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PETER C. CALDWELL and KARRIN HANSHEW, *Germany Since 1945: Politics, Culture, and Society* (London: Bloomsbury, 2018), xiv + 366 pp. ISBN 978 1 4742 6241 5. £22.99 (paperback). ISBN 978 1 4742 6242 2. £70.00 (hardback)

Overviews of post-1945 German history are now so numerous that it can be extremely difficult, especially for students, to know where to start. The resources available include large-scale syntheses of twentieth-century German history, handbooks, and general overviews that are mostly intended for a student audience. This book belongs to the latter category.

It tells the story of both German states from the perspective of two US authors who have taught and studied twentieth-century German history, and is primarily aimed at students at Anglo-American universities, as can be seen from the exclusively English-language literature recommendations included at the end of each of the book's thirteen chapters. Primary sources are supplied in the form of both images and texts (with primary texts framed within the main text to make it clear that this is what they are); these add the attraction of first-hand accounts to the narrative and could also be used as case studies for student seminars.

After a short summary of National Socialist society and a discussion of various interpretations of the Nazi era by contemporary German historians, the authors have chosen the unconditional surrender of the 'German Reich' as the starting point for their narrative. The main body of the book covers the history of West Germany (FRG) and East Germany (GDR) respectively as well as the shared history of the new Federal Republic of Germany from 1989/90 to 2017. The authors' very knowledgeable depiction is mainly focused on political history, but also considers social and cultural aspects.

The overview is structured chronologically in three periods, starting with 1945–1970 ('Dividing Germany'), before moving on to the period 1969–1992 ('New Beginnings') and finishing with the 'Berlin Republic 1990–2017'. The authors have embedded the developments and events that form the basis for this chronological structure in their historical context, thereby justifying their choice of these particular dates positively; this means that their historiography, at least in the

Trans. Emily Richards (GHIL).

main body of the text, is not marred by an artificial reliance on years and decades simply for the sake of it.

But which history of Germany are the authors interested in? Do they offer their readers the post-1945 narrative of (West) German success that has come to hold the status almost of an axiomatic truth, or have they decided to do things differently? And how do they integrate the history of the GDR? Both these questions lead us to historiographical debates that show no signs of fading away. It would be interesting to know, for example, how this overview fits in with the recent critique by Frank Biess and Astrid Eckert of the 'success story' that has in the past been typical for West German historiography.¹ As Biess and Eckert both teach in the USA, published their critique in English, and seem to be unaware of similar older, German-language criticism of such 'success narratives', it is natural to ask whether the two current authors, whose work seems to be mainly based on English-language secondary sources, bring an equally critical approach to German historiography. But they do not. Caldwell and Hanshew are happy to reproduce the success narrative, at least for West Germany, for example, in such phrases as 'the importance of the economic miracle to the short- and long-term success of the FRG' (p. 73).

Besides this, however, they go so far as to view this narrative as continuing unbroken in the period after 1989/90, especially when it comes to Merkel's chancellorship. Both authors seem to be enthusiastic fans of the current German chancellor, the only one out of all Germany's post-war leaders to be given her own section within the book. Caldwell and Hanshew foreground her scientific expertise during the Fukushima catastrophe (p. 309) and support her actions during the refugee crisis of 2015 (pp. 341-2). That Caldwell and Hanshew believe the success narrative to be constitutive for Germany even today can be seen in the three 'basic principles' which they claim lie at the heart of German politics: first, the rejection of racism and the defence of the rule of law in the face of growing right-wing populist and nationalist movements; second, Germany's refusal to expand its military capacity and reluctance to endorse or engage in international military interventions; and, finally, Germany's central position within the European Union (pp. 347-8). Just as Biess, in his highly

¹ Frank Biess and Astrid Eckert, 'Introduction: Why Do We Need New Narratives for the History of Federal Republic?', *Central European History*, 52 (2019), 1-18.

praised monograph *Republik der Angst*, cannot overcome the power of the success narrative,² Caldwell and Hanshew are ultimately unable to do this either, thereby acknowledging just how axiomatic it has become in German historiography.

This is understandable in the context of an introductory overview of post-1945 German history. However, it is still surprising that they should adopt this position so unconditionally given that in the book's introduction, they explicitly identify the works of Heinrich August Winkler and Ulrich Herbert as success narratives and ask how it might be possible to write German history differently (pp. 13–14).

On the other hand, in contrast to many overviews, the GDR is here no mere 'footnote to history' as Hans-Ulrich Wehler once described it. The authors dedicate almost as much space to East German history as to West Germany, although this should not be taken to mean that they see the history of the two Germanies exclusively as an entangled one. Instead, they maintain a balance between the USSR's influence (which should not be over-estimated) on East German politics and society, and the attempts of each side to differentiate itself from the other during the Cold War while, at the same time, each sought to instrumentalize the other for its own purposes. Sensibly, the authors are also careful to emphasize the differences between dictatorship and democracy; but unfortunately they restrict this explanation to an extremely short sub-section and only as a postscript to a lengthy description of political and social changes in the GDR in the 1970s. If they had chosen instead to foreground their explanation as an introduction to chapter 6 ('New Social Republics, East and West') this would have provided the reader with an important analytical tool for assessing these respective forms of society.

In fact, the authors generally situate their work within the current research landscape implicitly rather than explicitly – at least for West Germany. This is usual for overviews, yet it is conspicuous that they reference other research perspectives more explicitly when it comes to the GDR while omitting them almost entirely for the former FRG. It might have been worth considering introducing each chapter with an overview of current positions in research so that students are not only given a chance to become familiar with the content of contem-

² Biess admits this himself. See Frank Biess, *Republik der Angst: Eine andere Geschichte der Bundesrepublik* (Reinbek, 2019), 21.

BOOK REVIEWS

porary historiography but also with different approaches on the part of historians. Space could easily have been freed up for this by sacrificing some of the less relevant images in the book, for example the half-page depiction of Nina Hagen on p. 138.

But despite these critiques, the book's use as an introduction to post-1945 German history outweighs its faults – and not only for students from English-speaking countries.

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