THE (DIS)COMFORTS OF BELONGING:

FEMINIST NEGOTIATIONS OF GERMAN IDENTITY

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By

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Abstract

In the aftermath of National Socialism and the Holocaust, positive recourse to the idea of the nation has been a contentious issue in Germany. Members of the German feminist movement as well as of other 'progressive' segments of German society have considered the concept of the nation as antithetical to progressive politics, and they have frequently denounced their national association altogether. This strategy has come under critique for evading issues of power and accountability, for distracting from the effects that constructions of the nation and associations with nation-states have on people's lives, and for avoiding a critical confrontation with how one's own perspectives and politics are shaped by one's specific national association. In recent years, questions of German national identity have become a concern within the context of the German feminist movement, and some feminists have begun to address the issue of what could be constructive ways of coming to terms with their national identity and its implications. This thesis explores this issue by drawing on in-depth interviews with feminists in Germany. It discusses how they understood and negotiated the meanings of 'being German' with regard to a variety of dimensions of their national association, for instance, how they had been socialized as Germans, how they viewed the unified nation-state, and how they conceived of Germans as an "imagined community" (Anderson 1991). Particular attention is given to the historical context and how the women I interviewed interpreted the legacy of the Nazi past. I consider their views and experiences in terms of how they are marked by women's various locations in social relations and in terms of the specific notions of Germanness they presumed or produced in talking about 'being German.' Further, I discuss how their understandings of Germanness are related to their political views and practices. This thesis concludes with a review of the kinds of "politics of location" (Rich 1986) these women put forward and with reflections on how conducive various understandings of Germanness, and of social locations in general, are to dealing with the challenges of coalition work across differences.

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Introduction

The concept of the nation is fraught with conflict in the German context. Still today, it conjures up memories of National Socialism and the Holocaust. However, since the fall of the Berlin Wall and subsequent unification in 1990, the question of German national identity has taken center stage within public discussions in Germany. Several issues are at stake in these debates, among them whether the new German nation-state should understand itself in civic-political or in ethno-cultural terms, whether Germany should officially acknowledge its status as a country of immigration or continue to legally enshrine the notion of Germans as a community of descent, and whether German national history forbids a positive recourse to the idea of the nation or whether Germans should be considered rehabilitated and constituting a 'normal' nation (see, for instance, Baumann, Dietl, and Wippermann 1999; Habermas 1991; 1995; Hoffmann 1997; New German Critique 1991; Suchantke 1991; Zuckermann 1999a).

The political right has long been lamenting a lack of national sentiment in West Germany. They interpret unification as having set the end-point to the 'abnormal' post-war situation and call for the reestablishment of a positive national identity. A strong national consciousness is further promoted as necessary in order to resolve the fissures between the formerly divided populations of East and West Germany. The left has traditionally been more reserved towards the concept of the nation. However, over the last decade, attitudes towards the nation within the left-liberal spectrum of society have changed towards being more affirmative. The Socialdemocratic-Green federal government that superseded the Conservative-Liberal coalition in 1998 has joined ranks with conservatives in evoking a new, unified, 'self-confident' nation, which should finally step out of the shadow of its past and embrace its powerful role within Europe and the world. Critical views of the nation have become increasingly marginalized (see, for instance, Assheuer 1999; Bittermann 1994; Perger 1999; Postone 1993; Schönwälder 1996; Zuckermann 1999b.)

Questions of national identity have also been a contentious issue within feminist politics in Germany. During the 1970s and 1980s, members of the West German feminist movement tended to disclaim affiliation with the German nation. This attitude was also common among members of other social movements such as the 'New Left.' Such denunciation of national association was often linked to unresolved feelings of national guilt in relation to National Socialism and the Holocaust. To that extent, it reproduced a German national identity in negative terms and did not resolve the circumstances that made this an uncomfortable or problematic association (Rommelspacher 1995a; 1995c). Furthermore, while they disassociated themselves from Germanness, German women, particularly white and Christian or Christian-socialized women, continued to take their own experience as the norm and tended to ignore experiences that differed from this norm. They were slow in reacting to the critique voiced by feminists of color, Jewish feminists, and feminists who migrated to Germany from other countries, who called on them not to evade the issue of accountability for their privileged social position in relation to others and to recognize the extent to which their unacknowledged, yet taken for granted, Germanness shaped and limited their perspectives and politics (see beiträge zur feministischen theorie und praxis 1990; Hügel et al. 1993; Lennox 1995; Uremovic and Oerter 1994; Verein für Sozialwissenschaftliche Forschung und Praxis für Frauen e.V. 1991).

This critique unsettled the notion that, as women and feminists, German women automatically stood on the 'right' side and reminded them that they could not simply opt out of other relations of power that cross-cut with gender relations. It is difficult to assess what effect this had on the self-perceptions and the politics of German feminists at large. However, the issue of positionality is receiving increased attention, and disassociation from Germanness has become discredited as evading questions of accountability and obstructing the generation of responsible ways of dealing with the issue of national association (see Koppert 1990; 1991; Lennox 1995; Schultz 1993; Verein für Sozialwissenschaftliche Forschung und Praxis für Frauen e.V. 1991).

In the light of this development emerge the questions of what kind of strategies have come to replace the earlier strategy of denouncing Germanness, and to what extent are they more constructive and conducive to progressive feminist politics? Are German feminists now seeking to develop a more positive sense of national identity or do they consider affirmative recourse to the nation as antithetical to such politics? For some time now, feminist and postmodern theorists have been suggesting that we ought to conceptualize identities in ways that call them into question or at least leave them open, allowing for plurality and change and supporting the building of alliances across difference (for instance, Braidotti 1994; Butler 1990; 1995; Flax 1990; Grosz 1995; Mouffe 1992). However, as desirable as such a vision seems in theory, it has been criticized for not sufficiently addressing the actual legal, political, social, and economic differences with which constructions of identity and difference are entangled. Raising the issue of the investments differently situated groups of people have in various identities, what they stand to gain or lose from deconstructing or holding on to these, Angelika Bammer points out that crossing borders of identity is not "always or necessarily the progressive or liberating or emancipatory thing to do. It can be a relief, even a luxury, to stay put" (quoted in Jankowsky and Love 1997b:274).

Looking specifically at how questions of national identity are negotiated in the context of German feminism, this thesis seeks to comment on the issue of how concepts of identity are related to political visions and practices. Based on interviews with feminists in Germany, it explores the various ways in which these individuals positioned themselves in relation to notions of the nation. Particular attention will be given to how they articulated what German national identity meant or did not mean to them in relation to several other social and cultural locations, that is how their views were marked by gender, age, ethnicity or 'race,'[1] religious background, geographical origin,

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[1] It is by now a well-established fact that there is no scientific justification for distinctions between human 'races' (McClintock 1995; Ratcliffe 1994b). Ruth Frankenberg notes that such distinctions are a historically recent phenomenon, although the hierarchical ranking of groups of people or 'peoples' has a long history. The concept of 'race' was born out of, and could be build on, earlier notions of supremacy and inferiority, on "racism avant la lettre," and "it is not the case that an innocent racialness was corrupted by a later ranking of races, but rather that race and racism are fundamentally interwoven" (1997b:9). Because of

and political orientation. I consider their different experiences and opinions in relation to questions of national association in terms of what notions of German identity they put forward and how they understood the meanings or implications of their national association.

There exists now a growing body of literature that addresses how concepts of the nation, national identities, and nationalist projects are gendered, as well as the ways in which women and men are incorporated differently into the nation-state.[2] As gender is a relational category, a study including both men's and women's views on national identity would be more suited towards revealing the impact of gendered locations and experiences on such views than this study with its specific focus is. In most regards, I cannot comment on the extent to which what is presented in this thesis is or is not only applicable to women, particularly women who see themselves as feminists. While this study is situated in a wider context and draws on discussions of German national identity beyond those taking place within German feminism, its particular concern lies with how the issue is taken up by feminists. Still, its results, I believe, are not only relevant to the feminist movement in Germany but speak to questions of identity politics in other contexts as well.

The approach to national identity taken in this thesis entails a social constructivist insistence on the inessentiality of identity and considers nation as a historical, political, and social construct, rather than a naturally or objectively given entity. At the same time, it does not treat national identity as merely fictional but as 'real' to the extent that concepts of the nation are institutionalized and have an impact on people's lives. Aleida Assmann and Heidrun Friese (1998)

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the potential dangers of retaining the concept in academic discourse, some researchers have discarded it (Ratcliffe 1994a:4), while others, although they assert that race must be seen as an ideological construct, have held on to it in describing the effects of constructions of racial difference in various contexts (for instance, Anthias and Yuval-Davis 1992). However, in order to call attention to its problematic status and implications, some place the term in inverted commas. For stylistic reasons, I will not do so in the remainder of this thesis, except in particular circumstances. In order to be logically consistent, I would also have to set terms such as 'ethnic,' 'ethnicity,' or 'gender' in inverted commas throughout, as the phenomena they relate to are equally not objective givens but contextual constructions which refer to social and political processes of classification and meaning constitution entangled in relations of power (see, for instance, Banks 1996; Butler 1990; Eriksen 1993; Hall 1996; Lutz 1994; Ratcliffe 1994a;).

[2] See, for instance, Anthias and Yuval-Davis (1992); McClintock 1995; Nadig (1990); Walby (1992); West (1997); Wilford and Miller (1998); Yuval-Davis (1997).

note that 'we-groups' are now commonly conceived of as what Benedict Anderson calls 'imagined communities' (1991). This view challenges essentialist notions of collectivities and investigates identities as products of open-ended processes of construction and negotiation. However, their status as unstable constructions notwithstanding, 'imagined communities' procure "an extraordinary impact as real social phenomena in which people believe and on which they act" (Cesarani and Fulbrook 1996:1). With specific reference to the nation as an imagined community, David Cesarani and Mary Fulbrook point out that:

> The French sociologist Émile Durkheim's injunction to 'treat social facts as things' becomes brutally relevant when people are attacked or murdered because of (imagined) 'racial inferiority,' or when families are torn apart and relatives sent 'home' by officials paid to guard borders and prevent the entry of 'illegal immigrants'" (1996:1).

Viewing nations as "mental constructs sustained in being by imaginative labour and discursive habit" (Cubitt 1998:3) opens up a critical perspective on the ideological construction of nations and national identities, yet it must not lead away from considering the real effects of such constructions.

National identity is thus treated in this thesis as twofold or as denoting two dimensions: one the one hand, the individual's factual association with a political and social unit that calls itself a nation; on the other hand, the subjective meaning an individual gives to this association (see Rommelspacher 1995c). These two dimensions are distinguishable but not strictly separate. The subjective aspect of national identity is further not, psychoanalytic approaches to the issue suggest, an entirely 'rational' matter, but national consciousness or self-awareness is imbued with emotional, and often narcissistic, affects (Brunner 1997).

I will not rehearse here the extensive literature on concepts of the nation, nationalism, national identity, and how they relate to each other, as it is not of direct concern to my purpose in this thesis. The next chapter will address the particular national context of this study. Otherwise, suffice it to make the following general observations. Geoffrey Cubitt states that "if, as Ely and Suny observe, 'being national is the condition of our times,' it is a condition more easily evoked

than defined" (1998:1). The term 'nation' serves to refer to various ideas, imagined entities, and political or institutional units, such as a 'culture,' a 'people,' a 'country,' or a 'state.'

> [I]t designates now a community, now an environment, now a component in a global political system. The nation is presented sometimes as an object requiring a passionate commitment, sometimes merely as a descriptive category permitting individuals to be conveniently located for administrative or referential purposes. In short, nations as things remain elusive. Their assumed existence and importance form an imaginative field on to which different sets of concerns may be projected, and upon which connections may be forged between different aspects of social, political and cultural experience (ibid.).

Hence, national identity is best understood as an ongoing process of formation and reformation of a particular self-awareness in relation to a collective (institutionalized and/or imagined). In endowing a large number of individuals with a sense of collective identity, communities which claim to be a 'nation' must define themselves as specific and different from other communities (Anderson 1991). This is partly achieved through legal, political, social, and cultural institutions and symbolic structures of identification, which integrate a group of people as members of the nation and exclude others as outsiders. However, while nations construct identity and difference by defining insiders and outsiders, they are also faced with internal divisions along the lines of, for instance, social class, gender, ethnicity, and religion. In order to subsume such cross-cutting differences and the particular allegiances they produce, nations need to provide their membership with a sense of common fate, a "*sense of the continuing existence of that community as a coherent entity over time*" (Fulbrook 1999:17; emphasis in the original). Therefore, while the definition and continuous reproduction of boundaries between a national collective and others is a condition for national identity, in order to suggest itself as enduring and binding national identity also needs to be based on a belief in a presumed collective past or legacy and a common future or destiny (1999:232). Thus, notions of a shared history, of common traditions, and a shared historical consciousness serve to legitimize claims to nationhood and are employed to construct the nation as a "transhistorical essence that surpasses social-political division lines and provides national cohesion" (Levy 1999:53).

In any context, the incorporations, exclusions, hegemonizations, and marginalizations that are effected in discourses of the nation rarely remain entirely unchallenged. Addressing the production of identities in and for political projects and practices, Madan Sarup writes:

> I don't think that identity is nothing but ideology. Identities are not just expressions of the ideologies of their time. We are not merely prisoners of false consciousness. If this were the case, we would have to ask: why do so many people develop identities that transcend the ideological limits of their time, yielding us insight into the realities which ideology hides from view? (1996:141).

It is such insight into realities and understandings of identity hidden or marginalized in the dominant discourse of German national identity that this thesis aims at providing.

Chapter 1 presents an overview of various aspects of the context in which this study is situated. In particular, it addresses the historical context in or against which notions of German national identity are constructed and negotiated, issues of inclusion and exclusion with regard to how the German nation is defined legally and as an 'imagined community,' and how questions of national identity have been taken up within German feminism. Chapter 2 describes the research project on which this thesis is based, its theoretical and political points of departure, the group of women whom I interviewed, and how the interviews were conducted. Chapter 3 outlines the various regards in relation to which these women addressed the issue of German identity and discusses significant differences in their experiences and perspectives. Chapter 4 then takes a more focused look at the place or role of the NS (National Socialist) past in their understandings of German identity, how they saw themselves as linked to it, what moral and political implications they drew from it, and how these related to notions of Germanness they presumed or produced in this regard. Chapter 6 concludes this thesis with a discussion of the various ways in which these women understood and negotiated questions of German national identity in different contexts, and it considers their views and experiences in terms of how they comment on the issue of how to conceive of progressive feminist politics.

Chapter 1
National identity in the German context

This chapter provides an overview of the historical, political, and sociocultural context in which this study on understandings of national idenity among feminists in Germany is situated. I begin by outlining how German national identity is constructed and negotiated in relation to National Socialism and the Holocaust. Then I address issues of inclusion and exclusion with regard to legal and social constructions of Germanness. Finally, I discuss how questions of national association and identity have been dealt with in the context of the German feminist movement.

German national identity after National Socialism and the Holocaust

> History is a German obsession, a German métier. There are people who claim that, with Hegel and the great nineteenth-century historiographers, Germans actually invented history, and it is certainly true that the country now produces historians the way Italy produces lawyers, or Argentina psychoanalysts – in aggressive, even deviant, disproportion. By history, Germans mean German history. They call it a *Wissenschaft* – a science – though it is arguably more alchemy than science, since it has always had to do with turning myths, memories, and language of "Germanness" into a kind of collective destiny known as the German nation. It may be history's revenge that today, fifty years after the surrender, Germans are still arguing about what to do with the destiny that they invented.
>   – Jane Kramer, *The Politics of Memory* (1996)

Within the German context, the issue of national identity is most often discussed in relation to questions of how to 'come to terms with the past.' Recourse to national history in establishing a positive sense of national identity is distinctly problematic in Germany after 1945. It can be argued that most nation-states present their national history in selective ways, preserving certain memories and dropping others, usually towards the end of constructing a 'usable' past to serve present needs.[1] Yet, the terror which Nazi-Germany inflicted on Europe during World War II and its organized

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[1] Patrick H. Hutton puts it this way: "What is called history is no more than the official memory a society chooses to honor" (1993:9). See also Burke (1989) and Renan (1990).

pursuit of genocide left the successor states of the Third Reich with a legacy that is, to say the least, difficult to integrate into a narrative of a 'usable' past. Each of the new German states was further comprised of a population that had largely collaborated with the regime or at least given their silent approval. In the shadow of the Holocaust, the concept of the German nation was profoundly discredited by the mass murder and genocide that Germans had organized in its name.

Neither did German history prior to the Third Reich offer itself as an unproblematic basis for the formulation of a positive national identity. A concept frequently applied in explaining the course of German national history is the notion of the *Sonderweg* (special path). This concept dates back to the early nineteenth century and originally had a positive connotation as it was used to express the idea that the German nation was unique among the European nations. It was not until 1871 that a unified German nation-state was formed. Thus, the notion of German nationhood developed at a time when it was not possible to identify the idea of a German nation with a state because of the then existing territorial and institutional landscape of various German states. The idea of German nationhood was formulated by German intellectuals and literati during the era of Romanticism, and this Romantic understanding of nationhood was not political, but ethnocultural. The intellectuals who formed it "sought to distance themselves from the allegedly shallow rationalism and cosmopolitanism of the Enlightenment and the French Revolution through an historicist celebration of cultural particularism" (Brubaker 1992:1). In contrast to the French understanding of nationhood as state-centered, the German understanding of nationhood was centered on the notion of the *Volk* (people – defined in ethnic and cultural terms). The *Volk* was conceived of as "an organic cultural, linguistic and racial community – as an irreducibly particular *Volksgemeinschaft* [ethnic community]" (ibid.). The notion of the *Sonderweg* "crystallized along with the mythical conception that the German (nation) was superior, vested with a specific spirituality that set it apart from other nations" (Levy 1999:55). This view of the German *Volk* as a pre-political community sharing a unique essence formed the basis of what became an increasingly racialized and ethnocentric national self-understanding that culminated in the Nazis' conception of

a 'racially pure' and superior *Volksgemeinschaft* and its genocidal consequences. Due to this association, the concept of the *Sonderweg* was discredited after World War II (Fulbrook 1999:2; Levy 1999:55). However, it resurfaced during the 1960s as a model of explanation for the development towards Nazism. The revival of the concept is associated with the work of historian Fritz Fischer, who opposed attempts at dehistoricizing the Third Reich and depicting Nazism as a temporary aberration of German history. Against such views, Fischer pointed to continuities between the pre-fascist German Reich and the Third Reich, particularly the fact that Germany's aspirations in World War I had basically been the same as those pursued by the Nazis (Levy 1999:55; Maier 1988:106). In the wake of the subsequent controversy over Fischer's thesis, further studies on long-term German particularities and continuities were undertaken. The notion of a *Sonderweg* of German national history as leading towards Nazism came to include such factors as Germany's delayed achievement of statehood as well as the fact that Germans did not establish a democratic government until after World War I – and even then this form of rule was not based on strong popular acceptance (Parkes 1997:139). Such studies also showed that nationalistic, anti-democratic, militaristic, and anti-Semitic attitudes formed long-standing German traditions and facilitated the Nazis' rise to power. Because of these continuities, drawing on pre-NS German history and traditions as a source of positive identification has been contentious.

In addition to having to define themselves in relation to the legacy of a national tradition that had culminated in two world wars and in utmost racial hatred, violence, and genocide, the two post-war German states also had to define themselves in relation to each other, as the Cold War turned them into political opponents. In this situation, both the German Democratic Republic (GDR) and the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG) established their identities in opposition to each other and in recourse to selected elements of their shared past. Yet, particularly in West Germany, competing interpretations and struggles over which elements and memories of the past should be drawn upon in defining a collective identity have continued to be at the center of debates on the issue of national identity.

With the culmination of the post-war division of Germany in the formation of both the GDR and the FRG in 1949, the relationship between the two Germanies became increasingly adversarial. Each state's claim to legitimacy was bolstered through ideological attacks on the other. History played a key political role in this "complex game of mutual antagonism and self-definition," as both Germanies, "in different ways, claimed to be the 'better' Germany: the one that had more completely, decisively, made a break with the immediate Nazi past" (Fulbrook 1999:2). The GDR declared itself to be the inheritor of the 'progressive' forces within German history and culture, most notably the antifascist resistance against Hitler, and proclaimed that the FRG was continuing the 'reactionary' traditions, particularly capitalism, militarism, and imperialism. In turn, the Federal Republic saw itself as continuing the 'democratic' traditions whereas the GDR was continuing the 'totalitarian' strands of their shared history. The concept of totalitarianism posited National Socialism and communism as equally reprehensible and thereby served to discredit the GDR.

However, to the extent that actual confrontations with the Nazi past occurred during the post-war years in either of the occupation zones and the subsequent German states, they were not initiated by Germans themselves, but imposed by the occupying powers through denazification programs and trials against Nazi perpetrators. Yet, the Allies' denazification programs were rather unsuccessful in instigating a coherent confrontation with the past and mostly reinforced the tendency towards repression. Their results within the different occupation zones were decidedly different, though. In the Soviet Zone, 520,000 former members of the NSDAP (National Socialist German Workers Party) had been fired from their jobs by April 1948 and 12,500 persons were convicted of war crimes (Herf 1997:72). In the three Western Zones, only 1,654 out of 3.6 million Nazi party members were found to be "really guilty" (Kettenacker 1997:17), that is *Hauptschuldige*

(chief culprits).[2] While a more thorough attempt at purging the administration and other institutions was made in the Soviet Zone, Jeffrey Herf points out that not everything occurring under the name of denazification served political justice; at times "the label 'Nazi criminal' became a blanket accusation covering some persons who were actually guilty of such crimes as well as others who had simply displeased the East German authorities for a multitude of reasons" (1997:73).

The vast majority of the population in each of the two German states was not forced to seriously confront themselves with their share of guilt and responsibility for the recent past. Both the GDR's and FRG's leaders were less concerned with a thorough reckoning with the past than with establishing public support for the respective state formations. The official claims of having broken with the past were not reflective of democratically constituted collective intentions; rather, the break with the past had been enforced by the Allies. Yet, these claims served each state to legitimize itself, just as both states' treatments of their historical legacy stood in the service of political ends in the present.

The GDR's politics of history was focused on establishing the state's historical legitimacy as well as on fostering a positive identification with the state on behalf of its citizens. In 1955, the Central Committee of the SED (Socialist Unity Party of Germany) decided that the science of history was to be used as a "fierce ideological weapon ... in the education of the working class and all working people in the fight against the pernicious ideology of the imperialist and militarist forces in West Germany" (cited in Frevert 1999:173; translation: A.K.). The historian's task was to be the conveying of history in a way that would foster the people's "pride" in their "historical achievements," their rejection of "the German reaction, German imperialism and militarism," and their determination to "defend the socialist achievements of the workers' and peasants' combined

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[2] The German population was processed according to five categories: chief culprits (meaning war criminals), incriminated persons, less incriminated persons, fellow travelers, and exonerated persons (Giordano 1990:86).

power in the GDR" (ibid.; translation A.K.). The study and teaching of history had to follow detailed guidelines set by the SED. Particular emphasis had to be given to events such as, for instance, the Peasant Revolts of 1524-5 or the revolutionary activities at the end of World War I, as well as to the history of the workers' movement and particularly the KPD (Communist Party of Germany). Also drawn upon were those German philosophers and literary figures whom the leaders of the GDR deemed progressive. They were claimed as "virtual founding fathers" of the GDR in the construction of a genealogy, which conceived of the course of history as a progressing movement towards emancipation, freedom, and equality, with the GDR as its point of culmination (Frevert 1999:174).

In devising a politics of history that would serve to legitimize the GDR as a state entity, the SED was also endeavoring to revise the negative image of German history that suggested itself after World War II. In both post-war German states a view was gaining ground according to which the trajectory of modern German national history was destined more or less straight towards Nazism and the Holocaust. In the West, attempts at salvaging national traditions from under the ruins left by Hitler's regime aimed at depicting National Socialism as an unfortunate 'accident' or a temporary aberration within the nation's history. Instead, the SED claimed that the GDR was founded on the tradition of the antifascist resistance against Hitler and incorporated that resistance into the rendition of the GDR as the logical culmination of all the progressive strands within German national history. To be sure, numerous leaders of the GDR had been in the resistance and were persecuted and forced into exile by the Nazis. They had returned from exile or prison camps in order to build a 'better' Germany, an antifascist alternative to the Third Reich. However, they were not representative of the people who became the citizenry of GDR. Nevertheless, while antifascism became a GDR state doctrine, the GDR's leaders did not address the majority's moral failures and the ways in which it had sustained the Nazi regime, but rather absolved the GDR's citizens from all responsibility for the crimes of the Third Reich.

Significantly, the era of the Third Reich was referred to as fascism rather than National Socialism, which relates to the fact that official analyses gave little weight to anti-Semitism and the systematic persecution and extermination of the European Jews; although this was an essential aspect of National Socialism that set it apart from other fascist movements in Europe. Analyses of the Third Reich focused on fascism as an outgrowth of capitalism and imperialism, and anti-Semitism was considered a by-product of socioeconomic factors (Staab 1998:132). While the GDR did expel most former high-ranking Nazis from public service, it exonerated the masses by considering them to have been 'victims' of an imperialist and militarist dictatorship. Public rituals of remembrance focused on the communist victims of fascism. Jewish victims were not commemorated independently, as anti-communism, rather than racism, was seen as the central aspect of fascism. Accordingly, the expression 'victims of fascism' referred more or less exclusively to the men and women in the communist resistance. The emphasis lay on their having fought actively against fascism. Compared to the millions who suffered and died 'passively,' the resistance fighters provided a more convenient basis of identification: "Their sacrifice was an active one, turned towards the future; they offered it for a good cause, which could then, in 1945, in the form of the Red Army and its German companions, triumph over the evil" (Frevert 1999:167; translation: A.K.). While the category of 'active' victims was rather exclusive, the category of 'passive' victims was wide enough to include even former Nazis and their supporters. The 'active' victims served as role models and demonstration of the attitude that was expected of the 'passive' victims (ibid.). Whatever guilt remained was to be resolved in contributing to the building up of socialism. In doing so, the people in the GDR could depart from the past; they could emulate their communist and antifascist role models and join the side of those who emerged as the victors of history (Frevert 1999:168). Hence, the GDR did not only absolve its citizens from guilt for the Nazi past,

> the official interpretation of anti-Fascism offered the convenient political and
> moral advantages of presenting the GDR and its citizens as victims of and winners
> over National Socialism. They were victims of a Nazi-regime that had ultimately

emerged as the logical consequence of a capitalist society. They were winners out of the GDR's legitimacy as a workers' and peasants' state that overcame the exploitation of the masses and the imperialist expansion of capitalism in its quest to create the Communist society (Staab 1998:133).

The Federal Republic, in contrast, was portrayed as representing "a mere restoration of a bourgeois-capitalist society." Seeing themselves as having broken with the past while the Federal Republic did not, "the SED perceived the National Socialist regime as an exclusively West German issue and problem" (ibid.). This included the guilt and responsibility for the Nazi crimes, particularly the Holocaust. As the leaders of the East German state had relegated the issue of anti-Semitism and the pursuit of genocide to the margin within their analyses of the Third Reich, considering it secondary to issues of class struggle, they also refused to take part in the so-called *Wiedergutmachung* ('making good again'), the restitution payments to Holocaust survivors and to the state of Israel. Nor did they recompense emigrated Jews who had owned property on the territory of the GDR. This was another instance in which the subsumation of the "race question" under the "class question" provided a ground on which to reject responsibility for Nazi crimes and injustices: "Capitalists, regardless of their confession, were not welcome; Jewish property, most of which had been 'aryanized' during the Nazi period already, passed into the hands of the people after 1945" (Frevert 1999:172; translation A.K.).

This selective engagement with the Nazi past prevented a sincere confrontation with this legacy and a serious working through of the failures of the past towards a thorough moral renewal. The doctrine of antifascism was not the reflection of a consensus among the citizenry of the GDR, it was rather a *'verordneter' Antifaschismus* ('decreed' antifascism), as has been pointed out by, among others, Dan Diner (1995) and Ralph Giordano (1990). While both authors oppose such views that refer to the 'decreed' nature of this antifascism in order to discredit the project in its entirety,[3] they are very critical of the ideological-political ends that this doctrine served and,

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[3] For instance, Giordano seems to be concerned that his critique of 'decreed antifascism' in the GDR could serve attempts at deflecting from the shortcomings of the Federal Republic in dealing with the Nazi-past by way of referring to the flaws of the GDR's treatment of this legacy. He points out that, these flaws notwithstanding, the GDR's record is still favorable to that of the Federal Republic in various regards; for

particularly, the reductionist or distorted view of Nazism, anti-Semitism, and the Holocaust it implied.

Although "this 'imposed identity' may never have been a living reality among the bulk of the East German population" (Verheyen 1999:80), its functional significance must not be underestimated. Apart from exonerating the masses, the "master narrative of antifascism" also fulfilled an integrative function, as Frank Biess points out in discussing Herf's view of the GDR's politics of history as having served to withhold democratic powers from East German society. Biess argues that by "relieving East Germans from confronting individual guilt and responsibility and by offering a new antifascist identity, official East German memories also entailed a potential for accommodation and even consensus 'from below'" (1999:147p.). Dirk Verheyen further refers to the ways in which this 'foundational myth' shaped everyday life in the GDR, its political culture as well as the sociocultural and psychological constitution of its citizens (199:81p.). To that extent, the post-unification wholesale discreditation of GDR-antifascism – as a collective absolution from guilt and responsibility and as legitimization for authoritarian rule – risks precluding a deeper understanding of East Germans' experiences and their responses to the transformation process after 1989 and the new Germany.

As the division of Germany and the establishment of both the GDR and the FRG were the immediate result of the Third Reich's defeat, the Federal Republic was equally faced with the tasks of defining its relation to the Nazi regime as was the GDR.

> From the outset, the *Bonn* Republic was morally handicapped by the collective
> guilt of its people. The FRG and its newly democratic citizens carried the burden
> of succeeding from a political·system that trampled on humanity and morality, and
> that abandoned tolerance, respect, and intellectual enlightenment for the cause of
> racial supremacy and military superiority (Staab 1998:135).

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instance, in contrast to the Federal Republic, the GDR expelled most higher ranking Nazis from the administration and did not allow the formation of neo-Nazi parties and SS-successor organizations or the publication and dissemination of neo-Nazistic and anti-Semitic views (1990:216p.)

The way in which the founders of the Federal Republic handled this legacy was markedly different from the GDR's politics of history. While the founding of the Federal Republic was to be a new beginning, a rebirth "without sin," the new state still claimed legitimacy by considering itself the "follower of the pre-fascist German Reich" (Räthzel 1990:44) and, by implication, the successor state of the Third Reich. The establishment of continuity also entailed the "acceptance of full responsibility for Germany's past, especially *vis-à-vis* Israel" (Kettenacker 1997:39).

On that basis, the FRG claimed to be the only legitimate representative of the German people. The *Grundgesetz* (Basic Law), which was to serve as the Federal Republic's 'temporary' constitution, retained a concept of citizenship that reflected this self-understanding. Based on the Reich Citizenship Law of 1913, Article 116 of the Basic Law bestowed automatic rights of citizenship to all those of German descent, including not just residents of the Federal Republic but everyone "who, as a refugee or expellee of German *Volkszugehörigkeit* [ethnic membership], or as a spouse or descendent of such a person, has been admitted to the territory of the German Reich as it existed on December 31, 1937" (cited in Brubaker 1992:169). The principle of a single German citizenship emphasized a commitment to reunification, and the Federal Republic considered the residents of the GDR as well as ethnic German refugees and expellees to be "citizens in fact if not in name" (ibid.).

While the Western leaders officially accepted responsibility for the legacy of Nazism, the opportunity for a clean break and a thorough confrontation with the past was not seized. Only a small number of Germans "broke the generational code of a self-serving mutual attestation of innocence and honourable conduct" (Geyer 1996:170) and their attempts at exposing crimes and establishing liability were met with aggression and denial. The majority of the German population resented the denazification process and joined forces in order to outwit the authorities that enforced it. On the whole, this attempt at purging largely failed and, as Giordano points out, it frequently achieved the opposite of what it was supposed to: rather than establishing liability it served as

rehabilitation (1990:17p.). Lothar Kettenacker adds, drawing on Lutz Niethammer's study of denazification in Bavaria:

> Those who were cleared, whatever their true record, now had a perfect alibi and a case for re-employment. More serious still is Niethammer's contention that denazification as a bureaucratic procedure produced a psychological defense mechanism against any real attempts at collective soul-searching about the past. Persuading others that one was not guilty of any wrongdoing meant that one half-believed it oneself. Forgetting, conforming, and achieving seemed to be what was called for (1997:18).

In his review of the ways in which post-war West German society dealt with the legacy of National Socialism and particularly with the Nazi-perpetrators, Giordano shows that, with few exceptions, the perpetrators got away without punishment. Rather than seriously confronting the loss of "humane orientation" that allowed, and was expressed in, the inhuman laws and actions during the Nazi-era, West German society made what Giordano calls its "great peace with the perpetrators" (1990:11; translation A.K.) and integrated them socially, economically, and politically. The collective responsibility was continuously diminished until only a small elite of Nazi-leaders were considered to be truly responsible and everybody else was allowed to think of themselves as innocent or even as victims of Hitler, an insane dictator who had 'seized' the country. Democratic post-war political leaders who were willing to support denazification and to address and speak out against the crimes of the Nazi-era faced the dilemma of not being able to win elections on such positions, as these were profoundly unpopular with a substantial bloc of voters. The temptation to tone down the condemnation and the support for denazification was considerable since "silence won votes" (Herf 1997:203).

Whereas the majority of Germans focused on their own suffering during the postwar years, conveniently forgetting what had caused their situation and how much responsibility for it they shared, "the Nuremberg judgements accentuated the causal connection between the aggression and crimes of the Nazis and postwar German misery" (Herf 1997:207). The trials at Nuremberg and other Allied trials clearly established that war crimes and crimes against humanity had been committed and engraved the Nazis' pursuit of genocide into public memory in both Germanies.

Despite their weaknesses, the trials and other measures taken by the Allies, including

denazification, had an impact on public memory and served to discredit Nazism even though they

could not instigate a broad and thorough confrontation with the past and with questions of

individual and collective responsibility. With the onset of the Cold War, however, a comprehensive

pursuit of justice was further impeded, as anticommunism became a more pressing concern than

denazification and emphasis now lay on integrating West Germany firmly into the Western

alliance. Under Konrad Adenauer, the leader of the conservative Christian Democratic Union

(CDU) who served as chancellor from 1949 to 1963, Western integration, as well as economic

resurgence, clearly took precedence over a confrontation with the past. Adenauer made it clear that

he considered the newly established democracy in West Germany to be too volatile to allow for

aggressive denazification.

> Integration of the Germans into a Western alliance and of Germans who had gone
> astray into a postwar democracy within Germany was his central preoccupation,
> taking precedence over memory and justice. He drew this conclusion as a
> geostrategist and as a politician who understood that Nazism had popular support
> among the Germans and had left residues that would not vanish overnight.
> Embedding West Germany into a Western alliance, for Adenauer no less than for
> the Allies, was a defense against the Soviet present as well as a possible return of
> the Nazi past (Herf 1997:220).

Adenauer's pursuit of integration did not only take precedence over justice but came at the

expense of the pursuit of justice, as the political integration of those who had 'gone astray' was

bought at the price of mass exoneration of all except a small group of perpetrators. Adenauer

rallied against denazification, opposed a comprehensive purge of the West German establishment,

and paved the way for the reinstatement of highly incriminated individuals into public office.

Under his rule, the prosecution of those accused of having committed war crimes and crimes

against humanity was further abated. Instead, "Adenauer strongly supported measures that were far

less threatening to the voters, namely, restitution for Jewish survivors and good relations with the

state of Israel" (1997:209). While, as Michael Wolffsohn states, "[t]he standing of the young

republic and its Chancellor, Konrad Adenauer, rose in no small degree because this restitution [to

Israel] was pledged voluntarily and without pressure from the United States" (1993:13), it would be wrong to assume that these payments were not driven by self-interests. Adenauer's initiative met with significant opposition, which he propitiated "with moral and what amounted to economic arguments. The Jews of the world, especially the American Jews, argued Adenauer, possessed enormous economic influence. Their good will could be of great benefit to German exporters" (1993:18). The initiative toward *Wiedergutmachung* was not only guided by economic interest and meant to serve as an appeasement for guilt that could not possibly be 'made good for;' it was further Janus-faced in that it ultimately was part of the 'great peace with the perpetrators.' As Herf points out, "there was great discrepancy between the West German discourse of repentance and acceptance of restitution obligations on the one hand and the paucity of justice on the other. [...] Certainly restitution was a path of less resistance than justice" (1997:333).

The FRG's recourse to history was equally selective as was the GDR's and followed the logic of the political antagonism between the two Germanies as members of the opposed Cold War blocs. A case in point is the differential treatment of various legacies of resistance against Hitler. Whereas the GDR emphasized the communist resistance and claimed its members as national heroes, the FRG emphasized the conservative resistance and virtually ignored or even discredited the communist resistance fighters. Yet, even reference to the conservative and militarist resistance against Hitler was a contentious issue in West Germany. For example, a significant proportion of the population viewed Colonel Claus Schenk von Stauffenberg and the other army officers with whom he attempted to assassinate Hitler on 20 July 1944 as guilty of high treason. Nevertheless, 20 July 1944 was gradually elevated to almost the rank of a national anniversary and politicians such as Theodor Heuss, the first president of the FRG, claimed the assassination attempt as a source of national pride (see Giordano 1990:78). The establishment of this legacy as a positive point of reference for the Federal Republic against widespread resistance to such a view was pursued, Ute Frevert argues, because it could serve as legitimization for West Germany's re-armament. At a time when anti-militarist attitudes were common among the population, the officers who had

revoked their allegiance to Hitler were claimed as positive role models, heroes, or even 'martyrs,' as Theodor Heuss referred to them (Frevert 1999:202).

In both German states, the past was dealt with according to present needs. Both states pursued a politics of history that served to construct and secure their respective political identities. However, whereas the GDR's politics of history was rigorous and stringent, tightly orchestrated by the SED's Central Committee, the FRG did not establish an equally strict and obligatory view of history. Although anticommunism served as an effective and highly integrative ideology, which also "provided many conservative West Germans with a degree of ideological continuity and remarkable political self-righteousness across the divide from an anti-communist dictatorship to an anti-communist democracy" (Fulbrook 1999:61), the antitotalitarian consensus was loose enough to allow for dissent and did not prevent alternative interpretations of history from emerging. Overall, the FRG's official treatment of the past was more tentative, plural, and contradictory than that of the GDR. However, it was not until the late 1960s that the Nazi-past and its legacy became an issue of intense and controversial public debates. In the 1950s and 1960s, the government put little emphasis on remembrance corresponding to a predominant lack of interest in such issues on the part of the West Germans population; at least as long as such remembrance raised uncomfortable questions about their responsibility for the events of the past. Only to the extent that they considered themselves to be victims did people remember willingly and passionately (Frevert 1999:204pp.). The casting of Germans as victims included reference to the hardship and the losses that resulted from the war as well as to the fate of German refugees from the eastern parts of the former Reich. These had been expelled after the Allies decided in their 1945 Potsdam Agreement that these territories, which had previously been part of the Reich or incorporated by the Nazis, were now to be given or returned to the states of Poland, the Soviet Union, and Czechoslovakia. The Potsdam Agreement "laid down that such expulsions had to be conducted in a humane manner;" however, Stuart Parkes notes, "it is estimated that in the process about 2 million people

died, many from starvation and illness but many also as a result of acts of brutality" (Parkes 1997:155). Yet, reference to these German victims of violence frequently served to relativize German guilt, as it often came along with a convenient ignorance of the sequence of events that led to the expulsions. To the extent that this focus on German victims is combined with deliberate ignoring or denial of the many more millions of people who became victims of racial and political persecution and war crimes committed by Germans, it casts Germans as the actual victims of World War II and goes hand in hand with right-wing revisionism.

By the end of the 1960s, however, West Germans were pushed out of their willed forgetfulness when the generation born after World War II forced a confrontation with the past on the public agenda. Members of this generation, who were free of personal guilt for participation in, or approval of, the Nazi-regime, confronted and challenged their parents' generation about their actions and attitudes during the Third Reich. They also took on the West German establishment and its institutions, declaring them to stand in continuity with the culture and society that had allowed for fascism to take root. The student movement of the 1960s/70s and the emerging 'New Left' defined themselves in opposition to fascism and demanded the total transformation of German society and its institutions. Yet, as was the case with the analysis of fascism in the GDR, the New Left's interpretation of Nazism in terms of fascism, hence capitalism, led to a limited understanding of the specificity of National Socialism, particularly anti-Semitism and the Holocaust (Postone 1993). Their radical rejection of the past further hindered an understanding of how they were caught up – in structural as well as sociocultural and psychological terms – in the very past they rejected and prevented a thorough working through of this legacy (Mitscherlich 1987). Nevertheless, in the aftermath of 1968, the memory of National Socialism became "an 'issue' that nobody could avoid. While the general awareness of the issue was still driven by those who had pioneered its politics, memory was now political capital for everyone to use – impossible for anyone with some public stature to ignore" (Geyer 1996:172).

During the 1970s and 1980s, the Nazi past became an ever more central public concern in West Germany. Films and television series about the Third Reich and the Holocaust – for example, the American television film 'Holocaust' that was broadcasted in 1979 – triggered intense and widespread public debates. Questions were raised about the uniqueness of Nazi crimes and about whether this legacy irreparably burdened any concept of the German nation, that is whether Germans could ever 'overcome' this legacy or whether German national identity was forever tainted by it. This interest, Mary Fulbrook argues, took on an obsessive character and did little in the way of leading towards a coming to terms with the past:

> there was what might be called an intrinsically self-contradictory cultural feeding frenzy, an orgy of public engagement with an 'unresolved past' that seemed – like pulling the dressing off and scratching a wound to see how well it was healing, or tearing up a plant by its roots to see how well it was growing – only to exacerbate an obsession (Fulbrook 1999:172)

While the obsessive character of these confrontations with the past might have been an impediment to finding constructive ways of dealing with this legacy, it indicates that this legacy continued to be central within Germans' collective consciousness and revealed the magnitude of its imprint on their moral and historical self-understanding and sense of identity. The intensity of these public discussions further "illuminated retrospectively the nature and extent of post-war denial and revealed how much had been repressed psychically, even after 1968-69" (Postone 1993:295).

In describing the "memorializing culture" that began to develop in West Germany during the 1980s, Michael Geyer points to the crucial role played by visual media, which supplied a now receptive audience with an industrially produced popular form of remembrance of the Nazi past (1996:184p.). This emerging memorializing culture was not based on individual labors of remembering and interior processes of self-examination but was the effect of mass-mediated productions of memory, which individuals could consume without necessarily having to consider themselves as implicated in the "secular morality play" (1996:186) presented to them. Accordingly, this mass-production of memory failed to deliver the emancipatory effect that those who had "pioneered a politics of memory had hoped to achieve" (ibid.). These 'pioneers,' mostly

"[p]rogressive Germans of the educated class," promoted a working through of the past that would "lead to a more conscientious and more enlightened present and serve to guide future-oriented action" (1996:176). Geyer notes that their visions of how to morally and politically improve the German nation had a decidedly Christian tone to them, as acknowledging guilt and coming to terms with the past were expected to bring a redemption of sorts. Nevertheless, mass-mediated memory production still had the effect of reducing the earlier sense of distance from the past and disseminated information on the Nazi-regimes' terror and genocidal politics. In particular, it increased "public recognition of the Holocaust as a German crime and of Nazi rule in Eastern Europe as a savage and brutal regime" (1996:187).

This recognition had profound effects on perceptions of German national identity. It fed a desire to unburden oneself of the memories of the Nazi-past; however, these memories still were "too important an individual mark and too important a collective experience to be discarded" (1996:187p.) As a result,

> individuals and the national electronic public had to negotiate conflicting emotions, to struggle between pride and a desire for absolution; a hesitancy to acknowledge involvement and a willingness to make good; an insistence on their own identity and a desire to acknowledge that of others whose presence revived the memory of mass murder. These tensions were not resolved. They were, instead, articulated in a culture of shame – which is, I think, the most appropriate rendition of the popular version of German *Betroffenheitskultur*[4] (1996:188).

Geyer describes this 'culture of shame' as sentimental, moralizing, built on a Christian understanding of repentance to make up for past sins, and focused on reconciliation. He further points out that it was marked by a sense of being watched over by the international community as well as by Jews in Germany, who were becoming more involved and regained a voice in German politics.

> The ever-present 'eye' of the other, the prominence of rituals of *Wiedergutmachung*, the insistence on visible social effects of coming to terms with

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[4] The literal translation of *Betroffenheit* is 'consternation.' However, in this context, *Betroffenheit* refers to a broader range or combination of emotional responses, including embarrassment, awkwardness, shame, and guilt.

the past, the anxiety about behaving incorrectly – all served to transform the German memorializing culture into a distinct culture of shame (ibid.).

However, the 'culture of shame' was not all-encompassing. Supported by members of the left-liberal political spectrum, it was bemoaned by more conservative and right-wing segments of West German society, who chided it as 'national masochism,' castigated the intellectuals who promoted *Betroffenheit* as 'traitors to the fatherland,' and lamented a lack of positive national consciousness. Moishe Postone notes that the "reemergence of history" was met by a conservative reaction which sought to "reverse many political-cultural developments that had occurred in the Federal Republic after 1968-69, and to do so by establishing a greater degree of continuity with elements of the German past that had since been discredited" (1993:295).

This "counterpolitics of memory" (Geyer 1996:189) found its most prominent representative in Helmut Kohl, who became chancellor of Germany in 1982. Under his conservative government, the *Sonderweg* perspective became increasingly challenged and notions of "the 'nation' and the *Volk* regained legitimacy in public discourse" (Levy 1999:56). Kohl's politics of history focused on presenting Germans with a positive self-image. To that end, he sought to de-emphasize the legacy of Nazism and the Holocaust within German historical consciousness and to relativize German guilt by emphasizing German victimhood. During a visit to Israel in 1984, he referred to crimes committed 'in the German name' instead of to crimes committed by Germans and evoked a *'Gnade der späten Geburt'* (mercy of late birth) as absolving him and all Germans born too late to have been Nazi-perpetrators from moral obligation and the efforts of memory (Geyer 1996:189; Kattago 1998:96). He put the case for a *'neue Unbefangenheit'* (new uninvolvement) and a *Schlußstrich* (final line) to be drawn under the inglorious past; as terrible as it was, he argued, it was time to turn away from it and towards the future (Frevert 1999:259).

This shift towards exoneration and closure found symbolic expression in the Bitburg affair of 1985, the year of the fortieth anniversary of both the end of World War II and the liberation of the concentration and extermination camps. Upon Kohl's request, American President Ronald

Reagan agreed to visit the military cemetery at Bitburg and laid a wreath in honor of the German soldiers buried at the site. The announcement of this plan set off a heated controversy over the morality of this gesture, particularly after it became public that the cemetery also contained graves of Waffen SS members. As a result of the protest in the United States, Reagan and Kohl agreed to include a visit to the site of the concentration camp Bergen-Belsen into their program. Yet, this belated correction created the impression that "the meaningless rituals of public rhetoric of penance and shame were to be acted out here, while the reconciliation was to be effected in Bitburg" (Fulbrook 1999:95p.). The overall effect of Bitburg was a blurring of the distinction between perpetrators and victims of the Nazi-era. Through Reagan's willingness to honor former perpetrators and to declare Germans, even members of the SS, to have been victims of Nazi-tyranny, the Kohl government was able to put "an American imprint on West German conservative sentiment" (Herf 1997:351), to "wipe away the last moral residues of probation under which the Federal Republic still labored" (Maier 1988:10), and to "underscore the normalcy of the (national) present as opposed to the aberrations of the past" (Geyer 1996:189). Yet, most profound was the break from the former politics of memory, which was demonstrated at Bitburg in that this effort of remembrance focussed on German suffering rather than that of Nazi-Germany's victims. As Anson Rabinbach notes, Bitburg represented the disentanglement of German national identity from the singularity of the Holocaust by the Kohl government as it "publicly relativize[d] the Holocaust in relation to all other suffering inflicted by 'the war'" (1988:180).

Kohl's project of presenting Germans with a positive view of their national identity was not premised on obliterating the memory of National Socialism and the Holocaust; if that had been his goal, he would surely have failed against the resistance of internal and external 'watchdogs' over the Germans' treatment of their history. His was an attempt at downplaying the 'dark years' between 1933-45 "in favor of a positive meaningful identity emphasizing the continuity of German history and the democratic achievements of the Federal Republic rather than the burden of a catastrophic past" (Kattago 1998:96p.).

The place of National Socialism and the Holocaust in German history and its meaning for German identity in the present were also the main issues at stake within the *Historikerstreit* (Historian's Debate) that erupted one year after Bitburg. This debate is well documented and a detailed discussion of the different lines of argumentation is beyond the scope of this chapter (see, for example, Baldwin 1990; LaCapra 1995; Maier 1988, New German Critique 1988). In fact, some have argued that historical facts, evidence, and methodology were of peripheral importance in the *Historikerstreit* and that its true concern was "the question of what narrative construct of the Holocaust could enable the German nation to appropriate its troublesome past, without being overcome with shame and guilt" (Brunner 1997:266). The debate broke out when the philosopher Jürgen Habermas denounced revisionist positions among German historians in an article in the newsweekly *Die Zeit*. His initial attack focused on Ernst Nolte, who had recently published an article in another major newspaper, *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, in which he suggested that the Soviet Gulag system was the 'original' of which Auschwitz was a copy. Not only did Nolte compare the Holocaust to other crimes in order to present it as derivative, he even went so far as to suggest that the Gulag may have caused the Nazis to commit the crime that 'Auschwitz' stands for:

> Did not the National Socialists, did not Hitler perhaps commit an "Asiatic" deed only because they regarded themselves and those like them as potential or real victims of an "Asiatic" deed? Was not the Gulag Archipelago more original than Auschwitz? Was not the "class murder" of the Bolshevists the logical and factual prius of the "racial murder" of the National Socialists?" (quoted in Rabinbach 1988:184).

In Nolte's view, the Nazis' crimes may have been a preemptive move against an expected Bolshevik menace. Nolte does not consider Auschwitz to be truly a German crime; by calling it an 'Asiatic' deed he projects the guilt away from the Germans and onto a threatening other – and does so "in an act of racial slander that is particularly offensive in view of its context" (LaCapra 1995:50).

Habermas did not only take issue with attempts at relativizing the crimes against the Jews, as undertaken by Nolte and others; he also confronted historians such as Andreas Hillgruber and

Michael Stürmer (an advisor to Chancellor Kohl) who worked towards altering the contextual

meaning of the Holocaust and other Nazi crimes in order to create a positive German national

identity. Hillgruber, for example, was concerned about the "unconscious retreat of the majority of

Germans in the post war years from their nation" (quoted in Rabinbach 1988:189) and advocated a

view of post-war Germany's fate that dissociated it from the crimes of National Socialism and

constructed it as a victim of wartime power politics. Michael Stürmer warned of "a worried, deeply

insecure nation running away from its own past" (quoted in Brunner 1997:267) and proposed the

pursuit of a politically motivated historiography, which would further a positive image of German

national identity through affirmative historical narratives (ibid.).

Habermas's intervention was focused on countering such attempts at 'normalizing' the

German past, which he describes as renouncing a consensus about the Nazi past that "had been the

basis up to now of the official self-image of the Federal Republic" (1988:45). He insists on a

continuing historical liability and puts forward the notion of a solidarity of memory:

> Firstly, there is the obligation we in Germany have – even if no one else is
> prepared to take it upon themselves any longer – to keep alive the memory of the
> suffering of those murdered at the hands of Germans, and we must keep memory
> alive quite openly and not just in our minds. These dead have above all a claim to
> the weak anamnestic power of solidarity which those born later can now only
> practice through the medium of the memory which is always being renewed, which
> may often be desperate, but which is at any rate active and circulating. If we
> disregard this Benjaminian legacy, Jewish fellow citizens and certainly the sons,
> the daughters and the grandchildren of the murdered victims would no longer be
> able to breathe in our country (1988:44).

He further points to the fact that German nationalism and illiberalism had been major

factors in the development towards 1933 and argues that the search for a positive identity must be

based on a critical appropriation of the "better traditions of our history" (1988:45) and a sincere

confrontation with the destructive ones: "The Nazi period will be much less of an obstacle to us,

the more calmly we are able to consider it as the filter through which the substance of our culture

must be passed, insofar as this substance is adopted voluntarily and consciously" (ibid.). In

opposing initiatives towards a renewal of national identity, Habermas suggests that a

'postconvential' identity and a liberal-democratic notion of a *Verfassungspatriotismus*

(constitutional patriotism) would be far more suitable answers to questions of identity and the

nature of the German polity after the Holocaust. It was only after Auschwitz and through the bond

with the Western Allies, he argues, that West Germans built a pluralistic and open society based on

the principles of parliamentary democracy. Rather than a reinforcement of an identity based on pre-

political values, such as the "*Volk* as a historic community of fate" or "the nation as a linguistic and

cultural community," he proposes an "identification with the civic state-nation founded in 1949"

(1991:88).

The *Historikerstreit* was far more than just another dispute between a handful of

academics; it was fought out on the pages of major newspapers and numerous intellectuals and

journalists joined the controversy on one side or the other. It is difficult to peg the outcomes and

effects of the debate. Did it open the door for a conservative nationalism and a revisionist view of

the Nazi past? Or was the revisionists' move towards reconstructing a positive German national

identity by 'freeing' historical consciousness from the supposed 'obsessive' fixation on the years

between 1933-45 successfully discredited by their opponents? Initial estimates tended to see the

anti-revisionists as having come out on top of the dispute. For example, John Topley notes that

Habermas's effort at defending remembrance of the Nazi past as a "crucial, if infamous inheritance

in West Germans' self-understanding" (1988:23) was backed up by numerous historians. Provoked

into action by Habermas, they "rejected the nationalist and 'normalizing' tendencies of recent

conservative interpretations of National Socialism, and the corresponding 'instrumentalization' of

history for political purposes" (1988:24). For Topley, the debate indicated that the consensus about

the past within West Germany's political culture could not easily be cancelled. Support for this

consensus also came from Richard von Weizsäcker, who was the Federal Republic's president at

the time. In October 1988, he opened a historian's congress with a speech in which he criticized

those who attempted to relativize the Holocaust: "Auschwitz remains unique. It was perpetrated by

Germans in the name of Germany. This truth is immutable and will not be forgotten" (quoted in

Herf 1997:359). Already in 1985, days after Bitburg, Weizsäcker had rebuffed the signal set by

Kohl. On May 8, the day commemorating the fortieth anniversary of the end of World War II,

Weizsäcker held a speech in the *Bundestag* (West Germany's federal parliament) that was noticed

worldwide for its content. Weizsäcker explicitly addressed all the different groups of victims, those

of racial and political persecution as well as the victims of war crimes, thereby "crossing the Cold

War fault lines which had distorted memory at Bitburg" (Herf 1997:356). He further addressed the

persecution and extermination of the Jews and the extent to which Germans must be supposed to

have known about it. And he rejected claims of ignorance and insisted on the acknowledgment of

collective responsibility (1997:357). Weizsäcker's speech was widely understood to have been a

counter signal to Kohl's evocation of a *neue Unbefangenheit* and as establishing responsibility for

the past and particularly the Holocaust as an indisputable basis of West German identity.

However, the climate for memory further changed when the Berlin Wall came down in

November of 1989 and Germany was reunited in 1990. The question of the German nation and

German identity again became a focal point of public discussion. Conservatives and the 'New

Right' saw unification as marking the endpoint of the post-war situation and claimed that Germany

had now become 'normal' again. Furthermore, they called for a strong national consciousness as

requisite to overcoming the inner divisions and fissures of the newly unified Germany. To that end,

they wanted to see Germans presented with an affirmative image of their national history, which

could serve as a source of self-confidence, pride, and a sense of common purpose (see Klotz and

Schneider 1997). It seems that the political events following the demise of the GDR undid

whatever the *Historikerstreit* might have achieved in slowing down the 'roll back' of the post-1968

politics of memory. As Michael Geyer notes,

> [t]hose who thought that the *Historikerstreit* was over were clearly mistaken. It
> was just the beginning of a whole series of attacks on what was deemed cultural
> hegemony or critical orthodoxy. The *Historikerstreit* has mutated into a
> multiplicity of debates about the "normalization" of Germany as a sovereign
> nation-state. It is accompanied by an across-the-board challenge to seventies and
> eighties culture of sentiment [*Betroffenheitskultur*] (1995:102).

Dan Diner further points to a paradigm shift in West Germany's political culture, which emerged with the *Historikerstreit*. In its wake, history replaced the social sciences as the leading discipline in the explanation and interpretation of society and culture. From a post-unification perspective, he detects a parallel between this paradigm shift and the transformation of the polity that was about to take place:

> What really happened was the transformation of the *Bundesrepublik* into *Deutschland* – the displacement of the constitutive interpretive model of the body politic from *society* to *nation*. It is only this later event that locates the *Historikerstreit* in its rightful historical context and reveals the controversy's underlying concern – in anticipation of the political process of reunification – with the problem of German identity. The *Historikerstreit*, then, involved a debate over the past's significance in relation to a shift in Germany's sociopolitical status from a Western, i. e. institutional, body politic to veritable continental nation (1997:306; emphasis in the original).

As a result, the past is no longer negotiated in relation to the Federal Republic as a political formation situated in the context of the Cold War, but in relation to Germany as a nation-state, and an *ethnically* defined nation-state at that. The historicization of the present, which had previously been employed towards critical reflections on the society and the institutions of the FRG, now came to serve the creation of a national consciousness.

However, concerns that, after unification, National Socialism and the Holocaust might finally be crossed out of the national memory turned out to be unfounded; yet, the impetus behind efforts of remembrance varied and continued to change. If anything, public interest in the question of '*Vergangenheitsbewältigung*' ('mastering' or 'coming to terms with the past') increased after unification. This interest is catered to by the media and publishing houses, and there have been further historical debates that captured the public's attention to a similar degree as had the *Historikerstreit*. Recent years have also seen a veritable "memorial boom" (Geyer 1996:192). Of the various memorial projects that have been realized or suggested since unification, the national memorial of the Holocaust, to be built in the center of Berlin, has attracted the most attention. And it is the subject of an ongoing controversy over such issues as the (im)possibility of representing the Holocaust artistically, the question of how a people can adequately commemorate another

people that it had sought to extinguish, and the underlying politics and functions of the memorial. Critiques of the project have been voiced from a wide political spectrum. The Right denounces the memorial as a 'national disgrace.' The conservative mayor of Berlin, Eberhard Diepgen, declared that he will resist against this effort of making Berlin into a *"Hauptstadt der Reue"* ("capital of remorse"), and the writer Martin Walser protested against the memorial, decrying it as a *"Dauerpräsentation unserer Schande"* ("permanent presentation of our shame"). More left-leaning critics have argued that the memorial amounts to an appropriation of the victims' memory and point out that its actual function is not to honor the memory of the victims, but to serve the new Germany in reinventing itself, in showing the world that the Germans have done their homework, and in claiming the Holocaust as the source of a new sense of mission. Others critique the memorial for alleviating Germans from the individual and ongoing labor of memory and dealing with the past. And yet others claim that the national memorial should commemorate all victims of Nazi persecution, not just Jewish victims (see Cullen 1999; Kramer 1996). In any case, the national Holocaust memorial and other state-sponsored projects of remembrance indicate an ongoing development towards a nationalization of remembrance as they seek to define the place of the Holocaust within German national identity.

Just as the left-liberal politics of memory has never been as hegemonic as its opponents have claimed, the conservative politics of memory has not gone unchallenged either. The 1990s' culture of memory rather included diverse and conflicting narratives of the past and its meaning for the present. For example, Chancellor Kohl continued his project of downplaying the significance of the Holocaust in German history and of emphasizing German victimhood over German guilt. With the 1995 restoration of the *Neue Wache* (originally built to commemorate Prussia's victory over Napoleon in 1814) as the central German memorial to "all victims of war and tyranny," he initiated a memorial that commemorates the victims of the Third Reich and those of the dictatorship in the GDR collectively. This conflation implies a unified German past and "attempts to bridge the gap between East and West through the trope of shared victimhood" (Kattago 1998:91). On top of

suggesting such national cohesion, it erases the distinction between the two regimes, the distinction between their different victims, as well as the distinction between victims and perpetrators. German guilt becomes submerged in German victimhood, as ultimately everyone appears as a victim of tragic historical circumstances (1998:97). In contrast, a year later the debate over Daniel Jonah Goldhagen's book *Hitler's Willing Executioners: Ordinary Germans and the Holocaust* hit the feuilletons of practically all major German newspapers, bringing to public attention a very different perspective on the Holocaust and German guilt. Rather than calling the perpetrators "Nazis" or "SS men," Goldhagen called them "the Germans," arguing that "these men and women were Germans first, and SS men, policemen, or camp guards second" (1996:7). Goldhagen claims that previous analyses of the Holocaust, by focusing on structural and functional aspects, have failed to address the fundamental issue of the perpetrators' motivation. He describes this motivation as the result of a distinctly German 'eliminationist antisemitism,' which all Germans had internalized and which caused them to participate willingly in extraordinary acts of violence against Jews (1996:9,80pp., 401pp.).

The book was critiqued by many historians of various nationalities who pointed out serious flaws in Goldhagen's work, for example, that he quoted his sources out of context or that his argument was monocausal and deterministic, ahistorical and oversimplifying.[5] In Germany, however, the debate about Goldhagen's book took on a distinct character. Before it was translated into German, numerous well-known historians shredded the book in articles published in major newspapers and dismissed it with a fervor that has led to the suspicion that they were reacting "in the first instance not as specialists but as 'Germans'" (Pätzold 1998:163). Yet, in spite of this angry and defensive dismissal of Goldhagen's thesis by professional historians, the book struck a chord with the general public and, eventually, "Goldhagen and the book were celebrated for effecting an important change in how Germans regard their national past" (Shandley 1998b:2). When

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[5] See, for example, Deák (1997); Finkelstein and Birn (1998); Hilberg (1997); Shandley (1998a).

Goldhagen toured Germany after his book was translated into German, he received standing ovations at some events, and his visit has subsequently been called a "triumphal procession" (Ullrich 1998:197).

It might seem striking that Goldhagen's book, which makes such a damning argument about Germans and their history, would widely be greeted favorably by those it condemns. However, the positive response was certainly not unrelated to the fact that Goldhagen insisted that his indictment did not extend to present-day Germany. Upon accepting the Democracy Prize awarded to him by the *Journal for German and International Politics*, he gave a speech in which he praised the development of the democratic Federal Republic as "the great cultural and political success story of the postwar period" (1998:279). And he concluded his speech with another praise:

> That I am being acknowledged in Germany for writing a book with the unsettling and painful content that mine has is the strongest testimony to everything that I have said this evening, to the character and the democratic promise of contemporary Germany, and to the fact that it is really all the people in Germany, responsible for making the Federal Republic the democratic country that it has become, who deserve this prize (1998:285).

Goldhagen's remarks provide support for Habermas's insistence that the democratic Federal Republic is, and must remain, defined by a decisive split from earlier German traditions. Habermas greeted Goldhagen's book as countervailing apologetic and revisionist neo-conservative approaches and thanked him "for strengthening our ability to take another view of the past" (1998:272). In a similar vein, historian Wolfgang Wippermann considered the Goldhagen controversy as an indication that the "equalizers, relativizers, and deniers" have not yet won and the "struggle for cultural hegemony in the present by mastery over the past continues" (1998:243). However, it also needs to be pointed out that no few of Goldhagen's "willing listeners" felt liberated by what he was saying and that, in its later stages, the debate took on an overtone of redemption (Joffe 1998; Ullrich 1998). Goldhagen does not remark on continuing anti-Semitic tendencies in contemporary Germany, which he seems to consider negligible, and basically exonerates the post-war generations. His book contributed to the stimulation of a growing interest

in the past among the younger generations, but it remains to be seen what kind of politics of memory will come along with the new 'liberated' view of the past.

Meanwhile, the 1998 federal elections brought a Socialdemocratic-Green coalition to power, ending Kohl's 16-year chancellorship. It still might be somewhat premature to assess the impact of this change in federal politics on the ways in which German history will be officially interpreted. However, a number of developments and events of the last two years provide indication that the new government is continuing the tendency towards 'normalization,' although in a different direction than the previous government had pursued.

With the new government also came a generational change. Many of its members are of the generation that initiated the moral and political reckoning with the past in West Germany in the late 1960s and opposed conservative nationalism in the 1980s. However, now in power, they no longer profess to the reservation or critical attitude towards the nation they had once put forward. Having made peace with the nation, they also seem to have made peace with its history. In his first address to the *Bundestag*, Chancellor Gerhard Schröder spoke of pride for Germany and its achievements and evoked a new "self-confidence of a nation that has come of age, that feels neither superior nor inferior to anyone" (quoted in Grimond 1999:17). In numerous speeches and interviews he further explained how this 'self-confidence' relates to German history: He emphasized that his generation approaches the history of National Socialism with the *Unbefangenheit* of those born after the war; they do not ignore it, but they are not burdened by it either. The "grown up nation" faces its "past and its responsibility," however, "while willing to face it, they are focused on the future" (quoted in Perger 1998; translation: A.K.). In the light of such statements, commentators wondered whether the new government, the former '68ers of all people, would be the ones to draw the *Schlußstrich*, the 'final line' under the reckoning with the Nazi past, and thus to effectuate what Kohl failed to accomplish (Perger 1998).

Another signal for such a turn in the politics of memory was set by the government's representatives' silence in relation to the controversy that erupted over Martin Walser's speech

upon receiving Germany's top literary prize in October of 1998. Walser called for an end to the confrontation with the past, which he sees as an instrumentalization and exploitation of German shame for present political and commercial purposes. Auschwitz, he claimed, must not be used as a "routine threat" and a "tool of intimidation." He accused those who insist on a continuing confrontation with the past of being *"Meinungssoldaten"* ("opinion-soldiers"), of forcing German youth to join in their "national masochism," and of using Auschwitz as a *"Moralkeule"* ("moral club"). Having discredited all those whom he sees as forcing upon him and others negative memories for the purpose of inflicting pain and blocking Germany's return to normality, he claimed the right to "look away," to not be bothered anymore (see Assheuer 1998; Grimond 1999; Zuckermann 1999a). While the audience present responded enthusiastically to Walser's speech, a subsequent critique brought forward by Ignatz Bubis, then leader of Germany's Jewish community, sparked a heated debate, during which the new generation in power stood out by remaining silent. Chancellor Schröder only commented: "I think, a writer must be allowed to say this, the Chancellor must not" (quoted in Perger 1998; translation: A.K.). This statement could be, and was, read as a silent approval of Walser's initiative. As Moshe Zuckermann notes, the ultimate effect of Walser's speech and the ensuing debate – in which numerous politicians and intellectuals took part, many of whom defended Walser rather than criticized him – was a signal to the victims of Nazism that they have no say anymore, that the 'self-confident' nation no longer needs their approval (1999a; 1999b).

However, the new political class's *Unbefangenheit* in relation to the Nazi past has not put an end to political uses of this history. This became obvious when the government began to set the course for the participation of the German army in NATO's war against Yugoslavia, which began on 24 March 1999. In legitimizing the war effort as such as well as Germany's active participation in the combat mission, members of the government, particularly Foreign Minister Joseph Fischer and Defense Minister Rudolf Scharping, made extensive use of references to the Nazi past. While in 1994 Fischer had opposed a German participation in a military intervention in the war in Bosnia,

arguing that German soldiers could never be deployed in a region where the *Wehrmacht* (German army during the Third Reich) committed crimes and atrocities in World War II, this reservation had turned into its opposite by 1999. Justifying the intervention in Kosovo, Fischer now argued that Germans had a special responsibility to fight against human rights violations, even on such historically charged territory as the Balkans. Germany ought to send troops not *in spite* of Auschwitz, but *because* of Auschwitz. Scharping called the Yugoslav President "Balkan-Hitler" and claimed that the Serbs were installing concentration camps in Kosovo. Presenting the public with numbers of Albanian victims that later turned out to be vastly exaggerated, Scharping spoke of "ethnic cleansing" and of recognizing "the grimace of our own history" (quoted in Möller 2000:167). A number of Holocaust survivors protested against this use of Auschwitz as legitimization for the war and denounced as an infamy the instrumentalization of the Holocaust towards the end of reinstalling Germany as a full, unrestricted military power in spite of its legacy (Bejarano et al. 1999). However, most German media supported the government in portraying Slobodan Milosevic as the 'Serbian Hitler' and in positing the war effort as a kind of belated resistance against Adolf Hitler, a way of 'making good' as well as 'overcoming' the past (Bündnis gegen IG Farben 1999; Jacob 2000; Rohloff 2000).

Yet, while the new government claims Auschwitz as the source of a new sense of mission, this sense of mission and responsibility does not seem to include a speedy and fair fulfillment of still outstanding claims for recompense, for example, those of former forced laborers. Upon Schröder's initiative, the government and twelve of the companies against which these claims are directed established a joint fund and a foundation to settle the recompense issue. The goal of the foundation is clearly defined as defending the interests of the German industry. The name given to the foundation, *Erinnerung, Verantwortung und Zukunft* (Remembrance, Responsibility, and Future), indicates how the initiators want the payments to be understood: not so much as an acknowledgement of committed injustices, but as a gesture of generosity or, as the spokesperson for the foundation calls it, a "matter of humanitarian concern" (quoted in Eschrich 2000;

translation: A.K.). The negotiations with the claimants' representatives are dragging on, as payments will only be made on the condition that the U.S. government issues a guarantee that no further claims will be laid. Meanwhile, the number of people who have died without ever receiving any compensation increases because of these delaying tactics. Whereas a notion of responsibility for the Nazi-past is evoked as the basis for a positive German identity, Nazi Germany's victims are denied respect and dignity.

It seems that a new 'consensus' might be on the horizon, namely the claim that Germans have finally come to terms with their past. The fact that the German public reacted mostly positively to Goldhagen's book or to the so-called *Wehrmachtsaustellung*, an exhibition documenting the role of the *Wehrmacht* in Nazi atrocities, is taken as proof that Germans are no longer trying to run away from or deny their past and should be considered rehabilitated. And the new government is more successful than Kohl was in fitting the Nazi past and the Holocaust into a positive view of German national identity. Rather than emphasizing German victimhood over German guilt, they claim that Germans now make up a reformed nation that faces its past and accepts responsibility for it. The memory of the Holocaust is no longer considered an obstacle to Germany's development as a major global power, but is integrated into a success story of a nation's maturation from a guilty pariah to a normal nation. Whether this will be the last installment of Germany's official reckoning with its horrendous past remains to be seen. The inclination towards 'normalization' has certainly gained momentum since unification, and dissenting views have become increasingly marginalized. Furthermore, the generation that lived during the Third Reich, the victims who survived as well as the perpetrators and bystanders, is passing away, and the nature of debates over the past will change as a result. "Since the Third Reich is handed down as imagination rather than as actual experience," note Michael Geyer and Miriam Hansen, "remembering the Holocaust has shifted from being an issue of motivation (the willingness to remember) to an issue of representation (how to construct the presence of the past)" (1994:177). As

some forms of memorializing and commemorating stand in the service of forgetting rather than remembering – Bitburg, for instance – Geyer and Hansen conclude that "the problem is no longer 'never to forget': it is how to remember" (1994:176). There has been a quantitative explosion of (mass-mediated) memory of the Nazi past over the last decade in Germany, yet this memorializing culture might very well be the expression of a desire to turn the past into an object at a distance from the present.

However, the contemporaries of the Third Reich have left their descendents with not only a political, but also a psychic legacy, which might prove itself to be more difficult to 'overcome' or to 'normalize.' As the discussion of my interview partners' attitudes towards Germanness will show, the Nazi past and particularly the Holocaust are still central to many Germans' individual and collective self-understanding. This past has not become history yet, but continues to be active in the present and to constitute the backdrop against which notions of German identity are constructed, negotiated, and challenged. To that extent, collective memory of this era will most certainly remain a contested terrain.

Issues of inclusion and exclusion: citizenship, immigration, and racism

The old Federal Republic's Basic Law that is now the constitution of the united Germany enshrined the definition of German citizenship of the Wilhelmine period. Thus, the current definition of German citizenship still reflects and reproduces an ethnocultural national self-understanding as *Volk*-centered, rather than state-centered. It applies the principle of *jus sanguinis* (citizenship based on 'blood'), rather than that of *jus soli* (citizenship based on country of birth), whereby Germans continue to be defined as a community of ethnic descent regardless of political boundaries (Brubaker 1992:165; Fulbrook 1999:179). Immigrants who are considered ethnic Germans are immediately accorded citizenship, whereas non-German immigrants and their descendents are granted the rights of citizenship only under particular circumstances. However discredited the ethnic concept of the German nation might have been after National Socialism and

the Holocaust, it thus "lived on as a very real if silent phenomenon" (Fulbrook 1996:93). It facilitated the integration of around 10 million ethnic German refugees and expellees from Eastern Europe. While relations between refugees and native communities in the FRG were not free of tensions – caused by material strains during the post-war years as well as by cultural differences – "there was at a wider level a shared set of assumptions about belonging together as members of a common nation" (ibid.). At the same time, these assumptions about belonging excluded other groups of migrants who were not accepted as an integral part of society by the majority of the native population.

Beginning in the 1950s, the West German government sought to attract cheap labor from other countries, mostly from the southern regions of Europe. The recruited migrants were called *Gastarbeiter* (guest workers) and were not expected or invited to stay on and make the FRG their permanent country of residence. The temporary presence of foreigners was to be governed by the FRG's economic interests; the FRG did not regard itself as a country of immigration. Accordingly, no attempt was made at integrating migrants civicly and socially. In response to the recession following the oil crisis of 1973, West Germany stopped recruiting foreign workers, and the number of foreign workers subsequently decreased. However, the total 'foreign population' increased, as the limiting of back-and-forth migration reinforced tendencies towards long-term settlement, and many of those foreign workers who were already in the Federal Republic were followed by their families or they married and had children and grandchildren (Brubaker 1992:172; Fulbrook 1996:93; Senders 1996:152). Yet, whereas 'guest workers' have become permanent residents, they are not treated as such but continue to be considered *Ausländer* (foreigners). Even their children and grandchildren born in Germany, many of whom have little or no significant ties to their parents' or grandparents' countries of origin, are treated as 'foreigners,' since the blood-based German citizenship law defines them as 'non-German.'

The GDR also imported foreign workers, though to a much smaller extent than did the FRG, and the East German state was equally unwilling to integrate its foreign workers. Many of

these workers lived in segregated conditions and had little contact with East Germans outside of the workplace (Fulbrook 1996:97). Stefan Senders describes their living conditions as follows:

> Workers lived in isolated ghetto districts, enjoyed only limited access to social-help networks, saw large percentages of their pay deducted and sent to their home countries [...], suffered close state scrutiny and control, had no right to family (if women became pregnant, they could be forced to have abortions or face expulsion), and all foreign workers were barred from political participation (1996:152p.).

Fulbrook cites reports by the executive committee of the GDR's official trade union organization, which indicate that there were numerous incidents of hostility between foreign and native workers. In analyzing these tensions, the committee points to "'chauvinism and nationalism among some GDR workers'" (1996:98) as one of the causes – a finding that undermines the official rhetoric of international solidarity. Indeed, Fulbrook argues, despite official attempts to supersede the ethnic definition of nationality with a "new 'class theory' of the nation" (1996:96), East Germans retained a strong notion that there existed an ethnically defined German nation (1996:95pp.).

People without an ethnic claim to German nationality could and can, in principle, become citizens of the old FRG and now of the united Germany through 'naturalization.' But in practice there exist numerous restrictions that discourage or prevent migrants from becoming naturalized. Particularly before the liberalization of the stipulations for naturalization in 1990, few migrants applied for and/or were granted citizenship. Applicants had to have been educated in Germany or had to have resided there continuously for more than fifteen years. They had to be in possession of valid work permits, and they also needed to fulfill such criteria as "'commitment' to German culture and mastery of the German language, possession of economic means and adequate domestic conditions [...] as well as lack of any record of infringements of the law" (Fulbrook 1996:94). The 1990 and 1993 reforms of the *Ausländerrecht* (literally 'foreigner law' – laws governing foreigners and pertaining only to foreigners[6]) included revisions of naturalization

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[6] One might add that the law first of all reifies the construction of the 'foreigners' it then governs.

provisions that eased some of these restrictions. Yet, German law continues to disallow dual citizenship, and the requirement of renouncing their original citizenship deters, "for both material and symbolic reasons, many otherwise qualified candidates from seeking naturalization" (Brubaker 1992:173). The Schröder government's 1998 initiative to change the outdated citizenship law and to provide the possibility to hold dual citizenship was largely stifled by public protest orchestrated by the CDU. The federal government subsequently introduced only a minor reform. It makes naturalization more accessible and grants citizenship to children born in Germany, who are allowed to hold dual citizenship until the age of eighteen, when they have to chose either the German one or that of their parents. However, it did not provide the redefinition of German citizenship that had been promised.[7] Overall, a significant proportion of the population – about 7 to 8 million people or around 10 % of the population – is not incorporated through citizenship and does not enjoy full political and social rights (Mecklenburg 1999; Wippermann 1999). Instead, these people are subject to 'foreigner laws' that establish and reinforce the division of the population into 'Germans' and 'foreigners.'

Next to migrants and their descendents, what is considered the 'foreign population' in Germany also includes asylum-seekers. As a signal of distance from the Third Reich and as an acknowledgment of the fact that Nazi rule had stripped many Germans of their citizenship and forced them into exile, Article 16 of The Federal Republic's constitution states that no German can be dispossessed of his or her citizenship and that politically persecuted individuals have the right to asylum (Mattson 1995:76; Senders 1996:167). When the number of asylum-seekers began to increase significantly during the 1970s and 1980s, asylum turned into a major concern within West German politics and public perceptions of asylum-seekers became increasingly negative. Michelle

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[7] For more detailed information and discussions of the legal tradition of *jus sanguinis* in Germany, of debates surrounding the recent reform, and of its political implications see Baumann, Dietel, and Wippermann (1999).

Mattson points out that this development was related to the geopolitical origin of many of the refugees coming to Germany at that time:

> Up until then the right to asylum had been claimed mainly by individuals fleeing the states of the communist bloc. Generally, these petitioners were either fellow Europeans, fellow Caucasians, or, as victims of communist oppression, welcome tokens of western political superiority in the cold war era. The new "masses" of refugees, however, no longer racially, politically or culturally resembled the *native* German population. They were neither obvious victims of the ideological East-West split, nor part of Europe's racial family (1995:64; emphasis in the original).

Attitudes towards asylum-seekers continued to change for the worse during the 1980s. Rather than calling them *Flüchtlinge* (refugees) or *Asylbewerber* (asylum-applicants), politicians, the media, and the public began to refer to them as *Asylanten*.[8] This term originates from legal commentaries on asylum laws and is a neologism that "seems to have been a logical linguistic assimilation to other Latinate forms ending in *-ant, -ent-, -ient*" (Mattson 1995:64). Yet, within public discourse the term *Asylant* took on a negative connotation, as it resembles morphologically a category of words ending in *-ant*, many of which have negative connotations.[9] Moreover, the terms *Flüchtling* and *Asylant* became conceived of as referring to separate categories, "the former associated generally with light-skinned, freedom-loving Europeans, the latter with dark-skinned, non-European masses, merely feigning their need for help" (1995:64p.).[10]

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[8] Mattson translates *Asylant*, the singular of *Asylanten*, as 'asylum-seeker' (1996:63). However, in my understanding the English term asylum-seeker does not have the same negative connotations that the term *Asylant* has in German. I do not use the term asylum-seeker as a translation of *Asylant*, but rather in the sense of *Asylbewerber*. Even the term *Asylbewerber* has a somewhat negative connotation to it compared to the term *Flüchtling* (refugee). However, the term *Flüchtling* makes no reference to the legal status of a person, whether or not she or he has applied for or has been granted asylum or permanent residence. The term *Flüchtling* has further also been used in ways that imply negative connotations, such as when it is combined with other terms, for instance, *Wirschaftsflüchtling* (economic refugee). In this thesis, I use the term asylum-seeker when questions of legal status are of relevance. When referring more generally to the population that is considered foreign, irrespective of their legal status, I will speak of migrants and refugees.

[9] Mattson cites the following examples: "*Ignorant, Dilettant, Querulant, Simulant* (respectively, ignoramus, dilettante, grumbler, and malingerer)" (1995:64).

[10] Mattson further points out that the two terms differ in semantic direction: "a *Flüchtling* is after all fleeing something, trying to get away from a threat, whereas an *Asylant* is someone who is asking for something from the German government" (1995:66).

Asylum-seekers were not only cast as "illegitimate claimants on German prosperity" (Senders 1996:167), as 'economic refugees' who were a burden on the social infrastructure of the FRG. Asylum-opponents also employed culturalizing and racializing arguments in evoking an image of asylum-seekers as essentially different and claimed that they could not be integrated into German society. Various racist stereotypes were applied to asylum-seekers, for instance, that they were lazy and leaned towards criminality, and these alleged characteristics were proclaimed to be their 'nature.' Those who wanted to see the asylum law restricted or abolished further warned that the 'waves' or 'floods' of asylum-seekers would lead to an *Überfremdung* (foreign infiltration or swamping) and posed a threat to German culture and identity. Others argued in more openly racist terms by evoking a racial 'contamination.' Uli Linke cites various high-ranking conservative politicians as well as Social Democrats who put forward views of asylum-seekers as a "counterrace," of German refugee politics as an "adulteration and filthy mishmashing of blood," of Germans as threatened to become "hybridized and racially infested" by those "not of the blood," and of German society as becoming "mongrelized" (1999:120p.). Such notions are clearly reminiscent of Nazi ideology, yet the construction of difference based on 'race' or 'blood' also follows the logic suggested by the usually more subdued discourse of ethnocultural nationhood.

While these continuities in political rhetoric are disturbing enough, the dramatic increase in racist violence after unification, particularly the pogrom-like attacks on hostels housing migrant workers and asylum-seekers – during some of which the attackers were cheered on by crowds of onlookers and the police passively observed the crimes – awakened fears that Germany might experience a resurgence of Nazism and massive racist violence. Putting forward the notion that a revision of the asylum law would alleviate the situation, the SPD (Social Democratic Party of Germany) agreed to work out a compromise with the Conservative-Liberal government, members of which had called for either a major revision or even the removal of Article 16 of the constitution. In July 1993, the German parliament passed a revision of Article 16 and subjected the right to asylum to a number of restrictions. For example, petitions can now be rejected when refugees come

from countries considered 'safe' or have passed through such countries on their way to Germany. Since all countries bordering on Germany are included in this exemption, only refugees arriving by air can apply for asylum.[11] As a result of the revision, the number of applications has dropped as has the percentage of successful applications.[12]

Whereas politicians claim that the situation calmed down after the constitutional change, racist violence has continued to be an everyday occurrence in Germany.[13] Yet, by identifying the presence of asylum-seekers as the problem that needs to be solved, the political leaders did not address the racist attitudes driving the attacks. Habermas sees the constitutional alteration as a mere evasion, a symbolic politics that costs nothing and also changes nothing, although it did "succeed in getting the point across to even the dimmest of wits: the problem with the hatred of foreigners is the foreigners themselves" (1994:126). The political parties were using the issue of asylum as a means of diverting "attention from the real problems of a badly engineered unification process" (1994:127). He further points out that the government did not show any concern for the victims, but only feared that Germany's reputation and thus its economy would take damage.

Instead, a number of politicians showed concern and expressed sympathy for the attackers, sometimes to the extent of defending their actions and making themselves the spokespersons of their resentments. For instance, Dieter Heckelmann (CDU), State Minister of the Interior for

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[11] For more information see Mattson (1995) and Senders (1996).

[12] However, even before the change of the constitution in 1993, only a small minority of asylum-seekers was granted refugee status. Various restrictions had already been implemented to reduce the number of people to be considered political refugees. The percentage of successful applications has dropped from 9.4 % in 1987 to 5.5 % in 1990 (Räthzel 1990:34). By 1994, it had fallen under 3 % (Mattson 1996:77). While many of the unsuccessful applicants are granted permission to stay in Germany "for broadly defined humanitarian reasons" (Mattson 1995:77), the denial of political refugee status implies that they do not have the right to residence and work. Most of them have to live in camps or hostels, and they are not allowed to travel beyond a limited geographic area around these. The amount of state benefits they receive is very small, and some states no longer give out money but rather provide food and clothing, further restricting refugees' control over their lives. Nora Räthzel points out that such measures serve the purpose of discouraging refugees from seeking asylum in Germany (1990:34).

[13] In 1991, 2,427 "criminal acts against foreigners" were registered in the united Germany, compared to 246 in 1990. In 1992, this number further increased and altogether 17 people were killed by right-extremists (Gilman 1995:21,28). In 1999, 11,000 right-extremist crimes were counted, among them 708 acts of physical violence, including ten attempted murders. The number of unreported cases, particularly of violent crimes, is assumed to be several times higher (Mecklenburg 1999:9p.).

Berlin, was quoted as having responded to the pogrom in Rostock by saying: "It was not right-wing extremism, xenophobia or even racism [that voiced itself] in the displays of approval, but rather the completely justified indignation (...) [about] the massive misuse [*Massenmißbrauch*] of the asylum laws" (quoted in Mattson 1995:73).

However, although this was deliberately ignored by many politicians and parts of the media, it was obvious that there was more at work in the upsurge of violence than simply dissatisfaction with presumed massive misuse of the asylum laws. That changing Article 16 would not solve the problem was further evident in that attacks were not only directed against asylum-seekers but also against migrants. In November 1992, two girls and a woman of Turkish origin were murdered in an arson attack in the town of Mölln. In May of 1993, another arson attack in Solingen killed five women and children of Turkish background. The political establishment was slow in reacting to these events and showed little concern for the victims and for the fears that were growing among migrants – Turks in particular – as a result of the murders. Such lack of sympathy was signaled in Chancellor Kohl's decision not to visit either Solingen or Mölln during the demonstrations following the attacks, as he had more pressing business to take care of, an administrative spokesman explained, than "condolence tourism" (see Habermas 1994:127). Furthermore, politicians and the media did not address the racism behind these killings but depoliticized them, condemning the violence without addressing the motives. Public discussion was geared towards violence in general, "from right and left, from criminals (not right wingers) as well as Turkish or Kurdish extremists" (Schönwälder 1996:174). Issues of context, of power and discrimination, were cut out.

Whereas numerous politicians and parts of the media were at pains to deny or deflect from the racist and political motivations behind such crimes and claimed that they were the result of fears of *Überfremdung* through alien cultures, the majority of right-extremist crimes occurred in areas with a very small 'foreign population' compared to other cities or regions. Furthermore, right-extremists and neo-Nazis also targeted Germans whom they considered 'foreign' or 'un-

German.' As Sander Gilman notes, attacks were directed against those "who looked or were perceived to look different" (1995:21), including also Germans of color, homeless people, people with disabilities, leftists, punks, and gays and lesbians. By answering racist and neo-Nazi violence with restrictions to the right to asylum, the majority of Germany's political leaders made it clear that they were not willing to address the real issues at hand. Rather, concerned about losing votes to right-wing parties, they were prepared to legitimize racist resentment. Thereby they also indicated whom they see themselves as representing and whom they count out of the national community. Behind the veil of the asylum debate they were affirming a definition of the Federal Republic as an ethnic nation-state.

Habermas points out that the skinheads and right-extremist youth who carry out the attacks are not the main problem, it is rather the milieu in which they do so, "not the core of the violence but the shell in which it thrives" (1994:135). This 'shell' is ethnic nationalism, unleashed by German unification.[14] In the East, rapid economic restructuring and the destruction of social

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[14] It is beyond the scope of this introduction to provide a detailed account of the events that led to unification or of the unification process as such (see, for example, Jarausch 1994). However, it is worth noting that the events introducing the *Wende* (lit. turning point – term referring to the events that led to the demise of the GDR and to unification) were not driven by a nationalist desire for unification; this emerged as a result of the GDR's collapse. Those GDR citizens who fled to West Germany via Hungary in the summer of 1989 were more likely motivated by the prospect of an improved material situation and/or more political liberties than by an "ethereal belief in the unity of the nation" (Fulbrook 1999:220). And the civil rights activists who pushed for changes at home did not call for the destruction of the GDR, but for a reformed and democratic GDR. During the months following the fall of Berlin Wall on 9 November 1989, however, polls showed increasing support for unification among East Germans (Verheyen 1999:178). A significant factor in this support were hopes for a quick improvement of material conditions, which the Kohl government, in an attempt to halt the mass exodus of East Germans to West Germany following the decline of GDR's economy, promised would result from unification. Yet, the Kohl government did more than simply react to the developments in the East. The conservatives recognized the historical 'window of opportunity' for unification and sought to mobilize national sentiment in East and West to that end. It was Kohl who first proclaimed, standing at the Wall on 10 November 1989, 'We are one people, after all' (– the slogan 'We are one people,' a call for unification, subsequently came to replace the earlier slogan 'We are the people', which had been coined by those who wanted a democratic GDR.). In the first democratic election in March 1990, the majority of East Germans voted for those parties who promised a speedy unification (Fulbrook 1999:220pp.). The Western electorate was never given the chance to vote for or against unification. The unification process as such was essentially an annexation of the GDR; it was mostly dictated by the West German delegation in the "2+4" negotiations, which included the two Germanies and the four World War II allies. The process has frequently been described as a take over, buy up, or colonization of East Germany by West Germany (see, for example, Fulbrook 1999; Habermas 1991). The euphoria following the fall of the Wall was soon displaced by disillusionment in both East and West. East Germans had to realize that the

networks led to existential uncertainties, and with unification also came a devaluation of GDR

intellectual capital and of East German achievements and biographies in general. These economic

and social effects of unification together with the experience of a continuing material gap between

East and West, of Western dominance, and of being treated as inferior created a sense of being

"second-class citizens," argues Andreas Staab. In that situation, "the vigorous defense of ethnicity

provided an obvious solution for East Germans in their search for ego-boosting affirmative

orientations" (1998:151). Yet, economic and social insecurity alone do not explain the outbreak of

violent hostility against those considered foreign. The difficulties Easterners experienced after

unification were rather a catalyst for the reactivation of an ethnic jingoism from which there had

never been a clean break and which now reestablished itself through the exclusion of 'foreigners.'

In the West, a similar reactivation had been pursued, though more gradually, by conservatives since

at least the 1970s. The nationalist and racist theme of *Überfremdung*, which had been taboo

because of its association with Nazism, was resurrected in political discourse and public debates in

the early 1980s (Schönwälder 1996:166p.). Conservatives published newspaper and journal articles

in which they claimed that it was impossible to integrate a large number of immigrants and that

these posed a threat to the preservation of German national identity. Some made distinctions

between different groups of foreigners according to their presumed capability to assimilate

themselves. For example, Alfred Dregger, then chairmen of the CDU faction in the federal

parliament, pointed out two groups he deemed eternally different and therefore not integratable.

These were Africans and Asians one the one hand and Turks on the other. Such arguments made by

Dregger and others began a trend towards a racialization of issues of immigration, which

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promised benefits of the transition were not to come any time soon. Rather, they were faced with an
increasingly difficult economic situation resulting in high unemployment rates, with the dissolution of
traditional social milieus, and with being treated as inferior by arrogant and condescending *Wessis* (West
Germans). West Germans resented the fact their affluent society was now at risk of recession and inflation
and that they were faced with tax increases. They grumbled over having to pay for the 'laziness' of the *Ossis*
(East Germans), which they saw as the main cause of the East German economy's weakness, conveniently
ignoring the fact the GDR bore most of the brunt for World War II in economic terms and was not brought
back on its feet by a Marshall Plan.

constructed certain groups of immigrants as a threat to the cohesion of the German national community, understood in ethnic terms (1996:167p.).[15] Yet, Germany's division and prevailing critical attitudes towards nationalism set limits to the recreation of a *Volk*-centered national identity in the 1980s. In the wake of unification, however, such tendencies have gained momentum, and those who support a "non-national and non-ethnic self-definition of the German state have been harshly attacked for their alleged neglect of the national factor and the future of the German nation, and they have lost ground" (1996:170). Conservatives have called for a strong sense of national community as necessary in order to overcome the problems and disillusionments caused by unification as well as to alleviate tensions between the formerly divided populations. How this community should be defined was spelled out by CDU faction leader Wolfgang Schäuble in March 1993 in the context of the asylum-debate: "We gain our identity, not from commitment to an idea, but from belonging to a particular *Volk*" (quoted in Fulbrook 1996:101). One year later he added that such a community, when conscious of itself, does not have to fear for its identity when confronted with 'foreign faces' (see Schönwälder 1996:171). Thus, he suggests that those with 'foreign faces' are distinct from the national community, and his racialized notion of Germanness excludes not only migrants but also Germans of color.

Habermas describes the situation after the *Wende* as one in which a disoriented youth scene in the East ran headlong into a milieu in both East and West that was willing to support at least the ends, if not the means, of their violent project, that is the reestablishment of an ethnically defined national community (1994:135pp.). Recourse to this community is supposed to serve as a shock absorber to the effects of socioeconomic change, and many Germans continue the disturbing

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[15] Karen Schönwälder notes that violent xenophobic or racist attacks occurred in West Germany already in the 1980s, that is around the time when conservatives reintroduced the notion of *Überfremdung* into political discourse and warned that immigration would have a disintegrating effect on German national identity (1996:166p.). Some also suggest that the limitation of the asylum laws in response to racist violence has encouraged right-wing terrorists to turn their attention to other minorities, particularly the Turks, as they understood this official response as support for their right-extremist attitudes (see Gilman 1995:30; Mattson 1995:83).

tendency to blame their problems on those constructed as 'other' – the Jews before and during the Third Reich, now refugees and migrants.

However, this national self-definition stands in contrast to the (unacknowledged) reality of Germany as a country of immigration. Some have argued that the issue of asylum was turned into a focal point of political debate as a means of distracting from the issue of immigration. For instance, Mattson, drawing on Ursula Münch, states that

> asylum policy became such a heated issue because, given the legal resident status which the majority of so-called guest-workers [...] have, politicians could do little if anything to reduce the numbers of foreigners living permanently in Germany. Refugees were the only group of foreigners whose legal status had not yet been well defined and it was a policy area in which there was still some legislative room for the politicians to maneuver. Unable to address the subtextual problem of Germany's large and relatively permanent foreign population, political rhetoric was directed toward the refugees (1995:83).

Thus, the asylum-debate can be seen as a precursor to the debate that ensued in 1998 over the Socialdemocratic-Green government's plans to reform the citizenship law. The CDU successfully mobilized a majority of Germans who are not ready to let go of the ethnic concept of German citizenship. Not willing to acknowledge that the presence of more than 7 million migrants in Germany has changed the character of its society, they want to hold on to the myth of a homogenous national community.

In the dominant perception, Germanness continues to be defined in opposition to salient others. Traditionally, the salient other was represented by the Jews. Nazi race laws radicalized the long-standing Christian anti-Judaism by constructing Jewishness as a racial characteristic rather than, or above of, an adherence to a religious faith, and posited Germanness and Jewishness as mutually exclusive categories. Whereas the FRG's Basic Law does not uphold this exclusion but grants full citizenship rights to Jews, 'Germans' and 'Jews' continue to be seen as distinct groups. In the aftermath of the Holocaust, non-Jewish Germans mostly do not perceive Jewish Germans as 'normal' Germans, but as outsiders or strangers who do not really belong in Germany or who could

not seriously *want* to belong there (see Jacoby, Schopmann, and Zena-Henry 1994;

Rommelspacher 1995c; Verein für Sozialwissenschaftliche Forschung und Praxis für Frauen e.V.

1991). Likewise, there are Jews who do not believe that one can be both Jewish and German

(Rapaport 1997). Others find it difficult to reconcile these two identities, while yet others see no

contradiction in identifying as both Jewish and German. Different ways of negotiating the

relationship between German and Jewish identity find expression in various self-descriptions, for

instance, 'Jew living in Germany,' 'German citizen of Jewish faith,' 'German Jew,' or 'Jewish

German' (see Borneman and Peck 1995; Jacoby, Schopmann, and Zena-Henry 1994; Rapaport

1997).

Anti-Semitic attitudes persisted after the Holocaust, although their open expression was

taboo. Yet, next to the lingering customary repertoire of anti-Semitic stereotypes, a 'secondary'

form of anti-Semitism developed along with the desire to repress the past and particularly questions

of guilt for the Holocaust. Jews continued to be seen as the origin of Germans' 'misfortune,'[16] as

they disturbed the effort of forgetting or denying. One commentator summed up this attitude as

follows: "The Germans will never forgive the Jews for Auschwitz" (quoted in Postone 1993:296).

The repressed guilt was thus projected onto the Jews in anti-Semitic images of vengeful Jews

driven by destructive intentions or in the form of anti-Zionist equations of the Jews with the Nazis.

The number of Jews living in Germany is very small,[17] but, as John Borneman points out, the Jews'

symbolic significance for most Germans "seems to be inverse to their number" (1995:12). The

living Jews are a constant reminder of the 'missing Jews' and thus a source of uneasiness. Since

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[16] The slogan *"Die Juden sind unser Unglück"* (The Jews are our misfortune) encapsulated the crux of Nazi ideology and propaganda, according to which Jews were the source of every evil that had befallen Germany and constituted a continuing threat.

[17] In 1945/46, the Jewish communities in West Germany registered 21,454 members. By 1980, the membership had grown slightly to about 28,000. In the GDR, the number of registered members dropped from 1,715 in 1955 to 372 in 1990 (Burgauer 1993:356pp.). Due to Immigration of Jews from the countries of the former Soviet Union after 1989, the membership of the Jewish communities in the united Germany has grown to more than 60,000 by 1999. These numbers compare to 565,000 registered Jews in 1925 (Kempe 1999:196p.). Unofficial estimates of the number of Jews in Germany who are not registered as members of the Jewish communities range between 10,000 and 30,000 (see Remmler 1997:174).

unification, the taboo on open expression of anti-Semitism is weakening, particularly within

conservative and right-wing milieus, which Birgit Rommelspacher sees as connected to the

renationalization of the political culture (1995c:35). The number of anti-Semitic crimes is on the

rise; particularly desecrations of Jewish cemeteries and of memorials to the Holocaust have become

an ever more common occurrence. Gilman describes such acts as attacks "on the memory of the

past" (1995:27), yet these objects of memory are also attacked as surrogates for living Jews in

Germany (1995:31).

So far, there have been few physical attacks on Jews. Such attacks are mostly directed at

refugees and migrants as well as Germans of color, that is people who are perceived as 'different'

because of physical characteristics or who live in buildings understood to be occupied by asylum-

seekers or migrants. Gilman raises the question of whether the lack of direct attacks on Jews is due

to the fact that they are invisible as such. He points out that the groups who are most affected by

racist violence are more identifiable (1995:31). Furthermore, Jews are mostly rather absent from

the general public awareness, whereas, for several decades now, politicians and the media have

constructed the notion that Germany has a 'foreigner problem.' German national identity is now

mostly negotiated in relation to 'foreigners' in the country. These are not only alleged to be an

economic burden, although the German economy is dependent on continuing immigration. They

are also proclaimed to be 'different,' possibly unassimilable, and therefore a threat to the identity of

the national community. Accordingly, Karen Schönwälder observes, hostility towards 'outsiders'

has increasingly been maintained to be "a perfectly understandable and legitimate self-defense of a

people or culture that sees its survival threatened" (1996:170).

Turks, representing the largest group of migrants in Germany,[18] have been a particular

focus of anti-immigration arguments. Negative stereotypes of Islamic religion and culture are

drawn upon in constructing Turks as essentially different, and it is claimed that they cannot be

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[18] In 1980, they numbered about 1.5 million (Schönwälder 1996:167). In 1999, estimates ranged between 2.1 and 2.5 million (Sommer 1999b:4).

integrated into German society and culture, defined as Christian-European. The establishment of a "Turkish question" further provides, Eberhard Seidel-Pielen argues, an outlet for repressed anti-Semitism (1995:18). This is now channeled into Anti-Islamic and anti-Turkish resentment. While not all Germans share the view that Turks constitute a threat and should be repatriated, negative stereotypes and notions that perpetuate the reification of an opposition between Germans and Turks (and 'foreigners' in general) are common even within the left-liberal spectrum (Peck 1996). Turkish migrants' significant contribution to Germany's economy and to urban culture, as well as the fact that they have become an intricate part of German society, are ignored. Rather, Turks are proclaimed to be unwilling to adapt with no mention of the discrimination they are faced with nor of the legal hurdles that keep them from being able to participate equally in political and social life in Germany.[19] Yet, even Turks who have overcome the barriers to 'naturalization' and have taken on German citizenship are not considered equals by most ethnic Germans (Seidel-Pielen 1995). As Jeffrey M. Peck notes, "it is not surprising that the Turks have been called the 'new Jews'" (1996:489) since they have in many ways replaced the Jews in providing the epitome of 'foreignness' against which Germanness is defined. They have thus become the "new salient other" (Mandel 1989:39).

By now, about 250,000 people of Turkish descent have taken on German citizenship (Sommer 1999b:4) and there are more who see themselves as German in a social or cultural sense irrespective of their citizenship. The same is true for many migrants from other countries and their descendents. Yet, even those who are born in Germany, speak perfect German, and consider Germany their home, are often not perceived as 'really' German, as truly belonging, due to the dominant notion of Germanness that excludes those who are not considered ethnic Germans. This implies that Germanness is intrinsically white and Christian and constructs an opposition between being of color and being German as well as between being Muslim or Jewish and being German.

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[19] Nor do most Germans who expect Turks or any migrants to adapt consider it necessary to make concessions themselves or to meet them halfway.

The vast majority of ethnic Germans still accepts these exclusions as unquestioned commonsense (Räthzel 1990). Affected by this exclusionary concept of Germanness are not only migrants and their descendents but also Germans of 'multi-racial' origin, for instance, Afro-Germans. In the view of those who hold on to the notion that German equals white, a black German virtually constitutes an oxymoron. Afro-Germans are perceived as outsiders, since their physical appearance is translated into a racial identity that is seen as external to Germanness. If they want to lay claim to their German national and cultural identity, they are expected to deny their connection to the African diaspora and to identify with the dominant white culture, as these are conceived of as separate and mutually exclusive realms of identity (see Oguntoye, Opitz, and Schultz 1992).[20]

Still, many of those whom the dominant notion of Germanness excludes from belonging, who are denied affirmation as Germans, have long begun to claim Germanness in their own ways. They are no longer willing to let themselves be defined by the dominant attitudes, nor are they willing to accept the conditions for belonging, but demand that these attitudes and conditions must change in order to make room for them.[21] Unfortunately, it seems that such change will likely take a long, since the majority of the ethnic Germans continues to demonstrate a lack of adaptability. However, the fiction of a homogenous national community is increasingly being challenged by the reality of a society that is becoming ever more diverse in ethnic and cultural terms.

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[20] The term 'Afro-German' overpasses this dichotomous conception in bringing both identities together. In their introduction to *Showing Our Colors. Afro-German Women Speak Out*, Katharina Oguntoye and May Opitz explain how and why they came to use the term: "With Audre Lorde we created the term 'Afro-German,' borrowing from Afro-American, as the term for our cultural heritage. 'Afro-German' seemed appropriate to us, since many of us have an African father and a German mother. In using this term, our point is not to emphasize that we have a black and white parent. Our essential commonality is that we are black and have experienced a major part of our socialization and life in confrontation with West German society – a society that is not 99 percent white but that always has behaved as though it were, or should be. By the term 'Afro-German' we mean all those who wish to refer to themselves as such, regardless of whether they have one or two black parents. Just as with the similar name 'Black Germans,' our intent is not to exclude on the basis of origin or skin color. We know what it means to suffer exclusion. More important, we want to propose 'Afro-German' in opposition to more commonly used names like 'half-breed,' 'mulatto,' or 'colored,' as an attempt to define ourselves instead of being defined by others (1992:xxiip.).

[21] See, for example, Can (1999); Jankowsky and Love (1997a); Lottmann (1999); Opitz, Oguntoye, and Schultz (1992); Pazarkaya (1999).

Unwilling Germans? Feminism and the question of national identity

In discussing the ways in which questions of national identity have been taken up by feminists in Germany, I am focusing on the feminist movement in West Germany prior to unification and on feminist debates on the issue that have taken place since unification. Before turning to this discussion, I provide a brief sketch of the West German feminist movement. In doing so, I am not attempting to present a comprehensive account, but I want to offer some background information for the subsequent discussion of how members of the movement dealt with the issue of national association.[22]

The second feminist movement in West Germany grew out of the socialist student movement of the mid-1960s. Fed up with the movement leadership's indifference to gender issues and unsatisfied with purely economistic models of social analysis, feminists began to form the first women's groups in the late 1960s. While their theories and politics remained embedded in a socialist framework (at least initially), they refused to consider the 'woman's question' subordinate to the issue of class. Claiming that 'the private is political,' they called for an analysis of power and exploitation that includes examinations of everyday life and the particular situation of women in a patriarchal society. Feminists turned their attention to the conditions and circumstances of women's lives, focusing on issues such as pregnancy (wanted and unwanted), motherhood, sexuality and sexual health, and women's (domestic) work (Hagel and Schuhmann 1994; Young 1999). Like other feminist movements around the world, the German women's movement also professed a commitment to internationalism. Sexism and patriarchal power were understood as global or universal systems of oppression, and slogans such as 'women have no fatherland' and 'women of

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[22] In surveying literature on feminist or women's groups in the GDR, I did not find reference to issues of national/German identity. Therefore, I cannot provide information on whether or how such issues were addressed. The situation of women and the conditions under which women organized were very different in the two Germanies, and they also had different emphases and goals in their work. For more information on the East German women's movement before, during, and after unification, see Böhm (1993); Ferree (1994); Hampele (1993); Helwerth and Schwarz (1995); Hömberg (1994); Kulke (1992); Nickel (1993); Young (1999).

all countries unite' expressed the idea that all women shared a common identity and a common cause across all borders and divisions (Eichhorn 1994:86; see also Lenz 1996; Cordes 1996).

The early West German women's movement has come to be referred to as the 'autonomous feminist movement' because of its emphasis on autonomy from both men as well as the state and formal institutions. During the 1970s, feminists began to organize in non-centralized networks linking grassroots groups and women's projects. This 'project-culture' provided informal networks of communication to spread ideas and news and alternative spaces in which to organize and mobilize women into action. In addition to that, women also hoped that the projects would provide them the opportunity to work in self-determination and outside of the patriarchal capitalist system. Yet, in order to remain independent, the projects had to rely on self-financing and unpaid work by feminist activists (Hagel and Schuhmann 1994:71; Young 1999:52pp.).

By the 1980s, this self-financing was less and less seen as a viable political strategy. A drive towards increasing professionalization took hold within many women's projects. This development met with a turn to conservatism in West German politics. After the 1982 federal election, the government was formed by a Conservative-Liberal coalition with Helmut Kohl as chancellor. The subsequent changes in social policy intensified "distributional conflicts in the welfare arena" (Young 1999:54). Wishing more secure funding for their projects, many feminists redirected their strategies and became more receptive to institutional politics. "Their first focus was to have the state accept financial responsibility for the various local projects" (ibid.), even though the price for that was an institutionalization of the project culture within the state.

Parallel to the professionalization and institutionalization of parts of the autonomous movement, feminists also began to work within traditional German political institutions such as political parties (mostly within the Green Party, but also within the SPD). Feminists have also successfully fought for the establishment of 'women's affairs offices' or 'women's equality offices' within administrative institutions. Yet, parts of the movement remain highly skeptical towards the state and institutional politics; they continue to work within autonomous structures and

hold on to a political vision of fundamentally restructuring the existing social and political institutions. Relations between the autonomous movement and institutional feminism are often less than harmonious and coalitions are arranged ad hoc and remain tenuous (Hagel and Schuhmann 1994; Young 1999).

Overall, it seems that the larger part of the movement has given up on the ideal of total autonomy. The dependence on state funding, while beneficial to the establishment of feminist projects and structures, has led to internal competition for increasingly scarce resources as well as to depoliticization (Young 1999:56). Antje Hagel and Antje Schuhmann further point out that the early movement's radical approach, the analysis of personal experiences in relation to the social conditions of women's oppression towards a fundamental critique of both patriarchy and capitalism, has become increasingly diluted. They identify a reversal of the basic feminist principle that 'the private is political,' a changed perspective in which the political became private. The personal came to be seen as the most relevant political realm and, rather than aiming at changing the material life-world, feminists began to focus on first of all changing themselves (1994:71p.). During the 1980s, questions of 'women's identity' and projects of 'finding one's self' became a preoccupation of many feminists. 'Women's emancipation' was recognized as a 'gap in the market' and filled by commercial enterprises and media. Essentialist notions of female identity were recovered and revalued – for instance, women as 'in tune' with nature, as intuitive, nurturing, peaceful, or even morally superior – which established gender differences as natural and led away from a political analysis of gender relations. Parallel to other social movements, larger parts of the feminist movement shifted their focus away from comprehensive social critiques to one-point-politics. They identified various 'women's problems' and called upon the state to facilitate the alleviation or elimination of these problems through policy changes and/or financial support for their projects. A view of women as victims became both a justification for the demands feminists directed at the state as well as an integrating factor within the movement itself. Feminists worked

towards helping women through social work and counseling without fighting against the system of power in which their lives were situated (1994:72pp.).

While the above appears to be a major trend, it should be noted that not the entire women's movement has followed this development. The movement continues to be made up of various groups and individuals with disparate analyses and goals. In turning to the discussion of how questions of national identity have been dealt with in West German feminism, I should also point out that what I will describe is not necessarily representative of the movement as a whole. Yet, the literature addressing this issue is fairly consistent in outlining what appear to be predominant trends.

Until the late 1980s, issues of national identity were rarely addressed within the West German feminist movement. During the 1970s and 1980s, members of the movement tended to distance themselves from the nation and to denounce their national association. This attitude could also be found among members of other social movements, particularly within the New Left. Not only did these groups see nationalism as antithetical to progressive politics; against the particular background of German history a positive sense of national identity was considered reactionary or fascist.

Feminists further distanced themselves from the affairs of the nation and its past by insisting on the primacy of patriarchy. Conceiving of their own politics as outside of, or in opposition to, the nation and the nation-state – even beyond the point when much of the initial autonomy had already been conceded – and claiming a commitment to internationalist politics, to global sisterhood, allowed German feminists to treat their national association as more or less irrelevant (Lennox 1995:481). Most preferred to conceive of themselves as world-citizens in the sense of Virginia Woolf's statement (from her book *Three Guineas*, published in 1938): "As a woman I have no country, as a woman I want no country, as a woman my country is the whole world." Feminists were supposedly beyond such 'reactionary' or 'patriarchal' constructions as the

nation. However, as Susanne Kappeler points out, reformulating Woolf's statement: "'As a woman I have no country' – but a German passport" (1994:92; translation: A.K.). Ideals of global sisterhood are further called into question by the priority which the movement has given to the struggle for equality in relation to German men (rather than, for example, to fighting against the additional inequalities and discriminations that migrant women are faced with). While German feminists claimed that they did not have nor want a national identity, their politics presumed the nation as its 'natural' framework (1994:96pp.; see also Cordes 1996; Kalpaka 1994).

The emphasis on sexism and the patriarchy led German feminists to focus more or less exclusively on gender relations and gender identity, assuming a kind of 'universal woman' as the basis and center of feminist politics. Thereby, they neglected their structural implication within the nation-state and within other structures of power, such as that of class and race relations. They further failed to recognize how their particular location within such social relations affected and limited their theories and analyses. The experience of white, Christian or Christian-socialized German women[23] was taken as the norm and experiences that differed from or even contradicted this norm were ignored. In emphasizing their status as victims of the patriarchy, they also ignored their privileges in relation to others (Cordes 1996; Lennox 1995; Lutz 1993; Schultz 1993).

Yet, while German feminists took it for granted that they did not have to have a national identity, they did not extend this 'progressive' view to women of other backgrounds; these were not seen as 'just' women but, for instance, as *Turkish* women, *African* women, *foreign* women. Under the surface of such perceptions of 'non-German' women lay German feminists' unacknowledged, yet taken for granted, identification with Germanness, that against which these other women seemed different. Germanness was denounced at the same time as it remained

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[23] These were usually also middle-calls, able-bodied, and heterosexual women. Though, with very few exceptions, the literature I am drawing on here does not specify the women referred to along these lines. Some have looked more specifically at white Christian(-socialized) German lesbians and how they have dealt with issues of difference. Their findings do not differ significantly from those referring to the women's movement as a whole (see, for instance, Hark 1990).

unquestioned as a central determinant within German feminists' experiences, perspectives, and practices. Furthermore, German feminists often held images of 'foreign' women through which they constructed themselves as superior. Although they rejected it when men tried to define women and ascribe them a place in society, they did exactly that to migrant women. These were seen as more emotional and less rational than German women, as more 'traditional' (often meaning 'backward'), less adaptable, more 'repressed,' and not as 'liberated' as German woman (Kalpaka 1994; Lutz 1993). Feminist social scientific literature on migrant women depicted them as less 'developed,' not as 'far' as German women. Discussions of migrant women's lives usually focused on what the German authors saw as their 'problem;' for instance, they were described as victims of repressive cultures or religions or as being torn between their 'traditional' culture and that of 'modern' German society. Overall, this literature forged an image of migrant women that rendered them as helpless and pitiable (Nestvogel 1996). German women came to view these women as needing their help to be able to manage their lives in Germany. Yet, much of the help they offered (or sometimes rather imposed) was based on ethnocentric notions and primarily served the self-image and feelings of self-worth of the helpers (Aktas 1993; Kalpaka 1994).

The neglect of ethnocentrism, racism, and anti-Semitism by white Christian(-socialized) German feminists and their assumption of a universal status of victimhood shared by all women resulted in the denial of power imbalances between women. They did not question their own dominance and claim to leadership and presumed that they could speak for all women, brushing aside the issue of differences between women by maintaining that patriarchy is the 'original' and most powerful form of oppression to which all others are subordinate. This view allowed them to disregard their position and participation in various relations of power next to gender inequality. Accordingly, women of color, migrant women, Jewish or Muslim women who protested against the denial of differences and the absence of their interests from the dominant feminist agenda were answered with such remarks as 'but we are all women,' 'I don't see you as black,' or, as one

woman put in response to a conflict about racism at an international women's camp: "I will never

accept again that any woman divides us because of the special oppression she suffers/suffered."[24]

Such attitudes increasingly came to be challenged and criticized and, since the early 1990s,

the German feminist movement has been shaken up by stormy debate about racism and, although

to a much lesser extent, anti-Semitism. This debate was not initiated by white Christian(-socialized)

German women, but only came about when German women of color, migrant women, and Jewish

women forced the 'majority-German'[25] feminists to recognize their position of dominance, to

engage with women's differences, and to address their own exclusionary practices (Lennox 1995;

Schultz 1993). In fact, first attempts towards introducing these issues into feminist discussion and

making the movement and its politics more inclusive date back to the early 1980s. At the first

common "conference of foreign and German women" in 1984, majority-German women were

challenged to acknowledge and change their paternalistic and racist attitudes and behaviors. Yet,

the conference did not find much of an echo, and the feminist 'mainstream' in Germany continued

to ignore these issues (Lutz 1993:138p.). When majority-German feminists finally took up the

discussion of racism in the early 1990s, many migrant and Jewish women as well as German

women of color had already begun to turn their back on the wider movement and focused on

working amongst each other (Cordes 1996:154).

May Ayim (formerly Opitz) suggests that white Germans feminists' as well as leftists'

reluctance to confront themselves with the issue of racism relates to the fact they perceived racism

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[24] Quoted from an anonymous contribution to the documentation of the camp – see Goldmann
(n.d.:29; translation: A.K.). See also Lennox (1995) and Verein für Sozialwissenschaftliche Forschung und
Praxis für Frauen e.V. (1991).

[25] 'Majority-German' (*mehrheitsdeutsch*) is a term that was introduced into feminist discussions in
order to describe the 'national norm' in Germany, which is white/Christian(-secularized)/German. Gotlinde
Magiriba Lwanga (1993) points out that the term needs further differentiation and specification, since
members of this group take up different historical, social, and geopolitical positions within German society.
The term clearly does not refer to a homogenous group. The people referred to as majority-Germans do not
all share the same experiences, perspectives, and social status. Yet, the term is useful because it makes
explicit a relative position of dominance and power while, as Lwanga suggests, it does not imply the fixity
and fatefulness that other terms such *'dominanzdeutsch'* ('dominant-German') evoke. It also accommodates
contradictions within a subject's multiple positions and remains open for interpretation (1993:271p.,fn.2).

as a rare occurrence and as an issue that had nothing to do with themselves. They saw it as a topic for migrants, black Germans, or Jewish people. Accordingly, these groups of people were only invited to participate when events focused on 'their' issues; otherwise, they and their situation were not of interest to white Germans (1993:215p.). Dagmar Schultz adds that many white German women seemed unable to realize that their feminist 'We' only included women like themselves, that they had not been fighting for all women. Furthermore, their "internalized dominance" made them rely exclusively on their own experience; they did not "want to know about anything else" and reacted to challenges of their perception with "confusion and feelings of guilt" (1993:181p.; translation: A.K.) The acknowledgement of the exclusions within their politics would have implied an acknowledgement of their continuing ties to white German men and to the dominant culture and society. Since they sought to establish their identity and their community in separation from the white patriarchy, to face up to these ties would have threatened their identity as feminists. Schultz notes that in "the encounter with black[26] women they become painfully aware of these conflicts. White women don't want to acknowledge and admit that – at the same time they do not see the particular difficulties that black women have to deal with in their own community [the feminist community]" (1993:184; translation: A.K.).

In the wake of unification, feminists have been forced to reconsider the parameters of feminist work within the changed situation. Their perspectives and work were also affected by the changing social and political climate, particularly the divisions between East and West as well as the dramatic increase in hostility towards various minorities and in racist violence.

Following the fall of the Berlin Wall and subsequent unification, women from East and West Germany came together at conferences and other events in an attempt to build a common

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[26] Schultz's usage of the term 'black' (*schwarz*) here is it not in reference to skin color. The term has come to be used to refer to ethnic and racial minorities in general, irrespective of skin color or geographic origin, similar to the North American notion of 'people of color.' It is used in a political sense and is usually meant to include black Germans, migrants, and Jewish people, and sometimes also (white German) people with disabilities.

women's movement and to defend their respective achievements and build on them. However, after a short initial phase of high spirits, the differences between East and West German women's experiences, situations, and outlooks, as well as analyses and politics, proved to be difficult to bridge, and many an attempt at laying the groundwork for working together ended in dispute and mutual resentment (see Helwerth and Schwarz 1995; Müller 1996; Rommelspacher 1995b).

At the same time, endeavors of establishing relations and networks between women from the East and the West came under criticism for including mainly, if not exclusively, white Christian(-socialized) German women and subsuming or ignoring other women and their particular situations. German women's claims that it was they who were the 'losers' of unification and had to pay the price for it infuriated migrant women. Unification had certainly resulted in a (re)marginalization of German women in political and economic decision-making processes. And particularly East German women lost reproductive rights and economic independence and were hit much harder than East German men by growing unemployment and the destruction of the social infrastructure of the GDR, especially the comprehensive and affordable childcare system (Young 1999). Yet, migrant women pointed out that migrants were the first to lose their jobs and criticized German women for their failure to protest against the tightening of the discriminatory *Ausländergesetz*, which the government had pushed through along with the unification process. Particularly migrants who had lived in the former GDR found themselves in a precarious situation after unification. Unlike the ethnic East Germans, they were not welcomed as 'brothers and sisters' by the Federal Republic. Their GDR identification-documents were no longer valid and many experienced problems in securing their resident status and were faced with the threat of being expelled. Migrants and Germans of color in both East and West were further confronted with increasing hostility towards them and had to fear racist attacks (Ayim 1993; Nombuso 1993). The Afro-German Ayim describes her experience after the fall of the Berlin Wall as follows:

> I was walking around by myself [in Berlin], wanted to breathe in a bit of the
> general enthusiasm, to feel the historical moment, and to share my reserved joy.
> Reserved because I had heard of the imminent tightening of the legislation

concerning immigrants and those who seek refuge. Like other black Germans and immigrants I knew that not even a German passport represented an invitation to the East-West celebrations. We felt that the imminent German unification would bring with it an increasing fencing off towards the exterior – an exterior that would include us. Our participation at the celebration was not requested.
The new "We" in – as Chancellor Kohl likes to put it – "this our country" had and has no space for everybody. "Take off, *Neger*,[27] don't you have a home to go to?" For the first time since I lived in Berlin, I had to defend myself almost daily against blunt slanders, hostile looks, and/or openly racist defamations (1993:208p.; translation: A.K.)

Ayim became increasingly angry about East-West celebrations and events that did not include a North-South dialogue. The women's movement, too, was busy with German-German discussions and celebrations, "as if Germany was exclusively white and the center of the world" (1993:211; translation: A.K.). She critiques the support and solidarity that white West German women extended to white East German women for leaving out those who are in an even worse situation: "Where is the call for solidarity with those who, in the course of the German-German take over and competition, are first at risk of not finding work and accommodation and of losing their jobs and training placements?" (ibid.; translation A.K.).

At a conference entitled "Women against Nationalism – Racism/Anti-Semitism- Sexism" that took place in Cologne in November 1990, migrant women, Jewish women, and German women of color made it clear that they had enough of majority-German feminists' ignorance towards issues of racism, anti-Semitism, and ethnocentrism as well as with their denial of their own privileges. They posed the question of solidarity anew, indicating to majority-German feminists that they were not longer willing to work together with them unless they seriously rethought their analyses and politics.

The conference organizers (of whom all except one were majority-Germans) had written in the conference announcement:

We do not want to drown in the nationalist frenzy nor benefit from our status as FRG women, we do not want to let ourselves be separated from women of

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[27] *Neger* is literally translated as 'Negro,' but the meaning implied in its usage is often rather that of 'Nigger.'

different ethnic, national, cultural, religious origins who live in the two Germanies or in other countries affected by German and European nationalism. We need a feminist analysis of the process of unification. We want to investigate our situation as to our differences and commonalties in order to find our own standpoints and strategies for action.[28]

While the goal of the conference had been the achievement of solidarity between women across differences, it ended in tremendous dispute. Jewish women, migrant women, and women of color left the conference in protest. Their withdrawal from this attempt at coalition-building was preceded by heated debates over several issues. For example, they had criticized that the emphasis of the event lay on establishing relations and networks between women from East and West Germany. However, this was a unification of white Christian(-socialized) German women, which excluded other women by subsuming or ignoring their particular situations and how they differ from that of majority-Germans. Yet, the most contentious issue was the unquestioned prevalence of racist, anti-Semitic, and ethnocentric attitudes among majority-Germans and their unwillingness to acknowledge and share their privileges. Most of the majority-Germans present at the conference either denied the existence of such attitudes, tried to play them down by reference to common oppression, or reacted with helpless confessions of guilt and asked to be told how they should change. The conference concluded with a resolution on behalf of women of color, Jewish women, and migrant women to organize another conference on the same topics from which majority-German women would be excluded. For them, the conference had confirmed that majority-Germans were not willing to acknowledge and change their own exclusionary practices and failed to recognize that solidarity across difference was only possible if they faced up to their privileged position and worked towards transforming it. Sevin Türkoglu, the only migrant woman among the conference organizers, summarized the situation as follows: "How can there be communication when the 'strongest group' accepts only their own views, their issues, and their solutions as the basis for working together?" (1991:110).

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[28] See the documentation of the conference in Verein für Sozialwissenschaftliche Praxis und Forschung e.V. (1991:7; translation A.K.).

The altercation at the Cologne-conference was widely publicized and discussed within feminist media. Similar conflicts had occurred before and continued to occur at other feminist events. Coalitions split up, feminists of color, migrant feminists, and Jewish feminists continued to establish their own groups, and majority-German feminists found that they could no longer avoid confronting themselves with the criticism directed at them. Many, though certainly not all, majority-German feminists began to engage in what came to be referred to as the 'racism-debate.' Different parts of the movement approached this challenge in different ways; their efforts did not follow a universal course, nor is there a general outcome. However, a number of authors provide descriptions and critiques of what appear to be some general trends.

One observation is that many majority-German women seem to be looking for 'quick fixes' to the problem, which for them is often primarily the fact that they are accused of being racist. Their self-understanding, which was based on the assumption that, as feminists, they automatically stood on the 'correct' side, has been harmed by these critiques, and they are looking for ways to avoid such critiques in the future. Some women respond to critiques by confessing guilt (implying that guilt will be forgiven upon confession). Many try to prevent challenges by introducing every statement with an acknowledgement that they are white. Sabine Hark notes that such 'rituals' of self-naming are not in themselves indication of an acknowledgement of difference. Nor do they express much about the person who is speaking: such naming can rather serve the person to hide behind the label (1990:48). She points out that confessions of guilt or of membership in the dominant group can be defensive strategies, rather than the result of critical reflection, an exercise in 'political correctness,' rather than an expression of commitment to political change (see also Koppert 1990). The desire to imagine oneself on the 'correct' side also seems to underlie the eagerness with which some white women detect 'political incorrectness' among other white women; pointing out racism in others then serves to establish oneself as more 'enlightened,' whatever work one has actually done in confronting racism within oneself and in general (see Goldmann n.d.).

Another point of critique is the dichotomous distinction between 'white' and 'black' that has been predominant in feminist discussions of racism. The usage of the term 'black' (*schwarz*) as a political (self-)designation for migrants, Jewish people, and black Germans has been a contentious issue also among women included in this category. Some find that it brushes over their particular situation. Sara Lennox cites an Asian woman and a Turkish woman, both of whom pointed to the specificities of their situations and did not want to see these subsumed under the category 'black' (1995:494). At the same time, black women have pointed out that they remain black under all conditions, whereas white migrant women have the option of dropping that political self-identification and can assimilate and make use of their privileges as white-skinned people (see Benhavio 1993:77; Schultz 1993:183p.). It has been noted that the black-white framework, which was taken over from discussions of racism and antiracism developed in the U.S. and in Britain, does not adequately capture the situation in Germany (Lennox 1995). This 'import' can rather have the effect of obscuring the complexity as well as the particular historical background of power relations between different women in Germany. The unspecified application of the category 'white' also distracts from differences among white women; the 'white woman' becomes a type, an "incomprehensible symbol" (Lava-Redaktion 1991:42), and issues of context as well as individual positions and actions are obliterated. As the editors of the feminist journal *Lava* put it:

> Where does this white woman live? What did she do in her life? [...] For the
> political and scholarly practice of German feminists it cannot be irrelevant whether
> the 'white woman' comes from Greece, Canada, or Germany. Racism is not
> always the same, it does not always have the same roots, it does not always find
> the same nourishment (Lava-Redaktion 1991:42; translation: A.K.).

Ilse Lenz further points out that this decontextualization of the feminist debate about racism resulted in a focus on the relationship between 'white' and black' women and attention was drawn away from the structural dimensions of racism. Racism became individualized, as feminist antiracist initiatives concentrated on the individual white woman's need to 'unlearn' internalized racist patterns of perception and thought. Moreover, white feminists adopted a deterministic view of social locations. While they had not accepted that gender was a matter of determination but

insisted that, in Simone de Beauvoir's words, "one is not born a woman, but, rather, becomes one," Lenz notes that they did not extend such constructivist analysis to their dominant social position as white people. This appeared to them as fated, as determined by the unjust social conditions into which they are born. Lenz considers this perception to a be major obstacle to finding effective ways of fighting against racism, since it often results in feelings of powerlessness and resignation. Furthermore, it can

> ultimately have an exonerating effect, even though that comes at the price of individual feelings of guilt. Because when the position of the native [*einheimischen*] women is already "objectively" determined, attempts at individually confronting the racism among the native majority and developing joint strategies appear pointless from the outset. [...] Implicitly, the deterministic position offers a relief from having to take responsibility (1996:211p.; translation: A.K.).

Lennox makes a related observation in noting that feminists' assumption of a white identity without attention to the ways in which this category is produced may have the effect of "essentializing and stabilizing the category of whiteness rather than deconstructing it" (1995:493) and she points out that "'[w]hiteness' is, after all, a category developed by racists, not antiracists, a way for European colonialists to distinguish Europeans of different nations from the indigenous people they sought to subordinate" (ibid.).

Next to other problems with the ways in which many majority-German feminists have dealt with the issue of racism and their own implication in a racist society, many authors agree that they lack an appropriate analytical model for investigating the specificities of the situation in Germany. Particularly the issue of national association has been notably absent from many discussions in the context of the 'racism-debate,' although questions of race are not separate from questions of nationality in the German context. Furthermore, national membership, guarded through the ethnic definition of citizenship, is a major fault line of legal, political, and social inequality that runs through German society, and it creates power imbalances between women that are not exclusively related to 'race,' as white migrant women are also excluded from the privileges

of citizenship. Yet, while many majority-German feminists conceded that they had to acknowledge the fact that they are white, disassociation from national affiliation was often upheld.

Addressing this disassociation, Mira Renke notes:

> "German" could not be filled in a positive sense. Germanness has always been filled negatively, although in the so-called foreigner studies [*AusländerInnenforschung*] one could not do without the "cultural and national identity." German women in Germany never had to feel like one among many national identities. The self-evidence of their Germanness was or is so unquestioned that they never needed to set themselves in relation to others. The others could do so, even had to, otherwise they would not have been full human beings, they would have been inferior, because of lack of identity (Renke 1994:173; translation: A.K.).

Whereas majority-Germans professed a distance to German culture, identity, and from Germans as a collective, proclaiming that they did not have a nationality (Lwanga 1993:260), Germanness served as the unspecified reference point of classifications of 'others.'

Yet, the denunciation of Germanness was not simply or only a means of denying a position of dominance. Renke points out that German nationality was not simply ignored, but vehemently rejected, as it evoked a connection to National Socialism and the Holocaust (1994:173p.). Hence, the denunciation of Germanness also served to distance oneself from this legacy. It provided a way around having to deal with the past and of suppressing unresolved feelings in relation to it. Against this historical background, many majority-German feminists considered it virtually taboo to profess to seeing themselves as German. However, this disassociation often came along with an avoidance of a critical examination of this legacy and the extent to which the conditions that enabled the crimes and atrocities are still effective in the present. It got in the way of investigating the effect that this history might have had on oneself, as a descendent of perpetrators, supporters, and bystanders or as a member of the society which is built on this past (see Rommelspacher 1995c).

The history of National Socialism and the Holocaust is thus a major factor in accounting for majority-German feminists' unwillingness to confront themselves with the fact of their national association compared to their relative willingness to acknowledge the fact that they are white. They can think of racism as a global problem, not just a German one, and they can point to the United

States or to South Africa and their records of racist oppression as comparably worse examples than Germany. The history of German colonialism has practically been erased from public education in Germany, and many Germans are not aware of that legacy and do not see their country as sharing responsibility for colonialism and the present effects of this legacy (Lutz 1993; Schultz 1993). However, the singularity of the Holocaust and its central role in German national history make Germanness an immensely uncomfortable identity to own. Many majority-Germans seem to experience a sense of vulnerability in relation to this association. Critiques of their dominance as majority-Germans are interpreted as accusations of guilt, especially when such critiques are voiced by Jewish women. Claudia Koppert notes that these critiques are often not taken for their factual content, but are taken to be accusations in the sense of:

> "You are not better than your parents/grandparents." What a Jewish woman
> actually says is not decisive. What causes the inundation with feelings of shame or
> guilt is the force of the historical dimensions, combined with unresolved feelings,
> which the Christian German cannot get away from" (1991:227; translation: A.K.)

Not having resolved for themselves how they are related to the German past and the legacy of guilt for the Holocaust, majority-Germans try to evade the issue through proclamations such as "I might be German, but I do not identify with that" (quoted in Kranz 1991:42; translation: A.K.).

Unresolved feelings of guilt also seem to be at play in the strong tendency within majority-German feminism towards identifying with historical victims. Jessica Jacoby and Gotlinde Magiriba Lwanga point towards the Christian underpinnings of this focus on victimhood: While many German feminists who were baptized as Christian and/or were raised in a Christian context distance themselves from Christianity or religion in general, as they perceive most organized religions to be patriarchal institutions, Jacobi and Lwanga observe that they

> seem to find in the term victim a moral dimension to which they vehemently hold
> on to. Without requiring a religious dogma they insist on the victim's infallibility,
> the world-removed holiness of the female martyr [Märtyrerin]. And by counting
> themselves among the victims qua their biological sex, they generously give
> themselves the absolution: German identity is rescued. Long live woman!
> (1990:99; translation: A.K.).

This desire to see themselves as belonging to the side of the victims, Jacobi and Lwanga note, also leaves its imprint on many majority-German women's views of National Socialism. Rather than confronting themselves with the ways in which majority-German women have supported the regime and took part in or supported the persecution of Jews and others, they claim that all women were victims of the NS system (ibid.; see chapter 4 for a more detailed discussion). Jacobi and Lwanga suspect that "what makes the victim so attractive is its culturally specific associated moral dimension: innocence" (1990:100; translation: A.K.). By identifying themselves as victims, these women claim to be "historically/politically on the 'right' side" (ibid.). Schultz further notes that, in responding to critique which calls this self-understanding into question, majority-German often hold on to their view of themselves as victims by interpreting the critique as an unjustified attack. They see the black, migrant, or Jewish women who criticize their attitudes or behaviors as aggressive and threatening, while they negate their own power and privileges in relation to these women (1993:166pp.).

As several authors note, parallel to, or included in, the denial of Germanness is ignorance of the dominance of Christian traditions and values in German culture and society. Women who consider themselves to have cut their ties to Christianity mostly do not reflect on the ways in which they have been shaped by their Christian upbringing and the extent to which they have internalized Christian values and presume them as an unquestioned norm. Nor do most of them reflect critically on the images they hold of other religions and which they project on (actual or presumed) members of these religions (Lange 1993). For example, many secularized German feminists betray their Christian-German socialization in negative, stereotypical perceptions of Muslims or in anti-Judaic/anti-Semitic perceptions expressed in critiques of Judaism as the supposed epitome of patriarchy (Kohn-Ley and Korotin 1994; Lutz 1993). Jacobi and Lwanga further point to the predominant absence of engagement with anti-Semitism in German history and in the present. They see this as partly related to the fact that many majority-Germans are not aware of the presence of Jews in present-day Germany, nor of anti-Semitism; they have never examined their own

relationship to Jews or their own images of Jews. Jacobi and Lwanga also point out that anti-Semitism seems to hit too close to home and, therefore, the issue is avoided:

> German identity may mostly be denied, but, nevertheless, it is lived [...] Anti-Semitism, it seems to us, is too close to German history and identity(-conflicts?), which [German women] do not want to face up to. But if there exists no feel for the negative points of connection between Jewish and German Christian-secularized women, how then can positive interaction come about? (1990:98; translation: A.K.).

Disassociation from Germanness on behalf of majority-German thus has come under critique for evading questions of power and accountability. It has also been pointed out that this strategy does not resolve the issues that make (majority-)Germanness an uncomfortable position in the first place. Rommelspacher further argues that this strategy grows out of a confusion of national identity with nationalism. She sees national identity as referring to one's membership in a political and social association that calls itself a nation. National identity does not have to imply a positive identification with the nation, a glorification of one's national association, a sense of national superiority, or an aggressive attitude towards members of other nations. Such attitudes are expressions of nationalism. Recognition of one's national identity, explains Rommelspacher, means the acknowledgement of one's implication within the political, social, and cultural framework of a nation-state and of the ways in which one has been shaped by this association (1995c:164pp.). Such an acknowledgement is necessary in order to be able to reflect critically on the ways in which one's national association affects one's perceptions and practices. The denial of German identity, Rommelspacher notes, reveals a negative fixation on this identity that mirrors the uncritical glorification of national identity. This negative fixation prevents a critical self-understanding and the development of alternative conceptualizations of what this identity might mean and whom it might include (1995c:169).

Schultz further points out that not everybody can afford to denounce their national identity. While majority-Germans deny their association with Germanness, people who are excluded from

Germanness in the dominant view are claiming their right to belong, their right to call themselves

Germans (1993:160). And migrant women have confronted majority-Germans with their

nationality, pointing out that to denounce it is anything but 'progressive,' that it rather amounts to a

blatant denial of a position of dominance and privilege. For example, Binnur Bilen argues:

> The women's movement in Germany is German. We are not included in it. We are
> not Germans. Although they always talk about "women" in general, they do not
> mean us. To some extent, our interests are opposed to each other. It is more than
> dull, it is simply wrong that you try to explain our absence from your "women's"
> movement with reference to our alleged deficits ("they are not as far yet"). Rather
> than studying us and our "culture of origin," you should confront your own
> analyses and look whether they actually apply to "women" or really just to
> "Germans" (1991:43; translation: A.K.).

The idea of common victimhood as an integrating factor that would unite women across

their differences has become utterly discredited. Majority-German women have been forced to

acknowledge that they are not only victims, but stand on the side of privilege in many regards. If

they want to develop a feminist perspective and practice that gives up on the nation (and the

national 'norm') as its frame of reference, they have to overcome their ignorance of other women's

situations and experiences. They also need to become aware of, and critically reflect on, the

specificity of their own social location and their experiences. Moreover, they have to be willing to

work towards dismantling their own privilege. As Schultz argues, rather than denying their

privileges, they should yield them to underprivileged women whenever possible, and should also

put them to use in order to change the structures that produce them (1993:175p.). They have to

recognize that doing so is the only way they can reach their long-term goals, as the fight against

sexism is not separate from the fight against racism and anti-Semitism (1993:176).

It is difficult to assess what effect the critique of majority-German feminists' evasive

strategies and the subsequent debates about issues of accountability and the need to find more

constructive ways of dealing with their national association have had on the self-perceptions and

politics of this group at large. What can be noted, though, is that it is now common for

contributions to feminist publications or to discussions in feminist context to be introduced with a statement such as, for example, 'As a German woman, I [have this or that view]...,' or, 'As a white Christian-socialized German, I [have this or that perspective]....' However, what the speaker is actually saying about herself or what exactly it means to speak from that position is often not all that clear. The question arises whether such self-naming is based on critical self-reflection and expresses a commitment to being accountable for one's situation within concrete power structures or whether it is an exercise in paying lip-service to new political/moral standard within German feminism. It seems that many majority-German feminists have begun to rethink their earlier strategy of denouncing Germanness, but it remains to be seen what kind of politics of national/German identity will come to replace it.

Chapter 2

The project and its participants

Having presented an overview of the historical, social, and political context in which this study on German feminists' understandings and negotiations of national identity is situated, I now provide an outline of the research project itself. This chapter will describe the project's theoretical and political points of departure and the issues I sought to address, and it will provide information on how I conducted the research. I will discuss how I contacted the women who participated in this study, describe the make-up of the group of women I interviewed in terms of their social and geographical backgrounds, and address how the interviews were conducted, what kind of expectations my interview partners and myself brought to the interviews, and what kind of dynamics developed between participants and myself in the interview situations. This will not only provide readers with information about the scope of this study, but it will also serve as the basis for a discussion of questions relating to the status of interview narratives and of the limitations and possibilities of interview-based research. In addressing these various aspects of my research, I will also consider questions concerning my positionality and politics in conducting and writing up this research.

To begin with, I will provide some further background information on feminist discussions about issues of difference, positionality, and accountability that were one point of departure for this research. In particular, I will address the concept of a 'politics of location,' which is central to the questions this study addresses as well as to my analysis of the interviews I conducted.

The politics of location

Around the late 1970s/early 1980s, notions of a 'universal woman' as the basis and center of feminist politics, and facile concepts of 'global sisterhood' as uniting all women, increasingly

came under severe critique for obscuring divisions between women according to their different positions within various social relations such as that of class, race, ethnicity, religion, nationality, or sexuality. Mainstream feminism thus became faced with the challenge of reconsidering and redefining its premises, analyses, goals, and politics.

Sneja Gunew and Anna Yeatman (1993) note that the task of finding constructive ways of dealing with differences has to be feminism's central concern if it is to survive as a movement for social change. To that end, there needs to be more than a superficial appreciation of differences or an attempt at correcting former exclusions through 'add-on' approaches without challenging the framework that produced these exclusions. Rather, differences must be understood as embedded in, and resulting from, relations of power. Feminist theory and politics further must not shift from denying differences between women to taking them for granted; instead, what is needed is a critical inquiry into the manifold configurations of power through which differences are produced. This also implies that feminists need to be aware of the specificities of their particular situations and to "understand how the conditions of [their] lives are connected to and made possible by the conditions of other women's lives" (Russo 1991:299).

Hence, the first step towards (re)defining the grounds on which feminists can work together across divisions lies in acknowledging that women are situated differently within various relations of power, of privilege and oppression. In order to reflect critically on their own and others' politics and to establish common goals, they have to be aware of the particular and concrete histories and structures in which they are entangled and understand their experiences not just as distinct and diverse but also as interrelated and interdependent. Such awareness and accountability for one's position within material and symbolic relations of power is the necessary basis for the establishment of solidarity and common ground and for the development of a feminist politics that is committed to the struggle against all forms of injustice and oppression, rather than serving particular interests at the expense of others.

While women whose experiences have not been represented and accounted for in mainstream feminist analyses – for instance, women of color, Jewish and Muslim women, working-class and impoverished women, women from so-called Third World countries, women with disabilities, lesbians, and bisexual women – have long been pointing out the specificities of their situations and perspectives, feminists holding a dominant social position have been rather slow in recognizing the particularities of their experiences.[1] Yet, in recent years, and often in response to the challenge posed by articulations of perspectives that are marginalized within dominant feminist frameworks, dominant social locations have come under increasing scrutiny.[2]

The notion of a 'politics of location' was introduced into feminist debates over difference and accountability by Adrienne Rich, who applied it in addressing her own position as white feminist in the United States. She appealed to white Western women to "name the ground we're coming from, the conditions we have taken for granted" and to "come to terms with the circumscribing nature of (our) whiteness" (1986:219). Calling into question the "we" of white Western feminism, "the faceless, raceless, classless category of 'all women'" (ibid.), Rich challenged white Western feminists to give up their self-centeredness, to acknowledge that they are not only victims of "male evil" but also part of the oppression of others, and to become aware of how they exclude or marginalize other women in their movement. She urged them to recognize whiteness "as a point of location," and to take responsibility for this location (ibid.).

Caren Kaplan (1994) notes that Rich's articulation of a 'politics of location' has since been taken up by a number of feminists, not only but particularly by white Western feminists. However,

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[1] The same can also apply to people who experience marginalization and oppression in one or several regards, as this does not necessarily cause them to reflect on their dominant position in other respects.

[2] In North America, but not only there, particular attention has been given to whiteness as a racial identity and social position, and there exists now a growing body of literature on how whiteness was and is produced or constructed historically and in the present. These works deconstruct white people's view of themselves as racially neutral or 'nonracial' and address how white people's experience is racialized – how they see the world through 'white eyes,' that is how presumptions of whiteness as norm structure their perceptions and politics, and how whiteness as a location within a system of differentiation bestows privileges on them. See, for example, Fine (1997); Frankenberg (1993); (1997a); Frye (1983); hooks (1992); Morrison (1992); Pratt (1984); Segrest (1994); Thompson (1996).

the notion consequently underwent transformations and is used in various different ways. While some of these utilizations serve to resist and deconstruct hegemonic views of gender and gender oppression, to decenter (dominant and marginalized) identities, and to analyze the complex relationships between women within one or more geographical locations, others rather reestablish, affirm, or naturalize identities and the boundaries between them. A politics of location has also been used by some as a means of appropriating and relativizing various experiences and perspectives through superficial inclusion and equalization (1994:139pp.). As an example of the latter, Kaplan points to Anglo-American feminist poststructuralism, which she describes as having responded to critiques of ethnocentrism and racism with a politics of location that celebrates difference and pluralism on a theoretical level. This recourse to a politics of location "more often has led to a relativism that masks appropriation than to significant changes in the theory and practice of criticism" (1994:144). Thus, feminist critics shifted from applying essentializing and totalizing notions of gender and women's experience to a pluralist relativism in which historical specificities and asymmetries are depoliticized and power relations mystified under the guise of inclusiveness and celebrations of difference.

Against such uses of a politics of location, Kaplan suggests that the concept ought to be applied as a tool towards examining one's own investments in geopolitics as well as "cultural metaphors and values" and towards a critical analysis of the relationships between women and the possibilities for coalitions and affiliations. She proposes that, in order to enable a transformative critical "practice of affiliation," a politics of location must be used to identify "the grounds for historically specific differences and similarities between women in diverse and asymmetrical relations," so as to allow for the creation of "alternative histories, identities, and possibilities for alliances" (1994:139).

An example of how a politics of location could be utilized towards such ends is provided by Minnie Bruce Pratt in an autobiographical essay entitled *Identity: Skin Blood Heart* (1984). In this text, Pratt reflects on her identity as a white, middle-class, Christian-raised, lesbian woman

from the South of the United States by way of historicizing and politicizing the different places where she has spent her life and where she has sought to build a home for herself and with others. She investigates the historical and material configurations of power at these sites and works out how her own experience relates to that of different groups of people also located in these places. In exploring the conditions of her experience and her identity, she tries to discern the repressions and exclusions inherent in these.[3]

Pratt's text proposes a view of identities as points of departure without treating them as essential or natural. She works out how she changes through encounters with others and thus points to the impossibility of a stable and independent self, as any sense of self always includes others, in their presence or absence. Pratt advocates a transgression of the boundaries of any construct of self in order to get a little closer to the world of others; every step she takes beyond what she took for granted about herself has the potential of opening a world to her that she was previously unable to see. However, in taking apart the bases of her identity and her privilege, not for one moment does she suggest that this is where the work ends, that this would absolve her from responsibility and settle the issue of accountability. There is no innocent state of deterritorialization that she could escape to. She understands herself to be situated within a nexus of relations of power that she cannot opt out of; but she also does not allow herself to be paralyzed by this knowledge. Her essay puts the case for combining a refusal to take identity for granted and a vision of escaping the entrapment of a stable and unified self with recognition of the materiality of one's location in the world, one's implication in various histories and social relations, and with accountability for one's positionality.

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[3] For instance, she examines how her sense of self and her experience during her childhood in Alabama related to her growing up surrounded by notions of white supremacy and in a social and physical environment shaped by racism. Throughout the essay, she analyses conditions of experience, identity, belonging, and exclusion with regard to a variety of contexts, including the feminist contexts in which she has been involved. To address her reflections in detail is beyond the scope of my discussion in this chapter. Apart from referring interested readers to Pratt's text itself, I would also like to point to an insightful reading of Pratt's essay provided by Martin and Mohanty (1996).

The politics of location enacted in *Identity: Skin Blood Heart* avoids both essentialism as well as the relativism or abstractionism of certain strands of postmodern feminism. Pratt's conceptualization of identities neither treats them as fixed, nor as arbitrary or volitional. She rather points out that they are social and relational and that they always and necessarily remain incomplete. Thus, she refuses using a politics of location in a way that solidifies identities, while she also avoids the drawbacks of postmodern evocations of indeterminacy. Her dynamic theory and practice of location and positionality allows her to envision ways of moving beyond the narrow circle of a stable self without denying the histories and structures that constituted this self. As Martin and Mohanty note, Pratt thus is able to oppose passivity with agency without romanticizing or overestimating the latter, without divorcing it from the limitations of any location within historical and social relations. They see her "exposure of the arbitrariness and the instability of positions within systems of oppression" as evidencing

> a conception of power that refuses totalizations, and can therefore account for the possibility of resistance. "The system" is revealed to be not one but multiple, overlapping, intersecting systems or relations that are historically constructed and recreated through everyday practices and interactions, and that implicate the individual in contradictory ways (1996:183).

Pratt understands her positionality as resulting from the operations of power; yet, she does not conceive of her identity and location as destiny, but rather as a starting point for a political practice that opens up new possibilities for connection.

While Pratt's is a very personal account of her grappling with issues of positionality and locational politics, I believe that it speaks to much more than her individual "struggle with myself and the world I was born in" (1984:57). It raises crucial questions regarding feminist politics and practice, particularly concerning the issue of accountability for one's location within historical material and social relations. Pratt suggests that denial of one's positionality, or passivity and paralysis in the face of its implications, obstructs efforts at instigating social change. She proposes that change starts with awareness of one's location, a coming to terms with its meanings for oneself

and others, and an understanding of the conditions that produce it and how these are related to the conditions of other locations.

Engaging with articulations of a politics of location such as Pratt's, I was prompted to reflect on the kinds of politics of location that I had encountered in various feminist contexts in Germany and Canada, as well as on my own ways of dealing with issues of location. In particular, I was reminded of how I used to distance myself from my nationality, as I considered the national tradition into which I was born utterly negative and rejectable. As many other white Christian or Christian-secularized Germans, I did not want to identify as German and told myself and others that my national association was irrelevant to me. In the previous chapter, I pointed out what is problematic about this strategy of dealing with national association. Personally, I only came to question my own attitude in that regard in a sustained way when I no longer lived in Germany and mostly amongst majority-Germans. I began to understand how much of my experience was neither simply personal nor universal but in many ways 'German' when I was situated in a context where I was not part of a 'norm,' but an outsider in many regards. Five years of living in Canada have opened my eyes to specificities of my background that I did not perceive while I was centered in Germany, particularly the effect that growing up in Germany had on my views and my politics. I have not come to see German national identity as positive, nor any other national identity for that matter (yet, in discussing issues of national identity with Canadians, I also realized that my antinational stance is, to some extent, particularly 'German'). Even so, I no longer consider my national association to be irrelevant, neither in a political nor in a personal sense.

While I began to think through for myself what a more constructive politics of location in relation to my nationality could be, I was also following the developments and discourses around national identity in Germany with much unease. Along with attempts at rehabilitating affirmative notions of the German nation and the pursuit of 'normalization,' not only 'moderate' forms of nationalism but also outright national or ethnic chauvinism are gaining ground in political debates. At the same time, racist violence and murders committed under the banner of "Germany for the

Germans" have become part of the new German 'normality,' and a considerable proportion of German society responds to such crimes with passivity, indifference, or even support, at least for the idea behind such actions.

In the light of these developments, rather than calling for an antinationalist politics to oppose them, a growing number of people on the left argue that the question of the nation must not be abandoned to the right and call upon 'progressive' segments of German society to face this challenge. One proponent of this position is Andreas Huyssen, who argues that, in the face of the resurgence of nationalism, "it would be a serious political abdication for the democratic left not to occupy the question of nation, not to try and make use of its potentially constructive side that builds community, guarantees civil rights, integrates populations" (1994:12). A very similar argument is put forward by Angelika Bammer, who proposes that

> we [progressive Germans] need to own – not deny – being German as the ground
> for a progressive politics. Progressive intellectuals, people on what we have
> historically thought of as the Left, cannot afford to cede the terrain of Germanness
> to the Right while we disclaim affiliation. If Germanness with all that it entails –
> national identity, a sense of tradition, affiliation with a historical community – is
> relegated to the Right, then the Left can only situate itself negatively. This is
> perhaps one of the areas in which the legacy of Marxism, with its insistence on
> *inter*nationalism as an antinationalist move, has left the Left most pathetically,
> indeed dangerously, unequipped to counter the powerful rallying force of calls for
> national, regional, ethnic identities (1998:19p.; emphasis in the original).

However, the problem remains that the 'potentially constructive side' of nation cannot be disentangled from its less than progressive aspects, particularly its need to define itself through exclusion. Such arguments as Huyssen's and Bammer's further come close to the presumption that national identity is inevitable, a basic human need. The question of why national identities provide such a powerful rallying force, of the concrete interests with which they are invested and for which they are mobilized, tends to move to the background in such approaches.

A positive German national identity has also been called for from the ranks of the left as necessary in confronting xenophobia and racism as well as in order to come to terms with Germany's past. In explaining German xenophobia and racism, it is argued that Germans hate

others because, or just as, they hate themselves. This hatred stems from the unresolved guilt they feel as a result of their history. Antje Vollmer, member of the federal parliament for the Green Party, is a prominent proponent of this view. She argues that Germans lack a positive identity that would make them more relaxed about themselves and others. While other nations have such a strong sense of identity, Germans do not know who they are and therefore have to distinguish and fence themselves off from others (1993:121). According to Vollmer, unification would have offered an opportunity for a positive redefinition of German identity; however, the left in Germany missed that chance and left it to the right to take up the issue (1993:123). Vollmer argues that Germans should get over the paralysis caused by their national history and take on the question of how they want to relate to the rest of the world and what kind of tasks they want to take on in the global community. She suggests, among other things, that Germans could take on ecological issues, could work towards ending the debt crisis in the 'developing world,' and could generally provide more help to poor countries (1993:124).

Yet, leaving aside the question whether such projects require an affirmative sense of national identity, it is not clear how such a politics would tackle and resolve the issue of racist attitudes, not to mention the issue of structural or institutionalized racism. To take on such tasks in order to increase feelings of collective self-worth could rather give rise to paternalism, ethnocentrism, and national chauvinism. Furthermore, Vollmer's strategy leaves unquestioned the issue of how the collective is defined,. It is more than questionable whether the driving force behind racist attitudes and violence is actually a lack of 'positive' identification with the idea of a German nation. Based on what I have outlined in the previous chapter, I think it is rather necessary to understand these attitudes in relation to the particular concept of the nation to which they relate in an affirmative way.

Another argument that is employed in support of calls for a German national consciousness posits national identity as necessary in order to maintain historical consciousness and critical memory of National Socialism and the Holocaust. Coming to terms and taking responsibility for

the past is claimed to be dependent on a continuing sense of nationhood. However, Reinold

Schmücker and Rainer Hering point out that the *Historikerstreit* is one of many incidents that call

this claim into question, as it evidenced a correlation between affirmative notions of German

national identity and the disassociation from this horrific chapter of German history (1994:36).

They argue that, in fact, it is the wholesale attribution of the responsibility for the Nazi crimes to

one German nation that allowed those generations born after the Nazi era to distance themselves

from sharing historical responsibility, because it delegates responsibility "to an abstract collective

called nation" (1994:37) and impedes a critical identification of later born Germans with the

perpetrators and fellow travelers. Andrea Ludwig further emphasizes that, in so far as responsibility

is understood not just in terms of *Wiedergutmachung* (restitution) but also in terms of preventing

something similar to the Holocaust from ever happening again, what is needed is an antiracist and

antitotalitarian attitude, rather than a positive identification with the nation. Those who proclaim

responsibility to be a function of national identity, Ludwig argues, reduce individuals to their

national association, presume that their moral capacity is dependent on affirmative identification

with a national collective, and release them from having to be personally responsible for their

intentions and actions (1994:116).

The above arguments in favor of embracing the nation and national identity as a ground for

progressive politics are thus problematic in that they leave unquestioned the concept of the nation

as such, particularly the ways in which the nation is defined and the exclusions it implies and

produces. They also do not make a convincing case for the necessity of a positive national identity

to the pursuit of the projects of progressive politics they propose. Rather than critically examining

the concept of the nation, these strategies affirm it. But such affirmation of the nation, and thus of

the particularistic interests embedded in and served by the idea of the nation, is a more than

questionable ground for progressive politics.

The research project on which this thesis is based grew out of my interest in exploring what kind of perspectives and politics could be set against the dominant discourse of national identity in Germany that would avoid both the pitfalls of facile denial of national association as well as of the allegedly 'progressive' recourse to national identity. In particular, I was interested in finding out about how women committed to feminist perspectives view the issue of German national identity. I wanted to enquire into what kinds of politics of location individual feminists in Germany formulate in relation to their national association, what notions of identity underlie, or result from, their locational politics – for instance, essentialist or de/constructivist, static or dynamic understandings of identity – and how they negotiate identity and location in everyday situations and political practice, particularly in coalition work. To that end, I spent the months between May and August 1999 in Germany and conducted 29 in-depth interviews on questions of national identity with feminists in various parts of the country.

Finding/Reaching participants

In order to contact potential interview partners, I sent a brief description of my research project and a call for participants to about thirty feminist organizations across the country and to two feminist email lists, and I also put up posters and distributed flyers in women's centers and cafés, in feminist archives and libraries, as well as at the largest annual conference and gathering of lesbians in Germany and at an academic feminist conference.

My goal was to interview a very diverse group of women, as I wanted to explore how understandings of German national identity are related to women's various other social and geopolitical locations. I was not aiming at a representative sample, which would have been extremely difficult to realize in the context of a research project of this type (not to mention the difficulty of defining what exactly would be a representative sample). Furthermore, since much of the existing literature on the topic of this research focuses on majority-German women from the West, who also represent the numerical majority in Germany, I intended to overrepresent women

of other backgrounds whose views are mostly absent from discussions of German identity in the literature. Therefore, I sent the description of my research to a wide variety of feminist organizations and groups in both East and West Germany, including associations of black women and of Jewish women and organizations of migrant women.

Still, of the first ten respondents to my call for participants, nine were white and Christian-socialized, among them eight West Germans and one East German, and one was an Afro-German Christian woman who had moved from East to West Germany. Obviously, I was either not reaching many women besides majority-Germans in the West or my project struck much more of a chord in majority-West Germans than in other women. I subsequently adopted a more purposive strategy for finding interview partners who were not majority-German and/or from the West. With the help of friends I arranged interviews with two majority-German women in the East and with an Afro-German woman who was born in the East but had spent most of her life in West Germany. I also called several women's centers and organizations in the East, explained my project verbally, and asked whom I was talking to whether she would be willing to be interviewed or knew someone who might be. This way I found three more majority-German interview partners in the East. In the same way I made contact with an Afro-German Jewish woman who lives in the East and with a Jewish woman who had migrated to West Germany from Brazil. The latter woman referred me to two other women who had migrated to West Germany and agreed to be interviewed.[4]

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[4] However, not all of the women whom I contacted directly agreed to be interviewed. I was aware that my call for participants would likely not speak to women who denounce their national association. Still, I wanted to interview such women in order to find out how they had arrived at this attitude and how it relates to their political views and practices. Friends whom I told about my research and my interest in interviewing women who distance themselves from their association with Germany/Germanness helped me to establish contact with two women holding such an attitude. Both these women identified politically as radical leftists and seemed to be suspicious about what I was doing in my research. In talking to them, I got the impression that they thought of my project as potentially nationalistic. I explained to them that I was not seeking to affirm German national identity, but that I was interested in exploring different ways in which people relate to questions of national association, including antinational views. Nevertheless, both women declined my request for an interview with reference to the fact that they did not understand themselves to be German and thus saw no point in participating in my research. It seems that I have failed to convey to them that I did not want to limit my research to women professing to an identification with Germanness. Yet, three of the majority-German women who responded to my call for participants explained to me during the interviews that they did not see themselves as Germans. However, these women did not subscribe to a radical leftist

I also monitored the diversity of the group in terms of age. Most of the women who contacted me and offered to be interviewed where between thirty and forty years old. After I had interviewed ten majority-West German women from this age group, I declined further offers from women of the same background and age range.

By applying a partly random and partly purposive strategy in finding participants and by monitoring the make-up of the group while I was conducting the research, I arrived at a sample that represents a cross-section of social and geographical backgrounds (see below for details).[5] However, taken together, the women I interviewed are not representative of all such locations within German society. What I am presenting in this thesis is thus not a comprehensive or exhaustive account of how 'German feminists' or feminists in Germany understand and negotiate national identity. Still, the particular experiences and views that women put forward in the interviews offer insights into various ways of relating to and interpreting one's national association. In presenting and discussing their perspectives, I seek to provide an ethnographic basis for reflections on notions of identity and locational politics as they are developed in feminist theory and to comment on theoretical arguments from a grounded perspective.

The participants[6]

The twenty-nine women I interviewed ranged in age from nineteen to fifty-nine. Fifteen women had grown up and lived in West Germany; six women had grown up and lived in East Germany; two women had moved from West to East Germany; one woman had moved from East to West Germany; and five women were born outside of Germany and had moved to West Germany, two of them as children and three of them as adults. Twenty-one of my interview

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politics, as did the two women who declined to be interviewed. Thus, I cannot comment in this thesis on attitudes of denouncing national association connected to radical leftist politics and on how such attitudes might differ from those of the three women whom I interviewed.

[5] For discussion on nonprobability sampling see Johnson (1990); Sarantakos (1998).

[6] This section provides a general summary of the groups' make-up in terms of social and geographical backgrounds. Specifics about individual women's backgrounds can be found in the Appendix.

partners could be described as majority-German, as they were white and Christian or Christian-secularized and would be considered ethnic Germans. One woman who was white and Christian and of ethnic German background had lived most of her life in Russia and thus did not see herself as part of the 'national norm' in Germany (nor would she be granted that status by many majority-Germans). Three women were Afro-German[7], one was Turkish-German[8], and one was Serbian-German[9]. One woman had come to Germany from Brazil and one from Argentina. These two women described their national identity as Brazilian and Argentinean respectively. Neither of these two held German citizenship or was planning to apply for it. The other twenty-seven women were German citizens (the Turkish-German woman and the Serbian-German woman as well as the woman who moved to Germany from Russia had acquired German citizenship as adults, the Afro-Germans and majority-Germans held (East or West) German citizenship from birth).

The Brazilian woman and one of the Afro-German women were Jewish. The Brazilian woman described herself as not very religious, and it was only after she moved to Germany that she became interested in her Jewish roots. At the time of the interview she was in the process of exploring their meanings for herself. The Afro-German woman spoke of having a connection to Jewish as well as African spirituality, but she was not a member of a Jewish congregation. One of the majority-German women mentioned that she partly stemmed from an assimilated Jewish family (with the assimilation having taken place well before the Third Reich). She did not identify as Jewish, but rather saw herself as Christian-socialized. The parents of the Turkish-German woman were Muslims; she described them as very liberal Alevis and her upbringing as rather secular, and

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[7] These women referred to themselves sometimes as Afro-Germans and sometimes as black Germans. One woman also referred to herself as *farbig* (colored). In this thesis, I will refer to them as Afro-Germans rather than black Germans in order to avoid ambiguities that might arise from the fact that the term 'black' is often used not in specific reference to people of African heritage but in reference to various minorities in Germany.

[8] This woman was a daughter of Turkish migrants. She explained to me that her identity was made up of a complex and shifting mix of elements from both her Turkish background and her socialization in Germany.

[9] This woman had a Serbian father and a German mother. She spent the first years of her live in Belgrade before she moved to West Germany.

she described herself as an atheist. The other twenty-five women were raised in Christian or Christian-secularized families and social contexts. Only six of them described themselves as practicing Christians, two of whom were Catholics and four of whom were Protestants.

None of my interview partners described having any disabilities. Sixteen women described themselves as heterosexual, eight as lesbian, four as bisexual, and one as queer. Ten women had children. As a whole, the group had reached a much higher than average level of education. All except five women were university-educated.[10] Nineteen women had completed or were working on a Master's or an equivalent degree such as the *Staatsexamen* (state examination),[11] and five women had completed or were working on a Ph.D. Two women held positions as lecturers/assistant professors and two women worked as teaching or research assistants at universities. Four women were social workers, two were teachers, one was an editor, one was an educational therapist, three were translators, one woman was a Protestant priest, and another woman worked for a women's organization within the Protestant Church. Two women were artists, one woman was a nurse, one woman was a truck-driver, and one was employed at a telemarketing company. Two women were self-employed, one of whom owned a small business and the other did contract work for various businesses. Four women worked in the management of women's centers and projects. Four women were not in paid work at the time of the interviews, three of whom were unemployed and of whom was a full-time student.

Most of the data I have just provided were collected through a questionnaire that I asked my interview partners to fill out after the interviews. In this questionnaire, I also asked them how they would describe their socioeconomic status during their childhood and at the time of the interview. Many women explained to me that they could not answer this question in a

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[10] While this seems to be a particularly strong bias within the group of women I interviewed, it might also hint at a general overrepresentation of university-educated women among those who consider themselves feminists. When I asked my interview partners when and how they became interested in feminist perspectives and politics, many explained that this was in the context of their university education.

[11] So far, German universities do not grant Bachelor's degrees.

straightforward way. Their current status seemed particularly ambiguous for many women. For example, they might have come from a working-class background but acquired university degrees, which they associated with middle-class status, only to find themselves unemployed or working for low income. Because of such contradictions between their level of education and their actual socioeconomic position, many women were unsure about their status in terms of class. Some subsequently left the fields in question blank, whereas others came up with categories that pointed to such contradictions, for instance, "academic proletariat." Thirteen women described their childhood and their current status as middle-class. Four women described their family background as working-class and their current status as "educated class." Two women described themselves as coming from a working-class background and answered "student" to the question about their current status. The two artists among my interview-partners described their background as working-class and their current situation as "belonging to the sociocultural scene" and as "artistic proletariat" respectively. One woman described herself as formerly "bourgeois lower-class" and currently "academic proletariat." And one woman saw her background as "bourgeois middle-class" and described her present situation as "alternative middle-class." Overall, the majority of my interview partners counted themselves among the middle-class.

The interviews

With few exceptions, the interviews took place at the participants' homes or workplaces. I asked each woman to suggest a place where she would feel comfortable, and most women invited me to their homes. For some it was more convenient to meet me at their workplaces. Three interviews were conducted at apartments of family members or friends of mine with whom I stayed during the months I spent in Germany. And one interview took place in a restaurant. The interviews ranged in length between two hours and four and a half hours; the average length was three hours.

In preparing myself for the interviews, I had worked out a list of topics that I wanted to address. However, I was also interested in seeing what issues my interview partners would introduce themselves in talking about national identity. Therefore, I tried to let the women determine the topics as much as possible and saved specific questions to be asked late into the interview.[12] I generally started the interviews with the question: "Is national identity something that you have thought about often or rarely throughout your life?"[13] Although this was a relatively complicated as well as vague question, it proved to be a good lead-in to the interviews, as it almost always evoked long and detailed responses, in which my interview partners often already touched upon most of the issues I would have wanted to talk about. That way, I did not have to introduce these issues out of nowhere but could come back to something they had already mentioned, and, more importantly, I could get a sense of what they deemed most relevant in discussing national identity.

Overall, I was fortunate in that most women were highly interested in the subject of the research and took a lot of initiative in introducing topics, thus making it easy for me to lead the interviews in an informal way. During the first few interviews I had to consult my list of topics every now and then, so as to not lose track of important issues I wanted to cover. With increasing practice, this was no longer necessary, and I could follow my interview partners' leads without losing sight of the territory we covered. However, while I thought that it was preferable to let my interview partners determine the course of the interviews as much as possible, a few women

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[12] One could describe the interviews as partly unstructured and partly semi-structured (Sarantakos 1998:247). For the most part, I tried to conduct the interviews in a nondirective way and to leave the direction and the specific areas covered in the control of participants (Adams and Schvaneveldt 1991:216). When participants stopped introducing new topics, I began to introduce issues; but I did so without following a strict procedure or a structured interview guide. I was rather focused on further exploring participants' particular experiences in relation to the topic of my study.

[13] In several cases, a woman and I were already engaged in a conversation that was directly addressing issues I wanted to cover in the interview before we 'officially' began the interview. In such cases, I often ended up asking a woman to hold her thoughts until we had gone over the consent form together, clarified any remaining questions she might have, and turned on the tape recorder, and then we began the interview from where we had left off before.

seemed somewhat irritated by the fact that they did not perceive much structure in the way I conducted the interview. This did not seem to be a problem during the interviews, but rather occurred to these women at the end of the interviews. At that point, some women asked me whether what we had talked about was useful to me at all. This concern surprised me at first because I did not expect my interview partners to feel responsible for the outcome of the interviews or the research in general. But it seems that my interviewing style, that is my trying to follow participants' leads for much of the interview and my not taking more, or more obvious, control over its course, might have caused some women to feel that it was their responsibility to provide me with the 'right' information. I tried to assure them that the information they shared with me was very significant to my work and that I could not have wished for more. Yet, such incidents made me reconsider what I thought my interview partners expected the interview to be like and realize that I had never thought about the possibility of the interviews being too informal, I had rather worried about them being too formal.

Before the beginning of each interview, I repeated what I had stated in the consent form that the participant signed. I gave a brief overview of the purpose of my research and reminded the participant that she could withdraw from the study at any point during or after the interview. I also reminded her that she could ask for the tape recorder to be turned off at any point and that she should feel free to decline answering particular questions. I further encouraged her to inquire about the purpose of my questions or to redirect questions back at myself, as well as to add questions of her own. None of my interview partners requested that the tape recorder be turned off, but some did decline to answer specific questions. Several women redirected questions at myself or asked me questions of their own. However, only in very few interviews did the exchange approximate a balanced conversation. Most interviews followed the conventional model in that I asked the questions and the participant answered without asking many or any questions of me. Many women only began to ask questions of me after we were finished with the interview. It seems that the

expectations they brought to the interview, concerning my and their role in the exchange, prevented them from turning the tables during the course of the interview. Still, I tried to be explicit about my location and interests in what I was doing. While I did not share personal opinions or experiences when it seemed that my interview partner was not interested in such, I did relate experiences and views of my own in situations where that was asked for or seemed appropriate. For example, sometimes a woman would describe an experience, the meanings or implications of which she seemed to find difficult to communicate, and would ask me whether I understood what she meant. In such situations, I would sometimes offer a related or contrasting experience of my own. A subsequent discussion of the similarities or differences of our experiences often helped to clarify what my interview partner wanted to convey to me. Also, in cases where a woman made political statements that I did not agree with, but she seemed to assume that I shared her views, I pointed out that my opinion differed from hers, since I did not want her to disclose her views under such false assumptions. While I had concerns that such behavior on my part could lead a woman to censor herself, most often the effect was quite the opposite and she would elaborate on her own opinion.

Such behavior on behalf of a researcher might be seen by some as 'falsifying' the results of the research; however, I would suggest that not only is it impossible for any researcher to take up a completely disinterested and objective position, but participants also bring to the research situation their own assumptions about the motivations and opinions of the researcher, whether she discloses these or not. Thus, I tried to be open and honest about myself while also seeking not to be judgmental in any way nor to impose my own views on the conversation.

Nevertheless, while I was trying to avoid the traditional role of the distant and inscrutable researcher, to be as explicit as possible about where I was coming from and how I was situated in my research, and to take a dialogical approach to the research as far as my interview partners seemed to welcome it, issues of power relations in research are not resolved by such strategies. No matter how vulnerable I was willing to make myself in the exchanges with my interview partners, I am the one who has final control over what I will make of what they shared with me and how I will

represent them. I continue to be amazed by the openness and trust which I was offered by the women whom I interviewed, and I hope I will live up to what they have granted me in attempting to provide an adequate representation of their views and experiences. But my analysis and representation is, of course, limited by the specificities of what I was able to perceive in, and understand about, what these women were telling me.

At the same time, what they were telling me about themselves was also filtered through their perceptions of me and the interview situation, affected by how trustworthy or non-judgmental they considered me to be and by their interpretation of the purpose of my research. Oftentimes, a woman would come back to something she mentioned earlier in the interview and add crucial pieces of information or elaborate on it at a later point, which suggests that the impression she got of me during the course of the interview influenced what experiences and information about herself she was willing to share with me. Thus, sometimes a woman's presentation of herself changed significantly during the course of an interview.

My interview partners also brought various understandings of my role as the researcher and their role as the interviewee to the exchange. A few women, particularly women who were significantly older than me, adopted the role of a teacher during the interview. They tended to take a lot of control over the interview, sometimes to the extent of ignoring or passing over questions I asked. As a result, their narratives of themselves seem more unified and devoid of breaks and contradictions than the self-representations that developed in such interviews in which women mostly just responded to the questions I asked them and did not take much initiative in determining the course of the interview. In contrast, some women seemed to perceive me as an expert on 'correct' feminist politics and to expect a kind of 'evaluation' of their views. For example, when I asked one woman at the end of the interview (as I did after each interview) how she liked the way I conducted it, what she thought of the questions I asked, and whether she would like to provide some criticism or suggestions for changes, she replied that she had expected me to be more confrontational and to indicate to her which of her views might be racist. She had wanted to

participate in my research because she was interested in detecting racist or nationalistic attitudes within herself, and she was a little disappointed about the fact that I did not provide more critical feedback on her views. There were also some women who appeared concerned about not being knowledgeable enough to make a significant contribution to my research. Two women even asked me upon arranging the interview whether they should prepare themselves by reading up on the topics of my research, and one woman began the interview by telling me about which areas of feminist theory and political activism she had knowledge about and excused herself for not knowing more about other areas. I told these women that I was not interested in 'testing' knowledge but in finding out about their personal experiences and views. Nevertheless, these three women initially seemed hesitant to tell me about any personal experiences. One woman asked me whether I was really interested in "mundane" stories about herself. They seemed either to consider their own experiences as not important or relevant enough to be the subject of somebody's research or they might not have felt comfortable about sharing personal experiences, possibly because they were concerned about judgements on my part. In these three interviews, I tried to be even more careful with probes than I usually attempted to be, as I did not want to push women beyond their comfort zones. Yet, eventually, all three women moved from presenting me with impersonal information and general opinions to talking about their own lives and experiences in detail and in terms that suggested a considerable level of self-reflectiveness and critical awareness of the specificities of their experiences and social positions. The impression I got was that, given that my perception of them as concerned about being judged was accurate, this concern might have been related to the fact that they set very high standards for themselves in terms of being reflective and self-critical. They related some experiences to me that they undoubtedly felt vulnerable about, for example, incidents in which they had behaved in ways they considered ignorant, intolerant, racist, or something else they would rather not be. In such situations, I offered experiences of my own as indication that I have been and still are struggling with similar issues and am certainly not an expert on 'correct' feminists politics and behavior. I emphasized that I think it is best not to get stuck in

looking at such experiences only in terms of personal failures, but to consider them in terms of what they tell us about the conditions in which we grew up and live in now, and that I was not seeking to morally judge but to learn from the experiences participants shared with me.

Power imbalances in research do not simply rest in the relationship between researcher and researched, but are also mediated by their locations within multiple social configurations of power. There is no straightforward way in which I could account for how such issues of power came into my research. To every interview situation, I brought my own interpretation of the relations of power in which my interview partners and myself were situated, and so did they. Our relation to each other was not in any simple way predetermined, but was established and negotiated in the course of our interactions. I could not know beforehand how a particular participant would perceive me and the relationship between us. Thus, I tried not to make assumptions about similarities or differences between us while also trying to be aware of the specificity of my location and of the limitations to what I know.

I found that interviewing women whose background was most similar to my own, in terms of that they were majority-Germans who grew up in the West and were under 30 years old, was by no means easier than interviewing women of different backgrounds than my own. In fact, I realized that I had to be much more careful about making assumptions when I interviewed women with whom I shared many social locations. These women also frequently assumed that I would know what they meant or where they were coming from without them having to make explicit what they were getting at in a particular statement. I tried to be watchful in that regard and to make sure that I asked women to elaborate on certain points, even when I thought I knew what they meant, because I did not want to rely on my capacity to know by virtue of shared background what exactly they were implying. In contrast, women with whom I did not share particular social backgrounds usually expressed their views and described their experiences in more elaborate and explicit terms, probably because they did not expect me to share the same experiences and outlook.

The dynamics between my interview partners and myself was different in every interview, and each of the women whom I interviewed also brought their own agenda to the encounter. A number of women told me that they welcomed the chance to talk about an issue that they found to be taboo in the feminist and other contexts they participate in. Two majority-German women pointed out that they appreciated being able to reflect on what they considered a touchy issue in a situation where they could remain anonymous. One of them put it this way:

> Luci: *"The whole issue of Germanness, talking about it feels like walking over thin ice, like you can break in at any point. Most people seem to be afraid to even touch upon it, like you don't know what you might get yourself into. It's easier to think through some of this stuff in the context of an interview like this, where you can remain anonymous. It gives you some leeway to explore things without having to worry about immediate consequences."[14]*

Thus, many women seemed to offer themselves to be interviewed because they expected the interview to provide them with an opportunity to reflect on issues that were of significant concern to themselves. However, not all women seemed to bring to the interview such a personal investment in the topic of my research. In at least two cases it appeared more like participants wanted to do me a favor. They seemed to offer me to interview them out of a commitment to supporting young feminist researchers, not so much because they were interested in the topic of my research. A majority-German woman from the East told me that she agreed to be interviewed because she was concerned about divisions between feminists of different backgrounds and a lack of communication across such divisions. She expressed the hope that her participation in my study

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[14] In order to visibly distinguish quotations from the interview transcripts from citations of published texts, my interview partners' words are set in italics. In translating their statements, I have tried to produce as literal a translation as was possible without seriously infringing on comprehensibility. In cases where women used metaphors or idioms for which there exist equivalent or closely corresponding expressions in English, I have used the English counterpart. Where this was not the case, I either translated them literally when I deemed the meaning of the metaphor or idiom to be comprehensible to English readers, or I paraphrased them if the meaning of such expressions would have been lost or obscured in the translation. I did not make stylistic corrections and I retained characteristics of spoken language (for instance, incomplete sentences) in putting the women's speech into written form. All the names by which I refer to the women are pseudonyms. Information about age refers to the women's ages at the time of the interviews. I have left out or changed information by which individual women could be identified, for example, their exact location of residence or the names of institutions they worked for or were involved with.

could contribute in some way to building up such communication. And two of my interview partners told me that part of the reason why they responded to my call for participants was that they were in the process of devising qualitative, interview-based research projects of their own, and they were interested in how I would conduct the interview and in experiencing themselves in the role of an interviewee.

Partial visions and the status of interview narratives

The various motivations, assumptions, interpretations, and investments that my interview partners and myself brought to the interview situations affected our interactions and the form and content of the narrative self-representations forwarded by my interview partners. These self-representations cannot be considered concordant or unambiguous delineations of who these women are. An interview situation never provides a neutral window into people's experiences and sense of identity and cannot produce uninvolved accounts of these. Yet, it is not only because the interview situation actively influences the kinds of knowledge and the representations that are constructed and assembled in the encounter that interviews cannot result in straightforward reflections of social facts or ontological levels. In fact, interviewees themselves have no unmediated perspective on their identity and experience that one could try to capture through an interview.

Anthropological and other studies on concepts of self or personhood and on notions of identity show experiences and understandings of self and identity to be anchored within social relations and culturally specific frames of communication and interpretation. The concept of self, Elvi Whittaker argues, is a "metaphor" for something "assumed to exist" (1992:200). The notion of self allows humans to organize their experiences in a way that they are able to experience themselves as coherent, continuous beings. Paul Ricoeur (1991) as well as Elinor Ochs and Lisa Capps (1996), among many others, argue that the organization or production of a continuous and coherent sense of self is achieved through narrative interpretation of experience, as narrative provides a structure that allows to impose order on events that are otherwise disconnected, to

establish links between past, present, and imagined future, and to construct wholeness and unity out

of multiple and contradictory experiences. Narrative further provides an interface between self and

society; narrative serves to establish and interpret social relations, while the social context

constitutes the matrix within which narratives of self are constructed and enacted and within which

they acquire specific meanings. As self-experience and self-interpretation are embedded within

social relations, they are also entangled in the relations of power that structure the social context.

Dorinne Kondo points out that "some ways of being in the world" are always "more legitimate,

more rewarded, more recognized than others – as anyone in a marginal or minority position will

attest" (Kondo 1990:301) and calls for attention to the ways in which "our institutions, languages,

and social formations – schools, corporations, families, and meaningful cleavages such as class,

race, gender, and age – are vehicles for the disciplinary production of selves" (1990:305). Thus,

people's narrative constructions of themselves need to be understood as situated within particular

contexts and relationships that make possible or call for particular self-representations.

Given that "[i]dentity is not a fixed 'thing,' it is negotiated, open, shifting, ambiguous, the

result of culturally available meanings and open-ended, power-laden enactments of those meanings

in everyday situations" (Kondo 1990:24), the content of an interview can never be considered to

provide a definitive account of a person's understanding of her identity and experience. Identity

and experience are themselves not objective ontological facts, but the result of processes of

narrativization and interpretation (Ochs and Knapp 1992). Therefore, Jerome Bruner suggests, "life

as led is inseparable from life as told – or more bluntly, a life is not 'how it was' but how it was

interpreted and reinterpreted, told and retold" (1987:31). There is no impartial or complete 'truth'

about people and their lives that could be captured in an interview; at most, one can hope to

account for a 'moment' within continuous processes of people's making sense of their experience

and of how they are situated within social worlds. Yet, an interview cannot simply record such a

moment; rather, the interview situation, as a relatively artificial social context, produces a

particular performance of such a moment and actively influences procedures of reflection and

making sense. As Ruth Frankenberg notes in introducing her interview-based study of the ways in which race shapes the lives of white women in the United States: "An interview is not, in any simple sense, the telling of a life so much as it is an incomplete story angled toward my questions and each woman's ever-changing sense of self and of how the world works" (1993:41).

However, a recognition of the extent to which the 'ethnographic truth' one is able to put forward is "inherently partial – committed and incomplete" (Clifford 1986:7) need not lead to the conclusion that the results of interview-based research are arbitrary, reveal nothing beyond what went on in the interview situation itself, and cannot comment on existing social worlds.

The narratives people produce of themselves are not free-floating but draw on particular knowledges, conceptual frameworks, or "discursive repertoires" (Frankenberg 1993) provided by the sociocultural contexts in which narrators are situated and in relation to which they make sense of themselves. Their narratives of themselves, while not objective and stable, can be seen as specific windows into aspects of particular social worlds. As articulations of temporary subject positions they can provide insight into what kind of identities and subjectivities are constructed within particular social and historical contexts. As Jerome Bruner states with regard to life narratives: "Given their constructed nature and their dependence upon the cultural conventions and language usage, life narratives obviously reflect the prevailing theories about "possible lives" that are part of one's culture. Indeed, one important way of characterizing a culture is by the narrative models it makes available for describing the course of a life" (1987:15). Applying his argument to narratives of identity, such narratives can provide insight into concepts or models of identity employed by people situated in particular contexts.

In addition, to the extent that an interview-based study draws on several interviews with a range of interviewees, the understanding of a social world gained from individual interviews can be tested and deepened by reading various interviews with and against each other in order to see how each comments on the others and on the wider social and historical context which participants shared.

Yet, given that the viewpoints of both researchers and participants consist of "a mix of insight and blindness, reach and limitations, impartiality and bias," as Renato Rosaldo notes, "taken together they achieve neither omniscience nor a unified master narrative but complex understandings of ever-changing, multifaceted social realities" (1993:128).

Based on the above considerations about what kind of 'ethnographic truth' this interview-based study is able to offer, I suggest that the account I present in this thesis would best be understood not as an attempt at rendering something that is objectively given but as an incomplete and subjective narrativization and interpretation of the self-representations that were co-constructed by my interview partners and myself through our interactions in the interviewing process.

Of course, noting that both researcher and participants bring to the research limited and partial perspectives and co-construct understandings of social realities that necessarily remain incomplete does not absolve the researcher from taking full responsibility for the representation she produces. Starting from the awareness that one can never fully know another person and completely account for what they meant by something they said, setting out to produce what one hopes will be an adequate representation of others is a daunting endavour. Nevertheless, I agree with those who argue that, while we must be aware of the limitations to what we are able to perceive and know and of the partiality of any account we can produce, we must, at the same time, not allow ourselves to be paralyzed by this awareness or to escape into self-centered modes of reflexivity in which everything else disappears behind the problem of the researcher's own subjectivity. As Patti Lather suggests: "In an era of rampant reflexivity, just getting on with it may be the most radical action one can make" (1991:20). Donna Haraway (1991) further points out that a realization of the inherent limitations of any claims to truth and knowledge about the world must not be responded to with cynicism, but should rather be greeted for opening up questions about ways of knowing. "The knowing self," she notes, "is partial in all its guises, never finished, whole, simply there and original; it is always constructed and stitched together imperfectly, and *therefore*

able to join with another, to see together without claiming to be another" (1991:193; emphasis in the original). Against analytical traditions that proclaim to present unmediated accounts of the 'real' world from a disembodied perspective, projects of reaching a "view from above," she proposes a practice of connection that starts from owning one's view "from somewhere," as accounting for the 'real' world does not, she argues, "depend on a logic of 'discovery', but on a power-charged social relation of 'conversation'" (1991:198).

The account that follows brings together various partial visions, that of my interview partners and my own. I hope that my presentation of their views is open enough to allow for disagreement and different interpretations. Of course, I had ultimate control over how I 'stitched together' their various views and experiences. Yet, I wanted to avoid producing an account that simply uses interview excerpts to 'garnish' an argument that was developed at a distance from the concrete content of the interviews. My goal rather was to build my account on the women's words as much as possible. However, as I was getting down to the task, I soon realized that I could not include all the different experiences and viewpoints on all the different topics and issues that were brought up in the interviews and that I would have to make difficult and consequential decisions concerning what to feature and what to leave out.

As I wanted to hold on to my goal of giving much room to women's own words and drawing my discussion from these, I was left with two options: I could select a small number of interviews and address only these, or I could select one or two of the topics that featured prominently in all or most interviews and leave out the other issues. Because I considered the diversity in the views of the women I interviewed to be the most significant aspect of the interviews as a whole and because I wanted to honor the time and energy that each woman spared, selecting only a few interviews to draw on was not an acceptable solution.[15] Hence, I decided to

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[15] However, I eventually decided not to consider in this thesis the interviews with the women who came to Germany from Brazil and from Argentina. These two women approached questions of German national identity from the perspective of understanding themselves to be outsiders, as they professed to a Brazilian or Argentinean national identity respectively. The interviews with these two women focused

focus most of the discussion in this thesis on one issue. The history of National Socialism and the Holocaust, which is central to discussions of national identity in the German context in general, came up in all of the interviews, and most of my interview partners considered this to be one of the most or even *the* most crucial issue in relation to questions of German identity. The different ways in which my interview partners related to this history and interpreted its meaning in the present further provide a useful ground for a discussion of locational politics. Therefore, I decided to concentrate mainly on my interview partners' views on the history of National Socialism and the Holocaust.[16] However, before turning to these in chapter 4, I provide an overview of the other issues that my interview partners deemed relevant to a discussion of German national identity and of the range of views they put forward concerning these issues in chapter 3. The final chapter of this thesis takes up the different understandings of German national identity presented in chapters 3 and 4 and considers them in terms of what kinds of politics of location they imply or enable.

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largely on their views on these national identities and on comparisons between their experiences in Germany and in their countries of origin. While their views and experiences are relevant to the topic of my work, within the limits of this thesis I cannot adequately account for their specificities. My original plan had been to devote a chapter to the issue of multi-'racial'/multi-national coalition work, to which their views and experiences in this regard would have been very significant. However, as it turned out that less than half of all the women I interviewed had been involved in such contexts, I can only present a limited discussion of issues relating to coalition work (see chapter 5). Yet, I hope that I will be able to address the views and experiences these two women shared with me in another context at a later point.

[16] While this limited thematic focus allows me to feature a larger number of individual views on a particular issue and to give a better impression of the range of views women put forward, I still cannot represent all the women in the same depth. Some women are quoted to a much larger extent than others are. Particularly in cases where a number of women put forward very similar views, I do not address them all in the same detail but choose a few quotes as illustrations. My quoting some women more extensively than others should in no way be taken as a statement concerning the value of what individual women said. All of the interviews have informed this thesis, and their contribution cannot be measured by how often I refer to them explicitly.

Chapter 3
Realms of belonging: history, culture, nation, state

Introduction

This chapter will provide a broad outline of the topics and issues that my interview partners deemed relevant in discussing what being German meant to them. I will introduce these issues by way of putting forward short portraits of eight women I interviewed. These portraits are presented in the first person, as they consist of passages from the interview transcripts. I start with these portraits for three reasons: First, in being presented with literal quotations, rather than summarizing comments provided by myself, readers can obtain a more immediate impression of how these women talked about what being German meant to them. Second, whereas the subsequent chapter will focus on what individual women said in relation to a particular aspect of German national identity (the historical context), the portraits allow me to show that my interview partners understood the issue of national identity as multi-layered and contextual. And third, in putting together these eight portraits, I also seek to begin conveying an impression of the heterogeneity in my interview partners' approaches to the issue of German identity.

In selecting a number of interviews, and particular statements within these interviews, to be formed into portraits, my main goal was to introduce the range of topics we discussed and to demonstrate the diversity in women's views on these issues.[1] Going through all the transcripts several times, it became clear to me that no particular selection could possibly achieve more than to

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[1] Initially, I considered providing portraits of all the 27 women on the interviews with whom this thesis is based. However, I decided against that because of concerns that such a large number of portraits would present the reader with a veritable 'avalanche' of information and impressions, within which it would be difficult to orient oneself. In limiting myself to eight portraits, I was seeking to minimize the risk of such 'information overload' while still providing the reader with some substantial insight into the larger heterogeneous and multi-faceted picture that the interviews taken together present. These eight portraits are not representative of all the concerns and viewpoints that women formulated in the interviews. They rather serve as a starting point for discussing their various experiences and perspectives.

approximate an adequate representation of the heterogeneity within their experiences and opinions. In putting together the following eight portraits, I am making a first step towards capturing this diversity. The subsequent discussion in this and other chapters will provide further details and fill in some of the gaps that exist in this introductory illustration of the issues my interview partners grappled with in making sense of questions relating to national identity.

Reading these narratives with and against each other will provide insights into the historical, sociocultural, and political context in which these women thought through questions of German identity. At the same time, their narratives of what it means to be German are also marked by how they were positioned in multiple and intersecting social relations, most prominently ethnicity or race, geographical origin, gender, age, religious background (even if secularized), and political orientation.[2] These narratives do not represent slight variations of some 'master-narrative' of Germanness. Instead, the different positions these women occupied in contemporary German society as well as in relation to dominant conceptions of Germanness shaped their particular experiences and had profound effects on how they constructed and negotiated their identity as Germans.

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[2] Two more factors usually considered crucial in approaches to identities and social positions as anchored within a nexus of relations, namely class and sexual orientation, were rarely brought up by my interview partners when they discussed the issue of national identity. While women who identified as lesbian, bisexual, or queer spoke about what these identities meant to them, often in relation to telling me about what feminism meant to them, they did not establish a direct connection between their sexual preference/identity and their national identity. Only one woman made a statement in which she brought the two issues together (see chapter 4). The issue of class was only mentioned by a very small number of women. And, as with the issue of sexual orientation, these women mostly did not explicitly discuss class in relation to what it means to be German. I am hesitant to draw any conclusions from the fact that most of my interview partners seemed to see issues of class and sexual orientation as being of marginal or no relevance to discussions of national identity. For one thing, it might be a coincidence that none of the women I spoke with gave greater importance to these factors in dealing with questions of national identity; interviewing more or other women might have resulted in a different picture. Furthermore, the fact that these women predominantly did not establish an explicit connection between their socioeconomic status or their sexual orientation and their attitudes towards questions of national identity does not provide sufficient evidence that these factors have no bearing on how individuals position themselves towards the nation. It might have been possible to find some indication for such connections by looking for similarities in what women with a particular socioeconomic background or sexual identity said concerning issues of national identity. However, the results of such an investigation would have been rather speculative. Therefore, I have decided against such an approach and will base my analysis of connections between understandings of national identity and women's social and cultural positions on what can be deduced from the statements made in the interviews.

Faced with the task of arranging the portraits in any particular sequence, I had considered grouping together women who shared a certain background, for instance, West Germans and East Germans. While this might have helped readers in appreciating how certain similarities in the narratives relate to a shared background, it could have distracted from noting similarities that exist across different backgrounds. Therefore, I decided against a deliberate grouping of these narratives and opted for a random order. Whereas there surely is more resonance between certain of these narratives than between others, each of them provides a particular perspective on the larger context in which these women articulated their sense of national identity. In abstaining from organizing the portraits according to how these women were situated in particular social and geopolitical relations, I do not mean to downplay the significance of such positions. I rather want to avoid reducing their views to mere effects of such positions. How a woman was situated within various such relations and what she made of that position – how she negotiated it in relation to others and in conceiving of herself – are two different things.

Particular themes and issues keep reoccurring in these eight narratives as well as in the statements of other women I interviewed. While I will discuss these in detail after presenting the portraits, the following brief overview might be helpful to readers as a map for orientation. Of all the issues that my interview-partners deemed relevant to a discussion of what it means to be German, the historical context, particularly the legacy of National Socialism, was definitely the most important one to the majority of these women. Another dominant theme was the individual's implication in, or relation to, such structures and constructions as *Volk*, nation, and the state; that is, questions of status and privilege or exclusion. Many women further spoke about being German in terms of a particular socialization or cultural mould. They referred to values and norms that they had internalized and pointed to language as constituting a specific universe of meaning and a site of social interaction. And, finally, connected to all these themes and issues are questions of belonging, not just in structural terms, but also in terms of inclusion in or exclusion from an 'imagined' community. In talking about being German, my interview partners, wittingly or unwittingly,

constructed or reproduced certain notions of Germanness as well as other collective identities. And in constructing these notions they also positioned themselves in relation to them, that is, inside or outside various collectivities.

Thus, I suggest that these women understood Germanness as a question of belonging in cultural terms, in historical terms, in terms of an association with a people or nation and a nation-state, and in relation to an imagined community. These are distinct but not separate realms; rather, in many regards, they are closely connected with each other. (For instance, views on the German nation-state were often articulated in relation to the history of that state. Equally, reflections on history play into perceptions of German culture and society today.)

But for now I want to postpone further discussion of these different realms of belonging and turn to the presentation of the portraits. After each portrait, I provide brief summarizing comments. These are not intended to constitute comprehensive analyses; rather, they serve to recapitulate in broad strokes some of the territory covered in each narrative and to highlight some significant points that will later be discussed in more detail.

Eight perspectives on German identity

Julia

was 55 years old, had grown up in the former GDR and lived in East Germany. She was white and Christian-secularized. She had studied history and currently worked as project manager for a women's center.

> "I always saw national identity as negative, I always saw it against the background of fascism and the crimes committed by the German people. It is a difficult issue; I was not myself part of that, but I cannot step out of that origin, I am born into this and so I am part of it now. Well, there was also the antifascist resistance; these people provided a kind of role model with which I could identify. But overall, German was something burdened, something negative. I could identify more easily with the GDR and also this attempt at creating an alternative, a society that would never allow fascism to rise again. We can debate about the extent to which this was realized. But I find it quite difficult to identify with the united Germany. I never wanted that, it is not my country. There is this line, I don't

know whom it's from: 'I love Germany so much, I want to have as many Germanies as possible.' [laughs] So I would rather we still had two German states. That would have kept a limit on this attitude of 'we are a great power once again.' But that's what we have now, and I don't like it at all.

I was not in the opposition movement, but I experienced the time around and after October 1989 as really exciting. There was a real sense of possibility, a window of opportunity for constructive change. But my ideal was to change the GDR from within, to achieve a truly democratic socialism, and a truly plural society. I wanted more pluralism than what existed in the West. I had studied that society and my job allowed me to travel there. So I somewhat knew what the FRG was like, and that was not my ideal. I was against the travel prohibitions, but the way in which the opening of the Wall occurred, that was really the end of the GDR. After that, there wasn't much of a chance for other developments than unification. And I felt sick in the face of the slogan 'We are one people.' I really liked 'We are the people.' That I could identify with, a democratic alternative to these authoritarian structures. But when they started waving the FRG-flag and this 'We are one people,' that made me sick. I could not identify with the Germany that was called for. And I left the country sticker on my car that said 'GDR.' I thought, the GDR isn't going to go under that fast. Let's see how long the sticker takes to whither away.

And with that sticker on my car, I went to visit my parents. That was in the summer of 1990. My father had been a party-functionary. He had served the GDR with the same sense of discipline with which he had served Hitler. He was always 100 percent about it. We were not allowed to watch Western TV programs or listen to Western radio. He never concerned himself with the West. That way, he could stick to a simplified worldview, this thinking in terms of friends and enemies. However, after the Wende, it did not take him long to unpack what he had locked away when he became a loyal servant to the GDR. He almost immediately regained an identification with that Germany. And he is sitting there on his couch and watches the national soccer team play and screams for Germany. That really baffled me. He had been much more identified with the ideology of the GDR than I had been. And then I realized what was going on, and I said to them, 'You two grew up in Germany, then you lived in the GDR, and now you are back in Germany.' And my father said, 'And that's where we always wanted to be.' That was a real blow. So I said, 'And I did not want to be there.' I lived my whole life in the GDR, that's where my personal development took place, my positive and my negative experiences, that's the country I was at home in. I still get very emotional when I think about that, when I realize that my whole life... well... [Cries] ... when I realize that I am somewhere totally different now, where I feel alien, where I am not at home... And my father starts bugging me about the GDR-sticker on my car, 'You and your GDR-nostalgia, would you please take note that the GDR is over and done with!' And I responded, 'That the GDR is over and done with, that's our fault. That's not a question of destiny. You and I, among many others, have to take responsibility for the GDR's failure.' And that's how I see it. We have to ask ourselves what we could have done differently, where we were not critical enough, where we were opportunistic. These are the questions that preoccupy me. And I cannot identify with that Germany. I identify with certain people, from East and West, with whom I share views and ideas about politics and society. But I don't

identify with this society that we have now. And, frankly, it pisses me off that it is my generation which is trying to dispose of the past, which likes to pretend that this is all over now and puts the case for that so-called 'normalization.' And then they go off to war again [against Yugoslavia]. It's awful, it makes me sick. My generation should really know better than to evoke this great power stuff once again, to consider national chauvinism acceptable again. We were not part of Nazi Germany, but we could still see the ruins."

Julia described a profound sense of alienation that had taken hold of her since the demise of the GDR and German unification. She could not identify with the united Germany and was struggling with feelings of uprootedness or displacement, as the society with which she had been identified, with which her personal development and her life experiences were entwined, had been superseded by a different kind of society. Thus, she had lost the frame of reference against which she had oriented herself and in which she had felt at home. In the wake of the transformation of her life world, she also experienced ruptures in her personal relations, as some people around her, for example, her father, related to the new society in very different ways than she did. Her experience was being devalued, not only by the general post-unification demolition of the GDR-experience, but also by people with whom she had shared that experience.

Part of why she could not identify with the united Germany was that she had always seen Germanness as negative because for her it was inextricably linked to the memory of Nazi Germany and the crimes committed by Germans. She could identify more easily with the GDR because she saw it as making a positive attempt at creating an alternative to the fascist past. She conceded that the *"extent to which this was realized"* was debatable, and she acknowledged that the demise of the GDR was the result of internal deficits and failures, for which she saw herself as sharing responsibility. Still, she remained committed to some of the GDR's premises and was critical of the united Germany's politics, particularly attempts at 'normalization.'

Anka

was 37 years old, had grown up and lived in West Germany. She was white and Christian-socialized and worked as a teacher at a special needs school.

"First and foremost I see myself as a radical-feminist lesbian. But I have other identities as well. And, to some degree, I see contradictions within these identities, or I feel uncertain about some of them. That's mostly in relation to national identity. As a privileged white German... that I find difficult sometimes. I only started to become conscious of that during my leftist politicization. At some point,

racism became a central topic. Racism in general and also my own racist attitudes. My identity as a white, privileged person, and after that my position as a white, privileged German. This was mostly in relation to issues of guilt and responsibility with regard to National Socialism. But first was the issue of whiteness. I mostly looked at it on an international level. I rather wanted to distance myself from Germany. Which, to some extent, was also an attempt to circumvent dealing with that responsibility. That's of course the easiest thing to do, to just make a step to the side. I did have this tendency to think or say that national identity was not an issue for me. But then I began to realize that I am fooling myself, that I cannot deal with it that way, because... well, because of that responsibility. Because I am German, I am socialized as a German. And my grandfather had forced laborers in his factory; that's something I have to confront myself with. I cannot simply say, 'I have nothing to do with all that, I don't see myself as German.' For me, that was, or still is, a process of looking critically at myself and asking myself, where am I German, what does it mean to be German? And I never had a German identity that I didn't find problematic. Until I was 20 years old, I was not political at all, but I have never been proud to be German. And I think that National Socialism is a major factor in that; also in that I didn't want to confront myself with my own identity as a German. It is much easier to just distance oneself from that. But that doesn't change the fact that you're implicated in it, even though you might not always be aware of it.

So what does it mean? I think I am German in terms of my socialization, you know, I am overly punctual and extremely reliable. I don't have the talent for organizing that Germans are supposed to have. But there are these typically German 'virtues,' and I have internalized them to some degree, even though I might look at that critically. But I certainly don't have a sense of connectedness to all Germans. For example, I was not enthusiastic about unification, quite the opposite. That hysteria made me feel sick, and all that hypocrisy and ideology. To me, the GDR was a different country, a foreign country, one with a wall around it. But then there are things like the arson attacks and other racist attacks, the increase in racism and national chauvinism since unification. I mean, I'm a leftist, I don't identify with the people who do that kind of thing or agree with it. But I do feel some kind of responsibility because these attacks are happening in the country I live in. So I share a responsibility to build up resistance against these tendencies.

But racism is a difficult issue. Sometimes I don't know how I should behave or act. I certainly don't want to act in racist ways. But then... well, no real contact develops. I know a few Turkish and Kurdish women, and I would like to find out more about them, about their experience. But then I don't know how to ask, because I don't want them to feel like I am reducing them to their national or cultural origin or I am imposing my curiosity on them and exploit them in some way. I never know how far I may go with that, and therefore I don't ask the questions in the first place. I don't know how to overcome that. I guess feelings of guilt play a role in that. When I am in contact with migrants or black Germans, I am more aware of my privileges, and I would like to be able to deal with that situation in a constructive way, but most often I feel rather awkward and insecure. And I want that to change, which means that I have to confront myself with the sources of my discomfort. So my motivation to deal with these issues is the discomfort I feel as a privileged, white German. I know I cannot resolve that

status, but that's where my motivation comes from. And it's also about justice.
When I look at myself in an international context, I know that, whether I like it or
not, I am on the side of the perpetrators. I am not a victim. But even though I am
on the side of privilege, that injustice hurts me too. I want that situation to change.
And I would be happy to give up my privileges if that would result in more justice
in the world. So I think that progressive politics has to be international in focus. At
the same time you must not pretend that you're beyond this construct of the nation.
Even though you might be able to deconstruct it on an intellectual level, it's still
active on other levels. And you have to confront yourself with that in order to work
towards change."

Anka had wanted to distance herself from her national association, and she saw the legacy

of National Socialism as *"major factor in that."* In avoiding to confront herself with her identity as

a German, she had also been circumventing a confrontation with issues of guilt and responsibility

in relation to that legacy. Yet, she had come to be critical of her former attitude and now

considered it important to acknowledge that she was implicated in national and international

structures, and in a way that placed her on the *"side of privilege,"* as well as that she was

"socialized as a German." While she did not have a positive sense of connection to Germanness or

to all Germans and was committed to antiracist and antinationalist politics with an international

focus, she recognized a need to critically examine how her location and socialization as a German,

particularly a white German, had shaped her and how her own discomfort about that location

played into and affected her interactions with others. For the purpose of developing a progressive

politics, she considered it not sufficient to only aim at deconstructing national identity, but she

thought that there also needed to be an effort of coming to terms with its effects on oneself.

Karina

was 33 years old, had grown up and lived in the GDR until she moved to West Germany in

1988, where she still lived. She was Afro-German, a Protestant priest, and currently headed a

section of the women's department in the Protestant Church.

"When I was six years old, I began to realize that I am of color. My mother had
never mentioned that to me. So it was a rude awakening when I started going to
school and the other children teased me and called me names. For the longest time
I did not understand that this was about me. I realized that the other children had
some problem with me, but I did not understand what it was because I did not see
myself as of color. I tried so hard, I wanted to be accepted. And I had internalized
this notion that German equals white, and so I split myself off from the fact that I
am of color. I rejected it, I mean, nobody taught me to accept it. When I came

home and told my mother that the kids at school had called me 'Negro doll' ['Negerpuppe'], my mother just said, 'Why? You are white.' Well, my mother is white. My father is Ghanaian. I never met him, which is typical for that time. I guess this was a shameful thing for my mother. A few years after I was born, she married my white stepfather. And he was very nice to me, but there was a line that we never overstepped. He never dared to talk to me about the fact that I am of color. Although, I felt that he acknowledged it, knew what it must mean for me, and tried to look out for me. Without saying it he signaled me that I shouldn't feel ashamed for my color. My mother just denied it. She still does that, she doesn't acknowledge the fact that I am not white. And that is... there is something like despise in that. But she is my mother, what can you do? [Cries] ... I have two white siblings and they struggle with that, too. They recognize and accept me as a person of color, I can share that with them, and they listen to me when I need to talk about it. They also felt the pain and all that came with that taboo. So, for a long time, I couldn't accept my identity as a woman of color. My color couldn't be part of my identity. Still, people constantly asked me about it. But I thought that I had to become white. For me, whiteness was safety, confidence, belonging. I felt that I always had to be the best everything I did, so that people would accept me, would realize that I am actually really white, you know? [Laughs] Which is so grotesque, so... it's painful. It was only in my twenties that I truly began to acknowledge the fact that I am of color, that I could say to myself, this is part of me, I cannot deny it. It took a lot of tears, a lot of pain, but at some point I realized that I do not have to feel shame for it, that I do belong too, not only the others.

In the GDR, being German was mostly framed as 'we are the better Germans,' you know, 'we are the ones who resisted the Nazis. The murderers, the fascists, they are all in the FRG.' Of course, that was not true. But it was in people's heads. In my head as well. And when I came here in 1988, it was not talked about at all. There was this speechlessness, nobody seemed to want to talk about what this history meant for them or what it meant to be German. People did not want to think of themselves as German. I got the impression that I was totally conservative because I thought of myself as German. And I don't think you can deal with this history simply by saying that you are not German. You have to accept this as your own history in order to come to a constructive position.

When people ask me where I come from, I say that I am German. I say that because I identify with what we have here. But most people don't say, 'I am German.' They say, 'I live here,' or, 'I come from here,' or something like that. Or they say, 'I'm not German, leave me alone with that!' They don't want to identify with this country. And I am sure that this is so because of National Socialism. But they belong here anyway, whether they acknowledge it or not, whereas I have to prove that I belong, because I look different. It was like that in the GDR and it's the same thing in the FRG. When I came to the FRG, I did not have a passport, I was stateless. And I had to prove that I am German. In my case, that is not so easy because I don't know who my father is. So I had to prove that my mother is German and that I don't have any contact with my father. That was the one time that someone literally said to me, 'Prove that you are a German!' People often think that I am a Turk, and then I have to explain that I am not a Turk but an Afro-German.

> *Well, so it took me a long time to understand that there is nothing wrong with being of color. But that doesn't mean that the struggle is over. I live as an Afro-German woman among mostly white people – that's my life, everyday. For example, in my work that means that I am sitting there with white feminists who feel awkward or ashamed and don't know how to deal with me. And I don't get it: They had the guts to stand up against men, but they are afraid of me! I mean, what's there to be afraid of? I think what they are really afraid of is the idea that they could be perpetrators in some way. They tell me, 'Well, Karina, we like you, we don't see you as black. And we try everything to get along well, and you spoil the peace by insisting on something that is really not important.' They feel like I am declaring war when I simply want them to acknowledge that they are white and I am not. And so they make me the perpetrator, the bad one. They fall back into the role of victims, because when you are a victim, you cannot be a perpetrator. They want to go back into that comfy little hole and say, 'I am not guilty, I am a victim.' And I am tired of being told that I am stirring strife. I am tired of being told that I am the problem. I want to stand up for who I am, and I am no longer willing to excuse myself for the fact that I mess up the simplified picture they all cling to. I hope that they will come to see it as chance that they have an Afro-German with them, a chance to reflect and grow together."*

Karina emphasized a number of times how difficult it had been for her to come to terms with the fact that she was of color. In a society where her skin color marked her as an 'outsider,' she was faced with constant questioning of her status as well as with harassment and given the message that she did not belong. Her mother 'solved' the issue for herself by denying the fact that her daughter was not white. For a long time, Karina herself could not accept herself as a person of color, had nobody to help her with this, and thus tried to split herself off from the fact that she was of color and to convince herself and the people around her that she was *"really actually white."* Only in her twenties did she stop rejecting it and began to claim it as part of herself as a well as to claim a sense of belonging, of being German that included her identification as a person of color.

Whereas Karina identified as a German, *"with what we have here,"* her voice took on a note of sarcasm and mockery when she imitated (white) Germans as saying, *"I'm not German, leave me alone with that!"* She pointed out that they belonged anyway, while she was confronted with challenges to her claim of belonging because of the color of her skin. She thought that this disassociation was a way of avoiding a confrontation with the history of National Socialism, and she criticized it for being an impediment to dealing with this history in a constructive way.

Karina's perception of the white feminists she worked with as feeling awkward and ashamed around her resonates with Anka's description of feeling inhibited and uncertain about how to approach her Kurdish and Turkish acquaintances. Both Anka and Karina identified feelings of guilt as a factor in such attitudes. Anka saw a need to confront herself with the sources of her

discomfort in order to change her attitude, which corresponds to Karina's wish that these white women would stop seeing her as responsible for their discomfort, come out of their *"comfy little hole,"* and welcome the *"chance to reflect and grow together."*

Wiebke

was 49 years old, had grown up and lived in West Germany. She was white and Christian (Protestant). She had studied history and education and worked for a women-assault helpline.

> *"Coming to terms with the history of Nazism and its legacy has often been a central theme in my life. It comes up again and again. When I was a child, I wanted to find out about what had been going then. I wondered why my family never talked about it. All I heard was that my grandfather had been held in Russia as a prisoner of war. And they made it sound like that made him a hero. At the same time I was reading books like Anne Frank's diary and other books dealing with the suffering of Jews. They had quite an effect on me and raised all these questions, you know, what was going then? How could this people do such things? Kill children, kill women, mass murder, concentration camps – and nobody wants to have known about it? But I did not get answers. The silence in my family, that was the worst part. Because I did not know how to deal with this. And early on I developed strong feelings of guilt and shame. That's why it was very important for me to deal with these issues. And I also want to do my share in taking on that responsibility. It's bad enough that my parents deny this. And I have to confront them and say to them, this is not okay, we do have to take responsibility for what happened. And I as part of the next generation also have to deal with that. I am part of this society and I cannot pass on this task to somebody else. I later studied history, and I also always looked at how this relates to my own role as a woman. What share did women have in that, you know, in the 'Order of Mothers' [Mutter-Orden], producing boys for the war, these things. Then there were others who were raped. But I think it's important to clarify how women contributed to what happened, where they do share responsibility. And also to clarify the responsibility of the men in going into a war and wiping out other cultures or turning them into an object. I find that there are parallels to what women experience in this culture. Meaning that, what they do with other cultures, they are also doing with women and children. It's just a different level.*
>
> *When I think about being German, I think about questions of responsibility: How much responsibility do I share for what is happening in this country or for what this country is doing internationally? Particularly now after unification, there is all this talk about the different role Germany should take on internationally. I don't know if I would say that Germany is now a 'normal' nation. This constant talk about the nation makes me uncomfortable. But I find the issue of responsibility difficult to grasp because it is mostly men who get to make the big decisions. They decide whether this country joins in the war against Yugoslavia and things like that. So I find myself kind of divided. Still, I think that I cannot simply distance myself from that. I am of German origin and I have to face*

that and deal with that. But I have problems with the term 'German.' I would rather say 'European.' And then of course I have white skin, which means that I have certain privileges in this world because of that. But 'German'... you see, I don't like to be confronted with these stereotypes, punctuality, pigheadedness, achievement-orientation, intolerance toward other cultures. I have always tried to seek out other ways of living. And that makes it difficult to see myself as a German woman. And I don't know what I should be proud of or why I should want to be German. I rather dislike it. I don't think of myself in categories like nationality. I don't have a German identity and I don't want one. But I acknowledge that, to some degree, I was shaped by this culture and also that I have certain privileges.

One area of my life in which these issues are relevant is my work. Some of the women who call our helpline are migrants, and there are also more and more migrant women working within our regional network of helplines. Recently, we have begun to discuss the issue of racism. We did not get very far with that yet, but I think it's very good that we're starting to deal with such issues. And I want to learn more about that and how it affects women's lives. At the same time, I find myself somewhat split again. I mean, migrant men can also be perpetrators, they also rape women. Right now, we have a number of Albanians from Kosovo in the community, among them women who are affected by that. So I kind of divide that. For me, there is a world of women with whom I engage, discuss, from whom I learn. And then there is a world of men, which is spread over the whole world, and which continues using particular mechanisms to suppress women. My solidarity definitely lies with the women."

Wiebke saw her relationship to the affairs of the nation as ambiguous. In some regards she considered herself implicated in the nation and as having to share responsibility for its history and its current dealings. Yet, she saw this responsibility as mediated, or possibly diminished, by her status in terms of gender, as she considered the power *"to make the big decisions"* to lie mostly in the hands of men. In talking about German history, Wiebke pointed out that women did contribute to and share responsibility for the crimes committed under National Socialism, but she then spoke of parallels between how they were treated by the men of their own nation or culture and what these men inflicted on *"other cultures."* (It is not clear to me from her statement whether she considered women as sharing responsibility for that which the men of their nation inflicted on other cultures.) Wiebke described finding herself divided with regard to the degree to which women are accountable for the affairs of the nation, but she acknowledged that she could not simply distance herself from these. She felt a similar sense of ambiguity in relation to the issue of racism. While she acknowledged that her white skin implied *"certain privileges in this world,"* her interest in confronting herself with issues of racism was directly related to her work with migrant women, and she found herself *"somewhat split again"* with regard to this issue in relation to men, as *"migrant men can also be perpetrators."* Wiebke explained that she divided between a *"world of women"* and a *"world of men"* and that she was focused on the interests of women.

At the same time as Wiebke pointed out that she could not simply opt out of her national association, she emphasized that she did not relate to it in any positive sense. What she associated with Germanness was mostly negative, and she was trying to realize other things in her life. She explained that she did not have nor want a German identity, she would rather call herself a European.

Laura

was 27 years old, had grown up in the GDR and lived in East Germany. She was white, Christian-secularized, and currently studied towards a diploma in social work/education.

> *"I think identities are a messy business. Locking myself or my experiences into categories doesn't make much sense to me. I would rather call these categories into question. For example, I have problems with the category 'lesbian.' I prefer the term 'queer' because it leaves more room for changes and variations of experience. When it comes to being German, though, I find it's more clear-cut; it's just a fact. To me, being German means that I have a German passport and that I was socialized by German parents in this particular context. And I speak German, the language is also important in that regard. I am not particularly happy about being German, but I wouldn't say that I am outright unhappy about it either. When I was younger, I used to have more of a problem with it. A lot of that had to do with National Socialism. I used to think, well, I see how most Germans deal with that past, and it makes me angry. It makes me not want to have anything to do with them, not want to belong to them. But it's not that easy. I cannot deny that I am German. And living with the history of National Socialism is an essential part of my cultural identity. But for a while I was sort of trying to cut myself off from that belonging. In a way, I identified with the victims of National Socialism. I mean, I had it clear that I wasn't really a victim. So it was a bit weird that I would identify with the victims. However, I think I also did it as a form of opposition to all the many people who identify with the perpetrators and excuse them. And I was really happy about having a grandmother who is Polish. That was important to me, that was a kind of weird calculation on my part, 'at least I am not totally German.' I felt good about that, like it was an exoneration. By now I think it's really odd that I needed that.*
>
> *However, history was not the only reason why I wanted to distance myself from Germanness. It was also because of certain Germans, whom I find kind of sickening, to whom I did not want to belong. So I sought to set myself off against them by denying this Germanness and overemphasizing the fact that I have a Polish grandmother. I'm probably still doing that, although not to the extent as back then. And I used to feel embarrassed when I traveled abroad and encountered other German tourists. Which is kind of odd, but there still is a level of discomfort. Same with this united Germany, again and again I am surprised at how much of a matter of course that has become. Particularly with that new government, things that would have been inconceivable just years or months ago seem normal all of a*

sudden. That they would send troops to fight against Yugoslavia, for example. It seems like there is no development behind these changes; it's just facts being created. Just as with unification. I was definitely against that. But there was a lot of stuff going on in my life then. I was seventeen and had just moved away from my parents and to a different city. So these events overlapped and are mixed up in my memory. To some extent, I was more busy with myself and other things. But one of my most vivid memories is that of the demonstrators shouting 'Germany, united fatherland' ['Deutschland einig Vaterland'], that was terrible. I was fine with there being two Germanies. I wanted reforms, but not unification. At the time, it would have made more sense to me to unify with the Poles, or the Czechs and Slovaks. I felt much closer to them, I knew them much better. West Germany was rather strange and foreign, and I did not want to have a whole lot do with it.

But, all in all, I think I have begun to make peace with my national identity. Not that I am proud of it or something like that. I still think that the concept of the nation is something that needs to be called into question. Particularly when a nation is ethnically defined, as is the case with the German nation. But you cannot simply say that you have nothing to do with it. So I kind of made peace with it. I no longer endeavor to be permanently unpunctual, for example. I no longer have the attitude, 'punctuality is a German virtue and therefore I hate punctuality because I don't want to be German.' By now I even do something I would never have done a few years ago: When I am abroad, I no longer let it pass when people swear at me because I am German. Until recently, I would have submitted to that because I thought, 'I am German and I am burdened.' Now I find that too simple. My self-understanding has changed in that regard. I no longer accept it when people reduce me to my being German. It's something I am, but it's not the only thing about me. There are many other things as well. I am no longer running away from my national identity; still, it is not solely definitive of who I am."

While, at the time of the interview, Laura considered being German to be *"just a fact"* in terms of that she had a German passport and was of German parentage, she had wanted to cut herself off from that belonging when she was younger. This was because she did not want to have anything to do with certain Germans, for example, those Germans who she saw as identified with the Nazi perpetrators and as excusing them. Seeking to set herself in opposition to these Germans, she identified with the victims of Nazism, and she also gave much emphasis to the fact that one of her grandmothers was Polish, so at least she was not *"totally German."* But, by the time of the interview, she had started to *"make peace with [her] national identity."* That did not mean that she related to the idea of the German nation in a positive sense; she rather thought that this concept needed to be called into question, particularly in its ethnic definition. However, she no longer felt the need to distance herself from anything German or to avoid behaving in ways that she saw as stereotypically German. At the same time, she no longer accepted it when someone extended negative views of Germans onto her without taking more of her as a person into consideration. As

she was coming to terms with her national association as *"just a fact,"* she could actually start to claim distance from certain aspects of Germanness to which she had remained tied while she was still seeking to disassociate herself from Germanness in total.

Laura had been opposed to unification. She described a continuous sense of surprise at seeing how much of a matter of course the united Germany had become. The social and political changes appeared to her almost as coming from out of thin air, like there was no development behind them, *"just facts being created."* Yet, while Laura seemed to feel some distance to the new society and its politics, she did not point to a sense of alienation or displacement like Julia did. Unification occurred at a point in Laura's life when she was already faced with major changes, and it did not represent a singular rupture of the kind of magnitude it had for Julia.

Dilek

was 27 years old, had grown up and lived in West Germany. She was a daughter of Turkish migrants, and she described herself as an atheist. She currently studied towards a combined Master's degree in European ethnology and German literature and worked part-time as a sales consultant.

> *"Up until a few years ago I still had a Turkish passport. And, therefore, it seemed self-evident to the world that I was a Turk. I guess I also sometimes took that for granted, although it never really worked for me. But it seemed fairly clear, I am a 'guestworker-child' ['Gastarbeiterkind'], a foreigner who lives in Germany. That's how others see me, and so I saw myself that way. But there was always something about that which did not feel right. Of course, there was also something derogatory in that. And I certainly had many negative experiences, particularly as a child and a teenager, because I am not as light-skinned. People see that and automatically push you in a certain corner. And the older I got, the more I realized that I don't like that, I don't like the role that I am assigned.*
>
> *I was born in Istanbul but came to Germany when I was a baby. I went to kindergarten and school in this country, and I study here. I hardly know Turkey. I see my parents as Turks, but I don't feel like I am a Turk. And when I began to cut myself loose from my parents, there were certain conflicts, although we get along really well now. They accept that I am living my life in a different way than they live theirs. I think that the problems we had were really just the regular puberty stuff, normal and necessary. However, there are many people here who don't see it that way. They see it as a cultural conflict: 'you're a Turk, but you grew up in Germany, so you're suffering because you are stuck between different worlds.' But that's not how I see it. These expressions, 'sitting between chairs,' 'stuck between worlds,' I don't like them. They give a pathological sound to the simple fact of having experienced more than culture. But that's not an in-between, it's more like,*

well, you have had different kinds of influences, and that created something particular, neither strictly German nor strictly Turkish. That's how I would look at it; it's based on the two sources, but it's something new. So I don't have a problem with it. It's certainly not some pathological state, I am not schizophrenic.

But the question of origins... I still feel vulnerable around that. When people meet me and ask me, 'Where are you from?' – that's a really stupid question. I always have to wonder about the motives behind that question. It might sound harmless, like genuine interest even. But what they are really saying is, 'you don't look like us, you must be from somewhere else, and therefore you will never belong to us.' And when I answer, 'I come from [city in West Germany],' they say, 'No, not that, before, where do you really come from?' Or they take a more subtle route and ask about my name, 'Where does your name come from? Ah, Turkish, so you are a Turk.' And then I have that word ringing in my ear – 'I am a Turk, I am different, I am dark, I don't belong here.'

I got lots of stupid lines, particularly when I was younger. So I tried to be extra cool. And language was really important in that sense. I don't have an emotional relationship to the German language, but it was certainly important for me to speak it very well to be able to fight back against verbal assaults. And I wanted to belong, I wanted to take part in everything, even that stupid Christmas stuff. I even felt ashamed because I did not know what Christmas was. I wanted to know about it so that I wouldn't seem ignorant. I wanted people to see me as German.

And these people, feminists or others, who say they don't want to be German: they don't want to belong, but they do. And at the same time, they won't let others belong, people like me. They keep us out and give us the feeling that they are still better than we are. It doesn't matter how I see myself, for most people I remain a Turk. When I got into leftist and feminist circles, I first thought that I had finally hooked up with people who do not care about how I look or who my parents are. But that wasn't quite true. It was more this weird positive racism thing. My origins were given a positive value and, initially, that made me blind to a lot of things. They all thought of themselves as antiracist, but I don't want to know the real reason why most of them befriended me. I guess I provided the perfect surface on which they could project their ideas of the revolutionary subject, 'triple oppression,' all that stuff. They probably felt good about having a migrant woman in the group, but I am not sure if they ever took me serious at all. Perhaps they only let me contribute to the discussions because they thought, 'Oh, a migrant woman is saying something, so we let her finish, even though we know that it's really not important what she has to say.' And I was always supposed to be the expert on 'my' issues, like migration, Islam, etc. These were the issues on which I was heard, not so much on other issues, like I couldn't be knowledgeable in other regards. But I am not religious at all and I don't know much about Islam. Still, you're seen as an expert, because that's where they think you belong. So I withdrew from that scene and, sure enough, most people did not talk to me anymore when they saw me. I wasn't useful anymore.

The nation is certainly not a positive concept for me. Nations are always based on exclusions. So when I say that I am German, I don't say it in order to set myself apart from others. But I am German in the sense that this society has shaped me. I finally applied for the German passport because you're really at a

disadvantage if you don't have it. There is all this bureaucracy you have to deal with as a foreigner. You can't get a student loan, that kind of stuff. So I did it for functional reasons. Taking on German citizenship hasn't changed me as a person or hasn't changed my life in social terms. It just makes life a little easier. And why should I have the Turkish passport? I know comparatively little about Turkey. I grew up here, I live here, I belong here. Yes, I am a German. The only difference between me and most other Germans is that my parents came here from another country and my skin is darker. I don't have a problem with being German, I have a problem with the fact that such differences are given meaning, are given value. That's the problem with Germanness. "

At several points during the interview, Dilek talked about incidents in which she had been coming up against others' definitions of her and her experience. Whether her conflicts with her parents were perceived as cultural rather than generational conflicts, whether majority-Germans were trying to find out her 'real' origin, as her appearance and her name did not fit with their idea of Germanness, or whether she was assigned, or supposed to be an expert on, certain topics by the leftists and feminists with whom she was associated, since these were seen as 'her' issues – in all these incidents, members of the dominant group in Germany were imposing their ideas about who she was on her. The message she got was that she was different and, therefore, did not belong. She was not being taken for how she understood herself: *"It doesn't matter how I see myself, for most people I remain a Turk. "*

Dilek saw herself as influenced by both Turkish and German culture, as shaped by two sources that have joined together into something that is new, not simply the sum of the two parts. But she had her formative experiences in Germany and knew comparatively little about Turkey. In taking on German citizenship, she was not changing in any way. but she was seeking to no longer be faced with the discrimination that her former legal status had implied. Her change of citizenship status was only reflecting what was already a fact: *"I live here. I grew up here, I belong here. "* In contrast to those (majority-)Germans who do not want to see themselves as German, Dilek stated that she did not have a problem with being German, she had a problem with the exclusions that the dominant notion of Germanness was being based on. Much like Karina, Dilek pointed out that those Germans who denounced their Germanness belonged anyway, while she was defined as an 'outsider,' regardless of her sense of belonging.

Kris

was 33 years old, had grown up and lived in West Germany. She was white and Christian-socialized, had a Master's degree in modern languages, and was currently unemployed.

"National identity is a topic that I find somewhat difficult to talk about. It's a touchy issue. I come from a particular leftist tradition where this was really a non-issue. Any sort of self-reflection was kind of suspect. You as a person were not important, the 'cause' was important. Concerning yourself with your own ego was seen as petty bourgeois. So questions of identity were not discussed; maybe except for being a communist or, and that would already be stretching it, being a feminist. But everything else, for example, being German, to brood over that would have been considered bourgeois. Of course, the concept of the nation was to be rejected. At the same time, I think that our motivations are not totally independent from national origins. But I find it difficult. Not only do I feel somewhat uncomfortable talking about it, it even feels uncomfortable just to think about it, you know? Because you think, perhaps I will find some suppressed nationalistic feelings or thoughts. And you might be talking about a challenge to deal with these things, but then you do rather little to actually deal with them. You rather ignore them. And that's why it is an embarrassing or touchy issue. You're scared to find psychological depths or layers at which you would not pass the political correctness test, you know? [Laughs]

Well, I have always tended to identify with things that are not bound by a national context. Like a leftist identity or a punk identity, which are international phenomena. I have a sense of belonging with a certain type of subculture. And I also always look for that subculture when I am abroad. Although, of course, it's never exactly the same. I once lived in Scotland for a year, and that was probably the time in my life when I was most explicitly confronted with the fact that I am German. For one thing, the people perceived me as German and reflected that back to me. And then, of course, you also realize certain differences. Or you realize things about yourself that seem to be German. Like a culture you're carrying with yourself, or a socialization. A certain way of doing things, of approaching things. For example, I find that people in Germany tend to be more individualistic, also more isolated. And, as an effect of that, people are more into self-reflection and stuff like that. They do more soul-searching and they also seem to have a bigger need to talk about psychological stuff with each other. People in Scotland were more sociable, hung out in groups more often than meeting in pairs and discussing their psyches. Here, psychological stuff seems to be a regular part of everyday thinking. Although, I think that's not equally so in East Germany. Here, if somebody drinks a lot, it's taken for granted that they have some issues or problems. Whereas there, it's just that: the person is drinking. You know, you might be visiting in the East and there is somebody who's drinking insane amounts of alcohol and ends up under the table. And you say, 'My god, what's up with him, does he have problems?' And the people there don't know what you're getting at. Maybe they think it's you who might have a problem. Anyway. So Germanness was an issue when I was in Scotland. Also in the sense of, well, the Scots do not necessarily have a negative view of Germany. You know, this weird thing, like the

enemies of our enemies are our friends, this hate for the English. Some people congratulated me for the fact that the Nazis bombed London. Which made me really angry, I mean, that's such shit. But then I was also glad to be in a place where these German obsessions, you know, punctuality, order, discipline, work ethic, where all that was not so important. I mean, when you're in Germany, it's really hard to fend yourself off from this stuff, to not internalize this way of thinking: 'Oh, I did not achieve anything, I'm a loser.' And people were not like that in Scotland, which I really liked.

Well, one thing I do kind of identify with is the German language. That's quite important to me. There is something about the nuances of languages... It's hard to describe, maybe it's an emotional thing. But I found it to be a weird experience when I read original documents from the Third Reich. The fact that they are written in German, I mean, you read them and it's your language. When I learned about the crimes and all that in school, it felt like something strange. So when I read these documents, it felt like they ought to be in a different language. I am not sure how to explain this. But it was the language that brought me closer to this history. And I have come to understand this history as my own history, to see myself in its continuity, which also implies something like responsibility. So that's another regard in which it would be too simple to say, well, I am not German. You have to understand this as part of your own history.

But even though I am saying that I am German, I still think that national identity is a category that is not essential. I don't think you need to have a positive national consciousness or something like that. Yes, there are differences and you have to acknowledge them. But that doesn't mean that you have to be proud of your nationality or something like that. I can certainly do without a positive national identity. There are other things that are more important to me."

For Kris, talking about national identity seemed to be a balancing act between acknowledging the fact that one could not simply cut oneself off from it, that one was socialized in a particular context and implicated in a particular history, and trying to stay clear from treating national identity as essential or even stepping on nationalistic territory. She stated that even just thinking about the issue made her feel somewhat uncomfortable, and it seems that this was so because she felt that there might be *"psychological depths or layers"* to it that were not completely under her intellectual control or, as she put it jokingly, at which she might *"not pass the political correctness test."* She emphasized that her acknowledging the fact that she was German had nothing to do with nationalistic pride. Her nationality was not what was ultimately important to her.

Kris talked about Germanness in terms of a socialization or cultural mould, of which she had become aware when she lived abroad for an extended period of time. Yet, she saw the culture with which she was familiar and which had left its mark on herself as particularly West German, rather than generally German. She also described an affinity to the German language, which was the one thing she associated with Germanness that she identified with in a positive sense. This

language further brought her in contact with a history that had seemed 'strange' to her, but which she now understood as her own history.

Sonja

was 47 years old, had grown up in Siberia and lived in Moscow before she moved to West Germany. She was white, Christian (Catholic), and worked as a translator.

> "It's been four years now since I came to Germany. My husband and I were really frustrated with life in Russia, with what was going on there. We had put a lot of hopes in perestroika, but these were soon disappointed. We were so fed up with all the corruption, the poverty, and these wars in different regions. So we wanted to go somewhere else, not necessarily to Germany, but some place in Western Europe. Germany was the easiest choice because, as an ethnic German, I was entitled to German citizenship. At first, we were quite euphoric about being here. We were glad that we had come to a country where our children would have a better chance, more opportunities than in Russia. That this was Germany rather than some other country, that was not the important thing. Although there are certain things here that are really good, for example, the welfare system. And I did not really see the negative things at first. But then came a kind of depression because I had trouble finding work. And then I did realize, although nobody said it, that I don't quite belong with the rest here. There was something I picked up on.
>
> I do feel something like alienation. Though, maybe that has less to do with the people around me and more with the things in my head. I am not sure. But the past has begun to have a hold on my mind. The other day, I witnessed something in the subway: There were a black man and a German woman who both got off at the same stop. And he seemed immersed in his own thoughts and bumped into her when he got out of the train. And she began to scream and hit the man, really, on his arm and so forth. After that she took off quickly, and he went after her. So I got off as well and followed them. I thought, if this escalates, at least he will have a witness. But he got himself under control and we sat down and talked for a while. What I found shocking was that I was not surprised at all. I just thought, well, she is a German, so what do you expect. And I never thought that way when I was in Moscow. I thought that this is a terrible history and everybody in Germany is full of remorse. And that was surprising to me that I did not find this incident exceptional, because I thought, she is a German and she acts like a German. For sure, where I come from there also exists nationalism and racism, for example, against the Roma. And anti-Semitism as well. But I thought that it would be different in Western Europe. And all of a sudden there was this thought, well, she is a German after all. In Russia I did not always think of the past when I thought of Germany. And the Germans I met there were all leftists. But since I am here, I find myself more preoccupied with this past and with the continuities. I am not sure what kind of connection I see between that and myself. But I am also a kind of stranger here. I have not had any bad experiences yet. But I often find myself thinking about these things.

I am not quite sure what being German means to me. My parents were originally from the Volga region in Russia. They belonged to the German minority there. They met each other after the war in a labor camp in Siberia. The Germans were not allowed to live in cities, only in villages and only among other nationalities. My mother has lost most of her knowledge of the German language. When I was a child, I tried to downplay my German origins. You did not want people to see you as that, you rather assimilated. Later, when I was in my twenties and lived in Moscow, I reestablished a connection to the German language. I read a lot of German literature as well as newspapers and magazines that had been smuggled into the country. So the language became very important for me. When I think of Germany, I think of the literature. I don't yet know the country and the culture all that well. But the language is a point of connection. I guess I really have two homes, or I live in two worlds. Russia is my home country, but I also have a connection to Germany. When I speak German I am mentally in a different world than when I speak Russian. My children only speak German, but I speak Russian with my husband. And, with the two languages, I am jumping back and forth between two worlds."

Sonja's sense of connectedness to Germany came about when she reestablished a relation to the German language. Her parents were ethnic Germans, but Germanness was something she rather sought to de-emphasize during her youth. She had lived most of her life in Russia and did not know much about Germany and German culture. She and her family moved to Germany, not because she felt she had any special ties to the country, but because the German citizenship laws provided a way out of Russia.

Now in Germany, she had a sense of not quite belonging. While she had not had any bad experiences herself, she felt that there was an implicit message in how others related to her; though, perhaps this was only in her head. But she had a sense of alienation and felt herself to be *"a kind of stranger here."* Her sense of distance was particularly vivid in how she described the confrontation between a *"black man"* and a *"German woman."* (Her choice of adjectives seems to imply an opposition between 'German' and 'black.' Most likely, she was observing a confrontation between a black man and a white woman, both of whom may or may not have been German.) In describing her reaction to the incident, she took on the position of an outsider. This related to her sense of being a 'stranger,' of not being part of the majority-culture, as well as indicated a sense of allegiance with other 'outsiders,' a willingness to take side against what she perceived as the majority-attitude, and a feeling of solidarity with those who bore the brunt of the majority's hostility.

The following discussion of the different aspects of Germanness that were addressed in the interviews is organized along the four broad categories of issues I have outlined before. First I turn to questions of history, which I will address only briefly since these will be taken up in detail in the following chapter. Next I discuss questions of association and status and notions of the nation. Following that, I attend to questions of culture and socialization. And, finally, I address questions of belonging, particularly in terms of 'imagined communities.' This last set of issues will also be taken up again in the final chapter of this thesis.

Questions of history

Of all the issues my interview partners deemed relevant to a discussion of what it means to be German, the historical context was the most important one to a majority of these women. For Julia, *"the background of fascism and the crimes committed by the German people"* were the first thing that came to mind when we began the interview. Julia was born after the Nazi era, yet she felt herself to be connected to that history and it formed the background against which she formulated her views on German identity, the GDR, and the united Germany. Wiebke described the central role that *"coming to terms with the history of Nazism and its legacy"* had played in her life. She spoke of having felt guilt and shame in relation to this history and of the need to accept responsibility for it. Laura and Anka referred to this history as the main reason why they had wanted to distance themselves from Germanness. When Anka began to deal with issues of racism and her own position as a white person, she initially confronted the issue of whiteness in separation from Germanness. However, she realized that, in doing so, she was avoiding to deal with the national context in which she was situated and circumvented questions of guilt and responsibility in relation to National Socialism. Laura had found it upsetting to see how most Germans dealt with their murderous past and she perceived them as identified with the Nazi perpetrators. She did not want to belong to these people and developed an identification with the victims of Nazism. Karina compared the ways in which this legacy was dealt with in the GDR with the attitudes she

encountered in the FRG. She found both to be flawed as they avoided an acceptance of this history as one's own, which she considered necessary in order to deal with this history and the issue of being German in constructive ways. Sonja described how this past had begun to have a hold on her mind since she moved to Germany. She perceived continuities between the past and the present but was unsure about her own connection to the issue since, while she was of German origin, she was also *"a kind of stranger"* in Germany.

With few exceptions, the issue of German history was brought up by my interview partners themselves before I asked questions in relation to it. And in many interviews it was the first topic a woman touched upon. While they often used generic terms such as 'this history' or 'the past,' my interview partners practically always referred to a particular era: National Socialism and World War II. Very rarely did they address other historical periods. References to events and periods dating before the 1930s occurred in only three interviews. Events and episodes since the end of World War II came up more frequently, for example, the student movement of the late '60s and early '70s and, of course, unification. However, these were usually not included in discussions of 'history' but rather addressed in the context of other topics such as political socialization or attitudes towards the state. Discussions of 'history' or 'the past' always focused on National Socialism and World War II and/or questions of how to come to terms with this legacy in the present. Two women critiqued this restricted view of German history in relation to discussions of German identity; nevertheless, they also saw National Socialism as the most crucial part of German history to be considered in such discussions.

The systematic persecution and extermination of millions of Jews and other crimes and atrocities committed by the Nazis as well as the predominant complicity of the German population with the regime and its murderous politics were the most central issues in my interview partners' reflections on 'the past.' For many women, they were at the heart of the question, 'What does it mean to be German against the background of this history?' However, whereas a number of women addressed these issues explicitly, others made only vague references to them. In particular,

the Holocaust was frequently not addressed directly, although it appeared to be the implicit core of many women's reflections on the past (see chapter 4).

Given the magnitude of the crimes and atrocities committed by Germans during the Third Reich, this history certainly is anything but a source of a positive self-image for Germans today. With the exception of Ursula, who was born in 1940, none of my interview partners had lived during the Third Reich. Yet, most of them saw themselves in a continuity with this history. However, their understanding of how they were related to it was inflected by various factors, for instance, their age, their geographical origin, and, most importantly, their descent from either perpetrators, victims, or people who were neither.

Most of the majority-Germans I interviewed understood themselves to be descendents of individual perpetrators, supporters, and bystanders or they had a more general view of themselves as situated in the tradition of the collective responsible for the Nazi crimes. To that extent, this historical legacy was a source of shame and guilt for many of these women. Against the background of this history, being German was seen as 'negative,' 'burdened,' 'tainted', 'difficult' – something that many women did not feel good about or from which they would rather want to distance themselves. Other women emphasized a need to come to terms with this history, to accept it as one's own, and to acknowledge responsibility for it.

Three majority-German women did not see themselves in a continuity with the collective of perpetrators, supporters, and bystanders. Significantly, these were also the only three women among my interview partners who did not consider themselves to be German in any way or sense. They all emphasized that they wanted to be seen and treated as individuals and explained that they did not consider their nationality to have any effect on their lives. However, they also made numerous statements that contradicted this claim, some of which will be addressed in subsequent sections of this chapter. In relation to German history, particularly National Socialism and the Holocaust, they pointed out that that they did not relate to this history as Germans and, therefore, did not see themselves as implicated in it. Nevertheless, as will be illustrated in chapter 4, a closer

reading of their statements indicates that their location as majority-Germans was more relevant to how they interpreted the past than they acknowledged.

Most of my interview partners considered the strategy of distancing oneself from this history (by way of denouncing Germanness) as an inappropriate response to the challenge of coming to terms with this past and its significance in the present. Several majority-German women explained to me that they had pursued this strategy at some point in their lives, but now found it inadequate and keeping them from clarifying their relationship to this past as well as to descendents of Nazi victims. For a number of them, encounters and relationships with Jewish people had brought them in confrontation with this repressed part of their background and triggered them to look for more constructive ways of dealing with this legacy. Other women had come to deal with this issue in the context of their politicization in antiracist, leftist, or feminist contexts. However, for many of them, there continued to exist insecurities and unresolved feelings in relation to this legacy. Against this background, they considered it impossible to have a positive sense of German national identity. Yet, not all majority-German women were equally troubled by it. For some of them, it was a question of integrating this past into their identity as Germans by way of taking responsibility for it.

Those women among my interview partners who were not or not exclusively descendents of the perpetrators, supporters, and bystanders approached the history of National Socialism and the Holocaust from rather different perspectives. Dilek, for example, did not address the issue at all until I brought it up. Then she explained that it was nothing she was preoccupied with, although she had thought about what it means for Turks in Germany or for Germans of Turkish heritage. She referred to jokes according to which the Turks were the Jews of today. While she made a clear distinction between the experiences of Jews under National Socialism and the experiences of Turks or Turkish-Germans in Germany today, she said that she tended to approach this history from the side of the victims. In any case, it was not an issue that was central to her identity as a German, and she looked at this history from the perspective of someone with no direct personal relationship to it.

Sonja, although of German parentage, also approached this historical legacy from the position of a relative 'outsider.' While her youth in Siberia was overshadowed by anti-German sentiments in the aftermath of World War II, her sense of being German was not focused on questions of guilt or responsibility in relation to National Socialism and the Holocaust. When she talked about how a German woman's aggressive behavior towards a black man appeared to her as typical for a German, she established a continuity between this woman's racist behavior and German racism and anti-Semitism of the past; but she also implied that she herself was not German in that sense. In deliberating such continuities, she looked at them from the perspective of someone who found herself to be a kind of outsider, a 'stranger' in German society.

Mira, an Afro-German woman, and Mirjana, a woman of German and Serbian background, described their relationship to this history as ambivalent because they recognized ties to both perpetrators and victims. Mira said: *"I think black Germans have a kind of split relationship to that, it's very ambivalent. Perhaps we would have been killed had we lived at the time."* Yet, Mira's white German grandfather had been in the SA, and she thought that both he and her grandmother had been Nazis, at least Nazi supporters. Therefore, she saw herself as implicated in the historical legacy of Nazism, although, as a person of color, she did not identify with the collective of perpetrators in a straightforward way. Mirjana saw virtually irreconcilable cleavages within her family background. Her father was Serbian and her mother stemmed from the German minority in Yugoslavia. Her maternal family had been expelled after World War II. While her maternal uncles had been Nazis, members of the SS even, her Serbian father had fought among the partisans against the Germans in World War II. As a result, Mirjana's sense of connection to this history was conflicted and characterized by a mix of shame and pride. For much of her life she had chosen to identify with her Yugoslav origins and rejected her German roots. However, when Yugoslavia began to break apart, her identification with this country did so as well. The ethnic tensions and civil wars in the former Yugoslavia also caused Mirjana to confront herself anew with her maternal family's history. Overall, Mirjana's engagement with the history of National

Socialism was focused on coming to terms with the contradictions within her multiple connections to it.

Niko, an Afro-German Jewish woman, spoke of stemming from several traditions that had almost been destroyed and were still marked by the continuing struggle of living in the face of that devastation. She also pointed to the invisibility of people of color within renderings of German history and looked at her own experience of being designated a place outside of Germanness by majority-Germans in relation to the persecution and destruction of people of color during the Third Reich and the subsequent amnesia concerning this history. Against that amnesia, Niko claimed her ancestors' and her own history as part of German history. In asserting an identity and subject position as a German while drawing on traditions that the Nazis had sought to eradicate from Germanness, Niko saw herself as *"bringing something back home to Germany."*

Questions of association and status and notions of the nation

Next to considering Germanness as a place in history, many of my interview partners also considered it to be a place on the map, a location within geopolitics. They also spoke about Germanness in terms of citizenship and often addressed the issue of German citizenship in connection to privileges related to that status. Many women further addressed questions of how the German nation is defined, discussed whether and how they saw themselves as implicated in notions of the nation and in the nation-state, and described how they personally viewed and related to this state and its society. In attending to these issues, I begin by discussing views on the united Germany and how they relate to women's locations within the formerly divided halves of the new Germany.

During the rapid process of formal unification, the old FRG's political, economic, and social structures were extended onto the territory of the former GDR. Yet, the radical break from former structures did not relegate into oblivion people's experiences of life in the GDR. All of the women who had lived in the former GDR saw that society as having had a formative effect on

themselves. Even 19 year-old majority-German Viola, who was nine years old when the Berlin

Wall came down, pointed to the specificity of her childhood experiences in the GDR:

> *"I think I had a good age at unification. I was young and so I just grew into the*
> *new situation. But I did not miss anything as a child. Social differences were small,*
> *that was good. There was no competition with regard to owning stuff, like things of*
> *certain brands. I guess it would also have been more difficult for my mother, had*
> *we lived in the FRG, because she was raising three children by herself, and that*
> *was easier in the GDR. But now I have much more freedom. I don't miss the GDR,*
> *although I do find that there used to be more readiness to help each other back*
> *then, also in school. Now everybody mostly just looks after themselves. So, looking*
> *back, I think it's good that I spent those years in the GDR."*

The East German women's attitudes towards the unified Germany differed and ranged

from a profound sense of alienation as expressed by Julia (see portrait above) to Viola's

unambiguous sense of being at home in it: *"I am not sad that the GDR is gone. What we have now,*

that is my country." While Julia had lived in the GDR until she was 45 years old, Viola was only

ten years old at the time of unification. The age difference likely accounts in part for the different

levels of attachment they felt to that society. However, not all of the older East German women had

an equally strong sense of having been uprooted by the demise of the GDR as had Julia. For

example, Ursula, a 59 year-old white and Christian woman, said: *"I don't have a sense of*

alienation in this new Germany, but I certainly have a critical view of it." When I asked her how

she had viewed the transformation, she replied:

> *"Well, I certainly don't see what we have here as the promised land. But the GDR*
> *was no promised land either. Still, that was my country. I saw myself as a GDR*
> *citizen long before I saw myself as a German. In fact, that's still the case. That's*
> *my East-biography, that is my life, almost 50 years of it. And it was a good life.*
> *Well, it's not a bad life now, it's also a good life, it's even exciting. But there are*
> *things I miss. I mean, now I live in this state, this totally capitalistic state, just like*
> *I learned about it in school. And I don't find that desirable, but that's what we*
> *have now. And I think it's terrible that money is so important now, that was*
> *different in the East. That there are these tremendous social differences, that I find*
> *terrible. So this country is not like I wish it would be, but I have to accept it, just as*
> *I had to accept the GDR. I can only try to be critical and open my mouth."*

Ursula had a critical view of both the united Germany and the GDR. While she had been

aware of problems within the GDR, she had not been in favor of unification: *"I was dreaming of a*

humanistic socialism. " In her work as a counselor with the Protestant Church, Ursula had also been

called upon by people who were deliberating to leave the GDR for West Germany. Ursula told

them that she was not the right person to counsel them on this matter. She would rather have liked

them to stay and try to change things from within. She explained:

> "In our work we always tried to encourage people to work for change. Personally,
> I was lucky in that I never had any problems in the GDR. That was different for
> those who worked in the factories or enterprises. They had it worse, they saw how
> much shit went on there. So change was really very difficult, and there was a lot of
> depression. In that situation, the Church provided a space where people could
> puke everything out [sich auskotzen] on the weekend, and then they went back to
> work somewhat consoled for a while. And the state certainly knew that. So the
> Church served as a dustbin for the souls [Seelen-Ascheimer]. "

Ursula's response to the events that led up to unification was disappointment and worries

concerning the future: *"I knew that much about the West that it was clear to me that life in this*

Federal Republic would be no picnic. " By the time of the interview, however, she had also come to

see some advantages to the new situation: *"There certainly are now many more possibilities, not*

only but particularly with regards to traveling. " Still, Ursula pointed out that many people were

paying a very high price for these new possibilities. Ursula now worked for a women's center,

where she encountered many women who were struggling with unemployment ever since

unification: *"That is painful to see, that really gets at me. These women's biographies are totally*

wrecked. These are women who achieved so much, and that's no longer worth anything or is not

being acknowledged. "

Sabine, a 51 year-old white and Christian-secularized East German, was one such woman

who struggled with unemployment ever since unification. Like Julia and Ursula, she also explained

to me that she had been identified with the GDR:

> "I did not see myself as German, I saw myself as a GDR citizen. And this Germany
> on the other side was no alternative for me. I was in support of the idea of
> socialism. I did have problems sometimes, for instance, with superiors, because I
> could not keep my mouth shut. I was not in the Party, and it was generally not a
> good idea to criticize Party-members. So I probably could have progressed further
> in my career if I had just shut up. But today it's the same thing, you must also be
> careful with being openly critical. So, all in all, I was fine with my life in the GDR.

There were certainly things that should have been changed. But unification – no, that was not what I wanted."

Sabine had studied sports and history and had been a professional athlete. After her career as an athlete she worked as a trainer and sports teacher for children and youth. Since unification she had great difficulties finding employment, as the area of her work was no longer state-sponsored but was supposed to be taken care off on a voluntary basis. She could get short-term contract jobs, but these did not imply social benefits and a right to a pension. Her husband had also lost his job as a result of unification, but later found work again.

> Sabine: *"Perhaps it was easier for him to find work because he is a man. And our relationship has totally changed since then. My husband used to help a lot with domestic chores. Not all GDR men did that, but mine did. We were both working, we both earned money, so we both shared the domestic work. But today he comes home from a long day at work and a long commute and he falls on the couch, turns on the TV, and wants to be served. And that is totally dissatisfying for me. That's not the life I want. I was always independent, and now ... That kind of life does not satisfy me. We also cannot do the cultural things anymore that we used to do together. Theater, concerts, all that is too expensive now, we can't afford that. Perhaps once a year, but that's it. So our relationship underwent a very negative development. It is possibly going to be over soon."*

For Sabine, unification had brought many frustrations and disappointments, especially a setback in social status and a loss of economic independence. She had been satisfied with her life in the GDR:

> *"I had a job that I liked, I earned enough, I had no worries. Sure, sometimes I could not buy this or that, but I did not find that too much of a problem. I did not need Western products, the Eastern products were enough for me. And then ... well, and then, all this happened. And I tried to make the best of it, I did not want to fall into a depression. But the way everything was dismantled and demolished, all the factories and workplaces that were simply destroyed, that was terrible. Because one was connected to it on some level, one lived with it for 40 years, had taken part in this society and thought that one contributed to certain successes, and if it was only sports. And then everything gets wrecked. I mean, the terrible thing was that the people in the GDR were screaming for the D-Mark like there was no tomorrow – that was the end of it. That was disappointing. And I am scared of the future, but I try to avoid thinking about it. I try not to give up."*

Still, Sabine did not see everything about the new situation as negative. For example, she pointed out that she very much appreciated the fact that unification brought her in contact with

people of different cultural backgrounds, which she had rarely experienced during her life in the GDR, as that country *"was really not multicultural, you did not meet many people from other places in the world."* Her 17 year-old daughter had *"many foreign friends. And I enjoy hanging out with them when they come visit. That I really like, and I like traveling to other countries and learning more about other cultures. Sometimes I think about moving somewhere else."*

Sabine found that in meeting people of other cultural backgrounds she came to realize more about her own background and socialization and what was perhaps particularly German about her. But she did not have a positive relation to the nation or to being German. She told me about a conversation she had with relatives from the West whom she met at her father's funeral and who asked her whether she considered herself German: *"I don't know why they asked me that, but they kept going, 'you do feel yourself to be German, right?' And I have no use for that, certainly not in the sense that they meant. They reject me anyway, because I am a leftist and my attitude is antinational."* She was glad that her daughter had the same attitude, *"unlike many other East German youth."* She thought that in her daughter's circle of friends national or cultural background was of minor importance and generally hoped that *"maybe one day this whole society will just be a big mix, and that this Germanness, you know, in the narrow sense, will simply disappear."*

Isabell, a 44 year-old white and Christian artist, had been involved with the opposition movement. She pointed out that she certainly did not have unification in mind when she participated in the demonstrations. She had been very frustrated with many aspects of life in the GDR, but she had wanted a democratic GDR, rather than work towards its demise. In talking about the exodus of GDR citizens via Hungary and the West German embassy in Prague, Isabell said:

> *"That was terrible. I mean, I understood the individual reasons why people needed to leave the country, that they could not stand it anymore. But the whole wave of emigrants, I thought a lot of it had to do with material interests. I have to accept that for many that is an important aspect of live. I would not say that they left for illegitimate reasons. But I looked at the situation differently. During the 1970s, I had thought about possibilities of emigrating. But I decided against it, I did not want to accept that I should have to leave my country in order to live the way I want to and be able to express my ideas and opinions. I was not going to leave with a stoop. But the events after the Wall came down, all the people who were*

> *leaving just before and after that, that was upsetting to me. These were not my*
> *people, these were not people I could have worked with for change. "*

Isabell explained that she did not share the politics of the people who came to dominate the

demonstrations: *"They had very different interests. And then the demonstrations changed. The tone*

got rough, alcohol came to be a factor. One had to be afraid in discussions when one was not

sharing the majority's view and did not want unification. " Isabell had been opposed to the way in

which unification was to take place, that is in the form of an annexation. If it had to be unification,

she had wanted *"both sides to be aware that things had to change in both societies. "* In her view,

that was certainly not the case. Specifically West Germans were not willing to reconsider their own

ways and denied that things would be changing for them as well. However, the extent to which she

had hoped for something different notwithstanding, ten years after unification Isabell was feeling at

home in the united Germany: *"It is my country now. "* Yet, she felt a stronger sense of connection

to certain regions than to the country as a whole. This sense of regional connection was not stable

but shifted with personal relationships to people in certain regions: *"It changes, or there can be*

multiple connections. I would say that my home is where there are people with whom I have

significant relationships. "

None of the East German women I spoke with had been in favor of unification. The only

woman who did not point out that she had been against it was Viola, who said that she was too

young to really understand the extent of the change that was underway:

> *"I didn't think that my life would be affected by it. It wasn't an intense experience*
> *for me. I has fine with living in the GDR, I had a nice childhood. And I did not*
> *realize that the GDR would be gone soon. I can see that this must have been quite*
> *traumatic for some people who are older than me. But I myself was rather*
> *indifferent to the whole thing because I didn't understand it. "*

All the other East Germans I spoke with would have preferred a democratic and

autonomous GDR over unification. By the time of the interviews, most of them tended to see the

current situation as a kind of mixed blessing; they missed various aspects of the former GDR

society but also appreciated certain things that had come with unification. However, all of their

lives have been affected in more or less dramatic ways by the radical transformations that came

with the *Wende* and subsequent unification. Most of them had also been more or less identified with the society and the state that no longer exists and several of them had seen themselves as citizens of the GDR rather than Germans. For them, coming to terms with the changed situation and making sense of their experiences in two radically different societies were central to discussing their views on national identity.

Likewise, most West German women pointed out that, when they think about being German, they think about being West German. They had been more or less consciously identified with the former, smaller FRG, and it would not have occurred to them to think of the people in the GDR as fellow nationals. The GDR was a foreign country to them and they had not anticipated that the two German states would ever be united. For example, Bianca, a 36 year-old majority-German truck driver and occasional painter, had this view of the GDR:

> "To me that was a foreign country. Not even a normal foreign country, it was a foreign country that you could not travel to, or only under very specific conditions. I thought of the people there as locked in. And I could not understand how they could stand that, that they could not travel where they wanted and could not buy what they wanted. And then one day, when I was 18, I wanted to see what it was like there, and my friend and I went to East Berlin. And it was totally like I thought it would be. Like a prison. And I thought the people were kind of weird. So, I was happy for them when the Wall came down, but I certainly did not feel like I had much in common with them."

Ines, a 37 year-old self-employed majority-German woman who had studied social sciences and law, also explained that she had not felt any sense of connection to the people in the GDR: *"I knew that was a socialist country and people there also spoke German, but it was certainly a foreign country to me, just like Yugoslavia or Romania. The common language did not change that."* She described her reaction to unification as rather indifferent because: *"I did not have a history with that country, no family over there, or some other connection. I had never been there on school exchanges or something like that."* Just as the East German Laura pointed out that it would have made more sense to her to unite with the Poles or Czechs and Slovaks, as she knew them much better than West Germans and had more of a sense of connection with them (see

portrait above), Ines, who had grown up near the border to the Netherlands, mentioned that she felt

much closer to the Dutch than to East Germans.

While most West Germans described levels of indifference as their response to unification,

some women explained that they were shocked or disturbed when the prospect of unification

suddenly arose. Questions of national identity caught up with them when the sea change in the

other German state brought the issue of the German nation to the center stage of public discussion.

They had been more comfortable with the more subdued role that the nation had played in West

German public discourse before 1989. Now they were confronted with calls for a 'normal' and

'self-confident' German nation that came to the fore in the wake of unification. They had formerly

been able to keep uncomfortable questions about German national identity at an arms length by

way of foregrounding other identities, for example, as leftists or feminists, or by way of identifying

with the former FRG in a civic or 'postnational' sense. For instance, 36 year-old Luci, a majority-

German woman who worked in the field of adult education, said about herself:

> "I always understood myself to be a citizen of the Federal Republic
> [Bundesbürgerin]. I never said 'Federal Republic of Germany.' And I never said
> that I was German because I did not think of myself as German. I said that I am
> from the Federal Republic. That was my country, not Germany. I grew up in the
> Federal Republic. And all of a sudden there was a Germany again. So, in a way,
> unification meant a loss of identity for me."

Luci's response to unification was very intense: she explained that she *"literally felt hate*

for this Germany. That was a very strong emotion, stronger than anything else I have felt." Luci

had been opposed to unification because:

> "I did not think it was right. And I found it threatening. I was afraid of this
> 'Greater Germany.' I would have wished for the GDR to have an autonomous
> status. It all went too fast. So, I was against Germany. I think that was when I
> began to actively think about the issue of nationality. Before that... I don't know. I
> think I probably mostly circumvented the issue."

While none of the other West Germans had been quite as upset about unification or

described such a strong personal impact as Luci did, most of them had been opposed to it for

political reasons and saw it as the starting point of negative developments. They were not content

with the redefinition of the Federal Republic's role in international politics that set in with unification, and/or they saw it as having paved the way for neoliberal politics, a massive resurgence of right-wing extremism and racist violence, and increasing tendencies towards 'normalizing' German history and reinterpreting its moral and political implications. However, the impact that unification had on their lives was nowhere near as disruptive as it was for many East Germans. With the exception of Luci, none of the West German women thought that her personal life had been changed much or at all through unification.

Mira, a 33 year-old Afro-German woman who was Christian-socialized and worked as an editor, explained that, looking back, she thought her indifference and sense of distance from the events that led to unification partly had to do with the fact that she *"intuitively knew that there was an exclusionary element in all that. I am not sure whether I was fully conscious of that at the time. But I think on some level I knew it."* She thought that Afro-Germans who lived in Berlin had a stronger sense of that exclusionary aspect than she had living in West Germany: *"The Afro-Germans there were more confronted with signals that indicated to them that they were not part of this German thing. But I also felt rather skeptical and distant. And I guess I also had prejudices against the 'Ossis' [Easties]."* Though, she subsequently had a number of encounters with East Germans in which these prejudices were relativized.

Dilek's account of how she experienced that time period resonates with Mira's:

> *"That was a bad time. I did not consciously think that something really shitty was going on. I only had this sense, well, these Nazi slogans came up again and this nationalist thinking. And, as a Turk, I did not dare to criticize that. Not even in front of friends, as some of them were also quite enthusiastic about unification. But intuitively I knew there is something wrong here."*

Significantly, Dilek, who at other points in the interview pointed out that she felt more German than Turkish, positioned herself as a Turk in talking about the time around German unification. In that situation, she clearly felt like an outsider, whether or not it was explicitly signaled to her that she was not part of the celebration. She went on to talk about an East German woman who joined her high school class some time after the fall of the Wall.

Dilek: *"I did not like her at all. She really thought that Turks were lazy and stupid and justified these claims with reference to this Turkish guy she went out with – who was actually an idiot, but still. But, for some reason she was looking for contact with me. Perhaps she thought that both of us did not really belong there. But I wanted nothing to do with her. She was weird. I felt that I belonged with the other Germans, with the 'normal' Germans so to speak."*

Andrea: *"So when you say that you are German, that relates to West Germany, not the East or the unified Germany?*

Dilek: *"Yes, totally. I mean, there are certainly exceptions, but when someone outs themselves as East German, I am super-skeptical. And I have met people who were really nasty. So my reservations have to do with the experiences I had. I don't want to get stupid lines, get sworn at, or even get beaten up."*

Dilek had traveled to the East, mostly to East Berlin, several times and described these

trips as having led to very negative experiences:

"I could never live there. I feel threatened there, the looks, the atmosphere. And then you have these images in your head, Hoyerswerda, Rostock, and the population's attitude towards these attacks, their support. That made me feel scared. I was also afraid that this could roll over to Wessi-Land ['land of the Westies' – West Germany]. It did not end up being that extreme, but these years after the fall of the Wall, they were super shitty. Just after the opening of the Wall, I went to this small village in East Germany with some acquaintances of my parents. And it was terrible. I had hordes of children running after me. As if the Hunchback of Notre Dame was walking through the village. And they were calling me nasty things and went, 'Gee, she knows how to speak German,' or 'Gee, what does she look like.' So that was bad and I don't want to go back to that country."

Dilek's negative view of East Germans had been the cause of confrontations with majority-

German friends who criticized her for it. For example, one of her friends had moved to a city in the

East and was disappointed that Dilek would not come to visit her. Dilek felt that her friend was not

taking her fears seriously because the friend herself was not under any threat:

"I mean, maybe I exaggerate, but I am scared because I know there are people there who would love to give me one over the head. I don't want to go there because I don't feel secure. Well, there are skinheads everywhere in Germany. But over there it's not just the skinheads, the regular people are like that, too. While here, people like that keep themselves under control, even if they think like that. But I have the sense that my fears are not being taken seriously, that I am being treated as if I were paranoid."

Dilek went on to point out that she did not mean to downplay racism in West Germany.

But her majority-German friends' reactions to her decision not to go to the East anymore appeared

to her as a denial of the racism she might encounter there. The problem was made into a problem of her being prejudiced, and the source of her fear was not addressed by her friends. They did not acknowledge that is was a different experience for her to be in the East than it was for them.

Niko, a 42 year-old Afro-German artist who had lived most of her life in West Germany before she moved to the East a few years before I interviewed her, did not consider the situation with regard to racism to be significantly worse in the East than in the West. She came to talk about this when I asked her how she had experienced the time around unification.

> Niko: *"I was in Berlin at the time, and that was tough. The atmosphere was quite threatening. People started going crazy, you know, all this stuff, 'We are one people,' and, 'Germany, Germany, blah, blah, blah.' That was tough because, while the Germans were celebrating their thing there, we were outside and knew, now they are coming after us, now the restrictions are gone. But it was clear to me that I encounter this white thing everywhere and that it did not really matter whether I am in the West or in the East. And I don't mind being here in the East. I don't need all this stuff that the West has to it. And the racism that jumps into my face here, it also jumps into my face when I am in the West. I don't see a difference there. Perhaps they use a different language and are more open about it, but the intensity is the same."*

As Dilek described observing the events around unification as a 'Turk,' Niko talked about 'the Germans' celebrating their thing, while *"we were outside."* In this context, Niko did not identify with 'Germans' but with the people who were not part of the celebration, no matter what their status was in terms of nationality. But Niko did not share Dilek's view of racism being more extreme in the East than in the West. Under the surface of differences in the expression of racism, she saw the same intensity in both contexts.

Few of the West Germans had spent any length of time on visits to the territory of the former GDR; and with the lack of familiarity seems to come a lack of interest in these parts of the new German state. Of the East Germans, some had been on extended stays in areas of what used to be the old FRG, while others had only been there on one or two short trips that were enough to satisfy their curiosity.

Dilek was not the only woman who had a negative view of the 'other' Germans. Birgit, a

37 year-old majority-German educational therapist from the West, said the following when I asked

her how she had viewed the GDR when it still existed:

> "I did not feel any connection to that place; although it wasn't quite like a foreign
> country, it was rather something embarrassing. I think I found it embarrassing. I
> only knew it from driving through there, and I thought that everything there was
> kind of stale and dull. It was a bit like a zoo, because I could leave, and they were
> to stay. So it was not so much the GDR that I found embarrassing, I felt
> embarrassed being there. To know that, whomever you meet, you meet them as a
> free person and they are prisoners. It was simply wrong. I found it simply wrong to
> lock people up behind a wall, to force them to drive these ridiculous toy cars, to
> put them into these terrible jeans. That was just undignified, there was something
> undignified to all that. You know, these people could get excited about a plastic
> shopping bag from the West. And I thought, my god, that's garbage where I live.
> So I found it really undignified and embarrassing."

Birgit seems to have seen the people who lived in the GDR mostly as victims. She was not

criticizing them for what she described as the terrible things about the GDR; in her statement, they

rather come across as puppets, or 'animals' in a zoo, not as subjects. There appears to be a sense of

superiority in the compassion Birgit put forward.

In a similar vein, Bianca spoke about present-day East Germans as *"underdeveloped"* and

not self-dependent: *"They just sit there and wait for the good stuff to come flying over from the*

West, but that's not how it works. They themselves have to do something for it. But they can't do

that, they have not learned how to stand on their own feet and do something." Michi, a 39 year-old

majority-German social worker from the West, described a related view, though in more cautious

and self-critical terms:

> "I think I am a bit skeptical when I meet East Germans. I have this cliché in my
> head that they are somewhat behind in their development as far as science,
> general education, and so forth are concerned. Also that they were more sheltered
> and have less life experience. I think it's stupid of me to think that, but, I am afraid,
> I guess that's what I think. [Laughs] I am probably a typical arrogant Wessi. It's
> amazing how this propaganda works. And I have no close relationships with any
> East Germans and therefore no corrective."[3]

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[3] Some readers might find that these quotations beg for an in-depth analysis in terms of the kinds of
self-images or self-understandings that are implicitly expressed in them. In the context of this chapter, I

While East Germans described negative experiences with arrogant and dominating West Germans, they always pointed out that they did not think all *Wessis* were like that, and that they had had many good experiences with West Germans.[4]

Except for Viola, who was by far the youngest woman among my interview partners, these women had had many or most of what they saw as their formative experiences before unification. Their views and attitudes had developed within the context of the respective former German states they lived in, even if they did not profess to a positive identification with these states. With the exception of the three women who had moved from either West to East or vice versa, all of my interview partners felt certainly more connected to that part of Germany in which they grew up in than to the country as a whole. Some also felt a particular connection to the region within either of the two parts from which they originated. However, these regions were still seen as intrinsically Western or Eastern. Their origin in the respective former German states might have been more relevant to these women in certain regards and less important in others. Nevertheless, a ten-year history of unification notwithstanding, by far the most of my interview partners clearly thought of themselves and their experiences as East German or West German, rather than simply German.

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cannot deliver a detailed analysis of all the views I am presenting. My main emphasis is on outlining the range of issues and opinions that came up in the interviews. The following chapter has a stronger analytical component.

[4] It is possible that my being from the West might have kept them from expressing more negative views of West Germans. In order to signal them that I was aware of arrogant and patronizing attitudes among West Germans towards East Germans and would not take it personal if they were critical of West Germans, I introduced questions about their views on and experiences with West Germans by referring to the documentation of such attitudes in the literature on East-West feminist relations. I then asked the women whether their own experiences resembled what is described in this literature or differed from it. Two women said that they think the literature adequately described what they experienced in the first few years after unification, but that they saw the situation as having changed for the better since then. My impression is that the East German women I interviewed were generally much less prejudiced towards West Germans than were the West Germans I interviewed towards East Germans.

When women talked about being German in terms of citizenship, they mostly referred to the privileges associated with that status. Nadja, a 26 year-old majority German from the West who was studying towards a degree in education and had a part-time job at the women's bureau of her university, told me about different situations in which she had become conscious of such privileges:

> "Often it is about things I can do that others can't. And that makes me kind of uncomfortable, but it is a fact. For example, a friend of mine, who studies at the same university as I do, could not switch programs because the residence permit she needs to have as a foreigner specifies her program of study. So if she changed the program, her permit would no longer be valid. And for me it would be like, oh well, I don't like my program so I just switch. Or take elections... I mean, I have a very skeptical view of elections, I think that slogan is true, you know, 'If elections could change anything they would be forbidden.' You can only ever vote for the smallest evil. But still, I have to acknowledge that others are not even allowed to do that, to vote. So, even though I do not perceive the right to vote as a privilege in my own terms, it is still a privilege."

Ines also talked about issues of legal inclusion and exclusion and pointed out that:

> "We have this situation where a certain part of the population cannot vote in elections – meaning those whom we call foreigners. To me, that's a void in democratic legitimacy. But that's part of how Germanness is constructed in legal terms, how belonging and the distribution of privilege is regulated."

Only very few women did not consider citizenship a relevant or meaningful category or factor in their lives. For example, 35 year-old Annika, a majority-German from the West who has working on a Ph.D. in English literature and ran a small business, put it this way: *"Well, I have a German passport, so I guess in that sense I am German. But that's the only sense. And it does not mean anything to me."* When I asked Annika whether she thought that her citizenship had an effect on her life, apart from what it means to her personally, she said: *"Not really. I mean, others have a French passport or an English passport, and I have a German one, but that doesn't really make a difference. Nationality is not important to me, and I am glad when I am around people who have the same view."*

Most women did see citizenship as a crucial factor in their lives, and referred to privileges they had in relation to 'foreigners' in Germany as well as to the fact that their being associated with

the German state and being situated in Germany was a privileged location in international relations. They often talked about these privileges as a source of discomfort, because these implied the discrimination or oppression of others. For instance, Anka conceived of her location in international relations as *"on the side of the perpetrators"* (see portrait above). She felt uncomfortable about that location and wanted *"that situation to change;"* yet, she considered it necessary to start from acknowledging her position and come to terms with the effect it had on herself and her relationship with others in order to be able to work towards change.

Other women, in describing the discomfort they felt about being German, gave less emphasis to Germany's role in unjust and exploitative international relations and were more focused on what they saw as particularly negative aspects of the German national tradition and the German conception of citizenship. They referred to other national traditions, which they saw as more positive or progressive. For instance, Luci saw the French national tradition in a more positive light than the German one.

> *"I think that their positive [national] consciousness is founded on something different than that of Germans; for example, the French revolution. I don't know that history in detail, there were probably also many things that were not okay. But, all in all, I see their national consciousness as different from that of Germans. Theirs is built on values, which I think is more appropriate. And I think it also has more to do with genuine love for one's country and culture. And I don't think that's the same in Germany. Here, nationality is defined in negative terms by excluding others. The national identity itself is empty, there is nothing positive in it, so Germans need to put down others in order to feel pride."*

Barbara, a 37 year-old majority-German from the West who worked as assistant professor in a social science department, had a similar view:

> *"I think it's okay to feel good about your national identity, even though it's nothing essential, it's really a construct. But I think that there is a human need in that regard. People want to feel good about themselves. And for the Germans that is very difficult because of their history. They don't know what they could be proud of, and so they develop this stupid national pride which is based on looking down on foreigners. It's not a healthy national pride. And I think that's different in other countries."*

Instead, Michi thought that all nationalisms and all concepts of the nation should be viewed in critical terms, not just German nationalism and the German national tradition: *"I don't think its constructive to think, 'oh, I wish I was something else, anything but German.' I think it's important to be critical of the idea of the nation in general."* She continued by explaining that she thought of all nationalisms as having reactionary seeds within them and that she saw the nation as a concept that was always based on exclusions and therefore antithetical to leftist and feminist politics. Elke, a 44 year-old majority German social worker from West Germany who had moved to East Germany a few years prior to when I interviewed her, was also generally opposed to any positive recourse to the idea of the nation:

> *"I don't find other nationalisms any less disturbing and dangerous than German nationalism. Of course, people should fight for their self-determination and against oppression by others. But when this fight is based on nationalist ideas, you already have the basis there for what can easily become another form of domination."*

Many women pointed out that they considered the concept of the nation to be a construct, not an essential reality. They rejected the idea that there was a German *Volk* in the sense of an ethnic community that shared essential characteristics. But they also pointed out that, while it was important to recognize the nation as constructed, particularly in its ethnic definition, this did not do away with the fact that they were implicated in this construction and its effects in 'real' terms. As Anka put it: *"...you must not pretend that you are beyond this construct of the nation. Even though you might be able to deconstruct it on an intellectual level, it's still active on other levels."* Laura also emphasized that the concept of the nation needed to be called into question, although this did not mean that one had nothing to do with it (see portrait above). Nadja explained:

> *"I don't want to take the idea of the nation for granted, I think one rather needs to deconstruct it. But people are making it too easy for themselves when they say, 'I have nothing to do with that.' It simply makes a difference whether you are confronted with certain things or you are excluded or you cannot do certain things, for example, whether you cannot participate in a school trip to a foreign country because you don't have a German passport and would need a visa. And you cannot say, 'I have nothing to do with that because I am against the idea of the*

> *nation.' You still have to confront yourself with these things, and also with what it means for yourself to be implicated in that. I can distance myself from the nation politically. One can also try to pursue a different kind of politics and possibly to change certain things that happen here. At the same time, one is also responsible for what happens here. In the face of something like the CDU's campaign against the introduction of dual citizenship, one cannot simply say, 'I have nothing to do with that.' This stuff is going on in this country, and... yes, I would call that responsibility. A responsibility that all people here share, particularly those who are not excluded and discriminated against. You often cannot do much against what happens on the level of 'big politics.' But you cannot say that it's not your business."*

With the exception of Wiebke (see portrait above), none of my interview partners described gender as an important mediating factor in how they related to the nation and the nation-state. A few women pointed out that there were certain differences in how men and women were incorporated into the state, in how their lives were affected by state politics, and in what men and women stand to gain from nationalist projects. But, these differences notwithstanding, they rejected the idea that the nation was entirely a 'men's business' and that they as women did not share responsibility for the affairs of the nation.

However, as mentioned before, three of the women I interviewed, Annika, Bianca, and Jutta, stated that they did not view their national association as meaningful or relevant in any sense. They emphasized that they wanted to be seen and treated as individuals and explained that they did not consider their nationality as having any effect on their lives. For instance, Annika said: *"I guess I am technically a German, but I do not see myself that way. It really doesn't matter."* The only sense in which she considered herself German was in that she had a German passport, but she also considered that as ultimately irrelevant. When I began the interview with Jutta, a 52 year-old majority-German nurse from the West, by asking her whether national identity was something that she had thought about rather often or rarely throughout her life, she replied:

> *"Well, I don't feel that I am... well, that is of such minor importance to me. That's about as relevant as if someone is tall or small. I always say, whether checkered, striped, dotted, Eskimo, Kongo-Kaffir, that doesn't matter to me at all. I see much larger differences in the individual differences between humans."*

In stating that she did not consider her nationality, or nationality in general, to be of much or any significance, Jutta employed a rhetorical strategy that is frequently used in deflecting from the real impact that constructions of racial difference have on people's lives, such as when it is argued: 'What does it matter whether someone is white, black, yellow, or purple?' Jutta combined categories that are not used in order to construct difference, *"checkered, striped, dotted,"* with terms that are employed in categorizing people – and are pejorative and racist at that – and which are meaningful in the sense that such categorizations have a real effect on people's lives. Jutta continued by telling me that she could not understand why categories such as nationality were so important to so many people. She mentioned that she also had certain associations with such categories: *"For example, when I hear 'Spaniard,' I do think, 'fiery,' 'black hair.' But I can free myself from that."* Ultimately, she explained, *"none of these categories really mean anything. And this sense of belonging with a group of people, I don't have that at all."* She pointed out that she always put the emphasis on the individual: *"I don't like this thinking, you know, typical this or typical that. If someone would say to me that I am typically German, I would not let that pass. I would explain to them that there is no such as thing as 'typically something.' And also ask them why they see me as that, whether their thinking is somehow bogged down."* When I asked her whether she thought of herself as German in any sense at all, for example, in terms of her citizenship or her cultural background, she replied: *"Well, I really see it as something artificial, a construct."*

Jutta, Annika, and Bianca all expressed a distaste of collectivities. While Annika mentioned that her identity as a lesbian was the only collective identity that was meaningful to her, Bianca rejected any kind of collective identity:

> *"I hate all collective thinking. My partner is a woman, but that does not mean that I feel a connection to other lesbians, or to lesbians as a group. I don't belong to anything or anybody, only to myself. Same with Germanness. It's not really an issue for me because I don't belong to that."*

Yet, even though these women declared that they did not see themselves as Germans, each made numerous statements during the interviews that contradicted this claim. All of them clearly distinguished between Germans and other nationalities, particularly 'foreigners' in Germany. In making such distinctions, they explicitly or implicitly situated themselves among the Germans. All of them repeatedly used the pronoun 'we' in referring to Germans, and sometimes they even spoke in terms of 'we Germans'.

Bianca repeatedly referred to *"the problem with foreigners we have in Germany."* In her view, "they" were a burden on "our" social system. When I asked her to explain that a bit more, she replied:

> Bianca: *"Well, the problem we have here in Germany with these masses of foreigners who come here. I think xenophobia has developed here because foreigners can freely stream in here. And they get social benefits that Germans normally only get when they work here and pay their social security contributions. And many foreigners are taken in here, sometimes because they need refuge, which I can understand. But at the same time it costs a lot of money, they need clothes, food, shelter, and so forth."*

> Andrea: *"It seems to me that you are mostly referring to asylum-seekers, who are not allowed to work in Germany. Is that right?"*

> Bianca: *"Yes."*

> Andrea: *"And what about others who work here and contribute to the social system?"*

> Bianca: *"Well, those are integrated. To me, they are not foreigners, they are Germans."*

> Andrea: *"So what matters to you is how integrated somebody is, and if they are they belong here just as those who are born here?"*

> Bianca: *"Right, that would be a German for me. Although there is also the issue of mentality. I generally think that nationality is not what matters. It does not matter to me who is German in terms of their nationality. What matters to me is people's mentality. And we Germans have a mentality that is different from, for example, Turks or Jordanians. And certain things contradict each other there in these mentalities and don't go together."*

During this exchange, Bianca specified what she meant by 'foreigners' and explained that she considered all those who were integrated in German society to be German, regardless of their

nationality. At first, it seemed that the criteria by which she measured integration was whether a person worked and contributed to the social system. But then she explained that what mattered to her were people's mentalities, and that there were differences between the mentality of Germans and that of certain others, which she appeared to understand as more or less essential. Certain foreigners, she mentioned Turks and Jordanians, were thus more difficult to integrate on the level of mentality. Although, she did not consider it impossible, as she later mentioned some examples of people she knew who had taken on 'German mentality.'

Annika also mentioned the 'foreigner problem;' though, she spoke of it as a problem that other Germans, rather than herself, had with foreigners. Nevertheless, she thought that the solution to the problem was to reduce the influx of foreigners into Germany, as it seemed that *"the majority of people here cannot deal with it when there are that many foreigners around."* Jutta also expressed the view that the *"streaming-in of foreigners"* should be restricted. She was further concerned that *"we"* were letting all kinds of *"criminals"* into the country, *"who are then pampered all around."* And she explained that she was also opposed to the continuing integration of the European Union:

> *"I don't know how to say it. A superficial listener might now think that I am contradicting myself. But I have to say, I am not in favor of Europe, even though nationality doesn't matter to me. But... the thing with Belgium,[5] I don't want things like that. We Germans, we let ourselves be put down, and we put ourselves down. We do that more than others. We don't have this strict national consciousness like others do, which is also a good thing [not to have it]. But these security regulations, other nations don't take them seriously. And about us they say that we are too correct and orderly, and we even feel ashamed for that. But, in certain regards, that correctness is totally justified and needed. And I want that to stay that way. Perhaps that is a German peculiarity."*

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[5] About a week before the interview, the media reported about people in Belgium having become ill after drinking Coca-Cola products that were contaminated with chemicals, the source of which was not clear. Shortly after, a few people in Germany also became ill after drinking Coca-Cola products that had been imported from Belgium. This was a major news issue that sparked discussions about whether European integration was resulting in a weakening of national standards concerning food safety controls. I assume that this incident is what Jutta was referring to here.

While these three women expressed disdain for collectivities and denounced their national association, they displayed an identification with notions of Germans as a collective or of a collective German mentality. In talking about various others, particularly 'foreigners' in Germany and 'other nations,' they located themselves among the Germans, and the privileges they enjoyed as Germans were not in question for them.

Jutta further seemed to perceive Germanness as a racial or ethnic category. Starting off by telling me that she thought people should learn to think of themselves as cosmopolitans and give up fixed notions of identity, Jutta suddenly switched to talking about this incident.

> Jutta: *"The other day, I saw this very dark-skinned talk show host on TV, who says of himself, 'I am a Solinger [from the city of Solingen].' And he has an accent like someone from Solingen, but he is black as coal. And I thought that was great how he said that, 'I am a Solinger, I am born here, you cannot get more Solinger than me.' And then I felt this pain because I thought, 'I hope you never run into somebody who throws something at your head because you dare to feel so comfortable here.' I could cry when I think about that."*

> Andrea: *"Do you think that many people in Germany still see it as a contradiction to be black and German?"*

> Jutta: *"Yes, well a contradiction... I mean, I see that he is black, but that... I think that's fascinating, someone opening his mouth, and, really, black as the night, really. And I personally don't have a problem with the word 'Rasse' [race]. But by now I know better than to use it, I have often been attacked for that.[6] So I don't use it anymore. Although for me, same with 'Neger' [Negro/Nigger], I don't have any second thoughts when I say that. How else should I say it? And a cat that was born in a cow stable is not a cow. You know? Why shouldn't I say that? He does look different. And his ethnicity, I use that word now because race has negative connotations, I mean, when they are born here, I swallow that. But what remains is that, from the way he looks, he is not German in the sense that he is of the same descent as I am."*

When Jutta told me about the black German talk show host, and about her concerns that he might get attacked for 'feeling so comfortable' in Germany, I thought she was referring to the fact that many majority-Germans would not accept a black person as German and was critical of the

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[6] The German word for 'race,' *Rasse*, is loaded with Nazistic connotations. While the English terms 'race' or 'racial' can be used in a relatively neutral sense, for example, such as in 'multi-racial coalition,' the German terms *Rasse* or *rassisch* are much more charged as inherently racist and practically cannot be employed in a neutral sense.

racism behind that attitude. At the same time, it was also apparent that she was herself, as she later put it, fascinated by the fact that someone who was *"black as coal"* spoke with a Solinger-accent. Her response to my question whether she thought that many people in Germany still see it as a contradiction to be black and German did not pick up on what I perceived as a critical view of this attitude in her first statement; rather, she elaborated on her fascination and indicated that she herself did not see this man as German in the sense in which she saw herself German. Her use of the verb 'to swallow' in describing how she responds to claims of belonging by people like this man, *"when they are born here,"* suggests that she did not accept such claims, but rather gave in to them, much as she gave in to not using the term *Rasse* anymore, although she did not see it as problematic. In pointing out that *"a cat that was born in a cow stable is not a cow,"* Jutta indicated that, in her view, being born in Germany did not make people German, but that Germanness was a question of ethnic descent. Ultimately, she was not prepared to accept the black talk show host as German because *"he is not German in the sense that he is of the same descent as I am."*

This was the only case in the interviews in which a woman explicitly talked about Germanness in ethnic terms. However, notions of Germanness as an ethnic category appeared implicit in some other women's deliberations of what it means to be German, particularly in relation to questions of responsibility for the Holocaust. These will be addressed in chapter 4.

Questions of culture and socialization

Among the issues that were addressed in the interviews, explicit discussion of Germanness as a cultural category figured least prominently. Some women explained that they had no idea what could be said to constitute German culture and that they always wondered what exactly those politicians who speak of German culture as threatened by *Überfremdung* wanted to rescue. A few women associated with 'German culture' famous German artists such as Goethe, Schiller, or Beethoven; but they were unsure about how to describe German culture as lived reality today.

Many pointed out that there existed now such a mix of cultural elements and imports that one could not speak of there being any specific, and specifically, German culture.

However, several women spoke of Germanness in terms of a socialization, and some also mentioned the German language as a meaningful element in their sense of being German. Many women further referred to particular norms and values, particular mentalities, and certain characteristics that they perceived as 'typically German;' although some also saw regional differences in these mentalities and characteristics. Among the attitudes cited as 'typically German' were, for instance: achievement-orientation, materialism, punctuality, orderliness, thoroughness, discipline, seriousness, uptightness, narrow-mindedness, boringness, lack of humor, lack of spontaneity, inferiority complexes, a know-all manner, and washing the car every Saturday. Jana, a 30 year-old majority-German Ph.D. student from the West who worked part-time for a women's project at her university, also mentioned *"this attitude of majority-Germans that Germanness cannot include black skin or anything else that differs from what is considered the norm, that is maybe the most typical German thing, or majority-German I should say."* And Kris considered it to be typically German not to know much about Jewish culture in Germany before and after the Holocaust.[7]

For most women, and particularly majority-Germans, what they associated with Germanness tended to have negative connotations. They would not have liked to be considered 'typical Germans.' Wiebke, for example, explained that she did not want to be seen in terms of *"these stereotypes"* (see portrait above). As she herself associated Germanness with certain stereotypes – *"punctuality, pigheadedness, achievement-orientation, intolerance toward other*

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[7] Significantly, considerations of what was typically German or of dominant attitudes in Germany did not include reference to the role of Christian views, norms, and values in German society. Only one woman, Ines, brought up the issue of the dominant culture's Christian underpinnings in pointing to the absence of reflections on this issue in feminist contexts. Most women who were Christian or Christian-socialized only referred to this background in talking about the Holocaust or in talking about relationships with Jews. Otherwise, the issue of Christian background only came up in interviews with women who were practicing Christians but not in relation to questions of German national identity.

cultures" – but sought to be different than that, she saw herself as outside of Germanness in that regard. A similar view was put forward by Barbara:

> *"I associate Germanness with being overly serious, disciplined, dull, and lacking a sense of humor. These are characteristics that I see as typically German. But I wouldn't say of myself that I am like that. Therefore, I am always glad when people don't recognize me as a German when I am abroad. Yet, I see this seriousness and dullness as characteristic for many Germans. The Northerners are most like that, the people in the South not so much. And I find the people here in the far West to be a little more eloquent and elegant, more light and humorous. Of course, that's also a cliché, but I do find that there is something to it. It is a different mentality that I wouldn't associate with Germanness."*

Barbara identified certain qualities as typically German but did not see these as descriptive of herself, and she mentioned feeling positive about not being recognized as German. She rather identified with the mentality she perceived among the people living in the same region as herself and made a distinction between that mentality and Germanness. So, in constructing a particular notion of Germanness, Barbara situated herself outside of it.

Some women explained that they had been or were making a conscious effort at not behaving in ways they considered typically German. For example, Laura talked about having been deliberately unpunctual, as her attitude had been that *"punctuality is a German virtue and therefore I hate punctuality because I don't want to be German."* Several women mentioned incidents in which they were told by someone of a different cultural background that they were not typical Germans, an experience that all of them described as pleasant. Nadja, for example, told me about the following situation in which she had been with a Hungarian woman who was in Germany on a scholarship and lived together with Nadja for a while:

> Nadja: *"We were walking towards downtown one day and got to this traffic light, which showed red for us. But, since there was no car coming, I continued walking. And she laughed and said, 'I like the fact that you crossed at the red light. Normally Germans always stand and wait at the red light.'"*
>
> Andrea: *"Do you think it's rather positive to be seen as untypical?"*
>
> Nadja: *"Yes, of course. That is almost a compliment."*

However, her Hungarian roommate also challenged Nadja's view of herself as not a 'normal' German:

> *"While we lived together, she asked me a lot things, to which I often replied that I did not know that, I did not know how these things are normally seen in Germany because I am not normal in that sense. And she often kept on probing and also called my definition of what is non-normal into question. Not directly, but the issue often came up, what is normally German and how am I different."*

In conversation with her roommate, Nadja could not simply rest on her self-image as different from the 'norm' but had to negotiate her self-image in relation to this woman's perception of her, in whose view Nadja might have had a lot in common with 'normal Germans.'

Significantly, Afro-Germans Karina and Niko as well as Turkish-German Dilek, who associated much the same characteristics with Germanness as did many majority-Germans, had a different perspective on some of these characteristics. They described these as qualities they had aimed at perfectioning. Since their Germanness was often challenged, they had tried to prove it by *"becoming more German than the prototypical German,"* as Karina put it. Niko described herself *"more Prussian than the Prussians"* and spoke of qualities such as punctuality or correctness as her *"weapons."* She said to me:

> *"If you are late once, then you are just late that one time, you probably have some good excuse, that's fine. If I am late, then I am a lazy African. Or, let's take another example: If you are sweaty, you must have been running to catch the bus or something like that. If I am sweaty, then it's because I am a smelly, stinky African."*

Although she spoke of certain characteristics as her 'weapons' against the racist stereotypes with which she was constantly confronted, Niko did not describe her being *"more German than most Germans"* as a defensive attitude. She rather talked about it as a choice:

> *"In many ways, I am much more centered here than many white Germans. They don't want to be German and think that attitude is cool. But I have embraced certain values which they don't have anymore. I have taken that culture into me and represent it, while the white people who come from this culture reject it and say, 'I don't want to be German, I want to be....' Oh well, and then they go and try to be Indian or something, wear Indian clothes. But they are still white women. Or they want to be Africans and take African dancing lessons. But they don't want to be what they are. However, I am that, I am that too, I am exactly that. All these*

> *German values, punctuality, correctness, reliability, the language, I take them and I use them. I just don't have the looks of a 'typical' German. And so people are confronted with all of that in me. And they hear me speaking German, maybe even better than they do. And the exotic is gone. You know, the exotic, their view of me, 'oh, she must have that kind of temperament.' And then they are confronted with this Germanness, and all of sudden I hear 'gee, those Germans,' about me, you know? Then I represent Germanness in its negativity for them. But I do call them into question. When they go and take on another culture, they appropriate it and dominate it. When I go and take this culture, I claim what belongs to me and where I belong. And it's a choice you make. I could have chosen something else, but I chose Germanness, in spite of what most white Germans think of me, how they see me.*

Like Karina and Dilek, Niko pointed out that the majority-Germans who don't want to be German belong anyway. Their disassociation from Germanness does not change their status as majority-Germans; thus, as Niko put it, their taking on other cultures amounts to appropriation and domination. Instead, Niko saw herself as claiming *"what belongs to me and where I belong"* against the attitudes of members of the white majority for whom she always remained the 'other,' be it in exoticizing stereotypes projected onto her or be it in that Niko represented Germanness in a way that they saw as negative. In both instances, the white majority looked at Niko as if into a mirror. What they saw in her was not Niko for herself but their own ideas about others and rejected parts of themselves.

A number of women who referred to particularly German character traits saw these as a result of a socialization in Germany and reflected upon the extent to which they themselves were shaped by this socialization. Anka, for example, described herself as *"overly punctual and extremely reliable."* She saw herself as lacking *"the talent for organizing that Germans are supposed to have."* But, overall, she considered herself to have internalized certain *"typically German 'virtues.'"* Anka's voice turned ironic when she said the word 'virtues,' and she did not necessarily see these as positive. But they were part of her upbringing, and she considered it undeniable that she was, to some degree, German in that sense. Kris spoke of *"obsessions,"* rather than 'virtues.' She described herself to me as lacking most of these qualities, which she was not

concerned about because she mostly saw them as negative. Still, she felt that her socialization in Germany had implanted in her a tendency to judge herself by her achievements, which she could not completely fend off (see portraits above).

Sabine described her upbringing as typically German in the sense that she *"was pushed towards orderliness and discipline."* However, her daughter was not like that at all: *"And, on the one hand, I think it's good that she is not like that. But, on the other hand, I have trouble tolerating the mess she always creates. That's where my upbringing comes through, I need a certain degree of order."* Sabine also told me that she sometimes wondered whether her daughter was making a *"deliberate effort at not demonstrating these German characteristics, you know, punctuality, that certain kind of work ethics, etc. She is no longer working well in school, which she used to do. And sometimes I think, perhaps she doesn't want to be German."*

Mirjana, a 46 year-old Serbian-German from the West who was Christian-socialized and worked as lecturer at a university for applied sciences, explained to me that, although she would not have wanted to admit that throughout much of her life, she considered herself *"quite German."* She continued:

> *"I am certainly German in terms of the culture that shaped me. You know, certain things, this seriousness, I certainly have that. I pick up on that when I, well, for example, I'm on this Yugoslavia-committee because of the war [in Kosovo]. And there are a lot of Yugoslavs on there, mostly Serbs, but others, too. And when they get together it's always a big theater, lots of jokes, and this vulgar patter, you know, against Milosevic, which also has these sexual undertones. Then I realize, that's not mine. I would prefer a serious conversation over this howling."*

Birgit and Elke referred to particular ways of communicating and interacting with others, which they saw as related to one's upbringing in Germany. Elke said: *"There are certain things which go on without words, you can't really describe them, but you know they are particular. You only recognize that when you interact with people from another context."* Birgit, like Mirjana, thought that Germans tended to be more serious in interacting with others than people of other backgrounds: *"There is this seriousness, this way of talking with each other, and also what you talk*

about. I think Germans are generally bad at small talk. " Birgit explained that she became aware of

such peculiarities when she lived in the United States for two years:

> *"That's where I realized that I had a different way of communicating, a different*
> *perspective on relationships, a different way of seeing the world. Not different in*
> *positive or negative terms, just different. And I might not have picked up on the*
> *fact that this had something to do with my background if I had only dealt with*
> *Americans during that time. But I also had contacts with other Germans who were*
> *there with the same organization as I was. And that's when I saw the contrast. The*
> *whole dynamics was different when you had a bunch of Germans together, the way*
> *you talk with each other, the way you relate to each other. It was more like, 'let's*
> *get right down to the bones.'"*

Several women mentioned that they became aware of their German socialization or cultural

mould when they were abroad for an extended period of time. Birgit said: *"You leave with this*

wobbly sense or no sense of yourself as German, and you come back as a German." Mira had

spent half a year in Spain, and she explained that:

> *"In this context, I was particularly aware of my being German. It's starts with*
> *such clichés like punctuality, that you get mad when the busses don't come. Or*
> *things like how you approach people, what is important to you in contact with*
> *people. I think, what is typical about German culture is that you immediately start*
> *talking about serious stuff, global politics, world-shattering events. Germans can't*
> *do small talk for some reason. They are also quick in talking about their deepest*
> *traumas. I am not quite like that, I am not as quick in sharing things about myself,*
> *but I think many Germans are. Generally, when you grow up black in this country,*
> *it tends to be further from your thoughts to define yourself as German. At least for*
> *me that was the case, I actually don't know if that's generalizable. And I also went*
> *through a time when I totally rejected Germanness. But when you grew up in this*
> *culture and with parents, or one parent, from this culture, you're not free of it.*
> *Well, I am also narrow-minded and self-opinionated sometimes, or often rather.*
> *That's a very typical thing. And as a black person I experience that with white*
> *Germans because their racism is often expressed in this form: 'We know better*
> *how things are done, and in Germany that's the way it is done, and you better stick*
> *to our rules.' And, at the same time, I can also be like that and go, 'that's how this*
> *or that is done.' So I am also German in some of these things. And my roommates*
> *in Spain told me several times that I was typically German. Although, most people*
> *there did not think that I was from Germany. They thought I was from Africa. And*
> *so I guess they did not find my behaviors typically German because they did not*
> *necessarily see me as German. But my roommates told me that every now and*
> *then, the thoroughness, the diligence, the orderliness, all these clichés. But, funny*
> *enough, it seems like there is some truth to them."*

Mira's statement oscillated between talking about ways in which she was German in terms of her socialization and talking about how, as a black person, it had not been evident for her to see herself as German because of her experiences with the white German majority. For instance, she was not treated by the white Germans as an 'insider,' but as someone who needed to be told how *"things are done."* This ambivalence was paralleled in her experiences in Spain, where some people saw her as typically German while others did not perceive her as German but as African. Mira also spoke about what she described as typically German characteristics as clichés at the same time as she considered these to have *"some truth to them."* These tensions in her account seem to resonate with her shifting sense of herself as 'typically German' as well as different from 'typical (white) Germans.'

Luci, who had left Germany some time after unification and stayed in several countries of the Middle East for a lengthy period of time, described how her attitude towards her national association changed while she was abroad:

> *"I was in Syria, Egypt, Israel, that region. These countries had things to them that I liked and other things that I didn't like. Some things I found really difficult to deal with. I guess I realized that other places are not necessarily better than Germany, that there are likable and dislikable things about all countries. And for the first time I could see things that I liked about Germany. And I also became more conscious of aspects of my personality that could be seen as German. It is a certain socialization, a way of looking at things. And I realized that I have to accept that, if only to be able to reflect upon it, to deal with it critically. To that end, I first have to accept it. And that began on an intuitive level, not in my head. I knew intuitively that that's what I am. And that I also have certain advantages because of it. That's when I could come back to this country, because I had come to a point where I could begin to deal with that identity."*

Luci continued by explaining that she thought it was crucial to confront oneself with the effect that one's upbringing in a particular context had upon oneself in order to able to gain a critical perspective on it. In a similar vein, Pia, a 34 year-old majority-German from the West who worked at a sexual assault center, spoke about a need to become aware of the ways in which one is shaped by one's socialization in a particular culture in order to be able to reflect critically on how this affects oneself and one's work with others.

> Pia: *"I consider it pretty ignorant to think that the culture one grew up in had no impact on the kind of personality one has developed. I think, the more contact you have with people who are not German-socialized, the more you realize that you are German. Although, you also have to be critical of that at the same time. Because there are all these people who say that Germans are punctual and other cultures are not, for example. So that can be a way of putting down other cultures, and you have to be careful not to construct stereotypes in that way. So it's a bit tricky. But there certainly is something to growing up here, it shapes you. And you have to acknowledge that in order to take responsibility for it. For example, I sometimes wonder if my great need for structure, particularly in doing team work, has something to do with the fact that I am German. I really need order and clear structures and I don't deal very well with chaos. And when a migrant woman in the team tells me that she finds that typically German, I have this impulse to say, 'no, that has nothing to do with it, I just like it that way.' But then I have to ask myself, who am I, what has shaped me? And the other question is, how am I going to deal with that? Do I insist on things being done my way or am I willing to look for compromises, to respect other ways of doing things?"*

While Pia pointed out the importance of acknowledging one's cultural background, she also considered it a 'tricky' issue in so far as such an attention to different backgrounds can lead to stereotyping people. This tension between being accountable for the specificity of the norms and values one has internalized and refraining from essentializations was also addressed by Nadja:

> *"When you grow up here, you certainly internalize a lot of things that you might not even be aware of. Therefore, it is important to deal with history and to look at the structures of thinking that exist. And that shapes behaviors, that's part of your education in this country, it comes out in certain practices. I think that my way of organizing things might have something to do with my having grown up here. At the same time, I know Germans who are not like that at all. So I think you have to be really careful with that. You have to be careful with stereotypes. Even though you might pick up on certain things, you also have to consider that stereotypes already shape the way you perceive things. If you come to a situation with a certain pattern of perception, you will probably find what you expected. And then you don't pick up on the exceptions. So you're on treacherous ground there."*

Michi also pointed out that, while she thought that there were certain attitudes that were more predominant in Germany than elsewhere, she considered it necessary to call stereotypes into question: *"For every stereotype, you can find lots of people who are not like that."* In talking about ways in which she saw herself as shaped by having grown up in Germany, Michi said:

> *"I think, maybe I would not be as concerned with questions of national identity if I wasn't German. For me, that is part of being German that I don't have this clear or unproblematic relationship to my national identity, that it is rather a conflicted relationship. And that has a lot to with the history of this nation. And I think that's*

fine to have a sense of conflictedness in relation to your nationality. I am not
seeking to change that. It's almost something that I find positive about
Germanness, that it forces you to keep reflecting on these things, rather than
settling down in your nationality."

A similar view was expressed by Laura when she talked about *"living with the history of*
National Socialism" as *"an essential part of [her] cultural identity."* This was the aspect of
Germanness which had had the most influence on her sense of herself and how she viewed the
world. Besides that, she only talked about her cultural background in terms of being rooted in the
German language.

The German language was brought up by a number of women as something that was
important to them. Some of them described the German language as the only thing German they
identified with in a positive sense. While they saw most other aspects of Germanness as at least
somewhat problematic, the language was something they felt at home in.

However, some women talked about incidents in which they became aware that hearing the
German language could be extremely unpleasant for people who had terrible experiences with
Germans. Jana mentioned survivors of the Holocaust, for whom *"that can be a traumatic*
experience." Luci and Barbara mentioned that they avoided speaking German when they were in
countries that had been occupied by the Nazis. In a somewhat related vein, Kris described that it
was the German language that *"brought [her] closer to this history,"* which had *"felt like*
something strange" to her. When she read original documents from the Third Reich, she stumbled
over the fact that they were written in German, as she had a sense that they should be written in a
different language than her own. Being confronted with these documents written in her own
language, she began to see herself in a relationship with the history of National Socialism (see
portrait above).

For Niko, being highly eloquent in German was one of her 'weapons,' although she also
mentioned *"a love for the language."* Dilek also talked about the importance of being able to speak
German very well in order to be able to defend herself verbally. With her parents she spoke a mix
of Turkish and German, and she regretted that her grasp of the Turkish language was rather limited.

> Dilek: *"My mother wanted her children to learn German very well. With my father, communication is sometimes difficult because he doesn't want to speak German and I am missing too much Turkish vocabulary. But I am glad that I learned German very well. I mean, I wanted to be German, so it was natural that I adopted that language more than Turkish. And I am also glad because I see how people who don't speak German well are treated in Germany. A lot of doors stay shut when you don't speak the language well enough. But I wouldn't say that the German language is an essential part of my identity. It's more like a tool for me."*

Sonja also thought that her experiences in Germany would have been different had she not already known the language before she came. One example she mentioned were encounters with the immigration authorities: *"I did not have problems with the officials when I came here. And I think that was because I spoke the language. Therefore, they could not treat me as shitty as they treat those who don't speak much German."* Yet, for her the language was also an important point of connection to a society and culture that she was still in the process of becoming familiar with.

Questions of belonging

As I discussed in chapter 1, the dominant notion of Germanness as intrinsically 'white' by implication renders German identity an ethnic or racial identity and constructs an opposition between being of color and being German. To the extent that a Christian socialization or a Christian-secularized culture and worldview is part of the hegemonic conceptualization of Germanness, being, for example, Jewish or Muslim and being German are further perceived as mutually exclusive. Some of the women I interviewed were situated within this 'national norm' while others found themselves excluded from it. The majority-Germans among my interview partners expressed differing levels of awareness of this norm and their own implication within it. Those who recognized it as position of dominance and privilege often expressed feelings of discomfort in relation to this status. Several women explained that, at an earlier point in their lives, they had not been able or willing to recognize their implication in such relations of power; however, they had since come to acknowledge it and accept accountability for this position. Instead, the Afro-Germans and the Turkish-German woman among my interview partners related

experiences of being denied affirmation of their identity as Germans. All of them had been faced with questions such as 'Where are you from?' – sometimes followed up with 'But where are you *really* from?' when they explained that they were from Germany. As Dilek put it, the implicit message in such questions is: *"You don't look like us, you must be from somewhere else, and therefore you will never belong to us."* These women spoke of having to make room for themselves within Germanness in the face of challenges to their claim of belonging. In contrast to their experience, for many majority-German women the question of Germanness was an issue of coming to terms with the fact that they belonged to something they did not want to belong to.

Many majority-German women saw Germanness as a 'difficult' issue. Julia described it as *"burdened"* and *"negative."* Anka spoke of German identity as *"problematic."* Wiebke found it *"difficult"* to see herself as a German. While she acknowledged that she could not simply opt out of that association and recognized that her nationality had an effect on her life, she maintained that she did not have a German identity, nor did she want one. Laura described having felt *"embarrassed"* about being German and that she had tried to *"cut herself off from that belonging."* Kris explained that she found it *"difficult"* to address the issue of national identity; not only talking about it, even just thinking about it made her feel *"uncomfortable."* She saw it as a *"touchy"* and *"embarrassing"* issue (see portraits above). Important factors in why these women saw German identity as 'uncomfortable' or 'difficult' were the history of National Socialism and the Holocaust as well as privileges related to Germanness as a legal status and a location in international relations. However, some women's discomfort around being German also related to their views of other Germans with whom they did not want to be identified. Their notion of Germans as a collective and their sense of being associated with this collective caused them to feel uncomfortable about being German.

For instance, Laura mentioned that she had wanted to distance herself from Germanness because of *"certain other Germans, whom [she] found kind of sickening, to whom [she] did not*

want to belong." She talked about feeling embarrassed when she met other German tourists abroad. This was an example used by many women in pointing to situations in which they had felt uncomfortable about being German. They evoked images of the 'ugly' German who tramples about in foreign countries with the attitude of a soldier belonging to an occupying force, shows no respect for local customs, and wants everything to be just like in Germany. Several women described encounters with such Germans as a source of embarrassment. Isabell, for instance, made this comment: "*I feel really embarrassed when I am abroad and encounter Germans who don't know how to behave. That makes me uncomfortable or embarrassed, because I know that I also belong to this people.*" Watching other Germans 'misbehave,' a number of women felt reluctant to identify themselves as Germans and tried to stay clear from these German tourists. Some also expressed concerns about being identified with these 'ugly' Germans. For example, Barbara said: "*I always try to keep my distance from these German tourists who just don't know how to behave in a foreign country. I find them embarrassing, and I certainly don't want to be lumped together with them.*" A similar statement was made by Viola:

> "*Sometimes I find it embarrassing to be German. Particularly when I am abroad and I see how some Germans behave, for example, in the Czech Republic, where everything is cheaper than in Germany. These Germans go there just to get drunk. And when I see how they behave on the streets and in the pubs, I really find it embarrassing. And I don't want to be put into one category with these people. But I hope that the people there know that not all Germans are like that.*"

While these women viewed themselves as different from the 'ugly' Germans, their feelings of embarrassment indicate that, on some level, they saw a connection between themselves and these other Germans. Isabell made this explicit in stating that she "*also belong[ed] to this people,*" whereas Barbara and Viola were concerned about how they were perceived in the light of these other Germans' behaviors.

Another regard in which several majority-Germans had felt highly uncomfortable about being German was in relation to racist attacks and murders committed by (majority-)Germans. Birgit, for instance, referred to the chain of attacks, some of which had a pogrom-like character,

that occurred in the years after unification and explained: *"I had this feeling of embarrassment, you know, every time I went to a Turkish grocery store I almost felt like I should be extremely friendly and give the vendor a tip to make up a little for the fact that they are living in such a terrible country. I really had this impulse, because I felt embarrassed."* Barbara said: *"I remember when this arson attack in Solingen happened and these Turkish women were killed. That was terrible. In such situations, I feel very uncomfortable about being German, I feel embarrassed or ashamed."*

However, other women pointed out that, while they were shocked by the massive racist violence and murderous attacks, they did not have a sense that these racist actions reflected upon themselves in any way, because they did not identify with the people who committed them. For instance, Michi said:

> *"I was not really surprised when all this started to happen. I mean, I knew there were people like that. Although I was shocked at how fast the inhibition level sank all of a sudden. I guess, I did not expect that. But I don't feel like I have anything in common with such people. They are Germans and I am German, but that in itself does not make you a racist. I don't feel like I'm responsible for what such people do. What I am responsible for is trying to do my share in creating a social climate that doesn't allow such things to happen."*

Ines had a similar view:

> *"I was totally annoyed by this public display of shame, you know, the candle light chains, how this 'We feel shame' was being sold. I did not feel shame, I was angry, totally furious. I mean, these people are Germans, they also live in this country, but I don't identify with such people. My politics is completely opposed to theirs. And that's where my responsibility comes from, not because they are Germans and I also happen to be a German, but because I am opposed to such things, So I have to look what possibilities are there for myself to do something against that."*

What distinguishes Birgit's and Barbara's response to the racist crimes from that of Michi and Ines is that Birgit and Barbara seemed to feel somehow connected to the perpetrators, even though they did not agree with their actions, whereas Michi and Ines clearly distinguished between themselves and the perpetrators. Birgit's and Barbara's feelings of embarrassment or shame seem to be the result of a sense that the racist crimes committed by other Germans somehow also reflected upon them. Birgit even had the impulse to 'make up' for the crimes by being particularly

friendly to the Turkish grocers she bought from. Michi and Ines did not see themselves as

connected to the perpetrators. These were Germans and they themselves happened to be German,

but that was no grounds for them to identify with the perpetrators. Michi's and Ines's sense of

responsibility was not so much related to the fact that they were Germans but resulted from their

being politically opposed to the crimes and the motives behind them and from their wanting to

work against these.

In Jana's description of her response to the upsurge of racist violence after unification,

Germanness played a more important role than it did for Michi and Ines. She explained:

> *"I had this sense, you have got to do something. So I got involved with several*
> *initiatives, for example, against the change of the asylum law. I was also involved*
> *with this group that worked with refugees. It was important for me to show that*
> *there are people who are opposed to what is going on. Also to the victims and to*
> *potential victims. To show them that there are also other Germans than those who*
> *attack refugee hostels. But I did not feel shame or something like that. Because I*
> *was politically active, I felt that I stood, to put it in a flat or vapid [platt] way, on*
> *the correct side."*

While Jana did not describe having felt shame or embarrassment in response to the attacks,

it was important to her to show that there were 'other' Germans. It seems that, in opposing the

crimes and the change of the asylum law as well as in working with refugees, she was also

negotiating her own identity as a German and her relationship to the attackers.

Karina also talked about wanting to show that there were 'other' Germans. She described

the time when the attacks at Rostock, Mölln, and Solingen, among others, occurred as follows:

> *"That was a time when my skin color became very important again. I was in these*
> *two worlds again. On the one hand, I am of color and therefore affected by this*
> *racism. On the other hand, I am also German. And when I travel somewhere, for*
> *instance, I was recently in Egypt, people ask me about what is going on in my*
> *country. And what am I going to answer, that I have nothing to do with that? Or do*
> *I say, yes that happens in the country where I come from, where I feel I belong,*
> *where I am at home. And I don't want people to think that there is only racism in*
> *Germany, it's also a nice country in many ways. But that is difficult, to stand on*
> *both sides somehow. I mean, it wasn't too bad where I lived here in West*
> *Germany. But when I traveled East to visit friends and relatives... I stopped doing*
> *that for a while. And then, after a few years, I went there again with my husband.*
> *We wanted to go camping, but we had not even gotten to the camping site yet,*
> *when people screamed at me, 'Neger raus hier!' [Negros/Niggers out]. And so I*

am scared to go there again. So skin color was a big issue. At the same time, I also think that I have the chance to show foreigners, here and abroad, through my way of interacting with them, that not all Germans are idiots, that there are other Germans as well. That was also important to me at the time."

In the face of the racist attacks and the general upsurge of openly expressed racism, Karina found it difficult to reconcile her identity as a person of color with her identity as a German. While she was on the side of the victims, she also felt responsibility as a German; she spoke of being in *"these two worlds again."* As she felt connected to Germans as a collective, she wanted to show that not all Germans are racist 'idiots.'

Mira set herself in a different relationship to the crimes:

"When these attacks happened, I did not see myself in a relationship with the perpetrators, I rather saw myself in a relationship with the victims. That was automatic, I mean, it was clear to me where I stand in this. Well, I don't live in a hostel for refugees and so I am not as much of an easy target. But I did not feel shame or wanted to show the world that not all Germans are like that. I don't see myself as representative of the average German in that regard. These are moments when the fact that I am German is really of minor importance. Lately, when I was abroad it was often in relation to being a black German that I participated at certain events. And, in that function, it would not occur to me to try and represent Germany in any better light. And the people at these events would not see me as representing the average German. So, the issue for me then is rather to inform people, without whining, about how shitty it is in Germany for black Germans, what our everyday life is like, the things that happen, what we are trying to do against that. But I know that, as a child, when we lived outside of Germany, other children teased me because I was German. And then I had the feeling that I wanted to defend the country."

While, as a child and abroad, Mira had been identified with Germany and was prepared to defend the country when she was teased about her association with it, in relationship to the racist crimes committed by majority-Germans, she clearly situated herself as a black German, not an 'average' German. She was not identified with all Germans as a collective and did not have the sense of ambivalence that Karina described. The fact that she was German was of minor importance in that context, she felt more of a connection with the victims of these crimes. In her participation at events abroad, Mira saw herself as representing black Germans, not Germans as a whole, and it was not her objective to ameliorate Germany's reputation. She rather wanted to make clear how bad the situation really was with regard to racism.

The various responses to actions of other Germans just described, the feelings caused by these and women's understandings of responsibility in relation to them, appear to be linked to the kinds of collectivities women saw themselves as associated with. How they reacted and related to the behaviors and actions of others depended on whether or not they saw themselves as connected to these others and how they understood that connection, that is what kind of 'imagined communities' they saw themselves as belonging to. For instance, Isabell felt embarrassed by the behaviors of German tourists because she felt that she also *"belong[ed] to this people."* Birgit's and Barbara's feelings of embarrassment or shame in response to racist attacks committed by majority-Germans seem to indicate that they were identified with (majority-)Germans as a collective, whereas Michi and Ines did not have that sense of association with the perpetrators. Ines said: *"I also see myself in a chain of identification, but that does not go back to nationality. I identify with a certain politics."* In a different but comparable vein, Julia pointed out that she did not identify with *"that Germany."* She explained: *"I identify with certain people, from East and West, with whom I share views and ideas about politics and society"* (see portrait above). Jana negotiated her identity as a German in opposition but also in relation to racist Germans. Like Jana, Karina did not want to see these Germans as taken to represent Germans as a whole and wanted to show that there are 'other' Germans. Mira did not have an equally strong sense of connectedness to Germans as a collective as did Karina. Whereas Karina felt a tension between her identity as a person of color and her identity as a German, for Mira, Germanness was of minor importance in regards such as racist attacks committed by majority-Germans. As a black German, she did not, or not always, identify with 'average' Germans. Similarly, Dilek related to such incidents as a 'Turk,' although she otherwise did not *"feel like [she] was a Turk,"* but rather understood herself to be German. But her sense of Germanness did not include an identification with Germans who are racists. They would not see her as belonging to their 'imagined community,' nor would she see herself as connected to them. Sonja, in describing her response to the conflict between a *"German woman"* and a *"black men,"* positioned herself as *"a kind of stranger"* in Germany; she did not

really feel part of a collective of Germans (see portrait above). Another example of how a woman negotiated her own position in relation to 'imagined communities' was Wiebke's account of how she approached the issue of racism. While she mentioned that she saw herself as privileged because of her white skin and was seeking to learn about how racism *"affects women's lives,"* she found herself *"somewhat split"* when it came to how racism affects migrant men. It seemed that she found it difficult to reconcile the fact that migrant men can be victims of racism while they can also be *"perpetrators"* in relation to women. Therefore, she divided between a *"world of women"* and a *"world of men"* and sought to engage primarily with this 'imagined community' of women and leave aside the 'world of men' (see portrait above).

Interestingly, many of the women who identified with, or saw themselves in a relation to, Germans as a collective pointed out at other points in the interviews that they considered the notion of the German nation or the German people to be a construction, not a reality. In certain regards, however, they identified with that construct. Often, this was the case in regards that raised what could be considered moral questions, for instance, in relation to the legacy of National Socialism and the Holocaust and in relation to racism. In discussing issues of responsibility in such regards, these women connected their sense of responsibility to their being German. This indicates that people's attitudes towards the issue of national identity can be multi-layered and contradictory; their understandings of the nation and national identity are not seamless and entirely 'rational' edifices. It might also indicate that, in such charged contexts, calling the construct of the German nation or people into question was seen as in contradiction with the need to acknowledge accountability or responsibility and, therefore, possibly as immoral or politically irresponsible. These issues will be addressed in more detail in the following chapters. However, a brief discussion of two incidents where such contradictions were at play will serve to further illustrate this matter already at this point.

While we were talking about racism, Nadja made this comment:

Nadja: *"There are situations that I find difficult. For example, some time ago I was taking the subway, and this man approached me who... well, he did not look like he was German and he also hardly spoke German, he spoke French. And if that had been a German man, I would not have let him approach me, I would have told him to leave me alone. But I find that difficult when, well, when I do not want the person I am dealing with to get the impression that all Germans are cold. When I have this wish to show that there are also some, who..., well there are also other Germans. But in such situations I have this conflict because I don't want to get hit on no matter by whom, and at the same time I don't... I can't draw the line."*

Andrea: *"Because you are concerned that this person could experience that as racist?*

Nadja: *"Yes. And I don't have this concern when approached by a white German man. And I don't know how to deal with that. I let myself be drawn into conversations, but I have an uneasy feeling as I am doing it. That's an uncomfortable situation, because there are things in there that I have not clarified for myself."*

Nadja already seemed uneasy when it came to describing the man she was talking about. She appeared to be at loss for an adequate word to describe him, and so she said that he did not look like he was German, implying that he was not white, although, at an earlier point in the interview, Nadja spoke critically of such conceptions that equal Germanness with being white. Her assumption that he was not German was confirmed by the fact that he hardly spoke German. She explained that if a (white) German man had approached her, she would not have gone along with it. But in this situation, she felt that her simple disinterest in being approached, no matter by whom, could seem racist to the man in question. She saw her behavior in the context of what she assumed this person's experience was with Germans, and she did not want him to think that *"all Germans are cold."* She wanted to show him that *"there are also other Germans."* But she felt uncomfortable because she was doing something she did not want to do and had not clarified for herself how to deal with such situations. At several times during the interview, Nadja called the idea of the nation and notions of Germans as a collective into question. However, in this context, her decision as to how to respond to being approached by this man was not made by her for herself as an individual, but she decided in terms of how she wanted to act as a German, what kind of representation of Germanness she wanted to put forward. Her wish to give a particular

representation of herself as a German stood in contradiction to, and kept her from, acting in the way she would have preferred to act, and in which she would have acted if she had been approached by a white German man.

Laura commented on a similar kind of situation:

"One of the things I find really odd is when I realize that I do things like smile at a black guy on the street, not because I feel like doing that, but because he is black. In order to give him a positive feeling. That I find really odd, that I seem to think of myself that I should be the one to give him that feeling. Where I am not sure how to reflect on what I am doing there and why I am doing it, it's not entirely conscious. I guess, I really have this thing that I want to show him that there are nice Germans. But I think that's almost racist. Because I reduce this person to his being black and I reduce myself to being German."

The impulse to smile at a black person that Laura described was, much like in Nadja's case, related to a wish to show that there are *"nice Germans."* Laura's comment also implicitly posited an opposition between being black and being German. She pointed out that she thought her thinking and acting like that was not adequate. For one thing, it had a racist note to it, as she was reducing this person to his skin color and did not see and treat him as an individual but as a black man. For another thing, she was reducing herself to the fact that she was German, which was in contradiction to her rejecting it *"when people reduce me to my being German,"* since *"it is not solely definitive of who I am."* (see portrait above). Thus, she was evoking a notion of Germanness that she otherwise wanted to call into question. She was critical of the fact that she was reproducing notions of difference and identity that she thought were problematic. But she found that there was obviously something at play in such situations of which she was not entirely conscious and which led her to think and act in such ways.

Few majority-German women mentioned ever having felt comfortable about being German. Although, several women pointed out that, while they felt uncomfortable about being German, they had to acknowledge that it was in many regards a comfortable position to be in. For instance, Michi said: *"The circumstances for living are certainly much better here than in many*

other places. Most people here don't have much to worry about. So, while there might be a number of things that bother me about my nationality, it comes with a lot of advantages." Pia, Luci, and Ines, among others, made similar points, and these three women also mentioned that, as lesbians, they certainly had it much easier in Germany than lesbians in many other countries.

A small number of women explained that they were interested in identifying positive elements and traditions in German history and intellectual culture that allowed for a positive sense of German identity. For instance, Jana mentioned early in the interview that as a teenager she had mostly felt rather uncomfortable about being German but later developed a different view. When I asked her to elaborate on that, she replied:

> "*During my school years, I had a pretty simple picture. Being German was something negative or burdened, that was simply clear. And then at the university, I found that many important ideas had originated in Germany, that there are many important thinkers who come from Germany and who are well-respected in other countries. And there are also certain achievements, like the social system, where people really established something good. These things I can relate to in a positive sense. So I realized that it is not that simple, that Germany is not just the Nazi-past. But before that I did not have such a more differentiated view of Germany. I rather thought that one had to feel ashamed of being German.*"

Barbara explained that there were some regards in which she "*liked the fact that [she was] German.*" She continued:

> "*There are certain collective achievements in this country that I believe we can feel good about. We have a very open school system, which offers a lot of opportunities, a good social net – except for childcare, though – also certain political and economic achievements. So these kinds of things, in relation to such things I would say that I like being German, or even that I am a little proud to be German.*"

Jana's and Barbara's positive sense of being German was associated with the achievements of other Germans and with 'collective achievements.' Again, as in many of the examples above, what was decisive to their sense of being German was their view of the collective to which they understood themselves as being connected.

For most other majority-German women, however, their notion of the collective with which they felt associated rather evoked negative feelings, and anything like pride in relation to

that association was out of the question. Some women, Laura for example, talked about having put much emphasis on the fact that they had a grandparent or other ancestors who were not German, which meant to them that, as Laura put it, *"at least I am not totally German."* Sabine told me that her daughter had asked her once whether she only had German ancestors: *"So I had to tell her, 'sorry, I don't have anything else to offer you.' She found that a pity. But she was happy when we were in Tunisia and some people thought she was a Turk."*

Some majority-German women described a more distant or emotionally neutral sense of relationship to Germans as a collective. Kris, for instance, talked about her sense of connectedness as such:

> *"I was coming back from Italy once, where I had really felt a difference in how people treated me as somebody who looks kind of like a punk, you know, much more staring, that kind of thing. And on the train back to Germany, where there were mostly Germans, nobody paid attention to that. So I had this feeling somehow, well, I am back home. And it's something like... you know better how to estimate where people are coming from and they can estimate where you are coming from. There is less of an unknown in dealing with each other. But there are many Germans to whom I don't have any sense of connection, a sense that we share something, although there is this level of cultural familiarity, which I might not have with many Italians. But that is not enough to feel that I belong with people and certainly not a ground for solidarity or something like that. There are other things which are much more important. I feel that I belong much more to a certain political subculture, that's a much more important identification."*

For Kris, association with certain collectives was not a fateful circumstance; it was, to some extent, up to her to decide how much meaning she wanted to give to these associations. Luci made a related point in reflecting self-critically on her wish to distance herself from Germanness. She said: *"This Germanness is on some level really a fiction. I mean, whom do I have in mind when I think of Germanness? Do I think of black Germans or migrants who are also Germans? Do I want to distance myself from them, too?"* In reflecting on the notion of Germanness from which she wanted to distance herself, Luci opened up the question of how this was defined, who was included in or excluded from it. She came to realize that her idea of Germanness had been based on her view of white or ethnic Germans and had not included black Germans and migrants. Based on

this realization, Luci explained that she thought she should take a more critical look at what kinds of collectives she sees herself as associated with.

From Kris's and Luci's deliberations, as well as that of other women like, for example, Ines, Michi, or Mira, emerges a perspective on collective association in which a sense of belonging with certain people is not a matter of fate, but something of which one can take control. While there are certain factual implications which one cannot simply opt out of, for instance, legal status or race privilege, individuals can make decisions as to what communities they 'imagine' themselves to belong to and in allegiance to which they want to act.

Taking responsibility for the communities or collectivities one 'imagines,' and for how one acts in relation to them, needs to include attention to the conditions of belonging for oneself and others in a given social context and how one's own negotiations of issues of association relate to that of others. Indeed, as Karina, Dilek, and Niko pointed out during the interviews, it doesn't help them in their situation when majority-Germans denounce their Germanness and think that resolves what is problematic about that location. They would rather like to see majority-Germans accept accountability for how they are positioned and acknowledge how their situation relates to that of others. While Sabine's daughter might find it a positive experience to be seen as a Turk, this resonates in a rather discordant or conflicted way with Dilek's experience that: *"It doesn't matter how I see myself, for most people I remain a Turk."* She explained: *"I don't have a problem with being German, I have a problem with the fact that such differences [as skin color and her parents origin] are given meaning, are given value. That's the problem with Germanness."*

Searching for constructive ways of dealing with the issue of national association might thus best start from bringing into communication the various experiences and needs around this issue, from examining how these experiences and needs are connected to locations within social relations of power, and exploring where they meet and where they conflict. This could provide the grounds for imagining different kinds of communities and possibilities for allegiance and inclusive politics.

Seeking to make a step towards creating such communication and thinking through issues of locational politics, the following chapter will take a closer look at how the women I interviewed understood and negotiated Germanness in relation to the historical context in which they were situated, particularly the legacy of National Socialism and the Holocaust, and what kind of experiences and needs they formulated in relation to that context. The final chapter will then consider the kinds of locational politics inherent in my interview partners' reflections and examine what possibilities for connection they open up.

Chapter 4

A place in history: Reflections on German identity after National Socialism and the Holocaust

Introduction

> [I]n Germany and within the framework of its political culture the traces of the Nazi past and the Holocaust as its main core can be discerned at almost all layers of feeling and expression in both the private as well as the public spheres. Indeed, the history of the Federal Republic seems to be accompanied by cyclically recurring debates and periodic outbursts in regard to the Nazi past, which are often prompted by questions concerning the interpretation and representation of the Holocaust. Such a discourse appears basic to Germany's moral and historical self-awareness. Its fluctuations allow the beholder to gauge prevailing circumstances in the public realm and beyond. This discourse contributes to the formation of a specific collective consciousness, indebted to an incriminated past. By all appearances, the Holocaust might well be defined as an identity-forming foundational event.
> – Dan Diner, *On Guilt Discourse and Other Narratives* (1997)

This chapter addresses the place of the Nazi past in my interview partners' understanding of German identity. I will discuss how these women saw themselves linked to the past as individuals and/or as members of collectives, what moral and political implications they drew from it, and what notions of Germanness they presumed or produced in their reflections on the past and its relation to the present. As touched upon already, there are significant differences in how these women viewed and interpreted their personal and collective connections to National Socialism and the Holocaust and in how they understood and negotiated their identities in relation to this history. Many of the most trenchant differences relate to the particular continuity in which individual women considered themselves to be situated. Some women understood themselves as descendents of individual former perpetrators, supporters, and bystanders or, more generally, as standing in the tradition of the collective which brought the Nazi regime to power and supported or tolerated its crimes. Others traced their roots to victims of Nazism and the Holocaust. Some women recognized a connection to both victims and perpetrators, while yet others were related to neither. In correlation to these various associations, they approached the past from distinct perspectives and

there are decisive differences in how this history figured in their individual conceptions of 'being German.'

Other factors pertaining to differences in these women's views on the legacy of the Nazi past include their upbringing in the respective former German states, their age, their political outlook and commitments, and distinct circumstances and experiences that had caused them to reflect on this past and its role in the present. Yet, these differences notwithstanding, many women shared a concern with specific issues, even though they approached them from different angles. While my interview partners' engagements with the history of National Socialism and the Holocaust included questions of what happened, how, and why, most of their reflections focused on the political and moral or ethical implications of this legacy. These were of particular concern to women who understand themselves to be successors of the perpetrator group at large. In chapter 1, I have provided an outline of how the political dimension of this legacy has been negotiated in the two post-war German states and of how contesting interpretations of this legacy figure in political debates over national identity and the unified nation-state. Next to this political context, my interview partners' reflections on the past are marked by, and formulated in reference to, the ways in which the psychic and moral dimensions of this legacy were dealt with collectively since 1945, and differently so at various points in post-war history. A few comments on this context are in order before I attend to my interview partners' views and attitudes.

It is difficult to assess the extent to which the residents of the GDR internalized the official tale presented to them by their leaders, which must have dissonated with their actual experiences and memories. Yet, Fulbrook states, "there were sufficiently compelling political reasons for conformity, both to prevailing political circumstances and to what amounted to a collectively exonerating myth. Any twinges of guilt, if such existed, were soon assuaged." (1999:15). As the GDR counted itself among the 'victors of history' and projected all guilt and responsibility for the Holocaust and other crimes and atrocities committed during the Third Reich on to the FRG, there was no explicit or public process of 'working through' or 'coming to terms' with the past. The

GDR required conformity of its citizens and challenges to the official myth were suppressed. Furthermore, faced with the effects of the reparations exacted by the Soviet Union from its occupation zone, with food shortages, travel restrictions, and other demands and challenges of 'coming to terms with the present,' the vast majority of East Germans did not consider 'overcoming the past' to be an urgent issue (1999:56). Fulbrook notes that confrontations with the past and repressed feelings of guilt and shame surfaced in literature written by GDR-authors but not in general public discussions. Opinion polls and studies drawing on oral history interviews suggest a predominant absence of feelings of shame and guilt in the generation who were young adults during the war as well as among those who were teenagers in the 1980s (1999:162pp.).[1]

In the FRG, collective responsibility was acknowledged by the political leaders in form of restitution payments. However, apart from "deliver[ing] up a few sacrificial lambs, in the form of the concession that there actually were some criminals who deserved to stand trial" (1999:60), the remainder of the population was exonerated. Widespread repression and denial of the majority's support for Hitler's regime characterized the first two post-war decades. If the crimes were acknowledged, it was in the passive voice; they had been committed "in the name of the German people, but apparently not by any (or many) members of the German people" (1999:59). Giordano coined the term 'second guilt' in referring to the suppression and denial of the 'first guilt' that the Germans brought upon themselves through their actions and failures to act under National Socialism (1990:11). By denying their involvement and their responsibility, they forewent to face the challenge of a moral renewal. Instead, Giordano points out, the attitudes which had allowed Hitler's triumph in 1933 – for instance, opportunism, abstinence from responsibility, inability to feel consternation in the face of inhuman laws and actions – continued to actualize themselves in the rejection of guilt and responsibility. The second guilt came to mirror the first (1990:15).

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[1] Nevertheless, of the seven women among my interview partners who grew up in the GDR, two reported feeling or having felt guilt in relation to the Nazi past and one woman related having felt shame, suggesting that not everybody felt completely exonerated by the GDR's official doctrine.

This failure to accept responsibility, let alone guilt, and the repression of the past had a lasting effect on the psychic constitution of members of the Nazi generation as well as that of their children and grandchildren. In their study called *The Inability to Mourn*, first published in 1967, Alexander and Margarete Mitscherlich address the apparent absence of any emotional confrontation with the Nazi past in the post-war years. Given that the German population had been narcissistically identified with Hitler as their *Führer* and with the ideology of National Socialism, the Mitscherlichs argue, the psychological reaction to the loss of this ego-ideal should have been massive depression and melancholy. This was not the case; rather, the vast majority of the population avoided narcissistic injury – in fact, a self-devaluation that would have been extremely difficult to master – by breaking all affective bridges to the recent past (1998:38). This break was achieved through various defense mechanisms that prevented a confrontation with the Nazi past. One of these was the denial of involvement through which the past became 'derealized.' The repression of guilt also brought with it an inability to feel sympathy for the victims. The Mitscherlichs note that the population displayed a remarkable emotional coldness when confronted with pictures of concentration camps and with information about the extent and the brutality of the crimes. Another defense mechanism consisted in a shift from the identification with Hitler to an identification with the Allies or to an identification as victim. Finally, the gap created by the withdrawal from the former object of narcissistic identification was also filled by the manic pursuit of reconstruction and the 'economic miracle' (1998:40pp.). This flight from memory made it impossible to work through the past, to engage in a process of mourning that would allow for renewal. Accordingly, large segments of German society displayed a psychic immobility, an 'autistic' composure, which also led to a social and political immobility (1998:38,44) and to a social-psychological continuity in authoritarian character structures and illiberal as well as anti-Semitic attitudes and behaviors (Rabinbach 1988:172p.).

Those people who did try to confront themselves with the immediate past often were individuals who had not been identified with the regime or who had rejected it. Yet they frequently

reacted with massive feelings of guilt and shame, as they understood themselves to have been accomplices. Hannah Arendt noted this imbalance in emotional responses in postwar Germany and referred to it as a "moral confusion," since "those who were free of guilt assured each other and the whole world how guilty they felt, whereas only few of the perpetrators were willing to show even the smallest sign of remorse" (quoted in Koppert 1991:221; translation A.K.). Koppert suggests that this 'moral confusion' must be seen in relation to the muddled nature of personal responsibility under the conditions of a dictatorship, where individuals might not participate in certain actions themselves, yet function as 'cogs in the works' (1991:221). In particular, the persecution and extermination of racially, eugenically, and politically 'undesirable' groups of people had been organized based on a division of labor. There remained a "critical mass" of guilt, which could not be assigned to individuals, but which laid on the shoulders of the collective (ibid.). However, by and large, a critical confrontation with this systemic guilt and the conditions that effected it did not occur. Consequently, there remained, in the words of Dan Diner, a "free-floating feeling of guilt" (quoted in Koppert 1991:221; translation: A.K.), which also caught hold of the following generations.

Overall, the children of the Nazi generation grew up in an environment marked by silence over the recent past. When they asked questions touching on what their parents were repressing, they were often confronted with aggressive denial. If their parents shared memories with them, these most often related to their family's own suffering during the war. Such memories served as *Deckerinnerungen* (covering memories) behind which other events disappeared (Rommelspacher 1995c:27). Children and youth learned not to ask too many questions. However, many developed feelings of guilt, either for what they suspected their family members to have done or failed to do, or they came to share the collective, 'free-floating' feeling of guilt based on the scale of the general populations' involvement with the Nazi regime. Koppert notes that a marked gender difference seems to have existed in the ways in which the sons and daughters of known Nazi perpetrators responded to this knowledge. Whereas the sons tended to turn to aggression, and some attacked

their fathers in literary works, the daughters suffered silently or went into therapy (1991:223p.). On the whole, members of this generation either joined their parents in the suppression of memory or began to rebel against the predecessing generation's denial of guilt and responsibility. This rebellion was closely associated with the student movement of the late 1960s and early 1970s. While generational clashes occurred throughout the Western world at that time, the student revolts in West Germany had the added element of forming a challenge of their parents' generation's actions and failures to act under National Socialism (Fulbrook 1999:171).

However, the '68er revolt' did not achieve a working through of the guilt that had been handed down to them. They managed to rouse West German society from its collective denial, but they were pushing for a change that their upbringing in the reactionary '40s, '50s, and '60s had not prepared them to carry through. As Koppert argues, they remained fixated on 'elders' and authorities, replacing *Führer* and state with Marx, Engels, Lenin, Mao, and Che. They were constantly fighting over which was the ultimate 'correct line' to take and battled against those who deviated from their course. Envisioning a more free and humane society, their efforts towards creating it were marked by crass intolerance and self-righteousness (Koppert 1991:225). Furthermore, their confrontations with the NS past took on an impersonal note. They concentrated on capitalist interests and profiteers of 'fascism,' on the relation between economic developments and political structures, rather than on the German population and their motives and actions. Focussing on a few capitalist wire-pullers, functionaries, and chief thugs, they lost sight of the masses of perpetrators and fellow travelers as well as of the victims (Frevert 1991:263p.).

As they did not work through the moral questions implied in the legacy of National Socialism and the Holocaust nor their own feelings of handed-down guilt, these continued to figure in their attitudes and work in covert ways. Koppert notes that discussions within both leftist and feminist contexts are still frequently marked by mutual accusations of guilt and by individuals' desire to see themselves as free of guilt, as standing on the 'correct side' (1991:225pp.). This desire often takes shape in an identification with historical victims, that is with various oppressed peoples

around the world. A particularly notorious example is the identification with the Palestinians since the Arab-Israeli war in 1967. While the New Left had largely been sympathetic to Israel until then, they now identified the Jews with the Nazis. With this "psychological inversion" the New Left began to act out the German past "on the projected stage of the Middle East" (Postone 1993:297). Rather than being driven simply by sympathy and solidarity, the identification with the Palestinian cause amounted to a "'giant exculpation' derived from a symbolic displacement of blame onto the victims" (Rabinbach 1988:176).

Because the legacy of guilt remained largely unresolved, many Germans, perhaps particularly those who are committed to 'progressive' politics, continue to feel a sense of being 'born guilty' or being burdened with the guilt that their ancestors never worked through. Some acknowledge these feelings while others suppress them. Yet, as Koppert points out, the acceptance of handed-down guilt contributes to the 'moral confusion' Hannah Arendt described, since it blurs rather than clarifies issues of actual guilt and responsibility (1991:224p). The past continues to be active "'behind the backs' of social actors" (Postone 1993:294), who remain caught up in it, rather than work it through towards emancipating themselves from its hold. The same applies to another strategy of dealing with this legacy: that of 'opting out' of Germanness. While those who claim that they do not see themselves as Germans or want nothing to do with national identity often do so as a way of critiquing nationalism and the politics of the nation-state, they circumvent a confrontation with the ways in which they are implicated in the very thing they reject. And this includes the history of the country they live in and were socialized in. Through disassociation alone, they cannot escape from the ways in which this history informs the present, including their own attitudes and behaviors. In fact, such denunciation of Germanness, Rommelspacher argues, can rather be considered 'typically German' in that it is derives from German history (1995a:187).

Majority-German feminists' difficulty with developing constructive ways of understanding and confronting their personal and societal entanglement with German history is reflected within feminist studies on women under National Socialism produced by majority-German feminist

scholars. Many of the early works in this area, dating from the late 1970s and early 1980s, essentially presented all women as victims of a patriarchal regime, rather than dealing with women's active participation in it (Allen 1997:355p.). Anti-Semitism was defined as a "male sickness," and it was presumed that, to the extent that 'Aryan' women had shared this ideology, "they had done so not out of self-interest but in an adaptive response to masculine notions of racism and anti-Semitism" (Mushaben 1999:13p.; see also Windaus-Walser 1988). The predominant feminist focus on women as historical victims obscured questions of female motivation and distracted from the ways in which women deemed "worthy" profited from the Nazis' social policies, from the career options and leadership opportunities offered to them, as well as from the expropriation of Jewish property (1999:14).

The notion of women as passive victims did not remain unchallenged, though. In the late 1980s, historically oriented women's studies became shaken up by a feminist version of the 'historian's dispute,' which was set off by Claudia Koonz's book *Mothers in the Fatherland: Women, the Family, and Nazi Politics* (1987). Koonz argues that, rather than oppressing and victimizing 'Aryan' women, the regime's emphasis on gender difference empowered women in various ways, since it gave them a measure of independence from men. Through the Nazis' glorification of motherhood, women were further raised to the status of privileged membership in the *Volksgemeinschaft* as nurturers and protectors of the racial community. Koonz's work touched a "sore nerve among many German feminist historians" (Grossmann 1991:350) and was met with hostile responses. But it also sparked debates over the issues of female agency and complicity in Nazism and the Holocaust. Subsequent research focused not only on active and militant female Nazis but also on the attitudes and actions of the majority of non-Jewish German women, who, even when they were not actively involved in crimes and genocide, collaborated with and sustained the murderous regime in a multitude of intricate ways. The discussion about the degree to which non-Jewish German women who lived during National Socialism should be considered 'victims' or 'perpetrators' is still ongoing, though, and majority-German feminists searching for a 'usable' past

continue to struggle with their mothers' and grandmothers' place and actions in the Third Reich (1991:351).

Yet, the former consensus that all women were to be seen as victims has definitely been cancelled, and the body of research on women under National Socialism has itself become an object of scrutiny. In 1988, Karin Windaus-Walser published an article provocatively entitled *"Gnade der weiblichen Geburt?"* ("Mercy of female birth?"), which triggered another strenuous debate. Windaus-Walser dismisses the tendency to write a women's history of National Socialism that aims at constructing a 'usable' past and a positive object of identification for non-Jewish German women today. She challenges feminist constructions of anti-Semitism and fascism as a 'male disease' and critiques attempts on behalf of non-Jewish German women to identify with the victims of National Socialism. Her conclusion is that, far from being able to evoke a 'mercy of female birth,' feminists have to face up to the ways in which non-Jewish German women held power and used it, particularly in their role as mothers (1988:111pp.). Windaus-Walser's article was criticized by several feminists, particularly for the emphasis she gives to the 'power of the mothers,' which is seen as distracting from patriarchal power relations (see, for example, Bernardoni 1990; Bublitz 1992). However, others reacted positively; for example, social scientist Lerke Gravenhorst, who sees Windaus-Walser's work as reminding members of the feminist-social scientist public in Germany of their *"besondere moralische Aufgabe* [particular moral task or responsibility]" (1992:74). Drawing on Jean Améry's notion of the NS regime and its crimes as the Germans' *negatives Eigentum* (negative property), she calls on feminists "in and from Germany" to recognize their responsibility to own the crimes committed by the *"deutschen Handlungskollektiv* [German collective agency]" as their negative inheritance (1990:21pp.).

Gravenhorst's proposition resonates with the view put forward by such people as Richard von Weizsäcker or Jürgen Habermas, who maintain that responsibility for the past, particularly the Holocaust, is essential to German identity today. As will be seen, many of my majority-German interview partners also share this interpretation of the Nazi legacy. However, what this

responsibility entails exactly is often less than clear. By deriving this 'particular moral responsibility' from one's situatedness within the tradition of an undifferentiated national 'collective agency,' Gravenhorst and others risk to distract from ambivalences within this legacy, the complexity of the conditions under which members of this collective acted, their various motivations and the particular choices they made. Furthermore, this notion of collective responsibility for the crimes of the 'German collective agency' tends to conceive of this responsibility as one that individuals share *qua* their ethnicity, as this collective agency was ethnically defined. It is not clear to what extent German nationals who do not descend from the collective of perpetrators should be considered to share this responsibility. Rather, this discourse of a German responsibility seems to refer only to 'ethnic' Germans, whereby it reproduces a notion of Germanness that is based on ethnicity. It further takes ethnicity for granted, thereby losing sight of the ways in which it is produced and reproduced.

To be sure, in referring to the inessentiality of ethnicity, I am not suggesting that this resolves the question of responsibility. I rather want to argue that responsibility needs to be conceived of, and taken on, on other grounds than shared ethnicity in order to avoid drawing attention away from the particular historical, political, and sociocultural conditions under which people acted or failed to act during the Third Reich as well as from the particular circumstances in which people are situated in the present. Instead, an undifferentiated 'nationalization' of responsibility subsumes the memories of those who were forcefully excluded from Germanness under National Socialism and distracts from the fact that not all current German nationals stand in the same relationship to this history – making the dominant group's experience and sensibility definitive of German identity.

I now turn to the discussion of my interview partners' views and attitudes regarding the relationship between the legacy of the Nazi past and German identity today, which will illustrate the issues I have just outlined. Faced with the challenge of structuring the presentation of such a variety of different views, I have decided to organize the discussion in two sections. In the first

section, I attend to the perspectives of the majority-Germans among my interview partners, all of whom descend from the perpetrator group at large. In the second section, I present the perspectives of women who do not or not exclusively descend from the perpetrator group at large; these are the three Afro-Germans among my interview partners, two of whom are Christian/Christian-socialized and one of whom is Jewish, one woman who is a daughter of Turkish migrants and one woman who is of German and Serbian background.

I am not free of misgivings about this grouping. For one thing, I am wary about it replicating the distinction between majority-Germans and other Germans that is made within German society and often implies that majority-Germans are the 'norm,' whereas others such as Afro-Germans or children of migrants are not 'really' German. I do not want to support such a view. However, my interview partners' different backgrounds and their different situations within German society have a significant impact on their experiences and views, which I do not want to obscure either. In grouping them the way I did, my intention was to draw attention to this impact. My second misgiving relates to the fact that I do not want to overemphasize their social locations at the expense of distracting from differences that exist within views and experiences of women who share a particular position or from similarities in the attitudes of women of different backgrounds. Yet, as my discussion of their various perspectives will pay attention to such differences and similarities, I trust that it will become obvious that these women's backgrounds, while relevant to their perspectives, do not by themselves determine what views they arrive at.

Guilt or responsibility? Majority-German views on the legacy of Nazism and the Holocaust

Most of the majority-German women I interviewed described the legacy of Nazism and the Holocaust as playing an important role in how they understood themselves as Germans. Some expressed feelings of guilt in relation to this legacy; others spoke of having to accept responsibility for it; and some described both feelings of guilt and a sense of responsibility. None of these women

evoked a 'mercy of female birth.' They did not see their gender as preventing them from sharing

this legacy. Wiebke, the one woman who distinguished between men and women in talking about

NS history, seemed to imply that men share a greater responsibility, as they were the ones *"going*

into a war and wiping out other cultures or turning them into objects" (see the portrait of Wiebke

in chapter 3). She saw a parallel between what men *"do with other cultures"* and what they do

"with women and children" of their own group. It was not clear whether Wiebke considered

women to share any responsibility for actions committed mostly by male members of their nation,

for instance, war crimes. She did not address the fact that women have supported wars and that

wars are also fought in their name. In relation to National Socialism, Wiebke referred to specific

ways in which *"women contributed to what happened"* and spoke of the need to clarify *"where*

they share responsibility." Although, overall, Wiebke described women's responsibility as minor

to that of men, she did not exonerate women wholesale. And she saw herself as sharing

responsibility for the NS past.

While my majority-German interview partners did not distance themselves from the past

with reference to their gender, a few of them stated that they did not see themselves or their lives as

related to it, since they did not think of themselves as Germans. I address their views first, then I

discuss the issue of guilt as it was brought up by some of my interview partners, and following that

I turn to notions of responsibility. My discussion will focus particularly on the notions of

Germanness which underlie, or result from, the different ways in which these women conceive of

and negotiate their individual positions in relation to the Nazi past.

A distant relationship?

Three of the majority-Germans among my interview partners told me that the NS past did

not mean much or anything to them. They did not see a relationship between themselves and this

history. One of them, Annika, brought up the topic in the context of telling me how her attitude

towards national identity had changed since her teenage years, when she had been more

preoccupied with the issue. She first learned about National Socialism in high school; her parents had told her almost nothing about it: *"My father was eight years old when the war broke out. So he always said that he didn't really have anything to do with it. We didn't talk much about these things."* Yet, Annika remembered that her father used to get upset or angry when the news reported about compensation or restitution payments, for instance, to Israel. He thought that the time had come to draw a line under this chapter of history.

> Annika: *"He thinks it's just terrible, this collective guilt complex that Germans run around with, and how they let themselves be manipulated because of it. At first, I did not know what to think of that. As a teenager I had this idea that, well, we are Germans and we did that. But now I think that there is no such 'we'. We are a different generation today. We have nothing to do with that and should get over it, get over this guilt complex."*

Annika had no knowledge of her grandparents' attitudes or actions during the Third Reich. In any case, it did not matter much to her whether or not they were Nazis or supported the regime: *"Even if my grandfather had been in a leading position, I don't think I would feel differently about it. It does not affect my life today. It is history, but it is not really my history, because I am too far away from it."*

Bianca introduced the issue of National Socialism at the beginning of the interview when she explained to me that she did not see herself as German:

> *"Nationality does not mean anything to me, I do not think about it. And I do not have any problems with National Socialism, World War II, or with the things that happened back then. I don't identify with that. And I do not have to make good for anything, you know, like some other Germans think. I did not do that and therefore I do not have to make good for it. I am really not all that interested in things that happened before my lifetime."*

During the interview, Bianca mentioned that she had been adopted when she was a small child. Not knowing who her biological parents were, she described herself as having no roots, no sense of belonging with anybody. When she was a teenager, she had asked her adoptive parents about their lives during the Third Reich, who responded with evasiveness. Bianca had come to take the stance that she had nothing to do with this history. However, she did not want to rule out the

possibility that her attitude might have been different if she felt herself to be connected to a family that supported the NS regime or was even involved in crimes.

Both women had no knowledge of their relatives' attitudes and actions during the Third Reich and did not see themselves as connected to that history on a familial level. Nor did they establish a relationship to the past as German nationals, since they claimed that their national association was irrelevant to them. Although both women's parents had grown up during the Third Reich, neither of them saw this as having had an effect on themselves. They rejected the notion of a continuity between the past and the present; rather, they considered the NS past to be a historical chapter that had come to a close and had nothing to do with their own lives.

As shown in the previous chapter, Annika's and Bianca's expressed disdain for collectivities and denouncement of their national association did not prevent them from locating themselves among the Germans in relation to others such as 'foreigners' in Germany. While they claimed to have no affiliation with Germans as a collective and their past, the privileges they enjoyed as Germans were not in question for them. At least in Annika's case, the Nazi past also seemed to be more crucial to her perception of present situations than she was prepared to acknowledge in talking about how relevant she deemed that past to be in the present. When we talked about the ways in which the German state responded to the increase in xenophobia and racist violence after unification, for example, by restricting the asylum law, Annika said:

> "At first I was not in favor of that. But now I see that the situation has calmed down as a result of it. It seems that the majority of the people here cannot deal with it when there are that many foreigners around. They cannot deal with it, and some sort of emotions come up, and they are no longer controllable. And then these excesses happen and that is certainly in nobody's interest. While I am not in favor of the government's asylum policy, that they sent these people home, I also think that there are numerous examples of fraud, of people who are not persecuted taking advantage of it. And even if I do not entirely support this politics, I have to acknowledge that people cannot deal with it. And I don't want the state here to break down because of that. A new outbreak of fascism or National Socialism. That has to be prevented and so, unfortunately, one has to submit to this populism."

The Nazi past appears as the frame of reference against which Annika made her evaluation of the present and decided on what kind of political measures she deemed necessary in the present context. This was in contradiction to her earlier statement that the past seemed very far away and of no relevance in the present. Yet, she considered a repetition of the past to be a possibility. However, in deliberating this possibility, she was not pointing to continuities between the present situation and the historical situation that allowed Hitler's regime to gain the support of the vast majority of Germans living at the time. In her view, the problem appeared to be the migrants and asylum-seekers, with whom *"the majority of the people here cannot deal with,"* rather than the racist attitudes of these people, whom the government and other politicians supported in turning migrants and asylum-seekers into scapegoats.

Annika further mentioned a conversation with a Jewish woman as a situation in which she had felt somewhat awkward and had come to think about *"this issue"* – by which she seemed to be referring to the Holocaust or National Socialism in general.

> Annika: *"We had this long talk and it was very interesting. She said that she was born here and her parents were born here in Germany, but she mostly sees herself as a Jew, not as a German. For her, the German consciousness comes after the Jewish consciousness. And so we talked about that. And within myself I had this, I did not say that, but I had this thought, is she maybe holding something against me? Because I don't have this, I am not religious or there's nothing, no particular consciousness that I would put above everything else. Except for the lesbian one, that is most important to me. But I was quite relieved when I realized that she did not hold anything against me, and so I did not have a problem there. But there was this feeling, it made me think about this issue."*

Even though Annika did not mention the Holocaust, it appears to have been the source of her uneasiness and her suspicion that this Jewish woman might have held something against her. She spoke of not being religious and not having a *"particular consciousness,"* one that was of a similar importance to her as Jewishness was to this woman. However, why would this be something that could be held against her? It seems that Annika was rather referring, in a roundabout way, to the fact she was a non-Jewish German. In this encounter with a Jewish German she felt confronted with the destruction of millions of Jewish lives at the hands of majority-

Germans and wondered whether this Jewish woman was holding this against her as a majority-German. Although she considered herself to belong to a generation that had nothing to do with this history of genocide, in that situation this history crept up to her nevertheless, and she seemed less sure about her own relationship to it. It appears that, in distancing herself from this history, she had not clarified this relationship for herself. Therefore, she needed the Jewish woman to relieve her of the feeling that this could be held against her, to assure her that she *"did not have a problem there."*

Like Annika and Bianca, Jutta adamantly pointed out that she did not think of herself as a German; yet she also distinguished between Germans and other national and cultural collectives. During the interview, she frequently used the term 'we' in referring to Germans as a collective. While she claimed not to have a German identity, various statements she made contradicted this claim and displayed an identification with a notion of the German nation or the German people. Such contradictions were also evident in Jutta's articulations of how she saw her own relationship to German history, particularly National Socialism and the Holocaust.

The issue came up when I asked Jutta how she felt about the resurgence of nationalism in Germany since unification. Jutta replied:

> *"Well, it scares me, it really does. And I have to say, this* 'Gnade der späten Geburt' *[the mercy of late birth], I am really grateful for that. Not because I think I am responsible or something like that. But I know I would have ended up in a concentration camp, because I never go along with groups. I don't need that."*

Jutta continued by emphasizing that she did not see herself in a position of having to accept guilt or responsibility for the Nazi past. With regard to her parents' attitudes and actions during the Third Reich, she told me that they had *"stayed out of everything"* and that her mother had convincingly assured her that she had not known anything about the persecution of Jews and others. However, Jutta also mentioned that her mother had worked for a sub-division of IG Farben, a company that was substantially involved in the planning and execution of NS crimes, including

the industrialized pursuit of genocide, and made a great profit from its cooperation with the Nazi regime. According to Jutta, her mother had been the 'right hand' of the man heading this sub-division, which makes her mother's assertion of not having known about NS crimes at least somewhat questionable. But Jutta was not wondering about the extent to which her parents might have supported the regime, she rather saw them as potential victims: *"They were lucky, they were good at maneuvering through everything, they stayed out of everything. Who knows what might have happened to them if they had not managed to do that."* In a similar vein, Jutta reinterpreted the notion of the '*Gnade der späten Geburt*' – which is usually taken to mean 'being fortunate to have been born too late to be involved in Nazi crimes' – as meaning the good fortune of having been born too late to have become a victim of Nazism. Several times during the interview, she expressed the conviction that she would have been among the victims. For example, when she told me how, at age 17, she came across information about the Holocaust for the first time, I asked her what she thought or felt in that situation.

> Jutta: *"I did not want to believe it, but I did believe it. And I did feel something like shame, but as a human being, not on a national level. But, of course, I also asked myself, what would have happened to me during that time, what would I have done? And I realized how much I would have suffered, because I would have resisted against that from the first second on. What could I have done to prevent that? I realized that I would have been among the victims, because those who tried to resist, you know what happened to them."*

Jutta professed feeling shame in relation to the Holocaust, however, she pointed out that she did so as a human being, not as a German. She further asserted that, had she lived at the time, she would have resisted against the regime and therefore been a victim herself. Yet, both statements are called into question by other comments Jutta made.

In declaring that her national association did not play any role in how she looked at the past, Jutta assumed a seemingly neutral position in relation to it. However, in addressing the question whether Germans today have to accept responsibility for this history, Jutta explained that she was annoyed by the fact that Germans have to take all the blame for the Holocaust:

> *"Other countries did the same thing to the Jews, the same thing we did. Norway, for example. As my father always said, we were not the only ones, everybody did that, the whole world did that. It had nothing to do with nationality or political and geographical environment. And I agree with that. We did that, it is true. But there were others who were at least as bad. But only we are blamed."*

Here, Jutta positioned herself as a German, using the pronoun 'we' to refer to Germans as a collective. Meanwhile she rejected the allocation of responsibility for the Holocaust because, in her view, other countries were just as involved in the persecution of the Jews. With this claim, she was not only relativizing German guilt and responsibility, she also separated the Holocaust from the historical and political context in which it occurred and universalized it, thereby painting a picture in which questions of guilt and responsibility become extremely blurred if not unanswerable. Yet, she thought it was time for other countries to accept responsibility and to stop blaming only the Germans. While she contradicted herself by first claiming that her nationality was irrelevant in how she relates to the Holocaust and then defending 'us Germans' against having to accept the largest share of guilt for it, in both instances she avoided confronting herself personally with the history of the society she lives in and the implications for members of this society today.

Her defensiveness in relation to the question of responsibility seems to indicate that she had an investment in how the meaning of the NS past for Germans today is constructed; an investment that is obscured in the claim that she related to this past as a human being, not as a German. This defensiveness also appears to be in contradiction to her conviction that she would have been among the victims of Nazism. Furthermore, since nobody can know for sure how they would have acted had they lived during the Third Reich, claiming that one would certainly have resisted the regime can be seen as an avoidance strategy, as a way of evading the troublesome questions raised by the fact that the vast majority of the German population supported the regime and its inhuman politics. Jutta's view of herself as a potential victim appears even more problematic in the light of the aggressive attitude towards victims of National Socialism and their descendents she expressed in the interview. In referring to actual victims, Jutta said:

> *"I think that people should be compensated wherever that is still possible. But I think this as a human being. I apologize as a human being. As a German... well, if*

> *a Jew or a Gypsy would want me to do that, I would tell them: 'Listen, I am born here, but I would have had no part in that. I would have gone to a concentration camp myself.' I would not let some foreigner attack me because I am German. I would totally oppose that and fight back. And the Jews who confront me like that, that happened to me recently, I told them that they were not the least bit better. Look at the Israelis and what they do in Israel. They are much worse. Yet, they want us to forever crawl on the floor, they want even the tenth generation after that to crawl on the floor. It's okay for us to know about that history. But one must not let oneself by paralyzed by it, let it keep oneself from taking up one's rightful place. I don't want to be held responsible for something I didn't do. "*

Much about this statements would deserve to be commented upon in detail, which is beyond the scope of the discussion at hand. Suffice it to note that Jutta's defensiveness lead her to advance an anti-Semitic view of Jews as revengeful, as wanting to keep the Germans 'crawling on the floor forever,' and of Israel as a more terrible regime than Nazi Germany. A notion of the German nation as 'paralyzed,' kept from its 'rightful place,' or even 'crawling on the floor' hardly describes Germany's actual position 55 years after the end of World War II. While Germany has become one of the richest and most powerful countries in international economic and political relations, there are still victims of Nazism who have not yet received any compensation. What Jutta expressed in the last sentence of this statement seems to be crux of her attitude towards the Nazi past. She did not want to be held responsible for something she did not do. But she felt herself to be held to such responsibility by presumed revengeful Jews and foreigners who she saw as trying to use the past against her. Jutta's defensiveness suggests that she had not clarified for herself how she was related to the past, to what extent she did or did not share responsibility for it, or what it meant to be a citizen of the successor state of the Third Reich and a member of the society that is founded on this history. In resorting to evasive and defensive strategies, she remained identified with Germans as a collective, notwithstanding her claims that she resented thinking in collectivities and that she did not see herself as a German.

A position of identification with the victims of Nazism also came up in the interview with Laura. However, while Laura saw herself as having been *"victim-identified"* earlier in her life, she

had since then developed a different perspective and attitude. Her reflections on her former 'victim-identification' provide an alternative picture of how such an identification can be constructed as a way of dealing with questions of German identity in relation to National Socialism and the Holocaust.

Answering my question concerning when she had begun to reflect on issues of German identity, Laura said:

> "It became an important topic for me when I was 14 or 15. I wanted to know what my grandparents had done during the time of National Socialism. That was important to me. One reason why the issue came up was because I traveled a lot at that age, often to Poland. I also fell in a love for the first time. She was Polish and so this issue was very present. She and I spoke about our grandparents, and there was clearly this victim-perpetrator relationship there."

Her parents had told her bits and pieces about her grandparents' lives during the Third Reich, and she thought it was rather *"odd"* how relieved she felt at being given certain pieces of information. For example, she was glad to hear that one of her grandfathers did not have to fight in the war because an accident had left him permanently injured. But, overall, talking to her parents about these things was rather difficult.

> Laura: "I clearly identified them with non-persecuted Germans. And they were quick in bringing up excuses. They simplified things or confused cause and reaction. My mother always talked about some former neighbors who had to flee from Eastern Prussia after the War. She always talked about how terrible that was for them. And that made me furious. By now I can acknowledge that this must have been a terrible experience. But back then I couldn't because, and I would still make that argument, because my mother refused to take into account all that which happened before they were expelled in 1945. She only focused on the experience of these people. What happened to the Jews, for example, or the Sinti and Roma or others, all that did not seem to matter much for her. And that made me pretty aggressive, that made me furious."

Laura described how she felt anger in the face of her relatives' and others' denial or downplaying of the crimes committed by Germans. At the same time, she also felt guilty for these crimes, *"for being part of the people who committed them."* She did not want to belong to this people she had begun to resent. Attempting to resolve this dilemma, she developed an

identification with the victims. In doing so, she was also trying to revoke any identification with

the perpetrators:

> "I mean, I had it clear that I wasn't really a victim. So it was a bit weird that I
> would identify with the victims. However, I think I also did it as a form of
> opposition to all the many people who identify with the perpetrators and excuse
> them."

Nevertheless, Laura ultimately found her 'victim-identification' to be an obstacle in

coming to terms with this past and her own relation to it. She had used it as a shield to ward herself

off from feelings of guilt and as a platform from which to feel morally superior to those around her.

However, at some point she realized that her anger was born out of defensiveness and an inability

to really confront herself with that history in its complexities, to go beyond simple distinctions

between good and bad.

> Laura: "I used to moralize all the time. I held long monologues, and I couldn't
> listen to old people at all. When somebody wanted to tell me something about that
> time, I did not listen. I constantly interrupted them because I could not tolerate
> how they described their everyday lives. I constantly asked whether they did not
> realize what was going on with the Jews and the Sinti and Roma and so on. And
> whatever they wanted to tell me I wasn't willing to hear. It was all very clear-cut.
> Maybe I would have gotten more answers to my questions if I could have just
> listened. By now, I am a bit more open to that, to accounts of everyday lives. I am
> bit calmer and can listen to them. Which doesn't mean that I absolve them or
> agree with them, but I let them say what they want to tell me."

At the time of the interview, Laura no longer felt that listening to former perpetrators,

supporters, and bystanders made her an accomplice to the crimes. She was working towards

overcoming her defensiveness and towards understanding this past without distancing herself from

it. The process of rethinking her former attitude had begun while she was in a relationship with a

Jewish woman.

> Laura: "For one thing, we often talked about these issues. And I really had to
> rethink a lot of things when I realized that she also saw herself as German. She did
> not have this aggressive attitude that I had. She was much more open toward non-
> Jewish Germans. She had an openness that I did not have. I guess I was more
> victim-identified than she was."

She realized that her approach to dealing with the legacy of Nazism had been facile and that she could not simply imagine herself to be on the 'right side.' In reviewing her former strategies – avoiding the challenge of confronting herself personally with the Nazi past by denouncing Germanness and seeking moral immunity by identifying with the victims – Laura came to think of such strategies as impediments to the development of an independent moral and political standpoint:

> *"I used to think, well, I see how most Germans deal with the past, and it makes me angry. It makes me not want to have anything to do with them, not want to belong to them. But it's not that easy. I cannot deny that I am German. And living with the history of National Socialism is an essential part of my cultural identity. And I have to accept that, that's the least I have to do, to accept that legacy. Then I can start thinking about how to deal with it responsibly."*

Laura no longer tried to disassociate herself from Germanness, yet she had also come to look at herself as independent from Germans as a collective. While she had to take responsibility for her own views and behaviors, she refused to take responsibility for the behaviors of other Germans. She explained this by telling me about situations in which she was confronted with stereotypes about Germans:

> *"Traveling in Eastern Europe, you often get these stereotypes. And, of course, there is a reason for why they exist. And I used to just accept that. I listened to it and thought: 'Yes, those terrible Germans. and I am one of them. It's all true what they say, and for them to see me as a representative of this people is alright.' Now I look at it differently. I don't want to discount that they have certain experiences with large numbers of Germans. But I no longer accept responsibility for that. I want to be seen as who I am as a person and judged by what I think and do, not by my nationality."*

It seems that by realizing and accepting that opting out of Germanness was not a viable way of coming to terms with this 'tainted' national association, Laura could begin to engage critically with what that association meant for her and come to see herself as independent of it, at least to a certain degree. She no longer tried to escape from this association, but rather wanted to take responsibility for what she made of it as an individual and refused to let herself be reduced to or defined by her national origin.

Several more majority-German women talked about how they had tried to distance themselves from the Nazi past, particularly the legacy of the perpetrators. Birgit, for instance, told me that, in relation to children of Jewish Holocaust survivors she met while she stayed in New York, she had emphasized her identity as a lesbian:

> "I guess I did that because lesbians had been among the victims. The fact that there was a pink triangle, I found that somewhat exonerating. I carried that in front of me like a shield. As if I would have been a victim myself. Which is not really true. At least it would have been quite different than for the Jews. The persecution of lesbians was of a very different nature and scale. But I did feel then that it was kind of an excuse, meaning I could see myself as not belonging exclusively on the side of the perpetrators. I thought I could throw this potential victim status on the scale as a kind of counterweight to the weight of Germanness."

Kris had used to think that she had little to do with the legacy of the perpetrators because of her low socioeconomic status and the marginal position she took up in German society. Her family had frequently lived off welfare payments during her youth, and she deliberately chose to remain on the margins of a society she largely rejected for its consumerism and achievement-orientation by avoiding employment as long as it was not enforced on her through 'workfare' programs. Aware that mainstream society perceived her as "asozial" (antisocial), Kris had found it "easy to rest on that." Since the Nazis also took reprisals against those they considered antisocial, Kris had thought of herself and her family as potential victims rather than perpetrators.

At the time of the interviews, though, both Kris and Birgit no longer saw these factors as an exoneration or as preventing them from having to confront themselves with the legacy of the perpetrators. A few more women talked about having used to circumvent such a confrontation by claiming that they had nothing to do with Germanness. However, they had since rejected this distancing strategy as inadequate and as an impediment to finding constructive ways of dealing with the past. Overall, most of the majority-German women understood themselves to be related to the Nazi past as descendents of the perpetrator group at large and deliberated on the implications of this history from that perspective.

<u>'Inherited' guilt and the 'second guilt'</u>

Barbara was among those women who expressed a very strong sense of being German as something burdened or forever tainted: *"I can never look at German identity without thinking of the NS past. This history is absolutely central to what it means to be German. I am very aware of it. It has also been a huge issue in my family history."* She told me that her parents were teenagers during the Third Reich, and they were both active members of the NS youth organizations. Her impression was that her father had worked through some of his past; *"at least he did not glorify any aspects of it."* About her mother, Barbara said:

> *"She has never dealt with that past. In fact, she still talks about how great things were under the Nazis, how she loved to be involved in the League of German Girls, that these were the happiest years of her life. My older sister was born right after the end of the war, and all she knew about that time were the stories of my mother. And then she saw these films in school, films about concentration camps. And those were the best years of her mother's life! Her mother was part of that! And she could not deal with that at all and tried to kill herself when she was seventeen. That was just the terrible climax within our family. But the conflict is still there, and in many families, up until the present. And I do have these feelings of guilt, feelings that my parents should have, but they don't. It's me and my generation who feel that. It is also this uneasiness about the fact that our parents never worked through these things. One of my colleagues is Jewish, and there we are, he the son of the victims and I the daughter of the perpetrators, and we meet and connect. And that is a good experience, but I still feel some kind of irrational guilt, my parents' guilt. And it is a dilemma. However, then I see these Germans who go to countries like Holland, and, from the way they behave there, it is clear that they have no historical consciousness at all. I tend to think, I'd rather have too much than too little of that bad conscience around."*

Barbara described her feelings of guilt as irrational; she spoke of a dilemma. The way in which she dealt with her ambivalence was by ascertaining that Germans should better feel too much uneasiness or guilt around the past than too little. She rather took this guilt upon herself than to see it denied completely. Her dilemma was a moral one, and she made a moral choice of accepting this guilt, even though she felt burdened by it. In accepting this guilt, she was also making a statement as to what kind of German she wanted to be. At a later point in the interview,

she told me several stories of Germans she encountered abroad whose behavior she found embarrassing, *"particularly in these countries where people had these terrible experiences with Germans. But these 'I-buy-the-world-Germans' have no sense for that at all."* She certainly did not want to be identified with *that* kind of Germans.

Julia expressed an equally strong sense of German identity as burdened as did Barbara. The following is the very first statement she made during the interview:

> *"I always saw national identity as negative, I always saw it against the background of fascism and the crimes committed by the German people. It is a difficult issue; I was not myself part of that, but I cannot step out of that origin, I was born into this and so I am a part of it now. Well, there was also the antifascist resistance; these people provided a kind of role model with which I could identify. But overall, German was something burdened, something negative. And I always felt particularly negative about being German when I traveled in the Slavic countries, because of that history, and especially when I experienced other Germans walking around in these countries, and they still had this mentality, you know, like members of an occupying force. This also brought up this feeling that I carry some guilt as someone who belongs to this people. And I could not step out of that belonging. It was easier to see myself as a citizen of the GDR than as a German. I could identify more easily with the GDR and also this attempt at creating an alternative, a society that would never allow fascism to rise again. We can debate the extent to which this was realized. But I find it very difficult to identify with the united Germany. I never wanted that, it is not my country."*

There exist notable parallels between Barbara's and Julia's accounts. Both described travels to countries that had been occupied by Nazi Germany during World War II as occasions when they were particularly aware of Germany's history of crimes and atrocities and felt the burden of that history on themselves. While their different locations in the respective former German states had a profound impact on where they would or could travel, they had a very similar experience, the West German Barbara in the Netherlands, the East German Julia in countries of the former Eastern Block.

Julia further made a statement which resonates with Barbara's assertion that it was better to feel too much guilt or uneasiness than too little. When we talked about the current debates over the meaning of the Nazi past for Germans today, Julia said:

> *"If it was up to me, I think feelings of shame should persist. I feel this most strongly when I meet victims of fascism, people who were affected by it, for example, in Russia. And I am humbled by their openness and their tolerance. And I am not sure if the same is true in the reverse. Especially now, after the* Wende, *there is so much arrogance again, Germans who look down on others, particularly the Russians."*

For Julia, feelings of guilt or shame were not merely negative and burdensome. She also saw them as impediments to arrogance and self-importance, attitudes that hardly befit the Germans against the background of their history. Like Barbara, Julia considered attitudes towards the Nazi past to be more than a personal issue, as having a moral or political dimension as well.

Besides these similarities, there also are obvious differences in Barbara's and Julia's statements. As outlined in chapter 1, the two former German states have dealt with their common history in very different ways. The perspectives of East and West Germans on the past were formed within the context of the respective German societies' official politics of history, even if some took on views that dissented from the official versions. Julia spoke of how difficult she found it to identify with the united Germany. Part of the reason why she felt more comfortable with an identity as a GDR citizen was the attempt made by the leaders in the GDR to create a state and society that would have cut its fascists roots and realized a socialist alternative – although she acknowledged that this goal had not been successfully actualized. Julia had studied history and was particularly interested in the roots of fascism:

> *"I studied all these German traditions, Prussianism, authoritarianism, this subservient spirit, the specific developments that led to the singular crime, the Holocaust. There seemed to be something specifically German. And I certainly did not feel good about this people to which I belonged. And so I thought, we have to do things differently. I did not mind the kind of educational or pedagogic dictatorship that existed in the GDR. It seemed appropriate for this people. [Laughs] However, it also reinforced authoritarian structures. In school, we learned to love the Soviet Union. In identifying with them, we could feel that we belonged on the side of the winners. But that also meant that people never really confronted their past. And so this authoritarianism, everyone has the same opinion, this intolerance towards dissenting views, all that was preserved. And still, we all thought we had made up for everything, that we were the better Germans. We continued the progressive tendencies in German history, while the West continued the negative ones. We were on the right side."*

East Germans learned in school that the GDR was made up of the victims of fascism and antifascist resistance fighters, whereas the perpetrators were all sitting in the West. The guilt for the German crimes was delegated to the FRG while the citizens of the GDR were officially exonerated by their leaders and were offered to share a positive identity by devoting themselves to socialism. The situation was different for women who were raised in the old FRG. Rather than having resistance fighters come to their schools and participating in elaborate commemorative celebrations of the victory over fascism, the culture in which West German women grew up was marked by silence over the past, at least during the first two decades after the end of World War II. It is hardly a coincidence that the West German women with the strongest sense of inherited or collective guilt are those born in these two decades, the daughters of the Nazi-generation (which I will call the 'daughter-generation'). With the exception of Laura (see above), none of the granddaughters, from East or West, described intense feelings of guilt; they rather spoke about the legacy of Nazism in terms of responsibility (see the next section of this chapter). But several of the women belonging to the daughter-generation had a profound sense of having inherited the guilt that their parents, or the entire generation before them, never worked through. Yet, except for Barbara, none of these women related their feelings of guilt to actions and attitudes of family members who lived during the Third Reich. They rather described this guilt as something they felt as members of the German people or the German nation. One reason why they referred to the collective level, rather than their family history, in explaining their sense of guilt could be that only few women knew much or anything about their family members' actions and attitudes. Many women's parents and grandparents avoided talking to them about these issues as much as they could or even got angry when confronted with questions. Other women explained that they never really asked their parents and grandparents about what they did during the Nazi-era, or all they would hear in response were stories about their family's own suffering during and after the war. But even women who knew that family members had been supporters, if not perpetrators, or who had reason to suspect as much, explained that their feelings of guilt were related to the collective level. It seems that many women

found it easier to confront this legacy on the collective level rather than the familial one. However, this focus on the collective generally tends to distract from questions of individual guilt and responsibility. Within today's secular understanding, guilt presupposes an action of failure to act on behalf of an individual. Yet, these women felt guilt for actions and failures to act that occurred before their own lifetime. They had a sense of being guilty by birth or association. In that sense, guilt becomes a rather abstract issue, and it seems that nothing can be done about it. It is often experienced as paralyzing, as too immense to be comprehended and too terrible to be overcome.

However, while most women who carried a sense of guilt saw this as an inherited guilt, some women described feelings of guilt in the sense of what Ralph Giordano has called the 'second guilt.' They did not feel guilty for crimes they themselves did not commit, but saw themselves as having been accomplices in so far as they allowed the perpetrators and their supporters to maintain the silence over and denial of the past.

One of these women was Anka who told me that, on both sides of her family, her grandparents had forced laborers working in their businesses. She thought that her grandparents must have known something about the crimes and injustices happening at the time, even though they did not admit that: *"They only talked about the war. They were all victims. There were no Jewish victims or other victims. They were the victims of the war, never perpetrators."* In school, Anka learned about the crimes and atrocities committed during the Third Reich. But that did not make her question what she was told by her relatives: *"I thought of it as a terrible thing that happened a long time ago. It had nothing to do with my parents, my grandparents, my history teacher."* It was not until she was in her twenties that she began to develop a different view on her family's way of dealing with the past.

> Anka: *"And, you know, that is what I feel guilty about. I don't feel responsible for what my grandfather did. But this silence, this denial, that's what my guilt has to do with. The fact that I have supported that silence, that I did not begin to question them much earlier. That I feel uncomfortable about; that's where I have a place to develop feelings of guilt."*

Another woman who spoke about feelings of guilt in connection to her own attitudes and behaviors was Kris. She knew very little about her family history. Since her parents got divorced, she had almost no contact with her father and his family. She described her mother as having been an outsider for most of her life:

> *"And then my mother was found guilty in the divorce, so there was that stigma. After that, we lived on welfare most of the time. It's easy to rest on that, on the fact that we have experienced much discrimination ourselves. That we ourselves are in the role of victims, of outsiders. Like... perhaps the Nazis would have come after us as well, as people considered 'un-German.'"*

Kris told me that, until recently, she had never really thought much about the Nazi past and her own relationship to it. Then, a few years ago, she had a rather trenchant experience when she was on a trip in England.

> Kris: *"My boyfriend and I were staying on a camp site. And there was this youth group from London there as well. And at some point we realized that it was a group of Jewish youth. And they realized that we are German and were openly hostile to us. Some even came to our tent and swore at us, said that they hated Germans. There were sort of two factions within that group; some were on a kind of reconciliation-trip and invited us to join them at their campfire, the others told us that they hated us and hated the fact that we were there. At the time, I had not thought much about that issue yet. I just thought, what do they want from me, it's not my fault that I was born in Germany. My boyfriend's reaction was more relaxed, and he thought that we should rather leave it be and not go to them, that some of them might be really uncomfortable if we did. In any case, this was a situation that I did not know how to deal to with."*

> Andrea: *What did you find difficult about that situation?*

> Kris: *"I am not sure, I think I simply did not know how to deal with it. And I had not dealt with these issues, and I could not... I mean, I realized I cannot simply say, 'fucking Nazis, I don't want anything to do with them either,' even though, of course, I hate them myself. Somehow I had this feeling that you cannot clear yourself of that, you know, sort of like, 'hey, I am a leftist and I am on your side.' That doesn't work. Well, I think now that I felt guilty because I had never dealt with this issue. I mean, I lived here in Germany and I never bothered to deal with that. I think I could handle the situation differently today, approach them differently, because I have worked through some of this stuff. I no longer look at this kind of situation in such simple terms, you know, like 'where is the problem? I don't have any prejudices against Jews and of course I am against what happened.' I realize now that you cannot just sweep away the issue by thinking that, as a leftist, you are above or beyond that."*

Kris's sense of guilt was related to the fact that she let herself believe that, as a leftist, she was automatically on the 'correct side' and did not have to deal with the past or with anti-Semitism today. She told me how uncomfortable she felt when she realized that she knew virtually nothing about Jewish culture and history:

> *"And perhaps that is something that is typically German, that you don't learn that and you don't bother occupying yourself with that... that Jewish culture is no longer a part of German culture. And that you don't come in touch with it in your daily life, that it is not in your consciousness. And I do feel some kind of shame about that, because, even after such encounters like the one I told you about, I did not bother to really work on that. And I guess that is typically German."*

Kris's lack of knowledge about Jewish culture and history was nothing she stood alone with. It relates to her having grown up in a context where the post-war silence over the Nazi crimes came along with silence over the victims. A few women told me about moments in which they realized that Jewish culture was mostly absent in Germany today. Some became aware of that when they encountered Jewish communities and Jewish culture in other countries, for example, when visiting New York City or London. They all described this realization as unsettling, if not even painful. It brought them face-to-face with what is now missing in their own country, confronted them with the destruction of Jewish lives at the hand of Germans and the erasure of what had been a part of German culture prior to the Holocaust. Pia pointed out that, even though the Nazis were ultimately defeated, they had been successful at wiping out most of Jewish life and culture in Germany, and their success was also measurable by the absence of this part of German history and heritage in the minds and memories of most Germans today: *"You kind of just take it for granted that this is gone. Some people don't even realize that it's gone, that it was there before. It's like it never existed."* To realize that this absence had existed unquestioned in their own minds was what these women described as a painful experience, as causing them to feel shame. They looked back at their high school education and noted that they had only learned about Jews in terms of '6 million dead' or 'mounts of corpses.' Birgit said: *"It did not occur to me at the time that there was something wrong with the way in which we learned about the Jews. Looking back at it now, I*

think it's just terrible, you know, to reduce them to that, to corpses. " While these women were not

responsible for the ways in which history was taught to them, they felt shame or even guilt for not

having questioned these inadequate representations and for their own lack of awareness and

knowledge of Jewish life in Germany, before and after the Holocaust.

The women who felt their guilt to be inherited ultimately could not change anything about

the origin of that guilt; they could only carry this burden on behalf of those who had passed it on to

them. In contrast, Kris, Anka, and others, who felt guilty for their own actions and failures to act,

did not describe this guilt as paralyzing and unresolvable. The source of their guilt was something

they could take responsibility for and which they could strive to change. And they took on this

responsibility as individuals, not so much as members of a group. Focusing on their own actions

and attitudes, rather than a collective heritage, allowed them to keep a critical distance to notions of

the collective. They did not deny their association with the collective and its heritage; however,

they were trying to forego an unquestioned identification with it. Kris, for example, after

explaining to me that she felt shame for her ignorance of Jewish culture and suspected that to be

something 'typically German,' continued:

> "I feel shame for my own behavior. But it also has something to do with being
> German. Although that is difficult. I don't really have this national feeling, you
> know. If the chancellor embarrasses himself by doing or saying something stupid
> or insensitive, I don't feel shame for that, that's his business. I don't feel that kind
> of kinship with him, he's not speaking for me. But this thing with national identity
> is not totally clear for me. I would say that I am somehow part of that, I have to
> acknowledge that, even though I do not feel much for it. My identities, those that
> are important to me, are smaller than that."

Kris conceded that her national association was not irrelevant, but she rejected giving it too

much importance. She referred to other identities – as a leftist, as a member of a particular

subculture – that were more meaningful to her and which transcended national boundaries. Her

allegiance to these chosen identities was stronger than that to her national identity, which it had not

been up to her to chose. While she looked at the German past from the location of being German,

she tried to understand how she was affected by this past and to realize where her personal responsibility lay without reifying the concept of the German nation and German identity.

Such reification tends to be the byproduct of notions of collective guilt. Initially, I was surprised to find that a number of women who pointed out that they saw the German nation as an arbitrary construct that ought to be called into question, particularly in its ethnic definition, also subscribed to the notion of collective guilt. While they challenged essentialist notions of Germanness in some regards, they seemed to evoke them in others. As pointed out before, this underscores the fact that people's understandings of, or attitudes towards, national identity are not seamless and stable but rather complex and shifting; while they might draw on 'rational' thought processes and political considerations, they are also invested with emotions and based on identifications which are not entirely, or not always, conscious. Such contradictions might have to be seen as the norm, rather than the exception. I will come back to this issue in the last chapter of this thesis. For now, I turn to notions of responsibility.

Responsibility: for what and to what end?

The majority of the women who are descendents of the perpetrator group at large spoke of responsibility rather than guilt in relation to the NS past. As mentioned before, younger women were less prone to feelings of guilt than were women of the daughter-generation. They seemed less preoccupied with this history or legacy, although they acknowledged it as a part of their own history. Rather than seeing it as burden, they tended to approach it from a more distant point of view. They wanted to know what happened and to understand how it could happen. When Nadja, a 26 year-old West German, told me about situations in which she had felt uncomfortable about being German, most of which had to do with becoming aware of privileges connected to that status, I asked her if she had ever felt uncomfortable about being German in relation to National Socialism and the Holocaust. She responded:

"No. It was more this, this sense... it seems incomprehensible. I mean, it really affected me when I learned about what was going on then. I don't think I thought about how I am related to that. All I thought about was how can human beings do things like that? How could they live with themselves? Well, there are ways to explain it... yet, there remains something, a level at which I still don't understand it. It just blows my mind that human beings are capable of treating other human beings like that. And I think it's important to know that, to keep that in mind. To ask yourself, could something like that happen again?"

Viola, a 19 year-old East German, had just finished high school when I interviewed her and was planning to study history. She said that she was particularly interested in studying the history of the Third Reich because she wanted to understand how an entire people could support such a murderous regime. I asked her if she saw a connection between herself or her life and that history.

Viola: *"I don't really see myself in a direct relationship to that. But I want to do my share in preventing something like that from happening again. I want to learn from that history. And I would say that Germans have a special responsibility because of that history. I don't feel guilty for what happened. There is nothing I could do to change the fact that it happened. But I do think it's important to know what happened and to acknowledge that responsibility."*

Younger women generally seem to feel less personally affected by the Nazi past than the generation that grew up after the war. Yet, there is no clear generational divide between those who relate to the Nazi past by feeling guilt and those who interpret the legacy of this past in terms of responsibility. Several women of the daughter-generation also pointed out that they saw themselves in a position of responsibility rather than guilt. Many women were critical of presumptions of guilt in relation to the past and pointed to its paralyzing effect. A few of them, both older and younger women, told me that they had gone from feeling guilty to understanding that this was not a constructive approach and embracing the notion of responsibility instead. Looking at the interviews with majority-German women as a whole, it seems that the notion of responsibility as the legacy of the past for Germans today is finding most acceptance in this group.

However, the exact nature of that responsibility was often less than clear in my interview partners' statements. Claiming that Germans have to take responsibility for their history is a commonplace nowadays. Talking about this responsibility, many of my interview partners did not explicitly address what they are taking responsibility for and what that implies. Most commonly, it

was framed as 'a responsibility for preventing something like *that* from happening again.' The persecution and extermination of Jews and other groups of people by Germans was rarely addressed directly, even though it appears to be the implicit core of '*that.*' At a minimal level, 'accepting responsibility for the past' seems to be understood as implying an obligation to know about it and not to forget. Though, some women pointed out ways in which they were seeking to translate this responsibility into more concrete practices. This could mean that they try to be aware of traces of the NS past in the present, look out for continuities, and oppose denial and revisionist tendencies. Several women also spoke of a responsibility to look critically at how minorities are treated today, to speak out or organize against discrimination and exclusion, and to be antiracist in general. A few women also mentioned their involvement in groups that work with refugees in Germany as a way of taking on that responsibility.

Several women who spoke of such practices explained that they felt it was important to show that there are 'other' Germans, 'better' Germans. One of these women is Jana, a 30 year-old West German. When we talked about the meaning of the Nazi past today, Jana said:

> "I think the issue is one of taking on responsibility for preventing something like that from happening again. And I think that all Germans have this responsibility, including those who were born after the war. What does it mean today? The responsibility of the grandsons and granddaughters is to learn about this history and to be antiracist and antinationalist. I mean, I cannot claim that I am super-active. But around the years '92, '93, when these terrible attacks happened, I joined an antiracist group. We also worked with refugees. At that time, these things became really important to me. I wanted to do something. I also wanted to show that not all Germans are like that, that there are other Germans as well."

Similar statements were made by a number of women. It appears that such practices are sometimes pursued, if only in part, as a way of establishing oneself as a 'good' German. I do not think that a desire to show oneself to be different from the 'ugly' Germans, to be a 'better' German, is the only driving force behind these women's involvement in the various political projects they engaged in. But I do think that there is a general lack of reflection on the kind of identity politics inherent in such work, on what personal needs women are trying to fulfill in their politics and what

notions of Germanness they produce in the process. (I will address the issue of identity politics in the last chapter.)

Asked whether they felt that they had this responsibility as a person or individual or as a German, most women described it as a responsibility they shared as Germans. The predominant understanding was that this was a collective responsibility. Only four women emphasized approaching the issue as individuals.

The women who spoke of a collective responsibility saw this as a responsibility they have to accept as Germans. The collective at issue was mostly understood to be the 'German nation' or the 'German people.' Their sense of responsibility stemmed from their sense of belonging to this group. One woman, Michi, put it somewhat differently by referring to citizenship rather than nationality or ethnicity:

> *"I am not personally responsible for what happened, but I cannot simply say that it's none of my business. There is a connection. I am a citizen of this state and this state has a history and it deals with this history in particular ways. And I do think there is something like collective responsibility. A responsibility for how that past and its consequences are dealt with. And I do share that responsibility."*

Overall, it was not clear from the women's statements whether they thought that German nationals or citizens who do not descend from the perpetrator group at large – for example, Jewish Germans or German citizens who are not 'ethnic' Germans – ought to share this responsibility as well. Implicitly, they appear to have referred only to 'ethnic' Germans when they spoke of 'our special responsibility as Germans.' This might be justified given that the perpetrators were 'ethnic' Germans, and most women would probably not expect Jewish Germans or Germans who are children of migrants to feel responsible for Nazi crimes. However, in claiming that this 'special responsibility' is essential to what it means to be German, one risks reproducing a concept of Germanness based on ethnicity and the collective memory of the perpetrators and their descendents. I do not mean to argue against the notion that Germans have to confront the history of the society of which they are a part and share responsibility for how this society deals with its

history. But to substitute a national identity that is centered around silence over, or even denial of, the past with one that is centered around claiming responsibility for this past can have exclusionary effects, since not all German nationals or citizens stand in the same relationship to that history. In discussing the meanings of the past for Germans today, such differences must not be obscured, and the descendents of the perpetrator group at large need to find ways of addressing this legacy that consider the specificity of their relationship to it as well as their position in German society today.

To the extent that this responsibility is understood as collective, it also tends to be focused on the collective and to imply an identification with the collective. Several women expressed feeling shame or embarrassment in relation to how Germans as a collective are dealing with the past. At the time of the interviews, German media were frequently addressed the issue of recompensation for people who had been exploited as forced laborers during the Third Reich. A number of my interview partners described how the haggling and the delaying tactics employed by the German government and the German companies in question made them feel ashamed as Germans. Birgit, who had made a lot of friends, among them many Jews, when she lived in New York City for two years, spoke about this issue as well as attacks on foreigners in Germany and wondered what her friends were thinking about these matters: *"I thought, what are they going to think when they hear this on the news. Will they look at me differently, will that affect the impression they have of me? Did they get to know me well enough not to generalize or will I be confronted with this somehow?"*

An understanding of this responsibility as collective and for the collective can have effects not unlike the notion of collective guilt. It can result in a sense of being overpowered and paralyzed, since the individual feeling this responsibility has only limited influence on other members of the collective with whom she identifies, on how the past is dealt with collectively. In addition to that, questions of individual responsibility tend move to the background as responsibility is delegated to the collective. Furthermore, the collective with whom one identifies is mostly not in question; rather, the collective identity is reproduced through this notion of collective

responsibility. But, as mentioned before, constructing a positive German identity based on taking responsibility for the German past not only serves some women to enhance their own self-esteem or relieve the discomfort they feel around being German. It also, even if unwittingly, reproduces an exclusionary notion of Germanness, which yet again keeps out those who are not descendents of the perpetrators, supporters, and bystanders under National Socialism or those who are not part of the dominant group today.

The women who talked about coming to terms with the past and developing a responsible way of dealing with this legacy as individuals largely focused on the extent to which this past is still active in the present. They emphasized a need to recognize and work through the effects that this history had upon themselves as individual human beings. That could mean that they sought to understand how growing up in the society that is built of this past influenced their personalities, view points, and practices or that they tried to work through unresolved feelings of guilt in relation to this history. However, this focus on themselves did not imply that they were not interested in the broader context of this history and how it is dealt with collectively. They rather wanted to understand their own position within this context and reflect on the ways in which they interact with others. In fact, the initiative to look more closely at themselves often came out of their political work. They further talked about 'coming to terms with the past' as a task that could never come to a completion; rather, they saw history as continuous, something they would always live with. For instance, Pia put it this way:

> *"I look at this part of German history and I see such incredible, absolute violence. And the voids it created are still there. It's not over in that sense. You can suppress the memories but that doesn't undo what happened. And I don't know what could be meant by coming to terms with that, I cannot see it. Many people say, 'Well, it's enough now, I have dealt with it for long enough. But I think that the more I preoccupy myself with it, the more I come to realize dimensions that I had not been aware of before."*

Pia was convinced that nobody could ever arrive at a complete understanding of this history and its effects on the present. To that extent, she saw confronting herself with this history as

an ongoing struggle that could never come to an endpoint. This included a continuing responsibility

to look at all events in the present as well as one's own attitudes and behaviors against the

background of this history.

> Pia: *"And there still are many things that I have not looked at yet. Just recently, a colleague of mine from Israel pointed me towards something that I had not seen before. We had these conflicts in the women's project scene here in the city, and these conflicts led to major splits. And my colleague said that she found that to be a very German way of dealing with each other. We are very quick in separating what we consider good and bad, and then we split up over that. And that's not just among women. She said that this was different where she came from, that people were more relaxed in that regard. And that makes you think again about such cultural or character moulds. I am like that, too. I can be pretty tough and uncompromising. And I tend to think that I am doing it out of a good attitude, an idealistic attitude or something like that. But I guess I have to ask myself to what extent I am being very German there, when I respond like that, you know, like 'that's it, end of the discussion,' when I am firm-principled. The woman from Israel described the style there to be very different: People don't split up that easily, they sit down together again and talk about about their issues. But here, there always has to be right and wrong, good and bad. And everyone is anxious to show that they are on the right side, and we do so by rejecting every other way of looking at things."*

Anka described similar experiences in feminist contexts. While she had enjoyed working

with certain feminist groups, she also recalled how dreadful she found the moralizing and the

dogmatism in others:

> *"For example, I was in this feminist antifascist group. There, everything was so narrow and square and overly moral. And totally dogmatic, not just with regard to politics, even with private things. I was in a relationship with a woman who was also involved with the group, and things weren't going so well. And suddenly, the group began to discuss our relationship. It was like a trial, they wanted me to justify my behaviors. That was just terrible. Well, there was this constant pressure to justify yourself. There always had to be a clear-cut distinction between right and wrong, good and bad. No real exchange, only dogmas and rules. And either you sticked to the rules or you better left the group. That was my worst experience with a group."*

Such thinking in rigid binary oppositions has been noted by various authors working on the

psychological effects that the overall denial and repression of the Nazi past had on the generations

born after the Nazi period. While I have already touched on these effects in the introduction to this

chapter, I want to repeat and elaborate on the points mentioned before towards further contextualizing the dynamics described by Pia and Anka.

Writing about the 'second generation,' the daughters and sons of the Nazi-generation, Margarete Mitscherlich points out that they grew up in a culture marked by an 'inability to mourn,' where no systematic attempts were made at working through this legacy in its political-historical and psychological dimensions. Their parents passed along to them their defenses against the recent past. Mitscherlich concludes that this generation not only inherited a past that has not been worked through, they also became part of the continuing effort to ward off the task of such working through:

> Whether they want to or not, they are identified with their parents, either take over
> their denials and suppressions or fight in a blind rage against the older generation.
> In doing that, they tend to defend their values and ideals with the same rigidity and
> the same fanaticism as had their parents during Hitler's time (1987:125,
> translation: A.K.).

Here, Mitscherlich is referring to the West German student movement of the late 1960s and early 1970s. While the movement must be credited for breaking the post-war silence over National Socialism and the Holocaust, Mitscherlich's point is that their aggressive rejection of the past also prevented them from truly working though this legacy; they shared the predecessing generation's 'inability to mourn.' Michael Geyer describes the movement as having been engaged in a "drama of distantiation" from the past (as well as the materialism of post-war West Germany society), which found its most radical expression in terrorism (1996:175). Applying the psychoanalytic framework put forward by, among others, Dominick LaCapra, one could consider this 'drama of distantiation' a form of acting out, rather than working through. LaCapra explains the concept of working through as follows:

> To work through problems requires acknowledging them. It also involves an
> attempt to counteract the tendency to deny, repress, or blindly repeat them, and it
> enables one to acquire critical perspective allowing for a measure of control and
> responsible action, notably including a mode of repetition related to the renewal of
> life in the present (1998:54).

Acting out refers to a process in which repressed elements are not acknowledged and counteracted, instead "the past is compulsively relived rather than remembered and critically confronted" (1998:48). The denial and repression of the massive legacy of guilt that remained after the defeat of the Third Reich created an immense moral void. It is in this context that the binaries good/bad, right/wrong, victim/perpetrator have become particularly charged. Uli Linke notes that "the fact of German Nazism and Judeocide left an inescapable imprint on postwar West German culture and affected people's lives and self-understandings in the most intimate ways" (1999:67). Terms such as 'Nazi,' 'Auschwitz' and others invoking memories of National Socialism and the Holocaust serve as signifiers of absolute evil. In that regard, it "was ultimately no coincidence that members of the West German generation of 1968 repeatedly made reference to the Third Reich, and the Holocaust, in their battles with each other and with members of their parents' generation" (ibid.).[2] The aggressive rejection of the past on behalf of the New Left was also based on a desire to identify with historical victims. It prevented a critical confrontation with National Socialism, anti-Semitism, and the Holocaust and resulted in continued repression and acting out (Postone 1993).

While explicit references to Nazism and Judeocide might have become less common in political battles by now, they have not gone out of currency.[3] Several of my interview partners related stories of conflicts within feminist and leftists groups in which such terminology was used to discredit or 'shoot down' certain individuals or factions and their views. The use of such

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[2] It is rather ironic that their political opponents applied the same terminology in discrediting the movement, that is accusations of Nazism went both ways. The leftist terrorist group RAF (Red Army Fraction) attracted most such comparisons. Particularly in the 1970s, but in the following decades as well, its members and supporters were denounced as Hitler's or Himmler's children. In an article published in the newspaper *Berliner Zeitung*, historian Götz Aly even equated them with the SS (see Tolmein 1998).

[3] For example: Following a rather violent police eviction of a squatted house, which had served as a leftist culture center, in the city of Potsdam on 1 June 2000, leftist youth smashed the windows of five bank branches. A local conservative politician subsequently compared this window smashing with the "*Reichskristallnacht*," that is, the night of 9/10 November 1938, during which the Nazis organized anti-Jewish pogroms throughout Germany, burning synagogues and breaking windows of Jewish shops (see Kanzleiter 2000).

terminology and the application of rigid binary conceptualizations of 'right' and 'wrong' further

aggravated existing antagonisms, and most such conflicts were ultimately unresolvable.

There certainly are cases or situations in which compromising would amount to selling out

on one's political convictions and ideals. Yet, Pia was not alone in noting that at least parts of the

German feminist movement are quick in demarcating 'right' from 'wrong' and categorically

rejecting what they deem 'wrong' in order to secure their sense of being on the 'right side.' Pia did

not apply such terminology in talking about the conflicts within the women's project scene and

how they are dealt with, but one could see these attitudes and behaviors as forms of acting out. Her

colleague's comments challenged Pia to consider that what she used to think of as a positive

quality, namely being 'principled,' might be more than an individual character trait. She began to

contemplate the possibility that it was related to an unmastered legacy, the result of which was a

moral uncertainty that led people to be 'tough' and 'uncompromising,' created a strong need to feel

themselves securely on the 'right side,' and resulted in an incapability to tolerate ambiguities, as

these were seen as threateningto one's moral integrity.

Pia concluded that, in order to arrive at more constructive ways of handling conflict and

dealing with each other, she and the women she works with ought to confront themselves with the

historical, political, and moral context that shaped their personalities and practices.

> Pia: *"You don't have to turn being German into a positive thing. but you cannot
> ignore it either. This being German in German history, it is about absolute
> exclusion and extermination. But it is dangerous to think that, in disassociating
> oneself from that, one is automatically disassociating oneself from the mechanisms
> of exclusion as well. When you denounce this history, it does not mean that you
> might not somehow have it in yourself as a potential. So I think that you have to
> confront yourself with that history to be able to confront violence and exclusion in
> the German women's movement. And also to get away from this big fear or the
> idea that you will be seen as a bad person. You're not a good person just because
> you're a feminist."*

Luci was another woman who saw a relationship between the legacy of Nazism and her

own attitudes and behaviors. For example, she sometimes felt 'blocked' in encounters with Jewish

people and migrants in Germany, and she thought that was most likely a result of unresolved

feelings of guilt:

> *"It's not easy to explain, but I guess you feel like you're vulnerable, like you might be attacked. And so you close down and withdraw. And thereby you prevent any real contact from happening. You base your identity on denouncing German identity. However, it would be much more constructive if you were willing to let your German background be part of meeting other people, to revisit it in that contact. But through my bad conscience as a German or my rejection of that identity, I prevent such contact and make myself untouchable, safe from possible attack."*

Luci went on to explain her view that, in order to be able to meet others and work with

them, she had to take responsibility for and work through whatever unresolved feelings she was

harboring in relation to her national association:

> *"If I have a bad conscience about something, feel guilty or something, and I don't resolve that, then it will often be others who end up suffering or paying the price for that. Because no one likes to be constantly in a position of feeling bad about themselves. Sooner or later you're going to resent the people who do not have to carry that same load. Then you're also incapable of seeing what their lives are like, what kind of burden they have to master. If it becomes difficult to work or be with me because I have not worked through my own issues, then I have the responsibility to deal with these things. This could be National Socialism in general, it could be my family history, racism in German society today, or other things."*

Within feminist debates on how to fight against racism. anti-Semitism, and other

ideologies and structures of oppression, the responsibility of women belonging to the dominant and

privileged group tends to be conceptualized in two different forms. which are often perceived as

opposites or alternatives. Some put the emphasis on 'unlearning' their racism, anti-Semitism,

ableism, and other oppressive systems of thought they have internalized. Others argue that, by

paying too much attention to oneself, one risks neglecting the fight against the social, economic,

and political structures of oppression. They see activities such as 'unlearning-racism workshops'

for white women as resulting in solipsism and argue for more pragmatic strategies.[4] Changing

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[4] See, for example, the documentation of such debates in Goldmann (n.d.) and Verein für Sozialwissenschaftliche Forschung und Praxis für Frauen e.V. (1991).

society and changing the dominant subject then appear as two separate and competing struggles. Yet, Luci's and Pia's approaches to the issue of (majority-)Germanness, in which the legacy of Nazism played a major role, show that working on the self does not need not be detached from social and political activism. They wanted to work through issues relating to being German against the background of German history in order to understand the ways in which this background affected their attitudes and behaviors in the context of their political work. Based on such an understanding, they hoped to be enabled to take responsibility for these attitudes and behaviors and to become more effective allies.

In fact, coming to terms with one's position and background can be necessary in order to become a competent political actor in the first place. The African-American poet and political activist Audre Lorde noted the following about majority-German feminists while she stayed in Germany during the 1980s:

> I have met an immobilizing national guilt in white German women which serves to keep them from acting upon what they profess to believe. Their energies, however well intentioned, are not being used, they are unavailable in the battles against racism, antisemitism, heterosexism, xenophobia. Because they seem unable to accept who they are, these women too often fail to examine and pursue the powers relative to their identity. They waste that power, or worse, turn it over to their enemies. Four decades after National Socialism, the question still lingers for many white German women: how can I draw strength from my roots when those roots are entwined in such a terrible history? (1992:viii).

Lorde's statement resonates with Pia's and Luci's self-reflections. It was equally echoed by Anka and Ines, who also pointed out that, in order to deal with the past and one's position today in responsible ways, one had to start by working through whatever unresolved feelings one might have in relation to this history. Anka put it this way:

> *"First of all, you have to realize that it is not constructive to run around feeling guilty. You rather have to look at how you can take responsibility today. I mean, many people have probably asked themselves: How would I have acted during the time of NS? Of course, I would like to think that I would have been in the resistance. But I cannot know that. And so I think it's a question of... there is a moral obligation to at least act in this country today in a way that... that I don't put my head in the sand or look away but stand up for what I believe in. Also to be prepared should things get worse with right-wing extremists. So that I don't*

immediately run away in fear when I see a skinhead. That's what I take away as a lesson from this history, that it's important to develop courage. It's a learning process though. It starts with deciding against paralysis and then you have to keep on working on it."

Ines expressed a similar view:

"You have to confront yourself and deal with this historical legacy and also ask yourself how it affects you personally. But you have to do that in terms of responsibility, not in terms of a guilt which gets you totally down. That also means to be aware of continuities, to be very sensitive to what is going on right now, to take note of exclusions, persecutions, attacks, and to respond to that in a responsible way, to not look away and follow the line of least resistance. But you also have to be realistic about what you can do. You know, that collective sense of powerlessness and impotence that people often fall into when they confront their Germanness, that cannot be it. Yes, you have to acknowledge the fact that you are German and come to terms with what that means for you. But you must not get stuck in thinking: these terrible Germans, all this guilt, it's so negative to be German, etc. There is a point where I would say, you're German, fine, so what? Get over it! That's where you start from, but what ultimately matters is not who you are, it's what you do."

The question of 'responsibility for the past' was not an abstract issue for these women; they rather approached it as a personal challenge. They wanted to clarify for themselves how they were related to this past and understand the ways in which it was still active in the present, in German society and within themselves. They were not concerned with integrating the past into a positive sense of Germanness by way of claiming responsibility for it as Germans, but rather approached the issue on a more personal level by trying to develop political identities and practices that would allow them to take on responsibility in constructive ways. They pointed out problems with an identity politics that is guided by a desire to be on the 'right side,' to not be seen as a 'bad' person. Pia noted the negative effects that such identity politics can have on coalition work, and Ines pointed to the risk of being immobilized by overemphasizing the negative aspects of one's national association. While this association must not be ignored, one does not need to make it definitive of oneself, since, in Ines's words, *"what ultimately matters is not who you are, it's what you do."*

Beyond the perpetrator group and their descendents – exceeding the
'canon' of German collective memory

The concept of collective memory poses numerous theoretical and methodological

problems: How can it be defined and how can it can be surveyed or captured? How is it produced

and transmitted? How is it interrelated with individual memories? How and why does it change?

How can it be represented? Does it exist at all or is it a projection or a myth?[5] Within the context of

the discussion at hand, I have to leave these questions aside. Yet, although this concept is

ambiguous and cannot be linked to an 'objective' reality, I find it useful in conceiving of how

individuals participate in the construction and maintenance of collective identities by remembering

and setting themselves in relationship to events they have not experienced themselves and to

persons whom they have never met. In using the term collective memory, I am referring to

memories which are not based on individual experience but are socially transmitted – for example,

through media, education, museums, public ceremonies, or public discussions – and which

establish connections between individuals across time as well as within the present.[6] The social

groups to which individuals relate provide the frame of reference in which such memories become

meaningful. In turn, social groups and collective identities constitute themselves through

individuals' identification with socially transmitted memories. Yet, just as individual memories are

subject to continuous revision and reinterpretation within processes of identity construction, so are

collective memories. What Michael Lambek and Paul Antze note about the relationship between

memory and individual identities is applicable to collective identities as well:

> Memory serves as both a phenomenological ground of identity (as when we know
> implicitly who we are and the circumstances that have made us so) and the means
> for explicit identity construction (as when we search our memories in order to

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[5] See, for example, Fulbrook (1999); Gedi and Elam (1996); Hutton (1993).

[6] I am not suggesting that memories based on individual experience are more 'authentic' than such that are socially transmitted. Individual experiences and memories are, of course, themselves socially mediated. What I am distinguishing are experiences and memories that are interpreted as individual versus such that are perceived as collective. However, these two types of memory are not separate phenomena but rather draw on each other.

understand ourselves or when we offer particular stories about ourselves in order to make a certain kind of impression). But although we may set up the ideal of an unambiguous, limpid self – there should be no obscurities in our memories – ambiguity is the rule. So while memory should support the dominant view of our identity, the trouble is that it always threatens to undermine it, whether by obvious gaps, by uncertainties, or by the glimpses of a past that no longer seems to be ours (1996:xvi).

Collective memory cannot be thought of as a seamless whole, but must rather be seen as a process in which contradictory and conflicting memories are constantly renegotiated. This is particularly obvious in the German context, where representations and interpretations of German history, especially of the Nazi era and the Holocaust, constitute sites of intense and controversial public debates over how and what should be remembered. In chapter 1, I have shown how these debates serve as focal points in an ongoing battle over defining German national identity. What I have not addressed explicitly are the questions of who takes part in these debates over the past, in whose name they are carried out, and whose memories are included or excluded in these struggles over German collective memory?

From many of those who had formed, and felt themselves to be, part of the community of Germans before 1933, the possibility of continuing to contribute to German society, culture and memory was removed, against their will. Across the world, there are people who fled from, or whose parents and grandparents fled from, the Nazi system of terror. Their memories and the impact on their lives and personalities should form part of this story; but it is a part which more often contributes to the development now of other cultures, other societies, and has for the most part been excluded from what is deemed to be 'German' today (Fulbrook 1999:147).

While it is questionable that German-Jewish relations before the Nazi regime can correctly be described as a 'symbiosis,' as they are frequently referred to, Dan Diner points out that, "[a]fter Auschwitz it is actually possible – what a sad irony – to speak of a 'German-Jewish symbiosis', albeit a negative one. For both Jews and Germans, whether they like it or not, the aftermath of mass murder has been the starting point for self-understanding – a kind of community of opposites" (1990:251). The wedge that has been driven between Germans and Jews by the German pursuit of Judeocide largely remains definitive of the relationship between the two groups, which are still

often conceived of as mutually exclusive. As a result, their respective memories also form 'a kind of community of opposites.' In addressing the dividing line between the historical consciousness of most Jewish survivors and the vast majority of Germans after 1945, Frank Stern draws on Primo Levi's notion of a 'cordon sanitaire,' which Levi applied in describing how many Germans fended off burdensome memories during the last years of the Nazi regime. Stern argues that there exists a cordon sanitaire between German and Jewish memories, which has served Germans to keep troubling memories at a harmless distance: "This cordon sanitaire created a major shield against moral awareness and the necessity of self-critical questioning. It became the German postwar coat of arms, the main device in the German culture of forgetting" (1997:213p.). Whereas there have been attempts at countering such forgetting and confronting the past, they have mostly not managed, or even attempted, to cross the cordon sanitaire between the divided memories.

Debates about the relationship between German identity and the Nazi past, with the Holocaust as its core, are often conducted more or less exclusively among those who belong to, or descend from, the collective responsible for bringing the Nazis to power and for supporting or tolerating Nazi crimes. The dominance, within these discussions, of people who stand in the tradition of the perpetrators mirrors the make-up of Germany's population. However, what is at issue in these discussions is not only how people standing in this tradition ought to deal with that legacy. To the extent that these debates aim at defining German national identity, the legacy of the perpetrators becomes a, or even *the*, constitutive element of German identity, either in being relativized and downplayed or in being acknowledged and accepted. Therefore, the dominant collective memory that is being negotiated in this context also becomes normative of Germanness. The memories of the victims of Nazism are mostly not reconcilable with this construction of Germanness; they either have to be subsumed, or they indicate a position outside of Germanness.

The same applies to the perspectives of people who are neither related to the perpetrator group at large nor to the groups who were victimized, for example, to many migrants and their descendents. They are excluded from the dominant collective memory in its identity-constituting

function, unless they are willing to prioritize the dominant collective memory over the particular

perspective they might hold based on their specific background and position within German

society. Such a prioritization as the condition for unambiguous belonging was spelled out

implicitly by Klaus von Dohnanyi, a member of the SPD (Social Democratic Party of Germany)

and former mayor of Hamburg. In defending Martin Walser, Dohnanyi had suggested that Jews

critical of Walser's call for a *Schlußstrich* (see chapter 1) should ask themselves whether they

would have resisted against the Nazi regime if only 'Gypsies' and homosexuals had been

persecuted. During an interview he gave to the newspaper *Tagesspiegel*, Dohnanyi elaborated on

this claim and said:

> Personally, I think that in relation to the question of guilt for the Third Reich's
> crimes there can be no difference between a young non-Jewish German and a
> young Jewish German: Both are Germans who are personally without any guilt,
> but they are liable – as Karl Jaspers formulated it in 1946 already – for the German
> history by virtue of being German citizens. Should that not apply to, for example, a
> young German who has Turkish parents or grandparents? Those who see it that
> way risk making a 'racist' argument (1999; translation: A.K.).

In reducing individuals' relationship to the Nazi past to their citizenship and by contracting

the moral and political questions raised by this past to the issue of liability, Dohnanyi ignores the

fact that different groups within the population have made different experiences with that state and

society and hold distinct collective memories based on these experiences. These differences will

also affect how the issue of liability is understood and approached by German citizens of various

backgrounds (see Zuckermann 1999a:113). By discrediting attention to such particularities as

'racist,' Dohnanyi wards off challenges to the dominant collective memory in its binding function

as constitutive of Germanness.

Michael Geyer and Miriam Hansen make the following observation:

> If a German national consciousness has indeed emerged from collective processes
> of remembrance, this means that Germans have forged it on the basis of *their*
> memory of the Holocaust, from the very destruction they meted out only a
> generation ago! Even if this act redeems the past and its victims, it entails an
> appropriation and transfer of the memory of the Holocaust. We begin to recognize
> how problematic German memory is (1994:186; emphasis in the original).

What is disturbing about this development is its orientation towards recovering a national identity based on the collective memory of the perpetrator group at large and their descendents. This notion of German national identity repeats the exclusions that divided perpetrators from victims. It takes for granted a homogeneity of the German historical experience without acknowledging that this homogeneity was produced through the destruction or forcing into exile of those groups within the population that National Socialist ideology excluded from Germanness. It not only accepts their absence, it also writes out of German history their experiences and memories, thereby fending off their unsettling effect on the process of recovery.

This section now turns to the views of those of my interview partners who are not, or not exclusively, descendents of the perpetrator group at large. I present their various perspectives on the history of Nazism and the Holocaust and discuss how these figure into their understandings of themselves as Germans.

Mira is an Afro-German who was born in the GDR but spent parts of her youth in various countries and altogether lived most of her life in West Germany. She described herself as Christian-socialized. During the interview with Mira, the issue of German history and particularly National Socialism came up while she was telling me how she constantly negotiates multiple identities or subject positions in an environment that expects her to position herself unambiguously in relation to either/or choices:

> "Society, or Western society, functions that way. You have to define yourself and walk in line. You have to be either this or that. And I had internalized that, you know, that you cannot be more than one thing, like German and black. But now I think, people just have to learn to deal with the fact that human beings are many things, many different things. I cannot separate my different parts, I will always be all these things, black, a woman, a feminist, a lesbian, and also German. I am shaped by this culture, I have to acknowledge that, even though I do not look at German identity as something entirely positive. The history of National Socialism comes in there. And I think black Germans have a kind of split relationship to that, it's very ambivalent. Perhaps we would have been killed had we lived at the time. On the other hand, it's part of my history, I also have white German grandparents. My grandfather was in the SA. He was kicked out at some point because he misbehaved in some way or other, not because he was not in line with them

> *politically. He definitely was a Nazi, at least a Nazi supporter. And my
> grandmother also trimmed her sails to the wind. This was not a family of resisters,
> not at all."*

Mira continued by explaining that she saw herself as implicated in this history and as sharing the

historical guilt that remains; however, as all other Germans of her generation, she could not change

this history: *"I can only try to do my share today so that it will never happen again. Awareness,*

that is my responsibility. And also to know about Jewish identity and Jewish life, to know about

what has been eradicated from this country." Mira identified the Holocaust as the historical guilt

that she cannot opt out of. She made it clear that she considered Jews to have been the primary

victims of National Socialism. Even though she might have been persecuted or even killed because

of her skin color, in relation to Jews, as the group most severely affected by the Nazis' politics of

racial mass murder, Mira did not position herself on the side of the victims but acknowledged her

connection to the perpetrators. She had become further aware of that position when she realized

that she knew very little about Jewish culture and identity today. While she had left the Roman-

Catholic Church and did not identify as a Christian, she saw her ignorance as typical for the

Christian/Christian-secularized dominant culture in Germany. She described feeling guilty for her

ignorance and wondered if that was the kind of feeling white women seemed to have in relation to

black women, *"like, you got to be very careful, as if walking over eggs."*

Karina, also Afro-German, put forward a perspective that differed from Mira's in so far as

she did not point to any ambivalences in her relation to the Nazi past and situated herself

exclusively in continuity with the perpetrators.[7] As mentioned before, Karina had lived in the GDR

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[7] In contrast to Mira, Karina was a practicing Christian. Also, Mira had much more contact with other Afro-Germans and black people in Germany, through social relations and political work, than had Karina, who described *"the fact that I am mostly the only Afro-German among lots of white people"* as particularly decisive in her life. It is possible that these differences in their life worlds relate to the differences in their views on the Nazi past. However, I am hesitant to consider these differences in their lives as explanatory of their different attitudes towards the legacy of Nazism and the Holocaust. While they might be relevant to their views, my discussion is not focused on explaining how and why my interview partners arrived at their particular understanding of this legacy, but rather on how their views of the past relate to their attitudes towards German identity.

until she moved to West Germany in 1988. She came to talk about the legacy of National Socialism when I asked her in what ways she had experienced the two societies as different.

> Karina: *"Well, there was quite a difference. In the GDR, which was also a white society, being German was mostly framed as, 'we are the better Germans,' you know, 'we are the ones who resisted the Nazis. The murderers, the fascists, they are all in the FRG.' Of course, that was not true, but it was in people's heads. In my head as well. In school we were told: 'We Germans in the GDR, we are progressive, we are committed to the fight for equality and justice, to solidarity with the oppressed peoples of the world.' That's what I learned. But that did not quite go together with my experience, with my classmates calling me 'Negro doll' [Negerpuppe] or 'stupid Negro cunt' [blöde Negevotze], among other things. But I was always struggling to resist these attempts at excluding me. I wanted to belong. And so, because I could not solve that identity problem, I had an investment in thinking that these were just a few exceptions, that the majority of the people in the GDR felt solidarity with the peoples of the world and liked people of color. That was one of the big lies with which I lived. Because these people could call me 'Negerpuppe,' could kick me down the stairs and nobody cared. ...And when I came here in 1988, it was not talked about at all. There was this speechlessness, nobody seemed to want to talk about what this history meant for them or what it meant to be German. Even at the university where I studied theology. When the issue of National Socialism came up, it was all about the churches, how did the churches act during that time, what was good or bad about that. Always on this more abstract level. Nobody dared to say: 'But what about us? This happened not very long ago, it also has an effect on us.' Nobody said that. It was kind of shadowy, nothing you would talk about."*

Karina found the different ways in which the history of National Socialism was dealt with in the respective former German states equally inadequate. Each was marked by evasion and denial. She pointed out the hypocrisy in the official rhetoric of the GDR by contrasting it with her own experience of racism and the fact that this racism was tolerated in spite of GDR doctrine. In West Germany, Karina was stunned by the predominant silence over the NS history. Rather then seeing themselves as the 'better Germans,' the people she encountered there tended to not see themselves as Germans at all: *"When I said something like, 'how do we as Germans deal with that?' people responded by saying: 'Why German? I don't think of myself as German, I am a European.' I got the impression that I was totally conservative because I thought of myself as German."* Karina saw this avoidance of an identification with Germany as a result of unresolved feelings about National Socialism. She also thought of it as an avoidance of responsibility:

> *"You have to accept this as your own history in order to come to a constructive position. And you cannot work through that by looking at it only on an abstract level. These were not abstract crimes, they were committed by individual people. That's the level on which you have to come to terms with it. And then you can think about your own behaviors, how you want to act or not act. That's my responsibility today. And if we could arrive at a more open and direct way of dealing with this history, maybe we could begin to come to terms with the fact that we are German without all this shame, which is not constructive at all. You have to understand your own history in order to understand how it is connected with that of others. In our church, people are very interested in Jewish-Christian dialogue. And there is the question: What does it mean to belong on the side of the perpetrators? And what does that mean in relation to the victims?"*

Karina situated herself unambiguously on the side of the perpetrators. Her experience of not being perceived as 'one of them' by many members of this group because of her skin color did not affect that positioning. To her, being denied recognition as a German on behalf of white Germans and feeling associated with the perpetrator group as a Christian German were two separate issues: *"Just because I have suffered discrimination myself does not mean that I know the suffering of others. I can look at my own experience, and it might help me to understand something about the experience of others. But you also have to see where your experience differs from that of others."* At no point in the interview did Karina refer to the persecution of people of color under National Socialism. She might not have known about these victims of Nazism, or, if she did know about them, she did not establish a link between them and herself. While Mira's sense of connectedness to the NS history was ambivalent since she recognized ties to both perpetrators and victims, Karina saw herself exclusively in continuity with the perpetrators.

The different ways in which Mira and Karina positioned themselves in relation to German history correspond to how they framed their sense of Germanness. Both women had experienced reluctance on the part of majority-Germans to accept them as Germans because their skin color markd them as 'other' and situated them outside of the dominant conception of Germanness. They responded to this refusal of affirmation as Germans in different ways, though.

Karina described how difficult it had been for her to come to terms with the fact that she was of color: *"I had internalized this notion that German equals white and so I split myself off*

from the fact that I am of color." Only in her twenties did she begin to acknowledge that *"this is part of me, I cannot deny it. It took a lot of tears, a lot of pain, but at some point I realized that I do not have to feel shame for it, that I do belong too, not only the others."* She explained that she had finally arrived at a sense of being German that included her color. May other Germans show reluctance to recognize her as one of them, she laid claim to belonging in spite of that. At several times during the interview, Karina spoke in terms of *"We Germans..."* and did so deliberately. She also spoke in terms of 'we' when discussing the Nazi past and the issue of responsibility for it. She saw the crimes committed by Germans as an inheritance she shared with other Germans, as part of her Germanness. In situating herself unambiguously in relation to that history, she also claimed an unambiguous sense of being German, despite the fact that she was perceived as outside of the national norm.

Mira spoke of her German identity and her black identity as integrated and separated at the same time. How meaningful each of her plural identifications was to her in a particular situation was contingent on context. She described fluctuations in her sense of identity as a German. In some respects, she felt herself to be *"very German,"* meaning that she saw herself as profoundly shaped by German culture and society. Yet, her identification with Germans as a collective was not as straightforward and comprehensive as Karina's. This was evident in how Mira responded to racist crimes committed by majority-Germans (see previous chapter) as well as in how she situated herself with regard to NS history, to which she related not just as a Christian-socialized German but also as a person of color.

Mirjana was another woman who described herself as relating to the Nazi past in more than one way. She was born in Yugoslavia in 1953 to a Serbian father and a mother who belonged to the German minority in Yugoslavia. After the war, her maternal family members had been expelled from their land and had to live in camps and work as forced laborers. In 1948 they were allowed to leave for Germany. Mirjana's mother stayed on, though, and married Mirjana's father. Mirjana

lived in Belgrade until the age of six when, after the death of her mother, she and her sister moved to Germany to live with their maternal relatives. Yet, her connection to her father remained strong and with that her sense of connectedness to Yugoslavia. Mirjana did not remember ever having been discriminated against because of her Yugoslavian background, which she thinks was due to the fact that she was fluent in German and was not visibly different from the majority. But she remembered people talking in pejorative terms about Yugoslavia:

> "One of my teachers always said, 'the poor child is from the Eastern block, from behind the Iron Curtain. I didn't get what she meant by that. I was strongly identified with my father and therefore never felt that it was something negative to be Yugoslavian. They never managed to devalue that country in my eyes."

Her father had fought on the side of the partisans during World War II, for which she was proud: "Being Yugoslav in general was a source of pride, because they had been on the right side in the war. I knew that from an early age. Although my German family was always bitching about the partisans. But that just reinforced my sense of pride." Mirjana explained that she never wanted to belong to or identify with the German minority in Yugoslavia; she thought they were a "terrible bunch." Her maternal uncles had been members of the SS, for which she felt shame: "But that shame transformed itself into rejection. I didn't want to have anything to do with them." Her German family members were constantly talking about the past, about their fate as expellees, their own suffering:

> "I guess that's the same in most families of exiles. They talked about it all the time: the camps, the cruelties, the forced labor, how they had been treated unjustly. And, you know, for me it was a simple issue. I said, they collaborated with the fascist so everything that happened to them served them just right. I was pretty merciless. But today I think that this also served me to distance myself from all that, to not let the suffering and pain get to close to me."

Mirjana saw that many of her German peers were troubled by a sense of guilt or shame in relation to the Nazi past. But the distance she felt to her German relatives and her identification with her father and Yugoslavia prevented her from sharing such feelings. As a teenager, she began to be politically active in leftist circles: "You know, it was that 68er/69er thing. At that time, I was very proud to be Yugoslavian. Yugoslavia was the only country that tried to do its own thing,

neither Stalinism nor capitalism." Mirjana felt good about her association with Yugoslavia and downplayed her German heritage: "*And all around me people were starting to think about Germany and fascism and developed these feelings of guilt. And I could keep that away from me, at least for some time.*"

Meanwhile, Mirjana explained, she had certainly become German in a cultural sense, having lived in Germany most of her life. She had been socialized in Germany and felt much more comfortable speaking in German than in Serbo-Croatian. Yet, she did not really feel rooted in Germany, and she was also facing various disadvantages because she was not a German citizen, which reinforced her sense of not belonging entirely. She had applied for German citizenship when she was a teenager, although mostly for pragmatic reasons rather than to affirm a sense of Germanness. Because of her leftist political involvement she was denied citizenship, even though her maternal relatives had all become German citizens by then. Her mother had taken on Yugoslav citizenship when she married Mirjana's father, but Mirjana should still have been able to lay claim to German citizenship as she fulfilled the ethnic criterion, which the German citizenship law is based on. She filed a legal challenge against the decision to deny her citizenship and lost: "*It was disgusting. These laws were pretty much the same as under National Socialism. The same language, you know, terms like 'worthy of being German.' And I was certified that I wasn't worthy.*" Mirjana did not pursue the issue any further until the beginning of the war in Bosnia.

> Mirjana: "*That war affected me profoundly. I was absolutely terrified to see how these people were falling upon each other, how the country was breaking apart. And my Yugoslavian identity was suddenly up in the air, too. My father was totally infected with this Serbian nationalism, which made our relationship with each other very difficult. I could not accept this national pride at all, that's not mine. Although I also feel bad for the Serbs, who are so isolated now.*"

She applied for German citizenship again and finally got it. Because of the civil war situation, she did not have to give up her Yugoslav citizenship, although German citizenship law does not usually allow the holding of dual citizenship. Yet, she would have had to pay the Yugoslav government a fee in order to be expatriated, and so she was able to argue that she did not

want to support the warring government and, therefore, could keep her Yugoslav citizenship. She

explained that she had never wanted to give up this citizenship, she would rather have done without

the German one. However, this attitude changed with the war: *"That Yugoslav passport no longer*

has the value it used to have for me."

At that time, the history from which she had tried to distance herself also crept up on her

again. The ethnic conflicts and civil wars in Yugoslavia caused her to confront herself anew with

her maternal family's history:

> *"All of a sudden, my ties to this German minority came up for me again, although*
> *I had totally rejected them before. For one thing, this Serbian nationalism kind of*
> *uprooted me, because that's not where my place is. So that made me think about*
> *my other roots, made me look at them again. And then I also began to look at their*
> *history in a different way. That experience of being expelled, of being refugees, all*
> *that began to touch me in a way it had not touched me before. I no longer looked*
> *at it simply as something they deserved as collaborators."*

Mirjana no longer felt the need to distance herself from her relatives so as to make a

statement against their involvement with the Nazis. She realized that her former stance had also

been a way of avoiding questions of guilt and responsibility that she could not resolve. Having

come to see the political decisions she made for herself as much more important than her ethnic or

national background, Mirjana was less reluctant to confront herself with this part of her family and

its history. She saw no reason to assume guilt for her relatives' actions and attitudes since she was

now measuring herself by her own political engagement, *"which is based on very different*

premises and pursues different goals." From that position, she no longer needed to judge them and

could even allow herself to empathize with their painful experiences.

Mirjana did not refer to notions of collective guilt or responsibility in relation to National

Socialism and the Holocaust as aspects of her sense of being German. She could not situate herself

in a broad and singular continuity with this history in the way most majority-German women did,

but rather had to work through the tensions that existed between her diametrically opposed family

ties. On the one hand, her relation to Yugoslavia through her Serbian father had allowed her to feel

a connection to those who had been on the 'right side' in this history, to those who where victims

of and fought against Nazism. Yet, this identification had become troubled by the recent wars in the former Yugoslavia and particularly Serbian nationalism, which she felt alienated by. On the other hand, she began to acknowledge her ties to the German minority in Yugoslavia, which meant that she needed to confront herself with their collaboration with the Nazis as well as with what they suffered as a result of it.[8] But she did so as an individual, not as a German. Her political identity had become more relevant to how she confronted this legacy than her national association(s).

The interview with Dilek was one of the very few interviews in which I first introduced the issue of National Socialism. When Dilek told me about what she associated with Germanness, she did not mention this history that was so central to most of the other women in that regard. I asked her whether National Socialism was something that came to her mind when she thought about Germany or Germanness. Dilek replied that she was more focused on the here and now, although she was interested in looking at the present in light of the past and wondered about the extent to which the social and ideological conditions that enabled the rise of Nazism were still existing today. She told me that National Socialism was not central to her own sense of being German. She had thought about it more in terms of what it means for Turks in Germany and for Germans of Turkish heritage:

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[8] Several more women mentioned that they had relatives who had been expelled from their homes after World War II. Most of them had lived east of the Oder-Neisse line, an area that became Polish territory after 1945 according to the Potsdam Agreement between the Allies. However, most of these women only touched on this part of their family history in passing. When I asked them about it, several women explained that they did not know how to come to terms with that part of their family history. They saw the experiences of the refugees as a direct result of the German crimes and, therefore, found it difficult to empathize with their relatives' fate. They were also opposed to the politics of the lobby claiming to represent the expellees, which refuses to accept the Oder-Neisse line as the Eastern border of Germany and demands restitution of former property rights and compensation payments from Poland and the Czech Republic. Not wanting to support such revisionist and revanchist claims, which tend to ignore the sequence of events that led to the expulsions, these women found it very difficult to deal with that history. As Luci put it: *"It is a taboo topic. I don't know how I should deal with it, although I think I should work towards finding a way. It's just that... it's so difficult to talk about it. The people who do talk about it are revanchists, and if you don't want to be revanchist, you don't talk about it."* Most women explained that they found it difficult to talk with their relatives about their experiences because they did not agree with their views. As a result, they stopped addressing these issues with their relatives and, for most women, this also meant that they stopped addressing these experiences altogether.

"National Socialism and Turks, that was a topic for me from early on. As a child, I often heard these jokes, you know, the baseline is that what the Jews were back then, the Turks are today. The jokes have not changed, only the Jews were replaced by the Turks. And these are things... in a way that pushes me on the side of the victims. It makes me identify with the victims. I know that I would not be on the side of the perpetrators. No matter if I wanted that or not, I would not have the chance to be on that side. If there were to be a National Socialist or fascist regime today, there is no way I would be on the side of the perpetrators. I would be among those they would want to get rid off. If that would happen again, I would most likely be on the side of the victims. "

Dilek noted that her majority-German friends approached the issue from the side of the perpetrators: "They identify with the perpetrators, and that makes them aggressive, they feel guilt. Whereas I feel sad more than anything. " Relating to this history the way majority-Germans did was out of the question for her: "To do so, you would have to feel like you are really one of them. But I always knew that I could never have such a solid sense of being part of that. I was always signaled that I am different. It doesn't matter whether I think I am different or not, I will never belong in that way. " Therefore, it made no sense for Dilek to look at the Nazis' crimes and pursuit of genocide as a legacy or inheritance she shared as well. It seemed more obvious for her to identify with the victims. However, she also pointed out that such an identification was flawed or spurious in so far as her position and experience was not the same as that of the victims of Nazism:

"When I meet somebody who is Jewish, I feel a sense of solidarity. But I cannot say that I feel entirely uninhibited. I might think, 'why did they come back to Germany? I would never come back to this country.' But then I realize that this is total crap. I mean, I am here, and I will never really belong. And if there would ever be a regime like that again, I would not be in a very comfortable position myself. So what am I doing here? Of course they should live here if that's what they want. There are also nice things about this country, not to mention the comforts of living in a rich country like Germany. But I would certainly not feel like I belong with the former perpetrators. I would rather feel a sense of solidarity, something like, 'hey, we are in same boat.' Although that's not really true. What happened to the Jews is a completely different story than what's happening to us today. In that regard, it would be rather inappropriate to say, 'hey, we are in the same boat,' because their experience with Germany was so much more worse than anything we experienced. "

Even though, earlier in the interview, Dilek had explained that she felt more distance to Turkish communities in Germany than to mainstream German society, in this context, she

identified with Turks in Germany rather than with majority-Germans. She referred to a common experience she shared with people of Turkish origin living in Germany, which was a particular experience and could not be considered the same as that of other minorities, especially that of Jewish people under National Socialism and today. To some extent, she had internalized a view that is held by many majority-Germans, according to which Jews are somewhat of an 'oddity' in Germany and which is expressed in questions such as, 'Why did they stay or come back?' or 'How can they live here?' However, Dilek recognized that this view defines as a Jewish issue or problem what is really a problem of German society: the failure from 1945 onward to make a radical break with the structures and ideologies of National Socialism and to confront this legacy in ways that would allow for the creation of a society in which Jews, and not only them but anybody, could feel safe and at home.

Although Dilek could not, and did not want to, identify with majority-Germans in every regard, she still claimed a German identity for herself: *"I grew up here, I live here, this is also my country. I'm not like what you might call the 'norm' here, but I am also German."* For Dilek, coming to terms with being German was not about coming to terms with the legacy of the Nazi perpetrators, and even less about claiming responsibility for it; it was a question of struggling against attempts to define her as an outsider and of creating a notion of Germanness in which there was room for herself.

Niko grew up and lived in West Germany before she moved to the East a few years ago. When we started the interview, Niko introduced herself by way of telling me about her family history:

> *"My mother was a European Jew; although she had a German passport, she was a European Jew, with roots in France and Austria. My father's roots are African-American and Cherokee. My grandmother is full-blood Cherokee. This full-blood and half-blood stuff, that's not how I look at it, that's not our culture, but that's how people say it. And I am born out of my mother's resistance, her personal resistance against that which was waiting for her, the denial of her history and her roots."*

Most of Niko's male relatives on her mother's side had been killed in concentration camps. Her grandmother had managed to save her five daughters and herself through acquiring forged papers declaring them to be 'Aryans'.

> Niko: *"She beat her daughters until they forgot their real name, forgot who they were, what the Sabbath was and the most holy day, all the holy days. That's how she got them through. My mother was the youngest daughter and was put into a Catholic convent. That's where she survived the last years, but they also screwed her up there. But she kept her inner resistance alive. And she did not want to have children who could become part of something like that, who could be fascist. If I were white, maybe I would have had the chance to make it easy for myself, to go along with it and shout 'Heil Hitler.' But I can't. I am not white and still I have to be German, and I say this with a sense of irony. But for my mother I was a planned child, a wanted child. Can you imagine that? She was 17 and she knew exactly what she wanted. And that was not easy in 1957, to be with a black man. He was a soldier stationed in Germany and lived with us at first. Then he was sent to Vietnam as cannon fodder. That's where he died."*

Niko pointed that out that, unlike many other Afro-Germans of her generation, she had the chance to get to know her father and to learn from him about African-American history, culture, and spirituality: *"He gave me power and rituals, taught me about my roots."* She did not learn about her Jewish roots until she was 13 years old. Her mother had mostly kept silent about her family history: *"She often suffered from depression and trepidation. There were all these losses and repressed memories. And then, on that one day, she finally tells me that we are Jewish."* Niko described this as a very dramatic moment:

> *"The way she said it was not spectacular at all. I almost overheard it. But then it hit me right in the heart. I turned my face to her and she began to cry, she dissolved in tears. And I said to her, 'What are we?'. And she said it again, 'We are Jews.' Well, so that was it. I did not have a problem with being something, I had always been something else than the people around me. And now she told me we were Jews. Now there was an identity that connected me with mother. She passed it on to me, and that's when she opened herself up, and all these tears and losses came out, and she really broke down under that. So she also passed that burden on to me. But she also gave me the gift of my roots and a new sense of connection to her, to my mother who also looked different than me. Well, I am a Sephardi and she is an Ashkenazi, even the Jews make distinctions. But we are both Jews."*

Niko encouraged her mother to remember as much as she could about Jewish traditions and rituals. Her mother had lost most of her memories of these, and so Niko looked for information

in books. While Niko wanted to practice Jewish rituals with her mother, her mother was hesitant:

"That fear was still in her. She felt uncomfortable, she said, 'No, we cannot sing these songs here, what if the neighbors will hear us.' She was still in hiding, still feeling she had to hide in order to save her life. That's the first thing I learned about being Jewish."

Niko spoke of stemming from several traditions that had almost been destroyed and were still marked by the continuing struggle of living in the face of that devastation. She said: *"I don't care about the numbers, I don't care if it were this many or that many millions of victims. I like uneven numbers, Jews like uneven numbers. You cannot sum up these lives in even numbers."* Niko rejected the 'even numbers' because they rob the victims of their individuality and aim at containing the destruction in terms that cannot really capture it. They also cannot capture what it means to live with this history. Niko further spoke about the invisibility of people of color within renderings of German history:

> *"They are not documented. The Jewish victims are documented. They had their triangle. There was the pink triangle, the green triangle, and so forth. But the African diaspora had no triangle. Still, there were many people of color who disappeared toward the concentration camps. This history of people of color in Germany is erased from official memory. Who knows about them? Who knows about the people of African origin who lived here even before World War I, and the children of African soldiers which the French had stationed at the Rhine after World War I?"*

Niko established a link between this history of near annihilation of various groups of people who were once part of German society and the fact that their history is missing from public memory. She also looked at her own experience of being designated a place outside of Germanness in the context of this destruction and subsequent amnesia: *"I look in the mirror and I know I am not supposed to exist, I don't fit into what Germanness was supposed to be. I am not white, I am a Jew, but, still, I am here, I exist, and I am also German."* She explained that the plain fact of her existence was unsettling to many majority-Germans, because it was evidence of another Germany that once existed and continued to exist:

> *"You know, I am a provocation. People see me and tell me, 'Go back to where you came from!' But that's where I am. Yet, there is no country for people like me. For*

> me, identity means to know every day, every minute, who I am, what my roots are. Whereas white Germans might say that they don't want to be German, I know that I am German. I know my history. And it's a part of German history. I am a part of that, whether they like it or not."

Niko talked about the harmful effects that living in a racist society like Germany has on many people of color. Yet, she had never seriously considered leaving the country. Her staying was also a political statement:

> "I won't make it that easy for them. I am staying and by doing so I am confronting them with themselves. I am not the problem. It's them who are the problem. I just remind them of that. Though, sometimes I have thought, we should all leave, leave them alone. I wonder what would happen. Because, really, they can't stand others because they can't stand themselves. But I think that would be a pity for Germany. In many ways, it is a very beautiful country. I can appreciate that. You know, I think people like me might be the best thing that can happen to this country. [Laughs] I can love it without having to destroy it, the way it tried to destroy me. I am bringing something back home to Germany. If people weren't so stupid, they could see what a great chance it is that there are Germans like me."

Niko never used the term 'victim' in speaking about herself or her family, but rather referred to a tradition of resistance. She also talked about being German in proactive terms, as something she chose: *"It's a choice you make. I could have gone another way. But I didn't. And I like it. I mean, there are many ways of living that identity. And while all these Germans look away and don't want that identity, I didn't run away from it."* She spoke of this choice in terms of resistance and in terms of taking responsibility. She was claiming her history and that of her ancestors as part of German history and she was claiming Germanness in order to take responsibility for who she was and where she was at:

> "Here is where I have to do my work, and it's important work. I do it for myself and I do it for us. Because this 'us' exists. Just look at how many children of color there are in Germany now. My work is also for them. If there can be peace, I have to make it here. To opt out of it is not the answer to my question. If there can be an answer, I have to find it here."

Feeling rooted in a community of people of color in Germany, Niko was not oriented towards the dominant group and culture as her frame of reference. In asserting a subject position as a German while drawing on traditions that the Nazis had sought to eradicate from Germannness, and which are still excluded from the dominant perception of Germanness in the present, she was

defining German identity for herself on her own terms. Still, in doing so, she was also making an offer to other Germans or to German society – that of bringing *"something back home to Germany, "* as well as the offer of her love for the country that was, in contrast to that of others, non-destructive and open for connection.

Concluding remarks

In concluding this chapter, I do not attempt to synthesize the diversity of experiences and opinions that have been presented. If any overall conclusion can be drawn, it is that there is no unified or singular history which these women can be supposed to share, nor can their various experiences and views be categorized in neat types and moulded into a clear pattern of historical memory, consciousness, and experience. How these women interpreted their relationship to the past differs significantly and is marked or accentuated by their various and intersecting social locations. However, these factors alone cannot account for the particular views and attitudes individual women put forward. In reflecting on the past, they were also negotiating their sense of belonging or not-belonging to particular collectives. From women's accounts of how their understanding of the past and their own relationship to it had changed throughout their lives emerges a picture of historical consciousness and identity as a process in which social locations, socially transmitted memories, personal experiences, and political outlooks and commitments are continuously reinterpreted and reformulated. And individuals engage in such processes in relation to multiple and sometimes shifting frames of reference, for example, in relation to their state of citizenship, to their families, to the people within their social environments as well as people outside of it, to notions of collective identities, and in relation to reflecting on who they are as a person.

Few of these women wanted to leave 'the past,' that is National Socialism and the Holocaust, behind or considered it as no longer relevant to their present lives. Most of them understood themselves and their lives to be related to and shaped by this past. Their engagement

with it was coupled to their making sense of the present. Their interpretations of the past had an impact on their perspective on the present and events in the present influenced how they looked at the past. What and how they remembered as well as how they positioned themselves in relation to the legacy, or rather to different legacies, of the Nazi past varied considerably. In attending to their different views, my main interest has been in how their perspectives on the past relate to their understanding of German identity. As could be seen, crucial to individual women's conceptions of the relationship between the Nazi past and their own position and identity as Germans was the question of the particular continuity or legacy in which they saw themselves as situated and how they interpreted this legacy in terms of its significance and implications in the present. A review of and commentary on these interpretations will be the starting point of the following and final chapter of this thesis, which will pull together and further discuss the points that have been made in this and the previous chapter concerning the issue of locational politics as it was inherent or developed in my interview partners' reflections.

Chapter 5
The (dis)comforts of belonging

In concluding this thesis with a review of the kinds of locational politics the women I interviewed formulated in relation to various aspects of their national association, I do not intend to judge these in moral or other terms; my purpose is to consider them in terms of the notions of Germanness they presume or propose and what possibilities for connection across difference they open up. The following discussion is, of course, based on my subjective reading of their statements and not a disengaged analysis of the views presented in this thesis. It should not be read as an 'expert evaluation,' but as my personal suggestion of what are some of the things that can be learned from bringing into communication their different experiences and perspectives. The discussion takes as its starting point the different interpretations of the legacy of Nazism presented in the previous chapter.

Many of my interview partners' reflections on the history of National Socialism and the Holocaust and its meanings in the present resonate with the public debates in Germany that are centered around this issue. Central to them was the question of whether and how this legacy can or should be integrated into a collective and/or individual self-awareness as Germans. Particularly people who are descendents of the perpetrator group at large are faced with a legacy that is troublesome, to say the least, and which disturbs projects of establishing a positive sense of German national identity. Members of the conservative to extreme right spectrum of German society have thus often sought to downplay or even deny the crimes and their significance in seeking to recover an affirmative concept of the German nation. Members of the New Left, of the feminist movement, and others among the more left-leaning parts of the population have sometimes pursued the opposite strategy, namely the disassociation from Germanness and, with that, from the Nazi past. However, as has been discussed in previous chapters, this strategy does

not solve the psychic or emotional conflicts which underlie it, and it hinders a critical confrontation with the past and its reverberation in the present.

Most of the majority-German women I interviewed saw a need to recognize and acknowledge the history of National Socialism and the Holocaust as their own history. They interpreted this legacy in terms of guilt and/or responsibility. For some of them, accepting guilt for the past was a moral or political statement. In a context where this guilt has mostly been denied and not worked through, they took it on in opposition to this denial. However, to the extent that guilt is understood as handed down and collective, it can have an incapacitating effect, hinder a working through, and perpetuate the 'moral confusion' Hannah Arendt described (see chapter 4). When conceived of as collective, guilt becomes rather abstract and almost unresolvable. Such an understanding of guilt, Rommelspacher (1995c) states, distracts from a critical examination of the actual circumstances in which this guilt originates and the extent to which the conditions that enabled the crimes and atrocities are still effective in the present. It also distracts from an examination of actual actions and failures to act committed by oneself and how one as an individual deals with the past – the extent to which one might actually be guilty or responsible, not for crimes one did not commit, but for being an accomplice in so far as one allowed the perpetrators to maintain the silence over and denial of the past and for not confronting revisionist and exclusionary practices today. Jacoby and Lwanga further raise the question whether majority-German women embrace this paralyzing notion of guilt "because it serves the desire to remain passive." They note that:

> In any case, white Christian(-secularized) women speak much more often of guilt than responsibility, and they hear guilt when Jewish women and women of other minorities talk about responsibility. Again and again, the alternatives are reduced to either "born guilty," which is so close to the Christian concept of original sin, or the status of female and/or late birth (which serves to fend off feelings of guilt) (1990:103; translation: A.K.).

Beyond feeding into a sense of powerlessness, they argue, this summoning of guilt raises its carriers above critique; it "poses as moral greatness while it remains a form of self-gratification,

as it excuses one's own impotence as a cog in the works of the mean world" (1990:102). They see it as a defense strategy that serves to make oneself incontestable (ibid.).

In my view, Jacoby's and Lwanga's analysis appears to presume that taking on such guilt is an entirely conscious process, a strategic decision. Those women among my interview partners who professed to such feelings of guilt often mentioned having had these from their childhood onwards. Hence, I think that a view of such guilt as strategic misses important aspects of how and why people develop such feelings and the extent to which this process might not have been subject to their conscious control. However, my purpose here is not to speculate about the extent to which Jacoby's and Lwanga's assessment applies to my interview partners. Rather, it is relevant to take notice of the problems with this way of relating to the Nazi past that Jacoby and Lwanga as well as Rommelspacher point out and to recognize these as a potential inherent in this attitude. To the extent that such an attitude does have a paralyzing element and does serve to make oneself incontestable, it is likely to keep one from acting against traces or parallels of the past in the present as well as to stand in the way of connecting with people who are differently situated in relation to the legacy of Nazism. Understood as a 'national guilt,' it further implies a reification of the concept of nation and tends to 'ethnisize' this concept, as, for instance, Jewish Germans or Germans with a background of migration cannot reasonably be expected to share such feelings.

The last observation also applies to the notion of collective or national responsibility. It also often remains rather abstract, and its evocation is well-worn after it appeared in so many public speeches as not much more than an empty phrase. Nevertheless, as mentioned in the previous chapter, some of my interview partners were seeking to give it concrete meaning by translating it into political practices. The problem remains, though, that the pursuit of such practices in the name of being 'responsible' Germans, as the general notion of a collective 'special responsibility as Germans,' implies or produces an exclusionary concept of Germanness. It is centered on the legacy of the perpetrator group and thus evokes the ethnic definition of Germanness that the Nazis radicalized in their laws, politics, and the violent persecution of those

defined as alien. This exclusion might not be the purpose of taking on responsibility in such terms, but it is an effect – at least in so far as one accepts that people who do not stand in the same relationship to this history as the perpetrator group and their descendents cannot be expected to see this responsibility as essential to their sense of being German (even though some might chose to do so). If one does not accept this and expects all Germans, no matter their background, to embrace the perpetrators' legacy as theirs, one posits as normative the collective memory and the sensibility of the perpetrators and their descendents, which has a similar exclusionary effect. In this case, it is not persons who are excluded but their particular experiences and perspectives. I have argued in this thesis that, in order to avoid such exclusions and 'ethnification' of Germanness, descendents of the perpetrator group at large need to find ways of addressing this legacy and dealing with it responsibly which include the acknowledgement that not all people who consider themselves Germans stand in the same continuity as they do as well as a critical awareness of their own dominant status in German society today.

In summary, as a politics of location, the notion of collective responsibility 'as Germans' tends to reproduce or affirm the dominant notion of who belongs and the boundaries set up around it. Further down in this chapter I address ways in which this identity politics can obstruct effective coalition work. For now I would like to leave it at calling this a 'closed' politics of location and turn to the question of what could be an 'open' politics of location.

Some of the majority-Germans among the women I interviewed approached the legacy of Nazism not in terms of how it could or should be integrated into a collective identity as Germans but in terms of how they were personally entangled with it, in terms of how the past is still active in the present, in society as well as within themselves, and in terms of how they as individuals act in relation to this legacy. This included considering how they were positioned in German society as majority-Germans. But, rather than making that location definitive of how they engaged with the past, they were focused on developing individual strategies of dealing with it. They saw a need to come to terms with and work through whatever unresolved feelings they were harboring in relation

to the Nazi past in order to be able to become more effective political actors and allies in coalition work. The issue of responsibility was not approached by them in abstract terms and towards the end of restoring a positive sense of Germanness; they rather interpreted it as a personal challenge to which they responded by seeking to establish political identities and practices that would allow them to take on responsibility in constructive ways. Thus, there was room for movement, change, and ambiguity in how they understood the meanings of their location, as they negotiated these in relation to their personal politics. Their understanding of the past and their own relationship to it also remained open, since they saw confronting themselves with it as an ongoing task to which there could be no end-point.

Such a politics of location, I would suggest, allows for the development of an understanding of the past that neither seeks to 'master' or 'overcome' the past nor to make it definitive of the present, but which can serve as a bridge between past and present. The legacy of the perpetrators is then not something that determines who one is, but it is something one lives with and chooses to act upon in particular ways. This understanding also allows for an 'open,' rather than 'closed,' kind of memory work, in which memories that are not part of the dominant collective memory can be drawn upon in challenging the authority of those memories which pose as normative. Such a practice of remembrance would not seek to recover a singular, unified history and with that an integrated and settled identity. It would seek knowledge about multiple intertwined histories, which could be employed towards reflecting critically on the present and to call into question dominant discourses and definitions of Germanness.

Of course, social differences are not overcome by seeking to break through the 'cordon sanitaire' of memory and to embrace the memories of those who take up different positions than oneself. But such a memory practice could be a step towards 'imagining' community beyond differences. Allowing other memories to challenge one's own could be taken as an opportunity to rethink who one takes oneself to be, to reconsider one's frame of reference, and to reconceive of where one wants to be and with whom. Others' memories then need not be perceived as a threat to

oneself – as when majority-German women feel vulnerable and open to attack in contact with Jewish women – but could be perceived as an offer, which, when accepted, could enable a more complex understanding of the social and historical context in which one is situated and also a more complex perspective on one's own location and options of acting in relation to it.

Niko was making such an offer to majority-Germans. Rather than seeing her as a 'provocation,' as she unsettled their notion of Germanness, she suggested that: *"If people weren't so stupid, they could see what a great chance it is that there are Germans like me."* They could see that there are *"many ways of living that identity."* Luci's reflection on the 'imagined community' from which she sought to distance herself resonates with Niko's words. Luci realized that this had only included majority-Germans, that she wanted to disassociate herself from an image that did not reflect a more complex reality. Similarly, Laura found that she had to *"rethink a lot of things"* she had taken for granted about Germanness when she *"realized that [her Jewish girlfriend] also saw herself as German."* In opening up their view of what being German means or can mean, these women could *"make peace"* (an expression both of them used) with their national association. They no longer saw the meanings of this association as predetermined; the issue rather was what they themselves made of that association. Furthermore, at the same time as both women began to 'defreeze' their own images of Germanness and to gain a more flexible or differentiated view of their national association, they also stopped distancing themselves from it and accepted to be held answerable for their location as majority-Germans.

It is such a being answerable for their location that Dilek, Karina, and Niko missed in encounters with majority-Germans who disassociate themselves from Germanness. While the rationale behind this strategy might be a critical view of the nation, it does not resolve the issue of the exclusions through which the nation and the dominant notion of who belongs are constructed. Opting out of Germanness does not undo the privilege of being counted in, nor does it change anything for those who are counted out. It might rather have to be seen as a privilege in itself, as those whose status as Germans is constantly challenged cannot as easily afford to do the same. It

seems to be a more viable option for those who do not have much or anything to lose in 'real'

terms from distancing themselves from their national association. As a politics of location, it is

self-centered and does not take into consideration how the conditions of one's own location relate

to those of other locations. It rather distracts from these conditions and possibly prevents a critical

confrontation with them. Niko explained:

> *"How am I to work with people who try to conceal who they are or where they are,*
> *who refuse to engage with where they are at? How am I to work with women, who*
> *say, 'but we are all the same, we don't have any problems with each other'? How*
> *are they going to accept the experiences that women like me can contribute, our*
> *views and strategies, from where? While you white people can hide, I am always*
> *visible. I cannot refuse to engage with where I am at, I have to keep all this stuff*
> *together, keep the balance. I wanted to contribute, wanted us to work together, but*
> *not under the condition that we are all the same. And that was something they*
> *[white German feminists] were not willing to confront. That was outrageous for*
> *me to make this claim, which was not even a claim, it was an offer, the offer of my*
> *contribution. I wanted to contribute because I am also part of this. But how can*
> *they see me for who I am, for my experience, when they deny their own? And they*
> *deny the possibilities at their hands, possibilities for making a difference. It is so*
> *much easier for them to get at certain things than it is for me. However, they don't*
> *make use of these options because they don't need them. They don't even know that*
> *they have them. Probably because they're always to busy rejecting who they are to*
> *even think about that. To think about what they could do if they would face up to*
> *where they are at, the possibilities of making use of that. And the denial of that is*
> *something... that really makes me tired."*

Much like Audre Lorde, who noticed that "white German women [...] fail to examine and

pursue the powers relative to their identity" and thus "waste that power" (1992:viii; see chapter 4),

Niko suggested that their evasion of a confrontation with the conditions of their location prevents

them from realizing its potential. If they really want to dismantle their own privilege, they need to

start by recognizing and employing it towards that end.

Several of the majority-German women who were seeking to come to terms with the

"powers relative to their identity" expressed concerns that such recognition could come along with

the side-effect of essentializing identities and locations and affirming boundaries between them.

Yet, being answerable for one's location does not need to result in its reification. I have discussed

in this thesis the experiences and views of a number of women from various backgrounds whose

politics of location combines an acknowledgement of their position within social relations with an understanding of locations and identities as not natural and given but constructed, ambiguous, and malleable. I have also shown that many women's politics of location did not represent a unified whole but was situational and shifting. For instance, Dilek positioned herself sometimes as a (West) German and sometimes as a Turk, depending on specific contexts. In relation to the East German woman who joined her high school class, she felt that she *"belonged with the other Germans, with the 'normal' Germans so to speak."* In relation to the upsurge of nationalism after unification and in relation to the history of National Socialism, she identified with Turks in Germany. Majority-Germans often shifted from considering national identity as inessential and constructed in some regards to evoking it in rather fixed or closed terms in others. In the latter instances, they frequently (and, so it seems to me, mostly unwittingly) posited Germanness as an ethnic category or as intrinsically 'white' by opposing it to other categories such as 'black.' Thus, they employed a concept of Germanness that they otherwise wanted to call into question. I have noted that such contradictions in their politics of location seem to relate to a sense that, in certain contexts (for instance, in relation to the legacy of National Socialism or in relation to racism), it was not morally or politically sound to call Germanness into question, since this would possibly amount to abstinence from taking responsibility for one's location. Nevertheless, they then affirmed the dominant concept of Germanness and the exclusions it implies as well as reduced themselves to that association and others to a different ascribed status.

It seems to me that, in order to develop a more 'open' politics of location in relation to such charged contexts, it is necessary to start from a more differentiated understanding of location. They stepped into these situations not as 'any' Germans, but as white Christian(-socialized) Germans and hence also members of the dominant group. What appears to me to be most relevant in such situations is not so much the general fact that they are Germans, but rather such factors as race privilege or being a descendent of the collective responsible for the Nazi crimes. Taking responsibility in these terms, for these particular locations, then does not need to go along with

reproducing the notion that German equals white and Christian. To pursue an 'open' politics of location would also entail determining one's actions in such situations not in terms of seeing oneself as a representative of a collective, and possibly aiming at improving the image of that collective, but in individual terms. Acting as a representative affirms constructions of 'us' and 'them,' whereas acting as an individual opens up room for negotiating and redefining the meanings of certain collective associations. What becomes more important then is, in Ines's words, *"not who you are, it's what you do. "* Such an individual politics of location certainly needs to imply awareness of the conditions of one's own and other locations, yet it allows to decenter collective identities and to make connections based on acknowledging differences without taking them for granted.

Some women described negotiating ambivalences and contradictions in relation to their identities and locations as part of their everyday life. Niko, in talking about what it means to her to be black, Jewish, and German, said: *"It's not like there are no contradictions there, but they are only contradictions if you let them. You choose what you make of them. Or, to put it differently, for me it is not a contradiction to have contradictions. You just need to be able to live that. "* Mira talked about fluctuations in her sense of identity, since her plural identifications acquired different meanings in different contexts. For herself, oscillating between multiple identities or subject positions was a simple fact of life; it was only problematic in so far as her environment made it into a problem by expecting her to position herself unambiguously in relation to either/or choices. But she no longer gave in to such views that required her to *"separate [her] different parts. "* Instead, she thought that *"people just have to learn to deal with the fact that human beings are many things, many different things. "* Similarly, Dilek rejected to be viewed as 'sitting between chairs' or 'stuck between worlds.' She was far from having an identity crisis; it was rather the majority culture whose classificatory system was thrown into crisis by how she conceived of herself. Her sense of identity was *"neither strictly German nor strictly Turkish [...] it's based on the two sources, but*

it's something new." Dilek was not concerned with defining it in fixed terms: *"It's diffuse, it changes, you cannot capture it with labels."* She explained:

> "People constantly insinuate that I suffer from this dynamism and diffusion, that I suffer from having two cultures. That I am actually quite fine with that, that I can negotiate and reconcile them, carry several things with me, they don't see that because it doesn't fit into their picture. And when I have a white German woman in front of me, she also has different sides. And I would find it more honest of her if she dealt with these, with all of them. Including her Germanness, because that is always there, I can usually detect that fairly easily. But I am not being granted that I can be German. Because the structures of Germanness don't allow that. If this Germany would allow me to be a German like I am, with my differences, maybe then these differences between us would no longer matter all that much. Because then our differences could come together in something, they would not be in competition, and we would not need to define them all the time."

Many majority-German women seemed to find it considerably more difficult to deal with ambiguity and contradictions than Dilek, Mira, and Niko, among others, described for themselves. Mira saw it as a typically Western attitude to always distinguish and categorize and to set categories in opposition to each other. Based on what I have discussed in the previous chapter, I would suggest that the widespread lack of ability on the part of majority-Germans to tolerate and live with ambiguity and contradictions might also have to be seen in relationship to the legacy of Nazism and the moral void that resulted from the denial and repression of guilt and responsibility. I have addressed how certain binaries such as good/bad, right/wrong, and victim/perpetrator have become immensely charged in that context. Several of my interview partners pointed out that they saw a desire among majority-Germans to conceive of themselves as on the 'right' or 'correct' side as a powerful force in feminist politics, and one that often has problematic effects and is an impediment to constructive work. For instance, Pia and Anka referred to how it can result in dogmatism and aggressive/defensive attitudes, prevent exchange, and lead to stagnation and splits. Karina described how the white women she worked with dealt with their fear of *"the idea that they could be perpetrators in some way"* by turning the tables, assuming the role of victims, and making Karina the perpetrator, *"the bad one,"* accusing her of stirring strife. Mira made a similar

observation in talking about the superficial ways in which white feminists have taken on the issue

of racism:

> "During the end of the '80s or early 90s, it was suddenly 'in' to deal with racism.
> But nothing much has changed. It's always the same discussion, for ten years now.
> Always white women who don't want to understand the positions of black women,
> who get defensive and think that black women are arrogant and separate
> themselves. For them, dealing with racism is a compulsory exercise, but they don't
> seem to really get it. They don't want to be on the side of the perpetrators, they feel
> attacked all the time. But that's it, when they constantly take everything a black
> woman says as a personal attack on themselves, they are assuming that
> perpetrator role for themselves. And they think they can solve that by talking a bit
> about racism, but otherwise it's business as usual."

Luci addressed the issue of *"fear of being a perpetrator"* from the perspective of a

majority-German woman who had to deal with such fear herself:

> "This fear, this trauma, that's a German trauma. And I have to learn how to deal
> with that in a good way, not to deny that it is there, but not to let it overwhelm
> myself either. So that I can be open. I think people often withdraw from contact
> with migrants or black Germans because of such fears, because they don't want to
> feel vulnerable. But when you don't deal with such feelings, they can turn into
> aggression. Or you think that you are the victim, 'I always get attacked, I can
> never make it right for them.' But then you turn things upside down. Or you take
> on this attitude, all migrants are saints, and you cannot criticize them. So you are
> always nice, no matter what. Which is also crap, because you need not agree with
> everything a migrant says or does just because the person is a migrant. But in
> order to take responsibility for your behaviors you have to deal with why you
> behave in such and such ways. And how do you then respond if someone says you
> behaved in a racist way? Do you excuse yourself, no matter whether you think the
> person is right, do you break down and cry, do you react aggressive or with
> cynicism – none of these are adequate ways. Maybe you first need to accept that
> things are not always clear-cut, seem different to different people. And also get
> over this thing of always needing to be on the right side. You should not do things
> just to be able to think you are on the right side. Because that doesn't last long,
> that's not sufficient as a substance for politics."

Luci went on to explain that she thought the desire to have *"ultimate clarity, to ultimately*

know what is right or wrong," could also be an expression of laziness, *"because, when you assume*

that you have made it to the right side, you think that you can rest on that and no longer have to be

responsible for what you are doing." Instead, she suggested, she should learn to deal with the fact

that she *"may be a perpetrator in some regards,"* but without taking that to mean that she was a

bad person; it simply meant that she had work to do. She was hoping that this would allow her *"to go into confrontations more freely, when I have worked through my stuff, to be able to connect better and not run away when someone says I made a mistake."* Still, she also emphasized that she could not risk making mistakes in a reckless fashion and at the expense of others. She had to do her own work, rather than letting others point out to her what was problematic about her views and behaviors. Nevertheless, instead of letting *"fear of failure"* limit her and make her withdraw, she wanted to arrive at an understanding of failure as an opportunity to learn and move on.

Ines saw laziness or inability to deal with complexity and contradictions at work in what she called the *"litany of self-naming,"* by which she referred to majority-Germans' response *"to the critique put forward by Jewish, black, and migrant women by starting to name themselves as German white non-Jewish women."* She thought that:

> *"This was mostly just a reflex, a reaction to minority women's claim that they should confront themselves with the fact that they are a majority. But it did not go any further than that. They stopped again after making what was really just a first step. And it is something different when a minority comes and names itself, because they are ignored otherwise, and when a majority now starts to name itself as a form of appeasement, but then they stop there. And I always find it somewhat suspect when people start every sentence with 'I am a white German...' and so on and so forth. Because that in itself really says nothing. That can mean anything and nothing. That avoids the real issue, which is power. But this naming makes it seem like everything is clear now. And then these labels are quickly turned into essential things. And I think this also has to do with a kind of laziness or inability to take a more differentiated look at things, to look at things in their complexity and also at the contradictions which are always there. However, that's where it gets interesting, where you can open things up."*

Ines pointed out that identity politics is not the same, or does not have the same implications and effects, when pursued by minorities than when pursued by a majority. While it is employed by minorities to call attention to the specificities of their situations and to get their issues on the agenda, the majority's issues and views already dominate the agenda. Gaining self-consciousness as a majority might be a first step towards changing that situation, but in itself it does not change the power imbalances. What is really needed is for the majority to gain a critical awareness of their dominance and power and to work against it. To that end, Ines considered it not

useful to evoke or refer to the majority's identity in unquestioned terms; she rather thought this

identity needed to be deconstructed. She saw the starting point for such deconstruction of

apparently self-evident identities in looking at their complexity and inherent contradictions. Ines

explained that, because her family background was diverse in terms of class and religion, she had

"experienced many contradictions during [her] childhood." Members of her family also had acted

in different ways during the time of National Socialism; some were communists and tried to protest

against the regime, others were fellow travelers and acted *"cowardly."* She thought that:

> *"Because of the contradictions I perceived as I grew up, I developed a suspicious*
> *view on evocations of definite and unambiguous identities. Because I have seen*
> *that identities do not determine how people think and act, and there can also be*
> *contradictions within identities and social locations. And that gets lost when*
> *people situate themselves in static terms. And people begin to treat identities as*
> *absolute, rather than calling them into question. They get caught up in identities."*

As an example of such 'getting caught up in identities,' Ines referred to a kind of situation

that many of the majority-Germans I interviewed addressed, namely situations in which various

power relations cross-cut. Almost of all of them used the specific example of being confronted with

sexist behavior on the part of black or migrant man. In such situations, they saw themselves as

being in a position of power, or even *"among the perpetrators,"* in terms of how they, as white

women, were situated in racist power relations. At the same time, in terms of gender relations, they

saw themselves as in the weaker position, that of the 'victim.' Many women who described such

situations explained that they mostly did not criticize sexist behavior on the part of such men out of

concerns that this could be racist, or could be seen as racist. Ines thought of this attitude as too

simplistic: *"When you reject to be treated in a sexist manner by a black man, that's not racist in*

and of itself just because you are white. Of course, you need to ask yourself whether the particular

way in which you reject it might be racist. And if it is, you need to rethink that. But that is the level

of thinking and action, not of being." Some women thought that, as they were acting in a larger

context shaped by racism, any critique they put forward could potentially take on racist meanings,

whether they intended these or not. However, Laura pointed out that not being critical of behavior

on the part of a black person that she would not let pass on the part of a white person could in itself be racist: *"Maybe I am not taking him serious when I think that I cannot criticize him. I am making him smaller than he is. And I am not giving him the chance to respond to my critique. I just assume that his reaction would be negative. Maybe that is also kind of racist."* Besides possibly being racist in itself as well as foreclosing confrontations that could potentially be constructive, this kind of identity politics also reproduces dualisms such as white/black or German/migrant, rather than opening up avenues of calling these into question (see chapter 3). People are reduced to their locations, as Laura pointed out, which are thus rendered 'closed' or possibly even essential.

As has been seen in previous chapters, the source of such a 'closed' politics of location was often women's wish to show that there are 'other' Germans, 'better' Germans. Niko and Dilek, among others, described experiences they had in coalition work, which point to problems with such an identity politics. Both women talked about incidents in which white German women, when confronted about their racist or ethnocentric attitudes, reacted in aggressive ways and did not understand the accusation, because they thought of themselves as 'good' people, as doing the 'right' thing. Dilek related the following experience:

> *"I worked for this project, a service for women refugees who are victims of domestic violence. And this project was initiated by all white German women, and they also did all the fundraising and stuff like that. And... I don't know, well, I think it was a good thing for them to initiate this, but there was a certain politics in that... They were only supposed to be supporters. They hired migrant women or black women to run the project. But they kept ultimate control over everything. We had to go to them with everything, we had no right to make our own decisions. And so this was a dream that these white German leftist feminists realized for themselves. They could prove that they were the perfect feminists, not just in theory, but also in practice. And so they initiated this thing and paid some black women do the work, as the ones whose issue it was. But they never questioned their own authority, what they were reproducing in that they assumed total control over everything. And we were not allowed to criticize them, because how could we? They were doing something good for us, for our sisters in trouble. And so we could not say, 'that's nice that our sisters have a place to go to, but what you are doing is not as great as you think, it's actually real shit.'"*

Dilek continued by explaining that she thought these white women never questioned their own position in relation to the women they hired and in relation to the women who used the

service. In addition: *"They never saw the differences between us workers and those between us and the women we worked with. And that made the work impossible at some point, that they defined everything and we had no say."* She explained that it was not possible for the workers to address these issues with the white initiators:

> *"They always put on this phony 'we understand you'-façade. And we had to be really careful not to take the word 'racist' into our mouths, because they were always the good ones in the whole game. When you critiqued them, the first reaction was consternation. And you might have thought that maybe this consternation could turn into a productive confrontation with the issues. But it didn't. It turned into defensiveness and then total fury and attack. And then there was the break-up."*

In this and other contexts, Dilek had felt that she was being used by majority-Germans as an *"object of their correctness."* These women tried to prove their 'correctness' by seeking to work with her, but they did not treat her as an equal: *"And I am not allowed to criticize them, because they think they are the good ones and they know better than me anyway."*

Niko had also experienced situations in which she was used by majority-German feminists as an 'object of their correctness.'

> Niko: *"They do their antiracism workshops, because otherwise they wouldn't be good feminists, and then they forget about it again. It's just a compulsory exercise. Because... where are they know, where are all the white feminists, why don't they come to where we are? But they don't help women of color by doing compulsory exercises. They just do it because they don't want to be who they are. But, rather than doing all these exercises, they should deal with who they are. And maybe then they could deal with who we are and not only use us every now and then, when it is convenient, you know? Every now and then I am allowed to be part of something so that they can say, 'look, we're inclusive, we have foreigner, a migrant here.'"*

Andrea: *"So you are called upon as a migrant?"*

Niko: *"Well, to them I am a migrant, of course. Look at my skin color."*

Besides describing how she was being used as a token of inclusivity, and not being recognized for herself, Niko also pointed to the unquestioned dominance of majority-German feminists that Dilek had experienced:

> *"What I find really extreme is this control, that these women cannot give up control, because they always think that things won't work if they are not in charge. And they treat you like a little child. If you want to work with them, they have to be*

in charge, and they cannot deal with it when you are also dominant and challenge them politically and intellectually. Because they have this conflict: should they follow the lead of this brown face? They don't say it, but it's there. And, of course, they are the good Samaritans, and they want you to constantly thank them. Which they really don't deserve. All they do is act in a way that they can feel good. That's the problem, they don't act in a way that you feel good. It's about power, empowerment, the empowerment of the white woman, so that she can work with other women without having to be afraid that she could lose something there."

In the light of these experiences arises the question of what are people's motivations and goals in the political work they do, particularly for people in socially dominant and privileged positions. From how Dilek and Niko described their encounters with majority-German feminists, it seems that at least part of these women's agenda was to enhance their own self-esteem, to exonerate themselves, and/or to prove their 'correctness.' They were expecting gratefulness on the part of the migrant women or women of color with whom they were seeking to work, but their contribution was serving their own needs more than that of others.

Writing about coalition work, Sabine Hark (1990) points out that the mere desire to be 'politically correct' is not an adequate basis for effective work towards social change. She suggests that white Christian(-socialized) German women, in order to deal constructively with the challenges posed by coalition work, need to work through repressed aspects of their backgrounds and identities, so that they neither have to deny these nor impose their own views and needs on the work with others. Hark proposes that coalition work needs to be based on political solidarity and the recognition of difference, without treating difference as "simply there." The challenge is to work "towards the abolition of social inequality and, at the same time, to effect the visibility of different ways of living" (1990:57; translation: A.K.). Such a "politics of difference," she argues, needs to be based on *"knowledge of our particular bases or footings [Grundlagen]*: By repressing *our* history and simultaneously hegemonizing *our* perspective [...] *we* curtail other women's/lesbian's opportunities to create rooms for themselves (and *US*) and to fill them with their voices (1990:56; emphasis in the original).

When majority-Germans do the work they do (partly) because they want to show themselves to be 'good' people, their agenda and needs will most likely conflict with the agenda and needs of women in marginalized or oppressed positions. Based on Harks' argument as well as Dilek's and Niko's observations, it suggests itself that they need to be aware of their dominant position and come to terms with how their feelings and needs in relation to being majority-German affect how they act and respond to the actions of others. At the same time as they need to be conscious of their location, they should also seek not get 'caught up in identities,' as Ines put it; they should avoid reification of these and look for ways of gaining some critical distance to them. Several of the women whose views have been discussed in this thesis have come to a position of being answerable for their locations while also avoiding to treat these as fateful and their meanings as fixed by foregrounding political identities and practices. For instance, Mirjana and Laura could 'make peace' with their associations when they began to judge themselves in terms of their own politics rather than their national background (see chapter 4). Similarly, Anka, Luci, and Kris, for instance, saw as their own responsibility what they made of their national association. This also allowed them to avoid falling into certain automatisms in relation to being (majority-)German, particularly reacting defensive when confronted about it. Pia explained that she was working against the impulse to respond to views of her behavior (for example, her way of organizing things) as 'typically German' by way of simply denying that this might be so. She rather wanted to take a sober look at her own thoughts and actions, see to what extent they are shaped by her having grown up in the dominant culture in Germany, and consider ways of modifying these so as to be able to work more effectively with people who have *other ways of doing things.*" Ines was taking a similar approach to this issue:

> *"If somebody criticized my behavior and called it 'typically German,' I would have to think about it. That doesn't mean that I would have to feel terrible about it. I would have to look at what exactly they mean. And perhaps it is a cultural mould or perhaps it is just me. And if it really annoys them, I have to see how important it is for me as an individual to stick to that or not. But sometimes the issue is really something else, something that has nothing to do with nationality. And nationality is then used as a tool in order to make a different case. For instance, I am in this*

international group of gay men and lesbians. And we had this conflict once with this guy who made a lot of sexist comments. He responded to the critique of some lesbians by calling it typically German. So these things are sometimes used to silence or to end a confrontation. He used it as a 'red card' [as in soccer games] and the original issue was off the table. "

Ines's observation suggests that, beyond acknowledging locations and reflecting on them self-critically, it is also necessary to look at how identities or identity attributions are brought into play in political projects and in general, when and how they are evoked and to what ends, what 'us's and 'them's are constructed and how these then affect relationships and political work.

To get over the impasse that developed in many corners of the feminist movement as a result of confrontations over issues of difference and power imbalances, the starting point might have to be a turning away from absolutizing locations – while establishing all due awareness of them – and towards putting more emphasis on questions of political identities, commitments, and practices. Particularly women who take up dominant positions need to be clear about what motivates them, what their needs and goals are, and to what extend these are compatible with the needs and goals of women on the other side of unequal social relations. There needs to be a conversation about how people of different backgrounds can act in political solidarity with each other without denying or subsuming differences and divisions in an abstract notion of commonality as women or feminists. Rather than presuming that differences need to be resolved or overcome in order to be able to work together, it might be more productive to embrace a view of political communities and movements as necessarily characterized by contradictions and differences and to look for ways of connecting without having to bond in each and every regard. This could allow to avoid the all too common tendency to split up over contradictions. Political identities, when understood as emerging from ongoing processes of experience, discernment, and action, rather than as based on some 'correct' political platform that is taken to be valid for all times, can accommodate contradictions and differences. Chantal Mouffe (1994) points out that we cannot overcome the fact that identity is always based on difference; however, she argues, it does not have to be based on permanent exclusion. The challenge is to conceptualize a relationship between

identity and otherness that defuses the danger of exclusion that results from seeing an 'other' not simply as different but as rejecting or negating 'my' identity and threatening 'my' existence through their otherness from 'me.' The task is not to create an 'us' that would not have a 'them' corresponding to it, but rather to stop seeing this 'other' as inevitably a preordained enemy. It is to see the 'other' as "a 'counterpart' who could be in our place in the future" (1994:108).

I conclude with Niko's view on how to work together across difference and power imbalances:

> "What always bugged me about feminism is this emphasis on being a victim. I am not a victim. And that is the responsibility I accept. And that is difficult. It's difficult to know that you are also a perpetrator in some regards. But that is what I need to do and what I need from other women. I need it so that you can be my accomplice, so that we can look: what are your issues, what are my issues, how can we become allies, how can we make it better. What do you need, what do I need – to talk about that without falling into whining, like, 'you did this to me,' 'and you did that to me.' Instead, I tell you what it is like for me, what I have, and what I need. And you listen to me without taking everything personal, if you can do that. And you tell me what it is like for you, what you have, and what you need. And I listen to you without thinking, 'gee, what a lily-livered [schlapp] story, you should walk in my shoes for a day.' I take it for what it is. And then we look: where can we meet, what do we both need, and how can we get it. Because you have this and I have that, and we put it together. If we could do that, and treat each other as equal, that would be it. But it sounds easier than it is."

As Niko suggests, working together starts from listening to each other and from respecting differences. On that basis, she proposes a pragmatic notion of alliances that do not waste their time and energy in identifying victims and perpetrators but turn to the question of what can we do for and with each other. What is needed for that is willingness to live with contradictions and the discomforts they create and a focus on what it is we want to change.

Appendix

Profiles of participants

Anka

was 37 years old, had grown up and lived in West Germany. She was white and Christian-secularized, had studied special needs pedagogy, and worked as a teacher at a special needs school.

Annika

was 35 years old, had grown up and lived in West Germany. She was white and Christian-secularized. She was currently working on a Ph.D. in English and ran a small business.

Barbara

was 37 years old, had grown up and lived in West Germany. She was white and Christian-secularized, and she worked as assistant professor in a social science department.

Bianca

was 36 years old, had grown up and lived in West Germany. She was white and Christian-secularized. Shortly before I interviewed her, she had lost her job as a truck driver and thus was currently unemployed. She was not entirely dissatisfied with that situation, as it allowed her to pursue her development as a painter.

Birgit

was 37 years old, had grown up and lived in West Germany. She was white and Christian-secularized, had studied modern languages and psychology, and worked as an educational therapist.

Dilek

was 27 years old, had grown up and lived in West Germany. She was a daughter of Turkish migrants, her parents where Alevis, and she described herself as an atheist. She currently studied

towards a combined Master's degree in European ethnology and German literature and worked part-time as a sales consultant.

Elke

was 44 years old, had lived in Southeast Asia until she was a teenager and then in West Germany. A few years prior to the interview, she had moved to East Germany. She was white and Christian-secularized, had studied social work/education, and she worked as a social worker with youth.

Ines

was 37 years old, grew up and lived in West Germany. She was white and Christian-secularized. She had studied social sciences and law, and she was self-employed and did contract work as project manager for businesses and women's centers. At the time of the interview, she was planning to go back to university for a Ph.D. degree in law.

Isabell

was 44 years old, had grown up in the GDR and lived in East Germany. She was white and Christian (Protestant), had studied theology, and was an artist.

Jana

was 30 years old, had grown up and lived in West Germany. She was white and Christian-secularized. She was working on a Ph.D. in political science and worked part-time for a women's project at her university.

Julia

was 55 years old, had grown up in the former GDR and lived in East Germany. She was white and Christian-secularized. She had studied history and currently worked as project manager for a women's center.

Jutta

was 52 years old, had grown up and lived in West Germany. She was white and Christian-secularized and worked as a nurse.

Karina

was 33 years old, had grown up and lived in the GDR until she moved to West Germany in the late 1980s, where she still lived. She was Afro-German, a Protestant priest, and currently headed a section of the women's department in the Protestant Church.

Kris

was 33 years old, had grown up and lived in West Germany. She was white and Christian-secularized, had a Master's degree in modern languages, and was currently unemployed.

Laura

was 27 years old, had grown up in the GDR and lived in East Germany. She was white, Christian-secularized, and currently studied towards a diploma in social work/education

Luci

was 36 years old, grew up and lived in West Germany. She was white and Christian-secularized. She had studied education and was also trained in feminist psychodrama. She usually worked in the field of adult education. At the time of the interview, she was unemployed.

Michi

was 39 years old, had grown up and lived in West Germany. She was white and Christian-secularized, had studied social work/education, and worked as a social worker with people who have disabilities.

Mira

was 33 years old, had spent her childhood in several countries, but had lived most her life in West Germany. She was Afro-German and Christian-secularized. She had studied modern languages and worked as an editor.

Mirjana

was 46 years old, had lived the first six years of her life in Belgrade and then in West Germany. She was white and Christian-secularized and the daughter of a German mother and a Serbian father. She worked as a lecturer at a university for applied sciences.

Niko

was 42 years old, had lived most of her life in West Germany before she moved to East Germany a few years prior to the interview. She was Afro-German and Jewish, and she worked as an artist and in community projects.

Nadja

was 26 years old, had grown up and lived in West Germany. She was white and Christian-secularized and was currently studying towards a diploma in education. She worked part-time at the women's bureau of her university.

Pia

was 34 years old, had grown up and lived in West Germany. She was white and Christian-secularized, had studied social work/education, and worked for a sexual assault center.

Sabine

was 51 years old, had grown up in the GDR and lived in East Germany. She was white and Christian-secularized. She had studied sports and history, and, during her life in the GDR, she had worked as a trainer and sports teacher for children and youth. Since unification, she was struggling with unemployment, interrupted by short-term contract work.

Sonja

was 47 years old, had grown up in Siberia and lived in Moscow before she moved to West Germany four years prior to the interview. She was white, Christian (Catholic), had studied electrical engineering, and worked as a translator.

Ursula

was 59 years old, had grown up in the GDR and lived in East Germany. She was white and Christian (Protestant). She had studied theology and had worked as a counselor for the Protestant Church for most of her life. At the time of the interview, she was working for a women's center.

Viola

was 19 years old, had grown up and lived in East Germany. She was white and Christian-secularized. She had just finished high school when I interviewed her and was planning to study history. She had recently begun to work in the context of a '*soziales Jahr*' (year spent by a young person working for very low wage as a voluntary assistant in social services, hospitals, etc.).

Wiebke

was 49 years old, had grown up and lived in West Germany. She was white and Christian (Protestant). She had studied history and education and worked for a women-assault helpline.

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