

Undoing Trauma: Reconstructing the Church of Our Lady in Dresden

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Abstract This article is an examination of the recent reconstruction of the Church of Our Lady (Frauenkirche) in Dresden, Germany, in relation to a desire for normalcy, which in this case finds expression in a fantasy of resurrection. The reconstruction of a monumental edifice framed as a victim of World War II and socialism both depends on and enacts the fantasy that historical loss can be undone. In addition, the project identifies Germany with German cultural heritage, which appears wholly distinct from the nation's burdened pasts, and offers a monumental symbolic touchstone for narratives of modern German history in which the nation and its citizens figure primarily as suffering victims. In this way, the reconstruction of the church embodies something more complex than mere forgetting. It enacts a fantasy of undoing loss, rendering the work of mourning unnecessary, while at the same time embracing injury and victimhood. [Germany, Dresden, nationalism, architecture, memory]

In the mid-1980s, when national unity still appeared to most a remote possibility and to many a suspect desire, West German Chancellor Helmut Kohl proclaimed that it was time to “normalize” his country's national identity. The Federal Republic of Germany (FRG) had founded its identity on the rejection of old forms of nationalism, but for Kohl it was time to remove taboos on “the nation” and affirm Germany's positive historical achievements. By 1990, however, history seemed to have rendered Kohl's project unnecessary: the German nation returned as a political fact, and it did so to refrains (esp. among East Germans) of “Germany, united fatherland!” and “We are one people!” After decades of

political division as well as ambivalence and reticence surrounding the German nation, it appeared again available as an object of identification. Advocates of unification asserted that a solid bedrock of Germanness had persisted through 40 years of political and social division. East and West Germans should come together in a single nation-state, the argument went, because they simply belonged together as Germans. The widely used term *reunification* (*Wiedervereinigung*) also rendered the process as the recovery of a previous state of affairs. The postwar era appeared finally over; if division counted as punishment for Nazi crimes, the sentence had been served. Germanness could be “normal” again.

Or so it seemed. It turns out that neither unification itself nor 15 years of unity has resolved the conundrums of German identity. The “wall in the mind” that still divides East and West Germans belies the shared cultural bedrock invoked to justify unification, while ongoing debates over national memory and belonging confirm that Germans’ search for identity remains as troubled and contested as ever. The controversy over the recently installed Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe in Berlin is an especially vivid case in point (Kramer 1996). Conflicts over immigration and citizenship, xenophobia, the German military, and the state’s changing role in regulating and protecting society have added further weight and complexity to questions of collective orientation and national belonging (Geyer 2001). A persisting sense of discontinuity combines with the disappointing realities of unification and the enduring weight of “the past” to nourish the desire for an unburdened identity.

The longing for a normal Germanness has found stark expression in projects to restore monuments, historic landmarks, and urban centers—most notably in Berlin, but also in many other cities and villages, particularly in Eastern Germany (James 2001). Among recent restoration projects, the reconstruction of the Frauenkirche (Church of Our Lady) in Dresden is one of the most fascinating and symbolically freighted. Prior to its destruction in 1945, the church’s bell-shaped dome formed the most imposing feature of an elegant baroque cityscape that inspired comparisons with Florence.

The destruction of Dresden by British and U.S. forces has long served as a dominant symbol in Germany and elsewhere for the devastating human, material, and cultural losses inflicted by the Allied “area bombing” of German cities. Several factors gave Dresden legendary status. The contrast between Dresden’s

baroque splendor before the bombing and the wasteland it left behind is truly dramatic. This contrast is related to the frequent portrayal of Dresden in popular memory as a city of culture with no military significance, although some scholars dispute that notion as one of the many myths surrounding the bombing (Taylor 2004). It is now generally agreed that 25 to 30 thousand people were killed, mostly civilians (including a large number of refugees who had fled from the advancing Red Army). Most of the victims were burned, often by the incredible heat inside bomb shelters, because the attack utilized a special type of incendiary bombs. Together, these factors contributed to the framing of Dresden as an innocent victim of Allied cruelty (Kosher 2000:162f).

If Dresden's destruction became for many a powerful touchstone for the memory of German losses in World War II and a symbol of the incredible destructiveness of modern warfare, the remains of the Frauenkirche has served as the central symbol of Dresden's devastation. The bombing left the 200-year-old structure an imposing ruin: two wall fragments beside a mountain of charred stones—a stirring material “wound” (Ten Dyke 2001:21). Although restoration and new construction occurred all around it, the remains of the Frauenkirche were essentially untouched through four decades of socialist rule. The Soviet occupiers and the leaders of the German Democratic Republic (GDR) coded the ruin as a symbol of the capitalist West's “barbarity.” Other East Germans viewed the ruin as a monument to the collapse of the Nazi regime. In the 1980s, peace activists treated it as an admonishing monument (*Mahnmal*) against GDR militarism and war.

The “archaeological reconstruction” of the Frauenkirche combines a portion of charred stones salvaged from the ruin with new stones fashioned using “traditional” methods. The project has cost approximately \$156 million, with some funds provided by German federal and state governments but more than half supplied by private and corporate donors in Germany and other countries, including Britain and the United States. Construction is supposed to be complete in 2006, in time for the celebration of Dresden's 800th anniversary.

Supporters of the project have cast the reconstructed church as a symbol of healing, reconciliation, and European culture. Many no doubt view it as a symbol of Germany's “new beginning in peace and freedom” (Magirius 1991:80). The return of the Frauenkirche also promises the return of Dresden's former grandeur. Yet a number of journalists and academics have joined some

Dresdeners—a minority, project supporters insist—in lamenting the replacement of the ruin with a structure that they insist will never evoke loss as vividly. One of the few critical entries in the guest book on an unofficial website devoted to the reconstruction describes the ruin as a “witness” to the bombing and a memorial made all the more powerful by the fact that it was not purposely installed as one. The writer asks, “Will the reconstructed church be able to replicate the value and power of this symbol? I fear not” (Wiederaufbau Frauenkirche n.d.; my translation). Other critics have gone further, arguing that the reconstruction is driven by a desire to forget or repress the past. Another entry in the aforementioned guest book ruminates, “Sometimes I imagine how the city would look today if World War II had not occurred. Thank you for rebuilding the Frauenkirche” (Wiederaufbau Frauenkirche n.d.; my translation). Most other entries register excitement that “a piece of history has been given back to us” and satisfaction that Dresden’s skyline will be once again “complete.”

The beginning of reconstruction in 1994 was by no means the end of debate. Vociferous conflicts erupted over the church’s organ and the reconstruction of the surrounding Neumarkt quarter, revisiting difficult issues of nostalgia, authenticity, and identity. These debates foreclose assigning a single, definitive meaning to the project—not to mention the fact that a symbol like the Frauenkirche is inevitably interpreted in multiple and even conflicting ways. Indeed, the discrete material form of memorials and landmarks suggests much greater stability than they actually possess, for their meanings are better understood as emergent, indeterminate effects (Murakami and Middleton this issue). Although neither the Frauenkirche as symbol nor the dominant discourse of reconstruction determines the meanings people attach to them in any simple way, I contend that the project reflects a longing among many Germans to reverse loss and retrieve an unadulterated identity.

This interpretation expands on local critiques by connecting the Frauenkirche project systematically to broader shifts in practices of memory and identity in Germany—a trend that might be glossed as “out of the shadow of history” (Bartetzko 2004). Most notably, an unprecedented public discussion about German suffering and its supposed repression at both individual and collective levels has taken place in recent years.¹ Frei (2004), who views this discussion as part of a broader shift tied to generational issues and a valorization of individual experience as source of historical knowledge, worries that “breaking the silence” about German suffering will end in claims of victimhood. Claims of national

victimization are not new in modern Germany (Kosher 2000:256, 300). Indeed, both East and West German memories of World War II sometimes incorporated such claims (Borneman 1992; Hughes 2000; Hertel 2000; Linke 1997). Recent talk of German suffering stands out, however, as an instantiation of “identity politics,” to which claiming the right to bear witness to suffering and have it acknowledged as well as basing an identity on that suffering belong.

A second, related shift in the German politics of memory and identity concerns the concept of German culture. With encouragement and a sense of legitimacy derived from the politics of identity and the global currency of “culture” and “heritage,” it has become increasingly common to speak of German cultural traditions—and this even on the Left, which once defined itself in opposition to traditional formulations of national identity. The celebration of what often amounts to an essentialist vision of national culture has found expression in proposals to reconstruct prominent architectural monuments. The success of the Frauenkirche initiative has emboldened groups advocating the reconstruction of other “missing” landmarks, including the Hohenzollern palace in Berlin and the University Church in Leipzig, both demolished decades ago by the East German government.² Although arguments in favor of these projects highlight benefits for local identity and civic life, they also take part in a turn to the past—conceived as cultural heritage—as a central source of identity. Here, another aspect of identity politics, the notion of cultural endangerment and survival, plays a key role.

The Frauenkirche serves as an ideal icon of national heritage. In addition to its association with Christianity and its status as a baroque “architectural wonder,” the church evokes both the German “cultural nation” and a period prior to the traumas, turmoil, and ruptures of the 20th century. The reconstruction carries out, in other words, a symbolic act of identity (re)construction through a dramatic performance of recovery. This performance has two main dimensions, which I associate with two forms of fetishism. First, in what I call “monumental fetishism,” the reconstruction performs a conjuring of the nation in the form of a monument to German heritage. The drama of the Frauenkirche’s destruction and resurrection implies that an intact, unadulterated national tradition once existed, was lost, and can now be recovered—as if Germanness were an artifact or thing.

Second, the core fantasy of the project is simply that the Frauenkirche has returned—that loss can be undone. The reconstruction embodies, in other

words, a melancholic fantasy of reversing loss. The fantasy does not require one to forget loss or pretend it never occurred—only to believe that it can be reversed. Indeed, the acknowledgment of loss allows for it to be embraced as trauma and converted into a claim of victimhood. The Frauenkirche's fantasy of resurrection thus displaces the task of coming to terms with loss—engaging in what Santner (1992) calls “narrative fetishism.” It avoids the work of mourning by insisting, in effect, that mourning need not occur.

The concept of fetishism proves quite useful in illuminating the meanings attached to the Frauenkirche reconstruction and, I would suggest, the interplay of longing, fantasy, and disavowal often at work in practices of collective memory. Studies of collective memory and commemoration can benefit from more attention to the ways in which acknowledgment and disavowal enable memory constructs, as well as the ways desire inhabits memory practices, and constructions of the past not only justify but also motivate action.

This article draws indirectly on a wider-ranging ethnographic research project on urban renewal and heritage restoration conducted in Eisenach, a small city in Eastern Germany, between 1996 and 1998 (James 2001). Although restoration projects in Eisenach and Dresden must be seen in relation to the same complex of desires, fantasies, anxieties, and symbolic forms surrounding identity and memory in contemporary Germany, the Frauenkirche reconstruction exhibits unique features related to its iconic status in relation to the legend of Dresden, and as an edifice that replaces and incorporates the ruins of its predecessor.

Scrutinizing the Frauenkirche project in the terms outlined above requires that I set the stage by examining briefly the roles monuments and landmarks play in the construction of memory and identity. I proceed to a more detailed portrait of both the cultural and political contexts in which the Frauenkirche project emerged, illuminating the connections between unification and landmark restoration before returning to the project's fantasy of resurrection, its forms of fetishism, and the question of mourning.

Buildings, Memory, and Identity

Built structures often serve as sacred icons and precious objects. Their tangibility, apparent physical integrity, and relative durability provide ideal and often imposing symbolic form to claims of collective identity and continuity.

Sacred sites and monumental structures are also frequently cast as the physical body of the group that claims them, an image of the collective self.³ But to the same degree that architecture offers a powerful medium for representing and shaping identities, it also frequently serves as a target for attacks on them (Meskell 2002). The loss, survival, or reconstruction of important edifices registers a group's suffering, survival, or recovery. The desire often voiced after September 11, 2001, that the World Trade Center towers be rebuilt as they were (or at least replaced with something similar but even taller), reflects this symbolic investment in monumental structures, an investment that intensifies when their destruction occurs through an act of violence interpreted as originating beyond "our" social and moral universe.

Structures labeled "historic" are often made to embody an objective, unmovable link between the present and the past, offering concrete verification, as it were, for the continuity of collective being (Barthel 1989:118; Halbwachs 1980:128ff.; Koshar 2000:12). According to Handler (1988:6ff.), cultural landmarks and artifacts express collective identity based on the logic of possessive individualism. Discourses of collective identity treat the group as a collective individual whose cultural "property" embodies its distinctive "properties"—the essential cultural qualities and historical narratives that supposedly define it (cf. Ferry this issue). Heritage landmarks are perceived as instances of national substance; they provide the nation with substantiality in return (Baxmann 1995). National identity appears as a material reality that bears the singularity and integrity of the historic building or artifact.

Landmarks play a vital role in the construction of memory as well. As Radley explains, "The designation of buildings or other edifices as worthy of preservation or as of special historic interest . . . produces (constructs) a Past of which they are held to be a part and to which people then owe (or disavow) a certain allegiance" (1990:57). As such, historic landmarks frequently become sacred shrines or pilgrimage sites—stages for the performance of belonging and devotion (Gillis 1994:19; Koshar 2000:25ff.).

Restoring National Heritage

Historic buildings have played an important role in the politics of German unification and national identity. Framed as cultural property, landmarks (particularly those located in the East) provide concrete verification for claims of enduring

unity used to justify unification. In his address to the first session of the unified German parliament in October 1990, Chancellor Helmut Kohl extolled “rich traditions” contained in the cultural landscapes in the former GDR, stating that architectural monuments like the Semper Opera, Wartburg Castle, and Naumburg Cathedral “stand for a single Germany” (1990:554).⁴

Although Kohl and other conservatives once provoked accusations of reactionary nationalism from the Left when they invoked “the German nation,” some on the Left have now begun to speak more openly of national culture and tradition (Geyer 2001; Huyssen 2001). A manifesto endorsed by the editors of the center-left weekly *Die Zeit* in 1992, for example, diagnosed a “cultural crisis” and worried that Germans have become “an endangered people” because of their lack of a strong collective identity (Geyer 2001:364f). The anxiety suggested by “cultural crisis” and Germans’ “endangered” status coincides with a longing for normalcy.

Some members of the current governing coalition of Social Democrats and Greens have invoked “German culture” more explicitly. Michael Naumann, appointed by Chancellor Gerhard Schröder as the first Federal Minister for Media and Cultural Affairs, explained in 1999 that “West and East Germans will become aware of what it means to be German in Europe first and foremost through culture and history. We need this sort of ‘unifying tie’ even more than others in the wake of the disastrous past” (*Das Parlament* 1999; my translation). Remarkably, Naumann’s phrase “unifying tie” (*einigendes Band*) is also associated with the prominent conservative politician Wolfgang Schäuble (Maier 2002:20). In addition to grounding German identity in “culture and history,” Naumann treats them as categorically distinct from the “disastrous past”—that is, removed from politics and history.⁵ The effect of this separation, if not the intention, is to make the nation available as a cultural legacy untouched by “the past.” To question Naumann’s distinction is not to equate it with historical revisionism or radical nationalism; neither is it meant to imply that Germans cannot or should not embrace positive national legacies. Even Habermas (1987, 1989), one of the most ardent critics of efforts to revive a traditional national identity, has stated that Germans cannot do without history and culture entirely. Still, sequestering cultural identity from the burdened past engages in a simplification as common, but also as questionable, as the claim that all of Germany’s cultural legacies are implicated in fascism and genocide. No tradition is simply positive or negative, although the tendency

to frame Nazism and, to a lesser extent, state socialism as examples of absolute evil provokes the defensive reaction of seeking unadulterated traditions (Maier 2002).

The new celebration of national heritage has found expression in a variety of initiatives, including landmark restoration and reconstruction (James 2004). The spate of restoration projects undertaken in Eastern Germany following unification found its initial inspiration in the perception that, compared to the West, East German cityscapes had undergone less change (i.e., modernization) in the decades between World War II and unification. Many West Germans thus waxed nostalgic when they first came upon architectural treasures and “medieval” cityscapes left largely intact by the GDR’s poverty. In Western eyes, Eastern Germans and their landscapes had remained more “German.”

Although this supposed authenticity was an inadvertent product of the GDR’s feeble economy, the unified German state has framed the restoration of Eastern cultural landscapes as an effort to repair the damage inflicted on national heritage by the socialist regime. In his address to the 2000 World Tourism Conference, for example, Chancellor Schröder framed heritage landmarks in the East as emblems of national unity, echoing Kohl’s 1990 speech, but then went on to express regret that “the great cultural treasures [in Eastern Germany] . . . suffered such neglect under the totalitarian regime of the communist party” (Schröder 2000; my translation). The GDR’s “scandalous neglect” of national heritage and its “primitive” version of modern architecture are cast as part and parcel of its “totalitarian” legacy (Jarzombek 2001:22, 35ff.). In cases in which the regime demolished prominent structures like the Hohenzollern palace in Berlin and Leipzig’s University Church, it is accused of downright “barbarity” (Dieckmann 2004).

To be sure, the East German state was anything but exemplary in its treatment of historic buildings and cityscapes. Many of the East Germans who took to the streets in 1989 pointed to the country’s decaying historic structures and the ugly concrete “slabs” that replaced them as evidence of the regime’s economic and moral bankruptcy. Yet the accusation of cultural delinquency, especially when voiced by West Germans, is both exaggerated and self-serving. It neglects not only the fact that the socialist regime restored or rebuilt many historic structures but also that modernist architecture and planning in West Germany drew harsh criticism in the 1960s and 1970s for its “inhospitable” character and

blanket rejection of tradition (Mitscherlich 1965; Soane 1994). Recent heritage preservation and reconstruction efforts in the East can thus be seen as performing a negation of the GDR and a retrieval of national culture that confirms the current order's devotion to national heritage.

Condemnations of the GDR have been invoked to support the Frauenkirche project as well. Because the firebombing decimated Dresden's center, it became a showcase for the East German regime's architectural vision of socialist modernity. Some critics have gone so far as to cast the socialist rebuilding of Dresden as a second destruction. Preservationist Heinrich Magirius, for example, attacks the socialist regime's "disfigurement" of Dresden's cityscape with "faceless blocks" that appear "foreign and cold" (1991:79; my translation). According to Andreas Ruby (2000), even high-quality examples of postwar GDR architecture in Dresden are now maligned as symbols of the GDR's failure to rebuild Dresden as it was before.

For those who view the built legacy of socialism in this way, Dresden represents a void to be filled with structures embodying the triumph of the West German capitalist order (Huysen 1997; Jarzombek 2001:57ff.; Simon 2002). Yet many of those structures refer as much to the past as to the present. More specifically, they reflect a nostalgic vision of wholeness and organic community. The Frauenkirche has become the centerpiece of this vision. The city government now plans to reconstruct the Neumarkt quarter surrounding the church, for example, to restore the landmark's "proper" architectural, and by implication, sociocultural context.

The absence of the Frauenkirche during 40 years of socialism now appears as an aberration in the stream of national history, just as the GDR itself has come to represent an anomalous episode whose end allowed the restoration of normalcy. If it both negates the socialist era and confirms the GDR's depravity, the Frauenkirche reconstruction also participates in a broader effort to fashion a redemptive form of Germanness defined in terms of cultural heritage. Not only does this effort replace a stigmatized past with an ahistorical and apolitical one but it also ignores the cultural complexities of contemporary Germany, which has become a "country of immigration" in spite of pronouncements to the contrary. Indeed, the Frauenkirche might be seen as a declaration that German culture will continue to define public space and life in Germany.⁶

The Frauenkirche Returns

The reconstruction project began with a public appeal issued shortly after unification, on February 13, 1990, the 55th anniversary of the first bombing raid. The “Call from Dresden” begins by recalling the church’s destruction only a few weeks “before the end of a war whose outcome was already decided” (Bürgerinitiative für den Aufbau der Frauenkirche n.d.; my translation). In full knowledge of the great cost involved and the fact that such an enormous sum might be used for more pressing needs, the authors proclaim that “we cannot accept that this unique and magnificent structure should remain a ruin or even be cleared away.” The church should therefore be rebuilt as “a Christian center for world peace in the new Europe,” but its return is also necessary because “the reconstruction of Dresden would [otherwise] remain piecemeal.”

Subsequent texts advocating reconstruction invoke figures of trauma, healing, and resurrection in even more dramatic ways. One pamphlet asks potential donors to “Help heal one of the most painful wounds in the heart of Europe” (Telemundi 1994). Beneath the text appears one of the central emblems of the reconstruction effort: the image of a fully reconstructed church rising up behind the ruin it has replaced. Like most renderings used to promote the project, this one does not include the contrasting colors of the new and old stones that will supposedly discourage naive fantasies of return. Although the text introduces the anthropomorphic image of a wounded body and its recovery, the illustration calls to mind the proverbial phoenix rising from the ashes—the possibility of victory over death. In fact, the promotional literature often employs the phoenix metaphor explicitly.

In addition to contemporary renderings that evoke the old Frauenkirche rather than the new one, the promotional literature makes generous use of historic images (see Figure 1). Most popular are the 18th-century cityscapes painted by the Venetian artist Canaletto (e.g., Paul 1993; Stiftung Frauenkirche n.d.). These images and others like them invite nostalgic fantasy: the diminutive Dresdeners tending to their everyday affairs around the church’s base suggest a time of social peace and undisturbed identity, while the church’s imposing presence seems to embody culture and society as intact, immovable facts of collective life. These images find reinforcement in a widely advertised film regularly shown in a Dresden museum that also portrays happier times in an “old Dresden.” Jarzombek (2001:48) explains that the film includes unacknowledged

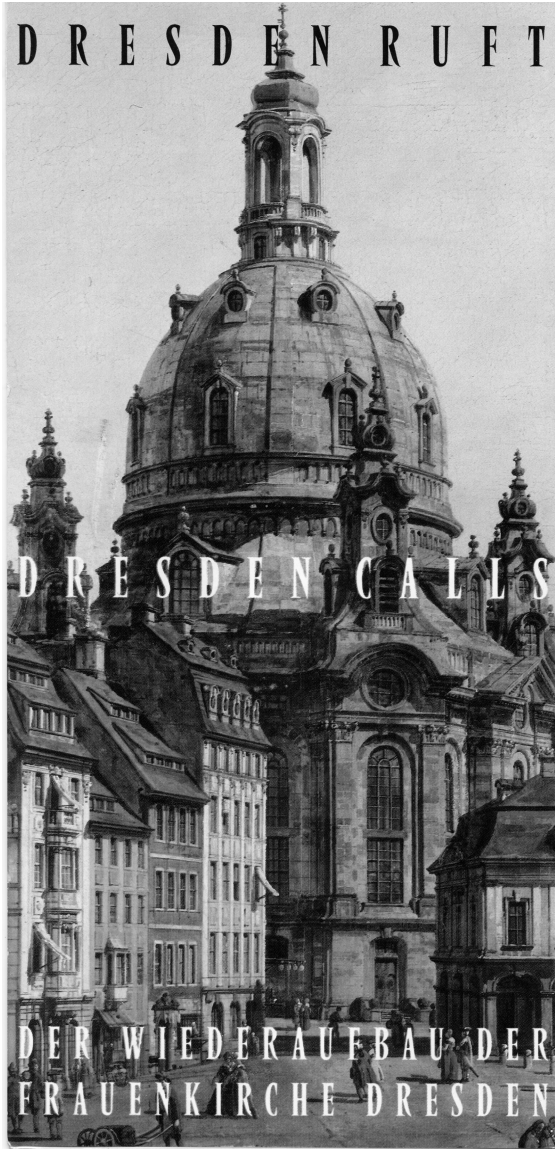


Figure 1. The cover of a pamphlet from the Society for the Reconstruction of the Frauenkirche presents a nostalgic image of the church and its milieu. Painting *Der Neumarkt in Dresden vom Jüdenböfe aus* by Bernardo Bellotto (Canaletto). Reprinted with permission of the Gesellschaft zur Förderung des Wiederaufbaus der Frauenkirche Dresden e.V. and the Staatliche Kunstsammlungen Dresden.

footage from Nazi propaganda films. Here, as with the 18th-century Canaletto images, context has been subtracted.

The reconstruction thus embodies a wish to recover a state of wholeness projected backward to a time prior to loss, that is, “old Dresden” and “old Germany” before February 13, 1945—perhaps even as far back as the Kaiserreich (the period between the founding of the Reich in 1871 and the beginning of World War I). In light of the multiple disasters that punctuate Germany’s subsequent history, the Kaiserreich and everything before it (broadly conceived as “medieval”) signify for many an unstigmatized, undamaged Germanness (cf. Huyssen 1997:69). This is the most obvious way that the Frauenkirche project participates in what Svetlana Boym (2001:41ff.) calls “restorative nostalgia”: the Frauenkirche, and Dresden and Germany along with it, will be whole again, the damage of the past undone.

Some prominent figures in Germany have voiced similar concerns about the desires and messages embedded in the reconstructed Frauenkirche. Böhme (1991:86–88), the coordinator of construction for the Lutheran church of Saxony, argued in 1991 that the Frauenkirche ruin should remain in place as a symbol of the collapse of the Third Reich and Germany’s collective guilt (*Kollektivschuld*). It would serve as a needed provocation, a powerful enunciation of “Never again!” and an acknowledgment that the collapse of both the church and the Nazi regime were not incidental but, rather, a consequence of Germans’ actions. Böhme also rejects the term *reconstruction* (*Wiederaufbau*), in this case because it implies retrieval rather than what he regards as production of a duplicate. In contrast, project supporters constantly invoke the phrase “archeological reconstruction” and speak of the Frauenkirche as returning to its place, exchanging the notion of duplication for that of retrieval.

Bartetzko, architectural critic for the national newspaper, *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, has also expressed serious reservations about the reconstruction, suggesting that the project invites forgetting by nourishing a dangerous illusion of immortality:

A glimpse of something that was believed lost forever has been granted, the promise of return now takes tangible form. . . . Dangerous and obliging illusions are at work here: brand new, as though untouched by time and war, the three-dimensional likeness of this Baroque architectural wonder presents itself as immortal. [Bartetzko 2002; my translation]

Bartetzko is correct to find foreboding illusions at work in the project, but in my view they are best described not as illusions of immortality but, rather, as a fantasy of resurrection. To believe that the Frauenkirche has returned does not necessitate pretending that it was never destroyed, only that it can return from the dead, as it were. This involves a form of disavowal regarded as characteristic of fetishism, in which one can both acknowledge reality and yet still believe the contrary (Gemerchak 2004:262). Those who hail the Frauenkirche's return can acknowledge that the structure that now stands in the center of Dresden is not the one that was destroyed while at the same time believing that the destruction has been undone. Indeed, the fantasy of undoing loss is more compelling than denial because it acknowledges loss in the very process of disavowing it. It allows for the celebration of a new beginning in the form of recapitulation.

A stock response to criticisms of the sort leveled by Böhme, Bartetzko, and me is to emphasize the use of 60 percent new material and 40 percent original, darkened sandstone blocks in the reconstruction, which “will call to mind the scars of an old wound” (Reconstruction Frauenkirche Dresden n.d.). The reconstructed church has not consigned the ruin and the memory of destruction to oblivion, supporters insist, but, rather, incorporates them. The contrast between old and new stones will distinguish the reconstructed Frauenkirche from the original. It remains unclear, however, whether the contrast will remain sufficiently stark over time. Will weathering reduce if not remove the contrast? Will future renovations restore contrasting colors? Bartetzko (2002), for one, remains doubtful that the contrast will prove emphatic and enduring enough to prevent amnesia. And even if the “wound” remains visible in the new edifice, the church's recovered presence may overwhelm those elements that recall its destruction.

Whatever else the darkened stones may signify, they have become part of a breathtaking transformation of the ruins of World War II into a monument that proclaims the possibility of return. This desire to retrieve the Frauenkirche not only requires believing that its resurrection is possible but also eliding the difference between the documented past and what one now wishes it to have been. That distinction is itself tenuous, but it ideally inspires a kind of persistent questioning that the Frauenkirche arguably deflects. Replacing a ruin that evoked the devastation of World War II with a reproduction of a baroque “architectural wonder” amounts to exchanging an unsettling symbol of the past for a more palatable, seemingly unadulterated symbol of national culture.

Here is a form of monumental fetishism that locates the nation in a discrete, imposing object—a sacred icon of “German cultural heritage.” Moreover, the allegory of destruction and retrieval attached to the Frauenkirche works to call forth the nation through a symbolic repossession. Not only does the miraculous resurrection of the Frauenkirche as national monument invoke an idealized cultural Germanness but it also conjures the nation as a kind of thing, a singular, discrete object that can be possessed, neglected, destroyed, and retrieved (see Žižek 1990:54; Gernerchak 2004:26). In this case, the act of retrieving German heritage masks the ambivalent, emergent, and diffuse character of Germanness as a complex of discourses and practices. Unlike Murakami and Middleton’s suggestion (this issue) that collectivity and remembering are best viewed as “unfinished business,” the Frauenkirche project presents identity and memory not only as capable of completion, but as having always been so. One need only repair, refurbish, or if necessary retrieve “German heritage.”

To insist that the Frauenkirche reconstruction reflects a fetishization of national culture and a symbolic performance of national recovery might at first appear unjustified given the lack of overt references to the nation in connection with the project. “Germany” appears much less frequently than “Dresden,” “Europe,” and “world heritage” in reconstruction discourse—and the church’s significance does indeed carry local and global dimensions. References to the nation, however, are conspicuous in their absence, despite the fact that the destroyed Frauenkirche has long figured as a primary emblem of Germany’s devastation in World War II.

A number of clues suggest, however, that the nation contributes much to the project’s symbolic purchase. Chancellor Kohl marked the Frauenkirche ruin as a national symbol in December 1989 when he used it as the backdrop for his first public speech in East Germany after the fall of the Berlin Wall, in which he affirmed the West German government’s commitment to (re)unification. The rubble of World War II looming behind him arguably evoked the damaged, divided nation that he pledged to heal. A spokesperson for Dresdner Bank, a major sponsor of the project, made this point explicitly when he described the church as a symbol of national reunification (Winter 2000). Moreover, the Society for the Reconstruction of the Dresden Frauenkirche received the first National Prize awarded in unified Germany. The German National Foundation awards the prize to advance German unity and to “make tangible the cultural identity of the Germans in Europe” (Magenau 2002;

my translation). The Frauenkirche performs this task in exemplary fashion. If, as Bartetzko (2004) claims, the church's collapse in 1945 signaled "the final death of old Dresden and symbolically with it old Germany and its culture," then the reconstruction not only redefines German cultural identity but reconnects that identity with old Germany.

Persisting Ambiguities

The promotional literature for the Frauenkirche project generally avoids confronting the potential contradiction of creating a replica while at the same time celebrating the return of something lost. Yet anxieties about authenticity and nostalgia have proven tenacious, resurfacing in two ancillary debates. One conflict concerns plans to reconstruct the baroque Neumarkt quarter surrounding the church. Most of those involved agree that the architectural proportions and layout of the former Neumarkt should be restored (some have called for reconstruction of the entire historic center). Members of a local organization, Historic Neumarkt Dresden, have objected, however, to the city's plan to reconstruct selected "principal structures" (*Leitbauten*) in the Neumarkt but otherwise allow contemporary architecture that will be required to conform to the proportions and materials of previous buildings. Critics fear that these potentially "experimental" structures will leave the historic reconstructions isolated among "faceless, functional buildings." To give Dresden back its old identity and do justice to Germany's national cultural heritage, "the Neumarkt must be rebuilt in its historic image and as a harmonious architectural unity." In practice this means orienting planning toward "the condition of the Neumarkt on February 13, 1945, before the bombing" (Historischer Neumarkt Dresden n.d.).

Simon (2002) has attacked the entire Neumarkt reconstruction plan as a historical "masquerade," whereas others have spoken of a "Jurassic Park of the baroque" (Holzamer 2002). Saxony's state conservator, Gerhard Glaser, has responded to critics by stating that the relationship between the surrounding baroque structures and the Frauenkirche simply must be reinstated. By itself the restored Frauenkirche lacks the power to alleviate what Glaser describes as Dresdeners' "traumatized condition" (Holzamer 2002). Together, the reconstruction of the Frauenkirche and the Neumarkt appear here as a kind of therapy that requires creating an "old Dresden" à la Canaletto (see Ruby 2000). Modern "glass-steel-concrete" architecture has no place here, one guest book entry insists,

while another demands, “Make Dresden again as it once was!” (Wiederaufbau Frauenkirche n.d.; my translation). In other words, reconstructing the Neumarkt and other parts of old Dresden is necessary to sustain the fantasy of recovered wholeness. It offers assurance that the Frauenkirche has not been displaced from its original context (Radley 1990:51), but has instead returned to its proper place.

A second debate focused on the reconstruction of the church’s organ. As of 1994, the reconstruction plans called for an exact reproduction of the organ designed by Gottfried Silbermann and played by Johann Sebastian Bach at the church’s dedication. But in 1997, a special commission concluded that an exact reconstruction was neither possible nor desirable, recommending a modern organ instead (Wolter 2001). Critics of the commission’s decision objected that it would violate not only the expectations of thousands of donors, but also the logic and spirit of the church’s precise archeological reconstruction. In response to these criticisms, the resignation of some commission members, and threats by some donors to retract their pledges, the commission offered a compromise in the form of a “modified reconstruction” that would approximate the original (Delau 2002). Letters poured into local newspapers, with most writers rejecting the “compromise organ” in favor of an exact reconstruction. An article in the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* (2001) entitled “Organ of Innocence” sees emphatic support for reconstructing the Silbermann organ as betraying the desire at the heart of the project to reverse time and proclaim the triumph of culture over politics (see also Hannusch 2001; Wolter 2001). Like the reconstruction of the Neumarkt, the recovery of the “original” organ is vital to sustaining the fantasy of return, for a modern organ would mark the structure as different from its predecessor. The symbolic power of the reconstructed edifice depends on disavowing its status as a replacement—a representation of something lost—just as the power of memory depends on ignoring its construction in the present.

At least two other structures built to replace their destroyed predecessors serve to underscore by contrast the Frauenkirche’s fantasy of resurrection. The Frauenkirche differs markedly from what might be regarded as its British counterpart, the cathedral in Coventry. Destroyed by German bombers, the structure was rebuilt beginning in 1956. Citizens of Dresden, who had by that time formed a partnership with Coventry, assisted with donations. The new cathedral in Coventry is a striking mixture of conserved ruins and contemporary

architecture—certainly not a structure that could be mistaken for its predecessor (Bartetzko 2004).

Another edifice that not only contrasts with the Frauenkirche but also appears to challenge its fetishisms is a new synagogue recently erected to replace the one burned in the pogrom of November 1938 and later demolished by the Nazis. The proposal to build a new synagogue came in 1996 from a local group headed by a Christian minister (Bartsch 2001). The city subsequently donated the available portion of the parcel on which the former synagogue stood (an embankment now covers part of the original structure's foundation line). The site lies quite near the Frauenkirche and Dresden's other showcase monuments. The original synagogue, completed in 1840, was designed by Gottfried Semper and joined an ensemble near the Elbe River that also included the famous opera house bearing his name. The new synagogue breaks ranks with its neighbors: a decidedly contemporary structure, it bears little trace of a desire to recapture the past.

Dedicated in November 2001, exactly 63 years after the destruction of its predecessor, the new complex consists of two cubic structures clad in sandstone separated by a courtyard, one housing the synagogue and the other a congregational center. Unfortunately, the synagogue construction has been overshadowed by the Frauenkirche project with respect to both publicity and donations (Bartsch 2001). Only one-third of the German firms solicited by Saxony's governor responded with contributions, and the generous support provided by the Dresdner Bank for the Frauenkirche project did not find an equivalent in the synagogue construction (Winter 2000).

Although both the embankment and financial constraints would have prevented a precise reconstruction of the original synagogue on its former footprint, the congregation's preference for a new structure also followed from the concern that a reconstruction would erase the memory of the original's destruction (Hollenstein 2001). Instead, the partial outline of the original structure in the new courtyard presents a void filled with shards to evoke the 1938 "Night of Broken Glass" (*Kristallnacht*). The new complex not only seeks to preserve this memory, but also to combat forgetting that has already occurred: even longtime residents have reportedly asked why the congregation chose to build their new synagogue on this particular spot (Burger 2001). Some Dresdeners who do remember the original have complained that the new one hardly

compares to its beauty—a remark to which one congregation member felt compelled to respond, “Then your ancestors should not have destroyed it in the first place.”

Some residents have also complained that the new synagogue does not fit properly into its surroundings, echoing concerns about “experimental” architecture in the Neumarkt. That appears to be precisely the point: the synagogue confronts the city rather than blending in (Jarzombek 2001:43). If the new synagogue signifies reconciliation, it also refuses to lay troubling memories to rest. At the laying of the cornerstone, congregation leader Roman Koenig recalled in a solemn tone the Semper synagogue’s cornerstone ceremony in 1838. At that time too, he emphasized, Jewish Dresdeners envisioned lasting cooperation with their fellow citizens (Bartsch 2001). By highlighting what now appears as the unjustified optimism of 1838, Koenig underscores the new synagogue’s rejection of nostalgia. The period of acceptance that one might be tempted to idealize in connection with the old synagogue proved to be transitory. Koenig’s speech and the new synagogue itself suggest that Dresden’s Jews emphatically refuse to share others’ fantasy of recovering an imagined past. The replacement of the synagogue cannot count as an undoing of its destruction.

Loss and National Suffering

I have argued that the Frauenkirche reconstruction enacts a fantasy of undoing loss and retrieving a former state of wholeness. This fantasy remains compelling because it acknowledges loss while insisting that it can be undone. That acknowledgment allows not just for a defense against accusations of nostalgic delusion but also provides the basis for claims of suffering. Indeed, the loss signified by the church appears not so much as a loss to be mourned but, rather, as an injury that confers the status of victimhood.

This reading of the reconstruction becomes much clearer and more unsettling when we situate the project in relation to a recent discussion about the suffering of Germans in World War II—a discussion often presented in terms of breaking an imposed silence, unearthing repressed memories of trauma, and acknowledging the damage (not just the stigma) at the core of postwar German identity. This change can be traced in part to the fact that the generation born during World War II and its aftermath now has control, as it were, of the discursive fields of memory and identity. This generation of “war children”

are not implicated in the rise of fascism or the Holocaust. For them the war was—or has become—a time of deprivation, a vaguely (and perhaps vicariously) recalled experience of loss.

Moreover, as Frei (2004) explains, many members of this generation who were once highly critical of their parents' silence about Nazism and the Holocaust have now begun to seek reconciliation. Part of this reconciliation involves seizing the opportunity to hear the parents' testimony about the war before they pass away. Soon, few Germans who experienced Nazism and the war as adults will be left. Frei suggests that a valorization of personal experience combined with the sense that Germans' war memories were long silenced by a combination of taboo and repression, has opened up a space for testimony, and also for claims of victimhood.

The most blatant of these claims have come from *Vertriebenen*—Germans expelled from eastern “homelands” such as East Prussia and Silesia. A group led by Peter Glotz, a conservative member of parliament, together with Erika Steinbach, chair of the Alliance for Expellees (Bund der Vertriebenen) and a member of parliament as well, has proposed constructing a “Center Against Expulsion” in Berlin not far from the new Monument to the Murdered Jews of Europe. Here, the story of German expellees would join narratives of other expulsions with the stated aim of drawing attention to this form of human rights violation (Bernstein 2003). Critics in Germany as well as the countries the expellees call home have contended that the center will place German expellees in the same category as all others displaced by war, and possibly with all other victims of war (see Hofmann and Ulrich 2003; Staud and Fink 2003). More recently, expellees have formed an organization called the Preußischer Treuhänder, through which they plan to seek the return of or compensation for lost property. Kirbach (2004) suggests that the English name for the organization, the Prussian Claims Society, deliberately echoes that of the Jewish Claims Conference.

The Prussian Claims Society and the proposed Center Against Expulsion have provoked strong reactions in part because the Alliance for Expellees has a reputation for nationalism and revanchist rhetoric. Yet the expellees' recent activities may represent only a rather obvious instance of something broader. Indeed, their claims of victimhood can be seen in relation to an emerging public discussion of German suffering in World War II. Three texts, two focused on the Allied carpet bombing campaign, did much to encourage this discussion.

W. G. Sebald's (1999) chapter "Air War and Literature" describes the trauma of the bombings as a "collective family secret" that "after the war bound the Germans together more tightly than any positive goal, such as the achievement of democracy, could have done" (*Neue Zürcher Zeitung* 1997; my translation). Sebald's primary aims are to explain what he regards as the almost total repression of this trauma and to encourage its belated acknowledgment—not to render Germans as victims. Nevertheless, the danger remains that Sebald's text presents Germans as having undergone unrecognized suffering, thereby lending itself to a discourse of victimhood. As with the growing comfort with the idea of national culture among those who formerly distanced themselves from it, the discussion of German suffering has been fueled not just by conservative nationalists but also by figures associated with the Left. Most surprising in this regard is the role played by Nobel Prize-winning author and persistent critic of nationalism, Günter Grass. His novella, *Crab Walk* (Grass 2002), is built around an account of the Soviet submarine attack on a German ship in which roughly 5,000 passengers—mostly refugees but also some military personnel—perished. As with Sebald, Grass's intentions cannot be reduced to an argument for German victimhood, but the novella nonetheless seems to participate in the current "rediscovery" of German suffering.

If Sebald's chapter and Grass's novella appear susceptible to the interpretation that they encourage an embrace of victimhood, Jörg Friedrich's (2002) best-seller *Der Brand* (*The Blaze*) seems designed to validate it. The book offers a painstaking account of the Allied bombing campaign and the devastation it wrought. In addition to questioning Friedrich's scholarship and his lack of attention to the broader context of the bombings, critics have charged that German civilians appear in the book solely as victims. Although Friedrich denies the charge, some have also suggested that his vocabulary equates these victims with those of the Nazi death camps: he refers to the civilian dead as "the exterminated" (*Ausgerottete*), and the bomb shelters in which so many died become "execution chambers" and "crematoria."

Key to the discussion of suffering inspired in part by these works is the notion that it breaks a long-standing silence. The claim of forced silence adds a second layer of victimhood to the first—those who suffered were never acknowledged as victims. Yet this silence may be exaggerated (Schmidt 2002; Kosher 2000:222ff.). Even if postwar cultures of commemoration in East and West Germany provided little room for public discussion of trauma, that does not mean the stories were

never told or acknowledged. The question now is how Germans can make this suffering a part of official memory without placing all suffering on the same plane.

Narrative Fetishism and the Work of Mourning

The return of the Frauenkirche as one of Germany's most prominent cultural victims expresses a kind of closure, a final clearing of the ruins left by a catastrophic 20th century, and ultimately a retrieval of what was lost. Or more precisely, it enacts a longing for closure and an undoing of loss while conjuring the nation in the form of heritage. If cultural heritage offers one form of morally unencumbered identity through the vehicle of monumental fetishism, victimhood offers another. In conjunction with other attempts to construct a shared memory of World War II that foregrounds German suffering, the Frauenkirche reconstruction recasts Germany's losses as injuries inflicted by others.

To be sure, for Germans and others to remember these tragic losses and include them in their recollections of the war need not be seen as inherently problematic. Germans did suffer, and Dresden's destruction was both tragic and militarily questionable. But to the degree that the Frauenkirche both supports a fantasy of return and offers a touchstone for a redemptive narrative, it participates in narrative fetishism. Whereas the work of mourning entails "elaborating and integrating the reality of loss or traumatic shock by remembering and repeating it in symbolically and dialogically mediated doses," Santner describes narrative fetishism as

the way an inability or refusal to mourn emplots traumatic events; it is a strategy of undoing, in fantasy, the need for mourning by simulating a condition of intactness, typically by situating the site and origin of loss elsewhere. Narrative fetishism releases one from the burden of having to reconstitute one's self-identity under "post-traumatic" conditions; in narrative fetishism, the "post" is indefinitely postponed. [1992:144]

In the case of the Frauenkirche, the site of loss becomes German culture rather than concentration camps or popular support for fascism, whereas the origin of loss is situated with the Allied bombers, outside of Germany. The appeal of narrative fetishism in this case lies in the possibility of exchanging culpability for innocence and trauma for wholeness, rather than constructing a narrative that refuses such totalized alternatives in favor of a less satisfying, more ambivalent memory. From this perspective the reconstruction suggests that one can avoid having to work through loss by retrieving the lost object, blaming the loss on others, and converting loss into a traumatized identity. The effort to recover a lost object

does not follow the course of assimilating loss associated with mourning, but instead enacts the melancholic fantasy that loss can be reversed.

Conclusions

To the degree that the Frauenkirche reconstruction partakes of nostalgia, it can be viewed as one instance of a more pervasive longing for better pasts that in recent years has taken hold not just in Germany, but in many former socialist states as well as societies in the industrialized West (Boym 2001). Heightened attention to (and anxiety about) memory in academic, political, and popular realms can also be regarded as part of this trend. Huyssen (1995:2ff.) argues that the contemporary obsession with memory reflects a sense of crisis about the mode of temporality that, in the modern period, placed a radically different, utopian world on the horizon. The emergence of supranational structures, he also suggests, has intensified anxieties about history and identity within the nation-state (see also Maier 1993).

Seen in the context of a late-modern fixation on memory, the longings manifested in the Frauenkirche project might appear unexceptional. Caution is indeed called for in approaching Germans' engagement with the past given the tendency to treat Germany as the negative exception of modernity, to project failures onto that country in a manner that makes it easier for others to disregard their own troubled pasts. My critical assessment of the Frauenkirche reconstruction is, therefore, not intended to diagnose an exclusively German syndrome. The circumstances and implications of these longings in Germany deserve closer examination for the sake of illuminating their distinctive character, but also to sharpen our critical gaze on other nostalgic and fetishistic practices of this kind. The fantasy of return that lies at the foundation of the reconstructed Frauenkirche offers an instructive case precisely because the moral and political implications of debates over German memory and belonging remain so obvious and seemingly inescapable.

It would be misguided to insist that the Frauenkirche reconstruction bears no meanings beyond monumental and narrative fetishism. We can certainly hope that in addition to reflecting nostalgic longings it also provokes questions about German memory and identity, and that for every Frauenkirche there will also be a "counter-monument" (Young 1999) that evokes other pasts, challenges the fetishisms of the nation, and perhaps even incorporates a sense of absence, as Liebeskind's Jewish Museum in Berlin (Huyssen 1997:80) and Dresden's new synagogue do. I have nevertheless raised the possibility that much of the Frauenkirche's appeal lies in its participation in a broader project of retrieving

the nation intact, as it is imagined to have been before. The act of retrieval assumes a prior state of intactness, of normalcy. In fact, the Frauenkirche reconstruction produces an image of normalcy in a performance of retrieval.

A central challenge faced by contemporary Germans is to engage with their past in a manner that escapes the binary alternatives of guilt versus absolution, of corrupted versus redeeming identity. The understandable but problematic desire to be done with the losses of the past by undoing them does not serve this aim. A further challenge is to imagine the nation, culture, and belonging in terms of relationships rather than artifacts and essences. The Frauenkirche reconstruction not only fetishizes the nation, it also asserts the centrality of a particular national, cultural inheritance at a time when immigration and diversity render a singularly established ethnocultural notion of Germanness untenable.

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Notes

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1. Near the end of the World War II many Germans left eastern regions of the German Reich, as well as German enclaves and areas that had been recently invaded and annexed. Many left of their own accord as the Soviet army approached, whereas others were expelled after the Potsdam Accords, which shifted Germany's eastern boundaries westward. The expellees' "homelands" now lie in Poland, Russia, the Czech Republic, Hungary, and Romania.

2. The palace in Berlin was heavily damaged by bombing, but some rooms continued to be used after the war. The regime cited issues of safety to justify demolishing the structure, but many interpret it as an ideologically motivated act of iconoclasm against a structure associated by socialist leaders with Prussian militarism. In the case of the Leipzig University Church, however, no pressing issues of safety were invoked to justify its demolition: it was demolished ostensibly to make room for a new university tower. Although the Frauenkirche remained in place as a ruin until reconstruction began, no remnants of the university church and very little of the Berlin palace are available. "Reconstruction" has therefore taken on a different technical meaning in these cases, although the wish to repair damage runs through all three projects.

3. See Linke (1997) on metaphors of the body and bodily integrity in Germany.
4. See Nipperdey (1990:189ff.) for an account of the similar role played in the 19th century by the Cologne Cathedral, whose completion came to symbolize the completion of national unification.
5. A related strategy employed by Naumann places German heritage and identity on par with others by asserting a common traumatization by cultural loss and insisting that the countries that compose the European Union should each maintain a distinctive cultural identity (Das Parlament 1999). Naumann's successor, Julian Nida-Rümelin (2002), has gone still further in naturalizing the idea of German culture: "To our shared political constitution that is binding for all Germans corresponds a deep-rooted (*gewachsene*), shared cultural disposition (*kulturelle Verfasstheit*)."
6. Here, I refer to the debate sparked in 2000 by Christian Democrat Friedrich Merz's assertion that the "dominant culture" (*Leitkultur*) in Germany must be German culture—a rather blunt rejection of multiculturalism (see Pautz 2005).

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