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German National Identity after the Holocaust

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This is an admirable feat of constructive compression. It achieves synthesis without sacrificing clarity, a feature that has become one of the author's hallmarks. What makes this book the more impressive is that within small confines it argues so effectively against reductionism in the study of national identity. To begin with one of Fulbrook's conclusions, we see that, contrary to the beliefs of Germanophobes on the terraces in international football matches and in Westminster, the German nationalism(s) of today are as much shaped by unification as *vice versa*. National identity, it follows from this collection of diverse thematic and case studies, may not therefore be considered static, and it is certainly not monolithic. Rather it evolves along a multitude of trajectories, and is more the collective product of smaller, sometimes amorphous communities than of the simple dichotomies - particularly the east-west one with which readers will be best acquainted - that have all too frequently been presented to us.

For a start it is good to read someone taking the GDR 'seriously'. This has happened too rarely since 1989 with its comfortable western assumptions about final victory in the ideological war with communism. Fulbrook's expertise in east German history means that she is capable of studying both sides of the divide with equal precision, and thus she does not settle for what is effectively criticism of the east and admiration of the west, or for the equation of 'objectivity' and liberalism which is often inherent to that position. The advantage *German National Identity after the Holocaust* has, for instance, over the work of Jeffrey Herf (*Divided Memory: the Nazi Past in the Two Germanies*) is its greater attention to detail and history from below. As well as the pronouncements of German elites, non-official voices are listened to extensively here, if always with Fulbrook's caveats about the impossibility of garnering those elusive 'private' thoughts for which social historians long.

Clearly the process of picking and choosing from the past *was* heavily manifest in the early years of the GDR, with the emphasis on non-Jewish, non-homosexual victims, and particularly on the communist

elements of the opposition to Nazism, beyond all proportion to the actual scale of that resistance. Conversely, the 'sandwich principle' employed by some of the more courageous eastern historians ensured that beneath the Marxist gloss their works contained much that would be considered respectable beyond the iron curtain. As for the Federal Republic, while the official line has long been one of contrition, its citizens were happy to glean the message of general innocence in the crimes of Nazism from the elite-centred Nuremberg trials in the 1940s-50s, and some of its finest scholars were prepared to swallow Helmut Kohl's agenda of drawing a 'final line' (Schlußstrich) under the German past in the 1980s.

One phenomenon which Fulbrook touches upon is worthy of greater enquiry. She repeatedly and correctly mentions that the fate of the Roma and Sinti has for the most part been ignored everywhere. This is even more true of the largest single category of victims of Nazism outside direct military combat: non-Jewish Soviet citizens. The three million plus POWs murdered outright or indirectly, and the millions of civilians who died as a result of bombardment, starvation, 'anti-partisan' and 'pacification' actions are almost never mentioned in public mantras of remembrance, right down to the multinational conference on Holocaust memorialisation in Stockholm at the beginning of 2000. For obvious reasons the Jewish fate has assumed centrality in the memory of Nazi crimes, but when so many deaths are ignored, the question arises - with repercussions for the development of German identity 'after the Holocaust' - as to what extent the focus upon that genocide as a totemic moral reference point has created blinkers to other crimes against humanity. (The institution of a Holocaust memorial day in Britain appears set fair to blind participants to the other murders of the Nazis and to the genocides committed elsewhere throughout the Twentieth Century.) Insofar as the past was reshaped on both sides of the iron curtain, however, this is yet one more illustration that the use of 'history' in 'democratic' and authoritarian regimes respectively is to be differentiated more in terms of degree than of nature. Fulbrook strongly reinforces that point.

As is inevitably the case in a work of this scholarly scope but of such comparatively diminutive physical dimensions, however, there are episodes which individual readers will deem worthy of more attention, particularly if, as the book's billing informs us, it is to be of widespread use to postgraduates and established scholars as well as members of the public and advanced undergraduates. For instance, the very brief subsection 'contested cultural representations' (pp. 75-77) only really considers Rolf Hochhuth's *Der Stellvertreter* (The Deputy / Representative) as contrasted over one paragraph with Peter Weiss's *Die Ermittlung* (The Investigation). These have both been examined much more extensively elsewhere, and the rich vein of which they are only a small part is scarcely tapped here.

It is also noteworthy that the Ulm Einsatzgruppen trial of 1958 was not the first legal accounting with the actions of those killing squads, as the author avers. (p.69) One of the earliest war crimes trials of the Second World War, conducted by the Soviet Government at Kharkov in the Ukraine in 1943, also concerned mobile police units and local collaborators. More relevantly, one of the trials conducted at Nuremberg under American auspices subsequent to the better-known trial of Göring *et al* was exclusively devoted to the Einsatzgruppen. During the war, and therefore in its immediate aftermath at least, more was probably known in Germany about the shooting massacres of the SS and police than about the extermination camps. The greater numbers and diversity of people - including soldiers of the Wehrmacht - directly associated with these crimes than those of the eastern camps might be one of the several reasons why the former have been submerged and the latter promoted in the 'memory' of genocide.

Indeed, a book concerned as this is with 'landscapes of memory' (chapter two) would certainly have benefited from consideration of that roving feature of the German landscape for the past few years, the exhibition 'Vernichtungskrieg: Verbrechen der Wehrmacht 1941 bis 1944' ('War of annihilation: crimes of the Wehrmacht 1941 to 1944'). However, the exhibition receives only cursory mention (p. 230) in the closing lines of the penultimate chapter. This is arguably the most important of the many modern German museums and memorial centres concerning Nazism and its crimes because more than any other didactic device it challenges notions of the breadth of participation in mass murder. And participation, in this case, implicated not just out-and-out Nazis, or the SS, but also one of the pillars of pre-Nazi German society. The reactions to the exhibition - the usual liberal hand-wringing and self-abasement (often sterile and predictably present at every periodic 'rediscovery' of a different element of Nazi-German criminality), but accompanied

across a spectrum incorporating condemnations and vehement criticisms from ex-servicemen, and even terrorist action - would both have complemented one of Fulbrook's ongoing themes about the accepted locus of guilt in German society, and problematised further any assumption that Germany has fully 'come to terms' with the Nazi period.

Further to the point about omissions, key publications and decisions on the Berlin Holocaust memorial presumably materialised too late for incorporation into this volume, for the shape the project has finally assumed - incorporating plans for a vast library on the crimes of the Hitlerzeit - would to an extent nullify, in this particular case, Fulbrook's criticisms of an obsessive 'memorial culture' less concerned with questions of 'sober pedagogy'. (We might also consider here the fact that much of the most penetrating recent research on Nazi 'Vernichtungspolitik' is being conducted by non-Jewish German scholars.) The debates around the focus of the memorial - whether it should concern the perpetrating society or the victims - would also have provided an interesting counterpoint to the author's earlier discussion (pp. 40-41) of concentration camps as lieux de mémoire.

On a more general plane, though in the main the author's observations of dissonance are very well employed, there is an argument for allowing some generalisations about the related processes of memory and identity formation. It may be the case, as the aforementioned Jeffrey Herf has argued, that the Holocaust provided no useful grounding for what have elsewhere been called 'foundation myths' of the post-war world; and thus that the worst parts of the Hitlerzeit would have been elided anyway, regardless of the precise, diverse courses of developments on the micro level.

Similarly, we must not downplay the function fulfilled by political elites in successfully shaping and legitimating particular interpretations of the past. The work of Norbert Frei (*Vergangenheitspolitik: Die NS-Vergangenheit und die Anfänge der Bundesrepublik*), and Frank Buscher (*The US War Crimes Program in Germany*) illustrate the key role of CDU politicians, representatives of the military and the German churches in the 1950s in pressing for that most crassly-labelled of all political aspirations in the FRG, the 'final solution of the war criminals question', when, in the first instance at least, the general public was not overly concerned about the issue. Meanwhile, Robert Moeller (in his *War Stories: the Search for a Useable Past in the Federal Republic of Germany*) has shown how adept Adenauer's government was in anticipating and exploiting concerns about German victims of the war: turning the focus on the 'Volksdeutsch' expellees from eastern Europe, and prisoners-of-war still incarcerated in the USSR, not to mention the rapes perpetrated by Soviet forces in 1945, provided a counterpoint of German suffering and perhaps a spurious equation of victimhoods with Jews, while bolstering anti-communism. This agenda also anticipated some of Andreas Hilgrüber's meta-contentions in the *Historikerstreit* arguments of a later decade, and while citing it is not to denigrate the very real suffering involved, or to suggest that communities were not themselves actively mourning their own fate, it is to observe that elites did have the power markedly to alter the context in which grieving took place, and the larger meaning attached to it. It is a fact, after all, that Armistice Day assumes a bigger role than ever in the public consciousness in Britain today as a result of the successful campaigning of the British legion.

Fulbrook, as is her prerogative, is not though prepared to admit what she calls a 'postmodernist view' of history. (p. 104) Nevertheless, she is admirably and cogently 'deconstructionist' in her dismantling of metanarratives of political development and public consciousness of the Nazi past. It is perhaps the chief strength of the book that she attacks the generalisations that were for so long *de rigeur* in examinations of national development - it is by no means to subscribe to the *Sonderweg* theory though to state that Germany's path through the Twentieth Century has been sufficiently singular to make it an ideal study for the debunking of any quasi-universal explanation. (And the opening essay 'National identity and German history could stand alone as an introductory survey and critique of the major trends in intellectual thought on nationalism.) The idea of the 'imagined' community, which has for some time been at the centre of sociological thought on nationalisms and nationhood, is here applied and modified without the homogenising effect that the approach can elicit. Thus, along with the breadth and intertextuality of her work - landscape is examined alongside historiography, ritual presented with opinion poll and individual recollection juxtaposed with high-political pronouncement - Fulbrook creates a remarkably variegated

picture of the meanings and uses of the past over time and between individuals, groups, regions and regimes.

It is refreshing to read a work of the survey type which is honest enough to have as its central message 'this is complicated', rather than 'here is the answer'. Fulbrook's work is the more valuable for that. The benefit that will be accrued by reading this book vastly outweighs the limitations that size has imposed upon it. Moreover, the slight haziness as to its target audience does not stretch to one group: time-pressed young lecturers such as this reviewer will gladly reach for *German National Identity after the Holocaust*. It is an insightful yet concise survey of the key areas of enquiry in this ever-more popular field, and its bibliographical references make it an ideal point of departure for further study.

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