

FORUM

German History beyond National Socialism

Since we moved into the twenty-first century, historians of Germany have been drawn into broader debates about transnationalism and globalization. They have also been faced with the destabilization of metanarratives that once framed their most contentious debates. This has led some, such as David Blackbourn, to challenge the hegemonic position of National Socialism in the writing of German history and to suggest that ‘it really is time that we stopped letting National Socialism dictate who we read and how we read them’ (*The Conquest of Nature: Water, Landscape, and the Making of Modern Germany*, New York, 2006, p. 18). In her address to the German Studies Association (GSA) in Oakland, California, in October 2010, Celia Applegate cautioned the assembly to consider the ways in which academics’ willingness to indulge the public’s obsession with National Socialism has compromised their scholarship and contributed to the weakened position of the humanities at the outset of the twenty-first century. Calls for de-centring National Socialism in German history, however, are vexed by the ghosts of the past as well as by the political predicaments of the present. How should historians engage with the strong association between National Socialism and Germany among our publics, and our students? And given the weight of the scholarship produced on this period, is it really possible to rethink National Socialism’s central position in German history? If so, what is at stake in this move? And what is its potential? *German History* has invited six distinguished historians working on different areas of the modern era to reflect on these questions. They are: Margaret Lavinia Anderson (**MLA**; University of California, Berkeley); Peter C[arl] Caldwell (**CC**; Rice University); Christian Goeschel (**CG**; Birkbeck College, London); Ian McNeely (**IM**; University of Oregon); and Andrew Zimmerman (**AZ**; George Washington University). The questions were posed by H. Glenn Penny (University of Iowa).

1. In the past, those who argued that seeking to explain National Socialism should no longer guide the study of German history have been accused of historical revisionism. Yet recently, a number of critically-minded scholars with strong liberal credentials have again suggested that it may be time to find new narrative frameworks for modern German history, which would de-centre the Third Reich. Should we continue to allow National Socialism and the Holocaust to structure our perceptions of what constitutes a ‘significant question’ to bring to the German past, or are there empirical and ethical reasons for moving to new perspectives?

MLA: Put so baldly, who could disagree? National Socialism is not the only significant question in German history. But the desire to explain the Holocaust was what took *me* into German history; the only reason why I, like so many then, ended up in the nineteenth century was because in those days big effects were assumed to have ‘deep’ (read: distant) causes. Nazism is still what attracts students to German history, although they have

dropped our ‘big effects must have deep causes’ assumption. Hurray for the truth. Alas for the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. At Berkeley, almost all our applicants for the PhD programme either want to work on National Socialist themes *tout court* or on its consequences and memory in postwar Germany. With undergraduates, it is no different. My course on ‘The Germanies, 1700–1918’ (note the spatial de-centring) got gratifying teaching evaluations—and anaemic enrolments. I did an internet search to learn how colleagues were teaching it, expecting to find that most would *concentrate* on the decades after 1871, but hoping for inspiration on the century before. I was shocked: almost all began in 1900. In the beginning was *not* Napoleon. Goodbye Enlightenment. Goodbye Romanticism. Goodbye 1848, *Ringstrasse* (yes, my German history certainly included Austria), Constitutional Conflict, *Kulturkampf*, Rosa Luxemburg versus Eduard Bernstein. I gave in and renamed my course ‘The Rise and Fall of the Second Reich’—at which point enrolments quadrupled. Since one of my themes is the *non*-centrality of so many of the issues in the Third Reich to Germany before 1914, you can imagine the inward wincing this new title cost me. It’s the same course, but now my classroom is full. Pandering? You bet.

So should we really hope (even ‘for empirical and ethical reasons’) to move people to ‘a new perspective’? Our audiences won’t tire of the Nazis, but they might tire of Germany. In terms of maintaining readers and enrolments, a new meta-narrative might well be self-defeating. The pathological narrative of German history has been popular in the English-speaking world since World War I, long before it received its canonical iteration by the Bielefelders. I ceased to believe in it shortly after I began teaching. But minus its pathological narrative, Germany’s history may go the way of Italy, France, and Spain; that is, reduced to the single period non-professionals care about: Italy = the Renaissance; France = the Revolution; Spain = the Conquest, Inquisition, and Golden Age.

AZ: Clearly, National Socialism remains among the most urgent topics for historians, both as an object of study in its own right and as an at least implicit referent in many other investigations. The magnitude of National Socialism and the struggle against it, like few other events in European or world history, was so great that all subsequent thought that does not at least implicitly take it into account risks triviality. However, how scholars should take National Socialism into account is, and should remain, an open question. The importance of National Socialism for historians of Germany specializing in periods before 1933 does not come from any teleology that they must pull, like a magician’s rabbit, out of every hat into which they reach their hands. Rather, it comes from the fact that historians of Germany today are, like their colleagues in a range of disciplines and subspecialties, intellectuals living in a world that has not yet made sense of, nor even drawn basic political lessons from, the experience of German fascism.

Indeed, it may be worth asking whether the adjective German, elevated to the status of a national narrative, hinders some aspects of understanding fascism. It might make more sense to speak of taking the German national narrative out of the study of National Socialism and the Holocaust than it does to take National Socialism and the Holocaust out of the German national narrative. This de-centring would be more in the interest of better explaining the Third Reich and its crimes than in the interest of improving a German national narrative.

Rightist participants in the *Historikerstreit* gave comparative or transnational approaches to the Holocaust and National Socialism a bad name. Recently, however, historians have made serious, scholarly attempts to contextualize National Socialism and

the Holocaust beyond Germany, in transnational, colonial and biopolitical contexts. These transnational contextualizations suggest that National Socialism may not be an obligatory topic for all German historians, but rather for a swathe of the profession that cuts across national boundaries. This puts the profession in a better position to explain National Socialism by going beyond exclusively national frameworks that have in any case come to appear less valid modes of historical explanation.

IM: As someone who was by no means principally motivated to study German history by an interest in National Socialism and the Holocaust, I see no reason why scholars should perpetually genuflect before the enormity of these events to keep their union cards. That said, I do believe that all roads in the field will continue to lead through the Third Reich for the foreseeable future. The reason has less to do with the intellectual merits of the topic—great as they may be—than with the dynamics of the historical profession. Take away the focus on Nazis, and the field of German history would wither away.

As history departments thin their ranks of Europeanists, in relative if not absolute terms, and as Europeanists themselves reach across national borders, there is little else besides the Third Reich to legitimate the study of Germany as a specifically national entity. Look at how French history has receded in importance now that the study of the Revolution is, it seems, finally exhausted. Look at how interest in Russian history has declined in the wake of communism's collapse. Look at countries such as Italy, Spain, and Poland, whose histories in modern times have never been done justice by the profession because they lack focal epochs of world-historical import.

Historians of individual European nation states have not gone meekly into obscurity, of course. Many have reinvented themselves by adopting global, transnational approaches. British historians have embraced the study of the Empire and the Atlantic world. French historians likewise regard the Francophone world as potential professional salvation.

Enterprising Germanists, too, have gone global to the extent feasible, penning innovative studies set in places such as Togo (Andrew Zimmerman) and Qingdao (George Steinmetz). By uncovering unfamiliar dynamics of race and empire abroad, these works illuminate now-familiar dynamics of race and empire back in central Europe. But the very choice of such themes for investigation attests to the continuing gravitational pull of National Socialism.

For better or worse, the Third Reich is the central event in the history of Germany, and the only one likely to command mindshare among students, publishers, and the general public in years to come.

CG: To start with, I am not entirely sure whether I agree with the question's premise that the Third Reich is at the centre of German history. Historians have long been studying many significant aspects of modern German history without using the Third Reich and the Holocaust as their central reference point. Early modernists and medievalists alike have rarely taken the Third Reich as the focus of their narratives and analyses.

Yet, to be sure, many historians study the Third Reich and the Holocaust or take the Nazi period as a central reference point, dealing with either its origins or its aftermath. In particular I am thinking of recent work on nineteenth-century Germany, such as Helmut Walser Smith's *The Continuities of German History*. For Smith, the central culmination point

of German history is 1941, the Holocaust—a debatable, but legitimate approach as it reopens the debate on the longer continuities of German history.

Most people who want to rethink our conceptualization of German history still feel the need to state their moral outrage about the Third Reich, lest they get associated with right-wing revisionism. However, times have changed since the *Historikerstreit*, when conservative historians argued the need for a more positive version of German history, one that would effectively reduce the Third Reich to the margins. Most victims and perpetrators of Nazism are now dead, and perhaps it is time to rethink Martin Broszat's plea to historicize the Third Reich and to integrate it more fully into the wider narrative of German history, seeing it both as a radical caesura with the German past and as pointing out some continuities.

Since the 1990s, connected with the rise of the Holocaust as a globally used concept, the view that Nazism was a unique form of a racial dictatorship has almost become an orthodoxy. As a result of its tremendous success, not least thanks to a public craving for books on the Nazis and the Final Solution, many historians of Nazi Germany have effectively stopped engaging with the wider European and global context. For many, the study of Nazism and the Holocaust is important *per se*.

But I think there are some compelling intellectual and historical reasons to reintegrate the historiography of the Third Reich and the Holocaust into wider narratives that go beyond the confines of German history, such as racism, totalitarianism and fascism. We must broaden our view on German history, not narrow it. But all in all, Nazism and the Holocaust will remain important subjects for many years to come.

CC: Good questions drive good historical writing. The phenomenon of National Socialism does not monopolize good questions. But at the same time, there is no doubt that the Nazi years dominate public discussion of German history, and that our classrooms as well as our publishing opportunities are affected by this fact. Last semester in my lecture course on modern German history, every single student elected to write a research paper on some aspect of Germany under National Socialism.

These are serious students asking serious questions, and they deserve answers. The pre-meds have already heard about the central place of National Socialism in discussions of medical ethics. The pre-law students know about the Nuremberg Trials and the classic confrontation between natural law and positive law. Christian and Jewish students are interested both in Nazi ersatz religiosity and in the enormous ethical challenge of the Holocaust. Military buffs are fascinated by Hitler's role in military decision-making. All of these are important topics; all inform fields of inquiry beyond history. And all are legitimate uses of history.

At the same time, they all make Germany into a useful but reductive example of a bad country. It is precisely our task as historians to make the story more complex; Margaret Anderson's approach to teaching German history does exactly that. We need to show that our work matters, also for disciplines beyond history. When lawyers want to investigate the sources of the rule of law in democratic West Germany, for example, investigating what passed for law under Nazism is not sufficient. Nazi law tells us little about the longer traditions of federalism, social law, rights, constitutionalism and administration in Germany, and their reception elsewhere. These issues call out for a focused national and transnational history. To ignore such questions in order to fixate on National Socialism does an injustice not only to the legal tradition itself (as an example), but also, and more importantly, to the questions posed.

2. If we did want to rethink the place of National Socialism in meta-narratives of modern German history, how should we proceed? What becomes the new centre, or subject, of German history? Or is a centre even necessary?

MLA: A subject is always necessary. But it's not sufficient; we need to know there's a *stake*. The reason the study of National Socialism has been so compelling for so long is its moral weight—something I find characteristic of political history more generally: revolution, repression, diplomacy, humanitarian intervention, war, imperialism, democracy and its enemies, and—as Carl has just reminded me—legal traditions, to name a few. Such subjects grip our imaginations because they must confront, in one way or another, the fragility and ambiguity of 'good'. When I search beyond political history for themes that have enjoyed similarly long runs, they too seem to be those with moral weight. For economic historians it has been the Industrial Revolution (pessimists vs. optimists; pro- vs. anti-capitalism). If the Industrial Revolution has now been dislodged (I'm not sure that it has), it is by themes also morally fraught, such as famine. Ecology—and even (if the historian is alert to impacts on distant regions and generations) consumption—may also claim this kind of moral weight. Truly great history—provocative questions, original perspectives, brilliant writing—will always have an audience. Who would have thought that German 'home towns' would provide a compelling 'centre'?—though, perhaps not accidentally, one whose epilogue, 'Death and Transfiguration,' ends with National Socialism. Bottom line: any new centre in German history must meet the challenge of discovering or imparting moral weight (however subtly or ironically) to its alternative meta-narrative.

CC: National Socialism already serves multiple narrative functions. From the perspective of Weimar democracy, it is tragic. From the perspective of the post-1945 Germanies, it serves as the crucial learning experience, the past one wants to break away from. In Jan-Werner Müller's subtle analysis of the role of Carl Schmitt in postwar West German thought, precisely the indigestible aspects of the interwar period and Nazi rule inform the critical spirit of the 1950s and 1960s. In other work, such as Paul Lawrence Rose's investigation of the ubiquitous antisemitism on the Left around 1848, National Socialism exists as a kind of vague premonition.

No one narrative can encompass all aspects of German history, then, not even National Socialism. And is a narrative what we are necessarily after in the first place? Good questions, to repeat myself, drive good histories, questions that shed light on new themes or cast old problems in a new light. One of my favourite examples is Margaret Anderson's important work from a decade ago, *Practicing Democracy*. Instead of belabouring the abstract question of *Sonderweg* or not, she actually looked at what universal manhood suffrage meant in the legalistic German culture. She produces an interesting account of how procedures create democrats. We know that this development comes to an abrupt halt in 1933; but Anderson's argument isn't about 1933. Its usefulness lies precisely in opening up comparative questions beyond German history—keeping in mind, of course, Germany's specific trajectory.

One final point on this topic: it is becoming less self-evident that there is something essential and necessary about German history in the academy, as others here have noted. It is not sufficient simply to list more facts about the German past. In the end, we justify

ourselves, it seems to me, only by posing questions that are interesting to students and other scholars.

IM: Those who chafe under National Socialism's historiographical predominance (and I put myself in this category) might consider an amicable divorce from the profession of German history. There are many other fields, such as the history of science, environmental history, gender history, economic history, the history of religion—and world history, as I will explain in question 3—where scholars with knowledge of the German past can profitably apply their talents.

The only other alternative I see, and this is a rather half-hearted suggestion, is to refound the project of German history not on the nation state but on German culture—high and low, good and bad, medieval and modern, national and especially transnational. German classical music and German beer have gained worldwide cachet from the Americas to Asia over the last two centuries. Germans constructed the world's first and most globally influential system of public education, inventing the kindergarten, compulsory primary schooling, and the research university. Also woefully understudied is the social history of cultural exchange involving Germans, whether in their millennium-long interactions with Slavic peoples or in the transatlantic diaspora that spread them from Milwaukee to Buenos Aires.

Refounding German history on culture rather than the nation state might indeed de-centre National Socialism and the Holocaust. But it need not efface the complex and deeply tragic roles these events play in the career of the entity we call *Kultur*. It might instead force us to find more nuanced meta-narratives than that of the 'bad German' which dominates popular (and still many scholarly) understandings of German political history.

Germans' recent efforts to submerge their culture in a wider Europeanness make this an issue of contemporary salience anchored in the forces of European integration. And yet the study of German culture—indeed of European civilization itself—lacks the moral urgency that has always driven the study of the German nation state. Hence my hesitation in recommending this approach as an agenda for German studies.

CG: I do not think that German history has ever had a single subject or that it needs one. It seems to me that the relentless search for new historiographical trends is to a large extent the result of the digital age. Thanks to instant communication, one subject comes into fashion and is quickly superseded by another one before historians have sufficiently reflected about a theme.

What we need is a fuller dialogue between German history and European and global history. Because of its tremendous success over the past few decades, much of German history has become fairly inward-looking. But twentieth-century German history has not always been so isolated. Especially in the 1960s and 1970s, many historians conceptualized the Third Reich in the wider framework of fascism. Some of the most influential historians of our time, such as Tim Mason and Geoff Eley, have written highly sophisticated interpretations of Nazism as a fascist regime. Likewise, totalitarianism, a theory pioneered by Hannah Arendt, is still a very important concept, as shown by Michael Geyer and Sheila Fitzpatrick in their *Beyond Totalitarianism: Nazism and Stalinism Compared*. I think there is some good reason to rethink the mantra that the Third Reich was unique by comparing and contrasting it to other European dictatorships of the twentieth century, such as fascist Italy and the Soviet Union. Furthermore,

scholars have begun to work on German colonialism, and the most successful examples of such work reject facile lines of continuity between the *Kaiserreich* and the Third Reich, along the lines that the Holocaust was inevitable because of German colonial atrocities.

AZ: There are a number of established approaches that help us explain National Socialism beyond the confines of a narrowly German history, using theoretical configurations with perhaps greater scholarly rigour than that of national culture.

One important approach is the connection of National Socialism to European imperialism. As Aimé Césaire wrote in his 1955 *Discourse on Colonialism*, the shock of Hitler for the European bourgeoisie is ‘the fact that he applied to Europe colonialist procedures which until then had been reserved exclusively for the Arabs of Algeria, the coolies of India and the blacks of Africa’. Historians including Wendy Lower, Mark Mazower and Jürgen Zimmerer, to name just a few, have explored the connection of empire and Nazism, including the Holocaust. This need not be a connection of German imperialism in Africa, especially Namibia, to National Socialism, but rather the connection of a range of genocidal settler colonialisms to Nazism.

A second venerable connection is that of capitalism to National Socialism. A great liberal interest during the Second World War and ever since has been to make Nazism a phenomenon of German culture and ideology so that it is not the product of a capitalism that can hardly be said to be uniquely German. The *Sonderweg* of German history involved treating Nazism as the result of a failed liberalism in order to rehabilitate an essentially capitalist liberalism in the context of the Cold War. David Blackbourn and Geoff Eley’s *Peculiarities of German History* has, in my view, been too often misunderstood as a prohibition against saying bad things about the *Kaiserreich* or against suggesting that there were continuities in German history from the *Kaiserreich* to the Third Reich. Rather, *Peculiarities* revealed the inadequacy of narratives that presented the history of Germany as a history of failed capitalist modernity rather than as a successful variant of capitalist modernity. While few historians today continue to pursue the kinds of continuities that Hans-Ulrich Wehler elaborated, the *Sonderweg* tradition continues in the idealizing distortions of liberals such as Max Weber and Rudolf Virchow, and in a general dismissal of the real anti-racism and anti-imperialism of Karl Kautsky, Rosa Luxemburg and other Social Democrats.

The study of the Third Reich as capitalist modernity has recently received great impetus from the work in biopolitics following Hannah Arendt, Michel Foucault and Giorgio Agamben. Indeed, Agamben has gone so far as to suggest that the concentration camp inmate is the paradigmatic subject of modern sovereignty. That goes too far, I think, in generalizing the Holocaust, which does remain indisputably unique, but Agamben does suggest how the study of Nazism as a kind of modernity displaces it from a uniquely German cultural narrative and places it in a broader transnational narrative. Edward Ross Dickenson has also warned against equating all biopolitics with Nazism or even right-authoritarianism in his important 2004 *Central European History* article.

3. Following Jürgen Osterhammel, attempts to de-centre the Third Reich can be seen as part of a broader move to de-centre the nation state, embracing a *longue durée*, and moving towards histories that are multiple and meandering. In what ways might such approaches transform the writing of German history?

CG: Osterhammel's work, alongside Dipesh Chakrabarty's pioneering *Provincialising Europe*, provides a welcome impetus for historians of Germany to rethink Germany's role in Europe and the world. It prompts us to go beyond the confines of the nation state. However, as a historian of the twentieth century, an age of radical nationalism, I find it hard to de-centre completely the German nation state.

Yet, it is clear that German history in the twentieth century was not a linear flow that inevitably led to the Third Reich. For example, short-term contingencies, especially the Great Depression and the backroom deals studied by Henry Ashby Turner Jr. in his *Hitler's Thirty Days to Power*, were highly important reasons why Hitler came to power. Likewise, the complicated decision-making process that ultimately led to the Holocaust was a series of often-contradictory developments. In other words, historians have long been aware of the multiple possibilities of German history.

If we broaden our view of German history, we can make some significant new discoveries. For example, it seems to me that a careful rethinking of Nazism as a fascist regime can lead to many new insights which we would not get if we studied Nazism in isolation from other European countries. In fact, some of Nazism's central features, such as a charismatic dictator, a dual strategy of seeking power by political violence and apparently legal political activity, were modelled to a large extent on the template of fascist Italy, Europe's first fascist regime. Moreover, both regimes, partners in the Axis alliance with Japan, mutually influenced and radicalized each other during the war. In other words, to understand the full extent of Nazism, we must go beyond the confines of German history. Perhaps it would be fruitful more generally to conceptualize Germany more rigorously as part of Europe and the wider world.

CC: National Socialism itself poses a problem for a state-oriented history. It was a regime that cannibalized pre-existing parts of the Prussian and German state apparatus in order to survive; it also insisted on a history of the people and of the continent that overwhelmed state-oriented histories. Indeed, the history of National Socialism forced observers to develop new categories to think about a dynamic, destructive, expansive force: the terms 'totalitarianism' and 'dual state' were conceptual innovations seeking to describe something that was transforming the state. The National Socialist historians themselves sought new approaches to historical analysis beyond the state.

By which I certainly don't mean to imply that such de-centring is somehow 'Nazi'—that's nonsense. The point is, there are plenty of issues within German history itself that pose critical and interesting problems for a focus on the nation state. State-formation itself is a long process that is not identical with nation-formation: that was, of course, the problem for the nationalist Germans in the decades before 1848. Couldn't we use German history to pry apart state and nation? And in fact, isn't this exactly what the best histories of liberalism, administration, and nationalist mobilization in Central Europe have done?

And of course, beyond the state, accounts of religion, emotion, popular culture—of the range of issues that Riehl investigated—will hopefully not lead directly to a specific goal, but be by their nature multiple and meandering. Nonetheless, such histories still have to have a point, a compelling question: what meanders need not be intrinsically interesting.

IM: One way for historians to break free of the German nation state is to embrace the burgeoning field of world history. Osterhammel's works—together with others,

such as Kenneth Pomeranz's *The Great Divergence*—can help point the way out. Both Osterhammel and Pomeranz subscribe to an emerging consensus holding that Europe and Asia were comparably developed down to about 1800, and that to speak of a *longue durée* of Western superiority is profoundly misplaced. For Pomeranz, the 'great divergence' in the economic fortunes of East and West is a highly contingent phenomenon traceable to specific regional (sub-civilizational) developments. Pomeranz's insights can be applied not just to the industrializing economy but also to other sectors—the bureaucratic state, the patriarchal family and literate culture rooted in classical languages—where Europe and Asia shared similar institutions, but where specific regions of Europe began to acquire recognizably modern features around 1800.

One question for German historians then becomes: what role did the German cultural region contribute to the great divergence between Europe and Asia? This is where Osterhammel comes in handy, since he stresses culture and scholarship rather than economics and industry, as Pomeranz does.

What Osterhammel calls the 'demystification of Asia' was as important to Western identity as the industrialization of England was to Western prosperity. German intellectuals helped fashion this identity through new scholarly methods and a new discourse of human historical development. This revolution in literary culture elevated the Occident above the Orient by enabling the one to appropriate the cultural patrimony of the other. That, at least, is one reading of Suzanne Marchand's brilliant *German Orientalism*.

Much work remains to be done on the ways not only German scholarship, but the formidable system of public education serving as its vehicle, propagated Western modernity worldwide. To take one illustration, Cai Yuanpei, Peking University's modernizing chancellor, trained under both Wilhelm Wundt (an experimental psychologist) and Karl Lamprecht (a cultural historian) in Germany. Many other such connections could readily be traced, particularly to the United States.

Here, then, is one example fitting Germany into a world-historical narrative without emphasizing National Socialism.

MLA: I doubt that it is given to most of us to follow Jürgen Osterhammel. To see the universe in a grain of sand (think *Marpingen!*) is, for ordinary mortals, a more promising tack than Osterhammel's reversal of that perspective. The cry to 'de-centre the state' has been trumps as long as I can remember. 'Economics, society, and culture seem to have monopolized historians' attention for the last half-century,' Jacques Le Goff opined approvingly in 1971, when it was Braudel who provided the inspiration. But 'the old political history is still a corpse that has to be made to lie down,' he warned. For the next two decades it was social history that was supposed to nail the stake into its heart ('We are all social historians now,' observed John Binfield and Harold Perkin—independently of each other). And now cultural history is the flag that gets all ships, whatever their cargo, into port. ('We are all cultural historians now,' David Blackbourn noted in a recent conference volume—not without a similarly raised eyebrow.) I can't help noticing that, as was the case when the flag of social history ruled the waves, the port itself is often a political one. I wonder why political history, practised so widely, remains largely (except among those who work on National Socialism) in the closet, the love that dare not speak its name?

AZ: The transnational turn does not affect just the history of National Socialism or the history of Germany but all history writing. Those of us who choose to pursue a transnational turn no longer treat nations as the unit of explanation and must, instead, choose other objects and problems of study. This seems to me all for the good. It will mean that those who study National Socialism can pursue their objects of study across all kinds of boundaries, including national boundaries. Some of the best recent work on the Holocaust, for example, attends not only to its German perpetrators, but also to its entanglements with Eastern European histories. Wendy Lower's work is exemplary here too.

The transnational turn also means that those who study things that can be called German that can also be shown to have nothing to do with National Socialism can follow those things also wherever they go. Such an actor-network approach to transnational history cannot respect national or any other boundaries. Historians, instead, can follow their objects of study as they become, varyingly, sometimes simultaneously, international, national and local. What it may not be possible to preserve is a notion of a unique or separate German culture that continues, say, from Goethe to Mann but does not also include Hitler. I'm not sure it's desirable or even legitimate both to study Germany as a national entity and simply to declare that National Socialism is not an overwhelmingly important part of that entity.

4. Conventional periodization in German history has focused on highly visible ruptures in the formal constitution of different German states, such as 1806, 1815, 1848, 1871, 1918, 1933, 1945 and 1989/90. Much recent cultural history has questioned the validity of such period breaks for important spheres of human experience and day-to-day political practices. Are such approaches simply a way of nuancing political history, or do they generate entirely different narratives and chronological models?

MLA: If breaks are sometimes less sharp in cultural than in political history, still, there are landmarks: 1776? Publication of *The Wealth of Nations*. 1960? The FDA approves the 'pill'. (And then there's Philip Larkin's *annus mirabilis*, 1963 . . .) Every historian has to start and stop somewhere. But it is not the placement of these bookends or their erasure that 'generate entirely different narratives.' It is we, the historians, who construct the narratives and thus it is *we* who get to decide the breaks. Paul Veyne is right: 'Events have no natural unity; one cannot, like the good cook in *Phaedrus*, cut them according to their true joints, because they have none.' This should give heart to imaginative historians who have a new story to tell (or, as Carl points out, new questions to ask).

CC: Cultural history can both generate different narratives and shed light on political history. To approach cultural phenomena well, in fact, the historian needs to resist the urge to flatten complex cultural phenomena into political or social or for that matter even cultural narratives, an unfortunate tendency in some of our classic works of cultural history: think of George Mosse! Interesting cultural history may lead back to political history, but it may not.

Take, for example, Inga Markovits's *Justice in Lüritz*, which examines the cultural significance of law in the GDR. At points, the legal story illustrates the political narrative: during forced collectivization, for example. But at others, the actual practice of law and its cultural understanding changes, as judges move 'nearer' to the people and legal norms

become more comprehensible and less formal. A specific legal culture develops within East Germany, then, one not reducible to dictatorship, as much as dictatorship determines it. In the end, Markovits can connect the culture back to a political process, the gradual hollowing-out of socialist slogans within the law; here her study of legal culture can indeed inform a history of the GDR's decline, starting well before 1989.

But we don't need to refer to political events to find meaning in cultural history. Tracie Matysik's work on *Reforming the Moral Subject*, for example, plunges into the far-ranging discussion of morality, subjectivity and humanity in the late *Kaiserreich*. Her chief actors are not characters in a plot whose outcome we know, but are adventurously seeking answers to questions still relevant today. The point of their disputes for political history is not clear; they certainly don't lead directly to National Socialism—which is fine. Indeed, it is a relief to delve into these debates without having to connect them with Nazis.

CG: There has been some fantastic work recently that has questioned the significance of political *caesurae* such as 1933 and 1945 from a cultural history perspective. However, there are a number of problems with a purely cultural history devoid of politics, as much as there is a problem with G.M. Trevelyan's famous definition of social history as history with the politics left out. I do not reject the legitimacy of work on everyday experiences and their continuity over political *caesurae*, but I insist that we consider the fundamental importance of political *caesurae* for our understanding of the course of German history. If we reduced German history to cultural practices, we would soon lose sight of German history's wider significance. Take an example from my own work on suicide in modern Germany: Germans committed suicide before and after 1933, so at first glance, there was an apparent continuity in suicide patterns. Many Germans continued to kill themselves, as people had done before 1933, and for similar reasons. But a closer analysis showed a dramatic increase in suicides directly prompted by Nazi politics such as the persecution of the regime's opponents and the targeting of Jews and social outsiders such as homosexuals. In other words, cultural history certainly nuances our understanding of the course of German history, but it is only meaningful if it is fully contextualized with politics.

IM: We need not be shackled any longer to conventional periodizations. In the wake of postmodernism, we are freer than ever before to cut and trim our chronological frames to fit particular motivating questions. What's unusual, then, is when certain questions still don't get asked and some periods still don't get their due.

Take, for example, the *Sattelzeit*, long an orphan among epochs of German history. Why did the cultural efflorescence that took place from the 1770s to the 1840s make far more impact on the history of the world than it has on the *historiography* of Germany?

The *Sattelzeit* gave the world Idealism and Marxism, ethnic nationalism and classical music, public education and the academic disciplines. Yet the very project of German history has made it difficult for scholars to appreciate its global significance, or use their skills as Germanists to reconstruct the society that produced these achievements. There are signal exceptions, of course—James Sheehan or Mack Walker, for example. But the organization of the profession limits both the amount and the type of attention that can ever be given to the *Sattelzeit*. Typically it looms as a dead zone where Reformation historians working forwards from Luther fail to meet up with twentieth-century historians working backwards from Hitler. Those who do study the *Sattelzeit* often cast

it as a time when Napoleon steamrolled German states into, at best, defensive modernization and, at worst, truculent reaction. This move merely re-embeds it in a narrative of flawed national political development—a narrative first constructed to explain the catastrophe of National Socialism. It is far better to treat the period as part of a global cultural history in ways I have suggested in my answers to the previous two questions.

AZ: Periodization and, more broadly, chronology are at the centre of historical methodology and, not just for German history, still need to be theorized much more rigorously. Louis Althusser, in *Reading Capital*, offers two important leads for us. First, he criticizes historians for reifying time, treating chronology as if it were some objective part of the world that we describe rather than something we impose on the world. Althusser's second, even more interesting point is that different 'levels' of history—politics, economics, culture, and so on—have different times. This includes not only different periodizations but different tempos and even different natures. There are the decisive moments in certain political events, but perhaps only because these events thematize their own temporality. Article 5 of the Enabling Act, to take an example close to the theme of the present discussion, specifies its own temporality: 'This law becomes effective on the day of its publication. It becomes invalid on April 1, 1937.' Cultural history not only has a different chronology with different turning points, but also another temporality, with a rhythm less staccato than that of political history.

Historians also have much to learn from Alain Badiou's theory of the event. The event, for Badiou, is not merely any happening but rather something that occurs in or emerges from one situation that then founds a new situation. For Badiou, the event grounds a new situation not simply because it is very important but rather because actors in a new situation recognize the event as something to which they should remain true. Their 'fidelity to the event', as Badiou phrases it, makes their situation new and thus makes the event to which they are true an event in the first place. Thus, historians are not the only ones who choose 1806, 1815, and so on—the actors following these events also choose them. Yet by structuring our narratives around these events we also retroactively make them events. If we do not pay attention to this double function of chronology as both historical and historiographical category then we risk ending up either in empty relativism or dreary antiquarianism.

Helmut Walser Smith's notion of a vanishing point should be absolutely central to this discussion. While he sees 1941 as an important vanishing point—one that both enables and constrains perception, that 'generates as well as limits knowledge'—there is no reason why any number of other vanishing points might not be considered. This does not, however, mean that all vanishing points offer perspectives of equal interest or even validity.

5. What role does space play in this? Recent work has also drawn attention to the polycentricity of Germany itself, the particular role that regional patterns have played in its history, and the ways in which German history has taken place far beyond Central Europe. What implications do these new spatial perspectives have for conceptualizing the flow of German history over time?

MLA: 'How should they know England, who only England know?' Kipling's lines, *mutatis mutandis*, should be the watchword for all historians, whatever nation they

specialize in. We should *always* be looking over our shoulders, across the (various) ponds, for connections, comparisons, analogies. But I'm not sure I know what is meant by the 'role . . . space plays in this' and 'new spatial perspectives.' Yes, German history has taken place outside Germany (especially between 1939 and 1945). And as Germany participated in developments common to the West there will always be spaces for Germans in the geographies of intellectual history, history of science and religion, and economic history. But I would warn against encouraging graduate students outside those well-established sub-disciplines to take the much celebrated 'trans-national' route. German gold miners in Mexico or Germans drafted into the Union lie not only beyond National Socialism, they lie beyond German history. They belong to another history. And searches are still organized around national units—whatever scholars advocate at conferences and in journals, and whatever search committees themselves may suggest. I speak from bitter experience. I have a student, out now ten years, whose dissertation/first book was truly transnational (German, Russian and French, primarily), who in graduate school had published peer-reviewed articles in eighteenth- and twentieth-century French history, and who has subsequently published books (with distinguished presses) on Russian and German topics, each with a strong transnational dimension. He's gained post-docs aplenty, but not a single job offer in North America or the UK. He's too Russian for the German searches, too German for the Russian searches, and not French enough for the French searches. Yet another, with a dissertation on Alpine sports as they developed in Austria and Switzerland and hopped to Lake Placid and Sun Valley, is facing a similarly dismal future. And while kicking myself that I ever encouraged these transnational interests, I also understand the objections. University departments want someone who can not only write great books and teach exciting courses but can also—perhaps especially—train graduate students in a 'field', which, for modern historians, is usually defined nationally. That means knowing the historiography of a state or collection of related states, and caring about it. Don't expect small liberal arts colleges looking for 'two-fers' ['two-for-one': to cover two positions with one appointment] to provide alternative employment. As I learned from two decades at Swarthmore: where fifteen students, more or less, make the difference between a big course and one that isn't viable, search committees are very concerned about overlaps, lest they inadvertently put an existing colleague out of business. This is the way our *profession*, not just German history, is organized. I do have two students, however, who've enjoyed splendid professional success with transnational history. One wrote on German minorities in 1930s Poland; the other, on ethnic Germans and Czechs in Nazi-occupied Czechoslovakia—neither, tellingly, 'beyond National Socialism'.

AZ: German localism is a venerable tradition in German self-understandings and in the history of Germany. Various German internationalisms are equally venerable, including diplomacy, international trade, *Weltpolitik*, *Lebensraum*, and Social Democratic and Communist internationalisms. Historians have treated all of these spatial imaginaries as objects of study and have also staged their own narratives in these various imagined spaces.

Transnational approaches challenge the intense nationalization of history and thus are especially important for German, as well as US history, because both of these nations have long been regarded as exceptional, uniquely national.

I think that the conceit of this forum, that we might displace National Socialism from the centre of German national history, should be reversed. It is more useful, more important, to displace the German national narratives from the history of National Socialism, as well as from many other histories. The history of high culture and particularly music, for example, of which Celia Applegate spoke so movingly in her 2010 GSA presidential address, can, probably to an even greater extent than National Socialism, be better studied transnationally than nationally. This transnational history of high culture crosses many other histories, including the history of National Socialism (Orff, Schmitt, Heidegger, for example), and such crossroads will remain among the most interesting places for historical investigation.

Such *histoires croisées* seem to me to offer more possibilities than the multilane *Autobahn* of national narrative. Such entangled histories do not exclude any spatial configuration, whether transnational, national, local, or even—as Bruno Latour has brilliantly demonstrated—microbial. But not every byway is equally important, and there remains no more important topic of historical investigation than National Socialism, even if German national history is not the best way to study it.

IM: We should let contemporary concerns generate new agendas and suggest different spatial frames as alternatives to the nation state.

Embedding Germany in world history strikes me as the most promising approach because globalization is the most powerful political, economic and cultural trend of our times. German colonialism, the German diaspora, and the global impact of German science, scholarship and culture are—to repeat my earlier remarks—all fruitful topics in this vein. One might also reimagine the comparative global study of the Nazi regime and the Holocaust by systematically tracking the precedents they set for later atrocities worldwide. I heartily endorse suggestions made elsewhere in this forum to embed the study of the Third Reich in global contexts beyond German national history.

Europe as a whole is another promising spatial frame, owing to European integration. Not so many decades ago, European historians in the Anglophone world routinely mastered both French and German—sometimes even Italian—to write comparative and transnational histories covering much of Western Europe. Now it is clearly time to integrate Eastern Europe just as thoroughly. Many Germanists have already blazed this trail by engaging Czech and Polish history and by focusing on borderlands.

The difference between world history and pan-European history is that, outside the Continent at least, the fate of Europe and the search for a European identity are hardly as compelling as globalization and the rise of China and India. Indeed it is becoming increasingly difficult to rationalize the study of Europe at all now that most people no longer reflexively view it as the source of a Western civilization that we all share. That is a problem not just for Germanists, but for all of us who study European history, and alas one unlikely to be solved in these pages.

CC: Environmental history must take space on in a different way than does national history: one cannot discuss the Rhine without at least four nations, and if climate change is taken into account an even larger complex. At issue, however, isn't just the question of huge spaces; the study of small spaces can also afford insights into historical processes. Jan Palmowski's recent *Inventing the Socialist Nation*, for example, presents us with the small

Catholic town on the western margins of the GDR. Struggles over Catholicism, mining and environmental degradation and party control lead to surprising local variations in East German history.

Palmowski's example leads to a further question about space and contemporary history: how much sense does it make to seek a unifying narrative of East and West Germany to fit with the fact of German unification? East and West Germany developed, culturally, socially, economically and politically, within larger and far more intrusive spaces of the Cold War and after. How can we talk about the socialism of East Germany without Soviet troops, or about the regional identity in the West without American jet fighters overhead? How to describe either economy's development without the COMECON or the European Community? In this way, too, the recent history of Germany has forced historians to move outside a national orientation towards the nation state.

Despite all the arguments for putting German history into a greater, transnational space, however, human spaces are structured to a great extent by humans themselves through communication, and communication about power continues to have a strong orientation towards politics and the state. Transnational or regional history-writing may not always help us to understand *political* spaces, or to understand *political* systems in a comparative sense. I am at times concerned that the demand for the transnational has occluded earlier concerns with the public sphere and democracy.

CG: Historians have long been aware of regional patterns in German history. Think of the important work by British historians such as Richard Evans and Niall Ferguson, among many others, on Hamburg. To be sure, the recent emphasis on space has made us rethink spatial and regional dimensions of Germany. But I am not entirely sure whether historians have successfully reconciled time, perhaps the primary category of history—a discipline that deals with continuity and change in the past—with space. Space is certainly an important issue for us to consider, but it is just one significant category among many others, such as class, gender, generation and confession. It would seem impossible to me to reduce German history to spatial perspectives. Discredited as a scholarly category after the end of the Third Reich, space can shed light on key questions of German history. Think of the German imagination of Eastern Europe and how it changed over time. But again, I would insist that we study German spaces in a wider European or global context, lest we run the risk of further isolating German history. What we need is a German history, with all its different nuances and facets, that is more firmly contextualized within Europe and the world, rather than identifying a centre or subject, old or new, of German history.