wehler, *Modernisierungstheorie und Geschichte*. Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht. 1975. p. 55. Although Wehler's critique of Marx "model" of "Base and Superstructure" reveals a dichotomy which appears to have more in common with Wehler's own approach to the *Sonderweg* than Marx' historical materialism. c:f the much more subtle appreciation of the interdependence of the two in Franz Jakubowski, *Ideology and Superstructure in Historical Materialism*. Pluto. London. 1990.

<sup>50</sup> Wehler. 1988. op. cit. p. 186.

<sup>51</sup> Wehler. 1979. op. cit. p. 141, 1969. op. cit. p. 19.

<sup>52</sup> Wehler. 1979. op. cit. p. 161.

<sup>53</sup> Schütz argues that this founding asynchronicity rendered the *Kaiserreich* incapable of reform and argues its collapse in terms of this deficit of democracy. Rüdiger Schütz *Monarchischer Konstitutionalismus und parlamentarisches System Zum Problem der Parlamentarisierungsbestrebungen in der Endphase des deutschen Kaiserreichs*. in Heinrich Bodensieck (Hg.) *Preußen, Deutschland und der Westen. Annäherungen und Beziehungen seit 1789*. Muster Schmitt Vlg. Göttingen. 1980. pp. 103-5.

Im Grunde aber stand die Politik dieses Regimes auf längere Sicht insofern einem unlösbaren Problem gegenüber, als Modernisierung ohne grundlegende Veränderung der Sozialstruktur und der ihr zugehörigen Machtverhältnisse, ohne soziale und politische Emanzipation nicht möglich ist, wenn der innere und äußere Friede erhalten werden soll.<sup>54</sup>

The apparent asynchronicity of socio-economic and political modernisation fuelled an unresolvable conflict in Imperial society which inevitably exploded in 1914-18/19 into international military aggression and domestic civil war, before undermining the Weimar Republic and ultimately ending in the NS regime of 1933-45.<sup>55</sup> Wehler perceived in the Prussian Establishment's *Revolution von oben* the construction of a "bonapartist dictatorship" along similar lines to the usurpation of executive power by Louis Bonaparte between 1848 and 1851 and described in Marx's 18 Brumaire of Louis Napoleon. In this model the usurpation of political power by the leader of the executive who commanded the loyalty of the military and enjoyed certain plebiscitary acclamation was compensated for by the defence and development of the bourgeois social order against the real or apparent threat of revolution.<sup>56</sup> Wehler applies this model onto the founding constellation of 1871 with the modification that in the German context this was a "bonapartist" dictatorship which was primarily employed to secure the political dominance of pre-industrial elites rather than the political interests of the industrial bourgeoisie.<sup>57</sup> In this constellation, critical historians observed that the German liberal bourgeoisie had been essentially convinced to abstain from the political arena in return for the prosperity generated by industrial-economic modernisation and security from the nascent, social democratic working class.<sup>58</sup> This apparent political quietism of the German national bourgeoisie was likened with pre-unification traditions of the Prussian reformers Stein and von Hardenberg who responded not only to the influence of the French occupation but equally to the widespread fear of social revolt from below by a policy of *Revolution von oben*.<sup>59</sup> For Sauer this testified to a continuity of cohering the domestic population around foreign wars as advocated by the Prussian military strategists von Clausewitz during the *Befreiungskriege* of 1813 and continued by Bismarck over the wars of unification which effectively quashed liberal oppositionists

---

<sup>54</sup> Hans-Ulrich Wehler, *Krisenherde des Kaiserreichs 1871 - 1918. Studien zur deutschen Sozial- und Verfassungsgeschichte*. Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht. Göttingen. 1979. p. 161.

<sup>55</sup> Wehler. 1988. p. 55.

<sup>56</sup> Wehler. 1979. op. cit. p. 409.

<sup>57</sup> Wehler. *ibid.* p. 410.

<sup>58</sup> Wehler. 1969. op. cit. p. 456-458. Wolfgang Sauer, *Das Problem des deutschen Nationalstaates*. (1962) in Wehler. (Hg.) 1966. op. cit. p. 409.

<sup>59</sup> Sauer. *ibid.* p. 420.

during the 1860s as well as invalidating the Habsburg claim over the German lands.<sup>60</sup> In this sense, left-liberal commentators often condemned the failings of the liberal bourgeoisie in nineteenth century Germany which had failed to perform its “historical mission” in realising modern, capitalist, liberal democracy and internalised the romantic, antimodernist nationalism of the aristocratic elite.<sup>61</sup>

For Wehler, the role of ideology was central in cohering a society riven with social tension. In this respect, the development of colonial policy under Bismarck in 1883-4 and the later Wilhelmine *Weltpolitik* was primarily derived from endogenous socio-economic and political forces rather than exogenous, traditional foreign-policy interests.<sup>62</sup> Alongside economic benefits which were regarded as a counter-measure to the problems of recession, overseas expansion is perceived as having performed an important internal function in Bismarckian Germany

Sie (Ausdehnung nach Übersee) gewann aber auch innenpolitisch eine spezielle Integrations- und Ablenkungsfunktion in der Fortsetzung der preußisch-deutschen “Revolution von oben”. Sie bot dem Reichskanzler eine Chance, die allmählich emporgewachsene, zum Teil dann aber auch künstlich angeregte Kolonialbewegung zu innen- und wahlpolitischen Zwecken auszunutzen, neue Ziele am fernen Horizont abzustecken und die von ihnen ausgehende integrierende Wirkung zur Verdeckung schwerer sozialer und politischer Spannungen in Innern des Kaiserreichs, damit aber auch zur Stärkung seiner bonapartistisch-diktatorischen Machtstellung, zur Steigerung der schwindenden Popularität und des angeschlagenen Prestiges der Reichsregierung zu verwerten: erfolgreicher Imperialismus sollte seine Herrschaft erneut legitimieren.<sup>63</sup>

For Wehler, the cultivation of an imperialist national myth, which during the Wilhelmine era was fused with a racial component, resulted from the necessity of cultivating a sense of legitimacy for an essentially anti-modernist, pre-industrial political regime. In the words of another critical historian, Bismarck noted that national sentiment and patriotism could be employed as a form of social “cement” with which an essentially traditional, conservative socio-political framework could be refounded against the transformatory pressures from forces of social and political emancipation.<sup>64</sup> Whilst post-war conservative historians had associated the collapse of the Empire with

---

<sup>60</sup> Sauer. *ibid.* pp. 421-5. Wehler. 1969. *op. cit.* p. 457.

<sup>61</sup> Hans Heigert, *Deutschlands falsche Träume. oder: Die verführte Nation.* Büchergebilde Gutenberg. Frankfurt/M. 1969. pp. 7-8.

<sup>62</sup> Wehler. 1979. p. 141-143.

<sup>63</sup> Wehler. 1969. p.454.

<sup>64</sup> Otto Pflanze, *Bismarck - ein konservativer Revolutionär?* in Dieter Langewiesche (Hg.) *Das deutsche Kaiserreich 1867/71 bis 1919. Bilanz einer Epoche.* Verlag Ploetz. Freiburg/Würzburg. 1984. p. 30.

the phenomenon of mass, politicised nationalism and related this to the legacy of *Großdeutschland* liberals and the influence of totalitarian “demagogues”, the critical school linked the predominance of reactionary nationalist sentiment to the social elite’s inability to contemplate democracy. Wehler draws upon the concept of the inter-war historian Eckhard Kehr who perceived a *Primat der Innenpolitik* as the motivation for the construction of a large naval fleet, begun in 1897. Kehr’s concept of a “primacy of domestic policy” is based upon an appreciation of the role which the fleet and the nationalist public agitation of the Navy League (founded in 1898) played in fostering a social and political identification with a *Weltpolitik* which, alongside economic benefits, was regarded as an ideal ideological weapon to counter the growth and legitimacy of social democracy.<sup>65</sup> In this vein, Kehr perceived the motivation behind the second Navy Bill in 1900 as originating less from the need for a large fleet and rather more from a consideration of its usefulness as a form of social *Ablenkungspolitik* after the defeat of the anti-socialist motivated *Zuchthausvorlage* in 1899.<sup>66</sup>

The thesis of asynchronicity in the socio-economic and political moments of Germany’s development as a modern capitalist nation derives from the conviction that the socio-economic and political moments of societal modernisation must be developed in relative tandem. This perspective operates from the normative evaluation of Western parliamentary democracy as the political system which corresponds most clearly to the “objective” interests of the modern bourgeoisie. As this approach appears to deny the possibility of a coincidence of bourgeois “interests” and authoritarian systems of rule,<sup>67</sup> critical historians concluded that the *Kaiserreich* essentially represented a “bonapartist” regime in which the bourgeoisie relinquished its own political emancipation under a class of aristocratic, pre-industrial elites in as the price of preventing the emancipation of the working class.<sup>68</sup> The major political continuity spanning the period of the German nation state is defined by the endurance of these pre-industrial elites into the inter-war period and the ascension of fascism. This insight forms the basis of not only Wehler’s understanding of the eventual collapse of Imperial Germany in the chaos of the First

---

<sup>65</sup> in Wehler (Hg.) 1968. op. cit. p. 393.

<sup>66</sup> *ibid.* p. 398.

<sup>67</sup> c:f David Blackbourn and Geoff Eley, *The Peculiarities of German History. Bourgeois Society and Politics in Nineteenth Century Germany.* Oxford. New York. 1991. pp. 75-97

<sup>68</sup> Wehler. 1969. op. cit. p. 459.

World War and the revolutionary uprising of 1918-1919, but also of the later developments of German history

Die fatalen Auswirkungen dieser Politik, durch die die politische Kontrolle vorindustrielle Führungsschichten bis in die Zeit der Hochindustrialisierung erhalten wurde, trat dann endgültig zwischen 1914 und 1929 zutage, als ihre Strukturen zerbrachen. Bis dahin hatte sie die Grundlagen dafür mitgeschaffen, daß sich in Deutschland als einzigem hochindustrialisiertem Land der Faschismus in seiner radikalsten Spielart durchsetzen konnte: die Blockierung der Emanzipation breiter Gesellschaftsschichten schlug in die "Revolte der declassés" der Industrialisierung um.<sup>69</sup>

Wehler's concept of modernisation is revealed in the implied paradox constructed between pre-industrial political rule and socio-economic modernisation which is then repeated in the couplet of highly advanced industrial nation and radical fascist state. The roots of the fascist state are clearly identified with the persistence of pre-industrial elites who had consistently repressed the broader process of social and political emancipation. The inherent unwillingness and inability of the *Kaiserreich's* political class to provide a democratic resolution of the tensions and conflicts created by the forces of socio-economic modernisation resulted in the tendency to find authoritarian political solutions to the problems created by change. It is this political continuity of Imperial Germany which helped create the broader conditions within which a fascist dictatorship could be constructed in the 1930s. From this perspective, the historical parallels between the "bonapartist dictatorship" constructed by Bismarck in the wake of military conquest, the declaration of *Weltpolitik* in 1890s and the "national revolution" of 1933 which aimed at imperial expansion reveal a wholly anti-democratic continuity of German national culture which derived from a fundamental developmental schism between the socio-economic and political forces of modernisation.

Contained within the critical historical conception of the *Sonderweg* was, from the start, an evaluation of the potential of society to progress. Permeating Wehler's analysis is the theoretical orientation towards the concept of progress in human affairs articulated in the belief that both past and present should be viewed through the political perspective of a better, improved future society organised in accordance with rational principles.<sup>70</sup> The basis of drawing instruction from the past is formed by the perception that the problems of socio-economic modernisation and political democratisation which

---

<sup>69</sup> Wehler. 1979. op. cit. p. 143.

<sup>70</sup> Wehler 1969. op. cit. p. 14.

unloaded such conflict during late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries continued to form the basic context of social existence in the present. More specifically, his continuity is formed by the dynamic social context or formed by the development of organised capitalism characterised by the concentration of domestic production in monopolies and cartels and increased international competition for markets. Of particular political importance in this process is the role played by the state in cultivating the political and economic conditions within which organised capitalism may thrive. For critical historians, the history of Imperial Germany displays the disastrous consequences which ensue when these processes of socio-economic modernisation are codified by a reactionary, anti-modernist political system. Thus for Wehler writing in the late 1960s

Im Hinblick auf die politische Ordnung des Interventionsstaats wird während dieser Entwicklung tendenziell die große Alternative zwischen autoritären (z.B. bonapartistischen, letztlich dann auch faschistischen) Systemen einerseits und sozialstaatlichen Massendemokratien andererseits aufgeworfen. In Deutschland, wo über diese Alternativen mit fatalen Folgen entschieden worden ist, bleiben die Lasten der Fehlentwicklungen im 19. Jahrhundert bis in unsere Gegenwart spürbar.<sup>71</sup>

This essentially constitutes the *Sonderweg* of German development for Wehler. Whilst other states in Western Europe complimented the process of industrialisation and urbanisation with a process of parliamentarism and democratisation of society, in the German nation these dynamic social developments were constrained within an entirely anti-democratic and reactionary political system. Thus whilst the post-war mass social-state democracies of the West developed from the bourgeois emancipation movements of the nineteenth century, nineteenth century German history offered quite antithetical traditions of state intervention in economy and society. Wehler operates from a much longer perspective of historical and social development which enables him to assert the continued relevance of these older themes in the present. Behind this lies the memory of the Third Reich as an example of the profound potential consequences of finding authoritarian answers to these problems. The *Sonderweg* thesis was controversial and contested by both German and non-German historians. Critics of the *Sonderweg* thesis have contended that in the late Wilhelmine period the potential for democratic reform was greater than imagined by critical historians. The long-standing liberal conservative critic of “critical social history”, Thomas Nipperdey, observed that the potential for

---

<sup>71</sup> Wehler. *ibid.* p. 19.

democratic reform contained in the *Koalition im Werden*, comprising left-liberals, the Catholic *Zentrum* party and Social Democracy, was much greater than assumed by critical historians.<sup>72</sup> Others have displayed that the bourgeoisie was able to stamp its mark on Imperial society which, by the turn of the century, had internalised the legal, economic and social characteristic of “bourgeois society”.<sup>73</sup> Geoff Eley in particular has displayed the distinctly bourgeois self-interests which fuelled the Radical Nationalist groups of the Wilhelmine period and related these to a longer term process of the reconfiguration of the right between the 1890s and 1930s.<sup>74</sup> Eley observed that the normative concepts of critical historians blinds them to the possibility that capitalism is a dynamic social form which has developed in a variety of social arrangements from late feudal absolutism, nineteenth century bourgeois democracy, authoritarian-fascist regimes through to the post-war social state.<sup>75</sup> As Wehler states above, the post-war mass democratic social state forms the basis of critical normative concepts of democracy and social modernisation in both past and present. This was a project which since the 1960s has been politically articulated in the work of Jürgen Habermas.

### 3. 3. Radical Democracy and Emancipation

Since the 1960s, Habermas has argued for a “correction” of the modernist disjuncture encapsulated in the *Sonderweg* thesis by the realisation of emancipatory social impulses.<sup>76</sup> In the development of the post-war social-welfare state, Habermas perceives the most progressive reflection of the legacy of nineteenth century bourgeois liberal and social democratic emancipation movements and ideas. Thus despite his emancipatory ambitions, Habermas’ social philosophy is firmly welded to the status quo of post-war liberal, Western democracy. For Habermas, the profound upheavals and change which ensued from the global conflict of 1914-18, the 1917 revolution in Russia and the

---

<sup>72</sup> Thomas Nipperdey, *Gesellschaft, Kultur, Theorie. Gesammelte Aufsätze zur neueren Geschichte*. Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht. 1976. p. 387.

<sup>73</sup> Blackbourn, Eley. op. cit. p.75

<sup>74</sup> c:f Geoff Eley *Reshaping the Right. Radical Nationalism and Political Change after Bismarck*. New Yale University Press. New Haven/London. 1980. p. 205. and also Eley, *From Unification to Nazism. Reinterpreting the German Past*. Unwin Hyman. Cambridge (US) 1990. esp. pp. 231-253 and 254-282.

<sup>75</sup> Eley. 1980. op. cit. p. 164.

<sup>76</sup> In the context of the university reform debates Habermas argued for a relative autonomy of the university from the interests of industry and state in order that it may realise its true independence from both in society. Jürgen Habermas, *Universität in der Demokratie - Demokratisierung der Universität in*, *Merkur*. XXI Jahrgang. Heft 5. Mai 1967. p. 423-4.

successive inter-war economic collapse formed the genesis of the three dominant utopias of the twentieth century which he perceives in Soviet communism, the authoritarian-corporatist models of fascist Italy, Falange Spain and Germany and the post-war social democratic reformism of the Western mass democracies.<sup>77</sup> Whilst Soviet communism sought to transcend and fascist regimes to eradicate bourgeois democratic culture, the project of the post-war reformist state staked a claim to the legacy of the nineteenth century bourgeois emancipation movements contained in the concept of the democratic, constitutional state.<sup>78</sup> The political identity of the post-war social state was founded upon the belief that the state could and should progressively intervene in both society and economy in order to increase the material prosperity and security as well as political rights of as broad a layer of society as possible. The success or failure of this project thus essentially rested upon the ability of the interventionist state to secure a “peaceful coexistence” between capitalism and democracy.<sup>79</sup> On the one hand the state intervened in the economic processes in order to tame and promote growth after the catastrophic experiences of the inter-war years collapse, and acted as an arbitrator between private industry and the trade unions. On the other hand, the social state sought to realise the “utopia” of the “work society” which neutralised the socially explosive conflicts derived from a society organised along principles of wage labour by a phenomenal expansion of democratisation, participation and rights for the majority of the population.

Yet as Habermas acknowledged in the early 1980s, this “utopia” of the social state society and the emancipatory discourse which accompanied it had largely been exhausted.<sup>80</sup> The problems of legitimacy experienced by the social state since the 1970s derive from an inner contradiction between aims and means of achieving its project of regulating the economy and intervening in social relations. For Habermas, the former created problems because of the inability of the state to guarantee employment and welfare structures due to the influence of relatively autonomous economic instances and the latter was problematic because of its underlying legalist interpretation. Whilst the reformist state aimed to cultivate an egalitarian structured social world, which also

---

<sup>77</sup> Habermas, *Die Krise des Wohlfahrtsstaats und die Erschöpfung utopische Energien.*(1984) in Habermas. 1992. op. cit. p. 111-12.

<sup>78</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>79</sup> Habermas. 1992. op. cit. p. 113.

<sup>80</sup> c:f Habermas. *ibid.* p. 37.

leaves room for individual self-realisation, this aim is undermined by the method of the legal-administrative translation of political programmes which results in ever-thickening layers of legal and para-state bureaucracy.<sup>81</sup> These considerations are related to a legitimacy problem of “late capitalism” which Habermas had identified only four years after Brandt’s assumption of the chancellorship.<sup>82</sup> Legitimacy crises essentially arise for Habermas when the socio-cultural system of society lacks the flexibility to adapt to the transformatory dynamic stimulated by the ceaseless process of socio-economic change. In the past, this disjuncture had been resolved by both fascist regimes, which repressed progress in the political cultural sphere and held the population in line by a tactic of permanent mobilisation, or conservative-authoritarian welfare systems, which sought to minimise the active political participation of the people by encouraging a form “privatisation” of the people into private citizens, employees and family members. For Habermas, such systems, however, prove less compatible with developed capitalism than the constitution of modern, mass, parliamentary democracy because dynamism in the socio-cultural sphere produces aspirations which authoritarian societies cannot fulfil.<sup>83</sup>

Yet the flexibility of the socio-cultural sphere is limited in the era of “organised capitalism” too, particularly by the powerful, semi-autonomous forces of economic interests and administrative bureaucracy. The technocratic approach of the social state towards reform fails to secure legitimacy because *Sinn* cannot be simply bureaucratically administered in tandem with social change.<sup>84</sup> At the same time as the level of legitimacy required by the state increases, due to its increased role in social-economic organisation, however, the less possible it is to reach for traditional bourgeois values such as effort, meritocracy, exchange values etc as they have increasingly been destroyed by the dynamic of “organised capitalism”. The ensuing motivation crisis and legitimacy crisis results from the increasing inability of a rigid socio-cultural system to adopt to the accelerated pace of social dynamism and the increasing gap thus produced between popular experience of society and the dominant system of social norms.<sup>85</sup> A more flexible system, however, and one which Habermas underlines, would take as its

---

<sup>81</sup> Habermas. 1984. p. 116-17.

<sup>82</sup> Habermas, Was heißt heute Krise? Legitimationsprobleme im Spätkapitalismus. in Merkur. XXVII Jahrgang. Heft 4/5. April/May. 1973.

<sup>83</sup> Habermas. *ibid.* p. 359.

<sup>84</sup> *ibid.* p. 357 and 1992. *op. cit.* p. 117.

starting point the level of progress achieved in the socio-cultural realm particularly through the media of science, modern art and universal moral values.<sup>86</sup> Upon each of these levels of socio-cultural transmission irreversible changes and progressions have occurred, with which a material concept of democracy must engage. National Socialism provides the most horrific example of the potential political reactionary consequences when the political system attempts to repress and degrade the level of socio-cultural progress achieved in science, art and moral values.<sup>87</sup>

In considering the question of how developments of the level of universal moral consciousness can be fused with the broader process of social norm creation, Habermas returns to the classical, republican concepts of democracy and in particular the process of law creation. The process of social modernisation stimulates ever newer demands, claims and values in society which undermine and challenge the legitimacy of dominant norms established in tradition. Habermas states that the principle of formal law derives from this conflict and allows for the liberation of the normative content of laws from the dogma of tradition thus enabling them to be set intentionally by the collective will of the people.<sup>88</sup> Whilst legal norms are, on the one hand, separated from the corpus of privatised moral norms, they require the active participation, and legitimacy, of the individual subject in the process of their creation - this process is thus based upon the democratic principle of intersubjectivity. The legitimacy of formal law is bound with the authority of a particular state over a particular area, yet, when raised to level of a general principle, no such boundaries exist for the morality of individual citizens.<sup>89</sup> Since principle morality is ultimately sanctioned only by the instance of conscience, its claim for universal validity contains an inherent conflict with the form of public morality which is bound to a particular state: thus there arises the latent and manifest conflict between the universal values derived from a humanist outlook and the particular loyalties placed upon the citizen of a particular state.<sup>90</sup> The only resolution of this conflict is the collapsing of the dichotomy between internal and external morality and a relativisation of the areas regulated by law and morality.<sup>91</sup> Habermas advocates

---

<sup>85</sup> *ibid.* p. 359.

<sup>86</sup> *ibid.* p. 362.

<sup>87</sup> *ibid.* p. 362.

<sup>88</sup> *ibid.* p. 363.

<sup>89</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>90</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>91</sup> *ibid.* pp. 363-4.

this action in the belief that in this manner the progressive developments wrought in the socio-cultural sphere can attain normative status in society as a whole and this, when formulated via the enunciated principles of communicative ethics, can contribute to the democratisation of late capitalist society. In this manner Habermas seeks to rescue the universal, democratic spirit of early capitalism which was undermined and eroded by the development of “organised capitalism”

Der Konkurrenzkapitalismus hat zum erstenmal streng universalistischcn Wertsystemen bindende Kraft gegeben, weil der Tauschverkehr selber universalistisch geregelt werden mußte und weil im übrigen der Äquivalenttausch eine im Bürgertum wirksame Basisideologie anbot. Nun bricht im organisierten Kapitalismus die Grundlage deieses Legitimationsmodells zusammen, während zugleich neue und vermehrte Legitimationsforderungen entstehen. Sowenig jedoch das System der Wissenschaft intentional hinter einen erreichten Stand kumulativen Wissens zurückfallen kann, so wenig kann auch das Moralsystem, wenn erst einmal praktische Diskurse zugelassen worden sind, einen kollektiv erreichten Stand des moralischen Bewußtseins einfach vergessen machen.<sup>92</sup>

Thus Habermas’ concept of legitimacy creation is based upon a radical restructuring of modern capitalist society in accordance with the progress attained at the level of morality. Habermas contends that the increasing gap between experience and norm promoted by progression on *all* levels of social relations has produced two main currents identifiable in youth counter-culture: on the one hand the “retreatist” current of drop-out culture, drug culture, hippies, phenomena of motivational decline, etc. On the other hand, Habermas has grounds for optimism in the existence of an “activist” current comprising the student movement, the school pupils and apprentice revolts, pacifists and women’s liberation.<sup>93</sup> In this earlier consideration of the question of legitimacy we encounter themes which Habermas has worked on from the 1960s to the present.

The distinct concept of “identity” does not really feature in Habermas’ work until the later specific advocacy of “post-traditional identity” in the critique of conventional national identity during the late 1980s. Whilst he rejects the discourse of identity creation as ultimately representing a flight from genuine socio-political problems and their mystification, Habermas’ concept of *solidarity* relates to similar problems of legitimacy creation and cultural hegemony. Neoconservatives invoke “cultural” arguments in order to mystify and divert potentially transformatory energies away from

---

<sup>92</sup> *ibid.* p. 364.

<sup>93</sup> *ibid.*

the social problems stimulated by economic-technological modernisation.<sup>94</sup> Habermas, on the other hand, seeks to assert the normative capacity of this emancipatory culture against bureaucratic or economic interests which conservatives attempt to preserve in the dogma of tradition. Thus it is not the project of legitimacy creation per se to which Habermas objects, but the *form* of solidarity which is cultivated in society and how this reflects, or not, the relationship between economic, bureaucratic and cultural areas. In turn, underlying this perception is the historical-philosophical position which seeks to secure a balance between socio-economic and political cultural moments of modernisation via the mediation of rational discourse. The neoconservative evocation of tradition aims to provide cultural compensation for the social dislocation and value heterogeneity characteristic of modern Free Market society and to stigmatise critical dissent. Habermas, on the other hand, seeks to cultivate precisely these critical counter-cultural moments and, upon the level of “universal moral consciousness”, restructure social relations in accordance with *their* progressive dynamic. He thus appears to attempt the inverse operation from that performed by neoconservatism and to assert progressive, socio-cultural currents against the power of bureaucracy and economic interests. We shall return to the specific critique of tradition shortly, before we do so it is useful to consider Habermas’ concept of solidarity and its role in progressively restructuring society.

Habermas perceives the emergence of three main currents in response to the decline of the social state project in its political and ideational terms: neoconservatism, right wing social democracy and the new social movements.<sup>95</sup> Neoconservative currents, which achieved particular resonance in the US and Britain of the 1980s, focus upon a liberalisation of the free market and the roll-back of the state’s economic regulatory capacity combined with a simultaneous political de-liberalisation of society. This finds political expression in the pursuit of a cultural policy which condemns critical dissent as treachery and from which cultural compensation for the socio-economic dislocation which can no longer be absorbed by the intermediary force of the social state is sought. Alongside this, Habermas perceives the changes in social democracy and the dominance of an approach which seeks to stabilise the status quo and rediscover the balance between the development of the social-welfare state and the modernisation of the

---

<sup>94</sup> Habermas. 1992. op. cit. p. 100.

market economy.<sup>96</sup> The chances of this approach are negatively assessed with reference to the declining power of the trade unions and the demographic and sociological change in the social state's traditional working class electoral constituency. For Habermas, both the sociological-political and socio-economic basis of this culture and expression of solidarity have been eroded, rendering a renegotiation of solidarity from the basis of the workplace highly unlikely.<sup>97</sup> It is the third form of response in the development of the post-1960s "new social movements", concerned with feminism, ecology, pacifism, regionalism, grass-roots and local initiatives etc, which Habermas finds most positive.

The new social movements offer a critique of both traditional conservative and social reformist approaches in that they polemicise against the economic-technological growth defended by the right and the bureaucratic legislation associated with reformism. These groups suggest that society is threatened by both commodification and bureaucratisation alike, both "money" and "power" are made culpable.<sup>98</sup> In the contemporary climate it is thus not only capitalism which requires taming and regulation but the interventionist state itself, and this perspective offers new and positive potential developments of social change. This attitude is reflected in the organisational structures of these groups which emphasise the importance of self-regulation and increasing the autonomy of cultural sub-systems. It is at this level that Habermas seeks to continue the modernist project, and in the new social movements he perceives the inheritors of the radical-democratic form of the social-state project jettisoned by right wing social democrats.<sup>99</sup> The collapse of the social state "utopia" of work society thus does not imply, as both neoconservatives and postmodernists claim, the termination of "utopia" but rather more the exhaustion of one form and the opening up of new possibilities other than a metaphysical "return to tradition".<sup>100</sup> Thus whilst the social state sought to rescue the legacy of nineteenth century bourgeois emancipation in "work" society, the next stage of synthesis is continued at the sub-level of autonomous groups, movements and discourses which form the "communication society" of the late twentieth century.<sup>101</sup>

---

<sup>95</sup> *ibid.* pp. 118-121.

<sup>96</sup> *ibid.* p. 118.

<sup>97</sup> *ibid.* p. 127.

<sup>98</sup> *ibid.* p. 118-122.

<sup>99</sup> *ibid.* p. 122.

<sup>100</sup> *ibid.* p. 110.

<sup>101</sup> *ibid.* p. 125.

Through the concept of solidarity, Habermas hopes to bridge the gap between the contextual, autonomous level at which these discourses and movements unfold and the generalising level of universal social values. This link is essential if the “autonomous public” is to acquire socially normative force against the powerful sectional interests of economic or bureaucratic instances. This restructuring of the social state project on a higher level thus involves for Habermas the mobilisation of the orientational resource of “solidarity” against the other orientational forces of economy and bureaucracy.<sup>102</sup> This constellation recalls the normative ideal of bourgeois democracy in the perception that political will is formulated and articulated through the interaction between “communicatively structured” social moments on the one hand, and state and economy on the other.<sup>103</sup> Yet as the state is not a neutral facilitator of these processes of social norm creation but itself an interested party, Habermas contends that the articulation of progressive socio-cultural programmes now assumes the form of self-organised interest groups which assert their interests and seek loyalty and agreement for their aims, and that this process of communication and rational discourse forms the inter-subjective web of an “autonomous public”. Habermas perceives three main areas of orientation in modern Western societies: political elites who realise their will through the state apparatus; the diverse, anonymous groups which regulate the productive and communication structures of society; and a third area consisting of elusive streams of communication which shape political culture and determine the “cultural hegemony”, or *Zeitgeist*, of society. Although the relationship between these areas is impossible to quantify, it appears to Habermas that until now the second arena of this developmental triumvirate has enjoyed predominance

Wie immer die empirische Antwort ausfällt, jedenfalls läßt sich unser *praktisches Problem* jetzt anschaulicher fassen: jedes Projekt, das die Gewichte zugunsten solidarischer Steuerungsleistungen verschieben möchte, muß die untere Arena gegenüber den beiden anderen oberen mobilisieren.<sup>104</sup>

This third area of orientation in modern capitalist society does not derive from “power” or “money” but rather from “values” which are cultivated, for Habermas, primarily from regionalist, feminist, pacifist, ecological discourse etc. Their development in the microsphere of daily communication produces a higher (and autonomous) level of intersubjectivity - these are autonomous publics engaging in an ever-developing

---

<sup>102</sup> *ibid.* p. 124.

<sup>103</sup> *ibid.* 125.

<sup>104</sup> *ibid.* p. 126.

dialogue around values. It is the task of these autonomous publics, via a combination of power and “intelligent self restraint”, to make the self-governing systems of state and economy sensitive to their intentional progress made via recourse to this process of radical-democratic will formation. For Habermas, this would only be realisable when the political parties were removed from the process of legitimacy creation

Vermutlich kann das nur gelingen, wenn die politischen Parteien *eine* ihrer Funktionen ersatzlos, d. h. ohne einem funktionalen Äquivalent bloß Platz zu machen, aufgeben: die der *Erzeugung* von Massenloyalität.<sup>105</sup>

This appears as a radical-democratic model which empowers the cultural system against political and economic interests. For Habermas, a more genuine form of legitimacy creation would be one which possessed the flexibility to adapt to challenges and changes from the cultural sphere, and which would grant these democratising impulses both parity with and autonomy from economic or political interests. As such it appears reminiscent of his earlier concept of a democratisation and politicalisation of the campus in the university reform debates of the 1960s. Since this period, Habermas’ critical discourse has focused upon the democratic and democratising potential of the counter-culture and its radical progeny in the 1970s and 80s. Whilst the social state project required the solidarity engendered by work which was strengthened in a now declining working class sub culture, the post-social state society is also dependant upon the cultivation of loyalty. Habermas radical resolution of this legitimacy problem assumes the form of empowering the intersubjective web of the “autonomous” public and thereby enabling the reformulation of solidarity in terms set neither by the state, employers nor politicians, but the alternative subculture itself.

Only within this form can the “utopian content” of “communication society” be realised. In contrast to conventional, and for Habermas misplaced, modernist formulations of progress, the utopia of communication society does not proclaim a total vision of society, but merely creates the normative structures through which the participants themselves are able to consider the concrete possibilities of improving life in accordance with their *needs* and from their own *initiative*.<sup>106</sup> Also, we may add, unlike previous social transformations which had invoked the principles of universal values, the emancipatory capacity of human reason and the potential of progress through social

---

<sup>105</sup> 1984. p. 127.

<sup>106</sup> 1992. 129.

transformation, this is an approach which argues for a revolution of *consciousness* over a social revolution. Through effecting a paradigm change at the level of legal and social norms, Habermas hoped to realise a more democratic restructuring of the relationship between socio-economic and political-cultural streams of modernisation. In the New Social movements of the 1970s, Habermas perceives a form of modern “civil society” which had inherited the radical core of the social state programme. Whilst Habermas appears to perceive in the new social movements the inheritors of the radical core of the social state project and therein the historical agency of social change, his priority is in the cultivation of “solidarity” in society. It is this turn which founds his concept of “identity” and *Verfassungspatriotismus* developed in the 1980s.

### 3.4 Post-Traditional Patriotism

In the critical engagement with neoconservatism in the 1980s, Habermas’ concept of a “progressive” or “enlightened” concept of social solidarity was developed into a discourse of *Verfassungspatriotismus* founded in a critical appreciation of indigenous history. This form of “post-traditional” identity was primarily concerned with developing critical consciousness of German national history and the anti-modernist *Sonderweg* in particular. This critical appreciation of the deviance of the historical German nation was invoked as source of inverse pride in the Federal Republic which, albeit culturally only since the 1960s, had successfully integrated itself into the Western political culture shunned by the nation state. In the national argumentation of the right, Habermas perceived a fundamental attack upon the post-national foundations of West Germany’s political-cultural *Westbindung* and an attempt to mobilise the experience of defeat of both “1968” and the social state for particularist, metaphysical values which sought to establish the legitimacy of the state in terms not dissimilar to the classic *Sonderweg*. It thus represented the most virulent and, after 1982, most politically influential critique of Habermas position of pursuing the “modernist project” in the present. The discourse of *Verfassungspatriotismus* and critical, “post-traditional” identity became over the 1980s the media through which this project was articulated, and concentrated in particular upon the dichotomy between the concepts of nation and democracy in modern German history.

In the critical discourse of *Verfassungspatriotismus* in the 1980s, Habermas expanded his earlier themes and his pro-modernist radical democratic concepts. Although one recognises the concepts of universal moralism, enlightenment culture, communicative reason mobilising “cultural solidarity” in society etc, they are brought in the 1980s into a new relationship with the Federal Republic. Whilst during the 1960s and 1970s this progressive discourse was invoked in the project of a radical reform of West German society, in the identity debates of the 1980s this discourse retained its radical pretensions towards social change, yet in the context of combating the national argumentation of the right was employed as a sophisticated legitimisation of the Federal Republic.

At the heart of *Historikerstreit*, for Habermas, lay the conflict between two distinct approaches to the contemporary social use of history and tradition in the Federal Republic.<sup>107</sup> Habermas’ positive orientation to modernist culture provides the philosophical-political standpoint from which he both rejects the attempted rehabilitation of the national idiom discredited by National Socialism, and instead advocates a “modernist” approach to resolving the identity question which is related to his earlier concept of cultivating phenomena of “cultural modernism” as a focus of social solidarity. In the neoconservative argumentation of the right Habermas perceived an attempt to regress the progress made in the political and cultural development of the Federal Republic, and as such he views this approach through the intellectual filter of critical history. Habermas’ critique of neoconservative cultural politics reveals his appreciation of the affinity between this current of conservative thinking and the older, inherently anti-democratic traditions of German conservatism in the pre-1945 period. In a speech given upon receipt of the Adorno Preis of 1980 in Frankfurt, Habermas offered the following political assessment of the neoconservative approach

Der Neokonservatismus verschiebt nämlich die unbequemen Folgelasten einer mehr oder weniger erfolgreichen kapitalistischen Modernisierung von Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft auf die kulturelle Moderne. Weil er die Zusammenhänge zwischen den willkommenen Prozessen der gesellschaftlichen Modernisierung einerseits, der catonisch beklagten Motivationskrise andererseits ausblendet; weil er die sozialstrukturellen Ursachen für veränderte Arbeitseinstellungen, Konsumgewohnheiten, Anspruchsniveaus und Freizeitorientierungen nicht aufdeckt, kann er, was nun als Hedonismus, mangelnde Identifikations- und Folgebereitschaft, als Narzißmus, Rückzug von Status- und Leistungskonkurrenz erscheint, unmittelbar einer Kultur zuschieben, die in diese Prozesse doch nur auf eine höchst vermittelte

Weise eingreift. Die Stelle der nichtanalytisierten Ursachen müssen dann jene Intellektuellen einnehmen, die sich dem Projekt der Moderne immer noch verpflichtet fühlen.<sup>108</sup>

Necoconservative discourse thus for Habermas corresponds to the schizophrenic attitude towards modernism which characterised the *Sonderweg* as represented in critical history. We can note how it is precisely the phenomena of “cultural modernism” which neoconservatives seek to repress which Habermas seeks to empower in society. This displays the inverted parallels between critical and neoconservative discourse which relate to the two distinct approaches to modernism which characterises these positions: the object of conservative suspicion and ire - “cultural modernism” - represents precisely the social phenomena of modernisation which Habermas seeks to mobilise against the economic and bureaucratic interests which conservatives seek to legitimise. Neoconservatism too operates from an understanding of the schism which exists in Western societies between cultural and economic and bureaucratic instances of modernisation. Yet right wing thought seeks to repress the radical elements of cultural modernism whilst simultaneously instrumentalising cultural arguments in the discourse of the nation in an attempt to compensate for the socially and politically disruptive consequences of rapid economic modernisation and the hypertrophic growth of bureaucracy. For neoconservatives, “modernism” has terminated, and cultural crisis derives essentially from subversive intellectuals and movements still committed to the transformatory modernist dialectic. The intellectual-political vacuum created by the termination of the modernist project is to be filled by recourse to myths of either religious or secular nature which form the basis of an identity which seeks primarily to cultivate legitimacy for the status quo.

History and the concept of tradition are the primary values from which neoconservatives hope to provide intellectual and political authority for the discourse of national identity. The conservative understanding of the social use of history relates to older right-wing traditions of “historicism” which seek to present a glorious past as the key and guide to present and future development. The conservative appreciation of “tradition” is that it may cultivate the sense of positive social solidarity required to master difficult times in the present and is thus predicated upon an overwhelmingly positive attitude towards the national past. Habermas related the current wave of “neohistoricism” to the conservative

---

<sup>107</sup> Habermas in *Historikerstreit*. 1987. op. cit. p. 71.

intellectual milieu of the Weimar Republic which likewise sought to counterpoise a positive “national” past against contemporary ineffectual democracy

Die Neokonservativen sehen ihre Aufgabe einerseits in der Mobilisierung der Vergangenheiten, zu denen man sich zustimmend verhalten kann, andererseits in der moralischen Neutralisierung anderer Vergangenheiten, die nur Kritik und Ablehnung herausfordern könnten. Walter Benjamin hat die “Einführung in den Sieger” ein Kennzeichen des Historizismus genannt. Das ist es, was uns Neokonservativen heute empfehlen.<sup>109</sup>

This appears an accurate assessment of the main thrust of neoconservative fetishisation of history which attempts to cultivate a sense of collective social loyalty via the naive identification with a glorious, victorious past at the expense of neutralising other, far from glorious traditions of history. As such, contemporary neoconservatism appears to exist in a continuity with traditional right wing discourse on past and present which characterised the *Sozialimperialismus* of the Second Empire and the right wing discourse of the inter-war years which attacked Weimar democracy as an “ungerman” Western import.<sup>110</sup> Hans Mommsen likewise perceived parallels between the inter-war period and the rise of national conservative currents since the late 1970s and related this to a creeping legitimacy crisis of the parliamentary system whose progressive, post-war dynamic was exhausted and was in fact, increasingly unable to address the primary political interests of the population. As in the Weimar Republic, history had become a “battleground” upon which claims for political consensus and legitimacy are fought out.<sup>111</sup>

Habermas’ concept of “post-traditional identity” represented a critique of the national argumentation of the right and also formed the intellectual forum in which a “modernist” concept of social solidarity was developed which, albeit in radically different form, also centred upon the question of the contemporary social use of historical traditions. For Habermas, the concept of “post-traditional” identity represented the attempt to develop the universal potential of occidental modernism in the present and to liberate this tradition from the “birth marks” of historicism and

---

<sup>108</sup> Jürgen Habermas, *Die Moderne - ein unvollendetes Projekt*. (1980) in, Habermas. 1992. op. cit. p. 39.

<sup>109</sup> *Die Kulturkritik der Neokonservativen in den USA und in der Bundesrepublik* (1983) in Habermas. 1992. op. cit. p. 100.

<sup>110</sup> Lukacs. 1980. op. cit. p. 76.

<sup>111</sup> Hans Mommsen, *Aufarbeitung und Verdrängung. Das Dritte Reich im westdeutschen Geschichtsbewußtsein*. in Dan Diner (Hg.) *Ist der Nationalsozialismus Geschichte? Zu Historisierung und Historikerstreit*. Fischer Verlag. Frankfurt/M. 1987. p. 82.

Marxism.<sup>112</sup> In reassessing the legacy of the emancipatory movements and ideas of the late eighteenth century, Habermas highlights the transformatory potential of the critique of tradition which lay at the heart of the revolutionary consciousness which developed during this period

Das Revolutionsbewußtsein ist die Geburtsstätte einer neuen Mentalität, die geprägt wird durch ein neues Zeitbewußtsein, einen neuen Begriff der politischen Praxis und eine neue Legitimationsvorstellung. Spezifisch modern ist das historische Bewußtsein, das mit dem Traditionalismus naturwüchsiger Kontinuitäten bricht; das Verständnis von politischer Praxis, welches im Zeichen von Selbstbestimmung und Selbstverwirklichung steht; und das Verstrauen auf den vernünftigen Diskurs, an dem sich jede politische Herrschaft legitimieren soll.<sup>113</sup>

It is essentially this “new mentality” which Habermas seeks to expand and develop in the altered conditions of contemporary society. In this context, Habermas notes that the nascent ideology of nationalism was itself, during this period, a “post-traditional” concept which sought a revolutionary political, intellectual and social break with the traditions and continuity of the ancien regime.<sup>114</sup> In distinction to French revolutionaries or later Marxism which drew inspiration from the emancipatory culture of the enlightenment when combined with social revolution, Habermas’ concentration upon the mentality of 1789 suggests the image that he seeks above all to achieve a “revolution in the mind” rather than a social revolution.<sup>115</sup> Habermas hopes to pursue the revolutionary project of modernism on a non- or post-revolutionary level as a catalyst for the further democratisation of society. This reassessment leads Habermas to conclude that of all the legal, political and ideological ideas of 1789, only the concepts of the democratic state and human rights have retained their exemplary value for the present. Yet, in the present these values are under threat from the every day experiences of poverty, inequality, abuse of human rights, repression etc. and with an ever increasing tempo. Furthermore, neoconservative and postmodern critiques of modernist political culture appear in the ascendancy and to correspond to a broader social mood in the West often described by the concept of the “end of the post-war period” and related to the collapse of the social state reform programme and the emancipatory politics of the 1960s.<sup>116</sup> It is this climate of a termination of “utopia” and specifically this modernist consciousness of the emancipatory potential of reason and social critique which inspires

---

<sup>112</sup> Habermas. 1968 *Zwei Jahrzehnte danach*.(1988) in Habermas 1990. op. cit. p. 25.

<sup>113</sup> Hab. 1992. p. 184-5.

<sup>114</sup> 1990. op. cit. p. 25.

<sup>115</sup> *ibid.* p. 99.

<sup>116</sup> *ibid.* p. 107.

neoconservatives to call for a return to the certainties of a glorious past. It is in the engagement with this discourse of national identity that Habermas recreates the “modernist consciousness” of 1789 and advocates the notion of “post-conventional” identity.

In characterising “neohistoricism” Habermas contends that conservatives are motivated by a basic faith or *Urvertrauen* in the past which allows for the continuation of historical traditions in the present. This basic trust in the validity of the past legitimises the handing down of traditions in a continuity from one generation to the next and the present merely continues that which has gone before. Habermas does not criticise the continuation of tradition - clearly he is indebted to emancipatory traditions in modern history - but the unquestioned, naive assimilation of tradition. The essential question for Habermas is whether or not particular values are *worth* continuing in the present and this can only be ascertained by a process of critical self-reflection of both past and present which demands rational justification for the continuation of particular traditions. In the German context, the catalyst of this process of critique is formed by the experience of National Socialism and Habermas suggests that the form of *Urvertrauen* in the past which resonates through neoconservative discourse was irrevocably destroyed in the gas chambers of Auschwitz.<sup>117</sup> After the experience of National Socialism and the fact that the Holocaust was perpetrated without impinging upon the *Alltag* of the majority of Germans, the only possible form of conscious historical existence is allowed by extreme suspicion towards unquestioned traditions and indigenous continuities which assert their normative legitimacy in their unquestioned status.

This forms for Habermas an essential distinction between the revolutionary consciousness around the turn of the eighteenth-nineteenth century and the contemporary version of the “new mentality” which he seeks to asset in the FRG. Whilst the emergence of the nation state and the break with the past traditions and continuities with the *ancien regime* was understood as an act of historical progress which behoved a responsibility for the future on the historical subject, after the experiences of the twentieth century this consciousness of temporal responsibility has

---

<sup>117</sup> Grenzen des Neohistorizismus. 1990. p. 150.

been expanded into the past.<sup>118</sup> After Auschwitz it is no longer possible to adopt the naive assimilation of national traditions, which must instead be passed through the filter of critical self-reflection. Whilst the present generation cannot “compensate” for the crimes of National Socialism, it is obliged to maintain the “weak force of memory” as an instance of solidarity with those innocent martyrs murdered under the NS regime and as an expression of the necessary critical distance to indigenous traditions which have formed the concept of identity. Whilst we cannot choose our traditions, we *can* exercise conscious choice in the manner with which we deal with them, thus

Aber unsere Identität ist nicht nur etwas Vorgefundenes, sondern eben auch gleichzeitig unser eigenes Projekt. Wir können uns unsere Traditionen nicht aussuchen, aber wir können wissen, daß es an uns liegt, *wie* wir sie fortsetzen. . . Jede Traditionsfortsetzung ist selektiv, und genau diese Selektivität muß durch den Filter der Kritik, einer willentlichen Aneignung der Geschichte, wenn Sie wollen: des Sündenbewußtseins, hindurch.<sup>119</sup>

We can thus appreciate the intimate relationship between the critical perspective of the indigenous national past and the continuation of the modernist project in the present. The critique of the German past and the NS past above all is not only an expression of decent moral repugnance towards the crimes committed by an older generation of Germans, but is also the definatory moment in restructuring the approach to traditions *per se*. Through the moral shock of National Socialism, Habermas hopes to rediscover the critical self-reflective approach to tradition which formed such an important component of the “revolutionary consciousness” which bore the modern epoch. Yet, unlike the democratic-nationalist or later Marxist formulation of progressive emancipation from past into future, the contemporary continuation of the revolutionary mentality is disciplined by the critical instance of the *Sündenbewußtsein* which, after Auschwitz, has replaced the now anachronistic notion of a heroic *Siegersgeschichte*. In diametrical opposition to the conservative fetishisation and celebration of national historical continuities, critical thinkers perceived the willingness and ability of West Germans to face up to the painful memory of a past which must never be allowed to “pass away” or be “normalised” as a form of litmus test for the moral-political substance of West German democracy. In this sense, Wehler inverted the neoconservative concept of contemporary political sovereignty based in a celebrated past as follows

---

<sup>118</sup> *ibid.* p. 155.

<sup>119</sup> *ibid.* p. 155-6.

Die Mündigkeit, die reflektierte Identität des Bürgers der Bundesrepublik wird sich auch künftig daran erweisen, wie selbstkritisch, wie frei von Arroganz und Verdrängungsgelüsten er mit der schweren Bürde unserer Vergangenheit umzugehen bereit ist. Daran wird sich seine innere Freiheit und Souveranität erweisen.<sup>120</sup>

Thus for Wehler, the critical engagement with the NS past exists in a reciprocal relationship with the articulation of contemporary democracy - again, one can perceive the inversion of the conservative appreciation of the relationship between “negative” past and “national” present. Like Habermas, Wehler, Mommsen and others, the historian Martin Broszat also perceived in the *Historikerstreit* the public-political arena in which antagonistic interpretations of West German political culture were played out. He too expressed serious misgivings about the intentions of those who, since 1983, with vehemence had argued for a homogenising national history in the post-national, pluralist, democracy of West Germany.<sup>121</sup> Like Habermas and Wehler, Broszat sharply criticised those currents who sought a return to the naive historicism of the nineteenth century in the debates over national identity and offered a similar interpretation of the relationship between critical engagement with the NS past and the cultivation of democratic consciousness in the present

Wer uns den selbstkritischen Umgang mit der eigenen Geschichte älteren und jüngeren Datums ausreden will, beraubt uns eines der besten Elemente politischer Gesittung, das in der Bundesrepublik entstanden ist. Besonders fatal ist die häufige Verkennung, die aufgrund der Nazi-Zeit notwendig gewordene Feinfühligkeit gegenüber der eigenen Geschichte sei ein kultureller und politischer Nachteil, verglichen mit anderen Nationen, und als gelte es, deren oft robusteres historisches Selbstbewußtsein, das sich politische meist als schädlich erwiesen hat, zu kopieren. Die deutsche Geschichte gehört nicht denen, die aus Geschichtsbewußtsein eine neue ordnungspolitische Funktion machen wollen, sondern denen, die die Auswirkungen staatlicher Aktivitäten auf dem Gebiet der Geschichtsforschung mit Sensibilität wahrzunehmen in der Lage sind.<sup>122</sup>

Broszat’s concept of *politische Gesittung* succinctly expresses the attitude of left-liberal thinkers towards value of a self-critical, reflective approach to the national past. The study of history *does* form a central aspect of contemporary value creation for these thinkers, yet one which is diametrically opposed to the practice of naive assimilation of tradition and uncritical identification with the past. It is the necessary critical distance and self-reflection behoved to post-fascist society after the shock of National Socialism

---

<sup>120</sup> Wehler. 1988. op. cit. p. 173.

<sup>121</sup> c:f Martin Broszat, Was kann das heißen: Konservative Wende?. (1986) in Martin Broszat, Nach Hitler. Der schwierige Umgang mit unserer Geschichte. DTV. München. 1988. p. 300-301.

<sup>122</sup> Broszat, Wem gehört die deutsche Geschichte ? 1988. op. cit. p. 310.

which forms the progressive and democratic content of the engagement with the past. Far from representing an inherent weakness of the Federal Republic, as invariably claimed by conservative thinkers on the subject, this self-critical impetus derived from the *Zivilisationsbruch* of National Socialism represents the best form of ensuring politically civilised behaviour in the present. Broszat stresses that history is ill-served as an *ordnungspolitische Funktion*, and with this he clearly has the discourse of national identity in mind pursued by conservative intellectuals and politicians since the return of the conservative coalition in 1982/3. Yet this naturally begs the question as to how the concepts of *politische Gesittung* and *ordnungspolitische Funktion* distinguish themselves in practical political discourse. In many ways this point forms the crux of post-unification arguments for the cultivation of a culture of contrition for the NS period as a source of value creation and progressive identity formation, and we shall return to this theme in detail in chapter five. In the pre-unification period, however, Broszat's *politische Gesittung*, Habermas' *Sündenbewußtsein* or Wehler's *selbstkritische Kontrolle*<sup>123</sup> all functioned in an antithetical capacity to the concept of conventional national identity. In this critical discourse, the memory of the national socialist past served primarily to de-legitimise the argument for a return to traditional values and a political-historical orientation towards the German nation state which had terminated, for critical thinkers, in Auschwitz.

The rejection of the discourse of national identity did not imply, as indicated, a rejection of the project of identity creation per se. The discrediting of traditional concepts of national consciousness and the physical division of the nation state after National Socialism also formed the foundation stone of the left-liberal concept of post-national identity. Both the facticity of division and the anti-Western, anti-democratic traditions associated with the historical German nation state were invoked to support a “post-national” reading of West German democracy in the terms of a progressive *Westbindung* into West European political traditions which preceded the creation of a unitary nation state in Germany. In this sense, the liberal historian Wolfgang Mommsen drew a parallel between the contemporary division of the German states and the pre-national, democratic traditions of the early nineteenth century. Mommsen concedes the importance of “history” as a source of orientation in contemporary society and yet he

---

<sup>123</sup> Wehler. 1988. op. cit. p. 144.

highlights rather the pre-national culture of Germany over the pomp and military ceremony of the *Kaiserreich* which he thoroughly rejects. As with many liberal treatments of the identity question, Mommsen considers the period of the unitary nation state as an *anomaly* of German history, the normality of which is far better represented by the absence of a unitary nation state. Thus, writing in 1983, Mommsen commented

Wenn nicht alles täuscht, so ist die Geschichte der deutschen Frage heute in ihre Normallage zurückgekehrt, in der sie sich über Jahrhunderte hinweg befand, nämlich der Existenz einer deutschen Kulturnation in der Mitte Europas, die in mehrere deutsche Staatsnationen gespalten ist. Alles spricht dafür, daß die Phase des konsolidierten nationalen Gesamtstaates von 1871-1933 eine Episode in der deutschen Geschichte gewesen ist und daß wir wieder, freilich auf höherer Ebene, den Zustand erreicht haben, der in Deutschland nach 1815 bestand, nämlich einer Mehrheit deutscher Staaten mit gemeinsamer kulturnationaler Zugehörigkeit.<sup>124</sup>

Thus, whilst Mommsen adheres to a sense of “national culture”, this is distinct from the concept of the nation state. Upon first glance this appears as a left-liberal inversion of the liberal-conservative approach of subsuming the Federal Republic within longer term national traditions. There are two essential distinctions to be made between these two approaches: firstly, Mommsen rejects the period of the nation state which is so important for conservatives as antidemocratic and concentrates rather upon pre-national cultural and intellectual traditions.<sup>125</sup> Secondly, Mommsen’s “cultural nation” is far removed from neo-romantic versions and rather more ought to reflect those historical, pre-national, democratic intellectual traditions which he considers were adopted by the contemporary, post-national, democratic state.<sup>126</sup> The strong attachment to Europe in post-war West Germany allowed, according to Mommsen, the liberation from such anti-democratic national traditions and provided a firm basis for the construction of a democratic state.<sup>127</sup> Given the acceptance of Austria and more recently of the GDR, Mommsen contends that national-plurality indicates more of a “normal condition” than the unitary nation and also offers a much stronger basis for the FRG’s attachment to democratic Western political culture. Thus whilst there appear certain parallels between this approach and that of liberal conservatives - the use of history, the concept of the *Kulturnation* - there also remain fundamental differences - the affirmation of West Germany’s “post-national” status as a condition of historical “normality” and most importantly the impression of an inherent dichotomy between the concept of the

---

<sup>124</sup> Mommsen. 1983 p. 76.

<sup>125</sup> Mommsen 1978. pp. 12-17.

<sup>126</sup> Mommsen. 1983. p. 78-9.

German nation state and modern, Western, democratic political culture. In this sense, Mommsen states that the historical-political description of the Federal Republic as a democratic system can only be asserted *against* elements of indigenous national history.<sup>128</sup>

Whilst this was expressed before the *Historikerstreit* and at the beginning of Kohl's conservative administration, it remained an important point of orientation throughout the decade and was frequently invoked against the national discourse of the Right. Indeed, in the attachment of West Germany into this Western European democratic tradition, Habermas perceived a source of progressive pride in the Federal Republic. It is worth repeating Habermas' oft quoted formulation of progressive patriotism at the height of the *Historikerstreit*

Die vorbehaltlose Öffnung der Bundesrepublik gegenüber der politischen Kultur des Westens ist die große intellektuelle Leistung unserer Nachkriegszeit, auf die gerade meine Generation stolz sein könnte. . . Der einzige Patriotismus, der uns dem Westen nicht entfremdet, ist ein Verfassungspatriotismus. Eine in Überzeugungen verankerte Bindung an universalistische Verfassungsprinzipien hat sich leider in der Kulturation der Deutschen erst nach- und durch Auschwitz bilden können. Wer uns mit einer Floskel wie "Schuldbesessenheit" (Stürmer und Oppenheimer) die Schamröte über dieses Faktum austreiben will, wer die Deutschen zu einer konventionellen Form ihrer nationalen Identität zurückrufen will, zerstört die einzig verlässliche Basis unserer Bindung an den Westen.<sup>129</sup>

The above excerpt neatly draws together the various strands of Habermas concept of "post-traditional" identity as a focus of social solidarity. This concept of Constitutional Patriotism invokes two legacies: firstly the universalist and democratic traditions of eighteenth-nineteenth century Western Europe and secondly the "refounding" of the Federal Republic in the 1960s. Inbetween these two progressive traditions lies the NS regime which acts as a critical fulcrum of this concept of Constitutional Patriotism. National Socialism represented for Habermas and other critical thinkers the reactionary apogee of the form of anti-Western and antidemocratic values which critical history described in the *Sonderweg* of the German nation state and which were antithetical to the progressive traditions of modernist culture. The collapse of this tradition with the defeat of National Socialism and the construction of a modern democratic, Western state thus represented a unique turn, or caesura, in modern German history represented by the

---

<sup>127</sup> Mommsen. 1978. p. 22.

<sup>128</sup> Mommsen. 1987. in Mommsen 1990. op. cit. p. 146.

inclusion into this Western enlightenment culture. As we have seen elsewhere, Habermas perceives this process of Westernisation in stages and after the economic and political inclusion into the Western community and the construction of a constitutional party democracy, West Germany was culturally included into this community only after the experience of the radical counter-culture during the 1960s. The critical engagement with the NS past formed a central component of the anti-authoritarian revolt and inspired varied democratic and radical discourses in which Habermas participated. The importance of this period lay founded in the fact that first during the 1960s was an open confrontation with the parental generation and a decisive political-cultural break with the legacy of the German nation possible, one important result of which was the emergence of “critical history”, developed by many of the left-liberal historians who participated in the *Historikerstreit*. In this sense, the political-cultural turn to the West is regarded as a moment of pride for the generation of critical thinkers who contributed to the democratisation of the FRG during the 1960s. Thus both the collapse of 1945 and the “refounding” of 1968 legitimise Habermas’ claim that Western democracy could only ever gain a foothold in German society *after* the experience of Auschwitz.

This is a perspective internalised in the concept of critical, post-traditional identity and from this standpoint, the attempt of neoconservative intellectuals to relativise or “normalise” the NS period in order to salvage a sense of national authority represents not only contrafactual historical dilettantism, but more importantly undermines the attachment of the Federal Republic to the democratic, cosmopolitan political and cultural traditions of Western Europe and the United States. In this sense Habermas contended that the relativisation approach of the right attacked the foundations of the moral-political consciousness of the Federal Republic.<sup>129</sup> Despite such threats, left-liberal intellectuals perceived cause for cautious optimism after the *Historikerstreit*. Particularly among the younger generation it was noted that the period of the “German nation” held little resonance in post-national West German democracy.<sup>131</sup> Habermas perceived broader forces at play and world-historical change in both the internal composition of Western societies and in the global East-West relations gave him ground for optimism.

---

<sup>129</sup> Habermas in *Historikerstreit*. 1987. op. cit. p. 75-6.

<sup>130</sup> Habermas. 1992. op. cit. 254-5.

<sup>131</sup> c.f Hans Mommsen in Diner. 1987. op. cit. p. 88.

With the prescience which one can expect of this far-sighted intellectual, Habermas outlines in the 1980s many of the themes which, during the 1990s, have come to dominate political discourse in the West. Whilst the evolution of Constitutional Patriotism in the Federal Republic clearly resulted from the specifics of German historical development, Habermas contended that all Western nations were on the way to becoming “post-national” societies. The phenomena of European integration, supra-national military alliances, global economic interdependence, economic migration, ethnic diversity, development of communications networks, human rights abuses, famine, solidarity with national liberation movements etc led Habermas to conclude that there was now no alternative to universal values.<sup>132</sup> In such phenomena and the East-West atomic stalemate, Habermas perceived the potential of pursuing the modernist project and for the first time overcoming the *Naturzustand* between the nations. Whilst the classic universal values of the democratic bourgeois state existed in a dichotomous relationship caught, as it were, between the particular loyalties demanded by the state from the citizen and the cosmopolitan solidarity with humanity, the post-national trend of Western societies represented an opportunity for realising the true universalisation of values around themes such as human rights, tolerance, pluralism, difference etc. Particularly in the politics of multiculturalism he perceives the chance to develop the cosmopolitanism of the modernist project in the present age. Whilst he welcomes the breakdown of traditional, particularist loyalties and models of large scale action such as Marxism, he also perceives the potential dangers emanating from the celebration of diversity, the coincidental, the private, sub-cultures etc. in that such trends away from the large scale could lead to a flight from the level of collectivity required to resolve social and global problems. In this sense, *Verfassungspatriotismus* based upon the universalisation of democracy and human rights should draw in the “last remnants” of solidarity in order to prevent a total atomisation of society.<sup>133</sup>

---

<sup>132</sup> Habermas. 1990. op. cit. p. 152.

<sup>133</sup> *ibid.* p. 16.

#### 4. *Westbindung* and Nation

In the following chapter I wish to examine liberal-conservative discourse of national identity which emerged in the wake of the unification of the two German states. Section one examines perceptions of the collapse of the GDR as a “victory” of the Federal Republic’s policy of *Westbindung*. Section two then considers arguments put forward by conservatives in the reconstruction of a “conventional” sense of identity. Section three examines attempts to reconstruct a conventional national identity with reference to the *Kaiserreich*.

##### 4.1 The Victory of the *Westbindung*?

The decision to unify Germany through Article 23 of the Basic Law, upon which basis the Saarland was finally integrated into the FRG in 1957, officially codified German unity as the *accession* of the GDR to the FRG. The fact that the West German Basic Law was considered by far the best constitution in German history and that the conservative “Alliance for Germany” partner of Kohl attained 48.14% of the vote in the first free elections to the *Volkskammer* on the 18.03.1990 (against the SPD’s 21.8%) displayed the popular legitimacy of this route to German unity. Advocates of Article 23 could cite the widespread support for the FRG model which among citizens of the former GDR was a popular symbol of aspirations to greater freedom and prosperity.<sup>1</sup> The appeal of integration into West Germany was underlined by the lack of support in the East for the notion of a reform of the GDR along democratic lines which would, however, retain an orientation towards socialist principles as expressed in the plea of intellectuals *Für unser Land*.<sup>2</sup> In the West, the generally more cautious approach to reunification by the SPD, typified in Lafontaine’s suggestion that national unity represented a temporary stage in the broader process of the creation of a “United States of Europe” contrasted with Kohl’s promise of *blühende Landschaften* in a united nation

---

<sup>1</sup> cf Interview with Wolfgang Schäuble (then Minister of Interior) and Markus Meckel (then vice president of the “GDR-SPD”) concerning unity via Article 23 or 146 in, ‘Der Spiegel.’ Nr.12/ 44. Jahrgang. 19.März 1990. p.48-57.

<sup>2</sup> In the failure of such alternative GDR concepts and the desire to join the West, Claus Offe speaks of 1989 as an “exit” revolution. cf Claus Offe, ‘Wohlstand, Nation,, Republik. Aspekte des deutschen Sonderwegs vom Sozialismus zum Kapitalismus.’ in Hans Joas, Martin Kohli (Hg) ‘Der Zusammenbruch der DDR.’ Suhrkamp. F./M. p. 293.

enabled the ruling coalition to profile itself as *the* engineers of German unity.<sup>3</sup> The assertion that the CDU represented the guardians of the project of German unity in the present was supported by a reading of post-war history which cast the CDU as the historic defenders of German unity throughout the Cold War. This approach evoked the impression of a conservative, anti-Communist continuity which culminated in the transcendence of the post-war division. For Kohl, the events of 1989 displayed not only the superiority of West German society and economy but also represented the historical vindication of the policies of the CDU since Adenauer. Kohl constructs a continuity between the declared aim of the first Chancellor of the FRG to advance the cause of German unity within the context of binding the FRG to the West.<sup>4</sup> This reading of reunification as a part of the heritage and conscious political aim of the CDU, together with the inference of SPD unreliability in the national question, presents the CDU as both the contemporary and historical “guardian” of national unity. This is a perception which has become popular in conservative commentaries of division and unification throughout the 1990s. Upon the commemoration of the fiftieth anniversary of the end of the war in Europe, Bavarian Prime Minister and CSU chairman Edmund Stoiber likewise stressed the “far-sightedness” of the Western integration policy of the FRG during the 1950s

Es dauerte für den Westen Deutschlands die angesichts des totalen Zusammenbruchs nur kurze Spanne von zehn Jahren, nach der die Bundesrepublik Deutschland wieder souverän, Mitglied der NATO und wenig später Gründungsmitglied der EWG wurde. Die transatlantische Partnerschaft mit den USA war hierfür die Grundlage. Sie sicherte dem Westen Europas 50 Jahre Frieden. Diese Adenauersche Außenpolitik war die historisch richtige Antwort auf den 8. Mai . . .

---

<sup>3</sup> cf Renate Fritsch-Bournazel, ‘Europe and German Unification.’ Berg Publishers, New York/Oxford. 1992.pp.193-4 and 219. Mary Fulbrook, ‘Germany 1918-1990. The Divided Nation.’ Fontana Press, An imprint of HarperCollins Publishers, London, 1991.p.338, Harold James, ‘Vom Historikerstreit zum Historikerschweigen. Die Wiedergeburt des Nationalstaates.’ Wolf Jobst Siedler GmbH, Berlin. 1993.p.45. Offe perceives in this the basis of an elite level nationalism employed to create mass acceptance for the process of economic restructuring of the GDR. op. cit. p. 285. Evans and James likewise perceive the main thrust to unity driven from economic factors. cf Evans. 1997. op. cit. p. 218. James offers a more pessimistic view of the possibilities of economic nationalism and argues instead for a strong institutional sense of identity in order that the “obsession” with economic affairs not be “imposed” on Europe. James. 1994. p. 246.

<sup>4</sup> Thus on the eve of reunification Kohl reiterated Adenauer’s belief that German and European unification were “two sides of the same coin” in, ‘Verhandlungen des Deutschen Bundestags.’ Stenographische Berichte. 11. Wahlperiode 173/178. Band.151. 1989. ‘Bericht zur Lage der Nation im geteilten Deutschland.’ 173 Sitzung. Mittwoch den 8. November.1989. pg 13018 also cf Helmut Kohl, ‘Ich wollte Deutschlands Einheit.’ Dargestellt von Kai Dieckmann und Ralf Georg Reuth. Ullstein Buchverlag GmbH, Berlin Propyläen Verlag.1996.pg 10-11.

Die Entscheidung für die Westbindung und für Europa war mit die Voraussetzung für die Zustimmung aller Nachbarn zur deutschen Einigung 1990.<sup>5</sup>

From this perspective, the *Westbindung* after 1945 is retrospectively claimed as a historical antecedent to the eventual transcendence of the post war order and German reunification in 1989-90. This is a reading which tends to underplay the role of the Cold War in facilitating the “friendly” relations between the Western allies and the Federal Republic. The notion that Adenauer’s policy of Western integration was the “correct answer” to the capitulation of the 8 May and that, in turn, this laid the foundations for eventual unification relativises the influence of the Cold War constellation in both creating the two divided states and also precipitating their unification in 1989-90. Whilst Adenauer undoubtedly presented the case for reunification in terms of integration into Western Europe and the Atlantic Alliance, it is problematic to infer that German unity was the vision which drove his political engagement and to invoke him as the “father” of German unity as common among mainstream conservative politicians.

Perhaps the most famous attack by Schumacher on Adenauer came during the parliamentary discussion over German membership of the International Ruhr Authority in November 1949 which the SPD rejected as a forsaking of sovereignty. Whilst Adenauer soberly reflected that Germany possessed no such sovereignty rights at all due to the unconditional surrender and Occupation Statute of the Allied High Commissioners, Schumacher famously criticised him as a craven *Bundeskanzler der Alliierten*.<sup>6</sup> Marion Gräfin Dönhoff also recalls Adenauer’s indifference to the concept of unity noting that as the Berlin Wall was constructed in August 1961 it took the Chancellor a full nine days before he visited West Berlin preferring instead to embark on his planned election tour of Bavaria as if nothing had happened.<sup>7</sup> Adenauer’s prioritisation of integration into the West reflected the facticity of US and Soviet hegemony in the post-war years. The directive to the military commander in chief of the US occupation forces from April 1945 stated quite clearly that *no political activities*

---

<sup>5</sup> ‘Rede des Bayerischen Ministerpräsidenten Dr. Edmund Stoiber bei der Feierstunde anlässlich des 50. Jahrestages des Kriegsendes vom 8. Mai 1945 in Aschaffenburg.’ Bayerische Staatskanzlei: Rede des Ministerpräsidenten vom 8.5.1995, <http://www.bayern.de/Politik/Reden/1995-05-08.html>, p.4.

<sup>6</sup> cf Habel, Kistler. 1987.p.17-19.

<sup>7</sup> According to Dönhoff, during this election tour, Adenauer also missed few opportunities to criticise the Mayor of Berlin Brandt which, under the circumstances, caused a great deal of indignation, cf Marion Dönhoff, ‘From Foe to Friend. The Makers of the New Germany from Konrad Adenauer to Helmut Schmidt.’ Weidenfeld and Nicolson. London. 1982.p.77.

*shall be countenanced, unless authorised by you.*<sup>8</sup> The SMAD operated from a similar basis and although the newly refounded KPD under the exiled Moscow leaders quickly assumed a prominent role politically cohering the zone, Soviet commanders left little ambiguity towards where power lay.<sup>9</sup> Adenauer himself was removed from the office of Lord Mayor of Cologne by the British authorities on October 6 1945 in censure of his rehiring of former Nazis and underrepresentation of “anti-fascist” parties in the city administration and following indignation at his first public speech in which he appeared to deny any German culpability for the disaster and concentrated upon the German people as the real victims.<sup>10</sup> Relations with the occupying forces only changed under the aegis of the emerging Cold War and the desire of each Superpower that “their” German zones be integrated into the broader East - West international and domestic political constellation. Both the “Westernisation” of the FRG, which liberal conservatives perceive as the “service” of Adenauer and the “Sovietisation” of the GDR after 1947 and the creation of the West economic zones and the dropping of the notion of a “German” route to socialism,<sup>11</sup> were ultimately products of supra-German forces. As Brigitte Seebacher-Brandt questions, would Kurt Schumacher have been in a position to suggest any alternative to the US if he had assumed the chancellorship in 1949 instead of Adenauer?<sup>12</sup>

Notions of a continuity of the Adenauerian *Westbindung* also underplay the changes brought about during the 1960s and the *Ostpolitik* of the social-liberal coalition which, in turn, also reflected developments between the Cold War Superpowers and the onset of a period of détente between East and West. The vociferous opposition of Barzel’s CDU and CSU against any recognition of the GDR and their inability to bend with changing global constellation reflected the more general inflexibility of the right and its reluctance to break out of the immediate post-war authoritarian and anti-Communist position of the Hallstein Doctrine.<sup>13</sup> Interestingly, casting a post-unification retrospective eye over the debates around *Ostpolitik* Kohl appears to present this

---

<sup>8</sup> Pulzer. 1995. op. cit. p. 23.

<sup>9</sup> cf Norman M. Naimek, ‘The Russians in Germany. A History of the Soviet Zone of Occupation, 1945-1949.’ Harvard University Press. Massachusetts. US. 1997. pp. 11-16.

<sup>10</sup> cf Herf. 1997. op. cit. p. 213.

<sup>11</sup> cf Wolfgang Leonhard, ‘Die Revolution entläßt ihre Kinder.’ Ullstein. Darmstadt. 1962. pp. 377-380.

<sup>12</sup> Seebacher-Brandt. 1992. p. 37.

<sup>13</sup> Sontheimer. 1979. op. cit. p. 25

development as a CDU inspired turn. Kohl refrains from invoking the SPD names most closely associated with *Ostpolitik*, Brandt, Scheel, Bahr and rather more associates this with Erhard and Grand Coalition Chancellor Kiesinger.<sup>14</sup> The only acknowledgement of CDU intransigence over the issue is on the refusal to accept the demand forwarded by sections of the SPD over the *Grundlagen* treaty of 1972 for a recognition of a separate GDR citizenship and the retention of the principle of *jus sanguinis* - an objection which seen in the context of 1989-90 could be presented as a wise foresight. In contrast to CDU interpretations of Adenauer as the “father” of later unification, Seebacher-Brandt considers the SPD under Brandt as the only post-war party to truly represent a pragmatic national interest. For Seebacher-Brandt, the high-point of an otherwise “embarrassing” history was the *Ostpolitik* of the social-liberal coalition which according to his widow, managed to combine co-operation with the foreign policy interests of the US with a more independent, assertive line on German-German relations which was articulated in the language of common nationality.<sup>15</sup>

Sadly, for Seebacher-Brandt, this national reference point increasingly dissipated and by the 1980s the politics of both SPD and CDU-CSU were characterised by a tacit acceptance of the German-German status quo. Despite the annual rhetorical lip-service to the “aim” of the Basic Law in the *Bericht zur Lage der Nation* Seebacher-Brandt contends that *Die deutsche Einheit galt als ein Ziel ohne Realitätsgehalt*.<sup>16</sup> Chancellor Kohl himself appears to have concurred with such sentiment when he, on a diplomatic trip to Moscow in 1988, confessed to the then political editor of the *Financial Times* David Marsh that he would never see German unification.<sup>17</sup> Similarly the official reception of Honecker in Bonn in 1987 with full military honours added legitimacy to the independent, if co-operative, status of the two German states.

Attempts to reconstruct a concept of the *Westbindung* whose primary aim was the fulfilment of the aim of unity inscribed into the preamble of the Basic Law reflect contemporary concerns to cultivate a sense of continuity and “normality” for the unification of the two states over 1989-90. The *de-facto* discontinuity represented by

---

<sup>14</sup> Kohl. 1996. p. 19.

<sup>15</sup> Brandt. *ibid.* p. 34

<sup>16</sup> *ibid.* p. 38.

<sup>17</sup> David Marsh. 1995. p. 25. Kohl later re-interpreted this as the belief that he would never see unification as German Chancellor.

unification is recast, in such readings, as a continuity of Adenauer's *Westbindung* and in this manner, the transcendence of German division formally codified in the preamble of the Basic Law is reinterpreted as a feature of pragmatic West German political engagement. In essence, this approach casts the particularist *West German* claim to national legitimacy which emerged during the events of 1989 back into the history of the rival German states. In this sense, Brigitte Seebacher-Brandt contends *Die Suche nach dem Selbstverständnis des geeinten Deutschlands ist eine Suche auch nach der deutsch-deutschen Vergangenheit*.<sup>18</sup> Although Seebacher-Brandt contests the interpretation of Adenauer as the father of German unity and instead emphasises Willy Brandt as the most successful "national" West German politician she appears to concur with CDU authors in her suggestion that this history is to be written from a West German perspective on the basis of its legitimacy as a free democratic society in contrast to the "illegitimate" society of East Germany.<sup>19</sup> From this perspective, the "Westernisation" of former East German society should be complimented with a "Westernisation" of post-war German-German history - a claim which is likewise legitimised by reference to the democratic superiority of the FRG.

It is interesting, and given such sentiment perhaps hardly surprising, to observe that the much sought after Westernisation of the GDR has become for a significant section of the former East German population a focus of resentment in post-unification society. Contrary to some West German perceptions that this testifies to an ingrained lack of initiative<sup>20</sup> or to the resentments of former beneficiaries of the regime<sup>21</sup> this must rather more be understood within the context of the failure of the terms on which unification was presented to materialise. Only two years after unification a commentary in *Der Spiegel* noted

Nun rächen sich die vielen Lügen, mit denen die Einheit schöngeredet, der Wähler getäuscht, die Macht erhalten wurde; blühende Landschaften, keine Steuererhöhungen, Markwirtschaft- am zweiten Jahrestag der deutschen Einheit sind diese Versprechungen im Volke nichts mehr wert.<sup>22</sup>

---

<sup>18</sup> Brigitte Seebacher-Brandt, 'Die Deutsch-deutschen Beziehungen: Eine Geschichte von Verlegenheiten.' in Jesse, Mitter. op. cit. 1992. p. 16.

<sup>19</sup> *ibid.* p. 17.

<sup>20</sup> Schäuble. in Langguth. 1997. op. cit. p. 284.

<sup>21</sup> Michael Mertes, 'Germany's Social and Political Culture: Change Through Consensus?' In Michael Mertes, Steven Muller, Heinrich August Winkler (eds.) 'In Search Of Germany.' New Brunswick Transaction. London. 1996. p. 4.

<sup>22</sup> 'Der Spiegel.' 05.10. 1992. p. 42.

In the course of unification, the East German economy lost its trading markets in the East with the dissolution of the *Rat für gegenseitige Wirtschaftshilfe* in June 1991, lost around 67% of its obsolete capital stocks and was subjected to a process of mass privatisation and subsequent disproportionate unemployment.<sup>23</sup> Unemployment has continued to remain disproportionately high in the former East and the official figures released for 1997 revealed Sachsen-Anhalt, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern, Thuringia, Brandenburg and Saxony assuming the top five places.<sup>24</sup> Such phenomena clearly undermine the proclaimed inclusion of the East German population into the prosperous West German community and it is little surprise that surveys of the East German population have revealed that e.g. in Mecklenburg Vorpommern according to estimates of the *Landesjugendamt* around 80% of youth consider themselves to be second class citizens<sup>25</sup> Whilst unification was popularly understood and presented as an opportunity to partake in the economic and liberal successes of post-war West Germany, 1989-90 also clearly signalled the transcendence of not only the GDR but also the post-war FRG. Whilst the East German region was obviously more seriously effected by the process of economic unification, in the West too during the 1990s, as elsewhere in the West, the tenets of the postwar social state have been subjected to reform. The Federal Republic extended substantially more democratic choice to its citizens than the GDR, offered greater room for opposition and through its relative material prosperity also offered a higher standard of living. The collapse of the GDR and the end of the Cold War, however, also raised the question of how far on could still speak of “West Germany” in the post-Cold War order. Writing shortly after unification, the historian Arnulf Baring expressed this sense of transience in an articulation of nostalgia for post-war West Germany

Wir haben die alte Bundesrepublik, solange sie lebte, nie für sehr gemütlich gehalten, sondern für sehr umkämpft und krisengeschüttelt. Aber im Rückblick erscheint sie dennoch als eine idyllische Phase unserer Geschichte.<sup>26</sup>

Baring’s retrospective attachment to the Federal Republic reveals a common sentiment among West German, and indeed East German opinion, which reflects a sense of unease

---

<sup>23</sup> cf Gerline Sinn, Hans-Werner Sinn, ‘Kaltstart. Volkswirtschaftliche Aspekte der deutschen Vereinigung.’ DTV. 1993.p. 55

<sup>24</sup> cf ‘Jahresbericht der Bundesregierung zum Stand der Deutschen Einheit 1998.’ Arbeitslosenquoten 1997. at <http://www.bundesregierung.de>.

<sup>25</sup> cf ‘Der Spiegel.’ 07. 12. 1992. p. 26.

<sup>26</sup> Arnulf Baring, ‘Deutschland, was nun ?. Ein Gespräch mit Dirk Rumberg und Wolf Jobst Siedler.’ Wolf Jobst Siedler Verlag GmbH. Berlin.1991.p.15.

at the passing of the certainties of the post-war order. During the euphoria of 1989-90, West German politicians could cite the clear illegitimacy of the GDR state in the eyes of the citizenry as a form of backhanded compliment for the FRG. Yet during the 1990s, the question of state legitimacy has become a central concern of the political class. In this sense, perceptions of the crisis of legitimacy of the GDR state mirror anxieties of the West German political class in the face of heterogeneity and potential social disharmony.

#### 4.1.1 The Victory of the Nation?

It is within this context that the liberal conservative reading of unification as the result of Adenauer's *Westbindung* is supplemented by an approach which understands the FRG not only as the more economically and politically successful state of the Free West but also as the custodian of "national values". For conservatives of all shades, unification represented an opportunity to translate the academic debates over the concept and legitimacy of the "German nation" into concrete political practice. Reconsidering these debates some time after unification, Kohl could perceive a historical vindication of his controversial national position during the 1980s which suggests that the CDU took national values into a form of "custody" during the Cold War which may now be unproblematically "de-thawed" in united Germany

Mich beunruhigte, daß man in vielen politischen Kreisen in der Bundesrepublik immer weiter von dem Gedanken abrückte, daß die Einheit der Nation trotz staatlicher Teilung fortbestand. Hier wurde einfach nicht zur Kenntnis genommen, daß das Nationalbewußtsein kein beliebiger Wert ist, den man nach Laune akzeptieren oder von sich weisen kann. Solange sich die Deutschen gegenüber anderen Nationen als Deutsche verstanden, war ihre Nation eine Tatsache. Die Menschen, die in beiden Teilstaaten lebten, gehörten unstreitig zum deutschen Volk, auch wenn sie als Deutsche in verschiedenartigen Gesellschaftsformen lebten. Sie waren nach wie vor deutscher Nationalität, auch wenn die Gemeinsamkeiten, die ein Volk als Einheit verbinden, durch die Trennung geschwächt waren. Diesen Erosionsprozeß galt es aufzuhalten und im Gegenzug das Zusammengehörigkeitsgefühl der Deutschen zu stärken. Dazu gehörte es nach unserem Verständnis, nach dem Verständnis des Grundgesetzes, festzuhalten am Ziel der staatlichen Einheit, an der Wiederherstellung der Identität von Nation und Staat.<sup>27</sup>

In this excerpt it becomes clear that for Kohl the media of synthesising *Westbindung* and national unity is a concept of "national consciousness" which was preserved by the

---

<sup>27</sup> Helmut Kohl. 1996. p.22.

CDU and bridged the division of the two German states in an abstract community of national “belonging”. Interesting is Kohl’s understanding of national consciousness which is presented here as a naturalised concept and is ascribed a transhistorical value. In this reading, national consciousness appears as a pre-political phenomenon which exists independent of state composition and appears to override subjective consciousness. As such this appears as a faithful representation of neo-romantic notions of the *Kulturnation* cohered by common language, culture and history. Kohl clearly perceives in unification the historical vindication of the national orientation of conservative politicians and intellectuals during the 1980s who managed, despite the criticism of West German intellectuals, to “keep alive” the sense of national consciousness which apparently united the two divided German states upon the level of an abstract, ephemeral identification with the “German nation”. Yet with unification the abstract became the concrete and the value of national consciousness changed from representing a discourse which was primarily employed to cohere the West German status quo around a core of “traditional” values to a political sentiment which had overcome the post-war division. In this context there has been a perceptible shift in the relationship between *Westbindung* and “German nation”. Whilst during the 1980s liberal conservatives sought to integrate the legacy of the German nation into West German political culture, since unification this period itself has become a “legacy” which is, for liberal conservatives, to be inserted into the political culture of the nation. Thus in a speech upon the opening of the *Haus der Geschichte der Bundesrepublik* in Bonn in 1994, Kohl articulated the following understanding of the need for an integration of the positive post-war experience of the Western integrated *Rechtsstaat* into the newly unified German nation arguing

Dieses Haus hier in Bonn, einer Stadt, der die Bundesrepublik Deutschland und wir alle so viel verdanken, dieses Haus der Geschichte der Bundesrepublik Deutschlands erinnert an eine Vergangenheit, die in unsere Zukunft eingehen muß.<sup>28</sup>

Kohl clearly still desires a more traditional orientation towards the national past yet his approach is characterised by a neutralisation of the NS past and the contention that a democratic tradition of the nation existed before, during and beyond the NS dictatorship and was maintained in the FRG. Whilst the FRG was the most successful and democratic period of recent German history, the problem which liberal conservative

---

<sup>28</sup> Presse und Informationsamt der Bundesregierung. Nr.59. Bonn, den 17 Juni 1994. ‘Vergangenheit, die in die Zukunft eingehen muß.’ p. 559.

interpretations face is revealed in Kohl's statement. The fact remains that the period of post-war *Westbindung* and the FRG is celebrated as a *legacy* already suggests that this is a period which has in fact passed into history. In this context the relationship between "legacy" and political culture has been inverted since the period of division and it now appears that the FRG provides a positive experience (which in this reading of the *Westbindung* retained its "national" orientation") which must be cultivated in the unified nation state.

The image that the Federal Republic had fulfilled its historical mission as the curator of the nation and national consciousness which had now succeeded the West German state is evident in the following triumphal interpretation of unification by the political historian Hans-Peter Schwarz. Schwarz accepts that the hour of the FRG's hiatus also represented the hour of its demise yet this appears as cause for celebration rather than mourning and invokes the image of the FRG as the historical "guardian" of the national idea throughout the period of (artificial) division

Erst durch den Beitritt der DDR am 3. Oktober erhält die Bundesrepublik alles, was ihr bisher fehlte: das ganze deutsche Staatsvolk und klare Grenzen, die im Inland gleichermaßen akzeptiert sind wie von den Nachbarn. Der dünnblütigen, wenn auch wohlmeinenden Professorenfiktion des Verfassungspatriotismus bedarf es nun nicht mehr. Staatsvolk, Staatsgebiet und Staatsgewalt fallen wider zusammen. Vielleicht entdecken die Deutschen sogar erneut, was ein Staat ist. Erstmals in der neueren deutschen Geschichte können sich nun alle Schichten und alle Regionen Deutschlands mit Staat, Geschichte, Volk und Verfassung ruhig und selbstbewußt identifizieren. Ein Land hat nach langen Irrwegen zu sich selbst gefunden.<sup>29</sup>

For Schwarz, unification represented both a fulfilment and simultaneous transcendence of the FRG but this was not a higher synthesis into the new and unknown but is perceived as the "return" to a supposedly "normal" historical condition. The assertion of a "return to normality" remains a central aspect of conservative interpretations of reunification. In this reading of recent German history, the post war division is rendered not only a provisional arrangement, which in itself is a highly dubious point, but the successful FRG is depicted as an incomplete social entity and as such the post-war division of the nation is transformed into the actual *Sonderweg* of German history. According to this reading, only in the moment of its transcendence did West Germany become a wholly legitimate social body as it could once more regard itself as a

---

<sup>29</sup> Hans-Peter Schwarz.1990.p.159.

sovereign, unitary nation state.<sup>30</sup> This appears as another way of naturalising reunification by means of denying *both* German states any real historical legitimacy and celebrating national unity as the return to an “essential”, natural condition. The same evidently applies for the perceived dominance of the critical ideological paradigm of the post war FRG which aimed to substitute the discredited concepts of traditional nationalism with a “constitutional patriotism” informed with a “post-national”, democratic spirit. As such, this interpretation rejects the “artificial” republican concepts of social solidarity represented by notions of “Constitutional Patriotism” and welcomes their transcendence upon the returned “natural condition” of national community. Whilst Schwarz may regard the post war FRG with a much cooler retrospective eye than many, his contention that Germany has rediscovered its “true” status as a nation state and as such has returned to *the* historically legitimate German continuity remains a popular interpretation of the events of 1989. In this reading, the FRG appears as the well meaning, yet temporary, executive of the legacy of the historical German nation state. This interpretation thus perceives a specific German element to the world historical “victory of the West” which heralds the long awaited “return” of the nation state to German society after a period of apparent misguided development and historical abnormality. In this sense, Schwarz reflects conservative awareness of the limitations of casting unification as a “Westernisation” process and continuity with the post-war Westbindung. Whilst the collapse of the Eastern Bloc fuelled a sense of Cold War triumphalism, German unification represented more of the swansong of the post-war Western order which was cohered by the politics of anticommunism. For conservatives, the answer to the question of what follows lies with the understanding of unification as a return to national normality which reflects a longer-term continuity. Thus for Schwarz, unification has displayed that *Die deutsche Geschichte geht weiter als die Geschichte der Bundesrepublik Deutschland*.<sup>31</sup>

#### 4.2. “Hard Times” and National Identity

Whilst the victory over the socialist alternative lent the West a sense of superiority, the evaporation of the Communist opponent also placed a question mark over the terms in which Western society had legitimised itself as a Western democracy for over forty

---

<sup>30</sup> Marsh notes this paradox at the end of the period of German division thus, The nation could become whole again only once it had ceased to think and behave as a nation. Marsh.1995.p.23.

years. Commenting upon the state of the *innere Einigung*, five years after unification, Kohl's lieutenant and chairman of the CDU-CSU parliamentary faction, Wolfgang Schäuble, noted the paradoxical situation of the West after the victory over communism

Es ist schon merkwürdig: Da hat die Idee der Freiheit und der Demokratie einen grandiosen Sieg über die Unfreiheit und Diktatur errungen, und ausgerechnet die Staaten des freien Westens, die über Jahrzehnte Hort von Freiheit und Demokratie waren, stehen jetzt, da der real existierende Sozialismus im Orkus der Geschichte verschwunden ist, in einer Krise ihres Selbstverständnisses.<sup>32</sup>

Conservative politicians and intellectuals celebrated the triumph over the socialist alternative and attempted to locate the return of the nation within the longer term trends of *Westbindung* and the “shared values” of the “Free West”. It soon became quite clear, however, that the collapse of the Eastern Bloc had not only transcended the post-war arrangements in Eastern European states but had also exercised an equally corrosive impact upon the values and self-perception of the West. As Schäuble notes, during the Cold War, the concept of “antitotalitarianism” and the threat of mutual atomic annihilation had acted as a form of social and political cement in the West. With the disappearance of the “totalitarian” enemy, however, the established self definition of the “Free West” has also evaporated leaving behind a political vacuum which demands the development of values more in tune with contemporary socio-political reality. For conservative thinkers the only value capable of fostering both a sense of unity between East and West and cultivating authority for the state is to be found in the concept of national identity founded in historical consciousness.

Kohl expressed his evaluation of the social role of the concept of the nation in an interview with TIME magazine in summer 1990 which coupled the declaration of the continued Western commitments of the new Germany internationally with a coded plea for a return to conventional patriotic sentiment domestically. Synthesising the concepts of *Westbindung* and the German nation, Kohl contended “the Fatherland is Germany, the future is Europe”.<sup>33</sup> As such, unification appears as both the historical vindication of the *Westbindung* policy of Adenauer and also of the *German nation* beyond the experience of National Socialism and post-war division. Yet if indeed the future is

---

<sup>31</sup> Schwarz.1990. *ibid.* p. 152.

<sup>32</sup> Wolfgang Schäuble, ‘Nationale Identität und innere Einheit.’ in Langguth. 1997. p. 283.

<sup>33</sup> TIME. June 25. 1990. ‘Germany Towards Unity. Interview with Helmut Kohl.’ Henry Muller/Kartsen Prager. p. 30.

Europe, we need to ask after the appeal of a national concept which had been compromised by the NS experience and rendered highly abstract through the period of division. Clearly, for Kohl, the association made between Adenauer's *Westbindung* and unification of the two German states aims to cultivate a more democratic concept of the German nation which combined longer term "positive" national traditions with the post-war experience of membership of the "Free West". This represents the technocratic form of *Westbindung* criticised by Habermas during the 1980s which primarily understands the achievements of the FRG in terms of economic and social institutions and the construction of the democratic *Rechtsstaat* but which, however, stops short of the form of democratic-republican political consciousness advocated by critical thinkers. In terms of the political substance of German identity, liberal conservatives accentuate the cohesive potential of "national" values. Kohl's understanding of the social role of the national idiom, or the concept of "Fatherland" corresponds more closely with the familiar tenets of conservative discourse of identity since the late 1970s - 1980s. For Kohl, the concept of patriotism is clearly linked with a perception of positive national historical continuities and exists in a compensatory relationship to the process of socio-economic modernisation. As in his address to the *Bundestag* upon the assumption of office in 1982, so eight years later, the primary problem of the Germans appears to be one of lacking moral fortitude

We have economic, material problems, but all of them can be solved. At issue is the moral strength of our people. Have we lost some of that during the years of affluence and prosperity? I don't think so. But a layer of butter and kiwi and shrimps has covered our moral strength. It will reappear when we remove that layer. The term idealism was born here - it was the contribution of German philosophers, and it was abused terribly in this century. There was a backlash, and now we have to achieve a sort of balance.<sup>34</sup>

It is in this context of strengthening the moral fibre of the German people that Kohl emphasises the importance of a sense of Fatherland in the new Germany. The material, economic problems to which he refers, and which promote the trends of social dissolution which he seeks to counter, are relegated in this reading to secondary, resolvable, problems. The crux of the matter for Kohl is the ability of the German nation to develop a sense of moral community and solidarity which could weather the storms caused by socio-economic modernisation. This argument tends to undercut the unconvincing relegation of economic factors to secondary issue and implies that

---

<sup>34</sup> Kohl. *ibid.* p. 33.

national identity gains primary definition through its ability to absorb the potentially disruptive effects of socio-economic modernisation. It is in this context that the concept of the German nation reveals its true virtue for conservatives which is not primarily derived from the description of the territorial status of the unified German state but rather more from its capacity to foster a sense of common value-consensus which could compensate for the anticipated “removal” of the layers of “butter, kiwi and shrimp”. In this understanding, “idealistic” faith must be revived as a form of compensation for the removal of the symbols of West German self-indulgence born from relative prosperity.

The solution to such implied West German “pampered decadence” lies, for Kohl, in a revitalisation of idealist traditions which could provide the emotional and intellectual sustenance required to survive periods of material hardship. The connection between anticipated material austerity and the rehabilitation of “idealist” traditions indicates that Kohl is above all concerned with the rehabilitation of a form of patriotic faith which stands above the actual experience of social existence and engenders social solidarity and loyalty in the face of social, economic or political disparities between groups of the population. Kohl’s understanding of the historically fortuitous constellation at the “End of History” for redressing the “imbalance” between idealist and materialist interests, in favour of the former, reflects a more deep seated unease towards the viability of the post-war domestic and international order after the demise of the Cold War order. From this perspective, the recourse to a discourse of national identity results more from a reflection of contemporary processes of social change than a “natural” reversion to transhistorical continuities constituted by “national values”. As such it exists in a continuity with pre-unification West German conservative understanding of the “compensatory” function of historical consciousness.

Returning to his familiar theme, the conservative philosopher Hermann Lübbe restated the relationship between the technological dynamism of modern society and the need for a cultivation of historical consciousness. Referring to the historians dispute of the mid 1980s, Lübbe draws out the main point of conflict between his concept of “historical cultural science” and the “critical history” argued by left wing intellectuals as the

dichotomy between *Kompensation* and *Aufklärung*.<sup>35</sup> For Lübbe this represents a false dichotomy and he perceives the remit of history in a combination of both these aspects. Lübbe operates from a different conception of both these categories and for him the “enlightenment” function of history lies in explaining the past in its own terms which can then be conserved in the present that it might serve as a source of “compensation” for the process of rapid civilizational change. In this sense, he seeks to derive *Selbstverständnis* from *Herkunftsverständnis*.<sup>36</sup> Repeating his earlier position, Lübbe offers the following conception of the social use of historical consciousness

Evolutionsbedingt fremd gewordene Vergangenheiten aneignungsfähig und zuschreibungsfähig zu machen - : das ist es, was das historische Bewußtsein leistet. Nur so lassen sich eigene Geschichten und die Geschichten anderer erzählen und läßt sich damit aussagbar halten, wer wir sind, wer die anderen sind und wer wir in unserem wechselseitigen Beziehungen sind. Identitätsvergegenwärtigung ist eine kulturelle Nötigkeit unter Bedingungen beschleunigten Identitätswandels. Selbsthistorisierung wird durch die Erfahrung evolutionsbedingter Entfremdung von Gegenwart und Vergangenheit erzwungen. Nichts wird uns rascher fremd als das Veraltete. Das historische Bewußtsein, das sich seiner annimmt, hebt damit nicht sein Veraltetsein auf, sondern hält es als das verstandene Veraltete gegenwärtig.<sup>37</sup>

The essential dilemma which Lübbe’s concept of “historical cultural science” seeks to address is the fact that in modern society the dynamic process of technological-industrial progress destroys traditions and established values which an ever increasing acceleration. Whilst Lübbe does not revert to traditional anti-industrial romantic conservatism and welcomes these processes as an “evolution”, they nevertheless corrode our sense of identity in the present as this is largely based in a sense of heritage and historical derivation. The function of historical consciousness is not to halt the process of technological-industrial social evolution but rather more to conserve the past in order that it may serve as a focus of orientation or compensation in the face of this dynamism. Although this basic position is one which Lübbe has argued for some time, the process of German unification and the transcendence of the established post-war order, together with trends towards “globalisation” of the economy and the development of “information society” over old industrial society clearly provided a very real context in which these ideas could be posed anew.

---

<sup>35</sup> cf Hermann Lübbe, ‘Im Zug der Zeit. Verkürzter Aufenthalt in der Gegenwart.’ Springer Verlag, Heidelberg/Berlin. 1992. p. 297-8.

<sup>36</sup> *ibid.* p. 300.

<sup>37</sup> *ibid.* 223.

In this vein, Schäuble frames his plea for the cultivation of a conventional sense of national identity based upon a sense of historical consciousness with reference to the experience of change in the present and two major destabilising trends of modern Western society in particular: Firstly the increasing difficulty of maintaining the material prosperity which was a hallmark of the West and secondly trends towards the development of an *Ego-Gesellschaft* which prioritises individual needs and desires over commitment to the social body as a whole. The erosion of the traditional social bonds engendered by the family, secure employment, religious observance, Trade Union loyalties, parish communities etc. represents a threat to the social integrity of modern society for Schäuble.<sup>38</sup> The root of the problem for Schäuble lies founded in the increasing difficulty of handing down traditions of common, consensual, values in a society characterised by accelerating social mobility, value pluralism and heterogeneity. For Schäuble, geographical mobility in a “globalised” world economy has led to an erosion of the bonds of *Heimat*, social mobility has broken the continuity of shared experience between parents and their children who often ascend (or descend) in the social scale and the decline of the traditional family unit and rising divorce rates have corroded traditional family values. Finally, political mobility has broken up traditional party loyalties in favour of a form of political opportunism which motivates electoral support for particular parties on a case by case basis which weakens their *gemeinschaftsstabilisierende Funktion*.<sup>39</sup>

The problem which exercises Schäuble is the corrosive effect of recent socio-political and economic changes upon the authority of the traditional canon of conservative values. For Schäuble, repeating the arguments of the 1980’, this testifies to a real danger of social heterogeneity and ultimately decomposition which can only be checked by the solidarity and loyalty cultivated by the concept of *nation*. The particular value of the national concept in unified Germany is viewed in terms of its capacity to establish common bonds between East and West Germans which could overcome the historical experience of division and, more importantly, the socially dislocating trends of the present. Schäuble suggests that although state and economic union has progressed relatively successfully, there remains a serious division on the level of “mentality” and the different norms, values and psychological characteristics of East and West Germans.

---

<sup>38</sup> Schäuble. 1997. op. cit. p. 285.

The terms in which Schäuble perceives these differences are revealing in their inherent contradiction. Whilst, in the former East, Schäuble perceives an enduring lack of *Eigeninitiative*, in the West he perceives an unhealthy preoccupation with individual material prosperity and security which weakens the commitment to communal values. Whilst the supposed endurance of “collective” modes of thought in the GDR is considered an obstacle to the development of a form of “entrepreneurial spirit”, the West is criticised for its lack of any sense of social bonds and its hedonistic individualism. Schäuble perceives the roots of contemporary division in primarily psychological terms of a problem of misplaced mentality. The only possible answer to such division appears separated from material disparities and economic restructuring and is understood in the potential of the national idiom to cultivate a sense of social solidarity above and beyond the concerns with personal fate or material gain

Die innere Einheit zu vollenden, die Deutschen in Ost und West auch mental zusammenzuführen, wird uns nur in dem Maße gelingen, in dem wir uns zugleich von Egoismus, Trägheit und Kleinmütigkeit freimachen, unsere Chancen erkennen, uns einen inneren Ruck geben. Es wird uns nicht oder nur sehr viel schwerer gelingen, wenn wir uns nicht wieder auf die Grundlagen unserer nationalen Gemeinschaft besinnen, diese Grundlagen neu mit Leben erfüllen. Der schwierige Prozeß des Zusammenwachsens von Ost und West braucht politisch, gesellschaftlich, kulturell den nationalen Rahmen. Wie anders sollten wir den Menschen erklären, daß sie auch einmal Opfer zu bringen haben, Belastungen und Einschränkungen hinnehmen müssen, wenn nicht unter Hinweis auf nationale Solidarität und Zusammengehörigkeit?<sup>40</sup>

The primary source of values which can claim absolute authority is to be found for conservative thinkers in the resource of historical consciousness and the myths of transhistorical national continuities and “national” values. This is, of course, an old problem for conservative thought due to the discrediting effect of National Socialism upon conventional concepts of patriotism and national solidarity. Yet in the post-unification, post-Cold War climate, many on the right perceived a unique opportunity for the reclaiming of German national history and a process of “normalisation” of aspects of the national past so that they may legitimately appear as the source of continuity with contemporary Germany. The conservative veteran of the *Historikerstreit*, Michael Stürmer, expressed, with a sense of optimism, a plea for a change of paradigm in historical investigation of national history and its political evaluation

---

<sup>39</sup> *ibid.* pp. 285-6.

<sup>40</sup> Schäuble. 1997. p. 294-95.

Deutschland hat mit der Wiedervereinigung eine zweite Chance erhalten. Die Geschichte braucht nicht mehr nur beklagt zu werden, sie bleibt, in Teilen jedenfalls, zu reparieren. Auch kann sich jetzt zeigen, welche Lehren aus der Geschichte gezogen worden sind. Die Welt ist im Wandel, und noch ist kein Ende des Dramas zu erwarten, nicht einmal eine Pause. Man wird die zweite Chance nutzen müssen, um den verantwortlichen Umgang mit der Macht zu lernen, und dies im schwierigsten Moment, den die Geschichte zu vergeben hat. Das wird ein Begriff des Politischen erfordern, der nicht bei Wachstum beginnt und bei Lebensqualität endet, sondern erkennen läßt, “wofür und wogegen das Land im Entscheidungsfall steht” (Joachim Fest).<sup>41</sup>

Stürmer regards the conditions for the cultivation of the historiography which he defended during the historians’ debate as ripe. The world historical re-encounter of Germany with global power necessitates a change in the conception of the nation. The tenets of post-war West Germany, symbolised by economic prosperity and an increased quality of life, are deemed inadequate in the face of the tasks imposed by the *zweite Chance*. Likewise German history should no longer be “lamented” in the style of the critical school but “repaired” in order that it might forge a concept of the political which can “stand above” the material disparities which ultimately fuel social heterogeneity. In the above we may perceive the connection in the conservative imagination between the return of Germany as a semi-hegemonial European power and the domestic project of reconstructing traditional categories of national identity. Stürmer is an advocate of the continued *Westbindung* of Germany and its firm integration into the European and Atlantic alliance yet this perception is joined with an appreciation of the new international importance of unified Germany in world politics. This sense of the return of Germany to the high table of the world powers is perceived by Stürmer in terms of a “second chance” to unfold German power, thus invoking an image of historical continuity of German power politics on the international stage, which, however, is now to be achieved in partnership with the other Western powers and principally the United States. In this sense Stürmer, like Kohl and Genscher or fellow liberal conservative political scientist Werner Weidenfeld rejects both the critical interpretation that the return of Germany as a world player will explode the Western foundations of the Federal Republic and also the more *deutsch-national* reading which would welcome the distancing from the Western alliance and the (re) cultivation of the “German East”. In terms of domestic politics, however, one can perceive the return of more traditional paradigms of social solidarity which enjoy superior cohesive potential than the concerns

---

<sup>41</sup> Michael Stürmer, ‘Die Grenzen der Macht. Begegnung der Deutschen mit der Geschichte.’ Siedler. Berlin. 1994. p. 274.

with material prosperity, economic growth and “quality of life”. Stürmer’s scepticism towards the capacity of society to generate social loyalty in terms of its ability to promote as broad a prosperity among the population as possible has clearly not been modified by the “victory” of Free Market society. The perception that 1989 heralded not only a second chance in international relations but also an opportunity to roll back critical perceptions of the nation leads conservatives to address two problems. Firstly: the conservative fetishisation of history and the hopes for contemporary social solidarity invested in historical consciousness necessitates the reconstruction of “positive” continuities of the German nation past and present. Secondly, this leads to the related problem of redressing the national socialist experience and in particular relativising its politically de-legitimising force upon traditional conservative corpus of values. These are two aspects evident in conservative interpretations of the return of the German *Mittellage* and the forces of *Geopolitik* which I now wish to consider.

#### 4.3 The Continuities of *Geopolitik* ?

Whilst Stürmer clearly rejects the notion of a rehabilitation of German hegemony in Central and Eastern Europe along the traditional lines of a *Sonderweg* between East and West, his enthusiasm for Germany’s “second chance” is based upon a celebration of Germany’s return to global politics. Stürmer offers an interpretation of transcendence of the post-war international constellation which suggests that “History” has placed the new Germany back into its old continuity as the leading power in Central and Eastern Europe. Whilst Stürmer recognises that, in contrast to nineteenth and early twentieth century, any new German power-politics must be legitimised by the alliance with the West and more importantly the United States, he perceives nevertheless a historical continuity based in the potential semi-hegemonial role of the nation in Europe. Returning to the relationship between past, present and future, Stürmer perceives the continued presence of older, longer term forces of historical continuity shaping present and future

Wie aber soll der Gedanke an die Vergangenheit den in die Zukunft schweifenden Blick lenken oder belehren? Geschichte verläuft nicht linear, und sie wiederholt sich nicht. Aber sie wird auch

nicht jeden Tag neu erfunden. In den “forces profundes” liegt auch das Material der Geschichte, die sich erst noch vollziehen soll.<sup>42</sup>

This rather esoteric concept of the motor force of history acts as a code for the historical continuity of the German *Mittellage* and the forces of *Geopolitik*. The collapse of the Eastern Bloc has reopened longer term historical continuities of the German nation state in the centre of Europe albeit that the “second chance” has been provided to a Germany which is now a fully integrated member of the Western community and alliance system.<sup>43</sup> Thus whilst there is no continuity of the German *Sonderweg*, there is a continuity of Germany as the shaping force of *Mittleuropa*. Alone of all the Western powers, Germany can claim a national interest in the cultivation of economic and political stability in the former East.<sup>44</sup> The implications of this world historical turn for domestic politics indicate, for Stürmer, that the post-war “critical” historical rejection of the German nation past and present via reference to the NS experience is no longer tenable. Thus the altered constellation of Central Europe has necessitated a rethinking of Germany in terms of global and domestic politics which is not compatible with the retention of the critical, “post-national” discourse of the left against which he argued during the 1980s

Nur soviel ist gewiß: Gewicht, Größe, Geschichte und Geographie des Landes gestatten den Deutschen nicht mehr die alte Verbindung von moralischer Empörung und politischer Enthaltbarkeit. Die Macht, die die Deutschen vor sich selbst versteckten, erfordert Gestaltung, ihre Grenzen müssen bestimmt, ihre tragische Natur muß gemeistert werden.<sup>45</sup>

From this perspective, the re-acquaintance of Germany with power appears rather more as a compulsion of geography and history than a question of subjective political or economic factors. From this perspective, “moral indignation” and “political abstinence” appear not just as outdated concepts in the new global constellation but as an obstacle to the fulfilment of the pathos laden “historical mission” of the new-old nation. It is within this context that the return of the *Mittellage* is linked with a revision of domestic political concepts and the “reparation” of history in particular. These two factors are frequently combined in conservative imagination with a form of identification with the *Kaiserreich*. In this sense, Arnulf Baring perceives the return of Germany to the constellation of 1871 albeit in the framework of Adenauer’s West German state.<sup>46</sup> For

---

<sup>42</sup> *ibid.* p. 10.

<sup>43</sup> *ibid.* p. 244-6.

<sup>44</sup> Stürmer. *ibid.* p. 272-3

<sup>45</sup> *ibid.* 271.

<sup>46</sup> Baring. 1990. *op. cit.* p. 83.

Baring, the return of Germany the major force of Central Europe reflects a historical-geopolitical continuity as *wir sind eine geborene Mittelmacht*.<sup>47</sup> Baring's concept of a synthesis between the democratic Western state of Adenauer and semi-hegemonial nation under Bismarck reflects a common perception of liberal conservative conceptualisations of unified Germany. In this sense, contemporary Germany draws upon the democratic, Western traditions of the Adenauerian *Westbindung* which itself is, as we have seen, often cast as the "custodian" of the "honourable" German nation reaching back to 1871. unification of the German states has, however, clearly reactivated a German power policy in Central and Eastern Europe which evokes memory of past German nation. Given the racist crusade for *Lebensraum* under National Socialism and the belligerent *Wilhelmine Weltpolitik*, this is clearly a problematic source of historical continuities between past and present. For this reason, liberal conservatives are often led back to the Bismarckian state of 1871 which appears as a period in which a unitary nation state could unfold a semi-hegemonial position in Central Europe whilst simultaneously respecting the balance of power.

Yet this is rarely expressed, in liberal conservative discourse, as a plea for a return to the political traditions embodied by the symbol of "Prussia". Often, this is a "national heritage" which is presented through the filter of post-war technocratic concept of the *Westbindung* and the history of the *Kaiserreich* is subjected to a process of "democratisation". In this context it was interesting to observe how moves to found a *Bismarck Stiftung* with federal money in his last place of rest in Friedrichruhe near Hamburg were legitimised by the concern to promote "democratic consciousness" in society. Bismarck is recalled as a significant figure in national history who inaugurated *die ersten Schritte in Richtung auf eine auf allgemeinen und gleichen Wahlen beruhende demokratische Verfassung*.<sup>48</sup> Whilst it is of course true that under Bismarck the franchise was expanded and social insurance legislation was introduced it appears disingenuous to conclude evidence of a democratic political culture from this. In a similar vein, Stürmer offered the following perception of Imperial Germany as a counter to the critique of the German nation argued by "critical history" and in congruence with his concept of the need to "repair" German history

---

<sup>47</sup> Arnulf Baring, 'Wir sind eine geborene Mittelmacht.' *Civis mit Sonde. Vierteljahresschrift für eine offene und solidarische Gesellschaft* 1 (1996) pp. 52-61.

<sup>48</sup> *Der Tagesspiegel*. 08.02.96

Daß das Kaiserreich im Kriege unterging, so wie es im Krieg entstanden war, hat zwar viele Historiker zu tief sinnigen Betrachtungen ermutigt, war ihm aber keineswegs zwingend vorgeschrieben. Vieles hätte auch anders kommen können, das Kaiserreich war, aufs Ganze gesehen, sicherlich sozialer als die meisten Staaten seiner Zeit, und kaum weniger liberal und demokratisch als die großen Nachbarstaaten. Und dennoch, die Rede von der "guten alten Zeit" ist den Deutschen nie leicht von den Lippen gekommen, wenn sie auf das Kaiserreich schauten, noch weniger allerdings im Blick auf andere Zeiten ihrer Geschichte.<sup>49</sup>

In the above excerpt, Stürmer touches upon several essential themes which are worth considering further. He rejects the critical analysis of the *Kaiserreich* which perceives its destruction as inherently linked to the wider system of social organisation. Against this interpretation he contends that the Second Empire could easily have taken an alternative developmental path and states that, in comparison with its neighbours, this society was essentially "normal" and, on the whole, a more socially advanced state. This enables Stürmer to reject the notion of a German *Sonderweg* and its responsibility for 1914-18 and perhaps more importantly 1933-45. Stürmer seems to believe that received interpretations are in need of revision as they deny contemporary Germans the ability to contemplate "the good old days". This latter point is of central importance to Stürmer's conception of the social role of history for which the history of the *Kaiserreich* should clearly play an important role.

Stürmer's approach is characterised by the interface between national and "Western" values which, however, is synthesised into a national frame of reference. He is obviously concerned with illuminating historical, German continuities in an attempt to confer identity onto the present and this project is not limited to the epoch of the nation state but extends way back to the Holy Roman Empire and the German middle ages. In fact, Stürmer maintains that from all the various periods of history, the Holy Roman Empire remains the most formative influence upon German society up to the present day. This particular, "German" historical continuity is, however, perceived in the form of federalism, welfarism, the legally codified, constitutional *Rechtsstaat* and the question of its international hegemonial status.<sup>50</sup> In this vein, Stürmer imbues formal elements of post war, "Western", political culture with the particularist authority of a "German" historical continuity. Historical continuities which pre date the nation state are also perceived by the historian Klaus Hildebrandt who detects a German "reform

---

<sup>49</sup> Michael Stürmer, 'Das ruhelose Reich.' Berliner Morgenpost.14.01.96

<sup>50</sup> cf Stürmer.1994 especially. pp.58-80.

model” during the epoch of feudal absolutism which synthesised church and state into the *fürsorglicher Gedanke über Wohlfahrt und Erziehung der Untertanen*.<sup>51</sup> This enables Hildebrandt to contend that the question of whether or not Germany latched onto the Enlightenment in the eighteenth century when explaining the peculiarity/normality of German historical development as essentially irrelevant. The German “reform model” is thus perceived as having rendered the question of revolution in German social development superficial. These are aspects which are perceived as being continued in the *Kaiserreich*, particularly in the form Bismarck’s social and welfare policy between 1883 and 1889 which also serve as the basis for the perception of him as the founding father of the modern welfare state.<sup>52</sup> Stürmer also perceives a similar continuity in the form of the social consensus created between labour, industry and the state during the Second Empire, noting that Wilhelm II refused to agree to Bismarck’s advice of carrying out a coup against parliament and the Empire’s *Reichsfeinde* in 1890.<sup>53</sup>

These perception invoke the impression that liberal conservative thinkers seek to “Germanise” particular democratic traditions most normally associated with the post-war West and in this manner effect a certain “democratisation” of German nation traditions. This corresponds to the technocratic understanding of Western democracy which is distinct from critical concept derived from enlightenment and republican traditions. Thus this concept of a “democratised” or “liberal” *Kaiserreich* can exist uncontradicted within an essential anti-modernist intellectual framework which prioritises “tradition” in terms of political outlook and “compensation” in terms of historical consciousness. Whilst such interpretations are keen to stress the “normal” political character of the *Kaiserreich*, its collapse into the chaos of war and revolution necessitates considerations of the reasons for its destruction. In a manner reminiscent of the post-war works of Ritter and Schnabel, Stürmer and Hildebrandt locate the catastrophies of the twentieth century within the context of a tradition-consuming “modernist” culture and the political inclusion of the “masses” during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Whilst both thinkers emphasise the legitimacy of the national unification programme of Bismarck they appear to want to freeze history,

---

<sup>51</sup> Hildebrandt. 1995. p. 859

<sup>52</sup> Hildebrandt. 1995. p. 875. Haffner. 1990. p. 58

<sup>53</sup> Stürmer. 1994. op. cit. p. 98.

at the latest, at the point of his departure in 1890. Stürmer formalises this conception in the contention that 1914 marked the close of the “bourgeois century” and the rise of the age of crises, dictatorships and concentration camps, which is alternately referred to as the “mass” or “totalitarian” age, which are frequently conflated. Such interpretations adopt a traditional strand of conservative, anti-modernist thought in identifying the process of social transformation and progress as the destroyers of culture and “classical” politics in the nineteenth century.

Fortschrittsglaube und Absturzangst aber hatten dieselben Ursachen: Entgrenzung aller Tradition, der Kultur, des Staates und des europäischen Gleichgewichts.<sup>54</sup>

Progress and decline are regarded as inseparable from one another in a pseudo-Nietzschean proposition of the inevitable end of the European, bourgeois age in the nihilistic self-destruction of 1914-18. This is an interpretation which confuses the discrediting of the robust Victorian faith in progress and Western civilisation, which resulted from the aftermath of the First World War, for evidence of the inherent nihilism of progress as an intellectual and social project. It also serves as a reminder of the contemporary importance and potential of cultivating culture and tradition (or contemplating the “good old days”) at a time when the social purchase of the concept of progress as been profoundly weakened. This understanding is based upon the conservative misinterpretation of the relationship between social hegemony and the status of tradition and perceives the decline of specific traditions and forms of cultural representation as the source of moral and social decay rather than evidence of the inability of established conceptions and arrangements to adopt to the dynamic of social change. Whilst the critical interpretation views the *suppression* of modernity by pre-industrial elites as the essential developmental contradiction of the *Kaiserreich*, in the conservative imagination, the destruction of the first unitary nation state resulted rather more from an “overload” of modernity and the decline of “classical” politics. This is an element which is also evident in the work of Hildebrandt, who regards the destruction of the *Kaiserreich* as essentially rooted in the inability of the Wilhelmine elite to contain the forces of modernity

Das prosperierende Wachstum seiner expandierenden Wirtschaft, das den teilweise stürmischen Wandel einer mobilen Gesellschaft förderte und erforderte, stand nicht selten in störendem

---

<sup>54</sup> Stürmer. *ibid.* 1994. p. 105

Gegensatz zu jenem politischen Erfordernis der Ruhe, das zumindest sein Gründer Otto von Bismarck dem neuen Mitglied der europäischen Staatengesellschaft mit verpflichtender Strenge auferlegte.<sup>55</sup> Hildebrandt perceives Bismarck's ability to keep the lid on social change and mobility as a central element of his political talent and as essential for the balance of the Second Empire. A marked characteristic of Hildebrandt's analysis is the concentration upon the centrality of the "great statesman" Bismarck who appears as Germany's last capable national leader before Adenauer. Hildebrandt echoes the insights of Franz Schnabel at several key moments including the perception that the liberal movement's *Großdeutsch* traditions upset the careful balance which Bismarck had constructed and pushed for expansionism from the last decade of the nineteenth century which witnessed the genesis of *Weltpolitik*. In a tradition which stretches beyond Schnabel and back to Chancellor Bülow's denunciation of the German social democrats as "German jacobins", Hildebrandt maintains that the liberal and democratic forces who sought domestic reform also sought international expansion and that they would have been an even greater danger for Europe if they actually had attained power.<sup>56</sup> Once more, this is an interpretation which is at odds with the critical perception of the weakness of liberal and progressive forces in the *Kaiserreich* who were held at bay or "duped" by the manipulative policy of *Sozialimperialismus*. Instead we are presented with an interpretation of the negative effects of modernisation and progressive forces and the incompetence of the Wilhelmine political elite. The period between 1871 and 1890 forms the central focus of interpretations of the historic "normality" and legitimacy of the German nation state. This is particularly evident in interpretations of the international hegemonial position of the historic German nation state and its foreign policy. The period of relative stability in European affairs during the "saturated" reign of Bismarck appears as the only legitimate period in which Germany occupied a semi-hegemonial position on the continent and did not seem to directly threaten existing international arrangements. This period is held up against the later policies of *Weltpolitik* and *Lebensraum* as a positive instance of an internationally responsible, autonomous, German nation state.

Consideration of Bismarck's foreign political rapprochement, however, contrasts starkly with the domestic repression and authoritarianism of the period and requires a more

---

<sup>55</sup> Hildebrandt.1995.p. 851.

<sup>56</sup> *ibid.*p. 865, 881

illustrious legitimisation. This relationship is regarded within the theoretical framework of *Geopolitik* which, in another inversion of critical theory, subordinates all factors to a primacy of foreign policy.<sup>57</sup> Indeed, in such interpretations, the eventual destruction of the *Kaiserreich* is regarded as essentially being determined by its international situation, the so called *Mittellage*, and its foreign policy over and above domestic or economic factors.<sup>58</sup> In many respects the theory of *Geopolitik* can be regarded as the counterpiece to the *Sonderweg* thesis. Stürmer provides the following explanation of Bismarck's political understanding of the relationship between foreign and domestic policy

Berlin berechenbar machen für das übrige Europa, Deutschland erträglich machen für das Gleichgewicht, in diesem Zweck verbanden sich Bismarcks friedliche Außenpolitik mit seiner friedlosen Innenpolitik.<sup>59</sup>

Here, Stürmer formulates a classical geopolitical conceptualisation of the influence of international hegemony and foreign political pressures upon domestic political freedom. Whilst these are undoubtedly very important elements of the *Kaiserreich*, geopolitical theories seek an absolute primacy over other developmental aspects and imbue historically specific developments with the legitimising and eternalising aura of "natural" phenomena. Thus commentators speak of the *Bürde der Geographie* or the *Diktat der geographischen Lage* which demanded that the military played an important role in society due to Germany's international vulnerability.<sup>60</sup> In this manner, the social authoritarianism of the Second Empire becomes a historically legitimate, natural compulsion which, in fact, served to preserve the domestic balance of forces in Germany and the European peace internationally.

Geopolitical concepts play an important role in perceptions of the German relationship to international power, past and present and thus serve as an intellectual framework for perceptions of historical continuity. Wehler perceives the roots of current assertions of the similarities and continuities between the international situation of reunified Germany and the *Kaiserreich* in the former's renewed potential as a semi-hegemonial world power.<sup>61</sup> The hegemonial potential of the reunified nation-state appears to Stürmer as an unavoidable, German, continuity which is intrinsically linked to the rather esoteric concept of the historical *forces profundes*. Hildebrandt presents the following,

---

<sup>57</sup> Hildebrandt. 1994. p. 389.

<sup>58</sup> Hildebrandt. 1995. p. 896, Haffner. 1990. p. 53.

<sup>59</sup> Stürmer. 1994. p. 100.

<sup>60</sup> Hildebrandt. 1995. p. 860, Schulze in Diner (ed) 1987. op. cit. p. 90.

more concrete, summation of the historical relationship of the German nation state to global hegemony

Der Verlauf des Ersten Weltkriegs demonstrierte, daß das Deutsche Reich offensichtlich zu mächtig war, um sich in die Balance Europas einzufügen. Es war aber auch nicht stark und im Hinblick auf die Wilhelminische Elite nicht fähig genug, Europa als Hegemonialmacht zu führen. Diese Feststellung beschreibt ein deutsches Dilemma, das sich seit dem 19. Jahrhundert bis heute beobachten läßt.<sup>62</sup>

Hildebrandt addresses an important aspect and the concept of the nineteenth and twentieth century “German dilemma” serves as an explanation of one of the fundamental continuities existing between the *Kaiserreich* and National Socialist Germany. The legitimacy of the development of a German global potential is not questioned in and of itself as in the critical reception, but is rather more presented as an example of European normality which was perverted by the unavoidable pressures of the *Mittellage* and the lack of a competent successor to Bismarck in the age of the masses. This is also a continuity which stretches into contemporary situation and pertains a particular relevance in connection with present discussions over the role of Germany particularly in Eastern Europe. A fundamental distinction between the present hegemonial potential and the situation of the *Kaiserreich* is the fact that reunified Germany is fully integrated into the Western politico-economic framework and military alliance. Nevertheless, the re-emergence of a sovereign, German nation state and the development of its international hegemony automatically revives memory of events between 1914-18 and 1939-45.

Geopolitics imply that the disruptive behaviour of the historic nation state essentially resulted from a combination of the compulsions emanating from the peculiar German *Mittellage* on the continent which forced (and now forces anew) Germany into a hegemonial role as well as the erosion of “tradition” in the face of rapid urbanisation, industrialisation and *Vermassung* of political culture. The critical reading’s normative assertion that capitalist modernisation normally promotes democratic institutions and beliefs, leads it to perceive the post war FRG as the only socially and foreign politically “normal” period of German history. This concept could attain a certain degree of consensus during the period of division where it appeared that the “post national” West

---

<sup>61</sup> Wehler: ‘Angst vor der Macht?.’ 1995.pg. 312.

<sup>62</sup> Hildebrandt.1995.p.886.

German state's *heilsame Primat der Innenpolitik*<sup>63</sup> would prove as permanent as it had successful. Yet the “unfreezing” of international relations, and importantly of those *between* the Western allied nations, has reopened the question of what shape domestic and global hegemonic “normality” should take. Whilst liberal conservative interpretations rarely question the importance of Germany's integration into the West, the technocratic appreciation of the Westbindung allows for the “democratisation” of certain “national” traditions and for the cultivation of a Western yet independent minded German foreign policy. The liberal conservative discussion of the relationship between the Westbindung and renewed German *Mittellage* reflects similar tension between concepts of Western state and German nation in the discourse of identity creation. Whilst liberal conservatives stress the Western democratic and social institutions of unified Germany and the allegiance to the Western community and NATO alliance in terms of foreign politics, the conservative desire to reconstruct a conventional sense of national identity reflects the eclipse of the domestic and international constellation of division.

Whilst liberal conservative discourse is characterised by an affirmation of post-war Westernisation and of the contemporary Western foreign-political commitments there are limits placed upon how far evoking post-war “western values” can foster the form of identity desired by conservatives. The transcendence of the post-war order - most graphically illustrated in the altered foreign-political role of Germany - combined with a natural political affinity towards the national concept prompted conservatives of all shades to perceive in 1989-90 a return to the “normality” of the nation state. Liberal conservative and New Right currents of conservatism as less separated in their perception of the welcome return of the nation state and more in terms of the political quality of the nation desired. Technocratic conceptions of liberal conservatives reduce democracy to post-war political, social and legal institutions. From this perspective, the achievements of the FRG as understood in terms of economic success and the strategic and political interests in the Western alliance which were intellectually cohered by Cold War anticommunism. Whereas the progressive concept of Westbindung advocated by left liberals derives political meaning from the identification with “Western enlightenment culture” and traditions of republicanism, liberal conservative concepts of the Westbindung were primarily mediated through the politics of anticommunism. The

---

<sup>63</sup> Habermas. 1995. p. 169

dissolution of the Cold War presented serious problems of self-definition for the FRG as for all Western societies. Yet, in Germany, the process of unification was perceived as the answer to the potential ideological vacuum created by the erosion of Cold War intellectual-political structures and as a means of politically uniting East and West. Yet, in liberal conservative perceptions, this appears much more as a “Western” nation whose legacy only the FRG had managed to preserve during the period of division and which now could be materially fulfilled with the reopening of longer term, Pan-German historical continuities. Yet this is obviously a problematic concept due to the compromised nature of much of German national history.

The only period which conservatives feel confident in celebrating appears as the *Kaiserreich* and even here this is divided into the early phase under Bismarck which is separated from the period of Wilhelm II. Liberal conservative celebrations of Bismarck appear less founded in the desire to rehabilitate the politically ambiguous symbol of “Prussia” but are rather more concerned with presenting this period of national history in terms of a forerunner of the modern democratic and welfare state domestically and as the “honest broker” in international affairs. In this move, the technocratic concepts of democracy re-combined with affinity towards the nation to construct a positive national past. The “democratic” nature of the *Kaiserreich* is reduced to the existence of formal democratic institutions and this perspective ignores or suppresses the primary roles played by monarch, military and bureaucracy in shaping the political culture of the Second Empire. This technocratic appreciation of Imperial German democracy enables such thinkers to cast the *Kaiserreich* as the forerunner of the modern, post-war democratic, welfarist state. Implicit in such readings is the impression that key components of contemporary democracy enjoy particular German national antecedents in contrast to left-liberal perception that democracy only overcame the nation in the post-war period and only substantially after the 1960s. Stürmer and Hildebrandt appear to subject the concept of democracy to a process of “Germanisation” and the history of the first unitary nation to a process of “democratisation”. This reflects the desire to construct a positive national past which could form the basis of contemporary concept of conventional national history.

Yet this remains a highly problematic project and any celebration of German national traditions is compelled to address the discrediting legacy of National Socialism. Liberal

conservative approaches to the past attempt more than anything to neutralise the NS past and its destructive influence upon concept of national continuity. For Stürmer and Hildebrandt and others the *Kaiserreich* was destroyed not by the inner disjuncture of this society but rather more by the twin related processes of “modernity” constituted by rapid urban and industrial modernisation and the politicisation of the “masses” all of which acted to erode traditional culture and hence sever society from its orientational roots. This approach reflects both the desire to explain the collapse of Wilhelmine and Weimar Germany with recourse to forces external to political elite - “modernity” or Geopolitik and the rise of “mass society” and totalitarian parties. In this scheme National Socialism is cast as the “usurper” of the “honourable” German nation symbolised in figures such as Bismarck, von Stauffenberg, Goerdeler and later Adenauer. The interpretation of the destructive effects of a modernisation which is not contained by the framework of tradition contains a relevant aside to the present and the case for conventional national identity founded in the patriotic affinity with “tradition”. The notion that the national socialists “usurped” this tradition aims to disassociate fascism with continuities of the German nation and hence free up national history for contemporary identificatory purpose. The priority of tendencies towards “democratising” national history or “Germanising” democratic traditions is the construction of a positive national past. The need to such obfuscation testifies to the compromised history of the nation and the problematic nature of appealing to the national past in the project of cultivating conventional national identity. It also testifies to a certain pragmatism of liberal conservative thinkers with respect to the national past and this also explains the basis of the relative convergence between liberal conservatives and left-liberals in the project of seeking a positive national past which we shall examine in chapters six and seven.

Before examining left-liberal formulations of unification and identity and in order to understand the basis of the liberal conservative convergence with established tenets of critical discourse, it is necessary to consider another conservative current of post-unification society: the so-called *New Right*. Whereas liberal conservatives pay formal respects to the *Westbindung* of the nation and generally seek to defuse the political charge of National Socialism by neutralising the past, *New Right* currents adopt a much more confrontational approach towards the NS past which corresponds to their desire too rehabilitate a particular form of German nation in the present. Often playing with

ideas associated with the Conservative Revolutionaries of the inter-war period, New Right thinkers seek to defuse the NS past in order to rehabilitate a critique of liberalism which enjoyed currency among the pre-fascist Weimar right. This is clearly a tradition which was profoundly discredited by National Socialism. New Right approaches to this legacy assume two basic forms; firstly an attempt is made to “normalise” aspects of National Socialism in particular on the level of economic and social policy which is often understood as an authoritarian forerunner to the FRG. Secondly, National Socialism is understood as a phenomenon of “totalitarianism” and, following the approach of Ernst Nolte, as the historical “answer” to communism. For New Right thinkers, the collapse of communism has not weakened the validity of the totalitarian approach to the NS past but rather more strengthened it. From this perspective, the roots of both communist and fascist ideology is to be found in the belief in “utopia” and some model of social progress beyond liberal democracy. The collapse of the Cold War testified for the right in general to the bankruptcy of “utopian” belief and for the New Right this implied a return to the certainties of tradition over emancipation after the internalisation of the “lesson” of the twentieth century that “utopia” leads to dictatorship. In this manner historical interpretation and contemporary political activity are combined in the aggressive campaign of relativising National Socialism through the comparison with Communism as witnessed in the *Aufruf gegen das Vergessen* proclaimed on 8 May 1995 in order to open the way for a return to more nationalist traditions in political culture. An examination of the project of the New Right will help clarify both its similarities and differences with liberal conservative currents on an ideological level.

## 5. The “New Right” and the End of Emancipation

In the following chapter I wish to examine the work of New Right thinkers. I wish to examine the concept of national identity offered by these thinkers, their approach to the legacy of National Socialism, modernist political culture and finally perceptions that at the “End of History” Germany can return to a “traditional” orientation in political culture.

### 5.1. The Renaissance of ethnic-nationalism?

Whilst conservatives of all political shades celebrated the “return” of the nation state in 1989-90, for New Right thinkers this testified primarily to the historical validity of a nationalist outlook. The principle task now facing the new Germany for these thinkers is the construction of a traditional sense of patriotism which could ideologically reflect the transcendence of the post-war domestic and foreign-political order. In this sense, the co-editors of the *Selbstbewußte Nation* Ulrich Schacht and Heimo Schwilk contend

Mit dem Einbruch von 1989 ist, über die irreparable Sprengung des Nachkriegs-Status-quo, der einer zeitabhängigen Symbiose von Selbstverfehlung und Fremdbestimmung geschuldet war, diese Normalität Geschichtsgrund geworden, von dem auszugehen ist. Das heißt: Die Aufhebung der deutschen Teilung und europäischen Spaltung durch den historischen Prozeß selber, der immer auch ein geschichtsgerichtliches Revisionsverfahren gegen die Status-quo-Verwalter war, verlangt ihre geistige Anerkennung. Ohne Selbstbewußtsein geht das nicht.<sup>1</sup>

Revealing in the above is the perception that the period of German division was primarily a phenomenon of *Selbstverfehlung* and *Fremdbestimmung* which, however, since unification of the nation has been transcended by a, metaphysically conceived, agency of “History” itself which had always been “on the side” of national thinkers even during the “abnormality” of national division. This socio-political transformation of the German situation demands a political-intellectual recognition which, for the right, is best expressed through the cultivation of a healthy nationalism or *Selbstbewußtsein* grounded in particularist values mediated through the continuities of national history.<sup>2</sup>

Alfred Mechttersheimer understands the emergence of national sentiment in the former Eastern Bloc as a product of the release from the ideological bonds of Marxism and

---

<sup>1</sup> Schwilk, Schacht (Hg.) 1994. op. cit. p. 12.

presents this as a reversion to innate human orientational needs. From this perspective the “anti-national” component of socialism formed one of the main reasons for its collapse.<sup>3</sup> In this sense, the renaissance of nationalism signifies a return to a condition of socio-anthropological “normality” which was disrupted by the Bolshevik revolution. From this perspective, it is not necessary to *explain* the emergence of nationalist or ethnic sentiment and loyalty claims in the former East as they essentially constitute “natural” phenomena of human social existence. In considering his own society, however, Mechttersheimer’s thesis of the natural status of national sentiment appears refuted by his complaint that the national renaissance remains *absent* from the political culture of unified Germany.

In the former East Germany the appeal to national identity was restricted primarily not by any “ideological” objections but rather more by the fact that this was a claim to be shared with the prosperous rival society of the West. In the former West Germany, however, the main problem with the national concept derived from the experience of National Socialism. In character with New Right thinkers, Mechttersheimer, however, perceives the post-war problems with the national concept as deriving primarily from the left and its insistence on the recanting of national identity in favour of an internalisation of the values of the West. Thus whilst Mechttersheimer cites the collapse of the “Marxist” ideology of the Eastern Bloc as a primary reason for the pseudo-psychological, cathartic recourse to national loyalties and ethnic identity, it is perhaps more valid to perceive the focus of his critical attention in the contemporary post-Cold War West. In contrast to the “rediscovery” of ethnic and national ties in the former Soviet Union and Eastern Bloc, Mechttersheimer laments the endurance of a “pathological” mistrust of the national idiom in unified Germany which bridges the left-right divide thus

Der anti-nationale Konsens ist nicht wirklich aufgebrochen. Die politische Klasse und die überwiegende Mehrheit der Meinungsführer begreifen den Nationalismus als eine Gefahr, die bekämpft werden muß, und nicht als eine Herausforderung zur politischen Gestaltung. Ist es bei der Linken der internationalistische Traum, so sind viele Konservative und Rechte durch den Antikommunismus des Kalten-Krieges zu West-internationalisten geworden. Als staatstragend

---

<sup>2</sup> *ibid.* p. 17.

<sup>3</sup> Alfred Mechttersheimer, ‘Friedensmacht Deutschland. Plädoyer für einen neuen Patriotismus.’ Ullstein. Berlin. 1993. p. 106-7.

gelten bis heute Positionen wie die von Michael Stürmer, die vor “nationalistischen Tendenzen im linken und rechten Spektrum” warnen.<sup>4</sup>

The above displays the distinction between New Right currents and liberal conservatives such as Stürmer as well as liberal-left positions. That Mechttersheimer can criticise Stürmer for his apparently “anti-national” position appears, to those familiar with this historian’s work, somewhat bizarre. What Mechttersheimer objects to is the idea of synthesis between *Westbindung* and nation employed by conservatives such as Stürmer and politicians such as Kohl. For Mechttersheimer, the “renaissance” of the nation implies the relativisation of the Western orientation of the Federal Republic in favour of a form of neutralist, nationalist pacifism internationally and the return to pre-1945 concepts of nationalism rather than their modification (or “watering down”) in the domestic political culture of Germany. Whilst Mechttersheimer largely concurs with liberal conservative interpretations of the need to foster a sense of legitimacy and authority for the state and to cultivate a basic value consensus via recourse to a concept of national identity,<sup>5</sup> the two depart in the form of patriotism desired. Whilst Stürmer tempers his national reading with a technocratic concept of Western values, Mechttersheimer perceives this as evidence of an “anti-national” consensus which gives rise to the impression that he seeks a “purer” expression of German identity and national interests untainted by the West. In this respect, Mechttersheimer’s conception of a renaissance of the nation implies a “return” to intellectual continuities which pre-date the post-war *Westbindung* and as such this is an interpretation which casts a question mark over the legitimacy of the post-war Federal Republic.

Whilst this is an interpretation of the events of 1989-90 which is broadly congruent with liberal conservative attitudes towards the “return” of the nation, right wing conservatives imply that not only the GDR constituted an “illegitimate” state but that the legitimacy of the FRG was also fundamentally questionable because of its “post-national” status. Celebrating the imminent collapse of the post war division, the then leader of the CDU-CSU parliamentary faction, Alfred Dregger, denied the existence of an Eastern “Communist” and Western “capitalist” Germany in favour of one “indivisible German nation”. For Dregger, the defeat of the Eastern challenge to the Western nation state seventy years after the Bolshevik revolution, delivered the final

---

<sup>4</sup> Mechttersheimer. 1993. op. cit. p. 112.

historical proof that the nation state is stronger than “artificial social systems”.<sup>6</sup> Implicit in such readings is the belief that the nation state represents the “normal” or “natural” form of modern social organisation which was radically overthrown by the Bolshevik revolution of 1917. This is an interesting interpretation as it seems to deny both the GDR and the FRG any genuine historical legitimacy and invokes the notion that the genuine *Sonderweg* of German history was formed by the period of division between 1945 and 1989. The implication of Dregger’s approach is that “the nation” has not only defeated the critique of Marxism but that the return to the “indivisible” German nation could or should also assert itself against the FRG’s “fixation” with the West and “Western values”. Whilst Dregger admits that after two attempts to break the hegemony of Western powers, Germany had to concede the strategic necessity of a form of *Westbindung*,<sup>7</sup> in terms of political culture, Dregger perceived in unification the possibility of cultivating a more conventional form of national patriotism. Thus, in terms of political culture, the collapse of the East also implies the relativisation of the Federal Republic’s Western orientation and the rehabilitation of specifically “German” national traditions.

One aspect of this rehabilitation which illuminates the dissonance with more liberal conservative currents is the evaluation of Adenauer’s position on the Western integration of the Federal Republic. For Rainer Zitelmann, the constellation of 1989-90 necessitates a more sober assessment of Adenauer’s commitment to the nation than that offered by Kohl. Zitelmann emphasises Adenauer’s prioritisation of Western integration over national unity in contrast to the positive examples of “national” politicians of the 1950s from across the political spectrum comprising figures such as Kurt Schumacher, Jakob Kaiser, Thomas Dehler and the former editor of the FAZ Paul Sethe.<sup>8</sup> Criticising the liberal conservative interpretation of Adenauer’s *Westbindung* as a conscious policy of attaining unification, Zitelmann highlights the engagement for national unity among these political figures of the early FRG. For Zitelmann, the illumination of West German “national” political thinkers in the 1950s is a means of asking contemporary question such as was the forty years of “division and dictatorship” totally unavoidable -

---

<sup>5</sup> cf Alfred Mechttersheimer, ‘Nation und Internationalismus. Über nationales Selbstbewußtsein als Bedingung des Friedens.’ in Schwilk/Schacht. 1994. op. cit. p. 362.

<sup>6</sup> Stenographische Berichte vom 8. November. 1989. op. cit. p.13026-7.

<sup>7</sup> *ibid.*

a question, he adds, which could become of extreme interest for former citizens of the GDR.<sup>9</sup> Zitelmann explains his principle concern with establishing the historical possibility of unification in the early years as follows

Die oftmals übliche aufdringlich-volkspädagogische “Zeigefinger-Geschichtsschreibung”, die den Leser im Kleide angeblich eindeutiger wissenschaftlicher Befunde darüber belehrt, daß der damals beschrittene Kurs der Westintegration der bestmögliche und einzig denkbare gewesen sei, ist dem Autor zuwider. Der unter bundesdeutschen Historikern und Politikwissenschaftlern lange verbreitete Glaubenssatz, das Eintreten für den deutschen Nationalstaat sei “rückwärtsgewandt”, weil die deutsche Geschichte in der “Zweistaatlichkeit” einen für alle Zeiten zu bewahrenden idealen Endzustand erreicht habe, war ohnehin schon immer unhistorisch. Diese These braucht heute natürlich nicht mehr widerlegt zu werden.<sup>10</sup>

Characteristic of the New Right is the condemnation of the *Volkspädagogik* of left-liberal historians which, however, betrays a desire to attain precisely the political-pedagogical influence which they ostensibly decry in the name of academic objectivity. Above all it is the anti-national hue of left-liberal discourse which Zitelmann finds so distressing. Whilst Zitelmann appears justified in criticising liberal conservative readings of Adenauer as the “father” of unity, his contention that unity was a historical possibility during the 1950s appears to correspond more to his contemporary agenda of “normalising” the national idiom than reflecting historical events. Zitelmann’s major bone of contention is the perceived endurance of the anti-national critique of “post-national” left-liberal discourse since the 1960s. It is at the door of ex ‘68er lefties that Zitelmann lays the blame for the apparent suppression of national discourse in unified Germany.

The perception of an “anti-national” consensus in unified Germany is understood by New Right thinkers as testimony to the iron-like grip in which veterans of the New Left hold contemporary political culture. According to Rainer Zitelmann, former ‘68er figures have long since completed the *Marsch durch die Institutionen* urged by Dutschke after the dissolution of the SDS in 1970 and have arrived in seats of power in the media, Trade Unions, political parties, organised religion and the universities albeit with the sacrifice of the ideals which once held the power to enthuse broad sections of

---

<sup>8</sup> cf Rainer Zitelmann, ‘Adenauers Gegner. Streiter für die Einheit.’ Straube. Erlangen-Bonn-Wien. 1991.

<sup>9</sup> Zitelmann. *ibid.* pp. 25-6.

<sup>10</sup> Zitelmann. *ibid.* p. 23.

society.<sup>11</sup> It is this cultural hegemony of the old West German left which is cited as the chief obstacle to the cultivation of a more traditional sense of patriotism and national *Selbstbewußtsein*. The primary ideological weapon of the Left remains the national socialist past which is instrumentalised in order to morally underpin the “anti-national” and pro-Western consensus of contemporary political culture. This is an approach which, if anything, is perceived as having been strengthened since unification and the collapse of the socialist alternative. Mechttersheimer perceives in the left’s apparent anti-national approach in post-unification society an expression of profound frustration at the collapse of the radical alternative project

Die Nationen wurden von der Revolution nicht gefressen, sondern die polnische, ungarische, kroatische oder auch die deutsche Nation haben den hundertjährigen Kampf gegen die Revolution gewonnen. Der antinationale Affekt linker Intellektueller ist deshalb so stark, weil ihnen das geistige Instrumentarium fehlt, um die elementare Bedeutung von Volk und Nation zu erkennen. Da bleibt nur ohnmächtige Wut über eine totgesagte Kraft, die mitgeholfen hat, das mit so großen Hoffnungen beladene sozialistische Modell aus der Geschichte zu verweisen.<sup>12</sup>

Thus the anti-national “affect” of the left reveals both its own conceptual inability to acknowledge the “elementary” significance of the relationship between *Volk* and *Nation* and also its own disorientation and depression in the face of the moral implosion of Marxism and radical social alternatives. Once more, we may note that for Mechttersheimer the collapse of bureaucratic socialism did not primarily testify to the stagnation of Stalinist society but is presented in terms of an ideological victory of the “nation” and nationalist loyalties. It appears peculiar that a value which is celebrated as the superior, essential form of orientation in human affairs should also be considered constrained by intellectual currents which derive from its vanquished opponent. This power of the old left is explained by New Right thinkers in terms of their “moral” instrumentalisation of the NS past. These are themes elaborated by Zitelmann who examines ways in which the broken *Selbstbewußtsein* of the German nation could be reinvigorated. Zitelmann acknowledges that knowledge of the crimes committed in the name of Germany under National Socialism and the experience of forty years of state division represent serious problems for the cultivation of a traditionalist sense of *Selbstbewußtsein*. Yet both factors do not fully explain the problems of national identity encountered in contemporary Germany for this thinker. For Zitelmann, more important

---

<sup>11</sup> Rainer Zitelmann, ‘Position und Begriff. Über eine neue demokratische Rechte.’ in Schacht, Schwilk. (Hg.) 1994. op. cit. p. 178.

<sup>12</sup> Mechttersheimer in Schacht, Schwilk. 1994. *ibid.* p. 347

than the national socialist dictatorship and the period of division is the perfidious influence of the left

Allerdings genügt dies nicht als Erklärung, denn mit dem Abstand zur NS-Zeit steigen Selbstzweifel und Selbsthaß, die bei der Linken vor allen Ausdruck eines enttäuschten Missionseifers sind. Die Enttäuschung darüber, daß sich die Mehrheit der Deutschen weigerte, das “verkehrte” Bewußtsein zu überwinden und sich im sozialistischen Sinne missionieren zu lassen, führte zu Frustration, Enttäuschung und schließlich zu einem Haß gegen das eigene Volk, dem man zur Strafe für Uneinsichtigkeit nun gerne “Ausländerfeindlichkeit”, Antisemitismus und Faschismus unterstellt.<sup>13</sup>

Zitelmann’s understanding of the reasons for contemporary Germany’s “broken self-confidence” reveal the central approach and concerns of the New Right. Whilst lip-service is paid to the effects of the experience of National Socialism these are subordinated under the, for him, much more serious problems derived from national division and above all the critique of the left. The critique of the left itself is denied any legitimacy as a necessary reflection of the NS regime and instead is understood in terms of resentment at the refusal of the Germans to allow themselves to be converted to socialism by left wing “missionaries”. The biggest crime of the left appears here as the hatred of the own *Volk* testifying once more, for the right, to the left’s inability to comprehend the relationship between *Volk* and *Nation*. Such concepts of national community, which are frequently complimented with complaints of “mass immigration”, clearly bear powerful historical and political connotations and in the context of the Far Right activity in the early 1990s attained a particularly provocative nature. New Right thinkers invert the relationship between a nationalist or anti-immigration tone in mainstream political culture and the blossoming of the Far Right and contend that the lack of a confident sense of national identity between *Volk* and *Nation* forms a central reason for the rise of extreme right wing groups. From this perspective, it is the left-wing “demonisation” of nationalism and the German *Volk* in particular which sows the seeds of Far Right radicalism and which represents, for this stream, the more socially destructive force. In this sense, Mechttersheimer perceived the potential for social instability if the “anti-national” attitude of the political elite does not change

Die bisherige Politik der Selbstverleugnung nationaler Interessen wird, so scheint es, in der deutschen Bevölkerung künftig keine Akzeptanz mehr finden. Dann wird ein Nationalismus der

---

<sup>13</sup> Zitelmann in Schacht, Schwilk. 1994. *ibid.* p. 174-5.

Massen mit einem Antinationalismus der Eliten kollidieren, mit schweren Belastungen für die Stabilität des Landes und seine Beziehungen zu den Nachbarn.<sup>14</sup>

From this standpoint, the phenomenon of the Far Right, which assumed such a central place in political and media culture during the early 1990s, represents a criminal expression or “perversion” of essentially legitimate ideas. For New Right thinkers, the most worrying aspect of the outbreak of Far Right activity appears that it constitutes a spontaneous phenomenon of the “masses” which is not regulated by the elite. For these thinkers, the correct political response to this development would be the cultivation of national sentiment at an elite level which could both dam the rise of the Far Right and foster a sense of national legitimacy for Germany’s domestic and international relations. Typical of such representations is the apologia for extremist nationalism which is coupled with criticism of the anti-racist campaigns which emerged as a response to the rise of the Far Right. For Zitelmann it appears that the campaigns against *Ausländerfeindlichkeit* are less about combating racist tendencies in contemporary Germany and more about providing the left with a second wind after the collapse of socialism and the unification of the nation.<sup>15</sup>

The proximity between the ideas propagated by the New Right and Far Right groups’ violently criminal expression of similar sentiment lies at the heart of perceptions of anti-nationalist - anti-racist campaigns as evidence of a pathological hatred of the self, or indigenous *Volk*. In a contemporary application of totalitarian approaches to fascism and communism, the extremism of the nationalist right is brought into a complimentary relationship with the “extremism” of the anti-nationalist left. Whilst the extremism of the Far Right articulates hatred of an “alien” *Volk*, the anti-nationalist “extremism” of the left is regarded as an expression of hatred towards the indigenous German *Volk*. For one of the co-editors of the controversial volume *Die Selbstbewußte Nation*, Ulrich Schacht, such “hatred of the self” forms an inverted echo of precisely the ideological traditions which it seeks to criticise leading him to the following conclusion

Denn das *unbarmherzige* Verurteilen der eigenen Nation und ihrer Angehörigen, einschließlich der Nochnichtgeborenen sowie aller Verblichenen zwischen Heinrich dem IV., Friedrich dem Großen und Wilhelm II., ist leider nichts anderes als ein grauenhaftes Echo der Unbarmherzigkeit gegenüber anderen Nationen zuvor. Und der totale rhetorisch-diskursive Vernichtungswille gegenüber *allen* konstitutiven Tatsachen und Aspekten der eigenen nationalen Identität, ihren

---

<sup>14</sup> Mechtersheimer. in Schacht, Schwilk. 1994. op. cit. p. 363.

<sup>15</sup> Zitelmann. *ibid.* p. 176-7.

historischen Voraussetzungen wie gesellschaftlichen, ordnungspolitischen und mentalen Ausformungen und Konsequenzen ist - in seinem *blindwütigen* Antriebsmotiv - identisch mit dem totalen Vernichtungswillen NS-Deutschlands gegenüber dem jüdischen Volk.<sup>16</sup>

Thus the circle of convergence is completed and the critique of nationalism and racism, with reference to the historical experience of National Socialism, is transformed into a variation of the extremist chauvinism which made the Holocaust possible, this time, however, directed against the indigenous *Volk*. In this context, Schacht contends that the left's Germanophobia casts them as the executors of Hitler's last testament and his contention that if the war were lost then the German *Volk* deserved to perish.<sup>17</sup> Indeed, as from this standpoint, the destruction of conventional national identity is identified as a condition for the rise of the Far Right, the suggestion is implicit that the anti-national left not only mirrors the right but is furthermore a causal factor in its ascendancy. As such, this is an approach which reproduces Ernst Nolte's thesis of the "causal nexus" between communism and fascism in the contemporary context of the old '68ers and the Far Right. More important for the *New Right* project of reconstructing a nationalist outlook, however, is the ability of this thesis to relativise the contemporary political charge of the national socialist past. Since the collapse of communism, this a perspective to which right wing thinkers have returned.

### 5.1.1 A Change of Paradigm?

During the *Historikerstreit* one gained the impression that Nolte's position has been positively refuted by his academic colleagues and rejected as a particularly crass species of anticommunism intent upon whitewashing German national history and bolstering the democratic identity of the contemporary state.<sup>18</sup> Returning to some of these themes since the collapse of the Berlin Wall and German unification, Nolte believes his thesis of the *Weltbürgerkrieg* vindicated by events. For Nolte it is now incontestable that the central historical continuity of the twentieth century was formed by the antagonism between capitalism and communism. Whilst anticommunism can no longer be employed to bolster the present via reference to the enemy counter-society of the East, Nolte states

---

<sup>16</sup> Schacht. *ibid.* p. 63.

<sup>17</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>18</sup> A perception which was enhanced by the Bitburg farce of 1985. cf Habermas in Hartmann. 1986. *op. cit.* p. 51

the continued relevance of viewing the history of the twentieth century, and the epoch of fascism in particular, through the intellectual framework of totalitarian theory

Auch das Dritte Reich des Nationalsozialismus muß in diesen wichtigsten der historischen Zusammenhänge des Jahrhunderts eingeordnet werden, und deshalb sollte die Totalitarismustheorie auf historisch-genetische Weise zum Verständnis der Epoche des Faschismus als des europäischen Bürgerkriegs und des kalten Krieges als das nur marginal zu kriegerischer Zuspitzung gelangten "Weltbürgerkriegs" fortentwickelt werden.<sup>19</sup>

Thus Nolte's justification for the development of totalitarian theory after the demise of communism is based upon his primary concern to understand the epoch of fascism which, for him, can only be understood as the radical, occidental response to bolshevism. Whilst there is little new in Nolte's position in the 1990s, the world historical context in which it is articulated is of course radically different - this is a form of totalitarian theory which no longer has a clearly defined opponent in the present. Thus it appears that the legitimatory function of Nolte's approach for contemporary society is absent. Yet upon closer consideration, this contemporary legitimatory function of totalitarian theory has changed rather than been eradicated totally. Congruent with more mainstream conservative interpretations, New Right thinkers perceive the answer to the political vacuum created by the collapse of anticommunism as ideally represented in the national idiom and conventional patriotism. Given the problems of the German nation past this is an approach which remains highly problematic and arguably even more pressing in the absence of the *Ersatz* political identity of anticommunism. In this context, Nolte's totalitarian approach could achieve this legitimatory function in its ability to relativise the political legacy of National Socialism in post-unification Germany and thus contribute to the rehabilitation of a more conventional sense of patriotism. From this perspective, we may discern that the collapse of anticommunism represents both victory and problem for conservative thought: problematic because of the loss of political and intellectual coherence provided by the struggle against Communism and beneficial because it appears to signal the defeat of the radical discourse which had subjected the national argumentation of the right to a vigorous critique.

---

<sup>19</sup> Ernst Nolte, 'Weltbürgerkrieg 1917-1989 ?.' in Eckhard Jesse (Hg.) 'Totalitarismus im 20. Jahrhundert. Eine Bilanz der internationalen Forschung.' Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung. Bonn. 1996. p. 367.

A common perception on the right was that after the collapse of communism, the traditional left-wing association between capitalism and fascism or nationalism and fascism or indeed conservatism and fascism was no longer tenable. In this vein, Brigitte Seebacher-Brandt contended that fifty years after its declaration, Max Horkheimer's dictum *Wer aber vom Kapitalismus nicht reden will soll auch vom Faschismus schweigen*<sup>20</sup> had finally been made redundant by the collapse of the "antifascist state" of the GDR.<sup>21</sup> This is a constellation which Seebacher-Brandt clearly perceives as more significant for the former West and the antifascist paradigm of the FRG left. Seebacher-Brandt is keen to stress the "normality" of concepts such as the "love of the Fatherland" or *Mort pour la patrie* which unified Germany should cultivate. Seebacher-Brandt is concerned with the corrosive effect which post-war anti-national currents exercise upon the expression of such patriotic sentiment in unified Germany. The climate would, however, seem ripe for the cultivation of a clean tradition of national patriotism which Seebacher-Brandt sees represented in the *freiheitliches Nein* of the SPD and the resistance of Carl Goerdeler, Stauffenberg and the *Kreisauer Kreis* which were all motivated by the common love of the Fatherland.<sup>22</sup> It is this legacy of national patriotism which the author sees as being carried over into the post-war West German state in the form of "national" politicians such as Schumacher, Kaiser and the later Willy Brandt thus distancing the concept of patriotism from the Nazi regime and associating it with "national" politicians of the early FRG. This author perceives both the electoral failures of the SPD and the "antifascist" stigmatisation of patriotism as emanating from the influence of the *neue Linke*<sup>23</sup> whose legitimacy, however, she clearly perceives as spent with the collapse of the East and the unification of the nation allowing a return to the "normality" of patriotic love of one's nation. This sense that the events of 1989 hailed the beginning of the end of the supposed political cultural dominance of the new left is also evident in Hartmut Lange's suggestion that the end of socialism implied the termination of the political association between conservatism and fascism, bemoaned by Kaltenbrunner in 1972<sup>24</sup>

Fazit: Die Deutschen haben 49 Jahre nach dem Ende des 2. Weltkriegs allen Grund, die politische Asymmetrie ihrer Gesellschaft, die das linke Spektrum bis in die Meinungsführerschaft

<sup>20</sup> cf Max Horkheimer, 'Die Juden und Europa' (1939) in Griffin (ed.) 1995. p. 273.

<sup>21</sup> Brigitte Seebacher-Brandt. 'Norm und Normalität. Über die Liebe zum eigenen Land.' in Schacht. Schwilk. 1994. (Hg.) op. cit. p. 47.

<sup>22</sup> Seebacher-Brandt. *ibid.*p.53

<sup>23</sup> *ibid.* 1992. p. 53

<sup>24</sup> cf Kaltenbrunner. Chapter Two. p. 8

heinein protegiert, das rechte Spektrum durch Faschismusverdacht bis zur Unerheblichkeit niederhält, endlich aufzukündigen.<sup>25</sup>

For Lange, the collapse of Communism and unification of the two German states should effect a transformation of the perceived left-wing bias of West German political culture. Both Seebacher-Brandt and Lange express a common sentiment of right wing thinkers that the collapse of the Cold War and unification of Germany would-should lead to the loosening of the shackles imposed upon the expression of conventional patriotic sentiment. As Lange displays, this reflects perceptions of the stigmatisation of traditionally conservative values which, however, in the post-1989 world context would appear due for revision.

Such interpretations of the altered left-right constellation in the present are complimented by a plea to revise the West German historical paradigm of the National Socialist past. If a coherent and socially effective sense of patriotism is to be developed then this is predicated upon establishing an artificial dichotomy between “conventional” or “honourable” patriotism and the bio-racist ultra-nationalism of the NS state. It is within the context of such a rehabilitation of conventional patriotism that Nolte’s totalitarian approach appears useful to New Right thinkers as it relocates the focus of critical attention away from occidental culture and the conventional right to the Bolshevik revolution and the revolutionary left. In this vein, for the New Right historian Karlheinz Weißmann, the primary impetus for the revision of historical approaches to the Third Reich does not emanate from new research but primarily from the altered political constellation after the collapse of communism

Das Ende der Nachkriegszeit verändert seit 1989 den Blick auf die Vergangenheit. Der Untergang der kommunistischen Ideologie - die “Zwillinge” (Francois Furet) der nationalsozialistischen - und die Vereinigung der Bundesrepublik und der DDR - deren getrennte Existenz das Ergebnis der militärischen Niederlage des “Dritten Reiches” war -, führen zwangsläufig dazu, daß die Entwicklung zwischen 1933 und 1945 unter neuen Gesichtspunkten bedacht wird. Das heißt nicht, daß sie nur noch von antiquarischem Interesse wäre oder ihre grundsätzliche moralische Beurteilung revidiert werden müßte, aber die Frage nach Bruch und Kontinuität in der deutschen Geschichte ist neu zu stellen, und die NS-Zeit wird

---

<sup>25</sup> Hartmut Lange, ‘Existenz und Moderne. Über Selbsterkenntnis als Solidarität.’ in Schacht, Schwilk. (Hg.) 1994. op. cit. p. 442.

für die Legitimation der Berliner Republik anderes bedeuten, als sie für die Legitimation der Bonner Republik bedeutet hat.<sup>26</sup>

The above represents a concise summary of New Right approaches to the NS past in the light of the collapse of communism and the unification of the post-war German states. For Weißmann, the collapse of the totalitarian “twin” of National Socialism in 1989 and the discrediting of the socialist alternative exercises a transformatory influence upon perceptions of continuity and change in the twentieth century and most specifically with regards to the NS dictatorship. This is a perception which clearly exists in a mutual relationship with perceptions that the demise of the GDR also heralds the end of anti-fascist approaches to the (West) German present. Although Weißmann, like other New Right thinkers, is ever keen to substantiate radical revision of historiographical approaches to National Socialism with reference to advances in objective *Wissenschaft*, it is clear that the primary stimulus of change derives from the collapse of the socialist alternative which is understood as a victory of the totalitarian approach over antifascism. It is interesting to note the lines along which this author perceives such change: whilst he states that the NS period has not been reduced to “antiquarian” interest or that its basic moral evaluation need not be revised one can not resist the impression that Weißmann actually desires a movement in this direction. Weißmann emphasises the “positive” aspects of the regime alongside “negative” elements (an approach we shall consider shortly) and confuses the destruction wrought upon Germany by the Allies with that perpetrated by the Nazis against the Jews (to which a total of 10 from 500 pages is dedicated) in an undifferentiated manner leading one critic to perceive in Weißmann’s approach a manifestation of *kompositorischer Revisionismus*.<sup>27</sup> Above all, Weißmann perceives a change in perceptions of continuity and change of 1933 within the intellectual framework provided by the collapse of communism. A fundamental aspect of such change is the perception that the moral discrediting of communism will exercise a revisionist effect upon the historical-political engagement with the NS past. This appears, as such, an attempt to develop Nolte’s totalitarian approach to the history of National Socialism after the defeat of the

---

<sup>26</sup> Karlheinz Weißmann, ‘Der Weg in den Abgrund. Deutschland unter Hitler 1933 - 1945.’ Propyläen Verlag. Berlin. 1995. p. 10.

<sup>27</sup> Götz Aly, ‘Macht - Geist - Wahn. Kontinuitäten deutschen Denkens.’ Argon Verlag. Berlin. 1997. p. 199. The clear political intent of Weißmann’s revision of the Third Reich proved highly controversial and resulted in Propyläen withdrawing the book and re-contracting the historian Hans Mommsen to write the volume dealing with National Socialism in 1996. cf Aly. *ibid.* pp. 196-7.

“Asiatic” threat to occidental culture. The change in historical paradigm presaged by Weißmann comprises the insight that the defeat of the socialist alternative in the present has had the concomitant effect of discrediting antifascist approaches to the NS past which will consequently occupy a different role in the legitimacy of the Berlin Republic than it did in that of the post-war FRG.

New Right thinkers have developed Nolte’s approach on a variety of levels and with differing results. In the work of Rainer Zitelmann we find an interesting development of Nolte’s approach which bridges the problems of communist-less totalitarianism by recourse to a more familiar critique of modernism. In Zitelmann’s approach, totalitarian theory once stripped of its contemporary anticommunist component is reduced to an antimodernist fundament which focuses upon the disastrous consequences of “political modernism” and the “fanatical” belief in an “ideology”. Applied to the NS experience this is expressed in Zitelmann’s older concern to remove National Socialism from its conservative antecedents and political context and to relocate to the provenance of the revolutionary left, presenting Hitler as a “German Lenin”.<sup>28</sup> At the same time, Zitelmann and other like-minded academics have staked a claim for interpreting National Socialism as a species of “totalitarian modernism” and have stressed the apparent socio-economic modernising tendencies of National Socialism. Leaning on earlier theories of the modernising effects of National Socialism such as David Schoenbaum’s 1965 work<sup>29</sup>, New Right thinkers cast the national socialist regime as a foretaste and more significantly catalyst of the social modernisation which was to unfold in the post-war Federal Republic. Unlike Schoenbaum, however, a characteristic of New Right approaches to this question is that they perceive these as consciously pursued modernising tendencies which testify to the genuine (rather than purely propagandistic) social aims of the *Volksgemeinschaft*.<sup>30</sup>

## 5.2. *Historisierung* and Modernisation

---

<sup>28</sup> cf Zitelmann. 1988. op. cit.

<sup>29</sup> David Schoenbaum, ‘Hitler’s Social Revolution. Class and Status in Nazi Germany 1933-1939.’ WW Norton & Company. New York. 1980.

<sup>30</sup> For Schoenbaum, the Nazis failed to “square the circle” of a formal belief in “equal opportunity” of the (racially “acceptable”) community and the heirarchy of the *Führerprinzip*. op. cit. p. 235.

Zitelmann's plea for the *Historisierung* of National Socialism formally addresses the concept proposed by Martin Broszat in 1985<sup>31</sup> and yet substantially represents a quite contrary historical enterprise than that envisaged by the former director of the Munich *Institut für Zeitgeschichte*. Broszat was primarily interested in breaking with the tendency to examine the NS regime within historical isolation and in examining the layers of socio-economic continuity and discontinuity which both pre and post-dated the regime. This was not a plea to return to the earlier *Sonderweg* thesis of 1960s critical social history which tended to present the *Kaiserreich* and Weimar as "prehistory" to the Third Reich and he welcomes the fact that both these epochs are now widely perceived in their own historical right.<sup>32</sup> What Broszat is concerned with is the continuity of socio-economic developmental processes which precede and succeed the NS regime and the extent to which National Socialism sought to address problems already latent in German society and which continued into the early Federal Republic. Thus whilst the historically false answer which NS ideology represented for the fundamental problems of the age is not in question for Broszat, we *do* need to re-examine the misdirected motives, pressures for change and attempts to resolve these problems which existed on a sub-level to NS ideology and which display a longer term continuity reaching back to the First World War. Of particular interest in this respect are questions such as the circumstances of the *Mittelstand* and their response to the turmoil of Weimar and also the development of welfarist ideas envisaged by Ley's DAF which likewise cut through a longer historical framework. Broszat is keen to state that this process of a "normalisation" of the history of the NS regime should in no way be understood as relativising the moral-political condemnation of its ultimate ideological world view or its historical form. Broszat summarises the intentions of *Historisierung* as follows

Die "Normalisierung" unseres Geschichtsbewußtseins kann auf die Dauer die NS-Zeit nicht aussparen, kann nicht nur um sie herum erfolgen. Auch die Pauschaldistanzierung von der NS-Vergangenheit ist noch eine Form der Verdrängung von Tabuisierung. Sie kann, je länger desto mehr, gar den Eindruck eines kompensatorischen Alibis für den restaurierten Historismus auf den wieder "heilen" Gebieten machen, die vor oder hinter der nationalsozialistischen Vergangenheit liegen. Auflösung dieser Blockade zugunsten einer moralischen Sensibilisierung der Historie

---

<sup>31</sup> Martin Broszat, 'Plädoyer für eine Historisierung des Nationalsozialismus.' in Broszat. 1988. op. cit. pp. 266- 281.

<sup>32</sup> *ibid.* p. 273.

überhaupt, gerade aufgrund der Erfahrung des Nationalsozialismus - das ist der Sinn dieses Plädoyers für seine Historisierung.<sup>33</sup>

Thus it is clear that Broszat certainly did not seek a form of apologia for the NS regime or indeed seek to establish “positive” aspects of the system but rather more this is an approach which compliments a critical perspective on the past both before and after period 1933-45. It is clear from the above that Broszat’s plea for a *Historisierung* reflects a desire to consider the NS regime within a much broader socio-historical context and to avert the dangers of either considering 1933-45 in a form of quarantine which releases other epochs from their association or of the reduction of the concept of the *NS-Gewaltherrschaft* to a stale moral mantra. Broszat does not object to the moral import of historical analysis but rather more seeks to reinvigorate the relationship between historical knowledge and moral-political sensibilities.

The form of *Historisierung* desired by New Right thinkers differs significantly from Broszat’s to whom the 1992 volume *Die Schatten der Vergangenheit* is dedicated.<sup>34</sup> Whilst many of the contributors appear to pursue the lines of historical investigation suggested by Broszat, his ideas feature rather more as a springboard for a quite different enterprise. This is particularly clear when one considers the interpretation of the moral-political aspects of historical investigation of National Socialism. Whereas Broszat sought to reinvigorate this relationship in a “historicising” analyses of National Socialism, New Right thinkers are of the distinct impression that such “moralising” has no place in historical investigation. In terms of moral-political perspective Broszat and Zitelmann actually stand at opposite ends of the spectrum and one cannot avoid the impression that for New Right thinkers the project of *Historisierung* is a means of *relativising* the moral-political stigma of the NS regime by, on the one hand, identifying its “positive” aspects and, on the other, associating “negative” elements with “totalitarianism” which, in turn, is understood as a historical derivative of the radical left. This is an impression contained in the definition of *Historisierung* penned by Uwe Backes, Eckhard Jesse and Zitelmann in which we learn that the tendency of the older generation to perceive in the Third Reich not only “negatives” but also many “positives” has been previously *all too hastily* interpreted as evidence of a failed de-nazification process or as a warning of the virulence of Far Right sentiment in the FRG. This

---

<sup>33</sup> *ibid.* p. 281.

phenomenon, which was documented in various opinion surveys commissioned by the allies in the immediate post-war years appears to have experienced a form of retrospective justification in the light of recent research

Wie die neuere Forschung belegt, zeichnete sich das NS-System gerade durch einen spezifischen Dualismus aus, der dessen Stabilität bis weit in den Zweiten Weltkrieg hinein garantierte: Während eine Minderheit von "rassisch" Ausgegrenzten, politisch Oppositionellen und anderen Randgruppen verfolgt, gedemütigt und letztlich "ausgemerzt" wurde, nahm das Regime auf soziale Belange der Arbeiterschaft in hohem Maße Rücksicht.<sup>35</sup>

Together with the brutal expulsion and persecution of those "minority" elements of the *Volksgemeinschaft* deemed unacceptable, the solidarity of the NS regime is understood as having been effectively achieved by the development of a social-welfare system which proved in many respects more modern than that developed in Weimar. Of central importance in this analysis is that such modernisation programmes were pursued as *conscious* social-political aims of the *Volksgemeinschaft* and that this formed a central tenet of regime loyalty.<sup>36</sup> The perception of "dualism" in the NS system between modern and anti-modern moments is employed by New Right thinkers to establish "positive" aspects of the regime in a manner which challenges the perceived left-wing orthodoxy of West German political historiography.<sup>37</sup> A central feature of attempts at *Historisierung* of National Socialism is a revision of received interpretations of the relationship between working class and NS regime.

Jürgen Falter's contribution to Zitelmann's *Historisierung* volume rejects the thesis that the middle classes displayed a high preponderance to vote NSDAP from whose allure the working class proved largely immune.<sup>38</sup> For Falter the roots of the "middle class thesis" derive in part from the dominance of Marxist intellectual traditions on the one hand and from well intentioned but counter-productive pedagogic intentions on the other.<sup>39</sup> Elsewhere, Falter has developed this notion with statistical research into the

---

<sup>34</sup> Uwe Backes, Eckhard Jesse, Rainer Zitelmann (Hg.), 'Die Schatten der Vergangenheit. Impulse zur Historisierung des Nationalsozialismus.' Ullstein. Frankfurt/M. 1992.

<sup>35</sup> Uwe Backes, Eckhard Jesse, Rainer Zitelmann, 'Was heißt: "Historisierung" des Nationalsozialismus?' in Backes, Jesse, Zitelmann. 1992. *ibid.* p. 41.

<sup>36</sup> *ibid.* p. 42.

<sup>37</sup> Hans Mommsen perceives the concern to develop a counter-position to the presumed hegemony of left-wing historiography as the defining concern of New Right thinkers, cf. Hans Mommsen, 'Noch einmal: Nationalsozialismus und Modernisierung.' in, *Geschichte und Gesellschaft*. 21 Heft 3. Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht. Göttingen. p. 392.

<sup>38</sup> Jürgen Falter, "'Anfälligkeit" der Angestellten - "Immunität" der Arbeiter? Mythen über die Wähler der NSDAP.' in Backe, Jesse, Zitelmann. 1992. *op. cit.* pp. 265-290.

<sup>39</sup> *ibid.* p. 265.

Nazi electorate and concluded that whilst the highest represented group was in fact drawn from the Protestant middle classes, working class Nazi voters represented a considerable sub-group which indicates that the NSDAP can no longer be regarded as a “middle class party” and rather more must be considered as Germany’s first successful *Volkspartei*.<sup>40</sup> A similar conclusion is also drawn by Günter Mai who has examined the role of the Nazi factory cell organisation NSBO and the DAF which he perceives as evidence of both the conscious aim and practical ability of the NSDAP to break through the traditional class structures of the nineteenth century and appeal to a broad range of social interests in developing into the model of the *Volkspartei*.<sup>41</sup> For Mai, the development of the NSBO testified to the existence of a “left wing” of the NSDAP which consciously strove for the achievement of particular “socialist” aims albeit in a conservative political framework.<sup>42</sup> Mai perceives in the NSBO more a trade union than fascist organ and notes that curbing of the factory cell organisations by the DAF, itself under the aegis of the Labour Ministry, reflected a desire in the party hierarchy to reign in more radical elements who sought not only the *geistige Gleichheit* proffered by Robert Ley but rather more material equality for the workers.<sup>43</sup> Conan Fischer and Detlev Mühlberger have also questioned “established” perspectives of the relationship between working class and NSDAP in his research into the working class membership of the SA particularly among the young unemployed.<sup>44</sup> For Fischer and Mühlberger the significant working class membership of the SA, although middle and higher ranks were almost exclusively drawn from middle class W.W.I and *Freikorps* veterans, indicates the necessary revision of the view that the Stormtroopers were primarily a manifestation of lower middle class militancy.

The above research into the sociological composition of the NS electoral and party constituency is understood as having consequences for our political understanding of National Socialism and most particularly the relationship between the ideological aims

---

<sup>40</sup> Falter. in Backes, Jesse, Zitelmann. *ibid.* p. 283. Also cf Jürgen Falter, ‘How Likely Were Workers To Vote For The NSDAP?’ in, Conan Fischer (ed.) ‘The Rise of National Socialism and the Working Classes in Weimar Germany.’ Berghahn. Oxford. 1996. p. 40-1.

<sup>41</sup> Günter Mai, ‘Arbeiterschaft zwischen Sozialismus, Nationalismus und Nationalsozialismus. Wider gängige Stereotypen.’ in Backes, Jesse, Zitelmann. 1992. p. 196 and also, ‘National Socialist Factory Cell Organisation and The German Labour Front. National Socialist Labour Policy and Organisations.’ in Fischer (ed.) 1996. *ibid.* p. 120

<sup>42</sup> Mai. in Backes, Jesse, Zitelmann. *ibid.* p. 202. in Fischer (ed.) *ibid.* p. 130.

<sup>43</sup> Mai. in Fischer. *ibid.* pp. 127-8.

of the NSDAP and NS state and their translation into pragmatic political practice. Falter, Mai and Fischer all state that they are not suggesting that the middle-class thesis of National Socialism should be replaced by a “working class thesis”.<sup>45</sup> Rather more these authors argue for taking the claims of the *Volksgemeinschaft* more seriously than as a mere ideological foil for the pursuit of class interests and stress the unique ability of the NSDAP to attract support across the traditional class structure. In turn this reflects a perception that class based analysis to National Socialism is less fruitful than has been previously assumed and that the unique, and for some “modernising”, feature of National Socialism was not only its intent but its ability to transcend class society in the *Volksgemeinschaft*.<sup>46</sup> Research into working class electoral support for the NSDAP during the late Weimar period is complimented by conceptions of the DAF, and in particular the organ *Kraft durch Freude*, as a media of working class interests and central in fostering regime-loyalty.<sup>47</sup>

It is important to emphasise that the body of research briefly summarised above does not correspond to a homogenous coterie of New Right intellectuals intent on relativising national socialist experience. Interesting for our project, however, is the congruence between such approaches and the more ideologically motivated New Right project of *Historisierung* which indeed seeks to effect a relativisation of the moral-political consequences of National Socialism. This appears to comprise two basic drives: firstly a degree of “normalisation” of National Socialism is implied by the reference to its modernising tendencies and role as “bridge” between the rigid class structures of the late nineteenth century to the meritocracy of post-war West Germany. In this sense, Weißmann perceives the events in German society post 1933 as testifying to the process of modernisation common to all modern industrial states albeit in a “new” form of “social revolution” and speaks of the existence of both *Wirtschaftswunder* and *Sozialstaat* during the 1930s.<sup>48</sup> It is this element which appears to ground the novelty of New Right approach which casts NS “social policy” as evidence of the NS state’s conscious policy of social *modernisation*.

---

<sup>44</sup> Conan Fischer and Detlev Mühlberger, ‘The Pattern of the SA’s Social Appeal.’ in Fischer (ed.) *ibid.* p. 109.

<sup>45</sup> Fischer. (ed.) *ibid.* p. 242.

<sup>46</sup> *ibid.* p. 243.

<sup>47</sup> Thus Mai in Fischer. (ed.) *ibid.* pp. 130-31 and in Backes, Jesse, Zitelmann. (Hg.) 1992. *op. cit.* p. 209.

<sup>48</sup> Weißmann. 1995. *op. cit.* p. 176.

The question of the relationship between the working class and National Socialism has formed a central tenet of approaches to the third Reich and has contained obvious importance for Marxist approaches to fascism since. The observation that fascism was capable of mobilising mass support has, despite criticisms of the antifascist approach, been a problem which Marxist thinkers have addressed. Clara Zetkin noted with concern the ability of fascism to formally adopt a revolutionary image as early as 1923<sup>49</sup> as did Arthur Rosenberg<sup>50</sup> and Georg Lukács<sup>51</sup>. This was also a factor understood by right wing conservatives such as the renegade Nazi Hermann Rauschning who in a retrospective on the Conservative Revolution explained the need to resolve the “problem” of the “masses” via recourse to mass means in justifying his active political support for the NSDAP.<sup>52</sup> Common in all of the above disparate perspectives is the understanding that the appeal to mass, revolutionary or anti-bourgeois politics essentially constitutes an ideological attempt to gain popular sympathies and mass support for a project which sought to destroy the political organisation of the working class and break the bond of socialism of either reformist or revolutionary provenance.

Acknowledgement of the ability of fascism to attract mass support and draw upon workers is thus in itself no new revelation. Distinctions between various Marxist and non Marxist approaches is of course apparent when one draws political conclusions from such sociological observations. Orthodox Stalinists perceived in National Socialism the “agents” of the bourgeoisie and the most reactionary elements of finance and monopoly capitalism<sup>53</sup>. Non orthodox Marxists such as August Thalheimer and Leon Trotsky offered a more sophisticated interpretation of fascism which addressed the autonomous character of National Socialism and its aggression towards the bourgeoisie and its parties with recourse to a version of Marx’s Bonapartist theory<sup>54</sup>. Whilst in the post-war GDR the former *Agententheorie* was continued in the official GDR antifascist theory, the latter found resonance in the FRG in the 1960s in the *neue Linke*, non

---

<sup>49</sup> ‘Extract from a resolution of the Third Enlarged Executive of the Communist International Plenum on Fascism’ (23. June 1923). in Griffin. 1995. op. cit. p. 260.

<sup>50</sup> Arthur Rosenberg, ‘Der Faschismus als Massenbewegung. Sein Aufstieg und seine Zersetzung.’ (1934) in Abendroth. 1972. op. cit. esp. pp. 118-127.

<sup>51</sup> George Lukacs. 1980. op. cit. 82-85.

<sup>52</sup> Hermann Rauschning, ‘Make and Break with the Nazis: Letters on a Conservative Revolution.’ Secker and Warburg. London.. 1941.pp. 181-2.

<sup>53</sup> cf Griffin. 1995. op.cit. pp.260-263.

<sup>54</sup> cf August Thalheimer. in Abendroth op cit. 1972.

Stalinist milieu which was more open to non orthodox Marxist interpretations of fascism. Whilst the various interpretations and approaches to fascism were conflictual and reflected the fault lines of the labour movement, common ground was found in the perception that fascism was a means of salvaging capitalist society in a period of profound crisis and of intensifying the economic exploitation and political suppression of the working class. It is this anticapitalist core of antifascism to which right wing thinkers have always objected and, since 1989 in particular, have believed exhausted with the demise of the socialist alternative and moral implosion of Marxism. Recent research which has supported the thesis of a greater working class participation in National Socialism than previously assumed is not in itself new or necessarily contradictory to antifascist approaches. The novel element in the thinking of the New Right is the perception that this reflected a genuine attempt of the NSDAP and NS state to respond to the social needs of the working class which is a quite different enterprise and one which has been convincingly refuted by critics.

It is undeniable that the notion of the *Volksgemeinschaft* and the creation of the DAF, KdF, NSV or initiatives such as the Winter aid schemes (WHW) were intended to foster the notion of a welfarist concern for the needs of the people and that this was often justified in terms of overcoming the “class politics” associated with not only the tumultuous Weimar years but also with the elitist structures of the Imperial epoch. It is quite something different, however, to take National Socialism at its word as New Right thinkers appear to do. Such initiatives of the regime, along with claims to have achieved a genuinely meritocratic or consumer society, rather more fuelled aspirations and claims which, however, it was incapable of realising.<sup>55</sup> Furthermore there was little new in the social policy of the Third Reich which, as in the instance of the *Winterhilfswerk* (WHW) and *Nationalsozialistische Volkswohlfahrt* (NSV) assumed the form of usurping functions previously performed by charities or confessional groups and overlaying them with the new, and hardly modern, *völkisch*, bio-racist ideology.<sup>56</sup> Furthermore, it is clear

---

<sup>55</sup> Thus Norbert Frei, ‘Wie modern war der Nationalsozialismus?’ in *Geschichte und Gesellschaft*. 19 (1993) Heft 3. Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht. Göttingen. p. 384.

<sup>56</sup> For the example of the WHW cf ‘Opferritual und Volksgemeinschaftsdiskurs am Beispiel des Winterhilfswerks.’ in Manfred Behrens (Mitverf.) ‘Projekt Ideologie-Theorie.’ *Das Argument: Argument Sonderband*, AS62. Argument Verlag. Berlin (West) 1980. pp. 199 - 226. For the development of the NSV cf Eckhard Hansen, ‘Wohlfahrtspolitik im NS-Staat: Motivationen, Konflikte und Machtstrukturen im “Sozialismus der Tat” des Dritten Reiches.’ Maro Verlag. Augsburg. 1991. esp. pp. 69- 79.

that NS social policy was not motivated by the needs of the individual or meeting the social needs of the workers, as Zitelmann suggests, but was rather more an attempt to compensate for the intensification of the labour process in a form of carrot and stick approach to labour relations.<sup>57</sup> Furthermore, as Mommsen has observed, not only do such interpretations confuse the DAF's plans with reality but also ignore the fact that social and welfarist policy as well as industrial productivity were only financeable through the exploitation of slave labour and the draining of the economies of the occupied territories.<sup>58</sup> Mommsen has also convincingly destroyed the New Right's modernisation argument on its own technocratic terms emphasising the inefficiency of the regime derived not least from its hypertrophic bureaucratisation.<sup>59</sup> Inefficiency was also a characteristic result of the prioritisation of certain ideological concerns leading, in the instance of armaments production, not only to the diversion of essential military resources in the genocidal campaign in the East but also to the inefficient expenditure on the development of the *Vergeltungsraketen* instead of the more vital production of new fighter planes.<sup>60</sup>

This brings us to another fundamental criticism of "modernisation" theory - the fact that Zitelmann and his colleagues separate the social policy of the Third Reich from the racial hygienist conceptions which ideologically cohered the concept of the *Volksgemeinschaft*. NS social policy was not only understood as a means of achieving a balance to compensate for the intensification of labour exploitation and the removal of all rights but more fundamentally corresponded to the conviction that the "national stock" needed to be enhanced (if the population were to be rendered ultimately fit for war) which also, of course, entailed the "eradication" of elements deemed weak, defect or otherwise damaging to the racial health of the nation.<sup>61</sup> The notion of a "dualism" in the behaviour of the NS state is predicated upon the artificial separation of NS social policy from the bio-racist, hygienist ideas which cohered population, health and welfare

---

<sup>57</sup> This is an impression strengthened from the SD report on internal security for 1938 in which the KdF is explicitly referred to as a form of necessary "balance" to even out the intensification of the labour process. cf 'Meldungen aus dem Reich.' 1938. pp 204-5.

<sup>58</sup> Mommsen. 1995. op. cit. p. 398.

<sup>59</sup> cf Hans Mommsen, 'Nationalsozialismus als vorgetäuschte Modernisierung.' in, Lutz Niethammer und Bernd Weisbrod (Hg.) 'Hans Mommsen: Der Nationalsozialismus und die deutsche Gesellschaft. Ausgewählte Aufsätze. Zum 60. Geburtstag.' Rowohlt. Reinbek bei Hamburg. 1991. pp. 408-9.

<sup>60</sup> Mommsen. 1995. op. cit. p. 397.

policies in the Third Reich. It is not possible to free social policy from the broader context of racial-hygienist ideas which informed NS *Bevölkerungspolitik* in the manner attempted by New Right thinkers. Although the conditions for the genocide did not unfold until the outbreak of the war against the Soviet Union, on the level of racial ideology, these ideas exist in a continuity which links seemingly innocuous initiatives such as the Winter Aid scheme and welfare groups through to the state policy of genocide which unfolded in the context of the military campaign in the East.<sup>62</sup> In the perspective offered by New Right thinkers, however, whilst NS social policy testified to the modernity of the Third Reich and its intentional plans of social modernisation, bio-racism was rather more a phenomenon of totalitarian belief in “utopia” upon which basis Zitelmann and others have suggested a parallel to the “class utopia” aspired to by the Communist movement.

The modernisation theory of New Right thinkers is predicated upon a separation of the process of social modernisation from all accompanying ethical and political norms and invokes a notion of value-free modernisation. Mommsen has criticised the claims made in support of the modernisation thesis and concluded that no convincing evidence can be found to support the argument that the NS state acted as a catalyst for social modernisation. For Mommsen, such developments must be viewed within a much longer historical time frame and he concludes that only when one investigates changes between 1918-1945 and after can one speak of social modernisation proper.<sup>63</sup> Furthermore, Mommsen and others have pointed out the crass provocation of adding the label “modernisation” to a regime which systematically destroyed democratic rights, imprisoned and murdered significant sections of the indigenous and neighbouring populations, advanced racial theory as a cohesive social value and, in the course of the imperialist conquest of its neighbours, initiated the unique crime of state-led genocide.<sup>64</sup> Whilst this aspect of the New Right’s concept of modernity has been seriously challenged by respected experts in the field, we now need to address the second aspect

---

<sup>61</sup> Michael Burleigh, Wolfgang Wippermann, ‘The Racial State. Germany 1933-1945.’ CUP. Cambridge. 1996. esp. pp. 75-197.

<sup>62</sup> Burleigh, Wippermann. *ibid.* Also cf Götz Aly’s analysis of the “Final Solution” which highlights the role of demographic and economic bureaucrats in generating the extermination programme in the East. Aly, “‘Final Solution’”. Nazi Population Policy and the Murder of the European Jews.’ Arnold. London. 1999.

<sup>63</sup> Mommsen. 1995. *op. cit.* pp. 393.

<sup>64</sup> Mommsen. *ibid.* p. 399, 1991. *op. cit.* p. 423. Frei. 1993. *op. cit.*

of this approach which considers the role of ideology in National Socialism. Whilst New Right thinkers do not deny the Holocaust and indeed condemn the racial theory which inspired the programme of genocide, racial ideology is presented, by these thinkers, as a variety of twentieth century political modernism and the “extremism” of the mass age. In this sense, they pursue Nolte’s relativisation enterprise of the 1980s and not only refute the notion of uniqueness of the Holocaust but further more suggest an innate, extremist relatedness between the “totalitarian” dictatorships of the twentieth century which is intellectually cohered by recourse to an older critique of modernism and mass society.

### 5.3. Race, Class and Mass

For Zitelmann, in an article which addresses Nolte’s theory of the *Weltbürgerkrieg*, the fundamental error of communist anti-fascism was the belief that the NSDAP came to power in order to avert the danger of proletarian revolution.<sup>65</sup> The falseness of this approach is not founded for Zitelmann in the recognition of the unlikelihood of a communist overthrow in the late 1920s-30s but rather more from the neglect of the revolutionary essence of National Socialism itself. Zitelmann recognises the superficial congruence between communist theory of fascism and Nolte’s understanding of the NSDAP as the historical “answer” to the Bolshevik revolution of 1917. The essential difference between the two positions is, of course, the fact that Nolte perceives the reaction of the bourgeoisie as understandable and to a point justifiable.<sup>66</sup> It was this aspect which drew the fire of critical intellectuals during the *Historikerstreit* who, according to Zitelmann, however, responded with moral indignation rather than academic critique. Zitelmann concurs with Nolte that the Soviet Union represented both *Vorbild* and *Schreckbild* for German fascism and states that the “fanaticism” of the KPD and CPSU in fact drew much admiration from Hitler. Zitelmann differs from Nolte in asserting parallels between fascism and communism in terms of their common ideological vigour which corresponded to Hitler’s intent on creating a right wing fanatical elite (or “historical minority”) which could impose its will upon society.

---

<sup>65</sup> Rainer Zitelmann, ‘Aus Anlaß der Thesen von Ernst Nolte.’ in Backes, Jesse, Zitelmann..1992. op. cit. p. 221.

<sup>66</sup> *ibid.* pg 224.

Zitelmann makes this the basis of the following distinction between fascist and conventional bourgeois anticommunism

Jene Merkmale der kommunistischen Bewegung, die vom Standpunkt des bürgerlichen Liberalismus aus als besonders verwerflich galten und den bürgerlichen Antikommunismus zu einem wesentlichen Teil motivierten, nötigten Hitler höchste Bewunderung ab: der totalitäre Charakter der Ideologie, der unumschränkte Machtwille und die klar formulierte Zielsetzung, alle politischen Gegner nicht nur "fanatisch" zu bekämpfen, sondern letztlich völlig "auszuschalten".<sup>67</sup>

In the above, Zitelmann ignores the widespread support within "respectable" German society for the right's brutal attacks upon the left which may well have aroused distaste for the SA's "vulgar" tactics but found resonance with regard to its social content. This is a position which also blurs the distinction between the "Red Terror" which was a response to genuine social confrontation in the context of a civil war and the Nazi persecution of the Jews which was a wholly ideological construction.<sup>68</sup> This also contrasts with the relative leniency with which fascist terror was treated by the authorities in comparison to the draconian measures imposed upon the left.<sup>69</sup> The above reveals more about Zitelmann's own "totalitarian" approach to the relatedness of the "fanatical" parties of left and right than it does historical events. Hitler's speech before the members of the *Düsseldorfer Herrenklub* in January 1932 in which he spoke of the remilitarisation of Germany, the crushing of the left and the expansion of *Lebensraum* are taken by Zitelmann to have represented Hitler's tactic of appeasing bourgeois unease towards the NSDAP rather than representing an expression of his genuine anticommunism and pro-capitalist approach. The fact that within the first few years of the erection of the NS dictatorship the regime set about implementing all of the above is remarkably ignored by Zitelmann. Zitelmann's divergence with Nolte results from his perception of the parallels between communism and fascism which ran deeper than a mere reflection of each others' radicality

Wenn Nolte pauschal die Furcht vor dem Bolschewismus als *das* Motiv der Nationalsozialisten beieift, dann schließt er damit von vornherein eine wichtige Strömung in der NSDAP aus, nämlich die sogenannte NS-Linke.<sup>70</sup>

---

<sup>67</sup> *ibid.* p. 227.

<sup>68</sup> This was a criticism which Mommsen levelled against Nolte during the *Historikerstreit* and which he has subsequently argued against New Right "modernisation" advocates. cf Mommsen. in 'Historikerstreit.' 1987. op. cit. 174-188

<sup>69</sup> One significant example of this was the comparatively lenient treatment of the Putschists of 1923 and the anti-republican state of Bavaria in contrast to the emergency ruled decreed in Saxony and Thuringia in the same year after the entrance of KPD members into regional parliaments. cf Mommsen. 1989. op. cit. pp. 163-171, p. 180

<sup>70</sup> Zitelmann. *ibid.* p. 231.

Thus in contrast to Nolte, Zitelmann is concerned with drawing attention to the apparent similarities between NSDAP and KPD on the basis of their apparent relatedness as “fanatical ideologues” and he supports this via reference to the “left wing” elements within the NS movement which we encountered in the *Historisierung* project. This is a perspective which is often complimented with the identification of nationalist currents in the KPD’s politics. The reference to the KPD’s adoption of nationalist themes is indeed accurate and evidence of this may be found in the 1923 Ruhr campaign against occupation by Belgian and French troops<sup>71</sup> as well as the 1930 programme of the party which argued for the *nationale und soziale Befreiung vom deutschen Volk* and attacked the *Versailler Raubfrieden*.<sup>72</sup> The KPD adopted a distinctly nationalist tone in the engagement in the Ruhr, as opposed to its earlier policy of proletarian solidarity between French and German workers against the bourgeoisie who, as Taylor noted, despite the official “passive resistance” continued to sell coal to the French at inflated prices.<sup>73</sup> Fischer has also noted the accommodation of the KPD to anti-Semitic prejudice in its condemnation of “Jewish” capitalists before audiences of “gentlemen of the *völkisch* persuasion”.<sup>74</sup> Such policy moves on the part of the KPD reflected a concession to a nationalist and chauvinist political climate which reflected on the one level political opportunism and on a more fundamental level this reflected the Stalinisation of the party and the adoption Stalin’s concept of the “national road to socialism”. Whilst this may well have represented an opportunistic concession to nationalism this must be distinguished from the assertion implied by Fischer that this indicated an innate relatedness between the two extremist mass parties of Weimar.

For Zitelmann such evidence testifies not to the political opportunism of the KPD under the growing influence of Stalinism but rather more indicates a congruence between the two extremes of the political spectrum which sought to mobilise the “masses”. Far more important a motivation for NS leading figures for Zitelmann was the dream of a system which would *unite* socialist and nationalist aims in one movement. Whilst he concedes

---

<sup>71</sup> cf Conan Fischer, ‘The German Communists and the Rise of Nazism.’ Macmillan. London. 1991. 45, 113-14. Although Fischer appears to conclude from such evidence testimony of grass-roots level informal cooperation between NSDAP and KPD - a position which he has developed since 1991 particular in his research into the working class composition of the SA.

<sup>72</sup> cf the apologetic formulation in Wolfgang Ruge, ‘Deutschland 1917 - 1933. Von der Großen Sozialistischen Oktoberrevolution bis zum Ende der Weimarer Republik.’ VEB Deutscher Verlag der Wissenschaften. Berlin (Ost) 1982. p. 373-4.

<sup>73</sup> Taylor. 1965. op. cit. p. 229.

<sup>74</sup> Fischer. 1991. op. cit. p. 59.

that anti-communism and anti-Semitism played an important role in the NSDAP, they did not constitute its basic social mission

Antisemitische Vorurteile spielten - allerdings in recht unterschiedlicher Ausprägung - eine Rolle, aber gewichtiger noch scheint für viele der Traum einer Vermählung des Nationalismus mit dem Sozialismus gewesen zu sein.<sup>75</sup>

For Zitelmann, Hitler's primary motivation was not anticommunism but the development of a revolutionary new elite which synthesised elements of nationalism with socialism. How is it possible for Zitelmann to argue an affinity between a movement which set at the front of its programme anti-communism, imperialist conquest and bio-racism and a movement formally committed to the destruction of capitalism as the womb of social deprivation and international conflict and to the realisation of social equality? Zitelmann takes points of apparent congruence - the revolutionary rhetoric, belief in an ideology and the vision of a future "utopia" and extracts these from their specific social and political context and rationality in order to construct an artificial relationship between radical left and right. From this perspective, the fact that when in power the national socialists set about implementing their aims of destroying the organised working class movement, re-militarising German society and constructing the racially exclusive *Volksgemeinschaft* appear as secondary, or even inconsequential particularly when this is coupled with the argument of a "welfarist" policy direction of the NSDAP and NS state.

Zitelmann's contention that the NSDAP sought to synthesise the currents of nationalism and socialism is worth considering further as it provides the key to the New Right's approach to the legacy of German fascism. In general, New Right thinkers have identified the mass and seemingly anti-elitist aspects of National Socialism in the context of its right wing conservative peers such as the DNVP. For thinkers such as Zitelmann and Weißmann the superficial "egalitarianism" of National Socialism indicated not only the "modernising" effects of the regime but also testify to the fact that National Socialism represented something quite distinct from traditional right wing parties and interests despite its clear antecedents in the conservative spectrum. Both Mai and Weißmann trace the political antecedents of National Socialism to late nineteenth century attempts to found a mass party from the right in order to address the transformation of society and the political entrance of the social democratic mass

population in particular.<sup>76</sup> Mai likewise emphasises the attempts of late nineteenth and early twentieth century conservatives to formulate a right wing “version” of socialism which primarily understood socialism however as an effective means of social organisation in the modern mass age.<sup>77</sup>

In a manner similar to that by which Zitelmann, Backes and Jesse formally adopt Broszat’s plea for a critical *Historisierung* of National Socialism, Weißmann invokes the work of the Anglo-American historian Geoff Eley into the reconfiguration of the German right between the late nineteenth and early twentieth century.<sup>78</sup> Again, similar to the invocation of Broszat, Weißmann conveniently ignores the underlying premise of Eley’s work that this reconfiguration was essentially one of an elite-level reconfiguration of the relationship between industry, state and political right in the objective interests of stabilising capitalist social relations. For Weißmann, however, these developments describe rather more problems of modern mass society and the political weakness of liberalism in particular.<sup>79</sup> For New Right thinkers, National Socialism represented a phenomenon distinct from the conventional political right - they thus decontextualise National Socialism from the longer term reconfiguration of the right and create a false dichotomy between a supposedly homogenous “traditional” conservatism and the new form of “revolutionary” conservatism during the 1920s-30s. Whilst it is of course legitimate to indicate the distinctions between National Socialism and “traditional” conservative nationalists such as those attracted to the DNVP, it is disingenuous to ignore the widespread rejection of republican democracy by the political right and important groups in influential positions of social power in state, military and bureaucracy. The fundamental distinction between left and right which is not considered in this New Right reading is that whilst National Socialism was in many respects “anti-bourgeois” in terms of its radical claim to absolute political power, it did not, in stark contrast to the radical left, seek to transcend the basis of bourgeois politics in the social relations of capitalism. In terms of the fundamental political and economic organisation of society National Socialism represented a radical political “revolution” in an attempt to stabilise a profoundly shaken system whereas communism sought a post-

---

<sup>75</sup> Zitelmann. *ibid.* p. 233.

<sup>76</sup> Weißmann. 1995. *op. cit.* pp. 14-34.

<sup>77</sup> Mai. in Backes, Jesse, Zitelmann. 1992. *op. cit.* pp. 196-99.

<sup>78</sup> Weißmann. 1995. *op. cit.* p. 16.

<sup>79</sup> Weißmann. 1995.

capitalist solution to contemporary crisis through a social revolution. Zitelmann seeks to evade this factor by arguing for a (different) concept of “revolution” in order to be able to classify National Socialism as a revolutionary phenomenon. This revolutionary quality is then highlighted as evidence of a “totalitarian” or “fanatical” relatedness of the extremes of left and right. For New Right thinkers the “revolutionary” element of National Socialism was contained in the political and physical destruction of liberal democracy which, significantly, is often portrayed in New Right readings as having practically invited its own destruction. For New Right thinkers, the characteristic feature of revolution is not primarily the socio-economic organisation of society but rather more the destruction of a core of “traditional” political values. National Socialism is above all condemned by these thinkers for its “usurpation” and subsequent destruction of conventional values of patriotism and nationalism. In this manner a political defence of “national tradition” forms the link between past and present in New Right thought: whilst the destruction of tradition under National Socialism in the past resulted from its “revolutionary” self conception it is imperative in the present that “traditions” are observed and defended against “totalitarian” threats in the form of either fascism, communism or even “democratism”, “PC” culture or *Verfassungspatriotismus* in the present. We shall return to critique of contemporary West German liberal democracy in the following section. Before examining the contemporary defence of “national tradition” against universalising and “moralising” political trends in present German political culture, let us consider the notion of an “ideological” congruence between fascism and communism in the context of the more conventional antimodernist argumentation of neoconservative thought.

In an article which returns to theory of the *Weltbürgerkrieg*, Nolte offered an interpretation of the intellectual-historical antecedents to the “global civil war” inaugurated by the Russian Revolution of 1917. For Nolte the *Weltbürgerkrieg* of 1917 - 1989 was a modern version and development of an older constellation of modern civil war derived from revolutionary upheaval of 1789. Citing the English conservative Edmund Burke’s observations of the French Revolution, Nolte understands the French Revolution as a seizure of power by a party of armed, fanatical ideologues of “moneyed interest” over “landed interest” who, furthermore, sought and attained international

resonance and influence between 1789 and 1815.<sup>80</sup> The crucial moment for Nolte in the eruption of this first *Weltbürgerkrieg* was the toppling of the old monarchical semi-absolutist order and the destruction of “tradition” in the name of progress and under the influence of mass social action. Whilst by 1900 it appeared as if a repetition of the *Weltbürgerkrieg* would be highly unlikely, opportunity for precisely such a renaissance was provided by the four years of industrial warfare between 1914-18 and, of course, more importantly the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917. A fundamental distinction between these two *Weltbürgerkriege* was the fact that whilst 1789 heralded the political entrance of the “masses”, the global civil war this unleashed was primarily fought between states. The Russian Revolution of October 1917 is perceived in many respects as a product of the development of modern mass society during the nineteenth century with its formal claims to equality and democracy.<sup>81</sup> As the Russian Revolution occurred in the age of mass political parties resulting from mass political participation it thus, for Nolte, produced the mass party of post 1918 radical fascism.<sup>82</sup> We have examined Nolte’s thesis of the relationship between Communism and fascism elsewhere. What is of interest here is the manner in which Nolte seeks to link the two epochs of global civil war via the revolutions of 1789 and 1917. Whilst the former introduced the “masses” and concepts of equality and democratic rights opposed to the old absolutist regimes at the birth of modern capitalism, 1917 sought the emancipation of the working class from the “highest stage” of capitalism.<sup>83</sup> Both 1789 and 1917 staked claims to progression beyond the confines of the present and an emancipation from particularist tradition under the principle of equality.

For Lübke too, the essence of modernist political ideologies is the emancipation from tradition and the present into an imagined future utopia. Lübke describes that whilst during the renaissance, the concept of utopia was associated with spatial categories, after the conquering of the earth this utopian desire was projected into the temporal category which cast the future as the arbiter of utopia.<sup>84</sup> Such temporal utopian visions were articulated in the modern age of mass society in the insistence that the chosen “party” represents the vanguard of humanity in the cause of emancipation from the

---

<sup>80</sup> Nolte. in Jesse. op. cit. p. 357.

<sup>81</sup> A similar argument that in the post-1789 epoch despotic regimes were compelled to adopt a mass character is advanced by Backes in, Jesse. 1996. op. cit. p. 310.

<sup>82</sup> Nolte. *ibid.* p. 362.

<sup>83</sup> Lenin. ‘Imperialism The Highest Stage of Capitalism.’ Progressive Publishers, 1974.

present.<sup>85</sup> Whilst Lübbe perceives that racial theory does not touch Marxism in terms of its intellectual niveau, he contends that both perceive history as a series of successive historical epochs based upon class or racial struggle which privileges the “party” to totalitarian self-empowerment. This forms the basis of the inherent relatedness between NS racial ideology and Marxist-Leninist class ideology, both of which are based upon mass terror.<sup>86</sup> Not only does this ideological perspective offer justification for the confrontation with the present society but it also provides a higher moral rationality for the parties of “armed fanatics” to implement their programme with little regard for the human consequences. It is upon this basis that Lübbe understands the capacity of both Communism and National Socialism to perpetrate the mass murders of the distinctly “modern” twentieth century and its concern to emancipate humanity from the traditionalism of “common sense”. For Lübbe the temporal location of the mass murders of the last century was not incidental and rather more he perceives them as a consequence of political characteristics of the modern age

Dieser Terror war vielmehr ein politisches Phänomen, das einzig im Kontext der modernen Zivilisation verständlich gemacht werden kann, nämlich als politische Konsequenz des Versuchs, den Desorientierungsfolgen des eigenen Gescheitertseins an den Herausforderungen der ohnehin desorientierungsträchtigen Moderne in die Gewißheiten einer Geschichtsideologie zu entkommen, die einen in die Rolle des Endsiegers einsetzt.<sup>87</sup>

For Lübbe it is thus inaccurate to describe the mass killings of the twentieth century as a lapse into “barbarism” as they were wholly products of the dynamic of modern civilisation which provided the technical precondition for the Holocaust or Stalin’s mass purges.<sup>88</sup> Significant in Lübbe’s approach is the lacking differentiation between Stalinist purges and the genocide against Europe’s Jewish population - whilst these events are not explicitly denied their historical specificity this is essentially abolished in the contention that they were related through the mediation of a fanatical belief in an ideology of future utopia. This explains the ability of the fanatical parties to perpetrate mass crimes and Lübbe refutes the notion forwarded by Horkheimer and Adorno that the Holocaust represented the fruits of a morally indifferent “instrumental reason”<sup>89</sup> and

---

<sup>84</sup> Lübbe. 1992. op. cit. p. 148-9.

<sup>85</sup> Lübbe. 1992. ibid. p. 149.

<sup>86</sup> Lübbe. 1992. p. 151.

<sup>87</sup> Hermann Lübbe, ‘Rationalität und Irrationalität des Völkermords. Ernst Nolte zum 70. Geburtstag.’ in, Hanno Loewy (Hg.) ‘Holocaust: Die Grenzen des Verstehens. Eine Debatte über die Besetzung der Geschichte.’ Rowohlt. Reinbek bei Hamburg. 1992. p. 90.

<sup>88</sup> cf Lübbe. 1992. op. cit. p. 137.

<sup>89</sup> ibid.

rather more suggest that the reason appealed to was understood as a higher moral category. This higher moral status of the reason invoked by Nazis and Class Warriors alike explains their ability to perpetrate morally repugnant crimes

Ohne die Wahrheitsüberzeugungen, wie sie sich bei den totalitären Parteien im Medium der Großideologien unseres Jahrhunderts gebildet haben, blieben die totalitären Massentötungen unverstündlich, ja, sie hätten sich gar nicht ereignen können.<sup>90</sup>

Whilst in terms of the execution of genocide, the perpetrators responded to questions of instrumental reason this does not explain the motivation for such crimes which Lübbe perceives in the *höhere ideologische Rationalität* offered by both categories of “class” and “race”.<sup>91</sup> For Lübbe the mass killings perpetrated by communism and fascism are the central definitory phenomena of the twentieth century to the extent that future generations will look back upon the twentieth century as the epoch of ideologically justified mass murders

Wir dürfen sicher sein, daß aus dem Blickpunkt des nächsten Jahrtausends, von dem uns ja nur noch wenige Jahre trennen, generell die Massentötungen aus ideologischer Rationalität mehr als alles andere die historische Einzigartigkeit unseres Jahrhunderts ausmachen werden. Millionen Opfer nationalsozialistischer Herrschaft und Millionen Opfer internationalsozialistischer Herrschaft dazu - das wird sich im Gedächtnis der künftigen Generationen nicht als unvergleichlich auseinander dividieren lassen.<sup>92</sup>

It is upon the basis of this insight that Lübbe defends the comparative approach advanced by Nolte during the *Historikerstreit* and contends that only via such comparison can one ascertain the uniqueness of both Stalin’s and Hitler’s crimes.<sup>93</sup> Lübbe’s thesis suggests a generic relatedness between communism and fascism which was grounded in their apparent faith in a tradition-consuming philosophy of history in the quest for a future utopia. Once this point has been accepted, questions of the historical specificity of the crimes perpetrated by Stalinists or fascists assume a necessary technical nature of when, how many and where etc. The notion that fascist bio-racism represented a form of “inverted Marxism”<sup>94</sup> which supplanted the theory of class struggle with that of race struggle serves not only to relative the historical specificity of National Socialism but by blurring the distinction between the two primarily serves to discredit conventional radical approaches to society and history.

---

<sup>90</sup> Lübbe. 1992. in Loewy. op. cit. p. 85.

<sup>91</sup> Lübbe. *ibid.* p. 84, pp. 86-7.

<sup>92</sup> Lübbe. 1992. in Loewy. p. 90. also cf Lübbe. 1992. p. 137.

<sup>93</sup> Lübbe. 1992. in Loewy. *ibid.* and Lübbe. 1992. p. 152-3.

Whilst this approach was cohered by recourse to Cold War anticommunism during the period of division, in unified Germany this approach appears intellectually cohered by recourse to a more traditional neoconservative critique of modernist political culture and mass society. The fact that this apparent congruence is expressed in such varied concepts as Lübke's notion of "philosophy of history", or "idealism", Mai's concept of their related "materialism" or Zitelmann's understanding of their "fanaticism" indicates that the perception of congruence is not derived from a study of the characteristics of historical materialism or racial social Darwinism as even the most perfunctory of glances reveals the incomparable nature of these currents. The basis of comparison which remains constant is the perception of these ideologies which were capable of politically mobilising the "masses" in the application of their ideas. Thus for one of the co-authors of the *Selbstbewußte Nation*, Ulrich Schacht, the actual political-philosophical position assumed by communism or fascism regarded such concepts of progress or reason is rendered a secondary value in the face of their common capacity to unfold mass terror in the name of a future utopia of either class or racial provenance. In turn, and in congruence with Nolte's appreciation the key event in this genealogy of ideologically founded mass political terror is the French Revolution

Der macht-politisch wirksame Effekt derartig kurzschließender Tugend- und Heils-Systeme, wie sie sich seit 1789 national und international entwerfen, um international und national unterwerfen zu können, heißt: Klassen- oder Rassen-, in jedem Fall aber Massen-Terror. Er geschieht, seit dieser Zeit, auf *moderne* Weise, also *systematisch*: Zunächst im Kopf, dann - als Kopf-ab-Ritual - auf dem Marktplatz oder aber hinter den Bergen bei den Sieben Zwergen, in jenem sagenhaften Gelände aller Ismen, die uns vor und nach den Zäsuren als entweder helle oder dunkle Märchen erzählt werden, in deren Licht und Schatten wir uns sonnen dürfen oder frieren sollen oder umgekehrt. Nationalsozialismus, Kommunismus, Ignorantismus und vice versa.<sup>95</sup>

The association made here between "race" or "class" terror rests upon the causal agency of the a concept of the "masses" in translating a philosophy of history into political reality. These are historical interpretation which of course have contemporary political significance and are particularly related to the desire of conservative thinkers to rehabilitate a more conventional form of nationalism post-unification Germany. Above all this form of "totalitarian" interpretation of National Socialism is an attempt to overcome the strictures of, in Schacht's words, the contemporary *postdeutsche national*

---

<sup>94</sup> Thus Günter Mai. in Backes, Jesse, Zitelmann. 1992. op. cit. p. 251.

<sup>95</sup> Ulrich Schacht, 'Stigma und Sorge. Über deutsche Identität nach Auschwitz.' in Schacht, Schwilk. 1994. op. cit. p. 58.

*suizidale Geschichtsschreibung* which employs the NS experience in order to discredit conventional forms of national identity.<sup>96</sup> For Schacht, the benefits of an interpretation of National Socialism as a product of “totalitarian modernism” is that it relieves concepts of German nationalism and “traditional” values from the association with the destruction of Weimar democracy and the construction of the “total state” for which many of the Weimar right argued during the inter-war period. For Schacht the reference to the “modernist” context of National Socialism implies that it is illegitimate to stigmatise the Germans with Auschwitz for contemporary political-pedagogic purpose. Schacht maintains that the Germans certainly have an obligation to know about Auschwitz yet this is a form of remembrance which has abandoned a critical perspective on German nationalism, the role of social elites or the crisis of inter-war capitalism. This is a form of remembrance which decontextualises Auschwitz and is above all shaped by the belief that the Holocaust testifies to the cosmic ability of man to perpetrate inhuman actions against fellow humans

Dieses Wissen der Deutschen ist allerdings ein Privileg: Das Privileg zu wissen, daß Auschwitz *möglich* ist, weil es geschah. Was aber *möglich* ist, weil es geschah, ist nicht einmalig, sondern *menschenmöglich*.<sup>97</sup>

What remains in this perspective is an interpretation of National Socialism which is stripped of all historical contingency and context and which presents the Holocaust as a consequence of the mass inspired ideologies of the modern age and the inherent inhumanity of humanity. As such this is a form of “remembrance” which fails to distinguish the specific socio-historical context of German fascism and the roots of racial-hygienist notions in the political elite of the West since the late nineteenth century and as such can be invoked in the neoconservative arguments in favour of a defence of “tradition” and conventional national identity after the moral and political discrediting of the concept of social emancipation and grand scale political action. If the destruction of tradition appears to open the door to mass terror then it appears only fitting that Tradition is defended in the present against a critical perspective. It is the context of these considerations that neoconservatives perceives in 1989 a unique historical opportunity to both revise post-war critical perceptions of national identity and to relocate National Socialism and the Holocaust as a problem of “emancipatory” politics

---

<sup>96</sup> Schacht. *ibid.* p. 62.

<sup>97</sup> Schacht. *ibid.* p. 66.

in the first instance. Let us now consider some of the contemporary formulations of “tradition” against “emancipation” in New Right discourse.

#### 5. 4. The End Of Emancipation

Although the thesis of the relatedness of communism and fascism remains contentious, the post-cold War climate is conducive to this basic approach which is characterised by its anti-modernist thrust. From this perspective, both communism and fascism represented modernist deviations from the “norms” of tradition and the nation which they sought to transcend by revolutionary intervention. At the end of the twentieth century, neoconservatives such as Zitelmann perceives an opportune constellation after the discrediting of the concept of emancipation and faith in a future “utopia” (or more commonly progress) for rehabilitating a more traditional perspective in political culture. Whilst the right has always rejected such an approach, the engagement with the history of communism within the totalitarian frame reference has apparently given a fillip to this older antimodernist critique of the right. Not only has the collapse of the Eastern Bloc discredited traditional left wing political approach as a non-viable option, but further more it is revealed as a criminal political direction which was responsible for a multitude of mass killings which cast the Holocaust of National Socialism in the shadows. This insight at the “End of History” has been perceived as offering a unique opportunity to counter the traditional deficit of the right - that of not being in possession of a “utopia”. As “utopia” is associated not only with naive attempt to overcome anthropologically grounded concept of “human nature” in the more traditional style of conservative argument but also with the mass crimes stretching from the eradication of the Kulaks to the killing fields of Cambodia, the end of the twentieth century appears to conservatives to represent a fortuitous constellation. Thus Zitelmann draws the following optimistic conclusion for the New Right

Nur wenn es der demokratischen Rechten gelingt, dieses vermeintliche Utopie Defizit als wirklichen Vorzug zu vermitteln, wird sie den Nachteil, nicht im Besitze von allesversprechenden Utopien zu sein, zum Teil kompensieren können. Am Ende eines Jahrhunderts, das uns vor allem lehrt, wie leicht schöne Utopien in schöne neue Welten, Diktatur und Vernichtung umschlagen, gibt es vielleicht eine Chance, dies zu vermitteln.<sup>98</sup>

---

<sup>98</sup> Zitelmann in Schacht, Schwilk. *ibid.*p. 181.

Zitelmann draws out the benefits of the present ideological climate for a conservative outlook. By associating “utopian” conceptions with totalitarian dictatorship and genocide he seeks to gain political capital for the right from the discrediting of the idea of social alternative. The problem is contained in the fact that a conservative programme which basis itself around the insight that “utopia” is a redundant term is a project which can at best stabilise but never inspire. Whilst for postmodernists the experiences of the twentieth century prove the illegitimacy of the grand narrative and reason, thus concluding that ideas are essentially relative and never absolute, for conservatives values can never be relative. The postmodernist fetishisation of the relative is matched by the conservative search for the absolute. Only an absolute value contains the potential to cohere and command authority which, for conservative thought, is the primary social function of national identity.

It is this antimodernist perspective which has been retained from the older totalitarian approach and been developed by the New Right. For the New Right, the end of the “modernist project” signals not only the end of the Grand Utopia of social transformation but equally discredits the *Kleinutopie* of bourgeois civil society championed by thinkers such as Wehler and Habermas in the concept of republican *Verfassungspatriotismus*. In this vein, Karlheinz Weißmann contended

Die *civil society* als Klein-Utopie überfordert und unterfordert den Menschen gleichermaßen, der kein durchgängig rationales, aber ein in der geschichtlichen Tradition gebundenes Lebewesen ist. Eine absolute Emanzipation aus diesen Bindungen bleibt unmöglich, solange die Individuen schon durch ihre Sprache und all kulturellen Selbstverständlichkeiten so wesentlich entlastet werden.<sup>99</sup>

Thus Weißmann repeats the common conservative anti-modernist critique that the modernist project of emancipation through the medium of human reason is an essentially “unnatural” mission which ignores the anthropological condition of humanity. Here “culture” and “tradition” are counterpoised to reason and emancipation. This is an insight which has profited from the collapse of the alternative socialist society of the East which confirms for right wing thinkers the futility of emancipation. For Weißmann this also testifies to the failure of universal values which, once more, appear to ignore the constraints of the “human condition” which is always contextualised by a particularist culture which cannot be transcended

Die in den vergangenen beiden Jahrhunderten unternommenen Versuche, diese Einsicht zu überspringen, um vom einzelnen direkt zur Menschheit zu gelangen, waren jedenfalls zum Scheitern verurteilt. Von der "Situation" kann sich der Mensch nur bedingt emanzipieren, sie umgibt ihn immer schon als kulturelle Sphäre.<sup>100</sup>

Thus for Weißmann, the particularist differences between cultures assume absolute status and form a kind of "second nature" of humanity which can not be transcended. From this perspective, the revolutionary upheavals of 1789 and 1917 which both drew upon universal values, the faculty of reason and a humanist approach were doomed to failure from the outset. This approach ignores, of course, the profound changes wrought by the revolutions of 1789 and 1917 in world history which, despite the evident failure of their historical projects, nevertheless represented a great shift forward in human social relations and not least in the sphere of culture. Weißmann's static conception of culture appears to be in fact a plea for particularism and a defence of "tradition" against the project of human social emancipation. As such this forms a succinct articulation of the conservative optimism that the collapse of the Cold War would herald a return to the certainties and absolutes of culture and tradition after the collapse of the revolutionary tradition and the discrediting of the concept of progress. Hartmut Lange expresses a similar view of the significance of the changes of 1989 for conservatism commenting

Bertrand Russell äußerte nach dem Kriegsverbrechertribunal in Nürnberg: Der europäische Nihilismus hätte in Nietzsche und Hitler seine historische Chance erhalten und ein für allemal verspielt, mit ebensolchem Recht könnte man aber heute behaupten: Auch der rigorose Rationalismus hatte in diesem Jahrhundert seine historische Chance und hat die aus den Fugen geratene Welt keineswegs bessern können.<sup>101</sup>

Lange sees the claim of Russell that "European nihilism" had lost its world historical chance as justified. This was indeed a widely expressed sentiment in the direct post-war years and reflected the mood that the "old world" was gone forever. National Socialism discredited the traditional values of imperialism and racial superiority which had also been a central tenet of the Anglo-American national identity before the war. In Germany this was obviously particularly sharpened and led to the total discrediting of the political elite and its traditional ideology. It is this background which formed the conceptions in the 60s that the FRG had superseded the nation state in its decisive rejection of the *Sonderbewußtsein* and the general suspicion towards more nationalist conceptions of

---

<sup>99</sup> Karlheinz Weißmann. 'Herausforderung und Entscheidung. Über einen politischen Verismus für Deutschland.' in Schacht, Schwilk. 1994. *ibid.* p. 313.

<sup>100</sup> *ibid.* pp. 315-16.

<sup>101</sup> Lange in Schwilk, Schacht. *op. cit.* p. 440.

statehood. This period is over and Lange concludes that the social discrediting of traditional conservative ideology in the post-war phase has returned to haunt its successor. After agreeing with Russell's conclusion on European nihilism, however, in the light of the defeat of rationalism, Lange then falls back upon that very tradition in order to comprehend the problems of the present. It would appear that Russell's verdict enjoyed validity only for the post-war period as he claims

Die Welt zeigt sich heute deutlicher denn je nicht als Gelegenheit zur Vernunft, sondern als "Wille und Vorstellung", die bis zur tödlichen Erschöpfung aneinandergeraten sind: Eindringlich erfüllt sich auch die Behauptung Nietzsches, daß der Mensch ohne Instinktschiene ein nicht festgesetztes Tier sei und daß der Intellekt diesen Sachverhalt nicht bessert, sondern lediglich bis in den Willen zur Bosheit hinein pervertiert. Und auch die Sorge Kierkegaards, wie man den Menschen, der sich dem regellosen Risiko überläßt, doch noch sicher in die Zucht und damit in die Obhut eines allmächtigen, gerechten und liebenden Gottes zurückgewinnen kann, ist als Transendenzbegehren wieder aktuell.<sup>102</sup>

The exhaustion of the idea of rational progress in human affairs has led to a renaissance of interest in anti-enlightenment thinkers of which nineteenth century Germany can boast the most rigorous of intellectual role models. The above quotation brings together central aspects of conservative anti-modernist thinking of the nineteenth and early twentieth century which was regarded as discredited by the experience of German fascism and as anachronistic in the enlightened and "post-national" West German society after 1945. As Lange notes, it appears that the social climate at the End of History has created a constellation in which such intellectual tradition may once more flourish after the discrediting of the classic modernist concepts of reason, universalism and faith in the capacity of humanity to meaningful purpose in social affairs traditionally associated with left wing and radical approaches to society and history. This mood not only effects the formulation of traditional radical critiques of modern society but also weakens the principles of Western liberalism which itself formally based upon principles of democratic equality and universal values. Whilst Western liberalism in the end proved more robust than either radical fascism or communism, it is itself a potentially destructive form of political organisation precisely due to this intellectual principle. This is a point addressed by Nolte. Whilst the fascist response was ultimately incapable of defeating the socialist alternative during the period of the European civil war, final victory of capitalism over the "last faith" of communism was achieved by the pluralist system of liberal capitalism, thus

Mit negativer Wertung möchte man behaupten, die mit ökonomischer Effizienz gepaarte Fäulnis des hedonistischen Individualismus habe den Sieg über den letzten Glauben errungen, welchen der letzte Gegenglaube nicht zu erringen vermochte.<sup>103</sup>

Nolte's aversion to liberalism, the weakness of which he considers a la Carl Schmitt, a major reason for the emergence of the total state in the inter-war period, does not prevent him from recognising its victory over the "last faith" of communism. This appears, however, as a victory which was not driven by ideology but rather more by the power of the "hedonistic individualism" of Western society. Does then, for Nolte, the end of the *Weltbürgerkrieg* signify an "End of History" in the sense implied by Fukuyama? We can deduce the answer to this question from Nolte's *negativer Wertung*. Whilst the end of the "last faith" is cause for celebration, he does not wish to terminate history in the system of hedonistic individualism which itself is perceived as a threat to the coherence of capitalist society. In this sense, one may perceive that the role formerly played by communism in the conservative world view has been, to limited extent, been supplanted by the older conservative critique of liberalism. Whilst Nolte supports the economic liberalism of Western society, he perceives the greatest danger in the present as deriving from the ascendancy of *political* liberalism. This critique of political liberalism is employed to understand both past and present political developments. For Nolte, arguing in the tradition of inter-war, pre-fascist, Conservative Revolutionaries, the roots of the collapse of the post-First World War period lay in the traditions of self-criticism of Western liberalism. Here he draws a clear parallel between the left of the Weimar Republic and contemporary critical and left-liberal historians who reject the thesis of the *Weltbürgerkrieg*

Aber im Kern war der Bolschewismus nichts anderes als die schon im Marxismus dogmatisierte, dann verselbständigte und mit einer sehr partiukularen Realität verknüpfte Selbstkritik der "westlichen" Gesellschaft, die eben dadurch zur schrankenlosen Selbstgewißheit und Selbstpreisung wurde. Daher darf man sagen, daß die verstehende Affirmation den Vorwurf, "konservativ" zu sein, nicht zu scheuen braucht: ohne Bewahrung gibt es kein Leben und die Erhaltung des Lebens selbst in seiner Vielfalt und Gegensätzlichkeit ist die wichtigste von allen.<sup>104</sup>

Thus for Nolte, the emergence of bolshevism in the First World War was intimately related to the critical tendencies which flourish in liberally constituted societies. The partisan approach of the left wing intellectuals during the *Historikerstreit*, who through

---

<sup>102</sup> *ibid.* p. 440-1.

<sup>103</sup> Nolte in Jesse. 1996. *op. cit.* p. 367.

their positive concept of emancipation and normative concept of revolution exist in a dangerous continuity with past movements. This appears as the crux of the matter for Nolte, who rejects both the revolutionaries of 1789 and 1917 and assigns to this coterie of “armed fanatics” the NS counter-revolutionaries of 1933. All three movements destroyed tradition, the defence of which is associated with the defence of life itself and appears as the historical mission of conservatism. The diversity of life which Nolte identifies is not associated with the political current of pluralism (which he perceives as a weakness of liberal society) but is rather more a coded plea for the cultivation of the national particularism which he perceives as endangered by the universalist tendencies of the critical left which, in turn, exists in a longer term continuity with previous utopian, tradition-consuming, fanatical movements of modern history. This perspective relates to the second function of post-communist “totalitarian” theory - that of underwriting the conservative critique of emancipation and the plea for a return to traditional values and the anthropologically essential community of the nation. This is a perspective contained in the controversial article *anschwellender Bocksgesang* by the playwright Botho Strauß originally published in *Der Spiegel* and reproduced as the central text of the *Selbstbewußte Nation*. In the figure of Strauß the New Right perceived a paradigmatic character of the broader socio-political shift from the new Left radicals of 1968 to the New Right radicals of 1989. Strauß offers the following interpretation of his concept of the “right” which is worth repeating

Rechts zu sein, nicht aus billiger Überzeugung, aus gemeinen Absichten, sondern von ganzem Wesen, das ist, die Übermacht einer Erinnerung zu erleben; die den *Menschen* ergreift, weniger den Staatsbürger, die ihn vereinsamt und erschüttert inmitten der modernen, aufgeklärten Verhältnisse, in denen er sein gewöhnliches Leben führt. Diese Durchdrungenheit bedarf nicht der abscheulichen und lächerlichen Maskerade einer hündischen Nachahmung, des Griffs in den Secondhandshop der Unheilsgeschichte. Es handelt sich um einen anderen Akt der Auflehnung: gegen die Totalherrschaft der Gegenwart, die dem Individuum jede *Anwesenheit* von unaufgeklärter Vergangenheit, von geschichtlichen Gewordensein, von mythischer Zeit rauben und ausmerzen will. Anders als die linke, Heilsgeschichte parodierende Phantasie malt sich die rechte kein künftiges Weltreich aus, bedarf keiner Utopie, sondern sucht den Wiederanschluß an die lange Zeit, die unbewegte, ist ihrem Wesen nach Tiefenerinnerung und insofern eine religiöse oder protopolitische Initiation. Sie ist immer und existentiell eine Phantasie des Verlustes und nicht der (irdischen) Verheißung.<sup>105</sup>

---

<sup>104</sup> *ibid.* 368.

<sup>105</sup> Botho Strauß, ‘Anschwellender Bocksgesang.’ in Schacht, Schwilk. 1994. op. cit. p. 24-5.

In the above we may glean a paradigmatic appreciation of the essence of conservatism promoted by right wing thinkers which is, for Strauß, above all a political position which is grounded in anthropological insights into the “essence” of human existence and the need for tradition and a sense of myth mediated through history in order to counter the (totalitarian) temptations of the promise of future utopia. The above represents a critique of the form of *Verfassungspatriotismus* argued by left wing republicans and who, or New Right thinkers, instrumentalise the *Unheilsgeschichte* of Auschwitz in order to legitimise the *Heilsgeschichte* of civil society which itself represents a form of “totalitarianism” intent on converting the “human” into the citizen in the service of a system of belief predicated upon universal values and orientated towards a progressive emancipation from tradition and myth. For Strauß, the phenomenon of “emancipatory” educationalism plays a key role in producing a cultural of youthful indifference and also for the emergence of Far Right rebellion against the political-cultural taboos of the “‘68” generation. Strauß indirectly acknowledges the proximity between the form of nationalism represented in criminal form by radical right wing extremists and the form of “traditional” nationalism and mysticism propagated by the New Right in contending

Der Rechte in solchem Sinn ist vom Neonazi so weit entfernt wie der Fußballfreund vom Hooligan, ja mehr noch: Die Zerstörung innerhalb seiner Interessensphäre wird ihm zum ärgsten, erbittertsten Feind. (Freilich: dürfen von uns verwahrloste Kinder zu unseren Feinden werden?).<sup>106</sup>

Whilst Strauß is concerned to distance Neonazi sentiment from the traditionalist nationalism desired by the right his contention that the Far Right exists within the right’s own “sphere of interest” and thus requires particular sharp condemnation of the right reveals an innate relatedness of nationalism propagated by both. Whilst New Right intellectuals of course must be distinguished from the racist Far Right, their polemics against immigration and desire for a “purer” form of patriotism derive from related sentiment. In a sense one may perceive parallels here with conservative condemnations of National Socialism contained in the writings of thinkers such as Nolte who on the one hand perceive an element of historical justification for the emergence of fascism within the context of the Russian Revolution and the breakdown of inter-war liberalism and yet understand that National Socialism’s “usurpation” of conventional conservative values acted to discredit this intellectual political heritage. In this sense too, one may perceive the New Right’s intellectual antecedents in the pre-fascism Weimar Right who

---

<sup>106</sup> *ibid.*

exercised a sharp polemic against republican democracy and yet remained suspicious of the mass movement of National Socialism and afterwards bemoaned the discrediting of conservatism through the experience of the Third Reich.

In contrast to both the inter-war Conservative Revolutionary critique of universal humanist values via recourse to the discourse race, or of post-war anticommunism, Nolte's critique of universalist tendencies identified with the left assumes the form of a defence of the concept of "difference" most commonly associated with the left<sup>107</sup>

Diejenige Differenz und Partikularität nämlich, welche von den Postmodernen Linken verteidigt wird, ist für die heutige gemäßigte Rechte, die der Nation. Damit setzt diese freilich von seiten der ganzen Linken dem Vorwurf des "Nationalismus" aus, und sie mag als obsoleter Spätform eines Phänomens des 19. Jahrhunderts oder gar des Faschismus erscheinen.<sup>108</sup>

Such accusations are, of course, refuted and Nolte contends that the contemporary right is less concerned with the cultivation of "nationalism" in the style of nineteenth century and rather more with the cultivation of "national consciousness" i.e. the consciousness of national particularism and difference. Thus the rehabilitation of the discourse of particularist values of national culture, although it assumes the "PC" style of a defence of cultural "difference" in fact relates to a much older concern of conservatism - the critique of political liberalism and formally "universal" values. In this manner, Nolte adopts the left motif of "cultural difference" in order to undermine the presumed hegemony of left-liberal culture in contemporary Germany. Thomas Meyer has identified this connection on the level of "culture" and speaks of the process of "retorsion" whereby the left-wing, "multicultural" position is employed to argue the particularism of German culture.<sup>109</sup> For Nolte, whilst the contemporary right apparently supports the greater union of Europe, its primary concern is that this will not lead to the subsumation of the nation under a form of supra-state or even "world government". These are trends which Nolte identifies with the political liberalism of the left and the universalising principles of "civil society"

---

<sup>107</sup> cf Jan Müller, 'From National Identity to National Interest: The Rise (and Fall) of Germany's New Right.' in *German Politics*. Vol.8. Nr. 3. December 1999. Frank Cass. Essex. p. 3.

<sup>108</sup> Nolte. in Schacht. Schwilk. 1994. op. cit. p. 160.

<sup>109</sup> Thomas Meyer, 'Identitätswahn. Die Politisierung des kulturellen Unterschieds.' Aufbau. Berlin. 1997. p. 45-52.

Es ist schlechterdings nicht mehr zu übersehen, daß der Liberalismus, sofern er sich zum Liberismus fortentwickelt oder von diesem abgelöst wird, die Nationen tötet und nach dem Ende einer gigatischen Bevölkerungsverschiebung auch die Menschheit töten könnte.<sup>110</sup>

Thus Nolte returns to the traditions of the Conservative revolutionaries and the anti-liberal discourse which played an important role in cultivating the intellectual-political atmosphere which, in combination with other factors, led to the overthrow of the Weimar republic.<sup>111</sup> As Conservative Revolutionaries railed against Weimar democracy, so the *New Right* challenges the “liberal” foundations of German political culture which are understood as “Western” values. The New Right sought political influence in the new Germany and attempted a paradigm shift to the right which was derived from older, pre-1945 antidemocratic and anti-Western political traditions. Yet the influence of this marginal group in terms of political efficacy is minimal. The failure of the right to organise a coup in the Berlin FDP around ex Attorney General Alexander von Stahl displayed there was little resonance for the ideas of this coterie of right wing conservatives. The most provocative act of this group was the declaration of an *Aufruf gegen das Vergessen* on 8 May 1995 which contested the reading of the end of the war as a liberation for the Germans. Whilst this perspective may have been more consensual among the right in the 1980s, the response to the *Aufruf* was largely negative even within the conservative camp. New Right thinkers were essentially mistaken in presuming that the exhaustion of emancipatory aspirations and politics would lead to a revitalisation of the traditions of German nationalism. Whilst these thinkers do not appear to hold much sway in political culture and their attempts to offer a reading of the national socialist state as a modernising regime appear rather more compromising than legitimising, the underlying motif of their understanding of the roots of National Socialism does appear congruent with liberal conservative readings of the National Socialist regime. The notion that the enlightenment and “modernism” are ultimately to be blamed for the Holocaust is a theme which resonates with thinkers who could never be described a recidivist nationalists. Thus Zygmunt Baumann has argued, in similar fashion to the notions underpinning Adorno and Horkheimer’s *Dialektik* that the scientific rationality of the modern age led to the barbaric catastrophe of Nazi racial ideology.<sup>112</sup> In this sense, although these thinkers exercise no influence at the level of

---

<sup>110</sup> *ibid.* pp. 160-1.

<sup>111</sup> cf Herbert Marcuse’s 1934 article, ‘Der Kampf gegen den Liberalismus in der totalitären Staatsauffassung,’ in Abendroth. 1972. *op. cit.* pp. 42-74.

<sup>112</sup> Zygmunt Baumann, ‘Das Jahrhundert der Lager.’ *Frankfurter Hefte* (1) 1994. pp. 32-33.

political culture, their underlying hostility to humanist and universal values describes a more consensual mood. Before examining contemporary political readings of the national socialist past, it is necessary to consider the development of the left-liberal discourse of identity in post-unification society to which the thinkers of the New Right take such exception.

## 6. The “Westernisation” of the German Nation

In the following chapter I wish to examine the development of the “post-national” left in the context of unified nation. I first wish to consider perceptions among left-liberal thinkers that unification represented a threat to the Western political culture of the Federal Republic. I then wish to examine the emergence of a discourse of national identity which synthesises a progressive model of “Western” political culture with the “German nation” in a democratic-nationalist identity. Finally I wish to examine the post-unification position of Jürgen Habermas as one of the few thinkers who remains formally committed to enlightenment values and the continuation of the “modernist project” of emancipation in a “post-national constellation”.

### 6.1. The Endangered Republic?

An initial response of left thinkers in both East and West to the unification question assumed the form of a plea for a form of confederation between the FRG and a reformed GDR. For Habermas, this position was linked to his preference for a solution based upon Article 146 of the Basic Law which foresaw a plebiscitary redrafting of the constitution rather than the accession route codified in Article 23. This preference rested upon his long held orientation towards a republican model of social organisation. For Habermas it appeared ironic that precisely those conservatives who, during the period of division, had pleaded for reunification were now formulating their justification for state unity via recourse to article 23. For Habermas this testified to revanchist sentiments on the right as it evoked the impression that the conditions for article 146 remained unfulfilled thus implying an attachment to the former *Reich* territories of East Prussia and Silesia.<sup>1</sup> For Habermas article 146 contained the potential to direct future developments between the two states in a republican manner

Nur der Volksentschied über einen Verfassungsvorschlag, und zwar zu der Alternative zwischen einem gesamtdeutschen Bundesstaat und einer Föderation, die der Bundesrepublik das Grundgesetz beizubehalten erlaubt, räumt *allen* Bürgern die Chance ein, nein zu sagen. Er macht ein qualifiziertes Minderheitstum möglich; damit wird die Entscheidung der Mehrheit erst zu

---

<sup>1</sup> Jürgen Habermas, ‘Der DM-Nationalismus.’ in Die Zeit 30.03.1990. Reproduced in, Volker Gransow und Konrad Jarasch. (Hrsg) ‘Die deutsche Vereinigung. Dokumente zu Bürgerbewegung, Annäherung und Beitritt.’ Verlag Wissenschaft und Politik, Berend von Nottbeck. Köln.1991.p. 150.

einem bewußt vollzogenen Akt, um den sich das republikanische Selbstverständnis künftiger Generationen wird kristallisieren können. Erst angesichts einer frei zu entscheidenden Alternative kann zu Bewußtsein kommen, was unter den Jüngeren ohnehin ein weitverbreitetes Gefühl ist: daß die Konstituierung einer einzigen Staatsbürgernation auf den bisherigen Territorien der Bundesrepublik und der DDR keineswegs durch vorpolitische Gegebenheiten der Sprachgemeinschaft, der Kultur oder der Geschichte *präjudiziert* ist. Deshalb möchte man wenigstens gefragt werden.<sup>2</sup>

We may recognise some of the themes familiar to Habermas political theory which, in the turn of 1989-90, he sought to bring into the discussion over the practical question of German unification. As the above excerpt makes clear, Habermas was an opponent of unification and not merely because of the eventual decision to unify in accordance with article 23. More important for Habermas is the danger of a return to the pre-political, anti-Western tenets of national conceptions expressed in the community of language and common culture of the *Volksnation* advocated by new right intellectuals in opposition to a republican model comprised of politically conscious, free and equal *citoyen*. From this perspective even an undesirable “yes” to unification of the two states would have represented a conscious political decision rather than mere West German arrogance underwritten by the economic muscle of the DM, a decision of the political elite or a metaphysically conceived idea of a “return to normality”.

Habermas scepticism towards the concept of the “German nation” is shaped by a critical reflection of the National Socialist experience. For Habermas, the experience of the Third Reich serves as an eternal warning of the dangers inherent in traditional formulations of German nationalism and national identity. In political terms, this epoch underwrites the obligation of contemporary Germany to orientate itself towards universal, republican values.<sup>3</sup> In place of the “return” to a primordial, naturalised nation state which exists above society, critical commentators emphasised the importance of the break with national traditions and continuities in 1945 and promoted varying forms of Constitutional Patriotism as a means of regulating the sovereign will of both the Western and Eastern German citizens. The act of determining a new consensus over the norms of post-unification society, to be codified by the drafting of a new constitution, was also intended to finally give the East German public sphere a political voice after more than 40 years of enforced silence and to break with the tradition of voting with the

---

<sup>2</sup> Habermas. *ibid.* p. 151.

political elite. In this sense, reunification was regarded as an opportunity to articulate a republican, “enlightened” political consciousness in German society as a counter to the traditionalist and regressive national concepts of the right.

Similar arguments were forwarded by thinkers in both East and West as witnessed in the declaration of notable East German writers and artists *Für unser Land* which foresaw a reform of the GDR under retention of the antifascist and humanist principles, which the East German regime formally referred to if never substantially realised, as a *sozialistische Alternative zur Bundesrepublik*.<sup>4</sup> The dramaturgist and playwright Heiner Müller, who also undersigned the declaration, argued for a reform of the GDR and perceived the possibility of wresting the concept of utopia from the terrorism of Stalinist rule.<sup>5</sup> Likewise, Günter Grass argued for a confederation and, similar to Habermas, supported his rejection of the realisation of a unified, sovereign German nation state with recourse to a critical reading of German national history. For Grass, the crimes of the last unitary German nation state eternally discredited the development of German hegemony in Europe and also the instrumentalisation of “the nation” as a political tool of social mobilisation

Die Wortblase “Wiedervereinigung” platzte, weil niemand, der bei Verstand und geschlagen mit Gedächtnis ist, zulassen kann, daß es abermals zu einer Machtballung in der Mitte Euopas kommt: Die Großmächte, nun wieder betont als Siegermächte, gewiß nicht, nicht die Holländer, nicht die Dänen. Aber auch wir Deutsche nicht, denn jener Einheitsstaat, denen wechselnde Vollstrecker während nur knapp fünfundsechzig Jahren anderen und uns Leid, Trümmer, Niederlagen, Millionen Flüchtlinge, Millionen Tote und die Last nicht zu bewältigender Verbrechen ins Geschichtsbuch geschrieben haben, verlangt nach keiner Neuauflage und sollte - so gutwillig wir uns mittlerweile zu geben verstehen - nie wieder politischen Willen entzünden.<sup>6</sup>

Grass also feared that the emerging diffuse national feeling would suffocate “rational national consciousness” and denigrate the value of the successful East German revolution as an instance of republican self-determination.<sup>7</sup> Western anti-national critics

---

<sup>3</sup> *ibid.* 151-2.

<sup>4</sup> ‘Eine sozialistische Alternative. Appel von Schriftstellern und Künstlern der DDR am 26. 11. 1989.’ cited in Herman Glaser, ‘Die Mauer fiel, die Mauer steht. Ein deutsches Lesebuch 1989-1999.’ DTV.München. 1999. pp. 59-60.

<sup>5</sup> ‘Dem Terrorismus die Utopie entreißen. Alternative DDR.’ in Heiner Müller, ‘Zur Lage der Nation.’ Rotbuch Taschenbuch. Berlin. pp.9-24.

<sup>6</sup> Günter Grass, ‘Deutscher Lastenausgleich. Wider das dumpfe Einheitsgebot. Reden und Gespräche.’ Luchterhand Literaturverlag GmbH, Frankfurt am Main. 1990. p. 8.

<sup>7</sup> Günter Grass. *ibid.* p.7. Thus noting the change in the democratic content of the chant *Wir sind das Volk* implying an identity as “the people” in opposition to the political elite in comparison to

of the unification process were disturbed by the arrogant overtones implied in the “annexation” of the GDR facilitated by the victory of the West. During a parliamentary discussion on the eve of reunification, the Green politician Antje Vollmer perceived *ein bundesdeutscher Nationalismus, ein bundesdeutscher Wohlstandschauvinismus* in the contributions of politicians from the ruling coalition. Vollmer emphasised that whereas democracy had been a “gift” of the Allies to the FRG in 1949, the contemporary events in the GDR represented the first instance in history where Germans had themselves consciously fought for and attained democracy.<sup>8</sup> She thus felt compelled to condemn the demand for reunification as misplaced and offer support for the reform process in the GDR as an act of democratic self-determination.

Left wing arguments for a German-German confederation, reform of the GDR, a plebiscite in accordance with article 146 or a rejection of unification via recourse to memory of Auschwitz found little popular resonance during the period of unification which was fulfilled via the accession of the restored *Länder* of the former GDR into the FRG. The appeal of a materially prosperous FRG held greater sway than an appeal for the retention of socialist principles or antifascism and criticisms of the mass population’s desire for material improvement sharpened the divide between intellectuals, many of whom had enjoyed a privileged status in the GDR, and the people evoking images of high minded figures peeping from the ivory tower and condemning the vulgarity of those intent on bettering their material lot. The republican reading of the events which led to the implosion of the GDR regime was suppressed in favour of a reading which interpreted the collapse of the Berlin Wall as a victory of the anti-Communist *Westbindung* of the FRG and as a historical vindication of capitalism over the socialist alternative. Similarly, in the decision to publicly celebrate the bureaucratic codification of unity on the 3. October rather than the act of self assertion of the people on the 9. November, some also perceived a missed opportunity to anchor a sense of republican *Verfassungspatriotismus* in contemporary historical consciousness. Commentating on the events of the 9. November, the liberal historian Christian Graf von Krockow explained

---

the adopted slogan of *Wir sind ein Volk* implying an identity as the “German” people thus legitimising reunification.

*Dieses Ereignis war die direkte Folge der ständig anschwellenden Demonstrationen, die in den Wochen zuvor in der DDR stattgefunden hatten; dieser Tag hätte zum Zeichen dafür getaugt, wie für die Franzosen der Sturm auf die Bastille, daß etwas Neues begann und daß ein Mündigwerden zur Freiheit die Einheit begründete.*<sup>9</sup>

Thus, for Krockow, 1989 is a date which could have been interpreted as existing in a historical continuity with the democratic-nationalist and republican traditions of the spirit of 1789 and the progressive legacy of Western political culture. Essential to this appreciation is the emphasis upon the conscious “coming of age” of the collective *citoyen* as opposed to the pre-political “belonging” of an ethnic *Volk*. The course of unity, however, failed to support this enlightened reading of reunification as representing a form of “German Bastille” and is therefore criticised by von Krockow. For von Krockow, the collapse of the GDR represented the collapse of an *Obrigkeitsstaat*. Herein he perceives the possible historical-political foundations of a concept of identity which was grounded in a republican form of *Verfassungspatriotismus* and which eschewed the “German” traditions of identity creation upon the basis of *Feindbilder*.<sup>10</sup> Krockow employs this concept in order to found a republican concept of identity based upon a positive celebration of the *Mündigkeit*, or political assertion and “coming of age” of the East German citizenry.

For critical and left-liberal thinkers attached to Habermas concept of post-national, Western identity, German unification, predicated upon the political and intellectual exhaustion of the socialist alternative society, represented a profound challenge and awakened fears of a return to pre-1945 traditions of German nationalism. The essential fear of liberal sceptics of the German nation state is that 1989 had acted to erase the progressive, pedagogic-political value of the year 1945 as marking the beginning of a *konstruktiver Lernprozeß*<sup>11</sup> or process of *politischer Zivilisierung*<sup>12</sup>. Left-liberals perceived the unification of the German nation as a potential threat to this progressive political re-education process and as having reopened the lines of historical continuity with older national traditions which had both shaped and then been discredited by the

---

<sup>8</sup> ‘Verhandlungen des Deutschen Bundestags.’ Stenographische Berichte. 11. Wahlperiode 173/178. Band.151. 1989. ‘Bericht zur Lage der Nation im geteilten Deutschland.’ 173 Sitzung. Mittwoch den 8. November.1989. p. 13031.

<sup>9</sup> Christian Graf von Krockow, ‘Die Deutschen vor ihrer Zukunft.’ Rowohlt Taschenbuch Verlag GmbH, Reinbek bei Hamburg.1995.p.124-5.

<sup>10</sup> *ibid.* p. 122.

<sup>11</sup> Wehler 1995. *op. cit.* p.311.

National Socialist experience. Left-liberal anxiety over a potential “return of the *Sonderweg*” stems from a fear that 1989 may come to displace the centrality of 1945 in the political culture of the new republic. Essentially this perspective operates from the perception of a historic dichotomy between the nation and democracy in German history. From this perspective, the danger becomes that it is no longer the liberation from National Socialism which acts as the anchor point of the political culture of German society but the “liberation” from the dual hegemony of the superpowers and the “return” to the naturalised continuities of the nation state.<sup>13</sup> Thus the critical aversion to interpretations of a “renormalisation” of German social conditions is grounded in fears for the future of German democracy. In a speech in the Frankfurt *Paulskirche* to mark the fiftieth anniversary of the 8. May, Jürgen Habermas delivered the following criticism of conservative celebrations of the “return to normality”

Aus der Perspektive der Wiederherstellung des Nationalstaats rücken die Kontinuitäten der Entwicklung seit der Gründung des Bismarck-Reiches in den Vordergrund. Die 1945 geteilte Nation hat erst nach 1989 ihre normale Form zurückgewonnen. Deshalb erscheinen die vergangenen 50 Jahre als Periode eines Sonderwegs, während dessen die Bundesrepublik eine mehr oder minder liebenswerte, aber nicht ganz ernst zu nehmende Rheinbundexistenz im Schatten der Weltgeschichte gefristet hat.<sup>14</sup>

From this critical perspective, interpretations of reunification which imply a return to the “normality” of the nation state denigrate the value of the enforced departure from German national traditions in 1945 and attempt to develop a normative social status for the national idiom. The apparent renaissance of conventional formulations of national identity appear to such commentators as a retardation of the political culture of the Federal Republic which brings with it the older dangers of German national hypertrophy. Thus in an interview in 1993, Habermas voiced concern over the danger of a reconstitution of the historic German *Sonderbewußtsein* stemming from the new found confidence of neo-conservative intellectuals and politicians which he believes endangers the republican principles of post war West Germany

---

<sup>12</sup> Habermas. 1996. op cit. p. 275.

<sup>13</sup> cf Thomas Assheuer, ‘Das Deutschlandspiel.’ in *Die Zeit*. Nr. 37, 03.09.1998.

<sup>14</sup> Jürgen Habermas, ‘Die Normalität einer Berliner Republik. Kleine Politische Schriften VIII.’ Suhrkamp Verlag, Frankfurt am Main. 1995. p. 172.

Das deutsche Sonderbewußtsein regeneriert sich von Stunde zu Stunde. Der ganze intellektuelle Müll, den wir uns vom Hals geschafft hatten, wird wieder aufbereitet, und das mit dem avantgardistischen Gestus, für das Neue Deutschland die neuen Antworten parat zu haben.<sup>15</sup>

Here Habermas touches upon an important aspect of the self identity of the new right. Due to the taboo over the nation during the period of division it is possible for neo-conservative national thinkers or the “Generation Berlin”<sup>16</sup> to present themselves as radical questioners of the intellectual status quo and to cast the post-war critical “‘68” generation of thinkers as the staid defenders of an essentially indefensible historical status-quo. Habermas perceives the renaissance of neo-conservative positions as a retrograde development which challenges the progressive political education process into the norms of Western political culture embarked upon in the post war FRG. Günter Grass offered a similarly pessimistic survey

Es gibt die demokratische Linke nur noch als beschworenes Gespenst oder allenfalls in Gestalt einiger zum Foil degraderter Einzelgänger. Eines dieser restlichen Exemplare spricht heute zu Ihnen. Ich habe mich umgesehen, Ausschau gehalten: Die Linke ist zermürbt. Der Dritte Weg ist vernagelt. Die letzten Verfassungspatrioten sind demnächst im Zoo zu bestaunen.<sup>17</sup>

Grass articulated a distinct air of fatalism resulting from the implosion of established left wing social and political approaches after the collapse of the East and the clear lack of resonance for a “Third Way” between capitalism and bureaucratic socialism and the perceived waning of the concept of *Verfassungspatriotismus* after the erosion of the post-national basis of both German states. although critical of concepts of “utopia” associated with socialism, Heiner Müller also perceived the outbreak of ethnic and nationalist conflict in regions of the former Soviet Union and Eastern Bloc as resulting for the search for values after the death of the twentieth century “God” of communism.<sup>18</sup> Whilst such sentiment, on the German left, reflected a certain feeling of mourning at the passing of the constellation of post-war liberal certainties, left-liberal constitutional patriots did not simply abandoned the ideas and principles of the republican civil society after unification. Krockow expressed what appears a more typical perception when he criticises Grass for his fatalism and suggests that such sentiment may well play into the

---

<sup>15</sup> Jürgen Habermas, ‘Das deutsche Sonderbewußtsein regeneriert sich von Stunde zu Stunde. Interview mit Wolfram Schütte und Thomas Assheuer.’ in Frankfurter Rundschau vom 12.Juni 1993. in Habermas. 1995.p.86.

<sup>16</sup> Thus Assheuer in Die Zeit. op. cit.

<sup>17</sup> cited in Christian Graf von Krockow. 1995. op. cit. p. 120.

<sup>18</sup> Heiner Müller, ‘Jenseits der Nation.’ Rotbuch. Berlin. 1990. p. 17-18.

hands of precisely those national thinkers viewed with suspicion by the left.<sup>19</sup> Whilst few, Habermas most notably, continued the post-national identity discourse, many more left liberals sought a form of rapprochement between the “post-national” tenets of Constitutional Patriotism and the returned national idiom. In the following two sections I wish to examine national and post-national answers to the question of identity from the left-liberal milieu.

## 6.2 Transcending the Dichotomy between Nation and Republic

In his survey of German national and nationalist thought and practice since the late eighteenth century, the left-liberal social historian Otto Dann refused to cast the future national-political direction of unified Germany as a *fait accompli*. Dann suggested that the left would do well to internalise the lessons of the first nation state after the purging of liberals during the “reconfiguration” of the Reich at the end of 1870s and challenge the conservative right in defining the national-political culture of the new Germany

Offen und für die Zukunft der Bundesrepublik als Nationalstaat entscheidend ist vor allem die Frage, ob es den demokratischen Kräften gelingen wird, die nationalpolitischen Institutionen, Symbole, Ideen und Gefühle in ihrem Sinne zu prägen. Im Deutschen Reich war die nationale Parole bald nach seiner Gründung vom konservativ-antidemokratischen Lager okkupiert worden<sup>20</sup>

For Dann, Krockow and others, as we shall see, whilst the altered circumstances of unified Germany eroded the post-national basis of their traditional political outlook, the republican project of *Verfassungspatriotismus* had to be reformulated rather than abandoned. In the context of the racist attacks and murders of the early years of unified Germany, this project of democratisation and the construction of a political culture based upon principles of civil society attained an extremely sharp focus which suggested that older, traditional forms of “ethnic-nationalism” were in danger of resurfacing. Whilst this discourse latched onto more established themes of left liberal discourse such as a republican social model orientated towards the “Western” enlightenment political culture championed as the core of the post-national identity developed in West Germany, it represents a qualitatively new stream in a fundamental respect: In post-unification Germany the democratic, “Western” and enlightened political legacy which was once perceived as existing in a historically dichotomous relationship to traditional

---

<sup>19</sup> Krockow. *ibid.*

<sup>20</sup> Otto Dann, ‘Nation und Nationalismus in Deutschland 1770 - 1990.’ Verlag C.H Beck. München. 1993.p. 325.

national concepts has been synthesised with the contemporary nation. This results in an uneven, reciprocal, process whereby the concept of the German nation is “Westernised” and the notion of Constitutional Patriotism is “nationalised”.

Early on in the unification discussion a current of left-liberal thought emerged which distinguished itself from the principled anti-national stance of Habermas which yet, nonetheless, invoked the progressive, enlightened, Western political culture championed by him. In this reading, the collapse of the Eastern Bloc and the return to the social form of the nation state did not represent a defeat of progressive ideas but rather more their *fulfilment*. The historian Jürgen Kocka offered an interpretation of the revolutions of the East which suggested that 1989-90 represented the historical victory of the “Western” enlightened political culture championed by progressives during the historical debates of the 1980s. Thus whilst Kocka formally shares the progressive, republican political values of Habermas, he diverges in the assessment of the role played by these values during the process of unification. Whilst Habermas perceived unification through article 23 as a defeat of republican conceptions of social organisation, Kocka perceives precisely in this route an affirmation of Western republican democratic traditions developed in the FRG and now extended to the former GDR. As such this is a reading which counterpoises and yet parallels liberal conservative interpretations of the “Westernisation” of the former GDR - in this reading the Westernisation of the GDR does not only assume the form of an expansion of the Free Market and West German institutions but rather more an extension of progressive Western political culture. Kocka accurately observed of the revolutions of 1989-90 that they were distinguished from previous models of revolution in that they were not characterised by the development of new ideas or utopias or even by a merging of alternative ideas such as the “Third Way” between capitalism and communism. Whilst the revolutions of 1989 did not espouse new ideals, they were, for Kocka, driven by the desire to retrospectively join the form of Western political culture advocated by liberal thinkers during the period of division

Die Revolutionen von 1989 wurden von demokratischen und freiheitlichen Ideen geleitet, die auf die Durchsetzung der Grundprinzipien der bürgerlichen Gesellschaft (civil society) und repräsentativer, pluralistischer, rechts- und verfassungsstaatlicher Regierungsformen zielen und Teil der Tradition westlichen politischen Denkens zumindest seit der Aufklärung sind. In diesem Sinne waren die Revolutionen von 1989 Aufhol-Revolutionen. In diesem Sinn hat das Jahr 1989

wirklich gezeigt, daß die französische Revolution die Zukunft der Russischen war und nicht umgekehrt.<sup>21</sup>

One can perceive in this reading a left-liberal interpretation of 1989-90 as a “victory of the West” which, however, is neither based in anticommunism, a sense of Free Market superiority nor indeed conventional nationalism but rather more in terms familiar to the classic post-national argument of the progressive left. Yet unlike previous positions, Kocka perceived in 1989 a rapprochement between the formally antagonistic concepts of nation and democracy which had been intermeshed by the association made between national unification and integration into the West.<sup>22</sup> In this sense Kocka has argued that unification in accordance with article 23 was paradigmatic of the transformation of the Eastern social model in that it did not represent something new but rather more an extension of the FRG.<sup>23</sup>

Since unification this period has been historicised and transformed into a positive historical legacy for the contemporary nation. From this perspective one may suggest that the waning of emancipatory or alternative political models has led to a rethinking of the tenets of FRG society. In this sense, Joschka Fischer concluded that after 1989 the choices facing humanity could be reduced to the formula *Kapitalismus oder Kapitalismus* and argued for the retention of the consensus model of the Federal Republic as the model of a progressive compromise between capitalism and democracy.<sup>24</sup> Whilst liberal conservatives perceive the continuation of the *technocratic* form of Western orientation particularly in terms of foreign policy, so left liberals argue for a continuation of the FRG model in terms of the *progressive Westbindung*. The primary distinction between liberal conservative and left liberal readings of the positive legacy of the *Westbindung* is apparent over reception of the historical and contemporary nation. Liberal conservatives remain attached to the historical concept of the German nation and attempt to synthesise the period of West German division with particular

---

<sup>21</sup> Jürgen Kocka, ‘Umbrüche - aber ohne neue utopische Ideen. Die Sogkraft des Nationalen und der Beitrag der Bundesrepublik zur Revolution in der DDR.’ in, ‘Historiker betrachten Deutschland.’ op. cit. 1992. p. 99.

<sup>22</sup> Kocka. *ibid.* p. 98. and Kocka, ‘Vereinigungskrise. Zur Geschichte der Gegenwart.’ Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht. Göttingen. 1995. p. 20.

<sup>23</sup> Jürgen Kocka, ‘Crisis of Unification: How Germany Changes.’ in Michael Mertes, Steven Muller, Heinrich August Winkler. (eds.) 1996. op. cit. p. 196.

<sup>24</sup> Joschka Fischer, ‘Kapitalismus oder Kapitalismus. Frontverläufe in der Auseinandersetzung um Republik, Sozialstaat und ökologischen Umbau.’ in ‘Blätter für deutsche und internationale Politik.’ 3. ‘96. (März) p. 284.

transhistorical continuities of the German nation. Left-liberal constructs of a modern, Western concept of the nation in post-unification society are, in contrast, predicated upon the intellectual internalisation of the break with national traditions in 1945.<sup>25</sup> Thus whilst for conservatives 1989 appears as the most important historical-political marker, for left liberals the primary historical date remains 1945 as this heralded the caesura necessary for the gradual political-moral inclusion of West Germany into broader Western enlightenment culture. This is the underlying assumption which led Habermas to contend that 1989 will only ever remain a cause for celebration as long as 1945 is remembered as the central historical-political caesura in German history.<sup>26</sup> In this sense, Kocka makes a plea for the retention of the “enlightened” political culture which the FRG integrated itself into in the post-war period which is reminiscent of Habermas plea for a selective appropriation of tradition

Wir können uns die Erbschaften auch keineswegs aussuchen. Aber man muß für die Zukunft sich entschieden in die eine oder andere Kontinuitätslinie stellen und gegenüber den übrigen auf Distanz gehen, ohne sie zu verleugnen oder zu vergessen. Ich plädiere dafür, das vereinigte Deutschland konsequent in der Kontinuität der Bundesrepublik zu verankern. Der tiefe Umbruch von 1989/90 darf die Zäsur der Jahre um 1945 nicht relativieren. Vielmehr sollte und kann er sie besiegeln.<sup>27</sup>

Thus whilst Kocka understands the new Germany as existing in several lines of historical continuity: the GDR, National Socialism and Western Europe he opts, understandably, for the post-war Federal Republic as a past which should guide the present. Yet whilst the celebration of 1945 over 1989 indicates the importance of the break with the historical German nation and its anti-Western, anti-democratic political and intellectual traditions, this does not indicate a continuation of the anti-national discourse of the divided years. Far more, the retention of 1945 as the central historical-political caesurae of modern German history forms the basis for a reconfiguration of the German concept of nation in tune with the values incorporated by Western political culture during the post-war period. This represents a celebration of the end of the *Sonderweg* in 1945 which had steered the nation in an anti-Western course and ultimately led to the horrors of the National Socialist regime.<sup>28</sup> The only continuity

---

<sup>25</sup> cf Thomas Assheuer, ‘Das Deutschlandspiel.’ Die Zeit. Nr. 37 vom 3. 9. 1998.

<sup>26</sup> cf Habermas, ‘1989 im Schatten von 1945. Zur Normalität einer künftigen Berliner Republik.’ in Habermas. 1995. op. cit. pp. 167-88.

<sup>27</sup> Jürgen Kocka, ‘Nur keinen neuen Sonderweg. Jedes Stück Entwestlichung wäre als Preis für die deutsche Einheit zu hoch.’ in ‘Historiker betrachten Deutschland.’ 1992. op. cit. p. 184.

<sup>28</sup> *ibid.* p. 185.

which should be salvaged in the new national context of post-unification society is the progressive democratic culture of the FRG rather than the compromised national traditions which led to the collapse of 1945. For this reason, it was not only justified but also politically astute to pursue unification as the integration of the former GDR into the FRG rather than an attempted “middle way” between the two systems.<sup>29</sup> This implies for Kocka, the relinquishing of a specific “German” national identity in the traditional sense and rather more the open acknowledgement of the Western roots of the FRG, and new Germany, in Western political culture

Nicht das Zusammenwachsen zu irgendeiner neuen national-deutschen Identität mit überraschenden Inhalten und neuen Strukturen ist die Aufgabe der nächsten Zukunft, sondern die möglichst taktvolle Übertragung des - entwicklungsbedürftigen - bundesrepublikanischen Modells auf den Bereich der ehemaligen DDR. Die Vereinigung als Mittel zur Demokratisierung und Verwestlichung der DDR - das ergibt einen Sinn und definiert eine Aufgabe, die uns lange noch beschäftigen wird.<sup>30</sup>

Thus for Kocka, the political cultural attachment towards the West which emerged in (West) Germany only after the horrific apogee and collapse of the *Sonderweg* in the National Socialist regime, must be retained and developed in the new German nation to ensure that this remains a historical continuity which remains politically discredited if not forgotten. Whilst Kocka perceives the form of nation state and nationalism which ended in the National Socialist regime as definitively over, this does not signify for him the end of the nation state which remains the normal form of political organisation of European societies into which the “post-national” societies of both FRG and GDR have been integrated. Although the nation of the present is characterised by supra- and sub-national levels of organisation and interests, he does not perceive a development of society *beyond* the nation state.<sup>31</sup> Whilst Kocka does not underestimate the problems of unified Germany resulting from the socially dislocative effects of the transfer of the Free Market onto the East and the obstacles to *innere Einigung* presented by the different social and cultural experiences in East and West,<sup>32</sup> his understanding of the political culture of the new Germany remains defined by the attachment to the post-national, Western principles developed in the FRG which, however, now need to be synthesised with the nation state. As such his interpretation is indicative of the

---

<sup>29</sup> *ibid.* p. 190.

<sup>30</sup> *ibid.* pp. 191-2.

<sup>31</sup> Kocka. 1995. *op. cit.* p. 30.

<sup>32</sup> cf Kocka. in Mertes, Muller, Winkler. 1996. *op. cit.* pp. 198-205.

transcendence (in the sense of a simultaneous process of negation and continuation on a higher plane) of the “post-national” left-liberal discourse of the FRG in post-unification society. These are ideas which have been developed most clearly in the 1990s by the historian Heinrich August Winkler.

The events of 1989-90 clearly exercised a corrosive effect upon such positions and Winkler was one of the first to reassess his position of the 1980s. Writing in 1990, shortly before the bureaucratic codification of unification, Winkler repeated the earlier critical perception of a historical dichotomy between the concepts of nation and democracy in the German nation state between 1871 and 1945 and perceived in the retarded democratisation of Germany the essence of the *Sonderweg*.<sup>33</sup> For this reason, Winkler rejected the conservative interpretation of 1989-90 as a “return to normality”. A return to the classic German nation state was not on the agenda for Winkler and he contended that the world and European powers would not countenance German unity if it were to assume the form of a return to the traditional German sovereign nation state.<sup>34</sup> Despite this, Winkler perceived continuities between 1871 and 1989 above all in the confirmation of the *kleindeutsch* solution to the German question and with the creation of the first “national democracy” of the Weimar Republic. Writing three years after unification in a study of the Weimar Republic, Winkler perceived the following parallels between the first national republic and the second

Das seit 1990 vereinigte Deutschland ist wieder, was bis dahin nur die Weimarer Republik war oder zumindest nach dem Willen ihrer Gründer sein sollte: ein demokratischer deutscher Nationalstaat. Zweifel, ob in Deutschland beides zusammenpaßt, die Demokratie und ein Nationalstaat, sind drinnen und draußen zu vernehmen.<sup>35</sup>

Thus Winkler touched upon a problem for those left-liberal thinkers who seek to synthesise the concepts of “German nation” and “Western democracy” in that German history displays the largely antagonistic relationship between the concepts of nation and democracy which, in the case of Weimar, was catastrophically resolved by the destruction of the latter. Whilst this reading formed a central legitimacy tenet of post-war, post-national formulations of West German democracy during the period of

---

<sup>33</sup> Heinrich August Winkler, ‘Der unverhoffte Nationalstaat. Deutsche Einheit: Die Vorzeichen sind günstiger als 1871.’ in ‘Historiker betrachten Deutschland.’ 1992. op. cit. pp. 164-5.

<sup>34</sup> *ibid.* 168.

<sup>35</sup> Heinrich August Winkler, ‘Weimar 1918-1933. Die Geschichte der ersten deutschen Demokratie.’ Verlag C.H. Beck. München. 1993. pp. 11-12.

division and could be invoked in the critique of “national” thinkers during the 1980s, it does not readily lend itself to a legitimisation of post-unification Germany. The solution to this problem is perceived in the task of redefining the contemporary concept of German nation along the “post-national” lines of Western political culture which developed in the post-war FRG after the historical collapse of the political and intellectual traditions of the *Sonderweg*. For Winkler, the historical conflict between democracy and the nation will not reassert itself in post-unification Germany if Habermas maxim of the unreserved opening to the West as *the* achievement of the FRG is internalised in contemporary political culture.<sup>36</sup> Thus Winkler perceives the contemporary definition of post-unification political culture as predicated upon the adoption of the Habermasian concept of the progressive *Westbindung* and its transference from the post-national society of the FRG onto the unified nation state of the 1990s. Unlike the Weimar Republic, contemporary Germany is not an “uneducated” democracy and possesses the 40 year democratic experience of the FRG. Thus both Bonn and Weimar are understood by Winkler as foundational historical experiences upon which contemporary German democracy can build.<sup>37</sup>

In contrast to his position in the 1980s, Winkler has developed a line of argument in the 1990s which reflects the shift from a post-national to a national orientation among liberal-left thinkers. Winkler’s tendency during the 1980s to ascribe normative political and historical value to the facticity of present social arrangements remains an aspect of his thought on identity during the 1990s in his perception of the “normality” of the present German nation state. Unlike liberal conservative readings of “normality” this is not predicated upon a relativising appreciation of German national traditions and thus does not seek to underline the “normality” of the historic German nation but is rather more founded in the observation that in the present all Western societies are constituted as democratic nations. This perspective brings Winkler to perceive in the post-national past which, during the 1980’s testified for him to a state of historical “normality”, an aberration from normality. Indeed, in a peculiar echo, albeit for different reasons, of a popular contention of the New Right, Winkler has argued that the “post-national” period

---

<sup>36</sup> Winkler. *ibid.* p. 12.

<sup>37</sup> Winkler. *ibid.* p. 16.

of division itself constituted a *Sonderweg* of German history.<sup>38</sup> This does not, however, imply for Winkler, an explicit relativisation of the *Sonderweg* of the German nation between 1871 and 1945 which he continues to regard as evidence of the prolonged influence of an atavistic *Obrigkeits* and as sealing the retardation of democracy in modern Germany up until the post-war period. In contrast to the argument of the right, Winkler's contention of national "normality" is based upon the perception of modern Germany (in tandem with the rest of the West) as a "post-classical" nation state. It is thus, in distinction to conservative readings, a formulation of "normality" which does not reflect any affiliation to the historical German nation but is rather more founded in the observation that modern Germany is as Western, democratic and pluralist as any other Western European nation or the United States

Das vereinte Deutschland *ist* wieder ein Nationalstaat, wenn auch keiner der alten Art, wie das deutsche Reich von der Bismarckschen Reichsgründung im Jahre 1871 bis zum Zusammenbruch des "Dritten Reiches" im Mai 1945 einer war. Europäisch und atlantisch eingebunden, ist die Berliner Republik ein postklassischer, demokratischer Nationalstaat wie die anderen Mitgliedsstaaten der Europäischen Union auch. Die Deutschen sind wieder, was sie zwischen 1945 und 1990 nicht waren, eine staatlich verfaßte Nation.<sup>39</sup>

Thus in 1990, all the *Sonderwege* of the Germans from the nation state of 1871 - 1945 through to the period of GDR and FRG had been overcome. The contemporary nation state does exist, for Winkler, in particular lines of continuity with moments of previous historical state forms such as the development of the social state, *Rechtsstaat* and the expansion of the franchise in Bismarckian and Weimar Germany. Notably, the GDR offers little for the new Germany and Winkler expresses a common perception of Western intellectuals in contending that the East Germans remain considerably more "German" in their value orientation than their Western counterparts.<sup>40</sup> The observation that in terms of political and cultural values, the former East German retained elements of the historic Prussian *Sonderbewußtsein* concentrating on duty, obedience, submission to the state and a Protestant confessional orientation forms an interesting counterpart to conservative perceptions of enduring "collective" mentalities in the former East. Both of these interpretations seek to explain the endurance of inequality of social experience in the new Germany on the level of "values" which appear as stubborn left-overs from the

---

<sup>38</sup> cf Winkler in Mertes, Müller, Winkler. 1996. op. cit. pp. 72, 76 also cf Winkler, 'Separatismus auf Filzlätschen. Der Marxismus-Leninismus ist tot, und der Weg nach Europa führt über Berlin.' in Die Zeit. Nr. 43. 15. Oktober. 1998.

<sup>39</sup> Winkler. in Die Zeit. 15. 10. 1998. *ibid.*

past either the collective mentality of bureaucratic socialism or the older “German” traditions derived from the period of the *Sonderweg*. Left liberal reformulations of the concept of national identity seek to address these problems of inequality and the concomitant trends to social heterogeneity in contemporary Germany via recourse to an appeal to national loyalties which, however, have been purged of their traditionally anti-democratic overtones.

A similar line of argument is pursued by Konrad Jarausch. Jarausch also considers different formulations of the “normality” of the contemporary German nation and warns against the dangers of a relapse into traditional national sentiment and tendencies of reinterpreting the *Bismarckreich* as the historical “norm” of the German nation.<sup>41</sup> Against such readings Jarausch emphasises the important of an orientation towards democratic *Verfassungspatriotismus* as a counter to the relapse into the conventional nationalism argued by the right. Yet at the same time Jarausch perceives the necessity of incorporating this liberal tradition with a contemporary concept of the nation which could provide an effective basis for the cultivation of a democratic national political culture. Jarausch describes the contemporary flux in established concepts of identity on left and right which have stimulated a rethinking of the conventional approaches of both left and right to the normative political and historical values associated with contemporary concepts of “normality” and the nation

Die Beantwortung der Frage der Normalisierung hängt weitgehend von der Definition der “Normalität” ab. Da sich die Schatten der Vergangenheit kaum bannen lassen, muß der neokonservative Versuch aggressiver Renationalisierung vehementen Widerspruch auslösen. Nach der Wiederherstellung des Nationalstaates erscheint jedoch auch die Haltung des Post-Nationalismus als unzureichend, denn eine permanente Besonderheit der Deutschen schafft Unsicherheit, die weder der europäischen Integration noch der internationalen Kooperation dient. Ein Ausweg aus diesem Dilemma könnte eine partielle Normalisierung sein, welche die schuldbeladene Kategorie Nation zu demokratisieren versucht. Als Wahrer der kollektiven Erinnerung haben deutsche Historiker in Ost und West, im Inland und Ausland, eine hohe Verantwortung, allen nationalistischen Tendenzen zu widerstehen. Jedoch stehen sie gleichzeitig

---

<sup>40</sup> Winkler, also cf Michael Mertes

<sup>41</sup> Konrad Jarausch, ‘Normalisierung oder Re-Nationalisierung? Zur Umdeutung der deutschen Vergangenheit.’ in *Geschichte und Gesellschaft* 21. Heft 4. Oktober-Dezember 1995. Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht. Göttingen. p. 577.

vor der Herausforderung, demokratische Perspektiven für den Umgang mit dem wiedererstandenen Nationalstaat in einem sich vereinigenden Europa zu entwickeln.<sup>42</sup>

Jarausch thus reconstructs the basis of the compromise between “national” and “democratic” readings of past and present: whilst the enduring stigma of National Socialism continues to hinder the project of “renationalising” German political culture in conventional terms of neoconservatism, the unification of Germany has likewise eclipsed the “post-national” formulation of democratic political culture argued by left-liberals. Similar to Dann, Jarausch perceives the dangers of leaving the national idiom to the right and stakes a claim for the retention of a critical perspective on the national past which, however, in the context of post-unification Germany should also emphasise a historical solidarity with the minority democratic-national traditions embodied in moments such as the attempted revolution of 1848, the history of Social Democracy and the construction of the Weimar republic.<sup>43</sup> It is clear that for Jarausch this is a case of articulating the established “western” democratic political culture previously associated with post- or anti-national arguments within the altered constellation of post-unification society. Whilst Jarausch criticises the conservative reception of unification and project of reconstructing conventional national identity as attempts to rehabilitate discredited national traditions and values, he omits an extremely important development in liberal-conservative formulations of national identity which provides an important parallel to left-liberal rapprochement with the national concept.

The form of liberal-conservative rapprochement with progressive discourse has been represented most clearly in the writings and speeches of former Federal President Roman Herzog. Herzog assumed the position of Federal President in 1994 after the withdrawal of the controversial CDU-CSU candidate Stefan Heitmann who provoked his withdrawal by his plea for the *geschichtliche Einordnung des Holocausts* and thus argued along *deutsch-national* lines of relativising the past in the reconstruction of a more traditional sense of German nationalism.<sup>44</sup> Whilst some observers perceived in the conservative current represented by Heitmann an indication of the likely development of German conservatism in the 1990s,<sup>45</sup> this has been challenged by the development of an

---

<sup>42</sup> *ibid.* p. 584.

<sup>43</sup> Jarausch. *ibid.* p. 583.

<sup>44</sup> cfFAZ 1993

<sup>45</sup> cfStefan Berger, ‘Nationalism and the Left in Germany’. *New Left Review* ‘Barbarism and Enlightenment’. 206/1994. p. 65.

influential liberal conservative strand which continues to prioritise the German nation and yet seeks a more “progressive” articulation of the terms of its identity. Herzog proved himself to represent a more liberal conservative stance and as such continued in a similar vein to Richard von Weizsäcker who, in 1985, had caused much controversy for his indirect criticism of Kohl’s relativisation of the 8 May during the Bitburg fiasco. Unlike Heitmann and many other in the CDU-CSU, Herzog has been concerned to develop a more liberal version of national identity and has displayed a much more flexible attitude towards dealing with the negative legacy of the historic German nation. Rather than confronting this legacy by the aggressive relativisation pursued by *New Right* thinkers, Herzog readily admits the disastrous consequences of traditional nationalism in German history. Yet he clearly remains attached to the concept of the nation in the present which he perceives as a necessary focus of social identity which also requires the legitimacy cultivated from history. Herzog overcomes these problems by creating a distinction between the “nation state” and the “nation”. In a speech delivered before the 41<sup>st</sup>. Historians’ Conference in 1996 Herzog offered the following understanding of this distinction

Das Prinzip der Abgrenzung, aus dem im 19. Jahrhundert die Nationalstaaten entstanden, taugt heute ebensowenig mehr wie das der Expansion, das ja auch mit dem Nationalstaat verbunden war. Wir sind am Ende dieses Jahrhunderts dabei, die nationalstaatliche Form zu überwinden, die in ihrer ideologischen Übersteigerung den Kontinent in den Abgrund gezogen hat. Ich sage bewußt, der Nationalstaat ist dabei, sich zu verabschieden, nicht die Nation. . .Der “Nationalstaat” mit den dazugehörigen Souveränitätsvorstellungen hat sich (jedoch) überlebt. Im 19. Jahrhundert gab es zwei Kriterien für diese Nationalstaatlichkeit: Zum einen das militärische Potential - das sowohl zur Verteidigung des eigenen als auch zur Eroberung anderen Territoriums dienen sollte - und zum anderen das wirtschaftliche Potential. Beides gilt längst nicht mehr. . .Der Weg in die Zukunft kann für uns nur lauten: Europa.<sup>46</sup>

Thus for Herzog, the division between the nation state and nation is founded in two primary trends: the discrediting of the traditional ideological-political concept of the nation state and the trends towards economic and political de-nationalisation associated with the process of “globalisation”. Herzog avoids these problems by evoking a separation between the historical nation state in its structural and ideological form and the concept of the “German nation” as a focus of expressing a notion of cultural particularism and collective identity in the present. This release from the stigma of an

---

<sup>46</sup> ‘Rede von Bundespräsident Roman Herzog vor dem 41. Deutschen Historikertag am 17. September 1996 in München.’ from, <http://www.bundespräsident.de>.

anti-democratic national past is conceptually enabled by German unification in 1989 which introduced a new, current, reality to the national idiom and offered an opportunity for reconfiguring the concept of “nation” in the present against the negative national legacy of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. For Herzog, the exhaustion of the “nation state” at the end of the twentieth century is founded in two phenomena: firstly the experience globalisation and the waning importance of national boundaries and institutions and secondly in terms of the conventional ideological political concepts of nationalism. Herzog appears to avoid the problems of conventional nationalism for the expression of patriotic sentiment by associating this form with the traditional “nation state” which has now been transcended leaving, however, the concept of nation as an expression of collective cultural particularism. This is rather more an attempt to *reconfigure* national patriotism and to shed the discrediting legacy of National Socialism from the concept of nation. Unlike previous conservative attempts to deal with the problems of the National Socialist past, however, for liberal conservatives this no longer implies a relativising approach to the past but rather more an open admission of this period of German national history. We shall return to this aspect in more detail in the following chapter. At the moment we need to consider some of the ways in which this more liberal, democratic expression of national identity and patriotism is being articulated in post-unification society. The approach of separating nation state from nation does not imply a departure from the project of constructing identity from an instrumentalisation of history. In this context it is interesting to observe how, in his first address as Federal President, Herzog attempts to create a “republican” reading of 1989 and implies therein a continuity which is both democratic and national and stretches back to the early nineteenth century emancipation movements of the liberal bourgeoisie. In this reading, the successful democratic and peaceful revolution of 1989 becomes the basis for a reconfigured articulation of national pride

Denn diese Freiheit, die Freiheit von 1989, ist durch das Volk selbst erkämpft worden. Die Westdeutschen haben beim Aufbau ihrer Demokratie bestimmt viel geleistet, aber viele haben es zunächst auf Grund einer totalen Niederlage und unter dem Drängen der Siegermächte getan. Die Ostdeutschen haben ihre Demokratie selbst erkämpft. . . Das ist mehr als Hambacher Fest und Paulskirche zusammen; denn sie sind, so bedauerlich das ist, letzten Endes gescheitert. 1989 ist

gelingen. Darauf kann man doch stolz sein. "Stolz" ist ein Wort, das ich ganz ungern in den Mund nehme, das heir aber wirklich enigma berechtigt ist.<sup>47</sup>

Thus Herzog articulates a concept of national pride which is conventionally associated with a traditional conservative outlook via reference to a republican motif which appears more at home in left-liberal discourse. The republican shading which Herzog casts upon the unification of the two German states via reference to both the self-assertion of the people in October-November 1989 and also the longer historical legacy of democratic-national movements in the early part of the nineteenth century is of particular interest. Herzog makes a claim for a democratic-national continuity which has been successfully fulfilled in contemporary Germany. During 1989-90 conservatives cast the project of unification primarily in terms of the successful economic model of the Federal Republic and employed this argument in justifying unification in accordance with article 23 thus shutting out any public-political consideration of new developments in a republican sense as argued by Habermas. Whilst Habermas, Grass or politicians such as Lafontaine were condemned as socialist dinosaurs for their defence of a republican and European over a national orientation, in the course of the 1990s such readings have assumed a prominent role in official commemorations of German unification. This testifies less to the transformation of conservatives into liberal republicans but rather more to the de-facto practice of liberal conservatives given the intractable problems of traditional romantic nationalism which is motivated by the search for a positive or at least more consensual articulation of patriotism.

A similar process of realignment is evident - from a liberal standpoint - in the post-unification work of Wolfgang Mommsen. During the 1980s, similar to Winkler, Mommsen perceived the post-national circumstances of the Federal Republic as the historical "norm" of German statehood and the unitary nation state of 1871-1933 as a mere "episode".<sup>48</sup> This contrasts with the position which he has developed in post-unification society. Writing in the early 1990s, Mommsen contends that the *Kaiserreich* not only forms the fulcrum of national identity in the present,<sup>49</sup> but also laid the

---

<sup>47</sup> cf 'Ansprache von Bundespräsident Roman Herzog zu seinem Amtantritt am 1. Juli 1994.' from: [www.bundespraesident.de](http://www.bundespraesident.de).

<sup>48</sup> cf Mommsen. 1983. op. cit. p. 76. (p. 110 in thesis)

<sup>49</sup> cf Wolfgang Mommsen, 'Der autoritäre Nationalstaat. Verfassung, Gesellschaft und Kultur im deutschen Kaiserreich.' Fischer. F./Main. 1992. p. 7. also cf Mommsen, 'Das Ringen um den nationalen Staat. Die Gründung und der innere Ausbau des Deutschen Reiches unter Otto von Bismarck 1850 bis 1890.' Propyläen Verlag. Berlin. 1993. p. 17.

foundations for important social and cultural traditions which continue to shape the Germans.<sup>50</sup> Mommsen remains critical of the *Kaiserreich* as an authoritarian-conservative state and acknowledges the contribution played by a positively endowed *Sonderbewußtsein* in destroying the Weimar republic and enabling the accession of National Socialism in 1933.<sup>51</sup> Mommsen also, however, is keen to stress the positive elements of the Second Empire such as the extension of welfare provision and the early expansion of the franchise in 1867.<sup>52</sup> Similar to Winkler, Mommsen remains committed to a perception of the underlying “normality” of present arrangements which has developed from a “post-national” to a “national” historical orientation. During the 1980s, conceptions of a German *Sonderweg* were firmly focused upon the German nation between 1871 and 1945. During the 1990s, this focus has shifted for some important left-liberals who remain critical of the *Kaiserreich* and yet consider the nation state as a “normal” form of social order and imply that the period of division represented a *Sonderweg* of historical development.

In this context it is interesting to compare such reflections of the *Kaiserreich* with the post-unification world of perhaps the historian most associated with the *Sonderweg* thesis - Hans-Ulrich Wehler. Wehler remains highly critical of conventional national identity and the attempts of neoconservatives of both liberal conservative and “new right” provenance who attempt to rehabilitate a concept of the compelling German *Mittellage*.<sup>53</sup> With respect to the *Sonderweg* thesis, however, Wehler has subjected his earlier theories to a critical revision.<sup>54</sup> Wehler no longer considers Bismarck’s regime as a “bonapartiste dictatorship” but rather more in terms of a “charismatic leadership” of the type described by Weber.<sup>55</sup> Wehler also concedes that whilst earlier formulation of a German *Sonderweg* were justified in examining the longer-term conditions of fascism in German history, they operated from an idealised perception of “normal” Western development<sup>56</sup> and were also of political use in morally legitimising the new post-war

---

<sup>50</sup> *ibid.* p. 12.

<sup>51</sup> Mommsen. 1992. *op. cit.* p. 421.

<sup>52</sup> Mommsen. 1993. *op. cit.* p. 25.

<sup>53</sup> cf Wehler, ‘Angst vor der Macht?’ 1995. *op. cit.* and Wehler, ‘Willkommen im Kreis der Neorankianer.’ 1994. *op. cit.*

<sup>54</sup> cf, Hans-Ulrich Wehler, ‘Deutsche Gesellschaftsgeschichte. Dritter Band. Von der “Deutschen Doppelrevolution” bis zum Beginn des Ersten Weltkrieges. 1849-1914.’ C.H Beck. München. 1995.

<sup>55</sup> *ibid.* p. 373.

<sup>56</sup> *ibid.* p. 464-5.

direction of West Germany.<sup>57</sup> Wehler, also concedes that it is no longer tenable to speak of a “deficit” of bourgeois culture in the Second Empire and that it is more accurate to speak of bourgeois imitation of the aristocracy rather than the feudalisation of the middle-classes.<sup>58</sup> At the same time as he has rejected the *Sonderweg* thesis and now speaks of the *Sonderbedingungen* of German modern development, Wehler, also continues to defend the study of the particular and specific aspects of Germany’s development into a modern industrial state. Wehler continued to question the reform potential of Imperial Germany given that the modernisation processes tend to engender democratic and parliamentary development and he also stresses the importance of the *Sonderbewußtsein* particularly in notions of the relationship between the state and civil society.<sup>59</sup> For Wehler today, the *Revolution von oben* in 1871 did not represent a continuity of the *Sonderweg*, but rather more created the conditions within which the *Sonderbedingungen* of German history could unfold destructive potential.<sup>60</sup> It was thus Bismarck who destroyed the German liberalism and not the experience of the failure of the 1848 revolution.<sup>61</sup> Thus whilst Wehler has revised the concept of a *Sonderweg* to modernity, he remains highly critical of Imperial Germany which, in fact, he understands as marking the beginning of many of the later problems of German history. Wehler thus remains committed to a perspective which attempts to understand National Socialism within longer-term historical, social and political developmental trends of the modern German state. Mommsen’s notion of the “centrality” of the *Kaiserreich* to present society and concepts of identity remains anathema to Wehler. Yet also with this critical historian, one can discern a changed attitude towards the project of the historical construction of national identity from positive historical experience. Wehler remains critical of the historic German nation and can perceive no potential for a positive national identity in the present emanating from Imperial Germany. Yet Wehler is not immune to facing the “challenge” described by Henry Ashby Turner Jr. of “identifying the antecedents of a durable, democratic, peaceable German republic.”<sup>62</sup> One important aspect of this process has been a reassessment of the legacy of 1848 for contemporary expressions of post-unification national identity and this involves a reconsideration and

---

<sup>57</sup> *ibid.* p. 467.

<sup>58</sup> *ibid.* p. 474.

<sup>59</sup> *ibid.* p. 479.

<sup>60</sup> *ibid.* pp. 480-1.

<sup>61</sup> *ibid.* p. 480.

reconfiguration of perceptions of national continuity in German history for both right and left.

At this point we may observe the congruence between liberal-left intellectuals who seek to democratise and “Westernise” the concept of German nation and liberal conservatives who seek a form of national argumentation which is not compromised by the association with National Socialism. Due to the historically conflictual nature of the concepts of nation and democracy the search for positive national-historical antecedents remains rather problematic. As Winkler’s example of the Weimar Republic displays this period in German history in which a synthesis between national and democratic concepts was attempted contains little positive as it was the abject failure of this project which eventually resulted in the destruction of the republic and the erection of the National Socialist dictatorship. For this reason, the period of the Weimar Republic appears too close to the National Socialist period in order to serve as a possible positive historical precedent for the contemporary project of synthesising the concepts of democracy and the nation. Due to this general problem of German national history, it appears, and not without a considerable element of irony, that the *pre*-national period remains the only epoch which could potentially serve as a historical precedent for a synthesis between the German nation and Western political culture.

In this sense the liberal historian Lothar Gall took the 150 anniversary of the revolution of 1848 as an opportunity to cultivate a sense of historical-political continuity between the democratic-nationalist movement of the *Paulskirche* in Frankfurt and the *Berliner Republik* to contend that the foundations of the Federal Republic emerged in 1848.<sup>63</sup> In a similar vein at the beginning of 1998 Wehler noted the increase in historical studies of 1848 in the world of academia and yet complained bitterly about the apparent lack of interest in this heritage in the public-political realm. Wehler appears particularly concerned that among the “inheritors” of this progressive tradition in the Trade Unions and Social Democracy, 1848 appears to hold little interest

---

<sup>62</sup> Henry Ashby Turner Jr, ‘Germany’s Past Viewed after Fifty Years of Democracy.’ in Merkl. (ed.) 1999. op. cit.p. 31.

<sup>63</sup> cf ‘Das Fundament der Bundesrepublik entstand 1848. Interview mit dem Historiker Lothar Gall.’ in Mainz Echo.15.10.1998. Also cf the interview with the same in ‘Der Spiegel’ Nr.7. 09.02.1998.pp.54-5. Gall herelike stresses that the foundations of the Federal Republic can be found in the national movement of 1848.

1948 war nur ein schwaches Echo möglich. 1998 sollte die Bundesrepublik, sollten ihre Parteien und gesellschaftlichen Kraft nicht nur imstande, sondern dezidierten Willens sein, sich zu 1848 und noblen Traditionen zu bekennen. . . Daß sich die Koalition mit der Ehrung auch dieser Revolution schwertun mag, wird manchen kaum überraschen. Aber muß auch diese Stunde der Opposition wieder ungenutzt vorübergehen?.<sup>64</sup>

Here Wehler quite clearly stakes a claim for the public-political cultivation of a democratic consciousness which relies upon an interpretation of the democratic-nationalist traditions of pre-national German history. This approach reflects a shift in attitudes towards the national past among left-liberal thinkers since unification in 1989. The attempt to establish historical antecedents for 1989 in the democratic national movement of 1848 signifies a subtle change in reflection of the past. Wehler's observation that the then ruling coalition experiences difficulties with the legacy of 1848 was, however, refuted by the events of the year. Wehler's premise that conservative leaning politicians and thinkers in general share few sympathies with the traditions of the liberal national movement is founded upon an accurate assessment of the conservative receptions of this period since the nineteenth century which has certainly been characterised by a critical attitude. From this perspective, Wehler appears to orientate himself upon the conventional dichotomy between left and right over interpretations of the relationship between the forces of the nation and of republican democracy throughout German history. 1998 witnessed, however, an official engagement with the legacy of the liberal-nationalists on the part of conservative politicians including Chancellor Kohl who asserted a line of historical continuity existing between the reunified Germany of the *Berliner Republik* and the democratic nationalist movements and ideas of the Frankfurt National Assembly of 1848.<sup>65</sup> In a similar vein, Roman Herzog, offered an interpretation of German historical continuity between 1848 and 1989 which traces the development of the concepts of unity and freedom from their genesis in *Vormärz* to their fulfilment in the collapse of the GDR in 1989.<sup>66</sup> For Herzog, the republican, democratic-nationalist principles of 1848 form the

---

<sup>64</sup> Hans-Ulrich Wehler, 'Nicht der Rede wert? Der Politik fällt zu dieser Revolution nichts ein.' in *Die Zeit*. Nr.5. 22.01.1998.

<sup>65</sup> cf 'Rede vom Bundeskanzler Dr. Helmut Kohl zur Eröffnung des 30. Deutschen Turnfestes am 31. Mai 1998 in München.' Pressemitteilung vom 31.05.98, Website source, <http://www.bundesregierung.de>.

<sup>66</sup> This point is also made by Winkler who perceives the demands of 1848 for unity and freedom as having been finally fulfilled through the reunification of Germany in 1989-90. cf Winkler, 'Die sperrige Revolution.' in *Die Zeit*. Nr.5. 22.01.1998.

key historical orientation of a positive democratic-nationalist national identity for reunified Germany

Und doch wies das Jahr 1848 weit in die Zukunft. Die "Paulskirche" ist das eine große Symbol für das Streben der Deutschen nach Einigkeit und Recht und Freiheit, und erst heute können wir hinzufügen: der Fall der Berliner Mauer 1989 ist das andere. Beides sind Sternstunde deutscher Geschichte, mit denen wir sorgfältig ungehen müssen; sie dürfen nicht in der Routine verordneten Gedenkens versinken. Das Zusammentreten des ersten, freigewählten deutschen Parlaments vor 150 Jahren ist ein Moment in unserer oft so schwierigen Geschichte, auf den wir uns ohne Einschränkungen berufen können, auch wenn wir heute über die Zukunft von Staat und Demokratie nachdenken. . . 1848 gibt uns das Recht, mit Selbstbewußtsein zu sagen: Die demokratische Idee, die Ideen der Freiheit, der Menschen - und Bürgerrechte sind auch ein Teil der deutschen Tradition - auch wenn sie sich erst später wirklich durchgesetzt haben.<sup>67</sup>

Thus for Herzog, the democratic-nationalist legacy of 1848 forms a central aspect of German historical continuity and also provides a contemporary and future orientation for reunified Germany. Perhaps the most interesting and revealing aspect of Herzog's appreciation of the significance of 1848 is that it is presented as displaying the supra-historical, *German* antecedents of democracy, freedom, human and civil rights which form an integral part of the legacy of "Western political culture" previously perceived as the historical enemy of traditional German national traditions. Thus Herzog appears to stake a claim for a *German tradition* of enlightened political culture which *predates* the western integration of 1945. In this sense, Herzog's prioritisation of 1989 over 1945 reveals an important point of contradiction between liberal-left and liberal conservative readings of democratic patriotism and this is clearly not a complete convergence. Yet the search for democratic national traditions provides a basis upon which left-liberal and liberal conservative perceptions converge. The historical-political climate of reunified Germany in the 1990's appears to find itself in a curious process of transformation in which a conservative patriot such as Kohl can invoke the legacy of the liberal nationalist movement of the 1832 *Hambacher Fest* and the revolutionary *Vormärz*<sup>68</sup> and the SPD Minister for Culture, Michael Neumann, could suggest dropping the *Holocaust-Mahnmal* project in the capital and support the reconstruction of the old Prussian *Berliner Stadtschloß*.<sup>69</sup> This situation would appear to reflect the common desire across

---

<sup>67</sup> 'Rede von Bundespräsident Roman Herzog anlässlich der Veranstaltung "150 Jahre Revolution von 1848/49" am 18. Mai 1998 in der Paulskirche zu Frankfurt am Main.' <http://www.bundespraesident.de>

<sup>68</sup> cf Kohl. 1996. op. cit. p.12.

<sup>69</sup> cf 'Interview mit dem designierten Kulturminister Michael Neumann. Die Pickelhaube steht mir nicht.' in *Die Zeit*.Nr. 32. 30.07.1998.

the broad left-liberal - liberal conservative political spectrum for a democratic and pro-Western articulation of national patriotism. In this manner a synthesis is achieved between the desire to cultivate positive German national traditions which can act as a source of contemporary social orientation and yet, however, do not conflict with the tenets of Western political culture. In this representation, pride in German history is fused with a commitment to “Western” democratic political culture.

As the foundations of the traditional conservative conception of the nation state crumble and the reputation of the “classic” nation state across the Western world appears fatally compromised then so it appears that resistance to historical movements such as German liberal nationalism in the first half of the nineteenth century weakens. In this situation, the inherent contradiction contained in the fact that such an attested admirer of Bismarck as Kohl can simultaneously invoke the legacy of those liberal forces who Bismarck placed himself in consistent and irreconcilable opposition to from the revolution of 1848 to the “refounding” of the Reich in 1878 does not appear to be problematic. In this interpretation of continuity in German history, the distinctive link between historical and political perspective appears transcended in the common search for a democratic national past. In this context it appears that the intense political polarisation between left and right as witnessed in the historical arguments of the 1980s has been replaced by the common spurious assertion of a vague historical continuity of the “democratic German nation”. The other essential aspect of this broader, and uneven, reconfiguration of perceptions of historical continuity is the reassessment of the “utopian project” in the light of the “End of History”. It thus appears as somewhat ironic that liberal thinkers in particular seek to present the “velvet revolutions” of 1989 as existing in a continuity with the traditions of enlightenment thought and the genesis of modern “civil society” in 1789 at a time when, not least amongst the left, the collapse of the Cold War has been widely received as heralding the death of such “utopian” projects which espoused the potential of historical progress through the agency of social transformation. Yet without faith in the progressive potential of social transformation, the political movements and ideas which are today lauded as key components of superior “Western political culture” would never have emerged and succeeded in the first place. Invocations of “Western political culture” conflate the West with progress and “Western political culture” with the post-war FRG. Yet without the commitment to universalism and historical progress these legacies turn into their opposite and appear

as an enlightened foil for the articulation of essentially particularist values. Internally this process is sealed in the creation of positive national identities which aim to cohere and legitimise contemporary society and outwardly they further the division of humanity through reference to the difference, and implied superiority, of “Western” political culture in the world at large. The most obvious problem for attempts to construct a sense of national identity from an instrumentalisation of “positive” national history is of course that such readings are compelled to confront the period of National Socialism which under no circumstances can serve as “positive” historical continuity. These developments are reflected in changed attitudes towards the public-political reflection of the National Socialist period and one may trace a similar process of congruence between conventional concepts of history as “compensation” and “emancipation” to that observed between concepts of “German nation” and “Western democracy”. This historical aspect forms the core of the final and following chapter. Before examining the developments in “critical history” and the formation of identity it is necessary to consider the arguments of perhaps the most notable left-liberal intellectual Jürgen Habermas. Habermas more than most formulated his concept of post-national, post-traditional identity during the FRG as a counter to the dangers of a relapse into conventional national identity. In contrast to many left-liberal thinkers who formally adopt his concept of Western enlightenment political culture, Habermas has continued to argue for a post-national form of identity which is based upon the universal principles of republican *Verfassungspatriotismus*. Let us now turn to Habermas concept of the emancipatory project and its relationship to “post-national” formulations of social solidarity.

### 6.3. “Emancipation” and Post-National Social Solidarity.

We should be wary of ignoring the distinctions between left-liberal and liberal conservative concepts of “democratic patriotism” and the underlying political motives which motivate the cultivation of a discourse of patriotism which fuses the national idea with the idea of democracy. Whilst left-liberals stress the centrality of the historical and political caesura of 1945 and seek to develop the post-war, “post-national” discourse of *Verfassungspatriotismus* upon the national level, liberal conservatives emphasise the importance of 1989 and seek a reconfiguration of nationalism into a more democratic and “Western” form. Posed in its broadest terms one may perhaps speak of a left-liberal

project of “nationalising” the concept of *Verfassungspatriotismus* which is paralleled by a liberal conservative “democratisation” of nationalism. The point of congruence for these two streams is formed by the common acceptance of the need to harness the nation as a focus of collective social loyalty and solidarity.

Similar to left-liberals, Habermas too perceives parallels between the contemporary constellation in the West and the bourgeois emancipation movements of the early nineteenth century. Unlike many left-liberal or liberal conservative thinkers, however, Habermas does not perceive this as a means of constructing a historical basis for contemporary democratic national identity. Rather more, Habermas compares the ideas of German nationalists during the 1840s in order to emphasise the fundamentally novel circumstances of contemporary existence. Citing the 1846 *Germanistenversammlung* in Frankfurt, Habermas contrasts the debates over the civic structuring of the nation and the demarkation of its boundaries to other nation states with contemporary political discussion in the West which is characterised by reflections of the demise of this republican core and the blurring of established national borders.<sup>70</sup> Habermas attempts to draw political conclusions on the state of the national concept in the present by reconstructing its genesis and development since the late eighteenth century. For Habermas then, as now, the national concept is intellectually founded upon two potentially conflictual ideas: firstly the republican, universal values enshrined in the legally mediated order of a willed community of free and equals and secondly the romantic, particularist values embodied by a pre-political community of fate

Die Nation hat zwei Gesichter. Während die gewollte Nation der Staatsbürger die Quelle für demokratische Legitimation ist, sorgt die geborene Nation der Volksgenossen für soziale Integration. Staatsbürger konstituieren aus eigener Kraft die politische Assoziation von Freien und Gleichen; Volksgenossen finden sich in einer durch gemeinsame Sprache und Geschichte geprägten Gemeinschaft vor. In die Begrifflichkeit des Nationalstaats ist die Spannung zwischen dem Universalismus einer egalitären Rechtsgemeinschaft und dem Partikularismus einer historischen Schicksalsgemeinschaft eingelassen.<sup>71</sup>

Habermas thus appreciates the role played by *both* “civic-republican” and “cultural-romantic” ideas in the evolution of the national concept in the West. For Habermas this dichotomy remains harmless as long as the cosmopolitan concept of the nation of

---

<sup>70</sup> Habermas. 1998. op. cit. p. 7.

<sup>71</sup> Habermas, ‘Die Einbeziehung des Anderen. Studien zur politischen Theorie.’ Suhrkamp Verlag. Frankfurt/M. 1996. p. 139.

*citoyen* prevails over the ethno-centric interpretation of the *Volksgenosse*. Only the non-naturalistic concept of nation is compatible with the universal conceptualisation of the democratic constitutional state which allows the republican idea to ascend and, most importantly for Habermas, to structure the instances of *social integration*. For Habermas the greatest measure of success of the historic nation state was its ability to substitute the decaying, particularist solidaristic bonds of late absolutist society towards family, region, dynastic ruler, the village community etc. with a new, higher, more abstract and universal level of social solidarity between free and equal national citizens who has hitherto been strangers for one another.<sup>72</sup> Yet, given the “Janus-face” of the nation,<sup>73</sup> this republican concept of social solidarity enabled by the national concept is endangered by the organic, pre-political concept of the nation which claims a “higher” level of authority than the rational will-formation process of the modern citizenry. The turn to such ethno-cultural national concepts is explained by Habermas with regards to the “conceptual” need to explain the basic totality of social relations. Habermas recognises that the legalist-constitutional concept of the state leaves the question of defining the boundaries of a political community open. For Habermas it is a “legalist-rational myth” that the concept of Free Will determines the practical definition of such boundaries which, in the “real world” are more likely the result of conflicts, wars and civil wars. Nationalism resolves these problems by a definition of the national political community as an organic, naturalistic phenomenon which is self evident in contrast to the supposed artificial order of positive law thus

Der Rückgriff auf die “organische” Nation kann deshalb den historisch mehr oder weniger zufälligen Grenzen der politischen Gemeinschaft das bloß Kontingente abstreifen, sie mit der Aura einer nachgeahmten Substantialität versehen und durch “Herkunft” legitimieren.<sup>74</sup>

In the above we may recognise the form of national identity argued by New Right conservatives in the continuity of “integrative nationalism” throughout the late nineteenth and early twentieth century which prioritised the “organic” over the republican nation. Similarly the above dichotomy is evident in conservative attempts to construct a conflict between “national interests” and the constitutional court in the debates over the defamation of the *Bundeswehr*, the Crucifix Judgement and the arguments over the *Reichstagverhüllung* considered in chapter four. As Habermas

---

<sup>72</sup> *ibid.* and also c:f, Habermas, ‘National Unification and Popular Sovereignty.’ in ‘New Left Review.’ 219. Sept/Oct. 1996. p. 9.

<sup>73</sup> *ibid.* p. 10.

<sup>74</sup> Habermas. 1996. *op. cit.* p. 140.

observes, the history of the early twentieth century displays the national idea has been most frequently employed to legitimise foreign political adventure, war and the negative integration of society and the Third Reich clearly exists in this continuity of the ethnic, organic nation.<sup>75</sup> Despite this, Habermas recognises the progressive origins of the nation state in the dissolution of the old absolutist order and the introduction of the concept of legally mediated social equality and universal values. The lesson which Habermas concludes from the history of the nation state is that it must lose its ambivalent character and, in the present constellation which displays the limitations of the traditional nation state, he perceives just such an opportunity.

The primary service of the nation and “national consciousness” was the ability to create a new context of social communication within which answers could be sought to the questions arising from the rapid process of social and industrial modernisation and which could reintegrate a population torn from the older corporatist bonds of late feudalism.<sup>76</sup> Habermas thus appears to prioritise the integrative function of the nation and it is with this question of social integration that he is primarily concerned in the present, unique constellation after the end of the Cold War. Whilst the early nation state developed its most effective integrative potential via the fusion of the concept of the *Rechtsstaat* with that of cultural membership of the nation, in the present we are faced with the dissolution of these factors

Der nationalstaatliche Rahmen für die Implementierung von Menschenrechten und Demokratie hat, über die Grenzen von Stämmen und Dialekten hinweg, eine neue, abstraktere Form der sozialen Integration möglich gemacht. Wir stehen heute vor der Aufgabe, diesen Prozeß mit einem weiteren Abstraktionsschritt fortzusetzen.<sup>77</sup>

Thus the central question for Habermas is formed by the ability of the nation state to serve this integrative function in a period in which its internal cultural homogeneity is eroded by the process of multiculturalism and externally throughout the force of globalisation which restricts the capacity of national government to purposefully intervene in economic arrangements.<sup>78</sup> It is within this context that Habermas has developed his concept of the post-national constellation with which he seeks to provide some answers to these newer problems of social integration during a period of profound

---

<sup>75</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>76</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>77</sup> Habermas. 1998. *op. cit.* p. 36.

<sup>78</sup> Habermas 1996. *op. cit.* p. 141.

change. The “post-national” concept is one which Habermas has developed over the past couple of decades and during the pre-unification period served to underwrite the concept of *Verfassungspatriotismus*. The “post-national” concept clearly obtained a particular relevance in the post-war context of divided Germany. Yet for Habermas, despite obvious German peculiarities, this represented a much broader change throughout the Western hemisphere represented in the breaking of the prioritisation of national interests during the period of bipolar hegemony.<sup>79</sup> This external paradigm shift corresponded to changes in domestic politics and most particularly in the pacification of the class conflict which had destabilised inter-war society. For Habermas the classic nation state allowed for an expanded and superior form of intersubjective communication to that which developed under the regional dynastic arrangements of late feudal society. The nation state thus created a new, abstract, level of social solidarity between strangers. This form was discredited through the internal cohesion of society via ethnic nationalism and the external policy and ideology of imperialism. The post-war period fundamentally altered this now discredited constellation and offered new forms of domestic and international regulation through the experiences of the Cold War, the process of de-colonisation and the creation of the welfare, social state. Whilst the Cold War overrode the narrow prioritisation of national interests and decolonisation formally offered equality among nations, the social state offered a new level of domestic social integration along democratic lines reminiscent of the earlier republican impetus of the classic nation state

In der Gestalt sozialstaatlicher Massendemokratie ist hier die hochproduktive Wirtschaftsform des Kapitalismus zum ersten Mal sozial gebändigt und mit dem normativen Selbstverständnis demokratischer Verfassungsstaaten mehr oder weniger in Einklang gebracht worden.<sup>80</sup>

The creation of the social state introduced a period of unprecedented improvements among the broadest section of the population and more importantly for Habermas sensitised the post-war citizenry to the priority of claiming and realising basic rights. Yet this project too became problematic due to the bureaucratising tendencies of social democratic welfarism which appeared to bolster the power of the state and which was led by a social democratic concept of bureaucratically administering emancipation

Allerdings ist die Sozialdemokratie überrascht worden vom systemischen Eigensinn der staatlichen Macht, der sie sich wie eines neutralen Instrumentes glaubte bedienen zu können, um

---

<sup>79</sup> Habermas. 1996. *ibid.* p. 144.

<sup>80</sup> Habermas. 1998. *op. cit.* p. 78.

eine sozialstaatliche Universalisierung der Bürgerrechte durchzusetzen. Nicht der Sozialstaat hat sich als eine Illusion erwiesen, sondern die Erwartung, mit administrativen Mitteln emanzipierte Lebensformen zuwege bringen zu können.<sup>81</sup>

Already during the mid-1980s Habermas has described the need to transcend the social state into a higher level which could reflect the social change from work to communication society and steer such forces in an emancipatory direction. Despite obvious problems, Habermas considers the development of the social state as the highest level of reflection in modern capitalist society and which offered the best possible solution to the problem of capitalist economics and the iniquitous distribution of material prosperity. The interventionist state regulated the economy and thereby assured not only favourable conditions for the accumulation of capital but also allowed for a more equitable distribution of the fruits of capitalist productivity as well as providing a framework for the securing of the basic rights of as broad as possible layer of the population. It is in this moment which Habermas perceives a continuity of the older republican inspired concept of the *Rechtsstaat* which constitutes the “real nation” of *citoyen* against the “imagined nation” of the *Volksgenosse*.<sup>82</sup> The question which Habermas poses is thus whether or not this project can be retained in the face of the forces of globalisation which effectively de-nationalise the economic arrangements which the interventionist state previously sought to tame and whether the republican core of this project can be developed after the “End of History”.<sup>83</sup> Habermas perceives in the subsequent “unfreezing” of history post-Cold War the return of a problem as old as capitalism itself and which had appeared to have been resolved during the post-war period

Wie läßt sich die Allokations- und Entdeckungsfunktion selbstregulierender Märkte effektiver nutzen, ohne dabei Ungleichverteilungen und soziale Kosten in Kauf nehmen zu müssen, die mit den Integrationsbedingungen demokratisch verfaßter liberaler Gesellschaften unvereinbar sind?<sup>84</sup>

This is a process which Habermas traces since the 1980s and his primary concern is the social costs engendered by the break up of the post-war social consensus under the aegis of a socially ruthless neo-liberalism. Habermas is particularly concerned with effects which such developments have upon the potential of liberal democratic societies to absorb socio-political deregulation

---

<sup>81</sup> Habermas, ‘Die nachholende Revolution. Kleine Politische Schriften VII.’ Suhrkamp. Frankfurt. /M. 1990. p. 192.

<sup>82</sup> 1996. op. cit., ibid.

<sup>83</sup> cf. ibid. pp. 146-8 and Habermas. 1998. op. cit. pp. 78-84.

Eine solche Desolidarisierung muß jedoch auf längere Sicht eine liberale politische Kultur zerstören, auf deren universalistisches Selbstverständnis demokratisch verfaßte Gesellschaften angewiesen sind.<sup>85</sup>

Globalisation and the structural changes of the world economic system create problems for the rich, welfare democracies of the first world and restrict the room for manoeuvre of traditional nation states which are no longer in a position to ameliorate the social consequences of the transnational movement of markets and investment. The older solution along the lines of “Keynesianism in one country” is simply no longer a viable option

Wie man es dreht und wendet, die Globalisierung der Wirtschaft zerstört eine historische Konstellation, die den sozialstaatlichen Kompromiß vorübergehend ermöglicht hat. Auch wenn dieser keineswegs die ideale Lösung eines dem Kapitalismus innewohnenden Problems darstellt, so hat er doch die entstandenen sozialen Kosten in akzeptierten Grenzen gehalten.<sup>86</sup>

Thus the constellation at the end of the Cold War has introduced a new stage of regulation in relationship between state and civil society which has developed since the seventeenth century from *souveräne Herrschaft*, the *Verwaltungsstaat*, to the *Steuerstaat* and in the modern age from *Nationalstaat* to the post-war *Sozialstaat*.<sup>87</sup> For Habermas, the next stage of development must proceed on a *supra-national* level and in this sense he urges that politics imitate economics and reorganise the principles of the social state on the supra-national level of Europe.<sup>88</sup> This is a move which demands a reconfiguration of solidarity whose primary purpose is the securing of social integration in modern societies and in this context Habermas stakes a claim for the substitution of a now outdated, and indeed discredited nationalism, by the concept of *Verfassungspatriotismus*.<sup>89</sup> The “post-national” constellation represents a transcendence rather than abolition of the nation state whereby the republican, universal core of the classic national idea is retained and the ethno-cultural, particularist element left behind. The current global constellation appears to demand precisely such a universal form of identification which is no longer confined by the political, geographic and economic boundaries of the nation state

Die Weltbevölkerung ist objektiv längst zu einer unfreiwilligen Risikogemeinschaft zusammengeschlossen worden. Nicht ganz unplausibel ist deshalb die Erwartung, daß sich unter

---

<sup>84</sup> Habermas. 1998. *ibid.* p. 80.

<sup>85</sup> *ibid.* p. 81.

<sup>86</sup> *ibid.* p. 83.

<sup>87</sup> *ibid.* p. 84.

<sup>88</sup> *ibid.* p. 85 and 1996. *op. cit.* p. 149.

diesem Druck jener große, historisch folgenreiche Abstraktionsschub vom lokalen und dynastischen zum nationalen und demokratischen Bewußtsein fortsetzt.<sup>90</sup>

This describes most clearly Habermas concept of the progressive potential of European integration which he argues must not be left at the (present) technocratic level of market regulation but rather more must include the domestic political democratisation processes associated with the post-war social state.<sup>91</sup> As economics have developed beyond the control of national government so must any social policy which hopes for success also be organised upon this supra-national level. Yet, as the above suggests, the European level of social integration represents a stage in a much more ambitious project which seeks to realise these progressive social developments on a global level leading Habermas to contend that what is required is the cultivation of a *Weltinnenpolitik*.<sup>92</sup>

Now that we have considered Habermas reconstruction of the “Janus face” of the nation and his appreciation of the contemporary post-national constellation we are in a position to consider his concept of identity and legitimacy creation. Whilst the formal adherence to a universal concept of *Verfassungspatriotismus* appears familiar to both left-liberal and even some liberal conservative readings of the identity question, Habermas concept differs from the discourses previously considered in his interpretation of the transcendence of the nation. Whilst left-liberals thinkers appear to share a similar political perspective to Habermas and adopt concepts developed by Habermas since the 1960s, they reign in the formally universal aspirations of Constitutional Patriotism by conceding the necessity of its basis in the cultural particularism represented by the nation. This may be a democratic form of patriotism but it nevertheless remains grounded in cultural particularism. Habermas development of a concept of anti- or post-national patriotism is based upon two essential observations: firstly the experience of the nation state in the West generally and in Germany in particular throughout the age of imperialism wholly discredited the organic-national concept as a focus of both internal social integration and international regulation of the legitimacy of the state. Secondly, Habermas considers the development of socio-economic arrangements in the globalised age as having effectively rendered the nation state an anachronism and the successful

---

<sup>89</sup> Habermas. 1996. *ibid.* p. 143.

<sup>90</sup> Habermas. 1998. *op. cit.* p. 89.

<sup>91</sup> *ibid.* p. 80.

<sup>92</sup> *ibid.* pp.167-8.

regulation of economic affairs through the medium of the nation an unrealistic aspiration.

Habermas also appears to differ from his liberal colleagues in another, fundamental aspect: in contrast to the left-liberal notion that in order to constitute itself democratically contemporary society requires a sense of progressive identity anchored in history, Habermas appears to argue for a much more “hands on” form of democratic discourse which draws legitimacy not necessarily from a sense of identity but from the procedural functioning of republican social organisation which is codified in law. Habermas recognises that the best form of social integration and cohesion is derived from the experience of an intersubjective relationship between the citizenry and state in the formation of law and particularly of *rights* mediated through law. This is the sense of Habermas claim to retain the republican origins of the nation state and the principle and practice of the post-war social state. For Habermas, social integration can only truly be achieved through the widest possible participation of the population or, in the classical terms upon which Habermas basis this concept, civil society which, in contrast to the naturalistic concept of nation is not a pre-political ethnic community but rather more a direct product of the social contract

Ein vorgängiger, durch kulturelle Homogenität gesicherter Hintergrundkonsens ist nicht nötig, weil die demokratisch strukturierte Meinungs- und Willensbildung ein vernünftiges normatives Einverständnis auch unter Fremden ermöglicht. Weil der demokratische Prozeß dank seiner Verfahrenseigenschaften Legitimität verbürgt, kann er, wenn nötig, in die Lücken sozialer Integration einspringen. In dem Maße, wie er den Gebrauchswert subjektiver Freiheiten gleichmäßig sichert, sorgt er dafür, daß das Netz staatsbürgerlicher Solidarität nicht reißt.<sup>93</sup>

This is the practical republican core of Habermas concept of *Verfassungspatriotismus* which not primarily based in the identification with a democratic history or traditions and rather more is derived from the *practical* experience of the political inclusion of as wide a sweep of the citizenry as possible. This is not an identity which flows from “top-down” but is rather more a reciprocal process based on the intersubjective principle of republican democracy which posts the citizenry as both the creators of law and the subjects of such commonly constructed regulations and rules of social interaction.<sup>94</sup> This is the sense behind Habermas understanding of the “procedural legitimacy” contained in

---

<sup>93</sup> Habermas, ‘Inklusion versus Unabhängigkeit. Zum Verhältnis von Nation, Rechtsstaat und Demokratie.’ in Hettling, Nolte (Hrsg.) 1996. op. cit. p. 119.

<sup>94</sup> Habermas. 1996. op. cit. p. 391.

the republican social model - we are the authors of the laws which bind us.<sup>95</sup> Habermas is keen to state that the project of constructing a “European Public” on the historical model of civil society is not one which can be achieved by political elites but rather more from the forces of “solidarity” as a force of social integration against the instances of state power and moneyed interest.<sup>96</sup> This is a project of “radical reformism” which does not aim to dismantle established power structures and replace them with new ones but rather more to shore-up existing structures against the threat from the right.<sup>97</sup>

Ein radikaler Reformismus ist nicht mehr an konkreten Schlüsselforderungen zu erkennen, sondern an der auf Verfahren gerichteten Intentionen, eine neue Gewaltenteilung zu fördern: die sozialintegrative Gewalt der Solidarität soll sich über weit ausgefächerte demokratische Öffentlichkeiten und Institutionen gegen die beiden anderen Gewalten, Geld und administrative Macht, behaupten können. Das “Sozialistische” daran ist die Erwartung, daß sich die anspruchsvollen Strukturen gegenseitiger Anerkennung, die wir aus konkreten Lebensverhältnissen kennen, über die Kommunikationsvoraussetzungen inklusiver Meinungs- und demokratischer Willensbildungsprozesse auf die rechtlich und administrativ vermittelten sozialen Beziehungen übertragen.<sup>98</sup>

In this manner Habermas seeks to continue the emancipatory project which is to be carried by radical, autonomous public and channelled through legal institutions in an attempt to restructure social and legal relations. Thus the law offers the only remaining channel through which emancipatory impulses can be articulated. As Habermas himself states, this is far from a revolutionary approach to emancipation and his approach essentially represents the plea for an altered legal paradigm which could tame and direct the forces of state power and capitalist interest into more emancipatory forms.<sup>99</sup> Thus Habermas project essentially attempts to cultivate a reinvigorated legitimacy for the law and this project is lent a radical edge by his contention that non-governmental agencies and the “autonomous” public must be the agents of this legitimacy creation rather than political elites. This project has a particularly urgent nature given the discrediting of established political parties and the notion of an end of “party democracy”. Habermas perceives herein the potential for cultivating new forms of political participation external to the established party structures which could exercise emancipatory impact upon the structures of established law

---

<sup>95</sup> Habermas. 1996. op. cit.

<sup>96</sup> Habermas. 1998. op. cit. p. 90. also cf Habermas. 1996. op. cit. p. 278.

<sup>97</sup> *ibid.* p. 386.

<sup>98</sup> Habermas. 1990. op. cit. p. 199.

<sup>99</sup> Habermas. 1996. op. cit. p. 389.

Wenn sich die Formen der politischen Beteiligung ändern, muß das nicht schon per se ein Schaden sein. Wenn sich die politischen Parteien immer weiter verstaatlichen und ihre Arbeit gleichzeitig immer stärker vermarkten, können in der Zivilgesellschaft Gegenbewegungen einsetzen. Die Grünen haben noch einmal den klassischen Weg von der sozialen Bewegung zur Partei zurückgelegt. Das muß nicht so bleiben. Andere Initiativen verharren im Stadium der Gegenorganisation und erobern sich manchmal, wie Greenpeace, weltweiten Einfluß.<sup>100</sup>

In such protest movements and ‘Non-Governmental Organisations’ (NGOs) Habermas perceives an example of the form of “autonomous public” which influences the institutions of state and capital in an emancipatory direction which he has argued since the 1970s.<sup>101</sup> In essence, such organisations and public represents a modern form of “civil society” which acts as the agency of the leap required from national to supra-national and global level of reflection and socio-political reorganisation. Habermas concept of *Verfassungspatriotismus* must thus be distinguished from conventional left-liberal versions in several important respects:

(1) Habermas notion of *Verfassungspatriotismus* has retained its anti or post-national orientation in post-unification Germany. Whilst conservatives celebrate the “return” of the nation in 1989 and left-liberals have been compelled to supplement a form of Constitutional Patriotism with the national concept, Habermas perceives in 1989 more an opportunity to progress to a European and ultimately global level of socio-political organisation. Thus, for Habermas, the universal core of *Verfassungspatriotismus* matches the socio-economic transformation from the confines of the nation to the extended parameters of the global society.

(2) Habermas concept of *Verfassungspatriotismus* offers more than the securities of a flattering positive identity and is founded in his republican model of social organisation. In this sense, Constitutional Patriotism is an expression of the “procedural legitimacy” inherent in a republican model which strives for the widest possible inclusion of the citizenry in the processes and structures of political will formation and decision making - the legitimacy of the law is based upon the republican principle of intersubjectivity which renders the citizen simultaneously subject and object of the collectively conceived legal codex.

---

<sup>100</sup> Habermas, ‘Es gibt doch Alternativen!’ in, ‘Die Zeit.’ Nr. 42. 8. 10. 1998.

<sup>101</sup> cf Chapter 3. pp. 92-101

(3) Habermas retains the aspiration to social emancipation in the post-socialist world. In contrast to the emancipatory moment achieved by the classic nation state which was driven by the liberal bourgeoisie and the emancipatory form of work society driven by the working class, the present constellation must be steered in an emancipatory direction by the modern civil society constituted by the “autonomous public” represented in non-governmental protest organisations which operate across a global web of intersubjective communication. In the mobilisation of these instances of “cultural solidarity” against the moments of state and capital Habermas perceives the potential to continue the radical-democratic, modernist project into the 21. century.

Habermas has been criticised by liberal thinkers for developing a form of Constitutional Patriotism which not only transcends conventional nationalism but which also transcends “patriotism” itself leaving an ephemeral “moral-universal” stance.<sup>102</sup> For Leist, Habermas is the chief representative of a radical modernist approach which exists at the opposite end of the political spectrum to the “national conservative” approach represented in New Right thought. Whilst national conservatives operate from the a priori of a cultural-ontological concept of national identity which demands piety from contemporaries towards national values and past traditions. The “radical modernist”, on the other hand, abstains completely from the concept of identity and national consciousness which is rejected as “ideology” and substitutes these with a concept of timeless and unhistorical “modernity”. Between these two “extremes” lies the genuine patriot who rejects both national conservative and radical modernist approaches

Er (der Patriot) ist der nationalen Geschichte verbunden, ohne dabei vergangenheitsfixiert zu sein; er weiß, daß die Nation als imaginierte Gemeinschaft je neu interpretiert und ihre Geschichte in der Gegenwart fortgeschrieben werden muß. Außerdem ist er davon überzeugt, daß eine Nationalkultur rational nicht einfach “zersetzt” werden kann, so daß ihre Kritik mit Tabus und Verboten zu verhindern unnötig ist. Tradition und Moderne sind für ihn keine Gegensätze.<sup>103</sup>

The distinction between these three positions becomes apparent with regards to their assessment of the normative content of tradition. Whilst conservatives ascribe national traditions normative power per se and radical modernists reject such an approach as

---

<sup>102</sup> cf Anton Leist, ‘Nation und Patriotismus in Zeiten der Globalisierung.’ in, Christine Chwaszcza, Wolfgang Kersting (Hrsg.) ‘Politische Philosophie der internationalen Beziehungen.’ Suhrkamp. Frankfurt./M. 1998. p. 394.

<sup>103</sup> *ibid.* p. 402.

anachronistic mysticism, the genuine patriot attempts to balance the value of particular traditions within the context of contemporary national community and thus

Einzig der Patriot kann damit eine unter *aktuellen Bedingungen glaubhafte nationale Identität* vertreten, während der Konservative durch seine Aufklärungsfeindlichkeit das nationale Erbe ebenso verspielt wie es der Modernist strikt verweigert.<sup>104</sup>

Thus Leist argues for a dynamic discourse of national identity which attempts to salvage what remains credible from past traditions in order to lend contemporary, modern society a sense of collective coherence and stability. This approach corresponds to the form of democratic nationalism argued by left-liberal thinkers considered previously. How does this interpretation of the patriot stand up against Habermas concept of *Verfassungspatriotismus*? Leist criticises Habermas primarily because he supposedly rejects not only the “national conservative” form of identity but an orientation towards the nation and tradition full stop in favour of a “moral-universal stance”. Upon first glance this appears to describe the form of identity argued by Habermas. Yet upon closer examination this is not the case. Leist accurately perceives the centre point of Habermas concept of Constitutional Patriotism as an expression of solidarity with the democratic process of political will formation which in and of itself fosters legitimacy through its procedural practice of political inclusion and empowerment. Also correct is the observation that Habermas rejects the particularist values embodied in national culture in favour of a universal orientation derived from both the republican practice of political inclusion of both indigenous and immigrant population and the commitment to human rights. Leist, however, appears to miss the most fundamental point in that whilst Habermas is an astute and sharp critic of the traditional, uncritical appropriation of the past in the project of national identity construction this does not mean that he disdains from relying upon an interpretation of history in order to lend his theory of identity social authority. In fact, the perspective of the past could be seen as the most important aspect of Habermas approach identity full stop. The essential difference, however, is that in contrast to the national conservative uncritical fetishisation of national tradition and left-liberal attempts to construct a positive past from the experience of the democratic and emancipation movements of the nineteenth century, Habermas concept of identity is based upon a wholly negative experience of history - the National Socialist experience. It is in this context that Habermas does rely upon an appreciation of history in order to lend his radical democratic vision moral-political authority.

Whilst formulations of national, and indeed, “post-national” identity have undergone radical change since German unification, the problem of the National Socialist past for identity constructs predicated upon an appropriate of “positive” continuities of national history remains. In this sense, both liberal conservative and left-liberal concepts of “positive” national historical continuities remain porous. Whilst critical historians are intellectually and politically better equipped than conservatives to engage with the National Socialist past, this still remains the largest obstacle to the cultivation of a sense of national identity based upon positive historical continuities of the German nation. Similarly, the clear eclipse of the social, political and economic arrangements which characterised the post-war period also renders an association with the FRG highly problematic. The key to unlocking the problem of the NS past in the construction of contemporary identity lies in Habermas theory of critical history. The novel aspect of this discourse is that in contrast to both liberal conservative and left liberal formulations of identity, Habermas has developed a construct of progressive, positive identity in the present which is predicated upon the critical reflection of the wholly negative national past of National Socialism. It is to this feature that we must now turn in the final chapter which will attempt to draw together the main currents of the thesis.

---

<sup>104</sup> *ibid.* p. 403.

## 7. The Culture of Contrition and the Reconfiguration of National Identity

In the following chapter I wish to examine the reconfiguration of concepts of national identity in post-unification Germany with reference to the critical reflection of the National Socialist past. I first wish to consider the concept of history as *Dementi* as elucidated by Habermas which perceives pedagogic potential from the disasters of history. I then wish to examine how the medium of contrition is employed to both address the National Socialist past and to reformulate the need for an engagement with history and the need for identity. I then proceed to consider Habermas “post-national” concept of “broken identity” as a medium of articulating the “normality” of the contemporary German nation.

### 7.1. History as *Dementi*

Habermas concept of the “post-national constellation” and the need for a transferral of fundamental executive and legislative powers of the nation state to the supra-national level of a European federation found little resonance in Chancellor Schröder’s SPD.<sup>1</sup> Yet, in terms of identity creation in the *Berliner Republik* it appears that Habermas concept of “post-national” identity has acquired patronage at the highest level of contemporary political culture. In the following I wish to elaborate Habermas concept of “post-national” identity and to examine the manner in which this concept of radical identity has become politically consensual in the new Germany.

During the 1980s, Habermas argued for a form of “post-traditional” patriotism as a means of enlightened self regulation and critical defence against the neoconservative discourse of conventional national identity. This is a theme which he has developed in post-unification Germany. Habermas concept of critical history is based upon a critical examination of conservative “Historicism” and modernist “philosophy of history”.<sup>2</sup> A primary concern of Habermas is that unification heralded not only a “return” to the nation state but

---

<sup>1</sup> cf

<sup>2</sup> cf Habermas, *Aus der Geschichte lernen ?* in Habermas. 1995. op. cit . pp. 9-18.

also signalled a rehabilitation of traditional forms of national identity creation in the manner of historicism. Habermas cites the following quotation taken from an editorial penned by the veteran of the *Historikerstreit* Michael Stürmer, published in the FAZ in 1993, which reproduces a long held concern of this conservative historian

In zunehmenden Begründungsnöten aber erhebt sich die Frage, wie lange es dem steinernen Gast aus der Vergangenheit noch gestattet sein soll, für alle Zukunft und alle Vergangenheit über Bürgertugend und Vaterlandsliebe sein Veto zu werfen.<sup>3</sup>

The above position holds that in order for the new Germany to constitute itself as “normal” nation state, the critical memory of Auschwitz must be erased from public consciousness.<sup>4</sup> This appreciation corresponds to a school of historiography which perceives in history not only a source of social knowledge of the past but rather more a source of political orientation in the sense of *Historia Magistra Vitae*. From this standpoint, present generations seek not only knowledge about the past from history but rather more seek a form of contemporary orientation based upon the perception that history constitutes a cycle of development which enables the present to anticipate the future from a reading of the past.<sup>5</sup>

We may recognise in this a dominant motif of the conservative engagement with identity considered in chapter one of this work. This form of historicism was challenged at the end of the eighteenth century in the form of the “historical thinking” which characterised the breakthrough of modernist society and which emphasised the transient nature of historical form and developed a historical sense of the unique and politically malleable nature of contemporary society. This form of awareness of the transient nature of historical form constitutes a central moment of the modernist consciousness for Habermas which enables the human, subjective agents of history to contemplate the contingency of historical form and, when wielded with the culture of reason to take history into our own hands free from either divine or monarchical authority.<sup>6</sup> Whilst Habermas considers this new form of historical thinking a progression over the naive faith

---

<sup>3</sup> Michael Stürmer in Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung. 27. 12. 1993. in Habermas. *ibid.* p. 9.

<sup>4</sup> Habermas, *ibid.*

<sup>5</sup> Habermas, *ibid.*

in history as a “school-mistress”, he is also critical of the “philosophy of history” associated with Hegel and later Marx

Während Hegel aus dieser Geschichtsschreibung die fatalistische Lehre zog, daß für die Handelnden alle Lehren zu spät kommen, wollte Marx, daß die Geschichtsphilosophie selbst den künftigen Generationen zur Lehre dient. Ihnen sollte die Erkenntnis des naturwüchsigen Verlaufs der bisherigen Geschichte zu der Einsicht verhelfen, daß sie sich in Zukunft zu Subjekten ihrer eigenen Geschichte emanzipieren können - also zu Autoren machen können, die ihre Geschichte, wenn auch nicht unter selbstgewählten Umständen, mit Willen und Bewußtsein produzieren. Hier verschmilzt das historische mit einem utopischen Bewußtsein, das die Grenzen der Machbarkeit der Geschichte überdehnt.<sup>7</sup>

Habermas thus repeats Marx’s criticism of Hegel’s philosophy of history due to its innate tendency to ascribe historical understanding an invariably *post-festum* character.<sup>8</sup> He then applies a similar criticism to Marx on the basis that he too propagated a “philosophy of history” based upon a reading of the “natural progression” of history which attributed too much potential to the human subject and the possibility of conscious action upon history. As such Habermas repeats a common conservative criticism of Marx and accuses Marx of a trait to which he himself responded during his lifetime. Both Marx and Engels contested the interpretation of historical materialism as a “philosophy of history” and stressed the importance of the particular and historically specific elements of social development over crude “models” of historical development of the kind which Habermas clearly finds them guilty of.<sup>9</sup> Interestingly, the element of this which Habermas objects to is that it ascribes too much potential to the human subject to take history in its hands and consciously direct historical development. This appears somewhat contradictory for a thinker who has invested much time and energy in defending the potential of reason and progress and the “modernist project” against attacks from both neoconservative and “postmodern” quarters.<sup>10</sup> This is, however, consistent within the context of Habermas theoretical position

---

<sup>6</sup> cf Habermas, *Die Moderne*. 1990. in Habermas. 1992. op. cit.

<sup>7</sup> Habermas. 1995. op. cit. p. 185.

<sup>8</sup> Marx., ‘Die Frühschriften’, Hrsg. von Siegfried Landshut. Stuttgart: Kröner Verlag, 1968. p. 522

<sup>9</sup> cf Chapter3, p. 85

<sup>10</sup> cf Habermas defence of reason and universal values against the “radical contextualism” of postmodernists and the metaphysical ontology of neoconservatism in *Die Einheit der Vernunft in der Vielheit ihrer Stimmen*. in *Merkur*. Heft 1. Januar 1988. 42. Jahrgang. pp. 1-14.

which, on the one hand formally defends a culture of emancipation and revolutionary consciousness whilst, on the other, negating the possibility of social revolution thus failing to attain the unity of revolutionary consciousness and practice characteristic of historical materialism. For Habermas, whilst historicism perceives too little reason in history, models of a “philosophy of history” read too much reason into historical development.<sup>11</sup>

Against this intellectual background Habermas stakes a claim for an emancipatory approach which is based in a “critical” concept of history which appears tailor made to the conditions of post-war Germany. What Habermas finds curious, and objectionable, in both historicism which fetes tradition and a “philosophy of history” which asserts a progression from past to future according to human will is that they both operate from a positive reading of history. Whilst conservatives perceive in history the validity of particularist, unreflected and hence naively assimilated traditions and progressives the faculty of human reason to shape the world, both operate from a positive appreciation of history and suggest that elements are worthy of repetition

Das ist merkwürdig, weil wir normalerweise aus *negativen* Erfahrungen, eben aus Enttäuschungen, lernen. Enttäuschungen sind es, die wir in Zukunft zu vermeiden suchen.<sup>12</sup>

Habermas *does* perceive the endurance of traditions through history and he ascribes to them a political-pedagogic potential for the present. Yet this understanding differs fundamentally from both conventional conservative and left-liberal versions in that Habermas perceives the progressive potential of tradition not in a positive perspective of the past but rather more in reflection of history’s *negative* experiences. For Habermas we *do* learn from history and tradition exercises the power to shape the present but, however, not in the form of a simple “handing down” of classic canons or ideas but rather more as part of a progressive *Lernprozeß* which issues from critical reflection of problems and failures in indigenous history

Ich meine enttäuschende Situationen, wo Erwartungshorizonte - und damit die erwartungsstabilisierenden Überlieferungen selbst in eine Krise geraten. Wenn die

---

<sup>11</sup> Habermas. 1995. op. cit. p. 13.

<sup>12</sup> ibid. p. 14.

Geschichte überhaupt zur Lehrmeisterin taugt, dann als eine kritische Instanz, an der, was wir im Lichte unseres kulturellen Erbes bislang für richtig gehalten haben, scheitert. Dann fungiert die Geschichte als eine Instanz, die uns nicht zu Nachahmungen, sondern zu Revisionen herausfordert.<sup>13</sup>

Applying this model to the German context, we may perceive that 1945 provides precisely just such an instance of critical self-reflection in the light of the utter moral and political collapse of indigenous national traditions.<sup>14</sup> This corresponds to Habermas belief that the defeat of German fascism represents the most significant event of the twentieth century which provides the foundations of his concept of “post-traditional” patriotism. History and tradition thus play a central role in Habermas concept of identity. In contrast to the conventional conservative naive assimilation of national traditions, or indeed left-liberal attempts to construct positive national-democratic traditions, this is a form of identity cultivated from reflection of a profoundly compromised and negative national past. It is only upon this basis of history as *Dementi* that the present can hope to learn from the past.<sup>15</sup>

It is interesting to compare this concept of history and identity with formulations of Federal President Herzog since his assumption of office. As we noted in the previous chapter the process of a “Westernisation” of the concept of the German nation, this rapprochement between left and right is reproduced on the level of history as *Dementi*. In an address to the 41. Historians’ Conference on 17 September 1996 in Munich, Herzog articulated an interesting perspective on the relationship between historiography and contemporary political orientation. Herzog begins with an interesting appreciation of the relationship between the reflection of the past and contemporary socio-political context

Als ich das Motto Ihres diesjährigen Historikerstages las: - “Geschichte als Argument” -, da wurde mir doch ein bißchen schwummerig. Natürlich wird, nicht zuletzt in der Politik, immer wieder einmal mit der Geschichte argumentiert - ob mit mehr oder weniger Glück will ich hier ganz offen lassen. Und gefährlich wird die Sache dadurch, daß der Rückgriff auf die Geschichte meist in solchen Momenten geschieht, in denen es um eine grundsätzliche Neuorientierung der Politik geht, in denen also das Bedürfnis nach Orientierung besonders groß und die Berechenbarkeit der Zukunft besonders klein

---

<sup>13</sup> *ibid.* p. 15.

<sup>14</sup> *ibid.* p. pp. 15-16.

ist. Die Geschichte wird meist dann zum Argument, wenn man in einer Gegenwart nicht mehr so recht weiter weiß.<sup>16</sup>

Upon first glance this appears as a conventional conservative appreciation of the role of history in shaping contemporary society. Herzog acknowledges that history - or to be more precise the political engagement with the past - assumes a particularly attractive character in times of uncertainty. The search for orientation in times of profound flux often stimulates a search for potentially cohesive values from a reading of the past. Unusual about the above appreciation, however, is the sense of unease articulated by Herzog towards this approach and his perception that this is even a potentially “dangerous” enterprise in times of high uncertainty about the present and anticipated future. This apprehension, however, appears to derive less from the practice of gaining contemporary orientation from a reading of the past (as we shall see this is an approach fundamentally supported by Herzog) but rather more from an appreciation that this has become a problematic enterprise. For Herzog, it is no longer possible to contend long with Leopold von Ranke that history is defined by the concern to reveal *wie es gewesen ist*.<sup>17</sup> Herzog appreciates that such a claim for an absolutely “objective” history is not possible and that the concerns of the present always act as a filter through which the work of the historian inevitably passes.<sup>18</sup> Indeed, Herzog appears to concede ground to a relativist perspective in suggesting that history fragments into the myriad perspectives, individuals and mentalities and social structures which comprise the past producing a plethora of historical perspectives.<sup>19</sup> This leaves us, for Herzog, with the fundamental question *ob man aus der Geschichte lernen kann*.<sup>20</sup> This old question is lent a unique context in the present given the departure from the nation state form which has dominated world history since the late eighteenth century.

---

<sup>15</sup> *ibid.* pp. 17-18.

<sup>16</sup> Rede von Bundespräsident Roman Herzog vor dem 41. Deutschen Historikertag am 17. September 1996 in München. at, <http://www.bundespraesident.de>. p. 1.

<sup>17</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>18</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>19</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>20</sup> *ibid.*

The unique constellation on the threshold to the next millennium necessitates a rethinking of the relationship between past and present, the tradition of historicism and the model of the nation state. Whilst the changes in contemporary socio-political constellation of the West necessitates a change in our appreciation of the relationship between past and present this does not imply a departure from the practice of deriving contemporary orientation from an engagement with the past as, *Geschichtliches Wissen ist stets die Quelle jener Gelassenheit, die die erste Voraussetzung für wirklich rationale politische Analysen und für rationales politisches Handeln sein sollte.*<sup>21</sup> Such rational political action is characterised also by the “lesson” of history that one must perform “better” in present and future. The third “lesson” which Herzog draws from history is that one must always bear in mind the contingency of contemporary constellation. Whilst he may be content with the relative democracy and prosperity of contemporary Germany, the historical and global perspectives teaches us that this is rather less the “normal case” and perhaps even the exception of history. We thus need to develop a familiarity with history in order to be aware that history may well repeat itself and thus gain awareness of the treasure which we possess in the present.<sup>22</sup>

Returning to his opening conjecture that history attains a particular relevance in times of flux, Herzog contends that 1989 heralded precisely the form of caesura in history which brings relations into flux. What, then, does 1989 signify for not only German history but rather more for global history? 1989 clearly represented the end of the Cold War and the ascension of the Free Market, democratic model to a global model.<sup>23</sup> Yet Herzog is not concerned to repeat the platitudes of common garden political science and is more interested in investigating the possible consequences of 1989 for our appreciation of history after the demise of the East West conflict

1989 bedeutet hier, daß geschlossene Geschichtsbilder widerlegt worden sind, wie sie der historische Materialismus im Osten, aber auch westliche Varianten des Historizismus und des ökonomischen Determinismus anboten. 1989 ist der beste Beleg für die

---

<sup>21</sup> *ibid.* p. 2.

<sup>22</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>23</sup> *ibid.* p. 3.

Offenheit der Geschichte, dafür, daß es keine gesetzmäßigen Notwendigkeiten gibt, sondern daß Gegenwart und Zukunft zunächst einmal von den Menschen selbst abhängen.<sup>24</sup>

More surprising, perhaps, than Herzog's condemnation of the "closed" historiographical approach of historical materialism which is conflated with the vulgar Marxism of Eastern bureaucratic socialism is the admission of the closed nature of traditional historicism of the West. The objection raised against both is that such closed historical models deny the subjective element of history any chance of conscious, positive action upon history. This objection is also raised against Fukuyama's "utopia" of the "End of History". As such it would appear that Herzog offers a more positive evaluation of the human potential than the radical philosopher Habermas. Both traditional left- and right-wing historical approaches are rejected by Herzog due to their tendency to project transcendental "laws" of historical development which he recognises as not only metaphysics but as a restriction on the subjective human potential to rational action. As such this appears a refreshingly open appreciation of the contingency of historical development and of the potential of humanity to take history in its own hands. Such a subject orientated perception of history must be welcomed over the determinist variants of either traditional Western historicism and the vulgar Marxism of state socialism of the former East.

Yet this is a perception with limitations. Herzog is not against the engagement with history in order to provide orientation in the present *per se*. Herzog's approach could be more accurately described as an articulation of the desire to *reformulate* more conventional notions of the social use of history in the construction of national identity. Commenting on the effects of National Socialism in post-war (West) German society, Herzog observes the following

Seit 1945 gab es für die Deutschen - und zwar weder im Osten noch im Westen - keine Daten, die zu "historischen Festpunkten" geworden wären. Aber auch eine Gesellschaft mit gebrochener Geschichte braucht "positive Orientierungspunkte". Sonst besteht die Gefahr für sie, in Geschichtslosigkeit oder gar Geschichtsfeindlichkeit zu verfallen.<sup>25</sup>

This is an interesting admission of the problems created for post-war Germany by the National Socialist experience. More characteristic of right wing thinkers,

---

<sup>24</sup> *ibid.*

and indeed politicians, during the post-war period was the tendency to contest the disruption of the “organic” continuity of German national history via recourse to a mixture of romantic projections of “German identity” and a relativisation of the National Socialist past via Cold War anticommunism. Herzog clearly remains faithful to the perception that a people needs a positive sense of history. Yet the frank admission that this was far from possible during the post-war period represents a remarkable openness towards the problems presented by the National Socialist past for traditional conservative perceptions of an orientation towards history. Whilst West German conservatives orientated themselves on historical events such as the founding of the Second Empire, Bismarck’s birthday, the founding of the FRG, the uprising of the 17 June and other, in the East a similar role was performed by celebrations of Marx’ birth and death anniversaries, similar for Luther and during the 1980s even Bismarck and Friedrich the Great and the founding of the GDR constitution. Clear from Herzog’s reading is that, in the West at least, these were understood as substitutes for a more open celebration of national traditions. Why does Herzog feel it necessary or even possible to retrospectively admit to the problems experienced in the post-war period in such an open manner? The answer would appear to be that he considers such problems as now consigned to the past. 1989 has opened up the possibility of national celebration and the cultivation of a more positive relationship to national history which proved so problematic during the post-war period: *Das Jahr 1989 könnte, wenn ich recht sehe, erstmals zu einem solchen positiven Orientierungspunkt werden.*<sup>26</sup> This 1989 represented not only the fortieth anniversary of the successful West German state, but also, of course, the democratic revolution in the former GDR and the events which opened the possibility of the unification of the two German states. Not only does this appear to represent a positive instance of national history which can form the basis of identification but also, it is understood as a date which relativises the negative caesura of 1945

Die Deutschen haben 1989 auch einen Anfangspunkt für eine positive Geschichtsaneignung gesetzt. Nach 1945 waren es die negativen Lektionen des Dritten Reiches, die die Generationen darauf verpflichteten, es “besser zu machen”. Mit 1989 ist

---

<sup>25</sup> *ibid.* p. 4.

<sup>26</sup> *ibid.*

diese Verpflichtung zwar keineswegs erloschen, es ist aber eine weitere dazu gekommen: Der Wille Opfer zu bringen, die Bereitschaft etwas zu riskieren, die Motivation, etwas Neues aufzubauen, der Mut, sich von Gewohntem zu verabschieden in der Hoffnung, etwas Besseres zu schaffen. Das sind die positiven Lektionen von 1989. Oder sie könnten es zumindest sein, wenn wir nur zu klagen aufhärten, und es nur wollen.<sup>27</sup>

In this context, we can perceive the basis upon which Herzog feels confident in admitting the problems of historically founded identity creation in the post-war period. This also demonstrates the distinction between Habermas concept of critical history which is centred upon reflection of the Third Reich and this version which is centred upon 1989. Thus whilst Herzog declares the departure from the “nation state”<sup>28</sup>, he also perceives 1989 as representing a new, positive basis for the cultivation of a sense of national identity. An additional point of celebration for Herzog is the fact that post-1989 Germany has neither reverted to traditional nationalism nor has it acted to relativise the commitment of Germany to the Western alliance.<sup>29</sup> Thus whilst reflection of the break of 1945 is not contested by Herzog, its significance for the national concept has been fundamentally altered by the positive national historical experience of 1989. Yet whilst Herzog clearly seeks a positive basis for defining contemporary national identity this is a problematic enterprise. Whilst it no longer appears that German unification could offer a point of common consensus and pride in united Germany, the construction of a “positive” German nation form history is limited by the experience of National Socialism. In order for a coherent and potentially authoritative concept of national identity to be constructed, the National Socialist past must be addressed. It is to this problem that I shall now turn.

## 7.2 Learning the “Lessons” of the Past

The occasion of the fiftieth anniversary of the end of the Second World War offered an instance whereby the transformation in official commemoration of the National Socialist past could be measured. The 8 May in 1995 aroused concern over the manner in which this date would be commemorated by the conservative

---

<sup>27</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>28</sup> *cf* : p. 217

<sup>29</sup> Herzog, *op. cit.* pp. 4-5

coalition government and whether this would lead to a repeat of the crass *Vergangenheitspolitik* of Kohl's commemoration in Bitburg.<sup>30</sup> Such fears were fuelled by the aggressive media-campaign of right wing conservatives combining figures from both the old *deutsch-national* right such as Alfred Dregger and *New Right* figures such as Zitelmann in an *Aufruf gegen das Vergessen*.<sup>31</sup> The culture of amnesia criticised by these thinkers did not relate to the National Socialist past but rather more to the invasion and occupation of Germany by the Red Army in 1945 thus rendering any celebration of "liberation" on the 8 May both historically and politically illegitimate. If the culture of relativised memory of the National Socialist past were to become, as many critical thinkers feared, the paradigm of national identity in the new Germany, then the *Aufruf* represented a potential rallying call for right wing *Vergangenheitspolitik*. The *Aufruf* and the political sentiment which underlay its proclamation, however, experienced a strong rebuttal. Whilst one might well have anticipated such a reaction from left and liberal figures, particularly interesting was the negative reception of the *Aufruf* among conservative politicians. In this context Edmund Stoiber declared *Kein Vergessen, kein Verfälschen, kein Schlußstrich, keine Wiederholung! Wer sich nicht erinnert, hat keine Zukunft!*.<sup>32</sup> Federal President Herzog in particular appeared to continue the enlightened path forged by von Weizsäcker a decade previous and stated in no uncertain terms that modern Germany required a vigilant and "living" memory of the National Socialist past emphasising *Wir wollen unser Entsetzen nicht konservieren*.<sup>33</sup> Herzog had set the tone of remembrance several weeks before the anniversary of the end of the War in Europe in a speech delivered before the gates of Bergen-Belsen to commemorate the liberation of the camp on 27 April. In this speech Herzog expressed the priority of open contrition for the past in contrast to the tactic of suppressing memory of German crimes

---

<sup>30</sup> cf Norbert Seitz, Die kalte Revision. Zur Aktualität der 8.- Mai-Rede Weizsäckers. in Frankfurter Hefte. Mai. 1995. (5). pp..389-392.

<sup>31</sup> cf Der Tagesspiegel. 8. 5. 1995.

<sup>32</sup> cf Rede des Bayerischen Ministerpräsidenten Dr. Edmund Stoiber bei der Feierstunde anlässlich des 50. Jahrestages des Kriegsendes vom 8. Mai 1945 in Aichach. at: <http://www.bayern.de>

<sup>33</sup> cf Herzog, Wir wollen unser entsetzen nicht konservieren, Der Tagesspiegel. 08. 05. 1995. also cf. Ansprache von Bundespräsident Roman Herzog zum Gedenktag für die Opfer des Nationalsozialismus am 19. Januar 1996 im Deutschen Bundestag. at <http://www.bundespräsident.de>.

An diesen Sünden tragen wir Deutschen schwer. Nichts darf verdrängt werden, nichts darf vergessen werden. Wir tragen Verantwortung dafür, daß sich sowas nie wiederholt.<sup>34</sup>

This is an expression of contrition which involves an open admission of German guilt and culpability which is combined with a responsibility that the like may never reoccur again. Herzog is adamant that the form of amnesia demanded by right wing conservatives must not take hold in post-unification Germany

Noch einmal zusammengefaßt: Der Ablauf von fünfzig Jahren seit dem Ende des NS-Regimes kann nicht Ende des Erinnerns heißen. Was wir jetzt brauchen, ist eine Form des Gedenkens, die zuverlässig in die Zukunft wirkt.<sup>35</sup>

Thus for Herzog, the elapse of half a century should in no manner act to relativise or suppress memory of the National Socialist past. Interesting in the above statement is the concept that “memory” and “commemoration” play an important role in cultivating future orientation. This underlies the concept of a German responsibility and “learning the lessons” of the past. The primary “lesson” which Herzog has elucidated throughout his tenure as Federal President is derived from the more familiar conservative critique of “totalitarianism”

Wenn wir aus der Geschichte lernen wollen, müssen wir erkennen, daß die Gefahr des Totalitarismus immer noch im Präsens steht und nicht nur in Deutschland - sondern der ganzen Welt - und daß sie uns auch im Futur wieder begegnen kann.<sup>36</sup>

Thus it would seem, the celebrated collapse of the “totalitarian” regimes in the East has not banished the dangers of “totalitarianism” in Germany or elsewhere around the globe and in this, Herzog perceives the connection between memory of the German past and contemporary political action. Whilst Herzog clearly expresses remorse in the name of Germany for the atrocities committed at Bergen-Belsen and other former camps, National Socialism is primarily regarded as an example of “totalitarian” politics. In this sense, Herzog’s approach is to be distinguished from both conventional left-and right wing readings of the National Socialist past: this is a discourse of the German past which appears to fuse both “critical” and “totalitarian” approaches. The collapse of the Soviet Union and the GDR in particular appears to have strengthened the totalitarian

---

<sup>34</sup> “Die Würde des Menschen ist unantastbar”. Ansprache in Bergen-Belsen am 27 April 1995. in, Michael Rutz (Hrsg.) Roman Herzog. Die Zukunft der Erinnerung. Wegmarken deutscher Geschichte. Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt. Stuttgart. 1999. p. 134.

<sup>35</sup> *ibid.* p. 136.

<sup>36</sup> *ibid.* p. 138.

reflex associated with the political right. Thus Herzog has often spoke of the need of contemporary Germany to come to terms with the “two” German dictatorships of the twentieth century in a manner which associates the “brown” and “red” dictatorships via their status as “totalitarian” regimes.<sup>37</sup> Yet whilst this approach continues to effect a relativisation of the National Socialist experience, it no longer appears to imply a policy of selective amnesia towards the German past.

Herzog frequently invokes the concept of “totalitarianism” to explain both National Socialism and the post-war GDR. Yet Herzog’s understanding of “totalitarianism” must also be distinguished from the neoconservative arguments of the 1980s in another respect. The brand of totalitarianism argued by Nolte during the 1980s was imbued with an innate sense of superiority over the current alternative society of the Soviet Union and Eastern Bloc. It is upon this basis that Nolte felt confident enough to argue that anyone who considers the post-war Western social system superior and more desirable than the Communist societies of the Eastern Bloc must be forced to concede at least an element of “justification” for the emergence of fascist movements in Europe during the 1930s.<sup>38</sup> Whilst during the 1980s right wing conservatives sought to explain National Socialism via recourse to an *a priori* fear of “asiatic” barbarism,<sup>39</sup> *New Right* thinkers have expanded this concept in the 1990s to an understanding of the barbarism inherent in all “mass -isms” of the twentieth century.<sup>40</sup> This perception is also coupled with an attempt to cast the National Socialist Holocaust as testimony to “man’s inhumanity to man” and thus relativise its specific social, political and historical genesis in the breakdown of inter-war German democracy.<sup>41</sup> Whilst Herzog is strictly against a relativisation of the past, the terms in which the National Socialist regime are understood appear congruent with the anti-humanist tone of New Right readings. Thus Herzog argued at the declaration of the 27 January as a day of national remembrance

---

<sup>37</sup> cf *Wege ins Offene: Lehren aus zwei deutschen Diktaturen*. Rede vor der Enquete-Kommission “SED-Diktatur” am 26. März 1996 in Berlin. in. *ibid.* pp. 171-184. also cf *Umgang mit der Schuld. Politische Meinung*.

<sup>38</sup> cf p. 63

<sup>39</sup> cf Chapter Two. p. 62.

<sup>40</sup> cf Chapter Five. p. 187

Was Menschen anderen Menschen an Leid und Grausamkeit zufügen können, ist tief in das individuelle wie in das gemeinschaftliche Gedächtnis der Deutschen eingeebnet. Der heutige Tag, der auf die Befreiung von Auschwitz hinweist, ist bleibende Erinnerung daran.<sup>42</sup>

In this reception, Auschwitz primarily stands as a symbol of the cosmic propensity of humanity to inhuman action. This perception is, however, not exhausted in the rather banal observation that the Holocaust serves as evidence of the depths of human depravity. In order for such “memory” to acquire the political function desired of identity, it needs to be related to the mantra of “learning the lessons of history”. What possible lessons can this perspective on the past impart upon present and future generations? Herzog attempts to link this rather anti-humanist perception with contemporary obligations

Eines ist klar: Auschwitz hat unser Bild vom Menschen verfinstert. Was einmal historische Wirklichkeit war, gehört für immer zu den furchtbaren Möglichkeiten des Menschen, deren Wiederholung in welcher Form auch immer, nicht ausgeschlossen werden kann. Die Dämme und Sicherungen müssen also immer wieder aufs neue gebaut werden.<sup>43</sup>

Thus the possibility of repetition of the atrocities of the past lies not primarily within particular political and social values, beliefs and practice but appears as grounded in “human nature” itself. If this is the case then not only is the possibility of “repetition” ever present but the chances of eradicating this inhuman tendency of humanity are faced with an absolute barrier shaped by the *conditio humanum*. It is within this context that the relationship between memory of the past and the contemporary state’s internalisation of the “lessons” of history is developed. The role of the state consists, in this reading, in securing contemporary society from the dangers of a relapse into the barbarism which appears innate to humanity. This appears to be the underlying content of contentions that the dangers of totalitarianism remain ever present and, in particular, a dangerous temptation for young generations who have no experience of dictatorship. Numerous contributions from all shades of political affiliation to debates on the National Socialist past remark that we currently stand at a period generational change and that this necessitates pedagogic-

---

<sup>41</sup> Schacht in Schacht, Schwilk. 1994. op. cit. p. 66.

<sup>42</sup> *ibid.* p. 147.

<sup>43</sup> *ibid.* p. 157.

political activity on behalf of the state, teachers, politicians and parents. This combines with a perception of “totalitarianism” as a phenomenon which surreptitiously creeps up upon a society from innocuous beginnings

Und wir dürfen keinen Augenblick vergessen, daß die Generationen unserer Kinder und Kindeskiner keine Anschauung mehr davon hat, was Willkürstaat, Entwürdigung und Massenvernichtung wirklich bedeuten, wie alle diese Scheußlichkeiten nicht auf einmal, sondern Schritt für Schritt, zum Teil in ganz kleinen Schritten, über ein Volk hereinbrechen und wie notwendig es daher ist, auf die kleinen Zeichen am Anfang zu achten.<sup>44</sup>

This appears a manner whereby the state and established politics can build a bridge with the young in a society characterised by ever declining participation in party politics and elections particularly among younger generations. Interesting here also is the perception that “totalitarianism” “happens” to a society from seemingly innocent beginnings. This interpretation relativises the specific historical context within which German fascism developed and underplays the popularity of replacing Weimar democracy with a form of authoritarian state within establishment and conservative social circles. Whereas the state and its representatives were instrumental in strengthening the power of the executive over legislative and in removing the former from democratic accountability during the late 1920s - early 1930s,<sup>45</sup> Herzog presents this as a phenomenon which creeps up upon society from the “outside”. Whilst a common perception of the left engagement with the National Socialist past during the period of division was of the role of the state and old bureaucracy in destroying Weimar democracy, in contemporary Germany the state appears as the last bastion of democratic civilisation. In the context of a latent, innate human preponderance towards barbarism, the state appears as a regulatory instance which lends the process of contrition and moral engagement with the past a necessary anchor of social authority

Die Geschichte der Zivilisation lehrt uns, wie lange es gedauert hat, bis die Menschen lernten, sich zu disziplinieren, ihre Konflikte in geregelten Bahnen auszutragen, ihre latente Gewaltbereitschaft zu überwinden. Die deutsche Gesschichte dieses Jahrhunderts - aber beileibe nicht nur sie - lehrt auch, in welch erschreckend kurzer Zeit alles an Zivilisation, Humanität und Selbstdisziplin wieder verspielt werden kann. Das

---

<sup>44</sup> *ibid.* p. 141.

<sup>45</sup> cf Hans Mommsen. 1989. *op. cit.* esp. pp. 275-489.

“moralische Gesetz in uns”, von dem Kant und die Aufklärung so emphatisch gesprochen haben, ist so stark nicht, wie man es glauben möchte, es verlangt daher funktionierende und durch Glaubwürdigkeit kraftvolle Institutionen.<sup>46</sup>

In this context the transmission of “memory” across the generations assumes the form of a moral obligation of established politics and the state to inculcate in the youth, in particular, a sense for the dangers of totalitarianism and, ultimately, of the latent bestiality of the human condition. This represents an interesting reversal from perceptions of youth and the fascist legacy since the APO period: during the 1960s, the critical engagement with the National Socialist past formed the moral-political core of radical youthful opposition to a social and political establishment implicated in the National Socialist regime. During the 1990s, the critical engagement with the National Socialist past appears rather more as a moral-political-historical obligation of the state to educate the young of the dangers of the totalitarian “temptation”.<sup>47</sup> On the surface level this would appear to match the political ascension of the “‘68” generation in contemporary Germany.

Whilst this appears the case, it must also be noted that this is a motif of critical self-reflection which is shared by mainstream conservatives and which predates the Red-Green coalition. What is equally interesting and important is the manner in which conservatives during the 1990s have been able to relate the older concern for a cultivation of historical-moral responsibility to the critical dealing with the past. Whilst it no longer appears possible to inculcate in the young a sense of national continuity and pride in traditions, what remains is a moral compunction to develop an emotional engagement with national history founded upon the obligations which issue from a horrific past. This formulation of the contemporary social use of “historical consciousness” combines a traditional conservative concept of *Historie* in a form more traditionally associated with radical and critical positions.<sup>48</sup> Yet in the reading of Auschwitz as testimony to innate human barbarity, National Socialism is detached from the specific socio-

---

<sup>46</sup> cf Herzog, in Rutz (Hrsg.) op. cit. p. 145.

<sup>47</sup> Herzog, in Rutz ibid. p. 151.

<sup>48</sup> also cf, Die Entwürdigten wieder ins Recht setzen. Rede bei der Gedenkveranstaltung aus Anlaß des 60. Jahrestages der Synagogenzerstörung 1938 (“Reichskristallnacht”) am 9. November 1998 in Berlin. in Rutz (Hrsg.) op. cit. pp. 139-140.

political context which has conventionally compromised traditional conservative *Geschichtspolitik*. This aspect of developing a sense of historical consciousness was also emphasised by the CDU member and former executive member of the *Zentralrat der Juden in Deutschland* Michael Friedmann in a contribution to the debate over the planned national *Holocaustmahnmal* in Berlin. Friedmann declared that he does not require the monument primarily as a Jew but rather more as a German citizen.<sup>49</sup> For Friedmann, remembrance of the National Socialist past and the cultivation of a historically founded sense of national identity in the present are mutually enhancing projects thus

Geschichtslosigkeit ist Geschichtslosigkeit. 50 Jahre nach der Befreiung vom Nationalsozialismus stellen sich wichtige Fragen, deren Beantwortung auch für die Zukunft ethische, politische und gesamtgesellschaftliche Konsequenzen haben werden. Die wichtigste Frage, die uns gerade im Kontext dieser geschichtlichen Erinnerung für die Zukunft beschäftigen wird, heißt: Wie Erinnerungsarbeit offensiv, institutionell organisiert, einer breiten Bevölkerung zugänglich gemacht wird.<sup>50</sup>

Thus Friedmann's prime concern is how *Erinnerungspolitik* can be organised and institutionalised so that it may penetrate broad sections of the population. The ethical, political and social values which Friedmann seeks to cultivate authority for in contemporary society derive their legitimacy from a reflection of the National Socialist past. Not only does remembrance of the Holocaust describe a moral obligation of successors of the perpetrator generation but this provides an opportunity to cultivate historical legitimacy for specific social and political values in contemporary society thus

Daß Erinnerung und die Auseinandersetzung mit Geschichte, auch mit dem Nationalsozialismus, Herausforderung und Chance und nicht Bedrohung ist, muß von uns allen vermittelt werden. Annahme von Geschichte ist identitätsstiftend. Sie hilft dabei auch Begriffe, wie Frieden, Freiheit und Menschenwürde, nicht als Selbstverständliches, sondern als Ausnahme zu verstehen.<sup>51</sup>

Thus, for this sensitive conservative, reflection of the National Socialist period can perform a highly useful and compelling role in fostering a sense of national identity and in lending contemporary social values a powerful source of moral-

---

<sup>49</sup> cf Michael Friedmann Geleitwort in Lea Rosh (Hrsg.) "Die Juden, das sind die doch die anderen". Der Streit um ein deutsches Denkmal. Philo. Berlin/Wien. 1999. p.8.

<sup>50</sup> cf Michael Friedmann, Das Drama, die Unlust und die Unverschämten. Streitpunkt Holocaust-Mahnmal: Zur Annahme der Geschichte. in Der Tagespiegel. 18 Januar 1995. in Michael Jeismann. (Hrsg.) Mahnmal Mitte. Eine Kontroverse. DuMont Buchverlag. Köln. 1999. p. 90.

<sup>51</sup> *ibid.* p. 91-2.

political authority. As the case of Friedmann exemplifies, this does not necessarily testify to a machiavellian instrumentalisation of the NS past for contemporary political ends but rather more describes the coincidence of two perceived fundamental needs: firstly the need to cultivate a more open relationship to the National Socialist past in post-unification Germany and secondly the need to foster collective, authoritative values at a time of socio-political flux. Upon the basis of contrition, a new authority and legitimacy can be cultivated by the critical engagement with national history. In contrast to historicist traditions, the national past no longer appears as an instance of imitation but rather more as a negative counter-foil to the present which illuminates the exceptional and therefore contingent nature of contemporary democracy and peace. This appears the true sense of the monument as a *Mahnmal* - as a symbolic historical *warning* to successive generations. In this context, the monument offers not only a site of collective memory but also a potential affirmation of the present.<sup>52</sup> This constellation offers the possibility of a reconfiguration of national “normality” in the new Germany which is curiously predicated upon the admission of former “abnormality”. In the following I wish to examine this reconfiguration of concepts of national “normality” and identity by examining contemporary discussion of the *Holocaustmahnmal*, the reception of Daniel Jonah Goldhagen’s *Hitler’s Willing Executioners* and the German contribution to the NATO intervention in Kosovo.

### 7.3. The *Holocaustmahnmal* and “Broken Identity”

The debates which have accompanied the plans for the construction of a national, central memorial of the Jewish victims of National Socialism have been shaped by conflicting approaches to the symbolic, public representation of the negative German past in contemporary society. The period spanning the founding of the *Bürgerinitiative PERSPEKTIVE BERLIN e.V* in 1988 to the acceptance in parliament of the Eisenmann 2 model of the *Holocaustmahnmal* in Berlin in June 1999 provides a useful context for assessing the changes in national identity since unification. A central point of controversy centres upon the question of

---

<sup>52</sup> Friedmann. in Rosh. 1999. op. cit. p. 9.

precisely *whom* the *Mahnmal* should provide a memorial for. The founding representatives of the *Initiative*, the journalist Lea Rosh and the historian Eberhard Jäckel, have consistently and adamantly argued that the monument should solely commemorate the *Jewish* victims of National Socialism. The first *Aufruf* of the *Bürgerinitiative* on 29-30 January 1989 demanded the construction of a memorial in memory of the Jewish victims of the Holocaust as an obligation of Germans in both East and West.<sup>53</sup> For Jäckel, who adopts an “intentionalist” approach, the Nazi Holocaust perpetrated against the Jews represented both the central motive of the regime and also the culmination of a thousand years old European anti-Semitism.<sup>54</sup>

These factors which distinguish the singularity of the Holocaust also legitimise the particularist remembrance of Jewish victims distinct from other groups. This drew criticism from some who accused the PERSPEKTIVE group of attempting to monopolise the former Reich Security HQ in the *Prinz Albrecht Gelände* and undermine the *Topographie des Terrors* museum.<sup>55</sup> Others, such as the president of the German Romanis, Romani Rose, accused Jäckel and Rosh of marginalising the extermination of Romani and Sinti<sup>56</sup> and creating a hierarchy of victims.<sup>57</sup> The exchange, like much of the subsequent debate, was marked with personal as well as critical objections. Rudolf Augstein accused Lea Rosh of being a *Wünschjüdin*, referring to the journalist’s decision as a young woman to affirm her Jewish ancestry and change her name.<sup>58</sup> Jäckel accused those who argue for a universal memory of the victims of essentially siding with the relativist argument of Nolte during the *Historikerstreit*.<sup>59</sup> Romani Rose in turn,

---

<sup>53</sup> cf Lea Rosh (Hrsg.) “Die Juden, das sind die doch die anderen”. *Der Streit um ein deutsches Denkmal*. Philo. Berlin/Wien. 1999. p. 20.

<sup>54</sup> cf Eberhard Jäckel, *Ann alle und jeden erinnern? Der Plan für ein Berliner Mahnmahl zum Gesenken an den Judenmord darf nicht zerredet werden..* (Die Zeit. 7. April 1989, in Jeissmann. 1999. op. cit. p. 58-9. also cf Lea Rosh’s defence of Jäckel against critics in Rosh. 1999. op. cit. p. 34.

<sup>55</sup> cf Gerhard Schoenberger. in *Die Zeit* Nr.15 in Rosh. *ibid.* p. 33.

<sup>56</sup>cf Romani Rose, *Ein Mahnmahl für alle Opfer. Im NS Regime gab es keine Verfolgung erster oder zweiter Klasse.* *Die Zeit.* 28. April. 1989, in Jeissmann. 1999. op. cit.

<sup>57</sup> Rose. *ibid.* p. 62. and Reinhard Kosellek, *Wer darf vergessen werden? Das Holocaust-Mahnmal hierarchisiert die Opfer.* in *Die Zeit.* Nr. 13. 19. März 1998.

<sup>58</sup> Rudolf Augstein,

<sup>59</sup> Jäckel. in Jeissmann. *ibid.* p. 60.

accused Jäckel of “betraying” the historical and political obligation to remember the victims of National Socialism.<sup>60</sup>

During the 1980s politics organised at party and governmental level displayed little interest in the *Holocaustmahnmal* project which appeared to contain little political capital for any of the parties.<sup>61</sup> During the 1990s this process has been reversed and the planned monument made a central focus of public-political debate not only at the level of the feuilleton but in the public selection of a model design and financial aid at both regional and federal level. In turn this reflects a change in perceptions of the relationship between concepts of national identity and the National Socialist past. Roman Herzog believed that modern Germany needed to construct the Mahnmal *unserer selbst willen*<sup>62</sup> Parliament President Wolfgang Thierse also emphasised the particular German context of the monument in his defence of the Eisenmann 2 model in parliament

denn nicht für die Juden - ob deutsche oder andere - bauen wir dieses Denkmal, sondern für uns, als unser ureigenes Bekenntnis zu einem politischen Selbstverständnis.<sup>63</sup>

From this, it is clear that the debate over the target group of the monument is expanded by a third, and perhaps most important group, the successor generations of the perpetrators. The major division within this group lies between those who perceive in open contrition for the Holocaust a potential basis for reconfiguring a new concept of “post-national” national identity and those who, as before, perceive in the focus upon the National Socialist past the greatest barrier to contemporary “normality”.

Perhaps the most controversial critique of the *Holocaustmahnmal* was contained in Martin Walser’s acceptance speech for the 1998 *Friedenspreis*. Walser criticised the *Dauerpräsentation unserer Schande* in German political and media culture and warned that Auschwitz was ill-served as a form of *Moralkeule* to be applied to the Germans at will.<sup>64</sup> As Gyorgy Konradi observed, Walser’s

---

<sup>60</sup> Rose. *ibid.* p. 64.

<sup>61</sup> cf Jeissmann. *op. cit.* p. 25. also cf Rosh. 1999. p.

<sup>62</sup> Herzog. 27 January 1999. in Rutz. 1999. *op. cit.* p.

<sup>63</sup> in Rosh. *ibid.* p. 133.

<sup>64</sup> Walser, at <http://brandstetter.de>

observations brought this “moral cosh” crashing down on his head<sup>65</sup> President of the Jewish Central Council Ignatz Bubis perceived in Walser’s intervention signs of a renaissance of nationalist sentiment which was not altogether free from anti-Semitic prejudice.<sup>66</sup> For Bubis and left wing critics of Walser he has essentially provided a legitimacy for the more undiplomatic demand from the Far Right quarter and figures such as the sponsor of the *DVU* Gerhard Frey for finally drawing a line under the German past. Walser’s critical observations on the instrumentalisation of the Holocaust provoked controversy also because this was coupled with a concept of “normality” characterised by a “privatisation” of the memory of National Socialism.<sup>67</sup> Walser’s comments thus aroused suspicion that his concept of “normality” was founded in rather more traditional notions of the value of national consciousness unimpinged by recollection of the National Socialist past.<sup>68</sup> In the construction of a *Holocaustmahnmal* opponents such as Walser and Augstein perceived the monumentalisation of the National Socialist past as a *moral-political restriction* of the sovereignty of newly unified Germany. Writing in *Der Spiegel* Augstein expressed this sentiment thus

Nun soll in der Mitte der wiedergewonnenen Hauptstadt Berlin ein Mahnmal an unsere fortwährende Schande erinnern. Anderen Nationen wäre ein solcher Umgang mit ihrer Vergangenheit fremd. Man ahnt, daß dieses Schandmal gegen die Hauptstadt und das in Berlin sich neu formierende Deutschland gerichtet ist.<sup>69</sup>

Thus Augstein perceived in the monument an attack upon the newly won sovereignty of the Berlin Republic and perceives “outside” forces (primarily from the US) attempting to lecture the Germans on how to deal with their past.<sup>70</sup> Whilst both Walser’s and Augstein’s criticisms contain insight into the manner in which the Holocaust is being subjected to a process of instrumentalisation which itself is of dubious moral probity, both of these contributors continue to perceive a dichotomy between concepts of German “normality” and sovereignty

---

<sup>65</sup> Gyorgy Konradi, *Die Zeit*, Nr. 53. 1. 22 Dec 1998.

<sup>66</sup> cf Ignatz Bubis antwortet Martin Walser - Unterschwellung antisemitisch. Auszüge aus Rede zum 60. Jahrestag der Pogromnacht, in *Süddeutsche Zeitung*. Nr. 259. 10. 11. 1998. and *Spiegel* Gespräch - “Moral verjährt nicht”. Ignatz Bubis über die Auschwitz-Debatte und seine Auseinandersetzung mit Martin Walser und Klaus von Dohnanyi. in *Der Spiegel*. Nr. 49. 30. 11. 1998

<sup>67</sup> Thus Robert Leicht, Warum Walser irrt. Auch die Nachgeborenen haften für das Erbe von Auschwitz. *Die Zeit*. Nr. 50. 3. December 1998.

<sup>68</sup> cf Walser’s 1993 contribution in *Der Spiegel*. re Far Right

<sup>69</sup> *Der Spiegel*. Nr. 49. 1998. op. cit. p. 32.

<sup>70</sup> *ibid.* p. 33.

at home and abroad and the critical reflection of the past. Far more important a development over the 1990s has been the reconfiguring of the moral-political sovereignty of the German nation which is articulated precisely through this process of critical self-reflection. In this context, Augstein appears correct in perceiving a tendency towards instrumentalisation of the Holocaust and yet wrong in associating this with a loss of moral-political credibility associated with the concept of national “normality”. In an article considering the development of the *neue Linke*, Richard Herzinger observed the longevity of this disparate group in determining the political culture of the Federal Republic since the 1960s.<sup>71</sup> Herzinger perceives two main successors of the *neue Linke* of the 1960s in thinkers such as Walsler, Botho Strauß, Hans-Magnus Enzensberger and Rüdiger Safranski who have turned towards traditional neo-conservative ontology and those, such as Peter Schneider and Daniel Cohn-Bendit who have transformed into adamant defenders of Western parliamentary democracy and the *Westbindung*.<sup>72</sup> In some important respects we might view the argument over the *Holocaustmahnmal* as a debate between these siblings of the New Left. What is most interesting in this relationship is not primarily the conventional conservative ontology of the right but rather more the manner in which progressive arguments are employed to reconfigure a new concept of national normality.

Writing before the parliamentary decision to construct the *Eisenmann II* model, Habermas emphasised the symbolic importance of constructing the monument in the new Germany

Täuschen wir uns nicht. In der fünfzigjährigen Geschichte der Bundesrepublik ist dies der erste Zeitpunkt, an dem ein parlamentarisches Votum für ein solches unübersehbar in die Zukunft hineinragendes Zeichen einer geläuterten kollektiven Identität der deutschen überhaupt in den Bereich des Möglichen rückt. Es scheint auch der letzte Zeitpunkt zu sein, an dem das noch möglich ist. Eine Berliner Republik, die der falschen, der monumentalen Vergangenheit gewidmet werden soll, wirft ihre Schatten voraus.<sup>73</sup>

---

<sup>71</sup> Richard Herzinger, *Left is Right and Right is Left. Über die Transformation ideeller Paradigmen in den nationalen Intellektuellendebatten*. in Langguth. 1997. op. cit. p. 300-301.

<sup>72</sup> *ibid.* p. 301.

<sup>73</sup> Habermas, *Der Zeigefinger. Die Deutschen*. in *Die Zeit*. Nr. 14. 31. März 1999.

For Habermas, the *Mahnmal* clearly offers a unique historical opportunity to lend symbolic meaning to the notion of a *geläuterte* or “purified” form of collective identity. Habermas also perceives that time is running out for this important political-cultural departure from conventional expressions of patriotism. Habermas rejects both the national conservative approach of a Baring as well as the left-wing nationalism of a Willy Brandt as dangerous developments. Equally, Habermas observes a new mutation of left-wing, social-democratic nationalism in the “telegenic” form of Chancellor Schröder who is pursuing a “normalisation” of the past undreamt of by Kohl.<sup>74</sup> Against such approaches, Habermas understands the *Holocaustmahnmal* as a unique opportunity to break out of traditional forms of national representation and to symbolically internalise the concept of history as *Dementi*. This necessitates placing the memory of Auschwitz at the heart of contemporary identity as he asks

Machen wir die selbstkritische Erinnerung an “Auschwitz” - die wachgehaltene Reflexion auf das mit diesem Namen verbundene Geschehen - explizit zum Bestandteil unseres politischen Selbstverständnisses?<sup>75</sup>

This forms the basic question which the Germans today have to ask themselves in accepting responsibility conferred upon later generations as an element of “broken” identity. Habermas then proceeds to explain the concept of “broken” identity

“Gebrochen” insofern, als diese Verantwortung den Willen zur Diskontinuierung irreführender Denkweisen in der Kontinuität eigener Überlieferungen bedeutet. Als mithaftende Nachfahren sagen wir das “Nie Wieder” zu uns selbst. Der Bruch an der Fortsetzung unserer tragenden Traditionen ist die Bedingung wiedererlangter Selbstachtung.<sup>76</sup>

Thus Habermas perceives in the internalisation of the National Socialist past in contemporary collective consciousness an instrument of critical self-regulation of indigenous traditions. In so far we can perceive a congruity with his earlier arguments from the 1980s. Yet in the contemporary context this concept of critical history centred upon reflection of the National Socialist past is invoked not to refute the legitimacy of “national identity” but rather more as a

---

<sup>74</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>75</sup> Habermas. *Die Zeit*. 31.03.1999. *ibid.*

<sup>76</sup> *ibid.*

precondition of its reconfiguration. Thus the concept of “broken” identity strengthened by critical memory of the National Socialist past forms the basis of a new reconfiguration of identity and indeed the precondition of regaining a sense of self respect. In the objections of Walser, Lübke, Augstein and others Habermas perceives a desire to return to old heroic, representations of the past which characterised the age of European nationalism.<sup>77</sup> For Habermas, however, despite the radical shift in content *nach wie vor geht es um die Selbstverständigung der Deutschen*.<sup>78</sup> The redirection of perspective to the victims of the Holocaust represents, for Habermas, an opportunity to lend his project of the “post-national” constellation a legitimacy cultivated in history

Die Zumutung besteht also darin, moralische Gesichtspunkte, die in den bürgerlichen Gleichheitsnormen des Binnenverkehrs westlicher Gesellschaften längst rechtlich verankert sind, nicht nach Kriterien der Zugehörigkeit selektiv anzuwenden. Der Holocaust fordert die Deutschen zu einer räumlichen und zeitlichen Entgrenzung der moralischen Verantwortung der demokratischen Bürgergesellschaft auf, die mit dem konventionellen Formen nationaler Totenkultue unvereinbar ist.<sup>79</sup>

in the critical reflection of the Holocaust as a component of collective identity Habermas perceives a possibility of historically legitimising the universalisation of the “moral principles” contained in his understanding of the bourgeois concept of civic equality. Thus the shift in emphasise from a celebration of indigenous traditions to a form of solidarity with the victims of those traditions provides the moral-political context within which a shift from particularist, national values to a universal, “post-national” orientation is enacted. Herein, perhaps, Habermas perceives a retort to conservative accusations of the emotional barrenness of *Verfassungspatriotismus* and a necessary source of historical legitimacy to supplement the “procedural legitimacy” of intersubjective mutual regulation. Whilst this is clearly a centrally important development in the German context, Habermas situates this within a broader trend throughout the West to a critical engagement with indigenous national history citing Helmut Dubiel’s suggestion that throughout the West in the post-Cold War period the national past has ceased to be an unquestioned source of orientation and affirmation in the

---

<sup>77</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>78</sup> Habermas, *Die Zeit*. *op. cit.*

<sup>79</sup> Habermas. *ibid.*

present.<sup>80</sup> In this context West Germany appears, due to the specificity of its modern history, to have been at the vanguard of a much broader, “post-national” development throughout the West which, since the collapse of the Cold War framework has taken root. Habermas acknowledges this is suggesting that contemporary debates over the national past in Western nations reflects in structure, if not theme, the course of the West German *Historikerstreit* of the 1980s. This distancing from the indigenous, national past and the “solidarity” with the victims ultimately provides the opportunity, for Habermas, of breaking the universalist core of democratic civil society from the particularism of national consciousness

Mit diesem Wandel im kollektiven Selbstverständnis holt der Universalismus des demokratischen Verfassungsstaates den Partikularismus des mit ihm verschwisterten Nationalbewußtseins ein, indem er dieses gleichsam von innen umstrukturiert. Die Nationen bekommen die postnationale Konstellation auch auf diese Weise zu spüren.<sup>81</sup>

Habermas thus perceives in the “post-national” constellation not only a force from “outside” in the form of increasing internationalisation of markets, investments and production but equally one which operates from “within” as witnessed in the growing popular alienation from established national narratives in all Western nations since the end of the Cold War. This interpretation of history as *Dementi* finds symbolic expression in the *Holocaustmahnmal*. On the one hand, the monument symbolises the break with national traditions after the experience of National Socialism and, on the other, the monument urges a break with national particularist loyalties in favour of solidarity with the victims of the indigenous past. Habermas interprets the weakening of conventional national consciousness as leading to the development of a universal outlook. Yet this model does not shed its particularist groundings. Habermas falls back upon an inherently particularist concept of German identity in order to support the development of a “post-national” orientation. Whilst Habermas appreciates the exhaustion of conventional left and right wing approaches to society and history his concept of history as *Dementi* denotes an attempt to cultivate historically legitimacy for contemporary identity based upon a reconfiguration of the relationship with the national past. Habermas concept of universalism is not

---

<sup>80</sup> Habermas. *ibid.* Dubiel. 1999. *op. cit.* p. 292.

<sup>81</sup> Habermas. *ibid.*

based on the traditional left-wing concept of internationalism nor indeed primarily on the principle of common human equality but rather more in generating moral solidarity on the historical experience of victimhood *par exemple*.

Despite the universal aspirations of Habermas concept of identity it remains conceptually focused upon a particularist German historical experience. This may well be formed by a wholly negative past which urges the break with national traditions but this does not indicate the departure from national identity *per se*. Rather more this appears as a progressive reconfiguration of national identity. This sense of departure and reconfiguration is succinctly expressed in the concept of “broken identity” which signals the admission of a wholly compromising national past as a means whereby a credible concept of “post-national” national identity can be reconstructed. The cultural historian Aleida Assmann has also considered the changes in identity politics in post-unification Germany. Like Habermas, Assmann comes from a critical perspective and also understands the emergence of “post-national” traditions over the 1990s as indicative of the need to reconfigure concepts of nation and national identity. This process has served to reactualise the nineteenth century practice of “nation building” via recourse to the construction of monuments and museums

Die Einrichtung und staatliche Förderung historischer Museen zeigt ebenso wie die Debatte um zentrale Denkmäler, daß der gesamtdeutsche Nationalstaat erneut im Begriff ist, sich ein Gedächtnis zu schaffen.<sup>82</sup>

Thus Assmann, like Habermas, understands the interest in history as a result of the value flux generated by the profound changes in the German context over the past decade. Assmann notes that the concept of national identity has long been a left wing taboo after the collapse of the last German nation state. Assmann stakes a claim for a “national feeling” which is neither “positive” nor “negative” but rather more is based upon the recognition of “historical truth” as a part of “self-definition”.<sup>83</sup> Again, like Habermas, Assmann perceives in the Holocaust an aspect of German history which touches all successor generations of Germans

---

<sup>82</sup> Aleida Assmann, *Zwischen Pflicht und Alibi. Wozu nationales Gedenken? Die Debatte um das Holocaustmahnmal zeigt die Deutschen auf der Suche nach einem neuen Gedächtnis*. in *Die Tageszeitung*, 20. März. 1996. in Jeissmann. 1999. op. cit. p. 160.

urging the cultivation of a reflexive concept of national consciousness based in the self critical acceptance of the nazi past in contemporary national consciousness. In this model, the credibility of contemporary national consciousness achieves definition to the extent that memory of the crimes of the indigenous national past is highlighted. Assmann is clear that collective memory is a constantly changing and dynamic social process. Whilst collective memory is thus constantly reconstructed, it *does* lay claim to authoritative values which can claim validity into the future. In this context, this concept of critical history appears as a suitable means of cultivating authority for socially normative values in the digital, “information-age”

Anders aber auch als der große digitale Zeichenfluß, der im World-WideWeb-Wissen permanent transformiert, konturiert das bewertende Erinnern nach wie vor Selbstverpflichtung, Orientierung und Identitäten.<sup>84</sup>

Thus the plea for a culture of reflexive, critical memory is understood as a means of reconfiguring “national consciousness” the authority of the value therein enshrined in the age of mass communication and permanently changing information. It thus reproduces a claim traditionally associated with romantic concepts of identity which seek in the engagement with history absolute values and points of orientation in periods of contemporary flux. Whilst Habermas speaks of a “broken identity” Aleida Assmann, together with her husband Jan Assmann have spoken in favourable terms of the concept of “negative nationalism”. When combined with a dynamic culture of self critical reflection, this concept of “negative nationalism” appears as a positive instance of self-regulation which simultaneously describes a particular German phenomenon *Nirgendwo auf der Welt wird wie bei uns eine die eigene Identität untergrabende Erinnerung festgeschrieben.*<sup>85</sup> Yet at the same time this is a form of self-critical reflection which provides the foundations for a reconstructed concept of contemporary national “normality” measured in the degree to which this negative past is acknowledged and accepted in the new Germany.<sup>86</sup>

---

<sup>83</sup> *ibid.* pp. 160-1.

<sup>84</sup> *ibid.* p. 165.

<sup>85</sup> cf Interview with Aleida and Jann Assmann. *Die Zeit*. Nr. 50. 1999. *op. cit.*

<sup>86</sup> Jan Assmann. *ibid.*

In this context, Thierse cited Habermas support for the Eisenmann model as encapsulating the *Pathos des Negativen*<sup>87</sup> and likewise considered the importance of cultivating contemporary moral responsibility from a critical reflection of the German past

Das Denkmal, über das wir heute entscheiden, richtet sich an die zukünftigen Generationen mit der Botschaft: Scham ist ein Moment unserer menschlichen Würde. Aus dem politisch-praktischen Gedenken unserer mit unfäßbarem Unrecht verknüpften Geschichte erwächst auch moralische Gegenwartsverpflichtung und Zukunftsfähigkeit.<sup>88</sup>

It is interesting to note how Thierse clearly perceives no contradiction between invoking the National Socialist past in contemporary identity creation whilst condemning the instrumentalised, “ritualised antifascism” of the GDR which, he and others have suggested, contributed to the later growth of the Far Right in the former East.<sup>89</sup> Such critiques suggest the impression that whilst the former SED regime shamelessly instrumentalised the National Socialist past for contemporary political aims, contemporary, unified Germany is engaged in a neutral, honest confrontation with its past. Yet, as Jan and Aleida Assmann suggest, such “neutral” collective memory is a fiction as the “remembered past” always serves to either legitimise or de-legitimise the present and reflects contemporary concerns.<sup>90</sup> The clearest expression of this relationship between engaging with the past and articulating contemporary interests was offered by Chancellor Schröder. Schröder was initially clearly ill-disposed towards the *Holocaustmahnmal* and only changed his attitude when it became apparent, in the wake of the reaction to Walser’s comments, that it was no longer possible to oppose the monument. Schröder’s engagement with the National Socialist past represents a more “pragmatic” version of the subtler formulations of reconfiguring “normality” evident in the writings of Habermas and the Assmann’s. Schröder’s understanding of the altered status of the National Socialist past in reunified Germany is strongly motivated by the acknowledgement that the end of the Cold War has also loosened the shackles on the concept of German sovereignty and the posing of questions of national

---

<sup>87</sup> Habermas, Die Zeit. op. cit. .

<sup>88</sup> Thierse in Rosh. ibid. p. 136.

<sup>89</sup> Thierse.in Rosh. ibid. Herzog.

<sup>90</sup> cf Aleida and Jan Assmann. Die Zeit. Nr 50. 1998. op. cit.

interests. Explaining his understanding of the “normality” of contemporary Germany Schröder elaborated

Ein Volk kann aus seiner ganzen Geschichte nicht heraus. Ohne Vergewisserung über die Historie gibt es weder Gegenwart noch Zukunft. Nur ist eben die Frage, was überwiegen soll. Schafft die Bereitschaft, einer neuen Generation, sich auseinanderzusetzen, nicht zu vergessen, nicht auch die Chance, unbefangener die eigenen Interessen zu vertreten? Ich glaube bislang überwog die Befangtheit. Das hängt auch mit der Frage zusammen, warum wir Europäer sind. Die Generation vor meiner hat gesagt: Wir sind es, weil das die richtige Antwort auf die deutsche Geschichte ist. Und wenn die Deutschen es nicht sind, werden bei den anderen die Ängste vor dem Furor teutonicus übergroß. Jetzt muß man hinzukommen, daß wir sagen: Die Deutschen sind nicht nur Europäer, weil sie müssen, sondern mindestens auch, weil sie wollen und es dazu gar keine Alternative gibt.<sup>91</sup>

Schröder clearly understands the value of contrition for the past as a means of asserting the legitimacy of national interests in the present. Furthermore, Schröder perceives a change in sovereignty perceptions between his generation and the one previous whose option for Europe was shaped by the recent, and frequently personal, experience of National Socialism. For Schröder’s generation it no longer appears as primarily a matter of “historical responsibility” whether the Germans are European orientated but rather more a matter of subjective political choice. One might infer from Schröder’s statement that this shift from a primacy of “historical responsibility” to pragmatic political choice could also be applied to the articulation of contrition for the National Socialist past. This concept of “normality” has been criticised and commentators have remarked on the curious phenomenon of the present establishment personnel who cut their political teeth during the counter-cultural rebellion of “‘68” and who now assert national interests to an extent unimaginable under previous administrations.

Writing in *Die Zeit* Klaus Hartung perceived a *Schlußstrich* under the German past in Schröder’s rigorous assertion of national normality at the Party Conference in Leipzig in April 1998.<sup>92</sup> Speaking before the September elections Schröder criticised Kohl’s European policy for casting integration and the Euro as the “price of German history” and argued for a more assertive articulation of

---

<sup>91</sup> Schröder. *Die Zeit*. Nr. 6 1999. op. cit.

national interests. Hartung notes that Schröder's "normality" rhetoric is unlikely to explode a new *Historikerstreit* as it is driven by pragmatic political concerns of a generation untouched by the war experience for whom the *Gnade der späten Geburt* has become a matter of fact.<sup>93</sup> Writing in *Der Spiegel*, Reinhard Mohr also noted the national tone in Schröder's governmental declaration in which the chancellor spoke of the *Selbstbewußtsein einer erwachsenen Nation, die sich niemandem über-, aber auch niemandem unterlegen fühlen muß*.<sup>94</sup> Mohr imagines the outrage among liberals and the left such comments would have provoked if Kohl had attempted such a "normalisation". Mohr notes the strange combination of a political class shaped to a large extent by the '68 experience employing a political vocabulary most traditionally associated with right-wing conservative nationalists such as Dregger or intellectuals of the New Right.<sup>95</sup> Yet this form of national normality is not accompanied by a plea for drawing an overt line under the National Socialist past in the manner implied in Walser's controversial speech. Mohr perceives the framework of German identity on the threshold to the new century as cast between the dispute over Walser's speech and Schröder's rhetoric of normality. Mohr perceives this new discourse of normality as a consequence of the broader ascension of a new power-generation born around the mid- to late 1940s

Und dennoch - es gibt so etwas wie eine langsam wachsende Normalität in Deutschland, auch im Verhältnis zu seiner Vergangenheit. Eine neue Generation der 40- bis 50 jährigen repräsentiert sie bereits. Sie stellt die Bundesregierung, sitzt in den Chefredaktionen der großen Medien, leitet Theater, Universitäten, Weltkonzerne.<sup>96</sup>

This is clearly the generation of the New Left and former '68 milieu which has successfully completed its *Marsch durch die Institutionen* in the 1990s. Mohr comments that the essential difference with this generation is that it *did* engage with the National Socialist past and hence is bound to adopt a more sovereign air in dealing with the German past than its predecessors. This is a point positively picked up in a contribution for the 'PERSPEKTIVE Berlin *Bürgerinitiative*' by

---

<sup>92</sup> Klaus Hartung, 'Schröders Schlußstrich Die SPD sonnt sich in der Gnade der späten Geburt. Die Zeit. Nr. 18. 23. April. 1998.

<sup>93</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>94</sup> Reinhard Mohr, 'Total normal?' in *Der Spiegel*. 49/1998. p. 41.

<sup>95</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>96</sup> *ibid.* p. 48.

the director of the SPD's party school Tilman Fichter.<sup>97</sup> Fichter, a former SDS member, draws a continuity between the critical student engagement with the National Socialist past during the 1960s and the support for the construction of a monument to commemorate the Holocaust during the 1990s.<sup>98</sup> Fichter suggests that between 1945 and 1968 three main generations determined political culture in West Germany comprising the Weimar, Front and HJ/Flak-auxiliary generations all of which failed to engage successfully with the National Socialist past.<sup>99</sup> For Fichter only the successive generations of war- and post-war children born after 1935 and 1945 respectively have developed a civilised and reflective relationship with the National Socialist past. This generation, which corresponds to Mohr's new elite, were shaped by the post-war experiences of economic reconstruction and Adenauer, the anti-authoritarian revolt of the 1960s, the social-liberal coalition, the Kohl era and the collapse of "poststalinism" in the East.<sup>100</sup>

It is primarily this generation which Fichter considers the prime supporters of the *Holocaustmahnmal* project.<sup>101</sup> For Fichter, the symbolic reflection of the National Socialist past could provide a point of social and political consensus in German society. Fichter suggests that the parliament, Berlin Senate and the group of sponsors of the monument could invite disparate representatives of youth comprising a rather motley congregation of Sports, Catholic and Evangelical and socialist youth groups, anarchist *Autonomen* from community groups together with young recruits of all three armed forces.<sup>102</sup> This appears as an exercise in rapprochement with the German past, particularly on behalf of the military, in which the articulation of contrition simultaneously offers a point of collective consensus for contemporary pluralist society in which the '68 generation have attained political hegemony. This is a theme which was also a dominant undertone in the public-political discourse of the so-called *Goldhagenkontroverse*.

---

<sup>97</sup> Tilman Fichter, *Zur Vorgeschichte des Denkmals: Fünf Generationen nach Auschwitz*. in Rosh. 1999. op. cit. pp. 173-201.

<sup>98</sup> *ibid.* p. 181, 197-200.

<sup>99</sup> *ibid.* p. 186.

<sup>100</sup> *ibid.* p. 197.

<sup>101</sup> *ibid.* p. 199.

#### 7.4 “Ordinary Germans” - Then and Now. The “Goldhagen Controversy”.

The publication in 1996 of the US political scientist Daniel Jonah Goldhagen's doctoral thesis<sup>103</sup> provoked unprecedented academic, media and public interests in the US, Israel and above all Germany. Goldhagen's *Hitler's Willing Executioners* was published in the US in Spring 1996 and later in the year translated and published into (the more ambiguous title) *Hitlers willige Vollstrecker* in Germany. The German publication in August 1996 was followed by a discussion tour of five major cities in September that year which attracted mass audiences and were broadcast live on national television and radio. The combination of intense academic, public and media interest in Goldhagen's thesis indicated that the discussion over *Hitler's Willing Executioners* expanded beyond an academic exchange of interpretations of the genesis of the Holocaust and provided insight into the reflections of contemporary Germans on contemporary German political culture. Through the tumult which emerged around the publication and promotion of the book one might perceive that, as in the case of the *Holocaustmahnmal*, the German past was being employed as a filter through which contemporary political culture could be observed. This perception could only be strengthened by the extremely problematic historical explanation of the Holocaust advanced in the thesis.

Goldhagen's central thesis is that the Holocaust was less a product of Nazi racial biology and rather more the most obscene manifestation of an inherently anti-Semitic *German* culture. For Goldhagen, the perpetrators were “Germans” first and only SS men, NSDAP, SD or Police Battalion members etc. second, *Their chief common denominator was that they were all Germans pursuing German national political goals.*<sup>104</sup> Distinctive of Goldhagen's thesis, however, is that this “perpetrator mind set” is considered paradigmatic of the collective mind set

---

<sup>102</sup> *ibid.* p. 193.

<sup>103</sup> Daniel Jonah Goldhagen, *Hitler's Willing Executioners. Ordinary Germans and the Holocaust.* Abacus. London. 1997.

<sup>104</sup> Goldhagen. *ibid.* p. 7.

of the vast majority of Germans.<sup>105</sup> Goldhagen argues that a historical perspective is imperative in order to understand the evolution of the genocide. This appears a reasonable claim yet in Goldhagen this historical explanation assumes the teleological form of reading backwards into German history from the Holocaust in order find spurious evidence of a centuries-old “eliminator anti-Semitism” which was transhistorically ingrained into German culture.<sup>106</sup> Goldhagen asserts that during the nineteenth century not only did the conservatives and *völkisch* nationalists form the “vast majority of the population”<sup>107</sup> but also that liberal emancipationists and assimilationists were in fact wolves in sheep’s clothing representing a brand of “philo-antisemitism”.<sup>108</sup> From this perspective, distinct phenomena such as assimilation, the repeal of emancipation, expulsion through to annihilation were all *variations, enormously different as they may be, on the eliminationist mind set*.<sup>109</sup>

For this reason the Nazis did not have to “remake” the Germans after 1933 as *the vast majority of them subscribed to the underlying Nazi model of Jews and in this sense (as the Nazis themselves understood) were “Nazified” in their views of Jews*.<sup>110</sup> Upon this basis Goldhagen asserts that the “Nazi German Revolution” was “on the whole, consensual”.<sup>111</sup> This notion that Nazi, exterminatory anti-Semitism reflected a central theme of “the cultural cognitive model of German society”<sup>112</sup> provides the substance of Goldhagen’s cultural-anthropological approach to the genesis of the Holocaust. Goldhagen’s *new and substantially different view of essential aspects of the period*<sup>113</sup> comprises the notion that previous non-German scholars were fundamentally mistaken in assuming that the Germans “were more or less like us”.<sup>114</sup> Goldhagen suggests that we should approach German history somewhat as an “anthropologist” does when

---

<sup>105</sup> *ibid.* pp. 4, 9, 44, 78-9

<sup>106</sup> *ibid.* pp. 31-2, 74, 399.

<sup>107</sup> *ibid.* p. 56.

<sup>108</sup> *ibid.* p. 59.

<sup>109</sup> *ibid.* p. 70.

<sup>110</sup> *ibid.* pp. 87. Also cf pp, 85, 103, 116, 443.

<sup>111</sup> *ibid.* p. 456.

<sup>112</sup> *ibid.* p. 74.

<sup>113</sup> *ibid.* p.

<sup>114</sup> *ibid.* p. 27.

investigating the world of a people about whom little is known.<sup>115</sup> Rather than representing children of the Enlightenment and rational occidental culture, Goldhagen considers the Germans almost as a species apart which, despite superficial congruence with Western societies, were in essence dominated by a cultural cognitive model which was founded in the “magical thinking” of exterminatory anti-Semitism. In the light of this dominant anti-Semitic cognitive model of German culture we are, according to Goldhagen, compelled to revise our assumption that the Germans were essentially “like us”. This is driven home in the final page of the book in which Goldhagen summarises the general underlying tenet of his thesis in which he contends that the concentration and death camps exposed not just Nazism’s but also Germany’s “true face” and that to a great extent “Himmler’s *Kultur*” had already become the “*Kultur* of Germany”.<sup>116</sup> Clearly aware of the implications of his thesis for perceptions of contemporary Germany, Goldhagen states, buried away in the endnotes of the book, that he does not believe in the existence of a “timeless German character”.<sup>117</sup> Goldhagen maintains that the “common cognitive models” of German history have changed and evolved particularly since 1945. This caveat is undermined, however, by the whole argument of the book which understands the Holocaust not only as the culmination of millennial European anti-Semitism but as the reactionary apogee of an already “Nazified” German culture.

Academic responses to Goldhagen were overwhelmingly critical. Hans-Ulrich Wehler noted the unintentional proximity of Goldhagen’s cultural cognitive model with the cultural categories of bio-racism.<sup>118</sup> Goldhagen’s monocausal explanation of the genesis of the Holocaust attracted criticism from both “intentionalists” such as Eberhard Jäckel<sup>119</sup> and Yehuda Bauer<sup>120</sup> and

---

<sup>115</sup> *ibid.* p. 28.

<sup>116</sup> *ibid.* p. 460.

<sup>117</sup> Goldhagen. 1997. *op. cit.* p. 594. Footnote 38.

<sup>118</sup> Hans-Ulrich Wehler, *Wie ein Stachel im Fleisch*. in *Die Zeit*. Nr. 22. 24. Mai 1996.

<sup>119</sup> For Jäckel, Goldhagen’s work is simply a “bad book” and has reduced the niveau of research to the level of the 1950s. cf Eberhard Jäckel, *Simply Put: A Bad Book* in Franklin H. Littell (ed.) *Hyping the Holocaust: Scholars Answer Goldhagen*. Merion Westfield Press. Pennsylvania. 1997. pp. 159-164. also cf the same accusation in Wehler. 1996. *op. cit.* and Wolfgang Scheffler, *Ein Rückschritt in der Holocaustforschung*. in *Der Tagesspiegel*. 03. 09. 1996.

<sup>120</sup> Yehuda Bauer, Daniel J. Goldhagen’s View of the Holocaust. in Littell. *ibid.* pp. 59-72.

“functionalists” such as Hans Mommsen<sup>121</sup> and Götz Aly<sup>122</sup>. Goldhagen’s cavalier treatment of the sources has also been subjected to surgical scrutiny and the illogic which underpins his argument that the Germans murdered Jews because they were anti-Semitic and that they were anti-Semitic because they were Germans has been critically exposed.<sup>123</sup> Goldhagen’s response to the critics has varied between arguing the same in more diplomatic language,<sup>124</sup> personally abusing his critics,<sup>125</sup> to threats of libel action in the British courts against his detractors.<sup>126</sup> Whilst historians and experts on the genesis of the Holocaust subjected Goldhagen’s work to a rigorous critique, other intellectuals have defended the work. The most important intellectual to defend Goldhagen was Habermas. Habermas defence of Goldhagen is not primarily motivated by intellectual agreement with his thesis but rather more by an appreciation of its provocative impact upon German political culture. In this context, Habermas perceives in the controversy surrounding the work an opportunity to develop the concept of “broken identity”.

In 1997 Goldhagen was awarded the *Friedenspreis* of the Federal Republic by a public forum in recognition of his academic achievements in *Hitler’s Willing Executioners*. In the laudatio for Goldhagen at the award of the prize, Jürgen Habermas explained his defence of Goldhagen’s work in terms of its

---

<sup>121</sup> Hans Mommsen., The Conditions for Carrying Out the Holocaust: Comments on Daniel Goldhagen’s Book. in Littel. *ibid.* pp. 29-43. Also, Mommsen, Die dünne Patina der Zivilisation. Der Antisemitismus war eine notwendige, aber keineswegs hinreichende Bedingung für den Holocaust. *Die Zeit*. Nr. 36. 30 August. 1996 in which Mommsen repeats his argument that the Holocaust must be viewed within the context of the “cumulative radicalisation” process which accelerated in the context of the war against the Soviet Union. Also cf Hans Mommsen, Die Realisierung des Utopischen: Die Endlösung der Judenfrage” im “Dritten Reich” in *Geschichte und Gesellschaft*. 9 (1983) pp. 381-420. Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht. 1983.

<sup>122</sup> Although Aly welcomes Goldhagen’s concentration upon the subjective motivation of the perpetrators he criticises the “super-intentionalism” of the thesis which substitutes Hitler for “the Germans”. cf Aly 1997. *op. cit.* p. 202.

<sup>123</sup> Norman G. Finkelstein and Ruth Bettina Birn, *A Nation on Trial. The Goldhagen Thesis and Historical Truth*. Henry Holt. New York. 1998.

<sup>124</sup> cf Daniel Goldhagen, *Das Versagen der Kritiker*. in *Die Zeit*. Nr. 32. 2. August. 1996.

<sup>125</sup> cf A Comment by Daniel Jonah Goldhagen on: *A Nation on Trial: The Goldhagen Thesis and Historical Truth*. at, <http://www.goldhagen.com> In this “review” of Finkelstein and Birn’s critique Goldhagen fails to justify his claim that their work represents a “tendentious series of inventions” by failing to address a single one of the numerous points raised by Finkelstein and Birn.

<sup>126</sup> cf Michael Jeismann, *Der Schutz des allmächtigen Autors. Rechtsanwälte lesen lassen: Wie Daniel Goldhagen mit seinen Kritikern verfährt*. in *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*. Nr. 256. 4. November. 1997. p. 41.

contribution to fostering debate on the theme of the social use of history.<sup>127</sup> For Habermas, Goldhagen's study has provided a public forum in which the citizenry of contemporary Germany can continue the social discussion over what form of political coexistence is desirable and which values should attain normative status. Such discussion reflects both Germans' perceptions of one another as citizens and also how they wish to be regarded by others

Dafür bildet die nationale Geschichte einen wichtigen Hintergrund. Nationale Überlieferungen und Mentalitäten, die Teil unserer Person geworden sind, reichen nämlich weit hinter die Anfänge dieser Republik zurück. Diese Verbindung aus politischem Selbstverständnis und historischem Bewußtsein bestimmt auch die Perspektive, aus der Goldhagens Buch für uns relevant wird.<sup>128</sup>

Thus for Habermas, the national past forms a useful background against which contemporary society is cast into relief. It is thus a perfectly natural, automatic reflex for the Germans to ask questions about the Holocaust when attempting to understand their contemporary political existence. In this reading, contemporary political identity is lent substantial definition by the concept of historical consciousness. Furthermore, the present is connected with the past not only through this process of political self-reflection but by the same "cultural threads" which linked the then generation of perpetrators to past generations as suggested by Goldhagen. This link between past and present German culture shatters the naive suspension of belief of contemporary generations towards their own traditions and implicates present generation in a process of moral-political self reflection.<sup>129</sup> Whereas Goldhagen posits an anti-Semitic German cultural cognitive mind set which continued from the middle ages to 1945, before vanishing into the ether, Habermas maintains the continuity into the present in the form of national traditions and mentalities which define a specific German culture. In this context, Habermas perceives in the public discourse over Goldhagen's study an opportunity to promote his concept of history as a critical,

---

<sup>127</sup> *ibid.* p. 48-9.

<sup>128</sup> *ibid.* p. 49.

<sup>129</sup> This argument also developed in Birgit Rommelspacher, *Anklage und Entlastung. Sozialpsychologische Aspekte der Goldhagen-Debatte.* in, Jürgen Elsässer, Andrei S. Markowitz (Hrsg.) *Die Fratze der eigenen Geschichte. Von der Goldhagen-Debatte zum Jugoslawien-Krieg.* Elefant Press. Berlin. 1999. p. 34. Rommelspacher main critique of Goldhagen is that he terminates his thesis in 1945 thus letting contemporary generations "off the hook".

negative pedagogic-political instance as *Diese kritische Einstellung gegenüber Eigenem ist es, was Goldhagens Studie fördert - und was die Besorgnis mancher Konservativer auf den Plan ruft*.<sup>130</sup>

Thus in Goldhagen's thesis Habermas appears to perceive a public discourse which is particularly suited to his project of critical self-reflection. In reading one cannot help but feel that Habermas suspends his critical faculties with respect to the intellectual and political character of Goldhagen's study in favour utilising the public controversy it created to promote the concept of "broken identity". The quality of insight offered by Goldhagen, his contribution to our understanding of the genesis of the Holocaust and the inner logic of his argument are all left untouched by Habermas. Clearly of more importance for Habermas, is the potential of the book to weaken the naive faith in indigenous traditions championed by conservatives with renewed vigour since 1989.<sup>131</sup> For Habermas the conservative alliance of historicism and nationalism collapses the necessary distinction between history as a tool of social analysis and history as a source of identity creation and degenerates to *Geschichtspolitik*.<sup>132</sup> Habermas argues for a differentiation of the distinct roles played by the historian in legal, moral and political discourse of the past. Whilst historians serve as experts in establishing causality in legal trials and historical knowledge of past deeds plays a central role in the moral dialogue between members of the personally effected generation, history serves a different purpose for successor generations. For successor generations of Germans, historical knowledge of the Holocaust and National Socialist past forms an important moment in their process of ethical-political self-definition. In this context, history serves as a source of normative values in the present and historians participate in its discourse no longer as experts but as "intellectuals".<sup>133</sup> Present German generations thus engage with this atrocious period of national history with regards to their *own* political identity

Sie wollen sich über die kulturelle Matrix eines belastenden Erbes Klarheit verschaffen, um zu erkennen, wofür sie gemeinsam haften und was gegebenenfalls von den

---

<sup>130</sup> *ibid.* p. 50.

<sup>131</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>132</sup> *ibid.* p. 52.

Traditionen, die damals einen verhängnisvollen Motivationshintergrund gebildet haben, noch fortwirkt und der Revision bedarf.<sup>134</sup>

Thus for Habermas whilst it is a nonsense to speak of “collective guilt” it is possible to speak of a widespread individual guilt in the past from which a consciousness of “collective responsibility” emerges in the present.<sup>135</sup> Thus although Habermas is critical of the alliance between historicism and nationalism, his own perspective of the role of history in shaping contemporary political culture is also firmly welded to the past. Habermas conception differs from conservative ideas of *Geschichtspolitik* in that he avoids the metaphysical associations of conventional, transhistorical “identity” in favour of a process of rational, conscious political reflection of discredited traditions. Thus for Habermas, the bond with the past is not founded upon an innate “need” of contemporary Germans to assure themselves of their identity via the assimilation of particularist, cultural traditions, but rather more from the political need to critically revise such traditions in the light of the catastrophe of National Socialism.

Despite this distinction, or rationalisation of the need to cultivate historical consciousness, however, this is a model which continues to cultivate authority for contemporary values with reference to the past. In the form of critical self-reflection, the past no longer demands the attention of contemporaries in terms of its status as a positive role model, but rather more derives moral-political authority from the experience of utter disaster and unimaginable inhumanity. For conservatives such as Stürmer or Hildebrand, the past in the form of the *Bismarckreich* or the history of the German *Mittellage* offers the present an affirmatory sense of historical precedent. For Habermas, the past offers the present a source of value orientation primarily in terms of its own moral and political bankruptcy. Thus, in the discussion over the Holocaust, the present generation finds the negative counterfoil *par exemple* against which contemporary value creation proceeds. Goldhagen’s greatest service, for Habermas, was in provoking a public discussion over the negative national past.

---

<sup>133</sup> *ibid.* p. 61.

<sup>134</sup> *ibid.* p. 54.

<sup>135</sup> *ibid.*

Yet more than its provocative impact as a catalyst of reflection, Habermas also appears to implicitly sanction Goldhagen's central, and most contentious assertion that the perpetrators committed atrocities because of the normative status of anti-Semitism in German culture.<sup>136</sup> It is this aspect which interests Habermas in particular and although he concedes that Goldhagen's model of a "straight road" to Auschwitz is problematic, he welcomes the emphasis upon the perpetrators motivation and mentality which mirrored the cultural norms of German society. The reason for this is that it provides a forum within which *contemporary* moral and political social norms can gain definition. Habermas suggests that the degree to which we ascribe culpability to individuals or circumstances and where we draw the line between free will and compulsion, guilt and innocence depends not only on our knowledge of the historical facts but upon our perception of the facts. These social preconceptions (*Vorverständnis*) thus shade our perspective of the past

Die hermeneutische Bereitschaft, den wahren Umfang von Verantwortung und Mitwissen anzuerkennen, variiert mit unserem Verständnis von Freiheit - wie wir uns als verantwortliche Personen einschätzen und wieviel wir uns selbst als politisch Handelnden zumuten. Mit Fragen der ethisch-politischen Selbstverständigung steht dieses Vorverständnis selbst zur Diskussion. Wie wir Schuld und Unschuld im historischen Rückblick verteilt sehen, spiegelt *auch* die Normen, nach denen wir uns gegenseitig als Bürger dieser Republik zu achten willens sind. An diesem Diskurs nehmen übrigens die Historiker nicht mehr als Experten, sondern wie wir anderen in der Rolle von Intellektuellen teil.<sup>137</sup>

This is an interesting perception of the dialectical relationship between historical consciousness and political identity. On the one hand, contemporary social and cultural norms and values provide a filter through which we view the past. Yet, on the other hand, these norms and values are susceptible to transformation from the reflection of history. Habermas himself has played a key role in this mediation between National Socialist past and Federal Republican present throughout his academic career and experienced at first hand the power of the National Socialist past to influence contemporary political culture since the 1960s. Whilst it appears that Habermas acknowledges the dialectical relationship between our perception of present and past, in the context of the project of

---

<sup>136</sup> *ibid.* pp. 56-7.

<sup>137</sup> *ibid.* p. 61.

cultivating a sense of “broken identity” Habermas appears to commit a similar confusion to that which he criticises in the conservative union of historicism and nationalism. This appears to be the only possible explanation of his defence of Goldhagen despite the serious problems with his perspective of German history, culture and the genesis of the Holocaust. In the context of the Goldhagen controversy Habermas appears to prioritise the contemporary process of value creation from the self-critical reflection of the National Socialist past above the clearly distorted “historical consciousness” represented in the book. In other words, the fact that Goldhagen has offered a seriously flawed explanation of the Holocaust which distorts rather than elucidates our understanding of the phenomenon appears less important than his ability to provoke critique of indigenous national traditions and culture. Thus for Habermas, Goldhagen’s real contribution to the ongoing discourse of ethical-political value creation is his concentration upon specific customs, traditions, mentalities and perceptions in a particular cultural context.<sup>138</sup> Rejecting the critique of Goldhagen’s rigid cultural model, Habermas states that anthropological pessimism, which enjoys strong German intellectual traditions, represents rather more the problem which he seeks to address in the book.<sup>139</sup>

Habermas conception of the need of contemporary Germans to reflect their own political and social norms in discourse of the National Socialist past is predicated upon a sense of continuity between the generations which lends this process moral authority. For Habermas this bond between past and present is formed by the continuity of cultural traditions and mentalities which, however, are subject to transformation.<sup>140</sup> They are also subject to reactivation and it is clearly this fear which motivates Habermas critique of right wing attempts to rehabilitate more conventional forms of nationalism which were given a fillip in unification of the two German states. The concept of “broken identity” draws upon concept of historical legacy in order to cultivate the social authority to which it clearly aspires. Unlike conventional discourses of “historical consciousness”, this is based upon a wholly negative past. Yet this is a negative past which potentially

---

<sup>138</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>139</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>140</sup> *ibid.*

provides a foundation upon which a more positive sense of self in the present can be reconfigured. The historian Lutz Niethammer, who by no stretch of the imagination could be described as a friend of traditional German nationalism, articulated this peculiar reconfiguration of national pride as follows with reference to the government's regulation of compensation for former slave labourers and victims of the National Socialist regime

Daß 100 Milliarden und mehr in die Wiedergutmachung geflossen sind, die hauptsächlich bei jüdischen Opfern angekommen sind, war berechtigt. Darauf sollten wir durchaus in einem nationalen Sinne stolz sein.<sup>141</sup>

Thus, in this reading, contrition and atonement for the past not only serves to underline the “normality” of the German nation but also transforms into a collective act which can be unreservedly viewed as a source of national pride and by implication patriotism. In the following, final, section of this chapter I wish to examine the manner in which this model of critical self-reflection as a means of articulating a more authoritative sense of national normality and pride was developed over the Kosovo intervention in 1999.

#### 7.5. Power Politics between *Sonderbewußtsein* and *Sündenbewußtsein* ?

Perhaps more than any other event, the military intervention in Kosovo displays with startling candour the degree to which reflections of the National Socialist past and German present have undergone radical transformation since unification. The military intervention and specifically its German component was overwhelmingly justified with recourse to the National Socialist past and the contemporary moral-political obligations imposed upon the Germans. In this manner the Kosovo intervention can be regarded as an example of the foreign-political dimensions of “broken identity”. Editor of the *Frankfurter Allgemeine* Frank Schirrmacher commented *Dieser Krieg wird in Deutschland, anders als in anderen Ländern, fast ausschließlich mit Auschwitz begründet* referring to the constant use of Holocaust vocabulary and imagery from Foreign Minister Fischer who compared Milosevic with Hitler and Defence Minister Scharping

---

<sup>141</sup> Spiegel Gespräch mit Lutz Niethammer, Wir wollen mit uns ins Reine kommen. Der Spiegel. Nr. 8. 22 Feb. 1999.

who “consciously” employed the word *KZ* to describe prison camps in Serbia.<sup>142</sup> This use of the imagery and vocabulary of the Holocaust and Third Reich in Western perceptions and presentations of the war in Kosovo was clearly not limited to Germany and formed the historical paradigm through which the “humanitarian intervention” was lent moral-political authority. Yet this clearly attains a particular importance in the German context.

In an article originally published in the British *Guardian* newspaper and subsequently published in the *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, Goldhagen elaborated his concept of a “German solution” for the conflict in the Balkans.<sup>143</sup> In Goldhagen’s commentary, the experience of the Second World War assumes not only metaphorical value but rather more the status of a practical historical lesson for the present and future. For Goldhagen, whilst during the early 1940s Japan and Germany persecuted brutal wars of conquest in which mass murder was inherent, during the 1990s this role is performed by the state of Serbia. Not only are the Serbs driven by the desire to conquer territory but also their “eliminator project” against the Albanian Diaspora differs only from the “German” atrocities in terms of number.<sup>144</sup> As the “Germans” were consumed with anti-Semitism, so the Serbs today are “obsessed” with the *glühender Haß ihres ethnischen Nationalismus*.<sup>145</sup> In contrast to “Germans” during the Second World War, Goldhagen perceives that the Serbs themselves suffered from “ethnic conflict” at the hands of Croats, Bosnians and even Kosovo Albanians. Yet despite this implicit recognition that the conflicts in the Balkans have more to do with civil wars than state projects of racial extermination, Goldhagen states *Doch haben die Serben alles in ihren Kräften getan, um die Welt an den Holocaust zu erinnern*.<sup>146</sup> In this, Goldhagen most certainly reflects the dominant historical-political filter through which the conflicts in Bosnia and Kosovo have been viewed in Germany and the West. Goldhagen escalates the comparison with the

---

<sup>142</sup>cited in, Matthias Küntzel, Milosevics willige Vollstrecker? Goldhagen, Deutschland und der Kosovo-Krieg. in, *ibid.* p. 174.

<sup>143</sup> Daniel Jonah Goldhagen, Eine “deutsche Lösung” für den Balkan. Um das Völkermord zu beenden, muß die Nato Serbien besiegen, besetzen und umerziehen. in *Süddeutsche Zeitung*. Nr. 99. 30.April/1.-2. Mai 1999.

<sup>144</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>145</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>146</sup> *ibid.*

Second World War further and perceives in the post-war occupation and “re-education” of Germany and Japan a successful model for the present conflict in Serbia and potentially a model for the whole of the Balkans.

In this, Goldhagen is at least consistent in his historical observation. Goldhagen disregards the historically specific context of the Second World War in which Germany and Japan emerged as serious rivals for world power with Britain and the US, in order to make the somewhat farcical comparison with the bankrupt Serbian state. Goldhagen holds an uncritical perception of US international influence. Although he speaks of the necessity of a NATO engagement in the Balkans, he rather undermines this sense of collective response by stating that if the nineteen member states could not make a decision the US, and any others, should simply go it alone.<sup>147</sup> He thus essentially argues that the Allies and-or the US should repeat the experience of 1945 and militarily defeat the ruling regime in Serbia, occupy the country and initiate a process of political and social re-education. For Goldhagen this is not only a moral but also, in the long-term, a “practical” necessity.<sup>148</sup> As in the post-war period not only Germany and Japan but the whole of the Western hemisphere was included into the hegemony of the US, in the 1990s Goldhagen escalates the “German solution” to the entire region

Die Besetzung Serbiens wäre die Voraussetzung für einen umfassenden Demokratisierungsprozeß - nicht nur in Serbien, sondern im gesamten ehemaligen Jugoslawien. Denn es gibt keinen Anlaß zu glauben, daß die Nachbarn der Serben lauter Engel sind.<sup>149</sup>

Goldhagen supports this with the observation that “history” has proved that foreign powers are capable of progressively intervening in other powers to achieve peace and democratisation. Goldhagen also suggests that mass-murder and wars of conquest deny the perpetrator nations any “moral right” to sovereignty or self-determination.<sup>150</sup> This appears as a “moral right” which clearly aspires to global validity and yet remains the exclusive property of the Western allies or more precisely, as he implies, of the US. Indeed, he perceives the only possible “moral” objection to this plan in terms of the potential “high

---

<sup>147</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>148</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>149</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>150</sup> *ibid.*

cost” of this enterprise for the Allies. Goldhagen concludes by posing the “simple” question of whether it would be better for the Serbs to be ruled by a Konrad Adenauer or a Saddam Hussein. Either way, the primary factory appears, as with the case of these two rulers, is that they are placed in power and sponsored by the US. This is a form of “democratisation” which operates above the heads of the supposed beneficiaries who would presumably oppose such a move to their peril. In Goldhagen’s contribution we may perceive a continuity of the “cultural-anthropological” model of analysis which substitutes “the Germans” with “the Serbs” who appear equally in need of a moral-political re-education programme facilitated by the US military.

It is interesting to compare Goldhagen’s US proscription for the Balkans with the position developed by Habermas. As Habermas perceived in the debates over *Hitler’s Willing Executioners* an opportunity to promote the domestic project of “broken” or “post-national” identity, in the NATO intervention in Serbia he perceived the chance of expanding this concept into the realm of foreign policy. During the early 1990s, Habermas warned of the dangers of a concept of “normality” orientated towards the *Mittellage* and *Bismarckreich*<sup>151</sup> and feared a regeneration of the *Sonderbewußtsein*.<sup>152</sup> In an article written dealing with the NATO intervention and specifically with its German military component, Habermas developed the concept of the “post-national” constellation and posed the possibility for realising the cosmopolitan order to which his concept of civil society aspires.<sup>153</sup> Habermas title *Bestialität und Humanität* recollects Carl Schmitt’s dictum *wer Humanität sagt, meint Bestialität*. Schmitt objected to the use of such phrases in order to justify the pursuit of national interests under the name of universalism and democracy. Schmitt’s objections were not primarily directed towards the instrumentalisation of this legacy for national interests but rather more stemmed from his principled objection to humanism and a universal outlook in general.<sup>154</sup> Habermas takes this point to argue against Schmitt and his

---

<sup>151</sup> Habermas. 1995. op. cit. p. 172.

<sup>152</sup> *ibid.* p. 86.

<sup>153</sup> Jürgen Habermas, *Bestialität und Humanität*. Ein Krieg an der Grenze zwischen Recht und Moral. *Die Zeit*. Nr. 29. April 1999.

<sup>154</sup> cf Habermas. 1996. op. cit. pp.

contemporary neoconservative acolytes such as Mechttersheimer and Nolte<sup>155</sup> and for a realisation of a cosmopolitan order. For Habermas, the potential for the realisation of this order is heightened by the weakening of the nation state's sovereignty in both domestic and international affairs. Thus the "natural struggle" between nations identified by Schmitt or the principles of national sovereignty defended by conservatives in the present is no longer tenable

Dagegen erheben sich triftige Einwände. Es ist ja nicht so, als ob in der postnationalen Konstellation kraftstrotzende Nationalstaaten von Regeln der Völkergemeinschaft gegängelt würden. Vielmehr ist es die Erosion der staatlichen Autorität, sind es Bürgerkriege und ethnische Konflikte innerhalb zerfallender oder autoritär zusammengehaltener Staaten, die Interventionen auf den Plan rufen.<sup>156</sup>

As instances of this constellation of decomposition Habermas cites the cases of Somalia, Rwanda, Bosnia and now Kosovo. Habermas rejects the idea that interventions are an attempt to compensate for the loss of power in the globalised world and argues that they represent a just answer to the experiences of the Holocaust and totalitarianism.<sup>157</sup> The problem of a "moralisation" of the situation to meet particularist political ends is acknowledged by Habermas and he perceives the answer to this problem in the institutionalisation of moral values in a legal codex which aspires to universal application. In this sense, the borders between law and morality can be relativised and reconfigured on the road to the realisation of cosmopolitan world order which, however, is not predicated upon a "world government".<sup>158</sup> Despite the universalist aspiration of this project, there is a discernible air of particularism under the surface of his argument. In the first instance this is represented in the belief that in fact only the states of the first world are in a position to realise this cosmopolitan order.<sup>159</sup> This prioritises the West as arbiter of universal values. Thus far this appears congruent with older arguments of the "enlightened political culture" of the "West". Yet this older position is supplemented by a newer turn in which Europe and indeed Germany appear as the genuine representatives of the modernised Kantian project of realising "eternal peace". Habermas suggests that for the first time this progressive tradition has been taken seriously by a German government. In

---

<sup>155</sup> cf Mechttersheimer. 1993. op. cit. pp.

<sup>156</sup> *ibid*

<sup>157</sup> *ibid*.

<sup>158</sup> *ibid*.

contrast to his earlier fears of a normalisation of the German nation and a regeneration of the *Sonderbewußtsein*, Habermas notes that the discussion over the war against Serbia progresses along similar lines to other Western states and that no trace of the *Sonderweg* or *Sonderbewußtsein* can be detected.<sup>160</sup> Interestingly, Habermas perceives a division in the alliance between Anglo-Saxons and Continental Europeans, between those who invited the General Secretary of the UN to their meetings and who strive for agreement with Russia and those who trust only in their weapons arguing

Ein interessanter Unterschied im Verständnis der Menschenrechtspolitik zeichnet sich ab. Die USA betreiben die globale Durchsetzung der Menschenrechte als die nationale Mission einer Weltmacht, die dieses Ziel unter Prämissen der Machtpolitik verfolgt. Die meisten Regierungen der EU verstehen unter einer Politik der Menschenrechte eher ein Projekt der durchgreifenden Verrechtlichung internationaler Beziehungen, das die Parameter der Machtpolitik schon heute verändert.<sup>161</sup>

In this context Habermas perceives that the US employs the moral vocabulary of human rights in order to legitimise distinctly political aims and relates this to the Wilsonian tradition of fusing national interests with humanitarian aims. He poses the legitimate question of how the West would react to Chinese intervention in Asia justified by the rhetoric of human rights. Curiously, for this advocate of “self-critical reflection” this is not an accusation levelled against Germany and the Europeans who he clearly perceives as the more progressive of the Allies who have internalised the cosmopolitan aspirations he describes. For Habermas the problem of morality as a vague, relative concept can be addressed by its codification in law. In this sense, this mirrors the project of republican democracy which underpins his concept of *Verfassungspatriotismus*

Erst wenn die Menschenrechte in einer weltweiten demokratischen Rechtsordnung in ähnlicher Weise ihren “Sitz” gefunden haben wie die Grundrechte in unseren nationalen Verfassungen, werden wir auch auf globaler Ebene davon ausgehen dürfen, daß sich die Adressaten dieser Rechte zugleich als deren Autoren verstehen können.<sup>162</sup>

Thus Habermas seeks to realise the republican democratic core of civil society in the international context as a collective *Lernprozeß*. The motif of the *Lernprozeß* is interesting and is a term which has been employed by critical thinkers to

---

<sup>159</sup> *ibid.* and also further in Habermas. 1996. *op. cit.* p. 192-236, esp. pp. 214-15.

<sup>160</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>161</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>162</sup> *ibid.*

describe the post-war inclusion of the FRG into the enlightened political community of the West. In the post-unification, post-national constellation, it would appear, and this is the implication of Habermas argument, that Germany is no longer in need of instruction but rather more is itself in a position to promote this culture around the globe. For Habermas, of course, this testifies to a commitment to cosmopolitan values. Yet his older theme of “Westernisation” as only possible in Germany after the experience of Auschwitz can be employed to legitimise a particularist German responsibility. In this sense, Chancellor Schröder argued for a possible German military contribution to NATO’s intervention prior to the outbreak of conflict

Uns steht das Argument “Wegen der deutschen Geschichte geht es nicht” nicht mehr zur Verfügung. Bis hin zu denen, die im Kosovo geschützt werden müssen, besteht doch die Einsicht: Weil wir dort solche vielfältigen Verwüstungen angerichtet haben, sind wir besonders gefordert, Mord, ja vielleicht sogar Völkermord zu verhindern.<sup>163</sup>

Thus the German past, in this reading, represents not merely a moment of shame and dignified contrition but rather more appears as a historically founded, moral-political obligation to engage in world politics even via recourse to military intervention. This of course remains a highly problematic past and the signs of splits in the coalition and the refusal to countenance the deployment of ground troops are clear signs that the National Socialist past remains a problematic past. Despite this, it must be noted that the theme of the National Socialist past has undergone perhaps its most radical transformation in the German context in terms of reformulating a progressive international mission of the new state which claims the moral high ground. This appears a dangerous and inherently escalatory model of action whether it is codified in law or not. This clearly represents a qualitative departure from the *heilsamer Primat der Innenpolitik* of the Bonn republic. The shift in left-liberal intellectuals from a critique of the missionering *Weltpolitik* of the Wilhelmine era to a legally codified *Weltinnenpolitik* is, perhaps, a marginal distinction for those effected who appear to disqualify themselves from participation in the *herrschaftsfreier Diskurs* of the new cosmopolitan order. It is now time to draw some concluding remarks on the culture of contrition and the reconfiguration of national identity.

---

<sup>163</sup> cf Interview with Chancellor Schröder in Die Zeit, Nr. 6, 4. Februar, 1999. op. cit.

## 8. Concluding Remarks:

### National Identity: Compensation, Emancipation or Contrition?

Manche läßt sich verführen durch sein augenblickliches Daseinsinteresse. Es scheint ihm vorteilhaft, die Schuld zu bekennen. Der Entrüstung der Welt über das moralisch verworfene Deutschland entspricht seine Bereitwilligkeit zum Schuldbekentnis. . .Dazu kommt die fatale Neigung, durch Schuldbekentnis sich besser zu dünken als andere. In der Demut ist verborgen der böse Stolz auf sich selber. Im Sichbloßstellen liegt ein Angriff auf die anderen, die es nicht tun.<sup>1</sup>

As Jaspers penned his treatise on the question of guilt over half a century ago, Europe and Germany lay in rubble. For Jaspers, the responsibility to admit culpability for the recent past derived from the rootedness of the National Socialist regime in broader trends of German history and political culture. This was a form of contrition for the recent past which issued from the criminal, political, moral and metaphysical responsibility to the victims and, ultimately, God. As the above indicates, Jaspers was clearly aware of the potential abuse of contrition for self serving ends. Jaspers returned to the question of guilt twenty years later and, on the occasion of the 1965 *Verjährungsdebatte*, argued that an honest, self-critical reflection of the crimes of National Socialism could facilitate the still absent *sittlich-politische Revolution* incumbent on West German society.<sup>2</sup> Upon first glance, this may appear to contradict the sense of *Die Schuldfrage* which rejected any instrumentalisation of the National Socialist past for contemporary interests. Yet, during the 1960s this discussion proceeded against the background of perceptions of social and political continuities, particularly at an elite level, between National Socialist and West German state. The ethical and moral questions arising from the engagement with the National Socialist past during this period issued from the perception of social and political continuities of older, authoritarian elites and political mentalities which continued to influence the present.

It is a curious phenomenon to observe that the willingness of political culture to internalise the discourse of contrition for the past appears to have developed in inverse proportion to the perception of social , personal and political continuity between National Socialist and West German society. From this perspective, the willingness to

---

<sup>1</sup> Karl Jaspers, *Die Schuldfrage. Ein Beitrag zur deutschen Frage*. Artemis Verlag. Zürich . 1946. p. 82.

<sup>2</sup> Jaspers, *Gespräch mit Rudolf Augstein: "Für Völkermord gibt es keine Verjährung"*. in Jaspers. 1966. op. cit. p. 20.

express contrition for the National Socialist past must be viewed within its specific historical context. In this vein, one critic of the *Holocaustmahnmal* project justified his opposition in terms of the rather “safe” form of “self-criticism” expressed in this symbolic representation of the past.<sup>3</sup> Broder highlights that thirty years ago such a project would have been genuinely radical and politically useful in the context of the endurance of former elites in West German society. In the present, such “secondary” solidarity with the victims is infused with the experience of a contemporary society free from any significant personal or political continuity.

This contrasts starkly with the context within which SPD politician Arndt made his passionate and genuinely self-critical declaration *Ich weiß mich mit in der Schuld*.<sup>4</sup> Unlike many of his parliamentary colleagues, Arndt had actively supported individuals persecuted by the Nazi authorities. Yet he still considered himself partially responsible as he had not, like the majority, rushed out into the streets to attempt to publicly hinder the persecution of the Jews. On the opposite side of the debate, arguments for the abolition of the statute were equally related to genuine social and political interests and forces as Barzel’s defence of the honour of the *Wehrmacht* displayed.<sup>5</sup> This contrasts with contemporary dealings with the past and Lea Rosh noted, with disappointment, that in contrast to the passionate debates of the 1960s, the parliamentary debate of the planned *Holocaustmahnmal* in June 1999 was conducted in a rather bureaucratic manner and the speakers put her more in mind of accountants than statesmen.<sup>6</sup> Whilst the limitations of the *Verjährungsdebatten* should not be underestimated,<sup>7</sup> she articulates an interesting point regarding the altered social context within which contrition for the past is expressed.

The expression of contrition for the National Socialist past in contemporary society clearly attains a different political significance than during the 1960s and is informed

---

<sup>3</sup> Henryk M. Broder, *Abgestürzte Flugzeuge. Streitpunkt Holocaustmahnmal: Das wohlige Gefühl, etwas Gutes zu tun*. Der Tagesspiegel, 17. Januar 1995. in Jeismann. (Hg.) 1999. op. cit. p. 88.

<sup>4</sup> c:f Arndt in, *Verhandlungen des Deutschen Bundestages. 4. Wahlperiode. Stenographische Berichte*. Band 57. 170. Sitzung. Bonn. Mittwoch, den 10. März 1965. p. 8552.

<sup>5</sup> Barzel, *ibid.* pp. 8530.

<sup>6</sup> Rosh. 1999. op. cit. p. 142.

<sup>7</sup> Jaspers criticised the *Verjährungsdebatten* (with the exception of Arndt and Jahn’s contributions) as a self-serving PR exercise for the “party oligarchy”. c:f Jaspers. 1966. op. cit. p. 115.

with the underlying impression of a “historicised” National Socialist regime. This does not imply a relativisation of the moral-political significance of the National Socialist past as argued by *New Right* revisionist historians in an attempt to salvage the reputation of traditional nationalism. Rather more this reflects the fact that contemporary Germany is clearly a fundamentally different society than the Third Reich or the early post-war republic which was marked by elements of personal and political continuity. In this context, there is the danger that contrition becomes subjected to a process of instrumentalisation for contemporary political interests in the form warned of by Jaspers in 1946. The thesis has attempted to examine the tendencies contained within a reconfiguration of national identity towards such an instrumentalisation.

This is a problem which reflects perceptions of history as a medium of understanding human social development and as a source of authority for particular values in the present.<sup>8</sup> In turn, this reflects attitudes towards the concept of progress in human affairs. E.H Carr distinguished the “barren” understanding of progress as an automatic or inevitable progression to a clearly defined “goal” of history from “progressive development of human potentialities”.<sup>9</sup> For Carr, history enabled us to appreciate the present within a dynamic context of historical development. This sense of direction in history, or the belief that we have come from somewhere is closely linked, for Carr, with the belief that we are also going somewhere. Likewise, he states that a society which has lost its capacity to progress in the future will quickly cease to concern itself with its progress in the past. In this context, he stated that our view of history reflects our view of society.<sup>10</sup> This is evident from the thinkers and positions considered in this thesis and the reconfiguration of national identity which I have suggested.

In this context, it seems desirable to distinguish between approaching the past as a source of contemporary value creation and as an investigation into human social development. The discourses of national identity examined in this thesis look to the past as a source of authority and legitimacy for contemporary political values. This appears the case with both the right and left wing thinkers considered in this thesis. For right wing thinkers such as Hermann Lübke, history offers a source of “compensation” for the

---

<sup>8</sup> c:f Füredi. op. cit. 1992. esp. pp 59-87.

<sup>9</sup> E.H Carr, *What is History?* Penguin. London. 1987. p. 119.

<sup>10</sup> *ibid.* p. 132.

dynamism and perpetual technological-social change which is characteristic of modern society.<sup>11</sup> Whilst technological-economic modernisation is welcomed by these thinkers on the basis of their commitment to Free Market society, they react negatively to the processes of social and political change which this generates. In the concept of “national identity” right wing thinkers perceive a discourse which can both cultivate a sense of continuity in the face of change and also foster a sense of common value consensus in society mediated through the patriotism derived from a positive identification with the national past. In the “schizophrenia” of the neoconservative attitude towards modernism, critical historians perceived a rehabilitation of the ideological model of the *Sonderweg* which promoted economic-technological modernisation and simultaneously repressed emancipatory political currents.

In response to this, the discourse of *Verfassungspatriotismus* represented an attachment to the civil society of the classic bourgeois age which was mediated by the self-critical analysis of the *Sonderweg* and the reflection of the National Socialist past as a warning of the dangers of German nationalism and “conventional” patriotism. In this sense, for Habermas, West Germany only ever became a member of the progressive, Western, enlightenment political culture after the discrediting of the *Sonderweg* through the horrific experience of Auschwitz and the critical reflection of this in the 1960s.<sup>12</sup> Critical history and the practice of critical self-reflection of indigenous traditions through the *Sündenbewußtsein* thus served to affirm West Germany’s commitment to the revolutionary critique of tradition and also performed an important self-regulatory function in the critique of nationalism and unreflected patriotism.

Both “compensatory” and “emancipatory” approaches to the German past reflected distinct perceptions of contemporary society and a desire to foster authority through recourse to history. During the 1980s, the dichotomy between left and right was reflected in perceptions of identity. Whilst conservatives perceived in “historical consciousness” a medium of cultivating conventional national identity, left-liberal opinion understood critical history as an underlying foundation of post-national Constitutional Patriotism and a medium of social-political emancipation. In historical-political terms, these approaches were broadly orientated towards the modernist culture

---

<sup>11</sup> Lübke. 1992. op. cit. pp. 281-304.

of the enlightenment and republican popular sovereignty on the one hand and the romantic reaction to the enlightenment and the nation state unified under Bismarck, on the other.

Both conservative and left-liberal thinkers argued for the cultivation of normative social values cultivated from an interpretation of history. Whilst conservatives perceived in conventional national identity a source of compensation for the rigours of modern society and social pluralism, left-liberals sought to cohere the emancipation from nation state to post-national social state in 1945 and the 1960s via recourse to a critical reading of national traditions. These positions reflected different political approaches to the present. A society organised along the ideas of Lübke or Nolte would assume a very different form than one conceived by thinkers such as Habermas and Wehler. Whilst this remains the case in the present, the dichotomy between “compensatory” and “emancipatory” approaches to past and present has undergone significant change since the emergence of the discourse of identity during the 1970s which was accelerated and influenced by the events of 1989-90. Whilst the collapse of the post-war order and the unification of the German states clearly exercised a profound effect upon political culture, seeds of congruence between liberal conservative and left-liberal perspectives were sown in the common orientation towards the status-quo which was remained characteristic of both these approaches to West German society.

Taking a broader, macro-perspective, many commentators, from both left and right, trace broader paradigm changes back to the 1970s and the gradual erosion of the post-war consensus. For the left in particular, the 1960s represented the pinnacle of the post-war “Golden Age”<sup>13</sup> which, since the 1970s, has appeared in terminal decline. This is expressed in the decline of the mass political parties, state regulation of the economy, the terms of economic security and welfare of the population and relative increases in poverty both within Western societies and between the “First” world and the rest of the globe.<sup>14</sup> This development also charts increasing scepticism in political culture towards the concept of progression in human potentiality after the decline and discrediting of both revolutionary and reformist currents of the twentieth century left. The

---

<sup>12</sup> Habermas. 1992. *op. cit.* pp. 159-160.

<sup>13</sup> Hobsbawm. 1994. pp. 224-400.

<sup>14</sup> Thus Hobsbawm. 1994. *op. cit.* pp. 403-585.

neoconservative backlash of the 1970s saw Reagan and Thatcher in the US and Britain champion a “radical” conservatism predicated on the dismantling of the post-war consensus, the celebration of free-market economics which was ideologically cohered by a distinctly nationalist political tone. In the West German context these broader developments assumed, as they did everywhere, a specific form. Whilst the Kohl government displayed less of the US and British conservative vigour in challenging the post-war socio-economic consensus, in terms of political culture, the 1980s witnessed an attempt by the right to rehabilitate conventional terms of patriotism. This was predicated upon a relativisation or neutralisation of the political charge of the National Socialist past.

The collapse of the Cold War appeared to confirm these longer trends and were synthesised in perceptions of a victory of capitalism over the only social alternative of the twentieth century and the discrediting of the left. In the German context, these developments were a source of inspiration for conservative thinkers who quickly set about translating the academic debates over national identity from the 1980s into the political reality of unified Germany. Liberal, pro-Western conservatives celebrated the victory of the anticommunist *Westbindung* and the return to a state of national “normality”. This project was based in the perception that reunification of East and West German states during a period of anticipated “hard times” necessitated the cultivation of a conventional form of patriotism based upon the positive traditions of the nation. The return of Germany as a global player was perceived as existing in the continuity of the *Mittellage* and the historical *Mittelmacht* of Imperial Germany. *New Right* conservatives eschewed the pro-Western approach of their liberal colleagues and instead proclaimed the welcome return to more traditional forms of national autonomy and German nationalism which pre-dated the “Westernisation” of one half of Germany post 1945. The collapse of communism appeared to these thinkers to indicate the bankruptcy of a “modernist” political orientation and to offer a basis for relativising the moral-political charge of the National Socialist past.

Yet where conservative thinkers of both liberal and *New Right* variety appear mistaken is the assumption that this signifies an unproblematic return to “traditional” forms of national identity and patriotism based upon a positive reading of the national past. The negative reception of the idea of “utopia” and “ideology” appears to have exercised a

disintegrative impact upon all formulations of utopia or progress. Hobsbawm conceives in the socio-economic disaster zone of a Russian society reorganised along the principles of the Free Market the discrediting of this ideology and social practice.<sup>15</sup> Furthermore, in the weakening of the autonomy of national governments in the face of the globalisation of productive forces, many commentators perceive in the 1990s a waning of the integrative capacity of the nation state to foster both social prosperity and social loyalty<sup>16</sup>.

I would argue that in the second half of the 1990s a rather different configuration of national identity has emerged which represents a qualitatively new departure from both the conventions of traditional left and right wing discourse. Whilst the left may have lost faith in the ability of human society to progress to an alternative and superior social form, a section of the liberal conservative right has ditched its embarrassing commitment to romantic concepts of nationhood which, in the context of German division, played a necessary role in articulating the commitment to the “nation”. During the 1990s the most remarkable feature of liberal conservative approaches to the question of the German nation has been the clear willingness of conservative politicians to express unreserved contrition for the crimes of the past and to link this with the articulation of national identity. Likewise, left wing discourse has been transformed and many left-liberal thinkers have engaged with the project of constructing a “progressive” identity for the new nation. In this sense, not only have various left-liberals attempted to construct a progressive continuity for the German nation between 1848 and 1989 but more importantly the critical reflection of the National Socialist past has assumed centre role in the reformation of national identity.

It is with regards to this aspect of reflecting the National Socialist past that the traditional discourse of conservative national identity has been most fundamentally outflanked by left liberal constructions. Liberal conservatives arrive at the point of contrition for different reasons than left-liberals. Traditionally, self-critical reflection of the National Socialist past has been anathema to conservatives of both liberal and *deutsch-national* provenance. This resulted primarily from the perception that critical

---

<sup>15</sup> Hobsbawm. 2000. op. cit. p. 71.

<sup>16</sup> William Wallace, *Rescue or Retreat? The Nation State in Western Europe, 1945-93*. in Dunn. 1995. op. cit. p. 75. Kennedy. 1992. op.cit. Habermas. 1998. op. cit. pp. 65-90.

reflection of the National Socialist past and the articulation of “conventional” national identity were mutually antagonistic. During the Cold War, anticommunism offered a means of articulating a concept of Western democracy and also relativising the National Socialist past. This function has been clearly eclipsed in the post-Cold War world. In this context the anticommunist relativisation of the National Socialist past appears reduced to its anti-modernist core which posits the horrors of the past as evidence of the innate barbarism of humanity. The initial enthusiasm for the reconstruction of conventional national identity was an important feature of the early 1990s. Yet at the end of the 1990s there appeared little resonance for a return to “Prussian” virtues, Bismarck’s Imperial Germany, or indeed the ethnic concepts of nationality argued by *New Right* thinkers. Romantic nationalism no longer appears a discourse which could command social and moral authority in the domestic and international arena. In particular, the ascent of an anti-humanist paradigm of explanation of the National Socialist past no longer effects a relativisation or neutralisation of this past. It appears rather more the case that not only in Germany but throughout the West, the engagement with this period in history forms an important component of the rearticulation of social values. In this vein it was interesting to read British Prime Minister Blair declare that in remembrance of the Holocaust he perceived the basis of a “new form of patriotism” and hoped to emulate the German decision of 1996 to declare the 27 January a “National Day of Remembrance”.<sup>17</sup> In the German context, however, these developments clearly attain a specific importance.

It is within this context, of the exhaustion of conventional national compensatory and post-national emancipatory approaches at a time of value flux that reflection of the National Socialist past has assumed a new public-political role. This assumes the form of a reflexive, constructed identity creation, which invokes a sense of “learning the lessons” of the past in order to cultivate present and future social values and political orientation. Yet unlike conservative concepts of conventional national identity or left-liberal formulations of democratic-national traditions this is a form of national identity based upon reflection of the wholly negative past of National Socialism. In this sense, I speak of the ascendance of a “culture of contrition” which is defined by the acceptance of guilt for past transgressions and the willingness to “learn the lessons” of the past.

---

<sup>17</sup> c:f *The Guardian*. 27. January. 2000

In the 1990s this self-critical reflection of the National Socialist past appears the constitutive core of the reconfiguration of the concept of national identity based upon the “critical ownership” of the indigenous past.<sup>18</sup> This also appears to be a discourse which meets with a degree of popular resonance. Although the Goldhagen controversy, *Holocaustmahnmal*, *Wehrmachtaustellung* all drew criticism from the right, it would appear that in terms of broader political culture - and particularly the articulation of the legitimacy of the state in domestic and international affairs - that this right wing critique is in a position to mobilise backward prejudices and resentment but not society as a whole. The self critical reflection of indigenous traditions appears a broader phenomenon which has engulfed all Western states in the post-Cold War world. As Helmut Dubiel argues, it no longer appears that traditional representations of a glorious national past offer much of a positive orientation for the present.<sup>19</sup> It is in this context that Jürgen Habermas perceives the force of the “post-national constellation” which could at last break the republican core of the classic nation state from its cultural-particularist context. In this Habermas appears to pursue the “post-national” arguments of the division years and offer a model of emancipatory alternative.<sup>20</sup> In Habermas we find the most sophisticated articulation of this critical reformulation of national identity.

Habermas reflects upon the republican origins of the nation state which he seeks to continue at a supra-national level between nation states and a “post-national” level in terms of national identity. The bearers of this radical democratic model are the “autonomous public” of modern communication society comprised of the New Social Movements and their derivatives. For Habermas, the bourgeois national citizens of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century attained an abstract level of *solidarity* in the principle of equality of all before the commonly agreed law. Whilst this appears an accurate observation it appears equally revealing that Habermas prioritises the solidaristic virtues of this republican model over the aspiration to emancipation from tradition and, more to the point, the present which fuelled the “Age of Revolution”.

---

<sup>18</sup> Thus the formulation of a collective national identity based upon critical analysis and reflection in Barbara Heimannsberg, *The Work of Remembering. A Psychodynamic View of the Nazi Past as It Exists in Germany Today*. in Barbara Heimannsberg and Christopher J. Schmidt (ed.) *The Collective Silence. German Identity and the Legacy of Shame*. Jossey-Bass. San Francisco. 1993. pp. 163-170. here p. 164.

<sup>19</sup> Dubiel. 1997. op. cit. p. 292.

<sup>20</sup> Jürgen Habermas, *Es gibt doch Alternativen!* Die Zeit. Nr. 42 vom 8. 10. 1998.

Habermas traces this principle of democratisation and equality through the lean years of the German *Sonderweg* through to the post-war period of the social state. The breakdown of this highest regulation of the relationship between capitalism and democracy is offset by Habermas in the emancipatory milieu of the “autonomous public” of Greens, feminism, the NGOs and human rights groups. Habermas perceives in a global autonomous public, which is held together by fear in an involuntary *Risikogesellschaft*, the radical inheritors of this defeated legacy and the bearers of “cultural solidarity” in society which strives in an emancipatory direction unhindered by the instances of *Geld* and *Macht*. The shift from “work” to “communication” society and the eclipse of the classic form of the nation state necessitate the continuation of this radical, modernist core to a higher level. Europe is the next logical stage of this post-national progression towards an ultimately cosmopolitan order of world society.

Yet despite the radical pretensions of this model, it remain problematic in terms of its own emancipatory aspirations. This is a model of regulating the relationship between the areas of “cultural solidarity”, the state and capitalist interest which, however, has accepted the failure of state intervention to regulate the relationship between capitalism and democracy. In this context, all that politics can do is as he suggests is “follow” the market.<sup>21</sup> Habermas remains critical of the social effects of a ruthless neo-liberalism and growing inequality within the Western nations and between richer and poor nations around the globe. Yet the only counter to this which he offers is a discourse of social solidarity rather than one of social change. In a sense, this radical democratic model repeats in different form, the dichotomy in neoconservatism between socio-economic modernisation and political emancipation in inverted form. In this context, given the prioritisation of solidarity over change, Habermas appears to offer a radical version of the compensation sought after by the right in the certainties of a positive past. Habermas in essence constructs a radical legitimacy for the law and identity by formally removing it from the remit of political parties and “official” state instances (because *Sinn* cannot be administratively cultivated) and its transference to the area of “cultural solidarity” born by the “autonomous public”. In this model, however, the tendency is inherent for the arena of “cultural solidarity” itself to be “tamed” by state and capitalist interest for which it provides a new, radical, legitimacy. In this context it appears rather

---

<sup>21</sup> Habermas 1998. op. cit. p. 84.

more the case that it is these groups whose emancipatory aspirations have been “tamed”.<sup>22</sup> Habermas’ prime concern appears social regulation rather than social emancipation. His radical formulation of legitimacy is based upon the insight that the best form of legitimacy to which society can aspire is one based upon the principle of self-regulation.<sup>23</sup> In this sense, his plea that legitimacy must be legally mediated both in terms of domestic solidarity and international law appears to contradict his critique of social democracy during the 1970s and 1980s for attempting the bureaucratic administration of *Sinn*.

Habermas’ claim to continue the modernist project appears undermined by his scepticism towards the concept of historical progress. Whilst he perceives in this period a positive legacy to be developed and continued in the present, Habermas’ project of emancipation is limited by his scepticism towards the ability of men and women to rationally progress human society. Habermas thus falls back onto a concept of radical identity which is centred upon the past in the form of the 1960s reconfiguration of West Germany but more importantly in the collapse of the German nation in 1945. This is a concept of “broken identity” which is historically focused upon the National Socialist experience as the central event of the twentieth century.

This concept of history as *Dementi* appears to unite both the exhaustion of the progressive faith in historical emancipation and also of the conservative faith in national traditions. This is a reconfigured relationship to tradition which nevertheless demands social authority and brooks little contradiction. This appears as a discourse of self-critical reflection which not only reserves its critical faculties for the past rather than the present, but which also appears immune to critique itself. As various commentators noted during the NATO intervention in Kosovo in 1999, the claim to historical and moral responsibility via remembrance of the Holocaust serves to suffocate or discredit all critical faculties.<sup>24</sup> Those who dare question this self-critique or suggest elements of political instrumentalisation therein run the risk of being criticised as Holocaust deniers, anti-Semites or neo-fascist hyper-nationalists. There appear clear tendencies of political instrumentalisation of the National Socialist past both in terms of reconfiguring the

---

<sup>22</sup> c:f Christopher Lash 1995. op. cit. p. 27. Hobsbawm. 2000. op. cit. p. 98.

<sup>23</sup> Habermas. 1998. op. cit. pp. 226-30.

<sup>24</sup> Thus Kühnl. in Elsässer, Markowitz. 1999. op. cit. p. 178-9.

legitimacy of the state domestically and internationally through the medium of national identity. Despite the radical form which this identity assumes, its formulation of political values as national identity inevitably prioritises the past over the future and present and represents a formulation of particularist values. This matches well with contemporary scepticism towards the possibility of progress either in the form of a “return” to an ideal national community or of a departure into an alternative future - the past is no longer positively endowed and this reflects the belief that a positive, alternative future is either no longer tenable or indeed a criminal enterprise. All that remains is the horror of the National Socialist past as a stimulus to engage in historical consciousness and learn the lesson of the past.

In this context, I argue that the culture of contrition expresses both the perceived need to address the National Socialist past and, at the same time, cultivate authority from history for a concept of national identity. This is a discourse of identity which offers neither the compensation cultivated from the certainties of a positive national past and nor does it feature as a discourse of emancipation from the confines of the present into a potentially better, alternative future. It both reflects the perception that the national past no longer commands the authority to discipline society and also, in the National Socialist past, offers an example of the dangers of “utopian” aspirations to change in the future. This appears, in contrast to many conservative formulations, a discourse of collective national identity which is aware of its historical contingency and indeed of its own constructed character. Whilst this appears a more rational and open ended form of identity, it nevertheless feels compelled to legitimise contemporary values in the form of an obligating historical legacy.

Against this broader background of our age, contrition offers a medium of reconfiguring a sense of national identity which can mediate both domestic solidarity and articulate the moral-political authority of the nation on the international stage. In this, despite its radical pretensions in thinkers like Habermas, it ultimately repeats the problems to which he has spent his life criticising: the prioritisation of “tradition” as a source of contemporary political and moral direction and the division of humanity into a hierarchy of particularist units. Habermas is formally committed to universal values, radical critique of tradition and political emancipation. This is formulated however as a distinctly Western political culture and a progressive legacy which only the nations of

the “first World” can truly represent.<sup>25</sup> For Habermas, the post-national West German republic joined this community in the 1960s and this membership was predicated upon the historical and political-intellectual departure from the nation state. The contemporary German nation achieves rapprochement with this community through the concept of “broken” identity which predicates contemporary national “normality” upon the degree to which past “abnormality” is acknowledged and repented. Furthermore, Germany is not only a member of this Western political community, but appears for Habermas as a more faithful representative of progressive traditions than the US. Whilst his critical faculties perceive power-political motives underlying the US invocation of “morality”, he does not countenance this as a feature of German and European policy.

It is in this sense that the thesis perceives a reconfiguration of national identity and a culture of contrition which can be invoked to reformulate a more assertive sense of national self and a sense of moral-political mission internationally. This appears an “emancipatory” discourse of identity which seeks a more resonant form of social regulation domestically and a more “progressive” basis for international activity. It is these aspects of this discourse which appear to appeal to more sensitive liberal conservatives, such as Herzog, who acknowledge the discrediting of conventional patriotism and who seek a more positive and less compromised articulation of national “normality”.

The thesis perceives in contrition the potential basis for reconfiguring “compensation” for contemporary social problems via an “emancipatory”, “critical” discourse which has, however, shed all pretensions to purposeful change in the present in the search for a better, alternative future. As such, this is a discourse whose socially critical aspirations are muted by its underlying pessimism towards progress in human affairs and its reconfiguration of national particularism. It is out of this pessimism that the concept of national identity emerges. The thesis suggests that the serious problems of the contemporary world are not best met by the divisive concept of national identity - whether in traditional or “broken” form. The realisation of human potentialities appears better served by a non-dogmatic, positive attitude towards an open-ended future rather than the final certainties of a horrific past.

---

<sup>25</sup> Habermas. 1996. op. cit. p. 213.

## **Bibliography**

- Abendroth, Wolfgang (Hg.), Faschismus und Kapitalismus: Theorien über die sozialen Ursprünge und die Funktion des Faschismus, (Frankfurt/Main: Europäische Verlagsanstalt, 1972)
- Aly, Götz, Macht - Geist - Wahn: Kontinuitäten deutschen Denkens, (Berlin: Argon Verlag, 1997)
- Aly, Götz, 'Final Solution': Nazi Population Policy and the Murder of the European Jews, (London: Arnold, 1999)
- Assheuer, Thomas, 'Das Deutschlandspiel', Die Zeit, Nr 37, 03.09.9
- Assmann, Aleida und Jan, 'Niemand lebt im Augenblick', Die Zeit, Nr 50, 03.12.98
- Augstein, Rudolf, 'Wir sind alle verletzbar', Der Spiegel, 49 (1998)
- Aust, Stefan, Der Baader Meinhof Komplex, (München: Goldmann, 1998)
- Bachmeier, Christiane u.a., Mythen Knacken: 40 Jahre Westdeutsche Linke, (Darmstadt: Alexander Horn, 1989)
- Backes, Uwe, Eckhardt Jesse und Rainer Zitelmann (Hg.), Die Schatten der Vergangenheit: Impulse zur Historisierung des Nationalsozialismus, (Frankfurt/Main: Ullstein, 1992)
- Baring, Arnulf, Deutschland, was nun? Ein Gespräch mit Dirk Rumberg und Wolf Jobst Siedler, (Berlin: Siedler, 1991)
- Baring, Arnulf, 'Wir sind eine geborene Mittelmacht', Civis mit Sonde, Vierteljahresschrift für eine offene und solidarische Gesellschaft 1 (1996)
- Barkai, Avraham, 'Die deutschen Unternehmer und die Judenpolitik im „Dritten Reich“', Geschichte und Gesellschaft, 15 (1989)
- Baumann, Zygmunt, 'Das Jahrhundert der Lager', Frankfurter Hefte, 1 (January 1994)
- Bayrische Staatskanzlei: Rede des Ministerpräsidenten vom 8.5.1995 at: <http://www.bayern.de/Politik/Reden/1995-05-08.html>
- Behrens, Manfred (Mitverf.), Projekt Ideologie-Theorie. Das Argument: Argument Sonderband AS62, (Berlin West: Argument Verlag, 1980)
- Benz, Wolfgang (Hg.), Die Geschichte der Bundesrepublik Deutschlands, (Frankfurt/Main: Fischer, 1989) III

- Berger, Stefan, The Search for Normality. National Identity and Historical Consciousness in Germany since 1800, (Oxford. Providence: Berghahn Books, 1997).
- Berger, Stefan, 'Nationalism and the Left in Germany'. *New Left Review*. Barbarism and Enlightenment. 206/1994. pp. 55-70.
- Bisky, Lothar, Uwe-Jens Heuer und Michael Schumann (Hg.), „Unrechtsstaat“? Politische Justiz und die Aufarbeitung der DDR-Vergangenheit, (Hamburg: USA Verlag, 1994)
- Biedenkopf, Kurt, Helmut Schmidt und Richard von Weizsäcker u.a., Zur Lage der Nation, (Reinbek bei Hamburg: Rowohlt, 1994)
- Blackbourn, David and Geoff Eley, The Peculiarities of German History: Bourgeois Society and Politics in Nineteenth-Century Germany, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991)
- Blüm, Norbert, Reaktion oder Reform: Wohin geht die CDU? (Reinbek bei Hamburg: Rohwohlt, 1972)
- Bodensieck, Heinrich (Hg.), Preußen, Deutschland und der Westen: Auseinandersetzung und Beziehungen seit 1789, (Göttingen; Zürich: Muster Schmidt, 1980)
- Bracher, Karl Dietrich, Wolfgang Sauer und Gerhard Schulz, Die nationalsozialistische Machtergreifung: Studien zur Errichtung des totalitären Herrschaftssystems in Deutschland 1933/4, (Köln; Opladen: Westdeutscher Verlag, 1962)
- Breuilly, John, Nationalism and the State, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1993)
- Breuilly, John (ed.), The State Of Germany: The National Idea in the Making, Unmaking and Remaking of a Modern Nation State, (London: Longman, 1992)
- Broszat, Martin, Nach Hitler: Der schwierige Umgang mit unserer Geschichte, (München: DTV, 1988)
- Bubis, Ignatz, 'Moral verjährt nicht - Ignatz Bubis über die Auschwitz-Debatte und seine Auseinandersetzung mit Martin Walser und Klaus von Dohnanyi', Der Spiegel, 49 (1998)
- Bubis, Ignatz antwortet Martin Walser, 'Unterschwellig antisemitisch. Auszüge aus Rede zum 60. Jahrestag der Pogromnacht', Süddeutsche Zeitung, . 10.11.98
- Burleigh, Michael, Ethics and Extermination: Reflections on Nazi Genocide, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997)

Burleigh, Michael (ed.), Confronting the Nazi Past: New Debates on Modern German History. (London: Collins & Brown, 1996)

Burleigh, Michael and Wolfgang Wippermann, The Racial State: Germany 1933-1945. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996)

Bundesregierung - Jahresbericht zum Stand der Deutschen Einheit 1998, Arbeitslosenquoten 1997, at: <http://www.bundespraesident.de>

Buruma, Ian, The Wages of Guilt: Memories of War in Germany and Japan. (London: Vintage 1995)

Calleo, David, The German Problem Reconsidered: Germany and the World Order, 1870 to the Present. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980)

Carr, E.H., What is History? (London: Penguin, 1988)

Carr, William, The Origins of the Wars of German Unification. (London; New York: Longman, 1991)

Carstens, Karl, Zur deutschen Zukunft. (Mainz: v.Hase & Koehler, 1989)

Chwaszcza, Christine und Wolfgang Kersting (Hg.), Politische Philosophie der internationalen Beziehungen. (Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp, 1998)

Czitrich, Holger, Konservatismus and nationale Identität in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland: Der Konservatismus, seine Theorie und Entwicklung im Spiegel der Diskussionen über des Selbstverständnis der Bundesrepublik Deutschland seit Mitte der siebziger Jahre. (Frankfurt/Main: Peter Lang, 1989)

Dann, Otto, Nation und Nationalismus in Deutschland 1770 - 1990. (München: C.H. Beck, 1993)

Dann, Otto (Hg.), Nationalismus und sozialer Wandel. (Hamburg: Hoffmann und Campe, 1978)

Diner, Dan (Hg.), Ist der Nationalsozialismus Geschichte? Zu Historisierung und Historikerstreit. (Frankfurt/Main: Fischer, 1987)

Dönhoff, Marion, From Foe to Friend: The Makers of the New Germany from Konrad Adenauer to Helmut Schmidt. (London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1982)

Dorrman, Michael, 'Das Bismarck-Nationaldenkmal am Rhein', Zeitschrift für Geschichtswissenschaft, 12/44 (July 1996)

Dubiel, Helmut, Niemand ist frei von der Geschichte: Die nationalsozialistische Herrschaft in den Debatten des Deutschen Bundestags, (München; Wien: Carl Hanser, 1999)

- Dunn, John (ed.), Contemporary Crisis of the Nation State? (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995)
- Dutschke-Klotz, Gretchen, Jürgen Miermeister und Jürgen Treulieb (Hg.), Rudi Dutschke: Wurzeln und Spuren eines Aufbruchs, (Reinbek bei Hamburg: Rohwohlt, 1983)
- Eley, Geoff, Reshaping the Right: Radical Nationalism and Political Change after Bismarck, (London; New Haven: Yale University Press, 1980)
- Eley, Geoff, From Unification to Nazism: Reinterpreting the German Past, (London: Unwin Hyman, 1990)
- Eley, Geoff, 'Die „Kehrites“ und das Kaiserreich: Bemerkungen zu einer aktuellen Kontroverse', Geschichte und Gesellschaft, 4 (1978)
- Eliot, Simon and Beverley Stern (eds.), The Age of Enlightenment, (London: Ward Lock Educational, 1983) I
- Elsässer, Jürgen und Andrei S. Markovits (Hg.), „Die Fratze der eigenen Geschichte“: Von der Goldhagen-Debatte zum Jugoslawien-Krieg, (Berlin: Elefant Press, 1999)
- Engelhardt, Ulrich, Reinhardt Kosellek und Wolfgang Schneider, Werner Conze: Gesellschaft - Staat - Nation. Gesammelte Aufsätze, (Stuttgart: Ernst Klett, 1992)
- Engels, Frederick, Anti-Dühring: Herr Eugen Dühring's Revolution in Science, (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1969)
- Evans, Richard J., In Defence of History, (London: Granta, 1997)
- Evans, Richard J., Rereading German History: From Unification to Reunification 1800-1996, (London; New York: Routledge, 1997)
- Feldner, Heiko, 'Politischer Umbruch und Geschichtswissenschaft in Deutschland: Gedanken zur Debatte', Geschichte und Gesellschaft, 22, (1996)
- Fichte, Johann Gottlieb, Reden an die deutsche Nation, (Köln: Atlas, [n.d])
- Finkelstein, Norman G. and Ruth Bettina Birn, A Nation on Trial: The Goldhagen Thesis and Historical Truth, (New York: Henry Holt, 1998)
- Fischer, Conan, The German Communists and the Rise of Nazism, (London: Macmillan, 1991)
- Fischer, Conan, The Rise of Nazism, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995)

- Fischer, Conan (ed.), The Rise of National Socialism and the Working Classes in Weimar Germany, (Oxford: Bergahn, 1996)
- Fischer, Joschka, 'Kapitalismus oder Kapitalismus. Frontverläufe in der Auseinandersetzung um Republik, Sozialstaat und ökologischen Umbau', Blätter für deutsche und internationale Politik 3, 1996 (März)
- Fischer, Joschka, '„Es gibt keinen deutschen Sonderweg“', Süddeutsche Zeitung, 27.11.98
- Fischer, Fritz, 'Deutsche Kriegsziele, Revolutionierung und Separatfrieden im Osten 1914-1918', Historische Zeitschrift, 188/2 (Oktober 1959)
- Fischer, Fritz, 'Kontinuität des Irrtums. Zum Problem der deutschen Kriegszielpolitik im ersten Weltkrieg', Historische Zeitschrift, 191/1 (August 1960)
- Frei, Norbert, Vergangenheitspolitik: Die Anfänge der Bundesrepublik und die NS-Vergangenheit, (München: DTV, 1997)
- Frei, Norbert, 'Wie modern war der Nationalsozialismus?', Geschichte und Gesellschaft, 19 (1993)
- Fritsch-Bournazel, Renata, Europe and German Unification, (New York; Oxford: Berg, 1992)
- Fukuyama, Francis, The End Of History And The Last Man, (London: Penguin, 1992 )
- Fulbrook, Mary, Germany 1918 - 1990: The Divided Nation, (London: Fontana, 1991)
- Fulbrook, Mary, German National Identity after the Holocaust, (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1999)
- Füredi, Frank, Mythical Past. Elusive Future: History and Society in an Anxious Age, (London: Pluto, 1992)
- Gall, Lothar, 'Das Fundament der Bundesrepublik entstand 1848 - Interview', Der Spiegel, 7 (1998)
- Gauly, Thomas M. (Hg.), Die Last der Geschichte: Kontroversen zur deutschen Identität, (Köln: Berend von Nottbeck, Verlag Wissenschaft und Politik, 1988)
- Gehlen, Arnold, 'Religion und Ethik', Merkur, XXIII. Jahrgang/Heft 10 (Oktober 1969)
- Gellner, Ernest, Encounters with Nationalism, (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995)

- Glaser, Hermann, Die Mauer fiel, die Mauer steht: Ein deutsches Lesebuch 1989 - 1999, (München: DTV, 1999)
- Goldhagen, Daniel Jonah, Hitler's Willing Executioners: Ordinary Germans and the Holocaust, (London: Abacus, 1998)
- Goldhagen, Daniel, 'Das Versagen der Kritiker', Die Zeit, Nr 32, 02.08.96  
Schröder, Interview, Die Zeit, Nr 6, 04.02.99
- Goldhagen, Daniel, 'Eine "deutsche Lösung" für den Balkan. Um das Völkermord zu beenden, muß die Nato Serbien besiegen, besetzen und umerziehen', Süddeutsche Zeitung, 30.04.99
- Comment by Daniel Jonah Goldhagen on: A Nation on Trial: The Goldhagen Thesis and Historical Truth, at: <http://www.goldhagen.com>
- Graf von Krockow, Christian, Die Deutschen vor ihrer Zukunft, (Reinbek bei Hamburg: Rohwohlt, 1995)
- Gransow, Volker und Konrad Jarausch (Hg.), Die deutsche Vereinigung: Dokumente zu Bürgerbewegung, Annäherung und Beitritt, (Köln: Berend von Notbeck, Verlag Wissenschaft und Politik, 1991)
- Grass, Günter, Deutscher Lastenausgleich: Wider das dumpfe Einheitsgebot Reden und Gespräche, (Frankfurt/Main: Luchterhand, 1990)
- Greiffenhagen, Martin, Von Potsdam nach Bonn: Zehn Kapitel zur politischen Kultur Deutschlands, (München: Piper, 1986)
- Greiffenhagen, Martin und Sylvia, Ein schwieriges Vaterland: Zur politischen Kultur Deutschlands, (Frankfurt/Main: Fischer, 1981)
- Günther, Rolf, Politische Reden in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland, (Berlin: Diesterweg, 1981)
- Habel, Fritz Peter und Helmut Kistler, Entscheidungen in Deutschland 1949-1955, (Bonn: Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung, 1997)
- Habermas, Jürgen, Die nachholende Revolution: Kleine Politische Schriften VII, (Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp, 1990)
- Habermas, Jürgen, Die Moderne - eine unvollendetes Projekt: Philosophisch-politisch Aufsätze 1977 - 1992, (Leipzig: Reclam, 1992)
- Habermas, Jürgen, Die Normalität einer Berliner Republik: Kleine Politische Schriften VIII, (Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp, 1995)
- Habermas, Jürgen, Die Einbeziehung des Anderen: Studien zur politischen Theorie, (Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp, 1996)

- Habermas, Jürgen, Die Postnationale Konstellation, (Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp, 1998)
- Habermas, Jürgen, 'Es gibt doch Alternativen!', Die Zeit, Nr 42, 08.10.98
- Habermas, Jürgen, 'Der Zeigefinger: Die Deutschen', Die Zeit, Nr 14, 31.03.99
- Habermas, Jürgen, 'Bestialität und Humanität: Ein Krieg an der Grenze zwischen Recht und Moral', Die Zeit, 29.04.99
- Habermas, Jürgen on National Unification in Germany and Korea, New Left Review, 219, (Sept/Oct 1996)
- Habermas, Jürgen, 'Universität in der Demokratie - Demokratisierung der Universität', Merkur, XXI. Jahrgang/Heft 5 (Mai 1967)
- Habermas, Jürgen, 'Demokratisierung der Hochschule - Politisierung der Wissenschaft?' Merkur, XXIII. Jahrgang/Heft 7 (Juli 1969)
- Habermas, Jürgen, 'Was heißt heute Krise? Legitimationsprobleme im Spätkapitalismus', Merkur, XXVII. Jahrgang/Heft 4/5 (April/Mai 1973)
- Habermas, Jürgen, 'Die Einheit der Vernunft in der Vielheit ihrer Stimmen', Merkur, XXXXII. Jahrgang/Heft 1 (Januar 1988)
- Haffner, Sebastian, Anmerkungen zu Hitler, (München: Kindler, 1978)
- Haffner, Sebastian, Von Bismarck zu Hitler: Ein Rückblick, (München: Knauer, 1987)
- Hahn, Hans J. and Eva Kolinsky (eds.), Germany In The Eighties, (Modern German Studies. Association for Modern German Studies (AMGS), Aston University; Goethe Institute, London: Nr 2, October 1986)
- Hallmann, Hans (Hg.), Revision des Bismarckbildes: Die Diskussion der deutschen Fachhistoriker, (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1972)
- Hansen, Eckhardt, Wohlfahrtspolitik im NS-Staat: Motivationen, Konflikte und Machtstrukturen im „Sozialismus der Tat“ des Dritten Reiches, (Augsburg: Maro Verlag, 1991)
- Hartmann, Geoffrey H. (ed.), Bitburg in Moral and Political Perspective, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986)
- Hartung, Klaus, 'Schröders Schlußstrich. Die SPD sonnt sich in der Gnade der späten Geburt', Die Zeit, Nr 18, 23.04.98
- Heigert, Hans, Deutschlands falsche Träume, oder: Die verführte Nation, (Frankfurt/Main: Büchergebilde Gutenberg, 1969)

Heimannsberg, Barbara and Christoph J. Schmidt (eds.), The Collective Silence: German Identity and the Legacy of Shame, (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1993)

Herf, Jeffrey, Divided Memory: The Nazi Past in the Two Germanys, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997)

Hertel, Gerhard, Der Weg zur „Wende“: Die Bundesrepublik Deutschlands in der Ära Schmidt: 1974 - 1980, (Regensburg: S. Roderweg Verlag, 1988)

Herzog, Roman, Die Zukunft der Erinnerung: Wegmarken deutscher Geschichte, Hrsg. Von Michael Rutz (Stuttgart: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, 1999)

Herzog, 'Wir wollen unser entsetzen nicht konservieren', Der Tagesspiegel, 08.05.95

Hettling, Manfred und Paul Nolte (Hg.), Nation und Gesellschaft in Deutschland: Historische Essays, (München: C.H. Beck, 1996)

Hildebrandt, Klaus, Das vergangene Reich: Deutsche Außenpolitik von Bismarck bis Hitler 1871-1945, (Stuttgart: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, 1995)

Hildebrandt, Klaus, 'Reich-Großmacht-Nation: Betrachtungen zur Geschichte der deutschen Außenpolitik 1871-1945', Historische Zeitschrift, 259/2 (Oktober 1994)

Hobsbawm, E.J., The Age of Revolution: 1789-1848, (New York: Mentor, 1962)

Hobsbawm, E.J., Nations and Nationalism since 1780: Programme, Myth, Reality, (Cambridge: Canto, 1991)

Hobsbawm, E.J., Age of Extremes: The Short Twentieth Century 1914-1991, (London: Abacus, 1999)

Hobsbawm, E.J., The New Century, (London: Little, Brown, 2000)

Horkheimer, Max und Theodor W. Adorno, Dialektik der Aufklärung: Philosophische Fragmente, (Frankfurt/Main: Fischer, 1998)

Hughes, Michael, Nationalism and Society: Germany 1800 - 1945, (London: Edward Arnold, 1988)

Jakubowski, Franz, Ideology and Superstructure in Historical Materialism, (London: Pluto, 1990)

James, Harold, Vom Historikerstreit zum Historikerschweigen: Die Wiedergeburt des Nationalstaates, (Berlin: Corso bei Siedler, 1993)

- James, Harold, A German Identity: 1770 to the Present Day, (London: Phoenix, 1994)
- Jaraus, Konrad H. (ed.), After Unity: Reconfiguring German Identities, (Providence: Berghahn, 1997)
- Jaraus, Konrad H., 'Normalisierung oder Re-Nationalisierung?', Geschichte und Gesellschaft, 21, (1995)
- Jeffery, Charlie (ed.), Recasting German Federalism: The Legacies of Unification, (London; New York: Pinter, 1999)
- Jeismann, Karl-Ernst (Hg.), Einheit - Freiheit - Selbstbestimmung: Die Deutsche Frage im historisch-politischen Bewußtsein, (Bonn: Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung, 1987)
- Jeismann, Michael (Hg.), Mahnmal Mitte: Eine Kontroverse, (Köln: DuMont, 1999)
- Jeismann, Michael, 'Der Schutz des allmächtigen Autors. Rechtsanwälte lesen lassen: Wie Daniel Goldhagen mit seinen Kritikern verfährt', Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung, (04.11.97)
- Jenkins, Keith, Why History? Ethics and Postmodernity, (London; New York: Routledge, 1999)
- Jesse, Eckhardt (Hg.), Totalitarismus im 20. Jahrhundert: Eine Bilanz der internationalen Forschung, (Bonn: Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung, 1996)
- Jesse, Eckhardt, und Armin Mitter (Hg.), Die Gestaltung der deutschen Einheit: Geschichte - Politik - Gesellschaft, (Bonn: Bouvier, 1992)
- Joas, Hans und Martin Kolik (Hg.), Der Zusammenbruch der DDR, (Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp, 1993)
- Joll, James, The Origins of the First World War, (London; New York: Longman, 1992)
- Kaes, Anton, Martin Gay and Edward Dimendberg (eds.), The Weimar Republic Sourcebook, (London: University of California Press, 1994)
- Kaltenbrunner, Gerd-Klaus (Hg.), Konservatismus in Europa: Unveränderte Sonderaufgabe des Buches „Rekonstruktion des Konservatismus“ für die Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung, (Freiburg: Rombach, 1972)
- Kearney, Richard, Modern Movements in European Philosophy, (Manchester; New York: Manchester University Press, 1994)
- Kennedy, Paul, The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers: Economic Change and Military Conflict from 1500 to 2000, (London: Fontana, 1989)

Kennedy, Paul, Preparing for the Twenty-First Century, (London: HarperCollins, 1993)

Kennedy, Paul and Anthony Nicholls (eds.), Nationalist and Racialist Movements in Britain and Germany before 1914, (London: Macmillan, in association with St Anthony's College, Oxford, 1981)

Knittel, Manfred, Die Legende von der „Zweiten Schuld“: Vergangenheitsbewältigung in der Ära Adenauers, (Berlin: Ullstein, 1993)

Kocka, Jürgen, Vereinigungskrise: Zur Geschichte der Gegenwart, (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1995)

Kohl, Helmut, Preserving Creation, Mastering the Tasks of the Future: Government Policy 1987 - 1990, (Bonn: Press and Information Office of the Federal Government, 1987)

Kohl, Helmut, Ich wollte Deutschlands Einheit, (Berlin: Ullstein; Propyläen Verlag, 1996)

Kolb, Eberhard, Die Weimarer Republik, (München: Oldenbourg, 1988)

Kosellek, Reinhard, 'Wer darf vergessen werden? Das Holocaust-Mahnmal hierarchisiert die Opfer', Die Zeit, Nr 13, 19.03.98

Koslowski, Peter, Robert Spaemann und Reinhard Löw (Hg.), Moderne oder Postmoderne? Zur Signatur des gegenwärtigen Zeitalters, (Weinheim: Civitas Resultate Band 10. Acta Humaniora, VCH Verlagsgesellschaft, 1986)

Kozicki, Henry (ed.), Developments in Modern Historiography, (Hampshire: Macmillan, 1998)

Kühnl, Reinhard, Texte zur Faschismus und Kontroversen, (Reinbek bei Hamburg: Rohwohlt, 1979)

Kühnl, Reinhard (Hg.), Streit ums Geschichtsbild: Die „Historiker-Debatte“ Dokumentation, Darstellung und Kritik, (Köln: Pahl-Rugenstein, 1987)

Langguth, Gerd, Protestbewegung: Entwicklung - Niedergang - Renaissance. Die neue Linke seit 1968, (Köln: Berend von Nottbeck, 1983)

Langguth, Gerd, Die Intellektuellen und die nationale Frage, (Frankfurt/Main;New York: Campus, 1997)

Langwiesche, Dieter (Hg.), Das deutsche Kaiserreich 1867/71 bis 1918. Bilanz einer Epoche, (Freiburg;Würzburg: Ploetz, 1984)

Laqueur, Walter, Facism: A Reader's Guide: Analyses, Interpretations, Bibliography, (Hampshire: Wildwood House, 1988)

- Lasch, Christopher, The Revolt of the Elites and the Betrayal of Democracy, (London: W.W. Norton, 1995)
- Leicht, Robert, 'Warum Walser irrt. Auch die Nachgeborenen haften für das Erbe von Auschwitz', Die Zeit, Nr 50, 03 12.98
- Leonhard, Wolfgang, Die Revolution entläßt ihre Kinder, (Frankfurt/Main; Berlin: Ullstein, 1962)
- Leonhard, Wolfgang, Das kurze Leben der DDR: Berichte und Kommentare aus vier Jahrzehnte, (Stuttgart: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, 1990)
- Loewy, Hanno (Hg.), Holocaust: Die Grenzen des Verstehens. Eine Debatte über die Besetzung der Geschichte, (Reinbek bei Hamburg: Rohwohlt, 1992)
- Lübbe, Hermann, Zwischen Trend und Tradition: Überfordert uns die Gegenwart? (Zurich: Edition Interfrom, 1981)
- Lübbe, Hermann, Der Fortschritt und das Museum: Über den Grund unseres Vergnügens an historischen Gegenständen, (Leeds: The 1981 Bithell Memorial Lecture. Institute of Germanic Studies, University of London: W.S. Maney and Son Ltd, 1982)
- Lübbe, Hermann, Im Zug der Zeit: Verkürzter Aufenthalt in der Gegenwart, (Berlin; Heidelberg: Springer-Verlag, 1992)
- Lukács, Georg, Werkauswahl Band 2: Schriften zur Ideologie und Politik, (Neuwied; Berlin: Luchterhand, 1967)
- Lukács, Georg, The Destruction Of Reason, (London: Merlin, 1980)
- Lukács, Georg, History and Class Consciousness: Studies in Marxist Dialectics, (London: Merlin, 1990)
- Luks, Leonid, 'Bolschewismus, Faschismus, Nationalsozialismus - verwandte Gegner?' Geschichte und Gesellschaft, 14 (1988)
- Lutz, Heinrich (Hg.), Franz Schnabel: Abhandlungen und Vorträge 1914 - 1965, (Freiburg im Breisgau: Herder, 1970)
- Maier, Charles S., 'Geschichtswissenschaft und „Ansteckungsstaat“', Geschichte und Gesellschaft, 20 (1994)
- Malik, Kenan, The Meaning of Race: Race, History and Culture in Western Society, (Hampshire: Macmillan, 1996)
- Marsh, David, Germany and Europe: The Crisis of Unity, (London: Mandarin, 1994)

- Marx, Karl, Die Frühschriften, (Stuttgart: Kröner, 1968)
- Marx, Karl and Frederick Engels, Collected Works, (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1976) VI
- Mason, Tim, Social Policy in the Third Reich: The Working Class and the 'National Community', (Providence; Oxford: Berg, 1993)
- Mayer, Arno J., Why Did The Heavens Not Darken: The "Final Solution" in History, (London, Verso, 1990)
- McAdams, A. James, 'The Honecker Trial: The East German Past and the German Future', The Review of Politics, 58/1 (1996)
- Mechtersheimer, Alfred, Friedensmacht Deutschland: Plädoyer für einen neuen Patriotismus, (Berlin: Ullstein, 1993)
- Mertes, Michael, Steven Muller and Heinrich August Winkler, In Search Of Germany, (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 1996)
- Meyer, Thomas, Identitäts-Wahn: Die Politisierung des kulturellen Unterschieds, (Berlin: Aufbau Taschenbuch Verlag, 1997)
- Möller, Horst (Hg.), Der rote Holocaust und die Deutschen: Die Debatte um das „Schwarzbuch des Kommunismus“, (München: Piper, 1999)
- Mohr, Reinhard, 'Total Normal?', Der Spiegel, 49 (1998)
- Mommsen, Hans, Die verspielte Freiheit: Der Weg der Republik von Weimar in den Untergang 1918 bis 1933, (Berlin: Propyläen, 1989)
- Mommsen, Hans, Der Nationalsozialismus und die deutsche Gesellschaft. Ausgewählte Aufsätze Zum 60. Geburtstag, Hrsg. von Lutz Niethammer und Bernd Weisbrod (Reinbek bei Hamburg: Rohwohlt, 1991)
- Mommsen, Hans, 'Die dünne Patina der Zivilisation. Der Antisemitismus war eine notwendige, aber keineswegs hinreichende Bedingung für den Holocaust', Die Zeit, Nr 36, 30.08.96
- Mommsen, Hans, 'Die Realisierung des Utopischen: „Die Endlösung der Judenfrage" im „Dritten Reich"', Geschichte und Gesellschaft, 9 (1983)
- Mommsen, Hans, 'Noch Einmal: Nationalsozialismus und Modernisierung', Geschichte und Gesellschaft, 21, (1995)
- Mommsen, Hans, 'Hauptstadt in Bewegung', Süddeutsche Zeitung, 11.02.99
- Morley, David and Kevin Robins, Spaces of Identity: Global Media, Electronic Landscapes and Cultural Boundaries, (London: Routledge, 1997)

- Müller, Heiner, „Jenseits der Nation“ (Berlin: Rotbuch, 1991)
- Müller, Heiner, „Zur Lage der Nation“ (Berlin: Rotbuch, 1990)
- Müller, Jan, 'From National Identity to National Interest: The Rise (and Fall) of Germany's New Right', German Politics, Vol.8 Nr. 3 (December 1999)
- Naimark, Norman M., The Russians in Germany: A History of the Soviet Zone of Occupation, 1945 - 1949, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997)
- Neumann, Michael, 'Die Pickelhaube steht mir nicht', Die Zeit, Nr 32, 30.07.98
- Nicolson, Harold, The Age of Reason (1700-1789), (London: Panther, 1968)
- Niethammer, Lutz, 'Wir wollen mit uns ins reine kommen', Der Spiegel, 8 (1999)
- Nipperdey, Thomas, Gesellschaft, Kultur, Theorie: Gesammelte Aufsätze zur neueren Geschichte, (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1976) (Kritische Studien zur Geschichtswissenschaft: Band 18, Hrsg. Von Helmut Berdng u.a.)
- Nipperdey, Thomas, Nachdenken über die deutsche Geschichte: Essays, (München: DTV, 1991)
- Nolte, Ernst, Deutschland und der Kalte Krieg (1974), (Stuttgart: Ernst Klett, 1985)
- Nolte, Ernst, 'Kapitalismus - Marxismus - Faschismus', Merkur, XXVII. Jahrgang/Heft 2 (Februar 1973)
- Norris, Christopher, What's Wrong with Postmodernism? Critical Theory and the Ends of Philosophy, (Hemel Hempstead: Harvester, 1990)
- Penny, H. Glenn III, 'The Museum für Deutsche Geschichte and German National Identity. in Central European History', Vol. 28, Nr. 3 (1995)
- Peukert, Detlev, The Weimar Republic: The Crisis of Classical Modernity, (London: Penguin 1993)
- Pulzer, Peter, German Politics, 1945-1995, (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1999)
- Rauschnig, Hermann, Make and Break with the Nazis: Letters on a Conservative Revolution, (London: Secker and Warburg, 1941)
- Redaktion diskurs (Hrsg.) Küss den Boden der Freiheit: Texte der Neuen Linken. Aurora Verlagsauslieferung, Edition ID-Archiv im internationalen Institut für Sozialgeschichte, Amsterdam 1991

- Ritter, Gerhard, 'Der Anteil der Militärs an der Kriegskatastrophe von 1914', Historische Zeitschrift, 193/1 (August 1961)
- Ritter, Gerhard, 'Eine neue Kriegsschuldthese? Zu Fritz Fischers Buch "Griff nach der Weltmacht"', Historische Zeitschrift, 194/3 (Juni 1962)
- Rosh, Lea, „Die Juden, das sind doch die anderen“: Der Streit um ein deutsches Denkmal, (Berlin; Wien: Philo, 1999)
- Rousseau, Jean-Jacques, Discourse on Political Economy and the Social Contract, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999)
- Rudé, George, Revolutionary Europe 1783-1815, (London: Fontana, 1975)
- Ruge, Wolfgang, Deutschland 1917-1933: Von der Großen Sozialistischen Oktoberrevolution bis zum Ende der Weimarer Republik, (Berlin Ost: VEB Deutscher Verlag der Wissenschaft, 1982)
- Schabowski, Günter, Das Politbüro: Ende eines Mythos Eine Befragung, (Reinbek bei Hamburg: Rowohlt, 1990)
- Schäuble, Wolfgang und Markus Meckel, 'Unity via Article 23 or 146', Der Spiegel, 12 (19.März 1990)
- Scheffler, Wolfgang, 'Ein Rückschritt in der Holocaustforschung', Der Tagesspiegel,. 03.09.96
- Schoenbaum, David, Hitler's Social Revolution: Class and Status in Nazi Germany 1933-1939, (New York: W.W. Norton, 1980)
- Schwilk, Heimo und Ulrich Schacht (Hg.), Die selbstbewußte Nation: „Anschwellender Bocksgesang“ und weitere Beiträge zu einer deutschen Debatte, (Frankfurt/Main;Berlin: Ullstein, 1994)
- Seitz, Norbert, 'Die kalte Revision. Zur Aktualität der 8. Mai Rede Weizsäckers', Frankfurter Hefte, 5 (Mai 1995)
- Shirer, William L., The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich: A History of Nazi Germany, (London: Secker and Warburg, 1971)
- Spengler, Oswald, Der Untergang des Abendlandes: Umriss einer Morphologie der Weltgeschichte, (München: DTV, 1993)
- Streit, Christian, 'Ostkrieg, Antibolschewismus und „Endlösung“', Geschichte und Gesellschaft, 17 (1991)
- Stürmer, Michael, Die Grenzen der Macht: Begegnung der Deutschen mit der Geschichte, (Berlin: Siedler bei Goldmann, 1994)

- Stürmer, Michael (Hg.), Die Weimarer Republik: Belagerte Civitas (1980), (Königstein/Ts: Athenäum Verlag, 1985)
- Stürmer, Michael, 'Das ruhelose Reich', Berliner Morgenpost, 14.01.96
- Taylor, A.J.P., The Course Of German History: A Survey of the Development of German History since 1815, (London: Methuen, 1961)
- Taylor, A.J.P., From Napoleon to the Second International: Essays on Nineteenth-Century Europe, (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1993)
- Verfassung der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik (from 6 April 1968), Staatsverlag der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik, Berlin: 1971.
- Verfassung der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik (from 7 October 1974), Staatsverlag der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik, Berlin: 1976
- Verhandlungen des Deutschen Bundestags: Stenographische Berichte. 11. Wahlperiode 173/178. Band.151, 1989. Bericht zur Lage der Nation im geteilten Deutschland. 173. Sitzung, Mittwoch, den 8. November.1989. p. 13018, p. 13026
- Verhandlungen des Deutschen Bundestags: Stenographische Berichte. 4. Wahlperiode 170. Sitzung, Mittwoch, den 10. März 1965
- von Laak, Dirk, Gespräche in der Sicherheit des Schweigens: Carl Schmitt in der politischen Geistesgeschichte der frühen Bundesrepublik, (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1993)
- Warren, John, The Past and its Presenters: An Introduction to Issues in Historiography, (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1998)
- Weber, Hermann, Die DDR 1945-1990, (München: Oldenbourg, 1993)
- Wehler, Hans-Ulrich, Bismarck und der Imperialismus, (Köln; Berlin: Kiepenhauer und Wietsch, 1969)
- Wehler, Hans-Ulrich, Krisenherde des Kaiserreiches 1871-1918: Studien zur deutschen Sozial- und Verfassungsgeschichte, (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1979)
- Wehler, Hans-Ulrich, The German Empire 1871-1918, (Leamington Spa; Hamburg; New York: Berg, 1985)
- Wehler, Hans-Ulrich, Entsorgung der deutschen Vergangenheit? Ein polemischer Essay zum „Historikerstreit“, (München: C.H. Beck, 1988)
- Wehler, Hans-Ulrich (Hg.), Moderne Deutsche Sozialgeschichte, (Köln; Berlin: Neue Wissenschaftliche Bibliothek, Kiepenhauer und Witsch, 1968)

Wehler, Hans-Ulrich, 'Nicht der Rede wert? Der Politik fällt zu dieser Revolution nichts ein', Die Zeit, Nr 5, 22.01.98

Wehler, Hans-Ulrich, 'Wie ein Stachel im Fleisch', Die Zeit, Nr 22, 24.05.96

Wehler, Hans Ulrich, '„Moderne“ Politikgeschichte? Oder: Willkommen im Kreis der Neorankeaner vor 1914', Geschichte und Gesellschaft, 22 (1996)

Weidenfeld, Werner (Hg.), Die Identität der Deutschen, (München; Wien: Carl Hanser, 1983)

Weidenfeld, Werner (Hg.), Geschichtsbewußtsein der Deutschen. Materialien zur Spurensuche einer Nation, (Köln: Berend von Nottbeck, Verlag Wissenschaft und Politik, 1987)

Weisbrod, Bernd, 'Der englische „Sonderweg“ in der neueren Geschichte', Geschichte und Gesellschaft, 16 (1990)

Weißmann, Karlheinz, Der Weg in den Abgrund: Deutschland unter Hitler 1933-1945, (Berlin: Propyläen Verlag, 1995)

Wilharm, Irmgard (ed.), Deutsche Geschichte 1962-1983: Dokumente in zwei Bänden, (Frankfurt/Main: Fischer, 1985) I

Willms, Bernhard und Paul Kleinewerfers, Erneuerung aus der Mitte: Prag - Wien - Berlin: Diesseits von Ost und West, (Herford: Busse und Seewald, 1988)

Wilson, Keith (ed.), Forging the Collective Memory: Government and International Historians through Two World Wars, (Providence; Oxford: Berghahn, 1996)

Winkler, Heinrich August, Weimar 1918 - 1933: Die Geschichte der ersten deutschen Demokratie, (München: C.H.Beck, 1993)

Winkler, Heinrich August, 'Die sperrige Revolution', Die Zeit, Nr 5, 22.01.98

Winkler, Heinrich August, 'Separatismus auf Filzlatschen. Der Marxismus-Leninismus ist tot, und der Weg nach Europa führt über Berlin', Die Zeit, Nr 43, 15.10.99

Wolf, Frank und Eberhardt Windaus (Hg.), Studentenbewegung 1967-9: Protokolle und Materialien, (Frankfurt/Main: Peter Stern, 1977)

Wolffsohn, Michael, Eternal Guilt: Forty Years of German-Jewish-Israeli Relations, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993)

Zitelmann, Rainer, Hitler: Selbstverständnis eines Revolutionärs, (Leamington Spa; Hamburg; New York: Berg, 1987)

Zitelmann, Rainer, Adenauers Gegner: Streiter für die Einheit.  
(Erlangen;Bonn;Wien: Straube, 1991)