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The Supernatural and the Poetics of History

Monica Black

IN THE 1950S, IN THE MIDST OF WHAT CAME to be known as the Economic Miracle, West Germany was positively deluged with other wonders: mysterious healings, mystical visions, rumors of the end of the world, and stories of divine and devilish interventions in ordinary lives. Scores of citizens of the Federal Republic (as well as Swiss, Austrians, and others from neighboring countries) set off on pilgrimages to see the Virgin Mary, Jesus, and hosts of angels,

after they began appearing to a group of children in the southern German village of Heroldsbach in late 1949.¹ Hundreds of thousands more journeyed from one end of the Republic to the other in the hopes of meeting a wildly popular faith healer, Bruno Gröning, who, some said, healed illness by banishing demons. Still others availed themselves of the skills of local exorcists in an effort to remove evil spirits from their bodies and minds. There also appears to have been an

Monica Black is Assistant Professor of History at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville. Her first book, *Death in Berlin: From Weimar to Divided Germany* was published by Cambridge University Press in 2010 and received the Fraenkel Prize in Contemporary History.

eruption of witchcraft accusations—neighbor accusing neighbor of being in league with the devil—accompanied by a corresponding upsurge in demand for the services of un-bewitchers (*Hexenbanner*). In short, the 1950s was a time palpably suffused with the presence of good and evil, the divine and the demonic, and in which the supernatural played a considerable role in the lives of many people.²

Scholars across a variety of disciplines have raised important questions about the epistemological and methodological capacities of the social sciences to capture the lived reality of otherworldly encounters, past and present. Historian Dipesh Chakrabarty argues that the hegemony of a historical practice created in the West in the nineteenth century to describe itself to itself has erased the very historicity of modes of explanation that do not satisfy its rules of evidence. Chakrabarty discusses the historiography of the Santal rebellion against the British in India in 1855—a victory for which the Santals thanked the intervention of the god Thakur. But because historians cannot permit gods to have agency, this local explanation for the victory—along with the historically and culturally specific consciousness that produced it—must be anthropologized or relegated to the status of myth (or perhaps “mere” memory).³ Sociologist Avery F. Gordon, meanwhile, has called on her peers to look for ways of “conjuring” social life that “merg[e] the analytical, the procedural, the imaginative, and the effervescent.” Only in this way, she says, can social science begin to take proper account of the ghosts that haunt both history and the present and that are, she writes, intrinsic to social life.⁴ Similarly, Robert Orsi, scholar of American Catholicism, has made a plea for an empiricism capable of accounting for what he calls “abundant events.” By this he refers to those experiences at the “edges of culture and self” such as relationships, responses to objects (such as a corpse or the Host), sense perceptions (the smell of sanctity, for example,

or the feel of blood), relations with special beings (among them the dead, ancestors, imagined-desired-feared persons, both real and imaginary), the experience of the body (such as it is experienced by sick people, for instance, or by the disabled, or by children, and by those experiencing the bodies of these others), and the work of memory.

Abundant events, Orsi says, are those uncanny things that lie beyond the narratives that frame our understandings of the world and constitute authorized knowledge. They are “the ‘more’ in William James’ word (which got him into so much trouble with positivist psychologists),” Orsi writes.⁵

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Chakrabarty, Gordon, and Orsi, in short, want to go a step beyond the kind of ethnographic empathy that has become an established part of the practice of many historians (though such empathy is, in different ways, implicit in all of these scholars’ projects). They want to find a way of proceeding in their inquiries into human experience and culture that permits the existence, agency, and reality of the unseen. As a historian, I am very much intrigued by the question of whether we can write history in a way that accounts for abundant events, or in a way that shows how people have lived, in the real world, in the presence of ghosts, deities, and other uncanny beings. Historian Kate Brown frames the question slightly differently, but to a similar end, when she asks, “Is there a way to write a history of events that do not make rational sense?”

Can we take seriously histories ‘less in thrall to the visible facts’ and more attuned to meanings as they are created and experienced?”⁶ For some historians, the answer is perhaps not so much “no” as “why would we want to?” Depicting experiences with the spirits of the dead and encounters with gods and demons may be disturbing, even abhorrent, for some. These experiences are not just anomalous or flamboyant, or deeply at odds with a certain, normative conception of modernity—though they are indeed all of those things. They are also somehow *wrong*. Fervent piety, along with beliefs about witches, spirits, and gods, continue to be treated as odious proof of backwardness, superstition, even primitivity, though no one really says that much these days. Even now, when secularization theory has proven a rather poor description of modernity for most people on this planet, there remains a powerful distaste concerning what Orsi calls the *presence* of the sacred or manifestations of the invisible or otherworldly in their many forms and permutations.

So the urge is to continue to cast certain experiences—however implicitly and even unthinkingly—outside the bounds of authoritative inquiry. Witchcraft beliefs and visits by the Virgin are ethnographic oddities, things you might find in a museum, not valid historical artifacts. “What have such things to do with the ‘real’ story?,” many historians might ask. That is, what have they to do with what historians often refer to as “the narrative” (in 1950s West Germany, this means the one about postwar, postfascist democratization and economic development)? Chakrabarty identifies a “deep collusion between ‘history’ and the modernizing narrative(s) of citizenship, bourgeois public and private, and the nation-state.”⁷ History as a “knowledge system” is predicated on an idealized norm of subjectivity—a conception of the self as fundamentally autonomous from other selves and from nature; as piously religious, perhaps, but disenchanting and able to separate “private” religious “beliefs”

from the rest of one’s affairs and opinions; and, above all, rationalist.⁸ Abundant experiences, ghostly matters, and warrior deities are not just out of time and out of place. Our methods simply cannot permit them to exist, so they have to be explained *away*. Apparitions of divinities, faith healings, prophecies of the end of time, and relationships with saints or the dead are ascribed to social crisis or attributed to alien belief systems. It is, moreover, a foregone conclusion for most historians that they are writing about “reality,” a

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category to which, it is implicitly held, supernatural encounters do not belong. It is perhaps an irony of historical practice that a single reference in an archive can be accepted as significant proof of a “normal” historical occurrence (a revolt, the formation of a political party, the transfer of land to an heir, a military command), yet no number of claims can substantiate a visitation by a deity, or the positive results of an exorcism or a faith healing.

All historians—all scholars, I expect—confront the “why does this matter?” question, as I sometimes have in discussing supernatural encounters in West Germany. There is always something interesting going on in these sorts of questions because, as much as anything else, they are about policing disciplinary boundaries. What is history and what is not? Some might say that making the past make sense to us, now, is a most important goal of historical practice. Unfortunately, this often means making the past make sense in the rationalist terms the discipline favors because, as Chakrabarty suggests, they are built into its very foundations.

For me, what is crucial in historical study is to give us and our students a heightened capacity to appreciate the multiplicity and complexity of human experience, past and present, and to come to some understanding of the various processes by which one symbolic order comes to be prized over another or erased altogether. As a sample of the West German population, Mary's pilgrims, vigilant local warriors against evil, and the throngs who sought healing through God's grace and by banishing demons were probably a relative minority (though it is estimated that at least 1.5 million people journeyed to Heroldsbach alone in the hopes of seeing the Virgin).⁹ However, representing the unique past experiences of culturally marginalized people—as the overwhelmingly hostile responses these individuals received from the established churches, the press, the medical community, and local authorities reveal them to have been—has been crucial to the development of the historical discipline in the last thirty or forty years. In other words, that some individuals in Germany sought direct relationships with the unseen may have made them unusual, but this is certainly no reason in itself to declare their past inconsequential. Moreover, millions of people around the globe live daily with the spirits of the dead, with angels, with witches, with *djinns*. They await the rapture, flagellate their bodies, and take up poisonous snakes in the hopes of getting closer to God.

Gaining a fuller appreciation of the continuous role and operation of the supernatural in human affairs—whatever the framework of one's own beliefs—is a humanistic act, an acknowledgment of the plurality of human life and consciousness. This does not mean that we like all of humanity's behavior, ideas, and stories, let alone adopt them as our own; attempting to achieve understanding surely need not imply that. But for Orsi, understanding another mental world, entering into another way of being or thinking, if only briefly, is also an act of self-clarification. By defamiliarizing one's own history,

reexamining the boundaries of one's own world, one can confront and comprehend them anew. For Gordon, leaving ghosts out of the story can be both an affront to social justice and to accuracy: "We do not usually experience things, nor are affects produced, in the rational and objective ways our terms tend to portray them." To ignore the haunting of the past, therefore, is to make both a "representational mistake" and to rub out the traces of someone's history.¹⁰

And yet there are historians, in my view, who have moved us a bit closer to representing affective life, otherworldly encounters, abundant events, and ghostly matters. They have crafted model narratives of human interaction with extraordinary beings that neither marginalize nor anthropologize that interaction nor obscure its meaning and reality for contemporaries. They have done so, I would argue, not through a self-conscious commitment to any particular theoretical perspective—though all of them are faithful to a vernacular understanding of history, to the past as it was lived and experienced by ordinary people. What all of them share, I think, is a commitment to history as literature. Narrative and description, for these historians, become vehicles for conveying or evoking things that the abstract and detached language of social science is often inadequate to represent.



The boundary-defining question I elaborated above—why do supernatural experiences matter for history?—is not one that medievalists and historians of Europe's early modern period typically have to answer. Evoking the worlds that produced, in various moments, the witch trials, *benandanti*, purgatory, the cult of saints, relic veneration, stylites, and holy men has been assumed by many historians to be an important goal in its own right because these phenomena appear to emerge from a past so distinct from the present—it is popularly held—as to be

Religious Freedom in the Arab World

At a dinner for over 150 Christian and Jewish trusts held in late August, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, the Prime Minister of Turkey, made an extraordinary announcement: the Turkish government will return hundreds of properties confiscated from religious minorities since the 1930s. This is a long overdue and welcome step. With new regimes emerging in the Arab world, one might also hope it will be an example for them of the just treatment of religious minorities.

In Egypt, concerns about resurgent Islamism have been fueled by the new political prominence of the Muslim Brotherhood and the Salafis. Since the fall of Mubarak, there have been attacks on the country's religious minorities. Coptic Christians have been the most frequent targets, but Sufis and other minority populations have also been harassed. In April, the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom recommended for the first time that Egypt be considered a "country of particular concern."

The Pew Research Center's new report, "Rising Restrictions on Religion," puts Egypt's religious tensions in a regional context. The report shows that of all the world's regions, Middle Eastern and North African countries have the highest levels of religiously inspired social hostilities; government restrictions on religion; and anti-Semitic, anti-Christian, and indeed anti-Muslim (presumably due to Shia/Sunni tensions) harassment. Moreover, while governmental restrictions on religion have increased in many countries since Pew's initial 2009 report, the Middle Eastern and North African regions has seen the worst increases.

Noting the history of his country's injustice against minority groups, Erdogan promised that "the times when a citizen of ours would be oppressed due to his religious, ethnic origin or different way of life are over." May it be true and a model for others.

See the report at: <http://pewresearch.org/pubs/2080/-religious-restrictions-social-hostilities-europe-asia>.

virtually impenetrable to contemporary ways of thinking. Perhaps more than any other subgroup in the discipline, medievalists and early modernists have excelled at making perplexing mental worlds comprehensible.

Peter Brown's classic work of interpretive history, *The Cult of the Saints*, is an extended methodological and interpretive argument against what he calls the "two-tiered" model of understanding the shifting religious culture of the late-antique period.¹¹ This model, with its roots in David Hume's *Natural History of Religion*, has tended to draw sharp distinctions between the "true" religion of elites and a vulgarized, "popular" devotion. By placing a constant and irresistible pressure on the former, the latter, in Hume's view, coarsened a putatively pure, theistic (and therefore coherently rational) Christianity. Under the long-spreading influence of Hume's vision, many modern scholars tended to assume that the cult of the saints represented a "capitulation by the enlightened elites of the Christian church to modes of thought previously current only among the 'vulgar.'"¹²

Brown takes a very different view. By exploring the "imaginative worlds" of late antiquity, he reveals the shifting contours of everyday piety. He begins by building up a picture of two worlds—the departing pagan and the emerging Christian—with light, impressionistic strokes, all the while allowing the voices of the past to speak. And there was a lot to talk about: a cosmological sea change took place between the third and sixth centuries CE that amounted to "the Christian breaching of the established map of the universe."¹³ The antique world had kept its dead far outside the city. But the Christians wanted the relics of the saints—whom Brown calls "very special dead people"—nearby. The graves of the saints made available some of their occupants' power to the faithful, made heaven *present*. The "Christian cult of saints rapidly came to involve the digging up, the moving, the dismemberment—quite apart from much avid touching

and kissing—of the bones of the dead.” Brown makes clear that these new beliefs and practices were a source of disgust and “charnel horror” for pagans, stirring “deep religious anger.”¹⁴ But it is how Brown represents this earth-shaking transformation that matters: the two worldviews are presented on morally equal terms. It is very difficult to imagine a historian of the recent past using this same strategy of moral balance, by say, depicting with equal weight and neutrality a mentality of scientific secularism and one that embraces otherworldly encounters. Yet Brown also resists naturalizing the transformation from the traditional (pagan) world to Christianity, as many historians had tended to do before him.

Brown’s characteristic sense of balance, liberality, and lightness of touch extends equally to persons he calls “invisible beings.” He neither diminishes their reality (say, by staking out their presence in his text with bristling quotation marks) nor adopts their ostensible point of view. Nor does Brown find it necessary to make judgments about the cult of the saints and their “power and presence.” The very special dead *were* powerful, and were present, in *relationships*: between heaven and earth, devoted and saint. Brown favors describing these relationships as a way of talking about the agency of mortals and of saints alike. As Brown points out, such relationships had usually been “relegated to the suspect category of ‘popular beliefs’”; in other words, medieval history has been no less devoid of the impositions and value judgments of modernity than other historical fields. But Brown does not see it as his job to judge or cast doubt on past realities; rather, his job is to portray the emergence and development of a devotional world with all of the color and vividness he can bring to that task.

Brown’s tone of non-judgment and his emphasis on relationships are distinctive features of his craft in *The Cult of the Saints*; no small part of his vast legacy as a historian rests on his extraordinary narrative ability, profound descrip-

tive powers, and sensitive rendering of past worlds. Orsi shares these characteristics, which are simultaneously scholarly and literary. His project as an ethnographer-historian of American religion has often been concerned to reveal “aspects of people’s lives and experiences within religious worlds” in ways that go beyond “what is officially sanctioned”—sanctioned, that is, by religious authorities, historiography, and religious scholarship.¹⁵ For Orsi, as for Brown, the emphasis is often on the relational, intersubjective nature of structures of religious experience, particularly American Catholic religious experience. These relational configurations, he writes, are “always both real and imaginary, experienced and desired or feared at the same time.”¹⁶

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Like Brown, Orsi, too, has developed a striking narrative style that is both elegant and highly individual, yet somehow down-to-earth. Perhaps what many readers find most remarkable about Orsi is his tendency toward autobiography. He often places his experiences and relationships—particularly with members of his own, Italian-Catholic family—squarely within the scope of his analyses. Even more remarkable to me about his work is that he has a clear awareness—though it is not, to my knowledge, overtly acknowledged—that describing special persons and abundant events calls for a certain poetics, a certain freedom, a certain expansiveness and ambiguity in one’s use of language. Orsi tends to layer his descriptions, sometimes using long strings of adjectives and verbs, often permitting what might seem to be sharp contrasts to coexist within single sentences, because this is the way he

conceptualizes human experience: as messy, paradoxical, contradictory, ambivalent. Like Brown, this poetic sensibility enables Orsi to call to mind a sense of a thing's existence and reality without categorizing it too sharply, or in a way that would compromise its ultimate ambiguity. This, to my mind, is one form of the "conjuring" of which Gordon writes. In much of Orsi's work there is an emphasis on instability, ephemerality, moment-to-moment mutability, and those things that slip through the fingers almost as they are grasped. His writing reflects this thinking: he dips into various worlds of experience, sometimes in rapid succession, without feeling a need to tie all of the threads together too neatly, or too finally, or too conclusively, at the end.

And yet there is a moral side to this, to be sure: that we do not overlook those experiences that seem to us to be odd, weird, untimely, out of place, shameful, distressing, or embarrassing.

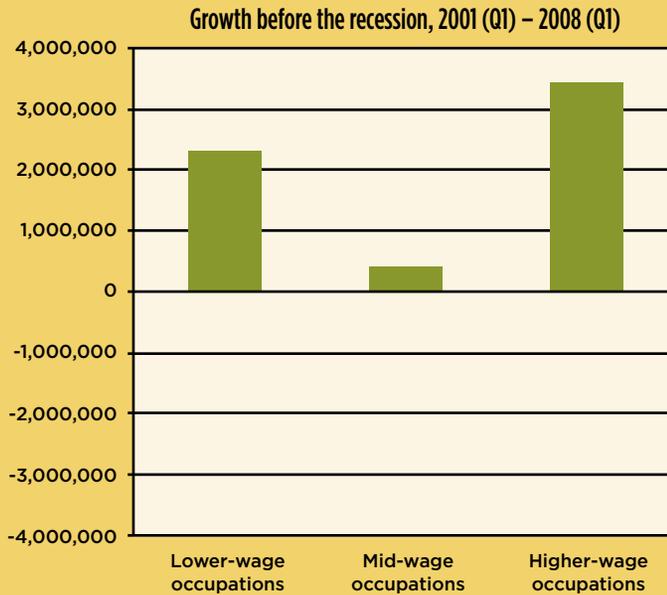
Like Brown, Orsi also works to heighten a sense of the multi-perspectival in his narratives, by offering manifold versions of the same story, feeling, or idea. His is "a history of invisible events experienced in unsubstantiated fragments, told in many, often colliding voices."¹⁷ There is a conversation going on in Orsi's work, among the people he writes about, his own beliefs, practices, and ideas, and the disciplinary boundaries that seek to contain certain kinds of stories or unwittingly omit them altogether. There are many ways that historians, like scholars of religion, can convey judgment in their work. Sometimes, they might simply come right out and tell us that this or that idea or person is untrustworthy, or not to be taken seriously. Sometimes the point is made more subtly: the author writes from the point of

view of one of her subjects, without necessarily acknowledging that she is doing so. What both Brown and Orsi share is a clear sense of delight in the kaleidoscopic variety of human life and experiences and a joyful desire to uncover those lives and experiences in their remarkable imaginative capacity. And yet there is a moral side to this, to be sure: that we do not overlook those experiences that seem to us to be odd, weird, untimely, out of place, shameful, distressing, or embarrassing. Orsi asks us to suspend "the impulse to locate the other...securely in relation to one's own cosmos."¹⁸ "Disciplined suspension," he argues, is the path to comprehension.

On this point I am reminded of the outstanding work of another historian named Brown—Kate Brown—and particularly of her description of a religious awakening that began (somehow, no one knows quite how) in the Soviet-Polish borderlands, or *kresy*, in the 1920s. Contemporary folklorists and ethnographers described villagers' accounts of known events: Sometime in 1923, the Virgin Mary and Jesus appeared in different places, to different people, for different reasons. This set in motion a pilgrimage and "within a week hundreds and then thousands of people started walking" to a village shrine, the location of a bleeding crucifix. They came, sometimes bearing crosses over great distances and gathering contributions to distribute to the poor along the way.¹⁹ Over time, the movement came to encompass Christians of various strands of belief, Orthodox, Catholic, and Lutheran, along with smaller evangelical sects: Flagellants, Foot-washers, Milk-drinkers. The pilgrims told tales of miracles, of healings, of the blind being made to see and the lame being made to walk.

In describing these events, Brown makes literary choices similar to Orsi's: she lets the people of the past tell what happened, about the miracles they witnessed and their meanings, about their relationships to the very special dead and the ghosts in the bathhouse, and she refrains, in long passages, from injecting herself—at least

Net change in occupational employment before the Great Recession



Source: NELP analysis of Current Population Survey (EPI Outgoing Rotation Files). Available at <http://www.nelp.org/goodjobsdeficit>.

The Hour-Glass Economy

The coming of postindustrial society has been discussed and debated for more than 30 years. If industrial society was centered on manufacturing and the production of tangible goods, postindustrial society involves the shift to a service-based and information or knowledge economy. By all measures, that economy is arriving, and with serious consequences.

In light of technological advances and the global relocation of manufacturing and routine, white-collar work, middle-wage jobs are disappearing in the U.S. From 2001 to 2008, for example, significant job growth occurred, but of those added jobs, only 6.2 percent were mid-wage. While high-wage “information economy” jobs in professional and technical occupations were generated, they were not sufficient to stop a downward move of many in the middle class to low-wage service sector positions. The economy is taking on the shape of an hourglass: jobs concentrated at the top and (far more) at the bottom, with shrinking opportunities in between.

A recent data brief from the National Employment Law Project (NELP) shows that the Great Recession has sharply exacerbated this ongoing realignment. Tracking employment trends by occupation, NELP finds that during the recession, 60 percent of the job losses occurred among mid-wage occupations. Since the recession officially ended, jobs added have been overwhelmingly in low-wage occupations. Mid-wage jobs have seen few gains, and high-wage jobs keep falling. The net result since 2008 has been virtually no loss of low-wage jobs (down just 0.3 percent) but a 4.1 percent loss of high-wage positions and a further 8.4 percent erosion of employment in the mid-wage occupations.

The widely discussed “jobs crisis,” then, is not just about recession-induced unemployment but also about the dearth of “good jobs” and the progressive hollowing out of the middle class. What we have is a deeper, structural problem, bringing ever-growing inequality in its wake.

See the brief at: <http://www.nelp.org/page/-/Final%20Occupations%20report%207-25-11.pdf?nocdn=1>.

as an all-knowing, all-interpreting narrator—into the text. Indeed when she injects herself, it is to disclose that “I am the one who is illiterate in the post[-Bolshevik] revolutionary *kresy*, because I do not know how to read the messages that were written by those who once lived there.”²⁰

Brown also underscores the imaginative capacities of the worlds her work seeks to capture, a strategy she shares with Orsi and Peter Brown. Thinking of past worlds as simultaneously real and imaginative emphasizes their being products of relationships, again, between people as individuals and in groups, and among people and gods and other special beings, including the dead. It points out that our worlds, all of them, are self-made, self-fashioned, yet not invented, at least not in the sense of being created out of whole cloth—let alone false. Nor are our many worlds the products merely of language, nor of one, putatively singular, “subjective” experience: they are the work of the groups of people who live in them. People have a role in making the worlds in which they live, Peter Brown, Robert Orsi, and Kate Brown show us, but they never do so alone.



Avery Gordon writes that scholars have become adept at discovering the construction of social realities... confounding some of the distinctions between culture and science, the factual and the artificial. We have rethought the relationship between knowledge and power, between text and context, highlighting the relationship between authorization and modes of authority. And we have made considerable representational reparations for past exclusions and silencings.²¹

Yet we mostly still miss the “hauntings, ghosts and gaps, seething absences, and muted presences” inhabiting the worlds we try to capture

or recapture.²² The authors whose work I have discussed here (all too briefly, to my regret) are important for many reasons, but not least because they have all found room in their work for elusive, yet no less real, realities. These authors have often focused on *evoking*, rather than explaining, the past, but ended up explaining a great deal in the process. They have emphasized the human imaginative capacity in their work and, natural storytellers all, have permitted themselves a certain poetic license in capturing it. They have done so largely by stepping a bit beyond the bounds, perhaps, of what can be known. There is nothing romantic about this, nor does their desire to achieve deeper understanding spring from some kind of fuzzy relativism. Evoking—conjuring—experiences with the unseen, like “the making of the realness of a religious world,” is not “a benign process.”²³ It can sometimes mean placing oneself in a conversation with worlds that are, like all human places, sometimes not beautiful, not charitable, and that can be cruel, painful, and exclusionary.

There is perhaps a broader idea to be drawn from all of this. Historians construct orderly, logical, rational narratives about the past, ascribe to past actors rational motivations, offer accounts of previous eras that make the chaos of reality make sense. Yet we know very well that the things that have often spurred human beings, driven them to act, past and present, are passions, abject prejudices, spiritual longings, even hallucinations. There is, in other words, often a contradiction between a cool, rationalist recounting of the events leading to a particular outcome and the beliefs and motivations of people in history. Historians’ commitment to rationalist narratives as vehicles of explanation often precludes our conveying the deep unease and strangeness and unearthliness of past mental worlds, even those of the recent past. Of West Germans who saw the Virgin, visited exorcists, accused their neighbors of being in league with the devil, I have sometimes been asked: were these people not

just peculiar outliers in an otherwise “normal” society? The impulse is to exile them because they do not fit within a secular or rationalist frame (except in a negative sense, as examples of what it means to be incompletely or unsatisfactorily “modern”). But what indeed was *normal* in the context of post-1945 West Germany? This is highly ambiguous. After all, we are talking about a society struggling, powerfully if often obscurely, with the legacies of the Holocaust, Nazism, and the Second World War. To leave the ghosts out of this story would surely be more than a failure to comprehend the past; it could also be a gross misrepresentation.

Endnotes

I did a lot of the thinking that went into this piece during 2010-11, when I spent a fellowship year in the Shelby Cullom Davis Center for Historical Studies at Princeton University. I would like to thank my wonderful colleagues in the Davis Center, from whom I learned so much: Sabrina Mervin, Mary Morgan, Mridu Rai, Rachel St. John, Hugh Thomas, Katherine Verdery, and Eric Weitz. I thank Dan Rodgers and Yair Mintzker especially. I also thank the ever-changing cast of the Davis Center's weekly seminar, most particularly Peter Brown.

- 1 Heroldsbach was only one of the sites where the Virgin made her appearance in those years. See Michael O'Sullivan, “West German Miracles: Catholic Mystics, Church Hierarchy, and Postwar Popular Culture,” *Zeithistorische Forschungen/Studies in Contemporary History*, Online-Ausgabe 6 (2009): <<http://www.zeithistorische-forschungen.de/16126041-Osullivan-1-2009>>.
- 2 Some of these phenomena are the subject of my current research into experiences of the supernatural in twentieth-century Germany. While such phenomena as witchcraft and *Hexenbannung* were briefly topics of interest among folklorists and ethnographers in Germany in the '70s and '80s, they have been overlooked almost entirely by historians.
- 3 Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (Princeton: Princeton University Press) 102–11.
- 4 Avery F. Gordon, *Ghostly Matters: Haunting and the Sociological Imagination* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008) 22.
- 5 Robert Orsi, “When $2 + 2 = 5$: Can We Begin to Think about Unexplained Religious Experiences in Ways that

Acknowledge Their Existence?,” *The American Scholar* (Spring 2007): <<http://www.theamericanscholar.org/when-2-2-5/>>.

- 6 Kate Brown, *A Biography of No Place: From Ethnic Borderland to Soviet Heartland* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004) 66, citing Della Pollock, *Exceptional Spaces: Essays in Performance and History* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998) 8.
- 7 Chakrabarty 41.
- 8 Randall Styers, *Making Magic: Religion, Magic, and Science in the Modern World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004) 13. See also Saba Mahmood, *Politics of Piety: The Islamic Revival and the Feminist Subject* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005); Anna Krylova, “The Tenacious Liberal Subject in Soviet Studies,” *Kritika* 1:1 (Winter 2000): 119–46; and Douglas Rogers, *Old Faith and the Russian Land: A Historical Ethnography of Ethics in the Urals* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2009) 14. The notion of “History” as “knowledge system” is Chakrabarty's (see 41).
- 9 O'Sullivan 3.
- 10 Gordon 22.
- 11 Peter Brown, *The Cult of the Saints: Its Rise and Function in Latin Christianity* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981).
- 12 Peter Brown 13–22; quotation on 17.
- 13 Peter Brown 4.
- 14 Peter Brown 4, 6.
- 15 Robert Orsi, *Between Heaven and Earth* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005) 167.
- 16 Orsi, *Between Heaven and Earth*, 17.
- 17 Kate Brown 66.
- 18 Orsi, *Between Heaven and Earth*, 198.
- 19 Kate Brown 59–60.
- 20 Peter Brown 68–69.
- 21 Gordon 20.
- 22 Gordon 20.
- 23 Orsi, *Between Heaven and Earth*, 108.