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United Germany: Debating Prospects and Processes

Charly Mostert

The University of Arizona, cmostert@email.arizona.edu

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***United Germany: Debating Processes and Prospects.* Edited by Konrad H. Jarausch.** New York: Berghahn Books, 2013. 290 pp. \$95.00 Hardcover. ISBN: 978-0-85745-972-5.

Konrad H. Jarausch's volume *United Germany: Debating Processes and Prospects* does not claim to paint an authoritative portrait of where German unification stands after 25 years. Both in form and in content, the essay collection instead works to undermine the validity of a monolithic narrative of unification and opts for a "balance sheet" approach to the exploration of what unification has enabled, hampered, and reworked in the present-day landscapes of the formerly antithetical republics. *United Germany* is at once interdisciplinary and transcultural; aside from Jarausch's own introduction, it consists of 15 essays which encircle five broad and not entirely separable domains of unification, entitled Political Processes, Economic Problems, Social Upheaval, Cultural Conflict, and International Normalization. Each domain is assessed trifold by academics of West German, East German, and American origins, who employ both personal experience and rigorous scholarship in their respective essays.

Jarausch's contributors broadly interpret the concept of Political Processes as the history of democracy in the former German Democratic Party (GDR). Gero Neugebauer chronicles the Eastern minority's gradual integration into the political landscape of the FRG, including the transference of Western political structures already in need of reform before unification, as well as the FRG's ignorance of Eastern cultural sensitivities. Lamentation underpins Heinrich Bortfeldt's essay, in which he critiques the GDR's euphoric and thus insatiable expectations of democracy, as well as the peaceful revolution's inability to assert itself as a viable political platform. He decries the overly-reductive representations of the GDR in post-unification German media—even as recently as the 2010 anniversary—which propagate an East German sentiment of second-class citizenship. Helga A. Welsh then advocates for an assessment of German unification that considers how other nations have emerged (or not) from their own Cold War divisions since 1990. Regional differences in political orientation, she notes, is a phenomenon not unique to Germany, nor are calls for "national unity," though this concept remains problematic because it suggests both embracing and downplaying individual differences.

Thematized in the section on Economic Problems are the East German market economy's troubled birth and its subservience to the FRG's industry. Though its purpose shifted from the protection to the rapid privatization of East German public corporate assets, Wolfgang Seibel argues that the *Treuhandanstalt*—the GDR's agency for privatizing East German companies—was indeed a success as an institutional coping mechanism. East Germans desired a 1:1 *Ostmark* to *D-Mark* conversion rate without any of the economic catastrophe that such a rate would entail, which the *Treuhandanstalt* handled by undertaking the privatization necessary to avert the total economic collapse of the GDR economy while concurrently shielding West Germany from any East German public outcry that might have hampered unification. In the second essay of the section, Rainer Land, while respecting this unenviable position of the *Treuhandanstalt*, also understands the agency's actions as being closely related to the Christian Democratic Party's (CDU) own self-interests at the time. Land regrets the almost instantaneous dissolution of a so-called "third way" for the East German economy, which might have better incorporated Eastern economic strengths into a unified Germany. Instead, because the East German public—itsself inexperienced in political leadership—was unable to collaborate with the then highly suspect Socialist Unity Party (SED), the East German economy contorted to satisfy the needs of West

German industry, leaving it dependent upon established West German strengths in the global marketplace. Jonathan R. Zatlin takes a critical stance against the East-West monetary union as the opening bid to economic unification, arguing that the reform of the East German labor markets should have taken precedence prior to the extension of the *D-Mark*. As it stands, the premature monetary union has resulted, according to Zatlin, in an institutional solidification of the East German economy's underperformance and its continued reliance upon Western regions.

Social Upheaval, the third section, details the encounter between Eastern and Western feminist thought during unification. Though the new Western feminism of the 70s and 80s made inroads into the political consciousness of the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG), Ute Gerhard laments the absence of a consolidated feminist political force and the consequential sidelining of feminist voices in unification talks. Furthermore, the influx of allies expected in the form of Eastern women yielded in reality a failed alliance, as the differing foci of feminist critiques—as well as contrasting perspectives toward men and institutions as possible allies—divided FRG and GDR feminisms. Ingrid Miethe offers a comprehensive look at the phases of the Eastern and Western feminist encounter, from assumed similarity to fundamental difference and then from the close examination of a marked East by an unmarked West to the present era of increasing similarity between German equality standards and those of its European neighbors. Myra Marx Ferree further explores divergent feminist platforms of the two Germanys as they stand in the broader European context, noting that what might have passed as Eastern feminism had much more in common with the Scandinavian countries and France than with the FRG's continued endorsement of the nuclear family supported by a male breadwinner. Indeed, in promoting social equality, the FRG still finds itself adopting “new” measures that were altogether more commonplace in the GDR, though Ferree cautions that gender as a category is difficult to isolate from other sociocultural categories that generate inequality.

Contributors to the section on Cultural Conflict examine how Eastern writers and intellectuals came to terms with the unfamiliar landscape of Western culture and its market economy. Whereas these public figures enjoyed a privileged status during the GDR years, Klaus R. Scherpe points out that Eastern readers quickly abandoned their own intelligentsia in favor of the Western market. Even as a few GDR authors continued on to carry the torch of socialism, many remain stigmatized by their former roles as mouthpieces of the SED. Consequently, discussing the public responsibility of the author has remained largely absent from the writings of former East German authors, whose writing instead reminisces about their own unique experiences and voices during the GDR years. In a very personal account, Eastern academic Frank Hornigk writes of his own encounter with Westerners' overly simplistic understanding of Eastern intellectualism, which they sought to displace and discredit. Frank Trommler similarly explores the challenges to Eastern cultural validity, suggesting that the Cold War contributed to a rapid increase in the symbolic value of culture on both sides of wall, and that East German literature gained a therapeutic function in this cultural constellation, only to lose this function with the introduction of the Western literary market. Compared to other Eastern artists, writers had a particularly difficult adjustment to Western conditions, as their artistic medium and the medium in which the discredited SED communicated were one in the same.

Finally, in International Normalization, contributors assess changes in German military and security policy abroad since unification, as well as how these changes correspond to the

German Basic Law and external pressures from allies in the EU, NATO, and beyond. Drawing upon the paradigm of “civilian power,” which consists of cooperative security, anti-militarism, multilateral consensus, and adherence to international law, Beate Neuss argues that these values have continued to inform Germany’s foreign security policy since 1990. By contrast, Erhard Crome suggests that the tenets of civilian power provide increasingly tenuous rationale for Germany’s foreign security policy since 1990, with the notable exceptions of Germany’s abstention from the Iraq War and the recent War in Libya. He views NATO’s efforts to shore up its self-importance following the Cold War as counterproductive to world peace, advocating instead for Germany and the western world’s strict adherence to international law as embodied by the UN Charter. Andrew I. Port offers a middle ground between the two preceding contributors, underscoring the new tone of Germany’s foreign security policy since 1990 even as he still views it as adhering to the values of civilian power. According to Port, new means of realizing civilian power came into existence with German unification, including the decreased likelihood of Soviet backlash, as well as Germany’s and the western world’s new perceptions of what Germany can militarily undertake abroad. Port’s largest criticism is the sometimes erratic nature of Germany’s foreign security policy, and he views the culprit as German politicians’ political maneuvering from their heightened sensitivity to populist opinion during pre-election periods.

United Germany represents a solid effort to approach German unification through a variety of critical lenses, with its contributors only occasionally falling prey to the reductive narratives of binary opposition—those decrying either the *Jammerossies* or the *Besserwessies*—that the volume seeks to deconstruct. The individual essays are engaging to scholars of manifold disciplinary backgrounds, including political and intellectual history, economics, gender studies, critical theory, literary studies, and governmental policy, and because Jarausch brings these fields into dialogue within a single volume, readers from individual disciplinary backgrounds gain a more nuanced understanding of the interdisciplinary trends to have traversed German unification. Furthermore, and perhaps more importantly, the volume sketches out for readers how their respective fields can and must interact with others to further the scholarly assessment of unification as an interdisciplinary endeavor. Contrasting West German, East German, and American perspectives provides the volume with additional critical balance, though the insinuation that these three perspectives are themselves homogenous risks oversimplification. Additionally, in light of the United States’ well-defined stance toward the FRG’s and GRD’s respective socioeconomic systems from 1949–1989, it is worth noting that a distanced American perspective is perhaps not akin to a neutral one.

Charly Mostert
The University of Arizona