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Review Article

Germany and the Aftermath of the Second World War*

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Some fifteen years ago Richard Bessel and Dirk Schumann observed that historians had "given enormous thought to how Europeans got into fascism and war" while devoting "relatively little thought" to the question of how "people emerge[d] from these horrors."[1] This was an apt point at the time, but the situa-

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tion has changed significantly since then. Fascism and the two world wars have, predictably, continued to elicit extensive attention from historians, but the aftermath of the Second World War has grown into an ever more popular area of European history. Indeed, a strong case can be made that the post-1945 period is the most vibrant subfield of modern European history today, rich in new insights and innovations, its appeal enhanced by the steady availability of new source materials.

Much of the recent literature on post–World War II Europe has focused on the relationship between the first half of the twentieth century, with its catastrophic levels of upheaval, violence, and death, and the post-1945 period, characterized by relative stability, albeit against the backdrop of a looming mushroom cloud. The degree to which Europeans continued to live under what Bessel and Schumann labeled "the shadow of mass death" long after the end of the Second World War has been one of the central preoccupations of this body of scholarship.[2] This article will survey some important recent contributions to the field. Its thematic focus will lie on the end and the early aftermath of the Second World War, with particular emphasis on the transition to the postwar era. Geographically the article will concentrate on Central Europe, in and around Germany. The aim will be to address several major interpretative issues, some of them well established points of debate, others more recent areas of controversy. The article will progress thematically, in a roughly chronological order, from the end of the Second World War to the early postwar period.

The End and *Stunde Null*

As William I. Hitchcock has eloquently observed, the end of the Second World War brought liberation from Nazi rule, within and without Germany, but it also ushered in "a time of limbo, a time without structure or form, a time of uncertainty, fear and loss" that brought "unbearable suffering" for very large numbers of people.[3] The most immediate cause of that suffering was the enormous devastation that the war had inflicted. The extent of the material destruction was described poignantly by numerous contemporary observers, including the British writer Stephen Spender upon his visit to Cologne in July 1945: "My initial impression on passing through was of there being not a single house left. . . . The external destruction is so great that it cannot be healed. . . . The ruin of the city is reflected in the internal ruin of its inhabitants. . . . They resemble rather a tribe of wanderers who have discovered a ruined city in the desert and who are camping there, living in the cellars and hunting amongst the ruins for the booty,

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[2] Ibid., 4.

[3] William I. Hitchcock, *Liberation: The Bitter Road to Freedom; Europe, 1944–1945* (New York, 2008), 367.

relics of a dead civilization. The great city looks like a corpse and smells like one, too."[4] The enormous toll in human lives was even more shocking than the material damage. More than 40 million Europeans had lost their lives because of the war and related killing operations, including the Holocaust.

This extreme level of devastation in the spring of 1945, in turn, was in large part traceable to one peculiarity of the conflict: Nazi Germany's refusal to give up the fight, even after the crushing superiority of the Allied forces had become obvious to most rational observers. As Ian Kershaw has argued, a situation in which a belligerent power keeps fighting to the absolute bitter end is "historically an extreme rarity." Modern wars have typically ended in negotiated settlements or in the overthrow of the authoritarian elites that had pushed their countries to the brink of military annihilation.[5] In Nazi Germany, neither of these things happened, and the war dragged on until most of the country lay in ruins. A few facts illustrate the deadly toll that the final phases of the war in particular imposed on the country. Of the 5.3 German military personnel who lost their lives in the war, 49 percent fell in the ten months from July 1944 to May 1945.[6] In the last four months of the war, from January to May 1945, more Germans were killed, mostly within the Reich, than in 1942 and 1943 put together. Justifiably, then, what happened in Germany in the first months of 1945 has been called a "killing frenzy" unmatched in history.[7]

But what made this historical anomaly possible? Why did the Nazi regime and its machinery of death keep grinding on until the very end, despite the increasing obviousness of the looming defeat and the rapidly accumulating toll of death and destruction, increasingly within Germany itself? Unsurprisingly, these questions have been debated extensively ever since the early postwar years. One set of explanations has stressed the causal role of Nazi terror, implicitly or explicitly separating the bulk of the German population from the regime, sometimes with apologetic undertones.[8] More recently, the prevailing tendency has been to argue the opposite by emphasizing the regime's fundamental connection with most of the German population, particularly through the widespread acceptance of the notion of a racially defined *Volksgemeinschaft*, or "people's community," which divided the in- and out-groups in a deeply Nazified society, providing cohesion for the former. According to this view, a strong popular identification with the regime and its goals persisted among the bulk of the population until the bitter

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[4] Spender, cited in Hitchcock, *Liberation*, 182–83.

[5] Ian Kershaw, *The End: Hitler's Germany, 1944–45* (London, 2011), 6–7.

[6] Ibid., 379.

[7] Richard Bessel, *Germany 1945: From War to Peace* (London, 2010), 11.

[8] For pioneering, nonapologetic studies that posited a fairly clear divide between the regime and the people, see Martin Broszat et al., eds., *Bayern in der NS-Zeit. Studien und Dokumentationen*, 6 vols. (Oldenbourg, 1977–83).

end, fueling a desperate and vindictive surge of violence against perceived enemies as the system entered its death throes.[9]

Transcending this polarity, scholars such as Ian Kershaw and Stephen G. Fritz have identified a multiplicity of factors that contributed to the peculiar behavior of Germans in the war's final months. While acknowledging the significance of Nazi terror and of continuing—albeit by 1945 drastically reduced—popular identification with the regime, they have drawn attention to additional causal elements. These include the perceived lessons of 1918, particularly the importance of preventing any allegedly premature capitulation on the home front; the significance of grassroots agency and radicalization in a rapidly collapsing, highly fragmented political system; and the powerful negative bonds among hardcore perpetrators, many of whom regarded a fight to the finish as the only available option.[10]

Sven Keller's monograph *Volksgemeinschaft am Ende* is a notable contribution to the ongoing debate about how to interpret the Third Reich's final stages. Keller focuses on a particular aspect of Nazi Germany's collapse: the *Endphasenverbrechen*, that is, the criminal acts, particularly murder and manslaughter, committed during the war's last months, mostly on German soil, ranging from various arbitrary killings to the mass murder that characterized the death marches of concentration camp inmates and other victims. Drawing primarily on judicial records from the postwar trials of some of the perpetrators, Keller addresses the questions of "why the perpetrators kept murdering even when defeat was certain and why National Socialism and the National Socialist regime were able to stimulate violent behaviour until the very end" (7). His answers revolve around the concept of a Nazi *Volksgemeinschaft*, which in his view provided a broad "legitimizing frame of orientation" for the outburst of violence at the war's end (425). The notion of a *Volksgemeinschaft* amalgamated a deadly mix of ideological constructs that propelled continued violence, even when the battle for the thousand-year Reich had evidently been lost. Particular significance accrued to the demonization of perceived traitors and racial enemies and to the desire to preempt the alleged mistakes of 1918 by suppressing any signs of possible treason with the utmost ruthlessness. In addition, a sense of being caught up in the web of a "National Socialist world view" drove not only many murders but also numerous suicides (430). Nazi ideology therefore remained the key motivating force for the killers of the final hour, but its effects were bolstered by several additional factors, including heightened emotional reactions, especially fear and a desire for

[9] Examples include Frank Bajohr and Michel Wildt, eds., *Volksgemeinschaft. Neue Forschungen zur Gesellschaft des Nationalsozialismus* (Frankfurt, 2009); Peter Fritzsche, *Life and Death in the Third Reich* (Cambridge, MA, 2008).
[10] Kershaw, *The End*; Stephen G. Fritz, *Endkampf: Soldiers, Civilians and the Death of the Third Reich* (Lexington, KY, 2004).

revenge, as well as certain long-standing influences in German society, such as "radical nationalism" and "the canon of traditional militaristic values" (432).

Keller's interpretation may not be radically new, but it does provide a convincing, insightful, and richly detailed account of the dynamics on the ground in the Third Reich's final months. His numerous illustrative case studies of violent incidents are especially striking. Although Keller does not position himself explicitly within the existing historiography, his analysis usefully complements the similar recent interpretations by Kershaw and Fritz in combining ideological and other explanatory factors. Another merit of the book is that, at least tangentially, it also engages with an additional interpretative theme linked to the end of World War II in Germany, namely, the idea of 1945 as a *Stunde Null*, or zero hour, for the country.

The concept of a *Stunde Null* emerged at the end of the war to denote a radical rupture with the past and the prospect of a new, unencumbered beginning. Although it possessed a certain amount of appeal in many countries, its attraction was strongest in Germany, for obvious reasons.[11] Historians have tended to be highly critical of the concept and its uses—again, especially in Germany— primarily on two grounds. First, the idea of a *Stunde Null* obviously downplays or rejects continuities across the divide of 1945, and, second, it has typically served apologetic functions, explicitly or implicitly distancing postwar Germans from the Nazi regime and its crimes. Of the many dismissals of the concept, Lutz Niethammer's is among the most quotable. According to him, "the so-called 'zero hour'" captured the "wishful thinking of the Germans" that "everything was over and forgotten" once the Third Reich had reached its ignominious end.[12]

The critiques of the concept are strong and valid, certainly on the level of subsequent rationalizations and historical interpretations, where the notion of a *Stunde Null* is both analytically inaccurate, given the multiplicity of continuities it obscures, and morally dubious, in view of its apologetic applications. And yet, on the level of contemporary individual perceptions at the war's end, the concept is less easy to dismiss. Sven Keller makes this point somewhat obliquely, avoiding the words *Stunde Null* but employing the term "point zero" (*Nullpunkt*) to similar effect. According to him, the anticipated collapse of the Third Reich formed the *Nullpunkt*, which defined Germans' future perspectives in the war's final stages. Normative assessments of the anticipated point zero varied, depending on a person's position and outlook, from a deeply dreaded point of collapse to

[11] Richard Overy, "Interwar, War, Postwar: Was There a Zero Hour in 1945?," in *The Oxford Handbook of Postwar European History*, ed. Dan Stone (Oxford, 2012), 60–78.

[12] Lutz Niethammer, "Privat-Wirtschaft. Erinnerungsfragmente einer anderen Umerziehung," in *"Hinterher merkt man, daß es richtig war, daß es schiefgegangen ist." Nachkriegserfahrungen im Ruhrgebiet*, ed. Lutz Niethammer (Berlin, 1983), 28. The translation is from Bessel, *Germany 1945*, 396.

a long-awaited moment of liberation, but the sense of a profound and fundamental rupture on the immediate horizon was ever-present and real (2, 433–34).

In recent publications, Richard Bessel has made similar points, albeit more forcefully and with direct reference to the notion of a *Stunde Null*. While fully acknowledging its "contradictions" and other flaws, including its exculpatory characteristics and its neglect of important continuities, he has nevertheless stressed the term's wide contemporary usage by Germans at the war's end. Amidst the shock and devastation of total defeat, in a state of disorder "the like of which Germans had not seen since the Thirty Years' War," the notion of a "zero hour" made sense to many.[13] Everyday experiences were marked by strong discontinuities in a new and unpredictable political, social, and economic setting in which immediate concerns of survival dictated the patterns of daily life and people effectively "had to start again from scratch."[14] Therefore, Bessel argues, "there can be little doubt that the end of the war meant a profound break in the biographies of millions of Germans, who perceived this as a personal 'zero hour.'"[15]

The broader point that Bessel develops on this basis is worth quoting at length:

Our task is less to judge than to understand. Of course many Germans were keen in 1945 to leave an unedifying and tarnished past behind, but that is part of the story and not the point of telling it. By refusing to acknowledge the terminology employed by the people who lived through these awful times, we risk failing to comprehend fully what happened, and its significance. If, seduced by the desire to emphasize the importance of continuities over the 1945 divide, we risk losing sight of the extent to which 1945 *was* a break, of the extent to which discontinuities rather than continuities framed people's experiences, and the ways in which they understood those experiences. While the concept of a "zero hour" may have offered a convenient escape route from the nightmare of war and Nazism, that does not mean it should be dismissed out of hand.[16]

Bessel's point is important, not only vis-à-vis the specific notion of a *Stunde Null* but also more generally about the end of the Second World War. His argument accentuates the need to examine May 1945 and its immediate aftermath as a crucial moment in itself. That has not been done very much so far. The spring of 1945 has typically featured in the literature in one of two ways: as a coda to the story of the war or as a prequel to what came after, especially the rise of the Cold War. Historians would do well to dwell on the end of World War II and its immediate aftermath at more length and in more depth, taking "the late spring and early summer of 1945" as a "period of utmost significance," to quote Gar-

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[13] Richard Bessel, "Establishing Order in Postwar Eastern Germany," in Mazower et al., eds., *Post-War Reconstruction*, 143–44.
[14] Bessel, *Germany 1945*, 394.
[15] Bessel, "Establishing Order," 144.
[16] Bessel, *Germany 1945*, 396.

eth Pritchard's study *Niemandsland* (28). This was, after all, a fundamentally important transitional moment, a time of uncertainty and openness when the future was extremely unclear and numerous different arrangements and outcomes seemed possible, at least for a time.[17]

One aspect of the openness of the moment in 1945 that has generated significant debate is the possibility of a "third way" for postwar Germany—the idea that a different path forward, a "vision of social and political change situated somewhere between or beyond the starkly polarized options of Stalinism and the anti-Communist consensus of the 'West'" might have been viable.[18] Underpinning the debate, which flourished mostly between the 1970s and the 1990s, were contrasting evaluations of the potential of the grassroots antifascist institutions that emerged in Germany around the end of the war. Composed predominantly of Communist and Socialist activists with strong anti-Nazi credentials, these antifascist committees tried, for a time, to challenge more conventional political authorities. Sympathetic historians have viewed them as pioneers of grassroots democracy who could have restructured German society in a progressive, democratic-socialist direction, had they not been pushed aside by the occupation forces, with the encouragement of reemerging native elites.[19] Although more critical observers have dismissed the antifascist committees as irrelevant footnotes, lacking popular support or wider influence, controversies about alleged missed opportunities and alternative post-1945 sociopolitical scenarios did swirl around them for some time.[20] Following the collapse of East European state socialism, these debates largely ceased, however, and Geoff Eley, for one, has lamented the fact that, as a result, "the exciting but transitory openness of the political circumstances produced by the end of the war [has] recede[d] almost entirely from view."[21]

Gareth Pritchard has revisited these questions in *Niemandsland*, a detailed case study of the biggest bit of territory in defeated Germany that was controlled by local antifascist action committees in the spring and early summer of 1945: an area approximately the size of greater London and with a total population of half a million, in the western Erzgebirge mountains, on the border between Czechoslovakia and the German province of Saxony. For unclear reasons this strip of

[17] See Konrad H. Jarausch, *After Hitler: Recivilizing Germans, 1945–1995* (Oxford, 2006), esp. 19–101; Edward N. Peterson, *The Many Faces of Defeat: The German People's Experience in 1945* (New York, 1990).

[18] Geoff Eley, "Europe after 1945," *History Workshop Journal* 65 (Spring 2008): 208.

[19] Examples include Lutz Niethammer, U. Borsdorf, and Peter Brandt, eds., *Arbeiterinitiative 1945* (Wuppertal, 1976); Geoff Eley, "Legacies of Antifascism: Constructing Democracy in Postwar Europe," *New German Critique* 67 (1996): 73–100.

[20] See, for example, Daniel Rogers, *Politics after Hitler* (New York, 1995).

[21] Eley, "Europe after 1945," 208.

land, known locally at the time as *Niemandsland*, remained defeated but unoccupied, sandwiched between British and Soviet areas of control, between April and June 1945. During these two months, antifascist action committees composed of local Germans, mostly Communists, took charge of the area and proceeded to address the many practical issues that required attention, from reestablishing public order to paving the way for postwar political, social, and economic arrangements. This experiment in left-wing local control ended in mid-June 1945 as the Red Army moved in and incorporated the area into the Soviet occupation zone.

Pritchard provides a lively, detailed reconstruction of the short but eventful history of *Niemandsland* on the basis of extensive archival research. He also uses his case study to address much larger historiographical issues, above all the long-standing question of whether the autonomous antifascist groups could have served as the basis for a "third way" for postwar Germany. On that point Pritchard is unequivocal. While awarding the *Niemandsland* antifascist action committees high marks for their success in addressing practical day-to-day challenges facing the region—success that he labels "truly remarkable"—he is very dismissive of them as a potential basis for an alternative societal model (117). In his view, the committees, with their Communist domination, drew on a very limited social constituency rooted in the prewar Communist milieu in which the activists had been socialized. The activists were overwhelmingly male, middle-aged or older, militant, and in good part driven by a preoccupation with local concerns, such as old political and personal feuds. In pursuit of their goals, they were "high-handed and autocratic." A "vast gulf" separated this small minority from the bulk of the population, with suspicion and disdain rife on both sides. The antifascist committees "did not enjoy any significant degree of political support," and they offered "no potential whatsoever" for an alternative, democratic socialism (216).

In their wider function, the antifascist groups were instead "by far the most important local agent for the Soviets." They had wanted "Communist domination" all along, and when the chance to secure that objective arrived, with the arrival of the Soviet authorities, an "almost seamless transition" ensued, as "many of the most prominent people in the Niemandsland antifas [antifascist committees] went on to enjoy long and successful careers as faithful servants of the East German state" (217). Furthermore, the advance of Soviet rule in eastern Germany fueled anti-Communism in the country's western regions, as long-established, homegrown anti-Communist forces took advantage of the rising rift between the Allies, manipulating it to their gain. The end result, according to Pritchard, was a stark duality in early postwar Germany, with "only two possible principles around which postwar politics could be organized": either "antifascism" or "anti-Communism. . . . In short, Germany after 1945 could have antifascism or it could have democracy, but it could not have both. There was no 'third way'" (229).

Pritchard makes his points forcefully, with extensive supporting evidence. Many of his arguments are persuasive, including his perceptive case for the significance of domestic and even local—rather than international—factors in explaining the political rifts and ultimate Cold War divisions of postwar Germany.[22] But his final conclusions seem overly sweeping. The polarized way in which Pritchard reduces the political choice in Germany in 1945 to a decision for or against Communism has a rather categorical, even teleological, ring to it. Does that assessment really reflect the full range of possibilities in 1945? Similarly, although he claims that the *Niemandsland* antifascist committees were "more than likely" to be "representative" of those in the rest of Germany or, indeed, "entirely typical" of them, that crucial point is asserted rather than systematically substantiated (213–14). Were the committees really so similar to those of the Ruhr area, for instance, despite the profound structural and other differences between Germany's industrial heartland and the largely rural border region that Pritchard examines? Overall, then, Pritchard has delivered a valuable, engaging study that casts significant new light on the transition from the Second World War to the postwar era in Germany. But he has not necessarily uttered the final word about possible alternative scenarios in that transition, especially in the country as a whole.

RECONSTRUCTION AND POSTWAR

The transition away from war was the obvious key challenge in Germany and the rest of Europe in spring and summer 1945. Such a statement seems self-evident at first, but on closer inspection it raises fundamental questions. Even the technical end point of the war calls for some reflection. In certain places, such as Finland or Romania, the fighting had ceased well before Germany's surrender on May 8, and in other areas, ranging from the Soviet Union's western borderlands to Greece, guerrilla warfare and civil war–like conflicts would continue for years. Even within the Reich, May 8 was by no means an absolute divide. German military courts continued to pass death sentences even after that date. The last execution of a "military deserter" by the German authorities occurred as late as May 11, in Flensburg, on the orders of the successor regime of Admiral Karl Dönitz, with British troops already present in the town.[23]

Apart from factual issues about the elasticity of the Second World War's endpoint in Europe, the transition away from the war also raises more fundamental

[22] See also Patrick Major, *The Death of the KPD: Communism and Anti-Communism in West Germany, 1945–1956* (Oxford, 1998).
[23] Axel Schildt, "The Long Shadows of the Second World War: The Impact of Experiences and Memories of War on West German Society," in *Experience and Memory: The Second World War in Europe*, ed. Jörg Echternkamp and Stefan Martens (New York, 2010), 201.

questions of interpretation. Technically, the conclusion of a war is followed by peace, of course, but how should "peace" be understood in this context? Can one speak of peace in any meaningful sense in the conditions of May 1945, particularly in the worst-affected areas, including much of Central Europe? The absence of organized warfare did make a difference, of course, but chaos, lawlessness, general misery, and violence, including widespread sexual violence, persisted for quite some time, and even after the worst material damage had been cleared, the dark shadows of the most devastating conflict in history continued to linger over most aspects of life.

How, then, should scholars approach the aftermath of the Second World War in Europe? On what aspects of the transition away from war should they concentrate? What analytical tools should they employ, and what kind of a time frame should they use in exploring the postwar period and its relationship to the war? These have become keenly debated issues, and anyone interested in them will need to pay attention to two recent, highly significant edited volumes: *Histories of the Aftermath: The Legacies of the Second World War in Europe*, edited by Frank Biess and Robert G. Moeller, and *Post-War Reconstruction in Europe: International Perspectives, 1945–1949*, edited by Mark Mazower, Jessica Reinisch, and David Feldman. Both books grew out of major conferences on this topic, and both present a wide range of contributions on particular aspects of the war's legacies, while also addressing broad interpretative issues.

A key point of agreement between the editors of both volumes is that the analytical framework, common at least since the early 1960s, in which the Second World War's aftermath in Europe featured primarily as "the incubation period of a new Cold War order that was shaped by the antagonistic influences of 'Americanization' and 'Sovietization'" is unsatisfactory.[24] That literature on Cold War origins, although important in its own context, focused too strongly on "high politics and diplomacy" and fixated on the two superpowers, which "sucked agency out of Europe itself."[25] It also placed excessive emphasis on "'moving on,' rather than 'looking back,'" downplaying the lingering shadows of the war and helping to promote nationally focused "self-congratulatory narratives" that celebrated the swift triumphs of post-1945 recovery.[26] To address such failings, the two volumes advocate alternative perspectives on the post–World War II years, perspectives that place more attention on what Biess aptly labels "the lasting and persistent aftereffects of the Second World War."[27] But precisely how should that objective be pursued, and with what analytical categories and epistemolog-

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[24] Frank Biess, "Introduction: Histories of the Aftermath," in *Histories of the Aftermath*, 1.

[25] Mark Mazower, "Reconstruction: The Historiographical Issues," in *Post-War Reconstruction*, 17.

[26] Biess, "Introduction," 3–4.

[27] Ibid., 1.

ical tools? Two different blueprints, distinct but also overlapping and in good part compatible, emerge from the introductory essays of the two books.

The first, laid out in a typically stimulating fashion by Mark Mazower in his introduction to *Post-War Reconstruction in Europe*, revolves around the concept of "reconstruction." The term was used widely in the late 1940s, at least in the West, but it did not feature much in the relevant historiography before the end of the Cold War, as Mazower indicates. Since then, it has helped to push the literature beyond traditional Cold War concerns in several ways. The focus on reconstruction as a shared transnational challenge has undermined rigid distinctions between Eastern and Western Europe, reinforcing a sense of "the contingency of these Cold War categories" (20). It has brought growing attention to what Mazower labels "internationalism," that is, the emergence of new legal norms, institutions, organizations, and other forces that transcended national boundaries, even if nation-states came out of the war with considerably enhanced powers and remained decisive for the success of international endeavors (20–25). In addition, the focus on reconstruction has, once again, highlighted the wartime roots of many postwar problems and processes, including the rebuilding efforts themselves, the planning for which began early in the conflict. Reconstruction, then, is a highly useful analytical tool for understanding the aftermath and consequences of the Second World War, and in the volume edited by Mazower, Reinisch, and Feldman it delivers notable returns as the connecting thread among seventeen chapters that cover a wide variety of countries and developments across Europe and beyond.

The concept of reconstruction also has its problems, however. Mazower himself acknowledges that the term "beg[s] the question of which past people wanted, or thought they wanted, to reconstruct" (26), and in a subsequent chapter in the volume Holly Case delivers a perceptive critique of the concept, as applied to postwar Eastern Europe. According to her, in the emerging socialist systems on the continent's eastern half, the emphasis lay on "the creation of something new" rather than on reconstructing what once had been, and subsequent "assessments of the immediate post-war period" from that region tended to stress "the theme of transformation," of moving toward a new and improved societal order. The notion of reconstruction also poses particular problems vis-à-vis specific countries and their postwar conditions. Case singles out the Polish example: "a state that lost territory in the East, acquired a comparably sized swathe of it in the West, and saw its capital city Warsaw completely annihilated during the last months of the war. . . . What does reconstruction look like in a territory that had not previously been part of the state? Or when the level of destruction is so great that the starting point is near tabula rasa?" (77–78). Despite its undoubted merits as an analytical tool, reconstruction has its limits in post-1945 Europe. An even more flexible concept would facilitate further comparisons and transnational analyses.

This is where the term "postwar," as explicated in Frank Biess's convincing introduction to *Histories of the Aftermath*, comes in. In recent years, particularly since the appearance of Tony Judt's monumental *Postwar: A History of Europe since 1945*, the concept has found growing currency in the international literature, in multiple languages, with terms such as "*sortie de guerre*," "*l'après guerre*," or "*Nachkrieg*" in wide circulation.[28] Biess's contribution significantly enhances this evolving historiography. In his view, postwar is much more than just a signifier of a particular "chronological and thematic unit." More importantly, it constitutes an "epistemological tool" for reinterpreting Europe's post-1945 history (2). The objective is to move beyond viewing the Second World War "merely as the 'prehistory' to the postwar period." Instead, the new historiography aims to "uncover the ongoing presence and subtle traces of violence in European societies after 1945," to underscore "the persistent injuries, fears, and traumata within European societies" and thereby "to reveal some of the ways in which postwar Europe remained bound to the previous order of Hitler's Empire despite persistent claims of a radical break with the past" (3). According to Biess, this approach promises to deliver both more plurality, "a multiplicity of the histories of the aftermath that defies a single periodization or thematic definition," and expanded opportunities for transnational and comparative history, also across the East-West divide (4).

All this sounds highly promising, and *Histories of the Aftermath* showcases the great potential of the general approach, as diverse contributions convincingly explore traces of the war in numerous areas, from memory regimes to cultural representations and emotions. To be sure, the postwar concept is not free of problems either. By its very terminology, it obviously accentuates continuities rooted in the war experience. This makes sense in view of the conflict's enormous impact, but it may run the risk of sidelining other potential continuities across 1945, including longer-term ones. In her chapter, Heide Fehrenbach raises that very point, proposing the term "postfascist" as a kind of complement to postwar. She regards "postfascist" as the "more elastic" term, capable of invoking "the full sweep of prewar and wartime violence unleashed by Nazi biopolitics," together with the subsequent consequences and without "a definable terminus or finite chronology," so that "its effects can resonate across generations and into the future" (191).

Although Fehrenbach's observations are persuasive on one level, on another they highlight an additional possible drawback of the postwar concept: its po-

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[28] See, for instance, Klaus Naumann, ed., *Nachkrieg in Deutschland* (Hamburg, 2001); "Sorties de guerre au XXe siècle," special issue of *Histoire@Politique: Politique, culture, societé. Revue électronique du Centre d'histoire de Sciences Po*, no. 3 (November–December 2007) (available at http://www.histoire-politique.fr/index.php?numero=03).

tential indeterminacy. With sufficient historical imagination, almost everything that has happened since 1945 could be categorized as an aftereffect of the war—or, indeed, of fascism. To counteract that danger, attention to possible end points of the postwar period also becomes important. At what moment, or moments, did issues other than those rooted in the war begin to push the war's legacies to the side in European societies?[29] Or did they? Was the postwar era simply followed by a "post-postwar" period, characterized by a resurgence of war-related problems in new guises, as Norman Naimark's contribution to *Histories of the Aftermath* suggests, in the context of ongoing strains in Polish-German relations (26–27)? At the same time, despite the undeniable significance of continuities across 1945, disruptions and discontinuities must not be denied either. Here Richard Bessel's observations about the end of the war as a personal zero hour in many people's subjective experiences deserve to be taken seriously.

Recent monographic literature on the post–World War II era in Central Europe has drawn extensively on the concepts of reconstruction and postwar, sometimes explicitly, sometimes more implicitly. It has also addressed other, perhaps more traditional concerns, such as the dynamics of the transition from the world war toward the Cold War. Although the precise topics have varied widely, much of the literature has shared certain analytical foci. The trajectories of power in the postwar world have been one key concern, as scholars have probed the extent to which even internationally decisive developments may have been shaped in part from the bottom up, through the agency of grassroots actors and subordinate officials. Another, closely related focus of attention has been the balance between transnational and national actors and forces, including the nature of interactions across Europe's emerging East-West divide. With these points in mind, the following pages will survey some significant recent monographs, in relation to several key locations and developments that helped to shape the postwar order in Germany and the surrounding area.

POSTWAR BERLIN

Paul Steege manages to touch upon all the analytical angles mentioned above in *Black Market, Cold War*, an ambitious social and political history of the Reich's former capital from the aftermath of the war to the end of the Berlin Blockade. The notion of the city as a postwar society is evident throughout, as Steege underscores the presence of "residual effects of war, Nazi rule, and the political and economic turmoil that preceded it" (11). Two types of continuities receive special emphasis. One concerns the ways in which "the language and debates of

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[29] Klaus Naumann, "Die Frage nach dem Ende. Von der unbestimmten Dauer der Nachkriegszeit," *Mittelweg* 36, no. 8 (1999): 21–32.

the 1920s and 1930s continuously reasserted themselves" in the political sphere, as key actors (mis)interpreted ongoing events, applying anachronistic terms and categories familiar from their formative prewar experiences while failing to grasp the true character of contemporary challenges (12). A case in point was the tendency of Communist leaders to blame problems of their own making on the presumed deviousness of their social democratic rivals, in an echo of polarized Weimar debates. The second, even more central area of continuity comprised ordinary people's "day-to-day experiences," particularly their practical struggles to cope with "hunger, scarcity and material crisis," tough realities familiar to many from earlier calamities, such as the hyperinflation of the early 1920s or the Great Depression (12).

This second line of continuity lies at the book's interpretative core, its vision of the dynamics of Berlin's transition from the Second World War to the Cold War. Steege aims to provide a fresh perspective on that process by demonstrating that the Cold War "was not just imposed from above," as traditional diplomatic histories have assumed. Instead, "everyday Berliners" played a crucial role in its emergence, asserting their agency, defying the occupation forces and other authorities, and thereby co-shaping realities and policies in "a messy Berlin setting that neither superpower ever truly mastered" (4–5). Steege stresses the centrality of "day-to-day material considerations" behind Berliners' actions (253). Pragmatic decisions about how to secure food for the dinner table or coal for the furnace repeatedly trumped more abstract considerations, including political and ideological preoccupations. The black market of the book's title functions not only as a concrete site but also as a shorthand for the way in which ordinary Berliners conducted their pragmatic daily business, crossing boundaries between occupation sectors, undermining economic and other policy blueprints, and thereby causing, as well as in good part subverting, such high policy initiatives as the Berlin Blockade of 1948–49. On this basis, Steege concludes that Berliners from both halves of the city "played vital roles in shaping the Cold War," especially in the formative period preceding the lifting of the Berlin Blockade in spring 1949, after which the great powers managed to assert greater control (295). Overall, Steege regards his study as a contribution to "an everyday life history of the Cold War," an attempt to explore "why and particularly how everyday life matters for the way the Cold War worked" (12, 15).

Steege's ambitious monograph has many merits. It draws on a vast amount of primary research. It casts new light on Berlin's history in the crucial transitional period in which an iron curtain of sorts was slowly descending upon it. The incorporation of microhistorical perspectives into political Cold War narratives is a commendable enterprise, and it deserves encouragement, although Steege's contribution may not be quite as pathbreaking as he suggests. Earlier studies by Christoph Kleßmann and others have already explored interconnections be-

tween the social and political realities of early postwar Germany in sophisticated ways.[30]

One or two other quibbles with Steege's interpretation also deserve mention. Occasionally his emphasis on the primacy of material motivations behind Berliners' actions seems overly single-minded. While it is true that the first postwar years were a time of profound hardship and existential struggle, they were also a period of political, intellectual, and spiritual ferment, when clashing interpretations of the past and competing visions of the future were debated fiercely. Little sense of the intellectual vibrancy of postwar Berlin emerges from Steege's account. In addition, the precise connection between the local and the global, and the relative causal weight between the two, remains murky. Steege makes repeated assertions about the power of ordinary Berliners to shape key trends in the early Cold War, culminating in claims such as "high politics *depended* on the outcomes of the street-level battles for survival" (62). But was that really the case? Did social issues in Berlin determine much wider political outcomes in the rising great-power confrontation? What was the causal relationship between life on Berlin's rubble-clogged streets and the high-level political decisions that were pushing the city toward an East-West split? Although Steege does demonstrate connections and correlations between the two, his main focus lies on the former, and the supposedly big impact of Berliners' everyday actions on top-level policy makers remains more asserted than proved. However, Steege deserves full credit for raising challenging, innovative questions about the political and social dynamics of the Second World War's aftermath and addressing them in a serious, sustained fashion. Despite its occasional shortcomings, his study is an important contribution to the history of the early postwar period in Central Europe.

The Iron Curtain

Another area of postwar history in which the power dynamics between local and central actors have recently preoccupied scholars is border formation, particularly the construction of the foremost symbol of the Cold War, the Iron Curtain. Until about two decades ago, the standard Western narrative of the emergence of Cold War Europe's East-West divide was straightforward. The Communist leaders had imposed the barrier unilaterally and arbitrarily, and the West had reacted by consistently denouncing and opposing it. The process had worked from the top down, with high-level decisions determining the course of events. "Or-

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[30] One example is Christoph Kleßmann, *Die doppelte Staatsgründung. Deutsche Geschichte 1945–1995*, rev. ed. (Göttingen, 1991).

dinary people" had exercised little agency. Their role in the standard narrative was typically that of spectators swept along by the events or victims harmed by the excessive violence with which the Eastern authorities guarded their arbitrary borderline. Geographically, the most publicly exposed section of the East-West boundary, the Berlin Wall, tended to receive the lion's share of attention.[31]

More recently, scholars have begun to challenge the old narrative, primarily through case studies of particular segments of the Iron Curtain. Although examinations of the Berlin Wall have remained prominent, other locations, especially on the inter-German boundary, have received growing attention. According to the new scholarship, the formation of the Cold War's East-West border was a much more complex affair than previously acknowledged. Western actors played prominent roles in its construction, particularly early on, in the late 1940s and early 1950s. The dynamics on the ground were complicated, with local and regional actors on both sides exerting extensive influence on the emerging border, not only locally but at higher levels too. Overall, the Iron Curtain was therefore not imposed unilaterally but shaped gradually, through complex interactions between local and more highly placed actors in East and West.

Three notable recent monographs highlight both the considerable promise and the potential pitfalls of this new perspective, which, for lack of a more original term, could perhaps be labeled "revisionist." Edith Sheffer's *Burned Bridge* and Sagi Schaefer's *States of Division* ask similar questions of the political and social dynamics of border formation at the inter-German boundary, while Yuliya Komska's *The Icon Curtain* shifts the focus to a cultural reading of a less thoroughly studied region, the German side of the Czech-German borderline in the Bohemian forest.

Edith Sheffer provides a fascinating case study of a particular locality at the inter-German border: the twin towns of Sonneberg and Neustadt in southeastern Germany, on the border between Bavaria and Thuringia, whose joint population of 50,000 made them the second largest divided urban area in the country, after Berlin. The boundary between the American and Soviet occupation zones ran between the two towns. It split the Burned Bridge of the book's title that had traditionally linked the two communities, leaving Neustadt in what became the Federal Republic and Sonneberg in the German Democratic Republic.

Sheffer aims to "shift the perspective" on Cold War border formation (6). According to her, the Iron Curtain across Germany was neither "unilaterally imposed by the East" nor the kind of "technological monolith" that images of its final incarnation from the 1980s suggest (6, 167). Instead, the boundary was "a living system," shaped by East-West interaction that progressed through sev-

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[31] See, e.g., David Shears, *The Ugly Frontier* (New York, 1970), or, more recently, Frederick Taylor, *The Berlin Wall* (London, 2009).

eral stages (167). Its original function was simple: to "enforce military occupation." However, in the early postwar disorder, it quickly became something else too: "a means of economic protection" (5). Initiatives from the West were crucial; amidst acute postwar anxieties, local residents of the US occupation zone strove to protect themselves against real and perceived threats from the East, ranging from raiding Red Army soldiers to smugglers and economic rivals. To a degree, locals also managed to manipulate the rising Cold War conflict to their advantage, particularly economically—by using the emerging border as a tool of protectionism, for instance, and by drawing special subsidies and other benefits from governmental authorities. As both sides reacted to each other with a gradual escalation of border restrictions, differences between the previously entwined towns deepened, most significantly through growing economic inequality between a prospering Sonneberg in the West and a struggling Neustadt in the East. By the early 1950s, the initiative in the border build-up process passed to the GDR, which attempted to seal the boundary increasingly tightly through forced removals of local residents and intensified fortifications in the border zone, particularly from 1952 onward. The inter-German frontier became solidified and increasingly militarized. It also began to serve as a crucial "instrument of political legitimacy" for both states: a physical guarantor of political survival for the GDR and a tool of differentiation vis-à-vis an allegedly inhumane rival regime for the Federal Republic (5, 255). Sheffer insists, however, that even in its advanced form the boundary remained both partly "porous" and, more importantly, a constantly evolving entity deeply enmeshed with the everyday lives of the region's residents (11, 167–68).

The shift of perspective that Sheffer's ambitious study proclaims, then, revolves around what she eloquently labels "the geopolitical significance of accumulated small, local actions" (6). Although careful not to deny "the centrality of high politics," acknowledging that the Cold War border through Germany was "devised in Moscow and Washington, Berlin and Bonn," Sheffer foregrounds the day-to-day actions of ordinary people in converting grand designs into concrete barriers (6, 4). According to her, "daily actions constituted the border, making it a reality" (13). "Frontier residents adapted to geopolitical changes and became part of the border apparatus, weaving it into the fabric of local communities. Their adjustments altered everyday life, including their sense of themselves and those on the other side. In time, their accumulated acclimations . . . inadvertently built and sustained a barrier that most did not want" (6).

Sheffer uses the term "postwar" to explain the emergence and consolidation of the Cold War border, albeit only in passing. Intriguingly, she describes the Cold War "as an outcome of postwar vulnerabilities" in which the anxieties of "war-torn populations" breathed "life and longevity" into structures initially introduced as temporary ad hoc solutions to immediate postwar problems, such as the administrative division of occupied Germany (6–7). In this light, the Cold

War appears less as "a frozen standoff between bipolar blocs" than "an unsettling aftershock to the butchery of the first half of the century" in which the Iron Curtain functioned as "a way of managing conflict" and "securing the end of all-out warfare in Europe" (252).

Sagi Schaefer's *States of Division* is in many ways similar—and indeed complementary—to Sheffer's *Burned Bridge*. Schaefer, too, examines border formation within Germany from the early post–World War II era to the end of the Cold War. He, too, does so through a case study of a particular location other than Berlin, although one profoundly different from Sheffer's south German twin towns. Schaefer's focus lies instead on the Eichsfeld region of central Germany, a rural, Catholic district that had formed a "stable regional community" before being split by the Iron Curtain (10). Schaefer, too, strongly rejects the argument that the inter-German border was imposed by the GDR regime on a powerless local population. Instead, he portrays border formation in postwar Germany as a dynamic process, composed of "interactions" between East and West and involving local and more elevated actors on both sides (2).

Schaefer describes that process as progressing with significant Western input through stages broadly similar to those identified by Sheffer. In the first phase, between roughly 1948 and 1952, Western stage agencies led the way, initiating and tightening border controls to bolster the economy of western Germany in what Schaefer cleverly labels the boundary's "DMark-ation" (18). From spring 1952, the GDR seized the initiative, seeking to consolidate its hold over the border zone and inaugurating a prolonged period of heightened conflict and gradual compromise between local residents and state authorities on both sides, which continued into the 1960s, intensifying after the construction of the Berlin Wall in 1961. Much like Sheffer, Schaefer too stresses the Iron Curtain's centrality to legitimacy battles between the two Germanys. He also highlights the way in which West Germany's policy of nonrecognition vis-à-vis the GDR ended up consolidating division, for instance by undermining efforts at local cross-border cooperation. Such trends culminated in the final stage of the Iron Curtain's development, the era of "the openly negotiated border and its demise," made possible by the wider normalization of inter-German relations from the early 1970s (157). A seemingly stable, mutually regulated dividing line emerged, with increasingly elaborate border fortifications, primarily on the Eastern side. The apparent stability proved illusory, however, as greater inter-German mobility posed growing challenges to the GDR, undermining the system to the point of collapse by the late 1980s.

Although Schaefer's account of the rise and fall of the inter-German border in the Eichsfeld region thus largely parallels Sheffer's analysis of the dynamics further south, there are important interpretative contrasts as well. The "postwar" concept does not feature in Schaefer's book. Schaefer "consciously chose" to

keep "the Third Reich and the Second World War . . . in the background" because "events and processes of the postwar period . . . cannot be deduced directly" from them (15). The rural context of Schaefer's study also accentuates different issues than Sheffer's urban setting. Complicated questions of land ownership feature prominently in Schaefer's account, as do structural changes, such as urbanization, which, by the 1960s, helped to defuse disputes over land ownership at the borderline, removing one important obstacle to stable border formation. Most significantly, Schaefer interprets the overall power dynamics at the evolving state boundary somewhat differently than Sheffer does. In arguing that "state-building and border formation" were closely "interwoven processes" in both Germanys, he not only highlights competition across the border but also often prioritizes interactions within each polity, particularly those between "frontier residents" and "state agencies," through which the latter gradually got the former to accept the state's more abstract priorities, including the observation of proper border discipline (2, 124). In this way, Schaefer argues, "Western and Eastern state-building projects . . . reinforced each other and the role of the border between them" (124).

At the same time, Schaefer presents himself as more cautious than Sheffer regarding the overall influence of frontier residents on border formation, claiming to "establish a new balance" with measured consideration to forces from above and below. According to him, "the actions and choices of frontier residents played a pivotal role in the creation of the Iron Curtain in Germany, but did so within limits determined in constant interaction with state agencies. Individual agency diminished over the decades, both paralleling and attesting to the progress of state building" (7).

Yuliya Komska examines the construction of the Iron Curtain in Germany from a rather different perspective in her *The Icon Curtain: The Cold War's Quiet Border*. Like Sheffer and Schaefer, she, too, has written a case study that emphasizes Western contributions to the building of the East-West boundary, but her approach and conclusions diverge from those of the other two scholars. The geographical location of Komska's case study marks one departure: moving away from the "privileged site[s]" of Berlin and the rest of the inter-German border, she looks further south, to the boundary between West Germany and Czechoslovakia in the Bohemian Forest (10). However, unlike many recent students of border-formation processes, including Sheffer and Schaefer, she does not explore interactions across the East-West boundary. Instead, she concentrates exclusively on the Western side, emphasizing the activities of a particular population group: the Sudeten Germans, somewhat over 2 million of whom had, during and after the war, fled or been expelled from what became post-1945 Czechoslovakia. Unsurprisingly, the Sudeten Germans had a particularly keen interest in both the West German–Czechoslovak border and the territories beyond it, and Komska

stresses their role in creating, in the West, "an international Cold War symbol" that was "very tightly . . . bound up" with the boundary itself (18).

That symbol was the "Icon Curtain" of Komska's title: not the notorious Iron Curtain but a parallel structure in its immediate proximity in Bavaria, with Sudeten German expellees as its chief architects and champions. This "Icon Wall," or "Prayer Wall," consisted of a "sequence of chapels and lookout towers" interspersed along the western side of the West German–Czechoslovak border. It included various components, from pilgrimage sites and other points of religious significance to observation platforms from which the Iron Curtain and the lands beyond it could be surveyed and contemplated. The "wall" was of particular significance to Sudeten Germans, who constituted most of the visitors to it and whose depictions were instrumental in promulgating impressions of it. Over the years, the "Prayer Wall" acquired an increasingly elaborate infrastructure, as its constituent parts developed and its popularity grew, with a corresponding proliferation of logistical support systems. These efforts "redrew the [Iron Curtain] in the West" to a point where, by the early 1980s, the relevant structures were "strikingly material on *both* sides" of the border (121).

What functions did the "Icon Curtain" serve, then? According to Komska, it provided the Western "counterpoint" to the Iron Curtain. It was "unquestionably peaceful" rather than militarized, its platforms and observation points "strictly for looking" rather than for sinister "surveillance" (210). It also possessed strong religious overtones. It helped to portray West Germany as "a stalwart bulwark of the West, its expressly Christian rim" reinforcing the "gulf between faith and atheism" (105, 121). In this sense, the "Icon Curtain" became the Western contribution to the construction of the Cold War's East-West boundary. It "cemented the border" and was "quickly assimilated into the wider Western Cold War agenda" (120–21).

While these points about Western contributions to the Iron Curtain's consolidation and about the border's function as a Western propaganda tool in the Cold War are largely in keeping with those of Sheffer and Schaefer, Komska's general approach and wider conclusions take her in a different direction. Methodologically, Komska's work is rooted in cultural studies; she bases her analysis on a close reading of a limited number of cultural artefacts, mostly somewhat obscure materials of Sudeten German provenance: photographs, travel reports, expellee magazines, poems, and other works of fiction. Many of these sources have rarely been used for scholarly purposes, and Komska claims to read them in a novel fashion. She purports to provide "the first concerted look at the actual Iron Curtain through representations rather than events," a study of "imaginings" and of "symbolic worldmaking" based on a "close reading of contextualized fictions, not a search for facts" (12, 13). Komska calls her general approach "contrastive" (11). She rejects the tendency of historians to generalize and to "explain why a given section of the Iron Curtain was representative of its entirety" (10). By con-

trast, she maintains that "*the* Iron Curtain did not exist," that the "definite article" cannot be applied to it. The Cold War's East-West barrier consisted instead of "a set of 'regional subsystems,'" each of them "exceptional" and therefore to be studied on its own terms, without being forced into a more general "totalizing . . . history of the divide" (10).

All three books are major contributions to the study of East-West border formation in post–World War II Europe. They draw on very extensive research in previously neglected or underutilized sources and ask novel, or at least unconventional, questions. They challenge established views and cast extensive new light on complex local and regional processes whose role has been poorly understood. They highlight the dynamic, volatile character of the Iron Curtain and stress Western actors' major contributions to its construction, especially early on. The monographs foreground the agency of people other than top-level decision makers, and, particularly in Komska's case, probe issues of distinctiveness and generalizability. They provide new kinds of social and cultural histories of the East-West border and the communities around it, posing challenging questions about wider power dynamics that are likely to stoke productive scholarly debates. For all these reasons, they deserve wide attention.

As with any kind of scholarly "revisionism," however, questions of balance also arise. To what degree are the new arguments convincing? Are there areas in which they may overstretch—or at least require further fine-tuning? The key challenge, shared by all locally based case studies, concerns the relationship between the local and the global. To what extent can a close analysis of particular developments at a specific location yield wider insights, applicable to other contexts too? The question of representativeness raised by Komska is one aspect of this problem, but a relatively minor one. Neither Sheffer nor Schaefer claims that her or his study is necessarily representative of all of the inter-German border; nor do they need to. They can—and do—identify wider patterns from their case studies without alleging representativeness for "their" region. The unique and the exceptional stressed by Komska are crucial features of any historical analysis, but her proposed "contrastive" approach also carries potential dangers. If pushed too far, it threatens to drift toward a kind of localist antiquarianism. For significant historical scholarship, a balance is needed: the research should seek to find broader patterns and explanations even if the empirical focus lies on a particular case.

A more important aspect of the tension between the local and the global in these studies has to do with the relevant significance of the identified patterns. Each book presents itself as a contribution to the wider literature on the emergence of Europe's Cold War borders, which has prioritized certain high-profile locations, particularly Berlin, and top-heavy processes controlled by centrally placed political actors. To what degree do these studies revise that big picture? How much did the relatively remote borderlands that they explore ultimately

matter in Cold War border formation? What were the power dynamics between the local and regional actors emphasized here and more centrally placed decision makers?

Here the report card seems mixed. On the one hand, the three studies, particularly Sheffer's and Schaefer's, do demonstrate that previously neglected border areas and their residents mattered in the emerging Cold War. Local and regional initiatives played a significant role in shaping the East-West boundary, particularly in the context of early postwar uncertainty and indeterminacy, and the conversion of local residents to Cold War border mentalities, partly through coercion but also through more voluntary adjustments, was an important part of the border build-up. However, Sheffer's and Schaefer's findings also strongly suggest that once the state authorities had established themselves, in West and East Germany, within their respective Cold War camps, their political priorities largely determined the dynamics at the borderline, and local wiggling room diminished significantly. Against this background, more sweeping claims, such as Schaefer's contention that "processes in the inter-German borderlands" were "key for the division of German society in its entirety" and that "the parameters of the rural borderlands . . . were at least as important in the development of German division as the policies made in Washington, Moscow, Berlin, and Bonn," seem exaggerated (15, 1–2). Local actions and processes did matter, but in the longer term the agency of local actors declined. From the 1950s onward, higher powers increasingly seized control, and locals had to adjust. The balance of the evidence still seems to indicate that the broad principles and policies that determined the evolution of the East-West border were set elsewhere, at more elevated levels. Although local actions complicated their implementation, and periodically provoked particular responses from higher authorities, the larger power dynamic flowed primarily from the top down. To paraphrase the wisdom of a certain social theorist, the residents of the border area did make their own history, but not within circumstances of their own choosing.

Forced Population Movements and Their Consequences

One of the most remarkable features of the transition between World War II and the postwar era in Europe was the massive scale of involuntary population movements on the continent. Tens of millions were on the move, people of every European nationality, who fell into a variety of different, partly overlapping categories: forced laborers, liberated concentration camp inmates, prisoners of war, evacuated civilians, people forcibly removed from their home territories as deportees or expellees. This enormous mass migration, among the largest in history, was a crucial factor in the transition from war to postwar, with manifold consequences.

The literature on these population movements is extensive, and it has been expanding rapidly in recent years. There have been two particular areas of growth: histories of the expulsions of civilian populations and histories of so-called displaced persons (DPs), civilian refugees that the Allies deemed worthy of targeted assistance, a category that explicitly excluded the Germans. In both literatures, Germany has stood at the forefront, for many reasons, including the fact that by far the largest group of European expellees, at least some 12 million, were people defined as Germans, and that the vast majority of the DPs, some 8 million, found themselves in Germany as the war ended. Despite its growing volume, however, the literature is still far from comprehensive. It is rather splintered, with a relative absence of broad syntheses. A national focus typically dominates, with largely unproblematized ethnic categories and national units of analysis. The administrative classifications drawn up after the war to separate different sorts of uprooted people have typically continued to divide them in the historiography too. DPs, for instance, have tended to generate a literature of their own, as have expellees and prisoners of war. New trends are emerging, however, and the following pages will examine three significant recent contributions that challenge key aspects of the historiography.

R. M. Douglas's *Orderly and Humane: The Expulsion of the Germans after the Second World War* is a highly welcome English-language overview that aims to fill a large gap in the literature by providing "a study of the expulsions [of Germans] that examines the episode in the round—from the time of its earliest origins and in all of the countries affected—and that carries the story forward to the present day" (4). That is a tall order, which Douglas fulfills remarkably well, in a book that reflects extensive multinational research in several languages and combines high readability with scholarly sophistication. At its core lies a loosely chronological narrative of the different stages of the expulsion of Germans during and after the war, starting from the planning phase and continuing to the aftermath, from the immediate challenges of the arrival and early integration of the expellees to such long-term issues as the consequences of the expulsions for international diplomacy, law, and memory regimes. Throughout, Douglas accentuates the enormous suffering caused by the expulsions, which were anything but the "orderly and humane" population transfers that the victorious Allies had, rather cynically, announced at the Potsdam Conference in August 1945.

Among the many analytical points in this fine study, two stand out in their forcefulness. The first relates to the causes of the expulsions. Douglas adamantly rejects the oft-repeated argument that the expulsions were a popular reaction to the horrors of Germany's wartime policies, in a setting in which "hatred" of the Germans by their "non-German neighbors" had "reached such a pitch . . . that a radical separation was unavoidable" (364). According to him, evidence of such popular passions is lacking; apart from a few exceptions, "the aftermath of V-E

Day witnessed practically no spontaneous violence against Germans" (365). The violent expulsions were instead "overwhelmingly the work of agents of the state, acting under orders" (366). Although these agents normally wore the colors of the states from which Germans were being physically removed, the victorious Allies stood right behind them, as integral planners, instigators, and facilitators. Douglas takes particular care to remind his readers of "the legal and moral responsibility" of "the Western Allies," which "has far too often gone overlooked" amidst Cold War recriminations, through which the West sought to pin the blame for the expulsions on the Soviet Union and its East European allies (368–69).

The other point that Douglas develops with particular vehemence is his rebuttal of several prominent social scientists, including John Mearsheimer and Andrew Bell-Fialkoff, who have sought to rehabilitate mass expulsions as instruments of international conflict resolution in the post–Cold War world. Douglas dismantles such arguments systematically, dismissing forced population transfers as "dangerously disruptive expedients whose baleful effects live on . . . decades after the crisis that gave rise to them has passed" (374).

Overall, then, Douglas has produced a highly valuable and convincing account of the expulsion of Germans, but certain quibbles nevertheless remain. One is the relative absence of the wider context of European forced migrations at the war's end, beyond the German case. Obviously one monograph cannot cover everything, but additional contextualization vis-à-vis the many other forced population movements that were taking place coevally with the German case, particularly around Eastern Europe, would have been useful. More significantly, Douglas's account of the causes of the expulsion of Germans seems somewhat narrow, on two counts. First, his rejection of pressures from below as partial drivers behind the expulsions appears overly categorical. Although central planning and direction were undoubtedly pivotal causal factors, the case for a near-total absence of violent popular animosity toward Germans in the immediate aftermath of the most destructive war in history is difficult to sustain. Douglas himself acknowledges at least three major exceptions to that claim, all from Czechoslovakia (365). Occasionally he also appears to contradict himself in his insistence on "a premeditated strategy . . . devised by each of the governments concerned" as the driving force behind the expulsions (93). For instance, when describing the brutal concentration camps for Germans that cropped up in various parts of East-Central Europe during the expulsion process, he admits that there was an "abdication or ineffectiveness of any kind of central control over the camps" by the governments and that "the principle of detention" for Germans in these camps "was loudly applauded by the populations" (134, 148).

The second weakness of Douglas's analysis of the roots of the expulsions is that he largely restricts himself to Allied planning during and immediately before the war, starting with Edvard Beneš's reactions to the Munich Agreement of 1938. That approach does emphasize an essential causal factor behind the forced

migrations, but it sidelines another key set of issues: a longer-term trajectory of plans for the creation of ethnically homogeneous nation-states in the region that had emerged well before the war and for which the conflict's end offered a chance of realization.[32]

Fortunately, another major study, Hugo Service's *Germans to Poles*, foregrounds precisely such a "broader nationalist campaign" aimed at creating "ethno-national homogeneity" in its analysis of forced migrations in East-Central Europe at the end of World War II (345). Service delivers an impressive, far-ranging interpretation of forced migrations in the territories that post-1945 Poland acquired from Germany. Empirically, *Germans to Poles* is a case study, but, unusually, a case study of two geographical locations: a particular administrative district in Lower Silesia and another in Upper Silesia, chosen because of their contrasting postwar "ethno-national transformations," which, in turn, reflected different underlying ethnolinguistic compositions (11). The book is a model of how to use carefully formulated case studies to illuminate broad societal processes. The issues upon which it touches are numerous, but from the perspective of the historiography of the World War II–era expulsions, two stand out as particularly significant.

The first is the question of the causes of the forced population movements. What goals and motivations lay behind the expulsions of Germans and others at the war's end? Here, Service's interpretation differs considerably from Douglas's. According to Service, both "revenge for Nazi German atrocities" and "decisions reached by Britain, America and the Soviet Union" played a role, but, at least in the Polish case, the main cause was a "nationalist campaign . . . aimed at transforming the country into a homogeneous nation state," which the Communist authorities, in an effort to boost their popularity, adopted from indigenous right-wing forces. The expulsion of Germans from the territories that the Third Reich forfeited to Poland was one "manifestation of this nationalistic campaign of ethno-national homogenization," but it was not the only one and should not be examined in isolation (9–10). Other minorities on postwar Polish soil, including Ukrainians, Belorussians, and Jews, were also targeted, and the physical removal of Germans was closely linked to three other, mutually reinforcing ethnonationalistic policies (345). The first was the drive to repopulate the newly acquired western territories with ethnically Polish inhabitants from other parts of the land. The second comprised a "campaign of ethnic screening and pressured cultural assimilation" aimed at showing that many residents of the newly acquired territories that had previously been considered Germans were, in fact, Poles (10). That policy, in turn, was underpinned by a third: a long-term program of "cultural cleansing" through which outward signs of German culture, from

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[32] Kate Brown, *A Biography of No Place: From Ethnic Borderland to Soviet Heartland* (Cambridge, MA, 2005).

street signs to schoolbooks, were to be removed and replaced by Polish equivalents. Although Service's empirical focus lies primarily on Poland, he convincingly suggests that similar priorities were in place "in much of the rest of East-Central and Eastern Europe" too (346). He also draws useful links among the various expulsions underway in the region in the war's early aftermath, positing that they were "entwined" with one another and also "interwoven" with other types of mass population movements, such as those involving forced laborers and prisoners of war. The literature would benefit greatly from further explorations of the kinds of "transnational linkages" among the different kinds of population movements that Service mentions (347).

   The second crucial point convincingly developed by Service is the fluidity and general dubiousness of ethnonational categories in the context of the post–World War II expulsions. All too often the labels applied by the expellers are still used uncritically in the literature, as if, in the case of Poland's new western territories, for instance, an easy distinction could be drawn between "Poles" and "Germans." Service demonstrates how this was frequently not at all the case, particularly in areas such as Upper Silesia, in which different cultures and languages were closely intertwined and regional identities often trumped national allegiances. By highlighting the continuing "cultural and linguistic diversity" of Poland's new western territories, Service "adds an important layer of complexity to the claim that the Communist-led government established a new ethno-nationally homogeneous Polish society in these territories in the second half of the 1940s" (148). Similar complexities in other expulsion-related settings, which other scholars have also begun to explore, deserve further analysis.[33]

   Adam R. Seipp's *Strangers in the Wild Place* uses another case study—of Wildflecken, a tiny garrison town in northern Bavaria—to address what Jessica Reinisch has identified as a major weakness of the literature on Europe's World War II–era forced migrations: the absence of studies that "look at the many different kinds of refugees and dislocated people in the same context."[34] Seipp focuses on four distinct population groups—DPs, ethnic German expellees, American occupation forces, and local German residents—which have typically been viewed "in isolation" from one another, despite their "close proximity" in early postwar Germany (7). Seipp intends to correct that shortcoming by analyzing the "dynamic interaction" of these groups in Wildflecken, where each was present in large numbers, thanks to three developments: the mass arrival of German expellees; the establishment of a DP camp run by the United Nations Relief

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   [33] For instance, James E. Bjork, *Neither German Nor Pole: National Indifference in a Central European Borderland* (Ann Arbor, MI, 2008).
   [34] Jessica Reinisch, "Introduction," in *The Disentanglement of Populations: Migration, Expulsion and Displacement in Post-War Europe*, ed. Jessica Reinisch and Elizabeth White (London, 2011), xv.

and Rehabilitation Administration (UNRRA); and the takeover of the local military garrison, originally established by the Nazis, by American troops. Through the local approach, Seipp intends to explore a "vast set of processes" in which the DPs and expellees played an integral role: the creation of new "civic and governmental institutions," the forging of new communities and identities, and, ultimately, Germany's transformation from a "defeated and destroyed Reich to a Cold War border state" (231, 2).

Seipp's analysis of the local-level interactions is detailed and enlightening, and his arguments about the wider dynamics of Germany's postwar transformation boil down to two main points. The first underscores the general importance of the American presence. "Directly and indirectly, American decisions and influence proved decisive in both the successes and failures of refugee management and integration," Seipp maintains (14). United States officials set the parameters of refugee policies and personnel appointments, intervened in numerous processes, and frequently provoked strong reactions from the affected population groups. The second point zooms in more specifically on the ultimately successful integration of expellees into postwar West Germany. According to Seipp, "the presence of non-German foreigners," above all the DPs and the US occupation troops, inadvertently "helped to speed, or at least to catalyze, the social integration of expellees in rural communities" by gradually promoting closer connections between "pre-existing communities" of Germans and the expellees, many of whom had faced initial rejection as unwelcome intruders and de facto foreigners (230, 5). Essentially, growing resistance to the presence of foreign DPs and Americans prompted locals to build bridges to the expellees, who came to be defined as less alien and at least ethnically German.

Seipp has written a meticulously researched, enlightening study that largely succeeds in delivering, in its local context, the kind of "integrated history," reflective of multivariant and multifaceted interactions, that Saul Friedländer has advocated in his pioneering work on the Holocaust and that Seipp cites as his inspiration (3).[35] The connections that Seipp draws between local developments and wider national and international trends are commonsensical and generally persuasive, although the book's empirical focus rests firmly on the former, so that the degree to which its conclusions apply to places other than Wildflecken is not always clear. This relates, among other things, to Seipp's assertion of the high level of American influence in postwar Germany. The general point about US power is undoubtedly correct, but to what degree would it apply, say, to the British occupation zone, which received the bulk of the expellees and witnessed similar, complex interactions among uprooted population groups? In addition,

[35] Saul Friedländer, "An Integrated History of the Holocaust: Possibilities and Challenges," in *Years of Persecution, Years of Extermination: Saul Friedländer and the Future of Holocaust Studies*, ed. Christian Wiese and Paul Betts (London, 2010).

certain questions of ethnonational definitions would deserve further exploration. To be sure, Seipp is sensitive to the fluidity and constructed nature of postwar ethnic categories. He indicates that UNRRA workers "invented a system of ethnic classification" to categorize different groups of DPs, for instance, and he criticizes Atina Grossman's pioneering study of the interaction among Jewish DPs, Americans, and Germans in occupied Germany for using "Germans" as an overly undifferentiated category, without distinguishing between expellees and longer-term local residents (85, 3).[36] However, Seipp himself tends to apply the term "expellee" in a fairly generalizing fashion, although it, too, would benefit from closer scrutiny. In postwar West Germany it promptly became a politicized blanket term that incorporated many subgroupings with varied backgrounds and experiences, eliding differences and creating an impression of seeming national homogeneity among a population group that was in fact highly diverse and divided. It is therefore an important postwar trope of considerable ambiguity and fluidity that scholars should continue to probe.[37]

INTERNATIONALISM VERSUS NATIONALISM IN THE EUROPEAN POSTWAR

One significant feature of the postwar era in Central Europe—as in many other places—was a tension between two opposing forces that would both be highly significant in shaping the post-1945 world. On the one hand, there was an emerging "internationalism," to borrow Mark Mazower's term: the rise of various influences and actors, including ideas, institutions, organizations, and legal norms, that transcended and defied national boundaries. The manifestations of such internationalism in post–World War II Europe ranged from the abstract, such as the new kind of individualist human-rights rhetoric whose dimensions Mazower has explored, to the concrete, embodied by new international organizations, many under United Nations auspices.[38] These included UNRRA and its successor, the International Refugee Organization (IRO), whose work among refugees in general and displaced persons in particular has been insightfully examined by Gerald Daniel Cohen and Jessica Reinisch, among others.[39]

[36] Atina Grossmann, *Jews, Germans and Allies: Close Encounters in Occupied Germany* (Princeton, NJ, 2009).

[37] For some observations, see Pertti Ahonen, "On Forced Migrations: Transnational Realities and National Narratives in Post-1945 (West) Germany," *German History* 32, no. 4 (2014): 599–614.

[38] Mark Mazower, "The Strange Triumph of Human Rights, 1933–1950," *Historical Journal* 47 (June 2004): 379–98.

[39] Jessica Reinisch, "Internationalism in Relief: The Birth (and Death) of UNRRA," in Mazower et al., eds., *Post-War Reconstruction*; Gerald Daniel Cohen, *In War's Wake: Europe's Displaced Persons in the Postwar Order* (Oxford, 2012). On the DPs, see also Anna Holian, *Between National Socialism and Soviet Communism: Displaced Persons in Postwar Germany* (Ann Arbor, MI, 2011).

This upsurge of "internationalism" in the European postwar moment was facilitated by two sets of background factors. The first comprised particular structural conditions. The end of the most destructive conflict in history brought extraordinary disruption and turmoil. State power had temporarily collapsed in much of continental Europe, most profoundly in the defeated Reich, and the absence of established governmental authorities left a vacuum for other forces to fill. The massive destruction and chaos imposed many potential hazards, from health epidemics to general lawlessness and political instability, which, if unchecked, could easily spread across state borders, many of which were themselves in flux. The other background factor favorable to greater internationalism was a political will among the victorious allies, particularly the United States and the United Kingdom, to promote intergovernmental collaboration. There was a widespread conviction, reflected most concretely in Anglo-American wartime planning and early postwar initiatives, that to avoid the disasters of the post–World War I era, programs that had been left in private hands then, particularly relief operations, now had to be coordinated by governments and that intergovernmental cooperation, institutionalized through new international organizations, especially the UN and its subsidiaries, was essential for the creation of a stable postwar order. Against this background, the wave of internationalist activity in post–World War II Europe was a logical development.

At the same time, however, nationalism was quick to reassert itself in postwar Europe. The victorious Allies' efforts at international collaboration were themselves underpinned by calculations of national interest. Meanwhile, on the devastated continent, national governments scrambled to reestablish themselves, to reassert their power, and to define new terms of legitimacy and inclusion, typically on a more ethnically homogeneous basis than before the war. As this "European rescue of the nation state," to adapt Alan Milward's influential formulation, proceeded apace with the wave of postwar internationalism, connections and tensions between the two became a defining feature of the postwar era.[40]

These connections and tensions, which in recent years have begun to feature prominently in historical scholarship, lie at the center of two important monographs by Jessica Reinisch and Tara Zahra. Although focused on different issues, both books highlight the complicated intermingling of national and international influences in the forging of Europe's postwar order.

In *The Perils of Peace*, Jessica Reinisch tackles a major postwar challenge that was archetypally international—or, perhaps more accurately, transnational—in its inherent disregard for political boundaries: the maintenance of public health. Reinisch focuses on public health policies in occupied Germany and delivers a meticulous, archivally based comparative analysis of their evolution from wartime planning to postwar implementation throughout the occupation period, in

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[40] Alan S. Milward, *The European Rescue of the Nation State*, 2nd ed. (London, 1999).

all four occupation zones. According to Reinisch, "public health was much more than a medical problem" (2). Admittedly, medical concerns as such were serious enough. Fear of dangerous epidemics preoccupied all the authorities involved, regardless of nationality, not least because of memories of the disastrous global influenza pandemic after World War I. But, as Reinisch convincingly argues, public health work was also closely linked to much broader questions of "how the defeated German population should and could be treated, whether and how Nazism could be eradicated, and what Germany's future path ought to be" (295). These questions, in turn, impacted directly on fundamental issues of wider "European reconstruction," as "German public health was realized to be inseparably entangled with the health of occupation troops and neighboring countries" (298).

The tension between national and international forces is a salient theme throughout *The Perils of Peace*, and the persistence—and ultimate predominance—of the former comes through repeatedly. A limited level of cross-border cooperation in public health emerged in the war's final stages, as the Allies began to draft plans for the occupation of Germany. However, the cooperation remained restricted to bilateral coordination between the United States and the United Kingdom, without any real involvement of the Soviet Union or the French government-in-exile, neither of which possessed the capability to devote much attention to public health planning during the war. From spring 1945, the blueprints drawn up in Washington and London came to define the parameters of public health policy in defeated Germany, as the Soviets and the French, lacking preparations of their own, also drew on them. In this sense, a shared international backdrop of sorts existed in this sector, but it soon began to crumble. Key assumptions behind the policy blueprints, such as the intention to delegate the practical work to German authorities, proved unrealistic, given the level of devastation and disarray in the defeated Reich. For a time, the realities on the ground defied national divisions, as the occupation forces found themselves "shocked" at the alarming conditions they encountered and the severe public health challenges they faced (298). When the powers struggled to readjust, however, each did so in its own way, with its own set of national priorities, each establishing distinct paradigms for its occupation zone.

To be sure, the differences between the occupation zones were far from absolute. Each zone and its great power hegemon faced broadly similar challenges and ended up making comparable compromises—for instance, in the declining vigor with which the planned denazification of the medical profession was ultimately implemented in the face of severe personnel shortages and other crises. International forces thus intertwined with national ones in the actions of the victorious powers, but the latter generally prevailed. To a considerable degree, similar dynamics also prevailed in German society, certainly in the medical field. Reinisch rejects any notion of a "radical transformation" through external influences at a postwar *Stunde Null*, accentuating instead a strong "continuity of per-

sonnel and institutions" in German "health administration and medical practice," which, in combination with the cautious controlling influence of the occupation powers, determined the direction of postwar developments in the two Germanys (95).

In *The Lost Children*, Tara Zahra provides a particularly forceful analysis of the clash of international and national imperatives in what she labels the "postwar moment" in Europe after the Second World War (244). In her view, the transitional period following the cessation of hostilities was characterized by the juxtaposition of two powerful, opposing forces along lines that have already been outlined. On the one hand, this was a moment of "internationalism" and "universal" values, evident in several ways: a novel kind of "individualist rhetoric of human rights"; new international organizations, many of them focused on humanitarian issues; swarms of enthusiastic "humanitarian workers" from various national backgrounds, imbued with shared "international ideals" of a better, peaceful future (118, 244, 19). On the other hand, however, the post–World War II era also constituted "one of the most violently nationalist moments in European history" in which policy makers across the continent viewed "postwar reconstruction as an explicitly nationalizing project, an effort to recover the national sovereignty and restore the national 'honor'" compromised during the conflict (119).

Zahra focuses on the role of children in this confrontation, with a particular emphasis on so-called lost or displaced children and youth—that is, children who had been uprooted from their home environments, typically separated from their parents, and whose nationality was often unclear or ambiguous. According to her, children in general and displaced children in particular received extensive attention across Europe after the war for two reasons. First, on an abstract level, they became key "symbols of both wartime dislocation and postwar renewal," particularly as the separation of families came to be seen as "the quintessential Nazi aggression, an unparalleled source of social disarray" (8, 18). Second, more concretely, they "represented the biological future of the nation," the next generation of citizens and a malleable population group from which displaced individuals of varied backgrounds could be assimilated into particular national communities (244).

In the treatment of displaced children, two imperatives soon collided. On the one hand, modern, internationalist influences asserted themselves, particularly in the mentalities of UN humanitarian workers assigned to care for these children. According to Zahra, such professionals typically disavowed "any particular political agenda," claiming instead to promote "the best interests of the child" on an individual, psychologically defined basis, in keeping with the cutting-edge principles of "case work," according to which social workers had to assess each client's particular circumstances in an objective fashion (17). On the other hand, Zahra argues, these abstract, individualist ideals of postwar humanitarian-

ism were promptly subverted in practice by ethnic nationalism. This happened because "humanitarian workers, child welfare activists, and government officials across Europe" ultimately shared certain key beliefs: "a general faith in the rehabilitative powers of both nation and family" after the turmoil of World War II and the conviction that these two collectives would provide both the best "basis for European reconstruction" and the most suitable "recipe for individual psychological rehabilitation" (21, 19). As a result, humanitarian workers, too, came to define "children's 'best interests' in sharply gender-specific, nationalist, and familialist terms," even if the precise definitions were malleable and subject to adjustments, particularly in accordance with political developments in the rising Cold War (19). In this fashion, humanitarian workers became "deeply implicated in the campaign to create homogeneous nation-states after World War II," as "nationalist ideals were absorbed into emerging visions of psychological stability, human rights, and democracy" (21). "Nationalist and internationalist impulses were deeply entwined" in Europe's postwar reconstruction, although the balance of Zahra's evidence suggests that the former was the primary driver of the process (19).

Zahra and Reinisch have both delivered ambitious, pioneering contributions to the study of the European postwar after 1945. They succeed admirably in providing the kind of cross-border and cross-sectoral analyses of large-scale problems whose relative absence from the increasingly narrowly focused expert literature they both lament.[41] Drawing on prodigious multinational and multilingual research, both studies cast significant new light on key interpretative problems of the postwar era, ranging from continuities and discontinuities across the 1945 divide to parallels and contrasts between the emerging Cold War blocs. The books connect important themes that have often been viewed in isolation, showing, for instance, how the seemingly specific field of public health was integrally linked to most key aspects of the occupation of Germany and how debates about the welfare of traumatized children contributed to much wider visions of peace and democracy in the postwar world. Zahra in particular succeeds admirably in linking her empirical findings to any number of broad postwar themes, not only peace and democracy but also debates about families, gender norms, forced migrations, Nazi legacies, Cold War origins, human rights, and forms of nationalism and internationalism. The list could go on.

No monograph is quite perfect, however, and both studies occasionally leave the reader wondering—or wanting more. While Reinisch is to be commended for her systematic analysis of the public health policies of all four occupation powers in Germany, her analysis of the Soviet Union remains thinner and somewhat less satisfactory than that of the other three. The lack of Russian-language sources in her study is a contributing factor, and some of her conclusions about

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[41] Zahra, 243; Reinisch, 15.

the Soviets seem rather sweeping. When considering the occupation period as a whole, for instance, can one really maintain that "the Soviet authorities often displayed little concern about alienating the German population, and little interest in winning them over to their side" (293–94)? Similarly, although the breadth and ambition of Zahra's study are remarkable, they also leave her painting with a rather broad brush at times. Some key arguments are developed on a high level of abstraction and would benefit from further empirical elaboration. A case in point is Zahra's contention that humanitarian workers ended up turning their supposedly nonpolitical ideals about the individually focused care of traumatized children to the service of highly politicized, nationalist rebuilding projects. How exactly did that happen? Were both sets of assumptions present in these workers' minds without major conflict? Or did a learning and conversion process take place and, if so, how?

Questions like these would obviously require further investigation, and one major achievement of Zahra's and Reinisch's studies is to have raised them in the first place. Their ambitious and insightful scholarship accentuates, once again, the significance of Europe's postwar era after 1945 and the need to study it on its own terms, as a formative period of intertwining but frequently contradictory forces and pressures. The competing imperatives of nationalism and internationalism form one key aspect of this challenge, and they, in turn, intersect with other key analytical foci surveyed in this article: the balance between national and international forces on the one hand and local and regional ones on the other; continuities and disruptions across the 1945 divide; the construction and application of particular concepts and categories that people in the postwar used to make sense of their precarious present and uncertain future. Additional analysis of these and other, related issues is needed, both for its own sake and as a contribution to the study of long-term postwar developments that this article, with its shorter-term focus, has kept in the background: various collective and individual learning processes over the ensuing decades; projects of identity formation, on national and other levels; changing memory regimes, with all their functions and effects, to name but a few booming areas of historical investigation. Some fifteen years on from Bessel and Schumann's expressions of concern, scholarship on the ways in which Europeans emerged from the horrors of fascism, war, and genocide is thriving, and the intellectual vibrancy of the field suggests that this robust state of health is unlikely to change anytime soon.