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Volker Depkat. *Lebenswenden und Zeitenwenden: Deutsche Politiker und die Erfahrungen des 20. Jahrhunderts.* Ordnungssysteme: Studien zur Ideengeschichte der Neuzeit. Munich: Oldenbourg Wissenschaftsverlag, 2007. 573 pp. EUR 69.80 (cloth), ISBN 978-3-486-57970-3.

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The Personal is Historical

In recent years historical biography, particularly the history of "generations," has experienced a renaissance among scholars of modern Germany.[1] *Lebenswenden und Zeitwenden* makes a contribution to this historiography, but also offers something more. It constitutes a thorough meditation on employing autobiography in historical research. Many historians have tended to problematize the use of autobiography because it is mediated by the vagaries of memory.[2] On the contrary, Volker Depkat suggests, autobiographers are more aware than most authors of the tension between past experience (*Erfahrung*) and future expectations (*Erwartung*) that colors all historical writing.[3] As "actors and analysts of their own time" (p. 506), the author argues, autobiographers are generally careful to corroborate their experiences through primary research, place them within the appropriate historiographical contexts, and comment effectively on perceived historical continuity and discontinuity. This conscious attempt to balance individual experience and epistemology–the "Nahtstellen zwischen Menschenalter und Zeitalter," in the words of Arnold Esch (p. 508)–makes autobiography an especially compelling genre for understanding the crisis-ridden twentieth century.

All fourteen autobiographers under investigation were born during the *Kaiserreich*, came of age before 1914, and with the exception of Albert Grzesinski, proceeded to live through the division of Germany in 1949. These include the socialists Wilhelm Keil, Wilhelm Dittmann, Grzesinski, Otto Buchwitz, and Max Seydewitz; the bourgeois Konrad Adenauer, Arnold Brecht, Ferdinand Friedensburg, and Hermann PÃ¼nder; and the ostensibly *bÃ¼rgerlich* female politicians Gertrud BÃ¤umer, Marie Baum, Marie-Elisabeth LÃ¼ders, Toni Sender, and KÃ¤te Frankenthal. I say ostensibly because, while the first three women were indeed middle-class liberals, Sender and Frankenthal, despite their bourgeois antecedents, were ardent socialists. Indeed, if this book has a weakness, it is the intermittent fungibility of the protagonists' sociopolitical stances.

In his extensive introduction, the author neverthe-

less makes a thorough case for the utility of the undertaking, dividing the text into three main sections: "Der EntschluÃ zur Autobiographie," "EpochbewuÃtsein der Autobiographie," and "Erinnerungssilhouetten." Section 1 addresses the reasons these individuals chose the genre of autobiography, observing several primary motivations. First, virtually all the authors chose autobiography as an opportunity for "self-historicization," a chance to (re)write one's political contributions into the historical record. For many, the genre also provided a mode of "self-therapy" that helped them to work through the multiple personal and political traumas of the first half of the twentieth century. Lastly, autobiography functioned as an "emancipation strategy" for those autobiographers who felt they had been marginalized due to their social class, politics, and/or gender.

Section 2 explores the question of periodization through the prism of autobiography. Here Depkat focuses on two critical turning points, the National Socialist seizure of power in 1933, which threw all fourteen protagonists into a state of utter confusion and distress, and the *Nullpunkt* of 1945. Their reflections vary considerably, not only in regard to gender, class, and politics, but also based on whether they wrote in the FRG or the GDR. Yet, we find a number of commonalties. It becomes clear, for example, that 1945 represents "einen TraditionsabriÃ, wie sie ihn tiefgreifender und weitreichender nie zuvor erlebt hatten–und das ist angesichts der Erfahrungen von 1914/18 und 1933 fÃ¼r die individuelle Orientierung in den 'Welten nach 1945' kaum zu Ã¼berschÃ¤tzen" (p. 247). All fourteen portrayed 1945 as a greater impetus for personal reorientation than 1933, a reorientation that reflected the new social and political realities of the two German republics. All fourteen protagonists likewise made some attempt to balance this overwhelming sense of a "new beginning" with an emphasis on pre-1933 political continuities. For bourgeois and socialist politicians alike, the Wilhelmine period came to represent an important period of liberal democratic becoming which, absent the First World War, might have led Germany down a successful republican path.

Finally, a longer and more detailed section 3 undertakes a systematic analysis of each protagonist according to sociopolitical milieu. The first chapter, "Hoffen auf den Sozialistischen Zukunftsstaat," begins by looking at the formative experiences of proletarian socialists in the Wilhelmine epoch, turning to the diverse responses evinced by the protagonists in the wake of the First World War, the revolutions of 1918-19, and the collapse of the Weimar Republic. In discussing all three epochs, the two East German socialists find themselves trying to rationalize their relatively moderate course–neither joined the more radical independent socialists or communists–while the three West German socialists offer a slightly less apologetic or predictably Marxist rendering of events. If the socialists disagree as to the extent to which the revolutions of 1918-19 failed and whether social democratic ideals were even possible in a bourgeois republic, all five concur that more should have been done to defend Weimar and prevent the rise of Adolf Hitler.

In "Die politische Erziehung der Unpolitischen," the author argues that the bourgeois politicians were, in contrast to their proletarian colleagues, only marginally politicized during the Wilhelmine epoch. Instead, the First World War and the early Weimar period galvanized Adenauer & Co. politically. Among both Catholics and Protestants, the war inspired a depth of national feeling and keen sense of sociopolitical destabilization that led bourgeois politicians to engage more directly in public life. Although the Catholic Adenauer briefly endorsed Rhenish separatism and the liberal Protestant Brecht felt some reservations about abandoning the *Kaiserreich*, all five eventually accepted the abolition of the monarchy and the necessity of the republic. All five also experienced varying levels of persecution during the Third Reich, which produced a kind of "anti-totalitarian consensus" founded in their own republican and religious sensibilities.

The last chapter, "Ausbruch aus der BÃ¼rgerlichkeit: Spielarten weiblicher Politik," addresses the ways in which female politicians–liberal as well as socialist–represented themselves vis-Ã -vis the dominant male establishment. Like their proletarian colleagues, all five women had already experienced a profound moment of politicization during the Wilhelmine epoch. They tended to respond more disparately to the First World War. Socialists proved more critical than liberals of the *Kaiserreich*'s imperfectly democratic constitution and imperialist war aims. Despite these different responses to war and defeat–with the nationalist BÃ¤umer appearing most devastated by Versailles and Sender least–all five women experienced viscerally the watershed moment of receiving political and legal equality. At the same time, they all felt the failures of the republic and the successes of the Nazis at least as intensely as their male brethren. If BÃ¤umer and, to some extent, LÃ¼ders accepted the need for a more authoritarian form of government, however, Baum, Sender, and Frankenthal made no concessions to the Third Reich. In this regard the

eminently bourgeois Marie Baum's Jewish background–which likely explains her stronger antipathy to National Socialism and greater willingness to assist Jewish colleagues–is perhaps underestimated. Conversely, in the case of the technically "bourgeois" (p. 109) but ideologically socialist Ã©migrÃ©s Sender and Frankenthal, the role of their Jewishness is probably overstated.

Indeed, the inevitably schematic organization of the book into bourgeois and proletarian, women and men, sometimes elides important ethnic, religious, and sociopolitical complexities. While all fourteen individuals were nominally "outsiders" in the Third Reich, the ambivalence many expressed toward the republic and attraction some felt for National Socialism makes it difficult to view them as a coherent "demokratisch-liberalen bzw. Sozialistischen Gegenelite" (p. 515). It would have been interesting, in any case, had the author included a "conservative" control group. Notwithstanding these minor qualifications, however, *Lebenswende und Zeitwenden* succeeds admirably in rescuing the genre of autobiography from the condescension of posterity.

Notes

[1]. See, among others, Kristin Platt and Mihran Dabag, eds., *Generation und GedÃ¤chtnis: Erinnerungen und kollektiven IdentitÃ¤ten* (Opladen: Leske and Budrich, 1995); Ulrich Herbert, *Best: Biographische Studien Ã¼ber Radikalismus, Weltanschauung und Vernunft, 1903-1989* (Bonn: J. H. W. Dietz, 1996); Michael Wildt, *Generation of the Unbound: The Leadership Corps of the Reich Security Main Office* (Jerusalem: Yad Vashem, 2002); Ulrike Jureit und Michael Wildt, eds., *Generationen: Zur Relevanz eines wissenschaftlichen Grundbegriffs* (Hamburg: Edition, 2005); A. Dirk Moses, *German Intellectuals and the Nazi Past* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007); and Volker R. Berghahn and Simone LÃ¤ssig, *Biography Between Structure and Agency: Central European Lives in International Historiography* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2008).

[2]. See, for example, Maurice Halbwachs, *The Collective Memory* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992); Ian Buruma, *The Wages of Guilt: Memories of War in Germany and Japan* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1994); Andreas Huyssen, *Twilight Memories* (New York: Routledge, 1995); Jane Kramer, *The Politics of Memory: Looking for Germany in the New Germany* (New York: Random House, 1996); Jeffrey Herf, *Divided Memory: The Nazi Past in the Two Germanys* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997); Mary Fulbrook, *German National Identity after the Holocaust* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 1999); Klaus Neumann, *Shifting Memories: The Nazi Past in the New Germany* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2000); Siobhan Kattago, *Ambiguous Memory: The Nazi Past and German National Identity* (Westport: Praeger, 2001); Robert G. Moeller, *War Stories: The Search for a Usable Past in the Federal Republic of Germany* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001); Alfred Loesdau, ed., *Erinnerungskultur in unserer Zeit: Zur Verantwortung des Historikers* (Berlin: Trafo, 2005); Moses, *German Intellectuals*; Alon Confino, *Germany as a Culture of Remembrance: Promises and Limits of Writing History* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006); Olga Kurilo, *TÃ¤ter, Opfer, Helden: Der Zweite Weltkrieg in der weissrussischen und deutschen Erinnerung* (Berlin: Metropol, 2008); Neil Gregor, *Haunted City: Nuremberg and the Nazi Past* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008); Caroline Schaumann, *Memory Matters: Generational Responses to Germany's Nazi Past in Recent Women's Literature* (Berlin: W. de Gruyter, 2008); and Paul B. Jaskot and Gavriel D. Rosenfeld, eds., *Beyond Berlin: Twelve German Cities Confront the Nazi Past* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2008).

[3]. Reinhart Koselleck, " 'Erfahrungsraum' und 'Erwartungshorizont'–zwei historische Kategorien," in *Vergangene Zukunft* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1979), 349-375.

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