



# Nonconformity, Dissent, Opposition, and Resistance in Germany, 1933–1990

The Freedom to Conform

Sabrina P. Ramet



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*For Bob Goeckel*

*Freedom is always the freedom to think differently.*

—Rosa Luxemburg

*If all mankind minus one were of one opinion, mankind would no more be justified in silencing that one person than he, if he had the power, would be justified in silencing mankind.*

—John Stuart Mill

## PREFACE

This book is conceived as a comparison of three different systems introduced within one nation: Nazism, 1933–1945; communism, 1949–1990; and parliamentary pluralism in West Germany, 1949–1990. The focus is on nonconformity, dissent, opposition, and resistance, embracing political engagement (broadly understood), music and art, religion, and the sexual sphere. This is, thus, not a history of Germany; it is a comparative analysis of the systems operating in three periods of German history in the twentieth century with emphasis both on how the systems operated and on the sundry forms of noncompliance and opposition which emerged in each of them. In order to understand how and why there were individuals and groups determined to ignore or criticize or mock or oppose or fight against one or another regime, it is necessary to understand the nature of the regime and its policies.

During the time I have worked on this book, I have made use of the University Library of the Norwegian University of Science and Technology, the Library of Northwestern University, and the Van Pelt Library of the University of Pennsylvania. I am grateful to Jennifer Bailey, Thomas Berker, John Connelly, Robert F. Goeckel, Mikhail Gradovski, Christine M. Hassenstab, Jo Jakobsen, David Kanin, Torbjørn Knutsen, László Kürti, Jerry Pankhurst, Priscilla Ringrose, and Michael Weigl for taking the time to check earlier drafts of portions of this manuscript and offer me helpful suggestions and corrections. I am also deeply grateful to Magnus

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Saksvik, Norway

Sabrina P. Ramet



# PRONUNCIATION OF GERMAN VOWELS AND CONSONANTS

**a** is pronounced like “uh”

**ä** is pronounced like the “air” in “airplane”

**au** is pronounced like the “ow” in “cow”

**e** is pronounced like the “e” in “egg”

**ei** is pronounced like “eye”

**eu** or **äu** is pronounced like the “oi” in “oil”

**i** is pronounced like the “i” in “hit”

**ie** is pronounced like the “ea” in “easy”

**o** is pronounced like the “o” in “on”

**ö** or **oe** is pronounced like the “u” in “purring”

**u** is pronounced like the “u” in “chute”

**ü** or **ue** has no equivalent in English; English speakers are often advised to approximate this sound by trying to say “see” while pursing one’s lips to whistle

**ch** is an aspirated “h,” pronounced like the “h” in “hard”; it is pronounced even when it occurs at the end of a word, as in the name “Bach”

**j** is pronounced like the “y” in “yodel”

**sch** is pronounced like the “sh” in “shush”

**st** at the start of a word is pronounced like “sht”

**th** is pronounced like the “t” in “boat”

**tsch** is pronounced like the “ch” in “church”

**v** is pronounced like the “f” in “fife”

**w** is pronounced like the “v” in “victor” or “poverty”

**z** is pronounced like the “ts” in “cats” or “tsar”

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# ACRONYMS<sup>1</sup>

AMZON	The American Zone of Occupation
BDM	Bund Deutscher Mädel (League of German Girls)
CC	Central Committee
CDU	Christlich Demokratische Union (Christian Democratic Union)
COMECON	Council of Mutual Economic Relations
CPSU	Communist Party of the Soviet Union
CSU	Christlich-Soziale Union (Christian Social Union)
CTC	Central Textbook Committee
DBD	Demokratische Bauernpartei Deutschlands (Democratic Farmers' Party of Germany)
DEFA	Deutsche Film-Aktiengesellschaft (German Film Joint-Stock Company)
DFD	Demokratischer Frauenbund Deutschlands (Democratic Women's League of Germany)
DPA	Deutsche Presse-Agentur (German Press Agency)
DVU	Deutsche Volksunion (German People's Union)
DZVJ	Deutsche Zentralverwaltung für Justiz (German Central Administration for Justice)
DZVV	Deutsche Zentralverwaltung für Volksbildung (German Central Administration for People's Education)
EKD	Evangelische Kirche in Deutschland (Evangelical Church in Germany)
FAP	Freiheitliche Deutsche Arbeiterpartei (Free German Workers' Party)
FDGB	Freier Deutscher Gewerkschaftsbund (Free German Trade Union Federation)
FDJ	Freie Deutsche Jugend (Free German Youth)

FDP	Freie Demokratische Partei (Free Democratic Party)
FRG	Federal Republic of Germany
FUB	Freie Universität Berlin (Free University of Berlin)
GDR	German Democratic Republic
HJ	Hitlerjugend (Hitler Youth)
KDC	Kirchenbewegung Deutsche Christen (German Christian Movement)
KPD	Kommunistische Partei Deutschlands (Communist Party of Germany)
LDPD	Liberal-Demokratische Partei Deutschlands (Liberal Democratic Party of Germany)
MfS	Ministerium für Staatssicherheit (Ministry of State Security)
NDPD	National-Demokratische Partei Deutschlands (National Democratic Party of Germany)
NPD	Nationaldemokratische Partei Deutschlands (National Democratic Party of Germany)
NSDAP	Nationalsozialistische Deutsche Arbeiterpartei (National Socialist German Workers' Party, or Nazi Party)
OMGUS	Occupation Military Government, United States
PDS	Partei des Demokratischen Sozialismus (Party of Democratic Socialism)
RKK	Reichskulturkammer (Reich Culture Chamber)
RMK	Reichsmusikkammer (Reich Music Chamber)
RSHA	Reichssicherheitshauptamt (Reich Security Main Office)
SA	Sturmabteilung (Storm Detachment)
SBZ	Sowjetische Besatzungszone (Soviet Occupation Zone)
SD	Sicherheitsdienst (Security Service)
SDS	Sozialistischer Deutscher Studentenbund (Socialist German Student Union)
SED	Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschlands (Socialist Unity Party of Germany)
SHB	Sozialistischer Hochschulbund (Socialist University Union)
SMAD	Sowjetische Militäradministration in Deutschland (Soviet Military Administration in Germany)
SPD	Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands (Social Democratic Party of Germany)
SS	Schutzstaffel (Protection Squad)
USSR	Union of Soviet Socialist Republics
ZDF	Zweites Deutsches Fernsehen (Second German Television)

## NOTE

1. Note: All acronyms are taken from the German words, except for the names of the countries, common terms such as “Central Committee,” and words associated with the Soviet Union and the Soviet bloc.

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## CHAPTER 1

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# Introduction: The Freedom to Conform

The underlying triune thesis of this book is that nonconformity, dissent, opposition, and resistance make a social and political difference, that their effectiveness is affected by the nature of the political system in which they emerge, and that, in the three incarnations of Germany between 1933 and 1990, these forms of noncompliance and obstruction, even when unsuccessful (as in the case of the attempted assassination of Hitler in July 1944) had a direct or indirect impact on the political culture, assumptions, expectations, or behaviors of Germans, whether in the short term or in the long term. It may seem strange at first sight to construe nonconformity as a form of obstruction. But, in the project to define, shape, and maintain the mindset of a people, nonconformity represents a refusal to accept the dominant or prescribed mindset.

At the national identity level, conformity is about more than just speaking the same language or accepting certain events in the past as important for the nation. National identity also involves adherence to certain traditions, norms, and social expectations. In other words, national identity always involves conformity. Every stable society endeavors to socialize its citizens, already from childhood, to the norms appropriate to the given society, typically conveying the message that certain values are to be prized over others. Thus, in a society where freedom is given the highest value, such as the United States, talk about equality, especially equality for same-sex couples, is contested and considered by conservatives to be outside the norm (or perhaps “left-wing”), while in, let us say, Stalin-era Russia—to

take an extreme example—talk of thinking for oneself or, for that matter, of desiring to travel could result in one’s arrest and incarceration in the gulag. For purposes of this book, I shall distinguish between nonconformity, deviance, dissent or dissidence, opposition, and resistance. To begin with the second in this list, by *deviant*, following the *Cambridge Dictionary*, I shall mean “not usual and . . . generally considered to be unacceptable,”<sup>1</sup> and not chosen for any social or political reason. By *dissent* or *dissidence*, I shall mean the conscious embrace of views or engagement in actions in opposition either to the government or to society at large, chosen for some higher social or political reason. By *nonconformity*, basing my definition once again on that offered by the *Cambridge Dictionary*, I shall mean “the quality of thinking and behaving in a way that is different from [the way most] other people” think and behave.<sup>2</sup> Thus, *nonconformity*, according to this definition, embraces not only both *deviance* and *dissent*, but also creative originality (as in the arts), the simple refusal to accept what an individual considers arbitrary idiocy, mere thinking for oneself rather than following the crowd (thus deciding on one’s own criteria for decision-making), seeing decisions to be made where others do not, and other forms of independence. A nonconformist, thus, is a free person, not in the sense of freedom to conform but in a more fundamental sense. But, by the same virtue, a nonconformist, at least in the sense of dissidence, chooses to stand aside from the modal understanding of a society’s identity and, as such, is implicitly, if not explicitly, threatening to the given regime’s identity project. For any regime, whether an authoritarian regime or a democratic regime, whatever other freedoms may be recognized, there is always an endorsement of the freedom to conform.

Two more terms remain to be defined: *opposition* and *resistance*. Thomas Ammer distinguishes between these two, suggesting that the criterion for distinguishing between them is their relationship to the law. Thus, according to Ammer, opposition (*Opposition*) should be understood as consisting of more or less legal activity, while resistance (*Widerstand*) involves illegal activity.<sup>3</sup> I shall, however, use these terms as they are defined in the *Cambridge Dictionary*. Here one finds *opposition* defined as “disagreement with something, often by speaking or fighting against it, or (esp. in politics) the people or group who are not in power.”<sup>4</sup> By contrast, *resistance* is defined in the *Cambridge Dictionary* as “a situation in which people or organizations fight against something or refuse to accept [it].”<sup>5</sup> Thus, resistance necessarily entails fighting, while opposition may or may not. Further, resistance typically involves the aspiration either to prevent

the government from pursuing policies of highest priority to the party in power, or to overthrow the government or at least remove its chief office-holders. Or, to put it differently, all resistance involves opposition, but not all opposition involves resistance.

I have chosen, in this book, to focus on four battlegrounds (in the Third Reich five, adding race) where the regime has dictated norms for conformity and where national identity has been contested: the state's concept of what Germanness means or should mean, religion and religious instruction in the schools, understandings of sexuality (can a gay or lesbian be considered a "good" German? what is the significance of abortion for the body politic?), and the arts (especially painting and music, where since the 1920s new idioms such as atonalism in music or abstract art have challenged people's ways of relating to art and perhaps also to reality). The differences over these policy spheres became visible in the years of the Hohenzollern empire, flared in the Weimar years, continued in the Third Reich, were muffled in the German Democratic Republic, and continued in new forms in the years of the Federal Republic, including where the presence of religious symbols in the schools and the legal status of homosexuality have been concerned. On the face of it, the debates seemed sometimes to pit "modern" or "modernist" views against "traditional" ways of thinking, but the reality has often been more complex.

In Germany, as elsewhere, collective identity is variously shaped or affected or challenged by state conditioning (typically but not exclusively through the schools), repression (e.g., of religious minorities or forms of art of which the Nazis disapproved), programs of control (e.g., of history textbooks), popular protest (building collective self-confidence and affirming values different from those espoused by the regime), resistance, and inevitably and most obviously also regime change. The pressures and policy fronts to be discussed herein relate, as already mentioned, to appropriate gender/sexual behavior, the place of religion in the schools and in society, control of culture (largely a theme for the Nazi era and the German Democratic Republic), and issues related to nation and race—all of which impinge directly on national or regional identity; and of course conformity to Bavarian social norms, for example, would not necessarily signal integration in Hanover or Hamburg. Every state, every regime in the world is interested in how its citizens think and behave and seeks, at least to some extent, to shape the political culture, values, and identity of its citizens. The United States wants its citizens to prize freedom (which for some Americans means the freedom to own and carry guns). Norway wants its

citizens to value equality in the first place even to the extent of keeping salary differences within a single organization within a relatively narrow range. Communist regimes, in their heyday, wanted their citizens to be convinced that a one-party regime ruled by a communist party was intrinsically better than any multiparty system, since—it was argued—a multiparty system could allow parties working against the interest of working people to gain advantage. But systems change and, when system change brings in tow changes in the values which the outgoing regime in question wished to promote, then the incoming regime will inevitably seek to reshape the political culture and values of its citizens, perhaps modestly, perhaps radically, and to reconstruct the identity of its citizens, so that they see themselves and their place in history in a different way.

### NATIONAL IDENTITY AND CONFORMITY

There have been a number of studies of national or regional identity in the German context, both in the Anglophone world and in the Germanophone world. As will be seen in Chap. 5, East German historians played their assigned part, in the wake of the erection of the Berlin Wall, in depicting the two Germanys as two distinct nations. At the center of the effort to promote and reinforce the construction of an East German nation was the argument that East Germany was an “anti-fascist” nation, while West Germany was not.<sup>6</sup> Ultimately, however, this effort failed, even though the legacy of four decades of communist rule left “Ossis,” as the residents of the eastern part of the country are sometimes called, with a sense that they are different in some ways from “Wessis.” But then again, Bavarians, to take just one of the provinces in what was West Germany, have long felt that they have their own culture, cuisine, music, and outlook.

One of the earliest contributions to the literature on national identity and homeland (*Heimat*) is Klaus Weigelt’s collection, *Heimat und Nation* [Homeland and Nation].<sup>7</sup> The contributors to this volume stressed familiarity with one’s locality as central to a sense of *Heimat*. Detlef Grieswelle put it this way:

The social, cultural-spiritual, and natural environment of a street, a village, a city or a smaller region gains value and meaning and mediates feelings of proximity, security, safety, and warmth. *Heimat* is all about spatial and social structure: the topographic and objective-architectural reality such as land-

scape, fields, soils, buildings, paths, streets, plazas and social relationships with local families, relations, friends, neighbors and the experiences one has here ...<sup>8</sup>

For another six years, aside from Charles Maier's 1988 analysis of the relationship of German national identity to the Holocaust,<sup>9</sup> no major works on the subject of German identity were published in either English or German—to the best of my knowledge. Then, in 1990, the University of California Press brought out Celia Applegate's pioneering work, *A Nation of Provincials: The German Idea of Heimat*.<sup>10</sup> She succeeded in showing that, across the German lands, even before 1871, and increasingly after the establishment of the Second *Reich*, there was a growing interest in and attachment to local dialect, local customs, local history, and, whether revived or invented, local traditions. A *Heimat* movement emerged, in which "people sang the old songs of the *Volk*; the old costumes, dances, and customs ... were brought back to life, and ... the historical festivals of the people [were] filled with fresh life."<sup>11</sup> The *Heimat* movement rejected homogenization to external standards, promoting rather—in the case Applegate studied—an attachment to and sense of *Pfälzer* folk culture. Thus, in its own localized way, the *Heimat* movement promoted conformity—to local customs, to the local dialect, and to local songs. Seven years would pass before Stefan Berger<sup>12</sup> and Alon Confino<sup>13</sup> would address the subject of *Heimat* and national identity. Where the former traced German concepts of *Volk* (nation) from Johann Gottfried Herder (1744–1803) and Heinrich von Treitschke (1834–1896) to Georg von Below (1858–1927), Friedrich Meinecke (1862–1954), Hans-Ulrich Wehler (1931–2014), and beyond, noting that German reunification in 1990 inevitably sparked a fresh debate about German identity and Germany's place in the international order,<sup>14</sup> Confino took up Applegate's theme but focused instead on Württemberg, arguing that, over the course of the years 1871–1918, a "multitude of local memories in Germany constructed a local-national memory."<sup>15</sup> In the case of Württemberg, Confino found that the local historical narrative was a mixture of partial truths and sheer invention.<sup>16</sup> In the effort to promote a sense of Swabian collective being, locals invented the Swabian *Tracht* or folk costume, presenting it nonetheless as "traditional."<sup>17</sup> The 371 *Heimat* museums which sprang to life across Germany after 1871 displayed local variants of common German artifacts, thus instilling in Germans a sense of a greater whole to serve as the focus for loyalty and providing in each case a standard for conformity.

While common language is generally understood to be a critical component in national identity, among other reasons because one needs a common language to communicate with other people in one's presumed national community, music has also figured, both historically and in the present, as part of the way in which a society identifies itself. The research of Celia Applegate and Pamela Potter<sup>18</sup> has highlighted the centrality of the music of Johann Sebastian Bach, Ludwig van Beethoven, and Johannes Brahms—and sometimes also Richard Wagner—to earlier generations of Germans' sense of self (I count Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, Joseph Haydn, and Johann Strauss Sr. and Jr. as part of the legacy of Austria), while Melanie Schiller has described the efforts of the industrial bands Kraftwerk and Rammstein to give Germans a new sense of their place in the universe, a refashioned national identity.<sup>19</sup> Conformity is also an unmistakable theme in Nancy Reagin's *Sweeping the German Nation*,<sup>20</sup> which recounts how, in the years 1871–1945, housewives were expected to maintain spotless homes, with white tablecloths, to cook traditional German food, to decorate their homes in a way recognizable as German, and even to celebrate the “German Christmas.” Deviation from these high standards was taken as a sign that the woman was not part of the *Volksgemeinschaft*, that is, not a German. A German housewife was expected to clean all shelves and cabinet surfaces at least three times a month, and “a specific style of housekeeping became bound up with German national identity.”<sup>21</sup> After 1900, *mandatory* classes in cooking, cleaning, knitting, and other facets of housekeeping were introduced across Germany. As Käthe Schirmacher, a conservative German feminist, put it in 1917, “The preservation of Germanness demands a clean home. The drive to scrub, *innate in our Volk*, has a moral and national value.”<sup>22</sup> Indeed, one can feel an emotional sense of *Heimat*, a love of the familiar, with any of a number of things, including local-regional foods, as Jennifer Jordan showed in her 2011 chapter<sup>23</sup> and, most certainly, with architecture. Indeed, in the case of Dresden, the end of the communist era provided an opportunity for Dresdeners to replace the Stalinist architecture downtown and “reinvent the past.” As Jürgen Paul has argued, in Dresden after 1990 “... as in Munich in the 1950s, the erection of replicas or near-replicas of buildings destroyed during the Second World War was more important than the development of new architectural styles.”<sup>24</sup> Reconstruction of the baroque Frauenkirche was started in 1994 and completed in 2005.

Jennifer Jenkins' 2003 study of local culture in Hamburg<sup>25</sup> confirmed the findings of Applegate and Confino (although those two scholars had some differences of interpretation<sup>26</sup>), noting that the *Heimat* movement offered a vision of overcoming alienation, of gaining a sense of rootedness. Hamburg's liberals hoped that promoting an interest in and fondness for local culture and traditions would build a sense of community, in turn feeding into civic mindedness.<sup>27</sup> But, as she understood, "[t]he popularization of the idea of *Heimat* ... changed narratives about the past and images of the present."<sup>28</sup>

Only a very few historians of Germany have contributed as much to understanding that paradoxical nation as Mary Fulbrook. In her landmark volume, *German National Identity after the Holocaust*, Fulbrook wisely points out, "National identity does not exist, as an essence to be sought for, found and defined. It is a human construct, evident only when sufficient people believe in some version of collective identity for it to be a social reality, embodied in and transmitted through all institutions, laws, customs, beliefs and practices."<sup>29</sup> For Fulbrook, a nation is "a self-identifying community of common memory and common identity."<sup>30</sup> In a subsequent study, *Dissonant Lives*, Fulbrook highlighted the importance of generational differences in defining how individuals and groups understand their nation or society and experience their collective identity. As Confino noted earlier, the content of national identity is not static; thus, the standards for conformity evolve. Thus, Fulbrook points to a general phenomenon of generational differences in outlook, values, and the content of national identity.<sup>31</sup> The difficulty of communication which one sometimes finds between members of "the younger generation" and members of "the older generation" typically reflects the fact that many of them are conforming to different standards; thus, even when young people think they are "rebellious," they may in fact really be choosing a different culture and different standards to which to conform. Jan Palmowski has discussed public narratives or "public transcripts," as he calls them, noting that such transcripts may be spun by the regime or emerge from popular culture. In the nineteenth century, as is well known, Churches defined the standards for public behavior across Europe and the United States, but the influence of Christian Churches has declined in most countries in the northern hemisphere. In the GDR, the regime spun a narrative or public transcript around manipulated memories, memorials, sites of (assigned or transformed) meaning, and locations. Conformity was central to this endeavor and, as Palmowski points out, "[r]efusal to subscribe to

the public transcript was not against the law, but it nevertheless constituted a most fundamental threat to the party's power, and the party considered it as such."<sup>32</sup>

In the GDR, as Fulbrook has shown in her *Anatomy of a Dictatorship*, "the basic idea of this totally unified state required voluntary collaboration, cooperation, or at least silent acquiescence"<sup>33</sup>—in a word, conformity, whether active or passive. But the theme of conformity, as already mentioned, is common to all national or political communities and thus, also to the Federal Republic of Germany, even if there are differences in socialization, enforcement, and penalization. What I hope I can offer here that may go beyond previous literature is to probe in greater depth than has been done up to now about how policies in the religious sector, cultural sector, and sexuality not merely set standards for conformity (just think of the socialist doctrine of socialist realism) but also set the stage for forms of nonconformity, dissent, and opposition. I will also show how freedom in all of the incarnations of Germany up to now (thus, including also the Berlin republic) has always been, whether within tight boundaries or looser boundaries, mainly *the freedom to conform*, and further how nonconformity, especially in the form of dissent or opposition, may challenge or contribute to modifying people's sense of their collective self and even changing the system itself.

## THE ARGUMENT IN THIS BOOK

Nonconformists, by definition, stand outside the regime's national project, either because they simply refuse to be assimilated into some party's model or because they harbor thoughts of an alternative model. Nonconformity challenges regimes to respond, and the examples of Magnus Hirschfeld<sup>34</sup> (in Hohenzollern Germany and also in the Weimar Republic), Sophie Scholl (in the Third Reich), and Rudolf Bahro (in the German Democratic Republic), among others, show how sensitive especially authoritarian or totalitarian regimes can be to the fundamental challenge posed by nonconformity and, moreover, how their respective responses in turn affected their own projects to mold, shape, or reshape national identity.

Nonconformists in religion and sexuality may find themselves pressured, harassed, and even beaten by members of the general public, even where the law is on their side. This is because nonconformity is, by definition, a challenge to the established order. Homosexuality challenges



heteronormativity, atheism and agnosticism challenge religious establishment, artists who produce abstract art and musicians composing atonal or modernist music have provoked disquiet, confusion, and even anger in the past, as the response of the Parisians attending the world premiere of Igor Stravinsky's *Rite of Spring* in 1913 showed.<sup>35</sup> Nonconformists are, whether they like it or not, rebels, and have repeatedly played a role in pushing for change, whether reform of legislation, transformation of the public's attitudes, or even regime change. Thus, in the context of the Weimar Republic both Magnus Hirschfeld, who championed gay rights, and the Nazis were nonconformists. But where Hirschfeld wanted merely to change how the public and the law treated homosexuality, Hitler and the Nazis rejected the Weimar Republic altogether and wanted to replace it with a racially driven dictatorship. Again, looking to communist East Germany, one finds that Robert Havemann, Wolf Biermann, and Rudolf Bahro—in their cases by criticizing the SED from a Marxist perspective—as well as others played their parts in pushing the regime toward ultimate collapse. Or, in West Germany, the Churches sought “the restoration of the old relationships that [had been] established before 1933,”<sup>36</sup> and the conservative Christian elite and the first chancellor, Konrad Adenauer, set sometimes rigid boundaries for acceptable behavior (not just in gender relations and sexuality)—boundaries which would be challenged and ultimately pushed back in the course of the rebellious late 1960s.

When a regime undertakes to define or shape or modify or transform national identity, this undertaking defines the limits of socially acceptable beliefs and behaviors in the society—in essence defining where conformity ends and nonconformity begins. What lies outside the limits of what power-holders or ordinary people define as acceptable has been variously termed “sinful” or “deviant” or “degenerate.” Indeed, “degenerate” served as the Nazis' favorite term to characterize anything they considered incompatible with their notion of German culture and identity. To be labeled as engaging in “degenerate” behavior was to be accused of un-German behavior. Needless to say, among Christians, there is no such thing as freedom to sin; the trick is what qualifies as “sin.” In the Third Reich, there was no right to be “degenerate,” no freedom to think outside the parameters defined by the regime. Rosa Luxemburg (1871–1919), the Polish-German communist revolutionary, famously declared that “Freedom is always and exclusively freedom for those who think differently.” That is, of course, the clarion call of nonconformists. But, for conservatives, one might say, freedom is always and only the freedom to obey

the laws and to conform. (As Immanuel Kant once wrote, there is no freedom to do what is wrong.) The tension between freedom and non-conformity runs through all of German history—and not only *German* history—with the nonconformity of the right-wing PEGIDA movement (Patriotic Europeans against the Islamization of the West), which has challenged the asylum policy of the German government, serving as a recent example.<sup>37</sup>

Can nonconformity, dissent, opposition, and resistance make a difference? No one who understands anything about opposition and resistance can have any doubt concerning the potential for these forms of confrontation with an existing political order to make a difference. But what about dissent and “mere” nonconformity? Both of these involve some measure of courage, the refusal to accept what Palmowski has called the regime’s script (or, alternatively, society’s script) and, in the case of dissent, the articulation of alternative values and an alternative way of understanding the reality in which people find themselves. In a word, dissidents keep alive an alternative vision, potentially setting the ship of state on a course to an alternative harbor. In each of the three cases examined herein, dissidents contributed to changing the script and changing the balance of power, albeit over time. In the German Democratic Republic, for example, the collapse of the socialist system in 1989 owed something—though not everything—to critiques presented by Wolf Biermann through his widely heard songs and Rudolf Bahro through his systematic and comprehensive critique of the socialist system as it existed, while, in West Germany, the student revolt of 1968 was part of a left-oriented reaction against the CDU, pushing politics in a more secular direction.

But even mere nonconformity, in which an individual or group does not challenge the system but merely seeks to stake out some sphere of autonomy, proves to make a difference for politics and can contribute to revising society’s “script.” In the cases of the Third Reich and the German Democratic Republic, an individual’s claim to define a sphere of autonomy from the Nazi Party or the SED was already political and, for these regimes, unacceptable. In all three cases, the persistence of nonconformity challenged the regime’s dominion in law, in social relations, and of course in politics. Where the Federal Republic of Germany is concerned, the most obvious case of nonconformity pushing against the law has to do with homosexuality, finally legalized in 1968, although right-wing and left-wing extremists also challenged the West German political order, especially in the early years of the republic. There were also mass protests

against remilitarization in the 1950s and against nuclearization in the 1980s. In addition, abortion figured as a contested area, with a revision to the law on the termination of pregnancy passed by the West German *Bundestag* in 1976. Later, after German reunification in 1990, it became necessary to harmonize the rather different laws which had been passed in East and West Germany; the result was passage of a new law on abortion in 1992. Finally, rock ‘n’ roll fans were as threatening to conservative values in West Germany as they were to the straight-laced cultural commissars in East Germany in the 1950s and 1960s.<sup>38</sup>

In the following chapters, I will trace regime efforts to define social norms and to construct or reconstruct German identity over the years 1933–1990, emphasizing how nonconformity in its various forms was always potentially problematic for any regime. I will also pay some attention to the fields in which national and citizens’ identity would be contested and defined, specifically in the spheres of politics, religion (and religious instruction), sexuality, and culture, bearing in mind that cultural history, like the history of struggles for gender equality and for religious freedom, “allows us to look for the operation of power outside conventionally recognized sites of political conflict.”<sup>39</sup> I will also take note of nonconformists who have challenged norms in the religious sphere, sexuality, and the arts, whether those norms have derived from social conventions and customs or have reflected rather decisions and policies of the respective regime. Part of what constitutes the identity of a society, a nation, a region, or an individual is memory of one’s past. People are who they are by virtue of who they have been, how much they have been willing to challenge existing norms, and how much they have learned and changed over time. And, of course, as new memories have accumulated, Germans’ memory of their own past has changed with time.

## NOTES

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  15. Confino, *The Nation as a Local Metaphor*, p. 8.
  16. *Ibid.*, p. 65.
  17. *Ibid.*, p. 116.
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  21. Reagin, *Sweeping the German Nation*, pp. 10, 39; the extract appears on p. 10.
  22. As quoted in *Ibid.*, p. 49 (my emphasis).

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