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Generations in Twentieth-Century Europe

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1
Introduction

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Generation has never been so ubiquitous in public discourse as in our own present day. For journalists, politicians and advertisers it is often the first recourse when making sense of voter behaviour, consumer preferences, or simply the *Zeitgeist*. The baby-boomers have duly been succeeded by Generations X and Y, not to mention a number of more refined categories. In 2000, for example, the young German novelist Florian Illies shot to prominence by publishing *Generation Golf*, an exploration of the values and world view of those who, like the author, had grown up in the blandly affluent eighties. Three years later, Illies felt the need to provide a sequel, which showed the 'fun generation' of his first book confronting economic uncertainty, undergoing a 'quarter-life crisis', and turning into the 'fear generation'.[1] In 2006, the sociologist Jean Twenge published *Generation Me*, a more analytically ambitious attempt to diagnose those Americans, born from 1970 onwards, who had 'never known a world that put duty before self'.[2]

Here, as in so many other places, there is a discrepancy between common parlance and scholarly usage. While members of the general public have become increasingly conversant with generation, historians have remained rather uncomfortable with the concept. They have not ignored generation, but they have construed it in subtly yet significantly different ways: some scholars emphasize socializing institutions, while others stress family life; some try to identify long chains of historical succession, while others focus on the unique experiences of a single cohort; some favour quantitative survey data or oral history, while others see generation as primarily a discursive phenomenon to be traced through the close reading of texts and the investigation of a given society's 'memory wars'. Yet age-related allegiances and forms of behaviour have never received the sustained attention that has been lavished on

other key markers of modern identity such as class, ethnicity and gender. Although generation has since the 1980s increasingly become a preoccupation of academic research, it has been a focus of discussion primarily in the social and political sciences. Historians have sensed that generations are important, being closely bound up with the *longue durée* of social change, with the distribution of economic resources, and with the never-ending competition for political legitimacy and authority. But they are quite understandably set on their guard by the fuzziness and multifacetedness of the generation concept (which often combines, or confuses, the senses of cohort and life stage), as well as by the apparent incommensurability of the research methods that are required to pin it down: how, they implicitly ask, can a demographer, an anthropologist, a political scientist, a literary scholar and an intellectual historian (all of whom make use of the term 'generation') convince themselves that they are engaged in a coherent collective endeavour?

That is one rather complicated question that lies at the heart of this book. In more straightforward terms, the chapters that follow can be regarded as an attempt to find out how, if at all, age mattered in twentieth-century Europe. Their working hypothesis, unsurprisingly, is that age *does* matter, and starts to matter in a rather different way in the modern era. While it is certainly the case that distinctions between young and old, juniority and seniority, are ancient and fundamental to human cultures,[3] they appear to gain new prominence and to be put to new purposes in the last third of the eighteenth century and the beginning of the nineteenth. At around this time, in several European cultures, the word 'generation' was made to do more work than hitherto. The concept it evoked became more complex, socially significant and culturally resonant. As Raymond Williams observes, 'the full modern sense of **generation** in the specific and influential sense of a distinctive kind of people or attitudes' did not begin to take shape until the mid-eighteenth century and only entered its heyday in the mid-nineteenth.[4]

Williams included 'generation' as one of his 'keywords' of modern culture: a term that, although in English it dated back as far as the thirteenth century, underwent a radical semantic shift in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. We can infer a number of social and historical reasons for this development. Certain groups in society (in the first instance, young, well-off, well-educated males) were stimulated by new institutions (universities, bureaucracies), places (notably cities) and events (notably the French Revolution) to find a solidarity with their coevals that might override previous loyalties (such as those within a family, clan or social estate). This sense of generational distinctiveness could find expression in several striking ways. It might bring political mobilization as young men competed with their fathers for access to the levers of power in the modern state. It might foster a youth culture or lifestyle, as in the Romantic movement. And generational consciousness might instil in men and women of any age a sense of their own historical location and direction. The modern concept of generation was complemented from the very beginning by a notion of history as a sequence of unique phases of development. Educated nineteenth-century Europeans were often preoccupied – or depressed – by the extent to which they were constrained by the past, and the concept of generation was a satisfying way for them to find an advantageous accommodation with it. Instead of being borne along by History, they could become its chosen ones.

This kind of account does, however, bring its own dangers. We need to be wary of taking nineteenth-century intellectuals at their own estimation. The idea of a decisive shift to modern generationality also has a distinctly teleological colouring: as 'traditional' societies undergo modernization (or enter modernity), so the argument runs, their patriarchal order is overturned and the older generation loses its privileged social and discursive position. In many histories, accordingly, 'generation' is practically a synonym for 'youth'.

Youth, however, does not have things all its own way, even in an era of modernization. Even a historical cleavage as bloody as the French Revolution did not put an end to the conflation of politics and the family. Beheading a paterfamilias was traumatic for the collective imagination, however great the provocation had been.[5] Although John Locke dealt a hefty blow to family-based justifications of political authority, and even though eighteenth-century Americans seriously considered the idea of replacing the legal code every nineteen years so as not to saddle the younger generation with the decisions of their elders, family metaphors abounded in the early years of the Republic. The Founding Fathers were just too powerful, and too convenient, to be passed over in favour of their offspring.[6]

The nineteenth century, then, saw no entirely clear transition from a familial, even genealogical sense of belonging to a lateral sense of allegiance within a particular cohort. On the contrary, the advantage of the generation concept is that it can play on the ambiguity between 'horizontal' and 'vertical' ties. People never need to decide whether, ultimately, they belong with kin or with coevals. The modern European cultures discussed in this volume all make it possible to speak of 'generations'

existing both across the family dinner table and in the electoral system or the welfare state. The generation concept potentially offers both a mechanism of change and a source of solidarity and cohesion (though, of course, it may also bring rupture and conflict). It is to do both with succession and with simultaneity.

Either way, generation always implies relativity. To belong to a generation, you need to have a location in time that is in some ways specific. It may just be that you have been born 30 years after your parents. Perhaps you have witnessed an epoch-defining event or undergone a socializing experience that represents a caesura in your own biography and a source of solidarity with those who have the experience in common. The generational clock may be ticking at different speeds in several different areas of existence: the individual life cycle, the cycle of family reproduction, social institutions (schools, armies, welfare states and so on), and history.

Given that generations can exist in several different dimensions, it is worth clarifying what they can contribute to historical knowledge. Above all, they are part of the way societies organize their time. Far from being natural or inexorable, generations require decisions to be made about how to measure the temporal positions of different groups and about where to draw the lines between these groups. Generations sometimes do not take shape until some time after the event that ostensibly gives them their meaning. We should not assume that our retrospective sense of the social coherence of a historical generation matches that of its members. Equally, we should not expect generations to be inclusive or fair. Almost invariably they will leave out people who, by dint of their date of birth or experiences, ought to belong. The right to speak in a generation's name is frequently hard-won. In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, European societies periodically fought memory wars to determine which generations had the strongest claims to exist. Such wars tended to be waged – and won – by educated, articulate and well-connected males. In nineteenth-century Russia, for example, the struggle over collective memory was carried on largely by the Russian intelligentsia, a group that numbered no more than a few hundred thousand. On the eve of World War I, there were only around 35,000 university students in Russia, and the number of active opinion-formers was, as everywhere, considerably lower than the annual intake into higher education – somewhere between 5000 and 10,000.[7]

It often takes a lot of discursive effort for the idea of a generation to coalesce, given the essential fluidity of the concept. Although we all know now that nations are 'invented' or 'imagined' communities, there

is a decent chance that nationality, once ascribed to an individual, will stick to him or her. With generation the situation is rarely so clear-cut for two main reasons. First, because the individual can postpone only temporarily, not indefinitely, his or her move from one generation to the next; today's youthful rebel may well be tomorrow's conservative patriarch.[8] Second, because it is not clear where the lines between neighbouring cohorts should be drawn.

For all that generations are hard to pin down, to write about them is more than an exercise in hair-splitting intellectual and cultural history. They are closely bound up with politics and economics – that is to say, with the distribution of power and resources in a given society. Generations can have considerable coercive power once they have taken shape as distinct social constituencies or interest groups. If your age marks you out as a member of the youth cohort, it is hard to avoid being treated as a 'young person'. When you enter the category of 'old person', your outlook and life-chances are likely to depend heavily on the ways in which your society treats its senior members. Generational issues seem to be articulated with particular vehemence at moments when societies are facing fundamental choices about the allocation of collective resources and the redistribution of political authority. Prominent examples include countries suffering the teething troubles of modernization: France in 1789, Germany and Italy in the middle of the nineteenth century, Russia in the late imperial era. 'Modernization' is a vexed and currently unfashionable term, but it does seem to imply the growth of a bureaucratic state that takes upon itself ever more elaborate functions: not just the collection of resources (through taxation, conscription, bureaucratic service) but also their targeted distribution. In the process, the state does much to define generations. Youth is the section of society that undergoes socialization in institutions such as schools, universities and armies. By setting up pension systems, the modern state also does much to create old age as a social generation rather than a biological fact.

So far I have tried to explain why generations might be interesting to historians. They are part of the way a society understands itself: they may serve as an effective means of reconciling succession and solidarity or else as a painful reminder of tensions and cleavages. They are also bound up with the ways that different groups lay claim to power and authority. They have to be taken into account when a society is debating how to distribute collective resources. They clearly have some relation – though not always a direct one – to the structure of families, to socializing institutions and to major historical events.

What is less clear, however, is how we might find a coherent way of combining these different aspects of generational history. Is generation perhaps a weasel word that tempts us to make arguments based on lateral association rather than analytical argument? How, quite simply, can we try to pin down generation and write its history? In the next section I survey the various heavyweight attempts that have been made to grapple with these questions.

Theories and histories of generation

In a lecture on the history of generations, Sir Herbert Butterfield recalled the wish expressed in the Fourth Book of Ezra that 'God, instead of creating the human race in a series of successive generations had put all men to live on the earth contemporaneously'. Not only would this, in Butterfield's words, have 'shortened the long tale of human misery', it would also have put historians out of business. Human beings do, however, come along in an unceasing flow, which means that academics can continue to make a living from disentangling continuity and change. As Butterfield himself admitted, it is hard – especially with respect to societies historically remote from our own – to establish whether generational turnover represents smooth transmission of political experience or conflict and rupture.[9]

David Hume, torch-bearer for the Scottish Enlightenment, had similar questions in mind as he inquired into the origins of political legitimacy. He indulged himself in a thought experiment that forms a neat counterpoint to Butterfield's. What would happen, Hume wondered, if one set of human beings were to die out suddenly and be succeeded, like a silkworm or a butterfly, by a whole new generation? How would people then run their affairs? He imagined that they would do things very differently. They might, for example, 'voluntarily, and by general consent, establish their own form of civil polity, without any regard to the laws or precedents, which prevailed among their ancestors'.[10] Thus would be eliminated all tension between old and new, traditional and modern; the newborn cohort would be free to find the form of government and social organization that best suited it, without being constrained by past arrangements. In such a case, government by 'original contract' would be not a myth of unsullied democratic descent but a political reality.

But the thrust of Hume's argument was that life does not work in this way. Flux, not a revolutionary cycle of extermination and rebirth, is the condition of human society. It is only individuals who enter and depart the scene all at once; groups and cohorts may become eroded, depleted or blurred around the edges, but they are never altogether effaced. For this reason, when we assert that our political system is based at some level on universal consent, on a truly democratic social contract, we are deluding ourselves. Authority as currently exercised has never arrived in the present via a morally unblemished ancestral line; nor has property. In the beginning, there have always been sordid acts of violence and usurpation.

In Hume's view, however, it is no bad thing that we are not free to remake civil society from scratch when we appear on earth. Wholesale change – revolution, in other words – is liable to bring with it confusion, conflict and error. Flux may not always carry us along in the right direction, but for the most part it is a helpful guiding force. The coexistence of generations may not always be frictionless, but it does ultimately ensure the smooth regularity of progress.

I cite Hume's essay partly for its intrinsic interest, but also because it attracted the attention of two of the most prominent modern theorists of historical generations, François Mentré and Karl Mannheim. Both these writers took up Hume's metaphor of the butterfly, but to rather different effect.[11] They agreed that history could never be stopped and restarted, but they thought of the self-reproduction of human society in terms not of flux but of succession and alternation. They argued that generations were not simply carried along by the flow of time but had a life of their own – a conclusion they were led to draw above all by observing the rise of 'mass society' before and after World War I. Generations in the modern world that Mentré and Mannheim saw around them tended to think of themselves as distinct social or cultural entities, as historical agents in their own right. By the early twentieth century it was highly plausible to see generations as providing the pulse of modern history, and not just in the sense that the tempo of human civilization depends on the rate of alternation between old and young, and on the nature of the relationship between them. Historically adjacent cohorts were profoundly divided by their experience of World War I, and in the alienated mass societies of post-war Europe generation was looming just as large as the other main social identities – class and ethnicity. Generation provided a point of intersection for biology, society and politics, and hence a powerful agent of mobilization – as fascism would soon demonstrate.

But for all that generations would appear to be an important element in modern history, it is far from clear how useful they are for historians. On closer inspection they turn out to be extremely elusive. It is hard to be sure where one generation ends and the next begins. The Annalistes,

pioneers of scientific 'total' history who came to prominence in the same post-war era, had no truck with the concept of generation in historical analysis. As Lucien Febvre wrote dismissively in 1929: 'it would be better to drop it [generation]'.[12] For the adherents of 'total' history, generational history represented much too partial and arbitrary a reading of the past. Karl Mannheim to some extent concurred with this kind of critique. As he noted in his seminal essay on the subject, generations are an exceptionally complex problem in historical sociology, because they invite both 'positivist' and 'romantic-historical' approaches, while being satisfactorily defined by neither of these. On the one hand, it is tempting to seek exact correlation between the average life span and the rate of historical progress. This was the thrust of the writings of Auguste Comte and his nineteenth-century successors, whose main concern was to find a scientific key to what they saw as the inexorable development of modern society.[13] On the other hand, it might seem plausible to ascribe to each generation an 'inner aim', and to each era a *Zeitgeist*. There are, in other words, two opposing ways of viewing generational time: 'a mechanistic, externalised concept of time' that can be used as 'an objective measure of unilinear progress by virtue of its expressibility in quantitative terms'; and 'subjectively experienceable time' that pulls people together into cohorts by virtue of the fact that they have been 'submitted to the same determining influences'. Mannheim himself was more sympathetic to the 'romantic-historical' than to the 'positivist' approach, but he argued that neither method was satisfactory in isolation. The task of the historical sociologist was to give the generation concept its due without consigning it entirely to the objective or the subjective realm; to acknowledge both the fluidity of time (which eroded objectivist certainties) and the multidirectional character of social processes (which placed limits on the effects of subjectivity, and made the *Zeitgeist* concept nebulous). For Mannheim, as for Wilhelm Dilthey, the generations represented a complex dialectic between layers of social experience, not a chain of succession or a straightforward series of conflicts.[14] The essays by Hume and Mannheim suggest that there is a tension, at the very least, between two basic senses of generation: as a source of historical continuity and as a manifestation of historical rupture.

This brief summary of Mannheim's essay will perhaps make clear another difficulty facing the historian of generations. As soon as we try to gain historical purchase on this slippery concept, we become aware that generations do not always succeed one another smoothly, that not all generations last the same amount of time, that not all generations speak with the same voice. Are generations defined by the shared experience of a particular cohort, or are they more diffuse than that? Does a generation always define itself by opposition to its seniors (or juniors)?

If we turn to more recent writings on the subject, we can find lucidity but no great reduction of complexity. In an incisive survey of the literature that existed in the early 1970s, Alan B. Spitzer concluded that the term 'generation' is used by historians and historical actors in six conceptually distinct senses, and that it is usually unclear how much we can ascribe a cohort's values and behaviour to its historical location, how much to the collective experiences it has undergone, how much to rites of passage or recurrent patterns of generational self-affirmation and so on.[15]

It is hard to argue with Spitzer that the generation concept is often fudged in practice, but this does not preclude further investigation. This book starts from the conviction that history is not an exact science, and that 'What is a generation?' is a *question mal posée*. It is more interesting to inquire when and why social, cultural and political differences are seen in terms of generation rather than of anything else, and how it is that certain generations come to see themselves as separate. For not only do generations make history; it is also the case that history makes generations. The very concept of generation, as used by Mannheim, Mentré and other twentieth-century commentators on the subject, implies chronological consciousness, a sense of one's own unique position in history. It suggests that a society has turned away from a genealogical sense of generation – an awareness of one's own place in a long chain of familial succession – to a less vertical, more horizontal sense of chronological belonging. And this in turn suggests that writing a national history through the prism of generations might be a good way of doing the things that historians often want to do: of finding a way to combine society, politics and culture, and using a society's understanding of itself (its culture) to inform – not to distort – the study of political movements and social structures.

The point will perhaps become clearer if we consider the three main peaks of interest in the historiography of generations in modern Europe. The first of these is the French Revolution and the following decades. Of course, the awareness of generational difference was not an invention of 1789; it is very old indeed. But the idea usually advanced by scholars is that the revolutionary period brought awareness of horizontal allegiances with one's coevals, not just of succession from the older generation, and that it made generational consciousness a historical phenomenon. To be young in 1789 or 1815 or 1830 was very different from being young

in 1740 (as was Hume). Hume could not see any way of isolating a historical generation, of observing it take shape in the shifting sands of time. A few decades later, at least for some intellectuals of the revolutionary era, these sands had hardened into a historical rock face. The members of the revolutionary cohort had a number of good reasons to believe in their own distinctiveness from their predecessors. For a start, the relationship between the generations was transformed by legislation. Revolutionary discourse gave sons the same rights as their fathers. Partible inheritance was imposed at a stroke of the revolutionary's quill. But declarations of revolutionary principle were not the only catalyst for generational consciousness. Perhaps more critical was shared historical experience and institutional background. On these grounds the youth cohorts of 1789 and 1815 differed profoundly. The Napoleonic period raised young men's social and occupational expectations; many of them gained a good education in the prestigious new imperial institutions. Even more importantly, the collapse of the Napoleonic Empire was a collective trauma that gave the 'generation of 1820' (defined by its main historian as the cohort born between 1792 and 1803) strong collective self-definition.[16] At approximately the same time, 'youth' became a broadly applied signifier across Europe. It was a vehicle for aspirations to national renewal; it was bound up with the aesthetics and politics of Romanticism; it connoted opposition to the purportedly inert and corrupt Restoration era. Young people were accordingly well represented on the barricades of the nineteenth century. The effect of revolution, then, was not just to establish a historical divide between pre- and post-revolutionary generations, but also to instil in educated young men a historical consciousness that would provide a generational dynamic for later European history.

The second main focus of work on generations in European history has been the era of mass politics (say, 1890–1930), when new, much larger, groups of people moved to the cities and discovered horizontal age allegiances. These people were not the relatively tight-knit elite younger generation of the first half of the nineteenth century; they did not have a clearly projected romantic nationalist, or liberal, or republican ideology. They were politically volatile and, especially after their own collective trauma of the World War I, profoundly disaffected.[17] As I suggested above, it is not by any means a coincidence that the founding works of the sociology of generations (those by Mannheim, Ortega and Mentré) date from this era.[18]

The third peak of historiographical interest in the question of generations is the post-war era with its youth countercultures and

protest movements. In an era of peace, prosperity and stability, and given the breakdown of existing social identities (notably class), it was generational, not economic, alienation that turned people into political actors in 1968. If this insight is pushed further, generational identity can be taken to epitomize (post-) modern Western civilization. We are so depoliticized and individualized, or so the argument runs, that it is only an apparently apolitical characteristic – our age – that is capable of mobilizing us and making us feel solidarity with others. What is perhaps most striking about the Parisian and Californian student cohorts of the 1960s is how little their values and life experience differed from those of their parents – as opposed, say, to the young people of late-modernizing countries such as Bulgaria, Rumania and indeed the Soviet Union.[19] As Pierre Nora has suggested, to be a member of a generation is the only way for us to feel individual while forming part of a social group, to feel we are making a personal choice when we enter a group to which we belong by an accident of birth.[20]

If we survey the full course of the twentieth century, the broad trends are clear enough: generational identities have become more numerous, less politicized, less nation-specific and more consumer-orientated. These changes mean that Mannheim's classic essay from 1928, though it remains an essential starting point for reflecting on the concept of generation, now appears to have certain limitations. It could not of course take into account the plebeian turn that many European cultures took from the 1960s onwards, nor the sexual revolution that has meant that generation can no longer be automatically gendered male. Mannheim was himself reacting against the 'great men' approach to defining generation that he found in the work of François Mentré, but his own essay now appears distinctly 'romantic-historical' in some of its particulars. Nor could it be expected to foresee the consequences of demographic ageing and the growth of welfare states, which have greatly increased the prominence of older generations. Coming shortly after a world war and in the midst of social turmoil and political extremism in many parts of continental Europe, Mannheim's analysis naturally emphasized the role of generational agency in bringing about social and political change. A historian writing on the more secure, prosperous, stable and individualistic phases of the century might be more inclined to emphasize the role of generation in creating social solidarity.[21]

There is, in other words, ample justification for examining the whole of the twentieth century, not just the youth politics of the interwar period, for the light it can shed on generation formation. Twentieth-century history throws up so many ways in which generations might

plausibly be measured. One is in terms of great events, especially the conflicts and cataclysms that marked the first half of the century. Another is in terms of political design: the century saw the rise (and later fall) of states with unprecedented coercive powers for whom the moulding of youth was crucial to their projects of social transformation. The twentieth century, like the nineteenth, had a thick overlay of 'generationalizing' commentary by various opinion-formers, but the range and the nature of such commentary was transformed by the explosive growth of mass culture and of new media (notably cinema and television, though the internet may not be far behind). Last, but certainly not least, the societies in which generational identities were taking hold themselves underwent fundamental changes: rural–urban migration, advances in medicine, improvements in health care and education, steep rises (and a few sudden falls) in the standard of living and the arrival of widely available birth control. All this meant that the life experiences and trajectories of neighbouring cohorts might differ as never before.

Yet these differences did not necessarily lead to a sense on the part of youth of generational distinctiveness, let alone of rupture. The family remained a powerful socializing institution. One recent exemplification of this point comes in an opinion survey of March 1998, when Russian under-30s, who had undergone their formative years in one of the most unsettled parts of later-twentieth-century Europe, were asked about their relationship with the older generation. Well over half of them (58 per cent) declared that they were not significantly different from their parents.[22] It is also clear that authoritarian regimes, given the immense resources and discursive energy they expended on affirming a particular vision of youth, suffered notable failures in their programmes of generational socialization. As Dorothee Wierling has shown, the GDR 'generation of 1949', although told insistently by the Communist Party that it had unique historical value and a special generational mission, is more adequately defined by the experiences it underwent in the less political and more everyday aspects of its collective biography: the high hopes and self-confidence born of the post-war era, when members of this cohort were the pride of their parents and the chosen ones of the regime, dissipated in the 1970s, when the educated specialists of the post-war generation confronted a lack of fulfilling employment in East German society. In other words, the 1949 cohort, despite the best efforts of the regime, can be regarded as a generation *an sich* but not *für sich*.[23]

This dichotomy – between generations as publicly declared identities, as social constructs, and generations as anthropologically verifiable communities of coeval experience – is hard to escape in the historiography of modern generations. It will insinuate itself into this book too. In the chapters that follow, some authors (Weisbrod, Krylova, Nehring) will be mainly concerned to track the generational narratives of a given society, their proponents and their political purposes. Others (Smith, Kelly, Souto Kustrín, Stargardt) will be more interested in the ways in which collective experiences really differed from one era to another and can properly be called 'generational'.

This does not mean, however, that historical analysis of generations must be split down the middle between those scholars who debunk the generational 'myths' put about publicly by hegemonic male intellectuals and those who seek 'real', sociologically identifiable generations through microscopic social-historical investigation. The relationship between 'real' and 'imagined' generations is a creative tension rather than an absolute divide. It is certainly wise to remain conscious of the arbitrary character of much 'generationalizing' and to be suspicious of narrowly deterministic accounts of generation formation (which hold, for example, that young people sign up for a protest movement on account of their domestic grievances against their parents, or their student milieu, or their year of birth). But generation is a socially rooted identity that has political and economic implications. In this light, it is hardly more arbitrary, or less 'real', than class or nationality.

Here, then, is one historiographical divide that this volume is designed to cross. Another is geographical. Most writing on the history of generations – with a few exceptions such as books on the 'generation of 1914' or the 68ers – is concerned with a specific national context. Scholars usually find acute cases of generational sentiment in the culture they happen to study. Pierre Nora has claimed that generational allegiance is a key to French political history.[24] Historians of Germany have several good grounds for arguing the special prominence of generational identity in their object of study: the proliferation of small city universities and consequent tension between students and artisans; the statization of the civil service and the professions; and the cult of youth as a part of nation-building.[25] Historians of Spain, besides pointing to the epoch-defining moment when Spain lost its last American colony in 1898, can cite abundantly the thinker who is perhaps the most famous (though certainly not the most convincing) generational theorist of the lot: Ortega y Gasset.[26] Hungarians can claim a globe-trotting Budapest 'generation of 1900', one of whose members, Karl Mannheim, would write the single most influential essay on generations.[27] Historians of Russia can point to the first militant generational subculture, whose

epicentre was St Petersburg in the 1860s, as well as to the obsession with youth socialization in the Soviet period.[28] The truly exceptional case is perhaps Britain, which largely lacks the generational narratives so abundant elsewhere.[29]

This book aims to establish a genuinely comparative context for interpreting the role of generation in twentieth-century Europe. It brings together material on Britain, France, Spain, Italy, Germany and the USSR, and thus loosens the structuring geographical binaries in the historiography of modern Europe: North and South, and (especially) East and West. It might appear that the countries of the Soviet bloc are a special case in the history of twentieth-century generations, given the state's domination of the public sphere in those societies and the consequent obscurity in the documentary record of issues such as generation conflict and student rebellion. But, as the chapters on Soviet history in this volume suggest, the political indoctrination of youth was only one part of the story. No less crucial were the social contexts in which projects to bring into being a 'new Soviet person' were carried out. In this light, Soviet generationality appears to be the outcome of processes of modernization which, although hypertrophied at some moments and highly attenuated at others, provide a meaningful comparator for modernization in Western democracies (and not something else entirely).

The structure of this book

The chapters that follow form three main thematic clusters. The first of these concentrates on the role that generation has played in political discourse in twentieth-century Europe. In Chapter 2, Bernd Weisbrod examines the tendency in Germany to conceive of generational change as a dramatic and/or heroic departure by elite groups of young men from the traditions of national regeneration. He shows that this habit of thought continued into the post-war era, when two further generations were identified as political for their efforts to break the mould and transform a political culture of defeat. In Chapter 3, Richard Vinen investigates the role of World War II in generational self-definition in France, while in Chapter 4 Holger Nehring examines the rhetoric of generational belonging in West European protest movements in the 1960s. Weisbrod, Vinen and Nehring all investigate the politics of memory in post-war Europe and the often highly tangential relationship between generational declarations and cohort experience.

The next group of chapters takes a step away from political discourse: it offers a series of case studies of particular cohorts and inquires

whether, and in what ways, cohort experience amounts to generational identity. In Chapter 5, S.A. Smith investigates the enormous efforts made by the Bolsheviks to do battle with 'vestiges of the past' and socialize young people comprehensively as 'Soviet'. His study of the early Soviet campaign against all forms of 'superstition' leads him to more general reflections on the relationship between modernization and generational formation. In Chapter 6, Anna Krylova takes a different perspective on the 'first Soviet generation' that the Bolsheviks were so desperate to bring into being. By attending both to public discourse and to first-person forms of expression, she argues that the opposition between 'false' generational ideology and 'authentic' cohort experience cannot be sustained usefully. In Chapter 7, Sandra Souto Kustrín investigates the connections between age groups and the acute political conflict of interwar Spain, putting this close-grained social and political history in dialogue with the various social theories that have been devised to explain the youth militancy of the 1920s and 1930s. In Chapter 8, Nicholas Stargardt takes as his object of study the 'war children' of Nazi Germany – a cohort that would appear at first glance to have undergone one of the most devastating and generation-defining collective experiences of the twentieth century. On closer inspection, however, Stargardt finds that there is just as much to divide this cohort as to unite it. In Chapter 9, Catriona Kelly examines post-Stalin children, who constitute a Soviet cohort apparently much *less* clearly defined than its predecessors. The children of the 1950s and 1960s did not figure in public discourse to the same extent as those of the 1920s or 1930s, and they had not undergone shattering historical experiences such as revolution, collectivization and world war. Yet, as Kelly argues, the post-Stalin era saw many small changes – expansion in the state-funded childcare network, improvement in health care infrastructure, increase in the provision of extra-curricular activities and growing availability (in theory) of consumer goods – that together led to major cultural shifts.

The third and final section of the book offers a reminder that generation is not just about childhood and youth. Every society contains several generations that define themselves in relation to each other as well as to historical events and socializing experiences. This multigenerationality only became more pronounced in the twentieth century, as Europeans lived longer and saw the state taking a more extensive role in the intergenerational distribution of resources. Chapters 10 and 11 offer case studies of these processes in Britain and Russia that, given the wildly different political and social histories of those two countries, have a surprising amount of common ground. In both places, modernization

and the rise of the welfare state have brought the issues of intergenerational equity and entitlement to the fore while at the same time leaving intact, or even strengthening, the co-operation and interdependency between old and young. The book concludes, then, with an agreeable paradox of contemporary generational history. Generational asseverations have in recent times increased in intensity and frequency (as I suggested in the first paragraph of this 'Introduction', people have never previously had so many ways of generationalizing their experiences), but in other respects the scope for intergenerational intimacy is greater than ever: new communication technologies mean that old and young can keep in touch at any distance, the family occupies a sacred place in popular culture and public discourse, intergenerational wealth redistribution within the family remains crucial (given that education, housing and long-term health care are unprecedentedly expensive), and the fall in the birth rate ensures that attention and economic resources have never been lavished by so many parents and grandparents on so few children and grandchildren. Generational history, like most other history, is not straightforwardly linear, and it is not wholly implausible to suggest that, when historians come to write their accounts of the 'Generation Z' of the early twenty-first century, they will note a turn 'back' to a filial piety that may never previously have existed in European history.

Notes

1. Information from the Random House website: http://www.randomhouse.de/book/edition.jsp?edi=135500.
2. Quotation from Twenge's website: http://www.generationme.org/aboutbook.html.
3. Justification for this view can be found in David Lowenthal's wide-ranging *The Past is a Foreign Country* (Cambridge, 1985), esp. Chapters 2 and 3. For a long view – extending back to late antiquity – of generational conflicts between 'Ancients' and 'Moderns', see J. Le Goff, *History and Memory* (New York, 1992), p. 27.
4. R. Williams, *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society*, 2nd edn (London, 1983), p. 140.
5. L. Hunt, *The Family Romance of the French Revolution* (London, 1992).
6. Lowenthal, *The Past is a Foreign Country*, pp. 117–21.
7. V.R. Leikina-Svirskaia, *Russkaia intelligentsiia v 1900–1917 godakh* (Moscow, 1981), p. 8 (university students) and pp. 124–5 (regularly published writers).
8. This is the thrust of P. Abrams, 'Rites of Passage: The Conflict of Generations in Industrial Society', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 5 (1970), 175–90.
9. H. Butterfield, *The Discontinuities between the Generations in History: Their Effect on the Transmission of Political Experience* (Cambridge, 1972), quotations on p. 1.

10. D. Hume, 'Of the Original Contract', in idem, *The Philosophical Works*, ed. T.H. Green and T.H. Grose, 4 vols (London, 1882–86), vol. 3, p. 452.
11. F. Mentré, *Les Générations sociales* (Paris, 1920), p. 180; K. Mannheim, 'The Problem of Generations', in his *Essays on the Sociology of Knowledge*, ed. P. Kecskemeti (London, 1952), p. 277.
12. Quoted in J.-F. Sirinelli (ed.), *Générations intellectuelles: Effets d'âge et phénomènes de génération dans le milieu intellectuel français* (Paris, 1987), p. 14, n. 4.
13. Note A. Comte, *Cours de philosophie positive*, vol. 4, pt. 1 (Paris, 1839), esp. Lesson 51, 'Lois fondamentales de la dynamique sociale, ou théorie générale du progrès naturel de l'humanité'. On later nineteenth-century approaches, see V. Drouin, *Enquêtes sur les générations et la politique 1958–1995* (Paris, 1995), Chap. 1, esp. p. 19.
14. Mentré found a way out of these difficulties by taking literary 'generations' as his measure. In this way, he was able to mark out the whole of French history from 1515 to his own present day. Nations without a literature, he argued, did not have a history either, and so were unsuitable for generational research.
15. A.B. Spitzer, 'The Historical Problem of Generations', *American Historical Review*, 78 (1973), 1353–85.
16. A.B. Spitzer, *The French Generation of 1820* (Princeton, 1987).
17. On the political incoherence and volatility of youth movements, note Philip Abrams's observation that 'just because it cuts across familiar lines of social differentiation the appeal to youth cannot follow up its attack on existing systems with any socially coherent, viable or widely acceptable proposals for an alternative system' (Abrams, 'Rites de Passage', 179).
18. See R. Wohl, *The Generation of 1914* (London, 1980).
19. On generations in the post-war French bourgeoisie, see R. Vinen, *France, 1934–1970* (Houndmills, 1996), p. 140.
20. P. Nora, 'Generation', in idem (ed.), *Realms of Memory: Rethinking the French Past*, vol. 1 (New York, 1996), p. 508.
21. See J. Zinnecker, '"Das Problem der Generationen": Überlegungen zu Karl Mannheims kanonischen Text', in J. Reulecke (ed.), *Generationalität und Lebensgeschichte im 20. Jahrhundert* (Munich, 2003), esp. pp. 45–7.
22. B. Dubin, 'Mezhdu vsem i nichem', in Iu. Levada and T. Shanin (eds), *Pokolencheskii analiz sovremennoi Rossii* (Moscow, 2005), p. 252. More poignantly, 45 per cent of these respondents said that they wished their own children and grandchildren to be different from them.
23. D. Wierling, *Geboren im Jahr Eins: Der Jahrgang 1949 in der DDR: Versuch einer Kollektivbiographie* (Berlin, 2002).
24. Nora, 'Generation', p. 503.
25. See M. Roseman (ed.), *Generations in Conflict: Youth Revolt and Generation Formation in Germany 1770–1968* (Cambridge, 1995).
26. D.L. Shaw, *The Generation of 1898 in Spain* (New York, 1975); J. Ortega y Gasset, *The Revolt of the Masses* (London, 1932). For a justifiably sceptical assessment of Ortega's writings on generation, see Chapter 7 by Sandra Souto Kustrín later in this volume.
27. J. Lukacs, *Budapest 1900: A Historical Portrait of a City and Its Culture* (London, 1988), pp. 137–81.

28. One of the most robust interpretations of this kind belongs to Lewis S. Feuer in his *The Conflict of Generations: The Character and Significance of Student Movements* (London, 1969).
29. The reasons for this are a matter of some speculation. One possible explanation is the relative paucity of epoch-defining historical events in modern Britain. Another is that, until quite recently, the major student centres in Britain were non-metropolitan. English exceptionalists might also claim that Britain is a place where empire has on the whole made the elite more, not less, integrated, and where the Church has also served as an integrative institution for educated young men.

2

Cultures of Change: Generations in the Politics and Memory of Modern Germany

Bernd Weisbrod

When the Düsseldorf faculty officially took leave of Wolfgang Mommsen, the prominent historian of Wilhelmine Germany, Max Weber and the British Empire who passed away in 2004, his equally famous colleague Hans-Ulrich Wehler reminded everyone that he and Mommsen belonged to the same generation.[1] We were both, he said, 45ers, still reluctant at the end of the war to leave our disappointments behind, and more and more intent on breaking new ground without, however, ever questioning the authority of our academic fathers. There were differences, of course, he explained, but on the whole, their common experience in Germany's painful post-1945 transition gave them a sense of democratic purpose that outlasted their own doubts. After all, they were the group that Helmut Schelsky back in the fifties had dubbed the 'sceptical generation' – one that encompassed Helmut Kohl and Hans-Jochen Vogel, Günther Grass and Hans Magnus Enzensberger, Ralf Dahrendorf and Jürgen Habermas, Joachim Fest and Rudolf Augstein, Hans-Ulrich Wehler himself and, of course, Hans and Wolfgang Mommsen.[2] This is a long list of politicians and academics, writers and journalists, still very young when the war was over, who on looking back can lay claim to the transformation of the Federal Republic from *Volksgemeinschaft* to liberal democracy. For some time they had seemed to stand in the shadow of the 68ers, the self-appointed political generation which was readily credited with the second coming of the democratic spirit in the Federal Republic, at least *ex post*, but now, maybe, it was their turn to claim responsibility for the post-war culture of change that had transformed West Germany for good.[3]

This is just one typical example of the automatic and retrospective approach to generations in modern Germany that divides historical actors into neat configurations of 'them' and 'us' and presents historical