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Nazi Legacies?

New Research on the Question of Continuities in Postwar Germany

ANDREAS WIRSCHING

The contribution by Andreas Wirsching deals with the recent significant expansion of historical research into the continuities of personnel and mentalities between the Nazi regime and the early Federal Republic of Germany. Concentrating on the ministerial bureaucracy, and specifically on the Federal Ministry of the Interior, Wirsching notes a pattern of considerable continuities, the careful evaluation of which has been made possible by the availability of new archival sources. Summarizing the current state of research, the article focuses on how the burdens of the Nazi past were addressed in the German bureaucracy and how they related to the longer-term continuities of anti-pluralism, socio-moral conservatism, and authoritarian éatisme. At the same time, Wirsching emphasizes the manifold learning processes that took hold during the postwar period, which allowed former officials of the Nazi regime to adapt to the conditions of the new democracy or even to help shape it.

Preconditions

In recent years German historiography has seen a substantial expansion of research on the Nazi period and its legacies after 1945. This trend was initiated first by private business enterprises and later by federal ministries and other public institutions. Following the opening of new archival sources, the question of the extent to which the policies of the early Federal Republic of Germany (FRG) were influenced by former members of the National Socialist German Workers' Party (NSDAP, *Nationalsozialistische Deutsche Arbeiterpartei*) and by an antidemocratic mentality has become a dominant issue in research on German contemporary history. This trend raises a number of questions, inviting us to engage in critical reflection.

There is certainly one important, albeit underrated, precondition for the current wave of so-called *Aufarbeitung* projects,¹ and that is the disappearance of the German Democratic Republic (GDR). The regime of the Socialist Unity Party of Germany (SED, *Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschlands*) had

a strong interest in portraying West Germany as a “fascist” state. It collected as much material as possible in order to prove that major representatives of West German elites had been Nazi Party members, supporters, functionaries, or even perpetrators. The propagandistic attacks contained in the famous *Braunbuch* (“Brown Book”) caused major uneasiness in Bonn.² Following the end of the GDR, however, the German discourse on how to come to terms with the country’s Nazi past changed. The subject was no longer one that was discussed between two German states, but it became a matter of internal debate instead.

German reunification was important in another regard, too, as it changed Germany’s position in European and global politics as well as within the increasingly close network of the global economy. As paradoxical as it sounds at first, dealing with the past lay in reunified Germany’s economic interests. The first main actors to become involved were the big German multinational corporations. These corporations possessed an increasingly pressing interest in investigating their company’s Nazi pasts. In an economy that was becoming more and more global, and especially in order to be accepted on the American market, they needed proof that their corporate culture was now reformed. From the mid-1990s onward, this essentially economic motivation provided the incentive for a number of significant research projects into company histories. These included the Deutsche Bank and the Dresdner Bank in the banking sector;³ the Flicks and the Quandts, to mention the two most important families in the armaments sector;⁴ and finally, more recently, Dr. Oetker, a large manufacturer of processed foods.⁵

These corporations were important trailblazers, leading the way in a new wave of *Aufarbeitung*. What emerged was more or less a new seal of approval for businesses, and more recently also for ministries, public authorities, and associations. This seal of approval, or certificate, states: “National Socialism and its consequences have been evaluated and dealt with.” What the actual results are is almost secondary (to exaggerate slightly). The most important fact is that this *Aufarbeitung* has taken place as an act of reformation—even purification—of the respective corporate or ministerial culture.

However, this has only become possible because—and this is another important precondition—by the 1990s there had been a fundamental generational shift. Speaking of generational change may seem trite. But it needs to be emphasized as it was, and indeed is, of huge significance. The disappearance of personal loyalties is a necessary precondition of historical distance, making it possible for history to be evaluated critically. For—as we all know from our private lives—as long as persons are still alive, their individual narratives shape

our image of their history. Simple admiration, relationships of obligation, and feelings of loyalty prevent us from asking deeper questions and maintaining critical distance. Rather, biographical and institutional self-images are adopted more or less without questioning over a long period of time. Any potential criticism is mainly voiced in private. Examples of this include Karl Dietrich Erdmann and Theodor Schieder in the academic discipline of history,⁶ Theodor Eschenburg in political science,⁷ and—to mention one important business figure—Rudolf August Oetker.⁸ Only after these protagonists had died was it possible for questions to be asked more openly and a freer discourse to be established. Incidentally, a parallel movement (which would also be worth investigating in greater detail) could be observed in the archives. Well into the 1990s, it was still sometimes possible for research into Nazi history in municipal archives, for example, to be blocked by older archivists who were close to retirement, who either stated that no sources existed or refused to present inventories. This has changed fundamentally, thanks to the emergence of a new and younger—a genuinely postwar—generation of archivists.

Generational change is also associated with the challenges presented by a culture of remembrance. Which names ought to be remembered, which achievements acknowledged? The answers to these questions are as changeable as cultural memory itself. For example, the trend of renaming schools, barracks, and streets because their old namesakes are seen as tainted by the Nazi period continues unabated. The study of the Federal Foreign Office, which garnered much attention, famously also had its starting point in the question of how the history of the ministry and its individual officials could and should be commemorated adequately.⁹ This shift in the culture of remembrance, of which much more could be said, also plays a very important role.

In parallel, since the 1980s research has adopted a much broader definition of the concept of the “perpetrator.”¹⁰ When we speak of the perpetrators of the Nazi regime today, this no longer means just the SS, the henchmen of the Holocaust, and the bureaucrats who were undeniably “desk criminals” (*Schreibtischtäter*) acting behind the scenes. The more the regime’s driving force comes to be located at the center of German society, the larger the group of perpetrators becomes. Thus, it has been shown that the National Socialist propaganda concept of the *Volksgemeinschaft* could indeed have a mobilizing effect. Its fundamentally exclusionary and thus essentially violent nature attracted “ordinary” Germans. As soon as they actively opted for the National Socialist *Volksgemeinschaft*, they chose the path of political and racist violence and often became perpetrators themselves.¹¹ The boundary between hangers-on and perpetrators becomes blurred. This poses a considerable

methodological challenge to all commissions dealing with the past, and more about this will be said later.

The fact that an obviously unjust regime carried out state-sanctioned mass crimes led to a loss of innocence for the state bureaucracy. In historical analysis, bureaucracy, which defines itself as acting objectively and rationally, apolitically and neutrally, becomes an inseparable part of the *Unrechtsstaat*, the state of lawlessness. One result is that the elite functionaries of the Nazi regime, whether in the civil service, the justice system, technology, or science, are no longer suitable candidates for creating identity within the culture of memory. There are many examples of this.

We might mention individuals such as Wernher von Braun or the airplane pioneer Willy Messerschmitt. In the 1970s, streets and schools were still named after these personages, who were seen as great pioneers of technological progress. Twenty or thirty years later, these names were changed. It had come to light that both had been responsible for the mass use of forced labor, and overall awareness had grown that any technological progress under the Nazi regime could hardly be “neutral.”¹²

The underlying reasons for this change are to be found not least in the progress made by historical research. Not only do we now know far more details; the history of forced labor, for example, which is the subject of an important, compulsory chapter in any study of corporate history, is thus now well investigated. Beyond such specific empirical findings, since the 1980s research on National Socialism has also developed some groundbreaking interpretative models that make it possible to gain a far better understanding of the behavior of elites, as well as that of many “normal” people under the Nazi regime. And this applies to an even greater extent to the ministerial bureaucracy, which has formed the main focus of *Aufarbeitung* over the past ten years.

Nazi Continuities

This brings us to my second point, where I would like to concentrate on the projects carried out on the history of the most important ministries. It is still too early to take stock. Some projects have not yet been completed, nor have all of the completed studies been published.¹³ Furthermore, the commissions deal with some very different subjects and issues. In some projects the Nazi period itself forms the focus of enquiry. This was the case in the vast majority of corporate histories, for example. While there are always certain prehistories, the Nazi period itself forms the main focus of interest. This also applies, for example, to projects on the Reich Ministry of Finance or the Reich Ministry of Labor.¹⁴ By

contrast, the study of the Foreign Office presented its findings in one single volume that goes from the Nazi years to the postwar period.¹⁵ The project on the Federal Ministry of Economics has adopted an even more comprehensive approach, looking at the ministry's history during the Weimar Republic, the Nazi period, and the postwar period, including the GDR ministry and the East German economy.¹⁶ The Federal Ministry of Justice and the Federal Ministry of the Interior have chosen a different approach yet again, deciding not to focus on the Nazi period in a narrower sense but rather on the postwar period.¹⁷ This may seem regrettable, given that it could create the illusion that the Nazi period has already been researched sufficiently.

Still another category of projects, such as those examining the *Bundeskriminalamt* (Federal Criminal Police Office), the *Bundesnachrichtendienst* (Federal Intelligence Service), and the *Bundesamt für Verfassungsschutz* (Federal Office for the Protection of the Constitution), are devoted exclusively to the history of the FRG.¹⁸ Here the key question is how the German ministries dealt with their Nazi pasts in terms of staffing and policies, that is, how pervasive the burdens of complicity (*Belastungen*) actually were in the politics of the early FRG. This is currently a more widely used approach than that of researching the National Socialist period itself. It almost seems as if unified Germany desires to assure itself of its postwar political roots. On the one hand, these disparities in research focus may seem unfortunate, but on the other hand they are also the result of an autonomous research process. Be that as it may, however, they sometimes make it more difficult to take stock, and blind spots are created. For example, due to the different designs and structures of these projects, the important question of what happened to the staffs of the Reich ministries directly after the end of the Nazi regime has been widely ignored.

What happened to the staff of the Reich Ministry of the Interior after 1945, for example? What happened to the staff of the Reich Ministry of Finance? What happened to the personnel of ministries that had no direct successor, such as Goebbels's Reich Ministry of Propaganda? These questions are both intriguing and important but lie outside the scope of the design of the current research projects.

There is, however, an undeniably positive result of all of these efforts: significant amounts of new source material that were previously inaccessible are being made available on an ongoing basis. Strong support from the ministries has led to the opening up of some of these sources—particularly personnel files and classified information, which are being disclosed on a grand scale. This in itself constitutes an important step forward for research. This can be illustrated by the findings of the project about the *Bundesinnenministerium* (BMI,

Ministry of the Interior) that has been conducted jointly by the Leibniz Institute for Contemporary History and the Leibniz Centre for Contemporary History in Potsdam.¹⁹

One initial finding is that staff continuity was high, in the sense that former members of the NSDAP were strongly represented in the upper tiers of the civil service, and in this regard the various studies, individual nuances aside, will not differ greatly. The proportion of NSDAP members was higher than previously assumed. In the initial phase, directly after 1945 or 1949, respectively, when Allied influence was still strong, this continuity was smaller. From the early 1950s to the early 1960s, under waning Allied influence and the application of Article 131 of the Basic Law, the number of former party members rose markedly, peaking in 1961: the proportion of former NSDAP members in the higher levels of the civil service was 67 percent, and the proportion of former SA members 47 percent. By contrast, the share of former SS members was comparatively low and remained broadly stable at five to seven percent. In some of the main departments, such as the Department for Cultural Affairs (*Abteilung für Kulturelle Angelegenheiten des Bundes*), at times up to 85 percent of senior civil servants had belonged to the NSDAP.²⁰

One important reason for that development was the officials' networks and personal connections. For many years the BMI's staffing policy, for example, was shaped significantly by a small circle of people. All of them had been employed in the Reich Ministry of the Interior prior to 1945 and thus had known each other for a long time. Besides Secretary of State Hans Ritter von Lex, this circle included the *Zentralabteilungsleiter* (head of personnel) and former ministerial official of the Reich Ministry of the Interior Sklode von Perbandt and, above all, the Department Head Erich Keßler. The latter had joined the NSDAP and the SA in 1933. His career as an administrative lawyer under the Nazi regime had not been straightforward, as he came into conflict with National Socialist authorities on several occasions. Nevertheless, he served as the deputy to the president of the Katowice governmental district from 1940 to 1944, before being transferred to the Reich Ministry of the Interior.²¹ As the appointment of leading civil servants was always approved by the Chancellor's Office, its head, Hans Globke, Adenauer's protégé, also played an important role.

Not a few leading civil servants had clearly contributed to the bureaucratic establishment and workings of the Nazi regime, a *Belastung* (burden of complicity) that was visible at least in outline. But if they were personally acquainted with, or had been strongly recommended to, the ministry's inner circle, this burden ultimately proved to be no obstacle to their employment. From the

point of view of their colleagues in the BMI, these individuals' professional experience as trained administrative lawyers and the manner in which they acquitted themselves in their new positions spoke in their favor. Today, of course, our stance is much more critical, or at least we place far greater emphasis on the ambiguities typical of the Nazi system. Many civil servants actively helped the Nazi regime to get the "normative state," to which they were bound, up and running in accordance with National Socialist measures. Civil servants made available the bureaucracy the regime needed in order to function, a bureaucracy bound to rational criteria, and thus dissolved what Ernst Fraenkel calls the difference between the "normative state" (a state in which the state bureaucracy and institutions operate according to the law) and the "prerogative state" (a state in which Nazi organizations could operate without any legal constraints) to a far greater extent than they were willing to admit after 1945. Even though they believed they had maintained a subjective distance or even opposition to the regime, and even though they believed they had prevented worse from happening, from today's point of view they must be seen as *belastet* (burdened by complicity) on the basis of the functions they performed.

The high numbers of former members of the NSDAP highlight a fundamental problem associated with research on the ministries. Naturally, the aim of these studies is not to initiate, so to speak, a kind of new and comprehensive denazification process. However, there is an increasing tendency to dismiss such findings as mere "Nazi counting" and thus make light of them. That is problematic. In the BMI's Main Department for Public Law, Constitutional Law, and Administrative Law, for instance, there were 58 department heads, division heads and subdivision heads (*Abteilungs-, Unterabteilungs- and Referatsleiter*) between 1949 and 1970. Of these, a full two thirds had been in the NSDAP and a full third in the SA. Five percent had been former SS members and 64 percent had belonged to other Nazi organizations.²² This is significant and cannot be simply "argued away." Rather, we need to take such findings seriously while at the same time using scholarly analysis to categorize, differentiate, and explain them.

This raises important questions that are not easy to answer, however. Blanket judgments may mislead, and in the end, one has to take a close look at the career of each individual in order to arrive at a well-founded judgment. Mere membership in the NSDAP or other National Socialist associations does not tell us much, even if joining the party had been a willful and deliberate act. Persons who are thought of as the ideological main perpetrators of the Nazi regime, who provided the SS leadership and were described as an "Uncompromising Generation,"²³ were rarely found in the postwar German

bureaucracy. Thus, between 1949 and 1969, of the leading officials of the BMI, only about two percent had been members of the SS and only about 4 percent had joined the NSDAP before 1933.²⁴

While it would be wrong to concentrate only on spectacular cases, which in any event hardly existed in the BMI, it is all the more important to name those officials whose burden was considerable. This applies, for example, to Gerhard Scheffler, born in 1894, who was mayor of Posen before 1945 and was clearly involved in the extermination policy in the Warthegau. After the end of the war he managed to go into hiding under the false name of Dr. Otto Jungfer. When the pressure of prosecution on Nazis decreased, Scheffler reappeared using his real name and was classified as “exonerated” by the denazification committee in 1949. Therefore, nothing stood in the way of his appointment in 1950 to the BMI, where he was also no longer asked about his past. We know from his personal notes that Scheffler essentially remained true to his National Socialist convictions, but kept silent about them so as not to expose himself.²⁵

Individuals who were more or less severely tainted thus entered the BMI's service, in addition to job candidates who simply falsified their curriculum vitae and remained unrecognized. Among these was the former judge Kurt Breull, who had gained prominence through antisemitic judgments and then was put in charge of none other than the BMI's Division for Foreigners and Residency Law.²⁶ By these means Friedrich Rippich, a former temporary NSDAP *Kreisleiter* (district leader), SS *Sturmabführer*, and district administrator in the district of Sieradz in the Warthegau, also gained a job in the Federal Ministry of the Interior. From 1945 to 1949 he was recorded as “missing,” but he had probably already escaped to Argentina at this time. It is characteristic of the atmosphere in the FRG during the 1950s that he was able to successfully apply for a position at the BMI from his Argentinian exile.²⁷

Old Nazi networks strongly influenced the ministry's Main Department for Social Affairs, where Gerhard Scheffler succeeded to become its head in 1956. His predecessor, Wilhelm Kitz, had been involved in National Socialist euthanasia crimes as a leading official in the Rhineland Provincial Administration. Johannes Duntze, who became Scheffler's successor in 1958, had been a specialist in welfare administration under the Nazi regime. During the Second World War he had been a senior official of the military administration in Belgium, responsible, among other things, for the infamous Breendonk prison camp. The department had close contacts with old acquaintances such as Hans Muthesius, who from 1940 to 1945 had worked in the Department of Public Health in the Reich Ministry of the Interior, where he had been responsible for setting up concentration camps for youth in the occupied eastern territo-

ries. Muthesius was successful in gaining influence on the legislation of the BMI. When preparing the new *Bundessozialhilfegesetz* (Federal Social Assistance Act) of 1961, the Main Department for Social Affairs wanted to include the forced detention of adults who were considered to be “at social risk” in the Federal Social Assistance Act. This clearly reflected an authoritarian, repressive tradition of socio-moral conservatism that, between 1933 and 1945, had turned to Nazism.²⁸

Long-Term Continuities of Etatism and Socio-Moral Conservatism

These examples clearly show that Nazi legacies did exist in the higher ranks of the Federal Ministry of the Interior as well as in other ministries. But this continuity must be placed into the context of longer-term continuities in Germany. We need to ask how much further back the continuities from the Nazi period reach, that is, to the time before 1933 and indeed to the time before 1914. Many long arcs of continuity of this kind can be seen in the careers of the civil servants and staff at the BMI. Most trained administrative civil servants cultivated an “apolitical” self-image that insisted on the “nonpartisanship” of state power. They saw themselves as members of a technical, purely “factual,” and professional administration. Their focus was a conservative (in the sense of preservative) efficiency. In German conservatism, this form of seemingly apolitical nonpartisanship was both an expression of anti-pluralism and a specific form of political self-deceit. For when political or politically relevant decisions have to be made, the fiction of the “apolitical” can no longer be upheld—and nowhere did the results of this self-deceit become more fatally clear than in the relationship of the German civil service to the Nazi regime. This holds true even though this self-deceit continued long after 1945 as a central narrative of self-exculpation. Thus the German Association of Civil Servants wrote the following to Federal Minister of the Interior Robert Lehr in 1952: “The civil servant’s membership in political or trade union organizations—past and present—has nothing to do with his professional activity.”²⁹ This corresponds to the typical self-description of a civil servant from Württemberg in 1948: “I was trained under the monarchy, then held office in the Weimar Republic, and in 1933 I became part of the Third Reich, simply as a professional civil servant.”³⁰

This fiction of apolitical nonpartisanship arose from an abstract understanding of the state that was all too easily instrumentalized under the Nazi regime and was still strongly present in the early FRG. One example of this is the anticommunism that became probably the most significant

overlap between Hitler and the German elite in 1933.³¹ This can be seen in a conversation that Ritter von Lex, who himself was by no means a Nazi, had with Hitler in mid-March of that year: “The Bavarian People’s Party [BVP, *Bayerische Volkspartei*],” Lex assured the new Reich chancellor, “approved of the destruction of Marxism, but in forms consistent with Christian moral law. Where communism was concerned [. . .] the BVP could for the most part go along [with the National Socialists]. [. . .] Social democracy constituted a branch of Marxism that needed to be overcome mentally rather than physically eradicated.”³² Accordingly, the “physical eradication” of the communists was consciously factored in. The same Ritter von Lex, as state secretary in the Federal Ministry of the Interior, led the proceedings before the Federal Constitutional Court banning the German Communist Party (KPD, *Kommunistische Partei Deutschlands*) in 1954, at which he delivered the opening statement on behalf of the federal government.³³ This, too, forms part of the continuities in the German interior administration.

Finally, German history’s long continuities include a specific social and moral conservatism. Sociopolitically, this conservatism was evident in the manner that peripheral social groups—so-called “antisocials,” “alcoholics,” “work dodgers,” and “gypsies”—were dealt with. For example, the language of the Bavarian “Law for countering gypsies, travelers and work dodgers” anticipated the social exclusion and repression that were to become the characteristics of Nazi persecution practice.³⁴ Its adherents also believed that authoritarian state intervention could curb and reverse those *cultural* movements that were regarded as indecorous and subversive, challenging the traditional social order. Such socio-moral conservatism was, for example, the cultural and political foundation of the controversial law against *Schmutz und Schund* (filth and trash) of 1926 which banned the sale of publications considered to be harmful (filth and trash literature) to underage Germans. After 1945 its traces could still be found in the BMI’s Main Department for Cultural Affairs.³⁵

After 1933 these older conservative and authoritarian traditions were radicalized and indeed perverted by the Nazi regime and thus ultimately compromised. However, many of these traditions became permanently discredited only in the 1970s. Thus, all of these phenomena constitute a time span in German history running from around 1890 to 1960 that is characterized by a relatively homogeneous, conservative attitude with a markedly antidemocratic and anti-pluralist impact. For civil servants in particular, this resulted in a considerable affinity to National Socialism. National Socialism—which was, after all, a parasitic movement—incorporated as much of this

conservative attitude as it found useful. Thus, many civil servants joined the NSDAP after 1933 and supported the dictatorship at the middle administrative level. Opting for the *Volksgemeinschaft*, they actively participated in its criminal practices, even though, in the notoriously euphemistic terminology of the denazification courts, they were *Mitläufer* (fellow travelers). It was this type of civil servant that accounted for the majority of former NSDAP members in the federal ministries of the 1950s and early 1960s.

The challenge for research is to consistently take into account and reflect upon this dualistic dimension of the continuity problem and to make it the starting point for new questions and inquiries. The term *Belastung*, which is difficult in itself, is thus to be differentiated and historicized. It needs to be placed within a historical context. That is, we need to ask: Who and what was seen as historically *belastet* or tainted by the Nazi period at which point in time? Up to the 1960s, mere membership of the NSDAP was no barrier to public employment. There was skepticism if job candidates had joined the NSDAP prior to 1933, if they had held official positions within the party, and especially if they had held office in the civil service in the occupied eastern territories. Even in the 1950s this could represent a certain boundary in staffing policy.

The Evolution of Democracy

But how could the stabilization of democracy during the 1950s be achieved if a large part of the elites had a National Socialist past? During the Nazi dictatorship, many people learned at the cost of great suffering and sometimes their lives what it meant to be governed by ministries and offices that made a lack of rights the norm and established an inhuman morality. The Reich ministries were at the very heart of this process. They were where the so-called will of the Führer was translated into a quasi-legal administrative language that does not differ much in formal terms from what ministries do today. For the bureaucracy, this language legitimized crime.

Against this backdrop, the early Federal Republic's establishment of an administration that, by and large, operated according to the rule of law and gave human beings back the ability to live in freedom and safety was a significant achievement. Accordingly, it seems appropriate to look not only at the unmistakable continuities in staffing and policy, but also at the fresh incentives and new beginnings in the ministries, asking what changes they were subject to, how existing administrative law was adapted to the norms of the Basic Law and simultaneously constitutionalized, to what extent the postwar ministries

and authorities contributed to the democratization of political culture, and—last but not least—how and why former National Socialists now operated in a different way than they had before. While their way of acting was once again in conformity with the system, it was compatible with the democratic context. Here, too, we can find a number of very prominent examples. One of them was the former Bavarian minister of education and cultural affairs Theodor Maunz, who wrote a law thesis that displayed great affinity for the Weimar system and subsequently enjoyed a remarkable career both in the 1930s and after 1945, becoming one of the commentators on the Basic Law. The latter point did not, however, prevent him from secretly writing for Gerhard Frey's *National-Zeitung*.³⁶

Frequently, a mechanism may have been at work that we are familiar with from the BMI files being studied at present: here, Gerhard Scheffler reflected upon the fact that he “cannot take much pleasure” in the new Bonn democracy. Even though he held an executive position, he was “always very reserved in his professional life after 1948” and tried “never to catch attention.” Furthermore, there were fears that one's personal past could become an issue. The “newly risen political forces” tried to “vilify” their opponents by trawling through their pasts and then “suspecting them without reason.”³⁷ If one “kept quiet,” there was a greater chance of not being noticed and being able to enjoy the benefits of the new democracy, such as rising salaries and the right to a pension. All of these ambivalences are typical of the time, different ways of functioning, so to speak, of one and the same person. While they are an extremely interesting field of study, they are difficult to trace in the sources.

It should have become clear by now that the ministerial *Aufarbeitung* projects are more than mere “Nazi counting.” In actual fact, commissioned research—which is sometimes regarded quite critically³⁸—is setting clear standards. Developments such as the guaranteed independence of the researcher and, above all, the opening of new sources and the making accessible of personnel files are wholly positive. Research based upon such standards clearly shows that there were strong personal continuities from the Nazi period to the early FRG. Two types of intertwined continuities can be observed. On the one hand, Nazi continuities in the narrower sense, expressed by racist and antisemitic mentalities, were noticeable in administrative actions of federal ministries. On the other hand, there was a rather extensive legacy of traditional etatist, anti-pluralist, and antidemocratic thought throughout the Adenauer era. Most of these continuities dated back to the Weimar Republic or even to the German Reich of 1871 and constituted, to some extent at least, a specific sort of traditional conservative mentality.

At the same time, and this needs to be stressed, West Germany was changing rapidly in the 1950s and 1960s. Thus, the early FRG is a good example of the evolutionary character of any democracy. This was expressed in the many learning processes West Germans had to undergo in the teeth of the many personal and mental continuities that existed at the beginning. This was especially true for ministerial bureaucracies. Civil servants had to learn that their traditional etatism increasingly ran counter to the *Bundesverfassungsgericht* (Federal Constitutional Court), the parliamentary opposition, the critical public, or simply the zeitgeist. The public authorities began to recognize that traditional moral concepts had to give way to a new, more pluralistic understanding of freedom of the press and artistic freedom. Members of parliament and political parties learned how to organize themselves in order to ensure the efficient work of government and opposition. But it was by no means only the civil servants and politicians who went through a learning process. Society, in its entirety, was fundamentally affected. Journalists learned to emancipate themselves from the patronizing media policy and the “consensus journalism” of the Adenauer government.³⁹ Men began to accept that the constitutionally guaranteed equal rights of women could also be realized institutionally.⁴⁰ Fathers became acquainted with new, “softer” forms of authority that corresponded better to the democratic “way of life” than traditional “hard” ideas of masculinity.⁴¹ Society as a whole gradually learned to accept and deal with the pluralism and individualism of modernity.

Notes

1. Projects that seek to work through and evaluate the Nazi past. *Aufarbeitung* is a widely used German term referring to the ongoing assessment of the Nazi past and its lessons and consequences.

2. See *Gestern Hitlers Blutrichter—heute Bonner Justiz-Elite: Übergeben auf der internationalen Pressekonferenz am 23. Mai 1957 in Berlin*, ed. Ausschluß für die Deutsche Einheit (Berlin/East, 1957); *Braunbuch: Kriegs- und Naziverbrecher in der Bundesrepublik*, ed. Nationalrat der Nationalen Front des Demokratischen Deutschland (Berlin/East: Staatsverlag der DDR, 1965).

3. See Lothar Gall et al., *Die Deutsche Bank 1870–1995* (Munich: C.H.Beck, 1995); Harold James, *Die Deutsche Bank und die “Arisierung”* (Munich: C.H.Beck, 2001); *Die Dresdner Bank im Dritten Reich*, ed. Klaus-Dietmar Henke, 4 vols. (Munich: R. Oldenbourg Verlag, 2006)—vol. 1: Johannes Bähr, *Die Dresdner Bank in der Wirtschaft des Dritten Reichs*, vol. 2: Dieter Ziegler, *Die Dresdner Bank und die deutschen Juden*, vol. 3: Harald Wixforth, *Die Expansion der Dresdner Bank in Europa*, vol. 4: Klaus-Dietmar Henke, *Die Dresdner Bank 1933–1945: Ökonomische Rationalität, Regimenähe, Mittäterschaft*.

4. See Johannes Bähr et al., *Der Flick-Konzern im Dritten Reich* (Munich: Oldenbourg Wissenschaftsverlag, 2008); Norbert Frei et al., *Flick: Der Konzern, die Familie, die Macht* (Munich: Blessing, 2009); Joachim Scholtyseck, *Der Aufstieg der Quandts: Eine deutsche Unternehmerdynastie* (Munich: C.H.Beck, 2011).

5. See Jürgen Finger, Sven Keller, and Andreas Wirsching, *Dr. Oetker und der Nationalsozialismus: Geschichte eines Familienunternehmens 1933–1945* (Munich: C.H.Beck, 2013).

6. See Martin Kröger and Roland Thimme, *Die Geschichtsbilder des Historikers Karl Dietrich Erdmann: Vom Dritten Reich zur Bundesrepublik* (Munich: R. Oldenbourg Verlag, 1996); Christoph Cornelißen, “Karl Dietrich Erdmann: Fortsetzung einer Debatte und offene Fragen,” *Geschichte in Wissenschaft und Unterricht* 61, no. 12 (2010): 692–99; Angelika Ebbinghaus and Karl Heinz Roth, “Vorläufer des ‘Generalplan Ost’: Eine Dokumentation über Theodor Schieders Polendenkschrift vom 7. Oktober 1939,” *1999: Zeitschrift für Sozialgeschichte des 20. und 21. Jahrhunderts* 7, no. 1 (1992): 62–94; Ingo Haar, *Historiker im Nationalsozialismus: Deutsche Geschichtswissenschaft und der “Volkstumskampf” im Osten*, 2nd ed. (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2002); Christoph Nonn, *Theodor Schieder: Ein bürgerlicher Historiker im 20. Jahrhundert* (Düsseldorf: Droste, 2013); Wolfgang J. Mommsen, “‘Gestürzte Denkmäler?’ Die ‘Fälle’ Aubin, Conze, Erdmann und Schieder,” in Jürgen Elvert and Susanne Krauß, eds., *Historische Debatten und Kontroversen im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert* (Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner Verlag, 2003), 96–109.

7. The debate the *Deutsche Vereinigung für Politische Wissenschaft* (German Political Science Association) started in 2011 on Eschenburg’s role in the Third Reich and on his postwar perspective on that role has been extremely controversial. See “Theodor-Eschenburg-Preis der DVPW,” <https://www.dvpw.de/informationen/eschenburg-debatte/>, accessed April 6, 2020; Anne Rohstock, “Kein Vollzeitrepublikaner: Die Findung des Demokraten Theodor Eschenburg (1904–1999),” in Bastian Hein, Manfred Kittel and Horst Möller, eds., *Gesichter der Demokratie: Porträts zur deutschen Zeitgeschichte* (Munich: Oldenbourg Wissenschaftsverlag, 2012), 193–210; Hannah Bethke, “Theodor Eschenburg in der NS-Zeit: Gutachten im Auftrag von Vorstand und Beirat der DVPW (3. September 2012),” in Hubertus Buchstein, ed., *Die Versprechen der Demokratie* (Baden-Baden: Nomos Verlag, 2013), 527–67; Rainer Eisfeld, “Theodor Eschenburg (II), ‘Der innere Widerstand gegen ein totalitäres Regime verlangte eben besondere Verhaltensweisen,’” *Zeitschrift für Geschichtswissenschaft* 61 (2013): 522–42; Udo Wengst, “Der ‘Fall Theodor Eschenburg’: Zum Problem der historischen Urteilsbildung,” *Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte* 61, no. 3 (July 2013): 411–40; Hans Woller and Jürgen Zarusky, “Der ‘Fall Theodor Eschenburg’ und das Institut für Zeitgeschichte: Offene Fragen und neue Perspektiven,” *Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte* 61, no. 4 (October 2013): 551–65.

8. See Finger, Keller and Wirsching, *Dr. Oetker*, 339–70.

9. See Eckart Conze et al., *Das Amt und die Vergangenheit: Deutsche Diplomaten im Dritten Reich und in der Bundesrepublik* (Berlin: Blessing, 2010).

10. See Frank Bajohr, “Täterforschung: Ertrag, Probleme und Perspektiven eines Forschungsansatzes,” in idem and Andrea Löw, eds., *Der Holocaust: Ergebnisse und neue Fragen der Forschung* (Frankfurt a. M.: Fischer Taschenbuch, 2015), 167–85.

11. See Michael Wildt, *Hitler's Volksgemeinschaft and the Dynamics of Racial Exclusion: Violence against Jews in Provincial Germany, 1919–1939* (New York: Berghahn, 2014); Frank Bajohr and Michael Wildt, eds., *Volksgemeinschaft: Neue Forschungen zur Gesellschaft des Nationalsozialismus* (Frankfurt a. M.: Fischer Taschenbuch, 2009). The concept of the *Volksgemeinschaft* and its significance for the social dynamics of the Nazi dictatorship is discussed in detail in Bernhard Gotto and Martina Steber, eds., *Visions of Community in Nazi Germany: Social Engineering and Private Lives* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014).
12. See Michael J. Neufeld, "Wernher von Braun, the SS, and Concentration Camp Labor: Questions of Moral, Political, and Criminal Responsibility," *German Studies Review* 25, no. 1 (February 2002): 57–78.
13. See Christian Mentel and Niels Weise, *Die zentralen deutschen Behörden und der Nationalsozialismus: Stand und Perspektiven der Forschung* (Munich: 2016), https://www.ifz-muenchen.de/fileadmin/user_upload/Neuigkeiten%202016/2016_02_13_ZZF_IfZ_PM_BKM-Studie_FINAL_Neu.pdf, accessed April 6, 2020.
14. See Christiane Kuller, *Bürokratie und Verbrechen: Antisemitische Finanzpolitik und Verwaltungspraxis im nationalsozialistischen Deutschland* (Munich: Oldenbourg Wissenschaftsverlag, 2013); Jürgen Kilian, *Krieg auf Kosten anderer: Das Reichsministerium der Finanzen und die wirtschaftliche Mobilisierung Europas für Hitlers Krieg* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2017); Ralf Banken, *Hitlers Steuerstaat: Die Steuerpolitik im Dritten Reich* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2018); Alexander Nützenadel, ed., *Das Reichsarbeitsministerium im Nationalsozialismus: Verwaltung—Politik—Verbrechen* (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2017).
15. Conze et al., *Das Amt*.
16. See *Wirtschaftspolitik in Deutschland 1917–1990*, ed. Werner Abelshauser et al., 4 vols. (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2016).
17. See Manfred Görtemaker and Christoph Safferling, *Die Akte Rosenberg: Das Bundesministerium der Justiz und die NS-Zeit* (Munich: C.H.Beck, 2016); Frank Bösch and Andreas Wirsching, eds., *Hüter der Ordnung: Die Innenministerien in Bonn und Ost-Berlin nach dem Nationalsozialismus* (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2018).
18. See Constantin Goshler and Michael Wala, "Keine neue Gestapo": *Das Bundesamt für Verfassungsschutz und die NS-Vergangenheit* (Reinbek bei Hamburg: Rowohlt, 2015); Imanuel Baumann et al., *Schatten der Vergangenheit: Das BKA und seine Gründungsgeneration in der frühen Bundesrepublik* (Cologne: Luchterhand, 2011); *Unabhängige Historikerkommission zur Erforschung der Geschichte des Bundesnachrichtendienstes 1945–1968*, ed. Jost Düllfer et al., 11 vols. (Berlin: Ch. Links Verlag, 2013–19).
19. See Bösch and Wirsching, eds., *Hüter der Ordnung*.
20. See Stefanie Palm and Irina Stange, "Vergangenheiten und Prägungen des Personals des Bundesinnenministeriums," in *ibid.*, 122–81, here 125; Stefanie Palm, "Auf der Suche nach dem starken Staat: Die Kultur-, Medien- und Wissenschaftspolitik," in *ibid.*, 594–634, here 601.
21. See Irina Stange, "Das Bundesministerium des Innern und seine leitenden Beamten," in *ibid.*, 55–122, here 56–58.
22. See Frieder Günther, "Rechtsstaat, Justizstaat oder Verwaltungsstaat? Die Verfassungs- und Verwaltungspolitik," in *ibid.*, 381–412, here 381.

23. See Michael Wildt, *An Uncompromising Generation: The Nazi Leadership of the Reich Security Main Office* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 2009).
24. See Palm and Stange, "Vergangenheiten," in Bösch and Wirsching, eds., *Hüter der Ordnung*, 147.
25. See *ibid.*, 156–60; Maren Richter, "'Stillhalten' der Sozialabteilung: Das Bundessozialhilfegesetz," in *ibid.*, 580–93, here 592.
26. See Palm and Stange, "Vergangenheiten," in *ibid.*, 156–61.
27. See *ibid.*, 145–48.
28. See Richter, "Stillhalten," in *ibid.*, 581–91. On the legislation process, see Matthias Willing, *Das Bewahrungsgesetz (1918–1967): Eine rechtshistorische Studie zur Geschichte der deutschen Fürsorge* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2003).
29. Stange, "Bundesministerium des Innern," in Bösch and Wirsching, eds., *Hüter der Ordnung*, 81.
30. Quoted in Michael Ruck, "Kollaboration—Loyalität—Resistenz: Administrative Eliten und NS-Regime am Beispiel der südwestdeutschen Innenverwaltung," in Thomas Schnabel and Angelika Hauser-Hauswirth, eds., *Formen des Widerstandes im Südwesten 1933–1945: Scheitern und Nachwirken* (Ulm: Süddeutsche Verlagsgesellschaft, 1994), 124–51, here 124.
31. See Andreas Wirsching, "Antikommunismus als Querschnittsphänomen politischer Kultur 1917–1945," in Stefan Creuzberger and Dierk Hoffmann, eds., "*Geistige Gefahr*" und "*Immunisierung der Gesellschaft*": *Antikommunismus und politische Kultur in der frühen Bundesrepublik* (Munich: Oldenbourg Wissenschaftsverlag, 2014), 15–28.
32. Wolfgang Dierker, "Ich will keine Nullen, sondern Bullen': Hitlers Koalitionsverhandlungen mit der Bayerischen Volkspartei im März 1933," *Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte* 50, no. 1 (January 2002): 111–48, here 139.
33. Hans Ritter von Lex, *Eingangsplädoyer des Prozessvertreters der Bundesregierung Staatssekretär Ritter von Lex in dem Verfahren auf Feststellung der Verfassungswidrigkeit der KPD vor dem Bundesverfassungsgericht am 26. November 1954* (n.p., 1954).
34. See Rainer Hehemann, *Die "Bekämpfung des Zigeunerunwesens" im Wilhelminischen Deutschland und in der Weimarer Republik, 1871–1933* (Frankfurt a. M.: Haag + Herchen, 1987).
35. See Palm, "Suche," in Bösch and Wirsching, eds., *Hüter der Ordnung*, 600–7.
36. Gerhard Frey (1933–2013) was a key representative of right-wing extremism in the FRG. His influence was based in particular on the *National-Zeitung*, which he published and which was one of the most important organs of the extreme right in Germany until it ceased publication at the end of 2019.
37. Richter, "Stillhalten," in Bösch and Wirsching, eds., *Hüter der Ordnung*, 592.
38. See Frank Bajohr and Johannes Hürter, "Auftragsforschung 'NS-Belastung': Bemerkungen zu einer Konjunktur," in Frank Bajohr et al., eds., *Mehr als eine Erzählung: Zeitgeschichtliche Perspektiven auf die Bundesrepublik* (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2016), 221–33.
39. Christina von Hodenberg, "Die Journalisten und der Aufbruch zur kritischen Öffentlichkeit," in Ulrich Herbert, ed., *Wandlungsprozesse in Westdeutschland: Belastung, Integration, Liberalisierung, 1945–1980* (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2002), 278–311, here 297.

40. See Carmen Leicht-Scholten, *Das Recht auf Gleichberechtigung im Grundgesetz: Die Entscheidungen des Bundesverfassungsgerichts von 1949 bis heute* (Frankfurt a. M.: Campus Verlag, 2000).

41. See Till van Rahden, "Wie Vati die Demokratie lernte: Religion, Familie und die Frage der Autorität in der frühen Bundesrepublik," in Daniel Fulda et al., eds., *Demokratie im Schatten der Gewalt: Geschichten des Privaten im deutschen Nachkrieg* (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2010), 122–51.