

## The German Myth of the East: 1800 to the Present

Vejas Gabriel Liulevicius

<https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199546312.001.0001>

Published: 27 August 2009

Online ISBN: 9780191720338

Print ISBN: 9780199546312

Search in this book

### CHAPTER

## 1 Introduction

Vejas Gabriel Liulevicius

<https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199546312.003.0001> Pages 1–11

Published: August 2009

### Abstract

This introductory chapter lays out the real stakes of this inquiry into a crucial transnational relationship of the modern period within Europe, and the implications it has had for the history of Germany and German culture. It draws parallels and explores contrasts to other frontier myths, especially the American notion of a formative experience in the Wild West, and conceits of a 'civilizing mission' common to other imperial or colonial ventures in modern times. It defines the usage of 'myth' as a concept, and establishes a conceptual framework drawing on the work of anthropologist Mary Douglas's *Purity and Danger* — which analysed concepts of dirt, pollution, identity, and cosmology — and Liah Greenfeld's scholarship on nationalism.

**Keywords:** [frontier](#), [Germany](#), [myth](#), [nationalism](#), [transnational](#)

**Subject:** [European History](#), [Political History](#), [Russian and Slavic History](#), [Modern History \(1700 to 1945\)](#), [Intellectual History](#)

**Collection:** [Oxford Scholarship Online](#)

The German encounter with Eastern Europe's lands and peoples began long before Germany existed as a unified nation-state. As a result, German nationalism, German thinking about the East, and German political organization and statehood have all evolved simultaneously, and are all tied together with evolving relationships with the neighbours to the East.

For Germans over the last two hundred years, the concept of the East has been an existential question. It established a durable reflex of looking at the East as both a site of the future and its promise and at the same time a location of peril, associated with the past. The encounter with the East took place across a vast geographic vista, including many places where the German element, once so crucial, is now missing. German populations stretched from the Volga to the Baltic to the Balkans, the Carpathian Mountains, Bukowina, Transylvania, Hungary, the Sudeten mountain range, Silesia, Prussia, Pomerania, Livland, Estland, Volhynia, Bessarabia, Bohemia, Moravia, Slovakia, Slovenia, Croatia, Serbia, Crimea, Ukraine, Poland, Vojvodina, Banat, and many other eastern parts of the continent.

How could so many Germans over the last two centuries have so often seen Eastern Europe at one and the same time as both a dirty 'Wild East' marked by chaos and disorganization, and yet ↪ also as a land of tremendous future possibilities and potential for Germans? The answer lay in the enduring tradition of seeing a German cultural mission in the East, a frontier myth (a European cognate to American ideas of Manifest Destiny in the nineteenth century, which endure in popular culture to this day).

The aim of this book is to demonstrate that there has been a durable fascination with the East in German culture and thought precisely as a projection of hopes and anxieties about Germany itself. This study obviously cannot be exhaustive, noting every appearance of ideas about the East, but it will give many examples, from high culture to popular culture, to demonstrate the ubiquity of these concerns, and to show how important thinking about the East has been in defining and repeatedly redefining German national identity in the modern period. That durable German discourse about the East constitutes a myth, which has powerfully affected politics and culture.

A natural point of departure is to grapple with some problems of definition, establishing how the terms 'German', 'myth', and 'East' are used in this study. The very difficulties that these definitions present are historically significant.

The group called 'the Germans' examined in this study includes not only the populations inhabiting the territories of the German nation-state established comparatively late in European history in 1871, but rather includes also German-speakers elsewhere, especially the Austrian Germans, who were part of a larger cultural community of German-speaking Central Europe until that fateful divergence of the late nineteenth century. Throughout the modern period, the question of what it means to be German has returned and has been answered in differing ways at different historical junctures.

When we speak of myth in this context, we don't mean outright lies or fabrications as such, but rather a complex of ideas, a durable discourse of expectations and imagination. Without claiming that a set of collective perceptions applies to an entire population, ↪ we can still discover even within a multiplicity of individual perceptions some widely shared assumptions, often unspoken and unconscious. It is precisely the task of cultural history to get at these hidden or deeply implicit assumptions, because ideas have consequences. Myth in this sense applies to a durable tradition of ways of thinking about some crucial and constitutive element, and for this reason Sallust, the Roman historian, described myth in the following terms: 'Now these things never happened, but always are.' Michel Tournier has described myth as 'history that everyone knows'.<sup>1</sup> A myth designates a set of common assumptions, related stereotypes, recurring images, and ubiquitous metaphors. Clearly, not all Germans have seen the East in the same way at all times, but within the range of responses (from antipathy to indifference to sympathy) there are nevertheless striking shared assumptions, which need to be explored as a whole and with attention to their internal and historical linkages, as well as inner tensions.

It is more difficult to define the 'East'. The existential question that was at stake in juxtaposing German identity with the East explains, for instance, why the very concept of the East eludes simple geographical definition: it potentially included, in modern German terminology, Poland, the Baltic States, Ukraine, Russia, the Czech lands, the Balkans, and in fact even the eastern provinces of Germany itself. This immediately shows that 'the East' implies not a location, but a state of being: an alleged condition of disorganization or underdevelopment. A crucial implication, thus, is that the East designates not only a distant geographical location, but can include Germans themselves.

This study advances three main arguments. First, it needs to be stressed that the German relationship with the East has never been monolithic. There has never been one single vision of the East in German culture. Rather, different understandings of the East have had features in common, and these affinities need to be explored. In particular, the fact of this diversity needs to be emphasized in order always to avoid the obvious danger of overdetermining this history ↪ and seeing it only as inevitably and inexorably moving towards the horrors of

the Nazi regime. Such relentless teleology is refuted powerfully by the counterexamples of more generous attitudes towards Eastern Europe evidenced at other junctures. Continuities are not the same as causalities or predetermined courses. Thus, without obscuring darker precedents, it is crucial also to illuminate other possibilities and models, which were implicit from the beginning of the modern period. The counterpoint and tension were there from the start. German views of the East were complex compounds of a sense of promise and threat, not an ahistorical, elemental and preprogrammed or unchanging 'Drive to the East'. As Wolfgang Ippermann's wonderful intellectual history of the concept of the 'Drive to the East' has shown, however, the ideological belief that something of the sort existed did have vast consequences.<sup>2</sup> It is necessary then to explore the context in which such ideologies arose, without reifying the concept and giving it an agency it did not possess.

Secondly (at the core of this work), I argue that what was at stake in this discourse about the East was often actually a definition of German national identity. One reason why ideas about the East were so vexing was that for Germans, the East was not only beyond Prussia's eastern borders, but was within Germany as well, in the border provinces and their instability. As my study highlights, at crucial junctures (the rise of German nationalism, the revolution of 1848, German unification under Bismarck in 1871, the First World War and its aftermath, the Nazi ascent to power with the project of recasting German identity racially, and in the post-Second World War period, down to reunification in 1989), projects defining Germans' relations with their eastern neighbours implicitly frame larger debates about what it means to be German.

p. 5 The third and final argument emphasizes the remarkable durability of distinctive rhetorical terms and images used by Germans to describe the East—together, these constitute a tradition in German culture (which can be put to strikingly different uses). As ↪ the tropes shift, change, and recur, they offer important insights, especially as certain themes are reiterated in the sources. The main trope was that of 'Kultur', a value identified with Germanness, opposed to barbarism and oppression in the East.

A special appeal of this intellectual project is that it represents a move beyond narrower national histories, examining a transnational relationship in motion, across borders. This offers the chance to transcend Cold War-era historiography, which too often saw Europe as divided into hermetic blocs of East and West. Crucially, in the study of German history, this perspective suggests significant new questions. Over the last decades, German historians agonized over the concept of a German 'Sonderweg', a supposedly unique historical route (often deplored, sometimes celebrated) which had marked German development, and set it off from the putatively 'normal' model of liberal political evolution, especially as seen in Great Britain. The ultimate result of the *Sonderweg's* twisted route to modernity, it was often argued, was the disaster of Nazi rule and genocide. While Germany was compared to the 'normal' West, the missing other half of this problem, scarcely ever broached explicitly, was the obvious comparison to the East. Important recent historical works have investigated Germany's 'long road to the West'<sup>3</sup> or 'Westernization', but the eastern dimension is neglected. Even today, German media poses the question: 'How Western are the Germans?', while the obvious alternative remains unspoken. When repeated again and again, these conspicuous silences become deafening and I would argue that such omissions are significant, pointing to a cultural phenomenon urgently needing explanation.

p. 6 Paradoxically, this gap in historical writing is accompanied by frequent admissions in the literature that Germany's central position between East and West has been essential to its historical trajectory, but the eastern dimension has not received sustained analysis. To give but one older and notorious example, A. J. P. Taylor's characteristically provocative essay, *The Course of German ↪ History* (1946), strongly argued that the German geographic position had produced a cultural dualism between West and East, but then fell back on essentialist arguments that Germans always sought to emulate the West and 'exterminate the East' (of course, his brilliantly ferocious arguments were colored by the time of writing, in the last days of the Second World War).<sup>4</sup> Taylor's polemics of course obscure fascinating complexities and paradoxes that need to be illuminated. Since then, much exciting and valuable scholarship has been produced on aspects of German interactions with

Eastern Europe and Russia.<sup>5</sup> What has not yet been confronted directly is the specific question of the German myth of the East as a whole.

At the same time, it is useful to keep in mind several caveats. First, the phenomenon addressed here is not somehow uniquely German. On the contrary, geography has been the stuff of mythologized self-understanding for much if not most of human history. The notions of an intrinsic opposition between 'The West' and 'The East' reach back to classical times, with Europe seen as a home of individual freedom and Asia defined as the essence of dehumanized servitude and tyranny.<sup>6</sup> In the modern period, 'Orientalism' (as argued by Edward Said) constituted a mysterious eastern realm to be mastered by western scientific knowledge.<sup>7</sup> Further, the German myth of the East needs to be situated in a broader comparative context, as it is one of a variety of frontier myths and ideologies of a civilizing mission shared by a number of societies. Indeed, Polish, Hungarian, and Russian cultures all themselves also possess what might be called a myth of the East of their own, celebrating the unlimited possibilities and expansive spirit of eastern regions, while also identifying them with potential perils.<sup>8</sup> In the age of high imperialism in the late nineteenth century, many European colonial projects were presented in terms of a 'civilizing mission' as well.<sup>9</sup>

p. 7 However, the key comparison here is one that was also often present in the minds of German nationalists in the modern period: the comparison with the American frontier. The American myth of the Wild West has been a foundational myth, and not only for Americans.<sup>10</sup> The possibilities of the frontier have been seen as endowing American experience with the 'abundance, the freedom, and the opportunity for self-advancement' that were key to the republican experiment of the United States.<sup>11</sup> Generations of American writers had contributed to this tradition. Thoreau had declared, 'eastwards I go by force, westward I go free' and announced 'I must walk to Oregon', and Mark Twain celebrated the urge to 'light out for the territory'. The political significance of the notion became patent with the articulation, from 1845, of the explicit notion of 'manifest destiny', summing up a calling 'to overspread the continent allotted by Providence for the free development of our yearly multiplying millions'. This slogan rang through the Mexican–American War of 1846–8 and further expansion westwards. The iconic image of American manifest destiny was in fact painted by a German Romantic. This was Emanuel Leutze's 1862 mural in the west stairway of the House of Representatives.<sup>12</sup> Further, the German-born Albert Bierstadt spearheaded the Rocky Mountain school of painting, producing canonical images of what the Wild West meant. When the 1890 US census concluded that there was no longer a frontier, the American historian Frederick Jackson Turner delivered a profoundly influential address at a 1893 conference which launched what came to be called the 'Turner Thesis', arguing that the frontier (as opposed to strict European borders) had formed American democracy, individualism, and national character most broadly.

And yet, for the provocative parallels between the German myth of the East and American notions of the Manifest Destiny embedded in the myth of the Wild West, there are also contrasts that need to be addressed. The most prominent of these is the fact that German views of Eastern Europe in the modern period have been marked by stereotypes of dirt and disorder, in a way which contrasts with American views of the West, which did not see it as repellingly unclean.

p. 8 How does one account for the combinations of attraction and repulsion that are encoded in German views of the East? Here the work of two scholars, one an anthropologist and the other a historian, are of great utility. Mary Douglas's anthropological analysis of the role of dirt in human societies provides a useful theoretical framework. In essence, she explains in her classic *Purity and Danger*, which analysed concepts of dirt, pollution, identity, and cosmology, dirt is identified with states of disorder:

we are left with the old definition of dirt as matter out of place. This is a very suggestive approach. It implies two conditions: a set of ordered relations and a contravention of that order. Dirt, then, is never a unique, isolated event. Where there is dirt there is system. Dirt is the byproduct of a systematic ordering and classification of matter, in so far as ordering involves rejecting inappropriate elements.

This idea of dirt takes us straight into the field of symbolism and promises a link-up with more obviously symbolic systems of purity.<sup>13</sup>

The impulse to impose order is also accompanied by the recognition that dirt and cleansing imply transitional states, which have a potency in the symbolic systems of societies ancient or modern. The historical scholarship of Liah Greenfeld on the origins and evolution of modern nationalisms also provides a key insight, which is that nationalisms do not exist in isolation from each other, but evolve in relation to one another, whether in emulation, reaction, or rivalry.<sup>14</sup> As we shall see, the relational nature of how national identities are defined and understood emerges very clearly as a phenomenon in the operation of the German myth of the East, expressing anxieties of the German position in national rankings and hierarchies of worth. Thus, while many German views of the East have seen it as intrinsically dirty, this has been an expression of Germans' trying to disassociate themselves from the East while being part of the civilized West, while American encodings of the meaning of the frontier, by contrast, were not as prone to depict it as dirty, because they were not as invested in claiming an identity based in the civilization of the Atlantic world to the East, but rather sought to distance themselves from it.

The inquiry which follows is structured as a chronological narrative, focused on key junctures in the trajectory of the German myth of the East. The following chapter (Chapter 2) sketches in brief the important pre-existing history of German relations with Eastern Europe, before the advent of nationalism. It deconstructs later nationalist mythologies of an elemental German 'Drive to the East' (*Drang nach Osten*), while laying bare the authentic, pre-national realities obscured by that term: large-scale migrations in antiquity of both Germanic and Slavic groups, the medieval 'east settlement' of Germans in Eastern European kingdoms, the movement of Jewish populations to Eastern Europe, Hanse trade networks and the Baltic crusade of the Teutonic Knights, and the emergence of the states of Prussia and Austria, along with early manifestations of German nationalism. The chapter concludes with an analysis of a crucial watershed in thinking about the East, the partitions of Poland. Chapter 3 investigates the influences of Enlightenment and Romanticism, 1800–30, revealing the multivalent potential of Enlightenment ideas and Romantic orientations in German thinking about Eastern Europe. The profoundly important message of Johann Gottfried Herder, often called the father of cultural nationalism, is analysed. At the same time, his sympathetic views of Slavs are juxtaposed with the antipathies expressed by other German Romantics. In the period after the 1815 Congress of Vienna, German liberal enthusiasm for the cause of Polish independence and the increasingly assertive counter-argument are observed. Chapter 4 deals with the fusing of the earlier elements into a myth of the East, in the middle of the nineteenth century. The period 1830–71 saw German enthusiasm for the cause of Polish independence followed by a crucial debate during the revolutions of 1848 about the orientation of a future Germany. In the aftermath of the failed revolutions of 1848, we observe the flourishing of narratives about the East on left and right, with fascinating commonalities even across this political spectrum.

Chapter 5 examines the age of empires, with the establishment of the German nation-state in 1871. Notions of a national calling for the German Empire produced growing animosity towards Slavs and fear of the East both within the empire and beyond its borders. Chapter 6 examines the First World War and its aftermath, the inter-war period, which saw Germany on the verge of gaining a continental colonial empire in Eastern Europe, followed by a humiliating defeat, which seemed to yield bitter lessons about the essence of the East. In Chapter 7, we examine Nazi visions of a German calling in the East, where their obsessions of anti-Semitism, racist thinking, and alternative modernities would come together, with the East representing the land of the German future. Chapter 8 follows the process by which the disasters of Nazi misrule and aggression instead produced a nightmare of the advancing East from 1943 to 1955, leading to the destruction of eastern German communities in mass expulsions, followed by the division of the German lands into two states with diametrically opposed relationships to the East, in the context of the Cold War. Finally, Chapter 9 traces the evolution of rival versions of German national identity, allied to the West or the East, until the collapse of the Berlin Wall in 1989. Our



inquiry closes by examining the revival of anxieties about the East in German society, but focused now on the inner East of the new federal lands of former communist East Germany.

Since this study concerns German perceptions of the East and projections onto its landscapes of ideas of a cultural mission, I have chosen to use the contemporaneous German place names for towns or regions that today bear other names, only providing the latter if the discussion requires it.

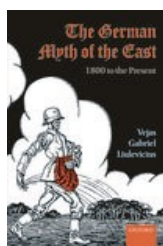
p. 11

Finally, I would like gratefully to acknowledge the National Endowment for the Humanities for their grant of a national fellow-ship, thank the staff at the University of Tennessee's Interlibrary Loan section, who have been wonder-workers, thank the College of Arts and Sciences of the University of Tennessee for the Research and Creative Achievement Award in the Arts and Humanities, and express my appreciation to the Bundesarchiv in Koblenz, the Bundesarchiv at Bayreuth, the Bundesarchiv-Militärarchiv in Freiburg, and the Kriegsarchiv in Vienna for their friendly receptions and help. In working with Oxford University Press, I thank Christopher Wheeler, Matthew Cotton, Kate Hind, and Nigel Hope. I thank my parents for their unfailing support and encouragement. My deepest thanks go to my family: Kathleen (to whom this book is dedicated), Paul, and Helen.

## Notes

1. Modris Eksteins, *Rites of Spring: The Great War and the Birth of the Modern Age* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1989), 313.
2. Wolfgang Wippermann, *Der 'deutsche Drang nach Osten'. Ideologie und Wirklichkeit eines politischen Schlagwortes* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1981).
3. Heinrich August Winkler, *Germany: The Long Road West 1789-1933*, trans. Alexander J. Sager (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006).
4. A. J. P. Taylor, *The Course of German History: A Survey of the Development of Germany since 1815* (New York: Paragon Books, 1979).
5. Walter Laqueur, *Russia and Germany: A Century of Conflict*, 2nd edn. (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 1990); Gerd Koenen, *Der Russland-Komplex. Die Deutschen und der Osten 1900-1945* (Munich: Verlag C. H. Beck, 2005); Eduard Mühle (ed.), *Germany and the European East in the Twentieth Century* (Oxford and New York: Berg, 2003); Gregor Thum (ed.), *Traumland Osten. Deutsche Bilder vom östlichen Europa im 20. Jahrhundert* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2006); Charles W. Ingrao and Franz A. J. Szabo (eds.), *The Germans and the East* (West Lafayette, IN: Purdue University Press, 2008); Lew Kopelew (ed.), *West-Östliche Spiegelungen. Russen und Rußland aus deutscher Sicht und Deutsche und Deutschland aus russischer Sicht von den Anfängen bis zum 20. Jahrhundert. Wuppertaler Projekt zur Erforschung der Geschichte deutsch-russischer Fremdenbilder* (Munich: Wilhelm Fink Verlag, 1985-2005); Martin Broszat, *Zweihundert Jahre deutsche Polenpolitik* (Munich: Ehrenwirth Verlag, 1963); Todd Kontje, *German Orientalisms* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2004); Michael Burleigh, *Germany Turns Eastwards: A Study of 'Ostforschung' in the Third Reich* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988); Lothar Dralle, *Die Deutschen in Ostmittel- und Osteuropa: ein Jahrtausend europäischer Geschichte* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1991); Henry Cord Meyer, *Drang nach Osten: Fortunes of a Slogan-Concept in German-Slavic Relations, 1849-1990* (Berne: Peter Lang, 1996).
6. Anthony Pagden, *Worlds at War: The 2,500 Year Struggle between East and West* (New York: Random House, 2008).
7. Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1979).
8. Willard Sunderland, *Taming the Wild Field: Colonization and Empire on the Russian Steppe* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2004).
9. Boris Barth and Jürgen Osterhammel (eds.), *Zivilisierungsmissionen. Imperiale Weltverbesserung seit dem 18. Jahrhundert* (Konstanz: UVK Verlagsgesellschaft mbH, 2005).
10. Richard Slotkin, *The Fatal Environment: The Myth of the Frontier in the Age of Industrialization 1800-1890* (New York: HarperPerennial, 1994); id., *Gunfighter Nation: The Myth of the Frontier in Twentieth-Century America* (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1998); id., *Regeneration through Violence: The Mythology of the American Frontier 1600-1860* (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1973); Henry Nash Smith, *Virgin Land: The American West as Symbol and Myth* (New York: Vintage Books, 1957); Ray Allen Billington, *Land of Savagery, Land of Promise: The European Image of the American Frontier in the Nineteenth Century* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1981).
11. Ray Allen Billington, *Westward to the Pacific: An Overview of America's Westward Expansion* (St Louis: Jefferson National Expansion Historical Association, Inc., 1979), 112.

12. Billington, *Westward*, 58.
13. Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of Concepts of Pollution and Taboo* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1970), 48.
14. Liah Greenfeld, *Nationalism: Five Roads to Modernity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992).



## The German Myth of the East: 1800 to the Present

Vejas Gabriel Liulevicius

<https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199546312.001.0001>

Published: 27 August 2009

Online ISBN: 9780191720338

Print ISBN: 9780199546312

Search in this book

### CHAPTER

## 6 The First World War and its Aftermath, 1914–1933

Vejas Gabriel Liulevicius

<https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199546312.003.0006> Pages 130–170

Published: August 2009

### Abstract

This chapter presents a watershed in German views of Eastern Europe in the fateful context of total war and its aftermath. World War I opened with a traumatic invasion of German East Prussia by Russian armies in 1914, a surprising German victory at Tannenberg, and German and Austro-Hungarian occupation of vast Eastern European territories, along with a dramatic expansion in their war aims for the region, propagandistically rendered as a cultural mission. With German defeat in the West, trauma followed with the 1919 Versailles Treaty and loss of German territory in the East. The chapter explores irridentist energies poured into the ‘sciences’ of *Ostforschung* (politically motivated ethnographic East research) and geopolitics. It reveals a complex range of ambivalent eastern approaches across the volatile political spectrum of the Weimar Republic, including anti-communism, attempts at rapprochement with the Soviet Union, and National Bolshevism.

**Keywords:** geopolitics, occupation, Soviet Union, total war, Versailles Treaty, Weimar Republic, World War I

**Subject:** European History, Political History, Russian and Slavic History, Modern History (1700 to 1945), Intellectual History

**Collection:** Oxford Scholarship Online

The First World War and its ending in defeat for Germany were watershed moments in Germany's relationship with Eastern Europe. This period was marked by wild fluctuations between anxieties about the East and hopes pinned on fulfilling a mission there, with vast possibilities awaiting exploitation. The war and the experience of the Eastern Front, marked by military occupation, did much to establish a sense of Eastern Europe as a place set apart, a war zone.<sup>1</sup> Afterwards, the inter-war period saw an abiding struggle to come to terms with the new and unfamiliar international constellation and changed political map, ultimately expressed in a failure to accept defeat and an ardent determination to revise the frontiers of Eastern Europe.

The assassination on 28 June 1914 in Sarajevo of the heir to the Habsburg throne, Archduke Franz Ferdinand, set off a chain reaction which led to a general European war of the Great Powers. As Russia mobilized in



p. 131

support of its Serbian ally, Germany delivered an ultimatum and on 1 August declared war. The fact that German political leaders claimed that they were responding to encirclement and Russian mobilization was a crucial factor in the conduct of the war. This key assertion undergirded the domestic truce, or '*Burgfrieden*' (the peace in a besieged castle) which was now declared in Germany. The claim that Germany was acting in self-defence against a long-standing Russian menace meant that the Social Democrats in Germany, earlier feared as opponents of the ruling system, were now co-opted for the war effort. Their representatives voted for credits in parliament, in spite of their earlier opposition to militarism. In the heady days of August 1914, spontaneous propaganda celebrated the 'Ideas of 1914' and championed a global struggle to defend German values. These were posited as the virtues of *Kultur*, which was opposed by western, French and British, *Zivilisation*. In the works of many German writers, Thomas Mann among them, *Kultur* was hailed as an organic, rooted, idealistic, and authentic expression of the creative essence of German national character. By contrast, the Latin word 'civilization' stood for artificial, merely technical achievements of a soulless western way of life, embodied by the decadent French and the coldly mercantile British. These themes would find further elaboration as the war dragged on.

p. 132

The leap into the unknown which the war represented opened with the prospect of disaster in the East for Germany. While German armies numbering one and a half million men on the Western Front swept through Belgium and northern France to achieve the knockout blow which had been sought by the Schlieffen Plan, prior to turning on the slower and larger Russian enemy, the calculations threatened to unravel as a result of what was happening eastwards. Contrary to the war plans of German generals, Russia mobilized faster than expected in support of its French ally. Germany's eastern borders had been left lightly defended, in a calculated risk, to put all the available force into the blow westwards. Now, two Russian armies bore down on the exposed provinces. Russian forces, about 650,000 men, faced a small force of 135,000 Germans. Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn's novel *August 1914* relates this episode. The German civilian population panicked and fled in a great disorganized exodus. The cry 'Cossacks are coming!' expressed their fears, conjuring up images of ferocious riders from the steppes and an implacable 'Russian steamroller' of giant peasant soldiers bearing down on Berlin. When the German commander considered retreat, he was summarily replaced by a general brought out of retirement at 66, General Paul von Hindenburg, with the young technocratic officer Erich Ludendorff as his aide. In a welcome surprise, the German forces destroyed the first of the two Russian armies at the battle of Tannenberg of 26–30 August, killing an estimated 30,000 and taking 90,000 prisoners.<sup>2</sup> The legend of this victory was cultivated from its very origin, as the deliberate naming of the battle was meant to redeem the defeat of the Teutonic Knights by Polish and Lithuanian forces in 1410. The second Russian army was thrown back at the battle of the Masurian Lakes of 5–15 September, with another 125,000 prisoners led away. In German propaganda, panicking Russian soldiers drowned in the East Prussian lakes. The news of these victories in the East came at an opportune moment for Germany, blunting the disappointment of the Western Front, where the Schlieffen Plan had failed. The victory also propelled Hindenburg and Ludendorff to enormous fame. Hindenburg, hailed as the 'Terror of the Russians', 'Rescuer of the Fatherland', and 'Saviour of East Prussia', would be literally idolized, as massive wooden statues of him were erected in Germany in war bond drives. He and Ludendorff by August 1916 assumed the high command and became virtual dictators of the war effort. Eastern peril continued, however. Later in the autumn of 1914, the Russian forces returned, while German forces had moved southwards to Poland. Renewed refugee treks took place. An estimated 350,000 refugees were shuttled westwards, in good order. In the Winter Battle of Masuria, of February 1915, the Russian forces were expelled once and for all from German territory.

p. 133

The significance of this episode was great. Propaganda, both official and spontaneous, encoded the Russian incursion as an ethnic invasion, the breaking in of an entirely different world. Two thirds of the territory of East Prussia had been occupied in what proved to be the only large-scale occupation of the territory of the German Empire. Older accounts claimed some 1,500 civilian deaths, and asserted that over 10,000 civilians had been dragged away by the retreating Russians. Atrocities were alleged, including numerous shootings of civilians as spies, rapes, arson, and looting. Today, by contrast, historical research argues that Russian

degradations were sporadic and not deliberate policy. More research is needed to establish what actually happened, but the memory of Russian atrocities and its elaboration in propaganda clearly help us understand how the war was viewed by contemporaries.

The trauma of the invasion was lovingly cultivated in German propaganda, as it offered a perfect exhibit for the assertion that Germany was fighting an essentially defensive battle against encircling foes. In October 1914, the mass manifesto of noted German intellectuals and academics, entitled 'A Call to the Cultured World', proclaimed a defensive war for German culture, as in the East 'the soil is soaked with the blood of women and children slaughtered by the Russian hordes'.<sup>3</sup>

The victories which German forces achieved here also were not only welcome in contrast to the frustrations on the increasingly static Western Front, but also indicated how total war would increasingly habituate peoples to brutality. The historian Golo Mann observed of the images which circulated in propaganda: 'This was the first occasion on which enormous numbers were mentioned, 100,000, 250,000 enemy soldiers killed or taken prisoner; old and young were shown pictures of dead or drowning, headless or limbless Russians being blown sky high. The public attitude hardened quickly.'<sup>4</sup> Postcards and paintings returned in particular to the image of masses of almost faceless and featureless Russian prisoners being led away through East Prussian cities where they had but recently paraded as conquerors.

p. 134 In a collection published in 1915, the famed war poet Walter Flex announced that 'the Eastern March calls!'. His 'Song of the Eastern Marches' proclaimed:

You holy German East!  
 You lie open like the German heart.  
 But your border wall's strong posts  
 Are our bodies, brightly armed . . .  
 You holy German East!  
 You are wide and bright like the German spirit . . .  
 No enemy shall taste your gifts,  
 You are fertilized with German blood.<sup>5</sup>

Such perspectives on the East were about to be expanded, owing to another string of great victories for the Central Powers on the Eastern Front in 1915.

In the spring of 1915, the German Great Advance, as it came to be known, commenced, a sweeping conquest in telling contrast to the deadlock of the western trenches. More than half a million German soldiers massed in the East and prepared to come to the aid of Austrian forces in Galicia to reinforce their allies' war effort. They confronted vast Russian forces, but often poorly led and inadequately equipped. Russian infantry lacked one third of the rifles they required, which sometimes led to troops being sent forward to the front unarmed and told to grab the guns of fallen comrades as they approached the battle. At Gorlice-Tórnow in Galicia a significant breakthrough was achieved by Austrian and German troops on 2–10 May 1915. Breaking the Russian front gave the Central Powers the momentum for a great advance, with the retaking of the lost fortress of Przemyśl and Lemberg (Lvov) in June and the reconquest of Galicia. To the north, German troops took Warsaw, Kaunas, Brest-Litovsk, and Vilnius in August and September. In September 1915, the great advance at last ground to a halt, close by Riga. Russian forces were thrown back 500 kilometres and lost Russian Poland, Lithuania, Kurland (southern Latvia), and western Ukraine. All this comprised an area the size of France, and about 15 per cent of Russia's European empire. Coupled with Bulgaria joining the Central Powers and the final quelling of Serbia, the year 1915 had brought dramatic successes in the East.

The first impressions that German soldiers acquired in this campaign and their lasting memories of it would colour their entire experience. A key fact was that the territories they now occupied were in disarray and

disorder, after a Russian scorched earth policy, which meant leaving the enemy in possession of no more than a ruined infrastructure. The overlay of wartime damage combined with earlier underdevelopment of these areas, marked by primeval forests, swamps, and open country, yielded the vision of a land essentially disordered and chaotic. One German soldier remarked on his first impressions, in Poland:

We wind our way forward and then finally glimpse the first Russian village, Wishainy, rising up dirty-grey (*schmutziggrau*) before us above the clay-grey region; above it stares the dirty-grey sky, as if hung with sackcloth, and dirty-grey is the huge mass of thousands of Russian prisoners that rolls towards us through the village; grey is the whole picture which unfolds itself before us today; grey the new impression that Russia has given us; grey and obscured is the fate of the next days—all grey—dirty-grey.<sup>6</sup>

Similarly bleak conclusions seemed to apply to the peoples of the region. The lands had been deserted, as over 1.5 million people had been forced to retreat with the Russian forces. In particular, populations whom the Russian authorities considered disloyal by their very identity, ethnic Germans and Jews, were subjected to harsh deportation, while others were abused or shot on suspicion of spying. This vast displacement, as it turned out, was to be but a first wave in a modern migration of peoples which began in earnest with the First World War and continued in the following decades, making the twentieth century what Hannah Arendt described as the age of the displaced person. By 1917, some 6 million refugees were adrift in the Russian Empire. Those civilians who remained in the occupied territories were often in a desperate state, prey to disease and hunger. Further, another durable first impression involved the sheer diversity and complexity of the populations German soldiers and officials encountered. Where earlier preconceptions had still seen the subjects of the Russian Empire as united under tsarist rule, that category increasingly dissolved.

The conclusions drawn from these first impressions were also given added force by the way they efficiently coincided with new growing ambitions for future possession and the redrawing of political boundaries. Thus, these observations were emphasized repeatedly and instrumentalized. The Russian scorched earth policy, even when not systematic, was cited as an argument that a regime capable of such actions in its own land had lost the title to it. Even exaggerating the totality of that intentional destruction would only further highlight the contrast with the order and advantages of German rule. The very degraded state of the native populations and their diversity, it would be argued, showed the need for stern but fair rulers from outside.

The experience of the Eastern Front differed in significant ways from the scenes in the trenches on the Western Front, which remain more familiar today. In the East, the front line was twice as long as in the West, from the Baltic Sea to the Balkans. Around 2 to 3 million German soldiers served on the *Ostfront*: 1.3 million each year, on average (half as many as on the Western Front). Numerous soldiers served on both fronts. In the East, the Germans were regularly outnumbered by Russians, but possessed better technology and organization. Yet in the final analysis, comprehensive victory seemed to elude the Central Powers, as defeated Russian forces withdrew into the open vastness of that land.

The German Eastern Front experience as a whole was marked by the reality of occupation. The constant presence among the press of unfamiliar scenes, even if closer to the German border, was a factor to be dealt with. Even Norbert Elias, later to be a famous sociologist but at that time a student turned soldier, confessed that he had known little of the East before. In letters, army newspapers, and memoirs, soldiers commented again and again on the alien nature of the East, its primitive conditions, emptiness, dirt, disease, and omnipresent lice. A German lieutenant summed up his impressions of the East: 'deepest Russia, without a trace of central European culture, Asia, steppe, swamp, spaceless underworld, and a godforsaken slime-desert'.<sup>7</sup>

A term which came up with great frequency was that of *Unkultur*, the sheer absence of recognizable culture. In many ways, the scenes of the East also seemed lost in time, out of tune with the modernity of the rest of Europe, and a journey back in time. Another feature was the conviction that the East was dirty and diseased.

The region was beset with epidemics: typhus, malaria, cholera, spotted fever, all further encouraged by the conditions of war. The army was fearful of these, set up delousing centres, and dispatched 'plague troops' to treat (sometimes forcibly) local populations, who were judged to be in a state of 'high-grade infestation'. This was dangerous work: ten out of fifty German medical officers in occupied Poland died of typhus.<sup>8</sup> The military command especially feared venereal disease, and supervised prostitution was instituted. Added to all these elements were the ordinary human emotions of soldiers far from home: boredom, longing for a return to the lives they had left behind, and a sense of isolation and lostness in remote posts.

p. 138 At the same time German leaders were already redrawing the boundaries of the East in anticipation of future decisive victories. Russian Poland, won in the advance of 1915, was divided into two zones, one under German direction based in Warsaw, the other centred on Lublin and run by Austro-Hungarian authorities.<sup>9</sup> What ought to happen next was unclear, and Poland represented perhaps the greatest political problem of the war for the Central Powers. Pan-German nationalists pressed for a seizure of more territory to be joined to Germany or the establishment of a 'border strip' as a buffer to the East. Prussian conservatives rejected the addition of more alien populations to their state and advocated returning Poland to Russia in a separate peace. Habsburg officials mused on an 'Austro-Polish formula', which would incorporate Poland into their realm as a new pillar of the monarchy. Instead, Ludendorff insisted on declaring Polish independence on 5 November 1916, without much in the way of further details, apart from an urging that Polish volunteers should now flock to the German cause. The disappointment was keen when Poles stayed away, sceptical of a future Poland without borders. To the north of Poland, what amounted to a military colony was established, called Ober Ost, named after the title of Hindenburg, the Supreme Commander in the East (Oberbefehlshaber Ost). The declared goal of this brutal utopia was complete military rule and no civilian administration.<sup>10</sup> The regime was shaped by Ludendorff's technocratic energies, even as the war raged. His stated aim was 'to take up again in the occupied territories the cultural work (*Kulturarbeit*) which the Germans had done in these lands over many centuries'.<sup>11</sup>

The rulers of Ober Ost also encountered populations of great diversity. Ober Ost included c.3 million people, after more than 1 million had fled as the front came nearer. These populations included Lithuanians, Poles, Latvians, Russians, Tatars, and three other groups whose presence left a considerable impression: the *Ostjuden*, Jews of Eastern Europe whose Yiddish language allowed them to communicate with the Germans better than any other group; 'White Ruthenians' (a shadowy and indistinct Slavic ethnic group whose very identity was disturbingly difficult to determine); and the Baltic Germans, whose aristocratic identity set them apart from the newly arrived Germans even when language and culture brought them close.

p. 139 The Ober Ost state met these unfamiliar challenges with promises of taking up a German *Kulturmission* in the East. Ludendorff declared that the varied ethnic groups themselves were incapable of producing real culture. Under the slogan of '*Deutsche Arbeit*', the army devoted astonishing effort in time of war to cultural improvement behind the front: newspapers in native languages, publication of dictionaries, folk museums, school regulations, archaeological and historical investigations, and theatre. These were intended to produce client nationalities, dependent on Germany's future sponsorship. At the same time, and often working at fatal cross purposes with the cultural initiatives, was another policy, *Verkehrspolitik*, which aimed to control all movement and economic activity. The goal was intensive exploitation of the area's resources and manpower, leading to vast requisitions of harvests and livestock, and the use of forced labour units. The policy was enforced with a regime of passes, censuses, and bans on movement, revealing similarities to European colonial policies elsewhere in the world. Infrastructure projects, including huge bridges, the conversion of railway track to the narrower German gauge (a vivid symbol of taking possession), and new projects like the gigantic lumber mill at the primeval forest of Bialowies, were to bind the territory to Germany in the future, as was the 'New Land' policy which laid future plans for the region and its colonization by Germans. Instead of the expected gratitude, these projects for intensive exploitation aroused nationalist reactions among the inhabitants.

German soldiers expressed a range of reactions towards the peoples of the region. The first was recognition of their diversity, beyond their being subjects of the Russian Empire. Some soldiers felt sympathy for the suffering

of the people they saw and qualms about the severity of German administration. Other soldiers were convinced that earlier prejudices had been more than confirmed with actual experience.

p. 140 The encounter with the *Ostjuden* was of special significance, as the Central Powers were 'now in control of the bulk of European Jewry'.<sup>12</sup> The *Ostjuden* had made up roughly 10 per cent of the area's pre-war population and between 30 and 50 per cent of ↳ the urban populations.<sup>13</sup> At first, Jews had often welcomed the troops of the Central Powers, hoping for deliverance from the persecutions visited on them by the Russian forces. Subsequent meetings were marked by ambivalence, as some anti-Semites in the German ranks felt that their comrades were not sufficiently aware of the true nature of the Jews, while other German soldiers felt new sympathy for this persecuted minority. A special dimension of this encounter was felt by German Jewish soldiers, as they met members of their own faith in this quite different context. While the writer Arnold Zweig admired the authenticity of the *Ostjuden*, the diarist Viktor Klemperer rejected the idea of kinship with them and avowed that he had never felt more German: 'I thanked my Creator that I was a German'.<sup>14</sup> In general, relations were marked by colonial-style condescension and casual brutality, not genocidal action as would be the case in the Second World War.

German perceptions of the different peoples oscillated between appreciation of the East's bewildering diversity and vast negative generalizations about the '*Fremdvölkische*'. A recent study of military newspapers concludes that using 'a colonial and at times racist discourse, the newspapers sought to explain why this occupation was justified, and why some eastern peoples were more highly valued than others'.<sup>15</sup> While Slavic peoples were generally devalued, those ethnic groups intended for client status in the future were more often praised or presented in a positive light. Also striking was the fact that the 'newspapers were surprisingly neutral, and sometimes even positive, in their portrayal of Eastern European Jews'.<sup>16</sup>

p. 141 Any local might dismissively be called a 'Panje', after the Polish word 'sir'. Overall, native populations of the East were often seen as dirty, undisciplined, lazy, and undeveloped. One German commander stated that the Lithuanian, for example, 'can rule himself independently exactly as well as for example my daughter Ilse could raise herself independently'.<sup>17</sup> This whole area was condemned as half-Asian and barbaric. Such views, which could ↳ carry an implicit racist charge, were later enflamed and radicalized by German defeat.

The lasting image of the East as a war land was durable, seen as part of its core nature, whatever future might be envisioned for it. One soldier catalogued his impressions: 'Discon-solate, dirty plain. Burned-down deserted villages! . . . A village of ruins.—Darkness—Rainfall—Smell of burning—distant keening of a dog—Wind howling—dull infantry fire—tired bones—dismay—hunger'.<sup>18</sup> Thus, just across the German border lay war-torn lands in which such scenes had become common-place.

One recurring image in the accounts of German soldiers summed up aspects of their view of the East which grew up during the war, and that was travel by rail which revealed a seeming division between two worlds, German and Eastern. In 1914 and 1915 the train wagons in which troops were transported bore chalked inscriptions, such as 'Onwards to Petersburg!' or 'To Moscow!'.<sup>19</sup> Others were fuller in their explanation of this act of travel: 'Tsar, it's an almighty shame | That we first have to disinfect you and your gang | And then thoroughly cultivate you!'<sup>20</sup> In the years of occupation that followed, soldiers and officials remarked on the differences at the border with Germany, a caesura between worlds.<sup>21</sup> The image which became established during the war was of the East as a place set apart, an impression that was reinforced by the experience of being deloused at the border. In sum, a trajectory of perceptions, never uniform, was traced during the occupation. Through familiarity with the East and its peoples, some Germans came to recognize its ethnic diversity, while others increasingly saw only uniformity there.

p. 142 At the same time, there was a sense of a German mission here, of German identity being given coherence by its role as bearer of culture to the East. This could take ludicrously literal forms, as in a postcard showing a German soldier giving native children haircuts, entitled 'German Culture'. Similarly, the very concept ↳ of 'culture' was

taken back to its agricultural roots in the image of a helmeted German soldier sowing in the East, published as a memento of agronomy courses in Minsk, in the further reaches of the German-occupied territories.

A key value invoked again and again was that of German order. This also found expression in the joke, repeated among Germans and Austrians alike, of a German or Austrian prisoner of war in Russia who fears for his life on the return of the peasant in whose farm he has been working. While the peasant had been away for years as a soldier in the tsar's army, the prisoner had conducted an affair with his wife, who bore his child. The peasant tracks down the terrified prisoner and declares, 'How shall I thank you for all that you did for me and my farm? The cows are full of milk, the pigs have little ones, and four calves have been born. And do you know, brother, the boy is a prize baby!'<sup>22</sup> Locals, however, subject to the German occupation, had a rejoinder. Polish Jews joked that 'the Germans had indeed brought order to Poland. Whereas before there was corn . . . now there is order; whereas before there were oxen . . . now there is order'.<sup>23</sup> There was also a gendered dimension to the conviction of bringing the seeds of culture, as the non-German populations in the occupied territory were subjected to a largely male German presence while they themselves consisted disproportionately of women, along with children and the elderly (as able-bodied men had been deported or conscripted by the Russians, to deprive the occupiers of local manpower).

From the outset, German war aims, like the aims of the other powers fighting in the war, proved not to be rigid and unchanging, but rather underwent transformations as a result of the events of the battlefield. In the German case, ambitions grew by leaps and bounds as new opportunities opened up in Eastern Europe.

p. 143 The nature of the desperate 'leap in the dark' of launching the war dictated that from the first German war aims centred on the imperative of avoiding encirclement, and this in turn required a fundamental reordering of the political map in Eastern Europe. ↪ On 9 September 1914 in the office of the chancellor Bethmann Hollweg, a memorandum was completed, which came to be called the 'September Programme'. It insisted on the need for guaranteeing 'security for the German Empire in the West and East for the foreseeable future', adding that 'as much as possible, Russia must be pushed back from the German border and its domination of the non-Russian vassal peoples must be broken'. In spite of an official ban on open discussion in the press of war aims, floods of memoranda and pamphlets were produced by ardent armchair annexationists. Pan-Germans and industrialists alike called for vast gains of territory around Germany. Another group, 'liberal imperialists', by contrast urged less direct but still effective German control of a reordered European continent.

A milestone here was the publication in the autumn of 1915 of a book entitled *Mitteleuropa* by Friedrich Naumann, a Christian-Socialist and leader of the Progressive Party.<sup>24</sup> His message called for the affiliation of Germany with Austria-Hungary and other countries at the centre of the continent, constituting a new coherent order for the region, with full respect for the cultures and identities of the non-German peoples. While interest in the formula of *Mitteleuropa* peaked in 1916, by this time it had been detached from Naumann's enlightened generosity and instead implied for many a core for further expansion.

p. 144 A project planned throughout the entire war was that of a Polish Border Strip to be carved out of the newly conquered lands of Russian Poland, functioning in future as a frontier buffer zone against the East.<sup>25</sup> Different versions of the idea exercised private individuals as well as government officials. The variations on this plan which were discussed included radical versions calling for the mass expulsion of Poles and Jews currently living in the coveted areas, plans summed up as 'land without people', emptied by force. Members of the League of the Eastern Marches and Pan-Germans were also alive to the new possibilities which the cover of wartime emergency could allow, and urged that expulsions be undertaken ↪ not just in newly conquered lands, but also in Germany's own eastern provinces, to tip the ethnic balance that decades of government fiat and subsidies had not been able to shift.<sup>26</sup>

In Austria-Hungary, the articulation of such nationalistic utopias of expansion to the East was far more difficult, given the tense ethnic balance of forces within the dual monarchy. But even here, writers like Hugo



von Hofmannsthal could wax eloquent on the subject of an Austrian mission, to grow out of the victories of the war. In his 1915 essay on the 'Austrian Idea', he discussed the Austrian calling of joining the new world of Slavic Eastern Europe with the old world of Western Europe. He proclaimed:

The essence of this idea, which has enabled it not only to endure for centuries but also to emerge repeatedly from the chaos and cataclysms of history with a rejuvenated expression, lies in its inner polarity, the antithesis which it encompasses: a borderland, a border wall, the edge of the European empire outside whose gates stretches a chaotically agitated mixture of peoples, half-European, half-Asian, and, at the same time, a fluid border, a starting point for colonization, for penetration, for the waves of culture that rolled to the East, but also receptive and prepared to receive the westward rolling counterwaves . . . The intellectual and spiritual amplitude of this idea surpasses everything the national or economic ideologies of our day can produce.<sup>27</sup>

But in a way this sort of mystical musing was paradigmatic of much of the deployment of the myth of the East, as it was not capable of being put into practice—on the contrary, the addition of any further Slavic populations into the Habsburg realm would have produced an internal political convulsion.

p. 145 When Hindenburg and Ludendorff achieved their ambition of being elevated to the High Command in 1916, they opened free discussion of war aims as a measure they believed would improve morale. In the Kreuznach Programme of April 1917, the government and the generals agreed on extensive gains in East and West, but the Reichstag's July 1917 Peace Resolution instead urged peace without annexations. In response, the Fatherland Party had been founded in September 1917 in Königsberg by Wolfgang Kapp and Admiral Alfred von Tirpitz, to insist upon a 'victory peace' marked by enormous annexations (by the summer of 1918, the party claimed 1.25 million adherents in support of its goals).

The situation again took a decisive turn with the Bolshevik seizure of power in Russia in November 1917. Indeed, this outcome had been hastened by the German high command, which had helped Lenin and his radical comrades return to Russia. Once in power, the new revolutionary regime was determined to leave the war. An armistice was signed on the Eastern Front in December 1917 and talks began at Brest-Litovsk on the outlines of the peace settlement.

At the turn of the year 1917/18, Germans celebrated their apparent victory on the Eastern Front. The negotiations, which had begun in December, dragged on as both sides cynically sought advantage from the slogan of national self-determination, in which neither believed. A crisis was reached when the Bolshevik negotiator Lev Trotsky startled his German counterparts by declaring that the Bolsheviks were simply leaving the war without a peace, and walked out. When the German commanders recovered from their surprise, they simply attacked. Diplomatic cover for further conquests was also arranged.

p. 146 As agreed at the Crown Council at Bad Homburg of 13 February 1918, the new areas under German control were to be secured under the slogan of their liberation from Russian rule. Representatives were to send pleas to Germany 'which mention the existing anarchy and continual danger to life and property and appeal to us to intervene to establish order'.<sup>28</sup> A million German troops sped eastwards, many by train, and seized the remaining parts of Latvia, Estonia, Belarus, Ukraine, the Crimea, and moved up to the Don River. Alarmed by this advance, the Bolsheviks hurriedly returned to the bargaining table and signed the harsh Treaty of Brest-Litovsk on 3 March 1918. Germany's gains were vast. It gained control over areas given up by Russia: Finland, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Belarus, Poland, and Ukraine. Russia lost a third of its population, a million square miles of land, and many of its industrial and mining resources. The treaty was enthusiastically received in Germany, and ratified by the Reichstag, although the Social Democratic Party abstained. The German historian Golo Mann perceptively noted that 'The peace of Brest-Litovsk has been called the forgotten peace but the Germans have not forgotten it. They know that they defeated Russia and sometimes they look upon this proudly as the real, if unrewarded European achievement of the war.'<sup>29</sup> A further exacting treaty followed with

Romania. Ukraine came under German and Austro-Hungarian occupation, with the hopes that this would yield vast food resources for the hard-pressed war effort of the Central Powers.<sup>30</sup> German forces even advanced further eastwards, to the Caucasus, between the Black Sea and the Caspian Sea, arriving in Georgia's capital in June 1918. German forces landed in Finland, quelling a civil war which had broken out between White and Red forces.

These triumphs opened up euphoric vistas. The military map of Germany's conquests in the East was striking, and seemed unequivocal. In reality, that map disguised complexities on the ground, where requisitions and concerns about the political future darkened the mood of local populations, stirred resistance, provoked growing banditry, and in general undercut the claims that the occupation regimes were upholding order. In blissful disregard of these developments, plans for the future of the eastern realm now moved ahead, with different scenarios being presented of German princes of minor houses being fitted for the thrones of duchies or kingdoms in the East. The claim to bring education and culture was buttressed with the symbolic opening of a German university at Dorpat (today Tartu) in Estonia in September 1918, with German-language instruction and an entirely German faculty (except for one lonely Estonian professor). The Berlin professor of history, Theodor Schiemann, was put at its head, and his advocacy of Germanization worried even Ludendorff.<sup>31</sup> Ludendorff also weighed the possibility of further advances to the east, to take Petrograd and crush the weak Bolshevik regime.

The hope for land in the East in the future also had wider significance for Germany's leadership. In claiming territories with a view to their military potential, Hindenburg explained that 'I need them for the manoeuvring of my left wing in the next war.'<sup>32</sup> The space was also relevant to Ludendorff's long-term settlement ambitions, which involved the settlement of 2 million Russian-Germans in these territories contiguous with Germany itself, to form an expanded population base. This might alter the international balance of power. As Ludendorff concluded, 'We had broken the blockade in the East, and it seemed that our life could be strengthened by this.'<sup>33</sup> The natural next step would be enacting his 'favourite idea of settling [ethnic] Germans strewn throughout Russia alongside our soldiers in the eastern territories'.<sup>34</sup> As the prospect of movements of larger populations loomed, another step was taken which had long been demanded by German anti-Semites. On 23 April 1918, the Prussian eastern border was closed to Jewish workers coming into Germany, ostensibly on medical grounds.<sup>35</sup>

The continuing pursuit of such alluring prospects in the East had a crucial implication, which may have played a decisive result in the last stages of the war and German defeat in 1918. Even after this seeming victory in the East, a million German troops remained stationed there while the last gamble of the German High Command, the Spring Offensive, raged on the Western Front. As that offensive at first surged forward, then lost momentum, and went into reverse, the troops stationed in the East could have played a decisive role.

Now Germany's stalled war effort became clear. By the autumn of 1918, it was increasingly obvious that Germany's reserves had been exhausted and its allies were falling away; and the German high command, which had foreseen great successes under its leadership, now systematically sought to displace responsibility for the defeat over which it had presided onto the civilian government. Even so, hopes vested in the vast expanses of the East were remarkably durable even at such a critical juncture. The National Liberal leader Gustav Stresemann mused in a letter in September: 'Perhaps in future Germany will turn rather more to the east and we will find there some substitute for what we will not be able to obtain for the time being in competition overseas.'<sup>36</sup> On 4 October 1918, the German government requested an armistice from the Allies. For the German public, this came as a shock following on the victory in the East and propaganda announcing certain victory if only the home front endured.

As negotiations continued, decisive political transformations were underway. Austria-Hungary began to dissolve, as representatives of the peoples of the empire declared national independence, disregarding the Emperor's promises of federal reform. Belatedly, Austria's Germans organized as well. On 21 October 1918, German representatives to the imperial parliament created a 'Provisional National Assembly of German-

Austria'. In Berlin, on 9 November, a democratic German republic was declared, while the Kaiser slipped away into exile. On 12 November, the Republic of German-Austria was declared, expecting in short order to be joined to Germany to the north, in an *Anschluss*.<sup>37</sup> In Germany, in the context of flux and uncertainty, even the Social Democratic revolutionaries were anxious about maintaining a semblance of order, and many feared that the alternative was the onset of 'Russian conditions', anarchy leading to radical total revolution.<sup>38</sup>

p. 149 On 11 November 1918, the Armistice in the West came into effect and the guns fell silent along the trench lines extending from the English Channel to the Alps. By contrast, Eastern Europe seemed to present a picture of vast ferment and continuing threat. On 13 November 1918, the Bolsheviks declared the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk invalid and began to move their Red Army westwards, hoping to link up with radical comrades in Central Europe, allying Bolshevik revolutionary spirit to the organization of German and other socialist movements. This part of Europe also saw fundamental dislocations of large populations. In the first years after the war's end, over 10 million displaced Europeans were refugees.<sup>39</sup> Hovering in the background alongside these anxieties were basic questions as to why Germany had lost, and what purpose the sacrifices had served. Germany had nearly 2 million war dead in this conflict. The ongoing project of Germany's top military leaders, especially Hindenburg and Ludendorff, to disassociate themselves from the odium of defeat culminated in the 'Stab in the Back Legend' (*Dolchstoßlegende*), which asserted that German armies had not been defeated in the field, but had in fact been betrayed by subversive influences on the home front, in particular socialists, democrats, and Jews. A corollary of that legend would also be developed for the failed occupation in Eastern Europe, claiming that too much care had been lavished on cultivating essentially unchangeable native populations and that close contact with the East had infected the morale of the occupiers. Such strains and stresses were at play among the German public as people waited to hear the terms of the Allies for peace.

The peace settlement was to be produced by a conference of the Entente powers in Paris. The conference opened on 18 January 1919. The Versailles Treaty with defeated Germany was drafted without German participation or negotiation. Instead, the terms were announced on 7 May 1919. This unleashed a wave of German outrage which endured throughout the post-war period. After repeated remonstrations and despair, the German government accepted the terms and signed the treaty in the Hall of Mirrors of Versailles on 28 June 1919. The terms were severe, and included drastic reductions in German armed forces, economic sanctions, and the obligation to pay extensive reparations, as well as to accept responsibility for starting the war. In territorial terms, Germany lost land both in the West and in the East, as well as all its overseas colonies. Alsace-Lorraine was p. 150 returned to France and border territories were assigned to Belgium. Losses in the East were of a different order, including extensive territory that had been German for centuries. Germany lost Posen and West Prussia to Poland, with the result that East Prussia now became an exclave along the Baltic, cut off from the rest of p. 151 Germany. The ports of Danzig and Memel (Klaipėda) were also made free cities under the supervision of the League of Nations. Further areas were yet to be disposed of, as plebiscites were planned for southern East Prussia and Upper Silesia, to determine the wishes or national identification of the populations there. In total, Germany lost a seventh of its pre-war territory and a tenth of its population. German nationalists loudly denounced the 'mutilation' of Germany's territory and its 'bleeding borders', in a chorus that would continue for decades. In the process, German outrage conveniently overlooked the still greater severity of the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk which Germany had imposed on prostrate Russia.



**Map 3.** Europe after the First World War.

Yet more profound were the terms of the Treaty of Saint-Germain with defeated Austria (Hungary was treated separately in the Treaty of Trianon which was just as furiously denounced by Hungarians). The result was a complete redrawing of what had been an imperial core, now a truncated and smaller, uncertain unit. In the process of the dissolution of the old Habsburg lands, German populations now often found themselves dispersed among new states or assigned to enlarged nations in which they were minorities. The Transylvanian Germans and those of the Bukovina now found themselves in Romania. The Danube Swabians were divided between Yugoslavia, Romania, and Hungary. Some 3.5 million Bohemian Germans now found themselves in the new state of Czechoslovakia, and would come to be known by the new identity of 'Sudeten Germans'. The implications for these German groups were unsettling. Having once been representatives, however humble, of the 'state people' of the Habsburg Empire, they now found their status imperilled and precarious.

The implications of these events for German self-understandings were profound. Earlier imperial identities had come crashing down, and left many feeling broken inside. In the wake of this collapse came new anxieties focused on the perceived porousness of national borders, the fearful premonition that Germany was now to be subjected to the kind of colonization which non-European countries had experienced at the hands of imperialist European powers. In Austria, the results were even more far-reaching. German-speaking Austrians, even after 1871, had continued to regard themselves as southern Germans, and most expected to be united to the larger democratic German state. Now these 7 million Austrian Germans found themselves in the bizarre situation of an unwanted state of independence, as the victorious Entente powers wrote into the Paris Settlement a ban on Austrian union with Germany to the north.



The sudden events of defeat produced a crisis in German views of the East, all the more powerful for coming so close on the heels of visions of expanded horizons of opportunity there, predicated on the victory of the Central Powers. What had seemed an eastern empire in the making now seemingly dissolved into a realm of confusion and danger. As revolution took hold in Germany, the German military occupation regimes in the East buckled. In Poland, in particular, nationalist forces took the initiative. Throughout the areas behind the Eastern Front, discipline among German forces faded, and soldiers' councils were formed, which saw their main task as negotiating a safe transit home for the former occupiers. At the same time, paradoxically, the Entente powers also had written into the armistice agreement a demand that German armies remain in the East to hold off the Bolshevik advance.

The result was great uncertainty about borders, fronts, and order in the East. This extended to Germany's eastern territories, whose fate was being negotiated at Paris. The archetypal chaos and disorganization of the East now seemed to move into Germany itself. The fascinating and telling result of these anxieties was two immediate undertakings in 1919, both coloured by a sense of unreality, but which nonetheless were symptomatic of views of the East: the East-state plan and the Freikorps' eastern campaign.

- p. 153 In anticipation of being assigned German–Polish border areas, Polish volunteers took possession of most of Posen by January 1919. German volunteers organized in response in Bromberg, and the government dispatched an 'emissary for the East', the socialist August Winnig, who turned steadily more nationalist in his post. Yet the government's response and the hesitation of the army to intervene led German nationalists in East Prussia to advance a strange plan to reconfigure Germany itself.<sup>40</sup> Spurred on by the announcement of the terms of the Versailles Treaty and the prospect that East Prussia would become an 'island among enemy neighbours', these activists summoned an 'East Parliament' in May 1919.<sup>41</sup> Among them was Freiherr von Gayl, one of the officials of the now defunct Ober Ost occupation regime on the Baltic. The group's potently symbolic protest against the treaty was issued from the Marienburg castle of the Teutonic Knights. The plan then crafted by a committee of the activists called for the four eastern provinces of the German Reich, East Prussia, West Prussia, Posen, and Silesia, to split themselves off from Germany and to continue the war against the Entente. The planners judged that this would give cover to the rest of Germany in the West, whose non-belligerence would block effective intervention by the Western powers against the new 'East State'. Gayl explained in his memoirs later that 'No one was thinking of a lasting separation from the Reich, but rather through temporary independence for the East to lighten the foreign policy burden of the Reich, thus giving it full freedom of action.'<sup>42</sup> The model for this action was clear, in the precedent of the 'loyal treason' or 'patriotic revolt' of General Yorck's neutrality pact with the Russians in Tauroggen in December 1812, as Prussia broke loose from its forced alliance with Napoleon. The key assumption was that 'in the final analysis the nation (*Volkstum*) stands higher than the state and that given the conditions in Germany then, loyalty to the nation justified temporary separation from Reich and state'.<sup>43</sup> The plan for an intentional division of Germany with freedom to the East came to nothing: both the government as well as the army's command more realistically rejected the notion. Gayl, who remained convinced of the plan's viability long after, regretted that Germans were not yet ready to 'mutiny for the Fatherland'.<sup>44</sup>
- p. 154

The other venture was the rampage of German freebooter units, the Freikorps, beyond Germany's borders. The name of the Freikorps was borrowed from the volunteer units of the Napoleonic Wars. Mustered together by individual charismatic and brutal captains, in the aftermath of the German defeat in the First World War, these units quelled communist revolts in Germany itself, in the pay of a democratic government which they openly despised. Their ranks were made up by former soldiers as well as students or schoolboys who had been too young to take part in the war. Those who professed the greatest disgust with the internal chaos of post-war Germany trekked out beyond the borders, eastwards. These Freikorps came to be called the 'Baltikumer' after the German name for the Baltic region, the 'Baltikum'. Numbering anywhere from 20,000 to 40,000, the Baltikumer were said to have caught the 'Baltic fever'.<sup>45</sup> The region offered a chance to continue the war, to fight communism, and also seemed to be rich in possibilities for a new life of settlement and colonization. In

p. 155

the territories of the young Estonian, Latvian, and Lithuanian states, whose existence remained precarious in the extreme, they fought in a multidimensional conflict against the Red Army and nationalist forces of the Baltic republics. The warfare with its stark brutalities was often described as a classic frontier war. The Freikorps obtained a promise of citizenship in Latvia after the fighting, but in Germany recruiting posts transmuted this into a promise of free land for settlement. In April 1919, these units engineered a coup in Latvia and tried to seize control of the entire territory, capturing the capital of Riga on 22 May 1919. This victory turned into defeat as the attention of the Entente at last focused on these machinations, and they ordered the Freikorps to withdraw. Just before their scheduled transport back to Germany, however, Freikorps units mutinied in August 1919 and went over to the White Russian counter-revolutionary army of General Bermondt, an eccentric warlord. Strange scenes ensued, of German troops marching together with the Russian soldiers, wearing Russian and German badges on their caps, and trying to learn how to drink vodka and sing 'God Save the Tsar' in Russian. Freikorps leaders indulged fantasies of the creation of a new Germany to the east of its former borders, with a revitalized Russia after the defeat of the Bolsheviks dependent on German support. These plans came to nothing when confronted by British naval support for the forces of the Baltic states. By December 1919, the last remnants of these mercenary forces retreated out of Lithuania over the border into East Prussia.

p. 156

These enterprises, although both were failures, also had a sort of afterlife, as the themes they had advanced continued to resonate. In his study *Male Fantasies*, Klaus Theweleit has shown, by drawing on the vast outpouring of memoirs, novels, and testimonies from the former Freikorps fighters, how much of their characteristic spirit depended on a repertoire of images, many of them also carrying a charge of gender. The dangers of revolution and alien ethnicity were depicted in terms of waves and feminized, while the Freikorps men pictured themselves as immobile walls, the very essence of militarized masculinity.<sup>46</sup> Echoes of these themes also showed up in politics. In March 1920, the so-called Kapp Putsch took place, as radical nationalists (led by Wolfgang Kapp, an East Prussian who had earlier founded the Fatherland Party) seized control in Berlin but quickly found themselves unable to rule. As they cast about for an agenda in their brief days of rule, their manifestos pointed to the significance of the East for Germany: 'From the East, we are threatened with devastation and rape by warlike Bolshevism.'<sup>47</sup> On the positive side of the ledger, the rebels promised a 'great liberating settlement policy': 'We must create settlement possibilities in the East and thus achieve a peaceful conquest through settlement. We wish for a strong Russia, while England wishes for a weak Russia.'<sup>48</sup> In spite of such promises, the coup attempt swiftly failed. Even though the Freikorps venture in the Baltic had also ended in failure, it was evoked repeatedly in the agendas and meetings of the nationalist right in Germany. One such meeting was to have fateful future significance. On 21 November 1921, a young man named Heinrich Himmler, later to be leader of grandiose Nazi planning for the East, heard a lecture on the alluring possibilities of the East in Munich by General von der Goltz, who had been involved in the Baltikum adventure. Himmler recorded his impressions in his diary: 'I am more certain than ever before that when there is another campaign in the East I will join it. The East is what is most important to us. The West dies easily. We must fight and settle in the East.'<sup>49</sup>

The inter-war German experiment with democracy, the Weimar Republic, experienced varying fortunes. After a difficult beginning in the years 1918–23, it was granted the 'Golden Years' of 1924–9, before plunging into breakdown and collapse in the fateful period of 1930–3. Throughout this period, visions of the East functioned as commentaries on existential questions of what constituted German identity and indeed what Germany truly was.

In this context, the central fact was that throughout the entire period, starting long before the advent of the Nazis, there was a continuity of revisionist demands and claims in German society, a consensus on this topic at least in an otherwise fragmented and fractured young democracy.<sup>50</sup> These revisionist claims and rejection of the new borders in particular in the East implied also a view of the new Eastern European neighbour states. These were commonly derided as 'seasonal states', especially in the case of Poland, with reference to its



periodic appearance and disappearance in the historical record. Smaller states, like the Baltic republics, were also ridiculed as mere 'mini-nations' (*Natiönchen*).<sup>51</sup>

p. 157 In popular fiction, some of these attitudes emerged most clearly in wistful scenarios of what the immediate future might hold. An example of this is a potboiler by Fritz Skowronnek, entitled *The Day of Wrath: An East Prussian Future-Novel*. This 1922 novel is a science fiction account of the future East Prussia, set a year or two in advance of its publication. In this wish-fulfilment, the international arena is transformed. Russia has thrown off Bolshevism and looms up as a possible ally for Germany in the struggle against Poland and Lithuania. But the threat of these countries is real for the East Prussians, who 'knew that the homeland was threatened by Poles and Lithuanians, that it was only a question of time before the Slavic wave would flood the last bulwark of Germandom in the East'.<sup>52</sup> Lithuanian and Polish soldiers raid across the border into East Prussia because of hunger in their own lands, which have fallen into disarray and chaos through some essential incapacity, and abduct German women. The rescue of East Prussia and Germany itself comes through modern German science, as an inventor develops a miraculous rod which is able to throw electric charges across vast distances, detonate enemy munitions, and ward off the threat from the East. In the author's happy ending, Lithuania and Poland are seized by Germany's ally, Russia, which is accustomed to ruling them, while Posen and West Prussia are returned to Germany. The larger outcome is a saving and total transformation of Germany's world standing as well, for the Entente powers now find the balance of power overturned by such wonder weapons and Germany regains everything that it had lost at Versailles. The ultimate moral of the story is that the renewal of all Germany had come about through East Prussia.

p. 158 The exclave of East Prussia took on great significance in the context of this ardent demand for revision, and was hailed as a lonely outpost of Germany off to the East. Anniversary celebrations of the battle of Tannenberg of 1914 were potent nationalist manifestations, calling for the redemption of German defeat. This was underlined by the dedication of the memorial to the battle of Tannenberg in 1927. Its form, with high towers, battlements, and an arena for ceremonies, was deliberately meant to recall the castles of the Teutonic Knights. General von Hindenburg, president of the Republic from 1925, was to be laid to rest at the site of his great victory (as he indeed was after his death in 1934). The Prussian government would not fund the memorial, so it was financed by donations, which gave it an additional significance as a symbol of nationalist mobilization. The monument was part of a distinctive 'cult of the fallen soldier' in Germany, which took on few of the pacifist resonances of remembrance in the victor countries, but instead focused on a desperate determination to ensure that the sacrifices had not been entirely in vain.<sup>53</sup> Even the postulate that Germany's borders were where the military graves lay took on a revisionist significance.

An entire 'science' grew up devoted to revisionism in Eastern Europe, the so-called 'East-Research', *Ostforschung*. This trend in fact drew on the earlier venerable tradition of German scholarship on Eastern Europe. *Ostforschung* has been aptly characterized by Michael Burleigh as the 'politicization and instrumentalization of a scholarly discipline'.<sup>54</sup> This trend would continue and accelerate markedly with the advent to power of the Nazis after 1933, but began with the political engagement of geographers, historians, archaeologists, medievalists, folklorists, linguists, and other scholars in the aftermath of the First World War. An interdisciplinary venture of these scholars aimed to provide arguments and talking points for German demands for revision. A key concept that was deployed by the *Ostforscher* was that of 'Boden' or soil. They argued that soil, the land itself, was over time reworked and formed by the people occupying it, and that vast areas extending far beyond Germany's present truncated borders were parts of its 'Kulturboden', 'cultural soil'. Their demands, moreover, moved beyond reclaiming the borders of 1914, to the call for a creation of an 'Ostraum' beyond them, to be exploited by German influence.<sup>55</sup>

p. 159 Further arguments were provided by practitioners of 'geopolitics'. The geopoliticians were proud of their instrumentalization of geography as an applied science. Geopolitics asserted that states and peoples were in a real sense living and vital organisms, obeying Darwinian laws of competition and survival. The measure of the potency of a state or people was its ability to win for itself space, 'Raum'. Geopolitics had grown up

especially during the First World War, when massive attention focused on maps of advances and retreats, and for German geopoliticians, the key problem of the post-war situation was the vexing challenge of Germans as a 'people without space'. Led by Karl Haushofer, a geographer at the University of Munich, geopoliticians pioneered an unprecedentedly effective use of maps for propaganda, using simple principles: bold arrows to indicate expansion or threats, massive blocks of colour to reduce the international scene to its simplest equation. All these contributed on the one hand to a reinforcement of revisionism and on the other hand to a geographical hysteria in Weimar Germany, which saw a claustrophobic future for a decaying German state, unable to expand and nourish itself. This could lead to the strange argument that Germany's population was declining because of insufficient space.<sup>56</sup> While the geopoliticians would willingly serve the Nazi state from 1933, their influence became marked in this earlier inter-war period. In fact, geopolitical thinking had been 'most dynamic and significant in the years before 1933'.<sup>57</sup>

German revisionist aims in the aftermath of the First World War had as their context an unsettled pattern of relations with the new countries of Eastern Europe. The German diplomat Ulrich von Brockdorff-Rantzau announced in 1919 that 'Germany has the choice either to broker between East and West or to provide the battleground for their struggle'.<sup>58</sup> How such a policy of brokering was to be pursued was the key question. The result was that 'German foreign policy towards Eastern Europe during the Weimar Republic did not follow a coherent pattern'.<sup>59</sup>

p. 160 Aftershocks of the total war continued here long after the halt of fighting in the West. Large numbers of Germans left the territories lost to Poland, while a million remained, as a large minority in a state in which every third person was non-Polish. Baltic Germans steadily emigrated from Latvia and Estonia. Larger upheavals seemed in prospect for the region as a whole with the Russo-Polish War of 1920. Fighting to expand the borders of the reconstituted Polish state, Polish forces had moved into Ukraine by the spring of 1920, but were thrown back to the gates of Warsaw by the Red Army's counterattack, which opened the prospect of a communist advance into the heart of Europe. The Bolshevik momentum, however, was checked at Warsaw by Polish defenders, who later saw in this salvation of the West a parallel with the Polish aid to besieged Vienna in 1683.

Further armed struggle also took place over the contested future of a formerly German territory, Upper Silesia. A plebiscite was to be held in the area to determine its disposition, and when the vote was held in March 1921, a majority of voters opted for Germany, but the League of Nations partitioned the area. Clashes between Polish paramilitaries and German Freikorps accompanied the process, including the climactic battle at Annaberg in May 1921. In the end, Poland received the eastern industrial areas and German opinion was left further embittered.

p. 161 An attempt to use the eastern option as a way of showing the western powers that Germany had other options and potential partners if it were pressed too hard came with the surprise of the Rapallo Treaty of April 1922. On his way to Genoa for trade negotiations, German Foreign Minister Walther Rathenau (two months before his assassination by German nationalists) slipped away to meet a Soviet delegation led by Chicherin. The agreement they hammered out re-established diplomatic relations between the two international pariahs, dropped all earlier mutual claims against each other, and gave most-favoured-nation trading status to each. Secret military talks later followed, with German experts in weapons development and training able to circumvent the disarmament provisions of the Versailles Treaty with Soviet help and facilities on Soviet territory. In Germany, opinion on the treaty was mixed, but included praise for the way in which it broke through the 'encirclement' that was said to threaten a weakened Germany. International opinion was shocked by this turn of events, and feared that it portended that the outcast powers would be much more inclined to make common cause in the future. In fact, the practical results of the Rapallo Treaty remained small, but it did provide an abiding model of what such cooperation could look like.<sup>60</sup>

In 1923, German external and internal weakness seemed to reach a fever pitch, with the French invasion of the Ruhr to enforce reparations payments, communist revolts in the cities, and Hitler's ludicrous Beer Hall Putsch in Munich. Amidst this chaos, Gustav Stresemann became chancellor from August to November and went on to play an important role in German relations with the East in his later role as Foreign Minister from 1923 to 1929. Stresemann was a leader of the German People's Party (Deutsche Volkspartei), successors to the National Liberals of the German Empire. He sought to craft another version of a German policy of maintaining the balance between East and West, improving relations with the western powers so as to be able to regain a position of strength for Germany from which it might be able to win a revision of the peace settlement in Eastern Europe. The culminating act of his determination to improve relations with France came with the Locarno Treaty of 1925. In this accord, including the Rhine Pact, the borders between Germany, France, and Belgium were guaranteed. Stresemann refused a similar arrangement, however, for Germany's eastern borders. The international response to the treaty came to be called the 'Spirit of Locarno', the hope that wartime hatreds had at last been quelled and replaced by reconciliation. The next year, Germany entered the League of Nations and Stresemann and the French foreign minister Briand shared the Nobel Peace Prize for their efforts. A practical result, however, was that the question of the borders of Germany with Poland and Czechoslovakia was left open, and indeed two kinds of borders had been established in Europe as a whole: one set guaranteed and permanent, the other open for revision. While Stresemann explained that he had kept a free hand for changes in the East, it seems however that he increasingly saw the prospect of peaceful change recede. His balancing was also evident in the treaty signed soon after with the Soviets, the Treaty of Berlin of April 1926, in which each side promised neutrality if the other were attacked by other forces. Stresemann used the League of Nations as a forum to argue for the rights of German minorities in Eastern European countries, while those same groups were secretly financed and subsidized by the German foreign ministry. Trade was also an important dimension, as German exports to the Baltic countries began to outpace those of Britain. On 3 October 1929, Stresemann died, and further prospect of revision would take more aggressive forms than those he had seen as possible.

Finally, what is striking is how many of the numerous internal political crises wracking Weimar Germany were given outward form, and directed against the East. This was to be seen across the entire fragmented political spectrum of left to right, with strange hybrid forms appearing as well, in the form of National Bolshevism.

The Soviet Union's very existence was an inspiring example to radical leftists in Germany, even as social democrats and communists denounced one another in debate. One venture which reflected this attraction was the founding in March 1919 of the organization 'Ansiedlung Ost' (Settlement East), which planned to facilitate the resettlement of German proletarians in utopian communities in the Soviet Union. These efforts, interestingly, were actually resisted by the German Communist Party itself. In spite of the mass membership the organization claimed, fewer than 150 workers embarked, and they discovered a reality quite different than the one they had imagined. Many returned to Germany and the organization dissolved in 1922.<sup>61</sup>

German conservative nationalists were also capable of being fascinated by the East as a realm of possibilities, and not only in terms of fears, but in terms of an alleged German affinity.<sup>62</sup> Oswald Spengler prophesied doom in his *Decline of the West*, which appeared in 1918. His argument in these volumes was that some younger, more energetic powers would usher in an age of iron, coming to sweep away earlier ideologies and 'European-American culture'. In his next book, called *Prussian Socialism* (1920), he urged a 'third way' of new socialism, between liberal capitalism and communism, a militaristic socialism. Moeller van den Bruck, the political mystic, wrote in his works, among them *The Third Reich* (1923), that the West would soon collapse and that Germany's destiny would instead be linked with the East.

On the *Völkisch* fringe, constructors of putative nationalist utopian communities also nurtured visions of a future directed against the West and allied in some fashion with the East. Many of these Volkish movements also included former Freikorps fighters and Baltikumer, who contributed some of their own obsessions. This was the case with the Artamanen League, which had been founded in 1923 with a programme of resettling

Germans from the cities on rural soil. Heinrich Himmler was one of its members. The organization proclaimed that 'Germany's future, Germany's young power is in the East. Our destiny is not determined at the Rhine and the Ruhr, but at the Vistula and the Memel.'<sup>63</sup> Ancient precedents were recalled for this imperative, as a leader of the organization stated: 'Either we will go to the East, as our ancestors did once before in the twelfth century, or we will be erased as a people from world history.'<sup>64</sup> Indeed, the cryptic name of the organization itself, which established colonies in German rural areas, was said to mean both 'protector of the soil' and 'German champion against the East'.<sup>65</sup>

p. 164 In the whirlwind of competing ideologies besetting the Weimar Republic, radicalisms of the left and right also encountered one another in a strange hybrid movement, as provocative as it was ↵ short-lived. This was so-called National Bolshevism, a deliberate attempt to fuse elements of radical socialism with nationalist energies. The figure most identified with the movement was Ernst Niekisch (1889–1967), who published a journal called *Resistance* from 1926 to 1934 propagating these ideas. As early as 1919, German communists had proposed the option of enlisting nationalists in a common struggle with the working classes.<sup>66</sup> This idea was taken up by the revolutionary Karl Radek (1885–1939?), a member of the Comintern, who in 1923 proposed this alliance again and gave a speech praising a Freikorps fighter, Schlageter, recently executed by French forces in the Ruhr. Although the mutual approach did not produce lasting results, the idea retained its force for Niekisch. At first a socialist, Niekisch parted ways with his comrades over his rejection of the West and his intense rejection of the Versailles settlement. He argued that Germany needed to turn its gaze eastwards, away from the poisonous civilization of the West, and to discover its affinity for Russia. Niekisch celebrated the Prussian state, as a union of masculine Germanic attributes and Slavic femininity, and looked forward to a natural alliance with Russia as a step towards a 'north-Asian and north-European world empire'.<sup>67</sup> Similar ideas were expressed in a less prophetic tone by the circle of journalists who worked on the publication *Die Tat* (*The Deed*), which emphasized antipathy towards the West.<sup>68</sup>

These attractions and complex emotions also appeared in literature, high as well as low. Thomas Mann, who had articulated notions of the battle between culture and civilization during the war, explored further the philosophical implications of the modern condition in his novel, *The Magic Mountain*. Among its themes is that of Germany as a 'land of the centre', facing choices between East and West.<sup>69</sup> A very different writer was the once popular right-wing author Edwin Erich Dwinger (1898–1981).<sup>70</sup> Though now relegated to well-deserved obscurity in literary terms, his fictional writings of the late 1920s and 1930s achieved phenomenal print runs, estimated at several million when one includes translations.

p. 165 Edwin Erich Dwinger was born in Kiel, of mixed German-Russian parentage. In 1914 he volunteered for the German cavalry and in the following year was wounded and taken prisoner by the Russians, spending the war in camps in Siberia and Mongolia. Overtaken by the Russian Civil War, in 1920 he joined Admiral Kolchak's White Russian army, and was again captured, this time by the Bolshevik forces. He escaped to Germany and settled as a farmer, while writing his popular novels, blending in them politics and adventure stories. Dwinger was celebrated by the Nazis after 1933 and in 1935 was named SS Obersturmführer in the SS-Reiterstandarte. After the Second World War, the author argued that he had opposed the Nazi system, but the affinities between their world-view and some of his writings were significant.<sup>71</sup>

His most popular novels on captivity in the war and the Russian civil war, based on his experiences, were marketed as 'The German Passion'. Among his other books, *The Last Riders* (1935), dealing with the Freikorps in the Baltic, also achieved popularity (a print run of 280,000 copies) and was serialized in the SS journal *Das Schwarze Korps*. The popularity of his books in the Nazi period is interesting, given their views of Russia which could on occasion be quite positive. Ironically, his books apparently fell into official disfavour after the Nazi–Soviet Non-Aggression Pact of 1939 owing to their representations of the communist regime but were again hailed after the invasion of the Soviet Union in 1941.<sup>72</sup>

p. 166 The novel of special interest here is the 1932 *We Call Germany*.<sup>73</sup> Its subtitle, 'Homecoming and Legacy' announces the main preoccupations of the novel. In 1921 a group of prisoners of war return to Germany. Their friend, the narrator Benjamin, who had escaped earlier, gathers the men together on an estate in East Prussia to give them time to adjust to peace, the new Germany, life outside the prisoner-of-war camps, and defeat. Not much actually happens in the novel, which makes reading it unpleasantly similar to chewing styro foam. The 559 pages of the work rather deliver a set of political monologues and exchanges between the narrator and major figures who are often nearly allegorical representations of particular political poles or human types, reacting to political news around them: the impact of the Versailles Treaty, the 1921 conflict over Silesia, the 1922 Treaty of Rapallo, the Ruhr occupation, and growing inflation.

Nonetheless, in the work some major themes can be identified with a bearing on views of Eastern Europe after the Great War. These major themes are an identification of the East with mass death and with German victimhood; both dread of and an ambivalent nostalgia for Russia in particular (as opposed to Eastern Europe more generally); a compulsion to rank nations in a hierarchy of ethnic groups; and a set of future imperatives, including a political synthesis, the acquisition of living space, and a coming new war.

In view of the depiction of the experiences of the prisoners of war in Russian camps, it is surprising to discover that the views of the land of their captivity are not purely negative, but rather are a mixture of fear and yet also ambivalent nostalgia. On the negative side of the balance, their time in Russia was marked by 'endless torture . . . cruelties of a medieval scale. But we comforted ourselves with the thought: Asia . . . When we are once again in Europe, in the old lands of culture (*Kulturländer*), the reserves of civilization . . . , things would be different.'<sup>74</sup> The East is identified with chaos and peril, death and disease. One soldier, for instance, returns with his head covered in bandages, suffering from a skin disease they call 'Russian scabies', but which turns out to be Asiatic syphilis. Yet despite these perceptions of the East, upon their return to a chaotic German domestic scene, the former prisoners conclude that the civilization of the West is the same. The narrator declares,

p. 167 I am ashamed to belong to such creatures . . . for whom culture means nothing but stealing from others with beautiful words! Oh, we have long since lost the culture and have only the slag of civilization. And I would a hundred times over prefer the natural gruesomeness of Asia, the natural horror between White and Red, to the civilized cruelty of present-day Europe!<sup>75</sup>

The ordeal of Siberian captivity, they argue, means that they are now unfitted for compromises and the superficiality of post-war society. Instead, each survivor is said to carry a legacy from his experience, as a holy calling.

At one and the same time, the former prisoners of war are both scarred by their captivity in Russia and nostalgic for that land of their transformation through suffering. Their ambivalent nostalgia shows up in myriad ways. They call themselves 'Siberians', speak of 'our Siberia',<sup>76</sup> call their barracks in East Prussia the 'Russian House', use Russian swearwords, pepper their banter with Russian expressions, and consciously (but ironically) use Soviet-style contractions for their 'political evenings' of discussion called 'Polab'.<sup>77</sup> The location for their convalescence, an East Prussian estate, is chosen precisely because it so resembles the Russian steppes. They welcome White Russian soldiers and Cossack officers into their midst, sing Russian songs, and drink tea from samovars. One of the prisoners, a German doctor, actually leaves to return to Russia, on a humanitarian mission of medical assistance.<sup>78</sup> As he had said earlier, 'Russia is the uncanniest land that I know. It beats those who love it until they bleed. Those who flee from it for that reason, however, die of longing. Suffering is simply its melody, which one cannot evade. And he who has heard it once cannot escape it ever again . . .'. Hearing of his departure, the narrator nods and responds, 'Oh, I thought in agitation, what is it about this Russian land, that it pulls everyone back to its bosom?'<sup>79</sup> At the end of the novel, as the company of convalescents separates to go their own ways, they celebrate a 'Russian symposium', a wild party in the Russian style.<sup>80</sup> Looking on, the narrator observes, 'While the singing goes on, I think, are they not Russians? They can only celebrate such wild feasts because in their inner depths they are half Russian . . .'<sup>81</sup> The contradictory

p. 168 nature of such reactions is striking. By contrast, other Eastern European peoples are regarded in much more uniformly negative ways, especially the Poles and Czechs. Throughout the book, the protagonists rage (often at stupendous length) against the results of the Versailles settlement, which has rearranged Europe in the name of 'security'. As one asks rhetorically of the Allies and their concerns for security, 'Where is ours? You were certainly secure against us, but against whom are we still secure? Not even against Poland and Lithuania, Latvia or Czechoslovakia.'<sup>82</sup>

Naturally enough, one can detect in the political discussions an abiding attempt to situate Germans in a new hierarchy of nations, an order among peoples that still needs to be cemented after the upheavals of the war. The Polish involvement in Silesia is presented as a parallel humiliation to the French stationing of African troops in the Ruhr, which in explicitly racist terms is called 'this disgrace against white people'.<sup>83</sup> Germany is repeatedly called an '*altes Kulturland*', as distinct from the newer structures of European peoples and small nations.<sup>84</sup> At other moments, however, Dwinger presents Germany as a young nation threatened by the older peoples of the world.<sup>85</sup> Yet elsewhere, Germany appears as the proletarian nation.<sup>86</sup> One sees throughout an attempt to perceive some overarching order among nations and peoples.

The final theme that is to be found in the book involves the prescriptions for the future that are ventured by the narrator and his fellows: the wish for a political synthesis of new energies, the demand for space, and the prospect of a new war. One of Dwinger's trademark obsessions was the demand for a synthesis in a time of such epochal change, '*Weltwende*'. As one survivor says, 'we all know that we stand at a turning point in the world, and therefore are all looking for a synthesis'.<sup>87</sup> For Dwinger, this synthesis involves a union of nationalist and socialist principles, a fusion of the White and Red. Remarkably, the communists are admired for their qualities of dedication and self-sacrifice. The narrator concludes that Germany must achieve this synthesis for itself and show the way forward for other nations: 'the synthesis from the war experience of the Whites and the revolutionary experience of the Reds—that is the bequest of our dead, that is our call for the new Germany!'<sup>88</sup> The revolutionary mission of the Russians must be taken away from them and taken up by Germans. As a '*Volk der Mitte*', 'a people of the middle', the narrator announces, the Germans are called to a special role between East and West. A communist officer, who is presented sympathetically, suggests that 'one day we will have to choose: slaves of the West or leaders of the East!'<sup>89</sup> Another Austrian character presents the 'old Reich idea', arguing that Germany should be

not the national, but the greater state that rules all small peoples, the state of work and justice—if Germany does not manage that, then Europe will fall with it. Panslavism overnight became a problem in the Balkans, but the German territory in fact only ends where the Russian border lies. All other peoples are tragic intermediate forms without ties, and thus naturally will be ended when Germany is resurrected. Germany sees its purposes too narrowly, it was always more than a nation—and must become more again.

He continues, 'We should form anew the west Slavic economic space, with Czechs and Poles and Serbs, with Romanians and Greeks and Bulgarians—that is our natural economic empire, from which one could never exclude us!'<sup>90</sup>

That need for space, both economic space and *Lebensraum*, lacking in an industrialized and claustrophobic Germany, is presented as one of the main reasons for the outbreak of the Great War in 1914. The book raises the demand for *Raum* for the future, arguing that the loss of territory in Germany as a result of the Versailles Treaty only made the crisis more acute.<sup>91</sup> *Raum* could be found, it is suggested, in several places, in colonies abroad or, implicitly, in 'our *Baltikum* . . . now the *Baltikum* is almost empty of people, but its old pioneers [Baltic Germans] must suffocate in Germany!'<sup>92</sup>

p. 170 Finally, repeatedly throughout the book there resurfaces the ominous suggestion of a new war that may be fought in the future if the Versailles Treaty is not revised: 'How can a war be the last, if as a result of the peace



that it creates a whole series of peoples that have no choice but to throw off the indescribable repression through a new war?<sup>93</sup> This prospect is not rejected, but rather presented as inevitable, given the insecure ordering of peoples in the world and the German need for space.

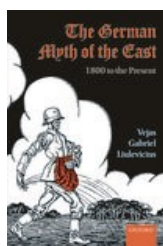
Dwinger's novel presents a mixed, ambivalent, and often confused picture of Eastern Europe and its lands and peoples. In an older tradition of solidarity between 'state-peoples' (*Staatsnationen*), Dwinger shows an affinity between Germans and Russia, at least the Old Holy Russia (it is thus interesting that these books were allowed to circulate by the Nazis, given their contradiction of the stereotype of Slavs as subhumans). At the same time, however, the East is presented in its essence as chaotic and dangerous. His novel is a collection of running political monologues delivered by different characters, hence a multiplicity of voices with different shadings of opinion from the radical nationalist wing of post-war Germany. Dwinger's novel and the enthusiastic reception it and the other volumes of the trilogy received suggest that there was a broad range of different potentialities before 1933 in German thought about Eastern Europe when viewed through the prisms of war and defeat. It would be left to the Nazis to pick and endorse the worst and most extreme of these potentialities for their own programmes.

## Notes

1. Vejas Gabriel Liulevicius, *War Land on the Eastern Front: Culture, National Identity and German Occupation in World War I* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).
2. Dennis Showalter, *Tannenberg: Clash of Empires* (Washington, DC: Brassey's, Inc., 2004).
3. Klaus Böhme (ed.), *Aufrufe und Reden deutscher Professoren im Ersten Weltkrieg* (Stuttgart: Philipp Reclam Jun., 1975), 48.
4. Golo Mann, *The History of Germany since 1789*, trans. Marian Jackson (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1985), 503.
5. Walter Flex, *Gesammelte Werke*, i (Munich: C. H. Beck'sche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1936), 84–5.
6. Josef Wenzel, *Mit Draht und Kabel im Osten. Aus dem Tagebuch eines Telegraphisten* (Karlsruhe: Akt.-Ge. Badenia, 1918), 22.
7. Bernhard von der Marwitz, *Stirb und Werde. Aus Briefen und Kriegstagebuchblättern des Leutnants Bernhard von der Marwitz* (Breslau: Wlh. Gottl. Korn Verlag, 1931), 147.
8. Paul Weindling, *Epidemics and Genocide in Eastern Europe, 1890–1945* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).
9. Antony Polonsky, 'The German Occupation of Poland during the First and Second World Wars: A Comparison', in Roy A. Prete and A. Hamish Ion (eds.), *Armies of Occupation* (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1984), 97–142.
10. BAMA PHD 8/20, 'Ziffer 259. Verwaltungsordnung für das Etappengebiet', *Befehl- und Verordnungsblatt* 34 (26 June 1916), paragraph 6.2, p. 270.
11. Erich Ludendorff, *Meine Kriegserinnerungen, 1914–1918* (Berlin: E. S. Mittler & Sohn, 1919), 138.
12. Polonsky, 'The German Occupation of Poland', 119; Steven E. Aschheim, *Brothers and Strangers: The East European Jew in German and German Jewish Consciousness 1800–1923* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1982), 139–41.
13. Aviel Roshwald, *Ethnic Nationalism and the Fall of Empires: Central Europe, Russia, and the Middle East, 1914–1923* (London: Routledge, 2001), 122.
14. Victor Klemperer, *Curriculum Vitae. Erinnerungen, 1881–1918*, ii (Berlin: Aufbau Taschenbuch Verlag, 1996), 687.
15. Robert L. Nelson, '"Unsere Frage ist der Osten": Representations of the Occupied East in German Soldier Newspapers, 1914–1918', *Zeitschrift für Ostmitteleuropa-Forschung*, 51/4 (2002), 500.
16. Ibid. 501.
17. Max Hoffmann, *Die Aufzeichnungen des Generalmajors Max Hoffman*, ed. Karl Friedrich Nowak, i (Berlin: Verlag für Kulturpolitik, 1929), 177.
18. Wenzel, *Mit Draht*, 91–2.
19. Ibid. 53–4.
20. Liulevicius, *War Land*, 25.
21. *Das Land Ober Ost. Deutsche Arbeit in den Verwaltungsgebieten Kurland, Litauen und Bialystok-Grodno* (Stuttgart: Presseabteilung Ober Ost, 1917), 190.
22. Alon Rachamimov, *POWs and the Great War: Captivity on the Eastern Front* (Oxford: Berg, 2002), 109.
23. Quoted in Aschheim, *Brothers*, 181.
24. Meyer, *Mitteleuropa*.
25. Geiss, *Grenzstreifen*.

26. Hagen, *Germans*, 286.
27. Lonnie R. Johnson, *Introducing Austria: A Short History* (Riverside, CA: Ariadne Press, 1987), 37–9.
28. Martin Kitchen, *The Silent Dictatorship: The Politics of the German High Command under Hindenburg and Ludendorff, 1916–1918* (London: Croom Helm, 1976), 219.
29. Mann, *History of Germany*, 561.
30. Claus Remer, *Die Ukraine im Blickfeld deutscher Interessen. Ende des 19. Jahrhunderts bis 1917/1918* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1997).
31. Hans von Rimscha, 'Adolf von Harnack, Theodor Schiemann und Karl Dehio in ihren Bemühungen um eine deutsche Universität Dorpat', in Jürgen von Hehn and Csaba János Kenéz (eds.), *Reval und die baltischen Länder. Festschrift für Hellmuth Weiss zum 80. Geburtstag* (Marburg: J. G. Herder Institut, 1980), 55–74.
32. John W. Wheeler-Bennett, *Wooden Titan: Hindenburg in Twenty Years of German History, 1914–1934* (New York: William Morrow, 1936), 127.
33. Ludendorff, *Kriegserinnerungen*, 506.
34. Ibid. 532.
35. Aschheim, *Brothers*, 177; Tude Maurer, 'Medizinalpolizei und Antisemitismus. Die deutsche Politik der Grenzsperrung gegen Ostjuden im Ersten Weltkrieg', *Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas* 33/2 (1985), 205–30.
36. Jonathan Wright, *Gustav Stresemann: Weimar's Greatest Statesman* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 107.
37. Johnson, *Central Europe*, 182.
38. Wright, *Stresemann*, 137.
39. Annemarie Sammartino, 'Migration and Crisis in Germany, 1914–1922' (Ph.D. diss. University of Michigan, 2004), 1, 9.
40. Hagen Schulze, 'Der Oststaat-Plan 1919', *Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte*, 18/2 (1970), 123–63.
41. Bundesarchiv Koblenz, Nachlass von Gayl, 343.
42. Ibid. 345.
43. Ibid. 345.
44. Ibid. 349.
45. Dwork and Van Pelt, *Auschwitz*, 72.
46. Klaus Theweleit, *Male Fantasies*, trans. Stephan Conway (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987).
47. Erwin Künemann and Gerhard Schulze (eds.), *Der Kapp-Lüttwitz-Ludendorff-Putsch. Dokumente* (Munich: Olzog, 2002), 142.
48. Ibid. 149.
49. Dwork and Van Pelt, *Auschwitz*, 73.
50. Peter Krüger, 'The European East and Weimar Germany', in Eduard Mühle (ed.), *Germany and the European East in the Twentieth Century* (Oxford and New York: Berg, 2003), 9; Eduard Mühle, 'The European East on the Mental Map of German Ostforschung', in Eduard Mühle (ed.), *Germany and the European East in the Twentieth Century* (Oxford and New York: Berg, 2003), 113.
51. Pistohlkors, 'Germany and Baltic', 57.
52. Fritz Skowronnek, *Dies irae. Ein ostpreussischer Zukunftsroman* (Berlin: Neudeutsche Verlags- und Treuhandgesellschaft, n.d. [1922]), 12.
53. George Mosse, *Fallen Soldiers: Reshaping the Memory of the World Wars* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1990).
54. Burleigh, *Germany Turns Eastwards*, 11.
55. Wippermann, *Drang*, 139.
56. Murphy, *Heroic Earth*, 199.
57. Ibid., p. viii.
58. Herwig, *Hammer*, 236.
59. Mühle, *Germany*, 9.
60. Cyril Buffet, 'Rapallo: Sirens and Phantoms', in Cyril Buffet and Beatrice Heuser (eds.), *Haunted by History: Myths in International Relations* (Providence and Oxford: Berghahn Books, 1998), 235–58.
61. Sammartino, 'Migration', 189–247.
62. Wolfgang Wippermann, 'Die Konservative Revolution und der Osten. Zur Geopolitisierung des nationalen Diskurses in der Weimarer Republik', in Heiner Timmermann (ed.), *Nationalismus und Nationalbewegung in Europa 1914–1945* (Berlin: Duncker & Humblot, 1999), 355–69.
63. Dwork and Van Pelt, *Auschwitz*, 79.
64. Ibid. 80.
65. Jost Hermand, *Old Dreams of a New Reich: Volkish Utopias and National Socialism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992), 109.

66. Warren Lerner, *Karl Radek: The Last Internationalist* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1970), 88.
67. Wippermann, 'Die Konservative Revolution', 367.
68. Walter Laqueur, *Young Germany: A History of the German Youth Movement* (New York: Basic Books, 1962), 183–4.
69. Kontje, *German Orientalisms*, 147.
70. Jay Baird, *Hitler's War Poets: Literature and Politics in the Third Reich* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 117–64.
71. Hans Wagener, 'Als Zeuge im Verhör. Zum Ideologieverdacht in Sachen Dwinger', in Jörg Thunecke (ed.), *Leid der Worte. Panorama des literarischen Nationalsozialismus* (Bonn: Bouvier Verlag Herbert Grundmann, 1987), 278–99. Other biographical information online through the Deutsches Historisches Museum, Berlin: <http://www.dhm.de/lemo/html/biografien/DwingerEdwinErich>.
72. Wagener, 'Als Zeuge', 279.
73. Edwin Erich Dwinger, *Wir rufen Deutschland. Heimkehr und Vermächtnis* (Jena: Eugen Diedrichs Verlag, 1932).
74. Ibid. 160–1.
75. Ibid. 161.
76. Ibid. 193.
77. Ibid. 169.
78. Ibid. 500.
79. Ibid. 502.
80. Ibid. 542.
81. Ibid. 543.
82. Ibid. 480.
83. Ibid. 80.
84. Ibid. 468.
85. Ibid. 353–4.
86. Ibid. 353.
87. Ibid. 469.
88. Ibid. 546.
89. Ibid. 244.
90. Ibid. 527.
91. Ibid. 480.
92. Ibid. 484.
93. Ibid. 497.



## The German Myth of the East: 1800 to the Present

Vejas Gabriel Liulevicius

<https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199546312.001.0001>

Published: 27 August 2009

Online ISBN: 9780191720338

Print ISBN: 9780199546312

Search in this book

### CHAPTER

## 5 Age of Empires, 1871–1914

Vejas Gabriel Liulevicius

<https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199546312.003.0005> Pages 98–129

Published: August 2009

### Abstract

This chapter dissects how the revolutionary unification of Germany into an empire by Chancellor Otto von Bismarck transformed the German myth of the East, creating anxieties about frontiers even as a new form of statehood was celebrated in official nationalism as a culmination of German culture. Bismarck pursued a foreign policy based on conservative solidarity with Russia while also caught in an internal struggle over the ethnic future of the 'Eastern marches' within Germany, its eastern provinces, and Slavic populations. The turn towards ethnic confrontation that came to the forefront after Bismarck's dismissal in 1890 can be traced in a turn towards Social Darwinism, racism, and the organized chauvinism of the nationalist leagues in both Imperial Germany and Austria-Hungary. As a result, earlier conservative solidarity between the empires now changed into a mutual terror focused on threatened frontiers.

**Keywords:** [Austria](#), [Bismarck](#), [Imperial Germany](#), [nationalism](#), [racism](#)

**Subject:** [European History](#), [Political History](#), [Russian and Slavic History](#), [Modern History \(1700 to 1945\)](#), [Intellectual History](#)

**Collection:** [Oxford Scholarship Online](#)

With the 'German Revolution' of January 1871, the founding of the *Kaiserreich*, and Bismarck's unification of a 'smaller Germany' dominated by Prussia to the north, the map of Germany was fundamentally redrawn. A particular version of contested German national identity was imposed. German-speaking Austrians now found themselves outside the new German national state and had to confront the question of how to define their own identity in the dual monarchy of Austria-Hungary, with its intensely complicated interethnic relations and hierarchies. Internationally, the decades after these transformations in Central Europe were also marked by the imperialist scramble for colonies and increased competition between the Great Powers. In the 1880s and 1890s, vast territories of Africa and Asia were quickly partitioned between European colonial powers. Empire was the theme of the day. Expansion seemed the patent of vitality, while the threat of loss of territory or receding frontiers stirred anxieties. Across the Atlantic, another set of anxieties prevailed, and what was understood as a crucial milestone was reached in American expansion, with the formal closing of the US frontier in 1890.

p. 99 Germany would face other fears. She was ready to participate in the competition for colonies at the same time as opportunities for overseas colonization were being closed off (indeed, a brief and late interlude of colonialism had yielded only disappointing gains in Africa), and Germany had a fresh premonition of peril within and without her own eastern territories.

These anxieties would crystallize around the notion of the East within, the 'Eastern Marches' of Germany, as they were called using a term resonant with medieval history. The marches designated the eastern borderlands of East Prussia, West Prussia, Pomerania, Posen, and Silesia. These poorer areas experienced both nationality conflict and portentous shifts in ethnic composition. A marked phenomenon that extended over this period was that of population flight from the East, as between 1840 and 1933, 4.5 million 'inhabitants of Prussia's five eastern provinces migrated west'.<sup>1</sup> Both Germans and Poles moved westward seeking jobs in industry or emigrating to the United States, but one outcome was a decline in the proportion of the German population in the east, as a higher Polish birth rate and the arrival of migrant workers had a cumulative effect. Large-scale agriculture on the estates of the Prussian Junkers had become dependent on this seasonal labour force.

p. 100 German nationalism obviously also underwent enormous alterations due to the new existence of a German nation-state. New questions needed to be confronted as a result. What was to be Germany's role in Europe and the world at large? How was German national identity to be understood? The rapid industrialization which coincided with this period also represented a challenge, with the alienation of industrial labour. One answer to this problem was the product of a national debate on work and social organization. Wilhelm Heinrich Riehl offered a compelling formula with his notion of 'German Work', arguing that the German character expressed itself in a kind of work which was not alienating, but creative and holistic. This notion of '*Deutsche Arbeit*' was linked to the concept of *Kultur* too, and was often invoked in conjunction with the allied concept of German '*Kulturarbeit*'. Such ideas were taken on by a broader so-called *Völkisch* movement, which arose in the last decades of the nineteenth century, although its precursors went back to the start of the century. *Völkisch* thinkers advanced a vision of a unique German essence, binding the people together organically and transcending history. *Völkisch* thought, often at odds with modernity, was fuelled by industrialization and social dislocations, especially those experienced during the great depression of 1873 and after.<sup>2</sup>

p. 101 The new German Empire which Bismarck had forged sought to find its role. The establishment of this form of possible national unity would have important consequences in particular for German understandings of Eastern Europe. With the new Germany presenting itself as a national state, the unity of Germans was stressed and national frontiers took on a new significance owing to the mobilization of the principle of nationality. The new Germany took on all the necessary attributes and markers of an 'imagined community': shared language, shared borders, shared enemies. The insistence on these could assume aggressive emphasis owing to the very uncertainties still latent in the new form of the German Empire. The *Kaiserreich* represented an unstable hybrid form, uniting elements of representative politics with authoritarian traditions. The Kaiser, in his dual capacity as emperor and King of Prussia (which dominated the new nation-state, making up two-thirds of its territory), held vast powers as sovereign and war lord. Yet the realm remained fragmented along lines of religion, class, and political loyalties. The new Germany also possessed minority populations, especially along its borders in all directions. Rapid industrialization in Germany was transforming the society in quick order, while the European Great Powers looked with concern at the military powerhouse that had appeared in the centre of the continent. The spirit of the new Germany thus seemed marked by a volatile character, embodying modernity and youth, retaining older patterns of order, and beset with problems which nationalists sought to answer by positing a national destiny and mission. Bismarck, more Prussian, flexible, and sceptical of such ambitions, pursued a foreign policy predicated on the old Prussian imperative of maintaining good relations with Russia, the great conservative empire to the east, as well as Austria-Hungary (now that dualism in the German lands had been ended), and domestic policies of rallying the populace against a succession of those he labelled enemies. In terms of relations with the East, this pattern would produce a distinctive outcome: a radicalized set of relations within Germany's eastern provinces, and seemingly stable relations with Russia.

Beset with the 'nightmare of coalitions', anxious about not having to face simultaneous challenges on several fronts, Bismarck worked against that dreadful vision. He stressed that his new Germany sought no gains or expansion in the East, and had no fundamental conflicts of interest with the other powers there. Bismarck was convinced that even a successful war against Russia would be a disaster, not worth the costs of the venture. The only gain would be 'Polish provinces; and we already have more of those than is comfortable for us'.<sup>3</sup> Yet the pattern of maintaining close relations with Austria-Hungary and Russia at the same time would be a challenging one, as his two intended partners found themselves involved in increasing competition in the Balkans. Bismarck carefully cultivated friendship with Russia. In October 1873, this produced the Three Emperors' League (*Dreikaiserbund*), aligning Germany, Russia, and Austria-Hungary. Although it soon broke down through international complications, this pattern would be revived by Bismarck in several different forms until he was removed from office in 1890.

p. 102 In domestic affairs, Bismarck pursued a policy of rallying the German people against 'enemies of the empire'. An immediate campaign launched in the earliest stages of the German state was Bismarck's *Kulturkampf* or 'culture struggle', directed against the institutional structures of German Catholics, from 1873 to 1887. Together with the National Liberals, Bismarck attacked the Catholic Centre Party, which sought to organize the Catholic minority in the new Protestant-majority Germany. In Prussia and then throughout Germany, new regulations undercut the earlier independence of the Church in education, excluded the Jesuit order, forbade discussion of politics through the 'pulpit paragraph' law, and otherwise aimed to reduce the Church's earlier status. Ultimately, the campaign backfired, as German Catholics rallied and organized themselves in durable structures, feeling themselves a community under siege. The Centre Party in fact grew stronger as a result. Bismarck drew the active campaign to a close by the late 1870s, and would soon focus his serial animosity on his former liberal allies and then the socialists (from 1878 to 1890).

The *Kulturkampf* also had a fateful eastern dimension. Bismarck would later claim in his memoirs that the initial impetus for his policy had been concern about the Catholic Poles in Prussia's border regions. The combination of a non-German population and Catholicism seemed an especially dangerous mixture. In his classic study of the nationality conflict in the Prussian East, William Hagen argues that Bismarck's new policies represented older traditions radicalized.<sup>4</sup> With 1848, the Prussian state had lost hope of winning the Polish elites' political sympathies, so that 'In the 1850s and 1860s, the word *Germanisierung*, hitherto seldom encountered in the Prussian political vocabulary, became a routine expression of the positive content of official policy.'<sup>5</sup> Bismarck believed fundamentally that the true political challenge lay not with the ordinary Polish people, but with the clergy and nobility. From his perspective, 'breaking the gentry's and clergy's influence over the Polish masses would deliver the politically passive and socially subservient common people to the guidance of the German upper classes'.<sup>6</sup>

p. 103 The first emphasis was on education and church organization. Bismarck launched policies which sought to Germanize education in the Polish territories and to bring under German control the archbishopric of Posen-Gnesen.<sup>7</sup> The conflict that erupted even led to the imprisonment of the Polish archbishop in 1876, and the appointment of a German archbishop a decade later. Regulations in 1873–4 replaced Polish as the language of instruction with German in all lower schools in Posen. Polish was still allowed for religious instruction, however. In 1876, German was made the sole language for official government business, including courts and publications. These measures, predictably, galvanized Polish resistance to being relegated to second-class citizen status, and led to the organization of educational associations and energized circles of activists.<sup>8</sup>

In the 1880s, Bismarck launched renewed initiatives, radical in their sweep and novel in their measures, 'an action unprecedented in nineteenth-century Europe during a time of peace'.<sup>9</sup> From 1883 to 1885, the Prussian authorities organized the mass expulsion from Prussia's eastern provinces of Poles and Jews who had come from the Russian and Austrian empires. In 1883, some 32,000 non-citizens were deported from the eastern provinces, although many of them had lived there for decades. The Interior Ministry justified these measures as needed for the 'security of the state' and the 'progress of German culture in those regions'.<sup>10</sup> The



deportations continued until 1887, and elicited strong protests in some quarters of German society and the condemnation of the Reichstag.

Even the deportations, however, did not significantly alter the balance of ethnicity. In Posen, in the twenty years after the founding of the Reich, the Poles had increased their numbers from 61 per cent to 63.6 per cent, as the German population fell.<sup>11</sup> German nationalists shivered at the prospect of an ethnic inundation of Slavs and the loss of the eastern provinces, and called for programmes of ‘inner colonization’.

p. 104 This provided the prompting for a further escalation, the land struggle, which opened in 1886. In April 1886, the Prussian parliament created a programme to settle German farmers in the East, to be enacted by the Royal Prussian Settlement Commission. It was endowed with a foundation that allowed it to operate from 1886 to 1916. With reserves of up to 500 million Marks by 1914, it was charged with buying up large estates of Polish nobles in Posen and West Prussia.<sup>12</sup> In that time, it transplanted some 130,000 Germans.<sup>13</sup> Again, the German Reichstag protested against this unequal treatment.

Yet the results here were also disappointing. Polish activists mobilized to oppose this new onslaught, and in their pragmatic tradition of ‘Organic Work’ organized formidably effective institutions, including a fund of their own to buy up land and a Land Bank.<sup>14</sup> This was taking on the contours of an ethnic ‘economic war’.<sup>15</sup> In everyday relations in Posen, the Polish community and the Germans and Jews drew away from one another, into increasing self-isolation. The government sought to reinforce the German presence in these areas by the prominent presence of officialdom, even offering special hardship pay for officials in eastern provinces. It also strove for the establishment of institutions, like the German Academy in Posen, which would claim the territory.<sup>16</sup>

For a time at least, this governmental assault on the Polish population of the borderlands was lifted after the dismissal of Bismarck in 1890 by the brash new Kaiser Wilhelm II (r. 1888–1918). Bismarck’s successor as chancellor from 1890 to 1894, Leo von Caprivi, introduced a change of course, repealing the anti-socialist laws and relaxing policies directed against the Poles, which meant (among other things) that the eastern borders were reopened to seasonal labourers. These changes did not bring a fundamental alteration, and from 1900, the Polish policies returned to a harsher tone.

p. 105 At this time, a diversity of new views about the East was also to be found in German culture. These spoke to the challenges of a modern German identity in the wider world. A significantly popular fascination with the wider world was reflected in the immense enthusiasm for the adventure novels of Karl May (1842–1912). May, after a youth marked by disorderly behaviour and brushes with the law, settled down to write fantastic stories set in the ‘Wild West’ of the United States and the Near East (places that he had not yet had a chance to visit). His stories were translated into a multitude of languages, and their sales are said to have reached into the 200 millions. Generations of German boys were transfixed by the books, and among the fans was Adolf Hitler. In the cycle of stories set in the American West, May took on the persona of a German adventurer nicknamed ‘Old Shatterhand’, who befriended a Native American hero, ‘Winnetou’, the very personification of a noble savage. Over time, May came to identify himself as the true hero of his stories. Around 1885–6, May wrote a book set in the expanses of the Russian Empire, entitled ‘Sable Hunters and Cossacks’, featuring a bizarre blending of Siberia with themes and characters from the Wild West.<sup>17</sup>

Another figure whose imagination also turned to the East was Paul de Lagarde (1827–91), a German professor of Oriental Studies and an active writer for the press. He has been considered the founder of the *Völkisch* movement.<sup>18</sup> At first a disappointed academic before winning a post at the University of Göttingen, Lagarde taught at secondary schools and published essays, collected as the volume *German Writings* in 1878. Lagarde was a prominent example of a radical nationalist opponent of Bismarck’s empire, and he condemned what he saw of Germany in its present state as a nullity, lacking a sense of itself and its national calling. He was an implacable critic of Bismarck, in particular for his contenting himself with the *Kleindeutschland* solution.

p. 106

Lagarde sought instead the creation of a larger Reich. He proposed a Germanic religion to give spiritual unity to a divided nation. He saw the Jews and liberals as particular foes of this project, because he identified them both as carriers of a modernity which created alienation. Capitalism and industrialization were threatening forces. Parliamentary government was fragmented and Lagarde hoped instead for the rise of a great German leader, a figure who would embody the entire nation in himself. Condemning the Junker class as a debased caste and traditional conservatives as feckless, Lagarde ↵ drafted plans for the creation of a new natural nobility among Germans. Going back to the 1850s, Lagarde articulated what he felt was most necessary to give internal unity to Germans, and that was a national mission directed against the East. This he identified first with the task of colonizing all the non-German areas within the Habsburg Empire. Beyond this, the Germans were called to dominate Central Europe and the areas eastwards. The realization of this task would create a true German unity. Otherwise, geopolitical dangers loomed, as both the United States and Russia grew into their full potential as flanking powers. It was imperative to seize Austria, which 'has no other purpose than to become Germany's colonial state'.<sup>19</sup> Ethnic uniformity was to be achieved by the outright forced movement of non-German populations. Emigration of Germans to the United States would stop, now that new lands for colonization were opened up. Once Eastern Europe had been won, the Germans might carry on to the Middle East. In 1885, Lagarde declared that Germany must found colonies 'not in distant parts of the world, but in our immediate proximity'.<sup>20</sup> As Fritz Stern points out, these prescriptions for a world-historical mission and German greatness were actually born of fears about Germany's present state. In calling for changes in borders, Lagarde and other radical nationalists expressed dissatisfaction with the nature of Germany itself.

p. 107

Interest in the borderlands could take a more peaceful form among other scholars. German linguists fascinated by minorities in East Prussia looked to the region known as Lithuania Minor (*Kleinlitauen*) on the Baltic coastal border with Russia, just across from the lands of the ancient Grand Duchy of Lithuania, which had fallen to Russia in the partitions. They founded the Lithuanian Literary Society in 1873, on the assumption that the Lithuanian language was due to die out in fifty years. Before that happened, the cultural artefacts and remnants of this wreckage of a people, they believed, needed to be collected and stored. One of these German scholars, following a trajectory charted by Herder almost ↵ a century before, was Georg Julius Justus Sauerwein (1831–1904). Sauerwein, born in Hanover, had studied at Göttingen and was an independent scholar who translated scripture for the British Bible Society. He was a remarkable polyglot, and was credited with speaking between forty and two hundred languages.<sup>21</sup> After a visit to Lithuania Minor in 1876–7, Sauerwein learned the dialect of the local Lithuanians and soon slipped into an active role in their national movement, being numbered among their leaders for two decades. Even when he moved to Norway, he returned to Lithuania Minor for visits. His activism included organizing delegations and petitions to the Kaiser, publicity in the national and foreign press on the situation of the Lithuanian minority, writing for the Lithuanian nationalist press, and standing for local election (however, he did not win a mandate, despite speaking for three-hour stretches to the voters). Sauerwein's self-identification with the local Lithuanians grew stronger as he challenged them to preserve their language as a religious as well as cultural duty, and he could lapse into speaking of 'we' and 'our concerns'. He penned a poem in which he spoke of having long dreamt that he was Lithuanian himself. Among them, he was called Jurgis Sauerveinas. Sauerwein condemned the Germanization policies in the region after 1876, rejecting such a version of German culture. His ultimate act of identification came with the writing of a song that came to be an anthem of the nationalist movement. The poem declared, (and in reading it one needs to think here constantly that the author is originally German), 'Lithuanians we are born | Lithuanians we want to be. | We received that honour at our birth | And we must not let it perish'.<sup>22</sup> Later, from 1898, Sauerwein grew disillusioned with the political passivity of this minority in Germany's eastern corner, but rekindled his interest towards the end of this life.

p. 108

With the foundation of the German Empire in 1871, a large group of Germans, the Austrians, had been excluded from the newly formed nation-state. They now formed 'the largest German ↵ minority outside the Reich'.<sup>23</sup> The new state of affairs was traumatic to their own self-understanding, whose larger context had now been overthrown. Before, the German-speaking Austrians, for all their diversity and divisions among themselves,

had often seen themselves as the politically and culturally leading group in the Habsburg realm, the *Staatsvolk* or 'people of state', while also linked to the larger sphere of German lands to the north. The connection with the other German lands was now lost, as new borders were drawn. At the same time, changes within the Habsburg Empire and the growth of nationalism challenged their earlier position.

The price of survival in the aftermath of Austria's defeat by Prussia in 1866 had been a grand political compromise, the *Ausgleich* of 1867, which co-opted the Hungarian political elite as rulers of the empire. It henceforth would be called the Dual Monarchy of Austria-Hungary. The compromise gave autonomy to Hungary, over which Franz Josef would rule as king, in a personal union, and only foreign, military, and financial affairs were coordinated centrally. In the Hungarian half of the monarchy, Magyar elites dominated the other nationalities and pressed forward with the imposition of magyarization. In the Austrian half, formally known as the 'kingdoms and lands represented in the imperial council', no such imposition of German dominance could be achieved. From the compromise to the end of the Habsburg realm in 1918, the dynasty tried without success different models for ruling the multinational state. The Fundamental Laws had promised to all nationalities 'equal rights, and each one has an inalienable right to the preservation and cultivation of its nationality and language'. The Germans did occupy a disproportionate political role due to the limited franchise, however, and German liberals made themselves the champions of centralized state authority and parliamentary government. Growing Czech political parties were frustrated by the reversal of promises of a compromise of autonomy for Bohemia and boycotted the parliament from 1871 to 1879.

p. 109 At the same time, the c.12 million German-speakers in Austria witnessed changes to their status.<sup>24</sup> Industrialization drew Slavs to cities that earlier had been largely German. Prague, in particular, went from a German majority in 1856 to a huge Czech majority by 1910.<sup>25</sup> Prague University, the oldest German university, was divided into German and Czech sections in 1882. Conservative parties among the national minorities were soon challenged by more radical groups, as for example the Old Czech notables were opposed by the Young Czechs.

The German liberals' role went into decline after 1879, when a new government, the Iron Ring of Eduard Count von Taaffe, took over. The Iron Ring brought together a varied coalition of nobility, clerics, and Slav leaders. Ironically, Austria-Hungary's alliance with Germany was signed at the same time, so that 'at the very moment that Germans lost power within Austria, the fate of Austria-Hungary was tied to Germany . . . the contradictory parameters for the rest of the Monarchy's existence had been set.'<sup>26</sup> Taaffe sought to finesse the nationality questions by keeping everyone, as he put it, in a finely balanced state of dissatisfaction. Taaffe's language decrees in 1881 promised bilingual government in Bohemia, to the fury of German nationalists. In 1897, the tension further increased with the ordinance that government officials in Bohemia needed to be bilingual, which (given their aversion to learning a Slavic language) seemed to exclude Germans. Withdrawal of these ordinances unleashed even greater outcries. Contrary to expectations, extension of the franchise in Austria in 1897 and universal male suffrage in 1906 did not calm nationalist passions, but raised them to the level of mass politics.

A radical reaction among German-speakers was to take up activism. In 1882 German nationalists crafted the Linz Programme, calling for the reconstitution of Austria as a German state. The Pan-German movement in Austria emerged in 1879, based on university students and patriotic gymnastic organizations. The radical Georg von Schönerer established the Pan-German People's Party in 1882. The party's aim was to consolidate German authority in the lands the Germans had historically dominated in Austria, including Bohemia and Moravia, and to link with the German Empire to the north. It soon also took on a vehement anti-Semitism. Schönerer also launched a movement called 'Break with Rome', arguing that all Germans in Austria should convert to Protestantism as the more truly national German faith. In a significant affectation, the Pan-Germans called Austria by its old name *Ostmark*, and called themselves *Ostdeutsch*, East Germans.<sup>27</sup>

p. 110

The populist Christian Social Party, founded in 1889 and directed by Karl Lueger, also sought to defend German interests in the cities. After repeated refusals by the emperor to confirm his election as mayor of Vienna, Lueger finally took office in 1897. The outer lunatic fringe featured the activities of those like the ex-monk Jörg Lanz von Liebenfels (1874–1954), who denounced Slavs with racial fury: ‘All those disgusting skin diseases originate in the East and are really diseases of filth and race. Even those of a higher race will be infected, as modern life, which no longer knows any boundaries between races, forces them to associate with members of lower races.’<sup>28</sup>

The nationality conflict took its toll on the socialists, whose party (organized in 1888) was federalized and then divided into national fractions. This development prompted the theorists Karl Renner and Otto Bauer to seek a fusion of socialist ideas with recognition of national cultures.

p. 111 As the clashes grew, the empire saw ethnic riots in the 1890s, especially in Prague and Graz, and violent collisions even within the imperial council, as disruptions became an art form for nationalist politicians. Beyond the cities, ethnic borderlands were imagined by nationalists of all varieties as crucial battlegrounds, an internal ‘language frontier’.<sup>29</sup> By founding organizations and schools, and laying on tours, the nationalist groups sought to raise awareness of these outposts of Germandom. Censuses became times of tremendous mobilization and anxiety over whether the ↵ frontiers had contracted further. Yet an especially frustrating phenomenon with which they sought to deal was indifference to national identity by the same border dwellers. As Pieter Judson argues in a new study, the very idea of the frontier was useful for the nationalists, as it was a stage for a ‘powerful, yet unstable projection of nationalist fantasy’, which had contradictory qualities.<sup>30</sup> The frontier Germans were seen as both paragons of Germandom and yet also awfully vulnerable to Slav influence and intermarriage. The result was the launching of a multitude of projects, including the establishment of nationalizing schools by the German School Association in contested areas, settlement of German colonists among Slovenes by the ‘South March’ association founded in 1889, nationalist tourism to these borderlands, and (most bizarrely) an initiative for retirement homes for elderly Germans to hold down the frontier in demographic terms.<sup>31</sup> Yet the Austrian Germans faced an uncertain future, as the 1910 census made clear that they were outnumbered in a state populated largely by Slavs. The Germans represented 35.58 per cent of the Austrian half of the dual monarchy, while some 60 per cent were Slavs.<sup>32</sup>

A changing international political scene provided the backdrop against which the evolving ideas of the German relationship to the East played themselves out. Bismarck pursued his dictum of seeking good relations with the Russian Empire, ‘the fundamental element of his foreign policy’.<sup>33</sup> But after his removal from office in 1890, that relationship was increasingly replaced by new frictions and diplomatic constellations. More generally, as Bismarck sought to present Germany as a satisfied power, the new Empire did not participate in the scramble for colonies except in more limited measure and late.

p. 112 A key problem for Bismarck’s policies lay in constructing good relations with both of the other eastern courts, Russia and Austria, while these two conservative powers increasingly came into conflict over the Balkans and other dimensions of the so-called ‘Eastern Question’. Bismarck himself insisted in 1876 that the ↵ issue was ‘not worth the bones of a Pomeranian grenadier’, and was thus entirely outside of Germany’s scope of interests, but his alliance system meant that he did indeed have a stake in the issue, should Germany’s partners clash. New volatility in south-eastern Europe led to the breakdown of the initial Three Emperors’ League of 1873. These troubles culminated in the Great Eastern Crisis of 1875–8, which saw revolts break out against Ottoman rule in Serbia and Montenegro and Bulgaria, accompanied by massacres. Russia intervened in the Russo-Turkish War of 1877–8, scored successes which brought it to the gates of Constantinople, and alarmed other European powers (although Russian and Austrian diplomats had agreed on Austrian neutrality). The peace imposed by Russia at San Stefano in March 1878 further outraged the other powers, as its redrawing of the Balkans established a huge Bulgarian state under Russian patronage. Bismarck hosted the Berlin Congress of June and July 1878 as an ‘honest broker’, to achieve a compromise. The outcome was a scaled-down Bulgaria, independent Serbia, Montenegro, and Romania, and Austro-Hungarian ‘temporary’ occupation of Bosnia-

Herzegovina. The outcome also left Russia anxious about its loss of prestige and feeling that Bismarck's role had been an ambivalent one.

p. 113 In the wake of this crisis, Bismarck reoriented his policies. He signed a secret alliance with Austria-Hungary to guard against Russian attack, the 1879 Dual Alliance. Bismarck intended this defensive agreement to function also as a restraint on Austria-Hungary. At the same time in domestic politics, in 1878–9 Bismarck switched from his earlier cooperation with the liberals to an 'iron and rye alliance' with industrialists and Junker estate owners, who advocated protectionism in trade. In 1881, Bismarck renewed the Three Emperors' League, with an agreement that no changes in the Balkans should be made without further consultation. In spite of this, renewed eastern problems arose between Russia and Austria-Hungary with the Bulgarian Crisis of 1885–7, when Bulgaria and Serbia sparred over further gains of Ottoman territory and drew in the outside powers.

This led Bismarck to the negotiation of the secret Reinsurance Treaty with Russia, signed on 18 June 1887. Both Germany and Russia pledged neutrality in a future war unless Russia attacked Austria-Hungary or Germany attacked France. Estimations of the treaty's wisdom or durability are still debated, but Bismarck clearly saw this as a vital improvisation in keeping Russia in his web of necessary alliances.

Yet German policy towards Russia and Bismarck's imperative of good ties with the court of the tsar changed with the succession to the throne of Kaiser Wilhelm II in 1888 and his removal of Bismarck from office in 1890. Set on charting a distinctively new course, the Kaiser and his new chancellor Leo von Caprivi (1890–4) did not renew the Reinsurance Treaty. German diplomats were convinced that the chances of a Russian–French alliance were small, given the ideological differences between a republic and pure autocracy, but by 1894, Russia and France had drawn closer to one another and signed an alliance. German–Russian relations remained flexible, however, as in the same year Chancellor Caprivi negotiated a commercial treaty with Russia. From 1897, however, a new element of tension entered into international politics with the launching of Imperial Germany's new *Weltpolitik*, to win Germany's 'place in the sun', led by new foreign minister Bernhard von Bülow and State Secretary for the Navy Admiral Alfred von Tirpitz. Yet any claims for colonial rights inevitably confronted the reality that much of the globe had already been divided, with Germany a latecomer. The new course managed to antagonize Britain and during Bülow's later term as chancellor from 1900 to 1909, Germany's international isolation increased. By 1907, Europe was divided into two increasingly rigid blocs of alliances. From 1909, the new chancellor Theobald von Bethmann Hollweg, a fatalistic bureaucrat, faced a daunting international prospect.<sup>34</sup>

p. 114 From around 1890, a turn toward intensified confrontation, mixed with elements of real anxiety, took hold in German relations with Eastern Europe. The larger context for many of these changes was broadly European in character, not unique to Germany. Among these was increasing racism in thought. As Peter Gay concludes, 'Race was everywhere by mid-century.'<sup>35</sup> Already implicit in elements of the Enlightenment passion for classification of humans, this new 'scientific racism', taking on the immense prestige of science in the nineteenth century, also coincided with the colonial scramble and was used to justify domination of non-European peoples. This racism argued in terms of biological essences as the most important aspect of an identity, and postulated a hierarchy among nations and races. A cardinal text in the growth of racism as an ideology was the Frenchman Arthur de Gobineau's *Essay on the Inequality of Human Races* of 1853–5, which depicted a world where superior 'Aryans' were nonetheless in danger of being overrun by masses of inferiors. In European thinking, non-European peoples (Africans and Asians) were ranked below the Europeans, and among the Europeans, Slavs were ranked lowest. In the German case, because of the lack of all but a handful of colonial possessions, the racial question was posed closer at home, in the frontier areas. Slavs were depicted as primitive, lazy, easily ruled, placid, but barbaric when roused. The physical stereotyping was less clear, but it was said that Slavs were half-Asiatic, hybrid, mongrel, disfigured by high cheekbones. Earlier ethnic conflict would now be increasingly seen in the new terms of racial difference.

p. 115

A further development likewise represented the radicalization of a hatred of earlier vintage, anti-Semitism. In the later nineteenth century, earlier traditions of religious anti-Semitism were transmuted into a radical anti-Semitism that no longer focused on doctrine or faith, but instead postulated essential biological alien natures for the Jews. Radical anti-Semites thus not only were not interested in the assimilation of Jews, but were in fact violently opposed to any such mingling. Anti-Semitism in Germany received a powerful stimulus owing to economic depressions and developments in the Russian Empire. After the assassination of Tsar Alexander II by terrorists in 1881, official and popular persecution of the Jews intensified, with waves of pogroms. More than 2 million Jews fled the Russian Empire from 1870 to the outbreak of the war in 1914, many of them travelling through Germany on their way to the United States.<sup>36</sup> These human waves of 'Eastern Jews' (*Ostjuden*) often elicited anxious reactions in Germany, even as the emigration also yielded profits. Delousing procedures and quarantines were mandated for the emigrants, and the cholera epidemic which swept the port city of Hamburg in 1892 was sometimes blamed on them.<sup>37</sup> A further issue involved anxieties over the unfamiliar appearance of the Eastern Jews, who spoke Yiddish, often wore traditional garb of long black caftans and broad-brimmed hats, and seemed foreign. In particular, these affected the more assimilated German Jewish communities. The contrasts between assimilated German or Austrian German Jews and the Eastern Jews had led the Jewish writer Karl Emil Franzos to depict Galicia and Bukovina, areas with large Jewish populations, as 'Half-Asia'. Anti-Semites seized on the issue to call for the closure of the eastern borders. They also argued that German Jews were in fact in essence the same. The stereotype of the Eastern Jew came to be associated with dirt and disease, and some claimed that they possessed a totally different smell.<sup>38</sup> The historian Treitschke in 1879 denounced them as the advance guard of a foreign invasion, totally hostile to the Germany they now intruded upon.<sup>39</sup> In 1892, the German Conservative Party officially added an anti-Semitic plank to its party platform.

p. 116

More ethnic friction was injected by another development in the Russian Empire, related to the development of an official nationalism based on Russification and Pan-Slavic ideology, which posited a mission for Russia of uniting a brotherhood of Slavic nations under its patronage. The result was a fundamental challenge to the position of the Baltic Germans in the western lands of the Russian empire. In the 1880s and 1890s, Russification policies were pursued in education, mandating the use of the Russian language in legal matters. The position of the Baltic Germans was also under threat by demographic changes at the time, as the Latvians and Estonians increasingly gained influence. Old cities like Riga, Reval (Tallinn), and Dorpat saw the shrinkage of the German proportion of the population. By the First World War, Baltic Germans formed only c.6 per cent of the population in Estonia and Latvia.<sup>40</sup> Some Baltic Germans emigrated to Germany, and there formed a very influential group, out of all proportion to their small numbers, owing to their social contacts, ties to the German government, and high standing in academia. They included Professor Theodor Schiemann of Berlin University and the prolific journalist Paul Rohrbach. German conservative and nationalist newspapers followed the Russification pressures with outrage, but Bismarck steadfastly resisted pressures to intervene.<sup>41</sup>

Emblematic of dissatisfactions with the character and policies of the German Reich was the proliferation of pressure groups and leagues representing special interests. Nationalist groups included the Army League, the Navy League, and the Colonial League, which often criticized the government and sought to mobilize society with their aggressive demands. Their calls could often be inopportune and embarrassing for the government, running counter to current policy needs, but their influence made them a force to be reckoned with.

p. 117

Of particular significance, although not the largest of the leagues, was the Pan-German League (*Alldeutschen*), founded in 1891.<sup>42</sup> Its goals were expansive and diffuse: to unite all Germans around the world, to carve out for Germany a dominant position in Central Europe, and to promote Germany as a world power. It numbered some 20,000 members, but was of considerable importance because of who they were: many were highly placed officials, academics, and schoolteachers.<sup>43</sup> The tone of the group was social Darwinist, seeking to unite the German *Volk* in advance of an inevitable clash of races. In a paranoid vision of an entire world of perceived enemies, special animosity was reserved for the Slavs, especially Poles and Czechs.<sup>44</sup> A battle between Germans and Slavs loomed, or as one member put it, the battle of 'blonds' against the Slavs.<sup>45</sup> Their message



thus was a compound of anxieties and aggressive confidence. It embraced racist, radical anti-semitism, and demands for land. Their propaganda often focused on fear of a flood of Slavs, with a proliferation of water metaphors used to describe the threat. The imagery they used to explain their own role featured fortresses and dams, protective walls, 'outposts and pioneers', all presenting a value of order set against threatening chaos.<sup>46</sup> Their urgings to settle small 'yeomen farmers' as a 'solid dike' against the Slavs ran into conflict with the large Junker landowners of the East until the Pan-Germans toned down this message.<sup>47</sup> In 1894, their newspaper declared, 'The old Drive to the East must come alive again'.<sup>48</sup> Rather than adopting a defensive stance alone, the Pan-Germans also urged continental expansion eastwards, especially after the first Morocco crisis of 1905–6 seemed to suggest to them that overseas expansion was less easy.<sup>49</sup> In 1905 the leader of the league Ernst Hasse called for the annexation of the Baltic provinces and Russian Poland, in the tradition of medieval eastern settlement.<sup>50</sup> His successor, Heinrich Class, stated in 1909 that Germans always had a mission to bring culture and that settlement in the East had been 'the greatest deed of medieval history'.<sup>51</sup>

p. 118 Another prominent group focused even more intently on the issue of the East was the German League of the Eastern Marches (*Ostmarkenverein*).<sup>52</sup> It had been founded in 1894 with the title 'Society for the Support of Germanism in the East' (assuming a simpler title in 1899). Among its Polish opponents and German critics, the League was often called the 'Hakatisten', after the initials of its founders, Hansemann, Kennemann, and Thiedemann-Seeheim. The membership, which by 1913 numbered some 48,000 in over 400 local branches, came from ↵ the educated, the middle class, landowners, and industry.<sup>53</sup> The organization was devoted to pressing for the Germanization of the border territories in West Prussia, Posen, and Silesia, in particular supporting the laws for the dispossession of Polish landowners in 1908. As a leader put it in 1905, 'German schools, every public meeting German, every official paid by the state German, every Polish newspaper with the text printed first in German before the Polish, and, may God grant it, some day also the pulpit German—that is how I as an old Prussian soldier wish the picture of the future of the Eastern marches to appear'.<sup>54</sup> The title to the territory was based on the work of German culture. As one leader described Posen, this land 'has been conquered for the German people by sword and plow, it has been fertilized by German blood and sweat, and owes its culture to Germans. For these reasons, we are the masters here'.<sup>55</sup> The organization's primary role was to generate propaganda, but it also had a strange relationship with the government: on the one hand criticizing and applying pressure, on the other hand encouraged and reinforced by governmental support.<sup>56</sup> Another problem for the organization was reconciling itself with the issue of large-scale estates in the East, when its ideology held that smaller-scale German colonization was the only real way of reversing the demographic decline of Germans. Yet the issue needed to be downplayed for fear of losing conservative agrarian support and official support from the government.

p. 119 Government policies at the end of the nineteenth century also reflected the increased turn towards confrontation. One remarkable example constituted a display of colonial imagery and a rhetoric of 'environmental chauvinism' on the part of state forestry officials in the Prussian East, especially in the desolate landscapes of the Tuchel Heath and the Kashubia of Pomerelia, coming to perfection in the 1890s.<sup>57</sup> In ways that corresponded exactly to colonialism overseas, the foresters saw their role as 'the imposition of discipline on what they regarded as an unruly populace and landscape', to make them both orderly and German in character.<sup>58</sup> ↵ New German scientific forestry, a model to the rest of the world, would correct the alleged Polish mismanagement of past ages. In the process, forestry officials argued that reforestation projects had to be managed differently in the East: here it needed to be state-led rather than privately funded as in Germany's West.<sup>59</sup> In the process, modernization would affect the Kashubians themselves, ridding them of superstitions standing in the way of true culture, such as their belief in vampires, and habits of theft, poaching, arson, laziness, and a generally 'unusually low level of culture'.<sup>60</sup> As became vividly clear in this proud project, culture and cultivation of natural resources were seen as linked, and the 'German *Kulturarbeit*' of the foresters was singled out for praise, but in fact depended on some key delusions, as was becoming clear more generally in the land struggle waged by the Prussian government at the same time.<sup>61</sup>

After the milder interval of relaxation of the Polish policy of Prussia with the chancellorship of Caprivi, harsher policies were resumed under the ministry of Prince Chlodwig zu Hohenlohe-Schillingsfürst, from 1894 to 1900, then under Bülow (1900–9), and finally under Bethmann Hollweg. Since Bismarck's 1886 measures, the government had committed itself to the mission of increasing the German population of the eastern provinces, and succeeding governments followed this imperative.<sup>62</sup> From 1895, measures against the Polish population were continued and funding for the Royal Settlement Commission was increased. Yet the reality also included failures which became glaringly prominent. The Royal Settlement Commission did not manage to settle many Germans (while supporting Junkers who were often using migrant labour). The result had been to plant 22,000 German farms at immense cost.<sup>63</sup> At most, this meant freezing the shift in the status quo, not a reversal of trends.<sup>64</sup> On the eve of the First World War, West Prussia was approximately 50 per cent German, Posen 32 per cent German. In addition, the competition between the Settlement Commission and Polish organizations produced ↵ distorted high prices in the land market in the East. The costs of bringing in settlers exceeded earlier estimates. The Prussian government turned to emphasizing its defensive role in supporting existing German communities in the eastern provinces. As one minister put it in 1897, 'It is time once again to take up in full measure the mission of the Prussian state: the strengthening of the German nationality and its expansion eastwards.'<sup>65</sup> German officials were encouraged in 1898 to take active roles in organizations like the League of the Eastern Marches and were paid an 'Eastern Marches bonus' in their salaries from 1903.<sup>66</sup> The situation was a strange one: while the Germans in the eastern outposts were praised as heroes playing a pioneer role, their inability to be self-reliant was also advanced as a need for constant government measures to give them aid.

p. 120

In 1902, Chancellor Bülow complained publicly that fast Polish reproduction presented the danger of a 'Slavic flood' and a further anxiety was that since German and Russian relations had deteriorated, it was not possible to be certain of a shared strong line against the Polish minority.<sup>67</sup> A public crisis erupted in the intensified Polish policies in Prussia with the Posen school strike in 1906 which followed on orders for replacement of Polish with German language in religious instruction. Where earlier isolated clashes between authorities and parents had taken place, there evolved now a passive resistance involving at least 60,000 Polish schoolchildren.<sup>68</sup> While the authorities were able eventually to quell the movement, the challenge was a formidable one.

In 1908, further intensified measures were put into effect, under Chancellor Bülow. The Expropriation Act in Prussia would allow the forcible confiscation of Polish estate land by the government for settlement purposes, a radical innovation, despite the qualms of conservatives. The measure was only used in several isolated instances after 1912, but its import was vast.

Another measure required the use of German at all public gatherings, and was to be used against Polish events. The new ↵ chancellor from 1909, Bethmann Hollweg, tried to steer clear of fresh confrontations, but the commitment of the state to its Prussian policy could not be dismantled, as 'its component parts had become mutually interlocking', with implications for both domestic and foreign policy in Germany on the eve of the First World War; yet at the same time the colonization policy 'had reached a critical impasse'.<sup>69</sup>

p. 121

Around the turn of the century, concerns for the eastern frontiers took on added elements. Among these were the culmination of a realization of the concepts of the 'Drive to the East' and a 'German East'. German historians, following the nationalist example of Treitschke, by this time had crafted a concept of the Drive to the East, renarrated in ethnic terms, projecting the nationalist identities and conflicts of their own age back onto the distant past. In this new anachronistic vision, the Teutonic Knights and medieval settlers were interpreted as German nationalists blazing trails for later generations of Germans to follow. In tune with the prestige of the biological sciences, the Drive to the East was also depicted as something elemental and irresistible, an ahistorical phenomenon against which there could be no appeal. In his study of the ideology of the Drive to the East, Wippermann notes the distinctive terminology used for the phenomenon, a vocabulary including 'spreading, expanding, pulling, pushing, streaming, flowing'.<sup>70</sup> In this timeless process, the Germans were held to have always played the role of the 'culture-bearers' (*Kulturträger*) eastwards, of necessity, owing to

p. 122 the alleged existence of a permanent 'cultural gradient'. The further east one went, the less culture there was to be found, until the slope brought one to sheer 'Unkultur'. A further dimension was added to this curiously ahistorical image of a permanent German eastwards movement with the assertion that German expansion eastwards was actually fundamentally a return to ancestral lands, a regaining of what was lost, not naked conquest. The argument was made that even when Slavic peoples moved into these lands, remainders of Germanic tribes had stayed ↴ and thus kept German title to the land. These arguments were not only dubious in terms of evidence, but also relied on conflating ancient Germanic tribes with the Germans of the present day. With such a discourse proliferating, Wippermann concludes in his study, elements later to be prominent in Nazi propaganda were actually already present at the end of the nineteenth century.<sup>71</sup>

The other image which came into its own now was the concept of the German East as a unit unto itself. It was perceived as a frontier territory involved in a seemingly permanent ethnic struggle. The rewriting of history played an important role here, not least as re-enactment. One occasion was the completion of the protracted reconstruction of the castle of the Teutonic Knights in Marienburg. Wilhelm II 'took part in a bombastic costume festival in 1902 to celebrate the restoration', and even telegraphed the King of England to remind him of his ancestor's participation in the Baltic crusades.<sup>72</sup> In 1913, in a speech at his brand-new Neo-Gothic palace in Posen, the Kaiser's toast urged that all the people of Posen, 'regardless of their nationality', might 'take unto themselves and enjoy the blessed fruits of German culture'.<sup>73</sup> Characteristic of his blundering in public, this was intended as a generous offer of friendship to Prussian Poles, who were not slow to take offence. At other times, the Kaiser struck more militant notes, as when he announced in 1905 on a visit to Gnesen:

Whoever as a German sells his property in the East without reason sins against his Fatherland, whatever his age or his station might be. He must hold here. To be active (*wirken*) here in the East is a responsibility towards the Fatherland, towards Germandom. And just as the sentry may not leave his post, so Germans may not leave the East.<sup>74</sup>

p. 123 The focus on frontiers had its parallels elsewhere, so that this was not a uniquely German preoccupation. It was at this point, for instance, that in the United States the mythology of the romantic Wild West was also being expanded, just as the frontier was being closed. In a famous address to the meeting of the American Historical Association in 1893, the American historian Frederick ↴ Jackson Turner launched his famous 'frontier thesis'. The address was entitled 'The Significance of the Frontier in American History'. Turner began with an epochal milestone: the 1890 census declared that there was no longer a frontier. Rather than a clear and moving line of onward expansion, settlement was now everywhere, in patches and filling in what remained of the untrodden wilderness. The end of this era was significant, as according to Turner, the frontier had shaped American character in decisive ways, producing democracy, egalitarianism, and venturesome self-reliance. As an aside, Turner also claimed that Europe had borders, not frontiers: if the frontier was a zone where these catalytic processes took place, borders by contrast were strictly delineated, unambiguous, and clear.

A similar concern with space, its scarcity, and its formative powers was also mulled over by German geographers. The late nineteenth century was a 'Golden Age of Geography', dominated by German scholars and academics. An especially influential contribution was made by Friedrich Ratzel (1844–1904). In fact, his impact could be seen in two concepts which had important consequences as they entered everyday language. One concept was that of the 'German culture landscape' (*Kulturlandschaft*), which promised to resolve the different approaches of physical geography and human geography. Ratzel wrote: 'As Germans in ever-growing numbers bound themselves to the soil, an entirely new landscape emerged, which bears the marks of the work by which a people clears, digs in, and plants its soil.'<sup>75</sup> A people remade their landscape on the basis of their long interaction with it, and thus a reciprocal influence obtained. Claims to land, then, could be based on this influence, beyond present political boundaries. Ratzel's other influential coinage of 1901 would go on to a more notorious afterlife; that was the concept of '*Lebensraum*' or 'living space'.<sup>76</sup> This was an outcome of Ratzel's provocative thought-experiment in the life of states understood as organisms. He isolated what he believed

p. 124 were seven laws in the natural ↪ expansion of states, a measure of the intrinsic health of a state. Expansive states showed their dynamism, contracting ones gave proof of their debility. As a result, borders were not permanent political realities, but temporary and shifting gauges of the present condition of a state. While Ratzel may have intended this as a metaphor, his idea caught on and would soon take on cruder versions.

One further portent of the new importance of these questions came with another ceremonial address, delivered in 1894 by Professor Max Weber at the University of Freiburg at the start of his tenure there. Weber, considered the father of modern sociology, was also a nationalist as well as thinker in the school of social policy. This inaugural address, much cited since, was entitled 'The National State and National Economic Policy'. His point of departure for his argument was an invitation for his audience to 'follow me to the eastern marches of the empire', where in a 'national borderland' an economic struggle is being waged between ethnic groups, with stark contrasts of class interposed between the masses of Polish agricultural workers, German villagers, and the celebrated Prussian Junker nobility on their knightly estates, long the 'carriers of culture and thus of Germandom'. A basic fact observed in the region is that 'the Poles have the tendency to gather in the economically and socially lowest layer of the population'. In parallel to this, 'economic culture, relative height of living standard, and Germandom are in West Prussia identical'. And yet, Weber observes that in spite of this mismatch of situations, the surprising outcome is that the advantage is moving to the Poles, owing to their ability to adapt, increasing in number despite poverty: the Poles 'in the East seemed in the first half of the century to be slowly and constantly pushed back, but since the 60s they are equally slowly and constantly advancing'. This is due to the lower basic needs of the Poles, 'which the Slavic race has been given by nature or

p. 125 has had bred into it in the course of its past history'. In addition, 'nomadic processions' of agricultural ↪ workers come over the borders every year, working for the Junkers, whose incapacity for a great national role is demonstrated by that fact. For Weber, the conclusion was a startling one: in this 'selection process' between nationalities, it was clear that 'the free play of forces' does not always produce victory for the higher group. The 'Germandom of the East' as a unit was losing in the 'economic battle of the nationalities' even in apparent peacetime. The immediate answers Weber proposed were closure of the eastern border and systematic purchase of land by the state for 'systematic colonization of German farmers' to 'hem in the Slavic flood'. The alternative was the creation of 'Slavic hunger colonies incapable of existence' in these territories. Weber then glided to a set of prescriptions for the future and for German identity in his address. For Germany to have a great future prospect, it was necessary to have the true political leadership pass to more capable hands than those of the Junkers, who had long since played out their necessary role, climaxing in the unification of the German state by Bismarck, the greatest of the Junkers. Tragically, Weber concluded, his act was unfinished, as the outwardly unified Germany lacked inner unity. The curse of following, as epigones, times of greatness lay on the current generation, which needed to shed its political adolescence and understand greater tasks, not least in overseas expansion. If 1871 was to be the end of the drama rather than a new prelude to greater things, Weber judged bitterly, it should have been left undone. Whether Germany was prepared for a 'German world power policy' remained an open question, and would demand an enormous task of political self-education.<sup>77</sup>

A particular factor that loomed for other Germans in considering the future prospects of their situation was a growing fear of Russia as a power that was achieving startling advances in industrial and military might. Russia's shedding of its traditional underdevelopment produced a new anxiety. Worried observers discerned Russia's influence behind developments such as unrest in the Balkans among the South Slavs, Pan-Slavist

p. 126 propaganda ↪ announcing a Slavic future for Europe, and fears of the radicalization of Slavic minorities in the German 'Eastern Marches' or in the Austrian realm. Baltic German professors and journalists could give personal testimony that encouraged these preoccupations. Particular fears of a surprise attack also loomed, with nightmarish visions of human waves of giant peasant armies bearing down on Berlin, and ferocious Cossack cavalry forces sweeping in along the North European Plain. A feature of the period was an oscillation between exaggerated fear and underestimation of Russia. The Russian defeat by Japan in the war of 1904–5 followed by the near toppling of the tsarist regime from within by the Revolution of 1905 gave some the sense that Russia's weakness was patent. But soon thereafter, spectacular Russian economic advances and

programmes of military modernization dented this assurance. A key factor was the dramatic growth in Russia's population, going from 74 million in 1861 to some 150 million by 1905.<sup>78</sup> The military implications were obvious and weighty. As Foreign Secretary Jagow declared in 1914, 'In a few years according to all expert opinion, Russia will be ready to strike. Then she will crush us with the numbers of her soldiers.'<sup>79</sup> And these German worries, incidentally, were mirrored by Russian anxieties about German intentions, so that the fear was mutual. Russian nationalists worried about the loyalties of the almost 2 million Russian Germans in the empire and anti-Semites questioned the loyalties of Yiddish-speaking Jews in the borderlands.

These views proliferated in textbooks, newspapers, and public commentary by academics.<sup>80</sup> The textbooks in German schools introduced Russia in ways that were 'remarkably uniform' throughout Germany, in spite of regional control of education policies.<sup>81</sup> Russia was presented as an alien, essentially Asiatic entity. It was allegedly an artificial construct, rather than an organic unity like Germany.

p. 127 More radical voices also were prompted by the crisis. In his multi-volume *German Politics*, Ernst Hasse, the theoretician of ↵ Pan-Germanism, called for a return from overseas ambitions to concentrate on European prospects. In a famous manifesto that went through repeated editions in 1912 and 1913, *Germany and the Coming War*, General Friedrich von Bernhardi spoke of the peril of Russian power and Slavic floods, while also holding out the promise of a German national mission.<sup>82</sup>

These nationalist outpourings on the theme of the Russian enemy found striking agreement in the unlikelyst of places, the German socialist Left. In fact, the call for revolutionary war against Russia, whereby defeating eastern despotism would also liberate Germany and Western Europe, was a longstanding theme of the Left. In the 1890s, the social democratic leader August Bebel (1840–1913) declared his readiness to fight against Russia. He announced at the SPD congress of 1891:

The soil of Germany, the German fatherland belongs to us the masses as much and more than to the others. If Russia, the champion of terror and barbarism, were to attack Germany to break and destroy it . . . we are as much concerned as those who stand at the head of Germany and we would resist Russia, for a Russian victory means the defeat of social democracy.<sup>83</sup>

The survival of such sentiments among the socialists turned out to be an absolutely crucial factor in their co-optation for the German war effort at the outset of the First World War.

p. 128 The German government's stance was an ambivalent one, a blend of apprehensions and confidence that a Russian threat could be defused. Kaiser Wilhelm II persisted in his hubristic conviction that he would be able to appeal to the monarchical solidarity of his cousin, Tsar Nicholas II, and the letters of the 'Willy and Nicky' correspondence that passed between them seemed proof of this. Yet there were also signs that factors other than the brotherhood of kings were at work, when the treaty both emperors signed impulsively at Björkö in 1905 was rejected by their governments as incompatible with other treaty obligations. Bizarrely, Kaiser Wilhelm was capable of meeting ↵ an apparent threat from Eastern Europe by conjuring up visions of an even greater more remote eastern threat, from Asia. In 1895, the Kaiser had the painter Hermann Knackfuss execute a painting he had sketched, entitled 'Peoples of Europe, protect your holiest possessions!'. The bombastic scene showed a crowd of metaphorical figures representing Germany, Britain, France, and others, led by the Archangel Michael with a flaming sword looking into the distance where a flame-engulfed Buddha idol hovers threateningly over the dark horizon. The Kaiser sent this picture to the tsar with an explanation that it symbolized the threat of a Chinese onslaught coordinated by Japan. This was the 'Yellow Peril' concept.<sup>84</sup> Kaiser Wilhelm II returned to it soon after, in a notorious speech delivered to German troops as they set sail to suppress the Boxer Rebellion in China as part of an international expeditionary force. In this so-called 'Hun Speech', Wilhelm II pledged them,



When you arrive, know this: pardon will not be given, prisoners will not be taken! As a thousand years ago the Huns made a name for themselves, so must the name 'German' through your actions be upheld in China, so that for a thousand years never again will a Chinese person dare even to look askance at a German.<sup>85</sup>

This strange intervention testified to a very odd capacity for self-identification with the Huns while at the same time claiming defence of the West against the East.

p. 129 In general, however, Wilhelm II and his officials took a less complicated view of the threat from the East and its perils in the years immediately before the outbreak of the First World War. The keynotes of this mood were fatalism about an inevitable collision, and bleak future prospects. The Kaiser spoke repeatedly of a coming clash of the Germans against Latins and Slavs. He could casually observe to the Austrian military attaché in Berlin: 'I hate the Slavs . . . I know it's a sin but I cannot help myself. I hate the Slavs.'<sup>86</sup> As crisis brewed in the Balkans, he described the Serbs as 'orientals and so mendacious, false and masters of obstruction'.<sup>87</sup> The imperial chancellor Theobald von Bethmann Hollweg was caught in despair, at his eastern estate of Hohefinow at the Oder River, commenting that there was simply no point in planting trees, as 'in a few years the Russians will be here'.<sup>88</sup> Bethmann reflected a widespread pessimism about what the future held, which became especially acute as the July crisis of 1914 began to unfold. He declared: 'The future belongs to Russia. It grows and grows and hangs upon us ever more heavily like a nightmare.'<sup>89</sup> To venture war with Russia and a world of enemies would be a leap in the dark, but that leap was soon taken.



**Plate 1.** Marienburg Castle, headquarters of the Order of Teutonic Knights (Corbis)





**Plate 2.** Postcard from the Eastern Front, First World War, labelled 'German Culture'(Bibliothek für Zeitgeschichte, Württembergische Landesbibliothek, Stuttgart)



**Plate 3.** Print from the Eastern Front, First World War, labelled 'To commemorate the agricultural course, Minsk, 23 September to 4 October 1918' (Bibliothek für Zeitgeschichte, Württembergische Landesbibliothek, Stuttgart)





**Plate 4.** Freikorps Recruiting Poster, labelled 'Join the Border Defence Force East! Protect the Homeland against Bolshevism' (Poster Collection, GE 2356, Hoover Institution Archives, Stanford)



**Plate 5.** German Storm Troop Leader in the invasion of Russia (Corbis)



**Plate 6.** German refugees, 1945 (Corbis)





**Plate 7.** Poster from German Democratic Republic, labelled 'Learning from the Soviet People Means Learning to Win!', 1951 (Deutsches Historisches Museum, Berlin)



**Plate 8.** Christian Democratic Union Party election poster, labelled 'All Paths of Marxism Lead to Moscow: Therefore, vote CDU', 1953 (CDU)





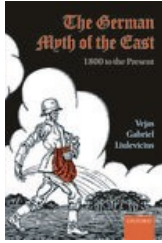
**Plate 9.** Berlin Wall and Brandenburg Gate, Berlin (Corbis)

## Notes

1. Hagen, *Germans*, 348 and table 326.
2. George Mosse, *The Crisis of German Ideology: Intellectual Origins of the Third Reich* (New York: Schocken Books, 1981).
3. Fritz T. Epstein, 'Der Komplex "Die russische Gefahr" und sein Einfluss auf die deutsch-russischen Beziehungen im 19. Jahrhundert', in Imanuel Geiss and Bernd Jürgen Wendt (eds.), *Deutschland in der Weltpolitik des 19. und 20. Jahrhunderts* (Düsseldorf: Bertelsmann Universitätsverlag, 1973), 153.
4. Hagen, *Germans*, 120.
5. Ibid. 121.
6. Ibid. 130.
7. Ibid. 128.
8. Broszat, *Zweihundert Jahre deutsche Polenpolitik*, 137.
9. Hagen, *Germans*, 132.
10. Broszat, *Zweihundert Jahre deutsche Polenpolitik*, 147.
11. Hagen, *Germans*, 133.
12. Broszat, *Zweihundert Jahre deutsche Polenpolitik*, 148–50.
13. Dwork and Van Pelt, *Auschwitz*, 49.
14. Geiss, *Grenzstreifen*, 18.
15. Broszat, *Zweihundert Jahre deutsche Polenpolitik*, 153.
16. Geiss, *Grenzstreifen*, 19.
17. Karl May, *Zobeljäger und Kosak* (Bamberg: Karl-May-Verlag, 1951).
18. Mosse, *Crisis*, 31.
19. Paul de Lagarde, *Deutsche Schriften*, 5th edn. (Göttingen: Becker und Eidner, 1920), 121.
20. Wippermann, *Drang*, 87.
21. Jonas Basanavicius, *Medega d-ro Jurgio Sauerweino biografijai*, ed. Domas Kaunas (Vilnius: VI Seimo leidykla 'Valstybes zinios', 2001), 63.
22. Ibid. 291.
23. Michael Hughes, *Nationalism and Society: Germany 1800–1945* (London: Edward Arnold, 1988), 164.

24. Ibid. 170.
25. Ibid. 168; Gary Cohen, *The Politics of Ethnic Survival: Germans in Prague, 1861–1914*, 2nd rev. edn. (West Lafayette, IN: Purdue University Press, 2006); on Budweis, see Jeremy King, *Budweisers into Czechs and Germans: A Local History of Bohemian Politics, 1848–1948* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002).
26. Steven Beller, *A Concise History of Austria* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 151.
27. Brigitte Hamann, *Hitler's Vienna: A Dictator's Apprenticeship*, trans. Thomas Thornton (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 263.
28. Ibid. 151.
29. Pieter M. Judson, *Guardians of the Nation: Activists on the Language Frontiers of Imperial Austria* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006).
30. Ibid. 34.
31. Ibid. 125.
32. 'Austria', *Encyclopedia Britannica*, 531.
33. Ludwig Dehio, *The Precarious Balance: Four Centuries of the European Power Struggle* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1962), 227.
34. Irmin Schneider, *Die deutsche Rußlandpolitik 1890–1900* (Paderborn: Schöningh, 2003); Stefan Kestler, *Betrachtungen zur kaiserlich deutschen Rußlandpolitik. Ihre Bedeutung für die Herausbildung des deutsch-russischen Antagonismus zwischen Reichsgründung und Ausbruch des Ersten Weltkrieges (1871–1914)* (Hamburg: Kovac, 2002).
35. Peter Gay, *The Cultivation of Hatred: The Bourgeois Experience*, iii (New York: W. W. Norton, 1993), 73.
36. Dwork and Van Pelt, *Auschwitz*, 51.
37. Ibid. 52–4; Richard J. Evans, *Death in Hamburg: Society and Politics in the Cholera Years* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), 394.
38. George Mosse, *Toward the Final Solution: A History of European Racism* (New York: H. Fertig, 1978), 120.
39. Ibid. 148.
40. Pistohlkors, 'Germany and Baltic', 48.
41. Hans Rothfels, *Bismarck, der Osten und das Reich* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1960).
42. Roger Chickering, *We Men Who Feel Most German: A Cultural Study of the Pan-German League, 1886–1914* (Boston: Allen & Unwin, 1964); Alfred Kruck, *Geschichte des Alldeutschen Verbandes 1890–1939* (Wiesbaden: PRESS, 1954).
43. Herwig, *Hammer*, 171.
44. Chickering, *We Men*, 85.
45. Herwig, *Hammer*, 180.
46. Chickering, *We Men*, 81–6.
47. Ibid. 280–2.
48. Wippermann, *Drang*, 89.
49. Chickering, *We Men*, 230–1.
50. Wippermann, *Drang*, 89.
51. Ibid. 89.
52. Richard Wonser Tims, *Germanizing Prussian Poland: The H-K-T Society and the Struggle for the Eastern Marches in the German Empire, 1894–1919* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1941); Adam Galos, Felix-Heinrich Gentzen, and Witold Jakóbczyk, *Die Hakatisten. Der deutsche Ostmarkenverein 1894–1934. Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte der Ostpolitik des deutschen Imperialismus* (Berlin: Deutscher Verlag der Wissenschaften, 1966).
53. Hagen, *Germans*, 268.
54. Quoted in Geiss, *Grenzstreifen*, 19.
55. Hagen, *Germans*, 271.
56. Ibid. 175.
57. Jeffrey K. Wilson, 'Environmental Chauvinism in the Prussian East: Forestry as a Civilizing Mission on the Ethnic Frontier, 1871–1914', *Central European History*, 41 (2008), 27–70.
58. Ibid. 31.
59. Ibid. 34.
60. Ibid. 39.
61. Ibid. 63–6.
62. Hagen, *Germans*, 167–8.
63. Geiss, *Grenzstreifen*, 21.
64. Ibid.
65. Hagen, *Germans*, 179.
66. Wilson, 'Environmental Chauvinism in the Prussian East', 58.

67. Hagen, *Germans*, 181.
68. Geiss, *Grenzstreifen*, 17.
69. Hagen, *Germans*, 199, 204.
70. Wippermann, *Drang*, 95.
71. Ibid. 103.
72. Burleigh, 'The Knights', 43.
73. Hagen, *Germans*, 203.
74. Broszat, *Zweihundert Jahre deutsche Polenpolitik*, 167.
75. Friedrich Ratzel, *Deutschland. Einführung in die Heimatkunde*, 2nd edn. (Leipzig: Fr. Wihl. Grunow, 1907), 255.
76. David T. Murphy, *The Heroic Earth: Geopolitical Thought in Weimar Germany* (Kent, OH: Kent University Press, 1997), 256.
77. Max Weber, 'Der Nationalstaat und die Volkswirtschaft', in Max Weber, *Gesammelte Politische Schriften* (Munich: Drei Masken Verlag, 1921), 7–30.
78. John Merriman, *A History of Modern Europe*, ii: *From the French Revolution to the Present*, 2nd edn. (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2004), 786.
79. L. C. F. Turner, *Origins of the First World War* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1970), 75.
80. Troy Paddock, 'Creating an Oriental Feindbild', *Central European History*, 39 (2006), 214–43.
81. Ibid. 220.
82. Friedrich von Bernhardi, *Germany and the Next War*, trans. Allen H. Powes (New York: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1914).
83. James Joll, *The Origins of the First World War*, 2nd edn. (New York: Longman, 1992), 210.
84. Heinz Gollwitzer, *Die Gelbe Gefahr. Geschichte eines Schlagworts. Studien zum imperialistischen Denken* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1962).
85. 'Kein Ruhmesblatt für Willys Hunnen', *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 2 February 2002, Nr. 28, p. 11.
86. David Clay Large, *Berlin* (New York: Basic Books, 2000), 119.
87. Joll, *Origins*, 20.
88. Herwig, *Hammer*, 180.
89. Gordon A. Craig, *Germany 1866–1945* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978).



## The German Myth of the East: 1800 to the Present

Vejas Gabriel Liulevicius

<https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199546312.001.0001>

Published: 27 August 2009

Online ISBN: 9780191720338

Print ISBN: 9780199546312

Search in this book

### CHAPTER

## 4 Fusing the Myth, 1830–1871

Vejas Gabriel Liulevicius

<https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199546312.003.0004> Pages 71–97

Published: August 2009

### Abstract

This chapter examines the fusing of earlier German thinking about Eastern Europe into a fully elaborated myth of the East. The period 1830–1871 was marked by broad shifts in relations with Eastern Europe, as liberal enthusiasm for Poland's independence waned after a catalytic 'Polish debate' in the German parliament of the revolution of 1848, spelling an end to these affinities. In the revolution's aftermath, a variety of narratives flourished about the East on the left and right of the political spectrum, with fascinating commonalities between socialists, nationalists, and conservatives. These were reflected in historical writing, fiction, and political discourse. Ultimately, these narratives reflected and contributed to the changing character of German nationalism in this period.

**Keywords:** [conservatives](#), [liberalism](#), [nationalism](#), [Poland](#), [revolution of 1848](#)

**Subject:** [European History](#), [Political History](#), [Russian and Slavic History](#), [Modern History \(1700 to 1945\)](#), [Intellectual History](#)

**Collection:** [Oxford Scholarship Online](#)

The middle period of the nineteenth century, from 1830 to 1871, saw dramatic shifts in German views of Eastern Europe, in which many earlier themes were rearranged in new patterns under the impact of immediate political pressures. The period was especially marked by a change in the character of growing nationalisms in Central and Eastern Europe, in particular in Germany itself.

Ever since the Congress of Vienna in 1815, the disappointment of liberals, democrats, and nationalists at the conservative and reactionary nature of that settlement had grown, and their ideologies had spread. The Austrian chancellor Metternich repeatedly launched investigations and persecutions against radical student organizations, propagandists, and revolutionaries. In Russia, the new tsar Nicholas I (r. 1825–55) was so determined likewise to oppose revolutionary forces that he became known as the 'Iron Autocrat' and his empire was called the 'Policeman of Europe', the most reactionary of the conservative regimes.

p. 72

As with the French Revolution in 1789, the signal for renewed European turmoil of the sort feared by conservative elites came again from France. In the July Revolt of 1830, the French king Charles X was replaced with a constitutional monarch, Louis-Philippe. Revolts then broke out in Belgium, Italy, and in Russian-occupied Poland, the largest of the partitioned lands. Exiled Polish patriots who had fled after the final partition of their state had longed for this hour, engaging in revolutionary conspiracies as they waited. Their revolt raised the slogan, 'For Your Freedom and For Ours!', as they expected other European states to come to their aid against Russian forces. Inspired by the summer's revolts in Western Europe, the Polish November revolt of 1830 began with dramatic successes for the rebels, and they formed a provisional government for a resurrected Poland. Yet after nearly a year of struggle, the Poles were defeated, surrendering in October 1831. Renewed waves of exiles moved westwards from Poland, where Russian rule was again consolidated. An estimated 10,000 went into exile, most of them from among the educated and aristocratic elite.<sup>1</sup> In exile, the homeless patriots developed a distinct 'messianic nationalism' which saw Poland as suffering in a universal cause of freedom, the 'Christ among the nations'. Their hopes lay in a renewal of European turmoil, especially a general war, which would make political boundaries fluid again and offer a chance for Poland's reappearance. In prophetic mode, the poet Adam Mickiewicz uttered this wish: 'For the universal war for the freedom of nations, we beseech thee, O Lord!'<sup>2</sup>

Across Europe, liberal public opinion followed these events, expressing sympathy for the Polish cause. Russia seemed to many a personification of the autocratic ideal of the Holy Alliance, and they denounced its suppression of the rebels. During the revolt, numbers of volunteers from European countries had trekked to the fighting to join the Poles. The enthusiasm for the Polish struggle recalled in many ways the shared European romantic phenomenon of philhellenic solidarity for the Greeks fighting for independence from the Turkish Empire in the 1820s.

p. 73

Many in Germany were swept along in what came to be called '*Polenbegeisterung*', 'Polish enthusiasm', hailing the Polish cause and its martyrs, identifying with them. Critics of these sentiments labelled them mere '*Polenschwärmerei*' or 'Polish gushing'. Nonetheless, throughout the German lands there appeared a network of organizations devoted to supporting the Poles.<sup>3</sup> Ideology bound the participants in these efforts with the Poles, as many were middle-class liberals and academics, and felt that the political cause of their ideals in Germany corresponded to the Polish hopes. With the collapse of the revolt, efforts were redoubled to aid the thousands of Polish refugees who passed through Germany to exile mainly in France and Britain. Women's organizations and leagues played a prominent role. Images of the heroic Polish resistance proliferated on any number of objects: paintings, banners, ceramic dishes, and pipes. In these images, the Holy Alliance was represented as a dark force, while heroic Polish lancers fought against barbaric Cossacks. The most prominent product of this German emotional reaction was an entire genre of poetry, the '*Polenlieder*' or 'Polish songs'. It is estimated that a thousand of these were produced, which became 'a durable element of German popular culture of this time'.<sup>4</sup> A typical example was Franz Dresler's poem 'To the Poles, 1831':

Hold on in the fight, people of the Jagiellonians,  
Freedom sprouts from the blood of sons,  
Quelled then is the arrogance of tyrants,  
And you may live freely in your land. . . .  
Rejuvenated and gigantic you will arise;  
He who is free will shout with joy at your triumphal feast!<sup>5</sup>

p. 74

Other cultural productions inspired in a similar way were dramas on Polish themes or Richard Wagner's overture 'Polonia'. A key reason for the enthusiasm for the Polish cause was a sense that Germany's own progress towards a liberal form of government and national unification paralleled the strivings of the unlucky Poles. The Polish example was celebrated in part to inflame German political aspirations as well. Some of the songs made this connection explicit, such as August Graf von Platen's 'The Bequest of the Dying Poles to the



Germans', in which the expiring rebels explain that they 'breathe out our hatred of the Russians into your souls' and urge renewed German heroism in the common struggle against tyrants.<sup>6</sup> In many cases, antipathy towards the Russian Empire was a common bond between Poles and liberal Germans. The same Graf von Platen also penned a 'Call to the Germans' on 11 December 1830:

From Europe must be expelled  
Every absolute horror!  
Moscovites or Turks  
Desire to work against us?  
Turn your deeds eastwards, you Asiatics!<sup>7</sup>

Another poem by Moritz Hartmann, 'The Three Riders', painted a fearful image of Cossacks mounted on blood-spattered horses approaching the German border, regarding Germany as the next victim after Poland is quelled. Although the riders turn and move eastward again for now, a German witness remains haunted by this scene from a 'wicked future dream which a German heart scarcely dares to interpret'.<sup>8</sup>

The Polish enthusiasm remained alive after the failure of the revolt itself, and was most dramatically evidenced in the Hambach Festival of 27 May 1832. This was a historic gathering, the first mass political rally in Germany, of some 30,000 participants (men and women) at the castle ruins at Hambach in the Rhineland Palatinate. Polish participants were prominent at the festival and thanked the Germans for solidarity with their plight. In a vivid image of brotherhood, the Polish red and white national flag flew beside the black-red-gold flag of the German revolutionaries. The festival's organizers raised the slogan 'Without Poland's freedom, no German freedom; without Poland's freedom no lasting peace, no salvation for all the European peoples! Therefore, let us fight for Poland's restoration, for the noble cause of all humanity!'<sup>9</sup> In coming decades, these sympathies would be recalled and periodically revived, but still later this enthusiastic ↪ fraternity was denounced by the Nazis as the 'Polish craze' and 'Poland-worship'.<sup>10</sup>

p. 75

It is crucial to note that, at the time, the enthusiasm for the Polish cause was not universal. In counterpoint to these effusions, a different reaction was recorded in conservative and official government circles. In fact, Prussia's King Friedrich Wilhelm III helped in the Russian crackdown, and closed the border between Prussia and the Russian Empire to prevent the inflow of aid to the rebels. After the revolt, Prussian administrators expressed deep worry about developments in their own Polish territory of Posen, and changed their policies, anxious about security. From 1815 until the revolt, 'the Prussian government attempted to administer the Grand Duchy in a conciliatory spirit'.<sup>11</sup> Poles served as officials and the Polish language was used as an official language and in the schools. The Prussian minister of education, von Altenstein, in 1822 officially stated that no Germanization was aimed at.<sup>12</sup>

These attitudes turned in different directions with the reaction to the revolt in Russian Poland. In the premier study of Posen's nationality politics, William Hagen concludes that 'Official Prussian opinion, wavering since 1817 . . . crystallized now in a sense thoroughly hostile to the Polish nobility and clergy' and an orthodoxy came to be established in these official circles that 'restoration of a Polish state would necessarily undermine Prussia as a great power'.<sup>13</sup>

One particular Prussian official embodied this change, the new Provincial President of Posen from 1830 to 1841, Eduard Heinrich Flottwell. Under his direction, cooperation with the Polish nobility and the Catholic Church was broken off, while German was made the sole official language. Flottwell expressed his aim to be a fusion of Germans and Poles, but one 'achieved through the decisive predominance of German culture'.<sup>14</sup> Besides bringing in German farmers as settlers, one other dimension of his attempt to recalibrate the identity of Posen was the attempt to draw the region's Jews to the German cause, promising civil equality to ↪ those who conformed to German culture.<sup>15</sup> Relations between the groups soured over this decade. Flottwell came into direct conflict with the Catholic hierarchy of the area, sparring with the archbishop over the issue of mixed

p. 76



marriages. With the coming to the throne of a new king, Friedrich Wilhelm IV (r. 1840–61), in 1840, Flottwell was removed from office, and a return made to the policies of the prior era, before a renewed revolutionary wave again wrecked this accommodation. An omen of the coming revolutionary wave was another Polish revolt in all the partitioned areas in 1846. The Prussian crackdown was energetic, with the arrests of 254 suspected conspirators in Posen, led by Ludwik Mieroslawski, who were put on trial in Berlin in the famed ‘Polish trial’. The condemned were imprisoned in the notorious Moabit jail.

Another set of reactions was to be found in the realm of writing and ideas, a response from those who considered themselves Prussian patriots and opposed concessions to the Poles. This Prussian patriotic counterpoint pre-dated the revolt, and venerated Prussian history and the state. A key figure was the historian Johannes Voigt (1786–1863) who from 1827 to 1839 published a nine-volume work on the history of Prussia, which praised the Teutonic Order’s subjection of the ancient Prussians as having created space for German culture.<sup>16</sup> The great historian Leopold von Ranke also praised the German movement eastwards as bringing culture to uncivilized lands.<sup>17</sup> Hegel likewise saw the Slavs, except for the Russians, as peoples without history, allegedly incapable of creating states and thus embodying world-historical principles.

p. 77 Under the impact of such ideas, the Enlightenment’s earlier condemnation of the Baltic Crusades of the Teutonic Order was strikingly transmuted into its opposite, the celebration of precisely this period, in nationalized terms. Plans arose for the rebuilding of the ruined castle of Marienburg, headquarters of the Order, which over the centuries had fallen into disrepair. The work was organized by Oberpräsident von Schön (who was later named the Burggraf of the Marienburg for his efforts in 1842), and reconstruction efforts began in 1817, with royal patronage and private donations.

These plans were promoted by Joseph Freiherr von Eichendorff (1788–1857), a Catholic Silesian nobleman, Prussian bureaucrat, and Romantic writer. In 1830, Eichendorff had written a historical drama entitled ‘The Last Hero of Marienburg’, in which the fall of the Order is recalled. The warning call goes up: ‘Wake up! The Christian bulwark is broken | From the East the blind flood is rushing in! Awake!’. Afterwards, Eichendorff published an essay in 1844, ‘The Reconstruction of the Castle of the Knights of the Teutonic Order in Marienburg’. In it he praised the knights, who ‘with cross and sword conquered a new Germany in the middle of the north-eastern wastes, without whose Christian bulwark all of the north of Europe would have taken a different, scarcely to be imagined spiritual character’.<sup>18</sup>

p. 78 He gave a long historical overview, from the days when the castle had held out against the ‘waves of revolt’ and the ‘confused horde’ of Baltic pagans.<sup>19</sup> He celebrated the ‘mission of the German order, with which providence had endowed it’, as it spread ‘German education (*Bildung*) and civilization far beyond its borders, and spiritually linked Livonia, Estonia, and even a part of Poland to Germany’.<sup>20</sup> After the Order’s disastrous defeat at Tannenberg in 1410, an epoch of decline set in which Eichendorff set out in a chapter significantly entitled ‘Die polnische Wirtschaft’—‘Polish management’, ironically signifying a descent into chaos of an ‘otherwise blooming land, which once excelled other states in fame in war, education, and industry’.<sup>21</sup> Finally, in the partitions the Polish ship of state ‘had to be wrecked owing to its own lack of moderation’.<sup>22</sup> Under Polish misrule, the castle itself had suffered from neglect and carelessness, surrounded by a ‘rabble city, whose wretched houses . . . covered the castle with the dirt of life far above the level of the ground-floor windows’.<sup>23</sup> Eichendorff concluded this long essay with praise for the active participation of society in the rebuilding that began in 1817. With this act, ‘The nation (*Volk*) has not only helped to build the Marienburg, but in this act has also built itself’.<sup>24</sup> Eichendorff praised the German spirit which united as brothers the Germans in the West with ‘Prussians, who have been placed in the vanguard’, and the Prussian king in his role as leader.<sup>25</sup>

Among other portents of animosity were trends in historical writing at the time. One of these was a popular history, published in 1847, by Moritz Wilhelm Heffter, entitled *The World War of the Germans and Slavs*. This work portrayed an epochal struggle extending from the fifth century to the present times, and the author was quite explicit in his insistence that the phenomenon needed to be seen as a continuous whole, not split up into

historical episodes. The book was dedicated to the German people, promising consolation for lost territories in the north and east, and a vision of the future, 'so that you may learn from it, how you basically need to treat your opponents, in order to overcome them'.<sup>26</sup> This had global significance for the author, who saw German qualities as determining their 'present place in the scale of peoples', with the potential of some day 'reaching that height, which you experienced under Otto the Great, when no European nation matched you in might and reputation'.<sup>27</sup> Heffter claimed that to the present day, the 56 million Slavs, especially those under German rule, were often consumed with envy and hatred for Germans. Germans, showing characteristic goodwill and selflessness, wished only the best for those Slavs who were at last ready to move out of 'their earlier state of resentment against other peoples, their easy self-satisfaction and isolation'.<sup>28</sup> The only real answer was for the Slavs to become like the Germans.<sup>29</sup> According to Heffter, the best medium for reconciliation was historical awareness, as 'history reconciles', by showing the inevitability of German superiority and triumph in the epochal struggle.<sup>30</sup> This was a 'world war, a battle between two of the largest European families of peoples—not tribes (*Völkerschaften*)', involving a struggle between the principles of 'culture and non-culture (*Uncultur*)', with Germans as the providential carriers of this transformation, a unified process of pressing back Slavic control.<sup>31</sup> The Slav, as the loser, was 'himself to blame for his own fate'.<sup>32</sup> It had all been the 'necessary result of the cultural-historical, spiritual, and moral preponderance, which the educated always gains over the uneducated'.<sup>33</sup> Among the characteristic failings of the Slavs the author pointed to their incapacity for producing great political leaders and their inability to unite, so that the result was the appalling spectacle of an 'unnational nation'. He compared the Slavs to 'the Indians in America' in their incapacity to cultivate the environment and shape it by their own efforts.<sup>34</sup> In closing his long chronicle, Heffter concluded that the process had involved both 'force of arms as with colonies and . . . higher culture'.<sup>35</sup> The centuries-long struggle up to the present time had made Germany expansionist and powerful. As a result, the 'mighty colossus' of the Russian Empire, a neighbouring Slavic power, was a source of great anxiety: 'policy towards it overlies all daily politics'. Heffter's ultimate conclusion was that the acquisition of these new German territories in the East had 'quite remarkable repercussions on Germany proper itself' because of the very nature of these newly won lands: 'their expansiveness', their promise of future progress, and their eager participation in all things German. This had given all German life from politics to literature and the sciences 'a special coloration'. The conquest of Slavic lands gave 'our German fatherland a significant expansion of its borders, a not insignificant expansion of its intense power', as 'these regions gained a quite different physiognomy through German culture and civilization than they had under Slavic rule'. The foremost example of this, for the author, was the growth of the Prussian state to Great Power status and indeed the status of a 'world monarchy'.<sup>36</sup> While Heffter's book was not very successful, it was read by Karl Marx.<sup>37</sup> The book's enthusiasm for Prussia's leadership potential reflected growing Prussian influence in the German lands at large, as the customs union of the Zollverein, which had come into being on 1 January 1834, soon encompassed 25 million Germans and knitted the northern German territories into an economic unit.<sup>38</sup>

Growing German nationalism experienced a watershed moment in 1840.<sup>39</sup> Anxieties over French intentions in the West prompted hundreds of poems about the defence of the 'German Rhine', summed up in Max Schneckenburger's 'Watch on the Rhine', and the 1841 'Song of Germany' by Hoffmann von Fallersleben. On the academic level, conferences of 'Germanists' took place from 1846. It was in this context that Friedrich List (1789–1846) articulated his ideas of an overarching organization of Central Europe, *Mitteleuropa*.<sup>40</sup> List's *The National System of Political Economy*, published in 1841, proposed a model of a strong German national state, integrated by railroads, and able to assert itself in a world increasingly being divided up into areas of economic influence. He stressed the urgency of directing colonization not overseas, but near to home. List announced, 'We have our backwoods as well as the Americans, the lands of the Lower Danube and the Black Sea, all of Turkey, the entire Southeast beyond Hungary is our hinterland'.<sup>41</sup> He urged Germans to 'organize Middle Europe into a political federation and an economic entity'.<sup>42</sup> As events did not move fast enough for him, List was driven to suicide in despair over his inability to bring his plans to fruition. These nationalizing impulses continued to worry the Habsburgs, with their dozen major ethnic groups, as German self-assertion would lead to corresponding stirrings among the Hungarians, Czechs, Italians, and Galician Poles.

p. 81

In the revolutionary wave that swept Europe in 1848, the so-called 'Springtime of Nations', the anxieties of conservative elites seemed to be realized, as established regimes yielded to the demands of liberal and democratic revolutionaries. This apparent initial success, however, turned to failure, as the revolutionaries were unable to cement their regimes and the monarchs regained the initiative. This crucial European turning point produced a change in German relations with Eastern Europe. In general, the failure of the revolutions of 1848 was also a portent that different nationalist demands for self-determination, at first promoted by intellectuals, but spreading to larger audiences over the rest of the century, might often prove to be tragically incompatible, as they conflicted and clashed with each other.

In response to the revolt in Paris on 24 February, there were revolts in Italy and the German lands, including Prussia and Austria, in March. Vienna experienced an uprising on 13 March and Berlin saw fighting in the barricaded streets on 19 March. Metternich fled the Habsburg Empire into exile. The Prussian king promised that Prussia would receive a constitution and that 'Henceforth Prussia merges into Germany'.<sup>43</sup> Meeting from 31 March to 4 April, a pre-parliament of German revolutionaries called for German unification and elections to a national assembly to write a constitution for the new nation-state. Among the declarations of the pre-parliament on 31 March was a pledge that the restoration of a free Poland was a sacred duty of the new Germany, to make good the historic crime of the partitions. The 'Polish enthusiasm' of the 1830s seemed revived, as the Polish rebels of the 1846 uprising held in the Berlin jail were freed by revolutionary crowds on 20 March. The liberating crowds of Germans in turn were hailed by one of the freed Poles who declared: 'You have felt that the time has come to expiate the fatal deed of Poland's partition, and to safeguard a free Germany by raising the bulwark of an independent Poland against the onset of the Asiatics.'<sup>44</sup> The Polish ex-prisoners reported to their allies in Posen that: 'Here the entire nation has but one desire: that Poland should re-arise as an independent State and form a bulwark against the East.'<sup>45</sup>

p. 82

A common shared conviction in these initial revolutionary days among many German liberals and radicals was that one thing was inevitable: war with Russia. Russia's role as the enforcer of the reactionary order embodied in the Holy Alliance would force it to intervene, confronting both the appearance of a new Great Power on its own doorstep as well as the republican revolutionary principles enshrined in Germany. But this prospect did not meet with fear alone, as indeed some radical souls actively hoped for war with Russia, believing it would fuse Germans together in a common cause.<sup>46</sup> German liberal newspapers in March 1848 urged the war, citing a common 'flaming hatred of Russia'.<sup>47</sup> Poland needed to be restored as a buffer and protection for the future Europe of peoples against tsarist absolutism. Marx and Engels wrote in August 1848 that 'The establishment of a democratic Poland is a primary condition for the establishment of a democratic Germany'.<sup>48</sup> Not only was 'the national existence of Poland . . . necessary for no one more than for us Germans', the war with Russia promised great things besides:

The war with Russia would be a complete, public and real break with our whole shameful past, it would mean the real liberation and unification of Germany, the re-establishment of democracy on the ruins of feudalism and the brief dream of the ascendancy of the bourgeoisie. War with Russia would be the only possible way to save our honor and interests with respect to our Slavic neighbors and particularly with respect to the Poles.<sup>49</sup>

The chairman of the Frankfurt national assembly, Heinrich von Gagern, wrote that

Sooner or later, war with Russia had to come, over the Baltic Sea and the Baltic Provinces, over Poland, over the Danube and the Eastern Question, lastly over Slesvig-Holstein; and it seemed advisable to hasten it. A new united Germany had 'to enter history not with freedoms only, but with deeds'. War against Russia would have been the most popular war throughout Germany; it offered the most wholesome remedy for reducing the existing ferment, and the most effective for countering the dislike of a standing army which thirty years of peace had fostered in the nation.<sup>50</sup>

p. 83 The constituent assembly met from 18 May 1848 at St Paul's Church in Frankfurt. It set up a federal system headed by a ↵ constitutional emperor. A crucial question to be confronted was how to draw the borders of the new Germany.<sup>51</sup> Two competing visions emerged: a *Grossdeutsch* or 'Greater German' solution and a *Kleindeutsch* or 'Smaller German' solution. According to the 'Greater German' solution, the Habsburg realm would be included in the new state, which would mean that the Catholic element would predominate in the German lands. The 'Smaller German' solution foresaw a northern German state built on Prussian dominance. The Habsburg Empire's ethnic variety was a problem, as even in Austria proper some half of the population was non-German.<sup>52</sup> But beyond these fundamental differences, which were debated heatedly, other special difficulties concerned the fate of areas with non-German populations, especially Posen (with its Polish population) and Bohemia (with its Czech population). West Prussia, although more than half Polish in its population, was included in the invitations to the national assembly. Local conflicts between the ethnic groups in Posen and Bohemia further aggravated the debate. In Posen in particular, the local Germans, who represented roughly a third of the population, demanded incorporation into the future Germany, a demand which Polish activists rejected. Lines of demarcation were proposed, but it was unclear where they were to be drawn, and all subsequent redrawings were controversial. A Polish National Committee had been set up to spearhead the Polish fight for independence, and volunteers gathered to form a future Polish army. While at first relations with the Prussian soldiers were good, with promises of 'together marching against the eastern enemy', Russia, in time they soured.<sup>53</sup> Prussian army units clashed with the Poles in April 1848, and more fighting ensued. Eventually, the Polish activists were quelled and their leaders fled. The Prussian troops, meanwhile, sang the very opposite of the 'Polish songs' of sympathy from the 1830s:

p. 84 Therefore, Poland, be brief;  
Get ready for your everlasting collapse; ↵  
For Poland cannot be allowed to be free again,  
If we want to enjoy our peace.<sup>54</sup>

The issue of the inclusion of these Polish territories, now in conflict with the parallel promises to restore a strong Poland in the East, was the object of a crucial 'Polish Debate' (*Polendebatte*) over three days at the Frankfurt Assembly, from 24 to 26 July 1848, with voting on 27 July. The conflicts in Posen had already had an effect on broader public opinion throughout Germany, giving rise to rumours of ethnic war.<sup>55</sup> The initial ardour for war against Russia had now also faded. Increasing stress was laid on the importance of being just in foreign affairs, in so far as this was possible without hurting German interests. Voices were raised that in any division of the province, the fortress city of Posen needed to remain German, in view of a future Russian threat. One of the participants declared that 'a great nation requires space (*Raum*) to fulfil its world destiny (*Weltberuf*)'.<sup>56</sup> The most striking of the speeches of the debate came from Wilhelm Jordan, a democrat from Berlin, but originally from East Prussia. He condemned the notion that half a million Germans in Posen should be 'subject to a nation of lesser cultural content than themselves'. That would be treason against one's own people, and the restoration of Poland would be a mistake. He urged instead 'a healthy national egotism without which no people can grow into a nation'. Citing the belief that 'Our right is that of the stronger, the right of conquest', Jordan announced that 'the preponderance of the German race over most Slav races, possibly with the sole exception of the Russians, is a fact . . . and against history and nature decrees of political justice are of no avail'. Abstract right did not mean as much as the pragmatic, demonstrated political ability to form and protect lasting statehood. Jordan ended his intervention with wishing liberty for all, but putting the good of a powerful Germany first.<sup>57</sup> In the voting that followed, the partition of Posen and incorporation of large Polish ↵ populations were confirmed. Liberals and democrats had made a fateful transition.

p. 85

Invitations had been sent to representatives of the Austrian Empire to attend the National Assembly, including to the Czech historian Franz Palacky (1798–1876). The desire was to have participation from those ancient lands of the Holy Roman Empire, Bohemia and Moravia, although they were not uniformly German in population. Palacky wrote back, in a famous letter, that 'I am not a German . . . I am a Bohemian of Slav race'.<sup>58</sup> He declined

to participate and commented that 'if the Austrian Empire did not exist, in the interest of Europe, nay, of humanity, it would be necessary to make haste and create it'.<sup>59</sup> This loyalty to the imperial idea looked forward to the day when an Austro-Slav solution was enacted. In the revolution of 1848, Czech national demands were made, on the basis of the old rights of the Crown of St Wenceslas, a restoration of ancient identity expressed in separate administration for Czech lands. Local German populations in Bohemia, especially in Prague, reacted against these demands, and the friction grew. They felt themselves embattled as minorities, as indeed they were in an empire 23 per cent of whose population were Germans and 47 per cent Slavs.<sup>60</sup> German fears extended to visions of simply being wiped out by surrounding populations. Slavic aspirations found expression in the Slav Congress held in Prague in June 1848. The cultural movement of Slavic fraternity had evolved slowly before this, but at the congress Slav nationalities gathered to make common political cause and to condemn the oppressive policies of the Habsburg state, especially Hungarian rule over the Slovaks. Non-Austrian Slavs were welcomed as guests, finessing the question of the scope of the programme, in an 'uneasy compromise'.<sup>61</sup> The conference, with some 1,000 participants, was presided over by Palacky. It reached a climax in a manifesto to European nations and a plan for an alliance of the Slavs. But the congress itself was ended by the outbreak of street violence. ↪ in Prague, after the establishment of a revolutionary Committee of Public Safety in Vienna, as urban crowds in sympathy with the revolutionaries confronted troops at a demonstration and rioting broke out. The Austrian forces withdrew and then shelled Prague into submission on 17 June. Rumours spread that the riots had been ethnic in nature, directed against defenceless Germans, a planned Czech programme of massacre only narrowly being avoided. Despite all evidence to the contrary, the impact of the rumours was significant and lasting.<sup>62</sup> In the Frankfurt parliament, as other deputies spoke of the danger of 'national annihilation' facing Bohemian Germans as a result of Slav fanaticism, Jordan again intervened to state that he was proud that Germans were united in outrage and that cosmopolitanism was fading in a shared resolve to oppose parasitical 'tiny nations'.<sup>63</sup>

p. 86

These scenes and debates were themselves soon overtaken by the return of the conservative elites, who had regained their political confidence in the interval. Renewed royal authority was reasserted. Habsburg generals crushed revolts in Italy, Bohemia, and then in Vienna itself on 26 October 1848. The young emperor Franz Josef replaced Ferdinand I, aided by his new prime minister, Prince Felix von Schwarzenberg. In Prussia, the assembly was dissolved by royal authority and a constitution imposed from above. In a last action, the Frankfurt parliament offered the crown of the future Germany to Friedrich Wilhelm IV of Prussia on 27 March 1849, but he scornfully refused it. With this, the life went out of the parliament. In a last gasp, a rump parliament was formed in Stuttgart, but it too was forced to dissolve in June. The last German revolutionaries were defeated in July 1849. A late episode of significance involved the uprising in Hungary against the Habsburgs, with the declaration of Hungarian independence in April 1849. As the Austrian forces alone were not able to defeat the Hungarian rebels, Emperor Franz Josef and Tsar Nicholas I met in Warsaw and agreed on Russian military intervention to suppress the Hungarian revolt, which was finally put down by October 1849.

p. 87

The reactions to the failed revolutions of 1848 and the events that had been imbedded within that failure were of striking importance. Within the German lands, many considered the setbacks for constitutionalism and the seeming triumph of reaction and absolutism to reveal a profound truth about their age: the impossibility of idealistic reform. It provided an impetus for mass migration from Germany. In the five years after 1848, more than a million Germans emigrated, most of them to the United States.<sup>64</sup>

In political terms, the dualism between Austria and Prussia within German affairs continued. The King of Prussia had wistfully worked on the idea of reorganizing Germany with a union of princes offering him the imperial crown, but this plan was destroyed at the diplomatic showdown engineered by Austria at Olmütz in 1850, with Russian support. The German Confederation was restored, with Austria again in the position of chairman. The parties seemed unevenly matched: in 1850, Prussia's population numbered 16 million, while that of Austria numbered 33 million (17 million in the German portions of the empire).<sup>65</sup>



A factor that was soon to have political consequences was the dramatic economic progress from the 1850s, as the conditions for industrial take-off were being laid. Prussia retained her leadership of the customs union, and Austria continued to be excluded. Although not united in a centralized political sense, the German lands were increasingly being bound together by railways, which by c.1850 had more track than France.<sup>66</sup> Demands for national unification would be reinforced by the economic imperatives running in the same direction.

Nationalism had also been boosted by the disappointments and clashes of the revolutionary period. In Prussian Posen, there ensued 'definitive estrangement' between many Germans and Poles.<sup>67</sup> Among Slavs, Pan-Slavism grew as an ideology proclaiming defence against Western encroachments. The growth of German nationalism was registered in the movement to rebuild ↵ historical monuments, including Cologne cathedral and the Marienburg in a first phase of rebuilding until the mid-1850s.<sup>68</sup>

Intellectual reactions to the perceived lessons of the failed revolutions of 1848 were also of considerable importance. Among the most radical revolutionaries, the experience seemed to confirm their analysis of insufficient determination and comprehensiveness in the 'German half-revolution'.<sup>69</sup> During the revolts, Marx and Engels had both urged revolutionary war against Russia, and this would remain a legacy for the socialist movement in Germany over the next decades. Engels declared that hatred for Russia represented the Germans' first revolutionary passion.<sup>70</sup> Marx and Engels also 'did not differentiate between the tsarist regime and the Russian people' until the surprise of a socialist movement growing in that country interested them in later decades.<sup>71</sup> What mattered most to them was the progress of the revolution. Smaller nations stood in the way of this process and were relegated to extinction. As Engels declared, there were 'those numerous small relics of peoples which, after having figured for a longer or shorter period on the stage of history, were finally absorbed as integral portions into one or the other of those more powerful nations'.<sup>72</sup> In spite of earlier expressions of sympathy, in 1851 Engels also scorned the Poles, who 'have never done anything in history except engage in brave, blatant foolery . . . "Immortal" about the Poles is only their baseless hullabaloo'.<sup>73</sup> Without a conscious nationalism, Engels identified German culture as a progressive factor in bringing civilization to Eastern Europe. He had a special horror of Pan-Slavism, which he defined as the 'subjugation of the civilized West by the barbarous East, the city by the countryside, industry and spiritual life by the primitive fieldwork of Slavic serfs'.<sup>74</sup> The triumph of a Pan-Slav agenda would mean declaring 'null and void the historical development of the last thousand years . . . to cut off one-third of Germany and all of Hungary, change Vienna and Budapest into Slavic cities'.<sup>75</sup> On the left, as the best-organized socialist movement in the world was built up ↵ in Germany, the identification of Russia as the great despotism in the East would be very important in the coming decades, up to and including the First World War.

Of a different political complexion were the views expressed by the author Gustav Freytag (1816–95) in the post-revolutionary years. His first novel, *Credit and Debit*, was published in 1855 and was 'one of the best-selling German novels of all time', indeed 'the most widely read German novel of the nineteenth century'.<sup>76</sup> Indeed, its sales were astonishing in their magnitude and longevity: 100,000 copies had been sold by around 1900, half a million by 1925, and a million by around 1960.<sup>77</sup> Freytag identified himself as a Prussian, born in Silesia, and avowed that having been born in borderlands shaped his vision. His novel, a *Bildungsroman*, followed the development of its young hero, Anton Wohlfahrt, and was set in Silesia. Working in business in Breslau, Anton travels to the Polish territories, and entering them seems to be like leaving Europe and crossing over into the Orient.<sup>78</sup> Jews are also identified with this eastern land, personified in the character of Veitel Itzig, whose pronunciation of German is said to be eastern. The backdrop to the development of the hero is a landscape threatened by the contest between German industriousness and 'Polish management'.<sup>79</sup> Polish revolts are seen not as politically motivated acts, but as explosions of a criminal and irrational nature. While travelling in Poland, one of Anton's companions states:

There is no race which is so little equipped to advance progress and to acquire humanity and education (*Bildung*) by its capital, as the Slavs . . . It means, they have no culture . . . It is remarkable,



how incompetent they are at creating for themselves that condition, which represents civilization and progress and which raises a band of scattered small farmers into a state.<sup>80</sup>

p. 90 In a famous passage, Anton concludes, 'I stand here now as one of the conquerors who have taken over this soil from a weaker race for free labour and human culture. We and the Slavs—it is an old struggle.'<sup>81</sup> A friend of Anton's who devotes himself to the role of asserting German presence by settling in these frontier territories is described thus: 'his life will be an unending victorious struggle against the dark spirits of the landscape, and a band of strong boys will spring up out of the Slavic castle; a new German race, full of endurance in body and soul, will spread out across the land, a race of colonizers and conquerors.'<sup>82</sup> In the end there is success, with Anton enjoying a 'German, middle-class identity . . . constituted in opposition to three main adversarial Others: German aristocrats, Jews, and Poles.'<sup>83</sup> As Kopp argues in her study of German colonialism imprinted on Poland, the novel is 'a test case for the flexible adaptability of colonial constructions of the Self and Other'.<sup>84</sup>

p. 91 Another figure of great significance here was a friend of Freytag's, and a leading nationalist historian of his day, Heinrich von Treitschke (1834–96). Although of Saxon origins himself, Treitschke celebrated the inner unfolding of Prussia's mission to unite Germany. A crucial essay of his, often cited and reprinted later, was penned at the age of 28, when he was still uncertain about his career path, and combined belles-lettres with historical narrative. It was 'The German Land of the Order, Prussia', published in 1862.<sup>85</sup> It opened with the imperative for all Germans to be aware of the great scale of the deeds of the medieval age in Prussia, 'the raging flood of German spirit over the North and East, the great creativity of our people as the conqueror, teacher, and discipliner of our most natural enemies'.<sup>86</sup> Germans needed to know this because they were at once old and young, and their sense of community was as yet in a 'state of incompleteness'. To know one's own nature commanded this, as the 'pitiless race wars' in the past had left 'traces, conscious and unconscious, [which] still live on mysteriously in the customs of the nation'.<sup>87</sup> In these eastern provinces, 'a magic hovers over the soil, which has been fertilized by the noblest German blood in battles for the German name and for the purest qualities of humanity'. Treitschke presented an idealized vision of the Teutonic Knights as at once soldiers beset with lust for combat, severe rulers, pious monks, and statesmen, in all things presaging the German Great Power of Prussia of the present day. Throughout the best days of the Order, Treitschke saw the recurring 'great idea of the founding of a state'.<sup>88</sup> In a larger sense, the Order also continued what Treitschke saw as a perennial eastwards movement, the medieval settlement which drove 'German city-dwellers and farmers into the devastated land, as the battle for common freedom, the crisis of overpopulation, the fury of the sea or impudent daring drove them eastwards'.<sup>89</sup> A 'grandiose triumphal parade of German manner (*Gesittung*)' spread over Eastern Europe.<sup>90</sup> There they encountered, as on the Baltic, hybrid people (*Mischvolk*) who 'over the centuries had led a harmless unique life'. Taking their lands was part of a 'necessary right, which the peoples of culture have always exercised against barbarians'.<sup>91</sup> The Order's territories were 'a firm jetty, boldly built out from the German shore into the wild sea of the eastern peoples. Thus new strongpoints were gained for further expansion.' Treitschke revelled in a brutal rendering of the wars fought here: 'A war unwinds here of inhuman gruesomeness. All of the hardness of our own national spirit unfolds itself here, where the conqueror confronts the heathen with the threefold pride of the Christian, the knight, and the German. The wild, exalted poetry of the far North elevates the romantic charm of these battles.'<sup>92</sup> The conquerors did not mix with 'un-German blood', but instead built up a 'New Germany' in the East, part of a constantly renewed 'system of advanced positions'.<sup>93</sup> The subject populations become German in language and culture. The great merit of this state was that the 'new Germany' was 'a colony of all of Germany'.<sup>94</sup> Treitschke deliberately drew parallels to the British and Spanish colonization of the 'huge spaces of America'. Another similarity he saw was in the brutality of subjection, which he praised as humane:

p. 92 In the fatal collision of races who are mortal enemies, the bloody wildness of a quick war of extermination (*Vernichtungskrieges*) is more humane and less shocking than the false mildness of laziness, which leaves the subjugated in the state of animals, either hardening the hearts of the victors or pressing them down into the numbness of the conquered. A mixing of the invaders and

the natives was not possible in Prussia, as neither the climate of the land nor the culture of the inhabitants had any attraction for the Germans, but on the contrary the incapacity of the people for national statehood, even in the face of the Slavs, was clear. It was thus a humane gift, that after the subjugation the lord gave his servant his language, thus opening the way for him to a higher civilization (*Gesittung*).<sup>95</sup>

Treitschke saw all this as part of a larger, monolithic advance of German culture, with the Teutonic Knights stepping into breaches made in German culture.<sup>96</sup> The Order fought against the Lithuanian pagans, who followed the 'unchanging art of waging war of the barbarians of the East', kidnapping all prisoners to take them away to their own 'depopulated homeland' as slaves.<sup>97</sup> Treitschke saw the Hanse and the Order as sharing an inner affinity, since both were 'German aristocracies in the middle of half-barbarian peoples'.<sup>98</sup> In more historical anachronism, Treitschke saw the Poles and Germans caught in nationalistic antagonism in the fourteenth century, as the 'innermost nature of both peoples pressed towards war'.<sup>99</sup> Throughout, he accented what he considered the double nature of the Order, one oriented towards the Middle Ages, the other resolutely modern in its power politics.<sup>100</sup> He praised the 'cultural work (*Kulturarbeit*) of the Order'.<sup>101</sup> By contrast, the splintered Slavs were only united by the 'old hatred of the Germans'.<sup>102</sup> The Order then met its tragic fate in 1410, only defeated by 'the combined might of the East', the 'first great victory which the Slavs won against our nation', with brave German knights mutilated by Tatars and Cossacks.<sup>103</sup> The lands were devastated with 'Hun fury'.<sup>104</sup> He lamented that Germans ceased to be the rulers among the West Slavs, who now drew ever closer together in a fanatical union.<sup>105</sup> The humiliating decline of the Order which followed, however, carried the seeds of a great development, as with the Reformation Prussia was secularized and began its inevitable rise to the position of a Great Power.<sup>106</sup> But for now, one noted the 'state, contrary to nature, of ↳ Slavs ruling over Germans'.<sup>107</sup> By contrast, Treitschke condemned the Baltic German aristocrats for their subservience to the tsars. In conclusion, he proclaimed the recovery of Prussia, with Frederick the Great greeting the ghosts of the Knights as the 'saviour of their German cultural achievement'.<sup>108</sup> Prussia was now powerful again, 'thanks to a blessed necessity', by which the state fulfils its 'German calling (*Beruf*)', when it acts selfishly and coldly according to power politics. As a 'real state', distinct from the particularism and fragmentation of the rest of Germany, it offered all Germans a sense of breadth and possibility. As Treitschke concluded, 'Every day Germans still carry the blessing of culture eastwards'.<sup>109</sup> But he added that 'the German teacher is met with hostility in the Slav land as an insolent invader', while only in Prussia had German culture won a permanent victory, and that same Prussia still awaits another role in the 'unchangeable rule of laws which build the world'.<sup>110</sup> Treitschke's utterances, further elaborated in later historical writings, were influential at the time and afterwards.

In fact, momentous political changes were coming soon. The first set of changes involved a different East. The 'Eastern Question', as it was known to Europeans at the time, referred to the vexed prospect of what would happen to the territories of an increasingly decrepit Ottoman Empire in south-eastern Europe and the Middle East. At the time, the empire was referred to scornfully as the 'Sick Man of Europe'. Internal disintegration and the growth of nationalism among its different peoples suggested that its decay was far advanced. The dilemma for all European Great Powers, with the exception of Prussia (which was too far away to be directly involved), was whether the Ottoman realm's present weakness was not preferable to a partition of the empire in which the spoils would not be shared equally. Russian policymakers had long dreamt of gaining the Turkish Straits and Constantinople, the imperial city. For its part, Austria was increasingly concerned about the implications of Russian advances ↳ for the Balkans and its interests there. From the 1830s, Great Britain had moved to maintain the Ottoman Empire. A crucial outcome of these conflicting imperatives was the Crimean War (1853–6), which pitted Russia against Great Britain and France. Most obviously, the war made clear the breakdown of the Concert of Europe tradition which had been created at the Congress of Vienna in 1815, as Great Powers went to war with one another. A general war was avoided, however, as Prussia and Austria sought to stay out, in spite of Russian pleas to hold to the traditional loyalties of the Holy Alliance. Prussia remained neutral, remote from the action, but Austria faced a more complicated dilemma and by its initial policy of neutrality and then its late

threat of intervention on the side of the western powers managed to antagonize both Russia and the western states. As a result, henceforth Austria would now find itself in an exposed position and without support in a series of international challenges that lay ahead. In particular, in 1859–60 Austria was defeated in a war with France over Italy, and lost the territory of Lombardy in northern Italy. The breakdown of earlier patterns of conservative solidarity introduced new fluidity into the international scene.

Increased competition also found expression in a changed intellectual climate at this time. Charles Darwin's *The Origin of Species* (1859) and his later writings would have a profound effect on European civilization more broadly. In particular, social Darwinists saw the patterns described by Darwin as equally natural and desirable in the human sphere. Nationalism also strengthened broadly in the period, throughout Europe, but took on special significance in a fragmented German context. A poem by Emanuel Geibel (1815–84) was widely cited, which illustrates well the heightened nationalist fervour also to be seen in Treitschke's work. That poem, written in 1861, was entitled 'Germany's Calling (*Beruf*)'. It looked forward to a day when rest and freedom would at last be secured by weapons in a peaceful Europe. The key was to return to the world its core, which was Germany: 'make Europe's heart ↴ healthy, and salvation is found for you'. Germany was to be built up as a refuge, in the traditions of the medieval empire. Germany's voice then would be heard clearly in the 'council of peoples'. The world would not be ruled by the moods of France, or by the pope in Rome, nor 'will the colossus in the North frighten us any longer with his hordes'. Instead, from Germany's position of a 'strong centre', all selfish drives would be reined in by 'power and freedom, justice and morality, clear spirit and sharp stroke', so that once again the world might 'be restored through the German character (*es mag am deutschen Wesen | Einmal noch die Welt genesen*)'. Among the nationalists, some looked to Prussia to play a leading role. Their sentiments were expressed in the 1859 founding of the Nationalverein.<sup>111</sup> The calls for nationalist unification had not become an overwhelming wave, but the momentum they were acquiring was significant.

With nationalist ideas seeming to press forward to some form of German unification, an unlikely contender used a window of opportunity to impose a solution of his own design. This outsider was Otto von Bismarck (1815–98). An unexpected series of domestic crises brought him to power in Prussia as chancellor. In 1861, King Wilhelm I (1797–1888) succeeded his brother, Friedrich Wilhelm IV. He soon found himself embroiled in debates with the Prussian parliament over funding for the military, which actually had broader implications for the internal character of the Prussian state. In desperation, he turned to an outsider with a reputation as a wild conservative. Bismarck's *Junker* family had Old Prussian roots, he managed a family estate in Pomerania, and he had done his military service in Greifswald. He identified himself as above all a Prussian patriot and through flexible and opportunistic policies determined to use the forces of the age to the advantage of the Prussian state. The internal political crises were simply to be made redundant by dramatic changes in international politics. In his earlier diplomatic career, Bismarck had challenged Austrian predominance in German affairs in the Confederation, ↴ and was determined either to partition the German lands between the two powers, north and south, or to expel Austria entirely from German affairs. The old pattern of dualism was to be destroyed, by methods of 'blood and iron', as Bismarck declared.

A key aspect of his foreign policy calculations was the old conservative premise that good relations with Russia were imperative. Bismarck insisted that there was no conflict of interests between Prussia and Russia, where he had been ambassador from 1859 to 1862. Russian benevolent neutrality would be crucial in the series of sharp conflicts with other European powers that Bismarck launched. A key demonstration of this affinity, one for which Russian policymakers were grateful, came with Bismarck's reaction to the Polish revolt of 1863. When the revolt broke out in January, Bismarck dispatched General von Alvensleben to Russia to offer assistance against the rebels, underlining the old shared interest in maintaining the partition of Poland. The Alvensleben Convention was signed on 8 February 1863, and would be emblematic of Bismarck's determination to cooperate with the Russian Empire.

The Alvensleben Convention was also indicative of his fundamental position on the Poles. Already in 1848, Bismarck had conjured up a vision of what would happen should Prussia cede its territories with Polish

populations, West Prussia and Posen: this would mean that ‘the best sinews of Germany would be severed, millions of Germans would fall prey to Polish arbitrariness’, all to win a dubious ally.<sup>112</sup> Later, in 1861, Bismarck wrote that it was imperative to ‘Flay the Poles until they despair of life! I have all sympathy for their position, but if we wish to endure, we can do nothing else but extirpate them.’<sup>113</sup>

p. 97 Bismarck now launched a series of wars. After Prussia and Austria had fought a war against Denmark in 1864 (over the disputed duchies of Schleswig and Holstein), Bismarck provoked a showdown with Austria in 1866, which led to its crushing defeat. In the aftermath of the war, Bismarck excluded Austria from German affairs to the north, ending the pattern of dualism that had endured for so long. At the same time, he imposed a less severe peace settlement on Austria, as good relations with that other German power would still be necessary in the future. An expanded Prussia set up the North German Confederation, to replace the German Confederation, which was now defunct. War with France came in 1870, with Prussia joined by the southern German states. Political unification was achieved in January 1871, in a dynastic federation sealed at the Hall of Mirrors in Versailles, with the declaration of the German Empire, under a Kaiser, the King of Prussia.

With justice, this event was called by contemporaries ‘The German Revolution’, as it presented a new factor on the political map of Europe, one which would have decisive impact on the further evolution of Germans’ ideas of their own national identity, their calling, and of Eastern Europe.

## Notes

1. Lewis Namier, *1848: The Revolution of the Intellectuals* (London: Oxford University Press, 1946), 44.
2. Ibid. 48.
3. Wolfgang Michalka, Erardo C. Rautenberg, Konrad Vanja, and Gerhard Weiduschat (eds.), *Polenbegeisterung. Ein Beitrag im ‘Deutsch-Polnischen Jahr 2005/2006’ zur Wanderausstellung ‘Frühling im Herbst. Vom polnischen November zum deutschen Mai. Das Europa der Nationen 1830-1832’* (Berlin: Kupfergraben, 2005), 22.
4. Michalka et al., *Polenbegeisterung*, 24-5.
5. Gerard Kozielek (ed.), *Polenlieder. Eine Anthologie* (Stuttgart: Phillip Reclam jun., 1982), 52-53.
6. Ibid. 73.
7. Kontje, *German Orientalisms*, 186.
8. Kozielek, *Polenlieder*, 113-14.
9. Michalka et al., *Polenbegeisterung*, 29.
10. Mindt and Hansen, *Was*, 24.
11. William W. Hagen, *Germans, Poles, and Jews: The Nationality Conflict in the Prussian East, 1772-1914* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980), 79.
12. Ibid. 82.
13. Ibid. 86.
14. Ibid. 89.
15. Ibid. 103.
16. Wippermann, *Drang*, 35.
17. Ibid. 35.
18. Joseph von Eichendorff, ‘Die Wiederherstellung des Schlosses der Deutschen Ordensritter zu Marienburg’, in *Tagebücher, autobiographische Dichtungen, historische und politische Schriften*, ed. Hartwig Schultz (Frankfurt am Main: Deutscher Klassiker Verlag, 1993), 689.
19. Ibid. 691.
20. Ibid. 693-4.
21. Joseph von Eichendorff, ‘Die Wiederherstellung des Schlosses der Deutschen Ordensritter zu Marienburg’, in *Tagebücher, autobiographische Dichtungen, historische und politische Schriften*, ed. Hartwig Schultz (Frankfurt am Main: Deutscher Klassiker Verlag, 1993), 728.
22. Ibid. 741.
23. Ibid. 743.
24. Ibid. 803.
25. Ibid. 804.

26. M. W. Heffter, *Der Weltkampf der Deutschen und Slawen seit dem Ende des fünften Jahrhunderts nach christlicher Zeitrechnung, nach seinem Ursprunge, Verlaufe und nach seinen Folgen dargestellt* (Hamburg: Friedrich und Andreas Perthes, 1847), p. iii.
27. Ibid., p. iv.
28. Ibid. 4-5.
29. Ibid. 6.
30. Ibid. 6-8.
31. Ibid. 8.
32. Ibid. 458.
33. Ibid. 459.
34. Ibid. 460-2.
35. Ibid. 478.
36. Ibid. 480-1.
37. Wippermann, *Drang*, 39.
38. Herwig, *Hammer*, 88.
39. Ibid. 98.
40. Henry Cord Meyer, *Mitteleuropa in German Thought and Action 1815-1945* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1955).
41. Ibid. 13.
42. Ibid. 14.
43. Namier, *1848*, 28.
44. Ibid. 57.
45. Ibid. 57.
46. Ibid. 40-3, 54-7.
47. Ibid. 49.
48. Ibid. 51.
49. Paul W. Blackstock and Bert Hoselitz (eds.), *The Russian Menace to Europe: A Collection of Articles, Speeches, Letters and News Dispatches by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels* (Glencoe, IL: The Free Press, 1952), 91-4.
50. Namier, *1848*, 56.
51. Brian Vick, *Defining Germany: The 1848 Frankfurt Parliamentarians and National Identity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002).
52. Namier, *1848*, 66.
53. Ibid. 58, fn. 4.
54. Ibid. 74.
55. Ibid. 65.
56. Ibid. 87.
57. Ibid. 88.
58. Ibid. 91.
59. Ibid. 92.
60. Ibid. 101.
61. Ibid. 107.
62. Ibid. 117.
63. Ibid. 120-1.
64. Herwig, *Hammer*, 109.
65. John Breuilly, 'Revolution to Unification', in John Breuilly (ed.), *Nineteenth-Century Germany: Politics, Culture and Society 1780-1918* (London: Arnold, 2001), 140.
66. Herwig, *Hammer*, 95.
67. Hagen, *Germans*, 105.
68. Hartmut Boockmann, 'Preussen, der Deutsche Ritterorden und die Wiederherstellung der Marienburg', in P. Klemens Wieser (ed.), *Acht Jahrhunderte Deutscher Orden in Einzeldarstellungen* (Bad Godesberg: Verlag Wissenschaftliches Archiv, 1967), 556.
69. Blackstock (ed.), *The Russian Menace*, 93.
70. Walter Laqueur, *Russia and Germany: A Century of Conflict*. 2nd edn. (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 1990), 40.
71. Ibid. 41.
72. Namier, *1848*, 51.
73. Ibid. 52-3.

74. Wippermann, *Drang*, 55.
75. Blackstock (ed.), *The Russian Menace*, 87.
76. Kontje, *German Orientalisms*, 197; Hagen, *Germans*, 157.
77. Kristin Leigh Kopp, 'Contesting Borders: German Colonial Discourse and the Polish Eastern Territories' (Ph.D. diss. University of California at Berkeley, 2001), 2.
78. Kontje, *German Orientalisms*, 200.
79. Gustav Freytag, *Soll und Haben*, 2 vols. (Leipzig: Hesse und Becker Verlag, n.d.).
80. Freytag, *Soll und Haben*, i. 374.
81. Freytag, *Soll und Haben*, ii. 156-7.
82. Ibid. 392.
83. Kopp, 'Contesting Borders', 3.
84. Ibid. 34.
85. Heinrich von Treitschke, 'Das deutsche Ordensland Preußen', *Preussische Jahrbücher*, 10/2 (1862), 95-151.
86. Ibid. 95.
87. Ibid. 96.
88. Ibid. 99.
89. Ibid. 101.
90. Ibid.
91. Ibid. 103.
92. Ibid. 104.
93. Ibid. 105-7.
94. Ibid. 109-10.
95. Ibid. 110.
96. Ibid. 111.
97. Ibid. 113.
98. Ibid. 123.
99. Ibid. 114.
100. Ibid. 118.
101. Ibid. 128.
102. Ibid. 133.
103. Ibid. 134.
104. Ibid. 136.
105. Ibid. 137-9.
106. Ibid. 145.
107. Ibid. 147.
108. Ibid. 149.
109. Ibid. 151.
110. Ibid. 151.
111. Breuilly, 'Revolution to Unification', 143.
112. Hagen, *Germans*, 123.
113. Ibid. 125.





## The German Myth of the East: 1800 to the Present

Vejas Gabriel Liulevicius

<https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199546312.001.0001>

Published: 27 August 2009

Online ISBN: 9780191720338

Print ISBN: 9780199546312

Search in this book

### CHAPTER

## 3 Influences of Enlightenment and Romanticism, 1800–1820s

Vejas Gabriel Liulevicius

<https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199546312.003.0003> Pages 44–70

Published: August 2009

### Abstract

This chapter reveals the multivalent potential of Enlightenment ideas and Romantic orientations in German thinking about Eastern Europe in the early 19th century. The profoundly important message of Johann Gottfried Herder, often called the father of cultural nationalism, is analyzed, along with his articulation of cultural ambitions directed towards the East. At the same time, his sympathetic views of Slavs and Baltic peoples are juxtaposed with the antipathies expressed by other German Romantics, often read back into popular history. In the period after the 1815 Congress of Vienna, German liberal enthusiasm for the cause of Poland's independence, and the increasingly assertive counterargument, are illuminated.

**Keywords:** Enlightenment, Germany, Herder, liberal enthusiasm, nationalism, Poland, Romanticism

**Subject:** European History, Political History, Russian and Slavic History, Modern History (1700 to 1945), Intellectual History

**Collection:** Oxford Scholarship Online

The first decades of the nineteenth century, from around 1800 to 1830, saw the formation of central themes of what coalesced into the German myth of the East. These themes included: increasingly elaborate negative stereotypes of an intrinsic eastern disorder, disease, dirt, a deep incapacity for self-rule, which was expressed in the allied phenomena of despotism and slavery; sympathetic encounters; and the assertion of a particular German national calling or mission. These themes often were in counterpoint, and would reappear in later decades in new combinations. These elements were formed in the context of two important larger European intellectual and philosophic movements in which Germans participated, the Enlightenment and Romanticism, even as these movements took on unique forms in the German lands.

What were the shape and the reality of the German lands around 1800? They were marked by the absence of a national state, and by diversity and variety under the larger frayed canopy of the Holy Roman Empire. With a population of 24 million in 1800, the Holy Roman Empire consisted of some 300 sovereign states, and added to

these were then hundreds of domains of imperial knights, for an impressive total of some 1,800 units.<sup>1</sup> Adding to the L,

L, complexity of the scene, not all of the lands inhabited by Germans or ruled by German princes were within the Empire. In particular, in the East, many Habsburg lands remained outside its bounds, as did much of the Prussian kingdom too. A political reality which beset the Empire, moreover, was the dualism between the two principal contenders for leadership of the German lands since 1740, Austria (with a population of c.9 million in 1800) and Prussia (with a population of 5.7 million in 1789).<sup>2</sup> In international politics, a new map needed to be assimilated and accepted, as from 1795 the eastern courts of Austria, Prussia, and Russia now all shared borders, since their elimination of the Polish state. As a result of this set of realities, German conceptions of national identity c.1800 tended to stress the character of ‘Germany’ not as a political unit, but rather as a cultural unity, drawing together speakers of the German language in a burgeoning literature and civil society. A scattered German middle class of c.6 million provided audiences for German literature, poetry, and intellectual discourse.<sup>3</sup>



**Map 2.** Europe in 1815.

The years at the start of the nineteenth century were also explosive in their redrawing of the map of Europe as well as the reframing of crucial political and intellectual issues. The Partitions of Poland, however, for a considerable time distracted Prussia and Austria from the gathering storm of events in the West. There, the

French Revolution had broken out in 1789. As the revolutionary regime underwent increasing radicalization, it launched a revolutionary war against Austria from April 1792 and French armies moved into western Germany. A new factor was added in the person of Napoleon Bonaparte, who took power in a coup in 1799, and then in 1804 crowned himself emperor of the French. The onslaught of Napoleon and his French imperial armies would soon sweep away much of the older German order, and provoke a German nationalist reaction.

p. 47 Long before the Napoleonic military impact, French ideas had already made a considerable impression in the intellectual life of the German lands. The Enlightenment propagated central ideas of the ↪ use of human reason (as against tradition, revelation, and organized religious dogma), utility, science, toleration, and natural law. Although the Enlightenment was a shared international movement throughout Europe and the Americas, many of its most ardent propagators were the French *philosophes*, including Voltaire and Denis Diderot. In his satirical masterpiece *Candide*, Voltaire had expressed his scepticism and emphasis on more modest practical results, summed up in the conclusion, 'let us cultivate our garden'. The promise of progress through the allied values of cultivation, culture, and civilization was a vital ingredient in the characteristic optimism of the Enlightenment.

The German version of this larger European movement was known under the label of '*Aufklärung*', and a key representative was the East Prussian philosopher, Immanuel Kant (1724–1804). Scarcely moving far beyond his home city of Königsberg, Kant announced in a famous essay of 1784, 'What Is Enlightenment?' the most far-reaching aim, 'Dare to Know!'. Enlightenment thus would mark a new epoch, as mankind moved beyond earlier immaturity and dependence to self-reliant thought and action. Linked to this imperative was his moral philosophical teaching of the categorical imperative: the necessity of acting as if each action is to become a universally valid law. This emphasis on an internalized ethos of duty was perfectly natural in the Prussian context. The kingdom of Prussia had originally been forged together from many disparate ethnic elements, German, Slavic, and Baltic, and thus in particular needed the uniting ethos to take the place of *ethnos* as a means of cementing identity. Other values which were celebrated and took on special significance in the German version of the Enlightenment were the central ones of *Bildung* and *Kultur*. *Bildung* was an evocative term which literally meant 'forming' or 'shaping', and in a higher sense meant education and cultivation. Likewise, the term *Kultur* carried associations that ranged all the way from the cultivation of land to the cultivation of the spirit, and always retained an implication of the organic. These terms came ↪ together in a notion of Germany as a cultural community, to be reformed and ordered along rational principles which dovetailed with earlier traditions of cameralism.

p. 48

With time, the broader movement of the international Enlightenment also showed its capacity for an unfolding radicalism in the evolution of its ideas. A crucial milestone in this development was the arrival on the scene of the Swiss *philosophe* Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712–78) who criticized earlier apostles of the Enlightenment for neglecting feeling. In his 1754 work, *Discourse on the Origins of Inequality of Mankind*, he argued that in an earlier age, in the state of nature, people had enjoyed a natural happiness without property or the state. This idealized primitive, a 'noble savage', was the very embodiment of authenticity and naturalness. While one admittedly could not go back to the state of nature, Rousseau's *Social Contract* (1762) argued that an expression of the 'general will' in democratic government offered the best option. These thoughts corresponded to early stirrings of nationalist ideas, as both Kant and Rousseau declared the people to be sovereign and vested hopes for progress in their evolution.

Broadly, two political responses could follow from the Enlightenment: a revolutionary impulse or hopes for reform within the system, especially in the doctrine of Enlightened Absolutism. The American Revolution of 1776 commanded the attention of many Enlightenment thinkers, as it seemed to enact part of their own agenda in a 'new world', beginning creation anew upon a seeming clean slate for experiment. The French Revolution seemed to hold similar promise. The alternative, Enlightened Absolutism, proposed revolution from above, directed by a philosopher-monarch who would bring welfare to the people, acting as a 'servant of the state' and mobilizing the energies of his subjects who served him. Such ideas had left a deep imprint on Frederick the

Great, a prominent practitioner. In the German context, earlier philosophies of cameralism and an active state role in supervision of subjects and society (*Polizei*), made these proposals seem especially natural and congenial.

A decisive and durable contribution of the Enlightenment was in fact the very mental mapping of Europe itself. This result was of lasting significance and continues to shape our thinking about the constituent parts of European civilization to the present day. In his crucial study, *Inventing Eastern Europe: The Map of Civilization on the Mind of the Enlightenment*, Larry Wolff shows how ‘the Enlightenment came to think of Europe as being divided into East and West’.<sup>4</sup> His argument asserts:

It was Western Europe that invented Eastern Europe as its complementary other half in the eighteenth century, the Age of the Enlightenment. It was also the Enlightenment, with its intellectual centers in Western Europe, that cultivated and appropriated to itself the new notion of ‘civilization’, an eighteenth-century neologism, and civilization discovered its complement, within the same continent, in shadowed lands of backwardness, even barbarism. Such was the invention of Eastern Europe. It has flourished as an idea of extraordinary potency since the eighteenth century.<sup>5</sup>

This was a fundamental innovation in imagined geographies, as during the Renaissance the decisive division was that between a mild and humanistic South and a brutal and uncouth North.<sup>6</sup> The Enlightenment engineered a new principle of division, a ‘conceptual reorientation of Europe’ which involved inventing Western and Eastern Europe in conjunction.<sup>7</sup> Eastern Europe was presented as at the same time outside and inside, ‘Europe but not Europe’.<sup>8</sup> Its nature was not the complete opposite of civilization, but an imperfectly developed attempt to achieve it.<sup>9</sup> Eastern Europe was seen as ‘essentially in between’, occupying a space between Europe and Asia.<sup>10</sup> The continued presence of the Turkish empire in Europe also played a role in the ways in which Eastern Europe was constructed, and meant that Eastern Europe would be seen as linked to the broader ‘Eastern Question’ of the vexed future of the Ottoman lands in Europe.<sup>11</sup> Travellers from Western Europe coming to Eastern Europe related in the travel literature so popular at the time impressions which served to characterize the region: a feeling of being transported back in time, encountering bad roads, common physical violence and beatings, slavery and despotism, forced labour and the knout, and distinctive medical disorders, such as particular skin diseases, especially *plica polonica*, a scalp infection.<sup>12</sup> Enlightenment writers, often not actually venturing out to observe the places they wrote about, elaborated a comprehensive imagining of Eastern Europe. In this vision, the essential feature of the region was ‘its suitability to receive culture—which could mean cultivation and could also suggest civilization’.<sup>13</sup> An internal logic was at work here, as the Enlightenment ‘from the beginning, needed another Europe against which to define its own sense of superior civilization’.<sup>14</sup> That status was seemingly ratified by the roles which Enlightenment thinkers not entirely modestly envisioned for themselves, as modernizers and advisers for the region or its rulers. Voltaire idealized Peter the Great and Catherine the Great for their civilizing influence. Rousseau by contrast championed the Poles and their programme for reforms. What these and many other various perceptions shared was the notion that in the ranking of civilization, Eastern Europe’s peoples were in a low position, but that Eastern Europe was a place where through outside advice and expert consultation one could ‘create a nation’.<sup>15</sup> In the ventures of ‘philosophic geography’ in the spirit of the Enlightenment, Wolff shows brilliantly how Eastern Europe was ‘constructed as an experimental domain’.<sup>16</sup>

Such perspectives also further informed the views of Enlightenment thinkers on the epochal partitions of Poland in the period from 1772 to 1795. The views were a spectrum of responses. While Voltaire cheered on the First Partition as a brilliant political stroke by the monarchs he courted, Rousseau had hailed Polish patriotism and its permanence. German writers, closer to the region, also showed a range of views. Among them were poets and novelists who celebrated the cause of Poland.<sup>17</sup> On the other end of the spectrum harsher judgements were to be heard.



Prominent among the critics was Georg Forster (1754–94), already a famous travel writer. With his father, he had accompanied Captain James Cook to the Pacific in 1772–5, and his narrative, *A Voyage around the World*, became enduringly popular. Forster had been born in Royal Prussia, under Polish rule. He had accepted an invitation by the Polish Commission on National Education which offered him a position at the University of Vilnius, in Lithuania, which he occupied from 1784 to 1787. Otherwise cosmopolitan in spirit, Forster was appalled by his new surroundings. He recalled his first impressions:

It was the dilapidation, the filthiness in the moral and physical sense, the half-wildness and half-civilization (*Halb-Kultur*) of the people, the sight of the sandy land everywhere covered with black woods, which went beyond any conceptions I could have formed. I wept in a lonely hour for myself—and then, as I gradually came to myself, for the so deeply sunken people.<sup>18</sup>

Poland seemed for him a ‘mishmash’ of barbarism and shoddy imitation of French manners. In a mixture of cursing and pity, Forster described the common people:

The actual people, I mean those millions of cattle in human form, who are here utterly excluded from all the privileges of mankind . . . is at present through long-habitual slavery totally sunken to a degree of bestiality and insensibility, of indescribable laziness and totally stupid ignorance, from which perhaps in a century it could not climb to the same level as other European rabbles.<sup>19</sup>

In denouncing the state of affairs he found, Forster popularized a term which he said was already common, ‘*polnische Wirtschaft*’, ‘Polish management’, synonymous with disorder, chaos, and disorganization.<sup>20</sup> Indeed, the term has had a long life, as it is still used in Germany today, to describe traffic jams or disorderly crowds.

p. 52 The scurrilous genre of ‘Polish jokes’ which endured ↳ in American culture certainly drew upon these stereotypes as a source. At the same time, while Forster did not ascribe these qualities to racial difference in the Poles, the supposed attribute clearly took on an ethnic coding.

In a similar spirit, a later important philosopher of the German Enlightenment and early German nationalist, Johann Gottlieb Fichte (1762–1814), journeyed to Poland in 1791, to take up a post as a tutor in Warsaw. He travelled on his way from Saxony through Silesia, which had already been Prussian for a half century. Already in Silesia, before even crossing over into Polish territory, Fichte recorded his displeasure with the Polish appearance of villages, the ‘less cultivated’ fields and ‘more Slavic’ people he saw, and the garbled dialect of German spoken here. His conclusion, while still in German territory, was: ‘God, what a difference!’<sup>21</sup> The actual crossing of the border made him shudder, and his impressions of Warsaw and Poland in general were negative, crowned by his losing his position as tutor. His negative impressions focused on his criticisms of endemic dirtiness, Polish Germans, and the numerous Jews of the towns.<sup>22</sup> Fichte returned to Germany and a celebrated philosophical career.

In reflecting on the Partitions, German thinkers combined earlier negative images of Poland with newer judgements. As Pickus notes, ‘From the late eighteenth to the mid-twentieth centuries, at least, mentioning Poland was a quick and direct way of signifying wild disorder and its consequences.’<sup>23</sup> Poland’s fate in the Partitions thus was presented as a cautionary tale, a lesson. Such writings cemented the ‘three-way association between Poland, excessive license, and self-induced grief.’<sup>24</sup> The Polish tragedy, whether gloated over or bewailed, was seen as the consequence of the Polish failure to act in line with bourgeois virtues celebrated by German Enlightenment writers. Poland functioned as ‘a mirror of what civil society was not’ and ‘could help them define what they wanted it to be.’<sup>25</sup> This was to be a tradition of long standing, issuing in such popular rhymes as ‘wo sich aufhört die Kultur, ↳ da beginnt sich der Masur’: ‘where culture ends, there Masuria begins’. With the Partitions, however, this alleged Polish disorder had now been brought inside the political boundaries of the German states.

In this period as well, a swift reaction also set in against aspects of the Enlightenment, a broad and often inchoate movement known as Romanticism. Romantics criticized what they saw as the aridities of the *philosophes'* rationalism and charged them with a neglect of the mysteries of tradition, emotion, and the human individual. They also emphasized unity with nature, contact with the spirit of the people, and the authenticity of irrationalism and direct experience. In the process, many Romantics also revalued or renarrated the past, celebrating the medieval period as one of faith and union. When linked with growing nationalism, the Romantic revisiting of history would often be a powerful mixture. Before the arrival of fully mature Romanticism, earlier German thinkers had already launched aspects of the critique that would coalesce into the Romantic challenge. A vital aspect of this earlier reaction involved growing resentment against the international dominance of French culture and language, especially identified with the Enlightenment. This criticism would shortly take on even more direct political significance, with the Napoleonic occupation of German lands, broadening into a nationalist surge.

A pivotal figure whose thought heralded Romanticism even as it grew out of many postulates of the Enlightenment was the East Prussian thinker and writer Johann Gottfried Herder (1744–1803). Although less familiar today, Herder was an important figure in the history of German culture, as a philosopher, literary critic, theologian, collector of folklore, and exponent of the 'Sturm und Drang' literary movement. Herder influenced Goethe, who met him in 1770. He also in great measure should be considered the father of multiculturalism, cultural relativism, and cultural nationalism in general. Paradoxically, this made him a nationalist, but an internationalist nationalist, in his central conviction that  $\hookrightarrow$  each people was endowed with a national mission which had to be brought to fruition.<sup>26</sup> Herder argued that all of humanity is one, but a varied mosaic. He insisted that the problem of being human had been solved in many different ways, with all cultures worthy, contributing to a providential evolution of humanity. Herder assigned special importance to *Bildung*, that key value of the German Enlightenment signifying education, formation, and cultivation of individuals and entire peoples. Each people needed to develop its own culture freely, to enrich mankind. Being true to your own culture was a way to love mankind. It followed from this that it was a crime to enslave or impose culture on others. Herder clearly was not without his Eurocentric prejudices typical of the age, but his special abhorrence of conquest was marked, all the more striking in a Prussian, whose state had been so strongly stamped by militarism.

Herder was of poor parentage, born in Mohrungen, East Prussia (now in Poland). He studied at the University of Königsberg from 1762, under Immanuel Kant, and with Johann Georg Hamann (a mystical critic of Enlightenment called the 'Magus of the North'). In November 1764, Herder accepted a pastoral position in the port city of Riga, in the province of Livonia, which was part of the Russian Empire. Riga, an autonomous German community sharing the Hanse traditions of the Baltic, was a centre of German culture on the rim of the expanding Russian state created by Peter the Great (who had captured Riga in 1710 from Sweden) and Catherine II the Great. Herder spent five years there as a teacher at the cathedral school while writing his literary and critical works, and gaining a growing reputation as a preacher. Aware of the surrounding non-German rural population, Herder studied Latvian and pursued an active interest in folklore.

All the same, ultimately frustrated by the narrow possibilities of the city and his position, Herder left this Baltic outpost on 3 June 1769, headed for France. While at sea, he penned the *Journal of my Journey in the Year 1769*. This proved to be not a journal of  $\hookrightarrow$  travels as such, but an intensely personal account, written by this young man of twenty-five. While it was only published in 1846, it is revealing how many of his later projects were anticipated in this memorandum to himself. The journal is a profuse outpouring of ideas for projects of world-historical significance to gain Herder eternal fame. Herder declared elsewhere that his particular interests were actually enormous in scope, including 'the formation of the nations, the epochs, laws, and governments of the century'.<sup>27</sup> His desire was to become a second Lysurgus, Solon, Luther, Zwingli, or Calvin. Among his projects were: to write a Universal History of the Education of the World, edit a Yearbook of Texts for Humanity, write a church history, research questions concerning the youth and premature ageing of human souls, write a modern



catechism, and produce detailed plans to create a model school in Riga. With these vast ambitions, it is no wonder that Herder was, in the finest Romantic fashion, doomed to ultimate disappointment and self-disgust. But the last of the ventures listed above is worth focusing on, as part of a larger vision of Russian empire, conceived of as a project for forming the culture of a nation, bringing it to perfection and plenitude.

Herder described the territory he left behind, Livonia, as ‘the province of barbarism and luxury . . . freedom and slavery’, but one that could be remade, with ‘barbarism destroyed, ignorance annihilated, culture and freedom spread’.<sup>28</sup> Its potential was vast. His own role, on a planned return to Riga, was to become the ‘Genius of Livonia’, to act as the foreigner who could intervene, destined ‘to a higher purpose—to form it [*es zu bilden*]!’.<sup>29</sup> This aim could be realized through the founding of a model school, which he referred to as the ‘Livonian patriotic school’ or ‘The Republic of Youth’.<sup>30</sup> This institution, in its unity of exalted purpose, would be nothing less than an academic utopia. Education would take place without rote learning, without lifeless abstractions, in the mother tongue. Its overall aim was to raise culture in the Russian Empire, literally to ‘create a province’.<sup>31</sup>

p. 56 For this goal, ↪ Herder hoped to gain the patronage of ‘our empress’, as he loyally called her, Catherine II the Great, who was herself German.<sup>32</sup> Herder revealed his self-taught patriotism for the Russian Empire, admiring Peter the Great as a great creator, who had forged an empire and furthered the great project, still enduring to Herder’s own day, of bringing the ‘culture of a nation to perfection’.<sup>33</sup> This stood in bold contrast to militarist Prussia and the detested Frederick the Great, and Germans feeling inferior to the over-civilized French. Herder felt confident in assigning such a great task to education, because he avowed that it was precisely education that was ‘so needed and useful in our time, when the spirit of war and religion has ended, and nothing but the spirit of commerce, finance, and education (*Bildung*) reigns’.<sup>34</sup> In this vision, Herder’s hopes for the entire region were great. If the project could be realized, he rhapsodized, then

What a perspective for the regions of the West-North, if the spirit of culture will visit them! Ukraine will become a new Greece—the beautiful skies of these people, their humorous character, their musical nature, their fertile land, etc., will one day awake. From the many small wild peoples, just as the Greeks were before, will come a mannered (*gesittete*) nation. Its borders will stretch to the Black Sea and from there throughout the world. Hungary, these nations and a strip of Poland and Russia will partake of this new culture. From the northwest this spirit will move over Europe, which lies in sleep . . .<sup>35</sup>

Herder’s vision of a future Renaissance was tied to his own conception of a cultural mission in these regions, to be discharged by himself, as a pioneer of education.

p. 57 As it happened, Herder never returned to realize these plans in Riga. Instead, after his French sojourn, Herder was employed in Germany in Bückeburg as a court preacher and later in court positions at Weimar. Yet Herder’s prophetic plans were later to be transcended, as he produced an even larger impact on the intellectual history of Central and Eastern Europe. In 1778, Herder published his collection of folksongs, the *Voices of the Peoples*, in ↪ which the folkloric productions of different nations were presented in parallel, emphasizing their diversity and equality. In a grand but ultimately unfinished work, *Reflections on the Philosophy of the History of Mankind* (published 1784–91), Herder presented the worldview that had animated his earlier thought. He argued that the value of culture, *Kultur*, was so important that it made a people, a *Volk*. Beyond a shared universal value of reason, culture expressed something intrinsic to each people itself, contributing to the whole. In his historical overview, Herder presented a mixed and often highly critical view of the Germanic peoples themselves:

We come to the family of peoples which—through its size and bodily strength, through its venturesome, bold, and enduring war-spirit, through its devoted spirit of heroism (to follow leaders wherever they lead in armies and to divide the conquered lands as booty among themselves), and consequently through its wide conquests and the constitution which was established everywhere after the German character—has contributed more than all other peoples to the prosperity and suffering of this part of the world.<sup>36</sup>

The positive aspects of this role had expressed themselves in crucial historical epochs:

When the German peoples accepted Christianity, they fought for it, as for their kings and their nobles. It is to their honor that they stood fast against the later invading barbarians as a living wall, against which the wild fury of the Huns, Magyars, Mongols, and Turks shattered. Thus it is they who not only conquered the largest part of Europe, planted, and arranged it according to their ways, but also protected and sheltered it. Otherwise there could not have arisen in it what did arise. Their standing among the other peoples, their war unions and tribal character thus became the foundations of the culture, freedom, and security of Europe.<sup>37</sup>

Herder here used a theme which already had a significant older history, and would recur repeatedly in thinking about the East, the notion of a 'living wall' against the East, which functioned 'as a protective fortification and bastion of Christianity for the freedom and security of all Europe'.<sup>38</sup>

p. 58 As Herder continued with his overview of the peoples of Europe, he delivered a message that was especially electrifying in its effects on Eastern Europe, among generations of intellectuals yet unborn. This was the so-called 'Slav chapter', which depicted a unitary Slavic family of peoples, above any particular divisions. The chapter condemned acts of violence against the Slavs, who were depicted as intrinsically peaceful and wronged. The narrative culminated in the promise of a Slavic future. From the time of Charlemagne,

In whole provinces the Slavs were wiped out or made serfs and their lands were distributed among bishops and nobles. The people became unfortunate because due to its love of tranquility and domestic industriousness it could not give itself lasting military organization, even though it never lacked for bravery in heated resistance. However, the wheel of change turns inexorably, and since these nations to the greatest extent inhabit the most beautiful portion of Europe, if it were entirely built up and opened to trade—since it is also unimaginable that in Europe legislation and politics rather than military spirit will not encourage quiet industry and the peaceful interaction of peoples amongst themselves, so you too, the deeply sunken, once industrious and happy peoples, refreshed at last from your long and inert sleep, will be freed from your slaves' chains, use as [your own] property your beautiful areas from the Adriatic Sea to the Carpathian Mountains, from the Don River to the Moldau, and again be allowed to celebrate there your old feasts of peaceful industriousness and trade.<sup>39</sup>

These predictions of a future peace, published in 1791, were mocked both by the recent First Partition of Poland, and by the two partitions that were to follow.

p. 59 Other German thinkers in his tradition followed Herder's impulses, and this also affected their understanding of historical episodes in the relationship with Eastern Europe. For instance, during the Enlightenment, the views of the Teutonic Order had often been markedly negative, in part because of the religious nature of the Order. These accounts included histories of Prussia, in which ↵ the conquests of the Baltic lands were compared to the destructive record of European colonialism in the Americas.<sup>40</sup>

These visions were to have an enormous effect on Slavic self-understanding, in a 'quirk of history'.<sup>41</sup> Intellectuals from the different peoples eagerly took up Herder's concepts and his valuation of their own past and future prospects.<sup>42</sup> Herder's influence can be traced in particular Eastern European historians and writers, including Poland's Adam Mickiewicz and Joachim Lelewel and the Czech Frantisek Palacky.<sup>43</sup> His influence on the evolving nationalist projects of Eastern Europe was such that one scholar surmises that his influence may eventually be seen as greater in the long run than that of Karl Marx.<sup>44</sup> Besides providing a German template for East European nationalism, Herder's thought also framed an understanding of Germanic and Slavic peoples as larger units, confronting one another in the East, so that it became convenient to think in terms of categories like 'Slavdom' and 'Germandom'.<sup>45</sup>

As Herder's ideas spread around 1800, they were not received without dissent and contest. This very fact serves to underline the multiplicity of simultaneous views of Eastern Europe circulating in Germany from this first stage of a modern myth of the East. The dissenting voices included key figures of German intellectual history, such as Immanuel Kant and Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (1770–1831), who both dismissed Eastern Europe in their writings.<sup>46</sup> This period also saw a re-evaluation of the Teutonic Order's image in some quarters, away from a negative image in the Enlightenment. Some factors in this shift included 'changing perceptions of Poland, the reduction of Herderian interest in nations as such to a growing belief in the unique mission of the German Volk and, finally, the diffusion of a Romantic and paradoxically less anachronistic understanding of the Middle Ages'.<sup>47</sup> The history of Prussia published 1801–5 by Johann Friedrich Reitemeier also introduced other themes, claiming that the Wends had been of 'oriental character' and endowed with uncleanness. He is judged to be the first historian who 'saw in the "medieval German eastern settlement" a unitary process', comparable to North American settlement in his own day.<sup>48</sup> He concluded that in a centuries-long conflict between Slavs and Germans in the region, superior culture had given ultimate victory to the Germans. Since Germans had brought authentic culture to the region, this justified their title to possession. Here was a significant expression of the theory of Germans as *Kulturträger* or 'carriers of culture' to Eastern Europe.<sup>49</sup>

Another prominent example of dissenting voices was that of August Wilhelm Schlegel (1767–1845). August Schlegel, together with his brother Friedrich, was one of the early prime movers of the German Romantic movement and founder of its main journal, *Athenaeum*. Later in life he became a professor at Bonn University and a key figure in Orientalist scholarship in Germany. In 1803, Schlegel gave a series of lectures in Berlin. In these lectures, Schlegel denounced Herder's *Reflections on the Philosophy of the History of Mankind*. In contrast to Herder's positive valuation of the Slavs, Schlegel avowed that the attempts of Slavs to create states without outside influence or help had mostly been failures. Contrasting these cases with the example of Russia as a Slavic state ruled by Germanic Norsemen, he noted that, 'however, an unmixed Slavic nation hardly can become anything very worthwhile'. This was due to the fact, he observed, that 'the Slavs everywhere and under all circumstances are destined to slavery (a word which derives from them, without a doubt)'. In Poland, this had led both to harsh serfdom and to 'the wildest, uncontrolled democratism of the numerous nobles', a chaotic situation which led to the fact that 'the topsy-turvy nature (*Verkehrtheit*) of the Polish constitution and the disorder of its parliament had to become proverbial'.<sup>50</sup> Turning to contemporary events, Schlegel observed that Poland's disappearance in the partitions was not surprising, as 'the nation had thus really no stability in itself' and now, 'After the loss of political independence and unity, of course, one cannot hope any longer that anything meaningful would evolve out of the Polish language or nationality, but also one should not assume that it will quickly vanish'.<sup>51</sup> Schlegel was sceptical whether Poles would ever adjust to 'north German culture and government' and worried that the Prussian acquisition of lands earlier so badly managed and with a 'deeply rooted habit of disorder (*Unordnung*)' would not lead to these new territories being fundamentally remade, but to the damaging influence of Polish culture being spread to the German lands. Both the Poles and Russians, he observed, had an 'aversion to German culture' as well as a great attachment to French culture. The Russian Empire, which Schlegel saw as nursing ambitions for universal monarchy as a result of its great and growing power, seemed to him a proof of the hypothesis that 'a Slavic nation needs foreign infusions into the whole mass, even if these are at first disturbing and destructive', as the Germanic Norsemen had shaped the genesis of the Russian statehood. In general, 'one must admit that there are underage nations, which cannot lift themselves up by their own strength.' While the Poles appeared to be 'incapable of discipline for any firm ordering of things', the Russians at least were shaped by a useful despotism which 'led them by a completely different path to culture'. Russia 'remained up to the most recent times actually Asiatic', until Peter the Great transformed that realm, following the example of the bourgeois Dutch Republic. Finally, Schlegel surveyed the present prospect of the 'huge Russian monarchy', which had 'in the West pressed forward (*vorgedrungen*) to the German core of Europe'. But he remained sceptical that Russia could spread the 'benefits of policing and culture' to other parts of the world, as it had 'in its formation (*Bildung*) nothing of its own', but only imported culture from Europe. Perhaps the Baltic Germans might spread the 'German character of moderation and legality'. But in the final analysis, Russians were

p. 62

very useful tools of despotism without a doubt, as a people which over centuries has become used to it, without a spirit of originality, but with a talent to appropriate all arts. Even the famed bravery of the Russians ↵ is among the common man only a slave's virtue. Siberia can readily be ceded to them—such a part of the world has little that can be ruined.<sup>52</sup>

Just around the turn of the century, other early Romantics also continued to wrestle with fundamental questions of what German identity was, and one answer some advanced was that in their European context, Germans had a special calling. Friedrich von Hardenberg (1772–1801), known as Novalis, also crafted a statement of the German mission. This was the essay 'Christendom or Europe' (*Die Christenheit oder Europa*), written in late 1799, circulated among friends, and only published later in 1826. It drew on Herder, among others.<sup>53</sup> The essay aimed to present a full historical overview of European history, beginning with an alleged golden age of 'beautiful, brilliant times, when Europe was a Christian land, when one Christendom occupied this humanly formed part of the world'.<sup>54</sup> This idealized medieval period was wrecked by the Reformation and then superseded by an age of Enlightenment ideas and reason, which now awaited in turn, in this dialectical process, a process of spiritual renewal. This renewal, according to Novalis, was to take place throughout Europe in general, but

in Germany, however, one can already detect with complete certainty the traces of a new world. Slowly but surely, Germany is advancing ahead of the other European lands. While they are occupied with war, speculation, and partisanship, the German is forming himself (*bildet sich*) with all diligence into a companion of a higher epoch of culture, and this head start must give him in the course of time a great preponderance over the others.<sup>55</sup>

He closed with an anticipation of a future permanent peace and harmony. The critic Adam Müller continued this line of thought by praising Germany as the 'fortunate land of the center (*Mittelland*)'. August Schlegel also concluded in another set of lectures in 1802–3 that 'if the Orient is the region from which the regeneration of humankind originates, then we should view Germany as the Orient of Europe'.<sup>56</sup>

p. 63

Epochal events soon broke in, with considerable violence, on such lyrical musings on Germany's place in a changing world, as Napoleon Bonaparte and his French armies moved on Germany and occupied it. The message of the French Revolution had often found enthusiastic reception in Germany, even as qualms arose about its excesses. By contrast, the French invasion and occupation sparked a reaction that would feed a growing German nationalism.

Austria and Prussia had been distracted by the partitions of Poland from important developments on the Rhine, where French revolutionary armies inflicted defeats on their forces. At the Peace of Luneville in February 1801, France's borders were advanced to the Rhine and Napoleon prepared to reorder the German lands. With the collusion of larger German states, many principalities and imperial cities were abolished. Napoleon crowned himself emperor of the French in 1804. When Austria joined a coalition against Napoleon with Britain and Russia, it was decisively beaten at Austerlitz and in December 1805 signed the Peace of Pressburg, reducing its realm. Napoleon created a bloc of German states aligned with France called the Confederation of the Rhine. As a consequence, the Holy Roman Empire was dissolved in August 1806, ending an existence of many centuries. In a masterpiece of bad timing, after the Austrian defeat, Prussia declared war on Napoleon in October 1806 and was swiftly smashed in the twin battles of Jena and Auerstädt. Napoleon paraded in occupied Berlin, while the Prussian king fled to East Prussia. There, Russia and France signed the Treaty of Tilsit in July 1807. Prussia's very existence had been in question at the negotiations, and what survived was significantly weaker: stripped of half its territories (many given to a future Polish state under Napoleon's patronage, while those west of the Elbe River fell to France), occupied, forced to pay reparations, and with a reduced army. Truncated Prussia became an unwilling ally of Napoleon in the years to come. A generation of talented statesmen in Prussia sought to use the chance to reform within and repair the many inadequacies ↵ revealed by defeat. Ill-advisedly, Austria now in turn tried to take on Napoleon in a renewed war in 1809, but

p. 64

again was defeated at Wagram and Vienna captured. The Treaty of Schönbrunn ratified more losses of territory in October 1809.

Napoleon dragged his German allies into the war with Russia which he launched in 1812, over breaches in the economic blockade against Britain which Napoleon had decreed.

Napoleon's Grande Armée which invaded Russia was only half French, the rest being made up of German auxiliaries, Poles, Dutch, and others. In this context, it is fascinating to record the account of an ordinary recruit from Württemberg, Jakob Walter, who offers the perspective of a simple German soldier experiencing the campaign, which soon was overtaken by disaster. When he was drafted into the army as a nineteen-year-old, Walter's regiment had been involved in the war against Prussia on the French side. He recorded his impressions of Brandenburg, around Berlin, which to a great extent struck him and his comrades as quite different from their home to the west. Walter remarked on the poverty of its people and sandy soil, and their 'lack of culture, especially of physical training, of willingness to work, of understanding and religion. Seldom does anyone go to church.'<sup>57</sup> Notwithstanding the fact that Walter was still in German lands to the east, not in foreign territory, the theme of lack of culture was echoed here. In the campaign of 1812, Walter crossed over into Polish territory, noting that this was 'where the use of the German language stopped, and the manners and culture made a strange impression'.<sup>58</sup> He also remarked on clouds of bugs 'so very thick that they darkened the atmosphere, and everyone was busy shaking them out of his face and hair'.<sup>59</sup> Once advancing into the depths of Russia, Walter's account turns horrific. From Smolensk, Russia itself appeared devastated, as 'everything looked like the complete ruin of all that lived . . . In such numbers were the Russians lying around that it seemed as if they were all dead'.<sup>60</sup> Walter called it a 'kingdom of the dead'.<sup>61</sup> Moscow, once reached, seemed 'more civilized than the regions . . . through which we had come', but this impression was not to last, as the invasion stalled and became a miserable retreat through winter rigours, marked by freezing, hunger, and cannibalism.<sup>62</sup> The troops were harassed by the feared Russian cavalry forces, the Cossacks. The retreat is described by Walter as 'like a world turned upside down'.<sup>63</sup> In the chaos, identities seemed in flux. As the troops retreated through Vilnius in Lithuania, Walter said that the army 'more nearly resembled a troop of beggar Jews than one of soldiers'.<sup>64</sup> The army disaggregated into different groups, with Walter reporting that the Russians would kill French soldiers, but would pardon German prisoners because their Empress was of the house of Baden.<sup>65</sup> In the competition for survival, countrymen from Württemberg stuck together, and 'Every time in bivouac the Germans joined together'.<sup>66</sup> But loyalties could still be usefully flexible, as Walter gained help from a Pole when in answer to what his nationality was he 'told him everything, that I was a Catholic and that the late sovereign of my country had been a prince of the King of Poland'.<sup>67</sup> The final episode of identities in flux involved the return of the veterans of the campaign to German lands, struggling back from the disaster. Physically, Walter observed, he resembled a 'heavily bearded Russian peasant', and his skin was encrusted with cracks and black scales that could not be washed off. An official he reported to called him 'one of those Moscow bums' and 'that was the welcome at my return'.<sup>68</sup> In spite of this hostile reception, he enjoyed reaching Leipzig, 'in which region German life began again, and because of decent eating and warm rooms my strength increased somewhat'.<sup>69</sup> At his arrival in his hometown, Walter appeared in a dirty Russian coat and covered in lice, so that he felt he had to wash first, as 'Only then was I fit for clean company'. Returned soldiers, he reported, were quarantined together so that they would not spread disease, 'for everywhere in Württemberg we were shunned like lepers'. In a final transposition of identity, these German soldiers were called 'Russians' on their return.<sup>70</sup>

Napoleon's retreat from Russia also gave the signal for a wider German reaction against French domination. German states rose in revolt against the French in 1813, and the upheaval was later powerfully mythologized into a 'War of Liberation'.<sup>71</sup> In fact, the event did not see a monolithic nationalist reaction across all classes in Germany, but was a mixture of old dynastic politics and new nationalist urges. On 30 December 1812 at Tauroggen in East Prussia, the Prussian General Yorck von Wartenburg, on his own initiative, signed a Convention with his Russian opponent, General Diebitsch (of German origins himself), which enabled Prussia to leave the war. Although Yorck's 'patriotic treason' or 'loyal revolt' had not been authorized by the King of



Prussia, it took on a life of its own, and on 27 February 1813, Prussia and Russia signed the Treaty of Kalisch and began to coordinate the effort to drive back Napoleon.

This Prussian act of changing sides and spearheading the attempt to expel the French had in fact been prepared over the last years in a movement for internal Prussian revival and reform, learning the painful lessons of defeat at the hands of the French revolutionary armies. The Prussian reforming bureaucrats included first ministers Baron Karl vom und zum Stein and Karl August Count Hardenberg, Wilhelm von Humboldt, and Gerhard von Scharnhorst. Their reforms extended to the abolition of serfdom, urban self-administration, educational restructuring, and army reforms. What united these efforts was a determination to match the formula for success of the French Revolution: the mobilization of a society, but from above rather than from below. In Berlin, the philosopher Johann Gottlieb Fichte (discussed above) gave lectures in 1807 entitled 'Addresses to the German Nation', calling for a popular commitment to nationalism. When the revolt came, the 'Spirit of 1813' had been prepared ahead of time. King Friedrich Wilhelm III proclaimed an appeal in March 1813, addressed 'To My People', as Prussians and Germans, to rally to the cause. After Austria joined the alliance against Napoleon, the coalition defeated him in October 1813 at the four-day 'Battle of the Nations' at Leipzig. The allies pursued Napoleon and occupied Paris, and the former emperor went into exile. After his sudden return to France, he was finally defeated at the battle of Waterloo in June 1815.

The expulsion of the French and the calls for national mobilization which had been raised gave an impetus to German nationalism, which was however mainly to be found among the educated middle classes. Volunteers who had rushed to the national cause hoped that their efforts would now be crowned by the establishment of a German nation-state, but they experienced keen disappointment as the peace settlement was established on quite different guiding principles.

The future of the European map, and in particular the German lands, was to be settled at a grand peace conference. This was the sparkling Congress of Vienna, held from September 1814 to June 1815. The guiding spirit of the international gathering was the Austrian Foreign Minister Klemens Count von Metternich (1773–1859), nicknamed the 'Coachman of Europe'. To the disappointment of romantic nationalists and liberals, he engineered a conservative new order for Europe intended to shore up its older foundations, committed to the ideals of legitimacy, elite cooperation and solidarity, suppression of revolutionary nationalism, and maintaining a balance of power. Quite deliberately, Metternich and his colleagues sought to disregard ethnic questions, as nationalism's energies posed an existential threat to the elite order they sought to cement.

With a wilful neglect of national questions, the map was redrawn and territories assigned to the victorious powers. To hem in a future revival of the French threat, Prussia was strengthened with western lands along the Rhine, and also gained parts of Saxony and recovered many, but not all, of its formerly Polish territories (its gains from the first partition). Poland itself was not re-established, but a so-called Congress Poland was set up under the Russian tsar as 'protector', and included areas which Prussia had seized in the second and third partitions, now under Russian rule. In the closing act of the Congress of Vienna, the rulers of Polish territories affirmed that 'The Poles, subjects of Russia, Austria, and Prussia, will receive national representation and national institutions.'<sup>72</sup> Such assurances did not satisfy Polish patriots hoping for full independence. After 1815, the 'goal of the Prussian policy towards the Polish subjects was to win them for the Prussian state.'<sup>73</sup> Prussia's population included more than 800,000 Poles, constituting some 15 per cent of the population.<sup>74</sup> As Prussia reoccupied Posen, or the Grand Duchy of Posen, as it was now called, with its large Polish population, the Prussian king Friedrich Wilhelm III assured the Poles that they would not be forced to change their nationality.<sup>75</sup> While the Prussian administration respected this promise in the next years, significant frictions would shortly emerge.

The hopes of German nationalists aspiring to a foundation of a German state were likewise disappointed. The Congress of Vienna saw the establishment of the German Confederation (*Deutscher Bund*), which became a loose association eventually numbering thirty-nine German states. In the German Confederation, Austria

predominated and its 'interest lay in maintaining Germany as a block against French power; keeping her divided so as not to increase the power of Prussia, and keeping her reactionary as a bulwark against the revolutionary impulse'.<sup>76</sup> A feature of the Confederation which carried over from the defunct Holy Roman Empire was the continuing dualism between the two strongest rival German states, Austria and Prussia, and the fact that many of their eastern lands lay outside the bounds of the Confederation. Both Austria and Prussia also contained significant Slavic populations. For Metternich, there had been every reason not to establish a unified German state, as this would only encourage other nationalisms in the region, a fatal threat to the Austrian Empire with its population of 10 million divided into a dozen major ethnic groups.

p. 69 Another expression of the shared interests of the eastern courts of Austria, Prussia, and Russia grew out of the Vienna settlement. This was the Holy Alliance, signed on 26 September 1815, at the proposal of the volatile and mystically inclined Russian tsar Alexander I (r. 1801–25), whose visionary side had been fostered by a Baltic German baroness similarly disposed.<sup>77</sup> The tsar's proposal envisioned a personal agreement of the monarchs of Europe to constitute a nation founded on Christianity and monarchism. Declined by Great Britain, the treaty was signed by its core members of Austria, Prussia, and Russia. Metternich, although sceptical of the practical effects of the agreement, saw it as a way of binding Russia to the preservation of the status quo. Metternich worked to establish Austria as a partner of Russia in order to restrain this large power, for which he had healthy respect. Metternich once quipped that as far as he was concerned, Asia started on the Rennweg, a street heading eastwards from the centre of Vienna.<sup>78</sup> Austria would have to play the difficult but necessary role of maintaining the balance of power between Eastern and Western Europe, although she was weaker than Russia or Britain.

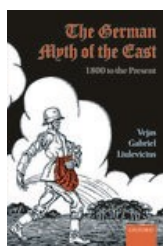
p. 70 The first two decades of the nineteenth century had posed key questions and introduced central themes that would form an important part of the German myth of the East, which was articulated fully around the middle of the nineteenth century. Important thinkers of the European Enlightenment had postulated Eastern Europe as the counterpoint to the progress of Western Europe towards reason and reform. In the German lands, because of their central location, this broader European 'philosophical geography' took on a specific regional character. German thinkers adopted a position that was opposed both to Eastern Europe and to the dominant cultural power of France, and asserted that the Germans had a national mission of their own, which was represented by the culture that was seen as defining German national identity at this stage. A key figure here was Herder, who united in his writings both a striking measure of sympathy and understanding for the non-German peoples of Eastern Europe, and the conviction of a cultural mission in the East. The element he put into play was the notion of larger ethnic units, the unified 'Volk', as carriers of national language and authenticity, each with its own calling. By a perverse concatenation of circumstances, the Nazis would later hail Herder as 'the first prophet of the idea of folkdom in German intellectual history', while ignoring his injunctions against force and conquest at every turn.<sup>79</sup>

## Notes

1. Holger Herwig, *Hammer or Anvil? Modern Germany 1648–Present* (Lexington, MA: D. C. Heath and Company, 1994), 2, 13.
2. Ibid. 7–8.
3. Ibid. 17.
4. Wolff, *Inventing*, p. vii.
5. Ibid. 4.
6. Hans Lemberg, 'Zur Entstehung des Osteuropabegriffs im 19. Jahrhundert. Vom "Norden" zum "Osten" Europas', *Jahrbuch zur Geschichte Osteuropas*, 33 (1985), 48–91.
7. Wolff, *Inventing*, 5.
8. Ibid. 7.
9. Ibid. 13.
10. Ibid. 13, 112.

11. Ibid. 165.
12. Ibid. 30.
13. Ibid. 116.
14. Ibid. 165.
15. Ibid. 270.
16. Ibid. 359.
17. Ibid. 340-1.
18. Ibid. 337.
19. Ibid. 338.
20. Hubert Orłowski, 'Polnische Wirtschaft'. *Zum deutschen Polendiskurs der Neuzeit* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 1996).
21. Wolff, *Inventing*, 333.
22. Ibid. 335.
23. David Pickus, 'German Writers, Power and Collapse: The Emergence of *Polenliteratur* in Eighteenth-Century Germany', in Charles W. Ingrao and Franz A. J. Szabo (eds.), *The Germans and the East* (West Lafayette, IN: Purdue, 2008), 78.
24. Ibid. 78.
25. Ibid. 87.
26. Helen Liebel-Weckowicz, 'Nations and Peoples: Baltic-Russian History and the Development of Herder's Theory of Culture', *Canadian Journal of History/Annales Canadiennes d'Histoire*, 21 (April 1986), 2.
27. Johann Gottfried Herder, *Journal meiner Reise* (Krefeld: Scherpe-Verlag, 1949), 144.
28. Ibid. 23.
29. Ibid. 24.
30. Ibid. 62.
31. Ibid. 32.
32. Ibid. 32.
33. Ibid. 16.
34. Ibid. 44.
35. Ibid. 63.
36. Johann Gottfried Herder, *Ausgewählte Werke*, ed. Heinrich Kurz, 4 vols. (Hildburghausen: Verlag des Bibliographischen Instituts, 1871), iii. 545.
37. Ibid. 549.
38. Ibid. 631.
39. Ibid. 550-2.
40. Wippermann, *Drang*, 23-4, 135.
41. Johnson, *Central Europe*, 132.
42. Konrad Bittner, *Herders Geschichtsphilosophie und die Slawen* (Reichenberg: Gebrüder Stiepel, 1929).
43. Wippermann, *Drang*, 25, 47.
44. H. Barry Nisbet, 'Herder's Conception of Nationhood and its Influence in Eastern Europe', in Roger Bartlett and Karen Schönwälder (eds.), *The German Lands and Eastern Europe: Essays on the History of their Social, Cultural and Political Relations* (London: Macmillan Press, 1999), 115.
45. Wippermann, *Drang*, 29, 135.
46. Wolff, *Inventing*, 314.
47. Michael Burleigh, 'The Knights, Nationalists and the Historians: Images of Medieval Prussia from the Enlightenment to 1945', *European History Quarterly*, 17 (1987), 38.
48. Wippermann, *Drang*, 27.
49. Wippermann, *Drang*, 135.
50. Josef Körner, 'Die Slaven im Urteil der deutschen Frühromantik', *Historische Vierteljahrschrift*, 31 (1936-7), 569.
51. Ibid. 570.
52. Ibid. 570-6.
53. Novalis (Friedrich von Hardenberg), *Fragmente und Studien/Die Christenheit oder Europa*, ed. Carl Paschek (Stuttgart: Philip Reclam jun., 1996), 148.
54. Ibid. 67.
55. Ibid. 81-2.
56. Kontje, *German Orientalisms*, 90.
57. Jakob Walter, *The Diary of a Napoleonic Footsoldier* (New York: Penguin, 1993), 17-18.
58. Ibid. 37.
59. Ibid. 37.

60. Ibid. 52-3.
61. Ibid. 54.
62. Ibid. 57.
63. Ibid. 71.
64. Ibid. 89.
65. Ibid. 74.
66. Ibid. 76.
67. Ibid. 99.
68. Ibid. 102.
69. Ibid. 105.
70. Ibid. 108-11.
71. Harold James, *A German Identity 1770-1990* (New York: Routledge, 1989), 36.
72. Frank Grube and Gerhard Richter, *Flucht und Vertreibung. Deutschland zwischen 1944 und 1947* (Hamburg: Hoffmann und Campe, 1980), 12.
73. Geiss, *Grenzstreifen*, 15.
74. Deborah Dwork and Robert Jan Van Pelt, *Auschwitz, 1270 to the Present* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1996), 48; Broszat, *Zweihundert Jahre deutsche Polenpolitik*, 85.
75. H. W. Koch, *A History of Prussia* (Longman: London, 1978), 220.
76. James, *German Identity*, 37.
77. Harold Nicolson, *The Congress of Vienna: A Study in Allied Unity, 1812-1822* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1946), 248.
78. Victor Mamatey, *Rise of the Habsburg Empire, 1526-1815* (Huntington, NY: Robert E. Krieger Publishing Company, 1978), 158.
79. Erich Mindt and Wilhelm Hansen, *Was weisst Du vom Deutschen Osten? Geschichte und Kultur des Deutschen Ostraumes* (Berlin: Verlagsgemeinschaft Ebner & Ebner, 1942), 109.



## The German Myth of the East: 1800 to the Present

Vejas Gabriel Liulevicius

<https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199546312.001.0001>

Published: 27 August 2009

Online ISBN: 9780191720338

Print ISBN: 9780199546312

Search in this book

### CHAPTER

## 2 Older Legacies Before 1800

Vejas Gabriel Liulevicius

<https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199546312.003.0002> Pages 12–43

Published: August 2009

### Abstract

This chapter surveys the important preexisting and premodern history of German relations with Eastern Europe before the advent of nationalism. It deconstructs later nationalist mythologies of an elemental ‘German Drive to the East’ [*Drang nach Osten*], while laying bare the authentic, pre-national realities obscured by that term: large scale migrations in antiquity of both Germanic and Slavic groups, the medieval ‘east settlement’ of Germans in Eastern European kingdoms, the movement of Jewish populations to Eastern Europe, Hanse trade networks and the Baltic crusade of the Teutonic Knights, and the emergence of the states of Prussia and Austria, along with early manifestations of German nationalism. The chapter concludes with an analysis of a crucial watershed in thinking about the East: the partitions of Poland.

**Keywords:** [Austria](#), [Hanse trade networks](#), [medieval](#), [Baltic crusade](#), [nationalism](#), [Poland](#), [Prussia](#)

**Subject:** [European History](#), [Political History](#), [Russian and Slavic History](#), [Modern History \(1700 to 1945\)](#), [Intellectual History](#)

**Collection:** [Oxford Scholarship Online](#)

The German encounter with Eastern Europe predated by centuries the mythologizing of that relationship around 1800, and thus it is worth examining in brief the raw materials out of which the later legends were constructed by German nationalists. The ultimate outcome of this reworking of the past would be the claim that there was a primordial German *Drang nach Osten*, a drive to the East, which allegedly had run its course from the prehistory to the modern age in varied forms. The term first became popular in the 1860s and was taken up by both German nationalists and Slavic nationalists, even as each group put the notion to different uses, celebrating or condemning the alleged phenomenon.<sup>1</sup> In fact, the reality had been quite different.

In the beginning, there was no Germany, and indeed no Europe as yet. In the truest sense, the narrative goes all the way back to the birth of Europe itself as a historical unit, with the transformation of the classical legacy of the Roman Empire. The Roman Empire encountered a succession of migrating peoples. Wandering down from northern Europe and the Baltic coasts came various Germanic groups, and as they moved further southward



through central Europe, they soon pressed against the borders of the Roman Empire, at the Rhine and the Danube rivers. The potency of these barbarians was demonstrated in AD 9 when the Germanic

tribesmen destroyed three Roman legions at the battle of the Teutoburger Forest. What emerged from these clashes, however, was a complex relationship marked by warfare as well as alliance and imperial service. Around AD 150–200, the Roman Empire was at the height of its territorial extent, but soon confronted larger Germanic movements from 166, a phenomenon that endured over the next three centuries. In the course of the 200s, larger political confederations of the Germanic-speaking groups began to emerge. These included the Goths on the Danube, Franks, Allemanni (Swabians) along the Rhine, Saxons, Chatti, Frisians, Thuringians, and Burgundians. Further east, the attack of the nomadic Huns set neighbouring peoples in motion, in a chain reaction that reached Rome. From 370, the Huns destroyed the empire of the Goths on the Black Sea. Germanic peoples moved onto Roman territory, seeking to put distance between themselves and the Huns moving in from the east. The Visigoths crossed the Danube in 376. As the Huns continued their sweeping onslaught into Europe, especially under King Attila (406–53), other Germanic groups followed. Different groups traversed Roman territory, as the Visigoths wandered to Spain, the Vandals to North Africa, and the Ostrogoths to Italy. The Roman state, after initial clashes with these refugees, sought to make accommodations with the emerging ‘supergroups’ of federated Germanic tribes, or to manipulate them by playing them off against each other. With the death of Attila in 453, the Hun threat receded, but a new political reality had emerged. Within the body of the Roman Empire, Germanic kingdoms were established—Visigothic, Frankish, Burgundian, and Vandal. As central imperial authority weakened, that of the Germanic kingdoms grew, and produced a cultural fusion of political traditions. The western Roman Empire was finally extinguished in 476 when a Germanic leader deposed the last emperor in Rome.



**Map 1.** Medieval German settlement.

The movements of peoples continued, with the Avars, a nomadic Central Asian people moving into Europe in the 550s, and the Bulgars appearing in the 670s and assimilating with the Slavic peoples spread throughout the region. The Slavs had moved into Central Europe from the fifth to the seventh centuries. Their place of origin is the object of a long-standing scholarly debate, but is often described as being around the Pripyet Marshes, near where present-day Poland, Ukraine, and Belarus converge. Their movements were conditioned by the physical geography of Central and Eastern Europe, which can be divided into three larger elements. To the south-east, the Balkan peninsula and its craggy landscapes form one area. In the centre lies the larger

region of the Danubian basin, a large plain of fertile soil stretching from the Bohemian plateau to the west to the great arc of the Carpathian Mountains and the Transylvanian plateau to the east. To the north lies the third region, a vast and open geographic feature called the Great Northern European Plain, the extension of a great expanse stretching beyond to Eurasia. It is a largely flat expanse without natural frontiers or boundaries beyond the Baltic Sea to the north and the Carpathian Mountains to the south. Such unboundedness has made it an ideal corridor for the movement of peoples, trade, and armies, over the centuries. Those Slavic peoples who moved westwards came to be known as the West Slavs, later emerging as Poles, Czechs, Slovaks, and Sorbs. Those who moved south, including all the way to the Balkan peninsula, came to be known as the South Slavs, who today include the Croats, Montenegrins, Macedonians, Serbs, and Slovenians. The tribes remaining in the north-eastern region and expanding east and north came to be called the East Slavs, and include the Russians, Ukrainians, Belarusians, and Ruthenians. By c.600, the Slavs had moved up to the Elbe River, in present-day Germany, to the Baltic shore, across Europe and along the Bohemian Forest, down to the Adriatic, as migrations slowed.<sup>2</sup>

p. 16 To the west, in the lands which had been the Western Roman Empire, a new European synthesis was forming, based on a fusion of the classic legacy of Rome, the newer Germanic elements, and Christianity. The Germanic groups were not politically unified, however, and Germanic lands were marked by a proliferation of leaders and tribal hosts. Among these groups, the Franks, who had converted to Catholic Christianity, in the course of the 500s increased their power in the Germanic lands and began to absorb other units. Even as they expanded eastward, other Germanic groups, the Frisians and Saxons, resisted, remaining mostly pagan. The often fragmented Frankish state experienced a resurgence under the Carolingian family, which ruled from the 730s and formally won the kingship in 751. Their new power was embodied in King Charlemagne, known in German as Karl the Great (742–814). In energetic expansive campaigns, Charlemagne defeated the Lombards in northern Italy, the Bavarians, crushed the Avars in 796, and fought with intensity against the pagan Saxons, whom he subdued. The result was an expanded Frankish realm, stretching from the Baltic to the north, down the Elbe River, along the Bohemian Forest, and southwards to the Mediterranean. This realm was bordered by frontier ‘marches’, known as Marks, to protect against external enemies. The term comes from the word for a boundary, and had cognates elsewhere in Europe, as in the Welsh and Scottish marches in Britain. The Carolingian marches included the Ostmark and Mark Brandenburg, and were ruled over by *Markgrafen* (margraves). The marches also formed springboards for missionary work, such as that of Bishop Anskar, who arrived in northern Europe in 828.

p. 17 As the climax of these political developments, Charlemagne was crowned in 800 by the Pope in Rome, as successor to the Roman Empire. The imperial concept of the *Reich* would take on great importance in German tradition. Even far beyond the Frankish sphere, the repute of Charlemagne was also something to conjure with: among Slavic and some other Eastern European peoples, the word for ‘king’ (*Kral*) was henceforth derived from his name, Karl. Yet the Carolingian dominion and its associated cultural renaissance were not of long duration. After Charlemagne’s death in 814, under his successors the Frankish state began to fall apart and in 843 was formally divided into units which later formed the basis of the future France and Germany.

When the last of the Carolingian line died out in 911, the German tribes elected Conrad, duke of the Franks, as their king. His successor, elected in 919, was the Saxon leader Henry the Fowler (later the leader of the Nazi SS, Heinrich Himmler, would convince himself that he had been this man in a former life). King Henry I launched a succession of frontier wars, moving to attack across the Elbe in 928. In 933 he beat back the Magyars, another nomadic people moving into central Europe. He also successfully established his own family line as the Saxon dynasty which ruled from 919 to 1024. He was succeeded by his son, Otto the Great (912–73; r. 936–73). Otto’s policies were more effective in expansion to the north and east, and relied on the role of the Church. Under Otto, the city of Magdeburg was rebuilt and became the seat of an archbishopric in 968, whose mission was to bring the Christian religion to the Poles and Czechs. Otto also effectively turned back the threat of the Magyars, defeating them decisively at the battle of Lechfeld in 955. As a result, settlement towards the south-east also

became easier, and a duchy in the Danube valley was established, which became known as 'Ostarrichi', literally the 'eastern realm'. Otto was crowned, as Charlemagne had been, in Rome in 962, formalizing the founding of what came to be called the Holy Roman Empire (from 1512 called the 'Holy Roman Empire of the German Nation'), a political form which would last until 1806.<sup>3</sup> Shortly after Otto's death, the expansion of his state was dealt a serious blow with the Great Slav Uprising of 983, in which the Wends, tribes inhabiting the lands between the Elbe and Oder rivers, rose up against the German forces and the missionary activities sponsored by the Saxon dynasty. The Saxon dynasty was succeeded by the Salian kings of 1024–1125, in a period that would see renewed eastward expansion.

p. 18 In the south-east of the continent, where before the Slavs had operated as allies of the Avars, Slavic states now emerged, after a Frankish trader named Samo had founded a Slavic state centred on Moravia in 623, although it proved to be of short duration. With the arrival in 679 of the Turkic people known as the Bulgars, a Bulgarian state was established and recognized by the Byzantines in 681. In the territories of the earlier Moravian state of Samo, a Greater Moravian Empire flourished in the 800s, and accepted the Christian missionaries Saints Cyril and Methodius, whom the Byzantines had sent to the Slavs in 863. Croat and Serbian states also grew.

A new factor on the scene came with the furious arrival of the Magyars (Hungarians), pressing in from around 895 and raiding across Europe. This dynamic people from Central Asia established themselves in the Hungarian Basin and continued their onslaught further abroad. It has even been surmised that they have left traces in our present language, with the word for a monster, 'ogre', perhaps being derived from 'Hungarians' or from the name of another Central Asian migrating people, the Uigurs.<sup>4</sup> In the process, the Magyars devastated the Greater Moravian Empire. A Bohemian state was established by the house of Premysl, centred on Prague. To the north, a Polish kingdom was established and Christianized by Prince Mieszko (c.960–92). It won ecclesiastical independence by the establishment in 1000 of a Polish archbishopric in Gniezno. After their defeat at Lechfeld in 955, the Magyars accepted baptism and in 1001 St István (r. 997–1038) was crowned king of Hungary, a state which came to include Slovakia and Transylvania. The establishment of the Magyars in this central location also had a crucial result of separating the southern Slavs from their ethnic cousins to the north.

p. 19 Further to the north-east, another political process had unfolded as a result of the migration of peoples. The Swedish Vikings, another Germanic group on the move, had expanded their trading and raiding along the river systems of Russia's interior from the late eighth century. These so-called Varangians set up trading stations as they communicated with the Byzantine Empire to the south. As legend has it, in 862, one of these men, named Rurik, was invited to establish order in Novgorod. His successors expanded this state, known as the Rus realm, whose capital was Kiev. In 987, Rus accepted Christianity with the baptism of Prince Vladimir (c.980–1015), the result of missionary and political wooing by the Byzantine Empire.

The High Middle Ages (1000–1300) marked a new period in the relationship, but scholars remain unsure precisely how to term an important development which started during this period. This was the movement eastwards, beyond the Elbe River, of Germans to settle in towns and agricultural areas. The movement was not centrally directed or constant, but it was to a large extent spontaneous, multifaceted, and cumulatively of crucial importance for Europe as a whole. Indeed, it has been called one of the most important migrations of the Middle Ages. Nineteenth-century nationalist historians depicted this as the classic German 'drive to the East', implying that it had been an elemental, primordial, inevitable, and unified process, impossible to resist, and moreover defined essentially as a German phenomenon. Historians writing after the Second World War chose other terms, such as 'East movement' or 'East settlement', to indicate its complexity and to distance themselves from the earlier associations.<sup>5</sup>

The causes of the phenomenon were European, rather than specifically and exclusively German. They need to be understood in the context of changes in Western Europe, the 'older' Europe. These linked changes included what has been described as an agricultural revolution, population growth, and technological advances. The process involved many segments of society, from the lowest ranks to the highest estates: ordinary farmers,

p. 20 craftsmen, merchants, missionary priests, monks, warriors, and princes. The result of this expansion over the long term was a movement ↪ eastwards on a broad front, from the coast of the Baltic Sea down to the Alpine regions and the Carpathians.

Inklings of these developments were already to be seen in Hungary from the 1000s, as German settlers were invited in by the Hungarian rulers, in particular to develop the rougher frontier areas of their kingdom. Germans coming from southern and western Germany, but often labelled 'Saxons' anyway by the Hungarians, were settled in Transylvania, the Zips district, and parts of Slovakia.

From 1140, the areas populated by Slavs between the Elbe and Oder rivers (essentially the territories of the German Democratic Republic after the Second World War) began to be consolidated under German control. These lands, which had been lost in the Slavic uprising of 983, the territories of Mecklenburg, Pomerania, Brandenburg, Upper Saxony, and Silesia became increasingly German.

German princes set out to capture these territories and control them as margraves. In theory, the supreme overarching authority was held by the Hohenstaufen emperors (1138–1254), even though they were more frequently involved in trying to control Italy. Prominent among the conquering princes was Duke Henry the Lion (1129–95) of Saxony in Mecklenburg, Count Adolf of Schauenburg in Holstein, and Count Albrecht the Bear (1134–1170), whose Ascanian dynasty moved into Brandenburg. The Wettin margraves of Meissen controlled Lusatia. The Hohenstaufens themselves also acquired territories in the Thuringian March. These leaders carved out territories seized from Slavs along the Baltic, founded cities, and tried to recruit settlers to people the newly won lands. The onslaught against the Slavs also took on crusading fervour, following on the First Crusade of 1096–9. A crusade against the Wends was authorized in 1147 and would be followed by a later Baltic crusade. Duke Henry the Lion however took a famous fall after refusing to aid his cousin, the Emperor Frederick I Barbarossa (1152–90), in 1176 in his Italian ↪ struggles, eventually finding himself outlawed, exiled, and stripped of his territories. The struggles of the Hohenstaufen emperors with the papacy known as the Investiture Controversy and domestic problems led to a collapse of authority in the Empire.

This chaos peaked with the Interregnum of 1250–73, a period of intense internal disorder. The disorder finally was staunched with the coming to imperial power of the Habsburg family. In 1273, Count Rudolf of Habsburg, representative of a modest aristocratic family of Swabia, was elected king by an assembly desiring to avoid a strong monarch. Ironically, the Habsburg family would use this position to excellent effect over the next centuries, becoming the traditional rulers of the Holy Roman Empire, with few interruptions, until 1806. Even as central power in the Reich had eroded, however, the movement eastwards continued, demonstrating a momentum of its own.

Also in closer proximity to the Empire, another wave of expansion, the Baltic Crusades, took place after control over the territories east of the Elbe and access to the Baltic coast had been gained. The southern shores of the Baltic Sea had long been home to peoples who were neither Germanic nor Slavic: the ancient Prussians, Lithuanians, Latvians (linguistically Baltic peoples), and the Estonians (a Finno-Ugric people) to the north. These loosely organized groups, distant from the Christian culture of Europe to the West, remained pagan in their traditions. Of a piece with Europe's general expansion in this period and the energies of the crusading movement, the Baltic Crusades represented a new phase in the encounter with this unfamiliar part of the world.

p. 22 The crusading attack on this region was not exclusively German, as Poles and Scandinavians also took part in the venture, which was seen as an arena for religious warfare similar to that in the Holy Land. The first assaults took place in Livonia (in present-day Latvia), as German missionary bishops established bridgeheads on the coast in 1186 and in 1201 Bishop Albert of Buxhoeden founded the port city of Riga, as a base from which to expand ↪ inland. A crusade against the Livonians was called. The new realm was dedicated to the Virgin, as a 'Land of Mary'.<sup>6</sup> A new military religious order, the Sword Brethren, was founded in 1202 to attract crusading

knights from Germany and elsewhere in Europe. Their ferocious fighting against the pagan peoples inland was recorded in the chronicle of Henry of Livonia of c.1290. To the north, Danish forces invaded Estonia in 1219 and seized lands as an outpost. In a serious setback, the pagan Lithuanian forces of Grand Duke Mindaugas defeated the Sword Brethren at the battle of Saule in 1236, but the Order was able to merge in the next year with a new force on the scene, the Teutonic Knights. This allowed for the continuation of the crusading movement, in what became a 'permanent crusade' institutionalized in this region, and broadened into an attack on the Prussians in particular.

The Order of the Teutonic Knights, later the object of such relentless romantic fascination in the nineteenth century, had been founded in the midst of the crusades, at the siege of Acre in 1190. Its formal title was the Order of Hospitallers of St Mary of the Teutons in Jerusalem, and it bore resemblances to the other two military Orders of the day, the Templars and Hospitallers. The knights were drawn from the German nobility, wore a white cloak with a black cross, and were commanded by a Grand Master. The fortunes of the Order became uncertain with the loss of Jerusalem and reverses for the crusaders in the Holy Land. At this juncture, Grand Master Hermann von Salza turned the Order in decisive new directions. At the invitation of the Hungarian king, in 1224–5 the Order transferred its operations to Transylvania, in the east of the Hungarian realm, to protect against invading Asiatic nomads. Yet relations with the Hungarian hosts quickly soured, and the Order moved further north, in response to another invitation. In 1226, a Polish prince, Duke Conrad of Mazovia, called on them for help against marauding pagan ancient Prussians along the Baltic borders of his territory. Centuries of dispute would follow on all sides about what the terms of the initial offer had been, but the Order well understood how to exploit the opportunity, using the chance to build up a crusader state on the Baltic Sea.

The Order expanded from its initial smallholding on the Baltic coast, the Kulmer land, by the conquest of ancient Prussian territories. With an official sanction from the Holy Roman Emperor and later papal approval, the Order set about building a state, steadily advancing along the Baltic coast. Waves of crusaders were summoned in a series of international campaigns against the ancient Prussians. The advance extended far to the north-east, until in 1242 Russian forces under Alexander Nevsky defeated them in a battle on the frozen Lake Peipus. As the power of the Order grew, friction also increased with neighbouring peoples, such as the Polish principalities and the pagan Lithuanian Grand Duchy as well.

In addition to young German warriors, foreign forces also arrived to join in the crusading efforts. These included King Ottokar II of Bohemia and English knights, including the future King Henry IV of England. In fiction, the Knight of Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* of the 1370s is introduced as having fought many times in Prussia, Lithuania, and Russia, having campaigned far afield, and 'no man farther'. In the seized lands, the ancient Prussian population was reduced to servitude, and fortresses and castles were built among the dense forests to establish the Order's presence, and to facilitate regular seasonal raids against pagan populations. A strange kind of travel literature evolved as a consequence, guidebooks to the raiding trails for these campaigns, the 'Lithuanian Road Reports'. Among the cities which arose in this new Prussia was Königsberg, the 'King's Mountain', named in honour of the Bohemian king who had come up to crusade.

The ancient Prussians rose up repeatedly in revolt against the Order, but by 1283, their subjection was complete, and the surviving population was reduced to serfdom. The Prussian language was extinct by the seventeenth century, although some terms survived in the dialect of the region, such as 'Marjellchen' for a girl. Eventually, the very name of the ancient Prussians was taken over by the new German masters of the region. As they established estates, the 'young lords' or 'Junkers' would become famous for centuries to come as a particular kind of aristocracy.

From 1309 the Order had its headquarters in the massive castle of Marienburg, dedicated to the Virgin and built in sprawling Gothic brickwork, on the Vistula River, not distant from the port of Danzig. By 1400, the Order controlled a large territory along the Baltic from the Oder in the west to the Narva in the north-east. While the ancient Prussians were decimated by degrees, further east in the Baltic lands of Kurland, Livland, and Estland, a



German ruling class dominated non-German native populations. The Order now came into confrontation with the Lithuanian Grand Duchy, which lay in the middle, between the Baltic German territories and East Prussia.

Throughout the new territories in the East, whether close by the Elbe, in Prussia, or in lands owned by non-German princes, a more pacific form of taking possession involved agriculture and changes to the land. This related to an agricultural revolution in western Europe in the 1100s, which involved the shift from two-field to three-field crop rotation; the use of metal ploughshares and scythes; the replacement of oxen with horses for ploughing; and the drainage of marshland and the cutting down of Europe's vast primeval forests to bring new land into cultivation. These developments in turn produced increased population growth and pressure for resources. Around the year 1200, Germany's population had grown dramatically, to approximately 7–8 million.<sup>7</sup> Under these circumstances, new lands would exercise a powerful attraction.

p. 25 Over the course of the twelfth, thirteenth, and fourteenth centuries, tens of thousands of German settlers moved to these lands, invited by German princes. Beyond this, in other Eastern European kingdoms, such as Poland, Bohemia, and Hungary, local rulers likewise invited German settlers to the region, to settle rural and urban sites, as a form of development from outside, with the lure of special privileges and terms of settlement. Not only German settlers were involved; farmers from the Low Countries in particular also felt the attraction.

The recruitment of settlers became an organized and efficient business. Settlement entrepreneurs called 'Lokators' (locators) laid out new settlements and then went in search of farmers from the West to establish there. The attractions they could offer included special legal privileges and exemptions from dues or taxes for a number of years, in what amounted to medieval 'enterprise zones'. The size of land allocated to farmers was also on a more extensive scale than in old Europe. With these enticements, locators and their agents travelled through German territories in the West and advertised the new opportunities and plentiful land to the east. Indeed, it has been suggested that the medieval legend of the Pied Piper of Hamelin, a sinister figure whose music allowed him to kidnap all the children of a town, leading them away, is a symbolic rendering of the experience of younger German farmers being lured away to new opportunities eastward.

In fact, year by year this phenomenon did not involve massive, sudden demographic changes. Indeed, it is estimated that as few as 2,000 new settlers made the trek each year in the 1100s and 1200s.<sup>8</sup> A famous 'Song of the East Land' purported to catch the spirit of the new settlers, the '*Ostlandfahrer*' or 'East Land trekkers':

'East Land Song'

1. To the East Land we want to ride, we want to come along to East Land—  
Well over the green heath, fresh over the heath, there is a better place for us.
2. When we come into the East Land, into the house high and fine—  
There will we be let in; fresh over the heath, one bids us welcome.<sup>9</sup>

p. 26 The new arrivals established towns or transformed the ones in which they were settled. It is estimated that between 1200 and 1400, over 1,500 towns were planted east of the Elbe River.<sup>10</sup> Entirely new towns and villages could be created, along patterns that were systematic in their layout and in that way distinctively different from the jumbled complexity of urban centres in Germany which had grown up organically over time.<sup>11</sup> Alternatively, new German urban development next to an older established Slavic centre could lead to a parallel urban centre alongside the old. The laws that were granted to these urban settlements were an export of Western European and German models, as expressed in the legal codes of Lübeck, Magdeburg, and the South German cities. Princes in Bohemia, Hungary, and Poland offered the towns administrative self-rule including this so-called 'German law' of municipal rights. In spite of its name, this was not a legal code exclusive to ethnic Germans, but rather the German version of a more general Western European tradition of urban autonomy and organization. In Hungary, the Golden Letter of 1224 was granted by royal authority and gave special privileges and self-government to German colonists, who came to be called the 'Transylvanian Saxons'. Transylvania in German is called 'Siebenbürgen', the land of seven castles, the fortified settlements. This area was devastated

by the Mongol invasion of the 1230s and 1240s, in a renewed onslaught of peoples from the East, but the incursion was short-lived, as the Mongols soon withdrew. In Russia, however, where Mongol rule continued, the results would be significant, long removing these eastern Slavic lands from interaction with the rest of Europe.

p. 27 A crucial added element in this overall eastward movement was religious. Much of the earlier press to the East had been motivated by the imperative of expanding the Christian creed, as monks and priests were sent as missionaries to the pagan peoples. By 1000, the Slavic states to the East had already been converted to Christianity (some to Catholicism, others to Eastern Orthodoxy). Missionary activities would continue in the Baltic region. A key group was the Cistercian Order, known for their monasteries which excelled at agriculture. They cleared undeveloped lands, drained wetlands to cultivate wild areas, and introduced new agricultural methods. Their monastic institutions, built in a brick Gothic style that came to be typical of this age in the East, were significant.

A final important aspect of the several dimensions of German eastward movement was the commercial motive, as German tradesmen drew Eastern European territories into a network of economic exchange. A vital institution was the Hanse, a trade federation which was at its strongest from the 1200s to the 1400s; as an economic organization it linked free trading cities and merchants in northern Europe and beyond. As testimony to a growing Baltic trade area, associations of German merchants called *Osterlinge* had been active in the eleventh century. These associations had merged into the Hanse by the 1280s, a trade federation or loose alliance, rather than a single, centralized organization. At its very height c.1300, the Hanse included over a hundred cities and towns, with Lübeck (where the Hanseatic Diet met), Hamburg, Brunswick, Danzig, and Riga among the chief members. These cities to this very day retain proud memories of their identities as Hanse centres. The merchant fleet of the Hanse, especially the more capacious cog ships, plied the Baltic and North Seas, carrying grain, fish, timber, furs, and many other goods. The Hanse maintained trade offices, known as *Kontore*, far afield, in London and Novgorod, and counting houses as branches in many Eastern European cities, including those further inland. The trade monopolies of the Hanse eventually went into decline after the 1550s, as competition and wars with Scandinavian states, England, and the Dutch cut into their trade, and with the redirection of the bulk of trade to Atlantic routes.

p. 28 Another parallel movement that coincided with the eastwards trajectory of settlement from German and other European territories involved a minority group which would take on great significance in the history of Eastern Europe, the Jews. Jews fleeing heightened persecution in Christian Western Europe sought refuge in the East, especially after a wave of violence associated with mobilization for the Crusades (1095–1215). The advent of the plague epidemic also led to the scapegoating of Jews and renewed waves of Jewish emigration. As a result of these ordeals, increasingly from the thirteenth century, Jews moved to the East in search of greater toleration and refuge, motives different from those influencing agricultural settlers. Many Jewish communities in Eastern Europe preserved aspects of their lives before their transplantation, and in particular, their language, Yiddish, represented a medieval dialect of Rhineland German.

Around 1350, the earlier eastern movement came to an end. The demographic pressures from the West that had driven the phenomenon underwent a shocking transition with the arrival of the Black Death in 1348 in Europe. To take stock of the entire cumulative impact of the process, we should note that the earlier contested territories of Pomerania, East Prussia, and Silesia became largely Germanized. But at the same time, to be German-speaking was not necessarily solely a matter of ethnic identity, as complicated processes of assimilation were taking place. Indeed, the German eastern territories had seen the formation of what came to be called German '*Neustämme*', or 'new tribes', formed out of the mixing and interaction of groups both resident and newly arrived. These included the Prussians, Pomeranians, Mecklenburgers, Brandenburgers, Upper Saxons, and Silesians, as 'Slavs, Ancient Prussians, Flemings, Dutch, Westfalians, Frisians, Thuringians, Franks, Bavarians, and members of other older German tribes . . . blended slowly into new communities'.<sup>12</sup> Paradoxically, in the later and often anguished debates over what it really meant to be German, these

p. 29

compound groupings, made up to a great extent of arrivals from scattered places in the German lands to the West, would have a strong claim to be the most German. New territories had been occupied with an increasingly Germanized population, but beyond ↵ these lands were further 'linguistic islands' of German-speakers, as another legacy of this medieval eastward movement.

The ending of eastern movement in its full intensity around 1350 also coincided with the beginning of the early modern period in European history. The politics of the region involved the interaction of the Holy Roman Empire, and the kingdoms of Bohemia, Hungary, and Poland. In the region's more remote reaches, the rise of Muscovy introduced another power. Further, the impressive advance of Islam in southeast Europe was a crucial part of the background.

The Holy Roman Empire's disintegration had set in from the High Middle Ages, with the progressive weakening of central imperial authority, in spite of the fact that that authority came to be increasingly inherited by one dynasty, the Habsburg family, after the election in 1273 of Rudolf as German king. After 1438, the position of emperor was held by Habsburgs with hardly an interruption for the next centuries. In spite of patent weakness—or because of it—the notion of the *Reichsidee* or 'imperial idea' took on significant importance in later German history.

Bohemia's monarch was one of the imperial electors in the Holy Roman Empire and under King Ottokar II (1253–78), who had also participated in the Baltic Crusades, the country played a crucial political role. Increasing numbers of German settlers received royal invitation to move to Bohemia, as a counterweight to noble power.<sup>13</sup> The golden age of Bohemia came under Charles IV (1346–78), as Holy Roman Emperor, who founded Prague University in 1348. Bohemia expanded, incorporating Silesia and Brandenburg. Bohemia was later wracked by religious strife, after the calls for reform of Jan Hus (1374–1415), a movement which took on an ethnic dimension as the German-dominated clergy establishment was the target of his criticisms. After Hus was burned as a heretic at the Council of Constance in 1415, fierce religious warfare erupted and lasted until 1436.

p. 30

A dramatic Polish revival came under the rule of King Casimir III the Great (1333–70), who also founded Cracow University. But upon his death came renewed disorder, until in 1386 a dramatic political fusion took place, as Poland and the Grand Duchy of Lithuania were brought into association. The heiress to the Polish throne, Princess Jadwiga, married the Lithuanian Prince Jogaila, who accepted Christian baptism for himself and his realm as part of the bargain. Although the states remained formally separate until the Union of Lublin in 1569, the combination they presented was a formidable one, as Poland now could draw upon the resources of Lithuania, with a territory three times larger and extending eastwards to Ukraine and the Black Sea, the largest state in Europe.

A crucial result of the union of powers, with many historical echoes to follow, was a decisive defeat for the Teutonic Knights at the battle of Tannenberg (Grünwald) in 1410. A diverse coalition of Poles, Lithuanians, Slavic allies, and Tatars battled against the Order for six hours, in a clash that left half of the host of crusader knights dead. After this epochal defeat, the Teutonic Order never regained the influence, prestige, and success it had once enjoyed. Its own expansion was ended, and borders were drawn which would hold largely unchanged for centuries after. After renewed fighting between the Order and Poland-Lithuania, by 1466 the Order even had to recognize Polish overlordship, and gave up West Prussia and the port of Danzig. What remained of the Order's territory was now a vassal of the Polish king. The Jagiellonian dynasty raised Poland to the status of a European Great Power, and provided monarchs for the thrones of Hungary and Bohemia, in what resembled an emerging state system in Central and Eastern Europe to rival the growing family power of the Habsburgs. An element of this period of Poland's flourishing participation in wider European patterns was exemplified in the work of the famous Gothic sculptor, Veit Stoss (c.1440–1533). Moving to Cracow from

p. 31

Germany, Stoss carved the famous altar ↵ of St Mary's Church in the capital, and other significant works. In

turn, Hungary had earlier experienced a brief golden age of regional dominance under Matthias Corvinus, king from 1458 to 1490. After his death, Hungary's kings were provided by the Polish dynasty, the Jagiellonians.

Europe as a whole also encountered what was widely seen as a new fundamental threat from the East, in the form of the Turkish advance on the continent, as the Ottomans moved into spaces which earlier had been dominated by the Eastern Roman Empire of Byzantium. The Ottomans moved up the Balkans and in 1389 at the battle of Kosovo dealt a punishing blow to the Serbian forces. In 1453, the imperial city of Constantinople itself fell, and became the capital to an expanding and mighty Turkish empire in turn. At the battle of Mohács in 1526, Hungarian forces were smashed by the Turks and the Hungarian king himself killed, in a defeat that would long be remembered as a historical turning point for the region. In the rest of Europe, propaganda about the 'Terrible Turk' underlined a shared Christian sense of peril.

Two other effects of long term significance followed from this shift in power in south-eastern Europe. One was the assumption by the Habsburg family, based in Austria, of a key role in consolidating resistance to the Ottoman advance. After the battle of Mohács, the Habsburgs assumed control of lands earlier belonging to the fallen Hungarian king, including Bohemia, Silesia, and a strip of Hungary. Sporadic fighting would continue along a military frontier in the region. The other consequence was a new self-appointed role for an emerging Russian state. After the fall of Constantinople (the 'second' Rome), Muscovite rulers and their officials articulated an imperial identity for themselves as the 'third Rome', the messianic and last incarnation of the classical Roman realm. The principality of Moscow would coalesce around itself a Russian state, presenting a later addition to the European state system. Russian lands had been conquered by the Mongols from 1237 to 1242. Tsar Ivan III threw off Mongol control in 1480 and styled himself the 'Lord of all the Russias'. Ivan IV the Terrible reorganized the state and pursued expansive policies towards the East, beyond the Volga and Urals, and westwards, in a futile war against Poland-Lithuania for the prize of the Livonian territory and its access to the Baltic. Livonia and Estonia fell to Swedish rule, and the south of the region fell to Poland. Around this time, the image of Russia as an Asiatic realm beyond Europe gained currency in Western Europe in the 1500s, in part because of Russia's novelty in an age of discovery, in part because the very concept of Europe as a unit was used by humanist scholars as a replacement for earlier universalistic notions of Christendom, and also as a result of Polish-Lithuanian propaganda, in which Poland was presented as the *antemurale Christianitatis*, the bulwark of Christendom, fending off both Turks and Russians.<sup>14</sup>

The early modern period in Europe also saw the beginnings of nationalist consciousness, although the full emergence of nationalism as an ideology would come only in the nineteenth century, fuelled by Romanticism, and even then uneven in its growth throughout Europe. Although without state structures comparable to the 'New Monarchies' of England, France, or Spain, which could encourage an emerging self-definition along approved national lines, Germans also were affected by these trends. The word 'Germany' was only coined in the fifteenth century and became common a century after.<sup>15</sup> Before that time, 'deutsch' had been a 'purely linguistic term and remained so for a long time to come'.<sup>16</sup>

In particular, the discovery of Tacitus' *Germania* in the 1450s was a crucial event, as its enthusiastic study and celebration by humanist scholars provided an ideal image of the original Germanic people, although they were considered 'barbarians'. In the period of the Reformation shortly afterwards, rhetorical appeals to German identity were constructed in parallel with religious strife, and Italian decadence and Turkish cruelty were counterpoised to the German ideal.

In the aftermath of the strife of the Reformation and the Thirty Years War (1618–48), both of which left the German lands even weaker and confirmed the incapacity of the Holy Roman Empire's surviving structures, two German states emerged as eastern powers, both straddling earlier borders of the Empire and including non-German populations. These were the rival German states of Prussia and Austria, and the dualism between them strengthened into an important theme in general German development over the modern period.

Prussia was an unlikely contender for the status of a great power, lying as it did in an exposed geographic position on the wide North European plain and along the Baltic coast, and with few natural resources to be found in its sandy soils. In 1525, the last Grand Master of the Teutonic Knights, Albrecht von Hohenzollern, converted to Lutheranism and privatized the lands that remained after the weakening of the Order, turning them into a secular duchy. Albrecht also founded Königsberg University in 1544. The former crusaders turned into Junker nobles and directed their energies to large-scale grain production. With the death in 1618 of the last of Albrecht's line, the rule of the state passed to the Hohenzollern branch of Mark Brandenburg, and the state was united into Brandenburg-Prussia. During and after the Thirty Years War, the Great Elector Frederick William (r. 1640–88) combined war and diplomacy to win sovereignty from Poland, in the Treaty of Oliva of 1660. The new lands won by the Great Elector were also settled by farmers brought in by locators, a policy that took on added urgency after the plague of 1709–10 depopulated these areas yet again. On 13 January 1701, the Great Elector's son Frederick III (r. 1688–1713) further elevated the status of his possessions, as he was crowned king in Königsberg. Significantly, he had acquired the permission of the Holy Roman Emperor for this promotion with the formula that he was king 'in Prussia' (not King of Prussia), as he ruled territories lying outside the Empire. Moreover, his coronation was surrounded by symbolism tying the state to ancient Prussia. Prussia (as Brandenburg-Prussia now came to be commonly called) welcomed settlers to its territory from Germany and other countries. These included Huguenots fleeing persecution in France, and some 30,000 Salzburg Protestants, who had been expelled by their lord, the archbishop, in 1731.

p. 34

The other rival German state of Austria had grown out of the original 'Eastern March' or realm (Ostarrichi) ruled by the Babenberg noble family since 976. In 1278, King Rudolf I, the newly elected monarch of the Holy Roman Empire, regained these territories after they had been disputed between Bohemia and Hungary. After his victory at the battle of Marchfeld outside Vienna, the Habsburgs took control of these lands and made them the headquarters for their expanding dynasty, whose original castle had been in what is now Switzerland. In their capacity as Holy Roman Emperors, the Habsburg kings pursued strategies of intermarriage to splendid effect in European politics, and developed a sense of Habsburg divine calling to preside over a universal empire. Marital diplomacy and the fortunes of war produced dramatic gains for the family. Under Charles V (r. 1519–56) their realm included Austria, the Empire, the Spanish kingdoms and their colonies including the Americas, the Netherlands, and Naples. The vast ambitions of Charles V, however, were frustrated by converging crises, including conflict with France, Reformation in the German lands and associated political struggles there, and war with the Turks (culminating in the siege of Vienna of 1529). Overwhelmed, Charles V abdicated in 1556, dividing his patrimony within the family, so that henceforth the Habsburg family lines of Spain and Austria were distinct. By 1618, religious conflict in Central Europe revived, and led to the vast international conflict of the Thirty Years War, which pitted the Catholic Habsburg emperors against Protestant princes of Germany and their allies abroad. The fighting centred on the lands of the empire. One decisive result involved Bohemia, where the spark had been laid for the conflagration by estates defying the emperor. At the battle of the White Mountain in 1620, the imperial forces crushed the Protestants, and in the aftermath the rebellious Bohemian nobility were dispossessed and their lands reapportioned to new men from outside, mostly from Germany. This would afterwards be identified as a great moment of national tragedy by Czech nationalists in the modern period. At the time, the tattered state of Bohemian refugees who fled to other parts of Europe gave rise to the enduring nickname of 'Bohemian' for other marginal persons.<sup>17</sup> With the peace of exhaustion signed in Westphalia in 1648, the Habsburg imperial idea had failed and the Holy Roman Empire was further weakened with the recognition of sovereign powers for its constituent states.

p. 35

Yet in a dramatic surprise, the Habsburgs reinvented their role soon afterwards. With the imperial role in the German lands as a whole further debilitated, the Habsburgs built up the power of their house in the Austrian base. This was demonstrated at the close of the seventeenth century, at an hour of peril for the capital, Vienna. A renewed Turkish surge had brought Ottoman armies up to besiege the city in 1683, before the attack was repulsed by a multinational Christian relief army led by the Polish king, Jan III Sobieski. The setback turned into a general Turkish retreat in the region, as Austrian forces led by Prince Eugène of Savoy, together with a



Holy League of other European forces, struck again and again, driving the Turks out of Hungary and Transylvania, and into the Balkans, across the Danube. In 1699, the Turks signed the Treaty of Passarowitz, acknowledging their losses, and after this, general European anxiety about 'the Turk' faded. By 1700, Austria had doubled its territories and had increasingly reoriented itself away from an earlier central focus on the German lands of the Holy Roman Empire and towards involvement with south-eastern Europe. In turn, this reorientation would produce the potential for friction with Russia, likewise pursuing its interests in the region.

p. 36 A further development in the course of the eighteenth century was the development of absolutist states, inspired by the example of the great monarch of the age, Louis XIV of France. The eighteenth century saw a further increase in competition in economics, international politics, and military establishments, which many states met by striving for an ideal of internal consolidation to create efficient development within. This included the establishment of increasingly centralized state bureaucracies, standing armies of harshly drilled soldiers, and internal 'policing' to cultivate order and economic development, associated with the economic philosophy of mercantilism. The pursuit of this ideal led to the growth of three 'eastern courts', in Prussia, Austria, and Russia, which expressed their absolutist character in part in projects for settlement involving German colonists. These settlement programmes took place under the rubric not of ethnic transformation or national homogeneity but from motives of 'Peuplierung', peopling empty expanses.

In Prussia, the 'Soldier King' Frederick William I (r. 1713–40) concentrated on the building of a strong military establishment there to meet its external challenges and precarious position. This regime became synonymous with Prussian militarism, as a cantonal system of recruiting enlisted soldiers for the vast army, and officers were drawn from the Junker class of noble landlords with larger estates east of the Elbe River. By 1740, some 80 per cent of peacetime state revenues went to the army.<sup>18</sup> The values which came to be stereotypically Prussian were also associated with the militarist emphasis: obedience to orders, asceticism, discipline, stark simplicity, and devotion to duty. A distinctive code of behaviour, a Prussian ethos devoted to authority, would stand in place of the ethnic uniformity so conspicuously lacking in the Prussian kingdom. Later generations of Europeans joked that Prussia was not a land with an army, but an army with a land for its headquarters. Welcoming settlers from abroad, the state was also marked by a relative degree of religious toleration, absorbing Huguenots and Mennonites. In 1740, Frederick II the Great (r. 1740–86) succeeded to his father's throne and inaugurated territorial aggression to mark his ascent, seizing the rich province of Silesia from Austria. The War of the Austrian Succession (1740–8) and the Seven Years War (1756–63) that flared up over this seizure unfolded into larger, global conflicts involving webs of alliances. Austria's Russian ally invaded Prussia and captured the capital, Berlin. The very continued existence of Prussia was doubtful in the crises of the wars, until Frederick was saved by the ascent to the Russian throne of Tsar Peter III, who was himself of German origins and admired Prussia, and consequently ended the war. In the peace that followed, against the odds, Prussia had survived and was now recognized as one of the European Great Powers. As a result of the fortunes of war, Frederick conceived a fear of Russian potential, inventing his own name for the Russians: 'oursomanes', or 'bearlike maniacs'.<sup>19</sup> Newly appreciative of peace, Frederick aimed now to rebuild his ravaged kingdom. Frederick praised aspects of his father's settlement projects, and wrote to Voltaire that there was 'something heroic in the generous and zealous way in which the king had colonized this desert and made it useful'.<sup>20</sup> Extensive projects for the drainage of swamps and areas flooded by the Oder and other rivers were part of a 'conquest of nature', at the end of which Frederick announced, 'Here I have conquered a province in peace'.<sup>21</sup> An allied measure was the planting of settlers in the areas, to take possession of cleared forest land and former swamp. In his reign, some 300,000 settlers were moved in. At the same time, the frontier areas remained problematic in his estimation. The fluid loyalties of the East Prussian population under Russian occupation in the war led him to conclude that they were more Russian than Prussian, not to be trusted.<sup>22</sup> German ethnic identity was not his main concern, and he mused about bringing in Tartars rather than 'slovenly Polish stuff'.<sup>23</sup> He revealed a clear antipathy to Poles and he denounced the 'stupidity of the Potockis, Krasinskis, Oginskis and that whole imbecile crowd whose names end in -ki'.<sup>24</sup> In 1772, he wrote to Voltaire of the Poles as the 'last people in Europe'.<sup>25</sup> Likewise, he expressed dissatisfaction with the Jewish presence in the

p. 37

p. 38 towns of the frontier provinces, concluding however that they were necessary 'on the Polish border because in these areas the Hebrews alone perform trade. As soon as you get away from the frontier, the Jews become a disadvantage, they form cliques.'<sup>26</sup> On balance, he concluded nevertheless that although only Libya had more sand than these areas of his realm, 'from industry and work it will be possible to correct a sterile soil and transform it into a mediocre one; and we must be happy with that.'<sup>27</sup> But in spite of such austere stoic satisfaction, new gains of Polish territory would shortly reorder the equation and Prussia's own identity.

At this time in Austria too, absolutist ideas produced concerted experiments in settlement and population movement. No sooner had Maria Theresa come to the Habsburg throne in Austria in 1740 than she was attacked by Frederick of Prussia, who seized Silesia. While the loss of Silesia could not be reversed, Maria Theresa and her officials did work towards the reconstruction of parts of the Austrian realm, directing streams of many thousands of settler families to the devastated lands of the central Danube and Hungary, in hundreds of settlements. This effort at repopulation after 1748 came to be called the fabled 'Trek of the Danube Swabians', which was a misnomer in fact, as many of the settlers hailed instead from the Rhineland, Hesse, and other parts of southern Germany, as well as France, Belgium, and the Tyrol. Settlers to Transylvania added to the Transylvanian Saxons, while new settlements were planted in the Banat, Slavonia, and the Bukovina. The aim was to build up a productive population in devastated areas and to provide exemplary settlements that might be emulated by the non-German populations surrounding them. Maria Theresa's son, Joseph II (r. 1765–90), continued these efforts, in a new spirit of enthusiasm for Enlightenment ideas and systematization summed up in the slogan 'everything for the people, nothing by the people'. His attempts at bureaucratic rationalization, which included the aim of making German the exclusive language of administration, were however frustrated by the complexities of a realm of great diversity.

p. 39 The last of the 'eastern courts' was the Russian Empire. Tsar Peter the Great (r. 1689–1725) sought to westernize his realm, and to break through to active involvement with the rest of Europe. The importation of western technical experts was one mode of these reforms, as was the founding of St Petersburg as a new capital on the Baltic Sea. Another expression of his determination was the launching of the Great Northern War (1700–21), which upset the earlier Swedish dominion of the Baltic region. By the Treaty of Nystadt of 1721, victorious Russia gained the Baltic provinces. The German nobility of these provinces, Estland, Livland, and Kurland, were guaranteed their traditional privileges as estates, represented in the *Ritterschaften*. These so-called 'Baltic Barons' continued to dominate local government and their non-German serf populations of Latvians and Estonians. In return, the Baltic German nobility pledged its feudal loyalty to the tsar, and that fidelity would become legendary in the following centuries. It was, moreover, rewarded with influence in government and exalted positions in the Russian Empire as a whole, demonstrating that ethnic differences were not a bar to this role. Indeed, over the course of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, over a tenth of the imperial bureaucracy was of German origin. Other German aristocrats from Germany itself were engaged in the imperial service, including the legendary Baron von Münchhausen (1720–97), whose mendacious adventures became famous. Peter the Great's titanic figure and ambitions gained European admirers, as the philosopher Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz showed, praising Russia as a blank page on which something entirely new could be written.<sup>28</sup> Further reforms were undertaken in a revived spirit of absolutism by a later successor to Peter, the Empress Catherine II the Great (r. 1762–96). She herself indeed was not of Russian background, but a German princess of the house of Anhalt-Zerbst, married to a tsar also of German background. After he was overthrown in a coup in 1762, Catherine came to the throne and, recasting herself as a Russian autocrat, launched further initiatives to strengthen the empire. These included a famous invitation in 1763 to German settlers to come to Russia, who by their very presence and industrious labour were to serve as models for the modernization of agriculture. In return, they were promised privileges and exemptions as a lure. In the next decade, over 30,000 settlers arrived: Germans from Baden, the Pfalz, Hesse, as well as others from Switzerland and the Netherlands. The settlers came to be called 'Volga Germans', as their main settlements were located in southern Russia on the lower Volga River, with some sent to the regions of Bessarabia and Dobrudzha on the Black Sea. These first settlers were later followed by a wave of German Mennonites from Prussia.

p. 40

Together, the eastern courts of Prussia, Austria, and Russia would also introduce dynamic changes in the state system in Central and Eastern Europe. In addition to the parallel undertakings of settlement and repopulation of territories, a concrete shared project of the eastern courts was the carving up of Poland at the end of the eighteenth century by these neighbouring powers. After a pinnacle of achievement in the early seventeenth century, when Poland had intervened in Russia (even occupying Moscow in 1610), Poland's fortunes had experienced a long decline, especially with the extinction of the Jagiellonian royal dynasty by 1572. Poland's elective monarchy and noble-dominated parliament (*sejm*) were celebrated by some as an expression of freedom, as the *liberum veto* in parliament allowed any objector to halt resolutions. Yet this system proved unable to keep pace with the centralizing energies of competitors on the international scene. Poland itself experienced repeated invasions in what came to be called the 'Deluge'. Outside powers used factions within Polish politics, and intervened with increasing intensity to protect their own interests.

p. 41 The climax of this process came with the three partitions (1772, 1793, and 1795), by which Poland was wiped off the map. When the newly elected Polish king Stanislas Poniatowski sought internal reform in Poland to restore order, Empress Catherine of Russia, who had supported his candidacy initially, opposed these efforts. At the suggestion of Frederick of Prussia, urgently seeking to avoid a general war over the question, a diplomatic agreement was forged, by which territories were carved off from the Polish state and assigned to the eastern courts, while Poland itself was to give up the reform programme. The Russian Empire received Belarus and parts of Ukraine, Austria gained Galicia in the south, and Prussia won a crucial prize: West Prussia, which linked East Prussia to the main body of the Hohenzollern's holdings to the west, in particular Brandenburg. Prussia gained half a million new subjects. Poland lost a third of its lands and nearly a half of its population but could not fend off the cynical bargain. When Poles sought renewed internal reorganization, through a constitution, the creation of a stronger hereditary monarchy, and the abolition of the *liberum veto*, this provoked the second partition, in 1793. Denouncing the new reforms, Russia invaded, and Prussia followed, anxious not to be left out of another round of territorial gain, while Austria abstained. Russia occupied most of the east of Poland-Lithuania and Ukraine, while Prussia occupied the port of Danzig (Gdansk), and the province of Posen (Poznan) in central Poland, designated by the new name of 'South Prussia'. This in turn set off a Polish nationalist reaction and revolt, led by Tadeusz Kosciuszko, in 1794. The revolt was soon quelled, and the final partition took place in 1795. Russia acquired the most, gaining the lands of the former Lithuanian grand duchy, the duchy of Kurland, and Volhynia. Prussia gained a Polish population of over a million, along with parts of southern Lithuania and more of central Poland, including Warsaw, creating out of these conquests 'New East Prussia'. Austria received 1.5 million new subjects with southern Poland, including Cracow. The three eastern courts pledged in addition to extinguish the memory and name of the Polish state, to underline the finality of their acts. One result of the partitions was to create a 'community of interest . . . which formed one of the constant factors in the competition of the powers during the entire nineteenth century'.<sup>29</sup> Despite the other tensions at work between them over this period, a shared conservative solidarity would bind Prussia, Austria, and Russia, in their common aim of keeping Poland under subjection and assuring the permanent possession of these spoils.

p. 42

Prussia had won valuable territory, which gave more coherence and connection to its parts. Frederick the Great exulted in this acquisition, but sought to downplay its importance in public to reduce the envy of others. As he confessed about his new lands, 'I tell everyone that on my travels I have seen just sand, pine trees, heath land, and Jews. Despite that there is a lot of work to be done; there is no order, and no planning and the towns are in a lamentable condition.' Yet he looked forward to playing the role of the lawgiver, 'the Lycurgus and the Solon to these barbarians', and concluded that: 'The Polish provinces may be compared to no state in Europe, they may only be likened to Canada. As a result we need time and work to allow them to regain what bad administration has left in neglect for so many centuries.'<sup>30</sup> A further outcome of this for Prussia was a firm relationship with Russia, as 'friendship with Russia practically became the basis of Hohenzollern foreign policy'.<sup>31</sup>

As we conclude this brief overview of the origins of the German myth of the East, it becomes clear that the earlier history of interaction was not determined by nationalism in a modern sense or national categories, but rather involved religious motives, economic pressures, and dynastic political motivations. These earlier periods had been marked by themes that would however be rewritten or reinterpreted in the nineteenth century. These included the repeated occupation of territories by multiple waves of peoples in the course of migrations. Later nationalists thus would later argue that expansion in the East was in fact ‘recovery of originally German lands’. Similarly, the medieval eastward colonization would later be depicted as primordially ethnic, a German primal urge, but in fact, the medieval chronicles did not even mention the development as a preoccupation of contemporaries. As a last theme, repeated incursions from the East (first the Germanic tribes themselves, then Huns, Magyars, Mongols, and others) led to the attendant notion of a mission to hold these back, functioning as the ‘bulwark of Christendom’, the *antemurale Christianitatis*, an understanding that had important influence not only on German culture, but also Polish, Hungarian, and other Eastern European societies. The nineteenth century witnessed a determined and conviction-filled effort by nationalists to revisit this complex past and to refine it into a German myth of the East.

## Notes

1. Wippermann, *Drang*, 12.
2. Dralle, *Die Deutschen*, 9.
3. Hagen Schulze, *Germany: A New History*, trans. Deborah Lucas Schneider (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998), 18, 44.
4. Eugen Weber, *Peasants into Frenchmen: The Modernization of Rural France, 1870-1914* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1976), 24.
5. Wippermann, *Drang*, 5.
6. Gert von Pistohlkors, ‘Germany and the Baltic Region in the Short Twentieth Century’, in Eduard Mühle (ed.), *Germany and the European East in the Twentieth Century* (Oxford and New York: Berg, 2003), 45.
7. Mary Fulbrook, *A Concise History of Germany* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 20.
8. Dralle, *Die Deutschen*, 95.
9. *Wir Mädel singen. Liederbuch des Bundes Deutscher Mädel. Herausgegeben von der Reichsjugendführung*, 2nd edn. (Wolfenbüttel: Reichsjugendführung, 1941), 173-6.
10. John Hawgood, *The Evolution of Germany* (London: Methuen & Co. Ltd., 1955), 51.
11. Dralle, *Die Deutschen*, 76.
12. Ibid. 90.
13. Denis Hupchick and Harold E. Cox, *A Concise Historical Atlas of Eastern Europe* (New York: St Martin's Press, 1996), map 19.
14. Ekkehard Klug, ‘Das “asiatische” Russland. Über die Entstehung eines europäischen Vorurteils’, *Historische Zeitschrift*, 245/2 (1987), 265-89.
15. Schulze, *Germany*, 15.
16. Ibid. 17.
17. Lonnie R. Johnson, *Central Europe: Enemies, Neighbors, Friends* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 92.
18. Fulbrook, *Concise History of Germany*, 78.
19. Giles MacDonogh, *Frederick the Great: A Life in Deed and Letters* (New York: St Martin's Griffin, 1999), 299.
20. Ibid. 127.
21. David Blackbourn, *The Conquest of Nature: Water, Landscape, and the Making of Modern Germany* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2006), 40.
22. MacDonogh, *Frederick*, 347.
23. Ibid. 319.
24. Ibid. 357.
25. Larry Wolff, *Inventing Eastern Europe: The Map of Civilization on the Mind of the Enlightenment* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994), 266.
26. MacDonogh, *Frederick*, 347.
27. Ibid. 356.
28. Hermann Schreiber, *Teuton and Slav: The Struggle for Central Europe*, trans. James Cleugh (New York: Alfred A. Knopf,

1965), 259.

29. Imanuel Geiss, *Der polnische Grenzstreifen 1914-1918. Ein Beitrag zur deutschen Kriegszielpolitik im Ersten Weltkrieg* (Lübeck: Matthiesen, 1960), 14.
30. MacDonogh, *Frederick*, 363-4.
31. Gerhard Ritter, *Frederick the Great: A Historical Profile*, trans. and ed. Peter Paret (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1968), 189.