European Memory in Populism

Representations of Self and Other

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Chapter 10

Between appropriation and appropriateness

Instrumentalizing dark heritage in populism and memory?

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Introduction

This chapter takes an interdisciplinary approach to the subject of memorialization and commemoration, protest and populism in relation to the performative enacting and official presentation of difficult history. It analyzes the various actors instrumentalizing the same dark heritage in different ways, by different means, and for different purposes, to draw conclusions about processes of coming to terms with the past (*Vergangenheitsbewältigung*) in relation to the contemporary context of populism and migration.

It analyzes a range of case studies connected to the memory and heritage of the 13 February 1945 firebombing of Dresden by the British Royal Air Force, under the command of Arthur 'Bomber' Harris, and the US Air Force. These case studies include museums, heritage sites, public exhibitions, 'official' city commemorations, 'unofficial' public commemorative acts, protests and counter-protests, and interviews with supporters of Germany's populist *Alternative für Deutschland* (AfD) party from Dresden.[1] Location not only of the 1945 firebombing but also the former GDR's third city and cultural nexus, Dresden is potentially now equally well known for the populist group Pegida (whose acronym stands for 'Patriotic Europeans against the Islamisation of the Occident') as it is for its art, music, and historic architecture. Previous analyses of the notion of Germans as 'victims' of World War II as well as perpetrators have addressed the mediation of this history and cultural memory more generally (in particular Niven 2006; Joel 2013). Taking theoretical work from a range of disciplines, including Habermas's idea of 'communicative action' and rational discourse (1984), Ruth Wodak's work on a 'politics of fear' (2015) and Jeffery Olick's on the 'politics of regret' (2007), Aleida Assmann's on traumatic memory (2016) and Sharon Macdonald's on difficult heritage and memory (2009, 2013) as its foundation, the chapter will examine in detail empirical data from fieldwork at these multiple sites and events. The range of case studies permits both a broad and a deep questioning of the realms of instrumentality within cultural policy, museums, heritage, and collective cultural memory practices. The analysis combines the theoretical with the empirical in arguing that two axes exist

within commemorative, museum, and protest practices – an axis of *appropriation* and an axis of *appropriateness*.

This provides a new theoretically based approach for scholars – whether from heritage, museum, or memory studies or from political, discourse, or populism studies – to frame and analyze uses of the past in relation to contemporary social and cultural phenomena (and vice versa). Going beyond the dichotomy of the victim/perpetrator narrative (part of what I term the axis of appropriation, based on either a 'politics of fear' or a 'politics of shame and pity'), it identifies a second, intersecting public dichotomous narrative. This focuses on the contrast between practices of commemoration, protest, and representations of the past which appear 'emotional' and those which appear to be 'rational' (part of what I term the axis of appropriateness).

This detailed examination of the Dresden 13 February commemorations and memory practices therefore illuminates the strategies within official and unofficial practices. It also frames the actions, arguments, and behaviour of the various actors in relation to both contemporary society and theories of communication, memory, and heritage, and draws out the interconnections between them within the ongoing dynamics of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*.

Analytical framing

The notion of 'dark heritage' is one which has emerged from various perspectives of looking at the difficult, contested, and problematic parts of the past, in relation to how they are presented to the public today, and why people choose to visit sites associated with such pasts. The associated phenomenon of 'dark tourism' has been an object of academic study since the 1990s (Seaton 1996; Foley and Lennon 1996; Stone 2011; Stone et al. 2018).

Over recent decades, heritage and museum studies scholars have examined various aspects of dark heritage in order to understand the impact of difficult history on museums, heritage, public memory, commemoration, the ways in which such histories are presented to or hidden from the public, and the public responses to their encounters with these histories and public presentations of them. Macdonald coined the terms 'continual unsettlement' (2009: 192) and 'past-presencing' (2013) in relation to the need for a future-facing and ongoing engagement with difficult pasts in the present. She emphasizes that this is intended to disrupt 'linear notions of past preceding present preceding future' (2013: 16).

The emerging academic discipline of memory studies is rooted in the work of Nora (1989) and Halbwachs and Coser (1992) but also connects to dark heritage, difficult histories, and how different memories and commemorative acts influence and shape societies. Much of this is based on traumatic memory in relation to the Holocaust and the changing collective, cultural responses to it (Hirsch 2012; Rothberg 2009; Olick 2007; Caruth 1995). Aleida Assmann's work (especially 2016) is particularly relevant to this study, in that it addresses the ongoing relationship between the history and memory of the

recent German past with strategies for developing new memory discourses within contemporary societies. Levi and Rothberg (2018) specifically address the challenge of how memory studies can engage with the contemporary far right's use of memory in a transnational and globalized society.

Analysis of memory in relation to public commemoration is inevitably linked to issues of emotion – and even more so when the commemoration is both for a contested past and through controversial practices and actors, such as the far right. While emotion was considered to have been a neglected subject matter within academic study (Williams and Bendelow, in Bendelow and Williams 1997: xii), the history of emotions has been analyzed (Frevert 2011; Plamper 2015). The practices of 'instrumental cultural policy' (Gray 2007) and the strategic use of emotions, affect, and empathy in museums and the heritage sector is widespread – particularly in the Anglophone countries – with a growing body of academic research (Smith, Wetherell and Campbell 2018). In Germany, however, there has long been a more guarded and sceptical view of instrumentalism and intentionally emotive engagement with the past in cultural policy, museums, and the heritage sector, largely in response to the propaganda uses of the past by the Nazis (Burns and van der Will 2003; Eckersley 2007, 2012). This legacy (Sternfeld 2013: 38) is still evident in Germany within museum practice and the attitudes of cultural sector professionals. Therefore, museums and the heritage sector in Germany are expected to provide factual, objective presentations of the past for their visitors, whether in relation to objects, sites of memory, or practices of commemoration.

In light of this, Habermas's work on communicative action and discourses of rationality (1984) becomes significant in aiding a reading of the events observed for this study. Habermas's ideas on communication, rationalism, and instrumentalism have been the basis of both research and criticism in various disciplines. Crossley's critical analysis of Habermas's failure to include emotion as a factor (in Bendelow and Williams 1997: 29) is particularly relevant to this chapter. For Crossley, Habermas sees *communicative* rationality as underpinning communicative situations which are focused on understanding and agreement, while *instrumental* rationality is the basis of a strategic form of thinking and communicating, the purpose of which is a given desired outcome based on a "means–end calculation" (ibid.), rather than mutual understanding.

It is on this broad and interdisciplinary foundation that this study rests, taking a deep view of the phenomenon of dark heritage, memory, and commemoration. The chapter does this through a wide selection of cultural case studies focusing on public presentations and practices relating to the 13 February 1945 bombing of Dresden.

Approaching the field

A significant body of fieldwork data was collected during a one-week period in Dresden in February 2018. This week (8–14 February 2018) of intensive

immersion into the official and unofficial practices and processes of memory, commemoration, and presentation provided a wide range of material for analysis, gathered using a combination of approaches from anthropology, museum and heritage studies, and memory studies. This data allows for particularly rich insights, firstly into the issue of how and why the presentation and commemoration of a difficult past can continue to be so challenging for public cultural organizations. Secondly, it exposes the heightened tensions present within the city in a compressed time and space, and the emotive nature of public participation within official and unofficial, political and civic acts of memory.

Fieldwork included architectural and display analysis, staff interviews at Dresden's Military History Museum (MHM) and City Museum, and a qualitative, semi-structured interview with a representative of the Saxon regional government's culture department. Exhibition analysis was undertaken at the Dresden 1945 Panorama, and site analysis in and around the *Frauenkirche*. Attendance and participant observation at a commemorative concert, at the official public commemoration ceremony at the *Heidefriedhof*, and at official public participatory commemorations were included. Several protests and counter-protests taking place within the city of Dresden during the time frame were observed. These included a neo-Nazi march (on 10 February) and associated left-wing counter-protest; a populist right-wing commemorative protest (on 13 February) and the simultaneous left-wing counter-protest; and numerous smaller public acts of commemorative intervention in the city. Additional data from interviews undertaken by an associated researcher in 2017 with AfD (*Alternative für Deutschland*, a populist right-wing party) supporters in Dresden are brought to bear on the material gathered in February 2018.

The myth of Dresden – appropriation and appropriateness

The ongoing use and misuse of the 'victim narrative' as part of the popular memory and populist revisionism of the Dresden 1945 firebombings, from the immediate period after the bombing and before the end of World War II, through the GDR, and to the present day has been analyzed extensively (Niven 2006; Joel 2013; Gegner and Ziino 2012: 197–218, Dresdner Hefte 84 and 115). The idea of the '*Mythos Dresden*' (Neutzner in Dresdner Hefte 84: 38–48) is based on the notion of Dresden as a 'special city' due to its Baroque architecture and artistic and musical strengths combined with historically inaccurate perspectives of it as an 'innocent city' – based on factually incorrect ideas that it was populated primarily by German refugees, women, children, and the elderly, and of no military significance. The resonance of this continues to shape and influence much of the contemporary discourse, commemorative, cultural, and museological practice within the city.

The far right have long used the victim narrative as a means by which to justify their presence at and public participation in the official commemorations,

even to some extent shaping the nature of the official commemorations – whether by causing such disruption that the city and Land governments chose not to hold official commemorations (Haase in Dresdner Hefte 115: 4–14) or, from 2005 onwards, through their influence *within* the city and Land assemblies, as elected members of those houses (Neutzner in Dresdner Hefte 115: 75–85).

Academic discussion of the Dresden firebombing and its memory has therefore previously focused primarily on the problematics of this perceived victim/perpetrator dichotomy. Significant as this still is, a second apparent dichotomy emerges from the current analysis of these events, which is equally significant – if not more so – in its relation to the changing dynamics of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* and the future. This focuses on the behaviours (and the *perception* of behaviour) of those commemorating and protesting the remembrance of the Dresden 1945 firebombing – an apparent dichotomy of behaviour which appears as either 'emotional' or 'rational'. These two supposed dichotomies can be better understood as two axes. The use of victim/ perpetrator narratives by various groups in relation to the past, as well as
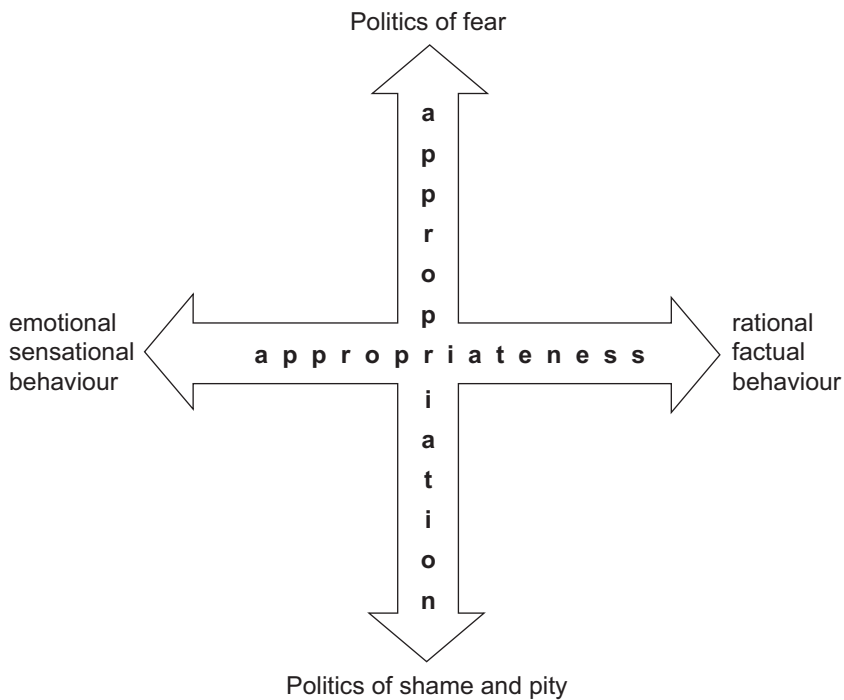

Image 10.1 The axes of appropriation and appropriateness.

Source: Graphic by Susannah Eckersley

in relation to the social context of the present, is represented by the axis of *appropriation*. The use of supposedly emotional or rational behaviours and communications is represented by the axis of *appropriateness*.

Against the backdrop of contemporary politics and discourses around multiculturalism, the integration of refugees, and the perceived marginalization of autochthonous populations, the impact of Dresden's specific history during and after the Third Reich, in the GDR, and following German reunification on the city and its population adds to the layers utilized within the axes of appropriation and appropriateness.

Appropriation of the past – the Holocaust as frame for both victim and perpetrator narratives

The 'anniversary week' in 2018 included multiple events, connected either to Dresden's civic institutions and representatives or to grassroots civil society actors and groups. In adherence with Germany's laws of assembly, all officially registered demonstrations are both regulated and protected. Participant observation undertaken at many of these events confirmed the use of 'victim' and 'perpetrator' narratives, both framed around differing attitudes towards the Holocaust and its status within the present memory complex (Macdonald 2013) of Dresden.

Far-right groups, who gathered for a '*Gedenkmarsch*' (memorial march) through the streets of Dresden on 10 February, positioned themselves as mourning victims of a past which they see as being inadequately commemorated, all framed in relation to relativizing the Holocaust. Around 600 self-proclaimed neo-Nazis marched, carrying banners which included the groups' far-right affiliations. These clearly positioned their revisionist view of the bombing of Dresden in relation to this victim narrative by including slogans such as 'Dresden's Bombing Holocaust' or showing inflated numbers of dead from the firebombing as a counterpoint to the numbers of Holocaust victims.

The city's official public commemoration of the anniversary of the bombing was a wreath-laying ceremony at the Heidefriedhof on the edges of the city, the site of the largest burial of ashes from the firebombing victims. Attended by official representatives from the Dresden Synod, the CDU (Christian Democratic Union), members of Pegida, the AfD, the NPD (National Democratic Party of Germany – a far-right-wing political party), and uniformed members of at least two *Burschenschaften* (historically based right-wing student 'fraternities') – the Dresden branch of Burschenschaft Arminia zu Leipzig and the Dresdener Burschenschaft Salamandria – as well as descendants of the dead, this sombre event was marked by the highly visible presence of armed police in protective clothing. The official commemoration included speeches, music, and a sombre procession to the 13 February memorial, with reflection at the Holocaust memorial en route.

a

b

Image 10.2 Banners from the neo-Nazi 'Gedenkmarsch' on 10 February 2018. Banner slogans read, a: 'We remember the victims of the bombing Holocaust on Dresden' and 'The bombing of Dresden was a crime against humanity', and b: 'We remember the victims of the Allied bombing terror'.

Source: Photos by Susannah Eckersley

a

b

Image 10.3 AfD (a) and Burschenschaftler (b) carrying wreaths at the Heidefriedhof commemoration on 13 February 2018.

Source: Photos by Susannah Eckersley

The AfD and NPD representatives and the Burschenschaftler, although ostensibly accompanying the official commemoration, separated themselves from it. The AfD and Burschenschaftler processed directly to the 13 February memorial in advance of the main commemoration, and the NPD after

the main commemoration – both groups very pointedly *not* pausing at the Holocaust memorial on their way to the firebombing memorial. The wreaths they laid included ribbons with messages focusing on victims and the duty to remember them. To one side of the main proceedings a couple of police officers easily and quickly prevented an attempt to protest against the commemoration by a small group whose banner read '*Where were you on 27 January?*', referring to Holocaust Memorial Day. This vignette highlights one of the key points of contest within the memory of 13 February as it is enacted by different groups, as well as of much of Germany's dark heritage – the centrality of the Holocaust as a frame for both victim and perpetrator narratives.

The 'perpetrator narrative' underpins much of both the left-wing activism and protest as well as the official presentations of Dresden's firebombing and its commemoration. Dresden's City Museum and Military History Museum (MHM) situate their presentations of the history of the firebombing very clearly and intentionally within the context and consequences of the Nazi regime and the Holocaust. They do so in a 'factual' manner which aims to reject the 'Dresden myth' and instead underline the population's complicity in Nazism, and to contextualize their suffering as a result of the firebombing. A member of the staff from Dresden's City Museum reflected on the challenge of this:

> We ask ourselves this all the time, why is it so special here? Of course, immediately after the destruction the National Socialists built up the myth idea – the number of victims, the innocence of the city – this was immediately built up and was then carried on in the GDR. The 'Anglo-American bomb terror', 'innocent city' and so on . . . it has stuck, and it gets carried

Image 10.4 Wreaths at the Heidefriedhof memorial.

Source: Photo by Susannah Eckersley

Image 10.5 Wreaths laid by Burschenschaft Arminia zu Leipzig and the NPD, whose dedications read: 'In deepest mourning for the German victims', and 'We remember the victims of 13 February 1945' respectively.

Source: Photo by Susannah Eckersley

on more and more. . . . So I see it as a duty to make sure that this is re-factualised or objectivised more.

(Interviewee from City Museum)

Breaking down the myths of Dresden as an 'innocent city' and the emotive power of the idea of 'countless victims' through the use of historical evidence and factual, somewhat detached, information-giving and museum interpretation texts is therefore a conscious and considered strategy to counter populist and revisionist discourses on Dresden's past. In both the City Museum and MHM, the Dresden bombing displays contain a minimal number of objects, using a few deeply symbolic objects combined with text providing factual information on the bombing and its consequences. In the MHM, Dresden is juxtaposed with other cities which suffered significant bombing during World War II: an intentional strategy to undermine the notion of Dresden's 'uniqueness' in the history of aerial warfare (interviewee from MHM). In the City Museum, the historical context prior to and subsequent to the bombing is emphasized, again, as an intentional strategy to undermine the myth of Dresden as an 'innocent city' and a city of 'powerless victims' (interviewee from City Museum). The agency of both individuals and groups, as perpetrators and *Mitläufer* (fellow-travellers) within Nazism, is communicated by means of the objects on display and their positioning and interpretation within the museum space.

The city's cultural and heritage organizations' commemorative activities also focused on the history of Dresden's complicity within Nazism and the Holocaust, whether in relation to specific places associated with the Nazi regime's programme of discrimination against Jews (such as at the sites of the *Stiftung Sächsische Gedenkstätten*) or in marking and making visible traces of the victims and the perpetrators of Nazism within the city of Dresden (for example the plaque commemorating the deportation of Jews at Dresden-Neustadt station). Events were organized by multiple groups from religious and civic organizations, creating a plethora of memorializing and commemorative activities within the space of a few days, many of which had the Holocaust and Holocaust memory as their focus.[2] This includes *Freunde der Frauenkirche* (Friends of the Frauenkirche) – an organization whose basis is in the peace movement which was active in the GDR as a form of anti-government protest (Niven 2006: 116–117) – and other cultural actors. For example, Shostakovich's 13th Symphony, *Babi Yar*,[3] was performed by the Dresden Philharmonic in the Dresden Kulturpalast concert hall on 11 and 13 February for their annual '*Gedenkkonzert*' (memorial concert), again juxtaposing the atrocities committed against Jews during the Nazi regime and the Holocaust with the contemporary processes and controversies around the memorialization of 13 February in Dresden.

This focus on the victims of Nazism and the strategic awareness-raising of Dresdeners' complicity has two purposes. Firstly, it attempts to undermine the

Image 10.6 The 'Dresden View' in the Military History Museum Dresden, positioning destroyed paving stones from Dresden with destroyed architectural elements from Rotterdam and other cities bombed during World War II.

Source: Photo by Susannah Eckersley

victim narrative of the right wing by highlighting the context of the bombing internationally as well as locally, as the museums do. Secondly, it aims to draw out the history and rich culture of religious pluralism in Dresden's past and thereby make parallels with contemporary discourses around multiculturalism and belonging. The ensuing narrative of peace based on the Holocaust remembrance phrase of 'never again' connects to the contemporary ideal of a 'culture of welcome' towards refugees and migrants. This is publicly articulated as a strategy to counter the right-wing populist and extremist activity within the city. While those adhering to either a victim or a perpetrator narrative are diametrically opposed in their understanding of history and politics, what they have in common is that both are appropriating and instrumentalizing the past as a means to shape the future and in counterpoint to present perceptions of reality.

Appropriation through transposition – a *politics of fear* as opposed to a *politics of shame and pity*

Dynamic and contested processes of dealing with Germany's difficult past within changing social contexts have been central to coming to terms with it – to *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* – as the *Historikerstreit* of the 1980s aptly demonstrates (the 'historians' debate' raised by Habermas and Nolte is documented in Augstein 1987). Through the varied examples relating to Dresden, we can

see how the appropriation and instrumentalization of a dark heritage takes on an added layer of meaning when transposed onto contemporary social conflicts.

Significantly, the narrative of perceived German victimhood is used by populist groups not only in relation to the bombing of Dresden as an event from the past; in fact, they transpose it onto the contemporary politics of the 'migration crisis' of multiculturalism and the integration of refugees in Dresden. Their position as supposed 'victim', seen in the discourses centring on February 1945, is also re-appropriated to underpin their anti-immigration standpoint, as seen in this interview with an AfD supporter in Dresden:

> What upsets me is that . . . we get a tiny pension and the so-called refugees get everything. . . . We have to find a normal way again, where foreigners are not valued as better people than Germans.
>
> (Interviewee 16)

The perpetuation of a collective victim mentality results in part in a perceived need for self-protection within the group, combined with the active and at times aggressive 'othering' of those who may threaten this status. While in Dresden in the past, these 'others' consisted of intellectual, cultural, or political 'elites', such as left-wing and centre politicians, civil servants, church leaders, academics, and cultural sector professionals, in particular historians (see Richter in Dresdner Hefte Nr. 115: 63–70) – an 'oppositional habitus' (Wodak 2015: 47) – the focus has shifted more recently to less powerful 'others'. The development of the Pegida group, notably in Dresden originally, and the success of the AfD in gaining seats in both Dresden's city hall and the regional Saxon parliament means that criticism of these previously 'elite' bastions of civic and regional power would now be something of an own goal. Instead, a shift to a 'governmental habitus' (Wodak 2015: 47) and a re-appropriation of the victim narrative has been necessary.

The focus of right-wing populist criticism in Dresden has therefore shifted from elites to some of the most vulnerable in the local population, refugees from Syria, Iraq, and elsewhere, and those whose appearance marks them out as visibly different to the majority of the local population. Within the discourses of Pegida and the AfD, the term 'refugee' or 'asylum seeker' has become synonymous not with victimhood and innocence (terms the right-wing populists reserve for German refugees during the Dresden bombing), but instead with perpetration and malicious intent. For example: 'The AfD always warned us that a lot of asylum seekers are criminals' (Interviewee 2); or

> The AfD has pointed out that among all refugees that came here, 500,000 are unregistered, therefore illegal in Germany. Most of them are terrorists or at least primitive people. Most of those who come to our country simply have no morals, no decency.
>
> (Interviewee 8)

and finally, 'I could tell you hundreds of examples showing that these people who came to us are not refugees, but social asylum seekers, parasites' (Interviewee 11). The discourses observed from Pegida and AfD supporters both during the anniversary week and in these interviews make it evident that the notion of the German as 'victim' is being transposed from those impacted by World War II bombing by so-called 'Anglo-American' bombers (a phrase stemming from Nazi and GDR propaganda) to contemporary Dresdeners with xenophobic fears of being 'overwhelmed' by non-European, non-Christian refugees. This may seem ironic, given the centrality of the idea of 'innocent refugees' to the 1945 Dresden victim narrative. However, the appropriation and perpetuation of Pegida and AfD supporters' historically based victim mentality in relation to contemporary issues align with both psychological and cultural analysis of trauma and memory (Caruth 1995; Hirsch 2012; Rothberg 2009). This re-appropriation of the past and transposition of the victim mentality onto the present is very evident when this AfD supporter speaks of heritage:

> In Europe we had a bad heritage with the First and Second World War. . . . In Germany . . . we have feelings of guilt, we have to. . . . There is a limit to everything. And with everything the government did in the past years, the limit is exceeded and that is dangerous for the German and European heritage. When we have an Islamic caliphate in Germany one day, the European heritage is gone. Maybe it sounds exaggerating, but I think we should be really careful. Many of the Muslim refugees have dangerous thoughts in their minds. Otherwise you would not think of driving a bus into a crowd [referring to the December 2016 attack on Breitscheidplatz in Berlin].
>
> (Interviewee 16)

Furthermore, the victim mentality follows the characteristics of a 'micro-politics of fear' outlined by Ruth Wodak, where she argues that key discursive strategies employed by right-wing populists include the reversal of victim-perpetrator narratives, combined with blame-shifting and revisionist historical narratives, underpinned by 'the *topos of history* and the *topos of saviour*' (2015: 66–67). The central significance of 'the past', 'history', 'heritage', and 'memory' to populist rhetoric is again evident from analyses of populism as a whole and in the specific examples of the 13 February commemorations and protests in Dresden. Indeed, Assmann's 'Guidelines for Dealing Peaceably with National Memories' (2007: 11–25) could almost have been used in reverse to inform the practices and discourses which have emerged in Dresden. The ideals of progressive memory work, as outlined in Assmann's 'guidelines' (ibid.) and Macdonald's 'past-presencing', are being appropriated as a tactic of the politics of fear, where blame-shifting and othering as part of the conflation of different victim-narratives are merged into contemporary political discourse, civic action, and far-right commemorative practices, which are themselves instrumentalized to mobilize public support for populist nationalism.

The left-wing protest events observed in Dresden also framed their arguments simultaneously on both the Holocaust and on contemporary multiculturalism. Many of the same protesters took part in the counter-protests to the right-wing march on 10 February and on the evening of 13 February. Music, dancing, the provision of hot food and drink, and the presence of many families with young children created something of a party atmosphere in the early phases of the left-wing protests, in marked contrast to the sombre, funereal atmosphere created intentionally by both the neo-Nazi 'Gedenkmarsch' on 10 February and the AfD candlelit commemoration on the Altmarkt (old market square) on 13 February. The counter-protests to the right-wing demonstrations on the evening of 13 February also transposed discourses from the past onto those of the present – firstly, Holocaust remembrance and the narrative of the 'ordinary German' as perpetrator, and secondly, multiculturalism and a culture of welcome for contemporary refugees. This re-appropriation of the past in relation to the present was evident in the banners, chants, and flags, for example, the banner about Holocaust Memorial Day seen at the Heidefriedhof reappeared. Others addressed German perpetration and contemporary racism. Clearly audible chants switched from 'there is no right to Nazi propaganda', to 'refugees are welcome here' and back again, while rainbow flags and 'Refugees Welcome' flags were waved. Such examples show how left-wing groups, as well as the radical right, appropriate leitmotifs from the past, transposing them into the present and instrumentalizing them to further their political objectives in the present day and for the future.

As the evening of the thirteenth progressed, and the number of riot police on the Altmarkt increased visibly to keep the two demonstrations – the AfD/Pegida 'stilles gedenken' (silent commemoration) and the left-wing counter-demonstration – apart, the atmosphere became heated and tense. A small number of the left-wing protesters surged towards the right-wing demonstration to mount a sit-in. This sparked a reaction from the police, who proceeded to kettle all of the left-wing protesters (and passers-by who happened to be in that part of the Altmarkt), not allowing anyone to leave the area for the next few hours, despite the sub-zero temperatures. At the same time, the right-wing demonstration was permitted to continue unhindered and even protected by the police, with AfD representatives giving speeches and participants able to move freely within the Altmarkt and to leave it unhindered.[4] While this ostensibly adheres to German laws of assembly providing officially sanctioned demonstrations protection from hindrance and possible violence, as both the right- and left-wing demonstrations were formally registered and approved, both should have been accorded equitable treatment from the police.[5] The discourse of peace was therefore evident within the left-wing protest but set within the apparently contradictory setting of disturbance strategies, including noise, aggressive language, and the physicality of sit-down blockades as part of their counter-protest activities.

a

b

c

d

Image 10.7 Left-wing protest banners from the evening of 13 February 2018 at the Alt-
markt, Dresden, reading, a: 'Where were you on 27 January?'; b: 'Your racism
makes us sick'; c: 'German perpetrators are no victims'; and d: 'You are not
responsible for that which has happened, but you are responsible that it never
happens again'.

Source: Photos by Susannah Eckersley

Image 10.8 Candles in front of the Frauenkirche during the bell ringing on the evening of 13 February 2018.

Source: Photo by Susannah Eckersley

The final event on 13 February was the official candlelit commemoration during the ringing of the Frauenkirche bells, which toll from 9.45pm until 10pm – marking the time from the sounding of the air-raid sirens to the first wave of bombing. This otherwise silent and uncontextualized symbolic act of commemoration attracted large numbers of people (many of whom may have come from other events earlier in the evening, whether right- or left-wing demonstrations or civic commemorations), who stood alongside one another in silent reflection. During the GDR years, the ruins of the Frauenkirche (it was not rebuilt until the 1990s) had become a kind of peace memorial – a focus for the growing anti-GDR and pro-peace movement (Joel in Gegner and Ziino 2012; Niven 2006: 116–117). The symbolism of peace was uppermost not only at the Frauenkirche, but also at other civic commemorative acts, such as the human chain organized by the rector of Dresden's Technical University, Professor Hans Müller-Steinhagen. This involved thousands of people – ordinary citizens, including many families, politicians, academics, and significant figures within the cultural sector – forming a human chain around the old town of Dresden. They held hands in silence for several minutes, in a symbolic act of both mourning and protection, before dispersing into the city again just as the right- and left-wing demonstrations on the Altmarkt (which is on the edge of the old town) began.

These narratives of peace and of welcome not only put the bombing into the historical context of Nazi perpetration but again transpose it onto the contemporary narrative relating to refugee, migration, and multiculturalism

Image 10.9 The human chain commemoration at the Dresden Altmarkt in the early evening of 13 February 2018.

Source: Photo by Susannah Eckersley

issues. Again, the protesters, activists, and cultural professionals (whether in museums, music venues, or memorial sites) use appropriation as a tactic of their politics – this time to highlight narratives of peace and multiculturalism. This is based on what I will call a politics of shame and pity. This is different to Jeffrey Olick's notion of a politics of regret (2007), given its direction towards the contemporary and future world, with parallels being drawn between Germany's Nazi past and the recent 'refugee crisis'. Olick describes 'a kind of political guilt or public culture of collective remorse [which] has taken unique and historically important forms in the Federal Republic of Germany' (2007: 13) and sees the politics of regret as related to 'peace and reconciliation' efforts within national political frames, such as Germany or South Africa (ibid.: 15). While this may be the foundation for much of the historical political memory and commemorative actions in Germany more broadly, the Dresden situation is more complex. On the one hand, those seeing themselves as 'victims' of the firebombing are part of the same national, civic, and cultural community as those who see themselves as descendants of the 'perpetrators' of Nazi crimes – the difference is not based on divergent pasts, but on differing perceptions and memories among individuals with a shared past experience and history. On the other hand, those adhering to a politics of shame (at the German past) and pity (for both past victims and for contemporary refugees) are not working through guilt and regret in order to achieve reconciliation with (or between) victims or perpetrators of past wrongs (as Olick describes in relation to earlier German political narratives of working through the past, ibid.). Instead, they are using it as a means to endorse a contemporary political discourse of inclusion, to differentiate themselves from the populist and extreme right, and potentially as a form of redemptive 'self-flagellation' (see also Olick 2007: 143 for the ways in which such 'self-flagellation' appeared within German politics of the 1960s) in what has been described as a 'politics of pity' in relation to media representations of refugees (Chouliaraki and Stolic 2017). Groups identified here as participating in both the politics of fear and the politics of shame and pity utilize *strategic* and *selective* appropriations of the past and then re-appropriate these in and for the present.

Appropriateness in the present – strategies of communication and behaviour

Returning to the idea of communication and the notion of rationality at this point allows for analysis of a further significant layer of the memory, commemoration, representation, and action around the Dresden firebombing. The notion of a supposed 'rationality' in discourse, behaviour, or presentations of the past (whether in museums or memorial sites or at events such as commemorations) can be related back to Crossley's analysis of rationality and communication in Habermas's work (in Bendelow and Williams 1997), and also back

to Olick (1997). In analyzing German collective responses to the Holocaust, Olick raises the idea of rationality connected to an

> unwillingness to accept collective guilt . . . [which] reflected Germans' inability to understand their own implication in what had happened . . . there is widespread evidence that many German people – often obsessed with their own victimhood – could not even imagine why anyone should think that collective guilt was appropriate.
>
> (Olick 1997: 928)

Crossley points out that 'we have expectations about reasonable and appropriate emotional responses to certain types of situations and we make judgements about the appropriateness and reasonableness of such responses' (in Bendelow and Williams 1997: 19). Judgements about 'appropriateness' are being made on many levels in relation to Dresden – by museum professionals, by civic and religious representatives, by activists, protesters, and populists in civic society, by the police and legal officials from the *Versammlungsbehörde* (Office for Assemblies), and by the media and general public.

One of the factors influencing museum practices and display strategies in Germany is a general distaste for what may be perceived as the 'instrumental' or 'sensational', which can be seen within German cultural policy more widely (Eckersley 2007). This appears to stem from a reaction against the Nazi use of cultural institutions including museums and exhibitions as a key part of their propaganda – an extreme example of instrumentality in cultural policy, but one which has arguably had a lasting impact on the structures of culture as well as on actors and participants within the cultural sector and the general public (ibid.). The two museum examples have already shown how the notion of a need for 'factual' and unemotional presentations of the past is articulated by museum curators and directors, not only – but particularly urgently – in the case of controversial uses of the past, such as in Dresden.

The expectations for a museum exhibition may be very different to those for a commemoration, and certainly the expectations for a protest are very different to both. However, when one protest is framed as being an act of commemoration and the other is framed as a counter-protest, the expectations about what might be considered 'reasonable and appropriate' behaviour and responses for each come into conflict with one another. Layered above that is the frame of what might be considered 'reasonable and appropriate' for a far-right march in Germany, set within the bounds of what is or is not legal within German freedom of expression laws, combined with laws protecting the German democratic constitution. Of course, no matter how apparently 'rational' or 'factual' a form of communication may appear or may be intended to appear, there is almost always an emotional appeal behind communicative praxis (Crossley in Bendelow and Williams 1997: 30). This is evident within the museum staff interviews, where the intent behind their preference for 'factual' display is to

counter extremist views by helping citizens to expand their understanding of the historical realities rather than be swayed by politically motivated discourses:

> Sometimes, themes such as 1945 spark discussions of xenophobia [among visitor groups]. We are used to this, we have to stay very factual, even if something unfair comes up, we stay factual and then it can move forward.
> (Interviewee from City Museum)

As staff member at the MHM points out:

> The impressive, emotional staging will always make a bigger impression, but I think it is very important for historical perspectives to show a rational view on this. We need to use our rational faculties, nowadays it is often too emotionalised and this has a kind of 'erosion effect'. I think we need a good strategy how to bring both together. To present something neutral, technical, and then also something more emotional and explain how they are part of the same. . . . It is always possible to emotionalise people more, but if that is what success is, well I would question that.
> (Interviewee from MHM)

Although the museum staff shy away from overtly emotive or otherwise instrumental means to transmit this message to their visitors, the architectural design of those exhibition spaces does create a change of mood and pace for

Image 10.10 Exterior view of the Military History Museum Dresden showing the 'Libeskind Keil'.

Source: Photo by Susannah Eckersley

visitors to both the City Museum and the MHM. For example, in the MHM the so called '*Libeskind Keil*' – a shard of metal mesh which pierces the outer shell of the MHM building, stabbing into the heart of the internal structure – creates an internal space where the Dresden bombings are addressed separately to the rest of the museums' collections. In the City Museum, a similar effect is achieved – although on a much smaller scale and through less dramatic means – to create a narrow display area situated in between the displays on Nazism and the Holocaust and on the post-war rebuilding and early GDR period.

The exhibition strategies of foregrounding the perpetrator narrative and of contextual juxtapositioning of Dresden's bombing with other cities, evident within both museums, are also utilized at the panorama of Dresden 1945. This is an immersive, panoramic image of Dresden, created by artist Yadegar Asisi and housed in a historic gasometer in a semi-industrial district of Dresden. An artistic display strategy is inevitably different to a city or historical museum's display strategy; however, the Dresden 1945 panorama and exhibition was developed in conjunction with historians from the MHM. The history of panorama displays is also more closely connected to overtly – and often political – instrumental ambitions (Bozoğlu 2019), and therefore runs counter to typical approaches to museum display in Germany.

Here, the use of strongly emotive sensory effects – changing light, colours, and sounds – culminating in the panorama showing a large-scale view of the destroyed city, is in stark contrast to the museums, despite the more nuanced contextual and historical positioning of the small exhibition which precedes the panorama itself. The overtly emotive and affective nature of this sensory experience, and the artistic license used in creating a single image within which time is compressed (it somehow manages to visually represent the city before, during, immediately after, and an indeterminate time after the bombing within its single panoramic image), results in an experience within which an emotional rather than a rational response seems inevitable – as well as intentional. The emotionality of the panorama means that – despite contextualization of the bombing in relation to both the Holocaust and other bombed cities – it aligns much more closely with the strategies employed at the different demonstrations. Firstly, its open appeal to emotions echoes the emotionality of the left-wing protests. Secondly, it reflects the emotive undercurrent to the right-wing commemorations, marches, and demonstrations. This mixing of the 'emotional' with the supposedly 'rational' may seem counter-intuitive, but is in fact what underlies all attempts to separate emotionality and rationality:

> Emotions are seen to be the very antithesis of the detached scientific mind and its quest for 'objectivity', 'truth' and 'wisdom'. Reason rather than emotions is regarded as the 'indispensable faculty' for the acquisition of human knowledge. Such a view neglects the fact that rational methods of

Image 10.11 Dresden City Museum's narrow display area focusing on the Dresden firebombing.

Source: Photo by Susannah Eckersley

Image 10.12 The Panorama Dresden 1945.
Source: Photo by Susannah Eckersley

scientific inquiry, even at their most positivistic, involve the incorporation of values and emotions.

(Williams and Bendelow in Bendelow and Williams 1997: xiii)

The use of an apparently 'rational' and 'unemotional' response to the controversy around Dresden's firebombing can also been seen in the 'memorialization' and protest behaviour of the far-right groups, in stark contrast to that of the left-wing protesters. It appears that the populists and far right are using 'appropriateness' as a political tactic – by adopting the behavioural criteria and values of the centre, they manage to appeal for wider acceptance. Their use of terms such as '*stilles gedenken*' (silent remembrance) is a means to take the 'moral high ground' from the political and activist left wing. The left-wing protests and activist events where phrases like 'Bomber Harris, do it again!' have been repeated in relation to both Dresden's history and contemporary issues with the far right become problematic as an 'inappropriate' response to civic commemoration or individual mourning. The impact of such 'inappropriate' slogans, together with the intentionally disruptive protest behaviour of the left-wing demonstrators, is that the underlying sense of potentially violent emotional behaviour undermines their position as a whole as coming from a desire for peace. The more extreme and emotionally loaded behaviours and statements of some of those protesting against the populists and the far right become associated with all of those on the left, in the same way that the measured, seemingly more 'appropriate' silent

commemoration behaviour of the populists and far right provides them with a cloak of respectability.

Drawing out the uses and strategies of 'appropriateness' highlights striking differences between the uses of emotions (not only in museums, but also in commemoration, protest, and public discourse in different countries) and indicates the significance of the perceived 'rationality' or 'emotionality' of responses to politically charged dark heritage and within the wider cultural and memory context – in Germany and beyond.

Conclusion

While the narrative of victimhood is used to underpin discourses of othering, exclusion, racism, and xenophobia (what Ruth Wodak terms a politics of fear, 2015), the narrative of perpetration supports discourses of peace, inclusion, and welcome – what I am terming a politics of shame and pity.

These two narratives are very evident in the opposing political extremes involved in the demonstrations (as well as commemorations) taking place against the backdrop of 13 February, but also, in a more nuanced way, in the centre ground representations of this history and memory, such as the museums, memorial heritage sites, cultural performances, and public discussion forums. Added to this, the contemporary context of migration, multiculturalism, integration, and exclusion provides a further means by which not only the protesters but also the museums and cultural institutions continue these narratives. We can clearly see a politics and discourse of fear from the far-right and populist movements – presenting themselves as culturally marginalized – and a politics of shame and pity from left-wing 'peace' protesters and the cultural institutions – where both 'ordinary complicity' during Nazism and positivist contemporary multiculturalism are highlighted.

So, while museums in general may feel they are being pulled in the direction of having to create more emotional encounters for visitors, amidst an international 'affective turn' in museum display, others are turning away from the use of emotion in order to gain legitimacy. We saw how right-wing protesters appear to have become aware of the value of presenting themselves as taking a serious role in commemoration in a socially 'appropriate' way, while their left-wing counterparts appear not to realize that their socially 'inappropriate' behaviour could be undermining their message. Either way, the historical facts of the bombing and the contemporary reality of refugees become subordinate to the manner in which the past is being presented to the wider public and to public perceptions of appropriateness and inappropriateness.

Investigating the multi-layered nature of, and multiple perspectives on, the approaches to commemoration and the presentation of the past in Dresden has provided a wealth of material for analysis. This has produced significant insights into the role of emotions and behaviours not only within dark heritage but also in contemporary uses of the past for political purposes. Memory, heritage, and

'past-presencing' combine in all the sites and settings analyzed – from large and small museums to far-right protests and left-wing counter-protests – to highlight the significance of not only the past itself but also of our relationships to it, in the present and for the future.

In identifying the two axes – of appropriation (of the past, of commemorative practice, of public space) and of appropriateness (in emotions, behaviour, discourses, and public history) – this study creates new intersections between disciplinary boundaries, providing a significant new analytical framework for understanding the changing nature of public, professional, and political responses to and manipulations of heritage, memory, and commemoration. The example of Dresden and the multiple case studies within it indicate how a 'shared' past, memory, and heritage may be used in diverging ways (and for divergent purposes) by different actors. This has particular relevance to Germany, given the long-standing societal process of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*, yet the two axes can also be used to analyze both historical and contemporary social, cultural, and political phenomena elsewhere, allowing researchers to identify the strategies being adopted by other actors to push their own political agendas and to reach wider audiences. In a time characterized as being both part of a 'memory boom' and a 'post-truth' era, it may be more important than ever to develop and apply such tools in order to analyze, understand, and respond to the appropriation of political, social, and cultural history for contemporary political purposes.

Acknowledgement

Notes

1 Interviews conducted by Susannah Eckersley with one staff member at Military History Museum, Dresden, on 8 February 2018, one staff member of Dresden City Museum on 13 February 2018, and one staff member of Saxon State Ministry for Culture on 9 February 2018. Survey interviews conducted by CoHERE project researcher with supporters of AfD in Dresden in 2017.
2 Many of these are listed on http://13februar.dresden.de/de/veranstaltungen.php.
3 Around 100,000 people were massacred by the Nazis at Babi Yar, near Kiev.
4 This information was gathered through direct participant observation – I observed the protests from the side of the Altmarkt where the left-wing counter-demonstration was located and as a result was kettled with this group until late in the evening. My colleague, Ian McDonald, who was making a film of the events for the CoHERE project, crossed from the left-wing protest area to the right-wing protest area when the sit-in protest began and remained with the right-wing demonstrators until the protests dispersed. Prior to this we had been working alongside one another to observe and record the variety of events of 13 February commemoration and protest, and we met up again later that evening after the two protests had mainly dispersed to compare notes on events from our different standpoints. The reporting of the two protests and the course of events

surrounding them in the official print media as well as on Twitter by the police and press included a number of factual errors – the length of time left-wing protesters were kettled, for example – in comparison to my own recording of events. Ian McDonald's film of the protest events is available online at https://vimeo.com/303706985.

5 Both demonstrations were carefully observed by experts from the *Versammlungsbehörde* (Office for Assembly), who did step in to ensure that actions and statements being made publicly did not run counter to German laws on freedom of assembly, freedom of speech, and Holocaust denial. A record of police interventions on 13 February was provided by the Saxon Interior Ministry in response to a question from a member of that parliament: https://kleineanfragen.de/sachsen/6/12481-strafermittlungen-anlaesslich-der-versam-mlungen-rund-um-den-13-februar-2018-in-dresden.

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