Introduction
Redesigning the Past: History in Political Transitions

Seldom does history seem so urgently relevant or important as in moments of sudden political transition from one state form to another. With the fall of the old regime, the inquests immediately begin. Why did it fall, what was wrong with it, what was good or bad about it, how should it be remembered? In some cases, the task of coming to terms with the changes is eased by the almost immediate availability of state and other documents that would normally be concealed for decades under the rules governing the disclosure of government materials, or the violation of personal privacy. In others, its traumatic nature is brought out by the public trial before specially constituted courts of the main surviving figures of the regime that has just been overthrown.

There have been numerous examples of such transitions in the second half of the twentieth century. In 1945 the defeated nations of Germany and Japan had to abandon their existing political systems and embrace western parliamentary democracy. In 1989 the communist regimes in East Germany and the Soviet Union gave way to post-communist rule. The principle, established by the Nuremberg war crimes trials of 1946, and their Japanese equivalent, that the crimes of dictatorial and belligerent political regimes should be tried before an international court of justice, has become firmly established in our own time. A different route was taken by South Africa, which established the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, in which legal immunity was offered to the servants of the apartheid regime in return for open, frank and honest confession before a public audience of their crimes, including murder, torture and much else besides, down to the last detail.

Whichever way a new, democratic political system chooses to deal with the crimes of its dictatorial, authoritarian or racist predecessor, however, history and its investigation are central to the process. This raises many acute questions about history itself. Is its function, for instance, simply to lay bare the facts and let others rush to judgment? Or is it the case, as some have argued, that the facts themselves are intrinsically unknowable, concealed forever behind a veil of language and discourse which proves impenetrable to simplistic notions of the truth? Is history, in the end, and perhaps above all in such traumatic situations, primarily a form of moral rhetoric, which can aid a society in dealing with issues such as guilt and shame, praise and blame? And when we talk of history, do we mean primarily professional, academic history,
or history as purveyed in school textbooks, or history in popular culture, in films, dramas, radio programmes, mass-market paperbacks, comic books and strip cartoons? If we mean all of these things, then what is the relationship between them, and what is history’s relationship in general with the whole phenomenon of public memory and the memorialization of the past? This special issue of the *Journal of Contemporary History* brings together a set of articles that address these topics. In focusing sharply on moments of political transition, in all their drama, we can perhaps learn more about history and historians than we might by concentrating on more normal times.

Dictatorships and authoritarian regimes of different kinds have a variety of means at their disposal to control what historians research, write and present to the public. Most obviously there is censorship, the banning of uncomfortable books and articles, the prior vetting of publications of all kinds. In extreme cases, books are centrally commissioned, checked for ideological correctness and changed where it is felt that the author has gone astray. State-controlled radio and television are easy to manipulate in such a situation. With school textbooks, control can be exercised by ordering one book rather than another for educational use, though in practice many regimes have committees that oversee the production of textbooks and the construction of a compulsory national curriculum. A little more subtle, though not much, are methods such as the state control of university appointments, state funding of research institutes and research projects, state control of the supply of paper and print, state control of book distribution, marketing and selling. All of these things can vary from one regime to another, so that under some circumstances historians have almost no room for manoeuvre at all, in others there are still spaces available in which they can present their work without too much interference from the state, providing they know how. And of course in a situation where a strong, ideological regime with authoritarian tendencies comes to power in a democracy, as with the right-wing BJP in India in 1998, or, some would suggest, the right-wing government of Ariel Sharon in Israel, there are ways of manipulating these various levers of state control to circumscribe the freedom, or if not the freedom, then at least the influence, of historians whose views are unpalatable to the government. Such governments rarely lack popular support, so that pressure can be mounted by the regime’s supporters in various ways as well, either directly, or through the media. In an extreme situation such as that of the transition to a military-authoritarian regime in Japan in the early 1930s, coercion and intimidation may be applied to historians by direct physical means, all the way up to murder.

History is more vulnerable to such pressures than many other branches of learning. It is rare for a political regime to impose its ideology on science, for instance, though Stalin tried to boost a kind of socialist biology associated with the dubious figure of Lysenko, and the nazis attempted to develop a ‘German physics’, though without much success. Areas such as science and technology have material and military rewards that are too obvious for politicians to start interfering in the way they are researched, although they will
readily direct funding towards some projects in preference to others if they think they have a direct use for the state. History, however, except in its most technical aspects (such as the editing of medieval manuscripts or the statistical analysis of economic and demographic data) is more immediately comprehensible and to many political regimes appears to have a more obvious political relevance. Even democratic governments see in it a means of strengthening national identity, and in the hands of an authoritarian state it can become a tool of political indoctrination. States in conflict with other states over territory have always turned to history for a justification of their claims, although such conflicts have become increasingly rare at the beginning of the twenty-first century; and historians have always been found to do the necessary work to demonstrate that Silesia is quintessentially Polish, or German, or that the South Tyrol belongs by historic right to Austria, or to Italy. In Europe in the two decades after 1914, professional historians in every country laboured to produce documentary editions, write massive works of scholarship, and edit learned and scholarly journals, to prove that the particular country for which they were working was not responsible for the outbreak of the first world war. Much hung on such a demonstration, with the Germans losing territory and paying massive financial reparations to the French and the Belgians on the argument, enshrined in Article 231 of the Treaty of Versailles, that the war had been caused by them and no one else. Although governments, and particularly German governments, invested heavily in such projects, no historian was forced to take such a line, and historians in Germany were still falsifying documents as late as the 1950s in an effort to prove their case, a reminder that it does not always take a dictatorship to bring historians to do such things.

Nevertheless, the pressures are obviously heavier and more widely exerted under authoritarian regimes. The role that history plays under a dictatorship depends, of course, on the importance the regime accords to the subject. Marxism, for instance, is an essentially historical doctrine; it rests on a representation of history as the operation of laws which will inevitably lead to a socialist society. The legitimacy of a regime such as the Soviet Union or the German Democratic Republic depends heavily on its self-justification as the culmination of a historical process dating back over centuries. History and historians therefore appear of central importance to such a system. Conventional, ‘bourgeois’ or in other words non-Marxist historians are pushed aside, the historical profession, or the portion of its members that remains, is drilled into conformity with the party line, school textbooks are centralized and all made to purvey exactly the same interpretation of the past; popular culture is carefully controlled to the same effect. By contrast, a racist regime such as that of the National Socialists in Germany between 1933 and 1945 had little time for history; it regarded human society as the outcome of timeless racial factors, and although historians had some role to play as cheerleaders in the nationalist cause, the regime’s legitimacy in no way depended on its interpretation of the past. On the contrary, the nazis rejected the past. The most they did was to
pluck some individuals, such as Bismarck or Frederick the Great, out of their historical time to present them as heroic exemplars of the German racial type. This meant that the historical profession could continue much as it had done under the Weimar Republic, consisting of a group of university-based researchers and writers whose work was of little intrinsic interest to Germany’s new rulers. Of course, some historians were thrown out because of who they were — above all, Jewish historians, even those with impeccably nationalist views — and a tiny minority of Marxist historians were suppressed. But on the whole, very little changed in the German historical profession in 1933.

Thus the historical profession was rather more obviously implicated in communist regimes than in fascist or National Socialist ones, notwithstanding the efforts of some scholars to provide historical backing for nazi plans for the ethnic reordering of Eastern Europe during the war. Both types of regime, like the Japanese military-Imperial dictatorship from the early 1930s, operated strict censorship of publications in which dissent, even about the past, was difficult and dangerous. The nazis used history textbooks like other schoolbooks to purvey their racial dogmas. But they did not operate the kind of central planning that is common in communist regimes, with the division of labour in research laid down from above, particular topics assigned to particular institutes, and a careful rationing of paper and print in the interests of mass indoctrination, with historical scholarship very low down the list of priorities. Some historians managed to engage in a kind of intellectual resistance in nazi Germany by writing about remote medieval or other topics in a way that reflected obliquely and critically on the present — or so they claimed afterwards. This was more difficult under communism.

Of course, communist regimes could allow a certain room for manoeuvre for scholars working on medieval or early modern history as well. They might, for instance, insist that research on landed society in Prussia in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century describe the object of its investigations as the capitalist agrarian reform rather than the traditional ‘emancipation of the serfs’; but other than that, they did little to interfere in the actual content of what was being written. Unusually, the consciousness that the communist regime in Fidel Castro’s Cuba is slowly coming to an end, as its creator enters old age, seems to be allowing historians to broaden their horizons and increasingly escape from the centralized control of the state. Interpretations of the past have been changing rapidly in post-Maoist China. Yet at the level of popular history and school textbook history, the central direction of the state was only too obvious. It extended beyond this to academic history that dealt with the immediate or the recent past. In topics such as the life of Lenin, or the founding myths of the 1917 revolution, Russian historians under the Soviet regime had to collaborate in a systematic distortion and manipulation of the evidence in the interests of a set of non-negotiable interpretations imposed from above: if they did not, they had no future. In such circumstances, those historians who were able to maintain some kind of integrity as scholars often did so at some cost to themselves, and not all their subsequent critics had
sufficient sympathy for the kind of compromises they were forced to make in order to keep going at all.

When history becomes a tool of political propaganda in such a blatantly obvious way, it undergoes a real crisis of legitimacy when the regime responsible for such a situation ceases to exist, indeed most probably long before that, although there are few ways of telling under conditions of censorship. Public cynicism becomes widespread. History, after a change of regime, can simply appear to be victors’ history. In a situation of poverty, deprivation and economic crisis, as in Germany after 1945, or Russia after 1989, or in South Africa after the collapse of the apartheid regime, most people have little time to indulge in the relative luxury of reflecting on the past: they are too busy trying to keep body and soul together in the present. In some circumstances, an open confrontation with a painful past may have to wait for a change of generations, as it did in Germany with the generation of 1968; in others, as in East Germany after 1989, it happens almost immediately; in a country such as Japan, an initial period of confrontation may be followed by a prolonged period of silence. Dictatorships are often the product of deep divisions within a society, and they generally drive them even deeper, so that there is a widespread need to heal the wounds they have produced, and after they fall, there are strong pressures in many societies to cover up the past because it is thought to be damaging to the precariously achieved cohesiveness of a new democracy, whose functioning depends to a large extent on keeping social and political divisions within reasonable limits. History and historians may be better at dividing than healing, so it is not surprising that in such situations they are often regarded with suspicion. The Japanese showed that they had come to terms with the past by comprehensively rejecting militarism and dictatorship after 1945: why, therefore, go back over it all and stir up old enmities when the problems that had beset Japanese political culture before 1945 had all been solved? Maintaining silence may be more helpful than redesigning the past when it comes to shaping the future.

Such processes are not the autonomous products of individual countries, however. How a nation deals with its past is never entirely within its own control, least of all with the growing globalization of intellectual life and popular culture in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Every dictatorship produces its crop of exiled historians who maintain an alternative vision from beyond its shores. Yet often when they return, they find that they are not as welcome to the post-dictatorial regime as they thought they would be. Those few historians who returned from exile in the USA to Germany after 1945 were unable to impose an alternative vision on the historians, far more numerous than they were, who had stayed in place during the nazi years; indeed, arguably, it was the latter who produced, or nurtured, the real innovations that took place in West German historiography in the 1950s and 1960s, rather than returning exiles such as Hans Rothfels. Liberal white historians who fled South Africa under the apartheid regime sometimes found themselves out-flanked by black radicals on their return.
Far more than exiles, it has been the international historical community that has exerted the real influence in political transitions, though the nature and timing of its influence has often depended on factors largely beyond its control. Yet in some areas the influence of the globalization of history has been undeniable. In Germany, for instance, the Nuremberg war crimes trials mounted by the Allies in 1946–48 had relatively little influence on public discourse about the nazi regime; but with the change of generations that began in the 1960s, the Eichmann trial in Jerusalem began to influence public memory, and was followed by the far greater impact of an American television series, ‘Holocaust’, that sparked a widespread debate and brought a new word into the German vocabulary for the first time. In popular culture, Hollywood’s influence on perceptions of history all over the world has been incalculable; and if Hollywood always prefers a good story to an accurate historical narrative, movies none the less often send a good proportion of their audiences back to the history books, as sales figures show. This suggests that the public is better able to tell fact from fiction than many critics of Hollywood’s way with history would have us believe.

In the end, perhaps, the international historical community, in which specialists on Japanese history are to be found in Germany, specialists on German history in Britain, specialists on Russian history in the USA, and so on, exerts a kind of quality control on what the historians of any one nation say about its past. History indeed is starting to become less closely confined to national boundaries itself; transnational, intercultural and comparative history is being more widely practised than ever before; and with the globalization of publishing and the media, and perhaps in the long term above all the internet, this is starting to change the ways in which individual societies come to terms with their own history, and perhaps undermine the ability of any given regime to monopolize the representation of the past. Perhaps, indeed, the loosening-up of history and its study in otherwise authoritarian political regimes like those of China or Cuba is in part a consequence of developments such as these. The remarkable recovery of public memory about the second world war that has been so apparent in so many countries since the early 1990s, with war crimes trials in France and Italy, compensation actions by slave labourers in Germany, restitution of looted art in Britain, the beginnings of a critical dialogue in Japan about issues such as ‘comfort women’ and other victims of Japanese militarism, and Holocaust memorials and museums in many different countries, may in part be the product of the globalization of public discourse about the crimes committed by the nazis and their allies.

Exposing the crimes of a regime that has only ceased to exist in the recent past, whose minions are still alive and kicking and often unpunished, has been one of the principal tasks of the historian in the political transition from dictatorship to democracy; yet it raises a fundamental question about how history and historians should proceed in such a situation. After the fall of communism in Russia there was a palpable anger at the distortions and manipulations of Stalinist history, its suppression of the truth, its denial of the facts
about issues such as the purges, the show trials, the labour camps, the shootings and the executions carried out by Stalin’s secret police. In South Africa, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission shocked many with its startling revelations about the campaigns of murder and torture carried out by the political police of the apartheid regime. In such a situation the primary duty of the historian would seem to be the simple establishment of the truth, the uncovering of empirical facts about past crimes, and the restoration of the historical profession’s lost reputation for honesty and integrity. What is needed, in other words, is an objective and unbiased approach to the past.

At the same time, however, historical research and writing at every level, from academic monograph to school textbook, from journalistic investigation to television documentary, is driven by a strong moral imperative to do justice to the victims of the past and bring the perpetrators to book. Added to this is frequently the conviction that history’s function should be to assist in the building of a free, open and democratic society, to reject the values of the previous regime and to underpin the values of the new one. Can these two seemingly opposed functions be reconciled? Are historians perhaps deluding themselves when they imagine that they are being objective in such circumstances? Should they perhaps simply admit that they are really doing no more than creating narratives that are acceptable to a different kind of regime from the one that has just been overthrown, that are perhaps morally more defensible, but in the end much the same in principle as the old ones? Showing that the old regime has committed crimes is an effective form of moral education, but is it any more than that?

But such a demonstration is not going to be effective unless it is based on the truth. History has recently taken on a stronger moral language than it possessed in the social science-dominated 1960s, 1970s and 1980s, and it has become customary to use moral terms such as ‘perpetrator’, ‘bystander’, or indeed ‘crime’ itself in place of the analytical categories common 20 or 30 years ago. But even if we agree with this use of history, it must rest on a demonstration that the Sharpeville shootings in South Africa, the mass gassing of Jews in Auschwitz, the killing of millions of Russians and others in Stalin’s camps, the chemical experiments on living subjects in the Japanese army, actually happened. Not to do so undermines the moral force of any rhetoric. Objectivity and moral purpose are not irreconcilable, that is, if we define objectivity as the reconstruction of the past within the limits allowable by the remains it has left behind. In the end, the international historical community will be able to check whether what any one historian in any given country writes about the past is verifiable by the sources or not; and the discovery that much of what historians under dictatorship write is not verifiable in this way, indeed can directly be disproved, gives the drive for objectivity a moral purpose in itself.

Beyond this, however, historians also need to understand and explain the past. To do this successfully means being prepared to confront uncomfortable realities and uncover inconvenient truths. It also means being willing to aban-
don interpretations that do not work when pitted against the sources, even if those interpretations are morally and politically preferable to those interpretations that do work. The discipline of history in the end cannot bind itself wholly to any political ideology and survive unscathed, though that does not mean it cannot be driven by a moral or political purpose and still retain its integrity. What makes for good history is precisely this clash between the ideas and aspirations that the historian brings to it, and the awkward and often recalcitrant historical material with which the historian then has to deal and which must in the end have the last word.

That means that in political transitions, historians can never be sure that their voice will be heard, because what they say is not always what people want to hear. Historians have an input, more now than ever before perhaps, into the public presentation of history in museums, in television series, in historical novels, even to a limited extent in Hollywood movies. The end of the dominance of history by the social sciences, which for all its virtues did not make for readability, has brought professional history closer to a wider public once more. History books have become popular again, and many of the most popular are being written by academics. The influence that professional history and historians exert depends not only on the political and cultural context but also on the state of their own discipline, and this varies widely from country to country and from situation to situation, as the articles in this issue show. Historians may be hard at work redesigning the past, however, but so too are politicians, painters, novelists, sculptors, movie-makers, television producers, textbook writers, teachers, museum directors and a whole host of other people, and what comes out as the end result may not be quite what any of them intended.

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What we need is a history like yours. A history that has no ideology. (Historian at Moscow University, September 2000)

The past is something that dictatorships do not leave to chance. They almost always control academic research. They limit public access to information. Most conspicuously of all, they also try to define popular history, including school and university courses, as well as media output, literature, commemoration and public space. These features have been common to most of the dictatorships of the past two centuries, but for those whose propaganda has emphasized an ideology of progress, they have been crucial. Marxism, which views all history through the lens of its own teleology, invites a radical rethinking of the past. Not surprisingly, history-writing was among the most controversial of academic pursuits in communist states such as the former Soviet Union.

The collapse of communism did not reduce the pressure on the past. History was also among the first areas that journalists and politicians attempted to reinvent. It was by turns a source of legitimation for new governments, a generator of transformatory rage, a set of falsified details to be put right, and a source of consolation for those who feared that their society had preserved few cultural resources beyond its bitter memories and loss. But recreating history was never likely to be a simple matter. It may be easy to agree on the destruction of a unitary past, but after that the contests start again, often in an atmosphere of anxious economic and political transition.

This article will look at the recreation of history in contemporary Russia. It is intended as a basis for more general discussion, and it will invite comparisons with other societies in political transition. It will focus mainly on popular history, including the material that is taught in schools, exhibited in museums, and discussed in the press. It is based on published materials, including the most recent school curricula; on museum visits and the observation of public ceremonies; and on the interviews and group discussions that I have been holding in schools and universities in Russia in the past three years.

The story begins with the Soviet legacy, but I have chosen to focus on Russia itself. The experiences of the other former Soviet republics are different, and usually simpler, for their recovered histories can rely on the familiar themes of imperial domination, cultural repression and national resistance. In Russia, by contrast, there is no obvious external foe. Politicians (including Vladimir
Putin) are constantly invoking the nation, but they are vague about its exact meaning. Professional historians, meanwhile, seem haunted by an enigmatic guilt. ‘What is Russia?’, their research papers ask, and their round table conferences and academic discussions search carefully for flaws, for schisms, for cultural or even genetic traits — anything that can explain their perceived failure to be prosperous, democratic, truly European, or even particularly happy.

Academic history has rhythms and priorities of its own, but its tone and overall agenda, at least in Russia, derive in obvious ways from the society it serves. The current intellectual mood of self-punishing introspection, although not new, has clearly been affected by political and economic uncertainty. Beyond the research institutes, however, and outside the government circles that must find new emblems for the military and new words for the national anthem, the same contemporary tensions have encouraged an indifference to politics of any sort, including political history. Russians have good reason to feel helpless in the face of spiralling and unpredictable inflation, organized crime, widespread corruption, and a long tradition of official disinformation. Rather than trying to control it all, many have given up, preferring escapist romance, including romantic versions of the past, as a counterbalance to their daily gloom. They do not trust their government, they do not understand their historians, and they are tired of dissecting their own souls.

These changes are most obvious among the young, and especially among those born after 1980, the children who grew up without the disciplines of a communist education. For them, history can easily appear to be irrelevant. Affluent teenagers in the cities, whose eyes are longingly fixed on travel, new jobs and money-making, cannot understand their parents’ continuing fascination with a story that was over before they were born. The obvious parallel is with modern Spain, where a generation tacitly agreed that ‘the bitterest aspects of the past should not be aired in public debate’. As Paloma Aguilar points out in her discussion of Spain’s transition since Franco, the reminders of civil war were visible on the living bodies of its veterans. Little seemed likely to be

1 There is even a debate about the correct word for the Russian people, with distinctions drawn between russkie (ethnic Russians), rossiiskie (pertaining to the Russian state), and rossiiane (a word that has become fashionable lately, and which refers to Russian citizens of the Russian state).

2 The academic journals, including Otechestvennaya istoriya, Vestnik Moskovskogo Universiteta and Novaya i noseishaya istoriya, have published regular discussion articles on this theme since 1991. For a recent example, see V.M. Khachaturian, ‘Teoriya tsivilizatsii v russkoi istoricheskoi mysl’, Otechestvannaya istoriya, no. 5 (1995); and A.S. Akhiezer, ‘Samobytnost Rossii kak nauchnaya problema’, Otechestvennaya istoriya nos. 4–5 (1994). The latter has been translated and reprinted in Russian Studies in History, 36. 1 (1997), 6–78.

3 The search for appropriate words for the Soviet and Russian national anthems has been a problem since 1917. See The Times, 1 January 2001.

4 The most vivid evidence of this has been the explosive rise of the detective paperback, a genre almost unknown to Russian literature (although translations of Agatha Christie were always popular) before 1990.

5 Paloma Aguilar, ‘Agents of Memory: Spanish Civil War Veterans’ in Jay Winter and Emmanuel Sivan (eds), War and Remembrance in the Twentieth Century (Cambridge 1999), 103.
gained, and much potentially put at risk, by opening an anguished public
discussion.

On the other hand, there are some people in Russia who regret that a deeper
discussion of public and individual responsibility was not held there in the
eyear 1990s. Most believe that the moment for a legal inquisition has passed,
which means that the criminals of the past — individual torturers, for
instance, and the people who gave them their orders — may never now face
justice. The impact of this on public attitudes towards legality and the state is
obvious. Russia’s alternative, a middle way that avoids the courts, might be to
use history as a means of teaching the next generation to understand the
language of politics, to respect the memories that help to define their parents’
and grandparents’ generations, and to ask more searching questions of their
own polity. ‘They do not know how to read between the lines’, a friend said to
me recently. ‘They are growing up without protection against dictatorship.
They do not have the antibodies.’

Most schoolchildren are scarcely aware of it (and this is a minor victory for
their teachers), but history has a tainted past in Russia. The reform of
academic research and teaching has taken 15 years. It has amounted to a
revolution, the reversal of a process that began in 1929, when Stalin inter-
vened for the first time in the writing of a history text. Thereafter, he person-
ally read and commented on many publications, and he maintained strict
censorship over the rest. Dissident historians were arrested and, occasionally,
shot. It was Stalin who checked and approved the infamous ‘History of the
Communist Party of the Soviet Union (Bolsheviks): Short Course’ in 1938, and
he supervised several revisions to it thereafter. The historians who survived in
this atmosphere were not renowned for their integrity.

There are still many older historians at work in Russia who remember the
next phase, and whose excitement about their subject still draws on it. After
Stalin’s death in 1953, his successors began the process of reforming what had
become a near-unworkable political system. They justified their ideas by refer-
ce to the past, although they maintained their control of it. Stalin was criti-
cized, along with the ‘cult of the individual’ and the mass purges, but Lenin’s
revolution, the imposition of single-party rule, and even the collectivization of
the peasants, were still beyond reproach. The ‘thaw’ that took place under

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6 The friend was Irina Prokhorova, the writer, editor and publisher.
7 The best single survey of the whole historical profession since the 1950s is R.W. Davies, Soviet
History in the Gorbachev Revolution (Houndmills 1989). For a discussion of more recent issues,
and some reflections on the past, see also Vera Kaplan et al. (eds), The Teaching of History in
Contemporary Russia (Tel Aviv 1999). On teachers in the Stalin era, see E. Thomas Ewing,
‘Stalinism at Work: Teacher Certification (1936–9) and Soviet Power’, Russian Review, 57, 2
Nikita Khrushchev was revolutionary, and many former Soviet citizens still remember it as a liberation, but history remained within official bounds.¹

Khrushchev’s fall, in 1964, gave way to an era of limited reaction. Because the framework for controlling information was still in place, it was possible for a new leadership to reinstate some aspects of Stalinist history, including a limited cult of the dictator and a ban on the publication of politically-suspect historical research. Survivors of this era now recall that it was forbidden to publish information, even if it related to the very recent history of the Great Patriotic War, unless the detail had already appeared in print somewhere else.² The handful of enterprising young historians who had begun, in Khrushchev’s time, to ask the first of many awkward questions found that their work had become unprintable and that their own promotions were blocked.³ The rest more or less willingly undertook to teach and write within the framework of official Marxism-Leninism.

The fact of government control made history controversial, and not merely for professional historians. Indeed, the rediscovery of the past would be decisive in the process of reforming the Soviet system. History was at the centre of Mikhail Gorbachev’s programme after 1986.⁴ What looked, at first, like a return to a Khrushchev-style thaw turned into a full-scale public debate about the Communist Party. The purpose of this, initially, was to revive a long-forgotten notion of pluralism within the one-party framework. By 1988, the hero of the hour was Nikolai Bukharin, champion of the socialist market, and an advocate of inner-party discussion. But as successive veils were lifted, the level of public interest grew. History became front-page news, and journalists began to investigate what Gorbachev had called the ‘blank pages’, demanding answers to questions that even he had tried to evade. Mass graves were discovered and exhumed.⁵ Documents from secret archives were published. Economic catastrophes and official lies were exposed. Lenin himself came under attack, and with him, the Bolshevik revolution and the entire basis for the communist monopoly. The process mesmerized historians in the West. In Russia, anyone who could read was talking about the past by the late 1980s. All that was more than 15 years ago. Since then, Russia has ceased to be the dominant power within a multi-ethnic empire, it has ceased to be a single-party state, and it has undergone a series of economic and political crises.

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² Davies, op. cit., 101.
³ The most notable casualty was the distinguished historian of collectivization and the peasant economy, V.P. Danilov.
⁴ I have discussed this at greater length in Night of Stone, op. cit., 386–97.
several of which have brought its people to the brink of despair. The 1980s were a time of shock and hope. By the mid-1990s, however, most ordinary people had become so preoccupied with mere survival that they had lost the energy for historical enquiry. While the historical profession itself regrouped, assisted by wealthier foundations in the West, and turned itself into a serious, if cash-strapped, academic community, most Russians turned to barter, plotting, drink and television soaps. The second half of the 1990s is now remembered as a time of escapism, when the streets emptied on weekday nights in time for Santa Barbara.  

The Soviet control of history included the renaming of things — streets and cities as well as events and festivals — and it also involved much commemorative building. By the end of Brezhnev’s time, there were statues of Lenin in every town in the Soviet Union, together with multi-purpose plinths that could, at various times, display a local poet, a secret policeman, a milkmaid or an unknown soldier. From the 1960s, the Great Patriotic War provided the most important images. The memory of it was genuinely sacred for whole generations. As time went by, however, it also became a convenient distraction from economic and political stagnation. Under Brezhnev, Patriotic War memorials became ever more grotesque. The last great monument to the war, Moscow’s Victory Park, was so extravagant, and took so long to complete, that the Soviet Union itself had fallen by the time it finally opened.  

Victory Park was contentious, but the arguments were mainly about its form and doubtful taste. The Great Patriotic War itself has remained a focus for Russian patriotism. It is an epic that nationalists can still invoke without adaptation. Few war memorials have been removed or changed since 1991. People leave flowers by them, and young couples still stand beside them to be photographed on their wedding days. In the Museum of Contemporary History in Moscow (the former Museum of the October Revolution), the Soviet Communist Party has become an object of mild satire. Rooms that were full of red flags and air-brushed photographs now house pictures of queues. The only galleries that have not changed are the two that commemorate the war. In contrast to the airy new spaces, these are dark and intimidating, their patriotic message coercive. ‘They have not changed those’, the curator told me. ‘They seem to think they’re still necessary. For something.’

Elsewhere, however, other images from the Soviet past have been removed,
defaced, or loudly satirized. Streets and towns have been renamed, buildings redecorated, and the statues that have not disappeared have often been spray-painted with graffiti. The renaming of towns and streets is expensive (the decision to restore the old name of St Petersburg alone cost millions) as well as inconvenient (people continually have trouble with the new names of Moscow’s metro stations), but it seems logical and justified to those who still remember what the past was like. For those who do not, it has begun to appear surreal.

The polarization between factions that takes place every time a statue is moved or a square renamed is fascinating for historians. Some see it as a symptom of the irreconcilable hostility that has always divided Russian society. In an article of 1994, Igor Ionov wrote longingly of the need for ‘an integral and uncontradictory conception’ of the past. ‘Unfortunately’, he continued, ‘this has been an unrealized dream for Russians since the eighteenth century.’ The goal, for Ionov, was to arrive at a point where ‘monuments are no longer destroyed, and the mention of national historical figures no longer calls forth the kind of hysterical reaction that undermines relations of friendship and family.’17 Since Ionov wrote, the controversies that bothered him have not died down. There is no sign of reconciliation. Instead, the alternative to factionalism appears to be complete numbness, a total blanking out of memory.

Polarization is clearest among those who still remember Stalinism. It is heartbreaking to see the bitter divisions that persist between people who, viewed from outside, can all be seen as losers — I am avoiding the word ‘victim’ — as a result of Stalinist dictatorship. Ironically, it is exactly these groups, the war veterans, dispossessed peasant farmers, and survivors of political repression, who are losing out again in the new order. All Russian pensioners have seen their status and identity as Soviets overturned, they have lost their savings, lost the security of social provision, and witnessed a new generation, with alien ideas about money, community and politics, take over with ruthless energy. But feuds and rivalries from the past ensure that many older Russians are more uncomfortable with members of their own generation than they are among the enviable young.18

There are two main tendencies. The first includes all those who resent the dismantling of the old Soviet order. The elderly are often veterans of the war, and many wear their medals every day, defying the new casualness. On the other side are the representatives of human rights organizations and survivors’ groups, a loose association of people united by their commitment to keeping alive the memory of Stalinist repression. The organization that has represented them since 1986 is Memorial, an association of campaigners, survivors, and social support groups. The Orthodox Church, conservative though it is, identifies more closely with the second group. In the past ten years, it has attempted

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to claim Stalinism’s martyrs for itself, playing a prominent role whenever new mass graves are found, sanctifying the sites and offering prayers even for atheist souls.\textsuperscript{19} Initially, the Church appealed to human rights activists because it, too, had been repressed. The elderly sometimes found comfort in the faith. More recently, the alliance has looked strange, and the links between Church and government have become more obvious, but when the Church attempts to trace its twentieth-century roots, the only story that it can invoke is that of political repression.

If there are some strange alliances among anti-Stalinists, the problem at the other extreme is to find an appropriate name for the conservatives who call themselves communists. In Russian politics they are usually referred to as the ‘red-browns’. In the early years of reform they were easy for outside observers to overlook because they seemed to be such an anachronism in the new world.\textsuperscript{20} In the provinces, however, and especially where unemployment is high, they sometimes represent local majorities, and form the basis for a robust Communist Party vote. The staunchest among them are often war veterans, old soldiers or men and women who remember childhoods of hardship, exile and collective effort. It is this group that has kept a mythic version of the Soviet past alive, to be reclaimed by disaffected members of the younger generation. Those who choose to cling to Stalinism (or to return to it) usually regard the authoritarian past as an escape from current difficulties. Even the milder winters of recent years — the lack of cold, crisp snow — seem like a further proof of Russia’s moral collapse. Affluent children mock this, but surprising numbers of young adults, especially in areas of high unemployment, are returning to the Communist Party. No one could accuse the new Stalinists of historical sensitivity. The past is merely a resource in the battle between dogmas.

Memorial, by contrast, includes serious historians, and has always played a part in the exposure of past secrets. Its work includes research into the repres- sions of the Soviet era, the investigation of subsequent abuses (such as human rights violations in Chechnya), and the establishment of libraries and documentary archives in Russia’s regional centres. It was among the organizations that inspired historians of the glasnost generation.\textsuperscript{21} It still provides resources for researchers and teachers of history. It publishes newspapers in Moscow, St Petersburg and several regional cities, and it issues regular newsletters and research bulletins. Several of its full-time staff are professional historians,

\textsuperscript{19} The latest of these ceremonies was the consecration of the burial pit at Kommunarka, where the bodies of Kamenev, Zinoviev and Bukharin are all buried, in October 2000.

\textsuperscript{20} The most famous was the chemistry teacher, Nina Andreyeva, whose letter, ‘I cannot give up my principles’, began the conservatives’ fight-back against glasnost in 1987. See Davies, op. cit., 140–4.

\textsuperscript{21} Dmitrii Yurasov and Arsenii Roginskii, both historians, were among its founder members, and both produced path-breaking work in the 1980s. Among the other institutions that inspired new work — and trained new teachers — at this time was the Historical-Archival Institute, then under the direction of Yurii Afanas’ev.
some of whom work on projects partially funded by western academic foundations. Books based on their research have been published consistently since the late 1980s. This work is internationally respected, and is probably the least contentious — and most enduring — of Memorial’s achievements.

Memorial’s other work, the building of physical monuments, has been more problematic. In the late 1980s, the organization’s central goal was to commemorate Stalin’s purges by placing some form of monument in the centre of Moscow, ideally outside the Lubyanka itself. The problem was agreeing on the image. After much debate, the by-product of which is another archive full of sketches and proposals, the memorial that still stands is a simple stone, a piece of rock from the prison island of Solovki. The same kind of monument also stands in Trinity Square in St Petersburg, although this one bears an inscription from Anna Akhmatova’s poem, ‘Requiem’ a meditation on Stalin’s repressions that was censored until after her death. These stones, then, do not preach by making a specific point, and they do not refer to a specific political or religious creed. When they were first unveiled, the strength of emotion among mourners and survivors was enough to draw large and admiring crowds. The people who gathered each October on the official Day of Remembrance (formally the Day of the Political Prisoner, inaugurated quietly in the 1970s by dissident civil rights groups22) understood what they were remembering, and all apparently agreed on what they wished to say about the present.

That consensus has become more ragged in the past decade. Many more monuments have appeared since 1991, including more explicit sculptures of imprisoned heads, enchained bodies, shackles and barbed wire, but the crowds are thinner and their sense of purpose far from clear. There is no single cause against which the protesters can unite; the past that once seemed so alive is fading as the present grows more complex and uncertain. The chains and wire appear over-insistent when set beside the single granite stone. Meanwhile, the museums are emptying — at least in the big cities — and even the elderly appear to be less interested in new reminders of the painful Soviet past. In 1997, Russia’s first elected president, Boris Yeltsin, proposed to build a monument to victims of the Russian Civil War, a gesture intended as an act of national reconciliation. ‘The Civil War?’ an elderly man said to me that winter. ‘That’s history! What use is that to us?’23

While monuments to the living past — the atrocities that people remember and that provoke real passion — receive less publicity these days, a new and vapid kind is taking over urban landscapes. Moscow’s mayor, Yuri Luzhkov, is a notable advocate of historical kitsch. His favourite architect, Tsereteli, has put equestrian statues in central Moscow. He has built a 40-foot wide luminous globe above the glitzy Manege shopping arcade (itself a historical conceit, built on three archeological levels under the city centre, each of which is named for the century of silt it notionally displaces), and topped it with a

22 A fuller discussion appears in Smith, op. cit., 160–3.
23 Merridale, Night of Stone, op. cit., 411.
prancing horse and rider (the British Isles, I discovered, are under the horse’s tail). He has stuck angels on a pole outside his own fake cathedral, and helped to rebuild the most famous of contemporary Orthodox monuments, the Cathedral of Christ the Saviour, a replica of the nineteenth-century memorial to Alexander I that was blown up in a single night in 1931. The story goes that Tsereteli’s garden is littered with dozens more of these sculptures, the ones that were too tasteless even for Luzhkov.

Everyone jokes about the images, and Moscow’s intellectuals love to hate Luzhkov, but the rash of concrete sculpture reflects a more general mood. Passion about history was easy when the way forward seemed to be clear. The only project for a conscientious citizen used to be the dismantling of dictatorship. These days, however, the answers are contentious, the results of the first decade disappointing, and the lessons of the past correspondingly uncomfortable. It is less troubling to make jokes about Tsereteli than to agree on a consensual, or even appropriately controversial, alternative. The kitsch horsemen provide an answer to the question of what Russia is. To the comfort of the new Russian capitalist élite, Moscow has reclaimed all of its past, not just the troublesome decades of dictatorship. The celebrations that marked its 850th year, in 1997, were lavish, and displaced grim reminders of Stalinism in a festival of reimagined Tsarism, fake Slavicism, and gold-encrusted religious ceremonial. A plastic shopping bag that everyone was carrying back then announced, in Latin script, that ‘Russia will rise again’.

The confusion about memory is mirrored, to some extent, in the debates about history in schools and universities. But there are other problems, too, and most of them are basic. Textbooks and curricula remain controversial, and the battle lines between conservatives and reformers are all too clear, but the most immediate difficulty for history in schools is not ideas but money. Russian education — and especially the humanities — is in financial crisis, a situation compounded by falling birth rates, internal migration (which leaves some rural schools without viable numbers of pupils), and the pressure on salaries and resources that dogs the whole state sector. Teachers are very poorly paid — their monthly salaries are often less than the price of a cheap winter coat — and they work under a constant threat of redundancy as schools are forced to close.

This is the atmosphere in which reformers are arguing for new textbooks, for the introduction of a new syllabus and new classroom techniques, the purchase of computers (an unrealizable dream outside the big cities) and a new sensitivity to historical debate. These theoretical and progressive questions have drawn in phalanxes of experts from the West, historians and educators (many cannot speak Russian, but ‘education’ is regarded as a transferable skill, like making boilers), and there has been a good deal of collaborative writing.24

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24 The project that I visited in Moscow last September, Euroclio, is partially funded by the Dutch government, and has drawn on expertise from several other EU countries, excluding (in this case) Great Britain.
Collaboration with the West has been fruitful in other ways as well, especially through the training of researchers. But it is the simple injection of money — the purchase of books or computers, for instance — that has proved most useful for reformers in the short term.

Funding is a relatively simple matter, however. There are deeper intellectual problems in Russia that the intervention of outsiders cannot solve. Like other kinds of intellectual endeavour, history in Russia was isolated from the debates that were taking place in the democratic world for more than 50 years. That isolation prolonged, and probably intensified, its distinctiveness. Outside the capitals, fewer historians read foreign languages today, and foreign books have always been prohibitively expensive. Russia has an intellectual culture of its own (it always has had, but the twentieth century did not witness a narrowing of the gulf that separates it from the rest of Europe), and the past years have highlighted Russian traditions that defy the notion of a global historical consensus. Textbooks that are written in Toronto or New York do not speak to this distinct culture. They fail to engage with its central concerns. There is a problem of communication between professionals with a ‘global’ training (whether teachers or researchers) and the audience for indigenous popular history, including schoolchildren.

The distinctive features of their own culture are explored by Russian historians, and they identify, among other things, a taste for schism, a fear of liberty, and a desire for self-castration or for death. Fortunately, when it comes to education and the practicalities of designing a workable curriculum, the issues are marginally less appalling. It would be interesting to consider how much they even derive from an imagined ‘Russian’ past and how much, by contrast, they are more direct legacies of authoritarian rule. They include a tendency to seek an undivided truth, the one correct answer beside which all others are sheer lies; a fascination with charismatic authority, and especially with the personalities of leaders; an equal fascination with the irrational, and especially with the idea of miraculous deliverance, the hoped-for but elusive ‘special path’; and a taste for making extreme judgments about events, dividing them into light and dark, good and evil, the echoes of omniscient morality.

The first — the search for undivided truth — is the most familiar. The Russian Orthodox notion of right belief, of apostolic religion, has been blamed for this, as has Stalinist dogma. Both probably play a part, probably interdependently, but what matters is their practical impact. In the old days there was one single history textbook for all schools. Students were required to learn it more or less verbatim. They were examined orally at the end of the year.

year, and marks (on a scale of 5, for excellent, to 1, fail) were awarded for accurate renditions of its contents. In the first years of glasnost, reformers often said that they were looking for ‘a new textbook’, not for several. The idea persists at all levels of educational administration. ‘They just want us to tell them which is the right one’, an educational reformer told me in September 2000.28

In 2001, after several years of classroom pluralism, Putin’s government announced that a single history textbook would soon be introduced for all schools in the Russian Federation. A competition to identify its author was duly launched, attended, predictably, by rumours of corruption, favouritism and fabulous potential royalties. At the time of writing (March 2002), the fortunate author has yet to emerge, and it is possible that the idea may be dropped. Nostalgia for the past persists among teachers, however. Librarians and departmental administrators explain that the main constraint is financial, that the introduction of a single textbook would save money. But it is likely that the real reason for the teachers’ concern is a mistrust of uncertainty, a lingering unwillingness to take responsibility for interpretation. To blame it on a clampdown from the centre is to miss the point. ‘You seem to think that there can be more than one right answer’, a first-year student at Moscow University said to me in consternation. I had been taking my first seminar there, attempting to find out how much the students knew about Stalinism. Her teachers looked a bit alarmed as well.

Among the other legacies of authoritarianism, the fascination with power and charismatic leadership was more evident ten years ago than it is now. The populist history of high Stalinism famously concentrated on heroes, abandoning the less accessible theories of Marx in favour of morality tales. To that extent, Stalin judged the popular taste — in his case that of a semi-literate population — with some accuracy. Russia is not the only country where romance and biography are eagerly consumed by readers with an interest in the past. In the 1980s, too, after decades of censorship and bland writing, the Russian public’s fascination with Stalin’s illustrious victims was entirely predictable. Among the bestsellers of glasnost were a number of books with titles like ‘Returned Names’. Most of these showed photographs of former enemies of the people, and all gave potted accounts of their lives, openly presenting the material that had been kept from public scrutiny for three generations.29 In the same vein, the bestsellers of the early 1990s included Dmitrii Volkogonov’s biographies of Trotsky and Stalin, along with a translation of Stephen Cohen’s biography of Bukharin.

Professional historians have reacted against this in the past ten years, preferring to explore ideas imported from the West — the history of mentalities, for instance, and cultural history, even post-modernism. Financial constraints at

28 Interview with Julia Kushnerova, teacher and member of Euroclio, September 2000.
29 For examples, see A. Proskurin (ed.), Vozvrashchennye imena, vols 1 and 2 (Moscow 1989); F.A. Karmanov and S.A. Panov (eds), Reabilitirovan posmertno, vols 1 and 2 (Moscow 1988).
home make joint ventures with foreign academics particularly attractive, and these inevitably reflect the intellectual interests of the richer partner. There are currently several excellent joint ventures and team-based projects in preparation, including Lynne Viola’s work on de-kulakization, Jeffrey Burds’ on banditry, and R.W. Davies’ long-running project on the Stalinist economy. Elsewhere, the inspiration for new history has come from the Annales school (the history of mentalities is among the most popular areas for new PhDs), and from the newly-fashionable (to Moscow) French schools of deconstruction and psychoanalysis. ‘If it’s not about French intellectuals, and it’s not about deconstruction either’, a publisher in Moscow told me when I was trying to find a translator for my own book, ‘we aren’t interested. Philosophy I might be able to do. But death, no.’ He was eating a hot dog and his coffee cup was balanced on a pile of new translations of Foucault.

Outside the research institutes, however, the public taste for biography continues. The memoirs of the latest crop of leaders have sold well, while scrutiny of policy takes second place behind a fascination with character. It was personality — image — that guided the people’s choice of Vladimir Putin in the elections of 1999. He looked good to a population grown weary of gerontocracy, and he looked even better beside Yeltsin, whose fondness for vodka was becoming an embarrassment even in Moscow. In Putin’s case, as one public-opinion pollster explained to me after the election, ‘Three things were all-important. He was healthy, he was young, and he was not a drinker.’ The details of policy were hardly ever mentioned. No one could say what Putin’s ideas really were. As Russian academics have noted in other contexts, ‘We operate throughout with general propositions; we want nothing to do with either moderation or number.’

The taste for miracles, morality tales, heroes and villains also remains strong in popular culture. The twilight of communism (a grand secular morality tale in its own right) saw the proliferation of alternative eschatologies — astrology, extrasensory perception, magical healing, spiritualism, and a popular Orthodoxy whose prophecies were drawn directly from the Book of Revelation. Three years ago, on a visit to Kiev, I was presented with a pile of petitions decrying a government plan to issue pensioners with social security numbers. ‘Who will get the number 666?’ it asked. A local newspaper also carried the story, together with interviews with outraged citizens. Across the former Soviet Union, recent ecological disasters, beginning with Chernobyl, have all been traced to Biblical prophecies, and the end of Russian civilization is regularly nigh. Schoolchildren bring their grandparents’ superstitions to the classroom. Another challenge for the textbook-writers is to make the stories in them simple and clear without encouraging irrationality or nursery moralism.

In the first years of reform, the teachers themselves were a further problem. The contrast between generations is especially clear in Russian schools. Older teachers accept that they have to teach new material. But they have much greater difficulty adapting to youth culture. In the old days, children were regimented, uniformed and deferential. Teaching was authoritarian. Since 1991, school uniforms have been abandoned almost everywhere (the traditional pinafores and bows come out, for a joke, on the last day of the children’s final year, when teenage schoolgirls accessorize them with fishnet stockings, garters, and platform boots), and discipline has been relaxed. Children who never knew the old world see nothing strange in answering back, giggling, fidgeting, moaning about work, and chewing gum. Older teachers, and my colleagues in some universities, have no idea how to adapt. Communication is often difficult. The children complain of the irrelevance of what they have to learn. The IT skills that they require, and the modern jargon that they use, remain mysterious to their teachers.

In this new Russia, history-teaching is having to change in at least three ways. The past is no longer sensational in its own right, as it was in the late 1980s, and so the new textbooks have to make it interesting by other means. They have to address the questions that new Russians want to ask, covering areas that used to be taboo. Secondly, they have to make their impact more quickly, as history is allotted less space in the timetable than when it had a direct propaganda value. Thirdly, curriculum designers have to pick their way round the stubborn Soviet legacy of ideology. Traditionally, history-teaching was separate from (and subordinate to) the formal classes in scientific atheism and dialectical materialism that were compulsory for all students. The old Soviet moralists have not yet retired, and they cannot just be pensioned off. Meanwhile, most history teachers still recoil from ideology on principle. Their ideal, for the time being, is history without a message. The solution has been to keep the two parts separate, to make history into a set of chronological tales, and to introduce a substitute for the old propaganda, to retrain the old Soviet moralists as civics teachers.

When I asked where the old ideas had gone, then, the answer was presented in a pamphlet-length curriculum, the course in ‘social awareness’. We try not to let the old people near the kids’, a teacher told me privately. ‘We ask them not to come in. But if they do, and they do have the right to work, of course, this is what they are teaching.’ Roughly three-quarters of the course looks fair enough. There are classes on democracy, the separation of executive and judiciary, capitalist finance, banking and the proper management of the environment in an unregulated market. (How these are taught, and how the interaction between generations works in a real classroom, remains to be investigated.) But the old authoritarian habits have not died. There are also

33 I have consulted two of these for this article, Pravovedenie i Oshchestvoznanie (1993) and Oshchestvoznanie, 8–9, 10–11 (Moscow 1994). Both were syllabuses recommended for all schools by the Russian Ministry of Education. The latter was still in use in 2000.
classes on ‘the ideal man’ and woman, the ‘ideal family’, the perils of divorce, the selfishness of the childless, and the dangers of a lonely old age. Homosexuality is not even mentioned. Language that echoes the old Soviet world resounds on every page — ‘personality and morality’, is one unit, ‘man in search of the Ideal’, another. These classes are aimed at 13–16-year-olds.

The point here is not merely that some of this material is stodgy, socially exclusive and outdated. Some of it, on the contrary, is the kind of basic information that new citizens will sorely need. But by putting it in the space where wooden-sounding Marxism-Leninism used to be, some teachers are guaranteeing that it will be shunned, satirized and quickly forgotten. ‘We want to include some of it in the history class’, another teacher told me. ‘But of course there isn’t time.’ That, too, is partially deliberate. For history is being purged of ideological taints. The new curriculum gallops through the entire past, from the Stone Age, Ancient Greece, and Kievan Rus to the Chechen crisis, in five years. There is an emphasis on leadership (Tsars and princes) and on culture. The latter is intended to provide romance. ‘We have to do the peasant hut four times’, a young teacher complained.

For those who see that history could raise issues of wider significance, and substitute, in many ways, for the new ‘civics’, the problem with the new curriculum is its breakneck speed. Children cover the entire twentieth century in a single year. They are 15 years old when they have to cope with ‘the idea of revolution’ (in Europe, Russia, China and Indochina) in a mere three hours, and the second world war, less than a month later, in another three. They are given an hour in total on ‘the political map of the world at the end of the twentieth century’. But at the end of the year, they will face a national oral examination on the entire course, so teachers cannot choose to focus on selected aspects of it, or to draw more detailed conclusions from the things the children like.

The one reform that has been implemented since 1995 is a revised final-year course that takes 17-year-olds through the twentieth century for a second time. In practice this repeats the previous mistakes. It goes too fast, it shuns all judgments, and it covers ground that everyone has seen before. Not surprisingly, the students frequently complain of boredom. Some teachers overcome all this — I visited one school where the students knew more than most British undergraduates — but in general the children agreed that there were too many ‘facts’, that modern history was ‘grey’, and that they preferred the stories that they read at home. I asked them if they ever talked to their grandparents about the past, and then I asked how many of their families had stories about war and loss. A forest of hands — almost all — immediately went up. But my suggestion that family stories were part of the same stuff as they were reading in the textbooks came as a surprise. Memory and school history have come adrift from one another, the one remaining painful and divisive while the other is now safe but bland.

34 The most recent history curriculum (currently under review, and likely to be superseded) is Komplekt programm po istorii s drevesshikh vremen do nashikh dnei (Moscow 1998).
Undergraduate history faces a similar set of problems. The students have family stories — we talked at length about their parents’ lives — but their lectures and seminars do not allow for much discussion of them. A colleague, a professor in his sixties, kindly invited me to take a class one afternoon. He was expecting me to follow up the lecture that he had just given. Instead, I began by asking the students to tell me how the revolution had affected their own families. ‘We don’t do that’, he whispered. It must have been a risky idea 10 or 15 years ago. It also invited a style of discussion — not the old Soviet authoritarian classroom style — that he found alien. But at this distance from the Soviet past, it seemed to work. Young adults do not draw up battle lines. The grandchildren of Gulag superintendents talked freely to the daughter of a dissident intellectual. But none of that will turn up in their final-year exam.

‘We want a history like yours’, another professor said. ‘A history that has no ideology.’ I found this such a strange idea that I asked him why he had embarked on his research. ‘History is about romance, isn’t it?’, he replied. ‘I have always loved the nineteenth century. People knew how to live back then.’ I asked about the great debates, about the validity of the revolution, the role of utopianism, the corruption of ideals. ‘We leave those things to the kids’, he replied. ‘All we can do is to provide the information.’ The image is of critical skills taught on the set of a costume drama.

It is easy for a foreigner to find fault. I have listed some of the obvious problems that I found, but in the end I cannot draw a simple conclusion, let alone prescribe. My observations leave me genuinely uncertain. It is clear that professional academic history is becoming ever more remote from the popular kind, that philosophical debates about Russian uniqueness do not help people to understand their family histories, still less the tensions that get enacted every May on Victory Day. It is also clear that there are cultural traditions, styles of thinking, that have not been much affected by communism’s collapse, and that these must form the starting-point for any revision of historical paradigms. It will never be enough simply to cut and paste the models that are fashionable in the West.

Finally, it is also obvious that the transition that really counts is between generations. The difference between the people who remember Stalin and the shock troops of glasnost is one fundamental stage. But the children who have never known communism at all, who have grown up with advertising, choice and freedom to talk back, are different again. I think, as a result of the last round of interviews and from my reading of opinion polls, that enough time has passed since Stalin’s death for the emotive questions to be asked and answered in less hostile ways, for some of the most difficult debates to be reopened. But for that to happen there would need to be a return to the past, and freedom, for young people at the moment, seems to include a focus on the present, on money, electronic media, jobs and fun.

Whatever new approach is sought, it would seem fair to say that history is failing Russians at the moment. It seems to be a disjointed mixture, still not quite respectable, and its potential as a source of questions about the present is
not being realized. To some extent, it is the glamour of the market, of money and dealing and rapid results, that has superseded reflective thinking about the past. But history cannot compete if it is dull. Prejudices and lazy thinking flourish because history is either too vague and theoretical, or else too bland, to make its students think in detail. Marxism-Leninism is not the only ideology that is going unexamined as a result. At the end of that class at Moscow University, for instance, I asked the students if they had any questions for me. The first was troubling. ‘Aren’t you worried about all those black immigrants in England?’ a young woman began. ‘Why doesn’t your government encourage white people to have more children?’ I tried to talk about multi-culturalism, anti-racism, and the economic needs of an ageing population, but my arguments did not convince the class.

The professor walked home with me afterwards and tried to sympathize. ‘It’s dreadful’, he said. ‘They are such terrible racists. They can be so prejudiced about Chechnya, for instance. It’s as if they had forgotten that these people fought with us in the war, and that theirs is among the most sophisticated of our ethnic cultures.’ It was a standard Soviet view put to good use. We walked in silence for a little while, apparently agreeing about it. But then he added something more. ‘Of course, the whole thing just gets stirred up by the press. And they are all Jews. It’s all a Jewish conspiracy.’

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War is the most wrenching of all political transitions. From peace to war and from war to peace — this double movement can have vast geopolitical, ideological and social consequences. The labels we apply to such transitions are as important as the events themselves. Sometimes these concepts are developed retrospectively; often they are taken from the vocabulary of the time. But the labels are rarely neutral, either in their political bias or their analytical implications. Although as historians we now live in an Age of Discourse, scholars have been selective about the concepts they choose to scrutinize as historical artifacts. One major blind spot is the two ‘world wars’.

It is now almost impossible to imagine the twentieth century without the categories of ‘the first world war’ and ‘the second world war’. Together they define the first half of the century — with ‘pre-war’ and ‘inter-war’ eras as punctuation marks. They also conjure up the ultimate horror — world war three — lurid imaginings of which helped to prevent the Cold War from turning hot. Yet, use of the term ‘world war’ for these conflicts was by no means axiomatic. While some countries applied this label to the war of 1914–18, others did not. Something like consensus only developed in the 1940s. In conceptual terms, therefore, it took the ‘second world war’ to create the first. But use of the latter term was by no means a foregone conclusion. As we shall see, only in 1948 did the British government formally decide that the country had just been fighting the ‘second world war’. Other major belligerents, notably the Soviet Union, China and Japan, continued to use quite different language. To a large extent, the discourse of world war was a German and American construction — foreshadowed in their conflict of 1917–18 and its aftermath, and then confirmed in the ideological struggle between Roosevelt and Hitler in 1939–41. As such, it may be understood as both product and procreator of globalization.

These terminological issues have attracted surprisingly little attention from scholars. Most histories of the two great conflicts usually take their titles for granted.¹ In this short article I can only be suggestive — raising questions

¹ For comments on a draft version the author is grateful to Cambridge colleagues Christopher Clark, Richard J. Evans, Emma Rothschild, John Thompson and Robert Tombs.

¹ For a rare exception see the brief but suggestive comments about 1914–18 in Hew Strachan, *The First World War*, vol. I: To Arms (Oxford 2001), 694–5.
rather than resolving them. Much more work can profitably be done in the secondary literature and in national archives.

This article will look first at how the conflict of 1914–18 was conceptualized in the years that followed; then at some language shifts in the 1930s. The next section deals with conceptualization of the war of 1939–45, before offering some final comments about why this business of labelling matters for our understanding of political transitions and twentieth-century history.

The problem can be grasped quickly by anyone seeking to follow up references to the two conflicts in those putative newspapers of record, The Times of London and The New York Times. Each publishes an annual index. From August 1914 The Times indexed the conflict under the heading of ‘War, European’, before shifting from April 1917 (the month of US entry) to ‘War, The Great’. It retained the latter terminology in its quarterly indexes right through the 1920s and 1930s, but dropped it from April 1940 in favour of ‘War (1914–1918)’. The new conflict of 1939–45 was indexed from the start as ‘War, 1939–’. After the Axis powers were defeated, The Times adopted the parallel categories of ‘War (1914–1918)’ and ‘War (1939–1945)’, and these it retains to the present day. Strictly speaking, the two world wars do not exist in The Times indexes.

They do, however, in those of its transatlantic counterpart. From August 1914, The New York Times’ half-yearly index adopted the term ‘European War’, and this remained its main heading into the 1930s. From July 1919, however, it started offering a cross-reference to the main entry under the heading ‘World War’. In January 1935, ‘World War’ itself became the main entry, and ‘European War’ the subsidiary cross-reference. September 1939 saw ‘European War’ revived as a functional heading for the current conflict. In the index for July-December 1941 Soviet participation was absorbed into this, now massive, entry under the sub-heading ‘Eastern Front’. But ‘World War’ had now been amended to ‘World War I (1914–18)’ and there was a new cross-reference ‘World War II (December 7, 1941)’, directing readers to the entries listed under ‘European War, Far East’. From January 1942, ‘European War’ disappeared and the main headings were simply ‘World War I’ and ‘World War II’. This has been the practice of The New York Times ever since.

This simple comparison hints at a broad pattern. We find Britain and generally France on one side of the conceptual divide, and America and Germany on the other.

In the 1920s and 1930s, British writing about the conflict of 1914–18 usually adopted the titles ‘the War’ or ‘the Great War’ — the latter with echoes of the 20-year war against Revolutionary and Napoleonic France. Thus the collection of official documents edited by G.P. Gooch and Harold Temperley was entitled British Documents on the Origins of the War 1898–1914. C.R.M.F. Cruttwell’s standard overview, first published by Oxford University Press in 1934, was called A History of the Great War, 1914–1918. A very rare
exception in the immediate postwar years was the two-volume study by Charles Repington, published in 1920. This was entitled *The First World War* (1914–1918). But Repington did little to exploit that theme in the book itself — largely an edited version of his diary as a war correspondent. The term ‘World War’ is used in the third volume (1927) of Winston Churchill’s memoir-cum-history, *The World Crisis*, but is not evident in the first two (1923) or the last two (1929 and 1931).²

In France, ‘la Guerre’ or ‘la Grande Guerre’ were the most widely-used titles for memoirs and studies. Examples are Victor Giraud’s *Histoire de la Grande Guerre* (1920), and Marshal Foch’s *Mémoires pour servir à l’histoire de la Guerre de 1914–1918*, which appeared in 1931. Again there were some exceptions. The Paris-based ‘Société de l’Histoire de la Guerre’, founded in 1918, began publishing its own quarterly academic journal from April 1923, under the title *Revue d’Histoire de la Guerre Mondiale*. Its principal editor was the diplomatic historian and war veteran Pierre Renouvin, whose teaching responsibilities at the Sorbonne included a course on ‘l’étude critique des sources de l’histoire de la guerre mondiale’. Funded by the Society, this was offered from December 1922 and was billed as the first of its kind in Europe. From it came Renouvin’s study of the immediate origins of the war, published in French in 1925 and in English translation three years later.³ But ‘la Guerre’ or ‘la Grande Guerre’ remained the most common labels.

What, then, of Germany and America? It is instructive to see what happened to book titles in the process of translation. The Gooch and Temperley volumes of *British Documents on the Origins of the War 1898–1914* became *Die Britischen Amtlichen Dokumente über den Ursprung des Weltkriegs 1898–1914*. The memoirs of the US Commander in Europe, General John J. Pershing, were published in France in 1931 under the title *Mes Souvenirs de la Guerre*. But the original American edition had appeared as *My Experiences in the World War*. It is to Germany and America, in different ways, that we must look for the origins of ‘the world war’.

In Germany, the term ‘Weltkrieg’ was used from the start to define the conflict, and it was also overwhelmingly the preferred title for memoirs. This is understandable when we recall that Germany’s lack of status as a world power (*Weltmacht*) had become an obsession in the Wilhelmine era. The concept of

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² Winston S. Churchill, *The World Crisis, 1916–1918* (London 1927), e.g. 9, 96, 252. I have also found one reference in idem, *The Eastern Front* (London 1931), 222. According to Churchill’s official biographer, the title *The World Crisis* was forced on him by his American publisher, Scribners — see ibid., vol. 4 (London 1975), 754. In 1916, when out of office, Churchill had written four articles on aspects of the conflict for *The New York Tribune*, which that paper unilaterally entitled ‘Four Great Chapters of the World War’; see Churchill papers CHAR 8/34 (Churchill College Archives Centre, Cambridge, henceforth CCAC).
Weltmacht has been traced right back to 1809. Although by the end of the nineteenth century it was almost a synonym for ‘Grossmacht’ (Great Power), the word did have distinctive referents — notably the idea that a large navy and numerous colonies were the marks of a true world power. Supremely Britain fell into this category: as early as 1833 Leopold von Ranke had spoken of it as ‘eine kolossale Weltmacht’.

Anglo-German rivalry in the decade or so before 1914 turned on Britain’s imperial and naval hegemony and Germany’s bid for world power. Logically, then, the ensuing war was a world war. This was the line taken in the postwar memoirs of Germany’s 1914 élite. Thus the former Chancellor, Theobold von Bethmann Hollweg, in his Reflections on the World War (completed just as the Treaty of Versailles was being signed), blamed Russia for turning the pan-Slav issue in the Balkans into a European crisis. But, he argued, this European conflict only developed into ‘world revolution’ because of the participation of Britain, which, in turn, drew in her colonies from India to Canada, and also the USA. None of these countries was bothered about the Straits or the Balkans, but they all had an interest in ensuring that Britain’s world empire (Weltimperium or Weltreich) was not weakened by the struggle. With Britain’s ally, Japan, also an active participant in the early stages, claimed Bethmann, ‘under pressure from England the war became a campaign of annihilation (Vernichtungskampf) by the entire world against Germany’.

The same line may be found in the 1919 memoirs of the pre-war Foreign Minister, Gottlieb von Jagow: ‘Through England’s entry the conflict became truly a world war.’ And the former Austrian Foreign Minister, Count Czernin, while more critical of ‘Prussian tendencies’, offered a similar analysis of the globalization of the conflict. ‘Belgium and Luxembourg were treated on the Bismarckian principle of “Might before Right” and the world rose against Germany. I say world, because England’s power extended over the world.’

From this perspective, the term ‘world war’ therefore seemed entirely apt. Germany was a ‘middle power’, encircled in Europe and denied ‘world power’ across the seas. The term Mittelmacht connoted both geography and size. Even a vehement critic of the Wilhelmine regime, such as the socialist Karl Kautsky, employed the vocabulary of ‘world war’ and ‘world revolution’ for his own polemic.

‘World War’ was also the preferred term in the USA, albeit for very different reasons. As we have seen, The New York Times adopted it once America

5 Theobold von Bethmann Hollweg, Betrachtungen zum Weltkriege (Berlin 1919), vol. I, 189–90.
7 Count Ottokar Czernin, In the World War (London 1919), 15.
8 Cf. Dr Kurt Jagow, Daten des Weltkrieges: Vorgeschichte und Verlauf bis Ende 1921 (Leipzig 1922), 49–50.
9 Karl Kautsky, Wie der Weltkrieg entstand (Berlin 1919). Note that the translation into English was entitled The Guilt of William Hohenzollern (London 1920).
entered the conflict in April 1917, and it became the standard terminology for popular and official accounts of the conflict in the USA.\textsuperscript{10} The explanation was partly geographical. In 1914–16 the term ‘European War’ seemed entirely appropriate since the major belligerents were all European. Japan’s active involvement occurred only in the opening weeks of the conflict. By contrast, 1917 saw the entry of America (April), China (August) and Brazil (October) and this gave the war new global dimensions.\textsuperscript{11}

But ideology also played a part. For nearly three years President Woodrow Wilson had sought to keep out of the European conflict, despite his country’s deepening economic ties to Britain which German U-boat warfare was intended to sever. He had been at pains to distance America morally from the warring parties, speaking of ‘Peace without Victory’ and outlining principles of disarmament, anti-imperialism and freedom of the seas which were a critique of the Entente as much as the Central Powers. In many ways April 1917 was therefore a humiliating defeat for the President. He thus took pains to insist that he was not simply being dragged into the European war but was becoming a belligerent to implement his own vision. This was nothing less than ‘to make the world safe for democracy’. Not just Europe but ‘the world’ — because the European conflict, in Wilson’s eyes, was symptomatic of the interconnected global problems of modernity to which he had frequently alluded in statements on both foreign and domestic policy. ‘Lacking guidance from the American diplomatic tradition, he internationalized the heritage of his own country.’\textsuperscript{12}

Wilson saw the League of Nations as nothing less than an instrument of world peace. This implied that the preceding conflict was nothing less than a world war. In America as in Germany, therefore, the terminology grew out of the war aims. For the Kaiserreich this was a world war because the root issue was world power; for Wilsonians the conflict was defined as a world war because the goal was world peace. Germany and the USA were both second-rank players seeking international influence, albeit in very different forms. In both cases ideology, as much as geography, shaped their vocabulary. The story would be similar a quarter-century later.

By the 1930s there were signs that the term ‘world war’ was becoming more popular in France and Britain. The Paris publisher Jules Tallandier issued a series of popular paperbacks under the title ‘La Guerre Mondiale: Pages Vécues’. In 1933 Camille Bloch, one of Renouvin’s colleagues at the Sorbonne and in La Societé de la Grande Guerre, published a short book entitled Les Causes de la Guerre Mondiale: Précis Historiques. In 1930 the British military

\textsuperscript{10} Again there were exceptions, e.g. Charles G. Dawes, \textit{A Journal of the Great War} (2 vols, Boston 1921).
\textsuperscript{11} Cf. Marc Ferro, \textit{The Great War} (London 1973), 205.
journalist, Basil Liddell Hart, brought out a study of wartime strategy, rather misleadingly called *The Real War*. The revised edition, four years later, appeared under the new title *A History of the World War 1914–1918*. Although Liddell Hart did not explain the reason for his second choice, it seems to have reflected the flood of twentieth-anniversary reflections in 1934 on the war and its significance. This may also account for the parallel shift in *The New York Times* indexing, mentioned earlier, whereby the main heading from 1935 became ‘World War’ rather than ‘European War’.

Intimations of a future conflict as well as anniversaries from the past were also important. In 1931–2 Japan occupied Manchuria, in 1933–4 Hitler’s Germany was rearming. In autumn 1934 the journalist ‘Johannes Steel’ (pseudonym for Herbert Steel) published *The Second World War*, his ‘bird’s-eye view of the political situation in Europe’. He predicted a second world war by the middle of 1935, sparked in Europe by Franco-German conflict over the Saarland, Austria and hegemony in Eastern Europe. This, he forecast, would prompt Japan to conquer the Soviet Far East while Russia was still weak and the world distracted. Although his prophecy was unfulfilled, such talk was now in the air. In China both communist and nationalist writers spoke frequently from 1931 about an impending ‘second world war’. ‘How many years do we have to prepare for the Second World War?’, the Nationalist leader Chiang Kai-shek asked in 1932 in a speech to the Army Staff College. Like many, he forecast that it would start in 1936. Even though that proved premature, the renewal of Sino-Japanese war on a far larger scale from July 1937 revived such predictions. The communist theorist Zhou En-lai wrote in February 1938 that the fascist ‘aggressor nations’ were so ambitious that they would ‘start the second world war without thinking’.

Despite such prophecies, however, it was by no means axiomatic that the conflict of 1939–45 should be termed ‘the second world war’. That term has never been officially adopted by several of the major belligerent countries.

Throughout the history of the Soviet Union, for instance, the conflict was always known as ‘The Great Patriotic War’ — the title coined by *Pravda*, the party newspaper, on 23 June 1941, the day after Hitler’s invasion began. This phrase linked the conflict with the struggle against Napoleon (‘The Patriotic War’) and established from the start the prevailing theme of Soviet domestic propaganda, namely to play down the ideological aspects of the struggle and highlight national history and culture. For the Soviet regime the war of 1914–17 was, by contrast, a tsarist and capitalist war, to be marginalized in history and memory. Churchill’s 1931 study of the Eastern Front was

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published in America as *The Unknown War*. The war remained equally 'unknown' within the Soviet Union, despite 2,000,000 dead, in ironic contrast to the intense memorialization of the Great War in the West.\footnote{Nina Tumarkin, *The Living and the Dead: The Rise and Fall of the Cult of World War II in Russia* (New York 1994), 61; Catherine Merridale, *Night of Stone: Death and Memory in Russia* (London 2000), 122–7.}

In China, too, the discourse of war has been circumscribed. The preferred term for 1937–45 is *The War of Resistance against Japan* (*Kang Ri Zhanzheng*). This also reflects both geography and ideology. Japan was China’s only direct enemy, occupying vast tracts of the country from 1937. Assistance from Britain and America was of limited significance — political symbolism more than substantial aid. Moreover, the communist regime that came to power in 1949 chose to celebrate its own victory rather than the inter-capitalist conflict that made victory possible. Like Soviet Russia, it focused on the October Revolution rather than the war of 1914–17. Not until the waning of communist ideology in the 1980s did Beijing start encouraging a new interest in the war of 1937–45, although still under the label ‘War of Resistance against Japan’.\footnote{Arthur Waldron, ‘China’s New Remembering of World War II: The Case of Zhang Zizhong’, *Modern Asian Studies*, 30 (1996), 869–96.}

Nor was the concept of world war employed in Japan. Its brutal and massive invasion of China was undeclared and was therefore dubbed, in a characteristic Japanese euphemism, ‘The China Incident’. After the conflict expanded in December 1941 to include the USA and the European colonial powers, it was described as the ‘Greater East Asian War’ (*Dai Tōa sensō*). Under the American occupation after 1945 the ‘Pacific War’ (*Taiheiyō sensō*) became the official title, but nationalist revisionist writers revived the earlier term in the 1960s.\footnote{Saburō Ienaga, *The Pacific War, 1931–45* (New York 1978), 247–56.}

Of course, none of these belligerents was involved globally. Japan and China did not join in the European conflict, and Stalin did not break the Soviet-Japanese neutrality pact of 1941 until a few days before the Japanese surrender in August 1945. France was in a different category from 1914 to 1918, having been knocked out of the war after nine months in June 1940. From London, Charles de Gaulle tried to rally the French by declaring that the battle of France was not the end because this was ‘une guerre mondiale’, involving the British Empire and the industrial might of the USA.\footnote{Address of 18 June 1940 in Charles de Gaulle, *Mémoires de Guerre: L’Appel, 1940–1942* (Paris 1954), 267. In the English translation of Jean Lacouture’s biography, ‘une guerre mondiale’ has been rendered ‘a worldwide war’, which is true to de Gaulle’s emphasis but obscures his exact use of words. See Lacouture, trans. Patrick O’Brien, *De Gaulle: The Rebel, 1890–1944* (New York 1990), 225.} But de Gaulle’s ‘Free French’ were now bit players in the conflict, marginal to both events and discourse. Great Britain, a full participant for whom this was truly a world war, did not readily adopt the term.

A few weeks after war broke out, the British politician, Duff Cooper, who...
had resigned from Chamberlain’s Cabinet after Munich, published his speeches for the period October 1938 to August 1939 under the title *The Second World War: First Phase*. He claimed that the invasion of Poland and the Anglo-French declaration of war brought to an end ‘the period of un-opposed aggression and bloodless victory’, and ‘the second World War entered upon a new phase’. But official statements usually referred simply to ‘the War’. Certainly, most people saw it as a continuation of the former struggle against Germany. From October 1939 the Amalgamated Press in London started publishing an illustrated fortnightly magazine on the conflict entitled *The Second Great War*. And in August 1940 Churchill, by then Prime Minister, spoke of ‘this second war against German aggression’. On 12 June 1941 he referred more specifically to ‘the war against Nazism’. It was not until 14 July, after the invasion of Russia, that he used the term ‘a great world war’. And on 26 December 1941, nearly three weeks after Pearl Harbor, he told the US Congress: ‘Twice in a single generation the catastrophe of world war has fallen upon us.’

The predominant British label, however, was still ‘the War’. In June 1944 the publishers, Macmillan, asked for an official government ruling, noting that a good many American publications were already using the terms ‘First World War’ and ‘Second World War’. The Cabinet Secretary, Sir Edward Bridges, commented:

> The phrase ‘Great War’ certainly seems pretty inappropriate now. The alternatives which first occur to one are:
> ‘War of 1914–18’ and ‘War of 1939–?’
> ‘First World War’ and ‘Second World War’
> ‘Four Years’ War’ and ‘Five (or six, or seven) Years’ War’.

Asked for his opinion, Churchill circled ‘First World War’ and ‘Second World War’, but Bridges decided not to make any official statement. ‘After all, this is a matter which is going to be decided by popular judgment. This is not really one for a Government decision and I do not think it would be right to go beyond informal guidance when occasion offers.’ And Churchill himself equivocated. When embarking on his war memoirs in April 1946 he used the working title ‘The Second Great War’. It was not until September 1947, little more than seven months before serialization was to begin in America and Britain, that he committed himself to the title ‘The Second World War’.

Norman Brook, Bridges’ successor as Cabinet Secretary, favoured a firmer

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22 Bridges to Martin, 24 June 1944, and Bridges to Lathwaite, 10 July 1944, CAB 103/286, Cabinet Office papers, Public Record Office, Kew (henceforth PRO).
23 See papers in CHUR 4/41A, esp. folios 52, 84, 127, 130 (CCAC).
official nod toward the term ‘Second World War’. When the question was raised again in the Commons in October 1946, Prime Minister Clement Attlee, following Brook’s advice, replied:

I rather doubt whether it is necessary to prescribe an official designation for use on all occasions. On the whole, I think that the phrase ‘Second World War’ is likely to be generally adopted. But there may be occasions, as for example for inscriptions, when the addition of the years will be regarded as appropriate.24

The issue was not decided unequivocally until the turn of 1947–8 when the first volumes of the British official histories of the war were ready for publication and it became urgent to agree on a formal title for the series. Llewellyn Woodward, the Oxford historian who was editing the Foreign Office documents, told Brook bluntly:

I think ‘Second World War’ is much the best term. There is the important point that this term or more briefly ‘World War II’ is already used, universally, in the United States. It would be convenient for us to use the same term (and very inconvenient to use a different one).

Many Commonwealth countries were writing their own official war histories and it was necessary to consult them. Canada, New Zealand, South Africa, India and Pakistan all agreed with the term ‘Second World War’. But Australia dissented, on the grounds that ‘there have been more than two wars that spread as widely as the war of 1914–18’.25

In January 1948, the Cabinet’s ‘Committee for the Control of the Official Histories’ was formally asked to adjudicate. Rejecting alternatives such as ‘the Six Years War’, it agreed to the title ‘History of the Second World War’. In discussion it was noted that Churchill intended to use that phrase as the title of his war memoirs. The Committee’s decision was endorsed by the Prime Minister on 27 January 1948.26 British publication of the first volume of Churchill’s memoirs in October 1948 served to consecrate the phrase, but two other surveys of the conflict published earlier that year in London also used the same title.27 And in France the Société d’Histoire de la Guerre resumed operations in November 1950 with the first issue of what it called Revue d’Histoire de la Deuxième Guerre Mondiale.28

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26 See CAB 134/103, esp. meeting of 21 January 1948, minute 7, and Attlee endorsement of 27 January 1948.
28 The final issue of Revue d’Histoire de la Guerre Mondiale was published in October 1939. A slip was inserted informing readers that publication was being temporarily suspended, ‘en raison de circonstances’, but promising that it would resume as soon as possible. Revue d’Histoire de la Guerre Mondiale, 17/4 (octobre 1939), opposite p. 305.
As Llewellyn Woodward in effect observed, the ‘Second World War’ was another American victory. This was the preferred term in the USA, and most of the western world followed suit. It might seem in retrospect that for Americans its adoption was a natural response to Pearl Harbor: after Japan attacked America it was truly a world war, as The New York Times index suggested. But, in parallel with 1914–18, geography alone was not decisive. In fact, the shift in American terminology was happening months before Pearl Harbor. Once again, the crucial actors were Germany and the USA or, more precisely, Adolf Hitler and Franklin Roosevelt.

Hitler, a war veteran, shared the German propensity to describe 1914–18 as a world war. In Mein Kampf, published in two volumes in 1925–6, the fifth chapter of volume one is entitled ‘Der Weltkrieg’. In the foreign policy chapters at the end of volume two, Hitler asserted that ‘Germany will either be a world power or there will be no Germany’. But he gave the conventional Weltvocabulary his own racist twist. Behind British policy and that of Bolshevik Russia he discerned the ubiquitous, malevolent power of world Jewry. He even wrote contortedly of ‘the Marxist shock troops of international Jewish stock exchange capital’. During the war, he insisted, it was the Jews who ‘systematically stirred up hatred against Germany until state after state abandoned neutrality and, renouncing the true interests of the peoples, entered the services of the World War coalition’. He spoke of ‘the leaders of the projected Jewish world empire’ committed to ‘the annihilation of Germany’. The original German version of the book referred to the Jews as ‘the world enemy’ (Weltfeind).

It is a commonplace that Mein Kampf is in no way a ‘blueprint’ for the war that eventually followed. But the book was the seedbed of some of Hitler’s most virulent ideas. After the Kristallnacht pogroms of November 1938 had revived in his mind the supposed linkage between Jewish conspiracy and international war, he delivered his notorious ‘prophecy’ on 30 January 1939 — the sixth anniversary of his ‘seizure of power’. He told the Reichstag: ‘If the international finance Jewry (Finanzjudentum), both inside and outside Europe, should succeed in plunging the nations once again into a world war, the result will be not the bolshevization of the earth and thereby the victory of Jewry, but the annihilation (Vernichtung) of the Jewish race in Europe!’

Among Hitler’s many reasons for the speech may well have been Franklin Roosevelt, who was engaged in a long battle to persuade his countrymen that isolationism was no longer a credible policy. He pitched his argument on two levels. One was geopolitical — the claim that in the age of air power America’s
oceanic barriers were no longer insuperable. Events in Europe could therefore impinge on American security. FDR’s other theme was ideological — as he put it in his annual message on 4 January 1939: ‘God-fearing democracies of the world . . . cannot safely be indifferent to international lawlessness anywhere.’ In late 1938 Roosevelt had been involved in efforts to promote Jewish emigration from Europe; Hitler mentioned this issue on 30 January just before uttering his lurid prophecy. Next day FDR told Senators that for the last three years there had been ‘in the making a policy of world domination between Germany, Italy and Japan’ which, he claimed, now amounted to ‘an offensive and defensive alliance’.

By January 1939, therefore, the ideological battlelines had been drawn between Roosevelt and Hitler. The Führer was prophesying a new world war unleashed by Jewish money power; the President was globalizing events to prod his countrymen out of their regional cocoon. For the moment, Hitler’s gaze was concentrated on Europe — Poland in 1939, France in 1940, the Balkans and Russia in 1941. ‘Weltkrieg’ was usually absent from his speeches, except at moments of stress. As the struggle over American neutrality reached its climax in the spring of 1941, it was Roosevelt who introduced the term ‘second world war’ into the lexicon of American politics.

On 31 May 1940, the President had warned of the danger of ‘a world-wide war’, and on 3 January 1941 he spoke of the reality of ‘a world at war’. But Roosevelt took a huge step further on 8 March 1941, the day on which the Lend-Lease bill was finally approved by the Senate. In a radio address he spoke of ‘the first World War’ and then started a sentence with this phrase: ‘When the second World War began a year and a half ago’. A week later, addressing press correspondents, he referred to ‘the first World War’ and ‘the present war’. And in another radio speech on 27 May 1941, he also made reference to ‘the first World War’ and ‘this second World War’, arguing that ‘what started as a European war has developed, just as the Nazis always intended it should develop, into a world war for world domination’.

Why did Roosevelt begin using the term ‘second World War’ in public from the spring of 1941? Firm evidence is lacking but at least three reasons may be inferred. In part, it was probably a response to signs of growing Axis collaboration. The assertions in his 30 January 1939 speech about a virtual alliance had been given credibility by their Tripartite Pact of September 1940. Second, the President may now have judged that it was no longer politically necessary
to shy away from analogies with 1917. The 1930s had been dominated by a ‘never again’ mentality, but the fall of France and the Battle of Britain aroused a growing popular conviction that America’s security and values were bound up with British survival. Passage of Lend-Lease had given Congressional endorsement to that new mood. Third, FDR’s public talk of a ‘second World War’ may have reflected the mounting intelligence evidence that Hitler was about to invade the Soviet Union. Operation Barbarossa on 22 June opened up a massive new front across Eastern Europe and Eurasia. From then on ‘world war’ became a recurrent theme in Roosevelt’s speeches.34

While redefining international events as part of a world war, Roosevelt was already anticipating the world peace that must follow. In January 1941 he had set out his vision of ‘a world founded on four essential human freedoms’. He claimed that this was ‘no vision of a distant millennium’ but a ‘world order’ that was ‘attainable in our own time and generation’.35 In August 1941, meeting with Churchill off Newfoundland, he developed the Four Freedoms in the eight-point Atlantic Charter. For Churchill the meeting was something of a disappointment. He had been hoping for a US declaration of war; instead he had to be content with a declaration of war aims.36 But the Axis powers, uncertain of what secret agreements lay behind the rhetorical façade, were convinced that this was a huge forward step towards American belligerency. To claim that the Atlantic meeting was the trigger for Hitler’s decision to embark on Endlösung, the ‘Final Solution’ to the Jewish problem, may well be an exaggeration, but in August 1941 the Führer told Josef Goebbels that his January 1939 prophecy of world war was coming true with ‘a certainty to be thought almost uncanny’. And it was in this mood, in September, that he sanctioned the deportation of German and Austrian Jews to the east — in Ian Kershaw’s words, ‘a massive step’ towards the Final Solution.37

Of course, Japan’s attack on Pearl Harbor in December 1941 transformed international affairs. Geographically this was now truly a world war. But, as in 1914–18, ideology played a significant role in establishing the term. For Hitler, as for the apologists of the Kaisertreich, the goal was world power — with the novel twist that this time the real obstacle was not the British Empire but the underlying global Jewish conspiracy. For Roosevelt, like Wilson, the goal was a new world order. But whereas Americans had defined the conflict

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34 For instance, his press statement of 24 July on oil exports to Japan: ‘There is a world war going on, and has been for some time — nearly two years’ (Public Papers, 1941, 280). For fuller discussion of FDR’s possible reasons see David Reynolds, From Munich to Pearl Harbor: Roosevelt’s America and the Origins of the Second World War (Chicago 2001), 131–2, 182–3.
35 Roosevelt, Public Papers, 1940, 672, speech of 6 January 1941.
of 1914–18 as a world war after they entered it, Roosevelt was already using that terminology before Pearl Harbor in order to prod Americans out of isolationism into belligerency. Hitler and Roosevelt were both waging ‘world war’, in fact and in name, for their own ends. Hitler lost, Roosevelt won. In doing so he established America as the dominant superpower for the remainder of the twentieth century. Less often noticed, he also established a dominant paradigm for conceptualizing the century’s two greatest conflicts.

I have sketched out a case study in the redesigning of the past. What are its larger implications for understanding political transitions? In this brief space, let me offer two pairs of conclusions — one about our understanding of the conflicts of 1914–18 and 1939–45, the other about the relationship between these two conflicts and our conceptions of globalization.

First, to talk of the two world wars may blur our awareness of differences between those conflicts. Linking the two, of course, is the ‘German question’ — one thinks of Marshal Foch’s comment that 1919 was ‘an armistice for twenty years’ and of the aphorism that the period 1914–45 constituted another thirty years war in Europe. In both wars, too, what is loosely called the Middle East was a major theatre of operations, but, in the first, the theatre of operations was more narrowly confined to the Eastern Mediterranean crescent from the Dardanelles through Palestine to Suez. The period 1940–3, by contrast, saw a more intensive and extensive series of campaigns along the whole North African littoral as well as, especially in 1941, in the Levant and East Africa. The sharpest contrasts were in ‘the Far East’. In 1914–18 the Asian dimension was limited — Japan was active at the beginning, China at the end, but in general this was not a vast Asian conflict. The war of 1939–45, by contrast, was profoundly Asian — extending from the eastern half of China, through south-east Asia and across much of the western Pacific in massive bloodbaths and appalling famines. Moreover, Japan’s spectacular victories in 1942, though eventually reversed, undermined the edifice of European rule across Asia. Independence for India and Burma was conceded in 1947, for the Dutch East Indies in 1949 and, partially, for French Indochina in 1954. In China the destruction of Nationalist power in the Sino-Japanese war paved the way for communist victory in 1949.

If linking the two conflicts may blur our sense of their differences, their global label can equally dull our sensitivities to regional distinctions within each. In the case of Asia in 1939–45 this observation applies on two levels — the ideological and the geopolitical. The search for ideological uniformity, encouraged by Roosevelt’s globalism, has resulted in a tendency to subsume all three Axis powers under the title ‘fascist’ or ‘totalitarian’. Yet fascism was

39 For a contrary view, insisting that ‘the First World War was global from its outset’, see Strachan, First World War, vol. I, op. cit., xvi.
born in 1920s Italy. Use of the label is debatable even in the case of nazi Germany; it is certainly problematic when we look at 1930s Japan, whose traditional society remained under the control of various élite groups and much less susceptible to radical mass politics. Geopolitically, the Asian dimension of the war has also suffered from a putative globalism that is really centred on Europe and America. One can see this in the transposition of the term ‘Pacific War’ for ‘Greater East Asian War’ in post-1945 Japanese terminology. Yet the Pacific conflict of 1941–45 was really part of a larger Sino-Japanese war that extended back to the Marco Polo bridge in 1937 and the Manchurian ‘Incident’ of 1931. Hence the tendency of postwar Japanese historians to write of a ‘fifteen-years war’. It is only in the last decade that we have begun to appreciate the magnitude of the Soviet war (perhaps 28 million dead), but the Sino-Japanese war remains obscure even though the death toll may have been as much as 15 million. This war in turn must be located within a larger struggle for mastery of China that takes us back to 1911 and forward to Mao’s triumph in 1949. In other words, by trying to encompass events in the ‘second world war’ box we miss out important ideological and geopolitical features of the Asian conflict, not least the most important political transition of twentieth-century China.

Turning to globalization — widely viewed as an essentially contemporary transition — the labels World War I and World War II can reinforce our parochialism. ‘One vanity of the twentieth century’, writes historian Geoffrey Blainey, ‘is the belief that it experienced the first world wars, but at least five wars in the eighteenth century involved so many nations and spanned so much of the globe that they could also be called world wars.’ In his quantitative analysis of wars over five centuries, Jack Levy makes a similar point about ‘general’ or ‘world’ wars, drawing particular attention to the War of Austrian Succession (1739–48), the Seven Years War (1756–63), and the French Revolutionary and Napoleonic wars of 1792–1815. Although centred on the rivalry of the great powers in Europe, each of these involved worldwide struggles for colonies and trade. Together they decisively shaped the future of India, North America and the Caribbean. The Australian official historians had this in mind in 1947 when, alone in the British Commonwealth, they rejected the label ‘second world war’ for the conflict of 1939–45. It is also interesting to note that Winston Churchill used the term ‘The First World War’ repeatedly in Marlborough — his 1934–8 account of the ‘Grand Alliance’ against Louis XIV — and as the title of his chapter on the Seven

Years War in his *History of the English-Speaking Peoples*, published in 1957. Of course, we must acknowledge differences as well as similarities. The death tolls from the conflicts of 1914–18 and 1939–45 were, in absolute terms, unique — perhaps 10,000,000 from the first and 50,000,000 from the second. Yet as proportions of the total populations of their time, some of the earlier conflicts, particularly the French Revolutionary and Napoleonic wars, may well have been as deadly. Just as historians rightly remind us that globalization did not begin in 1945, so we should remember that global wars were not peculiar to the twentieth century.

The material discussed in this article also has relevance for our thinking about globalization itself. Throughout, I have emphasized the ideological thrust behind use of the term ‘world war’, particularly in the USA. Woodrow Wilson and Franklin Roosevelt both sought global answers to specific international problems. FDR in particular employed ‘world war’ as a deliberate political instrument to break the intellectual bonds of American isolationism. At the same time, other American internationalists were adopting similar ploys. In February 1941 Henry Luce published his celebrated article on ‘The American Century’, in which he globalized the US Pledge of Allegiance and spoke of humanity as ‘for the first time in history, one world, fundamentally indivisible’. Attacking American isolationism, Luce offered a breathtaking agenda for what he called ‘the first great American century’: America’s duties included deciding whether or not ‘a system of free economic enterprise’ would prevail across the world, acting as ‘the Good Samaritan of the entire world’ and, above all, serving as the ‘powerhouse’ and not merely the ‘sanctuary’ of ‘the ideals of civilization’. Two years later, in April 1943, Wendell Willkie, the unsuccessful Republican candidate in the 1940 presidential election, published his book *One World*. This was an account of his whirlwind 50-day world tour in the summer of 1942, visiting international leaders and global hotspots. Willkie struck a chord with his affirmation that ‘the world had become small and interdependent’ and his injunction that ‘our thinking of the future must be world-wide’. *One World* became America’s biggest non-fiction bestseller to date, disposing of its first million copies in only seven weeks and topping 4.5 million by the time of Willkie’s death in October 1944.

The language of ‘one world’ is a familiar trope of globalization. Luce and Willkie were developing the Wilsonian vision of a globe reformed in America’s...
image. Less familiar is the effect of the ‘world wars’ on mental globalization. Making Americans think in terms of a unified global conflict was the essential counterpart to selling them on an integrated global peace. FDR was engaged in both processes months before Pearl Harbor made the term ‘second World War’ into a reality. In the origins of the two ‘world wars’ we find some neglected impulses towards globalization and a term worthy of much closer attention from conceptual historians.47

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Scholarly research on the Third Reich has benefited from the fact that the regime’s archives became open and available to historians almost from the moment of its collapse. Since 1946, nearly all the major crimes of the regime have been documented in outline, beginning with the Nuremberg war crimes trials which included important supplementary criminal proceedings. These trials presented massive documentary evidence for the nazi extermination of the Jews and for the regime’s war of aggression and extermination in eastern Europe. In addition, the participation of German companies in the nazi system was described in detail by the reports of the Office of the Military Government of the US (OMGUS) in postwar western Germany. The system of concentration camps as the real nucleus of the nazi state had already been analysed by Eugen Kogon; but his report was thought to be unsuitable reading for young Germans up until 1960. On the other hand, case studies and regional monographs remained few up until the 1970s, or even later. The relative absence of detailed scholarly research gave the authors of textbooks a free hand in many respects. Nevertheless, at least six principal crimes of the nazis could have been mentioned in any textbook written after 1946:


5. Until the mid-1980s, there were few regional examples; see e.g. Dieter Galinski et al. (eds), *Nazis und Nachbarn. Schüler erforschen den Alltag im Nationalsozialismus* (Reinbek 1982); Dieter Galinski and Ulla Lachauer (eds), *Alltag im Nationalsozialismus* (Braunschweig 1982); Dieter Galinski and Wolf Schmidt (eds), *Die Kriegsjahre in Deutschland* (Hamburg 1985).
1. aggression against the Soviet Union in 1941 in spite of the ‘non-aggression pact’ signed by Hitler and Stalin in 1939 — aimed at expansion into so-called Lebensraum (living space), and constituting, in effect, a war of extermination against Slavic nations;
2. the Kommissarbefehl, or order to execute Soviet Communist Party officials; the killing by deliberate neglect of millions of Soviet prisoners of war, the destruction of villages and the murder of hostages under the pretext of combating partisans, all with the participation of the German army;
3. the economic exploitation, up to and including mass starvation, of the inhabitants of the occupied East, the deportation of millions of male and female forced labourers and the scorched-earth policy carried out during the retreat in the later stages of the war;
4. the mass shooting of more than a million Jews by SS/SD and police task forces (Einsatzgruppen);
5. the deportation of European Jews, their engagement in forced labour, and their starvation in ghettos in the East;
6. the industrial mass killing of millions of Jews by poison gas in extermination camps.

The following analysis is restricted to textbooks written for students between 13 and 16 years of age. Its basis differs sharply between East and West Germany. Normally, in the German Democratic Republic (GDR) only one textbook existed for the whole state and all students; this text was revised every 8 or 10 years. Thus only five to seven textbooks appeared in 40 years (1949–90). In the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG), 20–30 completely different textbooks may have been competing with each other at any one time. Thus the books to be analysed total roughly between 150 and 180. Western pluralism’s contrast with a monolithic structure in the East is already evident in the material itself.

The changes that took place during the period of the existence of the GDR were only minor; so it is enough to describe the basic model. Before the foundation of the new state in 1949, the Soviet military administration brought with it a Russian history textbook in German translation; but it seems that a volume for the contemporary period never existed (at least I was unable to obtain a copy). After 1949, the new government developed its own version. The interpretation was clear enough. The main front-line in the twentieth century was that between ‘socialists’ and ‘imperialists’. Stalin had signed a pact with Hitler in 1939 solely in order to avoid an alliance between Hitler and the western powers. Thus he had gained two years for the preparation of Russia’s defence. The western allies had played no decisive role in the war. First, they had not helped Poland in 1939, while the Soviet Union had ‘liberated’ western Byelorussians and western Ukrainians and ‘protected’ them from fascist murder gangs. Later on, the western allies had not started the
promised ‘second front’ in time; instead, they had committed war crimes by bombing innocent German civilians in ‘terror raids’.

Using this scenario, one might wonder why the western powers had not agreed to a compromise with Hitler and stopped participating in the war altogether. They had many chances to do so, above all when Hess flew to Scotland (the authors clearly assert that Hitler sent him). The Allied strategy was best expressed in a so-called quotation of Truman which assumed a key position in all GDR textbooks up to 1990:

From a declaration of the senator of Missouri and later president of the USA, Harry S. Truman, given 24th July 1941: ‘If we notice that Germany wins, we should help Russia, and if Russia wins, we should help Germany — so that they kill each other as much as possible.’

In this view, western policy was based on a cynical and Machiavellian calculation. The US imperialists and their servants, the British, wanted to kill two birds with one stone: their communist enemy and their German imperialist competitor. Additionally, the arms manufacturers had a profit-based interest in a long war. Nevertheless, western leaders had to consider the pro-socialist and peace-loving ideas of the best and most class-conscious sections of their populations, and this had moderated their aggression.

In this official GDR version of the second world war, there was every reason to stress the crimes of the anti-socialist attack by the nazis in the east, including the exploitation, the plundering and destruction and the genocide against Slavic people, as intensively as possible. This was done on many pages in all editions in terrifying detail, alongside figures and tables of manpower losses, numbers of ruined buildings and factories, quantities of raw materials and food destroyed or stolen, and lists of names of the industrial companies that profited from all this and continued to exist in West Germany. The main responsibility was attributed to the political regime, to the upper strata (high military ranks, economy, nobility, administration) and to the capitalists, not to the population, the simple soldiers or the workers. This concept did not require any stress on the persecution and destruction of European Jewry. The people in the illustrations — even including those wearing the yellow star required by the nazi occupiers — are simply called ‘Poles’. The communist resistance against nazism in Germany, in the occupied countries and especially in the Soviet Union after June 1941 was repeatedly given a high significance. It formed a type of counter-government, a band of martyrs — commanded by the great leader Stalin, or at least so it was claimed, as long as the personality cult around him lasted.

The nazis’ crimes were described on many pages: the destruction of towns and villages, the plundering of food and raw materials, the starvation of civilians, the deportation for forced labour in Germany, the shooting of hostages, and the burning of villages (as repression and revenge for real, presumed and pretended activities of partisans). The ‘general plan for the East’ (‘Generalplan

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Ost’) which envisaged the deaths of 30 million Slavs, the profits of big German companies, the scorched-earth strategy carried out during the German retreat — everything was presented in detail.

Little emphasis was given in these textbooks to the destruction of the Jews, although it was not completely omitted. But Jews were merely one in the long list of victims: ‘Since 1939, camps became extermination camps in extraordinary numbers. Tens of thousands of human beings who were hated by the nazis ended in those camps: professors, engineers, priests, politicians, workers, Jews, Frenchmen, Czech citizens, Soviet soldiers and officers.’ Of course, this was correct — and it is always a problem to ‘privilege’ one group of victims. Nevertheless, some groups were totally omitted (e.g. homosexuals, gypsies and conscientious objectors) and the numbers were completely wrong — it was not tens or even hundreds of thousands but millions. This was indeed made clear in the following case.

The nazis had invented the extermination of human beings on a large-scale, industrial basis: in order to be able to kill quickly and to kill as many people as possible, they administered gassing. They guided the naked prisoners into a room into which they caused poison gas to be poured. One gram of this poison gas Zyklon B is sufficient to kill a person. German capitalists profited from this mass murder. Thus, in only one year, just one company, Tesch-Stabenow, supplied 190,000 kilos of this poison gas. The main supplier of the poison gas was the company IG-Farben. The SS-monsters removed gold dentures from their victims’ mouths, stole their clothes and valuables. They made the fat produced during the burning of corpses into soap and sold the ashes as fertilizer . . . . About 300 nazi concentration camps existed in Europe; more than 100,000 prisoners were crammed into some of them. The number of casualties in those camps was higher than 11 million.

Even in the late 1970s, Jews were not mentioned as a group of people specially threatened after the nazi invasion of the USSR. Instead, according to the textbook: ‘All members of the Communist Party, the Political Commissars of the Soviet Army, the employees of the Soviet State apparatus, all resistance fighters and partisans were in mortal danger.’ Jews, who comprised the highest number of victims, were only mentioned on the next page — in just one word. This playing-down was no accident; it was repeated in the description of the nazi dictatorship in Germany. Anti-Jewish measures and anti-semitic persecutions were omitted in favour of detailed information about anti-socialist and anti-humanitarian acts.

It took until 1988 before the Wannsee Conference and the number of Jewish victims (‘more than six million’) were mentioned; but plundering (‘profitable business’) and destruction (‘scorched earth’), the deportation of forced labourers and the shooting of hostages remained much more important even in

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7 Lehrbuch für den Geschichtsunterricht, 8. Schuljahr (Berlin 1952), 269.
8 Ibid., 269.
9 Geschichte, Lehrbuch für Klasse 9 (Berlin 1979), 204f.
10 Ibid., 206.
11 Ibid., 145–51.
12 Geschichte, Lehrbuch für Klasse 9 (Berlin 1988), 168.
the final textbook of the GDR (issued one year before its collapse).\textsuperscript{13} Again, the shooting by *Einsatzgruppen* and the killing by poison gas — of Jews simply because they were Jews — were not mentioned at all.

Normally, no differentiation was made in the GDR textbooks between the crimes of the SS and those of the army; the terminology ‘fascist murder bands’\textsuperscript{14} included both SS units and regular troops and excluded the ‘normal’ German worker. Often ‘fascist soldiers’, ‘fascist troops’ or ‘murder commandos of the fascist army’ were referred to interchangeably with SS units.\textsuperscript{15} In 1952 it seemed necessary for the textbook authors to cover the topic of responsibility — albeit very briefly: ‘As a disgrace to our nation it has to be mentioned that many soldiers enriched themselves from the properties of the inhabitants of the invaded countries. Nazism consciously corrupted large sections of the population.’\textsuperscript{16} Typically, German soldiers were described only as plunderers, not as mass murderers. Later on, any explicit allusion to the guilt of the ordinary German population seemed superfluous or detrimental.

Moving cases of persecution and resistance were recounted in many editions. One example was the 19-year-old partisan Soja Kosmodemjanskaja:

The fascists captured her in November 1941 near Moscow. They cruelly tortured the girl, but got no information about her fighting comrades. When the executioner led the young patriot to the gallows, she shouted to the Soviet citizens who had been driven to the place of execution: ‘Comrades! Fight, don’t be afraid!’\textsuperscript{17}

This quotation was very typical not only of the strategy of sparing the Germans (‘fascists’ instead of ‘Germans’ or ‘soldiers’), but also of the conscious forming and manipulating of emotions and the creation of a cult of heroes. At the same time, a tendency towards ‘mitigation’ and ‘détente’ was obvious in this text. In earlier versions, the final words of the heroine were: ‘I am not afraid to die, comrades! It is good to die for your nation! Goodbye comrades! Fight, don’t be afraid!’\textsuperscript{18}

Additionally, the textbook authors of the GDR found it useful to allude to the ongoing careers of former criminal fascists and imperialists in West Germany. Colonel Heusinger, later a high-ranking officer in the West (and in NATO), for example, was said to have been one of those responsible for the campaign against Serbia in 1941.\textsuperscript{19} In the chapter on the second world war, the West German Federal Armed Forces (Bundeswehr) were explicitly accused of preparing an attack against the Warsaw Pact. For this, the FRG — and the whole of NATO — supposedly needed the experienced specialists of the war

\textsuperscript{13} Ibid., 168–73.
\textsuperscript{16} *Lehrbuch für den Geschichtsunterricht, 8. Schuljahr* (Berlin 1952), 266.
\textsuperscript{17} *Geschichte, Lehrbuch für Klasse 9* (Berlin 1988), 162.
\textsuperscript{18} *Lehrbuch für Geschichte der 10. Klasse*, op. cit., 34.
\textsuperscript{19} Ibid., 22.
in Russia in 1941–44. Later on, in the period of détente, such accusations were toned down or dropped.

In all of this, the interpretative model preceded the ‘facts’. The selection, structuring and weighting of information were decisive. The obligatory pattern of relevance and conclusion was explicitly and implicitly conveyed by judgments and suggestions. Thus, a ‘correct’ identification and partisanship were produced — or at least were supposed to be. The school pupils had to accept the political task of influencing the future in a way that was decided by the ‘political class’ of the GDR. Normally, textbook authors did not find it necessary to falsify documents for this purpose, although crude omissions remained useful in many cases.

With some hesitation and uneasiness, I approached the West German textbook that was used in my own school when I was a schoolboy in the late 1950s, Kletts geschichtliches Unterrichtswerk. The edition was brand-new, since I attended the respective class in 1957–8 (I remember the cover). What did I learn or, at least, what could I learn? There were no statements on the persecution of the Jews up to 1939, while the nazi regime’s conflicts with the churches were given extensive mention. At first sight, I could find no word among the descriptions of the second world war and especially the ‘campaign against Russia’ concerning the deportations, mass shootings and industrial killings by gas. In this book, the genocide of the Jews was not clearly recognizable.

The ‘Russian campaign’ itself, ‘again without any declaration of war’, was explained by reference to the personal ‘mistrust between Hitler and Stalin’ and understood as a means of defeating Britain. War crimes, the shooting of hostages, the massacres of Jews or the deportation of forced labourers did not exist (there was no trace of the Commissar Order or of Babi Yar in the book); only the suffering of German soldiers at Stalingrad was described in great detail, since Stalingrad was the ‘culmination and turning-point’ of the war.

As for the question of responsibility, the textbook had the following to say:

Hitler bore the guilt for the defeat. Not only at Stalingrad, but before and after as well, he committed major errors of military leadership. But above all, his unreasonable politics in the conquered eastern territories drove the population to the strongest resistance in the end. When the Baltic peoples and the Ukrainians, and also many Russians, who hated Bolshevism, wanted to join the fight, Hitler rebuffed them. He also did not plan either to abolish the order that the Soviets had created or to administer a generous policy of liberation.

20 Kletts geschichtliches Unterrichtswerk für die Mittelklassen, Ausgabe B, Bd. IV (Um Volksstaat und Völkergemeinschaft) (Stuttgart 1956).
21 Ibid., 163–4.
22 Ibid., 183–4.
23 Ibid., 183–4.
24 Ibid., 185–6.
25 Ibid., 185.
26 Ibid., 186.
A quotation from Hitler followed, clearly showing his conscious provocation of a partisan war in order to gain an excuse and cover for his own ‘policy of extermination’.

In principle, it is important to divide the giant cake into handsome pieces so that we can first rule, second administer and third exploit it. The Russians now have given the order for a partisan war behind our front. This partisan war also has an advantage: it gives us the opportunity to exterminate whoever positions himself against us.27

The text continued: ‘No wonder that the Soviet troops fight grimly against the invaders and that the partisan war flares up everywhere. All supplies/reinforcements are constantly threatened. According to Soviet reports, the partisans killed about 300,000 German soldiers.’28

These claims might well have been accurate, but in total, they shifted the balance of responsibility in an ugly way and showed a certain identification with nazi aggression. The hint that Germany should have fought the war against Russia more skilfully and less brutally and should therefore have been victorious was already more than a mere underlying assumption; in places it became virtually explicit. In this text, the Führer belatedly received good advice as to how he could have won the Russian war and thus fulfilled his great plans for German hegemony in Europe. This sort of talk might have been common among groups of regulars in German pubs, but it should not have been included in a history textbook. Similar sentiments were to be found in memoirs of leading generals in the 1950s with typical titles such as Lost Victories.29

When the textbook came to recount the further course of the war, it only gave the internal German perspective:

The more Germany’s military situation deteriorates, the more the belief in victory vanishes, the sharper the rulers draw in the reins. More often than at any time before, people are sent to concentration camps. The fight against the Christian religion and the Church is intensified. In addition, mass murders of a most frightening kind are committed.30

Only at this point did four lines follow about the so-called ‘extermination of life unworthy to live’ and then 47 words about the Holocaust, which translate into 57 words of English as follows:

The Jews in Hitler’s sphere of control fared even worse. From the beginning of the war, harsher and harsher measures were taken. Hitler ordered the ‘Final Solution’ of the Jewish question. In the Empire and in the conquered territories some millions of Jews were arrested. They met a terrible death in the gas chambers of the Einsatzkommandos.31

Seemingly, the textbook could find no more space for details, differentia-

27 Ibid.
28 Ibid.
29 Erich von Manstein, Verlorene Siege (Bonn 1955).
30 Ibid., 192.
31 Ibid.
tions, categories of perpetrator or retrospectively returning some human dignity to the victims. The irritating duty of giving this awkward topic a mention having been fulfilled, all the guilt was loaded onto Hitler: ‘Hitler’s sphere’, ‘Hitler orders’; all other sentences were impersonal or passive. Nevertheless, a sense of shame and a wish for legitimation evidently allowed the authors no rest: they had to exonerate the whole German nation and nearly all its citizens individually by stressing their collective innocence. So they added the following:

The German nation and the general public of the world heard about these crimes only after the occupation of Germany in 1945. At Nuremberg . . . an American judge later on testified: ‘The statements of those who participated in this terrible planned mass extermination show with great plausibility that no more than a hundred persons were informed about what was happening in general or in any way.’

It is nearly impossible to translate the text because of the vagueness of its language. But its authors’ strategy was clear; they quoted an eyewitness and an expert from the enemy’s side who completely exonerated the Germans. Of course, we have to be careful when condemning such statements with hindsight; nevertheless, this was a clever, cold-blooded and suggestive falsification, a bold lie. After the Nuremberg follow-up trials there could be no doubt about the participation of tens of thousands of people (e.g. the ‘task forces’ in shootings in Russia), and the sharing of information about the killings, however vague, by hundreds of thousands.

Let us pause for a moment. Although full of apprehension, I did not expect such a catastrophic result from my re-encounter with my own textbook as a schoolboy. Of course, I anticipated the flavour and mentality of the ‘Cold War’; but it was more and worse than that: the total inability to learn, the complete suppression of guilt and, at the same time, the feeling of being insulted and the expression of national disappointment. Both overtly and obliquely, only one thing was mourned: the defeat of Germany. And this was only one of many examples of German textbook authors describing Germans mainly as the victims, e.g. of bombing and destruction, battles, ethnic cleansing (after the war), hunger — and sometimes of Hitler and the nazis. People were full of self-righteousness and self-pity. In the first decade after 1945, it seemed impossible for people to perceive themselves as perpetrators or as guilty of anything. This was true of West German society as well, as recent studies have shown.

32 Ibid.
33 E.g. Harald Welzer et al., ‘Was wir für böse Menschen sind!’ Der Nationalsozialismus im Gespräch zwischen den Generationen (Tübingen 1997); Welzer et al., ‘Opa war kein Nazi’. Nationalsozialismus und Holocaust im Familiengedächtnis (Frankfurt/M. 2002); Bernd Faulenbach et al., Zweierlei Geschichte. Lebensgeschichte und Geschichtsbewusstsein von Arbeitnehmern in West- und Ostdeutschland (Essen 2000); Aleida Assmann and Ute Frevert, Geschichtsvergessenheit Geschichtsversessenheit. Vom Umgang mit deutscher Vergangenheit nach 1945 (Stuttgart 1999); Michael Th. Greven and Oliver von Wrochem (eds), Der Krieg in der Nachkriegszeit. Der Zweite Weltkrieg in Politik und Gesellschaft der Bundesrepublik (Opladen...
This type of textbook description of the Holocaust had no future; for the war of extermination against Russia the situation changed much later. I obtained another edition of the same textbook published shortly after 1961. Generally, it was by no means a wholly new version, but the sections dealing with the persecution of Jews had been completely rewritten. Now there were two pages about Auschwitz with a long quotation, as well as a mention of the mass shootings (one word), though still no reference to the ghettos. The supposed quotation of an American judge at Nuremberg was now omitted; the general number of Jewish victims was — somewhat pedantically — discussed and estimated at between 4.2 and 5.7 million, with the explicit hope of a later correction downwards.

Yet the author of the new edition still evidently felt a need to legitimate, or excuse, the Germans. He stressed internal resistance to the murder of Jews and connected it to a change in the methods of killing. ‘As some protests became known, the leadership invented less conspicuous methods and increasingly hid the horrible acts of annihilation from its own (German) people.’ The author now managed to write at least one sentence of emotion and regret: ‘There remained an alarmingly high number of victims; and those terrible mass murders of defenceless human beings and the indifference of so many people who knew or suspected something in respect of this event will be a source of shame for ever.’ Here again, the text is almost impossible to translate; this is a clear sign of how difficult it was for the author to express the idea. Nevertheless, any comparison of the versions of 1956 and c.1961 reflect a growing awareness among the public and the start of the breakdown of the taboo.

For the next example, covering the period after 1968, I chose a textbook written for the academic type of school that prepared pupils for university — Menschen in ihrer Zeit IV. The example is relevant to me, since this was the book used by myself as a young schoolteacher in 1971. It was also brand-new (published in 1971) and belonged to a generation of ‘workbooks’ using many primary sources — and not just some short illustrative quotations — for the first time. Students really had to reconstruct and tell history from the original documents. In addition, a ‘history of structures’ was supposed to replace a ‘history of events’.

The book clearly showed that the crimes of nazism did not begin with the ‘campaign against Russia’. The war against Poland was already a ‘war of

34 Kletts geschichtliches Unterrichtswerk für die Mittelklassen, Ausgabe B, Bd. IV (Um Volksstaat und Völkergemeinschaft (Stuttgart n.d.)).
36 Ibid., 192.
extermination’: ‘The Polish population was driven out of the “Germanized” territories without pity; it had to give way to those ethnic Germans who had been resettled from the Soviet Russian territory cruelly and in an inhumane manner; the SS and Gestapo wreaked havoc among the Poles. The persecution of Jews began immediately.’38

In a sub-chapter entitled ‘The Final Step of Inhumanity’, the book summarized the ‘Final Solution’ and the policy of extermination in the East. It mentioned mass murders of Slavs, but analysed them much more briefly than the anti-Jewish ones.

Mainly in the conquered territories of Poland and Russia, mad ideas about ‘racially valuable’ and ‘racially inferior’ ethnicities inconceivably became terrible reality. The NS civil administration and SS followed the advancing troops. They separated out the ‘inferior’ population at their discretion, drove them out of their homes and properties, made them go hungry and forced them to work for them. ‘Private’ cruelties were added. An SS leader in a bad mood or a ‘racially inferior’ person looking askance at him was sufficient to cost a ‘subhuman creature’ his life.’39

Contemporary pictures were added, with captions.

A German general had already written from the ruins of Warsaw to his wife: ‘Here, we do not move as victors, but as people who feel guilty . . . . The most vivid fantasies of atrocity propaganda remain impoverished compared to the events which an organized band of murderers, robbers and looters is committing there with alleged toleration in the highest quarters. This cannot be called ‘justifiable indignation about crimes committed against ethnic Germans’ . . . . I am ashamed to be a German’ [underlined in the letter]. This minority which sullies the German name by murder, plunder and burning, will become a disaster for the whole German nation if we do not put a stop to their game soon.40

Although this perspective was important and unusual, it repeated and continued the myth of an army with clean hands, because it put the blame solely on the nazis and the SS. It claimed that the highest ranks inside the army had planned and prepared a purge for the period after the final victory.

The book dealt with the Holocaust somewhat briefly.41 A few lines of text summarized the most important facts (excluding the Wannsee Conference and the mass shootings by the task forces). The gassings in Auschwitz were combined with clearly exaggerated numbers, which cast everything else into the shadows. The gypsies were mentioned as victims in one sentence.42 The question of helpers and bystanders was evidently more important:

These actions were kept a careful secret. They were so terrible that those few uninvolved people who heard about them by accident did not want to believe them. What people in Germany itself really saw were only the foreign slave labourers and innumerable prisoners of war. They were partly recruited from the western countries, mostly deported from the east to

38 Ibid., 111.
39 Ibid., 118.
40 Ibid.
41 Ibid., 119–21.
42 Ibid., 121–2.
the Empire with violence; these women and men lived in barracks near large factories involved in the war industries where they had to work hard with low pay and inadequate food, clothing, etc. for the ‘final victory’ of Greater Germany.43

This was all rather vague. Casualties and removals to concentration camps seem not to have happened. Nevertheless, the clear perception of forced and slave labourers in large numbers was an extraordinary improvement (now ‘millions’ rather than only ‘tens of thousands’). The same could be said for the book as a whole, despite the continued systematic playing-down of the knowledge of nazi crimes among the population. The partisan war was given a prominent position, partly because of the four quotations of letters written by persons condemned to death.44 But reprisals and the shooting of hostages were not mentioned. These crimes were carried out in contravention of international law and were also committed by ordinary military force, a very relevant point, for if this fact had been mentioned, popular knowledge could no longer have been denied. From today’s perspective, therefore, I am not really satisfied by the interpretation put forward in the textbook used by me (though on my school’s orders) when I was a novice teacher in 1971.

*Rückspiegel*,45 generally edited and — in the case of the nazi chapter — specially written by one of my former schoolteachers, Rolf Schörken, is a characteristic product of the post-reunification era. The author experienced the second world war as a young boy and lost one of his legs as an anti-aircraft auxiliary when he was 16 years old, shortly before becoming a prisoner of war. The context for history textbook-writing about the nazis changed in 1989–90. There was no longer any competition with East Germany. The school students of today, born shortly before 1989 as the fourth generation after the war, are no longer the sons and daughters or grandsons and granddaughters, but already the great-grandsons and great-granddaughters of the Germans who lived under Hitler. About 20–25 per cent are descendants of immigrants from other nations. No longer is there a personal or deeply emotional face-to-face confrontation with family members responsible for nazi crimes, neither with an ambivalent father nor with a much-loved grandfather.

History textbooks have changed their methodology too. On the one hand they contain lengthy descriptive and interpretative sections with author’s text as a basis for learning; on the other, there are substantial additional chapters with selected primary sources (partly texts and partly photos). In these cases, the students are asked to interpret and to decide for themselves and thus to construct their own narratives. After the ‘history of events’ in the 1950s and the ‘history of structures’ in the 1970s there is now the ‘history of mentalities’

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43 Ibid., 121.
44 Ibid., 114–15.
45 *Rückspiegel. Woher wir kommen — wer wir sind*, Bd. 4: Vom ersten Weltkrieg bis zur Gegenwart (Paderborn 1996).
(or ‘history of experiences’). Students are asked to do research in their local communities (‘learning by investigation’) and to practise role-playing (‘learning by acting’). They have to take part in ‘dealing with history’ and reflect cases of the public use of history (‘culture of history’). This development (‘orientation towards historical methods’) is a new concept, replacing the old concepts of ‘orientation towards canonical knowledge’ (1950s) and ‘orientation towards critical moralizing’ (1970s).

In Rückspiegel, the chapter, ‘The National Socialist Dictatorship and the Second World War’, is 90 pages long. It begins with the statement: ‘A past that does not pass away’ and a comparison with other European states. Later on there is a special sub-chapter entitled ‘The War against Russia and the Widening of the Conflict into a World War’. In spite of the sober title, the book stresses the criminal character of the war:

This was a bid for world power. At the same time, Hitler unveiled his plans for enslavement and extermination to top military leaders before the beginning of the Russian campaign. The war against the USSR would be an ideological war of annihilation. The communist political commissars and the intelligentsia had to be wiped out. Reichsführer-SS Himmler obtained special authority for this, ‘since it is the consequence of a once-and-for-all struggle between two systems’. This coded language concealed the intention of annihilating whole sections of the population. The limits of German settlement were to be pushed forward far into Russia. That meant the expulsion of the Polish and Russian populations from these territories . . . .

The text continues with the killing of Jews. ‘The murder of the European Jews’ is mainly a sub-chapter of six pages with the author’s text, a map of the concentration camps (emphasizing the extermination camps), three photos, and a very useful table of five ‘stages of the “Final Solution”’, including the shootings in Russia and the concealment of the traces of the camps after 1943. Maintaining a balance between factual information, quotations in the brutal or euphemistic language of the perpetrators, and empathy with individual cases, is very difficult in this area. But Rückspiegel succeeds to an astonishing degree. Immediately after this part, the author’s last sub-chapter, ‘Total War — Total Defeat’, follows; it also deals with the German resistance movement and the attempt to kill Hitler on 20 July 1944.

As already mentioned, the second and shorter part of the textbook chapter on National Socialism is composed of primary sources, mainly about ordinary people’s experiences of history. It is only interrupted once by a systematic explanation: ‘What attitudes did people adopt? What scope of action did they have?’ Some of the main topics (and principal controversies as well) are covered, such as ‘Victims and Perpetrators’, ‘What the War Meant to the

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46 Ibid., 114.
47 Ibid., 160.
48 Ibid., 165–70.
49 Ibid., 170–7.
50 Ibid., 178–204.
51 Ibid., 193–6.
52 Ibid., 178–84.
People’, ‘Resistance against Hitler’, ‘How the End of the War was Experienced’ and ‘Attitudes towards National Socialism’.

Many of the texts present terrible — almost intolerable — details, but the cognitive and emotional reactions of contemporaries are even more interesting. At the end of the war, for example, there was a ‘feeling of having been offended’ among German prisoners of war. An old man explains the situation to a younger one (Max von der Grün), who later on became a famous writer:

My boy, these men are not strange; they are offended because they have lost the war. Because the losers are no longer heroes. And they have all been heroes until today, you really must have noticed that from what they have said. They have been heroes who have been forgotten by their superiors — heroes who, inconceivably, have not been invested with the Knight’s Cross medal.

This experience and the opposite one, the absence of an expected — and in some respects even accepted — punishment, are important for postwar behaviour and mentality. A young man, later on a well-known historian, Martin Broszat, writes:

At that time I was still certain that it had been ‘a great epoch’ which had ended that day; but I suggested at the same time that — legitimately — a span of 10 or 20 years of slave labour in the service of the victorious powers was in store for me and all other adult Germans.

Apparently, traumatic feelings and autobiographical ambiguities determined much of what went into history textbooks in the first decade after the war.

Of course, the long quotations in Rückspiegel present an opportunity to observe and investigate different positions and perspectives. They test the basic ability of a historian to practise ‘empathy’, to analyse the situation from contemporaries’ viewpoints, with only the information available to them and under different conditions in a world with quite different moral standards. This is not an easy task, since our own knowledge and convictions (‘human and civil rights’) are involved from the very beginning. Nevertheless, a mere shift to the victims’ view would again be moral self-deception. German children are descended from the ‘society of perpetrators’ — a fact which has been repressed for a very long time. Often self-pity has taken the place of self-reflection or self-criticism. In addition, it is quite clear that only insights into the thinking, mentality and ‘logic’ of the perpetrators will protect and immunize students against committing future crimes (as Adorno has already stated).

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53 Ibid., 185–8.
54 Ibid., 188–90.
55 Ibid., 190–2.
56 Ibid., 197–202.
57 Ibid., 192.
58 Ibid., 191.
59 Ibid., 178–204.
What historiographical concepts can be developed about National Socialism? The discussion is complicated and extensive. For the purpose of school textbooks, we need simple ideas which can be understood even by students of limited intellectual capacity. In the years immediately after 1945, I can detect only four main strands in the interpretation and explanation of National Socialism.

1. ‘No name is as closely connected with the phenomenon of National Socialism as that of Adolf Hitler. He is the outstanding central person in that epoch of German history, on which he has imprinted the characteristics of his disastrous personality in the deepest way. He himself created National Socialism as a political idea as well as a political movement to such a high degree that it was also called Hitlerism. The career of Adolf Hitler is one of the most astonishing, most frightening and most incomprehensible in world history.’60

‘As soon as this man’s orgiastic dream of power had come to an end the nation awoke as though from a long period of stupor. There was no suggestion that the regime and the Party might live on after him; not even if the foreign victors had not been the masters in Germany. The wicked spell did not outlast the magician. With unbelieving amazement the Allies found almost no National Socialists in a country governed for twelve years by National Socialists.’61

2. ‘At various periods of their history, particularly in the nineteenth century, the Germans have believed with a desperate conviction, born either of their internal weaknesses or, on the contrary, of the idea of a sovereign and invincible power, that they have a divine mission, that Germany has been singled out by Providence . . . . This irrational and fervent faith gives the German imagination, with its combination of fanatical nationalism and preoccupation with internal cohesion, precedents which it can never forget and on which it builds limitless aspirations.’62

‘For the mind and the passion of Hitler — all the aberrations that possessed his feverish brain — had roots that lay deep in German experience and thought. Nazism and the Third Reich, in fact, were but a logical continuation of German history.’63

3. ‘Indeed, it may be proved that the leading group of the NSDAP could only seize political power through the help of influential groups in the economy, the military and the higher echelons of the civil service. Precisely definable common interests and aims were the basis of this alliance. The policy of the fascist system was determined by these points. The allies of the fascist

leadership gained to an extraordinary degree by this policy. But they were not only the beneficiaries but — and this may be proved as well — they actively shaped and drove forward the system’s policy.\textsuperscript{64}

‘The erection of the fascist dictatorships demonstrated the endeavours of the most aggressive groups in German monopoly capital to undo or cancel in a violent way the worldwide transformation from capitalism to socialism, which had — according to a law of history — begun with the Great Socialist October revolution. It also tried to destroy Soviet power and to restore the undivided domination of world Imperialism.’\textsuperscript{65}

4. ‘The close kinship between the Bolshevik and the National Socialist system has long been neglected, since each claimed to be not only the arch-enemy of the other, but also its opposite. Everywhere in the world, where free scholarship is possible, there has been no doubt for a long time that National Socialism and Bolshevism belonged to the same type of totalitarianism. Especially if one takes the Stalinist system for comparison, their characteristics are identical: a one-party state with unlimited dictatorship, an ideology with a monopolistic demand, a total registration and control of the society by means of mass organizations, terror and propaganda, insatiable imperialism with the claim of hegemony — just to give some slogans.’\textsuperscript{66}

‘Decisive characteristics of totalitarian dictatorships are: an ideology, a party, a terrorist secret police, a monopoly of news, a monopoly of arms, and a centrally-steered economy.’\textsuperscript{67}

There are other concepts of National Socialism. It has been seen as a revolt against modernization (e.g. Aleff,\textsuperscript{68} Pross\textsuperscript{69}), as an unconscious agent of modernization (e.g. Dahrendorf,\textsuperscript{70} Schoenbaum\textsuperscript{71}), as an expression of the psychological (unconscious) state of the modern man (e.g. Reich\textsuperscript{72}) and as an outbreak of political chaos (e.g. Grebing,\textsuperscript{73} Broszat\textsuperscript{74}). But the four concepts listed have been the most influential in textbook-writing. All four positions clearly state that National Socialism has to be condemned from the beginning and unconditionally. Thus they run counter to the convictions of many, maybe

\textsuperscript{64} Reinhard Kühnl (ed.), Der deutsche Faschismus in Quellen und Dokumenten (Köln 1975), 475f.
\textsuperscript{65} Institut für Marxismus-Leninismus beim ZK der SED, Geschichte der deutschen Arbeiterbewegung, Bd. 5 (Berlin 1966), 11.
\textsuperscript{66} Hofer, op. cit., 365.
\textsuperscript{68} Eberhard Aleff (ed.), Das Dritte Reich (Hannover 1973).
\textsuperscript{70} Ralf Dahrendorf, Gesellschaft und Demokratie in Deutschland (München 1965).
\textsuperscript{71} David Schoenbaum, Die braune Revolution. Eine Sozialgeschichte des Dritten Reiches (München 1968).
\textsuperscript{72} Wilhelm Reich, Die Massenpsychologie des Faschismus (Frankfurt M. 1974).
\textsuperscript{73} Helga Grebing, ‘Nachwort’ in Melita Maschmann, Fazit. Mein Weg in der Hitler-Jugend (München 1979), 244–53.
\textsuperscript{74} Martin Broszat, Der Staat Hitlers (München 1969).
the majority in both German states after 1949. Opinion polls demonstrated widespread acceptance of sentences like: ‘Without the lost war and the persecution of Jews, Hitler would have been one of the greatest German statesman’; and ‘National Socialism was a good concept badly implemented.’ Thirty to forty per cent of the population agreed with these statements in the postwar years. This must have been the private conviction of many of the textbook authors and history teachers as well. Looking through the texts, you will often find this hidden self-evident message, at least in West Germany up to 1968.

Here we have to come back to the differences between the four concepts. All four proposals have their historical context, their vested interests and their anticipation of the future.

– The thesis of ‘Hitlerism’ includes the fact that it was impossible to resist Hitler (‘Nobody can resist the devil’, Freund). National Socialism was an unavoidable fate, but also an ‘accident of German history’ — with no precedents and no risk of repetition. The Hitlerism thesis is a thesis of German innocence and was therefore promoted by German historians. Happily, the Swiss author Walther Hofer and the German-American re-immigrant Golo Mann supported it fiercely. We may be sure that this position found support in West German textbooks for a long time, because young — and adult — Germans found it congenial.

– The second concept is opposed to the first one, supporting the idea of the long-term continuity and peculiarity of German history, directly and inevitably culminating in National Socialism. Thus Germans are responsible and bear a ‘collective guilt’; they threaten the world with the continuation and repetition of nazi crimes unless they are re-educated and deflected from their special path (Sonderweg) to the normal European line of development. This position is held by some western opponents of Germany in France, Great Britain and the USA. But it was neglected in German textbooks, at least from the moment of an independent German input after the end of the control of history textbooks by the Allied military administration.

– The third theory had already been invented in the 1930s by the Communist International (Comintern). According to it, the nazi system (‘German fascism’) is nothing but an emergency measure of national and world capitalism against socialism. Neither the anti-Jewish genocide nor German mass support for the system meets with any interest. The only opponents of the murderers are the courageous communists of the USSR (and Germany). Since capitalism has not been abolished in West Germany (or the western world), fascism still threatens the world. West Germany is a simple continuation of the nazi regime. Of course, this interpretation was obligatory in the GDR during its whole history — and not really used in western textbooks up to 1968.

– The last position was mainly developed shortly after the war (e.g. by Hannah Arendt); ‘totalitarianism’ is a new form of state and society;

75 See Martin Greiffenhagen and Sylvia Greiffenhagen, Ein schwieriges Vaterland. Zur politischen Kultur Deutschlands (München 1979), 56ff., 331ff.
Bolshevism and National Socialism are ‘twin brothers’, although they tried to destroy each other. The GDR simply continues a totalitarian dictatorship. Since the nazi peril is over, its surviving brother is now the most dangerous force in Europe. Therefore we should concentrate our efforts against this system — and forget as soon as possible about the other one. This was the philosophy of the integration into the West (‘the free world’), European union, and NATO membership. No wonder this was firmly endorsed by all western textbooks and explicitly ordered by the West German Minister of Education (5 July 1962).

The ‘Hitlerism’ and the ‘totalitarianism’ concepts could be combined with each other (indeed they are in Hofer’s very popular paperback, with more than 1,000,000 copies sold by 1985), although they were not in perfect logical harmony. ‘Collective guilt’ was not accepted at all (only repeated sometimes from outside, as in the case of Goldhagen’s book). The East had a stable and monopolistic interpretation in its ‘fascism theory’ and the West combined some parts of different interpretations in varying proportions. In the beginning, the accident concept was the strongest, later on the totalitarianism theory became more prominent; and after 1968 even the ‘rescue of capitalism’ won a few friends.

It might be expected that the fact that there were fundamentally opposed interpretations would have been discussed in the textbooks themselves. If your cousin in the other part of the country, East or West, is going to confront you with another concept, it would be useful to know his position and to find reasons to counter it. For an intellectually responsible handling of history, the shaping of controversies is even more important. Indeed, there has been a long debate in Germany about the common bases of civic education. In the end, three very simple regulations emerged in the so-called ‘Beutelsbacher minimal consensus’:

– ‘It is not permitted to overwhelm the students mentally or morally or with the teacher’s authority instead of encouraging and enabling them to make their own political judgments.’
– ‘If there is a controversy in the scholarly community and in society, the topic cannot be taught at school without mentioning its controversial character.’
– ‘The student has to be enabled to define his/her own interests and to find a means of influencing reality according to those interests; this includes an orientation towards methods and methodical abilities.’

Those principles, or at least the first two, may easily be transferred to history. But their application to National Socialism immediately runs into severe problems. On the one hand, the topic itself, the horror of witness reports, can

77 See Siegfried Schiele and Herbert Schneider (eds), *Das Konsensproblem in der politischen Bildung* (Stuttgart 1977), esp. 179f.
be overwhelming. Travelling to Auschwitz, looking at the film ‘Night and Fog’ by Alain Resnais or the documentary ‘Shoah’ by Claude Lanzmann may overwhelm both teacher and student, even if this is not intended. On the other hand, there are neo-fascist adolescents whom one would like to reach with one’s message. So perhaps one considers it necessary to ‘overwhelm’ them, despite the pedagogical ban on this, in their own interest and that of a stable democracy.

Indeed, historical instruction about National Socialism seems to be much more moralizing and normative than that about the rest of history. The principles of ‘controversiality’ and ‘students’ own judgments’ are infringed much more frequently than in other cases. We may simply state that often the ‘Beutelsbach minimal consensus’ is not fulfilled in the teaching about the Holocaust and the war of extermination in the East. Today’s school students — who represent the ‘fourth generation’ (great-grandchildren of the perpetrators) — are increasingly critical of this breach of the rules.

Textbooks and the practice of teaching are in no way identical. We have some examples of published lessons with an exact record of teachers’ and students’ words, especially with regard to National Socialism. The types of learning involved are deeply different; I even doubt that the common expression ‘learning’ makes much sense. Often, there is merely a transfer of unstructured and incomprehensible information (‘storage and reproduction learning’); in other cases, students use empathy with the victims and win moral and political examples for acting themselves (‘model and imitation learning’). Sometimes different (primary) sources are used, interpreted and discussed (‘insight and discovery learning’). Rarely, and only in situations of authentic communication and self-reflection, is the identity of students also involved (‘learning of identity and balance’). We may be sure that textbooks are used in a quite different way by different teachers and classes. Nevertheless, textbooks often remain the starting-point for both; and this study of their evolution in Germany since 1945 demonstrates how long it has taken for them to come to terms with the nazi dictatorship and its crimes, inasmuch as this is possible.

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Stefan Berger

Former GDR Historians in the Reunified Germany: An Alternative Historical Culture and its Attempts to Come to Terms with the GDR Past

The German Democratic Republic (GDR) was founded in 1949 and existed for just over 40 years as a self-consciously socialist German state which defined itself in stark contrast to the capitalist Federal Republic of Germany (FRG). Following Germany’s total defeat in 1945 and Allied occupation, the country was divided into zones of occupation. In the ensuing Cold War, the three western zones eventually formed the FRG while the Soviet zone became the GDR. Both Germanies developed their own economic, political and cultural sub-systems after 1949, although close ties existed between the two countries in a variety of different areas well into the 1950s. As far as German historiography was concerned, a separate GDR historians’ association was only founded in 1958, following complaints by East German historians about discrimination against themselves at the biennial historians’ conference of the all-German historians’ association in Trier. The institutional separation of FRG and GDR historiography continued apace thereafter, and historians on both sides of the divide eyed each other with suspicion and ideological enmity. While the historians of the FRG built fruitful contacts with American, British, French and generally western historiographies, GDR historians oriented themselves towards the perceived model of Soviet historiography. A rapprochement between the two Germanies and their historiographies only took place in the context of Neue Ostpolitik from the second half of the 1960s onwards. Just before the GDR came to its inglorious end, Alexander Fischer and Günther Heydemann, in their extensive review of GDR historiography, distinguished between three phases of its development: only the third and final one was described as a ‘phase of increasing scientificity (Verwissenschaftlichung), which started in the early 1970s and was characterized by a genuine dialogue between party and historians as well as a remarkably extended theoretical and

I should like to thank Norman LaPorte for his help in organizing some of the literature for this article. Furthermore, Hans Schleer, Werner Röhr, Matthias Middell, Frank Hadler, Siegfried Prokop, Ludwig Elm, Mario Kessler, Günter Benser, Jochen Čený and Jurgen Hofmann have given generously of their time to read draft versions of this article and their suggestions have greatly improved it. As always, any remaining shortcomings are entirely my own. Last but not least, Richard Evans suggested sensible cuts to what was an overlong journal article, for which I also owe him sincere thanks.
methodological independence of historiography from political guidance'. In the second half of the 1980s, this perception of the development of GDR historiography was shared by an ever-increasing number of West German historians. Yet the ‘refolution’ in 1989 and subsequent reunification of Germany changed things considerably. Initial attempts of East and West German historians to co-operate as colleagues on an equal footing soon gave way to recriminations and the exclusion of East Germans from the universities and academic life generally.

Between 1990 and 1993 the structures of GDR historiography were destroyed. A process of evaluation and assessment of the historical institutes at the Academy of Sciences and at the universities resulted in the dissolution of the Academy and the removal of the overwhelming majority of East German professors from the universities. A proper and open evaluation, carried out by the German government’s scientific council (Wissenschaftsrat) only took place at the GDR’s Academy of Sciences. Once the basic political decision had been taken to dissolve the Academy, few alternatives existed to an evaluation. The evaluators recommended integrating a considerable number of former scholars in the GDR into the all-German academic landscape, but these plans came to nothing in the miserable academic job market in 1990s Germany. It quickly became apparent that the remaining East Germans had nothing to offer to the power-hungry and well-organized networks of West German scholars. At the universities, evaluations were a much more nebulous affair, with no clear criteria for assessment, secret references and a whole range of other doubtful practices. Those whose qualifications and scientific merits were not found to be wanting were often dismissed as ‘politically incriminated’ (largely for contacts with the East German secret police, the Stasi). To justify the devastation of East German historiography, which found no parallel anywhere in post-communist Eastern Europe, the credentials of GDR historiography as a ‘scientific’ alternative to West German historiography needed to be destroyed.

In fact, it was now becoming increasingly fashionable to call into doubt the ‘scientificity’ of East German historiography as such. Many major works on GDR historiography which appeared after 1990 started from the assumption

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2 This fitting expression denoting the hybrid character of events in many central and eastern European countries in 1989/90 was coined by Timothy Garton Ash, Im Namen Europas. Deutschland und der geteilte Kontinent (Munich 1993), 503 ff.
3 For a balance sheet of what happened to East German academia in the process of reunification which goes far beyond the historical discipline, see the interesting volume of Jürgen Kocka and Renate Mayntz (eds), Wissenschaft und Wiedervereinigung. Disziplinen im Umbruch (Berlin 1998). For a far more critical East German perspective see Wolfgang Richter (ed.), Unfrieden in Deutschland: Weissbuch 2: Wissenschaft und Kultur im Beitrittsgebiet (Berlin 1993).
that a qualitative difference existed between the ‘scientificity’ of western historiography and the practice of history-writing in the GDR. Some historians have been outright condemnatory of GDR historiography and have viewed it as nothing more than propaganda for the Socialist Unity Party (SED), the ruling Communist Party in the GDR. Others have been both more willing to concede the different conceptions of historiography and less forthright in their moral condemnation of former historians in the GDR. Yet, even where they have been sympathetic to the integrity of personal and scholarly biographies of former historians in the GDR, they, like Martin Sabrow, have insisted on the very different character and self-understanding of historiography in the GDR. If the scientificity of West and East German historians was ultimately incompatible, it was best, in Sabrow’s framework of analysis, to treat GDR historiography as a separate historical system with its own rules and regulations. If this brought objections from East German historians that GDR historiography was being treated as a ‘cabinet of curiosities’, Sabrow has nevertheless been in the forefront of those who explicitly reject a history of GDR historiography which operates with concepts of moral guilt and condemnation. But it fell largely to former East German historians to insist on the ‘scientificity’ of East German historiography before 1989. Co-operation between West and East German historians became a rare exception in major research institutes such as the Research Centre for Contemporary History in Potsdam (ZZF), and the Berlin branch of the Institute for Contemporary History, but also in other research groups such as the Forschungsverbund SED-Staat at the Free University in Berlin, the Institute for Comparative Research on State–Church Relations and the Marx-Engels-Gesamtausgabe (MEGA). In all those institutes and research groups the leading positions were occupied by western historians.

On balance, many of the youngest generation of East German historians, those who were in the process of writing their PhD or had just finished it,
opted for a radical career change, as they saw no future as historians in the reunified Germany. A very small minority of former historians in the GDR, who are below the age of 50, are still active in German universities, seeking their place within the reunified historiography of Germany. Many were employed on short-term contracts in the HEP-WIP programmes of the early 1990s, and today many have precarious existences surviving on short-term contracts linked to specific research projects. The older generation of established former historians in the GDR were normally given early retirement, with a handful of exceptions, such as Hartmut Zwahr, Helga Schultz, Hartmut Harnisch (now retired) and Wolfgang Küttler, who continued to work in the universities and research institutes of the reunified Germany.

The vast majority of former historians in the GDR have not been given the opportunity to remain active as historians. Yet a surprising number of them are participating in a variety of historical associations and societies founded after 1990 to maintain scholarly networks of communication. Older, established former historians in the GDR, many of whom are retired, form the backbone of an alternative historical culture which has been emerging from the ruins of the old GDR historiography. Its members often define themselves negatively against West German historians accused of having colonized East German historiography. Yet this common grievance barely hides considerable internal differences. There are no overarching discursive structures, no institutions and no master narratives to hold the milieu of former historians in the GDR together. It remains a very disparate field. It should also be pointed out that the sharpest critics of East German historians after 1990 were not West Germans but (largely) younger East Germans. In particular the Independent Historians' Association (UHV), founded in opposition to the GDR's official historians' association in 1990 and by now defunct, was often vociferous in its total condemnation of GDR historiography. Following an all-too-brief characterization of the institutional underpinnings of the afterlife of GDR historiography in the 1990s, this article will first analyse the self-understanding of the historians active in it, and second, focus on the historical narratives that these historians have created about the history of the GDR.

The historical associations, in which former GDR historians, many of whom are unemployed or retired or on fixed-term contracts, are still active, can be divided into three types: first, those which are directly linked to the successor party of the Communist Party of the GDR, the Party of Democratic Socialism

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10 HEP stands for Hochschulerneuerungsprogramm (higher education development programme) and WIP for Wissenschaftlerintegrationsprogramm (integration programme for scholars) — both de facto employment programmes for positively evaluated researchers from the former GDR.

11 See, in particular, some of the contributions in Rainer Eckert, Ilko-Sascha Kowalczyk and Isolde Stark (eds), Hure oder Mase? Klio in der DDR. Dokumente und Materialien des Unabhängigen Historiker-Verbandes (Berlin 1994).
(PDS). The historical commission of the PDS, founded in 1990, is the most prominent of these institutions. It has organized a wide range of historical conferences and issued statements on behalf of the party on key anniversaries.\(^\text{12}\)

The Marxist Forum (MF) of the PDS, founded in 1995, regularly organizes historical conferences and issues its own publications.\(^\text{13}\) Furthermore, there are a number of regional and local historical associations in the vicinity and wider surroundings of the PDS which have developed a wide range of activities. The second group of organizations are close to the PDS, but independent of the party. The Rosa Luxemburg Foundation (RLS), founded in 1990, provides a forum for the wider dissemination of the history debates taking place around the PDS. It has sister organizations in all of the federal states of Germany which act independently. In particular the Saxon, Thuringian, Brandenburg and Berlin Foundations are very active in the field of history.\(^\text{14}\) The Marxist Working Group for the History of the Labour Movement (Marxistischer Arbeitskreis — MA), founded in 1992, co-operates closely with the Historical Commission of the (largely West-) German Communist Party (DKP) and the Wuppertal-based Marx-Engels Foundation in organizing conferences and workshops every half year.\(^\text{15}\) Finally, the third group of organizations involves the largest and most disparate number of historical associations with no direct links to the PDS, although many of its activists are undoubtedly either sympathetic to the PDS or criticize the party from the left. There is, to mention but a few, the Gesellschaftswissenschaftliche Forum e.V. Berlin, founded in 1992 to unite mainly academics from the GDR’s Academy of Social Sciences. The Berliner Alternatives Geschichtsforschung, founded in 1992 by Werner Röhr, belongs to the group of societies which were established to continue the scholarly work of historians in the GDR after they had to relinquish their posts. The dissolved Academy of the GDR found an afterlife in the Leibnitz-Societät, where many former GDR historians are active in one of the two sections for ‘Social Sciences’. Furthermore, numerous local groups and history workshops bring together former GDR historians who attempt to remain active despite the fact that their institutional backbone has been utterly removed. This alternative historical culture in East Germany has forged close contacts with a number of publishing houses,

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\(^\text{13}\) Details on the publications and self-understanding of the MF can be found on the group’s webpages: http://www.pds-sachsen.de/ag/MF/dokum01.htm.

\(^\text{14}\) See http://www.rosalux.de; and http://www.helle-panke.de.

\(^\text{15}\) http://www.pds-online.de/strukturen/marxistischer_arbeitskreis.
such as GNN Verlag Schkeunitz, Trafo Verlag Dr Wolfgang Weist, Edition Organon, Edition Ost Verlag, Querverlag, Spotless Verlag, Verlag Schwartzkopf und Schwartzkopf, Karl Dietz Verlag and Leipziger Universitätsverlag. The associations’ own publications belong to the category of ‘grey literature’, which is self-produced and largely available directly through the associations.

Even a cursory glance at the literature produced by former GDR historians after 1989 immediately reveals that, when talking about history, they often also talk about their role as historians in the GDR and their self-understanding now. What is noticeable about these self-reflections is, first of all, a strong desire to confirm their credentials as professional scholars (Wissenschaftler). This is a perfectly understandable reaction to their personal experiences of exclusion and delegitimation. Innumerable contributions of former GDR historians over the past 11 years start off with the authors’ profession of their faith in ‘scientific sobriety’, ‘rational scientific analysis’, ‘historical truth’, ‘scientificity’ and the production of ‘exact and specific knowledge’. Both Kurt Pätzold and Fritz Klein have stressed how much they owe their bourgeois teachers for instilling in them ‘a solemn concept of scientificity’ (ernster Begriff von Wissenschaftlichkeit).

The literature produced by former GDR historians includes a fair number of Festschriften which demonstrate the desire to cling to the traditional forms and self-understanding of academic historians. They invariably stress the strong international scholarly reputation of the honoured person and contrast it with their current vilification in the reunified Germany. Even when they admit to the strong impact of ideological orientations on historical interpretations, they are keen to stress that ‘the facts’ were always right. The strong emphasis on scholarliness, sobriety and factual correctness in effect makes the remnants of the GDR’s Marxist historiography today look extraordinarily positivist and historicist.

The non-acceptance of the scholarly work produced by historians in the GDR during the lifetime of the regime is the single most important source of bitterness and resentment among East German historians who find it difficult to forget their post-1990 cold-shouldering by the very same West German historians who, before 1989, had professed their belief in the professionalization of East German historiography, and had been keen to co-operate with their East German colleagues in the spirit of peaceful co-existence in the field of historiography. The dissolution of long-standing and productive scientific groups, such as the one working under Wolfgang Schumann on the history of the second world war or the one under Manfred Kossok working on the comparative history of revolutions, has created much ill feeling among East German historians. It is difficult to avoid the conclusion that West German historians wanted to ban from university curricula those subjects and areas

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which they disliked most. Planned joint projects between East and West German historians suddenly had to be buried in 1990, as West German historians hastily withdrew their support. Ludwig Elm has argued that the former recognition of East German scholars has been forgotten in the ‘atmosphere of West German dominance and self-righteousness’ which reigned after 1990. Kurt Finker has spoken of concerted efforts to silence any achievements of GDR historiography in the Federal Republic. For Wolfgang Küttler, one of the few former GDR historians to have a position inside the official German historiography (he is at the Max-Planck-Institut für Wissenschaftsgeschichte in Berlin), a ‘coniuratio silenciae’ by established West German historians aims to extinguish even the memory of a separate East German historiography. While the demolition of East German historiography is most often explained in terms of the strong anti-communist tendencies among West German historians, those more liberal forces of the West German historical profession who had the most contact with East German historians before 1989 and who, according to East German historians, should have known better, are taken to task for remaining silent after 1990 or for participating prominently in the destruction of East German historiography.

If East German historians have defended their own achievements as scholars, they tend to pass on any blame for the undeniable distortions and blatant political propaganda in their own works to SED apparatchiks seeking to control the scholarly output of historians. When Siegfried Prokop published his series of interviews with the senior member of the politburo, Alfred Neumann, the position of the interviewer was very much that of the critical and self-critical historian, whereas that of the interviewee was of the dogmatic and unyielding party hack, who still knew best what view of the past was correct. In an interview, Prokop pointed to his own attempts in the second half of the 1980s to write a more realistic history about the workers’ rising in the GDR of 17 June 1953 and about the failure of the SED élites to embark on a renewal of socialism after 1956 as examples of the difficulties historians encountered with the party whenever they went against the party line. However, as he insisted, ‘it was always extremely hard to find space for different historical

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interpretations, but it was possible and historians have been exploring these possibilities in the GDR'.

Hanna Wolf, in particular, makes a regular appearance as the arch-model of a dogmatic and inflexible party apparatchik in the post-1990 accounts of East German historians. Mario Kessler’s verdict on Wolf is representative of the derision with which these party apparatchiks are viewed today by former GDR historians:

She was an extreme example of a type of party cadre without whom the GDR would not have functioned. She has never managed to publish a scholarly work which would deserve this description. As a high-ranking party official, however, she constantly sat in judgement over historians and their publications.

Kessler’s account of East German historiography stresses efforts by ‘true historians’ to develop an alternative understanding of history writing. Far from being just a legitimating science, history in the early GDR was informed by the attempt to develop areas which were traditionally marginalized and ignored by German historiography. Yet, according to Kessler, it was ultimately the subordination of historians to the party which created a ‘self-inflicted political dependency’. This is a criticism that many former GDR historians are willing to make of themselves today. Manfred Weißbecker, for example, has taken himself to task for clinging on to a false understanding of ‘partisanship’ (Parteilichkeit) which led him to suppress criticisms about the more unpalatable aspects of GDR socialism. Fritz Klein has described his own silence over colleagues being relegated and removed from the institute of history at the Academy of Sciences as ‘wretched’. The late Joachim Petzold structured his autobiography along the lines of a constant struggle between his attempts to put forward more sophisticated historical analyses and a dogmatic party bureaucracy against which he was ultimately powerless. Although an SED member of 40 years standing, Petzold, like Klein, describes himself as growing increasingly disillusioned with the party and the way it prescribed the history that could be written in the GDR. Günter Benser, with hindsight, has also criticized the ‘wearing out’ of historians by the SED and other bloc parties.

23 Interview with Siegfried Prokop, 23 November 2001. For a similar argument see Günter Benser, DDR — gedenkt ihrer mit Nachsicht (Berlin 2000), 320 ff.
25 Kessler, Exilerfahrung, op. cit., 312.
27 Klein, Drinnen, op. cit., 296.
29 Benser, Gedenkt, op. cit., 324.
In Klein’s narrative, people who trusted each other always expressed their criticisms openly, but their resistance to the party’s authority had strict limits. Where the post-1990 accounts of former GDR historians talk about transgressing those limits, they become narratives of the disciplining powers of the party who punish historians for attempting to go against the party line. The picture emerging from these stories is not that of the willing ‘party worker’ but that of the reluctant propagandist and ideologue who felt his own integrity as a scholar compromised by the demands of the SED. With hindsight, many chose to portray themselves as, in Jürgen Kuczynski’s memorable phrase, ‘loyal dissidents’, who, despite all their criticisms of the regime, remained loyal to the socialist ideal which it allegedly represented. Yet it is their critical attitude towards aspects of the GDR which, according to their post-1990 texts, allowed them to experience 1989 as liberation and to look forward to new scholarly and personal freedoms and opportunities. It was therefore all the more disappointing to witness the complete destruction of East German historiography in which many West German historians willingly colluded.

Faced with a massive non-acceptance of their scholarly biographies, East German historians tend to stress the achievements of GDR historiography under adverse circumstances. According to Röhr, the unpublished dissertations of GDR historians are evidence of their considerable productivity. For Ernst Engelberg, GDR historiography developed ‘new perspectives on societal processes’ at a time when its West German counterpart was still largely concerned with politics. Wolfgang Ruge has pointed out that GDR research into the German revolution of 1918/19 served as one incentive for research into this topic in the FRG. Fritz Klein has emphasized the innovative potential of Marxist historiography after 1945 in contrast to the conservative and anti-communist orientation of West German historians. Günter Benser, Jochen Černý, Gerhard Lozek, Manfred Weißbecker, Wolfgang Küttler and many more have all defended the methodological and theoretical approaches as well as the practical achievements of a Marxist historiography in the GDR, which constantly had to defend itself against interference from SED officials — in

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32 Interview with Werner Röhr, 3 December 2001.
35 Klein, Drinnen, op. cit., 170f.
particular in the areas of labour movement and GDR history. The historians’ proximity to state power, and their acceptance of the leading role of the SED amounted to major weaknesses, but it did not prevent ‘the historiography of the GDR [from contributing] to the progress of scientific knowledge’.

Many former GDR historians have been willing to concede that today they might not completely rewrite their histories but that they would write many things differently. A willingness to give an honest account of their shortcomings and failures before 1989 goes hand in hand with a desire to stand by their scholarly biographies. Wolfgang Ruge has accused GDR historiography of ‘ignoring all the horrors and crimes which belonged to the essence of so-called really-existing socialism’, but has also argued: ‘Given all that, we have still contributed to the maintenance of a vision of a more humane society and have helped to instigate thought and actions for such a society.’ Arguably, that still remains one of the main concerns of those who have been active despite their marginalization. Far from being silent, they have produced, under adverse circumstances, a remarkable amount of historical analyses which, according to Walter Schmidt, amount to nothing less than a ‘second German scholarly culture’.

However, the future of that alternative scholarly culture has to be uncertain, given the average age of its key players and the fact that there are so few younger historians ready to continue the work of a marginalized Marxist historiography which lost its institutional foundations with the end of the GDR. Yet there is considerable pride in the afterlife of what Werner Berthold has described as ‘the other German historiography’. In fact, as Berthold points out, the recent debates about the National Socialist past of West German historians have brought in their wake a positive re-evaluation of GDR historiography, first, because historians in the GDR pointed to that nazi past early on, and, second, because the prominence of former nazi supporters in the West German historical profession contrasts sharply with the anti-fascist credentials of those who built up the GDR historiography. Indeed, as


40 Werner Berthold, ‘Postfaschistische Historiker der Alt-BRD und antifaschistische Historiker der Ex-DDR in totalitaristisch-egalisierender Sicht’ in Geschichtsschreibung, op. cit., 225–46; also
Hans Schleier points out, the experience of the unwillingness of western colleagues to face the National Socialist past was one of the foundational experiences of many East German historians of his generation.41 Yet this other German historiography is, first of all, very much circumscribed by financial limits. Historians who are active here do not have the research opportunities that are normal for their colleagues at established research institutes and universities. There is thus a strong feeling among former GDR historians that they could do a lot more if they worked under more favourable circumstances. The alternative historical culture is at best a ‘parallel discourse on a low heat’ (paralleler Diskurs auf Sparflamme).42 Secondly, their attempts to come to a re-assessment of their previous historical perspectives and to contribute to public history debates remain fairly isolated. There is considerable resentment on both sides of the divide: whereas unemployed former GDR historians resent West Germans taking their places at East German universities and often regard their western colleagues now occupying university chairs as third- or fourth-rate, the latter are often unwilling to seek the co-operation of former East German colleagues whom they regard as morally or scholarly compromised. Even where this is not the case, they are faced with pressure from their university administrations not to establish contacts with former GDR historians.43 The Landeszentrale für politische Bildung in Thuringia has shown a firm hostility towards co-operating with the Thüringer Forum, which is close to the PDS, and individual colleagues at the universities are afraid of the consequences that co-operation with former GDR historians might have for their careers.

East German historians, on the other hand, have sometimes put forward a strangely one-dimensional picture of western research on the GDR. Thus, for example, Rolf Badstübner has described contemporary historical writing about the GDR as returning to the predominant historiographical paradigm of the 1950s in its depiction of the GDR as a ‘second German dictatorship’ and ‘Unrechtsstaat’. He has accused western historians of having a ‘victor’s mentality intent on punishment’.44 According to Niemann, the SED’s official history has not been replaced by a genuine pluralization of the debate. Instead, the GDR now appears in one-sided negative contrast to the FRG.45 For


42 Interview with Werner Röhr, 28 November 2001.
43 Interview with Manfred Weißbecker, 5 December 2001, according to whom Lutz Niethammer, Weißbecker’s successor in Jena, experienced such pressure after he had invited Weißbecker to participate in his university colloquia.
44 Rolf Badstübner, DDR. Gescheiterte Epochenalternative, Aufbruch in die Sackgasse oder was sonst? Versuch einer Annäherung, hefte zur ddr geschichte 19 (Berlin 1994), 5.
Kurt Pätzold, the writing of GDR history in the reunified Germany is the best example of the political instrumentalization of history: by making the GDR a mere footnote in history, it can be presented as an effective deterrent to all future social utopias.46 Political parties in the West, just like the SED of old, are accused of using history for their own particular political ends.47 In Saxony, where totalitarianist theory has been written into the constitution, the GDR is constantly compared to the Third Reich in what, according to the MA, amounts to systematic ‘falsification of history’ (Geschichtsklitterung).48 Even if one is sympathetic to these complaints, it seems hardly justified to ignore the considerable diversity of historical accounts produced by western research on the GDR over the last decade. And, of course, several western historians have been keen to avoid any one-sided condemnation of GDR history and its historians. Increasingly, this has been recognized by former GDR historians, some of whom have been highly critical of tendencies to condemn the whole of western historiography about the GDR.49

In their post-1990 texts former GDR historians are often motivated by three concerns: a) to re-assess critically their own former judgments and work; b) to counter what they perceive as the anti-communist wholesale condemnation of GDR history after 1990, and c) to justify historically demands for a renewal of socialism as an alternative to triumphant capitalism. Their view of GDR history is similar to their perception of their own role as historians in the GDR; in both cases we find honest attempts to criticize their own behaviour and that of the state they defended for so long, which stand next to a dogged insistence on lasting achievements. Some, notably Günter Benser, have even attempted to write the history of the GDR as autobiography. Benser’s book interlinks autobiographical passages about his experiences of events with historical analysis: ‘I was surprised to see how closely the different phases of my own life corresponded with the evolution and passing away of the GDR.’50 His own positive experiences in the GDR are connected with a positive balance sheet for the GDR in terms of its social, educational and foreign policies. On the basis of the GDR’s successes, many of its citizens identified with it and the history of the GDR becomes ‘more than a negative contrast to the heroic history of the Federal Republic’.51 Benser explicitly rejects a nostalgic picture

50 Benser, Gedenkt, op. cit., 13.
51 Ibid., 10, 337.
of the GDR and discusses its many shortcomings and failures, notably its lack of democracy and the SED’s Stalinist practices. Yet, overall, the title of his book, ‘The GDR — Think about it with Leniency’, is also a plea not to condemn those who were representatives of that state.

Many former GDR historians writing GDR history emphasize that they do not aim for and indeed condemn attempts to produce a nostalgic picture of the state. In fact, the GDR is frequently portrayed as a state with ‘genetic defects’, crippled, above all, by the lack of democracy which allowed the party bureaucracy to assert its authority on the less dogmatic and more innovative elements of GDR socialism. The biographer of Erich Mielke, Wilfriede Otto, has portrayed the head of the Stasi as a symbol of the ‘social misconstruction’ of socialism in the GDR. The falsification of history by the Stasi in cases where the interests of the GDR were directly affected, is now openly admitted, as are cases of antisemitism in the SED and the SED’s purges of its own cadres as well as those of the West German KPD.

However much former historians in the GDR now criticize the GDR and however much they differ about how to weigh diverse foreign and domestic political factors responsible for the state’s demise, they are agreed on one point: historians must not view the history of the GDR from its inglorious end. The failure of GDR socialism was not inevitable. There had been alternatives and turning-points at which, in A.J.P. Taylor’s famous phrase, history failed to turn. The years 1948, 1953, 1956, 1961 and 1968 and the OSCE process starting in the 1970s are all heavily discussed in terms of missed opportunities. GDR history is thus written as a succession of failed attempts to democratize the Stalinist perversion of the socialist idea. In this version of events idealistic SED members are portrayed as attempting to defend the ideals of socialism against the realities of Stalinism in the GDR. The tragedy of generation upon generation of reform socialists was their repeated defeat at the hands of those dogmatic party apparatchiks which we have already encountered in the narra-

54 Ronald Sassning, Geschichte im Visier des MfS der DDR. hefte zur ddr geschichte, 65 (Berlin 2000).
56 A good overview of these debates for the first half of the 1990s is given by Herbert Mayer, ‘Die Plicht, vom Scheitern zu sprechen’ in Lothar Bisky et al. (eds), Die PDS — Herkunft und Selbstverständnis. Eine politisch-historische Debatte (Berlin 1996), 346–73.
tives produced by former historians in the GDR about their difficulty in writing ‘objective’ history in the GDR.\textsuperscript{57}

The pre-history of the GDR is widely perceived as the best part of its history. It is described as a period of great hope and much optimism for societal change. A thorough socialist reconstruction of German society was attempted, and the idealistic motives of the founder generation of the GDR are heavily emphasized. In this context many former GDR historians remain unwilling to endorse the verdict of the foundation of the SED in 1946 as an ‘enforced merger’ between KPD and SED. While they condemn the propagandistic character of GDR histories of the event, and while they readily concede the superiority of western histories, they equally insist on the genuine desire of many Social Democrats to unite the labour movement. In 1996, on the fiftieth anniversary of the merger, a statement by the historical commission, authored by Günter Benser, stated clearly that force was used and that enemies of the merger were persecuted. Yet it insisted that there was an ‘irresistible urge towards unity’ in 1945–6. The commission also pointed out that those Social Democrats in the West who had been in favour of the merger also faced persecution and were often excluded from the party. A difference in the quality of persecution was readily admitted: after all, the East German opponents of the merger were incarcerated and some even lost their lives, but the ultimate aim of silencing opposition was perceived as the same in the East and the West.\textsuperscript{58} In several accounts, personal memory has replaced historical analysis. Thus, for example, Fritz Klein writes: ‘For us the unification of SPD and KPD was no enforced merger.’\textsuperscript{59} In the light of this, it comes as no surprise that many former historians in the GDR criticized the public apology of leading party members Petra Pau and Gabriele Zimmer in 2001 which was addressed to the SPD and expressed the PDS’s deep sorrow about the persecution of Social Democrats opposed to the merger in 1946. For many this was just another example of political expediency rather than ‘sober’ historical analysis. Yet some, for example Wilfriede Otto, also defended Pau’s and Zimmer’s action.

\textsuperscript{57} See, for example, Dieter Schulz, Der Weg in die Krise 1953. hefte zur ddr geschichte, 6 (Berlin 1993); Prokop, ‘Das Jahr 1956 und sein Platz in der Geschichte der DDR’ in Leben, op. cit., 99–108; Stefan Bollinger, Die DDR kann nicht über Stalins Schatten springen. Reformen im Kalten Krieg — SED zwischen NÖS und Prager Frühling. hefte zur ddr geschichte, 5 (Berlin 1993); Jörg Kößler, ‘Das kritische Jahr der Reformen’, ND, 14 July 1998; Andreas Malycha, Herbert Nikolaus, Thomas Friedrich, Monika Kaiser and Monika Nakath, DDR Geschichte zwischen Hoffnung und Untergang (no place or year of publication [1991]).


\textsuperscript{59} Klein, Drinnen, op. cit., 108 f., 120.
and saw it as a continuation of the political and moral principle to make amends to those who had been persecuted by the SED in the GDR.60

Assessments by former GDR historians of the building of the wall in 1961 reveal the same ambiguity between revision and endorsement of their previously-held views. On the one hand, we find a clear condemnation of the human costs involved in the building of the wall. The official GDR explanation of the wall as an ‘antifascist protective wall’ is nowhere to be found, and several historians stress that they never believed in what was so obviously a propaganda myth. Yet, on the other hand, the building of the wall is still widely defended as a result of the logic of the Cold War. It was, in Wilfriede Otto’s words, ‘a necessary, pragmatic solution’. It was necessary for the stabilization of the GDR and is widely perceived as yet another missed opportunity for the start of a democratic reform process.61 Prokop has criticized those within the PDS who see the only alternative in 1961 as capitulation to the West. This, he argued, was no real alternative, as the Soviets would not have allowed any SED leader simply to hand over the GDR to Adenauer.62 A declaration initiated by the BAG and published in Junge Welt explicitly defended the building of the wall as a justified ‘action aimed at self-assertion’ and protection against continued western attempts to undermine the GDR.63

Perhaps the most surprising example of attempts by former GDR historians to embark on a radical rethinking of their positions is the stance of some of their leading proponents towards the revival of the totalitarianist paradigm after 1990. Far from rejecting the concept of totalitarianism, historians such as Wolfgang Ruge and Gerhard Lozek have called for a re-assessment of the value of totalitarianist theory for an understanding of GDR history.64 They distinguish carefully between different strands of thought within the totalitarian paradigm and find much of interest in the works of Hannah Arendt in particular. While it is recognized that totalitarianism has little to offer for an understanding of the functioning of GDR society and while it is rarely recommended as a universal explanation for GDR history, aspects of it are perceived as useful, when it comes to explanations for the political system of the GDR.65

60 See the different verdicts by Otto on the one hand, and Benser and Hofmann on the other, given at a conference of the historical commission: Karlen Vesper, ‘Drang oder Zwang?’, ND, 17 May 2001.
65 Ernst Wurl, ‘Politische Herrschaft in der DDR — totalitar, bürokratisch, autoritär?’ in Bisky et al. (eds), PDS, 199–208.
Horst Schützler has argued that the reception of totalitarianism by Russian historians in the 1990s may have important lessons for historians close to the PDS writing the history of the GDR. Among the majority of former GDR historians such ideas are, however, not popular. Kurt Pätzold’s praise of Daniel Goldhagen was rooted, above all, in the fact that he perceived Goldhagen’s book as an effective barrier to the continued equalization of National Socialism and the GDR under the totalitarian paradigm. Yet, despite the strength of feeling against the totalitarianist theory as a scholarly instrument of the Cold War, there is a recognition among some that not all totalitarianist theory necessarily invalidates anti-fascism and further anti-communism. It is indeed noticeable that former historians in the GDR have defended few things about the GDR as vigorously as the country’s alleged anti-fascist foundations, which have come under sustained attack from diverse groups of western historians since 1990. This is due to the fact that the ‘historical and political-moral legitimacy’ of the GDR rested to a large degree on its self-definition as an anti-fascist state whose socialism was supposed to be a key lesson learned from the experience of German fascism.

Hence, much more widespread than calls for comparisons of Stalinism and National Socialism under the totalitarian paradigm are attempts to compare the GDR and the FRG between 1945 and 1989. Jürgen Hofmann called on his fellow historians to develop this comparative perspective of the two German states in a discussion paper published by the Historical Commission in 1999, on the occasion of the fiftieth anniversary of the foundation of both German states. The paper starts from the assumption that they were bound up within their respective alliance systems in the Cold War. While the hegemony of the USA and the USSR respectively had an important influence on them, both were also representative of different strands in nineteenth- and twentieth-century German history. Hence, the GDR cannot be written out of German history as the history of a foreign-dominated state — a spectre that had been raised by a number of West German historians after 1989. It was more than a Soviet satellite in that it sought to realize the ideas and ideals of the German labour movement. Hofmann develops a research programme which would highlight comparisons between the two German states as the best way to understand the ‘double biography’ of Germany.

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Where such comparisons have been attempted, they tend morally to equate the histories of the two postwar Germanies. If anything, the GDR ‘represents the more exciting, more engaging part of German postwar events which more directly asks the observer to take sides and to declare their sympathies’. The GDR not infrequently emerges from the comparison as the better of the two German states. It learnt its lessons from the victory of National Socialism in Germany, and came to terms with the National Socialist past earlier than the FRG. The thoroughgoing reform process in the GDR is contrasted with the alleged restoration sanctioned by the western allies in their zones of occupation. If the GDR failed because of its lack of democracy, the FRG has also been found wanting in the realization of its democratic aspirations. Transitions from democracy to dictatorship are portrayed not as sharp and black and white, but rather gradual and fluid. It is, above all, their own experience of discrimination which made many former historians in the GDR sceptical of the democratic processes in the FRG. As Benser stated, his own relationship to the FRG was directly proportional to how the FRG had treated him. The deteriorating trust among East Germans in the institutions of parliamentary democracy is related to the self-perception of many East Germans as second-class citizens. Hence the basic values of democracy and human rights are strongly defended by former GDR historians against alleged attempts to restrict them within the Federal Republic’s parliamentary democracy. When it comes to the welfare state, social security and the ideal of equality, the GDR is frequently perceived as having been superior to the FRG. The GDR’s armed forces are portrayed as having made a very positive contribution to peace during the Cold War. The GDR economy is depicted as one with con-

71 See in particular the contributions in Konferenz Gegen den Zeitgeist. 50. Jahrestag der Gründung von BRD und DDR [no editor] (Schkeunitz 1999), and Fischer et al. (eds), Gegen die Zeitgeist. The ND also ran a whole series entitled ‘Deutsches Doppel’ during 1999.
73 See, for example, Rolf Badstübner, Vom Reich zum doppelten Deutschland. Gesellschaft und Politik im Umbruch (Berlin 1999).
74 Stefan Doernberg, ‘Ein Diskussionsbeitrag’ in Der historische Platz der DDR. Beiträge aus zwei Debatten im Marxistischen Forum. MF Heft 21/22 (Berlin 1999), 26–8.
77 Prokop, ‘Wo blühen sie denn?’, similar statements in Badstübner, DDR, op. cit., 43.
siderable innovative potential. As both German states are perceived as highly interdependent in their perception of each other, many East German historians have also stressed that eastern European socialism put western capitalism under pressure to adopt strategies which would accommodate the working class. Hence, the ‘golden age’ of Social Democracy in western Europe was in no small part due to the existence of really-existing socialism in eastern Europe.

Where the GDR is not perceived as the superior German state, there is often a strong tendency to emphasize the increasing similarity of both systems. Thus, according to Jörg Rösler, the economic systems of both countries showed astonishing parallels in the 1960s. In particular, the New Economic System (NÖS) is widely perceived as a positive alternative to both the socialist command economy of yesterday and the capitalist economy of today. Convergence theory was very popular among liberal left-wing circles in the old Federal Republic in the 1980s. After 1989/90 it vanished into a black hole, and like the professionalization thesis of East German historiography, already discussed, was only picked up by East German historians after 1990. Overall, many of the comparisons between the GDR and the FRG suffer from a lack of expertise on the part of former East German historians when it comes to the history of the old Federal Republic. Furthermore, wishful thinking tends to mingle with traces of a rather nostalgic view of the GDR and to prevent a more radical reassessment of the alleged achievements of GDR-style socialism. West German historians who attempt to write a history of the two Germanies after 1945 are usually applauded for their attempts to view both Germanies in their interdependency. By contrast, those who continue to write the history of the FRG as the only legitimate German history after 1945 are strongly criticized. The GDR is overwhelmingly portrayed as a valid and legitimate attempt to overcome a capitalism which had contributed to some of the worst excesses in the history of the first half of the twentieth century. Hence, any reassessment of GDR history has to take account of the country’s anti-capitalism and historians have often linked this to the continued search for alternatives to capitalism in the contemporary world. According to Benser, the programmatic and conceptual deficits of the SED have to be investigated precisely because any such analysis is the precondition for establishing a new socialist theory.

80 Thomas Kuczynski, ‘Über die Einheit von Geschichts- und Oppositionsverständnis als Ausgangspunkt für ein neues Parteiverständnis’ in Geschichte — ja aber, controvers (no place or year of publication [1992]), 6.
aimed at overcoming the momentarily victorious capitalism. The search for a viable democratic socialism is closely bound up with the maintenance of anti-capitalist strategies. For Doernberg, only a reinvigorated socialism will deliver democracy, as capitalism is inherently undemocratic. Any renewal of socialism should, according to some former GDR historians, build on the experiences with socialism in the GDR rather than reject wholesale the socialist traditions of the GDR. To arrive in the society of the reunified Germany means developing the ability to critique its capitalist society, which is perceived as the first step out of the impotence of the East German intelligentsia. The perspective on the PDS is one of ongoing emancipation and anti-capitalist struggle. The massive interest in communist dissidents from Luxemburg, Trotsky and Bukharin to Harich, Kuczynski and Havemann is also a clear sign that one of the key aims is the renewal of left-wing anti-capitalist thinking.

As many of the former historians in the GDR have noticed themselves, their history debates have little presence in the very public debates about German history which have characterized the historical culture of the Federal Republic. At worst they are completely ignored by the ‘official’ historical discourse in the FRG. At best they are perceived as espousing a ‘half-hearted revisionism’. Bernd Faulenbach has been highly critical of apologetic tendencies amongst the historical discourse produced by former historians in the GDR. At the same time he has been equally adamant that ‘the delegitimation of the dictatorship’ in the GDR and the complete destruction of the GDR’s élites were vital preconditions for the establishment of an ‘anti-totalitarian consensus’ in Germany. Yet Faulenbach, himself, has also pointed out that

88 Many articles in ND deal with the meaning of socialism today. See also the Helle Panke series Vielfalt sozialistischen Denkens which aims to introduce diverse schools of socialist thought. See also Verfemt, Verfolgt, Verschwiegen. Im Konflikt mit der Macht — Schicksale in der frühen DDR. Kolloquium in memoriam Wolfgang Kießling, Pankower Vorträge 26 (Berlin 2000), which is dedicated almost exclusively to communist dissidents who became victims of the SED.
90 Rainer Eckert and Bernd Faulenbach (eds), Halbherziger Revisionismus. Zum postkommunistischen Geschichtsbild der PDS (Essen 1996).
one of the major difficulties of arriving at an all-German ‘anti-totalitarian consensus’ is the fact that most of the delegitimation is done by West German historians.92 While this article has been able to confirm this latter view with the slight proviso that the harshest critics of East German historians came from within the East German UHV, overall, it arrives at a different conclusion to Faulenbach’s. Not only have I found among former historians in the GDR an honest and genuine desire to debate and revise their positions before 1989. Furthermore, the voices of former historians in the GDR have enriched the contemporary debate about GDR history as they add an additional perspective to the healthy pluralism which characterizes research on the GDR today.93 Hence I would like to add my voice to those in the reunified German historiography who have expressed their dissatisfaction with the way former historians in the GDR continue to be marginalized. Whereas moral and scholarly condemnation of GDR historiography dominated the scene in the first years after reunification, a more sophisticated pattern of interpreting the shortcomings and achievements of historians in the GDR seemed to have gained ground in the second half of the 1990s. At conferences and in scholarly journals, the past of historians does not matter to the same degree as it did immediately following reunification. And a minority of West German historians have at least begun to criticize the way in which East German historians were treated after 1990. Lutz Niethammer, for one, has voiced his regrets that the Abwicklung has ‘needlessly hindered and ended much potential for the development of GDR historiography’.94 Peter Bender has argued that all-German history needs authentic East German voices and cannot do without the expertise of former GDR historians.95 Jürgen Kocka argued in an interview with Kessler that the destruction of GDR historiography had gone too far.96 And Dieter Simon, the former president of the Wissenschaftsrat, wondered whether opportunities for a reform of the whole system of higher education in Germany had not been missed by the rash adoption of the less-than-perfect West German model for East Germany.97 Such insights might come too late to have any effect on the state of play in German historiography. The damage has been done and it has been done efficiently. However, such insights may yet prove to be the beginnings of a fruitful dialogue between West

German and East German perspectives on a divided history and may yet lead to the adoption of constructive suggestions for integrating those East German scholars who have so far managed to survive in the reunified Germany.98

Stefan Berger


Entangled Memories: Versions of the Past in Germany and Japan, 1945–2001

In the history of memory, the national paradigm continues to reign supreme. This may come as a surprise at a time when the historical profession is beginning to discard the category of the nation and starting to produce transnational work. International comparisons and relational histories, and also the larger frameworks of European, post-colonial, or world history gradually seem to be replacing the narrow confines of the nineteenth-century paradigm of national history.

Studies of memory, however, continue to cling to the nation with a peculiar stubbornness. Remembering and forgetting are the means through which nations confront their respective pasts. At the same time, nations appear as the products of memory — forged into imagined communities through a series of memorial days, public speeches and visits to memorial sites. Within this scheme, an idealized or traumatic moment is remembered internally in metaphors of a ‘past that does not go away’. Memory thus appears as largely a temporal relation between significant moments in the national past that linger on as memories for generations to come. In the cases of postwar Germany and Japan, the past and the present are severed through historical ruptures and ‘zero hours’ which, it is held, need to be bridged in order to come to terms with a traumatic experience that haunts both societies. From this perspective, memory appears as the almost direct expression of a national mentality, indicative of a nation’s ability to mourn, to learn and to mature (by overcoming narrow nationalist perspectives).1

The language of temporality thus produces the familiar image of the interpretation of the past as a matter of national culture. The conventional picture of Japan as inherently unable to deal critically with her aggressive and expansionist history falls in this category. This ‘inability’ and ‘deficiency’ is frequently couched in cultural terms and explained as the product of national character.2 The German preoccupation with the nazi past, on the other hand, is attributed to a process of collective learning. Daniel Goldhagen’s thesis

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1 The ‘ability to mourn’, of course, refers to Alexander Mitscherlich and Margarete Mitscherlich, Die Unfähigkeit zu trauern (München 1968).
2 Even Ian Buruma’s masterful Wages of Guilt. Memories of War in Germany and Japan (London 1994) is not free from such a tendency.
that innate German antisemitism has only been successfully overcome since 1945 is just the latest version of this culturalist paradigm.³

Apart from the unifying tendencies of such accounts — that homogenize the nation synchronically as memory-community, and diachronically across generations — this perspective conveys an almost xenophobic negligence of factors associated with the outside of the national territory. The history of memory is portrayed through a ‘tunnel vision’ of the past, where the influence of and entanglements with other national memories are marginalized. Memory is thus depicted as the last realm of national autonomy. But can we interpret, to give only one example, the famous visit by Japanese Prime Minister Nakasone to the Yasukuni shrine in 1982 — to honour the war dead at a memorial site symbolically appropriated by nationalist groups — only in terms of internal Japanese developments? Could we not read this particular event as an articulation with a global context that can for illustrative purposes be associated with the names of Margaret Thatcher, Helmut Kohl and Ronald Reagan? The Nakasone visit would then appear not only as the expression of an ‘evasive’ Japanese mentality, but also a part of a global situation that three years later produced the reconciliation ceremony at Bitburg with Kohl and Reagan standing hand in hand at a military cemetery.

Interpretations of the past, this would imply, do not originate and develop within one country but rather must be understood as the product of the connection and exchange between different discourses and practices. ‘Mastering the Past’ (Vergangenheitsbewältigung) was by no means only a German affair, ‘war responsibility’ (sensō sekinin) was never exclusively a Japanese concern. The seemingly national discourse on what were considered problematic legacies of war and violence was always inscribed into larger transnational contexts. Against the grain of much recent debate that treats memory as the last vestige of a national ‘culture’,⁴ it seems promising to wrestle the complex processes of remembering and forgetting from the phantasma of autonomy and to read them as ‘entangled memories’.

The term ‘entangled memories’ does not refer so much to the fact that the past which is remembered — the object of memory — must itself be placed in a transnational context and be seen as a product of processes of exchange and influence. Instead, it focuses on the moment of memory production which is seen not only as an attempt to connect to the individual or collective past, but also as the effect of a multitude of complex impulses in the present. The history of memory production, moreover, is a process of entanglement rather than a ‘shared history’ suggesting the hope for consensual interpretations of the past. There have been endeavours to arrive at an uncontested and shared version of the past, most notably in the German-Polish (and, more recently,

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Japanese-Korean) project of writing a common history textbook. Against this nostalgia for a ‘pure’ and ‘objective’ (and therefore uncontroversial) account of past reality, the term ‘entanglement’ stresses the asymmetrical relations and interactions that produce different and conflicting accounts of the past.

A focus on the entangled histories of memory in West Germany and Japan can help to contextualize and situate the postwar experience in both countries and thus to render more complex a story frequently caught in the stereotypes of divergent national characteristics. In particular, the outburst of controversies over issues of memory in Japan since the 1990s demands clarification. Has Japan finally caught up with the West German model of coming to terms with its past, as many commentators would have it? Must the increase of critical voices be read as attesting to a learning process and a willingness to take responsibility for the atrocities and crimes in the nation’s past? Can the current debates be understood as yet another example of Japan as the ‘latecomer’, this time to the critical turn West German memory had witnessed since the 1960s? A comparative perspective that reads the history of memory in both countries as ‘entangled memories’ may help to eschew the forms of cultural essentialization so frequently employed and instead situate Japanese memory in a larger context. Rather than interpreting the virtual ‘explosion’ of discussions about the past as an expression of political maturation, I will argue, they must be understood as what could be called the ‘Return of Asia’.

In the early years after 1945, memories of the war in both Germany and Japan were already situated in a context that transcended the nation state. The point of reference in both countries was first and foremost the USA, not least because remembering happened in the context of the American occupation. Both Japanese debates on the ‘dark valley’ (kurai tanima) of fascism and the attempts to come to terms with the ‘evil past’ of the Third Reich in Germany cannot be understood without taking American interventions into account.

The American presence, permeating interpretations of the past, made itself felt in different forms. Not all influence was direct, and not every taboo was made explicit. Perhaps it is no exaggeration, however, to say that what was remembered and forgotten in postwar Germany and Japan was already pre-structured. As Etsô Jun has remarked, Japanese understanding of past events

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6 While in Japan the occupation was essentially an American affair, West Germany was occupied by French, English and American troops. In the educational and academic spheres, however, American policies soon emerged as the most important factor. See Johannes Weyer, Westdeutsche Soziologie 1945–1960. Deutsche Kontinuitäten und nordamerikanischer Einfluß (Berlin 1984), 308–10.
happened within a closed discursive space. The unprecedented and highly publicized war crimes trials held in Nuremberg and Tokyo were among the more direct interventions with the side-effect of producing an authoritative master narrative of the war. In both cases, the political and military leaders were severed from the larger population and held responsible for expansion and atrocities — to different degrees, however. In Germany, the population had to undergo individual denazification, and a number of subsequent trials extended the circle of perpetrators. In Japan, however, no follow-up trials complemented the Tokyo trial, and even the emperor was exempted from indictment.

The war crimes trials had long-lasting effects, particularly in Japan, where even today the ‘war crimes trial view of history’ (Tokyo saiban shikan) is a frequent object of denunciation from the nationalist fringe. Some of the more direct interventions, however, had more ephemeral effects. They included purges in universities when representatives of an older interpretation of history that had by now become obsolete were expelled from academe. The enunciative space for interpretations of the past was further delimited by the institution of censorship. In both countries, the central objects of national commemoration were subject to restrictive measures by the occupation authorities. In Japan, coverage of the atomic bomb explosions in Hiroshima and Nagasaki was largely prohibited, and photographic documentary was banned. Only after the end of the occupation in 1952 were pictures of the catastrophic event published in major newspapers. In Germany, it was the resistance movement of the Twentieth of July that attracted the attention of the censors. From the perspective of the occupation forces, the largely aristocratic composition of

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7 Etô Jun, Tozasareta gengo kûkan. Senryôgen no ken’etsu to sengo Nihon (Tokyo 1994); idem, Wasureta koto to wasuresasereta koto (Tokyo 1979). For the continuity to wartime censorship see Satô Takumi, ‘The System of Total War and the Discursive Space of the War on Thought’ in Yasushi Yamanouchi, J. Victor Koschmann and Ryûichi Narita (eds), Total War and ‘Modernization’ (Ithaca, NY 1998), 289–314.

8 On the effects of the American occupation in Germany see Walter L. Dorn, ‘Die Debatte über die amerikanische Besatzungspolitik für Deutschland (1944–45)’, Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte, 6 (1958), 60–77. For Japan, see Richard H. Minear, Victors’ Justice. The Tokyo War Crimes Trial (Tokyo 1972); Awaya Kentarô, Tokyo saibanron (Tokyo 1989); Hosoya Chihiro et al. (eds), The Tokyo War Crimes Trial. An International Symposium (Tokyo 1986).

9 Prominent examples of this tendency are the interpretations put forward by the ‘Association for a liberalist view on history’ (jyûshugi shikan kenkyûka) led by Fujiioka Nobukatsu. See Rikki Kersten, ‘Neo-nationalism and the “Liberal School of History”’, Japan Forum, 11 (1999), 191–203; Aaron Gerow, ‘Consuming Asia, Consuming Japan: The New Neonationalistic Revisionism in Japan’ in Laura Hein and Mark Selden (eds), Censoring History. Citizenship and Memory in Japan, Germany, and the United States (London 2000), 74–95.

10 For Germany, see Winfried Schulze, Deutsche Geschichtswissenschaft nach 1945 (München 1993), 121–30; for Japan, see Yamamoto Reiko, Senryôka ni okeru kyôshoku tsuibs. GHQ, SCAP mono ni yoru kenkyû (Tokyo 1994).

the resistance group seemed to make it unsuitable as a starting-point for the democratisation of German society. The first studies on the planned assassination of Hitler in the bomb plot of 1944, therefore, had to be published in Switzerland or the USA.\(^\text{12}\)

While the bulk of American measures was prohibitive in character, there were instances of prescription as well. In Japan, an American version of the Pacific War was serialized in all national newspapers in autumn 1945. It used ‘unimpeachable sources’ to present the ‘truth’ about the recent past ‘until the story of Japanese war guilt has been fully bared in all its details’.\(^\text{13}\) In addition, a radio documentary with the title ‘This is the truth!’ (shinsô wa kô da) was broadcast between December 1945 and February 1946, to inculcate the American version of the Japanese past into the minds of the Japanese people.\(^\text{14}\) In Germany, documentary films showing the liberation of concentration camps were shown to a population that in addition was confronted with its genocidal past through a series of large-scale posters displayed in various German cities.\(^\text{15}\)

The intervention of the occupation forces contributed to and reinforced a number of striking similarities in West German and Japanese interpretations of the recent past. At the same time, however, the transnational context can help to explain one of the most striking differences — namely the persistence of a largely conservative orientation among German historians (who remained pledged to the methodological tenets of a ‘politically and morally tamed historicism’\(^\text{16}\)) that contrasted sharply with the strong influence which Marxism had on postwar Japanese scholarship. Marxist historiography, it is true, was by no means a postwar invention. Particularly in the field of economic history, it can be traced back to the late 1920s. The intensive ‘debate on Japanese capitalism’ (Nihon shihonsugi ronsô) that raged in the early 1930s was the most notable example of the new perspective. In the course of the following years, however, these discussions were subdued and their protagonists gradually removed from Japanese academe. After defeat in 1945, Marxist scholars


\(^{13}\) GHQ (General Headquarters United States Army Forces, Pacific), Historical Articles on the War in the Pacific, GHQ/SCAP-Records in the National Diet Library Tokyo, Sheet No. CIE (D) 05235, 05236, Box No. 5869, Classification No. 840, 800, 000 and No. 000, 840, 1.


\(^{16}\) Ernst Schulin, *Traditionskritik und Rekonstruktionsversuch. Studien zur Entwicklung von Geschichtswissenschaft und historischem Denken* (Göttingen 1979), 140.
were called back to the universities, and historical materialism soon emerged as the most influential school of interpretation that for almost a decade effectively silenced the more traditional (and conservative) historians.\footnote{Germaine A. Hoston, Marxism and the Crisis of Development in Prewar Japan (Princeton, NJ 1986).}

This emergence of a Marxist intellectual hegemony was thus the continuation of a longer trend, at the same time colluding with occupation politics. For as unlikely as it may seem, US pressure to reinstate oppositional academics in their former positions primarily referred to Marxist scholars, due to their anti-war stance regularly termed ‘friend of America’ in the occupation documents. But apart from purges, reinstatements and the politics of personnel, in the early postwar years there was an astonishing degree of consensus between the occupation forces and Japanese Marxists. In particular, the sweeping reform programme that the American headquarters had designed for postwar Japan — a new constitution, the limitation of the power of the \textit{zaibatsu}, and, most important, a thorough land reform — met with approval from Marxist academics. The American reforms were based on the conviction that feudal remnants characterized Japanese society and polity, and they seemed to represent the kind of modernization — a ‘bourgeois revolution’ — that in Marxist eyes had long been overdue.\footnote{Sebastian Conrad, \textit{Auf der Suche nach der verlorenen Nation. Geschichtsschreibung in Westdeutschland und Japan 1945–1960} (Göttingen 1999), 88–114.}

In West Germany, the notion of structural deficits that made fascism seem like a logical result rather than a temporary aberration — a notion the Japanese Marxists so readily embraced — was received far less favourably among historians. In fact, most reacted polemically against views propagated by the adviser to the British Foreign Office, Lord Vansittart, who conceived of continuities ‘from Bismarck to Hitler’.\footnote{Joachim Radkau, ‘Die Exil-Ideologie vom “anderen Deutschland” und die Vansittartisten. Eine Untersuchung über die Einstellung der deutschen Emigranten nach 1933 zu Deutschland’, \textit{Aus Politik und Zeitgeschichte}, B 2 (1970), 31–48; Jean Solchany, \textit{Comprendre le nazisme dans L’Allemagne des années zéro (1945–1949)} (Paris 1997), 5–24.} The negligible role that early variations of a ‘\textit{Sonderweg} thesis’ played in West Germany — in its Japanese incarnation common currency in the early postwar decades — had a great deal to do with the fact that the personal composition of the historical profession remained largely unchanged. In addition, however, the aversion to interpretations of historical continuity must be situated within the context of what can provisionally be described as a division of labour between East and West German historians. To the degree that the interpretation of the ‘German catastrophe’ as a necessary outcome of German history gained hegemonic status in East Germany, it lost credibility among West German historians.\footnote{For East German historiography, see Martin Sabrow, \textit{Das Diktat des Konsenses. Geschichtswissenschaft in der DDR 1949–1969} (München 2001).}

West German historiography was thus inscribed into a matrix, with the USA and East Germany as the two principal points of reference. This double per-
spective was particularly evident in the historiography of the nazi period now undertaken under the label of ‘contemporary history’ (*Zeitgeschichte*). The interpretations of the recent past, it was held, had to be wrestled from distortions by American historians who did not have direct experience of dictatorship and consequently lacked the ability to ‘understand’ life in a totalitarian state. Only those who had lived through the Third Reich and ‘themselves stood the test of the times’ seemed eligible to interpret German history. From its inception, one of the purposes of the newly-founded Institute for Contemporary History in Munich was to keep interpretations of the recent past firmly in German hands. The director of the institute, Hermann Mau, proclaimed in 1950: ‘Research into the history of National Socialism is a German task.’ At the same time, West German *Zeitgeschichte* was set against the emerging East German orthodoxy and stressed the possibility of unfettered scholarship, free from propagandistic purposes. The focus on the German opposition to Hitler, for example, was thus not only meant to complement Anglo-American views but at the same time to correct the distortions and ‘pseudo-truths from the East’.

While in West Germany interpretations of the recent past were frequently indexed with this double reference, in Japan the principal orientation remained towards the USA. The voices of the neighbouring Asian countries hardly contributed to the views taken on the wartime past. To some extent, these two aspects were interrelated. The hegemonic role of the USA, undiminished after the end of the occupation as a result of the Cold War, also reinforced an ignorance of Chinese or Korean perspectives. A particularly telling example concerned the naming of the war which until 1945 had been glorified as the ‘Greater East Asian War’ (*daitōa sensō*), a term prohibited during the occupation. Instead, ‘Pacific war’ was introduced as the official name of the second world war in Japan. This term, however, highlights certain aspects of the conflict, namely the Japanese war against the USA beginning with the attack on Pearl Harbor in 1941. The long period of fighting on the Asian mainland with its estimated toll of over 20 million Chinese lives is marginalized. These terminological interventions during occupation days were not simply forced upon the Japanese, however, but were appropriated and internalized. When historian Ienaga Saburō wrote a new history of the war in 1968, he produced a Marxist narrative that focused on the events in China. He nevertheless chose to call his book ‘The Pacific War’ because otherwise (as he

22 Quoted from Institut für Zeitgeschichte (ed.), *25 Jahre Institut für Zeitgeschichte. Statt einer Festschrift* (München 1975), 27.
admitted in the preface) he would have anticipated the readership’s ignorance of what the book was about.\(^{25}\) Some of the discursive effects of American interventions lived on after the occupation forces had left.

At the same time, the example shows that the privileged position of the USA colluded in the marginalization of Japan’s military involvement in China and Korea during the war. In the 1960s and 1970s, this was not an exceptional phenomenon but rather part of a general pattern. It illustrates what Karatani Kōjin has called the ‘De-Asianization’ of Japanese postwar discourse.\(^ {26}\) In a sense, this can be interpreted as a continuation of earlier attempts to ‘escape from Asia’ (\textit{datsu-a}) and write Japan into the history of the modern West. In the field of memory, this led to partial amnesia about Japan’s expansionist past. Japanese victimization of other Asian nations and the history of Japanese violence on the Asian mainland remained largely undiscussed. The war appeared, in the first place, as a conflict between Japan and the USA. The atrocities committed on the Asian mainland — the Nanjing massacre, the biochemical experiments of Unit 731, the forced prostitution throughout Asia — were excluded from debate. In Japanese discourse, ‘Asia’ disappeared in a historiographical vacuum.\(^ {27}\)

This is not to say that there were no attempts by other Asian nations to intervene in Japanese memory politics. One example is the extended negotiations between Japan and South Korea between 1951 and 1965 leading to a treaty of reparation and compensation. In the process of the negotiations, however, Korea had to give up the idea of an official apology on the part of the Japanese government. Demands for material compensation and for payment of wages for conscript labour during the war met with stubborn resistance from the Japanese delegation. Finally, reparations were not paid to make up for colonial oppression, but rather, as the official rhetoric went, as part of ‘economic assistance’. In the context of asymmetrical power relations and the dichotomous logic of Cold War thinking, the South Korean perspective on the common past had no repercussions in the Japanese debates.\(^ {28}\)

In the virtual absence of Asia, the principal referent of Japanese politics and world view was the USA. In the realm of historiography, this constellation translated into the massive import of US modernization theory, beginning with the famous Hakone conference in 1960. Funded by the Ford- and Asia-Foundation, the conference formed part of a decidedly anti-communist politics

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25 Ienaga Saburô, \textit{Taiheiyô sensô} (Tokyo 1968), 4. On the different terminological approaches to coming to terms with the war, see David Reynolds’ article ‘The Origins of the Two “World Wars”: Historical Discourse and International Politics’ in this issue.

26 Karatani Kōjin, ‘The Discursive Space of Modern Japan’ in Masao Miyoshi and Harry D. Harootunian (eds), \textit{Japan in the World} (Durham, NC 1993), 288–315. The philosopher Takeuchi Yoshimi in his \textit{Kindai no chôkoku} (Tokyo 1983) has made a similar point.


in East Asia by presenting the concept of modernization without revolution as historical norm.\footnote{Judith Coburn, ‘Asian Scholars and Government — The Chrysanthemum on the Sword’ in Edward Friedman and Mark Selden (eds), America’s Asia — Dissenting Essays on Asian-American Relations (New York 1969), 67–107.} While in the early years of the occupation period we encountered surprising affinities between American and Japanese Marxist versions of the Japanese past, the perspective of modernization theory was explicitly anti-Marxist. In the framework of modernization theory, Japanese fascism appeared as but a temporary aberration from an otherwise successful path towards modernity.\footnote{See Kinbara Samon, ‘Nihon kindaika’ron no rekishizô. Sono hihanteki kentô e no shiten (Tokyo 1968).} Its principal proponent, the Harvard historian, Edwin O. Reischauer, stressed the political nature of this remodelling of the Japanese past: ‘This classical Marxism is our true foe in Japan. I have never shirked from an opportunity to inflict a blow against it. Of course, one does not use such words. The words I do use are: “Taking on a new view of history”.’\footnote{Quoted from Harry D. Harootunian, ‘America’s Japan/Japan’s Japan’ in Miyoshi and Harootunian (eds), Japan in the World, op. cit., 196–221, here 207.} When in 1960 Reischauer was appointed US ambassador to Japan, this marriage of scholar and politician only underlined the fact that interpretations of the past are not formed in an academic vacuum. The Cold War setting, as Harry Harootunian has argued, ‘prompted Japanese to incorporate American expectations to fulfill a narrative about themselves, produced by others, elsewhere’. The memory of the recent past was inscribed in a decidedly transnational context; Harootunian concludes that ‘America’s Japan became Japan’s Japan’.\footnote{Ibid., 200, 215.}

While Japan remained ‘de-Asianized’, in West Germany the 1960s through the 1980s can be characterized by what historian Heinrich August Winkler has recently called Germany’s ‘Long path towards the West’.\footnote{Heinrich August Winkler, Der lange Weg nach Westen, 2 vols (München 2000).} In historiographical terms this implied the dominance of the Sonderweg interpretation of modern German history which must be understood as an attempt to write Germany into the history of Europe. This is not to say that American influence disappeared; particularly through the appropriation of the work of Max Weber by Parsonian systems theory and its subsequent re-import into Germany, American approaches remained an important factor. At the same time, ‘Europe’ emerged as a complementary point of reference and, in its particular and mostly metaphorical incarnation, as a Weberian ideal type. The alleged Sonderweg was pitted against a supposed north-west European normality, and modern German history was interpreted by measuring distance, difference and deviance. The preoccupation with comparative history among social historians since the 1980s is one of the consequences of this approach. Not only in terms of historical trajectory, but also in theoretical and methodological perspective, the ascendancy of social history (Sozialgeschichte) was
part of an attempt to integrate German historiography into the European landscape.\textsuperscript{34}

The *Sonderweg* emerged as the new metahistory of the German past, not unlike its Japanese equivalent in the immediate postwar decades. In both countries, this interpretation for a long time remained the most influential meta-narrative.\textsuperscript{35} The main difference was that it allowed West Germany to become European, while Japan hardly perceived herself as Asian. In the German case this development was spawned by the political process of European unification, and also by various treaties of compensation making up for German atrocities during the war.\textsuperscript{36} The dynamics of this larger political situation had repercussions in the interpretations of history that needed to take their potential European reception into account. In Japan, on the other hand, in the absence of a movement towards political allegiance, Asia largely remained in a political and historiographical vacuum. The marginalization of ‘Asia’ in postwar Japanese memory was not so much the product of conscious decisions but rather itself the effect of the larger international context. The silencing of ‘Asia’ corresponded with the great divide of the Cold War, the incorporation of Japan into a western/capitalist world order dominated by the USA. Under the umbrella of the security treaty with the USA, there was no space in Japanese discourse for the concerns of other Asian nations. Japan regarded itself as ‘western’,\textsuperscript{37} and was likewise treated as the ‘Prussia of the East’. In Noam Chomsky’s words: ‘Of course Europe now includes Japan, which we may regard as honorary European.’\textsuperscript{38}

Beginning in the 1980s, but particularly in the course of the 1990s, the landscape of Japanese memory changed dramatically. This shift can be described as a combination of two phenomena: a massive increase in discussions about the wartime past, and the emergence of new actors in these debates. Most importantly, the voices of other Asian nations made themselves heard in the heated discussions about Japan’s wartime legacy. Their interventions were no longer marginalized but met with an often critical, and at times sympathetic, response.

\bibitem{34} Thomas Welskopp, ‘Westbindung auf dem “Sonderweg”’. Die deutsche Sozialgeschichte vom Appendix der Wirtschaftsgeschichte zur Historischen Sozialwissenschaft’ in Wolfgang Küttler, Jorn Rusen and Ernst Schuhn (eds), *Geschichtsdiskurs*, vol. 5 (Frankfurt 1999), 191–237.

\bibitem{35} In West Germany, this meta-narrative became hegemonic to the degree that what was perceived as a Japanese *Sonderweg* was interpreted as an outright copy of the German model. See Bernd Martin, ‘Verhängnissvolle Wahlverwandtschaft. Deutsche Einflüsse auf die Entstehung des modernen Japan’ in Jost Düffler et al. (eds), *Deutschland in Europa. Kontinuität und Bruch* (Frankfurt 1990), 97–116.

\bibitem{36} The attempt to adapt interpretations of the past to a European context began much earlier. For an illustrative example, see Institut für Zeitgeschichte (ed.), *Das Dritte Reich und Europa* (München 1957).

\bibitem{37} See, for example, Umesao Tadao, ‘Bunmei no seitai shikan josetsu’, *Chûô kôron* (1947), 32–49.

Not unlike many other countries, Japan in the 1990s witnessed an intensified debate over issues of memory and remembrance. The reasons for this notable increase in public interest and awareness are manifold. Some are worldwide in character and have contributed to a global vogue of memory debates, while others are more specific to the Japanese archipelago. To begin with, the current omnipresence of discussions about the past clearly has a generational dimension. Those who experienced the war themselves and can still remember it will not be alive much longer. This biological factor has contributed to the heated nature of some recent conflicts over issues like compensation for forced labour and the ‘comfort women’ in the service of the Japanese military. In addition, documentation and testimony of personal experience have developed into an urgent need at a time when there are only a few witnesses around. The extraordinary boom of personal histories (jibunshi), of innumerable ‘ordinary Japanese’, has to be placed in this context as well.39

Most importantly, the end of the Cold War has helped to open up a new space for debate and dissenting voices. The fall of the Berlin wall and the breakdown of the Soviet Union not only had effects in these countries themselves, but were indicative of the end of the postwar world order in a broader sense. With the disappearance of the East–West dichotomy, the clearcut framework within which all events were endowed with political meaning has also disappeared. In many respects, the symbolic conflicts over the meaning of the past have moved into its place and been substituted for the ideological antagonisms.40 As a result, we can speak of a virtual ‘explosion’ of memory in Japan in the 1990s. After the ‘end of history’ (at least the end of a history dominated by universalist projects), the permanent discourse on the past corresponds with a post-ideological economy of signs.41

The end of the primacy of the US–Soviet antagonism affected the political landscape in Japan considerably. One of the consequences was the end of the political monopoly of the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) in 1993. The dissolution of the ‘1955 system’, based on the dominance of the conservative LDP and a foreign and security politics exclusively oriented towards the USA, corresponded with a renewed and contested debate about the national past that had been muted in the decades before. The end of the power monopoly of the LDP coincided with the crash of the ‘bubble’ economy in the early 1990s, and the ensuing economic recession also provided the motivation to look inwards and to subject Japan’s past history to critical scrutiny. One last factor

must not be overlooked: the death of Emperor Hirohito, head of state since 1926, who through his sheer presence made an open discussion over war responsibility (sensô sekinin) and the failures of coming to terms with this past after 1945 (sengo sekinin) virtually impossible.42

The most notable effect of the end of the Cold War was the change it spawned in Japan’s relationship with her Asian neighbours. After a long period of relative ignorance, Japan was again ‘homing in on Asia’.43 This development had already begun in the 1980s and was influenced in particular through the economic upswing in South Korea, for example. Political and economic contacts as well as the exchange of popular culture have increased since, and in this context the interpretation of the national past has undergone palpable changes as well.44 In particular, the voices of Asian victims of Japan’s wartime expansion were given an importance that they had not had in the decades before. These complex and reinforcing shifts have opened up the possibility of new forms of contestation of the hegemonic versions of national memory.

The re-emergence of ‘Asia’ does not imply that other transnational connections were no longer relevant. On the contrary: as the controversy over the Enola Gay exhibition in Washington in 1995 demonstrated, the concern with American interpretations of the Japanese past had not diminished.45 Another interesting case, particularly in our context, is the German example that from the 1980s was instrumentalized by oppositional groups in Japan pressing for a more critical perspective on the nation’s wartime history. Japan, it was held, had not sufficiently ‘mastered the past’ and should look to West Germany for a model. The famous 1985 speech by German President Richard von Weizsäcker 40 years after the end of the war, for example, was translated into Japanese and went into 29 editions within a dozen years. Even the term for ‘mastering the past’ (kako no kokufuku) was invented in 1992 to translate the German Vergangenheitsbewältigung. The comparison with West Germany was implicated in the political conflicts of the time and served oppositional interest groups as a model; at the same time, it was open to instrumentalization by their political opponents.46

These examples of transnational entanglements notwithstanding, the most

42 Buruma, Wages of Guilt, op. cit., 249–51.
44 Gerow, ‘Consuming Asia, Consuming Japan’, op. cit.
45 See the articles in positions, 5, 3 (1997).
important development in the 1990s was what could be named the return of ‘Asia’.

47 On the occasion of the fiftieth anniversary of the end of the war in 1995, in particular, the demand for an official apology from the Japanese government was made by many Asian governments and civil society groups. The debates in Japan cannot be understood outside this broader context.48 The representation of the war in school books has also remained contested terrain, as the Chinese protests against the admission of a revisionist textbook in the spring of 2001 amply demonstrate. The conflicting interpretations of the Nanjing massacre are another subject of public concern and academic dialogue. In the course of scholarly exchange, ‘Chinese’ and ‘Japanese’ positions are negotiated but at the same time hint at the possibility of transcending nationality as a crucial factor determining the interpretation of the past.49 The arena in which the Asian dimension of Japanese memory is played out most prominently, finally, is the issue of compensation for former ‘comfort women’ (jugun ianfu), more precisely forced prostitutes in the service of the Japanese army.50

What is striking in all these debates is not just the extent to which formerly marginalized voices have made themselves heard and turned a Japanese preoccupation with the national past into a transnational endeavour. At the same time, these voices have diversified. In the early postwar decades, state governments spoke on behalf of the professed interests of their nations; they intervened to protest in schoolbook matters or to correct what they perceived as faulty interpretations of Japan’s role on the continent in the 1930s and 1940s. Moreover, issues of reparations and compensation were negotiated exclusively between governments, while individual claims were not admitted. This form of representation in some cases led to surprising coalitions, as the example of forced prostitution demonstrates, where Japanese and Korean governments colluded in suppressing the claims of former ‘comfort women’. In the 1990s, however, the voices increased and undermined the governmental monopoly on national memory. Individuals and civil society groups from other Asian nations began to play a leading role in the shifting terrain of Japanese memory production. Through these various and discordant interventions, they contributed to the emergence of what Lisa Yoneyama has recently called ‘post-Conrad: Versions of the Past in Germany and Japan, 1945–2001’.

47 To be sure, a concern for things Asian has never been entirely absent from Japanese debates. See, for example, Ubukata Naokichi, Tôyama Shigeki and Tanaka Masatoshi (eds), Rekishizô saikôsei no kadai. Rekishigaku no hôhô to Ajia (Tôkyô 1966); see also Wolfgang Seifert, Nationalismus im Nachkriegs-Japan. Ein Beitrag zur Ideologie der völkischen Nationalisten (Hamburg 1977). Before the 1980s, however, these perspectives remained marginal.


49 See Daqing Yang, ‘Convergence or Divergence? Recent Historical Writings on the Rape of Nanking’, American Historical Review, 104 (1999), 842–65; Daqing Yang, ‘Contested History. Re-presenting the Nanjing Massacre in Postwar Japan and China’ in Takashi Fujitani et al. (eds), Perilous Memories. The Asia Pacific Wars (Durham, NC 2001), 50–86.

50 See the articles in positions, 5, 1 (1997).
nationalist public spheres in the production of historical knowledge’. The multiplication of actors and the discursive coalitions across national boundaries attest to both the centrality of memory politics in contemporary Japan and to the crucial role of ‘Asia’ in the context of Japanese identity formation.

The history of memory is part of an entangled and transnational history. Debates about the past bear the traces of a globalizing world which are deeply engraved in what is often still perceived as the realm of the uniquely national, of a peculiar mentality and mindset. The various exchanges and interventions across national boundaries introduce multiple temporalities into an arena where these conflicting narratives of the past are negotiated. At times, interventions from without have delimited the discursive space within which the past can be remembered (e.g. the occupation); in many instances, however, they have helped to decentre dominant narratives of a nationalized history and have thus contributed to a pluralization of the past, to what Kan San Jun has termed the ‘civil war of memory’ in contemporary Japan. The complex dialectic of remembering and forgetting — as indeed history itself — is not confined to the territory of a nation state.

A perspective that foregrounds the transnational embeddedness of memory production may contribute to a more complex interpretation of the different trajectories of West German and Japanese interpretations of their ‘evil’ pasts which have frequently been clouded in the myth of national character. This perspective suggests that an allegedly more self-critical way of coping with its wartime experience in West Germany has to be situated within a process of European integration and multiple forms of discursive exchange. At the same time, it helps to explain the ‘explosion’ of Japanese debates about the war in the 1990s beyond a convenient narrative of repression, amnesia, and eventually, critical mastery. A transnational perspective, moreover, suggests that the changed terrain of Japanese memory production may be associated with what I choose to call the return of ‘Asia’ into Japanese discourse.

This is not to deny the importance of internal conflicts and heterogeneity within a given society, which, in turn, can always be contextualized within a larger transnational arena. But as long as Ruth Benedict’s dichotomy of ‘cultures of guilt’ and ‘cultures of shame’ continues to serve as a shorthand explanation for an alleged German learning process in contrast to Japanese denial, the focus on ‘entangled memories’ may serve as a necessary complement. Given the central role of memory in definitions of a national Self at the turn of the twenty-first century, this perspective suggests that national identity

51 Lisa Yoneyama, ‘Transformative Knowledge and Postnationalist Public Sphere. The Smithsonian Enola Gay Controversy’ in Fujitani et al. (eds), Perilous Memories, op. cit., 323–46.
53 Sekai (1997), 188.
itself is the product — and not the precondition — of processes of trans-national interaction, exchange and entanglement.

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Japan experienced a political and social transformation when it was defeated in August 1945. The postwar development of Japan was greatly influenced by the change in the postwar international system, namely the onset of the Cold War in East Asia, as Japan developed into an economically strong yet politically conservative state. In a sense, the onset of political conservatism came too early for the Japanese to have had a proper process of dealing squarely with pre-1945 militarism and the resultant war that had ravaged Japan. In this article, an attempt will be made to understand how that past came to be represented in popular culture. In the process, it should shed light on how postwar Japanese society attempted to cope with the war. Not surprisingly, popular representations of the past were highly sensitive to politics. We will need to bear in mind why certain portrayals of the past are more important than others. Not only are we interested in how the past is portrayed by the present, but how that portrayal helps us to live in the present and form the basis for a new cultural consensus in society.

For the Japanese, it was important to construct a clear demarcation between the pre-1945 and post-1945 Japan because it needed to separate the ‘polluted’ past from the new present, as a springboard to construct a new narrative of postwar Japan. As we shall discover, the postwar Japanese liked to portray themselves as victims of pre-1945 militarism. This victim mentality is pervasive in the three categories of popular representations — literature, films and television — examined here. After the ‘chaos’ of the initial decade, there gradually emerged an implicit political, social and cultural consensus in postwar Japan that supported this perspective. Moreover, the intensely myopic preoccupation of the Japanese with the ‘self’ came at the cost of ignoring the ‘other’, namely the victims of Japanese aggression, especially in Asia. This was symptomatic of the incapability of the Japanese to come to terms with their own past.

This article will discuss the popular representations of the past in postwar Japan, with the focus on the war, in the categories of literature, films and television. These three categories are analysed together and discussed in seven...
different thematic sections — namely, war responsibility, purification, the sanitized memory, women and pacifism, the atomic bomb, mass consumerism and neo-nationalism (I–VII respectively). This article does not claim to be a comprehensive study but an impressionistic one. The main purpose is to derive a general overview of how popular culture is affected by the politics of the present and of the immediate past.

I

Post-dictatorship society often needs to name former collaborators as the new enemy. Among the few die-hard left-wing cultural élites that survived the continued political oppression of 1930s Japan, the question of war responsibility became urgent as a means of making a complete break with the past. So, the climate of retribution emerged, albeit briefly, in the years immediately after defeat in American-occupied Japan. This phenomenon was most strikingly evident in the literary world, possibly because there the sense of betrayal felt by the survivors was the greatest.

Japanese literature in the 1930s experienced the darkest moment in its recent history. Political oppression of left-wing political and cultural movements, which began as early as 1910, came to bear down with enormous pressure on the proletarian literary movement, the most important literary movement by the 1930s. In 1933, the death resulting from police torture of one of the writers of the movement, Kobayashi Takeji, sent a shock wave throughout the literary world and triggered a mass ‘reorientation’ (tenkō) of writers who made public statements that they were politically converted to pursuing the nationalist cause. An estimated 95 per cent of writers eventually succumbed to police pressure, for social, political and economic reasons. In May 1942, these ‘reorientated’ writers took part in the establishment of a national policy body for literature called the Association of Patriotic Writers (Nippon Bungaku Hōkokukai).

Not surprisingly, therefore, the remaining 5 per cent of committed communist writers who refused resolutely to be pressured into ‘reorientating’ were highly critical of those who did. The Association for New Japanese Literature (Shin nihon bungaku kai) in particular called angrily to resolve the issue of war responsibility by naming well-known authors who had collaborated with the Association of Patriotic Writers. Ironically, however, since most of the writers who had ‘reorientated’ in the pre-war and wartime era had done so not out of political conviction but out of social and economic expediency, they were all too happy to perform the second ‘reorientation’ in the postwar period by renouncing their pre-1945 conversion. Moreover, the new grouping of the

1 Donald Keene, Dawn to the West: Japanese Literature of the Modern Era Fiction (New York 1984), 623.
2 Sato Shizuo, Sengo bungaku no hôhō (Tokyo 1966), 18.
3 Usui Yoshimi, Sengo bungaku ronsō (Tokyo 1972), 115–16.
4 Keene, op. cit., 884.
communist writers into two main movements caused rivalry, leading to the accusation that one movement was using the cause as a way of promoting its own literary agenda.5

How did the film industry deal with the question of war responsibility? With the arrival of the Supreme Commander of Allied Powers (SCAP) a major restructuring of the film industry ensued. The SCAP issued guidelines on films designed to develop and promote the new democratic Japan. For instance, it encouraged films which portrayed Japanese people with creative and progressive ways of dealing with postwar reconstruction, as well as those that showed the peaceful and constructive formation of labour unions.6 Unlike in the highly divided literary world, the film industry was more united in terms of how it dealt with the governmental collaboration of the 1930s. Like the majority of Japanese people, those in the film industry felt that they, too, were the victims of pre-1945 militarism, having to make propaganda films for the state in order to survive economically and commercially.7 This meant that the industry was not at all keen to point fingers and, as a result, only a handful of companies were convicted and had to leave the industry for a three-year period. The denial or rejection of the film industry as a supporter of militarism implied that its sense of responsibility towards the victims in Asia was very weak. Moreover, it may be more accurate to say that although the reforms undertaken by SCAP were intended to democratize the industry, from the latter’s point of view they had the effect of purifying the past in order to have a new beginning.

II

In the initial postwar period from 1945 to 1958, an element of catharsis pervaded war literature. By catharsis, I mean the outpouring of autobiographical writings motivated by the desire to expose the evils of militarism. The most powerful classics in war literature emerged in this period, such as Noma Hiroshi’s Shinkei chitai (The Zone of Emptiness) in 1947, Ooka Shōhei’s Furyoki (A Prisoner’s Record) in 1948, followed by Takagi Tōsirō’s Imupalu (Imphal) in 1949. These books convey powerful messages even half a century after their publication because they were based on the very rawness of personal experiences, and motivated by anger towards the militarist regime. No doubt the American occupation of Japan had fostered an environment generally conducive to outbursts of anger and criticism of militarism. However, it can also be regarded as a popular reflection of the general sentiment of the contemporary Japanese who wanted to place the burden of war responsibility on the shoulders of the former regime.8

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5 Usui, op. cit., 151, 158–9.
6 Satō Tadao, ‘Kokka ni kanri sareta eiga’ in Imamura Shōhei et al. (eds), Köza nibon eiga 4: Sensō to eiga (Tokyo 1986), 50.
7 Ibid., 64.
8 Takahashi Saburō, ‘Senki mono’ o yomeru: Sensō taiken to senso nibon shakai (Kyoto 1988), 36.
Noma’s book was sensational because it exposed ‘what it was really like in the army’, with all its violence, repression and bullying, which had not been publicly exposed before. In fact, the official English translation of the title misses the nuance of the original Japanese title, which is meant to convey the sense of an ‘airless vacuum’ where soldiers lived claustrophobically. On the other hand, Ōoka’s A Prisoner’s Record was about his personal experience as a prisoner of war of the Americans in the Philippines. Controversially, Ōoka wrote: ‘I never felt that the position of a prisoner was as shameful as the military had taught him . . .’. Not only that, he was one of the very few writers to hold the silent majority responsible for the rise of militarism:

I felt strong hatred towards the military that had drawn my home country into such a desperate war; but I also felt that I did not have any right to complain about the regime since I myself had not done anything to prevent it from coming into being in the first place.10

On the other hand, Takagi’s Imupāru characterizes the Imphal campaign as a ‘battle between civilization and madness’.11 His work is an indictment of the disastrous mismanagement by the military leadership in undertaking the self-destructive campaign.

The period of purification ended in 1958 with the publication of Gomikawa Junpei’s Ningen no jōken (Conditions of Humans) that became a bestseller and broke the record by selling 2.4 million copies in less than three years.12 Gomikawa’s work still stands out today as unique in its depiction of the Japanese as aggressors, and in the process, victimizing not only their compatriots but also the Chinese and Koreans as second-class citizens of Japan’s very costly Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere. These works had an important social and political function which was to purify the Japanese from their polluted past, by expressing their deeply-held anger.

A similar cathartic process was occurring in the world of cinema under the American occupation. Not surprisingly, the SCAP attempted to use the film industry for propaganda purposes. In 1947, it ordered the making of a film called ‘War and Peace’ directed jointly by a well-known left-wing director, Yamamoto Satsuo, and Kamei Fumio.13 This film was unusual in that it portrayed the Chinese as victims and also placed the Japanese protagonist at the mercy of the kindness of the Chinese people. The literary success of the war writings mentioned previously meant that they were almost immediately turned into films. In particular, Yamamoto Satsuo was kept busy, directing ‘The Zone of Emptiness’ in 1952 and another hugely popular work critical of the war called ‘Senso to ningen’ (War and Man) made in three parts in...
1970–73, based on Gomikawa Junpei’s novel of the same title. On the other hand, Gomikawa’s masterpiece, ‘Conditions of Humans’, was filmed in six parts by Kobayashi Masaki and produced by Shōchiku Productions in 1959–60. Albeit to a lesser extent, the film industry was also affected by the ideological divide that had tormented the literary industry. In the early 1950s, the McCarthyite purge of ‘Reds’ in the film industry resulted in the sudden increase of independent film production companies to accommodate left-wing film-makers against the backdrop of the Korean War in the early 1950s. Most of the left-wing directors wanted to convey political messages of an anti-war and pacific nature through their works.14 Many of these films tended to unify the Japanese through the common experience of suffering caused by war. Another common element was the tendency to ignore the effect of that war on Asia.

III

Another characteristic is the development of a taboo surrounding popular representations of the war. Towards the end of the 1950s, after a decade of highly revelatory and damning writings on the military, there gradually emerged an implicit consensus that it was no longer acceptable to write ‘detestable and distasteful’ things about the war. Why was this the case? From the point of view of the families of the war dead, this taboo seems to have arisen from the feeling that those who had suffered the death of their loved ones should not have to suffer further at the hands of writers seeking to expose the unsavoury pasts of certain individuals.15 Powerful political pressure groups such as the Association of the Families of the War Dead (Nihon izoku kai) may have had some role in influencing the politicians. More importantly, the continued process of purification became an obstacle to the more urgent national agenda of postwar reconstruction.

In the ‘reborn’ Japan, many former high-ranking officers and officials of the pre-war and wartime Japanese empire went through a silent metamorphosis and emerged as beacons of the postwar Japanese economic miracle. It became politically inexpedient to condemn, let alone name them, even in literature, because postwar democratic Japan needed to rely on the motors of pre-1945 militarism. In such a climate, the militarists were no longer depicted as real people but came to assume a faceless, monolithic mask. Instead of a thorough catharsis, then, the purification process which started during the American occupation ended prematurely in postwar Japan, leaving many skeletons in the cupboard, as well as many stones unturned. However, such a movement against the liberal atmosphere of the immediate postwar years was not a surprising development after all. It was indirectly affected by the change in the policy of the SCAP towards Japan, known as the ‘reverse course debate’, as the

14 Satô Tadao, Nihon eiga shi, vol. 3 (Tokyo 1995), 144.
Cold War began to affect American foreign policy priorities in East Asia. Similarly, it was in line with the consolidation of postwar politics around the conservatism of the Liberal Democratic Party.

In this atmosphere of increasing political conservatism, the mainstream popular postwar attitude towards the war — that the Japanese were really the victims of the war — was established. Self-victimization of the Japanese, as a means of coming to terms with the past, implied that the memory of the war needed to be selective and sanitized to emphasize the suffering, as opposed to the aggression. Nowhere was this tendency more evident than in television, which became the most powerful mass medium from the 1960s onwards. In general, television programmes on the war are commemorative in nature and are shown on dates of historical importance, namely the anniversaries of the dropping of the atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki on 6 and 9 August 1945 respectively, and the day of unconditional surrender on 15 August 1945. Needless to say, the intention behind concentrating programmes on these particular commemorations is to portray the Japanese as the victims of militarism, rather than the aggressors. Moreover, even the smallest detail can be used to affect the general portrayal of Japan on those days. The best example is the term used to describe 15 August. It is commonly known as the ‘shisenbi’, translated as ‘the end of the war’, rather than ‘haisenbi’, or ‘the day of defeat’.

A quick survey of television programmes during the postwar years reveals a number of characteristics. In general, there were more programmes on war during daytime viewing hours in the 1960s and 1970s than in the later decades. Evidently, only housewives and the elderly in the affluent postwar society had enough leisure time to watch these programmes, and even the midday talk shows took up ‘war’ as a subject worthy of a whole hour. Noticeably, more commercial channels showed programmes about the war, such as Tokyo, TBS and Fuji stations, indicating that ‘war’ must have ranked high in the ratings war.

‘War’ as a theme began to lose mass appeal in the 1980s. Even on the important commemorative days, war programmes appeared much less frequently, particularly on the commercial television stations, and eventually disappeared totally from the daytime slots. This was caused by demographic change in the 1980s, as the ‘war generation’ began to dwindle in Japan. In fact, war pro-

16 For the purpose of this brief survey, I have looked at television programmes shown on 6 and 9 August (the dates of the dropping of the atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki respectively), and 15 August, the date of the unconditional surrender of Japan, in 1965, 1975, 1985, 1990, 2000, 2001 of Asahi shinbun.

grammes have become so unpopular that only the state-owned NHK has managed to retain the top billing slots, showing them in August every year. Hence, there appears to be a direct correlation between the degree of popular interest in the war, and the number of viewers with personal experience of it. Is it inevitable that the memory of the war gradually fades as the war generation disappears? If so, who will continue the task of communicating the war/past to future generations? Or is it unhealthy for society to dwell on the war when the memory of it naturally becomes faint and distant through the process of time? Even the very fact that the memory of the war is problematized today seems to be a novel development, as new technological advances allow for diverse ways of constructing and preserving memory.

In the mid-1990s, the change in the political climate was partly responsible for a renewed spate of war-related television documentaries after a dearth of them in the 1980s. The more progressive attitude towards Japan’s war responsibility taken by Prime Minister Hosokawa (August 1993 to April 1994) and later by the Socialist Prime Minister Murayama (June 1994 to January 1996), partly accounted for renewed public interest in the war. Coupled with that was a sense of urgency that Japanese society needed to come to terms with the war, as the war generation was fast dying. In 1993, a six-part NHK documentary series called ‘Documento Taiheiyo sensō’ (The Documentary: The Pacific War) was produced, whose main purpose was to teach some useful lessons from history.18 In spite of its seemingly challenging objective, the programme concluded on a disappointing note, as it regurgitated the same old dictum that the Pacific War was caused by egotism and the self-conceit of the military. Possibly, the only new ‘thesis’ was that Japan needed to take into consideration criticisms from neighbouring Asian countries that in making this programme ‘Japan has not changed.’ Nineteen ninety-four was another good year for documentary television programmes featuring the war.20

In the politically conducive climate fostered by Socialist Prime Minister Murayama, the fiftieth anniversary of the defeat in 1995 produced a large number of television programmes — documentaries, dramas and films — on the war. In August alone, there were 26 documentaries and 6 dramas.21

18 Satsuma Kōta, ‘Kakkyoku no shūsen tokuban ni miru shinryaku sensō no sekinin to shinjitsu’, Zen’ei, 638 (October 1993), 229.
19 Ibid., 230.
20 NHK did a special, ‘Japan’s longest day’ (Nihon no ichiban nagai hi) on 12 August, then another on the 15th, ‘The Showa 20: My Voice’ (Showa 20nen: watashi no koe) a collection of interviews with Japanese housed at the National Archives in Washington DC. Then another two-part series on ‘How the prisoners in Siberia were used’ (Shiberia no horyo wa kōshite okonawareta) and ‘New: The age of nuclear’ (Shin: kaku no jidai). The Asahi Television (Telebi Asahi) ran a special on 14 August ‘400,000 child evacuees’ (40 man jin no gakudō sokai), and the Nihon Television (Nihon telebi) showed a documentary on ‘Daughters of . . . the Fiftieth memorial of Hiroshima’ (Musume wa . . . Hiroshima 50 kaiki) on 31 July. Nihon Telebi also showed three further programmes related to the war on 24 July, 7 August and 14 August. Satsuma Kōta, ‘Senso wa owatteina: Shūsen yonjūkikunen me no tokushū’, Zen’ei, 652 (October 1994), 185–7.
Among the commercial stations, Asahi Television splashed out on a major series entitled, ‘Special Event for the Fiftieth Anniversary of the End of the War’, which included a number of programmes on the atomic bombs, some of them multi-national collaborative ventures. Hitherto, commemorative programmes on the war tended to emphasize the enormity of suffering inflicted on the Japanese, concluding consensually that wars should never be fought again. Finally, things began to change in the mid-1990s as more programmes questioning Japan’s role as the aggressor began to appear. In 1995, NHK took up the issue of ‘comfort women’, and also of the biological unit 731 in China. Moreover, a war drama by the NHK portrayed the Japanese as aggressors in Korea.\(^{22}\) However, the problem remains that commercial stations are hesitant about showing ‘war’, and even on the rare occasions when they do, they do so after midnight.\(^{23}\) By default, therefore, the state-owned NHK has a monopoly of popular representations of the war in the most powerful and effective mass medium.

Because the majority of programmes focus on the personal experiences of ordinary Japanese people, they shift the focus of memory away from the state to the individual. In popular representations of the war, the state represented as the militarists and the people as victims remain completely separate. As a result of this naturally preferred bias, these representations remain one-dimensional, introspective and stagnant. Most of the programmes contain the underlying message of pacifism — of a kind that does not question the responsibility of the Japanese.

IV

Women’s literature continues to have a major influence on popular representations of the war in postwar Japan. As is widely known, women’s literature has a long historical tradition in Japan, and the ‘women’s literary establishment’ (joryū bundan) of contemporary Japan boasts some of Japan’s best-known and influential writers. The year 1945 liberated not only Japan from the militarists but also women writers from the social constraints of the pre-war and wartime era. As a result, many of them published their best works after 1945.\(^{24}\) Unlike many of the male authors who made an impact on war literature through writing about their personal experiences as combatants, women’s writings tended to focus on society including the effect of the war on those behind the lines, and also on the meaning of life. Most significantly, their writings were pacifist in nature, partly because many of the important female writers of the immediate postwar Japan were left-wing sympathizers.

Their writings had the effect of bringing to the fore the tragedy of the defeat caused by militarism and contributed to the sense of suffering that permeated women’s literature in modern Japan. Hayashi Fumiko (1903–51) who was a

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\(^{22}\) The programme was called, ‘Saredo waga ai’.
\(^{23}\) Nakamura Tokio, ‘Telebi media no rekishi ninshiki’, *Galac* (December 1997), 33.
\(^{24}\) Keene, op. cit., 1114.
well-known enthusiast for the war, wrote *Drifting Clouds* (*Ukigumo*) in 1949–50 which was praised for its evocation of the defeated Japan, ‘the collapsed morale of a vanquished Japan’. Other writers such as Nogami Yaeko and Miyamoto Yuriko wrote fiction more directly critical of the militarist regime. Without a doubt, the most famous novel of this genre was written in 1952 by Tsuboi Sakae, a communist, called *The Twenty-four Eyes* (*Nijūshī no hitomi*) which came to symbolize the anti-war, pacifist sentiment of the post-war era. It is a moving story about the effects of the war on twelve pupils (and hence the ‘twenty-four eyes’), written from the perspective of a female schoolteacher, set on a small island in the inland sea. Tsuboi’s writings are known as ‘maternal literature’ and ‘literature of mercy’. She questions not only the futility of life under militarism, but also the futility of giving birth to children knowing that they will be killed in war. It was made into a hugely popular film in 1954 directed by Kinoshita Keisuke.

From the 1970s, women writers contributed to mainstream representations of the war in influential non-fiction writing. Yamazaki Tomoko, for one, has long been interested in understanding the plight of the lower-class Japanese women who were sold as overseas prostitutes in the pre-war period. In her trilogy of ‘karayuki-san’ (a generic name given to Japanese prostitutes overseas), *Sandakan bachiban shōkan* (*Sandakan Brothel No. 8*) won the prestigious Oya Sōichi Prize for Non-Fiction in 1972 and was made into a film the following year. Her study of the ‘karayuki-san’ provided the historical context for understanding the importance of ‘comfort women’ during the war as ‘the vanguard’ of Japanese military expansion in Asia. In this sense, her work paved the way for understanding the relationship between gender and class discrimination, exacerbated by war. Similarly, Sawachi Hisae has written a number of books on the subject of the war. Her best-known work may be *Tsuma tachi no ni ni roku jiken* (*The 26 February Incident and the Wives*), portraying the lives of the wives of the officers executed for having master-minded the large-scale revolt against the government in 1936. It is a history of a tragic incident from the wives’ perspectives. Sawachi claimed that they were victims twice over; first, by the fact that their husbands had decided to place ‘obligation’ above ‘family’ in participating in this incident; and second, when they had to live after the death of their disgraced husbands. The accessibility of these writings has meant that their overall effect on the formation of popular images of the war among female readers has been enormous. In particular,

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25 Ibid., 1143, 1146.
26 For instance, Miyamoto’s *Banshū Heiya* (The Plains of Banshū) in 1946 and Nogami’s *Meiro* (The Labyrinth) in 1956.
28 Tsuboi, op. cit., 170.
29 Komatsu, op. cit., 234.
Yamazaki’s works are noteworthy as she managed to break out of the mainstream perspective of seeing only the Japanese themselves as victims, to seeing Asian women generally as victims of Japanese expansionism.

The most powerful symbols of Japan’s defeat were the atomic bombs. It was the sheer scale of the destructiveness of these bombs that anointed the Japanese for ever as victims of the war. Significantly, the first commemorative ‘war’ event every August is the memorial ceremony for the victims of the Hiroshima bombs on 6 August. The experience of the bombs initiated the growth of a pacifist movement in postwar Japan, and justified the mass conversion of the Japanese to pacifism. After the passing of the heyday of the ‘purification’ literature, writings around the theme of the atomic bombs, known as the ‘atomic bomb stories’ (genbaku mono), grew steadily and produced some influential works. Due to the highly politicized nature of the atomic bombs as the symbol of extremities — both peace and war — memories of Hiroshima and Nagasaki have become an internationalized memory of the war.

However, during the American occupation of Japan, any information on the effects of the A-bombs was highly sensitive and treated as a military secret. As a result, large film production firms shied away from making films about them. Only those which were considered to be ‘safe’ from the standpoint of the occupation forces were shown, such as ‘Nagasaki no uta wa wasureji’ (We shall not forget the song of Nagasaki) directed by Tasaka Tomotaka in 1952 and ‘Nagasaki no kane’ (Bells of Nagasaki) directed by Ōba Hideo in 1950. With the help of grass-root anti-nuclear lobby groups, Shindo Kaneto wrote and directed a film in 1952 called ‘Genbaku no ko’ (Children of the Atomic Bomb), a story about children in Hiroshima whose lives were changed dramatically for the worse by the atomic bombs. It was the first film to depict the horrifying slow death from radiation sickness. Diplomatic controversy surrounded the well-known case of a 19-reel documentary made by a Japanese team in the immediate aftermath of the atomic bombs called ‘Hiroshima and Nagasaki’ which was confiscated by the US military. It was returned to Japan in 1967 on condition that it would only be used for research purposes. Defiantly, the Japanese government showed it all on television, apart from the most gruesome section on the effects on humans. It was Japan’s way of sending the political message to the Americans that the Japanese as victims had the sole right and duty to disclose the real effects of the bombs. Not surprisingly, most Japanese learned of the extent of damage caused by the bombs for the first time through this documentary.

33 Ibid., 246.
In 1965, the twentieth anniversary of the defeat launched a huge number of works on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. The most famous to come out in this period was *Hiroshima Notes* by the Nobel Prize winner, Ōe Kenzaburō. Ōe’s work did not escape criticism, however, as some critics pointed out that his emphasis on the moralistic perspective had shifted the focus away from the political.35 His focus had the tendency to over-emphasize the victims of the bomb as symbolic and even sacred. Even before then, Ibuse Masuji’s *Black Rain* had caused a literary sensation with its depiction of social discrimination towards the ‘*hibakusha*’ (radiation victims) in postwar Japan. In 1989, it was turned into a film by the director, Imamura Shōhei.

Unlike mainstream war literature based on battle experience, the genre of ‘atomic bomb stories’ has had a more enduring popular appeal, especially for the younger postwar generations with no experience of war. In a survey of war-related literature studied in high schools, five works out of nine belonged to this genre, including both *Black Rain* and *Hiroshima Notes*.36 The tendency to prefer using ‘atomic bomb stories’ in education underlines the strength of pacifist and left-wing leanings amongst teachers. More importantly, it has had an enormous influence on the younger generation in terms of their seeing the experience of the war mostly from the standpoint of the Japanese as victims. The tragedy of the atomic bombs was also conveyed to children through the popular media of manga (Japanese-style comics) and animated cartoons. One of the most representative works is Nakazawa Keiji’s 1977 *manga* called ‘*Hadashi no Gen*’ (The Barefoot Gen), a story of a young boy who had to survive in the tough social and economic circumstances of post-bomb Hiroshima. It was made into an animated cartoon in 1986.

All in all, the appeal of these ‘atomic bomb stories’ is quite evident. The tragic experience of Hiroshima and Nagasaki allowed the Japanese to adopt the role of victim and, in the process, to forget their primary role as perpetrators of the war. Hiroshima became the symbol of peace, thereby providing the uncontested narrative for the rebirth of postwar Japanese as pacifists. Moreover, the influence of this genre is most deeply felt in the education of the younger generation.

VI

Popularization of the war as a theme in the culture of mass consumption was another important development in popular representations of the war. Noticeably in the field of cinema, ‘war’ began to be treated as a theme for popular entertainment towards the end of the 1950s. Most famously, ‘*Meiji tennō to nichiro senso*’ (The Emperor Meiji and the Russo-Japanese War,
1957) became the all-time blockbuster for Shin Tōhō Productions, grossing 542 million yen in the first seven months. It was directed by Watanabe Kunio, an apologist of emperor-centred nationalism, who excelled in large-scale populist entertainment films. One of the highlights of the film was a scene of the emperor shedding a few tears over the news of the deaths of his soldiers. The film was also intended to give a ‘feel-good factor’ by reminiscing about Japan’s ‘good war’, though not everyone in the audience was taken in by the simplistic portrayal it offered. According to a survey of the viewers, roughly 40 per cent said that they liked the film because it brought out great things about the old Japan. However, 24 per cent responded negatively to the film, stating that it was a simplistic glorification of the war and the emperor.

It was not until the late 1960s and early 1970s that the signs of mass consumerism of war-related themes in both the publishing and film industries became truly evident. Previously, even films with popular appeal embodied some political or moral message. For instance, one of these ‘messages’ conveyed in The Emperor Meiji and the Russo-Japanese War was that the emperor was a good, decent human being — a very potent message for the audience who had spent most of their lives believing that the emperor was divine. Moreover, nearly all fiction and films dealing with the war started from the assumption that the war was bad. Now, the war could be enjoyed purely for fun, for its adventure and thrill. Principally, ‘war’ now functioned as a setting for exciting stories. As one critic noted, the object was to turn the war into the equivalent of a spaghetti western or gangster film. Stripping away the normative elements resulted in a major shift in how the war came to be portrayed. In other words, the war was de-historicized and de-politicized. This change was also evident in the war literature as new writings began to lose the ‘threatening’ or critical voice, which made the reader reflect not only on the war but also on the human condition. Some of the books which belong to this new genre of ‘war’ as a consumable product are Agawa Hiroyuki’s Yamamoto Isoroku and Koizumi Shinzō’s Kaigun shukei daii Koizumi Nobukichi, published by major publishing houses. The appeal of these writings comes from the fact that one can simply enjoy the swashbuckling narrative without having to worry about the heavy moral questions that surround war.

37 Till then 180 million yen from ‘Himeyuri no tou’ in 1953 was the highest record. Hamada Yoshihisa, Nihon eiga to senso to heiw (Tokyo 1996), 233; Niimura Hiroo, ‘Arashi Kanjūro ron (jō): Arakan zettai ron’, Eigashi kenkyū, 7 (1975), 68.
41 ‘Meiji tennō to nichiro dai sensō’ ni okeru kankyaku hannō’, Kinema jumpō, 177 (June 1957), 114–15.
42 Ibid., 23.
43 Satō Shizuo, op. cit., 41.
44 Takahashi, op. cit., 76.
In the world of cinema, there was a revival of war films called the ‘8.15’ series, released on the day of surrender on 15 August. It was spearheaded by Okamoto Kihachi’s ‘Japan’s Longest Day’ in 1967, followed by a hugely popular ‘Yamamoto Isoroku’ in 1968, directed by Maruyama Seiji, ‘The Battle of the Sea of Japan’ (Nihon kai dai taisen) in 1969, Horikawa Hiromichi’s ‘The Military Clique’ (Gunkaku) in 1970, and Okamoto’s ‘The Decisive Battle of Okinawa’ (Okinawa Kessen) in 1971. These films were popular precisely because they were good entertainment, focusing on famous battles for maximum visual effect. Their popularity was no doubt reflective of the buoyant Japanese economy, as the Japanese were enjoying reaping the rewards of their economic miracle, and began to regain national confidence. Of course, not everyone enjoyed these films: the Chinese government perceived them as a sign of a revival of militarism in Japan. In spite of these concerns, the trend in producing multi-million dollar war films, depicting war as a major spectacle, continued well into the mid-1980s until the audiences lost interest. By not taking any moral or political position, these films had the overall effect of portraying the Japanese as good, sincere people who were forced to go to war, and suffered greatly as a result. Moreover, the highly dramatic nature of selected historical moments such as the attack on Pearl Harbor, the kamikaze pilots, the atomic bombs and the unconditional surrender meant that they tended either to ‘beautify’ or ‘glorify’ Japanese participation in the war.

VII

Popularization of the war as a consumable product provided the public with little sense of the moral criteria for judging the war. The younger generation, not surprisingly, became increasingly uninterested in the war, as the generational distance between those with war experience and those without continued to widen in the 1990s. Suddenly, however, the rise of neo-nationalism became the all-engrossing issue in public debate in the late 1990s, with the publication of Kobayashi Yoshinori’s influential manga, Shin Gōmanizumu sengen special: Sensôron (The New Special Statement ‘Gōmanizumu’: The War Debate). It quickly became a bestseller, selling 650,000 copies. Kobayashi had already written a series of political manga around controversial issues in contemporary Japan such as the ‘comfort women’, the burakumin, and the Aum, of which this was his latest attempt.

Briefly, Kobayashi promotes the nationalist school of history that justifies Japanese expansion into Asia as a war of national liberation from western

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45 Satō Tadao, op. cit., vol. 3, 32.
47 Satō Tadao, op. cit., vol. 3, 147.
48 Ibid., 32–3.
imperialism. He dared to express forcefully and openly what was hitherto considered to be a politically unfashionable, right-wing nationalist perspective on history. His work presents an uncomfortable read as he makes sweeping propagandist generalizations based on very weak and tenuous grounds. At the root, Kobayashi is very anti-western, and Japan-centric. For instance, he goes so far as to say that the whole idea of war guilt was a way of brain-washing the Japanese so that the status of the SCAP as the occupational force would be secured. He denies the Rape of Nanking as demagogic propaganda, arguing that the Chinese army was even more violent towards its own people as well as towards the Japanese. Kobayashi personalizes all these historical events by comparing them to incidents in his own life, and then expounds moralistic statements by packaging them with neat, bite-sized messages through the popular medium of manga.

However, Kobayashi, at bottom, is angry with contemporary Japanese society, which he perceives as having lost its direction and raison d'être. According to him, the Japanese people are now concerned only about pursuing their own personal rights and happiness, and do not think of the public well-being. For him, the postwar Japanese have become ‘a spineless nation’, to the extent that they cannot even admit that they believed in what they were fighting for. This, of course, is the result of the long-term indoctrination of the left-wing intellectuals and intelligentsia who dominated postwar Japan. Ironically, although Kobayashi is critical of Japanese consumerism, what he does in this work is precisely to sell his politics as a well-packaged consumer product. Critics ignored his work for a long time until it no longer became possible to do so. Intellectuals deplored his work, especially as he was on the panel of experts of the ‘Committee to produce new history textbooks’ (Atarashii rekishi kyokasho o tsukurukai). Kobayashi, the new guru, in this way continues to wield an overwhelming influence on Japanese youth, whose nebulous sense of history is revamped by the clarity and force of argument presented in his nationalistic framework. Very tellingly, the young are attracted to his work because it empowers them, by giving them self-confidence. Possibly, the damage has already been done, as many of the new university students first gain their knowledge of the war

50 Ibid., 32, 36.
52 Ibid., 49.
53 Ibid., 151–71.
54 Kobayashi, op. cit., 34.
55 Ibid., 312–13.
56 Ibid., 22–4.
57 Aaron Gerow, ‘Zuzo to shiteno “Sensoron”’, Sekai, 656 (December 1998), 123.
through Kobayashi’s *manga*. Alternatively, perhaps, any debate may be better than no debate.

The Japanese case presented here has shown that the amount of ‘redesigning the past’ that goes on in a society depends largely on the willingness of its members. Instead of taking ‘the proper course of action’, a total national self-criticism of the past, the Japanese opted for a less drastic measure, attempting to put a certain selective interpretative gloss on the past. This indicates that the Japanese generally did not necessarily consider a large-scale social catharsis as an essential part of the postwar reconstruction of themselves and their country. On one level, the majority of Japanese clearly did not identify with the objectives of the militarist regime, and, as a result, did not feel responsible for what had happened in ‘the past’. In addition, they considered themselves to be the victims of pre-war and wartime militarism, rather in the same way that the Koreans and Chinese considered themselves to be the victims of Japan. Therefore, most Japanese were only too happy to name ‘the militarists’ collectively as being responsible for wartime Japan and its consequences.

On another level, the constraints of the newly emergent Cold War meant that there was little time left for the Japanese state and the élite to ‘cleanse’ their past. In this tense international climate, both the Japanese and Americans recognized the need to rely on the motors of the pre-1945 militarist regime if they were to rebuild the country from scratch. Hence, the pre-1945 apparatus had to be reinstated swiftly in the early postwar years under the new banner of liberal democracy. Not surprisingly, both the state and the élite were none too happy to keep mum and let the public blame the faceless and now symbolically necessary ‘militarists’ for the evils of the past. Apart from the initial decade of intense self-criticism and soul-searching by left-wing intellectuals, postwar Japan settled down to the comfortable middle-of-the-road solution based on the half-baked myth that all Japanese were victims of pre-war and wartime militarists. This myth allowed some Japanese to re-invent themselves as pacifists, as the keepers of the memory of the atomic bombs.

What has become strikingly evident in this study is the close correlation between politics and culture, especially when it concerns politically sensitive themes such as war. This indicates that even when the state, through its public sector, does not take initiatives to promote a particular perspective on the past, the very nature of the politics that it practises affects the societal environment in which cultural products are produced. In other words, representations of the past directly reflect the concerns of the present. How we conceive the ‘difficult’ past can never really be politically neutral, since the very act of wanting to give shape to that past is in itself a political act. In this study, we have seen that the representations of the past in the literature, films and television of postwar Japan tended to reflect the conservative political environment created by the post-Occupation Japanese polity. An examination of the theme of war reveals that politics and culture are intimately entwined.
This was best illustrated in the mid-1990s when the change in attitude towards the war during the Hosokawa and Murayama administrations triggered immediate changes in popular representations of the war, especially on television. Moreover, this short-lived revisionism in turn produced an immediate backlash in the form of a nationalist response of Kobayashi Yoshinori's manga.

An analysis of the postwar representations of the past in this article has left us with a narrative for postwar Japan. Assuming the role of victim allowed the Japanese to shy away from the unpleasant truth that they were also aggressors, whose victims in Asia and elsewhere still demand an apology and compensation. Moreover, there is the added complication that the widely-shared victim mentality and pacifism rest uneasily on the bed of political conservatism. Therefore, the constructed identity of the postwar Japanese is inherently unbalanced, reflecting the yet unresolved nature of their past. It would not be an exaggeration to say that the single most important problem of ‘postwar’ Japan is this inability to come to terms, once and for all, with the pre-1945 past. However, it has also become evident in the last 50 years that we need to have alternative ways of dealing with the past, other than the mainstream state-centred approach. The Japanese case has shown that popular culture can bring to bear an inordinate amount of influence in creating and moulding representations of the past. Quite clearly, agencies other than the state are just as or even more effective in ‘redesigning the past’.

Naoko Shimazu

Although the 1989 protests in China did not lead to a regime-changing revolution as did the protests in Eastern Europe, the influence of a changing global order had a profound impact on the country throughout the 1980s and beyond. In particular, the politics of transition fuelled a new fascination with the past in China, marking a deep ambivalence about the effects of globalization and foreign influence on China in the era since the death of Mao Zedong in 1976. The historical myths which sustained China during the Cold War have undergone a radical shift for reasons rooted largely in the present day.1

This is not unprecedented. In the late nineteenth century, too, the ambiguity of reform provoked by the impact of western-driven globalization marked a serious problem for the Chinese imperial state. Mostly resentful of the West, partly admiring it, China remained unsure of its status in the world until the communist victory in 1949. Even today, the keenly-remembered 'national shame' of humiliation by foreigners is a rhetorical constant everywhere from top leaders' speeches to the ranting monologues of taxi drivers.2 Now once again, during another era of globalization, China is ruled by half-willing, half-resentful reformers who are unsure how much of the outside world to let in.

The era of reform in contemporary China, broadly considered to have started in 1978 with the ascendancy of paramount leader Deng Xiaoping, has seen a multitude of new interpretations of Chinese history. These stretch from the ancient (the revival of Confucianism after the condemnation of Confucius as 'feudal' for much of the twentieth century) to the very recent past (the presentation of Mao's Great Leap Forward and Cultural Revolution not as socialist triumphs but as chaotic disasters).3 However, in this article, I shall

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1 For an excellent analysis of the word ‘myth’ in this context, see Jonathan F. Vance, Death So Noble: Memory, Meaning, and the First World War (Vancouver 1997), 8.
3 For a wider variety of ways in which the 1980s Chinese state co-opted history, see Jonathan Unger (ed.), Using the Past to Serve the Present: Historiography and Politics in Contemporary China (Armonk 1993).
concentrate on one of the most powerful, but in the West, least-known recon-
figurations of history: the new understanding of the second world war in
China. Under Mao, many aspects of the war remained undiscussed and
hidden, but the dynamics of reform after 1978, and the trauma of the
Tian'anmen uprising of 1989, have forced both the Chinese government and
the public to turn back to the experiences of the 1930s and 1940s to under-
stand their place in the world at the turn of the twenty-first century. The
parallels with the past are very explicit, expressing fears of imperialism and
invasion, economic if not necessarily territorial, and also reviving the Social
Darwinist atmosphere of a century ago.

This article is divided into three sections. The first outlines the main issues at
play at the turn of the twenty-first century in the Chinese reinterpretation
of their own history, as well as suggesting, broadly, ways in which that
reinterpretation is both similar to and different from what has happened in
other transitional societies. The second part focuses on specific case studies
that show the ways that changing interpretations of the war have been used
in practice. The third part makes comparisons with the experience of a
successful transition to democracy in the Chinese-speaking world, that of
Taiwan.

One of the most important factors in understanding why 1989 was not ‘1989’
in China is the differing dynamic of the Cold War in Asia. During the high
Cold War, the fledgling People’s Republic of China (PRC) found both its posi-
tion on the international stage and its domestic policies intertwined and
shaped by global forces. The relative isolation of Beijing meant that a major
aim of the Chinese government was to seek official recognition from Japan,
which after 1949 followed the official US line and continued to recognize
Chiang Kai-shek’s Nationalist government on Taiwan as the legitimate ruler of
China. Beijing therefore regarded detaching Japan from the embrace of the
USA as a major prize, and in 1972 Japan finally did recognize the PRC.

However, the 1972 Zhou-Tanaka communiqué between both countries’
prime ministers also marked a change in the way in which the Chinese assessed
their recent past. Throughout the period up to the 1970s, the most traumatic
of the many disastrous events to affect China in the twentieth century, the
Sino-Japanese War, had been dealt with relatively cursorily in public memory
and education. The need to appease Japanese sensibilities had meant that it
was simply not tactful to recall the horrors of the war in detail. Although
the Japanese were attacked in books and memorials, it was often hard to
differentiate them from other opponents of the Communists, such as Chiang
Kai-shek’s Nationalists or the Americans. Mark Eykholt has noted that as late
as 1976, when officials in the Chinese North-east (formerly known as
Manchuria) had the opportunity to link the CCP’s 14 years of struggle against
Japanese occupation with their memorial to the recently-deceased Mao, they
filled all of two lines of the eulogy out of 170 with a mention of the Sino-
Japanese War. Another distorting factor was the dominance of Mao-centred historiography which placed the story of the Yan’an base area at the centre of the permitted narrative of the war. This cut out of the story, for instance, the Communists who fought away from Mao’s area of command, the widespread collaboration in the Japanese-controlled areas, and, perhaps most notably, the areas that remained under the control of the Nationalists. The largest area of China during the war was that controlled by the Nationalist government, yet there was little mention of Chiang Kai-shek’s contribution to the war effort in pre-1980s CCP historiography. Rather, the domestic emphasis on class warfare, and in particular during the period of collectivization in the late 1950s (the Great Leap Forward), meant that the Nationalists became the demons and bogeymen behind every reverse in policy, the wounds of the Civil War of 1946–49 now trumping those of the Sino-Japanese War which had immediately preceded it.

This account of the recent past had to reflect the reality of the early Cold War world. Therefore, the traumas of the Japanese invasion were downplayed and stylized in the historiography of the early PRC. Yet, as the Chinese mainland remains perhaps the last major theatre of the second world war the history of which is still shadowy in the West, it is worth remembering just how great the upheavals of the period were. During the war, it is estimated that at least 20 million people were killed, and around 100 million were forced to become refugees. Western ignorance, however, is at least partly due to the historiographical priorities of the CCP. For it, Japan was a defeated enemy: the Nationalist government, exiled to Taiwan, was merely a subdued one, waiting for its chance to reconquer the mainland. This meant that as well as demonizing the Nationalists, the positive contributions of Chiang Kai-shek, for instance in the reunification of China in the late 1920s, but most notably in the Sino-Japanese War, were almost entirely ignored. A conventional wisdom grew up in China and the West that Chiang Kai-shek’s troops were led by corrupt generals and were ill-trained and ineffective; the implicit (or explicit) contrast is with Communist troops who were supposed to have been at the vanguard of the anti-Japanese resistance. Recent research, however, has shown the highly significant contribution that was made by the Nationalists to winning the war. However, it is interpretations that concern us here, and up to the end of the 1970s there was little sign of a change in the accepted historiographical teleology in the PRC: the ‘inevitable’ victory of the Communists against the forces of imperialism (including Japan), but more notably, against the class enemy within, personified in Chiang Kai-shek.

Things changed rapidly in the 1980s, however. Domestically, this marked

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the period of the ascendency of Deng Xiaoping (purged during the Cultural Revolution) to paramount leadership, and the dominance of the reform policies which he advocated. The story of the reforms, and the seeming economic miracle which China has undergone in the last 20 years, does not need retelling here. What does bear repeating is the fierce ideological battle within the leadership, reflected in society as a whole, about the downside of the reforms and the embrace of globalization. Deng’s advocacy of special economic zones (SEZ) that would concentrate foreign investment was opposed throughout the 1980s by leadership conservatives such as Chen Yun, who pointed out that income inequality was growing rapidly as the SEZ areas grew richer, while the factories of the impoverished west and north-east were unable to compete and having to shut down. Rising inflation and unemployment helped fuel the 1989 student and worker protests in Chinese cities, most notably in Tian’anmen Square in Beijing, where the confrontation finally led to massive bloodshed. The next few years saw struggles between the reformers and conservatives in the leadership, and while the economic reforms were saved through Deng’s personal intervention to protect the SEZs, there was wide agreement that social stability would have to be much more actively controlled in the 1990s.

It was in this climate of seesawing reform that the reinterpretation of history became an issue in the leadership. In the Cold War, class struggle and national liberation struggles had shaped the PRC’s image as a revolutionary state, looking outward to change the system. In the era of reform, particularly after the collapse of European communism, and the discrediting of Maoist political and economic nostrums at home, the leaders turned their attention inward to battening down the hatches at home. The idea of China as a victim state, persecuted by the global community, began to emerge at the same time as a rhetoric of China as a great power, ready to take its rightful place on the world stage. It is no wonder, then, that this period saw a rapprochement with the USSR (and subsequently Russia), a state which also perceived itself as having lost out in the global order for reasons beyond its control. Opening up to foreign investment and taking part in the global economic and political order via the UN and the WTO was inevitable, reasoned Deng and Jiang Zemin, but the consequences seemed in the short term likely to fragment China, rather than bring it together: the reforms split China along lines of region, income differential, generation and sex. They had to live with these dangers, at least in the short term, so as to reap the benefits. But they would also find ways to reverse the trends, and bring China together. Their answer has been to foster a new nationalism, inclusive of all Chinese, regardless of party affiliation and, more controversially, nationality, but finding a common enemy to oppose.

However, the cupboard where the symbolic capital was kept was bare: the Long March or tales of Lei Feng the Model Worker were now resonant only to a few true believers. But in the pre-1949 past there still stood the now

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shadowy events of the great conflict of 1937–45. Commemoration of the Sino-Japanese War became a new source for the construction of a centripetal nationalism that would counter the separatist forces that threatened to tear China apart, and create a patriotic antidote to the pressures that had led to the 1989 confrontation. Furthermore, Japan had been successfully wooed, but now the USA-Japan Security Alliance was threatening to restrain China’s quest for regional great power status. On both the economic and diplomatic fronts, it was now time to use the experience of the war to put pressure on the Japanese. Anti-Japanese feeling was also fuelled by the rise in the 1970s of ultranationalist forces in Japan who now sought to downplay the enormities of the war crimes committed on Chinese soil. There are four main contemporary issues that have led the Beijing government to leverage the Sino-Japanese war politically: first, the need to provide a legitimating ideology in the face of the collapse of Marxism; second, the desire to reunify with Taiwan; third, the need to reduce US and Japanese power in East Asia; and fourth, the quest to bind the Chinese together in the face of forces which are driving society apart. Both the potency and the pitfalls of the strategy that the PRC has used in creating a new memory of the war will become clearer later.

How is history remade in China? The vectors of memory are varied, but there are certain tendencies that can be clearly traced. Academic history is generally the first area in China to show the signs of historiographical change, when prestigious research institutes are authorized to open up new channels of interpretation. Historians of China in the West are now well used to the phenomenon: first, a topic is considered off-limits, then a set of documents relating to that topic is published with minimal commentary, and finally, monographs begin to appear, still staying within official guidelines, but opening up a field for consideration.

One such topic has been the Sino-Japanese War, considered in all its aspects. The most important journal in the field, *Research on the War of Resistance to Japan* (Kang-Ri zhanzheng yanjiu), published by the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, only started up in 1991. A wealth of monographs by respected historians has emerged over the last decade and a half. Within this genre, various formerly off-limits topics have now been written about extensively: these include the performance of Chiang Kai-shek’s armies (more objectively assessed) and the contribution of the USA to the Chinese war effort. The Nanjing Massacre (or Rape of Nanking) has, perhaps unsurprisingly, been one of the major events which has come under scrutiny. A research group at the

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8 I take the term ‘vectors of memory’ from Henry Rousso, *The Vichy Syndrome: History and Memory in France since 1944* (Cambridge, MA 1991), chap. 6.
9 See van de Ven, op. cit., footnotes 46, 61, for a very useful survey of key primary and secondary works on the war published in China in the 1990s.
10 See Yang Daqing, ‘Convergence or Divergence?: Recent Historical Writings on the Rape of Nanjing’, *American Historical Review*, 104.3, 842–65, and Eykholt, op. cit., 11–69.
The Jiangsu Academy of Social Sciences in Nanjing is dedicated to continuing investigations into the Massacre, and is at least in part spurred on by the belief that a large proportion of Japanese opinion has denied the reality and scale of the massacre.\textsuperscript{11} As with all academic research that is politically sensitive in China (and that is still the great majority), the utter dependence of academics on state or provincial funding for their institutions, as well as the potential threat of censorship, means that one can trace closely the connections between the loosening or tightening of the grip at the political centre with the research agendas allowed or restricted in the academy. Yet it is also clear that certain institutions are given more leeway than others. In some cases, this is because of their high prestige; in other cases, geographical distance may be a defence, as Beijing is less likely to keep tabs on publications coming out of obscure provincial centres.

Where the academics are given licence to be the first to tread softly in new fields of research, popular history aimed at a mass audience follows behind, taking the agendas of academic history and expanding on them. In these interpretations, the dichotomies of good and evil which are implicit, or soberly stated, in the academic literature are much more strident. However, that stridency gives a better indication of the feeling that mass consumers of history have about the relationship between the past and the present, particularly when it comes to the war. And once again, this is linked to the dichotomy between China as victim and China as great power: interpretations of the war serve to bolster both images.

A clear example of the former is the Nanjing Massacre, and publications aimed at the educational market also provide periodic renewals of the message. Typical of these are the books of news pictures from the massacre, published in 1995 as a joint project of the Second National Archives of China and the Jilin Academy of Social Sciences in both Chinese and Japanese versions.\textsuperscript{12} Another example is the special exhibition held in 2000 at the Nanjing Massacre museum surrounding the return to Nanjing of Azuma Shiro, a Japanese soldier stationed in Nanjing in 1938–39, who had come under attack at home for witnessing to the reality of the Massacre. To capitalize on his lectures, special publications were rushed out to accompany his visit, including a translation of his wartime diary, and a book of pictorial evidence which accompanied the evidence of the diary.\textsuperscript{13} Other, more permanent institutions such as the Nanjing Massacre Museum (discussed later) show how deeply the Massacre has helped to bolster the part of China’s self-image that is rooted in victimhood in the political culture of the 1990s.

However, the construction of wartime memory is by no means confined to

\textsuperscript{11} I attended a meeting of the research group in September 2000 and was able to discuss their agenda with various members of the group.

\textsuperscript{12} Liu Ye, Bo Liechen (eds), \textit{Nanjing datusha tuzheng} (Photographic evidence of the Nanjing Massacre) (Jilin 1995).

\textsuperscript{13} \textit{Dong Shilang riji} (Azuma Shiro’s Diary) (Beijing 2000), \textit{Dong Shilang riji tuzheng} (Pictorial evidence of Azuma Shiro’s Diary) (Beijing 2000).
the Nanjing case, however dominant it may be in popular memory. Elsewhere, writings highlight the other side of China’s image, as a great power in the present that was also able to resist invaders in the past. An example of this is the memoirs of war correspondents which were published in 1995. While much of the writing echoes standard formulaic language about war, and is clearly enhanced by being written many decades after the period the writers are recalling, the subject matter shows the way in which acceptable boundaries have been altered in the post-Mao era. In particular, the favourable reporting of Nationalist battles fought by Chiang Kai-shek’s generals is noticeable. Among the memoirs is one by Lu Yi, one of the most distinguished of the New Journalists of the 1930s, who recalled the night before the battle of Taierzhuang. His memoir of the aftermath of battle shows the tropes both of war reporting of the time and retrospective shaping, concluding with the line ‘seeing [the Chinese soldiers’ corpses] made you bring forth a feeling of deep veneration!’. Taierzhuang, a battle fought in April 1938 in which a small group of Chinese soldiers defeated a large contingent of Japanese troops, was a rare Chinese victory in the terrifying early months of the war, when it seemed that the Japanese would sweep all before them. At the time, it was the source of tremendous propaganda value for Chiang Kai-shek’s government, then in retreat at its first temporary capital of Wuhan. Yet after 1949, Taierzhuang was rarely mentioned in China: it did not become an iconic event like Dunkirk, Stalingrad, Alamein or Midway for the other Allied powers.

The change came with the 1980s, for the reasons already discussed: now that Japan was to be painted once more as a threat to peace, and Taiwan was to be wooed, the memory of Taierzhuang could be revived, and Lu Yi’s memoir celebrating a Nationalist victory could be published and promoted. Elsewhere, in the Museum of the War of Resistance in Beijing, there is a diorama son-et-lumière reconstruction of the battlefield, while in 1986 a film entitled The Great Battle of Taierzhuang was released, which portrayed the Nationalist war effort in a highly favourable light. While the government has on occasion become worried about over-praise for the Nationalist generals, the trend seems to have turned strongly toward this interpretation.

These memoirs and interpretations come, of course, from those who participated in the war themselves. However, another related phenomenon is the new significance of the war to generations born after the events themselves (which echoes the increasing interest in war commemoration among the

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15 Lu Yi, ‘Qianxian caifang’ (Covering the Frontline) in Song Shiqi, Yan Jingzheng (eds), Jizhe buxia de kang-Ri zhanzheng (The War of Resistance in Journalists’ Writings) (Beijing 1995), 1–22.
younger generation in western societies). One example is Fang Jun’s memoir *The Devil Soldiers I Knew* (Wo renshide guizibing), published in 1997. The author was born in 1954 in Beijing, became a steel-factory worker at the age of 16, and joined the CCP in 1973. In the 1980s, he studied Japanese at night school, and got a job as a reporter for the Japanese *Yomiuri Shimbun* newspaper’s office in Beijing. He then went to study in Japan between 1991 and 1997. While there, he interviewed various former Japanese Imperial Army veterans who had participated in the invasion of China in the 1930s — the ‘devil soldiers’ of the title.

The story is not an academic account. It is a piece of journalism written as a journey of self-discovery, a genre now familiar in the West. Fang visits former Japanese soldiers who served in China, as well as rediscovering the Chinese heroes of the resistance to the invaders, and the book is as much about Fang himself as it is about what happened during the war. More widely, it is also about what the response of the postwar generation to the war should be. The last paragraphs of the book express some of this response in an emotionally-charged scene. Fang recalls a day when he was searching in the snowbound city of Sapporo, on Hokkaido, for the Chinese consulate, and lost his way in the snow:

> Where was the Chinese consulate? Wasn’t there even a pathway? Hokkaido’s cold, hunger and isolation . . . all pressed on my mind.

> Suddenly, in the midst of this pure white world, I saw our Chinese flag waving, the bright red five star flag! The hot blood rose in my heart. I ran towards our national flag, my feet sinking into the snow . . . . I wanted to cry, I wanted to laugh . . . . our motherland! I’d found you! . . . . Who says I’m just one person alone? Isn’t our strong and great motherland together with me? . . .

> Motherland, you have gone through so many trials . . . .

> The Japanese invaders wilfully trampled over your territory, wilfully ravaged your people . . . .

> You! My motherland! You have not been overcome!

> Among the forest of nations in the world, you are a giant . . . .

> Motherland, I celebrate you. National flag, I salute you.17

The north-eastern war memorial of 1976, which barely mentioned the Japanese, seems a long way off from Fang’s impassioned pleas. Instead, we have a trope of a violated, personified motherland (strictly, ‘ancestral land’ [zuguo]) which has recovered from invasion to reach a sacred greatness, an image which has parallels in the idea of *Vaterland* in the first unification of Germany or *rodina* in the creation of Russian identity. Fang is of the generation that came of age in the later part of the Cultural Revolution: for those who joined the party at this time, the old certainties had little resonance left, and the new history of the war came just in time.

Because the CCP has continued to stay in power even while its ideology and agenda has changed utterly since 1978, the cases above have been presented to the public as *faits accomplis*: nobody has got up to say, ‘We used to believe

this, but now we believe this’, in the way that, to some extent, did happen with the Cultural Revolution. However, another case shows how China’s undeclared reorienting of its historical fissures can lead to serious ideological contortions. One such case is that of Anna Chennault, who personified the pro-Chiang Kai-shek, anti-Communist China Lobby in the Cold War USA just as another powerful woman, Soong Meiling (Mme Chiang Kai-shek) had done during the war against Japan. Anna had first come to prominence because she married Claire Chennault, the commander of the American Volunteer Group, or ‘Flying Tigers’, which had kept Chiang Kai-shek’s wartime capital of Chongqing supplied ‘over the hump’ to Burma. Having fled the Communist advance in 1949, the Chennaults moved to Hong Kong and then Taiwan. Soon after Claire Chennault’s death from cancer in 1958, Anna Chennault moved to the USA, where she developed her powerful role in the China Lobby, although she rather faded from public view in the 1970s after the opening to China by Richard Nixon.

However, since the late 1980s, Anna (known by her Chinese name, Chen Xiangmei), has become a respected and prominent commentator on public affairs in China, where she is widely published and received in high government circles. This is no mean achievement for someone who was known for decades as one of the most prominent voices of opposition to ‘Red China’, and was in effect defined by her anti-communism. The new approaches to the recent past, however, have proved an effective way of bringing overseas Chinese, particularly ones perceived as influential, into the new Chinese project of national self-awareness. In particular, the new understanding of the Sino-Japanese War, bringing the Nationalists in from the cold, has special relevance for the widow of the leader of the ‘Flying Tigers’ and former close associate of Chiang. Chen has also managed to tap into Beijing’s wider worries about neo-imperialism, not just from Japan, but from the international community, whose agenda it sees as driven by solidarist, transnational concerns that threaten once again to violate Chinese sovereignty. In particular, the explicit linking of human rights and trade access to the US market in the 1980s and 1990s created an official and popular constituency in China for arguing that imperialists were once again forcing China to behave in ways it had not chosen for itself.

In this atmosphere, writing that linked imperialist oppression of China in the past and present was encouraged. And once again, the issue of China’s record of resistance during wartime is made to serve as a lesson for the present. One essay by Chen Xiangmei, published in 1992, which speaks to these concerns, is ostensibly about a then controversial and imminent problem, the return of Hong Kong to Chinese sovereignty in 1997. Reading books about colonial Hong Kong, she declares: ‘In my heart, I felt unstoppable anger, because the Hong Kong Chinese had been second-class citizens for so long, and there were people who were unexpectedly apathetic at this.’

Although she spent many years in Hong Kong, including the period 1939–41 as the

18 ‘Xianggang’ (Hong Kong) in Chen Xiangmei, Chunshui dongliu (The Spring Waters Flow East) (Beijing 1992), 66.
Japanese took over most of south and central China, she did not like the place. Chen writes:

After Pearl Harbor, I fled to study behind the lines of the War of Resistance to Japan [i.e. in the Nationalist-controlled zone], and life there was harder than in Hong Kong, but we didn’t consider it hard, because that territory, that blue sky, belonged to us; it was our China! In the morning, we’d raise the national flag, we’d sing the national anthem . . . . All of this made me feel I had a country that let me love such a source of pride. In Hong Kong, I did not have this feeling of attachment.19

Her linking of imperialism past and present means that Chen’s recollections of the war years tell us much more about her concerns in the 1990s than they do about her experiences in the 1940s. The same can be said of her article, in the same collection, entitled ‘Chiang Kaishek and Claire Chennault’. The change in historical orientation in China can be seen in the fact that a complimentary article about Chiang and his wartime contribution was being openly published in Beijing. However, the article goes still further, and attempts to reconcile the current template with the previous one, where Chiang was the embodiment of all evil. ‘Right up until he died of his illness, Chennault deeply believed that the Chinese people would one day unite. He also believed that after Chiang Kaishek and Mao Zedong had both passed away, China would be able to talk about unity again.’20 The article then discusses Chennault’s association with Chiang at length, portraying Chennault (correctly) as an ardent defender of Chinese interests during the war, but hardly mentioning his strong anti-communism: ‘Even though he did support Chiang and the Nationalists, he supported the democracy and freedom which the Chinese people sought even more.’21

The case of Chen Xiangmei is intriguing not because it is typical, but because it is an extreme example of the contortions which the new national historical myths have had to undergo. The collapse of the East European communist regimes in 1989 allowed the public to draw a line under the narratives that those regimes had constructed. The Chinese government and people are engaged in a much more difficult attempt to move in a diametrically opposed direction while having little leeway to acknowledge explicitly that anything at all has changed. Both Fang Jun, discussed earlier, and Chen Xiangmei put forward attachments to the flag as a marker of their attachment to their homeland. Again, for Chen this is the Nationalist flag, and for Fang it is the Communist flag, but the significance it has is the same. By means of anti-imperialist, anti-Japanese and nationalist language, Chen, Fang and others are enlisted by Beijing in what the government perceives as the last unfinished business of the civil war — reunification with Taiwan.

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19 Ibid.
21 Ibid., 26.
In the early 1980s, a major ideological and financial investment was made by a group of Chinese leaders at the highest level, including Deng Xiaoping, Jiang Zemin, and the conservative ideologue Hu Qiaomu. This marked one of the most important spheres of the new historiography, the reorientation of public education. One of the most prominent agencies of this change was the establishment of museums setting up a new interpretation of the war. As a result of this, four decades after the ending of the war, China had not one, but three, major national-level museums dedicated to the commemoration of the War of Resistance against Japan. The similarities and the differences between the museums were significant. The cities chosen for the museums were Beijing, Nanjing and Shenyang (in the Chinese North-east, formerly known as Manchuria). The locations within the cities were chosen for their resonant association with events during the Sino-Japanese War: in Beijing, the Marco Polo Bridge incident of 7 July 1937, which saw the first clash that broke into open warfare between Japan and China; in Nanjing, the notorious Nanjing Massacre (‘the rape of Nanking’), which stretched over six weeks in the winter of 1937–38; and in Shenyang, the Japanese coup of 18 September 1931 which led to the occupation of Manchuria and the establishment of the puppet state of Manchukuo.

They are also notable for being commemorations of that part of history which remained hidden for decades. Whatever other fissures had riven Russian society, the memory of the Great Patriotic War remained as a reliable source to inspire patriotism, and remains a powerful if much more openly contested touchstone in the current era. In a reversal of the Russian situation, the War of Resistance to Japan did not provide such a common source of legitimacy. In addition, it is clear that the victim/hero dichotomy that exists in popular writings on the war and its legacy is very much present in the museums.

In all the events commemorated, either the CCP is absent or the Nationalist role is more relevant, whether for good or ill. In the Nanjing Massacre, the Nationalist role is hardly heroic, as defending General Tang Shengzhi slipped out of the city on the eve of the invasion, but the main thrust of the story is innocent Chinese being slaughtered by vicious Japanese troops. In the Manchurian Incident, again, the Nationalist government is condemned for its refusal to support armed resistance against the Japanese, but the main story is the attack on and oppression of innocent Chinese. These two events, then, primarily feed into the image of China as victim. The War of Resistance

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23 See Nina Tumarkin, The Living and the Dead: The Rise and Fall of the Cult of World War II in Russia (New York 1994), and Catherine Merridale, Night of Stone: Death and Memory in Russia (London 2000). In Night of Stone, 415–23, Merridale warns against too simplistic a usage of metaphors such as ‘wound’ and an uncomplicated use of the language of victimology to understand the nature of contemporary understanding of Russian attitudes toward the second world war. This is a very fruitful thought to bring to the Chinese example too.
Museum, however, as the name implies, portrays China as capable of fighting back against the oppressors through the inspiration of nationalism. In the first two events, however, the CCP is notable by its absence. Despite some concentration on CCP attempts to unite resistance armies in Manchuria against the Japanese in the later war years, neither the Nanjing nor Manchurian cases are portrayed in the museums as being of primary importance as events in the previously dominant teleology of CCP hegemony. The War of Resistance Museum in Beijing, not least because of its more heroic narrative, does allow much more space to the CCP, but not at the expense of a rehabilitated account of the Nationalist contribution to the war effort.

This dichotomy of China as victim and hero is, again, not unique. Indeed, one can find aspects of it in almost all societies outside the North American and European nations whose ideology has become dominant since 1989. The narrative of dispossession has become very powerful in a world perceived by the outsiders as unipolar. The Chinese past also informs the present: not just the Sino-Japanese War, but the whole ‘century of humiliation’ from the Opium Wars to the mid-twentieth century. Agencies like the museums help to propagate that narrative to an ever-wider audience, with the War of Resistance Museum, for instance, hosting 650,000 domestic visitors in 1998.24

And public opinion responds to these stimuli, often more enthusiastically than the leadership expects. An opinion survey cited by Joseph Fewsmith and Stanley Rosen suggested that 82 per cent of the Chinese public felt that Jiang Zemin’s government was too accommodating toward Japan. Other surveys carried out for the China Youth Daily in 1995–6 suggest that 83.9 per cent of youth polled associated Japan above all with the Nanjing Massacre, and that over 74 per cent also believed that China would reach the status of top-level global power within 30 years.25

There is also another factor that militates against the wholesale acceptance of the unifying intent of the centre’s project: localism. The north-eastern city of Shenyang is one of the most important sites of Sino-Japanese conflict because the Manchurian crisis of 1931 broke out there. Today it is also renowned for a different but also negative reason: it is one of the biggest economic basket cases in the country, with one of the highest unemployment and strike rates in China. The provincial Academy of Social Sciences has suffered, like other public institutions, from the starving of funds, and is now closed several days a week to save on costs. Yet it is a prolific source of materials on the history of the region, and particularly its period under Japanese occupation. With titles like Seven Northeastern Heroes of National Salvation [Dongbei jiujwang qijie], these books portray a region which was both more of a victim (occupied by Japan since 1931, not just 1937) and more of a resister

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(armed guerrillas fought the Japanese during that whole period, though not very effectively) than the rest of China. Its huge and expanding Museum of the Manchurian Crisis is also a source of local, as well as national, educational pride, concentrating very much on the North-east’s regional contribution to the anti-Japanese struggle.26 If Shenyang cannot be proud of its present, it makes up for it in the past.

The dialogue about imperialism shows both change and continuity from what has gone before. The change is obvious, in that a figure such as Chen Xiangmei would never have been permitted to have any kind of public voice in pre-1978 China. However, the monolithic nature of the official line shows, in some ways, little variation from what has gone before. Dissent from the new line about the nature of Japan’s role and imperialism is as hard to find as dissent from the line about the evil nature of the Nationalists was in the 1960s, and categories such as gender and ethnicity have made little impact on what remains a masculine, Han Chinese narrative. This monolithic narrative contrasts with the multiplicity of voices that can be heard across the Taiwan Straits in the other Chinese transitional state. For 1987 was the year during which Taiwan’s Nationalist government ended military law and opened up to what, within a decade, had become a multiparty, liberal democracy.

Democratization has meant that ‘Taiwan history’ has now become hugely contested, along with the concept of ‘imperialism’. Until the late 1980s, Taiwan’s ruling Nationalist government continued to maintain the fiction, though less and less stridently, that it remained the legitimate government of China, and would eventually return to the mainland. In that context, the official version of Chinese history espoused on Taiwan was a mirror-image of that in the PRC. While its assessment of the roles of the Nationalists and Communists was diametrically opposed, its centralizing, teleological narrative was almost identical: although temporarily split, China was one country whose ultimate destiny was to be reunited under one government. However, democratic reforms after Chiang’s death in 1975 brought new interpretations of history, including Japanese imperialism and the war years.

In the early 1990s, the fissures which had been kept under the surface of Taiwanese society by the Nationalist dictatorship rose to the surface under democracy, two of which are particularly notable. First was the continuing resentment harboured by the ethnically Chinese native Taiwanese (who had come to Taiwan centuries before) toward the mainland Chinese who fled to the small island in the wake of the Nationalist defeat in 1949, and who then dominated its politics for decades afterwards.27 The other main division was between the ethnic Chinese and the 300,000 or so indigenous aboriginal

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26 Interview with director and staff of the museum, August 2000.
people of Taiwan, who were forced by the centralizing nationalist project of Chiang Kai-shek to ‘civilize’ and regard themselves as Chinese citizens.

Freedom to speak out in the 1990s meant that for the first time these groups could reappropriate their own histories. Chen Shui-bian, the first non-Nationalist mayor of Taipei, and now the President of Taiwan, renamed a central park the ‘February 28th Peace Park’, in a ceremonial gesture that rehabilitated the victims of a notorious 1947 purge as heroes rather than villains. Similarly, the 1990s saw the indigenous Taiwanese reclaim their own history from the *mission civilisatrice* interpretations of the earlier period. A Ministry of Aboriginal Affairs was set up with dedicated funds, and cultural projects which aimed to celebrate the history and identity of the indigenous peoples were established.28

These trends have much in common with the liberation from centralizing historical narratives in other transitional societies. However, they run counter to Beijing’s project of reunification with the mainland. Beijing’s efforts, chronicled in this article, to try and reorient the history of the Nationalists and Chiang Kai-shek so as to woo Taiwan, have come at least a decade too late, at a time when the Nationalists have been deprived of the presidency and their parliamentary majority, and Chiang is a figure now regarded with scepticism, at least, by many of the population. The likeliest period for reunification might have been the late 1970s, when the old enemies Mao and Chiang had both recently died, and the governments on the mainland and on Taiwan were cautiously reformist dictatorships which still shared a centralizing, one-country view of China. Now it is largely Beijing’s threat of force which stops further moves towards Taiwanese independence.

In this context, the significance of Japanese imperialism in Taiwan is very different from that on the mainland. As the piece of Chinese territory under the longest continuous occupation by the Japanese, from 1895 to 1945, it might be thought (and is certainly assumed on the mainland) that Taiwan ought to have a lingering resentment of the Japanese period in power. In fact, though, memories of the Japanese are much more ambivalent, as relations between the Taiwanese and their Japanese colonizers were much more collaborative (in the non-pejorative sense of the term used most famously by Ronald Robinson) than in mainland China during the war.29 This alternative view of recent history is visible in differing views of the Sino-Japanese War: for instance, as Chang Jui-te has noted, the Nanjing Massacre, so central to the reimagining of the war on the mainland, often receives far less attention from Taiwanese audiences. One should beware of over-exaggerating this response: Chang reports a 1995 opinion survey which stated that 45 per cent of Taiwanese still disliked the Japanese, and 34 per cent were unsure what they

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28 See, e.g., ‘Taiwan lishi yinggai ruhe dingwei’ (How Should We Decide What Taiwan History is?), *Ziyou shibao* (21 July 1997), 4.
thought of them. But it is clear that popular memory of occupation by Japan is not the same as that on the mainland. To counter the Taiwanese rehabilitation of Japanese imperialism, the mainland makes efforts such as the special exhibition held in summer 2000 at the Beijing War of Resistance Museum on the ‘Taiwanese compatriots’ role in the War of Resistance’. There is little evidence of its changing hearts and minds across the Taiwan Strait, though. The legacy of the past in both China and Taiwan remains powerful, but it seems to be pulling the two states ever further apart.

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30 Chang, op. cit., 155.
Any consideration of historical writing and public understanding of the past in the subcontinent reveals that history was an important terrain of the battles that led to political transformations rather than simply being transformed in their wake. The anti-colonial challenge in the domain of historiography long preceded the actual defeat of the colonial system. Yet the onset of colonial modernity also led self-avowedly nationalist intellectuals from the later nineteenth century to share historiographical conventions established by European scholarship that often refused to acknowledge earlier, pre-colonial representations of the past as ‘proper’ history. The struggle to redesign the past in the context of colonial rule and its aftermath in South Asia has proved to be an especially long-drawn-out and complex one. On one level, the rejection of colonial historiography is as old as colonial rule itself. On another, the de-colonization of the historians’ archive and history-writing has lagged nearly half a century behind the formal processes of political decolonization. At the same time, the process of ‘decolonizing’ South Asian history has in recent years been rendered more complex and controversial by the transformations of contemporary South Asian politics.

Ranajit Guha, founding editor of the influential ‘subaltern studies’ school of historians, has written that ‘education in history [in colonial India], was . . . designed as a servant’s education — an education to conform undeviatingly to the master’s gaze in regarding the past’.1 ‘A historiography of colonial India’, in Guha’s formulation, ‘would qualify as genuinely Indian and autonomous if and only if it allowed bahubol [physical force] to operate as a decisive element.’ There were many pitfalls and roadblocks that had to be encountered and negotiated before Indian historiography could ‘make the Indian people, constituted as a nation, the subject of their own history’.2

An exhortation to Indians to write their own history was articulated in a chorus of educated middle-class voices emanating from different regions of

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1 Ranajit Guha, ‘An Indian Historiography of India’ in Dominance without Hegemony: History and Power in Colonial India (Cambridge, MA 1997), 171.
2 Ibid., 205.
India during the later decades of the nineteenth century. The early responses to this kind of urging were marked by at least one of two disabilities. First, histories of colonial conquest contested the aspersions cast in the colonialists’ master narrative on the causes of Indian subjugation. But the blow struck for selfrespect was of a limited sort; it was a quest for ‘prestige coveted by the servant in the form of recognition from the master’. Second, when the concept of babubol was deployed as in the essays of Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay, the Bengali Hindu writer of the late nineteenth century, it was done by putting it in the ‘wrong place in Indian history’, that is to say, the pre-colonial period. This transpositioning robbed the concept of its ‘power to objectify the most significant contradiction of the colonial era — the contradiction between colonizer and colonized as one which could not be resolved except by recourse to arms’. As a result, the nineteenth-century agenda for ‘an alternative historiography’ ended in failure.

On Guha’s reading, ‘it would not be until the first decade of the twentieth century that a nationalist view of the past would develop a critique ‘which would question the very necessity of colonialism itself’. However, as the leaders of the Indian National Congress came closer to the acquisition of state power, mainstream nationalist discourse ‘sought to endow India’s own ruling elite’ with the same ‘unhistorical hegemonic role’ that the alien rulers had claimed for themselves, thereby de-legitimizing the revolutionary alternative. That view became enshrined in ‘India’s official history’, assiduously ‘propagated since Independence, by the educational and other agencies of the state’. The process of ‘a colonized people’s struggle to reclaim its past’ had been an exceedingly complex one. The official version, however, gave a ‘syncopated view’, ‘fully in accord with the telic formation of a modern nation state’.

Even though the educational agencies of the Indian state have recently become embroiled in much publicized historiographical controversies, some of the finest historical writing and the more sophisticated historiographical innovations in the South Asian context have in fact taken place well beyond the reach of the tentacles of state-supported research. South Asian academic history in the last two decades has become a global intellectual enterprise, conducted simultaneously on several continents. Unlike the cases of Russia or China, where historians in ‘exile’ have played a marginal role in re-interpreting the past, South Asian professional history and historians have come to inhabit a certain shared intellectual world, despite the ferocity of disagreements on matters of interpretation. The widespread use of English, ironically the language to which had been assigned the ideological task of reconciling the
colonized with colonialism, has something to do with this. But just as the anti-colonial challenge to a colonialist historiography could not be sustained by a simple turn to indigenous languages, the contemporary historiographical moment is shaped by a broader interplay of culture and power. What has energized the best of historical writing in English has been the boldness to read texts embedded in the colonial archive against the grain, to expand the concept of the archive to include a much wider array of non-state source materials, and, most important, to take seriously representations of the past in a variety of genres of prose and poetry in the many regional languages of the subcontinent.

While standing resolutely against the colonial, and later the official nationalist disparaging of alternative ways of representing the past as something less than history, the new decolonized perspective has in a sense blurred the colonizer/colonized distinction with post-colonial critiques powerfully expressed from metropolitan locations (the former colonial metropoles) as well as erstwhile colonies. However, colonialism continues to function as one of the principal terms of easily recognizable historiographical ‘debates’ which often do scant justice to the richness and complexity of recent historical writing on India. This article briefly assesses the state of the subject as it relates to the onset and formal end of colonialism. It makes a case for the need to move well beyond the rounded circles of certain dead-end ‘debates’ if South Asian history is to continue to make creative contributions to international historiography. In conclusion, it seeks to put into perspective the ways in which the ‘debates’ in academic history intersect with the politics of public representations of the past in contemporary India.

The academic controversies about ‘de-colonizing’ South Asian history have, not surprisingly, been particularly intense in relation to the question of colonialism itself. The debate has been shaped over the past two decades by the subaltern studies school and its critics. The Subaltern Studies series initially styled itself in opposition to the hegemony of colonial, and nationalist, state-centred histories. Reflecting the subsequent influence of post-modern or post-structuralist scholarship, the subalternists moved increasingly towards a ‘communitarian’ mode of historical writing, celebrating an indigenous religious ‘fragment’ as the true essence of India, in opposition to the ‘cunning’ of post-Enlightenment modernity, and the hegemony of the nation state. Partha Chatterjee’s Nation and its Fragments was particularly influential in this respect.8 The challenge to the subalternists has come from historians, including David Washbrook, who dispute their exaggerated claims of cultural difference, while situating South Asian history more firmly within a global framework of economic and political history. ‘Instead of saying, as do his predecessors in the discipline of political economy’, Partha Chatterjee wrote upon

reading David Washbrook’s 1988 historiographical essay on South Asia, ‘that India was so different that it was incapable of capitalism and therefore required British colonialism to bring it into the orbit of world history, Washbrook has simply inverted the order of similarity and difference within the same discursive framework. In the process, he has also managed to erase colonialism out of existence.’ In a recent paper, Washbrook — the prime villain in Chatterjee’s demonology of cunning, neo-colonial historians — seems to plead guilty to the charge of proclaiming ‘It Never Happened’. But in a characteristically ingenious act of subversion, he points out that ‘colonialism’ was never ‘it’. Setting out to ‘deconstruct the concept of colonialism in India’, Washbrook argues that ‘the concept needs much more specification — contextual and historical — than it is conventionally given’.

It is worth pointing out that Washbrook’s subalternist critics, with the solitary exception of Ranajit Guha himself, have not dealt in substantive terms with the period from the 1750s to the 1850s, while claiming that colonial transformation can be dated to the mid-eighteenth century. Even a cursory glance at the contents of the multiple volumes of Subaltern Studies makes plain that the favoured period of its contributors is the 50-year span stretching from the 1890s to the 1940s, when not only might ‘it’ be said to have clearly happened, but ‘it’ was resisted as well by nationalists among whom the ‘subaltern’ middle classes took pride of place. The debate over continuity and change during the transition to colonialism continues to be fraught with definitional problems. While Washbrook has often been provocative with his measured exaggerations, his critics have tended to confuse irreconcilable cultural difference with colonial domination, even though the lack of the former should not necessarily undermine any argument about the existence of the latter. If only the particular forms of power relations between metropolis and colony that emerged in the late nineteenth century are truly to merit the label of ‘colonialism’, then one can only speak of an absence, or at best a pre-history, of tendencies leading towards that telos. The sheer longevity of British and Dutch colonial rule in parts of India and Indonesia calls for a reorientation of our conceptual apparatus that allows theory to grow out of the history of the different phases of colonial rule. Otherwise, we are left with an argument about early colonialism that finds the roots of certain trends in the late pre-colonial period and a few buds of the full flower of colonialism that bloomed only in the late colonial period.

In light of the work of economic historians which shows that peasants and artisans of India may have been better able to negotiate the demands of the
state and merchants before the establishment of the East India Company’s rule, upholders of some form of ‘continuity’ between the pre-colonial and colonial periods have made a case for regional differentiation as well as a conceptual demarcation between the domains of economy and culture. ‘The Company’, Washbrook writes, for instance, ‘did not provide South India with an unequivocal and effective “rule of property” as Ranajit Guha holds it did in Bengal.’12 What Guha holds, however, is actually far more all-encompassing in its ramifications than a particular point that Washbrook may be prepared to concede. ‘The site of a new state’, Guha argues, ‘is always cluttered with the remains of the one that preceded it; and the individuality of each state, as it comes to be formed, derives to no small extent from the quality and degree of resistance put up by the debris through which it has to make its way.’13 It is futile in the context of late eighteenth-century India to attempt to mark off an economic domain that was in any meaningful way separate from the domains of politics and law. The late eighteenth century in Bengal, quite as much as elsewhere in India, was a period of economic loot at a time when cultural relations between British and India had a semblance of equity as well as intermingling. Yet it would be a mistake to see the grant of Diwani (the concession of the right of revenues in Bengal, Bihar and Orissa to the East India Company) in 1765 in purely economic terms — ‘a technicality which has’, in Guha’s view,

... alas, made scholars insensitive to its significance as the truly inaugural moment of the raj — it brought together in one single instance all the three fundamental aspects of colonialism in our subcontinent, namely, its origin in an act of force, its exploitation of the primary produce of the land as the very basis of a colonial economy, and its need to give force and exploitation the appearance of legality.

It was ‘this characteristic combination of politics, economics and law’ that characterized the emerging colonial state.14 This accepted about the transformative quality of the early colonial state, Washbrook has nevertheless spotted the blot on the historical anthropologists’ argument about the wilting of the small kingdoms of South India in the face of a supposed colonial onslaught, an argument that has tended to be devoid of any broader, historical context. He has shown how, contrary to the claims of Nicholas Dirks,15 the days of the South Indian ‘little king’ may already have been numbered before the onset of colonial rule. In fact, this may be said to be true of local rajas and agrarian élites in Bengal and in many other regions of India. Even though state-building started with the activities of local little kings, it did not end with them. Regional polities with sovereigns above the level of local kings and below the highest level of imperial sovereignty were of critical

14 Ibid., 156.
importance. The real problem with the ‘hollow crown’ thesis is not just that the ‘little king’ was in some trouble before colonialism, as Washbrook correctly points out, but that it reduces Indian kingship in both the pre-colonial and colonial period to the tiny scale of the South Indian region of Pudukottai, and draws untenable generalizations from a local story bereft of the larger subcontinental picture. As Mridu Rai has shown in her study of Kashmir, the crown that adorned the princely head was by no means a hollow one when it came to the pact of dominance between ruler and subject. While the crown may have been hollowed in relation to the paramount power, the British guarantee of the personalized sovereignty of the ruler vis-à-vis his subjects obviated the need for the ruler to seek legitimacy through the time-honoured practices of material munificence and cultural patronage. The buttressing of princely autocracy was then one of the key changes brought about by colonialism in the nineteenth century, involving a very dramatic shift in ideas about sovereignty and legitimacy. The issue here, therefore, is not continuity versus change, but the kind of change set in motion by the onset of colonialism.

The meaning of colonialism needs to be understood in the context of the cognitive map of the colonized, subalterns and élites alike. To do this, one has to leave behind the worn change-versus-continuity debate about the onset of colonial rule and also avoid falling into over-simplified paradigms of ‘dialogue’ across the colonizer/colonized divide. The point of departure for any new historical scholarship in this area will have to be C.A. Bayly’s classic Empire and Information about north Indian society in the transition to colonialism. What comes through in Bayly’s work is a sophisticated periodization showing the discontinuity between orientalism in the pejorative sense and the wielding of state power in the late eighteenth century, the colonial conquest of the 1790s to 1830 when the partial, successful suborning of the plains information networks contrasted with failures on the fringes, the qualitative information ‘revolution’ of 1830 to 1857 and, finally, ruptures of and continuities across the great rebellion which was characterized by a massive intelligence failure. While noting the prior existence of a north Indian ‘critical ecumene’ as distinct from ahistorical notions of pre-colonial ‘community’, Bayly also shows the qualitative difference in the nature of the colonial ‘public sphere’, especially the depreciation in the value within this sphere of India’s knowledgeable people and communities. The key transformation here was from the embodied knowledge of the pre-colonial era into the institutionalized

17 For the continuing obsession with sterile, decades-old debates about colonialism and nationalism on the side of ‘change’, see Nicholas Dirks, Castes of Mind (Princeton, NJ 2002). On the other side of the change/continuity fracas, Eugene Irsichick’s Dialogue and History (Berkeley, CA 1994) with its spotlight on Tamil informants of the East India Company ends up with a circular argument about dialogue between Britons and Indians, the predictable product of a jaded empiricist’s belated enchantment with theory.
18 C.A. Bayly, Empire and Information: Political Intelligence and Social Communication in North India, 1780–1880 (Cambridge 1997).
information order of the post-1830 period; a quantitative leap entailing a qualitative loss of access to patrimonial and affective knowledges. Even Bayly, it must be acknowledged, is much stronger in providing a detailed and vivid prosopography of the ‘informants’ of the raj than those who turned their faces away from it. Not everyone relished the role of the ubiquitous munshi; those who did not like the changes wrought by colonialism not only retired into religious contemplation, but also authored discourses of resistance. To them, colonialism appeared to be a far more disruptive force than to those who accepted the hegemonic claims of colonialist historiography and reconciled themselves to subjection.19

Post-colonial critics are generally closer to the mark in their analyses of the formal end rather than the onset of colonialism. Yet here, too, it has become imperative to reassess the role of religion in a variety of nationalisms by guiding the historiography well beyond the dichotomy and fruitless debates between ‘secular’ statist and ‘subaltern’ fragmentalist historians. The ‘secular’ variety of South Asian historiography has tended to condemn a little too easily any resort to religion in nationalist thought and practice as ‘communalism’, the pejorative ‘other’ of the noble sentiment of nationalism. The ‘subaltern’ strand, on the other hand, has leaned towards valorizing an ahistorical notion of Indian religion as the only true or authentic site of nationalist resistance, uncontaminated by the pernicious influence of post-Enlightenment reason.20 The infirmities of the ‘secular’ approach have not been confined to the more banal statist histories of ‘communalism’ by historians like Bipan Chandra or K.N. Panikkar21 but have crept into the works of some of the finest Marxist historians of India. The example of the role of religion in the Swadeshi movement against the partition of Bengal between 1905 and 1908—an early attempt by the urban nationalist élite to mobilize popular support via an economic boycott—might clarify this point. Dipesh Chakrabarty pointed to ‘the remarkable failure of intellect’22 in Sumit Sarkar’s book on the subject23—the best monograph on this particular movement—whenever it addresses the question of religion. So far as Hindu religious symbolism is concerned, Sarkar seems to accept, willy-nilly, the need to evoke religion as a means towards the end of nationalist, political mobilization, but finds the prospect of religion as an end in itself a little too disconcerting. The protection

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of religion as faith had been a time-honoured ‘end’ of anti-colonial nationalism since the mid-nineteenth century and remained so until at least the 1920s. At the height of the non-co-operation and Khilafat movement of 1919–20, a mass-movement notable for its display of unity between Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs, Mahatma Gandhi explained that both he and the pro-Khilafat Muslim leader Maulana Mohamed Ali valued political freedom because — as he put it — ‘only by Swaraj is the safety of our respective faiths possible’.24

If the secularist historian betrays a sense of unease with the use of Hindu religious symbolism for an altogether laudable ‘nationalist’ political end, any expression of Muslim communitarian feeling is immediately declared to be beyond the pale of legitimate nationalism and consigned to the dustbin labelled ‘communalism’.25 Sumit Sarkar refers to expressions of Muslim communitarian interest in the Swadeshi era as ‘communal’, even though the term had not entered Indian political discourse until the granting of communal electorates in 1909 and had certainly not acquired its pejorative overtones before the controversies surrounding the Motilal Nehru Report of 1928. The historiographical blindspot is not limited to the problem of religious difference alone, but extends to the relationship between national unity and communitarian difference in general. The anti-colonial nationalist strategy of class conciliation typically came in for some criticism from Marxist historians, who remained, however, remarkably uncritical of the ‘secular’ self-projections of the post-colonial Indian nation state. The secular, state-centred historiography of Marxist historians ended up being almost as insensitive to themes of resistance couched in the language of communitarian or regional difference as so-called ‘communal’ histories premised on the virtues of Hindu majoritarianism. It was this historiographical trend that Ranajit Guha condemned as being slave to the ‘master narrative’ of official nationalism propounded by the organs of the post-colonial Indian state. What was refreshing about Subaltern Studies was its refusal to accept at face value the state’s ideological self-projections. The key theorist on nationalism among the members of this collective is undoubtedly Partha Chatterjee, whose two books have had a profound influence on new thinking about this important subject.26 In Nationalist Thought he offers a powerful critique of nationalism at its ‘moment of arrival’, when it came to be conducted in ‘a single, consistent, unambiguous voice . . . glossing over all earlier contradictions, divergences and differences’. Yet his method in seeking to ‘give to nationalist thought its ideological unity by relat-

ing it to a form of the post-colonial state leaves him little theoretical space to explore the full gamut of contested visions of nationhood and alternative ideas about state forms. The stark dichotomy he draws between the material and spiritual domains in *The Nation and its Fragments* is offered as a critique of Benedict Anderson’s argument about the modular nature of western nationalisms and perhaps his own earlier over-emphasis on the derivative nature of Indian nationalism. But it effectively rules out the possibility of any exercise of nationalist imagination in the so-called material domain of the state and hugely exaggerates the capacity of the much-vaunted spiritual sphere to retain its pure autonomy. His assertion that ‘difference’ was ‘not a viable criterion in the domain of the material’ is unsustainable on both conceptual and empirical grounds.

Chatterjee’s championing of the ‘subalternity of an élite’ in the form of the urban Bengali Hindu middle classes has contributed to a serious lack of balance in the historiography of nationalism in Bengal and India. He correctly underscores the modern evocation of a classical Hindu past in the attempts to construct a nationalist hegemony; nor is he unaware of the potential of Islam to form the basis of alternative hegemonic efforts. Yet Chatterjee’s chapter on the ‘moment of manœuvre’ exemplified by Gandhi contains no reference to the key manœuvre in the history of popular mobilization, namely, the fusion of the symbols of Indian nationalism and Islamic universalism in the non-co-operation and Khilafat movement. The resounding silence about Islam means that there is no consideration whatever of the many Muslim contributions to the emerging discourse on the Indian nation in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. If the secular, statist historiography relegates religiously-informed nationalism, especially of the Muslim variety, to the status of ‘communalism’, the subaltern, fragmentalist kind unduly privileges the fragment constituted by the Bengali Hindu middle classes, almost equating it in the process with the whole of the Indian nation. The equation of the fragment with the community and the whole with the nation is itself hugely problematic. If the nation is indeed an imagined community, and imagined as inherently limited and sovereign, there is no reason why the historiography of nationalism should not address the imagining of a variety of religiously-informed or linguistically-defined nations as seriously as it has the making of the Indian nation state with its implicitly Hindu flavour.

Chatterjee’s theoretical apparatus has proved inadequate in the face of the historical reality of multiple contenders for nationhood in India. His later work briefly acknowledges a strand in nationalist thought that ‘raises doubts about the singularity of a history of India’ and notices ‘a great disjuncture here between the history of India and the history of Bengal’. Chatterjee further

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speculates that ‘there were many such alternative histories for the different regions of India’. But, sadly for the historiography of nationalism in the different regions of India, including Bengal, he pleads that ‘we do not yet have the wherewithal to write these other [suppressed] histories’.30 Far from hankering for power at the helm of a centralized Indian state, nationalist thought and practice in the regions of India displayed, on the one hand, a deep attachment to a regional homeland and, on the other, a range of universalist aspirations to transcend the territorial limits of India. I have tried to show elsewhere how ‘the language and idiom of nationalism operated in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century with the greatest potency at the level of the linguistic community and region’.31

What role, then, did religion play in the articulation of both regional and national identities? ‘Scientific rationalism’, Dipesh Chakrabarty has contended, ‘or the spirit of scientific enquiry, was introduced into colonial India from the very beginning as an antidote to (Indian) religion, particularly Hinduism.’ The opposition between reason and emotion, ‘characteristic of our colonial hyper-rationalism’, is seen to have ‘generally afflicted’ the attempt by historians to ‘understand the place of the “religious” in Indian public and political life’.32 There is a certain static quality to Dipesh Chakrabarty’s invocation of age-old Indian religion set under siege by the modern forces of scientific rationalism. The last four or five years have witnessed a new trend in scholarship that seeks to neither erase nor reify religious difference in studying the formation of and interplay between regional and national identities in late pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial South Asia. It is animated by a more dynamic conception of religion and its changing meanings in the pre-colonial ecumene and colonial and post-colonial public sphere. A rich historical account of the ways in which religiously-tinged, regional patriotisms presaged and informed nationalism can be found in C.A. Bayly’s study Origins of Nationality in South Asia.33 During the course of Indian anti-colonial movements, religion as faith within the limits of morality, if not the limits of reason, had rarely impeded the cause of national unity and may in fact have assisted its realization at key moments of struggle. The conceits of unitary nationalism may well have caused a deeper sense of alienation among those defined as minorities than the attachments to diverse religions.34 The field is in need of a historiography that knows how to distinguish between religious sensibility and religious bigotry35 as well as between secularism as a system of values and secularism as an ideology to buttress the centralizing project of a post-colonial nation state. Several younger scholars are now engaged in detailed research on

31 Bose, ‘Nation as Mother’, op. cit.
33 C.A. Bayly, Origins of Nationality in South Asia: Patriotism and Ethical Government in the Making of Modern India (Delhi 1998).
34 For a full elaboration of this claim see Bose, ‘Nation, Reason and Religion’, op. cit.
35 For a recent work that makes this distinction see Ayesha Jalal, Self and Sovereignty, op. cit.
various regions of the subcontinent and are helping to fashion a distinctive and innovative approach to a subject that is of vital importance to South Asia and South Asians across all borders.36

This protracted and complex process of reinterpreting the past by historians of South Asia has taken place in a context of both proximity and distance in relation to the broader politics of public representations of the past which have generated much heated controversy, especially since the change of regime in India in 1998 which brought to power a coalition government headed by the Hindu majoritarian Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). In one of his essays, Sumit Sarkar had charged the subalternist or anti-modern ‘culturalist’ historians with sharing ‘discursive space’ with the votaries of Hindutva, the ideology of an exclusive Hindu nationalism.37 Implicit if not explicit has been the retort that it is secular nationalism with its favoured official historians that fashioned the discursive and institutional space of the nation state’s centralizing project over which a battle for the share of the spoils is now being waged. Hindu nationalism has simply stepped into the breach left by the failure of secularism as an ideology of state to fulfil its centralizing mission, yet another instance of dominance without hegemony.

Sumit Sarkar has objected to this mode of interpretation by pointing out that the ‘numerous instances of nepotism under Congress regimes, or for that matter under CPI (M) [Communist Party of India (Marxist)] governments [at the state level]’ were not as ‘systematic, consistent, and generalized’ as what is being attempted by the BJP. The current controversies have much to do with control over educational agencies of the state, but there is no doubt that the forces of Hindutva have no professional historians of any worth, while their opponents have at least a few historians, such as Romila Thapar, of rare distinction. The Hindutva ‘anger’, Sumit Sarkar argues, is ‘directed ostensibly against “Marxist” (or what they like to call “pseudo-secularist”) historians, but actually against the whole state-of-the-art historical scholarship’.38 Yet there are those who have contributed to the state of the art, and not just the subalternists, who would not accept the lead of the old Marxist orthodoxy in defending their discipline.

Most professional historians condemn, as they should, the brazen attempts by Murli Manohar Joshi, the BJP cabinet minister in charge of education, to censor the officially-sanctioned National Council for Educational Research and Training (NCERT) textbooks without reference to their authors or to

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38 Sumit Sarkar, ‘Hindutva and History’ in Beyond Nationalist Frames (New Delhi forthcoming).
prevent the publication of volumes of *Towards Freedom*, an anthology of primary sources, commissioned by the Indian Council of Historical Research (ICHR). At the same time, the ‘liberal’ historical anthropologist Ramachandra Guha has excoriated the orthodox left for its hubris and sectarian intolerance during the decades it had the educational agencies of the ‘secular’, centralized state within its grasp.

The BJP is now doing only what the left did earlier: place its own favoured intellectuals in strategic positions of power, using the state in promoting partisan propaganda in the guise of ‘history’. One is tempted to suggest that in this respect at least Murli Manohar Joshi is a Leninist. Or at least an Althusserian. He well understands the significance of ‘ideological state apparatuses’.

The prior experience of left sectarianism within the state’s educational agencies is emphasized by another ‘liberal’ historian in an attempt to place the current controversies in context. ‘The result of this intolerance, by historians of the left’, according to Sanjay Subrahmanyam, ‘is that there is much to disagree with in the existing text-books, which do not represent discussions amongst a wide spectrum of historians but rather the views of a limited group.’ He refuses to allow the discussion about what kind of history should be taught in schools to become ‘a choice between Messrs Rajput [current head of the NCERT] and Murli Manohar Joshi on the one hand, and Professors Irfan Habib, Satish Chandra and R.S. Sharma [Marxist and Marxisant historians] on the other’. The Indian History Congress, run by Habib et al. in recent years on principles of democratic centralism and used as a venue to orchestrate protests against Joshi and Co., has been described by Subrahmanyam as ‘a sort of Republic Day parade for historians, where they may demonstrate their patriotism [of the secular assortment] and also give a very brief glimpse of their craft (usually about ten minutes per head)’.

Ramachandra Guha and Sanjay Subrahmanyam have touched a raw nerve among ‘secular’ historians under siege by highlighting some unpleasant home truths about the orthodox left’s style of functioning. While there is substance to the ‘liberal’ position, it shares in a curious way the pitfalls of a statist bias of the left, secular tendency it seeks to criticize. This comes through in Ramachandra Guha’s nostalgia for the imagined heyday of ‘liberalism’ during the Nehruvian era in the early decades after independence. He draws too sharp a contrast between Jawaharlal Nehru and Indira Gandhi and glosses over the

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39 NCERT stands for the National Council of Educational Research and Training and ICHR for Indian Council of Historical Research, the former having a much wider reach than the latter. It should be mentioned, while decrying the non-publication as yet of the volumes prepared by Sumit Sarkar and K.N. Panikkar, that all the editors of the ICHR volumes covering the years 1937 to 1947 were Delhi-based historians tracing the genealogy of the Indian nation state.


centralizing character of the post-colonial Indian state from its very inception. In a throwaway sentence Guha writes that India’s ‘liberal’ intellectuals ‘all admired, even worshipped Nehru’.42 Were they then any less sycophants of the centralized post-colonial state than Indira Gandhi’s acolytes whom Guha so roundly condemns?

‘Fierce political opponents though they may be’, Ramachandra Guha writes tellingly, ‘intellectuals of red and saffron hues often practise the same methods.’ But he is careful not to broach ‘a naive or simple equivalence between left and right’ and concedes that the latter with its propagation of ‘atavistic prejudice’ poses by far ‘the greater threat’.43 The various academic protagonists — left or liberal — would probably agree in their observation of a vast ‘gap between professional history and popular conceptions of history’.44 Sumit Sarkar expresses deep concern over the fact that ‘the reach’ of the kind of academic history practised in the last few decades in post-independence India ‘has remained quite limited’ and ‘the danger’ of Hindutva success in achieving their redesign of history is ‘extremely grave’.45 Yet such a view betrays an unwarranted fear based on a tacit presumption that somehow the Hindutva view of history might find greater popular resonance. By contrast, it is plausible to argue that popular versions of history are as varied as the rich heterogeneity of India itself. Powerful regional and ‘subaltern’ (with a small ‘s’) counter-narratives had always challenged the official, historical discourses of the secular, nationalist state. There is no reason to presume that a state-sponsored Hindutva attempt to redesign the past would meet with any easier success or not encounter formidable obstacles from many different quarters.

For some academic historians, the main enemy of the autonomy of Indian histories remains not just the post-colonial Indian state with its new-found Hindu majoritarian defenders but the spectre of what is described as a ‘hyper-real Europe’. So far as academic history, written within universities, is concerned, Dipesh Chakrabarty has commented, ‘Europe remains the sovereign, theoretical subject of all histories, including the ones we call Indian, Chinese, Kenyan and so on’. ‘History’ constantly seeks to appropriate on behalf of the modern equated with a hyper-real Europe ‘other collocations of memory’. As Chakrabarty sees it, anti-modern and ‘anti-historical constructions of the past’ provided ‘very powerful forms of collective memory’ in various anti-colonial struggles.46 His project of provincializing Europe in historical thought seeks to promote a tense dialogue between ‘History 1’, ‘the indispensable and universal narrative of capital’ and ‘History 2’s’ ‘thought about diverse ways of being

43 Ibid.
44 Subrahmanyam, op. cit.
45 Sarkar, ‘Hindutva and History’, op. cit.
human... in order to live within our different senses of ontic belonging’. He attempts to do so in his book by bringing Marx and Heidegger as representatives of the analytical and hermeneutic traditions of European social thought into conversation with one another. Chakrabarty concedes the need for universals ‘to produce critical readings of social injustices’, but warns that the universal and the analytical ‘produce forms of thought that ultimately evacuate the place of the local’.47

An imaginative recovery of Bengali Hindu ways of being in a Heideggerian mode, Chakrabarty’s programme of provincializing Europe in ‘an anti-colonial spirit of gratitude’ ends up confining ‘India’ within local horizons. There is no room within the dichotomy between 1) the universal discourse of European capitalist modernity (in which some Indians are partners) and 2) local discourses of Bengali Hindu communitarian cultures of coping with modernity, of Indians as authors of discourses of multiple and competing universalisms. Anti-colonial thought never staked its position on claims to difference alone, but always nurtured universalist aspirations of its own. It was never wholly satisfied with dreams of nostalgia, but wished to forge a history that would, to use a phrase from Tagore, track the process of ‘India’s entry into the universal’. Colonial frontiers etched on mental maps continue to obstruct the study of comparisons and connections of India across the oceans. One way to disturb essentialized views of India that had been colonialism’s legacy is to unravel the internal fragments; the other would be to render permeable and then creatively trespass across rather rigidly drawn external boundaries.48 A new departure towards comparative and connective histories might be the best way to bid the defensiveness engendered by European colonialism in post-colonial histories of South Asia its final adieu. The shackles placed on historical writing by the post-colonial state, religious majoritarianism and a hyper-real Europe will then finally have been broken.

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48 I attempt to do this in Sugata Bose, The Indian Ocean Rim: An Inter-Regional Arena in the Age of Global Empire (Cambridge, MA forthcoming).
The Absolution of History: Uses of the Past in Castro’s Cuba

In his famous defence speech at the trial for his attack on the Moncada barracks in 1953, Castro declared: ‘History will absolve me.’ The attempted storming of Moncada was the first act of armed struggle in the Cuban revolutionary war, which resumed at the end of 1956 with Castro’s return from exile to launch a rural guerrilla movement against the dictatorship of Fulgencio Batista (1952–58). The guerrillas, supported by organized resistance in towns and cities, achieved a relatively quick victory two years later when Batista fled to the USA, enabling the revolutionaries to march triumphantly into Havana on 1 January 1959. Throughout the war, ‘History will absolve me’ functioned as the manifesto of the revolution, the founding text of what it promised for Cuba’s future. Aside from that speech, which is mainly an indictment of the past, Castro made very few specific policy statements, preferring to mobilize as broad a constituency of support as possible by talking only of social justice and a restoration of the democratic and reformist Constitution of 1940. That Constitution, in one of many ironies of Cuban history, had been promulgated during the first presidency of Batista himself (1940–44), when he had operated in populist, rather than repressive mode. After the revolution, when the leaders opted to legitimize their government on the basis of ‘direct’ rather than procedural democracy, it was quietly dropped as a basis for policy. The centrality of ‘History will absolve me’ to the revolutionary struggle meant that history, rather than constitutionalism or ideology, was the key legitimating force behind the Cuban revolution.

Like most revolutionary regimes, Castro’s government immediately took several highly-visible measures to signal its rejection of the past: the US-owned Havana Hilton was nationalized and renamed the Habana Libre; the barracks of Batista’s henchmen were converted into schools; the casinos and brothels that had attracted wealthy (male) US tourists were closed; and formerly private beaches and recreation areas were opened up to the general public. Revolutions have often tended towards the puritanical, but in Cuba’s case the clamp-down on vice was overtly political, signalling that the nation was no longer prepared to play the prostitute to the desires of US imperialists and their local lackeys. The government also pursued policies of both retribution and restoration in the name of history. Batista’s armed forces were dissolved,
as were all political parties implicated in the dictatorship; predictably, Batista supporters were purged from the state administration and the trade union hierarchy. Furthermore, the revolutionary leaders chose to dispense with civil liberties in their treatment of prominent members of Batista’s notoriously brutal Rural Guard. These agents of Batista’s repression were summoned before impromptu courts of ‘revolutionary justice’, indicted for their crimes against the Cuban people, and sentenced, usually to summary execution, without being permitted the formal procedures of a legal defence. For the first time, declared Castro, ‘the torturers and murderers who have victimised so many good patriots throughout our history’ were being ‘called to account for their misdeeds’. These revolutionary trials caused outrage in the USA, but met with widespread popular approval within Cuba. The government also confiscated goods misappropriated by Batistianos — ‘This, too, for the first time in our history’, returned them to their owners where possible, and restored jobs to workers who had been sacked by order of the dictatorship. Thus, the revolutionary government took its revenge, in the name of the people, against Batista supporters, who were depicted as the incarnation of all the oppressors in Cuban history. It further pursued the metaphor of a settling of accounts by means of necessarily limited but high-profile measures to right some of the wrongs done by the previous regime.

Having thereby consigned Batista and all his works to history’s voracious dustbin, the revolutionary government embarked on a large-scale propaganda effort to represent itself as the culmination of Cuban history. This idea was employed by Castroites to convey a vision of socialism in which history was no longer a question of politics, or even of ideology, but primarily of morality — dedicated to the creation of a ‘new person’ committed to selfless solidarity and patriotic loyalty. It is this version of history (rather than Marxist-Leninist accounts) that has actually been dominant in the public arena (print, film, broadcasting, political speeches) for most of the post-revolutionary period. It depicts the wishes of the oppressed people as made historically manifest through the heroic martyrdom of a pantheon of revolutionary heroes. It is anti-capitalist in orientation and rhetoric but not Marxist in methodology. Its determinism is moral rather than economic; its emphasis on action rather than theory.

As a result of this revival of a loose Hegelianism, in several senses history did indeed effectively stop in Cuba on 1 January 1959. An annual series of commemorative events, often with re-enactments of key episodes in the revolutionary struggle such as the attack on Moncada and the Granma landing, and the celebration of anniversaries of the births and deaths of selected national heroes, both served to reinforce the impression of stasis. It is a telling detail that the Ministry of Culture recommended the use of a spoken chorus of

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3 Ibid., 31.
six to twelve voices to familiarize people with historical events, recalling the moralistic functions of the Greek chorus. When Cubans refer to ‘the Revolution’ (always capitalized) they mean, customarily, everything that has happened since Castro came to power, so that more than four decades of change are condensed into a single process, subject to the same dynamics. History is thought of as what took place before the revolution, or antes, as it is popularly known. Likewise, the rich academic historiography produced by the many highly-talented Cuban historians working on the island under the revolutionary government has barely touched upon the post-1959 period. Virtually all the available material on it has been written by academics and activists from abroad — several of the most prominent of whom are Cuban exiles based in the USA, but the substantial body of which is the work of US and European scholars. When it eventually comes to después [after], Cuban historians will have to start virtually from scratch in trying to come to terms with the history of the Castro government, and there will surely be a renewed process of cultural decolonization as the Cubans seek to reclaim this latest part of their past from the usually able, often well-meaning, but almost invariably policy-oriented historical research of US Cuba-watchers. The situation will be complicated even further by the fact that about one-tenth of Cuba’s population now lives in the USA, nurturing their own — also divided — versions of the nation’s history. Sebastian Conrad’s notion of ‘entangled memories’ could well help to illuminate the complex relations between varieties of Cuban history written on and off the island, although it would be premature to attempt such an undertaking. For the present, within Cuba itself the official version of the inexorable progress of the revolution, holding steadfast to its ideals despite the vicissitudes of superpower politics, continues to prevail, as it has done since the early 1960s, albeit increasingly by default.

To a large extent, then, at least until the late 1980s, the Cuban revolutionary regime devoured its own past, continuously reprocessing it in the form of new, enhanced recipes for a more appetizing future. Concomitantly, and wholly unsurprisingly, the government kept a watchful eye on precisely which morsels of pre-revolutionary history were to be consumed and digested by the population. Understandably perhaps, given his Jesuit education, Castro has never shown much inclination to leave the matter of his absolution to chance. From the outset, the revolutionary regime saw the teaching of history as a key element in mobilizing support, raising revolutionary consciousness and enforcing

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4 Cuba, Ministerio de Cultura, Dirección de Orientación y Extensión Cultural, Documentos normativos para las Casas de Cultura (Havana 1980), 75.
5 See the results of fieldwork carried out from 1988 to 1990 by anthropologist Mona Rosendahl, in her Inside the Revolution: Everyday Life in Socialist Cuba (Ithaca, NY and London 1997). Rosendahl worked in one Cuban town, of 30,000 people, so her survey is clearly limited, but data of this kind is so rare as to be highly valuable.
6 For an attempt to find common ground between Cubans on the island and those in the USA about what it means to be Cuban, see Ruth Behar (ed.), Bridges to Cuba (Ann Arbor, MI 1995), although it contains little treatment of history, focusing mainly on literary and musical explorations of Cuban identity.
ing the identification of the Cuban nation with the revolutionary state. The first major vehicle for inculcating a sense of history was the much-imitated Cuban literacy campaign of 1961, when nearly three-quarters of a million uneducated Cubans were taught basic literacy and numeracy. Primers for this endeavour included extracts from the writings of national heroes and descriptions of their epic adventures in the cause of ‘Cuba Libre’ (Free Cuba). In an elementary propaganda device, acts of heroism and battles in the revolutionary war were introduced in place of the more customary apples and bananas as the elements of simple arithmetical problems. For example, a school workbook of 1962 posed the following question: ‘On December 6, 1956, Fidel Castro and 81 other expeditionaries disembarked . . . at Las Coloradas beach, facing the Sierra Maestra. By land and by sea the forces of the tyranny bombarded them; 70 men lost their lives. How many expeditionaries from the [yacht] Granma began the epic struggle for the liberation of Cuba?’ The teaching of national history was placed at the heart of the regime’s propaganda effort, especially in primary and secondary schools, and remained there throughout the various educational reforms that have been undertaken (albeit in reduced form during the 1970s, when the history of the international workers’ movement was given precedence). If anything, Cuban history became even more important after the withdrawal of Soviet aid in 1990, after which the regime had even more need to promote itself as an authentic manifestation of cubanidad (Cubanness).

All of the above is familiar to historians of Cuba, and supports Louis A. Pérez Jr’s well-known conclusion that history has acted as ‘handmaiden to the revolution’, ‘serving as a major source of moral subsidy [and] conferring . . . a sense of continuity’. In what follows, I shall not try to suggest — as academic convention might dictate — that it was all far more complicated than Pérez has claimed, because I think it is hard to make a convincing case that it was, at least with respect to the 1960s and 1970s. Instead, I will develop two main themes. First, as Pérez noted, there already existed a body of revisionist historiography challenging the liberal-positivist view of Cuba as having been led out of the darkness of Spanish superstition and barbarism into

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7 Cuban Ministry of Education, ‘Producir, Ahorrar, Organizar’ (1962), translated in Richard F. Fagen, *Cuba: The Political Content of Adult Education*, Hoover Institution Studies, no. 4 (Stanford, CA 1964), 57–71, 63. The desired answer of 12 was mathematically correct but historically inaccurate. In fact, several more men survived the Granma landing and accompanied Castro up into the mountains to embark on guerrilla warfare, but the revolutionary mythology has always preferred to retain the echo of twelve disciples dedicated to the cause of revolution.


the bright dawn of enlightened progress and prosperity by the benevolent USA. The stock elements of post-revolutionary official history, namely anti-imperialism, the idea of the pseudo-republic from 1902 to 1958 and the longue durée of Cuba’s struggle from the early nineteenth century onwards for true independence, had all been established by revisionists during the 1940s.\footnote{Indeed, most of the revisionist themes could be identified as early as 1940 in an encyclopedia intended for a general audience, which noted that the errors and contradictions of Cuba’s history as a nation state could be attributed largely to ‘imperialism of an essentially economic nature, which made the country into an appendage’ of the USA. Esteban Roldán Oliarte (ed.), \textit{Cuba en la mano: Enciclopedia popular ilustrada} (Havana 1940; repr. Miami 1969).} The revolutionary leaders had read their works, and once in power took full advantage of the ‘ideological conviviality between the revolution and revisionism’.\footnote{Pérez, op. cit., 147.} In many cases, all the government had to do was to reprint and distribute key texts that had been unavailable under Batista. So far so good, but more needs to be said here, especially about the conditions of production of this revisionist historiography, which emerged, I will argue, from a civil society that became sufficiently well-developed from the 1920s through to the 1940s to survive the intense if inefficient onslaught of the Batista regime.

For at least the first decade after the revolution — and this leads on to my second theme — Castro’s government actively sponsored and promoted historical research, resulting in an efflorescence of Cuban historiography and the publication of several key works that were widely acclaimed not only in Cuba itself but also in the wider academic world. In that respect the revolution gave a new lease of life to the Cuban historical community. This section of civil society received sponsorship in return for allowing itself to be drawn in under the umbrella of the state, and the dangers of that became all too manifest as the regime began to cast a long shadow over intellectual freedom in the early 1970s, largely because of the implementation of Soviet-style economic and political organization. However, this should not detract from the fact that the initial results were highly creative. Moreover, the policies of the 1960s facilitated the training of a new generation of historians which, having endured the ideological restrictiveness of the period from the early 1970s until the late 1980s, emerged in the 1990s to offer the bases of a critique of the regime’s monopoly over Cuba’s past. We are dealing with two transitions here, neither of which fits entirely comfortably with the discourse associated with the term ‘transition’, which in the post-Cold-War world tends to imply a change from dictatorship to liberal democracy. The first one took place in 1959, from Batista’s regime — undeniably a dictatorship — to the revolutionary government. The term dictatorship is not particularly illuminating in reference to Castro’s rule, for it implies a level of coercion and arbitrariness of governance which is not fully supported by the relatively limited evidence available. However, the revolutionary government has offered no scope for any kind of accepted opposition, and has certainly been authoritarian in many key respects. The second transition to be discussed will be triggered when Fidel
Castro either resigns or dies. Its outcome is highly uncertain, and as a prospective event it is, of course, strictly speaking out of the purview of historians. I introduce it briefly, however, because it is clearly a prospect that is informing the thinking of many of Cuba’s historians. For several reasons, therefore, the Cuban case study does not quite fit the standard paradigm of transition from dictatorship to democracy. Nevertheless, I hope to show that it can offer interesting perspectives on the broader comparative questions addressed in this issue, not least in the evidence it provides that changes in historical perspective can precede and perhaps anticipate political transition.

Political engagement was a prominent feature of Cuban historiography from many decades before the revolution. Pérez dates it from the start of the republic in 1902, but it goes back far further than that. Like many post-colonial states, Cuba had long been acutely conscious of the role of history in struggles for independence. Unlike other Latin American countries, Cuba had already developed a powerful vision of national identity before becoming a nation state in 1902. Its failure to win independence along with Spain’s other American colonies during the 1820s, the defeat of the first independence war of 1868–78 and the eventual compromised victory over the Spanish as a result of military intervention by the USA at the end of the second war of independence (1895–98) had all lent Cuban history an epic dimension well before 1959. From the outset, all the various constitutions of the Cuban republic made reference to history and called upon it as their witness and their sanction. The Constitution of 1901 contained the notorious Platt Amendment allowing for US political, economic and military intervention in Cuban affairs and explicitly attributing a key role to the USA in liberating Cuba from Spain. This claim was reiterated in the constitutional law following the revolution of 1933, its anti-imperialist rhetoric notwithstanding. In the new Constitution of 1940, however, all reference to the US role in effecting Cuba’s independence was eliminated, and a markedly nationalist tone was adopted. It was specified that Cuban history, geography and literature should be taught by native-born Cubans with texts written by native-born Cubans. Another article stipulated that all Cuban education, whether public or private, was to instil a spirit of cubanidad and human solidarity. Batista played a key role in drafting this constitution, but in 1952, having launched a coup, his revised document declared that the Constitution of 1940 had been betrayed, hence the need for a new version in accordance with ‘the sacred principles of our true history’.

It is a small irony in a history full of ironies that the institutions creating a

12 Academia de la Historia de Cuba, Constituciones de la República de Cuba (Havana 1952), ‘Ley constitucional, 1934’, 137–57, 137.
solid basis for the promotion of the revisionist historiography that proved to be so useful to the revolutionary government were built during the pseudo-republic, particularly during Batista’s first government in the early 1940s. It was under the first US military occupation (1898–1902) that a National Archive was organized, and a director appointed to run it. An Academy of History was established in 1910, and although it became a bastion of the conservative, positivist ‘scientific’ historiography that adopted the line that Cubans needed the USA to save them from themselves, it also functioned as an important institution for training historians at a time when history was scarcely even taught in the universities. It was from within the Academy that the first revisionists emerged, only to break away from it in the 1930s and 1940s. A Society of Cuban Folklore was founded by the Cuban state in 1923, followed by a Society of Afro-Cuban Studies, both of which sponsored important work on Cuba’s African heritage. The state also funded a National Board of Archaeology and Ethnology, which helped to promote a series of significant findings about Cuba’s pre-Columbian peoples, and convened a landmark meeting of Caribbean archaeologists in 1950. During Batista’s first period in power (unofficially, 1934–40; as elected president, 1940–44), the Cuban state took several important measures to support historical research, establishing a municipal archive in Havana in 1937 with a permanent post for an official historian of the city, passing a much-needed law on the conservation of public documents in 1942, creating a permanent body to run the Cuban archives, and — most importantly — giving the main national archive a permanent purpose-built home after its years of peripatetic existence around various unsuitable locations in Havana. Batista also provided funds for the national archive to start publishing documents on Cuban history, which ran to 52 volumes by 1961, and for the Ministry of Education to publish the archival papers of national hero José Martí.15

The main institution for revisionist historiography, the Cuban Society for Historical and International Studies, was founded in 1940 by a group of historians led by Emilio Roig de Leuchsenring, who was famous for his pioneering history of the Platt Amendment (1935), and by then enshrined as the official historian of the City of Havana. The initial impetus to revisionism had come from the 1920s, when increasing concern about the dominance of the USA (which had returned for a second military occupation from 1906 to 1909, landed marines in 1912 and 1917, and intervened at the heart of Cuban government from 1920 to 1923) and disillusionment with Cuba’s own political leaders prompted an intense debate about the state of the nation. Encouraged by Batista’s national-popular government, in 1942 the Society launched a series of annual National Congresses of History, which aimed to bring together all those involved in researching and teaching history in order to reaffirm ‘Cuban faith in the historical evolution of its nationality and [to]

stimulate a healthy patriotism'. Twelve of these congresses were held (from 1942 to 1952), the second of which was inaugurated by President Batista himself. Each produced a set of resolutions on how the history of Cuba should be interpreted, and made recommendations concerning how history should be taught throughout the educational system. Many of their revisions were incorporated into official textbooks, especially but not solely after the revolution.

It was through the resolutions of these congresses that the key tenets of the revisionist version of Cuban history were established. Their main objective initially was the vindication of the second independence war of 1895–98, now known in Cuba, thanks to the efforts of the revisionists, as the Liberating Revolution. Before the 1940s, the corruption and collusion with US dominance displayed by Cuba’s politicians, many of whom were veterans of the war of independence, had led to a widespread perception of all those who had survived as self-seeking traitors to the patriotic cause. The war was fundamentally misunderstood by the generations of the 1920s and 1930s, who had no conception of life under colonial rule, claimed Roig de Leuchsenring. The revisionists argued that the war had not been a failure, as its detractors claimed, and that the corrupt nature of the resulting republic did not in itself vindicate the arguments of those who had preferred autonomy for Cuba under continuing colonial rule from Madrid, on the grounds that Cubans were incapable of governing themselves. The war could not be blamed for the problems after 1902, they insisted, which they attributed to a series of factors, including the poor example of governance set by the Spanish, US intervention in the war and the subsequent military occupation, continuing economic dependence on the USA and the failure to implement effective educational reform. The war of 1895–98 should be seen as the direct continuation of the war of 1868–78 (the Ten Years War), indeed the whole period should be regarded as one single process, to be known as the Thirty Years War (1868–98). Noting that the second war had continued despite the deaths of two of its greatest leaders, Martí in 1895 and Antonio Maceo in 1896, Roig de Leuchsenring argued that this fact conclusively disproved the ‘great men’ theory of history and that the Liberating Revolution had been a ‘movement of the Cuban people towards the realisation of its historical destiny’. The USA, far from being the benefactor that had brought independence to Cuba, had always been an enemy of Cuba’s independence and freedom, it was claimed, and a litany of documents was cited in support of that argument. In 1946, Cuba’s legislative body endorsed a resolution from the historical congress of 1943 that the Spanish-American War should henceforth be referred to as the Spanish-Cuban-American War. The title of Roig de Leuchsenring’s book,

16 Oficina del historiador de la ciudad de La Habana, Revaloración de la historia de Cuba por los congresos nacionales de historia (Havana 1959), 14.
17 See Roig de Leuchsenring’s prologue, ibid., 7–16, esp. 11–15.
18 Ibid., 15.
19 Ibid., 78 and 143–69.
20 Freeman Smith, op. cit., 49.
Cuba Does Not Owe its Independence to the United States (1949), became a leitmotiv of official pronouncements.

The resolutions of the first congress in 1942 on the teaching of history provided the basis for Cuban educational policy until well into the 1960s. History should be taught as social history, it was stipulated, to show ‘the integral evolution of society’. The positivist legacy in teaching should be eradicated, giving students of history a grasp of broad developments rather than minute detail and innumerable facts; a residue of scholasticism should also be eliminated, with no more rote learning or recitation, and schools should supplement their curriculum with visits to museums and historical sites. ‘The syllabus should be divided into three areas: General History, ‘to develop the feeling of human solidarity’; History of the Americas, ‘to foster a sense of continental union and brotherhood’; and History of Cuba, ‘to consolidate the spirit of our nationality’.’ Martí’s Manifesto of Montecristi, which was the founding text of the Second War of Independence, should be ‘the basis of Cuban ideology’ because it brought together ‘a profound sense of nationality, an embrace of the whole American continent and a universal inspiration and reach’. As recommended, it was reproduced by the Ministry of Education in cheap editions for use in schools, as was the Constitution of 1940.

By the time the revolution came to power, then, historians in Cuba had already done much of the work involved in decolonizing the nation’s history. Positivist and Hegelian approaches to history had been decisively challenged, and the influence of the Annales school had been felt through Cuban historians who had studied in Mexico. Social and economic historians had started looking at new sources to uncover what Juan Pérez de la Riva called, in the title of a landmark work, the history of those without history. During the 1940s, Marxist methodology had been incorporated into Cuban historical analysis, the case for which was argued by Carlos Rafael Rodríguez in his classic essay, *El marxismo y la historia de Cuba* (1943). Even political liberals such as Roig de Leuchsenring wrote about US–Cuban relations in terms of imperialist exploitation. A pantheon of heroes from the struggles for independence had been created by historians, with José Martí firmly established as the nation’s founding father. The work of commemorating Martí had started with the National Congresses of History, and culminated in the tributes paid on the centenary of his birth in 1953, when the Plaza José Martí was built in Havana, a conservation order was placed on his house and other places relating to his life, and commemorative stamps and medals were issued, along with popular editions of his works.

21 Emilio Roig de Leuchsenring, *Cuba no debe su independencia a los Estados Unidos* (Havana 1949).
22 Oficina del historiador, op. cit., 17.
23 Ibid., 22.
24 Ibid., 18.
25 Ibid.
26 Juan Pérez de la Riva, *Para la historia de las gentes sin historia* (Barcelona 1976).
Pre-revolutionary historians had also addressed the question of where in the past Cubans were to look for authenticity and integrity, given the country’s experience of dual colonialism (the formal rule of Spain and the informal domination of the USA). The main solution to this difficulty was proposed by ethnographic historian Fernando Ortiz, who introduced the idea of transculturation, based on Cuba’s long historical experience as a point of transition for travellers into and out of the whole Americas.28 In a metaphor reminiscent of the US melting-pot, Ortiz represented Cuban culture as an *ajiaco*, or stew seasoned with chilli sauce (*ají*), which had originated with the Taino Indians and been added to by Spaniards, Africans, Asians, French and even Anglo-Americans. Cuba was a ‘thick broth of civilization bubbling away on the Caribbean stove’, he suggested.29 In response to Ortiz’s work, the first National Congress of History in 1942 called for research into the ethnic evolution of the Cuban people, and the significance of all the cultures that had contributed to its formation ‘from Indian to republican times’.30 In 1945, a Congress resolution sought to rectify the image of the Indo-Cubans as cowardly, arguing that much of the evidence for their rebellions against Spanish rule had been suppressed by the Spaniards.31 It was declared that the process of transculturation characteristic of the Cuban people dated back to the contacts between the dominant pre-Colombian Cuban culture, the Ciboney, and the Spanish invaders.32 Revisionist historians called upon the Ministry of Education to avoid terms such as ‘racist revolutions’ or ‘black rebellions’, for, it was argued, such uprisings ‘always had a political rather than a racial character’.33 Slave revolts of 1812 and 1844 were inserted into the history of the struggle for independence, and by the time of the first War of Independence in 1868, it was stated, independence had become a ‘common ideal for both black and white Cubans’.34 Indeed, it was ‘the crucible that fused the two great ethnic components of Cuban nationality’, uniting black and white, young and old, women and men in the cause of *Cuba Libre*.35

After the Revolution came to power, history was assigned the dual role of scapegoat and saviour. All that was wrong in Cuba, from illiteracy to illiberalism, was represented as a product of imperialist exploitation; at the same time, history was identified as a crucial source for evidence of a deep-rooted Cuban tradition of resistance to tyranny. As indicated earlier, existing historiography

29 Fernando Ortiz, ‘Los factores humanos de la cubanidad’ [1940] in *Orbita de Fernando Ortiz* (Havana 1973), 149–57, 154 and 156.
31 Ibid., 32.
32 Ibid., 37.
33 Ibid., 27.
34 Ibid., 64.
provided a degree of vindication for both claims. Arguably, although there is no space to make the case here, the Cuban revolutionary government forged a distinctive ideology through its use of history. The revolutionary government published revisionist works in large print-runs. It also took a number of important measures to promote further the study of history. History faculties were established for the first time in Cuban universities, and provincial archives founded. The revolutionary leaders’ continual evocation of the historical roots of Cuba’s revolutionary traditions in itself acted as a stimulus to historical research. The regime was particularly keen to promote studies illustrating the role of workers and peasants, especially women and blacks, in the social struggles of the past. Internationalism was also stressed, and later — especially after Cuba’s military involvements in Angola (1975) and Ethiopia (1978) — the history of its indebtedness to African culture. During the 1960s, professional historians working outside the official bastions of the Revolutionary Armed Forces or the Cuban Communist Party focused on issues of culture and national identity, employing ‘new methodological approaches, including oral history, ethnohistory and folklore studies . . . . Greater emphasis was given to the history of the inarticulate.’ These years saw a climate of creative freedom that was stifled — but only temporarily — by the implementation of the Soviet model from the early 1970s to the mid-1980s. During the 1990s, evidence emerged that the legacy of the 1960s had been lasting.

Despite the huge obstacles to historical research in Cuba during the ‘Special Period’ of the 1990s to date, including the mundanities of trying to acquire basic stationery supplies, some remarkable work has been done. Moreover, the opening of a series of small windows, like those on an Advent calendar, suggests that academics in the humanities are positioning themselves to take their place in a potential civil society that is gradually assembling its cumulative force for when it can emerge from the shadow of an increasingly authoritarian state. I will mention just three instances of coded critique, which make no claim to be systematic (more the result of material that I have chanced upon, reflecting the necessarily fragmentary nature of any research undertaken in Cuba), but which have some illustrative force. The first two are from cultural journals. As many individuals trying to resist the vicious cycle of censorship and self-censorship have shown throughout history, commentary on literary developments can offer the possibility of making an oblique critique of historical issues that might be deemed to be out of bounds to historians. Anniversaries — which can be commemorated with official blessing — provide the most usual pretext for a discreet reassessment of the past.

My first example is taken from a response to the fortieth anniversary of Fidel Castro’s famous ‘Words to the Intellectuals’ of 1961, during which he pronounced thus on the issue of intellectual freedom: ‘Within the Revolution

36 Grail Dorling makes this case, and offers detailed analysis of historiographical debates during the 1960s in his ‘The Representation of History in the Cuban Revolutionary Press during the 1960s’, MPhil. thesis (University of Wolverhampton 1998).

everything, against the revolution nothing.’ A series of articles in the periodical *La Gaceta de Cuba* of June 2001 re-examined those ambivalent words and the incident that lay behind them, namely the regime’s suppression in April 1961 of a film called *PM* that showed Cubans frivolously enjoying the nightlife of Havana. The writers concerned are cultural critics rather than historians, but they mobilize history behind a cautious critique of the regime’s policies of cultural repression. In standard apologistic vein, Roberto Fernández Retamar argued for a historical perspective on the *PM* incident (it took place, after all, at the time of the Bay of Pigs invasion, when it was hardly surprising that the regime was jittery). But he went on, more controversially, to suggest that not everything published in two publications that had run foul of the regime, namely *Revolución*, edited by the subsequent dissident Carlos Franqui, or its cultural supplement, *Lunes de Revolución*, edited by the subsequent dissident Guillermo Cabrera Infante, was contemptible; in time, its value would be seen, he argued, heretically.38 He then went on to denounce socialist realism — ‘that monstrous deformation . . . which caused incalculable harm’ — and to adduce Soviet influence as the explanation for the Cuban government’s over-reaction to *PM*. The criticism of the Soviet Union is implicit but strong; after acknowledging its contribution to the defeat of nazism, and expressing ritual gratitude for aid to the Cuban revolution, he adduced socialist realism, which, as he noted, was attacked by Che Guevara, as a metonym for all the Soviet regime’s ‘grave political errors, arbitrary measures and intellectual deformities’.39 Lisandro Otero’s contribution to this discussion also made a thinly-disguised call for greater intellectual freedom, arguing that if *PM* had been released at any other moment it would have been forgotten the following week.40 His generation saw itself as heir of the vanguard intellectual tradition of the 1920s, he claimed: ‘Those who created the *Revista de Avance*, who introduced the African heritage into our culture and forged links with Marxism, and also [those in the 1940s who founded] *Orígenes*, a group that understood the strength of our roots in the nineteenth century, explored the question of what was Cuban, and dedicated themselves seriously to artistic creation.’41 These articles add up to a decided rejection of Soviet influence on the Cuban revolution.

My second example, taken from a literary review of 1997, is an article about the writings of women participants in the literacy campaign of 1961. Framing her argument around the wish to claim a position for post-revolutionary Cuban women in the field of the Latin American women writers who became the object of so much attention from critics in the 1990s, Luisa Campuzano sought to explain why two women who produced notable texts based on their experiences during the campaign then abandoned writing. Her conclusion is that women were invited to participate in the campaign only

39 Ibid., 50.
40 Lisandro Otero, ‘Cuando se abrieron las ventanas a la imaginacion’, ibid., 53.
41 Ibid., 55.
because they were needed as an emergency measure, rather than because the government recognized their potential contribution to public life. The space apparently opened up for women by the campaign was in the event ‘historically marked and closed’, rather than being ‘an open space that had been permanently conquered’ by women, and as a result it proved to be a trap from which these two writers found themselves unable to escape. Thus, she continues, ‘what could have been the first chapter in the construction of diversity in the literature of the Revolution, was converted into an episode of the unitary history of culture of a people that for a variety of reasons was not in a condition to take on board difference’. It is tempting — perhaps too tempting — to read this as a critique of the overall lack of opportunities for women to express themselves under the revolutionary government. But if that is a correct reading, then her ultimate conclusion — squirrelled away in a discreet last footnote — is even more damning, for she draws attention to the persistent lack of women novelists of the Revolution, noting that scarcely a score of novels by women had been published during the period 1984–95, a fact which she could not wholly attribute to the effects of the economic slow-down suffered by the country.

My third example is a critique of the practice of academic history during the period 1970–85, when the Soviet model was applied in Cuba. In a survey of historiography before and during the revolution, historian Jorge Ibarra argued that from 1970 to 1985 the School of History at the University of Havana imparted a strongly ideological and ‘monolithic vision of history’. The government issued lists of authors banned from publication; very few were allowed to go abroad, even to attend conferences; key figures deemed by the regime to be controversial were prevented from receiving their doctorates. There were no Congresses of History, despite the existence of a Union of Historians, and no new historical journals were founded. Teaching of the history of Cuba was supplanted by history of the international workers’ movement — or, rather, of its activist leaders — at pre-university and university level. Nowadays, Ibarra noted, there was more awareness that ‘history is not the servant of politics, but its most learned teacher’, and he cited Marx and Engels in support of his argument. Ibarra’s article was a severe indictment of ‘Sovietization’, both in the practice of history and, by implication, in other areas. But he was by no means wholly negative about the relationship between the revolution and historiography. Despite the fact that academic doors were closed to historians during this period, a new generation of researchers, influenced and guided particularly by Hortensia Pichardo, one of the few historians

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43 Ibid., 57, emphases in the original.
44 Ibid., 58, fn. 38.
of the 1960s to continue teaching at the University, ‘dedicated themselves to working in silence’. The result, argued Ibarra, was that

Independently of the policies dictated by state officials, [a combination of] the path marked out by the masters of Cuban revolutionary historiography [in] the institutions created during the 1960s, the scientific interests and revolutionary attitude of the researchers, and the new spaces created by the founding of the Ministry of Culture [in 1976], together frustrated the [state’s] plans to convert historians and social scientists into the servants of its dictates.

In other words, the practice of critical history, once established, could not be wholly suppressed.

Since Ibarra’s article, and particularly in the context of the fortieth anniversary of the revolution, several debates about the role of history and historians in Cuba have been published, especially in two key journals which were launched in 1995: Temas and Contracorriente. Many of the participants invoke the Annales school, which seems to serve as a signal for a critique of crude nationalist history. During these discussions, most of the key features of post-revolutionary Cuban historiography have been challenged: the ahistoricism of the idea of ‘one hundred years of struggle’; the use of Marxist theory at the expense of archival work; the lack of analysis of social structure (groups such as the workers tended to be studied in isolation); the emphasis on ‘objective’ factors and heroic action to the neglect of the history of ideas and values. Cuban historians are calling for a return to the documents, with minimal predetermined mediation by any theoretical perspective. It is not that they are rejecting Marxism altogether, but rather that they are seeking to redress the balance between theory and evidence in favour of the latter, and indeed claiming that this in itself is the authentically Marxist approach. Some of them are arguing for a more complex appreciation of the relationship between past and present, abandoning the idea that the past can ever be a finished product, promoting the idea that history is the outcome of a continual reinterpretation of social processes, and questioning the assumption that distance from an event necessarily lends objectivity. Some question the idea that history can deliver any absolute truth, emphasizing the relativity of knowledge, and celebrating interdisciplinary approaches. Most crucially, most of them are calling for the study of contemporary history, despite their awareness of the inherent difficulties, especially in relation to sources, which are either not organized or wholly inaccessible. Indeed, their argument is that it is partly because of the problems of documentation that it is crucial that historians who have lived through the revolutionary experience record it. ‘Each day we lose a little more history’, noted one. ‘We should not leave the understanding of our era to the generations of the next century . . . There are circumstances [such as aspects of the Cuban Missile Crisis] that will go unnoticed if we do not record them. I feel sorry for the historians that will succeed us. In barely 40 years, how much

46 Ibid., 9–10.
47 Ibid., 10.
of our history has been lost because nobody has taken the trouble to preserve living memories?" There are suggestions that Cuban historians should start to resolve the tension between their self-appointed role as creators and defenders of national consciousness and their professional commitment to historical truth more in favour of historical truth, on the grounds that creation of a false memory is ultimately more damaging to national consciousness. In other words, Cuban historians are calling for a return to critical history.

What will the legacy of the revolution be, then, for the study of the past in Cuba? Undoubtedly, there are glaring omissions in the historiography produced under the revolutionary regime, not least, as mentioned earlier, analysis of the revolutionary experience itself. The revisionist rejection of the republic of 1902–58 has also been perpetuated, with very little in-depth work on what used to be regarded as key turning-points, such as the revolution of 1933, Batista’s populist phase or the anti-corruption campaign of 1950–51. Indeed, periodization in general is a key issue, for the insistent teleology of official history has eclipsed debate about rupture and continuity in all periods of Cuban history. Another major omission is US–Cuban relations. This issue has been exhaustively discussed within the USA, although largely within the restricted fields of diplomacy and superpower politics. But little work has been done on either side of the straits of Florida on the cultural history of US-Cuban contacts, which must surely be crucial to any accurate understanding of the undeniably peculiar fascination that these two peoples have exercised upon each other. As Louis Pérez has observed, during the early twentieth century Cubans and North Americans ‘seemed to possess the capacity to meet each other’s needs well, finding in one another fulfillment of their fantasies’. More concretely, as he also notes, ‘the US had set out purposefully to “Americanize” Cuba, but never considered the consequences of success: a First World frame of reference within Third World structures’. We might cavil at the language used here, but we surely cannot gainsay the basic point that he is making.

Despite all these problems, however, it remains the case that the revolution has overseen the development of a community of able professional historians, committed to the critical evaluation of their sources. Of course there have been ideological constraints, large areas have remained out of bounds, and debate is at present highly muted, although that has not been the case throughout the revolution. But at least history is deemed to be important in Cuba, not only by state officials but also at the popular level. Indeed, history is a salient part of day-to-day life and of Cubans’ sense of their identity, to an extent that is unusual perhaps even in post-colonial societies.

It is all the more regrettable, then, that history has featured little in the field of post-colonial studies, which tend to focus on the role of literature and popu-

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50 Ibid., 176.
lar culture in the process of cultural decolonization. Even books which have the word history in their title usually turn out to address history as represented by fiction. Moreover, the national liberation movements of the 1960s (Cuba, Algeria, Vietnam) are currently being re-evaluated as the manifestation of élite desires for power rather than the empowering of the powerless, and as fatally flawed by their commitment to the maintenance of grand narratives with all their authoritarian implications. In the case of Cuba, this academic reassessment undeniably has its political counterpart in the increasing authoritarianism of the Castro regime, especially since the withdrawal of Soviet aid. But, as I hope I have suggested, the revolution’s legacy is more ambivalent. The grand narrative of liberation was developed to counter the grand narrative of imperialism, as Edward Said and, long before him, Frantz Fanon pointed out. The promotion of historical research, even by a government set upon controlling both its output and its conclusions, opens up a Pandora’s box, at least in a society in which a tradition of dissenting from the official version of the nation’s past was already well-established. History probably will absolve Fidel Castro, but only partially, and that — in a final irony — will be partly the result of his own government’s commitment to history.

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51 There is considerable debate about whether the term ‘post-colonial’ is appropriate to Latin America. Some of its opponents maintain that it is yet another manifestation of western impositions on the region; others that the long experience of independence of most Latin American nations changes the picture considerably — a valid point but not one that applies to Cuba. For these debates, see Alfonso de Toro and Fernando de Toro (eds), El debate de la postcolonialidad en Latinoamérica (Frankfurt and Madrid 1999). My own view is that postcolonial studies will not fully confront the issues they address until they take the Latin American experience into account.

52 Edward Said, Culture and Imperialism (London 1993); Frantz Fanon, trans. Constance Farrington, The Wretched of the Earth (Harmondsworth 1967).
Abstracts

Redesigning History in Contemporary Russia (Catherine Merridale)
History was always an important tool in the hands of Soviet propagandists. All types of historical work were subject to state interference, from school textbooks and encyclopedias to formal historical research and the commemorative use of public space. This article traces the fate of history in Russia through glasnost and the collapse of communism and into the twenty-first century. It discusses the role that history played in current politics, and also the relationship between popular understandings of the past and the formal teaching of history in schools. It argues that history was central to the ideological ferment of the 1980s, but that it has become increasingly marginal, for economic as well as intellectual reasons, as the new Russian state consolidates its position. The argument is made that the decline of history, which some regard as a sign of Russia’s so-called normalization, allows some past injustices to endure, and also permits prejudices to survive unchallenged. Instead of history, today’s Russians — with some conspicuous exceptions — seem to prefer romantic escapism. They are exhausted by political infighting, including morally-charged debates about the recent past. It remains to be seen what price they may pay for turning away from a closer engagement with the painful memories of their grandparents.

The Origins of the Two ‘World Wars’: Historical Discourse and International Politics (David Reynolds)
It is now almost impossible to imagine the history of the twentieth century without the terms ‘first world war’ and ‘second world war’. Yet using the language of ‘world war’ to describe these two great conflicts was by no means axiomatic. This article on conceptual history concentrates on four principal belligerents — Britain, France, Germany and the USA. It looks first at how the war of 1914–18 was conceptualized at the time, noting the preference in France and particularly Britain for ‘the Great War’, and then examines rethinking during the 1920s and 1930s. It goes on to show how the term ‘second world war’ triumphed during and after the conflict of 1939–45 — though with important exceptions such as China, Japan and the Soviet Union. In both conflicts the leading proponents of ‘world war’ came from Germany and America, and the ultimate triumph of this concept owes much to the ideological battle between Hitler and Roosevelt in 1939–41. The article ends by suggesting that this dominant paradigm may in some respects distort our understanding of modern history.
The presentation of the nazi period, 1933–45, in German history textbooks has been completely different in West and East Germany. Each side declared the other to be the direct continuation of and no less dangerous than the nazi system. While the interpretation remained basically the same throughout the existence of the German Democratic Republic (1949–90), the main focus in the Federal Republic of Germany changed several times. At first, textbooks to a certain extent maintained nazi positions (in accordance with conservative nationalist policy) on many questions of national interest, engagement and expansion. Thus there was hardly any mention of the mass crimes, including the killing of Jews. Later, the Holocaust was allocated a prominent position. It was not until the end of the Cold War that anti-Slav racism and war crimes received the same attention. Authors also changed their underlying theories about national socialism. In the first decade, the ‘Hitlerism and single accident’ interpretation was strongly held, as opposed to that of the victors who believed in ‘German historical continuity and collective guilt’. Quite early on, the communist theory of ‘fascism’ as an instrument (almost a conspiracy) against socialism was put forward in the East and the theory of ‘totalitarianism’, i.e. communism and national socialism as hostile twin brothers, was officially promoted in the West. In western textbooks, the placing of the nazi period (and crimes) in the continuity of German history and society was not seriously discussed before the 1980s.

Former GDR Historians in the Reunified Germany: An Alternative Historical Culture and its Attempts to Come to Terms with the GDR Past (Stefan Berger)

This article investigates the remarkably productive alternative historical culture which emerged in East Germany after 1990 and its links to the official historical culture dominated by West Germans. This alternative historical culture in the East is supported very largely by historians of the former GDR who lost their jobs following the evaluations and restructuring of the GDR’s system of higher education in the wake of reunification. It finds expression in a multitude of historical associations, some of which are briefly mentioned. The historians, who have been active here, have been drawing up a balance sheet of their own for the historical sciences in the GDR. The article explores the way in which they engage with their own past as historians in the GDR and with the past of the state and the party with which they, for the most part, identified. Finally, the article analyses the diverse ways in which this alternative historical culture has assessed the revolution of 1989 and the subsequent reunification process. It concludes by asking about the prospects for this alternative historical culture in the medium to long term.

Entangled Memories: Versions of the Past in Germany and Japan, 1945–2001 (Sebastian Conrad)

In the history of memory, the national paradigm continues to reign supreme. This is particularly striking at a time when the historical profession is increas-
ingly producing transnational work. The history of memory, however, continues to cling to the nation as a frame of reference. German and Japanese memory, accordingly, are first and foremost described as different ways of ‘coming to terms with the past’, or as the ‘inability to mourn’. This internalist approach remains firmly within the boundaries of the nation state and tends to explain memories of the wartime past as the expression of ‘cultures of mourning’ or specific national mentalities. This article attempts to put the postwar history of memory in West Germany and Japan into a transnational perspective and to read the continuities and ruptures of memory discourse as the effects of a process of entangled histories.

**Popular Representations of the Past: The Case of Postwar Japan (Naoko Shimazu)**

This article examines the popular representations of the past in literature, film and television in postwar Japan, with the focus on the war. The main aim is to derive a general overview of how popular culture is affected by the politics of the present and the immediate past. In the process, light is shed on how postwar Japanese society attempted to cope with the war. Not surprisingly, popular representations of the past were highly sensitive to politics.

**Old Ghosts, New Memories: China’s Changing War History in the Era of Post-Mao Politics (Rana Mitter)**

Reinterpreted historiography has been an integral part of the modernizing project in post-Mao China, and among the most important of those reassessments has been the significance of the second Sino-Japanese War (1937–45). In academic and popular culture, official and grassroots memory, the 1980s and 1990s have seen significant changes in what China chooses to remember and forget about the period of perhaps China’s greatest single trauma of the twentieth century. This article examines written sources (historical and literary texts) and institutional structures (museums) in assessing how contemporary international and domestic politics have affected the way the Chinese use the experience and memory of the war to shape debates about politics and identity, and also offers some comparisons with the parallel period of historical transition in Taiwan.

**Post-Colonial Histories of South Asia: Some Reflections (Sugata Bose)**

This article investigates how and the extent to which historical writing on the South Asian subcontinent has been influenced by the onset and formal end of colonialism. It makes a case for the need to move well beyond the rounded circles of certain dead-end ‘debates’ if South Asian history is to continue to make creative contributions to historiography. It also asks to put into perspective the ways in which the ‘debates’ in academic history intersect with the politics of public representations of the past in contemporary India.
There are two transitions in question in the Cuban case, neither of which entirely fits the model of dictatorship to liberal democracy: 1) the actual transition from Batista’s regime (1952-8), which was undeniably a dictatorship, to the revolutionary government; 2) the prospective transition from Castro’s government, in relation to which the term dictatorship is not very illuminating, to an uncertain future. History has a key role in both processes. Louis A. Pérez’s claim that history served as ‘handmaiden to the Cuban revolution’, supplying ‘moral subsidy and . . . a sense of continuity’, provides the starting-point for my development of two main themes. The first theme, related to the first transition, concerns the conditions of production of the revisionist historiography appropriated by the revolutionaries, which was boosted by a degree of state sponsorship, ironically from Batista himself in the early 1940s. The second theme is the emergence during the 1990s of a critique of the regime’s monopoly over Cuba’s past, which has its roots in the revolutionary government’s own promotion of historical research and debate in the 1960s, before the ideological clampdown of the 1970s and 1980s. In both periods, historians have tried to create a space — however restricted in practice — for civil society. The main comparative point to emerge from the Cuban evidence is that changes in historical perspective can precede and even anticipate political transition.