Intellectuals, Nationalism, and the Exit from Communism: The Case of East Germany

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In Eastern Europe, succeeding generations of intellectuals have been at the forefront of first creating and then demolishing the communist regime. Because communism was ultimately based on ideas ("logocracy," says C. Milosz),[1] the abandonment of these ideas by intellectuals turned dissidents was a critical factor in the regime's demise. As Daniel Chirot (1991:20) emphasizes, communism died more from ideological exhaustion and "utter moral rot" than from its economic malaise or the pressure of organized opposition movements. The dissident intellectuals, powerless as they seemed to be, delivered the decisive blow when they denounced the regime's underlying ideology as ritualized lies out of touch with reality.[2]

When intellectuals in Eastern Europe adopted the role of dissidents, they also fundamentally revised the political role that intellectuals had played since their first appearance as a corporate group in the age of the French Revolution.

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[1] Following Martin Lipset (1959:333), I define as intellectuals "all those who create, distribute, and apply *culture*, that is, the symbolic world of man, including art, science, and religion." However, conditioned by the socio-geographical context of European communism and the temporal context of post-World War II history, the actual range of intellectuals considered in this study is much narrower: left-wing intellectuals with an explicitly political orientation. The focus on intellectuals shall not deny that many other, more mundane and material factors were involved in the breakdown of communism, such as the popular discontent generated by a deteriorating shortage-economy. The focus on intellectuals also forces us to take more seriously their typical product—ideas—than is typically done in comparative politics or historical-comparative sociology. Finally, what an anonymous reviewer criticized as the "philosophical" character of this essay only reflects the character of a regime that has been built upon "ideas" more than any other in modern history. Excellent, furthergoing discussions of intellectuals in communism can be found in Verdery (1991) and Torpey (1993a).

[2] The anti-communist manifesto of Eastern European dissidence is Havel (1990).

Tocqueville (1955:140) noted that the "men of letters" who had taken the political lead during the last phase of the ancien régime tended to "indulge in abstract theories and generalizations" and to be "quite out of touch with practical politics."[3] Ever since, the "intellectual mode," dramatically reaffirmed by Communist Revolution of 1917, had been "proselytism, moral mission, and cultural crusade" (Bauman 1987:174), that is, to make the world safe for abstract reason.[4] In this light, when Eastern European intellectuals renounced utopia, they also performed an extraordinary act of self-denial. In Michael Walzer's (1988) terms, Eastern European intellectuals abandoned the role of the "stereotypical leftist critic" who cuts himself off from his society to discover truth and universal values. Instead, they adopted the role of the "national-popular" critic, who remains grounded in his society and, like Hamlet's glass, turns his society's eyes into its very soul. This conversion prepared the way for the "heroic comeback" of the intellectuals in 1989 (Lepenies 1990:12).

In abrogating utopia and shedding the pretensions of virtuoso activism and privileged access to truth, Eastern European dissidents moved out of the doctrinaire orbit of communism. As Elemer Hankiss (1990:273) put it, the "freedom" so achieved was an "ironical" one and consisted of a newly won capability to "think in alternatives." To be sure, any alternative to communist regimes, with their disregard for civil liberties and national self-determination, could not but aspire to the model of the constitutional regimes of the West, with their stress on the rule of law and political pluralism. This led to the ironic yet consequent result that dissidents in the East adopted a language that in the West the political center used to calm down an agitated periphery: The open society was held against the straitjacket of utopianism; defensive antipolitics took the place of virtuoso activism; and the personal should not be political but be rescued from politics. In the laconic words of Gyorgi Konrad, the alternative to communism was to obtain "what the West already (had)"[5]

The turn from revisionism to dissidence as the premier mode of communist

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[3] Tocqueville (1955) delivered the prototype of a sociology of intellectuals that does not take the universalistic claims of intellectuals at face value but grounds them in particular group interests. He was followed, among others, by Weber (1977), Schumpeter (1942), Gouldner (1979), and Bourdieu (1984).

[4] Edmund Burke, the first modern counter-intellectual, spoke of "geometrical policy" (Burke 1987:201).

[5] Quoted in Kennedy 1992:63. An anonymous reviewer criticized this article for its "conceptual premise" of the "superiority and desirability of the Western political and economic model." To this it may be replied that Eastern European dissidence was itself premised on the "superiority" of the Western model, with the notable exception of East Germany. This opens up the interesting question why East Germany was different. The empirical thrust of this comparison leaves the normative question of the actual "superiority and desirability" of the West untouched. If a certain preference for the West nevertheless shines through the following analysis, then *mea culpa*. As one could argue with modernization theory, opting for the West is not a question of mere preference but in accordance with the functional prerequisites of modern, differentiated societies (see Parsons 1964; Willke 1992). In general, I see no point in belittling the historical caesura of 1989.

opposition politics[6] went along with the invocation of national discourse,[7] which allowed the tapping of the most powerful resource in the exit from communist rule. Without national discourse the dissidents' quest for human rights and citizenship lacked political concreteness: The collectivity had to be defined to which these rights and citizenship apply. In a world of "bounded citizenries" (Brubaker 1992), the concept of nation forms the logical comple- ment to the concept of citizenship rights because nations are the collectivities within which these rights are made actual. The nation is individual self- determination transposed to the level of the aggregate: It is the "self" if self- determination is to have a political sense (see Bubner 1991:15). Nationalism so understood also allowed the bundling of the grievances of society under communism, such as the forced disruption of tradition and cultural identity: Nationalism was the memory that withstood the force of organized forgetting.

Compared with Eastern European intellectuals, the fate of East German intellectuals has been less fortunate. As Wolf Lepenies (1990:13) states, "the heroes of the (East German) revolution . . . were not intellectuals." In East Germany, intellectuals did not become dissidents in the Eastern European sense. In fact, the resulting lack of an indigenous counterelite with popular legitimacy facilitated the rapid extinction of East Germany's statehood. Why did East German intellectuals remain basically loyal to the communist regime, and why did even the existing opposition groups not turn to the "ironical freedom" of dissidence?

As I would like to argue in the following, East Germany was different because national discourse could not be mobilized against communist rule. Thus, there was no language for oppositionists to "think in alternatives." The historical separation of the German concept of nation from civic principles of liberty and democracy, which was completed by Nazism, made a national opposition to communism impossible; the divided postwar nation became couched in a Manichaean dualism of capitalism versus socialism that proved immune to revision and even secured East Germany an irredeemable advan- tage. The Hungarian dissident, Miklos Haraszti, once argued (1987:160) that the opposition in his country was helped by the fact that Hungarian commu- nism was not *sui generis:* "Communism . . . was imposed upon us by an invading and then occupying foreign army. Dissent, however feeble, can at least draw upon a democratic past" (Haraszti 1987:160). Such a position was not possible in East Germany, where Nazism overshadowed any reference to

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[6] "Revisionism" is within-system opposition that seeks to transform communism on its own grounds—"socialism with a human face," as the reformers of the Prague Spring called it. "Dissidence" abandons the utopian premises of socialism and invokes standards of individual rights and liberties that are denied by communist regimes (see Joppke 1994). After the failure of the Prague Spring of 1968, opposition politics in East-Central Europe moved from revisionism to dissidence—with the notable exception of East Germany.

[7] "National discourse" is understood here as the use of national symbolism and rhetoric to express demands for individual rights and collective self-determination.

the past. The legacy of Nazism even obliterated the fact that the GDR was an occupied country. As a leading oppositionist put it, "We always thought (the occupation) serves us right. Why did we have to start WW II?[8] In turn, in its anti-fascist clothing, communism in East Germany was indigenous as in no other country in Eastern Europe—at least in the view of most intellectuals.[9] Communism meant redemption from the sins of the past, organized forgetting was welcomed here. Against this backdrop, regime opposition had to be a paradoxical "opposition against [one's] own consent," as the playwright Heiner Müller (1990:93) put it aptly.

However, an analysis that stresses only the discontinuities of German history would be incomplete. In addition, important cultural continuities, the most important being a deep suspicion of Western-style liberal democracy in the German *Sonderweg* tradition, kept East German intellectuals in communism's orbit. Against this backdrop, the question of why dissidence could not exist in East Germany will be answered in reference to both discontinuous pull and continuous push factors. On the pull side, there was no legitimate national discourse that could be mobilized against the communist regime. On the push side, socialism had indigenous roots in German culture, which could be uniquely preserved in a society that defined itself as socialist and which made it particularly difficult for intellectuals to abandon it. In historical analysis, single-factor explanations are always incomplete, as would be an account of East German exceptionalism that does not include its German component.

THE DELEGITIMIZATION OF NATIONAL DISCOURSE

In her imposing study of Soviet dissent, Ludmilla Alexeyeva (1987:451) gets to the core of the meaning of dissidence, which, she argues, abandons existing ideological schemes and "start(s) from the very beginning," is grounded on a basic "social instinct" to escape lies and manipulation, and operates in moral rather than political terms, "so that righteous persons and not politicians emerged" (1987:451). Some of the comparisons she draws are interesting: Gandhi's opposition to British rule in India, the resistance of the early Christians in the Roman Empire, and the black civil rights movement in the United States. Obviously, demands for rights and liberty are always raised by—or in the name of—a bounded collectivity. In Eastern Europe, this collectivity has been the nation.

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[8] Bärbel Bohley, quoted in Philipsen (1993:139).

[9] This is not to deny that "antifascism" provided a legitimation for most communist regimes set up in East-Central Europe after World War II. But East Germany's "anti-fascism" was more permanent and constitutive of the regime than elsewhere because it was tied to East Germany's self-delimitation from previous and contemporaneous German regimes. As Sigrid Meuschel states (1992:29), "among great parts of the intelligentsia antifascism has legitimated the GDR-regime until its very end." This could certainly *not* be said of any other communist regime in East-Central Europe. A brilliant assessment of "antifascist resistance" in the political mythology of postwar Europe is Judt (1993).

Here it is important to differentiate between two types of nationalism in Eastern Europe.[10] The first, and today most prevalent, type is ethnic nationalism. It reflects the shortcomings of the Wilsonian nation–state solution for Eastern Europe which forced incompatible ethnic groups into a common state (as in Yugoslavia) or left sizable ethnic minorities outside their national homeland state (for example, ethnic Hungarians in Romania or Slovakia). Ethnic nationalism is mostly situated at the intra-state level or becomes entangled in a complex triangle between ethnonational minority, territorial state, and external national homeland elite (Brubaker 1994). But ethnic nationalism is largely indifferent to the political form of the state; only its ethnic composition matters. In this regard ethnic nationalism differs from a second, civic type of nationalism. Civic nationalism in Eastern Europe is directed not against other ethnic groups in the same state but against foreign Great Power rule that keeps national collectivities in quasi-colonial dependence. Civic nationalism has been at the root of the great upheavals against communist rule in Eastern Europe: the Hungarian Revolution in 1956, the Prague Spring in 1968, and the Polish Solidarity movement from 1980 to 1981 (see Rothschild 1989).

However implicitly, dissidence is linked to civic nationalism. This linkage is particularly clear in the two countries in which the turn from revisionism to human rights dissidence has been most pronounced: Poland and Czechoslovakia. The Polish intelligentsia has always understood itself as the preserver of Poland's national and cultural identity against external domination. As Jacques Rupnik (1979:80) observed, the central feature of Poland's post-revisionist opposition politics was the "interplay between the defence of national sovereignty and of individual civil rights." The same holds true for Czechoslovakia, particularly after the Warsaw Pact invasion in 1968. "For the first time I have the sensation of belonging to the nation," wrote Pavel Kohout in the wake of this traumatic event (quoted in Rupnik 1989:217). In Czechoslovakia, the linkage between dissidence and civic nationalism was easily established because "the dominant tradition was itself democratic" (Skilling 1966:118). Accordingly, a characteristic feature of the dissident opposition around Charter 77 was liberal nationalism in the legacy of Thomas Masaryk, the founder of the first interwar republic (Kusin 1979). Even in Hungary, where the imperial past and the existence of a huge ethnic diaspora outside its territory conditioned a strong current of ethnic nationalism, civic nationalism in the "insurrectionary tradition" (Schoepflin 1977:135) has been an important factor in the exit from communism. This was particularly evident in the 1989 ceremonial reburial of Imre Nagy, the hero of the 1956 revolution, which marked the watershed event in the transition to democracy. In all these cases, dissidence was premised on a new perspective on communism as a quasi-

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[10] See the excellent account given by Hammond (1966).

colonial imposition by a foreign power that denied national collectivities the right of self-determination (see Feher 1988).[11]

Only in East Germany did such a Yaltaesque perspective on communism not take hold. There was no dissidence in East Germany because no unambiguous nation existed in which it could be grounded. For historical reasons, the recourse to the German nation had become inconceivable for democratic movements, and if the regime's definition of membership was accepted, as indeed it was by most opposition groups, it resulted in being caught in the socialist self-definition of the "German Democratic Republic" (GDR).

The German Concept of Nation

In the modern world, it is inconceivable *not* to be the member of a nation. As Ernest Gellner (1983:6) put it, "A man must have a nationality as he must have a nose and two ears." Although nations always present themselves in the primordial form of language, ethnicity, or history (Smith 1986), they are also constructed and thus amenable to reconstruction and change. Following Pierre Bourdieu, it is useful to conceive of the nation not as a fixed entity or thing but as a discursive "field of struggle," in which competing forces try to define and redefine its content and boundary.[12] Along these lines, Katherine Verdery (1993:41) sees "nation as a construct, whose meaning is never stable but shifts with the changing balance of social forces." Such a constructivist view of the nation allows the shifting meaning of nation to be seen over time and these shifts to be viewed as the outcome of social struggle. But there are certain parameters within which the struggle over the meaning of nation occurs. In terms of structure, the concept of nation exhibits tension between the plurality of the civic component and the unity of the ethnic component; and in terms of time, the outcomes of previous conflicts narrow the range of future revisions.

The development of the German concept of nation may be reconstructed as the successive depletion of its civic component, culminating in the assault of the ethno-racial *Volksgemeinschaft* on the civic *Weltgesellschaft*. This is ironic, since the modern concept of nation was born under the civic premises of citizenship and democracy. But after its inception in the Romantic reaction to the Enlightenment, the German concept of nation presented itself as an ethnic countermodel to the civic nations of the West (see Greenfeld 1992:ch. 4).

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[11] By the same token, human rights dissidence in Russia, actually the first of its kind in the communist world, was aligned with the nationalist movements of the non-Russian republics (*e.g.*, the Baltic states) but *not* with Russian nationalism (see Alexeyeva 1987:ch. V). This reflects the fusion of Russian and communist hegemony as well as the uniquely authoritarian, antidemocratic features of Russian nationalism. However, the Russian case does not disprove the postulated linkage between dissidence and civic nationalism because post-revisionist dissidents like Sakharov became involved in a discursive struggle over the (re)definition of Russian nationhood. They now form the camp of "reformers" who try to remodel the Russian nation along Western-style democracy and pluralism.

[12] The "logic of fields" is elaborated in Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992:94–115).

Friedrich Meinecke's (1970) classic distinction of state nation (*Staatsnation*) and cultural nation (*Kulturnation*) is still helpful to make sense of this essential difference. In the state nations of the West, the processes of state and nation building coincided, so that the nation became defined through the political principles of constitution and citizenship. In Germany, where for historical and geopolitical reasons the process of state building occurred belatedly and remained incomplete, the nation became defined as a pre-political community of culture, language, and ethnicity. While itself an historical outcome conditioned by Germany's relative backwardness vis-à-vis its Western neighbours, this ethnocultural notion of nationhood became perpetuated over time and planted the seeds for the xenophobia and racial exclusivism associated with the meaning of Germanness ever since (see Forsythe 1989). When German nationalism first emerged under liberal premises in the Napoleonic period, it was already a cause opposed to the French, thus the ethnic was put above the civic component. Heinrich Heine, himself an exponent of liberal nationalism, noticed this ethnic bias from the start, when he compared the cosmopolitan patriotism of the French with the parochial patriotism of the German, "who hates all that is foreign, and no longer wants to be a citizen of the world or a European, but only a narrow German."[13]

Although the ethnocultural component was dominant from the outset, the meaning and boundary of the nation was still subject to conflict and change. The changing face of German nationalism represents *in extremis* the development of European nationalism in the nineteenth and early twentieth century.[14] One may differentiate among an early liberal phase, which culminated in the aborted revolution of 1848 and in which the concept of nation stood for the democratic transformation of the feudal order; a conservative middle phase of official nationalism, which became dominant with the foundation of the German Reich in 1871 and in which traditional elites used national rhetoric to repress political opposition at home while fostering military aggression abroad; and a militant third phase of integral nationalism, which peaked with the Nazi movement and in which the nation became a weapon in the struggle of the extremist right against the liberal-democratic order of the Weimar Republic. By the end point of this development, the notions of nation and democracy had become antithetical.

The German concept of nation thus took on some lasting characteristics that made it unsuitable as an asset in democratic struggles. First, the meaning of nation became devoid of a civic creed. "To be German," argues Helmut Plessner (1959:33), "was and is simply the expression of a reality." There is no "golden age," no foundation myth, no common symbols that could bind

all groups and classes and inspire civic action across time. As it was, the reference to Germanness is less an argument to stand up against despotism than an explanation why despotism was possible. An East German dissident expresses this lack of a civic creed very clearly: "The history of our nation offers little occasion for celebration. . . . There's no reason to be a German other than that one already is one."[15] In lieu of a civic creed, the instrumental values of economic success and geopolitical power gave German national identity the necessary sense of direction.[16] Second, following the ethnic code of us versus them, the German nation has primarily constituted itself *ex negativo,* through an act of delimitation: externally in the wars against France; internally in the exclusion of certain groups such as the Social Democrats, the Catholics, or the Jews. The German concept of nation thus became more like a weapon than a unifying symbol, the property of some but not of others. General De Gaulle once refused to arrest a heretical Sartre because he was "also France." This would be difficult to imagine in Germany, in which the great heretics from Heine and Marx to Rosa Luxemburg were never acknowledged as national heroes but instead were forced to emigrate or worse (see Greiffenhagen 1986:105). This leads to the third and decisive point: that since the late nineteenth century the nation had been the property of the political right. This was evident in the fate of the Weimar Republic, which offered the nominal chance to reconcile nation and democracy. But a host of militant new movements which were inspired by the experience of World War I and which absorbed impulses of the antimodernist youth movements of the time, of which the Nazi movement was only one, succeeded in turning national discourse into a weapon against the first German democracy. The antidemocratic new nationalism of the Weimar period differed from its Wilhelminian precursor in its chiliastic militancy and anti-bourgeois radicalism.[17] Its reduction of nation to blood-affiliated *Volk* carried the ethnic streak of the German concept of nation to its racist extreme, tainting irretrievably German nationness.

The Legacy of Nazism

While the aversion of democratic movements to the nation has deep historical roots, only the experience of Nazism has permanently foreclosed nationalism as a counter-discourse to communism. The German defeat in 1945 marked the deepest caesura ever experienced by a modern nation. This was the zero hour (*Stunde Null*) in which all historical continuities were shattered, and renewal was the unanimous imperative of the day. If there has ever been a common

[15] Lutz Rathenow, quoted in Torpey (1993a:259).

[16] The importance of economic success in German national identity is stressed by James (1989).

[17] The best study of Weimar nationalism remains Sontheimer (1992), which was originally published in 1962.

reference point in German national consciousness, it was provided by the Holocaust and the crimes of the Nazi regime. But this reference point was a negative one that made any positive national identification impossible. Anti-nationalism became a dominant habitus, especially among the intellectuals, the category that had previously conducted and crafted national discourse in its liberal and less liberal shades. While the German division naturally made the "national question" a perennial issue, the very meaning of Germanness remained peculiarly untouched, and an ersatz political identification was sought in such new ideas as European integration, socialism, or the fierce opposition to the latter in terms of anticommunism.

The central problem for both German postwar states was how to separate themselves from the Nazi past (see Lepsius 1989). Identity had to be built on a delicate balance of continuity and discontinuity. A radical break with the past was needed because otherwise no moral and political renewal was possible. On the other hand, without a basic national continuity, no mastery of the past was possible because the subject of guilt and remembrance had vanished—the complete denial of continuity would amount to exculpation. The two German successor states to the Nazi regime went in opposite directions to solve this dilemma, and the strategies they chose decisively influenced the shape of opposition movements in both societies. West Germany tended to move toward the pole of continuity. This expressed itself in its self-understanding as the legal successor (*Rechtsnachfolger*) to the German Reich of 1871 and in its attempt to restore and rebuild the democratic foundation of the Weimar Republic. This is not to deny that the need for a "total renewal" (A. Andersch) was felt as urgently in the West as in the East. But a secular regime had to abrogate utopia in favour of Popperian "piecemeal engineering." "Paradise exists only in utopian novels," said Theodor Heuss, West Germany's first president. "We shall be happy without Paradise if only we get back to the firm ground of a free life" (quoted in Alter 1992:159). East Germany, by contrast, opted for the radical break and utopia. As Andrzej Szcypiorski puts it, the GDR was designed as a "purification from the sin of fascism" and was "founded on the principles of expiation and absolution."[18] Here, the task of confronting the past was not, as in West Germany, left to the moral discretion of the individual but was elevated to the central program of state and society. Programmatic continuity was limited to the "progressive" strands in German history and culture that the GDR claimed to inherit.[19]

Both the option for continuity and for a radical break were riddled with ambiguity. Continuity meant shouldering the political and moral responsibility for the Nazi past, the most famous symbol of which may be Chancel-

[18] Interview with Andrzej Szczypiorski, in *Bündnis 2000* (East Berlin), 1:10 (19 April 1991), p.19.

[19] As we will see below, this does not mean that there was no *empirical* continuity of certain (less desirable) cultural and political traditions.

lor Willy Brandt's humble bowing to the victims of the Warsaw Ghetto. No other successor state to the German Reich went through similar exercises—indeed, agonies—of mastering the past, from the student movement to the Historians' Struggle. But continuity also implied the permanent suspicion that the Nazi past was not really over. Responding to a deplorable leniency in the prosecution of Nazi criminals and a propensity to repress the immediate Nazi past, intellectuals quickly raised the charge that reconstruction (*Wiederaufbau*) really meant restoration (for example, Dirks 1950). West Germany's radical protest culture of later years, with its peculiar propensity to *Totalkritik* and violence, could not be understood without the ever-present Nazism charge against the elites in society and state—"this is the generation of Auschwitz," said terrorist Gudrun Ensslin, "you cannot argue with them".[20]

Radical break meant more symbolic efforts to make a clean cut with the past, as expressed in more rigorous measures to identify and persecute Nazi criminals. It is striking that those opposed to the East German regime were never tempted to draw unfriendly parallels between the Nazi and communist leaderships, even though both were certainly dictatorships. On the contrary, the anti-fascism formula provided an unshakable bond between regime and opposition up to the "For Our Country" initiative of November 1989.[21] But behind the facade, radical break meant exculpation. Since anti-fascism was elevated to an official state doctrine, the whole society was automatically absolved from responsibility for the past. As Peter Bender (1989:48) notes sarcastically, "Hitler had obviously been a West German." In East German parlance, May 1945 was referred to not as "breakdown," as in the West, but as "liberation".[22] The secret truth of the radical break was thus to exempt the new regime and the people it claimed to represent from responsibility and guilt. Accordingly, East Germany's communist leaders ignored Israel's claims that it be compensated for the Jewish victims of the Holocaust; and these leaders felt free to participate in, or recommend, military action in 1968 and 1981 against the two first victims of Nazi Germany's crusade for world domination, Czechoslovakia and Poland.

Regime and protest movements are thus inversely related to one another in both German postwar states. In West Germany, the relationship is centrifugal: The ever-present Nazism charge caused the sharp division between the regime and opposition, with left-wing terrorism as its most extreme, yet logically

[20] Quoted in Aust (1986:54). The Neo-Marxist "new social movement" literature overlooks this generational aspect of West Germany's protest culture. Excellent accounts of West German protest movements from a generational perspective are Elias (1992:300–89) and Borneman (1992:ch. 8).

[21] Issued shortly after the opening of the Berlin Wall, the "For Our Country" declaration conjured up the "anti-fascist and humanist" founding myth to rescue East Germany's independent stateness. While initiated by leading intellectuals and regime oppositionists, the declaration was endorsed also by the Communist Party leadership. It is reprinted in Schüddekopf (1991:240f).

[22] A typical historiographical example is Benser (1985).

consistent, expression. In East Germany, the relationship is centripetal: The myth of the radical break created a basic consensus between regime and opposition. If West Germany's culture of radical protest may be interpreted as a belated and apocryphal resistance to Nazism, such "catch-up resistance" (Trommler 1991) was redundant where card-carrying "anti-fascists" were the state's leaders. When Christa Wolf, East Germany's quintessential intellectual, was asked why a democratic movement with broad support had emerged only so late, she touched upon the core problem of regime opposition in her country:

This has to do with the fascist past and the partition of Germany. As very young people who had grown up under fascism, we suffered from guilt feelings. [The communists] helped us out of this. These were antifascists and communists who had returned from concentration camps, prisons, and emigration and, more than in the Federal Republic, dominated the political life in the GDR. We felt a strong inhibition to oppose people who had sat in concentration camps during the Nazi period (Wolf 1990:135f).

Its programmatic anti-fascism and utopian promise of redemption made East Germany the obvious choice of the intellectuals, particularly those who had been forced to flee Hitler.[23] This was their state, one devoted to a moral vision and not just the cold proceduralism of market capitalism and representative democracy. A prevalent motif at the time was that "total defeat" offered the chance of "total renewal" (see Mommsen 1990:16). The departure to socialist utopia corresponded to this hope more intimately than the restoration of capitalism. The intellectuals shared a basic consensus and loyalty to the communist regime that were modified by successive generations but never given up. Ernest Renan once remarked that part of being a nation is getting one's history wrong. The one success of East German "nation" building was the intellectuals' firm and unshakable acceptance, and perpetuation, of the GDR's founding myth.[24] In fact, more than the Federal Republic, the German Democratic Republic could bolster itself with a founding myth in Malinowski's classic sense: a story about the past that serves as a charter for the present. Hans Mayer, an exile intellectual of the first hour who was also one of the first to flee East Germany, still remained convinced, in 1991, that "the bad end does not refute a—possibly—good beginning" (Mayer 1991:15f).

[23] The score of exile intellectuals who preferred to return to East rather than to West Germany is impressive, including Berthold Brecht, Anna Seghers, Heinrich Mann (who died shortly before his planned return from exile in the United States), Arnold Zweig, and Ernst Bloch. They were lured also by generous benefits and an initially "liberal" cultural policy by the Soviet Military Administration (see Childs 1983:ch. 8).

[24] The founding myth is to be seen in the negative light of Renan's remark because it obscures the dictatorial principles on which East Germany was based from the start. The anti-fascism formula also plasters obvious inconsistencies in the opposition of communism to fascism, such as the Hitler–Stalin pact, the persecution of many anti-fascists who deviated from the party line, or the creation of a pseudo-nationalist party—the NDPD—to tacitly integrate ex-Nazis into East Germany (see Fippel 1992).

While all intellectuals accepted East Germany's anti-fascist founding myth, the modalities of this acceptance differed, particularly over time and generations. For the Weimar generation of exile intellectuals, loyalty to the regime was the most genuine and unconditional. Anna Seghers, returning from her exile in Mexico via Frankfurt am Main, recounts that she "travelled into the eastern zone (*Ostzone*) because I was sure that my work . . . was needed and welcomed there in the struggle for the new society" (quoted in Franke 1971:13). The anti-fascism of the Weimar intellectuals was genuine in that it resulted from their own experience of persecution and struggle, not from their adoption of an already established doctrine. Indeed, these intellectuals helped cement the official founding myth from often privileged positions in the emergent cultural institutions, such as the Kulturbund (see Pike 1992). For them, the GDR was a chiliastic community of anti-fascists who had set out to "build a new world in which there is justice," as Stefan Heym (1990:75) put it. To leave this Zion of the persecuted was out of the question. In his autobiography, Stefan Heym, perhaps the most irreverent intellectual of the exile generation, admits to an "anxiety . . . [about being] expelled from the warmth of community, however flawed this community may be" (quoted in Noll 1991:62).

The modalities of acceptance changed for later generations of intellectuals. Those who had experienced war and Nazism in youth adopted the founding myth often through conversion, guilt, or submission to quasi-paternal authority. The writer, Franz Fühmann, who had been drafted into Hitler's army as a high-school student, indicated that Auschwitz had converted him to "the other society."[25] The element of guilt and authoritarian submission is unsparingly revealed by Christa Wolf, who had been a member of Bund deutscher Mädchen, the Nazi female youth organization: "My generation . . . has a tendency to follow authority and a compulsive need to conform, and it fears conflict with the majority and exclusion from the community. We had difficulties in growing up, becoming independent, and standing on our own feet."[26] For those who had been too young to be responsible for Nazism but old enough to carry a memory of involvement and guilt, the anti-fascist communist leaders represented the generation of lost fathers. Characteristically, Christa Wolf argues that the decay from the "good beginning" set in when a "small group of antifascists, who ruled the country . . . in the conviction of being the 'winner of history,' failed to explicate the . . . intricacies of Nazism to *their children*."[27]

Over time, the emphasis in the intellectual syndrome of "critical loyalty" (Domdey 1993) tended ever more toward the critical component. But loyalty was maintained nevertheless. The literary imagination continued to conjure

[25] Quoted in Emmerich (1989:113).   [26] Quoted in Anz (1991:255).

[27] Quoted in *DDR-Journal* (Berlin: Die Tageszeitung), no.2 (1990), p.22 (emphasis added).

up the founding myth, even though one began to realize that the "dream" had meanwhile turned into a "nightmare" (Müller 1992:363). In the 1980s, Volker Braun compared the failing socialist project to a small "iron cart" turned into the uncontrollable "locomotive of history": "It was a . . . small and uncomfortable cart, which we pulled out of a rotten barn near the city, and on which we climbed. A few down-and-outs who had barely survived, we knew the direction." Yet the small cart turned out to be the locomotive of history: "The machine kept me tight . . . I could not escape. . . . The cart would be my mausoleum, my grave."[28] This remarkable metaphor, though used for critical purposes, still left the founding myth intact; the author, a child in 1945, even imagines himself as a member of the heroic founding elite. The metaphor also conveys the complete absence of an alternative which forced one—almost fatalistically—to stick to the once-chosen path. In his autobiographical reflections, Heiner Müller (1992:359) accepts the criticism that the "critical solidarity" displayed by the intellectuals vis-à-vis the regime "fed the illusion that a reform of the system was possible." But he adds: "The problem was, in my view, the lack of an alternative (*Alternativlosigkeit der Alternative*)" (1992:359). Why was there no alternative?

There was no alternative because of the division of Germany. This division perpetuated the absence of national discourse, thus burying the alternative that East German intellectuals could not find. The loyalty of intellectuals was based not only on the positive acceptance of the founding myth but also on the negative demarcation from the other German state. Peter Brückner (1978:150) has cogently argued that in postwar Germany "the one nation became split into society and its counter-society." The notion of Germanness became peculiarly repressed or "homeless" (1978:7), which was convenient because it was associated with Nazism. In intellectual discourse, the dualism of capitalism and socialism came to signify the two halves of Germany. Because it was fused with the problem of national identity, this dualism proved immune to revision and accounts for some peculiarities of intellectual culture in both postwar Germanies.

In the West, a virulent anti-communism provided a dearly needed alternate identity, particularly for the political elite. When the student movement criticized the legitimizing function of official anti-communism, which allowed the Nazi past to be repressed, its critique had to be couched in "anti-anticommunist" terms (Dubiel 1991).[29] Peter Schneider (1993) has characterized the ensuing mind-set as "oppositional thinking" (*Denken aus dem Gegenteil*). It prevented West German intellectuals from recognizing the totalitarian aspects of the East German regime because this was the abhorred turf

[28] Quoted in Emmerich (1989:422).
[29] Tony Judt (1992:178) observed a similar "anti-anticommunist" orientation among French intellectuals after World War II. Not unlike the German case, the French "anti-anticommunism" pays tribute to the prominent role of communists in the resistance to Hitler.

of conservative anti-communism.[30] Accordingly, the Gulag Archipelago debate, which converted a great part of the French intelligentsia from Marxism to liberalism in the mid-1970s, failed to develop in West Germany.[31] Criticizing socialism forever smacked of exculpating Nazism, and any deviation from the Manichaean scheme of socialism versus capitalism would lead one into the repressed abyss of national identity. So it was more convenient to ignore Solzhenitsyn's trenchant exposure of communist terror on the basis of the author's "nationalism" or to rail against the "Catholic-reactionary" nature of the Polish Solidarity movement (Markovits 1992:178*f*). Within or outside Germany, national opposition to communism was simply unacceptable for German intellectuals. Because the national option was foreclosed, the GDR always retained its socialist bonus.

Similarly, the dualism between capitalism and socialism muted the critical impulses of East German intellectuals. There was no alternative to the socialist regime, paradoxically, because it already existed in form of the capitalistic West. This alternative was taboo because it revoked the radical break with the German past that was seen as the GDR's decisive advantage.[32] From this angle, the intellectual preoccupation with the Nazi past fulfilled important legitimizing functions in East Germany, even if the results are as subtle as Christa Wolf's novel, *Kindheitsmuster,* of 1976. In striking similarity to the official line, intellectuals continued to portray the West as being always threatened by a rebirth of Nazism. "In this way one could bear the GDR," Heiner Müeller admits today (1992:312). On the reverse, when the regime expatriated its opponents, as it first did in the famous case of songwriter Wolf Biermann in 1976, none of the protesting intellectuals drew the obvious comparison with the Nazi regime, which had pioneered this inhumane practice. This association was simply not thinkable within the capitalism–socialism scheme because Nazism was safely located on the other side.

The prevalence of the capitalism–socialism dualism also prevented intellectuals from recognizing the national implications of East Germany's revolution. Within this scheme, the only alternative was either that of a "revolutionary renewal" (C. Wolf) or a retreat to capitalism. Renewal was thus the intellectuals' initial enthusiastic reading. In striking contrast to Eastern Europe, their enthusiasm was not about freedom from dictatorship but about utopia's final arrival.[33] Christa Wolf, for instance, compared the East German

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[30] This is also the reason why most West German research on East Germany, as pioneered by Peter Christian Ludz, is essentially apologetic. See the critical remarks by Jäckel (1990).

[31] However, it should be noted that the French turn from Marxism to liberalism was exceptional in Continental Europe. See the excellent comparison of Italy, Germany, and France by Mark Lilla (1994).

[32] "Radical break" was premised on Marxist fascism theory, which depicted fascism and Nazism as the logical culmination of capitalism. This theory was also widely shared by West German intellectuals (see the popular treatise by Kühnl 1971).

[33] The absence of the very concept of freedom is the core theme of Ash's (1993) superior

upheaval to the uprising of the Parisian Commune—and this through the lens of Brecht's pedagogical drama (Wolf 1990:15). Helga Königsdorf praised the "moment of beauty, in which utopia was near": "For a moment we were so sick with happiness that we poured into the streets to turn reality into our work of art."[34] When the people abandoned the script, the intellectuals did not question their writing but instead faulted the people. Leipzig's pro-unity demonstrations now appeared to the intellectuals as the "tyranny of the bawling mass" (Fritze 1991:561) or even as "Nazi parades" (Hörnigk 1990:140). Devoid of a national language to tie them to their society (Offe 1991:26), the intellectuals remained isolated from the popular forces that intuitively grasped the national implication of the revolution against communism.

Because the concept of national self-determination did not exist for German intellectuals, the extinction of the socialist GDR was perceived as simply capitalism's victory. Agnes Heller (1990:14) argued that the image of capitalism as a "closed totality encompassing every aspect of life" was a product of "adversarial imagination." This Eastern European insight could not take hold in Germany. For a young East German intellectual, the new "capitalistic democracy" imported from the West was "not the lesser but the other evil."[35] In a similar vein, Stefan Heym (1990:77) conjured up the rise of a "new *Grossdeutschland* dominated by Daimler-Messerschmidt-Bölkow-Blohm and the Deutsche Bank." To the imagery of a colonizing capitalism was added that of Nazism reborn: The polemic notion of *Auschluss* (annexation) of East Germany to the West suggests an analogy to Nazi Germany's annexation of Austria in 1938. Andreas Hyssen (1991:122) noted, in his balanced account of the heated unification debate, that the "discourse of colonization" betrayed a "lack of understanding, if not contempt, for Western style democratic institutions." But it was indeed the only discourse available because no legitimate discourse of nationhood existed.

The Dilemma of Opposition

But were there no dissidents in East Germany? What about the indefatigable activists of the peace and human rights movement of the 1980s, who displayed no less courage than the Eastern European dissidents in speaking out against an oppressive regime at great personal risk? This movement, which emerged under the roof of the Protestant church in the early 1980s, was carried by a younger generation of peculiarly nameless intellectuals who had been socialized in the postwar period and whose key experiences had been the Western student upheaval and the Prague spring of 1968. To distinguish these younger activists for peace and human rights from the established literary

account of German political discourse in the age of détente and *Ostpolitik*. See also the historical analysis of the "peculiar German attitude toward liberty" by Krieger (1957:ix).

[34] Quoted in Grunenberg (1990:44).

[35] Quoted in Dieter Zimmer, "Die Verbitterung," *Die Zeit* (10 July 1992), p.14.

intellectuals, John Torpey (1993a:150) introduced the useful category of "blocked ascendents." It points at the greater disillusionment and distance of these younger dissidents from the official institutions of party and state. One must note, however, that ascendence was blocked precisely because the actions by the younger dissidents carried a greater propensity for risk, which is altogether difficult to categorize.[36] As in Eastern Europe, the annals of the opposition in East Germany are not lacking in careers broken and opportunities of a lifetime forfeited. Because they shared the experience of being marginal, these dissidents formed a distinct milieu, particularly in the 1980s, which proved that stingier forms of opposition were possible than the "critical solidarity" of the literary intellectuals.

Although their elevation of opposition into a lifestyle separates them from the established intellectuals, these younger dissidents still did not revoke their basic loyalty to the regime. Yet this loyalty was not so much the result of a positive "anti-fascist" commitment as of a lack of alternatives. "The opposition was operating on the basis of this [anti-fascist] consensus," says one of the most perceptive East German dissidents, "for the simple reason that you could not abolish what you wanted to reform."[37] These dissidents had not known anything but the GDR, and they took its existence simply for granted—like almost everybody else, including the political elites, in both Germanies at the time.[38] Moreover, these dissidents had come of age in the era of détente, when the regime had systematically purged its ethno-national component and tried to elevate socialism into a quasi-national identity.[39] "The so-called 'national question,'" says a young dissident, "was neither negatively nor positively discussed; it was taboo" (Rüddenklau 1992:13).

Due to the lack of a national alternative, these young dissidents became caught in the regime's socialist self-definition. Their opposition to the regime

[36] This is evident if one looks at some typical biographies of these dissidents, most of whom came from privileged families and had initially set out for promising academic or professional careers. Examples are Gerd Poppe, who was unable to take up a position in the prestigious Academy of Sciences because of his protest against the expatriation of song-writer Wolf Biermann in 1976 and then worked in various manual jobs; Wolfgang Templin, a trained philosopher, who was forced out of the Academy of Sciences in 1983 and then was unable to find work; Ludwig Mehlhorn, a mathematician, who was driven from his position at the elite Hochschule für Okonomie in 1985 and then worked in various church-supported jobs, including as a night watchman (short biographies of these and other dissidents are provided by Torpey [1993a:419–429]). Most of these "blocked ascendents" became closely affiliated with the "Initiative for Peace and Human Rights," East Germany's most important opposition group in the 1980s.

[37] Ludwig Mehlhorn, quoted in Philipsen (1993:88).

[38] The two most authoritative accounts of the paradoxes of West German Ostpolitik, which had started as an attempt to recover national unity yet led to the recognition and perpetuation of the German division, are McAdams (1993) and Ash (1993).

[39] The East German regime had countered the national rapprochement implicit in Ostpolitik and detente with a strategy of delimitation (*Abgrenzung*), which bolstered the socialist distinctiveness of the "GDR" while eradicating all "German" references from official language (see McAdams 1985).

was genuine yet marred by the opposed regime's artificiality. Even if one limited oneself to the "antipolitical" defense of elementary human rights, such as the Initiative for Peace and Human Rights (East Germany's most important opposition group in the 1980s, which was modeled on the Czech Charter 77), one still had to define the bounded collectivity on whose behalf this defense was made. Who comprised this collectivity? Obviously the East Germans, or "GDR citizens" (*DDR-Bürger*). The second official term is revealing because it indicates that one was an East German citizen only by virtue of the regime's socialist self-definition. Otherwise one was simply a German. But the dissidents could not even think of this because no legitimate national discourse existed. A perceptive dissident explicates the dilemma of opposition in East Germany in this way: "We always had a broken relationship [regarding] the concept of nation. In contrast to the opposition movements in Eastern Europe, we could not ground our opposition in the nation, but had to resort to socialist ideology instead. Therefore we were not 'against' but 'for' socialism. . . . One could almost believe that we became the Fifth Column of the Communist Party (SED)."[40]

The dilemma of opposition was that without national discourse no genuine opposition to communism was possible. If the regime's definition of membership was accepted, even intentionally genuine opposition had to turn into an unintentional collusion with the regime. This "implicit loyalty to the rulers" (Rüddenklau 1992:12) characterized even the most outspoken of all East German opposition groups, the Initiative for Peace and Human Rights (IFM). The IFM went as far in the direction of Eastern European human-rights dissidence as it was possible in East Germany. Yet when confronted with the massive movement of would-be emigrants, which increased very dramatically in the second half of the 1980s, the IFM experienced the limits of such opposition (see Joppke 1993). Because political opposition was premised on rejecting the exit alternative, it was consistent not to support the would-be emigrants' cause. "The problem of emigration is a serious one. But it cannot become the focus of our work because we seek change *within* the GDR," declared the IFM.[41] In rejecting the plea of the notoriously underorganized would-be emigrants to take up their quest for more transparent and quasi-legalized emigration procedures, the IFM undermined its own position that human rights should be supported unconditionally and implicitly sided with the same regime that it had so adamantly opposed. Startling examples of its unintentional collusion with the regime abound. For instance, when it broke the taboo of convening with the conservative Christian Democratic Party (CDU), the IFM still rejected any Western criticism of the human rights

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[40] *Interview with Edgar Dusdahl* (New Forum) 26 July 1991, Leipzig.
[41] IFM, *Erklärung der Initiative "Frieden und Menschenrechte,"* 19 January 1988, East Berlin (hectographed pamphlet).

situation in East Germany, admonishing the CDU and "other state-supporting parties" to "concentrate on the improvement of the human rights situation in the Federal Republic."[42] A regime representative would not have said it differently.

Though unparalleled in their fearless and outspoken opposition to the iron claw of the SED's rule, the peace and human rights activists of the 1980s thus continued the collusion with the regime that had characterized the stance of East German intellectuals since 1953.[43] Wolfgang Rüddenklau (1992:13), no meek oppositionist, now mocks the "inappropriate *(verfehlte)* loyalty" of himself and his fellow oppositionists, about which "at best a few Stasi officers may have laughed." These oppositionists are the victims of the East German regime's ultimate triumph: to impose socialism as a quasi-national imperative even on its most courageous opponents.

As its quick evaporation after 1989 testifies, the socialist rhetoric in East Germany's peace and human rights movement was at least as much the result of the political context as that of inherent idealism. Even the rejection of national unification, among other reasons, sprang from a rational perception that the civic and national dimensions of the East German revolution did not coincide. Influenced by the new social movements of the West, East German dissidents were committed to the civic principle of grass-roots democracy *(Basis-Demokratie)*, which was at odds with the imposition of the established political institutions of the West from the top. Yet the peculiar modeling of the opposition to the East German regime in the style of new social movements in the West proved inadequate for the particular context of (post)communism. A characteristic of new social movements is their "self-limitation": They complement rather than replace market and state (Cohen and Arato 1992). The East German regime's breakdown generated the inevitable illusion that "grass-roots democracy" could be more than an institutional corrective and replace the process of institution building. The rhetoric of capitalism versus socialism nurtured by established intellectuals obscured the real dualism at work here between developing civic grass-roots democracy and building the national market and state. It must be stressed that the shrewd grass-roots dissidents of the Initiative for Peace and Human Rights were quick to abandon the illusions of yesterday and to carve out a niche for their civic cause in the new nation–state. While the more established intellectuals still deplore the death of "GDR culture," the marginalized and persecuted former dissidents are mostly free of such nostalgia and readily admit that "many new opportunities" exist in a liberal democracy.[44]

In an implicit attempt to destroy the image of past collusion, the former

[42] Dissident Gerd Poppe, quoted in Rüddenklau (1992:112*f*).

[43] In the Workers' Uprising of June 1953, the first anti-communist rebellion in Eastern Europe, the intellectuals either remained impassive or took the side of the regime (see Mohr 1982).

[44] *Interview with Gerd Poppe,* 26 June 1991, East Berlin.

dissidents are now at the forefront of "coming to terms" with the East German past and of drawing stark lines between "victims" and "perpetrators" (see Torpey 1993b). This is in striking contrast to the case of the Czech Republic, where the initiative for the inquisitorial "lustration laws" (which prohibit former "collaborators" of the security police from holding public office) originated not from the former dissidents but from those who had "kept quiet" under the old regime.[45] In East Germany, an unusual alliance of former dissidents and conservative anti-communists pushed for the opening of the files of the secret police (*Stasi*), demanded unrelenting punishment for those who for whatever reason and in whatever position had collaborated with the Stasi, and supported the formation of the parliamentary Commission of Inquiry into the History and Consequences of the SED Dictatorship in Germany, which seeks to reestablish the previously much-chided totalitarianism paradigm in research about East Germany. In a statement entitled, "Theses on the Clearing-Up (*Aufklärung*) of the Past," a group of former dissidents and Western politicians sharply rejected the left-liberal establishment's campaign to close the painful investigation of the Stasi's past: "The Germans in the West must learn that even in a dictatorship civic courage and resistance were possible."[46] Never before had dissidents called the still-existing SED regime a "dictatorship." The new posture of the dissidents is evidently not free of a certain distortion of their own ambiguous past. Vaclav Havel argued in his famous dissident manifesto, "The Power of the Powerless," that no neat distinction was possible between victims and perpetrators in "post-totalitarian communism" and that everyone was "both a victim and a supporter of the system." It is ironic that East Germany's dissidents, who had forever remained convinced that the old regime could be reformed, are now so insistent that a clear distinction must be made between victim and perpetrator. But it reflects the dissidents' marginal status in unified Germany and their understandable desire to find retroactive meaning in the now undeniably quixotic quest for true socialism.

GERMAN CONTINUITIES

Historical analysis in general, and of Germany in particular, as Gordon A. Craig demonstrated with much success in his panoramic reflections on *The Germans*, is necessarily a "balancing act" between the "contesting claims of change and continuity" (Craig 1982:11). So far, the account of East German exceptionalism in this essay has stressed the discontinuities, or pull factors, which kept East German dissidents within the orbit of communism, most

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[45] See Lawrence Weschler, "The Velvet Purge: The Trials of Jan Kavan," *The New Yorker*, 19 October 1992, pp.66–69. This difference may reflect the greater political role played by the ex-dissidents in the new Czech republic (they simply have better things to do than digging in the past), as well as a tacit need of the opportunistic majority to smirch the more daring dissident elite with the suspicion of collaboration.

[46] "Thesen zur Aufklärung der Vergangenheit," *Deutschland Archiv*, 25:4, 1992, 445–7.

notably the lack of a legitimate discourse of nationhood. But there are, in addition, important continuities of German culture, or push factors, which contributed to this outcome.

Archie Brown and Jack Gray (1977) have argued in their seminal work on political culture in communism that communist regimes, contrary to their intention, have not succeeded in extinguishing the national cultural traits of their host societies. On the contrary, Brown and Gray observed that the official communist culture and the dominant national cultures have remained "mutually antagonistic" (1977:257). This observation both fits and does not fit the German case. It fits in the sense that East Germany, in contrast to the Westernized Federal Republic, has remained in many ways traditionally German (see Krüger 1977). Yet in one important sense the observation does not fit the German case: Communism and national culture are not entirely antagonistic in Germany. Is it surprising that German intellectuals have been unwilling to abandon Marxist socialism, which is, after all, a German tradition? In a provocative analysis, Liah Greenfeld (1992:ch. 4) has demonstrated that Marxist socialism inherits key motifs of German romantic nationalism. Both share the anti-Western thrust (transmuted as anti-capitalism in Marxism); both subordinate the individual and her or his liberties to the collective requirements of Volk or class; both depict the modern individual as alienated from his or her true nature but awaiting complete transformation in a perfect society that is yet to come; and, finally, both accord the intellectuals a cardinal role in this transformation. If one studies the peculiar affection of German intellectuals for the experiment of socialism on earth, particularly their fierce resistance to abandoning it after 1989, one cannot help but conclude that subterraneous push factors that have deep roots in German culture are at work here.

The third way that rhetoric in the unification debate particularly may be regarded as an implicit continuation of the German Sonderweg between East and West.[47] The notion of Sonderweg was not invented by historians—a fact sometimes overlooked—but originally referred to the conscious self-delimitation of German intellectual culture from the West.[48] The roots of this self-delimitation go back to the Romantic reaction to the Enlightenment. In a *ressentiment*-laden "transvaluation of values," the intellectuals of backward Germany transformed the values of the developed West, such as progress, reason, and individualism, into the evils of mechanization, calculation, and egotism (Greenfeld 1985:159). At the same time, they introduced organicist and collectivist conceptions of individual and society and looked at history not as universal progress but as the realization of national *Besonderheit* (peculiarity). The self-proclaimed difference between Germany and the West be-

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[47] Ulrich Oevermann (1990) makes this point most forcefully.

[48] The historic-analytical concept of *Sonderweg* has been sharply criticized by Blackbourn and Eley (1984).

came enshrined in the dualism of culture and civilization.[49] In his *Reflections of an Unpolitical,* Thomas Mann delivered its classic formulation:

The difference of spirit and politics includes the difference of culture and civilization, soul and society, freedom and the right to vote, art and literature; and Germanness is culture, soul, freedom, art, and *not* civilization, society, the right to vote, and literature (Mann 1988:23).

In the tradition of the German Sonderweg, the rejection of the West is coupled with a peculiar rejection of politics as a conflict of secular interests. Because both motifs were used to defend a separate GDR, it is useful to further illuminate their historical roots. In contrast to Britain or France, where intellectuals were quickly integrated into the world of democratic politics, German intellectuals, after their democratic aspirations were defeated in 1848, turned away from politics.[50] In the shadow of the autocratic state, which often employed them as teachers, bureaucrats, or priests, the intellectuals developed into a self-conscious "mandarin elite" (Ringer 1969) that combined a strong distaste for interest politics with a penchant for theoretical and cultural, not practical, learning (*Bildung*) and the refinement of the spirit. Thomas Mann, distancing himself from his earlier diatribe against the West, characterized the ensuing intellectual habitus as one of "power-protected inwardness" (*machtgeschützte Innerlichkeit*). It drew a sharp distinction between *Geist* and *Macht,* the inward realm of artistic creativity and scholastic learning, and the outward realm of pure power and *Realpolitik.* This habitus nourished a pessimistic attitude toward modern social conditions—the genre of *Zivilisationskritik* and the pessimism of modern German sociology have their origins here (Hughes 1958). The aversion to market and politics, which also reflected the provincial closure of the German "home towns" in which most mandarin intellectuals resided (see Craig 1982:24), made them receptive to utopian phantasies, such as *völkisch* nationalism. The infamous "ideas of 1914," Germany's answer to 1789, were mandarin notions: the death of politics; the triumph of ultimate, apolitical objectives over short-term interests; and the reassertion of moral cohesion and social unity against the "materialism" of the modernity imported from the West (Ringer 1969:180*f*).

Jürgen Habermas (1986) has pointed out that the mandarin dualism of spirit and power left no room for institutionalizing the role of the modern intellectual, who occupies the space between spirit and power. Indeed, in the world of mandarins the intellectual was a despised figure who stood for the West's shallow rationalism. For young Thomas Mann, an intellectual was "someone who fights on the side of civilization against the 'sword', that is, Germany"

[49] Norbert Elias (1969) has shown that the distinction between culture and civilization was originally a societal one: "It is the polemic of the German educated middle class against the mannerisms of the aristocratic upper class" (p.9). Because these mannerisms, from dress to language, were unmistakably French, the societal could be easily transposed into a national distinction.

[50] The best short treatment of this topic is Greiffenhagen (1986).

(Mann 1988:51). When *les intellectuels* in *fin de siècle* France forcefully entered the political scene in defense of the Jewish General Dreyfus, there were only counter-intellectuals in Germany but no intellectuals. As Martin Greiffenhagen (1986:107) noted, political impotence generated the syndrome of "bourgeois self-hatred"; German intellectuals denied themselves as intellectuals.

Only in postwar Germany, in which right-wing thinking was thoroughly discredited, could intellectuals achieve a recognized status in society: in the West, from 1968, after a delay, as critics of power in the French style; in the East, from the start, as actual participants in power, ambitiously claiming to have overcome the mandarin dualism of spirit and power.[51] These obvious discontinuities helped obscure the fact that central motifs of mandarin culture stayed alive while migrating from the right to the left wing of the political spectrum. Utopianism, the other side of the unpolitical tradition, was even subterraneously reanimated by Nazism's defeat. In the West, an intellectual on the Catholic left argued that the meaning of the second republic, originally nothing but a regime for military occupation, lay in the future, not the present, and that this meaning had to be found through "productive utopia" (Dirks 1946:15). But the true place of utopia was the East. Still in 1989, intellectuals would depict East Germany in the dual terms of *Traum* (dream) and *Alptraum* (nightmare): "Traum stands against Alptraum," says Günter Grass (1991:37) in his defense of a "third way"; "a Traum which history has turned into an Alptraum," says Heiner Müller (1992:363) about the late East Germany; "[East Germany] was an utopia . . . (A) German possibility [gone] to ruin," Hans Mayer similarly concludes (1991:258). Nazism, or the capitalist West as its successor, figures as the negative reference point, the Alptraum, against which the Traum unfolds. In Christa Wolf's defense of the Warsaw pact's invasion of Czechoslovakia, socialism appeared as "the solution" (*die Lösung*) that had to be defended against its enemies (quoted in Domdey 1993:165). In all these accounts, the GDR figures as an unpolitical republic of the spirit, always at risk of being swallowed by a predatory West. Irritated by the elusive search for a third way in the unification debate, a perceptive American observer diagnosed the continued longing of German intellectuals "for the all-encompassing solution, the total transformation of politics and economics, the definitive answer, the new—and completely moral—human being" (Markovits 1992:185).

One of the most obvious continuations of mandarin motifs is the pessimistic genre of Zivilisationskritik, which likewise migrated from the right to the left

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[51] For Johannes R. Becher, the expressionist poet who became East Germany's first Minister of Culture, East Germany was nothing less than the "Reich that is called Goethe," in which the old division between "spirit" (*Geist*) and "power" (*Macht*) was finally reconciled (in Glässner 1988:121).

side of the political spectrum. The apocalyptic visions of the ecology and peace movements, combined with startling anti-Western (particularly anti-American) and crypto-nationalist rhetoric, have some similarities with the beliefs of the right-wing movements of the Weimar Republic, such as the Conservative Revolution.[52] In East Germany, the cultural pessimism of the peace movement and its intellectual allies helped obscure the specific shortcomings of a communist regime. The discontent with "real socialism" was broadened into an all-out attack on "industrialism." The disenchantment with growth and progress could even be turned into a new legitimation of the communist regime. Now that the image of progress had exhausted itself and that the economic superiority of the West could no longer be challenged, East Germany could still be defended as a refuge of slowness and contemplation amid the catastrophic self-destruction of Western civilization. The later work of East German literary intellectuals like Heiner Müller or Christa Wolf borrowed typical motifs of German Zivilisationskritik to demarcate an idyllic and communal East Germany from a materialistic and impersonal West. As two literary critics observed in an analysis of this work, "the tradition that antifascism legitimates socialism is transformed into an antirationalism that legitimates the opposition to Westernization" (Herzinger and Preusser 1991:199). Christa Wolf, for instance, now saw herself "standing aghast before the objectified dreams of that instrumental thinking which still calls itself reason," nevertheless detecting an "utopian rest, never quite illuminated (*aufgeklärt*)" (in Emmerich 1989:270,275). If the main problem in communism was not the lack of civil rights and democracy, but the "pure utilitarianism (*blanker Nützlichkeitswahn*) of the industrial age" (C. Wolf in Herzinger and Preusser 1991:270), the communist regime was exculpated.

In historical perspective, the rhetoric of the third way, so innocently used in the opposition to unification, has rather dubious precursors (see Jesse 1992). When Fritz Stern (1961:254) observed a German penchant for "thinking in thirds," he of course meant the reactionary "politics of cultural despair" that had foreshadowed Nazism. Möller van den Bruck, the proto-fascist ideologue of the Conservative Revolution, had first popularized the notion of a third way in his option for a "Germanic socialism" which was corporatist and anti-modernist. Indeed, National Socialism may be looked at as the other "blossom" of the "Blue Flower" of German romanticism (Greenfeld 1992:386–95). The familiar juxtaposition of Marxism and conveniently anonymous fascism (as a shorthand for National Socialism) in German intellectual discourse helps obscure the common roots of both. The multiple discontinuities in modern German history have prevented an awareness of such cultural affinities. But one of East German communism's most secret sources of stability was its

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[52] See the excellent recent study on the "conservative revolution" by Stefan Breuer (1993).

exploitation of cultural traits that had made also Nazism possible: the deep German opposition to Western civilization and its "formal" democracy.[53]

CONCLUSION

I have tried to explain the exceptional commitment of East German intellectuals to the "revisionist" reform of the communist regime as the outcome of two factors: first, the peculiar history of nationhood and nationalism in Germany, which prohibited the intellectuals from invoking national discourse as a counter-discourse to communism; and second, the embeddedness of Marxist socialism in German culture and the implicit continuation of some motifs of the German Sonderweg tradition. Although it is impossible to deny that both factors were involved in producing the observed outcome, the question of their relative importance is more difficult to answer. Three reservations with regard to the asserted cultural continuities should be mentioned. First, the fact that West German intellectuals, initially at least, also rejected unification and argued in favour of a reformed socialist East Germany suggests the primacy of the national question, most notably the long-held animus against nation–state and nationalism that had grown out of the experience of Nazism. Otherwise, one would be forced to make the questionable argument that the political and cultural Westernization of the Federal Republic had been unable to root out quasi-genetic Germanness. Second, the Slavic cultures of Eastern Europe are hardly more inherently democratic than German culture, all of which suffer from a democratic deficit when compared with the cultures of the core countries of the West. If Eastern Europe, including Russia, nevertheless produced genuine dissidence, while East Germany did not, the essential difference between the two seems to be that only Eastern European dissidents had viable nations to fall back on. Finally, no neat distinction between discontinuous pull factors and continuous push factors can be made because the suggested cultural continuities have themselves been involved in producing the aberrant features of German nationhood and nationalism. Yet the distinction can still be defended in heuristic terms. It allows us to see a striking dissonance between the explicit claims of German intellectuals and the implicit cultural sources that feed these claims; try as they might, German intellectuals also could not escape their culture, some of whose darker aspects they so emphatically disclaimed.

This analysis suggests that multiple factors were responsible for keeping East German intellectuals tied to the socialist project and that we must specify very carefully which precise factors were effective at which times and for which particular groups or generations of intellectuals. Similarly, the general maintenance of a revisionist style of opposition politics must not obscure the fact that there were significant variations in oppositional behavior, from the

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[53] This connection is convincingly elaborated by Meuschel (1992:part I).

rather cautious approach taken by the established literary intellectuals to the directly confrontational course of the younger peace and human rights dissidents, who were as daring and uncompromising as any in Eastern Europe. Although it may be easily misunderstood because it examines a topic that has stirred intense emotional debate, this analysis was not meant to reproach East German intellectuals with alleged moral failures. Rather, these intellectuals were depicted as acting out the constraints of their political and cultural context, most importantly the peculiarities of a divided nation in which the legacy of Nazism had extinguished a positive sense of nationhood.

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