

The Search for Normality

THE SEARCH FOR NORMALITY

*National Identity and Historical Consciousness
in Germany Since 1800*

Stefan Berger



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For Jutta

'For more than 150 years German historians have been writing in favour of a German nation ... They have wanted to revive or strengthen the German nation state, but only few have aimed at taming it.'

Hans-Ulrich Wehler, 'Einleitung', in: Theodor Schieder,
Das deutsche Kaiserreich von 1871 als Nationalstaat

'There is no close relationship between "securing identity" and "German national history" or "European history", as is sometimes alleged ... If the task is to mediate between "life history" and "universal history", then there is no need at all for "national history".'

Bodo von Borries, *Geschichtsbewußtsein als Identitätsgewinn?*
Fachdidaktische Programmatik und Tatsachenforschung

'The future has become more open, one waits expectantly and has the feeling of treading on thin ice.'

Jürgen Kocka, 'Die alte Bundesrepublik wird Geschichte',
in *Frankfurter Rundschau*

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‘Historians are dangerous. They have to be watched carefully.’ These words, attributed to Nikita Krushchev, certainly give undue importance to the work of a small number of people engaged upon, what surely seems to most others, a wholly impractical task: to find answers to the questions, what happened in the past and why it happened the way it did. Yet, there is some truth in the late Soviet leader’s comment, as historians have participated and intervened in public political debates for at least the last two centuries, routinely pointing to their position as privileged knowledge-holders of the past to legitimate their advice, both sought and unsought, for the present and future.

This study is based on close observation of the political-historical debates about nation-building in Germany which have unfolded over the past seven years or so, and relating these observations to the historical profession’s history. Being a historian myself, I have a ‘natural’ interest in this profession. However, it has been impossible to do justice to the whole spectrum of its members and their work. By concentrating on the intervention of historians in public political debates, I have tended to overemphasise the importance of the ‘big names’ in the profession. This is certainly not out of disregard for the many hundreds of historians who produce extremely valuable and good work and who might not find themselves represented one way or another in the following pages. I have not attempted to demolish the many accomplishments of German historiography and its representatives. Almost all those historians whom I have criticised in the following have proven their talents as historians many times over. My criticisms do not, therefore, mean to challenge their reputation or the value of their historical work, for which I often have the highest regard. Yet I do believe that the trends and tendencies outlined here may well mark a new direction in which certain aspects of German historiography are moving.

As someone who grew up in the old Federal Republic but received most of his training as a historian in Britain, I felt enough of an outsider to watch and comment freely on the way the profession has been developing since reunification. However, being an outsider, of course, also means that one does not have access to much privileged and private information which historians closer to German academia will have – especially in a profession which is as gossipy and rumour-laden as the historical one. Hence, and not for this reason alone, this volume no doubt has many shortcomings which are entirely my own.

I should like to add that Wolfgang Wippermann's recent book *Wessen Schuld? Vom Historikerstreit zur Goldhagen-Kontroverse*, Berlin 1997, which – in an extremely lucid manner – also discusses aspects of the development of German historiography after 1989/90, only came to my attention after the manuscript had been typeset and was ready to be submitted to the printer.

I would like to thank a number of people for their support and help in writing this book. My colleagues at the University of Wales, Cardiff have provided a stimulating and lively atmosphere for intellectual debate. David Hanley, as head of department, ensured that I had the time and financial means to carry out the necessary research. In particular I would like to thank David Jackson and Helmut Peitsch for reading and commenting on the whole manuscript. Kevin Passmore, Andy Croll, Mark Donovan, Chris Ealham and Jonathan Osmond read parts of it, and I have valued their suggestions greatly.

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States and Israel. I feel particularly indebted to Georg Iggers who addressed the conference and, during his stay in Cardiff, kindly discussed key aspects of this book with me. Finally I am grateful to all archivists and staff at the newspaper archives and libraries, listed in the bibliography, who had to put up with me. My greatest debt, however, is, as always, to Jutta and Kristina. No acknowledgment can reflect my gratitude to them adequately.

Stefan Berger
Cardiff 1997

ABBREVIATIONS

1999	1999. Zeitschrift für Sozialpolitik und -geschichte
AfS	Archiv für Sozialgeschichte
BDO	Bund deutscher Offiziere (German officers' organisation who, as prisoners of war in the Soviet Union, declared against Nazism)
Blätter	Blätter für deutsche und internationale Politik
BZG	Beiträge zur Geschichte der Arbeiterbewegung
CDU	Christlich Demokratische Union
CEH	Central European History
CSCE	Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe
EU	European Union
FAZ	Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung
FR	Frankfurter Rundschau
GG	Geschichte und Gesellschaft
GWU	Geschichte in Wissenschaft und Unterricht
HZ	Historische Zeitschrift
IRSH	International Review of Social History
IWK	Internationale Wissenschaftliche Korrespondenz
MFG	Militärgeschichtliches Forschungsamt (Research Institute for Military History)
ND	Neues Deutschland
NKFD	Nationalkomitee Freies Deutschland (German Communist organisation in the Soviet Union opposing Nazism)
NLR	New Left Review
PDS	Partei des demokratischen Sozialismus (Party of Democratic Socialism, successor party to the SED)
SED	Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschlands
SPD	Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands
SZ	Süddeutsche Zeitung
TAJB	Tel Aviver Jahrbuch für deutsche Geschichte
VfZ	Vierteljahreshefte für Zeitgeschichte
ZfG	Zeitschrift für Geschichtswissenschaft
ZfP	Zeitschrift für Politikwissenschaft

Foreword

**‘THE SEARCH FOR NORMALITY’
SIX YEARS LATER**

*History Writing and National Identity in Germany
at the Beginning of the 21st Century*

Identity is impossible without history, and there is no history without identity’. Thus stated the president of the Federal Republic of Germany, Johannes Rau, at the last *Historikertag* in Halle in September 2002. Rau was calling on historians to write history that would foster feelings of national identity under the conditions of a rapidly changing immigration society (*Einwanderungsgesellschaft*).¹ Just before the *Historikertag* opened, Hans-Ulrich Wehler had controversially remarked on Germany’s ‘problems with its Turkish population (*Türkenproblem*)’. Muslim Turks, he had argued, were impossible to integrate into German society. Wehler had then gone on to pontificate on the undesirability of Turkey’s membership in the European Union.² This interview with Wehler demonstrated, above all, that the *Einwanderungsgesellschaft* had the potential of mobilising racist sentiments among key players of the historical profession. Since this book was first published six years ago, a range of debates on national identity have come and gone.³ Not all involved historians, but historians were prominent participants in many of them. The president’s speech and Wehler’s interview are just two examples of many which demonstrate the continuing strong link between history writing and national identity creation. The investigation of this link is at the very heart of what follows.

The controversies surrounding the reconstruction of the Berlin palace have been resolved in favour of rebuilding⁴ and the portrayal of national history in museums in Bonn and Berlin raises few questions today.⁵ Yet attempts to remove the National Socialist years from

the centre of historical attention continue to be futile. Not only has the Jewish museum in the new capital been a huge success, but, despite continuing questions surrounding the financing of the 'Topography of Terror' exhibition, it looks as though it will eventually find a permanent home. The holocaust memorial and the House of the Wannsee Conference, a permanent exhibition centre on the terror regime of the Nazis, will also help to keep the memory of Germany's darkest years alive.⁶ Furthermore, the exhibition on the crimes of the Wehrmacht in the Second World War was very much in the headlines. Following Bogdan Musial's revelations that some of the photos used in the exhibition were incorrectly ascribed as being Wehrmacht soldiers, it was completely redesigned and went on display again in November 2001.⁷ More dubious histories of the Second World War, blaming everything on Hitler and attempting to white-wash the Wehrmacht have also appeared,⁸ but the success of the exhibition in debunking the myth of the 'clean' German army is beyond doubt. More recently, the decision of an increasing number of companies to examine their own histories during the Third Reich has been widely discussed.⁹ Lively debates have also surrounded the decision to pay out compensation for former slave labourers in Nazi Germany.¹⁰ In 2000, Norman Finkelstein's book on the 'holocaust industry' caused much debate among historians.¹¹ In 2001, Lothar Machtan's study alleging Hitler's homosexuality briefly agitated the public.¹² Yet there are signs that the continued historical concern with the National Socialist past continues to produce negative reactions from sectors of the German public. The conservative Konrad-Adenauer-Foundation bemoans, from time to time, the strong presence of the National Socialist past in the school curricula.¹³ What is more, according to a recent representative survey of German students, more than a third of them do not want to be confronted with the National Socialist past any longer, and a significant proportion even showed signs of anti-Semitism.¹⁴ It is clear that post-Goldhagen, debates on the holocaust have not subsided.

As the dispute surrounding the Hannah-Arendt-Institute for Research on Totalitarianism in Dresden has demonstrated once again, there are those who would like to remove the National Socialist past from its central place in German identity debates.¹⁵ Conservative politicians in Saxony seemed intent on ensuring that the Institute prioritises research on 'the second German dictatorship' in the GDR over the Nazi dictatorship.¹⁶ The GDR past has undoubtedly remained the second biggest focus for history debates in Germany. The publication of the *Black Book of Communism* has spawned renewed controversies about totalitarianism and the nature of Com-

munism. The German translation included an additional chapter about the GDR, which was mercifully absent from the original.¹⁷

The history of the twentieth century continues to shadow German identity debates at the beginning of the twenty-first century. Suggestions by a Social Democratic minister to merge Berlin and Brandenburg in a newly reconstituted Prussia raised the temperature of the discussions for a short while.¹⁸ The Prussia year in 2001 did not create the same debates that characterised the previous anniversary in 1981,¹⁹ but the folkloristic and cultural recourse to Prussia as reference point for German identity has become more widely accepted than was the case in the early 1980s. In other ways the 'German East' has recently been a matter of much concern in Germany. The portrayal of Germans as victims of the Second World War²⁰ gathered momentum with Guido Knopp's popular five-part television series on the flight of Germans from the advancing Red Army and the expulsions of Germans from Eastern Europe (*Die große Flucht*, first screened in 2001).²¹ The novelist Günter Grass, one of the fiercest critics of the re-nationalisation of German identity in the early 1990s, published a much-discussed novella in which the story of the suffering of the German civilian population fleeing from the advancing Red Army and the impact of that story on German collective memory take centre stage.²² In line with his argument that the topic of German suffering in the Second World War should not be left to the radical right, Grass has subsequently supported the idea of a German National Foundation (*Nationalstiftung*), one of whose tasks would be to keep alive the memory of German cultural achievements in Eastern Europe.²³ Historians such as Manfred Kittel have eagerly taken up this issue and are propagating an historiographical offensive on the history of what once had been 'Prussia's East'. Historians, according to Kittel, need to break from the West German taboo on writing about Germany's east, if the threat of a complete loss of German cultural heritage and a total 'historiographical Polonisation' is to be avoided. Germany, in short, needs to remember its spiritual part in the making of the European East.²⁴ German loss, German suffering and German victimhood have certainly all been foregrounded in the second half of the 1990s, although not always in an attempt to exculpate German guilt and avoid German crimes in and responsibility for the Second World War. In the debates surrounding Jörg Friedrich's book on the Allied bombing war against civilian targets in Germany,²⁵ some commentators have problematically celebrated the rediscovery of Germans as victims as something which reunification of the country has made possible.²⁶

The celebrations of the ten-year anniversary of reunification in

2000 sometimes showed liberal-conservatives, such as Horst Möller, lamenting the allegedly missing foundational myths which would unite all Germans, East and West.²⁷ Yet many of his colleagues participating in the public debate confirmed Germany's 'normality'. The German weekly *Die Zeit* opened on 28 September 2000 with the heading 'Praise to the Germans. Ten Years Since Reunification – a Totally Normal Country'. Manfred Görtemaker, a historian at the University of Potsdam, wrote in the *Berliner Zeitung* of 1 October 2000 of the differences between 1871 and 1989, but also confirmed the theme of a 'return to normality'. The Berlin *Tagespiegel*, in its lead article of 2/3 October 2000, saw the country making the 'transition to a quieter rhythm. What next? Stabilisation? Normalisation?' There was still a question mark. But, without quoting more celebratory statements, the drift of the argument is clear: normality is rapidly becoming the new German *Sonderweg*.²⁸ After all, it would seem absurd to read an article in a leading British or French newspaper loudly proclaiming the country's normality. The normalisation discourse is part and parcel of a re-nationalisation discourse. As Heinrich August Winkler has repeatedly put it: 'It was a mistake to think that the nation was a thing of the past.'²⁹

In a brief preface it is impossible to do justice to the richness and complexity of debates involving historical consciousness and national identity which have been taking place in Germany during the last six years. Yet, given the continued importance of this theme in public debates, is it simply a matter of business as usual? I think not. Significant changes and new departures deserve to be mentioned. To begin with, the 'new right', which formed such a prominent part of the story six years ago, has all but vanished from the public scene in Germany.³⁰ Its leading representatives such as Rainer Zitelmann and Karl-Heinz Weissmann have been completely marginalised. The new right failed to win a foothold within the respectable mainstream of German historiography. Its few institutional strongholds have either declined in importance or have been taken away from them. Thus, for example, the weekly newspaper *Junge Freiheit*, despite claims to the contrary, has not been able to influence public opinion outside its circle of dedicated right-wingers.³¹ The Ullstein publishing house was returned to the centre-ground and attempts of a right-wing take-over were ultimately prevented.³²

What had already been emerging in 1997 can now be confirmed: Those in the liberal-conservative mainstream, who had at times defended representatives of the new right against attacks from more left-liberal historians, and whose agenda had many common refer-

ence points with that of the new right, ultimately were not prepared to form a lasting alliance³³. Such reluctance can partly be explained with the new right's anti-Western stance, and partly with its clumsy and unconvincing attempts to rewrite the history of National Socialism in a more positive light. Historians belonging to the liberal-conservative mainstream were staunch defenders of Westernisation and the integration of Germany into Western alliances, such as the European Union and NATO. They had few sympathies with the new right's *Deutschtümelei*, which had strong parallels to the traditional anti-Western *animus* of the German right before 1945. The current search for 'normal' national identity takes place very firmly along Western lines. The new national emphasis seems compatible with liberal-democratic principles and a positive attitude towards further European integration.

According to Ulrich von Hehl, liberal conservatives could legitimately view themselves as belated victors in the *Historikerstreit* of the mid-1980s.³⁴ This made them even less likely to join forces with a maverick right wing. Reunification had in any case largely silenced their opponents who had argued against any re-nationalisation of German identity in the mid-1980s. In fact, some of their former adversaries were now advocating re-nationalisation. The argument could now be heard that 1989/90 was the first opportunity to bring together the national and the democratic principle in German history after a similar attempt to merge nationalism and democracy had failed in 1848.³⁵ The highpoint of attempts to portray 1990 as the moment when the nation, at long last, arrived at a democratic and Western identity (which had been successfully nurtured and developed in West Germany after 1949) was Heinrich August Winkler's two volume German history appropriately entitled 'The Long Way West'.³⁶

If the former adversaries in the *Historikerstreit* had moved closer together during the 1990s, they are still capable of differing substantially over particular issues. It is therefore only a partial consensus that has emerged in post-reunification historiography. Westernisation, the merger of a democratic with a national self-understanding, and the continued importance of the National Socialist years (albeit with different valuations) for German identities – those are the key pillars which are underwritten by all mainstream participants in the public debate on national identity and historical consciousness today.

Six years ago, I was careful not to neglect the historians in the GDR in my analysis, both before and after 1989/90. There have been a number of new and important publications on GDR histori-

ography since 1997.³⁸ In the 1950s and 1960s, historians in the GDR missed the opportunity to move beyond the national paradigm and instead fell back on sometimes very traditional forms of national narratives.³⁹ Yet, quite apart from a wide range of serious criticisms that could have been levied against them, historians in the GDR, by the late 1980s, had also achieved a great deal. The near total destruction of GDR historiography after 1990 (see chapter 7) remains one of the most questionable forms of ‘coming to terms’ with the second German state and its history. The overwhelming majority of former historians in the GDR have since withdrawn from the history field, many have gone into early retirement, others, especially the younger ones, have changed professions. Yet, after more than ten years, a historical sub-culture has developed in East Germany which is largely organised by former GDR historians. Widely ignored by the official West-German-dominated historiography of the reunified Germany, this ‘second German scholarly culture’⁴⁰ has been, among other things, rethinking the GDR past. It has tried to maintain networks of communication between former GDR historians, and contributes to the plurality of voices making up the historical discourse in Germany today.⁴¹

National history writing itself has increasingly become the object of study in the second half of the 1990s. Konrad Jarausch imported the term ‘master narrative’ from Anglo-American debates on the nature of history writing. Translated as ‘*Meistererzählung*’, Kocka, together with a number of scholars, has been investigating national master narratives in Germany.⁴² Edgar Wolfrum has analysed in great detail the complex relationship between history and politics in Germany. His concept of *Geschichtspolitik* is very useful for any critical examination of the relationship between history writing and national identity creation.⁴³ In addition, the magisterial attempt to transfer Pierre Nora’s hugely influential idea of the ‘*lieux de mémoire*’ to Germany has produced three impressive volumes on German memory places.⁴⁴ The emphasis is on the fragmentary, contradictory and open-ended nature of all forms of collective memory,⁴⁵ but all attempts to survey the collective memories of the nation run the risk of providing a highly selective list of memory places which is then cast in stone. Hence, on the one hand, studies on collective memory heighten our awareness of what constitutes identity, but, on the other hand, they also contribute to identity formation.

Yet, overall, few German historians still attempt to distil essences of national history. Rather, they tend to concern themselves with the different ways in which the nation has been constructed and remem-

bered. This is an important step on the road to a genuine pluralisation of national discourses. The acceptance of such plurality will be a precondition for more open and more tolerant identity discourses. In addition to the innovative work on the themes of nationalism and national identity mentioned above, the concept of identity itself has come under considerable scrutiny. Lutz Niethammer has described it as a 'plastic word' meaning nothing and everything at the same time.⁴⁶ Niethammer, one of the doyens of oral and everyday life history in Germany, has consistently been among the strongest critics of the national paradigm in the old Federal Republic.⁴⁷

In addition to such fundamental critiques of identity discourses, new research themes and areas have helped to undermine the traditionally strong links between history writing and national identity creation. Recent research on civil societies has already been demonstrating its potential to transform traditional concerns with national paradigms and move the historical discipline towards transnational perspectives.⁴⁸ Histories of migration and cultural exchange between different cultures have heightened awareness of the hybrid nature of all European nation states.⁴⁹ Another area of research that promises to problematise national paradigms is that of gender history. Recently many historians (not only in Germany) have explored the fascinating twists and turns of the gendering of national discourses.⁵⁰ Others have usefully explored the emotional hold of historical memory and its impact on national identity formation.⁵¹ The various forms of symbolic representation of the nation have found particular interest among historians. The cultural turn in the historical sciences has had a significant impact on a younger generation of German historians. Their research has been particularly successful in transgressing the national paradigm where it has been comparative in nature. One noteworthy example has been the comparison of attempts to overcome older nationalist historical paradigms in Japanese and German historiographies after 1945.⁵²

A genuinely transnational and comparative investigation into the structures and workings of national histories will play an important part both in understanding the diversity of national histories and preparing the way for further dialogue and understanding among nation states.⁵³ Only a detailed and comparative analysis of the processes of construction, stabilisation and erosion of national histories and wider historical representations will allow us to gain an insight into how diverse states and peoples have constructed and continuously reconstruct their national histories. From this vantage point one could problematise stumbling blocs which prevented a constructive interaction of national history with transnational ten-

dencies. Comparing national histories can thus help to understand processes of territorialisation which are not necessarily restricted to the national level. They can provide important insights on regionalisation and globalisation alike.

A variety of conferences in the 1990s were dedicated to the analysis of national historiographical traditions in comparative perspective.⁵⁴ They demonstrated, among other things, that the comparative method needs to be supported by an analysis of cultural transfer processes, as all memory places attempt to symbolise the authenticity of 'their' national history while at the same time depending on references to other histories which are related to 'their own'. Models from other, often rival historical cultures, have been taken up and used in different national surroundings.⁵⁵ Surely, Andreas Eckert is right when he calls on his fellow historians to end 'the remarkably strong national historical navel gazing' in German historiography and to encourage a more global orientation of historical research and teaching.⁵⁶

In light of the insignificance of the new right in Germany today, as well as research agendas which now aim to transgress the national paradigm, or question and critically analyse the link between history writing and national identity creation, I wonder if I was too pessimistic and worried in 1997, as several reviewers of this book suggested?⁵⁷ I think this would only be the case if one constructs the argument of the book to be about a straightforward return of German historiography to nineteenth-century Prussianism. Admittedly, my own emphasis on the long continuities in German historiography from the nineteenth to the twentieth centuries perhaps lent itself towards creating this impression. Certainly, my use of the term 'Prussianism' in 1995 was misleading,⁵⁸ which is why I did not use it much in this volume. Today, I would also want to introduce a greater note of caution with regard to some of the continuities in German historiography discussed below. In particular, the break in German historiography after 1918 needs to be emphasised more. I wrote in 1997 that the Nazi years produced 'little that can be classified as genuine Nazi historiography' (p. 38). With the ongoing research on *Volks-tumsforschung* and the deep involvement of a great number of German historians in the Nazi plans for a new racial order in Europe, this statement can no longer be retained.⁵⁹ The concepts of 'Volk' and 'race' clearly challenged the traditional concern with nation and state after 1918 and fed directly into a racialised historiography which served the Nazi state between 1933 and 1945.⁶⁰ Some of the most influential post-war West-German historians, such as Werner Conze, Theodor Schieder and Hans Rothfels, had been deeply

involved in *Volksgeschichte* and the dubious services it provided for the Nazi regime.⁶¹ Furthermore, my argument that one can only speak about a ‘delayed break’ with the national tradition after 1945⁶² was not meant to depreciate important ruptures that did indeed occur. The excesses of hypernationalism and the strong anti-Western thinking that had characterised so much of the historical discourse in Weimar Germany, were largely absent after the end of the Second World War. Yet the commitment to the propagation of positive national identity remained in place among the vast majority of German historians.

At the beginning of the twenty-first century Prussianism is unlikely to return to the Federal Republic. But, as Part II of this book demonstrates, under the impact of reunification, the discursive field within mainstream German historiography has been changing. The boundaries between liberal conservative and left liberal positions were being redrawn during the 1990s. In 1990, Karl Heinz Bohrer’s plea to his fellow citizens ‘to become a nation’ again was controversial. More than ten years on, the goal has been generally accepted. A return to national identity and a commitment to nationalising German identity is unmistakable among mainstream German historiographical and political discourse.⁶⁴

A number of other critics of this book sought to challenge my analysis by arguing that mine was not a scientific enquiry but more a political pamphlet. I have addressed those claims at length elsewhere,⁶⁵ and therefore only want to reiterate my general suspicion of attempts to delineate a neatly scientific method from political positioning in the broad meaning of the word. Of course there are disciplinary rules and regulations, but those do not exist in a vacuum. It makes no sense to juxtapose the autonomy of history as a scientific discipline to politics. Historians internalise (usually during their training) and seek to ensure civilised and regulated forms of debate within scholarly discourse. In pluralist and democratic societies, they form the basis for such discourse, but they cannot and should not replace debates about their scope, meaningfulness and adequacy. But to doubt the autonomy of history from politics, as I indeed do, is clearly not the same as to say that history is subordinate to, or a mere function of, politics. It is perfectly possible, and I certainly claim to do this in what follows, to write an interpretation of historical events which follows the established practices of historical scholarship, for example, the practices of source criticism, logical argument, and allowing for the possibility of checking, criticising, and revising its truth-claims. Method provides the intersubjective epistemological criteria for coherence and correctness, yet such ‘objectivity’ is

restricted to respecting the rules of the game.

The political dimension of history writing can be acknowledged without reducing history to politics by accepting the perspectival nature of all knowledge: all truth-claims are interpretative, partial, and revisable within the boundaries of rational, scientific discourse. A fact is only ever a fact within a specific framework of description. This not only allows for a plurality of true statements, it also means that the realm of facts cannot neatly be separated from the realm of values and politics. Factual statements already presuppose normative choices. Values can be hidden (as is usually the case with historians⁶⁶), or they can be brought out in the open. Whichever is the case, knowledge is only possible within particular political-normative-ideological 'horizons of expectation'.⁶⁷ What is on offer in this book is a historical argument, which openly declares its social, cultural and political investments and implications. I make explicit my underlying cognitive interests (*Erkenntnisinteressen*), as far as that is possible for any author. *The Search for Normality* has no pretension as being a neutral reading of the sources. Its arguments depend on moral norms and political dispositions, which should not be kept artificially before the gates of historical enquiries.

My book can in many respects be read as a sequel to Georg Iggers's classic work on the *German Conceptions of History*.⁶⁸ Whilst it does not claim to be of equal significance, it proudly stands on the shoulders of this giant and gladly acknowledges its debt towards Iggers's interpretations. For anyone interested in the development of the national master narrative in more recent German historiography, my book will hopefully provide a useful guide through the multitude of historical debates surrounding the nation state.⁶⁹ If, as one reviewer kindly predicted, it 'will surely become a standard item on every reading list for every course on German history in the English-speaking world',⁷⁰ I shall be more than satisfied.

Stefan Berger
Cardiff, December 2002

NOTES

1. Rau is quoted in Christoph Jahr, 'Geschichte für das Wir-Gefühl', *Neue Züricher Zeitung*, 16 Sept. 2002.
2. On Wehler's comments see his interview with *taz*, 10 Sept. 2002; see also, Hanno Helbling, 'Der Historiker und die Gründe. Hans-Ulrich Wehlers "Türkenproblem"', *NZZ*, 15 Oct. 2002.
3. For a review of some of the literature see Stefan Berger, 'Nationalism and Historiography', *German History* 18 (2000), pp. 239–259; see also Jan-Werner Müller, *Another Country. German Intellectuals, Unification and National Identity*, New Haven, Conn., 2000.
4. See below, p. 204. The debates have moved on to questions about how the palace should be used; see 'Vorschläge zur künftigen Schloß-Nutzung', *Die Welt*, 20 April 2001.
5. For positive balance sheets on the work of both museums see Ulrich Speck, 'Distanzierung vom Übertäter', *Frankfurter Rundschau*, 25 July 2001; Ilona Lehnart, 'Das Deutsche Historische Museum feiert seinen fünfzehnten Geburtstag', *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 28 Oct. 2002.
6. Interview Philipp Gessler with Reinhard Rürup in *die tageszeitung*, 10 May 2000.
7. Volker Ullrich, 'Das Bild wird düsterer. Zur Neukonzeption der Wehrmachtsausstellung', *Die Zeit*, 3 Dec. 2000.
8. Manfred Rauh, *Geschichte des Zweiten Weltkriegs*, vol. 3: *Der Weltkrieg 1941–45*, Berlin, 1998. Even more apologetic is Wilhelm Karl Prinz von Preußen and Karl-Günther von Hase (eds), *Die Soldaten der Wehrmacht*, Munich, 1998.
9. Hermann Kaienburg, 'Große weiße Flecken', *Der Spiegel*, 31 August 1998.
10. For more details on the compensation demands see http://www.ns-zwangsarbeiterlohn.de/zwangsar/stiftung/3_3_memorandum_02.html.
11. Petra Steinberger, *Die Finkelstein-Debatte*, Munich, 2001.
12. Volker Ullrich, 'Schwul', *Die Zeit*, 12 Oct. 2001; Lothar Machtan, *Hitlers Geheimnis. Das Doppelleben eines Diktators*, Berlin, 2001.
13. 'Deutsche Geschichte ist nicht nur NS-Zeit. Adenauer-Stiftung präsentiert Geschichtskanon', *Die Welt*, 27 August 2001.
14. 'Schluss mit dem Holocaust. Viele Hochschüler wollen von der Nazi-Zeit nichts mehr wissen', *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, 4 Nov. 2002.
15. On the centrality of the holocaust in particular see Mary Fulbrook, *German National Identity after the Holocaust*, Cambridge, 1999. For attempts to use the GDR past to move the concern for the Nazi past to the margins see below, p. 151 f.
16. 'Geschichtsstunde im Geisterhaus', *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, 10 Nov. 2000; 'Die Tendenz zum Tendenzbetrieb', *NZZ*, 27 Oct. 2000; the close connections between conservative politics in Saxony and events at the research institute has also been criticised by Hans-Günter Hockerts, 'Leserbrief', *FAZ*, 17 Oct. 2000.
17. Stéphane Courtois, Nicolas Werth, Jean-Louis Panné, Andrzej Paczkowski, Karel Bartosek, Jean Louis Margolin, *Das Schwarzbuch des Kommunismus. Unterdrückung, Verbrechen und Terror*, Munich, 1998.
18. Vigorously arguing against a reconstituted Prussia was Hans-Ulrich Wehler, 'Preußen vergiftet uns. Ein Glück, daß es vorbei ist', *FAZ*, 23 Feb. 2002.
19. See below, p. 87.
20. See below, p. 137 f.
21. On Knopp see Wulf Kansteiner, 'The Radicalization of German Memory in the Age of its Commercial Reproduction: Hitler and the Third Reich in the TV Documentaries of Guido Knopp', unpublished paper.
22. Günter Grass, *Im Krebsgang. Eine Novelle*, Munich, 2002.

23. Günter Grass, 'Die vielen Stimmen Deutschlands. Im Geiste Herders: Warum eine Nationalstiftung not tut, und was ihre Aufgaben sein müßten', *FAZ*, 22 March 2002.
24. Manfred Kittel, 'Preußens Osten in der Zeitgeschichte. Mehr als nur eine landesgeschichtliche Forschungslücke', *VfZ* 50 (2002), pp. 435–463.
25. Jörg Friedrich, *Der Brand. Deutschland im Bombenkrieg*, Munich, 2002.
26. Berthold Seewald, 'Deutschland entdeckt seine Leiden und die Trauer darum', *Die Welt*, 9 Dec. 2002.
27. 'Gelehrtenstreit', *Der Tagesspiegel*, 27 June 2000.
28. On the meaning and development of the Sonderweg paradigm in German historiography see below pp. 37 and 64 f.
29. Heinrich August Winkler, 'Eine Entscheidung des eigenen Willens', *NordWest Zeitung*, 29 Dec. 2000.
30. This is also the conclusion of the latest analysis of conservative historical discourse in Germany during the 1990s. See Gerd Wiegel, *Die Zukunft der Vergangenheit. Konservativer Geschichtsdiskurs und kulturelle Hegemonie*, Cologne, 2001.
31. For a stylised self-portrayal see <http://www.jungfreiheit.de/>.
32. On Junge Freiheit and Ullstein see below, pp. 2, 128 f.
33. See below, p. 253. Although it is inevitably problematic to divide historians into broad normative-political camps, such as 'liberal conservative' or 'left liberal', it can be justified as a heuristic device to introduce some order into the manifold positions taken by individual historians on the national question. John Breuilly's review in *German Politics* 8:1 (1999), p. 228 f. rightly points to the fact that 'the compressed treatment of the subject does create problems' in that values and politics are prioritised over methods, scholarship and craftsmanship, yet Breuilly also acknowledged 'the impossibility of conveying such detail of historical debate in a short book with a broad remit.' That he still found it, on balance, 'complex and richly informed' is gratifying.
34. Ulrich von Hehl, 'Kampf um die Deutung. Der Nationalsozialismus zwischen "Vergangenheitsbewältigung", Historisierungspostulat und "neuer Unbefangtheit"', *Historisches Jahrbuch* 117:2 (1997), pp. 406–436.
35. See below, p. 209.
36. Heinrich August Winkler, *Der lange Weg nach Westen*, 2 vols, Munich, 2000.
37. Frank Trommler in his review in: *The German Quarterly* (Fall 2000), p. 432 f. kindly highlighted the importance of such a chapter.
38. Martin Sabrow, *Das Diktat des Konsenses. Geschichtswissenschaft in der DDR 1949–1969*, Cologne, 2001; Mario Keßler, *Exilerfahrung in Wissenschaft und Politik. Remigrierte Historiker in der frühen DDR*, Cologne, 2001; Heike Christina Mätzing, *Geschichte im Zeichen des historischen Materialismus. Untersuchungen zu Geschichtswissenschaft und Geschichtsunterricht in der DDR*, Hannover, 1999; Ilko-Sascha Kowalczyk, *Legitimation eines neuen Staates: Parteiarbeiter an der historischen Front. Geschichtswissenschaft in der SBZ/DDR 1945–1961*, Berlin, 1997.
39. Stefan Berger, 'National Paradigm and Legitimacy: Uses of Academic History Writing in the 1960s', in: Patrick Major and Jonathan Osmond (eds), *The Workers' and Peasants' State. Communism and Society in East Germany under Ulbricht 1945–1971*, Manchester, 2002, pp. 244–261.
40. Walter Schmidt, 'Bedingungen und Resultate der Geschichtsforschung vor und nach 1989', in: *Thüringer Forum für Bildung und Wissenschaft e.V. (ed.), Geschichtsschreibung in der DDR. Rück-Sichten auf Forschungen zum 19. Jahrhundert und zur ersten Hälfte des 20. Jahrhunderts*, Jena, 2001, p. 51.
41. For details about this alternative culture and its historical discourse see Stefan Berger, 'Former Historians in the German Democratic Republic (GDR) in the Reunified Germany: an Alternative Historical Culture and its Attempts to Come

- to Terms with the GDR Past', *Journal of Contemporary History* 38:1 (2003), pp. 63–83.
42. Konrad H. Jarausch and Martin Sabrow (eds), *Die historische Meistererzählung. Deutungslinien der deutschen Nationalgeschichte nach 1945*, Göttingen, 2002.
 43. Edgar Wolfrum, *Geschichte als Waffe. Vom Kaiserreich bis zur Wiedervereinigung*, Göttingen, 2001; idem, *Geschichtspolitik in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland. Der Weg zur bundesrepublikanischen Erinnerung 1948–1990*, Darmstadt, 1999; for useful comparative perspectives on Geschichtspolitik see also Petra Bock and Edgar Wolfrum (eds), *Umkämpfte Vergangenheit. Geschichtsbilder, Erinnerung und Vergangenheitspolitik im internationalen Vergleich*, Göttingen, 1999.
 44. Etienne François and Hagen Schulze (eds), *Deutsche Erinnerungsorte*, 3 vols, Munich, 2001.
 45. On the precarious and ambiguous nature of German collective memories see also Hagen Schulze, 'Die Sprach- und Kulturnation auf der Suche nach sich selbst', *Die Welt*, 3 Nov. 2000.
 46. Lutz Niethammer, *Kollektive Identität. Heimliche Quellen einer unheimlichen Konjunktur*, Reinbek, 2000.
 47. On the refusal of many representatives of the history from below school to partake in national identity debates see below, p. 80. Geoff Eley in his review in: *Labour History Review* 64:2 (1999), p. 238 f. also highlighted the contribution of history from below and of gender history in subverting the 'grand narrative of national history'.
 48. Manfred Hildermeier, Jürgen Kocka and Christoph Conrad (eds), *Europäische Zivilgesellschaft in Ost und West. Begriffe, Geschichte, Chancen*, Frankfurt-on-Main, 2000.
 49. Klaus J. Bade, *Deutsche im Ausland. Fremde in Deutschland. Migration in Geschichte und Gegenwart*, Munich, 1993.
 50. Just one title among many is Ida Blom, Karen Hagemann and Catherine Hall (eds), *Gendered Nations. Nationalisms and Gender Order in the Long Nineteenth Century*, Oxford, 2000.
 51. See, for example, Etienne François, Hannes Siegrist and Jakob Vogel (eds), *Nation und Emotion. Deutschland und Frankreich im Vergleich. 18. und 19. Jahrhundert*, Göttingen, 1997.
 52. Sebastian Conrad, *Auf der Suche nach der verlorenen Nation. Geschichtsschreibung in Westdeutschland und Japan, 1945–1960*, Göttingen, 1999.
 53. This is also, why, in a European context, I am co-directing a five-year programme, financed by the European Science Foundation in Strasbourg, on the topic of: 'Representations of the Past: Writing National Histories in Europe in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries', which will run from 2003 to 2008.
 54. See, for example, K. Lönnroth, K. Molin, and R. Björk (eds), *Conceptions of National History*, Proceedings of Nobel Symposium 78, Berlin, 1994; K. Baczkowski and C. Simon (eds), *Historiographie in Polen und in der Schweiz*, Krakow, 1994; A. Bues and R. Rexheuser (eds), *Mittelalterliche nationes - neuzeitliche Nationen. Probleme der Nationenbildung in Europa*, Wiesbaden, 1995; H. Duchhardt and A. Kunz (eds), *"Europäische Geschichte" als historiographisches Problem*, Mainz, 1997; S. Berger, M. Donovan and K. Passmore (eds), *Writing National Histories. Western Europe Since 1800*, London, 1999; R. Thorstendahl (ed.), *An Assessment of Twentieth-Century Historiography. Professionalism, Methodologies, Writings*, Stockholm, 2000; C. Conrad and S. Conrad (eds), *Die Nation schreiben: Geschichtswissenschaft im internationalen Vergleich*, Göttingen, 2002.
 55. Cultural transfers between British and German historiographies are explored in Peter Wende and Benedikt Stuchtey (eds), *British and German Historiography 1750–1950. Traditions, Perceptions and Transfers*, Oxford, 2000; Stefan Berger, Peter

- Lambert and Peter Schumann (eds), *Historikerdialoge. Geschichte, Mythos und Gedächtnis im deutsch-britischen kulturellen Austausch*, Göttingen, 2003.
56. Andreas Eckert, 'Gefangen in der Alten Welt', *Die Zeit* 40, 27 Sept. 2002; for another plea to develop more transnational perspectives in history and the social sciences more generally, see Jürgen Kocka, "'Wir brauchen transnationale Sichtweisen'", *Die Welt*, 29 Dec. 2000.
 57. A.J. Nicholls in: *English Historical Review* (1999), p. 761 f.; Gunnar Beck in: *National Identities* 1:3 (1999), pp. 322–325; Joyce Crick in: *The Political Quarterly* 69:4 (1998), pp. 475–477.
 58. Stefan Berger, 'Historians and Nation-Building in Germany after Reunification', *Past and Present* 148 (1995), pp. 187–222.
 59. I agree in this one respect only with Jakob Vogel's criticism of my book. See Jakob Vogel, 'The Search for the Nation', in: *Journal of Contemporary History* 35:3 (2000), pp. 501–511.
 60. Winfried Schulze and Otto Gerhard Oexle (eds), *Deutsche Historiker im Nationalsozialismus*, Frankfurt-on-Main, 1999.
 61. On the painful process of a belated coming-to-terms with the historical profession's brown roots see Konrad Jarausch and Rüdiger Hohls (eds), *Versäumte Fragen: deutsche Historiker im Schatten des Nationalsozialismus*, Stuttgart, 2000.
 62. See below, pp. 40 f., 56–76, 252.
 63. Karl Heinz Bohrer, 'Warum wir keine Nation sind. Warum wir eine werden sollten', *FAZ*, 13 Jan. 1990.
 64. This is also confirmed by the analysis provided by different authors in Christhard Hoffmann (ed.), *One Nation - Which Past? Historiography and German Identities in the 1990s*, special issue of *German Politics and Society* 15:2 (1997). See also Michael Geyer (ed.), *The Power of Intellectuals in Contemporary Germany*, Chicago, 2001.
 65. Christopher Clark, 'Manifesto against the Nation', *Times Literary Supplement*, 10 July 1998, p. 28; reply by Stefan Berger in *Times Literary Supplement*, 17 July 1998, p. 17; also Ulrich Muhlack's review in *Bulletin of the GHIL* 22:2 (2000), pp. 36–43 and reply by Stefan Berger in *Bulletin of the GHIL* 23:1 (2001), pp. 21–33. See also reviews which highlighted the thoroughness of the scholarship in *Search for Normality*, e.g. Georg Wiessala in: *The Journal of Area Studies* 13 (1998), pp. 202–4, Ewald Grothe in: *Archiv für Sozialgeschichte* 40 (2000), p. 542 f., who emphasised the book's 'differentiated and prudent judgments', and Jörg Echternkamp in: *German Studies Review* (1999), pp. 359–361 who spoke of a 'nuanced historiographical tour d'horizon'.
 66. See p. 3 for my use of the terms historism and historian rather than historicism and historicist.
 67. For an up-to-date and succinct introduction to the relationship between facts/science and values/politics see Chris Lorenz, *Constructing the Past. An Introduction into Philosophy of History*, Princeton, N.J., 2003.
 68. Georg G. Iggers, *The German Conception of History. The National Tradition of Historical Thought from Herder to the Present*, 2nd rev. edn, Middletown, Conn., 1983.
 69. Several reviews acknowledged the usefulness of the volume in this respect; see, for example, Detlef Siegfried in: *Internationale Wissenschaftliche Korrespondenz*, 2 (1999), pp. 276–278.
 70. Günther Minnerup in *Debatte* 5:2 (1997), p. 253.

HISTORIOGRAPHY AND NATION-BUILDING

Some Preliminary Remarks

The nation has returned to Germany with a vengeance. A ‘new right’ has emerged in the reunified country with the resurrection of ‘a self-confident nation’ as the focal point of its programme.¹ Of course, nationalism always survived within the plethora of extreme right-wing organisations that accompanied the history of the old Federal Republic. It scored spectacular successes at the ballot box in the early 1950s, the late 1960s and the mid-1980s. However, what is worrying about the post-reunification renaissance of the national idea is that ‘new right’ thinking had some impact on the centre-right and even on some sections of the left in Germany.² An ‘extremism of the centre’³ has surfaced in the reunified country, and public discourse has steadily shifted to the right for the past seven years. Changes to the liberal asylum laws, discussions about the fight against organised crime and the remilitarisation of foreign policy all testify to the changing *Zeitgeist*. The repercussions amongst Germany’s intellectuals are unmistakable. Some of its most prominent writers such as Hans-Magnus Enzensberger, Botho Strauß and Martin Walser have, in their different ways, all put forward ideas for a renationalisation of German identity.⁴ Philosophers such as Dieter Henrich and Karl Heinz Bohrer,⁵ film-makers like Hans Jürgen Syberberg,⁶ and theatre directors like Frank Castorf⁷ have all contributed to what is one of the most hotly debated public issues in Germany today. This

national debate has been rekindled not only by extreme right-wing newspapers like *Junge Freiheit* (weekly circulation by March 17, 1997: 36,000) or *MUT*, but also by the more mainstream papers such as *Die Welt*, *Rheinischer Merkur* and *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*.⁸ The Ullstein publishing house and publishers like Herbert Fleißner provided the neo-nationalists with an important outlet for their 'new right' agenda.⁹

Historians have been prominent participants in this debate. After 1989 the alleged 'normality' of the nation-state found its enthusiastic propagators amongst German historians, both inside and outside of the university sector. It is mostly historians of the old Federal Republic who are at the very heart of the current debate. Therefore this book largely concentrates on developments in West Germany. However, former East German historians should not be further marginalised than they already have been (if that is possible). Ignoring East German historiography altogether would, in a perverse way, contribute to the post-1990 'national turn'. Hence, I have included brief surveys of the GDR historians and their views on the national question in chapters two, three, four and seven.

This study's focus on the role of historians as nation-builders further demands close attention to the politics of historians and its impact on their research agendas and historical interpretations. Unlike Thomas Nipperdey, for example, I do not believe in the autonomy of history as an academic subject from politics. Yet I do recognise that my emphasis on historical consciousness and national identity has to leave aside a number of methodological debates and key concepts which have been crucial for the development of the discipline over the past two centuries. This current study does not pretend to be a total history of German historiography. Its aim is more modest. It seeks to highlight one particular tradition and its renaissance in contemporary historical discourses – that of the historians' commitment to nation-building. The shaping of historical consciousness and culture¹⁰ is not only, not even predominantly done in scholarly tomes written by university professors. However, the increased public media presence of academic historians in and after the events of 1989/90 is in itself testimony to efforts to recreate the nineteenth-century role of history as the leading subject for political orientation. Nevertheless, prominent participants in the debates on national identity have been political scientists, often with a strong interest in contemporary history, like Karl Dietrich Bracher, Kurt Sontheimer, Hans-Peter Schwarz, Eckhard Jesse or Bernard Willms. Others have been historically trained journalists and/or publishers such as Joachim Fest or Wolf-Jobst Siedler. I have therefore adopted

a broad definition of who can actually lay some claim to being a historian, so as not to exclude significant opinions from the debate.

The commitment of historians to nation-building can look back on a long tradition in German historiography,¹¹ its major function being to uphold national honour and glory and create national identity. The self-perception of German historians as promulgators of the national idea has had a lot to do with their high social status and the very strength of historicism. Historicism is a confusing term. Historicism, the far more common term in English, is even more confusing, because the one word refers to two quite separate sets of ideas. On the one hand it describes a notion, criticised and rejected by Karl Popper, that history develops towards a particular end according to predetermined laws. On the other hand it refers to a concept, represented most prominently by Leopold von Ranke, which understands all political order within its own historical context. Hence, I propose to use historicism only for Popper's concept and to introduce the term 'historism' for the German *Historismus* (in contrast to the German *Historizismus*).

Yet even if we distinguish between Popper's notion of historicism and historism, the latter still remains a multi-faceted phenomenon which often is defined in very different forms. In our context of nation-building historicism became important in three different ways. At a basic level the assumption underlying historism that any given society can only be understood on the basis of its historical development, meant in effect, that historians were given the automatic right to interpret the present given that they supposedly held the key to the past. Secondly, the historian's insistence that an emphatic 'understanding' (*Verstehen*) forms the only basis from which to grasp both the 'individuality' and the 'development' of historical phenomena has been interpreted by Friedrich Meinecke as specifically German.¹² Historism's methodology was explicitly pitted against the allegedly more facile methods of 'Western' positivism. Meinecke's hugely influential emphasis on different cultural traditions with reference to German historicism served the purpose of underpinning the widespread belief in German superiority over the West and thus strengthened the nationalist mood amongst German historians. Thirdly, the individualising concept of *Verstehen* suffered from a value relativism which did not allow for any normative assessment of historical events. Together with the Rankean belief in an evolutionary process inherent in history, historism tended to write the history of the victors and condemn the losers to the garbage heap. Hence the small-German Prussian historiography, equipped with the instruments of historism, teleologically wrote the history of the nineteenth century as one great move-

ment towards 1870. Historians became, in Nipperdey's words, the 'main speakers for the nation' (*Festredner der Nation*).¹³

The dominance of historicism over German historiography only came to an end after 1945. In East Germany it was replaced by a Marxist-Leninist perspective highly critical of historicism's methodological and political legacy. In West Germany a delayed break with historicism occurred in the 1960s. A heterogeneous group of historians, sometimes referred to as 'critical historians', aimed at ending the close relationship between defence of the nation and historiography. Much of critical historiography was Social Democratic or, more broadly speaking, left-liberal in its political orientation. Yet it would be misleading to speak of a school of 'critical historians' in the Federal Republic. With reference to methodological innovation, it would be more correct to speak of the emergence of 'historical social science' in the 1960s.¹⁴ Often the supporters of 'historical social science' were also to the fore in criticising the national tradition of German historiography. Yet, more traditional scholars like Karl-Dietrich Bracher or Eberhard Jäckel could also be found amongst the critics of that national tradition. Hence critics of the national paradigm were not synonymous with practitioners of 'historical social science'. The politics of historiography often cut across the methodological debates.

At times the politics of German historians has been linked to generational experience which in turn is often linked to political ruptures epitomised in German history by such dates as 1815, 1848, 1871, 1918, 1933, 1945, 1968 and 1989.¹⁵ For many of the early nineteenth-century historians the restoration period following the Napoleonic era became, according to generational theory, the paramount reference point for their historical work. The shockwaves produced by the French Revolution made them focus on questions of how a political order could be stabilised and immunised against revolutionary threats. For those historians who came of age in the middle years of the nineteenth century, the struggle for national unity came to be their guiding light, whilst those who matured in Imperial Germany sought to defend the united nation against its perceived internal and external enemies. The generation of the First World War transformed the 'experience of the trenches' into *Volksgeschichte* and fought to revise the Treaty of Versailles so as to allow the national reawakening. Many saw in National Socialism the promise of such national revival. The generation of the 'founding fathers' of the Federal Republic still had a largely unproblematic relation to the nation-state as they knew it before 1945. The 'Yalta generation', by contrast, born in the late 1920s, socialised under National Socialism and matured in the

Europe divided at Yalta, came to accept the division of Germany more easily. The 1968 generation's concern with the fascist past led to a critical re-assessment of national history. The 1989 generation's concern with nation-building has led to an attempt to save the national idea from the alleged denigration of its predecessors. Whilst there is clearly some mileage in generational interpretations of historiographical change, such explanations remain at the same time both limited and limiting. Some founding fathers of the FRG, such as Bracher or Golo Mann, for example, were among the first to question the merit of clinging to the idea of a unified nation state in the 1960s. Members of the Yalta generation, such as Bernard Willms, always remained rabid nationalists tirelessly stressing the 'national imperative'. Old 1968ers, like Imanuel Geiss, have returned to more conservative positions in the 1980s and 1990s. Although I should belong to the 1989 generation, I cannot find much sympathy for efforts to renationalise German identity. A generational approach to the politics of historiography in Germany might therefore well obscure more than it reveals. I shall restrict myself to referring occasionally to generational impacts, where it seems appropriate, whilst generally confining myself to discussing the various ruptures and continuities in German historiography within their respective political contexts. In this way I hope to have avoided any unnecessary homogenisation of generational experience.

A wide range of historians have recognised that 1989 marked the latest 'rupture of consciousness' in German history and questions have been asked about its consequence for German historiography. In April 1995 the Institute for German History at Tel Aviv University, in conjunction with the Wiener Library, held a stimulating conference on the subject of historiographical change 'at era's end'.¹⁶ Jürgen Kocka has spent considerable intellectual energy on interpreting the events of 1989, emphasising that 'such radical change will not leave unaffected the way in which we write history'.¹⁷ Peter Bender reached a similar conclusion: 'The years 1989/90 form a caesura for the historian as well. It does not matter what his politics are. He simply cannot ignore the question of what the unexpected unification of Germany means for our concept of the history of past decades.'¹⁸ For neo-nationalists like Karlheinz Weißmann, the changes of 1989 mark a welcome opportunity to start revising the misconceptions about the past.¹⁹ Imanuel Geiss wants to reopen the *Historikerstreit* of the 1980s. The turning point of 1989, according to Geiss, ultimately serves to show up the failures of critical historians and proves Nolte and the revisionists right.²⁰ Kocka has already argued that the appetite of critical historians for a second round of the *Historikerstreit*

may well have been whetted by tendencies to renationalise German historiography.²¹ Even if, as will be argued below, the contours of the opposing camps in this latest of the great battles amongst German historians are still largely visible, they have also been changing since 1989/90. Commenting generally on the intellectual controversies which have followed reunification, Lothar Probst wrote: 'The process of German unity has in many ways reinforced the decomposition of ideologically rigid blocs and led to an increasing differentiation of the various discourses' on the nation.²² This is certainly the case in German historiography.

Discourses on national identity and historical consciousness²³ have for a very long time been extraordinarily broad and complex. The topic has attracted considerable attention from historians, sociologists, anthropologists and political scientists who have come up with a bewildering variety of explanations. Some scholars have dismissed national identity as false consciousness. Marxist historians have tended to interpret national identity as a thinly veiled attempt to cloak some specific class interest.²⁴ Weberians have also been analysing nationalism largely in terms of an ideology which fulfilled and continues to fulfil certain functions in society.²⁵ Others have stressed the need for national identity. Karl-Rudolf Korte, for example, writes: 'National perceptions of the self and the other are of the utmost importance in structuring both society and politics.'²⁶ For A.D. Smith 'ethnic identity' lies at the core of 'national identity'. 'The nation and nationalism', according to Smith, 'remain the only realistic basis for a free society of states in the modern world.'²⁷

National identity, according to Ernest Gellner, emerges in the process of industrialisation.²⁸ The latter dissolves traditional ties of kinship and replaces them with shared norms of a national 'high culture'. For Gellner such 'a common idiom' is necessary to allow individuals in any modern society to negotiate their position in society. National identity becomes a major stabilising factor in modern societies, and historical consciousness aims at underpinning it. National identity thus becomes an aspect of modernity. The formation of industrial societies and the modern state in the nineteenth century was necessarily connected to the emergence of national identities.

Whilst such a functionalist explanation of the need for national identity, which is present in many Weberian and Marxist accounts of the phenomenon, goes some way towards explaining the strong hold of the nation on many minds and takes seriously the threat of nationalism, one nevertheless has to ask how functional the nation-state still is. At the end of the twentieth century, faced with the increasing globalisation of markets and communication, a global environmen-

tal crisis and the limits of national welfare states in advanced capitalist countries, one might equally want to draw attention to the nation as a contingent, historically limited and limiting condition of humankind. Other constructions might well take its place in the twenty-first century. Indeed the nation-state would seem to be either too small or too big for most things. This fundamental truth has not been changed by the collapse of Communism in Eastern Europe. We cannot and should not take the concept of the nation for granted. There is no 'normality' of the nation-state. It is a concept devised for a particular set of questions, a concept which fits a certain set of beliefs. To do this, it is constructed in a particular way – usually by 'inventing traditions' or 'imagining communities' which then allegedly form the basis for the claim to national identity.²⁹ The interesting thing about national identity is how it is constructed, by whom and why? Historians clearly play a major role in the processes of constructing national identity. The struggle for cultural hegemony between rival political concepts functionalises the past and selectively perceives the present in the light of a constructed past.

The task of the historian, I would argue, is to guard against such political and ideological misuse of history, to rationalise the politics of national identity by identifying the variety of national, ethnic and political myths underpinning it. After all, as Michel Foucault argued, it cannot be the aim of historiography to offer 'substitute identities' to individuals 'who do not know who they are or what name they carry'.³⁰ The 'hunger to belong' has often been the result of social disorganisation.³¹ Irrational emotive identification with larger collectives is clearly not indispensable. Recent empirical studies have demonstrated that a lack of national pride does not have to coincide with either political destabilisation or psychological illness. It is rather the other way round: a low degree of national or indeed any collective pride can be seen as an indicator of a mature self-confidence of the individual.³² Therefore, representations of the past should not seek to recreate mythical roots for our national identity. On the contrary, they should aim at dissolving ideas of imagined identities, thus barring any easy fallback positions for individuals in their struggle to give direction and meaning to their lives. The first step, to paraphrase Marx on culture, is to avoid allowing 'fog in the brain' (*Nebelbildung im Gehirn*) to build up. This is all the more necessary as the politics of national identity is often a politics of exclusion. It frequently works on a them versus us opposition, a friend versus foe dichotomy. In our quest for national identity we distance ourselves from others. In inventing our own past we have to invent the past of others who are perceived as our enemies.³³ At the same time, however, we depend

on our enemies for our self-definition which makes the concept of national identity all the more confusing and disturbing. Sometimes national programmes gave prominent place to civic rights and democratic reforms yet equally, there are strong links between the national idea and military aggression. To encourage tolerance and understanding, to make people accept differences, that is a pressing task in today's multi-cultural Germany. The concept of citizenship, based on the territorial definition of the *ius soli* is of key importance here. By contrast, the concept of the nation has little part to play.

If this study starts from the assumption that today's politics in Germany makes any return to the concept of national identity unnecessary and potentially harmful, it also seeks to remind the reader of the long and unhappy relationship between historiography and the politics of national identity. The fact that most academic historians in Germany have been civil servants surely had a part to play in the emergence of a strong link between nation-building and history writing. With a guaranteed job, high social prestige and fixed salaries, history professors had little incentive to bite the hand that fed them. By the late nineteenth century the state had become the major sponsor of jobs and research funds. A historical profession which concentrated on constructing a collective national identity was helpful to the state in several ways. It instilled loyalty to the state in the history taught at schools and universities. It provided an excellent training ground for future civil servants, particularly those serving in the German Foreign Ministry. Furthermore, it enhanced the state's prestige when it could point to 'scientific' research which confirmed its own claims and pretensions. Hence the criteria of the Prussian state for the appointment of professors included not only academic excellence and prominence in scholarly debate, but also loyalty to the Hohenzollerns and a political standpoint 'above party'.³⁴ This in effect excluded Social Democrats, Jews, Catholics, Democrats and left-wing Liberals. However, German historians' motives for legitimating the state's actions have roots other than economic ones. It was not only dependence on the state, but also identification with the state which transformed historians into apologists for the nation-state. Hegel's hypostasis of the state as the incarnation of historical right and Herder's insistence on the people as the basis of a distinct historical collective were both to become hugely influential. Reacting against the universalism of Enlightenment principles, historians emphasised the distinct and unique role of the nation. Nations were increasingly regarded as 'natural'. They were identified with specific features, for example ethnicity, culture or language, which allegedly formed the 'national spirit' (*Volksgeist*). Tracing such