

The Other Half of Germany: New Perspectives and Controversies on East Germany— A Roundtable

Katja Hoyer, Christina Morina,
and Joyce Mushaben, in conversation
with Samuel Huneke

Introduction by Simone Lässig (Director of the GHI)

In November 2023, the German Historical Institute brought together a panel of three authors whose new works on the history of the GDR and the unification process have attracted a great deal of attention both nationally and internationally and have enlivened the debate on the history of “the East Germans” in different ways. I would like to thank Christina Morina, Katja Hoyer and Joyce Mushaben for answering Samuel Clowes Huneke’s questions and agreeing to make their discussion accessible to the readers of our Bulletin.¹

Transcending Walls

It was not long after German unification in 1990 that there began to be talk of a lingering *Mauer im Kopf*, a “wall in the head” that had taken the place of the Berlin Wall. Much as

¹ Katja Hoyer, *Beyond the Wall: East Germany, 1949–1990* (New York, 2023); Christina Morina, *Tausend Aufbrüche: Die Deutschen und ihre Demokratie seit den 1980er Jahren* (Munich, 2023); Joyce Marie Mushaben, *What Remains? The Dialectical Identities of Eastern Germans* (Cham, Switzerland, 2023). Samuel Huneke has also published a highly regarded monograph on German-German history: *States of Liberation: Gay Men between Dictatorship and Democracy in Cold War Germany* (Toronto, 2022).

Bulletin of the German Historical Institute 73 (Spring 2024): 23–60

© Katja Hoyer et al. | ISSN 1048-9134

CC BY-SA 4.0

Illustrations included in this article are not covered by this license.

eastern and western Germans might have agreed that the two post-war states should be one, it quickly became clear that they often had very different views on what had happened, what was happening, and what should happen in Germany. The term *Mauer im Kopf* was mostly used, though, by western Germans in describing the thinking of their fellow citizens in the east, and it strongly implied that easterners were still stuck in a past better forgotten. That past—the forty-year history of the German Democratic Republic—was cast in overwhelmingly negative terms in public discussion in the early years of unification. The GDR was typically taken to be synonymous with dictatorship, economic backwardness, and environmental devastation. But as the “blossoming landscapes” promised by Chancellor Helmut Kohl failed to materialize, easterners became more vocal in pointing out that life in the GDR had not been unrelentingly bleak and that some aspects of their lives had actually been better before unification.

Much has changed in Germany—in both halves of the country—since the 1990s. Thanks to national and European funding, for instance, many cities in the East have spruced themselves up and can boast both a modern infrastructure and a low unemployment rate. The divergence in views of the GDR era, however, largely remains.

Scholars, curators, and public historians have produced a rich body of research that offers and represents a nuanced, multifaceted picture of life and politics in the east from the end of World War II to the dramatic events of 1989. Today, everyday life in the GDR is an established subject of scholarly research and the post-1989 transformation that in one half of Germany—as in the entire eastern part of Europe—affected all spheres of life is receiving increasing attention. In political and social debates, however, the differentiated images established by recent research or exhibitions rarely emerge.

The binary concepts and collective attributions that characterized debates about “the East Germans” in the 1990s

reverberate still in public discourse. This first became particularly clear in reaction to the high approval ratings that the “Party of Democratic Socialism” (PDS), the successor to East Germany’s ruling party, the SED, enjoyed in the new federal states. After the PDS was merged into the all-Germany party “Die Linke,” thereby losing importance as a mouthpiece for genuine East German interests and consequently also losing voter support, the focus shifted. The focus of public debate is now directed at the right-wing populist party Alternative for Germany (AfD), founded in 2013, which the German Verfassungsschutz (Office for the Protection of the Constitution) has now classified as definitely right-wing extremist and a threat to democracy in Thuringia, Saxony, and Saxony-Anhalt. Some attribute the popularity of the AfD, particularly in the new federal states, to the supposedly weak roots of liberal democracy and a political culture in which the legacy of the National Socialist and Communist dictatorships has not yet been dealt with. Others see this support as a protest against western Germany’s hubris and deafness to the biographies, concerns and experiences of people in the East.

As crude and simplistic as the dominant and competing readings in public discourse are, and as little as they reflect the current state of research, it is indisputable that the history of the GDR and German unification is once again booming today. But it is equally undisputed that many East Germans still do not see themselves adequately represented in these debates and in the historical memory of the new Federal Republic as a whole. There are many explanations for this paradox, and almost all of them have a historical dimension.

Ambiguities of Transformation

In 1990, the majority of GDR citizens, for a variety of reasons, voted in favor of rapid unification with the old Federal Republic. Skeptical voices and calls for a new constitution to be created jointly found little response in both East and West. And indeed, by joining an apparently economically and

politically superior system, the East Germans gained much that had been unattainable for them in the GDR—personal freedom, democratic rights, and access to an alluring consumer society. What implications such a collective migration into firmly established social structures would have, and how profoundly it would change their lives, was only realized by the majority of East Germans when unexpected social hardships displaced the euphoria of the quickly completed unification and the joy of its achievements. Hardly any families were spared the consequences of the privatization and closure of state-owned enterprises, which were the responsibility of the Treuhand, a trust agency founded in the late GDR but headed by West German officials after the Unification Treaty. Only a tiny proportion of East Germans was able to benefit from privatization under the conditions set by the Treuhand, but the effects of the rapid economic and social change affected many of them. The state tried to compensate for material hardships, but the mental ones left wounds and scars: mass unemployment was an experience that had been absent in the GDR and therefore was just as traumatic as the social devaluation of industrial work, much of which had been performed by women in the GDR, and the collapsing social reputation of blue-collar workers.

Simultaneously with these social ruptures, the East Germans experienced a cultural change that gave many of them the impression of being restricted in their own power to act and having their autonomy determined by others in a new way. The GDR had disappeared, but the old Federal Republic lived on in a united Germany as a society of dominance and difference. The new citizens of the Federal Republic had to orient themselves, for better or worse, within this new normative framework if they wanted to survive in the new system. For East Germans, “unification” primarily meant catching up and adapting to West German standards. In the discourse of the 1990s, these standards were seen as the norm and everything East German as a deviation. At a time when the “end of history” was being celebrated in the West, “the East” embodied

everything that needed to be overcome quickly, and by no means in Germany alone. But here, where East and West wanted to come together in one and the same country, this constellation created specific feelings of dependency, inadequacy and the loss of identity—even among many representatives of East German civil society, who had experienced and shaped the period between the peaceful revolution and German unification as a time of self-empowerment, but now, like all East Germans, had to learn to navigate in legal frameworks and institutions that were foreign to them.

Most East Germans were not able to draw on relevant social experiences and coping strategies. The transfer elites from West Germany, on the other hand, had the cultural, social, and economic capital that new German citizens usually lacked. Regardless of the individual motives that led West German experts and job-seeking academics to East German administrative offices, judicial bodies, or research institutions, they reinforced the impression that East German biographies and knowledge were being devalued and delegitimized across the board.

The functionaries of the socialist system quickly lost influence at the upper, and in some cases middle, levels of society. The majority of East Germans welcomed this and yet were no less excluded from access to the new elites than they had been previously. This was soon to change in politics and government to such an extent that East Germans such as Angela Merkel and Joachim Gauck gained national and international recognition as representatives of the new Federal Republic. However, the disparities rooted in the early unification process still have not disappeared in top positions in business and academia, the media, or the judiciary. Neither have the serious differences in wealth distribution, demographic structures, or the location of innovative industries. Statistical surveys on inherited wealth delineate the borders of the GDR on a permanent basis—on average, inheritances in the new federal states are around a tenth as large as in those which

² In the new federal states, the range of inherited estates is between €12,000 and €19,000; in the old federal states between €220,000 (Hamburg) and €59,000 (Saarland). The average for all old federal states is €125,000 and the average for all new federal states is €15,000. Data according to: Spiegel 2.3.2024 based on surveys by the Federal Statistical Office.

constituted West Germany.² The income and living conditions of many East Germans have improved significantly over the years, but these material gains are built on a shaky foundation. Property is usually permanent, income is not. The widespread fear of loss and decline in the East can be explained by the radical system change after 1990 and the experience that everything in life can change quickly. However, these feelings can also be explained by the fact that the social status newly acquired over recent decades is in comparison to that of many West Germans highly volatile. In the face of the multiple crises that *all* contemporaries are currently confronted with, terms such as “security” and “predictability” have a very special ring to East Germans (and Eastern Europeans as well).

In all of this, disparities are also increasing *within* eastern Germany, particularly between regions that are lagging behind economically and have a high proportion of older citizens, in contrast to cities such as Dresden, Leipzig and Jena, which are benefiting enormously from the burgeoning, robust knowledge industry that has emerged in proximity to the region’s universities and is thus attracting young, creative people. The *pace* of deindustrialization in the former East Germany, and to some extent Eastern Europe writ large, may well be unprecedented internationally; however, with the wide gap between urban and rural areas, between “left behind” regions and those attuned to cutting-edge technological development, the East German federal states symbolize *fundamental* problems of post-industrial societies in the age of globalization. Similar disparities have shaped the USA for a long time and with similar consequences for the political landscape as in united Germany.

However, there are striking differences in East Germans’ stance toward the state: on the one hand, experiences of real socialism and a transformation that many East Germans experienced as transfer recipients are the reason for the high, often exaggerated expectations that many people in the East project onto the state as a problem solver; disappointment

and frustration are therefore inevitable. On the other hand, the same experiences have nurtured a deep-seated mistrust of “the state” and the conviction that East Germans—on behalf of *all* German citizens—have to show “those up there” what “the people” expect.

As all the participants in our discussion pointed out, East Germans shaped their lives under real socialism in very different ways. They embodied or supported the system, endured or criticized it, or did both at the same time. Only a few actively fought against the communist state and its elites. But many developed *eigensinnige* (stubborn, independent) practices in their everyday lives. They experimented with various forms of self-empowerment, and in the end they even allowed a dictatorship to implode (or watched it do so). Quite a few of them, including former or prevailing communists, saw the subsequent upheavals—as Christina Morina shows—as the dawn of a promising future. Nevertheless, many East Germans trust the democratic institutions of the new Federal Republic less than their fellow citizens in the West, and in public discourse this is predominantly understood as a lack of democratic capacity. More recent research represented on our panel, on the other hand, sharpens the focus on East-specific elements of a democratic self-image. According to this framework, notions of democracy were not absent from everyday life in the GDR but were practiced and called for “from the bottom up” in structures and forms of expression such as individual petitions or internal debates in companies, partly even in local branches of socialist mass organizations. However, these forms of grassroots democracy, which experienced an impressive confirmation of their effectiveness in 1989, could not easily be reconciled with the representative democracy established in the West, and this in turn reinforced the latent feelings of limited political agency in the East. Grassroots movements and parties of the right-wing spectrum, which had previously found only moderate support in the West, knew how to use these feelings to their advantage.

The Political Use of Contemporary History

Notwithstanding differences over how to gauge the democratic potential of East Germans, historians and social scientists agree in the assessment that right-wing populists have cleverly appropriated widespread experiences of loss, fears of decline, and discourses of devaluation; that they benefit enormously from the construction of an “Eastern identity”; and that they know how to instrumentalize historical moments of self-empowerment for goals that threaten democracy. Institutions of research, education, and victim advocacy have all contributed to this to some extent, not to mention the predominantly West German-dominated media: for a long time, they treated GDR history as a mere history of dictatorship and defined confrontation and demarcation as the dictum of their “reappraisal.” In doing so, they established narratives that bypassed many people and did not invite them to critically reflect on their own responsibility in the socialist system.

To this day, East Germans have hardly given an account of their own actions to each other. For the most part, they avoid putting themselves to the test and engaging in an honest debate that goes beyond the usual victim narratives. The “Round Tables” convened over 1989/90 made enormous efforts to establish such a critical position. In the culture of Western dominance, however, such spaces for self-reflection suddenly seemed to be sealed off. In a time of undifferentiated judgments, anyone who wanted to find a place in the new system always ran the risk of permanently damaging themselves with a critical review. Added to this was East Germans’ widespread feeling of having become a living experiment in how to overcome a dictatorship. What the old Federal Republic had neglected and suppressed in dealing with the history of National Socialism in the decades after 1945 was now to be dealt with all the more emphatically, and quickly, when it came to the history of the GDR and the responsibility of Germans in just one (the dictatorship-shaped) part of the country.

This complex constellation has made it difficult for East German families and micro-collectives to critically examine the history of the GDR and has contributed to the fact that even members of the post-reunification generation conjure up an East German identity and complain about a lack of historical representation. Hardly any East Germans want the GDR back, but debates such as those experienced by West German families after 1968 about their own historical responsibility and the leeway that each individual has in dictatorships are still rare in East Germany today. More widespread were inter-generational forms of self-empowerment, self-assurance, and collective remembrance, which—with ripple effects since the late 1990s—were expressed in literature, private consumption, sport and regional media. Nostalgia and *Eigensinn*, defiance and self-assertion, entered into an interesting *mélange*. This mixture became politically explosive when the political right wove itself into these discourses and when its leading figures, most of whom came from the West, projected the fear of further social devaluation felt among East Germans onto the already conflict-ridden topic of “migration.”

As all our panelists emphasize in different ways, East Germans were never a homogeneous group, and most GDR citizens were neither in the Stasi nor in the opposition. Caution is still required today when making collective attributions. It is true that the AfD’s gains and the challenges facing representative democracies became apparent earlier and more clearly in the east than in the west of the country. However, despite all justified concerns, it should be noted that the majority of East Germans who go to the polls in state and federal elections do not vote for right-wing populists, but for democrats.

Discussing Multiple Perspectives

The panel, which we document below, was unusual in its composition, not only because we gave three female authors a stage, but also because two of them—Katja Hoyer and Christina Morina—as well as the two conveners—Anna Maria

Boss and myself—grew up in the GDR, while the other two panelists—Joyce Mushaben and Samuel Huneke—bring a North American perspective. The fact that the West German perspective, which is usually perceived as the dominant one, was not biographically represented on the panel was not a conscious decision on the part of the organizers, but this constellation may have lent our discussion a special “spice.” It centered on three questions: how should the history of the former socialist part of Germany and the experiences of its citizens be incorporated into an intertwined history of Germany after 1945? How have different readings of German history and different experiences of reunification and social change specifically influenced the understanding of democracy and expectations of democratic political processes in East and West Germany? And what weight should differences in memory and historical perspective have when it comes to understanding the current political and social situation in Germany?

The three panelists offer very different answers, as they perceptibly differ in their methods, their objectives, and their approaches to the recent history of a divided Germany struggling for unification. What unites them is their endeavor to finally break down binary interpretations and give a broad spectrum of actors a historical voice. The issues that are increasingly preoccupying historians are the questions of how to write a polyphonic history that does not become arbitrary but sharpens the focus on structures, causalities, and processes; how to make the many entanglements in the history of the two states and their European and global contexts visible; and how to do justice to the inherently heterogeneous historical experiences of East Germans in *public* discourse. The panelists provide answers that can open up new perspectives on seemingly familiar developments. However, they also show that the transformation that began in 1989/90 has not been completed. It continues and interlocks with new transformations and experiences of crisis in a way that is likely to further intensify the need for social and historiographical debates.

This is why it is so important to bring together different ways of approaching recent German history, but also the different chambers of resonance in which they become audible, on one and the same platform, and to allow controversial approaches to coexist. The GHI is a place of free research and as such promotes the unprejudiced study of history and its representations in society. The discussion documented below offers a telling example of this, and I would therefore like to thank the three authors and the moderator for making their contributions available to an even wider audience.

The Roundtable

Samuel Huneke: I'd like to briefly thank the GHI, Simone Lässig, and Anna Maria Boß, for organizing such a wonderful event. I'll begin by introducing the three panelists, and then I have a few questions that I'll pose before we open it up to general questions and answers from the audience.

First we have Christina Morina, who has been Professor of Contemporary History at the University of Bielefeld since 2019. Her research focuses on major themes in German and European history from the 19th to the 21st century, particularly Nazism and the history of bystanding during the Holocaust, socialism, Marxism, and communism, political and memory cultures in Germany since 1945, and the history of historiography. Her dissertation on the memory of the Eastern Front War in post-war Germany appeared as *Legacies of Stalingrad: Remembering the Eastern Front in Germany since 1945*, with Cambridge University Press in 2011. Since then, she has published a wide range of articles and book chapters. Her second book, her Habilitation, *Die Erfindung des Marxismus: Wie eine Idee die Welt eroberte*, was published in 2017 with Siedler. It won the prestigious "Geisteswissenschaften International" translation prize and appeared in English with Oxford University Press in 2023 as *The Invention of Marxism: How an Idea Shaped Everything*. In 2019, she co-authored *Zur*

rechten Zeit: Wider die Rückkehr des Nationalismus (published with Ullstein), with Norbert Frei, Franka Maubach, and Maik Tändler. And most recently, and relevant for today, Morina's third monograph was published under the title *Tausend Aufbrüche: Die Deutschen und ihre Demokratie seit den 1980er-Jahren*, also with Siedler.

Next, we have Katja Hoyer, who is a German British historian, a journalist, and the author of the widely acclaimed history of the Kaiserreich, *Blood and Iron*. Her latest book, *Beyond the Wall: East Germany 1949-1990*, was long listed for the Baillie Gifford Prize and deemed one of the best books of the year by several newspapers, including the *Times of London*, the *Financial Times*, and the *Daily Telegraph*. Katja is a visiting research fellow at King's College London and a fellow of the Royal Historical Society. She's a columnist for the *Washington Post* and contributes to several other newspapers in the UK and Germany. Katja co-hosts the podcast "The New Germany." She was born in East Germany, as was just mentioned, and is now based in the UK.

Finally, last but not least, we have Joyce Mushaben, who is Curators' Distinguished Professor of Comparative Politics Emerita at the University of Missouri, St. Louis. She now lives here in Washington D.C. and works as an adjunct faculty member at the BMW Center for German and European Studies at Georgetown University. Her early work focused on new social movements, in particular, peace, ecology, feminist, anti-nuclear protests, and neo-Nazi activism, on German national identity, and generational change. She then moved on to European Union developments involving women's leadership, gender policies, citizenship, migration, and asylum policies, Euro-Islam debates, and comparative welfare state reforms. She's the author of six monographs, including most recently and relevant for today, *What Remains? The Dialectical Identities of Eastern Germans*, which was published in 2023 with Palgrave Macmillan. Her current book project is titled "Becoming Madam Europe: Ursula von der Leyen and the Pursuit of Gender Equality."

Welcome to all three of you. And as a sort of icebreaker question, I'm curious to hear a bit more about the books each of you have just published, which are either on or include the history of East Germany. To start off this discussion, could you say a little bit about your book, its focus and arguments, and what drew you to your topic in the first place?

Katja Hoyer: My book was called *Beyond the Wall*, and was intended to be an entire history of East Germany, of the GDR, from its origins in 1949 to its fall in 1990. In German, the subtitle is actually "A New History of the GDR." We had a long debate about whether that's appropriate or not, given that I'm synthesizing a lot of the research that's already there. But what I think is new about it is that I've tried to write it for a Western audience, taking this internal German debate out of Germany. I wrote it in English for, first, the UK audience, but also internationally, for an audience that is not particularly familiar with East Germany or all those particular details about the state, about its development and so on. And mainly also for people who didn't actually live in East Germany themselves. But I was also trying to do that out of the perspective of East Germans themselves. So, I didn't want to talk about them without including them in this narrative. And so the idea was to make as many of their voices heard in the story as I possibly could.

Each of the chapters, even each of the subchapters, starts with a personal story of one individual who lived in East Germany. So, it'll say something like: "On the 17th of September in 1954, Brigitte left her house thinking about this, that, and the other," and I'm trying to link her story back to what happened in the GDR overall, to try and humanize the entire political history of the GDR while telling it. So, I think in that way it is a new history of the GDR in that it's trying to tell the story from the perspectives of the people who lived there, but making it understandable for an audience that doesn't have that experience.

What brought me to this idea is an interesting speech that Angela Merkel, arguably the most famous East German of them all, gave in 2021, one of her last big speeches in office just before she left as German Chancellor, where she said that it still riles her when people reduce her biography before 1990, so the first 36 years of her life, really just over half of her life at that point, to a negative aspect of her biography, something she should shrug off, leave behind. The phrase that the Konrad Adenauer Foundation, who basically are very close to her own party, used—they intended to praise her at the end of her career and said, essentially, despite the “ballast” of her GDR biography, she still managed to become a decent politician and make her way in life after 1990. And she said there’s so much wrong with that sentence, not only despite of that, has she managed to do it, but also to call that entire time span of her life, “ballast,” something heavy, a heavy load to shrug off. And I thought it was interesting that even after 16 years in the highest office of the land, that she’s the success story of post-unification, this is the first time really she made a big thing out of it and discussed it. And I thought—she says this in the speech herself –, but it’s interesting that if it’s difficult for her to talk about these things, then imagine what it must be like for a lot of other East Germans out there who can’t tell their story, or feel that they can’t tell their story. Whether that’s actually the case or not is neither here nor there, but people feel that they can’t talk about these things without putting it into a context of the dictatorship.

So my intention really was to try and put all of those things together, the big political history that I’m interested in, the economic and social strands, but making it relatable on a human level for people who didn’t live there, and making it relatable for the people that did live there, who hopefully—the majority tell me so, anyway, of the letters and responses that I get—see themselves somewhere in that story

Joyce Mushaben: My book has a much longer history. I came here about 32 years ago—you know, as a child prodigy, when

I had a grant over at AICGS—now the American German Institute—to write about East German identity because I had already conducted extensive research for a book on West German identities, titled *From Post-war to Post-wall Generations*. I have always been interested in the question of generational change, and its impact on the political culture, having focused on three full generations in Western Germany who had very different senses of national identity. The second generation, the Baby Boomers, proved the most ambivalent, with responses such as “no national identity is a good national identity,” “I am a citizen of the world,” or “I’m a European”—anything but a national German identity. I decided to conduct a parallel study.

I arrived at the AICGS in May of 1989 and had a conversation with *Die Zeit* editor Theo Sommer, whom I had interviewed for my first book. After I told him about my project on East German identity, he responded, “Joyce, there is no such thing as a GDR identity.” Six months later, the wall fell, and I proved him wrong. In fact, the next time I visited him in Hamburg, he poured me a glass of whiskey at 10 o’clock in the morning and said: “You were right.”

One of the problems is that Westerners, including politicians, had always failed to differentiate between “*GDR identity*,” the officially state-defined, imposed-from-above identity, and what I call “*Ostdeutsche Identität*,” “East German identities,” rooted in one’s everyday association with “*Heimat*,” peer culture, values, friends, relationships and families. One of my purposes in writing this book [*What Remains*], which I picked up again after 30 years, was to prove, first of all, that those two categories of identity are distinct, and that even if people rejected the official GDR state identity, that does not mean they did not have deeper, everyday peer-culture identities.

My second point was to focus on the fact that a lot of people, right after the wall fell, jumped on the bandwagon to write about *exit, voice, and loyalty*, Albert O. Hirschman’s paradigm

for understanding decline in systems and organizations, and how management and consumers respond. Most scholars looked at the fall of East Germany and concluded there had never really been *voice* in the GDR until the Leipzig demonstrations and the Monday night demonstrations that began to spread; they completely underestimated the function of *loyalty*, cutting it a bit short. What I intended to do was to look at the wide array of subcultures within East German society.

The GDR was never a homogeneous mass of people, all marching to the beat of a single socialist drum. The SED leadership had to respond to different groups in the population: women, youth, working class men, Stasi, intellectuals, writers. I explored the identities of each of these groups, before and after the fall of the Wall, the factors that shaped their identities during GDR days, what happened to them during the period of transition ten years after unification, and what these identities look like 30, 32 years later. It is important to stress that each of these groups developed their own form of *exit*, their own form of *voice*, as well as their own *loyalty* dilemmas. GDR writers, such as Christa Wolf and Stefan Heym, had a concept of loyalty grounded in anti-fascism and the founding of the new republic. That made it much harder for them to leave because they kept hoping this ideal might someday maybe be realized. The second generation, the born-into generation, was willing to accept all the kinds of advantages, subsidized childcare, free education, opportunities that the GDR afforded. But that does not mean they identified politically with the regime and with its many constraints. By the time we get to the third generation, there is no *systemic loyalty* whatsoever. These people then develop their own forms of voice, the gruffies, the punks, the hooligans, the crazy groups that congregated out on the streets of the GDR, the local eco-movements, the little peace movements that found a base for themselves in the churches across Eastern Germany, who then contributed to a mass movement as all of these groups came together in 1989. Then there are the working-class men who were always

the prototype of the ideal “*sozialistische Persönlichkeit*,” who thought they were going to emerge from the system’s collapse more successfully than they actually did at the end.

My third framework for this book is to explore who were “the winners“ in GDR times, what has happened to them in the interim, and whether they qualify as “winners” or “losers” today. Do they perceive themselves as such? I evaluate the status of each of these groups. We could argue, for example, that women were the clear losers of unification: abortion was recriminalized, Kohl eliminated subsidized childcare, and mass unemployment ensued, up to 35 percent in some regions. Under Angela Merkel’s four terms as Chancellor, under Ursula von der Leyen as well, many policies that they took for granted in the GDR are being restored, like guaranteed childcare. One could argue that 30 years later women emerged as winners of unification, whereas the people who thought they were going to grow up to be the big corporate managers, run their own companies and businesses, these are the men who are increasingly inclined to vote for the AFD, because they suddenly feel like the losers. It’s a case of relative deprivation. I offer a very complicated framework at three different levels. It is very easy for me to argue that there are still Eastern German identities, that they are highly differentiated, and that they have absolutely nothing to do with the state-imposed GDR identity that most Westerners immediately call to mind whenever you talk about Eastern identity.

Christina Morina: My book actually is concerned with *both* halves of Germany, which differentiates it from the other two books. It also covers a specific, very recent period. *Tausend Aufbrüche* focuses on the decades since the 1980s—for contemporary historians, a period where it becomes somewhat uncomfortable because of the archival limitations we have and the lack of temporal distance to the events.

I want to talk about the three impulses that inspired me to write the book. One is truly historiographical. In Germany

and beyond, we've been discussing the challenge of writing postwar German history in an integrative perspective, to relate East and West German history to one other and to find ways, narratives, questions that make it possible to write East and West German history in a connected way. Much has been done on the 1950s and the 1960s, on cultural themes or sports, for example, but regarding the political-cultural history of the 1970s and 1980s and across the caesura of 1990, there are astoundingly few attempts to explore and narrate this history of Germany in an integrated way. So, my book is the attempt to fill this gap, it suggests one way to approach this recent political-cultural history as an integrated history.

The second impulse came from the present. The idea for the book was born around the year 2017 when the AfD, the already mentioned right-wing populist party, managed to gain 94 seats in the Bundestag, and to establish itself as a permanent political force to the right of the CDU/CSU. And as this rise was significantly driven by East German voters, I was interested in finding out why. Not that right-wing populism is not a West German problem, too, but the difference, the ten or 15 percent *more* that the AfD has in East Germany, is what I wanted to investigate and explain. So, the second impulse was tied to the classic, yet somewhat outdated question: How could this have happened? How do we explain the rise of the AfD from a historical perspective, and why, in particular, was and is it so strong in East Germany?

A third impulse is the popular narrative of the revolution in 1989 as a high point, a *Sternstunde* in German history. It's considered the happy end to a—finally—successful democratic history of Germany. Yet, at the same time, we've been talking about East Germany mostly in terms of crisis, threats to democracy, and disarray. So there as an obvious paradox, and I wanted to know how the idea of a *Sternstunde* and the democratic crisis mode in which we have been discussing the East basically since the early 1990s were actually related to one another. It is time for us historians to take up the task, to

address this paradox and move beyond the overly schematic and polemical debates that Simone mentioned at the very beginning. We need to find different ways of talking about East Germany in past and present, in academic history as well as in society at large.

Finally, a few words about the title of the book and its main argument. It came to me during a visit of the Archiv der Bürgerbewegung, Leipzig, which holds records of the civic movement from the 1989 revolution. There I came across two boxes with hundreds of miscellaneous documents that were collected in the fall of 1989 and the spring of 1990, where ordinary citizens had written down or put on flyers their ideas about how, finally, “true” democracy can be built, now that the SED dictatorship with its pseudo-democratic rhetoric was toppled. And these ideas were so creative, so diverse, so idiosyncratic, too, that, you know, when I left the archive and went down the stairs, I thought: *tausend Aufbrüche*, a thousand new beginnings! That’s what it felt like. And it was the perfect title for a book that looks at how ordinary citizens in East and West Germany perceived themselves as citizens, what they understood to be the state, what they understood to be the task of politicians and politics, and how they thought about democracy.

Regarding the East, all this has to be considered before the backdrop of another paradox, namely that the GDR called itself “Deutsche Demokratische Republik”—a democratic republic, while, in fact, it was a dictatorship. The term democracy is mentioned over 90 times in the state’s constitution. So, there’s a tension regarding what we understand as (liberal) democracy and how the idea of “democracy” was propagated in the past. At the same time, this offers a path towards relating East to West German history in new ways: We can ask, for instance, how democracy was imagined and practiced on *both* sides of the wall. Thus, in the book, I’m comparing citizens’ correspondence from various contexts, in West Germany, mostly letters to the Bundespräsident, and in East Germany,

correspondence that was collected by the Stasi, plus material from various citizen movement archives from the revolutionary period. So, I am interested in what people understood by democracy when they talked about it in the West and in the East, and how these notions actually played out and matter in the political culture of contemporary Germany. One of my conclusions is that part of the extra support for the AfD in East Germany is related to a distinct, *eigensinnige*, sense of “people’s democracy,” popular or direct democracy “from below.” That’s what the SED promised, as all communist regimes promised while, in fact, they built dictatorships. But that promise had a profound, real-life impact. And in the run-up to the truly democratic revolution of 1989, its significance, you know, comes from the fact that people started throwing this back at the regime and saying, “you’re telling us this is socialist democracy. We know that this is not democracy. What we want is *real* democracy.” So, there’s a democratic experience, there’s a learning curve, a discourse of democracy also in East Germany, that started way before and goes way beyond the revolution. I think that is a perspective that enables us to look at Germany as a country in which two very distinct democratic traditions merged, even if the East German one was long about a fake democracy, a hollow claim and promise. Still, it mattered greatly, and matters until today.

Samuel Huneke: Right, thank you. So, that’s actually a wonderful lead-in to my next question, which is very much about the historiography of East Germany. As Simone mentioned, there’s a rich but also fragmented history of East Germany in both English and German. For a long time, the German Democratic Republic was seen as a totalitarian country, as equivalent even to the Nazi state. You’ll frequently hear references to Germany’s second dictatorship making that direct comparison. This is a common view today, I think, among people who aren’t professional historians. I was recently teaching about East Germany to my undergraduates and I asked them what they knew about East Germany and they threw out all

sorts of things about how it was gray and awful and everyone was constantly being spied on and sent to prison and so on and so forth. So that's rather the traditional view. In subsequent years, scholars of everyday life have turned to private experiences, and to everyday life, to argue that East Germans enjoyed a degree of agency, what's oftentimes called "Eigensinn." And even more recently, scholarship has looked at successful political and social movements, as we've already heard a little bit about today, that further challenge this totalitarian hypothesis. So, I'm curious to hear each of you talk a little bit more about your overall perspective on East German history. What do you make of these historiographical debates, where do you see yourself fitting in, where do you fall among them?

Katja Hoyer: I would subscribe to what you just said about people's perceptions. Despite the fact that the scholarship has moved in that direction, I think quite a long time ago, and opened up the field to different perspectives, I think the perceptions that people outside of Germany in particular—but I would say even in what was West Germany—hold of what life was like in the East are very much as you describe.

I remember when I was still a child, one of my best friends moved to Hamburg. So this would have been the mid-nineties, and I went to visit him and spend some time there and I was asked by their neighbors whether by now we had running water in East Germany and I just, you know, from a child's perspective, I hadn't been confronted with these sort of stereotypes before. The questions went on: "Are there cars and what's life like now?" and, "Is there some color now in your cities?" and things like that. So that was the first time that I was presented with these stereotypes and didn't quite know, as a kid, what to do with that and whether that was representative in any shape or form or not.

But certainly, in the context of the Cold War, I would say, my experiences in Britain and also, from the response that I've had from here, from the U.S. as well, there's a very cartoonish

kind of Cold War image of what East Germany was like as well; people imagine men in gray coats walking around and watching people and spying on them. And people associate East Germany immediately with the Berlin Wall and with the Stasi and of course these are extremely important elements of what the state was, not just elements of it, but they provide the framework quite physically and also politically to life in the GDR, but it's not the only thing that shaped the lives of people. And if you think that way, it basically takes agency away from East Germans. So, when you speak to people who've never had much to do with that this topic, they imagine East Germans, not even as individuals, but often as a gray mass of victims or perpetrators, depending on which category they fell in.

And in Germany, that debate was a bit more complicated, but for a long time, there was still the assumption that East Germans, were either perpetrators or victims and would fall into one or the other category. And what I was trying to do with the book is break this up. Not so much to reinvent the whole thing because this had been done in scholarship for a long time. But I don't think it's been done in a way that's accessible enough to have this debate, both in Germany and abroad, with a wider audience. So I'm pleased with the way that the book has been so widely received. I mean, when I first started writing it, people were saying it's a niche topic. But actually, it's been picked up by most of the newspapers. As a result of that, I've been able to speak in so many countries about it with people who've never really come across this topic before, or thought much about it since, and that's what I was trying to do—bring that idea of diversity, of agency, of complexity, of the idea that there's 16 million East German stories to tell, and not one or two, to a wider audience and to have those debates as widely as I possibly can.

Christina Morina: I think it is important to differentiate between scholarship and the public image of and discourse on East Germany. And I also think it's important to differentiate between analysis and narratives, history and memory.

Plus, there is always the question, “who are we writing for,” right? The book I’ve written is supposed to reach a wider audience. I’m not an identity producer nor someone seeking to provide ideological material to a certain political viewpoint or worldview. I am a historian. My goal is to understand and explain a matter of the past, and to ask how it might relate to the present. And for me that can only happen while acknowledging that I am standing on the shoulders of many other historians and the work they are doing next to me or have done before me.

Having said that, I actually invite us to rethink the “two dictatorships” perspective, because the question “In which way was the GDR a democratic state?,” which is an irritating question at first sight, adds something to the explanation of that very dictatorship. It points us to why people were willing to be mobilized—were available for mobilization, as Mary Fulbrook put it—in much greater numbers than just for the party and just for the Stasi. Many people were very skeptical of the party and state institutions, but a lot of people *still* bought into the idea of socialism, of the other, the better Germany with a true, a socialist democracy being built here. So, in that sense, the central framework of the GDR remains the dictatorship, but I think we also have to move beyond that paradigm, conceptually and empirically. What does it actually mean if we tell the story of German radicalization and de-radicalization in different ways, if we make this story, or rather these stories, more complicated, and seek new explanatory frames for why the twentieth century in Germany looked the way it did. That’s what scholarship is all about, in my view, including historical scholarship.

So, I think if we look differently at the issue of dictatorial mobilization and propaganda, we can actually add something to the question how dictatorships work. I also think it’s necessary to relate the historiography on Nazism in a deliberate and nuanced way to the second, the communist dictatorship. Just think of the scholarly consensus that Nazism

was a societal project, that it was not only a destructive but a crudely visionary communal endeavor, a “Zustimmungsdiktatur” to cite Frank Bajohr. It was not founded on hatred only, but also on some kind of a vision for a supposedly better, happier *Volksgemeinschaft*. The communists promised the socialist *Menschengemeinschaft* and justified repression in its name. So, notions of community matter greatly, and they mattered in divided Germany in ways that are comparable, especially those related to the idea of an ethnically homogenous German people. And these notions have lingered on and contributed to the rise of the AfD as a truly German-German endeavor, because the party resumes and nurtures long-standing authoritarian, racist and nationalist traditions, including those stemming from the second German dictatorship.

Joyce Mushaben: I come back to my framework of exit, voice, and loyalty because I think about the different kinds of voices that were developed: writers could use their novels and their works, [such as] *Guten Morgen, du Schöne*, the interviews that Maxie Wander transcribed, to substitute for what we in democratic societies normally consider to be voice.

You go to the polls, you can write a letter to the editor,—or you don’t go vote, that’s also a political statement—but then you have to push it a bit farther. Even though I am a political scientist, and I cannot take part in family debates here, I have done a lot of historical research. For my book on West German identities, I went back and reviewed 30 years of survey research in Western Germany. By 1984, I kid you not, it was very clear that even though the Preamble [to the Basic Law] said, “we should all look forward to the day when Germany can unify and we’ll be one big happy family,” according to poll data from the mid-1980s, only 12 percent really believed that unification would ever happen. That led, on the one hand, to a lot of West German indifference. Or, to quote Peter Schneider’s novel, *Der Mauerspringer*: “The wall became a symbol of something that told them day by day, who was the fairest in

the land. Whether there was life on the other side of the death strip was something that sooner interested only cats and pigeons.”

There is also an emotional paradox here, because both of these populations were caught up in Cold War ideology. Each of their governments consistently pointed to the other as the enemy. Yet people were supposed to remain brothers and sisters, or at least second cousins through all of this, to develop positive social relationships with each other, or to still feel this kind of emotional attachment. When you finally do put them together, they find out they're not “zwei Staaten in einer Nation,” but “zwei Nationen in einem Staat.” So, two nations in one state, to paraphrase Willy Brandt.

But that also brings us to points about the East German side. I had unprecedented access to youth data at the Central Institute for Youth Research in Leipzig right before the whole institute was “abgewickelt.” That includes a lot of classified studies that were always given to Honecker et al. and immediately put in what they called the “Panzerschrank.” None of the leaders wanted to read these things. I have data that go back to 1964, when they created the ZIJ, where you can also see major changes in attitudes. When, in 1986, roughly 23 percent of the FDJ functionaries admit in anonymous surveys that they no longer believed in the leading role of the Communist Party, you know you have a problem.

The real problem was that the East German officials never read the reports. They didn't even read a lot of the Stasi reports they routinely demanded which said, “Here's a problem and the Pleiße [River] stinks: you have to fix this river because you have a big environmental problem.” This idea of East German democracy never filtered down, but the belief I share with Christina, is that they hoped the grassroots democracy they imagined could eventually filter up to the top of the system. Suddenly they were confronted with West German institutions that were also superimposed from above, although

they chose this result in the March 1990 elections. This is what led to the reaction, to cite Bärbel Bohley, “Wir wollten Gerechtigkeit, und wir haben den Rechtsstaat bekommen.” (“We wanted justice, and we got the rule of law.”) The West German institutions did not work at all in terms of the democratic categories they had in their own heads, and that has yet to be resolved. There is still gross underrepresentation, a disproportionate distortion among the people (mostly West-erners) who hold all the elite positions in united Germany.

Samuel Huneke: That’s actually a great segue to the next question. I’d love to hear you share your thoughts about—the place that the GDR occupies today. Obviously, it no longer exists as a state; it was abolished in 1990. But in what ways—cultural, economic, political, and so forth—does the GDR linger on? We’ve already talked about the AfD, and I’d love to have all of you speak a little bit more about why the AfD is so popular, as well as in what other ways does the GDR still continue to be somewhat relevant to life in Germany?

Christina Morina: By life in Germany, I was just going to ask, what do you mean: in relation to what? Public discourse, politics, historiography?

Samuel Huneke: Whatever you think is relevant.

Christina Morina: Maybe I can tie my response to Joyce’s previous remarks. In my book, I also have a chapter on Angela Merkel, and of course, the statistics you cite are worrisome: there’s a significant misrepresentation or underrepresentation of East Germans in German public life. Other groups are also underrepresented, so it’s a structural problem of democracy or societies in general, not only an East-West German problem. Still, I would not count the fact that Angela Merkel became chancellor, and Joachim Gauck president, as exceptions. Because if you look at the statistics closely, the one area in which East Germans have been overrepresented for more than two decades, is the so-called *staatspolitischer Sektor*. In the areas of federal government, the executive branch, and

the political parties, there's a slight overrepresentation of East Germans. So, Merkel and Gauck are actually not exceptions from the rule, but their careers exemplify a deeper fact and development. I would argue that they are a kind of testament to the positive effects of the *Tausend Aufbrüche*, the thousand new beginnings of 1989, and many other women and men from the GDR's civil rights movement have likewise made politics their profession and ended up shaping the Berlin Republic in pretty remarkable ways.

So, in that sense, my book is also a plea to quit looking at the East German "problem" as the *East German* problem and ask instead why certain groups are better represented in any given democratic systems and others worse. And we should have a clearer view of what East Germans actually constructively added to German democracy—what the *Sternstunde* was and is really about, in terms of strengthening the idea and practice of democracy. Not least because this also raises the question of East German agency and responsibility, what East German politicians actually did do in the "Berlin Republic", why Angela Merkel talked about East German underrepresentation and a peculiar outlook on democracy only this one time, at the very end of her fourth term. Why didn't she—and the two other chancellors before her, for that matter—address the problem, which she knew very well, earlier, in a more profound way, not only in terms of socio-economic development, but as a political-cultural challenge? So, there are a lot of questions we as historians still need to ask and answer.

Joyce Mushaben: Right. You want this to get spicy? It's about to get spicy. Because I am now going to argue like a pure political scientist, and I come equipped with data. Angela Merkel actually entered the Kohl cabinet because there is a kind of quota system within the CDU; he said to her, "Do you get along well with women?" and she said, "I think so." He decided at that point to make her the Minister for Women and Youth. He needed another East German besides [Günther] Krause and [Rainer] Ortleb in the cabinet. So that's how she

got in. Gauck got in because, first of all, conservatives had rejected Jens Reich as a potential presidential candidate, they had rejected Gesine Schwan—there were lots of pushes to try to get a female president. There are structural, informal albeit systemic rules inside the CDU that catapulted them into these unusual positions.

However, it's kind of like the old feeling about the Russian Czar, who like "heaven is high above and far away." Okay, average easterners did not really identify with Angela Merkel, who could not say a whole lot about East Germany. Even though she was pretty inexperienced at that point in time, she was confronted by the likes of [Horst] Seehofer (CSU), Michael Glos (CSU), and other people in the cabinet who just did not want anything that she was trying to push through in the environmental field or with regard to women's opportunities.

Where it would matter is exactly where East Germans still do not see themselves as being represented. As late as 2016, a study compiled by Michael Blum and Olaf Jacobs at the University of Leipzig defined roughly 15,000 positions that qualify as the top elites in Germany. Eastern Germans comprise 17 percent of the population, yet as late as 2016, they held only 1.7 percent of those elite positions: three out of 60 state secretaries, two out of 200 Bundeswehr admirals and generals. Their share of ownership of regional newspapers and chief editorships of regional newspapers in their own territory had fallen to less than 13 percent. They occupied only 5.9 percent of all the chief justice slots—and that includes in their own state constitutional courts. I could go on, one in seven directors of research institutes. We're talking about almost 30 years after unification, where you do not see yourself represented even in your own state governments, because a lot of Westerners continue to dominate. The only East German *Ministerpräsident* for many years was [Manfred] Stolpe in Brandenburg. Because they did not see themselves being brought into the lower levels of the elites where they could eventually move up the ladder, this was one great source of

resentment. I will stop there with my political science take on this and pass it on.

Katja Hoyer: Maybe just to add something anecdotal to that as well—when I arrived at Jena University, which is in the East, in 2005, I think two of the history professors were from East Germany; the rest had all come over from West Germany. And of the Eastern ones, one was for local medieval history, so not only quite niche, but actually local to the region that he was from. And the other one, I forget now, but basically this was 15 years after reunification and they had basically culled the entire academic staff there and thoroughly replaced them.

So these things did, I think, make many people feel like they had been annexed, or, as another widely-read book argued, that East Germany was taken over by West Germany. I think on a cultural level—since you included that in the question—many people also felt that their memories and the sort of day-to-day stuff that they remembered from the GDR wasn't really valid memory anymore. One example that springs to mind was that a few years ago, Rewe, the second-largest German supermarket chain, had the slightly odd idea of bringing back some East German foodstuffs. So they brought back this bizarre design of soups and cans where they had the East German state logo on it, or the pioneer organization, uh, so you had like little boys and girls with their neckerchiefs and so on, advertising for the tins basically. There was "NVA-Suppe," the soup that you'd get from the East German army at festivities and events where they'd rock up with their field kitchens, and people bought that. And then the Bundesstiftung Aufarbeitung—the official institute that deals with the legacy of East Germany—actually wrote a letter to Rewe to say, "Can you take these off the shelves, please, because this is glorifying dictatorship." And people were saying, "Well, hang on a minute, I just like pea soup. I just want to have the taste of something that I'm used to from my childhood." Or they had this overcooked pasta and tomato sauce—I quite liked it, but it's really quite awful—which you got in your canteen, at school

and workplaces and things, which had such a distinctive taste and smell, mainly because it was probably completely synthetic. But they brought that back and people bought that, and wanted to have that taste back in their lives, or perhaps sit there and reminisce about their past. And they were told by an organization that is, by law, in charge of GDR memory that that's not a good thing, that it means that they're glorifying dictatorship. And I think these things collectively led to a sense that your own history, your own legacy, is written out of the national narrative because there was a sense that 1990 was the happy ending to Germany's horrible twentieth century, and anything that came before it opened up all of those wounds again, and people didn't really want to talk about them.

So, I think, it's hard to pin this on things because it always ends up in pretty acrimonious discussions when you try and talk about this, because some people will say: "This has absolutely nothing to do with me. I just want to talk about Germany now as a unified country. I'm neither East German nor West German." Other people say: "But you know, I'm old enough to remember things that happened, either in the East or the West, and I don't want that taken away from me." And you very quickly end up in a situation where one anecdote stands against another, or this statistic stands against that statistic. I would argue it's a very individual experience, post 1990, whether people feel aggrieved about the situation or not. And it's difficult to bring that into an overarching conclusion, whether it's in which areas has it been successful and in which it hasn't. Because we get people saying, "Oh, but I heard about this person that they're really nostalgic about what happened in East Germany." So therefore, all these Germans are "Ostalgic," as the phrase has it now. And I find it difficult to pin that on an entire group of people, never mind the entire country.

Samuel Huneke: Thank you. As a historian of gender and sexuality, I am always interested in the ways that East Germany sort of bled across the border into West Germany and actu-

ally affected policy and life and culture in the former Western lands. I remember distinctly when I was interviewing former East German Prime Minister Lothar de Maizière for my book, he told me rather shockingly that he thought not only had East Germany been a better place for queer people, but also that that sort of progressiveness had bled across the border into West Germany after the “Wende.”

So, one more question: I’m really curious to hear your take on why it is that East German history is still, over 30 years later, discussed so intensely. I’m thinking in particular about the reaction to your book, *Katja*, in Germany. I think in the United States East Germany is oftentimes a sort of stand-in for socialism or state socialism. And that’s the reason why these discussions can be heated in our country. You also then have figures like Kristen Ghodsee who come out and say, “Well, I think state socialist countries are better for women,” and making these really provocative claims. So I’m curious to hear why you think it’s so heated still today. What are the stakes of this work?

Katja Hoyer: I find it really interesting how different the response was from different people, but also in different countries. The book has come out in different countries now. It’s been translated into 15 languages now, and it’s interesting that wherever I go I have different discussions. So, for instance, a few weeks ago I was in Dublin and the whole debate was around national unity: how do you bring two parts of a country, of a nation, together without everything erupting into acrimonious political dialogue again. So, they were interested in that aspect. In Finland, now that the country has joined NATO, people there are very interested in reassessing the odd hybrid role it had, sort of sitting between East and West, having a close and strange relationship with the Soviet Union, but at the same time being a neutral country. They collaborated a lot with the Stasi at the time. So many people that are now still in economic and political positions might well have collaborated with the Stasi. And my book fell right into that

debate. Should the Stasi archives be opened in Finland? And should they be looking at who was involved in that, now that they're part of NATO in case they're putting those people into sensitive positions?

What makes East Germany both fascinating and also quite a heated subject to debate is there are really big questions at stake there. You could look at it from a national point of view, from a divided nation point of view, you could look at it in terms of the experiments that it tried to do as a population. So, when you look at public housing, for example, the way that that was done on a large scale. The role of women —by the end of the GDR, over 90 percent of women were in full-time employment. That's the highest rate ever achieved in the world, and whatever the motivations behind that, the question is, "How was that possible, and are there elements of that that are worth preserving?" So there are 'all of these really big questions about society, about politics, about the way that nations divide and unify. All of these play a role for different people for different reasons, but they're all really big things that matter. And I think as a result of that, it's such a heated debate because, people will say, "Oh, look at this, it worked," or, "It didn't work." And the next person will look at the same historical example and draw very different conclusions for the present. And you can't escape the idea that this is really highly relevant for politics and for thinking today.

Christina Morina: Well, I think anything else would be surprising, I would say, because it's contemporary history, right? We are the historians who have the honor and the harrow of having to deal with stuff that people remember, that people have lived through. And I think one of our most important tasks is to remind our listeners and our readers, that history, academic history, historiography is not about representing every single individual experience, but about larger questions. Our task is to relate individual and collective experiences to traditions, attitudes, and actions, to explore their conditions and contingencies, to trace continuities and change, and, yes, even

to probe questions of causation and generalization. We should strive to capture the signum of a society in a certain time and place, without negating that there is a plethora of individual experiences and memories that often differ fundamentally. That is, I think, the message we have to get across—this is our work. It is neither about legitimizing nor delegitimizing people's biographies or memories. Rather, the art of history for me is to educate people's sense for larger societal and perennial issues, if you will, for history in general—and to position and contextualize individual stories within it in plausible ways.

My book has gotten a reception that tells me just like what you said, Sam, people are very, very interested. Most are looking for explanations and differentiations, not for polemics. The willingness among non-historians to read a 400-page book and engage with its ideas is astounding; it tells you the stakes are really high.

But, if I may, I want to comment briefly on the critique to your book, Katja. In my view, it has partly to do with the fact that it does claim it's a *new* history. In the introduction you claim that you portray *all* sides of East German society, while in fact, the book paints a rather one-sided picture and focusses only on selected aspects of East German history while downplaying or marginalizing others. At the same time, I would agree that it is indeed still a huge challenge to write a synthesis of the GDR that does justice to its signum, in the sense I just talked about, and represents and contextualizes individual stories in a fair manner. But crucial, I think, is the way we deal with scholarship that's already there; that's a big issue in the critique of your book coming from German academics. If you claim, "this is all new," it's going to invite criticism. This, of course, touches upon the question how we sell our books, in a very literal sense—how we let the market shape our work. I think the way your book has been marketed explains part of the fire it has gotten in Germany.

But returning to the scholarly criticism, let me point to an example. The guest worker chapter doesn't mention racism

with one word, even though the historiography on racism, antisemitism, and nationalism in postwar East Germany is rather extensive by now. And it's so relevant for understanding the present! Instead, you present a rosy story of somebody who experienced some sort of "tension" in Eberswalde without addressing even half of the story that needs to be told here when talking about so-called guest workers in the GDR. Another example is your treatment of women and the issue of gender equality, in which the fundamental *political inequality* plays no role whatsoever. So, there are real issues that people have trouble accepting and, you know, it's a legitimate debate we can and should have.

Joyce Mushaben: It will keep coming back to haunt us, already your example of racism. Each generation will be looking for different things in the history of a place, and there will be new sources. Or there will be new conceptual frameworks, different kinds of discourses. So you have to keep revisiting history—never mind Ron DeSantis and his take on slavery in the United States—but a lot of communities are talking about reparations. Native Americans' water rights are being recognized now, in the context of the extreme water shortage out in the Western states, although it says right there in the treaties that they get first dibs on the water. We cannot expect there to be a kind of one-size-fits-all history. If we keep debating, then it is going to be a case of generations debating with each other about the significance and what that means for [their personal] sense of ethics, my sense of morality, my sense of belonging in a particular society that has this kind of a history, good and bad.

Samuel Huneke: Katja, do you want to have a quick response and then we can open it up to the audience?

Katja Hoyer: Yeah, there's so many points that I can't obviously respond to all of them. I mean, I did try and capture that. What I don't do is use the same vocabulary, the same phrases. It was also a deliberate decision to write it in English for that

reason. I think it comes across, in my chapter, for example, on guest workers. Jorge Nogueira, who I discuss there, is a Cuban who came over on a contractual basis to the GDR. He says that he was extremely conscious of looking different, of having a darker skin color because East Germany wasn't an immigrant society, it was largely a homogenous white society. He does say that he felt very uncomfortable with that and there were tensions, so I describe a brawl, a drunken brawl, that the immigrant workers had with German workers who were supposed to teach them, basically, and then send them back to Cuba. But what I was trying to do in that chapter is explain the whole idea behind his story: because East Germany wasn't an immigrant society, the idea was to bring contractual workers there, train them, and then send them back because East Germany lacked the international trading network it needed to procure things like coffee, sugar, tobacco, all sorts of things. And, because it was isolated from the West, the idea was to try and build up a viable network of like-minded states that it could trade with. The problem is, of course, that when you are the most developed state, you can't really do this kind of German model of importing cheap raw materials and then exporting stuff. Cubans aren't going to buy your washing machines or your cars or whatever, because the economy is just not there. So, the point of the chapter wasn't specifically to talk about racism. I try to explain that at the same time, but the point of the chapter was to explain this whole idea behind the contractual workers.

And I think why this met with such a hostile response from many people immersed in the historiography is precisely because so much research had been done on this; people were expecting this story to lean on the same references and it doesn't. So, by no means was I trying to find a particularly rosy story. I was trying to find one that covered these kinds of different elements. He is an exception in the sense that in the end, actually, he stayed, which *isn't* normal, but that's the reason why I could use his testimony, because he speaks German

and lived somewhere nearby. So, I obviously completely agree with the fact that I couldn't represent all aspects and it's not trying to be a complete history. I think that'd be very difficult to do and get all the different aspects in.

Katja Hoyer is a German-British historian, journalist, and the author of *Blood and Iron: The Rise and Fall of the German Empire, 1871–1918* (Pegasus, 2021) and *Beyond the Wall: East Germany, 1949–1990* (Allen Lane, 2023). A visiting Research Fellow at King's College London and a Fellow of the Royal Historical Society, she is a columnist for the *Berliner Zeitung* and hosts the podcast *The New Germany* for the Körber-Stiftung. She was born in Germany and is now based in the United Kingdom.

Samuel Clowes Huneke is Associate Professor of History at George Mason University. His publications include: *States of Liberation: Gay Men between Dictatorship and Democracy in Cold War Germany* (University of Toronto Press, 2022) and *A Queer Theory of the State* (Floating Opera Press, 2023).

Christina Morina is professor of history at the University of Bielefeld. Her publications include: *Tausend Aufbrüche: Die Deutschen und ihre Demokratie seit den 1980er Jahren* (Siedler, 2023), winner of the 2024 Deutscher Sachbuchpreis; *Die Erfindung des Marxismus: Wie eine Idee die Welt eroberte* (Siedler, 2017), translated as: *The Invention of Marxism: How an Idea Changed Everything* (Oxford UP, 2023); and *Legacies of Stalingrad: Remembering the Eastern Front in Germany since 1945* (Cambridge UP, 2011).

Joyce Marie Mushaben retired as Curators' Distinguished Professor of Comparative Politics at the University of Missouri-St. Louis, where she also served as Director of the Institute for Women's & Gender Studies (2002–2005). She is currently an Affiliated Faculty member in the BMW Center

for German & European Studies at Georgetown University. Her publications include: *What Remains? The Dialectical Identities of Eastern Germans* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2023); *Becoming Madam Chancellor: Angela Merkel and the Berlin Republic* (Cambridge UP, 2017); and *The Changing Faces of Citizenship: Integration and Mobilization among Ethnic Minorities in Germany* (Berghahn, 2008).