State, Territory, and Identity Formation in the Postwar Berlins, 1945–1989

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Introduction

In the modern system of nation-states, most, if not all, large human cultural groups base part of their claim to an integrated identity on residence in a territorially defined home and a culturally delineated nation (see, e.g., Anderson 1983; Hobsbawm 1990; Smith 1986). As Sahliins (1988:234–263) shows for Spain and France, at least since the early 19th century, the modern state has based its juridical definition of sovereignty on defining and enforcing its “social and territorial boundaries,” with political control, or creation of the center, being secondary and derivative. This tie to homeland or territorially circumscribed space, on the one hand, and to a unified culture or nation, on the other, has been extremely problematic in the construction of the identities of German-speaking peoples residing in geographical units that have been called, successively, Wilhelmine Germany, Weimar Republic, Third Reich, Allied occupied territories, German Democratic Republic, and Federal Republic of Germany.

Particularly troublesome for this century’s Berlin residents has been the notion of Heimat (home). Both world wars resulted in shifts in physical boundaries and massive population movements. Indeed, the peculiar solution of the Allies in their 1945 Potsdam Accord was to deconstruct any semblance of the unity of culture, state, and nation: they divided the nation territorially and ideologically, displaced large parts of the population, and opened for contestation the physical boundaries of the home. Berlin became the site and symbol of this “answer,” which was then reinscribed in varied forms by the two new German states when they established themselves in 1949.1 During the Cold War, these two states—autonomous, asymmetrical mirror images of one another—competed for legitimacy in signifying and representing the nation. They were involved in what Hegel (1953) called a “struggle to the death”: seeking recognition (Anerkennung) of self without having to recognize the other in turn. Although publicly denouncing and threatening to overcome the social and territorial other, they were, in fact, intent on producing cultural difference—for the production of different nations was a precondition for their claim to legitimate statehood! This struggle was nowhere more transparent than in the divided Berlin, what I have elsewhere referred
to as a dual organization in-the-making, where the idea of home became a contentious and contested place, evoking competing references to nostalgia, indeterminacy, inviolability, and taboo. As a result, the notion of Heimat, although losing a clear descriptive or locutionary meaning, has nonetheless been infused with affective or illocutionary force.

This 45-year effort in state-orchestrated production of difference has not been effaced by the simple act of political "national" unity on 3 October 1990. Creating a common semantics of place—where the pan-German state, territory, and national identity are seen as elements of a whole rather than disjointed parts out-of-place—is a project in the reterritorialization of space, fraught with difficulties and burdened, to paraphrase Marx, by the separate East and West traditions of all the dead and living generations, which now act like nightmares on the brain of the youth. Without a shared history, one has no commonalities for the present. In this article, however, I want to take us back to the Cold War past, to what Gupta and Ferguson in the introduction to this issue call the "construction of difference." Specifically, I want to examine the consequences of the deterritorialization of Heimat that has been true for this century's Berliners. I will focus on what this has meant for the identity, the Germanness, of the specific generation of German residents in the two Berlins who reached adulthood during the Third Reich, and who were the architects of the two postwar Germanies.

My argument proceeds as follows: First, after World War II, German identity could no longer be linked to a finite, secure territory due to the forced surrender of formerly occupied lands and the "ethnic cleanup," expatriation of 6,500,000 Germans out of east and northeast Europe, all of which were carried out by the Allies according to the Potsdam Accord (Malkki 1985:36; United States Displaced Persons Commission 1952:259–266). More than 12 million Germans were eventually expelled or fled—termed die Flucht—from East Prussia and former German territories between 1944 and 1961 (Korte 1985:14–15; Meinicke 1988), and the land on which they had made their homes was ceded to Poland, Czechoslovakia, and the Soviet Union. These refugees and homeless people, referred to as Fluechtlinge (refugees) and Vertriebene (expellees), initially made up 20% to 25% of all people in the territory that now belongs to Germany. Their divided loyalties and varied integration into the new states thwarted the geographical placement of the home in the process of postwar German identity construction.

Second, the Allied Occupation Forces between 1945 and 1949, and the two German states after 1949, employed different strategies in creating a new meaning for Germanness, for incorporating individuals into one of the new nation-states. The dual tasks of distancing themselves from Nazism and of constructing new identities based on symbols not associated with the Nazis were performed differently due to oppositional ideological assumptions of the Superpowers and of their two client states.

Third, the different state strategies for defining nation, manifested in, for example, how it narrates the political history of this century and in official codes for group membership, have had a direct influence on the way in which each
state’s respective citizens constituted postwar identities. Comparing these state accounts with those of their citizens reveals the extent to which state commentaries were able to legitimate themselves as national narratives.

This research is based on 34 months of fieldwork in East and West Berlin between the fall of 1986 and 1989, in other words, in the context of the waning years of the Cold War. And as already mentioned, I am limiting my analysis to the generation born between approximately 1915 and 1935. Hence, I am not accounting for the border changes and population movements of 1989 that brought about the final collapse of the Cold War and the political unification of Germany. These events were instigated by the youngest children and grandchildren in East Germany of the generation examined in this article.

Yet, this analysis does point to an explanation of this flight (by approximately 300,000 young Germans) in the fall of 1989, for the participants understood their displacement, I would argue, in terms of the previous flights of parents and grandparents around the end of World War II. The disposition to flight is a practice growing out of culturally specific German experiences in this century, but, moreover, it is acquired and embodied differently (and transformed in the very process of being made one’s own) by each generation, living as it does in a particular historical time and space. Furthermore, this disposition has a generative capacity to transform dissimilar problems into structurally similar responses, thus linking Germans of different generations together. Let me begin with a brief theoretical excursion into the logic of the state’s relation to national identity.

State and National Narratives

Contemporary state narratives about a national identity are constructed in a long conversation between states and their citizens. In its laws and policy statements, the state proposes for its citizens a model life course using tools including educational institutions, housing regulations, monetary policy, and marital laws. The citizen, reflecting on, and responding to, this model life course in an everyday life experienced in interaction with it, inscribes his own, variant autobiographical account. Both state and individual commentary on this life course take narrative form; in other words, the life course is understood as having a sequence, with beginning, middle, end, and with a subject or narrator, namely, the citizen as a member of a nation. The long-term legitimation of a nation-state is dependent on the extent to which the state can claim to represent a specific national identity unique to it, meaning that it has people with characteristics it can call its own.

We can address the legitimacy of the state narrative, the extent to which citizens can be said to validate it, by subjecting official texts (state models embedded in laws and policy) to individual (national) interpretations, or “readings,” revealed in autobiographies. By comparing the narrative elements in legal and autobiographical texts, and by confronting official (state) significations with their appropriation by individual (national) actors, we may better understand the nature and relative success or failure of different legitimation strategies. In short, the legitimacy of state policies can be analyzed as a series of historical texts or gen-
eration-specific readings about the nature, coherence, and validity of national identity.

Individuals and states do not include all experiences or events in narrative constructions, but rather select specific nodes that are for them most significant in the construction of a coherent story. Periods and categories are the devices used to figure narratives, for those of both the person and the group; together they make up what I shall call experiential tropes. Because the tropes are themselves of indeterminate meaning, their potential polyvocality allows for different individuals with dissimilar experiences to use the same trope to figure their autobiographical accounts. Yet, it is only in relation to the totality of a life, that is, in their employment over time into coherent form, that tropes become meaningful through regular appeals to master narratives. I define master narratives as public matrices for the creation of collective conscience, for the creation of a processual political economy of meaning in which the semantics of Germanness are defined.

**Prewar History of Codes for Group Membership**

How would one write, then, a history of the semantics of Germanness? Admittedly, there is tremendous regional variation in codes for group membership in German-speaking countries, and in each locality, in turn, as Sabean writes in his study of the village of Neckerhausen (1990:432), “The nature of alliance, the forms of reciprocity, the structure of social divisions, and the systemic character of conflict all changed continuously.” Yet, to give the reader a very general sense of what such a history of prewar transformations in official codes for group membership in the polity would look like, let me offer a sketchy and preliminary account.

Up to the Nazi period, German self-identity, meaning the grounds for membership in the community, had always been tied variously to the concepts of household, work, residence, and religion. A membership code centered around the Haus, or ganzes Haus (entire house), was the generative category for German thought well into the 18th century. During the territorial consolidation of the German Laender in the 17th century, the terms used were Stammbaum (clan) and Hausgenossenschaft (household), the former based on the residential unit, the latter on the place of work. Although Geschlecht (lineage) was not foreign to German thought, it was never primarily connected with inheritance through shared blood. Whether the “descent was real or fictitious,” write Mitterauer and Sieder, “. . . seems to have made no difference to the lineage as a social unit” (1983:10). The term used in the late 15th century by Martin Luther, for example, in the first chapter of the Gospel of Matthew was Geschlechtsregister (genealogy), referring to inheritance through the pater familias (authority of the male); it had nothing to do with biological parenthood—women, in fact, were not even listed in the register.

In sum, in neither the Geschlechtsregister nor the Hausgenossenschaft were consanguinity and affinity the generative categories of membership; the former denoted a dependency relationship based on authority, the latter shared residence
and work. Unlike France or other Latin countries, the family as a legal unit came very late to Germany (Flandrin 1979; Mitterauer and Sieder 1983:5–13). The distinction between family as a distinct group of blood relatives and the *Hausgemeinschaft* (household community) was first introduced in the Prussian Land Rights Act of 1791/94.

Up to 1875, entry into one of the provincial communities of the German Reich was regulated by the churches. Anyone could become a member of the community by changing faith, either to the Catholic or the Protestant, or, in some communities, to the Jewish. For adults, the change of faith was most often accompanied by marriage to a member of the community. The relatively late German political unity, forged by Bismarck in 1871, was followed by the enactment of various pan-national standards, among which included the introduction in 1875 of the civil marriage. Thereafter, the state and church shared control over the rules for membership in the Reich, rules that no longer centered around work or household, but around affinal ties and ascribed citizenship.

First in 1896, with the enactment of a *Bürgerliches Gesetzbuch* (comprehensive civil law book), the Germans codified the complex set of marital and property relations centered around patrilineal inheritance. At the end of the 19th and beginning of the 20th century, anthropological and biological research, often done on natives in the colonies and on the Slavs to the east, began linking physiological differences with cultural ones, resulting in typologies of cultures based on blood types (for a summary see Ploetz 1895; Rehse 1969). The concept *Blutsverwandtschaft* (blood relative), whose validity the German-American anthropologist Franz Boas so vehemently questioned, was conveniently trotted forth as a scientific basis for laws delineating the northern Europeans (Aryans) from other so-called racial types (see Pommerin 1979). Male input into reproduction was thereafter defined more in terms of blood than authority (or semen), which paradoxically admitted the possibility of females also passing on their traits. Because this concept allowed for inheritance through the female line, it also prepared the grounds for rules of bilateral inheritance.

The National Socialists then based their marital laws in the 1930s on these scientifically “proven” blood differences between groups, which were said to correlate with cultural differences (for a sketch of the role of anthropology, see Stoelting 1987:129–133). Initially more concerned with male blood ties than female ones, the Nazis thus stubbornly showed a structural preference for male over female blood in their hierarchy of *Mischehe* (mixed marriages). Citizenship rules—who deserves the protection and rights of the state—were also formulated according to these models. Other possible codes of belonging, such as a territorial one (place of birth) or a voluntaristic one (German by choice or learning), remained essentially outside the purview of German law through 1945. The Nazis used marital and blood distinctions to construct further discriminations into Germaness and non-Germaness, forcing, for example, a large number of their female citizens to abort, and criminalizing abortion for others, who were then coerced into producing more children. Male and female sterilization programs and the extermination policies directed to Jews and Slavs were simple logical ex-
tensions of these pre-Nazi kinship distinctions (Bock 1986; Kaufmann 1988:34–43; Muehlfeld and Schoenweis 1989).

Among the Nazi “innovations,” however, was linking the results of the scientific research on blood types to the concepts of Heimat (home) and Lebensraum (living space). Nazi policies of internal policing and external expansion were aimed at creating a secure Heimat with plenty of Lebensraum for the Blutsverwandtschaften (German blood relatives). After the war, the two new German states, established in 1949, had the difficult tasks of, on the one hand, distancing themselves from the concept of Lebensraum and, on the other, constructing a new concept of Heimat and Germanness. After the German defeat in May 1945, natives referred to the immediate period as Stunde Null (zero hour) and to the German territory as Niemandsland (nobody’s land). Both concepts refer to the desire to see oneself as a tabula rasa, as well as indicating the lack of semantic referents available for time and place in everyday language use to construct Germanness.

Postwar State Strategies

Differences in postwar state strategies for reconstituting or recategorizing Germanness might best be illustrated by two examples: first, of distancing from the past—the comparative periodization of fascism; and second, of recategorizing—the comparative reconstruction of kinship codes or rules for membership in the group.4

Contrasts between the two German states were nowhere more directly visible than in how they dealt with the Nazi period, the dating and explaining of its origin and end. In its official historiographical tracts periodizing fascism, the West German state dated the origin of fascism to 1933, when Hitler “took over power.” The end of fascism was dated to the unconditional German surrender in 1945.5 This periodization, 1933–1945, because it made fascism coterminous with a particular German political event, the Third Reich, led to an internalization of the Third Reich, meaning that Nazism had to be explained as a German problem (on West German historiography, see Mommsen 1983:168–190; Wehler 1984:221–262).

The West German state has, in fact, never totally distanced itself from the Hitler state, but rather absorbed its major figures into the West German economy. Even in politics, there was no great stigma attached to a Nazi background. At the same time, however, giving fascism a narrowly political periodization relieved it of accounting for Nazism in economic or cultural terms. Subsequently, even though this periodization tends to reduce fascism to a problem of political leadership (in other words, Hitlerism), its dating within German history still entailed an internalization of the problem and forces some sort of reckoning, albeit intermittent and narrowly defined, with fascism.6

Official historiography in East Germany, on the other hand, categorized fascism as a child of capitalism, whose emergence after the German defeat in 1918 resulted in the Nazi government some 15 years later.7 Note that this is both an economic and political periodization, though, like the West German example,
a cultural one. By claiming that fascism is a problem of capitalism, and not necessarily of German history alone, the GDR universalized and abstracted the Third Reich. Fascism became a universal problem of an abstract, nonlocal nature, attributable to a virulent form of capitalism and class conflict that could, theoretically, exist anywhere in the world. The GDR insisted that the Russian occupation in 1945 marked an absolute break with this period, and that the post-1949 state (because it was socialist) eliminated the preconditions for fascism, which still lived on in capitalist West Germany. Responsibility for the Nazi period, the leaders said, was not theirs, for those at the top, in contrast to most West German leaders, also were incarcerated in concentration camps or had worked in resistance—they had also been fascism’s victims. And they pointed to the ‘‘131 Law’’ in West Germany, which took effect on 11 May 1951, granting all former Nazi Party members an amnesty. Their own more thorough reeducation program, more complete demonopolization, and initial demilitarization more strictly conformed to the stipulations of the Potsdam Accord.

The strategies of internalization by West Germany and universalization and abstraction by the GDR were also formative for reconstructing kinship or codes for group membership. What happened to the race categories and to the concept ‘‘blood relative,’’ so important in the racial policies of the Third Reich? Lebensraum as a concept, was, of course, totally taboo in both states. Yet, West Germany claimed to be the successor state to the Third Reich, with the accompanying rights to land and people. Hence it never relinquished its claims on land ceded after the war to Poland, the U.S.S.R., and Czechoslovakia until six months after the Wall came down; and it made good on its claims to the territory of the GDR, formally completing annexation in October 1990 (see Borneman 1991b). In the postwar period, powerful organizations of Vertriebene (refugees), who had been driven out of their homelands, primarily in what is known as the Ostgebiet, kept open the issue of reclaiming their lost land, property, and kin.

Meanwhile, the West German state always claimed to represent all the German people, including those who were GDR citizens, and those who had emigrated to the Soviet Union or East Europe (Warsaw Pact countries) in the previous 200 years. Thus, West Germany retained prewar kinship codes more or less intact, until some partial reforms in 1965, and more major reforms in 1977 (Glendon 1989). Through all these reforms, the central category of belonging in West Germany has remained the concept deutschstaemmig (of German descent). And the only way to prove German descent is through blood ties, with shared blood being the generative category of kinship (see Borneman 1989, 1991a; Forsythe 1989).

Regardless of how culturally ‘‘German’’ any of the Turkish nationals living in West Berlin might become, regardless of how well they learn the language or cultural rules, they cannot become German (see Mandel 1988). Many of these guest workers now have permanent resident rights, but very few will ever obtain citizenship. Yet Article 116 of the Basic Law guarantees that all Aussiedler (Germans who had settled out) and Volksdeutsche (ethnic Germans) have the right to resettle in the Federal Republic at any time, merely because they can prove Ger-
man descent. And, as mentioned above, despite the existence of the GDR as a state, its citizens, called *Uebersiedler* (settled over), automatically qualified as West German citizens. In sum, the West German state internalized most of the Nazi race codes, though changing terminology from *Blutsverwandtschaft* (blood relative) to *deutschstaemmig* (of German descent).

Kinship codes in East Germany, on the other hand, were radically reconstructed in 1949, organized around a universal concept of socialist membership: anyone claiming shared ideology could apply for membership. Membership in the East German community was always defined in terms of class identity, class conflict, and socialism, though it took many years before the self-described "Worker and Farmer State" formalized this complex of values into a notion of "socialist nation." Much as in the law of the Federal Republic, marriage-into could also be used to obtain membership, but shared blood no longer counted for much. Anyone was allowed to marry-in, though preferably someone from another socialist land. But it was irrelevant whether they came from white Poland or black Angola. The territory on which one was born was also irrelevant—the only thing that really counted was prior citizenship: membership in a socialist or capitalist state. In sum, the East German state strategy was one of value abstraction and universalization (see Borneman 1989:62–70, 263–275).8

**Autobiographical Accounts**

How did these two state strategies of dealing with the past and incorporating members—internalization by West Germany, universalization and abstraction by East Germany—relate to the way their respective citizens reconstructed personal histories?9 In autobiographical accounts of citizens in West Berlin, women commonly began their postwar history with rape or the threat of rape by the invading Russian soldiers. This was followed by the great hunger of the winters of 1946 and '47, by the currency reform of 1948, and by themes related to domestic purchases of basic consumer goods, to child care, and to kin. Men began their postwar experience as prisoners of war, followed by the currency reform, and by economic or labor themes (such as, e.g., purchase of a new automobile, changes in status at the workplace).

For both men and women in West Berlin, the one commonly related event, the currency reform, functioned as an experiential trope because it signified first, a clean break with the Nazi past and a distancing from the Communist East, and second, an event with no clear agency, with no way to implicate Germans themselves in the planning (the plan originated with the Americans and was forced on the reluctant Germans), and third, the possibility for a new future through the Marshall Plan and the *Wirtschaftswunder* (economic miracle).

At another level, the symbol that West Berliners most often used in their narratives to periodize the economic miracle in the late 1950s and '60s was the personal automobile. In nearly all of the accounts of domestic life related to me, the purchase of the first automobile is used as a rhetorical take-off point, a trope, which then expands on the theme "*Wir sind wieder wer*" ("We're somebody
This slogan arose in 1954 after the West Germans won the World Soccer Championship, proof to themselves that they, the Germans (West), were winners again. These men repeatedly emphasized the prosperity that they accomplished through work.

Private automobile ownership, the symbol of this prosperity, increased steadily in the last 35 years, from 1% in 1950 to 50% in 1969 to 83% in 1985. During this period, when the number of cars increased from 8 million to 36 million, private automobile traffic was prioritized over all other ends. In an incredibly brutal fashion, old trees were chopped down, private gardens destroyed, and parking garages built in the middle of medieval city centers—all to make room for the automobile (see Monheim and Monheim-Dandorfer 1991). In addition to the increase in number of owners, the type of autos has also changed, with a steadily increasing consumption of the deluxe German cars (Mercedes-Benz, Porsche, BMW) replacing the standard Volkswagen (Borneman 1989:200–201; Maase 1985:220; Zahlenspiegel 1988:79). It is also important to note that, though West Germany has the strictest environmental laws on the continent, it remains the only country in Europe without a speed limit on its freeways.

A second symbol appears in categorizing the '70s: the once or twice a year vacation—traveling—most often to a foreign country. Vacations bring together important aspects of time and space: It is free time (accomplished through, and opposed to, work) and movement outside "German space." Whereas only 5% of all Germans traveled on vacations in 1954, 58% did so in 1982, with 67% of those traveling to a foreign country (Maase 1985:214–219). Length of vacations has also increased: In 1975 only 30% of all West Germans vacationed five to six weeks, 0% did so six or more weeks; by 1985, 25% vacationed five to six weeks, 72% did so six or more weeks (Suessmuth 1988:225).

Despite the fact that male and female autobiographies are not always troped the same, the differences in experiential tropes are unimportant in and of themselves; these tropes obtain significance by being metonymically linked at the group (national) level through appeals for meaning to common master narratives. The two focal symbols of the car and vacation, as well as the experiential tropes of rape for the women, flight for the refugees, and of confinement in a POW camp for the men, obtain coherence by relying on the state’s master narrative of prosperity. This master narrative reterritorializes space, enabling links to be established between the different experiential tropes of rape for the women and of flight for the refugees, and it simultaneously provides an answer for men to the confinement of the POW camp. Selbstverfluechtigung, a flight or evaporation/sublimation of the self caught between debasement and adaption, as Bude (1987) defines this phenomenon, is, in fact, an experiential answer to rape, to the POW experience, as well as to territorial displacement and loss in the faith of cultural particularities (the legacy of Nazism). The state-directed prosperity of the Wirtschaftswunder, troped in the currency reform of 1948 and then obtained through work, provides the mechanism enabling flight; it provides a "way out."

Relationships between the trope of flight and the master narrative of prosperity, on the one hand, and the state strategy of internalization of the Nazi past,
on the other, should now be quite transparent. Because the West German state absorbed Nazism into its midst—many people joke about having obtained Persilscheine (Tide certificates of denazification)—and deployed the amnestied Nazis along with the refugees to reorganize industry and create the Wirtschaftswunder (Korte 1985:17), both native inhabitants and refugees need another trope to claim a break with, and distance themselves from, the Nazi past. The experiential trope that does this, the currency reform, and the master narrative used to emplot this trope, prosperity, were both provided by the state. The symbols of wealth resulting from this economic reform—consumer goods, the car, and free time and vacation—are today sacrosanct items, often used by other Europeans to caricature the West Germans.

In the autobiographies of East Berliners, women began their postwar narratives with the same events as their West Berlin counterparts: rape, hunger, and child care. But when they began dealing with life in the 1950s, most of them also made reference to their work accomplishments during what was officially called Aufbau, the reconstruction period. Their integration into the economy in the ’50s, often against their will, was reconstructed as something meaningful, if not always positive. In this story, they differ radically from West Berlin women, who rarely held steady employment. By 1965, 75% of all East German women were employed, compared to 47.5% of all West German women; by 1985, 91% of all GDR women were employed, compared to 51% of all West German women (Borneman 1989: Ch. 3; Obertreis 1985). These women, in their narrations, tended not to return to the experiential tropes of rape and hunger, as did women in the West, but instead either dwelled on the hardships experienced and the obstacles overcome during reconstruction, or emphasized their distinct contributions to society. Insofar as they emphasized work experience, they related it to increased self-esteem (see Niethammer 1988).

East Berlin men often began their narratives much like West Berlin men, with experiences as POWs, followed by the currency reform. But for them, both events were experiences of victimization. Even the currency reform was an experience of loss and exclusion, not gain and pride as in the West, dividing, as it did, recipients of the Marshall Plan from those in the “Soviet Occupied Zone.” The positive role of these men in the difficult Aufbau was most often counterbalanced by other events of victimization. For example, they frequently mourned the loss of kin who moved to the West, they bemoaned their time as Nazi soldiers, and they regretted their own powerlessness in the realm of politics in East Germany. Conversely, a very few, mostly members of the ruling Socialist Unity Party, narrated an exaggerated defense of their satisfaction with socialism—“Ich fuehle mich wohl!” (‘I feel good!’). How are these experiential tropes connected? With difficulty, to say the least. If anything connects them as a coherent narrative, it is not the state’s strategies of abstraction and universalization, but the citizens’ own experiential trope of victimization. In sum, whereas GDR women often had one experience—socially valued work—that distinguished them from their West German counterparts, GDR men had no domain of experience with which to construct an identity that might have positively compared to their West German counterparts.
At another level, we can search for key symbols in East Berlin narratives, much as we did for West Berliners, and ask how they relate to the creation of a group identity. First, we must conclude that the East German state was not able to provide a master narrative to organize and make coherent the experiences of individual citizens. Yet, the state’s inability to emplot citizen experiences positively over time did not lessen its significance in the process of identity construction. On the contrary, the state set the ideational and aesthetic framework, ultimately inadequate but nonetheless present, in which citizen experiences were narrated.

This process can again be illustrated with the example of a key symbol, one manufactured by the East German state, that appeared in nearly all of the autobiographies of GDR citizens: the automobile. But this car is not the efficient, powerful West German type, not the Mercedes or the BMW, but the state-produced Trabant, a small, weak, heavy polluting, two-cylinder model made purely for domestic consumption. A friend who had waited for her Trabant for 13 years—the average wait in the GDR—exclaimed to me, “I don’t have a car, I have a Trabant!” The word “Trabant” comes from astronomy and means neighboring planet; like the moon, it follows and accompanies, but does not lead. Consciously or unconsciously, GDR leaders picked this word for their postwar car, a kind of premonition of the problems they would have in keeping pace economically with the West Germans. Not only did the East Germans drive Trabants, but most citizens (until November 1989) also were limited in travel to their own country and Czechoslovakia. Even if they could leave their country, they could not have done it with their Trabant, for it did not meet pollution standards in Western Europe. For these reasons, few East Germans could have engaged in the kinds of flight characteristic of their West German counterparts.

The importance of the Trabant as a symbol of East German identity is captured well by Reinhold Andert (1989), a GDR poet-songwriter, in his song “Mein Trabbi” (“My Trabant”):

My Trabbi fits me like a glove,  
a car of the people, for citizens, Genossen.  
A vehicle of the people, for you and me,  
something we can afford, but certainly nothing more.  
Small and narrow, something you feel close to,  
it loudly warns everyone its coming,  
slowly, then I begin to notice how large my homeland is,  
My Trabbi guzzles a bit much, but in that we’re like relatives.  
Mazda, Peugot, Golf, Volvo, Citroen,  
products of alienated labor—obscene.  
My little motor, sometimes it putters  
was built according to the book, with a hammer,  
Sounds like a lawnmower, moves like a racing pasteboard.

The point I wish to make about East Berliners is not that they had fewer experiential tropes with which to periodize their life stories than did West Berliners. On the contrary, Andert’s lyrics contain many of the symbols and themes that
index experiences East Germans widely shared. In line two, he links the car to people, state, and party—a holy trinity in the GDR. He then presents this car as synecdochic for the self-image of the East German: “small and narrow” (Kleinbuerger (petty bourgeois), spatially incarcerated in a “homeland.” But this is more a parody and rejection of self and state than a use of state emplotment forms to bring disparate experiences into coherent form. No metonymical work is being performed here.

Most significant, Andert’s text suggests a lack of fit, or lack of mimesis, between the state’s strategies and citizen narrations. The “fit like a glove” about which Andert sings acknowledged the fit only to undermine its legitimacy. Likewise, East Germans knew exactly what the state expected from them, but they did not legitimate the state’s emplotment forms when narrating their own lives. Often, this refusal to confirm the “social,” the positioning of self as incapacitated object of, and not subject in, history, resulted in a mere chronicle, a series of unconnected experiential tropes, with no metonym, no agreed-upon, integrating structure, to link experiences into a whole. And to the extent that experiences did cohere, as in sagas built around the Trabant, it was the trope of victimization that united, acting as metaphor—borrowing a phrase from Fernandez (1986:25)—to “cross-reference domains.”

Yet, feeling “the aptness of each other’s metaphors” (Fernandez 1986:25), although perhaps a distinguishing feature of ritual action, was not sufficient to unite the East Germans into a collective “nation.” At most, the Trabant operated as metaphor to distinguish them from their wealthier, well-traveled counterparts in the West. Whatever “sensation of wholeness” citizens experienced did not translate into construction of a collective whole, for so long as they remained spatially confined and culturally homeless, they defined their experience in contradistinction to the master narratives of the state; ultimately this incongruence worked at the expense of both citizen and state.

It was often said that the East Germans suffered from an inferiority complex, which, like the story of the Trabant indicates, has much truth to it. Certainly, the West Germans were by far the more confident and aggressive in their identity. However, this inferiority alone was incapable of serving as a master narrative around which East Germans could unite. Martyrdom and passion for sacrifice may be Polish or Israeli master narratives, but they are not mythological themes that permeate German culture. East German weakness vis-à-vis West Germans merely enhanced their idealization of the symbols of West Germanness.

The East German state strategy of universalization and abstraction was not able to generate the kind of master narratives capable of integrating to produce durable social cohesion. On the other hand, the West German strategy of internalization enabled the generation of the master narrative of prosperity. Thus, although West Germans have an extremely problematic relationship to their collective, ergo national, past—running from it when given the chance, bonding around prosperity and consumption, reducing the Nazi period to a political aberration—they did, in fact, develop a concrete, state-supported relationship to themselves and their history.
Conclusion

Two quite distinct dynamics of personal identity and nation building are the results of the production of difference in the postwar division of Germany. Because of the Nazi legacy, both states had difficulty appealing to a culturally delineated nation with ties to the past. Because of the Cold War, neither state could appeal to a fixed, sovereign territory. Thus, the reterritorialization of Heimat, the space within which home could be legitimately constructed, involved a simultaneous distancing from the past and demarcation from the oppositionally defined other half.

Berlin and its residents were at the center of this struggle. For the generation examined in this article, who reached maturity before 1945, more than 40 years of dual state structures has indeed contributed to the construction of two different nations. Several of the individuals whom I interviewed have already died since my study, the rest are now retired from public life. Nonetheless, these two mirror-image dynamics of identity formation—generative dispositions anchored in experiential histories—now bear directly on succeeding generations, and particularly on the process of unifying them. In terms of the issues taken up in this article, how are the new state and its citizens overcoming division?

After political unification, the Federal Republic’s immigration and kin law, with a few important exceptions (especially in asylum law) written into the Union Treaty and some issues yet to be decided upon, was taken over by the reorganized East German provinces. (For lack of a politically neutral name, they are referred to as “Five New Laender.”) A non-German can still marry into Germany, by marrying someone of German blood, but the marriage is subject to oversight and control. Many West German Laender, including Berlin, have their own special police forces to investigate “binational marriages,” as they are called, that are suspected of being so-called Scheinehen (fake marriages). In their investigations, the police concentrate on the shared domestic habits of African-German and Middle-Eastern-German couples.

Rather than expanding the codes for group membership, territorial and political unity of Germany has done the opposite: increased the distinction between, and reinforced separate codes for, East and West, and intensified the pressure to prevent foreigners from entering. Given the current political instability and economic difficulties in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union, the numbers of resettlers to West Germany since the easing of travel requirements accompanying Gorbachev’s reforms (always a demand of American and West European regimes) has been growing astronomically: 200,000 in 1988; 700,000 in 1989; more than 1 million in 1990. Moreover, the numbers of East Germans resettling to the West increased from 23,000 in 1987 to 40,000 in 1988 to 200,000 in 1989 to 330,000 in 1990. In addition, Germany ranks first among EC countries in applications for political asylum.

Polish immigrants form a special category, with a unique set of responsibilities, for Germany, considering the suffering inflicted on the Poles by the Germans in this century. During World War II, Germans had classified some Poles,
under Category 3 of their racial types, as *eindeutschungsfähig*, capable of becoming German. As many as 1.7 million persons living in Poland could theoretically qualify as descendants of these elect few. Estimates vary widely as to how many want to emigrate. When we add to the Poles the other estimated 4.5 million Volksdeutsche, ethnic Germans who had “settled out,” who now apparently also “want in” to the wealthy Federal Republic, we begin to understand the present dilemmas of the new German state (*Der Spiegel* 1989:72).

Thus, territorial and national unity—one state, one territory, one culture—has exacerbated rather than solved the problems that have haunted Germans in this century. The process of unification calls into question the whole set of assumptions tied to conceptualizing personal identity, home, culture, and nation as discrete, spatially distinct wholes. Far from eliminating division, unity has reformulated its terms: quickening time, refiguring space, and introducing alternate principles of legitimate domination. Subsuming the particular identities of East and West Germans under a more abstract Germanness and single state may indeed be a precondition for creation of a common fate, but it is no substitute for shared intersubjective meanings, which can only be created with metonymical devices over time and which, due to 45 years of division, are not at hand. The difficulty of creating an identity not tied to fixed notions of race, culture, territory, or history is what many call part of the postmodern condition. Germans may have been the paradigmatic cultural group of this century to experience this kind of homelessness, but certainly, in this they are not and never have been alone.

Notes

1 Berlin was constantly reterritorialized during the Cold War (see Borneman 1989: Ch. 1). It was both object of contestation and arena in which allegiances were contested. West Berlin, cut off from its territorial center and cultural habitus, was reduced to a city on the political periphery. But at the same time, because it was physically connected with East Berlin, the capital and center of East Germany, it operated as center stage. This liminal status made it a topos on which to map changing significations.

2 I initially wrote this article in 1988, in other words, at a time when nobody suspected the GDR would soon dissolve. Since then, the dynamism of history has severely tested the extent to which I have been able to employ a dynamic, processual model capable of speaking about contexts that are being transformed as I write. I revised this article in November 1989, a week after the Wall came down, at a time when it still seemed unlikely, even improbable, that the Germanies would be swiftly united. The last rewrite is from April 1991. I have not changed the argument I initially made, though I have put it to a slightly different use. Since 1988, the politics of division has been replaced by a politics of unification. My initial argument was about the fact that, in the postwar construction of different nations, it has been extremely difficult to establish legitimate group-identity narratives in the two German states, given that they employed oppositional models, and that they and their citizens were unable to avail themselves of appeals to territoriality and culture. History has in fact confirmed this argument, but then placed it in a different context, and that is: What will the legacy of division be for the unified Germany? I have chosen to retain my initial question, but have tried to point to how it might now also be used to address the new
circumstances confronting Germans in Berlin.

Much of this material on the construction of division is drawn from my dissertation (Borneman 1989), which is now revised and forthcoming with Cambridge University Press. A more complete discussion of problems related to unification can be found in Borneman 1991a, 1991b. This research was supported by grants from International Research-Exchange (IREX), Harvard Krupp Fellowship, Social Science Research Council Berlin Program for Advanced German and European Study (SSRC), and Fulbright-Hays. I thank them for their generous support.

I am following Hegel in my definition of the state as a system of legality and legitimacy, a specific kind of politically organized moral community. The state as a bureaucratic system of norms and commands, of organizations and regulations, is merely one of its dimensions, albeit its most visible. The objectifications of the state must be seen as part of a “temporal totality,” which in turn takes its form (and authority) from, and gives form back to, the cultural order. Therefore, again following Hegel, I do not see the state as “secular” and distinct from the practices of religion, science, and art (see Hegel 1953:49–62, 75–77).

These descriptions hold true for the two German states during the period I did my fieldwork, 1986–89. From 1949 to 1986, both states pursued strategies that, although changing significantly in content, remained consistent in aesthetic, ideational, and teleological aims (see Borneman 1989: Ch. 4).

In addition to the works cited in this article, readers may wish to review three edited volumes dealing with West German historiography relevant to my analysis (Bondy 1970; Habermas 1984; Weidenfeld 1983).

The recent Historikerstreit in West Germany, provoked by a Juergen Habermas letter responding to attempts historically to relativize the crimes of the Third Reich, can also be seen as a response to the internalization I talk about in this article (see essays by Habermas and H. Mommsen in Piper 1987). Unification (incorporation of the East into the West) provides new possibilities in dealing with this history, such as West German projecting “evil” onto the “Stalinistic” East, and, due to the asymmetry in the relationship, East German internalization of this role.

Much GDR historiography has been written by East German statesmen themselves. I refer the reader to accounts by two former Politburo members (Axen 1973; Norden et al. 1967).

This point has been made many times by West German writers. See Hacker (1974) and Ludz (1973).

These summaries of autobiographies are based on both formal tape-recorded interviews and informal conversations between 1986 and 1989 in the Berlins. For the study from which this is drawn, I drew on information from 196 East Berliners and 110 West Berliners. In this article I am focusing on one generation, which I knew well (repeatedly visited): 20 East Berliners and 6 West Berliners. Additionally, much of this information is cross-referenced with several oral histories by German scholars (for a complete summary, see Borneman 1989).

Only after much equivocation, and in response to pressure from the Soviets and Western Allies, did the ruling Christian Democrats (CDU) of West Germany finally renounce their claim on Polish territory lost after the Second World War. They did this shortly after unity
became a certainty, following the March 1990 East German elections. Up to that time, many members of the CDU and CSU (Christian Democrats in Bavaria) had expressed the wish to reestablish the German Reich in the boundaries of 1937.

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