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German Angst: fear and democracy in the Federal Republic of Germany, by Frank Biess, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2020, 432 pp., £77.00/\$99.00 (hardback); £27.50/\$35.00 (paperback), ISBN 978-0-19286-787-2

Over the past two decades, the history of emotions has become a lively subdiscipline brimming with insights. Its practitioners have succeeded in reconstructing entire emotional styles or cultures as well as a range of specific emotions. Still, there remains the thorny problem of how to get at emotions beyond a mere analysis of the language that contemporaries used to express and categorise feelings and that shaped most sources on which primary research can draw. Frank Biess's response to this challenge is to foreground articulations of fear, following William M. Reddy's influential labelling of such speech acts as 'emotives', which are framed by culturally and historically variable emotional regimes. He also stresses fear's diachronic character in simultaneously anticipating future threats and reflecting past experiences. Beyond such methodological considerations, it is Biess's ambition to mainstream the history of emotions by bringing its insights to bear on the interpretation of a national history – albeit a partial one, given that his book focuses on the western part of divided Germany. He takes issue with the success story of the Federal Republic as it has been told by several renowned contemporary historians. According to that interpretation, cultural barriers stemming from the pre-1945 periods hampered the adoption of Western-style, liberal democracy. In the years around 1960, however, most citizens came to accept it, thus achieving their country's belated *Ankunft im Westen* (arrival in the West), as Axel Schildt once titled an influential long essay. Instead, Biess tells the more ambivalent story of a society that remained sufficiently fearful of various real or imagined threats to warrant the label of *German Angst*. That, he argues, should not be seen in negative terms alone, however: in the 1970s and 1980s, fears of catastrophe became a legitimate feature of a democratic culture that diverged significantly from that of the 1950s, owing to a normative shift that encouraged expressing rather than suppressing emotions.

So what, exactly, were West Germans afraid of, and how did their fears change over time? Biess addresses these questions based on a range of contemporary books, pamphlets and articles in newspapers, magazines and periodicals. He also draws on parliamentary debates, published and unpublished diaries, reports by allied and German authorities, juridical sources and letters that citizens wrote to branches of the state. The chapter on 'Postwar angst' demonstrates that the aftermath of the Second World War was dominated by uncertainty about whether or not Jewish Holocaust survivors, former forced labourers and American occupation soldiers would retaliate for the Third Reich's crimes. The next chapters explore fears of recruitment to the French Foreign Legion ('Moral angst') and of nuclear war versus communist invasion ('Cold War angst'). Here, Biess highlights continuing feelings of disempowerment owing to the post-1945 loss of national sovereignty and painful memories of exposure to bombing. In the 1960s, détente between the superpowers and resignation to American predominance, according to Biess, did not so much usher in a less angst-ridden period as shift fears to the domestic arena. These were precipitated by the automatised industrial production, which worried intellectual observers alongside the trade unions ('Modern angst'). The unclear trajectory of West German democracy also triggered fears, which were linked to the starkly opposed scenarios of a decline of authority among conservative thinkers and a revived authoritarianism on the New Left ('Democratic angst').

Left-wing intellectuals thus heralded a new emotional regime that valued feelings as a crucial sensorium for threats to democratic life. In this vein, many student protesters in and after 1968 owned up to their fear of 'fascism', and the more radical among them used it to justify revolutionary violence ('Revolutionary angst'). Public speaking and liberated sexuality promised an escape from bourgeois anxiety yet quickly became bound up with fears of being judged by others. The emphasis on expressing feelings subsequently permeated the cultural landscape of the 1970s and 1980s ('Proliferating angst'). The contemporary 'Psychoboom' entailed an intense preoccupation with fear among therapists and in left-wing circles. Fear also governed the ways in which West Germans perceived the activities of the Red Army Faction and the state's reaction to the terrorist challenge. The supposed dying of the German forest, the controversies around nuclear power and the stationing of Pershing missiles ushered in a period of 'Apocalyptic angst', which the media exploited and the peace and environmentalist movements defended as the only alternative to a coolly technocratic rationality. In reunified Germany, 'German angst' became a trope with which the right tried to attack these movements' legacy. However, Biess also finds it in fears of immigration and European integration, downward mobility and male vulnerability. His argument here is that the populist right feeds off the expressive culture of subjectivity that was originally established by the 'alternative' left – and that the way to oppose it lies in a democratic politics of emotions, which should take fears seriously while also cultivating empathy and trust.

Frank Biess's approach is original, certainly within the subfield of contemporary history, which has often been hesitant to adopt, let alone develop, methodological and conceptual innovations. Moreover, it is executed with impressive historical knowledge and analytical grasp. It is a testament to the book's quality that it stimulates further reflection. Readers might fruitfully ponder contrasting ways of writing the history of emotions in West Germany. Fearlessness, in a society that never saw actual combat, exerted more of an appeal than Biess's brief mention acknowledges, from the illustrated magazines that told stories of daredevil soldiers during the Second World War to the admiration for terrorists and the knack for street battles with the police among sections of the radical left. Perhaps more significantly, the emotional history of the Federal Republic from the 1960s to the 1980s might be written as one of calm self-satisfaction, a feeling that is easy to underestimate because it is, by definition, not expressed as openly and vividly as fear. Employment was fairly safe for several decades (and, when it ceased to be, governments compensated unemployment through job creation programmes and early retirement schemes that far exceeded what was on offer in Britain). In municipal sports halls and swimming pools, neighbourhood pubs and Mallorca hotels, in their private houses or flats, and in cars lacking seats and seatbelts for children, millions of West Germans spent their leisure time in ways that can appear rather angst-free in retrospect. Hence, most people quite happily turned out to vote, but then chose to leave decision-making either to centre-right Christian Democrats or to centre-left Social Democrats. Peace and environmental activists experienced and emphasised fear of existential risks, only to feel alienated from the majority of not-so-concerned citizens. Furthermore, neoliberals have often scolded West Germans for being unfazed about the country's economic problems, which is why they have pushed so hard for measures that would make people fear for their jobs and pensions. Frank Biess has written a brilliant account of *German Angst*, which is bound to influence future scholarship and whose original edition has enjoyed

a favourable reception in the German media. Still, how central fear really was to the emotional history of the Federal Republic remains debatable.

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