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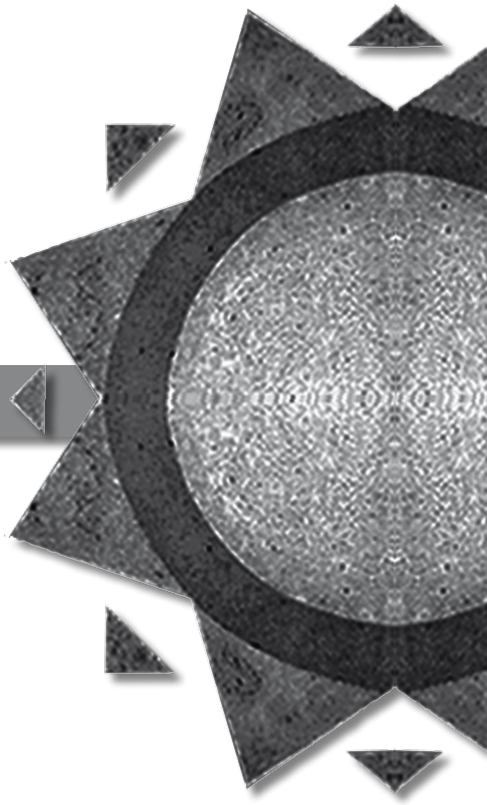

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LEAVING VIOLENCE BEHIND: THOUGHTS ON THE DEVELOPMENT OF GERMANY AFTER 1945*

DEJANDO ATRÁS LA VIOLENCIA: REFLEXIONES SOBRE EL DESARROLLO DE ALEMANIA DESPUÉS DE 1945

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Abstract

Among the 'miracles' that characterised post-war Germany, perhaps the most miraculous was the turn of the German population away from violence and their violent past. The transformation already had begun during the last months of the war, when the violence visited on Germans reached its peak. This avalanche of violence provided a shock that created the basis for a profound cultural shift: away from militaristic values as Germany became a strikingly peaceful, non-violent country. After considering what occurred in 1945, the article goes on to discuss various spheres where this cultural shift may be traced: attitudes towards the military and military service, corporal punishment in schools, the increased prominence of women in public life, and the general process of liberalization that affected postwar Western Europe generally.

Keywords: Germany, Post-war, violence, peaceful.

Resumen

Entre los 'milagros' que caracterizaron a Alemania durante la posguerra, quizás lo más milagroso fue el alejamiento de la población alemana de la violencia y su violento pasado. La transformación ya había comenzado en los últimos meses de la guerra, cuando la violencia visitada a alemanes alcanzó su nivel máximo. Esta avalancha de violencia generó un shock que sentó las bases para un cambio cultural profundo: lejos de los valores militaristas Alemania se convirtió en un país sorprendentemente pacífico, no violento. Después de consi-

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derar lo que ocurrió en 1945, el artículo pasa a discutir diversos ámbitos donde puede encontrarse este cambio cultural: las actitudes hacia lo militar y el servicio militar, los castigos corporales en las escuelas, el mayor protagonismo de la mujer en la vida pública y el proceso general de liberalización que afectó a Europa de posguerra en general.

Palabras clave: Alemania, Postguerra, violencia, pacífica.

Over the past few decades, there has been an explosion of interest in violence as a subject of research. Sociologists, political scientists, anthropologists and historians have devoted enormous attention to violence – to its measurement, to its causes, to possible ways of reducing or combating it. Thousands of books and articles have been produced that examine just about every conceivable aspect of the subject – a subject that also has attracted wide public attention, as evidenced by the tremendous interest aroused by the recent book of Harvard psychologist Steven Pinker, *The Better Angels of our Nature*, in which he argues that 'violence has declined over long stretches of time, and today we may be living in the most peacable era in our species' existence'[1]. While objections can be, and have been raised about Pinker's thesis[2], it seems incontrovertible that violence has become a major public pre-occupation, at least in Europe and North America. The Second World War, it would seem, has been a significant turning point, if not necessarily with regard to the amount or extent of violence in the world (as Pinker may insist) but almost certainly with regard to perceptions of and even the obsession with violence. Over the past half century, we seem to have become much more sensitive with regard to violence[3]. Something has changed.

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1 Pinker, Steven, *The Better Angels of Our Nature. The Decline of Violence in History and its Causes*. London, Penguin Books, 2012. For a few (generally positive) reactions in prominent publications, see *The New York Times, Sunday Review*. 7 January 2012. 'Sunday Dialogue: Do We Live in a Less Deadly Time, or Not?' (http://www.nytimes.com/2012/01/08/opinion/sunday/sunday-dialogue-do-we-live-in-a-less-deadly-time-or-not.html?ref=stevenpinker); Singer, Peter, 'Is Violence History?'. *The New York Times*. 6 October 2011. (http://www.nytimes.com/2011/10/09/books/review/the-better-angels-of-our-nature-by-steven-pinker-book-review.html?pagewanted=3&ref=stevenpinker); Kolbert, Elizabeth, 'Peace in Our Time'. *The New Yorker*. 3 October 2011. p. 75; review by Cookson, Clive, *Financial Times*. 7 Oct. 2011. (http://www.ft.com/intl/cms/s/2/910d787a-eb91-11e0-a576-00144feab49a.html#ixzz1b5o1T17P);Wilson, James, 'Burying the Hatchet'. *The Wall Street Journal*. 1 October 2011. (http://stevenpinker.com/pinker/files/book_review__the_better_angels_of_our_nature_-_wsj.com_.htm).

2 For a particularly thoughtful, critical review of Pinker's book, see Ziemann, Benjamin, 'Eine "neue Geschichte der Menschheit"?. Anmerkungen zu Steven Pinkers evolutiver Deutung der Gewalt'. *Mittelweg* 36. Vol. 21. N° 3. 2012. pp. 45-56. The subtitle of the German edition is 'Eine neue Geschichte der Menschheit' – 'a new history of humanity'.

3 This will be argued more extensively in my forthcoming book, *A Brief History of Violence*.

In this article, I want to explore that change by focusing on the aftermath of an extreme case of violence in the modern world – extreme in the extent and intensity of the violence both that people experienced and that they had perpetrated. That case is provided by what happened in Germany in the wake of the Second World War[4], something that may have general relevance with regard to our understanding of the recent histories of other societies that have suffered and emerged from extreme violence. For as important as it is to understand how people were drawn *into* an environment of extreme violence, it perhaps is even more important to understand how people have been able to get *back out*.

In many respects, what occurred in Germany, and particularly in West Germany, after the destruction of the Nazi regime in 1945 has seemed little short of miraculous. Since the Second World War it has been common to speak of the development of postwar West Germany in terms of miracles. The most prominent element of this 'miracle' vocabulary is the 'economic miracle', the name given to the recovery that began in the wake of the currency reform in 1948 and that, at least in retrospect, characterized the 1950s in West Germany. The early years of that 'economic miracle' may not have appeared quite so miraculous to Germans at the time, and that miracle may have been essentially a special product of what Eric Hobsbawm described as the postwar 'golden years' which saw unprecedented economic growth and increases in the weath and welfare of the inhabitants of western industrialized countries[5]. However, looked at from the vantage point of the mid-1960s German economic recovery did appear miraculous and was commonly described as such. Historians, who often believe that they know better than the people who actually lived through these times, are keen to deconstruct the idea of miracles, and in so doing have given us new perspectives on what Hanna Schissler referred to, in her influencial collection of essays published in 2001, as 'The Miracle Years'[6]. Yet for all our admirable attempts to deconstruct historical myth, we should not lose sight of the often

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4 Timothy Snyder has levelled criticism at Steven Pinker for neglecting to treat adequately the history of post-1945 Germany in *The Better Angels of Our Nature*: 'Treating Nazi Germany as a historical aberration (...) allows Pinker to sidestep the question of how Germans and central and western Europeans became such peaceful people after the demise of Nazism. This is a strange oversight, since European pacifism and low European homicide rates are where he begins the book. Today's Europe is Pinker's gold standard, but he does not ask why its levels of violence are the lowest in all of his charts. **If,** as he contends, the "pleasures of bourgeois life" prevent people from fighting, Pinker should also consider the place where these are most fully developed, and how they became so. See Snyder, Timothy. 'War No More. Why the World Has Become More Peaceful'. *Foreign Affairs*. 2012. p. 158.

5 Hobsbawm, Eric, *The Age of Extremes: A History of the World, 1914-1991.* Vintage Books, New York, 1994, chapter 9.

6 Schissler, Hanna (ed.), *The Miracle Years: A Cultural History of West Germany 1949 to 1968*. Princeton, Pricenton University Press, 2001.

surprising quality of the overall success story that is Germany since the Second World War.

This success story was the subject of a conference in Montréal in 2009, entitled 'Bonne Fête "BRD": Regards croisés sur six décennies d'émerveillements'. The talk at that conference – not without a degree of irony – was of 'six decades of miracles' that framed the sixty years of German history following the establishment of the Federal Republic in 1949. The miracles were many: the economic recovery, the establishment of a stable republic, the avoidance of war, the re-establishment of a German military without a return to German militarism, the achievements of the reform movements of the late 1960s that successfully democratised German political culture and society.

In this article I would like to offer a suggestion for placing these 'six decades of miracles' into a general perspective, and state my thesis baldly at the outset: At the center of the 'six decades of miracles' stands perhaps the greatest miracle of them all, namely that Germany and Germans largely came to turn their backs on violence and their violent past, and this shift began in 1945. That is to say, the starting point of our discussions should not be 24 May 1949 - the birth date of the Federal Republic, when the Basic Law came into force; nor is it 14 August 1949, the date of the first West German parliamentary elections; nor is it 7 October 1949, when the German Democratic Republic was born; nor is it the date of the currency reform and introduction of the Deutsche Mark, 20 June 1948, something which has loomed large in discussions of the basis of postwar (West) German society and mentalities[7]. The starting point for our discussions should be 1945 – not May, when Germany surrended to the Allies, but mid-January, when the Red Army launched its vast offensive that sealed the fate of the 'Third Reich'. That offensive smashed the Wehrmacht's defenses on the eastern front and destroyed any illusions (illusions that had been widely held up to that point) that Germany might avoid total defeat. In 1945 Germans were transformed from the profiteers of violence into its victims - at least in how they imagined themselves.

Never has there been a killing frenzy to match what occurred in Germany at the

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[7] For a particularly perceptive discussion along these lines, see Niethammer, Lutz, 'Privat-Wirtschaft. Erinnerungsfragmente einer anderen Umerziehung'. Niethammer, Lutz (ed.). *"Hinterher merkt man, daß es richtig war, daß es schiefgegangen ist". Nachkriegs-Erfahrungen im Ruhrgebiet*. Berlin and Bonn, Verlag J. H. W. Dietz Nachf.1983. esp. pp. 79-87. According to Niethammer: 'No other event etched itself so broadly into the experiences of the West German population as did the Currency Reform of 20 June 1948.' ('Kein anderes Ereignis hat sich so allgemeinverbindlich in die Erfahrungen der westdeutschen Bevölkerung eingeschrieben wie die Währungsreform vom 20. Juni 1948'.)

beginning of 1945. In January, when Soviet armies launched the offensive that brought them from the Vistula to the Oder in a couple of weeks, German casualties reached their peak. During that single month more than 450,000 German soldiers lost their lives, and in each of the following three months the number of German military dead exceeded 280,000[8]. (Allied, in large measure Soviet, casualties probably were even higher!) This occurred at the same time as the Allied bombing of Germany, and the casualties that resulted from it, reached their peak; and at the same time millions of Germans were fleeing westwards ahead of the Red Army, many thousands losing their lives in the process. Not surprisingly, Germans emerged from this tsunami of violence convinced that they were victims. In their minds the Second World War became the violence that others did to them in 1945 rather than the violence that they had done to others since September 1939[9]. The bloodbath of 1945 enabled Germans to dissociate themselves from the bloodbaths that they had inflicted on others, and from the violent ideology that had fuelled the Nazi regime; it enabled Germans to leave violence behind. It is this – the avalanche of violence in early 1945 and Germans' responses to it – that forms the proper starting point of a history of German mentalities in the wake of the Second World War.

Given the condition of Germany at the end of the war, the change that occurred after 1945 - as Germany became a strikingly peaceful, non-violent country during the second half of the twentieth century - was remarkable. Despite recurrent concerns that, as the *Handelsblatt* put it when commenting on a reported rise in the number of crimes of violence in 2005, 'German society is becoming ever more aggressive' ('die deutsche Gesellschaft werde immer aggressiver')[10], postwar Germany became a very safe place to be. Indeed, considering what occurred during the first half of the Twentieth Century, historians of recent German history probably would be amazed to read that German society had become 'more aggressive' than ever.

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8 Overmans, Rüdiger, *Deutsche militärische Verluste im Zweiten Weltkrieg.* Oldenbourg Verlag, Munich, 1999, p. 238. See also Kunz, Andreas, 'Die Wehrmacht in der Agonie der nationalsozialistischen Herrschaft 1944/45. Eine Gedankenskizze'. Hillmann, Jörg and Zimmermann, John (eds.). *Kriegsende 1945 in Deutschland.* Munich. Oldenbourg Wissenschaftsverlag. 2002. p. 107.

9 See Bessel, Richard, *Germany 1945. From War to Peace*. London and New York, Harper, 2009, pp. 167 - 168, 396 - 397; Bessel, Richard, 'The War to End All Wars: The Shock of Violence in 1945 and its Aftermath in Germany'. Lüdtke, Alf and Weisbrod¸ Bernd (eds.). *No Man's Land of Violence. Extreme Wars in the 20th Century*. Göttingen. Wallstein Verlag. 2006. pp. 69-100.

10 *Handelsblatt*. 9 Sept. 2005 'Gewaltkriminalität in Deutschland erreicht Höchststand'. (http://www.handelsblatt.com/politik/deutschland/gewaltkriminalitaet-in-deutschland-erreicht-hoechststand;910614).

In fact, it is the ***sensitivity*** to outbursts of violence, rather than the quantity or intensity of that violence, that is noteworthy. This could be seen, for example, in the reactions to the outbreak of xenophobic violence in Germany during the early 1990s (most notably in the attacks on foreigners in Rostock-Lichtenhagen in August 1992[11]) – when, in the words of Klaus Bade, public discussion was 'marked by fear of a growing, aggressive xenophobia, acceptance of violence against foreigners, and, correspondingly, a growing number of perpetrators and victims'[12]. With hindsight, we now can see that the upsurge of nasty xenophobic incidents in the early 1990s, dreadful through they were, remained limited. As it turned out, 1992 proved the high-water mark of this violence, which was roundly condemned and led to massive counter-demonstrations against racial violence (as well as to education programmes and much research into youth violence)[13]. As Bade has pointed out, it is the fact of Germany's dark history during the 1930s and 1940s

> 'that makes brutality against minorities seem even more gruesome. (...) Normal peaceful coexistence in united Germany is thus overlooked as are the 'foreigner-friendly' countermovements and helpful initiatives: the human chains of candlelight in the winter of 1992; the vast numbers of organized and spontaneous offers for [*sic*] help in daily life; the taking in and caring for refugees; and the provision of illegal hiding places for asylum seekers whose applications have been denied and who are to be extradited.'[14]

It was not so much the, relatively benign, present that aroused alarm, but the spectre of the past and the fears that it embedded in German mentalities, which determined the tenor of public discussion. What is striking in public discourse in postwar Germany is not violence so much as it is the ***fear*** of violence.

This suggests that Germany underwent a remarkable transformation in attitudes towards violence during the second half of the twentieth century, not just

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11 For an account of the violence in Rostock-Lichtenhagen in 1992, which notes the importance of unemployment in the region, see Panayi, Panikos, 'Racial Violence in the New Germany 1990-93'. *Contemporary European History*. Vol. 3. No. 3. 1994. pp. 270 - 272. In my own discussions with people in Rostock soon afterwards, I was told that inexperience in dealing with such crowd violence on the part of the local police had allowed matters to get out of control, until reinforcements arrived from Hamburg.

12 Bade, Klaus, 'Immigration and Social Peace in United Germany'. *Daedelus*. Vol. 123. N° 1. 1994. p. 85.

13 Panayi, 'Racial Violence in the New Germany 1990-93', p. 279.

14 Bade, 'Immigration and Social Peace in United Germany', p. 86.

in terms of politics but also in terms of mentalities and culture in the broader sense. Few aspects of this transformation – and one, which sets Germany apart from other European countries (not least from the United Kingdom) – were more striking than changes in attitudes towards the armed forces. In 1945 the Wehrmacht failed, catastrophically. The attractions of militarism, so long a prominent feature of German public culture, evaporated. The Wehrmacht had lost a war such as a war never had been lost before: totally! This was followed by concerted campaigns of the occupation powers to stamp out what they regarded as German militarism: libraries were cleared of books that endorsed violence; teachers were forbidden to glorify the military; public monuments deemed to preserve the German military tradition were pulled down; and in December 1945 the Allied Control Council ordered a 'demilitarisation of sports' by banning sports associations that displayed a military character and were involved in activities such as fencing or shooting[15].

These Allied campaigns did not meet with much public opposition among the German population. Looking out over the rubble left by Nazism and war, it appeared to many - including Theodor Heuss, who was to become the first President of the Federal Republic - that the defeat in 1945 marked the end of German military history[16]. The use of armed force so obviously had brought catastrophe, the boundless application of violence and the glorification of things military so obviously had led to disaster, that public opinion in postwar Germany turned away from martial values. According to the Social Democratic politician (and Vice President of the German Bundestag from 1949 to 1966) Carlo Schmid, anti-militarism had become 'the real ideology of German youth after the war'[17]. Even so unlikely an anti-militarist as Franz-Josef Strauß, who had been a Wehrmacht officer during the war and who served as (among other things) West German Defence Minister from 1957 to 1962, was heard to remark in the late 1940s that 'whoever takes a rifle in his hand once again, may his hand drop off'.[18] In a public-opinion survey in West Germany in January 1950, when asked 'Would you think it right to become a soldier again or that your son or your hus-

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15 See Jarausch, Konrad, *Die Umkehr. Deutsche Wandlungen 1945-1995*. Munich, Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, 2004, pp. 41-43.

16 Afflerbach, Holger, 'Das Militär in der deutschen Gesellschaft nach 1945'. Afflerbach, Holger and Cornelißen, Christoph (eds.), *Sieger und Besiegte. Materielle und ideele Neuorientierungen nach 1945*. Tübingen and Basel. Francke. 1997, p. 249.

17 Quoted in *Der Spiegel*. 6 April 1993. "Das Wesen der Republik verändert". Der Nachkriegs-Pazifismus der Deutschen und Adenauers Kampf für die Militarisierung'. p. 24.

18 Wette, Wolfram, 'Die deutsche militärische Führungsschicht in den Nachkriegszeiten'. Gottfried, Niedhart and Riesenberger, Dieter (eds.). *Lernen aus dem Krieg? Deutsche Nachkriegszeiten 1918 und 1945. Beiträge zur historischen Friedensforschung*. Munich. C.H. Beck. 1992. p. 40.

band again be a soldier?', three quarters of the respondents answered 'no'[19]. In the autumn of 1951, while a narrow majority of West Germans favoured the formation of a national army, nearly half the population - and more than half of former Wehrmacht soldiers - expressed their approval of conscientious objection[20]. Similar sentiments were current in the East: police reports on the 'opinion of the population on the creation of the People's Police in Barracks' (the precursor of the 'National People's Army' of the German Democratic Republic) during the summer of 1952 revealed considerable disquiet about the creation of a new German army. As one farmer (and member of the ruling Socialist Unity Party) near Pasewalk put it: 'Didn't they always say, we want to take no weapons in our hands any more?'[21] Carlo Schmidt expressed an opinion held by millions of Germans when he asserted in 1946 that 'we never want to send our sons into the barracks again'[22]. During the immediate postwar years, the war experience and, in particular, the shock of the extreme violence of 1944 and 1945, led to a radical shift in German mentalities. The belief in the virtue of war and military values had been dealt a massive blow.

One can counter that Germany did not remain demilitarised for very long. Substantial German armies were formed during the second half of the 1950s on both sides of the east-west border, and if one can speak of a new German antimilitarism following the experience of Nazism and war, this was antimilitarism of a rather peculiar kind. It was a product not only of the shock of 1945, but also of the political impotence of a defeated and occupied nation in a world dominated by two superpowers. It was in this context that the pacifist tendency, the 'Count-Me-Out' (*Ohne-Mich*) movement in the Federal Republic of the 1950s, co-existed with a powerful sense of the Soviet threat[23]. Although few young men in West Germany sought to avoid military service during the 1950s and 1960s, the idea that it was desirable to sacrifice one's life for the Fatherland was conspicuous by its absence.

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19 Quoted in Afflerbach, 'Das Militär in der deutschen Gesellschaft nach 1945', p. 250. The lack of attraction of life in uniform and the armed forces continued into the 1950s. See, for example, Schildt, Axel, *Moderne Zeiten. Freizeit, Massenmedien und "Zeitgeist" in der Bundesrepublik der 50er Jahren*. Hans Christian Verlag, Hamburg, 1995, p. 322.

20 Michael Geyer, 'Cold War Angst. The Case of West-German Opposition to Rearmament and Nuclear Weapons'. Schissler, Hanna (ed.). *The Miracle Years: A Cultural History of West Germany 1949 to 1968*. Princeton, Pricenton University Press, 2001, p. 387.

21 Mecklenburgisches Landeshauptarchiv Schwerin, Kreistag/Rat des Kreises Uekermünde/ Pasewalk. Nr. 118. ff. 2-4: Kreisverwaltung Pasewalk, Landrat, Abt. Information, Pasewalk, 14 July 1952.

22 Wette, 'Die deutsche militärische Führungsschicht in den Nachkriegszeiten', p. 40.

23 According to a poll conducted in July 1952, two thirds (66%) of those asked 'do you have the feeling that we are threatened by Russia or not?' answered that they felt threatened. Quoted in Afflerbach, 'Das Militär in der deutschen Gesellschaft nach 1945', p. 250.

The rejection of military values gathered pace from the late 1960s onwards as the postwar generations came of age. This was reflected in the numbers of young men applying for recognition as conscientious objectors in the Federal Republic, which increased from a trickle in the late 1950s (with 2,447 altogether in 1958) and early 1960s (3,311 in 1963) to a flood: 11,952 in 1968, 54,193 in 1980, 77,398 in 1988, and 172,024 in 1998. By the beginning of the 1990s roughly two in five of the men called to perform military service refused, opting instead for 'Zivildienst' ('civilian service') – in 1958 the comparable figure had been a mere half of one per cent – and by 2008 altogether over two and a half million men had performed alternative service as conscientious objectors[24]. During the early 1980s, mass protests unfolded on the streets of the Federal Republic against the NATO 'Double-Track Decision' ('Doppelbeschluß') and the deployment of the 'neutron bomb' – culminating in the demonstration of nearly half a million people for peace and disarmament and against the 'Doppelbeschluß' in Bonn in October 1983. The German popular opposition to the American and British invasion of Iraq in 2003, and the political boost enjoyed by the then Federal Chancellor Gerhard Schroeder for refusing to support George W. Bush's crusade against Saddam Hussein, comprise a recent expression of German popular hostility towards engaging in military conflict.

There also has been a diminishing acceptance of violence in everyday public encounters, as exemplified by changing attitudes towards corporal punishment in schools. Although the great majority of West Germans continued to appove of the corporal punishment of children well into the 1970s[25], the tide was turning. Dirk Schumann has observed that 'at the end of the 1940s almost all the *Länder* of the Federal Republic granted teachers the right to carry out corporal punishment; in the early 1970s almost all of them revoked it' [26]. Of course, this development too was not exclusive to West Germany: corporal punishment in schools was being rejected at roughly the same time across the western world.

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[24] In 1958 a mere 2,447, or 0.5%, of the 464,418 men called for military service refused; at the peak, in 1991, the proportion had risen to 39.7%. See Afflerbach, 'Das Militär in der deutschen Gesellschaft nach 1945', p. 263. See also the statistics assembled by the Bundeswehr: 'Anzahl der gestellten Anträge auf Anerkennung als Kriegsdienstverweigerer pro Jahr. Stand 28. Februar 2009'. Accessed via http://www.zivildienst.de/lang_de/Navigation/DasBAZ/Presse/Statistikangebot/Statistikangebot__node .html__nnn=true

[25] In 1977 it was reported that, according to a poll taken by the Allensbach Institut für Demoskopie, 70 per cent of West Germans approved of corporal punishment. See *Der Spiegel*. 10 Jan. 1977. 'Hirn statt Hosenboden'. p. 50.

[26] Schumann, Dirk, 'Legislation and Liberalization: The Debate About Corporal Punishment in Schools in Postwar West Germany, 1945–1975'. *German History*. Vol. 25. N° 2. 2007. p. 193. In 1976 the German Supreme Court ruled that corporal punishment in schools had no legal basis. See Schumann, Dirk, 'Authority in the "Blackboard Jungle": Parents and Teachers, Experts and the State, and the Modernization of West Germany in the 1950s'. *GHI Bulletin*.

However, the shift from the authoritarian education system which had been so characteristic of Germany during the first half of the twentieth century to an education system which became increasingly influenced by anti-authoritarian movements during the second half of the century, is striking.

A parallel to this may be found in new, 'democratic' conceptions of fatherhood in postwar West Germany. Postwar criticism of authoritarian, patriarchal models of fatherhood – at a time when millions of fathers were missing as a result of wartime losses – was not least a criticism of 'fathers who raised their children with "authoritarian (...) and violent methods"' and who allegedly 'had been the midwives of the Nazi dictatorship'[27]. The 'new models of domestic masculinity, so central to the early West German quest for democracy', meant, in Till van Rahden's formulation, substituting 'gentle fatherhood instead of militarized masculinity'[28]. Brute force was out; the 'playful father' was in. 'Democratic fatherhood' was non-violent fatherhood, and was to help ensure that Germany would not revert to its authoritarian, militaristic and violent past.

One way of conceptualising the transformations referred to here may be to view them as consequences of a feminisation of culture and public life, assuming of course that we regard women as being less violent than men. At the point when the great transformation from a remarkably violent to a remarkably non-violent society began – 1945 – German society had become overwhelmingly female. With over four million German soldiers dead and roughly 10 million more sitting in prisoner of war camps when the Second World War ended in Europe[29], the proportion of the German population that was female probably was greater than at any time before or since. In the 'Province of Saxony' (i.e. Sachsen-Anhalt), for example, at the end of 1945 there were twice as many women as men between the ages of 30 and 40 and three times as many between the ages of 20 and 30[30]. Of course, Germany was awash with young men at the time: the soldiers of the armies of occupation. However, German society itself remained disproportionally female for decades as a result of the wartime losses, and concerns of and about women were particularly important in both public and private culture. To be sure, as Robert Moeller pointed out

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27 Rahden, Till van, 'Paternity, Rechristianization, and the Quest for Democracy in Postwar West Germany, in Germany'. *Forschungsberichte aus dem Duitsland Instituut Amsterdam*. N° 4. 2008. p. 60. See also Rahden, Till van, 'Wie Vati die Demokratie lernte. Zur Frage der Autorität in der politischen Kulture der frühen Bundesrepublik'. *WestEnd: Neue Zeitschrift für Sozialforschung*. Vol. 4. N° 1. 2007. pp. 113-126.

28 Rahden, 'Paternity, Rechristianization, and the Quest for Democracy', p. 65.

29 On the number of prisoners of war, see Bessel, *Germany 1945*, p. 125.

30 Bundesarchiv Berlin Lichterfelde. DO-I-7. f. 58: Statistisches Landesamt to the Abteilung Polizei, Halle/Saale, 8 Oct. 1946.

some time ago, the conservative West German political coalition of the 1950s 'underscored connections between a strong German nation and strong German patriarchs', but at the centre of this concern for a 'strong German nation' lay the perceived need to protect women and motherhood[31]. More generally, with the military defeat, the Allied occupation and the disproportionally large number of women, one might argue that Germany as a whole assumed a more passive posture than in the past.

Another line of argument may be to see the change in attitudes towards violence as part of a general transformation of West German society from the 1950s through the 1980s that Ulrich Herbert has characterised as a 'process of liberalisation' – a transnational process which involved a 'modernisation of forms and norms of life, and of political attitudes in the sense of participation, pluralism and the dismantling of hierarchical and authoritarian structures'[32]. Trends in (West) Germany were not all that different from what unfolded in many other western countries after the Second World War, which suggests that the transformation sketched out here could be understood as part of trends affecting the western world generally rather than as a result of the specifics of the German case. Pushed to its extreme, it may even suggest that the horrors and violence of the Nazi regime and of the Second World War had little lasting effect.

However, that violence was so extreme, and the shift from a violent and militaristic culture to a remarkably pacifist one was so sudden and so striking, that reference to general trends seems to offer a necessary but not sufficient explanation of how the Germans became civilised after 1945. Reference to general trends across the western world should not cause us to lose sight of the scale of the transformation of specifically German mentalities since the Second World War or of the shock of the extreme violence of 1945. That shock left behind a huge legacy of fear – fear of the ghosts of a violent past, fear of Germany's and Germans' violent potential, fear of war, fear of social breakdown and civil disorder. Unlike the inhabitants of some other countries, notably of the United Kingdom and the United States, Germans had experienced in extreme form the horrors that unrestrained violence could bring. And this left

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31 Moeller, Robert, *Protecting Motherhood: Women and the Family in the Politics of Postwar West Germany*. University of California Press, Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1993. Quotation from p. 202.

32 Herbert, Ulrich, 'Liberalisierung als Lernprozeß. Die Bundesrepublik in der deutschen Geschichte – eine Skizze'. Herbert, Ulrich, (ed.), *Wandlungsprozesse in Westdeutschland. Belastung, Integration, Liberalisierung* 1945-1980. Göttingen, Wallstein, 2002, p. 12.

Germany with a public culture particularly characterised by fear and a desperate desire for security[33].

It may be comforting to think that the shock of 1945, the explosion of violence at the end of the Second World War and the revelation of the utter bankruptcy and defeat of an ideology that glorified violence, led to an irreversible shift in German mentalities and civic culture. However, we should not confuse wish with analysis, or be lulled into complacency by the idea that what was experienced during the past half century comprised a permanent state of affairs. Dan Diner wrote more than ten years ago that 'historically the epoch of the Cold War was paradoxically an epoch of great neutralisations'[34]. He was referring to the neutralisations of national conflicts, rivalries and animosities, but the same argument perhaps could be developed about the application of violence, in an era when open warfare was effectively ruled out in Europe by the threat of nuclear confrontation. However, the epoch of the Cold War is over, and we no longer can be sure that the 'great neutralisations' of the postwar era have been embedded in public culture.

Similarly, those who grew up in the wake of the Second World War and who now are trying to analyse the development of a society in the shadow of that war, should be aware that that shadow is passing. The heightened sensitivity towards, and fear of violence since the Second World War may be, at least in part, something generation-specific. Like other Europeans, Germans born in the 1980s and 1990s are products not of a postwar world but of a post-postwar world. They did not grow up with war-scarred landscapes; their parents had not suffered at first hand from the war; they did not grow up listening to the war stories of those who had participated in the conflict; they have not had contact with people who lost their relatives or their limbs in war; they have not lived in a society where women in their twenties or thirties outnumbered men by two or three to one. Their points of historical reference are not located in the Second World War, to say nothing of the First. Historical consciousness always changes. The second half of the twentieth century witnessed the development of a remarkable shift in how Germans came to regard violence and war, as a consequence of the incredibly violent history of the first half of that century. But that may change.

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[33] See Geyer, 'Cold War Angst'.

[34] Diner, Dan, *Das Jahrhundert verstehen. Eine universalhistorische Deutung*. Munich, Luchterhand Literaturverlag, 1999, p. 313.

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