In Search of Identity – *the German Question*

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Preliminary remarks:

This paper, as had to be expected, was written under great pressure. Teaching (almost) full time is, under the circumstances I am in, a very time -consuming and demanding job. Doing a bit of research besides sometimes seemed to be impossible.

We all know this feeling: The more you struggle with a subject, the more insight you gain, the more interesting details cry out for attention, the more fascinating ideas and books you find. Eventually one has to stop to meet the deadline.

Thirdly, I am aware that most of the points raised require more detailed analysis, but for our purposes it should be permitted to draw comparisons and conclusions on the basis of current knowledge and experience.

Fourthly, not being a native speaker of English, some of the formulations have to be considered with care.
I hope you can accept this partly as an apology, and partly as an invitation for discussion.

I have decided to print all my footnotes, even though some of them are simply my own 'footwork', allowing me to trace my own sources.
Rüdiger Kraatz

Introduction: the geo-political framework

Germany in the middle of Europe: Whereas most nations celebrate their ***victories***, Germans, despite some very few (formerly) mystified 'glorious battles' (like the battle in the Teutoburg Forest in the year 9 AD, Sedan in 1870, Tannenberg in 1914), more than others are left to celebrate ***defeats***: in 1648 (after the Thirty Years War), during the Napoleonic Wars, 1918, 1945 or even the mythical slaughter of the Nibelungen in the saga of the same name.

After 1648 and thirty years of destruction, leaving roughly one third of the original population alive, the Holy Roman Empire of the German Nation was subjected to a European balance of power dictated by other nations. After 1807, Germany was reconstructed and modernised by Napoleon, giving rise to rebellion, reform and national fervour. After 1918, Germany had to face the humiliating Versailles Treaty regulations and most Germans found it difficult to accept the responsibility of an international tragedy. After 1945, Germany had almost ceased to exist, a juggling ball in the hands of the world powers. For many Europeans, there has been something like a 'German question' haunting the political centre of this continent through all of these centuries.

The 'German question" (a formula often quoted especially in Great Britain since the 19th century) has entailed many sub-questions:
What 'is' Germany in the first place?
Who should rule or control this Germany?
Who are the Germans and where do they belong?
These 'German questions' were also questions of identity, very complex ones indeed, as will be illustrated below.
Historians are familiar with Polish (1795), Irish (1800 -01), Southern Slavic (1804) or the Italian (1815) 'questions', all relatively 'late' national entities. There have never been any 'French' or 'Spanish' questions. Germany called for attention in Europe for a number of reasons:
- ■ it concerned the quantitatively largest of the nations 'in question',
- ■ it represented not only the remnants of an old empire, but also a well-known culture (Vienna, Weimar etc.),

- wedged between its neighbours in the heart of this continent it has always been a bridge between West and East, North and South.[1]

Never in history have these issues been questions of the Germans alone. Whatever happened in the centre of Europe, all the powers around it could not view events without concern or mistrust. Whoever became master of Germany could become the controller of Europe. This is why Germany was bound to become a chessboard of political power plays in peace and a battleground during wars.

So-called 'natural borders' hardly exist for Germany, perhaps with the exception of the Alps, but even here we can argue that the Alps have been a link between parts of Europe rather than a dividing range. This is even more true for such geographical lines like the rivers Rhine, the Elbe, the Oder, the Etsch or the Belt (cp. 'Deutschland, Deutschland über alles'). Only misleading propaganda has claimed these waterways to be of national importance and borders 'against' neighbouring countries ('Die Wacht am Rhein'). In reality, they can not be used as borderlines of geographical identity, they have united people rather than separated them, a history that still has to be comprehended by the peoples of Europe. So German identity questions can hardly be defined with geo-political data, whichever role they may have played in popular mythology.

Until 1806, the Holy Roman Empire of the German Nation stood for a universal principle, derived from the Roman Empire with a Christian ideology. Power was distributed according to rules of feudality on the basis of personal relationships. Such an edifice could not rest on 'national' pillars and it had to be crushed (by Napoleon), before anything like a national spirit could become more than just an isolated occurrence. And it could not be built in only a few years either, the Restauration during the Metternich era was enforced on contrary, reactionary principles and expressed more conveniently the power lines of Europe (in disregard of what the people wanted).

The only revolution in 19th century Germany was the one of 1848/49, preceded by its model in France. Basically, two main demands came to the foreground and swept away the Metternich restauration for a brief spell: unity (a united Germany) and liberty (freedom from monarchical despotism). As we will see later, nationalistic voices were already crying out, but the majority of revolutionaries welcomed other nations fighting similar predicaments, they hailed the Poles in their struggle for freedom, for example, and Siebenpfeiffer finished his famous speech at the Hambacher Fest in 1832 with the words 'Völkerbund, hoch!', hailing a future league of nations based on what the French Revolution coined as 'fraternité', based on a brotherhood of peoples.

But the political framework of Europe did not permit such revolutionary and international dreams to come true. No support was given to the Paulskirche Parliament by anyone but the United States, not quite a power to be reckoned with yet. The other governments (esp. Britain and Russia) more or less forced the Germans in the Malmö truce in 1848, the Olmütz Punctuation 1850 and the London Protocol (1852) to accept the international status quo, ushering in a new period of reaction in most German states. It is strange to see how, from then on, the more liberal Germany, in the oncoming years and manipulated by Bismarck, sometimes even **supported** Prussian military might, thus illustrating the gradual shift from genuine (Western) liberalism to a more national-liberal stance. In 1864, the frustrated German liberals cheered the Prussian army during the conquest of the Duchies of Sleswig-Holstein which helped to substitute autocratic Prussian rule for the regional autonomy the Duchies formerly enjoyed. This was not, as it seems at first sight, simply a minor shift of power. It rather indicated firstly that Germany could not be

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[1] Imanuel Geiss elaborated on this in 'Die deutsche Frage', 1806 – 1990, Mannheim,Leipzig, Wien, Zürich 1992, p. 13 ff.
Cp. Michael Stürmer: 'Dissonanzen des Fortschritts', Essays über Geschichte und Politik in Deutschland, München 1986

united at this stage against the will of the other European powers and secondly that the process of unification was accompanied by a swing of public opinion toward right-wing liberalism or even 'Prussian' nationalism. It has to be underscored at this point that international politics played a considerable role in the suppression of (Western oriented) liberalism in Germany.

One may well ask, why Bismarck was able to bring about unification in 1871 at all. In brief, this seems to be the result of fortunate circumstances, apart from shrewd political brinkmanship: Russia's European interests were blocked and deflected after the Crimean War, Great Britain focused her attention on America after the Civil War and other imperial issues and France, besides similar outlooks, was left isolated and intrigued to proclaim war against the German - Prussian alliance. It is no surprise that Bismarck, being aware of the European complications, was haunted after unification by the „cauchemar des coalitions" and insisted on Germany being 'saturated'.

From 1356 to 1871, we could say, the central bodies in Germany were designed to be weak and a unifying identity could hardly be construed.
The first real threat for this arrangement was symbolised by the Prussian eagle, uniting German territories under its military wings by the statesmanship of Bismarck. Prior to that, one facet of the German question had to be solved: Austria was excluded and forthwith it developed separately. For some decades, Germany seemed to rely on Prussian dogmas, which caused a few problems during the unification process in the middle of the 19th century. But Prussian 'identity' was a problematic foundation for a unified Germany, even though it contributed considerably to the outcome later. Something else had to be developed.

'Germany' as a territorial or even national concept had other traditional difficulties to overcome as well: the religious divisions since the Reformation, for instance, or the lack of an undisputed commercial and cultural centre, like Paris or London.
Hence quite a few preconditions were strangely detrimental to any national development. Why, then, did German nationalism burst into existence so suddenly and, after a few decades of careful alliances welded by Bismarck, challenge the other nations in such a chauvinistic manner? Where did the nationalistic fever come from, all of a sudden?

The dilemma can be approached from two slightly different but complimentary angles: What are the sources of German identity from a historical point of view
and what or who helped to fabricate and proliferate elements of such an identity?
It has to be added quickly, of course, that most nations even before the wake of Imperialism revealed similar tendencies, created national myths and celebrated their often dubious national heroes, yet the 'German question' remained to be an especially vibrant, disturbing factor until very recently.

After these preliminary remarks mainly of geo-political nature, we will have to take another look back into some deeper recesses of German history to find some distinct historic roots of what would later be called national identity. The second step will take us in the same chronological direction, but this time I suggest to analyse the **construction** of national myths and symbols, often rather far away from what historical research today may find acceptable. On stage three of this paper, the combination of both steps 1 and 2 may then provide a slightly more comprehensive answer to the 'German questions' raised above. In the part following, it will be attempted to find answers on a national - psychological scale before we can investigate more recent traces of identity and finally relate all this to the European level.

The Historical Evidence
Some traces of German identity: Answers provided by historical research

The Middle Ages

Proof of something 'national' in German history before the 19th century is, compared to evidence to the contrary, rather scattered.
To determine identifiable peoples in the early Middle Ages, one may begin with three distinct but interrelated groups of cultures: the Romanic (Latin speaking), the Slavic and the Germanic elements (the Celtic contribution being of minor impact in this context). Such a view rests largely on linguistic observations and it has to be added that over long periods, these cultures overlapped or lived side by side peacefully, a tradition often underestimated in historic research. Moreover, the distinctions between various Germanic tribes, say between the Saxons, the Franks or the Bavarians, were remarkable, often much larger than between Slavic and Germanic peoples living in the vicinity.[2]

It is probably safe to assume that the medieval empire was politically a 'universal' one, with the Kaiser standing in the ancient tradition of Rome rather than anything 'Germanic'. Socially, the vassals probably recognised their overlords as superiors for other reasons than 'national' ones. The troubadours of this age (like Walther von der Vogelweide) may have praised the King and their country, they may have deplored military disasters or unstable political situations, but all this can scarcely be defined as 'national'. Society was based on a fixed and legal subordination of certain classes, but organised on a local basis. Trevelyan described feudalism as a 'confession of the disintegration of the Empire and the extreme weakness of the State' - obviously such a system is very far away from a nation state.[3]
And while England and France developed 'national' features earlier, in the Empire of the Eastern Franks, power disintegrated even more. The Kaiser may have pursued European ambitions and represented the dream of the people of a holy, just, peaceful and Christian Empire, but normally he was a figurehead dependent on its regional rulers.[4]

Our modern questions would most probably have sounded weird for people in the early Middle Ages. They belonged to families, villages, lords, monasteries, towns or regions, perhaps, on top of that, to a larger tribal unit ('gens') like the Saxons, Allemans or Franks. Nowadays we can distinguish cultural groupings like the Slavs, Celts, Romanic and Germanic tribes. The ethnogenesis began to be branching out in the 9th to the 11th centuries in a gradual transition.[5] It is rather impossible to detect any understanding of 'German' during the Middle Ages.

The word "deutsch", Old German 'diutisc' or 'theodisk', later in medieval Latin 'theodiscus' (in educated circles often called 'teutonicus') means 'vernacular', 'non-Latin' in the 8th and 9th century. Gradually these terms were applied to the tribes of the Eastern Franks ('gens theudisca, Teutisci, Theodisci, Teutonici'), testifying a certain linguistic identity. The modern word 'Deutschland' as a geographical and cultural term was used in expressions like 'tiutschiu lant' in the Middle Ages. Only later in the 15th and 16th century this melted into one word. The term 'Deutsches Reich' (Regnum Teutonicum),significantly, was an accentuated usage made popular by Gregor VII in his strife against Heinrich IV , originally in an attempt to differentiate between Italy and the Vatican versus the rest of the Empire. The addition 'of the German Nation' ('Deutscher Nation') to the official title 'Holy Roman Empire' became accepted usage only in the 15th century. This setting apart of a separate 'German'

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[2] I am personally not convinced of the fairly common view that these three cultures lived in permanent fear of one another and that European history can be interpreted as continuous struggle between these three entities. Such a view has been presented, for instance, by Norbert Elias in his 'Studien über die Deutschen', (1992), Frankfurt 1998, p. 9
[3] G.M. Trevelyan:'A Shortened History of England', Harmondsworth 1967, p. 119
[4] Norbert Elias, 'Studien über die Deutschen', (1992), Frankfurt 1998, p. 18 ff.
[5] Johannes Fried: 'Die Formierung Europas', 840 - 1046, München 1993, chapter 2

Reich really became popular during the Reformation, as a counter-attack against Popish influence.
In so far, the Reformation certainly made a contribution to a sense of identity.

Modern Times: A period of transition

But it has to be remembered, as an example, that the Council of Konstanz (1414 - 1417) tried to vote on a 'national' basis, which failed because there were no adequate criteria for such a term yet. Students enrolled in universities like Bologna or Paris were broadly classified in 'nationes', like the 'natio germaniae' at Bologna, but those 'Germans' included Bohemians and Saxonians, but not students from the Southwest of Germany, who were listed as 'natio alemanniae'.[6]

Ulrich von Hutten may be quoted as an early source, who addressed the whole German nation in his verbal assault on Popish agitation between 1520 and 1521. He requested the Kaiser and all 'free Germans' to help the German country and fight for their freedom. But Hutten was also a humanist, among others, and it is impossible to link him to anything truly "nationalistic".

Martin Luther is often mentioned in connection with the building of 'German' mentality, wrongly, to my mind, if a direct line is drawn from him to Hitler. A.J.P. Taylor advocated a similar theory, saying: 'No man has ever been so representative of the German spirit, and no man has had such a deep and lasting effect on German history. [...] In Luther was implicit the emotionalism of the Romantic movement, the German nationalist sense of being different, above all the elevation of feeling over thinking, which is characteristic of modern Germany.'[7]
It is hard to reconcile this stereotype view of Germany with all the more rational traditions. The implied connection between Lutherian beliefs, Romanticism and racist National Socialism is hardly a convincing theory, but certainly not uncommon. As far as Luther is concerned, I would suggest to differentiate clearly between the myth around him (developed mainly in the 19th century when he was discovered as a national liberator) and the historical facts, which is not to deny his historical and religious importance.[8] It should be added that Luther was adored as a liberator from the domination of Rome in Northern Germany only, he was vilified as the divider of the nation in Bavaria, however. Luther's adoration reached a climax during the festivities in Wittenberg on the occasion of his 400th birthday in 1883. Many souvenirs in the form of cups, lanterns or flags printed with Luther's portrait or his words were manufactured for this event.
On the other hand Luther truly contributed to a sense of identity in so far as he rejected popery, in many pamphlets he was depicted as „furor teutonicus", martially swinging a club against his 'Italian' enemy. His contribution was especially strong as far as the German language was concerned. His translation of the Bible not only made it accessible to the common people, it also set a linguistic standard and underscored a cultural identity (the first indication of linguistic identity, by the way, were the famous Strassbourg oaths of 842, a solemn celebration of unity between the Eastern and Western Franks and their armies).
In a general sense, a common language is undoubtedly a foundation of identity, but the diversities of regional dialects and accents were very marked in Germany until the 18th century. A Frisian could hardly understand a Bavarian, a fact still true even today in an age of increasing mobility and migration. People living in the Northwest of Germany would have found it a lot easier to communicate with their Dutch neighbours rather than with Southerners. Thus the linguistic argument has to be considered with prudence.

The Age of Absolutism

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[6] Cp. Hagen Schulze:'Das Europa der Nationen', in 'Mythos und Nation', p. 67 ff.
[7] A.J.P.Taylor: The Course of German History, London 1945, repr. 1968, p. 8
[8] Cp. „Mythen der Nationen – Ein europäisches Panorama", catalogue of the exhibition in Berlin in 1998, p. 111 ff.

During the age of Absolutism, the German Reich was often considered an anomaly, no genuine empire at all. Samuel Pufendorf (1632 - 94) called the constitutional construction of the Reich with her decentralised distribution of power 'a monstrosity' and complained about this miserable state of affairs. This, as I indicated above, was the answer to the 'German question' in the centuries after the Middle Ages. Influenced by Grotius, Hobbes and the principles of Natural Law, Pufendorf realised that the German Empire developed differently from the other Western European states. But at least his comments document a desire for more unity. All the attempts to achieve this, however, failed together with the establishment of a common system of taxation. The disintegrating forces were too potent, and they had the support of most other powers around the Holy Roman Empire. The Treaty of Münster and Osnabrück (1648) demonstrated this political stalemate on German grounds: None of the states concerned were allowed to dominate the status quo. In other words: the German question was to a large extent the sum total of European influences and a particular German answer to this could not be mobilised.

In many ways the results of the Thirty Years War were devastating and what was later called Germany was literally 'thrown back' one or two centuries, almost eliminating the social and economic progress being made before. Whereas in many countries like the Netherlands the cities developed into self-governing units with a vigorous sense of pride and independence, in Germany this progress was halted or reversed. In the centre of Europe, various little absolute kingdoms indulged in modest courtly splendour, exceeding their precious resources and suppressing what was left of the Hanseatic spirit of free enterprise and participation. In Russia, to extend this comparison, the role of towns and cities was even less decisive for national development, leaving a conspicuous gap between Eastern and Western parts of Europe, with Germany somewhere in the middle. In the West, traditions of political compromise, persuasion and negotiation evolved, further East, more medieval, even military models, based on the three estates and patterns of 'order and obedience'.

It may be interesting to name Leibniz next (1646 - 1716), a famous universal mind and like most Germans very conscious of the lasting after-effects of the Thirty Years War. He was also complaining about the fragmentation, the political powerlessness of the German Reich.[9] In some essays and letters he sets 'Germany' apart from the situation in France, thus anticipating later endeavours to contrast Germany and France. When lashing out against the 'inner deformities and degeneration ('Deformiertheit und Entartung')[10], especially against the discrepancies between rich and poor in France, he sets a tone repeated in later centuries: France and the French culture were often considered alien, degenerate and 'over - civilised'. At the same time, Leibniz maintained a vision of a balanced constellation of all Christian peoples in Europe living in harmony, with the individual nations contributing their and different parts to a larger unity. Despite his complaints about the powerlessness of the Empire, Leibniz later in his life cherished the 'particularist' set-up of the Holy Roman Empire and he became a defender of those 'little German sovereignties'.

After the Thirty Years War, the general sense of belonging together among educated people in the larger Germany had clearly developed. Perhaps, like in later centuries, the common memory of suffering had contributed towards this. Leibniz, too, wrote about a 'fatherland', citing a common language as the decisive factor, not in a 'nationalist', but in a 'universal' sense. In various letters and essays he expounded on the necessity of using proper language to educate people, so that they can sharpen their intellect and reason.[11] In

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[9] 'Bedenken welcher Gestalt Securitas publica interna et externa (und Status Praesens) im Reich ...auf festen Fuß zu stellen' (1670)

[10] Leibniz: Die Gebrechen Frankreichs, Politische Schriften I, EVA, Frankfurt ... S. 67 f.

[11] 'Und ich bin der Meinung daß alle Nationen, deren Sprache wohl ausgeübet und vollkommen gemacht, dabei einen großen Vorteil zu Schärfung ihres Verstandes haben... Im übrigen ist ja dem Vaterlande höchlich daran gelegen, daß es treffliche Geister habe, so mit tiefsinnigen Erfindungen

many ways, Leibniz is a perfect example of enlightened German thinking and doubtlessly in his age, the term 'German' had already acquired a distinct meaning.

The efforts in contrasting national characteristics (like the ones by Leibniz) helped to determine something later understood as 'German'. French so-called 'reunion' policies during Louis XIV and his successors played a significant part in the development of anti-French sentiments, especially in the Palatine region of Germany, since they were under direct threat of occupation. And indeed the French forces devastated large areas and famous cities (like Heidelberg) in the Palatine War (1688 - 1697). The name of the French general Mélac became a swear word, contorted to the German colloquial 'Du Lackl!' as a derogatory expression for someone disgusting.

This anti-French tradition will have to be pursued later. On the whole, the French court, way of life, language, architecture etc. served as models for all the major and minor courts in Germany. Often this led to ridiculous imitations: The Prussian Frederick I had a curtisane in his court according to the (French) fashion, yet as a puritanical Lutheran he never dared to make use of this mistress. This highlights the ambiguous attitude toward France in this age. The Prussian King Frederick II admired Voltaire and invited him to his court and most educated or politically important Germans spoke fluent French. Apart from a few exceptions, European noblemen still had a strong sense of 'esprit de corps', of belonging to a special rank of chosen people. National sentiments were still rather alien to them. Many German philosophers followed and further developed ideas expressed during the period of Enlightenment. The rise of the (enlightened) reading public in Germany was not significantly hampered by censorship, a certain advantage of the political fragmentation at that time. Reading circles and clubs discussed and published stimulating material, usually in support of enlightened forms of absolute rule.

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und hurtigen Anschlägen in Krieg - und Friedenszeiten, bei Gesandschaften, bei Zusammenkünften ... ' Leibniz in „Einige patriotische Gedanken" (1697), printed in „G.W. Leibniz: Politische Schriften I", Frankfurt/M. 1966, p. 90 ff.

The Great French Revolution: A political and cultural watershed

And at the beginning of the Great French Revolution, most German thinkers welcomed this break with absolutist tradition eagerly. A new stage for political and philosophical discourse had been set. German literati and philosophers welcomed the appeal in favour of a global liberation and emancipation.[12] Kant, Fichte, Hegel, to name but a few, analysed the French Revolution carefully and, as Jörg Altwegg suggests, created the myth behind this revolution for many Germans helping to constitute something like the birth of Germany.[13] Altwegg discusses the question, whether French pragmatic thinking (the emphasis on human rights) was turned into a 'theoretisation of revolutionary truth' especially by Hegel and his followers, something compared in his book to a historic 'fall of man' ('Sündenfall').[14] This may sound like a very 'French' point of view, but it is an interesting one. Most European nations would find it easier to accept diverging interests, trying to find workable solutions (including political tricks, bickering, gerrymandering, blackmail etc.) for immediate problems. Germans (at least in the past) are reputed to raise the issues on to lofty (perhaps philosophical) platforms, so that pragmatic 'day to day' answers tend to be more difficult to be solved. But it has to be emphasised that both traditions have always existed in Germany: 'Realpolitik' and 'Weltanschauung' and in many cases the 'Weltanschauung' simply disguised some straightforward political advantage. In other words, the philosophical overtone was part of the ideological cloaking to increase the appearance of legitimacy.

As we know, among the competing conceptions of politics and civilisation, the idea of the nation became the decisive one in the 19th century. No other political alternative was able to survive as an alternative ideological basis. But this idea was more than just an ideological construction, it proved to be a weapon in the arsenal of statesmen, provided the people could be led to believe in it.

The French Revolution with the levée en masse (1793) shocked the contemporary rulers at this age. In France, Hagen Schulze argues, the nation was defined as a political community, taking over the sovereignty of the crown. Such a unity of state and nation was unthinkable in Germany at that time. Whereas in France pragmatic political links between people and the nation accompanied the emotional mobilisation, in Germany such links were simply non-existent. In fact, the political framework did not yet allow them to come into existence, which was also the result of the European political stalemate after Napoleon. A nation as the sum of sovereign people being represented in politically defined bodies, with the people being active participants in the political process - such an understanding of 'nation' was not feasible in 19th century Germany.

Nations are, as Benedict Anderson[15] put it, 'imagined communities', politicians and intellectuals conceived them and turned them into practical realities, the media popularised them and they were propagated on pulpits and in parliaments.

What, then, could the Germans put against the French understanding of a nation? How did they 'imagine' their nation?

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[12] B. Giesen/K. Junge:'Der Mythos des Universalismus', in 'Mythos und Nation', ibid. p. 61 ff.

[13] Cp. Claude Jaquillard in 'Adieu à l'Allemagne', quoted in Jürg Altwegg:'Die Republik des Geistes', Frankreichs Intellektuelle zwischen Revolution und Reaktion, München 1986, p. 13 f.

[14] Altwegg, ibid. p. 14

[15] Benedict Anderson,'Die Erfindung der Nation', Frankfurt 1996

Romanticism and beyond: The conception of a nation

Johann Gottfried Herder, firmly rooted in a humanist tradition like Leibniz, formulated a representative answer to this question in Weimar: The nation was not a political constitution, but based on a common language (a reminder of what Leibniz had said) and the consciousness of belonging together. Herder investigated such links by juxtaposing 'nation' and 'people', referring not so much to practical politics, but to language and poetry. Fairy tales and songs, revealing the inner harmony of the souls of the people were collected by idealists like the Grimm brothers or Arnim and Clemens Brentano[16].

The famous tales published by Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm still resound around the world and not only in Germany the brothers are recognised as pioneers in the filed of folklore research. They viewed themselves as patriotic folklorists, not simply as entertainers of children. Their work was begun at a time when Germany was a 'messy patchwork' of fiefdoms and principalities overrun by the French under Napoleon. The new rulers were not intent on supporting local culture, quite the contrary. As young, workaholic scholars, single and sharing a cramped flat, the brothers Grimm undertook the fairy - tale collection with the explicit goal of saving the endangered oral tradition of Germany. Many stories read like dreams come true: Handsome lads and beautiful damsels, armed with magic, triumph over giants, witches and wild beasts. They outwit mean, selfish adults like Germany was expected to outwit the giant Napoleon. Whether this parallel is fully justified is open to doubt, but these tales soon fell prey to ideologues and propagandists. Later, during the Third Reich, theorists turned Little Red Riding Hood into a symbol of the German people, saved from the evil Jewish wolf. At the end of World War II, Allied commanders banned the publication of the Grimm tales in Germany in the belief that they had contributed to Nazi savagery. To whatever extent the Grimms intended their tales to play not only a cultural but also a political role may remain an open question, but there can be no doubt that the tales did mean a lot for the Germans, for their identity and also politically.

The German nation was imagined as a spiritual human community sanctified by the grace of God. Far more than political institutions or the constitution, collective and spiritual bonds were regarded as essential, to be a German was a result of destiny, language and blood. The poets, translating the songs of a common heritage, were more considered as national models than politicians solving practical problems. This concept has persisted until today, the current debate about German citizenship (traditionally based on blood ties) gives ample proof for this. Herder's concepts of nation and 'Weltgefühl' ('universal feeling') are still taken into consideration today in the more recent 'quest' for a German identity.[17]

In so far, we can understand why many Western Europeans understand Germans generally as 'romantic', and national feelings rose to their first height during the age of Romanticism. Goethe himself is still called a Romantic in France, rather than a Classical scholar. Many European (and American) observers have regarded this romantic element as typically German, and perhaps there is quite some truth in this, even though I personally find it difficult to accept this image without reservation.

Somehow German Romanticism seems to reflect the strong desire for change coupled with a sense of mystery, of retreat from politics into the private sphere. Moreover, it is loaded with grave sensations vaguely linking nature, life and death, unfathomable personal feelings and a sense for ancient rites and roots. A quest for 'soul', a universal principle like Novalis' search for the blue flower.

The Grimm brothers, not particularly Romantics themselves, are still a case in point: They led a scholarly life in the shade of politics, they personified the longing for a free, unified fatherland, they revolted against the breaking of a constitutional oath by their 'Landesvater',

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[16] „Des Knaben Wunderhorn", an edition of songs published 1805 / 06
[17] Ernest A. Menze:'Johann Gottfried Herder - Nationsbegriff und Weltgefühl', Aus Politik und Zeitgeschichte, B 1/86, Beilage zur Wochenzeitung Das Parlament B 1/86, January 4th, 1986, p. 31 ff.

the Hanoverian Ernst August in 1837 (and had to suffer accordingly), they scrutinised the patriotic significance of language and history. Later they were glorified as heroes of the people, or in German 'völkische Heroen', in various ways by all the generations until today.[18]

There are further repercussions to be realised: Hagen Schulze adds that Herder's views determined Eastern Europe perhaps even more than Germany. A quite remarkable idea: The gap between West and East may be partly due to these different conceptions, Germany being somewhere in the middle, with many people under the impact of Western modes of thinking and many others following Herder's tradition.[19]

The originally positive assessment of the French Revolution abruptly turned into criticism or even disgust during the radical phases of this revolution. Suddenly the French experience of revolt against established authorities was violently rejected in most parts of the German bourgeoisie and intelligentsia. In a curious way, anything French was combined with terror, tumult and unrest. They turned away from Voltaire and Rousseau and looked for other sources for a source of national identity. By the way, many writers argue that this rejection of French cultural influence was also the reason why so many Germans were fascinated by another world-famous classic: Shakespeare. There can be no denying that the German reception of Hamlet requires explanations along such lines. Like Faust, Hamlet has been interpreted as particularly 'close to the German soul'. To be or not to be, Kaiser Wilhelm II applied this to German policies of confrontation: 'Es geht um Sein oder Nichtsein' ('the question is to be or not...') he announced after the outbreak of the First World War on one of the earliest recorded broadcasts. Another representative example is the reception of Macpherson's invention of Ossian[20], understood as an ancient poetic voice of the people, which caused a tremendous response in Germany during Goethe's age.

More importantly, the condemnation of revolutions, of people assuming the right to radically alter the political set-up was ultimately compromised in Germany, a fact still true for German identity today. The individual citizen, especially the so-called bourgeois, learned to respect 'die Obrigkeit' (authorities) and the sense of being 'ein Untertan' (a subject, but the German word has a special undertone) slowly solidified as a factor of German identity.

Only in a few areas or cities (like Mainz) pro - French sentiments survived, but not for long. When Napoleon defeated the Austrian and Prussian armies, some Germans still applauded, even or especially when considering the final annihilation of the ancient Holy Roman Empire (abdication of Kaiser Franz II in 1806). But soon Napoleon turned into an oppressor, not a liberator, and his troops became infamous for their often brutal enforcement of French will.[21] And even though the sovereigns of Germany were still hesitating, hatred against French rule increased among the people and even learned representatives of German culture furiously voiced their dismay. To demonstrate the ferocity of their criticism, let me add a few quotations:

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[18] Wilhelm Bleek:'Die Brüder Grimm und die deutsche Politik', Aus Politik und Zeitgeschichte, Beilage zur Wochenzeitung Das Parlament B 1/86, January 4th, 1986

[19] Hagen Schulze, 'Das Europa der Nationen', ibid. p. 73

[20] James Macpherson, the son of a farmer, published 'Fragments of Ancient Poetry collected in the Highlands of Scotland and translated from the Gaelic or Erse language' in 1760. This work was followed by 'Fingal, an ancient epic poem in six books' in 1762 and by 'Tempora', another epic, claiming to be translations from the Gaelic of a poet called Ossian. Goethe was among the admirers of these works, and Ossian was mentioned in his 'Die Leiden des jungen Werther' (1774). The authenticity of Ossian was soon in doubt, and after Macpherson's death a committee was appointed to investigate the Ossian poems. It reported that Macpherson had edited traditional Gaelic poems and inserted passages of his own. Later inquiries supported this view.

[21] W. Wülfing:'Heiland und Höllensohn', Zum Napoleon - Mythos im Deutschland des 19. Jahrhunderts. in 'Mythos und Nation', ibid. p. 164 ff.

'Es ist eine unumstößliche Wahrheit, daß alles, was Leben und Bestand haben soll, eine bestimmte Abneigung, einen Gegensatz, einen Haß haben muß...'
('It is an irrefutable truth that everything having life and duration must have a certain disinclination, a contrast, a hatred...') said Ernst Moritz Arndt in his pamphlet 'Über den Volkshaß' in 1813. And he continued:'So muß bei den Deutschen jetzt der Haß brennen gegen die Franzosen... [...] Ich will den Haß gegen die Franzosen, nicht bloß für diesen Krieg, ich will ihn für lange Zeit, ich will ihn für immer...' ('Thus hatred must burn in the Germans against the French [...] I want this hatred against the French not only for this war, I want it for a long time, I want it forever... '). Based on this concept of hate, he determined black-and-white national characteristics for both nations later used in fascist propaganda. Arndt and J.G. Fichte raved against 'French vanity, hollowness and coquetry' and even raised anti-Jewish sentiments ('Gegen die Einfuhr von Juden', 1914).
One may also find pseudo-biological arguments reminding the readers of racist perceptions of later decades.[22]

The older generation of German intellectuals had felt akin to universal commitments and 'Weltbürgertum'. Schiller expressed this in the fragment 'Deutsche Größe' ('German Greatness') in the following words: '...indem das politische Reich wankt, hat sich das geistige immer fester und vollkommener gebildet' (...'while the political Empire is staggering, the intellectual one has become stronger and more perfect...')[23]

The new generation, like Fichte and Arndt, were advocates of the new dimension in politics: the nation. And their efforts demonstrated that a nation does not simply 'exist' like a pebble in a river, it has to be imagined, people have to be persuaded to accept this notion and the printing media have ardently multiplied the message. Some passages in the 'Reden an die deutsche Nation' sound like invocations, like emotional appeals to accept this idea.[24] Interestingly, at a time of increasing social stratification, this concept helped to gloss over the differences between rich and poor, the powerful and the powerless, thus offering an effective ideological weapon to make the subjects pliable and subservient. It seems that in Germany, the ruling classes were even more successful in this than the rulers of other parts of Western Europe. This was why the idea of 'serving one's nation' was more readily accepted than the idea of 'fighting for one's rights'.

National identity erupted during the struggle against the French invaders, so that 'love for one's nation' was coupled with hatred against anything French.[25] The invectives of Arndt and Fichte (and others) seem to be a prelude for French - German animosity until the 1950s.
On the other hand we should not forget the opposing tradition either: France was still regarded by many liberals and socialists as a model and cultural exchanges flourished unabated. But generally, the newly found orientation as a German nation helped to repress the more global perspective of enlightened discourse as mentioned above.

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[22] Kurt Lenk:'Volk und Staat', Strukturwandel politischer Ideologien im 19. u. 20 jahrhundert, Stuttgart 1971, p. 90 ff.
[23] from: Theodor Schieder:'Das Jahr 1813 und das heutige Europa',Freiherr-vom-Stein-Gesellschaft Schriften, Heft 4, Münster, Westf. 1964
[24] 'Diese Reden beschwören auch Fürsten Deutschlands... Euch Deutsche insgesamt, welchen Platz in der Gesellschaft ihr einnehmen möget, beschwören diese Reden...' ('These speeches implore the sovereigns of Germany ... and you Germans altogether, which ever place in society you may occupy... these speeches implore you...')
[25] No other nation has attracted as much revulsion. As far as Anglo - German relations are concerned, another thrilling field for studies, the tensions were surprisingly moderate (with the exception of the years during the wars). Slogans like 'Gott strafe England', or 'das perfide Albion' were certainly popular, but never dominated the generally positive assessment of the British. Cp. Karl Heinz Bohrer, ' Gott strafe England!' in: Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung Feb. 17th, 1979, or the amusing study by Karin and Harald Husemann, Lachlan Moyle: 'Coping With Relations', Anglo - German Cartoons from the Fifties to the Nineties. Osnabrück 1995

Napoleon Bonaparte had uttered something very interesting on the first Brumaire of the new year VIII (actually Nov. 9th, 1799): The novel of the revolution had been finished, he claimed, and they had to begin with its history, concentrating on what is real and possible, leaving behind the speculative and hypothetical philosophies of the revolutionary epoch. Perhaps this can be called an early example of Bismarckian 'Realpolitik'.

For the Germans, such a distinction became true in quite different ways much later. With regard to what Napoleon had meant, the Germans were hardly in a position to differentiate between these two French stages: For them the French appeared as oppressors representing both revolutionary enthusiasm and Napoleonic Realpolitik. There was little chance of glorifying the first stage of the revolution, when the people of Paris and France were turning the world upside down (the revolt of the deputies in 1789, the Fall of the Bastille, Declaration of Human Rights, the destruction of the feudal system and so on). These achievements and the active participation of the common people was drawn into the quagmire of negative images of bloody terror and subjugation.

The Nineteenth Century

Historians can give plenty of examples how the idea of the nation (in the case of Germany) materialised into popular movements and common sacrifice: the Rhine - crisis of 1840, the completion of the cathedral in Cologne (1848), songs like 'Die Wacht am Rhein' (against the French), supported by a Romantic, backward-looking historical consciousness may be sufficient here. This is symbolised by the Gothic architecture of the Dom in Cologne: the tremendous height, the magnificent windows, the treasures, foremost among them the Shrine of the Three Magi - all in all medieval in outlook, fairly typical of the search for identity in history. The celebration of the inauguration of the Cologne Cathedral was certainly a national event of the highest order. The Forties of this century were a fertile period for the movement in support of national monuments: the planning of a memorial in the Teutoburg Forest ('Hermannsdenkmal'), the 'Walhalla' near Regensburg (inaugurated in 1842), to name just two. National feelings, already visible in the Wartburgfest (1817) or the Hambacher Fest (1832), once the ideology of an intellectual minority, gradually developed into a mass phenomenon.[26]

This was certainly a crucial period for the construction of a German identity, even though the 'German questions' remained unsolved for the time being.
What, as a preliminary conclusion, were the constituting factors of this 'national identity under development'? Let us quickly recapitulate a few aspects in note-taking form:
■ the fairly long tradition of French - German animosity as a birthmark of identity,
■ the cultural (versus the political) definition of German traditions (language, 'felt togetherness', songs, fairy tales, customs and costumes etc.),
■ the construction and use of historical myths (often related to the medieval Empire or distant 'Germanic' heroes like Hermann or the Nibelungen) as exemplified below,
■ the Romantic desire for something genuine, truthful, unrefined, 'whole', unmutilated by civilisation and political intrigues, deeply related to God, (in contrast to the world of practical common sense, reasoning, enlightenment or logic),
■ the acceptance of authorities representing the legitimate political bodies and limiting the scope for active participation,
■ the denunciation of 'revolutionary changes' and the decline of the bourgeois middle classes as progressive political forces.

I have already signposted a few stages of the development of German national identity in the second half of the 19th and the 20th century. From the point of view of an

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[26] Hagen Schulze described this development in his book 'Der Weg zum Nationalstaat',München 1958

historian, the debate of the 'belated nation' ('verspätete Nation', Helmuth Plesner and plenty of others)[27] should not be overlooked. And indeed, many of the above mentioned trends seem to support such opinions: The German nation was not able to develop 'naturally' at an even pace, and certainly not without the counter - image of 'the French'. The geo- political circumstances, or rather the foreign powers around Germany, did not permit an early unification. This may indeed have led to a collective sense of inferiority, of coming late and being left at an (unfair) disadvantage. While other nations had had time and opportunities to accumulate riches and colonies, Germany had to compensate this by a special kind of importunate and insistent imperialism. We may come back to this line of thought later.

Perhaps even more importantly, Germany had only a few chances to create a true liberal movement with solid bourgeois backing like other parts of Western Europe. It was Bismarck and Prussia who united Germany first against the Austrian Empire and then in another war against France: not particularly fortunate indications for the future. We may recall Bismarck's famous saying that not majority decisions and parliamentary debates (he regarded those as the 'mistake of 1848/49') decide the course of history but 'blood and iron'. Clearly, the national - conservative current began to supersede the idealistic - liberal stream in German history. The victory of German armies over the French in 1870 /71 was at the same time a victory of Prussian - German nobility over the liberal German bourgeoisie. The family of Max and Alfred Weber may serve as proof here that the latter tradition had not ceased to exist. And yet from now on almost everyone who could afford it in Germany tended to adopt and imitate the values and habits of the German nobility, adhering to military rather than civil codes of behaviour.[28]

At the beginning of the Second German Empire, Bismarck steered Germany into still waters, but as a proficient politician he could hardly resist using frictions with other nations and international crises as means to artificially strengthen his rule in German politics at home. He cleverly outmanoeuvred the liberals, for instance, and did his part in persuading the liberal politicians to not only accept Prussian domination but also an overall more nationalist stance.

After the death of Wilhelm I, is was unfortunate for the Germans that the more liberal successor, King Frederic III, married to the eldest daughter of Queen Victoria, deceased after less than three months on the throne. A completely new generation and national - Prussian tradition was represented by Wilhelm II, the next Kaiser. His 'personal regiment', as he liked to call it, contributed immensely toward the re-organisation of alliances (against Germany) in Europe and a further shift to radical 'German' interpretations of their identity.

Nationalism certainly was a European phenomenon at large, and jingoism was not a German feature alone. The British Navy League had its counterparts in the "Associatione Nazionalista Italiana" or in the "Alldeutscher Verband". No nation was free of racist interpretations of superiority or singularity based on Darwinist or similar notions. But obviously it was in Germany, where this particularly disgusting variety of chauvinism and later Fascism flourished. Neither imperial nor totalitarian regimes were a German invention, and yet the Germans developed this particularly extremist nationalist identity. Why?

Before going on to further explain the notions of 'coming late', 'being under threat' and 'being submitted or defeated by others' as typical symptoms of a 'vulnerable' nation, I would

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[27] As discussed for example in Hagen Schule, 'Das Europa der Nationen', ibid. p. 78

[28] This has been marvellously documented by Norbert Elias in both 'Studien über die Deutschen', (1992), Frankfurt 1998, p. 23 ff.,p. 81 ff. and his study 'Über den Prozess der Zivilisation", 1978. Most modern German historians have by now accepted such results, especially the school around Hans-Ulrich Wehler (e.g. 'Das Deutsche Kaiserreich...',1973. The decline of liberal traditions has been deplored by lots of scholars, for instance by Dolf Sternberger in 'Ich wünschte ein Bürger zu sein', Fraankfurt 1967

now like to have a closer look at some special myths constituting German identity. Comparisons with other national myths can easily be drawn.

German national myths and the construction of identity[29]

There is not much room in this paper for a more theoretical analysis and survey of how national myths and identity are constructed. As general guidelines, one may also refer to the concept of 'lieux de memoire' (Pierre Nora) or 'sites of memory'.[30] In addition, one may consider public holidays and festivals, historical myths, symbols, artefacts, heroes etc. etc.

Last year's exhibition in Berlin (and the illustrations in the respective catalogue) concentrated on five key myths:
- the battle in the Teutoburg forest 9 AD (defeat of 3 Roman legions),
- the death (1190) and expected resurrection of 'Barbarossa', Kaiser Frederick I, as illustrated in the monumental Kyffhäuser memorial, inaugurated by Kaiser Wilhelm II in 1896,
- the revolt of Martin Luther against the Pope (the burning of the Papal Bull threatening excommunication in 1520),
- the liberation battle at Leipzig in 1813 ('Völkerschlacht') and
- the 'Kaiserproklamation' at Versailles in 1871.[31]

This selection may be partly justified and I would only briefly like to comment on just a few aspects before adding one or two alternative issues.

Like the French (Vercingetorix as opposed to the Bourbon preference of Chlodwig, the founder of a Christian line of French Kings), the Germans have an anti - Roman hero, the chieftain called 'Hermann der Cherusker' or with his Latin name 'Arminius'. Not much is known of him historically, but he seemed to have organised resistance against the Roman occupation forces and lured the legions of Varus into defeat in the year 9 AD. Already during French occupation in the early 19th century, Hermann was epitomised as a liberator, someone people imagined to help in their struggle against Napoleon. Many allegorical artefacts document the utilisation of Hermann as a national model hero. Artists like Caspar David Friedrich or Karl Friedrich Schinkel symbolically paralleled the Battle of Teutoburg and the Battle of the Nations near Leipzig in 1813. Hermann and the famous battle in the forest constitute one of the earliest 'Germanic' myths, and he has been made to symbolise, rightly or wrongly, some of the German virtues: fighting against a superior enemy, leadership (juxtaposed with trustful following of the warriors, the idea of 'Gefolgschaft') honesty, faithfulness, physical strength, valour and persistence.

Perhaps the most important myth (not highlighted in the above mentioned exhibition) in this context is based on the Nibelungen Saga and a few more comments about it may be justified.

The history of its reception in the 19th century, including the circle of motifs around the Edda and similar ancient legends, can illustrate quite clearly the usage of similar 'virtues' like Hermann's. The characters were deliberately taken out of context, stripped of their original literary ambivalence and some traits exaggerated to create independent myths. The figures in this Saga were then treated as eternally valuable incorporations of values already implied by Tacitus. The adjective 'Germanic' used by Tacitus was automatically substituted by 'deutsch' in disregard of the intentions behind the Roman script.

First attempts to utilise the Nibelungen Saga were made at the time of the Napoleonic Wars, too. This was the time of enthusiasm for the Middle Ages, the aspiration

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[29] Of course the selection of examples is not only very limited but also the presentation has to be sketchy.
[30] Gavin Baldwin in his paper 'The intercultural identity of Europe: On living in an historical environment'
[31] 'Mythen der Nationen', Katalog zur Ausstellung in Berlin 1998, p. 101 ff.

for a national rebirth. The Nibelungen were a warranty for the genuineness of such aspirations. This is why the Saga became a national epic. Already in 1810, the professor of German language and literature Heinrich von der Hagen depicted the Nibelungen heroes as models of topical importance, most of all the virtues of „faithfulness and friendship until death'. Johann August Zeune (1812/13) connected the Nibelungenlied with the war against Napoleon and Siegfried, the central hero, became a symbol of national identity and strength, freeing Germany from 'dem fremden Gewürm' ('alien worms', vermin or rabble). The enemies were presented as snakes and dragons. This was the time of the first endeavours to use all this as national - pedagogical instruments for the education of young Germans. August Wilhelm Schlegel demanded that this Saga should become the main book in education. It was supposed to strengthen German thinking and feeling.

Felix Dahn, another nationalist writer, insisted in 1859 that decline and ultimate self - destruction have to be accepted, being faithful to one's friends was the main duty. The notion of 'Heldentod', later used by the Nazis, too, crept into popular debates at that time. After the unification of 1871, the Nibelungen were no longer only a compensation for national weakness, but signified a renewal of national power. Bismarck and Wilhelm I were compared with Siegfried, defeating the 'dragon' symbolising the French. Simultaneously, Siegfried stood for the military or war-like values of the Kaiserreich ('ungestüme Kampfeslust'), thus he was used as a tool for 'Wilhelmian' Imperialism and militarism. In schools, the epic was widely read, but in distorted ways and out of context to suit the ideological purposes.

We are all familiar with the role that Richard Wagner's treatment of the Nibelungen epic played, with the foregrounding of a few fighting scenes and Siegfried's heroism. Similar trends can be observed in the fine arts.
Politically, this myth became important before the First World War, when Chancellor von Bülow used the word 'Nibelungentreue' to underscore unlimited faithfulness to the German ally Austria-Hungary.

After the war, many Germans eagerly took up this myth again to find reasons for their defeat: they imagined to have been stabbed in the back on the home front like Siegfried by Hagen. This was bundled into a complete package of lies called the 'Dolchstoßlegende', still believed in today by right-wing radicals. Oddly enough, Germans often identified with both, the hero Siegfried and with his murderer Hagen, the latter symbolising the unquestioned and boundless sense of duty and sacrifice. Trust versus betrayal - this is one of the leitmotifs, without the literary ambiguities of the original. The artificially proliferated ideal of military invincibility was irreconcilable with the events in the final year of the First World War. This was the origin of a second 'enemy image' (after the arch-rivalry with the French): the obscure enemy taking other shapes, hiding somewhere in the back to shamefully bring about defeat. The different shapes were usually the scapegoats most convenient in this century: the Jews and the socialists.
Consequently, after World War I, a more and more racist interpretation of the Nibelungen Saga was popularised. The myth of the ancient nordic hero was born, the forefather of all the Germans, a representative of highest racial value.

Belief in one's destiny, allegiance and loyalty were the main concerns of Nazi ideologists. Göring compared the battle of Stalingrad with the struggle of the Germans, heroising the hopeless fight as a symbol of sacrifice until the final ' Endsieg' ('final victory'). In this connection, the absolutely senseless 'sacrifice' of an entire army was justified as a rearguard struggle of Europa in their 'battle of destiny' against the 'storm from the East'. All this amounted to something like a cult of death in Germany, heroising the warriors who died for their country. The so - called Langemarck - legend (the first 'storming' of an enemy frontline in 1914) became a symbol of both youthful enthusiasm and celebration of sacrifice. The Nazi Reichsführer Baldur von Schirach utilised this with the help of 'Langemarck - Organisations' under the control of the NSDAP, for instance. It was only after 1945 that this legend slowly disappeared but surprisingly it can still be heard among many people today.

The concept of such explanations of the Nibelungen Saga may be contrasted with cosmopolitan or other myths in Germany, derived from the period of Enlightenment ('all men will be brothers'). But schoolbooks and popular editions reflecting the respective interpretations at a given time were most widely read. The majority of schoolboys would have read such sagas and even the working classes with their distinct cultural niches were deeply affected by them.

It may be interesting to quote from a newspaper article printed in 1914, during the first months of the war, summarising most of the identity features from above:[32]
One writer contrasted 'barbarism' and 'civilisation' and claimed: 'Nein, mein Deutschland, du bist nicht für diese Kultur geschaffen.' ('No, my Germany, you are not made for this culture'). Whereas the word 'culture' sounded like doves on a roof, the word 'barbarian' rang like a clear trumpet into eternity, the thunder of Wodan's carriage. Shaw's cynicism, modern paintings with green skies and blue trees, decadent tragedies - such garments of culture had to be torn off one's naked body in order to free the barbarian underneath from the bondage of civilisation, the writer exclaimed. He demanded to impose the barbarian order on to the world, naming 'virtues' like truthfulness, resilience, the readiness to fight, steadfastness, the belief in God, love for all creatures, faithfulness and allegiance to the one's Kaiser, one's wife and one's fatherland.
These were the pieces in the puzzle of national identity at that time.

Memorial days and national holidays represent another important cornerstone. In 1842, the Director of an educational Seminar, Anton Wilhelm Ferdinand Stiehl, responsible for new educational rules called the 'Stiehlschen Regulative' in Prussia, requested that patriotic history lessons should be grouped around national and religious memorial dates. He mentioned Luther's birthdate and his death, the battle of Belle-Alliance (the English significantly called it the battle of Waterloo, since this was were Wellington's troops stood their ground), the birthdays of Friedrich Wilhelm III and Friedrich Wilhelm IV, the battle of Leipzig in 1913, among others. This was the beginning of the 'calendarical method' in history teaching, the basis of 19th century historic culture in Germany. Jubilees and anniversaries abounded and were made the epoch-making hallmarks of national history. Especially annual memorial celebrations served as reminders of common heritage and experiences. The tribe, the people, the nation: stage by stage the imagined development was re-enacted, often linked with religious festivals. Thus the secular modern state occupied ancient forms of accentuating certain part of the year. 'Sedantag' (in memory of the battle of Sedan) and 'Kaisers Geburtstag' were probably the most cherished of all holidays during the Kaiserreich until 1918. Doubtlessly experiences around these celebrations were deeply engrained in the memory of these generations.

If ever there were recurring turning points in German's calenderical history, when modern Germans, on the way to themselves, had arranged appointments with destiny, November 9th must be mentioned first.
It became important in 1918, when parts of the German navy revolted against the suicidal order to sail against the much superior forces of the British Navy. This triggered off a general uprising among the German armed forces with the spontaneous emergence of revolutionary groupings (at least in name comparable to the Soviets in Russia, 'Arbeiter- und Soldatenräte', their emergence and build-up have little in common with Lenin's revolutionary cadres).
On this day in 1918, Scheidemann proclaimed the new German Republic after the First World War. Hitler and a few early Nazis supporters organised their silly coup in Munich 1923, which was later mystified and re-enacted as the party foundation myths ('Blutopfer').

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[32] from: „Gut oder schlecht, mein Land hat Recht“, die ersten Wochen des 1. Weltkrieges an der Westfront. Berichte und Gedichte aus deutschen Tageszeitungen. Quoted from the radio broadcast of the same title.

Then the ominous 'Reichsprogromnacht' (often referred to as 'Reichskristallnacht') in 1938 and the day (or night) when the people broke through the Berlin Wall after many months of civil unrest in the former GDR.

Each of these days is fascinating material for further studies, which cannot be extended here.[33] Arguably, this could have been a suitable day for the new re-unified Germany after 1990, but no, the government at this time decided to choose October 3rd as a public holiday, the day when the GDR formally became part of the Bundesrepublik. A parliamentary act instead of a day of the people, which could have incorporated many of the contradictions of German history.

Another former public commemoration before unification took place was ritually held on June 17th (an uprising in the GDR in 1953). In Berlin, when the Wall was broken down, some unknown people altered the street name 'Straße des 17. Juni' into 'Straße des 9. November'. But this did not last long. A few days afterwards the then minister of home affairs, Wolfgang Schäuble, suggested that both parts of Germany should celebrate the 9th of November together. Immediately this caused adverse reactions. The chairman of the FDP, Otto Graf Lambsdorff expressed his concern, that this day permitted not only a commemoration of the 'Reichskristallnacht', but also the day of capitulation of the Germans after the First World War and Hitler's march towards the Feldherrenhalle in Munich in 1923. 'Die Gesamtkonstellation gefällt mir nicht', he added ('I do not like the general constellation'). More serious commentators requested not to mix up all those memorable dates, arguing that they should be remembered separately.

Similar difficulties can be documented in other fields of study: regional or local 'management' of history[34], exhibitions like the 'Wehrmachtsausstellung', the Goldhagen debate, the disconcerting discussions around the planned Holocaust memorial in Berlin etc. etc. All these reveal the difficulties Germans have with the contradictory components of their history. [35]

It is impossible to finish this section without at least a brief look at a few „lieux de memoire" in Germany: a vast field for studies and each investigation could be very meaningful in a local or national context.[36]

I have already referred to various instances in passing: the Dom of Cologne, the 'Hermannsdenkmal', the Kyffhäuser, the 'Völkerschlachtdenkmal' near Leipzig and so on. Such sites, being ritually visited by scores of schoolchildren and adults, must have had an enduring influence.[37] In a wider context, such a site of memory is the entire river Rhine.[38] When the Beatles once toured Germany, they were asked whether they were aware why it was so beautiful 'on the Rhine' (a reminiscence of the German saying 'warum ist es am

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[33] Cp. for instance Klaus Vondung, 'Revolution als Ritual', Der Mythos des Nationalsozialismus, in: 'Hier, hier ist Deutschland', Weimar 1997

[34] Heinz Schilling: 'Ortsjubiläen ohne Gedächtnis', Geschichte als Medium des lokalen Identitätsmanagements. In: 'Gedenktage', in: 'Geschichte Lernen', Nr. 49, 1996, p. 60 ff.

[35] 'Gedenktage', in: 'Geschichte Lernen', Nr. 49, 1996

[36] Who would disagree with Gavin Baldwin arguing 'that teachers who are serious about antiracist education must make explicit the influence on identity formation of the historical environment and explore the underlying prejudices that might be part of this process. In:'The intercultural identity of Europe: On living in an historical environment", p. 57

[37] Cp. the wonderful description of a public disclosure of a national monument in Heinrich Mann's 'Der Untertan', reprinted in 'Klassenbuch 2', 'Ein Lesebuch zu den Klassenkämpfen in Deutschland 1850 - 1919, Darmstadt 1972

[38] I am in complete agreement with Daniel Malbert 'Gedenkstätten: Von Frankreich bis Deutschland'

Rhein so schön'). The answer was bluntly that they didn't know, 'We were asleep'. Well, in the 19th century, people would have given a different reply, even Englishmen and Americans (like Mary Shelley, James F. Cooper, Mark Twain). On such continental tours, many of the images of 'Romantic Germany' would have been confirmed. For the people living on both sides of the river this was a different story. Friedrich von Schlegel, at home in both countries, pointed out: 'Hier wäre der Ort, wo eine Welt zusammenkommen...könnte' ('This could be a place where a whole world could gather').[39] Such blasphemous remarks were a challenge for the new German intellectuals like Ernst Moritz Arndt, who started a propaganda campaign in 1813 referring to the Rhine as 'Germany's river, not Germany's border' ('Teutschlands Strom, aber nicht Teutschlands Gränze'). This set off a mass tourist trade along the Rhine in the 19th century. Brentano and others wrote about the famous rock, the Loreley, and created the illusion of an ancient German saga around it. In 1840, Alphonse de Lamartine caused a wave of nationalist resentment on both sides of the river, both countries were on the brink of war. In Germany, a man called Nikolaus Becker reciprocated with the verses every German learnt by heart at least until the middle of the 20th century: 'Sie sollen ihn nicht haben, den freien deutschen Rhein...' ('They shall not have him, the free German Rhine'). Hugo, Dumas, Nerval did not hesitate to visit 'their' Rhine, expressing (Victor Hugo, 1840) how this river divided oaks from vine (tendril). What better place to visit today (with students or children) to do research together? Where else can one more promisingly demonstrate how a geographical region has united people over thousands of years, interrupted by many decades of arch-rivalry and mutual prejudices?

Today, approximately 2 million people visit the Germania in Niederwald (near Rüdesheim) annually, without enemy contact, but perhaps also without more enlightening information or activities. Superficially, the question where the Rhine belongs has become meaningless, but presumably the old allegories and emotions still reverberate in some minds. Historic traditions die hard and the longevity of myths should not be underestimated. They are passed on by word of mouth in families and leave undiscovered traces, at least I have often been confronted in school with most surprising, perhaps shocking revelations. They can easily be mobilised by cunning politicians, inciting 'national feelings' based on the prejudices deeply buried in collective history. All the more reason to take up the challenge and do local and regional research, perhaps bringing students from various countries together. Such 'lieux de memoire' like the Rhine (at diverse places) may serve as marvellous occasions to substitute half-forgotten myths with more reasonable attitudes. Similarly promising areas are the border regions between Denmark and Germany, the river Elbe, the Alps, ancient trade routes and many others.

The Twentieth Century: The Weimar Republic and the NS-Regime

During the 20th century, the construction of national myths took different, more compelling and refined forms. Politicians, their supporters and media experts developed more and better tricks to manipulate people in their direction. I don't think it is wrong to assume that no radical changes took place during the years of the Weimar Republic with regard to national myths, lieux de memoire etc. This may be due to the fact that the responsibility for the defeat had not been recognised (cp. the 'stab in the back' - legend). Germans did not have to face the negative repercussions of their history in all sincerity and the necessity of change was not yet obvious to the majority. This may be a curious argument, but in this respect the Treaty of Versailles was not compelling enough to instigate fundamental change. Socially, economically, and militarily, the same influential circles were still prominent after 1919. As far as I can see, the same old myths permeated in the influential circles, in schoolbooks and in the oral tradition of families.

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[39] Wolfgang Minaty, 'Rambos am Rhein', Zum Sängerkrieg zwischen Deutschland und Frankreich im 19. Jahrhundert, Rhein-Main Presse Journal, 4.10.1997

Stefan Breuer even claimed that national myths thrived during the Weimar Republic.[40] Some analysts went further and postulated an increase of the effectiveness of national mythology. Whereas during the Kaiserreich nationalism was an affair of the bourgeois classes, it now turned into a boundless mass phenomenon. For Ernst Jünger, the 'New Nationalism' was non-bourgeois, vivid, fiery and full of vitality.[41] This new dimension would be unthinkable without the emergence of the new media, urbanisation and mobility. Talking about Jünger, I cannot resist quoting at least from one of the books he edited: 'Mögen Tausende, mögen Missionen sterben, was bedeuten die Ströme dieses Blutes gegenüber diesem Staate, in den alle Unruhe und Sehnsucht des deutschen Menschen mündet und eingeht. In ihm lebt die mächtige Stimme der großen Wälder, die sich aus Millionen Grundstimmen zu einer Einheit von ewigem Wohlklang erhebt' ('Thousands, millions may die, what do these streams of blood mean in comparison to this state, in which all restlessness and longing of German people are united. In it lives the mighty voice of vast forests, rising to a unity of eternal harmony from the millions of individual voices'.[42]

Working class culture had developed quite apart from the dominant middle class and upper class ways of life under Bismarck (cp. the anti-socialist legislation and isolation of the labour party (SPD) or trade union movement. But the vast majority of the SPD had supported the war credit legislation in 1914 and had not taken part in any anti-war agitation between 1914 - 1918. A surprising history in itself: Large sectors of the working class had taken over the myths from above, socially speaking, and had tried to be 'good Germans' in bad times. This trend continued after 1918, which led to a split between the left parties (which again was exploited by Moscow to widen the gap between the Communists and the Social Democrats).[43]

The Communist revolution in Russia inserted another new element into the popular mythology in Weimar - Germany. Even though both countries co-operated in many ways (especially the armies), prejudices against the peoples of the East were enhanced by popular propaganda, in preparation of what happened in Word War II, so to speak. Across the Eastern border, the 'German question' meant for the Germans the re-occupation of land lost after the First World War. This was a direct threat to the Poles, all the more so since the Soviet Union agreed to limit Poland to her 'ethnic boundaries'. Political revisionism strengthened national myths and the need for it became a question of identity for many Germans. [44] In conjunction with the history of public racism, this turned into an explosive ideological mix.

Another relevant feature for Weimar was the development of what was called the 'Angestelltenkultur'[45] together with the 'Beamtenkultur' in the century after 1870. In Germany, the values behind them were based on the 'virtues' already known: obedience, efficiency, an orderly life and the acceptance of legality as a principle. The integration of codes of honour from the nobility into bourgeois ways of life continued. The universities played a significant part in this: The formerly liberal - progressive 'Burschenschaften' (student fraternities) had mutated into an elaborate 'old boy network' with strict and almost military

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[40] Stefan Breuer, 'Der Neue Nationalismus in Weimar und seine Wurzeln', in: 'Mythos und Nation', 1966, p. 257 ff.
[41] Breuer, ibid. p. 262
[42] Friedrich Georg Jünger:'Aufmarsch des Nationalismus', ed. by Ernst Jünger, Berlin, Vormarsch Verlag 1925, p. 65 ff., reprinted in E.Loewy: Literatur unterm Hakenkreuz, p. 81
[43] Modern research has been able to destroy the myth of the working classes, led by model socialists, largely resistent against conservative, racist or simply Nazi manipulation.
[44] More details in Immanuel Geiss, 'Die deutsche Frage 1806 - 1990', Mannheim 1992, p. 69 ff.
[45] siegfried Kracauer:'Die Angestellten', (1931), Verlag für Demoskopie, Allensbach 1959

perceptions of 'belonging'. Fighting a students' duel was a pre-requisite of advancement, this applied to drinking duels as well as actual fencing activities with sharp sabres. [46]The 'Schmiss' or 'Mensur', a scar on the cheek of the initiated as the result of a ritual duel, was interpreted as a sign of commendation and esteem, as a token of superiority as far as the lower classes were concerned. In positive terms, Germany fostered values like duty, loyalty, trust, a feeling of responsibility and observation of legal requirements. All these characteristics were mixed into a different stew than in other European countries, the German idea of being a 'Beamter' is certainly different from being a civil servant in Great Britain. The same holds true for the concept of 'Untertan' versus 'subject', or 'citizen' (citoyen) for instance. All this can easily be exaggerated, and perhaps the differences were not that marked after all, but neither can they be totally denied.

In brief, the Weimar Republic seemed to be a kind of interregnum between two phases of authoritarian rule (and two wars), at least in consideration of German identity questions. The first four years can be considered as a time of political and economic turmoil, worsened by the ignoble Versailles Treaty regulations. The last 3 years can be described as a transition to a dictatorial regime. Only in the years in between did Germany enjoy a life ostensibly democratic or pacific. It should be emphasised that the movement and success of National Socialism was not an unavoidable national destiny. First and foremost the social, economic and political circumstances have to be named to determine the general framework: the world recession, growing class conflicts and many unsolved international problems. All this was beyond the scope of what the majority of Germans were able to comprehend. The official policy of fulfilment and compromise during the twenties seemed to be imposed on the Germans rather than endorsed by them and as soon as the world depression struck, not only the political system, but also the official policy of reconciliation was denounced and finally rescinded. In the background, most of the items constituting identity for the Germans had survived unabated.[47]

As indicated above, the Twenties and Thirties of this century saw new forms and generally the proliferation of the mass media, providing new grounds for national liturgies.
As far as Germany was concerned, the Nazi propagandists, under the lead of Goebbels, initiated a kind of quantum leap here.[48]
Again, this would require the judgement of more experienced scholars in this field, but it seems to be correct to say that most of the elements of national identity from above were played upon during the Nazi years, only more rashly, in a more threatening manner. This holds true for
- the foundation myths of Germany,
- the martial virtues, including the readiness for sacrifice and a 'fight towards the end' attitude,
- while the praise of militaristic attitudes increased, so-called western European concepts of culture, civilisation and humanism were rejected,
- the combination of specific leadership - loyalty - ideals,
- the backward-looking, historic views,
- the pseudo-Romantic values,
- the contrast between Germany and the 'decadent West', including Great Britain, America, and France,
- the pre-supposition of national and racial superiority.

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[46] Norbert Elias, 'Studien über die Deutschen', Frankfurt 1998, p. 118 ff. and p. 134 – 150, p. 96 ff. describing the history of duels.
[47] The problem of 'continuity' from Bismarck to Hitler has often been discussed, for example in Wilhelm Alff: 'Materialen zum Kontinuitätsproblem der deutschen Geschichte', Frankfurt 1976, or Imanuel Geiss: ' Studien über Geschichte und Geschichtswissenschaft', Frankfurt 1972,
[48] Rainer Rother, 'Vom Kaiserreich bis in die fünfziger Jahre. Der deutsche Film'. in 'Mythen der Nationen - Völker im Film', 1998

Nazi-ideology, more than their forerunners, joined these items with racist prejudices, not a new feature at all, the history of European racism need not be repeated here. All in all, the Nazis were able to translate the national myths of the 19th century surprisingly fluently into their ideology - with most people unable to resist or contradict.

The Nazis took special pains to celebrate certain days, fascinating especially the young with their torch-parades, camps, marches, songs, heroic legends like the Horst Wessel cult. Every year, they more or less successfully re-enacted the 1923 putsch in Munich, which was, from a historian's point of view, actually a ridiculous affair.

Another intriguing train of thought is the growth of anti-intellectualism in Germany. One could refer back to the anti-French, anti-enlightenment and anti-civilisation campaigns in the 19th century. Perhaps a link could be established to the Romantic rejection of reasoning and logic. As far as I can see, one of the first clear signs of this can be related to Bismarck's Realpolitik. During his rule, a popular sentiment developed to belittle and ridicule intellectuals, mainly socialist and liberal ones. Leftist intellectuals occupied remote niches of society, they were almost treated as outcasts by the traditional élite or by the prosperous upper classes engaged in commerce. Wilhelm II had no sense at all for intellectual criticism of his regime.

During the Weimar Republic, this gap between certain strata in society seemed to have widened, even though the critical left became quite outspoken and acquired international repute. The Nazi movement with their rather unsophisticated 'Führer' had made an early commitment to racial struggle against (esp. left) intellectuals, relying on the infuriated populace (against republican democracy and critical reflections). Ernst Jünger, still very popular with conservative politicians today[49], was one of their literary heroes, not Bertold Brecht or Heinrich and Thomas Mann[50]. Later we will have to consider, whether this trend has continued.

On May 10th, 1933, books were burnt on a public pyre. The works of Heinrich Mann, Heinrich Heine, Tucholsky, Ossietzky, Remarque, Kästner, Karl Marx, Sigmund Freud and many other 'intellectuals' were thrown into the fire in a solemn ceremony. The 'new' literature of Nazi Germany had to be irrational, anti-intellectual and 'völkisch' (based on the people).[51] This is often interpreted as a neo-Romantic revolt against bourgeois society, without an understanding of its inner sources and rules. Fascism, of course, could not allow rational or truly scientific approaches: the brain is leading to the wrong track, said Gottfried Benn, he requested 'dream and ecstasy'. ('Das Gehirn ist ein Irrweg. Wir wollen den Traum. Wir wollen den Rausch').[52] Instead of 'a clever ratio', many people demanded virile feelings, with a fighting spirit ('...indem er der rechnenden, klugen und klügelnden Ratio, die immer wiederkehren wird, kampffreudiger das GEFÜHL entgegenstellt...').[53]

Apart from racism, Nazi ideology underscored the 'leadership principle' ('Führerprinzip') to legitimise their despotism and enforce the readiness of the people to go to

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[49] Helmut Kohl confessed his admiration of Jünger and often visited him.

[50] In the early stages of his career, Thomas Mann still confessed to be anti - democratic (as in 'Bekenntnis eines Unpolitischen', 1918), but he changed his mind quite radically later.

[51] Ernst Loewy: 'Literatur unterm Hakenkreuz', Frankfurt 1969, p. 34 ff.
The ritual invocations spoken while the books were burnt are telling examples of the ideological background on which this book burning took place.

[52] Gottfried Benn: 'Ithaka'. 1914. from: Franz Roth: 'Entartete Kunst', Hannover 1962, p. 109

[53] Hans Friedrich Blunck: ' Volkstum und Dichtung', in: Ernst Loewy, 'Literatur unterm Hakenkreuz', ibid., p. 46

war.[54] It is not difficult to detect the underlying current preparing for the acceptance of this principle. Misunderstood 'teutonic values' like the loyalty of a vasall, willingness to sacrifice oneself for a leader or a cause: Even though such features already existed before the First World War, they were made a cornerstone of the official ideology of the Nazis. Gerhard Schumann exclaimed in his 'Die Lieder vom Reich': 'Aus tausend Herzen brach der stumme Schrei: Den Führer! Knechte uns! Herr, mach uns frei!' (The silent cry broke from a thousand hearts: The Führer! Enslave us! Master (Lord), make us free!').[55] These lines epitomise the fateful combination of medieval allegiance, pseudo-Romantic imagery, religious implications and the master - slave pattern. It is hard to say to what degree such messages became part of the collective consciousness of Germans, partly they were simply bad propaganda, but undeniably they played a part in German history.

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[54] Needless to say, this 'Führerprinzip' looked a lot different in reality, the NS - state was by no means a hierarchically structured and efficient political or economic system. But this is how most people even today have learnt to look at it. When being asked about this, about 95 % of our pupils would most probably believe in this myth.
[55] Gerhard Schumann: 'Die Lieder vom Reich.', München 1935, p. 11 f., reprinted in Loewy:'Literatur unterm Hakenkreuz', p. 242
The passionately masochistic relationship to power is magnificently elucidated in Heinrich Mann's 'Der Untertan'.

Further speculations: the development of German 'national psychology'

It may be advisable to stop at this point and reconsider some of the findings so far from a different angle. Can we determine certain trends that help to answer the 'German' questions raised at the beginning?

I am aware that this is a dubious line of thought, but at the moment I am inclined to take the risk and apply a few psychological explanations to answer the 'German identity questions' (until 1945). To me, some of the parallels between the psychology of individuals and nations are certainly surprising.

Questions of identity occur when human beings enter a teleological discussion about themselves individually and collectively, they reflect our desire and need for 'meaning': Where do I come from? Where will I go? Who am I? All explanations we find are mental constructions serving our purposes (or not). The result is a network of interrelated judgements about meaning establishing a sense of 'being oneself'. In times of crises, identity questions seem to acquire special urgency and the answers often resemble hectic emergency solutions rather than carefully considered schemes. In times of growing uncertainty, the religious or mythological dimensions creep in more forcefully. The more pressing the problems are, they more 'fuzzy' the perceptions and the imagery become.[56]
All this seems to be true for both individuals and nations.
(1) A mature 'identity' implies the acceptance of oneself or 'being at one with oneself', which is based on the following conditions:
(2) the possibility to accept borderlines between oneself and others, one's own ambitions or desires and those of other persons,
(3) the ability and readiness to take up responsibility for one's actions, especially in times of conflict,
(4) the ability and readiness to accept contradictions in one's self and in one's ideals and to bear the resulting tensions ('mature ambivalence' as a pre-condition of the ability to love),
(5) the ability and readiness to accept such contradictions and tensions in others, too, and to enter a dialogue between equals,
(6) in social terms, this results in a willingness to compromise and to react flexibly.

In this sense, a mature personality has obtained the ability to establish relationships with others.[57] If maturity has not been achieved, more violent solutions of problems tend to be more likely. With regard to human adolescents, this often entails a 'prolonged period of initiation', occasionally involving visions of one's own omnipotence.
It is certainly amazing at first sight, to realise the similarities between the processes behind individual and national identity (applied to the 'German questions'):

(1) How many nation states in the period under scrutiny were 'at one with themselves'? Perhaps Germany is one of the least likely candidates. Finding their national identity, as illustrated above, was a rather painful and contradictory process. 'Modernisation' took place at an accelerated pace and the inner tensions accompanying this development were diverted by imperialist policies. Some historians have claimed that the ruling classes under Wilhelm II have committed suicide in order to prevent death, implying that they subconsciously felt they were doomed, and there are striking indications for this. Already in 1895 / 96, the top military men were warned that the Schlieffen - plan was bound to fail and that the result would be a devastating world war with incalculable risks. They pursued their objectives despite all reason, thus hastening their decline as an elite having become outdated in a modern, capitalist world.[58]

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[56] I am referring here to Gavin Baldwin's article on 'The intercultural identiy of Europe...", ibid. p.58
[57] These remarks are based on a seminar in our school, conducted by the psychologist Dr. Lensinger - Bohleber in March 1994
[58] New documents found in former GDR - archives have given further evidence for this.

(2) The first item raises the question of 'maturity' of most politicians (and military people) all around the world. Not many seem to have the strength and wisdom to balance out manifold diverging interests and continuously adjust individual perspectives. Nationalist policies, whether the policy of revenge of the French after 1871, British imperialist ambitions in South Africa around the turn of the century or the 'Lebensraum' - ideology of the Nazis, have never been a sign of 'mature identity'. On the contrary, they may be interpreted as signals for tensions within one's borders. Would it be legitimate to say that Germany until 1945 was particularly vulnerable and 'immature'? The policies of Wilhelm II and his private behaviour may be seen in this light, and the biography of Nazi leaders also provide a lot of food for thought in this direction.[59] Apart from this, the silly plots and intrigues to win certain tracts of land for one nation would fall into this category.

(3) Accepting responsibilities, especially after a defeat or personal blunders, is not easy for anyone. The German leaders responsible for both world wars were particularly bad at this. An unequivocal example is the legend of the 'Dolchstoß' (stab in the back). The more unrealistic and fantastical one's 'wishful thinking', the more people will be frustrated when they have to face reality like a brick wall in front of them. Under such circumstances they tend to direct their wrath against official scapegoats. During the Weimar Republic, these were mainly the democrats like Walther Rathenau or Matthias Erzberger or Communists like Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht. More and more, right wing fury was also channelled against Jews, too. As soon as the Nazis acquired the monopoly of power, they were in a position to control, guide and release public anger against their public enemies.[60]

(4) Politicians, being confronted with public expectations all the time and feeling the need to maintain an image of oneself in public, may not easily accept contradictions. Germany as a nation has probably struggled more violently with such issues. Dissenters, outsiders, eccentrics or political renegades have been blamed and pursued perhaps more aggressively than elsewhere. Behind this may stand the assumption that a nation must be a complete unity with her members serving diligently and obediently. In essence, this may be a Romantic vision, but linked with the history of 'following orders' and 'being loyal' to the legal institutions. 'Nestbeschmutzer' ('nest fouler') is a popular term even today. The debate about the 9th of November (as a possible national day) is another case in point.

(5) The black - and - white image of oneself is just one side of the coin. Other nations are judged in a similarly narrow-minded way. Contradictions in others are interpreted as signs of weaknesses which have to be exploited. Many politicians have a pseudo - Darwinist explanation for such attitudes and the fascists have certainly been examples of this.

(6) Were German politicians more than others unable to compromise and react flexibly? The argument could be convincing, because the policies of 'risk all' or 'ultimate defeat', totalitarian rule and annihilation of opponents were more obvious in the Germany of the past than in other countries. The word 'compromise' was often considered as alien to German politics. If something has been realised as being right, it should be carried out, no matter the resistance. Again this is a 'Romantic' view of politics, not flexible enough for reality. However, this was simply a camouflage strategy, as long as people believed in such notions, the ruling classes were left undisturbed. Like elsewhere, the national identity myths served as a 'legitimisation' of power politics. At the same token, one could easily mention instances of this in all nations. 'Right or wrong, my country' was not a German invention. From a Freudian point of view, the avoidance of conflict and 'delegation of responsibility' may be interpreted as the attempt to get rid of the super - ego, an agent to affect our conscience. In Germany, the psychological strategies of projection and

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[59] I am especially reminded of Röhl's research about the Kaiser and the Hitler - biographies by Alan Bullock, Fest and, more recently, Ian Kershaw. More than other historians, Kershaw carefully investigates the ambiguous connections between a family history and the social or political circumstances. Hitler is viewed as a result of the contemporary constellations.

[60] Norbert Elias, 'Studien über die Deutschen', Frankfurt 1998, p. 198 f.

identification, of sublimation and repression (of conscience, too) may have been more common than in other countries.

Can national conditions be metaphorically compared to something like a 'state of health' or psychological development? Let me add one more speculation:
Germany has functioned as a country of transmission and transit between East and West, between North and South. This may be related to a volatile trait of character in Germany: the tension between a kind of inferiority complex with regard to South and West (the ancient civilisations, modern industrial societies based on parliamentary government) and a superiority complex with regard to the (Slavic) East.[61] Such a psychological split may also be discovered in most nations, but only the German predicament is under investigation here.

To conclude this line of thought, the comparisons within the framework of a 'national psychology' are very risky, relying on stereotypes. Bits of evidence can be found for almost anything. Even though I would remain sceptical, I cannot deny that the parallels between psychological findings and national identity are intriguing.

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[61] Norbert Elias, 'Studien über die Deutschen', (1992), Frankfurt 1998, p. 82 ff., especially concerning the national inferiority complex

Germany today: the quest of identity continues

The final part of this paper is the most controversial of all, especially since recent and future trends are difficult to assess and anticipate.
The first relevant question has to be, whether the political changes of the last 50 years have laid a fundamentally new basis for identity or not.
This has been debated intensively and definite conclusions are impossible.
I will try to get a few ideas together and concentrate on three levels:

- ♦ Has 1945 been a watershed for 'German identity'?
- ♦ Have the old myths survived and new ones been constructed?

- ♦ How should we interpret events during and after unification in 1990?
- ♦ Have the Germans reached an entirely new stage?

- ♦ Has globalisation created new circumstances and has a national identity become obsolete? Do the rules of the markets, the new media, the global involvements dictate what will happen in the future?

Long before the end of the war, the allies were once again confronted with the odd 'German questions' (s.a.): Who are these Germans? Where do they belong or what shall we do with them, with the guilty and the less guilty ones? Roosevelt proposed the partition of the former Reich into four or five separate self-governing states, so that Germany could never again become a major power in Europe (at the Teheran Conference of November 1943), but historic necessities soon pointed in different directions. The Germans were confronted with their past, some of them were tried and punished, many were exposed to an exceptional re-education programme.[62]

From the German point of view, entire generations had a vested interest in drawing a line between Nazi - Germany and the FRG, the key - words were 'Kahlschlag' (clear -cutting of the ground) 'Stunde Null' ('zero hour', and 'democratisation', implying that everything can begin from scratch, without historic burdens).[63] New foundation myths were created and all nationalistic overtones radically avoided. Critical investigations into the intricate relationships between past and present have been extremely painful and continue to rake the minds of generations. The history of German identity after 1945 is a history of (psychological) repression. During the 'Historikertag' in 1998 (!), German historians have started, some say for the first time in earnest, to discuss the role historians and history (teaching) have played before 1945. As the protestations around the 'Wehrmachtsausstellung' recently showed, the realisation of past atrocities can take many forms and by no means solved German identity questions.

Perhaps the responsibilities for the wars and the Holocaust especially can and should never become 'solved' (in German the word 'aufgearbeitet' is a very ambivalent one). This would mean that the Germans should never have an identity unless they accepted the challenge of permanent and conscious confrontation with their past, which requires the 'maturity' of coping with contradictions. By the way, every nation should do this, but there is a special urgency for such scrutiny in Germany.

As Professor Münkler (Berlin) and other specialists pointed out convincingly, some of the dangerous new myths in the West relied on assumptions like:

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[62] Cp. John Ardagh's chapter on schools (p. 204 ff.) in 'Germany and the Germans'
[63] A typical case of what the Germans call 'Verdrängung'. The German word has different connotations than the English word from the Freudian terminology ('repression').

- crime was committed in the name of the German people, but not by the Germans collectively,
- 'we' in the West have proved by our 'philo-semitism' after 1945 that we have changed: German - Israeli co-operation as a fig - leaf? We have also demonstrated by public confessions, the establishment of memorial sites etc. that we have been mentally 'cleansed'.
- 'We' in the West have become scapegoats, too, made responsible for something we personally did not do. Some people took over this 'Opferrolle' (the role or part to sacrifice oneself), some others rejected it, like many young people who did not live in Nazi Germany.[64]

On the other hand a lot has changed after 1945, the shock was profound. The Cold War, however, enforced a speedy integration of two separate Germanies into a new world order. On both sides of the border, the Germans had to 'function' quickly, and 'de-nazification' had to come to a halt (with some significant exceptions). The 'Wirtschaftswunder' in the West enhanced this development and made it easier to forget. A new myth of resistance was developed, with the conservative movement of the Kreisauer Kreis and the attempted assassination of Hitler on July 20th in the centre. For many, National Socialism was a tragic accident in history that could have happened anywhere and the lessons from history, both from Weimar and the Third Reich, had been successfully taken.

The student revolt after 1966 helped to break up this surface again and since then the debate of what the Germans learnt from the past has continued more openly.[65] Travellers of Germany will hardly find people still sticking to the imperial, militaristic modes of behaviour. In the Kaiserreich, the most revered civilians looked like army officers, 'schneidig' was a popular word for this (dashing, resolute, courageous) and many young ladies cast their eyes on such figures, genuine or not. Such role models seem to be completely 'out' these days, open for satire and ridicule. John Ardagh, in his very informative book on 'Germany and the Germans'[66], even finds this country a 'very pleasant and easy country to travel and work in'. His analysis underscores tendencies only vaguely reminding us of previous traditions: 'The Germans are more methodical but less innovative than the French: there is endless talk, and even some violence, but constructive reforms and changes take place in so muted and legalistic a way that it is much harder to spotlight them than in France with its penchant for pioneering and confrontation.'

In Eastern Germany, the Moscow oriented Communists were quickly set in control and only very few political trials were organised to prove that an entirely new phase in history had begun. Many former Nazis 'disappeared' in the new SED and proved very useful for the reorganisation of state and party. Here, authoritarian rule has continued almost without a break.[67] This may help to explain some of the outbreaks of violence in the new Länder after 1992.

In contrast with the FRG in the West, Eastern Germany was directed to believe in different foundation myths and different explanations of the past. Concerning National Socialism, the holocaust was only mentioned in passing, the emphasis in history teaching was laid on the resistance movement of the Communists. The heroic struggle of Communists, allied with the Soviet Union, was given the most prominent place, not, for example, an analysis of how the system worked or the role of racism in German history.

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[64] Prof. Herfried Münkler in his lecture 'Political Myths and Collective Identity', in Weimar during the seminar on 'Erstarrte Zeitgeschichte: Mythen als Form historischen Erinnerns', May 1998

[65] Norbert Elias, 'Studien über die Deutschen', Frankfurt 1998, the chapter on 'Der bundesdeutsche Terrorismus - Ausdruck eines sozialen Generationskonflikts', p. 300 ff., esp. p. 306 ff.

[66] John Ardagh, 'Germany and the Germans', Penguin, London 1988, p.3

[67] These brief comments are based on a number of conferences we were able to attend recently and we have benefited tremendously by the co - operation with the Thuringian institute of teachers training.

The memorial at Buchenwald is a renowned example for such a construction of history, it has to be seen to be believed.[68] Jews or other religious minorities were hardly mentioned, resistance movements were only referred to if linked with the Communists. Significantly, when talking about this period, the GDR officials spoke of 'Fascism', not of 'National Socialism' or the 'NS - regime'. Fascism was treated as a result of monopoly capitalism which had successfully manipulated the working classes, including the Social Democrats. And finally the preconditions of Fascism had been defeated by the Communist working classes in Eastern Europe during the Second World War - this is how Communists spokesmen explained their 'revolution'. During the war, it was claimed, the main enemy of Fascism was Soviet Communism, who had to take the brunt of military attacks. Contrary to that , Western democracies reacted with hesitation and were not suffering as much from the war as the Soviet Union. This was the ideological justification for the belief that the GDR had little or nothing to do with Hitler, since a completely new chapter in history had been opened: the capitalist system as a basis of Fascism had been liquidated and the heroic Communist freedom fighters had done their best to defeat a devilish regime. The ones who remained to be guilty had (mysteriously) gathered in the other part of Germany, in the 'Bundesrepublik'. This is why the Federal Republic was impelled to accept the responsibilities for the past the Communists had overcome. In reality, the German Communists being infiltrated from Moscow after 1945 had deliberately integrated the majority of NSDAP party members (and especially the uprooted and disoriented youths) into their movement. Thus they were able to take advantage of people who had already been 'streamlined' or made familiar with party ideologies and the persecution of dissenters. The 'authoritarian personality', traits of character in people who had been manipulated to accept anything from above in the political hierarchy, was very welcome for a party trying to build up a new totalitarian system. There was nothing like the Western anti-authoritarian movement in the Sixties and Seventies, most people we have talked to asserted that the authoritarian tradition continued in Eastern Germany almost without an intermission.
In this context it has to be admitted immediately that the role of the so-called student rebellion may be interpreted from different perspectives, too. It would certainly be misleading to simply name it as an example of a (successful) remedy against authoritarian structures in the West.[69]

This illustrates, in the necessary brevity, that both Germanies have made strikingly different experiences after 1945, with a few similarities but with opposing foundation myths. Apart from what we can gather from the news, we have been familiarised with the problems of integration of the East by our colleagues around Weimar. And we have been left with less than optimism as far as our common future is concerned.[70] Some of the almost forgotten features of German identity still seem to loom somewhere in the attic of the newly reconstructed house called Germany.

Many specialists have argued during the seminars we have attended that the 19th century myths may be considered dead now and indeed, in school we do not hear much anymore about the Nibelungen or Kaiser Barbarossa (there is little time for such side-issues in class anyway). No youngster would even dream of obtaining a 'Schmiss' or 'Mensur' as a scar of honour, even though the topical art of piercing may vaguely resemble this ritual of self-mutilation. Has the former 'German question' been solved on a European scale?

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[68] Many specialists have expounded on these GDR-myths: Dr. Joachim Köppner, Prof. Leo, Prof. John (seminar 'Erstarrte Zeitgeschichte...', Weimar 1998, or Dr. Schroeder, Dr. Jander and Prof. Rabehl during the seminar 'Stationen deutscher Teilung' in Vacha, January 1999
[69] Cp. Norbert Elias: 'Der bundesdeutsche Terrorismus ...' in 'Studien über die Deutschen', Frankfurt/M. 1989.
[70] The seminar on 'Bildungswandel in Europa',(Königstein i.T., September 1998), with many exciting speakers from Eastern Europe, has revealed similar problems of adaptation and integration there.

The cornerstones of German national identity as summarised on the pages 11 and 20 have certainly been eroded or have almost disappeared: I have not heard anybody refer of 'arch-rivalry with the French' (or even 'Erbfeindschaft') in recent decades. Martial values only persist in limited or isolated right-wing circles or in sections of the Bundeswehr (which is dangerous enough), they are not shared by the majority of young people at all, rather the contrary is true. There is a firm neutralist or even pacifist trend in Germany, it seems that the politicians have to lure the Germans into accepting their 'new political role', as they say in public, and they justify this new commitment by referring to the expectations of the UN and the NATO allies. At the moment, the Bundewehr is conceived as a 'citizens' army, based on conscription rather than professionalism. Conscripts can do their service either in barracks or as 'conscientious objectors', helping out in organisations devoted to charity or in environmental projects, for instance, and a large proportion of young Germans choose the latter option.

The German police has also learnt a few lessons (especially during and after the wave of terrorism in the Seventies) in recent decades and presents itself in a much more civil way. Isolated cases of rough-handling suspects or pulling the triggers too readily certainly even occur in most 'civilised' countries, perhaps even less frequently in Germany than elsewhere. From the Kaiser's days until the early decades of the GDR, the police were used like an army and kept up a high profile in German streets, but this is no longer true for the Nineties of this century.

Backward-looking, historic views are not very common either, we cannot say that Germany hosts more racists than other countries and only a few people today would still claim a German 'cultural superiority' against a 'decadent West'. But it would be wrong to deny certain anti-American views in this connection.[71] 'Like other German obsessions', John Ardagh claims, 'it seems to come and go in waves, and it is strongly tinged with emotionalism, irrationality, even petulance - almost the feeling of a spoilt child for its parent.'

Furthermore it may be added that nowadays new traits of collective identity rule in the (young) people's minds: The world of blue jeans, Hollywood movies, fast food, video games, the Internet and Western music have probably outpaced the experiences we have discussed so far.

Modern life is characterised by a different search for meaning, a more egotistic one, a desperate chase of the elusive 'I'.[72] This is nonetheless a quest of identity, perhaps pursued the more frantically the more historic models disappear or prove to be inacceptable. Identity, we have said, always becomes more important in times of crisis, and that is exactly where we are. Formerly, people have imagined a 'unity with one's nation or community', but this does not seem to be a suitable aim anymore. What remains is the search of oneself as an individual which Kierkegaard has described as the desperate desire to be oneself and not to be oneself.
When we look at pictures, we immediately look for ourselves. As soon as we have found us, we tend to be disappointed and express our critical distance to ourselves. We are not at ease (or 'at home') with ourselves.

If this trend has been observed correctly, then the questions of collective identity have to be re-phrased. The German questions, especially after 1990, have become an integrated part of the European or even the global dimensions. The German philosopher Peter Sloterdijk has gone further with his claim that nations are simply 'communities under stress', and stressful situations have to be continuously re-enacted and celebrated in order to be meaningful for the people. The so-called post-modern future, however, is no longer fixed on

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[71] Cp. John Ardagh, 'Germany and the Germans', ibid. p. 451 ff., the following quotation is taken from p. 454
[72] Prof. Peter Gross, 'Ich-Jagd, Sinnsuche, Selbstverwirklichung, Selbsterlösung', TV - lecture ('Tele-Akademie'), SW, Nov. 22nd, 1998

national paranoia, international networks take the tensions away and modern bourgeois society has imprinted different codes in our minds, the codes of competition, of securing one's pensions, of surviving the rat race around us. The nation as an entity forged by destiny to organise a mass society in times of stress - such a necessity does no longer exist, Sloterdijk suggests.[73] What is left is a vibrant market of relationships, in Germany we find our jobs and partners, a 'genital ecosystem', he satirically adds. Fukuyama has even proclaimed 'the end of history', perhaps just like Napoleon's dictum above. One's nation may be a society of 'language addicts', those dependent on speaking the same language with ease, a convenient basis of communication, but little else. Capitalism is the root of our culture, no longer national values or images.[74] It is an economic game of win and lose with little regard for the losers. So-called civilian virtues, like a sense of duty, loyalty, a certain obedience etc. will no longer be upheld by future generations.[75]

It is impossible to foresee what print modern capitalism may leave on social, cultural and human relationships. The topical watch-word is 'post-modern', implying that almost everything is possible but nothing compulsory. Marital relationships are based on contracts subject to change. In England (February 1999) a couple was wed on the basis of a computer analysis, organised by a media company. The first time they met was in church, and the basis of their decision to get married was a contract binding them for a number of years.

Employees have to take up and leave jobs flexibly just like business connections change their nature with little guarantee for the future. Youngsters tell us about party-going these days: They like to come and go, stay for a little while and leave without any commitments, not even to the hosts. Something like a corporate identity may well be wishful thinking in an age of rapidly changing conditions. Fewer people today seem to feel obliged to actively support their local institutions, their schools, their relatives, their country. Perhaps this is a trend only in Germany, but I suspect that thanks to Margaret Thatcher at least Great Britain, too, has developed in this direction. What does this mean for 'national identity'? At any rate, such tendencies always create counter-movements and the need of any individual to belong somewhere will continue.

All this remains to be seen. So far, most future prognostications have proved to be largely wrong. Furthermore, there are many reasons for being prudent:
- Identity questions will always remain central issues as long as human beings require a meaning of themselves and a sense in life. Being at ease ('at one') with oneself will consequently lead to questions of living together with others, especially since the need for community experiences has always been strong in human history. Images of 'US' are integral components of my images of 'ME'.[76] It has been argued that nothing identifies a German so much as this search for his identity (which does not automatically mean 'patriotic feeling') and this may raise the question whether this can be considered an asset or a handicap. Many young Germans, perhaps increasingly, regard this more as a disadvantage, something disturbing their sense of identity.

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[73] Peter Sloterdijk, ' Der starke Grund, zusammen zu sein', Erinnerungen an die Erfindung des Volkes. In: 'Die Zeit' Jan. 2nd, 1998, p. 9 ff.
[74] Dieter Claessens, 'Kapitalismus als Kultur', Düsseldorf 1973
[75] Nowadays letters like the following one by Mozart's father, written in 1778, only cause feelings of wonder and ridicule:
'Ihre Hochfürstlich Gnaden! Hochwürdigster des heil:Röm: Reichs Fürst! Gnädigster LandsFürst und Herr Herr! Euer Hochfürstl. Gnaden lege ich mich unterthänigst zu Füssen ... als empfehle ich mich Euer Hochfürstl: Gnaden demüthigst und ersterbe in tiefster Unterwerffung
Euer Hochf: Gnaden meines Gnadigsten LandesFürsten und Herrn Herrn unterthänigster und gehorsamster Leopold Mozart.
printed in Norbert Elias, 'Studien über die Deutschen', (1992), Frankfurt 1998, p. 39
[76] Norbert Elias, 'Studien über die Deutschen', Frankfurt 1998, p. 197

- Modern forms of togetherness (like pop concerts or soccer matches), providing collective sensations, are not sufficient substitutes for such 'handicaps'. Even when young people, unaware of their 'Germanness', travel abroad, they become conscious of their being different very soon. Often, especially when victimised for being German, they react with dismay and confusion. The reaction is frequently a return to something 'national', something offering a line of defence. Will the continuing shame about Nazism, even if unconscious, and the wariness over questions of national identity and pride ease as the years go by? Can a more developed sense of European identity accelerate this process?[77]

- Surely we have to be sceptical about the view of individuals as 'free-wheeling' independent persons, able to make conscious decisions about what they would like to be or identify with. Whether we like it or not, we will always remain members of families, groups, peoples. Our languages and cultures determine and limit our outlooks and perceptions. They more we attempt to deny our historic ties, the less we are able to understand the multitudinous forms of dependence - and ourselves. Consequently, the self-assurance often observed (on the surface) of many youths today may be a dangerous delusion. Neo - Nazi activity today is neither simply a nostalgic backlash nor only based on economic and social problems in the new Eastern states of Germany, especially unemployment.

- Similar problems occur at home, the problems of multi-cultural societies, whether 'melting pot', 'mosaic' or 'salad bowl' do not have to be described here. Various religious and cultural roots may easily clash in cosmopolitan areas. Most metropolitan cities around the world have quarters with one 'subculture' only. Some parts of Berlin represent the second largest Turkish city world-wide and the Kurdish population in Germany is three times as large as all the other Kurds in Europe together. Given a variety of problems other than ethnic, unemployment for example, this may easily erupt into forms of civil war.

- In times of crisis, we have said repeatedly, the need of a collective identity increases. And whenever there is a need for symbols or myths providing elements of such identity, they will be found. Nothing is easier than to take the ready-made imagery of the past. The neo-Nazis of Germany today still believe in the same old stories. When confronted with arguments about history, they often simply deny the existence of such sites like Auschwitz or they claim that so many millions could not have been killed, that the gas ovens were not big enough etc. etc. In reality, they are still proud of 'being Aryan', they admire Nazi leaders or people like Hindenburg, Bismarck and Nietzsche (not knowing much about either, especially the latter). They still are leadership-oriented, ready for sacrifice and fighting, anti-foreign and anti-intellectual. They comment on people discussing 'contradictions' in German history with words like 'these are flabby intellectuals' ('schlappe Intellektuelle') and 'they only keep on babbling' ('die labern bloß herum'). When talking about the outcome of the last war, they often say that this could only be discussed on racial terms.[78] For those people, certainly a minority, little has changed. And presumably, even though they would not know much about this, they would endorse the (neo-Romantic) 'German' desire for 'wholeness' and 'clear conditions' (a poor translation of 'klare Verhältnisse', a term disguising the delegation of responsibilities, often to whatever leader is available).

- It is very hard to actually dissect the relics of the traditions labelled above, but perhaps the contrast between the Germans' passion for orderliness and their tendency towards romanticism, irrationality and - at the end of this spectrum - extremism has not been entirely overcome yet. But we are working on it and a few glances at the schoolbooks of

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[77] John Ardagh expresses his confidence 'that the troubled Germans will finally find their escape from Nietzsche's "hidden path to chaos", ibid. p. 459

[78] Matthias Apel, ' Zum Auftreten neofaschistischer Jugendlicher, ein Augenzeugenbericht', in: 'Ästhetik und Kommunikation', 'Faschistische Öffentlichkeit', Kronberg 1976, p. 78

German pupils and students may offer ample evidence to the contrary. Still, many foreign visitors seem to sense these traits of national character in the Germans or our age. [79]

■ Another observation has, over the years, increased my scepticism about the theories of 'new dimensions of identity': It is always amazing how children or adolescents argue when working on such issues. The majority is comparatively well-informed about the wars and the holocaust, and still almost all of them repeat such assertions that during the NS - period people could feel safe in the streets, that Hitler overcame the depression by building the Autobahnen, that his foreign policies were not so bad until 1939 and so on. How can this be explained? I hope to get more convincing answers during our project year and our course in Weimar. Very tentatively, I believe that the (oral) traditions in families and between generations are far more influential than we have assumed in the past. The desires to whitewash collective histories are strong and traditional lies and legends are eagerly taken up and passed on by word of mouth 'through the grapevine'. One need not look into respective web sites on the Internet to realise the meaning of this. On the other hand the underlying patterns in modern youth cultures are by no means 'nationalist'. Even German skinheads and other groups ready to commit violent acts cannot be categorised easily alongside traditional socio - political patterns. A lot of their behaviour can be explained by conventional social and psychological research: the desire to distinguish themselves, to form gangs, to provoke, to adhere to dichotomic views, to attract attention etc.[80]

■ As far as the two former Germanies are concerned, we have to admit particular intricacies. The Communists of the SED (at least after the Seventies) have re-claimed traditional values and heroes in their attempts to stabilise 'socialist' identity dilemmas. Martin Luther, Frederik I of Prussia, Bismarck, Prussian civilian virtues etc. achieved far greater appraisal than in the West. The Prussian 'Stechschritt' (military goose step) was exercised by the army and to be disciplined was one of the major pre-conditions of a good socialist. In school, direct instructions were preferred to whole-class or group activities and anyway, the outcome of discussions had to be the one prescribed by the party. It will take a long time to change these conditions.[81]

■ The solution of the 'German questions' through European integration may well work, but it should be observed carefully. Hagen Schulze, among others, has suggested that this may be interpreted as an attempt to escape the complications of German national identity.[82] In his latest book he also adds that the history of this continent will have to be told continuously and that we need the struggle for Europe in order to avoid complacent indifference.[83] And what role may 'globalisation' play in this? Once again we cannot be sure that this development will solve identity issues. It is a very paradoxical process and while people enjoy Thai food and drink Spanish Sangria until they pass out on Spanish beaches, they return home with even more prejudices. They observe and take over

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[79] John Ardagh certainly does in 'Germany and the Germans' (p. 5 ff.) and he also refers to the chapter 'The Mutable Germans' of the book 'The Impossible Europeans' (1983) by Luigi Barzin. Ardagh also admits that 'The Germans are changing...', no longer waiting patiently for the green light to appear at a crossing when the roads are clear (p. 411).

[80] Klaus Farin / Eberhard Seidel - Pielen: 'Skinheads', München 1997; Wilfried Ferchhoff / Uwe Sander / Ralf Vollbrecht (ed.): 'Jugendkulturen - Faszination und Ambivalenz. Einblicke in jugendliche Lebenswelten. Weinheim / München 1995.
„but I like it", Jugendkultur und Popmusik, ed. by Dieter Kemper et al., Stuttgart 1998

[81] Cp. 'Schwieriges Erbe: Der Umgang mit Nationalsozialismus und Antisemitismus in Österreich, der DDR und der Bundesrepublik Deutschland. Frankfurt/New York 1995, ed. by Werner Bergmann, Rainer Erb, Albert Lichtblau, Schriftenreihe des Zentrums für Antisemitismusforschung Berlin, Band 3

[82] Hagen Schulze: 'Staat und Nation in der europäischen Geschichte', München 1994, p. 329

[83] Hagen Schulze: 'Phoenix Europa', Berlin 1998, p. 515

fragments of different cultures without leaving their snug native cocoons.[84] In September 1998, I found an interesting (in many respects very one-dimensional and inconsistent) 'Weekly Analysis' in the Internet, entitled 'Global Intelligence Update, Red Alert. European Forecast: The Re-emergence of the German Problem'. In brief it prognosticated a revival of German domination in many parts of Europe, especially the East, after a future withdrawal of the USA from this continent and a re-grouping of alliances. Russia, the political analysts imagine, will overcome her current crisis and thus the pressure (perhaps on a pan-Slavic basis) will increase on the Baltic and Balkan states. Germany, the authors continue, will have to face this challenge and her international role will consequently become more active. This will finally be interpreted as a modern variation of German Imperialism in many countries. Under these circumstances, the 'German question' would be on the agenda again.[85]

■ Sometimes it seems that the younger German generations indeed carry the burden of our history in more than one sense. Something like 'civil courage' ('Zivilcourage'), the stamina to stand up and say no to something regarded as dangerous, does not seem to be a common feature in our schools. I wonder whether this is different in France, Sweden, Slovakia or England. In the autumn of 1998, French pupils and students were very actively expressing their dissatisfaction in manifestations of various sorts. In Germany, the pressure on students is similar, conditions of learning are generally criticised, but a wave of solidarity and protest can hardly be expected. People complain about anything, but finally they expect the state, the government, the authorities to solve their problems (and luckily they are allowed to occasionally vote), the readiness to commit oneself to a public cause is rather limited. Can we detect characteristics of German history in this or do we have to acknowledge some post-modern principles at work?

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[84] Cp. Ulrich Beck (ed.): 'Politik der Globalisierung. Perspektiven der Weltgesellschaft.' Fankfurt/M. 1998, or: Christoph Hennig: 'Die Mythen des Tourismus', in 'Die Zeit', July 25th, 1998, p.47 ff.
[85] From: alert@stratfor.com, Weekly Analysis, September 8th, 1998. http://www.sanitizer.com/
Stratfor Systems, Inc. Austin, TX 78701, USA

German Identity – Thesis statements

1) Most modern analysts claim that the seemingly outdated myths constituting former nationalist identity in Germany are no longer relevant. Despite a lot of evidence in this direction I would be more cautious. Right wing nationalist movements today are increasing their influence, even in Germany. Whenever there is a need for myths, people will find some. In this case, the usage of old nationalist beliefs may serve this purpose just as well as other, more modern varieties. A lot of the more clever nationalists in Germany today have proved quite flexible, esp. in their use of modern media and the subtle infiltration of certain youth groups like Skinheads. But it seems that many of the older myths are still part of the ideology of German nationalists. This can be demonstrated by many examples.

2) Generally speaking, it appears that Germany has fewer problems with nationalists than other Western countries, as can be demonstrated by polling results. But Germans have got lots of reasons to be especially careful. The two parts of Germany have not been mentally, socially, culturally and economically united yet. This process will still take a long time. In Western Germany, however, democratic ways of life have settled quite securely. It is certainly impressive that even with about 10 % unemployment over many years now, there was no rightist backlash.

3) As far as Eastern Germany is concerned, things are very difficult. Our friends in Thuringia have illustrated their difficulties of transition very forcefully. This applies not only to the well publicised attacks of Skinheads against 'aliens' or asylum seekers, but also to the whole teaching sector. Many former Communists still occupy essential positions and teaching methods are still shaped by 'socialist standards'.

4) The integration of Western Germany into the European Union has helped a great deal to overcome isolationist or nationalist revivals. It is quite possible that the same could happen to the Eastern part of Germany, but as mentioned above, it will take quite a number of years.

5) The enlargement of the European Union to Eastern Europe has been recognised as an essential precondition for further progress on our continent. This development should be envisaged as a united effort of all the cultures and peoples involved, not simply as an 'integration' of another series of countries. Concerning Germany, this process will probably complicate the current internal difficulties, since we have to reckon with considerable prejudices against people East of the Oder - Neisse border. This can be exemplified by tensions with migrant working groups, the reputation of Mafia-like organisations infiltrating Germany or certain court cases (last year two Russians kidnapped a German conscript soldier and demanded ransom money. In the end, the soldier died a terrible death being suffocated in an earth hole).

6) Many Germans find it difficult to establish and accept a workable collective identity. And when abroad they are often exposed to reflected images of past shades of identity. This confrontation is occasionally difficult to cope with, especially for young Germans - a possible source of irritation in the future. This will continue to be a challenge for teaching in German schools.

Some comments on the situation after the Kosovo - air strikes:
For a long time, German politicians have been very reluctant to move upstage on international theatres. After the fall of the Soviet empire and the Berlin Wall, the gradual process of so-called 'normalisation' has certainly been promoted by Anglo - American political pressure. In most international conflicts, the Germans were asked to contribute more than simply money - even or especially when military commitment was required (the war against Irak, in Far Eastern Vietnam, in former Jugoslavia and in Africa).
Many Germans, like myself, have observed this development with mistrust. The Germans should not, I believe, move any troops into regions where people have not forgotten the cruelties inflicted on them by German soldiers during the world wars.
Significantly, Slobodan Milosevic wrote his letter indicating his willingness to give in to the German chancellor Gerhard Schöder, not to Clinton or Blair. Probably he did not only do this in consideration of the German chairmanship in the EU, but because he knew how vulnerable German public opinion was as far as this air war was concerned. 'Vulnerable', since the debate had opened up old 'national wounds'. German identity and historical consciousness has not reached a stage of 'normality'. This debate challenged especially what was left of the left, the idealistic 68 - generation, as it is often called. Their assumptions have been shattered many times after reunification. Peter Schneider, once a determined leftist and a known author, declared that Germany should be concerned less with their Nazi - past and more with the future as a unified nation. This has also been the tune of more or very conservative politicians. Before 1989, hardly anybody would refer to Germany in public as a nation. We rather preferred to talk about us as Europeans rather than Germans. Now, after the NATO - settlement in Kososo, influential members of the former left like Jürgen Habermas and Günter Grass have moved away from old convictions. Both have supported air-strikes, even though Grass has pleaded for an end of those assaults later.
The former socialist comrades Schröder and the pacifist Fischer have changed their minds together with general public opinion. Schröder, in his inaugural speech, demanded a self-confident Germany. Fischer has now become one of the most popular German politicians, but this personal triumph could turn into a defeat and split of his Green party, whose pacifist traditions have been violated. It is possible that the Greens will be marginalised and the left social democrats isolated, which would imply a victory of the Schröder - wing in the SPD.
Like in the Fifties, most Germans are most concerned with problems closer to them, unemployment, fuel prices or their material prosperity. This will make it easier for Schröder to seek a more confident role for Germany. Perhaps this could mean a more independent stance in foreign politics between the former East and West, between the USA and Russian in particular. The partly successful mediation during the recent conflict in Kosovo could strengthen this tendency.
As long as Germany remains committed to the European issues, this should not be dangerous as such, but the internal struggle within German parties (those on the left at least) will continue. Not, as some commentators put it, 'until Germany has acquired a normal national identity', but because the issues themselves require constant critical observation. One has to remain critical of one's 'national identity' at all times, especially the Germans. The debate about a 'normalisation' could actually be quite dangerous since the necessary confrontations with history could be repressed.

R. Kraatz