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Nation and Nationalism

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Nation and nationalism

Helmut Walser Smith

What pity is it ! That we die but once to serve our country.[1]
(The cover page inscription, a citation from Joseph Addison's
Cato, chosen by Thomas Abbt for the first edition of his *On Death
for the Fatherland*, 1761)

As there was no first nationalist, so there was no first event initiating
the course of German nationalism. In the beginning, there was
neither an absence of revolution nor the fact of Napoleon; there
was, instead, the slow, tentative emergence of a discourse, trans-
atlantic in reach, that transformed the way men thought ·about
fighting and dying for their country. This was a discourse about
nations.

In the German lands, traces of a national discourse were already
evident in the so-called 'German Wars' of religion in the sixteenth
and seventeenth centuries—in the Schmalkaldic War of 1546–7 and,
more poignantly, in the Thirty Years War, which contemporaries con-
ceived of as ruinous not only for its destruction of person and
property but also for the way it tore at the fabric of 'the German
fatherland'.[2] If conflicts of faith imparted one context for the emer-
gence of German national consciousness, the inter-state violence
of absolutist monarchies provided the other, with the wars of the
eighteenth century inaugurating successive waves of public polemics

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[1] Thomas Abbt, 'Vom Tode für das Vaterland' (1761), in Johannes Kunisch (ed.),
Aufklärung und Kriegserfahrung (Frankfurt am Main, 1996), plate 14, 1009.
[2] Georg Schmidt, 'Teutsche Kriege: Nationale Deutungsmuster und integrative
Wertvorstellungen im frühneuzeitlichen Reich', in Dieter Langewiesche and Georg
Schmidt (eds.), *Föderative Nation. Deutschlandkonzepte von der Reformation bis zum
Ersten Weltkrieg* (Munich, 2000), 33–62.

in, which a bellicose discourse increasingly rang national.[3] These polemics—published in broadsides, pamphlets, sermons, and political tracts—altered not so much the reality of death in war (Friedrich II's mercenary armies were still made up of 'a wonderful mixture of Swiss, Swabians, Bavarians, Tirolians, Welsch, Frenchmen, Polacks, and Turks') as the national gloss that 'death for the Fatherland' now assumed.[4] 'Death for the fatherland is worthy of everlasting honor', Christian Ewald von Kleist wrote in his 'Ode to the Prussian Army'— before dying such a death himself.[5] In the pathos-heavy, masculine rhymes of Johann Wilhelm Gleim's 'Prussian War Songs . . .' ('Composed by an Infantryman'); death for the fatherland, a duty and a privilege, opens the gate to immortality.[6]

As Benedict Anderson reminds us, a nation is an imagined community one is ready 'not so much to kill, as willingly to die for'.[7] If this is true, then the poetry of the Seven Years War already represented a watershed in the way it aestheticized death. The fatherland to which von Kleist appealed was still unmistakably the kingdom ruled by the House of Hohenzollern, yet in Gleim's verse, the appeal was not always as clear, and both Friedrich Schiller, who wrote a foreword to his poem, and the philosopher Johann Gottfried Herder, who reviewed it, immediately understood its national import.[8] In the mid-1760s, this import became the subject of the so-called 'national spirit' debate. Unleashed in 1765 by Friedrich Karl von Moser's *On the German National Spirit*, the debate centred on the question of what the fatherland properly consists of—whether the empire, as Moser argued, or a republic, as the Swiss Johann Georg

[3] Hans Martin Blitz, *Aus Liebe zum Vaterland. Die deutsche Nation im 18. Jahrhundert* (Hamburg, 2000); on the Seven Years War as decisive, see also Ute Planert, 'Wann beginnt der "moderne" deutscher Nationalismus? Plädoyer für eine nationale Sattelzeit', in Jörg Echternkamp and Sven Oliver Müller (eds.), *Die Politik der Nation: Deutscher Nationalismus in Krieg und Krisen 1760–1960* (Munich, 2002), 31.

[4] The quote is from a Swiss mercenary, cited in Blitz, *Aus Liebe zum Vaterland*, 223.

[5] Cited ibid. 225.

[6] Hans Peter Herrmann, 'Individuum und Staatsmacht: Preußisch-deutscher Nationalismus in Texten zum Siebenjährigen Krieg', in Hans Peter Herrmann, Hans-Martin Blitz, and Susanna Moßmann (eds.), *Machtphantasie Deutschland* (Frankfurt am Main, 1996), 70.

[7] Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism*, 1st edn. (London, 1983), 16.

[8] Blitz, *Aus Liebe zum Vaterland*, 279; Herrmann, 'Individuum und Staatsmacht', 74–5.

Zimmermann believed, or Prussia, as Thomas Abbt, the author of *On Death for the Fatherland*, had maintained.[9] It is, moreover, in the wake of this debate that Herder formulated his initial ideas—original, humane, and portentous—about the relation of language to nation.

Language patterned national cultures as a weave lends contour to a cloth; it is, in Herder's image, a lyre with a tone all its own. To hear its tones is to understand something of what makes each culture special. Contrary to enlightened claims of universality, Herder believed that each national culture possessed something of peculiar value, and that this peculiarity, this uniqueness, ought to be cultivated and understood on its own terms. That understanding had to proceed historically and linguistically. In his prize-winning essay 'Treatise on the Origins of Language', Herder argued that language was not God-given, but made by men over time; it infused folk tales and folk songs, history and literature, with life; it was the filament of nations.

Herder was the first to advance a concept of nation that could not be reduced to an expression of old regime politics. For what was special about language was that even the humblest he could understand the cadences of his own tongue and the words of the people in his immediate ken. Herder thus imparted to the idea of nation a potentially powerful, even revolutionary attribute of social depth, conceived in terms of belonging, as opposed to subjugation.[10] That belonging to a nation might be as important as eating or accumulating wealth or amassing power was a new idea; in the eighteenth century, it was also a novelty to celebrate the common folk within the nation as more virtuous than the cosmopolitan citizens of the world, whose 'inundated heart . . . is a home for no one'.[11] Herder's perception that the humble are naturally hospitable while the cosmopolitan heart is cold now seems ingenuous. Yet it rested on the sensible insight that the basis of a moral community is not an abstract link between the self and the universal, but, more concretely, 'the self and

[9] Nicholas Vazsonyi, 'Montesquieu, Friedrich Carl von Moser, and the "National Spirit Debate" in Germany', *German Studies Review*, 22/2 (1999), 225–46.

[10] Nathan Gardels, 'Two Concepts of Nationalism: An Interview with Isaiah Berlin', *New York Review of Books*, 21 Nov. 1991.

[11] On Herder, see Jörg Echternkamp, *Der Aufstieg des deutschen Nationalismus* (Frankfurt am Main, 1998), 98–106.

someone else'.[12] All subsequent ideas of nation and nationalism built on Herder's having made belonging into a fundamental category, a positive form of liberty.[13] Nationalists are equally indebted to his counter-enlightenment assumption that truth is not one, but many, and that diverse cultures each have their own centre of gravity.

Herder's ideas reflected the currents of a larger sea change. The new sense of nation was not thinkable without the shifts in mental attitudes—especially as regards time, human allegiances, and the individual—commonly associated with the beginning of the modern period.

Nations rest on a developmental sense of time. Nation thinking, in a stronger sense than simply having patriotic pride, only squares in a world in which the future is an open and malleable space. It was not always this way, for the imminence of Judgement Day had long cast a blunting shadow over western ideas of the future. 'We who have been placed at the end of time', Bishop Otto von Freising repeatedly wrote in his twelfth-century chronicle.[14] By contrast, for late eighteenth-century thinkers the future seemed malleable, as evidenced by the French Revolutionary Directorate's decision in September 1792 to invent a new calendar and start it with the year One. Man, not God, made the future. This conception of time, which the historian Lynn Hunt has called 'the single greatest innovation of the (French) Revolution', profoundly influenced the possibilities for imagining the nation.[15] The latter involved connecting an allegedly primordial past to the national awakening of the present to a future conceived of as secular salvation. Historians, among the most important nationalist

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[12] Tony Judt, 'The New Old Nationalism', *New York Review of Books*, 26 May 1994.

[13] Isaiah Berlin distinguished between negative and positive liberty: the first kind belonged to the tradition of Thomas Jefferson, and called for liberty from the intrusions of one's own tyrannical government; while the second kind referred to the right of a group—religious, ethnic, or national—to determine its own way of life. See Isaiah Berlin, *Two Concepts of Liberty* (Oxford, 1958). On belonging, see also Siegfried Weichlein, 'Nationalismus als Theorie sozialer Ordnung', in Thomas Mergel and Thomas Welskopp (eds.), *Geschichte zwischen Kultur und Gesellschaft* (Munich, 1997).

[14] Cited by Marc Bloch, *Feudal Society*, vol. i, trans. L. A. Manyon (Chicago, 1961), 84. For a discussion of the relevance of notions of time to nationalism (which I follow here very closely), see Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 29.

[15] Lynn Hunt, 'The World We Have Gained: The Future of the French Revolution', *American Historical Review*, 108/1 (2003), 6.

intellectuals, were in this sense 'backwards-looking prophets', as the Romantic philosopher Friedrich Schlegel called them.[16]

Nation, in the modern sense, also involves altered coordinates of loyalties and affinities. In dynastic empires, loyalties are defined vertically, ruler to subject in a descending chain of highly personalized relationships of fealty, each man 'the man of another man'.[17] In nations they work along a horizontal axis: a peasant in Bavaria imagines himself the kin of a shoemaker in Pomerania. Affinity, not hierarchy, counts. This affinity—'brothers' as Gleim already understood—is finite; it cannot reach to the rest of humanity, even if early theorists were of a different opinion.[18] This egalitarian conception also has important consequences for the value placed upon sacrifice in war. Medieval chronicles described the death of a nobleman on the battlefield in compassionately telling detail; the sufferings of a common soldier, by contrast, remained unsuitable material.[19] How different in the modern period! The change is best illustrated in gravestones for fallen soldiers, which, previous to the age of national consciousness, rarely mentioned the individual names of those who died for the fatherland. This began to change after the French Revolution, even in Germany. In 1792, Frederick the Great had a memorial built for his victorious Hessian troops, with the names of those who fell listed according to rank.[20] In subsequent decades, a gradual democratization of death set in; in the early nineteenth century, churchyards contained memorial graves with the individual names of soldiers who died 'for King and Fatherland'. The memorials did not yet commemorate death for the nation, in the full, unequivocal, sense

[16] Cited in Lucian Hölscher, *Die Entdeckung der Zukunft* (Frankfurt am Main, 1999), 70. On nationalist intellectuals more generally, see now Ronald Grigory Suny and Michael D. Kennedy (eds.), *Intellectuals and the Articulation of the Nation* (Ann Arbor, 2001).

[17] Bloch, *Feudal Society*, 145.

[18] Friedrich Meinecke, *Weltbürgertum und Nationalstaat*, vol. v/2 of Meinecke, *Werke*, ed. Hans Herzfeld (Berlin, 1963), 9–26.

[19] See Alain Finkielkraut, *Verlust der Menschlichkeit. Versuch über das 20. Jahrhundert* (Stuttgart, 1998), 47; Erich Auerbach, *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature*, trans. Willard R. Trask (Princeton, 1953), 243.

[20] Reinhart Koselleck and Michael Jeismann (eds.), *Der politische Totenkult: Kriegerdenkmale in der Moderne* (Munich, 1994), 12.

of the term. Yet the historical trajectory, characterized by the equality of dead soldiers, was nevertheless unmistakable.[21]

Finally, the modern idea of nation depended on an emerging concept of the individual as a person with a conscience and a will, one who followed his own moral reasoning, and not necessarily the plan of God or an external determination of the Good. This is the subjective turn of modernity, poignantly represented in the rise of autobiography, the predominance of portraiture in painting, and revolutionary charters that defined individual, as opposed to corporate, rights. The American 'Declaration of Independence', for example, guaranteed the individual 'inalienable rights' to 'life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness'—a stunning formulation when considered from feudal Europe. And the French 'Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen', which built upon the nationalist assumption that 'the principle of all sovereignty resides essentially in the nation', set 'the aim of all political association' as 'the preservation of the natural and imprescriptible rights of man'.[22] The very idea of what it meant to be an individual was thus defined anew. Following Rousseau, the individual possessed inner depth, an authentic, individualized, self; he became, in Herder's words, 'his own measure'.[23] Subsequent analogies between personhood and nationhood only make sense in the context of this tectonic shift.

Yet changes in broader mentalities occurred slowly; the reading public remained, in a generous estimate, limited to a few hundred thousand readers. If the Westphalian peasant read at all, he read religious almanacs and devotional books; he read them intensively (out loud, the same passages) and not extensively, as we used to read books in the twentieth century, namely from cover to cover.[24] He thought himself a subject, not a citizen, and his loyalties were not yet to his brethren in the Palatinate, but to his local lord.

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[21] Michael Jeismann, *Das Vaterland der Feinde: Studien zum nationalen Feindbegriff und selbstverständnis in Deutschland und Frankreich 1792–1918* (Stuttgart, 1992), 95.

[22] Richard van Dülmen, *Die Entdeckung des Individuums, 1500–1800* (Frankfurt am Main, 1997), 142–5.

[23] Charles Taylor, *Multiculturalism and 'The Politics of Recognition'* (Princeton, 1992), 26–30; and, in greater detail, Taylor, *Sources of the Self* (Cambridge, 1989).

[24] Reinhard Wittmann, *Geschichte des deutschen Buchhandels: Ein Überblick* (Munich, 1991), 171–4. On this aspect of the public sphere, see James Brophy's chapter in this volume.

Nation was not yet the self-evident 'principle of vision and division', as Pierre Bourdieu has put it, of the world.[25] But by the late eighteenth century, it already constituted a powerful, if not yet dominant, set of coordinates. One talked about 'national education' (*Nationalbildung*), 'national sentiment' (*Nationalgefühl*), 'national spirit' (*Nationalgeist*), 'national taste' (*Nationalgeschmack*), and 'national language' (*Nationalsprache*)—but not, significantly, 'national state' (*Nationalstaat*).[26] Moreover, in the course of the eighteenth century, a German literary language had established itself, and despite the wide range of spoken dialect, German more closely approximated a national language, judging by its mutual if imperfect comprehensibility over large stretches of territory, than French, Italian, Spanish, or Russian.[27]

Nationalism

Nationalism is a political doctrine with a set of core ideas: that the world is divided into nations, that the loyalty to the nation ought to override other loyalties, and that nations constitute the only legitimate basis of sovereign states.[28] A theory of the world, it is also an emotionally overdetermined account of the special, and usually superior, attributes of one's own country.

The birth of German nationalism, as an ideology widely shared, cannot be deduced from the raw experience of the Wars of Revolution and the subsequent Napoleonic invasion, as some historians still suppose.[29] It is true that the war was waged on an unprecedented scale, with troops numbering in the hundreds of thousands rather than in the tens of thousands, and that they plundered the land to an unheard of degree. It is also true that Napoleon easily toppled the

[25] Cited in Rogers Brubaker, *Nationalism Reframed: Nationhood and the National Question in the New Europe* (Cambridge, 1996), 3.

[26] See the entry for 'Nation' in Grimm's *Wörterbuch*. The term nation-state first appeared in a work by the liberal politician Paul Pfizer in 1842, but was not commonly used until after the revolution of 1848. See Dieter Langewiesche, *Nation, Nationalismus, Nationalstaat in Deutschland und Europa* (Munich, 2000), 83.

[27] Eric Blackall, *The Emergence of a German Literary Language, 1700–1775* (Cambridge, 1959).

[28] Anthony D. Smith, *Nationalism: Theory, Ideology, History* (Cambridge, 2001), 22.

[29] Hans-Ulrich Wehler, *Nationalismus: Geschichte, Formen, Folgen* (Munich, 2001), 10.

rickety structure of the Holy Roman Empire, and that in 1803 he dramatically reduced the number of political entities in Germany. The new shape of Germany, its greater cohesion and its more rational form, doubtless contributed significantly to a tighter sense of a German nation. Yet a German war of liberation against Napoleon, inspired by intellectuals and fought for and by the people, belongs to the realm of nationalist myth-making. Regular soldiers, not volunteers, comprised the vast majority of troops that fought against Napoleon.[30] In the Prussian army, for example, less than 10 per cent of the soldiers were volunteers, and of these, the largest contingents were not intellectuals and students but craftsmen, farmers, peasants, and day labourers.[31] For most people, conscription remained a plague not a calling. Especially in borderland areas, the numbers of men who went into temporary hiding to avoid being mustered often exceeded those who were rounded up.[32]

In Germany, 'the thought precedes the deed as lightning precedes thunder', Heinrich Heine warned. It was in fact German intellectuals who interpreted German defeats as national humiliations, to which a nationalist-inspired war of liberation was an answer.[33] Even this observation, however, must be qualified: German intellectuals in Austria did not share this sentiment in the same measure as in Brandenburg Prussia, and a sense of humiliation pulsed less palpably in areas where Germans had benefited from the Code Napoléon, like the Rhineland and south-western Germany.[34] It is, then, in Prussia that the new nationalism first crystallized; its most outspoken proponents—Ernst Moritz Arndt, Johann Gottlieb Fichte, and Friedrich Ludwig ('Turnvater') Jahn—were Prussian, if not by birth, then certainly by sentiment. German nationalism inflected differently from region to region, yet its starkest hues and deepest grounding remained Prussian in origin and aspiration.

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[30] Horst Carl, 'Der Mythos des Befreiungskrieges. Die "martialische Nation" im Zeitalter der Revolutions- und Befreiungskriege 1792–1815', in Langewiesche and Schmidt (eds.), *Föderative Nation*, 73–6.

[31] Wolfram Siemann, *Vom Staatenbund zum Nationalstaat: Deutschland 1806–1871* (Munich, 1995), 307.

[32] Ute Frevert, *Kasernierte Nation: Militärdienst und Zivilgesellschaft in Deutschland* (Munich, 2001), 25–6.

[33] As Michael Jeismann, *Das Vaterland der Feinde*, 44, puts it: 'not the enemy, but the animosity was a central catalyst for German national feeling'.

[34] Langewiesche, *Nation, Nationalismus, Nationalstaat*, 109.

The loudest of the new nationalist intellectuals was Ernst Moritz Arndt, whose popular prose and poems, many of which were rendered as song, appeared in pamphlets with immense print runs, some approaching 100,000 copies.[35] With a poetic felicity that could have served a nobler cause, Arndt elevated revenge and hate, especially against and for the French, into sentiments that served the fatherland. 'Hate of the foreign, hate of the French, of their trinkets, their vanity, their dissoluteness, their language, their customs, yes, burning hate against everything that comes from them', he admonished, 'must unite all Germans in a solid, fraternal bond',[36] With Arndt, an utterly unironic stress falls on strong, manly emotion. Although already evident in Gleim's war poetry, this stress takes on a new aggressiveness under the pressure of Arndt's bloody-minded stylus. 'Fresh into them! And colour the swords red in their vital arteries!', he urges, in 'To the Germans', 'so that every river and every brook and even the smallest spring flows with waves of red'.[37] Arndt emphasized killing more than dying for the nation; he preferred manly forward thrusts to the passive reception of outrageous fate, and he praised the positive deeds of common folk over 'princely slaves and vassals, who flee.'[38]

Arndt's political fervour oscillated between Prussian patriotism and German nationalism, though the lodestar of Prussia's future pointed to the greater German nation, which, in his often quoted line, 'stretches as far as the German tongue is heard'. Language thus constituted the starting point for the German nation and the rough estimate of where its boundaries were. In his widely read essay 'The Rhine, Germany's River but not its Border', Arndt imagined a Germany in its 'old borders': 'these divide it from Italy by the Alps in the south, by the Ardennes from France; in the east the [borders] extend to the Dalmatians, Croatia, Hungary and Poland; in the north the Baltic Sea and the Eider divide Germany from its Scandinavian brothers; in the west the North Sea closes her in.'[39] This is an expansive Germany, though not one that also encompassed the archipelagos of

[35] Siemann, *Vom Staatenbund zum Nationalstaat*, 306.

[36] Ernst Moritz Arndt, *Werke*, ed. Heinrich Meisner and Robert Geerds, vol. xiii (Leipzig, 1910), 82.

[37] Ibid. ii/1. 115–16.

[38] Ibid. 113–6, 41–2.

[39] Ibid. xiii. 168–9.

German settlements further afield in eastern Europe. His poem 'German Fatherland' mapped out the extent of this imagined nation, and it served as the national movement's unofficial anthem, its siren song.

Arndt desisted from formulating fully the philosophical presuppositions of his nationalist passion; in Germany, this task fell to Johann Gottlieb Fichte in his epoch-making 'Lectures to the German Nation', which he delivered to enraptured audiences in the amphitheatre of the Berlin Academy in the winter of 1807–8.[40] Philosophically the most radical of the new German nationalists, Fichte saw Germany's salvation in 'the use of completely new, untried means' to 'create a wholly new order of things' centred on the construction of a new self and on the education of the nation.[41] The emphasis on the making of a new reality, so central to current theories of nation-building, derives directly from Fichte's epistemology. Not just our categories, as Kant had argued, but both our categories and the sensations are products of the human mind, according to Fichte.[42] It followed that a nation was not simply 'a collection of individuals' with traits in common, as David Hume had assumed, or 'a body of associates living under one common law and represented by the same legislature', as Abbé Sieyès had maintained.[43] Rather, it was the product of the human mind, of culture, and of will—in any case something beyond ordinary politics, something higher, greater.[44] Nation was the realm in which free individuals realized their full potential and, at the same time, served humanity.

The nation did not serve the state; rather, the reverse was true: 'Love of Fatherland', Fichte wrote in the eighth lecture, 'governs the state as the undisputed highest, last and independent authority'.[45] This reversal had revolutionary implications, which nineteenth-century conservatives like Count Klemens von Metternich quickly understood. It suggested that the legitimacy of states derived from the nation, and not from God or the fortunes of a dynastic house,

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[40] J. J. Sheehan, *German History 1770–1866* (Oxford, 1989), 377.

[41] Johann Gottlieb Fichte, *Reden an die deutsche Nation* (Leipzig, 1924), 9, 12.

[42] Elie Kedourie, *Nationalism*, rev. edn. (New York, 1961), 34–6.

[43] Cited ibid. 14–15.

[44] Bernhard Giesen, *Die Intellektuellen und die Nation* (Frankfurt am Main, 1993), 147–8.

[45] Fichte, *Reden an die deutsche Nation*, 127–8.

Although Fichte did not discuss national borders in the lectures, rough congruence of national and state boundaries followed from his philosophical propositions. Moreover, the central task of the state was now conceived as the construction of the nation and the propagation of the national interest. This idea, which nowadays seems self-evident, constituted a significant step forward from Herder, who believed national cultures should be protected, but did not theorize their defence as the principal task for states and armies. Moreover, Fichte, unlike Herder, did not perceive national cultures on a horizontal axis of coexistence; rather, he underscored the value of struggle in human relations and described the Germans as among the 'first peoples', an *Urvolk*, with a privileged place in the pantheon of nations.

Fichte also posited an unmediated relationship between the individual and the nation, which in turn had profound implications for older loyalties, like family, religious affiliation, and local ties. The unmediated quality of this relationship allowed for the possibility, for example, that children inform on their parents since each is equally bound by membership in the nation.[46] In Fichte, the language of identity, rooted in a naturalized sense of what was authentically German, necessarily emphasized the similarity of individuals belonging to a large group over vast territorial space. In the same way, it erased internal differences within the nation, militated against the human propensity for mixing, and downplayed competing webs of human relationships. As Fichte imagined the nation as an autonomous individual writ large, with a will and a conscience of its own, he also shellacked it with developmental images of youth and maturity, which subsequent thinkers would coat with starker biological and racial colurings.

The earliest of those subsequent thinkers was Friedrich Ludwig (Vater) Jahn. Known principally as the founder of the gymnastics movement, he was also the author of the popular *German Peoplehood* (*Deutsches Volkstum*), a handbook for inventing a nation and creating a national state. Like Arndt and Fichte, he saw in Prussia the state most likely to drive the national unification of Germany forward; Austria, he opined, had already degenerated into a 'great national chaos' (*Völkermang*).[47] Yet unity was the signature of the times: 'One

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[46] Craig Calhoun, *Nationalism* (Buckingham, 1997), 46.

[47] Friedrich Ludwig Jahn, *Deutsches Volkstum* (repr. Berlin, 1991), 8.

God, one fatherland, one house, one love', he wrote in his deathlessly demagogic prose. He balanced his celebration of unity with loathing of its opposite. 'Mixed peoples and mixed languages must destroy themselves or be destroyed', he wrote in his 'Letters to Emigrants'.[48] He had also taken up themes concerning death in war, as represented in war poetry from Gleim to Arndt, and he too hoped that the war against the French would bring forth, in violence, a new German nation.[49]

To his disappointment, the Wars of Liberation did not summon the nation he had longed for, yet the gymnastics clubs he founded in 1811 on Berlin's *Hasenheide* quickly grew to become popular organizations of middle-class German youth. 'Gymnastics', as he envisioned it, was 'a means to a complete education of the nation', and, as such, 'preparatory work for future defenders of the nation'.[50] Nation should form not only the sentiments of individuals but should, as we now say, be inscribed in their bodies, defining the shape and strength of their muscles and the flow of their movements.[51] Jahn's gymnasts, who placed a premium on twisting, turning, and tumbling, wore loose-fitting 'old-German garb' of linen, the opposite of the stiff uniforms of the Prussian line, and they addressed each other, regardless of station, in the familiar form—'Du' not 'Sie'. They thus performed a conception of the nation at once popular, democratic, anti-dynastic, and anti-French.[52]

Nationalism spilled over from politics into other semantic fields, dying into the senses and bleeding into ordinary emotions. 'Ethnoscapes' now coloured the hills; meadows were no longer green but German; rivers, especially the Rhine, were declared national sanctuaries; and oak trees, as metaphors for steadfast loyalty, referred

[48] Cited in Langewiesche, *Nation, Nationalismus, Nationalstaat*, 107–8.

[49] Ibid. 106.

[50] Jahn, *Deutsches Volkstum*, 175, 177.

[51] Svenja Goltermann, *Körper der Nation: Habitusformierung und die Politik des Turnens, 1860–1890* (Göttingen, 1998); Daniel A. McMillan, '... die höchste und heiligste Pflicht ...' Das Männlichkeitsideal der deutschen Turnbewegung 1811–1871', in Thomas Kühne (ed.), *Männergeschichte—Geschlechtergeschichte* (Frankfurt am Main, 1996), 88–100.

[52] Christopher Clark, 'The Wars of Liberation in Prussian Memory: Reflections on the Memorialization of War in Early Nineteenth-Century Germany', *Journal of Modern History*, 68 (Sept. 1996), 559–66.

beyond themselves.[53] The woods themselves took on a sacral aura as a site of a special kind of solitude ('Waldeinsamkeit') and Germanic freedom ('germanische Waldfreiheit').[54] Romantic in impulse, the nationalistic rendering of the land sometimes suggested transcendence, as in, for example, Caspar David Friedrich's famous image of the wanderer, standing on a cliff overlooking an ocean of clouds.[55] But in the new discourse, everyday things also assumed national attributes. Peasant dress, hitherto a treasure of local variation, now marked German off from foreign. Virtues like persistence and depth became German virtues, and vices like fickleness and shallowness resonated as predictably French.

This semantic shift, inordinately important for understanding the salience of nationalism, suggests its power to frame consciousness, and the overriding importance of intellectuals within this process. Yet intellectuals did not simply speak for the nation; rather, specific intellectuals in a competitive field argued for the general validity of particular conceptions of the nation. In Germany, it proved to be of overriding importance that many of the most prominent German nationalists were Prussian, male, and Protestant.

In their own minds, the nationalists sided with the most progressive state in Germany, whose enlightened traditions, most visibly embodied by the Prussian Reformers, suggested progress not only toward a new nation but also, as Fichte insisted, a more humane world.[56] This was not cant, but Prussia also represented a military tradition and subsequent ideas of German nationalism remained especially entangled in Prussia's martial values.[57] The nationalists did

[53] On ethnoscapes, see Eric Kaufmann and Oliver Zimmer, 'In Search of the Authentic Nation: Landscape and National Identity in Switzerland and Canada', *Nations and Nationalism*, 4/4 (1998), 483–510. On this topic, see also Jeismann, *Vaterland der Feinde*, 55–9.

[54] Albrecht Lehmann, 'Der deutsche Wald', in Étienne François and Hagen Schulze (eds.), *Deutsche Erinnerungsorte*, 3 vols. (Munich, 2001), iii. 189–90. This nationalization occurred, paradoxically, as communal forest rights disappeared throughout central Europe, and lumber became a capitalist commodity.

[55] Bernhard Giesen, *Die Intellektuelle und die Nation: Eine deutsche Achsenzeit* (Frankfurt am Main, 1993), 150, 156–9.

[56] Matthew Levinger, *Enlightened Nationalism: The Transformation of Prussian Culture, 1806–1848* (Oxford, 2000).

[57] In the Europe of the 19th century, this was to some extent the common lot of new national states, only two of which, Norway and Iceland, were not forged in the fires of war. Langewiesche, *Nation, Nationalismus, Nationalstaat*, 46, 49.

not, however, take as their model the disciplined Prussian line, in which the soldier feared his officer more than he feared his enemy. Rather, following the Jacobin-model, the new nationalists looked to the citizen in uniform, who considered it an honour to serve his country and who brought his full intelligence and passion to the unit. The contrast could not be starker—on the one side, aristocratic privilege, drill, and obedience, on the other merit, courage, and flexibility. If the old Prussian army constituted a state within a state, the new represented the school of the nation. Conceived in the midst of the Napoleonic Wars; the Prussian army reforms, masterminded by Gerhard Scharnhorst, foresaw that all men above 20 years of age could be drafted for a period of three years to serve in the regular army (the line), and thereafter for two years in the reserve. If only partly implemented, the nation in arms—'well-weaponed Fichtians' in Elie Kedourie's wonderful, if misleading, phrase—continued to exercise the nationalist imagination.[58]

The new nationalism was an ideology of and for men. The point is too simple, only partly true, and it begs questions. Yet there was a special vehemence to Arndt's valorization of violently assertive masculine deeds, a new rigidity to Fichte's relegation of women to the domestic sphere, and a novel aesthetic in Jahn's idea of the swift, strong, male citizen in uniform.[59] Nationalism widened the wedge, already pried open in the late eighteenth century, separating a male public sphere from a female private domain. The proliferation of war poetry and pamphlets, mostly written by men, established a scale of virtues, including physical strength, discipline, forcefulness, and independence, which existed in counterpoint to female receptivity, caring, and dependence. If such oppositions were not newly minted coins in 1800, they nevertheless attained a new salience in a wider, more inclusive discourse about who constituted the active force of the nation. They also became hardened. Once derived from social

[58] Kedourie, *Nationalism*, 89; Ute Frevert, 'Das jakobinische Modell: Allgemeine Wehrpflicht und Nationsbildung in Preußen Deutschland', in Frevert (ed.), *Militär und Gesellschaft im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert* (Stuttgart, 1997), 31.

[59] Jahn cited in Frevert, *Die Kasernierte Nation*, 50. On Arndt, see Karen Hagemann, 'Der "Bürger als Nationalkrieger". Entwürfe von Miliär, Nation und Männlichkeit in der Zeit der Freiheitskriege', in Hagemann and Ralf Pröve (eds.), *Landsknechte, Soldatenfrauen und Nationalkrieger* (Frankfurt am Main, 1998), 78–89. On Fichte, see Isabel V. Hull, *Sexuality, State, and Civil Society in Germany, 1700–1815* (Ithaca, NY 1996), 315–23.

roles; juxtapositions of gender were now rendered as natural differences in sex.[60]

Religious division also seemed to tear at the fabric of the new nation. Codified since the Peace of Augsburg in 1555 as *cuius regio, eius religio* (in whose territory you live, his religion you have), the divisions between Lutherans, Calvinists, and Catholics appeared inimical to a unified national culture. Yet far from preaching tolerance, many German nationalists argued that the German nation could only be built on the foundation of Protestantism. 'All of Germany is the land of Protestantism', Ernst Moritz Arndt argued, 'because Protestantism seems to be purely Germanic'.[61] He believed Protestantism was the principal source of German vernacular culture, starting with Luther's translation of the Bible. He also decried the anti-national position of the Roman Catholic Church. But while tied to Protestantism, the new nation would transcend its denominational moorings. 'To be a people, to have a feeling for a cause; to come together with the bloody sword of revenge, this is the religion of our time', Arndt wrote in 1809.[62]

The transcendence of religious division, as the historian Wolfgang Altgeld has argued, imparted a radical dynamic to German nationalism.[63] From the start, it meant the straightening out of a bent history, in which 'invisible boundaries' between religious groups had been a fact of everyday life. National-religious projects ranged from Karl Bretschneider's idea of a Protestant-inspired union of northern Germany under the aegis of Prussia, to Fichte's belief that the three denominations could be dissolved and a Christian religion of reason erected in their place, to early notions of a mystical, Germanic religion. German nationalism was thus not so much 'an ersatz religion', as an 'ersatz church', with romantic intellectuals serving as its high

priests.[64] In the view of the new clergy, religiosity should not be banished, only its anti-national forms, and in their place rituals and festivals invented that unified rather than divided Germans.[65] The result, however, was often the reverse.

The capacity of nationalism to divide the nation was never so much in evidence as at the Wartburg Festival of 1817. Organized by German fraternity students, the Festival commemorated the fourth anniversary of the Battle of Nations, a decisive defeat for Napoleon, and the 400th anniversary of the Reformation. The festival involved nearly 500 students, who in the evening marched with torch in hand, singing the Lutheran song 'A mighty fortress is our God', up to the Wartburg. In the court of the very castle in which Luther had translated the Bible into German, they staged an auto-da-fé.[66] As if to absolve the students, historians usually note that they only burned reactionary books. The truth is more complicated, however. The roster of burned books also included works by a south German who welcomed Napoleon, a critic of the Prussian government, and an author who possessed the temerity to contend that regular troops, not intellectuals in gym uniforms, defeated Napoleon. They also included the anti-Lutheran dramas of a recent convert to Catholicism, and the *History of the German Empire* by August von Kotzebue, whose immensely popular dramas undermined the confident moral strictures and gender coordinates of an emerging culture of nationalism. Ignominiously tossed into the flames was also *Germanomanie*, a pamphlet by Saul Ascher, who denied that Christianity was a Germanic religion and claimed that Jews, too, were Germans.[67]

The book burning was perhaps a minor incident, rash behaviour. Yet it allows us to see that German nationalism cannot easily be arrayed on a simple scale that slides from progressive to reactionary,

[64] Altgeld, 'Religion, Denomination and Nationalism in Nineteenth Century Germany', 166; Giesen, *Die Intellektuellen und die Nation*, 158.

[65] George S. Williamson, *The Longing for Myth in Germany: Religion and Aesthetic Culture From Romanticism to Nietzsche* (Chicago, forthcoming, 2004).

[66] Levinger, *Enlightened Nationalism*, 110–13.

[67] See, on Kotzebue, George S. Williamson, 'Who Killed August von Kotzebue? The Temptations of Virtue and the Political Theology of German Nationalism, 1789–1819', *Journal of Modern History*, 72 (Dec. 2000), 890–943; Saul Ascher, *Die Germanomie* (Berlin, 1815). For the list of burned books, Robert Keil and Richard Keil, *Die burchenschaftlichen Wartburgfeste von 1817 und 1867* (Jena, 1868), 21–3.

left to right. 'Hatred of foreigners', as Saul Ascher bitterly complained, was already 'the first virtue of a German'.[68] From its nineteenth-century inception, German nationalism was Janus-faced, and the malformations that marked later phases of German nationalism were already in evidence.[69] These include the valorization of violence, especially marked in the tradition, and myth, of a people in arms; restrictive codes of moral conduct and male-dominated, middle-class, conceptions of gender hierarchy; antipathy towards Roman Catholicism, especially its seeming anti-national inflections; and anti-Semitism based not on religious but rather on national criteria. It is tempting to write that the Wartburg Festival contained the seeds of worse to come, except that the sentiments were already in full flower. Soon after the Wartburg Festival, in the midst of an economic downturn in 1819, there was a pogrom in Würzburg. Ignited by the spectre of Jewish emancipation, the pogrom spread throughout Germany as the Hep Hep riots, the first occurrence of nation-wide violence against the Jews of Germany since the Middle Ages.[70] The book burning at the Wartburg Festival also shows that the German nationalism of Arndt, Fichte, and Jahn was, in reality, only one way of imagining the German nation. There were competing conceptions, whether the romantic, medieval, temperamentally Catholic projections of Novalis, or Saul Ascher's plea for a more tolerant, inclusive German nation, in which Jews, too, could find a place. Finally, the Wartburg Festival suggests the potentially radical character of early German nationalism. Not content to burn the books of August von Kotzebue, Karl Sand, a student, stabbed to death the author and playwright.[71] It happened in a calculated paroxysm of patriotic passion on a spring day in March 1819. Seizing the opportunity, Prince Metternich, who personified the conservative German Confederation,

[68] Saul Ascher, 'Die Wartburgfeier', in Ascher, 4 Flugschriften (1818; Leipzig, 1991), 251.

[69] Christian Jansen, 'Deutsches Volk und Deutsches Reich. Zur Pathologie der Nationalstaatsidee im 19. Jahrhundert', Wolfgang Bialas (ed.), in Die nationale Identität der Deutschen (Frankfurt am Main, 2002), 168. For the sustained argument, see Jeismann, Vaterland der Feinde.

[70] Stefan Rohrbacher, 'The Hep Hep Riots of 1819', in Christhard Hoffmann, Werner Bergmann, and Helmut Walser Smith (eds.), Exclusionary Violence: Antisemitic Riots in Modern German History (Ann Arbor, 2002), 23–42.

[71] See now the brilliant interpretation of this event by George S. Williamson, 'Who Killed August von Kotzebue?', 890–943.

outlawed the fraternities and the gymnasts, and, in the Karlsbad Decrees of November 1819, censored the nationalists—whom he rightly perceived as radical.

The spread of nationalism

The power of nationalism derived from the force of an idea, yet this idea only gradually made its way, as a result of organization, into wider circles. The fraternities and the gymnasts were the most conspicuous of the early organizations. By 1818, over 150 gymnastics clubs with a total of 12,000 members existed in Germany, mostly in Prussia, and almost exclusively north of the Main River.[72] With few exceptions, the geography of nationalistic fraternities largely conformed to this pattern. Yet after the Karlsbad Decrees, the national movement assumed a different shape: south Germany, though not Austria, became a more active participant in organized nationalism, and it increasingly included mature men, not just passion-driven youth. The choral societies, which started in 1826 in Württemberg and spread north, became the most popular nationalist organization in Germany, numbering 100,000 members by 1848. The societies staged festivals and sang ballads praising the courage of men and the glory of the fatherland. Led by local notables, the choral societies' ranks reached deep into the male population of cities and towns.[73]

The national movement became less radical; it also attached its fortunes to the fate of liberalism, a political programme for freedom, progress, and arrangement with monarchical power.[74] Liberalism also represented the political articulation of middle-class men, who disdained the indigent and the dependent and the unlearned, and took it upon-themselves to speak in their name, endowing their 'purposes', as Prospero said to Caliban, 'with words that made them known'. The people, *das Volk*, thus received a rational voice—in any case, a more moderate voice. The altered tone could be heard at the Hambacher Festival of 1832, a patriotic celebration in the Palatinate, where 20,000

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[72] Langewiesche, *Nation, Nationalismus, Nationalstaat*, 104–5.

[73] Ibid. 132–71.

[74] On the importance of this 'elected affinity', see Echternkamp, *Der Aufstieg des deutschen Nationalismus*.

men gathered to 'shout', as Heinrich Heine put it, 'the sunrise songs for modern times'.[75] It was a hymn to a more reasonable nationalism, anti-French to be sure, but not as shrill as Arndt's earlier impassioned antipathies, or as strident as the students at the Wartburg Castle shouting down the enemies of the nation. Significantly, there was no burning of books. Instead, the Hambacher Festival brought forth a range of voices, from radical to moderate.[76] There was, moreover, a great deal of talk about educating the masses and the importance of constitutions, with representative, not democratic, legislative bodies. For Metternich, however, the national movement still seemed too dangerous, and he again moved to suppress it. Increasingly, though, the repression was a saw without teeth, a sheath *sans* sword.

If the sense of nation in the meanwhile penetrated deeper, it remained a project of nationalist intellectuals, who, in the context of emerging scholarly disciplines, like political and literary history, attempted to discern the national past as a spiritual atmosphere anterior to the reality of states. Even Leopold von Ranke, whose greatest work was on the relations between states, thought of the nation as a 'mysterious something' that 'precedes every constitution'.[77] But if nation seemed at once natural and ineffable, its mystery resulted in no small measure from the conscious invention of tradition.[78] The Brothers Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm, for example, set out in a Herderian quest to record the 'pure' voice of the people as expressed in the fairy tales of an authentic German peasantry; in reality, many of the tales came from literate townspeople. Dorothea Viehmann, a tailor's widow from just outside Kassel, contributed thirty-five tales to the *Kinder- und Hausmärchen*. She was of Huguenot background, and some of the tales, which the Grimms stylized into authentically German voices, derived from the experiences of religious conflict in France.[79] If the tales initially possessed the rough fibre of oral tradition, they were subsequently reworked by the

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[75] Cited by Sheehan, *German History*, 610.

[76] Jonathan Sperber, *Rhineland Radicals: The Democratic Movement and the Revolution of 1848–1849* (Princeton, 1991), 112.

[77] Cited in Sheehan, *German History*, 553.

[78] Eric Hobsbawm, 'Inventing Traditions', in Hobsbawm and Terrence Ranger (eds.), *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge, 1983), 1–14.

[79] Maria Tatar, 'Grimms Märchen', in *Deutsche Erinnerungsorte*, i. 279.

Brothers Grimm, especially Wilhelm, and smoothed over with an aesthetically pleasing sheen.

While dependent on the work of nationalist intellectuals, the nation reflected an emerging structure of communication predicated on 'the revolution in reading' (by 1840, roughly 40 per cent of Germans counted as literate).[80] The rapid expansion of postal services, the spread of newspapers, and the astonishing growth of the book trade also contributed to a sense that the nation was something actually existing. So too did improvements in roads and the construction of a railway system. The latter, which began in the 1830s, exercised nationalist fantasies in revealing ways. In 1833, the political economist Friedrich List sketched out an imaginary railway system whose centre point was Saxony, and whose track lines seemed to undergird the small-German solution to the national question: Prussia plus the states of the middle and south.[81] And in fact, in the subsequent two decades, rail lines largely, though not exactly, followed List's projections. As List understood, the most significant innovation was, however, the Prussia-led Customs Union (Zollverein), which began as a series of bilateral tariff treaties in the 1820s between states and was largely complete by 1834, with Baden, Nassau, Frankfurt, Braunschweig, Hanover, and Oldenburg joining in the following years. In addition to the Mecklenburgs and the Hansa cities, Austria remained outside. The Customs Union stitched together the nation, 'not just as history and language', as one merchant said, but so that every citizen 'experiences it daily'. Others agreed. 'And so one morning our knights of cotton and heroes of iron saw themselves transformed into patriots', quipped Karl Marx, no friend of the cunning ('Listigen') theory he.[82] Historians tend to more caution; they point to continuing discrepancies in weights, measures, and monetary units, kinks in individual taxation policies, and the overall drift of trade, which did not so self-evidently follow the curves of the Customs Union. And then there was the question posed by the perspicacious

[80] Rolf Engelsing, 'Die Perioden der Lesergeschichte in der Neuzeit', in Engelsing, *Zur Sozialgeschichte deutscher Mittel- und Unterschichten* (Göttingen, 1973), 140.

[81] John Breuilly, 'Nationalismus als kulturelle Konstruktion', in *Die Politik der Nation*, 255–6.

[82] The merchant and Karl Marx cited in Andreas Etgers, 'Von der "vorgestellten" zur "realen" Gefühls- und Interessengemeinschaft? Nation und Nationalismus in Deutschland von 1830 bis 1848', in *Die Politik der Nation*, 61, 76.

liberal politician Paul Pfizer: who would go to war for a customs arrangement?[83]

The question was, of course, rhetorical. In the 1840s, German nationalists increasingly believed that a broad range of criteria, some cultural, others political, contributed to the making of nations. These included not only language but also customs and folkways, laws and constitutions, religion, shared historical memories, and, perhaps most importantly, consciousness of community. The old dichotomy, according to which there existed west of the Rhine a political definition of the nation, and east of the Rhine a cultural understanding, hardly rings right for the 1840s. In the generation subsequent to Arndt and Fichte, cultural assumptions still determined the nation's centre of gravity: nationhood continued to turn on a community of language and sentiment; its closest analogy was to personhood; as such, bourgeois notions of honour shaped the way the nation was imagined. Yet in this period there was a greater emphasis on the political than there had been during the Wars of Liberation, and consequently questions of constitutions, borders, and national membership increasingly came to the fore.[84]

The revolutions of 1848

The revolutions of 1848 afforded German nationalists the opportunity to provide a solid casing to what had hitherto been an imaginary community held together by the delicate, unloved lace of Metternich's German Confederation. But there were significant problems from the start, and solutions were not rendered easier by the tenuous mandate and rickety power base of the Frankfurt parliament. With respect to German nationalism, the most intractable difficulties involved the definition of borders and the issue of sovereignty.

The German Confederation resembled a tethered tapestry in which whole areas—Danish, Polish, Czech, Slovakian, Slovenian, and Italian

[83] Cited in Etgers, in *Die Politik der Nation*, 71.

[84] See Brian E. Vick, *Defining Germany: The 1848 Frankfurt Parliamentarians and National Identity* (Cambridge, Mass., 2002). On membership, the standard work is now Dieter Gosewinkel, *Einbürgern und Ausschließen: Die Nationalisierung der Staatsangehörigkeit vom Deutschen Bund bis zur Bundesrepublik Deutschland* (Göttingen, 2001).

ethnic spaces—were threadbare, or nearly so. The first problem, borders, was vexed in all directions, yet most conspicuously in the east, where German hopes for national and territorial integrity clashed with the equally legitimate claims of competing nations, especially Poland. The crux of the problem was the Prussian province of Posen, which lay outside Confederation borders and two-thirds of whose inhabitants were Polish speakers. Undeterred by these facts, most German nationalists in the Frankfurt parliament argued for inclusion of significant swathes of Posen that could not, on a purely linguistic reckoning, be counted as German (though the precise borders were to be determined at a later date). Appropriating strategic and historical arguments, they thus followed what the left-wing parliamentarian William Jordan approvingly called 'a healthy national egoism'. In the course of the revolution, the rhetoric of the eastern borderlands became increasingly strident, with the Germans of Posen evoking apocalyptic visions of racial war and warning against the dangers of a 'general bloodbath and national war of extermination'.[85] Conflict in Bohemia, though not as pitched, nevertheless elicited similarly portentous declarations. Equally ominous, the men of the Frankfurt parliament supported the use of force in both cases in order to suppress bloodily the national movements of people whom, not so long ago, they would have called their Slavic brethren. If the aggressive fantasies of German nationalists were once reserved for France, they now turned eastward as well.

The role of the House of Habsburg in a new German nation-state complicated calculations further. Even more than the German Confederation, the Habsburg dynasty was a vast multinational empire, and to make all of it part of Germany—'the 70 million solution'—would have rendered Germany populous and powerful but internally divided. For most German nationalists, who fervently believed that cultural cohesion constituted a source of strength, this was an unacceptable outcome. 'Whether the thing is practical or not', a Westphalian parliamentarian observed of the 70 million solution, 'you will never call it a German State'.[86] Cultural understandings of

[85] Vick, *Defining Germany*, 192. For a concise overview of the problems in a European context, see Jonathan Sperber, *The European Revolutions, 1848–1851* (Cambridge, 1994), 90–100.

[86] Cited in Vick, *Defining Germany*, 166.

the nation remained poignant. Following a kind of magnet theory, German parliamentarians believed that over time a German national state could assimilate peripheral nationalities, especially given that in most of the ethnically mixed zones, Germans counted disproportionately among the upper classes, townsfolk, and city dwellers.

A more modest proposal involved the inclusion of the Austrian lands within the German Confederation. In the early months of the revolution, this form of the great-German solution enjoyed considerable consensus among the delegates at Frankfurt, even though it would tilt the demographic balance against a Protestant-dominated German nation and towards rough denominational parity. It also entailed a complicated arrangement according to which the non-German lands of the Habsburg Empire could only be coupled with the German nation through the personal rule of the monarch—*de facto,* a partition of the Habsburg lands. As one might have imagined, Vienna hardly welcomed the idea, and the new Minister President, Prince Felix Schwarzenberg, fresh blood on his hands from his ruthless reoccupation of the capital in November, said as much.

Left was Prussia and the small-German solution. The support base for turning to the Hohenzollerns was thin, with Catholics, democrats, and south Germans opposed. A small majority did, however, emerge in favour of offering the crown, with limited veto power over legislation, to Friedrich Wilhelm IV, who was publicly cordial but privately acerbic about the offer. 'This so-called crown', he wrote, 'is not really a crown at all but actually a dog collar'.[87] His armies intact, his nerve regained, he was little inclined to be leashed to a parliament. Their hopes for a unified German nation dashed, not a few German nationalists might have agreed with A. J. P. Taylor's famous judgement, rendered nearly a century after the fact, that here 'German history reached its turning-point and failed to turn'.[88]

The road to unification

Subsequently, German nationalism scarcely determined the road taken to unification. The point is perhaps too sharp, for it is intended

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[87] Cited in Sheehan, *German History,* 691.
[88] A. J. P. Taylor, *The Course of German History,* 10th edn. (New York, 1979), 68.

to deflate a common misperception, according to which German nationalists, forced into deeper insight about the importance of power, turned from idealism to realism and mapped out the only possible path, whose destination was the German Empire of 1871. There were, of course, powerful structural factors pushing Germany to a small-German solution. Ever since the 1860s, Prussia had begun to outstrip Austria in economic terms, registering remarkable growth rates, spurred by the industrial sector. Moreover, the Customs Union, the Zollverein, ensured that Prussia's economic ascendancy exerted gravitational pull on the economies of middle and southern Germany, binding them ever more closely to their northern neighbour. In the realm of nationalist organization, too, structural elements favoured Prussia over Austria. In the 1850s and 1860s, new national organizations—such as the German National Association (Deutscher Verein), the Congress of German Economists, the German Chamber of Commerce, and the German Diet of Deputies—brought forth a 'discernible, national-political functional elite', which, according to one estimate, consisted of roughly eighty men, most of whom were academically educated, typically as jurists, were mainly Protestant (83 per cent), and came from all corners of Germany with the important and telling exception of Austrian lands.[89]

If we admit all of the above, it is still necessary to consider that on the battlefield of Königgrätz in 1866, the outcome might have been different—perhaps an Austrian victory, more likely a stalemate. With the ominous shadows of the Civil War in the United States still cast, such an outcome might plausibly have led to a compromise peace, with uncertain ramifications for the German national state. Rather than imagining German nationalism as a driving force for unification, it might make more sense to consider it, as John Breuilly has suggested, 'as a ratchet on a wheel'. Nationalism, in this analogy, 'does not push the wheel forward but it prevents the wheel from slipping back'.[90]

It follows that the history of German nationalism between 1848 and 1871 is not necessarily the prehistory of unification, any more than the history of Wilhelmine Germany is exhausted by an

[89] Andreas Biefang, *Politisches Bürgertum in Deutschland, 1857–1868. Nationale Organisation und Eliten* (Düsseldorf, 1994).

[90] John Breuilly, *The Formation of the German National State, 1800–1871* (London, 1996), 109.

exploration of the origins of the First World War or the history of the Weimar Republic is adequately conceived as but a prelude to the Third Reich.

While many German nationalists embraced the new politics of 'blood and iron', others, and often the best among them, resisted the putative facts of *Realpolitik*. This was at least partly true of the left of the Frankfurt parliament, who, after the brief interregnum of Reaction, continued to occupy prominent positions in politics and to work out strategies for attaining national unity. These ranged from south-west German ideas of a federalist union, achieved gradually, to a national state that, also gradually, coalesced around a liberal Prussia, to a position (more readily embraced by a younger generation) that supported the military initiatives of Prussia, to, finally, a pro-Austrian position that imagined a German-dominated *Mitteleuropa*.[91] Not if, but how a German nation-state should be achieved divided German nationalists. The split was not a left–right division; for many nationalists, on the left as well as the right, military conquest constituted a viable road to national unity. This was especially true after the Crimean War, which found protagonists of the Vienna Settlement of 1815, England and Russia, warring against one another, and Austria pursuing policies inimical to Russia, its former ally. Central Europe suddenly seemed a softer military environment, as military strategists like to say. But not all German nationalists envisaged as the ideal Moltke's swift, disciplined, industrial warfare. Many considered an army of the people, not the Prussian line, the preferable agent of national unification, even if more blood would thus be shed.[92]

The question of who died for the fatherland, and how this death was to be represented, remained at the core of German nationalism. It had been so since the Seven Years War, in which death for the common soldier was first aestheticized; it had been the case in the Wars of Liberation, in which an aestheticized death was rendered in increasingly national terms; and it was the case in the revolution of 1848, where cults of death centred on fallen revolutionaries, like those who died in the March Days in Berlin, as well as on the soldiers who shot them, some of whom also counted among the fallen.[93] Death does not

[91] Christian Jansen, *Einheit, Macht und Freiheit* (Düsseldorf, 2000).

[92] Biefang, *Politisches Bürgertum in Deutschland*, 435.

[93] Manfred Hettling, *Totenkult statt Revolution: 1848 und seine Opfer* (Frankfurt am Main, 1998).

just unify nations, it also divides them. It is perhaps no coincidence that the last great defeat of liberal nationalism before unification concerned control over the army, the institutional arbiter of state-induced death. In the Constitutional Conflict of the 1860s, Prussian liberals sacrificed parliamentary control to the exigencies of an authoritarian military state; more importantly, the democratic structures of civilian life scarcely dented the shield behind which the Prussian army cultivated an ethos all its own. In the end, the army militarized men; men did not democratize the army, as German nationalists had long hoped.[94] The idea of a people in arms, 'well-weaponed Fichtians', did not simply vanish, however; it reappeared in 1918, in the midst of defeat during the first great calamity of the twentieth century, a war in which roughly 80 per cent of casualties resulted from the fire of machine guns.[95] One would think that the new technology of violence would have rendered obsolete the nationalist fantasy of dying a singular, heroic, death for the fatherland. Instead, we learn that the refracted lines of continuity fall in surprising, if dismaying, ways.

[94] For the traditional view of the conflict, see Gordon A. Craig, *The Politics of the Prussian Army, 1640–1945* (New York, 1964), 136–79; for a brilliant start at a reinterpretation, Michael Geyer, *Deutsche Rüstungspolitik 1860–1980* (Frankfurt am Main, 1984), 25–44.

[95] Michael Geyer, 'Insurrectional Warfare: The German Debate about a Levée en masse', *Journal of Modern History*, 73/3 (Sept. 2001), 459–527; Dan Diner, *Das Jahrhundert verstehen: Eine universalhistorische Deutung* (Frankfurt am Main, 2000), 41.