

“Greetings from the Apocalypse”: Race, Migration, and Fear after German Reunification

Christopher A. Molnar 

ABSTRACT. In the early 1990s, reunified Germany faced surging numbers of asylum seekers and a wave of far-right violence against foreigners. In letters that German citizens wrote to President Richard von Weizsäcker, it is clear that some Germans feared that the arrival of large numbers of non-Germans would bring about the collapse of the state or the destruction of the German people. This article engages with the history of fear in postwar Germany by examining Germans’ post-reunification fears of migration and foreigners. I argue, first, that a biological understanding of race was still surprisingly widespread as late as the early 1990s. Second, I call for a substantially more nuanced understanding of German reunification, one that emphasizes uncertainty and the terrifying openness of the future. Finally, I highlight the intersection of race thinking and memory by showing that racial fears were frequently shaped by memories of Germany’s dark past.

EARLY in the morning of May 29, 1993, four right-wing youths firebombed an apartment building in their hometown of Solingen, a city in North Rhine-Westphalia. The attack killed two women and three children, all of whom were of Turkish origin.¹ This was the deadliest attack in the wave of violence against foreigners that had engulfed the country after German reunification in late 1990, and it received widespread media coverage in Germany and abroad.² The Christian Democratic (CDU) chancellor Helmut Kohl did not attend the funeral in Cologne, having earlier stated that he would not take part in “condolence tourism.”³ But President Richard von Weizsäcker, also a member of the CDU, attended the funeral in Cologne’s central mosque and gave a funeral oration in which he denounced far-right violence and more subtle forms of everyday discrimination against Turks, called for Germans to be more tolerant and inclusive, and, most controversially, seemed to endorse dual citizenship for foreign residents, an idea that entered the political mainstream after the Solingen attack.⁴

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¹Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung, “25 Jahre Brandanschlag in Solingen,” May 24, 2018 (<https://www.bpb.de/politik/hintergrund-aktuell/161980/brandanschlag-in-solingen>).

²For a summary and early analysis of this violence, see Panikos Panayi, “Racial Violence in the New Germany 1990–93,” *Contemporary European History* 3, no. 3 (1994): 265–87. For a more recent and detailed analysis, see Norbert Frei, Franka Maubach, Christina Morina, and Maik Tändler, *Zur Rechten Zeit. Wider die Rückkehr des Nationalismus* (Berlin: Ullstein, 2019), 161–81.

³Klaus Jeziorkowski, “Feine Gesellschaft. Kohldeutsch: Unwürdiges nach des Kanzlers Unwort,” *Die Zeit*, March 11, 1994.

⁴Richard von Weizsäcker, *Reden und Interviews*, vol. 9 (Bonn: Presse- und Informationsamt der Bundesregierung, 1993), 290–95. On the connection between the Solingen attack and the demand for citizenship for foreign residents, see the “Solinger Appell,” 1993, Stadtarchiv Solingen, NA56-8

The day after the funeral, Norbert Lange, a private citizen from Cologne, wrote a letter to Weizsäcker in which he shared a very different vision of Germany's future. "In Germany," he wrote, "it is quite simply a matter of making our country free of foreigners again." He continued by noting that "since the foreigners no longer voluntarily return to their home country, they have to be forced to do so through violence." After pointing to the brutal ethnic cleansing that was taking place in Yugoslavia, he contended that "what is currently going on in Yugoslavia is repeating itself in Germany." He maintained that peaceful coexistence "in a multicultural society of different races and peoples is the beautiful illusion of a few naive humanitarians." In reality, "living together cannot work in daily practice due to the diversity of religions, cultures and controversial worldviews. The clashes in America, Africa, India and Eastern Europe are the best examples for this thesis." He believed that the violent conflicts between Germans and foreigners would "ultimately degenerate into a civil war that could no longer be controlled," and in order to avoid that fate all Germans would have to work together to push out the foreigners. His vision grew darker yet. If foreigners were not forced out, he feared "that so many sympathy demonstrations, candlelight vigils, solidarity concerts or similar events will not be able to prevent the clear signals of Hoyerswerda, Rostock-Lichtenhagen, Mölln and Solingen from being repeated," each of which were major sites of far-right violence against foreigners after German reunification. In the end, he believed that if no action was taken, "Germany will explode, the dramatic development will end in murder, homicide, lawlessness and chaos. It is too late for prayers." Lange thus raised the specter of an uncontrollable racial civil war on German soil and of a total social and political collapse, leading to mass murder, anarchy, and chaos. This was truly an end-times vision, as he made clear with the penultimate line of his letter: "Greetings from the apocalypse."⁵

Who was Lange? Unfortunately, we know nothing about him besides his name and that he lived in Cologne. His letter provides no internal clues as to what generation he belonged to, his occupation, or what political party he supported, although it is probably safe to assume he was on the political right. Given this lack of information, a historian might be tempted to dismiss the letter as a fascinating and disturbing, if only marginally useful source. But more than a thousand German citizens wrote to President Weizsäcker about migration, refugees, and antiforeigner violence between German reunification in 1990 and the end of his presidency in 1994.⁶ And while Lange's letter stands out as being particularly extreme, especially his open support for violence against foreigners, similar ideas crop up frequently in the letters ordinary white Germans wrote to Weizsäcker.⁷ A substantial number of letter writers, it turns

Brandanschlag. See also Jacob S. Eder and Daniel Stahl, "In Deutschland herrscht Apartheid.' Solingen, Mölln und der Kampf um politische Partizipation," in *Demokratisierung der Deutschen. Errungenschaften und Anfechtungen eines Projekts*, ed. Tim Schanetzky et al. (Göttingen: Wallstein Verlag, 2020), 318–32; and Ulrich Herbert, *Geschichte der Ausländerpolitik in Deutschland. Saisonarbeiter, Zwangsarbeiter, Gastarbeiter, Flüchtlinge* (Munich: C. H. Beck, 2001), 329–33.

⁵Norbert Lange to the Bundespräsidialamt; Vorfälle in Solingen, June 4, 1993, Bundesarchiv Koblenz (hereafter BAK) B122/47247. In accordance with German archival regulations, I have provided pseudonyms for all letter writers. With the final line of his letter, Lange suggested Turks and Roma should be the first groups to be deported.

⁶Only an exceedingly small portion of the letters in this collection were written before 1989.

⁷Minorities and foreigners also wrote a substantial number of letters to Weizsäcker, but they generally expressed fear at the violence directed against non-Germans. See, for example, Mehmet Özdemir to President Weizsäcker, November 25, 1992, BAK B122/47242.

out, feared that the arrival of large numbers of non-Germans—described variously as distinct races or unassimilable ethnic or religious groups—would bring about the collapse of the state or the destruction of the German people. These apocalyptic visions of racial or national destruction, moreover, were not confined to the imagination of young unemployed men or to the geographic space of the former East Germany, the group and region, respectively, generally held most responsible for the resurgence of racism and antiforeigner sentiment in Germany since reunification.⁸ The letters to Weizsäcker came overwhelmingly from the former West Germany, and the limited biographical information contained in the letters shows that they came from young and old people, men and women, and from all walks of life, including doctors, nurses, and engineers. This is not to suggest that West Germans were more racist or hostile to foreigners than East Germans, only that they must fully share the blame for the rise in antiforeigner sentiment in the years after reunification.

Based primarily on an examination of letters that Germans wrote to President Weizsäcker, this is the first study to use archival sources to explore the history of race and migration in reunified Germany. The letters at the heart of this study allow an examination of the unfiltered voices of ordinary German citizens rather than that of politicians, officials, intellectuals, or journalists; this vitally important perspective is mostly absent in histories of migration in postwar Germany. Although the collection of letters has many benefits as a source base, it is nonetheless not entirely clear just how representative the letters are of broader German attitudes toward migrants, asylum seekers, and antiforeigner violence. Surveys from the era do not ask about fears of state collapse or racial or national destruction. Some do, however, point to widespread anxiety and fear about the arrival of migrants and asylum seekers. In May 1993, 66 percent of respondents in one survey agreed that “the problems that the influx of asylum seekers has caused in the Federal Republic” were “no longer bearable,” while in October 1993, 64 percent of respondents agreed that “one must take seriously citizens’ fears of over-foreignization (*Überfremdungsängste*).”⁹ The majority of Germans thus believed that asylum seekers had caused unendurable problems and that the fear of being swamped by foreigners was not a fringe or marginal position that could simply be ignored. Those who wrote to Weizsäcker claiming that the influx of foreigners could bring about the destruction of the German state or people may have expressed their ideas in a particularly extreme manner, but it is clear that they were taking part in a heated national conversation in which even fears of “over-foreignization” were to be taken seriously. Although only a small minority of all the letters written to Weizsäcker on the topic of migration, apocalyptic letters appear frequently enough that it seems reasonable to see them as evidence for the existence of a subterranean social discourse, a set of ideas that could not be spoken publicly without being considered a neo-Nazi.

It is difficult to determine why people in the former East German lands wrote remarkably few letters to Weizsäcker. Millions of East Germans had become politically active in the peace protests that helped usher in the collapse of the German Democratic Republic, and even before that, East Germans had frequently written letters of protest, often at great personal

⁸Rita Chin and Heide Fehrenbach, “Introduction: What’s Race Got to Do with It? Postwar German History in Context,” in *After the Nazi Racial State: Difference and Democracy in Germany and Europe*, ed. Rita Chin, Heide Fehrenbach, Geoff Eley, and Atina Grossmann (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2009), 2–3, 24.

⁹Renate Köcher and Elisabeth Noelle-Neumann, eds., *Allensbacher Jahrbuch der Demoskopie, 1993–1997*, vol. 10 (Munich: K. G. Saur, 1997), 635.

risk, to East German officials and statesmen.¹⁰ Why, then, did so few write to Weizsäcker? Perhaps Germans in the East did not yet see him as their president in the same way that people in the West did, but this is just a supposition. Although it would be desirable to have more East German voices in this source base, the small number of letters from the East nonetheless reflect many of the fears and preoccupations of those in the West.

Race, Migration, and Fear

Fear, according to the historian Joanna Bourke, “is the most pervasive emotion of modern society.”¹¹ As the history of emotions has grown as a field of inquiry in recent decades, historians have increasingly explored the history of fear in postwar West Germany.¹² This scholarship has shown that beneath the veneer of a restrained, rational, and orderly postwar state and society, West Germans were plagued with anxiety and fear. For decades, Germans feared the revival of Nazism and the creation of a Fourth Reich.¹³ They also feared nuclear war, the deployment of nuclear weapons on West German soil, radioactive fallout, and military rearmament.¹⁴ In her examination of the West German reception of a messianic healer who was active in the country until his death in 1959, Monica Black has uncovered a surprisingly widespread strain of end-times thinking, which she calls an “apocalyptic sensibility.”¹⁵ Finally, in his masterful book, *Republik der Angst*, Frank Biess describes a litany of fears that gripped the West German imagination throughout its long postwar history. These ranged from the fear of violent reprisals during the postwar military occupation to fears of moral destruction, the outbreak of war, the collapse of West German democracy, technological modernization, and environmental destruction. The prevalence of fear leads Biess to question the conventional narrative of success that has structured the historiography on West Germany: “How successful, in reality, was the history of the old West Germany if millions of people experienced apocalyptic fears and also expressed them in mass demonstrations?”¹⁶

¹⁰Siegfried Suckut, ed., *Volkes Stimmen. “Ehrlich, aber deutlich.” Privatbriefe an die DDR-Regierung* (Munich: dtv, 2016). By some indicators, it seems that those living in the former East Germany were actually more politically active than those living in the West during this era. See Renate Köcher and Elisabeth Noelle-Neumann, eds., *Allensbacher Jahrbuch der Demoskopie, 1984–1992*, vol. 9 (Munich: K. G. Saur, 1993), 624–25.

¹¹Joanna Bourke, *Fear: A Cultural History* (Emeryville, CA: Shoemaker and Hoard, 2006), ix.

¹²For a survey of the history of emotions, see Jan Plamper, *The History of Emotions: An Introduction*, trans. Keith Tribe (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015).

¹³Gavriel D. Rosenfeld, *The Fourth Reich: The Specter of Nazism from World War II to the Present* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019).

¹⁴Frank Biess, “‘Everybody Has a Chance’: Nuclear Angst, Civil Defence, and the History of Emotions in Postwar West Germany,” *German History* 27, no. 2 (2009): 215–43; Caitlin E. Murdock, “Public Health in a Radioactive Age: Environmental Pollution, Popular Therapies, and Narratives of Danger in the Federal Republic of Germany, 1949–1970,” *Central European History* 52, no. 1 (2019): 45–64; and Michael Geyer, “Cold War Angst: The Case of West-German Opposition to Rearmament and Nuclear Weapons,” in *The Miracle Years: A Cultural History of West Germany, 1949–1968*, ed. Hanna Schissler (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), 376–408.

¹⁵Monica Black, “A Messiah after Hitler, and His Miracles: Bruno Gröning and Postwar Popular Apocalypticism,” in *Revisiting the “Nazi Occult”: Histories, Realities, Legacies*, ed. Monica Black and Eric Kurlander (Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2015), 212. See also Monica Black, “Miracles in the Shadow of the Economic Miracle: The ‘Supernatural ’50s’ in West Germany,” *Journal of Modern History* 84, no. 4 (2012): 833–60.

¹⁶Frank Biess, *Republik der Angst. Ein andere Geschichte der Bundesrepublik* (Reinbek bei Hamburg: Rowohlt, 2019), 7.

Much of this new scholarship emphasizes the positive valences of fear in postwar West Germany. Biess and Gavriel D. Rosenfeld, in particular, argue that fears of democratic collapse often mobilized Germans to defend and thus stabilize their democracy.¹⁷ Although both make convincing arguments, fear has more generally been viewed as having a corrosive impact on democratic life. Already in the late seventeenth century, Baruch Spinoza, one of modern Europe's earliest and most important theorists of democracy, insisted that fear was a hallmark of unfree and undemocratic states. According to Spinoza, "A free multitude is guided by hope more than by fear, whereas a multitude which has been subjugated is guided more by fear than by hope. The first want to cultivate life; the second care only to avoid death. The first are eager to live for themselves; the second are forced to belong to the victor. So we say that the second are slaves, and the first free."¹⁸ More broadly, Spinoza believed that fear led to envy, hatred between individuals, and disdain for a state's laws and institutions, all of which threatened democracy.¹⁹ Much more recently, Zygmunt Bauman claims that in the West, states have increasingly focused on stoking fear and promising safety, leading to expanding security states and the never-ending "war on terror," both of which have eroded civil rights. He concludes that "fear is arguably the most sinister of the demons nesting in the open societies of our times."²⁰

This article contributes to the new history of fear in West Germany, but unlike most of the recent work on this subject, it emphasizes the destructive, violent, and antidemocratic impact of fear. Unlike the fears examined in recent works, Germans' post-reunification fears identified foreigners on German soil as the agents of destruction.²¹ Without wanting to propose a simplistic racist continuity spanning Germany's twentieth century, the apocalyptic fear of foreigners after reunification fits into a longer tradition of fears of racial destruction. During the Kaiserreich, Germans feared the impact of "race mixing" in its imperial territories on German national identity and German racial purity, but after World War I, these fears arrived with force in the metropole.²² Tina Campt has shown that Germans responded to France's use of Black colonial troops in the occupation of the Rhineland after World War I—which Germans called the "Black Shame on the Rhine"—by portraying themselves as victims of a racial conspiracy meant to pollute and destroy the German race.²³ Nazi

¹⁷Biess, *Republik der Angst*, and Rosenfeld, *Fourth Reich*.

¹⁸Benedictus de Spinoza, *Political Treatise*, in Benedictus de Spinoza, *The Collected Works of Spinoza*, vol. 2, ed. and trans. Edwin Curley (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2016), 530.

¹⁹See Susan James, "Democracy and the Good Life in Spinoza's Philosophy," in *Interpreting Spinoza: Critical Essays*, ed. Charlie Huenemann (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 131–32; and Justin Steinberg, *Spinoza's Political Psychology: The Taming of Fortune and Fear* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 80–83, 86–89.

²⁰Zygmunt Bauman, *Liquid Times: Living in an Age of Uncertainty* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2007), 5–26, quote from 26.

²¹Biess does discuss German fear of foreigners, particularly at the end of World War II and since reunification, but that is not the focus of the book *Republik der Angst*.

²²Pascal Grosse, *Kolonialismus, Eugenik und bürgerliche Gesellschaft in Deutschland, 1850–1918* (Frankfurt: Campus Verlag, 2000); and Lora Wildenthal, *German Women for Empire: 1884–1945* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2001).

²³Tina M. Campt, *Other Germans: Black Germans and the Politics of Race, Gender, and Memory in the Third Reich* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2003), 31–62. See also Julia Roos, "Women's Rights, Nationalist Anxiety, and the 'Moral' Agenda in the Early Weimar Republic: Revisiting the 'Black Horror' Campaign against France's African Occupation Troops," *Central European History* 42, no. 3 (2009): 473–508.

antisemitism likewise described Jews as a racial threat, one that had to be annihilated before it could destroy the German race and nation.²⁴ After World War II, in much more muted tones, one still heard whispers that the German people were being destroyed by Jewish Displaced Persons and African American occupation troops.²⁵

This article makes three historiographical interventions. First, it builds upon a growing body of work that highlights the persistence of racism in Germany after 1945. Whereas most of this scholarship has emphasized the emergence of a new cultural racism after 1945, I show that, at the popular level, a biological understanding of race was more prevalent than is generally assumed as late as the early 1990s. Second, by highlighting fears of state collapse and racial destruction, I argue for a substantially more nuanced understanding of German reunification. Often interpreted teleologically as the end point of a long and successful process of Westernization or modernization after the horrors of the Third Reich, as the crowning accomplishment of postwar “recivilization,” the letters to Weizsäcker show that Germans experienced reunification as a deeply unsettling time.²⁶ Far from representing “the end of history,” many Germans experienced the collapse of communism and the first years of the Berlin Republic as the beginning of a new and uncertain era in which nightmare visions just might come to pass.²⁷ Third, I highlight the intersection of race thinking and memory by showing that racial fears of destruction were frequently shaped by memories of Germany’s dark past, from the collapse of the Weimar Republic to the memory and experience of war and genocide.²⁸ More broadly, I seek to integrate the history of migration—and the German response to foreigners and minorities—into the history of German reunification and postwar Germany more generally.²⁹

Asylum Seekers and Antiforeigner Violence after Reunification

The explosion of violence against foreigners and increasing levels of antiforeigner sentiment in the early 1990s did not come from out of the blue. In the late 1970s and the 1980s, West German attitudes toward foreigners and asylum seekers hardened, both at the governmental and popular levels.³⁰ Soon after taking office in 1982, and in the midst of rising popular

²⁴Doris L. Bergen, “Antisemitism in the Nazi Era,” in *Antisemitism: A History*, ed. Albert S. Lindemann and Richard S. Levy (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 198–200. The Nazis also portrayed Jews as a powerful international enemy that controlled the American, British, and Soviet governments and sought to destroy the German people. See Jeffrey Herf, *The Jewish Enemy: Nazi Propaganda during World War II and the Holocaust* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2006).

²⁵Maria H. Höhn, *GIs and Fräuleins: The German-American Encounter in 1950s West Germany* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002), 26, 114, 198–222.

²⁶Frank Biess and Astrid M. Eckert, “Introduction: Why Do We Need New Narratives for the History of the Federal Republic?” *Central European History* 52, no. 1 (2019): 4, 17–18. For an insightful critique of the dominant narratives of German reunification, see Jennifer L. Allen, “Against the 1989–1990 Ending Myth,” *Central European History* 52, no. 1 (2019): 125–47, see esp. 140–41. On reunification as part of the process of Germany’s postwar “recivilization,” see Konrad H. Jarausch, *After Hitler: Recivilizing Germans, 1945–1995*, trans. Brandon Hunziker (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 238.

²⁷Francis Fukuyama, “The End of History?” *The National Interest* 16 (Summer 1989): 3–18.

²⁸On the intersection of race and memory, see Michael Meng, “Silences about Sarrazin’s Racism in Contemporary Germany,” *Journal of Modern History* 87, no. 1 (2015): 102–35; and Chin and Fehrenbach, “Introduction,” 23.

²⁹On this point, see Sarah Thomsen Vierra, “Central, Not Subsidiary: Migration as a Master Narrative in Modern German History,” in *Modern Germany in Transatlantic Perspective*, ed. Michael Meng and Adam R. Seipp (New York: Berghahn Books, 2017), 200–16.

³⁰For a brief overview, see Rita Chin, *The Guest Worker Question in Postwar Germany* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 144–57.

hostility toward Turkish labor migrants and their families, Chancellor Helmut Kohl and his government developed a plan that sought to dramatically reduce the number of Turks in Germany by paying them and their families to leave Germany forever. The plan, overwhelmingly supported by the German people, was put into law in 1983.³¹ Kohl wanted to make clear very early on that the Federal Republic was not a country of immigration. At the same time, successive West German governments, first under Chancellor Helmut Schmidt and then under Kohl, sought to limit the number of asylum seekers, who were now stigmatized as “economic refugees” (*Wirtschaftsflüchtlinge*). They did this by making it more difficult for asylum seekers to reach West Germany and by placing substantial restrictions on asylum seekers—including barring them from working—in order to make applying for asylum less desirable.³² The 1980s also witnessed increasing far-right violence against foreigners and minorities, including arson attacks that killed two Vietnamese refugees in Hamburg in 1980 and three members of a Turkish family and a German roommate in Schwandorf in 1988.³³ Fear of and hostility toward foreigners and minorities was not limited to a radical fringe. Indeed, in a 1982 survey, 43 percent of West Germans indicated that they felt “threatened by the high proportion of foreigners in their place of residence.”³⁴

Antiforeigner sentiment increased significantly during the 1980s, a reality that shaped policy and social and political discourse on asylum and migration in the early 1990s. Nonetheless, the period from 1990 to 1993 represents a critical and distinctive moment in the history of migration in Germany’s long postwar history. Those years witnessed the arrival of by far the largest number of asylum seekers and the highest level of antiforeigner violence—measured by attacks and deaths—in Germany’s postwar history up to that point, as well as the passage of a controversial constitutional amendment to restrict the right to asylum, an act that was of such consequence that the historian Patrice G. Poutrus calls it “another founding act of the Berlin Republic.”³⁵

During the Cold War, communist East Germany had accepted only small numbers of refugees, while the Federal Republic emerged as one of Europe’s major receiving countries for asylum seekers.³⁶ The collapse of communism in eastern Europe and the violent dissolution of Yugoslavia, however, led to an unprecedented numbers of foreign asylum seekers arriving in Germany in the early 1990s.³⁷ Indeed, in the year 1992 alone, 438,191 people sought

³¹Michelle Lynn Kahn, “Between *Ausländer* and *Almanci*: The Transnational History of Turkish-German Migration,” in *Bulletin of the German Historical Institute*, ed. Richard F. Wetzell (Washington, DC: German Historical Institute, 2020), 65–66; in a poll from March 1983, 80 percent of respondents stated that guest workers should return to their country of origin (Herbert, *Geschichte der Ausländerpolitik*, 241).

³²Patrice G. Poutrus, *Umkämpftes Asyl. Vom Nachkriegsdeutschland bis in die Gegenwart* (Berlin: Ch. Links Verlag, 2019), 83–92, 95–100, and Lauren Stokes, “The Permanent Refugee Crisis in the Federal Republic of Germany, 1949–,” *Central European History* 52, no. 1 (2019): 35–41.

³³Poutrus, *Umkämpftes Asyl*, 89, 99.

³⁴Herbert, *Geschichte der Ausländerpolitik*, 241.

³⁵Poutrus, *Umkämpftes Asyl*, 13.

³⁶For an overview of the history of asylum in both German states, see Poutrus, *Umkämpftes Asyl*; see also Stokes, “The Permanent Refugee Crisis in the Federal Republic of Germany, 1949–.”

³⁷Herbert, *Geschichte der Ausländerpolitik*, 288; Philipp Ther, *The Outsiders: Refugees in Europe Since 1492*, trans. Jeremiah Riemer (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2019), 232–40; Christopher A. Molnar, *Memory, Politics, and Yugoslav Migrations to Postwar Germany* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2018), 164–67, 175.

asylum in Germany, more than four times West Germany's peak year prior to the collapse of communism in 1989.³⁸ The arrival of 1.4 million ethnic German *Aussiedler* (resettlers) between 1989 and 1993, mainly from the Soviet Union, only intensified the widespread sentiment that Germany was facing threatening levels of migration.³⁹

In 1990, the ruling Union parties, the CDU and the CSU (Christian Social Union), pursuing one of their long-held goals, launched a concerted campaign to push for a constitutional reform to limit the right to asylum. According to Ulrich Herbert, between 1990 and 1993, "This developed into one of the sharpest, most polemical and most consequential domestic debates in postwar German history."⁴⁰ The core of the asylum campaign focused on convincing Germans that the overwhelming majority of asylum seekers were "economic refugees" and therefore "bogus asylum seekers" who did not face persecution in their homelands but simply wanted to live off of the generous German welfare system. At times, politicians and officials from the CDU/CSU went further and presented asylum seekers as dangerous criminals, such as when the head of the CDU fraction in Berlin complained about foreigners who "wander the streets begging, conning, and sometimes even stabbing people, are arrested and then, simply by shouting the word 'asylum,' enter a seven year long legal proceeding that taxpayers have to pay for."⁴¹

The press, especially but not only the conservative tabloid *Bild-Zeitung*, played a key role in portraying asylum seekers as "asylum swindlers" who represented a threat to the German nation.⁴² Even the popular center-left magazine *Der Spiegel* featured a cover image in 1991 that depicted the German state as a boat that was overloaded with foreigners and about to go under, thereby pushing into the mainstream the notion that "the boat is full," an idea that had previously been confined to the far right.⁴³ The asylum debate inflamed passions in Germany, so much so that, looking back at the debate twenty years later, one German journalist likened it to a "religious war."⁴⁴ The political and media anti-asylum campaign made a powerful impression on the German people. Between June 1991 and July 1993, Germans considered the asylum issue to be the most pressing matter facing the country, more important even than dealing with reunification and soaring unemployment.⁴⁵

³⁸The highest total in a single year prior to 1989 was 107,818 in 1980. See Douglas B. Klusmeyer and Demetrios G. Papademetriou, *Immigration Policy in the Federal Republic of Germany: Negotiating Membership and Remaking the Nation* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2009), 135.

³⁹Peter Gatrell, *The Unsettling of Europe: How Migration Reshaped a Continent* (New York: Basic Books, 2019), 289. On entry policy for *Aussiedler* during this era, see Jannis Panagiotidis, *The Unchosen Ones: Diaspora, Nation, and Migration in Israel and Germany* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2019), 248–75.

⁴⁰Herbert, *Geschichte der Ausländerpolitik*, 299.

⁴¹Herbert, *Geschichte der Ausländerpolitik*, 299–302, quote from 302. See also Poutrus, *Umkämpftes Asyl*, 164–68; Klaus J. Bade, *Ausländer, Aussiedler, Asyl. Eine Bestandsaufnahme* (Munich: C. H. Beck, 1994), 107–13, passim; and Michelle Mattson, "Refugees in Germany: Invasion or Invention," *New German Critique* 64 (Winter 1995): 61–85. For a longer-term history of "economic refugees" in West Germany, see Stokes, "The Permanent Refugee Crisis in the Federal Republic of Germany, 1949–."

⁴²Herbert, *Geschichte der Ausländerpolitik*, 299.

⁴³The cover reads as follows: "Onslaught of the Poor: Refugees, Resettlers, Asylum Seekers," *Der Spiegel*, September 9, 1991. See also Maren Möhring, "Mobilität und Migration in und zwischen Ost und West," in *Geteilte Geschichte. Ost- und Westdeutschland, 1970–2000*, ed. Frank Bösch (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 2015), 402.

⁴⁴Roland Preuss, "Diskussionsbeitrag. Die Debatte um Zuwanderung in Deutschland," in *20 Jahre Asylkompromiss. Bilanz und Perspektiven*, ed. Stefan Luft and Peter Schimany (Bielefeld: Transcript, 2014), 161.

⁴⁵Herbert, *Geschichte der Ausländerpolitik*, 303.

The anti-asylum campaign culminated in the so-called asylum compromise, an agreement in December 1992 between the ruling CDU/CSU and the opposition Social Democrats (SPD) that called for a constitutional amendment that would severely restrict the right to asylum.⁴⁶ The toxic asylum debate was propelled and punctuated by the greatest outburst of antifoignier violence in Germany's long postwar history. In total, between 1990 and 1993, at least forty-nine non-Germans were killed in this wave of violence.⁴⁷ Antifoignier violence surged first in the former East Germany, where it took on terrifying form in Hoyerswerda in 1991 and Rostock-Lichtenhagen in 1992, when, over the course of days, thousands of onlookers cheered on right-wing youths who threw stones and Molotov cocktails at buildings housing foreigners. After the pogrom in Rostock-Lichtenhagen, Berlin's interior secretary Dieter Heckelmann (CDU) stated that "what the chorus of approval expressed was not right-wing radicalism, xenophobia or even racism, but the fully justified resentment of the massive abuse of the right to asylum."⁴⁸ The deadly attacks quickly spread to the West, with three Turkish Germans killed in an arson attack in Mölln in 1992. The single deadliest attack of this era, the murder of five Turkish Germans in Solingen that this article began with, took place in late May 1993, three days after the asylum compromise was passed into law.⁴⁹ Although the campaign to limit the right to asylum targeted asylum seekers, many Germans did not make fine distinctions between asylum seekers and minorities who had lived in Germany for decades. It was thus not just asylum seekers, but a whole range of minority groups, especially Turkish guest workers and their descendants, who were demonized and targeted for violence. Germans' racial fears must be understood against this triple backdrop: large-scale migration into the country, a vitriolic campaign to restrict the right to asylum, and explosive violence against foreigners.

Racism with Races

After the horrors of the Third Reich, race became a taboo subject throughout much of the Western world. According to David Theo Goldberg, Europeans adopted the following logic: "There is no racism because race was buried in the rubble of Auschwitz."⁵⁰ But racism had not gone away; it had simply changed. In 1988, the French philosopher Etienne Balibar identified the development of a new type of racism in the postwar world. According to Balibar, this was a "racism without races ... a racism whose dominant theme is not biological heredity but the insurmountability of cultural differences."⁵¹ In the last

⁴⁶On the asylum compromise, see Stefan Luft and Peter Schimany, eds., *20 Jahre Asylkompromiss. Bilanz und Perspektiven* (Bielefeld: Transcript, 2014); and Niklaus Steiner, *Arguing About Asylum: The Complexity of Refugee Debates in Europe* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2000), 84–94.

⁴⁷Möhring, "Mobilität und Migration in und zwischen Ost und West," 402.

⁴⁸Christoph Dieckmann, "Schlimm, Schlimmer. Streit um die Berliner Zentrale für Asylbewerber," *Die Zeit*, October 16, 1992.

⁴⁹The asylum compromise became law on May 26, 1993, and the Solingen attack took place early in the morning of May 29. The Solingen attack is often incorrectly described as taking place the day after the asylum compromise was passed. See Herbert, *Geschichte der Ausländerpolitik*, 319, and Poutrus, *Umkämpftes Asyl*, 173–74.

⁵⁰David Theo Goldberg, "Racial Europeanization," *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 29, no. 2 (2006): 338.

⁵¹Etienne Balibar, "Is There a 'Neo-Racism'?" in Etienne Balibar and Immanuel Wallerstein, *Race, Nation, Class: Ambiguous Identities*, trans. Chris Turner (London: Verso, 1991), 21. He also notes that this cultural racism was not entirely new because it had precedents in antisemitism, 23–34. See also Geoff

two decades, historians of postwar Germany and scholars in related fields have detailed both the persistence and transformation of racism after the defeat of the National Socialist “racial state.”⁵² Whether they have examined West German attitudes toward African American occupation soldiers and their mixed-race offspring; fears of supposedly violent, temperamental, and backward “southerners,” as guest workers were often referred to in the 1950s and 1960s; the stigmatization of Turks and Muslims more generally; or East German attitudes toward foreigners, most scholars have pointed to the presence of cultural, rather than biological or scientific, racism.⁵³ Rita Chin’s comment on how the new racism shaped West German debates about the integration of Turkish guest workers more or less describes the conclusions reached by most scholars of race and migration in postwar Germany. She writes that “cultural difference, rather than racial purity in the older Nazi sense of blood and biology, became the new, more acceptable way of explaining who belonged to German society and who did not.”⁵⁴

Eley, “The Trouble with ‘Race’: Migrancy, Cultural Difference, and the Remaking of Europe,” in *After the Nazi Racial State*, 137–81; and Neil MacMaster, *Racism in Europe, 1870–2000* (New York: Palgrave, 2001), 193–98.

⁵²On Nazi Germany as a “racial state,” see Michael Burleigh and Wolfgang Iyer, *The Racial State: Germany 1933–1945* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991); for a thoughtful critique of the racial state paradigm, see Devin O. Pendas, Mark Roseman, and Richard F. Wetzell, eds., *Beyond the Racial State: Rethinking Nazi Germany* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017).

⁵³For an excellent introduction to the history of race and racism in postwar West Germany, see Chin et al., *After the Nazi Racial State*. On attitudes toward African American occupation troops and mixed-raced occupation children, see Höhn, *GIs and Fräuleins*; Heide Fehrenbach, *Race After Hitler: Black Occupation Children in Postwar Germany and America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005); and Julia Roos, “The Race to Forget? Bi-racial Descendants of the First Rhineland Occupation in 1950s West German Debates about the Children of African American GIs,” *German History* 37, no. 4 (2019): 517–39. On early racialized discourses on guest workers, see Mark E. Spicka, “Guest Workers, Social Order, and West German Municipalities, 1960–7,” *Journal of Contemporary History* 54, no. 3 (October, 2018): 619–39; Karen Schönwälder, “Why Germany’s Guestworkers Were Largely Europeans: The Selective Principles of Post-war Labour Recruitment Policy,” *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 27, no. 2 (2004): 248–65; Yvonne Rieker, “Südländer, Ostagenten oder Europäer. Die Politik der Bundesregierung und das Bild der italienischen Gastarbeiter, 1955–1970,” *Archiv für Sozialgeschichte* 40 (2000): 231–58; and Julia M. Woesthoff, “Ambiguities of Anti-Racism: Representations of Foreign Laborers and the West German Media, 1955–1990” (PhD diss., Michigan State University, 2004), 28–86. On the stigmatization of Turks and Muslims, see Chin, *The Guest Worker Question in Postwar Germany*; Ruth Ellen Mandel, *Cosmopolitan Anxieties: Turkish Challenges to Citizenship and Belonging in Germany* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2008); Katherine Pratt Ewing, *Stolen Honor: Stigmatizing Muslim Men in Berlin* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2008); and Julia Woesthoff, “‘When I Marry a Mohammedan’: Migration and the Challenges of Interethnic Marriages in Post-War Germany,” *Contemporary European History* 22, no. 2 (2013): 199–231. On race and migration more generally, see Maria Alexopoulou, “‘Ausländer’—A Racialized Concept? ‘Race’ as an Analytical Concept in Contemporary German Immigration History,” in *Who Can Speak and Who Is Heard/Hurt: Facing Problems of Race, Racism, and Ethnic Diversity in the Humanities in Germany*, ed. Mahmoud Arghavan et al. (Bielefeld: Transcript Verlag, 2019), 45–67. On race in communist East Germany, see Quinn Slobodian, ed., *Comrades of Color: East Germany in the Cold War World* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2015); and Sara Pugach, “Eleven Nigerian Students in Cold War East Germany: Visions of Science, Modernity, and Decolonization,” *Journal of Contemporary History* 54, no. 3 (2019): 551–72. Finally, on racism and memory of the Holocaust, see Michael Meng, “Silences about Sarrazin’s Racism in Contemporary Germany,” *Journal of Modern History* 87, no. 1 (2015): 102–35.

⁵⁴Rita Chin, *The Crisis of Multiculturalism in Europe: A History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2017), 165.

This type of cultural racism was evident in the letters that Germans wrote to Weizsäcker during the early 1990s. Shortly after the days-long assault on foreigners in Hoyerswerda, a man from Braunschweig condemned the attacks but said he could understand them. He noted that he had read enough “scientific papers on the peoples of Africa, Arabia, and Asia” to know that they were lazy and not inclined to work. “The asylum-people (*Asylantenvölker*),” as he called them, would have been taught how to learn, teach, and work, and even then, he maintained, “in twenty to twenty five years these peoples will only be as far along as we were around 1965.”⁵⁵ Lumped together into an undifferentiated mass and described as being culturally backward, this writer was sure that non-Europeans could never truly belong in Germany. Jutta Schmidt from Frankfurt described herself as a “normal citizen” who was disturbed by the influx of foreigners. She called for all citizens from the former Eastern Bloc countries to return to their homelands and then, emphasizing the significance of culture, said that ethnic German *Aussiedler* should have been given priority over asylum seekers. She believed that it would have been better “to have more ethnic Germans from Russia enter the country instead of bogus asylum seekers from completely foreign cultures. Their children, well-educated and hardworking like their parents, would also be a piece of the future for us. In contrast, what use are Nigerians to us?”⁵⁶

More surprising than these expressions of cultural racism, which reflected the sort of differentialist thinking that was common throughout the long German postwar era, was the frequency with which letter writers viewed race as a biological reality that should shape Germany’s asylum and migration policies. Instead of Balibar’s notion of “racism without races,” they adhered to a worldview that can better be described as racism *with* races. Some Germans believed that God or some sort of higher power had created distinct races and given each race its own part of the earth, which they were not to stray from. Erika Winter, a nurse from Frankfurt, asserted that Germany was struggling to come to grips with its “asylum and foreigner problem” because German foreigner policy ignored the “law of creation (*Schöpfungsgesetz*).” This law, she continued, says that “every race is meant for, indeed placed in or also provided with, its own country.” “Disregarding this law of creation,” she contended, “results in horrific chaos, as we now see every day, and leads our youth to instinctively go on a rampage against asylum seekers and foreigners.” For Winter, not only was the existence of distinct races a biological reality, but the influx of foreigners caused an *instinctive* violent response from German youths. She called for all foreigners to be removed from Germany, which she believed would cure or alleviate all of Germany’s social problems and would have positive effects for the foreigners who would be back in their native environments.⁵⁷ In the aftermath of the Solingen attack, a man from outside of Ludwigshafen shared a similar idea. He stated that foreigners were flowing into Germany only to take advantage of the German welfare state, and he also thought that even guest workers, many in the country for decades, should return to their homelands. According to him, “When God created the world, he also placed the human races into their respective countries. That is why everyone should stay in their country and not become a burden to others.”⁵⁸

⁵⁵Jürgen Becker to President Weizsäcker, October 8, 1991, BAK B122/47247.

⁵⁶Jutta Schmidt to President Weizsäcker, September 17, 1991, BAK B122/47246, 1–2.

⁵⁷Erika Winter an die Politiker von Weizsäcker, Kohl, Däubler, Gmelin, Schäuble, Kinkel, Süßmuth, u.a., November 5, 1991, BAK B122/47248, 1.

⁵⁸Joachim Kühn to President Weizsäcker, June 8, 1993, BAK B122/47246, 1–2, quote from 2.

While some pointed to the supernatural to explain both the existence of races and their own antiforeigner politics, others explained their animus toward foreigners with reference to the sort of scientific racism that had deep roots in German history. Norbert Hartmann, from a small town near Hamburg, explained the science of race at the outset of his letter: “No scientifically informed person doubts the correctness of the finding that no specimen of a biological species can leave its phylogenetic basis. Many of us know, consequently, that man is also subject to this lack of freedom, whether he likes it or not.” Politicians, he continued, did not seem to recognize “that the increasing popular outrage at the flood of asylum seekers is based on a concrete phylogenetic fixation.” This was his way of saying that human races were real and biologically distinct and that any group that felt that its racial purity was being threatened would respond, again instinctively, with hostility against foreigners. Politicians’ efforts to warn the German people against racism, xenophobia, and right-wing politics, Hartmann concluded, were foolish because they conflicted with a hard biological reality. Trying to stamp out racism, to him, was “like trying to do away with bowel movements.” Both were biologically impossible.⁵⁹

Other Germans shared Hartmann’s scientific racism. In a letter published in the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, Götz Baum, a doctor in Koblenz who was in his early seventies, objected to the influx of asylum seekers and pointed to the writing of the prominent Munich-based behavioral scientist Irenäus Eibl-Eibesfeldt to support his own racial worldview.⁶⁰ Baum insisted that “humans are designed to form groups and to associate with those who are the same or at least similar. The more foreign other people are and the more they appear in large numbers, the stronger the emotional aversion in a previously homogeneous society.” He concluded that “this is a law of nature.” As in the previous letter, he viewed hostility toward foreigners as an inevitable, almost biologically driven response to rising immigration.⁶¹ Along the same lines, a surgeon and head physician from southern Bavaria claimed that “it is a phenomenon required by natural law that all living creatures—in the interest of their own continued existence—reject those who are foreign to their habitat (*lebensraum-fremde*).”⁶²

German racial thinking from the late nineteenth century through the fall of the Third Reich in 1945 had never been based purely on biology and science (or pseudoscience). Even Nazi racial thinking, often thought of as being obsessed with biological and scientific classification, was a composite of scientific and cultural racism.⁶³ This blending of racist traditions is also evident in the letters that Germans wrote to Weizsäcker in the early 1990s. Gudrun Fischer, who identified herself as part of the “postwar generation,” pointed to the significance of culture when it came to immigration to Germany. According to her, “Europeans from the EC states (European Economic Community) are not foreigners for

⁵⁹Norbert Hartmann to President Weizsäcker, November 10, 1991, BAK B122/47245, 1–2.

⁶⁰On Eibl-Eibesfeldt’s controversial views on migration, see Herbert, *Geschichte der Ausländerpolitik*, 240, 259, 326–27.

⁶¹Götz Baum, “Voreilige Innenminister,” *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, February 1, 1993, 6.

⁶²Harald Schmitt to President Weizsäcker, March 26, 1992, BAK B122/47234, p. 1.

⁶³Two recent edited volumes explore the history of racial thinking in Germany through 1945, with chapters variously emphasizing biological, cultural, and national understandings of race. See Pendas, Roseman, and Wetzell, eds., *Beyond the Racial State*; and Lara Day and Oliver Haag, eds., *The Persistence of Race: Continuity and Change in Germany from the Wilhelmine Empire to National Socialism* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2017).

us. We come from the same culture. Already with Eastern Europeans there are difficulties. And especially with the Muslim Turks.” She thus had a finely calibrated mental geography of immigrant desirability, with Western Europeans acceptable, Eastern Europeans appearing to be problematic, and Turks—presumably because of their Islamic faith and culture—being especially undesirable. But in the same letter, she also gave voice to a much more rigidly biological conception of race. She insisted that “racism exists because there are races. It is necessary for the preservation of your own species and for the protection of your own territory.”⁶⁴ Willy Busch, from West Berlin, likewise combined cultural and biological conceptions of difference. He first denounced Turks in more culturalist terms, stating that they “had already in the past proven themselves to be unable and unwilling to integrate” and had also “oppressed and exploited” the German people. But he closed his long letter with a vision of hereditary racial difference, based, in this case, on skin color. According to him, “Foreigners who are born here are not Germans! Or is a Negro who is born in Greenland an Eskimo?”⁶⁵

In late 1981, a group of conservative West German professors wrote and published the Heidelberg Manifesto, which presented foreigners, and especially Turks, as a racial threat to the German nation. The manifesto highlighted incommensurable cultural differences between Germans and foreigners, but it also presented race as a genetic and biological reality. According to Rita Chin, it represented the first time since the early postwar years that “the older language of race was invoked to describe a group of people as fundamentally incompatible with Germans.”⁶⁶ Commentators at the time denounced the manifesto and its authors as being racist, and since then scholars have described it as representing an extreme position and having little influence beyond the far right.⁶⁷ But the letters Germans wrote to Weizsäcker suggest that just a decade later, by the early 1990s, a biological understanding of race was more widespread than is generally assumed and was not found only on the far right.⁶⁸

Apocalyptic Fears I: National and Racial Destruction

This outpouring of racial rhetoric, written without shame to the president of the republic, did not exhaust itself with explanations of the science of race or the significance of cultural difference. A substantial number of letter writers conjured up apocalyptic visions of destruction. For the sake of analysis, these visions can be grouped under two rubrics: fear of national and racial destruction and fear of state collapse and civil war. In the first, and smaller group, writers envisioned a not-so-distant future in which the German people—imagined to be a racially or nationally defined group—were overrun, destroyed, and, in some cases, actually

⁶⁴Gudrun Fischer to President Weizsäcker, December 4, 1992, BAK B122/47244, 2 and cover letter.

⁶⁵Willy Busch to President Weizsäcker, December 4, 1991, BAK B122/47239, 1, 3.

⁶⁶Chin, *The Guest Worker Question in Postwar Germany*, 147–50, quote from 149. First published in far-right newspapers, it leaked to mainstream publications in early 1982, which published the manifesto with critical commentary. See, for example, “Heidelberger Manifest,” and Hanno Kühnert, “Rassistische Klänge,” both in *Die Zeit*, February 5, 1982.

⁶⁷Chin, *The Guest Worker Question in Postwar Germany*, 149–50.

⁶⁸I am not suggesting that this was a direct result of the Heidelberg Manifesto, although Andreas Wagner makes a compelling case that the manifesto had a much more significant influence on debates on German foreigner policy than is generally held to be the case. See Andreas Wagner, “Das ‘Heidelberger Manifest’ von 1981. Deutsche Professoren warnen vor ‘Überfremdung des deutschen Volkes,’” in *Manifeste. Geschichte und Gegenwart des politischen Appells*, ed. Johanna Klatt and Robert Lorenz (Bielefeld: Transcript, 2010), 306–13.

replaced by alien newcomers. Under the second rubric, a larger number of Germans foresaw the rising foreign population in Germany leading to civil war conditions and ultimately the collapse of the state. Although useful analytically, these groupings have substantial overlap. Those who feared the destruction of the German people sometimes also feared or implied that civil war conditions or the collapse of the state might come about. Likewise, those who feared the emergence of civil war and the collapse of the state often described this catastrophic future in racialized terms. Above all, these two apocalyptic fears shared a fundamental characteristic: in both visions, Germans portrayed migrants as the agents of Germany's downfall and destruction.

In both of these apocalyptic visions, Germans frequently critiqued and rejected multiculturalism. As other scholars have shown, this was an era in which Germans engaged in a contentious debate about the future of Germany's identity: Would it become a multicultural state that embraced diversity, or would it continue to deny that it was a country of immigration and insist on an ethnically German national identity?⁶⁹ The debate on multiculturalism is not the focus of this article, but the following material nonetheless provides rich evidence from below to support Sabine von Dirke's contention that opposition to multiculturalism in Germany was often driven by "a biologist-nationalist argument which cannot hide its racist underpinnings," an argument that "serves first and foremost to assert the allegedly insurmountable differences between ethnic cultures and peoples."⁷⁰

In spring 1990, during the interregnum between the East German vote for reunification and the consummation of unification on October 3, 1990, two East Germans wrote anonymous letters to Almuth Berger, East Germany's newly appointed commissioner for foreigners' affairs, in order to protest what they saw as the destruction of the German people through migration. Communist East Germany had only a small foreign population throughout its history, and only 191,000 foreigners resided in the country at the time of reunification. Most foreigners, moreover, had been placed in isolated locations and living quarters so that they would have little contact with East Germans.⁷¹ The fall of the Iron Curtain opened up East Germany, for the first time, to the potential of large-scale immigration, particularly from former Eastern Bloc states. Although there was only a trickle of migration into the country at this time, the arrival of Roma asylum seekers in East Berlin in spring 1990 resulted in growing concerns about the possibility of an uncontrollable surge of migration from the East.⁷² It was in this context that two East Germans wrote to the commissioner for foreigners' affairs.

⁶⁹On multiculturalism and the attending debate in German postwar history, see Sabine von Dirke, "Multikulti: The German Debate on Multiculturalism," *German Studies Review* 17, no. 3 (1994): 513–36; Chin, *The Guest Worker Question in Postwar Germany*, 191–247; Maria Stehle, "White Ghettos: The 'Crisis of Multiculturalism' in Post-Unification Germany," *European Journal of Cultural Studies* 15, no. 2 (2012): 167–81; Brett Klopp, *German Multiculturalism: Immigrant Integration and the Transformation of Citizenship* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2002); Karen Schönwälder, "Germany: Integration Policy and Pluralism in a Self-Conscious Country of Immigration," in *The Multiculturalism Backlash: European Discourses, Policies and Practices*, ed. Steven Vertovec and Susanne Wesendorf (London: Routledge, 2010), 152–69. For an excellent study of multiculturalism in western Europe, including West Germany, see Chin, *The Crisis of Multiculturalism in Europe*.

⁷⁰Von Dirke, "Multikulti," 517, 518.

⁷¹Mike Dennis and Norman LaPorte, *State and Minorities in Communist East Germany* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2011), 87, 94, 96.

⁷²See, for example, "DDR als Exilland hilflos überlastet," *Neue Zeit*, May 15, 1990, 2; and "Asylantenquartier Bahnhof Lichtenberg," *Neues Deutschland*, May 16, 1990, 1.

In May 1990, writing in the name of “the people of the GDR,” one East German expressed outrage—in strikingly *völkisch*-nationalist language—that Berger was supposedly letting foreigners into the country “without the vote of the *Volk*.” He then accused Berger of being part of a plot to destroy the German people. “Your goal,” he wrote, “is nothing less than to destroy our national body (*Volkskörper*). You want to bring in Gypsies and Jews in masses, and then a corrosive digging machine (*zersetzende Wühlmaschine*) will gnaw at the German *Volk* in order to hollow it out from the inside and demoralize it.” He concluded with a call for Berger to resign, “because the *Volk* is outraged at your ruinous scheme.”⁷³ Berger received a similar letter less than a month later from an East German in south Thuringia. This writer wanted to know what the government was doing letting in foreigners. He asked Berger if she wanted to “totally undermine and pollute our country with foreigners in this difficult time? The people have been overcome with fear and terror.” He suggested that her job should be to protect the German *Volk*, “not to smuggle in foreigners through false propaganda,” and warned, apparently referring to the mixing of peoples, “that when everything is nice and mixed up, decomposition begins.”⁷⁴ Both writers thus described foreigners as pollutants or invasive species, that would weaken and destroy the German national body.

Some Germans asserted that the government’s migration policies would lead to the destruction and ultimately the replacement of the German people. In doing so, two letter writers referenced a far-right conspiracy—stoked relentlessly by the Nazis from 1941 until the end of World War II—that if the United States won the war, its leaders, who were supposedly controlled by Jews, planned to exterminate the German people.⁷⁵ Günther Pohl, from West Berlin, condemned the CDU’s migration and asylum policies, claiming that some of its leaders wanted to transform the German *Volk* into a “super-multicultural and super-multinational society.” In allowing foreigners to pour into the country, he warned that “they are not only creating a new people (*Staatsvolk*) that is not at all identical with the traditional German people, but that their diabolically pursued politics of over-foreignization (*Überfremdungspolitik*)” would also achieve what the United States had sought but failed to realize during its postwar occupation of Germany: “the greatest possible integration of foreign cultures into Germany and the most complete mixing of the German people with completely alien tribes.” For him, the end result of this process would be “the annihilation of Germany and the extermination of the Germans!”⁷⁶ Another man from West Berlin held similar beliefs. In a letter that focused on Turkish criminality, he insisted that “multiculturalism, as history shows, always means the ultimate cultural disintegration and downfall (of the established culture) of a people.” He concluded that “whoever demands multiculturalism from us demands the destruction of the German people” and then noted that that had also been the plan in 1944–1945.⁷⁷ Conspiratorial fears of racial destruction, sown by the

⁷³Das Volk der DDR to Almuth Berger, Ausländerbeauftragte, received May 25, 1990, Bundesarchiv Berlin-Lichterfelde (hereafter BAB), DC 211/16.

⁷⁴Anonymous letter to the Regierung der DDR, Dezernat Ausländerbeauftragte, June 15, 1990, BAB DC 211/4.

⁷⁵Herf, *The Jewish Enemy*, 110–14; and Jeffrey K. Olick, *In the House of the Hangman: The Agonies of German Defeat, 1943–1949* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 29–33.

⁷⁶Günther Pohl to President Weizsäcker, regarding ZDF v. 10.11.1991: “Bonn direkt,” November 12, 1991, BAK B122/47249, 1–2.

⁷⁷Willy Busch to President Weizsäcker, December 4, 1991, BAK B122/47239, 2.

Nazis nearly a half-century earlier, still shaped at least some Germans' responses to the state's migration, asylum, and foreigner policies.

While only a small number of Germans referred to Nazi conspiracies of racial destruction in order to buttress their antforeigner politics, others employed language that echoed the Nazi view of the world as a Darwinian struggle of nation against nation, race against race. Rolf Huber, a middle-aged man from a long-time CDU family, emphasized foreigners' criminality and called for a complete halt to immigration. "A *Volk* dies," he insisted, "if it is continually corroded nationally, culturally and religiously, as is happening with our people now!"⁷⁸ Dieter Koch, from Munich, stated that he had nothing against foreigners who worked in Germany, but that he objected strongly to the influx of "freeloading asylum seekers." Despite making this distinction, his letter went on to denigrate foreigners in general, who he accused of bringing in "AIDS, drugs, theft, break-ins, murder, and more." He then raised the specter of the demographic destruction of the German people, linking his fears to both abortion and migration. "It can't be," he wrote, "that German women take nascent life out of their stomach and foreign women get over ten in their stomach. Does one want to exterminate us in that way?" He closed by claiming that distinct racial and national groups should not mix because "God created the races, and it should stay that way."⁷⁹

As the deadly attacks in Mölln and Solingen made abundantly clear, the CDU/CSU's campaign to restrict the right to asylum unleashed antforeigner sentiments that ended up targeting not just asylum seekers, but also other foreigners, especially Turks, who had been a stigmatized group in Germany for more than a decade prior to reunification.⁸⁰ A substantial number of Germans, as should already be apparent, wrote to Weizsäcker to make clear their hostility toward Turks. But some took this a step further and envisioned a Turkish invasion that would destroy the German people, giving an apocalyptic gloss to a trope that had long been present even in mainstream West German society.⁸¹ Shortly after the attack in Solingen, Georg Meier, a septuagenarian mechanical engineer from Lower Saxony who stated that he had never been a member of any political party, portrayed Turkish labor migration into West Germany as an invasion that, just like the Ottoman Turks who were turned back at the gates of Vienna in 1683, aimed to conquer Europe for Islam. He could not understand why German politicians would consider dual citizenship for Turks, especially in light of contemporary conflicts in Lebanon, Sudan, and Yugoslavia, which he understood to be the result of the mixing of peoples with different religions. He claimed that in these places "Christians and others were exterminated by Muslims" and asked if German politicians "want to deliver us and our children to the same misfortune." Raising the specter of an impending holy war on

⁷⁸Rolf Huber to President Weizsäcker; Betr.: Meine große Sorge um Deutschland, December 6, 1991, BAK B122/47242, 1–2.

⁷⁹Dieter Koch to President Weizsäcker, October 5, 1991, BAK B 122/47250.

⁸⁰On the stigmatization of Turks, see Chin, *The Guest Worker Question in Postwar Germany*, 141–71; and Karin Hunn, "Nächstes Jahr kehren wir zurück..." *Die Geschichte der türkischen "Gastarbeiter" in der Bundesrepublik* (Göttingen: Wallstein Verlag, 2005), 492–99.

⁸¹For examples from the mainstream, see "Die Türken kommen—rette sich, wer kann," *Der Spiegel*, July 30, 1973, 24–34; and Lauren Stokes, "'An Invasion of Guest Worker Children': Welfare Reform and the Stigmatisation of Family Migration in West Germany," *Contemporary European History* 28, no. 3 (2019): 383. The notion of a Turkish invasion was also prevalent on the far right and was featured in the Heidelberg Manifesto; see "Heidelberger Manifest," *Die Zeit*, February 5, 1982.

German soil, Meier warned politicians that “if you help destroy our German identity, then you destroy the German people.”⁸²

In spring 1990, an East German man wrote to Lothar de Maizière, the first and only democratically elected leader of East Germany, to congratulate him on his electoral victory and to raise his concerns about Turks settling in the state. Like Meier, he noted that the Turks had been defeated in Vienna in 1683 but that they seemed to be in the midst of another invasion of central Europe. “I have heard,” he wrote, “that very many Turks live in West Germany... these Turks mostly establish large families, so that this Turkish population spreads quickly.” With Turks heading to East Germany to establish businesses, he feared that “German reunification means a Turkish invasion for our GDR.” He insisted that every *Volk* and nation needed to stay within its own borders, and, more ominously, contended that “the Turkish problem requires a solution, otherwise Germany will no longer belong to us Germans.”⁸³ It did not take long for hostility toward Turks, long prevalent in West Germany, to spread to the East.

Apocalyptic Fears II: State Collapse and Civil War

Although a substantial number of letter writers harbored apocalyptic fears of racial or national destruction, brought about by an influx of foreigners, many more feared the outbreak of civil war in Germany and the collapse of the state. These nightmare visions, too, were often expressed in racialized terms. In order to understand these fears of civil war and state collapse, we need to conceive of the momentous transformations of 1989–1991, in the German and European contexts, less as an end point, whether the “end of history” or the end of divided Germany, and more as the beginning of a new epoch, linked in countless ways, of course, to the deeper German and European past.⁸⁴ For Germans living through the dawn of this new epoch, old Cold War era certainties no longer seemed to hold and the world appeared to be full of new possibilities, both hopeful and frightening.

As a starting point, it is useful to remember just how unlikely and unexpected the events of 1989–1991 were. In her memoir, *After the Wall*, Jana Hensel recalls her mother taking her as a thirteen-year-old to one of the large peace demonstrations in 1989 at Leipzig’s St. Nicholas Church. Looking back on that demonstration thirteen years later, she wrote that if someone at that moment had told her that the communist East German state would soon come crashing down, she would have thought, “fat chance. The GDR couldn’t disappear. Not in a million years.”⁸⁵ As late as the summer of 1989, this basic sentiment was shared by nearly all Western Sovietologists, who, according to Philipp Ther, “were convinced of the permanence of the Cold War constellation and the Soviet Union.”⁸⁶ The opening of the Berlin Wall on November 9, 1989, was itself an accident, one that

⁸²Georg Meier to President Weizsäcker, June 10, 1993, BAK B122/47246, 1–3.

⁸³Egon Winkler to the Premierminister of the DDR, Herm Dr. Lothar de Maizière, April 14, 1990, BAB DC 211/1, 1–2.

⁸⁴For a critique of 1989/1990 as an end point, see Mary Elise Sarotte, *1989: The Struggle to Create Post-Cold War Europe* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014), 25; and Allen, “Against the 1989–1990 Ending Myth.”

⁸⁵Jana Hensel, *After the Wall: Confessions from an East German Childhood and the Life that Came Next*, trans. Jefferson Chase (New York: Public Affairs, 2004), 3.

⁸⁶Philipp Ther, *Europe Since 1989: A History*, trans. Charlotte Hughes-Kreutzmüller (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2016), 5.

was followed by other unforeseen developments, including East Germans—against all expectations—voting for the CDU in the state’s first free elections in March, 1990, a vote that paved the way for Chancellor Helmut Kohl’s push to rapidly achieve German reunification.⁸⁷ Martin Sabrow emphasizes the shock and disorientation of the events of 1989–1990 when he writes that during those years, “Germans were ripped out of their familiar mental landscape in a way they had not anticipated.”⁸⁸ At the same time, of course, communist regimes in state after state throughout eastern Europe collapsed, a development Padraic Kenney refers to as “a world turned upside down in the space of a few short years.”⁸⁹ Most shockingly, in late 1991, the Soviet Union, a nuclear superpower, came crashing down under its own weight. In that same year, socialist Yugoslavia descended into a brutal and eventually genocidal civil war that pitted nation against nation. This was a televised war, beamed into living rooms throughout Germany, and it made a strong impression.⁹⁰ Some letter writers, as will become clear, gleaned a lesson from the civil war in Yugoslavia that shaped their views on the arrival of record-setting numbers of asylum seekers.

In short, in the early 1990s, in the midst of a rapidly changing European territorial and political landscape, skyrocketing unemployment in the East and later in the West, and the massive movement of people from eastern to western Europe, it was not completely far-fetched for Germans to fear the outbreak of a civil war in Germany or to foresee the collapse of the German state.⁹¹ Indeed, in a November 1991 survey, more than 30 percent of German respondents feared that war might break out in Germany.⁹² These fears of war and collapse are even less surprising when one considers that throughout the long postwar era, West Germans consistently feared that their democracy would go under and perhaps be replaced by a Fourth Reich.⁹³ What does seem much more far-fetched, however, is the suggestion that war and social collapse would result from the arrival of asylum seekers and other foreigners. For some Germans, foreigners and minorities seem to have been a convenient target upon which they could focus their anxiety and fears about the future.

Those who predicted or implied that the arrival of large numbers of foreigners would lead to the collapse of the state often displayed a deeply racialized worldview in which foreigners

⁸⁷Mary Elise Sarotte, *The Collapse: The Accidental Opening of the Berlin Wall* (New York: Basic Books, 2014); and Konrad H. Jarausch, *The Rush to German Unity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 123–28.

⁸⁸Martin Sabrow, “A Myth of Unity? German Unification as a Challenge in Contemporary History,” in *Modern Germany in Transatlantic Perspective*, ed. Michael Meng and Adam R. Seipp (New York: Berghahn Books, 2017), 160. See also Thomas Großbölting and Christoph Lorke, “Vereinigungsgesellschaft. Deutschland seit 1990,” in *Deutschland seit 1990. Wege in die Vereinigungsgesellschaft*, ed. Thomas Großbölting and Christoph Lorke (Stuttgart: Steiner, 2017), 12.

⁸⁹Padraic Kenney, *A Carnival of Revolution: Central Europe in 1989* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002), 2.

⁹⁰Milena Michalski and James Gow, *War, Image and Legitimacy: Viewing Contemporary Conflict* (New York: Routledge, 2007), 118–23.

⁹¹Although his focus is on eastern Europe, Dariusz Stola’s description of Europe after 1989 as a postwar period, featuring numerous border changes, the creation of new states, and the massive movement of people, is helpful for thinking about Germany as well. See Dariusz Stola, “Borders,” in *Europe’s Postwar Periods—1989, 1945, 1918: Writing History Backwards*, ed. Martin Conway, Pieter Lagrou, and Henry Rousso (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2018), 34–37. On unemployment and economic crisis, see Ther, *Europe since 1989*, 88–89.

⁹²Köcher and Noelle-Neumann, *Allensbacher Jahrbuch der Demoskopie, 1984–1992*, 28.

⁹³Biess, *Republik der Angst*, and Rosenfeld, *Fourth Reich*.

appeared as violent, criminal invaders. Ingo Koch, from Bonn, denounced Weizsäcker's displays of support for asylum seekers and stated that German leaders should instead focus on German victimization at the hands of asylum seekers, alleging that asylum seekers had raped and violently threatened German women and that "on multiple occasions defenseless older women were attacked and robbed by dark-skinned criminals." He asked if German politicians and the press were "traitors to the nation (*Volksverräter*) or representatives of the people" and suggested that they had made a deal with "criminal invaders." German politicians, he continued, were also criminals, as they were leading Germany into "irreversible decline" and destruction and then "stabbed in the back the few who are still able to defend themselves."⁹⁴

In the aftermath of the far-right attack in Mölln that killed three Turkish Germans, Uwe Böhm from Hamburg likewise emphasized the dangers of foreigner criminality, including "Kurdish dealers, freeloading Gypsies, pimps, fraudsters, and pickpockets from all over the world." He believed that the purposeful "over-foreignization (*Überfremdung*)" of the country had come at an "incalculable price" and that Germany's "future is uncertain."⁹⁵ Days after the deadly attack in Solingen, Böhm again picked up his pen, and this time he gave a much fuller airing of his apocalyptic fears of destruction. He admitted that Germany had previously needed foreign laborers, but rejected all talk of providing them dual citizenship or voting rights. According to him, anyone who supported those ideas wanted to "inconspicuously and smoothly liquidate the German nation state and transform it into a multicultural conglomerate." He warned that, in contrast to multiethnic states, in Germany "the most diverse ingredients are compressed into a highly explosive mixture in a confined space. Germany is a powder keg!" He provided the following bleak assessment of Germany's health and its likelihood of survival: "The medical report on patient D (D for Deutschland) is concerning: metastasizing cell disease. Questionable whether the self-healing powers are sufficient."⁹⁶

Women also vented their rage against foreigners and German politicians. They too foresaw the death and destruction of Germany. Emmi Schwartz, born in the early Weimar era, claimed that crime and filth were taking over Frankfurt and that most criminals were foreigners. Ordinary Germans, she claimed, were suffering from the "flood of foreigners" while politicians were carefully protected from the impact of the surge of refugees. Continuing with the proposition that political elites did not know what Germans were facing, she asked Weizsäcker if he would be comfortable lying next to "Gypsies, Turks, or Africans," as ordinary Germans have to, if he was sick in a hospital. Turning to her fears, she contended that even young people could no longer defend themselves from the onslaught of foreigners. For Schwartz, "one can only watch as Germany dies."⁹⁷ Ingeborg Hartmann, a woman from Augsburg who lived through World War II, expressed similar sentiments. "Fifteen thousand asylum seekers arrive every month," she exclaimed. "We are afraid!" She called for Russian Germans to be allowed into the country in massive numbers because she considered them to be "hard-working and respectable." She believed,

⁹⁴Ingo Koch to President Weizsäcker, October 3, 1991, BAK B122/47234, 1–2.

⁹⁵Uwe Böhm to Redaktion, "Bild"—Zeitung (copy sent to Weizsäcker), November 27, 1992, BAK B122/47247.

⁹⁶Uwe Böhm to Redaktion, *Welt am Sonntag* (copy sent to Weizsäcker), June 9, 1993, BAK B122/47247.

⁹⁷Emmi Schwartz to President Weizsäcker, January 29, 1992, BAK B122/47218, 1–2.

however, that “Africans, Asians, and Muslims should remain where they were placed in the world.” The influx of asylum seekers also led Hartmann to envision a dark future. “Europe,” she wrote, “is an egotistical, chaotic mess, and one day it will be destroyed by an invisible hand.”⁹⁸

The large-scale arrival of asylum seekers, combined with the already substantial foreign population, led some Germans to foresee the emergence of civil war conditions or the imminent outbreak of civil war on German soil. Almost without exception, these letter writers objected to what they saw as Germany’s disastrous transformation into a multicultural state and society. A married couple from Stuttgart that referred to themselves as “normal citizens,” and hence not part of the far right, portrayed asylum seekers as criminals and claimed that most Germans wanted the “containment of the flood of bogus asylum seekers.” To them it appeared that German politicians “no longer needed the German *Volk*, except for paying taxes; its culture and identity is being dissolved as quickly as possible into a multicultural society,” which could lead only “to wars and civil wars.” If Germany did not quickly change course and stop the “flood” of “bogus asylum seekers,” they feared that the state would “face a huge catastrophe” and that it would “go under in the maelstrom of events.”⁹⁹ Dirk Wolf, from a small town near Aachen, held that asylum seekers who had really been persecuted should be granted protection, and he recognized that Germany’s declining birthrate required the importation of laborers, but he nonetheless strongly opposed the influx of “economic refugees, bogus asylum seekers, and other threats.” He also warned that turning Germany into a multicultural society “would bring us civil wars or religious wars in a few years, as the current experience in other countries teaches us.”¹⁰⁰

Whereas Wolf only indirectly alluded to contemporary conflicts in multiethnic societies, others pointed to specific conflicts, especially the war in Yugoslavia, in order to explain their antiforeigner sentiments and visions of doom. In doing so, they relied upon and gave voice to what Rogers Brubaker calls “ethnic common sense,” that is, “the tendency to partition the social world into putatively deeply constituted, intrinsic kinds.”¹⁰¹ Equipped with this “ethnic common sense,” for many letter writers, the origins of ethnic or racial conflict in places like Yugoslavia, the Caucasus, and South Africa required no actual analysis. The explanation was always simple: multiethnic societies, by their very nature, will eventually all devolve into ethnic violence, likely ending in civil war and state collapse. Some Germans of a historical bent even extended this lesson to the remote past, insisting—as the Nazis had—that the Roman Empire and other ancient civilizations had collapsed as a result of the mixing together of distinct peoples.¹⁰² Most, however, focused on contemporary conflicts.

⁹⁸Ingeborg Hartmann to President Weizsäcker, October 4, 1991, BAK B122/47245, 1.

⁹⁹Rudi and Helga Franke to President Weizsäcker, October 8, 1991, BAK B122/47216.

¹⁰⁰Dirk Wolf to President Weizsäcker, March 10, 1993, BAK B122 / 47240, 1.

¹⁰¹Rogers Brubaker, *Ethnicity without Groups* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004), 9.

¹⁰²See, for example, Rolf Huber to President Weizsäcker; Betr.: Meine große Sorge um Deutschland, December 6, 1991, BAK B122/47242, 2; Harald Schmitt to President Weizsäcker, March 26, 1992, BAK B122/47234, 1; and Willy Busch to President Weizsäcker, December 4, 1991, BAK B122/47239, 2. On Nazi thinking and educational policies on the collapse of ancient civilizations, see Johann Chapoutot, *Greeks, Romans, Germans: How the Nazis Usurped Europe’s Classical Past*, trans. Richard R. Nybakken (Oakland: University of California Press, 2016), 324–56.

Paul Ludwig, a doctor from a small town in Baden-Württemberg, made the connection between multiethnic societies, the war in Yugoslavia, and Germany's future most concisely. Complaining about the crime rate among asylum seekers and the development of a multicultural society in Germany, he stated that "what was already known and is now being demonstrated to us in Yugoslavia *ad oculus* is the fact that the intermixing of peoples (*Völkervermischung*) must inevitably lead to civil war."¹⁰³ Another man from a small town near Hamburg saw Germany as essentially importing civil war into the country through its asylum policy. He claimed that 80 percent of Germans objected to the state's liberal asylum law and were concerned that with the coming "*Völkerwanderung*,"—a word that can be translated as migration but which also immediately calls to mind the "barbarian invasions" that supposedly destroyed the Roman Empire—"we in the smallest overpopulated country are laying the foundations for Yugoslav conditions that will bring civil war into the country, which our children will have to pay for if we do not change our asylum policy."¹⁰⁴ Along the same lines, an older woman from near Bonn demanded that all those who had been denied asylum be thrown out of the country and then raised the specter of civil war in Germany: "Civil war in Yugoslavia—soon also here in Germany?"¹⁰⁵

Racial Fear and Memory of the Nazi Past

In his study of fear in the Federal Republic of Germany, Frank Biess argues that German angst "resulted from an ever present, constantly changing and dynamic memory of a catastrophic past, which resulted in fearful and sometimes apocalyptic anticipation of the future." The memory of the "collapse of Weimar, of National Socialism, of total war and total defeat, as well as the Holocaust," passed down through the generations, created mental templates and language through which Germans expressed their fears.¹⁰⁶ As we have seen, German fears of racial or national destruction and of war and civil war, brought about by uncontrolled migration, were shaped or at least heightened by the outbreak of violent ethnic conflicts in Yugoslavia and other parts of the world. But like the fears that Biess examines, they were also informed by Germany's catastrophic past. In the 1940s and 1950s, German expellees described their expulsion from eastern Europe in terms that echoed, often purposely, the Nazi persecution and murder of European Jews, in order to portray themselves as victims of the war. Robert G. Moeller writes that, in postwar expellee testimonies, "Jews were an absent presence, providing the language with which Germans could describe their own experiences."¹⁰⁷ In a similar manner, after reunification some Germans used the language and memory of racial war and genocide in order to depict Germany again as a nation of victims, with the perpetrators now being migrants and the German officials who supposedly enabled their arrival. Much of this is evident in what has previously been described. Many letter writers, as we have seen, envisioned a future in which migration would lead to the death and destruction of the German people and the German state, variously described as

¹⁰³Paul Ludwig to President Weizsäcker, November 18, 1991, BAK B122/47247.

¹⁰⁴Peter Vogel to President Weizsäcker; *Ausländerfeindlichkeit in Deutschland?* October 16, 1991, BAK B122/47218, 2.

¹⁰⁵Gerda Schmidt to President Weizsäcker; *Asylanten ohne Ende?*, October 7, 1991, BAK B122/47247.

¹⁰⁶Biess, *Republik der Angst*, 12–13, 28–29. See also Biess, "Everybody Has a Chance," and Karrin Hanshew, *Terror and Democracy in West Germany* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

¹⁰⁷Robert G. Moeller, *War Stories: The Search for a Usable Past in the Federal Republic of Germany* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), 78–81, quote from 80.

the liquidation, destruction, annihilation, or extermination of the German people, language that recalled the Nazi past and the Holocaust.

In a substantial number of letters, Germans made more explicit reference to the country's dark past. Viktor Schulte, a resident of Munich who lived through World War II as a young adult, stated that, like other "respectable citizens," he had been called a "Hitler-hater" during the Third Reich and now was accused of hating foreigners. He saw clear parallels between Hitler's destruction of Germany and the actions of German politicians after reunification. He wrote that "Hitler wanted to conquer the whole world—at the expense of the Germans—and our democrats up there also want to conquer the world and make them happy—at the expense of the Germans." When Germany's ruin was complete, the German people would have to "hide themselves safely from the many foreigners—as was the case during the occupation back then—and could only look on, now the inferiors in our own land, as our hard-won belongings are distributed under foreign domination." In Schulte's vision, Germany, once again occupied and ruled by foreigners, would not be revived as it was after World War II. The study of history, he concluded, showed that "our German fatherland would not be the first country to be destroyed by refugees and to have its people completely exterminated."¹⁰⁸

The historical reference point for Schulte's apocalyptic vision was the defeat of Germany during World War II and the postwar occupation. More commonly, Germans identified the collapse of the Weimar Republic and the attendant rise of the Nazis as their historical touchstone. For them, the collapse of the state or emergence of a Fourth Reich would be the result, ultimately, of the chaos and suffering caused by the influx of foreigners. Rudolf Krämer, an expellee who lived in Hamburg, wanted to live his life in a peaceful Germany, not one that "will dismember itself from the inside through the STREET FIGHTING of different RACES," as he thought would happen in a German state that was now home to "more than seventy different RACES!" Complaining about "bogus asylum seekers," Turks, and Poles, he predicted that the German state would collapse within ten years. In doing so, he turned to the German past: "I prophesy that, just as in the Weimar Republic, today's young GENERATION, who by then will have lived for forty years with this RACIAL MISH-MASH, and will face the foreigners' ever-increasing SOCIAL DEMANDS, will, from the date of the FALL OF THE WALL, in exactly the same time as the WEIMAR ERA, terminate this government!!!!!!!!!" The Weimar Republic lasted fourteen years, from late 1918 to early 1933; Krämer thus thought the new Germany would last only that long, from 1989 until 2003. From the tone of his letter, including his praise for the "impatient young people," it is clear that he did not envision the government being removed through democratic means.¹⁰⁹

Other Germans used "Weimar" as a sort of shorthand, as a word full of foreboding that could call to mind visions from the past of crisis, collapse, and the rise of authoritarian rule. Karin Huber, from a town in North Rhine-Westphalia, implored Weizsäcker to listen to the lower-level municipal bureaucrats and officials who were overburdened with and threatened by "the black people who are pouring in in massive numbers." She complained that the government was neglecting Germans while providing lavish benefits for asylum seekers and ended by stating that "enough is enough. If it keeps going like this, we will soon have

¹⁰⁸Viktor Schulte to President Weizsäcker, November 17, 1991, BAK B122/47247, 1–2.

¹⁰⁹Rudolf Krämer to President Weizsäcker, March 1, 1993, BAK B122/47234, 1–3.

what came after Weimar.”¹¹⁰ Along the same lines, a retiree from a small town in Baden-Württemberg held that no German would reject a “real refugee,” but that “99.9% of those who come to us are bogus asylum seekers.” He asserted that Germans were disturbed by the “rapidly increasing over-foreignization” and warned that “the people are becoming increasingly restless, and when they take to the streets for the first time, it is already too late, as it was with the Weimar Republic.”¹¹¹ Christian Walter, from Bielefeld, condemned the violence against foreigners, but he blamed it on German politicians, and especially Weizsäcker, who he believed had not taken sufficient steps to stem the tide of asylum seekers. Like many other Germans, he emphasized the criminality of foreigners and rejected multiculturalism. He worried, moreover, that Weizsäcker’s lack of action was destroying Germany’s democracy and feared that “Weimar could indeed come again.”¹¹² Each of these people feared that uncontrolled migration could lead to the demise of Germany’s democracy, a vision of the future that was shaped by Germany’s dark past.

Fear, Migration, and Reunification

The history of fear in postwar Germany is a relatively new field of inquiry. But scholars working in this area agree that, rather than dismissing Germans’ fears as being simply irrational or hysterical, we must take them seriously.¹¹³ This is the case for two reasons. First, fear has been consistently present and widespread in the Federal Republic of Germany and thus needs to be historicized. Second, the history of fear provides a powerful vehicle for complicating and critiquing the historiographical master narrative of the Federal Republic, which for decades tended to focus, often teleologically, on its success, especially in establishing a stable democracy and a robust economy and civil society.

If we take German fears of migration seriously—which does not mean finding them rational or turning a blind eye to their racist form—German reunification also begins to look different. Over and over again, Germans insisted, in often apocalyptic terms, that the arrival of foreigners in large numbers would lead to death, war, and perhaps the destruction of the German state and people. Apocalyptic and millenarian thinking tends to emerge during periods of rapid, disorienting change. That has certainly been the case in twentieth-century German history, with apocalyptic fears flourishing during and after both world wars.¹¹⁴ Although the chaos and disorder that accompanied German reunification cannot compare to what Germans experienced during the Weimar Republic or the early years after World War II, the letters Germans wrote to Weizsäcker suggest that many experienced reunification as a terrifying new reality, a moment when the future seemed too wide open. We know, of course, that reunified Germany has become a stable democracy, but that outcome seemed anything but certain for Germans living through those tumultuous years. Perhaps it is time to begin taking more seriously the notion that Germany was, in some respects, living through yet another destabilizing postwar period

¹¹⁰Karin Huber to President Weizsäcker, November 15, 1991, BAK B122/47218.

¹¹¹Heinrich Lehmann to President Weizsäcker, November 17, 1991, BAK B122/47250.

¹¹²Christian Walter to President Weizsäcker, June 14, 1993, BAK B122/47247, 1–3.

¹¹³See, for example, Biess, *Republik der Angst*, 13; Rosenfeld, *Fourth Reich*, 3; Murdock, “Public Health,” 47. Although not strictly a history of fear, see also Joachim Radkau, *Geschichte der Zukunft. Prognosen, Visionen, Irrungen in Deutschland von 1945 bis heute* (Munich: Hanser, 2017), 30.

¹¹⁴Black, “A Messiah after Hitler,” 205–207, 212, 215; Biess, *Republik der Angst*; and David Redles, *Hitler’s Millennial Reich: Apocalyptic Belief and the Search for Salvation* (New York: New York University Press, 2005).

during the early 1990s.¹¹⁵ Seen in that light, reunification appears less as a redemptive end point and more as a foreboding new beginning. Martin Sabrow captured this sentiment when he wrote, in the shadow of the 2015–2016 refugee drama, that “every day it becomes more apparent that German reunification has not been the crowning finale but rather the sinister beginning of a story that is still unfolding.”¹¹⁶

There is analytical value in conceiving of German reunification as a new beginning, but by no means does this mean that it represented a rupture or a fundamental break with the German past. This is obvious in two areas: racism and memory. In their letters, Germans often laid bare their deeply racialized worldviews. Many employed the cultural or “new” racism that had flourished in Germany throughout the long postwar era. They described asylum seekers or Turks as peoples who were either perpetually backward or adherents of a different culture that made it impossible for them to ever adapt to German culture and society. But a substantial number of Germans also held views that can only be described as biological racism; they took the existence of biologically distinct races as a given and warned against the dangers of “race mixing.” This form of racism links reunified Germany, in most disturbing fashion, with the Nazi past. Germans employed both varieties of racism, moreover, to argue that the influx of foreigners threatened to destroy the German state and people, visions of annihilation and collapse that echoed earlier fears of racial destruction, from the age of imperialism to the “Black Horror on the Rhine” and National Socialism. Although global ethnic conflicts, especially the war in Yugoslavia, informed Germans’ apocalyptic fears of civil war, collapse, and destruction, they were also shaped in important ways by the memory of Germany’s dark past, from the collapse of the Weimar Republic to the experience and memory of war and genocide. Some, for example, feared that the arrival of foreigners in large numbers would lead to the “extermination” of the German people, whereas others foresaw the rise of a Fourth Reich.

Historians of fear in postwar Germany often argue that fear played a positive role in the Federal Republic’s long postwar history. In this reading, fears of the collapse of democracy or the emergence of a Fourth Reich, even if exaggerated or irrational, made Germans come together to fight against such a possibility.¹¹⁷ Likewise, fear of nuclear radiation led to important changes in public health policy and to a better understanding of radiation.¹¹⁸ Fears that the United States was using memory of the Holocaust to tarnish the Federal Republic’s reputation led to a more open and public engagement with the history and memory of the Holocaust.¹¹⁹ Fear, apparently, has been good for postwar Germany. But the apocalyptic fears Germans expressed about the influx of foreigners belie such an interpretation. A Panglossian history of this episode would surely point to the millions of Germans who gathered at candlelight vigils to reject racist violence, to increased antiracism organizing,

¹¹⁵For an innovative recent attempt to treat 1989 as the beginning of a new postwar era in Europe, see Martin Conway, Pieter Lagrou, and Henry Rousso, eds., *Europe’s Postwar Periods—1989, 1945, 1918: Writing History Backwards* (London: Bloomsbury, 2017). For an earlier attempt, see Carl Levy and Mark Roseman, eds., *Three Postwar Eras in Comparison: Western Europe, 1918-1945-1989* (Houndmills: Palgrave, 2002).

¹¹⁶Sabrow, “A Myth,” 168.

¹¹⁷Biess, *Republik der Angst*, Rosenfeld, *The Fourth Reich*.

¹¹⁸Murdoch, “Public Health in a Radioactive Age.”

¹¹⁹Jacob S. Eder, *Holocaust Angst: The Federal Republic of Germany and American Holocaust Memory Since the 1970s* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016).

and to the liberalization of German citizenship law at the end of the decade. But such a history would be deeply unsatisfying. For these fears, unlike so many others in postwar Germany, targeted vulnerable populations for violence and expulsion. Even if most letter writers did not advocate violence, they helped to foster an environment that emboldened the far right and others who took to the streets to rage against asylum seekers and minorities. Finally, their fears of racial destruction, civil war, and state collapse helped to create a terrifying new reality for foreigners and minorities in reunified Germany.¹²⁰ Shortly after three Turkish Germans were killed in an attack by right-wing youths in Mölln in late 1992, a young Turkish boy, probably seven or eight years old, climbed onto his father's shoulders at a demonstration against the attack. The boy held up an unadorned, homemade sign with only the following words: "I'm afraid!"¹²¹ That sentiment was ever-present for foreigners and minorities during the early 1990s, and it is very much alive in Germany today. This fear also needs a history.

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¹²⁰For one poignant example, see the Afro-German poet May Ayim's discussion of the climate in Germany in the immediate aftermath of reunification. May Ayim, "Das Jahr 1990. Heimat und Einheit aus afro-deutscher Perspektive," in *Entfernte Verbindungen. Rassismus, Antisemitismus, Klassenunterdrückung*, ed. Ika Hügel, Chris Lange, May Ayim, Ilona Bubeck, Gülşen Aktaş, and Dagmar Schultz (Berlin: Orlanda-Frauenverlag, 1993), 206–22.

¹²¹"Brandschläge von Mölln: Ibrahim Arslan erinnert sich," *Spiegel Geschichte*, November 20, 2012, photo seven.