Per Helldahl

The Challenge from Nationalism

Problems of Community in Democracy
Abstract


The dissertation examines the relationship between democracy and nationalism from a normative standpoint. A point of departure is the assumption that any democracy requires a referent community, or demos. Nationalism has, in practice, frequently provided democracies with this sense of community during the last two centuries. The author argues, firstly, that this connection has led to an entanglement of the concepts of democracy and nationalism, so that democrats tend to rely, often unknowingly, on the thought structures of nationalism as they seek to make explicit the identity of their respective communities. The mechanism by which this connection is upheld is demonstrated through two contextualized studies of discourse on common society-wide identity in, respectively, the contemporary United States of America and the contemporary Federal Republic of Germany. Secondly, it is argued (also on the basis of these contextualized studies) that the nationalist features which tend to ‘leak’ into the overarching, society-wide identities that are constructed in these debates contain an inherently exclusionary potential; however, this leakage is often glossed over by superficial anti-nationalism and phrases such as ‘civic nationalism’, which is contrasted with ‘ethnic nationalism’. Rather than hidden behind such rhetoric, the author argues, the nationalist thought structures that democrats tend to rely on should be brought into the light of day, so that the potentially destructive features of nationalism can be handled in the best way possible. Thirdly, it is claimed that deliberative models (such as that of Jürgen Habermas) are better suited than liberal nationalist models (such as that of David Miller) for this task.

*Keywords:* Nationalism, Community, Theory of democracy, Political theory, United States of America, Germany

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To Edina
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I. Introduction

The question of the relationship between national community and democracy is a complex and multi-faceted one. Nationalism is often thought of as an evil – as a source of intolerance, chauvinism and xenophobia – and indeed there is ample evidence of the apparent shortcomings of nationalism from a normative point of view, in international politics as militarism and expansionism, and in domestic politics as the exclusion and repression of cultural minorities. Taken to its extreme, this repression may even take the form of ethnic cleansing and genocide. Yet, there is wide agreement that the solidarity and sense of community which nationalism may generate have in many instances proven a valuable asset to democracy. Indeed, most scholars agree that some source of community is indispensable for democracy to function, and historically, nationalism has been the dominant source of such community.

This book is about the normative problems stemming from the fact that democracies frequently rely on nationalism for community, and the proposed solutions to these problems.

For better or worse, nationalism has in many instances provided democracy with the sense of a common good, the solidarity yielded by the perception of belonging to the same community, and the unifying myths and narratives which place the individual in a meaningful context as a bearer of citizenship with the rights and duties which come with it. The continuing relevance of the nation as the basic social or geographical unit of democracy is demonstrated by the observation that democratizing societies tend to be nation-building ones as well, except in cases where nationhood has already been established. On a philosophical level, Robert Dahl (to name but one) has

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remarked that ‘the criteria of the democratic process presuppose the rightful-
ness of the unit itself’. Nationalism emerges as a pragmatic solution to this
problem in democracy, providing the narratives and thought structures that
neatly explain who belongs in which respective community. More formally,
we may express the matter at hand in the following terms. The dependence
of democracy on some sort of community is a conceptual one, following
from the logical fact that democracy requires a *demos* for the exercise of
*kratos* (political power). This function may be performed by nationalism –
but this is by no means a logical necessity. We need only think of, for exam-
ple, the ancient Greek city-states such as Athens to find an example of a
democratic community which emerged long before the development of na-
tionalism. However, since the French Revolution – which constitutes the
founding moment of nationalism – liberal democracy and nationalism have
developed in close conjunction; to a large extent, nationalism has come to
define the conceptual world in which modern democracy finds itself. This
conceptual entanglement, which I will attempt to demonstrate during the
course of the book, makes the extraction of democracy from the folds of
nationalism exceedingly difficult.

The conjunction of recognition of the need for democratic community, on
the one hand, and the apparent shortcomings of nationalism, on the other,
have proved a challenge for normative political theory. In the field of politi-
cal theory, the two main responses to this challenge have been to (a) turn to
sources of community other than classical nationalism – although the polity
in question may still be a state which emerged in the context of nationalism;
or (b) seek to construct permissible, normatively ‘safe’ versions of national-
ism. The former category of theories, which may be labelled ‘postnationalism’ and which is also associated with terms such as ‘civic patri-
otism’ and ‘constitutional patriotism’, generally builds on notions of repub-
licanism and civic virtue as a source of solidarity, the roots of which may be
traced back to Aristotle and Cicero, and which are perceived as ‘untainted’
by nationalism. Among the foremost proponents of postnationalism are Jür-
gen Habermas, David Held, and James Bohman. As I will try to show, it is
not an easy task they have set out for themselves, as the very development of
democracy has since the period of the French Revolution been entangled
with nationalism, not only on a political-historical but also on a conceptual-
historical one. The latter strategy – i.e., the various ‘liberal nationalist’ posi-
tions associated with names such as David Miller, Will Kymlicka and Yael

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nally published in 1992 as: *Faktizität und Geltung. Beiträge zur Diskurstheorie des Rechts
und des Demokratischen Rechtsstaats*, Suhrkamp Verlag, Frankfurt am Main); Held, David &
Daniele Archibugi (eds.), 1995: *Cosmopolitan Democracy: An Agenda for a New World
Tamir⁶ – is a no less difficult one, given the tensions generated by the exclusionary mechanisms of nationalism in relation to the universalist tenets on which democratic principles rest.

Very generally, the aim of the thesis is to contribute to an understanding of the normative status of national community, by seeking to clarify the relationship between nationalism and democracy. This means shedding light on two distinct items: firstly, the conceptual-historical interrelation between democracy and nationalism, and secondly, the internal tensions of national community. The analysis, thus, is not in itself an exercise in normative theory; however, there is an important link to normative theory in that the analysis seeks to shed light on some particular aspects of national community which are of central importance to a normative dispute – that of the normative status of nationalism in relation to democracy. Ultimately, this analysis challenges the theoretical assumptions made by postnationalists and liberal nationalists alike. Thus, the aim of the thesis is, firstly, to demonstrate the entanglement of nationalism with democracy. I argue that existent theories have failed to pay sufficient attention to the particular dynamics of the relationship between democracy and nationalism, a failure that hampers their ability to grasp the problematic of community in democracy. Secondly, I will seek to spell out why this entanglement may cause problems for democrats. Finally, I offer some reflections on how these problems may best be dealt with. (I will return to these aims at the very end of this chapter, where they are expressed in terms of three ‘basic claims’.)

To fulfil this aim, one particular type of political discourse is analysed in which these two conflicting approaches engage: namely, the normative discourse of reconstruction and reinterpretation of national identity in democracies in the light of collective historical experience. It is a starting point of the analysis that normative-political debate within this field is structured by the underlying tensions generated by, respectively, the demands of the universalist tenets of democratic principle, and the demands of community. These tensions are of crucial importance to a proper understanding of the normative problems of national community. Thus, the insights which will be gleaned from the analysis of the debates on national identity will make possible an enriched understanding of the nation as a phenomenon, with respect to the normative problems it entails, thereby making a contribution to the normative discourse outlined earlier, in which postnationalists and liberal nationalists are the central protagonists. To this end, a study of discourse on national identity in two national contexts – the United States and Germany. The logic

of this study, as well as of the choice of nations, will be discussed later. First, something must be said about the general methodological approach.

Contextualized Political Theory: How Can It Be Done, and Why Should It?

The methodological path chosen is one informed by the wish to, in a comprehensive manner, take into account the central importance of context in political theory (as well as in political analysis generally). In what follows, it will be argued that little headway can be made in the analysis of the normative problematic of the nation as a political community if this analysis is conducted on a purely abstract level, without so much as a glance at the specificity of the historical conditions which give rise to this problematic in the first place; that is, the extensive interrelatedness and co-implication of the phenomena of the modern nation and of modern democracy, respectively. An argument for the centrality of context in political theory is put forward by Joseph Carens, according to whom a contextualized approach offers three interrelated advantages:

First, it can clarify the meaning of abstract formulations. Secondly, it can provide access to normative insights that may be obscured by theoretical accounts that remain at the level of general principle. Thirdly, it can make us more conscious of the blinkers that constrain our theoretical visions when they are informed only by what is familiar.7

While Carens’ first argument may be regarded as somewhat peripheral – abstract formulations in philosophy can probably just as easily be clarified with hypothetical examples as they can with contextual accounts – the second and third, which are really one and the same, are highly informative. By confronting theory with new and diverse ‘cases’, that is, placing them in divergent contexts, we may gain a more nuanced and enriched understanding of the phenomena the theory attempts to make sense of. Yet, it is doubtful whether Carens’ argument is sufficient in the way of a defence of the particular type of modus operandi pursued in this dissertation – that is, one which comprises a lengthy, in-depth analysis of debate on national identity in two particular national contexts. Carens stresses the fact that contextualization makes for a theoretically enriched analysis, but intuitively it seems that it would be possible to make the stronger argument that a lack of contextualization, under some conditions, not only ‘constrain[s] our theoretical vision’8, but results in misleading conclusions. Can we defend the proposition

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8 Carens 2000.
that a contextualized approach makes possible not only an enriched but a more correct analysis of a given normative problematic?

Andrea Sangiovanni offers an interesting defence of contextualized political theory in a 2008 article, in which ‘practice-dependent’ and ‘practice-independent’ approaches to theories of justice are contrasted. Sangiovanni defends the practice-dependence thesis: ‘The content, scope, and justification of a conception of justice depends on the structure and form of the practices that the conception is intended to govern.’ The contrasting, practice-independent approach (which Sangiovanni claims is the prevailing one in mainstream political-theoretical discourse) proceeds according to the assumption that principles of justice can be worked out in the abstract; although proponents of this approach admit that existing practices and empirical conditions generally must be considered when principles are applied, these principles are derived completely independently of such practices. To avoid charges of relativism, Sangiovanni makes a crucial distinction between two types of practice-dependence: cultural conventionalism and institutionalism. The more familiar type, cultural conventionalism, claims that a just institutional system ‘realizes and embodies, in its law and public policy, the values implicit in its cultural practices.’ Put simply, cultural practices dictate what is right and what is wrong in a given cultural context. This approach, exemplified most famously by Michael Walzer in Spheres of Justice, is susceptible to charges (as brought forward by, among others, Ronald Dworkin) of ‘holding up a mirror’ to existing institutions and practices, thus foregoing any critical potential. Institutionalism, on the other hand, maintains that principles of justice are dependent not on culture, but on institutional form, and that institutional form is not reducible to cultural beliefs and practices. According to Sangiovanni, principles of justice can only be meaningfully constructed in the context of the institutional conditions in which particular demands for justice emerge in the first place. In other words, institutions alter the relations among individuals who participate in these institutions and shape their interactions, giving rise to demands for justice. From the starting point of these institutional conditions, principles of justice can, interpretively, be worked out. Note that this interpretive pro-

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11 Ibid. p. 144.

12 Ibid. p. 144.


14 Ibid. 2008, p. 146. 15 Ibid., p. 150.
cess has a critical aspect, as the principles of justice arrived at may differ
from those actually prevailing in the society in question. This, further, sets
the institutionalist approach apart from the cultural conventionalist one, ac-
cording to which conceptions of justice are simply derived from the wider
culture; the latter approach is thus susceptible to Dworkin’s ‘mirror image’
critique.\textsuperscript{16} Sangiovanni cites John Rawls’ later (post-1980) theory as an ex-
emplary instance of an institutionalist practice-dependent approach in action.\textsuperscript{17} In this stage of his work, Rawls derived his conception of justice as
fairness from institutionally contingent conceptions of the person and of
society as a fair system of social cooperation.\textsuperscript{18} They are institutionally con-
tingent because Rawls seeks to interpretively flesh out conceptions of justice
implicit in the public life of a democratic society such as the United States.
To quote Sangiovanni: ‘For \textit{justice as fairness} to be justified […] it must be
publicly acceptable not to all persons \textit{qua} human beings but to all \textit{citizens of a democratic society}.’\textsuperscript{19} To elaborate a conception of justice is, for the practi-
tioner of institutionalist practice-dependent theory, not only a philosophical
task but at the same time a historical and political one.\textsuperscript{20} Disputes over justice
are in a sense secondary to the primary concern of securing conditions of
trust, cooperation and security, that is, \textit{political} concerns. The way the struc-
ture of justice claims and counterclaims is cast in a given society depends on
the mould of the political structure in place to solve these basic, political
problems.\textsuperscript{21} When practice-independent theorists look for a solution to ques-
tions of justice on an abstract level, detached from the political context in
which they emerge in the first place, they misconstrue these questions of
justice.\textsuperscript{22} Problems arising within the context of a given institutional struc-
ture, Sangiovanni claims, cannot be solved without reference to the purposes
towards which this institutional structure was constructed. By beginning
with institutions rather than ending with them, Sangiovanni points out, ‘the
institutionalist in this way embeds a kind of anti-utopian political realism
into the structure of his theory’.\textsuperscript{23}

A question that the reader may ask at this point is whether Sangiovanni
believes that all problems of political philosophy arise contingently within
the bounds of the institutional structures of which he speaks – say, the insti-

\textsuperscript{16} Sangiovanni 2008, p. 149; Dworkin 1983.
\textsuperscript{17} Sangiovanni 2008, p. 150; Rawls, John, 1993: \textit{Political Liberalism}, Columbia University
Press, New York; Rawls, John, 1999: \textit{The Law of Peoples}, Harvard University Press, Cam-
2005 for another influential example of an institutional approach in Sangiovanni’s sense.
\textsuperscript{18} Sangiovanni 2008, p. 150; Rawls 1993.
\textsuperscript{19} Sangiovanni 2008, p. 151.
\textsuperscript{20} Ibid., p. 156.
\textsuperscript{21} Ibid., p. 157.
\textsuperscript{22} Ibid., p. 157f.
\textsuperscript{23} Ibid., p. 161.
tutions of liberal democracy as it practised today —, and that it is a pointless exercise to conduct any normative analysis of questions which transcend such structures. If this is so, his account may ultimately be a relativist one after all. However, if he does indeed claim that all principles of justice are completely contingent upon a given institutional structure, we need not follow him along that road. What we will take with us from Sangiovanni’s concept of institutionalism is, first and foremost, the following observation: it is of vital importance to properly differentiate between philosophical problems and proposed solutions which are ‘timeless’ in character, and those that emerge within a particular historical context. When arguments constructed on an abstract, purely philosophical level are offered up as solutions to problems that appear within the bounds of a particular context, the end result may even be counterproductive. This will be a recurring theme throughout the analysis that follows. To be more specific, and to foreshadow one of the major lines of argument in the book, attempts to formulate solutions to the problem of community in democracy which are ‘untainted’ by nationalism may be misguided if they do not answer to the fact that they are constructed within a historical context saturated by the conceptual and institutional expressions of nationalism. The proposed solutions — although elegant on the surface — may conceal, and in the worst case, be perverted by the tensions generated by underlying, unrecognized contextual factors. As will be argued, it is often the best strategy to seek to contain and practically manage such tensions rather than seek solutions to problems that may be fundamentally insoluble.

Summing up: rather than attempt to answer any normative questions about the relation between democracy and community generally, the scope of the analysis is somewhat more limited, as it is focused on the way the problems related to community in democracy express themselves in a particular context, namely, one saturated by nationalism. I do not claim that normative principles as such can be reduced to context; however, I do claim that contextual factors in some cases have a decisive impact on the interpretation of normative principles, that is, we may be led to the wrong conclusions if we do not pay attention to such contextual factors. The contextualization takes place in two steps. The first step is to examine the impact of the concept of nationalism on a general, historical level. In the second step, I conduct a comparative analysis of debates on national identity in two particular national contexts: the United States and the Federal Republic of Germany. The logic of the second step of contextualization will be explained later in the chapter (pages 20-22). We now turn to the first step of contextualization, which will proceed largely according to the logic of conceptual history, a strain of thought that will be outlined in the following.

Conceptual history, or Begriffsgeschichte, is a general approach to the historical study of ideas, introduced by the German historian Reinhart
Koselleck.\textsuperscript{24} It means the study of the change of meaning of central concepts of (especially) political discourse over time, the outcome of which is often the result of conflict. According to Koselleck, concepts are units in which human actions, ideas and socioeconomic structures interact.\textsuperscript{25} Crucially, he argues that the change in meaning of particular concepts often occurs in conjunction, so that this change comprises all concepts which form part of the same ‘semantic field’.\textsuperscript{26} Koselleck claims that the late 18\textsuperscript{th} and early 19\textsuperscript{th} centuries in Western history – that is, the era of the prototypical political revolutions, those in France and America – constitute a \textit{Sattelzeit}, during which the central concepts of present-day political discourse acquire their modern meaning.\textsuperscript{27} For our purposes, it is especially important to note that the concept of the ‘nation’ in the modern – political as opposed to strictly ethnic – sense emerges during this period, and is closely intertwined with the development of mass democracy and the idea of popular sovereignty in the wake of the French Revolution. Precisely this conceptual ‘democracy-nationalism nexus’ will play a crucial role in the study as a contextual factor profoundly influencing the way the relation between democracy, nationalism and community plays out on the level of normative-political discourse. Therefore, a fairly extensive analysis (comprising Chapter III) will be carried out on the history of the concept of the nation, or to be precise, the aspects of this history which are of direct relevance to democratic theory. In this respect, the analysis does contain an element of conceptual history in the Koselleck tradition. However, as is probably already evident, the study at hand does not begin and end with such an exercise in conceptual history; the next step (schematically) is to examine the ways the governing concept of the nation conditions and constrains the ways in the problematic of community in democracy is debated in the present-day United States as well as in the Federal Republic of Germany. That is, conceptual history forms but an initial step in the general methodological approach of the study.

To clarify what such a method of political theorizing might entail, an example may be in order. Seyla Benhabib, in her book \textit{Another Cosmopolitanism}, criticizes Will Kymlicka for his use of the terms ‘liberal nationhood’

\textsuperscript{24} Koselleck, Reinhart, 2002: \textit{The Practice of Conceptual History. Timing History, Spacing Concepts}, Stanford University Press, Stanford. Note that there is another current of conceptual history for which the major source of inspiration is the works of Quentin Skinner rather than Reinhart Koselleck. See Skinner, Quentin, 2002: \textit{Visions of Politics: Volume I: Regarding Method}, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge. Sometimes the German term \textit{Begriffsgeschichte} is used in English academic parlance to describe conceptual history in the Koselleck tradition as distinct from the Anglo-Saxon one. Skinner’s work will not be addressed further in this brief account of conceptual history as a methodological current.


\textsuperscript{26} Koselleck 2002.

\textsuperscript{27} Ibid., p. 5.
and ‘liberal democracy’ as guiding, normative concepts. These concepts, according to Benhabib, are in fact ‘concrete totalities’ which contain within themselves contradictory normative principles: not only has there been conflicts between liberalism and democracy, between the protection of individual rights and the extension of the collective franchise, but there have been and will continue to be conflicts between liberalism and nationalism, and even between the state, as an organ of the rule of law, and the nation, as a community of fate that may instrumentalize the state [...] Proceeding from such conflictual totalities I ask: which polities best permit the exercise of the democratic principle?

A general theoretical point may be elaborated on the basis of this passage in Benhabib. To take democracy as an example, it is of vital importance to distinguish democracy as an ideal concept – expressed in Benhabib’s question ‘which polities best permit the exercise of the democratic principle?’ – and (liberal) democracy as a concrete totality, as a historically contingent practice, open-ended, non-finite, and riddled with internal contradiction. The work undertaken in this book consists of the analysis of internal tensions and contradictions within such historically contingent conceptual totalities, including ‘democracy’ as well as ‘the nation’. It will be shown that some of the difficulties surrounding these tensions and contradictions are exacerbated by the fact that ideal concepts are mistaken for concrete ones.

‘Concrete totality’ is a Hegelian concept, further developed by Marx and Lukács, and Benhabib’s usage of it betrays her placement in the tradition of critical theory (or, somewhat more narrowly conceived, of the Frankfurt School), which, as Craig Calhoun points out, is heavily indebted to Hegel. To crudely summarize a vast body of literature, the aim of critical theory is to produce ‘critique’ in a specific sense; a critique which (again, extrapolating from Calhoun) entails an engagement with the theorist’s contemporary social world, and with the dependence of predominant constitutive categories and conceptual frameworks on prevailing historical and cultural conditions. This book takes as its starting point the fact of the historical embeddedness of a particular problem complex, and attempts to make sense of the internal contradictions within this historically contingent conceptual

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29 Ibid.
32 Ibid., p. 35f.
totality (‘immanent critique’). However, this is to be understood as a general approach rather as a commitment to critical theory in a more substantial sense. The tensions and contradictions of the present are taken as given, as facts to deal with pragmatically, rather than incorporated into any dialectical scheme of historical progress as in the Hegelian-Marxian tradition.

Methodological Structure

After this discussion of the theoretical underpinning of the methodological choices made, we now move on to a more practical description of the method and of the general structure of the analysis. The thesis is made up of three main parts. The first, constituted by Chapter II, is an exploration of the role of national community in democracy, conducted according to the logic of practice-dependent political theory, described in the previous section. The function fulfilled by nationalism in modern democracy is outlined in a historical perspective, and the consonant conceptual imprint made by nationalism in democratic thought and practice is discussed; thereafter follows an analysis of the tensions within democracy that this conceptual linkage has given rise to.

In order to fully carry through a contextualized, practice-dependence approach to political theory, two national contexts are studied in depth: the United States of America and the Federal Republic of Germany. This is the second main part of the thesis, comprising Chapters III and IV. More specifically, the matter of analysis is, as already mentioned, normative discourses in which national identity is reconstructed and reinterpreted in the light of collective historical experience. In each national context, a small number of core debates are selected in which questions of national identity and the normative demands of democracy are at stake. Examples of policy fields where such questions play a part are integration and citizenship policy, as well as what may be referred to as the politics of history and remembrance. Further, it is demonstrated that the normative problematic surrounding national community and democracy in each national context are dependent on internal tensions within what I have called ‘the democracy-nationalism nexus’ – although these tensions express themselves differently in the United States and Germany, due to historically contingent factors. The two contextualized studies analyse the risks involved in attempting to recast or re-imagine society-wide communities in contexts shaped by the deep conceptual impact of nationalism.

The third step of the analysis, constituted by Chapter V, is a re-examination and critique of two major theoretical responses to the problems of community in democracy, within the liberal nationalist and postnationalist traditions respectively, in the light of the analysis of the expressions of this

33 Sangiovanni 2008, p. 162.
problematic in the two national contexts. The contributions to this debate by philosophers David Miller and Jürgen Habermas will be singled out for closer scrutiny.

Two Contextual Studies: On the Selection of Contexts

The logic applied in the selection of national contexts to be analysed can be stated as ‘most different in the same category’: the United States and Germany constitute widely divergent contexts in terms of the historical legacy shaping the conditions under which new forms of community are constructed, although nationalism is a dominant feature of this legacy in both cases. Recalling the advantages of a contextualized account mentioned by Carens (see p. 14 above), the divergent character of these cases may be expected to generate a fruitful comparison and therefore a nuanced account of the phenomenon studied, that is, nationalism. We will return to the matter of case selection shortly. Turning to the two contextual studies themselves, I will focus on political debates in which questions of national identity and democratic community have been raised – for example, debates on immigration, aspects of foreign policy, and restitutions for historical injustices – and particularly on contributions to these debates in which these questions are raised to a higher level of abstraction and dealt with in the context of an explicit philosophical model.

While the logic of the case selection must be demonstrated in the analysis itself and cannot be explained exhaustively in advance, it may be of some help to the reader to substantively foreshadow the outline of the comparison between the United States and Germany. Very roughly, a basic distinction between the two nations is that the United States possesses a democratic or proto-democratic heritage manifesting itself in the Revolution of 1776 (and actually predating that era), a heritage which has obtained a mythical status in American political and general culture, constituting the fundamental structure of American national identity. Germany, on the other hand, has little in the way of such a heritage. Conversely, German national identity has traditionally been constructed not on abstract rights but on features such as culture, ethnic community and ‘blood’. In fact, the formative stages of (traditional) German national identity took place in the decades immediately following the French Revolution and the Napoleonic Wars and, partly, constituted a reaction to the republican identity which characterized France in the Revolutionary and Napoleonic era. This German identity can thus be linked to the ideological and philosophical movements of Romanticism and (what is today called) the Counter-Enlightenment. Of course, this general type of nationalism – one based on ethnicity, folk culture and birth rather than universalism and abstract rights – is not unique to Germany but can be found in many other European countries as well. However, the exclusionary character of such a make-up of national identity has proven to have especially disas-
trous consequences there, contributing to the extreme nationalist and anti-Semitic ideology of Nazism and the atrocities of the Nazi regime, the most heinous of which was the Holocaust. The resurrection of Germany as a democratic nation in the Post-War era has been accompanied by a long and arduous process of soul-searching in German political culture, resulting in both an acceptance of blame and the adoption of a vigilant, self-questioning attitude, as any sign of chauvinist nationalism is (largely, although of course not universally) condemned in the light of the darker aspects of German history. It is my argument that in the case of the United States, by contrast, the democratic, republican heritage said to fundamentally constitute what it means to be an American, has, paradoxically, on many occasions served as a ‘shield’ against the unveiling of and reflection upon unpleasant aspects of American history. This would indicate that, at least in the American case, it is not the ‘substance’ of national identity which ultimately determines its quality but rather the attitude towards the heritage which constitutes identity and the public democratic culture through which this heritage is sifted.

Three Claims

Summing up what has been said so far, the three main claims I make, and that I aim to substantiate in my analysis, are the following:

Claim 1. For conceptual-historical reasons, the entanglement of democracy with nationalism is deep and far-reaching. This means that, on such a level, the concept of democracy contains features which may give rise to nationalism, and a democratic culture need always be wary of these features.

Claim 2. Due to this entanglement, attempts to recast and reconceptualize an overarching, society-wide community in modern democracies, i.e. in contexts saturated with nationalism, entail a great risk that benign as well as malign features of nationalism leak into this reconceptualized community. These contextual factors need to be recognized, so that the problems they give rise to can be handled in the best manner possible. Anti-nationalist rhetoric may conceal such leakage; thus, the unreflective anti-nationalism which is strong in some currents of the liberal tradition may have perverse effects.

Claim 3. The reformation and reconceptualization of community are best thought of as a continuous process rather than a problem to be fully resolved. In terms of normative theories of democracy, models emphasizing deliberation are therefore superior to rights-based theories, such as that of liberal nationalism, when it comes to dealing with the problematic of community in democracy.
As made clear in the introduction of this book, the spectre of the *demos* – in other words, the hidden problem of community – looms large over democracy. Firstly, democracy would not be thinkable without a defined and delineated *demos*; secondly, the reliance of modern democracy on nationalism to provide a sense of community has shaped democratic practice in fundamental ways. In the two chapters that follow, we will look more closely at two national contexts in which this problem complex makes itself felt, analysing some attempts to spell out the meaning and identity of the particular democratic community – the United States and Germany, respectively – while staying true to the values of democracy. Due to the complexities and tensions of the relationship between democracy and nationalism, they are faced with a difficult challenge. But what exactly is the nature of this entanglement between democracy on the one hand and national community on the other? In the preliminary investigation undertaken in the present chapter, I will attempt to make this clearer. In terms of the argumentative structure presented on page 22, the arguments explicated in this chapter relate particularly to Claim 1.

The investigation takes place in three steps. The first portion of the chapter, ‘The Republican Tradition and the Liberal’, traces the republican tradition within democratic thought in which the value of community – never abandoned in democratic practice – has been kept alive in the field of political theory. Further, some basic problems in the complex relation between republican and liberal strands in democratic theory are pointed out. In the next section, ‘The Two Faces of Nationalism’, this line of argument is carried further, as it is demonstrated that *nationalism has come to fill the slot of community in the practice of democracy*. Since the advent of nationalism, the modern concept of the ‘nation’ has shaped the way community is conceived of and envisaged in democracies. In the concluding part of the chapter, ‘The Multiculturalism Discourse’, some preliminary points are made about the consequences of this link between democracy and the nation. There, it is argued that the debates over the question of the status of cultural pluralism in liberal democracy, particularly the recent backlash against the ideas of ‘multiculturalism’, reflect the fact that community in democracy has historically been defined in national terms. This historic link may be exceedingly difficult to undo, and may have consequences that prove dire, given the unattractive side of nationalism we all know too well.
The Republican Tradition and the Liberal

The revival of the concept of ‘republicanism’ in political theory in the 1970s and (especially) the 1980s was, simultaneously, a rediscovery of some strands of thought in the history of political ideas that had long been hidden from view, and a reinvigoration of these ideas on a normative plane.³⁴ This tendency first made itself felt within the field of the history of American political thought. Although used in the current sense in a 1972 article by Robert E. Shalhope, the concept of republicanism came to the attention of academic circles principally through the work of J.G.A. Pocock, a scholar of the ‘Cambridge School’ associated with Quentin Skinner and who in his seminal study The Machiavellian Moment traced the intricate genealogy of a certain constellation of ideas from present-day American political culture to 16th century Florence.³⁵ Of course, republicanism as a political ideal, in the broadest sense, is nearly as old as Western political philosophy itself, as Aristotle argued in favour of a constitutional government with the common good as its aim. However, Pocock takes as his starting point not the Ancient Greek polis but the system of government developed in the self-governing city-states of Renaissance Italy, particularly as expressed by Machiavelli (who, in turn, was profoundly influenced by ancient ‘republicans’ such as Cicero).³⁶ His close reading of classic as well as obscure political-philosophical texts reveals a ‘persistent association’ between what he calls ‘republican language’ – language praising active citizenship and civic virtue – and ‘juristic language’ protecting the rights and freedoms of individuals in relation to a sovereign.³⁷ From the writings of Machiavelli and his contemporaries in Renaissance Florence, these modes of political language found their way to ‘Whig’ political thinkers in 17th century England, and thence to revolutionary America, where they had a huge and lasting impact on political institutions and culture.³⁸ Up to the 1970s, it had been a general contention in the scholarship on American political thought and political culture that America was, to its very core, a ‘Lockean’ nation, saturated by that philoso-

³⁶ Pocock 1975.
³⁸ Pocock 1975; Pocock 1981.
pher’s individualism, liberalism and (proto-) capitalism.\textsuperscript{39} As demonstrated by Pocock and other scholars, however, American political culture was characterized by a ‘Republican synthesis’ of civic, republican ideals on the one hand and the ideas of individual rights and freedoms on the other.\textsuperscript{40} The empirical particulars of Pocock’s history of republican ideas have not remained unchallenged, but for our present purposes, what matters most is his identification of the republican synthesis – the elements of which, as it turns out, have to a certain extent been in tension ever since Revolutionary times until the present day.\textsuperscript{41}

Next, the discourse on republicanism took a decidedly normative turn. Not only had the republican tradition been ignored by contemporary scholarship; the positive virtues of active citizenship had been lost in political practice as well – or so it was claimed in a slew of literature on the values of ‘citizenship’ which emerged in the 1980s and 1990s.\textsuperscript{42} This development can be said to have been foreshadowed by the ‘liberal-communitarian’ debate of the 1980s.\textsuperscript{43} However, the republicans and ‘citizenship theorists’ were motivated partly by other concerns than the communitarian critics of the liberal conception of the unencumbered self, and did not rely on traditional, pre-political sources of community like some communitarians did, turning instead to democracy itself and the virtues and practices that sustain it – expressed in a normative conception of citizenship. This conception differs from T.H. Marshall’s influential account of citizenship as constituted by the possession of (civil, political, and social) rights.\textsuperscript{44} The new citizenship theorists criticized this passive, non-public notion of citizenship, emphasizing the participatory virtues and dedication to the common good associated with full membership in a democratic polity, and were alarmed by what they perceived as signs that the virtues and practices of democracy were being undermined in Western democracy: increasing voter apathy, welfare dependency, and conflict between subgroups in society.\textsuperscript{45} In the field of empirical social science these concerns were expressed by Robert Putnam, who made a huge impact on scholarly and political debate with the study \textit{Bowling Alone},

\textsuperscript{40} Pocock 1981; Rodgers 1992.
\textsuperscript{41} Pocock 1981, p. 53.
\textsuperscript{43} Regarding the communitarian critique of liberalism and the liberal response, see for example Avineri, Shlomo & Avner de-Shalit (eds.), 1992: \textit{Communitarianism and Individualism}, Oxford University Press, Oxford.
\textsuperscript{45} Kymlicka 2002, p. 284f.
in which he claimed that ‘social capital’ in the United States was being eroded as citizens retired into a strictly private sphere, severing associational and social ties with co-citizens and therefore failing to develop the mutual trust and skills necessary to partake effectively in democratic decision-making.46

Republicans or citizenship theorists (whichever term we prefer) are generally supporters of liberal democracy and would like their propositions for the improvement of democratic culture and public-spiritedness to accord with liberalism; however, in this endeavour they face some challenges. While it cannot be stated *a priori* that republicanism and liberalism are at odds – as we have seen, and as pointed out by Pocock, republican and liberal traditions are interlinked in Western history – tensions between the two may readily be envisioned. Unlike Athenian democracy, for example, modern democratic states grant their citizens the right to retreat entirely from the public sphere into the private one, thus potentially undermining participatory virtues. In fact, this is precisely what the ‘citizenship theorists’ of recent decades have argued. Further, and most importantly for our purposes, as soon as we leave the purely abstract sphere we discover that republican virtues have a particularistic bent to them which does not sit well with liberal universalism. Republicans urge individuals to embrace ‘the common good’ as they take on the duties of citizenship; however, this is, by necessity, the common good of one particular polity, substantively defined by (to begin with) its territorial borders. The civic duty of patriotism, that is, the commitment to the defence and integrity of one’s polity, makes for an even clearer case in point. Having come thus far, we can easily see the proximity between national community and national identity on the one hand and the practices and virtues that sustain democracy on the other. Numerous difficult questions arise. What is the relationship between national community and the community posited by republican theory? More bluntly, can we have patriotism without nationalism? Questions such as these cannot be answered without an analysis of the concept of nationalism, particularly in relation to the status of community in democracy. Such an analysis is undertaken in the following section.

The Two Faces of Nationalism

The word ‘nationalism’ tends to conjure up sharply divergent images and connotations. On the one hand, nationalism is often regarded as a primitive form of identity and social organization, based on primordial ties which are involuntary in character, such as ethnicity, ancestry and folk culture; a form of identity which is fraught with the potential for destructive expressions such as xenophobia and civil war.\(^{47}\) On the other hand, nationalism as we know it is undoubtedly a modern phenomenon, emerging on a large scale in the 19\(^{\text{th}}\) century and closely linked with the development of democracy, the expansion and entrenchment of citizenship rights, and the unravelling of traditional hierarchies of rank, status and prestige.\(^{48}\) Some have, ultimately without success, attempted to solve this apparent dilemma in taxonomical terms, arguing for the existence of ‘ethnic’ and ‘civic’ varieties of nationalism, respectively, which constitute wholly distinct phenomena.\(^{49}\) Although refuted innumerable times, at least in its strong form, this distinction continues to structure the theoretical and practical debate on nationalism, directly or indirectly.\(^{50}\) I will return to this point later. My contention is that nationalism contains both these elements – on the one hand, the ‘pre-political’, cultural, mythical; on the other, the ‘political’, civic, rational – and that it is impossible to grasp the phenomenon of nationalism without an understanding of the various ways the tension between these elements expresses itself. I will attempt to sketch out the dynamic of the dyadic tension within nationalism and, furthermore, to hint at the inherent contradictions within modernity itself of which, I argue, this tension is an expression.

This chapter is not intended to be an exhaustive account of the phenomenon of nationalism. Rather, my objective here is to make a few basic points concerning the conceptual history of the nation which the normative analysis, in turn, will build on. The method of conceptual history is described on pages 12-14.

Nationalism: Origins

The German historian and philosopher Reinhart Koselleck has described the period between the mid-18\(^{\text{th}}\) century and the mid-19\(^{\text{th}}\) century in terms of a Sattelzeit, an age during which the central political concepts gradually come to acquire new meanings and which thus separates us from the conceptual


\(^{49}\) Ignatieff 1993, p. 4ff.

world of Antiquity and the Medieval and Early Modern eras.\footnote{Koselleck 2002, p. 5f.} One of these concepts is that of the ‘nation’. The Latin word \textit{natio} originally meant something like ‘ethnicity’, signifying groups united by a common kinship-based identity, although this identity was not necessarily political in character.\footnote{Miller, David, 1995: \textit{On Nationality}, Oxford University Press, Oxford.} It is common knowledge that the great revolutions of the late 18\textsuperscript{th} century, particularly the French Revolution but also the American one, were an important watershed in this respect. These popular revolutions were the first instances in which ‘the people’ constituted itself as the prime political subject – the ultimate source of all legitimate authority – thus establishing a bond between ‘the nation’ and the political. A leading thinker of the French Revolution, E.J. Sieyès, even went as far as to equate the nation with the Third Estate, proclaiming that the nobility thus did not form part of the nation; thereby underscoring the genetic link between nationalism and radical, egalitarian politics.\footnote{Ibid.; Miller, David, 2000: \textit{Citizenship and National Identity}, Polity Press, Cambridge.} Jean-Jacques Rousseau, who was, of course, the first philosopher to spell out a theory of popular sovereignty, was also one of the founding fathers of nationalism: the sovereign community of citizens he envisaged was a homogenous one, bound together by common customs and the bonds of civic friendship.\footnote{Rousseau, Jean-Jacques, 1988 [1762]: \textit{The Social Contract}, translated by G.D.H. Cole, Prometheus, Buffalo, New York.} Thus, it seems that the conceptual roots of nationalism and modern democracy intertwine at this point (that is, the late 19\textsuperscript{th} century). The precise nature of this conjuncture (in other terms, the depth of the relationship between nationalism and democracy) is a disputed point, however, which will be dealt with later in the book. For the time being, suffice it to say, that the degree of co-implication of nationalism in modern democracy as a political and ideational construct is considerable. Correspondingly, it is also the case that nationalism contains the conceptual seed or germ of democracy in the form of the idea of popular sovereignty; and while many nationalist states have been authoritarian, the leaders of such states have had no choice but to rely, at least on a rhetorical level, on some notion of the ‘general will’.

As pointed out by Jürgen Habermas, nationalism in Europe can be said to have developed in two stages. The early nation-states, such as France, developed within the framework of already existing territorial states, while the ‘belated’ nations, such as Germany, were created by a cultural-political movement which raised national consciousness through ‘propaganda’, eventually resulting in the creation of nation-states.\footnote{Habermas, Jürgen, 2002: \textit{The Inclusion of the Other. Studies in Political Theory}, edited by Ciaran Cronin and Pablo De Greiff, Polity Press, Cambridge, p. 105.} Many nations in Central, Eastern, and Southern Europe were to follow the same course. In Germany especially, the philosophers and poets of the Romantic Movement were to
play a central part in the establishment of a national consciousness demonstrating the co-implication of Enlightenment and Romanticist traditions in nationalist thought and politics. Most influential in this respect was the work of J.G. Herder, who taught that each nation had its own unique character, expressed in its folk culture, and that it was only as an integral part of the organic whole – the Volk – that an individual could truly realize his potential.\(^{56}\) The Romantic Movement, of course, was a reaction to the Enlightenment or at least certain aspects thereof, and has thus been labelled (most famously in the writings of Isaiah Berlin) the ‘Counter-Enlightenment’, a moniker which, while intuitive, may be somewhat misleading.\(^{57}\) To begin with: while the Romantics extolled the value of community, rootedness, the concrete, and the particular partly in opposition to the disembodied, metaphysical Reason of Kant and the French Enlightenment thinkers, this move constituted something quite different than simply a return to tradition, a point perceptively made by Charles Larmore.\(^{58}\) Traditionalism as a reflected, self-aware intellectual stance was unknown before the Enlightenment and the French Revolution, and was born as a reaction to these phenomena – although contemporary communitarian theorists sometimes fail to grasp this fact.\(^{59}\) The German Romantics and Idealists, on the other hand, realized that their conscious re-appropriation of tradition and folk culture represented something quite novel; as Friedrich Schlegel remarked, the German national community of which he spoke was something which ‘lies not behind us, but ahead of us’.\(^{60}\) While reflecting tradition, this national community is not simply inherited but is a political creation. Thus, in fine dialectical fashion, the philosophy of the so-called Counter-Enlightenment movement is the fruit of intellectual seeds sown by the Enlightenment movement which the Romantics opposed – a point which will be further elaborated later in this chapter.

In passing, we may make note of the fact that the line of argument explicated above dissolves one of the major controversies in the field of nationalist studies – that of the ‘modernity’ or ‘antiquity’ of the phenomena of nations and nationalism. The British Marxist historian E.J. Hobsbawm, one of the firmest proponents of the ‘modernist’ camp in this particular controversy, has sought to expose the artificial, constructed nature of the traditions of supposedly ancient nations, coining the term ‘the invention of tradition’ to


\(^{59}\) Larmore 1996. Larmore (p. 59f) cites the work of Alasdair MacIntyre as an instance of such shallow conservatism.

\(^{60}\) Quoted in Larmore 1996, p. 62.
describe this process.\textsuperscript{61} In the opposite camp, Anthony D. Smith is noted for his argument that such a constructionist position is grossly overstated, pointing out that while nationalism as such is a modern phenomenon, modern nation-states (primarily those in Europe) in many cases have deeper historical roots, having existed in the form of ‘proto-nations’ as early as the Middle Ages.\textsuperscript{62} There is some truth to both Hobsbawm’s and Smith’s accounts, yet each occludes more than it reveals. Smith is correct to point out that national identities are not invented or constructed out of thin air but that this process rather draws on more or less deeply rooted historical traditions; however, the reflexive character of this process of identity-forming, for which various ethnic traditions form the material, marks it as a distinctly modern phenomenon. Hobsbawm, for his part, overstates the normative weight of the ‘constructed’ character of nationality, ignoring the fact that all collective identities are necessarily constructed. The latter point is equally relevant with regard to Benedict Anderson’s famous description of nations as ‘imagined communities’.\textsuperscript{63}

Nationalism, Historicity, and the Dynamic of Modernity

In the preceding section it was argued that there is an important conceptual link between nationalism and democracy, a link which becomes evident as one studies the history of the two concepts: their modern versions both have their roots in the late 18\textsuperscript{th} century, and these roots are largely intertwined. A further change which takes place in the same period, and which was to have a profound effect on the development of both nationalism and democracy, is the nascence of the modern concept of historicity.\textsuperscript{64} Gradually, older, cyclical notions of temporality were replaced by an idea of progress as the fundamental force of history.\textsuperscript{65} For example, this change can be traced in the development of the concept of ‘revolution’, which on an etymological level means ‘turning’ or ‘rotation’, originally referring to an event in world history which heralded a return to previous conditions.\textsuperscript{66} As the cyclical notion of history was replaced with a linear one, however, the concept of revolution came to be firmly associated with progression, with the ascent to a higher stage in the development of civilization. This development with regard to the concept of historicity was to have a profound influence on the modern concept of the nation. As mentioned previously, nationalism was seen as a mod-


\textsuperscript{62} Smith 2001.


\textsuperscript{65} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{66} Ibid., p. 45.
ernizing force; indeed, the nation, the ‘community of fate’, was perceived as the prime political subject of the inexorable process of progression which characterized world history. In sum: the nation is conceived as a self-governing, self-aware political community, which, on the basis of an active interpretation of its past, and of its role in a larger, world-historical context, shapes its future.

Nationalism: ‘Civic’ vs. ‘Ethnic’

In the light of the conceptual-historical analysis undertaken in the previous sections, it becomes possible to gain a deeper understanding of the topic of civic vs. ethnic national identity. However, I will start this section with a summary of the statements on this subject by Bernard Yack in an oft-quoted 1999 book chapter. Yack argues that the concept of ‘civic nationalism’ has become popular due to the perceived need by liberal theorists to find some normatively acceptable form of nationalism, but that the distinction between civic and ethnic national identity is superficial and misleading. An exemplar of this liberal group, according to Yack, is the Canadian historian and politician Michael Ignatieff, whose thoughts on the subject of nationalism were widely publicized in the 1990s in the wake of ethnically based warfare in the former Yugoslavia and elsewhere. According to Ignatieff, ‘ethnic nationalism’ is pernicious because it by definition rests on inherited or ascriptive criteria such as birth, culture and religion, while by contrast ‘civic nationalism’, based on freely chosen membership in a community dedicated to a particular political creed, lacks this dangerous potential. Yack argues that this contrast is simplistic, drawing attention to the fact that the ‘political’ identities of, for example, France and the United States, are culturally inherited artefacts no less than those of ‘ethnic nations’. What defines the respective political communities of France and the United States is not solely certain political values, but also ‘the contingent inheritance of distinctive experiences and cultural memories that is an inseparable part of every national political identity’. An American citizen cannot be expected to be ready to change his political membership as soon as he perceives that there is some other liberal democracy which appears superior in realizing the political values on which the United States was founded. The following quote from Yack is illuminating: ‘The myth of the ethnic nation suggests that you have no choice at all in the making of your national identity: you are your

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67 Yack 1999.
70 Ignatieff 1993, p. 4ff.
71 Yack 1999, p. 105.
72 Ibid., p. 106.
cultural inheritance and nothing else. [...] The myth of the civic nation, in contrast, suggests that your national identity is nothing but your choice: you are the political principles you share with other like-minded individuals.\textsuperscript{73} Yack follows Ernest Renan in concluding that there are two things which make a nation: a rich cultural inheritance of shared memories and practices, along with present-day consent (Renan’s famous ‘daily plebiscite’).\textsuperscript{74} If this conclusion is correct, as I believe it is, the forming and maintenance of the national identity of a modern liberal democracy consists of an ongoing, reflexive process, the subject of which is the polity’s citizens.

The Double Nature of the Nation

Returning to the theme of ‘the two faces of nationalism’, the analysis has yielded the result that nationalism is indeed a Janus-faced phenomenon: it is a child of modernity, but utilizes pre-modern traditions for its purposes. Thus, the views of nationalism as a thoroughly modern entity, and as an atavistic one harking back to primordial sources of community, respectively, each contribute to our understanding of nationalism, but from a limited perspective. Further, we should reject the splitting of nationalism into two discrete objects, a civic and an ethnic nationalism; this dichotomy reflects different aspects of what is fundamentally the same phenomenon. Instead, we should conceptualize these two aspects as poles in a dynamic process. The goal of nationalism is social integration, and nationalists thus seize upon pre-modern traditions to anchor their political community in tradition. In other words, the nation creates a history and a space for itself. Yet, this construction is always necessarily a fragile one, as it is threatened by individualism, the overcoming of which was the purpose of its creation in the first place. The nation is, thus, a concept fraught with tension.

The same tension is found within the practice of liberal democracy as it has developed since the age of the French Revolution. While the normative underpinning of democracy is universal in character, democracy cannot be realized in the abstract, but must create a history and a space for itself. Historically, nationalism has been a means by which citizens have sought to achieve this task. Nationalism has thus been built into the very fabric of modern democracies and the beliefs and practices which sustain them; it has shaped the way modern polities reflect upon themselves and their history. Therefore, it is a heritage which is very difficult to shake off.

The brief analysis of nationalism conducted thus far allows us a glimpse of what may be called an existential dimension of politics, albeit in frozen form. Echoing Hannah Arendt, we may think of the challenge of any emergent self-governing political entity as one of constituting a common world

\textsuperscript{73} Yack 1999, p. 107.
\textsuperscript{74} Ibid., p. 116.
for itself, in other words, of drawing up the common horizons necessary for meaningful political action.\textsuperscript{75} Nationalism is a means of answering the existential questions in politics: it provides a political collectivity with a common identity, anchored in culture and narrative. The reason this fact usually remains hidden from view is that, to a large extent, the political world we inhabit is one created by our forebears. Not only do we, on a daily basis, take for granted the particular politico-geographical units which consolidated nation-states constitute, but, more fundamentally, our very frame of reference is one in which nationalism provides the answer to the question ‘who are we, as a political community?’ It is in this sense that nationalism shows us the existential dimension of politics in frozen form: on a macrohistorical level, we currently remain within the bounds of the nationalist paradigm. As long as this is the case, culture and identity will be important factors in our politics, since nationalism links culture and identity (and, frequently, ethnicity) to politics. The consequences of this fact, which will be one of the recurrent themes throughout this book, are hinted at in the following section, where we turn to the discourse of multiculturalism as a field in which the impact of nationalism on the way we view and deal with the fact of cultural diversity is especially evident.

Nationalism versus Diversity: The Multiculturalism Discourse

Multiculturalism as a trend or current in political theory arose as a result of a heightened awareness of challenges related to the ever-increasing cultural diversity in Western societies. For our purposes, multiculturalist ideas themselves are not as interesting as the massive backlash against them (on a political as well as a theoretical level) in the last decade or so, a backlash which, as it turns out, demonstrates the continuing prevalence of nationalism in Western political culture. This resurge of nationalism – often hidden beneath such concepts as ‘citizenship’ and ‘civic integration’ – will be a major theme in the book.

The primary concern of multiculturalist theorists and debaters was the illusory character of the prevailing ‘difference-blind’ approach to politics of culture: supposedly ‘neutral’ laws and practices are often biased in favour of the majority culture. Liberal political institutions, it was claimed, frequently serve as a fig-leaf for assimilatory and/or exclusionary processes directed toward cultural minorities. Early multiculturalist criticism of liberal institutions largely mirrored the communitarian critique of liberalism which caused a great stir in the field of political theory in the 1980s. Minority cultures were, thus, perceived as close-knit communities which constituted self-enclosed moral ‘universes’ in themselves and needed to be left alone by the liberal majority culture. Charles Taylor, in an influential account, follows this basic formula. However, the 1990s also saw the emergence of a group of theorists within mainstream political theory who, while rejecting the anti-universalism of communitarian multiculturalists, argued, firstly, that liberal theory had hitherto failed to take seriously the challenges posed by the fact of cultural pluralism and, secondly, that culture-based group rights could be justified from the point of view of basic liberal principles, and may in fact be required by these principles. Foremost in this group of ‘liberal multiculturalists’ was perhaps the Canadian political philosopher Will Kymlicka, whose theory may be regarded as an application and expansion of the liberalism of philosophers such as John Rawls. Kymlicka argues that the right to culture

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78 Ibid., p. 337.
should be included among the basic rights required by Rawls’ theory, and makes the claim that minority cultures – for example, the Basque people in Spain and the indigenous peoples in North America – should be provided with resources in the form of group rights which make it possible for them to preserve and develop their culture.

The backlash against multiculturalism, however, was not long in coming. From the vast body of literature criticizing the ideas and practices of multiculturalism, I have selected Brian Barry’s fiercely polemical Culture & Equality, which was subject to intense debate. From the viewpoint of his interpretation of basic liberal principles Barry argues that group rights are very seldom motivated, and that they tend to strengthen internally illiberal cultural minorities to the detriment of their individual members. However, a careful reading of Barry’s book reveals that he is not only critical of group rights being devolved to illiberal cultural minorities, but of the very idea of any cultural subgroup being equipped with such rights – and that a main reason for this is Barry’s concern that the individual be properly assimilated in general society. Such assimilation is of vital importance from the perspective of the individual as well as from that of society as a whole: the individual’s life chances are greatly and inequitably reduced if he or she cannot fully partake of mainstream society, and, perhaps even more importantly, ‘the foundation of common identity […] is needed for the stability and justice of liberal polities’, as such stability and justice necessarily entail ‘a willingness on the part of citizens to make sacrifices for the common good – which, of course, presupposes that they are capable of recognizing a common good’. Barry explicitly argues in favour of the assimilation to a common national identity, but points out that what he has in mind is a ‘civic’ national identity rather than an ‘ethnic’ one; a ‘civic’ national identity is, he claims, compatible with cultural pluralism, but apparently this is a pluralism of a limited kind, as he apparently recognizes the impossibility of a culturally ‘neutral’ public sphere. Barry does not explore much further the idea of a ‘civic’ national identity, arguably underestimating the problems of national identities being rooted in (socially constructed) ethnicities.

83 Ibid., p. 80.
84 Ibid., p. 83, 80.
85 Ibid., p. 80f.
Barry’s argument about the need for community and a common identity was taken up by a large number of commentators in the policy and academic fields alike. Even among theorists sympathetic to multiculturalist ideas, it was widely recognized that the historical link between the culture/politics nexus and nationalism had been underestimated. Theorists such as Anne Phillips and Seyla Benhabib sought to develop multiculturalist theories that avoided the trap of conceptualizing cultures as static, discrete totalities.\(^86\) Will Kymlicka, for his part, went the other way, not only accepting but embracing the fact that the concept of culture he had operated with was largely shaped by nationalism, and devised a theory of liberal nationalism which still accommodated cultural minorities to some extent.\(^87\) A more common response, however, was an outright dismissal of multiculturalist ideas, which found its expression not least in the current policy trend of ‘civic integrationism’.\(^88\) Many European countries which had until then pursued multiculturalist agendas with respect to immigrants and cultural minorities, notably the Netherlands and the United Kingdom, declared a change toward a policy centred on ‘citizenship’, which became the byword for the integration and adaptation of minorities to the social and political conditions of the host society. Multiculturalist policies, it was claimed, had been misguided in their objective of supporting the maintenance and integrity of minority cultures, and had resulted in ‘the socio-economic marginalization and self-segregation of migrants and their children’, as sociologist Christian Joppke puts it.\(^89\) Anti-terrorist and anti-Islamist rhetoric plays an important part in fuelling this discourse. Integrationist measures such as ‘citizenship tests’, intended to gauge prospective citizens’ knowledge of the language, political system, and (in some cases) general culture of the host country, were introduced in the Netherlands and the United Kingdom, and the idea soon spread to France, Germany, and Austria, among other nations.\(^90\) While some scholars hailed this as ‘a new assertiveness of the liberal state in imposing the liberal minimum on its dissenters’ (Joppke again), others were critical, claiming that the tests stigmatized non-European immigrants as bearers of

\(^86\) Phillips 2007; Benhabib 2006.
\(^87\) Kymlicka 2002.
illiberal values. Parallel with the growth of momentum in the political mainstream of this hard-line stance on integration and immigration, Europe has seen a surge of right-wing populism, with increasing support for neo-nationalist parties, the inflammatory rhetoric of which is often directed towards the perceived failures of ‘multiculturalism’.

Thus, the virulent reactions against multiculturalism which have been so prominent in the past decade or so – reactions which are not limited to conservatives, but which have been evident among many liberals and social democrats as well – are not simply a protest against the positive measures inspired by multicultural ideology (that is, special rights for cultural minorities). Rather, these reactions – at least in part – point to the perceived dangers to a liberal democratic society of cultural pluralism as such. If the principal danger of special rights for cultural minorities is that they may lead to sociocultural segregation, then the very fact of cultural pluralism potentially becomes a problem, inasmuch as such pluralism may lead to segregation. In the eyes of some, state-directed measures are necessary to ensure the integration of cultural minorities into society’s mainstream; such measures may include tougher demands on minorities to take part in mainstream social, political and economic life. In this respect, the backlash against multiculturalism is partly coextensive with the resurgence of republican criticism of the excesses of liberal individualism discussed in the previous section of this chapter. Further, and crucially, what we observe is the consequence of the conception of republican civic virtues – participation, public-mindedness, and sociability among them – being channelled through nationalism. Since the time of the breakthrough of modern democracy, citizenship virtues and communalism have been linked to culture and identity. This link is less visible in relatively homogenous societies – and, to take on a cynical perspective, in societies in which minorities have been successfully marginalized. In an age when international migration has made many societies less homogenous, and when cultural minorities and disadvantaged groups are more vocal in their demands for acceptance and recognition, the nationalist features of democracy, expressed in the republican notions of citizen virtue, have been exposed. The resistance to cultural pluralism, which the more specific resistance to multiculturalist ideas and policies has paved the way for, is an articulation of this nationalism.


The prolonged debates surrounding the concept and practices of multiculturalism constitute a much too complex object of study to be dealt with exhaustively in this brief overview. Neither would such an analysis be necessary. To our purposes, what is of greatest interest is the way these debates have begun to lay bare a \textit{co-implication of the practice of liberal democracy on the one hand and national community on the other}. Whether defenders or detractors of multiculturalism (in some definition), theorists aiming to normatively account for the place of identity and cultural difference in liberal democracies were, knowingly or not, finding themselves in a terrain shaped by the forces of nationalism. The success of any such undertaking depends on the recognition of the impact of these contextual forces. In trying to account for the normative status of (national) identity and cultural difference in liberal democracies today, we would have to start from an account of liberal democracy such as it is, entangled with nationalism, as many of the problems surrounding cultural difference have their roots in nationalism. Some such attempts, notably the liberal nationalism of David Miller and the constitutional patriotism of Jürgen Habermas, will be examined and evaluated in the concluding chapters of this book. However, the methodological approach of this dissertation demands that we examine the workings of national identity not only in the abstract but also in context. Therefore, we now turn to the two contextualized studies of the debates on national identity in the United States and Germany, respectively, the purpose and logic of which were outlined in Chapter I.
Brief Recapitulation

In this chapter, we have learned that the modern concept of the nation emerged in conjunction with the breakthrough of modern mass democracy around the late 18th Century, as a solution to the problem of community, that is, of the *demos*. This emergence of the nation was a political act, through which the People defined itself in spatial and temporal terms. Democracy may be thought of purely in the abstract, as a process for political decision-making, but it can be realized only in the concrete, as it is instituted as a political system for the purposes of a particular group of people at a particular time. *The nation comes to be the means by which democracy achieves this particularity.* The temporal aspect is important, as it encompasses the narratives – typically describing the progression of the People from slavery to sovereignty and, eventually, a glorious future – by which the citizens of the nation answer the question ‘who are we?’

It is for these reasons that we may claim that *democracy and national community are entangled on a conceptual-historical level*. Citizens of any democracy have continually had to face the question of what defines them as a political community – what constitutes their common good, who belongs and who does not, which borders should be considered ‘natural’ – and they have largely, and often unwittingly, relied on the thought structures of nationalism to answer these questions. In other words, *nationalism has shaped and coloured the way in which citizens of a democracy have thought of themselves collectively*. This description, still at an abstract level, will be rendered more concrete in the following two chapters, where we will look closer at the way democracy – very often tacitly – has relied on nationalism in two separate national contexts.

Another important point is that the conjunction between the concepts of democracy and the nation, one which came into being at the moment in which democracy takes a concrete and particular form, explains the peculiarly Janus-faced character of national community: on the one hand, it is associated with values such as rationality, the rule of a sovereign citizenry, and equality; on the other, with culture, boundaries, and the particular. During the course of the book, I will argue that it is important that we recognize this ambivalence within nationalism, rather than attempt to split the concept of the nation into two dichotomous concepts. My arguments for this are developed in full in the concluding chapter.
III. A Dream Deferred: Debates on Nation and Community in the United States

A bronze plaque inscribed with the poem ‘The New Colossus’, written by Emma Lazarus, can be found, since 1903, in a room within the Statue of Liberty. Its solemn phrases, familiar to generations upon generations of Americans, speak of a phenomenon that forms a central part of American national identity: immigration. The opening passage of the poem alludes to the ‘old’ Colossus, that of Rhodes, with its ‘conquering limbs’, placed ‘astride from land to land’ – a symbol of oppression. Its contrasting, modern counterpart is the Statue of Liberty, the ‘Mother of Exiles’, whose ‘beacon-hand / Glows world-wide welcome’, addressing foreign nations with the words:

[...] ‘Give me your tired, your poor, / Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free, / The wretched refuse of your teeming shore. / Send these, the homeless, tempest-tost to me, / I lift my lamp beside the golden door.’

Lazarus expresses a salient feature of the traditional conception of American identity: that the United States is a nation of immigrants, a haven to which people from all corners of the world have come to make a better life for themselves under free and equitable laws. This narrative effectively provides an answer to the question ‘who are we?’, and resonates powerfully to this day, not only with Americans themselves, but globally as well. American identity as a political community has, from its very beginnings, been based on the very values of political freedom and democracy (or, to be precise, an interpretation of these values), a fact that, in the minds of Americans and foreigners alike, has often set the United States apart as unique among nations. This is one aspect of the many-faceted concept of the ‘American exceptionalism’, itself a fundamental part of American self-understanding. A passage borrowed from the historian Gordon Wood neatly summarizes these familiar ideas: ‘Our beliefs in liberty, equality, constitutionalism, and the well-being of ordinary people came out of the Revolutionary era. So too did our idea that we Americans are a special people with a special destiny to

lead the world toward liberty and democracy." This idea of a mission or destiny is present even from colonial days, expressed by Puritan settlers in the formula of a ‘city on a hill’ that would serve as a beacon to other nations. Its major formative event was the Revolutionary War and the subsequent Declaration of Independence. The tradition was carried further by statesmen such as Abraham Lincoln, who, with great rhetorical power, interpreted the emancipation of the slaves as the realization of the values of the American Revolution, and whose Gettysburg Address — with the famous opening phrase ‘Four score and seven years ago…’ — added a new dimension to the understanding of the Revolution, itself eventually referenced in Martin Luther King’s momentous ‘I Have a Dream’ speech. This idea of a destiny or mission, and the traditions and practices surrounding it, is the reason that some commentators have even described certain aspects of American political culture as a ‘civil religion’.

It is a truism that the United States has simultaneously come to symbolize the values of democracy (in the eyes of its defenders) and the abuse of these values for purposes of national self-interest and self-aggrandizement (in the eyes of its detractors). Narrowing the focus somewhat to the questions of national community in a normative perspective, the idea of a community based on political ideals, as opposed to cultural, ethnic, or religious particularism, has proved attractive to many, regardless of the question of whether or not the United States has actually lived up to its ideals. In this chapter, I present an analysis of certain aspects of the debate over American national identity. The aim of this undertaking is not to examine whether the United States has always lived up to its ideals — certainly, this is not the case. We need only think of the abuse of human rights committed during the administration of George W. Bush in the wake of September 11, and particularly the manner in which a discourse of freedom and patriotism was deployed to cloak the realities of the ‘War on Terror’. Rather, my aim is to uncover certain structures within American national identity, structures which give rise to lofty ideals as well as, seemingly, the perversion of such ideals. Foreshadowing the conclusions of this chapter somewhat I suggest that the concept of American exceptionalism is, to a certain extent, misleading. While certainly unique in its particular forms of expression, American nationalism is fraught, fundamentally, with the same dilemmas that plague the phenomenon of national community as such.

96 See, for instance, Jewett, Robert & John Shelton Lawrence, 2003: Captain America and the Crusade against Evil, William B. Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, Michigan.
In the context of the book as a whole, the purpose of this chapter is to *explore the inner workings of the civic variety of national community* – a kind of national community that the United States has come to typify – and to *point to the pitfalls and blind spots of this particular variety of nationalism*, often held up as an ideal in liberal thought on community in democracy. This analysis has bearing on the first of the three claims spelled out in Chapter I (page 22), as it demonstrates that even the civic political community which has characterized the United States has its roots in nationalism, as well as the second claim, pointing out the particular problems stemming from the fact of the ostensive ‘anti-nationalist’ quality of American patriotism.

The first half of the chapter is devoted to a debate sparked by the publication in the 1990s of new ‘standards’ for the teaching of history in American schools. In the polemical exchange over the portrayal of American history in this document, the general narrative and interpretation of historical fact, as well over the role and function of history teaching in general, questions of the identity of the United States, as a political community and a nation, were at stake. Taking with us the insights gained from this analysis, we move on to a more abstract level, as we turn to three distinct interpretations – offered by, respectively, Michael Walzer, David Hollinger, and Samuel Huntington – of the content of American identity, which are, in turn, subjected to critical assessment.
Republic and Revolution: On History and the American National Consciousness

America is a daughter of the Revolution. This is not to say that the pivotal events of the years between 1776 (the year of the Declaration of Independence) and 1788 (when the Constitution was ratified) would once and for all determine all aspects of the nation they brought into being, but rather that the Revolution has remained fundamental to the self-perception of this nation, although the interpretation of the context, consequences and meaning of the revolutionary events has varied over time. As a background to the subsequent analysis, I will therefore provide a brief account of the Revolution as it has been interpreted in significant scholarly and popular debate.

Two features of the Revolution which have been especially striking to latter-day observers – both of which have, however, later been called into question – are its paradoxical conservatism and its abstract, idea-driven character.\(^\text{97}\) Though the Declaration of Independence, of course, constituted an act of rebellion against the British crown, the posture of the revolutionaries was remarkably defensive, as the stated goal of the uprising was self-protection against British tyranny. What provoked the Americans was a series of laws passed by the English Parliament during the 18th century, seen as egregious violations of ancient rights and liberties. The revolutionary movement, thus, was a direct continuation of the Whig tradition which arose in opposition to royal absolutism in 17th century England, and which in turn, as we saw in the section on republicanism in Chapter II, channelled the ideas of the civic humanism of Renaissance Italy.\(^\text{98}\) Thus, the Revolution has often been interpreted as being mainly concerned with the protection of ancient rights rather than the creation of a new polity based on novel political ideals. Further, the reaction of the American rebels to the perceived British tyranny has often been characterized as disproportionate to the actual hardships suffered; the Revolution, therefore (so the argument goes), was a peculiarly idealistic one, concerned more with abstract rights and freedoms than worldly wants and needs.\(^\text{99}\) This is the interpretation alluded to in the previous chapter, which dominated American historical scholarship in the mid-20th century: the Revolution was portrayed as an uprising of learned, temperate gentlemen, defending abstract ideals of individual freedom against the autarchic and aristocratic regime.\(^\text{100}\) It has now been firmly established, however, that this is a poor characterization of the Revolution and the men and women who brought it into being. In a groundbreaking study, Bernard Bailyn pointed to the abundance of incendiary pamphlets, treatises and leaflets in circulation

\(^{97}\) Wood 2011.

\(^{98}\) Pocock 1975.

\(^{99}\) Wood 2011, p. 27f. 34.

\(^{100}\) This is the interpretation associated with Louis Hartz (Hartz 1955). See also Pocock 1981.
immediately prior to the Revolutionary War and the key role of the ideas promulgated by these writings to instigate revolt.\textsuperscript{101} The pamphlets present a view of 18\textsuperscript{th}-century politics as riddled with secret plots and designs to subdue liberty and establish tyranny, and provide us with a vibrant picture of the atmosphere of ‘fear and frenzy’ in which the Revolution was born, the ‘exaggerations and enthusiasm, the general sense of corruption and disorder’ which animated the revolutionaries.\textsuperscript{102} This view of politics and of the world, which has even been characterized as ‘paranoid’ in style, constituted a vital element of Whig tradition, and would form part of what became American political culture.\textsuperscript{103} It is a far cry from the principled conflicts over constitutional particulars stressed by historians such as Hartz.

‘Freedom’ was perhaps the most cherished concept in the American Revolution; it was, however, a complex notion of freedom, not reducible to simply the individual freedom to pursue one’s own ends and interests.\textsuperscript{104} Although values of individualism were not absent, what may be termed republican freedom – freedom of the citizens of a community to collectively govern their own affairs and cultivate the civic virtues of participation and public-spiritedness in the process – was of paramount importance.\textsuperscript{105} This republicanism was to fundamentally shape the values of the new polity and, as we have seen, was also an inheritance from the Whig tradition and the ideas of civic humanism. The classic republicanism of the civic humanists had as its ideal the self-governing city-state, an ideal that was translated on American soil to the image of the free and independent New England township.\textsuperscript{106} To ardent republicans such as Thomas Jefferson these small-scale, self-governing, agricultural communities were truly the seedbeds of civic virtue.\textsuperscript{107} However, the very fact of their limited scope, a quality long regarded as fundamental for a functioning republican community, was soon recognized as problematic. The architecture of a large-scale republic, a phenomenon which was at that time ruled out by all experience as well as theory, eventually began to take form in the writings of Founding Fathers such as James Madison and Alexander Hamilton (writers, along with John Jay, of the enormously influential \textit{Federalist Papers}).\textsuperscript{108} The earliest Constitution, the Articles of Confederation ratified in 1777, was criticized for its lack of provision for a sufficiently strong central government. The new Constitution,
greatly influenced by the thoughts of Madison and Hamilton, was intended
to provide for such strong federal government with a vigorous executive,
while attempting (as is common knowledge) to steer clear of the dangers of
excessive democracy and caesarism by means of a system of checks and
balances, as recommended by Montesquieu. While the architecture of the
new union was intended to preserve the spirit of republicanism, Thomas
Jefferson, among others, criticized novel features such as the presidency,
which seemed too reminiscent of monarchy, and spoke in favour of a more
radical, wholeheartedly democratic system of government. Unlike many of
his aristocratic contemporaries, Jefferson, who took to heart John Locke’s
idea of the equal worth and moral authority of every person, believed in the
ability of the common man to participate wisely in political affairs.109

Both tendencies – the federalism associated principally with Hamilton
and the radicalism, at the same time democratic and liberal, of Jefferson –
were to be permanent fixtures in United States political culture. What is of
particular interest to our purposes is the eventual emergence of a ‘republican
synthesis’ – a concept which has been criticized in recent scholarship as too
vague and all-encompassing, but which nevertheless conveys an important
idea – of civic republican and liberal values.110 The earlier republicanism was
coloured by the aristocratic societies in which it emerged: while it gave some
space for commoners to participate in politics, the pre-eminence of the
members of the patrician class in the affairs of government was nevertheless
taken for granted. This paternalism is evident as late as the time of the draft-
ing of the Constitution, as it explains the fear of such statesmen as Madison
and Hamilton of what consequences pure democracy would have.111 What
eventually emerged was a more democratic republicanism – which was, at
the same time, more national. Gordon S. Wood lucidly accounts for the latter
fact, as he expounds on the challenges the new American Republic was fac-
ing, in contrast to contemporary monarchies:

[...] Republican and monarchical governments were designed for very
different societies. Republicanism put a premium on the homogeneity
and cohesiveness of its society. By contrast, monarchies could com-
prehend large territories and composite kingdoms and peoples with
diverse interests and ethnicities. Monarchies had their unitary authori-
ty, kingly honors and patronage [...]. Republics had none of these ad-
hesive elements. Instead, republics were supposed to rely for cohesion
on the moral qualities of their people – their virtue and natural soci-
ability. Monarchy imagined its society in traditional and prenational
terms, and thus had little trouble embracing African slaves and Indians
as subjects. But republicanism created citizens, and since citizens
were all equal to one another, it was difficult for the Revolutionaries

111 Wood 2011, p. 141f.
to include blacks and Indians as citizens in the new republican states they were trying to create.\textsuperscript{112}

Repablics, thus, relied on the cohesiveness of their societies and the natural sociability of their citizens. In small-scale republics, this question of cohesion needed never arise, due to their homogenous character. The large territory and diverse population of the American Republic, as well its democratic character which ruled out the dominance of any cohesive aristocratic class, meant that the new nation had to define itself, and it would do so largely in terms of culture and race. Wood points out the reluctance to accept Africans and Native Americans as citizens. Furthermore, Matthew Frye Jacobson, in a study of the history of the concept of ‘whiteness’ in American culture, shows that there was a consistent bias in the early days of the American Republic in favour of the Anglo-Saxon population element, which was argued to possess the properties necessary for prudent and virtuous self-government to a higher degree than other ‘races’.\textsuperscript{113} For example, the first naturalization law, passed in 1790, limited naturalized citizenship to ‘free white persons’.\textsuperscript{114} Anglo-Saxons, further, were the only group the ‘whiteness’ of which was universally accepted. Jacobson remarks that ‘inclusions and exclusions based on whiteness did not contradict, but rather constituted, republican principles’ – that is, whiteness was construed not primarily in terms of skin colour but in terms of certain personality features that dovetailed with the notion of ‘fitness for self-government’.\textsuperscript{115} The late 18th century was not only the age of the Enlightenment and the emergence of modern democracy, but the age of (pseudo-) scientific racism as well.

In conclusion: though the beginnings of the revolution that gave rise to the United States of America may indeed be characterized (at least in part) as conservative, the political community that eventually emerged was to take on a character that would definitively mark it as a novel creation. The republicanism inherited from an earlier English and Renaissance Italian tradition would give rise to nationalism, as the sovereign citizenry sought to define itself and maintain social cohesion in a culturally and socially diverse North American context; the newly instituted political institutions would eventually be surrounded by a veneration that has even been described as a civil religion; and the ideals of the small-scale agricultural society of the original 13 states would fade as the nation expanded westward, giving rise to the myth of the frontier and the ideology of manifest destiny. While the tradition of ancient freedoms to be jealously guarded was to live on, the temporal perspective changed, as the Revolution was eventually interpreted as heralding

\textsuperscript{112} Wood 2011, p. 233f.
\textsuperscript{114} Ibid., p. 7.
\textsuperscript{115} Ibid., p. 26.
a new, democratic era. In the following section of this chapter, we will ana-
lyse in detail some ways history has been utilized to make sense of and re-
shape the national identity of the United States.
New Standards for History: Struggles over the American Past

One major conclusion in the previous chapter was the central importance of the dimension of temporality for nationalism and the construction of national community. It is through fashioning a common past for themselves, and imagining a projected future, that nations constitute themselves as political subjects, situating the actors of the present within a larger narrative structure that provides action with meaning. Battles over the interpretation of history, therefore, often constitute the occasions when the substance of national community is re-examined and, frequently, renegotiated. Note that when I write ‘fashioning a common past’ I do not mean that such historical narratives are necessarily fabricated. Such national histories may be entirely fictional, or possess a solid factual base, or anything in between. Whether or not the central events of the national mythopoeia – for example, the Revolution of 1789, in the case of France – have taken place, and whether the factual account of these events is accurate, is of secondary importance to the aspect of the construction of a national, community-building narrative: what is crucial is the interpretation of these events, and the significance accorded to them. To overstate the point just a bit, we may imagine a counterfactual, monarchical development of French history in which the Revolution of 1789 would have been remembered as nothing more than one in a series of unsuccessful revolts against regal authority, rather than as the defining moment of national identity.

The first half of the present chapter will be devoted to an analysis of a public controversy and exchange of ideas in the United States during the 1990s, regarding the question of the interpretation of American history which is to be conveyed to students in the nation’s schools – the debate over the National History Standards (NHS). The NHS was a project initiated by the federal government with the aim of providing guidelines for the teaching of history in American schools, in order to elevate the standards of teaching in the subject. A committee of leading academic historians was charged with the task of developing these guidelines. When the committee finally published the resulting document in 1994, following a complex and protracted process, it became the focus of a heavily politicized debate. Conservative politicians and pundits accused the committee of falling under the spell of ‘political correctness’, producing an exaggeratedly negative picture of United States history, and thus contributing to the undermining of patriotism and social cohesion in American society.

After briefly sketching the context in which the NHS emerged, in what follows I will give an account of the most relevant contributions to the debate, before turning to an in-depth analysis of the ideas in question, and their bearing on the central issue – that of the identity of the United States as a national and political community.
Standardizing National History

Paradoxically, in terms of the debate that followed their eventual publication, the initiative to develop new standards for the teaching of history in American schools was taken by the Republican Party.\(^\text{116}\) During the Reagan administration, education and the issue of the quality of teaching in the nation’s schools was near the top of the Republican political agenda. A 1983 report commissioned by the Secretary of Education, *A Nation at Risk: The Imperative of Educational Reform*, had revealed that many American schoolchildren were unable to answer even the most elementary general knowledge question and to solve simple mathematics problems. The conclusion drawn by Republican policymakers was that the progressive tendency of American educational policy from the 1950s onwards was to blame. Equality in access to education, it was argued, had been prioritized to such an extent that the quality of education had suffered. ‘Excellence in education’ was the new slogan, and the Republicans were successful in their attempts to fasten their interpretation of the problem on the political agenda, although liberals countered that the impact of socioeconomic differences was the actual reason that many students were lagging behind. During the 1980s, the Reagan administration would eventually break the Republican tradition of federal non-intervention in educational matters. Among the initiatives taken was the development of federal ‘standards’ or guidelines for teaching in the public school system; these guidelines, however, were advisory in character, and local boards of education were free to choose whether or not to comply with them.

History was one of the subjects singled out for reform. Its status within the curriculum was a contested issue during the 1980s, many conservatives being eager to elevate its prestige, specifically in relation to the adjacent subject of social studies. Two separate themes were intertwined in the criticism of the specific form the teaching of social studies was said to be taking. Firstly, conservatives reacted to the progressivism, influenced by the philosopher and educational reformer John Dewey, which was characteristic of social studies. For one thing, according to Dewey’s concept of ‘expanding environments’, teaching on an elementary level should concern itself with the children’s immediate environment and relate to their own experiences; later, the perspective would be widened to include the nation and the world at large. This idea would be questioned by a growing number of public intellectuals and educationalists who espoused a more traditionally academic, liberal arts-based curriculum, claiming that children develop their thinking not primarily by having their own experiences confirmed but by coming into contact with narratives and ideas out of the past, which stimulate their imag-

\(^{116}\) The following account is based mainly on Symcox, Linda, 2002: *Whose History? The Struggle for National Standards in American Classrooms*, Teachers College Press, Columbia University, New York.
ination and open their thinking to new perspectives. The history subject was well suited to this task.

Secondly, conservatives criticized the cultural relativism which, they claimed, was inherent in social studies as the subject was currently taught. It was of paramount importance that younger generations understood the rootedness of American society and culture in the great tradition of Western civilization, in which the ideals took form that were inherent in American democracy and expressed in its Constitution. The teaching of history was seen as a tool in the process of reaffirming and strengthening national identity and of conveying the core values of American democracy to younger generations of Americans. One of the most prominent advocates of this vision was Lynne Cheney, chairwoman of the National Endowment for the Humanities between 1986 and 1993.\footnote{The National Endowment for the Humanities is an independent federal agency dedicated to ‘promoting excellence’ in humanities teaching and scholarship. Information retrieved from the agency’s web page (www.neh.gov) on August 27, 2012.} According to Cheney,

\[\ldots\text{we put our sense of nationhood at risk by failing to familiarize our young people with the story of how the society in which they live came to be. Knowledge of the ideas that have molded us and the ideals that have mattered to us functions as a kind of civic glue. Our history and literature give us symbols to share; they help us all, no matter how diverse our backgrounds … By allowing the erosion of historical consciousness, we do to ourselves what an unfriendly nation bent on our destruction might.}\footnote{Quoted in Symcox 2002, s. 85.}

The initiative to develop national standards for history teaching was taken in 1988, with George H.W. Bush having recently been elected President. Lynne Cheney was put in charge of the project, and delegated the undertaking of the development of the standards to a committee of historians at UCLA, headed by Professors Gary B. Nash and Charlotte Crabtree. In selecting the membership of the committee, Cheney, Nash – a social historian with a broadly liberal outlook – and Crabtree were each granted a veto in an attempt to secure the development of standards able to secure a broad consensus in American society, and avoid extremism of the Left as well as the Right. The committee consulted with nine specially appointed focus groups representing teachers and school principals, among other professional groups with a stake in the field of school history teaching. These focus groups were to have great influence on the document that was eventually produced. Nash and the other historians on the committee interpreted their task as one of contributing to raising the standards of quality in history education, by exposing school history teaching to the advances made in history research during recent decades – especially in the field of ‘new social history’, a branch that had expanded greatly especially during the 1960s and 70s. Very
generally, a consequence of this was that traditional political history was somewhat sidelined by the NHS history, and the ‘history of the common people’ was emphasized. Interpretations of political history that had long been standard were transposed by, or at least supplemented with, a class perspective on American history, as well as women’s history and the history of race and ethnic minorities, in order to take into account the experiences of underprivileged groups.\(^{119}\)

Of course, it is a seemingly paradoxical fact that a Republican administration commissioned a group of liberal historians, informed by the development in the field following the political radicalization of the 1960s, to produce national standards for the teaching of history. Linda Symcox, in the book *Whose History?*, argues that because the conservative politicians and pundits who were so ardent about the status of history in schools were themselves not historians, they were largely unaware of the development within the field in the past decades.\(^{120}\) Alternatively, one may point to a latent conflict between the two themes in the argumentation for an upgrading of the history subject mentioned above. The conservative politicians and the academics were in agreement with regarding the first goal – that of making history teaching more intellectually stimulating – but the academics did not agree with the second goal – the strengthening of national community and the inculcating of the positive values of American democracy. However, this conflict of values remained implicit until the completion of the standards. The development of guidelines able to secure consensus proved a time-consuming process. The document was, eventually, published in 1994. I will briefly summarize its content, before moving on to the analysis of the debate it subsequently sparked.

The National History Standards: An Overview

The document that constitutes the history standards comprises a volume of about 270 pages.\(^ {121}\) The material is structured chronologically, with ten chapters each dedicated to a particular period in American history and the chapters divided into thematic segments. Concluding each chapter is a number of points or paragraphs (‘standards’) summarizing the content, specifying what students of different grades (5-12) are expected to have learned. The greater part of the text, however, is made up of ‘teaching examples’, suggested activities and tasks. It is primarily these examples that express the progressive ambitions of the writers, and, consequently, would cause the most outrage.

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\(^{120}\) Symcox 2002, p. 39, 106.

among conservatives in the media. I will return to this matter in the following section.

In the introduction, the authors raise the question of the reasons for teaching history in schools and, in a broader perspective, why a society needs to remember its past. Their answer is, on the surface, a simple one: people need some knowledge of the past in order to fulfil the duties of citizenship. ‘Knowledge of history is the precondition of political intelligence.’ By studying our past, we will be able to make more informed political decisions. In other words, history may be construed as a laboratory by means of which we may draw conclusions about ‘the consequences of thought’. However, no less important for an enlightened citizenry is a familiarity with its common past as a society, and the capacity to interpret the core values of the political community in the light of new experience. ‘Denied knowledge of one’s roots and of one’s place in the great stream of human history, the individual is deprived of the fullest sense of self and of that sense of shared community on which the fullest personal development as well as responsible citizenship depends’ (my emphasis).122

One of the most interesting segments in the book is its first chapter, entitled ‘Three Worlds Meet. Beginnings to 1620’. Here, the writers trace the roots of the United States as a society to three distinct cultural spheres: the Native American, the European, and the West African, in obvious contrast to the traditional view of history in which American culture is understood as a branch or continuation of European civilization, with other cultures playing a marginal, or antagonistic, role. Here, we see the contours of the ambition to reconceptualize American identity in pluralist or even multiculturalist terms. Interestingly, the three cultural spheres in question are treated quite differentially. The Native American and West African culture are described in positive terms, apparently aimed towards empowerment and the strengthening of group identity, and are conceived naturalistically, as organic wholes. European culture, on the other hand, is described in either causal or mechanistic, or critical terms, as the writers trace the reasons for European global expansion and colonialism, and European attitudes to other cultures. The following passages typify the affirmative or empowering attitude towards Native American and African cultures:

Compare Native American and European views of the land. How did European beliefs in private property and in their claim to lands that were not ‘settled’ or ‘improved’ differ from Native American beliefs that land was not property, but entrusted by the Creator to all living creatures for their common benefit and shared use?123

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122 All quotes in this passage are taken from the National Standards for United States History, p. 1f.
123 National Standards for United States History, p. 56. Italics in the original.
Compare how Native Americans and European societies in North America were influenced by one another. In what ways did the early settlers in Massachusetts and Virginia depend on the skills and assistance of Native Americans in order to survive? In what ways did trade benefit Native Americans and Europeans and foster alliances, but also change traditional patterns of Native American life in ways that were harmful?124

Drawing upon music, literature, stories [...] and art, describe the influence of African heritage on slave life in the colonies. How did enslaved Africans draw upon their heritage in art, music, childrearing activities, and values to draw strength to cope with slavery and develop a strong culture in an unfamiliar land?125

Also of note is the chapter on the American Revolution, the Declaration of Independence, and the Constitution. The writers are eager to add some nuance to the traditional, heroic image of the revolutionary events. The socially radical potential of the Revolution is emphasized, while its actual achievements are somewhat downplayed:

[The Revolution] called into question long-established social and political relationships – between master and slave, man and woman, upper and lower class, officeholder and constituent, and even parent and child – and thus demarcated an agenda for reform that would occupy Americans down to the present day. In thinking about the causes and outcomes of the American Revolution, students need to confront the central issue of how revolutionary the revolution actually was. In order to reach judgments about this, they necessarily will have to see the Revolution through different sets of eyes – enslaved and free Americans, Native Americans, white men and women of different social classes, religions, ideological dispositions, regions, and occupations.126

The passages that follow exhibit numerous examples of these ambitions toward the pluralization of viewpoints. To name one, it is remarked that the question of the abolition of slavery was on the agenda as early as in revolutionary times, but that it was ultimately dismissed. The writers also call attention to the fact that, right from the outset, interpretations of the Constitution were divergent, and that the concomitant political battles became a prism of social and regional conflicts. The Revolution entailed manifold ‘movements’ to reform American society.

The basic idea, apparently, is to take up the abstract ideals of the Revolution and to question whether the new nation actually lived up to these ideals. This idea forms the centrepiece of the narrative that the writers of the National History Standards construct: the continuous, gradual realization of the

124 National Standards for United States History. Italics in the original.
125 Ibid., p. 68. Italics in the original.
126 Ibid., p. 70.
political ideals of the Enlightenment, which, over time, has come to be interpreted in more radical ways, as larger segments of society have been able to voice their concerns. This narrative clashes with the conservative tradition within American history writing (and, perhaps, society in general) in which the Constitution is taken as a given historical achievement, forming the basis for American sense of identity once and for all. The writers of the NHS, on the other hand, point to the fact that the Constitution indeed had a radical dimension but also a conservative one, as (so they claim) part of its purpose was to form a bulwark against the socially revolutionary potential of the peasant rebellions of the 1780s.

A third period in American history which is presented and analysed in an interesting way by the authors of NHS is the late 19th and early 20th centuries. The industrialization and emerging capitalism of this era are described as a constructive as well as destructive process, the social consequences of which are discussed at length. One passage which was to draw heavy criticism from conservatives is the following:

Conduct a trial of John D. Rockefeller on the following charge: ‘The plaintiff had knowingly and wilfully participated in unethical and amoral business practices designed to undermine traditions of fair and open competition for personal and private aggrandizement in direct violation of the common welfare.’ 127

After this brief summary, in which I have tried to capture the points in the NHS at which the central issues of American identity as a nation and a political community are at stake, we will continue by looking at the ways the NHS clashed with more traditional interpretations of American history, by examining the reactions of some of those who felt that their sense of American identity was called into question.

Struggles over the History Standards

Even before the publication of the National Standards for United States History in October 1994, the document was to come under heavy criticism by none other than Lynne Cheney, who had been one of the driving forces behind the project that led to the development of the history standards. Expressing her outrage on the pages of the Wall Street Journal, Cheney wrote:

Imagine an outline for the teaching of American history in which George Washington makes only a fleeting appearance and is never described as our first president. Or in which the foundings of the Sierra Club and the National Organization for Women are considered noteworthy events, but the first gathering of the U.S. Congress is not. This

127 National Standards for United States History, p. 56. Italics in the original.
is, in fact, the version of history set forth in the soon-to-be released National Standards for United States History. [...] The authors tend to save their unqualified admiration for people, places and events that are politically correct. The first era, ‘Three Worlds Meet (Beginnings to 1620)’, covers societies in the Americas, Western Europe and West Africa that began to interact significantly after 1450. To understand West Africa, students are encouraged to ‘analyze the achievements and grandeur of Mansa Musa’s court, and the social customs and wealth of the kingdom of Mali’. Such celebratory prose is rare when the document gets to American history itself. [...] Counting how many times different subjects are mentioned in the document yields telling results. One of the most often mentioned subjects, with 19 references, is McCarthy and McCarthyism. The Ku Klux Klan gets its fair share, too, with 17. As for individuals, Harriet Tubman, an African-American who helped rescue slaves by way of the Underground Railroad, is mentioned six times. Two white males who were contemporaries of Tubman, Ulysses S. Grant and Robert E. Lee, get one and zero mentions, respectively. Alexander Graham Bell, Thomas Edison, Albert Einstein, Jonas Salk and the Wright Brothers make no appearance at all.128

It was clear that the Republican politicians who had commissioned the guidelines in the first place were anything but satisfied with the end product. Cheney’s views were emphatically supported by talk show host and political commentator Rush Limbaugh, who referred to the NHS as ‘a bunch of P.C. crap’. Limbaugh charged the writers of the standards with undermining young Americans’ belief in the future by describing the United States as ‘inherently evil’, and with falsifying history by resorting to interpretation rather than sticking to factual account. (‘History is real simple. You want to know what history is? It’s what happened.’).129

In November 1994, the Wall Street Journal published a number of comments by conservative debaters who largely shared Limbaugh’s views. Balint Vazsony claimed that the writers of the NHS drew inspiration from Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union, turning the teaching of history into a tool for indoctrination rather than the conveying of objective knowledge.130 Kim Weissman and J.D. Dampman argued that the standards were bound to teach children to hate America and be ashamed of their heritage, and to encourage ‘Balkanization’ by boosting ethnic identities.131 Bob Dole, who in 1995 was running for the Republican presidential nomination, claimed that the NHS was a ‘shocking campaign’ aimed at ‘disparag[ing] America and disown[ing] the ideas and traditions of the West’.132 The debate over the history standards had quickly turned into a front in the so-called ‘culture

129 Quoted in Nash et al 2000, p. 5f.
130 Quoted in Nash et al 2000, p. 188f.
131 Quoted in Nash et al 2000, p. 189.
132 Quoted in Nash et al 2000, p. 245.
wars’ that were raging in American politics and society during the 1980s and 90s and which pitted liberal academics, feminists, and advocates of multicultural ideas against conservatives, Evangelical groups, and those eager to defend (their interpretation of) the Western cultural heritage. Soon, all protagonists were locked into familiar patterns of antagonism, and the debate was ripe with mutual charges of relativism and postmodernism on the one hand, and racism, sexism, and Christian fundamentalism on the other.

Simply put, conservatives criticized the writers of the guidelines for what they perceived as the attempt, based on radical ideology and the misguided wish to oblige vocal minorities, to present a distorted view of American history, thereby undermining the patriotism and the faith in American democracy of younger generations. If we examine this statement more closely, we quickly see that, in fact, it contains two distinct assertions: firstly, that the guidelines present a false account of American history; and secondly, that history teaching based on the NHS would undermine American national community. The former issue was to occupy a significant place in the criticism of the standards. Conservatives claimed that the NHS turned school history teaching into an ideological tool, rather than a means of conveying objective knowledge of historical events. It is my contention that this line of criticism is a red herring. History teaching can never be entirely value-free; we must have some criteria to determine which facts are important and worthy of a place in the curriculum, and in which sequence and narrative context these facts are presented. It follows that even if the factual accuracy of certain historical events is undisputed, the issue of the place of these facts within the curriculum remains undetermined and is potentially the object of contention. Such contention may well be politically charged, given that narrative and interpretation in American history are saturated with identity structures which are political in character. To see this we need only think of the fact that in the United States, as in so many other countries, public schooling – not least in history – has been one of the most important tools for nation-building. Thus, through the efforts of earlier generations, struggles over the content of history education can hardly be anything other than a politically charged battle over identity. The second issue in the conservative criticism of the NHS is therefore the most pertinent one – which is of course not to say that the critics were right, but only that this was in actuality the main point of contention in the exchange.

Gary Nash, one of the most prominent historians in the committee which had developed the guidelines, soon responded to the criticism, in newspaper

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134 Nash et al 2000, p. 15.
columns as well as televised debates and attempted to demonstrate that Cheney’s numerical examples were misleading, and that the guidelines allotted plenty of space in the curriculum for such formative events as the American Revolution and the signing of the Constitution. In this way, much of the debate came to take on an unfortunate, myopic character while the fundamental issues of contention were largely overlooked. Following the initial heated controversy, a second, more conciliatory phase of the debate commenced, in which the standards became the object of an overhaul in which the most contentious passages were weeded out.\footnote{Thomas, Jo, 19960403: ‘Revised History Standards Disarm the Explosive Issues’, \textit{New York Times}; see also Ravitch, Diane, 1999: ‘The Controversy over the National History Standards’, in Fox-Genovese, Elizabeth & Lasch-Quinn, Elisabeth (eds.), 1999: \textit{Reconstructing History. The Emergence of a New Historical Society}, Routledge, New York and London.} The end result was a product bearing the unmistakable stamp of compromise, while still not satisfying the most vociferous critics.\footnote{Fonte, John D. & Robert Lerner, 1997: ‘History Standards are Not Fixed’, \textit{Society} Jan/Feb 1997, pp. 20-25; Diggins, John Patrick, 1997: ‘Can the Social Historian Get It Right?’, \textit{Society} Jan/Feb 1997, pp. 9-19.} Yet, the controversy over the standards eventually petered out, and the attention of political commentators and pundits was turned elsewhere.

The History Standards Debate: Some Interesting Contributions

As the fiercely polemical exchanges over the history standards had died out, Gary Nash, in collaboration with fellow historians Charlotte Crabtree and Ross Dunn, published a volume that constituted an attempt at defending in more depth and detail the guidelines Nash and Crabtree had been instrumental in developing.\footnote{Nash et al 2000.} Nash, Crabtree, and Dunn claim, firstly, that the content of school history teaching is an issue that inevitably raises questions about national identity and that critics were misguided in their juxtaposition of ‘facts’ with ‘interpretations’ or ‘ideology’. Furthermore, they take issue with the contention that a history curriculum that devotes significant space to the experiences of minorities and marginalized groups serves to undermine national and political community. Turning this critique on its head, they counter that it is only through a critical examination of the expressions of political and economic power, and the recognition of historical injustice, that an authentic community, in the true sense of the word, may be achieved. This point is illustrated in the following quote:

\begin{quote}
We argue here that nothing can serve patriotism worse than suppressing dark chapters of our past, smoothing over clearly documentable examples of shameful behavior in public places high and low, and air-brushing disgraceful violations of our national credo such as the actions of the Ku Klux Klan or the internment of Japanese Americans.
\end{quote}
during World War II. If events like these are seen as mere footnotes to history, America’s youth are unlikely to swallow the story, especially when they see around them systemic problems that eat away at the national fabric.\textsuperscript{138}

Remarkably, the language of nationalism and national community is clearly evident in passages like this. The process by means of which historical injustice and violations are to be rectified is described in therapeutic, even psychiatric terms; the goal of such a process is one of healing, and its subject an almost personalized Nation. The metaphors used by Nash et al point to a conception of national community that is almost organic in character. We have been taught to associate such a conception of the nation with the Romanticism of 19\textsuperscript{th}-century European nationalism rather than what is often assumed to be the fundamentally liberal spirit of American political community. Unfortunately, Nash, Crabtree, and Dunn do not delve more deeply into these issues nor do they seek to answer the difficult questions about the relationship between nationalism and liberal political community they raise.

By more closely examining some of the more lucid critical comments directed towards the history standards, we can reach a bit further in our understanding of this problematic. Among these contributions to the debate, we find two articles by John Patrick Diggins, a historian working primarily in the field of American intellectual history.\textsuperscript{139} Diggins quotes, apparently with approval, the objective of the history standards as presented in the introduction of the volume, that is, to further a form of history teaching that fosters active citizenship.\textsuperscript{140} However, he claims that the writers of the NHS have failed in this endeavour, caving in to the pressures of (allegedly) fashionable multiculturalist ideology that undermines, rather than strengthens, the democratic ideals on which citizenship virtue depends. Diggins is especially critical of the first chapter, ‘Three Worlds Meet’, claiming that a falsification of history takes place as the writers seek to confirm the ethnic and cultural pluralism of contemporary American society by speaking of a ‘convergence’ of three cultures. In fact, claims Diggins, ‘the three cultures described by NHS did not so much converge as bypass one another by means of exclusionary classifications and tragic misperceptions’.\textsuperscript{141} He continues by stating that any narrative on the United States should take as its starting point the cultural sphere in which the ideals of democracy originated, that is, the European one. Instead, he says, the NHS invites us to admire the culture and values of the Native Americans, which are completely alien to European culture, as they are based on totem, rituals, stability, and a cyclical conception of tem-

\textsuperscript{138} Nash et al 2000, p. 16.
\textsuperscript{140} Diggins 1997, p. 14.
\textsuperscript{141} Diggins 1999, p. 259.
porality. The standards ‘[ask] students to appreciate stable cultures of lineage, unchallenged standards, filial authority ... and totemic solace, all alien to America’s liberal values’. Diggins, quoting Claude Lévi-Strauss, argues that the standards subscribe to the tradition, common to Christianity and cultural anthropology, of expressing ‘the “remorse” of the West in the face of inexorable change’. In my opinion, the point Diggins makes is worth contemplating. The history standards celebrate non-European cultures in the Americas, but view these cultures through the lens of modernity; they are construed as the heroic but tragic victims of modernity.

Diggins recognizes in the history standards the ambition to strengthen the self-esteem of minorities by accentuating their respective histories and afford them more space within American self-understanding. If people are made aware of their cultural roots and ancestral history, their sense of meaningful belonging within American society is reinforced. Diggins questions the intellectual coherence of these ideas, particularly the relevance of the concept of ‘roots’ in a modern, democratic society. That an individual’s status or identity is to be based on his or her ancestry, Diggins interprets as a reactionary, nativist, almost racist idea. The United States as a political community has always looked towards the future rather than dwelling on the past, and one of its prime ideas is the ability of individuals to break with their past and be the makers of their own fortune. ‘The NHS risks misleading students into thinking one can have the best of both worlds: a culture of lineage and a politics of liberty.’

On a deeper level, it is significant that Diggins points to the dimension of temporality as central for American identity. In order to be successful, every national project needs to prove that it is in possession of the future. Diggins, quoting Octavio Paz, claims that the Pre-Columbian Meso-American cultures the NHS celebrates lacked ‘all historical sense of change’ and ‘reproduced rites of servitude’. In the account of the encounter between the European and Meso-American civilizations, the focus should be on the ‘dynamics’ that led to ‘progress’; that is, Diggins seems to imply, present these non-European cultures as objects of European expansion in the narrative of the ‘inexorable’ advancement of modernity.

It is easy to be suspicious of Diggins’ obviously Hegelian concept of Europe as the ‘historical civilization’. Yet, to dismiss it as simple-minded Eurocentrism would be unwise. Regardless of the veracity of the claim that European culture possesses a self-consciousness and a drive towards progress and self-improvement that is absent in other civilizations, what is important for our purposes is the fact that Europeans in fact have long thought

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143 Ibid.
144 Diggins 1997, p. 15.
145 Ibid.
of themselves in this way. The peculiarities of the notion of temporality inherent in European modernity, as was pointed out in Chapter II, have been a factor which has formed the nationalism that the era of the great Revolutions (the French and the American ones) gave rise to. These peculiar features have been present in American identity right from the outset, and continue to shape the attempts of modern-day Americans to reinterpret their identity and role in world history – attempts that the history standards are an example of. Diggins helps us see this by pointing to the resulting ambiguities when the writers of the history standards try to reinterpret American identity in such a way that non-European cultures are afforded a more important place within it, but do not deal with the fact that this American identity is deeply shaped by the underlying structures of temporality and meaning that are typical of European modernity. Matters are further complicated, one might add, by the continued reliance of the writers on these very structures – particularly notions of progress through continuous self-examination – in their attempts to recast the narratives of American history and identity. The weak spot in Diggins’ account is his simplistic glorification of American culture as one that celebrates the future rather than the past; in this statement, we see traces of the seemingly perennial tendency to naively separate the ‘good’ from the ‘bad’ nationalism (a tendency also analysed in Chapter II). Rather, we should seek to examine further the aforementioned structures of meaning, specifically associated with progress, within American identity, in order to check the potential of these structures of performing an exclusionary function – for example, when ‘progressive’ and ‘rational’ are equated with ‘European’ and ‘white’, as has frequently been the case since the era of the Enlightenment. We will deal with these questions in further detail in the concluding section of this chapter.
American Identity: Three Interpretations

Raising the level of abstraction somewhat, and keeping in mind the findings from the debate on national history, in the section that follows we will analyse three interpretations of the nature of American national identity, by three prominent political theorists and political scientists: Michael Walzer, David Hollinger, and Samuel Huntington. I argue that the comparison between these three is a fruitful one as each presents a distinct position within the field of discourse on American political identity; combined, they allow us to, through a comparison of their respective strengths and weaknesses, gain a fuller understanding of the fundamental value conflicts at stake in the formation of American identity.

Walzer: What It Means to Be an American

In the book *What It Means to Be an American*, published in 1996, the political philosopher Michael Walzer presents his interpretation of American national identity, particularly in relation to the questions of cultural diversity and identity politics which were high on the societal agenda at that time (and largely remains so).146 The ambiguousness of the term ‘interpretation’ mirrors what is in fact an ambiguity in Walzer’s work, which is at once descriptive and prescriptive: he describes what he perceives to be the American model of dealing with the fact of cultural diversity, while simultaneously providing a normative argument in favour of this model. More or less implicitly, Walzer starts from the assumption that the core of the national identity of the United States – or, differently phrased, its identity as a political community – is to be found in its constitution, and that a normative account of the right institutional approach to cultural diversity in the United States consists of a correct interpretation of the ideas expressed in the Constitution. In other words, such an interpretation of the central constitutional ideas simultaneously provides an answer to questions of identity (‘who are we?’) and of the right approach to cultural diversity.

The sentence *E pluribus unum* – ‘out of many, one’ – is included on the Seal of the United States, adopted by an Act of Congress in 1782, and is found on coins of many denominations. The phrase, of course, refers to the creation of a new nation out of the original 13 states or colonies which were to constitute the United States; however, it has also been used to suggest the emergence of national unity out of a plurality of cultures and nationalities, and it is this second usage that Walzer adopts as he utilizes the motto as an emblem of the coexistence of multiple ethnic, religious and cultural groups within one political community.147 In Walzer’s vision, these groups form the

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147 Ibid., p. 15, 26.
discrete building blocks of the American nation. Walzer designates this vision as a pluralist one: each individual develops a primary identity within the confines of his or her subnational, cultural group, while the larger, union-wide community is held together by a limited, strictly political identity, for which the republican spirit of civic virtue is paramount.

Walzer characterizes the United States as a union of multiple nations, races and religions, dispersed throughout its territory and living side by side. The fact that he uses the concept of ‘nation’ in the plural in this context is remarkable, and an indication of the depth of American cultural-social diversity in Walzer’s conceptualization. He does not deny, however, that the United States in one sense constitutes a nation – but it is a ‘nation of nations’. Walzer makes this argument by means of a contrast between the United States and Europe. In a recurrent rhetorical trope, he refers to Europe as ‘the Old World’ and suggests that European-style nationalism is based on natural and organic social ties. Surprisingly, Walzer uses the example of France – rather than of the nations traditionally associated with the ius sanguinis, such as Germany – as an illustration of this point. He draws on the concept of patrie, which he describes as central to French national identity, and notes that the idea of a fatherland, which suggests family ties as a basis of community, is absent in American discourse of patriotism. If an American were to speak of the ‘fatherland’, Walzer claims, it would more likely be in order to refer to the Old Country – his or her ancestral homeland. Apparently, Walzer accepts the idea that a nation is a community held together by ‘natural and organic’ social ties. People have ‘a deep need of [...] historically and communally structured forms of life’; and in the contemporary United States, this need is satisfied (if at all) by the membership in cultural, ethnic and religious groups. However, social and geographical mobility (to which Walzer ascribes a positive value) means that the integrity of these ‘communal groups’ is in jeopardy. For this reason, Walzer proposes various forms of public support to ensure the survival of these communities. Further, he suggests that communal groups may perform a function in the production of publicly-funded social services.

Americans, Walzer says, are held together not by loyalty to any common nation or ‘fatherland’, but to the overarching political community – the Republic. This is a loyalty quite different from the European variety of patri-
otism, with its notions of mythical, mystical community; it is an abstract, patriotism, a little dry in character; ‘it does not lend itself to ritualistic elaboration’.

Walzer emphasizes the importance of a politically active citizenry, and the sense of community generated by this political participation, for the democratic process to work. He explicitly defends a republican theory of democracy, while rejecting the more overtly communitarian strands of the republican tradition. The Walzerian republic is a community but does entail a deeper ‘sense of purpose’ which some republicans advocate. This aspect of his theory, however, remains somewhat underdeveloped: it is not entirely clear what, according to Walzer, gives meaning to the republican community if it is not a common sense of purpose. Further, the relation between the (strong and comprehensive) ‘national’ communities and the (abstract, even lukewarm) overarching republican community remains a bit vague. However, it appears that he thinks of this relation as harmonious, even synergistic, rather than conflictual. A clue is perhaps provided by the fact that he regards individualism as a common threat to political participation and involvement in the community, and that he notes that people who are active in churches and other religious communities tend to be active participants in the democratic process as well.

Before moving on, we can note some problematic features of Walzer’s argument. To begin with, the contrast between ‘American’ and ‘European’ patriotism is surely exaggerated. There is some truth in this dichotomy, as the conceptualization of the nation as an organic, mythical community has been widespread in Europe. However, the important point is that thinking of the nation in this way – as an organic community – is a modern phenomenon (as argued in Chapter II). Rather than acknowledging this fact, Walzer accepts the primordialist self-understanding of Romantic nationalism. We see an odd consequence of this as Walzer applies this primordialist conception of the nation in the American context: surely, he overstates the depth of identification of modern-day Americans with their respective ancestral homelands, as well as the extent to which ethno-cultural groups in the United States form socially encapsulated communities. Proportional to this exaggeration of ancestral attachment is his curious devaluation of American patriotism and attachment to the Republic. The description of the American variety of patriotism as not lending itself to ‘ritualistic elaboration’ is, quite simply, glaringly inaccurate. Rather, patriotic discourse in the United States is saturated with a rich symbolism, complete with historical narratives, national holidays, and quasi-sacred places – recall the notion of ‘civil religion’ referenced in the opening section of this chapter.

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155 Walzer 1996, p. 82f.
156 Ibid., p. 97.
157 Ibid., p. 11.
158 Bellah 1967.
where for a satisfactory account of national and political community in the United States.

Hollinger: Postethnic America

While Walzer’s *What It Means to Be an American* is a defence of (a variety of) multiculturalism, David Hollinger, in his book *Postethnic America*, presents a criticism of multiculturalist ideas, as he interprets them. Hollinger’s main contention is that the excessive attention to subnational communities and identities (whether racial, ethnic, cultural, or religious), which has been a general feature of American society since the 1970s, has contributed to an undermining of national community as well as individual freedom. Hollinger’s book was first published in 1995 and revised editions were issued in 2000 and 2005.

Beginning with acknowledging what he claims is sound within multicultural theory, Hollinger is critical of the ‘naïve’, Eurocentric form of universalism which he claims was predominant in the social sciences in the mid-20th century, and which tended to, implicitly, equate Western culture with universal values and standards. Such an attitude, Hollinger claims, underlies the powerful metaphor of the American melting pot, which (supposedly) created uniform American citizens out of the disparate material constituted by immigrants of diverse cultural backgrounds. The blind spot of this narrative of American national identity is the fact that it overlooks the disproportionate influence of Anglo-Saxon, Protestant Christian culture upon mainstream American culture. Hollinger regards multiculturalism as a reaction against naïve universalism in general, and Eurocentric conceptions of American national identity in particular. Unfortunately, he says, the socio-cultural climate has subsequently shifted towards the other extreme. Universalism has been rejected, and the aspiration to respect and make room for the culturally particular too often leads to relativism. Rather than discarding universalism altogether, we should strive to develop a more nuanced, contextually sensitive universalism. At this point, Hollinger makes a distinction within multiculturalism between two positions he terms pluralism and cosmopolitanism. While pluralists – a group which should probably include Walzer, although Hollinger does not think so – take existing socio-cultural groups as a given and seek to preserve and protect the integrity of these groups, cosmopolitans – like Hollinger himself – maintain a more dynamic conception of culture, acknowledging the potential of cultures to change, develop, and influence one another. Pluralists, Hollinger claims, too often

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159 Hollinger 2005. Remarkably, Hollinger apparently construes Walzer’s position as compatible with his own (p. 141).
160 Ibid., p. 58ff.
161 Ibid., Chapter 3.
162 Ibid., p. 86.
take for granted the bonds between the individual and a particular ethno-
cultural group, ignoring the pressures of conformity to which the individual
is subjected on behalf of the group. Rather than identities, given once and
for all, we should speak of affiliations, bonds which the individual freely
chooses to tie or untie. In a truly liberal society, all cultural groups, reli-
gious congregations etc. are dependent for their existence upon the lifestyle
choices of the individuals within that society. These choices exert a continu-
ous pressure on cultural groups, thus ensuring the dynamic character of the
general culture in the society.

Hollinger makes use of the term ‘postethnic’ to designate a perspective
that acknowledges that the individual is situated within a complex web of
affiliations and identities – rather than being constituted by these affiliations
and identities. It is therefore a perspective which contextualizes, but does not
relativize. Hollinger exemplifies by referring to the debate on the content
of history teaching in the nation’s schools which took place in the United
States during the 1990s, and which was discussed in the previous section of
this chapter. One ambition with these guidelines was to give greater attention
to the history of groups that had traditionally been discriminated against or
marginalized, such as African-Americans, Native Americans and Hispanic
Americans. Gender and class perspectives were also to be given greater
weight, similarly in order to highlight divisions and conflicts which had pre-
viously largely been ignored in the teaching of school history. Hollinger
approvingly cites the committee chairman, Gary Nash, who claims that the
Eurocentrism of history teaching must be dealt with, but is strongly critical
of the various forms of ethnocentrism of other persuasions (for example,
Afrocentrism) which had many defenders at the time. Instead, Nash says,
the perspectives of disadvantaged groups should be integrated within the
national self-understanding.

Hollinger’s insistence that identities must be freely chosen, and the fact
that he designates his own position as ‘cosmopolitanism’, could lead one to
expect him to propagate a vision of a world without borders. However, he
does not do this. Hollinger claims that a national identity serves an important
unifying function in a society such as that of the United States, and that such
an overarching identity is unproblematic, as long as it is civic, rather than
ethnic, in character. It is ethnic nationalism, not civic, which has given rise
to bloody conflicts in the Balkans, the former Soviet Union, and parts of
Asia in recent years. Characteristic of ethnic nationalism is that it is
primordialist, based on ancestry; ‘ethnic nationalism claims “that an individual’s deepest attachments are inherited, not chosen”’, Hollinger writes, quoting Michael Ignatieff. Hollinger acknowledges that this is a truth not without its exceptions; for example, for extended periods of its history the United States has sought to limit immigration from certain parts of the world in order to maintain the predominance of people of West European heritage within its population (p. 134f). However, he notes that in doing so the United States violated its own fundamental principles.

Like Walzer’s, Hollinger’s account of the identity of the United States as a political community is too simplistic and, ultimately, unsatisfactory. In what follows, I will briefly summarize my criticism of Hollinger in two points. Firstly, he makes too much of the concept of openness as he seeks to demonstrate how the ‘good’ American nationalism differs from the ‘bad’ European one. Following Ignatieff in his analysis of ethnic nationalism, he apparently argues that the reason it is so destructive is its primordialism, that is, its closed character: your ancestry determines your nationality, once and for all. However, a brief glance at European history since the Middle Ages suffices to demonstrate the fact that a community which is in principle universalistic in character may nonetheless exhibit great hostility towards its antagonists – and sometimes, the very reason for this hostility is linked to the fact of its universalist aspirations. The great wars of religion sparked by the monotheistic, proselytizing faiths – the military expansion of the Caliphate in the 7th and 8th centuries, the Crusades, the extended conflicts between Protestants and Catholics in Europe from the 16th century onwards etc. – are all exemplars of such aggression. A similar mechanism is found in the ideology that served to justify European colonialism, and which to a large extent borrowed its ideas from the Enlightenment. To the actor proclaiming to have access to eternal truths, the Other is not only different but an inferior who refuses to see the light, either an infidel (in the case of the wars of religion) or an irrational primitive (in the case of colonialism).

Secondly, Hollinger’s apparent definition of ethnicity in terms of particularity is problematic. An underlying tendency in his book is his criticism of
global tendency towards particularism – in other words, the tendency to defend the local, the situated, the contingent, against the incursions of purportedly universal values. Therein lies his scepticism towards ethnicity. This global tendency makes itself felt in the bloody ethnic wars in Eastern Europe, among other places, and in less lethal but nonetheless worrisome conflicts in American society, where increasing focus on group identities means that the political community is weakened and the democratic process hampered. If the ‘ethnic’ is defined only in terms of the particular, however, any national community, including that of the United States, is ‘ethnic’ in relation to international society. What is ‘ethnic’ can only be defined in terms of scale. A great weakness in Hollinger’s argument is that he does not account for the particularity of American identity. A simple defence of universalism against particularism does not suffice to demonstrate the superiority of the American variety of nationalism (or patriotism). What we need is an account which makes sense of the complexities of the interplay between universalism and particularism in American political identity.

Huntington: Who Are We?

Samuel Huntington, in his 2004 book *Who Are We?*, dedicates himself to a search for the core of American national identity, in a historical as well as contemporary perspective. He challenges the widespread assumption that the national community of the United States is based purely on certain political values (‘the American creed’, in Gunnar Myrdal’s memorable phrasing). Huntington claims that these values are intertwined with and dependent upon a Protestant, Anglo-Saxon political core culture which has dominated American society from colonization onward. The integration of new groups of immigrants has, historically, amounted to an assimilation of new population groups to this core culture.

Huntington depicts the national narrative of Americans as a people of immigrants, a narrative which seeks to afford all cultural groups within the nation’s borders an equal status (although the cases of Native Americans and African-Americans are obviously problematic), as a revisionist and relatively late construction. The first English-speaking people who migrated to North America from the 16th century onwards were settlers, not immigrants; they did not adapt to a pre-existing society, but founded new settlements on the basis of their own values. Huntington refers to Alexis de Tocqueville, who in his classic study of American political culture stressed the impact of Protestantism, or more specifically, Calvinism, and of a conception of citizen

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175 Ibid., p. xvii.
176 Ibid., p. 39f.
177 Ibid., p. 39f.
virtues bearing the mark of this religion. A central feature of the Protestant faith as it developed in America is the right of the individual to interpret the word of God, without the interference of any ecclesial or worldly authority. From this principle is derived the right of individuals to join together and form independent congregations. The English colonization of America can only be understood in this light, according to Huntington, since the colonists were largely made up of Puritans seeking to establish new political communities based on their faith. Later, as the Revolution unfolded, the ratification of the Constitution largely reflected a constitutional philosophy which had been in place since earlier colonial times, although influence from contemporary Enlightenment thinkers is also evident. The subsequent political and cultural development has followed along this track. The Anglo-Saxon, Calvinist heritage has not lost its grip on the political culture; the successive waves of immigrant groups have largely adapted to this culture, and competing religious denominations have been thoroughly influenced by the specifically American form of Protestantism. Huntington claims that the latter phenomenon is evident not least among American Catholics, who, despite papal resistance, made the conscious decision to be ‘Americanized’ during the first half of the 20th century.

To a European observer, many features of American political culture are strikingly unfamiliar. On the one hand the United States, with its Constitution expressing Enlightenment ideas of universal rights and freedoms, is often seen as the paradigm of a liberal society. On the other, religion is visible in political culture in a way which has few counterparts in the largely secularized Europe. Huntington refers to the historical impact of Calvinism to explain this apparent paradox. If I interpret Huntington correctly, what he claims is that the individual freedom so cherished in American political culture is fundamentally the freedom to practice one’s religion without interference by the State or any other authority. Note that this is a freedom which can be said to stand on a Biblical ground: as Huntington claims, ‘scholars who attempt to identify the American “liberal consciousness” of Creed solely with Lockean ideas and the Enlightenment are giving a secular interpretation to the religious sources of American values’. The freedom of religion can thus be interpreted as a freedom to religion.

It is only from the 1960s onwards, Huntington claims, that the ‘American creed’ has gradually been detached from its context in the construction of American national identity, from which has followed the application of lib-

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180 Ibid., p. 47.
181 Ibid., pp. 95-98.
182 Ibid., p. 63.
eral values in the national, cultural, and linguistic spheres. This tendency to the affirmation of pluralism (which Huntington interprets as related to multiculturalism) has led to greater difficulties in the integration of new immigrant groups than has previously been the case. This integration, Huntington controversially claims, is also made more difficult by the fact that contemporary immigration is relatively homogenous – Spanish is by far the largest language among immigrant groups, while previous waves of immigration were linguistically heterogeneous in character – and territorially concentrated to the American southwest. This, Huntington claims, may result in the splitting of the United States into two de facto nations, one English- and one Spanish-speaking.

Huntington, of course, is most famous for his book *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of the World Order*. The ideas he presents in this work feed into the argument in *Who Are We?* and allow us to more fully grasp this argument. In *Clash of Civilizations*, Huntington posits the existence of certain cultural patterns, immanent within sharply delineated, self-contained ‘civilizations’, which fundamentally structure the way we think, interact, and organize society. According to Huntington, the major civilizations in the world today are the Western, Orthodox, Islamic, Hindu, Sinic (Chinese), and Japanese civilizations. Ideas and practices cannot readily be transferred from one civilization to the other, due to the fundamental differences in values and outlook, and even if such transfer takes place, these ideas tend to take on a different meaning when placed in a new cultural context. Western pretences to universalism are thus false, and Westerners’ attempts to export their concepts of democracy are doomed to fail. Huntington points, among other things, to the separation of church and state, the Reformation, and the emergence of the rule of law as some fundamental socio-historical changes which are unique to the cultures with their roots in Western Europe, which have paved the way for the individualism and pluralism characteristic of Western societies. (He makes a comparison with Russia, where these socio-historical changes have not taken place.) Further, Huntington claims that the borders between civilizations are destined to form the frontiers that replace the fault lines of the Cold War – but these geopolitical claims are of little concern for our present purposes.

According to Huntington, the universal values of democracy and human rights form part of Western self-understanding and cultural identity. This is a

184 Ibid., p. 224.
186 Ibid., p. 41ff.
187 Huntington speaks of three additional civilizations – the Hispanic, African, and Buddhist – but does not assign to them the same degree of integrity and political significance.
188 Huntington 1996, p. 70.
relatively uncontroversial statement. Further, and more problematically, he construes them as immanent within this cultural context. However, I contend that these values cannot be conceived of as dependent on any particular cultural context, or they lose their very meaning and *raison d'être* – their purported universality. Somewhat paradoxically, while these values may define our identity as Westerners, they cease to be meaningful (and, thus, to define our identity) when they are thought of as exclusively Western in their application.

Huntington is not a philosopher but a political scientist with a deep interest in and knowledge of political and social history, and we should not expect him to deliver the sharpest judgments in normative, philosophical questions. However, as we return from the abstract level of inquiry to questions of American national and political identity, we see that Huntington’s mistakes prove fatal in this field as well. I will attempt to briefly summarize the reasons for this. While Huntington correctly points to the roots of American national identity in (circa) 17th-century Anglo-Saxon culture, it cannot simply be reduced to the substance of this culture. There is something which gives shape to American national identity that cannot be reduced to culture as such, a grand narrative formed around the momentous occasion of the Revolution and the historic significance projected from this event onwards. Further, Huntington is correct in calling attention to the fact that the revolutionary event and the chiliastic significance afforded to this event are foreshadowed in the particular branch of Anglo-Saxon culture out of which American political culture grew; however, what he misses are the universalistic implications contained within this tradition. These implications meant that American political culture would, as it were, turn against itself, or to be more precise, against the contingent features present at the inception of the American nation (that is, the particularities of American culture at that time). The reaction against slavery is one example. Thus, Hollinger is closer to the truth at this point than is Huntington when he implies that the violations of the United States against its own fundamental principles are, over time, checked by the self-reflective mechanisms provided by these principles.189

In American national and political identity, the universal and the particular are interwoven in a complex manner. Huntington provides us with one side of this picture, as he shows us some of the ways the particular (that is, contingent cultural factors) has shaped American national identity. However, his nearly exclusive focus on cultural factors as opposed to political ones gives us a lopsided and ultimately unsatisfactory account.

189 See note 171 above.
American Identity According to Walzer, Hollinger, and Huntington

Michael Walzer’s interpretation is the easiest one to refute. According to Walzer the United States is hardly even a nation at all, at least not in the common sense of the word, a conclusion he reaches by means of an overly narrow definition of the concept of nation as an ethnic community. America is not an ethnos, but is in fact made up of several ethne, and therefore cannot constitute a nation. This simplistic definition undoubtedly resonates with certain aspects of the concept of ‘nation’ as it is popularly conceived, but it is nevertheless inadequate, as it is completely devoid of the political dimension which is of fundamental importance to a proper understanding of the nation – a matter discussed in the previous chapter. A ‘nation’ is a community which either possesses sovereignty or aspires to achieve it; the manner in which it chooses to define itself – in terms of birth, language, culture, geography, or something else – is secondary to this fact. The ‘ethnic’ subcommunities in the United States which are labelled ‘nations’ by Walzer lack this political status (although ethnic communities undoubtedly play a part in politics, secession is – with few exceptions – not on the agenda of these communities); the union itself, however, possesses it. A curious consequence of Walzer’s restrictive definition of nation in terms of ethnicity is that he seriously underestimates the depth of American national sentiment and the magnitude and degree of elaboration of American patriotic discourse.

Hollinger comes closer to articulating the self-understanding of the United States as a nation, but the problem is just that: he reproduces this self-understanding without attempt an at critical analysis, and therefore ends up misrepresenting the phenomenon of American nationhood. His conception of national community is somewhat more sophisticated than Walzer’s, as he does not equate ‘nation’ with ethnos, but (following Ignatieff et al) posits two distinct types of national communities – ethnic and civic. This is a step forward compared to Walzer’s account, as it makes sense of the fact that the United States possesses a strong sense of nationhood, while its self-understanding as a political community is based not on ethnicity but largely on the very fact of ethnic pluralism. The image of the United States as a community held together by political values rather than ethnicity is one which is not only normatively appealing, but also, empirically, resonates well with the received understanding of American society. (Indeed, my reason for including Hollinger in this analysis is not that he is either an eminent or an excellent thinker, but the fact that he is, to some extent, typical.) However, Hollinger’s Alexandrian solution to the Gordian knot of the various conceptions of nationhood – that is, a simple dichotomy of ethnic versus civic nationalism – is one which leaves the concept of ‘nation’ itself curiously empty. We know what the civic nation is not – an ethnic or cultural com-
munity – but it cannot be constituted solely by the abstract political values on which it is (purportedly) based. The United States, after all, came into existence at a particular time and in a particular place, and cannot be understood completely in the abstract, apart from its historical context. We may grant Hollinger that the United States is a ‘civic nation’, but – and this cannot be stressed enough – it must be established what exactly is the nature of such a community; in other words, what constitutes the ‘nation’ part of the expression ‘civic nation’. Is it of a completely different species than its counterpart, the ‘ethnic nation’, or do the two have some elements in common? To do this we must turn to history, in order to understand the process through which the United States came into being as a political community. We will take up this thread in the concluding part of this chapter. However, to foreshadow the conclusions somewhat, the answer to the rhetorical question of the nature of the civic vis-à-vis the ethnic nation is, of course, that they do have some elements in common. Indeed, we may miss the exclusionary potential which the civic nation undoubtedly possesses if we are not wary of this fact.

Huntington, for his part, challenges the self-understanding of the United States as a community held together principally by political values. Empirically, his argument is a counter-intuitive one in terms of the received understanding of the nature of American society, but he makes his case by means of an extensive account of the national history of the United States – something that cannot be said for either Walzer or Hollinger. He skilfully constructs an alternate narrative, linking the facts that support an interpretation of the United States as a national community built around an ethnic and cultural core, to which subsequent immigrant groups have gradually accommodated. Effectively, his account of American national identity is one which has in common with Hollinger’s the basic dichotomy of ethnic versus civic – but Huntington takes the opposite view, designating the United States as fundamentally an ethnic nation. Consequently, his analysis is of limited, yet not insignificant, value. Huntington correctly points out the particularities of the circumstances under which the United States came into being, and the extent to which these particularities – especially certain features of Protestant Anglo-Saxon culture in the 17th and 18th centuries – shaped the character of this emergent national community. He also points out the many instances of nativism and assimilationism in the subsequent history of the nation. However, he ignores the universalism which has also been a consistent feature of American identity, the trait which Hollinger makes so much of, and which has made possible the mechanisms of self-criticism and self-correction that the political culture of the United States also possesses. To take the most obvious example, slavery eventually came to be seen as a practice too glaringly inconsistent with the values expressed in the Constitution to be allowed to continue. Of particular note here is that this Constitution arose within a slave society and did not abolish slavery – yet, it did not,
as we would expect from Huntington’s account, in a simple manner *express* the values of this society but rather contained within it some elements that made possible the *transcendence* of this society, understood as the reform of its laws. We may see this in the fact that the abolitionists were able to draw inspiration from the Bill of Rights. Thus, I contend that we ought not to see the United States as a purely ‘civic’ nation, as Hollinger would have it, or as an ‘ethnic’ nation, which Huntington in effect claims, but should rather seek to understand the identity of its national community in terms of a dialectical process, moving between the poles of universality and particularity. To understand the nature of American identity is to chart the trajectory of this process.
Conclusions

The question of the inner nature of American national identity is one which elicits wildly divergent answers. In the idealist view, the United States is the model of democracy, a pure political community built upon the values of liberty and equality. On the other hand, according to the cynical view this image is a sham, a Potemkin façade erected to conceal the politics of the particular and serve the interests of certain privileged groups and strata in society. While Walzer and Hollinger come close to espousing the former view the latter is one shared, paradoxically, by Huntington along with the most virulent anti-Americans, as Huntington ultimately concedes that the United States is an ethnic democracy, based on the culture of a historically dominant class. We would be mistaken, however, to assume that because the former image is erroneous, the latter one is necessarily correct. Both are in fact grossly oversimplified. As argued throughout this chapter, there is some truth to the traditional image of the United States as a political community based fundamentally on the ideas and values of democracy; certainly, the Constitution is the main focus of American political identity. However, this image is incomplete if we do not add to it the insight that the abstract values of American democracy have always depended on more contingent, contextual factors; they have always worked within some ‘background culture’ which has provided them with the cultural resonance needed to render them concrete, evoke emotion, and inspire action. This has meant that American identity was, inevitably, shaped by the cultural context in which it arose. The recurrent nativist sentiment to which Huntington points has been among the cruder expressions of this phenomenon. Nativism and racism are, however, not necessary consequences of American national community. More subtly, though, right from the very onset, American identity has been moulded by a particular narrative structure, which in its main features reflects the inner logic of nationalism (as described in Chapter II) – thus, it may be said that the ‘exceptionalism’ of the United States is, in part, an overstatement. Briefly put, this narrative structure endows the political community of the United States with an exalted past – the emancipation from British colonial tyranny and the founding of a new republic that would embody the ideal(s) of political freedom – as well as a meaningful present, as it entreats contemporary Americans to continue the grand tradition established by the Founding Fathers, and a projected future, in which progress is coupled with the duty to preserve the ideals constituent of American political identity. This narrative marks Americans as a chosen people, destined to – again, in the words of Gordon Wood – ‘lead the world towards liberty and democracy’.190 Conservatives and liberals (or ‘progressives’, which was the preferred term in the early 20th century) among American politicians, theorists and ordinary

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190 Wood 2011, p. 3.
citizens have to some extent interpreted this narrative in differing ways, but while the content may change, the basic structure of the narrative remains largely intact. Barack Obama, in his bid for the presidency in 2008, had a large stock of national symbolism and patriotic imagery to build on, and his campaign was highly inspirational to the nation’s liberals – although many were eventually disappointed with his actual performance.191

The strength and tenacity, as well as the malleability, of American patriotic feeling and rhetoric are remarkable. It is beyond the purposes of this book to pass judgement on American patriotism as such; it is a far too complex and multi-faceted phenomenon. However, a conclusion we can draw – and which is in fact more far-reaching than it may seem at first glance – is, firstly, that the particular conjunction of elements present in the identity of the United States as a political community, in fact mark this identity as a variety of nationalism. Remember the argument established in the previous chapter: nationalism is at heart a unified phenomenon, and the salutary as well as the destructive features of nationalism are immanent in this phenomenon rather than accruing to any ‘good’ and ‘evil’ variety of nationalism, respectively. If the virtues of the democratic community of the United States are inextricably tied up with nationalism, this would mean that the vices of nationalism are present as potentialities in the constitutive structure of this community. The ideology of national community is a double-edged weapon, to be handled with care. On the other hand, if the political identity of the United States gains its momentum from forces that cannot be separated from nationalism, then we are misguided if we attempt to ‘cleanse’ democratic community of nationalism. Should we accomplish this, we would make this community meaningless in the process.

We can draw a further conclusion, summarized in the adage nosce te ipsum, know thyself. If we recognize elements of nationalism within our beliefs, we may be better equipped to deal with the destructive potentialities in those elements, and avoid any unwanted consequences. Somewhat paradoxically, this may be particularly difficult in the American case precisely because the values of American national identity are based on democracy. It must be recognized that American nationalism is nationalism nonetheless – or the cynical view of America may, in the worst case scenario, be proven right: imperialism and chauvinism may be hidden behind the façade of democratic rhetoric.

To sum up: democracy has throughout its history in America sustained itself by means of a particular story arc, explaining how the people came to be masters of their own house, rather than slaves subject to the whims of despots, how they fashioned their polity in accordance with their beliefs about the rights of every individual, and how they, acting as a collective of enlight-

ened citizens, continue to shape their polity and society in the direction of an envisaged ideal. It is a story that emerged at the dawn of modern democracy, and at the same time, it is a story quintessential in its nationalism; in the terms presented in Chapter II, it demonstrates the entanglement of democracy with nationalism. Democracy in America has been sustained by nationalism, and vice versa. If we do not see this, we may miss the valuable (or at least useful) aspects of nationalism – and simultaneously, the potentially dangerous aspects of democracy as it takes on a concrete and bounded form.
IV. Becoming a Nation like Any Other?
Debates on Nation and Community in the Federal Republic of Germany

Germany is exceptional in many ways. Most obviously, the feat of transforming from the ruins of an utterly defeated totalitarian empire into a functioning, prosperous liberal democracy in just a few decades has evoked wonder among its European peers. My chapter will focus on one aspect of this transformation – the prolonged and often anguished metamorphosis of German national identity. As already alluded to, Romanticism and Völkisch ideas had played a large part in the formation of a German identity in the 19th century. Later, the perceived contrast between (French, or Western) ‘civilization’ and German ‘culture’ – cast as one between superficial refinement, cosmopolitan relativism, and capitalist commodification on the one hand, and Innerlichkeit, idealism and imagination on the other – was further entrenched, as the influential cultural critics and pessimists of the Weimar Republic conceived of German identity in opposition to the liberal democracy associated with ‘the West’, the victors of the Great War. Nazism would come to power expounding an extreme version of such ideas. Part of the daunting challenge faced by post-war political culture in the Federal Republic, thus, was to reimagine German identity, somehow reshape it to fit democratic values, the experiences of totalitarianism, and the lessons learned from these experiences. In what follows, I will conduct a discussion and analysis of the debates and intellectual confrontations that have played out during this process – especially from the 1980s onward. Although Germany is, as has been pointed out, an exceptional case in many ways, I argue that it provides us with a context in which the problem of national community vis-à-vis the values of democracy are not only presented in an exceptionally stark light – due to the fateful experiences with nationalism of the German people – but has also, due to the painstaking and comprehensive nature of the intellectual debate, been analysed with unusual depth and precision. The world may have a great deal to learn from the post-war German experience, and I will attempt to spell out what this lesson should consist of.
German National Identity in the Post-War Era

The following section serves as an introduction to the topic of German national identity, outlining the general development of the discourse on ‘what it means to be German’ during the Post-War era. Inevitably, the main (although not exclusive) focus of this overview will be what has come to constitute the major formative event of modern German national consciousness; namely, the atrocities committed during the Nazi regime and the attempts and strategies to cope and come to terms with this dark heritage. It should be noted that this resume is meant to be nothing more than a rough outline of the vast body of literature on the subject.

‘Stunde Null’192

No sooner had Hitler’s empire met its demise than was the question of German guilt first raised. As the Allied troops advanced into the Reich, the extent of the horror of the Nazi death camps began to dawn upon the world, while Germany itself was initially in too much turmoil for its people to yet seriously begin to grapple with the issues of guilt and historical responsibility. Its cities lay largely in rubble, starvation was rampant, and the general chaos was exacerbated by the mass immigration of millions of Germans from the east, victims of the Soviets’ brutal ethnic cleansing of the territory which was now to be western Poland. Conditions under the Allied occupation of Germany were initially rather harsh, although to varying extents in the respective occupation zones. In the immediate aftermath of the war, it was the objective of the Americans in particular to hold the German people responsible for crimes committed and to definitively root out any lingering Nazi influence.193 For example, all adults were required to solemnly pledge their renouncing of Nazism and their allegiance to democratic values. In response to this, a brief but lively debate broke out on the pages of the so-called license press (German-language newspapers and journals subject to the supervision of the respective occupational government), the general tendency of which was protest against the perceived Allied charges of the German people being ‘collectively guilty’.194 Questions were now asked which proved to be as difficult as they were vital to answer: What were the causes of Nazism? What were the roots of Nazi ideology in German culture, and, correspondingly, to which extent could German culture as a whole be said to be tainted by Nazism? And, last but not least, who was guilty of the genocide and the numerous war crimes – Hitler and the uppermost leadership of

192 ‘Zero hour’: an expression pertaining to the situation in Germany immediately after the war.
194 Ibid.
the Reich, Nazi officials, the members of the Nazi party, or even the German people as a whole?

In the intense debate during the first post-war years, no agreement or synthesis was on the horizon as fingers were pointed in various directions. Conflicts over German historical guilt largely followed established ideological, religious, geographical and class-related fault lines. Catholics, to name one intellectually influential group, largely exonerated themselves, pointing to the aggressive militarism of (Protestant) Prussia and the inwardness and uncompromising attitude of Lutheranism as the intellectual roots of Hitler’s movement. Marxists, on the other hand, regarded Nazism as but a national variety of fascism, which itself constituted a historically necessary final stage of capitalism and therefore was not exclusive to or in any specific way related to German society and culture. The educated, liberal or conservative middle class (Bürgerliche) pointed to the ‘plebeian’ qualities of Hitler and his movement, and were keen to rescue German high culture from any association with Nazism. Especially the figure of Goethe was frequently invoked, both as a symbol for the cultured, ‘good Germany’ and as a prophet who, it was claimed, perceptively identified the demonic or Faustian qualities immanent in all of Western culture but especially pronounced in Germany. Thomas Mann, returning from exile in the United States, exhibited a complex stance, retaining his long-held love for German culture while (specifically in the novel Doktor Faustus, published in 1947) lamenting its tendencies toward hubris, nihilism and excess. Expressing this conflict in terms of tragedy, Mann can be said to contribute to a quasi-mythological understanding of German ‘destiny’ which was to make its reappearance at several points in post-war Germany. Another influential work written during this early stage of German post-war soul-searching was Karl Jaspers’ The Question of German Guilt (Die Schuldfrage), published in 1947. Jaspers served to make the discourse of guilt more manageable by drawing a distinction between criminal, political, moral, and existential guilt, respectively.

In the Soviet occupation zone the process of dealing with the Nazi past was considerably less anguished, since the Marxist interpretation of history which soon achieved hegemonic status viewed the German people as victims, rather than agents, of Nazism. The uppermost of the Nazi leadership was swiftly prosecuted and done away with, officially relieving East German society of guilt. Anti-fascism became a fundamental tenet of the ideology of the political entity established in 1949 as the formally sovereign German People’s Republic (Deutsche Demokratische Republik, DDR), and the mythologized remembrance of communist resistance to Nazism was to form an important part of the self-understanding of this Republic.

‘Wirtschaftswunder’ and Silence

As the Cold War deepened, the military governments in the Western occupation zones grew more conciliatory in their attitude toward their inhabitants as Western Germany was recognized as an important future ally against the Soviet Union. Key officials and professionals with links to Nazism in many cases proved crucial to the task of reconstructing German economy and society, and the Western powers pragmatically decided to curtail their ambitious denazification plans and grant amnesty. The Federal Republic of Germany (Bundesrepublik Deutschland, BRD) was established as a parliamentary democracy in 1949, and within a few years its economy flourished, partly thanks to the Marshall Plan, giving rise to the idea of the German economic miracle or Wirtschaftswunder. The Federal Republic was integrated firmly in the West during the leadership of the first post-war chancellor, Christian Democrat Konrad Adenauer, joining NATO in 1955. Adenauer, who had been Mayor of Cologne during the Weimar Republic, was part of a generation of politicians who had come of age politically before the appearance of National Socialism and whose outlook was generally socially conservative and watchful of the dangers of radicalism. Nazism was denounced from a Christian-humanist perspective as a moral abomination, an instance of ‘evil’; and was thus, one may argue, de-historicized and de-contextualized. Faith and watchfulness were the order of the day rather than any deeper historical analysis or delving into the German psyche. At this time, the conceptual frame of ‘totalitarianism’ became predominant, making possible a comparison between Nazi Germany and its communist neighbour in the east, and thus proving ideologically useful to the strongly anti-communist leadership of the Federal Republic. The BRD at this time did not yet recognize the DDR as a sovereign state, and the partition of the German nation and its people was officially regarded as temporary. Furthermore, before 1970 the Federal Republic did not accept the Oder-Neisse line as Germany’s border with Poland, thus making a claim on the Polish territory east of this line which formerly constituted a part of the Reich and at that time was home to a large German-speaking population.

The 1950s in the Federal Republic are often characterized as a time when people were focused on security and economic prosperity and were reluctant to ask uncomfortable questions about the past. This silence was analysed in retrospect by psychoanalysts Alexander and Margarethe Mitscherlich, who in their influential book Die Unfähigkeit zu Trauern (translated as The Inability to Mourn) argued that Germans in general were in denial about their previous infatuation with Nazi ideology and the Führer himself. As an acceptance of the complicity (active or passive) in the monstrous crimes of the Third Reich would engender feelings of guilt too terrible to bear, most Germans, the Mitscherlichs claimed, had emotionally shut off their relationship with their individual and collective past, which resulted in a ‘psychic
immobilism and inability to tackle the problems of the present-day society in a socially progressive fashion'. According to the Mitscherlichs, Germans suffered from *Identifikationsscheu*, a reluctance to identify, which hindered them from successfully dealing with – and ensured their continued ensnarement by – the past.

Meanwhile, the process of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* – coming to terms with the past, or mastering the past – was in practice largely a matter for the intellectuals, a group in which a general left-leaning or liberal outlook was prevalent. Leading figures such as Ralf Dahrendorf, Jürgen Habermas, and the novelists Heinrich Böll and Günther Grass (in contrast to the intellectuals or *Mandarinen* of the Weimar era who often leaned toward the reactionary), staunchly defended democratic values in general, and, for the most part, the constitution of the Federal Republic specifically, although they persistently pointed out the flaws and imperfections of democracy as it was actually practiced in the Republic. This intellectual stance is particularly associated with ‘Gruppe 47’, a culturally highly influential literary association, founded in Munich in 1947, of which Böll, Grass, Paul Celan, Hans Magnus Enzensberger, and Ingeborg Bachmann, among others were members. In the field of history studies, which was of utmost importance in the process of interpreting and dealing with the horrors of the recent German past, in the early 1960s figures such as Fritz Fischer and Hans-Ulrich Wehler launched the hypothesis of the *Deutscher Sonderweg* (‘the special path of Germany’). According to this hypothesis, the root causes of Nazism were associated with the fact that the German path toward modernity had taken a course different from that of West European nations like Great Britain and France. Factors such as the strength of the landed aristocracy (the *Junker* of Prussia) had contributed to the fact that the modernization which occurred during the Wilhelmine era had not resulted in stable democracy, but rather in a strengthening of an authoritarian tradition. The *Sonderweg* hypothesis, an implication of which was that the integration of the BRD into the group of Western liberal democracies constituted the return of Germany to historical ‘normalcy’, eventually became highly influential and was consonant with the generally liberal climate among German intellectuals in this period.

However, it is a simplification to portray 1950s West Germany as complacent and in denial about its past. Notably, the Federal Republic accepted the status of legal successor to the Reich, and the concomitant responsibility to make restitution to its victims. In a speech in 1951, Adenauer recognized

the BRD’s historical guilt to the Jews and its obligation to compensate Israel, as the main representative of the Jewish people, for the Holocaust. The Federal Republic would pay Israel the sum of 3 billion Marks over the following fourteen years. The DDR, for its part, did not accept any such historical responsibility, placing this guilt squarely upon its capitalist neighbour. While Nazism was regarded as a form of fascism and thus linked to the BRD, the DDR did develop its own form of German nationalism, drawing selectively upon German history in order to separate the ‘progressive’ (i.e., precursors to the People’s Republic) from the ‘reactionary’. Not least, the leadership of the DDR was eager to appropriate representatives of German ‘high culture’ such as Beethoven as part of their nationalist symbolism. The DDR even saw the reoccurrence of public anti-Semitism in the 1950s with the so-called ‘anti-cosmopolitan’ purges.198

The rift between East and West became more definitive than ever in 1961, as the DDR, to hinder further migration to the West, erected the Berlin Wall, or as it was officially known the ‘Anti-Fascist Protection Wall’. From the point of view of West Germans, the building of the wall, in the words of political scientist Jan-Werner Müller, ‘finally exposed the illusion of the compatibility of integration into the Western alliance, democracy, and unification – at least for the time being’.199

Conflicts Resurface

The 1960s in Germany, like elsewhere in the Western nations, saw a resurgence of political radicalism and confrontation. The student revolt in 1968 was part of an international wave of student radicalism, and the German 68ers were, like their counterparts in the United States, France and elsewhere, motivated by protest against Western capitalism and ‘imperialism’, particularly the American intervention in Vietnam. However, it is beyond doubt that they simultaneously channelled some specifically German concerns. According to the student leaders, the working through of the Nazi past in the Federal Republic had been superficial, and fascist tendencies still permeated the structures of the capitalist West German society. Among these structures was the private sphere, as it was claimed that the patterns of intra-family relations were still characterized by authoritarianism and repression. Student leaders criticized what they termed the ‘Scheissliberalen’ (‘shitty liberals’) of the 1950s for their belief that the social and political problems in the Federal Republic could be addressed with reform rather than a complete restructuring of society.200 Some of the established intellectuals, such as

199 Ibid., p. 47.
200 Ibid., p. 48.
Enzensberger and Peter Weiss, were swept away by this radicalization of the Left and became fervent Marxists, while others, for example Grass and Habermas, remained sceptical and even charged the radicals with ‘left fascism’.\footnote{Müller 2000, p. 48ff.} In retrospect, the late 1960s and early 1970s may be characterized as a time when the problems related to \textit{Vergangenheitsbewältigung} ceased to be regarded as a matter for a small group of intellectuals, and, suddenly and even violently, came to the fore in the public mind. The radicalism of the time could then be interpreted as a stage in a dialectical process of dealing with the collective past; an interpretation which chimes in with the collective-psychological model of Alexander and Margarethe Mitscherlich discussed in the previous section.

The turn to the Left made itself felt in the political midfield as well. In 1969 Willy Brandt was elected Chancellor, the first Social Democrat to lead a cabinet in the Post-War era. Brandt addressed himself to the younger generation in particular, promising reforms that would lead to greater political participation (‘daring more democracy’). However, it was for his \textit{’Neue Ostpolitik’} that Brandt would be especially remembered, as he made several important initiatives toward the improvement of relations with the Eastern Bloc countries. Perhaps most crucial (and controversial) was the Basic Treaty in 1972 with the DDR, establishing formal relations between the two countries for the first time since the partition. However, the DDR did not repeal its claim to represent the entire German nation, although Brandt made efforts to smooth over this point. During a visit to Warsaw in 1970, Brandt made the famous \textit{‘Warschauer Kniefall’}, kneeling at the monument to the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising, thus expressing the recognition of Germany’s historical guilt.

Parallel with the spirit of conciliation predominant in the field of foreign policy, the 1970s were characterized by an increasing internal polarization in West German society. The successive generations of the Red Army Faction (or Baader-Meinhof Group) carried out a string of bombings and assassinations throughout the decade, and the state replied with harsh, according to some critics repressive, measures. For example, the so-called \textit{Radikalenerlass} issued by the Brandt government in 1972 meant that holders of public offices could be fired if there was reason to doubt their allegiance to the constitution. Intellectuals such as Heinrich Böll came under heavy criticism when they proposed dialogue with the radical left-wing movements, in order to address the deeper concerns that had motivated the protest movement in the first place.\footnote{Eberan 2002, p. 290.} Political scientist Dolf Sternberger was among those who vehemently opposed Böll’s position, specifically the latter’s proposition of ‘mercy’ for Ulrike Meinhof.\footnote{Müller 2000, p. 54.} Sternberger’s theory of ‘consti-
tutional patriotism’ (a term which was later appropriated and largely given a
new meaning by Jürgen Habermas) can be interpreted as an expression of
the Brandt government’s stance vis-à-vis the terrorists, constituting an argu-
ment for the necessity of civic allegiance and loyalty to the democratic con-
stitution – and therefore to the democratic state – as a safeguard against ex-
tremism of both Left and Right.
The Long Shadow of the Past: Battles over History and National Identity

In what follows, I will present an analysis of the debates over national identity from the 1980s onwards, especially in relationship to the Nazi past, the Reunification, and the reactions to the ‘return of history’ that the re-emergence of a unified German nation-state signalled to many intellectuals. The first two sections – ‘Renewed Nationalism and the Historikerstreit’, and ‘Die Berliner Republik’ – map the course of these debates and provide a kind of summary. I then move on to look more closely at some of the major political and intellectual positions, from right- to left-wing, and finally focus the discussion on two major figures in the debate on national identity – Jürgen Habermas and Heinrich August Winkler – who, I argue, have made especially weighty contributions to the debate on the significance of history to the German Republic of today. However, the conclusions they make with regard to the national community and the legitimacy of a German nationalism, are distinct and divergent.

Renewed Nationalism and the Historikerstreit

The conservative tendencies which made themselves felt in the mid to late 1970s presaged a more definitive shift to the Right in the political and intellectual climate in the early 1980s. This shift, generally known as die Wende, is associated with the chancellery of Helmut Kohl, who headed a Christian Democratic-Liberal (CDU-FDP) coalition government from 1982 onwards. Again, this change in political climate occurred in conjunction with an international trend (of conservatism and neo-liberalism) yet had some distinctive-ly German features. Kohl and his conservative allies and sympathizers actively pursued a nationalist agenda, proclaiming reunification as a goal of foreign policy.204 Another goal was ‘normalization’: Germany was finally to be a ‘normal’ nation, and Germans were to be able to take pride in their country just like the citizens of any other nation.205 Apparently belying this nationalist trend, during the 1980s the spectre of Nazism and the Holocaust loomed larger than ever in the German public mind. In 1979 the American TV series Holocaust was broadcast in Germany, generating a huge emotional response among audiences.206 For the first time, the story was told from the victims’ point of view as Holocaust survivors began to make their voices heard.207

204 Müller 2000, p. 56.
207 Eberan 2002, p. 298
These parallel trends – the resurgence of nationalism and the need to keep the memory of past crimes alive – intersected during the late 1980s in the fierce debate which would soon be known as the Historikerstreit or ‘historians’ dispute’.208 Pitting left-wing against right-wing intellectuals (mostly, but not exclusively, historians) in a battle fought over the interpretation and meaning of German historical experience, this debate had a huge impact, defining the frontlines in the continuing struggle over German national identity for years to come. The beginning of the debate can be traced back to Kohl’s and the CDU’s support of a group of historians, descriptively referred to by some as ‘government historians’, in their attempt to gain a firm foothold in the intellectual field, which had been dominated by the Left throughout the Post-War era. One of the leading figures in this group, Michael Stürmer, indeed served for a time as advisor to the chancellor. During the 1980s Stürmer argued in favour of an interpretation of Vergangenheitsbewältigung as a finite process, which would enable the German people to heal the wounds in the national fabric by once and for all drawing the relevant conclusions and making the necessary amends, thereby casting off the yoke of collective guilt. He further argued that Sinnstiftung, the creation of meaning, was a vital task for academic historians, who would thus contribute to the creation of a new interpretative consensus that a successful Vergangenheitsbewältigung would require.209 These issues were the incendiary material which nourished the flames of the Historikerstreit. The principal actor of the Left was Jürgen Habermas, who launched an attack on historian Ernst Nolte over the latter’s theory that the Soviet policy of terror and genocide directed against internal and external enemies was a prime causal contributor to the Holocaust.210 What was at stake was, thus, the question of the singularity, whatever one would make of the meaning of this term, of the Nazi genocide. Although much of the ensuing debate would concern the validity of causal explanations such as Nolte’s, it could be argued that the fundamental question was a normative one, as the protagonists of the Left


accused the conservative historians of seeking to somehow relativize and thus normalize the darker aspects of German history. Nolte indeed argued openly, in a phrase that would soon take on a life of its own, that the time had come to ‘draw a line’, to put an end to (what he interpreted as) the mythologization of the past and the collectivist condemnation of the Germans.\textsuperscript{211} Habermas’ prime target was, however, not the relatively isolated figure of Nolte but the influential Michael Stürmer, and his central argument was the criticism of the perceived attempt by historians such as Stürmer to subjugate the interpretation of history to nationalist ends.\textsuperscript{212} The aftermath of the debate spawned Habermas’ formulation of his theory of constitutional patriotism, which differs from that of Sternberger in vital respects. The main contention by Habermas with respect to the Historians’ Debate was that it was not, nor would it ever be, the time to ‘draw a line under the German past’. No one actor could legitimately do so, as this would mean the suppression of new findings and interpretations regarding the German – and, in general, European – experience. Habermas opposed the Stürmerian ambition to create a consensus and a renewed national identity. According to Habermas, the only definitive consensus that is called for in a democracy is the general agreement with respect to the procedure regulating democratic discourse. The fellow feeling, patriotism or identity which should permeate a democratic society is properly to have as its point of reference the principles of this very procedure, as opposed to some specific substance. Habermas’ theory of constitutional patriotism thus, quite purposively, has a more abstract quality than the earlier theory proposed by Sternberger.

The outcome of the \textit{Historikerstreit} was a seemingly decisive victory for the Left and the retreat and marginalization of the right-wing historians. The cries for a \textit{Schlußstrich}, a thick line under the past, were silenced for the time being. In a parliamentary setting, a similar battle over history yielded much the same result, as Kohl saw his plan defeated to construct a national memorial site in Bonn dedicated to the memory of ‘the victims of war and the rule of violence’.\textsuperscript{213} The proposition was in fact based on an initiative first put forward by a coalition of associations representing war veterans and ethnic Germans who had been persecuted and expelled by Soviet forces in the aftermath of the war (\textit{Vertriebene}), and was widely criticized for making no distinction between those who had fought for Nazism and their victims.\textsuperscript{214} Some even accused Kohl of trying to whitewash the SS. Especially infamous was Kohl’s initiative to carry out a joint ceremony with Ronald Reagan at the military cemetery at Bitburg (Kolmeshöhö) during the American Presi-

\textsuperscript{211} Nolte 1993, p. 22f.
\textsuperscript{213} Selling 2004, p. 183.
\textsuperscript{214} Ibid.
dent’s visit to the BRD in 1985, commemorating the fortieth anniversary of
the end of World War II and symbolizing the reconciliation of the two coun-
tries. It soon became known that a number of Waffen-SS men were buried in
the cemetery; yet, amid the ensuing scandal on both sides of the Atlantic,
Kohl and Reagan decided to go through with the ceremony.

Kohl’s attempts to ‘normalize’ German national identity, through
measures signalling a conciliatory attitude towards the generations who had
lived under and fought for the Reich, were widely perceived as insensitive.215
A counterpoint is presented by Bundespräsident Richard von Weizsäcker’s
famous speech in the Bundestag on 8 May 1985, which, like the Bitburg
ceremony, commemorated the fortieth anniversary of the end of World War
II. In his speech, Weizsäcker referred to the events of 8 May 1945 as a liber-
ation from tyranny rather than the defeat of a nation.216 As Jürgen Habermas
points out, Weizsäcker’s speech contributed greatly toward making this in-
terpretation of history officially accepted.217 Thus, it constituted a landmark
event in the history of Germany’s coming to terms with its past.

Die Berliner Republik

The fall of the Berlin Wall in November 1989, of course, turned everything
on its head. The ensuing, swift unification process spelled triumph not only
for Western liberal democracy but also, it may be argued, for a reinvigorated
German nationalism. Once and for all, it seemed to many, a united, democ-
ратic Germany, once again with Berlin as its capital, might take its place
among ‘normal’ Western nations, put aside its historical guilt and shame,
and its people allow themselves feelings of national pride and self-
confidence. While the political Right was ecstatic about this development,
and the liberal midfield on the whole enthusiastic, many intellectuals of the
Left felt the need to distance themselves from this exuberance, cautioning
against tendencies of a renewed, geopolitically aggressive German national-
ism which had effectively been kept in check during the period of the divi-
sion of Germany into two splinter states.218 Voices on the Left also criticized
the swiftness and ‘takeover’ style of the unification process, whereby East
Germany was annexed by the Federal Republic rather than the two uniting
on an equal footing; for instance, the democratic movement in the DDR was
almost completely sidestepped once the unification process had been initiat-

216 Weizsäcker’s speech is quoted in its entirety in Hartman, Geoffrey (ed.), 1986: Bitburg in
Moral and Political Perspective, Indiana University Press, Bloomington.
217 Habermas, Jürgen, 1997: A Berlin Republic: Writings on Germany, University of Nebraska
Press, Lincoln, p. 161 (originally published in 1995 as Die Normalität einer Berliner
Republik, Suhrkamp Verlag, Frankfurt am Main).
218 Müller 2000.
The move of the seat of the federal government in 1999 from Bonn to Berlin was greeted with similarly mixed feelings. For some, Berlin’s resurrection as the capital of a German nation-state evoked the echoes of the chauvinism and expansionism of Bismarck’s era, and of course Hitler’s. Alternatively, the relocation might be construed as signalling a determination to confront darker aspects of Germany’s past – and what place could be more suited to this endeavour than the city which has been the main focal point of the forces that have shaped German history for the past two centuries or so?

Unification, as we all know, was not without its problems. Despite massive investments in infrastructure, the new Länder saw unemployment soar in the 1990s as unprofitable industries from the DDR era were closed down. Especially worrisome was the rise in right-wing violence directed towards immigrants and refugees, which was especially marked in the East. For example, in August 1992 riots broke out in Rostock during which an apartment block housing refugee seekers was attacked with rocks and petrol bombs. Anti-immigrant sentiments made themselves felt in the political midfield as well, the Kohl government (supported by SPD) implementing restrictions on the rights to asylum, for which a change in the constitution was required.

As late as 1996, the CDU/CSU government declared that Germany was ‘not a country of immigration’, despite the fact that 13 per cent of the population at that time had been born in another country. While immigration policy was generally restrictive, in the early 1990s Germany welcomed a large number of so-called Aussiedler: people from the former Soviet Union, or other former communist countries in eastern Europe, who gained access to citizenship through – sometimes distant – German ancestry. German citizenship laws, at that time still based strictly on the principle of ius sanguinis, privileged the Aussiedler while many of the children of, for example, Turkish ‘guest workers’ had difficulty obtaining German citizenship although they themselves had been born in Germany. However, German citizenship laws have since been altered in a liberal direction. German policies and public debate regarding immigration and the integration of newcomers will be discussed in much further detail in the following section.

Lively debate, in which questions of national identity and the relationship with the past were again brought to the fore, surrounded two monumental-scale projects undertaken in the new German capital in the 1990s, both engaging with aspects of the Nazi past and both having as their principal initiator Bundeskanzler Helmut Kohl. The first of these was the transformation

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219 Müller 2000.
222 Ibid., p 137.
and reopening of the monument *Neue Wache Unter den Linden* – a site which possesses a complex and multi-layered history, having served various ideological functions during the Wilhelmine Reich, the Weimar Republic, the Third Reich, and the German Democratic Republic, respectively. In 1993, it was decided by the Federal Cabinet that the Neue Wache was to serve as the ‘central memorial in the Federal Republic of Germany’. A sculpture group by Käthe Kollwitz – ‘Mutter mit totem Sohn’, featuring a scene highly reminiscent of the *pieta* in the traditional symbolism of Christian art – was placed inside the memorial building; and next to it a plaque which declared that ‘Die Neue Wache ist der Ort der Erinnerung und des Gedenkens an die Opfer von Krieg und Gewaltherrschaft...’, among which are listed (firstly) those who have suffered under war, including soldiers and their families, and (secondly) the murdered Jews, Roma, and those who were killed for the sake of their religious or political beliefs. Both the choice of this particular sculpture and the wording of the text on the memorial plaque would come under heavy criticism. It was pointed out that Kollwitz’s *pieta*, through its apparent reference to Christian symbolism of sacrifice, called to mind the sacrifice of a people for their nation, rather than the victims of a tyrannical regime. On the same theme, the wording of the memorial text seemed to place on an equal footing the perpetrators and the victims of the Nazi atrocities, enumerating the soldiers who fought in the World Wars amid the ‘victims of war and the rule of violence’. Ultimately, the ceremony during which chancellor Helmut Kohl declared the inauguration of the monument would, embarrassingly, be boycotted by the chairman of Berlin’s Jewish congregation, one of the guests of honour; and would be marred by protests and demonstrations. Further controversy surrounded the plans to erect a second great historical memorial in Berlin, the *Denkmal für die Ermordeten Juden Europas*. The example of the *Neue Wache* illustrates well the difficult waters the German governments, as well as the public culture in general, have had to navigate when it comes to the public remembrance of the victims of National Socialism. If not conducted in a historically sensitive manner, such monuments may easily be dismissed as hypocritical prestige projects the ultimate

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225 Ibid., p. 171.
226 ‘*Die Neue Wache* is the memorial site for the victims of war and the rule of violence’ (my translation).
230 Ibid., p. 171, 196.
aim of which are to gloss over the National Socialist past rather than keep it in remembrance. A radical version of such an argument, not untypical of the intellectuals of the German Left, is presented by historian Stefan Berger in his book *The Search for Normality*. Berger certainly does not disagree with the objective of remembrance of past atrocities; however, he is highly critical of the aestheticization which, he argues, is a prominent feature of the developing public memory culture – an aestheticization which is the tool of ideology. He worries that the ‘debates about a central Holocaust memorial in Berlin and a day of remembrance of the victims of National Socialism’ might lead to a nationalization of the collective memories of Germans. ‘[T]he central problem is to prevent the creation of affirmative symbols of national identity which hinder rather than encourage individual cultures of remembrance.’ However, it is not self-evident that individual cultures of remembrance, rather than collective ones, are to be preferred – one wonders if the collectivization of individual experience and reflection, through public debate, is not a necessary aspect of a democracy’s ability to come to terms with its past. We will return to Berger’s firmly anti-nationalist position on the public memory culture later in this chapter.

In general, the 1990s can be characterized as a time when the confrontation of Germany with its past was, if anything, further intensified. An event too huge in its impact to be overlooked is the publication in 1996 of *Hitler’s Willing Executioners*, a controversial work by American political scientist Daniel Goldhagen. Goldhagen’s thesis was provocative, firstly in its insistence on the willing, even enthusiastic, participation of ordinary Germans in the Holocaust, and secondly in its postulation that this enthusiastic participation in genocide was immediately caused by a deep-seated hatred of Jews that had been an integral part of the German cultural mind-set at least since the early 19th century. In Germany as well as the United States, the book came under heavy criticism from historians. Geoffrey Eley, to take one example, argues that Goldhagen’s simplistic theory of the immanence of genocidal anti-Semitism in German culture is poorly supported by Goldhagen’s own account of German history in the pre-war era. Further, Eley claims, Goldhagen overstates the originality of his claims by neglecting
the scholarship of historians such as Hans Mommsen, who have also pointed to the complicity of ‘ordinary Germans’ in the Holocaust, but have given more explanatory weight to the internal dynamics of German society during Nazi rule as well as pathologies in the modernization process which transcend Germany itself, rather than innate German anti-Semitism. \(^{240}\) However, the reception of Goldhagen’s book by audiences, as opposed to narrower academic circles, was more positive. \(^{241}\) Perhaps this was a sign that the German public was, to a larger extent, ready to accept the horrors of Nazi rule as a part of their collective past.

In the following section, I will outline the main positions taken on the question of German national identity and reunification during the 1990s by intellectuals representing, in turn, the conservative Right, the liberal midfield and the liberal and radical Left; thereafter undertaking a preliminary analysis of the debate.

The ‘New Right’

While it seemed that the cries for a Schlüsselstrich and a renewed national confidence had for the time being been silenced in the wake of the Historikerstreit in the late 1980s, after reunification they returned with a vengeance. A huge controversy was stirred up by playwright Botho Strauss’ essay ‘Anschwellender Bocksgesang’, published in Der Spiegel in 1993. \(^{242}\) The title, literally translated as ‘Swelling Goat Song’ or ‘Rising Song of the Goat’, refers to an etymology of the Greek word for tragedy (tragoidia) as meaning ‘goat song’. Strauss vociferously portrays the culture of contemporary Germany as one of mindless political correctness and the ‘totalitarian’ dictatorship of public opinion – a description harking back to Romanticism and Counter-Enlightenment traditions, not least the work of Martin Heidegger. \(^{243}\) Aside from criticizing such phenomena as feminism and multiculturalism, Strauss urges Germans to embrace the tragic role in history which defines their identity. \(^{244}\) The article caused much uproar in the liberal press. Strauss’s detractors accused him of xenophobia as well as fascist tendencies; a response which, ironically, might be interpreted as a confirmation of his own assertions of a climate of knee-jerk political correctness. \(^{245}\) Right-wing intellectuals and academics, on the other hand, seized on the

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\(^{240}\) Eley 2000, p. 11-15.
\(^{241}\) Müller 2000, p. 227.
\(^{244}\) Strauss 1993.
\(^{245}\) Müller (2000, p. 201) seems to suggest that much of the liberal criticism was less than perceptive.
debate generated by Strauss’ essay as an opportunity to take stock and muster its forces – leading to the formation of an intellectual-political grouping that became known as the ‘New Right’. A book entitled *Die Selbstbewusste Nation*, edited by journalists Heimo Schwilk and Ulrich Schacht and containing contributions from nearly 30 prominent conservative intellectuals and politicians (including Ernst Nolte), saw the light of day in 1994, featuring ‘Anschwitzender Bocksgesang’ as its opening essay. According to Swedish historian Jan Selling, the conservative statement which this volume constituted reprised the demands for a ‘normalization’ of German history and national consciousness which had precipitated the Historikerstreit, although now in a more radical form. While the book brings together a somewhat disparate assembly of conservative forces, there are a number of overarching themes. These include criticism of ‘hedonistic liberalism’, an oversized welfare state and the perceived lax stance on crime; as well as a call for greater national self-assertion in foreign politics: Germany must become a ‘militant democracy’ in order to ensure national security both within and without its borders. With regard to the question of Vergangenheitsbewältigung, some conservative historians argued that this process had already been brought successfully to its conclusion, and that the myth of a supposedly unresolved past kept Germany in its subservient relationship with the West, prohibiting national self-assurance and self-determination. A preliminary analysis yields the conclusion that there are three ways the intellectuals on the Right, in their efforts to sanitize German national identity, have dealt with the ‘problem’ of the Nazi past. Firstly, they have sequestered the Nazi experience, labelling it as a unique and aberrant period in German history. This method, which we may recognize as the opposite of the Sonderweg hypothesis associated with Fischer and Wehler, is the one practiced by Zitelmann. Secondly, the Nazi regime has been relativized in various ways; an example of this is Nolte’s theory of Soviet communism as the root cause of Nazism, which was one of the hotly debated topics during the Historikerstreit. This strategy came to the fore once again in the 1990s, when it became commonplace to lump together Nazism with DDR communism under the heading of ‘totalitarianism’, implying that the crimes of the two regimes are comparable. Thirdly, the Nazi experience has been sublimated, as the Holocaust has been made to serve as an element in a ‘tragic’ German self-understanding, as exemplified in Strauss’ famous essay.

A kind of counterpart to *Die Selbstbewusste Nation* in the field of foreign policy, called Westbindung, had been published a year earlier, in 1993, and

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246 Müller 2000, p. 1, 117.
249 Müller 2000, p. 208.
shared with the later volume many of its contributors. Its introduction stated that the Federal Republic’s identification with the West and its liberal values had taken on ‘an almost totalitarian character’. In the words of Jan-Werner Müller: ‘While Germany was not necessarily to sever all ties to the West, it should seize on unification as a new beginning, and shed its childlike dependence on an idealized “West”. In foreign policy, this meant above all overcoming the Germans’ supposed “fear of power”, instead “normally” pursuing a realistically defined “national interest” and establishing a clear national scope of action.

The Centre and Centre-Right

A somewhat different approach to the question of German history and national identity – one which can be said to characterize the political midfield – was chosen by historian Christian Meier, writing in 1990, the year of unification. Meier agreed with the conservatives that it was time for the German people to embrace its history and its status as a nation, defining ‘nation’ as ‘a community of solidarity and action’. However, he also stressed that it was necessary for the German people to face and come to terms with their dark past; a goal which was not at all a contradiction to the embracing and strengthening of the national identity – rather, the latter was a prerequisite for the former. Indeed, Meier argues that this dark past is constitutive of contemporary German national identity. Perhaps the moniker ‘negative nationalism’, which has become commonplace in German discourse of national identity, might not entirely unjustly be attached to Meier’s views.

Jan-Werner Müller, in his work Another Country: German Intellectuals, Unification and National Identity (2000) places Christian Meier in a grouping he labels variously as ‘liberal’ or, perhaps more aptly, ‘liberal-conservative’. While more welcoming of the unification than the Left, and more accepting of nationalism generally, liberal-conservative intellectuals differ from the ‘New Right’ thinkers in adopting a more practical attitude towards the concept of the nation: rather than a primordial ‘community of fate’, the German nation constitutes a historical fact, a community bound together by traditions, which can be utilized to ensure the stability of a democratic polity such as Germany. Liberal-conservatives were keen to crit-

250 Zitelmann, Rainer, Karlheinz Weissmann & Michael Grossheim, 1993: Westbindung, Propyläen, Frankfurt am Main; see also Müller 2000.
251 Zitelmann & Grossheim 1993.
252 Müller 2000, p. 205f.
254 Meier 1990, p. 102f; see also Müller 2000, p. 144.
255 Meier 1990.
256 Müller 2000, p. 141-144.
257 Ibid., p. 142.
icize those on the Left for whom the nation was a thing of the past, soon to be replaced by supra-national (and regional or local) institutions. 258 The influential liberal Ralf Dahrendorf, for example, pointed out that the nation-state was still the main guarantor of citizenship rights. 259 While the right-leaning liberal-conservatives define ‘the nation’ in terms of ethnic homogeneity, liberals such as Dahrendorf operate with a definition of the nation that is tied to constitutionalism and rights, and one which allows for heterogeneity. 260 Thus, for Dahrendorf, German nationalism itself is not a problem, provided that it is the right kind of nationalism; that is, one that emanates from the ‘civic’ definition of the nation espoused by Dahrendorf. Taking up the term introduced by Dolf Sternberger in the 1970s, Dahrendorf labels this kind of nationalism ‘constitutional patriotism’: ‘Now that Germany is no longer a provisional, but a normal nation-state, it can also develop a normal constitutional patriotism’. 261 The term ‘constitutional patriotism’, and the various concepts and theories associated with it, will be discussed and analysed later. At this point, we can briefly note that Dahrendorf’s version of German constitutional patriotism consists of an allegiance to the Federal Republic and the liberal traditions developed in the political culture of this polity during the Post-War era, while in the version associated with Jürgen Habermas, constitutional patriotism is supposed to maintain a critical perspective. Consonantly, Dahrendorf rejected Habermas’ accusation toward the citizens of Post-Unification Federal Republic of ‘DM Nationalism’. 262

The Liberal and Radical Left

Intellectuals and debaters on the political Left, for their part, appeared somewhat taken aback by the fact of unification, and many of them remained sceptical about its justification and implications. 263 The foremost reason for this was the anti-nationalism which was more or less the consensus in this grouping; the unification was (more or less implicitly) justified with reference to the nationalist idea of ‘one nation, one state’, and many on the Left considered nationalism either as an evil, or passé in an age of globalization, or both. The intellectual current of postnationalism was widespread in the 1980s and many of those who identified themselves with the Left saw the

258 Müller 2000, p. 141.
260 Dahrendorf 1990; Müller 2000, p. 142.
263 Müller 2000, p. 120.
increasing irrelevance of nation-states as a fact to be taken for granted. A second reason was a certain mourning of the loss of Utopia: while few left-wing debaters in the Federal Republic supported the DDR regime as such, to many it still offered an alternative to the capitalist West, and in some quarters there remained up until the very fall of the Berlin Wall the hope that the communist system might be reformed – the hope of a ‘socialism with a human face’. Thirdly, as mentioned, the manner of the unification was widely criticized for its ‘colonizational’ style. Günther Grass, for instance, proposed that the people of the DDR be put in charge of their own state, and that the two states be joined in a loose confederation rather than subsuming East Germany in the Federal Republic. (Grass even went so far as to speak of this subsumption as a second Anschluss, and drew comparisons between the economic power of the Federal Republic and the military power of the Third Reich.) Of course, throughout the Post-War era the Left had remained critical of many aspects of West German society, chiefly those relating to its capitalist economy, and the unification process as it developed was lamented as a lost opportunity for the renewal of society and culture in the Federal Republic. However, some segments of the Left opted to embrace reunification rather than question it, and to reclaim as its own, rather than reject, the emerging nationalism. For example, several historians of the so-called ‘critical’ school (to which the previously mentioned Fritz Fischer and Hans-Ulrich Wehler belonged) have argued for a left-wing nationalism, ‘freer and more open’ than previous incarnations of German national identity, while at the same time harking back to ‘libertarian traditions and social democratic notions of patriotism in German history’. Among these is Peter Brandt, the son of the late chancellor Willy Brandt.

One of the foremost left-wing intellectuals in the Federal Republic is, of course, Jürgen Habermas, whose thoughts on the sources of community and patriotism in post-war Germany have been highly influential. As mentioned, Habermas appropriated the term ‘constitutional patriotism’ which had been introduced by Sternberger, but used it in a partly different manner. While Sternberger’s conception focused on the loyalty of the citizens toward the (democratic) state, Habermas maintained that the state derives its legitimacy

264 Müller 2000, p. 139.
266 Müller 2000, p. 118; according to Müller, not only Grass but also Habermas speaks of the unification in terms of Anschluss.
268 Berger 1995, p. 148, referring to Peter Brandt.
from the body of citizens, and that a democratic patriotism is properly to emanate from the bond of solidarity between free and equal citizens.270 In keeping with Habermas’ general theory of deliberative democracy and communicative action, it is in a public sphere characterized by domination-free discourse that democratic will-formation should occur, including the creation of a common, overarching identity and the corresponding republican solidarity.271 Thus, Habermas’ conception of the sources of community in a democracy such as the Federal Republic is procedural and political, contrasting with the étatism of Sternberger’s theory which is also evident in Dahrendorf, and for that matter with the appeal to traditional, pre-political ties shared by the New Right and many liberal-conservative intellectuals (and of course many others). Consequently, Habermas viewed the unification process with some alarm. The swift (‘Anschluss’) manner in which it occurred, and the fact that East and West Germany lacked a common public sphere, left no room for the procedure of will-formation needed to create a polity grounded in citizens’ conceptions of their own identities and interests.272 This void was instead, filled by a combination of the pre-political, conventional national identity which by default came to define the common identity, and by the economic and administrative power by means of which the Federal Republic incorporated East Germany.273 On a practical level, Habermas suggested in 1990 that a referendum be held on an All-German Constitution, which would establish a ‘new social contract’ between West and East Germany.274 This proposition was not heeded.

However, another and perhaps more important reason that Habermas took a sceptical attitude towards the reunification than the manner in which it proceeded was that he, along with many other intellectuals of the Left, saw in this process the risk of a reappearance on the political stage of the traditional German nationalism associated with Romanticism and the Counter-Enlightenment. According to Habermas, the year of 1945 had been one of tremendous political significance in German history as it marked the cessation of its distancing itself from Western Europe and its integration, politically but also intellectually, in the West. He expressed concern that ‘1990 might overshadow 1945’; that new interpretations of history might become commonplace, according to which 1990 marked a return to normality following the aberration of the post-war two-state period.275 Thus, one may note

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270 Habermas 1996.
271 Ibid.
272 Habermas, Jürgen, 1994: *The Past as Future*, University of Nebraska Press, Lincoln (originally published in 1993 as *Vergangenheit als Zukunft. Das alte Deutschland im neuen Europa?*, Pendo Verlag, Zürich).
273 Ibid., also Müller 2000.
274 Müller 2000, p. 112.
a paradoxical nostalgia for the Bonn Republic – paradoxical because of the vociferous criticism Habermas, and the Left generally, had directed towards many aspects of West German society in the Post-War era. Now, however, he noted that the liberal political culture that had, after all, formed during the Bonn years had been a great historical accomplishment, in the light of Germany’s anti-democratic traditions. Ralf Dahrendorf was among those who remarked on Habermas’ apparent change in attitude, proclaiming that the latter had revealed himself to be ‘Adenauer’s true grandson’.276

Habermas and Reunification: Analysis

As we have seen, Habermas expressed a fear of ‘German continuities’, the potential reawakening of pre-1945 traditions, and a concomitant intellectual and political dissociation from the West, as a result of the unification. In this section I will question this position from the perspective of Habermas’ own theoretical writings, arguing that a welcoming of reunification as an opportunity to deal with and face up to the past is a more logical conclusion in terms of his theory.

An interesting starting point is offered by Habermas’ thoughts over continuities from the culture and society of the German Democratic Republic. While in no way defending the political system of the DDR, Habermas contends that it was a failure of the unification process that it did not properly allow the people of the former East to draw their own conclusions from the experience of living under a communist dictatorship, and have a say in the future of their society. Expressed more abstractly, the ‘lifeworld’ of the former East was, according to Habermas, subsumed by the ‘systemic world’ represented by the economic and administrative power of the capitalist West. What is interesting is that this logic can just as easily be applied to another ‘lifeworld’ – that of Germany prior to 1945. In fact, the partition of Germany in 1945, the occupation of the country by the victorious powers of the War, and the integration from above of the ‘two Germanies’ into the respective social, economic, and military systems of these powers represented a rupture similar to that which occurred in 1989-90. To the extent that, indeed, a resurfacing of forgotten traditions occurred as a result of unification, this could be construed as an opportunity to work through the past in a learning process that builds, unmediatedly, on experience. Of course – and this cannot be stressed enough – such an interpretation presupposes that the traditions in question are transcended through their exposure to an open discussion in the public sphere, as opposed to simply being reappropriated (as they have been by the New Right). I will return to this issue in the concluding chapter, where I analyse different interpretations of the concept of ‘constitutional patriotism’.

276 Müller 2000, p. 111.
While, as it turned out, the creation of a new state on the ruins of the Reich – the Federal Republic of Germany – and its integration into the West did ensure the survival of democracy in West Germany, it also arguably facilitated the repression of the past which was typical especially of the early Post-War era. Habermas (quoting Hans-Magnus Enzensberger) speaks of the ‘*Lebenslüge*’ (‘vital lie’, an expression from Ibsen) that haunted the Federal Republic from the Adenauer period onward: ‘that we are all democrats’.277 The sweeping under the rug of unpleasant remnants of the past which occurred during this period was consonant with the myth of the birth of the Federal Republic as ‘*Stunde Null*’, as starting over with a clean slate. Habermas’ belated support for the Bonn Republic seems supportive of such a myth; an impression borne out by the fact that his sweeping use of the term ‘the West’ entails intellectual as well as political connotations – ‘Enlightenment traditions’ and ‘the powers of the West’, respectively – and comes close to conflating the two (reinforcing the tendency to blur the distinction between ‘democracy’ and the status of being allied with the Western powers). Focusing on the concept of constitutional patriotism, it seems that Habermas is drawing closer to Dolf Sternberger in his interpretation of this concept, as he appears to think of constitutional patriotism as loyalty to the institutions upholding a democracy rather than to the principles of a democratic procedure more abstractly. Such an analysis gives rise to the seemingly paradoxical observation that the myths surrounding and legitimizing a democratic regime may in fact be a hindrance to the development of a sound democratic culture.

Germany’s ‘Long Road West’: Heinrich August Winkler

The historian Heinrich August Winkler has been one of the most influential voices in the debate on German history and national identity since at least the 1980s.278 While it would be wrong to label Winkler a conservative – rather, he has a leaning towards the Social Democratic party – he nonetheless presents an argument which is far less hostile towards nationalism as a phenomenon than that of, for example, Habermas. In his two-volume work *Germany: The Long Road West*, Winkler presents his definitive statement on German national history up to (and including) Unification. Note that the following brief recapitulation will include not only Winkler’s contentions regarding nationalism and national identity in Germany today, but also some of his purely historical-empirical claims, to the extent that the latter provides the argumentative underpinning for the former.

277 Habermas 1993, p. 63.
As one would guess from the subtitle of his book, Winkler defends the so-called *Sonderweg* hypothesis – or at least a variant of it. This hypothesis states that, at some point in its history, Germany diverged from the ‘normal’ West European path toward liberal democracy and instead gravitated towards authoritarianism and aggressive nationalism, culminating in the years of National Socialist rule.\(^{279}\) The blame is most often placed on the tensions generated by the character of Germany’s (in a West European comparison) late and conflictual nation-building process. German nationalists of the 19th century were divided between propagators of the *Kleindeutsche Lösung*, centring on Prussia and excluding Austria, and the *Grossdeutsche Lösung*, promoted by Austria and including the northern German states as well as, importantly, the non-German speaking areas of imperial Austria.\(^{280}\) Due largely to this division, the question of the very identity of the German nation became a politically controversial one.\(^{281}\) The ethnically charged or *Völkisch* nationalist ideology that accompanied the creation of imperial Germany has had a long-lasting effect on German national identity and political culture.\(^{282}\) Historian Hans Mommsen and Nobel Prize winning author Günther Grass are among those intellectuals who have followed this line of argument in dismissing the idea of a politically unified Germany.\(^{283}\) Winkler’s *Sonderweg* argument is of a different kind as he points to the lack of civil rights in Wilhelmine Germany as the prime aberrance.\(^{284}\) Concomitantly, he argues that there is nothing inherently ‘evil’ in either the German nation-building process or German national identity which would fundamentally set it apart from other European nationalisms, as others have claimed.

Winkler’s book is a *post facto* defence of German unification against those intellectuals of the Left who opposed it (or at least maintained a sceptical attitude), such as Grass and Habermas. His criticism of leading Social Democratic politician (and author) Oscar Lafontaine is especially interesting. In a 1988 book, Lafontaine argued that German nationalism was deeply compromised and had no role to fulfil in contemporary Europe.\(^{285}\) Unlike, for example, France, the German political nation was not the product of an uprising by the people against monarchy; instead, it was created from above

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\(^{279}\) See for example Kocka, Jürgen, 1988: ‘German History before Hitler: the Debate about the German *Sonderweg*, *Journal of Contemporary History*, Vol. 23, pp. 3-16.


\(^{281}\) Ibid.


\(^{284}\) Winkler 2007, p. 487.

through political alliance and warfare, and its character was therefore anti-democratic rather than democratic. Reunification was, thus, not a political priority; while West Germans should certainly seek to influence their Eastern neighbour to reform its political system, they should come to terms with the fact that the Federal Republic was now the relevant political unit, not the ‘Bismarckian’ German nation which was a historical failure and should once and for all be relegated to the past. He lamented the fact that the Federal Republic still had an ‘ethnic idea of the nation’, as expressed in its citizenship laws, unfavourably comparing this idea with the French one, expressed in Renan’s understanding of the nation as a ‘daily plebiscite’. Furthermore, Lafontaine predicted the imminent decline of the nation-state as such, as apparent in the process of European integration, and hinted that Germany, with its dissolving national identity, was especially well suited to take the lead in this process.

As we have seen, Winkler takes issue with the characterization of the German nation-building process as fundamentally flawed, instead arguing that the ‘failure to solve the question of liberty’ in imperial Germany was to blame for the subsequent lack of democratic development. He agrees with Lafontaine’s criticism of the ethnic conception of the nation and his urge for a reformation of the citizenship law, but argues for the continuing political relevance of German national identity, which has ‘nothing to do with heritage and everything to do with history’. The post-war partition of Germany was a direct result of the defeat of the Third Reich, and came to be viewed by many as a punishment for the National Socialist atrocities. However, Winkler points out, the East Germans were to shoulder a disproportionate share of this burden, as they were deprived of the civil and political rights of their Western neighbours. Winkler therefore defends unification as a rectification of this historical injustice. The German people are bound together by history. Winkler also questions Lafontaine’s understanding of European integration as an ‘absorption’ of nation-states into a new political entity, contending that such a presumption on the German part may be perceived by other member states as an attack on their national identity.

Winkler joins Lafontaine in his rejoicing over the fact that the Federal Republic is now firmly integrated into the West, through its membership in the European Union and NATO. However, Europe is a collective of nation-states, and is not becoming a postnational community as Lafontaine

286 Lafontaine, as quoted in Winkler 2007, p. 542.
287 Winkler 2007, p. 586; 487.
288 Ibid., p. 542. (Winkler is describing the views of Willy Brandt on unification in this passage.)
289 Ibid., p. 430f: ‘The responsibility the free Germans bore for their unfree brothers and sisters was a product of their common history. This history had not come to an end with the downfall of the German Reich. It lived on, and it did so primarily because the burdens of this history after 1945 had been so unevenly distributed.’ (Emphasis in the original.)
290 Winkler 2007, p. 542.
This is as it should be. Winkler does not accept the view that the German nation is fundamentally flawed because of its unusual modernization process, or that nationalism is an ‘evil’. While the memory of the Holocaust must certainly be kept alive – Winkler does not object to its ritualization – it cannot be allowed to completely define German identity but must be put in a larger perspective, and one must resist the exploitation of this memory for political purposes. In the 1990s, fierce political debates erupted over the question of German participation in military operations in the Gulf War and, later, the wars in Bosnia and Kosovo; the spectre of Auschwitz was frequently evoked by the critics of German participation in any form of warfare. Winkler attacks this standpoint as an attempt to use the past as an excuse to avoid shouldering the burdens of sovereignty and international responsibility. On the final pages of his book, Winkler tellingly quotes a speech by Salomon Korn, Vice President of the Zentralrat der Juden in Deutschland:

Willingness to remember and commemorate depends on an individual’s relationship to his or her own history, to the history of his or her own people, and depends on the degree of identification with this people, state and nation. The closer and more firmly we stand to the destinies of our community, the more we will seek to preserve the memory of its history, which is felt to be our own. The more ambivalent, difficult, and fragile the past is of the people to whom we belong, the more effort it takes to deal with its history, which then tends to be denied as our own. Under these conditions, remembering and commemorating become an arduous activity, confronting us with the dark sides of our community and making it more difficult to establish an unbroken identity with it. Then, remembering and commemorating mean being forced to deal with the biographies of our parents, grandparents, and ancestors. The willingness to hold the National Socialist crimes in honest remembrance depends on the willingness of non-Jewish Germans to take up national identity in its historically formed ruptures and discontinuities – to not take refuge in an ostensibly unscarred national identity, which necessarily bends, qualifies, and ultimately falsifies the National Socialist mass murder to fit its own needs.

By means of this quote, Winkler defends nationalism on the grounds that a community such as a nation provides us with a link to the past, allowing us to gain a deeper understanding of it through an identification with our predecessors. Further, he warns against the dangers of a simplified and half-

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291 Ibid., p. 586f, 542.
292 Winkler 2007, p. 587.
293 Ibid., p. 560f.
understood national narrative – perhaps targeting, once again, the ‘myths’ of postnationalism.\footnote{Winkler 2007, p. 588: ‘[European nations] have cause to take a good, self-critical look at their histories and their myths, old as well as new.’}

Winkler’s criticism of Lafontaine has much to commend it. Lafontaine displays a disturbing tendency of parts of the German Left to oversimplify and thus to avoid drawing the right conclusions from history. The contrast between ethnic German and civic French nationalism is a case in point: the idea of the civic nation as a ‘daily plebiscite’ is misleading, as has frequently been pointed out.\footnote{Yack 1999; Canovan 2000. This matter is further analysed in the concluding chapter.} After all, the right to vote in this theoretical plebiscite is a privilege of citizens, marking a clear limit to the openness of the nation’s borders. To a vast majority of citizens in any given nation in the world today, citizenship is a privilege bestowed upon the individual by virtue of ancestry or place of birth; more rarely is it the object of an active choice. Further, Winkler’s emphasis of the fundamental role of historical consciousness for the identity of nations generally, and the German nation specifically, is well informed. What binds modern-day Germans together as a nation, Winkler says, is not, in essence, a common cultural identity but a common past; primarily, the experiences of Nazi rule, World War II, and the subsequent partition of the German territory. Events such as these place individuals in a particular moral relationship towards one another, and it is only if individuals act collectively, as a nation, that the ills of the past can be rectified. Here, Winkler is more far-sighted than Habermas. While Habermas views the German nation as a fundamentally ethnic and therefore antiquated community, in Winkler’s perspective ethnicity becomes one particular content of German nationality, one which may change over time, and which is secondary to the German nation as a historical community. If Germans are to enter into a meaningful relationship with their past, Winkler seems to say, they must not shed, but rather transform, German national identity.

Winkler thus avoids Lafontaine’s simplistic dualism of ‘bad’ nationalism versus ‘good’ postnationalism, a simplification that ultimately hinders the transformation and development of German identity. The dangers of such simplified dichotomies – whereby all the ills of nationalism are projected onto a category (labelled ‘ethnic nationalism’, ‘primordialism’, or simply ‘nationalism’) which is sharply contrasted with the sound democratic community (‘civic nationalism’, ‘constitutional patriotism’, or ‘republicanism’) – have been a recurrent theme throughout the book. However, Winkler himself does not manage to steer entirely clear of this dualism. His overarching narrative – one of German normalization, of a Germany at long last rejoining its peers in the community of Western democracies – has overtones of the ‘End of History’ and is not conducive to a continued process of collective, democratic re-examination and self-criticism. Winkler does not pay sufficient
attention to the extent to which nationalism is itself a part of the Western tradition, the malign as well as the benign aspects of nationalism being present in the political cultures of all Western democracies. It is in this sense that he reduplicates the simplistic dichotomies of the postnationalist thinkers he criticizes.

Preliminary Conclusions

The polarization that for a long period of post-war German history characterized the debate over the significance of the Nazi past for contemporary Germans had to do with the enormity of the guilt and trauma associated with the Nazi crimes, which made them an exceedingly difficult material (to use a somewhat crude organic metaphor) for German culture and society to digest. The two dominant strategies of Vergangenheitsbewältigung pursued by German intellectuals will be analysed in more detail at the very conclusion of the chapter (pp. 121-124). For now, it will suffice to make the observation that both these strategies involve a kind of isolation or distancing. The first, typified by the conservatives who initiated the Historians’ Dispute in the 1980s, was to encapsulate – to somehow place in quarantine – the memory of National Socialism so that a positive German identity could be salvaged. The proponents of the second strategy, more common on the Left, went the opposite way: they concluded that National Socialism had resulted in a stigma that adhered to German culture as a whole, and that any attempt to isolate or seal off the guilt associated with this trauma would be unethical. While the second strategy ostensibly rejected the defence mechanisms of isolation and repression, it (at least when taken to its extreme) entailed a kind of ritualistic distancing from the identity of being ‘German’ – and of any positive attributes of belonging to German culture and society – which made more difficult the working through of the experience of National Socialism. This mechanism is evident, for example, in the resistance among some intellectuals on the Left to the erection of monuments commemorating the victims of the Holocaust, especially in the 1990s. To these intellectuals, exemplified by Stefan Berger, the gesture on the part of the German federal government to erect these memorials constituted an attempt to rid oneself of the guilty conscience once and for all, and to hypocritically utilize the past to strengthen the legitimacy of the Berlin Republic. While such concern should not be rejected out of hand, the knee-jerk reaction on the part of such intellectuals to any attempt to draw a conclusion from the experience of National Socialism, and to integrate this experience into the German national consciousness, may in some cases be detrimental. However, we can note in passing that there are signs that the polarization of the 1980s and 1990s has abated. The ‘New Right’ movement, with its aggressive programme of a reassertion of German identity and resistance to what was perceived as excessive attention to the Nazi past, is now nearly invisible. Monuments such as the Denkmal
für die ermordeten Juden Europas, inaugurated in 2005, are no longer a very contentious issue, among either conservatives or radicals. Thus, an important step may have been taken towards an integration of the memory of the Holocaust in German political and cultural identity.
From Post-Nationalism to Civic Integrationism?

The German public policy and debate regarding immigration and the integration of immigrants are fraught with paradoxes, many of which stem from the complexities of the relationship between Germans and their inherited conceptions of the nation. In the following part of the chapter, I will analyse the attempts of German intellectuals and politicians to deal with these complexities, and the changes over time in German policy in the field of immigration and the integration of immigrants.

Immigration and the Nation in the Post-War Era

A major formative event in the history of the Federal Republic of Germany was, of course, the large-scale immigration of ‘guest workers’ (Gastarbeiter) which started in the 1950s and continued into the 1970s. The long stretch of consistently high growth rates which the German economy experienced at this time resulted in a labour shortage, in response to which individual companies (with the state’s blessing) undertook the recruitment of foreign workers from countries such as Turkey, Greece, Portugal, and Yugoslavia. As the moniker ‘guest workers’ indicates, what was envisaged was a ‘rotation system’ whereby individual workers would not settle permanently in Germany but would, after a few years, return to their home countries, to be replaced by new labourers. In fact, no legal mechanism existed for such a rotation scheme to be implemented – one example of the passive and uncoordinated nature of German immigration policy in the decades following World War II. While many guest workers did return home many others settled in Germany, and the number of permanently resident ‘guest’ workers eventually numbered in the millions. The situation of these groups as permanently resident ‘foreigners’ was a peculiar one, as they were the object simultaneously of exclusionary and inclusionary measures on the part of the State and civil society. Foremost among the exclusionary elements was the general withholding of German citizenship from immigrants. The citizenship law of the Federal Republic, dating from 1913 and not reformed until 2000, has become paradigmatic for its embodiment of the ius sanguinis principle, and constituted a formidable hurdle to those immigrants seeking naturaliza-

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300 Ibid., p. 65.
301 Heckmann 2003, 51f.
It is today commonly recognized that the motives for retaining (for several decades) the seemingly antiquated *ius sanguinis* citizenship regime, which provided an easy road to citizenship for all persons of ‘ethnic German’ descent, were twofold. Political elites wished, firstly, to ease an eventual reunification of the two German states, and secondly, to keep an open door to the German ethnic minorities ‘trapped’ in the Soviet Union, Romania, and other parts of the Eastern Bloc and who suffered persecutions there. Excluding immigrants from citizenship, thus, was part of the maintenance of an ideology, for said purposes, of an ethnic German nationhood. While it was, in principle, possible for an immigrant of non-German descent to become a German citizen, this process was lengthy and difficult enough for naturalization rates to remain exceptionally low by international standards.

The other side of the coin was that guest workers from the beginning enjoyed the same rights to social benefits – health and unemployment insurance, pension funds etc. – as citizens. Furthermore, two crucial rulings by the Constitutional Court upheld the right to permanent residence of immigrants who had come to Germany as guest workers, even if they lost their employment. Thus, while immigrants were excluded from the political community they were safely integrated into the welfare state, and in the eyes of the political elites this was enough. However, the manner of inclusion of immigrants in the welfare state did have some peculiarities; Rogers Brubaker goes as far as to speak of an ‘apartheid’ system, an overstatement which yet contains some truth. Responsibilities for social service provision to immigrants were allocated by the state to three charitable organizations, on the basis of nationality: Italians being the responsibility of one such organization, Turks another, etc. Furthermore, elements of segregation were also present in the education system in some Länder, notably Bavaria, which oriented foreigners in ‘separate, home-land oriented classes’. Of course, such policies were founded on the long-surviving notion that guest workers

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305 Heckmann 2003, p. 65.
306 Joppke 1999, p. 72f.
307 Ibid., p. 186.
309 Ibid.
310 Brubaker 2003, p. 45.
and their children were but temporary residents of Germany. Exclusionary measures, especially the prohibitive citizenship regime, contributed to the branding of immigrants and their descendants as foreign nationals, somehow part of society but yet not part of the German nation. In lieu of a policy of integration, relations between ethnic Germans and immigrants were frequently expressed in terms of ‘equality between nationalities’, integration into the German nation being ruled out beforehand.

The Gastarbeiter system was curtailed in 1973. However, the immigrant percentage of the population was still rising as Germany’s laws regarding family reunion-based immigration were comparatively generous. Furthermore, many political refugees were now seeking asylum in Germany. In the face of this development, the political elites maintained in its insistence on the (in-) famous mantra: ‘Deutschland ist kein Einwanderungsland’, ‘Germany is not a country of immigration.’ While such a slogan in a nation with millions of resident non-citizens might appear simply inaccurate, it reflected a political strategy the object of which was to define all immigration to Germany as an exception to the rule, and to label the guest worker era a historical parenthesis and a unique event. In doing so, politicians were also catering to an electorate whose resistance to immigration and immigrants was at times considerable. However, in other political camps as well there was a greater awareness of an ‘integration problem’, that laws concerning the acquisition of citizenship were outmoded, and that the state had not done enough to integrate immigrants into German society. While conservatives and the political Left were in agreement that a major overhaul was needed of the ‘patchwork’ of administrative regulations constituting the Federal Republic’s immigration policy, they differed regarding the content of this proposed revision. Eventually, when a new ‘Foreigner Law’ was passed in 1990, it turned out to be a step in the liberal direction (even though its chief architect was the CDU Interior Minister Wolfgang Schäuble), eschewing the ‘Germany is not a country of immigration’ slogan as well as the objective of the return migration of foreigners. An even more important step was the new Citizenship Law passed in 2000 after a lengthy and controversy-ridden political process, which introduces an ius soli principle supplementing ius sanguinis, and allows for multiple citizenships, if only in certain

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313 Joppke 1999, p. 64.
315 Ibid.
316 Joppke 1999, p. 84f.
317 Ibid., p. 78, 92.
318 Ibid., p. 199f.
319 Ibid., p. 83.
circumstances.320 The question of multiple nationality was the main crux, as many within CDU/CSU vehemently objected to this idea.321 It is notable that the process towards a reformation of the citizenship regime was initiated following unification, as the ethnic conception of citizenship had clearly served its purpose and played out its role, facilitating not only a smooth transition to a unified Germany but also the large-scale immigration of ethnic Germans (Spätaussiedler) from the former Eastern Bloc, especially the Soviet Union.

As a general characterization of German policy on immigration and the integration of immigrants until the 1990s, it can be said that it contains a curious blend of elements of ethno-nationalism and post-nationalism, respectively. The conception of the German nation remains based on ethnicity, as evident in the citizenship regime. However, membership in the nation is not a prerequisite for partaking in society, as the labour market and the welfare state are open to non-nationals. As Christian Joppke points out, this disaggregation of political rights (citizenship) from social rights is, if anything, a marker of what in the works of Yasemin Soysal is termed ‘postnationalism’.322 The unwillingness to extend the boundaries of the nation and relying on ethnicity as the source of nationality can, in part, be explained by strategic considerations concerning the prospects of reunification, as mentioned above. Yet this unwillingness also reflects the recalcitrance to confront the issue of what German nationality means in the post-Nazi era, much less politicize this issue. Simply adhering to the conception handed down from the Wilhelmine era while dampening its effects by playing down the importance of citizenship, was a convenient solution, ruling out the need for any discussion of national identity. Thus, this approach simultaneously served the purposes of conservative ethno-nationalists and of postnationalists who wanted nothing to do with the nation and were happy to declare it obsolete. However, as we have seen, this compromise was eventually abandoned, as important steps have been taken in Germany towards a redefinition of the nation in ‘civic’ or ‘republican’ terms. This process is analysed in more detail later in this chapter.

The ’Leitkultur’ Debate

Few debates concerning issues of immigration and integration in Post-Unification Germany have been more inflammatory than the brief but intensive controversy surrounding the launch of the concept of ‘a German

320 Horváth & Rubio-Martín 2010.
Leitkultur’ by CDU politician Friedrich Merz in October 2000.\textsuperscript{323} While this occasion marked the first instance in which the concept of Leitkultur (translated roughly as ‘guiding culture’ or ‘defining culture’) had any impact on German political debate, it had been introduced, in a strictly academic setting, a few years earlier by Göttingen political science professor Bassam Tibi.\textsuperscript{324} Tibi, however, envisaged a European rather than a German Leitkultur.\textsuperscript{325} For Tibi, what defined European culture were the Enlightenment values of democracy, secularism, individualism, and tolerance, and the successful integration of immigrants from other parts of the world depended on the acceptance of these values on the part of the immigrants.\textsuperscript{326} The main threat Tibi perceived was that of multiculturalism: social fragmentation, the development of parallel societies and the loss of universally accepted values were the inevitable consequences if European states continued to pursue policies based on multiculturalism and cultural relativism.\textsuperscript{327} It is noteworthy that Tibi’s theory mirrors that of Samuel Huntington in its description of democratic values and human rights as properties inherent in Western civilization rather than universal principles.\textsuperscript{328}

Friedrich Merz, then parliamentary leader of the CDU, picked up the catchword of Leitkultur in an article in Die Welt, having declared beforehand that he intended to make immigration and the integration of immigrants a central issue in the coming elections.\textsuperscript{329} In contrast to Tibi, Merz spoke of a German rather than a European Leitkultur, while substantively defining it in much the same way, and underscoring the link between Germanness and Europeanness. Merz argued that the peaceful coexistence of cultural groups presupposed that German culture was guaranteed a special or ‘leading’ status.\textsuperscript{330} The core of the ‘liberal German Leitkultur’ to which immigrants would have to adapt, according to Merz, found its expression in the German Basic Law of 1949.\textsuperscript{331} The Basic Law constituted ‘the most important expression of German moral order guaranteeing the coherence of German society … Germany, as a country at the centre of Europe, has identified itself

\textsuperscript{324} Manz 2004; Bauböck 2001. The translations are Bauböck’s.
\textsuperscript{326} Tibi 1998, p. 183; Manz 2004, p. 484.
\textsuperscript{327} Tibi 2000; Manz 2004, p. 484.
\textsuperscript{328} Huntington 1996; Pautz 2005, p. 43.
\textsuperscript{329} Friedrich Merz quoted in Pautz 2005, p. 45.
\textsuperscript{330} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{331} Ibid.
with European integration and its peace and liberty." Merz thus conceives of cultures as closed, integrated, programmatic systems or totalities, from which norms may unequivocally be derived - a feature that would draw considerable criticism in the ensuing debate. Further, it is noteworthy that while the above quote may read like a defence of a constitutional patriotism of quasi-Habermasian mould, Merz departs from the likes of Habermas and Sternberger in his totalization of the concept of constitutional patriotism, conceiving it as the de facto foundation of German culture and society at large - as though everything within German culture ultimately stemmed from, and could be defended by reference to, the values expressed in the Basic Law. This leads to some fundamental ambiguities in his argument.

Merz was immediately successful in his aim of stirring up a debate; questions surrounding immigration and integration were and are highly sensitive in German political life, and the catchword Leitkultur proved an unusually provocative and incendiary one. Reactions were almost wholly negative on the political Left, while they were divided within the CDU and conservative circles generally. Critics claimed that the concept of Leitkultur suffered from a lack of clarity which meant not only that it was unable to serve a productive function in the discourse on immigration and integration policy, but also that it could easily be appropriated by xenophobic forces. Clearly, the usage of the term ‘culture’ as a marker of German identity in the ears of many called to mind the ethno-cultural understanding of the German nation which was forever associated with National Socialism. Among the most vocal critics was the Green Party, the spokesmen of which claimed that Merz’s ‘Leitkultur twaddle’ had set off a ‘fireworks display of racism’. Nadeem Elyas, chairman of the Central Council of Muslims in Germany (ZMD), likewise pointed to the danger of this ‘catchword devoid of meaning’ being ‘misused’ by the extreme Right, and claimed that the idea of pluralism was inconsistent with a ‘leading’ role for German culture. The SPD was likewise critical, Chancellor Gerhard Schröder stating that the whole debate was superfluous and covered up the essential question of what the basis for peaceful coexistence between Germans and non-Germans would consist of. Fellow Social Democrat Otto Schily, Minister of the Interior, suggested that culture had to develop in freedom and that while allegiance to the constitution may justly be asked of immigrants, cultural assimilation may not. Within the CDU the Leitkultur debate resulted in a political rift, as many senior politicians were critical of the concept. Former General Secre-

332 Friedrich Merz quoted in Pautz 2005, p. 45.
333 Manz 2004, p. 491f.
336 Ibid., p. 492
337 Ibid., p. 488.
tary Heiner Geissler observed that it could ‘serve as a justification for every skinhead, if somebody does not fit into his notion of Germany and he thinks he can beat him up for this reason.’ The right wing of the party was supportive, however, continuing a tradition within this political camp of warning against ‘Überfremdung’ and the loss of German national identity. Apparently, those critical of the concept gained the upper hand, as the final report presented by the CDU immigration committee in June 2001 made no mention of Leitkultur. However, it should be noted that chairperson and future chancellor Angela Merkel was among Merz’s supporters, taking the debate as an opportunity to express her views about the need for Germany to come out of the shadows of its past and ‘go into the united Europe as a joint and self-confident nation’. Furthermore, a few years after the initial debate, the CDU undertook a ‘re-launch’ of the Leitkultur concept, in a somewhat modified form. In 2006, speaker of parliament Norbert Lammert published a book urging for a renewed debate about the constitution, patriotism and a lead culture, and the following year, the CDU incorporated the notion of Leitkultur into its party programme, this time relating it to language and patriotism as well as to historical awareness and responsibility, and to European cultural traditions. Significantly, the idea of a German lead culture was now coupled with a stated commitment towards immigration, and to proposals for the introduction of integration courses and tests for aspiring citizens. The latter policy trend will be analysed in depth in the following section (‘The Turn towards Civic Integrationism’).

As mentioned earlier, the static and essentialist conception of culture was one of the focal points in the criticism of Leitkultur. For example, sociologist Claus Leggewie pointed out that ‘culture is only thinkable in the plural, as chaotic difference and evolution’. Interestingly, the criticism of an essentialist conception of culture which was voiced by many had repercussions within the Left as well, as doubt was cast upon the once popular notion of multiculturalism. For example, such a development took place within the Green Party, for which ‘multicultural society’ had hitherto been a key term. Most likely, this reflects the fact that ‘multiculturalism’ in German

338 Manz 2004, p. 493
339 Ibid., p. 483, 491f.
341 Ibid., p. 48.
debate had largely been defined in somewhat segregationist terms, as the peaceful co-habitation of mutually exclusive and closed cultural enclaves. In fact, such a vision betrays a concept of culture not very different from the one expressed in the notion of *Leitkultur*.

Stefan Manz, in his 2005 article on the *Leitkultur* controversy, makes a normative point of the distinction between Tibi’s original concept and Merz’s nationalist redefinition of it, noting that Tibi explicitly states that the ‘Enlightenment’ values he defends are ‘political’ in nature and incompatible with an ethnocultural understanding of the nation. However, Manz misses the point that Tibi’s ‘European’ values may easily be appropriated as content to fill the vessel of German national identity, as evident in Merz’s conception. Another commentator, Hartwig Pautz, comes closer to the mark, arguing that the CDU, in its attempt to equate German culture with Enlightenment values by way of the larger Occidental culture of which German culture forms part, was performing a kind of whitewashing of German identity, bracketing off the Nazi dictatorship as an exception to the rule in German history. More generally, it is clear that Merz and other CDU politicians exploited the tendency to conflate ‘democracy’ and ‘human rights’ with ‘Western culture’ (while virtually equating ‘being German’ with ‘being part of the West/Europe’).

Hartwig Pautz further characterizes the *Leitkultur* debate as part of an international phenomenon which he describes as the ‘culturalization of politics’: the fact that ‘cultural identity/difference have become key terms for explaining and rationalizing both international and national conflicts’, exemplified in the works of Samuel Huntington. As this phenomenon entails the conception of cultural belonging as an essentialist category, it paves the way for a ‘culturalized’ immigration discourse in which immigrants are perceived as bearers of an alien culture who have to assimilate in order for a society to maintain its harmony and integrity. Pautz even goes as far as describing this discourse as fundamentally ‘racist’ in that the static concept of culture has become a way for conservative and New Right forces in Germany to retain an ethnic conception of the nation, simply replacing the category of ‘blood’ with that of ‘culture’. This analysis certainly sheds much light on the *Leitkultur* discourse, yet it is too one-sided. A fact overlooked by Pautz is that the ‘culturalist turn’ he describes has an emancipatory element as well, as many academics, intellectuals and activists working within the field that may broadly be characterized as ‘multiculturalism’ have pointed to culture as an important dimension of power relations. The unequal power relations

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347 Joppke 1999.
349 Pautz 2005.
350 Ibid., p. 41.
351 Pautz 2005.
352 Ibid., p. 41, 47.
between ‘cultures’ (however defined), not least in Western democracies such as Germany, which have historically been shaped by nationalism, means that culture should not be discarded as an analytical tool; rather, we must employ better, less static definitions of culture than those applied by the conservatives taking part in the Leitkultur debate.353

It is easy to agree with the common assertion that the Leitkultur debate was an unproductive and polarizing one. The concept introduced by Merz and his allies was marked by a lack of clarity, which allowed arguments from the constitutional patriotism discourse to be deployed in an assimilationist context, muddling the ensuing debate. The Left, for its part, largely reacted by displaying its postnationalist reflexes and ended up scrambling for intellectually simplistic solutions in order to stave off the right-wing onslaught as quickly and efficiently as possible. One such solution is exemplified by Stefan Manz, who chooses to opt for the ‘purely political’ communal values as contrasted with the ‘ethnocultural understanding of the nation’, disregarding the fact that the meaning of such ‘political’ values is context-dependent; they may well take on an ethnic significance in a context where ‘West’-‘non-West’ serves as a dominant frame of reference. Another simplified solution is offered by Hartwig Pautz, who argues against the use of the concepts of ‘culture’ and ‘nation’ altogether, thereby obscuring power relations that have in fact been shaped by the factors of culture and nation and which therefore will be invisible if these concepts are jettisoned as analytical tools. A better way forward is suggested by Rainer Bauböck. While Bauböck does not think ‘that it is possible to create a culturally neutral public sphere in which immigrant identities and those of the native population would no longer be perceived as different’, he claims that ‘it should be possible to create a much more pluralistic public culture that includes the immigrant minorities.’354 Unfortunately, not many have followed the guidelines offered by Bauböck, and the post-Leitkultur German immigration and integration debate largely remains locked in its polarized positions.

The Turn towards Civic Integrationism

Civic integrationism, frequently associated with the introduction of mandatory integration courses and citizenship tests, has been a growing policy trend in Europe, including Germany (where it is often referred to as ‘republicanism’), over the past decade or so. Constituting a more activist approach of governments vis-à-vis the integration of immigrants, civic integrationism has been interpreted variously as: a pragmatic effort to strengthen the economic integration of immigrants in European societies; an attempt by liberal democratic societies to reassert themselves and confront political and religious

353 A similar point is made by Bauböck (2001), p. 70.
354 Bauböck 2001, p. 70.
extremism; a repressive and/or nationalist-assimilationist turn in the field of immigration and integration policy; and a step in the general development of citizenship policies and from an ethnocultural towards a civic understanding of the nation.\footnote{Joppke, Christian, 2007: ‘Beyond National Models: Civic Integration Policies for Immigration in Western Europe’, \textit{West European Politics}, Vol. 30, No. 1; Peucker, Mario, 2008: ‘Similar Procedures, Divergent Function: Citizenship Tests in the United States, Canada, Netherlands and United Kingdom’, \textit{International Journal of Multicultural Societies}, Vol. 10, No. 2; Etzioni, Amitai, 2007: ‘Citizenship Tests: A Comparative, Communitarian Perspective’, \textit{The Political Quarterly}, Vol. 78, No. 3; Michalowski, Ines, 2009: ‘Citizenship Tests in Five Countries – An Expression of Political Liberalism?’, discussion paper presented at the Wissenschaftszentrum Berlin für Sozialforschung (Social Science Research Center Berlin); Winter 2010.} As we shall see, the multiplicity of interpretations and verdicts is due not least to the diverse character of policies and philosophies, differing considerably between national contexts, summed up in the umbrella term of civic integrationism. In what follows, my main focus will of course be expressions of civic integrationism in contemporary Germany; however, as the policy trend is international in scope and must therefore be related to an international context (as well as a national one) to be properly understood, I will begin by outlining the development of civic integrationism in Europe generally, focusing on issues such as integration courses and citizenship tests.

Whereas citizenship tests have been in place quite a long time in nations with a tradition of conceiving of themselves as countries of immigration, such as the United States and Canada, they are a fairly recent development in European countries such as Germany, Austria, the United Kingdom, and the Netherlands.\footnote{Michalowski 2009, p. 1; Etzioni 2007, p. 355.} The Netherlands in particular is interesting, firstly because of its pioneering role in the discourse of civic integrationism and secondly because it constitutes an extreme example, the hurdles towards citizenship being raised considerably higher there than in most other countries. In the Netherlands, civic integrationism constituted a reaction to and a sharp break with the particular brand of multiculturalism which had characterized its policies concerning ‘ethnic minorities’ (a term that was preferred to, for example, ‘immigrants’) up until the years surrounding the turn of the millennium.\footnote{Entzinger, Han, 2003: ‘The Rise and Fall of Multiculturalism: The Case of the Netherlands’, in Joppke, Christian & Ewa Morawska (eds.), 2003: \textit{Toward Assimilation and Citizenship: Immigration in Liberal Nation-States}, Palgrave Macmillan, London; Entzinger, Han, 2006: ‘Changing the rules while the game is on: From multiculturalism to assimilation in the Netherlands’, in Bodemann, Michal & Gökce Yurdakul (eds.), 2003: \textit{Migration, Citizenship, Ethnos: Incorporation Regimes in Germany, Western Europe and North America}, Palgrave Macmillan, New York.} At this point, the policies of Dutch multiculturalism started to sustain heavy criticism, as they had allegedly resulted in the emergence of an ethnic underclass, segregated from the rest of society.\footnote{Entzinger 2006.} Specifically, Muslims were pointed to as a problem group, as it was argued that the Muslim population
had failed to embrace the values of mainstream Dutch society, those relating to liberalism and democracy in particular. This current was further reinforced after September 11, 2001, and particularly after the murders of right-wing politician Pim Fortuyn in 2002 and Islam-critical filmmaker Theo van Gogh in 2004.\textsuperscript{359} An integration law had been passed already in 1998, obliging non-EU newcomers to take part in a 12-month integration course, including Dutch language instruction, civic education and preparation for the labour market; however, as attitudes against Muslim immigrants hardened, there was a change of emphasis toward instilling (what was perceived as) Dutch values and norms.\textsuperscript{360} Perhaps even more significantly, while the integration course had originally been state financed, the revised civic integration law of 2006 shifted the responsibility to migrants, who were now required to pay for the courses themselves.\textsuperscript{361} Furthermore, the granting of a permanent residence permit has been tied to the successful passing of the integration test.\textsuperscript{362} Last but not least, the new policy of ‘integration from abroad’ means that applicants for family reunification now have to take an integration test at the Dutch embassies of their respective homelands before being granted a temporary residence permit, and the Dutch government provides no education programmes in preparation for this test.\textsuperscript{363} Such policies seem intended to repel immigration rather than further integration.

While the policy development in the field of the integration of immigrants in Germany exhibits parallels with, and indeed drew some inspiration from, that in the Netherlands, German policymakers have generally chosen a somewhat softer, less punitive approach.\textsuperscript{364} Integration courses not dissimilar from those in the Netherlands, targeted at non-EU immigrants, have been introduced.\textsuperscript{365} The Immigration Law of 2004 enforced stricter requirements, making the courses mandatory for some groups and establishing positive as well as negative sanctions with regard to noncompliance, including social benefit cuts and (in some cases) the denial of temporary residence permits.\textsuperscript{366} While these expressions of civic integrationism can hardly be said to be excessively repressive in and of themselves, they are being introduced in a context where attitudes towards immigrants – Muslims especially – are hardening and the general tendency of integration politics is to move in a more coercive direction.\textsuperscript{367} A clear sign of this change in attitudes is the tremendous success of Thilo Sarrazin’s – admittedly controversial – 2010 book \textit{Deutschland schafft sich ab}, roughly translated as ‘Germany abolishes it-

\textsuperscript{359} Entzinger 2006; Joppke 2007.
\textsuperscript{360} Joppke 2007, p. 6f.
\textsuperscript{361} Ibid., p. 7.
\textsuperscript{362} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{363} Ibid., p. 8.
\textsuperscript{364} Ibid., p. 12.
\textsuperscript{365} Ibid., p. 14.
\textsuperscript{366} Ibid., p. 13; Winter 2010, p. 173.
self’, in which the author argues that German integration policy has failed and portrays Muslims in particular as a group unwilling to integrate and largely living off state welfare benefits. To date, more than a million copies of the book have been sold. Further, it is noteworthy that public outcry regarding issues such as ‘honour killings’ among Turkish immigrants and interethnic violence are being met with promises of stricter reinforcement of integration policies, meaning that the coercive turn in integration policy in general which has taken place in the Netherlands may well spread to Germany.

The European policy trend of civic integrationism, particularly citizenship tests, has been the subject of an extensive academic discourse. Much of the research conducted in the field concerns the question of whether the tests are permissible from a liberal point of view. The primary focus of these analyses is the content of the tests, whereby a distinction is commonly made between test content related to culturally ‘neutral’ issues (politics, basic rights and freedoms, history, geography, etc.), on the one hand and traditions and public morals on the other, which would point to a ‘thicker’ understanding of membership in the political community. Ines Michalowski conducts one such analysis, comparing tests in Germany, the Netherlands, the United Kingdom, and Austria, and concludes that with the partial exception of the Netherlands, they all fall within the bounds of political liberalism (a concept borrowed from John Rawls). Another approach is offered by Mario Peucker, who argues that context rather than content is crucial; the function of citizenship tests can be to promote integration of new citizens into the host society or to serve as a ‘deterring hurdle’ to citizenship, depending on the overall naturalization procedure and political context. Peucker too singles out the Netherlands as the most clearly illiberal example among European nations; not, however, because of the content of the test but rather due to such factors as the level of difficulty, the lack of assistance and encouragement, and the context of a ‘public and political debate on integration and immigration generally dominated by immigrant-sceptical attitudes’.

The perhaps most developed analysis of citizenship tests thus far is offered by Christian Joppke. Following Desmond King, Joppke argues that civic integration policies are an instance of ‘repressive liberalism’: ‘a balance of rights and duties is inherent in “liberal contractualism”, and […] at

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368 Sarrazin, Thilo, 2010: *Deutschland schafft sich ab*, Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, München.
371 Michalowski 2009.
373 Peucker 2008.
374 Ibid., p. 251.
times this balance [can] shift decidedly towards “duties”’. Parallel to the liberalism of equality and individual rights, there is a liberalism of power and disciplining, aimed at turning individual persons into the self-regulating, self-sufficient subjects required by a liberal society; this repressive liberalism has been thoroughly investigated in the literature on ‘governmentality’. This approach accounts for the strong economic-instrumental features of civic integrationism, the aim of which is to promote adaptation to the demands of the labour market and independence from the welfare state. Joppke waxes polemic in his insistence that civic integrationism is to be interpreted exclusively as an expression of this repressive liberalism, as opposed to nationalism or assimilationism, which have been thoroughly discredited by the prevailing spirit of liberalism of the present era. While Joppke’s analysis of civic integrationism as repressive liberalism is illuminating, it is my contention that he overstates his case, and that a lingering nationalism most likely does play a part in the ideas and policies of civic integrationism. Evidently, while economic considerations play a part in the ideological underpinning of civic integrationism, issues concerning social peace, community, and the defence of democracy from political extremism also figure prominently: the fear of social segregation and of ‘parallel societies’ looms large in the discourse. Further, the persistent focus on Muslims as a problem group (rather than, say, people on welfare benefits, as Joppke’s theory would predict), and the suggestions of the incompatibility of Islam with ‘Western’ culture, point to deep-seated notions of the Oriental as ‘Other’, contrasted with the civilized European, coming into play.

If there does exist a tension within liberalism, as Joppke contends, this is equally true of democracy: the ‘community’ side of democracy makes itself felt in the perennial need to point out who belongs and who does not, who is a threat and who is not, who deserves to benefit from my tax payments and who does not. I suggest that questions of community – and of nationalism, the expression of community that has historically been dominant in European democracies – play a large role in the discourse of civic integrationism. To propose a somewhat bolder hypothesis: because purely ethnocultural markers can no longer be employed to stigmatize those perceived as outsiders, as this strategy has been discredited by the prevailing liberal political climate, we turn in this endeavour to the only thing left which may still be used to define who ‘we’ are – the values of liberalism and democracy. In the worst case scenario, these values are perverted as they serve as a cover for the exclusionary mechanisms of nationalism, which, unseen and unchecked, continue to thrive.

376 Joppke 2007, p. 14; King, Desmond, 1999: In the Name of Liberalism, Oxford University Press, Oxford. (The quote is from Joppke 2007.)
378 Ibid., p. 16f.
Returning to the more specific questions of citizenship tests and integration courses in the context of contemporary Germany, these measures may seem innocent enough in and of themselves—Germany has not gone to the lengths that, for example, the Netherlands has—but they must be understood in the light of the context in which they have been introduced. As we have seen, this context includes a debate on immigration in which anti-Muslim sentiment is increasingly prominent. For this reason, there is cause to be— if not dismissive—at least wary of the policies influenced by civic integrationism which are developing in Germany. More generally, such contextual sensitivity is of vital importance in the analysis of the implications of civic integrationism policies in a context saturated with nationalism, especially if the national community has been defined in ethnic and/or cultural terms (as in Germany). Otherwise, policies of civic integrationism may conceal the continued workings of old-style nationalism. What is demanded is a redefinition of the national community itself, a reshaping of the way the substance of this community is interpreted, which can only be achieved through a piecemeal and arduous process of public debate and collective self-reflection.

Concluding Analysis

It is an understatement that concepts of ‘nationalism’ and ‘the nation’ remain highly sensitive and emotionally charged in Germany. This has turned out to be both a blessing and a curse. Throughout the history of the Federal Republic, pre- as well as post-unification, democracy’s watchdogs such as left-wing intellectuals have maintained a hypervigilant stance toward tendencies to a return of aggressive and/or völkisch nationalism, authoritarianism and other dangerous traditions from the German past. Their influence has been great and to a large extent beneficial; while debaters calling for a relativizing or even apologetic stance toward the Nazi era have made themselves heard on numerous occasions, the resistance toward them has been vigorous and their impact on German public culture has ultimately remained limited. However, the fact of the semi-taboo status of the concepts of nationalism and the nation has also resulted in an unfortunate polarization in the field of immigration and integration. In simplified terms, reluctance to make explicit the concept of ‘Germaness’ in the context of integration policy has, to some extent, allowed traditional ethnic notions of belonging and identity to remain implicit and unchallenged. The equating of ‘nation’ with ‘ethnos’, which has been common or even dominant in German discourse (due to the role of ethnicity in the creation of German identity in past centuries), has played an important role in this process. Partly because of this association, postnationalism has been an attractive position. However, postnationalism, focusing on a future state of affairs in which national borders have little or no significance and overstating the extent to which this development has
already taken place, offers little guidance regarding the problems Germans face in the present. Further, as stated in the previous chapter, the proposed abolishment of the German nation as such is incompatible with German acceptance of historical responsibility for its Nazi past. In recent years, a ‘solution’ seemingly more robust than postnationalism has emerged: civic integrationism. This conglomerate of ideas offers a convenient solution in its distinction between community based on common ethnicity and on common democratic culture. The sharp distinction between public and private culture on which civic integrationism rests its arguments is, however, difficult to sustain. A careful analysis shows that the identification of problem areas on which policy initiatives in the field of integration and immigration are based in fact transcends the borders of ‘private’ and ‘public’ culture. More specifically, this identification of problems forms part of an othering process by which Muslims in particular are targeted. To restate an important conclusion in this chapter, civic integrationism may cloak the development of a German national identity centred on whiteness or ‘non-Muslimness’, and the consonant exclusionary mechanisms. Such a process constitutes a misuse of democratic principles as a simple emblem of belonging and may, if worse comes to worst, erode the public support for these principles.

To end on a note of (tentative) speculation, it may be a better idea to bring up the topic of national belonging for open discussion in order to replace antiquated notions of German identity with new ones, which explicitly take into account the momentous experience that large-scale immigration has constituted in German history, and seek to explicitly include and perhaps accommodate immigrant groups. The reshaping of German identity in the wake of World War II, although a long and agonizing process, indicates that development through painstaking public discussion is indeed possible. While allegiance to the constitution may play a part in such a process, it is of paramount importance that the ‘myth’ of the constitution and the rebirth of Germany as a democratic nation does loom so large as to distort discourse and inhibit self-criticism. Such a strategy of deliberation does not, of course, eradicate the fundamental tensions in the relation between nationalism and democracy; it may, however, be the most fruitful approach to dealing with these tensions and containing their destructive potential.
Concluding Analysis: The German Paradox

The relationship with the national past has anguished Germans for generations, and continues to do so. Nazism and the Holocaust simply comprised a catastrophe too large to be ignored, and the ensuing trauma and guilt has demanded of each successive generation of Germans that they take an active stance vis-à-vis the question of how to deal with the past and with the stigma with which Germanness has been associated since the end of World War II, in the minds of Germans and foreigners alike.\(^{379}\) The answers to this question have been legion, but may be grouped into two basic categories depending on the strategy pursued.\(^{380}\) The first, which can be dubbed the *containment* strategy, entails the sealing off of historical traditions identified as causes of or precursors to Nazism; the remainder of German culture is thus deemed to be ‘sound’, and to constitute the foundations for a ‘normal’ Germany, a democratic, liberal nation as any other in Europe. It has been a common assertion among historians that Germany, initially developing as a normal European nation, veered off from the mainstream at some point during the 19\(^{th}\) century and commenced the fateful process which would eventually lead to the founding of the Third Reich.\(^{381}\) An equally common assertion is that, by drawing the right lessons from historical experience, Germany might once and for all depart from its *Sonderweg* and return to European normality – indeed, some claim that this has already taken place with the extension of democracy to the Eastern German territories. As we have seen, this is the standpoint of, among others, Heinrich August Winkler.\(^{382}\) The proponents of the *redemption* strategy, by contrast, contend that this quest for untainted traditions in German culture and society is bound to be fruitless; the very concept of being German has been stigmatized by the atrocities committed during the years of Nazi rule, and nothing short of a complete rebirth will suffice if the German nation is to achieve some form of catharsis. The founding of the Federal Republic of Germany is construed as a historic opportunity for Germany to break with its anti-democratic traditions once and for all, and the challenge – it is claimed – throughout the Post-War era has been the development of a ‘postnational’ German identity in which, paradoxically, the critical stance towards every hint of German nationalism is inherent.\(^{383}\) Consequently, the redemptionists take a very different position on the question of ‘normality’ compared to the adherents of the containment strategy: because the Nazi atrocities constitute such an unfathomable abnormality, the only way for successive generations of Germans to achieve some form of

\(^{379}\) Moses 2007.

\(^{380}\) Moses (2007) makes a similar distinction, using the terms ‘German Germans’ and ‘non-German Germans’, respectively.

\(^{381}\) Winkler 2007.

\(^{382}\) Ibid.

\(^{383}\) Habermas 1989, pp. 229-234.
normality is to unconditionally accept the abnormality of the German past. In a peculiarly negative way, Auschwitz forms something of a Grundungsmythos for the redemptionist camp; a phenomenon widely referred to as ‘negative nationalism’ and ‘Sühnestolz’ (‘pride in atonement’) by critics of the redemptionists.384

Neither of the two strategies is without its difficulties. The containment strategy, to begin with, arguably misconstrues the normative problem: regardless of whether the scientific dispute is settled regarding the causes of Nazism and the correctness of the Sonderweg hypothesis, the relevant fact is that the Nazi-era German nation as a collective shared a responsibility for the atrocities that took place, and the crimes committed in the name of the German nation mean that the identity of the German nation is forever altered. Furthermore, the struggle to achieve ‘normal’ nationhood is suspect for another reason: there are no ‘normal’ nations, if by ‘normal’ we mean safe or harmless. The creation and maintenance of a national community necessarily entails processes of erecting borders, geographically as well as conceptually, exclusionary processes which always run the danger of degenerating into chauvinism and xenophobia.

The redemptionists, in turn, are acutely aware of the destructive potential inherent in nationalism; however, nationalism and national identity generally remain somewhat crudely defined, a fact that hinders redemptionists in dealing constructively with the nation’s relationship with its past. The stated goal is to overcome nationalism entirely and develop a ‘postnational’ identity. In pursuing this project, redemptionists inescapably run into what I have termed ‘the German paradox’: in order to continue to assume responsibility for its history, Germans must remain Germans – there must be some continuity in identity from the Nazi era and earlier to the present day – and with the maintenance of this German national identity inevitably comes the risk of reactivating the aspects of nationalism, the expression of which has made itself felt so catastrophically in the past. Rather than recognizing it, redemptionists have largely found themselves trapped by this paradox. Their postnationalism may, firstly, express itself as the resistance to the nation-state as such, a stance which (as pointed out above) is incompatible with German acceptance of historical responsibility. Secondly, given a more narrow definition (common in German discourse) of the concept of the nation as an ethnic as opposed to a civic community, postnationalism may be interpreted as a call for the replacement of ethnic German national identity with a new, ‘civic’ German identity based on the constitution. As the American example demonstrates, such a move does not fundamentally solve the problems inherent in nationalism but may rather serve to cloak and obscure them. Indeed, recent developments in German immigration and integration policy

hint that a new form of nationalism, hiding its exclusionary mechanisms behind rhetoric of democratic principle, is gaining hold.

Thus, the ‘German paradox’ mirrors the problematic inherent in nationalism: while it may provide space for public deliberation and political action, this space is inevitably bounded and demarcated in character. With this boundedness comes an element of arbitrariness – in terms of who gets to take part in the deliberation, and in terms of limits to the agenda – which is, in turn, masked with ideology. The content of this ideology of community may change over time, in order to better reflect common experiences, conflict and reconciliation between groups in society, etc.; ideally, this takes place through public discourse. While such discourse can never fully overcome the inner conflict which accrues to the space in which the deliberation takes place, it is possible to avoid some category mistakes which may obscure things further. One lesson drawn from the analysis of German debate on the national question is that ‘anti-nationalism’, common in German political discourse, may be counterproductive or ultimately self-defeating, if poorly conceived. Anti-nationalism purporting to criticize the nation-state as such but actually criticizing specific content of nationalist ideology, may have the effect that one ideology is simply replaced by another – which is, superficially, anti-nationalist in character. In this case, the exclusionary mechanisms inherent in nationalism would make themselves felt in an insidious fashion, hidden behind the illusion that the conflict inherent in the nation-state has been overcome.

According to Jürgen Habermas, at the root of the German people’s struggle with their national identity lies the entanglement of the principles of democracy with the contradictory principles of nationalism, that is, of pre-political ethnic community.385 This entanglement occurred with the French Revolution, and the unfortunate reliance of democrats on given pre-political sources of community has had dire consequences, as democracy has time and again deteriorated into mob rule and ethnocratic forms of government. In Habermas’ view, post-war German society (paralleling developments elsewhere in Europe) has seen a gradual disentanglement of the principles of democracy and nationalism, as ethnicity as a source of belonging has become discredited – a turn of events that has been especially pronounced in Germany due to the dire example of National Socialism. He considers this liberation of democracy from its national fetters as a historical gain of vast proportions and is understandably wary of any tendencies of a regression into nativism and chauvinism (and is, therefore, disheartened by the strengthening of the national discourse that occurred in conjunction with the Reunification). Summing up my argument I contend that Habermas’ conclusions are misleading, for two reasons. Firstly, the German discourse of com-

ing to terms with the past – of dealing with perceptions of German guilt – would not have been possible without a *demos*, a sense of ‘us’, a common identity that served as the – however disputed and questioned – focal point of this process of conciliation and working through the past. More generally: for all its flaws, national community provides democracy with a concrete forum, a bounded conceptual space, which makes deliberation possible. The ‘entanglement’ of democracy with nationalism is therefore, it would seem, deeper than Habermas allows; it is not a mere historical accident, but rather, national community provides an important function for the democratic process. Secondly, as I have pointed out, despite the tendencies in the direction of postnationalism that Habermas welcomes, the practice of democracy is still to a very large extent rooted in a national context. Any construction of a ‘postnational identity’ which takes place in a context saturated with nationalism runs the risk of acquiring, tacitly, some features of nationalism, although its explicit ideology is one of anti-nationalism. The policies of civic integrationism developing in Germany might very well turn out to be an example of such ‘covert nationalism’.
V. Two Normative Approaches

After dedicating Chapters III and IV to a study of the discourse of community and national identity in the United States and Germany, in the following chapter I will shift the focus somewhat. Building on the lessons learned from the contextual studies, I will analyse some significant theoretical attempts to deal with the central contentious issues in focus in the debates in the United States and Germany – that is, questions regarding the role of the nation as a source of community in democracy. David Miller’s liberal nationalism, and Jürgen Habermas’ constitutional patriotism, each provides us with a distinct solution to this problematic. Although starting from initial positions in normative questions that are not very far apart, while Miller ends up defending a variant of nationalism, Habermas rejects the nation as a source of political community and presents what he terms ‘constitutional patriotism’ as an alternative. Following an analysis of their ideas, which will also include some valuable commentaries on Habermas’ theory by Craig Calhoun, Thomas McCarthy and Seyla Benhabib, I will present my conclusions on the nature of the tensions inherent in the relation between democracy and nationalism, and some preliminary ideas about the preferable manner of dealing with these tensions.
I: Miller’s Liberal Nationalism

David Miller is one of the leading theorists in a group often labelled as ‘liberal nationalists’. His theory, expressed primarily in the books *On Nationality* (1995) and *Citizenship and National Identity* (2000), is a (qualified) defence of nationalism from a broadly liberal perspective, and in this sense may be said to belong to the ‘mainstream’ in contemporary political theory.\(^{386}\) Miller basically makes two kinds of claims in his writings on nationalism: firstly, he argues that there are some ‘special responsibilities’ owed to fellow nationals above and beyond those responsibilities owed to mankind at large; and secondly, that some kind of community, specifically in the form of a common national identity, is a prerequisite for democracy. That is, Miller’s theory of liberal nationalism constitutes, in its various aspects, a contribution to two distinct fields in political theory: (global) justice theory and theory of democracy. In keeping with the general focus of this book, I will concentrate on the second of these aspects – that is, Miller’s defence of nationalism from the point of view of democratic theory.

Miller starts off his account with a fairly nuanced discussion of the concept of national identity.\(^{387}\) He delineates this concept sharply from that of an ethnic group, defining the latter concept (as he himself admits, somewhat stipulatively) as ‘a community formed by common descent and sharing cultural features (language, religion, etc.) that mark it off from neighbouring communities’.\(^{388}\) Nations need not be rooted in ethnic communities, although they often are, and multi-ethnic nations do exist.\(^{389}\) Instead, Miller points to five other factors as defining features of nationalism. First, nations are constructed in the sense that they exist only if their members believe they form a national community and are committed politically to this fact. Second, nationalities are historic communities, upheld through the awareness of a shared past and of a projected common future. Third, a national identity is active in character; nations are groupings of people who in some sense act collectively as a community. Fourth, national identity has a geographical dimension as it is binds a community of people to a specific location. Fifth and finally, a nation is held together by a common public culture – a concept which is somewhat vague and undeveloped in Miller’s account, although he does say that it has to do with a ‘set of characteristics’ that members of a nation have in common.\(^{390}\)

Miller goes on to make the claim that national identity has a normative significance, firstly because it entails specific obligations of justice and secondly because a national identity serves as an essential basis for democratic

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\(^{386}\) Miller 1995; Miller 2000.

\(^{387}\) Miller 1995, p. 21.

\(^{388}\) Ibid., p. 19.

\(^{389}\) Ibid., p. 19ff.

\(^{390}\) Ibid., p. 22-25.
community. In what follows, I will investigate this latter claim. Miller concentrates his argument around the concept of *citizenship*, thereby, as he notes, adding to an expanding body of literature in the field of political theory in which ‘citizenship’ (variously defined) has been evoked as a solution to the problem of securing peaceful and democratic coexistence in an age of increasing ‘cultural fragmentation’. Rejecting, in turn, liberal and libertarian notions of citizenship, Miller opts for the conception of citizenship which stems from the republican tradition. In the republican view, citizenship is not simply a set of rights, as in the liberal conception, but is a matter of attitudes and virtues as well: a good citizen is someone who ‘identifies with the political community to which he or she belongs, and is committed to promoting its common good through active participation in its political life’. Miller is keen to disavow himself of the questionable claim of (at least some) classic republicans that participation in politics constitutes the highest form of human endeavour; what he defends is ‘something weaker: that it should be part of each person’s good to be engaged at some level in political debate, so that the laws and policies of the state do not appear to him or her simply as alien impositions but as the outcome of a reasonable agreement to which he or she has been party’. Note that the choice of the words ‘reasonable agreement’ reflects Miller’s commitment to a deliberative theory of democracy. Although this is not completely clear from his account, what Miller seems to say is that, given that democracy is a good, active participation in the democratic process is a good with respect to each individual citizen since democracy would not survive without this active participation, and from this follows the necessity of the presence in the citizenry of virtues underpinning participation. Further, this commitment to partake in the democratic process must be directed at a *specific* polity to which the citizen owes allegiance: if there is no consensus among people as to what polity they belong, no reasonable agreement is possible – ‘citizenship in this mode [cannot] cope with radical disagreement about the very existence of the state of the kind which gives rise to separatist movements’. Therefore, ‘a common sense of nationality is an essential background to politics of this [deliberative] kind’.

In what follows, I will not dispute the basic claim that agreement on boundaries is of fundamental importance for a functioning deliberative process within a democratic polity – which is Miller’s principal argument for national community as a basis for democracy. This statement, however, is very broad in character and does not tell us much about the precise nature of the national community that Miller envisages – only that it is some kind of

391 Miller 2000, p. 41.
392 Ibid., p. 53.
393 Ibid., p. 58.
394 Ibid., p. 8-23.
395 Ibid., p. 60.
396 Ibid.
overarching community with which all members of the polity identify. My method of teasing out the nature of this posited community is to locate the points of controversy, that is, the points at which other thinkers have criticized nationalist positions (such as Miller’s), and to analyse Miller’s response to such criticism.

Miller on the Politics of Recognition

One way to more clearly grasp what kind of national community Miller defends is to focus on his position on what he variously terms ‘the politics of recognition’, ‘the politics of difference’ and ‘identity politics’, a position I will proceed to spell out in this section. Miller’s choice of adversary in this context is Iris Marion Young.397 Young presents the familiar claim that the idea of universalism is illusory and that what has in political theory been regarded as a culturally neutral perspective is in fact one saturated with norms ensuring the continuing domination of privileged groups (men, whites etc.); further, the idea of a neutral public sphere is erroneous for the same reasons.398 The individualist political theory supported by false universalism must therefore give way to a theory founded upon justice between groups rather than individuals. Public policy should reflect such justice between groups rather than some biased idea of a common good, and should explicitly affirm group identities through symbolic politics.399 This idea of the common good, of course, is central to the republican model of democratic politics that Miller defends.400

In his rebuttal of Young’s theory and of other theorists of the ‘politics of recognition’, Miller argues that regardless of the contempt of such theorists for any idea of an overarching national community, the idea of recognition itself seems to presume such a community: ‘We ask for recognition from those with whom we already identify as members of a larger community such as a nation … This point is worth stressing because advocates of the politics of recognition often seek to disparage these larger identities as artefacts of the dominant groups’.401 Surprisingly, Miller does not regard this observation as evidence of the existence of common ground between the recognition theorists and himself, but rather assumes that the various theories of recognition are dependent on, and therefore subsumed by, some theory of nationalism.

399 Ibid.
400 Miller 2000, p. 65.
401 Ibid., p. 76.
In passing, it may be noted that Miller also makes the remarkable argument that the ultimate goal of all groups involved in the ‘politics of recognition’ is to ensure their own survival as groups by establishing their respective identities as, once and for all, politically relevant and therefore deserving of public support. The underpinning of this argument is less than convincing, relying as it does on little more than anecdotal evidence as to the intentions of group leaders. Perhaps more relevantly, Miller argues that the active identity politics espoused by Young disrupt the process of democratic will-formation by a priori privileging certain identities over others, and do not take into account the fact that identities are always in a state of flux. The argument Miller seems to have in mind is that the question of which identities are politically relevant at any given point in time cannot be settled in such a priori fashion but must be made the object of a democratic process. If this indeed is his argument, it is a valid one. However, Miller seemingly contradicts this idea in the very same chapter of Citizenship and Nationality. Rejecting Young’s claim that the ideal of national unity is tantamount to the assimilation of minority groups to a national culture, Miller argues that a shared public culture may exist alongside a plurality of ‘private’ cultures which ‘help define people’s identities as members of sectional groups (including perhaps minority languages). Such a public/private distinction seems disconcertingly close to the a priori settlement of the political relevance of given identities Miller previously criticized – that is, unless this distinction itself is made the object of deliberation in the public sphere. But then, is this the same public sphere that is already suffused with national culture? There appears to be an important tension here, of which Miller is seemingly unaware.

In his dismissal of the politics of identity and recognition, Miller does not investigate the claim that active recognition in a given society of certain groups who have traditionally been disparaged and disadvantaged may be a necessary condition for the individual members of these groups to fully participate in the political and social life of the society. It is not evident that the politics of recognition in some form (although not the one proposed by Young) is incompatible with an idea of republican community. Miller states that ‘claims about the inherent biases of the public realm do not stand up to close scrutiny’. The key word here is inherent: by narrowing the discussion to the question of whether the notion of the public sphere in the abstract contains bias Miller avoids the weaker, but plausible, claim that actually existing public spheres have usually or always contained biases – in terms of
gender, ethnicity, sexuality etc. This weaker claim is actually the more relevant one in the context of an analysis of Miller’s defence of nationalism, as one could make the argument that nationalism is in fact precisely such a bias; if so, the relevant normative question – which Miller does not deal with satisfactorily – is whether nationalism in any form is compatible with a public sphere such as it is envisioned in deliberative democratic theory.

Miller on National Responsibility

In his most recent book, *National Responsibility and Global Justice*, Miller presents an interesting addition to his normative theory of nationalism.406 As the title makes clear, the primary focus of the book is global justice; however, one chapter in particular contains a development of Miller’s thought on the sources and the justification of nationalism. Miller poses the question of whether members of a given nation may be held responsible for misdeeds committed by (previous generations of) that nation in the past.407 He argues that although such a conclusion may offend our liberal instincts, there are cases in which such responsibility does obtain. Collective responsibility, as such, may arise when individuals a) form what Miller calls a ‘like-minded group’ or b) take part in a ‘cooperative practice’, the latter category of which (Miller claims) a nation is an example.408 Further, to make the case about inherited responsibilities, Miller draws a parallel to some basic common law principles: while I cannot, for example, be punished for theft committed by my deceased father, I do not have the right to any good acquired through his illegal activities; this ill-gotten property should, instead, be returned to its rightful owner. Correspondingly, Miller claims, if the members of a nation have collectively profited from theft from or exploitation of some group of people, they may be morally obligated to pay restitutions.409 Situations in which the crimes committed are not strictly economic in nature – when the offending group cannot be said to be better off economically because of the misdeeds, or the offended group worse off – are less clear-cut. However, Miller claims that there are such situations when, for example, a public statement or gesture such as an apology by the nation’s leaders may be warranted. He makes the argument that a national culture, and the pride taken in the achievements of that culture, in itself is a resource enjoyed by the members of a nation; and in order to be able to justly take pride in our nation we must ‘at the same time acknowledg[e] responsibility, and the need to apologize, for past actions that were harmful to others.410 As an example, Miller

407 Ibid., pp. 135-161.
408 Ibid., p 114-134.
409 Ibid., p. 135-161.
410 Miller 2007, p. 159.
mentions Germany, where the ‘ongoing reflection on the Holocaust and its sources has helped to strengthen Germans’ commitment to their present democratic constitution’. Very broadly, this observation is correct: the identity of the democratic post-war German public culture has been largely constituted by the absolute disavowal of National Socialism and by the commemoration of its victims. However, if we interpret Miller’s statement as a defence of national community as integral to democratic responsibility-taking, his conclusions regarding the German case are much too sweeping. As we have seen in the study of the discourse on German national identity in Chapter IV, the protracted post-war debate on German identity in the light of the experiences of World War II was characterized by recurring suspicions (usually voiced by intellectuals on the Left) that the foundations of which German democracy was built were not sound; that remainders of authoritarianism and xenophobia lingered on beneath the democratic facade, the ritualized public culture of remembrance and the lip-service paid to liberalism and humanitarianism. While nationalism, as Miller is keen to point out, may be a source of a culture of collective responsibility-taking, it may also serve as a cloaking device, concealing ugly truths about our common legacy. In the German context, the national perspective provided the focal point without which a collective reflection on the German past would probably not have been possible; however, there was always the threat that patriotism would generate a new mythos that would limit or distort the public debate. (The latter point is echoed by Winkler in his claim that, during the 1980s, Auschwitz gradually came to constitute a foundational myth for the German Republic.) We should be aware of this tension in the function of national identity within a public democratic culture before uncritically accepting Miller’s defence of nationalism.

There is an apparent paradox in the fact that the creation and maintenance of a national identity may, as Miller notes, be a way of dealing with the past and gaining ‘salutary lessons of how the nation should not behave’, while it may just as well serve to obscure or obfuscate history, and to hide uncomfortable truths about ourselves or our forebears. How are we to make sense of this? Is there a ‘good’ and a ‘bad’ kind of national identity, or are they two sides of the same coin? It is my conclusion that Miller’s work, while a valuable contribution to the normative theory of nationalism, does not delve deeply enough to offer an answer to these questions.

411 Miller 2007, p. 159.
412 Winkler 2007, p. 555f.
413 Miller 2007, p. 159.
Conclusion: Some Critical Remarks on Miller’s Theory

It is not hard to accept Miller’s republican argument that some kind of common, overarching identity and sense of community is necessary for democracy to function (and, in any case, it is not this proposition that is the primary focus of this dissertation, but rather the questions of how this identity is best to be constructed and what its relation is to the basic principles of democracy). However, his normative position is problematic for a number of reasons.

At the outset Miller’s normative theory of nationalism looks promising, with its nuanced definition of the nation as a politically constructed community, active in character, and held together by a shared interpretation of the past and of a projected future (to name three of his five criteria). However, the conception of the nation spelled out in his work turns out to be excessively cultural, and insufficiently political. Miller conceives of the nation as a kind of culturally encapsulated totality, within the boundaries of which the realization of a deliberative democracy, with a viable public culture, is possible; he does not pay enough attention to the nature and effects of the borders (conceptual as well as geographical) that constitute this bounded community. From our studies of the public debate on national identity in the United States as well as in Germany, we learn that this national community is not a static entity but is rather continually created anew, in discourse as well as practice, as new collective experiences are interpreted and incorporated into the national identity, and that these successive reconstructions have political ramifications. We have witnessed this in the battles in America over national history, as well as in the more extreme case of Germany’s confrontations with its national past. In this way, the nation is indeed constructed in terms of identity and culture – but it is the primarily political nature of this process of linkage that is essential. Summing up, there are two basic problems with Miller’s theory: 1. His analysis does not do justice to the fact that the nation is a dynamic phenomenon, political in character, based on practice, and therefore must be analysed in a temporal perspective. Miller does contend that the relationship of a national community to its common past and imagined future is one criterion of the national character of such a community; but while this analysis seems to cry out for a diachronic, dynamic perspective on the historically situated and constructed nature of national community, his work does not fully bear out such a perspective. 2. Miller does not adequately confront the consequences of the link national community establishes between the political and the cultural – consequences that may include the, juridical or discursive, exclusion of minority groups. The underlying tension is evident in Miller’s position on the relation between the overarching identity and the identities of subgroups contained within it. According to Young, the establishment of a common ‘civic’ identity always takes
place at the cost of minorities and subgroups. Whether or not we agree with this conclusion, Miller, with his resolute resistance to any but the most fleeting and unsubstantial connection between the individual and some subgroup in society, certainly does little to assuage such fears. To raise a related question, how are we to regard the element of myth in the construction of a national identity from the perspective of the truth-seeking process of deliberative democracy, to which Miller is committed? He states that nationalist myths which originate within the competitive public fora of a democratic, open society may be accepted, but the that myths foisted upon citizens by an autocratic regime are not. This answer does not seem entirely satisfactory, as the competition even within an open society need not be a fair one, but is most probably riddled with bias stemming from class, cultural, or gender bias.

What we need is some account of the role and nature of community in democracy which offers more in terms of normative guidance, as well as a more dynamic account of the role of community in democracy, particularly in relation to memory, public culture, and identity. In the following chapter, I will look at the works of a group of theorists – the most influential of whom is Jürgen Habermas – who accept the same basic republican argument as Miller, but take seriously the inherent normative problems of nationalism, question the link between republican community and national identity, and attempt to normatively account for the dynamics of the relation between a common identity and the identities of subgroups in a democratic society.

II: The Habermasian Tradition

Constitutional Patriotism

As we have seen, constitutional patriotism emerged in the Federal Republic of Germany as a response to the moral challenges of the situation in which German society found itself in the wake of World War II. Traditional German nationalism being thoroughly discredited, the democratic constitution of the Federal Republic was seen by many as the only legitimate source of unity in German society. The theory of constitutional patriotism, originally put forward by political scientist Dolf Sternberger (although he did not invent the term itself) in the 1970s, can be regarded as the theoretical expression of this general notion.\(^{416}\) Sternberger built on the republican tradition originating in the works of Aristotle, arguing that strong bonds of civic community as well as the inculcation of civic virtue in the citizenry were of vital importance for a functioning, vibrant democracy. The foremost value for Sternberger was *Staatsfreundschaft*, meaning loyalty to and affective ties with the democratic institutions of the state on the part of the citizens. Solely through the means of this affection or loyalty could democracy be upheld and the threats of right- or left-wing extremism, which had so fatally influenced German society in the past, be averted. Sternberger was adamant that this form of patriotism was distinct from base nationalism, claiming that the republican sources on which he drew predated, and were thus untainted by, the nationalist strands of thought which arose with the Romantic Movement.

Political scientist Jan-Werner Müller discusses two related lines of criticism which may be levelled against this early, as it were pre-Habermasian theory of constitutional patriotism.\(^{417}\) Firstly, the vigilant, almost militant loyalty towards the institutions of the Federal Republic which Sternberger endorses has a distinctly conservative slant. This in fact became evident during the 1970s as Sternberger defended the harsh (according to many left-wing intellectuals, repressive) methods employed by the federal government in its efforts to root out left-wing terrorism. Secondly, the concept of *Staatsfreundschaft* emphasizes the vertical aspect of democracy, i.e. the relation between the state and individual citizens, rather than the horizontal aspect, i.e. the links between citizens which enable political action.

Habermasian constitutional patriotism is of a more abstract character than Sternberger’s version, taking as its point of reference the principles of the democratic constitution rather than the institutions themselves, and it lacks the latter’s conservative and vertical character. Habermas’ theory is opposed to Sternberger’s fierce defence of the institutions of the Federal Republic.

\(^{416}\) This section owes much to Müller, Jan-Werner, 2007: *Constitutional Patriotism*, Princeton University Press, Princeton and Oxford.

\(^{417}\) Müller 2007.
(‘militant democracy’), and entails a verdict of this defence as ahistorical. The democratic constitution of the Federal Republic was imposed from outside, and it is up to the German people to make it their own through a continuing process of public discourse (and, possibly, amendment) rather than to defend it dogmatically.

Habermas constructs his theory of constitutional patriotism in opposition to the ideology which has historically been the dominant source of community in democracy during the modern era – namely, nationalism. He agrees with the predominant view that nationalism has served to anchor and to constitute a social basis for democracy, but argues that the link between democracy and nationalism is functional, not conceptual. In the present historical circumstances, whereby globalization is rendering national identity and national culture irrelevant as sources of solidarity, Habermas argues that a ‘functional equivalent’ of nationalism is needed, which takes as its point of reference the universal, democratic values inscribed in the constitution rather than some particular culture.

It is of crucial importance that although the principles forming the civic glue of Habermas’ constitutional patriotism are universal in character; however, they must in each specific political community be interwoven with the political culture of that community. This process serves to anchor constitutional patriotism in the local context and thus gives it an element of particularity. Further, Habermas describes constitutional patriotism as a ‘postconventional’ identity. In the postmodern condition, people still relate the social structures associated with nation, class etc. in their construction of a personal identity, but do not take these ‘conventional’ identities as given. Traditional norms and identities are ‘de-centred’ and subjected to critical scrutiny from a universalist perspective. Constitutional patriotism is an example of how this process works on a national level, in each case building on a national tradition which is de-centred and transformed in sometimes radical or paradoxical ways. Germany is a case in point: ‘Our form of life is connected with that of our parents and grandparents through a web of familial, local, political, and intellectual traditions that is difficult to entangle – that is, through a historical milieu that made us what and who we are today.’

By means of this, as Ciaran Cronin has pointed out, paradoxically organic conception of nationhood, Habermas contends that the guilt of the Holocaust constitutes part of (post-conventional) German identity.

One of the seminal articles in which Habermas sketches his theory of constitutional patriotism is ‘Citizenship and National Identity’, first published in 1990. The thrust of Habermas’ argument is that (republican, democratic or constitutional) patriotism is distinct from nationalism and lacks the dangers concomitant with the latter. He is aware, however, that the distinct

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419 Cronin 2003, p. 17.
nature of these respective phenomena is far from a self-evident fact. Habermas notes that, as has frequently been pointed out, democracy and the nation-state (and therefore, one must presume, nationalism) are the twin children of the French Revolution. The process of democratization that broadly characterizes macropolitical development during the 19th century occurred in conjunction with the development of nation-states, and in this process France provided the model for other European countries. According to Habermas, the nation-state ‘laid the foundation for the ethnic and cultural homogeneity that made it possible, beginning in the late 18th century, to forge ahead with the democratization of government, albeit at the cost of excluding and oppressing minorities.’ Implicit in Habermas’ argument is the recognition that this linkage between democracy and nationalism is a troublesome fact for any liberal or progressive defender of any kind of communal ethos or identity pertaining to a particular democratic polity. Habermas, however, argues that this link is not conceptual but functional. Historically, nationalism has served as the vehicle for the burgeoning republicanism associated with democratization, rather than being implicit in this republicanism. The self-determination of free citizens, as first conceived by Rousseau, is coterminous with the republican ethos but conceptually prior to nationalism, as nationalism consists of the appropriation by the self-determining community of citizens of certain cultural traditions which, through this act of appropriation, are imbued with political significance. In the next stage these cultural traditions, ‘filtered by historiography and reflection’, are communicated through the mass media and serve to provide the public discourse with structure, depth and coherence; yet they are of relative rather than absolute significance with respect to the democratic community. Democratic republicanism, of which Habermas is a champion, is thus, correctly understood, free of all charges of being coterminous with nationalism. Instead, democratic republicanism presupposes a liberal political culture, where citizens afford each other a threefold mutual recognition as individuals, as equal political subjects, and as members of ethnic or cultural communities.

421 Ibid.
422 Ibid.
423 Ibid., p. 495.
424 Ibid.
425 Ibid., p. 493-499.
426 Ibid., p. 493. It should be noted that the account of the role of tradition in democratic discourse is my interpretation and is not found verbatim in Habermas’ article.
427 Ibid., p. 496, 499.
Constitutional Patriotism under Scrutiny

Thomas McCarthy, in an interesting commentary, notes that Habermas’ general theory (as stated in Between Facts and Norms) allows for an element of ‘particularity’: any actually existing system of rights can only be a situated interpretation of the normative idea which should guide every legitimate constitution-framing process, and will thus contain ‘ethical’ elements, reflecting the particular cultures and forms of life of the political community in question.\(^{428}\) However, McCarthy points to a tension in Habermas’ argument as the latter speaks of the “‘neutrality’ of the law vis-à-vis internal ethical differentiations” and of the need for “‘decoupling’ political integration from the various forms of subgroup and subcultural integration among the population of a democratic constitutional state”.\(^{429}\) McCarthy calls into question whether such a decoupling is feasible, given that ‘there can be no culturally neutral system of law and politics’.\(^{430}\) He argues that Habermas’ distinction between civic and ethnic culture, which underlies the theory of constitutional patriotism, is overstated and ignores the fact of the ‘interpenetration of public-political and public-cultural spheres’ which was an important theme in Habermas’ earlier works.\(^{431}\) Not finding the idea of constitutional patriotism as a ‘neutral political culture’, distinct from the ‘ethnic cultures’ of the various subgroups in society, very promising, McCarthy instead takes up another thread in Habermas’ theory: constitutional patriotism as ‘impartial’ rather than ‘neutral’, as the contingent, negotiated agreement between such subgroups, as embodied in a particular constitutional tradition. However, McCarthy does not develop this line of argument further. Craig Calhoun, in an article titled ‘Imagining Solidarity: Cosmopolitanism, Constitutional Patriotism, and the Public Sphere’, likewise offers a lucid critique, not unsympathetic to the basic outline of Habermas’ project. Calhoun emphasizes the need for social solidarity in order for democracy to function, arguing that the engendering of such solidarity is a creative process, of ‘imagining’ and of ‘world-making’ in Arendt’s sense, and that one of the primary functions of the public sphere is to provide the locus for such processes to take place. Habermas and other postnationalists, Calhoun claims, have largely overlooked this fact, focusing almost exclusively on the constitution as a legal framework (as opposed to constitution-making as the creation of social relationships) and on the public sphere as an arena for rational deliberation as opposed to discourse on ethical questions concerning conceptions of the common good.\(^{432}\) The latter point makes clear that Calhoun’s argument in

\(^{429}\) Ibid., p. 196, 195.
\(^{430}\) Ibid., p 195.
\(^{431}\) Ibid., p. 199.
part consists of an internal criticism of Habermas; like McCarthy, Calhoun turns Habermas’ ideas on the ethical permeation of the public sphere against the latter’s theory on constitutional patriotism. Further, and in relation to this point, Calhoun claims that Habermas and other postnationalists somewhat misconstrue the phenomenon of nationalism, often ‘equating nationalism with ethnonationalism and understanding the latter primarily through its most distasteful examples’, while overlooking the fact that nations are ‘modern products of shared political, cultural, and social participation, not mere passive inheritances’. Calhoun argues that the vilifying of nationalism is coupled to a failure to realize that political culture in practice depends on ‘richer ways of constituting life together’ and is thus in itself not enough to provide a basis for solidarity.

Another intriguing argument is put forward by Seyla Benhabib in the book *Another Cosmopolitanism*. It is not explicitly a response to the theory of constitutional patriotism, but may be interpreted as such, as it represents a different approach to the problematic of democracy and community, while remaining within the Habermasian tradition. Benhabib’s stated aim is to show how one can mediate between cosmopolitan norms on the one hand and republican self-determination on the other. She is wholly supportive of the gradual emergence of an ‘international human rights regime’, which has been taking place ever since the end of World War II, yet, she takes equally seriously the right of the people to write their own laws, which lies at the heart of democracy as a normative tradition conceived. The relation between these two ‘goods’ are, however, not as straightforwardly conflictual as one might think – or so Benhabib claims. Taking as a point of reference the political theory of Jean-Jacques Rousseau she speaks of a ‘paradox of democratic legitimacy’, remarking that the rights of Man and the rights of the Citizen are not contradictory but are, rather, coimplicated: “‘We, the people’ refers to a particular human community, circumscribed in space and time, sharing a particular culture, history and legacy; yet this people establishes itself as a democratic body by acting in the name of the ‘universal’.” Benhabib attempts to show how they may be mediated, and to this end introduces two concepts: ‘democratic iterations’ and ‘jurisgenerative processes’. She adopts the concept of ‘iteration’ from Derrida, in order to underscore the fact that norms are not static phenomena but are instead constantly reinterpreted as they are restated and applied – each interpretation thus constituting an ‘iteration’ of the norm in question. Further, following Robert Cover, she argues that there is a disjunction between ‘law as power’ and ‘law as mean-

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433 Calhoun 2002, p. 150.
434 Ibid., p. 151.
435 Benhabib 2006.
436 Ibid., p. 27.
437 Ibid., p. 32.
438 Ibid., p. 47ff.
ing’: even though positive law is an expression of power, it simultaneously (even in authoritarian circumstances) generates a ‘surplus’ of meaning over which lawmakers have no control. Thus, a people may fruitfully reappropriate and reinterpret such norms and principles, giving rise to ‘jurisgenerative processes’ which may result in ‘the augmentation of the meaning of rights’ and ‘the growth of the political authorship by ordinary individuals’.\textsuperscript{439} Benhabib underscores that the concepts of democratic iterations and jurisgenerative processes are not to be understood teleologically: not all such processes yield positive results. Rather, she deploys these terms in order to conceptualize democratic norms in a processual manner, which ‘permits us to think of creative interventions that mediate between universal norms and the will of democratic majorities’.\textsuperscript{440} Benhabib envisages a stage at which these processes have led to the point of transcendence of nation-states and, possibly, a global regime.

**Constitutional Patriotism: Analysis**

Certainly, Habermas’ account of the relation between democracy and nationalism, simultaneously a statement on the normative status of constitutional patriotism, is a step forward from David Miller’s more static description of the role of national community in democracy. However, his theory has some serious flaws and is in need of further development. In general, the problems with Habermas’ theory of constitutional patriotism can be summed up as an inadequately account of the role of process versus substance. McCarthy is on the right track when he questions the ambition of ‘decoupling’ political integration from integration into a cultural community.\textsuperscript{441} The aim of this decoupling, crudely put, is to keep the political realm processual, free from substantive, cultural elements. However, it is questionable whether such an ambition is at all compatible with the basic purpose of the theory of constitutional patriotism – that of providing a normative account of political integration in a democratic society. Habermas apparently accepts the proposition that such integration necessarily has a cultural component, as it is constituted by attitudes and practices (presumably virtues such as loyalty to institutions and mutual respect, communication and recognition among citizens). We therefore end up with Habermas’ strange notion of a ‘political culture’, somehow distinct from the general culture, and somehow more acceptable. The dichotomy of process and substance hovers over this distinction, political culture being associated with process and general culture with substance; however, this dichotomy is anomalous when applied in this con-

\textsuperscript{439} Benhabib 2006, p. 49.
\textsuperscript{440} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{441} This is my interpretation of McCarthy, who, as we have seen, speaks of ‘subgroup and subcultural integration’ in relation to political integration. See note 429.
text, as surely culture (whether political or general) has a processual as well as a substantive aspect. At this point, the reader may recall the criticism that was levelled at the concept of ‘civic nationalism’ in Chapter II. To once again quote the words of Bernard Yack: it is not only political values that define the identity of a nation, but, inevitably, also ‘the contingent inheritance of distinctive experiences and cultural memories’. Habermas, it seems, makes the same mistake as the proponents of a civic nationalism.

So, what are the potential consequences of confusing process and substance in this manner? In Chapter III, on the discourse about national identity in the United States, we saw some of them. For example, David Hollinger is fairly typical in his description of American identity in terms of procedural, political values – ‘the American Creed’, as they are sometimes known – as opposed to substantive culture. Yet, while it is true that this political creed is central to American self-understanding, we must be aware that American identity is not simply constituted by the political creed itself, but by a particular constitutional culture, rich in symbolism and traditions of veneration, that has evolved with these political values as its core. Something like this is probably what Calhoun has in mind when he claims that political culture depends on ‘richer ways of constituting life together’; in other words, the political culture and the general culture are, in practice, intertwined. If we, like Hollinger, make the category mistake of confusing the content of the ideas with the culture and identity of which the ideas form but one element, we may be blind to the fact that, whether based on political values or ethnicity, nationalism is still nationalism. The political culture of a ‘civic’ nation such as the United States runs the risk of being blinded by the myth of itself as a quintessentially democratic nation. The constitutional patriotism of Jürgen Habermas, unfortunately, carries with it the same risk.

What has been said so far does not amount to any assertion that the dichotomy of process versus substance is irrelevant to the questions at hand. In fact, the case is quite the opposite. However, we need to deploy this dichotomy at the right level of abstraction, or we end up with the anomaly of the ‘purely civic’ national identity or of Habermas’ (strictly) political culture. I suggest that we should not be looking, primarily, for the right ‘kind’ of substantive element, the right kind of national identity. Rather, the processual element comes to the fore in a temporal perspective, in the form of continual public reflection on the collective experiences of the polity. This idea will be developed further in the following section. Note, further, that the application of the process/substance distinction at this level of abstraction drains Habermas’ critique of nationalism of its meaning. A national identity inevitably contains cultural or other biases – however, this fact is just as inevitable when it comes to any public culture in general.

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442 Yack 1999, p. 106.
Constitutional Patriotism and National Community: An Alternative Account

As we have seen, Calhoun makes the comment that postnationalists such as Habermas have an oversimplified understanding of nationalism, equating it with ethnonationalism.\textsuperscript{444} In what follows, I will attempt to untangle the intellectual consequences of this flaw. The context in which Habermas’ theory of constitutional patriotism first emerged – the intellectual culture of the Federal Republic at a time when reflection on the German past was especially intense – is, again, a good place to start. Nationalism as a source of political community was, in the view of Habermas, thoroughly discredited; yet, his reflections on the Nazi past nevertheless had an unwaveringly national perspective. There is no question that the responsibility of honouring the victims of National Socialism and of drawing the right lessons from history falls harder on Germans than on mankind in general. Let us recall the quote: ‘Our form of life is connected with that of our parents and grandparents through a web of familial, local, political, and intellectual traditions that is difficult to entangle – that is, through a historical milieu that made us what and who we are today.’\textsuperscript{445} Germans of today find themselves shaped by a lifeworld constituted by the forces of nationalism, and their reflection and engagement with the past therefore takes on a nationalist quality: taking part in national German culture, they cannot escape the national past. As pointed out earlier, the reflected experience of Nazism and the Holocaust becomes a part of German identity. However, Habermas claims that this is an example of a post-conventional identity, whereby traditional notions of belonging are transcended or, in his terminology, de-centred. Post-war German identity is, therefore, not a national but a post-national identity. This is where my analysis parts ways with that of Habermas. Arguably, his notion that post-war German identity is ‘post-conventional’ stems from his simplistic notion of the nation as a pre-political (and therefore conventional) community, with the ensuing connotations of tribalism and primordialism. As we have seen, this understanding of the nation is lacking: national community – although in many instances cast as ‘ancient’ in the mythologizing of its own past – is very much a political community, constituting itself in a historical plane. The post-war German political identity, therefore, is more aptly described as a national identity – although its content has been thoroughly transformed through the experiences of Nazism, World War II, partition and reunion, etc. – than a postnational identity.\textsuperscript{446} The outcome of the many battles over history from the 1960s onwards may be described as a kind of ‘settlement’ – this is probably what Thomas McCarthy has in mind when he argues for a con-

\textsuperscript{444} Calhoun 2002, p. 150.
\textsuperscript{445} Habermas 1989, p. 233.
cept of constitutional patriotism centring on contingent, negotiated agreement rather than an aseptically neutral constitutional culture. Such a perspective, less idealizing than Habermas’ own, has a further advantage in the fact that it lets us see the potentially problematic features of the settlement that has been reached. What has emerged is a culture and language of ritualized remembrance, which has arguably allowed contemporary Germans some degree of closure – but which might, feasibly, block out alternative perspectives and narratives, or deteriorate into empty symbolism and ritual. In other words: we are better equipped to deal with the potentially negative aspects of nationalism if we recognize nationalism for what it is. Idealizing the settlement as a precursor to a quasi-utopian ‘postnational’ condition, whereby democracy has rid itself of any connections to nationalism, may be an unwise option.

As we have seen, Habermas conceives of the relationship between democracy and nationalism as a functional one: nationalism has historically provided the democratic process with a criterion of membership in the demos – a simplistic one, based on descent – something which it cannot generate itself. More advanced studies of nationalism have found that matters are more complex, as nationalism is itself a political phenomenon, coming into being as the polity constitutes itself through the construction of a national historical narrative (a founding mythos of some sort). Furthermore, this political identity develops over time, dynamically, as new circumstances and experiences, filtered through public culture, leads to changes in the way the nation perceives itself, its past, and its projected future. Contemporary democratic publics find themselves inhabiting a lifeworld shaped by nationalism. A further possible explanation of the fact that the link between democracy and nationalism seems to remain is that nationalism continues to provide a valuable service for democracy: it provides a given democratic polity with a structuring of space and time that makes action possible. In the case of Germany, we find both mechanisms at work. United by a common past shaped by nationalism, contemporary Germans constitute a nation, whether they like it or not. Furthermore, this national context has provided Germans with the structure needed to fashion a meaningful historical narrative and constructively deal with their common past.

Notwithstanding what has been said thus far, my contention is that there is indeed, in one sense, a conflict between democracy and nationalism, but it is a conflict more intricate than Habermas believes. A national narrative provides structure and meaning but inevitably blocks alternative narratives, or pushes them into the peripheries. There is therefore an enduring tension between the democratic process – if we accept the view of the democratic process as one of truth-seeking – and nationalism. This is why the notion of ‘settlement’ is a helpful one. In a democracy with a well functioning public

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culture, the settlement of any given point in time will reflect a kind of consen-
sus on central ethical matters. This consensus, however, will always be sub-
ject to criticism, and will inevitably change over time, as new experi-
ences are made and new perspectives enrich public debate. The democratic pro-
cess must always be understood as unfinished, and all conclusions must re-
main tentative.

Seyla Benhabib’s version of the Habermasian theory – while an im-
provement on constitutional patriotism – no less than Habermas’ own falls
victim to idealization. Benhabib perceptively points out the conflictual na-
ature of an international human rights regime with the (just as legitimate)
rights of self-government, which is necessarily situated and contingent in
nature. Yet, her assumption that the ‘jurisgenerative processes’ of which she
speaks carry in the direction of the transcendence of nation-states and toward
a global regime is certainly questionable. On the contrary, if we accept that
the contingency and rootedness of democracy comprise an indispensable
good, the tension between process and substance (in my terminology) is
certain to remain, even if the particular form of the nation-state as we know
it is transcended. As people take democracy into their own hands, it will
inevitably become rooted in concrete circumstances, in culture and prac-
tice.448 What we need are the intellectual tools to better understand the nature
of the problems generated by this tension between the abstract and the con-
crete, and the best method for dealing with them.

Conclusions: Liberal Nationalism versus Constitutional
Patriotism

David Miller has been one of the foremost philosophers to defend (a variety
of) nationalism, on a normative plane, in recent decades. He puts forward an
argument for democracy based on republican values: nationalism constitutes
a vital source of community for democracy, linking the citizens of a given
polity with meaningful interpretations of the common past and allowing
them to envisage a common future. However, one could ask if such a prac-
tice does not, if unchecked, give the citizens of a democracy (or rather a
majority among them) carte blanche to invent whatever history for them-
selves they see fitting, erasing uncomfortable facts from the history books
and arbitrarily elevating leaders of the past to the status of unassailable he-
roes. David Miller does not sympathize with such an interpretation – in fact,

448 Robert Post expresses this point well in a brief aside in his introduction to Benhabib’s
*Another Cosmopolitanism*: ‘Even after endless reiterations, human society seems to remain
recalcitrantly divided. Perhaps this is because persons tend to inhabit solidarities produced by
shared memories of time past and by anticipated achievements in time future. The ethnos may
in fact be nothing more than the social embodiment of these temporal modalities, the social
form of these orientations toward past and future.’ (p. 9)
he claims that members of a nation have a responsibility to rectify injustices committed by that nation in the past – but neither does he provide a sufficiently robust idea about the relationship between truth-seeking and nationalist myth in democracy.

This leads us to Jürgen Habermas. Deeply influenced by the impact of German historical guilt upon the first post-war generation, Habermas is deeply suspicious of anything that would amount to nationalist myth. His theory of constitutional patriotism, emanating from his reflections of the working through of the past in the Federal Republic, posits that a sense of community may be rooted in the constitutional traditions of a democracy, while remaining strictly neutral in relation to the surrounding culture – contrasted with nationalism, which draws on this culture in its construction of identity. The problem with this idea is that constitutional patriotism, in order to gain the sense of concreteness necessary for it to function as a source of community (Habermas himself grants that such concreteness is required), needs to be rooted in the surrounding culture – it needs to resonate with the ideals, experiences and practices of the time. Arguably, this is what has happened in the Federal Republic of Germany: rather than being pushed into the background, national identity has undergone a transition; Germans have incorporated the experience of National Socialism into their sense of what it means to be German. This reformed identity, however, brings with it its own set of potentially problematic attitudes. Essentially, Habermas wants his constitutional patriotism to perform the same function as nationalism has done traditionally – a provider of a sense of community, meaning, and historical continuity – which means that it, more or less inevitably, takes on the characteristics of the nationalist ideology which performs this function in the present context.

The weakness of Habermas’ analysis is that, in its implicit idealization of the ability of the democratic process to bring about consensus regarding moral truth, it may hide from us the workings of the nationalism it aims to obliterate. The extension of this problem is much larger than a mere passus in the works of German philosopher Jürgen Habermas. Democratic nations run the risk of idealizing their own democratic status, thus being blinded to injustices they may commit – a latent danger we can witness in the political culture of the United States. The identity of the United States as a nation founded upon the values of democracy and equal individual rights may, if misinterpreted, deteriorate into empty ideological phraseology, concealing the true actions and motives of the nation’s leaders.

My analysis suggests that we are unwise to reject nationalism – not because it is necessarily a good thing, but because it permeates our political culture, and performs vital functions in this political culture. Thus, nationalism cannot be eliminated overnight, and if we believe we have eliminated it we are in fact more likely to let ourselves be governed by its logic, as we are robbed of the intellectual tools by which we can recognize its workings.
Rather than as an absolute to be revered, or an abomination to be rid of as quickly as possible, we should view national identity as a kind of provisional settlement to be amended over time, through the means of continual reflection and deliberation in the public sphere and in our democratic fora. As new knowledge comes to the fore, as our understanding of history deepens, and as new cultural groups are integrated into society, the content of the settlement changes. If national identity is understood in this way, the democratic process is more likely to be able to constructively deal with the tensions inevitably generated by nationalism.
VI. Conclusions

The introductory chapter of this book included three basic claims, which I have sought to substantiate throughout the account that has followed. Having come thus far I will restate these claims, one by one, and make explicit how the analysis has demonstrated their validity.

Claim 1. For conceptual-historical reasons, the entanglement of democracy with nationalism is deep and far-reaching. This means that, on such a level, the concept of democracy contains features which may give rise to nationalism, and a democratic culture need always be wary of these features.

The first of the two ‘case studies’ was dedicated to the discourse of national identity in a nation which may be regarded as the quintessential civic (as opposed to ethnic or cultural) political community – the United States. The logic of this choice is an obvious one: if there is anywhere we would find a democratic community free of nationalism, it should be here. A conclusion we may draw is that nationalism goes to the very core of the self-understanding of the United States as a political community. Defenders of American-style civic community point to the roots of United States political community in the Constitution and the democratic values of the American Revolution. This connection between democratic values and American identity is a very real one. However, what we must realize is that these values are anchored in a specific narrative in order to fulfil their function as constitutive of American identity. To repeat the conclusions in Chapter III, this narrative structure endows the political community of the United States with an exalted past – the emancipation from British colonial tyranny and the founding of a new republic that would embody the ideals of political freedom – as well as a projected future, in which progress is coupled with the duty to preserve the ideals constituent of American political identity. Note that this narrative structure, which exalts ‘the people’ and makes them a principal agent of the progression of humanity to a more enlightened state, is archetypical of the general character of nationalism, as it came into being through the great democratic revolutions of the late 18th century (see Chapter II).

Further, the case studies of debates on national identity in the United States and Germany indicate that democracies, as political communities, engage in processes of collective self-reflection and soul-searching, as they
attempt to normatively make sense of experiences, assume historical responsi-
bility, and map out their common future. The study of the ‘battles over
history’ in the Federal Republic of Germany, in particular, demonstrates the
vital importance for citizens in this fairly recent democracy to correctly in-
terpret events of their past, to draw the right lessons from history, in order to
construct a firm ethical foundation for this democracy. For our purposes,
what is especially significant is that in order to pursue such projects of col-
lective self-interpretation, citizens of democracies such as the United States
and the Federal Republic of Germany tend to draw on the thought structures
of nationalism, the central features of which are narratives providing ‘the
people’ with a meaningful past, present, and future. This is the mechanism
by which the connection between democracy and nationalism is kept alive. It
follows that democrats, if they rely on nationalism, should be aware of the
risks such reliance entails.

This brings us to our second claim:

*Claim 2.* Due to this entanglement (that of democracy with nationalist-
ism), attempts to recast and reconceptualize an overarching, society-
wide community in modern democracies, i.e. in contexts saturated
with nationalism, entail a great risk that benign as well as malign fea-
tures of nationalism leak into this reconceptualized community. These
contextual factors need to be recognized, so that the problems they
give rise to can be handled in the best manner possible. Anti-
nationalist rhetoric may conceal such leakage; thus, the unreflective
anti-nationalism which is strong in some currents of the liberal trad-
tion may have perverse effects.

To repeat a conclusion reached in Chapter IV: the German discourse of com-
ting to terms with the past would not have been possible without a concrete
and delineated *demos*, or sense of ‘us’, that served as the focal point of this
process of working through the past; national community, thus, may provide
democracy with the bounded conceptual space, or forum, which makes
meaningful deliberation possible. This achievement is bought at a cost, how-
ever, as the creation and maintenance of such national community necessari-
ly entail processes of erecting borders, geographically as well as conceptual-
ly. Such exclusionary processes always run the danger of degenerating into
chauvinism and xenophobia. For example, the risk of the development of a
‘negative nationalism’ – a paradoxical self-perception of superiority derived
from the sense of having confronted and worked through historical guilt – is
brought to the fore time and time again in the debate on German national
identity. In the case of the United States, we may note that the fact of its
national community being rooted in the values of democracy does not render
this community immune to the destructive potentialities of nationalism.

National community is thus at heart a double-edged phenomenon, offer-
ing a space for meaningful deliberation while always entailing some kind of
exclusion (in the widest sense). As democracies make use of nationalist thought structures in the creation of historical meaning, they should be wary of the double-edged character of these thought structures. However, there is a widespread tendency in modern liberal democracies to deal with the idea of community in an ahistorical manner, applying a conceptual framework that superficially distinguishes the ‘good’ community – associated with terms like ‘patriotism’ and ‘civic community’ – from the ‘bad’ community – associated with ‘nationalism’. The reason that I call this conceptual framework superficial is that it conceals the continued reliance in practice on the thought structures of nationalism. The inescapable, dark side of national community, thus, is projected onto the ‘ethnic nationalism’ of Central and Eastern Europe, while this dark side is hidden from view in the case of the ‘civic nationalism’ of Western Europe and the Americas. (Jürgen Habermas has, generally, been among the foremost of those theorists who have insisted upon the importance of history for political theory; therefore, it is a paradox that he contributes to this projection by means of his concept of constitutional patriotism – one informed by the deeply suspicious attitude of post-war German intellectuals towards anything associated with ‘the national’.) An important conclusion in this book is the following: if modern liberal democracies continue to rely on nationalist thought structures in their creation of meaning – and this reliance seems difficult to avoid – the negative aspects of national community should be brought into the open rather than hidden. This conclusion underscores the value of a contextually informed approach to political theory (see Chapter I, specifically pages 14-22), which makes discernible such facts as the impact of nationalist thought structures on the modern concept of community.

The civic/ethnic dichotomy underlies the selection of the ‘cases’ of the United States and Germany, and a comparative analysis of the debates on national identity in the two respective nations demonstrates how misleading this dichotomy can be, when applied carelessly. The analysis leads us to the conclusion that although nationalism may indeed present two distinct appearances – referred to as ‘the two faces of nationalism’ in Chapter II – it is, at heart, a unified phenomenon. The selection of two cases superficially unlike each other helps us grasp this phenomenon more clearly (remember the discussion of case selection in Chapter I – specifically p. 21). Due to historical factors, the internal tensions of nationalism manifest themselves largely in a distinct way in these two cases; yet, the dilemmas these underlying tensions give rise to are fundamentally the same. We have noted the embeddedness of the democratic core values of America in a particular historical narrative, and a major dilemma American democrats face is to remain true to these democratic values while holding on to the particularity of the narrative which makes American democrats ‘American’ rather than simply democrats. Germans, for their part, have faced the dilemma of bridging an inherited national identity, burdened by its associations with racism and Na-
tional Socialism, with the values of a liberal democracy. Speaking in very broad terms, they have sought to do so by means of the construction of a new national narrative in which the democratic republic emerging out of the ruins of World War II would form a historical continuation of the German nation of earlier times, but (at least partly) in a negative sense, as the experiences of National Socialism would constitute an antithesis to the values of the Federal Republic and a perennial caveat for the citizens of this Republic. This has been a tremendously difficult task. It has been a tempting solution to simply close the door on pre-1945 Germany, forswearing any connection to this Germany while clinging to the values of the Constitution; such a solution, however, glosses over the inescapable continuities in the lifeworlds of pre- and post-1945 Germany, respectively. It goes far beyond the purposes of this book to determine whether the German nation has been successful or not in the project of working through its past. Rather, what we have achieved is an account of the dilemma German intellectuals have faced in this process.

Summing up: the nature of the complexities of each of these cases, that of the United States and Germany respectively, indicate that underlying the superficial civic/ethnic dichotomy we find a fundamental tension of particular versus universal, expressing itself in various forms depending on historical factors. This tension is the one democrats face when they rely on nationalist thought structures; and, to repeat, it is a major lesson from our analysis that this tension should be acknowledged rather than hidden away.

To return to our three basic claims, the final one follows naturally from what has been said so far:

Claim 3. The reformation and reconceptualization of community are best thought of as a continuous process rather than a problem to be fully resolved. In terms of normative theories of democracy, models emphasizing deliberation are therefore superior to rights-based theories, such as that of liberal nationalism, when it comes to dealing with the problematic of community in democracy.

Deliberative models, on the whole, are better than liberal-nationalist models at dealing with the complications stemming from the entanglement of modern democracy with nationalism. Through deliberative processes, tensions arising from nationalist components in the concrete totality which constitutes liberal democracy can be brought to the fore and handled in a reasonable way, although they can never be resolved definitively. Habermas’ constitutional patriotism (of course, an example of a theory within the deliberative-democratic camp) is a step in the right direction, although he relies on a distinction between ‘political culture’ and ‘general culture’ which, ultimately, is untenable. The rights-based model of liberal nationalism, on the other hand, tends to conceal these tensions, as democracy is conceived as a finished in-
stitutional structure rather than an ongoing project, subject to continuous reflection and deliberation.

This distinction is relevant in a comparison between debates on national identity in the United States and Germany, respectively. In broad terms, a rights-based approach has been dominant in the United States, where the tendency is that certain rights are thought of as fundamentally constitutive of American national identity. In Germany, by contrast, the Post-War era has seen a painstaking process of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*, of gradually coming to terms with the past, which means that virtually no stone has been left unturned in the continuous reflection on what it means to be German after National Socialism. For the intellectuals of post-war Germany, especially those on the Left, facing the truth about the national past was not only a moral imperative, but an indispensable aspect of becoming a democratic nation. Many of their contributions have been exemplary of a deliberative approach to national identity. However, a parallel, more problematic, tendency may be discerned as well. For some, it has been an all too tempting solution to draw a definitive line between the (autocratic, Teutonic) ‘old Germany’ and the (democratic, European) ‘new Germany’, concealing historical continuities under the sheen of the institutions and ceremonies of democratic constitutionalism. There are signs that ‘Westernness’ and ‘Europeanness’ are becoming the markers of a new German nationalism, equating ‘Western’ and ‘democratic’.

An important reason that national community is such a persistent phenomenon is that it offers us a way to make sense of our past. Importantly, this includes negative aspects of the past as well as positive ones: lessons learned from darker sides of our history may come to constitute part of our identity, and, ideally, this means that we are not doomed to repeat past mistakes. However, the narratives that help us in this process may ultimately restrain our vision. For this reason, the task of critical reflection on the stories that sustain a democratic nation is a perennial challenge, as the tensions generated by nationalism can never be fully resolved.
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