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Frank Biess: Homecomings

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INTRODUCTION

On May 8, 2005, the world commemorated the sixtieth anniversary of the ending of World War II in Europe. The global celebrations of the defeat of Nazism marked a moment in the larger process of consigning to history the most destructive of all global conflicts in the modern era.¹ For more than half a century, the war's abiding legacies cast a long shadow over postwar societies in Europe and beyond. These multifaceted consequences of the war assumed different temporalities that have made it difficult to proclaim an end to the "postwar" period.² Yet the late twentieth century nevertheless marked a series of "endings" in the history and memory of the war and its consequences. The end of the Cold War brought to an end the division of Germany and Europe as the most important territorial consequence of the Second World War. The collapse of Communism led to the demise of an antifascist politics that had gained its central legitimacy from the struggle against European fascism.³ And the bitter fights over the memory of the Second World War point to ongoing efforts at shaping a lasting, more ritualized cultural memory of the war at the moment when the voices of the remaining survivors are in the process of being silenced forever.⁴ This rendering into history and cultural memory enables a new historical vantage point on the war and its aftermath. Precisely because some of its most important consequences are coming to an end, it has become possible to assess the ways in which the war and its legacies structured the postwar period. Thus, this book probes the precise meaning and historical specificity of the elusive and indeterminate category of the "postwar."

This study employs the return of the POWs to East and West Germany as a vehicle to write a comparative history of post-1945 Germany as *post-war* history. The book focuses primarily on the reception, treatment, and experience of more than two million German POWs returning from Soviet captivity to East and West Germany, but occasionally also considers returnees from Western captivity. Returning POWs from the Soviet Union constituted one of the most important, long lasting, and highly visible consequences of war and defeat. Their service first as soldiers in the war of annihilation on the Eastern front, then as German POWs in Soviet captivity, combined, in a dramatic fashion, active and passive experiences of violence.⁵ Their delayed homecoming—the last POWs did not return until January 1956—literally transported these experiences of violence back into postwar society and ensured the presence of the war's conse-

quences throughout both postwar societies' formative period of postwar reconstruction.

When I first conceived of this project almost exactly a decade ago, I was struck by the discrepancy between the rich historiography on the political, social, economic, cultural, and psychological consequences of the First World War and the virtual absence of a similar literature for the post-1945 period.⁶ The suspicion that this omission did not result from mere oversight but was rooted in systemic features of postwar historiography—together with my desire to make use of the recently opened East German archives and write a comparative postwar history—led first to my dissertation and then to this book. To be sure, over the last few years, several works have investigated the second German “postwar,” and others are in the process of being completed.⁷ But the analytic and topical possibilities for exploring the myriad aftereffects of the Second World War are far from exhausted, and few studies have employed the “postwar” paradigm comparatively for both East and West.

While this is neither a history of the war on the Eastern front nor of German POWs in Allied or Soviet captivity, this study draws on the considerable literature that has emerged on both of these themes over the past decade.⁸ The book asks what happened when the Eastern front “came home” to postwar Germany. By focusing on returning POWs, it investigates the social and moral burdens that total war and total defeat imposed on both German societies in the postwar period. To fully appreciate these challenges, a brief synopsis of returnees' experience in war and captivity will be required.

TO STALINGRAD AND BACK: HISTORY AND MEMORY

When German troops invaded Poland in the early morning hours of September 1, 1939, and unleashed what was to become the Second World War, they embarked not only on a conventional war but also on a much broader campaign of terror and ethnic cleansing. Moving into the occupied territory in the rear of the army, SS units liquidated thousands of members of the Polish elites as well as many Jews. While some Wehrmacht leaders articulated their opposition to these criminal transgressions, army units also lent logistical support and participated in these mass killings.⁹ After the German army had swept through France, Scandinavia, and the Balkans, the attack on the Soviet Union in June 1941 became the centerpiece of Nazi Germany's effort to impose a “new order” on the European continent. From its onset, “Operation Barbarossa” was designed as a racial war of annihilation. Its aim was the complete subjection of Eastern European societies in order to create “living space” for

an ostensibly superior German “master race.”¹⁰ There can be no doubt that the Wehrmacht as an institution was involved in this project at all levels. The Wehrmacht was not only Hitler’s “instrument”—a metaphor that suggests too passive a relationship—but actively fostered and promoted this genocidal project. The overwhelming majority of military commanders, for example, endorsed and willingly executed Hitler’s “commissar orders,” which mandated the shooting of captured “political commissars” of the Red Army.¹¹ The Wehrmacht leadership also expressed its utter disregard for “subhuman” Soviet soldiers by providing no provision whatsoever for millions of Soviet POWs captured during the early stages of the war. Instead, Soviet POWs were either killed immediately—as happened with Jewish POWs under Wehrmacht supervision—or deliberately starved to death. By 1942, out of 3.9 million Soviet POWs, a staggering 2.8 million had died. By the end of the war, out of 5.7 million Soviet POWs, approximately 3.3 million (or almost 58 percent of) Soviet POWs died in German captivity.¹²

As part of the effort to secure and exploit the occupied territories in the East, Wehrmacht units committed countless massacres against Soviet civilians, including women and children. These murderous practices occurred under the guise of “antipartisan” warfare and were part of the systematic economic exploitation of occupied territories. They were first implemented on the Eastern front but later also spilled over to the West.¹³ The result of these brutal policies was an extremely violent and lethal intervention in occupied societies in the East whose consequences still defy adequate historical understanding. In his massive study of German occupation policy in Belarus, historian Christian Gerlach estimates that among the 1.6–1.7 million murdered POWs and civilians (out of a population of nine million), a “little bit more than half . . . had been killed by Wehrmacht units.”¹⁴ The slow German retreat from the Eastern front with its corresponding scorched-earth policies as well as the Wehrmacht’s tenacious fighting up until the very end further drove up Soviet civilian and military casualties, which, according to recent estimates, amounted to a staggering 27 million dead.¹⁵

The war of racial annihilation on the Eastern front also provided the essential context for the Nazi project to murder all European Jews.¹⁶ The Wehrmacht was directly involved in the implementation and execution of the Holocaust. The army’s conquest of vast territories in the East not only provided the context and the opportunity for the murder of European Jews by mobile killing units; the army leadership also identified itself with “mass slaughter for ideological reason.”¹⁷ In addition, army units provided crucial logistical and organizational support for the killing squads from the SS or the police. Army units identified, ghettoized and rounded up Jews, and they supervised and secured killing actions. Finally, Wehr-

macht soldiers directly participated in the killing of Jews, often under the guise of antipartisan activity.¹⁸ The Wehrmacht's structural implication in genocidal warfare does not imply that every German soldier became a perpetrator, and the precise extent of ordinary soldiers' participation (as well as their motivations) remains an open and highly contested area of research.¹⁹ Still, the quest for nuance in studying a huge collective comprising up to nineteen million men should not distract us from the basic historical fact: the soldiers of the Wehrmacht were deeply implicated in a genocidal project that brought unspeakable suffering and irretrievable losses to millions of Europeans.

For most Wehrmacht soldiers, the war did not end with unconditional surrender but led into a period of captivity of varying length and hardship. The global spread of some eleven million German POWs from Egypt to Scandinavia and from the Rocky Mountains to Siberia reflected the extent of the failed imperialist aspirations of the Third Reich. A veritable boom of "POW studies" over the last decade or so has brought into focus the experience of captivity during and after World War II, including such aspects as the POW policies of captor nations, political reeducation efforts, living conditions, the inner functioning of the "camp society," and the impact of captivity on the attitudes of POWs.²⁰ The experience of German POWs depended largely on time and place of captivity. POWs in British and American captivity generally encountered—with only a few exceptions²¹—circumstances that compared favorably with the situation of German civilians in the early postwar period.²² By contrast, POWs in Eastern European, Soviet, and, to a lesser extent, French captivity, experienced a period of deprivation and forced labor that resulted in death rates ranging from 2.6 percent in French captivity to more than a third in Soviet captivity.²³ Official Soviet sources confirm the death of 356,687 German POWs in Soviet captivity, yet recent estimates place the additional death toll of unregistered German POWs—in transport to POW camps or in front camps—as high as 750,000.²⁴ Among the approximately three million German POWs, one-third did not survive Soviet captivity.

It is important to emphasize, however, that, in contrast to the German treatment of Soviet POWs, the mass death of German POWs in Soviet captivity was not the result of a deliberate Soviet policy of mass killing or even of passive negligence.²⁵ Many German soldiers were already utterly exhausted and sick when they fell into Soviet captivity. This was especially true for the approximately 110,000 POWs captured at Stalingrad, of whom only 5,000 survived.²⁶ In general, Soviet authorities were primarily interested in enlisting German POWs for the enormous task of postwar reconstruction, not in letting them die. The release of hundreds of thousands of sick and exhausted POWs in 1945–46 testifies to this priority. During the early postwar period, official food rations for German POWs

were only slightly below the ratios accorded to Soviet civilians. Deaths of German POWs in Soviet captivity appear to have been largely the result of bureaucratic inefficiencies and corruption, an extremely bad harvest in 1946, and inadequate medical resources.²⁷ Mortality rates in Soviet captivity, moreover, declined significantly after 1947.²⁸ During their period of internment, German POWs were integrated into the vast universe of forced labor in Soviet industry. They worked primarily in industry, coal mining, or in the rebuilding of the Soviet infrastructure.²⁹ However, compared to the massive destruction of the German occupiers, German POWs' actual contribution to the Soviet economy amounted to only to 4.8 percent of the national income.³⁰

Former soldiers and POWs were not the only group to experience the consequences of defeat. Total defeat brought back to ordinary Germans the violence that Germans had previously meted out all over the European continent. German civilian losses during the last two years of the war were considerable. They included approximately five hundred thousand civilian victims of the Allied air war as well as another five hundred thousand deaths among the approximately twelve million ethnic Germans who fled or were expelled from territories in Eastern Europe during the last months of the war and in the immediate postwar period.³¹ Tens of thousands of German civilians fell victim to violent transgressions of the advancing Red Army in the East, and German women were subjected to mass rape by Soviet soldiers.³² These were the collective experiences of suffering and defeat that shaped the German transition from war to the postwar period. They also constituted the social and emotional context for the postwar confrontation with fascism, war, and genocide.

The "many faces of defeat" notwithstanding, this book argues that returning POWs, especially from the Soviet Union, represented a particularly potent symbol for the consequences of war and defeat in postwar Germany.³³ Apart from historians' tendency to identify their own particular object of study as central to the period under investigation, certain aspects of returnees' collective experience substantiate this claim. First, returnees' active and passive experiences of violence exemplified, in a dramatic fashion, the experience of most ordinary Germans, which often included implication in and collaboration with the Nazi dictatorship as well as suffering from the consequences of total defeat. From today's perspective, the experience of returning POWs transcended the binary categories of perpetrator and victim. More so than other war-damaged groups, returnees exemplified the moral, social, and political challenges of confronting the legacies of defeat in postwar Germany. Moreover, returnees from the Soviet Union assumed a larger functional and symbolic significance for postwar reconstruction. These were "men in their best years" who represented a cross-section of the entire male segment of post-

war German society.³⁴ In addition, returnees' experiences of Soviet captivity became symbolically significant in the context of the Cold War, when both Germanys defined their postwar identities largely with respect to the Soviet Union: either as an "ever present Other" in the West or as a Socialist "big brother" in the East.³⁵

By focusing on returning POWs from the East, this book addresses the morally and methodologically difficult problem of German suffering in the aftermath of World War II. It cannot be emphasized strongly enough that the violence that Germans had to endure during the final stages of the war was a direct consequence of the unprecedented violence that Germans had previously inflicted all over the European continent. Any moral equation between German losses and German violence is misleading and necessarily obscures the relationship between cause and effect.³⁶ German violence was the cause and the precondition for violence against Germans, even if the German targets of violence were not always identical with those responsible for German violence.

This book does not condone recent interventions claiming that postwar Germans never sufficiently confronted German suffering. At least with respect to returning POWs and expellees, such criticism is based on a profound misreading of the postwar history of memory. As Robert Moeller's work has shown, the experience of returning POWs (and of expellees) formed the key reference points for a German discourse of victimization that revolved around German suffering.³⁷ Rather than contributing to this discourse of victimization (in either its 1950s or its contemporary version), this book seeks to historicize it. It highlights the commemorative function of narratives of victimization but also underlines, based on the example of returning POWs, the real experiences of suffering and hardship that informed these memories and made them plausible for ordinary Germans. In so doing, the book seeks to delineate—and historicize—the possibilities as well as the limitations of memory in a postwar society reemerging from total defeat.

If removed from the safe abstractions of statistics and figures, human suffering is always unique and cannot easily be classified into hierarchical categories. Collective experiences of suffering and loss leave indelible marks on individual lives and collective memories, and they reshape the moral and social fabric of societies that undergo them.³⁸ As a result, German suffering needs to be taken seriously as a formative force in shaping the postwar period and as an important social and emotional context for German confrontations with guilt and responsibility. From a moral and political point of view, a focus on German suffering and its consequences does not necessarily serve the purpose of relativization and apology, although it often has. Instead, such an analysis can reveal the extent to

which both East and West German postwar societies remained infused with the violence and destructiveness that had preceded them.³⁹

By focusing on the persistent legacies of war and defeat, this book calls into question widespread assumptions of a quick overcoming of the war's consequences as they still inform standard narratives of postwar Germany. Both postwar societies not only needed to muster considerable ideological work to manage German guilt and responsibility. They also needed to come to terms—and this aspect has not yet received the attention it deserves—with the consequences of defeat, that is, with a past that included fascism and genocide *as well as* a history of massive suffering, irretrievable loss, and mass death.⁴⁰ In both postwar societies, the return of the POWs prompted social and discursive strategies that sought to erase the consequences of German violence *and* of violence against Germans. This book is centrally concerned with tracing these social and discursive strategies of redemptive transformation. It discusses the costs and benefits of these efforts for returnees and for German society at large, and it highlights the difficulties and limitations of moving beyond defeat. In so doing, the book places the lingering aftereffects of war and defeat—as well as individual and collective efforts to overcome them—at the center of the analysis.⁴¹

A COMPARATIVE HISTORY OF POSTWAR GERMANY

This book's path of inquiry follows two conceptual axes: first, it focuses on the German "postwar"; and second, it investigates the aftereffects of the war comparatively for both East and West Germany. Even though the field of post-1945 German history initially constituted itself as postwar history, this label tended to assume a more temporal than conceptual meaning. Apart from some very important exceptions that have defined the contours of this study, the focus on the abiding legacies of war and defeat has not occupied a prominent place in the historiography of post-1945 Germany.⁴² In recent syntheses, the "postwar" is either virtually absent or appears as a temporary moment of a "German chaos" that then quickly became the "starting point for a better future."⁴³ Such conceptualizations bespeak a tangible pride in the achievements of the "old Federal Republic," its "remarkable stability" over fifty years.⁴⁴ They are also informed by the contrast to the experience of the Weimar Republic, which, as Richard Bessel has shown, never managed to make the transition from a postwar to a peacetime society and was characterized by an "inner denial of peace."⁴⁵ To be sure, there were important differences between the two German postwar periods that resulted, not the least, from different international contexts.⁴⁶ "Bonn," and for that matter, "East Berlin" did

not become “Weimar,” as the publicist Rene Alemann had declared, with a considerable sigh of relief, in 1957.⁴⁷ By contrast, Hans Peter Schwarz’s suggestion to write the history of the Federal Republic as the history of a “catastrophe that did not happen” restores more contingency to postwar history. Yet at the same time, this perspective tends to downplay the considerable material and ideological costs of postwar stability, and it also underestimates the significant fissures between public affirmation and acquiescence and a persistent private unease that was constitutive for both German postwar societies.⁴⁸

More recent approaches in post-1945 historiography have also tended to sideline the lingering consequences of war and defeat. Employing paradigms such as modernization, Westernization, or Americanization for the West, Sovietization or Stalinization for the East, historians have persuasively identified the 1950s as a period of decisive political, social, and cultural change.⁴⁹ While these approaches have significantly enhanced our understanding of the post-1945 period, they are less well suited to capture the lingering consequences of war and defeat. To be sure, the focus on the dynamic transformations in both postwar societies is not incompatible with a renewed attention to the war’s aftermath. Indeed, the peculiar juxtaposition of unprecedented violence and unprecedented prosperity may well constitute the decisive hallmark of twentieth-century Germany. In this perspective, the longing for normality, security, and prosperity that marked much of the 1950s resulted from collective experiences of violence, insecurity, and loss.⁵⁰ Still, this book shifts the emphasis from what both German postwar societies have become to what they emerged from. It seeks to portray the 1940s and 1950s not only as the fulcrum of a liberal-democratic and increasingly Americanized consumer society in the West and a Stalinist dictatorship in the East but as the posthistory of unprecedented experience of violence, suffering, and mass death.

Defining the nature and the contours of the German “postwar” is no easy undertaking.⁵¹ Given the collapse of most boundaries between front and home front, between soldiers and civilians during the Second World War, postwar societies needed to face more than just the classical tasks of reintegrating returning soldiers or even of converting a wartime to a peacetime economy. In light of the “extensity” (Roger Chickering) of warfare during the First and, even more so, the Second World War, postwar societies also needed to come to terms with the legacies of mass displacement, ethnic cleansing, and, most importantly, genocide.⁵² If the signature of the epoch of European civil war during the first half of the twentieth century was the “socialization of violence,” then postwar societies necessarily lived in the shadow of this large-scale mobilization of entire societies for the purpose of destruction.⁵³ The indeterminacy of the category “postwar” thus points to the all-pervasiveness of the war’s legacies in

postwar society.⁵⁴ The goal of a “postwar” history, then, is to identify the aftereffects of those experiences of violence—both active and passive—and to analyze coping strategies of both individuals and societies at large.

This book builds on the boom in memory studies over the last decade that has convincingly demonstrated the presence of the past in postwar Germany. As many studies have shown, Germans did not repress the past after 1945 but rather engaged in selective remembering and often very conscious effort to manage and mold the past.⁵⁵ In this perspective, the history of post-1945 Germany does not just appear as a history of a radical transformation but also as a “history burdened by the past” (*Belastungsgeschichte*).⁵⁶ Yet, as Klaus Naumann has argued, both German societies were not just *postfascist* societies that needed to confront the shared legacy of National Socialism and the Holocaust but also *postwar* societies that were centrally preoccupied with the legacies of total war and total defeat.⁵⁷ To be sure, given the Wehrmacht’s extensive implication in the National Socialist genocidal project, “postfascism” and “postwar” cannot be neatly separated and always remained closely intertwined. This book does not intend to complement a history of postfascism that focused on Germans as perpetrators with a postwar history that emphasizes German suffering. Instead, it seeks to delineate the tensions and constant renegotiation between these two defining characteristics of East and West German societies after 1945.

This analytic focus on the postwar nature of both German societies offers new conceptual possibilities for a comparative history of East and West Germany. Since the collapse of the GDR in 1989, historians have not only invested tremendous energies in writing the history of the East German dictatorship, they have also debated the ways in which that history can be incorporated into the larger narrative of twentieth-century German and European history.⁵⁸ While persuasive arguments have been marshaled for comparing East Germany to other Communist societies or for a diachronic comparison between the Nazi and the East German dictatorship, this book argues for the continuing validity of the East/West German comparison.⁵⁹ In so doing, however, this study does not merely seek to add an East German story to a more familiar West German one, nor does it intend to contrast a West German success story with an East German narrative of failure. Instead, the book focuses on common problems that both German societies needed to address as a result of a shared past, and it elucidates the dialectical interrelationship between East and West.⁶⁰ This “separation and interconnection” between both postwar societies, as Christoph Klessmann has called it, was always asymmetrical—the West was more important for the East than vice versa—even though this contrast was less pronounced in the late 1940s and 1950s than it became later on.⁶¹

By emphasizing the shared postwar nature of both German societies, my analysis reveals surprising functional and structural similarities between East and West German responses to returning POWs that were located below the rhetorical antagonisms of the Cold War. I argue that the Cold War by no means completely overshadowed the consequences of war and defeat but rather shaped the ways in which East and West Germans confronted them.⁶² This approach does not deny the considerable differences between liberal democracy in the West and dictatorship in the East. But it seeks to contribute to an ongoing critical investigation of the “old” Federal Republic that remains important for both political and historiographical reasons.⁶³ At the same time, the comparison between East and West also helps to bring into sharper focus the very real achievements of postwar West Germany.

Finally, this book places the German postwar within the larger context of a European postwar period. Arguably, Germany stands at the center of both postwar European history and historiography. German violence plunged the European continent into disaster, yet Germany was also central to Europe’s postwar recovery. Clearly, postwar East and West Germany faced unique challenges in the postwar period, with total defeat and responsibility for genocide being the most important ones. Yet East and West German confrontations with the legacies of the Second World War also followed more general European rhythms.⁶⁴ While this book does not attempt to write a comparative history of the European postwar period, it draws on an emerging cross-national European historiography that has begun to bring into focus the war’s aftermath as a central feature of European postwar societies.⁶⁵ It seeks to delineate the specificities of the German “postwar,” yet also points to commonalities with larger European developments. As such, this comparative history of postwar Germany hopes to contribute to a yet-to-be-written integrated European “history of the aftermath” that would encompass both halves of the divided continent.

MEMORY, MASCULINITY, AND CITIZENSHIP

This book is the product of a historiographical moment that seeks to transcend the divide between social and cultural history. No theoretically informed history, it seems to me, can afford to ignore some of the central insights of the “new cultural history,” especially regarding the definition of culture as a “symbolic, linguistic and representational system” that itself constitutes reality rather than simply reflecting it.⁶⁶ At the same time, the book seeks to follow methodological and theoretical suggestions that, for some time now, have advocated new efforts to reconcile the focus on

narrative, representations, and discourses with a renewed attention to subjectivity, agency, and experience.⁶⁷ I do not seek to propose a general theoretical resolution as to how these categories are related to each other at all times and at all places. The point is that they are, indeed, interrelated—“experiences” take shape within available discursive frameworks even though they are not completely determined by those frameworks.⁶⁸ The precise nature of this interrelationship, however, needs to be analyzed in specific historical settings and depends, not the least, on specific political contexts.

The argument proceeds on three distinct yet interrelated analytical levels. First, it investigates cultural representations of returning POWs as part of larger discourses—that is, culturally established and meaningful narratives—about war and defeat in postwar Germany. Second, it analyzes social and political strategies toward returnees and shows how they constituted a central aspect of sociopolitical reconstruction in East and West. Third, I demonstrate how returnees formed their own male subjectivities within the social and discursive contexts they encountered. The book is not designed primarily as a social history of integration. By definition, the concept of “integration” is too closely associated with the notion of overcoming the war’s consequences that this book seeks to problematize.⁶⁹ Instead, the book combines the political history of postwar reconstruction with the social history of returnees and the cultural history of war memories and gender identities.

I deploy three conceptual terms to connect these different levels of analysis for both the East and West German case: memory, masculinity, and citizenship.⁷⁰ First, the project is inspired by the concern with memory as a central aspect of the “new cultural history.”⁷¹ Unlike many studies of memory that remain primarily on the level of representations, this book seeks to reconnect public representations of the past to social and political strategies as well as to the (re)constitution of subjectivities. My analysis follows a recent suggestion by Alon Confino and Peter Fritzsche “to destabilize the boundaries between memory as representation and memory as social action.”⁷² I demonstrate that public memories of returnees’ experience were, at every turn, interrelated to social and political strategies of incorporating them into new communities of belonging. As such, public memories did indeed constitute, to quote Fritzsche and Confino again, “efforts to manage the social order.”⁷³

While the link between memory as representation and memory as social action constitutes one methodological premise of this study, another one concerns the relationship between public and private memories. Like many other historians, I have been centrally influenced by Maurice Halbwachs’s concept of “collective memory,” which defined memory as a social act that was shaped by available social frameworks.⁷⁴ Yet I also agree

with the criticism that Halbwachs's model leaves too little room for the variances of individual memory.⁷⁵ Public and private memory are not necessarily identical, nor can their relationship simply be characterized as one of "production" and "reception," even though this is often necessary for narrative purposes. Instead, the transformation of individual memory into collective remembrance needs to be understood as a process of contestation, appropriation, and mutual influences that often also results in incongruities between public and private memory. This was certainly the case in East Germany, where the institutions of civil society did not mediate between the individual and the state, and public memories were largely imposed "from above" by Communist elites. Still, the assumption of a complete divergence between public and private memories in the East underestimates processes of appropriation and accommodation in the East German dictatorship, just as the thesis of a complete convergence between public and private memories in the West overestimates, in my view, the extent of consensus in postwar West Germany. By investigating the degree to which official East and West German memories succeeded in allowing former soldiers and POWs to connect their past and their present, the book explores the interrelationship of public and private memory in the different political contexts of democracy and dictatorship.

Second, this book draws on the central insight that the use of "gender as a category of analysis"—in Joan Scott's now famous phrase—also needs to incorporate the study of men and masculinities. The significance of the emerging history of men and masculinities for this study is twofold.⁷⁶ First, this book studies men *as men*, that is, as gendered subjects whose experience and behavior were crucially shaped by culturally and historically specific conceptions of masculinity. Total defeat called into question not only the racialized masculinities of the Nazi period but also the more general link between masculinity and militarism that had formed the basis of male citizenship since the early nineteenth century.⁷⁷ To be sure, historians of masculinity have warned against overusing and diluting the topos of a "crisis of masculinity"—the persistence of patriarchal relations of power, after all, hardly squares with a masculinity supposedly in permanent crisis.⁷⁸ But in both postwar societies, the return of exhausted, weak, and often traumatized POWs triggered widespread (and divergent) diagnoses of a masculinity in crisis as well as parallel processes of social and symbolic "remasculinization."⁷⁹ My analysis demonstrates that responses to returning POWs were primary sites for the formation of new "hegemonic masculinities" in East and West.⁸⁰ I also show that returnees were often not able (or willing) to live up to normative conceptions of masculinity. Persistent discrepancies between norm and reality thus posed distinctive challenges to male subjectivities in the postwar period. At the same time, parallel processes of social and symbolic "remas-

culinization” also yielded “patriarchal dividends” for returnees as well as for men in general.⁸¹

Besides investigating men as gendered subjects, the book also utilizes masculinity for analyzing East and West German confrontations with war and defeat as inherently gendered processes. Along with other recent studies, this study emphasizes gender and sexuality as primary sites for the experience and memory of war, genocide, and defeat.⁸² Concerns over masculinity and male authority drove East and West German efforts to move out of the shadow of defeat. The renegotiation of masculinities structured the formation of postwar memories and shaped sociopolitical reconstruction. In particular, the rehabilitation of a male narrative of war and defeat legitimized the reassertion of male authority over women in both postwar societies. By demonstrating how reformulated and rehabilitated masculinities promoted the recreation of men’s (social and symbolic) authority over women, this study seeks to alleviate concerns that histories of masculinity might replicate the marginalization of women.⁸³ Even though my primary concern here is with men and masculinity, this study hopes to contribute to an integrated and truly relational gender history of the postwar period.

Citizenship constitutes the third conceptual term that I employ to connect the multiple layers of my analysis. Postwar confrontations with the legacies of war and defeat were inextricably intertwined with parallel strategies of making East and West German citizens on opposite sides of the Cold War. My usage of the term *citizen* differs from T. H. Marshall’s classic definition, which understands citizenship as a progression from civil to political to social rights.⁸⁴ Given the absence of important citizenship rights in East Germany, a merely rights-based, legal concept of citizenship is not conducive to the comparative framework of this book. However, the massive theoretical literature on citizenship has moved the concept away from the liberal-democratic context in which it originally emerged. Citizenship is now also construed as a concept of belonging and as a marker of subjectivity that is located at the intersection between state and society.⁸⁵

This book draws on these expanded meanings of citizenship by demonstrating how the transformation of returnees into citizens entailed their incorporation into new postwar communities of belonging.⁸⁶ In the aftermath of war, genocide, and total defeat, when the relationship between the state and the individual had been severely strained if not completely ruptured, public memories of war and defeat were central for reforging those symbolic bonds between postwar polities and male subjectivities. Memory assumed a crucial significance in this process. In particular, membership in both postwar communities of belonging crucially depended on the “decontamination” of returnees from active and passive experiences

of violence; and my analysis focuses on the narrative strategies that both societies deployed in order to achieve this goal.⁸⁷

While East and West German responses to the return of the POWs were central to defining ideal male “posttotalitarian” or “antifascist” citizen, former soldiers and POWs actively participated in this process of renegotiating postwar citizenship. They did so more in the West, where returnees shaped public narratives of war and defeat through their self-organization in interest groups, than in the East, where returnees’ agency manifested itself in a defensive posture towards the increasingly expansive claims of the totalitarian state. Still, in both societies, national belonging provided returnees with rhetorical and political tools that they employed in making claims to the state for material and ideological compensation. Finally, my analysis demonstrates the limitations of returnees’ full integration into postwar communities of belonging. In both societies, the persistent consequences of defeat engendered more “passive” forms of citizenship that reflected these persistent gaps between normative discursive constructs and lived experience. These incongruencies between public discourse and private sensibilities constituted one of the hallmarks of the condition of the “postwar” in both societies.⁸⁸

THE SCOPE OF THE BOOK

The book analyzes East and West German efforts to make “citizens” out of “returnees” as a comparative and transsocietal process. The temporal frame reaches from the defeat at Stalingrad in 1942–43 into the late 1950s. The study traces the origins of the postwar period back into the last years of the war, when ordinary Germans first began to face the massive consequences of defeat, and it ends with the return of the last POWs in 1955–56. Historians of the *longue durée* might object that this temporal focus privileges short and midrange upheavals at the expense of more salient, long-term structural change. But, as Konrad Jarausch and Michael Geyer have written, “focusing on the long run average does not account for the intense fluctuations that mattered at a given time—the extraordinary upheavals that ripped apart a nation, and all the exertions required to allow a people to pull itself back together.” This book thus addresses precisely the “intense labors of undoing and belonging,” which, as Jarausch and Geyer write, “ultimately made history.”⁸⁹

This book adopts a mixture of chronological and thematic organization. Part 1 discusses the German transition from war to postwar. Focusing on the increasing number of MIAs and POWs after 1943, chapter 1 analyzes official and popular responses to increasing losses, and it reveals the emergence of a privatized perspective on the future that anticipated

postwar confrontations with war and defeat. Chapter 2 demonstrates how the return of the POWs gave rise to different versions of German victimization that gradually displaced an indigenous German discourse on guilt and responsibility. Based on an analysis of returnees' own encounter with a devastated homeland, the chapter also argues that narratives of victimization constituted a problematic basis for the reconstitution of male subjectivities and for postwar reconstruction at large. Chapter 3 elaborates on these tensions between victimization and postwar reconstruction by focusing on medical and psychiatric responses to the trauma of the returned POW. Returnees' pathologies represented a central site of the war's aftereffects in both postwar societies, and the ways in which East and West Germans diagnosed and treated these symptoms reveal much about their specific confrontations with the often traumatic legacies of total war and total defeat.

Part 2 analyzes how East and West Germans sought to overcome total defeat by transforming returning POWs into functioning male citizens on opposite sides of the Cold War. Chapters 4 and 5 analyze the emergence of redemptive memories in East and West respectively, which then translated into social and political strategies of "making citizens." I argue that redemptive memories in both societies did not fully succeed in incorporating returnees into new communities of belonging, thus pushing their adjustment to postwar society into the less public spheres of the workplace and the family. Chapter 6 highlights the exclusionary aspects of East and West German efforts at making citizens by focusing on returnees who were denied access to redemptive memories. The chapter compares the West German trials of former POWs who had assumed official functions in camp administration or had participated in antifascist activity in Soviet captivity, with the East German purges of returnees from Western captivity.

Part 3 shows how East and West German confrontations with the consequences of defeat increasingly diverged in the first half of the 1950s. Chapter 7 contrasts East German efforts to declare an end to *all* confrontations with the war's consequences after the end of POWs mass repatriations in May 1950 with the intense public and private concern with missing POWs that moved the war's consequence to the center of West German public life. In both societies, however, the issue of missing POWs prompted significant social and political tensions between political authorities and family members of missing POWs and MIAs. As chapter 8 shows, these tensions were only resolved with the return of the last POWs in 1953–54 and 1955–56. The return of these last POWs represented a preliminary end-point of East and West German confrontations with war and defeat. It brought into focus distinct strategies of coming to terms with defeat in East and West, and it offered a window into the self-percep-

tion of both societies a full decade after the end of the Second World War and at the height of the Cold War.

Finally, a word on terminology is in order. Throughout this study, I use the term *returnee* (*Heimkehrer*) to refer to former Wehrmacht soldiers returning from captivity to East and West Germany. This is not an innocent term. In German, its etymology is linked to the concept of *Heimat* (homeland) and thus tends to emphasize former soldiers' status as civilians, thereby distracting from their military service in the war of annihilation. "Returnee," moreover, also constituted a rather opaque category. Besides former Wehrmacht soldiers, its contemporary usage also included civilian internees who had never served in the military as well as, in its feminine form (*Heimkehrerinnen*), Red Cross nurses and female auxiliary forces of the Wehrmacht.⁹⁰ At various points in this study, I therefore make clear which groups were subsumed under the category of "returnee," and I discuss the implications of such categorizations. With these caveats, it seems justified to employ the term *returnee* here. It is the term used by contemporaries in East and West to refer to my object of study, and it was this identification as a distinct group with a shared collective experience that then defined "returnees" as a significant social and political problem in both postwar societies.