Introduction

Writing Unbound German Histories

German history was long fraught with problems. It was not just the unsavory political ideologies that historians frequently used to frame its narratives: communism, fascism, imperialism, nationalism, racism, and many other -isms, all of which demanded an appraisal. It was the narratives themselves, which subsumed the histories of German cultures and societies into unitary national accounts that were overdetermined by the chronicle of the German nation-state. Such myopic storylines not only hindered our efforts to understand people's actions and motivations at particular moments in time, but they frequently skewed our interpretations of political forces and their consequences, reifying the very ideologies they were meant to explain.

This is hardly news. For decades, we have been keenly aware that although the German nation-state first emerged in 1871, it has run roughshod over the German past since the moment of its creation, if not before. Many historians of Europe and Germany, echoing their counterparts in other fields, have made careers out of arguing this point. They have underscored the primacy of individuals' and groups' local orientations across German-speaking Europe; they have highlighted the salience and persistence of many Germans' regional affiliations; they have pointed to global trends that flowed powerfully across Europe's national borders; and they have called attention to the sundry people who persisted in living hybrid lives on or around the German nation-state's borders long after they were clearly defined. Many of those people were immersed in multiple cultures and languages, and as we have learned, a good number were indifferent to, or even hostile to, the pronouncements of nationalists who sought to speak about and for them. So too, in fact, were many of the people who lived in the heart of the German nation-state before and long after its creation. Taken together, this work, as it emerged over the last thirty or more years, has demonstrated repeatedly how poorly unitary narratives tied to the nation-state have served Germans and their histories.

If pointing out the inadequacies of a German history wedded to the nation-state has been relatively easy, fashioning alternative narratives has not.

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Unbinding German history is much like decolonizing the western histories of the world. It requires a fundamental rethinking of how our tales of the past have been told and a great deal of reflection on the language we have used to tell them. During the 1980s, for example, James J. Sheehan, who stimulated much of the rethinking that followed over the next four decades, struggled with this conundrum in a series of pivotal essays and books. "What," he dared to ask, "is German history?" Who participated in it? When and where did it begin?[1] Today, we might also ask where German history went: how far it extended across Europe and the world? And what that extension might mean for the people living in the German nation-state and the rest of Europe today? Yet even if we can find answers to those questions, we are still left with the problem of their narration: How do we judiciously tell the many continuous, discontinuous, overlapping, persistent, and simultaneous tales that constitute German history?

The answer depends on what we want to achieve with our narratives. Consequently, we have to start with self-reflection, with acute attention to how our own goals and interests affect the tales we tell. That is challenging. Given my goals, however, it is imperative: At the very least, I believe that historical knowledge exerts power. I also believe that historians' chief mission is consciousness-raising. It is our job to demonstrate how and why history matters. To do that, we must strive to better understand people's actions, intentions, and motivations in particular historical moments, and that, in turn, requires us to shake off persistent reifications, exposing the limitations of dominant paradigms, and pursuing a totality of the past despite the dictates of reigning teleologies. In the case of modern German history, that means moving beyond a focus on tragic acts, radical ruptures, and the crimes of colonialism, imperialism, and National Socialism that have dominated the historiography and shaped our inquiries for generations. I do not mean to suggest that we ignore those parts of German history any more than I would advocate disregarding the emergence and preponderance of the German nation-state. That is not the point. Rather, it is my contention that we cannot let the nation-state dictate our histories of the modern era to us, and I believe the intellectual and political stakes of resisting its hegemonic position and shaking off its teleologies are high: For within an unbound German history there are characteristics, clues, models, and precedents that can do much to undermine the return of violent, exclusionary nationalism that cannot be achieved only by a preponderance of revelations about past crimes.

[1] James J. Sheehan, "What Is German History? Reflections on the Role of the Nation in German History and Historiography," *The Journal of Modern History* 53, no. 1 (1981): 1–23.

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Sheehan's Conundrum

At the end of the 1980s, as James Sheehan published his masterful history of Germany between 1770 and 1866, he exposed many of the challenges of narrating a unitary German history even as he fell victim to others.[2] It is instructive to examine his effort. It has much to teach us about the cunning teleology of national histories as well as their many limitations.

Right from the outset, Sheehan struggled with the question of how to write a German national history during a period in which there was no nation-state. The challenge, as he saw it, was that his history of Germany needed to begin with "the equally obvious and no less significant fact that 'Germany' did not exist."[3] "In the second half of the eighteenth century," he explained, much "as in the second half of the twentieth, there is no clear and readily acceptable answer to the question of Germany's political, social, and cultural identity." Then, he added one of his greatest insights: "to suppose otherwise is to miss the essential character of the German past and the German present: its diversity and discontinuity, richness and fragmentation, fecundity and fluidity. Our history," he declared, "cannot be the single story of a fixed entity, a state or a clearly designated landscape. We must instead try to follow the many different histories that coexisted within German-speaking central Europe, histories that led Germans towards and away from one another, at once encouraging them to act together and making such common action virtually impossible."[4]

There is no question that Sheehan was right about the need to accept the great diversity inherent in German-speaking Europe as a starting point for any modern German history. It remains imperative that we take seriously "the many different histories that coexisted there." There is also no doubt that his emphasis on plurality and difference set Sheehan's work apart from most of the histories that preceded it, and it is equally clear that his work helped to launch decades of new inquiries into the "diversity, discontinuity, richness, fragmentation, fecundity and fluidity" he identified.

Yet hidden within his goals is also the conceit that there should be a unitary narrative that naturally informed the origins of the nation-state. Once that state was formed, we could finally begin to accept the existence of Germany. Through that process of acceptance, the nation-state came to dominate our definitions of Germany and Germans' political, social, and cultural identities. As its proponents taught us to subsume older notions of the German nation within the realities of the nation-state, they offered Sheehan and the rest of us a

[2] James J. Sheehan, *German History 1770–1866* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989).
[3] Ibid., 1. [4] Ibid., 1.

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set of normalizing rhetorical strategies for taming the many different histories he had acknowledged.

Those strategies channeled and shaped his solutions. The "problem of German identity," Sheehan explained, "begins with the land itself." Its variety created fragmented isolation. Before "technology enabled people to break the limits imposed by the natural world," he went on, "most Germans lived in islands defined by their geographical limits, distinctive in speech and custom, disconnected from any common life." Consequently, "this geographical diversity" had to be the basis of his "starting-point, not only because it is the setting for the Germans' histories, but also because it symbolizes the multiplicity of their condition."[5]

Sheehan's use of the singular and the plural exposes the limitations of his argument. *The* "German identity" Sheehan evokes is singular; *the* land that must match it is assumed to be a unit; yet both *the* land and *the* Germans remained "a problem" in his story because that land was too fractured and its inhabitants too varied. As a result, its motley mix of peoples remained isolated and diverse in custom and tongue until modern networks of communication, exchange, and travel helped to solve the "problem" by breaking those "limits," smoothing over the fractures, uniting *the* land, homogenizing *the* people. That process squared Sheehan's circle and thus solved his conundrum by transforming the land of "Germans' histories" and their cultural "multiplicities" into a suitable place for the unitary German history that would emerge at the end of his book and with the birth of a nation-state. Until that process was underway, he reminded us, any search for boundaries during the seventeenth, eighteenth, and even at the outset of the nineteenth centuries remained "a vexed and contentious enterprise" quite simply because the Germany that ostensibly did not yet exist would not be bound.

Yet Germany did exist long before the German nation-state. Early-modern Germans had been evoking it for centuries and historians of the period have been writing about it ever since. In fact, as a host of scholars have shown us, the idea that there was a Germany filled with Germans thrived unperturbed within the early-modern sea of difference and diversity Sheehan identified.[6] So too did the belief that these Germans shared a disparate set of commonalities that few people could precisely define and even fewer thought worth the attempt. Moreover, Germany's unbounded character was only a problem for those who would change it, or those who sought to tame its inhabitants' diversity after the fact with the nation-state's teleology: a task nineteenth-century historians

[5] Ibid., 2.

[6] Most recently see: Helmut Walser Smith, *Germany: A Nation in Its Time before, during, and after Nationalism, 1500–2000* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2020).

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helping to build up the nation-state pursued with vigor and later passed on to their descendants.

Why else would we regard either the lack of a singular and unique German identity or the absence of a single political state as "problems?" Why else would we seek to write those persistent characteristics out of the history with narratives that focus on how they were overcome? Unless, as I would like to suggest, this aggregate identity based on fluid sets of cultures, customs, languages, and states was only a problem of the modern imagination, dependent as it is on explicit unitary categories that can be systematically studied and easily harnessed for political purposes.

Maps, particularly the kind Helmut Walser Smith used so effectively in his recent exploration of early-modern Germany, are an excellent example.[7] Sheehan argued that contemporary maps of the era exemplify "the problem" to be solved. They are notorious for their inability to capture either the fluidity of political boundaries or the multiplicity of loyalties and sovereignties within them at any given time. Still, the vast majority of the people who lived in those lands so imperfectly captured by the political maps in our textbooks did so untroubled by the ambiguities that vexed the historians of the German nation-state during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. How those people lived with such putative ambiguities has something to teach us about the contours of that unbounded history they experienced in the not-so-distant past (Map I.1).

The maps of the past, in other words, are not a problem: They are part of the solution. They offer us one window into the question of how we might narrate an unbounded German history. During the twentieth century, however, the scholars who were perplexed by the mishmash of states and people the political maps captured so imperfectly turned instead to a small minority of Germans who had set out across centuries to define concrete notions of Germanness. They, more than the maps, seemed to offer these scholars a fitting answer to Sheehan's question: "what is German history?" Consequently, Sheehan too elevated them to heroes in his story, as did the authors of most of the stories of modern German history written over the last two centuries.

From the humanist Johann Stumpf to the prolific Johann Gottfried Herder, Sheehan and others could draw on the writings of men who "tried to find the essence of German nationality in culture rather than geography, in the lives of people rather than in the terrain."[8] These were Sheehan's tragic heroes. Their effort to reduce Germanness to a set of precise, quantifiable character traits and linguistic tags remained as futile as it was valiant without the

[7] Sheehan, *German History 1770–1866.* [8] Ibid., 3.

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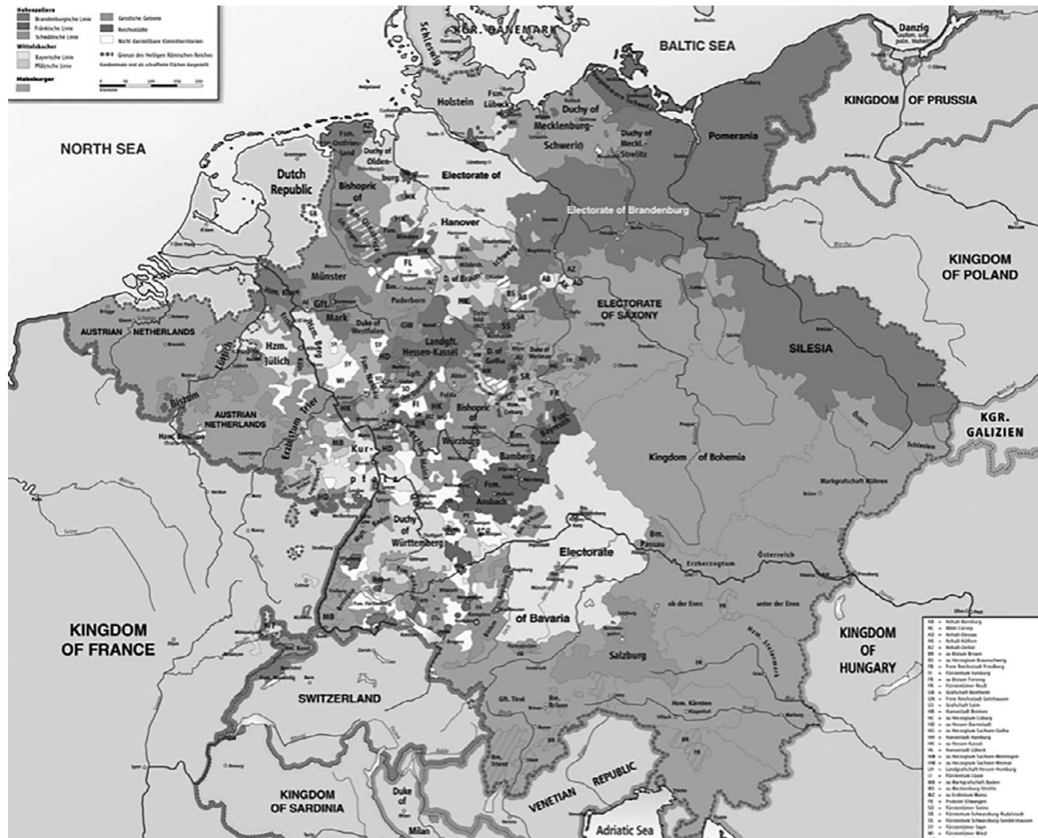

Map I.1 The standard map of the Holy Roman Empire in 1648
Source: Creative Commons.

intervention of "some political force – either the state or a popular movement." Until then, as Sheehan argues in his book, Germany's "various linguistic borders and islands" would remain "relatively porous and malleable, subject to a variety of cultural, economic, and demographic pressures." In short, the efforts of these clever men offered historians of the nation-state's origins a point of departure in their modern tale of German history; they offered them a means for taming the great ambiguity and diversity inherent in the German-speaking lands.

Understanding that point, Sheehan used his own rhetorical strategies to fashion a set of tidy premises: "German history from the middle of the eighteenth century until 1866," he argued, "must be first of all, the history of the Germans' various efforts to master their political, social, and cultural worlds, the history of their separate achievements and defeats, institutions and innovations." At the same time, however, it "must also be the history of the emerging questions about Germany's collective identity and its future as a national community. Finally," he added, "it must be the history of the multitude of answers to this question which Germans formulated and sought to act upon."[9]

Sheehan, of course, was right: *if* we believe that German history before 1866 must be reduced to a history of what happened along the road to making the nation-state. Yet German history could also be written without abandoning the diversity and plurality he identified during the century prior to Imperial Germany's creation and which subsequent scholars have shown persisted much longer than historians focused on nation-making, nationalism, and the nation-state imagined: or wanted to admit. It could be written with more attention paid to the persistent dexterity and multiple subjectivities of the varied people living in these fractured lands and with far less focus on their roads to ostensible unity.

There are good reasons for paying attention to this diversity and plurality rather than trying to subordinate it to unifying trends. The cultural, political, and social structures that shaped the German-speaking lands of early-modern Europe were quite good at preserving difference and individuality even while providing the parameters for fashioning collectives. We also know that those characteristics persisted right through the history of the nation-state's rise, its repeated falls, and its re-imaginings. We know as well that "the Germans," such as they were, never found themselves confined to any one state: not during the modern era any more than during the early-modern period. Germans were spread about, and despite the fractured landscape, frequently on the move.

[9] Ibid., 7.

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Consequently, as many recent scholars have taken pains to remind us, Germans could be found across the nineteenth and twentieth centuries living in a great number of European nation-states and quite a few empires, not to mention Swiss cantons. In addition, as European empires expanded and new nation-states emerged from them, many of those polities also boasted distinctly German communities. Often, those were tied together by networks of communication, exchange, travel, and trade that informed the attitudes and actions of the Germans in those communities as well as the people they lived among. It makes no sense to cut those millions of Germans out of German history; yet the binding-up of historical narratives around the fate of nation-states has frequently done just that.

Unbinding German history requires its respatialization; it requires as well that we engage a great many more Germans in motion, across Europe and in the world. One effect of that move is integrative: It offers millions of Germans a place and a voice in a history that has both excluded them and marginalized their contributions to the German histories that flowed through the heyday of the nation-state. The intellectual and political stakes, however, are higher than simply re-integrating excluded groups into a more globalized German history. Unbinding German history demonstrates that the diversity and plurality Sheehan identified as inherent to Germanness at the end of the eighteenth century continued to inform many Germans' actions over the course of the last two centuries. That insight should inform our analyses and animate our narratives as well.

It is, in fact, my conviction that German history can and should be written with greater attention to mobility and a greater emphasis on the explanatory power of modes of affiliation, affinity, and belonging. It also should be written with a recognition that an acceptance of difference and hybridity played as much if not more of a role in the lives of most Germans than did exclusionary arguments about unity. If we begin by accepting those positions, by understanding that German history can only ever be regarded as an aggregate of Germans' histories, and by recognizing that a great many of the people who lived these histories did so without regarding difference and unity as antinomies or hybridities as problems, we will be better able to understand the actions of the great variety of people who thought of themselves and were regarded by others as German during the modern era. As a result, we will also be able to gain a better understanding of the roles Germans and German things have played in the history of the modern world. That is what this book's narrative is meant to achieve. To reach those goals, it begins by examining some of the characteristics of medieval and early-modern German history that other historians have deemed problems, but which I regard as solutions.

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Polycentrism

Polycentrism characterized late medieval Germany. It also continued to define Germany after 1512, after the Empire began to be commonly referred to in writing as the Holy Roman Empire of the German Nation. No one mandated it. In part, German polycentrism developed out of the landscape that Sheehan observed would remain fractured right into the modern era. More importantly, however, it was a product of German rulers' consistent focus on their individual localities combined with their comfort at maintaining diversity within the Empire's unity. As Len Scales reminds us, while most late medieval Europeans experienced collective bonds "within local and regional spheres, which also provided a starting point for imagining broader identities," "nowhere was this truer than Germany."[10] "The steps taken by rulers elsewhere in Europe to enlarge the territories under the monarchy's direct control and limit or suppress regional autonomies had no real counterparts in Germany." By the same token, if in other European kingdoms "members of the high nobility competed for access and influence at court, the great men in Germany preferred on the whole to attend on the ruler as little as possible, and to concentrate their energies at home, upon consolidating their regional spheres of dominance." In the German lands, Scales explains, it was "not the strong and ambitious but the weak and threatened" who sought out "the proximity of the monarch."[11]

There also was no natural geographic center to which these late-medieval German rulers might gravitate, such as Paris or Saint-Denis for the French, and thus there was no single location that might serve as a foundation for a collective identity. Yet those German rulers did recognize the emperor, in Aachen, Mainz, or Vienna or wherever he might be, and "late medieval writers persisted in viewing the German lands, despite all the evidence for their divisions and diversity, as constituting a single community of experience under the monarch, all alike thriving under a good ruler and suffering together under an evil or unlucky one." Thus "diffuseness, multiplicity of voices, even regionalism and localism," did not undermine "the development of notions of a larger common past" in German-speaking Europe. Quite the contrary, they proved to be "capable of furnishing resources and stimuli of their own for perceiving such a past."[12]

In many ways, "the delicate balance between unity and diversity" that Scales identifies in the late medieval period and Joachim Whaley has continued to trace through the early-modern era persisted because "the relationship

[10] Len Scales, *The Shaping of German Identity: Authority and Crisis: 1245–1414* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 504.
[11] Ibid., 72–73, 87–88. [12] Ibid., 190, 352.

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between the Empire and the German nation was never clearly defined." That might surprise modern readers who assume that a state requires such definitions. Yet as Whaley made clear decades ago, "most commentators from the late fifteenth century onwards simply took the existence of some kind of relationship between the two for granted." People "rarely" sought precise definitions even for encyclopedia entries until sometime after 1750, when "a sustained discussion of the identity and future of the Germans and their culture began," led largely by those men who played heroic roles in Sheehan's tale.[13]

Yet even as that debate began to take shape at the end of the eighteenth century, "for most Germans *Vaterland* certainly still meant the region, town or village in which they lived and their primary loyalty was to the local dynasty rather than to the emperor or to any abstract German Nation." Even among the literary heroes who sought out precise definitions for "Germanness" and the "German nation," the majority "took a generally positive view of the effects of territorial diversity on German cultural development." Indeed, Whaley is adamant that even with the radical transformation of the map during and after the French revolutionary wars, "the idea of unity in variety remained as fundamental a principle."[14]

It should not surprise us, then, that historians such as Celia Applegate, who taught us so much about the interconnections between Germans' understandings of nation and region, would remind us that ethnologists and folklorists during the middle of the nineteenth century, such as Wilhelm Heinrich Riehl, consistently thought of Germany as "'a land and a people at once homogenous and unified and also polymorphic and disparate'." Thus Riehl, like so many of his generation, believed that "the challenge" of their age "was to preserve the diversity while achieving unity."[15]

We can see Riehl's conviction governing the actions of people in a number of surprising places. Take, for example, the nineteenth-century archeologists, prehistorians, and the many laymen who supplied them with objects in German-speaking Central Europe, and the town leaders who created institutions for those collections as well. The focus on *Heimat*, or homeland, which Applegate and others brought to our attention in the 1990s, and which begot the Heimat associations and Heimat museums that one can still find across contemporary Germany, almost always had an element of prehistory to them.

[13] Joachim Whaley, "Thinking about Germany, 1750–1815: The Birth of a Nation?" *The Publications of the English Goethe Society*, NS Vol. LXVI (1996): 53–71.

[14] Ibid.

[15] Celia Applegate, "Music in Place: Perspectives on Art Culture in Nineteenth-Century Germany," in David Blackbourn and James Retallack (eds.) *Localism, Landscape, and the Ambiguities of Place: German-Speaking Central Europe, 1860–1930* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2007), 45.

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It was those ancient collections, removed from the local earth, that quite literally grounded each place across time.

Moreover, since Riehl's era, the pre-historical objects in those Heimat collections were regarded as placing the local history into a larger, European history, one that nineteenth-century German archeologists recognized was characterized by waves of migration. Even after later generations of nationalists tried to ignore the facts articulated by the objects and press them into national stories of distinct German territories and tribes, "nonnational approaches to archeology endured alongside" those efforts and eventually won out. As a result, as Brent Maner has demonstrated, "the strongest continuity" in the history of German archeology is quite clearly "its local resonance, not a radical form of ethnic nationalism."[16]

Mobility

During the first two-thirds of the nineteenth century, Germans such as Riehl were quite cognizant of the mobility and migration that had characterized German-speaking Europe for millennia. As a result, it was almost instinctive for many among his generation to quickly position local histories of the distant past within fluid European histories. They were certainly more aware of that history of mobility than their descendants, many of whom became fixated on particularist narratives that purposefully obviated that past while legitimating their versions of a German nation subsumed by the German nation-state.

As Ernst Renan wrote long ago, and historians of nationalism have frequently reminded us: forgetting is essential to nation-making. Perhaps, then, remembering is just as essential for unbinding the history nation-makers fashioned to legitimate their efforts and for freeing the voices they sought to quell.[17]

Not all modes of mobility were obviated. As Sheehan explained in his narrative, the new, modern German nation-state was made possible in part by the mobility that nineteenth-century technologies brought to German-speaking central Europe. They led to quicker networks of transportation, trade, and travel across the fractured isolation he described. That change was impossible to overlook or forget. The increased mobility was stunning. As Dirk Hoerder has reminded us in a daunting number of studies over recent decades, "by the 1880s about one-half of the German population did not reside at its

[16] Brent Manner, *Germany's Ancient Pasts: Archeology and Historical Interpretation since 1700* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2018), 11.

[17] See inter alia: Geoff Eley and Ronald Grigor Suny, *Becoming National: A Reader* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996).

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place of birth."[18] By the middle of the nineteenth century, and especially during the century's final decades, so many Germans were on the move that Steve Hochstadt has termed "the kaleidoscope of human geographical movement" completely "bewildering."[19]

The scale of the movement impresses; yet historians of the early-modern period have also underscored that what Hoerder and Hochstadt have observed in the nineteenth century was an uptick in scale rather than a transformation in kind. If by the 1880s half of the German population did indeed end up living someplace other than where it was born, it also appears "that at least one-third of all early-modern Germans [had] changed their place of living once in their lives."[20] And if larger populations in the modern era covered ever-vaster distances more quickly, such movement in the early-modern period could be just as adventurous and daunting as the longer and ostensibly more common moves of the nineteenth century.

The precedents and patterns of mobility, in other words, were there before the modern era. Moreover, when we focus on particular kinds of people and specific occupations – investigating the lives of merchants, focusing on economy and the trades, or following the efforts of people engaged in religious and scholarly exchanges – we see an even more common experience of movement across a rather long period of time.

That mobility was also consistently multidirectional, much as it still is today. It included a wide variety of non-German migrants who eventually became regarded as German, or whose descendants certainly did. Perhaps the most well-known among those groups from the early-modern era were the French Huguenots, who fled north into Brandenburg after Louis XIV of France revoked the Edict of Nates in 1685. Otto von Bismarck famously declared them and their descendants to be among the "best of the Germans" because they had proven to be so hard-working, loyal, and productive.[21]

That loyalty and productivity is precisely what the princes who welcomed the Huguenots in Brandenburg and elsewhere expected. As Ulrich Niggemann explains, many political leaders contrasted the "high standard of French culture" with the "backwardness" of Brandenburg, and many of those nobles also anticipated Bismarck's quip by crediting the Huguenots' cultural traits and French connections with much of Brandenburg's subsequent progress. Moreover, those characterizations were not limited to Brandenburg. The agents of German princes from Frankfurt to Rotterdam to Switzerland and

[18] Dirk Hoerder and Jörg Nagler, *People in Transit: German Migrations in Comparative Perspective, 1820–1930* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 1.
[19] Hochstadt, *Mobility and Modernity*, 7.
[20] Jason Coy, Jared Poley, and Alexander Schunka, *Migrations in the German Lands, 1500–2000* (New York: Berhahn, 2016), 7.
[21] Ibid., 69.

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beyond sought out Huguenots in the early-modern era much as non-German princes and non-European states would seek out Germans in the modern age for similar reasons: as a means to cultural and economic improvement without political disruptions.[22]

Inclusion and Tolerance

Most importantly, the integration of Huguenots into Brandenburg was not unique. Here again, historians of early-modern Germany have unearthed a great deal of continuity and precedent where historians of the modern era once assumed only stark contrasts existed. One striking example is the religious pluralism David M. Luebke and others have found in an era often characterized by religious wars and isolated towns. As Luebke demonstrates, there was much more confessional diversity in early-modern German locations than we once assumed, and, it turns out, early-modern German communities were more accommodating, flexible, and tolerant than we used to believe.

By focusing their research on mid-sized German towns, these scholars of early-modern Germany found that hard and fast divisions among confessions were less common than "pragmatic compromises, obfuscation, and porous boundaries between one creed and another."[23] In early-modern Westphalia, for example, Luebke learned that most communities "harbored more than one Christian faith" and that the inhabitants of those towns used what he termed "regimes of religious coexistence" to cope with "the vagaries of religious diversity during the century after Luther's dramatic confrontation with Emperor Charles."[24]

On the one hand, those insights have required us to rethink the character of German towns during the early-modern era. On the other hand, they have also offered historians of modern Germany a striking precedent that extends beyond religious conflict. There is no question that the accommodation and comfort with diversity that Luebke and his colleagues have been finding among early-modern religious congregations is similar to what a generation of historians have found while examining ethnic and national borderlands during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Anyone familiar with the fantastic work that has been done over the last two decades on the hybridity of ethno-national communities in central Europe is sure to find familiar Luebke's arguments that the Germans in his studies consistently demonstrated a variety

[22] Ulrich Niggemann, "Inventing Immigrant Traditions in Seventeenth and Eighteenth-Century Germany: The Hugeugnots in Context," in ibid., 88–109.
[23] David M. Luebke, *Hometown Religion: Regimes of Coexistence in Early Modern Westphalia* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2016), 2.
[24] Ibid.

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of "accommodating stances" and a great deal of "indifference" to the varied faiths among many people in their parishes.

In some ways, it is worth noting that the same generation of historians experienced similar revelations about inclusion and the acceptance of difference across disparate locations in two different historical periods. There is an argument to be made that the similarities in their results stemmed in part from the fact that these historians' modes of argumentation and many of their arguments' historiographical and theoretical underpinnings were similar: That is, perhaps they found similar things because, in part, they were looking for similar things. That, however, does not undercut the importance of the inclusion and plurality they found. It only implores us to wonder how earlier generations had managed to overlook them for so long. The obvious answer, of course, is that postwar historians' overriding focus on locating the antecedents to the kinds of exclusion that later legitimated unprecedented violence in the twentieth century made it easy for them to overlook or ignore those characteristics such as inclusion and tolerance that offered them no useful antecedents.

There is more: Luebke's findings not only unsettled our long-term assumptions about isolated, inward-looking, and suspicious German towns, but they also demonstrated that "the forms such accommodation might take were as many and varied as the empire was diverse." That, in turn, has made it clear that the religious dogmatism that emerged in later centuries was newer than we once thought. It was part of a set of modern innovations and a new focus on concrete distinctions, not legacies of a less enlightened German past.[25]

Such local histories in Westphalia are made all the more important because they confirmed what other historians of early-modern Germany had been finding in more putatively cosmopolitan places, such as the trading center of Hamburg: German communities in and out of the Empire, much like the Empire itself, had a long history of accommodating diversity within their unity. In addition, how that accommodation was negotiated and resisted in cities such as Hamburg could also be regarded as anticipating the ways in which non-religious groups, particularly ethno-national and linguistic groups, found accommodation across German-speaking Europe in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

Michael D. Driedger's study of Mennonites in early-modern Hamburg is an excellent example.[26] During the age of Luther, when Anabaptists were held under great suspicion, Mennonites found acceptance in Hamburg for many of the same reasons that Brandenburg would welcome Huguenots. In times of crisis or tension, however, authorities and experts emerged from the church

[25] Ibid., 6, 16.

[26] Michael D. Driedger, *Obedient Heretics: Mennonite Identities in Lutheran Hamburg and Altona during the Confessional Age* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2002).

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and the city government as spokesmen for all the people who counted themselves among the Mennonites, while individual Mennonites, who were notorious for their varied readings of scripture, were often "pushed to the margins of activity." That led to tensions between the variety of Mennonites living within Hamburg and those who claimed the authority to speak for them all, because during those critical moments, "they were expected to conform to official standards set for them by others." As the spokesmen articulated their positions through texts, those texts were meant to "fix standards of identity."[27]

Such moments of "controversy," in other words, were also moments of opportunity, which "encouraged clarity and group standards." In many cases, that process gave the people who took the lead in directing the defining discourses and penning the codifying texts a great deal of power to obscure the variety of positions among Mennonites while drawing distinctions between Mennonites as an ostensibly unitary group and other confessions in and outside of the city. Those efforts, however, seldom afforded the opportunists with long-term gains, because "following every peak of controversy there was also a broad valley of quiet," indicating that the general public was less interested in living by hard and fast distinctions than some putative leaders were in enhancing their own power by solidifying and laying claim to those distinctions.

Driedger's observations led him to conclude that in "ideal-typical terms, collective identity in its flexible mode was the opposite of fixed identity," and that "the less attention spokesmen paid to defining or maintaining standards of congregational membership, the greater the freedom of public conduct available to congregation members became." Much as with Luebke's analyses, Driedger's stress on "the contingent, dynamic, emergent, situational nature of official standards of Mennonite identity" is not unlike the emphasis historians of ethnic nationalism or scholars of groups in general have made for the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

From the early-modern through the modern eras, in other words, the self-appointed spokesmen for ethnic or religious groups (they usually were men) simply cannot be trusted. That includes, of course, Sheehan's heroes of German national identity. Rogers Brubacker made this point long ago. He warned us against the all too human "tendency to represent the social and cultural world as a multichrome mosaic of monochrome ethnic, racial or cultural blocs." While it is important that we "take vernacular categories and participants' understandings seriously," he explained, we should not "uncritically adopt *categories of ethnopolitical practice as our categories of social analysis*." Above all, we have to bear in mind "that participants' accounts –

[27] Ibid., 174–177.

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especially those of specialists in ethnicity such as ethnopolitical entrepreneurs," much like those Mennonite spokesmen in early-modern Hamburg, often seek to evoke unitary definitions of groups for their own purposes. "Their categories," Brubacker warned us, are "designed to stir, summon, justify, mobilize, kindle and energize." By creating and defining categories, they often seek to produce what they only claim to designate, and we, as historians, need to be wary of those actions less we too are deceived. Consequently, it remains critical that we always begin by observing how categories work, and that we "focus on processes and relations rather than substances." We need to begin by reflecting on "how people and organizations do things with and to ethnic, and national [or religious] categories; how such categories are used to channel and organize processes and relations; and how categories get institutionalized and with what consequences."[28]

Germans in Europe

A good place to start is with Austria and Austrians. When Sheehan wrote his text on the century before the founding of Imperial Germany, he underscored the necessity of including within German history all the Germans who had been part of the Habsburg empire. Yet as Philipp Ther pointed out, with the exception of Dieter Langewiesche, not many of Sheehan's colleagues in the Federal Republic of Germany followed his lead. In a pointed 2003 essay, Ther sketched out why those practitioners of comparative and social history were just as keen to exclude Austria from their analyses as the historians who had practiced a traditional, state-centered historiography before the 1960s. In part, there were practical and theoretical reasons. To begin with, modern nation-states provided many of the statistics needed in an era of quantitative approaches. Perhaps even more importantly, however, most social historians of Sheehan's generation, like traditional social scientists, implicitly equated societies with nations.[29]

As a result, many of these social historians purposefully excluded Poles and other ethnic groups living within the German nation-state from their analyses and never explicitly addressed which "Germans" were included and excluded from their studies. That might strike some readers as a stunningly obvious error; but they were useful omissions that served the teleology of the nation-state's history very well. Those omissions obscured the inconvenient fact that "in ethno-linguistic terms, the [German] empire of 1871 was not as German as

[28] Rogers Brubaker, "Ethnicity without Groups," *Arch. European Sociology* XLIII, no. 2 (2002): 163–189.

[29] Philipp Ther, "Beyond the Nation: The Relational Basis of a Comparative History of Germany and Europe," *Central European History* 36, no. 1 (2003): 45–73.

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the confederation of 1815," because "millions of Poles and Polish-speaking people were included and thus became participants in the history of Germany, while an even higher number of Germans living in Austria [and elsewhere] were excluded." As many people living in the late nineteenth century had been aware, and as Ther repeatedly argued, "the boundaries of the German state and of the German nation were not the same," and "the relevance of Germany's eastern border for setting the boundaries of a German nation was limited" at best. Affiliations, we now know, were not demarcated by these political boundaries. Consequently, "while some groups living in the [German] empire did not identify themselves as Germans or as members of a German society, parts of the German diaspora in Eastern Europe and the Austro-Germans kept close ties."[30]

During the last two decades, historians of the Habsburg empire have spent a great deal of time engaging these questions of affiliation and belonging: to Austria, to the Habsburg Empire, and to multiple ethnic groups, one of which was labeled "German." Following theorists such as Brubacker, many cautioned us to think more actively about whom we are speaking of when we use ethno-linguistic categories, and they have encouraged us to ponder the problem of creating umbrella categories for the great variety of people who were able to move about or live within worlds in which cultural hybridity was common and political boundaries and cultural categories shifted around them.

In his masterful rethinking of the Habsburg empire, for example, Pieter Judson placed belonging at the center of his narrative.[31] In part, his goal was to remind historians that even during the era of high nationalism, the Astro-Hungarian Empire "constituted an alternative source of symbolic and real power that might not outweigh the power of local elites but could at least temper it." This led to collective experiences across the Empire among people who belonged to a wide variety of ethno-nationalist groups, and while it is impossible to deny the prominence of nationalist movements in state politics at the end of the nineteenth century, that prominence "was not necessarily reflected in their centrality to daily life concerns."[32]

Much like religious affiliation in multi-confessional early-modern Hamburg, "nations mattered most to people when it appeared that their fundamental cultural rights were under threat," and while "nationalism may have stirred up passions in group situations" its "centrality often faded once an event had ended and more quotidian concerns took over. Nationalist movements," Judson reminds us, "did not always influence the concerns and rhythms of

[30] Ibid., 54.
[31] Pieter M. Judson, *The Habsburg Empire: A New History* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2016).
[32] Ibid., 10.

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everyday life in more than a passing manner."[33] Thus by underscoring the important roles the Empire played in many Austrians' lives, the influence it had on their varied senses of belonging, the degree to which it accommodated diversities, and the ways in which many Austrians turned to it for solutions to local as well as international political problems, Judson effectively undercut older, ethno-national narratives and histories based on a tale of emerging European nation-states.

One of the most important implications of that new work, as Judson makes clear, is that "both social conflict and linguistic diversity were typical of many nineteenth-century European societies," and that any "serious comparison" of these conflicts within the Habsburg empire with those in other European states at the time (including Imperial Germany after 1871) "suggests that Austria-Hungary's distinctive cultural makeup was more a question of relative than absolute difference."[34]

In many ways, Ther's point was similar: Like the Austro-Hungarian Empire, there was much less homogeneity, much more heterogeneity, and much greater accommodation of difference in Imperial Germany than most historians of Germany had been willing to admit or to include in their analyses. Again, we should pause and ask ourselves: why?

Why the pointed omission? The simple and less generous answer is that this omission served these scholars' purposes. The less piercing, yet just as disconcerting observation is that these are symptoms of the kinds of institutional thinking Mary Douglas once identified: Historians are trained to think within particular parameters and in ways that often tend toward a kind of dynamic complacency that stems from our comfort with familiar directions in scholarly inquiry.[35] That can too easily create an intellectual inertia that is difficult to escape.

It is indeed remarkable how many of Judson's observations resonate with people's experiences outside of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, or even outside of Europe. For instance, as he writes about battles over education and everyday people's interests and needs: "where nationalists wanted children to attend monolingual schools and not, for example, be exposed to a second or third crownland language, parents often desired the opposite for their children – a multilingual education to facilitate social mobility." He is almost certainly correct, but it is worth underscoring that his statement would be correct as well in a great variety of historical situations, including many in which German-speaking families lived within or outside the German nation-state, be it in the Austro-Hungarian Empire, another European state, or in Latin American states, such as Argentina and Brazil. In fact, carefully examining the lives of

[33] Ibid., 3, 10. [34] Ibid., 271.
[35] Mary Douglas, *How Institutions Think* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1998).

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people who regarded themselves as German while living in those places forces us to rethink what we assume to be true about other Germans' lives in the German nation-state after 1871.

Germans in the World

Moreover, we know that linguistic and cultural hybridity was part and parcel of Germans' mobility during the early-modern era. It should not surprise us, then, that as we move our analyses across time and into the modern era that hybridity did not go away, even if the value associated with people's choices continually shifted across space and over time. If we return, for example, to Ther's argument about some German-speakers living under the auspices of the Habsburg monarchy retaining ties with their counterparts in Imperial Germany, we can and should recognize that German places – peopled at least in part by communities of self-styled Germans – were not always contiguous. Moreover, we should also recognize that this tendency was not limited to central Europe. To greater and lesser degrees, it marked the communities of German speakers that could be found across much of Europe and in the Americas, South Africa, and Australia.

Because Germanness was, since the medieval period, recognized as an aggregate that could accommodate a great deal of difference, it was not a complex matter for that notion to persist as German communities followed the expansion of European empires and put down roots in a wide variety of colonial territories and emergent nation-states. In part, that was facilitated by the very transformations in communication and travel that enabled European expansion as much as the nation-state's consolidation, but it was also assisted by the concomitant growth in communications and exchange and the exceptional state of literacy among German speakers that resulted from the literacy laws pushed forward in German-speaking central Europe (including the Habsburg Empire) in the wake of the French revolutionary wars. As a result of that high level of literacy and the ever-cheaper forms of mass print literature, ties among German speakers could be retained regardless of where they came from, where they went in the world, or how long they stayed away. Moreover, they could easily be passed on to subsequent generations, so long as families retained an interest in multilingual educations that continued to include German. In many parts of the world, in Hungary and Romania as much as in Argentina, Guatemala, and Mexico, that continued well into the twentieth century.

At the same time, as Judson has emphasized again and again, the desire of some people within or outside of the Habsburg Empire to retain ties with a German cultural community in the north for cultural, economic, or social reasons is not the same as their being drawn to the German nation-state.

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Similarly, the ability of many Germans after 1871 who went abroad to reconcile their cultural patriotism as Germans with their political loyalty to (or at least neutrality toward) the states in which they lived was widespread. Ther's point that the state's border did not demarcate the limits of the cultural nation applies to many of these people as well. Emigrating, migrating, and traveling did not require relinquishing a connection to Germanness or a sense of affinity with other Germans in what many recognized as an unbounded cultural community or *Kulturgemeinschaft*.

In many ways, that widespread ability to move location and change citizenship was facilitated by a long tradition of Germans living in many varied states, oftentimes with multiple sovereigns. That was one legacy of the Holy Roman Empire, and another reason why no modern German history can neglect the early-modern period. Yet that is not the only reason Germans had a historical advantage when it came to being effective migrants and transmigrants during the modern era.[36]

As historians of medieval and early-modern Europe have taught us, local princes in Eastern Europe, much like Catherine the Great of Russia, used cultural concessions and economic incentives to solicit German settlement in their lands for the same reasons the princes of Brandenburg had endorsed the settlement of French Huguenots in theirs: They regarded Germans, loosely defined, as agents of cultural and economic development. They believed they brought skills, a strong work ethic, and connections to European goods and markets. Over time, Germanness came to serve as a marker of aristocratic and later bourgeois estate status in those territories, and many "Germans in eastern and southeastern Europe" accepted the princes' characterizations, learning to regard "themselves as Kulturträger (carriers of culture) bringing civilization and propensity to societies lacking either, and deriving a sense of belonging and entitlement from this flattering self-image."[37] At the same time, this "prenational group migration to dynastic states shaped how Germans in eastern Europe later reconciled their Germanness with their state loyalties as nationalist ideas spread."[38] Given their putative contributions to these states and societies, it was easy to see themselves as the best Russians or Romanians just as Bismarck had regarded the descendants of French Huguenots as the best Germans.

Germans who left Europe were often able to harness the same arguments and leverage the same discourses about their ostensibly inherent

[36] For a discussion of this concept see: Nina Glick Schiller, Linda Basch, and Cristinz Szanton Blanc, "From Immigrant to Transmigrant: Theorizing Transnational Migration," *Anthropological Quarterly* 68, no. 1 (1995): 48–63.

[37] Alexander Maxwell and Sacha E. Davis, "Germanness beyond Germany: Collective Identity in German Diaspora Communities," *German Studies Review* 39, no. 1 (2016): 1–15, here 9.

[38] Ibid.

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characteristics, taking up the role of *Kulturträger* for western states whose political elites, following the reasoning of eastern European princes before them, frequently solicited their immigration in the hopes of raising the cultural and economic status of their states.[39] Here too, Germans' mobility took them outside of Europe long before the modern era thickened and quickened the global networks of communication, trade, and travel that spun out of Europe and tied the hemispheres together. And here again, there were many historical precedents for living productively as Germans under non-German regimes.

Business families dedicated to trade, for instance, had long made lives under the auspices of other European states' overseas empires. Many Germans helped to build those empires in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, even as many more Germans would help to build the nation-states that emerged from them in the nineteenth century. Great Britain, for example, became a particularly lucrative site for early-modern German trade families engaged in international trade, and many who took up work there quickly recognized the economic advantages of acquiring foreign nationality.[40] For them, that was a savvy business decision, and for the thousands of Germans who migrated to Great Britain and either integrated, continued on, or took up residence in one of its "German colonies" in London and other municipalities that action helped to connect the German state from which they migrated to the growing world trade dominated by the British. Moreover, these patterns persisted over generations, expanding in scale with the growth of technology and migration in the nineteenth century; creating precedents and models for German movement into other empires and the nation-states that emerged from them; and thus continuing to inform the actions of German families in Europe and abroad well into the twentieth century.

Contextualizing Germans and Germanness in the Modern Era

Germanophone networks of communication, trade, and travel are incredibly important for our understanding of how German cultures and societies in and outside of Europe changed over time. They also matter for our analyses of Germans' actions in particular historical situations. Just as important is understanding the ways in which interconnections built on those networks persisted over time: They informed so much. It would be a mistake, however, to simply shift our focus from Germans who remained within the borders of the nation-state to those who lived beyond it. It would be equally misguided to fetishize

[39] The classic statement: Domingo Faustino Sarmiento, *Facundo: Civilization and Barbarism* (Berkeley, 2003).
[40] Stefan Manz, Margit Schulte Beerbühl, and John R. Davis, eds., *Transnational Networks: German Migrants in the British Empire, 1670–1914* (Brill, 2012).

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mobility or forget that many of the structures that facilitated Germans' increasingly global movements were deeply integrated into Europe's imperial power structures.[41]

Until 1919, the emerging nation-states were always thought of in relationship to the major empires. "Western Europe" had no meaning before 1871, and it remains a highly problematic analytical term to use before it was clearly codified during the Cold War.[42] Moreover, we also should not forget, as Jürgen Osterhammel reminded us, that even in this age of empire, industry, migration, mobility, and transfer the vast majority of people in Europe and elsewhere remained fixed on the land and engaged in agricultural pursuits.[43]

Still, as Osterhammel also demonstrated, the world was changing rapidly around even those who stayed in their original locations, as older peripheries became centers, older centers peripheries, new information flowed into the most remote areas, and "no country of embarkation and no destination country remained unchanged."[44] As a result of those changes, we need to pay greater attention to the global interconnections between Germans who lived abroad, their host societies, and Germans who lived within German-speaking central Europe before 1871, and after that date, the German nation-state.

We already know, for example, that many Germans' actions and experiences abroad helped to channel and shape conceptions of Germany and Germanness during the modern era, both in and outside of the nation-state.[45] We also know that this was a dialogical relationship, and that the nation-state's actions after 1871, particularly after it grew in industrial and military might toward the end of the nineteenth century, had consequences for Germans who had gone abroad as well as the descendants of those who had left central Europe generations before but retained a place in what many regarded as an unbounded German cultural community.

Consequently, a respatialized German history, which integrates German communities in non-German lands into our more general historical narratives, is essential for understanding the actions and fates of Germans wherever they were. Among other things, it illuminates the ways in which older notions of Germanness, nation, and inclusive modes of belonging common before 1871 persisted through the ages of empire and high nationalism and into the present; it also demonstrates that those ideas circulated far beyond the borders of the German nation-state and were reinforced there.

[41] Sebastian Conrad, *What Is Global History?* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2016), 127.
[42] Osterhammel, *The Transformation of the World*, 89.
[43] Jürgen Osterhammel, *Die Verwandlung der Welt: Eine Geschichte des 19. Jahrhunderts* (Munich: C. H. Beck, 2009), 183. Cf. Conrad, *What Is Global History?* 193.
[44] Osterhammel, *Die Verwandlung der Welt*, 128.
[45] Penny and Rinke, "Germans Abroad."

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Yet here again, it remains critical that we reflect on our categories as well as those used by our subjects. To begin with, as I pointed out in the preface, many German words that were widely used in the nineteenth century took on new resonance in the twentieth century. Terms such as *Auslandsdeutsche* (Germans abroad), *Kulturegemeinschafft* (cultural community), *Stamm* (tribe), *Volk* (people), and *Raum* (space) were especially politicized during the interwar period and especially under National Socialism. From the middle of the nineteenth century into the postwar era, in fact, the terms *Auslandsdeutschtum* and *Deutschtum* (Germans and Germanness at home and abroad) were hotly debated political concepts.

Those debates articulated the multiple meanings of what it meant to be "German" during those decades and in a variety of locations within and outside of Europe. In 1923, the conventional definition of the Auslandsdeutsche (Germans abroad) was captured in *Das Politische Handwörterbuch* (the concise political dictionary). It defined the Auslandsdeutsche first as Reichsangehörige (German citizens) living outside of the German nation state, that is, "Ausland-Reichsdeutsche," and second as "Volksdeutsche," or ethnic Germans who were citizens of other states and resided outside of the Weimar Republic. The most important characteristics of those people, the editors argued, was not only a clear descent from Germans in central Europe and the use of the German language but also a sense of belonging to a *Kulturgemeinschaft* (cultural community), which included "all Germans."[46]

At the same time, it is essential that we define what, precisely, we are studying as we seek to trace "Germans" across space and time. The authors of *Das Politische Handwörterbuch* seemed to know. Yet, not everyone then or today would agree with their assertions. It is, in fact, particularly challenging to analyze the movements of such groups, because although the umbrella category "German" used by modern states to track immigration and migration implies an overriding homogeneity, Germans who went abroad were as culturally, politically, and socially varied as those who did not. Diversity, it turns out, remained a central commonality shared by Germans in the twentieth century much as it had been in previous centuries. That is why words such as *Kulturgemeinschaft* were so crucial: They made it possible to include a great diversity of peoples in a single, amorphous community that nevertheless shared commonalities.

As Frederick C. Luebke underscored decades ago: "few ethnic groups in America have been as varied in religious belief, political persuasion, socioeconomic status, occupation, culture, and social character as the Germans are,

[46] Kurt Jagow and Paul Herre, eds., *Politisches Handwörterbuch* (Leipzig, 1923), 120. Cf. Penny and Rinke, "Germans Abroad."

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despite persistent historic stereotypes to the contrary."[47] Moreover, because "mother tongue" and "fatherland" were both local things for most of these people, the statistically impressive migration of "Germans" during the modern era is not only "bewildering" in its size but also misleading in its characterizations of people who came from different cultural regions and spoke distinct dialects, many of which were mutually unintelligible. Many of these Germans, in fact, were also already multilingual before they departed, particularly those who had been living among the Czechs, Danes, Dutch, French, Italians, and Poles within the nation-state or on its borders, not to mention the communities of Croatians, Hungarians, Romanians, Russians, Ukrainians, and many others outside of it. Left on their own, the numbers obscure all that.

In short, even at the turn of the twentieth century, even with state bureaucracies operating with distinct national categories in an international field, we have to accept that these Germans' notions of belonging and embeddedness were local as much, if not more than, national. So too were acts of acculturation or integration they might pursue in new locations. Those were often translocal as well as transcultural. Furthermore, while states frequently conceptualized and engaged emigration and immigration as singular trajectories, and their bureaucracies generally treated migrants that way, migrants regularly moved more than once. Some migrants moved frequently. Large numbers returned to their places of origin, for visits, or permanently. As a result, there was a great deal of cross-fertilization among German communities abroad, and a single individual might act on and be acted on by a series of different localities.[48]

Consequently, scholars such as Dirk Hoerder, who devoted his career to analyzing migrants' activities, have advocated for shying away from discussions of transnational movements and trends in favor of transcultural analyses. That is particularly important for analyses across time, because individuals, families, and groups change over time and across generations. The dirty little secret is that we are never following the same people, even if the labels we assign to them remain the same. The labels, like the numbers, continue to obscure that "the Germans" were an ever-changing, loosely defined group of people.

Even more problematic, as scholars ranging from Brubacker to Hoerder have continued to remind us, the labels assigned to ethno-national groups will almost always reify them. Therefore, Hoerder has advocated abandoning the descriptive categories "German migration" and "German immigrants" as analytical tools when exploring how the people included in those categories came

[47] Luebke, *Germans in the New World*, xiii.
[48] Annemarie Steidl, *On Many Routes: Internal, European, and Transatlantic Migration in the Late Habsburg Empire* (West Lafayette, IN: Purdue University Press, 2021).

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to live in other states, such as Argentina, Chile, or South Africa, and he has taught us the advantages of focusing on local-to-local transfers of ideas, people, and things.

These are effective solutions to past challenges. After all, most "Germans" who left the fractured landscape of German-speaking central Europe arrived in new locations to set up communities that were often just as distinct in their differences as they had been in Europe. In many cases, they moved along well-known networks between well-connected communities. This made those communities trans-local in the sense that they shared a set of common orientations and transcultural developments along their routes and in their new locations, which set them apart from many others who shared their generic national categories.[49] Diversity within unity persisted even through the periods of National Socialism and the Cold War.

The Goal of Unbinding German History

Despite the great variation among German communities over space and time, global discourses of Germanness also emerged and persisted across centuries. That final conundrum, however, also should not surprise us. It makes perfect sense given the long history of maintaining diversity within unity since the age of the Holy Roman Empire. Depending on class, religion, gender, ideological orientation, and political or economic expediency, the many multiplicities recent scholars have detected and traced across space and time could be configured in very different tropes in particular historical situations that were sometimes mutually reinforcing, and sometimes competing: as German 'landscapes', each with their distinctive vernacular cultures; as German federal states, with their different institutional frameworks for conducting public affairs; as German civic cultures, with their distinctive forms of social organization; as German tribes or ethno-cultural categories, all with their peculiar ethnic characteristics; as German places in or outside of Europe, which carried unique characteristics that enhanced the whole; or as German things (education, law, literature, music, science, etc., as well as a host of commercial and personal products), which many regarded as the articulations of German character but which were never produced or consumed only by people who counted themselves as Germans.[50] Within these narratives, a great variety of people who did think of themselves as Germans have long found ways to integrate into a whole without assimilating.

[49] Dirk Hoerder, *Geschichte der Deutschen Migration: Vom Mittelalter bis heute* (Munich: C. H. Beck, 2010).

[50] I am grateful to Maiken Umbach for helping me with this conundrum.

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In that sense, the word "German" works much better as an adjective than as a noun in our narratives of German histories. The adjective indicates those things that are shared among the diversity of peoples that lay a claim on belonging to an ever-shifting German cultural community. The noun is almost inherently exclusive. Unbinding German history thus requires us to unbind the exclusionary noun "German/s," and to accept its inclusivity in the past and the present, rather than to assume its limits are inflexible at any historical moment. In the past, many tried to modify the noun with a hyphen, to find ways in which to accommodate the German-Chileans or Czech-Germans. Most recently, Jan Plamper has made a plea for thinking of such people as "plus-Germans," quite literally German plus other things, be they also Russian or Syrian or some other cultural or linguistic combination.[51] Meanwhile others, such as the linguist Patrick Wolf-Farré, have advocated seeing those people in places such as southern Chile who still think of themselves as German, even if their use of the German language has become quite limited, as simply another variant, as another "tribe" of Germans living as loyal citizens of other states, yet still included in a cultural community that never knew or needed boundaries.[52]

I am sympathetic to these suggestions, but as I said in the preface, it is not the purpose of this book to set out a new set of parameters for defining Germans and Germanness in the present or across time. Instead, my goal is to highlight the flexibility of those terms, identify their varied uses by a wide range people in specific times and places, and generate a new set of narratives that can help us analyze and understand people's actions and attitudes in particular historical situations. The point is to develop these narratives as analytical tools rather than as programmatic statements.

[51] Jan Plamper, *Das Neue Wir: Warum Migration dazugehört. Ein andere Geschichte der Deutschen* (Frankfurt a. M.: Fischer, 2019).

[52] Patrick Wolf-Farré, "Der dritte Weg: Zur Entwicklung der ehemaligen deutschen Sprachinsel in Südchile," in Stefaniya Ptashnyk, Ronny Beckert, Patrick Wolf-Farré, and Matthias Wolny (eds.) *Gegenwärtige Sprachkontakte im Kontext der Migration* (Heidelberg: Winter), 303–317.

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