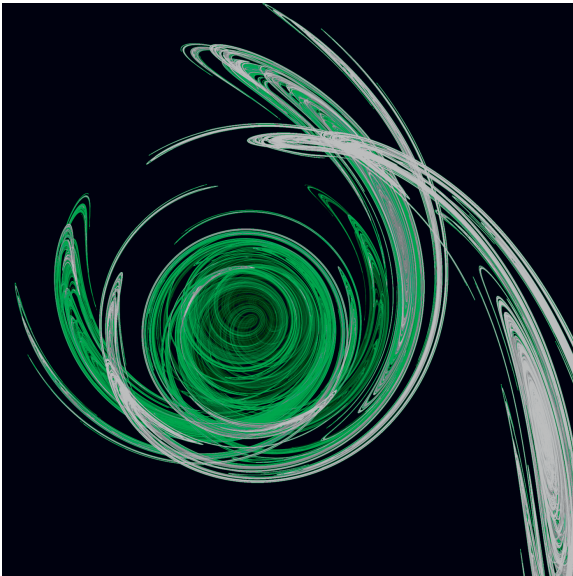


Anna Wolff-Powęska

# Memory as Burden and Liberation

Germans and their Nazi Past (1945-2010)



PETER LANG  
EDITION

Anna Wolff-Powęska

## Memory as Burden and Liberation

This book examines both the obvious and less obvious ways in which Germans struggle with their Nazi past. It embraces only a small part of a complex problem, which is impossible for an individual author to grasp in its entirety and character. The main intention, which leads through a thick of actors, issues, institutions, events and phenomena, is a reflection upon the reasons for which German reckoning with the past turned out to be a process full of contradictions; a bumpy road rippled with political, intellectual and moral mines. This intention is accompanied by the question about the specific character of German collective memory in relation to the helplessness and moral

condition of a person defending himself/herself and his/her nation in the face of unimaginable evil.

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## Memory as Burden and Liberation

**GESCHICHTE - ERINNERUNG - POLITIK**  
**POSENER STUDIEN ZUR GESCHICHTS-, KULTUR-  
UND POLITIKWISSENSCHAFT**

Herausgegeben von Anna Wolff-Powęska und Piotr Forecki

**BAND 10**

Anna Wolff-Powęska

# Memory as Burden and Liberation

Germans and their Nazi Past (1945-2010)

Translated by Marta Skowrońska

**Bibliographic Information published by the Deutsche Nationalbibliothek**  
The Deutsche Nationalbibliothek lists this publication in the Deutsche Nationalbibliografie; detailed bibliographic data is available in the internet at <http://dnb.d-nb.de>.

**Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data**

Wolff-Powęska, Anna.

[Pamięc-brzemie i uwolnienie. English]

Memory as burden and liberation : Germans and their Nazi past (1945-2010) / Anna Wolff-Powęska ; translated by Marta Skowrońska.

pages cm. – (Geschichte-Erinnerung-Politik, ISSN 2191-3528 ; Band 10)

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 978-3-631-64051-7 – ISBN 978-3-653-02443-2 (e-book) 1. Collective memory–Germany. 2. Memory–Social aspects–Germany. 3. Historiography–Social aspects–Germany. 4. National socialism–Social aspects. 5. National socialism–Psychological aspects. 6. Holocaust, Jewish (1939-1945)–Social aspects–Germany. 7. Germany–History–1945-1990. 8. Germany–History–1990–9. Germany–Social conditions. I. Title.

DD257.2.W6513 2015

943.086–dc23

2014043361

The Publication is funded by Ministry of Science and Higher Education of the Republic of Poland as a part of the National Program for the Development of the Humanities. This publication reflects the views only of the authors, and the Ministry can not be held responsible for any use which may be made of the information contained therein.



NARODOWY PROGRAM  
ROZWOJU HUMANISTYKI

Cover illustration courtesy of Benjamin Ben Chaim.

ISSN 2191-3528

ISBN 978-3-631-64051-7 (Print)

E-ISBN 978-3-653-02443-2 (E-Book)

DOI 10.3726/ 978-3-653-02443-2

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Peter Lang Edition is an Imprint of Peter Lang GmbH.

Peter Lang – Frankfurt am Main · Bern · Bruxelles · New York ·  
Oxford · Warszawa · Wien



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This publication has been peer reviewed.

[www.peterlang.com](http://www.peterlang.com)

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# Introduction

National Socialism was the ideological foundation of Hitlerite Germany for twelve years. For the last sixty-five years, Germans have been struggling with its memory. This long period of stumbling through the past, acquiring and rejecting the images of the most dramatic modern history – both for Germans and the rest of Europe – is sometimes called “a second history of Nazism”. Social sciences use Pierre Nora’s term, “history of the second degree”, to refer to the history of memory, of collective representations, their evolution and role in the process of shaping identity.<sup>1</sup>

German memory is a subject of interest for many academic disciplines, as well as art, media and politics. For the first time in history, a nation publicly dealt with its own past in front of our eyes. We observe a particular experiment: generations of Germans participate in a process that is full of contradictions, and they have to confront both themselves and the outside world. The factors that affect this process are, for example, changes in internal political conditions and in international surroundings, as well as generational changes.

The uniqueness of this phenomenon and the fascination in the subject that is sweeping through academic circles and the media can be explained by the fact that, despite numerous wars and barbarisms in the history of humankind, there is no commonly accepted standard, as the one in Sèvres, that would determine how a community, in whose name murders and violence were committed, should cope with the wrong that was done, what it should remember and for how long, and what the accepted forms of externalising memory are. The expectation that the departure from National Socialism would be a path that follows religious patterns – confession, penance, absolution and reconciliation – turned out to be an idealistic utopia. What should the narrative and debate on the murderous character of the Nazi system be? How can one be a German and a German patriot after Auschwitz? How can one confess a guilt that can stigmatise? How can a democracy be built on the ruins of dictatorship, in a society that is not convinced that democracy is the solution?

In 1945, Germans and their political leaders faced numerous challenges, the character and size of which had been impossible to anticipate. Their long record

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1 Popularisation of the term in Polish academic literature was aided by an international programme of the Centre for Historical Research of the Polish Academy of Sciences in Berlin, entitled *Polish-German Realms of Memory*, initiated by Prof. Dr. Hab. Hans-Henning Hahn and Prof. Dr. Hab. Robert Traba.

of running away from and returning to history has been rippled with disputes that are impossible to define equivocally. This process of evolution of the culture and policy of German memory is not over. It is marked by both subjective and objective contradictions that have been part of it from the beginning.

- Even the preliminary stage of semantic interpretation of the basic categories related to reckoning with the past caused fierce disputes. The terms ‘perpetrator’, ‘victim’, ‘guilt’, ‘punishment’, ‘denazification’, ‘zero hour’, ‘overcoming the past’, ‘defeat’ and ‘liberation’ all polarised public opinion. None of these terms were satisfactory, a common denominator was found for none of them and the division lines of German public opinion were not based on an unequivocal criterion.
- There was a gap between suppressed, repressed or unaware remorse and German society’s sense of responsibility and the expectations of individual, group, national or state victims of the politics of the Third Reich. The perpetrators wanted to forget the old and build the new; the victims desired punishment for the perpetrators and commemoration of their suffering and losses. The feelings of victims and perpetrators are incompatible. The Hitlerite Third Reich fell in 1945 but a nation remained that had to face a justified accusation of carrying out a genocide on a scale never seen before.
- Those who were expected to honour and mourn the victims remained helpless. Hitherto, mourning practices defined grief as sorrow for one’s own loss, for those who died in war. Death for one’s country usually gave meaning to national identity. Modern history had not yet known a case of mourning for victims from other countries and nations by the nation in the name of which the crime was committed. How to go into mourning after losing common values? How to lament those who had been excluded from the German community long before and were seen as *Untermenschen*? How to commemorate the death of millions? Are Germans allowed to lament their own losses and victims? Historical experience of dealing with mourning shows that it can be easily used to manipulate, to mobilise crowds and to arouse conflicting feelings.
- The memory of the criminal nature and politics of National Socialism is distinguished by permanent asymmetry between the official, ritual policy of the past of the German state and individual reflection, between political correctness, moral command and an individual need to forget. This dualism has been a source of tension and conflicts.
- Debates on the past both in German states and in the united Germany have demonstrated that individuals do not seek justification for the dictatorship but for their own life. Strategies of releasing witnesses and minor players of the Third Reich from the charge of compliance in the Nazi system resulted from a need to get rid of the stigma of false people living in false times.

- Both in Germany and abroad, the issue of the price that had to be paid to build a new country is still controversial. Contradiction lay at the very foundation of building democratic structures in post-war West Germany. Some German intellectuals found collective silence after 1945 to be an element of an efficient political strategy, a necessary factor in the emergence of German democracy.
- Collective memory is one of the major factors that legitimises the political system of a country, and is a crucial element of identity. Post-war German democracy needed a positive identity to integrate around democratic values. However, what past should it refer to if the history of the previous twelve years included genocide and an exhausting war? In the first years after the war, negative memory conflicted with the process of creating a positive image of the new country. Against the expectations of idealists, it was not spiritual renewal or moral self-examination of Germans that constituted a *sine qua non* condition to build foundations of a democratic state, but, on the contrary, it was the state, its institutions and citizen values that formed a basis for inner freedom, and allowed Germans to face and accept history.
- The question, asked by many intellectuals, as to how to rebuild the spiritual substance of Germans was marked by ambivalence in spirit and in politics from the beginning. The writer Günter Kunert, struggling with his image of Germany, expressed it emphatically: “The word ‘Germans’ hardly passes through my mouth. It leaves an unpleasant taste on my palate. This term is like some kind of vessel, brimful of old and new contradictions. The inextricably linked – Heinrich Heine and Heinrich Himmler, Weimar and Buchenwald, masterpieces of art and death as a master – from Germany. A variety of artists and even more experts in memory tricks.”<sup>2</sup>
- The exceptionality of Nazi crimes does not correspond with exceptionality of memory. Collective memory is characterised by the minimum amount of content and the maximum amount of symbols. Germans could not rise like a phoenix from the ashes and suddenly become citizens aware of their responsibility for political consequences of the criminal politics of the Third Reich. Reckoning with one’s own involvement in the Nazi system requires, first of all, knowledge and understanding of the origin, process and consequences of the racist system. This demands temporal distance, generational change, a new language of education and new awareness. The difficulty of bearing the burden of responsibility in a democratic state results from the necessity for deep reflection: the compass of law should not get lost in the process

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2 G. Kunert, *Notgemeinschaft (Dezember 1988)*, in: F. Barthélemy, L. Winckler (Ed.), *Mein Deutschland findet sich in keinem Atlas. Schriftsteller aus beiden deutschen Staaten über ihr nationales Selbstverständnis*, Frankfurt a. M. 1990, p. 33.

of overcoming a state of lawlessness and democratisation of anti-democratic structures should not deprive society of respect for democracy.

- The external world expects harmonisation, unequivocalness and uniformity of the image of the memory of the period 1933-1945, which influenced the fate of Europe and the world. In democracy, however, memory is heterogeneous. The culture of collective memory in a democratic state is a culture of dispute. Germans themselves are not sure whether they are acrobats or masters of historical reckoning with the past.
- As archival resources and primary source documentation were gradually made available, the quantitative and qualitative increase in academic and memoir literature contributed to the permanent revival and pluralisation of memory. The Holocaust research exhausted the hitherto prevailing formula of debate on perpetration. It turned out in the 1990s that a dichotomy of evaluation and interpretation of crime according to schematic division into intentionalists and structuralists does not correspond with the research results of many academic disciplines or with the broad interests of literature, art, and media.<sup>3</sup>
- Along with the development of research, the complexity of motivations for the perpetrators' activity within the system of National Socialism is constantly revealing. There is no single, complete interpretation model. Memory of the Nazi crimes must absorb new knowledge of the history of the crimes, including overlapping research interests and aspects and contexts of different areas of life in the Third Reich and the occupied countries.

On the threshold of the 21st century, 95% of German society consisted of people who were either born after 1945 or were under the age of twenty during the war. Thus, present and future historical discourse of Germans will be only a reconstructed memory of the times of the Holocaust. The agenda of public debate will include themes and questions raised by a generation that will look for a different form and language to commemorate the past. Geography of memory is changing. Immigrant members of the multicultural society that is emerging in Germany do not have to identify with the negative part of German history. Will this new community be a good carrier and guardian of memory? Universalisation and globalisation of memory is inevitable; collective memory is permanently transformed.

The competition between communities of memory is constantly joined by new actors. First, Central and Eastern European countries, which, liberated from the corset of Cold War confrontation, demanded honour for their history, full of tragedy and humility. Ethnic groups, minorities and nations that had not so far had

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3 More on the subject, see: P. Longerich, *Tendenzen und Perspektiven der Täterforschung; Aus Politik und Zeitgeschichte* 14-15, 2007, pp. 3-7; H. Mommsen, *Forschungskontroversen zum Nationalsozialismus; Aus Politik und Zeitgeschichte* 14-15, 2007, pp. 14-21.

the opportunity to be noticed by the world's public opinion, made their voice heard. Communities that lost their countrymen in mass murders and rapes during the 20th century, symbolised by e.g. Srebrenica and Rwanda, do not want to be 'second category' victims. Development of new techniques of human communication enriches the culture of memory by providing new forms of commemoration. However, it also brings new sources of conflict as we live in times when measures of memory and forgetting undergo a thorough revision.

German struggles with memory, that is, collective recognition of the essence and efficiency of National Socialism and its mechanisms of seducing the masses, is a process in which what mostly matters is its influence on the present. Collective memory has a great political potential. Therefore, the quality of German citizens' dialogue with the past is to a great extent determined by the quality of governance and the political class. Although intellectual and political reflection is rarely accompanied by the question whether – and how – a person can consciously and rationally draw conclusions from the past, Germans after 1945 had to face the question of who is ready to take responsibility for the traumatic heritage of Nazism, and how.

The book that the Reader now holds in his or her hands is an attempt to examine both the obvious and less obvious ways in which Germans struggle with their Nazi past. It embraces only a small part of a complex problem, which is impossible for an individual author to grasp in its entirety and character. The main intention, which leads through a thick of actors, issues, institutions, events and phenomena, is a reflection upon the reasons for which German reckoning with the past turned out to be a process full of contradictions; a bumpy road rippled with political, intellectual and moral mines. This intention is accompanied by the question about the specific character of German collective memory in relation to the helplessness and moral condition of a person defending himself/herself and his/her nation in the face of unimaginable evil.

These intentions determined the structure of the book. It includes an introductory part, which aims to clarify terminology and theoretical and definitional grounds on which the reflection on the collective memory has been based. Then the book leads the Reader chronologically through the period of occupation zones (1945-1949), divided memory in two German states (1949-1989) and the reunified Germany since 1990. In justified cases, the content of the book extends beyond the planned time borders. The last part is devoted to rituals of memory, mainly the celebrations of memory. What is their content, their choreography, whom do they serve and what function do they have? Commemorations of three anniversaries are the examples. Their choice has been dictated by the conviction that each of them commemorates an event that significantly influenced the identity and political culture of Germans. The memory of 8 May 1945 demonstrates the ambivalence of

liberation and loss, which is still present in German consciousness. The memory of the Night of Broken Glass on 9 November 1938 consists of emotions and the necessity of coping with the greatest trauma – the Holocaust. The decision to choose the anniversary of 1 September 1939 resulted partly from a question that has been troubling me: why a nation that was the first victim of World War II was seen as the last and barely registered in memory.

The book does not end with any conclusions, as the subject of this work has no end. The dialogue with the past, not only the German one, remains open. Each generation introduces new problems and doubts into the dialogue, looks for their own ways of conciliation with the past. It is future generations who, with their maturity and courage, will determine whether the memory of National Socialism will remain a burden or will become liberation.

# Chapter 1

## Mnemosyne – Mother of the Muses

Mnemosyne, the goddess of memory (from *mnēmē*; Greek for memory) occupied a special place in ancient mythology. The daughter of Uranus – the father of the Titans and the Cyclops, personification the sky – and Gaia, the great mother of all, gave birth to nine Muses by Zeus. For ancient Greeks, the sky represented constancy while the Earth represented change. Thus, the mythological inspiration lets us interpret the meaning of memory, which includes elements of what is constant and what is changing. At least since the times of Homer, there used to be a custom of referring to a Muse at the beginning of every work. The goddess of memory, as the mother of Muses who were honoured to feast with gods at Mount Olympus and who were patrons of various fields of art and science, symbolises the source and fundament of what is most important in life. Allegoric Memory as “the mother of all knowledge and thinking”, born from “the nuptials of Heaven and Earth” was expected to remind successive generations that she was the beginning of all human skills and actions.<sup>4</sup>

Cesare Ripa, the author of *Iconologia*, generously referred to the tradition and aesthetic imagination of antiquity according to the rules of Baroque. His Memory is presented as a two-faced woman, as it embraces “all things past, and through the rule of prudence, all things which will happen in the future”.<sup>5</sup> In the world of iconographic poetics, where the spirit of a phenomenon was expressed through symbol and allegory, History was presented as “a Woman, resembling an Angel, with great Wings, looking behind her”, writing on a table, on the back of *Saturn*. The Wings “denote her publishing all Events, with great *Expedition*”; her looking back, “that she labours for *Posterity*” and “her white Robes: *Truth* and *Sincerity*: *Saturn* by her side, denotes *Time* and *Spirit* of the Actions.”<sup>6</sup>

Learning is personified by “a mature Lady, fitting with her Arms open, as if she would embrace another. A Scepter in one hand, on which is a Sun. A Book open on her Lap; and from the serene Sky falls abundance of Dew. The age shows

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4 K.P. Moritz, *Götterlehre oder Mythologische Dichtungen der Alten* (1795), Berlin, München, Wien 1967, p. 53.

5 C. Ripa, *Iconologia*, Padua, 1611, title page.

6 C. Ripa, *Iconologia*, London, 1709, p. 38.

that learning is not acquir'd but by *long Study*; the open Book, and the extended Arms, that learning is very *communicative*; the Scepter and Sun the *Dominion* it has over the *Darkness of Ignorance*; the Dew, that learning makes tender Youth *fruitful*.”<sup>7</sup>

Although memory has been a common subject of interest since ancient times, it is a relatively new phenomenon as a scientific category and an element of historical discourse. Its origin dates back to the 20<sup>th</sup> century. In the last century, philosophers’, writers’ and artists’ interests focused on the art of remembering and its forms: *ars memoriae*, and the role of paintings and works created in the process of memory and oblivion. The art and the theories and models of memory show how humans created a kind of thesaurus that gathered treasures of the preserved fragments of the past. The architecture of memory, which embraces what museums and archives gathered as objects of aesthetic sensitivity, corresponds with what historical and social sciences refer to as social or collective memory. The accumulated energy of individual and national suffering, expressed in works of art, corresponds with the philosophical reflection formulated by Friedrich Nietzsche: “only that which hurts incessantly is remembered.”<sup>8</sup> Not incidentally, some scholars called history a science of human suffering. The ribbon of memory is marked by dark colours of life. Canons of human awareness are determined by blood, martyrdom and sacrifice.

Since the memory of posterity focused on human suffering and misfortunes, the task of historiography was to emphasise the glory and greatness of rulers. Herodotus, considered to be the father of history, was driven by the common human instinct in his aspiration to preserve from decay “the remembrance of what men have done, and of preventing the great and wonderful actions of the Greeks and the barbarians of losing their due meed of glory”. According to the ancient thinkers, a historian had an important mission to complete – the creation of soul. However, it was ancient Israel that gave decisive meaning to history: not in terms of philosophical reflection but exceptional faith. Only in Israel is “the injunction to remember [*Zakhor*] felt as religious imperative to an entire people”.<sup>9</sup>

The fact that memory lies at the source of history as quite systematic knowledge of empirical past makes the interdependence of both categories an entanglement of fascinating and diversified speculations, interpretations and theories. History balances between what is proven and what is presumed, between verified knowledge and the imagination of a witness, between certainty and doubt. The English medievalist John Arnold expressed an important truth in his reflection on the functions of the history

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7 Ibidem, p. 26.

8 F. Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals: A Polemic. By way of clarification and supplement to my last book Beyond Good and Evil*, Oxford University Press, 1997, p. 42

9 See: Y.H. Yerushalmi, *Zakhor: Jewish History and Jewish Memory*, University of Washington Press, 1996, p. 9.



and memory, noting that “history is to society what memory is to the individual”.<sup>10</sup> Dobrochna Ratajczakowa, who analyses the relationship between historiography and various branches of literature and art since ancient Greece, emphasises how much the historical truth has, to a varying degree, consisted of different truths of artistic imagination.<sup>11</sup> The objectivity of a historian has always included the subjectivity of creators: artists, orators, and poets.

The author reminds that late Antiquity and early Middle Ages considered five signs of the Greek alphabet as mystical letters. The first and the last were interpreted as a symbol of history going from the beginning to the end and from the end to the beginning. Thus, there was comprehension that contemporary times determined the final shape of the past that was described. Due to the process of merging historiography with other disciplines of science and art, these disciplines could be harnessed to the chariot of history as important auxiliary sciences of history. They demonstrated varied cultural experiences of different generations. The poetics of memory, the relationship between history, literature and theatre paved the way for the later interdisciplinary approach and the tendency to combine different scientific and cultural perspectives.

## 1. Dialectics of memory and forgetting

Following the growing interest in historical reflection and memory that has been observable since the 1970s among professional scholars as well as in public opinion, one can come to conclusion that the question “what happened?” attracts less attention than the question “how to read history?”.

Alongside the history that is happening, the history that is remembered is gaining importance. The meaning of this kind of history was emphasised by Pierre Nora, who noted that it is “less interested in actions remembered or even commemorated than in the traces left by those actions and in the interactions of those commemorations; less interested in events themselves than their meaning; less interested in ‘what actually happened’ than its perpetual reuse and misuse, its influence on successive presents; less interested in tradition than in the way traditions are constituted and passed on.”<sup>12</sup> The career of memory, second-hand

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10 J. Arnold, *History: A Very Short Introduction*, Oxford University Press, 2000, p. 33.

11 D. Ratajczakowa, *Grecki dar*, in: K. Meller, K. Trybuś (ed.), *O historyczności*, Poznańskie Studia Polonistyczne, Poznań 2006, p. 23-40.

12 P. Nora, *General Introduction: Between Memory and History*, in: Pierre Nora (ed.), *Rethinking the French Past: Realms of Memory*, New York: Columbia University Press 1996, p. XXIV, after: K. Kończal, *Polsko-niemieckie miejsca pamięci, czyli o nowym spojrzeniu na historię sąsiedztwa*, *Kultura współczesna*, issue 1, 2010, p. 61.

history and its numerous prostheses directs our attention to classics. The reflection on memory dates back to Plato, whose notion of “anamnesis” was the starting point for a philosophical and historical debate.<sup>13</sup> Since the Enlightenment, the belief that history is memory has been gradually weakening. Source criticism of historians resulted in treating history as opposed to memory: the latter could be misleading due to subjectivisation of individuals and social groups. Jan Assmann, the Egyptologist and religious studies scholar, identified three fathers of the analysis of collective memory: Friedrich Nietzsche, Aby Warburg and Maurice Halbwachs.

Observations by the German philosopher date back to 1874, when he noticed that it was possible to exist almost without memories – and live happily, like animals. However, it is impossible to live without forgetting. Nietzsche stated that “the unhistorical and the historical are equally necessary for the health of an individual, a people and a culture”.<sup>14</sup> The author of *Untimely Meditations* decided that overdosing memory could lead to losing identity instead of strengthening it: “Imagine the extremest possible example of a man who did not possess the power of forgetting at all and who was thus condemned to see everywhere a state of becoming: such a man would no longer believe in his own being, would no longer believe in himself, would see everything flowing asunder in moving points and would lose himself in this stream of becoming.”<sup>15</sup> Nietzsche demonstrated in his works that forgetting can sometimes be a chance for a good life as the memory of the past sometimes paralyses.

The notion of the “community of memory”, introduced by Aby Warburg in the 1920s, covers the cultural circle of images and gestures of the East and West. Basing on the analysis of images, Warburg decided that people use rational and mythical interpretations in order to defend themselves against irrational fears.<sup>16</sup> Maurice Halbwachs, Émile Durkheim’s student who co-created *Annales*

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13 See also: C. von Bormann, *Erinnerung*, in: J. Ritter (ed.), *Historisches Wörterbuch der Philosophie*, vol. 2, Basel 1972, pp. 635-644; R. Herzog, *Zur Genealogie der Memoria*, in: A. Haverkamp, R. Lachmann (eds.), *Memoria. Vergessen und Erinnern*, München 1993, pp. 3-8; C. Cornelißen, *Was heißt Erinnerungskultur? Begriff – Methoden – Perspektiven, Geschichte in Wissenschaft und Unterricht*, issue 10, 2003, pp. 548-563.

14 F. Nietzsche, *Vom Nutzen und Nachteil der Historie für das Leben* (1874), *Gesammelte Werke*, vol. 6: *Philosophenbuch, Unzeitgemäße Betrachtungen. Erstes und Zweites Stück*, 1872-1875, München 1922, p. 234, 236; F. Nietzsche, *On the Use and Abuse of History for Life* (1873). trans. Ian Johnston. Accessed online: [athttp://www.mala.bc.ca/~johnstoi/Nietzsche/history.htm](http://www.mala.bc.ca/~johnstoi/Nietzsche/history.htm).

15 F. Nietzsche, *Untimely Meditations*, Cambridge University Press, 2003, p. 62.

16 A. Warburg, *Der Bilderatlas Mnemosyne*, ed. M. Warnke, Berlin 2000. See also: R. Kany, *Mnemosyne als Programm. Geschichte, Erinnerung und die Andacht zum Unbedeutenden im Werk von Usener, Warburg und Benjamin*, Tübingen 1987.

*d'Histoire Economique et Sociale* together with Marc Bloch and Luciene Febvre, carried out the first analysis and development of what interests us the most: social frameworks of memory<sup>17</sup>. Although the term “collective memory” was first used by the Austrian poet Hugo von Hofmannsthal in 1902, it did not become common until the 1920s, thanks to the French scholar. Individual memories are evoked through the prism of social present when the memory of others protects us from forgiveness. Halbwachs’ main thesis is that individuals remember their own past but in conditions that they have not chosen themselves.<sup>18</sup> Collective memory is a set of memories that a society of any epoch can reconstruct within current conditions. Halbwachs distinguished between collective and historical memory. Collective memory guarantees integrity and uniqueness of a group while historical memory does not provide identification. Historical sciences are expected to care about objectivity, search for details, and discover contradictions, while collective memory has a tendency to retouch and modify history according to social expectations. The author’s analyses enrich the knowledge of the role of memory in our image of the present; they help understand how our perception of the past determines our perception of the present moment. Individual remembering is determined by social memory; one cannot liberate oneself from the pressure of the present and, at the same time, he or she is a co-creator of both the present reality and the past he or she reconstructs.<sup>19</sup>

Society has become Halbwachs’ observation field. In the process of remembering, an individual needs reference points from society: instruments in the form of words and images shaped by the social environment. Communities do not have memories but they shape the memory of their members. Memories, including individual ones, emerge through communication and interactions within social groups. Human experiences are mediated by social frameworks of meaning. Seeing that there is collective remembering, there must also be collective forgetting. Oblivion is also established within specific social frameworks. Halbwachs claims that forgotten elements are what bring mental discomfort, separate environments and families, or what conflicts with the interests of a group or society. Society “tends to erase from its memory all that might separate individuals, or that might distance groups from each other. It is also why society, in each period, rearranges its recollections in such a way as to adjust them to variable conditions of its equilibrium.”<sup>20</sup>

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17 M. Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory*, University of Chicago Press, 1992.

18 Halbwachs worked for over 15 years on his work *La mémoire collective* [*The Collective Memory*], published posthumously in 1950 r.

19 M. Halbwachs, *Das kollektive Gedächtnis*, ed. H. Maus, Frankfurt a. M. 1991.

20 M. Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory*, University of Chicago Press, 1992, p. 183

Before French scholars described and defined the phenomena and processes of creating “communities of memory”, the Polish scholar Stefan Czarnowski had carried out pioneering works on the methodology of societies’ development. Already in 1919, drawing from historical and sociological studies, Czarnowski elaborated on a study in French on Saint Patrick. Czarnowski, who, like Maurice Halbwachs, was a student of Émile Durkheim, dealt with the cult of the Irish national hero to finally demonstrate that social facts are based on collective consciousness.<sup>21</sup> Contemporary studies on collective (social) memory have a lot to contribute to Czarnowski’s astute interpretations. The term “past in the present” that he introduced was undoubtedly an anticipation of today’s categories related to social functions and determinants of memory.

The French school has made an invaluable contribution to collective memory studies. Between 1984 and 1992, Pierre Nora published seven volumes of his work, covering the whole spectrum of the French culture of memory. For his project *Realms of Memory* (Les Lieux de mémoire), Nora managed to gather the most reputable historians of the Paris Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales. For the author, the terms ‘history’ and ‘memory’ are far from being synonymous; on the contrary, he finds them to be in fundamental opposition. Memory is life born by living societies in its name. It remains in permanent evolution, open to the dialectic of remembering and forgetting, vulnerable to manipulations and appropriation.

Julia Hartwig, in her poem *Beautiful Sisters* (1976/2008), included the essence of what Nora finds in the polyphony of memory:

No memory is not alone  
 it has many sisters who are unlike each other  
 all hard working never resting  
 Their order must be respected  
 the oldest always continue to grow  
 while the youngest die before gaining strength and body  
 bringing successors to life  
 For nature doesn’t rule the family of memory  
 it isn’t an image even a reflection of an image  
 but a separate formation a presence apart  
 in the end we remember only the beginning  
 distant greenery before banishment from Eden<sup>22</sup>

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21 See: S. Czarnowski, *Kult bohaterów i jego społeczne podłoże. Święty Patryk bohater narodowy Irlandii*, translated by A. Gliniczanka, in: *Dziela*, Warszawa 1956, vol. 4.

22 J. Hartwig, *In Praise of the Unfinished: Selected Poems*, Alfred Knopf, New York, 2008, p. 89.

Memory and oblivion are integral elements of culture. However, while the imperative of memory is omnipresent, the order to forget does not focus too much public or academic attention.<sup>23</sup> In democracy, when memory is being privatised, there is an increasing number of actors whose interests in memory and oblivion are often in conflict. Collective forgetting is usually referred to through the back door. Franklin R. Ankersmit distinguished a few types of forgetting. We mechanically forget what is devoid of any relevance to our everyday life and what we almost do not perceive. What is traumatic and painful for a community, however, is forgotten on purpose, withheld from conscious memory. The unconscious memory is a constant reminder that there is something we should or wish to forget.<sup>24</sup> There are elements of the past that naturally, with time, cease to be a subject of public and scholastic interest (e.g. the Kościuszko Uprising or the Revolution of 1905). In case of the Holocaust, both the victims and the perpetrators, a paradox of remembering in forgetting can be observed. The Jewish community after the Holocaust, or rather the memory of it, is spoken of as if it was a sum of scars on the collective souls that one wished to forget at first impulse.

A particular type of forgetting concerns a situation of a fundamental turning point, when a nation/ a society approaches a new, different world and wishes to get rid of the old uniform of identity. Such was the case for Germany after 1945 and Poland and other post-communist states after 1989. However, can one fully agree with Ankersmit in his belief that civilizations sometimes commit suicide, a self-annihilation of memory, destroying previous identities to acquire new ones? Is it possible and real to fully and efficiently separate a new reality from the old one? Don't old elements of identity and memory come back in other forms and at another time?

Various scholars and artists have devoted a lot of time to the methods of preserving memory. Many questions still remain unanswered. If memory means identity, does disowning memories of a difficult past mean identity loss? In other words, does memory strengthen our existence, as a basis of identity, and does forgetting mean loss, meaninglessness? Doesn't the excess of the institutionalised forms of memory aimed at conserving and defending it reduce the individual reflection on the past? Many artists call for moderation in the commemoration of the past. Umberto Eco responds to times of increased commemoration of the past by calling for a revival of the art of forgetting. He points at the fact that contemporary civilisation systematically extends the possibilities to remember the knowledge of the past but it has not created a system that would filter it.

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23 See: M. Schneider, *Liturgien der Erinnerung, Techniken des Vergessens*, Merkur 41, 1987, pp. 676-686.

24 F.R. Ankersmit, *The Sublime Dissociation from the Past: or How to (Be)Come What One is No Longer*, "History and Theory", vol. 40, issue 3, pp. 299-300.

Memory, Joseph Brodsky noted, is an “ally of oblivion”. Hans-Georg Gadamer wrote: “forgetting is not merely an absence or a lack but, as Nietzsche in particular pointed out, a condition of the life of mind”.<sup>25</sup> He noted: “Only by forgetting does the mind have the possibility of total renewal, the capacity to see everything with fresh eyes, so that what is long familiar fuses with the new into a many leveled unity”.<sup>26</sup>

Forgetting can be a gift and a grace. In her reflection on human nature, Barbara Skarga repeatedly stated that forgetting is an inseparable human feature. “Memory (...) can be a burden for the self. It makes the self uneasy, bringing events and experiences the self would prefer to forget. If the whole past disappeared, ‘I’ would be free in many respects. (...) Forgetting provides balance as it denies and hides whatever disturbed the possibility to create oneself. (...) It seems it is due to forgetting, due to its benevolent hand, ‘I’ can again want to be its unique itself”.<sup>27</sup> The victims of Hitlerite genocide and Stalin’s terror sought relief in forgetting. Varlam Shalamov, a Gulag prisoner and the author of *Kolyma Tales*, wrote: “A man sends a Kolyma branch by airmail; he wants people to be reminded. Reminded not about him, but those million murdered, tortured prisoners, buried in brotherly graves, in the north of Magadan. To help others remember, to ease this heavy burden; when one has seen something like this, he needs bravery not to tell, not to remember.”<sup>28</sup> Memory and forgetting are two companions, inseparable sides of a coin.

Inquisitive humanities scholars lament the relinquishing of the subject of oblivion in research. Dictatorship of memory dominated the contemporary culture. In December 1993, at an international conference aimed at presenting the status of forgetting, often understood as ‘memory loss’, from historical, psychoanalytical, philosophical and cultural perspectives, Gary Smith noted the importance of the question of how to distinguish forgetting from withdrawal, passing over in silence or loss. Smith decided that the problem of forgetting needed rehabilitation. He did not mean affirmative rehabilitation of forgetting but rather a presentation of the interaction of memory and forgetting, the theoretical and cultural interrelations of the two categories. The work on forgetting requires renewed confrontation with “the category that today seems monolithic and abstract.”<sup>29</sup> In contrast to memory and remembering, there is no command to forget or a strategy for forgetting. However, as Smith argues, the ability to forget is a necessary element not only of our cultural practices but also social and academic institutions.

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25 H.G. Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, Continuum, New York, 2004, p. 14.

26 Ibidem.

27 B. Skarga, *Tożsamość i różnica. Eseje metafizyczne*, Kraków 1997, p. 218, 224.

28 V. Shalamov, *Prokurator Judei i inne utwory*, Warszawa 1991, p. 308, 309.

29 G. Smith, *Arbeit am Vergessen*, in: G. Smith, H.M. Emrich (eds.), *Vom Nutzen des Vergessens*, Berlin 1996, p. 16.

Professor Gabriel Motzkin, representing the Hebrew University of Jerusalem at the abovementioned conference, repeated the elementary truth that there are different kinds of forgetting in everyday life, culture and politics. Forgetting may pose a threat but so may obsessive memory. The two dangers differ. Forgetting is more than simply absence. The fact that we experience both memory and forgetting has simultaneously a constitutive and inhibitory function.<sup>30</sup>

Memory serves its various functions also through common forgetting. Histories of individuals and nations confirm the truth that what is forgotten is what disrupts the self-esteem of a community. Paul Ricoeur distinguishes between passive and active forgetting. The former means the process of avoiding (not always realised) knowledge that casts a shadow on an individual and his environment/milieu. The latter is an intentional, selective choice of information aimed at the elimination and forgetting of facts that are uncomfortable for the self and the community – a manipulation of the strategy of memory and forgetting and a selective approach to history.

Memory is believed to prevent evil from returning. However, historical experience demonstrates that humankind also did a lot to forget disgraceful deeds. Many peace treaties granted amnesties. Cicero, in his speech given in the Roman Senate two days after the assassination of Julius Caesar, on 14 March 44 BC, decided that to create “foundations of peace”, “all remembrance of civil discord should be buried in eternal oblivion”. An example of a desire to forget was the resolution of Louis XVIII, who decided in 1814, after returning from emigration, that the memory of the French Revolution and its regicide should be blotted out. He introduced a constitutional law, according to which “investigations concerning opinions and votes before the Restoration Period are forbidden. Courts and citizens are equally obliged to forget.”<sup>31</sup>

Totalitarianism and all kinds of dictatorship started and introduced mechanisms of memory-killing: collective amnesia as a kind of *raison d'état*. Instrumentalisation of oblivion means complete elimination of a debate on a certain subject from public life. Burning books and censorship serve the strategy of silence, which finally must lead to forgetting. In totalitarian systems, bringing memory back or sentencing it to exile serves the struggle for power or elimination of political opponents.

Democratic systems are not in the least free from manipulation or instrumentalisation. Responsibility lies, for example, in the fact that the superior role in contemporary societies is still performed by the community of national

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30 Ibidem, pp. 287-288.

31 See. C. Meier, *Pamięć – wypieranie z pamięci – zapomnienie*, trans. J. Jabłkowska, in: *O kondycji Niemiec. Tożsamość niemiecka w debatach intelektualistów po 1945 roku*, Poznań 2008, p. 510.



memory that has an advantage over other myths and ideologies.<sup>32</sup> The revival of nationalism in post-Cold War Europe is conducive to the raising of many myths. The war in the Balkans in the late twentieth century showed that what seemed impossible in Europe became possible. As the Spanish writer Juan Goytisolo noted: “Five centuries of Serbo-Ottoman coexistence was wiped out at one blow. Only on the basis of amnesia transformed in the *raison d’état* could the myth of revival emerge. Based on dark grounds and brutal values, such as race and blood, the members of the Academy of Sciences in Belgrade developed a programme of conquest and cleansing, which certainly led to the atrocities in Vukovar, Sarajevo and Srebrenica, and Europe did not even lift a finger to stop the massacre.”<sup>33</sup>

Along with democracy, individuals and institutions emerge that seek common ground for dialogue between various communities of memory. These communities may be connected by religion, ethnicity, language, territory or region. Collective experience, often traumatic, passed on to the next generation, also unites the people who identify themselves with it. Every country has many communities of memory. In the case of Germany, there are, for example, the Wehrmacht soldiers, victims of expulsion and bombings. In Poland, veterans of the 1939 Defensive War (known as September Campaign), members of underground groups of the occupation period, and, later, of the Workers’ Defence Committee (KOR) and Solidarity.

A state and a nation that articulate their national interest or *raison d’état* attempt to present in public a coherent image of their identity based on one (at least in the official version) vision of history. Inevitably, history becomes smoothed and linear and everything that decreases the value of the community from an outside perspective is silenced. Every community of memory holds on to a belief that its history is better than that of other communities. In extreme circumstances, Radovan Karadzic’s ‘truth’ is in force: “If it is not ours, history should not exist.” The cases of treachery, collaboration with the enemy, cowardice and any qualities that contradict the positive image are eliminated from the created picture of the past.<sup>34</sup>

Main government and local government actors can attach new meanings to history, create new heroes and annihilate the old ones: through awards and distinctions, renaming streets, patrons of schools and other institutions, memorial plates, publications and educational programs. Today, the mass media and electronic instruments of social communication have unlimited possibilities from which to select information material and manipulate collective memory and forgetting of the past.

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32 After: M. Hirszowicz, E. Neyman, *Spoleczne ramy niepamięci; Kultura i Społeczeństwo* 3-4, 2001, pp. 23-48.

33 Ibidem, p. 30.

34 After: M. Ziółkowski, *Pamięć i zapominanie: trupy w szafie polskiej zbiorowej pamięci; Kultura i Społeczeństwo*, op. cit., pp. 3-22.



## 2. History *versus* memory

Analyses of memory cover various areas that can overlap or contradict each other. Alongside the academic, purely cognitive aspect of history, the political aspect occupies a prominent position. Paraphrasing the conclusions of the religious peace in 1555, *cuius regio eius religio*, one can say that power struggles have always and everywhere been an effective struggle over interpretations of history and collective memory. The past is always chosen for a particular purpose. Memory of a given element of the past has always served someone or something. Subjects used to be spectators and more or less active participants in the ceremonies and rituals staged by lay and clerical rulers to honour themselves and their ancestors.

Competing cultures of memory of various social, religious and ethnic milieus have a long tradition. The staging of ceremonies related to historical anniversaries has roots in the Old Testament. Each fiftieth year was celebrated as a jubilee year, during which all debts were to be remitted. The Middle Ages continued this tradition except that only the clergy received a discharge of debts.<sup>35</sup> A catalyst for early-modern jubilees in Western Europe were the Protestant universities of the Reformation era. Protestant jubilees lasted three days and were a religious demonstration, as opposed to Catholic celebrations, such as processions, which were mostly a manifestation of the triumphant Church. Both cases, however, involved a public act of memory in order to strengthen Christian identity. In the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> century, interdenominational disputes arose among theologians over the question as to whose jubilees reflected the true past. By the initiative of the rulers, conscious work on cultivating and creating memory was undertaken by searching for documents and relics, architecture and historiography.

The French Revolution and the Age of the Enlightenment brought fundamental changes in the culture of memory. The philosophy of history was developing. History was found to be a process, not a fossil, open to a two-way interpretation: to the past and to the future. It evolved from an informative set of examples into a living science that offered more than simple political prescriptions. Along with the incubation of the philosophy of history, the semantic meaning of history altered. Research capacity and functionality of history increased, as well as the possibilities of using it in public and political activity. The evaluation and interpretation of the past depended mostly on the perspective of the person looking back.<sup>36</sup>

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35 For more, see: S. Römmelt, *Jubiläumskonkurrenz? Zum Verhältnis von evangelischer und katholischer Erinnerungskultur in der Frühen Neuzeit; Geschichte in Wissenschaft und Unterricht* 10/2003, pp. 564-577.

36 D. Langewiesche, *Geschichte als politisches Argument: Vergangenheitsbilder als Gegenwartskritik und Zukunftsprognose – die Reden der deutschen Bundespräsidenten; Saecula*

The new understanding of history has made it a field of conflicting interpretations and varied expectations of the future. Whoever possessed power had the casting vote in interpreting the past and giving directions for future. Competition over the images of history was growing. Numerous disputes involved not only the results of historical research but also, and sometimes most of all, the public use of history. Along with the epoch-making changes, secularisation and acceleration of events, the old topos of *historia magistra vitae* lost its significance. The concept of history as a teacher of life or a reservoir of multiplied experiences lasted almost unbroken until the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The German scholar Reinhart Koselleck referred to its immemorial function using “the word of one of the ancients” that “history makes us free to repeat the successes of the past instead of re-committing earlier mistakes in the present day.”<sup>37</sup>

The new perspective that made history a field of conflicting views of the past also served as a critical argument and a barometer of forecasts and expectations of the future. Liberation of science from theology made historical chronicling a historical science. Historians replaced the Bible as the crucial decision-makers in the process of interpreting history.<sup>38</sup> Fundamental changes in historical thinking occurred. Historiography aimed for rational methodology based on sources and proven arguments. At the same time, history was treated as a discursive project: periodicals were multiplying, the roles of historical pedagogy and increasingly complex academic organisations were growing.

In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, important changes occurred in this field. Evaluating them, Koselleck decided that history, actuated by modernity, had lost its former role. A byproduct of the historical revolution was the conviction that “counsel is henceforth to be expected, not from the past, but from a future which has to be made.” An ordinary witness of the epoch quoted by Koselleck, the editor Friedrich Christoph Perthes, stated in 1823: “History made by others, no matter how much written about and studied, seldom gives rise to political reasonableness and wisdom: that is taught by experience.”<sup>39</sup>

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lum 43, 1, 1992, pp. 36-53; R. Hübner, *Geschichtswissenschaft und Geschichtsphilosophie*; *Saeculum*, op. cit., pp. 54-65.

- 37 R. Koselleck, *Historia a Magistra Vitae. The Dissolution of the Topos into the Perspective of a Modernized Historical Process* in: *Futures Past: On the Semantics of Historical Time*, Columbia University Press, New York, p.27. The author refers to a formulation by an ancient writer, Diodorus Siculus, *Bibliotheca Historica*, ed. F. Vogel, vol. 1, Leipzig 1883.
- 38 T.E. Fischer, *Geschichte der Geschichtskultur. Über den öffentlichen Gebrauch von Vergangenheit von den antiken Hochkulturen bis zur Gegenwart*, Köln 2000; K. Fußmann, H.T. Grütter, J. Rüsen (eds.), *Historische Faszination. Geschichtskultur heute*, Köln, Weimar 1994; J. Kölsch, *Politik und Gedächtnis. Zur Soziologiefunktionaler Kultivierung von Erinnerung*, Wiesbaden 2000.
- 39 R. Koselleck, op. cit., p. 40.

In his insightful analysis, Koselleck concludes, referring to Theodor Mommsen, that “no matter how scholarly, every past example is always too late. Historism can relate to history only indirectly.”<sup>40</sup> Dethronement of traditional history as a collection of life experiences and the discovery of the possibility of creating history, also in the sense of manipulation of the image of history and planning the future, was an expression of arrogance, but also contained high hopes for the new idol of history, that is, progress.

The bourgeoisie was the beneficiary of the changes; their victory was confirmed by making individual use of history. To an unprecedented extent, the past became a flexible material to model and reconstruct. The philosophers of the Enlightenment enthusiastically announced a theory of progress. Historical imperialism meant subjecting the past to the future. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, nations moved to the centre of historical interest. Nations that gained statehood in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century justified their aspirations by referring to historical arguments. The subjective, ideological dimension of national identity turned out to be crucial. National identity meant more than patriotism and loyalty. Language, customs and culture became a bridge for bringing a community together, although often some of its bays were simply fiction. Nevertheless, it was not homogeneity but mutual permeating of cultures and languages that characterised Western Europe.

Early nationalism involved mostly a particular perception of history. History was interpreted nationally, and the nation was interpreted historically. Wars and military conflicts generated patriotic feelings. The Hundred Year’s War aroused the national feelings of the French and the English; the Franco-Prussian war woke German patriotism, and fighting against their invaders brought Poles closer together. Nations that gained statehood in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century referred to history also to legitimise their national wishes. Movements towards German and Italian unification as well as the Greek liberation movement were based on an idealised image of antiquity. In Ireland, nationalism referred to Celtic roots and Zionism justified its claims to the Palestinian territory by the Old Testament reference to antiquity. Not incidentally, historians were among the initiators of these movements.

The pivotal character of historical reflection in post-revolutionary times was expressed in various ways. The above-mentioned Koselleck, using the term “futures past” noted the specific relationship between history and time.<sup>41</sup> Since historical reflection was liberated from the Christian notion of the End of the World, the idea of history has revealed its unlimited openness to the infinite future. “It was the philosophy of the historical process which first detached early

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40 R. Koselleck, *op. cit.*, pp. 105-106.

41 R. Koselleck, *op. cit.*

modernity from its past and, with a new future, inaugurated our modernity.<sup>42</sup> It became apparent that one can refer to different pasts but there is only one future. The experience of time and historical time, which are the subject of interest of the German scholar, reveal a new research horizon.

The post-revolutionary era demonstrated that time, primarily as historical time, has different speeds. It may accelerate, decelerate and reveal different stages of development at the same time. The same period may be a dramatic and accelerated time in one region and slowed down in another. This variety of real experiences is “the simultaneity of the non-simultaneous.”<sup>43</sup> Historical time was figuratively presented in 1807 by the poet and writer of German Romanticism, Ernst Moritz Arndt, who wrote about the recent French Revolution: “That which then went at a steady pace is now at the gallop. Time is in flight; those who are clever have known this for a long time. Monstrous things have happened: the world has suffered great transformations silently and noisily, in the quiet pace of the day and in the storms and eruptions of revolution.”<sup>44</sup>

When historians went beyond the chronicler roles, the dichotomy between memory and history was revealed. Historical studies are a memory process on their own.<sup>45</sup> Memory is associated with space, emotions, symbols, rituals, collectivity. History, however, is associated with time, texts, rationality, individualism and modernity. Memory is a more general concept than history and contains a far wider set of individual and cultural practices. Historical practice is far from exempt from emotions and imaginations, as historians are linked to particular environments and their conditionings. The rhetoric of their practice is beholden to the narrative and theories from the archives of memory. Their research results are used, abused, or even purposely produced to confirm dominant views. Historians participate in the process of constructing or discarding values and building feelings of belonging. In every society there is a competition between the ruling and the oppositional memory. Public memory can be based on the authority, its official truth and symbolic forms, or it can focus on the repressed and excluded memory. Nursing what has been forgotten and expelled from the official space of memory can lead to a conflict and destruction of the culture of memory.

German language distinguishes between the terms experience, remembrance and memory. Remembrance (*Erinnerung*) is defined by Aleida Assmann as

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42 R. Koselleck, op. cit., p. 21.

43 For a detailed analysis, See: D. Gerber, *Was heißt ‘vergangene Zukunft’? Über die zeitliche Dimension der Geschichte und die geschichtliche Dimension der Zeit; Geschichte und Gesellschaft 2*, 2006, pp. 176-200.

44 Quotation after: R. Koselleck, *Vergangene Zukunft*, op. cit., p. 242.

45 For more, see: L. Niethammer, *Gedächtnis und Geschichte. Erinnernde Historie und die Macht des kollektiven Gedächtnisses; Werkstatt Geschichte 30*, 2001, pp. 32-37.

“particular and separate acts of evoking and reconstructing individual experiences. That which we have not experienced cannot be later remembered.” This rule applies only to episodic memory. The memory we are interested in – *Gedächtnis* – is described as a collective term for gathered memories, as “frameworks and foundations of single memory acts and entries.” In order to understand the connections between memory and history, the German scholar distinguishes between individual memory, collective memory and memory of culture, according to time coverage and stability.<sup>46</sup>

In order to prevent an observer from drawing false conclusions about memory and history, Halbwachs indicated that “history can be represented as the universal memory of the human species. But there is no universal memory. Every collective memory requires the support of a group delimited in space and time. The totality of past events can be put together in a single record only by separating them from the memory of the groups who preserved them and by severing the bonds that held them close to the psychological life of the social milieu where they occurred, while retaining only the group’s chronological and spatial outline of them”.<sup>47</sup>

Pierre Nora took the next step, moving from the group memory, identified by temporal and spatial dimension, to collective memory, expressed by symbols. Through various symbolic signs, an individual becomes a co-participant in collective memory and identity. Observing the interrelation of history and memory, Nora points to the fact that history, as a representation of the past, is a constant, incomplete reconstruction of what is no longer. Memory, as an affective and magical activity, accommodates only certain facts. It feeds on blurred, disordered or global memories; it is responsive to any conveyance, censorship or projection, while history disciplines memory, calls for intellectual efforts, analysis and critical argumentation. Memory sacralises, history disenchant. Memory is by nature multiple and collective; it takes root in the concrete, in gestures, spaces, images, while history belongs to everyone and to no one, bound to temporal continuities.<sup>48</sup>

Pierre Nora refers to Halbwachs when he radically historicises the difference between history and memory and interprets it as the result of the process of European modernisation. In his opinion, “revolutionary trauma”, “democratisation and mass culture on a global scale” destroyed the traditionally defined memory. “realms of

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46 A. Assmann, 1998 – *Między historią a pamięcią*, trans. M. Saryusz-Wolska, in: M. Saryusz-Wolska (ed.), *Pamięć zbiorowa i kulturowa. Współczesnaperspektywaniemie cka*, Kraków 2009, p. 158.

47 M. Halbwachs, *Historical Memory and Collective Memory*, in: *The Collective Memory*, USA, Harper and Row, 1980, p. 84.

48 P. Nora, *Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Memoire; Representations*, no 26, p. 8-9.

memory” take place because realms of memory have disappeared.<sup>49</sup> Museums, cemeteries, archives, festivals, anniversaries, treaties, monuments, sanctuaries, societies of war veterans – their common function is to protect collective memory from disappearing and being transformed into nothing more than history. They are instruments of modern *ars memoriae*. Memory also has its history, integral with myths, psychology and politics. Sites of memory are dynamic; they are historical events as well as artefacts and symbols. Liable to change, they become revised and instrumentalised by current events.

A new position of memory, according to Nora, results from the resistant movement, the revenge of excluded, handicapped memory. Nora criticises “memorialism”, believing that the dynamics of commemoration reversed and the commemoration model dominated the historical one, which made new applications of the past capricious and unpredictable. Nora explains the current explosion of commemoration as a form of liberation of minority memories: “Unlike history, which has always been in the hands of the public authorities, of scholars and specialised peer groups, memory has acquired all the new privileges and prestige of a popular protest movement. It has come to resemble the revenge of the underdog or injured party, the outcast, the history of those denied the right to History. Hitherto, if it did not have truth, it at least had loyalty on its side.”<sup>50</sup>

The French historian is an author of a very inspiring project on “second degree history” (*l’histoire au second degré*). While “first degree history” reconstructs events, “second degree history” focuses on the functioning of historical phenomena in collective memory. The contribution by the Polish-German project endorsed by the Centre for Historical Research of the Polish Academy of Sciences in Berlin is to develop the subject of cultural theories of memory on the basis of Polish-German research. The scholars discovered this new research perspective as an important shift towards “symbolic space, appreciation of collective imagination and popular culture, the analyses of uses and functions of the past for current needs.”<sup>51</sup>

As a result of cultural and political changes, the subject of memory became a general, cultural, interdisciplinary and international phenomenon. Diverse social discourses, cultural symbols and fields of knowledge cumulated around this subject. Memory plays different roles; it is a subject of literary and artistic

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49 P. Nora, (ed.), *Rethinking the French Past*, op. cit., p. XII.

50 P. Nora, *The Reasons for the Current Upsurge in Memory*, *Transit* 22 (2002), <http://www.eurozine.com/articles/2002-04-19-nora-en.html> (accessed online 29.08.2013).

51 Quotation after: M. Saryusz-Wolska, *Wprowadzenie*, in: *Pamięć zbiorowa i kulturowa*, op. cit., p. 20. See also: K. Kończal, *Deutsch-polnische Erinnerungsorte: Wie die deutsch-polnische Beziehungsgeschichte neu konzeptualisiert werden kann*; *Historie. Jahrbuch des Zentrums für Historische Forschung Berlin der Polnischen Akademie der Wissenschaften* 2, 2008/2009, pp. 118-137.

productions, public and political debates; for the last twenty years memory has become a central notion in culture studies, anthropology, religious and literary studies.<sup>52</sup> Studies on the history of memory and culture of memory gained more prominence in the history field in the 1990s. There was even an inflation of the notion of the culture of memory, which became an umbrella term to refer to history in public life, through various means and for various purposes. Animated debate on the idea of collective or cultural memory enriches humanistic discourse but does not bring the answer regarding how and in which form these notions can be applied to study modern societies. Multiplicity of proposals is appealing in some way while the lack of distance to the changes we are now witnessing justifies interpretation difficulties.

Simplifying, one can distinguish three forms of memory: individual, social-communicative and cultural-institutional memory. Regarding roles, there are two types: functional and archive memory.

Since an individual does not remember in isolation but through his or her belonging to a particular milieu and through communication with others, thinking of the past becomes an element of communicative memory. In everyday language, this term is used interchangeably with the term ‘collective memory’. Jan Assmann, who popularised the term ‘cultural memory’, contrasted it with communicative memory and defined it as the one that has a limited temporal horizon: usually narrowed to one or two generations and to everyday communication. Assuming that communicative memory offers no fixed point that would bind it to the past, he also believed that cultural memory contains such permanent references and that its temporal horizon does not change along with the passing of time. “The concept of cultural memory comprises that body of reusable texts, images, and rituals specific to each society in each epoch, whose ‘cultivation’ serves to stabilize and convey that society’s self image. Upon such collective knowledge, for the most part (but not exclusively) of the past, each group bases its awareness of unity and particularity.”<sup>53</sup>

Communicative memory is a generational memory usually limited to the experience of one generation. Polarity of the two forms of memory, according to Assmann, is expressed in the structure of participation. In communicative memory, member participation is indefinite. There are no experts “in the field of informal communication.” Participation in the cultural memory, on the other hand, is always diversified. Every culture has its guards of memory, special carriers. They can be shamans, bards, writers and scholars. The German researcher, on the example of the analysis of literate and illiterate cultures, showed that the distinction between

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52 A. Erll, *Kollektives Gedächtnis und Erinnerungskulturen. Eine Einführung*, Stuttgart, Weimar 2005.

53 J. Assmann, *Collective Memory and Cultural Identity*, New German Critique, No. 65, Cultural History/Cultural Studies (Spring - Summer, 1995), pp. 125-133.



the two abovementioned forms of memory is connected with “the distinction between weekday and holiday, *sacrum* and *profanum*, between what is ephemeral and constitutive, what is particular and what is general.”<sup>54</sup>

The most significant events in a life of a nation, preserved due to monuments, rites, texts, documents and institutions, are the most important ‘figures of memories’. Thus, the memory of societies, which is formed by culture and tradition, focuses on symbolic figures. Icons or memory sites can be material and immaterial figures, myths, metaphors, works of art, real persons. Assmann explains ‘sites of memory’ as symbolic records of the past, emotionally bound with our collective identity. He also notes the normative character of memory: “Memory is needed by those who have to commit, who have to bind. Memory conveys belonging; one remembers to be able to belong. Such memory is binding. Normative memory gives an individual the feeling of identity and belonging.”<sup>55</sup> These sites and figures, sometimes imaginary, occupy a central position in a society in certain political circumstances.<sup>56</sup>

Since the beginning of the 1990s, studies on memory have gained intensity by enriching cultural, social and literary aspects with psychological, psychoanalytical, and neurobiological links. The contribution of the German social psychologist, Harald Welzer, was to present the whole range of relationships between the abovementioned academic fields that focus on individual and group memory.<sup>57</sup>

Considering the fact that in modern social formations, drawing strict boundaries between these fields is difficult and that communicative and cultural memory overlap, some limited categorisation of the research field may prove to be helpful. The German researcher Peter Reichel distinguished four areas of interest in the

- 54 J. Assmann, *Kultura pamięci*, trans. A. Kryczyńska-Pham, in: M. Saryusz-Wolska (ed.), op. cit., p. 91.
- 55 J. Assmann, *Erinnern, um dazuzugehören. Kulturelles Gedächtnis. Zugehörigkeitsstruktur und normative Vergangenheit*, in: K. Platt, M. Dabag (eds.), *Generation und Gedächtnis. Erinnerungen und kollektive Identitäten*, Opladen 1995, p. 52.
- 56 The subject of memory and its close relationship with identity was recognised by Scholar Publishing House in its series of publications *Współczesne Społeczeństwo wobec Przeszłości* [Contemporary Society and the Past]. So far, the following books have been released: A. Szpociński, P.T. Kwiatkowski, *Przeszłość jako przedmiot przekazu*, Warszawa 2006; P.T. Kwiatkowski, *Przemiany pamięci zbiorowejspołeczeństwa polskiego w okresie transformacji*, Warszawa 2008; B. Szacka, *Czas przeszły – pamięć – mit*, Warszawa 2006; A. Szpociński (ed.), *Pamięć zbiorowa jako czynnik integracji i źródło konfliktów*, Warszawa 2009; S. Kaprański (ed.), *Pamięć, przestrzeń, tożsamość*, Warszawa 2010; M. Golka, *Pamięć społeczna i jej implanty*, Warszawa 2010. A more comprehensive list, though not a complete one, is included in the bibliography.
- 57 H. Welzer, *Das kommunikative Gedächtnis. Eine Theorie der Erinnerung*, München 2002; H. Welzer (ed.), *Das soziale Gedächtnis. Geschichte, Erinnerung, Tradierung*, Hamburg 2001.



past that may also either complete each other or be mutually exclusive. They are the following: the politico-judicial dealing with the past, the history of public culture of the past, the history of aesthetic culture and scientific interpretations.<sup>58</sup> Reichel's methodological recommendations may also be helpful, particularly when analysing the subject of the Nazi dictatorship in Germany. The author recognises the need to include different categories in the social memory research:

- Social determinants: the extent to which the interpretations of the past formulated by elites are accepted or denied by different social groups,
- Generations: a generation's attitude to the past, the influence of generational changes on the interpretation of the past,
- Nation and memory: national dimension of the creation of common myths and memory in the context of shaping national consciousness,
- Faith and ideology: continuation and turns in the culture of memory in pre-modern and modern social formations, in terms of faith and ideology of nations and groups,
- The media: conventional and traditional forms of preserving memory.

The renaissance of interest in the subject of memory also sets various traps. The analysis of the macro dimension of collective memory cannot go earlier than the 18<sup>th</sup> century, when public opinion emerged. Recognition of the scope of illiteracy and a relatively late (19<sup>th</sup>/20<sup>th</sup> century) emergence of the national areas of communication should protect us from drawing false historical conclusions. Therefore, in the case of past ages, the notion of the culture of memory can only refer to cultural institutions of power, such as monarchs, gentry, churches. In this respect, the greatest research area is related to the wars and two dictatorships in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Highlighted contradictions between the memory of winners and losers, comparative studies of the culture of commemoration in different countries and generations show how the present determines memory; which events, people, and historical relationships are stored.

Studies on memory, animated in the 1980s by the works of Pierre Nora and Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi, brought new methodological reflections, theses and areas of dispute. Increasingly often, terms such as 'redemption', 'grief', 'trauma', 'soul', 'scar', or 'ritual' appear in discourse and suggest a community of spiritual and emotional experience. Michael Roth calls the memory work a "science of the soul", and treats memory as the core of identity: "In modernity, memory is the key to personal and collective identity (...) the core of the psychological self."<sup>59</sup>

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58 P. Reichel, *Vergangenheitsbewältigung in Deutschland. Die Auseinandersetzung mit der NS-Diktatur von 1945 bis heute*, München 2001, p. 9.

59 M. Roth, *The Ironist's Cage: Memory, Trauma, and the Construction of History*, New York 1995, pp. 8-9.

Terminologies of academic and popular discourse overlap. Increasingly often, memory is an alternative to history and its growing popularity results, for example, from the disappointment in historiography, which cannot meet social expectations.

Advancement of academic disciplines dealing with memory and developing theories of memory bring an enriching harvest of knowledge informing us about multiple correlations of the phenomena related to the broadly defined culture. Media and culture studies bring interesting cognitive material on the role of media in shaping collective memory. Memories and memory are transmitted through language, writing and image. Due to the oldest media (oral and written), the new media (print, radio, television and Internet), and the symbolic media, (such as monuments or commemorative plaques), memory can perform its elementary functions. “Media do not only convey information but present reality, which shapes modality of our thinking, reception, memory and communication. (...) ‘mediality’ means that our attitude to the world, that is, our actions and experiences that interpret the world, are shaped by the distinguishing options offered by the media and by the restrictions that appear on the way.”<sup>60</sup>

Categorising the knowledge of the media and their functioning in the life of a community, and considering the history of memory as the history of media, Astrid Erll lists three fundamental functions of collective memory: storing, circulating and cueing.<sup>61</sup> Storing means keeping the content of collective memory and preserving it. The task of circulating media is to synchronise “great societies of memory” (first print, now e.g. television, radio, Internet). The cueing role is performed by media, which stimulates our memory, for example images or fragments of dialogues, and, on a collective level, places and landscapes that communities associate with a particular vision of the past.

### 3. Memory and identity

Memory studies gained unexpected inspiration from non-scientific actions. The notion of the culture of memory, discussed among curators, anthropologists, art historians and literary scholars, became commonly known. The fact that this subject anchored quite late in the academic field can be explained, for example, by the ambiguity of the term that is observable even today. Only following the works of certain French researchers, and, most of all, following the collapse of the

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60 S. Krämer, *Was haben Medien, der Computer und die Realität miteinander zu tun*, in: S. Krämer, *Medien – Computer – Realität. Wirklichkeitsvorstellungen und neue Medien*, Frankfurt a. M. 1998, pp. 14-15.

61 A. Erll, *Literatura jako medium pamięci zbiorowej*, in: M. Saryusz-Wolska (ed.), op. cit., p. 219.

optimistic social mood in the industrially developed countries of Western Europe, did doubts about the blessed consequences of progress and mental changes make politics and then science respond with an increased interest in the forms of memory in relation to the questions of national identity.

These interests brought new debates, theories and interpretations. Memory as a ‘discursive construct’ revealed its multifaceted nature.

Memory studies are closely related to studies on shaping identity. Starting from John Locke, the question: ‘Who are we?’ was always linked to the question: ‘Where do we come from?’. “Awareness of the common past is awareness of common existence in time, common faith and common ancestors. It is also a common repertoire of symbols, to which people and events from the past are transformed by social memory”, Barbara Szacka notes.<sup>62</sup> The author observes multiple functions of memory that contribute to the transfer of patterns of values and behaviour in public life and to the legitimisation of an existing social order. The important role of the awareness of existence in time for an individual identity, and the belief that our present being consists of everything we have experienced in the past, raise the position of the past in collective life and direct attention towards collective identity. As David Middleton and Derek Edwards, social psychologists, note: “it is not just that ‘he who controls the past controls the future’ but he who controls the past controls who we are”.<sup>63</sup>

The intensity of dealing with collective identity unfortunately does not mean that this overused term has become transparent. It simply means anything that connects people in any way. Lamenting the loss of ‘collective identity’ is common and the desire to declare one’s group identity became standard in our civilisation. According to Lutz Niethammer, this commonly used term is a norm of psychosocial health.<sup>64</sup> The longer the existence of an ethnic group and its uninterrupted continuation, the greater the sense of security and pride in the past. Therefore, it is not coincidental that newly constituted states search for the basis of their identity in the past, ‘invent’ traditions, adding history or appropriating it. Sociologists note that referring to history brings an important message: that current

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62 B. Szacka, *Pamięć społeczna*, in: *Encyklopedia socjologii*, vol. 3, Warszawa 2000, p. 54.

63 D. Middleton, D. Edwards, *Introduction*, in: *Collective Remembering*, ed. idem, London 1990, p. 10. Citation after: B. Szacka, *Konflikty i pamięć zbiorowa*, in: R. Traba (ed.), *Akulturacyja / asymilacyja na pograniczach kulturowych Europy Środkowo-Wschodniej w XIX i XX wieku*, vol. 1: *Stereotypy i pamięć*, Warszawa 2009, p. 229.

64 See e.g. L. Niethammer, *Diesseits des »Floating Gap«*. *Das kollektive Gedächtnis und die Konstruktion von Identitätswissenschaftlichen Diskurs*, in: K. Platt, M. Dabag (eds.), *Generation und Gedächtnis. Erinnerungen und kollektive Identitäten*, Opladen 1995, pp. 25-49.

generations have not grown on fertile ground but, on the contrary, constitute a community of the continuators of the past generations.

History provides important material for the process of shaping the mental condition of a nation, as it is always morally judged. It can only be positive or negative, accepted or rejected, but never neutral. Which heroes we place on a national pedestal and who we reject is crucial for the determination of our identity. The fact that the whole historical baggage of the 1933-1945 period was rejected by Germans after the war is a vivid example of the selection of historical material in order to create a new, positive world of values that would be favourable for the community.

Collective memory fulfils an important function by converting historical figures and facts to the language of symbols and identification signs that are distinctive for a group, milieu or a nation. Memory of the past does not only perform a significant role in constituting common values and behavioural patterns but is also important in creating and strengthening social bonds.<sup>65</sup>

Collective (social) memory influences individual and group identity in many aspects: it integrates scattered memories of which we are proud, and selects and distinguishes 'us' and 'them'.<sup>66</sup> Organising memories and putting them into a narrative form is a necessary condition for assigning meaning to the past. Narrative and narration are important displays of the social aspect of memory. Narrative has a significant influence on creating and maintaining identity. In his considerations on the subject of connections between memory and identity, Paul Ricoeur notes the fragility and traps of memory in relation to the passage of time and confrontation with others, which is perceived as a threat. The problem of "wounded memory", which he raises, is strictly related to "wounded identity". Therefore, when the circumstances make it difficult to answer the question "who am I?", many search for the answers in myths, imaginations and suggestions. These phenomena involve different categories of misuse. Main actors refer to therapeutic terminology, e.g. borrowed from psychoanalysis. As there is no such thing as a collective mind, it is easy to refer to collective emotions, feelings and memory.

Emancipation of memory and its dissemination in historical discourse is related to the emancipation of psychoanalytic terminology. Memory is commonly hypostatized. Freudian semantics, which is sometimes close to mysticism, is used to describe both individual memory, defined as mental experience, and collective memory. Such terms as 'mourning', 'working through', 'melancholy', 'sorrow', 'atonement', 'repentance', 'revenge' appear in the literature of the subject devoted to the renewed fascination with the relationship between memory and identity.

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65 B. Szacka, *Pamięć społeczna a identyfikacja narodowa*, in: A. Jasińska-Kania (ed.), *Trudne sąsiedztwa z socjologii konfliktów narodowościowych*, Warszawa 2001, pp. 37-45.

66 M. Golka, *Pamięć społeczna i jej implanty*, Warszawa 2009, pp. 51-66.

Marita Sturken, joining the followers of the opinion that memory is outweighed by historical truth, claims that memory, as something unsteady and fragmentary, can have a therapeutic value and fits our chaotic times: “It is precisely the instability of memory that allows for renewal and redemption (...)”.<sup>67</sup> Ambiguity of the notion of identity and the fact that a confrontation with another person is interpreted as a threat intensifies the subjectivity of feelings. What is a subject of national celebration means glory for some people and mourning for others.

The ethico-political sphere and the compulsion of memory often involve manipulation. Remembering is treated as a moral obligation. Ideology legitimises the existing power and order: “A trained memory is in fact, on the institutional plane, an instructed memory; forced memorization is thus enlisted in the service of the remembrance of those events belonging to the common history that are held to be remarkable, even founding, with the respect to common identity. (...) A history taught, a history learned, but also a history celebrated. To this forced memorization are added the customary commemorations. A formidable pact is concluded in his way between remembrance, memorization and commemoration.”<sup>68</sup>

Searching for the key to confirm the identity of societies, ethnic groups and nations is increasingly intense. Institutions that connect us with the past are multiplying. The epoch of commemoration brings significant transformations. Political decolonisation is accompanied by an “appreciation of ethnic identity” of the societies of former colonies.<sup>69</sup> Emancipation of the identities of local minorities all over Europe allowed them to conform and appreciate their particularism. Living witnesses of the biggest cataclysms of the 20<sup>th</sup> century are not satisfied with one history and one historical truth. They expose the truth that is closer to an individual, the truth of personal experiences and individual memory. This new situation is a challenge to professional history, which has always been controlled by public authorities and academic science. Is it a triumph of memory over history? It is a sign of the times and of the mass culture. The times when history belonged to the community, and claimed as a university discipline to be infallible, are changing. The symptom of the epoch of discontinuity and constant changes is the popularisation of a conviction that a group can have a common memory.

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67 Citation after: K.L. Klein, *On the emergence of Memory in the Historical Discourse*, REPRESENTATIONS, no. 69, (2000), p. 138. He refers to the awarded book by M. Sturken, *Tangled Memories: The Vietnam War, the AIDS Epidemic, and the Politics of Remembering*, Berkeley, Los Angeles, London 1997.

68 P. Ricoeur, *Memory, History, Forgetting*, University of Chicago Press, 2009, p. 85.

69 *Epoka upamiętniania*, an interview with Pierre Nora in: J. Żakowski, *Rewanż pamięci*, Warszawa 2002, p. 62. See also: P. Nora, *The Reasons for the Current Upsurge in Memory*, Transit 22 (2002), <http://www.eurozine.com/articles/2002-04-19-nora-en.html> (accessed online 08/29/2013).

Until recently, identity meant an element of the uniqueness of an individual. Today, the importance for an individual of belonging to a group is clear. “Identity, like memory, is a form of duty. I am asked to become what I am: a Corsican, a Jew, a worker, an Algerian, a Black. It is at this level of obligation that the decisive tie is formed between memory and social identity. Viewed in this light, they are both governed by the same mechanism: the two terms have become all but synonymous (...)”.<sup>70</sup>

The ease of manipulation concerning memory and identity results, for example, from the fact that the past cannot be changed; memory, however, can be altered. Tzvetan Todorov warns against the “unconditioned praise of memory”, believing that abuses of memory are not a speciality of totalitarian systems alone but also all those who are enamoured by glory. Memory communication is mostly a subjective interpretation of the facts: “The work of the historian, like every work on the past, never consists solely in establishing the facts but also in choosing certain among them as being more salient and more significant than others, then placing them in relation to one another; now, this work of selecting and combining is necessarily guided by the search, not for truth, but for the good.”<sup>71</sup>

The academic interest in memory and disputes over the history-memory-identity relations enrich the discourse upon the culture of history and the feeling of belonging to a particular group or territory. Kerwin Lee Klein is certainly right when analysing the relationship between historical imagination and new memorial consciousness, and explains the revival of the latter with the very nature of memory. The appeal of memory discourse results from the closeness and relevance of memory to human lives, while history seems to be something distant.<sup>72</sup> In public debates on memory and sometimes even in academic discourse, the notion of memory is associated with religion, theology, mysticism, which can be explained e.g. by referring to Judeo-Christian, rabbinic, and the Old Testament tradition in which memory performed a prominent role.<sup>73</sup>

When history began professionalising in the 19th century, memories were identified as a dubious source for the verification of historical facts. Some academics highlight the differences between the more rigorous application of the term ‘memory’ in scientific language and a more blurred and multifarious common use. The American sociologist Michael Schudson observes that memory may characterise social groups by revealing a “debt to the past”. Recent debates confirm the tendency,

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70 Ibidem, p. 65.

71 C. Todorov, *Lesabus de la mémoire*, Paris 1995, p. 150. [translation after: P. Ricœur, *Memory, History, Forgetting*, op.cit. p. 86]

72 See: K.L Klein, op. cit., pp. 42-56.

73 See: Y.H. Yerushalmi, *Zakhor: Jewish History and Jewish Memory*, University of Washington Press, 1996.

which has been observable for decades, that the subject of identity somehow favours discretion in the use of memory and the abuse of it for public purposes.

Today, after the experiences of Nazism and communism, reflections on history, memory and national identity are becoming closer to psychology and morality. In the case of memory and forgetting, not only what and how something is remembered and forgotten is important but also the requirement to remember certain memories, and the permission to forget others. Thus, the question of the culture of memory becomes a moral issue. The participation of various academic disciplines in the studies on the abovementioned problem influences the exposure of psychological and psychoanalytical aspects. Memory scholars refer to the findings and terminology introduced by Sigmund Freud. The notion of guilt is replaced by the notion of shame, which does not appear in the first generation, and if it does, it is extremely rare. The culture of apology for a past evil becomes a desirable part of historical culture.

Charles S. Maier suggests using the term ‘hot memory’ with regard to Nazism and ‘cold memory’ for communism. Regardless of the accuracy of the comparative analysis of both traumatic memories, one cannot be free from doubt when reading the text of the eminent American historian.<sup>74</sup> Will not the time perspective change the character and scope of memory of both totalitarianisms in a few decades? The character of accounting with communism and post-communism in the former Eastern Bloc changes the shape of memory. Who will remember the crimes and degenerations of both dictatorships and how they will be remembered will depend not only on academic honesty today, but also on modern media and electronic messages: they are increasingly sophisticated and were unknown in the post-Nazi times. The extent of their impact simply cannot be predicted today.

Current studies on identity agree that on an individual level, national identity is a multidimensional and inconstant construct. It is related to the concepts of patriotism that fulfil various functions in political cultures of democratic societies. Negatively assessed pseudo-patriotism, based on ethnocentrism, is contrasted with the positive effect of constructive, critical patriotism. One of the positive functions of national identity is integration. Countless studies distinguishing between positive and negative forms of national identity are consistent at least in matter – pseudo-patriotism or nationalism are attributed to a more authoritarian personality,<sup>75</sup> which is distinguished by excluding groups defined as different from an imagined collective. Constructive patriotism, on the

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74 Terminology used by Charles S. Maier, *Koniec przyszłości*, The interview with Charles S. Maier, in: J. Żakowski, op. cit., pp. 81-90.

75 D.J. Levinson, *The Study of Ethnocentric Ideology*, in: T. W. Adorno, E. Frenkel-Brunswik, D.J. Levinson, R. Nevitt Sanford, *The Authoritarian Personality*, New York 1950, pp. 102-150.



other hand, is interpreted as a positive, open relationship with a collective that is characteristic of democratic societies.

No nation does not want to be proud of its past. The relationship between identity and a created, selected image of history is strongly related to the definition of both concepts. The awareness of a common past and a commonly inhabited area is the most important constituent of identity. Already Ernest Renan's classic definition from 1882 recognises the central role of the image of history for defining the national community. Renan noted: "Forgetting, I would even go so far as to say historical error, is a crucial factor in the creation of a nation, which is why progress in historical studies often constitutes a danger for [the principle of] nationality."<sup>76</sup> What is important for a nation is not only what it remembers but also what it forgets. A nation is a soul, a spiritual principle. Two things, which in truth are one, constitute this soul or spiritual principle. One lies in the past, one in the present. One is the collective possession of a rich legacy of memories; the other is present-day consent, the desire to live together, the will to perpetuate the value of the heritage that one has received in an undivided form."<sup>77</sup>

National identity in a democratic society consists of many, sometimes contradictory, images and interpretations of history. A significant feature of the identity communities is that they create an image of the past that is free from guilt. A nation that is negatively burdened by history defends itself against memory and isolates itself from guilt. The theory of social identification vividly demonstrates that the memory of World War II divides particular national groups. Placing the entire blame for the Nazi crimes on Hitler and his 'clique' in the first years after the war is one of the examples confirming the strategy of building positive identity on the basis of rejecting the 'dark side' of the past. The collective recognised that it is more likely to be positively evaluated if it denies its part in Nazism. An individual identifying with the collective avoids all comparisons when a positive result is unlikely.<sup>78</sup> This is overestimating the value of one's own nation. Such a community is immune to any information that reveals the bitter historical truth. It also excludes ambiguous, ambivalent attitudes towards the nation. In this case, a nation is considered a construct that has always existed as a natural entirety. Such

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76 E. Renan, *What Is a Nation?*, trans. M. Thom, in: *Becoming National: A Reader*, G. Eley and R. G. Suny (eds.), Oxford/New York: Oxford University Press, 1996, pp. 52-54.

77 Ibidem, p. 308.

78 A. Blänsdorf, *Die Einordnung der NS-Zeit in das Bild der eigenen Geschichte: Österreich, die DDR und die Bundesrepublik Deutschland im Vergleich*, in: W. Bergmann, R. Erb, A. Lichtblau (eds.), *Schwieriges Erbe. Der Umgang mit Nationalsozialismus und Antisemitismus in Österreich, der DDR und der Bundesrepublik Deutschland*, Frankfurt a. M., New York 1995, pp. 18-45.



an attitude results in idealisation of the nation and its history.<sup>79</sup> Numerous studies demonstrated that the specific image of National Socialism, involving a strategy of liberating from guilt, is represented more often among people of nationalist orientation and weaker personality. The stronger the attachment to democratic values shared by the collective, the weaker the tendency to move the guilt and responsibility for Nazi crimes away.<sup>80</sup>

#### 4. History and politics

“There is a painting by Klee called *Angelus Novus*. An angel is depicted there who looks as though he were about to distance himself from something which he is staring at. His eyes are opened wide, his mouth stands open and his wings are outstretched. The Angel of History must look just so. His face is turned towards the past. Where we see the appearance of a chain of events, he sees one single catastrophe, which unceasingly piles rubble on top of rubble and hurls it before his feet. He would like to pause for a moment so fair [verweilen: a reference to Goethe’s *Faust*], to awaken the dead and to piece together what has been smashed. But a storm is blowing from Paradise, it has caught itself up in his wings and is so strong that the Angel can no longer close them. The storm drives him irresistibly into the future, to which his back is turned, while the rubble-heap before him grows sky-high. That which we call progress, is this storm.”<sup>81</sup>

This often-quoted text from 1940 by the German philosopher Walter Benjamin is believed to be a response to the shock after the pact between Nazism and communism. Benjamin’s Angel of History is a catastrophic, warning vision. The author observed the importance of today in creating the past when he wrote in *Thesis on the Philosophy of History*: “History is the subject of a structure whose site is not homogenous, empty time, but time filled by the presence of the now”.<sup>82</sup> The dismay and amazement of the author that “the things we are experiencing are ‘still’ possible in the twentieth century” depicts the helplessness of the great thinker and a participant in and witness to the history of the glorious march of Nazism.

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79 T. Blank, *Gemeinnutz oder Eigenwohl. Motive und Erscheinungsformen nationaler Identität im vereinigten Deutschland*, Mannheim 2002.

80 F. Pollock, *Gruppenexperiment. Frankfurter Beiträge zur Soziologie*, t. 2, Frankfurt a. M. 1955; A. Herrmann, *Ursachen des Ethnozentrismus in Deutschland. Zwischen Gesellschaft und Individuum*, Opladen 2002; K. Stephan, *Erinnerungen an den Zweiten Weltkrieg. Zum Zusammenhang von kollektiver Identität und kollektiver Erinnerung*, Gießen 2006.

81 W. Benjamin, *On the concept of history*, trans. Dennis Redmond, <http://members.efn.org/~dredmond/ThesesonHistory.html>, accessed 09/04/2013.

82 Ibidem.

Benjamin experienced history that was in a constant state of emergency, in which politics maintained the unceasing primacy of history and that needed new notions and intellectual constructs to understand and describe the weave of interlocking events and eras.

History shapes politics and politics creates history. Successive revolutions and turning points present the role of history as an important political factor. Velvet revolutions in Central and Eastern Europe made it a battleground, a weapon and a medium that helped to elevate victorious heroes and throw down lost icons of history. New monuments, street names, amnesty for some and amnesia for others define the political culture of the region. It is not only a theatre of illusion, but also important social cement in the new, disenchanted world. In the late 20<sup>th</sup> century, when new national states were forming on the ruins of communist ideology, the role of state and social structures changed and the need for mythology and history as protection and support increased.<sup>83</sup>

Rediscovered communities, sites and memory signs ennoble societies; they become a current expression of historical consciousness of ethnic groups, minorities or nations. Alongside current transformations, new problems appear that are not yet followed by considered vocabulary or conceptual apparatus. We grope our way. An increased number of historical works, popularisation of history and the abundance of its presentation forms increase the number of its recipients. At the same time, the number of actors aspiring to decide about the past in the name of the future is growing. This involves numerous traps. Historical experience has demonstrated that extending knowledge about the past does not go hand in hand with the responsibility for the present and willingness to draw the right conclusions for the future.

The increasingly intensive interdependence of history and politics in the life of nations provoked a question concerning the nature and borders of the mutual infiltration. This question appeared for a short time as a subject of reflection in modern science in a text from 1836 by the German historian Leopold Ranke, *Über die Verwandtschaft und den Unterschied der Historie und der Politik*. Not raised by Ranke's followers, the subject remained rather in the shadow of interest of the next generations of scholars.<sup>84</sup> Historians, however, co-created the new national consciousness just as the state attempted to impact the interpretation of history using its politicians and administration. At the beginning, the instrument of their actions was HR policy at universities, archive policy and schooling. Gradually,

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83 E. Wolfrum, *Neue Geschichte als Politikum – Geschichtspolitik. Internationale Forschungszum 19. und 20. Jahrhundert; Politische Literatur* 3, 1996, p. 376.

84 See: C. Cornelißen, *Geschichtswissenschaft und Politik im Gleichschritt? Zur Geschichte der deutschen Geschichtswissenschaft im 20. Jahrhundert; Neue Politische Literatur* 2, 1997, pp. 275-309.

the direct sphere of influence was extending. Introducing national holidays and anniversaries, awarding medals; monuments, exhibitions and museums were a consequence of the top-down inspirations. Many politicians, with the help of 'court' chroniclers and memoirs, tried to gain a permanent seat in the gallery of the ancestors of the national heroes. The cult of heroic ancestors served the rulers not only to raise their own glory but also to motivate citizens to sacrifice themselves for their motherland. The myth of war experience was expected to fuel important values. Thus, the understanding of history focused on great figures and great subjects of national history.

In totalitarian systems, there was a rule of the primacy of the political truth over the historical truth. Historians were expected to adopt an attitude in accordance with the "spirit of the fighting epoch." In the Third Reich, the social mission of historical studies was to create an ideological version of events that would verify and confirm the Nazi line of reasoning. The value of history was equal to its political and educational function; it mostly served as a tool in political struggle. One of the exponents of the new "study of history" wrote that "its meaning and its truth are the main forces that activate faith."<sup>85</sup> The task of a historian was not to update the past but to transplant the present to the past. Degradation and depravity of history were manifested in its loss of independent existence.

The Hitlerite educational activist, Walter Voigtländer, wrote plainly about the sense of studying the past in contemporary circumstances. "If studying history was examined from the political perspective, it should be treated as an attempt to justify present struggles with the images of the struggles that happened in the past."<sup>86</sup> As Carl Schmidt's doctrine said, "all concepts of the spiritual sphere, including the concept of spirit, are in themselves pluralistic and are to be understood only in terms of their concrete political existence." A single agreed, collective image and historical consciousness was supposed to be in force, according to the rule that faith and history are one.<sup>87</sup> Myths were assigned an ahistorical meaning, as it was believed they should not be subjected to analysis. Wishful thinking was important while examining the causes of historical events and processes was rejected. Communist authorities dictated patriotism, releasing historiography from 'cosmopolitan deformation' and historical education in which a socialist hero would be equal to a hero of the September Campaign.

Political and social processes had an impact on the evolution of historical culture. After the times of the flourishing of history and the interest in the past,

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85 E. Kriek, *Der Mensch in der Geschichte. Geschichtsdeutung aus Zeit und Schicksal*, Leipzig 1940, p. 302.

86 After: H. Olszewski, *Nauka historii w upadku*, Warszawa, Poznań 1982, p. 404.

87 W. Brachmann, *Glaube und Geschichte; Nationalsozialistische Monatshefte* 162, 1944, p. 108.

there was a time of the “loss of history.”<sup>88</sup> The ‘decline’ of history was present as an idea in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, when history was an integral element of modernity as well as anti-modern views and concepts. It was the confrontation of the societies with the barbarity of revolutions, colonial wars and both world wars in the last century that caused traumatic experiences, leading to the crisis of memory and moving the past aside.<sup>89</sup>

Germany was for obvious reasons a particular laboratory for analysing the past. The former West Germany in the late 1970s and early 1980s became an area where historical consciousness and identity got promoted to the rank of a central category of historical teaching. A debate on the elementary notions related to the politics of memory resulted in tremendous theoretical achievements.

Karl Ernst Jeismann defines historical consciousness as a synthesis of the interpretations of the past, understandings of the present and perspectives for the future.<sup>90</sup> It is the way in which a society or a nation express their attitude to the past and shape their self-awareness on the basis of particular experiences. German literature on the subject is more focused on historical culture – a very broad term that encompasses consciousness and practice, symbols and emotions, institutions and rationality. It involves multifarious strategies of dealing with the past, including science, art, historical education, media and historical politics.<sup>91</sup> Jörn Rüsen considers historical culture as a fundamental category, which he perceives as a practically effective articulation of historical consciousness in the life of a society.<sup>92</sup>

The recent debate is not only about the sole phenomena of historical culture or the culture of memory (which is used synonymously) but also about normative measures and historical consciousness in the life of a society.

The notion of historical politics became very useful in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. It incorporates all the forms in which a society presents historical

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88 A. Heuss, *Der Verlust der Geschichte*, Göttingen 1959.

89 See e.g. N. Bolz, *Auszug aus der entzauberten Welt. Philosophischer Extremismus zwischen den Weltkriegen*, München 1989; F. Stern, *Kulturpessimismus als politische Gefahr*, München 1986; A. Demandt, *Endzeit? Die Zukunft der Geschichte*, Berlin 1993; H. White, *Metahistory. Die historische Einbildungskraft im 19. Jahrhundert in Europa*, Frankfurt a. M. 1991.

90 K.E. Jeismann, *Geschichte als Horizont der Gegenwart. Über den Zusammenhang von Vergangenheitsdeutung, Gegenwartsverständnis und Zukunftsperspektive*, Paderborn 1985.

91 J. Rüsen, *Geschichtskultur; Geschichte in Wissenschaft und Unterricht* 9, 1995, pp. 513-521.

92 See e.g. J. Rüsen, *Historische Orientierung. Über die Arbeit des Geschichtsbewusstseins, sich in der Zeit zu rechtzufinden*, Köln 1994; idem, *Geschichtsbewußtsein und menschliche Identität. Gefahren und Chancen der Geschichtsschreibung; Aus Politik und Zeitgeschichte* 41, 1984, pp. 33-10.

knowledge and its attitude to it. Scholars pay attention to its three fundamental dimensions: the aesthetic, the political and the cognitive, which aim at the principles of beauty, power and truth respectively.<sup>93</sup> The notion of historical culture, which includes analytical and normative factors, is based on historical memory. Political culture and historical culture complement each other.

Historical culture is an element of civilisation, as it is closely related to political, social and economic thought and practice. The way of doing politics impacts the perception of the past. Individual and group historical images are influenced by particular social and psychological interests. The condition of economy and well-being has an impact on research financing. Historical culture is an element of culture. Aesthetical principles of the time, literature, art and music participate in the process of selecting particular themes from the past. Finally, historical culture is an element of the every day, an expression of individual and collective fascination and historical projections. Conscious performances and ceremonial updates of historical images play a paramount role here.<sup>94</sup>

The politics of memory, in German *Geschichtspolitik*, is an extremely important element of political culture. In German-speaking areas, *Geschichtspolitik* as a research topic is mostly a debate on history as a political event in democratic countries.<sup>95</sup> The attention is focused on political actors. In European science, *Geschichtspolitik* is a relatively new phenomenon and it focuses on different subjects depending on a country. In Germany, the dominating research interests of *Geschichtspolitik* revolve around historical consciousness and historical culture. The problem with the political aspect of historical culture is that it cannot be controlled. How much historical knowledge is needed for political practice is not known. Science can neither intervene nor fully explain difficult relations between politics and history.

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93 See first of all: J. Rüsen, *Was ist Geschichtskultur? Überlegungen zu einer neuen Art, über Geschichten nachzudenken*, in: K. Fießmann, H.T. Grütter, J. Rüsen (ed.), *Historische Faszination. Geschichtskultur heute*, Köln, Weimar, Wien 1994, pp. 3-26.

94 T.E. Fischer, *Geschichte der Geschichtskultur. Über den öffentlichen Gebrauch von Vergangenheit von den antiken Hochkulturen bis zur Gegenwart*, Köln 2000, p. 12. Lech M. Nijakowski distinguishes a category of the culture of memory that he defines as “ways of commemorating past events and figures, narratives of the past, religious notions of death, victim, tradition, etc, which are typical for a cultural area.” L.M. Nijakowski, *Polska polityka pamięci, esej socjologiczny*, Warszawa 2008, p. 38.

95 This concise definition was presented by Edgar Wolfrum, *Geschichtspolitik in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland. Der Weg zur bundesrepublikanischen Erinnerung 1948-1990*, Darmstadt 1999, p. 19. See also: E. Wolfrum, *Geschichtspolitik in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland 1949-1989; Aus Politik und Zeitgeschichte* 45, 1998, pp. 3-14.

Edgar Wolfrum was one of the German scholars who decided to systematise the studies on the political aspect of historical culture. He observed many dimensions of the politics of memory in a democratic state, defining it as follows:

- The area of actions and politics in which different actors treat history according to their particular interests and make political use of it, striving for social acceptance. It is oriented towards public life and aims at legitimisation and mobilisation, which is expressed in political scandals and compromising disputes. In a narrow sense, political actors are crucial. Since the scope of political presentation of history is broader in comparison to the philosophy of history, the most important question raised by scholars is how the politics is 'made' with the use of history;
- A functional perspective. Politics of memory fulfils concrete social functions. It can be emancipative, but it can also be manipulative;
- A political-pedagogical task. It has concrete strategies that alter the image of the past, consign it to oblivion or enliven it. Continuous work on the past is a part of a necessary canon of every political power. In democratic political culture, it also requires constant cultivation and social concern. History authenticates politics and politics authenticates history;
- Legislative actions, means of legal execution, damages related to state actions;
- Public opinion and competition. Different political interests related to the interpretation of the past clash in a debate;
- Public conflicts and political culture. Some morally burdened conflicts present in mass media have a strong impact on public opinion, which is connected with the stabilisation of norms and values. German past, stigmatised by the crimes of National Socialism and burdened with the history of the division into East and West, is a very conflicting subject about which it is easy to moralise or scandalise. Thus, conflicts resulting from politics of memory may manifest strengthening or updating of particular behavioural patterns, views and values that influence changes of political culture over a prolonged period of time;
- The tension between science and politics. The role of a historian has significantly changed since the time of Herodotus, who perceived scholars of history as the guards of memory and historiographers of heroic acts. The problem of the relationship between the researcher's objectivity and partiality, involvement and distance, science and politics, has become more complex and complicated. Politics, which is guided by particular interests, often uses history as weapon directed against the enemy;
- Two-sidedness: history in politics and history as politics. Interpretation of the past can be an important factor in current conflicts. Politics of memory includes legitimisation and delegitimisation strategies. Professional historians' debates

can also include political accents and can have an impact on public opinion. One of the examples is the “historians’ debate” [*Historikerstreit*] in Germany in the mid-1980s;

- Democratic agreement. The politics of memory in the former West Germany was manifested through the confrontation of subjects and ideology with the other German state. Thus, West German historians and other persons speaking of the past were aware of the permanent conflict with East Germany, which could have had an impact on their historical-political interpretation;
- *Geschichtspolitik* and *Vergangenheitspolitik*. German historiography uses these two terms, which function as synonyms, in everyday speech. Commonly, it is accepted among scholars that the main subjects of interest of *Vergangenheitspolitik* are legal, legislative and executive decisions (practical-political actions taken in the past). *Geschichtspolitik*, on the other hand, focuses on the symbolic sphere, public constructs of the images of the past and identity that are expressed in rituals or discourses (this involves e.g. the policy concerning monuments, museums and historical education).

The revival of interest in historical memory and the political atmosphere of Poland in the first years of the 21<sup>st</sup> century made the notion of the politics of memory penetrate the public discourse in Poland and the countries of the former Communist Bloc.<sup>96</sup> The term ‘politics of memory’, which denotes political dependencies of historical memory, is not quite a scientific category. It still resembles a media slogan, political demand or an argument in political-historical controversies, involving emotions rather than a search for cognitive meaning. Most frequently, it is applied to the description of the role of historical sciences in times of dictatorship. Considering the abuses of history carried out by totalitarian systems, both Hitlerite and communist, the term evokes mainly negative associations in Poland. As a research subject, it includes e.g. disputes about history as political events both in the people’s republics and after the political breakthrough of 1989/1990.

In recent years, the politics of memory has become an important measure of the political culture of a society. The question of which political actors expose the past, how they do it and in the name of which interests becomes an important question not only for Germany or Poland. The crucial question is not about the historical truth but which means and experiences should be used to make the past attractive for all, as well as politically efficient. The past is treated as an important political and educational task, as the work on history demands constant nurturing.

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96 L.M. Nijakowski was one of those who decided to categorise the debate on the abovementioned subject, *Polska polityka pamięci*, op. cit.; S.M. Nowinowski, J. Pomorski, R. Stobiecki (eds.), *Pamięć i polityka historyczna. Doświadczenia Polski i jej sąsiadów*, Łódź 2008.



A wide perspective and comprehensive evaluation of the past and, most of all, a critical approach, guarantee appropriate social education.

The politics of memory is an inseparable element of democratic political cultures. Sometimes a weak leader seeks compensation in the past and sundry lay preachers treat the past as a stretchy bag, from which one can draw something for every occasion and political weather. The politics of memory can be an important pedagogical task.<sup>97</sup> However, it is located in the area of tension between science and politics, which are related but have their own ways. Politics is not science, even though many scientists have political ambitions. Politics takes a short cut, aims at immediate effects, simplifies and counts on emotions. Historical science is about the past, politics is about the present. Politics operates with simplifications. Historical culture and the culture of memory reflect the possibilities of shaping historical consciousness, its social, political and cultural determinants and practices. They involve commemorations of the past that are characteristic for particular regions, ethnic groups and nations. Politics is focused on conflicts of interests and power struggles; its aims and perspectives are different, its actions are taken in the spotlight. Historical studies demand expert knowledge, have rational aims, exclude temporary measures, need continuity, regularity and concentration.

The distrust that the relationship between politics and history still arouses results not only from the latest experiences with Nazism and communism. Although the struggles of different visions of the past have been common since the emergence of public opinion, it is hard for democratic societies to accept the fact that after Auschwitz, they can again take a maleficent form. In East-Central Europe, the democratic breakthrough was related to the transformation of historical culture and consciousness. This region of the Old Continent, more so than Western Europe, abounded with discontinuation and radical changes of political borders, and there was less space for a homogeneous culture of memory – rather little islands. Where winners and losers, perpetrators and victims remain as a legacy from the previous epoch, the measures of justice are inconclusive, for it is difficult to determine how much of each is in us. As Herman Hesse rightly noted, there are periods in history when a whole generation exists in two times and lifestyles, as all the confidence, security and innocence are lost.

The unusual renaissance of the interest of many academic disciplines in the history and politics of memory is caused not only by the collapse of the bipolar world with a black and white divisions of enemy and friend. The new longing for history, manifested in ‘identity neuroses’ of many societies and nations results also from the feeling of loss of basic trust. A lack of stability, the predictability of

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97 E. Wolfrum, *Geschichtspolitik in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland 1949-1989*, in: P. Bock, E. Wolfrum (eds.), *Umkämpfte Vergangenheit. Geschichtsbilder, Erinnerung und Vergangenheitspolitik im internationalen Vergleich*, Göttingen 1999, pp. 55-81.



the world, a sense of security and the division of international roles – quite clearly defined so far – make nations seek confirmation and acceptance of their identity in aspects of the past. The wars in and around Europe and the emergence of new states from the broken Yugoslavia and the Soviet Union resulted in a hail of research on nationalism. In history, nations look for justification for their identity, as well as new symbols and founding myths. The path from dictatorship to democracy is filled with the need to rest on former glory and historical compensation.

Every image and every interpretation of the past is always aimed at the achievement of a goal; it can be a search for meaning, for solidarity, building a new sense of belonging, an argument against a political adversary or another country. The past can be accounted for, justified, overcome, dealt with by revenge or judicial procedures. New politics brought new historiography in times of democratic breakthrough. The rehabilitation of monarchism in Romania, Bulgaria and Serbia, idealisation of the pre-socialist order and system, fascination with the nation, particularly in its 19<sup>th</sup> century version, were reflected in a huge selection of biographies, diaries, historical journalism and film.

In some regions, the passions of historical disputes entangled in new politics of the emerging democracies of the 1990s had their dramatic finale. All the conflicts in the European countries leaving the communist system had a historical basis. In the cases of conflicts concerning borders of a state territory, the parties in the conflict made use of history to achieve political goals, used tested stereotypes and ideology, authenticating history for current needs. Revitalisation of inter-political goals in the Balkans came at the price of thousands of victims, mass expulsions and outrage. The communist party and the Orthodox Church gathered over a million people in 1989, on the 600<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the defeat in Kosovo Polje, and the state leader, Slobodan Milošević, reminded the crowd that every nation had love that always burnt in its heart. For Serbs, it was Kosovo. That is why Kosovo was expected to be Serbian. Croatia and the followers of the idea of Great Serbia searched for prominence in history; they perceived the “natural historical alliance” of Russians and Serbs – their Orthodox brothers – as the basis for the resurrection of the united Slavic land, and they referred to the memory of Peter the Great, Bohdan Khmelnytsky and Dmitri Donskoi.<sup>98</sup>

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98 About historical reckonings in the former Yugoslavia, see for example: I. Iveljić, *Cumira et studio. Geschichte und Gesellschaft Kroatiens in den 1990er Jahren*, in: H. Altrichter (ed.), *Gegen Erinnerung. Geschichte als politisches Argument im Transformationsprozeß Ost-, Ostmittel- und Südosteuropas*, München 2006; C. Bethke, H. Sundhaussen, *Zurückzur “alten Übersichtlichkeit”?* in: H. Altrichter (ed.), op. cit., p. 205-218; W. Höpken, *Vergangenheitspolitik im sozialistischen Vielvölkerstaat. Jugoslawien 1944 bis 1991*, in: P. Bock, E. Wolftrum (eds.), op. cit., pp. 210-246.

Years of dictatorship made it difficult to accept that historical memory in a democratic, mass society is polyphonic, dynamic, fast, and commercialised. The answers to the burning questions of today are searched for in the past. After 1989, historical politics on the East of the Elbe revealed its duplicity. Where everything overlaps, real knowledge is needed about the essence of the totalitarian system, about the search for victims and perpetrators, about compensation, morality, the growing importance of political sensitivity, and distance to the case.

Historiography has always been engaged in the service of the state and historians often performed the role of initiators of national memory and eulogists of the authorities. While pre-modern historical culture was traditional and elitist, the modern version became dynamic, polyphonic and varied in form, due to, for example, overcoming illiteracy and massification of society. Contemporary commercialisation and acceleration of history and the attractiveness of audio-visual communication technologies make historians, as guards of the past, be perceived only as one of many actors co-participating in the process of interpretation and use of the past to create a better future.

History is always a result of our mental selection. Every debate around the criminal activities of the Wehrmacht, the role of Prussia in history, the anti-Nazi resistance movement and the Holocaust Museum in Germany went on for years. The debaters included the representatives of all the parties, scholars, writers and journalists. In Poland, after 1989, two subjects focused public opinion for longer. One was related to the Polish-Jewish relationship (Jedwabne) and the other with the Polish-German one (the idea of the Centre Against Expulsions). It is difficult to evaluate their effects from a recent perspective. They certainly enriched the knowledge of both societies, although sometimes they resembled a battlefield more than a discussion forum. However, it is hard to give an unequivocal answer to the question as to whether the historical truth will emerge from them as the winner.

## 5. A historian between media and politics

Aleida Assmann, repeatedly referred to in this book, distinguishes three forms of historical presentation: narrating, exhibiting and staging.<sup>99</sup> A narrative orders events chronologically and offers presentation of facts in casual relationships. Historical narration chooses what to emphasise and sets directions. To exhibit means to order historical texts, images and objects in a particular space. Exhibits

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99 A. Assmann, *Geschichte im Gedächtnis. Von der individuellen Erfahrung zur öffentlichen Inszenierung*, München 2007, pp. 149-179.

in museums are “elements of the lost order.” The aim of the exhibition is to show their new contexts. What happens is a kind of “re-contextualisation of the exposed objects.” Staging is sometimes associated as something negative, something artificial and entertaining, a Disneyland of science. Film, television and digital media are focused on a wide, mass audience; they are history for all. There are fears that staging history<sup>100</sup> sometimes takes the form of a show. However, when an object or a town becomes a great scene of history (old castles, fortresses, churches, concentration camps), it can still convey important information and messages. The cognitive value of the varied modern forms of presentation depends on the competences of the author and the abilities of the recipient.

The direction towards which social interests are developing today clearly shows that the attention of public opinion focuses less on events and more on reconstructing facts; results are closer to the centre of interest than causes; attaching meanings, forms of messages, storing memories or removing them and the context are more important than historical processes alone. How, when, why and by whom the memory is evoked are questions that become an important element of situating the past in the present and, at the same time, a determinant of the current debate on the politics of memory in Europe.

Those who are engaged in the struggle for dominance in this debate are the virtuosos of memory, political actors, initiators of new places of memory: museums and monuments. Sites of memory are constructed in order to solve concrete political and social tasks. In this sense, history is rooted in the world of everyday. The style of debate and the atmosphere of public discourse have an important role. There are significant changes everywhere regarding the use of the language of dispute.<sup>101</sup> It is impossible not to notice the progressive radicalisation of language in the constitution of social reality. Although history has never been a single, coherent unity, it is difficult to accept the fact that the language we use to interpret it is full of contradictions.

A historian of today is in a real quandary about the successes of the ‘staged history’. Recently, historians have often been curators of great exhibitions. Historical exhibitions that are scoring triumphs, particularly in Germany, are a significant contribution to historical studies. Museum practice would not be possible without using historical research results. Sometimes, however, it is done

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100 Sometimes staged history can open new horizons and areas of dispute and dialogue. The recently released work edited by Tomasz Majewski and Anna Zeidler-Janiszewska, *Pamięć Shoah. Kulturowe reprezentacje i praktyki upamiętniania*, Łódź 2009 presents a wide range of possibilities of commemorating introduced by new media.

101 G.G. Iggers, *Zur ‘Linguistischen Wende’ im Geschichtsdenken und in der Geschichtsschreibung*, *Geschichte und Gesellschaft*, issue 4, 1995, pp. 557-570.

without it and against it.<sup>102</sup> Museums are not mausoleums but are a real challenge for the academic profession. Alongside ‘staged history’, ‘experienced history’ is another challenge; stories told by ordinary people with limited access to mass media. Edward P. Thompson, the English pioneer of social, everyday-oriented history puts it as follows: “As some of the leading actors of history recede from our attention – the politicians, the thinkers, the entrepreneurs, the generals – so an immense supporting cast, whom we had supposed to be mere attendants upon this process, press themselves forward.”<sup>103</sup>

The democratisation of history and memory allows the history of everyday life to speak. This causes new theoretical and methodological problems. The competition between macro and microhistory, between the apostles of structural order and those who prefer to record feelings and experiences, is growing. At the same time, however, this shift to small, daily-experienced history of individuals and communities enriches the universal history. It reminds us that great history is composed of small experiences and leads to the political punch line: “Universal politics is also a subject of suffering in the small and smallest worlds.”<sup>104</sup>

Alongside the popularisation and institutionalisation of the commemoration culture, mythologising history and its involvement in current politics became common. Neither history nor collective memory are to be found in a pure form. Collective memory is based on representations, myths, but also on historical knowledge. Our work on the past that involves memory and forgetting must include the nature of the times we remember and the plurality of cultural, political and social circumstances to which memory refers. Jorge Semprun, a writer, communist, Gestapo victim and Buchenwald prisoner, describes his process of remembering as follows: “Regardless of the problems with remembering, I know that traces of memory cannot be erased irreversibly. Certainly, memories will not return on their own. I have to search for them strenuously. But they exist somewhere behind the apparent oblivion. I just need to make an effort, sort out the marginal aspects of the present reality, withdraw from the surroundings, the environment and turn into the inner world, with a patient, focused gaze towards those distant days. Then, faces and episodes emerge, and the old encounters will see the surface of life”.<sup>105</sup> Spontaneous memory is not enough. Reconstruction of events requires work, supported by knowledge, the help of expert resources and multiple environmental stimuli. Some events are difficult to pause and set in

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102 See eg. G. Korff, *Ausgestellte Geschichte; Saeculum* vol. 43, 1, 1992, pp. 21-35.

103 E.P. Thompson, *Folklore, anthropology and social history, Indian Historical Review*, vol. 2, No. 2 (Jan. 1978), p. 250.

104 H. Bausinger, *Erlebte Geschichte – Wege zur Alltagshistorie; Saeculum*, op. cit., p. 107.

105 J. Semprun, *Leben oder Schreiben*, Frankfurt a. M. 1995, p. 210.

order, other ones have explosive power and “flood the body like incandescent lava and instantly freeze.”<sup>106</sup>

When history becomes a medium of political construction and national identity, historians are often helpless. Politics of memory is still pursued in a pluralistic society because political elites need constitutive norms, symbols and values. Therefore, politics of memory is a field of activity that allows political actors to analyse the past from the perspective of their own interests, for which they want to influence the public opinion. History may unite or divide. The intersection of journalism, public opinion and politics makes it possible to provoke scandals and de-legitimise political enemies, but also to unite. The privilege of presence in the media gives the politics of memory a much greater chance of reaching the public than historiography. Therefore, what ultimately counts is not the historical truth but the efficiency in making historical subjects known and gaining an audience for them.

Considering the multiplicity of subjects that aspire to create the culture of memory, politics is often in conflict with other actors: intellectual elites, institutions, associations and professional historians. It must involve such factors as local tradition, family, school, and the immediate environment. Representatives of various environments, religions and cultures have the right to participate in the public discourse on history. However, public legitimisation is needed to be able to shape the politics of memory.<sup>107</sup>

While in a dictatorship the authorities can impose particular forms of memory that are against the opinion of the general public through administrative means, legal regulations and school curricula, in a pluralistic society, political proposals of the content and character of commemoration are the subject of disputes from many environments and elites. This applies to monuments, cemeteries, street names, school and institutional patrons, museums and decoration, but also to individual and collective projects. In a democratic state, the range of impact of the politics is more limited.

In this respect, those who legislate and represent public institutions are confronted with the varied expectations of the citizens. They have to be aware of the moral challenges involved in the politics of memory. Aware of the contradictions of human nature and the expectations of creating a harmonious and homogenous image of the world, the American historian of German origin and founder of the realist school, Hans Morgenthau, wrote in 1945 in his essay *The Evil of Politics*

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106 R. Koselleck, *Glühende Lava, zur Erinnerung geronnen. Vielerlei Abschied vom Krieg .Erfahrungen, die nicht aus tauschbar sind*; *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* 6.05.1995.

107 See an interesting series of discussions named *Pamięć po komunizmie*; *Przegląd Polityczny* 73-74, 2005; *Historia jako polityka*; *Przegląd Polityczny* 75, 2006 and *Polityka historyczna*; *Przegląd Polityczny* 76, 2006.

*and the Ethics of Evil*: “Man is a political animal by nature; he is a scientist by chance or choice; he is a moralist because he is a man. (...) Thus it remains for every age, and particularly for a scientific one, to rediscover and reformulate the perennial problems of political ethics and to answer them in the light of the experience of the age. (...) Neither science, nor ethics, nor politics can resolve the conflict between politics and ethics into harmony. We have no choice between power and common good. (...) In the combination of political wisdom, moral courage, and moral judgement, man reconciles his political nature with his moral destiny.”<sup>108</sup> In his desire to emphasise “tragic contradictions” of human nature and warn against looking for apparent harmony, the author suggested that every conciliation was nothing more than a provisional *modus vivendi*.

The understanding of history, the historical knowledge of a society and the role of history in everyday life are impossible to embrace and analyse in their multiplicity and variety. At the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the relationship between the political identity of contemporary nations and interpretations of the past became a subject of dispute. Individuals, groups, institutions and parties argue about which version of the past their spiritual orientation, political legitimisation and the sense of belonging should be derived from. What role should the state and its administration have in creating the image of the past? What function should journalism and science have in the service of historical enlightenment?

The need to explain the relationships between the political determinants, the scientific orientation of historians and the historical awareness in society emerged alongside global transformations, the development of new disciplines and branches of science and unlimited possibilities of interpersonal communication. Frequent problems, such as the impetuous emancipation and increased awareness of ethnic and cultural minorities, national aspirations of new states, and the expansion of the European Union set new turning points that have an impact on our understanding of history. In these new circumstances, scholars ask about the role of historical events and their symbols in public space. New sources, forms and relationships between historiography and public sphere emerge. In this respect, history has benefited a lot in recent years from other academic disciplines, e.g. literature studies and cultural anthropology. The increasing interest of unprofessional researchers in the past and its role in the contemporary world raises fears among the representatives of historical science, whose authority is often undermined by giving preference to existential experiences of an individual over the meaning of historical processes.

The awareness of the limited impact of a historian on a social image of history in a democratic state causes frustration. Considering the huge competition in the information society, the chances of a historian of reaching the general public

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108 H.J. Morgenthau, *The Evils of Politics and the Ethics of Evil; Ethics*, Vol. 56, No. 1, Oct., 1945, pp. 1-18.

with his research results are decreasing. In post-communist societies, where the triumphant commercialisation embraced also the publishing market, the opportunities to publish historical sensations without verification of their content are unlimited. In this context, the responsibility of decision-making and the intellectual elite is greater.

Historical experience has demonstrated that the historian has a double role: the creator and the victim of the images of history. After World War II, the new, democratic authorities in Germany had the ambition of separating the humanities from politics and ideologies. However, the post-war ideological confrontation between the West and the East required a strong political stance towards the Communist Bloc. Therefore, since the very beginning, the most recent history has been characterised by contradiction. *Ostforschung* (Research of the East) vowed scientific objectivity but was often a protest against the loss of the Eastern territories. The motto of the *Osteuropa* magazine, published from 1951, “objectively, but not neutrally” questioned the postulate of the non-political character of historical research regarding Central and Eastern Europe.<sup>109</sup> Despite accomplishing its main task, which was the provision of information about the countries behind the Iron Curtain, some German historians cultivated undiluted nationalism under the cover of being anti-communist.

The situation in Poland developed similarly. Western research was used by the new authorities in order to legitimise the communist government. Communist authorities demanded that the historians dealing with the subject of the ‘Recovered Territories’ (the former Free City of Danzig and the parts of pre-war Germany that became part of Poland after World War II) would confirm the deep-rooted Polish origin of these territories. The dilemma between scientific objectivity and the justified expectation of objection against the revindicationist rhetoric of the West-German scholars marked the history of the time.

The examples of Charles de Gaulle, Konrad Adenauer and Władysław Gomułka demonstrate that the image of history can be a powerful weapon in the hands of politicians who use great historical myths and visions. Changes in historical awareness rarely occur under the influence of scientific research and are instead a result of the competence of numerous historical experiences confronted with contemporary problems. The impact of research is slow and demands a lot of investment. Therefore, contemporary times also pose a challenge to the researchers of the past.<sup>110</sup>

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109 C.R. Unger, “Objektiv, aber nicht neutral” *Zur Entwicklung der Ostforschung nach 1945; Osteuropa* 12, 2005, pp. 113-132.

110 See also: an example in German history H.-P. Schwarz, *Geschichtsschreibung und politisches Selbstverständnis; Aus Politik und Zeitgeschichte* 36, 1982, pp. 5-16.



Every state considers the construction of memory as its significant political task. These efforts should provide impulse for public debates. Controversies over interpretations of history in a pluralistic society may be a source of inspiration for debates and research, provided that their aim is only cognitive. However, post-communist countries and new political formations most of all need new historical legitimisation. In this context, history often serves as a vehicle for uniting milieus and generations and is a source of social mobilisation. In this respect, historical myths have a particular role as they generate identity and stabilise society. They also create the impression of unity and harmony and decide the particularity of a nation. Rituals, symbols and myths are not only an ornament of social reality. They serve a communicative and informative role; they also considerably dramatise the emotions that unite nations in special circumstances.<sup>111</sup>

The interest in reckoning with the past and the problems caused by this process reveal the complexity of this problem. In Africa, where tribal wars continue, the question arises concerning who should judge local dictatorships. Legal issues overlap with moral ones. Democratic and non-democratic countries apply different methods of reckoning with the past. The pressure of public opinion, which no longer tolerates unpunished murders like the ones in 1993 in the collapsing Yugoslavia, became the determining factor in the creation of the International Criminal Court.<sup>112</sup> Political changes and insurgencies in Africa and Latin America make history and memory an important tool for reckoning with the past and judicature. After the devastating tribal and civil wars in Rwanda, where genocidal mass slaughter took place in 1994, the international community demanded reckoning with the bloody past in the courtroom. The same applies to Pol Pot's regime, under which over 1.5 million Cambodians were murdered, and to the countries of Latin America. The Cambodian Genocide Justice Act is a new instrument of a historical judicature, one of the elements of political and moral reckoning with the past. Judicature needs truth to pass a sentence, which is an element of the politics of memory. Commissions are assembled, with 'reconciliation' and 'truth' in their names. In Africa, they are only a substitute for a new politics of memory.

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111 For more see: E. Wolfrum, *Geschichte als Politikum – Geschichtspolitik. Internationale Forschungszum 19. und 20. Jahrhundert, Neupolitische Literatur* 41, 1996, pp. 376-401; H. Folkers, *Die gerettete Geschichte. Ein Hinweis auf Walter Benjamins Begriff der Erinnerung*, in: A. Assmann, D. Harth (ed.), *Mnemosyne. Formen und Funktionen der kulturellen Erinnerung*, Frankfurt a. M. 1993, p. 367; J. Danyel, *Die Historiker und die Moral. Anmerkungen zur Debatte über die Autorenrechte an der DDR-Geschichte; Geschichte und Gesellschaft* 2, 1995, pp. 290-303.

112 R. Fuchs, D. Nolte, *Politikfeld Vergangheitspolitik: Zur Analyse der Aufarbeitung von Menschenrechtsverletzungen in Lateinamerika; Lateinamerika-Analysen* 9, 2004, pp. 59-92.



If a ‘victim-perpetrator’ interpretation remains a dominant pattern of historical reckoning in the countries of ethnic conflicts, sooner or later it will become the seeds of a new conflict.<sup>113</sup>

In Central America, Chile, Argentina and Uruguay, confrontations with the criminal activity of authoritarian dictatorships continue to take place. Questions arise as to whether historians do not face demands beyond their competence. The question as to whom the past belongs arouses widespread emotions. What function should a historian perform in the face of new, unknown challenges? Should he or she evaluate the past with the eyes of a judge or a barrister? Can the call for truth and justice, which requires objectivity, be assigned to contemporary historians?<sup>114</sup> Although a historian and a judge differ in many ways, they share the concern about evidence and critical examination of the credibility of witnesses. A judge has to judge, to make a decision. A tribunal verdict, however, is not a verdict of history. A historian who looks for the truth has to revise history all over again. It is not his/her task to decree judgments of history, its actors and witnesses.

The booming subject of the politics of memory reveals the challenges faced by historians as one of many groups participating in the creation of memory and historical consciousness, and thereby political culture. The historian also remains a citizen, and asks himself/herself a question, along with society as a whole: who are we and what is our destination in the free world? Historians draw public attention to new threats to freedom and democracy. In 2002, the Association of Historians of the Czech Republic issued a declaration entitled ‘Historians Against the Violation of History’. On 13 December 2005, a group of prominent French historians appealed against a spate of cases relating to the interference of politics in the field of history. In a manifesto entitled ‘Freedom for history’, the scholars asserted: “History is not a religion. Historians accept no dogma, respect no prohibition, ignore every taboo... Historical truth is different from morals. The historian’s task is not to extol or to blame, but to explain. History is not the slave of current issues. The historian does not stick contemporary ideological outlines onto the past and does not bring today’s sensitivity into the events of former times. History is not memory. The historian, in a scientific procedure, collects people’s memories, compares them with each other, confronts them with documents, objects, traces, and establishes the facts. History takes remembrance into account but is not reduced to it. History is not a juridical issue. In a free state, neither the Parliament nor the judicial courts have the right to define historical truth. State policy, even with best case will, is

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113 See e.g. K. Ambos, *Die Rolle des Internationalen Strafgerichtshofs; Aus Politik und Zeitgeschichte* 42, 2006, p. 10-17; P. Gobodo-Madikizela, *Trauma und Versöhnung – Lehren aus Südafrika; Aus Politik und Zeitgeschichte* 42, 2006, pp. 32-38.

114 P. Ricoeur, *Rola sędziego, rola historyka; Res Publica* 7, 2001, pp. 21-27.

not history policy.”<sup>115</sup> The appeal, signed by the most eminent French historians and hundreds of intellectuals, was a response to the so-called memorial laws that hindered research work. The scholars decided that controlling memory was dangerous, and the parliament as the main historiographer was not reliable due to its not always sufficient competence and its relationship with short-term political interests. The appeal resulted from the fear of the possibility of research results being confronted with decisions of the highest authority and the manipulation that can reduce science to no more than ideology written on political order or the order of veteran’s circles. When Arno Klarsfeld published an article in *Le Monde* entitled: ‘To Whom Does History Belong’ in response to the appeal by French historians, new questions emerged. Klarsfeld defends history as the property of all citizens, which cannot be appropriated by anyone, including historians. He expects that the results of scientific works will harmonise with the feelings of the general public and support memory as a pillar of identity, an essential element of stability and order in times of chaos and instability.

In October 2008, French historians, the representatives of the Freedom for History Association, launched another appeal, the last sentence of which reads: “In a democracy, freedom for history is the freedom of all”.<sup>116</sup> Behind the ‘Blois Appeal’ were mostly Pierre Nora and the writer Françoise Chandernagor. The pretext of the ‘Appeal’ were political decisions concerning historical publications, sanctions and punishments against politically and historically incorrect works, or works that falsified history. They regarded the denial of the gas chambers, Holocaust denial and parliamentary recognition of the Armenian genocide. The French citizens resident in the old French colony of Algeria introduced a law that recognised a ‘positive role’ played by French colonialism. Resolutions about Stalin’s genocide in Ukraine in 1932 are waiting in parliaments to be enacted. The ‘Blois Appeal’ addressed all countries, asking them to stand against the “retrospective moralisation of history and intellectual censure” under pressure from contemporary politics. ‘The Appeal’ is gaining supporters in many countries. In Germany, Gaby Cohn-Bendit, the brother of the Green Party politician, supported the demand for “total freedom of speech for historians and lunatics”, arguing that “one can oppose and fight only that which can be freely articulated.”

The French example demonstrates traps laid by the categorical separation of actors and factors that create historical awareness and the colonisation of memory. The French debate reveals the inevitability of certain processes in the modern

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115 E. Bieńkowska, *Demokracja – historia – cenzura: Spór o pamięć i przeszłość; Dziennik. Europa: tygodnikidei* 29, 19.07.2006, translation after: [http://learning.londonmet.ac.uk/cice/docs/2008\\_493.pdf](http://learning.londonmet.ac.uk/cice/docs/2008_493.pdf)

116 Polish signatories were Karol Modzelewski and Krzysztof Pomian. *Historikerkämpfen für die Freiheit der Geschichte; Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* 16.10.2008.

world. Emancipated individuals, circles and social groups no longer need the dictate of the state, in its current scope and dimension, in the creation of sites of memory. The communities of memory that emerged as a result of grassroots initiatives and interest groups want to actively participate in the process of the creation of historical culture. They need constantly renewed negotiations.

The debate on the politics of memory must be accompanied by a reflection on the role of history in a democratic society. Historians will not avoid a confrontation with other actors who have an impact on public opinion and its interest in the past. Considerations about the interpretation of history and its politicisation should take into account the objective truth that we are witnessing the popularisation of history, when every memory of a conflict becomes a memory conflict, and nearly every narrative of history is undermined by a different historical narrative. We are accompanied by contradictions between individual experiences and collective memory, emotions and rationality, understanding of the victims who await compensation and a democratically created history, objectivity and partisanship, research inquisitiveness and imagination, between collective moral imperative and individual intellectual concern. These contradictions are an inevitable part of life in a pluralistic society, and the ability to seek common ground and listen to different arguments is a prerequisite for developing democratic historical culture.

The changes the historian has to face are qualitative and quantitative. They are objective factors, both external and internal, which reveal transformations of historical sciences. There are many hasty, short-term forecasts in the evaluation and interpretations of these transformations, which should be interpreted cautiously. The changes in the situation of a historian, in the context of other sciences and the external circumstances, did not take place from one day to the next. The transformative process has been taking place for a long time. However, the symptoms and consequences of these changes have very recently been visible. Their definitions and terminology are being elaborated. The end of the Cold War, the collapse of communist ideology in the countries of Central and Eastern Europe, and, as a consequence, the release from the shackles of censorship and opening of archives, and the expansion of the European Union are the main factors that led to a renaissance of interest in recent history. Along with it, new questions, interpretations and visions came into light.

The popularity of the literature about methodology, theory of historiography and philosophy of history, which reveals problems with the understanding of the term ‘truth’, and debates over relations between facts and fiction also cause unrest among historians. Generational change, internationalisation of research, a qualitative and quantitative increase of academic disciplines examining history and the growing social demand for history are factors that evoke questions and doubts. What is history? What is the relationship between the past and historical

writings? What is the role of history as a discourse? Sceptics prophesy the era of the end of grand history. Some theoreticians want to reduce historians only to “producers of historical interpretations.”<sup>117</sup> There is a growing need for a debate about new criteria for distinguishing fictional and non-fictional texts. The dichotomy of fiction (myth) and reality (history), subjective and objective truth, modernist truth and postmodern representation are in the centre of debates. The tendency to historicise in contemporary societies leads to a focus on the multiplicity of forms of presenting the past. Therefore, the interest in political aspects of history and cultures of memory is inevitable.

The shift of interest and methodological orientation in historiography coincided with the end of the division of Europe. This fact revealed deep differences between the cultures of memory in both parts of the Old Continent and updated the question about the role of a professional historian in the countries of the former Soviet Bloc. The problem of a historian’s ethos came back with a vengeance. Maria Kujawska seems to have been right to join the scholars calling for a new ethos of historians, for an ethical turning point in historical studies. Theoreticians, e.g. philosophers of history who depreciate the classic definition of truth, highlight ethical issues. The questions of moral responsibility for historical records are becoming prevalent. The studies of Poznań historians concerning contemporary heroes of the Polish youth, combined with sociological research (e.g. by Hanna Świda-Zięba) emphasise the dominant tendency among young people: a longing for what is good and right and provides a sense of security makes them look for noble characters who are ready to make sacrifices for others. This provides an important hint for the authors of school textbooks and for historians<sup>118</sup> – the question is whether they are the only ones who can see it. In the contemporary world, where the characters of popular imagination are created mostly by the media, every branch of science and every author should remind others about ethical standards.

Disciplines related to history initiate debates. Historical anthropology derived from a combination of interest in history and anthropological reflection focuses on what seems obvious; the researcher of the past asks questions shaped in the present.

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117 See the extensive literature on the subject of disputes over competence in theoretical considerations: M. Middell, M. Gibas, F. Hadler, *Sinnstiftung und Systemlegitimation durch historisches Erzählen. Überlegungen zu Funktionsmechanismen von Repräsentationen des Vergangenen*; *Comparativ* 2, 2000, pp. 7-35.

118 M. Kujawska, *Bohaterowie współczesnej polskiej młodzieży i jej rodziców. Afirmacja dobra. Zwrot etyczny?*, in: M. Kujawska, B. Jewsiewicki (eds.), *Historia – pamięć – tożsamość. Postaci upamiętniane przez współczesnych mieszkańców różnych części Europy*, Poznań 2006, pp. 333-344. See also e.g. E. Domańska (ed.), *Pamięć, etyka, historia, Anglo-amerykańska teoria historiografii lat dziewięćdziesiątych*, Poznań 2002; idem, *Mikrohistorie. Spotkania w międzyświatach*, Poznań 2000.

He brings to the world of the informant all the routine ways of thinking, current notions of time and space, logic, stereotypes, language of the culture in which he lives. In other words, he fully demonstrates that historiography is a product of its times, and the “cultural imputation is the foundation of historical thinking.”<sup>119</sup> The fact that we use presentism to study the past demonstrates the extent to which the truth of historical narratives depends on the context of the present.

Philosophers, including the philosophers of history, ask about the relationship between historiography and future. Concerns about the current role of history as an advisor of life do not free us from the obligation to reflect on whether the theory of historical cognition can develop tools to help us interpret the relationship between historiography and future. The questions as to whether historiography can speak about the future draw our attention to new areas of reflection at the junction of different disciplines. They also force historians to take greater account of the expectations of the recipients of their writing. Doubts and suggestions stemming from various humanistic disciplines are multiplying. They concern ideological entanglements of writers about the past that should be taken into consideration. The historian cannot invite people to travel into the past without realising that he/she does not work in an isolated studio and cannot pretend a lack of commitment to the situations that form the world around him/her.<sup>120</sup>

Old and new media pose a challenge. It was already Aristotle who pointed at the closeness of science and art in his *Poetics*. He gave artists a lot of freedom, believing that the poets' role is not only to imitate reality but also to communicate what is likely to happen. Aristotle considered poetry to be more philosophical and to carry more weight than history. Today, the dialogue between artists and scientists is common and the space of their communication and disputes is usually the museum. The fact vs. fiction relationship has occupied scholars' attention for decades. Recent German disputes over the exhibition about the Wehrmacht, about the final form of the Holocaust monument, countless debates about artistic forms of presenting the past demonstrate the problem of communicating and negotiating a common vision of the past between historians, art historians, architects, sculptors and painters.<sup>121</sup>

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119 See e.g. W. Wrzosek, *Imputacja kulturowa jako fundament myślenia historycznego*, in: M. Kujawska, B. Jewsiewicki (eds.), op.cit, pp. 35-39.

120 See. M. Bugajewski, *Historiografia i przyszłość. Mapa kontekstu pytania badawczego*, in: M. Kujawska, B. Jewsiewicki (eds.), op. cit., pp. 53-62. A wide spectrum of the debate amongst German scholars is presented by Jerzy Kałużny in his anthology. See: *Opowiadanie historii w niemieckiej refleksji teoretycznohistorycznej i literaturoznawczej*, selected, translated and edited by J. Kałużny, Poznań 2003.

121 K. Wettengl (ed.), *Das Gedächtnis der Kunst. Geschichte und Erinnerung in der Kunst der Gegenwart*, Frankfurt a. M. 2000.

A few decades ago, museums were said to be in crisis. Today, however, we are experiencing a real museum boom. At a German Museums Association congress in Ulm in 1989, an amazing increase in the number of museums in West Germany was documented. While there were 673 registered museums in 1969, there were already 2,400 by 1988. The number of visitors was over 60 million.<sup>122</sup> Of the 1,100 districts of Baden-Württemberg, over a thousand has a museum. Popularisation of museums and musealisation of the past have a mutual impact. At the same time, professionalisation of museum work and its contribution to the organisation of state and regional institutions is increasing. The initiatives and acceptance of important state organs and institutions increase the visitors' trust. Such a great increase in the number of museums has not been granted the explicit approval of those concerned with the issue. Niklas Luhmann interprets this phenomenon as rejection of the present. The author is not alone in his belief that the flourishing of museums is a symptom of crisis. The often-discussed cultural heritage of nations is in fact exploited as aesthetic compensation for the deficiencies and frustrations of the industrial society. Some interpret musealisation as a decline of rationality, as getting closer to history not in the form of critical analysis but rather nostalgia, convinced that the culture of objects and things shortens and reduces memory to what is tangible and desirable.

History displayed in museums presents opportunities and challenges regardless of the contradictory opinions and diverse interpretations of scholars representing different academic disciplines. Museum visitors receive a modernised past. As Johann Gustav Droysen noted, one cannot reconstruct the past from contemporary materials; one can only shape or modify the image of the past.<sup>123</sup> Marshall McLuhan, the Canadian theoretician of communication, claimed that a museum exhibition is a cold medium that demands recipient's participation. Understanding requires knowledge and ability to link facts. If a museum is expected to be an independent medium and not only an assistant of history, it has to seduce visitors, create an aura of authenticity, generate interest on the one hand and give new meaning to the exhibits, trigger a discussion and reflection on the past on the other.

Today, history is a subject of stage presentation. The authors of historical television programmes give their works the impression of authenticity. They use sources and write screenplays often based on documents and scientific texts. Their main aim, however, is to fascinate the audience. An author of television shows can make up missing historical sources, and, using cameras, can manipulate

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122 G. Korff, *Musealisierung total? Notizen zu einem Trend, der die Institution, nach der erbenannt ist, hinter sich gelassen hat*, in: K. Füßmann, H.T. Grütter, J. Rüsen (eds.), *Historische Faszination Geschichtskultur heute*, Köln, Weimar, Wien 1994, pp. 129-144.

123 J.G. Droysen, *Historik. Vorlesungen über Enzyklopädien und Methodologie der Geschichte*, Darmstadt 1950, p. 20.

images by arranging, cropping, zooming in and zooming out. An average viewer digests only what is unambiguous and understandable. The author of a TV show can give the bygone past a dramatic character by staging historical facts and literary sources. Staged history is based on the viewer's memory capabilities, his association potential and emotions. A good actor will obtain more in this respect than a document. History on television, however, does not have to be frivolous. Historical science can and should exercise control over the performance. Also, a television viewer must be aware that he/she is dealing with a reconstructed past that oscillates between fiction, fantasy and reality. Television images are always a manipulated reality. To influence a viewer, the television image of history has to be a responsible manipulation. The 'television historiographer' should free him/herself of any ideology. Only then can he understand the meaning of the past in the present.<sup>124</sup>

Generating feelings by creating fiction can provide a sense of co-participation and compassion for the victims. The question is, what next? Only commercial profit? Will the compassion remain only until the tears dry out or will a deeper interest be the result? Culture as a realm of memory provides new opportunities but also poses new threats.

The challenges faced by a historian in the contemporary world are as varied as their impact on science. The most significant phenomena and processes are as follows:

- In the globalised world, the historian does not have a monopoly on truth. He is one of numerous actors offering historical knowledge and historical science is one of the products on the free market.
- The omnipresence of media that are naturally focused on mass culture and popularisation results in professional history losing out to modern techniques of interpreting the past and presenting images of the past. The pervasive commercialisation forces history to be more attractive to pander to mass expectations and political tastes. It is not historians who decide on thematic priorities in public debates, but the sensation-seeking media, judges of vetting boards, film producers, directors, editors, ministerial administration and politicians, all of whom are involved in the 'production' of historical elaborations and interpretations. In Germany, the European champion in the European trend of a great increase in the number of museums, discussions about the dangers of fictionalising history are developing. Representatives of many academic disciplines and areas of life are involved. Professional historians accuse museums of the dramatisation of history. They provoke distrust of the images that are accused of being ambiguous and unverifiable.

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124 E. Klöss, *Die Last der Bilder – Geschichte im Fernsehen*, in: K. Fußmann, H.T. Grütter, J. Rüsen, op. cit., pp. 189-195.



History is criticised for warming hearts at the expense of reason whenever aesthetics, imagination and magic of images are concerned.<sup>125</sup> Without doubt, the new culture of electronic media – television, video, computer games – offer a new world of historical imagination without taking responsibility for the historical truth. Therefore, questions concerning the authenticity of images in this arrangement of history are justified. Museum experts are right, however, when they assume that simplifications are inevitable wherever projection and arrangement are in focus. The concern about emotional effects is also important. As contemporary practice demonstrates, museums can introduce significant subjects to public debate, provide interesting material and direct public interest and scientific research. Museum education is important in the contemporary world. Museum forms of history, however, will not replace historiography and cannot have such an ambition. Interpretation is always more important than staging. It is also dependent on many factors. Wolfgang Goethe noted, advising the Weimar court theatre in 1802, that one cannot show more respect to an audience than not treating them like common people, and his words should be dedicated to those who debate about the sense and character of museums.

- After the collapse of the Soviet Union, Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia, we entered a new stage of the rationalisation of memory. The emergence of new national states, deprived of sovereignty before, caused the need for a change in historiography. Some call this period a time of crisis in historical sciences and in the ‘methodological identity’ of the historians of these nations.<sup>126</sup> Stateless and divided for many centuries, societies write their history from the beginning. This process of the empowerment of historical narrative and historical ethnicisation usually develops according to patriotic canons. In the period of independent Ukraine (until 2004), about twenty synthetic works of the history of this nation were released, mostly elaborated according to an ethno- and state-centred vision of Ukrainian history. The common feature of the new analyses by the ‘non-historical nations’, not only that prepared by Ukraine, is a demonstration of historical linearity and continuity of a nation, using clichés and stereotypes about stronger neighbours and the presence of a national historical myth.

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125 G. Korff, *Bildwelt Ausstellung. Die Darstellung von Geschichte im Museum*, in: U. Borsdorf, H.T. Grütter (eds.), *Orte der Erinnerung. Denkmal, Gedenkstätte, Museum*, Frankfurt, New York 1999, pp. 319-336.

126 See e.g. L. Zaszkilniak, *Nacjonalizacja historii: państwo i historiografia na współczesnej Ukrainie*, in: S.M. Nowinowski, J. Pomorski, R. Stobiecki (eds.), *Pamięć i polityka historyczna. Doświadczenia Polski i jej sąsiadów*, Łódź 2008, pp. 27-34.



- Critical voices concern the clannishness of history. Are historians indeed shutting themselves in their guild, thinking only through martyr-heroic clichés? Interdisciplinarity is gradually gaining appreciation in humanities. The cooperation of cultural anthropologists, ethnologists, art historians, literature researchers and sociologists is visible at conferences and in international projects rather than in great historical debates. Converting historical accounts into a discourse of collective utility detracts neither from the rank nor from the seriousness of the historian. On the contrary, history should always serve to explain the present. Great debates after the reunification of Germany, concerning e.g. Daniel Goldhagen's books, exhibitions about the crimes of the Wehrmacht, building a Holocaust victims monument, and about the expulsion of Germans in 1945 gathered, besides historians, representatives of various professions and social groups. There were also disputes over the character of German identity and the degree of legitimacy of the Berlin Republic. In Poland, the public debate on Jan Gross's books was dominated by ideological and political accents. How much are the media to blame and how much the passiveness of historians? This question has no clear answer. Each debate brings some value to science and to political culture. Much depends on the questions we ask and the conclusions we draw.
- Postmodernism has forced the historian, with his traditional methodology, to answer difficult questions about the scholarship of history and the character and form of the historical narrative. Provocative undermining of what used to be the fundamentals of historical methodology and questioning the historical truth and historical sources went almost unnoticed by Polish historiography – and not only there. In most societies, the questions of methodology usually interest a small group of methodologists, theoreticians and philosophers of history. Undoubtedly, our duty remains to draw the attention of young academicians to the questions and challenges that should become an integral part of our historical debate. The words of the Polish methodologist, Gwidon Zalejka, are important in this context: “Nothing comes out of history that has not been earlier in ourselves. If we want, history will teach us morality and evil, joy and suffering, activity and fatalism. An honest question addressed to our historical knowledge today should therefore read not: ‘how was it?’ or ‘why was it this way, and not otherwise?’ but rather ‘what past do we need today?’, ‘what do we have to learn from history today?’”<sup>127</sup>

Historical sciences face the task of adapting the achievements of other sciences to enrich its own methodology. A science may cooperate with literature, art and even

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127 G. Zalejko, *Stereotypy w myśleniu historyków*, in: M. Kujawska (ed.), *Podręcznik historii – perspektywy modernizacji*, Poznań 1994, p. 38.

politics without losing its scholarship. This problem is raised by Karol Modzelewski in his discussion about Andrzej Mencwel's book: "We historians often cannot recognise the trace of history in the present, its continuance and legacy. And even if we can, we cannot interpret how it works in the contemporary culture. We need anthropologists, sociologists, cultural studies and literature studies scholars so as to better find hot spots on the map of the present and find our way in this present. We have to transcend the boundaries of our discipline to formulate the most important questions and to combine efforts to answer them, but each within the area of their competences."<sup>128</sup> Closer contact with the subjects of European history and the search for answers to the questions troubling European historiography intensify the dialogue between Polish and general history. Heartwarming history engages a small group of historians and is oriented more towards education. Today, the fear of enclosing history in a national ghetto should not give us sleepless nights. There is a growing conviction that a focus on national history that ignores the European context does not create trust or the sense of co-responsibility for the Old Continent. The awareness of the road travelled together, its good and tragic moments, is needed.

The European narrative needs to equally include the experiences of both parts of the Old Continent. Mutuality and European history without myths are necessary. They are an important condition of European integration. Research possibilities in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, ease of international contacts and studying abroad provide great chances and opportunities for young researchers. There is a growing need for openness and mobility amongst historians and for the development of new specialisations in university education, such as public history, applied history, the role of historical imagination. The question as to what degree this openness translates into a system of historical education for schools and universities remains. Courage in exposing and defining problems and in posing research questions is needed. In the times of acceleration, when the character of interpersonal communication and information is changing, the historian must ask himself how to spread knowledge so it can reach everyone rather than becoming an ivory tower.

In the face of these challenges and developments, a question arises as to whether prophesying the agony of 'great history' is not premature after all. Are the above-mentioned problems more of a risk or an opportunity? Admittedly, political, civilisation and cultural changes make the historian only one of the actors of historical presentation and narrative. However, doesn't this competition provoke greater research creativity? Decentralisation in Eastern and Central parts of Europe means re-empowering the individual, with all its consequences. Multiplicity is the sign of our times: multiplicity of sciences, interpretations and

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128 K. Modzelewski, *Wokół książki Andrzeja Mencwela "Wyobrażenia antropologiczne"*; *Przegląd Filozoficzno-Literacki* 4, 2008, pp. 30-31.

opinions are distinguishing features of democracy. The specialisation within history is growing. Yet doesn't this process affect other academic disciplines? Popular literature has always coexisted with highbrow literature and the final product of humanities has always depended on the elementary honesty of a researcher. Pluralism as the new experience also embraced historical sciences. It is related to democracy and dispersion. The multiplicity of the theories of the past and forms of commemoration creates a sense of chaos and anxiety. Individual experiences exposed in rapidly produced memoirs become an additional source that the historian tries to integrate. This does not diminish his/her role whatsoever.

The historian has never been a cold observer. In Poland and probably other countries of 'wounded memory' there is a lingering image of the historian as a spiritual guide, educator of a nation and a guard of national virtues. Among twenty conditions that Joachim Lelewel imposed on the historian in his paper *Jakim ma być historyk* (*Who should the historian be*) from 1818, a significant role was attached to the following one: "Fulfilling his great duty, he [the historian] should be guided by the public interest, free himself from outside pressure, be filled with sentiments and articulate them. Should he document the sentiments that had the greatest impact on history, he must feel proud of his religion and deeply love his fatherland and his nation."<sup>129</sup>

The image of the historian changes with society. The society of the 21<sup>st</sup> century articulates diverse expectations of the profession of a historian. Although there are no studies that reflect the social tastes and requirements of readers, I dare think that the dominant element has always been the scientific integrity of the researcher, which can neither be decreed nor measured. The English writer Julian Barnes admits that history always reveals everything. We try to hide things, but history never gives up. It has "time and science" on its side. Nonetheless, the temptation to tell history in a more comforting and beautifying way never leaves people. However, we have gained enough experience to realise that false arguments lead to false conclusions and false history to false politics. Therefore, history can and should warm hearts but it must not do it at the expense of reason.

Disintegration of historical sciences is inevitable. A similar fate befalls other academic disciplines. It will not be easy to meet this challenge. In the face of the exponential growth of literature, the debates on historical sources, interpretations and experiences have no common denominator or common goal. De-professionalisation of history is a broader phenomenon, resulting from the

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129 J. Lelewel, *Jakim ma być historyk*, in: idem, *Wybór pism historycznych*, ed. H. Więckowska, Wrocław 1950, p. 37.

spirit of the times. Is the main culprit the expansion of postmodernism that, as Rafał Stobiecki notes, legitimises “every individual historical discourse”?<sup>130</sup>

We are still in the circle of questions and doubts about the condition of the historian in the face of the present challenges. Can the blame for the threats be attached mainly to the virus of postmodernism? What roles do we attach to ourselves as the members of the historical guild? What factors determine our image of the past? Isn't the role of history as the factor legitimising political order and national identity an anachronistic phenomenon? Where do historians' dialogues intersect and where do they diverge? Whether we want it or not, history goes beyond the walls of archives. New circumstances and determinants force a new debate. I do not perceive them as threat. In the times of change, when historical arguments are of value, the historian's duties should be reconsidered. There is no ready-made recipe and one should not expect one.

Postmodern criticism of history causes anxiety, but also positive responses. One can agree that the debate about new methodological issues does not absorb the attention of historical and related sciences in Poland to the extent it does in some Western countries; however, it is present at many universities.<sup>131</sup>

Knowledge of the past has always been an element of the formation and education of individual and social groups, a link in the process of transformations and experiences. In times of crises, the past arouses more interest and the demand for historical studies is greater. However, regardless of the times, history can be reduced neither to moral teachings, historical justice, nor to media sensationalism. Does it have to be the foundation of patriotic or citizenship education? It is important that those who practice it have a sense of responsibility for the future. There still have been authors asking about the subject of historical studies, and the cognitive value and function of historiography. An increasing number of adepts are interested in philosophical reflections on history. In addition to those who judge Polish history as backward, detached from the great European thought, confined in a national cocoon and oriented exclusively to the treatment of the ailing Polish soul, there are also debates in various academic centres focusing on the question of how to face new challenges.

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130 R. Stobiecki, *Rola historyka we współczesnym świecie*, *Dziennik Europa*, January 12, 2005. See also: idem, *Was gibt's Neues in der polnischen Historiographie zu Beginn des 21. Jahrhunderts?*, *Historie. Jahrbuch des Zentrums für Historische Forschung Berlin der Polnischen Akademie der Wissenschaften* 1, 2007/2008, pp. 37-56.

131 See e.g. the editorial debate in *Konspekt*, participated in by Prof. Jacek Chrobaczyński, Andrzej Chwalba, Czesław Robotycki and Krzysztof Zamorski, in: *Jesteśmy niewolnikami naszej kultury historycznej i polityki*; *Konspekt* Czasopismo Akademii Pedagogicznej w Krakowie 14/15, Spring-Summer 2003.

The answer to this question also depends on the interpretation of postmodernism. Is the so-called narrative philosophy of history ending together with the end of the century or is it only “getting older”?<sup>132</sup> We are facing a general shift in the philosophy of humanities. What position will we assign to the ontological status of the past and history that was previously accepted but is now questioned by postmodern reflection? Will we share the doubts whether history is science or literature, or will we agree with Hayden White that history is “the place of fantasy”?<sup>133</sup>

Whether we want it or not, history will remain our everyday companion. The researcher’s task will be to recognise the character of new sources and to analyse them according to historical methodology. This involves every history, including the one that is narrated, filmed, staged, iconographic or recorded on a tape. Historians of the 21<sup>st</sup> century gradually incorporate new sources and new problems into their methodology. The fact that neither an individual nor entire nations draw conclusions from history cannot be a discouragement from studying it. Despite all the risks, the basic tasks of the historian remain unchanged. He/she should still be a link between the past and the present. The elementary honesty of a researcher and a citizen makes him/her do what Joachim Lelewel appreciated more than two hundred years ago, when he emphasised the value of the “untiring diligence” of the historian and his/her skills and noted that he/she “should look for a scholarly disposition, acquire skills for philosophical activities, improve critical capabilities and endeavour to personally be of the same as that history itself should be.”<sup>134</sup>

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132 E. Domańska, *Wstęp*, in: *Historia: o jeden świat za daleko?* introduction, translation and editing: E. Domańska, Poznań 1997, pp. 11-18.

133 E. Domańska, *Białatopologia. Hayden White i teoria pisarstwa historycznego*, *Teksty Drugie* 2, 1994, pp. 165-166.

134 J. Lelewel, op. cit., p. 39.



# Chapter 2

## Between the end and the beginning

### 1. Legacy of the two World Wars

The intensity of dealing with some problems in the history of mankind and its nations sometimes does not translate into their understanding. On the contrary, discovering new truths entails new doubts and new questions. It is still difficult to organise thoughts on the legacy of National Socialism, that is, on the evaluation of a historical process burdened with the most dramatic experiences. The distance that increases as we move away from the end of World War II makes it possible to predict the limits of our understanding. “The owl of Minerva begins its flight only with the onset of dusk”, wrote Georg W. Hegel in 1821, noting that human reflection and philosophical wisdom usually come too late.<sup>135</sup>

Alongside the discoveries of new, unknown areas and aspects of war crimes, genocide and the mechanism of the seduction of German society with the Nazi ideology, literature is developing about the content and forms of the perception of this greatest civilization breakdown of the modern era. Thus, research results enrich our knowledge not only with the historical facts of the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, but also with information concerning the condition of social memory and identity and the political culture of the succeeding German generations. Interest in the recent German past rose to the rank of a political and moral problem. The length and intensity of the rising and falling waves of memory and forgetting about the twelve years of the Third Reich makes one ask questions about the specificity of the German path, its determinants and consequences. Guilt and responsibility for evil carried out (and the subsequent repressing of that evil) in the name of a social, ethnic, religious or national group had never before been a matter of scientific dispute or controversy in public debates and politics to such a spatial and temporal extent as it has been in the case of Germany.

Many circumstances affect the nature of this discourse. The character of World War II is one of the important factors. Just as World War I helped one draw conclusions about the nations of 19<sup>th</sup> century Europe, the 20<sup>th</sup> century, its political

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135 G.W.F. Hegel, *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, Cambridge University Press, 1991, p. 23.

processes, national passions and individual dramas can be understood in the light of the tragedy of World War II. World War II took place in a completely different epoch. The 19<sup>th</sup> century was called the long one, and the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the short one. The greatest stigma was imprinted on the latter by the years 1939-1945. The true end of the postwar era was marked in 1989 with the end of the Cold War epoch.

Both wars radically transformed human consciousness, formed and deformed societies, changed the territorial and political order of countries, modified national identity and had an enormous impact on the history of Europe and the world. In the last century, for the first time in history, a deep gap emerged between the development of science and civilisation and political and moral barbarity. Both cataclysms were the result of obsessive nationalism. They did not end with the last accords of battles. The memory of them was preserved in literature, art, museums, archives, graves, symbols and icons of the past. Opening the lock of memory, wars also shaped poetic and aesthetic tastes as well as human opinions and visions. They became a subject of research and philosophical and theological reflection. They occupy the imagination and memory of the masses. They also revealed the limit of what is human. War releases heroism but it also demoralises. In the realities of war, the most heroic borders with the most barbaric. War creates a situation in which “their armor of position, esteem, and property has collapsed, and now they stand in the last shreds of their humanity.”<sup>136</sup>

Wars broke historical continuity and interfered with private and collective life. They redefined time, giving it a new dimension. The prewar period and the postwar period became important historical caesura. Although only twenty years separate the two wars, their course, character and, most of all, consequences for Germany, were different. World War I was received with enthusiasm by society. There was not a political party that did not wish for ‘more space under the Sun’. By the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the Second German Empire had already become a continental power. Everything seemed to entitle the German emperor to make the blustering assertion to his nation on 24 February 1892: “We are called to greatness, and to glorious days will I lead you!”<sup>137</sup> The war ended with a peace treaty. The defeat of 1918 had a different dimension compared to the one in 1945. While military operations during World War I were not conducted on German territory, with the exception of East Prussia, World War II brought the perpetrators destruction similar to that of the Thirty Years’ War. The Swiss writer Max Frisch noted in his journal at the beginning of 1946 that it would be better “if exuberant grass overgrew destroyed houses and the silent nature of thistles and mosses

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136 E. Hillesum, *Letters from Westerbork*, New York: Pantheon Books, 1986, p. 36.

137 J. Penzler (ed.), *Die Reden Kaiser Wilhelms II in den Jahren 1888-1895*, vol. 1, Leipzig 1897, p. 209.



overgrew German cities and brought eternal peace to the exhausted European continent”.<sup>138</sup>

This war was the most critical experience of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The central place occupied by World War II in collective memory results from its incomparability with any other military conflict in history. Traditional forms of warfare, such as regular army, frontlines and battlefield lost their importance. War World II, due to the genocide – the consciously pursued extermination of nation and social, religious and ethnic groups by the Hitlerite Reich – does not fit any classic categories of war known from history and the international rules of conduct. The old image of death in the battlefield, in defence of homeland, was ousted by the recollection of a tortured, executed, gassed victim. As a consequence, it must have had an impact on the change of perception of the whole meaning of war. It is impossible to understand the 20<sup>th</sup> century without reflecting on the experience of this war. The nature of myths after World War II and after World War I was very different, as World War II was a total war. Its specificity was also related to the fact that the enemies were not defined by frontlines but antagonisms rooted deeply in history. The fight against racial enemies and for living space was conducted with the use of the most brutal methods. As it was believed to serve to maintain the German nation, it was also considered to be a ‘righteous’ war. The Germans’ dilemma was represented in the unsolved dialectics of defeat and liberation. It was reflected in the unprecedented shock in German society following the discovery of the magnitude of the crimes committed by Germany as well as the premonition that there was no alternative to the construction of a new order. On the one hand, the Third Reich had collapsed completely and Germany stood before the courts; on the other hand, the victorious powers had the opportunity to give a chance for a new beginning. German identity and self-image were shaken. The German nation-state had collapsed. One could observe an apocalyptic end to German ideology; historiography could not be continued. All the nation-integrating values became devalued and trampled. The words of the exiled Thomas Mann, who wrote that “after all, this is a great time, the return of Germany to humanity”, did not convince his compatriots.<sup>139</sup>

Human losses, the loss of Eastern areas, millions of expelled citizens, bombed cities and a four-year occupation by the victorious powers; in the end, the division of Germany and a new dictatorship in East Germany were a result that no one could call liberation. The world’s condemnation, compensation and reparation demands

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138 M. Frisch, *Tagebücher. Tagebuch 1946-1949/Tagebuch 1966-1971*, Darmstadt 1984, p. 35.

139 T. Mann, *Niemieccy słuchacze!* trans. by L. Żyliński, in: *O kondycji Niemiec. Tożsamość niemiecka w debatach intelektualistów po 1945 roku*, selected and edited by J. Jabłkowska, L. Żyliński, Poznań 2008, p. 54.

and denazification, considered by the victims as the logical consequence of the defeat of the Third Reich and a substitute for punishment for the unimaginable evil, were considered revenge and a source of humiliation by German citizens.

Dealing with the legacy of guilt and responsibility for World War II was absolutely different in comparison to World War I. The problem was not only how to come to terms with the consequences of unconditional surrender but also with the criminal character of the war. How to cope with guilt, shame, humiliation and loss of dignity? Self-esteem is the core of every personality. Karl Bruno Leder expressed it clearly when he wrote: "A person lives to keep his self esteem; he works, takes pain, suffers and fights to keep it; and, if necessary, he dies for it."<sup>140</sup> Injured self-awareness leads to attempts to let off steam. With nations, it is similar: "Humiliate a nation, and you will wake belligerent nationalism that will pay any price to regain self-esteem, 'national dignity' or something of that sort – call it what you will. Promise a nation to raise its self esteem to superhuman, sky-high levels, and you will always be able to request superhuman deeds and sufferings for it! (...) The central motive of all liberation movements is to regain self-respect, self-awareness and self-esteem."<sup>141</sup>

World War I ended with the Treaty of Versailles, which found Germany and its allies responsible for causing all moral and material loss and damage and considered them debtors of the 32 victorious states. However, while the causes of the outbreak of World War I still remain controversial, there is no doubt about the sole responsibility of the Third Reich for the outbreak of World War II. Both wars were mass conflicts. However, while in World War I 15% of the casualties were civilians, in World War II the proportion increased to 65% (including Jews).<sup>142</sup> The main difference was that while the ideas of 1914 were a specific ideology of the great powers that served to justify war activities, the outbreak of World War II was preceded by a widely disseminated, racist worldview that involved the plan to destroy the *Untermenschen* [subhumans], to conquer nations regarded as culturally inferior and to exterminate Jews, who were considered alien to the Germanic race.

For Germans, the situation after 1945 was an unprecedented challenge that differed from previous great wars. Their national memory in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries was confronted with different problems. After the Franco-Prussian war in 1870/1871, a triumphant memory was the basis of the collective identity of the German Reich. The Battle of Sedan, the Victory Column commemorating

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140 K.B. Leder, *Nie wieder Krieg? Über die Friedensfähigkeit des Menschen*, München 1982, p. 97.

141 Ibidem, p. 70.

142 B. Ehrenreich, *Blutrituale. Ursprung und Geschichte der Lust am Krieg*, Reinbek b. Hamburg 1999, p. 250.

the defeat of France and the power of the proclaimed German Empire were only some elements of the triumphant symbolism that covered the area of public commemoration until World War I. Despite the defeat and fall of the Reich in 1918, Germans did not abandon the mythology of heroism. Victorious memory glorifies, dignifies and strengthens the new, postwar order and new configuration of forces. The memory of the defeated is directed at a return to power. The memory of the humiliation of the defeat hurts and intensifies a desire for revenge. The Treaty of Versailles, called ‘national disgrace’, activated a destroying power that stimulated a new war. Moreover, literature conveyed a belief to young people that the effort of German soldiers was not in vain and that the defeat could be transformed into victory. As Ernst Jünger, the prominent representative of the conservative revolution, persuasively wrote: “The spirit of an exhausting struggle: a battle in trenches, a ruthless, brutal fight, fought with more ferocity than any fight before, gave birth to men the world has never seen. It was a whole new race, it embodied energy, and was loaded with the greatest impetus (...). Because this war is not the end of violence, as many believe, but its overture. It is a forge, in which hammer strikes divide the world into new communities according to new borders. It is an evening light of the fading era and, at the same time, a light in which people prepare for a new, magnificent fight.”<sup>143</sup>

Historical culture of the Weimar Republic denied German responsibility for starting the war just as much as it could not accept the defeat of 1918. Admittedly, by 1918 a parliamentary commission had already been appointed to investigate responsibility for World War I. It functioned up to 1932. However, the commission never presented the results of its work, as it was not supported by political will. In 1919, the cabinet of Philipp Scheidemann refused to deliver official documentation prepared by Karl Kautsky about the German role in the outbreak of the war.<sup>144</sup> Leading politicians spread their version of the events after the war: “No enemy defeated us; the German army was stabbed in the back.” The inability to cope with World War I manifested itself in the trials against war crimes in Leipzig in the 1920s. In the interwar period, a few scholars, e.g. Walter Fabian and Eckart Kehr, saw German militarism and imperialist aspirations as factors that led to the war. However, the interest in World War I was mainly motivated by revisionism and the need to defend oneself against supposedly anti-German propaganda.

While the soldiers returning from World War I were greeted with the slogan, “You were not defeated by any enemy”, soldiers coming back from World War II could not be honoured that way due to the crimes committed by the Wehrmacht. The generation of German participants in the war could not deny the evident fault

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143 E. Jünger, *Der Kampf als inneres Erlebnis*, Berlin 1922, p. 32 and 74.

144 T.E. Fischer, *Geschichte der Geschichtskultur. Über den öffentlichen Gebrauch von Vergangenheit von den antiken Hochkulturen bis zur Gegenwart*, Köln 2000, p. 171.

to the outside world. The silence in the first years after the war was therefore all the greater, as was the process of shifting the responsibility. German soldiers returning from the war and captivity expected recognition according to the old traditions. They awaited respect. However, the country was blemished by shame and had lost its independence, and, when confronted with accounts of cruelties and crimes committed in the occupied countries, could not honour its soldiers. German soldiers' war experiences had to remain private memories. As the sociologist Jan Philipp Reemtsma noted when commenting on the 1998 exhibition on Wehrmacht crimes, it was as if the nation formed an unwritten pact with its soldiers: you remain silent about your heroism and we remain silent about your crimes. Unlike the winners' memories, the memories of German soldiers could not become an integrated element of national history. Therefore, a conflict arose between the Germans' individual and collective memory, private and official memory, as well as between the memory of the war between the Germans and the occupied nations. This discrepancy influenced the whole postwar German discourse and the conflict of memory in international relations.

The character of the German reckoning with the past was doubtlessly influenced by the fact that World War II involved almost all of Europe. Only six countries of the Old Continent – Ireland, Portugal, Sweden, Switzerland, Turkey and Spain – were saved from hostilities. The contradiction between the memory of Germans and of other nations was also related to the fact that, unlike World War I, in which German areas suffered only minimally, World War II activities ended in raids, bombings and devastating battles in the Third Reich. Individual German losses related to the end of the war. Fleeings and forced expulsions were the reason why, for Germans (particularly Germans from the East), the war started in spring 1945, not 1 September 1939. In Western areas of their country, Germans started to experience such phenomena as hunger, chaos, black markets and migrations with full intensity only in the final phase of the war and after its conclusion. Thus, German memory organised around these events. This non-synchronism of war experiences has impacted awareness, memory and the range of interests of public opinion for years.<sup>145</sup> One can better understand the focus of memory on the last months of the war and on the German victims if he or she takes statistical data into account. Until the end of the war, 18.2 million Germans were enlisted in the army (13.6 million to land forces, 2.5 to Luftwaffe, 1.2 million to the navy and 900,000 to Waffen-SS). The losses amounted to 5.32 million. Half of the soldiers died on the Eastern Front. During World War I a thousand German soldiers died every day; during World War II, it was 2,000 on the Eastern Front alone. From

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145 Włodzimierz Borodziej noted this fact in his text *Wojna i jej skutki w świadomości zbiorowej Polaków i Niemców – w pół wieku po wojnie*, in: E. Traba, R. Traba (eds.), *Tematy polsko-niemieckie*, Olsztyn 1997, pp. 15-25.

summer 1944, this number increased to 5,000 a day. Half of the German war losses occurred in the last ten months of the war. Another 1.5 million soldiers were declared missing. In September 1945, 6.5 million soldiers lived in Western POW camps, and 2.1 million in Soviet camps. The last group of 35,000 soldiers returned from there at the turn of 1955 and 1956. The bombing of German cities caused the deaths of 600,000 civilians. The approximate number of all German victims of the war and its consequences is estimated to be 9.23 million, which was about one-sixth of the population of the Reich before 1938.<sup>146</sup>

War, as well as many other historical events, is also a matter of perception, time, distance and gradually developing knowledge about past events. Duration, the number of victims, the degree of brutality and postwar regulations all affect how it is evaluated. Various factors decided that the opinion of Western Europe did not dwell on the atrocities during the Boer War or the massacre of Armenians in World War I. The 19<sup>th</sup> century wars, with the exception of the American Civil War (which became a great trauma for Americans and a subject of decades of analyses and literary interest), did not leave a permanent mark. It was World War I, with its modern technology, that left behind a lasting pain that was expressed in films, literature, memories and art. Many writers and theoreticians of political thought treated warfare as a positive experience, as an ideal. Resistance, self-discipline, comradeship and courage were promoted as features that were brought from the battlefield. The figure of a war hero sometimes fascinated academics. Rudolf Schulten, a historian from Erlangen, stated in 1928: “A hero is something magnificent, something we do not understand, something divine. Thus, we want to adore him even more, to feel sublime joy coming from his work and to trust in the advent of a new hero. With an inspired nation, a hero can do anything.”<sup>147</sup> War appeared to be a good teacher of life. National Socialists used the image of a soldier-hero, balancing between emotions and rational thought, romanticism and reality, in their attempt to educate new elite, ‘people of the future’. Film and literature helped to promote this ideal.<sup>148</sup>

World War I set a new profile of German nationalism. The propaganda of national community continued after the defeat of 1918 and combined different interests. In interwar literature and political rhetoric, the nation was depicted as a fascinating community that assigned the perspective for the whole outside world.

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146 See: H.-U. Wehler, *Deutsche Gesellschaftsgeschichte*, vol. 4: *Vom Beginn des Ersten Weltkriegs bis zur Gründung der beiden deutschen Staaten 1914-1949*, München 2003, pp. 942-945.

147 R. Schulten, *Held und Volk*, Erlangen 1928, citation after: C. von Krockow, *Niemcy. Ostatnie sto lat*, trans. A. Kopacki, Warszawa 1997, p. 138.

148 G.L. Mosse, *Gefallen für das Vaterland. Nationales Heldentum und namenloses Sterben*, Stuttgart 1993, p. 226.

The confrontation involved not only other nations but was also directed inwards. It obliged the nation to exclude other ethnic groups. The expansive politics of imperial Germany paved the way for the use of ethnic categories to define the nation. *Volksgemeinschaft* was a central category in the political debate of the interwar period. In setting its objectives, the Nazi ideology could rely on the general agreement of German society. Already in March 1933, Kurt Tucholsky wrote to Walter Hasenclever about the strong roots of nationalism. “The SPD assures us today that it is patriotically and bravely oriented in defence; almost everyone acknowledges categories introduced by Adolf and argues only about their use. (...) However, one cannot proclaim to a nation something contrary to what the majority wants (...) Many are only against Hitler’s methods but not the essence of his ‘science.’”<sup>149</sup>

After the war, Germans could refer to the pre-war patriotism. National Socialism did not create the category of nation; nationalism was a slogan that consolidated the nation long before. As Sebastian Haffner noted while in exile, young people who were loyal to the government were already infected with the virus of nationalism in 1939. The Nazis were “the terrible incarnation of the ideas of the bombastic ceremonial orator who flourished from 1870 to 1918, and after. (...) The patriotism that Germans have learnt since the foundation of the Reich is not the love of the Fatherland, but fatherland-fixation. It is a feeling that partially paralyses moral, intellectual and aesthetic responsibilities. It is, so to speak, a blind spot in the spiritual eye. The Nazis have not created the fatherland-fixation. On the contrary one might say that it has created the Nazis. At least the Nazis have found it readymade and have been able to work wonders with it.”<sup>150</sup>

The perception of World War II was impacted by general processes taking place in Europe. Alongside the democratisation of political and social life and the popularisation of human rights, contrary tendencies developed. Ideological polarisation of public opinion was progressing. Nationalism, capitalism and socialism locked horns. Life was more political than ever before. The 20th century became the century of mass society. Society became a subject of complex changes and processes. Concentration camps became a new indicator of war. Not only governments and armies but also whole nations fought against each other. Brutalisation covered all areas of life. The frequency of crimes made it difficult to clearly indicate individual perpetrators and non-perpetrators.

Occupation of Germany by victorious powers, denazification, re-education, damages and international expectations for a German confession of guilt as well as the punishment of perpetrators all caused moral confusion and permanent internal

149 K. Tucholsky, *Politische Briefe*, selected and edited by F.J. Raddatz, Reinbek 1969, p. 12.

150 S. Haffner, *Germany: Jekyll and Hyde*, in: V. Sander (ed.), *The Devil's General and Germany: Jekyll and Hyde*, p.169 and 171, New York 2005.

tension. On the one hand, the country was being rebuilt and society started to integrate around the new values of a democratic state. On the other hand, there was latent guilt, the awareness of committing unimaginable crimes and the gradually acquired knowledge of the Holocaust. They all formed negative memories that could not in any way become the basis of identity of civil society.

The silence of the first years served as a *cordon sanitaire*. The mental blockade was also the effect of a psychologically complex situation. The social community, solid during the war, became atomised in the extreme circumstances following the defeat: what mattered were individual biographies and experiences. The blame for the crimes against humanity was so incomprehensible that confessing it would stigmatise an individual for life. Moreover, individual perception of one's own participation in the criminal system collided with the collective evaluation of the past. That is why the German nation did not mourn the victims of other nations on the ruins of their cities, as the international opinion would expect, but mourned their own fate: dead soldiers, the humiliation of defeat and the poverty of first years after the war.

## 2. Coming to terms with the past

Dealing with the burden of the Nazi past was such a great challenge that intense emotions and heated debates had already started in the search for adequate vocabulary to describe what had happened between 1939 and 1945. None of the terms formulated to deal with the past were free of ambivalent associations and interpretations. Both in public debates and scientific disputes they were attached meanings that were diverse in terms of content and emotions.

German literature is the master of semantics. The tendency to analyse in detail each phenomenon in humanities is rooted in German philosophical tradition, and the nature of the German language contributed to the possibility of creating a precise one-word term to describe the most complex and intricate questions. They are usually untranslatable to foreign languages but live their own life and are the subject of extensive debates. Immediately after the war, numerous terms were coined that soon entered common speech. Among the ones most often used and the cause of the greatest controversies was the term *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*: coming to terms with the past (sometimes also translated as 'overcoming' or 'working through the past' – translator's note). It has been used in pedagogic reflection, academic analyses and political debates. The transformations in Central-Eastern Europe at the end of the 1980s extended the meaning of the term to include the German debate after reunification; coming to terms with the past involves also the reckoning with the communist past of East Germany.



The ubiquity and ambiguity of the term has given rise to doubts among historians, journalists and writers.<sup>151</sup> ‘To come to terms’ may mean distancing oneself from the memory of the past as well as struggling with it. Some associated the controversial term with a calling for historicisation.<sup>152</sup> This broad term contained the wish for ‘zero hour’ and ‘final crossing out of the past’, widely disseminated by the press of 1945 and 1946, but also a claim to work on the past and draw conclusions for the future. The authorship of the term is ascribed to the president of West Germany, Theodor Heuss, who, in his often wrongly interpreted speech of 1949, used the expression “coming to terms with the past” and “the mercy of forgiveness”. At the same time he warned: “It is my concern that some people in Germany abuse this mercy and want to quickly forget.”<sup>153</sup>

Abuses and misunderstandings related to *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* result e.g. from the fact that despite being a demand or a claim, it does not specify the recipients. It does not suggest what should be come to terms with, or how and whether it is even possible.<sup>154</sup> These doubts resulted in many alternative proposals such as ‘pedagogic working through’ (*pedagogische Verarbeitung*). However, none of them gained acceptance or entered popular discourse. The question remains whether and to what extent the term ‘come to terms with’ is useful in the interpretation of the past. Which is more important: what was overcome or sank to oblivion after 1945, or what society will learn as a history lesson?

Inquisitive critics note a rare combination of two nouns that do not match. ‘The past’ represents National Socialism, as if all the other past was ‘absorbed’ and ‘dissolved’ by this particular, single past. It is not named, maybe from a desire to avoid a collective taboo. When one calls for critical reckoning with a past epoch, warns against silence and oblivion, legitimises a new order and attempts to get rid of the burden of the past with this single term, the past is already insurmountable at the stage of defining conceptual tools to evaluate history.

German scholars who analyse semantic collocations of this controversial term note that what one should come to terms with are in fact the consequences of the past events. The past itself is insurmountable. In other words, they assumed

151 P. Dudek, “*Vergangenheitsbewältigung*” *Zur Problematik eines umstrittenen Begriffs; Aus Politik und Zeitgeschichte* 1-2, 1992, pp. 44-53.

152 E. Jesse, “*Vergangenheitsbewältigung*” und *politische Kultur; Politische Bildung* 23, 1990, 3, p. 57; R. Zitelmann, *Vom Umgang mit der NS-Vergangenheit*, in: R. Italiaander (ed.), *Bewußtseins-Notstand. Thesen von 60 Zeitzeugen*, Düsseldorf 1990, p. 76.

153 Stenographic report of German Bundestag, 12.09.1949, p. 10, citation after: T. Eitz, G. Stötzel, *Wörterbuch der ‘Vergangenheitsbewältigung’*. *Die NS-Vergangenheit im öffentlichen Sprachgebrauch*, Hildesheim, Zürich, New York 2007, p. 602.

154 P. Reichel, *Vergangenheitsbewältigung als Problem unserer politischen Kultur*, in: J. Weber, P. Steinbach (eds.), *Vergangenheitsbewältigung durch Strafverfahren? NS-Prozesse in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland*, München 1984, p. 147.



that the slogan only expressed a “longing for the impossible”, a kind of naive expectation and belief that “what happened can be ordered in such a way that its memory would not burden the present any more.”<sup>155</sup>

Since 1955, the term ‘insurmountable past’, which the Protestant Academy of Berlin (Evangelische Akademie zu Berlin) made the subject of a seminar, became widespread. Historians also refer to the Göttingen historian, Herman Heimpel, who used such an expression in 1956 when he wrote: “The achievement of our memory is overcoming the danger of oblivion that terribly burdens our reality. Even a bright look on the life and history of an individual and a nation, a look that is not darkened by an excuse, can (...) cure of the disease of our time, can (...) overcome the insurmountable past.”<sup>156</sup>

The term ‘to come to terms with the past’ (or ‘to work through the past’/ ‘overcome the past’) attracted criticism from various branches of science. The social psychologist Peter Hofstätter argued about the primary meaning of the term. “A workload can be worked through, or a road distance, or a long menu. (...) In my opinion, a rider can speak of working through obstacles. (...) How can this term be applied to the past? How can you overcome it? (...) There is no nation on the globe that could work through their past. We are rather obliged to admit the insurmountability of the past.”<sup>157</sup> Most critics suspected that the controversial term hid an escape from responsibility. However, would a more precise definition of the term change the content and character of the legacy of the past? The philosopher and sociologist Theodor W. Adorno demanded a precise definition of what ‘working through the past’ was, believing that the attitude of contemporary German society to the Third Reich made this controversial term highly suspicious. In its usage “working through the past does not mean seriously working upon the past (...) On the contrary, its intention is to close the books on the past and, if possible, remove it from memory.”<sup>158</sup> Adorno noticed the weaknesses and deficiencies of the German attitude towards the past. He postulated that we should “educate the educators”, enlighten society and demonstrate the sources of fascism. “That fascism lives on, that the oft-invoked working through of the past has to this day been unsuccessful and has degenerated into its own caricature, and empty and cold forgetting, is due to the fact that the objective conditions of

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155 Commonly used definitions and interpretations were presented in e.g. B. Schlink, *Die Bewältigung der Vergangenheit durch Recht*, in: H. König, M. Kohlstruck, A. Wöll (ed.), *Vergangenheitsbewältigung am Ende des zwanzigsten Jahrhunderts*, Opladen 1998, pp. 433-451.

156 H. Heimpel, *Kapitulation vor der Geschichte*, Göttingen 1956, p. 86.

157 *Die Zeit* 14.06.1963.

158 T.W. Adorno, *The Meaning of Working Through the Past*, in: T. Adorno, *Critical models. Interventions and catchwords*, Columbia University Press, New York, 1998, p. 89.

society that engendered fascism continue to exist.”<sup>159</sup> Hannah Arendt also warned against the difficulties of dealing with the Nazi epoch. In 1959 she argued that no past could be overcome, particularly the Nazi one.<sup>160</sup>

Peter Dudek, who attempted to order the debate on the term and the meanings attached to it, aptly noted the difficulties with defining the problem. “If one wants to define a morally instrumentalised term more precisely and reconstruct the history of its varied usages and meanings, they are forced to create a definition filled with content. The difficulty lies in the fact that the term escapes from the contents accepted by everyone, because, for instance, the content attached to it is not oriented towards a concrete goal, it cannot be planned and it is not empirically verifiable but is subject to the changing conditions of recent German history. Additionally, it has been burdened by moral pathos and anti-fascist rituals that were often limited to outright diagnoses of the deficiencies of memory. Therefore, there is only one, historical way to approach the wide meaning of the content of the term.”<sup>161</sup>

Following terminology disputes, one can conclude that the focus on names and lexical forms replaced the substance of the case. The criticised term became a subject of distinct studies and analyses. In the first years after the war, one did not look for the reasons why the Nazi ideology managed to seduce the masses, the origin of the Holocaust or the scope of the Nazi crimes. With persistence worthy of a better cause, scientists fought battles of definitional problems. However, is it even possible to weigh and assess where and when to draw the line between what is ‘worked through’ and what is still to ‘come to terms with’? Lamentation over the deficiency of the ‘insurmountable past’ was heard both from Germany and outside. Where, however, is the righteous one who should draw the line and decide about the moment to stop dealing with the past? Regardless of the criticism and doubts about the notion itself (the mere expectation that one concept can comprise such a complicated matter does not seem reasonable) it is worth taking a closer look at the reflections and questions of journalists and scientists, because their opinions, criticism and interpretations reflect the phobias, complexes and hopes of post-war German society.

One can evaluate the meaning and forms of commemorating the National Socialist past only when one understands these meanings and forms. There are systematic analyses of the knowledge and attitude of the German public opinion regarding the twelve years that burdened German history the most. In 1996, a survey was conducted to investigate attitudes towards the newly established

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159 T.W. Adorno, *Ibidem*, p. 98.

160 Citation after: J. Kölsch, *Politik und Gedächtnis. Zur Soziologie funktionaler Kultivierung von Erinnerung*, Wiesbaden 2000, p. 72.

161 P. Dudek, *op. cit.*, p. 47.

Holocaust Remembrance Day on 27 January. Almost two-thirds of respondents (64%) supported the decision to honour this day, but 78% did not know why 27 January, the day of the liberation of the death camp Auschwitz-Birkenau, was chosen as the day of memory.<sup>162</sup> Therefore, the question of how one can come to terms with what one does not know remains meaningful.

If we assume, with a gross simplification and generalisation, that *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* includes a departure from the content, form and ideas of National Socialism in all areas of life, then we should have a closer look at Michael Wolffsohn's understanding of the concept and content of the German struggle with the past. According to Wolffsohn, coming to terms with the past is composed of four 'W' actions: *Wissen* – to know, be aware of the past; *Werten* – to carry out an evaluative assessment of the meaning and significance of the barbarity; *Weinen* – to express remorse and cry over the victims of the crimes and genocide; and *Willen* – to express the will to change and to act to overcome evil. The practical outcome of the abovementioned endeavours should be *Handeln* – to act.<sup>163</sup> These four elements that the author considered to be the integral components of satisfactory work on the past are one of many theoretical interpretations. This proposal has an ordering value and can serve as one of the reference points, the optimal measure in assessing the German struggle with the past.

Many German intellectuals considered 'pedagogic working through the problem' as more useful than 'coming to terms with the past'. They are convinced that this phrase includes the thematisation of National Socialism in social and historical sciences and pedagogic practice, and the permanent work on the past treated in West Germany (unlike in East Germany) as an educational task and not just a job for historians.<sup>164</sup> It would be impossible to count all the definitions and evaluations of the term. None of them is or can be satisfactory simply because the content of the controversial term is too multi-threaded, vast, variable, dependent on political conditions, changing social structures, changing generations, education and the changing outside world. The evaluation of the German reckoning with the past depends on whether Germans deal with it or the victims of the Hitlerite politics: the winners or the defeated, the citizens of the old or new countries of the federation, Rheinland or Brandenburg.

The main controversies concern the role of the attitude towards the past in the context of the construction of the democratic German state. Major authors admitted that Germans could also achieve economic success and focus on the

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162 *Forsa-Umfrage; Die Woche*, 26.01.1996, p. 27.

163 M. Wolffsohn, *Von der äußerlichen zur verinnerlichten 'Vergangenheitsbewältigung'. Gedanken und Fakten zu Erinnerungen; Aus Politik und Zeitgeschichte* 3-4, 1997, pp. 14-22.

164 See e.g. P. Dudek, *op. cit.*

construction of the new system through their escape from the uncomfortable past.<sup>165</sup> Some members of the elite of the first postwar years wondered whether the construction of German democracy by referring to the past would not be a constant and threatening accusation against the citizens of the young German republic. If one acknowledges all the political and psychological premises of the times after 1945, it is impossible not to agree with those who considered the defective process of dealing with those convicted of Nazi war crimes, the withdrawal of the Nazi past and the integration of many who were burdened with guilt as the high but necessary price of the new democratic beginning. For the first time in German history, democracy and the rule of law became a “common good of the leftist and rightist democrats.”<sup>166</sup>

One can distinguish a few areas in the means and methods of the work on the Nazi past in West Germany: criminal law, financial (damages, reparations) and psychological-pedagogical aspects. In each of these areas, coming to terms with the past had a different character, different action tools and scope of influence. The collective memory of the past easily transforms into an ideological fundament. The history of nations and ethnic groups provide enough examples demonstrating that this rule applies mainly to the defeated. “Regardless of the actual perpetrators or instigators, collective memory eventually succeeds in clustering around the axis of victimization and victimhood.”<sup>167</sup> The historical trauma of the collective experience of the German defeat is full of contradictions. As perpetrators, the nation exhibits the mentality of the burdened conscience that wants to forget as soon as possible; at the same time, as the defeated party, it displays feelings similar to the victims. It is easy to remember and analyse someone else’s guilt but it is hard to reflect on one’s own. The sense of being a perpetrator paralyzes and persuades people to separate the past from the present. The psychoanalysts Alexander and Margarete Mitscherlich noted: “it is obvious that the murder of millions of people cannot be mastered. Rather, by ‘mastering’ we mean a sequence of steps in self-knowledge. Freud called these: ‘remembering, repeating, working through’.” The psychoanalysts described the inability of Germans to mourn but also noted a discrepancy between the limited memory of Germans and the unlimited memory of the outside world. They reminded the readers in 1967: “it is not up to the Germans to decide when enough has been learned from a past that

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165 See e.g. M. i S. Greiffenhagen, *Ein schwieriges Vaterland. Zur politischen Kultur Deutschlands*, Frankfurt a. M. 1981; W. Röhrich, *Die Demokratie der Westdeutschen. Geschichte und politisches Klima einer Republik*, München 1988.

166 P. von Kielmansegg, *Lange Schatten. Vom Umgang der Deutschen mit der nationalsozialistischen Vergangenheit*, Berlin 1989, p. 94.

167 See: A. Markovits, S. Reich, *The German Predicament: Memory and Power in the New Europe*, New York 1997, p. 17

destroyed the lives and happiness of such vast numbers of people. The supporters of the disease theory of dictatorship are quick to suggest that we take leave of what lies behind all of us in Germany. There is, however, a world public which has never forgotten nor is ready to forget what happened under the Third Reich. We had occasion earlier to note that only the pressure of opinion outside Germany forced Germans to institute legal proceedings against Nazi criminals, to extend the statute of limitations, and to reconstruct the circumstances of mass crimes.”<sup>168</sup>

A. and M. Mitscherlich represent the elite circles that consider coming to terms with the past by German society as a political and moral scandal. Ralph Giordano presented an even more critical attitude when he decided that National Socialism was a permanent challenge that Germans had not met. He wrote about the “second guilt” of Germans and a deficit of overcoming Nazism.<sup>169</sup> Titles of many works highlight main theses of the authors who condemn “collective silence”. Particularly since the 1980s, the diagnoses concerning German society concealing, moving away from and releasing themselves from guilt have become widespread.<sup>170</sup>

At the other side of the spectrum there are those who, in critically referring to the first period of silence over the past, appreciate the great effort by the West German state and then the reunified Germany to deal with the legacy of National Socialism, in comparison to the other state-perpetrators of the war. These authors believe that the struggle with the past legitimised the anti-authoritarian system of Germany. Integration of these struggles in the process of creating the democratic identity of Germany is considered a success of the German state.<sup>171</sup>

Undoubtedly, there were much fewer authors with revisionist tendencies who treated *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* as an extension of denazification activities and expected that the reckoning with the Nazi past should come to an end. In every period of the history of the Federal Republic of Germany, there have been groups of extreme rightists and neo-Nazi movements, operating on the outskirts of democratic political culture, which considered every reckoning with the past to be unnecessary and harmful. Some voices also state that it is important to remember

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168 A. and M. Mitscherlich, *The inability to mourn*, New York 1975, p. 14 and 29.

169 R. Giordano, *Die zweite Schuld oder Von der Last ein Deutscher zu sein*, Hamburg 1987.

170 See e.g. B. Heimannsberg, C. Schmidt (eds.), *Das kollektive Schweigen. Nazivergangenheit und gebrochene Identität in der Psychotherapie*, Heidelberg 1988; J. Müller-Hohagen, *Verleugnet, verdrängt, verschwiegen. Die seelischen Auswirkungen der Nazizeit*, München 1988.

171 See e.g. P. Steinbach, *Postdiktatorische Geschichtspolitik. Nationalsozialismus im deutschen Geschichtsbild nach 1945*, in: P. Bock, E. Wolfrum (eds.), *Umkämpfte Vergangenheit. Geschichtsbilder, Erinnerung und Vergangenheitspolitik im internationalen Vergleich*, Göttingen 1999, pp. 17-40.

the Nazi past but beating one's breast in public too often activates the extremist potential of the country.

Coming to terms with the past is accused of superficiality and moralising. Since the beginning, there were voices critical of the 'forced' re-education as a pure rhetoric that did not contribute to a change in mentality. Radical opinions were found on both sides of the political spectrum. While some proclaimed the end of the period of coming to terms with the past, others considered it a life-long task.

It was only after the acts of vandalism and desecrating Jewish cemeteries and synagogues and the wave of anti-Semitism, which intensified at the end of the 1950s, when the political debate started in West Germany. The CDU politician Ferdinand Friedensburg defined coming to terms with the past as follows: "To come to terms with the past means not to ignore it, not to close your eyes to it (...) It means to look the truth in the eye and to do your best not to let the tragedy happen again."<sup>172</sup> The CDU deputy Richard von Weizsäcker took a clear stand in this matter. In his speech on the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the end of the war, he rejected the term 'to come to terms with', stating: "We are here and now not to enter a competition in coming to terms with the past. Only the present can be overcome or not. But we cannot leave the past. There is no zero hour. There has never been one."<sup>173</sup> On the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the end of the war, now as the President of the Federal Republic of Germany, Richard von Weizsäcker again rejected the term 'coming to terms with the past' and warned against silence and oblivion. "All of us, whether guilty or not, whether old or young, must accept the past. We are all affected by its consequences and are liable for it. The young and old generations can and must help each other to understand why it is vital to keep the memories alive. It is not a case of coming to terms with the past. That is not possible. It cannot be subsequently modified or made undone. However, anyone who closes his or her eyes to the past is blind to the present. Whoever refuses to remember the inhumanity is prone to new risks of infection."<sup>174</sup>

In the reunified Germany, the debate over the controversial term frequently returned during anniversaries but the term was increasingly often replaced with the word *Aufarbeitung* (to work through). The *Der Spiegel* editor, Rudolf Augstein, suggested the term 'coming to terms with the past' be replaced with

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172 Stenographic report of German Bundestag, 18.02.1960, 5604, after: T. Eitz, G. Stötzel, *Wörterbuch der "Vergangenheitsbewältigung". Die NS-Vergangenheit im öffentlichen Sprachgebrauch*, Hildesheim, Zürich, New York 2007, p. 606.

173 Bulletin des Presse-und Informationsamtes der Bundesregierung, 9.05.1970, p. 592, after: T. Eitz, G. Stötzel, op. cit., p. 610.

174 R. von Weizsäcker, *8 maja – czterdzieści lat później*, trans. J. Jabłkowska, in: *O kondycji Niemiec*, op. cit., p. 328.

‘working through the past’: “One can redeem something - guilt, for example. One can work something through or neglect it. That is what happened here in Germany (...) How can one, however, ‘come to terms’ with the past? It is an unsettled and confusing term. The past cannot be cancelled. Neither six nor six million people can be brought back to life. (...) The past is worked through if this means the will of knowledge rather than inquisitorial questions. The constitution that was developed is an element of such a successful work.”<sup>175</sup>

Similar to ‘coming to terms with the past’, the term ‘historicisation’, introduced to the debate by the historian Marcin Broszat in 1985, is affected by ambiguity.<sup>176</sup> It denotes one of the forms of the work on the German collective memory. Broszat claimed that the post-Nazi shock still existed but the epoch that concocted it already belonged to the moral paradigm of German history. Historicisation cannot be confused with relativisation. The repercussions of Broszat’s text and the debate that accompanied it forced the author to explain what he meant. He often wrote about the misunderstanding of his appeal for historicisation of the era of National Socialism.<sup>177</sup> What he meant was to warn against abuses and simplifications of actions under the slogan of coming to terms with the past. He warned against a Manichean and selective approach to history. The author had no doubt that present expectations impacted easy moralising and political instrumentalisation.

The subject of Broszat’s criticism was routine and presentism in the assessment of the experience of the Third Reich. In Western Germany, the first idea was to create a state and social order that would be a negation of the National Socialist monster and give priority to the rule of law and humanitarian values. The respected historian pointed at the weaknesses of the official, undifferentiated, declaratory distance to the past. Martin Broszat expressed the need to look for individual responsibility. Historical research of the 1950s and 1960s confirm his theory, proving that at the time the dominant interpretations of Nazism were demonological; closer to incantations than historical explanation. Today, when the majority of the population is the generation of grandchildren of the bystanders and participants in the Nazi era, there is no reason for a general national quarantine. This past does not have to be moved away, but opposing it should be a compulsory educational exercise.

Broszat’s texts were widely commented upon by the Bochum historian Hans Mommsen. For Mommsen, historicisation means “taking seriously the diversity,

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175 R. Augstein, *Politik der Erinnerung*; *Der Spiegel* 8.05.1995, p. 50, 54.

176 M. Broszat, *A Plea for the Historicization of National Socialism*, in: P. Baldwin (ed.) *Reworking the Past: Hitler, the Holocaust and the Historians’ Debate*, Boston, 1990, pp. 77-87.

177 M. Broszat, *Was heisst Historisierung des Nationalsozialismus?*; *Historische Zeitschrift*, vol. 247, 1, 1988, pp. 1-14.



the relative openness, and the contradictory character of the Nazi system rather than simply rejecting it out of hand. It means analyzing both the destructive elements of the system and the features that appeared promising in the eyes of many contemporaries. Historicization will thereby allow us to explain how someone like Adolf Hitler, whose pathological refusal to face reality is uncontested, could come to enjoy such great (though never unlimited) popularity and (...) could continue until well into the spring of 1945 to act as a symbol of national integration above and apart from the conflicts of the state and party.”<sup>178</sup>

Doubts about the abovementioned understanding of historicisation were expressed for instance by Saul Friedländer. In his opinion, such an attitude inevitably led to relativisation of the Nazi crimes and the blurring of the exceptionality of Hitler’s genocide. The ‘dispute of the historians’ and the response to it in the middle of the 1980s suggested that some fears proved to be right. Researchers who compare criminal human activity in time and space may sometime come to conclusions that relativise the exceptionality of the criminal activity of Nazi Germany. Do we fully recognise all the variance of moral implications of violence and crimes when we acknowledge political conditions and circumstances? All hasty theories can mislead us as long as we do not have enough empirical material.<sup>179</sup>

Historians who deal with the history of National Socialism are accused of making historiography too pedagogic. Some authors believe that pedagogic imperative played too great a role in the creation of the image of Hitlerite crimes in German history. Therefore, the critics say that the “ritual of coming to terms with the past”, represented by historical science, is not free from selection and taboo. Consequently, various appeals full of wishful thinking are multiplying. Although the authors of these appeals undoubtedly have the noblest intentions, it is hard to resist the impression that they often practice art for art’s sake: for instance, an appeal to create a ‘reasonable’ image of the Hitlerite era may include everything and nothing.<sup>180</sup>

The evaluation of the controversial term, its usage and interpretation depends on a cultural, didactic and ethical perspective. Scholars of cultural studies sometimes accuse historians of worshipping the role of emotions and feelings

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178 H. Mommsen, *Reappraisal and repression: The Third Reich in West German Historical Consciousness*, in: *Reworking the Past...*, op. cit., p. 182.

179 H. Jäger, *Über die Vergleichbarkeit staatlicher Großverbrechen. Der Historikerstreit aus kriminologischer Sicht*; *Merkur* 43, 1989, p. 505.

180 See e.g. M. Wolffsohn, *Das deutsch-israelische Wiedergutmachungsabkommen von 1952 im internationalen Zusammenhang*; *Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte* 36, 1988, p. 691-731; U. Backes, E. Jesse, R. Zitelmann (eds.), *Die Schatten der Vergangenheit. Impulse zur Historisierung des Nationalsozialismus*, Frankfurt a. M., Berlin 1990.



in their assessment of Nazism. Some scholars suggest that in the 1990s there was an excessive 'sentimentalisation' and 'moralisation' of public life.<sup>181</sup> When emotional standards change, new problems appear for different branches of science. Increasingly often, scientists search for the sources of phenomena and processes in specific historical relations, cultural traditions and political events that are expressed in emotions and feelings.<sup>182</sup>

Can one accuse the leaders of the 22 countries who gathered in January 2000 on the anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz-Birkenau camp to talk about the responsibility of the genocide of moralising and emotional excess? In the background of this meeting, Michael Jeismann asked whether guilt is a new European founding myth.<sup>183</sup> He also wondered whether the good conscience of contemporary times that bravely face the future 50 years after the Holocaust is a good measure of political culture or maybe only provides a chance for politicians to boast their moral sensitivity.

While some criticise the excess of emotions, others find fault with the lack of emotions. It is hard to agree with Michael Wolffsohn when he pillories the existing forms of knowledge transfer applied by historians and journalists whose work is not as well received in Germany as the books of Daniel J. Goldhagen. He blames a lack of empathy and emotion for the inability of the academic knowledge of the Holocaust to reach readers and public opinion. In this respect, he expects a turn in the forms of narration and popularisation of historical knowledge. He postulates that we should attempt to change the present situation unless we want 'coming to terms with the past' to become also an internal act and not only the external recognition of the fact. Should pandering to the emotions of the public and readers become a new task for historians?

Coming to terms with the past is not a specifically German phenomenon. Comparative research on dealing with history in the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> century provides some conclusions. Societies transitioning from dictatorship show many similarities in behaviour and assessment of the past. In Europe, wherever the

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181 M. Kohlstruck, *Zwischen Geschichte und Mythologisierung. Zum Strukturwandel der Vergangenheitsbewältigung*, in: H. König, M. Kohlstruck, A. Wöll (eds.), op. cit., J.-H. Kirsch, *Nationaler Mythos oder historische Trauer? Der Streit um ein zentrales "Holocaust-Mahnmal" für die Berliner Republik*, Köln, Weimar, Wien 2003.

182 M. and H.-G. Vester, *Emotion, Gesellschaft und Kultur. Grundzüge einer soziologischen Theorie der Emotionen*, Opladen 1991; R. Fiehler, *Kommunikation und Emotion. Theoretische und empirische Untersuchungen zur Rolle von Emotionen in der verbalen Interaktion*, Berlin, New York 1990; A. Klein, F. Nullmeier (eds.), *Masse – Macht – Emotionen. Zu einer politischen Soziologie der Emotionen*, Opladen, Wiesbaden 1999.

183 M. Jeismann, *Schuld – der neue Gründungsmythos Europas?* Die Internationale Holocaust-Konferenz von Stockholm (26.-28. Januar 2000) und eine Moral, die nach hinten losgeht; *Historische Anthropologie. Kultur. Gesellschaft. Alltag* 8, 2000, pp. 454-457.

political turn resulted from top-down reforms and concessions, the past was left in peace. However, the researchers who used the example of Spain as evidence of the negotiated silence about the crimes of the dictatorship drew their conclusions too hastily. Recent years have shown that history caught up with Spain and the country that was used as an example of peaceful transition from dictatorship to democracy and general amnesty for the criminal activity of General Franco's followers is today shocked with the disputes over the reckonings with the past.

During transitions accompanied by personal continuation of the criminal system, and when no one asks about the guilt of the leading group and their followers, self-appointed violent acts and political cleansings occur sooner or later. This is how collaborators were disposed of and how revenge was expressed in acts of terror. Wild executions took place at the end of the war and after it in France, northern Italy and Yugoslavia.

It is impossible to settle all conflicts about the past with one common denominator. Although this problem should be raised, one cannot solve it in a satisfactory way. In this sense, the abovementioned debate cannot be summarised. There is no one, single, commonly accepted measure that would determine how to come to terms with the past, to overcome it or to deal with it. In a democratic state, no one can decide whether and when the process of coming to terms with the past should be complete. The debate over the question of when the postwar time ends was closed with the belief that the end of the Cold War and reunification of Germany marked the end of the postwar period. The question often posed by German intellectuals – 'how long can the past remain an accusation against German citizens?' – is rather rhetorical. Public debates and German historiography demonstrate how many factors influence the interpretation, use and abuse of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*. There are different ways of overcoming the past and every such attempt can be a subject of criticism, which is also an element of a debate. One can come to terms with the consequences of National Socialism and not the past that is already gone.

### 3. Guilt and shame

The essence of the work on the past lies in the problem of guilt. Guilt and shame are the greatest challenges for democratic identity. Societies that free themselves from totalitarian systems long for innocence and normality. However, the expectation that every historical wrongdoing will be redressed, every lie will turn into the truth and every victim will lead to its perpetrator proves to be an aspiration for the impossible. The question of how to face this expectation is one of the elementary dilemmas of the new political culture for post-totalitarian nations.

The problem of guilt is the problem of human existence. It is one of the main subjects of religious reflection, it lies in the centre of interest of many cultures, it is an object of ethical and philosophical interpretation. Memory that obsessively focuses on guilt and perpetration is considered by psychiatry to be a medical condition; it is memory that destroys the social tissue. Sigmund Freud wrote about guilt as “the most important problem in the development of civilization”. The eternal reflection on the human condition and sinful nature is also a recurring question about whether God is good, or just and punitive.

Since the earliest times, human nature and the propensity for evil have been the subject of philosophical reflection. The Old and New Testaments are filled with content related to human sin and conscience. In assessing the guilt of a community, it is impossible to free oneself from the whole religious and lay tradition that constitutes the understanding of guilt. The Old Testament prophecy of Ezekiel, one of the so-called major prophets, already demonstrates distance from the archaic tradition of inheriting guilt and bloody revenge, when “the fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children’s teeth are set on edge.” He categorically says, “a son shall not bear the guilt of the father”. The tradition of reformation and Enlightenment brought completely new elements to the philosophical discourse. Conscience was considered to be a source of freedom and autonomy of an individual. It was an important step towards developing the modern legal system that acknowledges only individual responsibility for guilt.

When, after the end of World War II, the world turned against Germany with the accusation of guilt, the German philosopher Karl Jaspers was one of the first to speak, trying to order and explain the essence of guilt in the name of human dignity and reminding us that first of all we are human beings and only then, representatives of particular nations. He understood that the assessment of Germans depended on the answers to the external accusation. In his considerations, the German philosopher touched on the most important issue for the culture of memory of the National Socialist crime: the asymmetry between the official confession of guilt and internal silence. This asymmetry is difficult to grasp. “It is a vital question for the German soul. No other way can lead to a regeneration that would renew us from the source of our being. That the victors condemn us is a political fact which has the greatest consequences for our life but it does not help us in the decisive point, in our inner regeneration. Here we deal with ourselves alone. Philosophy and theology are called on to illuminate the depths of the question of guilt.”<sup>184</sup>

Karl Jaspers distinguished between the following forms of guilt:

- Criminal guilt. A crime capable of objective proof and for which jurisdiction rests with the court.

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184 K. Jaspers, *The Question of German Guilt*, Fordham University Press, 2001, p. 22.

- Metaphysical guilt, expressed in words: “There exists a solidarity among men as humans that makes each co-responsible for every wrong and every injustice in the world, especially for crimes committed in his presence or with his knowledge. If I fail to do whatever I can do to prevent them, I too am guilty. If I was present at the murder of others without risking my life to prevent it, I feel guilty in a way not adequately conceivable, whether legally, politically or morally. That I live after such a thing has happened weighs upon me as indelible guilt.” In this case, God is the supreme jurisdiction.
- Moral guilt. Every evil, including crimes committed under duress, the execution of orders in the conditions of terror, is subject to moral evaluation. Jurisdiction rests with conscience.
- Political guilt. The citizens of a state bear the consequences of the deeds of the state whose power governs them. The responsibility of the state is to redress grievances, provide compensation and war reparations.

Jaspers wrote about the internal and external consequences of the war. The accused: a German as a human being, a state citizen and a Christian stood in front of the tribunal of the world’s opinion, victims who brought the accusation also as people thinking according to a particular canon of religious demands and as representatives of victorious and defeated nations. He warned the victorious ally countries against using guilt as a political tool in order to make Germans a nation of pariahs. Most of all, however, he focused on the individual work on guilt, self-enlightenment and recognition of the essence of evil. He particularly wanted a citizen to find, voluntarily and without outside coercion, the right way to regain dignity. His expectations that one should judge according to the Jewish-Christian tradition of dialogue that ordered one to love one’s neighbour as oneself, posed a challenge both for the victors and the defeated; perpetrators and victims.

In the eyes of law, guilt is always individual. The legal responsibility of a person is enforced by another person and towards another person. Moral guilt is something that can only burden one’s own conscience. Hannah Arendt wrote of an “organised guilt” and distinguished, alongside major offenders, those who were sympathetic to the criminal politics, that is, perpetrators in a broader sense, and those who knew. Analysing the question of guilt, she searched for the answer to the question of how to treat the German nation: “The true problem however is not to prove what is self-evident, namely, that Germans have not been potential Nazis ever since Tacitus’ Times, nor what is impossible, that all Germans harbor Nazi views. It is, rather, to consider how to conduct ourselves and how to bear the trial of confronting a people among whom the boundaries dividing criminals from normal persons, the guilty from the innocent, have been so completely effaced that nobody will be able to tell in Germany whether in any case he is dealing with a

secret hero or with a former mass murderer.”<sup>185</sup> In her correspondence with Jaspers right after the war, Arendt was sceptical about whether a legal and moral solution of the problem of guilt would be even possible, considering the void between the innocence of the Holocaust victims and the criminal activity of the perpetrators, which was beyond all borders of cognition. She expressed doubt regarding the ability of the legal system to deal with the accumulated hatred: “Just as there is no political solution within human capacity for the crime of administrative mass murder, so the human need for justice can find no satisfactory reply to the total mobilisation of a people for that purpose. Where all are guilty, nobody in the last analysis can be judged.”<sup>186</sup>

Thomas Mann, in the last of his 58 broadcasts for BBC radio that began in 1940, noted on 8 November 1945, with all sharpness, the complexity of the problem of guilt: “Who has been long struck with the mountain of hatred gathered around Germany (...) cannot see in what the Germans are now experiencing from Russians, Poles and Czechs anything else but a mechanical and unavoidable response to the crimes committed by the nation as a whole. This response, unfortunately, does not refer to individual justice, individual guilt or innocence.”<sup>187</sup>

Self-examination is an act of courage, internal freedom and responsibility. Guilt is a great burden.<sup>188</sup> A person burdened with guilt, stigmatised by external judgement, with lower self-esteem, is lonely. The psychologist Janice Lindsay-Hartz wrote about the situation of a guilty person in 1984: “(...) when guilty, we also feel lost, isolated, and out of place. We feel a tension between ourselves and others; we look around and avoid eye-contact. We are alone with our guilt and unsure of our relations to others. We are not at home in the present since we are stuck in going over and over our role in some past event. There is no peace.”<sup>189</sup>

Starting with the Bible, theology, psychiatry, and belles-lettres have provided an endless number of analysed cases of how people release themselves from the burden of guilt. These cases warned against a false escape from guilt, which destroys one from the inside, and isolates and disturbs the internal balance of a person. Major religions command one to free oneself from guilt in a real way, through cleansing, sorrow, repentance, confession, atonement and internal

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185 H. Arendt, *Organized Guilt and Universal Responsibility*, in: P. Baehr (ed.), *The Portable Arendt*, London, Penguin, 2000, p. 149.

186 *Ibidem*, p. 88., p. 150.

187 T. Mann, *Deutsche Hörer! Europäische Hörer! Radiosendungen nach Deutschland*, ed. Europäische Kulturgesellschaft, Darmstadt 1986, p. 159.

188 G. Schwan, *Politics and Guilt: The Destructive Power of Silence*, University of Nebraska Press, 2001.

189 J. Lindsay-Hartz, *Contrasting Experiences of Shame and Guilt*, *American Behavioral Scientist* 24 (1984), 689-704.

conversion. Only then are there premises for forgiveness, reconciliation and liberation. History demonstrates that lay societies have identical expectations.

The history of humankind is also the history of unimaginable evil done by people to other people. Everyone who deals with a mass crime must face the question of whom and how does one accuse. What guilt is inherited? How criminal can a nation be? What is the moral instance of a collective, which, contrarily to an individual, does not have a conscience? Can a person enslaved by dictatorship confess a crime? How can one deal with guilt in the conditions of a democratic country?

Guilt and perpetration burden the account of modern European history to an unprecedented degree. The nation that was thrice confronted with the responsibility for evil done to itself and other countries – after 1919, 1945 and 1990 – are Germans. They are also the only society in the Old Continent that fully experienced both totalitarianisms. Their reckoning with the legacy of National Socialism and communism demonstrates how individuals and social groups deal and do not deal with the problem of guilt and responsibility. The passage of time does not at all weaken the intensity of dealing with a dramatic past. On the contrary, discovering new truths brings new questions and doubts and new sources of conflict, defining the borders of our understanding at the same time.

Reckoning with the Nazi crimes has a different dynamic in Germany and in the countries of the victims of Hitlerite Germany. The processes in these countries impact each other and overlap. This reckoning is the main aspect of dealing with the past; it has become a second history of National Socialism. Dealing with the consequences of the Nazi dictatorship does not cease to cause conflicts in the debates on the memory of guilt and the expectations that human sensitivity, film, literature and monuments of memory will faithfully reflect the past, or fail to match reality. The diverse sensitivities of different generations, the multiplicity of actors referring to the problem of guilt in a democratic state and the complexity of guilt were the reasons why guilt was dealt with, persecuted and condemned, to a different extent and in different ways, in courts, parliaments, political parties, churches, academic institutions, in the media and in schools.

The major discrepancy between expectations and practice of judging guilt for the committed crimes and various forms of human rights violations result from the fact that in a democratic state only individuals are responsible for evil and their guilt must be proven. The law does not distinguish between enemies and friends, as totalitarianism used to do. Yet, the public debates after 1945 and 1990 were dominated by the theory of collective responsibility for the crimes and degenerations of both systems. Although no official allied documents after the victory over the Reich in 1945 mentioned collective guilt, Germans from the beginning considered the politics of the victorious powers as a sentence and moral execution on the nation.

## Collective guilt: truth and myths

Collective guilt as a slogan was found in the centre of the postwar discourse in Germany and abroad. Before the sense of guilt was expressed in the official politics of memory, collective guilt became a subject of heated debates. Commonly, the term was related to anything that was connected to genocide, war crimes, occupation and generally, human suffering. The slogan 'guilty' could include the worst criminal and an average person who was a loyal citizen of the Reich or an official who wrote regulations and was an obedient executor of orders. It was a stigmatising term. Everyone defended themselves against it: those who had nothing in common with the Nazi politics of violence and the main perpetrators of the crime.

The victorious allied powers, particularly the Americans, were not free of various doubts. However, they decided to do everything in their power to avoid the mistakes made after World War I at the peace conference. The Treaty of Versailles was a sufficient memento. Judging and sentencing the worst criminals had several purposes but primarily, it was intended to show the Germans and the world the entire dimension of bestiality. It was also aimed at enabling democratic transitions in Germany. The choice of Nuremberg was not incidental. The city was a symbol of the exclusion of Jews; it was where the race laws were introduced and where the capital of the Nazi *Reichsparteitage* was.

The crimes were clearly defined in the Statute International Military Tribunal. The list included: crimes against peace, that is, planning, initiating and waging wars of aggression with the violation of international treaties; war crimes, that is, a violation of the laws applicable in armed conflict; crimes against humanity, such as extermination; crimes against the civilian population, persecution for political, racial, and religious reasons. During the Potsdam Conference (17.07.1945 - 02.08.1945) it was established: "The Allied armies are in occupation of the whole of Germany and the German people have begun to atone for the terrible crimes committed under the leadership of those whom in the hour of their success, they openly approved and blindly obeyed."<sup>190</sup> Although harsh words were said, they were not an accusation of collective guilt. The victorious powers explained: "It is not the intention of the Allies to destroy or enslave the German people. It is the intention of the Allies that the German people be given the opportunity to prepare for the eventual reconstruction of their life on a democratic and peaceful basis."<sup>191</sup>

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190 *Die Wandlung* 30.11.1945.

Translation after: [ftp://ftp.nsl-lager.com/pub/Schriftdateien/Revisionismus/Morgenthau,%20Henry%20S.%20-%20Germany%20is%20our%20Problem%20\(1945\).pdf](ftp://ftp.nsl-lager.com/pub/Schriftdateien/Revisionismus/Morgenthau,%20Henry%20S.%20-%20Germany%20is%20our%20Problem%20(1945).pdf) (accessed 24.11.2013)

191 *Ibidem*.



That is why the main prosecutor in the Nuremberg trial, Robert H. Jackson, stressed very emphatically that the aim of the International Military Tribunal, called to judge the worst criminals of the Nazi state, was not to punish the German community. “That four great nations, flushed with victory and stung with injury stay the hand of vengeance and voluntarily submit their captive enemies to the judgment of the law is one of the most significant tributes that Power has ever paid to Reason.”<sup>192</sup> With pathos, unavoidable in this historical moment, he noted the essence of the problem when he claimed that the main prosecutor in the trial was civilization. As Jackson stated: “Civilization asks whether law is so laggard as to be utterly helpless to deal with crimes of this magnitude by criminals of this order of importance. It does not expect that you can make war impossible. It does expect that your juridical action will put the forces of international law, its precepts, its prohibitions and, most of all, its sanctions, on the side of peace”<sup>193</sup>. The American prosecutor claimed that this first international trial of war criminals in history should not ignore, amidst the immensity of procedures and the fervour of emotions, the fact that “We must never forget that the record on which we judge these defendants today is the record on which history will judge us tomorrow.”

Decades were necessary for German lawyers and historians to form a positive evaluation of bringing criminals to justice and for the public opinion to accept the opinion about the Nuremberg process of learning. Before that, this process was interpreted as ‘victor’s justice’ and an introduction of the law of the occupiers.

There were slogans in the everyday postwar jargon that caused fierce disputes. Although the term ‘collective guilt’ was not used *in extenso*, one could hear statements that included the accusation of the whole nation. Already in the first days after the capitulation, the American military press published the statement of the British marshal Bernard Montgomery, who said: “The Allies’ strict non-fraternisation policy is part of a planned programme to teach the German people an ultimate and final lesson. (...) Our soldiers have seen terrible things in countries where your leaders waged war. You may think you are not responsible for these things, but these leaders arose from the German people, and the nation is responsible for its leaders.”<sup>194</sup>.

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192 Citation after: T. Taylor, *Die Nürnberger Prozesse. Hintergründe, Analysen und Erkenntnisse aus heutiger Sicht*, München 1994, p. 203. Translation after: <http://www.roberthjackson.org/the-man/speeches-articles/speeches/speeches-by-robert-h-jackson/opening-statement-before-the-international-military-tribunal/>

193 Citation after: P. Reichel, *Vergangenheitsbewältigung in Deutschland. Die Auseinandersetzung mit der NS-Diktatur von 1945 bis heute*, München 2001, p. 50. Translation after: <http://www.roberthjackson.org/the-man/speeches-articles/speeches/speeches-by-robert-h-jackson/opening-statement-before-the-international-military-tribunal/>

194 ‘Frankfurter Presse’ 14.06.1945, after: T. Eitz, G. Stötzl, op. cit., p. 372.



Accusations came also from the German emigrants. For instance, the German writer Franz Werfel, who emigrated to the USA in the Nazi period, accused his compatriots: “You have to do with it, each and every one (...) Weren’t you proud of your ‘national community’, in which an individual is only a fantastic atom that unconditionally serves the entirety? Therefore, the crime was not committed by everyone individually but by the national community in which one is for all and all for one.”<sup>195</sup>

The theory of collective guilt was denied in the Russian occupational zone. Soviet administration published their opinion in *Berliner Zeitung*: “Nazism is guilty of the German catastrophe. Hitler and his clique are guilty of the suffering and misery of the German nation during and after the war. Most of the German nation believed in Hitler’s promises and supported him.”<sup>196</sup> The Swiss theologian, Prof. Karl Barth, wrote about those who said a categorical ‘no’ to Nazism. Thus, he warned his readers against defining all the Germans as a “Nazi gang”. Barth believed that the Germans’ main fault was the passiveness of the society and the fact that they failed to be heroes.

Sensitivity to accusations made Germans throw the baby out with the bathwater. The sound of the word ‘guilt’ activated a defence mechanism. Accusations were often used as a pretext to prove one’s innocence and deny all responsibility. At a constitutive meeting of the Landtag of North Rhine-Westphalia, on 19 May 1947, the CDU representative, Senior President Theodor Schneemann, said: “A lot is being said about the collective guilt of the German nation. Whether such guilt exists, history will tell. History will also determine whether they were not foreign influences that formed the leaders of National Socialism. (...) The German nation cannot in any way accept the collective guilt. When the nation recognised the real nature of National Socialism, it mostly fought it (...) and rejected it. The witnesses are dozens of thousands who, aware of the great danger associated with it, fought against the system.”<sup>197</sup>

A defensive strategy was also adopted by intellectuals, such as Eugen Kogon, the opponent of Nazism and a prisoner of Buchenwald. He presented his own categorisation of guilt, writing: “A bystander is not guilty in the sense of higher justice, because he only followed the one who is responsible for the political error. Therefore, the responsible should be first to stand in the dock! No, we will answer; none of them belong there because we refer to a political error, not a crime. (...) To make a political error is not a fault. To commit a crime or participate in it, even by tolerating it, is a fault. (...) Ignoring it is also a fault (...) although of a lesser

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195 ‘Bayrischer Tag’ 19.05.1945, after: T. Eitz, G. Stötzel, op. cit., p. 372.

196 ‘Berliner Zeitung’ 29.05.1945, after: T. Eitz, G. Stötzel, op. cit., p. 373.

197 See: T. Eitz, G. Stötzel, op. cit., p. 374.

size. But a political error – with all its aspects (...) does not belong to court or ruling chambers. To err is human.”<sup>198</sup>

A replacement theory was desperately needed. The debate, reflected mainly in the press, demonstrated defence mechanisms: instead of a critical analysis of the past, the emphasis was put on freeing Germans from the burden of ‘collective guilt’. What Germans dealt with was not their own past but a phantom accusation. Soon, collective guilt transformed into collective innocence. A deep line was marked to separate society from the daemons of Hitler and his criminal leadership. The nation, which served its authorities in good faith, was obedient and fulfilled its duty, was betrayed; its trust was abused. What counted in the press debate was the voice of the average man in the street, who complained to the world that his only fault is what other nations consider normal and obvious: service to one’s homeland, loyalty, willingness to sacrifice and the fulfilment of obligation to the state. “In good faith, we accepted struggle and suffering, convinced that it was necessary to save our country and the life of our nation. We were misled about the goals. Is that why we are guilty for what happened and what we did not know about? We cannot accept in our conscience that we bear the guilt because we believed, because we were ready for sacrifices, because we were faithful and steadfast.”<sup>199</sup>

Does the term “collective shame” suit the climate of the times better? Did the words of the first president of West Germany, Theodor Heuss, who rejected the term collective guilt and replaced it with another in his speech to the Society for Christian-Jewish Cooperation in Wiesbaden, change the reality or the attitude to the past? He said: “In that sense I am, you are, we are to blame because we lived in Germany, and are guilty of this devilish injustice. It was that which four years ago moved the souls of people, and especially the newspapers, and also the occupying powers, when they spoke of a collective guilt of the German people. The term collective guilt and what stands behind it is too simple a simplification, a distortion actually like the manner in which the Nazis were accustomed to regard the Jews, so that the fact of being a Jew automatically represented a phenomenon of guilt. But something like collective shame has grown out of this time and remained. The worst that Hitler did to us – and he did much – was that he forced us into the shame of bearing, along with him and his accomplices, the name of Germans.”<sup>200</sup>

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198 E. Kogon, *Das Recht auf den politischen Irrtum*, in: idem, *Gesammelte Schriften*, ed. M. Kogon, G. Erb, *Ideologie und Praxis der Unmenschlichkeit. Erfahrungen mit dem Nationalsozialismus*, vol. 1, Weinheim, Berlin 1995, p. 247.

199 ‘Die Zeit’ 23.01.1947, after: T. Eitz, G. Stötzel, op. cit., p. 382.

200 T. Heuss, *Politiker und Publizist. Aufsätze und Reden*, selection and introduction M. Vogt, Tübingen 1984, p. 382.

Collective guilt lived its own life and in the 1950s was used increasingly often as a useful political tool.<sup>201</sup> In the course of a debate in Bundestag, on 5 April 1951, during the second and third reading about paragraph 131 on the rehabilitation of the officials and soldiers released in the process of denazification, Konrad Adenauer used this term for political purposes saying: “No one should rebuke professional soldiers for their former activity, or criticise them or treat them worse than others as long as they are in public service. The book must be closed once and for all on the issue of the collective guilt of former professional soldiers.”<sup>202</sup>

The denial of guilt under the guise of the argument that it was an unfair accusation of the whole nation resulted e.g. from the fact that Germans felt themselves to also be victims of the war, the defeat, the politics of occupying powers, all the misery of everyday life, ‘Nazi deception’ and Hitler. As some German scholars observed, this obsessive defence against the accusation of collective guilt – made by no one – leads to a ‘psychoanalytical’ interpretation. This defence indirectly included countless Germans admitting to their multifarious involvement in the historically unprecedented crimes of their country.<sup>203</sup>

This opinion was confirmed by Norbert Frei, who found the theory of collective guilt to be a product of German consciousness. The passionate defence against any accusation helped German self-stabilisation in the difficult, postwar period. It was a preventive attitude against possible foreign claims for damages. In this respect, the bugbear of collective guilt was a “perfect rhetoric figure” that served to obstruct further settling accounts with Nazi criminals. A cry in self-defence was a subconscious recognition of their own guilt.<sup>204</sup>

International calls for a critical reckoning with the past and confession of guilt, addressed to Germans as a collective, resulted e.g. from the inability to prove individual guilt in most of the cases. This helplessness was a consequence of the specific structure and organisation of the Nazi totalitarian system, which harnessed anonymous crowds of people into its machinery. How to select particular culprits from the vast logistics of the violence apparatus, in which officials documented the crime, railway men transported victims to death camps, special groups sorted robbed belongings, and whole professional groups, consciously or subconsciously, supported the Hitlerite state? The fact that Hitler had been chosen in free elections fostered generalisations in the evaluation of German perpetration. The memory of

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201 N. Frei, *Von deutscher Erfindungskraft oder: Die Kollektivschuldthese in der Nachkriegszeit*, ‘Rechtshistorisches Journal’ 16, 1997, pp. 621-634.

202 After: T. Eitz, G. Stötzel, op. cit., p. 384.

203 H. Dubiel, *Niemand ist frei von der Geschichte. Die nationalsozialistische Herrschaft in den Debatten des Deutschen Bundestages*, München, Wien 1999, p. 71.

204 N. Frei, *1945 und wir. Das Dritte Reich im Bewusstsein der Deutschen*, München 2005, pp. 154-155.

crowds enthusiastically cheering their Führer only confirmed that. Was he cheered as a person who provided stability in the times of crisis or as the one who had promised to conquer the whole world for Germany? It was easy to perceive the Hitlerite state as a criminal community. It was the German nation for which Hitler was going to gain living space and for this purpose he unleashed a world war. However, was the Holocaust in the name of the nation? Can one call Germans the ‘nation of perpetrators’?

The accusation against the German nation was justified by the sentence that the Nazi state and its elites passed on the Jewish nation. Opposite the Jewish nation, there stood the ‘symbolic’ German nation. C.K. Williams, using the term “nation of perpetrators”, expressed in this way the symbolic identity of a collective from an outside perspective. He also observed that from the viewpoint of victims and the outside world, Germans born after the war could not create their national identity according to their free will but had to acknowledge the fact that their history was connected to the history of Jewish suffering; they needed to accept it.<sup>205</sup>

The dialogue with the theory of collective guilt is problematic due to the difficulties with defining guilt: both in the two German countries after the war and in Central and Eastern Europe after the collapse of communism. Hannah Arendt, writing about “organised guilt” pointed at political, military and judiciary machinery that could function only due to institutions and many professional groups, which all together constituted “total complicity.”<sup>206</sup> In response to the accusation of collective guilt that involved, alongside the main criminals, millions of supporters, silent bystanders of Nazism who knew but for various reasons did not oppose the evil, a theory of the terrorised and seduced nation gained importance in public opinion.

According to the interpretations of social psychologists, the feeling of shame, unarticulated in public debates, blocked the confession of guilt. Was it a collision of two categories of action and two systems of values? A feeling of shame interpreted in national categories may have various consequences. Loss of dignity can provoke aggression and resentments. However, it may also lead to acknowledging one’s guilt. The latter case turned out to be a complex process that shaped the identity of German citizens for the last 60 years.

Bernhard Schlink, in dealing with the problem of collective guilt, distinguished its “horizontal” and “vertical” character. The accusation of collective guilt affects fellow citizens. It refers to the moral guilt of those who witnessed the crime, accepted ghettos and stayed silent, avoiding any protest. This accusation cannot be applied to all those who lived in the times of National Socialism. However, it

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205 C.K. Williams, *Das symbolische Volk der Täter, Die Zeit*, 7.11.2002.

206 See e.g. H. Arendt, *Die persönliche Verantwortung unter der Diktatur, Konkret* 6, 1991, p. 38.

emphasises the consequences of doing so. Speaking of collective guilt in its vertical dimension is even more difficult when it comes to those who refer to the mercy of late birth.<sup>207</sup> The relationship of guilt between nations, the experience of guilt and feeling of guilt towards different groups changes within decades. The intensity was different when the main actors of the drama were still alive; it is different today when the relationships between both sides of the war are normalised and the vast majority of societies know the history of National Socialism only second hand.

The problem was the question of how to apply the principle of the state of law, *nulla poena sine lege*, to judge the guilt of a state of lawlessness. Internal charges, Jaspers demonstrated, refer to the moral decay of a criminal. Such an accusation one can only level at oneself. Internal charges, on the other hand, may refer only to political guilt. A community can be burdened with the responsibility for its state's actions. It applies also to those who did not agree with the regime. However, only an individual can be punished. One cannot morally accuse a nation as a whole, as a nation does not exist as a whole. "A people cannot perish heroically, cannot be a criminal, cannot act morally or immorally, only its individuals can do so. A people as a whole can be neither guilty nor innocent, neither in the criminal, nor in the political (in which only the citizenry to a state is liable) nor in the moral sense. The categorical judgment of a people is always unjust. It presupposes a false substantialization and results in the debasement of the human being as an individual".<sup>208</sup>

Was this a description that the citizens of Germany at the time accepted? How to name the perpetrators of war crimes, genocide, political crimes, authors and devout followers of the racist ideology, helpers in the decision-making process for condemnation to the gas chambers? Should a mass, collective perpetrator answer to the collective graves, and stacks of corpses in concentration camps, since no individual pleaded guilty? There were no individual confessions. Mutual knowledge of the dark side of human nature paralysed and silenced.

## Helplessness of an intellectual

The paradigm of guilt, shame, disgrace, grief, sorrow, repentance, all these categories connected more with the language of religion than secular politics and created a world that was alien to the postwar language and with which Germans did not want to identify. Questions and accusations were answered with modifications

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207 B. Schlink, *Recht – Schuld – Zukunft*, in: J. Calließ (ed.), *Geschichte – Schuld – Zukunft, Loccum Protokolle 66. Dokumentation einer Tagung der Evangelischen Akademie Loccum vom 4. bis 6.12.1987*, pp. 57-78.

208 K. Jaspers, op. cit., p. 35.

to one's own biography. To save their own biography, they defended the epoch in which they lived. In this way, a 'community of little victims' emerged that hid 'great perpetrators.' Attention paid to the last accords of the war served to shift the focus to ethical-moral issues. Lawlessness attributed to the victors served to relativise their own responsibility. Division and occupation of Germany made escape from the past easier. Since foreign powers took the responsibility for Germany on their shoulders, masses of people felt released from this duty. Victors continued to be 'strangers' who reminded Germans of their fault. For decades, Germans continued to be the nation of many perpetrators in everyone's eyes but their own.<sup>209</sup>

The need for integration of new structures of the state, the economic miracle in West Germany and rapid incorporation of both German states into the structures of European alliances and institutions – all of these factors favoured the process of clear separation from the past. However, the motif of 'normality' that appeared in debates about the recent past and the need to finish the disputes about history always met strong resistance from the external world. States and nations who had been victims of German aggression did not want to and could not forget.

At different stages of the development of West Germany, the return to normality was imagined differently. Intellectuals considered the question of guilt to be the key issue of postwar times. However, the question of how the catastrophe occurred was not as popular. Only few wondered how Germans became accomplices, background actors, passive marionettes and bystanders of the crime and considered the recognition of the sources of the whole evil as the requirement for healing the nation. What dominated were appeals for spiritual and moral renewal, catharsis. Intellectuals, such as Friedrich Meinecke, believed that the moral renewal of Germans would be possible by means of a return to humanist ideals, particularly human rights. Rather than understanding the sources of evil and the causes of the "German catastrophe", the focus on culture was believed to be the lifebuoy for "the German spirit." Renewal and continuation of the nation of poets and philosophers, referring to the classics of literature and science –

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209 See e.g. E. Siepman (ed.), *Heiß und Kalt. Die Jahre 1945-1969*, Berlin 1986; interesting correspondence: M. Broszat, S. Friedländer, *Umdie 'Historisierung des Nationalsozialismus'. Ein Briefwechsel*, 'Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte' 2, 1988, pp. 339-372; H. Mommsen, 'Suche nach der "verlorenen Geschichte". Bemerkungen zum historischen Selbstverständnis der Bundesrepublik', 'Merkur' 9, 1986, pp. 864-874; U. Hehl, *Kampf um die Deutung. Der Nationalsozialismus zwischen "Vergangenheitsbewältigung", Historisierungspostulat und "neuer Unbefangenheit"*, 'Historisches Jahrbuch' 117, 2, Halbband, 1997, p. 271-310; H. Welzer, *Von der Täter- zur Opfergesellschaft. Zum Umbau der deutschen Erinnerungskultur*, in: H. Erler (ed.), *Erinnern und Verstehen. Der Völkermord an den Juden im politischen Gedächtnis der Deutschen*, Frankfurt a. M., New York 2003, pp. 100-106.

“witnesses of the good Germany” – was believed to have the power to return the nation its dignity.<sup>210</sup>

A narrow intellectual elite, struck by what had happened, postulated a turn to abstraction and universalism. Arnold Gehlen’s work *Man, his Nature and Place in the World*, written in the mid-1950s, in which the author posited a reorientation of humanity, expressed the mood of the contemporary humanities. Dolf Sternberger, the editor of *Wandlung* magazine, pointed at a new objective of moral education that should help Germans become “the good defeated” and regain humanity: “We have committed enough ‘superhuman’ and ‘subhuman’ acts. Let us finally commit some ‘human’ acts.”<sup>211</sup> Few, such as the writer Carl Zuckmayer, raised the issue of conscience: “Now let’s look in the mirror and be moved by our reflection. What noble human beings we are! Everyone has his conscience-Jew or several of them so he can sleep nights. But you can’t buy yourself free with that. That’s self-deception. We’re guilty for what’s happening to thousands of people we don’t know and we can never help. Guilty and damned for all eternity. Permitting viciousness is worse than doing it.”<sup>212</sup>

People of culture and science called for self-reflection. The philosopher Julius Ebbinghaus asked his compatriots to check whether they could recognise their own co-responsibility. Everyone should acknowledge his or her guilt “in one’s own conscience, with all seriousness, before an internal court in which God is the judge”.<sup>213</sup> Rudolf Plank warned, as one of the few: “If our duty is to ask how it was possible that so many German people followed the voice of the conscience-deprived instigators and only after the catastrophe did they recognise the deep precipice on the edge of which they stood: did all of them actually recognise it?”<sup>214</sup> The tension between the burden of guilt and the need to rebuild the country and one’s own life after the war was so intense that reconciliation with oneself by escaping from the past was a common endeavour. Those who considered themselves a conscience of the nation and publically expressed the sense of guilt were faintly audible. One of them was Ernst Wiechert, who spoke to the youth on 11 November 1945: “Let us realize that we are guilty, and that it may take a whole century to wash the guilt from our hands. Let us realize that our guilt demands atonement from us, a long

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210 F. Meinecke, *Die deutsche Katastrophe. Betrachtungen und Erinnerungen*, Wiesbaden 1946.

211 D. Sternberger, *Tagebuch, Wandlung* 3, 1945/1946, p. 203.

212 C. Zuckmayer, *Des Teufels General. Drama in drei Akten*, Frankfurt a. M. 1946, p. 98, translation after: Block, Haskell M. and Shedd, Robert G. *Masters of Modern Drama*, New York, Random House, 1963, p. 940.

213 Citation after: H. Kämper, *Der Schuldiskurs in der frühen Nachkriegszeit. Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte des sprachlichen Umbruchs nach 1945*, Berlin, New York 2005, p. 398.

214 Ibidem.



and hard atonement; that happiness and homes and peace are not for us, because the others became unhappy and homeless and without peace through us.”<sup>215</sup>

When the idea of collective guilt was rejected and criminals were sentenced by courts, doubts remained regarding the question of how to make one feel the moral guilt, how to oblige one to confess crimes and take on personal responsibility. Also, how to check whether a citizen, left alone with his conscience, will reckon with the past. Since the faith in German honour, loyalty, sanctity, willingness to sacrifice and duty was buried in the ruins of war, people in the postwar reality unsuccessfully looked for new, firm ground on which they could build a German identity. Some searched for new values, and some, such as the writer Paul Rilla, criticised pompous, empty words and inflated slogans and pointed at the German tradition of “semantic creativity”. When earthly authorities failed, one turned to the eternal. The social-democratic politician Adolf Grimme put the emphasis on “religiousness, law and truth, goodness and (...) individual freedom and human dignity”. He postulated a shift to absolute values that no one could violate with impunity.<sup>216</sup> He also believed that values of reason and enlightenment, particularly

the focus on the spiritual sphere, are imperative in order to begin a dialogue.. The theologian Hans Asmussen exhorted Germans in 1947 to the courage of acknowledging God and his revelation. Faith was expected to bring vitality back to the nation. The first Prime Minister of Hesse spoke in 1946 about a new attitude that should be focussed on God. The return to religion that Christian-Democratic politicians appealed for was believed to provide internal freedom to a citizen. Was the way to God, which meant a choice of a new political path, a democratic path, a substitute for the culture of memory? The Christian dramatist Reinhold Schneider urged his compatriots to adopt a clear attitude. In 1945 he wrote: “Penance is the attitude of he or she who is aware of his or her dignity and wants to regain it despite the injury to it (...) A nation that has taken a clear stance is a personality in history. A nation without an attitude is nothing.” A clear stance was supposed to lead to a democratic system of values. The direction was the past. “An inclination to greatness has already once defined the German spirit and it was the inclination to the indefinite; an inclination to a definite greatness can define it anew.”<sup>217</sup> Religiously motivated therapy was believed to relieve from disease, infection, remove from quarantine. A Christian Democratic politician, Konrad Adenauer, in his speech of 26 March 1946, joined the choir of those who sought the restoration

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215 E. Wiechert, *Rede an die deutsche Jugend 1945*, München 1946, p. 27. Translation after: Ezrahi S.D., *By Words Alone: The Holocaust in Literature*, University of Chicago Press, 1980, p. 113.

216 A. Grimme, *Unser Standort*, in: idem, *Selbstbesinnung: Reden und Aufsätze aus dem ersten Jahre des Wiederaufbaus*, Braunschweig 1947, p. 9.

217 H. Kämper, op. cit., p. 387.



of the German soul through religion: “Currently, the German nation is in such a state of mind, everything inside it collapsed (...) that the powers that lie hidden most deeply in every human soul must be awoken: the religious powers that will restore health.”<sup>218</sup>

Tomas Mann wanted to bring Germans back to the great human family. On 10 May 1945 he spoke to his listeners: “The German name has been burdened with a horrible wrong that is difficult to redress, and German power has been lost. But power is not everything, not even the most important matter, and German honour was never only a matter of power. As in the old days, let Germanness educe respect and admiration for power by human contribution, by free spirit.”<sup>219</sup> The rhetoric of purification was dominant. Writers saw the Nazi past as dirt that needed to be cleaned. A participant in the first congress of German writers in 1947, Hertha von Gebhardt stated: “We all want to extract the word, battered in mud and stinking, the word we hardly find courage to pronounce, the word ‘Germans’, from the shell of dirt and clean it. Not to polish to brilliance as a uniform button (...) but wash it with the clean water of spirit; all of us who care about the German culture.”<sup>220</sup> Calls for German virtues, for a different Germany, on the basis of human dignity, service to freedom, and peace and love of one’s neighbour, were the voice of seeking hope in the ocean of uncertainty and chaos. Political and intellectual elites spoke of the sense of responsibility for the future.

The loftier the declarations were, the less specific was their content. Although human dignity was highly valued, the debate seemed to be outside everyday life. The appeals were abstract manifests that fell on deaf ears. They did not bring up fundamental issues; they did not mention what Nazi Germany had done to people of different nationalities and religions.

Among the politicians of the Western occupational zones, there was a common belief that building the new state demanded integration, consolidation and strengthening identity. One can neither build anew with a humiliated nation, nor stimulate it to optimism. Therefore, the first chancellor of West Germany, Konrad Adenauer, in the governmental statement of 20 September 1949, when speaking of the absolute necessity of punishing the criminals, highlighted: “We should no longer distinguish between the two classes of people in Germany: the politically free of charges and the incriminated. This division should disappear as soon as possible”. The defence of society – broad masses that were necessary to build a new reality – imposed the attitude of laying all the blame and responsibility on the Nazi leaders. The President of the Bundestag between 1950 and 1954, Herman Ehlers, the CDU/CSU politician bound to the Evangelist Church, associated “the

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218 Ibidem, p. 393.

219 T. Mann, *Niemieccy sluchacze*, trans. L. Żyliński, in: *O kondycji Niemiec*, op. cit., p. 54.

220 H. Kämper, op. cit., p. 390.

German catastrophe” only with Hitler’s political path. He encouraged Germans to work on the past but could not see the space for reckoning with what had been done to Jews and other nationalities. He considered the past 12 years as mostly a German tragedy. He was also mostly interested in the position of Germany in the future: “If we want to cultivate contacts with other nations, we will take care to maintain equal rights and duties. Being a pariah among other nations is not the right thing to do. It would be more dangerous for others than for those who are expected to perform this way.”<sup>221</sup>

#### 4. Perpetrators and victims

The consequences of the two World Wars differ semantically: while after 1918 one talked about the defeated and the winners, after 1945 the collective imagination was dominated by perpetrators and victims. Both pairs of conceptual categories carry ambivalent content and are the subject of endless disputes. Aleida Assmann contributed to the debate by providing an insightful analysis of the culture of memory in both categories.<sup>222</sup> The victors and the defeated in collective memory functioned differently when war was still associated with heroic virtues, solidarity and companionship. This period is related to the history of national states. National memory cumulated symbols and rituals associated with victorious war.

Although victories won in heroic struggles in battlefields were the subject of cult and national pride, there were also defeats that were a central point of reference both in collective memory and historiography. Such a defeat was Sedan for the French. Ernest Renan, the expert in the anatomy of national states in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, noted the role of collective feting of victory and collective suffering in shaping bonds ten years after the French defeat in the war against Prussia. “I spoke just now of ‘having suffered together’ and, indeed, suffering in common unifies more than joy does. Where national memories are concerned, griefs are of more value than triumphs, for they impose duties, and require a common effort”.<sup>223</sup>

Traumatic past particularly impinges on the future. Victory can sometimes make one ‘lose’ something; one can also ‘gain’ something by defeat. A defeat allows a community to shape the awareness of collective victimhood. After the

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221 H. Ehlers, *9. Juli 1954, Deutschland in Europa*, in: idem, *Präsident des Deutschen Bundestages. Ausgewählte Reden, Aufsätze und Briefe 1950-1954*, ed. K.D. Erdmann, Boppart a. Rhein 1991, p. 349.

222 A. Assmann, *Der lange Schatten der Vergangenheit. Erinnerungskultur und Geschichtspolitik*, München 2006.

223 Ernest Renan, *What Is a Nation?*, trans. Martin Thom, in: G. Eley and R. G. Suny (eds), *Becoming National: A Reader*, Oxford/New York: Oxford University Press, 1996, p. 54.

defeat in World War I and the Versailles Treaty, German national memory was formed as a typical memory of the defeated. The verdict of the peace treaty was interpreted as humiliation and honour loss, destruction of the positive and collective image of the nation.

World War II did not end with a peace treaty but with unconditional capitulation. Germany lost subjectivity in terms of international law. The unprecedented character of the Holocaust and genocide were the reasons why Germany, in contrast to the situation after World War I, could not transform their defeat into a manifestation of heroic greatness. There was a semantic turn. Due to the all-encompassing character of the war and the defeat of Germany and the fact that World War II went far beyond military actions, their memory was not only the memory of the defeated but mostly the memory of the perpetrators. What the defeated of 1871 and 1918 did not experience, the defeated of 1945 did. "This historical turn in the national grammar of memory means a shift from the heroic semantics of honour to the discourse of perpetrator and trauma. Trauma is a different heroic story. It does not stimulate or strengthen but is responsible for destruction: yes, the destruction of identity."<sup>224</sup>

For the culture of memory, it is crucial whether the perpetrator or the victim remembers. Assmann reminds us that a victim (a term that derives from ancient and Judeo-Christian worship<sup>225</sup>) can be active or passive. This is fundamental for memory. The previous experiences of war demonstrated that the awareness of the victimhood of a soldier in battlefield was an integral part of the ritual of national heroism. A fallen soldier had something in common with a religious martyr. What winners and losers shared was the belief that their death was not in vain; it was a sacrifice in the name of the country, and the memory of their martyrdom would pass on to the next generations. The helplessness of the passive victims, unprepared for torture intended for them by the elite of the Nazi state, changes the relationship completely. Asymmetry between the unimaginable machinery of violence and the powerlessness of the victims changed the character of collective memory – in contrast to the consequences of World War I. One can call a soldier who died at the front a heroic victim, while a victim of a concentration camp is rather a traumatic victim.

This change of the form of memory as a result of the genocide seriously impinged on the character of the discourse about Nazism. A traumatic victim cannot handle the past. The whole heritage of the children of the Holocaust demonstrates how much the Holocaust survivors searched for meaning and an explanation for what they had experienced. Belles-lettres and memoirs asked questions about

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224 A. Assmann, *Der lange Schatten*, op. cit., p. 68.

225 In Polish and German, the word for 'victim' (*Opfer* and *ofiara* respectively) and 'sacrifice' are the same.

the meaning of a death in Auschwitz. Heroic victimhood is similar to religiously sanctioned martyrdom. Traumatic victimhood, on the contrary, as the experience of suffering and loss of human dignity, does not find a place in memory and does not help create a positive image of oneself. This process of creating memory needs time to articulate.

Basic asymmetry between the memory of the perpetrator and the victim lies in the consequences of their experiences in shaping individual and collective identity. While suffering strengthens, guilt destroys and reinforces a false image of a person. The perpetrator searches for various strategies of defence against ruinous memory. Defence against guilt is defence of one's face, defence against shame and social stigmatisation. Pride and honour define one's identity; guilt stands in the way. One can be proud of suffering but not of guilt. The silence that is the consequence of the experience of war and extermination is different in the cases of the victim and the perpetrator. Assmann demonstrates that while the silence of a victim is merely a transitional phase, as he or she needs distance from the trauma, for the perpetrator it is an escape and nothing more. The memory of the Holocaust survivors, as Dan Bar-On noted, met a "double wall of silence". When the Holocaust survivors were ready to overcome the wall and cross the border of silence, they met another wall that the surrounding society had raised as a defensive wall against trauma.<sup>226</sup>

Perpetrators want to hide their perpetration; through silence they create taboo and illustrate their desire to avoid punishment. The memory of a victim has a moralising and therapeutic character. Inquisitive researchers of the psychology of Nazi criminals draw our attention to the fact that the subject of remorse and guilt cannot include areas that, due to ideological blindness, have already been excluded from moral judgment before or during the criminal act. Covering up and averting guilt was already programmed into the ideology of the criminal system.<sup>227</sup> Not without reason, what was happening behind the barbed wire of the concentration camps was hidden from the world and the traces of the crime were covered.

From the first moments after the end of the war, there was a deep void between the necessity for official confessions of guilt and individual silence. Inability to integrate the past into the postwar reality became an insuperable fact. A kind of schizophrenic situation occurred when it was not possible to confess in official discourse that the twelve years of National Socialism had, at some point, been suppressed from the collective memory. At the same time, the rejection of National Socialism became a political and moral founding fundament of West Germany

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226 D. Bar-On, *Die Last des Schweigens. Gespräche mit Kindern von NS-Tätern*, Hamburg 2003.

227 G. Anders, *Wir Eichmannsöhne. Offener Brief an Klaus Eichmann*, München 2002, pp. 79-80.

in 1949. From the beginning, continuous repetitions and confirmations of this statement occupied the central position in the official self-defining narratives in West Germany. There was a silent crowd opposite a small group of intellectuals and politicians who called for self-critical reflection on the past in the name of the democratic moral order.

However, it would be wrong to argue that there was no debate about the past in Germany after 1945. The past was a subject of continuous narrative. The victims spoke about dramatic situations they managed to survive. The witnesses wanted to understand and explain; the perpetrators, accused by the outside world, had to prove their 'innocence'. Aleida Assmann justifies the necessity of the witnesses of history recounting their past by referring to their proximity to events and to how they attach meaning to the past through oral history. Eyewitnesses and the new category of moral witnesses are those who survived the Holocaust. They were close to death and can accuse in the name of the murdered. They are the faces of those who can no longer show their face; they are the voices of the mute. They create a 'moral community' in the public space.

## 5. In search of defensive strategies

Whenever there is guilt, there must be a perpetrator. However, in the German and international discourse, the definition of the perpetrator caused problems. While particular categories of crime were quite precisely defined in the language of law, in the language of public debates, the term 'perpetrator' hid varied content, expectations and conjurations. There was a mass murderer behind a mass murder. The key question was who he was: the commander or the executor. Daniel Goldhagen demanded that one put an end to euphemisms and "convenient labels" such as 'Nazis' and the 'SS men' and start calling murderers by name: "Germans".<sup>228</sup> This accusation was levelled at all citizens of the Reich with no exceptions; even those in exile. Due to the lack of precise findings regarding who and how many people should be counted as the personnel of genocide, the predicted numbers of perpetrators vary between 100,000 and 200,000 people.<sup>229</sup>

The arbitrariness in assigning various criminal activities to the term 'perpetrator' does not contribute to a precise definition. Who hid behind the terms 'a typical Nazi perpetrator' or 'a Hitlerite sadist'? Was every official who sent transports a perpetrator to the same extent as the creator of the ideology who

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228 D.J. Goldhagen, *Hitler's willing executioners. Ordinary Germans and the Holocaust*, London 1997, p. 6.

229 H. Kämper, op. cit., p. 40. The ambiguity results from the fact that some counted only crimes against Jews and others – all the Nazi crimes.

never soiled his hands? Was the fundamental criterion the number of victims, the character of participation in the criminal activity or the type of crime? B.A. Rusinek proposed a distinction between the perpetrators who directly participated in executions and murders and those who did it indirectly (bureaucrats, economic, military and academic elite, ideologists and propagandists).<sup>230</sup> In view of the abovementioned troubles, the only sensible solution was to consider all those covered by the judgement of the International Military Tribunal at Nuremberg and other trials as perpetrators, as well as those who performed important functions in the Nazi apparatus of power and its executive structures. Heidrun Kämper divided them according to the range of criminal duties, classifying the following as perpetrators: members of government, planners, executioners, “project pilots”, ideologists, distributors, war criminals and the highest Nazi staff.

Having read the protocols of investigations and interviews with the greatest criminals of Hitlerite Germany, psychologists concluded that the only explanation for the accused’s good mood and the strategy of releasing from guilt was not the lack of conscience but the pre-war establishment of a moral canon that deviated from traditional norms. For the outer world, the scope of the crimes and the cruelty remained incomprehensible. The Nazi criminals created a cocoon of innocence in which they felt normal. There are different ways of constructing false homogeneity of one’s identity. One of them is fragmentation of one’s actions. It allows one to do evil without involving conscience. Officials harnessed in the genocide apparatus separated their bureaucratic duties from the final effect of their tasks. The bureaucracy of crime functioned as something separate, unrelated to its physical execution. Guards and other service officers of the camp, as well as the commandants of the concentration camps, separated their private lives from the ‘profession’ they performed, not noticing any cause-effect relationship.

The period after the crimes became the time for assessment of the past. Dealing with huge emotions demanded time and a few generations. It is hard to determine to what extent the debates accompanying the events related to dealing with the past, such as trials of criminals, reparations and damages, amnesties and rehabilitations, anti-Semitic scandals, and disputes in the Bundestag about expiration of crimes were a process of educating society. The debates about definitions of perpetrators and criminals did not end until the late 1960s. In 1967, the federal minister of justice, Gustav Heinemann, drew the attention of the highest authorities to the necessity of distinguishing between ‘war crimes’ and ‘National Socialist crimes’. In 1978 Sebastian Haffner found that “lumping

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230 B.-A. Rusinek, *Gesellschaftliche Kommunikationsprozesse und die Einbindung von NS-Tätern*, lecture at a conference of experts on 17-19.03.2000, citation after: H. Kämper, op. cit., p. 41.

Hitler's mass murders together" with war crimes was a mistake made by the victorious powers.<sup>231</sup>

The ways of dealing with guilt are classified by specialists of different branches of science, particularly those analysing human psyche, on the basis of the profuse material: the behaviour and statements of great and small perpetrators. Aleida Assmann distinguishes between five strategies of ousting guilt from awareness:<sup>232</sup>

- Compensation: pointing at the guilt of others is the basis of self-justification and is intended to counterbalance one's own guilt;
- Externalisation: moving guilt away from oneself by attributing it to others;
- Exclusion: a more complex process over many centuries, grounded by the morality-weakening racist ideology of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Jews and other despised groups were excluded from the community and from consciousness. Thus, their disappearance could not arouse conscience;
- Silence: not the mute silence of the victims but the silence of perpetrators, which is akin to concealment;
- Misconstruction: committed under the pressure of the present, for one's own comfort and exculpation in the face of loved ones.

The first official confrontation with the major criminals responsible for the decisions to kill millions of people was appointed by the Nuremberg trial. For the first time in history, the highest-ranked politicians and military leaders were being held accountable for their actions and no national law or norms could save them from this process. The major trial against 21 defendants took place between 20 November 1945 and 1 October 1946. It ended with twelve death sentences. Three defendants received life sentence, three were acquitted and the rest got light sentences. The protocols of 218 meetings took over 16,000 pages, 240 witnesses testified and 300,000 sworn declarations were examined.<sup>233</sup> None of the accused, except Albert Speer, pleaded guilty. They rejected the Tribunal as "victor's justice".

The interest of foreign correspondents was considerable. In the occupied zones, the response was different. Karl Jaspers wrote significant words at the turn of 1945 and 1946: "We live in poverty. The majority of the population is in such severe, direct poverty that they seem insensitive to such reports [of the Tribunal meetings; author's note]. They are interested in how to handle poverty, who will give them jobs, bread, accommodation and heating. The horizon has narrowed. One cannot hear about guilt, about the past, one is not moved by the histories

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231 S. Haffner, *Anmerkungen zu Hitler*, München 1978, p. 165.

232 A. Assmann, *Pięć strategii wypierania ze świadomości*, trans. A. Pełka, in: M. Saryusz-Wolska (ed.), *Pamięć zbiorowa i kulturowa. Współczesna perspektywa niemiecka*, Kraków 2009, pp. 333-350.

233 The documentation of the whole trial against major criminals in front of the International Military Tribunal in Nuremberg includes 42 volumes published between 1947 and 1949.

of the world. One wants to stop suffering, wants to get out of poverty, to live and not to meditate. This mood is as if after horrible suffering one needs to be recompensed, consoled, and not burdened with guilt.”<sup>234</sup>

The world expected that the dock in Nuremberg would be occupied by monstrous, pathological creatures. Yet, there were normal people facing the Tribunal: according to psychological categories, they were representatives of society. They were the youngest functional elite in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The majority were people who, at the moment of Hitler’s seizure of power, were young and well educated: Joseph Goebbels was 35, Albert Speer – 27, Adolf Eichmann – 26, Josef Mengele – 21, Heinrich Himmler and Hans Frank – 32, Reinhard Heydrich – 28. According to Götz Aly, they were people who “developed the most destructive generational project of the twentieth century.”<sup>235</sup> One could see in their profile “the face of the Third Reich” and “the face of the whole nation.”<sup>236</sup> The behaviour and testimonies of the main architects and executors of the Nazi ideology before the International Military Tribunal in Nuremberg and during other trials are a rich source material that shows the whole complexity and contradictions of human nature.

### Innocent criminals

No features of the perpetrator’s personality were identified on the basis of the Nuremberg materials. The armoury of arguments justifying their criminal activity was within the range of human logic. The staff of psychologists and other experts did not find any reason to support a diagnosis of illness. Psychopaths and sadists were sought but ordinary people were found. “On the basis of our research we should state that these people are neither ill nor particular and we could find them in any other country in the world”, noted the forensic psychologist Douglas Kelly in 1946.<sup>237</sup>

The difficulty of judging the perpetrators of monstrous crimes results from the fact that human actions are usually perceived dichotomously: moral or immoral, perpetrator or victim, Nazis and anti-Nazis. However, psychopaths aside, people are never completely unequivocal. The excuses of perpetrators were: the war, orders, a sense of belonging to the chosen race, obedience. Mass murderers turned

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234 K. Jaspers, *Hoffnung und Sorge. Schriften zur deutschen Politik 1945-1965*, München 1965, p. 75.

235 G. Aly, *Hitler’s Beneficiaries: Plunder, Racial War, and the Nazi Welfare State*, Holt Paperbacks, New York, 2005, p. 16.

236 J. Fest, *Das Gesicht des Dritten Reiches. Profile einer totalitären Herrschaft*, München 1980, p. 409.

237 See: H. Welzer, *Täter. Wie aus ganz normalen Menschen Massenmörder werden*, Frankfurt a. M. 2005, p. 9.



their heads away from the piles of corpses, avoided confrontations with what was disgusting or unsightly about the most brutal scenes; they were aesthetes. They dealt with their own emotionality and sensitivity, not with the victims.

The defensive strategies of the major criminals included similar argumentation. All those in Nuremberg who were given voice and had an opportunity to talk to forensic psychologists or journalists claimed to have a clear conscience. All the accused answered the question of the chairman of the Nuremberg hearings with “not guilty”. A note of pathos could be found in some of the words. The war criminal Ernst Fritz Sauckel, Plenipotentiary General for the Deployment of Labour, said: “I confess to God and the world, first of all to my nation, that I am innocent.” Alfred Jodl, Hitler’s close advisor and the Chief of the Operations Staff of the Armed Forces High Command, made a declaration of innocence stating: “For what I have done and what I have had to do I can answer with a clear conscience to God, history and my nation.”<sup>238</sup>

One of the main ideologists of Nazism, the Reich Minister for the Occupied Eastern Territories, Alfred Rosenberg, considered National Socialism the “noblest idea a German can serve”: “National Socialism was the content of my active life. I served it faithfully, albeit with some blundering and human insufficiency. I shall remain true to it as long as I still live.”<sup>239</sup> He could not regret anything if he believed to the end of his days that anti-Jewish attitudes were “understandable and morally justified” and “the domineering Jewish presence”, its “anti-German and anti-Christian intentions, pornography” justified “the will of cultural purification.” What is considered unacceptable by traditional morality is considered normal by ideological fanatics. Thus, Rosenberg could honestly declare that his conscience was “completely free from any such guilt, from any complicity in the murder of peoples. (...) The thought of a physical annihilation of Slavs and Jews, that is to say, the actual murder of entire peoples, has never entered my mind and I most certainly did not advocate it in any way.”<sup>240</sup>

Murderers presented their own truth, served their ideals and saw themselves as historical figures. Hermann Göring, the second in line to Hitler, commander of the German Luftwaffe, the person responsible for the plans of the conquest of the East, presented himself as a man of peace and reconciliation: “I have never decreed the murder of a single individual at any time, and neither did I decree

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238 *Der Prozess gegen die Hauptkriegsverbrecher vor dem Internationalen Militärgerichtshof*, Nürnberg 14. November 1945 - 1. Oktober 1946, veröffentlicht in Nürnberg, Deutschland 1947, vol. 2, p. 114. Translation after: <http://avalon.law.yale.edu/imt/11-21-45.asp>

239 A. Rosenberg, *Letzte Aufzeichnungen*, Göttingen 1955, p. 272.

240 *Der Prozess gegen die Hauptkriegsverbrecher vor dem Internationalen Militärgerichtshof*, Nürnberg 14. November 1945 - 1. Oktober 1946, veröffentlicht in Nürnberg, Deutschland 1948, vol. 22, p. 435. Translation after: <http://avalon.law.yale.edu/imt/08-31-46.asp>

any other atrocities or tolerate them, while I had the power and the knowledge to prevent them. (...) I stand up for the things that I have done, but I deny most emphatically that my actions were dictated by the desire to subjugate foreign peoples by wars, to murder them, to rob them or to enslave them or to commit atrocities or crimes. The only motive, which guided me, was my ardent love for my people, its happiness, its freedom, and its life, and for this, I call on the Almighty and my German people to witness.”<sup>241</sup>

Adolf Eichmann, the main coordinator and executor of the ‘final solution of the Jewish question’ stated at the trial in Jerusalem: “I am not the monster that I am made out to be. I am the victim of an error of judgment.”

Minimising one’s complicity in the work of destruction and annihilation, marginalising and trivialising or presenting one’s role as insignificant was ubiquitous. The dominating strategy included lies, denial, alleged ignorance, and arguments that one was against the ideology from the beginning but served the system only out of loyalty. Even the most vulgar racist, Julius Streicher, organiser of Jewish pogroms and the editor of the most primitive magazine of the Nazi propaganda, *Der Stürmer*, who cried out “Sieg Heil!” at the bottom of the scaffold on 16 October 1946, did not plead guilty. In his last words, he claimed that his articles were only an answer to the provocative statements of Jewish writers who demanded eradication of German nation. “Neither in my capacity as Gauleiter nor as political author have I committed a crime, and I therefore look forward to your judgment with a good conscience.”<sup>242</sup>

## Honest murderers

The murderers calmed their conscience in the name of purity and order, a specifically understood work ethos and sense of duty. The crime of genocide appeared to them as a moral obligation. German virtues such as orderliness, diligence and duty were respected by the outside world and were harnessed to serve the murderous machine. A specific understanding of duty and morality is present in a statement by Hans Frank, the Governor-General of the territory of occupied Poland, who complained in his diary on 30 May 1940: “With respect to Polish leaders, they are assigned to be liquidated and anything that emerges must be removed again for our own safety. Therefore, we do not need to burden the German Reich or German police. We need not bring these elements into German concentration camps, for in that case we would only have difficulties and an unnecessary correspondence with their families. We must simply liquidate matters in the country, and in the simplest

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241 Ibidem, p. 418-420. Translation after: <http://avalon.law.yale.edu/imt/08-31-46.asp>

242 Ibidem, p. 439-440. Translation after: <http://avalon.law.yale.edu/imt/08-31-46.asp>

way. My gentlemen, we are no murderers. It is a terrible task for the policemen and SS people who are officially or professionally obliged to carry executions. It is easy for us to sign hundreds of death sentences but delegating their execution to German citizens, honest German soldiers, is a terrible burden.”<sup>243</sup> The man who, on the government meeting on 16 December 1941, said “(...) we will have pity, on principle, only for the German people, and for nobody else in the world. (...) We must destroy the Jews wherever we find them”, presented a pious face in front of the scaffold. His only fault was that he represented “pure ideals” and Hitler’s power appeared to him as “destiny”.

Hitler’s closest associates questioned in Nuremberg referred to the Nazi morality of killing. It allowed them to treat themselves as ‘honest’ murderers. Rudolf Hoess, the commandant of Auschwitz concentration camp, presented himself as a person “who has a heart” and “is not evil”. During his trial in Poland, in 1946-1947 he wrote a diary entitled ‘Commandant of Auschwitz’, in which he depicted himself in the face of the expected death. It was the confession of a person who tried to present himself as someone torn between a sense of duty and a sense of losing moral foundations:”I had to continue to carry out the process of destruction. I had to experience the mass murder and to coldly watch it without any regard for the doubts which uprooted my deepest inner feelings. I had to watch it all with cold indifference. (...) I really had no reason to complain about being bored at Auschwitz. When something upset me very much and it was impossible for me to go home to my family, I would climb onto my horse and ride until I chased the horrible pictures away. I often went into the horse stables during the night, and there found peace among my darlings. (...) Many a night as I stood out there on the railroad platforms, at the gas chambers, or at the burnings, I was forced to think of my wife and children without connecting them to what was taking place.” The sense of mission and the performance of the task of mass murder demanded intensive work. Perpetrators were tired, which deprived them of satisfaction. That is why Hoess did not express regret because of the victims but because of negligence at ‘work’. Liquidation of prisoners was only a backlog of work that decreased the level of satisfaction of the commandant: “I was no longer happy at Auschwitz once the mass annihilation began. I became dissatisfied with myself, my main responsibility, the never-ending work, and the undependability of my co-workers.”<sup>244</sup> The commandant repeated his ‘truths’ about coercion,

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243 *Deutsche Politik in Polen 1939-1945. Aus dem Diensttagebuch von Hans Frank, Generalgouverneur*, in: I. Geiss, W. Jacobmeyer (eds), *Polen*, Opladen 1980, p. 71.

244 *Rudolf Hoess, Kommandant in Auschwitz. Autobiographische Aufzeichnungen des Rudolf Hoess*, ed. M. Broszat, Stuttgart 1958, p. 129. Translation after: *Death Dealer: The Memoirs of the SS Kommandant at Auschwitz*, ed. Steven Paskuly, Da Capo Press, 1996, p. 163.

force of duty and the tasks that he had to do: "I had to do all of this because I was the one to whom everyone looked, and because I had to show everybody that I was not only the one who gave the orders and issued the directives, but that I was also willing to be present at whatever task I ordered my men to perform."<sup>245</sup>

Searching for the criminals' conscience in Nuremberg Trials did not bring any results. There was no loss of conscience. The experts of human psyche spoke rather of a collision between traditional morality and Nazi morality.<sup>246</sup> This division of morality is particularly striking in the speech of Heinrich Himmler, the co-founder and chief of the SS and subsequently the chief of the Gestapo police and finally the Minister of the Interior, in Poznan on 4 October 1943. When he addressed the SS Gruppenführer, it was evident that he cared that murders should not betray the Nazi honour. The justification of the Nazi policy was "the Slav character." He depicted Russians as "uninhibited beasts" who can torture and torment other people" and are capable of "the perversest of things, even devouring his comrades or keeping his neighbour's liver in his lunch bag". He considered it wrong to project the German "harmless soul and heart", "good nature", and "idealism" onto foreign peoples. For the SS man, some principles must apply absolutely: how to be honest, decent, loyal, and comradely but only "to members of our own blood, and to no one else. What happens to the Russians, the Czechs, is totally irrelevant to me. Whatever is available to us in good blood of our type, we will take for ourselves, that is, we will steal their children and bring them up with us, if necessary. Whether other races live well or die of hunger is only of interest to me insofar as we need them as slaves for our culture; otherwise that doesn't interest me. Whether 10,000 Russian women fall down from exhaustion in building a tank ditch is of interest to me only insofar as the tank ditches are finished for Germany. We will never be hard and heartless when it is not necessary; that is clear. We Germans, the only ones in the world with a decent attitude towards animals, will also adopt a decent attitude with regards to these human animals; but it is a sin against our own blood to worry about them and give them ideals, so that our sons and grandchildren will have a harder time with them. (...) I am talking about the 'Jewish evacuation': the extermination of the Jewish people. It is one of those things that is easily said. 'The Jewish people is being exterminated' (...) And then along they all come, all the 80 million upright Germans, and each one has his decent Jew. They say: all the others are swines, but here is a first-class Jew. And none of them has seen it, has endured it. Most of you will know what it means when 100 bodies lie together, when there are 500, or when there are 1,000. And to

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245 Ibidem, p. 164

246 H. Jäger, *Verbrechen unter totalitärer Herrschaft. Studien zur nationalsozialistischen Gewaltkriminalität*. Mit einem Nachwort zur Neuauflage von Adalbert Rückerl, Frankfurt a. M. 1982.

have seen this through, and – with the exception of human weaknesses – to have remained decent, has made us hard and is a page of glory never mentioned and never to be mentioned.” Himmler cared about the morals of his subordinates. He threatened them with death for the theft of even one Mark. “We have the moral right, we had the duty to our people to do it, to kill this people who wanted to kill us. But we do not have the right to enrich ourselves with even one fur, with one Mark, with one cigarette, with one watch, with anything. That we do not have. Because at the end of this, we don’t want, because we exterminated the bacillus, to become sick and die from the same bacillus”. He also assured he would not accept any laziness. “But altogether we can say: We have carried out this most difficult task for the love of our people. And we have taken on no defect within us, in our soul, or in our character.” At the end, he reminded the SS people in the fifth year of the war the most important virtues, that is: “loyalty to Hitler and the nation, obedience, bravery, truthfulness, honesty, comradeship, joy of the responsibility for Germany, diligence and avoidance of alcohol”.<sup>247</sup> Richard Breitmann, the biographer of Heinrich Himmler, stated that one of the main architects of the murderous Nazi machine was convinced that he was a moral person.<sup>248</sup>

Despite the lack of hatred to a single Jew, the image of global Jewry as a threat to the Germanic race fully justified the crime, and treated it as a historical necessity. This fact completely freed the perpetrators of guilt. They themselves decided what was law and what was lawlessness, finding that murdering people is ‘good’ when it served the superior aim, i.e. the wellbeing of the community of German people. First, it was important to point at the enemy and believe in the threat that the Jews and the Eastern nations were thought to pose. This helped to create the selective morality of National Socialism. What traditional morality would define as abnormal was seen as normal.

Killing as a higher-rank duty was not contrary to the moral standards of the nurses who administered poison to the prisoners of concentration camps. When during questioning, one of them was asked whether she would obediently execute an order to commit a theft or burglary, she answered: “I would not commit a bank robbery or theft because one does not do that. Besides, theft was not one of my duties. (...) I was a shop assistant in difficult times and I had many opportunities to steal but I never did anything like this. I simply knew one should not do it. Already as a child I learnt not to steal.” Another nurse confessed: “I gave medicines, including

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247 *Rede des Reichsführer-SS bei der SS-Gruppenführertagung in Posen am 4. Oktober 1943*, in: *Der Prozess*, op. cit., vol. 29, pp. 110-173. Translation after: <http://www.holocaust-history.org/himmler-poznan/speech-text.shtml>

248 R. Breitmann, *Himmler and the Final Solution. The Architect of Genocide*, London 1991, p. 243.

those that were intended to kill the mentally ill, as an obligatory professional task assigned to me, which I could not refuse to perform.”<sup>249</sup>

Franz Stangl, the commandant of Sobibor and Treblinka camps, was considered in Berlin to be the best camp commandant in Poland; during his term of office, 900,000 people were murdered in Treblinka. In his interviews with Gitta Sereny, an American journalist, Stangl revealed his specific morality, referring to the teachings he received: “at police training school they taught us – I remember, it was Rittmeister Leitner who always said it – that a definition of a crime must meet four requirements: there has to be a subject, an object, an action and an intent. If any of these four elements are missing, then we are not dealing with a punishable offense. (...) by doing this I could apply it to my own situation; if the ‘subject’ was the government, the ‘object’ the Jews, and the ‘action’ the gassings, then I could tell myself that for me the fourth element, ‘intent’ [he called it ‘free will’] was missing.”<sup>250</sup> The most important for him was to demonstrate his correctness in everything he did. He fulfilled the task he had been given and remained a human. He repeated: “My conscience is clear about what I did, myself. (...) I have never intentionally hurt anyone, myself.” Finally he confessed: “But I was there” and continued with difficulty: ‘So yes,’ he said finally, very quietly, ‘in reality I share the guilt. . . . Because my guilt . . . my guilt . . . only now in these talks . . . now that I have talked about it all for the first time. . . .’ (...) My guilt,’ he said, ‘is that I am still here. That is my guilt.’ He died of heart failure nineteen hours after the conclusion of that interview (...).<sup>251</sup>

Harald Welzer, in his analysis of how ordinary people become mass murderers, found that one of the reasons the Nazi criminals could free themselves from the sense of guilt was because they murdered not as individuals but as the carriers of a historical task, a special mission. What was happening was beyond their emotions, beyond their resistance. They only fulfilled a certain task. Ideology, propaganda and obedience justified ‘normal people’. The Reserve Police Battalion 101, ‘famous’ due to the academic curiosity of the American researcher Christopher Browning, consisted of only 500 members but killed 35,000 people and deported 45,000 to certain death in Treblinka. One of the members of the battalion said: “I made the effort, and it was possible for me, to shoot only children. It so happened

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249 After: P. Huemer, G. Schurz (eds.), *Unterwerfung. Über den destruktiven Gehorsam*, Wien, Darmstadt 1990, p. 43.

250 G. Sereny, *Into That Darkness: An Examination of Conscience*, Knopf Doubleday Publishing Group, 2011 p. 164 The trial of Franz Stangl, who escaped to Damascus after the war and then to Brazil (from where he was deported), took place at the end of 1970 in Dusseldorf. He was sentenced to life imprisonment. Gitta Sereny interviewed him for 70 hours over nine weeks.

251 *Ibidem*, p. 431.

that the mothers led the children by the hand. My neighbour then shot the mother and I shot the child that belonged to her, because I reasoned with myself that after all without its mother the child could not live any longer. It was supposed to be, so to speak, soothing to my conscience to release children unable to live without their mothers.”<sup>252</sup>

The Nazi morality was presented by Dr. Fritz Cuhorst, the President of Lublin, who wrote in December 1939: “We agreed in the official conversation last Saturday that from now our behaviour at work will be exactly the opposite to our behaviour at home, that is, dirty. One will not greet any Pole. It is obvious that I walk through the door first, also if there is a Polish woman next to me.”<sup>253</sup>

### Hitler and his ‘clique’

Moving the guilt away, the criminals defended their own integrity. They wanted to demonstrate that they behaved as moral people. This tendency applied to all criminals, regardless of their education and position in the system hierarchy. In most cases, their defence turned into an accusation against Hitler. This is what Hans Frank did, among others. “The post in Cracow was his revenge on me... He knew what went on in Treblinka and other places. And he knew the burden of crime with which he was besmirching me and my name...”<sup>254</sup> Thus, if he confessed the crime, he did it for Hitler. Hitler bore all responsibility. He served him and hoped to convince him to his ideals: “Collective murder against all nations is something most terrible: and Hitler is guilty here, and he is guilty against Jews. For me, as a compatriot, there is only one thing left to do. For he, in his most horrible awareness of guilt, made his will, committed suicide and escaped earthly justice, I, instead of him, stand in Nuremberg before the judges and confess the crime.”<sup>255</sup>

Fritz Sauckel, the General Plenipotentiary for Labour Deployment since 1942, who once impudently announced: “We shall get rid of the remains of our humanitarian thoughtlessness”, tried to weaken his guilt before the Nuremberg Tribunal, arguing that he was directed by the excess of emotions and sensitivity. However, it turned out that he reserved this sphere of his personality only for the Nazi staff: “My error was perhaps the excess of my feelings and my confidence in, as well as my great veneration of, Hitler. I knew him only as the champion of the German people’s rights to existence and saw him as the man who was

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252 C. Browning, *Ordinary Men: Reserve Police Battalion 101 and the Final Solution in Poland*, New York, 1998, p. 79

253 After: H. Welzer, op. cit., p. 267.

254 H. Frank, *Im Angesicht des Galgens. Deutung Hitlers und seiner Zeit aufgrund eigener Erlebnisse und Erkenntnisse*, München 1953, p. 46.

255 *Ibidem*, p. 391.



kind to workers, women, and children, and who promoted the vital interests of Germany.”<sup>256</sup>

Communists in the Soviet occupation zone had an easier task. According to them, there was a category of the incriminated: “brawlers and criminals without conscience”. They were “Hitler and Göring, Himmler and Goebbels, the active followers and supporters of the Nazi party, (...) champions of reactionary militarism, the likes of Keitel, Jodl, and associates (...) imperialistic sponsors of the Nazi party, the gentlemen of the large banks and concerns, Krupp and Röchling, Poensgen, and Siemens. (...) We German Communists declare that we, too, feel responsible. For despite the bloody sacrifices of our best fighters (...) we were unable to forge an anti-fascist unity.”<sup>257</sup>

In 1945, the first party leader of East Germany defined German guilt by pointing at the “perpetrators of the tragedy of the German nation”. According to Walter Ulbricht, stigmatisation of this “gang of criminals” and recognition of their guilt was a: “prerequisite for our people finally breaking with their reactionary past and entering resolutely upon a new road. The joint responsibility consists in the fact that they permitted those forces which were the most rapacious and greedy for conquest in Germany, the Nazi bureaucracy and the big armament industrialists, to take over the full state power. (...) [I]n the fact that they permitted the hate propaganda against French, Polish, Russian and English peoples and allowed the Hitler clique to break all treaties and even tear up the Soviet-German non-aggression treaty... in the fact that they credulously allowed themselves to be deceived, that the old Prussian spirit of submissiveness and blind obedience dominated great masses in that these masses obeyed a gang of war criminals.”<sup>258</sup>

Alexander Abusch, a journalist and literary critic, the Minister of Culture in East Germany between 1958 and 1961 and the deputy Prime Minister between 1961 and 1971, pointed at ideological enemies as perpetrators of the war and crime, saying: “Heavy is the burden of guilt of the leaders of the right wing of the social democrats, The Centre Party and the German Democratic Party, who were in favour of ‘moderate’ nationalist and imperialist ideas and thus paralysed the

256 *Der Prozess*, op. cit., vol. 22, p. 451. Translation after: <http://avalon.law.yale.edu/imt/08-31-46.asp>

257 *KPD Aufruf des Zentralkomitees der KPD vom 11. Juni 1945 an das deutsche Volk zum Aufbau eines antifaschistisch-demokratischen Deutschlands*, za: H. Kämper, *Opfer – Täter – Nichttäter. Ein Wörterbuch zum Schuldiskurs 1945-1955*, Berlin 2007, p. 251. Translation after: [http://germanhistorydocs.ghi-dc.org/docpage.cfm?docpage\\_id=3251](http://germanhistorydocs.ghi-dc.org/docpage.cfm?docpage_id=3251)

258 W. Ulbricht, *Das Programm der antifaschistisch-demokratischen Ordnung*, in: idem, *Zur Geschichte der deutschen Arbeiter-Bewegung. Aus Reden und Aufsätzen*, vol. II, Berlin 1953, p. 428. Translation after: W Ulbricht, *Speech at the First Conference of Officials of the KPD of Greater Berlin (25 June 1945), On Questions of Socialist Construction in the GDR* (Dresden, 1968), pp 13-14.



resistance against the Nazi poison (...) Smaller is the political guilt of the left wing of the German labour movement, which, despite its sectarian mistakes, called for a fight to the death against the approaching Nazi danger.”<sup>259</sup> Party leaders in the Eastern zone freed average Germans and the labour and peasant masses from guilt. They opposed the denazification of working people. Wilhelm Pieck, the first President of East Germany, who co-founded the Socialist Unity Party of Germany after his return from the Soviet Union in 1945, spoke about them in 1947: “In good will, they became entangled into the promises of Hitler’s gang and began to understand how much they were deceived.”<sup>260</sup> The first Prime Minister of East Germany, Otto Grotewohl, did not doubt that only “German imperialists are the proper culprits (...) those who, with cynical insolence, proclaimed themselves ‘the council of gods’.”<sup>261</sup>

### ‘The disciplined’, ‘the patriots’, ‘the idealists’

The protocols with testimonies and the interviews with perpetrators demonstrate that criminal guilt was unbearable for them, while moral guilt became integrated into a specific system of values. An action with a good will, even if it was consent for mass murder, was a justifying instance. Faith, love and hope constituted maxims, a comfortable coat that was intended to cover one’s consent for evil. Homeland, nation and duty created a network of defensive terms. The Nazi logic of blind obedience was the most frequent defensive motif. The fanatic anti-Semite, the Reich Minister of the Interior, Wilhelm Frick followed this track saying: “I have a clear conscience with respect to the Indictment. My entire life was spent in the service of my people and my fatherland. To them I have devoted the best of my strength in the loyal fulfilment (of my duty (...)) In fulfilling my legal and moral duties, I believe that I have deserved punishment no more than have the tens of thousands of faithful German civil servants and officials in the public service who have already been detained in camps for over a year merely because they did their duty.”<sup>262</sup>

There were defensive attempts to highlight human weakness and the fact that crimes were not committed exclusively by Germany. Dispersal of guilt over time

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259 A. Abusch, *Der Irrweg einer Nation. Ein Beitrag zum Verständnis deutscher Geschichte*, Berlin 1946, p. 256.

260 W. Pieck, *Der Sinn der Entnazifizierung*, in: idem, *Reden und Aufsätze. Auswahl aus den Jahren 1908-1950*, vol. 2, Berlin 1952, pp. 124-125.

261 O. Grotewohl, *Rede zum Tag der Befreiung*, in: idem, *Im Kampf um die einige Deutsche Demokratische Republik. Reden und Aufsätze*, vol. 2, Berlin 1951, p. 52.

262 *Der Prozess*, op. cit., vol. 22, p. 438, translation after: <http://avalon.law.yale.edu/imt/08-31-46.asp>

and onto other epochs, other nations and other people was intended to tame and weaken the significance of the deed. Defences based on lies and falsifications and the intensity of the defence confirmed the awareness of guilt. The accused attributed different meanings to well-known terms. One could also hear that to err is human. “Human life consists of error and guilt. I, too, have made many mistakes; I, too, have let myself be deceived in many things (...) Therein I see my guilt”, Walther Funk, the Reich Minister of Economy and the President of the Reichsbank, testified in Nuremberg. Funk was sentenced to life imprisonment and released in 1957 because of ill health.<sup>263</sup> He insisted that until the trial he had known nothing about the crimes or about the appropriation of Jewish properties; he had heard nothing and had seen nothing. Funk felt free of guilt as he only fulfilled the duties that were assigned to him by the higher instance.

Release from guilt was a consequence of a mental process described by Raul Hilberg: “Germans murdered more than five million Jews. This act of violence did not come as a bolt from the blue; it happened because the perpetrators gave it a meaning.”<sup>264</sup> Not only did the Nazi ideology give meaning to actions, it also had to prove useful in the everyday practice of the exclusion of Jews. What could help the release from guilt was the conviction that this practice was a preventive measure in the defence of one’s own country. What was absurd from a scientific point of view was made real by the Nazi doctrine with everyday actions of ‘self-defence’. Joseph Goebbels stated in his diary on 20 August 1941: “In order to perform the tasks we must perform, one need only bear in mind what the Jews would do to us should the power be in their hands and not ours.”<sup>265</sup>

The perpetrators escaped from guilt by idealising their deeds. As punishment was unavoidable, they wanted to present themselves in their last public performance as people of good will. For Rosenberg, National Socialism was a “European answer to our century”, “the noblest idea to which a German could give his or her strength”, the idea of “a truly social world-view” and “the ideal of cultural purity, determined by blood”. For them, euthanasia was a “protection of the national community” and the “relocation” of Jews was understood as “protective actions of the state”.<sup>266</sup>

Participation in the criminal work was called idealism, and Nazism was described as fate, destiny, on which a helpless man had no influence. The politician Franz von Papen explained his collaboration with the regime, referring to the reliability of his work for the country. He did not recognise any moral

263 Ibidem, p. 441.

264 R. Hilberg, *Die Vernichtung der europäischen Juden*, Frankfurt a. M. 1990, p. 1061.

265 After: P. Longerich, *Judenverfolgung und nationalsozialistische Öffentlichkeit*, in: K. Platt (ed.), *Reden von Gewalt*, München 2002, p. 237.

266 A. Rosenberg, *Letzte Aufzeichnungen*, op. cit., p. 272, 314.

guilt of his own, believing that in the case of great historical interdependencies, the guilt is only “historical”. “I have no other justification but only my sense of responsibility.”<sup>267</sup> Hans Frank also justified himself before God and people, saying he honestly “represented pure ideals” and he perceived Hitler’s power “as destiny”. Constantin von Neurath, Foreign minister of Germany between 1933 and 1938 and Reichsprotektor of Bohemia and Moravia between 1939 and 1941, stated that his life was consecrated to “truth and honour, to the maintenance of peace and the reconciliation of nations, to humanity and justice”.<sup>268</sup>

### The ‘big’ and the ‘little’ person in a uniform

The creation of myths was also an effective form of protection against guilt and the attribution of the status of a victim. The myth of an enslaved nation that was seduced by Hitler and his associates, who used the SS as an alibi, was reflected in trivial literature and film productions, amongst other media. Criminals in the dock, as well as the authors of memoirs and military commanders who co-created the myth of ‘clean Wehrmacht’, were also responsible for the image of Germans as innocent victims. Demythologisation of this image took a few decades. The memory of the soldiers’ participation in the war was very complex. The German army, as the Israeli politician Omer Bartov noted, enjoyed the greatest victory in the twentieth century not in battle, but in politics.<sup>269</sup> Generals of the defeated and dissolved army created legends. The first document, a memorial of Wehrmacht generals dated 10 November 1945, was already intended to serve as self-defence against the International Military Tribunal in Nuremberg. Field Marshal Walther von Brauchitsch, who edited it in agreement with other generals, reported the critical stance of the Wehrmacht towards the Hitlerite politics and the protests of military leaders against war crimes. The same commander in chief of the army explained in his orders to the officer’s corps in 1938: “The Wehrmacht and National Socialism are from the same intellectual roots. They will accomplish great things for the nation if they follow the example and the teachings of the Führer (...)”. Field Marshal Erich von Manstein explained in his postwar memorandum that

267 F. von Papen, *Der Wahrheit eine Gasse*, München 1952, p. 300, 492.

268 *Der Prozess*, op. cit., vol. 22, p. 462. Translation: <http://avalon.law.yale.edu/imt/08-31-46.asp>

269 O. Bartov, *Brutalität und Mentalität. Zum Verhalten deutscher Soldaten an der “Ostfront”*, in: P. Jahn, R. Rürup (eds.), *Erobern und Vernichten. Der Krieg gegen die Sowjet union 1941-1945*, Berlin 1991, pp. 183-199; See also: G. Meyer, *Soldaten ohne Armee. Berufssoldaten im Kampf um Standesehre und Versorgung*, in: M. Broszat, K.-D. Henke, H. Woller (eds.), *Von Stalingrad zur Währungsreform. Zur Sozialgeschichte des Umbruchs in Deutschland*, München 1988, pp. 683-750.

“The soldier must show understanding for the harsh atonement of Judaism, the spiritual carrier of the Bolshevik terror.”<sup>270</sup>

Both generals and soldiers with the lowest military rank referred to order and obedience. Generals spoke of the lost victory, duty, defence of the homeland, comradeship. They all were “soldiers until the last day”. They knew nothing about the crimes. General Field Marshal Albert Kesselring, who commanded air forces in the invasions of Poland, and Field Marshal Walther von Brauchitsch testified in Nuremberg that they had been unaware of the “atrocities against the Jews”. The Chief of Naval Command and Admiral Inspector of the Navy, Erich Raeder, marginalised his responsibility in his testimony: “If I have incurred guilt in any way, then this was chiefly in the sense that in spite of my purely military position I should perhaps have been not only a soldier, but also up to a certain point a politician, which, however, was in contradiction to my entire career and the tradition of the German Armed Forces. But then this would have been a guilt, a moral guilt, towards the German people, and could never at any time brand me as a war criminal. It would not have been guilt before a human criminal court, but rather guilt before God.”<sup>271</sup>

Alfred Jodl, the Army General, Chief of the Operations Staff of the Armed Forces High Command, Hitler’s close advisor and co-author of the main military plans, did not go beyond stereotypical slogans about the duty towards the homeland and the nation. General Wilhelm List, who was awarded the Knight’s Cross of the Iron Cross for carrying out the attack on Poland, claimed he had not only served his ‘party’ but also fulfilled his soldier’s duty for the homeland “as we have been doing for centuries.” General Wilhelm Ritter von Leeb, released from service after the failure of the attack on Leningrad, said: “We were not driven by criminal instincts, as the prosecution wishes to believe; we have lived a life sucked dry by the service and selfless performance of duties towards the homeland and our soldiers.”<sup>272</sup> In October 1952 in Verden, at the first meeting of Waffen-SS after the war, General Bernhard Ramcke asked a rhetorical question: “Who are the real war criminals?”, to which he himself answered: “Those who

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270 Memoirs, see: S. Westphal, *Der deutsche Generalstab auf der Anklagebank. Nürnberg 1945-1948*, Mainz 1978 (memoirs of: Walther von Brauchitsch, Erich von Manstein, Franz Halder, Walter Warlimont, Siegfried Westphal. Citations are from the critical analysis of the memoirs: M. Messerschmidt, *Vorwärtsverteidigung. Die ‘Denkschrift der Generäle’ für den Nürnberger Gerichtshof*, in: H. Heer, K. Naumann (eds.), *Vernichtungskrieg. Verbrechen der Wehrmacht 1941-1944*, Hamburg 1995, pp. 531-550; see also E. von Manstein, *Lost Victories*, ed. by Anthony G. Powell, New York 1982.

271 *Der Prozess*, op. cit., vol. 22, p. 446.

272 Citation after: H. Kämper, *Der Schuldiskurs*, op. cit., p. 256. See also H. Laternser, *Verteidigung deutscher Soldaten. Plädoyers vor alliierten Gerichten*, Bonn 1950, p. 239.

without tactical justification destroyed whole cities, bombed Hiroshima, and now are manufacturing new atomic bombs.<sup>273</sup> This voice joined the everyday chorus of statements aimed at relieving the sense of guilt by criticising the victorious powers. It was also a way of overcoming the division of Germany and Allied policy in the occupied German zones.

The words of Field Marshal Wilhelm Keitel were unusual in comparison to others. He confessed: "I believed, but I erred, and I was not in a position to prevent what ought to have been prevented. That is my guilt. It is tragic to have to realise that the best I had to give as a soldier, obedience and loyalty, was exploited for purposes that could not be recognised at the time, and that I did not see that there is a limit set even for a soldier's performance of his duty."<sup>274</sup>

Absolute obedience was one of the virtues of an SS member. This 'catechism' was obligatory only for their own race. Various 'preventive measures' in dealing with the enemy, such as immediate shootings of the captured Soviet political commissioners, *Kommissarbefehl*, confirmed that morality was in contradiction to the law. One of the orders read: "In the struggle against Bolshevism the enemy's conduct will not be based on the principles of international law or humanity. In particular, hate-inspired, cruel and inhuman treatment of our prisoners of war must be expected from political commissars of all grades, who form the hard core of enemy resistance. These commissars are the originators of barbarous, Asiatic methods of warfare, and they must therefore be dealt with all possible severity and dispatch... Whether captured during battle or whilst offering resistance they must be shot at once."<sup>275</sup> At the same time, a 'Decalogue' was publicised through leaflets and publications for soldiers, which stated, for example: "The German soldier fights chivalrously for the victory of the nation. Acts of cruelty and senseless destruction are unworthy of him. (...) No enemy who surrenders may be killed (...) They will receive their just punishment."<sup>276</sup>

At the lower steps of the military hierarchy, the obedience to an order was the most common justification and a form of releasing oneself from guilt. The perpetrators' argumentation was that the authoritarian political culture of military discipline did not give a choice. The consequences of a refusal to obey orders were obvious. The problem was that, in court proceedings, no prosecutor or counsel for the defence was able to prove that the one who disobeyed would receive such a punishment. It was also unclear to which act of disobedience the punishment would

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273 N. Frei, *Adenauer's Germany and the Nazi past*, New York 2002, p. 216

274 Citation after: P. Reichel, *Vergangenheitsbewältigung in Deutschland*, op. cit., p. 53.

275 Citation after: H.-A. Jacobsen, *Kommissarbefehl und Mass Executions of Soviet Russian Prisoners of War*, in: H. Buchheim et. al., *Anatomy of the SS State*, New York 1968, p. 519-520.

276 Citation after: G. Schwan, op. cit., p. 63.

be given. Partisans were the enemy that one had to treat particularly harshly. “The partisan struggle is a struggle for Bolshevism, it is not a people’s movement. (...) The enemy must be *totally destroyed*. The incessant decision over life and death posed by the partisans and suspects is difficult even for the toughest soldier. But it must be done. He behaves correctly who, by setting aside all possible impulses of personal feeling, proceeds ruthlessly and mercilessly”.<sup>277</sup>

The image of war and a simple soldier’s participation in it is reflected in a particular way in the letters of soldiers from the Eastern Front. The Battle of Stalingrad remained the reference point and the memory icon. Just like the Russians, Germans made the battle at the Volga River the focal point of the war. Thanks to films, novels, diaries and letters, the battle has lived its own life. Both parties considered it a battle of destiny, and their fallen as the victims who decided the fate of the war. Even in the late summer of 1942, German propaganda still announced that Stalingrad could become the symbol of victory over Stalinism and Bolshevism.<sup>278</sup> The battle had been already lost when, on 30 January 1943, Hermann Göring declared in a radio broadcast that “Stalingrad will remain the greatest battle of heroes in our history.” Göring compared the battle, in which 200,000 German soldiers died and 90,000 were taken prisoner (about 6,000 returned to the country), to the fight of Leonidas, the defender of Thermopylae, and his 300 Spartans, against the Persian emperor Xerxes. He also noted an analogy to the battle of the Nibelungs, who, in the heat of battle, “quenched the thirst with their own blood, fighting till the end.”<sup>279</sup>

Making the defeat a mythical project of the future had multiple aims. The myth was intended to conceal the problem of responsibility, to deaden the everyday of war barbarity. The press was ordered to deliver only ‘moving’ information. In the face of the enormity of the defeat, public opinion needed to be convinced about the moral victory of German soldiers, about the strength of their heroic attitude and the will to win. Therefore, a heroic epic was being written and announced. Identification of the German army with the defenders of Thermopylae meant that the Battle of Stalingrad was presented as a defence battle. There were

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277 *Richtlinien des Chefs der Ordnungspolizei zur Partisanenbekämpfung vom 17. November 1941*, after: C. Browning, *Ordinary Men*, op. cit., p. 183.

278 M. Steinert, *Hitlers Krieg und die Deutschen. Stimmung und Haltung der deutschen Bevölkerung im Zweiten Weltkrieg*, Düsseldorf 1970; M. Steinert, *Stalingrad und die deutsche Gesellschaft*, in: J. Förster (ed.), *Stalingrad. Ereignis – Wirkung – Symbol*, München 1992; J. Ebert (ed.), *Stalingrad – eine deutsche Legende*, Reinbek b. Hamburg 1992; M. Kumpfmüller, *Die Schlacht von Stalingrad. Metamorphosen eines deutschen Mythos*, München 1995; W. Wette, G.R. Ueberschär (eds.), *Stalingrad. Mythos und Wirklichkeit einer Schlacht*, Frankfurt a. M. 1992.

279 Citation after: R.G. Renner, *Hirn und Herz. Stalingrad als Gegenstand ideologischer und literarischer Diskurse*, in: J. Förster, op. cit., p. 472.

many strategies to blur the boundaries between the perpetrator and the victim, the aggressive and defensive war. The most important one was the ideological confrontation of Western civilisation and Bolshevik barbarity. There were efforts to arouse a ‘sense of European bonding’ in the face of the common enemy: the Soviet system. The war was presented not as the Hitler’s fight against the Allied forces but as the crusade of the European spirit against ‘the Bolshevik beast’. The alternative given to the German nation was freedom or annihilation by the Eastern barbarians. It was believed that the Stalingrad heroes had to die so that Germany could exist. No one asked why they had to defend Germany in a city 4,000 miles away from the Reich. German propaganda did not see Russians as defenders of their homeland. The enemies were ‘Bolsheviks’, ‘communists’, ‘partisans’ and ‘monsters’. Such an image appealed to many environments, including the Church hierarchs in Germany who believed that the war against godlessness must be just. The zeal of military chaplains in their service was based on the principle that ‘the strength of faith is the source of the strength of the defence’.

The pastoral letters addressed to the soldiers of the Wehrmacht brought not only comfort, but also hate: “These weeks when you confronted the masses of the Bolshevik armies, you must have realised in the most shocking way what the demonic regime of barbarity has made of these people. The regime has never moved people from primitivism to the stage of freedom (...) You experienced how people in the territories occupied by the Bolsheviks manifested their joy when you entered the cities and villages; how they greeted you as liberators. In their eyes one could see gratitude for saving them from brutal tyranny, the real hell of martyrdom and suffering. This severe experience in the East made you realise what an unspeakable happiness it is for us to be Germans. In the face of these millions, whom Bolshevism has deprived of religion and faith in God for more than 20 years, this experience will make you feel your Christian faith as the most valuable godsend.”<sup>280</sup>

Lorenz Jaeger, the Archbishop of Paderborn, wrote in his pastoral letter in 1942 about the “Slavic sub-humans (*Untermenschen*)” against whom the German soldiers had to fight: “Look at Russia! Didn’t this poor, ill-fated country turn out to be a place where people, due to their hatred of God, became like animals? Aren’t our soldiers suffering there? (...) And why? Because the order there was not built in accordance with Christ, but with Judas.”<sup>281</sup> Franz Justus Rarkowski,

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280 Hirtenbrief vom 29.07.1941. Citation after: T. Breuer (ed.), *Dem Führer gehorsam. Wie die deutschen Katholiken von ihrer Kirche zum Kriegsdienst verpflichtet wurden. Dokumente*, Oberursel 1989, p. 23; idem, *Gehorsam, pflichtbewußt und opferwillig. Deutsche Katholiken und ihr Kriegsdienst in der Wehrmacht*, ‘Stimmen der Zeit’ z. 1, 1999, pp. 37-44.

281 H. Gruß, *Erzbischof Jaeger als Kirchenführer im Dritten Reich*, Paderborn 1995, p. 407.



the Catholic military bishop, believed that German soldiers would pass this test successfully until complete victory and “then, at the right moment, God will do his bit.” The Soviet Union and its army were mostly depicted as the “enemies of the faith.” The war was sometimes perceived as a crusade that was aimed to relieve the world of communism. The archbishop of Breslau, Adolf Bertram, wrote to the Reich Ministry for Ecclesiastical Affairs on 23 October 1943, stating that no one should wish for an unsuccessful end to the war. According to Bertram, every sensible person knows that in that case, every state or Church order would be destroyed by the “Russian chaos.”

The controversies over the meaning and significance of the Battle of Stalingrad have continued until today. Films and novels about this event brought a therapeutic message to the nation. They idealised the image of a soldier, they were the human monument to the German soldier and adjusted history to the present needs. The fictionalised image de-politicised the war. It was no longer a racial war or a fight oriented towards extermination, but Hitler’s war, which compelled obedience from the brave and honest soldiers. The film and literary images sensitised the recipients to human suffering but did not make them wonder why Germans were found in Stalingrad. In the 1950s, the literary critic Erich Kuby aptly noted that “every German unconsciously wanted to win the war they lost.”<sup>282</sup> Both sides of the Iron Curtain maintained the legend of Stalingrad through literature, film and documentaries. Repeated in hundreds of images, the scenes of human wrecks going to captivity in tattered uniforms and with frostbitten limbs were intended to arouse sympathy, but also to trigger anger against the enemy. How could one feel guilty when one’s heroes suffered, endured hunger and cold? Thousands of dead were the argument for the mothers and wives to define Russia as the enemy.

The highest-ranked German officers attempted to minimise their responsibility. The diaries of General Erich von Manstein, published under the significant title *Lost Victories*, leave no doubt that Hitler bears all the blame for what happened. German armies, encircled in the Stalingrad cauldron, were the Führer’s “first victim”, the “betrayed army.” Manstein suggested that if it had not been for Hitler, the whole course of the battle and the war would have been different.<sup>283</sup>

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282 For an extensive analysis of the film and television productions about Stalingrad, compare e.g.: G. Feil, *Zeitgeschichte im deutschen Fernsehen. Analyse von Fernsehsendungen mit historischen Themen (1957-1967)*, Osnabrück 1974; K. Korn, *Heroische Sentimentalität, ein Filmaster*, ‘FAZ’, 28.02.1958; F. Violet, *Der Arzt von Stalingrad*, ‘Süddeutsche Zeitung’ 29.04.1958. *Der Arzt von Stalingrad* patrz *Der Engel, der keiner ist. Der geistige Pate des Hetzfilms ‘Arzt von Stalingrad’ ein Lügner*, *Neues Deutschland*, 7.08.1958.

283 E.von Manstein, *Lost Victories*, ed. by Anthony G. Powell, New York 1982.



The posthumously published memoirs of Friedrich Paulus<sup>284</sup> depict the heroism of German soldiers as the model for the entire nation.

The image of the battle and the memories of the rank and file were different. The preserved letters do not present a heroic army or an involved Nazi who shouts “Heil Hitler” before he dies, but a terrified human being, who most of all wants to survive. Even if a simple soldier was not a convinced Nazi, he easily believed the propagandist idea of the Manichean struggle between good and evil. On the frontline, it was more comfortable not to think about whether what one is doing makes any sense. The common feeling was rather that of what a simple man must do in service of his country.

Little has been saved of the source materials, letters from the frontline or military mail. During World War I, about 28.7 billion postal items were exchanged between the frontline and the homeland and during World War II, almost 50 billion between the Wehrmacht soldiers and the homeland.<sup>285</sup> Among the simple soldiers there were also intellectuals, writers, teachers and others. The unsent letters found with the dead German soldiers reveal the great effectiveness of propaganda, but also the amount of human tragedy. The extreme conditions of fights in the East – cold, envelopment and homesickness – helped to promote soldierly duty, sacrifice, discipline and suffering to the rank of the greatest sacrifice. A simple soldier who only obeyed orders was easy to defend by referring to the Wilhelmine military tradition. An expert on the psychology of the masses aptly describes his mentality: “Each command he carries out – and they are innumerable – leaves a sting behind in him. These stings accumulate rapidly. If he is a common soldier, on the lowest step of the military hierarchy, all opportunity to get rid of them is denied him, for he himself can give no orders. He can only do what he is told to do. He obeys and, in doing so, grows more and more rigid”.<sup>286</sup>

The defensive strategy after the war was supported by the belief that a lot had been done for the national community, which demonstrated the effectiveness of the Nazi propaganda. War nationalism came to the fore. Soldiers believed in the superiority of the German community. The frontline correspondence reveals a belief in the inequality of cultures and races. A dichotomist view of the world helped to contrast the German world of cleanliness with Eastern dirt, high culture

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284 Walter Gorlitz (ed), *Ich stehe hier auf Befehl! Lebensweg des Generalfeldmarschalls Friedrich Paulus, mit den Aufzeichnungen aus dem Nachlass, Briefen und Dokumenten*, Frankfurt am Main, 1960.

285 K. Schracke, *Geschichte der deutschen Feldpost im Krieg 1914-1918*, Berlin 1921; P. Knoch, *Feldpost – eine unentdeckte Quellengattung*, ‘Geschichtsdidaktik’, 2, 1986, p. 156; O. Buchbender, R. Sterz (eds.), *Das andere Gesicht des Krieges. Deutsche Feldpostbriefe 1939-1945*, München 1983.

286 E. Canetti, *Crowds and power*, trans. C. Stewart, New York, 1994, p. 315.

with the culture of primitivism, the superhuman with the subhuman, Europe with Asia. Even if the enemy's courage was acknowledged during the war, he was never perceived as the defender of his homeland. If one noticed poverty, he or she did not relate it to the war and the perpetrator of the war, but explained it in the simplest possible way: "If you see this screaming poverty, you need to knock on your head and realise that this rabble, this Bolshevik beast, wanted to give their culture to us: diligent and clean Germans."<sup>287</sup>

The range of epithets that described Jewish districts in the East was wide. No one thought about the reasons for this poverty. What soldiers saw on their combat track served to confirm the content of their education in the National Socialist country. The enemy was being dehumanised. "All the things they wear they do not take off, even at night, and they are full of lice to the extent that one can say that the Russians do not have lice but the lice took possession of the Russians. They are a swine nation of the first rank."<sup>288</sup> The enemy did not only live in a cesspit – he was the cesspit.<sup>289</sup> Alongside the astonishment at the poverty, there was a disdain towards the strange nation. Captain Heine-Gerd A. wrote on 22 September 1942 from Russia about the fundamental character of their poverty. It was easy for the German carrier of culture to contrast his country with what he saw: "The greatest poverty is not hopeless cottages and streets, for instance, no; they are the people who spiritually are completely on the bottom."<sup>290</sup> There were letters in which the pride of belonging to the nation of culture and civilisation led to the conclusion that "such a swamp, such a humanity shows us what a great colonial task lies here." Some, such as the lieutenant Richards S. in autumn 1942, indulged in dreams: "This East will be our future. Hundreds of kilometres of limitless space, a fertile field (...) It is obvious that here is the only possibility to save our peasantry from destruction and let new peasantry emerge and provide space for the future German generations." What they saw was a justification for making plans about Slavic slaves working for their German masters; plans to settle at the Black Sea and make Ukraine, under German rule, the main granary of Europe. De-humanisation was the result of the fear of the threat from the East and the confirmation that far in the East one would need to defend not only the civilised world but also the German nation, sisters, wives and mothers.

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287 A fragment from the letter dated July 1941. On the basis of: S.O. Müller, *Deutsche Soldaten und ihre Feinde. Nationalismus an Front und Heimatfront im Zweiten Weltkrieg*, Frankfurt a. M. 2007, p. 183.

288 Ibidem, p. 184.

289 K. Latzel, *Deutsche Soldaten – nationalsozialistischer Krieg? Kriegserlebnis – Kriegserfahrung 1939-1945*, Paderborn 1998.

290 S.O. Müller, op. cit., p. 187.

The fear and warnings were expressed against “Mongol hordes” that could enter German soil. The soldier Josef Z. wrote on 25 October 1941 about the captured: “You should see these captives. Mongols, Chinese, Tatars and other savages. God’s grace upon us if these legions would enter our homeland. They will destroy themselves on their own.”<sup>291</sup>

The nation had to fulfil not only the ideological and material needs of its representatives. German loyalty in the war resulted not only from conformism, obedience and coercion. The nationalist understanding of the national community was a help and provided soldiers with a compass that oriented them and helped them assess and experience the war. There was no reckoning by the active soldiers with the war in terms of critical analysis. There was also no defence of this war similar to the apologetic image of the war created in the 1920s by the diaries of officers, war novels and popular brochures. Military history also could not provide any defence. The Wehrmacht consisted of about 20 million soldiers, 99.7% of whom were non-commissioned officers and soldiers of lower rank. One speaks of the soldier masses and their anonymous suffering. As research progresses, there are voices calling to restore the unknown soldier his face and name. An individual approach allows one to see the ‘little person’ in a uniform in a double role: as a perpetrator and as a victim – the victim of the system, for which he gave his own life.

War experiences became the memory of the war. However, memory is a not a constant category. It changes under the influence of the consequences of the war and many other circumstances. Some memories fade, some are moved away and some are glorified. New language, ideologies, slogans and stereotypes modify the memory of the war. Everyone dies alone but an organised mass murder led to common experiences of memory. The implacability of death during war is the main war experience. It was attached a theological and political meaning. The forms of cult of the dead soldiers and other victims changed in Germany after World War II.<sup>292</sup> The main motto of political culture became ‘No more war.’ Forms of commemoration changed as well. R. Koselleck draws attention to the distinctiveness of the sites of torment, concentration camps as collective monuments of memory that lost the function of cemeteries. There, it is impossible not to ask oneself about the meaning of death. Unlike cities and villages, where tombs and cemeteries testified that death is the answer, martyr deaths in camps could be understood as a question. There was a change of understanding of the cult of the dead and the signs of commemoration. There are monuments that were intended to compensate for the lost war. The dominant image of the war in belles-

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291 Ibidem, p. 199.

292 R. Koselleck, *Der Einfluß der beiden Weltkriege auf das soziale Bewusstsein*, in: W. Wette (ed.), *Der Krieg des kleinen Mannes. Eine Militärgeschichte von unten*, München, Zürich 1992, pp. 324-343.

lettres and memoirs was a fulfilled duty. Even anti-war novels kept presenting a character who tells his fate from the perspective of the rank and file and who sheds the burden of responsibility from his arms and shifts it upwards. Michael Horbach, in his novel *Die verratenen Söhne*, lets a lieutenant justify his military promotion: “Millions have to participate. They are not asked. They are forced. I do not want to oppose. (...) We ourselves got into this trouble because we did nothing to stop it.”<sup>293</sup> In novels, an anonymous soldier who found himself on the wrong side makes a compromise with morality for the good of his company. Instead of confessing complicity, war literature was intended to arouse sympathy. The most trivial novels depict a soldier who is first seduced, and then betrayed. Their character is in fact an honest soldier who does not want to let his colleagues and superiors down.

### Social ‘normality’

The most difficult and important problem of dealing with the past is the attitude of *Mitläufer*: the witnesses and bystanders of the epoch, crowds that for various reasons remained indifferent to the political activities of the Third Reich. In the poverty of postwar reality, an average person was not willing to perform any reckoning or self-insight. If one has a closer look at the situation in Germany in the 1930s and the process of isolating Jews and turning away from their tragedy, it can be assumed that the consent and gradual, passive incorporation into the Nazi system helped people release themselves from the sense of responsibility. Sebastian Haffner, who quickly recognised and carefully watched the metamorphosis and adjustment of society, was one of the few to perform vivisection on his own example.

He noticed, after years, how the process of the reconstruction of social norms took place. In his diaries, the author presented the anatomy of enslavement: how even those who did not accept the Nazi order started acting their assigned role. They voluntarily switched to the side of the dominant power, without force or pressure from outside. They wanted to melt into the crowd and do what everybody else did; it was a way of defending their own integrity. While remaining distant on the inside, they manifested their belonging on the outside. “I wore a uniform with a swastika armband. I stood to attention and I cleaned my rifle. (...) [I]t was not me that did it. It was a game and I was acting a part,” Haffner confessed. We also owe him a self-critical evaluation of his actions when, a few months after Hitler’s seizure of power, he sang Nazi songs with his colleagues on a Training Camp for Referendars in Jüterbog. “A fanfare signaled the national anthem, and we all

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293 M. Horbach, *Die verratenen Söhne*, Reinbek 1956, p. 129.

raised our arms. A few hesitated like me, it was so dreadfully shaming. But did we want to sit our examinations, or not? For the first time, I had the feeling, so strong it left a taste in my mouth, ‘this doesn’t count. This isn’t me. It doesn’t count,’ and with this feeling I, too, raised my arm and held it stretched out ahead of me, for about three minutes. That is the combined length of ‘Deutschland über alles’ and the ‘Horst Wessel Song.’ Most of us sang along, droning jerkily. I moved my lips a little and mimed singing, as one does with hymns in church. But we all had our arms stretched out, and in this pose we stood facing the radio set, which had pulled these arms out like a puppeteer manipulates the arms of his marionettes, and we all sang or pretended to do so, each one of us the Gestapo of the others.” Haffner described the daily routine of the adaptation process. In March 1933 he was working in the Kammergericht library as an article clerk. People in brown uniforms entered the library shouting: “Non-Aryans must leave the premises immediately”. Then, one of them approached the author of the memoir and asked: “Are you Aryan?” Haffner confessed. “I said, ‘Yes.’ He took a close look at my nose – and retired. The blood shot to my face. A moment too late I felt the shame, the defeat. I had said, ‘Yes!’ Well, in God’s name I was indeed an ‘Aryan.’ I had not lied, I had allowed something much worse to happen. (...) What a disgrace to buy, with a reply, the right to stay with my documents in peace!”<sup>294</sup>

This is how the new ‘normality’ of the nation without Jews was emerging. A new morality of blood, race and national community prevailed over traditional morality. It is impossible to point at the moment when people believed that National Socialism was the norm and the order to murder people of the inferior race was considered a duty. It was a gradual process. Norbert Elias, in his attempt to explain how the impossible happened, drew attention to the shift in the consciousness of the German Bourgeoisie in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. At the time, the questions of honour, inequality, satisfaction, nation and Volk prevailed over the ideas of the Enlightenment and humanism. A specific honour code with “strict hierarchization of human relationships”, and “a clear order of command and obedience” was established.<sup>295</sup> Elias explains these processes, noting that the unification of Germany was not the work of the Bourgeoisie but was achieved by military means as a result of the victory in 1871. Therefore, it was a victory of the honour code of the traditional upper classes, not bourgeois values. Honour norms were praised over social equality and humanist ideals were discredited as the ideals of lower social classes.

The report prepared by Saul Padover, a historian and an American Jew, for the Psychological Warfare Division, reveals the most common attitude of the externalisation of guilt. The historian, who accompanied American troops

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294 S. Haffner, *Defying Hitler: a Memoir*, Stuttgart, New York 2003, pp. 290, 267-8/151.

295 N. Elias, *The Germans*, New York 1996, p. 107.

as an unarmed intelligence officer from 1944 to 1946, conducted hundreds of interviews with Germans of various ages and professions.<sup>296</sup> He did not want to moralise and was only interested in the motivations of human attitudes. At the end of the war, when the approaching defeat of Germany was no longer a secret, most of Padover's interviewees condemned National Socialism but denied their own guilt and responsibility. When it was already known how the politics of the Third Reich would end, Germans moved away from Hitler but did not condemn his politics. Padover registered these tendencies in German society and concluded that "psychologically the German people are now prepared to escape punishment and moral responsibility by offering to the world a scapegoat who only a short while ago was a demi-god." No one "criticized aggression as such. The only criticism was of aggression that failed. Hitler is blamed for losing the war, not for starting it."<sup>297</sup>

It was common to see such a shift in responsibility and the desire to find one's place in the new country as an ordinary commentator of the war, interested in understanding the sources of the defeat without having to perform any self-insight. Aleida Assmann refers to the autobiographical novel of Uwe Timm, who remembers gatherings of family and friends: "My father could not allow himself to grieve, only to feel anger, but because he saw courage, duty and tradition as inviolable virtues he directed his anger not at the real causes but only at military bunglers, shirkers, traitors. That was the subject of his conversation with his old comrades. They came round in the evening, sat together, drank coffee and cognac, and talked about the war. They tried to find explanations for why it had been lost. Battles were fought all over again, wrong orders put right, incompetent generals dismissed, Hitler deprived of his command of the army. It is hardly imaginable now to think of that generation discussing such subjects all evening."<sup>298</sup>

A comparison of the Nazi crimes with the most extreme cases of violence and terror, ethnic cleansings and massacres in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century leads to the conclusion that from the perpetrators' perspective, one of the most important arguments was the belief in the necessity of self-defence: the "defensive identity" of the ones who waged the war.<sup>299</sup> First of all, the enemy must be defined, excluded and stigmatised. The sense of belonging, the willingness to be with others in one row was also very important. It made ordinary people become cogs in the machine

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296 His report was released in English in 1946, but only quite recently in German. See: S.K. Padover, *Experiment in Germany: the story of an American intelligence officer*, New York, 1946, and *Lügendetektor: Vernehmungen im besiegten Deutschland 1944/45*, Frankfurt a. M. 1999.

297 Ibidem, p. 117 and p. 118.

298 U. Timm, *In My Brother's Shadow*, London 2006, p. 67.

299 N. Basic, *Krieg als Abenteuer*, Gießen 2004, p. 137.

of brutality and evil. Pseudo-scientific arguments were found for the needs of the community, in the name of race, ethnic purity, and religion. The essence of these endeavours was to define anew who belongs to 'us'. This is how it was in Rwanda and the former Yugoslavia.<sup>300</sup> Raul Hilberg clearly defined when the defining started and who did not belong to 'us'. In the case of the Third Reich, it was 1933, when the officials decided who was 'Aryan' and who was not.<sup>301</sup> Everyone joined this action. Hannah Arendt concluded: "the Nazis gave their members at least the psychological equivalent for the initiation ritual of secret societies when, instead of simply excluding Jews from membership, they demanded proof of non-Jewish descent from their members and set up a complicated machine to shed light on the dark ancestry of some 80 million Germans. It was of course a comedy, and even an expensive one, when 80 million Germans set out to look for Jewish grandfathers; yet everybody came out of the examination with the feeling that he belonged to a group of included which stood against an imaginary multitude of ineligible".<sup>302</sup> There was a collective ennoblement of the Aryans. The new, attractive, emotional bond translated into the new reality, which was considered necessary and real. That the consequences of this spiral could not be predicted explains the behaviour to some extent but does not justify it.

## 6. Crime and punishment

The privilege of the victors to deal with the defeated enemy and replace the old order with a new one has an old origin. Both the proscription of Sulla in ancient Rome and the liquidation of the Girondists by the Revolutionary Tribunal in France were examples of similar historical mechanisms. Today, the responsibility for the future peaceful coexistence of nations obliges the international community to reflect and debate on the new possibilities of preventing political cataclysms, solve moot problems and punish the guilty. International law has not kept pace with the ingenuity of history in the mutual destruction of people, cultures and religions. However, since the Peace of Westphalia, peace treaties have included the amnesty clause. When, after the French-Prussian war in 1870, there were voices demanding uncompromising treatment of the captured Napoleon III, Otto von Bismarck, the later chancellor of Germany, despite his Machiavellianism, displayed the spirit of the epoch in his criticism of the attitude of a victor who names himself as prosecutor with the moral code in his hand. This attitude "means

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300 Compare e.g. H. Welzer, *Täter. Wie aus ganz normalen Menschen Massenmörder werden*, Frankfurt a. M. 2005.

301 R. Hilberg, *Die Vernichtung der europäischen Juden*, Frankfurt a. M. 1990, p. 70.

302 H. Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, Cleveland and New York, 1958, p. 377.



a wrong understanding of the nature of political matters that do not include such terms as punishment, reward, revenge (...) It would be a falsification of the essence of politics.”<sup>303</sup>

The plan of the USA and England to appoint an international tribunal to punish war criminals was never implemented due to disagreements and lack of determination. The powers failed to prosecute the perpetrators of the murder of Armenians in the years 1915-1918, or, as it was originally intended, the German Emperor. In the end, only two officers of the German Navy responsible for torpedoing the British infirmary stood in front of the Leipzig court. An old problem returned: who should decide whether a war is just or not? In the face of troubles with defining and classifying the character of conflicts, questions and doubts appeared, along with suggestions to consider war as an inevitable phenomenon, similar to natural occurrences such as earthquakes. Nuremberg created new way of thinking and provided new impulses.

The Allies agreed on one matter. They wanted to destroy German militarism and Nazism and create guarantees that would prevent the rebirth of war in any form. Two elementary ways were believed to lead to this goal: prosecution and conviction of the war criminals, and a ban on Nazi organizations, Nazi symbols and repression of the influence of Nazi ideology in all forms and all areas of life. Whenever the law could be applied, the question seemed easy; the problem was how to ‘clean’ society of Nazism. The size and extraordinariness of the Nazi crimes and the fact that the victorious powers decided the fate of the defeated Germany were the reasons why denazification as the problem of dealing with the evil of National Socialism and the process of re-education of the German nation marked a new chapter in the history of modern international relations.

However, finding a punishment that would suit the crime turned out to be a much more difficult task than had been predicted in the euphoria of victory. There were particular consequences following the plan of the liquidation of National Socialism and denazification of the German nation. Rooting out the idea and eradicating the system so that they would not be reborn in any form in the future not only demanded the use of repression but also prevention in order to control all the spheres of the public, economic and spiritual life of Germans. From the beginning, the integral element of the denazification plan was both the exchange of institutions and the fundamental transformation of people.

The decisions of the Allied Control Council for Germany, the organ of powers occupying Germany after World War II, precisely defined the criteria for the extent of German responsibility for the war crimes. However, despite the complexity

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303 After: G. Hankel, G. Stuby, *Die Aufarbeitung von Verbrechen durch internationale Strafgerichte*, in: P. Bock, E. Wolfrum (eds.), *Umkämpfte Vergangenheit*, Göttingen 1999, p. 247.



of the process, denazification was legally a quite transparent activity. Political 'eradication', however, lacked explicitness from the very beginning. The pressure by the nations – the victims of German aggression – and lack of time for deepened reflection resulted in inconsistency in the victors' discourse. The fact that every decision concerning who should be deprived of participation in creating a new Germany included political and moral elements deepened the controversy of the principles of the political cleansing.

One can notice the difficulties inherent in the fact that German war crimes, crimes against peace and crimes against humanity went beyond the conventions defined in Hague in 1907 in 'Laws and Customs of War on Land'. Particularly, the problem of planned and precisely implemented genocide of Jews, a nation that had never been hostile to Germans, escaped clear categorisation.

### Denazification – a failed experiment?

The most important task for the victorious countries of the anti-Nazi coalition was to create a new democratic order in Germany. However, this was not obvious from the beginning. In 1944, at a conference in Quebec, the American politician Henry Morgenthau presented a plan to transform Germany into an agrarian country and ignore the fate of the people because they deserved punishment. Distrust for the occupied country was prevailing. Fraternising with Germans was forbidden. However, the countries of the anti-Nazi coalition did not expect a strong and unanimous resistance against the educational measures they implemented.

The legislation and regulations of the Allied Control Council for Germany raise questions and doubts today. Did the formal categories ('major offenders', 'incriminated persons', the 'less incriminated', 'active followers', and 'honest' or 'dishonest' Nazis) exhaust the criteria of judgement and communicate the whole truth of the extent to which people identified with and consented to the criminal system? The authors of the denazification principles must have been accompanied by doubts about whom to punish: the elites of National Socialism or the whole nation? For what: giving orders or executing them? Could obedience serve as justification? Should we change the institutions or the mentality of the German society?

As soon as the bureaucratic machine of denazification started, the opinion spread that the victorious allies were going to administer collective punishment. The American documentaries from the liberated concentration camps, featuring piles of corpses shown to the local inhabitants of Buchenwald between 1945-1946 with the best educational intentions, turned out to be counterproductive. The response was defensive: no one knew anything. Instead of mourning or moral responsibility, the reaction was to hide: a gesture of defence against the

charges. Eugen Kogon perceived the meaning of the Allies' efforts in a similar way. He defended Germans and predicted the failure of the Allies' re-education programme: "Today, almost a year after announcing the programme, one can say it has not reached its goal. This fact does not really speak against the German nation but rather against the implemented educational measures. (...) The shock policy did not awaken the power of German conscience but the power of defence against the general accusation of being co-responsible for the National Socialist bestiality. The result is failure."<sup>304</sup>

One associates collective guilt with collective punishment. Despite official communication that punishment of the whole nation was not intended, all the forms of political and legal reckoning and accountability were considered to be revenge and injustice. The bureaucratic and political forms of reckoning introduced by the Allies were the first confrontation with a crime in history that could not be defined in terms of international law. There was no pattern or model. Therefore, from the beginning, these attempts included errors and weaknesses that were impossible to avoid in such a situation.

Denazification and the process of atonement touch the elementary problems of German self-identification after 1945. At the beginning, the procedures of 'cleansing' were implemented by the victors. Although general guidelines were common, in fact each occupational zone executed them in their own way. Denazification practices met huge problems. 200,000 of the most dangerous people responsible for crimes were placed under automatic arrest. For half of them, internment in the Western zones ended in early 1947. They were members of the Nazi state structures, which the Nuremberg Military Tribunal classified as 'criminal institutions' (SS, Gestapo, political management of NSDAP). 150,000 of the representatives of public service and 70,000 of those employed in trade and economy also became internees.<sup>305</sup>

Conflicts within the American government concerning the goals of the occupational and denazification policy resulted in schematism and a lack of consequences in formulating guidelines for punishment and releasing. The American occupational authorities also had to acknowledge their own public opinion, according to which Germans were treated too gently. The American

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304 E. Kogon, *Der SS-Staat. Das System der deutschen Konzentrationslager*, München 1946, p. 327; idem, *Das Recht auf den politischen Irrtum*, 'Frankfurter Hefte' 2, 1947, pp. 641-655.

305 E.g. C. Vollnhals (ed.), *Entnazifizierung. Politische Säuberung und Rehabilitierung in den vier Besatzungszonen 1945-1949*, München 1991; L. Niethammer, *Die Miltäuerfabrik. Die Entnazifizierung am Beispiel Bayerns*, Bonn 1982; P. Reichel, *Vergangenheitsbewältigung in Deutschland. Die Auseinandersetzung mit der NS-Diktatur von 1945 bis heute*, München 2001.

Minister of Finance, Morethau, and his supporters had a considerable influence on this opinion. They considered National Socialism to be the effect of a deformed, pathological political culture and the collective mentality of Germans and demanded a properly severe punishment with all the social consequences.

An example of a difficulty that caused more confusion and harm than good was a questionnaire with 131 questions, which all those performing important functions were required to fill in, and a list with 99 categories of the Nazis and other people defined as enemies. Constant compromises between the interests of the occupying powers and Germany seemed necessary in the implementation of the 'Law for Liberation from National Socialism and Militarism' that came into force on 5 March 1946. A compromise was also necessary between the formal obligation to define denazification categories on the one hand, and analyse individual cases and decisions of ruling chambers on the other. Individualisation and returning criminal proceedings to German chambers was necessary, if only to improve the efficiency of the whole denazification process. However, it did not change the fact that the political and moral costs of concessions proved to be very high. It was not possible to avoid misunderstandings and permanent parting of objectives and results. The needs of the reviving state made amnesties necessary and the obligation of reparations for the injured states demanded the rapid recovery of the economy. Thus, the planned mass denazification eventually turned out to be a mass rehabilitation. Nonetheless, there was a popular opinion among the elites and the masses about 'victor's justice' by the occupying powers, and revenge on the Germans. The act required excluding from the public life "all those who supported the National Socialist tyranny." Every adult resident had to fill out a questionnaire. Then, they were examined by the public prosecutor or ruling chambers according to the five formal categories: (1) major offenders (particularly, members of the criminal organisations: SS, Gestapo, the political corpus of NSDAP, (2) incriminated persons (the NSDAP activists, militarists), (3) less incriminated, (4) *Mitläufer*, (5) exonerated, or non-incriminated persons. In the American zone alone, over 13 million questionnaires were filled out and 3.4 million of their authors were subject to the law. Only some cases involved interrogations. About 1,600 persons were found to be 'major offenders' and the 22,000 'incriminated' were soon reclassified to lower categories and were, in the end, left without sanctions; 2.4 million were soon granted amnesty.<sup>306</sup> According to Lutz Niethammer, the ambitious plans resulted in the creation of *Mitläuferfabrik*.

The 545 ruling chambers in the Western Zones employed about 20,000 people, who were obliged to analyse 950 cases. These legal amateurs, recruited from the reviving parties, took the role of arbiters and faced a task that was unworkable:

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306 Data after: C. Vollnhals (ed.), op. cit.

examining thousands of individual cases. The categories were being changed with the help of witnesses, representatives of churches and colleagues from work and on the basis of documents. Many were released. 95% returned to work in the public service. They were classified as harmless opportunists, the victims of political errors.<sup>307</sup>

The forms of conduct of the ruling chambers were in contradiction to traditional criminal law; instead of proving guilt by court, the ruling chambers were expected to prove innocence. The consequence was the common practice of issuing innocence certificates, which were ridiculed and called *Persilscheinen*. Major criminals gained from the lengthy procedure involved in dealing with lesser cases. Thus, the saying ‘Little thieves are hanged, but great ones escape’ proved right. The sense of injustice (until the case was solved, one could not perform his profession but only deal with ‘simple tasks’) led to the decreasing support for denazification. Immediately after the war, one could say that the idea of denazification had popular support, but, at the beginning of 1949, only 20% of society evaluated it positively. The procedures of the occupying powers met numerous unpredictable barriers presented by the postwar reality. In the flood of requests for verification of the initial unjust, hastily and harshly judged cases, severe cases went missing. Initial assumptions were confronted with real life. The chambers were under normal, everyday pressures: the lack of competent people in public service, jurisdiction, education, healthcare, police and administration. Organisational, economic, social and mental aspects were not the only reason for mass acquittals. The tendency to let Germans judge themselves, and not only victors judge the defeated, was received with appreciation and proved to be another exculpatory step. People who sat together in one denazification commission or chamber were often neighbours, friends, colleagues, the Nazis and their opponents; people who had to live next to and with each other. In a situation when a neighbour deliberated on a neighbour’s guilt or innocence, a friend judged a friend and a parishioner judged another parishioner, objectivity receded to the background. Such a situation created a kind of protective filter.<sup>308</sup>

The press provided examples of the initiatives that were believed to be proof of the rehabilitation of fellow citizens. *Süddeutsche Zeitung* from 24 December 1945 presented an individual case of atonement, reporting: “A Munich citizen gave a practical example of penitence. He was dismissed from BMW, where he had worked as a mechanic, for having joined the party in 1937. Nonetheless, he

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307 A. Blänsdorf, *Zur Konfrontation mit NS-Vergangenheit in der Bundesrepublik, der DDR und Österreich. Entnazifizierung und Wiedergutmachungsleistungen*, ‘Aus Politik und Zeitgeschichte’ 16-17, 1987, pp. 3-18.

308 K.-D. Henke, H. Woller (eds.), *Politische Säuberung in Europa. Die Abrechnung mit Faschismus und Kollaboration nach dem Zweiten Weltkrieg*, München 1991.

wanted to help. His wife sewed thirty items of children's clothing from swastika banners and the leftovers of old fabrics, and presented them to the poorest members of her community at Christmas. This joyful example of practical atonement can be recommended to wider circles to follow."

Such a bloated procedure, which applied in particular to upper and mid-level officials, was impossible to sustain for long. For instance, 75.3% of officials were dismissed, only seven out of 302 judges in Bamberg were not incriminated and 65% of *Volksschulen* teachers in the American zone were qualified for dismissal. Public service was threatened with total collapse, as there were no successors to the vacant positions. Due to the equal treatment of the innocent and the guilty, a kind of solidarity emerged among those affected by the denazification.<sup>309</sup>

The German ruling chambers faced an almost impossible task. Heaped with requests for the rehabilitation of those dismissed from work, functioning under the constant bureaucratic pressure due to the dramatic lack of specialists in almost all trades, they were not able to perform their tasks, especially because they were under enormous pressure to deliberate on the fate of millions of people. The huge scale of the endeavour made it impossible to analyse particular cases and biographies and to compare them. How, for instance, one should classify the extent of involvement of the theologian Karl Themel? Defining himself as "God's fighter", in 1933 he offered his services to "the experts in race research" in the Reich Ministry of the Interior. This lower-rank official perceived the reconstruction of when and where in Berlin "the Jewish blood" entered "the German national body" on the basis of Church books as his mission and duty to the state. He saw no causal relationship between preparing a list of Jews to deport and their gassing in concentration camps, perceiving himself as only an archivist. The authorities of West Germany also did not see guilt in this activity – after the war, they rewarded Themel for his contribution to "the research on genealogy and family studies." Was his guilt less than that of a soldier mobilised to the Wehrmacht?

Although the victorious powers agreed about the basic principles of establishing the criteria and categories of guilt that determined removal from prominent positions in public and social life, the methods of following the guidelines of denazification were varied. This was a result of the diversity of political and ideological objectives of the Western powers and the Soviet Union, as well as different interpretations of National Socialism. The British considered Nazism to be a kind of disease. Getting rid of the virus was believed to be tantamount to curing the whole body. Free from the American righteous

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309 A. Blänsdorf, *Zur Konfrontation mit der NS-Vergangenheit in der Bundesrepublik, der DDR und Österreich. Entnazifizierung und Wiedergutmachungsleistungen*, 'Aus Politik und Zeitgeschichte', 16-17, 1987, p. 7.

enthusiasm for the mission, the British started the purification of German society with a delay and without a clear plan. Their pragmatic attitude to the problem resulted in excluding some branches of industry, such as coal mining or agriculture, from the denazification procedures. No obligation to register the population in the British and French zones meant that both areas were the true promised land for those classified as ‘major offenders’.

French politicians, who perceived the activities of Nazi Germany mainly as the continuation of Bismarck’s Reich, considered the liquidation of Prussia and German unity as the condition for healing German society. Their efforts were distinguished by great improvisation: in 1945 they had already delegated the realisation of denazification procedures to German institutions. A different interpretation of denazification principles in different federal states and districts made people who were rejected in one region receive the grace of forgiveness in another. Therefore, the French, who put emphasis on the purge in public service, accepted Germans disqualified by American authorities at universities, schools and in industry.

In every little town, sins of little denounciators and kingpins were gradually revealed and the local press informed the public about sensitive issues. The whole dimension of the system was unveiled. This lesson could not be avoided. Did it influence the attitude of German society or did it strengthen defensive tendencies? The dominating phenomenon was a quiet adjustment to the new conditions of political life. The collective accusation of social elites – judges, barristers, academics, doctors and senior officials – transformed into a collective professional solidarity. The initial silence changed into demonstrative accusations. Self-cleansing by German elites followed the criteria of the ‘fair’ and ‘unfair’ Nazis. This also applied to functional elites.

The Soviet interpretation of denazification significantly differed from the Western perspective. Denazification was carried out in the most consistent manner but, at the same time, it raised the most objections of a political and moral character. The Russians collaborated with the leaders of the German communist party, who had participated in various bodies of political purge from the beginning. Therefore, acts of punishment in the Soviet zone were not only a reckoning with Nazism but also a form of fulfilling the political aspirations of German communists. They served communist authorities to remove ‘capitalist elements.’ In 1945, the parties of the ‘Antifascist Bloc’ (the communist KPD, the social democratic SPD, the Christian Democratic Union CDU and Liberal Democratic Party LDPD) published ‘Guidelines for the punishment of Nazi criminals and activists’. They defined active (members of Nazi organizations) and ‘nominal’ Nazis. It was planned to remove the former from public service. The latter were expected to break with the past and be temporarily deprived of

the right to vote. However, guidelines and principles could not be followed. There was a need for manpower.<sup>310</sup> A fragmentary illustration of the problem was for instance the situation of education in the Soviet zone, where 28,179 teachers (71.1% of all those employed in education) with a Nazi background were employed after 8 May 1945. Despite a few purges, 15,466 remained, only due to the lack of staff that had not been incriminated of collaboration with the Nazi system. A lack of experts, particularly in industry and agriculture, made it necessary to employ the formerly dismissed NSDAP officers, which consequently led to the emergence of a separate category of 'economically valuable Nazis'.

On 16 August 1947, the Soviet Military Administration in Germany (SMAD) issued an order that marked the last phase of denazification. Commissions were resolved. Most of those dismissed moved to the Western side. Until 1947/1948, the senior management in the economic sector was almost entirely replaced. Only 6.2% of the previous management remained. In April 1948, a month after the official end of denazification in the Soviet zone, *Neues Deutschland* announced that 520,000 former NSDAP members had been dismissed so far. It is estimated that denazification measures affected 2.7% of the population.<sup>311</sup>

The Allies' lack of consistency and growing resistance by denazification opponents resulted in conflict situations. The attitude of the clergy even intensified the difficulties. Many of the Church hierarchs protested against denazification as a new form of injustice; even some of the determined opponents of Nazism called for a boycott. Martin Niemöller, president of the Protestant Church in Hesse and Nassau and a former camp prisoner, called on his priests to boycott denazification. At the end of the period of occupational zones, denazification was considered a misunderstanding and a complete failure. Its actions were seen as counterproductive. Many years were needed for its positive effects to be visible.<sup>312</sup> Democratisation of Germany and gradual successes in the international field allowed Germans to more distantly and objectively evaluate what once was regarded as a punishment and revenge of the victors.

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310 W. Meinicke, *Die Entnazifizierung in der sowjetischen Besatzungszone 1945 bis 1948*, 'Zeitschrift für Geschichtswissenschaft' 11, 1984, p. 978.

311 W. Meinicke, *Zur Entnazifizierung in der sowjetischen Besatzungszone unter Berücksichtigung von Aspekten politischer und sozialer Veränderungen (1945 bis 1948)*, Dissertation Humboldt-Universität Berlin 1983, p. 196.

312 K.-D. Henke, *Die Grenzen der politischen Säuberung in Deutschland nach 1945*, in: L. Herbst (ed.), *Westdeutschland 1945-1955. Unterwerfung, Kontrolle, Integration*, München 1986.



## Social reaction

None of the forms of re-education and punishment found social acceptance after the war. There were various motivations for criticism and rejection. Neither denazification practices nor the films aimed at arousing consciences and giving credence to the incredible brought any educational results. The motivation of the Allies, which was by all means positive, evoked a contrary response. The existence of concentration camps was disputed. Erich Kutner, at the time a *Neue Zeitung* columnist, noted the reactions of viewers after the film *Death Mills*. They had only one word on their lips: 'propaganda.' The camp reality was perceived as 'the truth of the Allies' that no one wanted to face. The dominating attitude was: 'let us look forward and finish with the purges'. American authorities were accused of new lawlessness. At the end of the 1940s, denazification was considered to be a completely unsuccessful project: 'a denazification comedy.'

It was not the idea of denazification that brought so much opposition and criticism, but the denazification procedures themselves. Left-wing commentators and representatives of labour unions evaluated denazification goals positively. "That we need to definitely put an end to the past should raise no doubts. However, one should note that the objective should not be the punishment of the past but making it impossible to return. This should be the idea of every 'denazification'", *Die Zeit* wrote on 9 May 1946.

Bad intentions were seen even in phraseology. No term was good enough to accept. A *Die Zeit* commentator wrote: "A denazified workplace is one that employs no Nazis. A denazified person is one who was cleansed of all the sins of the past and passed through the mills of the denazification procedures. The person classified as an activist by a ruling chamber, that is, as a Nazi who was dismissed from office, is not denazified. This person is only a dismissed Nazi or, if he does not accept it, he is dismissed due to his 'former National Socialist activity'."<sup>313</sup>

The press rejected denazification as a stigmatising term: "If 'cleansing' does not in fact clean, if 'liberation' does not in fact liberate, then the name does not match the object. Therefore, one should not be surprised that such a name is permanent only on an endlessly patient decree paper, but not in impatient speech. What should be a cleansing and liberation in Germany has for a long time only been called denazification. This confusing, terrible term should not be allowed to take root in a live language if the matter is believed to be bright and beautiful."<sup>314</sup>

*Die Welt* raised similar lexical and associative objections. On 2 November 1946 it stated: "Something odd happened with the term 'denazification.' Initially, it was understood as the removal of active National Socialists from important

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313 'Die Zeit' 1.08.1946, after: T. Eitz, G. Stötzel, op. cit., pp. 202-203.

314 'Die Zeit' 29.05.1947, after: T. Eitz, G. Stötzel, op. cit., pp. 204-205.



functions of social life, that is, purification of the life that became dirty according to today's ideas. (...) Yet, something unexpected and impossible to predict happened: a conceptual and auditory analogy. The term that defines a cleansing of a workplace, a group, a province, the economy or the state sounds similar to the word 'disinfect' (...) There is a little trick that constitutes this phrase. It is often unrecognised. One wants to be only a little bit different, just as a person that is full of lice is different when he is cleaned. One wants to separate something from himself a little bit."<sup>315</sup>

It wasn't only political parties that disputed the scope and character of denazification. The commentary of Evangelical churches and the Catholic Church was increasingly negative and demanded an end to denazification. Joseph Frings, the Archbishop of Cologne, demanded: "Make it end at last!" As *Die Welt* commented on 2 March 1948, "At the meeting of labour organisations of the Western occupational zones, Cardinal Frings demanded an end to denazification as soon as possible (...) As much as punishing real culprits is necessary, finishing it is necessary as well."

Even in the Soviet occupational zone, it was announced in April 1948 that denazification commissions had been disbanded and this way, denazification and reckoning with National Socialism were officially finished. On 2 April 1948, *Neues Deutschland* announced that "the more important areas of education, jurisdiction and police have been cleansed from fascism and replaced with progressive and democratic forces, which are fully tested in their new positions. Fascism was deprived of its economic basis due to consistent democratic measures (...) The past has been clearly separated from the present."<sup>316</sup>

Governments and parties of the federal states did not hide their dissatisfaction. In April 1948, the Landtag deputy from SPD, Wilhelm Pawlik, said at the forum of the North Rhine-Westphalia Parliament: "The social democratic fraction of the Landtag follows with growing concern the denazification activities that have been undertaken by the British military government since 1945. It states that denazification as a political and democratic measure did not reach its objective; it only left deep anxiety in society. While a great number of bystanders were punished with the loss of office and position, real culprits have not been held liable. Similarly, the beneficiaries of National Socialism have only slightly been deprived of privileges. Therefore, the political purge must be considered a failure."<sup>317</sup> The Chancellor, Konrad Adenauer, also critically referred to denazification in his inaugural speech in the Bundestag on 20 September 1949. He decided that it caused "a lot of unhappiness and damage" and resulted in the distinguishing of

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315 'Die Welt' 2.11.1946, after: T. Eitz, G. Stötzel, op. cit., p. 203.

316 After: T. Eitz, G. Stötzel, op. cit., p. 205.

317 Ibidem.

“two classes of people”. Particular ‘care’ was taken of former Wehrmacht soldiers. On 13 September 1950, in one of the Bundestag debates about paragraph 131, the Lower Saxony deputy Franz Richter stated: “We know that the explicit intention of the ‘former’ enemies was the discrediting and incapacitation of Wehrmacht. As a result, many people, as so called militarists, do not want to undertake work in their profession or be economically active.”<sup>318</sup>

Many commentators believed that, in the long run, the term ‘denazification’ became distorted and ended up as a synonym for clearing the Nazis from blame. Even in the 1960s, denazification was called an unsuccessful action and inquisition. The opponents of prolonging the 20-year statute of limitations called this idea a new denazification. In the course of the debate on the statute of limitations, *Die Zeit* commented on the views of “those who are against prolonging the period of prescription. They introduce an old, well known theory: the past should be radically separated from today, the mantle of oblivion should cover the genocide. One cannot (...) foul his one nest all over again. One should finally let the grass grow over the past; all this is nothing more than a new denazification. In the end, the victorious powers should also put their criminals, who turned Dresden and Hiroshima into ashes, into court.”<sup>319</sup>

Willy Brandt, on the other hand, rejected such comparisons: “It must be completely clear. This is not about another denazification. This is not about a penance for political errors or political guilt. This is only to make sure that a murder will not be treated as a misdemeanour, also when the murder was committed of the will of the state.”<sup>320</sup> Denazification served as a political bugbear in the debates about ‘coming to terms with the past.’ It also appeared after the fall of the Berlin Wall, when the question of the replacement of elites in the former East Germany became significant, as well as the problem of reckoning with the communist past. The despised term was used as a comparison tool; denazification was juxtaposed with ‘destrasification’.

Denazification processes and activities did not stir the conscience of the German nation. On the contrary, many believed that if the guilty ones were punished, the ‘clean’ citizens at liberty should be exempt from any suspicion and penitential mood. Denazification had also another aspect. The discredited Nazi activists turned away from their country and politics with a sense of humiliation and defeat. They treated denazification not as an act of historical justice but revenge and arrogance of the victorious powers. As the ‘victims’ of the wilfulness of the victors, they quickly found themselves in the community of the rejected and ‘stigmatised’, unified in self-sympathy. Along with denazification, the circle of

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318 After: T. Eitz, G. Stötzel, op. cit., p. 629.

319 *Die Zeit* 27.11.1964, after: T. Eitz, G. Stötzel, op. cit., p. 209.

320 SPD-Pressmitteilung 22.01.1965, p. 1.

frustrated citizens opposing the new political order widened. This group became potential members of the extreme right, who made their way into the hearts and minds of those who have not accepted the dethronement of Germany, under the slogan 'enough of national humiliation'.

There are a lot of differences between communism and National Socialism. However, the functioning of both systems was based on terror, repression and seduction of the societies, which explains the similarity in reactions and problems faced by the nations in overcoming the guilt of totalitarianism. In both cases, integration into the transition phase proved more important than excluding the guilty from the newly created democratic community, and the will of political consolidation proved stronger than the need for moral renewal. Both dictatorships guaranteed social safety, hence in the period of fast economic reconstruction there was a search for a new source of stability.

Recent history brought another form of reckoning with violence, war and guilt: truth commissions that use enlightenment instead of punishment, as a middle way between the judgment under the law and general amnesty. On 15 December 1995 in South Africa, President Nelson Mandela created the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, which was expected to be the nation's conscience. The Anglican Bishop Desmond Tutu, a winner of the Nobel Peace Prize, headed the commission. This great experiment, on which a lot of hope was pinned, is an interesting form of overcoming the past. Satisfaction and rehabilitation of the victims are the most important factors here. The commission has a budget and legal personality. It brings the criminal past of apartheid into the daylight; it recognises and publicises the suffering of victims. The condition for avoiding punishment is to confess guilt and reveal the truth to the world. Such a strategy is expected to be a source of reconciliation. The strength of this model lies in the focus on truth and reconciliation. Satisfaction is not limited to the material aspect. There is also a space for reflection on how to restore the dignity of a victim. The weakness of the African way is not bringing the perpetrators to justice. It is a high price, which, however, may be worth paying to avoid another civil war.

The next steps are the tribunals appointed by the United Nations Security Council: the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia on 25 May 1993 and for Rwanda in November 1994. The first ever permanent International Criminal Court in The Hague, appointed on 1 July 2002, is gaining its first experiences. Its efficiency depends on social and international acceptance and credibility. International judgment must be free of political games. Previous forms of punishment for crimes forces one to ask questions about what societies and countries learned from this experience. Can the conclusions from the German lesson prove useful in contemporary dealings with the past? Former methods of reckoning with a criminal past of dictatorships, not only in Germany, with

all their successes and failures, could not bring complete satisfaction, as their foundations are internally contradictory. The basic principle: ousting people 'contaminated' with Nazism or communism from power is hard to reconcile with the creation of an open society in a democratic country. Democracy needs conscious and active citizens who accept the new order. Eugen Kogon, a left-wing Catholic and prisoner of Buchenwald, expressed it clearly when he criticised the denazification verifications after the war: "they all should be either killed or won over to democracy."

In the Polish debate, which is focussed on chaotic witch-hunts and burdened with political instrumentalisation of guilt, key questions were missing. If democracy is based on human trust, what to do when it fails? How can a democratic culture with a memory of the non-democratic past be built? How should the state of law deal with the state of lawlessness? History cannot be brought to a tribunal. The new order is built with the same nation: its experience and habits, but also its achievements. History proved that institutional changes are not accompanied by revolutionary transformations of awareness and identity. Dealing with guilt and raising public awareness demands time. Millions of the followers and bystanders of an old system will not transform into zealous democrats in one night.

Schematic categories in Polish lustration documents will not reflect the truth about the complex reality of the Polish People's Republic. Without a long-term education process and efforts by citizens to learn the conditions and character of the socialist state, the search for little culprits may do more harm than good. As Voltaire noted, while defamation is fast, the truth is slow.

## Chapter 3

### **Divided nation, divided memory**

The perception of National Socialism and its status in the history of Germany had a fundamental role in the development of the political culture of the divided and unified German state. National consciousness and a sense of belonging to the community develops in relation to history, which can be heroised, sanctified or moved to the margins of public life. The establishment of the two German states on two different political bases brought long-term consequences for the cultural memory of the divided society. Since the beginning of the process of constructing German postwar order, there was a contradiction: a discrepancy between the negative and discredited past and the need for an acceptable image, which was necessary to build a positive identity of the new state.

The Nazi past was a burden to the German disposition. Contrary to the hopes of the majority that the present would eradicate the past, the victims of the Third Reich's politics guarded the past and the pressure created by international public opinion did not allow one to forget. Thus, each of the German states stood before the Herculean task of referring to the National Socialist past, rejecting the heritage of the Nazi state and, at the same time, consolidating society around common ideological principles and acceptable political values. In the search for a means of bringing people together, they had to combine different strategies and tactics of the reckoning with the past in order to legitimise the new state and build the sense of a new community.

The challenges faced by the Germans after World War II were of a different nature. As a result of the division of Europe and the division of Germany, both German states were located in the victors' camps. Initially, under outside pressure and with outside help, post-totalitarian cultures searched for their own way of dealing with the incriminating past. There are many differences concerning the culture of memory in Germany and in other states that developed nationalist movements on the basis of fascist ideology in the 1920s and, consequently, powerful apparatuses of violence. However, what Germany and Japan had in common was that although they lost the war, they won the peace. The debates in all post-fascist countries were focused on the opposition between perpetrators and victims; at the beginning, one's own victims were always at the centre of attention. In all these countries, the victorious Allies forced critical reckoning with the

criminal dictatorship in the process of democratisation. Since the beginning, this work had a double purpose: to 'convert' the countries to democracy, or 'people's democracy' and make all the citizens aware of the consequences of the fascist and Nazi totalitarianisms. In the process of democratic transformation led by the victorious powers, the states in whose name war crimes were committed were charged with Nazism. The trials against major criminals in Germany and Japan were an element of this process.

Many circumstances fostered the process of blotting out the memory. The shock of the defeat, deaths of loved ones, poverty of everyday existence, occupation by foreign powers, forced expulsions, division of Germany and the new dictatorship East of the Elbe were the factors that determined the hierarchy of priorities in the social consciousness. The pressure from Israel and the Allied powers significantly influenced the process of German dealing with the past. Another important factor that affected the perception of the history of the Third Reich was the Cold War. Ideological confrontation between the East and the West facilitated the escape from acknowledging the criminal nature of the war. The vast majority in both German states saw themselves as the victim of Nazi politics and the bombing by the Allied powers. Japan also perceived itself mostly as a victim of the American atomic bombs that were dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki on 6 and 9 August 1945. The most popular museum of peace in Hiroshima, visited by 1.5 million people a year, draws the attention of the visitors to Japanese victimhood. Although the crimes committed by the Japanese were not an act of planned destruction of whole nations, their barbarity was comparable to the cruelty of German slaughterers. The Japanese saw themselves as the Asian nation of masters derived directly from the gods. The veterans of the 'holy' Japanese-Chinese war confessed on TV without any scruples to the murders committed on the Chinese, explaining that they were a destruction of 'sub-humans'.<sup>321</sup>

From the beginning, Austria assumed the position of an innocent victim. The Declaration of Independence of the Austrian Provisional Government led by Karl Renner proclaimed on 27 April 1945: "As a result of the total annexation of the country, on a political, economic and cultural level, Adolf Hitler's national socialist government led the powerless and passive Austrian nation to an aggressive, pointless and futile war, which no Austrian ever wanted or expected; the war against nations to which no true Austrian felt hostility or hatred."<sup>322</sup>

Alongside the emergence of the two German states, an additional problem appeared. The history of the nation also became divided. Without common history,

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321 I. Buruma, *The Wages of Guilt: Memories of War in Germany and Japan*, New York, 1994.

322 After: J. Haslinger, *Austria po wojnie*, trans. Z. Choderny-Loew, 'Przegląd Polityczny' 52/53, 2001, p. 111.

it is impossible to define national identity. Therefore, its prostheses emerged: partial identities based on two ideological homelands. The difference was that the West Germans saw themselves as victims of National Socialism, and the East Germans, of fascism. The members of the Central Committee of the Socialist Unity Party of Germany (German: Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschlands, SED) perceived themselves as German patriots who regarded ‘Americanisation’ and integration with the Western world of the Federal Republic of Germany as the greatest betrayal of national interests. East Germany was expected to be the “bastion of the national liberation struggle”. However, despite references to the revolutionary tradition and labour movement and the usurpation of the anti-fascist movement, the attempt to create a socialist version of the German nation between the Elbe and the Oder failed. The imposed ‘internationalist’ patriotism with the enemy on the Western side proved to be a phantom unworthy even of scientific and literary description.

The most significant turning point for West Germany was the end of National Socialism and the transition to democracy. Democratisation of political institutions did not, however, remove the spiritual and moral vacuum. The second attempt in the history of Germany to introduce democracy, after the Weimar Republic, was made under the weight of grave crimes. The new system was not accompanied by any revolutionary change of mentality. The Germans were not heroes who overthrew the system of evil. At the beginning, there was no will to change and convert to democracy. Millions who felt at home in the Third Reich could not transform into zealous democrats in a day, which was confirmed by the findings of the research conducted by the ‘Institut für Demoskopie Allensbach’ in October 1948. The question whether National Socialism was a good idea but realised in a bad way, was responded to positively by 57%, negatively by 28%, and 15% had no opinion.<sup>323</sup> In addition, 21% said they were interested in the future political system, while 40% were not interested or regarded the issue as insignificant.

## **1. The winners of history: the German Democratic Republic in the shadow of anti-fascism**

People’s democracy, a new political system introduced by the victorious Soviet empire and a new dictatorship, determined the way East German citizens handled their recent past. The evaluation of the war was directly derived from Marxism-Leninism. According to Lenin’s theses, presented in his work ‘Work

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323 E.P. Neumann, E. Noelle-Neumann (eds.), *The Germans. Public Opinion Polls 1947-1966*, Westport, Connecticut 1981, p. 197.

and Revolution', every war is related to the political order of the state determined by the ruling class. War has a class character and demonstrates the contradictions of the epoch: the antagonism between imperialism and socialism. Socialism is a synonym for peace. Contrary to 'bourgeois pacifism', the working class does not condemn every war. A just war is a war in defence of the socialist homeland. According to the leader of the October Revolution, unjust wars are imperialist wars of the bourgeoisie. He also believed that a war between two socialist states was not possible.<sup>324</sup>

As a political instrument of the Nazi state, war occupied a prominent position in the East German foreign policy and their internal political rituals. It fitted well into the binding doctrine of the SED and the confrontational Cold War policy against the nearest enemy, West Germany, and the other countries of the Western Bloc. The attitude of the East German party authorities and decision-making elites towards the Third Reich was based on the Georgi Dimitrov's definition of fascism, according to which the Nazi system was "the open terrorist dictatorship of the most reactionary, most chauvinistic and most imperialist elements of finance capital".<sup>325</sup> Such an approach allowed only for a class interpretation of the criminal regime and by the same token excluded individual guilt and responsibility. Therefore, the agrarian reform and confiscation of private property in East Germany were considered an important step in 'overcoming' the past. Human resource policy was an additional tool that helped remove old elites and employ a new one according to the criteria of social origin and ideology. Property was also confiscated from the 'bourgeois' members of the anti-Nazi resistance movement and social democrats who did not express their willingness to merge with the Communist Party of Germany (Kommunistische Partei Deutschlands: KPD) and SED.<sup>326</sup> This way, they were degraded to the role of the collaborators of fascism. Although denazification in the Soviet occupation zone was more radical than in the Western ones, many former Nazis could still continue their career in the new state.

Jürgen Danyel, who devoted a substantial part of his research to the analysis of the anatomy of the East German historical and political identity, distinguishes

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324 B. Blanke, *Kriegs- und Feindbild der Nationalen Volksarmee*, in: H.-A. Jacobsen, G. Leptin, U. Scheuner, E. Schulz (eds.), *Drei Jahrzehnte Außenpolitik der DDR*, München-Wien 1979, pp. 325-332.

325 *Protokoll des VII. Weltkongresses der Kommunistischen Internationale*, Moskau 25 Juli-20 August 1935, vol. II, Stuttgart 1976, p. 985.

326 See e.g. W. Müller, *Die DDR in der deutschen Geschichte*, "Aus Politik und Zeitgeschichte" 28, 2001, p. 43-53; an extensive analysis of the literature of the subject, see *Die Nacht hat zwölf Stunden, dann kommt schon der Tag. Antifaschismus. Geschichte und Neubewertung*, ed. C. Keller et. al., Berlin 1996.



several essential features of the political profile of the ruling party of the GDR in terms of its attitude to fascism. They include:<sup>327</sup>

- thinking in the framework of enemy-friend categories and the ensuing irrational sense of being encircled and endangered. The anti-fascist ideology proved to be determined by the experience and mentality of a specific political generation in the German communist movement. SED personnel was an amalgam of people who experienced the Weimar Republic, the Nazi persecutions and Stalin's gulags;
- double obstruction resulting from the experience of the Nazi persecutions and entanglement in Stalin's purges in exile in the Soviet Union. On the one hand, the communist elite felt threatened, which was reflected in their belief of the supremacy of their ideas and organisation over an individual. On the other hand, the situation brought about a mixture of fear, opportunism, the need for self-defence, denunciation and cynical pragmatism. This is well attested in many psychographic records of Moscow immigrants in their autobiographic literature;<sup>328</sup>
- the awareness of the elites and their sense of moral superiority resting on the conviction that they not only suffered Nazi persecutions but also actively fought Nazism from the beginning. The KPD Politburo members even declared themselves to be a part of the Soviet Union victorious military rule. This consequently led to hierarchisation of various categories of victims and the exclusion of some from the GDR political consciousness;
- deep distrust towards the majority of the German citizens who lived a "happy and content" life between 1933 and 1945 and let themselves be corrupted by the right "to get a Volkswagen and be allowed to buy some public shares." This is how educational dictatorship developed, which, by using pedagogical and propaganda political strategies, served the purpose of permanent mobilization of the masses;
- a symbiosis of the proletarian and petty-bourgeois worldview, which helped communist ideology combine typical resentments towards particular social groups and anti-Semitic attitudes.

Anti-fascism as the legitimating ideology of the GDR provided a specific platform for reckoning with the past. It served mostly as an element of social

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327 J. Danyel, *Die Opfer- und Verfolgtenperspektive als Gründungskonsens? Zum Umgang mit der Widerstandstradition und der Schuldfrage in der DDR*, in: idem (ed.), *Die geteilte Vergangenheit. Zum Umgang mit Nationalsozialismus und Widerstand in beiden deutschen Staaten*, Berlin 1995, pp. 31-46.

328 R. Müller (ed.), *Georg Lukács/Johannes R. Becher/Friedrich Wolf et.al Die Säuberung – Moskau 1936: Stenogramm einer geschlossenen Parteiversammlung*, Reinbek b. Hamburg 1991.

integration and a tool to exclude ideological enemies. Alongside the dissolution of the denazification commission on 26 February 1948, the Soviet seizure of power was considered an accomplished fact. Walter Ulbricht had already explained the sense of denazification several months earlier, saying that the point was not to judge the activity of an individual in the times of National Socialism but to see his or her current doings and involvement in the ‘democratic’ construction of the SED state.<sup>329</sup>

Anti-fascism fitted into the doctrine of socialist progress and signified the intention to equate the past with the present. The aim was to highlight the role of the Communist Party in the anti-Nazi resistance movement and to develop the propaganda of the GDR as the successor of the movement. The generalisation of the experiences of the pre-war communists to the whole East German population and using it as an ideological construction was the greatest swindle, and at the same time the strongest founding myth behind the establishment of the East German state. The principle, according to which the future belonged to East Germany while the past belonged to West Germany, functioned as a smoke screen for the activity of party executives. The terms ‘fascism’ and ‘fascist’ were reserved for political enemies. Hence, the construction of the Berlin Wall in 1961 was regarded as an act of “erecting an anti-fascist rampart”. All internal unrest, riots and protests were interpreted as attempts of a “fascist coup”. The terms ‘anti-fascism’ and ‘anti-capitalism’ were treated as synonyms of ‘loyalty towards the GDR.’

Anti-fascism as the most important component legitimising the new order attached special meaning to the victim and the communist resistance towards Nazism. “We in East Germany learnt our lesson from the incurable past. The legacy of the dead (...) and the great ideals of the anti-fascist struggle for freedom have become a reality here. We, for the first time in the history of our nation, created a strong, indestructible foundation of humanism and socialism. (...) We educate the new youth who learn and work according to the model of anti-fascist fighters of the resistance movement. The German Democratic Republic became a homeland for all the Germans who hate fascism and war and want to live in peace and friendship with all nations.”<sup>330</sup> The ‘canonised’ anti-fascist heroes were promoted to the role of martyrs. Nationalised anti-fascism had a wide range of political rituals performed for the victims of fascism, which were repeated according to the same script every year in East Berlin’s Babelplatz, and which constituted an element of the anti-fascist socialisation.<sup>331</sup>

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329 W. Ulbricht, *Zur Auflösung der Entnazifizierungskommissionen*; *Neues Deutschland* 28.02.1948.

330 R. Thalmann, *Rede zur Weihe der Nationalen Mahn- und Gedenkstätte Ravensbrück*, in: Komitee der antifaschistischen Widerstandskämpfer der DDR (ed.), Ravensbrück, Berlin, o.J., p. 19.

331 M. Maron, *Ich war ein antifaschistisches Kind*, in: M. Maron, *Nach Maßgabe meiner Befreiungskraft*, Artikel und Essays, Frankfurt a. M. 1993, p. 9-29; B. Wittich, *Initiationen*

It wasn't only the East German intellectual circles that considered anti-fascist ideology as a moral principle or even a synonym for the GDR. Contrary to the common belief in West Germany that anti-fascism was only a manipulative power tool for the SED state, it provided a representative costume for many East German citizens. Anti-fascist awareness was an important element that strengthened loyalty towards the state and provided the basis for the later civil movement programmes. Yet, the communist theory supported by anti-fascism was still unable to interpret all the problems of National Socialism in terms of the ideology of work and capital and it soon contributed to universalising National Socialism.

For the most part, antifascism served a political function. It also led to the social integration of the former members of the NSDAP, Wehrmacht soldiers and the majority of the East German citizens who had supported Hitler's Third Reich. At the early stages of the GDR, in the process of implementing various strategies to overcome the past, individual memory was replaced by antifascism as an ideological credo. The existence of the other German state forced rapid integration of East German society. The propagandist portrayal of West Germany as only an extension and a successor of the Third Reich, which was common particularly during the intensification of the Cold War, created a favourable climate for acquitting oneself. The last barrier on the way to the full integration of the perpetrators and victims within the East German state was removed in November 1949, right after the establishment of the GDR, by adopting a law that waived punishment for the former members and supporters of the NSDAP and the Wehrmacht officers. Three years later, the law was supplemented by the 'Civil Rights Act for the former officers of the fascist Wehrmacht and the former members and supporters of the NSDAP'. The remission of guilt in return for collaboration in the creation of the socialist East Germany was expected to strengthen loyalty towards the new political rule and bring internal political stability. The equalisation of rights resulted in focusing attention on the nearest ideological enemy and intensifying criticism towards neighbouring countries.

While the programme of the Association of Persecutees of the Nazi Regime (Vereinigung der Verfolgten des Naziregimes – VVN), established in 1947 and later transformed into the Federation of Antifascists (Bund der Antifaschistinnen und Antifaschisten – VVN-BdA) made room for some elements of individual forms of commemorating the past along with the establishment of the GDR commemoration, it was fully monopolised by the institutes of Marxism and

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*zum Antifaschisten. Folgenreicher Antifaschismus*, in: B. Rauschenbach (ed.), *Erinnern, Wiederholen, Durcharbeiten. Zur Psycho-Analyse deutscher Wenden*, Berlin 1992, pp. 180-188.

Leninism. The nationalization of memory and anti-fascist socialisation led to the omnipresent ritualisation of commemoration, led by the Committees of Anti-fascist Resistance Fighters, which in 1953 replaced the dissolved VVN. They had their local branches all over the country.

On 1 April 1951, Franz Dahlem, a member of the Politburo of the Central Committee of SED, who was later persecuted as a Zionist, spoke in this spirit at a meeting of the central executive of VVN and pointed out the need to re-orientate the work done by the organisations of the persecuted and direct it against the former advocates of the Nazi regime. For him, the central task of East German policy was “hampering the remilitarization of West Germany and halting American military plans. Now the main aim is to attract people who, for whatever reasons, are for peace. In other words, we must do everything in order to seize from those who are preparing war all the reserves from which they could create soldiers for their formations.”<sup>332</sup>

Alongside the dissolving of the VVN, the stage of the transformation of individual memory into a commemorative policy based on the ideological foundations of the party ended. Commemorative practices became an empty formula stripped of any real content, diversity and individuality and were replaced by official symbols. These practices allowed the average citizen to dispense with the conflict of conscience and, by being granted a new political mentality, join the construction of the new socialist state. In fact, not only the working class was included in the ‘anti-fascist resistance forces’ but all citizens of East Germany. In this way, anti-capitalist continuity was implied. East German citizens could be considered the victims of Nazism and presented as victors of history. Their personal share in Nazi crimes remained a taboo subject until the end of the GDR.<sup>333</sup> Such a self-image assessed Hitler’s Third Reich as a temporary stage of foreign rule. The status of victims provided measurable privileges; it at least allowed the rejection of demands for reparations.

The policy towards the past adopted in the Soviet zone led to equating National Socialism with fascism.<sup>334</sup> The Soviet occupation facilitated selective perception of the recent past, particularly the idea that many of the party executives were communists who had been persecuted as early as before 1933. This helped to create

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332 After: J. Danyel, op. cit., p. 43.

333 See e.g. K. Stephan, *Erinnerungen an den Zweiten Weltkrieg. Zum Zusammenhang von kollektiver Identität und kollektiver Erinnerung*, Gießen 2006; A. Blänsdorf, *Die Einordnung der NS-Zeit in das Bild der eigenen Geschichte: Österreich, die DDR und die Bundesrepublik Deutschland im Vergleich*, in: W. Bergmann, R. Erb, A. Lichtblau (ed.), *Schwieriges Erbe. Der Umgang mit Nationalsozialismus und Antisemitismus in Österreich, der DDR und der Bundesrepublik Deutschland*, Frankfurt a. M., New York 1995, pp. 18-45.

334 H. Weber, *Geschichte der DDR*, München 1985.

a myth of historical continuity and to relate it to the democratic tradition of 1848 as well as the revolutionary experiences of 1918. Following this approach, the GDR could free itself from the Nazi past in two ways: through making reference to the renewed state authorities and through demonstrating distance from the bourgeois, imperialist or post-fascist society of West Germany. As a result, West Germany, which made endeavours to be regarded as the only representative of Germany on the international arena, was in a way forced to integrate the heritage of the recent past, which became one of the main topics for their internal disputes.

From the very beginning, the ideological confrontation between the Eastern and Western occupation zones, and later between the two German states, was accompanied by conflicts over the priorities in the so-called politics of memory. The resistance movement came to the foreground. While in East Germany, the legacy of the heroic, communist, anti-Nazi resistance movement was cherished, in West Germany the focus was on civil and military resistance. Nonetheless, neither the East German policy towards the Third Reich, based on dual morality, nor the theory of totalitarianism created later in West Germany, which equated the Nazi dictatorship with that of the SED, served the purpose of rational reckoning with the Nazi policy well.<sup>335</sup>

Peter Reichel, an experienced researcher whose studies focus on the collective memory of Germans, evaluates this situation as a gain for East Germany, and a burden for West Germany.<sup>336</sup> The state authorities of East Germany retreated into history and used it in a selective way for their internal political benefits – unlike West Germany, which at least in the first two decades made successful attempts to free itself from the corset of the past by concentrating on contemporary problems. Nearly until the end of the SED state, the memory of National Socialism was arbitrarily administered and controlled by numerous state institutions. The binding arguments were based on the reasoning that the new socialist social order, which overpowered capitalism, was itself a premise to break free from Nazism and its consequences. By associating National Socialism with ‘bourgeois society’, the SED state managed to present itself as opposed to the Hitler’s state in two ways: as an antitype of the Third Reich and of every ‘bourgeois state’.<sup>337</sup>

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335 L. Niethammer (ed.), *Der gesäuberte Antifaschismus. Die SED und die roten Kapos von Buchenwald. Dokumente*, Berlin 1994; C. Kleßmann, *Das Problem der doppelten “Vergangenheitsbewältigung” in der früheren DDR*, in: R. Eckert, W. Küttler, G. Seeber (eds.), *Krise – Umbruch – Neubeginn. Eine kritische und selbstkritische Dokumentation der DDR-Geschichtswissenschaft 1989/1990*, Stuttgart 1992.

336 P. Reichel, *Politik mit der Erinnerung. Gedächtnisorte im Streit um die nationalsozialistische Vergangenheit*, München, Wien 1995, p. 37, 40.

337 M.R. Lepsius, *Das Erbe des Nationalsozialismus und die politische Kultur der Nachfolgestaaten des “Großdeutschen Reiches”*, in: *Kultur und Gesellschaft, Verhandlungen des*

In the first years after the war, the fashioning of the communist anti-fascist movement as the only anti-Nazi opposition was supported by the conviction that the Communist Party gathered the most determined activists. This thesis was reinforced by a historical fact that was difficult to reject: the extent of persecutions suffered by the communists and the number of victims provided a strong argument to the successors of the communist movement. This fact, however, was the basis of manipulation and political abuse. It resulted in slogans about the undisturbed continuity of the communist resistance against the Third Reich and in depicting the East German state as the only successor of the movement and its representatives as the best forces of the German nation.

The complex content and functions of anti-fascism made it difficult for East German society to recognise the traps hidden in the state's ideology. The fact that the first government and party leaders in the GDR were opponents of Nazism and had been frequently persecuted by Hitler's regime made their political programme and beliefs credible. This fact was also the source of idealism oriented towards the future and the conviction that East Germany represented a new and better Germany, which particularly applied to the left-wing writers returning from their emigration. The idealistic anti-fascism had a strong impact on the general public. The effectiveness of the party propaganda was corroborated by the fact that the East German public opinion was not informed about communist crimes in the Soviet Union and in Spain. This 'humanistic pathos' of anti-fascism was losing credibility in Europe as a consequence of the disclosure of the size and nature of the German victims of the Stalinist dictatorship. The SED dictatorship regarded them as the victims of fascism, which allowed them to be granted pensions.<sup>338</sup>

The central aspects of Nazism were eradicated from official sites of memory for quite a long time, while censorship and the monopoly held by the party effectively paralysed every discussion attempt. Thus, it was easier to accredit Hitler's seizure of power in 1933 to the "chauvinist part of imperialism and the aggressive part of the German finance capital", the view which had to lead to a specific interpretation of history. Academic and school textbooks contained information which was intended to convince people that Hitler's regime was directed against the working-class movement, proletarian revolution and the

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24. Deutschen Soziologentags, des 11. Österreichischen Soziologentags und des 8. Kongresses der Schweizerischen Gesellschaft für Soziologie in Zürich 1988, ed. M. Haller, H.-J. Hoffmann-Nowotny, W. Zapf, Frankfurt a. M., New York 1989, p. 252.

338 U. Herbert, *Zweierlei Bewältigung*, in: U. Herbert, O. Groehler (eds.), *Zweierlei Bewältigung*, Hamburg 1992, p. 21.

Soviet Union. The victims of the Dresden bombing could thus be used as a political argument in the cold war.<sup>339</sup>

The German nation, particularly the working class, became victims of Nazism while the perpetration was attributed to the elites of great industry. In this context, the extermination of the Jews was entirely pushed to the margins and regarded as a result of German imperialism. This view freed East German citizens from the responsibility for the consequences of the Holocaust. The attractiveness of such an interpretation of history lay in the fact that while a group of perpetrators was pointed out, the others were cleared of guilt. The advocates of this interpretation were immediately placed on the right side of history. Thus, in the eyes of the East German people, National Socialism was becoming exclusively a history of West Germany. The West German disputes around denazification, prosecution of the war criminals and reparations were treated by East German propaganda as an evidence for the existence of the nationalist tradition carried on by the revanchists and neo-Nazis.

The Cold War strengthened the belief that East Germany belonged to the most progressive nations, those oriented towards the future and that cherished peace. Thus, Germany came out of the shadow of the nation of perpetrators. In 1949 Walter Ulbricht said in his speech: “Nowadays, the criterion for a peace loving citizen who wants the unity of Germany is not their former membership card or whether they belonged to the Hitler’s party. The only measure is whether or not you support the peace treaty and you are against the Atlantic Pact, which is transforming West Germany into a war base. Such an easy question. Whoever asks the question about former membership in the Nazi party works against the creation of the National Front.”<sup>340</sup>

The acknowledgement of anti-fascism as the fundament and *raison d’état* of the GDR had an impact on historiographic accounts of the Holocaust. Subordinating Holocaust research to communist ideology must have led to false conclusions, which were a product of accepting false premises. Communist history education treated fascist anti-Semitism as of secondary importance to anti-communism. The status of a victim was first of all reserved for the communists who had been freed from camps. The Jews who were connected with communism and located in the Eastern occupation zone, including Alexander Abusch, Albert Norden,

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339 After: J. Danyel, *Die Erinnerung an die Wehrmacht in beiden deutschen Staaten. Vergangenheitspolitik und Gedenkrituale*, in: R.-D. Müller, H.-E. Volkmann (eds.), *Die Wehrmacht. Mythos und Realität*, München 1999.

340 W. Ulbricht, *Warum nationale Front des demokratischen Deutschlands?* Aus dem Referat auf der Parteikonferenz der SED Groß-Berlin, 17 Mai 1949, in: idem, *Zur Geschichte der Deutschen Arbeiterbewegung. Aus Reden und Aufsätzen*, vol. 3: 1946-1950, Ost-Berlin 1954, p. 491.



Hanns Eisler, Walther Felsenstein, Anna Seghers and Arnold Zweig, did not play a significant part in the debate about the Nazi genocide. The communist rhetoric from the 1930s was still binding in the later stages of East Germany. Still in 1988, Oskar Fischer, the East German foreign minister, said: “The GDR is a German anti-fascist state in which racism, anti-Semitism and fascism have been eradicated with their roots. Peace and friendship between nations are the basis of its political system. Inciting to war, racist hatred and manifestations of racist thoughts are forbidden and prosecuted. The East German government and the nation pay respect to the memory of the victims of Nazi barbarity, including the six million murdered Jewish citizens. The young generation in our country has been consistently educated in the anti-fascist spirit, and everything in our capacity is being done so that the young generation will never forget the evil of Hitler’s fascism, as well as the immeasurable suffering of Jewish citizens and the heroic deeds of the antifascist resistance movement.”<sup>341</sup> The declaration of membership of the victorious camp, and especially of the fraternity with the Soviet power, required a mythology. Even the German defeat in Stalingrad was used to create a legend. For East Germany, Stalingrad became a starting point towards a new, better future for Germany. In the official discourse the catastrophe was perceived as the source of the East German and Soviet friendship. Stalingrad functioned as a “triumph of the just war” against the fascist invaders, and a “great lesson” for the nation.<sup>342</sup>

With the beginning of the 1950s, history education in the GDR was uniformised. On 5 July 1952, the German Historical Museum was opened in Berlin, which was intended to function as a centre for coordinating East German historiography. The opening date of the Museum almost coincided with the 2nd party conference of SED (9-12 July 1952), during which ‘Aufbau des Sozialismus’ was established. The party devoted a lot of time and space to history education: not only the institutions but also the ideological and political dimension of the studies. “The history of Germany has shown to the entire nation the pernicious route of imperialism and the necessity of peaceful coexistence with other nations in Europe, and in particular the need for friendship between the German nation and the nations of the powerful Soviet Union. History also proves how necessary it is to grant the working class a leading role in the struggle by the German nation to reinstate the unity of Germany.”<sup>343</sup>

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341 After: P. Reichel, *Politik mit der Erinnerung*, op. cit., p. 39. See also e.g.: H. Schmid, *Antifaschismus und Judenverfolgung. Die “Reichskristallnacht” als politischer Gedenktag in der DDR*, Dresden 2004.

342 M. Kumpfmüller, *Die Schlacht von Stalingrad. Metamorphosen eines deutschen Mythos*, München 1996, p. 175. Compare also: J. Herf, *Zweierlei Erinnerung. Die NS-Vergangenheit im geteilten Deutschland*, Berlin 1998.

343 *Dokumente der Sozialistischen Einheitspartei Deutschlands (SED)*, vol. III, p. 581.



The resolutions of the Politburo from 5 July under the innocent title ‘Improvement of historical research and education in the GDR’ clearly specified the task of historians. “Our history education can fulfil its national objectives only when it refers to the only scientific theory of social development, historical materialism, created by the greatest sons of our nation, Marx and Engels.”<sup>344</sup> The recommended topics focused not on the Third Reich but on the “social and national liberation movements”, starting with the “fight for liberation against the Roman slave owners waged by the Germans”. German historians at the conference on 12 January 1956 did not unanimously accept the party’s directives. Some historians did not agree to the ideological primacy of the SED and defended the science of history against making it completely political.

East German historiography was engaged in the construction of a new model of history in total opposition to West German research culture. Works by Alexander Abusch were a leading example of systematising the entire German past according to the class criteria. From the very beginning, the writer worked for communist journals. While in exile between 1935 and 1939, he was the chief editor of *Rote Fahne*, and after his return to Germany in 1946 he quickly made his way up the ranks, and in 1956 started his career in the Central Committee of SED to become the minister for culture in 1958. His publications belonged to exemplary and the most frequently cited literature. In his most popular publication from 1946, entitled *The Wrong Path of the Nation (Irrweg einer Nation)*, he described Hitler as an agent of the “monopolists of steel, coal and chemical industry”, and depicted National Socialism as an outcome of the erroneous development of German history since the Middle Ages. His historical writings were political manifestos. According to Abusch, the national route of mistakes committed by Germany started with Martin Luther, “the undertaker” of German freedom. In his opinion, the most brutal enemy of the 20th century Germany was “the reactionary trust of the Junkers and capitalists”. He also regarded the opposition between the “reactionary powers” and “the progressive working classes” as the fundamental contradiction that cast a long shadow over the course of history.<sup>345</sup> Abusch’s interpretation was tailored to the party programme. “It is not possible to talk about the responsibility of Germans without at least mentioning the role of their closest neighbours. The reactionary and capitalist primacy of the political interest of England and France, the victorious countries after World War I, helped to strengthen the reactionary forces in Germany after 1918. The West

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344 After: U. Neuhäuser-Wespy, *Geschichtswissenschaft unter der SED-Diktatur: Die Durchsetzung der Parteilinie in den fünfziger Jahren*, “Aus Politik und Zeitgeschichte” 39/1996, p. 18. Compare also *Der Verband der Historiker Deutschlands und die Historiker der DDR*, in: W. Schulze (ed.), *Deutsche Geschichtswissenschaft nach 1945*, München 1989.

345 A. Abusch, *Irrweg einer Nation. Ein Beitrag zum Verständnis deutscher Geschichte*, Berlin 1946, p. 215.

European countries saw the young Soviet Union as their enemy and they believed that they could target it with the bastion of the Federal Republic of Germany.”<sup>346</sup>

In the same vein, Walter Ulbricht interpreted National Socialism as a derailment within capitalism. In 1945 he wrote, “Hitler’s party turned out to be a party of war waged by the German owners of the arms industry and banks (...) Hitler’s imperialism exposed as the darkest reactionary force.”<sup>347</sup> For Abusch, the German route of mistakes and weaknesses ended in 1945 and the new socialist objective was to overcome the chain of false actors and replace them with progressive German forces. For the First Secretary of the SED, together with the new order, the great tradition of a revolutionary struggle would be revived. On 9 July 1952, during the SED’s second party conference, Ulbricht made it clear how the fight for the past could become an important element of the confrontation between both adverse systems saying, “Everybody understands the great importance of the scientific study of German history for our struggle for national unity and for cherishing the whole great traditions of the German nation. This gains special importance in the face of the endeavours of the American occupier to bury the great achievements of our nation.”<sup>348</sup>

Ideological deformation made historiographic reckoning with the Holocaust impossible and equating Jews with capitalism and the West added further difficulty. A specific philosophy of history was not without significance. Walter Ulbricht and Wilhelm Pieck, the leaders of German communism in Moscow, focused mainly on the suffering and triumph of the Soviet Union. There was no room for the Holocaust in the communist manifesto to the German nation from June 1945 and in the work by Ulbricht entitled *Die Legende vom Deutschen Sozialismus (The Legend of German Socialism)*, of which 50,000 copies were published (up to January 1947 a further 300,000 copies were printed, and from 1952 a new edition was published under the title *The Fascist German Imperialism*). In the KPD Manifesto from June 1949, which was referred to in the 1950s, one could read: “Working people of Berlin! (...) You failed to notice the warning from anti-fascists (...) and you took the Nazi poison of the criminal imperialist ideology. You became the instrument of Hitler’s war and by the same token you accepted the responsibility and joint blame. Now you will have to gradually free yourselves from the blame and clear the German name from the dirt left by Hitler’s disgrace”.<sup>349</sup> Ulbricht’s

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346 Ibidem, p. 260.

347 W. Ulbricht, *Die Legende vom “deutschen Sozialismus”. Ein Lehrbuch für das schaffende Volk über das Wesen des deutschen Faschismus*, Berlin 1945, p. 90.

348 After: E. Wolfrum, *Geschichte als Waffe. Vom Kaiserreich bis zur Wiedervereinigung*, Göttingen 2001, p. 69.

349 After: J. Herf, “Hegelianische Momente”. *Gewinner und Verlierer in der ostdeutschen Erinnerung an Krieg, Diktatur und Holocaust*, in: C. Cornelißen, L. Klinkhammer,

obligatory work was freeing the masses from guilt. His analysis of anti-Semitism was consonant with the interpretation adopted in the 1930s and 1940s. After 1933, he wrote that Hitler's fascism started with the destruction of the Communist Party and the SPD, as well as the trade unions and the pogrom of Jews.<sup>350</sup>

The reckoning with the past in the sense of individual, diverse work on the nature and consequences of Hitler's regime was made impossible by the ideology, which deprived people of civil rights, in the sense in which Western democracies use the term. East German statehood was built on collective class sovereignty with a limited right for the citizens to cooperate with one another. The singularity of the GDR was manifested by the fact that, contrary to other countries of the Communist Bloc, it could not refer to the idea of a nation and use national sovereignty to compensate for the deficit inherent in legitimating class sovereignty.

The East German symbols and rituals did not have much in common with the real victims of Nazism and the war. They all served the 'struggle for peace'. Every year in September, the 'Day of Remembrance for the Victims of Fascism' was celebrated. In the VVN Manifesto from 1951, the Day of Remembrance was announced as "the day of struggle against war and fascism". The remembrance did not focus on the victims who were led into the gas chambers, shot and transported to work as forced labourers in the Third Reich, but on those who were described as "11 million men and women from all European countries who fought against Hitler's fascism for the peace of mankind. (...) All those who then opposed fascism and resisted the regime (...) were primarily fighters for peace."<sup>351</sup> Such discourse left no room for German blame and responsibility, since the term 'victim' was reserved for 'martyrs and heroes' murdered for political beliefs. The essence of the politics of memory formulated by the communist dictatorship can be found in the text of a telegram, sent by Stalin on the occasion of establishing the German Democratic Republic, which read: "the greatest sacrifices in the war were made by the German nation and the Soviet nation", and that "both nations have the greatest potential in Europe to carry out great actions of international significance".<sup>352</sup> In this context, the years between 1933 and 1945 were perceived as a time of foreign rule and class division. The situation was made worse by the fact that East German historiography started to investigate the Nazi past more thoroughly only as late as in the 1960s. After 1945, the 'bourgeois' historians did not have their say. There was no objective academic discipline dealing with history, since historians were replaced by interpreters of history from communist executive circles.

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W. Schwentker (ed.), *Erinnerungskulturen Deutschland, Italien und Japan seit 1945*, Frankfurt a. M. 2004, pp. 198-209.

350 W. Ulbricht, *Der faschistische deutsche Imperialismus (1933-1945)*, Berlin, 1952.

351 After: J. Herf, op. cit., p. 204.

352 Za: H. Weber, *Kleine Geschichte der DDR*, Köln 1980, p. 53.

The centrally controlled cultural policy in the GDR was subject to the official version of history. While in the Western zones, the term ‘West’ was synonymous with values and considered a bulwark against communism, in East Germany one spoke of cherishing the “great patriotic traditions and national cultural heritage”. ‘The Cultural Association for the Democratic Renewal of Germany’ (Kulturbund zur demokratischen Erneuerung Deutschlands), created in 1945 by the Russian administration, aimed from the very beginning to “awaken great German culture, the pride of our homeland, and provide an impulse for the new spiritual life.” In 1949 the same organisation defined itself as a movement of spiritual restoration and referred to the “liberating, humanistic and truly national tradition of our culture. The Cultural Association is in all spiritual capacities a fighter for an objective truth, humanistic measures and values, and a non-falsified view of history for the ideals of progress and freedom”.<sup>353</sup> For the entire existence of East Germany, the authorities made an effort to increase the number of portrayals of memory. The directives issued in September 1970, which defined the “anti-fascist and humanistic foundations” of cultural policy, displayed pride in the number of museums created: “The German Democratic Republic has 553 museums and places of commemoration, which are visited by 18 million people annually. With respect to the density of the network of museums, the large number of visitors and the intensity of work, East Germany occupies the first place in Europe”.<sup>354</sup>

The SED also wanted to be a party for the revival of German culture and that is how it referred to itself in its 1946 manifesto. The intention was to associate socialism with humanism. The history of the class struggle of the working masses became synonymous with the history and the development of humanism. This country, and not the one signified by the swastika, was believed to be the true Germany. The East German writer and politician, Werner Eggerath, asked about German nature in the times of contempt. “Was it Germany that bashed the streets in hobnailed boots and disgraced humanity? Was it Germany that scattered our nation’s blood across the battlefields of half of the world and let it rot? Was it Germany?” He answered: “No, this was not Germany. This was a hectic fever of a sick world, these were convulsions of a dying person. The real Germany is a country of peace and human progress and cooperation of fraternal nations. One must win humanism, not wake it.”<sup>355</sup>

The dominance of anti-fascism and the focus on the communist resistance movement meant that memory became an abstract amalgam, detached from

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353 *Kulturbund 1949: Grundaufgaben des Kulturbundes*, in: E. Schubbe (ed.), *Dokumente zur Kunst-, Literatur-, und Kulturpolitik der SED*, Stuttgart 1972, p. 121.

354 After: E. Wolfrum, *Geschichtspolitik in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland. Der Weg zur bundesrepublikanischen Erinnerung 1948-1990*, Darmstadt 1999, p. 298.

355 W. Eggerath, *Nur ein Mensch*, Weimar 1947, p. 187.

particular people, places and events. The monumental nature of the commemorative topography in the places of torment led to the loss of historical consciousness. Martin Schönfeld, in his study about the plaques commemorating the Nazi dictatorship in East Berlin, pointed to the tendency to establish such a form of commemoration in which “individuals and their biographies fell into a normalized mesh” so as “their individuality was levelled and degraded to the sole representation of the resistance movement.”<sup>356</sup>

The East German sites of memory had their blade pointed in two directions: against the culprits of the criminal war and against the West German state. The centre of East German historical policy was dominated by the constitutional command to “uproot militarism and fascism” in all areas of life. Each exposition commemorating the Nazi terror was also expected to remind the viewers of who was the continuator and successor of the militarist doctrine. This confrontational character of East German memory of their compatriots across the Elbe deprived it of its credibility. The divided memory was expressed in the competition for primary victimhood, most clearly exhibited in the former concentration camps. The camp in Buchenwald was the most suitable commemorative place for such a confrontation. The nearby Weimar, the birthplace of the first German Republic and the heir of the humanistic tradition of Goethe and Schiller, and Buchenwald with the mass graves, expressed the brilliance and misery of German history. Thus, the official propaganda instituted the Buchenwald concentration camp as a national memorial of liberation from fascism, as the ‘red Olympus’, essential for the construction of the GDR founding myth. Other East German camps, in Sachsenhausen and Ravensbrück, shared the same fate.

In the early German Democratic Republic, a few types of political memorials could be distinguished: ‘to the anti-fascist resistance movement’, ‘to victims of fascism’, and the monuments serving as socialist models for the working-class movement and for the development of the GDR. The initial commemorative function gradually gave way to the imperative one. The statues that dominated the pedestals in the former concentration camps did not portray suffering victims but fearless victorious revolutionary activists.<sup>357</sup> While the defeated West Germans commemorated their fallen soldiers, victims of air raids and of the resistance movement, East Germans exhibited symbols of the international victory over fascism. They were intended to demonstrate the dominance of the socialist community over imperialism and solidarity of the anti-fascist forces.

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356 M. Schönfeld, *Gedenktafeln in Ost-Berlin*, Schriftenreihe Aktives Museum, vol. 4, Berlin 1991, p. 22.

357 H. Adam, *Erinnerungsrituale – Erinnerungsdiskurse – Erinnerungstabus. Politische Denkmäler der DDR zwischen Verhinderung, Veränderung und Realisierung*, “kritische berichte” 3, 1992.

The memorial in Buchenwald, the work of Fritz Cremer, is distinguished by its huge expressiveness; a child and ten men do not represent a group of people sentenced to death but a group set in a combat pose with guns and a flag. It is not the overwrought victims but the victors with their clenched fists who constitute the dominant structure of the monument.<sup>358</sup> Maoz Azaryahu, a historian from Tel Aviv, noted how an artistic mode of expression can falsify history. The clenched fist raised in protest in the representative memorial in Buchenwald loses its subjectivity. A victim remains anonymous and limited to the symbol of the condemnation of fascist barbarity. What matters is only the group of victims, the collective eternalised in the official pantheon. Only this collective can bring a political message.<sup>359</sup>

The area of the concentration camp became the location for commemorating the anti-fascist resistance movement and liberation. In 1985, on the 40th anniversary of liberating the camp, a museum was opened, primarily for educational purposes. The ideological opponent was clearly marked in the background. The verbal and visual messages focused on the Red Army, the Communist Party and the working class. Nevertheless, a problematic question remained: how to relate this image to the mass graves, discovered in 1984, from the time of the special Soviet camps which existed between 1945 and 1950, and which, according to expert estimates, contained the remains of 6,000 to 13,000 victims?<sup>360</sup>

The dual history of the camp-museum revealed the dual memory of the victims of Nazism and Stalinism. The reunification of Germany brought new elements into the commemorative culture. Starting in 1991, a committee of experts headed by the historian Eberhard Jäckel and established by the government of Thuringia issued recommendations. The exhibition presenting the history of the concentration camp was intended to account for the current research and free itself from the propaganda of East German historiography. A lot has been done to secure the documentation of the early commemorative places in East Germany as well as to weaken the monumental character of the political symbols.

The confrontation of memory on the level of pure propaganda assumed various forms. When, in early 1965, the Federal Republic of Germany was facing a decision whether or not to extend the statute of limitations of war crimes, in February the East German parliament issued a ‘Statement to the Parliaments of

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358 P.Reichel, *Politik mit der Erinnerung. Gedächtnisorte im Streit um die nationalsozialistische Vergangenheit*, München, Wien 1995, p. 131.

359 M. Azaryahu, *Vom Wilhelmplatz zum Thälmannplatz. Politische Symbole im öffentlichen Leben der DDR*, Schriftenreihe des Institut für Deutsche Geschichte der Universität Tel-Aviv, vol. 13, Gerlingen 1991, p. 189.

360 E.g. M. Klonovsky, J. von Flocken, *Stalins Lager in Deutschland, 1945-1950*, München 1993.

the World' which read, "According to the will of the West German government and as enacted by the resolution of the Federal Cabinet from 5 November 1964, the date 8 May 1965 (...) will be the day of general amnesty for the thousands of Nazis and war criminals. This hideous plan is a blow to the sense of justice among nations. It also constitutes a serious threat to peace and security. (...) It is a constituent of the revanchist policy of the West German government".<sup>361</sup>

The dual heritage of Nazism and communism, revealed after the reunification, brought complex consequences. In the 1990s, the media became interested in a particular case. In 1994, a former camp warden from Ravensbrück received 65,000 German marks in damages because she had spent 10 years in camps and prisons in East Germany. The Soviet war tribunal had sentenced her to 25 years in a penal labour camp. As one of the journalists commented, the SS camp warden received 550 German marks for each month in prison, whereas a former camp prisoner from Ravensbrück, according to the federal law, can only be awarded 150 German marks for each month spent in the camp.<sup>362</sup>

In the late the 1960s and early 1970s, East Germany introduced some corrections of their view of history. In 1967, after the 7th party congress, a large effort was made to position history closer to the nation's executive authorities. In response to the change of government in West Germany and the Eastern Policy of the SPD/FDP coalition, the East German authorities made an unsuccessful attempt to develop a vision of a socialist nation. The concept of a nation and the image of history constitute two categories that were constantly mutually dependant in East Germany. The primary aim of teaching history was the formation of the socialist consciousness, which was expected to result in developing socialist patriotism within the country and to be expressed as a class struggle abroad.

When Erich Honecker came to power in May 1971, a new era began. The central research plan for historians for the years from 1972 to 1975 determined the principles of teaching history. They included the theory that the international socialist system focused around the Soviet Union had developed as a result of the course of world history, and that the GDR was a legitimate successor of the revolutionary, progressive and humanistic tradition of German history, and primarily of the German working-class movement.<sup>363</sup> The new concept of East Germany assumed that the two German states represented two nations, whereas in 1968 the constitution of East Germany still admitted to national unity: "The German Democratic Republic is the socialist state of the German nation". The elements of national unity were erased from the 1974 constitution. Since then the GDR functioned as "the socialist state of workers and peasants". The adjective

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361 *Neues Deutschland* 4.02.1965.

362 A. Schneider, *Alles Opfer, oder was?; Tageszeitung* 1.12.1994.

363 After H. Weber, *Kleine Geschichte...*, op. cit.



‘German’ was removed from the official language. Thus, the radio stations which included the word ‘German’ in their names became ‘the voice of the GDR’, the German Academy of Science was renamed as the ‘The GDR Science Academy’. The national anthem could no longer be sang but only played as music due to its lyrics: “Germany - one homeland”.

However, it was not possible to mould the idea of the nation and its history strictly according to the party’s directive. The state could not be entirely separated from the nation. The renaissance of interest in history in West Germany could not remain without an impact on historical consciousness in East Germany. The 30th anniversary of the GDR provided an occasion to open a new historical perspective under the name of ‘Heritage and Tradition’. Prussia became the centre of attention but the historians had to make acrobatic efforts to select only the aspects of the Prussian heritage that were in line with class ideology. The public in both German states were overcome by a wave of nostalgia. The attractiveness of the Stauffs and the Wittelsbachs resulted not only from the idyllic image of the lost world. The debate around the Prussian legacy raised new questions about the national unity of Germans and their interpretation of history. The Prussian legacy had a double meaning for East Germany. The negative image of Prussia as the homeland of militarism was complemented in the 1980s by the partially rehabilitated images of some Prussian personalities, such as, for example, Karl von Clausewitz, Gerhard von Blücher and Gerhard von Scharnhorst, who were raised to the rank of “the servants of progress” as they “stimulated the activity of the masses”. The great reformers, Freiherr vom und zum Stein, Karl August von Hardenberg, and the general Ludwig Graf Yorck von Wartenburg, who in 1812 signed the neutrality Convention of Taurggen and provided arguments for the camaraderie of arms with Russia, could be used to extend the historical argumentation for the present friendship with the Soviet Union. Both German states needed founding myths, positive elements together with maintaining a bond with their own history. They both corrected and verified the past in various ways. In 1948 when the anti-fascist ideology became the basis for the historical narrative of the German Democratic Republic, the classical statue of the reformer, Gerhard von Scharnhorst, the work of Christian Daniel Rauch, was removed as a symbol of Prussian militarism only for it to return 15 years later. The general was needed as a reformer, who had modernised the Prussian army, to legitimise the people’s army in East Germany.<sup>364</sup>

The commonly shared German history returned to East Germany by the back door. Together with the sense of belonging to a nation with a shared culture came the awareness of history, which the state managed to divide only on the façade.

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364 G. Wolff-Bonekämper, *Schinkels Neue Wache Unter den Linden. Ein Denkmal in Deutschland*, in: *Akademie der Künste* (ed.), *Streit um die Neue Wache. Zur Gestaltung einer zentralen Gedenkstätte*, Berlin 1993, p. 35.



The rehabilitation of the Prussian-Protestant tradition and the huge interest in Martin Luther, especially in 1983, the ‘Year of Luther’, showed the shared German emotions that were running underground and that paved the way for the reunification of Germany. Although throughout the 40 years, both German states competed with one another in all areas of life, including in the domain of history, which had to fulfil the external as well as internal political functions, the collapse of the Berlin Wall exposed the false glitz of ideology. Overnight, East German historiography became a museum exhibit demonstrating the role of political doctrine in shaping the vision of the past.

In the final stage of the GDR, that is, in the short history of the democratic East Germany, the delayed admission of guilt came together with the declaration of independence. On 12 April 1990, the democratically elected *Volkskammer* announced a resolution that read, “Immeasurable suffering was inflicted on the peoples of the world by Germans during National Socialism. Nationalism and racial madness led to genocide, particularly of the Jews in all of the European countries, of the people of the Soviet Union, the Polish people and the gypsy people.” The parliament admitted “joint responsibility on behalf of the people for the humiliation, expulsion and murder of Jewish men, women and children. (...) We ask the Jews of the world to forgive us for the hypocrisy and hostility of the East German policies toward Israel and for the persecutions and degradation of Jewish citizens also after 1945 in our country.”<sup>365</sup>

## **2. Burdened with history: the Federal Republic of Germany between myth and memory**

The creation of a democratic state demanded a completely new approach to the past, at least in official policy. The pluralist democracy permitted all political parties to speak. Their attitude, biographies and experience impacted the assessment and profile of the political culture of the ‘old’ Federal Republic of Germany. Under the watchful eye of the victorious powers and the world’s public opinion, the young Bonn Republic had to prove itself as a good student that would soon make up for lost time. However, it is impossible to change mentalities, thinking habits and culture over a period of one generation. Therefore, the price of freedom was voices, tendencies and organisations that compromised West Germany. Freedom made it possible to release autobiographical literature, including the authors involved in the old, criminal system. Various trends of mass culture provided comfortable

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365 After: *Der Tagesspiegel* 14.04.1990.

room for bystanders and actors of Nazi politics who publicly defended their 'innocence'. The extreme right regularly provided material that falsified the past.

Lawful control and restraining of movements and trends referring to the compromised past were a challenge, which, judging from today's perspective, West German democracy met. The challenge was two-fold: inside, constant confrontation with the part of society that was mentally related to the Third Reich and its ideology and, outside, facing the demands of the victim states. Since West Germany served as the only continuator of the German state, it was burdened with all the consequences of World War II.

The lack of a peace treaty, 1937 borders still legitimate in law, the non-recognition of the finality of the Oder-Neisse line and treating the German issue as open created a constant political tension between West Germany and the Communist Bloc, particularly Poland, which prevented any exchange of views on the past. West Germany perceived itself as temporary. The continuation of the careers of some of the war criminals, who often lived to old age in little towns, did not loom large in most citizens' minds. Rapid reconstruction of the country and the 'little stabilisation' fostered strategies of releasing from guilt. As the influential CSU politician Franz Josef Strauß noted, due their economic achievements, Germans had the right to forget Auschwitz.

West Germany considered the work on memory to be an element of the process of consolidation of West German democracy and building civil society. Despite assurances that 'Bonn is not Weimar', in the first years there was a natural discrepancy between consciousness and action, social communication and mental habits, institutional sphere and individual attitude. The part of society that cheered Hitler and was grateful to him for stabilisation in the 1930s did not keep pace with the democratic transitions. Individuals perceived the change of system as a critical event and a destabilising life experience that would ultimately lead to crisis. The new system required responsibility, different moral norms and life orientation. The responses to this new experience were varied: silence or involvement in the debate about the future.<sup>366</sup> Many researchers point to the uniqueness of the situation in Germany, which was related to the problem of continuation and sudden shifts in the political culture of the country since 1870. The path from National Socialism to parliamentary democracy was a second attempt at democratisation of the country within an atmosphere of complete political and moral breakdown and a spiritual vacuum. The fact that Germans did not overcome the Nazi dictatorship voluntarily but were forced to the unconditional surrender must have impacted the character of mental transformations of the society.

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366 M. Rosch-Inglehart, *Kritische Lebensereignisse – eine sozialpsychologische Perspektive*, Stuttgart 1988.

The Nazi regime served as a contrast for the new order that emerged from the ruins of the Third Reich. Its ideology disturbed historical continuity and ruined certain elements of the tradition of German political culture. The new system required rejection of the authoritarian model and acceptance of the pluralistic organisation of the state. Despite initial resistance and reservations and criticism of new institutions, German society had no alternative. The Nazi elites were discredited. Unconditional surrender and division into occupational zones and later the division of Germany ended the stage of the domination of nationalism as a political ideology that integrated the German nation. The German state had to construct a new order on the basis of different criteria of a political system.<sup>367</sup>

Different political systems and social developments in the two German states resulted in completely different politics of memory. Democratisation of West Germany excluded central control of the politics of memory. In this part of Germany, the confrontation with the Nazi past was more direct and complex. Therefore, West Germans, despite the economic successes and political stability they achieved, were more uncertain in their self-esteem and in the search for a better past in the future than East Germans.

When striving to achieve a positive image abroad and in the confrontation with international public opinion, West Germany was constantly forced to face the darkest period in German history. This long process of low and high tides of memory resulted in gradual metamorphosis of society. The greater the time distance, the greater the intensity of dealing with the subject and the possibility of a more objective view. There were different tendencies and degrees of intensity in the discourse on the Nazi past, which speak a lot about particular generations of Germans.

As the result of the discredit of nationalism and authoritarianism, the postwar republic became a post-totalitarian and post-nation state, which was not, however, free from opposing tendencies. In the debate about the past, conflicting attitudes clashed throughout the whole period of the FRG. There were loud campaigns to acknowledge guilt and periods of silence, passionate indictments of one's own society and falsification of history, political scandals and political correctness. Since the beginning, reservations and opposition to the recognition of guilt, punishment and redress were strong and a vast section of society expressed acceptance for the pre-war period of the Third Reich, considering it the best time of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Overcoming the state of lawlessness, democratisation of political relations and building a culture of memory is a complex process, fraught with conflicts and controversies. Dealing with the consequences of the Nazi dictatorship constantly provided new conflict material. The arguments between scientists, journalists and

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367 M.R. Lepsius, *Das Erbe*, op. cit., pp. 247-264.

politicians, perpetrators and victims all conflicted with one another, and individual reasons clashed with public ones. Varied actors of the culture of memory, parties and parliaments, courts, museums, academic institutions, documentation centres, institutions and foundations dealing with damages for victims and the media, sites of memory, museums in former concentration camps and centres of political education: they all competed and cooperated.

Different phases of the struggle of West German citizens and state with their past were determined by the internal state policy and the situation abroad. Joining the West European community and NATO required the Bonn Republic to fulfil certain duties and standards. Anti-communism and the Cold War freed West Germany from reckoning and acknowledging crimes committed on the countries that found themselves in the Communist Bloc. Today, one can ask how far Germans would have dealt with the Holocaust if it had not been for the emergence of the state of Israel and its position as a central ally in the Western camp. Current politics set norms and standards of reckoning with the history of the Third Reich. Strategies of legitimisation of West Germany evolved over forty years. The overriding principle was integration and a search for a positive identity as the elementary building block of pluralistic democracy.

### Community of silence?

It is impossible to fit the evolution of the politics of memory over the forty years of West German history into a precise chronological framework. It was not determined by spectacular events. Its orientation points were set according to e.g. the political climate and stages of development of democratic political culture. The personality of chancellors, the makeup of governments, the international situation and generational changes: they all impacted the shaping of the images of the past in West German society.

The political direction of Konrad Adenauer, the first chancellor of West Germany, resulted from the expectations of the Allies and a part of society. There was a strong need to rebuild the destroyed country, to restore social bonds, to integrate different groups that had been involved to different extents in cooperation with the Nazi system and to adhere to current political principles. The development of the new, democratic state, the transformation of political culture and breaking from the criminal dictatorship was a Herculean effort for years. Even the best director would not be able to design and implement such a project.

The economic and political connections between the Federal Republic of Germany and the Western democratic states, the bond between the defeated and the victors, and security guarantees were an important psychological element that provided internal stability for democratic transitions. The phantom of the

Weimar Republic and its consequences, the memory of humiliation and discredit of the extreme, nationalist right made post-fascist states particularly alert to the threats that could lead them away from the right path. Distrust of the outside world resulted from historical experience. Frequent changes in German political systems over the political history of Germany from the last century did not give rise to much hope for efficient democracy. Therefore, the state and society of West Germany were under permanent observation by Europe and the powers responsible for Germany. West German society was expected to learn a lesson from history, particularly to understand the errors of the political system of the Weimar Republic and to find their own responsibility for the humanistic values devastated by National Socialism.

The evolution of democracy in countries transitioning from totalitarianism exposed the fact that their political culture was influenced by political tradition, historical conditions and the will to overcome old structures. The path to democracy is always a dialogue with the past. This dialogue was impacted by many factors. Idealism that derived from romanticism was a homeland for those with a critical attitude towards the new state. Many intellectuals believed that there was still a gap between the sphere of politics and the realm of the spirit in Germany. In German political thought, there were elements of striving for harmony and national community free from internal conflicts and a tendency to believe in social utopia. Right and left wing extremism reflected the impatience of the ideologists during the times when order was the primary objective, regardless of social cost. After the war, the leftovers of formalism could be found among the ideological traditions of German political culture, that is, the tendency to define political problems in legal terms and attempt to solve them by bureaucratic means.

Building the new, democratic state was based on developing bonds with the West and its system of values, the integration of society and bringing back its self-esteem. Together with uncompromising anti-communism, the abovementioned tasks set priorities for West Germany in the 1950s. Therefore, under the watchful eye of the Western allies, Germans did their homework from ‘enlightened’ patriotism. Teaching ‘republican’ patriotism and building a community of ‘enlightened’ identity were tasks for decades. Theoreticians of transformation distinguish several stages of the construction of democratic state and society. They are:

- institutional consolidation – creation and strengthening of the key political and constitutionally established institutions;
- representative consolidation – emergence of parties and interest groups that mediate between the state and the society;
- behavioural consolidation – this stage is considered finished when no important political, economic or military actor questions democracy or mobilises others against it;

- consolidation of civic culture – mental transformation and development of social forces supporting democracy.<sup>368</sup>

Considering that particular processes of consolidation do not occur symmetrically and simultaneously, one should be prepared for all the elements of democracy education to include inevitable contradictions. On which values should national pride be based when the recent history is a source of guilt and shame? How to combine satisfaction from economic and social achievements with the stigmatisation from the outside world? As a result, a crisis of the sense of belonging and an obsessive search for a new formula of bonding with the ‘difficult homeland’ became a permanent element of the West German everyday.

The objectives of Konrad Adenauer’s government were not shared by society, which, in the first years of the Republic, expected work and bread rather than democracy. The general public rejected both the criminal system of National Socialism and political instructions of the victorious Allies. The evolution of democracy in West Germany confirms the thesis of the non-simultaneous consolidation of institutions and civic culture, which is confirmed by the results of social surveys regularly conducted in West Germany. The interest in the new state was minimal and the effects of democratisation were sometimes counterproductive. Eugen Kogon commented on the democratisation attempts: “Since we have been enlightened by the sun of democracy, we have been more and more brown.”<sup>369</sup> The German writer Wolfgang Koeppen described his own society at the beginning of the 1950s: “The people was not so mannerly as the people in school text-books. It didn’t share the author’s notion of civics. The people was resentful. It resented the title of its deputies, their seats, their immunity from prosecution, their diet, the free travel passes. The dignity of parliament? Laughter in the bars, laughter in the streets. The loudspeakers had humiliated the parliament in people’s front rooms for too long, the representation of the people had been a male voice choir for too long, simple chorus to beef up the dictator’s solo. Democracy was held in low repute. It failed to galvanise. And the repute of the dictatorship? The people said nothing.”<sup>370</sup>

In the atmosphere of breakdown, it was impossible to expect revolutionary mental changes and enthusiasm for the new system. However, the research conducted by the ‘Institut für Demoskopie Allensbach’ suggested a gradual evolution. While in March 1949, only 21% of respondents claimed to be very interested in politics, and in autumn 1951, 45% believed that the best period

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368 See e.g. W. Merkel, *Plausible Theory, Unexpected Results: The Rapid Democratic Consolidation in Central and Eastern Europe*, IPG, no2, 2008, p. 13.

369 After: H. Kämper, *Der Schuldiskurs*, op. cit., p. 442.

370 W. Koeppen, *The Hothouse*, New York. 1957, p. 31.

in German history was before 1914 and only 2% that it was the current period, in 1963 the approval for the new state increased to 62%.<sup>371</sup> The 1950s were a transitional period when democratic foundations were still very fragile. It was not without a reason retrospectively called 'a democracy without democrats'. In July 1952, when the respondents were presented a list of the leading National Socialist politicians and asked for their opinion about them, Hitler was positively evaluated by 24% and Göring by 37%. Another study conducted at the time, about the popularity of contemporary politicians, showed that the Minister of Economy Ludwig Erhard received only 2% more positive votes than Hitler.<sup>372</sup>

Various melodies could be played on the keyboard of national emotions. Therefore, the longing for unity and harmony, which was natural in a divided nation, could be easily used for particularistic political reasons. Extreme right and neo-Nazi movements and political parties used patriotic and nationalistic rhetoric, which was also successively employed by marginal fractions of big, people's parties. However, this time, the powers responsible for Germany drew a lesson from history. Germans were not left on their own. There was no space in the European community for the 'special German way'. Allied troops on the territory of the FRG, financial assistance in the reconstruction of the economy and democratic education, which included knowledge of the recent past, they all were intended to be a guarantee of safety as well as a permanent form of control and therapy for society, which in the plans of the Nazi Reich was appointed to be the 'chosen people.'

Adenauer's rule was the time of effective construction of the fundamentals of the new system based on parliamentarism and the rule of law, accompanied by social disorientation. After the fall of the Third Reich there was a time 'without history'. Intellectuals asked about what was left after the fall of Prussia and the 100-year Reich. Although pragmatic conformity dominated the early years of the FRG, normative ideals of Western democracy were not widely shared. There was no true political unanimity. After the Stalin note of 1952 and the uprising of 17 June 1953, controversies were increasing about the unity of Germany and the position of Germany in Europe.

The motto of the politics of memory in Adenauer's era was to overcome the future by moving the past away. There was no amnesia. However, the political majority represented by national conservatists believed that concentrating on the past would result in losing the future and would harm the collective national identity. The problem of dealing with the past in the 1950s was related

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371 E.P. Neumann, E. Noelle-Neumann (eds.), op. cit., p. 227.

372 E. Piel, *Spuren der NS-Ideologie im Nachkriegsdeutschland*, in: H. Oberreuter, J. Weber (eds.), *Fremdliche Feinde? Die Alliierten und die Demokratiegründung in Deutschland*, München 1996, p. 149, 160.



mostly to legal and judicial activities. In this period denazification ended. The Nuremberg trials and their wide repercussions strengthened the common belief that since the criminals had been punished, the others could feel released from guilt. Legal procedures were taking place ‘outside’ the citizens. In the first years of the Republic, everyone agreed that the political purges initiated by the Allies should be revised and finished as soon as possible. The politics of memory was at the time dominated by attempts to integrate the million former members of the NSDAP into society and to return their professional and civil status. Norbert Frei described these activities by Adenauer’s government as a policy of amnesty, integration and demarcation.<sup>373</sup>

The politics of memory in the first years of the FRG were determined by actions with a defined beneficiary. It did not address the victims of National Socialism but Nazi sympathisers: those who felt that they were the victims of denazification. Only the state could provide what the Germans aspired for, that is, releasing them from the burden of responsibility and a non-problematic transition to normal life. And the voters – their wishes and expectations – were the most important reference points for political parties and their leaders. Therefore, all the Bundestag fractions tried to end the political purges, which was reflected in numerous parliamentary and administrative initiatives.

The expectation of forgiveness was also extended to those who were distant from the politics of the Third Reich. Dolf Sternberger, a sensitive journalist and political scientist, expressed a popular belief when he wrote in 1949: “We feel that a new, positive order should be created, that is, one should show his or her heart, give a chance and tolerate many of those who were our enemies yesterday.”<sup>374</sup> Amnesties and integration of the ‘sympathisers’ of National Socialism were considered an inevitable necessity. Eugen Kogon had already formulated these expectations before the FRG, saying that political amnesty and social reintegration of the bystanders and sympathisers of Nazism was unavoidable.<sup>375</sup> The intentions of the authorities of West Germany met the expectations of the majority of society that most urgently needed collective auto-rehabilitation. The priority was the reconstruction of the country, consolidation and finding a new place for oneself, in the individual and national sense. Amnesties for the Nazi crimes in Adenauer’s era were an element of re-integration into a society that wanted to end the period of constant humiliation.

Legislation and legal procedures deleted the pasts of over three million denazified Germans and thousands of the amnestied. In the period 1949-1954, a federal amnesty was announced (1949), the instructions of the Bundestag regarding

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373 N. Frei, *Adenauer’s Germany and the Nazi Past*, New York, 2002 p. XII.

374 D. Sternberger, *Die deutsche Frage; Der Monat* 8/9, 1949, p. 17.

375 E. Kogon, *Das Recht auf den politischen Irrtum; Frankfurter Hefte* 2, 1947, pp. 641-655.



the completion of denazification from 1950 were introduced as well as a law regulating the legal situation of persons defined by article 131 of the constitution (1951), and a law was passed guaranteeing exemption from punishment (1954). The beneficiaries of this generous policy and solidarity with the ‘victims’ were not only professional soldiers and state officials, but also more incriminated Nazis. Under pressure from the officials’ lobby, the powers of state officials, including even a vast part of former Gestapo members, were restored.

Soldiers remained the subject of particular care. Konrad Adenauer expressed his attitude towards the military several times. On 5 April 1951, in his speech about the “honour of the former German Wehrmacht” in the Bundestag, he said: “No one may reproach the career soldiers on account of their earlier activities and, so long as they are to be employed in public service, place them behind other applicants if they have the same personal and professional qualities. The chapter of collective guilt for militarists alongside activists and beneficiaries of the National Socialist regime must be ended, once and for all.”<sup>376</sup> The first chancellor of West Germany, who, after the Nuremberg Trials must have been aware of the crimes of the German Wehrmacht, spoke to the parliament on 3 December 1952, calling for recognition of “everyone who carried guns”: “We are convinced that the good name and achievements of German soldiers, despite the disgrace of the recent years, are still alive in the nation and will remain so (...) Our common task must be – and I am sure we will complete this task – to integrate moral values of German soldiers with democracy.”<sup>377</sup> No one asked which moral values of the Wehrmacht the chancellor had in mind. Social democrats also made endeavours towards rapid integration of citizens. On 30 October 1951, Kurt Schumacher, the SPD leader, spoke about the Waffen-SS: “Most of these 900,000 men have practically become pariahs. (...) It seems to us a matter of human and civil necessity to break up this ring and to help the great mass of former Waffen-SS soldiers to make something of their lives and become good citizens ... A compact complex of some 900,000 men without human and societal prospects is, taken together with their families, numerically not a good thing for a young democracy, rent with the greatest class and ideological tensions. We should grant these men, who have committed no crime, the opportunity of making their way in what for them is a new world.”<sup>378</sup> The support for the former soldiers was considerable due to the almost prevailing conviction of their innocence. After all, the former soldiers themselves, for instance returning war prisoners, took an oath in the Friedland camp in 1955: “Before the German people and before the dead of the German and Soviet armies we swear

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376 After: T. Eitz, G. Stötzl, *Wörterbuch*, op. cit., pp. 630-631.

377 Ibidem, p. 631.

378 After: H.A. Winkler, *The Long Road West*, vol. 2: 1933-1990, Oxford 2007, p. 156.

that we have not killed, profaned or plundered. If we caused misery or suffering to other people, it all took place according to the rules of war.”<sup>379</sup>

The chancellor was under pressure from different political fractions. Demands for general amnesty were formed in parliamentary circles. In 1952, Erich Mende, an FDP politician (and its leader in the years 1960-1968), the Minister for All-German Affairs in Ludwig Erhard's government (until 1966), presented an ultimatum to the government and the Allies that regarded “fundamental alterations” in the problem of former soldiers “being held in and out of Germany”. Mende spoke in the name of the deputies from the war generation. The retired major, whose proposal to release “on the occasion of the seventh anniversary of the capitulation”, on 8 May, “all those being held who are over sixty or under twenty-eight” was rejected by the Allies, wrote in his ultimatum: “We do not underestimate the effects of everything unfortunately perpetrated in the name of Germany on yesterday's enemies. But in the end, seven years have passed and the will to a European Defence Community is inalienably tied to psychological premises. An army is not simply an accretion of officers, enlisted men, and equipment. Rather it is a living organism whose deciding element is the spirit inhabiting it. But this spirit, in the sense of a readiness for European solidarity and defence cannot manifest itself in any German division knowing its former commanders and to still be in Allied prisons, without a general conviction of their guilt being present.”<sup>380</sup>

The defence of the honour of the Wehrmacht soldiers was related to the present political situation: respect and authority of the Bundeswehr, its ideological and cultural tradition. This aspect returned like a boomerang during every debate about West German armed forces. In April 1956, the deputy Franz Böhm (CDU) still spoke of “our young Wehrmacht”. One of the elements that sparked off the debate was the bill from 20 March 1956 regarding the legal status of soldiers. The bill showed that ten years after the war there were deep discrepancies in German society regarding the perception and assessment of the role of soldiers in the politics of Nazi Germany. The CDU deputy Hellmuth Heye represented a not very popular view, saying that “in the eyes of many citizens, a professional soldier was perceived as the most powerful helper of the system of the Third Reich.” At the same time, the former Wehrmacht general Hasso von Manteuffel, who represented the FDP in the years 1953-1957, attempted to prove that he had had no idea about the methods of exterminations and had not been aware of the existence of gas chambers. Another debate, provoked by the desecration of the Cologne synagogue at Christmas 1959, was a protest against the semantic strategy of East Germany, which used the symptoms of anti-Semitism in West Germany

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379 T.E. Fischer, *Geschichte der Geschichtskultur. Über den öffentlichen Gebrauch von Vergangenheit von den antiken Hochkulturen bis zur Gegenwart*, Köln 2000, p. 195.

380 After: N. Frei, *Adenauer's Germany..*, op. cit., p. 206.

to compare the Bundeswehr with the Nazi Wehrmacht. In response, *Die Zeit* commented: “the Soviets use this opportunity with abandon. Their whole anti-German propaganda campaign actually uses one single trick: equating of West Germany with the Third Reich, Adenauer with Hitler, the Bundeswehr with the Nazi Wehrmacht, democracy with fascism.”<sup>381</sup>

However, the problem of Nazi criminals at the time involved soldiers only to a small extent. When the Bonn Conventions regarding war criminals were signed in 1952, only 88 out of 603 prisoners in Landsberg, Werl and Wittlich were Wehrmacht members. Half of the prisoners were ‘camp cases’. The Wehrmacht was perceived by the general public as a defence community. The main approach to them, except rare cases of political scandalising and tabooing, was integration and political pacifism. Full integration of the war participants was an element of the ideal of “the new beginning.”<sup>382</sup>

The ideological atmosphere of the Cold War fostered an anti-Bolshevik orientation and somehow justified the defence of the Wehrmacht. The collective work was published in 1953 and contained the memories of many officers and generals that depicted the war as a “heroic symphony of the German front.”<sup>383</sup> In the campaign against Russia, a German soldier could see himself as “the saviour of Europe”. “Fulfilling this task, which was in line with the thousand-year message (...), he felt the West on his back.” Publications, films and paintings in the 1950s strengthened the image of the Wehrmacht as a community of duty, necessity and fate: in other words, of sacrifice. The general public was proud and convinced that the soldiers had fulfilled their patriotic duty, returned home and were ‘one of us’.

Political parties were not the only ones to lobby for the rehabilitation of soldiers. The Catholic and Evangelic churches, employers and social organisations also got involved. The moral consequences of their actions should not be underestimated – one of which was pardoning the guilty. Another was the price that needed to be paid for the policy of general amnesty, which was the historical truth. An average citizen, a bystander of the Nazi system, was increasingly convinced that the war activities of German soldiers must have made sense and their sacrifice should not be in vain.

All the belles-lettres and film spoke in defence of the ‘little man in the uniform’. As television was at an early stage of development, its part in popularising the softened version of war was minimal. Instead, radio and illustrated magazines appealed to the collective imagination in the 1950s, presenting fictionalised war

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381 *Die Zeit* 19.02.1960, after: T. Eitz, G. Stötzel, *Wörterbuch*, op. cit., p. 640.

382 See more: K. Naumann, *Nachkrieg. Vernichtungskrieg, Wehrmacht und Militär in der deutschen Wahrnehmung nach 1945; Mittelweg* 36 6, 1997, 3, pp. 11-25.

383 *Bilanz des Zweiten Weltkrieges. Erkenntnisse und Verpflichtungen für die Zukunft*, Oldenburg, Hamburg 1953.

stories in a form of serials. The most popular were *Stern* and *Quick*, of which one million copies a week were published. Researchers estimate that around twenty million readers followed the newspaper stories every week. The magazines were shared by neighbours and people of various professions, from hairdressers to doctors, who kept them in their waiting rooms and parlours.<sup>384</sup> The editors received hundreds of letters from readers who participated in constructing and continuing war stories.

The characters of the serials from illustrated magazines were the heroes of the 1950s. Society experienced “war adventures” together with them. The German soldiers from the serials were obsessed with their duty, which they fulfilled with youthful involvement and passion. Not only did they fulfil their duties in “dark times” but they also demonstrated imagination. The greatest star of the illustrated magazines was Arthur Nebe, SS-Gruppenführer, the commander of the Kripo (Criminal Police), responsible for mass executions of Jews and gypsies. One of the serials published in *Quick*, about ‘The Criminal Counsellor of the Devil’ presented a whole gallery of pleasant Nazis, with Hermann Göring as the most prominent character. “Without Hermann Göring’s support, Nebe and Diels would not be able to lead the struggle for order.”<sup>385</sup> For dramatic reasons, criminal types also had to appear in the novels. Their behaviour was immediately classified as diabolical activity of ‘typical criminals’.

The highest-ranked Wehrmacht generals and SA and SSA leaders were depicted as secret opponents of Hitler, almost as participants of the resistance movement against the Nazi regime. War events were processed by the media machines, which did everything they could to please the readers. “Résistance is a chaotic assemblage of groups that enviously fight one another. They consist only of communists and criminals who want to cook their selfish soup”, reported *Quick* in 1957 in a story about the resistance movement entitled ‘Violet’s Secret Weapon’. In 1951, the magazine depicted the French resistance movement as a very suspicious phenomenon: “A German soldier would not dare to hide in the homes of Marseilles. In these narrow streets, criminals hid next to patriots, prostitutes, souteneurs, spies and saboteurs.” The physiognomy of the members of the resistance movement corresponded with the image of a criminal derived from the typology created by the theoreticians of the Nazi ‘science’. “A face one cannot easily forget: stern and repulsive, with a broad boxer-nose, stunted ears,

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384 H. Knittel, *Der Roman in der deutschen Illustrierten*, Berlin 1967, p. 17.

385 *Der Kriminalrat des Teufels*; *Quick* 39, 1958. The texts of illustrated magazines collected and discussed by Michael Schornstheimer, “Harmlose Idealisten und draufgängerische Soldaten”. *Militär und Krieg in den Illustriertenromanen der fünfziger Jahre*, in: H. Heer, K. Naumann (eds.), *Vernichtungskrieg. Verbrechen der Wehrmacht 1941-1944*, Hamburg 1995, pp. 634-650.

a beard and deep-set, piercing eyes.”<sup>386</sup> Those who fought these gangs were their opposites: good-looking, friendly and polite German soldiers. Partisans in the occupied countries were presented as spies, traitors, drug dealers, souteneurs, fanatics and criminals who lay in wait for harmless German victims. On the other side, there were German gentlemen, exemplary superiors and faithful comrades in arms and fantastic lovers. At their feet, they had ‘foreign agents’, female members of the resistance movements in the occupied countries who “brazenly, boldly, ruthlessly and fanatically in their patriotism” fought against the Germans. Could the war be so tragic if its heroes were chivalrous, honourable soldiers, honest leaders?

German aggression in Poland was dispassionately depicted in the serials as a report of the acquisition of Eastern lands. German soldiers “ordered” and “cleaned” the occupied area. No blood or death was presented. The enemy was “brought under control.”<sup>387</sup> The image of the German defeat was radically different. The descriptions of Allied bombing and counter-attacking were apocalyptic scenes of the immense suffering of German victims inflicted by the enemies: “mad dogs”. The serials never starred the prisoners of concentration camps but German prisoners of war, “systematically tortured” by the American POW camp supervisors. The readers must have felt indignation and also sympathy for the persecuted, the heroes of the war, who were “woken at night” or “starved for twelve hours.” In 1959, *Quick* pictorially presented Germans imprisoned in POW camps, who were “loaded into the truck, on the platform of which there was a heavy, movable iron bar. (...) Without any protection against the blazing sun, they were driven back and forth for hours, constantly exposed to either sunburn or strikes with the bar. And then, again, another hearing.”<sup>388</sup> Six of the many letters by readers addressed to *Stern*, printed in one issue, included a demand for punishment of the murderers (*Stern* enclosed the term “murderer” in quotation marks). Others responded with indignation: “One should finally end the nonsense of condemning German people who had no time to think about what they were doing or were told to do.”<sup>389</sup>

Society demonstrated solidarity with those who saw themselves as “the victims of purges”, as it saw itself as a victim of the war and the politics of the victorious powers. Therefore, the question of how the process of dealing with the criminals would have looked without the Allied Control Council (which followed all the activities and controlled the procedures) must remain a rhetorical one. There was a common striving to overcome the postwar chaos and disintegration and the need for rehabilitation, acquittal and forgetting whatever was uncomfortable to

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386 After: M. Schornstheimer, op. cit., p. 641.

387 Ibidem, p. 644.

388 Ibidem, p. 646.

389 Ibidem, p. 647.

think about. It was not until 1958, when the Central Office of the State Justice Administrations for the Investigation of National Socialist Crimes constituted in Ludwigsburg started a more determined and systematic analysis of the past. However, a few years before, in 1949, 'Legal Protection for Germans Abroad' was established as a Justice Ministry departmental section, whose task was to guarantee the best possible defence to any German prisoner abroad: those in Allied prisons and those convicted in the Nuremberg trials who served their time in Spandau.

The process of dealing with the past in the mass media was equally determined by international and domestic events. The question of identity, patriotism and identification with the temporary homeland regularly appeared during the whole history of West Germany and occupied the minds of intellectuals. It was easy to arouse emotions in the place where many different problems met: the problem of national unity, the ambition of the young republic and complexes caused by the division of the country and condemnation of the outside world. Making the widest possible circle of citizens accept the new homeland was the key task for each government. Therefore, the question of which image of the past would be commonly shared in the new, nationally reduced state was returning like a boomerang.

The union parties (CDU and CSU), which dominated the political landscape attempted in the first decade of their rule to convince the general public that West Germany was their "true homeland." The question of national unity was returning increasingly often. This problem was also inseparably linked to the question of the collective assessment of the past. Thomas Dehler, the liberal vice-president of the Bundestag said in 1960 that "the FRG, the state – Confederation of the Rhine, the extended Rhenish Republic, is not the German homeland."<sup>390</sup> The FDP politician moved a stone that started an avalanche; he caused a new wave of disputes on the problem of which past should be the basis of the identity of West German citizens. History became politics again. The politicians of the Union believed that the awareness of the citizens should focus on the democratic state and its constitution. SPD and FDP argued that West Germany was still inhabited by the German nation that lived with its history for better or worse, while East Germany replaced the citizens with proletariat and broke the continuity of national history.

The politics of memory had to be a subject of permanent negotiations. The general populace, with its mental habits and hidden sense of injustice, was the voting mass. Therefore, the political class of West Germany did not stop searching

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390 After: E. Wolfrum, *Geschichtspolitik in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland 1949-1989. Phasen und Kontroversen*, in: P. Bock, E. Wolfrum (ed.), *Umkämpfte Vergangenheit. Geschichtsbilder, Erinnerung und Vergangenheitspolitik im internationalen Vergleich*, Göttingen 1999, p. 55.

for integrating symbols. The other German state stood in the way by usurping selected chapters of history so they could represent their politics of memory. Official attempts in Bonn to make 8 May (the day of German capitulation) or 20 July (1944: an attempt to assassinate Adolf Hitler) the days of memory did not take root. 8 May did not function as the liberation day, as political correctness ordered, and the assassins of 1944 were stigmatised by the majority as traitors. Therefore, 7 September – the day when the Bundestag and Bundesrat were constituted – was chosen as the day of memory of the German nation, which caused general confusion. The president Theodor Heuss admitted that this date lacked a “dramatic historical emphasis.” On the other hand, the re-establishment of the National Day of Mourning at the turn of 1951 and 1952 carried contradictory messages. Its beneficiaries were soldiers who could, without any inhibitions, support the legend of the ‘normal war.’

Politics and history supported one another on a daily basis. On the initiative of the SPD, 17 June 1953, the date of the People’s Uprising in East Germany was established as a ‘Day of German Unity’ (from 1963, ‘National Day of Remembrance’). The building of the Berlin Wall confirmed to Bonn that they had chosen the right path: 17 June was a chance to reinforce national feelings and provided a semblance of resistance against the authoritarian state. Meanwhile, the long unaccepted date of 20 July 1944 was a chance for the rehabilitation of the German nation in the eyes of the world. There was still no place for the victims of the Third Reich in the newly constructed order and the search for symbols of national continuity. The Cold War confrontation and the dominant image of the Eastern Bloc as a hostile, totalitarian system made it easy to perceive National Socialism as the German version of the European phenomenon of one-party dictatorship, which allowed Germans to relativise the twelve years of the Third Reich and set this problem aside.

The 1960s, after the construction of the Berlin Wall, slowly brought visible changes in the international climate. On the one hand, it helped to once more raise the question of national unity and a nation’s collective responsibility for its past. On the other hand, along with increasing stabilisation, economic successes and strengthening the position of West Germany in the political salons of Western Europe and the USA, there was a growing conviction that the postwar period was coming to an end. The expectation of the end of reckoning, the end of accusation, the end of history were reflected in the search for boundary dates that would mark a new epoch. Just like ‘zero hour’, the term ‘the end of the postwar era’ was a symbol of hope to end the depression and sense of guilt and highlight that the Germans, converted to democracy, found themselves in the better world of the present and the future.



Each of the terms that were attached a role of an important historical caesura aroused extreme emotions and sparked off new debates. The main actors in the public scene immediately declared themselves ‘for’ or ‘against’. The wait for the end of the postwar era manifested itself in attempts to set its symbolic end. There was no single determinant or criteria of the ‘end’. For some, the end of the postwar era meant awaiting the return of war prisoners; for others it meant general amnesty. Konrad Adenauer said in his governmental statement on 20 October 1953, after parliamentary elections: “Ladies and gentlemen, we wish that the countries with which we have close contacts respect and acknowledge the results of the election. We hope that the vision of the return of National Socialism and aggressive Germans will never again appear in international opinion.”<sup>391</sup> This wish returned in different forms in the following years. The newly elected chancellor Ludwig Erhard in his speech on 18 October 1963 described the West German reality as the state of “normality” that ended the postwar era. “We have largely overcome the material consequences of the war and have been able to meet many urgent social tasks by building up a flourishing economy. The democratic order of our country is firmly in place, and the Federal Republic has found security in the Western alliance system (...) The tasks that lie ahead of us are of great importance. We have to look ahead. Not only the Federal Republic, but the entire world, is about to step out of the postwar era”.<sup>392</sup>

Ludwig Erhard confirmed his diagnosis even more emphatically on 10 November in his governmental speech, when he announced the postwar period closed: “The fifth German Bundestag was elected 20 years after the end of World War II. 167 of 518 members of parliament reached their voting age only after 1945. In 1933, two thirds of our nation were children or were not born yet. The years 1933-1945 are historical past without personal memory for almost half of our society. (...) Although all the generations of our nation bear the consequences of the politics of 1939-1945 led in the name of the German nation, the points of reference for the present Bundestag and the politics of the FRG should not be the war and the postwar period. They are beyond us and not in front of us. The postwar time has ended! (...) 1965 is beyond this global phase we sometimes call the postwar period – the period in which the FRG was constituted and in which it was first an object of the global politics and then gained importance as an active force.”<sup>393</sup> This slogan included also an appeal to turn to future challenges and new tasks. “The Federal Republic knows that the end of the postwar era sets new tasks for Germans, inside and outside, and calls for new duties. New position must be strengthened by new means. A new period of sober reflection awaits us.”

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391 Stenographische Berichte des Deutschen Bundestages 20.10.1953, p. 12.

392 Stenographische Berichte, op. cit., 18.10.1963, p. 4192.

393 Stenographische Berichte, op. cit., 10.11.1965, p. 17.



In the middle of the 1960s, when black clouds were gathering over the world, communists won in Cuba, the Third World was shaken by numerous conflicts and civil wars, and the tension between the East and the West was growing, in the FRG there was an increasing expectation of a new beginning. However, Erhard's interpretation of the times was controversial. According to *Der Spiegel*, Erhard's statement was an opportunity given to political radicals: "the NPD recognised the sign of the times. The postwar era – marked by exhausting and ultimately futile efforts to overcome the past – ended, according to the chancellor. Ludwig Erhard said: 'We are someone again.' The national pride, repressed for so long, revived."<sup>394</sup> When the NPD, a right-extremist party, was elected to Hesse Landtag in the elections of 6 November 1966 with 7.9% of votes, *Die Zeit* interpreted this event as the consequence of the caesura announced by the chancellor. He reminded that the voices that expect the end of the postwar era were coming from all sides of the political scene. He also quoted the NPD, who believed that "the time of German suffering has finished", and their slogans: "The postwar time is over" (Erhard), the German nation can no longer be "discriminated against as less valuable, potentially dangerous or even permanently as a criminal one" (F.J. Strauß) and the German youth should no longer "parade in the penitential shirt of history."<sup>395</sup>(E. Mende)

The arguments for and against announcing the end of the postwar era were related to the issue of German unity. Academic and journalistic commentaries put emphasis on different elements. For many, signalling the end of the postwar period meant cutting clear from the past and escaping from responsibility. While some perceived the imagined caesura as cutting from the past, others emphasised the need to normalise relations with the outside world. Alongside the argument that the division of Germany excluded complete reckoning with Nazism, there was a belief that as long the two German states remained, the end of the postwar period was not possible. Fritz Erler, an SPD deputy, represented the latter view. In his critique of Ludwig Erhardt and his expression "the end of the postwar time", Fritz Erler noted that as long as "17 million of our compatriots are hostages in foreign hands [East Germany: author's note] and as long as the problem of the involvement of Germans in the criminal system is unsolved, World War II will not be a closed chapter in our history."<sup>396</sup> The political context of relating the question of German unity to the problem of overcoming the past regularly appeared in the Bundestag debates and in the press. The leader of the FDP, Knut Freiherr von Kühlmann-Stumm, admitted that the FRG had to leave the "shadow of the past" due to demographic transformations but "for the divided German homeland

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394 After: T. Eitz, G. Stötzl, op. cit., p. 462.

395 *Die Zeit*, 11.11.1966.

396 Stenographische Berichte 29.11.1965, p. 94.

(...) the postwar time unfortunately has not ended. For us, Germans, the time of normal development of our history will begin only when all Germans have been guaranteed the rights of self-determination.”<sup>397</sup>

East Germany understood the end of the postwar era differently. As the Minister for Foreign Affairs of the GDR, Lothar Bolz, expressed in his speech before the People’s Chamber in November 1964: “The transition from the end of the postwar era to a firm order must be forced. The essential problem is to dispose of Bonn’s revanchism and hinder their plans for nuclear arms.”<sup>398</sup>

Moscow was not indifferent to the official voices demanding the end of the postwar period. Andrei Gromyko argued in his speech during the plenary session of the Central Committee of the USSR Communist Party on 9 December 1965: “The Federal Republic of Germany announced that the postwar period has ended. (...) There is a wish behind this statement to release oneself from the liabilities resulting from the defeat of Nazi Germany and to act as if German militarism did not wage World War II, as if there were no crimes of fascism and no unconditional surrender of the Nazi Germany. Bonn strives to cut off from the past; not to say ‘no’ to the previous policy of German imperialism but to return to singing the old song. The West German government, which enforces a quasi-new chapter of history with its announcement, wants to determine the conditions of life of European states. No, history does not end with the announcement of the federal chancellor.”<sup>399</sup>

The content and form of shaping cultural memory in the Adenauer era is difficult to order according to a precise chronological scheme. The helplessness in finding a commonly accepted phraseology corresponded with the helplessness in dealing with the past on an academic level and in everyday life. Searching for the key to understanding and diagnosing the condition of historical consciousness of the FRG citizens in local chronicles brings disappointment. Local history in the 1950s represented several patterns of dealing with the Nazi past. The prevailing pattern was to repress history, blur or even ignore it. When there is no national reason of state or routine policy towards the past, chroniclers of local history (*Heimatgeschichte*) gain in importance. In their description of the period 1939-1945, the chroniclers used phrases that obfuscated reality and hardly ever explained anything. The most common were abstract expressions such as “dark times”, “entangled times”, “times of chaos”, “hostages of war”. There was a tendency to avoid calling a spade a spade. Local Nazis disappeared, as local patriotism did not allow the chroniclers to name them. Collective consciousness was dominated by the events of the last days of the war; by those who never returned from war

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397 Ibidem, p. 116.

398 Za: T. Eitz, G. Stötzel, op. cit., p. 457.

399 Ibidem, p. 461.

or the refugees from the East for whom one should find a place and with whom one should share his or her goods. Local press and discussions focused on local poverty and the lack of individual responsibility. Conspiracy of silence was the rule. The communities of villages and towns wanted to forget. It was the main survival strategy regardless of the social position before 1945.<sup>400</sup>

The Klöckner-Werke chronicle is an example of a commonly copied description. It compares the times before and after German capitulation: "The Ruhr region experienced terrible things in bunkers and cellar holes, but what followed were even worse times. Cynical were the words: 'Children, enjoy the war, the peace will be terrible', as much as they were prophetic."<sup>401</sup> The Nazi regime seemed to be distant, abstract, unrelated to real people. Local perception narrowed the image to the local circle. There were also exceptions, such a history of Dortmund written in 1957, which included a description of the shameful behaviour of residents and their indifference to the murder of 6,000 fellow citizens, the residents' complicity in Kristallnacht and their attitude to forced labourers. The focus on local perpetrators and accomplices, which was very unusual in comparison to the dominant tendencies, caused protests.<sup>402</sup>

Clear tendencies to conceal the past were common wherever it was impossible to erase the traces of terror and crime. The local community in Dachau long protested against the idea of preserving the camp area as a commemoration site. In 1953, local authorities closed the exhibition that had been displayed there since 1950. Only the international protest made them agree to preserve the museum and the crematory. Attempts to devastate elements of commemoration sites across the entire FRG did not stop. In 1963, in Schloß Holte cemetery, a plate commemorating 65,000 Russian prisoners of war was destroyed and replaced with a monument to the expellees.<sup>403</sup> The authorities and residents of most of the local sites of terror obliterated the traces of the Nazi party. Fourteen years passed before the authorities of Lower Saxony opened a modest building in Bergen-Belsen that contained camp documents in 1966. Overcoming the resistance of local communities lasted decades. Citizen initiatives of the victims who wanted to document their tragic

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400 U. Jeggle, *Heimatkunde des Nationalsozialismus. Vier lokale Versuche, verwischte Spuren zu sichern*, in: W. Benz, B. Distel (ed.), *Erinnern oder Verweigern – Das schwierige Thema Nationalsozialismus*, München 1994, pp. 162-181.

401 J. Reichert, Peter Klöckner. *Ein Leben für die Industrie. Die Geschichte seiner Werke*, Duisburg, o. J., p. 263. Quoted by H. Berghoff, *Zwischen Verdrängung und Aufarbeitung. Die bundesdeutsche Gesellschaft und ihre nationalsozialistische Vergangenheit in den Fünfziger Jahren; Geschichte in Wissenschaft und Unterricht* 2, 1998, p. 100.

402 L. von Winterfeld, *Geschichte der freien Reichs- und Hansestadt Dortmund*, Dortmund 1957.

403 Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung (ed.), *Gedenkstätten für Opfer des Nationalsozialismus. Eine Dokumentation*, Bonn 1987, p. 596.

experiences fought their way with difficulty.<sup>404</sup> In Neuengamme, a district of Hamburg where a concentration camp was established in 1938, the visits of former prisoners aroused the annoyance of the local authorities. The mayor of Hamburg, an SPD politician, argued in 1951 that the requests of former prisoners to visit the area should be rejected: “we should avoid everything that touches old wounds and brings painful memories.”<sup>405</sup> Only thanks to pressure and financial investment by the French was a little monument erected in 1953, outside the camp area, and at the beginning of the 1980s a centre of documentation was built.

Alongside the establishment of the museum in Dachau in 1965, the first steps were made to set a new political course in commemorating the criminal activity of the Nazi state. A long time also passed until the members of the anti-Hitler resistance movement were publically symbolically honoured and until Plötzensee (where some Hitler’s would-be assassins were tortured and killed) and the Bendlerblock (the headquarters of the 20 July plot; today secondary seat of the German Federal Ministry of Defence) were considered commemoration sites. Since 1999, the Bendlerblock has been used as a ceremonial site where new members of the Bundeswehr take their oaths. The conspiracy of Claus Schenk von Stauffenberg was earlier a taboo subject, as the conspirators broke the military oath.

The world of victims of World War II awaited not only legal trials of the crimes and material reparations, but most of all the confession of guilt and the spiritual and mental rehabilitation of the Germans. Jews were expected to be given a central position in German memory and mourning for the victims. This expectation came from Israel, from the Holocaust survivors and from the intellectual elites of Europe and the USA. However, 1945 was not a breaking point in the perception of Jews. Israel was paid reparations under a considerable international pressure. There was not much common moral belief in this rehabilitation, but rather a lot of political calculation regarding the political and moral reputation of Germany. The leader of CDU/CSU, who signed the reparations agreement with Israel on 10 September 1952, gave only as much space for the Holocaust as was necessary for Christian-Democrat politics. The Christian-Democratic party, which after the war was established from a merger of different fractions and lacked firm structures, combined various versions of political Catholicism and conservative, Protestant groups and was surrounded by extreme factions from both sides. Everyone who dared to raise the subject of the murders committed on other nations was exposed to immediate protests. One of the people who experienced it was Martin Niemöller,

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404 R. Matz, *Die unsichtbaren Lager. Das Verschwinden der Vergangenheit im Gedenken*, Reinbek b. Hamburg 1993.

405 After: H. Berghoff, *Zwischen Verdrängung und Aufarbeitung. Die bundesdeutsche Gesellschaft und ihre nationalsozialistische Vergangenheit in den Fünfziger Jahren; Geschichte in Wissenschaft und Unterricht* 2, 1998, p. 102.

one of the founders of the Confessional Church (Bekennende Kirche), which opposed the Nazi politics, and the co-initiator of the Stuttgart Declaration of Guilt of the Evangelical Church in Germany. The protocol of Niemöller's lecture, given in 1946 to 1,200 students of Erlangen University, notes that when he mentioned the crimes against Poles, Russians and Jews, the audience responded with anger, cries of indignation and protest. Holocaust and war crimes were a taboo subject for the students of the war generation.<sup>406</sup> German language in the 1950s did not find a term to refer to Shoah. Various euphemisms were used. People escaped from the subject and from calling a spade a spade. Even those who saved the lives of Jews in the times of terror preferred to remain silent. The attorney Hans Georg Calmeyer, who saved about 3,000 Jews in the occupied Netherlands, long concealed this fact so as not to harm his office. He only acknowledged his role for the first time in 1960, when the Berlin Senate honoured 700 rescuers of Jews.

The internal lack of acceptance of the reparations is not surprising, considering the attitudes towards Jews registered by the centres of public opinion polls. There was a real face of society behind the official condemnation of anti-Semitism. Even in 1961, 73% of the respondents asked by the 'Institut für Demoskopie Allensbach' felt that Jews belonged to a "different race." Only 14% would accept a marriage with a Jewish partner. In 1952, only 20% disagreed with the statement: "It is better not to have any Jews in the country"; in 1956 the number increased to 35%, and in 1963, to 40%. However, at the same time, only 18% wanted Germany free from Jews.<sup>407</sup>

Analysing the present reality, Jörn Rüsen notes that "the Holocaust is the most radical experience of crisis in history. It is unique in its genocidal character and its radical negation and destruction of the basic values of modern civilization."<sup>408</sup> It is a "borderline-experience" of history, which does not "allow its integration into a coherent narrative". Due to the unique character of the Holocaust, there is an expectation that it will bear a special place in memory and reckoning with the Nazi policy of Germans. However, even placing the Holocaust in historical and public canon of interpretation meets obstacles that are difficult to overcome. The problem is to find a common ground even at the stage of interpreting the 'uniqueness' in the literature of the subject. Methodological and theoretical disputes around the confrontation of Nazism and communism are a subject for another book. The huge

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406 U. Schmidt, *Hitler ist tot und Ulbricht lebt. Die CDU, der Nationalsozialismus und der Holocaust*, in: W. Bergmann, R. Erb, A. Lichtblau (eds.), op. cit., p. 74.

407 E. Noelle, E.P. Neumann (ed.), *Jahrbuch der öffentlichen Meinung 1947-1955*, Allensbach 1956, p. 131; idem, *Jahrbuch der öffentlichen Meinung 1958-1964*, Allensbach 1965, p. 214, 218, 229.

408 J. Rüsen, *Holocaust-Memory and German Identity*, in: J. Rüsen (ed.), *History: Narration, Interpretation, Orientation*, Oxford-New York, 2005, p.189

volume of world literature on the subject of the experience of the Holocaust is impossible to analyse. Considering the multiplicity of assessments and the fact that every historical event is unique, we may assume after the German researcher that “the uniqueness will gain empathetic character when its criminal aspect becomes one of the key reference points for the historical consciousness (of Jews, Germans and other nations).”<sup>409</sup> The understanding of the reasons for the Holocaust and making this interpretation present in the FRG reality is fundamental for the whole process of working on memory after 1945. The answer to the question of the influence of the Holocaust on German identity is an important part of the answer to the question of the political and moral condition of the German republic.

Immediately after the war, the memory of the Holocaust and the obligation for dignified remembering were under pressure from various factors that made reckoning very difficult. The awareness of the existence of gas chambers and the whole machinery of genocide was for the Allies the most convincing education material that most emphatically and vividly presented the greatest barbarity of the Germans. This ‘object-lesson’, *corpus delicti*, made the receivers speechless. Most of them turned their head and did not acknowledge the truth. Thus, from the very beginning, a “silent continuity of beliefs and attitudes” was emerging on the one side, and the trauma of the victims of persecutions and the survivors on the other. The specific character of the situation was that from the beginning there was a competition of victims: non-Jewish victims that demanded their own place in culture and politics of memory of both German states.

In the 1950s, the Holocaust was not considered a crucial event of the Third Reich either by political decision-makers or by society. The symbolic turning points concerning the role of the Holocaust in the development of German self-identity are 1968 and 1989, which correspond with the war generation, the postwar generation and their children. A radical break of continuity and the experience of defeat were an impulse to develop collective identity in opposition to the ‘German catastrophe’. Sociologists who study the impact of critical situations on national consciousness draw attention to the situation in which Germans, because of National Socialism, were deprived of sources from which they could derive self-acceptance, a necessary element of identity. The 1950s, the years of shock following the defeat, were the time of developing an identity construct with no place left for the Holocaust. A positively integrated community used different strategies to repress whatever was impossible to acknowledge. An example is the words of Leopold von Wiese at a postwar sociological congress, which were quoted by Rüsen. He called the recent past a time of the plague that “came upon

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409 J. Rüsen, *Pamięć o Holocauście a tożsamość niemiecka*, trans. P. Przybyła, M. Saryusz-Wolska, in: M. Saryusz-Wolska (ed.), *Pamięć zbiorowa i kulturowa. Współczesna perspektywa niemiecka*, Kraków 2009, p. 412.

the unprepared people from the outside. This is a metaphysical secret, not to be touched by a sociologist.”<sup>410</sup>

Before German historians made the Holocaust a subject of thorough research, more general questions appeared. What does the past mean in the face of the division of the state and nation? How to reconcile the reduced nation and its consciousness with the national history? Many were fascinated by the question of whether it is possible to provide a credible image of history in the era of increasing technicality. In the face of “fatigue of the past”, history was escaped from. There were suggestions that the time after 1945 was post-historical. Historians, aware that they lost their overwhelming influence on the general public, developed a theory of history in crisis. A young historian, Wolfgang J. Mommsen, attempted to find the factors responsible for this state of events. He decided that the crisis results from the development of the industrial society, weaker social position of the bourgeoisie and the pace of economic and social changes. “Today, great numbers of people live harnessed in everyday obligations, without history.”<sup>411</sup> The debate on the “loss of history” in the late 1950s and the early 1960s was symptomatic of the search for new historical orientation, new dominant historical images in the history of West Germany. At the same time, the debate demonstrates the uncertainty of dealing with the past in the times of anxiety and civilization and social transformations.

The politics of memory in the times of Konrad Adenauer was deeply analysed after the reunification of Germany. The assessment of the politics of memory of the 1950s resulted in a revision of earlier theories of the past. Generally, there were two types of interpretation and evaluation of the first years of the FRG. Researchers repeated for years that the FRG in its first two decades was defined by silence. The German “inability to mourn” was considered an undeniable fact and various reasons for this phenomenon were identified. However, in the 1980s, one could also hear the opinion that the policy of suppression and exterritorialisation of memory was the inevitable price to pay for effective democratisation. The one who defended his stance most consistently was the philosopher Hermann Lübbe, who pointed at the “passing the past through a filter of silence in the 1950s” as “the necessary means of converting citizens to democracy, from the perspective of social psychology and politics”.<sup>412</sup> Lübbe considered collective concealment

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410 After: J. Rüsen, *Holocaust-Memory and German Identity*, in: J. Rüsen (ed.), *History: Narration, Interpretation, Orientation*, Oxford-New York, 2005, p. 204.

411 W.J. Mommsen, *Historisches Denken der Gegenwart*, in: W. Besson (ed.), *Geschichte*, Frankfurt a. M. 1961, p. 94.

412 H. Lübbe, *Der Nationalsozialismus im politischen Bewusstsein der Gegenwart*, in: M. Broszat et.al. (eds.), *Deutschlands Weg in die Diktatur. Internationale Konferenz zur nationalsozialistischen Machtübernahme*, Berlin 1983, pp. 329-349.



– “communicative silence” – to be an efficient strategy that fostered social integration and construction of the new state by removing psychological barriers. He argued that the Nazi past was present in the postwar reality and the theory that it was concealed and repressed was found to be a weapon of the students’ movement, used in the battle of generations.

The critical attitude to refraining from reckoning with the past in the early postwar period was sharply opposed by Manfred Kittel. In his dissertation, published in 1993, Kittel made a radical turn in German historiography. He strongly rejected the interpretation of Ralph Giordano, who severely criticised German failure to work on the past in this period, calling these memory deficits the “second guilt” of Germans.<sup>413</sup> What used to be a subject of critical consideration was raised to the rank of success. The young historian judged that the “Adenauer era” had turned out to be “in many aspects, the only attempt to overcome the past ideologically and materially.”<sup>414</sup>

Kittel believes that “the government, the parties and the media” put a lot of effort into the collective care of memory and that Germans had the right to feel subjectively innocent by finding others guilty. In his opinion, the unsuccessful denazification weakened the sense of guilt. Moreover, Germans were in “mourning for the dead in the frontline, for their lost family members and their lost homeland in the East. Perhaps this entirety of individual mourning in the 1950s hindered stronger awareness of the suffering inflicted on other nations.”<sup>415</sup> Kittel argues that the omnipresence of the past contributed to the “devastation of German historical consciousness” and of the eradication of the positive German tradition that, as a consequence, left Germans badly prepared for the reunification of the nation and the state.

Hermann Graml also focused his attention on the history of success of the FRG, claiming that the theory of “permanent suppression of guilt” is impossible to maintain. He pointed at the efforts of “journalist elites” and their contribution to setting proper directions. In his interpretation, Adenauer’s government did much to prevent the past being left aside.<sup>416</sup> An interesting interpretation of the politics of memory in the first postwar decades was presented by Jörn Rüsen. The author inclines to believe that confrontation with such a great burden of guilt

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413 R. Giordano, *Die zweite Schuld oder Von der Last ein Deutscher zu sein*, Hamburg 1987.

414 M. Kittel, *Die Legende von der “Zweiten Schuld”. Vergangenheitsbewältigung in der Ära Adenauer*, Frankfurt a. M., Berlin 1993. In 2009 r. The Foundation Council ‘Flight, Expulsion, Reconciliation’ appointed him as a director of the emerging Berlin museum, known as ‘Visible Sign’.

415 *Ibidem*, pp. 359-363.

416 H. Graml, *Die verdrängte Auseinandersetzung mit dem Nationalsozialismus*, in: M. Broszat (ed.), *Zäsuren nach 1945*, München, p. 170, 172.



as the crimes of World War II would only be possible in certain psychological conditions. Yet, the awareness of the defeat and the atmosphere after 1945 made it impossible for Germans to “acknowledge the entanglement and guilt and incorporate them into the history of their own lives. There was usually not enough internal freedom to perform critical self-analysis that would be able to remove the curse of the past.”<sup>417</sup> The author concluded that the crisis of collective identity was overcome by leaving aside the memory of the Holocaust and related crimes in the realm of the public discussion. According to the author, the fact that the Nazi crimes had not been the subject of wider public discussion right after the war did not prove they were suppressed or negated. Rüsen believed that silence was an integral part of the history of the birth of West German democracy. He admitted, however, that its cultural price was high. The past was suppressed but was “silently present” in people’s minds. The positive aspect of the process of coming to terms with the past is that “using the power of suppressed memory, [this mental] process brought a new constellation of memory and oblivion. It was considered a burden by the new generation and resulted in the attempts to revise it.”<sup>418</sup> Rüsen distances himself from the theory widely promoted in the 1960s by Alexander and Margarete Mitscherlich about the Germans’ “inability to mourn.” All those who supported the theory and criticised the postwar attitude of Germans, according to the author, “overlooked the limited possibilities of mental survival and the function of forgetfulness in overcoming a deep identity crisis by a rupture of historical continuity”.

Norbert Frei, the author of a reliable analysis in the 1950s regarding the policy towards the National Socialist past, quotes Eugen Kogon when writing that “political amnestying and social reintegration of the army of ‘fellow travellers’ was as necessary as it was unavoidable.” However, he also postulates the necessity of systematic analysis of the conditions in which these actions were taken and a more careful explanation of the wishes or even demands that the Nazi criminals were covered by the policy of amnesty and release from guilt.<sup>419</sup>

Whenever the question of the period on which the historical memory of Germans is focused is the subject of reflection in social and political disputes, this question concerns the identity of the democratic state. And whenever history becomes a medium of political and national identity, historians cannot impose their opinion. History, thus, is left to the fate of free market. Western liberal democracy became the basis of the FRG constitution. Parliamentarism and state of law were expected to become the fundament of norms and values, with reference to the sessions in the Paulskirche at Frankfurt am Main in 1948. In the first phase of

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417 J. Rüsen, *Pamięć o Holocauście*, op. cit., p. 421.

418 Ibidem, p. 422.

419 N. Frei, *Adenauer’s Germany...*, op. cit., p. XIV.

development of the West German state, in the atmosphere of social disorientation, no coherent formula of memory was found. The first decade of the FRG has been called “the time without history” ever since.

Both German states still deal with the question of an alternative. Was there any other possibility of converting millions of Nazi activists to democracy? Could one expect that the crowds of ‘fellow travellers’, who adjusted to the terror of the Third Reich, would become convinced democrats in one day? The question whether temporary disqualification was the necessary element of social education has not become obsolete. It is impossible to say whether it increased their willingness to participate in the life of the new democratic state. The compromised society could not be converted to democracy without a period of quarantine, even if it was imperfect and full of errors.

### The return of history

Turning points in manifesting the new historical consciousness did not occur suddenly. The events that signalled the advent of the new could only be recognised *post factum*. They were embedded in the changing political climate of West Germany and its neighbours. In the late 1950s, one could observe new emphases in the attitude to the past. The Nazi system of values and the expectation of clear cutting off from the past were losing importance. One could more often hear criticism of the prevailing means of dealing with the past, which was related to certain stability reached by West Germany at the time. On 5 May 1955, the Paris-Bonn conventions came into force. The state of occupation was officially ended and the Federal Republic of Germany obtained the full authority of a sovereign state, with the reservations included in the conventions. On 7 May West Germany was admitted to the Western European Union and on 9 May, to NATO. In the same year Adenauer visited Moscow, which resulted in establishing diplomatic relations with the Soviet Union and the release of 10,000 German war prisoners and 20,000 deportees. It was the period of apogee for Adenauer. West Germans saw themselves as a full-fledged partner of the Western community. The FRG was internationally acknowledged and the dynamic economy and the well-functioning state ensured the loyalty of the citizens. The successes were associated with prosperity. Unemployment fell from 11% in 1950 to 1.3% in 1960, and the mental space began to be filled with a positive German history.

At the same time, international tensions, the erection of the Berlin Wall on 13 August 1961 and intensification of the Cold War polarised the political scene. Between 1958 and 1963 there was a turning point in the interpretation of the German question. The shock related to the Berlin Wall contributed to the crisis of

the idea of re-unification of Germany. In the late 1960s and early 1970s, due to the new policy of the SPD/FDP coalition, the conditions for a more self-critical reflection on the Nazi past were created and the window to the East was opened. There was a chance to note that millions of World War II victims were living on the other side of the Iron Curtain, whose pain and losses had not yet been noticed.

Germany was entering the period in which the debates on the past for the first time involved not only the attention of media but also the general public. The German question, the identity of the nation and the interpretation of the past formed a Gordian Knot that the representatives of different political and spiritual orientations tried to solve in their own ways. An intriguing intellectual and political problem was the question of which forms and deformations of the German image of the past were relevant under the new conditions. The questions of the relationships between national consciousness and history were troubling. Historians were trying to reach a new diagnosis. They were concerned that the young generation of Germans did not refer to the national issues. Modernity and technology drew the attention to the future. When history seemed to surrender, sociologists, political scientists and historians initiated debates about its future. The prose of life, focus on everyday life and technocracy were blamed for the loss of history. A young historian, Wolfgang J. Mommsen, gave a diagnosis in 1961: “dissatisfaction with history, being tired of history, escape from history: yes, they are gaining appreciation in the public consciousness. Historical knowledge, both of the educated environment and the masses is shrinking and, and more importantly, losing its prestige.”<sup>420</sup>

The disputes of the 1960s developed in the atmosphere of searching for new ways and new guide-posts. The journalistic debates referred to as ‘the scandal over Jaspers’, ‘the controversies over Fischer’s theories’ and the disputes in 1961, 1965, 1969 and 1979 over the statute of limitations of the Nazi crimes created conditions for the change of the paradigm of thinking of the Nazi past.<sup>421</sup> Karl Jaspers, the 77-year-old laureate of the Peace Prize of the German Book Trade in 1958, in a television interview given to Thilo Koch on 10 August 1960 before six million viewers, acknowledged the primacy of freedom over unity and declared that the desire for reunification of Germany is “unrealistic in terms of politics and philosophy”. He found that the Bismarck nation state, which was reasonable and had a great chance of success in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, was buried by the Third

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420 W.J. Mommsen, *Historisches Denken der Gegenwart*, in: W. Besson (ed.), *Geschichte*, Frankfurt a. M. 1961, p. 93.

421 See e.g. E. Wolfrum, *Geschichtspolitik in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland. Der Weg der bundesrepublikanischen Erinnerung 1948-1990*, Darmstadt 1999; P. Bock, E. Wolfrum (eds.), *Umkämpfte Vergangenheit*, Göttingen 1999.

Reich.<sup>422</sup> He publically confirmed the essence of his speech in Paulskirche on 28 September 1958 when he rejected the work of the founder of the German Reich: “Today, under new world powers, with the state of the world completely transformed, the Bismarck state is entirely a thing of the past. If we continue to live in such a way as if it could become reality once again, then we are allowing the ghosts of the past to feed on the blood of the present, preventing us from understanding the real dangers and the great opportunities of the future.”<sup>423</sup> Jaspers, whose reflections were printed and discussed in the most important West German newspapers, convinced the readers that it was impossible to come to terms with the past. According to the author, Germans should take the responsibility for the past. Jaspers condemned Bismarck’s work and the top-down process of the unification of Germany. The speech of the German philosopher, teaching at the university in Switzerland, brought controversies that lasted for weeks. A large number of people who questioned his intentions considered him to be a traitor of national interests. All political parties protested against the philosopher’s theses. In the end, the debate focused on the ‘temporary character’ of the FRG. It was the conflict between the supporters of the ‘West German homeland’ and ‘the real, unified German homeland.’

The question of the nation state of 1871-1945, which, due to Jasper’s speech, became the subject of a heated debate for the first time since the beginning of the FRG, took a new dimension after Fritz Fischer’s ‘provocation’. The book by the Hamburg historian, *Germany’s Aims in the First World War (Griff nach der Weltmacht)*, released in 1961, contributed to a change in understanding history. Fischer challenged the German national approach of historians who undermined the theory of Germany’s blame for the outbreak of World War I. His devastating critique of the policy of the Reich before and after World War I broke the national consensus around the separation of the history of the German Empire from the Third Reich and challenged the traditional “national narrative”.

Fischer touched a sensitive area of German historiography: the objectives of the war. He showed German imperialism in its aggressive mode, and, this way, fell out of favour with the historians of the war generation. The major campaign against Fischer’s theories was launched by Gerhard Ritter, who called the writings of his opponent a “penchant for political masochism”.<sup>424</sup> While Fischer managed

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422 See: *Nur Freiheit – allein darauf kommt es an*; FAZ 17.08.1960 oraz *Der Streit um Jaspers*; *Die Zeit* 19.08.1960.

423 After: H.A. Winkler, *The Long Road West*, vol. 2: 1933-1990, Oxford 2007, p. 161.

424 Compare: K.H. Jarausch, *Der nationale Tabubruch. Wissenschaft, Öffentlichkeit und Politik in der Fischer-Kontroverse*, in: M. Sabrow, R. Jessen, K. Große Kracht (eds.), *Zeitgeschichte als Streitgeschichte. Große Kontroversen nach 1945*, Bremen 2003, pp. 20-40.

to guide over 100 PhD students, including Immanuel Geiss, his most faithful follower, Ritter could only count on the colleagues of his own generation, e.g. Egmont Zechlin, Karl Dietrich Erdmann, Erwin Hölzle. The climax of the debate was on the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of World War I, during the Berlin historical congress in October 1964, where Fischer presented his theses to over 2,000 listeners in Auditorium Maximum.

This time, the debate crossed the borders of the discipline. The public opinion also divided into two hostile camps. Conservative media stood on the side of the defenders of national historical strategy. Leftist journalists and intellectuals supported Fischer in his criticism of the traditional interpretation of history. This historical dispute spread wider and became a political dispute. Konrad H. Jarausch notes that the two aspects are closely related. The disputes over German guilt in World War I and the casual relationship between the Second and Third Reich included the contemporary attitude to the national question and identity of the democratic state. The stake was liberalisation of the spiritual climate of West German contemporaneity. The older generation of historians attempted to defend the dignity of the nation after the two great defeats. Younger colleagues and critics wanted to strengthen democracy through education and critical revision of historical images. Fritz Fischer's theory that "imperial Germany's foreign policy was only a preface to Adolf Hitler's politics and that one can observe a direct continuation of the German foreign policy that aimed to conquer the world, which started a few decades before the war and lasted until 1919" also encountered political resistance.

In response to the words of the Hamburg historian, in 1964 the president of the Bundestag, Eugen Gerstenmaier, warned his compatriots against the loss of national consciousness as a result of self-blame. The chairman of CDU/CSU, Franz Josef Strauß, summoned the federal government to "strengthen all available measures and capabilities and agree to draw the attention to this centre of gravity." He wanted to "fight, starting from today, all the unconscious and sometimes conscious actions aimed at dissolving Western community and destroying German history and the image of Germany."<sup>425</sup> Strauß also advised that Germany's sole blame for World War II should not be applied to the case of World War I. The new FRG chancellor Ludwig Erhard asserted in his radio speech in 1914 that neither of the German governments deliberately aimed to wage war. Fischer, as an 'intellectual dissident' was refused funds that he had been earlier granted for a journey to the USA for a series of lectures. This decision resulted in protests by American universities. The situation was no longer an expert debate but the

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425 After: I. Geiss, *Die Fischer-Kontroverse. Ein kritischer Beitrag zum Verhältnis zwischen Historiographie und Politik in der Bundesrepublik*, in: idem, *Studien über Geschichte und Geschichtswissenschaft*, Frankfurt a. M. 1972, p. 108.

stigmatisation of a historian whose theory did not correspond with the political awareness and images of the past.

Fischer's strong attitude forced one to ask a difficult question about the legitimisation of the German nation state. Fischer's theories and the debate they started significantly contributed to developments in the culture of memory. His book broke one of the greatest taboos in German history, even if it also radicalised the conflict, forcing the defenders of the national pantheon to strengthen their positions. His attitude was the forecast of a climate change. A generational change occurred and the prevailing, national-apologist image of German history gave way to revisions of historiography and of the interpretation of the past. Political and historical pluralisation was increasing. The era of Christian-democratic vision of German politics was ending and the social-democratic epoch was approaching.

History also reached the average citizen. Bundestag debates about the statute of limitations of the Nazi crimes and, most of all, the spectacular trials of the criminals, were new history lessons. In 1958 in Ulm, ten former members of Gestapo, SS and police stood before a court accused of the murder of 5,500 Jewish men, women and children around the Lithuanian-German border in the period from June to September 1941. In the years 1960-1961, Eichmann's trial took place in Jerusalem. In 1963-1964, the executioners from Auschwitz stood trial in Frankfurt am Main; 360 witnesses, including 211 camp survivors, were questioned during 20 months. The Krumei and Hunsche trial in 1964, the Belzec Trial in 1965, the Treblinka and Sobibor trials in 1965 and 1966<sup>426</sup>: such a shocking and painful dose of information from eyewitnesses and victims led to confrontation with the community of memory. Silence was no longer possible. Thanks to the work of the Central Office of the State Justice Administrations for the Investigation of National Socialist Crimes, 167 criminal proceedings were held in the years 1961-1968. Articles and media commentaries that accompanied the trials focused the attention of the average citizen on the most brutal chapters of German history. The texts did not let their readers be indifferent.

The change of political climate in the 1960s, the wave of anti-Semitic scandals, repercussions of the abovementioned trials, the emergence of the parliamentary opposition (APO), the protests of leftist youth against the conservatism of the establishment in the Adenauer era: they all fostered intellectual ferment. The notion of fascism became a weapon for the protesting youth against the generation of their fathers. At the same time, the successes of the NPD, a neo-Nazi party that promoted 'healthy nationalism', made it necessary to defend democracy. In 1966, a great coalition replaced the Christian-Democratic government and in 1969 social democrats and liberals took power for the first time. The chancellor Willy Brandt's

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426 See e.g. G. Werle, T. Wandres, *Auschwitz vor Gericht. Völkermord und bundesdeutsche Straffjustiz*, München 1995.

Eastern Policy and his symbolic kneeling (Warschauer Kniefall) at the foot of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising monument provided a new climate and direction for historical reflection. The social democratic chancellor, a credible witness of history and a member of the resistance movement, shifted the emphasis in comparison to Adenauer. Brandt perceived himself as a chancellor of “not defeated but liberated Germany”. Although the chancellor’s attitude met with serious criticism by the opposition, the Third Reich became at the time a permanent element of the image of German history. Perceived earlier as a monolith, its structures and elites were now noticed. The theory of totalitarianism had to compete with other theories of interpreting Nazism. Old elites faced new challenges. One had to refer to the youth protests and the new dimension of Eastern Policy.<sup>427</sup>

The student movement in the second half of the 1960s drew public attention to the generational problems in perceiving the past. Belonging to a generation, as Karl Mannheim noted in the 1920s, does not mean chronological synchronism. A generation is a group of individuals of similar ages whose members share “location in a socio-historical structure” and “certain definite modes of behaviour, feeling, and thought”. It is “participation in a common fate”.<sup>428</sup> The German generation of 1926-1929 is called a generation of anti-aircraft warfare helpers (*Flakhelfergeneration*) or a silent generation. As opposed to the generation of their fathers, the generation born at the end of the war or after it, called an unbiased generation (*unbefangene Generation*), was not socialized by the Nazi regime. The sons, unburdened with the direct experience of crimes, had, however, the opportunity to learn history from their family and closed ones. The generation of 1968, called the ‘counter-generation’ made their parents’ history their own. Only the third generation may feel free from psychological, social and biographical burden.<sup>429</sup>

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427 In the eyes of many, Willy Brandt did not deserve respect. He was not a Wehrmacht soldier, he did not serve his duty to the homeland, he could not share his experiences or join the collective remembering of the combatants. Hence the remark of Franz Josef Strauß: “We should ask Mr Brandt one thing: what did you do outside Germany for 12 years?” See: H. Potthoff, *Die Auseinandersetzung der SPD und der Gewerkschaften mit dem NS-System und dem Holocaust*, in: W. Bergmann, R. Erb, A. Lichtblau (eds.), *Schwieriges Erbe. Der Umgang mit Nationalsozialismus in Österreich, der DDR und der Bundesrepublik Deutschland*, Frankfurt a. M. 1995, p. 126.

428 After: A. Schildt, *Die Eltern auf der Anklagebank? Zur Thematisierung der NS-Vergangenheit im Generationenkonflikt der bundesrepublikanischen 1960er Jahre*, in: C. Cornelißen, L. Klinkhammer, W. Schwentker (eds.), *Erinnerungskulturen. Deutschland, Italien und Japan seit 1945*, Köln 2004, pp. 317-332. Compare also: H. Fogt, *Politische Generationen. Empirische Bedeutung und theoretisches Modell*, Opladen 1982.

429 H. Bude, *Die Achtundsechziger-Generation im Familienroman der Bundesrepublik*, in: H. König (ed.), *Vertuschte Vergangenheit. Der Fall Schwerte und die NS-Vergangenheit*



The research about the attitude of young people to the past, conducted in 1961-1962, demonstrated two tendencies. The youth expected more matter-of-factness and knowledge of the past. They expressed the opinion that their parents were not objective while teachers did not have enough courage to interpret the past in the right way.<sup>430</sup> The essays of students and young people aged 10-23 about Hitler and his times that were published in the 1970s confirm the theory that historical education did not meet elementary standards. The students described Hitler as “the king of the Netherlands”, “the president of the FRG, all armies and colonies”, “the successor of the emperor Wilhelm”, “the chief of NATO”, “the leader of German democracy”, “the chancellor of the FRG”, “the one who helped Germans stand on their feet after the war”, “the greatest personality in the history of the world”, and “the one whose greatest achievement was the persecution of Jews”. Hitler gassed Jews and the mentally ill only because “he wanted to relieve Germany from all the dirt” and “wanted to have a clean country.” “He arrived in Germany in 1900, and in 1905 he declared war against the Americans”, “he wanted good for Germany” and “lost because it was snowing in Russia.”<sup>431</sup>

The approach to history changed only when the consensus of the early years of West Germany collapsed. The protests of the young generation in 1968 revealed differences in the understanding of history. The student rebellion mobilised and polarised historical consciousness, which revealed forcefully the extent to which history is politics. The young generation asked different questions and looked for different answers. The ‘68 generation changed the political climate of the FRG. This generation’s ideological and political origin has been the subject of extensive research. The consequences of the student rebellion, called the anti-authoritarian revolution, have been critically and thoroughly discussed. Here, I will only focus on how this revolution referred to the pasts of the parents and imprinted itself on the German culture of memory. One of the leaflets on 1968 expressed the revolutionary style: “Our patience must now end: let us end with the fact that the Nazi racist instigators, murderers of Jews, murderers of Slavs, choppers of socialists, all the Nazi shit is spreading its stench on our generation.”<sup>432</sup>

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*der deutschen Hochschulen*, München 1997, pp. 287-300; idem, *Vom Altern einer Generation. Die Jahrgänge 1938-1948 als “68-er”*, Frankfurt a. M. 1995.

430 W. Jaide, *Das Verhältnis der Jugend zur Politik. Empirische Untersuchungen zur politischen Anteilnahme und Meinungsbildung junger Menschen der Geburtsjahrgänge 1940-1946*, Neuwied, Berlin 1964, after: A. Schildt, op. cit., pp. 321-322.

431 D. Boßmann (ed.), *“Was ich über Adolf Hitler gehört habe...” Folgen eines Tabus: Auszüge aus Schüler-Aufsätzen von heute*, Frankfurt a. M. 1977. Quotations from the chapters: *Hitlers Ämter, Politischer Werdegang, Der Zweite Weltkrieg*.

432 J. Kölsch, *Politik und Gedächtnis. Zur Soziologie funktionaler Kultivierung von Erinnerung*, Wiesbaden 2000, p. 87.



The student protest negated almost everything that made up the twenty years of achievements of the Federal Republic. The generational conflict became to a large extent a political problem. Wars and conflicts in the world, particularly the Vietnam War, activated the youth in protest against the barbarity of the contemporary world and drew attention to the barbarity that had been unaccounted for. Left-oriented intellectuals, with all the radicalism of youth, turned against the war generation and their 'community of silence'. The politically engaged writer Bernward Vesper, the son of a Volk poet who was involved in Nazism, sharply articulated the anxiety of his time and the burden of the past when he wrote: "Yes, I knew exactly I was Hitler (...), that I would not release myself from it, that this was a life and death struggle, poisoning my life. His damned existence stuck to mine like napalm and even if I intended to do something completely different, visit Inca tombs or sit at the foot of Himalayas and await dawn, and I 'do nothing while my nation changes', I must try to extinguish the burning flame; but this is not Hitler but my father, my childhood, my experience, ME..."

The outright reckoning with the past performed by these intellectuals, particularly their interpretation of fascism from a communist perspective, had also a reverse side: it hindered objective analysis of the causes and consequences of the German participation in the implementation of the criminal project. The gesture of Beate Klarsfeld remained a symbol of radicalism. The German woman from Berlin, who married a French Jew in 1963, spoke of her parents' generation: "I felt these people were hiding something from others and from themselves. I was too young and I did not have enough knowledge to guess what it was. Maybe their conscience was uncomfortable with the indifference to human suffering that they did not want to see in their comfortable lives? If they noticed it, they would need to react, which would disturb their peace of mind. They preferred to remain passive. There were millions of such people."<sup>433</sup> After slapping the chancellor Kurt Georg Kiesinger during the CDU congress in Berlin in 1968, and calling him a fascist (during the war Kiesinger was the head of the propaganda department in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs; he was released after the war with allegations of complicity in Nazi crimes), Klarsfeld explained her gesture saying that Kiesinger's conversion to Christian democracy was a "cunning ruse". She considered his presence in the government a disgrace for Germany. Klarsfeld was sentenced to year and a half in prison. The severity of the sentence in comparison with minor sentences in the Frankfurt Auschwitz trials, which did not evoke any response of prominent politicians, led to "intensification of the conflict and strengthened the belief, particularly of some young people, that at least a part of the older

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433 *Wýgrane bitwy*. An interview with Beate and Serge Klarsfeld, called the hunters of Nazi criminals, about love and justice; polityka. pl/ historia.

generation had learned nothing and, despite the declarations, had not become real democrats.<sup>434</sup>

The anarchist youth questioned the norms and values of the war generation. However, pillorying the whole generation equally for the construction of the criminal Nazi system and the capitalist state deprived the contesters' criticism of rationality. The definition of National Socialism as the "most developed form of imperialism", based on communist ideology, could not be accepted in West German society. The radical and outright evaluation of the past led, in extreme cases, to the questioning of the German nation and its culture. There are no studies that could prove that the leftist movement of the 1960s has influenced the development of knowledge of the Nazi past. However, it has certainly impacted to a large extent the political and ideological atmosphere of the FRG. It raised the problem of intergenerational communication and the transmission of war experiences. It also drew attention to the question of ideological confrontation and to the fact that anti-communism was not sufficient as a form of evaluation of the Eastern nations. Young radicals of the left considered anti-communism to be a substitute ideology that prevented or even justified leaving aside the uncomfortable past. They shocked but also sensitised the general public by violating widely accepted taboos.

There were moments in the 1960s and 1970s when the disputes about the past intensified. They were generated by different actors and groups; the inspirations were top-down and bottom-up. The debates in the Bundestag on the statute of limitations between 1960 and 1979 provided an opportunity for actors to demonstrate their political attitude to the past. The arguments of different political camps collided. Christian Democrats usually promoted the view that "earthly justice" would not suffice. A dominating belief in 1960 was that whatever could be done in terms of law had been already done. Another debate in the Bundestag on 10 March 1965 was held under the watchful eye of international public opinion, concerned with the successes of the neo-Nazi NPD party and numerous manifestations of anti-Semitism in Germany. Some MPs believed that 'true' perpetrators were no longer to be found in the FRG. Thomas Dehler (FDP) said: "Before God and conscience, there is something more than the statute of limitations. There is forgiveness. I cannot imagine any of the perpetrators who were guilty in those mad times who would not express regret today. (...) The perpetrators are different people now; time has changed them."<sup>435</sup> A similar point of view was represented by the CDU/CSU MP,

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434 Julia Kölsch quotes an opinion of Hermann Korte, *Eine Gesellschaft im Aufbruch. Die Bundesrepublik Deutschland in den sechziger Jahren*, Frankfurt a. M. 1987, p. 41.

435 *Presse- und Informationszentrum des Deutschen Bundestages* (ed.), *Zur Verjährung nationalsozialistischer Verbrechen*. Dokumentation der parlamentarischen Bewältigung des Problems 1960-1979, part. 1, Bonn 1980, p. 278.

Richard Jaeger, in the debate of 1979: “When I think about the murderers in the times of National Socialism, I believe society does not need protection against them any longer. (...) The perpetrators of the regime murdered only under the particular circumstances of the regime; they would not do it in a normal society. Therefore, there is no need to scare anybody. Anyway, the rehabilitation of the offenders has fulfilled its task.”<sup>436</sup>

Some politicians were certain that giving the difficult task to the legal system was equal to solving the problem of coming to terms with the past. The German sociologist Niklas Luhmann, who developed the theory of social communication, called this kind of message (in this case, a law promising to solve a difficult issue) a symbolic policy. Such a focus on the result, which promises more than it actually gives, can be treated as a ritual. The American political scientist Murray J. Edelman notes that in international diplomacy there are known cases when “publicized release of some prisoners is repeatedly depicted as a signal of progress toward guaranteeing human rights, even if torture, murder or imprisonment of political opponents continue.”<sup>437</sup>

The debates that led to political decisions on the prosecution of crimes were each time an attempt to achieve a balance between pragmatism and morality. Politicians wanted to defend their moral integrity. The final decision concerning the statute of limitations, which was made in 1979, came after fresh experiences with left-wing terrorism. The debates that made up the final result only confirmed the words of the then German Chancellor Helmut Schmidt that “in an open society, there cannot be a single image of history. Each of the two times in this century, two short periods in which Germans believed that they took possession of the ‘correct’ image of history, each of these times, we and the world went down very badly. These were the images corresponding to the Nazi ideology”<sup>438</sup>.

The 1970s, when the crisis of progress of the industrial society became the central topic and the economic miracle lost its magnetic impact, created conditions that facilitated asking about the quality of democracy. There was also a doubt whether it was possible to be a democrat without a dialogue with the past. Society lost self-confidence. Front pages of newspapers and magazines covered subjects related to public morality and identity of the divided nation. In this climate, in the years 1978-1979, an American four-part film called *Holocaust* was broadcast on West German television. To this day, the film is remembered as a great media event, the first that aroused great excitement and provoked a debate that exceeded

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436 Ibidem, part. II, p. 393.

437 M. Edelman, *Constructing the Political Spectacle*, Chicago, 1988, p. 24.

438 *Texte zur Deutschlandpolitik*, series II, vol. 5, Bonn 1979, p. 17. See also: H. Lübke, *Zur Identitätspräsentationsfunktion von Historie*, in: O. Marquard, K. Stierle (eds.), *Identität*, München 1979.

generation limits. Each part was watched by 10 to 13 million viewers over 14 years old, which was equal to 31-40% of the audience. The discussions held after each episode, and encouragement to the viewers to call the studio increased the number of questions and commentaries. According to the WDR (Westdeutscher Rundfunk) archive, more than 10,000 calls from viewers were registered up to 31 January 1979.<sup>439</sup> There is insufficient research on the impact of film on the collective consciousness and group memory. However, there is a lot of data that allows one to roughly assess the interest in the subject of the film.

Those who decided to watch the American movie spent about seven hours with three fictional German and Jewish families whose lives were intertwined. The characters of the drama were different figures and roles of the Nazi period: a murdered Jewish family and a German witness of the deportation and murder of Jews who always looked away, but finally confessed: "I saw what happened, and I did nothing. We must admit that we are all guilty." One of the characters was also a member of the resistance movement against the regime and an associate of Reinhard Heydrich.

In April 1978, German TV producers, Peter Märthesheimer, Heine Werner Hübner and Günter Rohrbach initiated talks with NBC regarding the purchase of copyrights. The motivation of their endeavours was interesting: "We were accused, not only abroad (...) of cowardice, of following the general trend to avoid discussions and leave the past aside; we are accused that although recently we have been speaking a lot about terrorism and what to do to fight it, the subject of the trials of the concentration camps criminals (...) is still too far away."<sup>440</sup> The producers said openly at a press conference that they were critical about the film; that it often ignored and simplified some things. However, they believed that due to its emotional impact the film should be seen by the German audience.

The purchase of the film was a political decision. The TV director H.W. Hübner spoke of the criticism he met in Germany and the necessity of explaining why the series should be watched in the FRG. When it comes to Hübner, he perceived the WDR initiative as a duty to young people whose knowledge of the Holocaust was rudimentary. Aware of the fundamental communicative role of the media, he pointed at the possibility of stimulating a discussion, which is an important element of developing an attitude to the past. The public opinion was not informed that the final sequences of the film, in which the German character speaks about the complicity of all Germans, were cut out by the German broadcasters. The decision

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439 S. Brandt, "Wenig Anschauung?" *Die Ausstrahlung des Films "Holocaust" im westdeutschen Fernsehen (1978/79)*, in: C. Cornelißen, L. Klinkhammer, W. Schwentker (eds.), *Erinnerungskulturen. Deutschland, Italien und Japan seit 1945*, Frankfurt a. M. 2004, pp. 257-268.

440 *Ibidem*, p. 259.

was explained as follows: “In our opinion, the scene with Kurt and Marta Dorf, which reflects the problem of complicity that is central to our country, should have a more appropriate and powerful ending.”<sup>441</sup> The order of some scenes was also changed.

Regardless of this censorship, which some explained with society’s latent anti-Semitism and the fear of the rising tide of the right-wing extremism movement, the movie met the expectations of the initiators of the whole project. Research for the WRD and the ‘Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung’ (Centre for Political Education) has shown that for 80% of the viewers, the film was a deep emotional experience that initiated discussions among families and friends. 51% admitted that the film broadened their knowledge. Some encountered the problem of the Holocaust for the first time and said that only after the broadcast of the film did they believe that the number of 6,000,000 victims was not fabricated. While before the broadcast 51% of the respondents believed that war criminals should no longer be prosecuted, the number decreased to 35% after it.<sup>442</sup>

However, researchers of public opinion warned Germans against euphoria. Those who best responded to the film were young people between 14 and 19 years old but in older generations there were many who believed that the film would harm the perception of Germans abroad. Although the film, regarded as a turning point in the process of the development of German consciousness, did not radically change West Germans’ image of history, it did provide an impulse for greater interest and intellectual and emotional work on the subject.

Experts on media and their impact on the human mind warned, however, that despite a temporary stir, the emotions provoked by film or literary fiction could never replace authentic reflection. An emotional experience may make an impression of sympathy and solidarity with victims but it can also be a “dangerous simulation.”<sup>443</sup> Bernd Mosebach warned his readers: “The danger lies in making the mourning a provoked memory, an individual experience of loss. But this mourning is untrue, because it is directed at the observer without the recipient-partner: it will disappear when the fiction is over, as quickly as it once came. What will remain? Maybe a feeling of release, a feeling that something was experienced together, something that, as fiction, does not exist. The allegation remains: the impression of participation, co-experience and compassion with the victims, but this is a dangerous illusion.”<sup>444</sup>

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441 Ibidem, p. 260.

442 Ibidem, p. 263.

443 B. Mosebach pointed to this fact in this review of the reception of *Schindler’s List*; B. Mosebach, *Gedenken ohne Ende oder Ende des Gedenkens?*; *Die neue Gesellschaft/ Frankfurter Hefte* 3, 1995, p. 219.

444 Ibidem.

## Patriotism after Auschwitz

German cultural memory was developing under external and internal political impulses. Unlike other post-fascist countries that were supported by the nation-state, the division of Germany and the disqualification of nationalism by Nazism questioned the value and meaning of patriotism as indispensable support of the legitimacy of the new state and national identity. As the FRG was gradually being recognised as a credible partner in the Western European community with successes in the international field, its citizens were increasingly burdened with a discrepancy between the need to be proud of their homeland and the compulsion to confess guilt and distance themselves from national issues, as dictated by political correctness. The question whether and how can one be a patriot after Auschwitz interested not only intellectuals. The extent to which the memory of the Holocaust impacts the condition of national consciousness and the relationship between German collective memory and collective identity are questions that have been a subject of intense study by different branches of science for at least two decades.

For a long time, the notion of ‘patriotism’ could not function without an adjective. Thus, in historiography and in public debates, patriotism was ‘revolutionary’, ‘libertarian’, ‘enlightened’, ‘national’, ‘post-national’, ‘cosmopolitan’, ‘democratic’, ‘economic’, ‘constitutional’ and ‘European.’ The complicated road for Germans to their own nation state made the mutual relations between the state and the nation a subject of heated political debates, literary narratives, aesthetic and emotional experiences. “Perhaps it will be regarded as a blot on my escutcheon, but I have no concept of the love for the fatherland, and it appears to me a heroic weakness that I gladly dispense with”, the great German philosopher Gotthold Ephraim Lessing stated in the times when the territory of the Reich consisted of 250 lay and clergy principalities, 50 free cities, and 1,500 estates of chivalry that no one associated with a ‘German homeland’.<sup>445</sup> The cosmopolitanism of the Enlightenment did not consider patriotism to be a virtue.

After the unification of ‘little Germany’ in 1871 under the leadership of Prussia, the ‘late nation’ was diligently catching up with the lesson in nationalism. The sense of failure due to the lack of genuine unity of spirit and culture and the disappointment of the supporters of the vision of ‘Great Germany’ made Germans fight for the ‘great space’. On 6 December 1897, Bernhard von Bülow, Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs of the German Empire expressed the opinion of all political groups saying: “We’re not going to keep anyone in the shade, but also we require a place under the sun”. Only very few sensed the cadaverous smell of ‘national acts’. In response to a survey concerning patriotism published in a Parisian journal on the eve of World War I, an anonymous reader replied that

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445 After: W. Krauss, *Studien zur deutschen und französischen Aufklärung*, Berlin 1963.

the German homeland means that “the German stomach can digest as much as possible” and that “peace of the process of digestion is guarded by a strong soldier”.

The use that was made of the German nation state made its neighbours associate the concept of ‘German people’ and ‘German homeland’ almost exclusively with violence and expansionism. The short interwar period only confirmed the fears of the neighbours. Hitler, as the German-born Romance scholar Victor Klemperer noted, led to the “holiest collective selfishness expressed in the idea of a nation.” No other notion was surrounded with so many lies and false, fervent appeals. ‘The Nation’ was added as a pinch of salt to each ideological and political dish.

The politics of Nazi Germany compromised the German homeland for good. The greatest success of Nazi propaganda was that it provided the nation, humiliated after World War I, and the average citizen, alienated in the industrialised world, with the promise of a national bond and harmony. ‘National community’ (*Volksgemeinschaft*) became the central notion of the Third Reich. Hitler’s paladins promised much more than an ordinary collective identity. The community was believed to provide a sense of belonging to something bigger than one’s own self. This exclusive community included past generations, heroic deeds and Germanic virtues and reached beyond the ‘narrow’ territory of the Reich. The spiritual bond was believed to unite Germanness of the whole world. Members of this community felt elevated. Outside the *Volksgemeinschaft* were only strangers. A lack of German roots would result in the verdict of exclusion while the almost mythical bond with German nature and landscape could restore humanity.

This community of enthusiasm did not *de facto* mean love but rather an imposed bond with the homeland, a feeling that paralysed all moral and spiritual responsibility. Perceiving the nation in terms of race and blood entailed the necessity of having an enemy, making the nation a community of passion. This way, a ‘man in the street’ could consider the state to be his property. Some soldiers’ letters from the Eastern Front confirm the effectiveness of the Nazi teachings. A new homeland demanded destruction of the enemy, which was expected to be brought about not only by theoretical construction of the Nazi elite, but by everyday nationalism of racial purity and the sense of superiority over other nations. Feldwebel Eduard E. explicated in a letter to his family, written at Christmas 1941 in Ukraine, why the “Jewish scum” justified the “German mission” in the East. Civilisational and cultural diversity of the vast areas of Russia strengthened German self-esteem. One of the soldiers reported: “Here in Russia, in the paradise of misery, one can see better the beauty of our German fatherland: how great and valuable is our German culture, which our enemies want to destroy”. At the same time, Lieutenant Paul D. wrote: “Should you look in their face at least once, you would have no doubt



that if the Mongol hordes defeated us, Europe, the way it is today, would cease to exist. They are beasts and one should not bother with them.”<sup>446</sup>

As a result of the policy of the Third Reich, ‘nation’ and ‘national community’ buckled under the weight of the crime, which determined the traumatic psyche of the Germans. The notion of patriotism after 1945 was expelled to exile. The division of Germany and the associated rift between the state and the nation resulted in a permanent crisis of identity for citizens of both countries. Patriotism became synonymous with aggressive nationalism and nationalist rhetoric is, as Erich Maria Remarque noted in *The Night in Lisbon*<sup>447</sup>: “as if someone had lifted up a big stone – all the vermin came scurrying out. At last they had found a lot of big words to make their meanness and vulgarity look like something else.”

One could observe complete disorientation. The sense of collapse of the entire world of values, loss of self-confidence and fear of the opinion of the outside world were the factors that made Germans lose the compass that would tell them who they were, where they were going and where the German Fatherland was. Shortly after the war, the German historian Wilhelm Röpke expressed this confusion asking: “How is it that the central country of Europe, fatally for itself and for Europe, again and again plays a lone hand in the intellectual and political life of this continent, fighting against the spirit of the rest, and that many Germans seem even to be proud of playing this part, as rebels against Europe?”<sup>448</sup>

Intellectual and political elites of the old FRG persisted in searching for content that could unite society. Since recalling the recent past would bring shame, a new source of German pride needed to be found. Aside from ‘economic’ patriotism, what was expected to provide the reasons for satisfaction were the achievements of German parliamentarism and federalism and the opening of the Bonn Republic to Europe and the world. On 23 May 1979, on the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the enactment of the FRG constitution, the journalist Dolf Sternberger wrote in the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* editorial: “The national sentiment remains wounded; we do not live in a full Germany. But we live in a full constitution, a fully constitutional state, and that itself is a kind of fatherland. It is a good constitution that provides for all these things and for a powerful leadership. We do not have to be afraid to praise the Basic Law”<sup>449</sup>. In 1982, Sternberger confirmed his credo, wishing that he himself and his nation “find our place in our constitution, that we defend it with teeth and claws and do not hastily reject this security with the expectation

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446 S.O. Müller, *Die “Volksgemeinschaft” an der Ostfront: Der Vernichtungskrieg in Feldpostbriefen deutscher Soldaten*, in: idem, *Deutsche Soldaten und ihre Feinde. Nationalismus an Front und Heimatfront im Zweiten Weltkrieg*, Frankfurt a. M. 2007, p. 128-229.

447 E.M. Remarque, *The Night in Lisbon*, New York 1992, p. 73.

448 W. Röpke, *The German Question*, London, 1946 p. 119.

449 After H.A. Winkler, op. cit., p. 425.



that we can maintain freedom on our own. It does not exist anywhere else but in this armour! Also, let us not succumb to the temptation to reject the constitution because of the nation as a whole."<sup>450</sup>

The 'constitutional' patriotism was a useful but limited prosthesis. It was a substitute for national patriotism, but it taught respect for the democratic state as the guarantee of fundamental freedoms, tolerance and the tradition of the rule of law. The aim was not only the document of the Basic Law, but a system of values and order, which would be the azimuth for the Germans. Sternberger's idea was a result of the search for humanistic patriotism accepted by the democratic world. In the 1980s, it found considerable resonance in the public debate, causing numerous controversies. It divided the intellectual circles. Sceptics kept asking how much political solidarity and sense of belonging the liberal constitutional state could arouse. Could it be a binder that would integrate society?

People perceive themselves a community because they refer to a common past. However, they mainly think of famous ancestors whose glory they could dwell on. The construction of identity needs stability and sustainable points of support. Since the recent past is a burden, a segment of history with which one can identify must be found. East and West Germany, at various stages of their history, exhibited identification with their respective truncated states. East German pride relied, inter alia, on sporting achievements, social stabilization, and the position of women, while the West Germans manifested commitment to liberal democracy, economic successes and civilisational achievements. However, while until the 1970s the issues of national pride and patriotism only occasionally reached the public and became the subject of disputes, in the 1980s the subject could no longer be swept under the carpet.

Alongside the increase in interest in the subject of patriotism, the number of definitions and theories was also rising, although their usability was limited. Nationalism and patriotism are not clearly separated. Generally, the literature on the subject defines nationalism as a category that is distinguished by:

- idealisation of one's nation;
- feeling of national superiority;
- uncritical approval of the state's authority as the representation of the nation.

Patriotism, on the other hand, is distinguished by

- adherence to a universal, humanistic system of values;
- acceptance of democratic values
- acknowledgement of positive and negative properties of the nation.<sup>451</sup>

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450 D. Sternberger, *Patriotyzm konstytucyjny. Przemówienie z okazji 25. rocznicy Akademii Kształcenia Politycznego*, trans. L. Zyliński, in: *O kondycji Niemiec*, op. cit., p. 307.

451 See e.g. R. Kosterman, F. Seymour, *Toward a measure of patriotic and nationalistic attitudes*; *Political Psychology* 10, 1989, p. 257-274; A. Liphart, *Patterns of democracies: government forms and performance in thirty-six countries*, New Haven 1999.

Various premises give explanation for the sense of national belonging. A citizen who defines himself or herself as a 'healthy' nationalist accepts democratic conditions, and a patriot in certain circumstances becomes a chauvinist. Life often corrects the definitional boundaries. The findings of comparative studies bring into question the credibility of structured research systems and categories. Belonging to a nation does not always go hand in hand with identification with its history. The attitude to the past depends on the emotional attitude of an individual to the nation and on the strength of identification. When nationalists idealise their society and do not accept any ambivalence, they reject the negative elements of the history of their own nation. The question as to whether only nationalists do so remains.

The findings of empirical research demonstrate that those who idealise their own nation do not see themselves as perpetrators in history. Although they acknowledge the defeat of Germany in World War II, they also interpret the history of their own group in a particular way. The defeat is perceived as a starting point for a new beginning. For people with national pride, the nation is the basis of self-identification. They refer to economic achievements and successes in rebuilding the country. Patriotically oriented citizens admit to having a critical approach to the past. 'Criticism' means the work on the past of one's group and on the responsibility of the nation. They also feel a sense of guilt. People with a strongly nationalist attitude put the emphasis on the war period, but they do not connect it with National Socialism, dictatorship or the liability of Germans. The victim is only their own group and their own nationality. The discrepancy between theory and reality becomes apparent when it turns out that patriots do not think about the Holocaust more often than others. A lot of data indicates that those who are aware of what the extermination was and whose knowledge of this subject is consolidated can neither impartially identify themselves with Germans, nor are they able to deal with the discourse of shame-burdened history. Conscious memory of Auschwitz is not interrelated with the sense of national belonging, as this memory discredits national identity.<sup>452</sup>

In the German debate about patriotism and national identity in relation to the National Socialist past, one can find a wide range of interpretations, diagnoses and proposals to overcome the contradiction between the pride of the 'wounded nation' and the necessity of symbolic honouring of the victims of German genocide. The findings of the studies conducted in the 1980s by

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452 H.-A. Heinrich, *Die kollektiven Erinnerungen an die Shoah als Störfaktor nationaler Identität*, in: W. Bergem (ed.), *Die NS-Diktatur im deutschen Erinnerungsdiskurs*, Opladen 2003, pp. 59-80; C. Meier, *Vierzig Jahre nach Auschwitz. Deutsche Geschichtserinnerung heute*, München 1987; E. Angehrn, *Identität und Geschichte*, Berlin 1985.

Elizabeth Noelle-Neumann and Renate Köcher, working for the 'Institut für Demoskopie Allensbach', correspond with the spirit of the troubled times. The researchers came to conclusion that the German nation, in comparison to others, is distinguished by a broken identity, wounded pride, a lack of self-esteem and a lack of life satisfaction.<sup>453</sup> The authors associate pride in the homeland and nationality with the pride in one's family, children, job, trust in oneself and other people. They highlight the central role of family as an institution that transfers and continues basic values and an emotional, intergenerational bond. The analysis of German families led the researchers to conclude that unlike families in other Western states, German families are distinguished by unfamiliarity, coldness and distance between parents and children. According to Noelle-Neumann and Köcher, emotional satisfaction in the German family is strikingly low, and the lack of emotional bonds makes the transmission of values, loyalty and respect difficult.

Interpretation of the results is also interesting. The condition of the German family, according to researchers, results in uncertainty in political spheres. The lack of familial and generational bonds is mechanically transferred to a societal level. As a result of the family crisis, German democracy suffers and there is no acceptance of the nation state.<sup>454</sup> However, the authors failed to notice an important reason for the familial distance. According to Friedrich Tenbruck, "a mute generation of parents was silent not only about the past, but about all questions concerning one's place in the political and historical landscape. In the process, the parents were left with the closed-off and irritating result of an incomprehensible and unreasonable discrepancy between their personal motives and the political outcomes; the children were at first left de facto and morally with the dull feeling of an unjust and dark legacy."<sup>455</sup> This discrepancy between the private and the public sphere was difficult to overcome after the war: there was no appropriate form of communication. Uncertainty led to fears and a lack of trust.

Conservative politicians and supporting circles shared the two researchers' belief that historical fate and the totalitarianism of the Third Reich destroyed German self-esteem and satisfaction with the state and democracy. Noelle-Neumann and Köcher treat Germans as victims: "What do all the religious, moral, political and human values matter if in one century the power system has been

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453 E. Noelle-Neumann, R. Köcher, *Die verletzte Nation. Über den Versuch der Deutschen, ihren Charakter zu ändern*, Stuttgart 1987.

454 Ibidem.

455 F.H. Tenbruck, *Alltagsnormen und Lebensgefühle in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland*, in: R. Löwenthal, H.-P. Schwarz (eds.), *25 Jahre Bundesrepublik Deutschland – eine Bilanz*, Stuttgart 1974, p. 290. Translation after: G. Schwan, *Politics and Guilt: The Destructive Power of Silence*, Lincoln 2001, pp. 103-4.

changed four times? If not one, but two military defeats broke the pride? If a violent, perfectly organised totalitarian state combined idealism and anxiety, and if finally there was only one decision left to make during the war: to choose between love for the homeland and to consciously seek defeat in an evil war.<sup>456</sup> The war, the defeat and everything associated with them were treated by the authors as the irresistible fate that led the country, destroyed the idealism of the citizens of the state and kept them in constant fear. Noelle-Neumann and Köcher quoted a Swiss journalist, Roger de Weck, who was full of sympathy for the Germans, and about whom he expressed the opinion in 1984: “It seems to me that no other nation treated itself as unfavourably as Germans did.”<sup>457</sup>

The character of questions and the interpretation of answers leave no doubt. The authors are not interested in what Germans did to other nations but what burden the war imposed on their shoulders. The main subjects of interest are expulsions and escapes from Eastern areas, the humiliation of being occupied by the four powers, and the years of postwar poverty that most respondents identified as “the time when one was not happy”. Memories of this historic ballast are a burden for Germans, which must affect their attitude to the state and nation. There is no need for explicit conclusion, which imposes itself from the above analysis: in order to regain satisfaction with family life and restore national pride, one should end flagellation and humiliating, destructive work on the past.

Gesine Schwan argues with these theories, finding the causes of the German plight in poor communication between the war and post-war generations, which, in her view, resulted in emotional distance. Her standpoint is radically different from the position of Noelle-Neumann and Köcher. According to Schwan, silence about the war does not protect, does not calm down, and instead leads to negative consequences.<sup>458</sup> Schwan believes that “the silent treatment in the families lays the foundation for a syndrome of attitudes and psychic dispositions and values whose effect is frequently destructive – destructive to the familial atmosphere; relationship of trust between parents and children; to the handing down of moral attitudes and values supportive of democracy (...) to the sense of self and self-esteem; to trust in oneself and in strangers on the part of parents and – especially – the second and to some extent even the third generation; to the intellectual and emotional integrity of the second and third generations as autonomous person; to their willingness and opportunities to assume responsibility and practice individuality as well as cooperation, non-conformism and compromise; to their ability to enter into

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456 E. Noelle-Neumann, R. Köcher, op. cit., p. 35.

457 R. de Weck, *Die bedrückte Republik. Ein Schweizer sieht Deutschland. Zwischen Aufgeregtheit und Gleichmut*, *Die Zeit* 13.07.1984.

458 G. Schwan, op. cit.

commitments that are lasting, reliable, and grounded in reciprocity and in this way develop a stable and affirmative relationship to the common good".<sup>459</sup>

Schwan supports her theory of the destroying power of intergenerational silencing of the evil with the theories of psychologists and experts of the subject. After the Israeli psychoanalyst, Dan Bar-On, she lists the methods that lead to the healing of disturbed family relations. They are: moral integrity; acknowledgement of the facts and the role of the parents in the Nazi politics; understanding of the moral significance of participation in the Nazi system for the parents and for one's own moral responsibility; emotional participation and emotional conflict in the relationship between the parent-perpetrators and their children.<sup>460</sup>

Léon Wurmser, with reference to the Freudian theory, supports the abovementioned thesis: "Shame and guilt cause direct conflicts (...) they play a decisively important role in all unconscious internal struggles, and we cannot imagine the unceasing play of external, conscious conflicts without them, not only on an individual level, but in the life of entire cultures, societies, and political forces."<sup>461</sup> Guilt provokes fear of shame. Guilt brings shame, and handing it down to the next generations brings the sense of inferiority. Sons do not want to live with shame as the hump on their backs. Shame results in the sense of powerlessness and false identification, which must have measurable consequences for the political culture of society.

Overcoming silence is undoubtedly important for the core of society, the family, and for the people's mental and moral sensibility. For every democracy, open dialogue is of superior value. Democratic stability depends on many factors. It is hard to disagree with the theses of Noelle-Neumann and Köcher. Their interpretation of the results of public opinion polls assist the national conservative camp in pushing the idea of "making a clear cut with the past", which means to stop opening old wounds and to end with the neurosis of guilt and indicating German perpetration: all in order to become a good citizen and a German democrat. False assumptions of an overloaded psyche and consciousness of the Germans result from false conclusions about disrupted relationships in families and in society. Germans did not sprinkle ashes on their own heads after the war and did not walk in penitential bags, nor did their alleged blaming disturb the relationships in families and in society. The growing gap between the generations, which was observable not only in Germany but all over Western Europe, was, above all, the result of abrupt civilization and culture transformation processes.

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459 Ibidem, p. 110.

460 D. Bar-On, *Die Kinder der Holocaust-Täter und ihre Suche nach moralischer Identität; Integrative Therapie* issue 3, 1990, pp. 222-245.

461 L. Wurmser, *The Mask of Shame*, Baltimore 1981, p. 78.

It would be also hard to entirely agree with the idealistic interpretation of Gesine Schwan. Model theoretical assumption that theological demands – confessions of guilt, regret, repentance, forgiveness, reconciliation – correspond with the same order in social and political life is a wishful illusion. The fact that fathers did not talk to their children at the birthday table about their opportunism, cowardice, about crime and guilt cast a shadow over the entire process of the German dealing with past. But it would be impossible to demonstrate that it permanently disrupted the atmosphere in homes and made family relationships cold and distanced. How to prove that the children and grandchildren of fathers and grandfathers who never shared their war experiences with families were worse democrats who did not identify with their state? If the sincerity of intergenerational confessions about the past determined the durability of order created in the FRG in 1949, Germany would have to be crossed off the map of democratic Europe.

### Identity of a ‘normal’ nation

The climate of the 1980s established a particular framework for dealing with the past more intensively than ever. The left-wing and right-wing approaches to historical memory were increasingly polarising. One could observe ubiquitous ambivalence in the attitude to the nation, German unity, identity and integration of diverse images and visions of the history of the Third Reich in the collective memory of Germans. Part of the German elites believed the Federal Republic had already demonstrated itself to be a reliable democracy and did not need to beat its breast any longer. As Franz Josef Strauss clearly formulated in 1986, “I am proud to be a German. Step by step, mile after mile, we must pave the way in which the past will be gradually overcome, overshadowed, it will simply disappear. Eternal overcoming of the past, treated as a permanent task of penance, paralyses the nation!”<sup>462</sup> The historian Michael Stürmer, an advisor of Helmut Kohl, new chancellor of the FRG since 1982, said at the same time: “We do not need to kneel forever”, referring most probably to the symbolic gesture of Willy Brandt in Warsaw.<sup>463</sup>

The Federal Republic of Germany, with a change in the ruling coalition in 1982, entered a new phase of communication with Europe and with the world, and, above all, a new stage of development of national consciousness. After thirteen years of SPD / FDP rule, the CDU / CSU returned to power, this time in coalition

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462 After: J. Kölsch, *Politik und Gedächtnis. Zur Soziologie funktionaler Kultivierung von Erinnerung*, Wiesbaden 2000, p. 130.

463 M. Stürmer, *Dissonanzen des Fortschritts. Essays über Geschichte und Politik in Deutschland*, München 1986, p. 285.

with the FDP. Already in the 1970s, a change in the spiritual climate could be seen, and not only in Germany. In the first weeks after Helmut Kohl's governmental statement, the 'Flick Affair' was revealed, which involved illegal contributions to political parties. Embarrassing information reached the public about how big companies "were buying the Republic". Under the facade of the rule of law and democracy, political arrangements formed. Their financial dependence on 'donors' was unconstitutional.<sup>464</sup> After a period of detente initiated with the new Eastern Policy of Willy Brandt's government, ideological confrontation was intensifying. It was related to NATO's 'dual decision' and the deployment of medium-range missiles, as well as the entry of Soviet troops into Afghanistan. On the other hand, Mikhail Gorbachev's policy of perestroika, and the growing acceptance in West Germany of the autonomy of their state created an atmosphere of both uncertainty and hope in this region of Europe.

Politicians from the right and left accused one another of neglecting work on the past. Karl Carstens announced in his address to the nation in 1975: "CDU/CSU demands that German historical consciousness be strengthened. (...) I only want to say, Mister Federal Chancellor, that regress in teaching history and falsifying the image of history in the schools of our country is the consequence of SDP/FDP rule and the politics systematically introduced in some countries."<sup>465</sup> In the 1980s, disputes about the subject and character of the central narrative of the past were intensifying. There were demands to "de-criminalise history" and warnings against treating German history as a "collection of criminals" and forcing the nation to "permanent penance." Alfred Dregger, the leader of Hesse CDU, wrote in 1981: "Let us tell our youth that the history of our nation has not lasted for twelve years, but twelve centuries, and the remaining 1188 years were at least as good as it was in the case of other nations and that these twelve brown years of the crimes committed by some were not of the will of everyone."<sup>466</sup>

In a *Bayernkurier* article from 1982 entitled 'Germans and their homeland' one could read: "Instead of dealing with the past and working objectively on the partly criminalised German past to explain our historical origin, people are concerned with environmental issues or they get involve in so-called peace movements that protest against government policy. (...) The dark past of the state becomes even gloomier in the eyes of these people due to their perception of the present. The efforts of our historians, educators and politicians are necessary to enable Germans to adopt a natural and objective approach to their history, state

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464 The editors of *Der Spiegel*, Hans Werner Kilz and Joachim Preuss in 1983 published a book about the scandal entitled *The Purchased Republic*.

465 K. Carstens, *Zur Lage der Nation*, ed. Bundesministerium für innerdeutsche Beziehungen, Bonn 1975, p. 28.

466 After: E. Wolfrum, *Geschichte als Waffe*, op. cit., p. 114.



and homeland. (...) After all, our history, state and the notion of homeland have been ruined enough in recent decades.”<sup>467</sup>

The disputes over the past in the 1980s were one of the symptoms of a shift in the historical consciousness of the Germans. They consisted of internal, political conflicts. The political and moral revival, announced together with the change of government, was accompanied by tensions between conservative and leftist elites. The motto of the annual convention of Silesian expellees in 1985, ‘Forty years of expulsions – Silesia will remain ours’ demonstrated that some groups questioned the European status quo. When, during his 1984 visit to Israel, Helmut Kohl spoke about the “the mercy of a late birth”, his generation interpreted it as a signal to release oneself from guilt on an individual level. Some interpreted the chancellor’s words as another attempt to escape from the past, others as a constructive challenge that did not in any way conflict with the sense of responsibility of Germans for World War II and its consequences. For others, the words were a confirmation of the normalisation of the relations between the FRG and Israel. As the Jewish-German writer Rafael Seligman noted: “This juggling between the past and the present, between moral obligation and a political necessity, and the wish of the saving ‘normalisation’ was clear in Kohl’s mental and linguistic efforts at the end of his visit to Israel. From the special German-Israeli relationship as a result of history, a new relationship due to generational change emerged, based on particular moral grounds.”<sup>468</sup>

The circumstances of the mid-1980s fostered politicisation of historical discourse. The fortieth anniversary of the end of the war, which was lavishly and enthusiastically celebrated in Europe, in West Germany abounded with events that rekindled an interest in the past. The Bitburg ‘scandal’ and the speech by the FRG President, Richard von Weizsäcker, which was a landmark in the history of German struggles with the past, focused the attention of the public opinion and provoked numerous commentaries and discussions.<sup>469</sup> The wave of terrorism that shook the Bonn Republic shed a new light on the issue of safety and a strong state and its relationship to the official image of history. Politics and history were in a clinch that was difficult to resolve.

A year after Weizsäcker’s speech, a dispute erupted in which all the controversies about the past, the nation, German unification, history interpretation and confrontation with communism clashed. There was an overwhelming desire to interpret history in an apologist way in order to strengthen national pride. The debate that went down in history as a ‘historians’ dispute’ (*Historikerstreit*) received

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467 A. Schickel, *Der deutsche und sein Vaterland*; *Bayernkurier* 12.06.1982.

468 R. Seligmann, *Mit beschränkter Hoffnung. Juden, Deutsche, Israelis*, Hamburg 1991, p. 220, after: J. Kölsch, op. cit., p. 132.

469 Both events will be analysed in more detail in Chapter 5.



a lot of media and political attention despite the fact that the name suggested an expert debate in academic journals. Prominent historians played out great battles in daily newspapers and weekly magazines, debates were held in the media and the audience was the public opinion of Germany. The historians' dispute was a breakthrough in the culture of historical debates in Germany. Significant topics for collective memory, which were the subject of the disputes, became a great media event for the first time. The controversies related to the historical uniqueness of the extermination of the Jews revealed a number of dilemmas. On 28 February 1986, *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* published a commentary by Friedrich Karl Fromme on a debate over anti-Semitism held in the Bundestag the day before: "Other nations might ask if their predilections are to be dictated to them. In the Nazi state, the 'destruction of Jews' – the phrase belongs in quotation marks – took place in a discreet manner. It was in no way the case that German radio in those days sent out a weekly bulletin announcing that such-and-such a number of Jews had been killed the last few days... How impartial [*unbefangen*] can a German be today? He must remain partial in the sense that the otherwise freely permitted separation of people into those one likes and those one doesn't like is forbidden in the case of Jews... There is much good will towards Jews among young people and among those who are no longer quite so young. But to a generation that feels itself impartial, it must be granted that its patience has a limit. Reason and humanity, two ideas that do not always go together, must be handled with delicacy – by all sides."<sup>470</sup>

Real commotion was provoked by polemical arguments published in the same newspaper on 6 June 1986 by Ernst Nolte. The West Berlin professor was known from his earlier statements as a supporter of very critical dealing with the past. In 1968, during his professorship at the University of Marburg, he experienced an attack from, at the time, dominant extreme left-wing communist groups referring to the experiences of the USSR and the GDR. It can be assumed that these events influenced his way of looking at the past. Nolte suggested a causal nexus between the Gulag archipelago and the Nazi concentration camps. He also interpreted the Holocaust as an allegedly necessary defence of the European bourgeoisie against the Bolshevik threat. The author considered it necessary to ask: "Could it be that National Socialists, that Hitler performed an 'Asiatic' deed only because they saw themselves and people like themselves as potential or actual victims of the 'Asiatic' deed? Did the 'Gulag Archipelago' not exist before Auschwitz? Was Bolshevik 'class murder' not the logical and factual predecessor of the Nazi 'racial murder'? Can Hitler's most secret acts not also be explained by the very

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470 After H.A. Winkler, *Long Road West*, vol.2, op. cit., p. 401.

fact that he did *not* forget the ‘rat cage’? Did Auschwitz not, perhaps, originate in a past that would not pass away?<sup>471</sup>

Nolte was supported by Andreas Hillgruber, who collated “two catastrophes”: the murder of Jews and the “expulsion of Germans from Central and Eastern Europe and the destruction of the Prussian-German Reich in 1944-1945.”<sup>472</sup> Comparing the two events and treating them as equal inevitably led to the escalation of the debate. The expulsion of Germans from the East and the destruction of the Reich was, according to Hillgruber, not only a response to “the crimes of the National Socialist regime, not fully known during the war, but it corresponded with the long-intended plans of the enemy powers that moved to the fore during the war.”<sup>473</sup> The author equated “the catastrophe of European Jewry” and “the German catastrophe.” The whole of Europe became victims as the war “destroyed the European Middle.”

The radicalism of the philosopher and researcher of the University of Cologne was answered with the radicalism of another philosopher, Jürgen Habermas, on 11 July in *Die Zeit*. Habermas turned against the conservative historians Michael Stürmer, Andreas Hillgruber and Klaus Hildebrand, accusing them of using ideological measures to revive German national consciousness. He fiercely attacked them as revisionists who believed that they could illuminate the present with the light of the freely interpreted past. Habermas highlighted that the main achievements of the Federal Republic result from its being receptive to the political culture of the West. That opening “has been achieved by overcoming precisely that ideology of the center [the idea of Mitteleuropa; author’s note] which our revisionists are warming up to again with their geopolitical palaver of the “old central position of the Germans in Europe” [Stürmer] and “the reconstruction of the destroyed center of Europe” [Hillgruber]. (...) Whoever wishes to exorcise the shame surrounding this fact with such phrases as the ‘obsession with guilt’ [Stürmer and Oppenheimer], whoever wishes to pull Germans back to a conventional form of national identification, is destroying *the only reliable basis for our link to the West*.”<sup>474</sup>

The dispute, in which most authors were against Nolte, polarised. When history meets politics it is difficult to adopt a balanced approach, particularly because the debate was held at the time when Mikhail Gorbachev initiated the policy

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471 Ibidem, p. 402.

472 A. Hillgruber, *Dwie katastrofy. Rozbicie Rzeszy Niemieckiej i koniec europejskiego żydostwa*, trans. M. Łukasiewicz, in: *O kondycji Niemiec*, op. cit., p. 340.

473 Ibidem.

474 J. Habermas, *A Kind of Settlement of Damages On Apologetic Tendencies In German History Writing in: Forever In the Shadow of Hitler?* edited by Ernst Piper, Humanities Press, Atlantic Highlands, 1993 p. 44.

of perestroika. Some historians positively referred to the German Democratic Republic and abandoned the idea of the unification of Germany. Some opponents of Nolte denied any relationship with the opposition in the Communist Bloc, considering it a threat to the peaceful order in Europe.<sup>475</sup> Hans Mommsen rejected the comparison of two dictatorships and equating communism with Nazism. He noted that although “anti-Bolshevism and anti-Semitism were always presented as a twin couple, this form of ‘coming to terms with the past’ seeks confirmation in defining the Soviet Union as the source of all evil. If the National-Socialist catastrophe teaches us anything, it is the conclusion that one should abandon all the ‘collective’ images of enemy.”<sup>476</sup>

Heinrich August Winkler presented a voice of reason. “Considering the part Germany played in the origin of the two World Wars”, he wrote, “Europe cannot and Germany ought not to want a new German Reich as a sovereign nation state. Thus is the logic of history, which, as Bismarck said, is more stringent than the Prussian high chamber of accounts... However, our legacy also includes a national solidarity with the Germans in the GDR, who to this day bear the burden of German history to an incomparably greater degree than the citizens of the Federal Republic.”<sup>477</sup>

The historians’ dispute revealed ideological and political contradictions and controversies. There were opinions that comparisons of the two dictatorships and their crimes should be categorically forbidden. The Cold War instrumentalisation of the notion of totalitarianism served this comparison; it also helped to relativise Nazi crimes. As the debate demonstrated, some left-wing and liberal disputants wanted to cover, decrease, or even functionalise Stalin’s crimes through a loud and pompously manifested postulate to ban comparisons of the two dictatorships.<sup>478</sup>

The dispute also showed that the national-apologist interpretation of the German past was not given priority but was quite effectively challenged. Heuristically, the historians’ debate did not bring any new elements, studies or sources. Criticism of the conservative faction of historians soon became criticism of Helmut Kohl’s government and its attitude towards history. Some commentators

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475 J. Holzer, *Gdy Niemcy się spierają*; *Gazeta Wyborcza* 26-27.06.2004.

476 H. Mommsen, *Neues Geschichtsbewußtsein und Relativierung des Nationalsozialismus*, in: *Historiker-Streit*. Die Dokumentation der Kontroverse um die Einzigartigkeit der nationalsozialistischen Judenvernichtung, München, Zürich 1987, p. 188. Compare: idem, *Weder Leugnen noch Vergessen befreit von der Vergangenheit*, in: ibidem, pp. 300-321. Translation after: H.A. Winkler, *Long Road West*, vol.2, op. cit., p. 402.

477 H.A. Winkler, *Auf ewig in Hitlers Schatten? Zum Streit über das Geschichtsbild der Deutschen*, in: ibidem, p. 263.

478 U. Herbert, *Der Historikerstreit. Politische, wissenschaftliche, biographische Aspekte*, in: M. Sabrow, R. Jessen, K. Große Kracht, *Zeitgeschichte als Streitgeschichte. Große Kontroversen nach 1945*, München 2003, pp. 94-113.

treated the historians' dispute as a substitute debate between the political camps of the Federal Republic. Can it explain the unique fierceness and aggressiveness of the dispute, during which Rudolf Augstein called Hillgruber a "constitutional Nazi" and Habermas was accused of being responsible for the physical attacks on non-Marxist professors by the representatives of the 1968 student revolt?

Conflicts related to the Nazi past have always touched the basic values underlying the democratic identity of the Germans. The dispute in 1986-1987, the last great debate by intellectuals in the 'old' Federal Republic, touched the fundamental issues of the normalisation of the West German republic as a nation. Conservative intellectuals tried to change the basic narrative of German history, which was increasingly accepted officially by the democratic state. They did not question, by any means, the nature and extent of the crimes. They did not want to delete this chapter from German memory. As CDU/CSU put it in its strategic paper of 1989, the point was to demonstrate more national pride, in such a way that National Socialism would not be erased from the memory of citizens and the state. The historians' dispute corresponded with the politicians' dispute to a large extent. Some wanted to neutralise the twelve years of the Nazi past and make it a part of a national-educational concept. Germans were expected to regain pride in their own history. According to conservative thinkers, excessive dealing with the past could harm German identity. "Due to their constant dealing with the past, Germans will not notice that they will lose their whole future", Robert Hepp warned.<sup>479</sup> Hubert Grosser claimed that restoring a German positive identity depended largely on the awareness of the harmful effects of dealing with the past and opposing them by "revealing the hypocritical and one-sided process of coming to terms with the past as the evil that makes our nation sick and destroys it."<sup>480</sup> Armin Mohler concluded that dealing with the past introduced a "neurotic atmosphere of national masochists." Mohler called for an end to this process as it led to a blockade of politics and a fear of losing the past.<sup>481</sup> Self-criticism and straightforward acknowledgement of the history between 1939 and 1945 could tarnish, according to some, the positive image of the Germans. Defining the process of coming to terms with the past as an element of the conflict between the East and the West and entangling it in the anti-Bolshevik crusade helped to

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479 R. Hepp, *Die Endlösung der Deutschen Frage. Grundlinien einer politischen Demographie der Bundesrepublik Deutschland, mit einem Exkurs über Demokratie und Identität*, Tübingen 1988, p. 88.

480 H. Grossem (ed.), *Das Volk ohne Staat. Von der Babylonischen Gefangenschaft der Deutschen*, Bad Neustadt a. d. Saale 1981, p. 9.

481 A. Mohler, *Der Nasenring. Im Dickicht der Vergangenheitsbewältigung*, Essen 1989, p. 187.

decrease the significance of the Nazi regime and at least partly normalise the image of the past.

The dispute demonstrated that both the extreme leftist and the extreme rightist interpretation did not facilitate objective work on the past. Most generally, those who wanted to restore pride to the 'wounded nation' provided arguments in favour of German unity and a normal nation state. Left-oriented intellectuals, led by Habermas, defended or even praised the division of Germany. The moderate left discovered 'their' republic in the historians' dispute in the FRG and its connections with the West.<sup>482</sup> At the end of the 1980s, Auschwitz and its place in German history and memory became an unalienable measure that defined the horizon of values and ethics of the West German state. The 'old' FRG achieved its aim on its fortieth birthday: it was accepted as a 'nation'. A new chapter of dealing with the past started, and this past, despite many prognoses, has not yet passed away.

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482 E. Wolfrum, *Geschichtspolitik*, op. cit., p. 342.



## Chapter 4

# The Berlin Republic: a marathon of memory

### 1. German turning points: 1945 and 1990

The turning points related to the transition from dictatorship to democracy are characterised by the intensive search for the new cement of national unity and identity. Societies afflicted by totalitarianism need to determine their attitude to the old order if they want to build a new one. The example of the two German states shifting away from the policy and values of the Third Reich has demonstrated that the defence of one's history and finding an answer to the question of what to remember and what to repress are factors that significantly determine the political consciousness of societies in epochs of transition. German reunification in 1990 confirmed that democratisation processes are accompanied by social crisis, which is also a crisis of the criteria of memory and forgetting: the integral elements of every history.

As a result of reunification, Germany, for the second time in the 20th century, faced the challenge of overcoming the past. However, the circumstances and the ideological climate by the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century were fundamentally different from the situation after 1945. The new conditions stimulated parallels between the attitudes of West Germans towards National Socialism and the attitudes of East Germans towards communism. The question about consequences of the ideological interpretation of the past was inevitable. Yet, the difference between the SED state and the NSDAP state was comparable to the abyss between the Stasi (Ministry of State Security of German Democratic Republic) records and the Auschwitz crematoria. The Third Reich lasted 12 years; it waged a war of conquest and committed genocide. The German Democratic Republic lasted for 40 years. It was not burdened with the consciously implemented policy of extermination against other nations. The Third Reich was a permanent state of emergency, while East Germany was a homeland for the normal life of millions of its citizens. While Hitler could count on the support of the nation because National Socialism was a native product, communism in East Germany was an imported article.

The way the past was treated by the general public in both German states was strongly influenced by the nature of the collapse of the Third Reich and of the East German 'real socialism'. The fate of post-war Germany was decided by the

victorious powers. Therefore, the end of the war was not treated by Germans as liberation. In contrast, the fall of the GDR was instigated by its citizens. Also, the aims of National Socialism and those of the party establishment in East Germany were different. The former had a nationalist-racist programme, the latter, at least in the official version, an internationalist-fraternal-egalitarian one. The motives for the acceptance of the system were different. While after 1945 both German states were facing the task of handling the Nazi past, the reckoning with communism after 1989 was a necessity only for the former East Germany. The accusation of adopting a ‘victor’s mentality’ no longer referred to foreign occupying powers, as was the case after World War II, but to the ‘Wessis’. Contrary to the situation after 1945, when, out of necessity, the old Third Reich elites were included quickly into the lifeblood of the new social and economic reality, after 1989 the positions of GDR officials dismissed from public life because of their incriminatory past were filled by elites imported from the Western part of Germany.<sup>483</sup>

The reactions to fascism in West Germany and to communism in East Germany also had many tangent points. Both ideologies, Nazism and communism, although so different in their intentions, were directed against democracy and Western values, and had an authoritarian character. Their totalitarian nature was expressed in the ambition to have a monopoly on truth. Both kinds of dictatorship rejected pluralism, promised security instead of freedom, full harmony and community of interests instead of the clashing of conflicting interests, and ‘salvation’ instead of everyday political pragmatism. Their practice of authority was based on a peculiar seduction of society, repressions and terror. To a large extent, they both owed their stability to a specific Prussian tradition of political culture, which was expressed in various forms of adaptation, political passivity and trust in the authority of power.

The post-fascist and post-communist societies were confronted with similar problems. After 1989, the judiciary system faced the same dilemma as after 1945: how can the crimes that were committed in a state of lawlessness be tackled using means available in a state of law? In both cases it was equally difficult to solve the problem of legal and political responsibility and effectively document the blame of the elites without excluding them altogether from life in a democratic state.

After the end of World War II, as well as after the fall of the Berlin Wall, there was an acceptance of ‘quiet’ integration of the people accused of cooperation

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483 More on this subject see e.g. P. Eisenmann, G. Hirscher (eds.), *Bilanz der zweiten Diktatur*, München 1993; B. Faulenbach, M. Meckel, H. Weber (eds.), *Die Partei hatte immer recht – Aufarbeitung von Geschichte und Folgen der SED-Diktatur*, Essen 1994; A. von Plato, J. Schütrumpf (eds.), *Wendezeiten – Zeitwende. Zur “Entnazifizierung” und “Entstalinisierung”*, Hamburg 1991; H. Orłowski, M. Tomczak (eds.), *Elity w jednoczących się Niemczech*, Poznań 1999.



with the regime. The reality of transformation has demonstrated that at least in transitory stages, integrating people who had been involved in cooperation with the NSDAP state and the SED state turned out to be more important for the political consolidation of society than for moral renewal through radical exclusion of the group from the rest of society. The difference in the treatment of the guilty resulted from the fact that after the war, Germans could not afford an entire exchange of the elites because of the large number of people entangled in the Nazi system. After the reunification of Germany, an efficient and almost complete exchange of the executive management could be introduced in all areas of life, since the discredited GDR elites were replaced by West German experts.

Both after the end of World War II and after the collapse of the GDR, the community of interests of the losers and the rejected proved to be strong. The choice between revenge and reconciliation was the factor that divided society into two camps. The experience of denazification and destasification did not really help Germans recognise their role in the old system. For many Germans, Nuremberg became a symbol of criminal pathology that did not refer to normal citizens. After 1989, just as after 1945, it was difficult to come to terms with the whole dimension of the transition. In the assessment of the past system, the same patterns of excusing people's attitudes could be observed. People were either too young to bear responsibility, or they were only fulfilling their duties for their state and their home country.

In both cases, an emotional void prevailed. There was a lack of acceptance of the new order, which in its initial stage proved to be a democracy without democrats. The denazified and destasified rejected the idea of the cold judgment of those entangled in the wheels of the system. It was common to vindicate one's own biography; defending it became more important than defending the collective. Questioning one's entire life as false and led in a false era and depriving one's life effort of any meaning caused the greatest resistance and was not favourable to the democratic turn.

The old and the new Federal Republic of Germany needed founding myths, that is, positive experiences. The choice between quick democratisation and integration and ruthless treatment of the guilty ones proved ultimately to be an unsolvable problem. After 1945 as well as after 1990, individual reckoning with the past did not follow public debate. Each call for a clear cutting off the past caused a new wave of discussions and an opposite reaction. As democratic public opinion is always polyphonic, some consider the debates on the past too frequent and others too rare.

After reunification in 1990, West Germans, enriched by forty years of wrestling with the past, did not want once more, in the same century, to sweep the history under the carpet. Therefore, legal redress for the victims of Stalinist and

communist repressions in East Germany became one of the priorities of the unified Germany. However, it proved extremely difficult to bring the responsible for the SED dictatorship to justice. Just as it was in Nuremberg, where none of the war criminals pleaded guilty before the Tribunal, the attempt to settle the scores with the people responsible for the crimes and deviations of the communist system in the former East Germany disappointed all those who were awaiting long prison sentences for the political and economic elite.

To illustrate, a trial that took place between 1996 and 1999 against six members of the Politburo of the SED concerning responsibility for deaths of citizens attempting to escape from East Berlin on the East German-West German border and the Berlin Wall showed the difficulties encountered by a democratic state when settling accounts with an undemocratic system. Similar to the situation after 1945, the society that was put on trial assessed the efforts of the prosecutors as ‘victor’s justice’ and revenge of those who won the Cold War over the defeated ones. All those who were charged pleaded not guilty and saw the court trial as illegal. Kurt Hager, the main ideologist of the SED, turned defence into prosecution saying, “Your aim is to make me into a criminal”.<sup>484</sup> Erich Mückenberger, a trained metal worker, claimed that “Moscow is responsible” for everything that was bad in the GDR. Egon Krenz, a teacher by occupation and the successor of Honecker, saw himself as a victim: “I have been accused because I opted for an anti-capitalist alternative on German soil”. When he was opposing the escapes from East Germany he was only “defending the territorial integrity of the GDR state.” In his opinion, in East Germany “no order was given to shoot people (...) I have never ordered a soldier to kill (...) I am not a murderer” (...). It was West Germany that had an interest in casualties on the border, they organised such cases.<sup>485</sup> His defence lawyer claimed that the fact that E. Krenz handed over his power in a peaceful manner, preventing larger numbers of victims, was to his advantage. Referring to such, he compared him to the national heroes of the anti-Hitler resistance movement from 20 July 1944. Karin Schmidt, the auxiliary prosecutor, whose husband was killed during his attempt to flee the country in 1987, was of a different opinion: “It was not the Soviet Union that killed my husband, it was not the Soviet Union that threatened to put our children in an orphanage; it was Krenz.”<sup>486</sup> Horst Dohlus, a hairdresser by occupation, explained that his

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484 R. Grafe, “Die Politbüro-Beschlüsse waren Bedingungen der tödlichen Schüsse”. *Der Prozess gegen sechs Mitglieder des SED-Politbüros (1996-1999)*; *Deutschland Archiv* 1, 2000, p. 19.

485 *Ibidem*, p. 20.

486 *Ibidem*, p. 22. See also: P.J. Winters, *Das Urteil gegen Krenz und andere*; *Deutschland Archiv* 5, 1997, p. 693-696; *Auszüge aus dem Plädoyer der Staatsanwaltschaft, dem Schlusswort von Egon Krenz und der Urteilsbegründung*; *Deutschland Archiv* 5, 1997,

activity was always task-oriented and always “in the interest of our society” and that “the GDR border system was not unlawful but it only served the interests of its citizens.” Günther Kleiber, an electrician, understood the grief of the victims’ families but “he had nothing to do with it all”. Only Günter Schabowsky, the head of *Neues Deutschland* between 1978 and 1985, admitted to moral guilt and asked for forgiveness. The trials gave the impression of party meetings and no sentence satisfied the victims. In 1993, Erich Mielke, the head of the much-hated Ministry of State Security (Stasi) received a six-year prison sentence for complicity in the murder of two police officers in Berlin in 1931. Because of his old age (85) he was released in 1995. In most trials the sentences were symbolic, and most often suspended.

In the reunified Germany, the lustration fervour was controlled by law. The first federal commissioner, Joachim Gauck, who implemented the resolution from 1991 concerning Stasi records, had at his disposal a staff of qualified specialists (3,400 jobs were planned) and a budget of over 200 million German marks to verify files measuring 178 km in length. The major aim was the defence of freedom and democracy. Despite the attacks launched mainly by the Democratic Socialist Party (PDS), the work of Gauck’s commission ran smoothly, and it took into account primarily the perspective of the victims and the need to know the full truth about the GDR.<sup>487</sup> Yet, in many cases the victims of the secret police and repressions from the former GDR communist state were disappointed. They soon found out that the legal guarantees in a democratic state referred not only to the victims but also to the perpetrators. Bärbel Bohley, the initiator of a civil movement called New Forum and one of the first people to demand the opening of the files, expressed a view held by many when she said, “[w]e expected justice and we received a state of law.”

The turn of 1989/1990 changed the perspective of evaluating National Socialism. The collapse of the dictatorship in Eastern and Central Europe and the reunification of Germany did not bring “the end of history.”<sup>488</sup> Quite on the contrary, the past returned with double force. West Germans expected that their compatriots from the East, who had not been involved in public debates concerning their part in the policy of Nazi Germany and their responsibility for the past, would make up with interest for the history lesson they had missed. However, the former GDR citizens did not agree that their compatriots from across the Elbe should have the

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pp. 697-699; P.J. Winters, *Der letzte Politbüro-Prozess; Deutschland Archiv* 5, 2004, pp. 752-757.

487 See e.g. *Stasi-Unterlagen-Gesetz auf dem Prüfstein. Urteil des Bundesverwaltungsgerichtes vom 23. Juni 2004; Deutschland Archiv* 5, 2004, pp. 770-775.

488 More about the significance of turning points in German history, see e.g. D. Papenfuß, W. Schieder (eds.), *Deutsche Umbrüche im 20. Jahrhundert*, Köln, Weimar, Wien 2000.

right to dictate the rules for reckoning with the past only because they had been liberated by Western Allies decades ago. Yet, international circles expected that the reunification of Germany would consequently bring a reunification of guilt and responsibility.

The new caesura opened a new chapter on the work on the past. The generation of witnesses and participants in the National Socialist state was bidden farewell to. The ‘children of war’ came to have their say. Memory crossed all borders. The scope and course of overcoming the past is determined by such factors as, among others, the way in which the system is changed (continuation of elites or a sudden revolutionary turn), the length of the dictatorship and the manner of diverging from dictatorship. Democracy imposes certain practices and gives voice to all citizens. After 1989 in the post-communist countries, the struggle with the past was supplemented with a new element. It was no longer the problem of political culture and historical enlightenment but of a concrete decision: should we open the records or not? It was a battle for one’s own image. Contrary to some concerns, the reunification of Germany did not weaken the process of dealing with the Nazi past. Quite the opposite: dealing with the past became an object of study. Finally, it was discovered that the problem of reckoning with the past after the end of tyranny, civil wars and armed conflicts is a topic with a long tradition.

A comparative analysis of the struggle with the past in both German states shows that memories jostle for position before one prevails.<sup>489</sup> Temporal distance intensifies the process of historicisation of the Nazi past, whereas the GDR past is now a current political problem. The debate about German self-determination and self-identification with reference to German history is open and in progress. Both pasts are slowly becoming an integral element of the political culture of Germany. Many questions still await answers.

The evolution of communicative memory towards cultural memory and its position in the reunified Germany were determined by many factors. The most important ones were:

- The end of the Cold War and the end of the ideological and political confrontation of the two German states. Although the debates after 1989 highlighted an asymmetry between the citizens of Eastern and Western lands in their perception of the Nazi past, the end of the Cold War pressure

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489 See e.g. B. Faulenbach, *Probleme des Umgangs mit der Vergangenheit im vereinten Deutschland: Zur Gegenwartsbedeutung der jüngsten Geschichte*, in: W. Weidenfeld (ed.), *Deutschland. Eine Nation – doppelte Geschichte. Materialien zum deutschen Selbstverständnis*, Köln 1993, pp. 175-190; idem, *Probleme einer Neuinterpretation der Vergangenheit angesichts des Umbruchs 1989/91*, in: W. Weidenfeld, M. Stadelmaier (ed.), *Diktatur und Emanzipation. Zur russischen und deutschen Entwicklung 1917-1991*, Essen 1993, pp. 9-18.

and conflicts created the conditions for common reflection on the history of the Third Reich, the origin of National Socialism and the entanglement and responsibility of the Germans for the war and its consequences. The release from ideologisation, which made one, on the one hand, treat anti-totalitarianism as anti-communism, and on the other, equate anti-fascism with anti-capitalism and perceive international relations through the categories of friend vs. enemy, provided conditions to work on proper identifications. Public work on the past in the reunified Germany got released from the ideological competition. Together with the collapse of communism, doctrines promising the optimism of progress and faith in the power of a collective lost their former attractiveness. Small narratives gained in popularity. Anxiety, opacity of the present and unpredictability of the future make the attention focus on what is important for the individual fate, which affects the way of dealing with the past;

- Comparison of dictatorships. The end of the history of two-state Germany created a new problem in the studies of Nazism and its consequences. World War II resulted in another German dictatorship in the Eastern sector. Thus, Germany is the only country in Europe that experienced two totalitarianisms and had to struggle with their consequences and the memory of them. After reunification, two different cultures of memory confronted each other. The need to deal with the history of National Socialism overlapped with the need to deal with the SED dictatorship and Stalinism. This situation created a new field of tensions and conflict. The citizens of the Eastern federal states, from whom their Western compatriots expected reckoning with the communist past, again considered themselves to be victims. Numerous new studies focusing on the comparison of the two dictatorships face new challenges. The history of National Socialism had acquired a new point of reference. The struggles of the former GDR and, most importantly, of the countries behind the Eastern border of the Iron Curtain with their communist past provided a wide field for observation and contributed to new accents in the perception of National Socialism;
- The settling of generational conflict. At the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the main actors and direct witnesses of the Third Reich could no longer set the tone of the debates on the past. The different generations gained a new dimension and became a community of experience and an important reference point for the collective identity.<sup>490</sup> The current generation of grandchildren does not have an opportunity to confront their knowledge with their grandparents' strategies of

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490 H. Bude, *Die Erinnerung der Generationen*, in: H. König, M. Kohlstruck, A. Wöll (eds.), *Vergangenheitsbewältigung am Ende des zwanzigsten Jahrhunderts*, Opladen, Wiesbaden, pp. 69-85.

releasing from guilt. Recent research has shown increasing distance between the family memory and public memory, confirmed by academic, journalist and material sources.<sup>491</sup> This new situation highlights the increasing responsibility of academic and non-academic actors;

- The change of *modus memorandi*. With the passing away of the generation of participants and witnesses at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> and the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the politics and culture of memory changed. The transition from communicative to cultural memory expresses itself in a huge increment and diversity of aesthetic and cognitive measures of commemoration. New forms of social communication, electronics, new media – they all contributed to an unprecedented degree of development of the ‘sites of memory’. We are dealing with an unprecedented explosion of historical films, exhibitions, museums, performances and reproductions. This situation presents us with new challenges, since the tension between professional history and the exhibited and staged history is growing. Memory holidays and rituals are increasingly important, and what follows is the temptation to experiment and beautify the past;
- The search for ‘normality’. After 40 years of split identity and struggle with the ‘German problem’, the reunification of Germany intensified the wish for national normality. In the public and academic sphere there is an intensive search for national identity and the way to reconcile it with the politics of memory. Numerous political scandals related to the commemorating rituals demonstrate the sensitivity and topicality of the problem. Dealing with the past gained a new, interesting dimension in the Berlin Republic.<sup>492</sup>

## 2. Debates that changed Germany

The reunification of Germany did not automatically combine East and West German memory into a new entity. New conditions brought new subjects. Contemporary, international conflicts in Europe and in the world forced a new look at the history of National Socialism. Contrary to the expectations and despite the enormous transition effort by the former GDR and reunification-related problems, what caught the attention of public opinion for months and years were historical subjects related to the question of perpetration and victimhood in the times of war. These subjects provoked heated disputes and controversies that had an impact

491 See e.g.: H. Welzer, S. Moller, K. Tschuggnall, “*Opa war kein Nazi*”. *Nationalsozialismus und Holocaust im Familiengedächtnis*, 2. edition, Frankfurt a. M. 2002.

492 An interesting analysis of the problem, see: W. Bergem, *Barbarei als Sinnstiftung?* in: idem (ed.), *Die NS-Diktatur im deutschen Erinnerungsdiskurs*, Opladen 2003, pp. 81-104.

on the developing national identity and self-definition of the new state. The most important disputes focused on:

- The exhibition ‘A War of Annihilation: Crimes of the German Wehrmacht 1941-1944’ (Vernichtungskrieg. Verbrechen der Wehrmacht 1941-1944), presented initially between 1995 and 1999 in 33 German and Austrian towns and then, since late 2001, in a corrected version and under a new title: ‘Crimes of the German Wehrmacht – Dimensions of a War of Annihilation 1941-1944’ (Verbrechen der Wehrmacht – Dimensionen des Vernichtungskrieg 1941-1944);
- Daniel Jonah Goldhagen’s book *Hitler’s Willing Executioners: Ordinary Germans and the Holocaust* (*Hitlers willige Vollstrecker. Ganz gewöhnliche Deutsche und der Holocaust*) released in Germany in 1996<sup>493</sup>;
- Martin Walser’s speech upon accepting the Frankfurt Book Fair Peace Prize in October 1998;
- The decision of Bundestag in June 1999 to erect a central Holocaust Monument in Berlin.<sup>494</sup>

The abovementioned debates do not exhaust the catalogue of subjects and issues that engaged public opinion. Other disputes were evoked by the decision to move the German capital to Berlin, by the date of the new national holiday of the reunited Germany, by the Bundeswehr’s participation in the war in Kosovo in 1999 and by publications related to the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the bombing of German cities and forced expulsions. Moreover, there were disputes concerning historical films, such as *Schindler’s List* by Steven Spielberg or Oliver Hirschbiegel’s *Downfall* as well as Victor Klemperer’s diaries from the times of National Socialism. Other debates centred on the reparations for the former forced labourers of the Third Reich, the Bundeswehr’s participation in military actions outside the NATO area, the problem of returning stolen cultural goods and, finally, issues and events evoked by anniversary celebrations. The temperature of the discussions and their duration depended mostly on the interest of the media, which defined their position on the public opinion market.<sup>495</sup> In the process of dealing with the past and redefining

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493 D.J. Goldhagen, *Hitler’s Willing Executioners: Ordinary Germans and the Holocaust*, London, 1997.

494 The author focused on the abovementioned four debates because they lasted the longest and absorbed the attention of both experts and the general public. All media were involved in them and the emotional behaviour of the participants went beyond the average response.

495 The subject of escapes and forced expulsions of Germans is intentionally not included in the area of interest of this book for several reasons. The disputes about this issue, evoked by Erika Steinbach’s idea of the Centre Against Expulsions, have been widely examined by the Polish press as well historical, sociological and political science literature. They have not brought anything essentially new to the German debate on the Nazi past. This politicised subject has been present in German collective memory, although less intensively,



the vision of the future of the reunifying nation there is an important question to answer: what is the significance of the abovementioned debates for the culture of memory of the Berlin Republic and the identity of the Germans in the unified state? How are these disputes different from previous reflections and historical narratives of the old FRG? Which images of the Nazi past and which interpretations of the war dominated the nationwide discourse?

### The Wehrmacht: a defence community?

The exhibition devoted to the Wehrmacht, organised by the Hamburg Institute for Social Research (Institut für Sozialforschung), ‘A War of Annihilation. Crimes of the German Wehrmacht 1941-1944’ did not include the whole history of this military formation. The organisers had to select from a huge volume of material. One of the elements that remained outside their field of interest was the activity of the Wehrmacht in Poland. On 1 September 2004 an exhibition entitled ‘Extreme Brutality: Crimes of the German Wehrmacht in Poland, September-October 1939’ opened in the Royal Castle Library in Warsaw. It was cooperatively prepared by the Polish Institute of National Remembrance and the Deutsches Historisches Institut in Warsaw, in consultation with the Hamburg Institute for Social Research. The purpose was to complete the Hamburg exhibition. The exhibit’s curator, Hannes Heer, explained its main intention in the catalogue: “The Wehrmacht did not conduct a ‘normal war’ in the Balkans and the Soviet Union from 1941 to 1944 but a total war against the Jews, prisoners of war and civilians; a war responsible for the deaths of millions. Although German military historiography did much to explain the facts, it declined to admit that the Wehrmacht had actively participated in all crimes as an organisation. The exhibition is intended to carefully demonstrate evidence. Three examples have been chosen for this purpose: the partisan war in Serbia, 6th Army on their way to Stalingrad and the three-year occupation of Belarus. (...) The exhibition is not intended to pass a delayed and outright sentence. It is expected to open a debate about the most barbaric chapter of German and Austrian history, with the exception of Auschwitz, a war of annihilation led by the Wehrmacht in 1941-1944.”<sup>496</sup>

As Jan Philipp Reemtsma, the head of the Hamburg institute explained, the exhibition was intended to show particular relationships between the war and the Holocaust: two areas of behaviour and actions that were often treated separately in

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since the beginning of the FRG. Some aspects of this issue are analysed in Chapter 5, with reference to Polish-German relations. Wehrmacht – a ‘defence community’?

496 After J.-H. Kirsch, *Nationaler Mythos oder historische Trauer? Der Streit um ein zentrales “Holocaust-Mahnmal” für die Berliner Republik*, Köln, Weimar, Wien 2003, p. 47.



Germany. Its purpose was to draw the attention of the public opinion to biographical experiences of a generation that had lived through the years 1939-1945, since war is not only a political instrument but also a 'social condition' with its own canon of rules and behaviour and long-term consequences.<sup>497</sup> Presenting military history as an integral element of social history was a novum. Responses to the exhibition, its long-term consequences, publications and interviews revealed myths and legends deeply rooted in the culture of memory of war and postwar generations. The subject of the greatest controversies was the thesis by the initiators and organisers of the exhibition that the criminal mentality characterised not only Wehrmacht leaders but also ordinary soldiers. This theory was aimed at the groups that attached all the evil of genocide to the Nazi 'clique'.

The organisers wanted to demonstrate that since the army of 18,000,000 was a wide representation of the nation, its fate and biography must have concerned almost all German families. The confrontation with one's ignorance about the crimes of the Wehrmacht and the destruction of the legend of the German army as a friendly community devoted to defending the fatherland touched the deepest emotions of the war participants and their families. Reemtsma explained that the violent reaction to the presented image of the Wehrmacht resulted from the fact that the exhibition showed "not what everyone did but what everyone could potentially have done."<sup>498</sup>

The volume of interest, both positive and negative, exceeded all expectations. Everyone wanted an explanation for the success of the exhibition. For the participants in historical debates in the reunified Germany, the exhibition was not only a media event. How to explain the number of visitors? About 850,000 people viewed the exhibition between 1995 and 1999 in 28 German and 6 Austrian towns. It became a subject of history lessons and podium discussions in great congress halls and the audience went beyond elite circles.<sup>499</sup> In Munich, nearly 90,000 people visited the exhibition, and about 100,000 in Frankfurt am Main. Factual documentation: 1,400 photographs appealed to the imagination of those for whom the war was a distant historical event and were a slap the face of those who had been on the Eastern Front. Attack and defence intertwined with each other.<sup>500</sup>

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497 J.P. Reemtsma, *Krieg ist ein Gesellschaftszustand; Mittelweg* 36 6, 1997, 2, p. 55-60.

498 After: J.-H. Kirsch, op. cit., p. 68.

499 See e.g. T. Sommer (ed.), *Gehorsam bis zum Mord? Der verschwiegene Krieg der deutschen Wehrmacht – Fakten, Analysen, Debatte*, Hamburg 1995.

500 About the response; see e.g. Hamburger Institut für Sozialforschung (ed.), *Eine Ausstellung und ihre Folgen. Zur Rezeption der Ausstellung "Vernichtungskrieg. Verbrechen der Wehrmacht 1941 bis 1944"*, Hamburg 1999; Landeshauptstadt München, Kulturreferat (ed.), *Bilanz einer Ausstellung. Dokumentation der Kontroverse um die Ausstellung "Vernichtungskrieg. Verbrechender Wehrmacht 1941 bis 1944" in München*, München 1998.

The exhibition's most important reflection was on German self-image and intergenerational family confrontation. It provoked postwar generations to exchange opinions about their grandparents' participation in the war. Were they at the front, were they in death squads? Why had they been silent for so long? No one was indifferent about the shocking image of the war that had been earlier unknown. A large number of veterans rejected the project, accusing the exhibition of compromising and falsifying the reality of the war. Others, however, as interviews demonstrate, welcomed the exhibition with relief as a delayed confession of guilt. Some visitors recognised their family members in the photographs and brought letters and pictures. Dozens of press commentaries and interviews were published.

The response to the exhibition revealed the distance between the historical knowledge and the public image of the Wehrmacht. The memory of war preserved in families involved the stereotype of a cruel enemy in the East and the belief in fathers' and grandfathers' courage and heroic acts. The war was not associated with racism or gas chambers but only with the front where the loved ones had fought. Many cherished in their hearts a legend of a 'clean Wehrmacht' that had not been entangled in crimes. The exhibition questioned the ethos of the Wehrmacht. Suddenly, it turned out that what had been separated in memory thus far, that is, the experience of war and the political practice of National Socialism, was inseparable. That was the contribution of the endeavour of the Hamburg institute. Contemporary media, with their power of expression, photographs and letters by soldiers were put on display as a contrast to well-known memoirs of generals, film stories, popular literature, and countless memorials to honour the fallen for the fatherland. In the early postwar years, politicians argued that German soldiers did not lose their dignity or honour in the war. "Hitler's criminal group" and the Wehrmacht were believed to be two different stories. Cinema screens presented what had happened in 1939-1945 as a 'normal war'. Memoir literature, numerous veterans' organizations, conventions and meetings helped to sustain the myth of solidarity. After decades, the issue of the guilt of a soldier and his command emerged with intensity.

From the very beginning, the responses of the audience visiting the exhibition split into advocates and accusers of both the Wehrmacht and the exhibition organisers. The confrontation with exhibition documentation could not be favourable for the defenders of soldiers' dignity. Even the soldier's oath did not leave any doubts about the connections between the German army and Nazi politics. Soldiers did not swear on the constitution but on Hitler: "I swear by God this sacred oath that to the Leader of the German empire and people, Adolf Hitler, supreme commander of the armed forces, I shall render unconditional obedience and that as a brave soldier I shall at all times be prepared to give my life for this

oath.”<sup>501</sup> It was even more difficult to accept the exhibited photographs due to the fact that the conviction about honourable actions of German soldiers had not been questioned for decades. Every attempt to pillory the Wehrmacht was criticised as fouling one’s own nest.

The exhibition resumed a discussion on the tradition of the Bundeswehr, which had its own history and was the subject of political disputes. Almost all major newspapers published opinions and comments. *Bayernkurier* criticised the events related to the exhibition for their intentions to deprive millions of Germans of dignity. The paper accused the organisers of the exhibition of leading a “campaign against the German people.”<sup>502</sup> Former soldiers complained in newspapers about “outright dishonouring” of the Wehrmacht. Many newspapers and magazines were flooded with letters whose authors either supported the idea of the exhibition or accused it of “offending soldier’s honour.”

The subject divided not only ordinary people but also politicians. During the Bundestag debate on 13 March 1997, different standpoints clashed. Alfred Dagger, a CDU deputy, tried to discredit the exhibition, calling it a “private initiative of two gentlemen”. His words were applauded by CDU/CSU deputies and opposed by the Alliance ,90/The Greens. Dagger asked an open question: whether the organisers had “moral and scientific legitimisation” to “condemn and hurt millions of people they didn’t know without providing evidence of the truth”. “Soldiers are always the victims of war”, was the MP’s justification. “Germans did not want the war (...) the soldiers risked their lives and endured infinite suffering.” Most of them could “rightly say they never participated in the Nazi crimes and they are not guilty of any war crimes. (...) This is not about individuals; this is about all of us. How a nation deals with its soldiers after a lost war says a lot about its moral substance, its dignity and its inner strength or weakness.”<sup>503</sup>

The exhibition inspired new research and provoked more general questions. Experts’ circles and journalists wondered to what extent the reunited Germans denied their Nazi past. Confronted with the truth, could they accept it or did they cast it aside as an offence from outside? What did the exhibition teach the Germans? Was it even possible to draw conclusions from history after 60 years? Was such a debate possible only because the generation of participants was mostly gone?

It is difficult to provide a simple answer to the question whether the exhibition put a final stop to the image of the Wehrmacht as a manipulated victim of Hitler. Undoubtedly, the myth of a hero was destroyed. Hannes Heer, the initiator of the exhibition, wanted it to make “peace between generations.” He assumed

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501 W. Hofer, *Der Nationalsozialismus. Dokumente 1933-1945*, 48. ed., Frankfurt a. M. 2002, p. 72.

502 *Bayernkurier* 22.02.1997

503 *Stenographische Berichte*, op. cit., 13.03.1997, p. 14710.

that such a dialogue would be possible only when the German nation “looked the truth in the eye.” It was expected to be a cathartic process.<sup>504</sup> The second edition of the exhibition, after the controversies related to the suspicions of manipulation, confirmed the main and primary theory.<sup>505</sup> The expert commission that had verified the first version announced in their report in 2000 that only 20 out of 1433 photographs raised interpretation doubts and two photos were found to be false.<sup>506</sup> Alongside the second edition of the exhibition, new publications and commentaries appeared with unquestionable educational value, despite the criticism and resentments that followed them.

The exhibition provided an opportunity to observe the reactions of visitors. Young people and veterans were at the centre of researchers’ attention. The interviewers and researchers were interested in the persistence of myths, their origin, and the answer to the question regarding what would remain in memory after the war generation passed away. In the Vienna edition of the exhibition, a special programme for teenagers was introduced between 9 April and 16 May 2002. Students aged 13-19 were interviewed with regard to their interest in the past and the role of Nazism in their historical consciousness. 4,000 students of Vienna schools took part in the research and a survey was conducted on 924 students.

The main message of the project was the question whether contemporary youth was a generation without memory. The generation of children of the Third Reich was confronted with categorical questions: guilty or not guilty. A dissonance was revealed between the knowledge they obtained at school and the lies or silence of their parents. It turned out that one-third of the interviewees had not learned about Nazi history from their parents. The war and Nazism were not a subject of intergenerational education. The research confirmed the earlier theory that family communication is usually an uncritical continuation of family history as an experience of victims and suffering of family members during the war.<sup>507</sup> The

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504 *Wessen Schuld?* Konkret-Debatte; *Konkret* 6, 1997, pp. 12-15.

505 The break in the exhibition was caused by undermining of the authenticity of several photographs. The Polish historian Bogdan Musial, who received political asylum in Germany 1985, worked at the German Historical Institute in Warsaw 1999-2004, and since 2007 has been employed in the Office of Public Education of the Institute of National Remembrance, demonstrated that some of the photographs did not show the crimes of the Wehrmacht, but the crimes of the Soviet NKVD from June 1941.

506 M. Klundt, “Normalisierung” und “historische Anthropologie”. *Geschichtspolitische Kontroversen um die alte und neue Wehrmachtsausstellung*, in: M. Klundt, S. Salzborn, M. Schwietring, G. Wiegel (eds.), *Erinnern, verdrängen, vergessen. Geschichtspolitische Wege ins 21. Jahrhundert*, Giessen 2003, p. 91.

507 I. Garnitschnig, S. Kiessling, A. Pollak, *Generation ohne Erinnerung? Wehrmacht und Nationalsozialismus im Geschichtsbewusstsein von jugendlichen BesucherInnen der*

answers of the young people equated the suffering and violence at the times of National Socialism with the suffering and violence inflicted by National Socialism. The cruelties described in the survey lacked the political and ideological context of the times: “My grandfather used to often talk about the war but I don’t remember now. These were terrible things.”<sup>508</sup> The stories told by family members were a significant contribution, but were they ‘digested’? “My grandparents once told me they had had no choice but to worship Hitler. He did everything for the good of an average citizen (...) They never thought about possible crimes because they were doing well and this was the most important factor. I was shocked to hear it.”<sup>509</sup> The authors of the survey were mostly struck by the lack of elements distinguishing Nazism from other totalitarian systems. The singularity of the Hitlerite system disappeared among other atrocities of which the respondents had heard.

Selected interviews with visitors to the exhibition were used in research projects that demonstrated that there were different reactions to it and its impact was diverse. Grandchildren of the perpetrators tried to defend their relatives but there were also young people who would prefer to be descendants of the victims. Those who suspected that their fathers had known the image of the war from experience but had removed it from memory were shocked. For some visitors, the exhibition turned out to be a traumatic experience, a meeting with a crime.

The confrontation with the exhibition was especially difficult for the oldest visitors because of the question of the soldier ethos.<sup>510</sup> The elderly wanted to talk. They spoke of the “curse of an early birth.” When they were young they did not think about what had happened to the Jews. Everyone used the phraseology of comrades in arms: tradition, organisation, ethos, fate, comradeship.

The visitors bemoaned the lack of a positive history of the Wehrmacht. “In my opinion it is not fair to show only crimes without demonstrating that the vast majority of the Wehrmacht (...) fought fairly, which, for example, was confirmed by our former enemies, even the Israeli army. I am of the opinion (...) that half of the truth is no truth. One could have shown how the great majority of soldiers,

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*Ausstellung “Verbrechen der Wehrmacht. Dimensionen des Vernichtungskrieges 1941-1944”, in: H. Uhl (ed.), Zivilisationsbruch und Gedächtniskultur. Das 20. Jahrhundert in der Erinnerung des beginnenden 21. Jahrhunderts, Innsbruck, Wien, München, Bozen 2003, pp. 115-136.*

508 Ibidem, p. 123.

509 Ibidem, p. 124.

510 For the results of research and interviews with the participants, see: K. Naumann, *Kameraden oder Komplizen? Der Zwiespalt ganz normaler Berufssoldaten*, in: Hamburger Institut für Sozialforschung (ed.), *Besucher einer Ausstellung. Die Ausstellung ‘Vernichtungskrieg. Verbrechen der Wehrmacht 1941 bis 1944’ in Interview und Gespräch*, Hamburg 1998, pp. 21-47.

19 million soldiers, thought and fought.”<sup>511</sup> Some tried to justify themselves: “one should understand the spirit of the Nazi times.” The visitors searched for respect and honour for the soldier effort, not only in the exhibition; they needed a history of heroism. It was much more difficult to look inside oneself, to see one’s own biography from a distance and to answer to the question why people voluntarily decided to go to the front if, after Stalingrad, it was certain that the war would be lost for the Germans.

The conversations about the exhibition said a lot about the contemporary perception of guilt and responsibility. One could notice defensive strategies that had been returning for decades in the confessions of people related to the Nazi system. Political education and wide access to knowledge of the Third Reich did not weaken individual instincts to defend one’s ‘innocence’. Arguments of the power of duty and necessity to help the state were repeated: “If not me, who was supposed to help?”, “Every war brings atrocities”, “the arguments against the Wehrmacht could be used against any army in the world.” Some wondered how “one can show something like this when the German army is expected to go to Bosnia”, questioning whether they should reconsider Germany’s participation in such conflicts instead of allowing.<sup>512</sup> The visitors highlighted the selflessness of the efforts of the soldiers who went to the front “for families, for our women and children.” The question about the reasons for the presence of the German army in the East was answered: “We were apolitical veterans of the war.” Many let the cumulated memories out but presented idealised images of themselves. They talked of others who had believed in the material profits to be gained from the war and accepted Hitler’s political system. However, the interviewees themselves were always beyond suspicion: critical towards Hitler’s power, they had not believed in victory and had not intended to grow rich on the war. Only few interviewees from the war generation did not deny the atrocities. Those who confirmed their own participation in crimes justified themselves by referring to the context of the times. Terror, they said, was “far away from us”, in the front. The interviewees blamed the organizers of the exhibition for imputing SS crimes to ordinary soldiers.<sup>513</sup> They minimised their own participation and pacified the evil by ascribing it to others. They also often pointed at partisans as those who provoked criminal activity.

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511 An opinion of one of the visitors: A. Leh, ‘*Die andere Hälfte der Wahrheit*’ – *Was Zeitzeugen in der Ausstellung vermissen*, in: Hamburger Institut für Sozialforschung (ed.), *Besucher*, op. cit., p. 48.

512 After: *Stuttgarter Nachrichten* 8.11.1995.

513 H. Heer, *Landschaft mit Kratern*, in: Hamburger Institut für Sozialforschung (ed.), *Besucher*, op. cit., pp. 75-115.

The stories told by the visitors of the exhibition were modified in order to save face. They were shaped and beautified in a way that helped to save one's self and biography. Heer believed that instead of adjusting a positive self-image to the bad reality, the negative heroes of the exhibition cut down bad memory so it would fit their positive self-image. The cases of such cryptomnesia, when elements of the past are extracted from the unconscious and experiences of others are ascribed to oneself or vice versa, are described by the sociologists Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann as a complicated process: "Since it is relatively easier to invent things that never happened than to forget those that actually did, the individual may fabricate and insert events wherever they are needed to harmonise the remembered with the reinterpreted past. Since it is the new reality rather than the old that now appears dominantly plausible to him, he may be perfectly 'sincere' in such a procedure - subjectively, he is not telling lies about the past but bringing it in line with the truth that, necessarily, embraces both present and past."<sup>514</sup>

The campaign for and against the exhibition also went to the street. It brought about one of the largest extreme rightist manifestations in Munich. The leader of the German People's Union (Deutsche Volkunion – DVU), Gerhard Frey, was applauded at the party congress after saying that the Wehrmacht was the best, the most honest and honourable army of all time.<sup>515</sup> Soldier and veteran organisations discredited the exhibition on Internet forums. The curators received threatening and abusive letters. However, the protesting manifestations were accompanied by counter-demonstrations. The history of the Wehrmacht on the Eastern Front and the reactions to the exhibition of former soldiers, their family members and other visitors were undoubtedly rich research and educational material, evaluated from different perspectives.

The co-organiser of the exhibition, Klaus Naumann, expected that the image of the crimes of the Wehrmacht would undermine the prevailing images and knowledge of the subject; after Nurnberg, the awareness of war crimes penetrated public opinion and was no longer a strict taboo. However, there were double moral standards in public life. The West German social state and social market economy were based on an agreement, on the spirit of a community. The state allowed soldiers to save their honour; they received pensions. Although they were not recognised as heroes, neither were they stigmatised as criminals. They were incorporated to a "denazified variant of the former national community."<sup>516</sup>

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514 P.L. Berger, T. Luckmann, *The Social Construction of Reality*, London, 1981, p. 180.

515 H. Prantl (ed.), *Wehrmachtsverbrechen. Eine deutsche Kontroverse*, Hamburg 1997, p. 23.

516 K. Naumann, *Was bleibt von der Wehrgemeinschaft? Ein doppelter Blick auf die 'Wehrmacht-Ausstellung'*; *Blätter für deutsche und internationale Politik* 12, 1997, p. 490.



In the opinion of the observers of German struggles with the past, the documentation of the criminal activity of the Wehrmacht revealed the double bottom of the phenomenon, that is, two past periods: before and after 1945. The tendency to treat the exhibition as a segment of history was unacceptable as the authors highlighted from the beginning that their intention was to demonstrate the connection between German people and the criminal activity of the Nazi state “as closely and intensively as nowhere before.” The Wehrmacht was presented as a part of the society: “it is not some social institution but an organisation connected with the life of an average family: a father, a grandfather, an uncle and everything they might have done.” When myths were destroyed, images of oneself and of the war started to reach the citizens’ consciousness; it has become clear how much a war generation lives in their own image of the past.

The reaction to the exhibition should also be analysed in the context of new experiences of the reunited Germany, particularly, the debate on the participation of the Bundeswehr in the Persian Gulf War, in the former Yugoslavia, and in Kosovo. In the 1980s, in the old FRG, the pacifist movement against armaments, stationing missiles and the American SDI programme revived as apocalyptic visions of the militarising world were spreading. In the critical 1980s, the slogans ‘No more war’ and ‘No more Auschwitz’ lost their potential as reference points. The exhibition demonstrated that not all wars were similar. Alongside collective anxiety about the association between the participation of German soldiers in military actions outside the NATO area and the memory of the Wehrmacht presence in the occupied lands, another important political motif appeared that was important for the evaluation of the role and position of the exhibition in shaping German collective memory.

Impressions and observations revealed in the interviews with visitors were confirmed by the academic study focused on family conversations about the war past in the reunited Germany. In the analysis of their study, Harald Welzer, Sabine Moller and Karolina Tschuggnall came to conclusions that allow for valid generalisations.<sup>517</sup> On the basis of the gathered material, the authors distinguished repeating patterns of conversations and types of messages. They are: adopting the role of a victim, justification, distancing, fascination and being overwhelmed. As the authors provided enough examples to prove the validity of their conclusions, it is worth examining at least some of them more closely. The most interesting ones are the most typical and common processes of constructing a victim and reverting the historical roles of the perpetrator and the victim.

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517 H. Welzer, S. Moller, K. Tschuggnall, ‘*Dziadek nie był nazistą*’. *Narodowy socjalizm i Holocaust w pamięci rodzinnej*, trans. P. Masłowski, in: M. Saryusz-Wolska (ed.), *Pamięć zbiorowa i kulturowa*, op. cit., pp. 351-410.



The newest research on the memories of the war generation confronted with the knowledge of children and grandchildren shows the whole complexity of remembering and the difficulty of intergenerational transfer of war experiences. How to put into words the experience of an SS officer, a soldier, a camp commandant? What emerges from the conversations of three generations is the image of heroic family traditions. The interviewees deprived their participation in the war of historical context. The greater was the participation in the criminal machine, the greater was the need to save family members from revealing the evil. In every conversation, one attached his or her own meaning to history. As a result, the Nazis and the Germans were defined as two different, separate categories of people.<sup>518</sup>

The citizens of the new lands of the Federation, when talking about their war experience, referred to the communist persecutions they suffered as if they were a kind of justification of Nazism and a way to relativise the Nazi past. The dichotomy of private memories and the official image of history resulted in a belief that the SED officials were responsible for deforming the image of the past has now passed into oblivion.

In the family memory albums in the former GDR, the differences between Nazism and communism are blurring. National Socialism appears to be a system without National Socialists: ‘an average little man’, terrorised by the system, fell victim to ‘blind history’. The official culture of memory and private memories do not overlap. Remembered images, usually from films, do not teach criticism without proper interpretation of the witness of history. This is how a person born in 1976 described his feelings after watching a film picturing the marches and parades of the youth in uniforms: “This was cool, how they were doing it, how they were shouting: ‘Heil Hitler’ or ‘Sieg Heil’. This enchantment of people makes everything so fascinating; how strong this nation was. Because everyone was afraid of us.”<sup>519</sup>

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518 See e.g. H. Welzer, S. Moller, K. Tschuggnall, ‘*Opa war kein Nazi*’. *Nationalsozialismus und Holocaust im Familiengedächtnis*, Frankfurt a. M. 2002., see also: H. Erler (ed.), *Erinnern und Verstehen*, op. cit.; W. Bergem (ed.), *Die NS-Diktatur im deutschen Erinnerungsdiskurs*, Opladen 2003; A. Silbermann, M. Stoffers, *Auschwitz: Nie davon gehört?*, Berlin 2000.

519 H. Welzer, S. Moller, K. Tschuggnall, ‘*Opa war kein Nazi*’..., op. cit., p. 107. For more see: J. Käppner, *Erstarrte Geschichte. Faschismus und Holocaust im Spiegel der Geschichtswissenschaft und Geschichtspropaganda der DDR*, Hamburg 1999; J. Herf, *Zweierlei Erinnerung*, Berlin 1988; K.H. Jarausch, M. Sabrow (eds.), *Verletztes Gedächtnis. Erinnerungskultur und Zeitgeschichte im Konflikt*, Frankfurt a. M. 2002; M. Klundt, S. Salzborn, H. Schwietring, G. Wiegel (eds.), *Erinnern, verdrängen, vergessen. Geschichtspolitische Wege ins 21. Jahrhundert*, Giessen 2003; K. Ahlheim, B. Heger, *Die unbequeme Vergangenheit, NS-Vergangenheit, Holocaust und die Schwierigkeiten des Erinnerns*, Schwalbach/Ts. 2002.

The interviewees sometimes show their distance to the problem through irony. They laugh together at the Nazis and ridicule all the power elites in the world, which makes German leaders more normal. The witnesses of National Socialism in family conversations speak of the ‘beautiful times’ of their youth with a sparkle in their eyes. According to them, present times compare poorly with the epoch when community was highly valued. The witnesses recount to their younger family members ‘heroic’ stories about the readiness to help, civil courage and resistance to evil. As a consequence, children and grandchildren mostly consider their parents and grandparents to be people who suffered during the war, either as a result of captivity or occupation, or due to military service. One of the interviewees, born in 1949, recalled that his father had had to march away to Poland and then Russia and “always in the infantry, as far as I know, which means in the part of the army that always has to sit in the worst mud.” The authors note that these confessions, narratives and memories lack the reflection regarding why someone close found himself “in the mud.” Where was this war going? What mattered to the interviewees was the difficult conditions in which Germans had to fight their enemies.

No one wondered what the Wehrmacht soldiers had been seeking in Russia. Every memory of the Eastern Front was associated only with fear and danger. The stereotype of the evil Bolshevik was deeply rooted. The opinion of Poles was no better. One of the interviewees, born in 1922, recounted a story of the good treatment meted out to a Polish forced labourer. He recalled a policeman who had come to his house and who “immediately wanted to beat this Pole, our Alfred. (...) Then my father jumped to his feet and said: ‘Stop! What is going on here? First of all, I want to know what is going on and second, it is me who decides when he is beaten!’” No context was provided for the stories of forced labourers. A “possessive pronoun (‘our Alfred’) was used, which clearly defined hierarchical relations and seemed to include an aspect of humanity and solidarity; also, one’s own kindness towards this man was highlighted.” The conflict with the policeman did not concern the problem whether or not a Pole should be beaten but when it is allowed.<sup>520</sup> The authors pointed to the syndrome of the so-called empty speech, which they observed in the family stories and memories. Whenever the most dramatic events appear, there are no concrete facts, places or persons but phrases such as “and so they took these Jews”, “and so it happened”, “one knew nothing at all.” There was a “bad Russian” and a “good American”. The “empty speech”, as the authors of the study observe, builds a “mechanism of intergenerational communication.” They prove that this mechanism corresponds with the function

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520 H. Welzer, S. Moller, K. Tschuggnall, *‘Dziadek nie był nazistą’*. *Narodowy socjalizm i Holocaust w pamięci rodzinnej*, trans. P. Masłowski, in: M. Saryusz-Wolska (ed.), *Pamięć zbiorowa...*, op. cit., pp. 373-374.

of many vague and inconsistent stories. Their efficiency lies in the fact that “they can be filled with content and images that best fulfil the listeners’ need for a meaning. One can say that the ‘empty speech’ opens the widest possible space for attaching the intentions and ideas to the speaker that [the listener] would like most like to attach from his or her perspective.”<sup>521</sup>

### Daniel Jonah Goldhagen: an ordinary German as a Hitler’s assistant?

Great public debates about the newest history of Germany became a permanent element distinguishing the intellectual milieu of the Berlin Republic. Many of these debates were initiated by particular books. This was the case for Fritz Fischer’s book published in 1961 (*Griff nach der Weltmacht: Die Kriegzielpolitik des kaiserlichen Deutschland 1914–1918*; published in English as *Germany’s Aims in the First World War*). Rolf Hochhuth’s 1963 drama, *Der Stellvertreter. Ein christliches Trauerspiel* (*The Deputy, a Christian Tragedy*), also caused commotion and produced a distinct echo. Media messages in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century contributed to the popularisation of the most difficult historical questions. The most recent history, either analysed in narrow academic circles or discussed in talk shows, has attempted to capture public attention.

A historical book, intended to have an academic status, rarely becomes a subject of interest of readers outside expert circles. However, the book of the American political scientist Daniel Jonah Goldhagen gained not only readers but also viewers and a wide audience.<sup>522</sup> The huge resonance and great excitement in response to *Hitler’s Willing Executioners* make one ask about the reasons behind the behaviour of the German readers of the book written by a young lecturer at Harvard University. Perhaps it was the same reason that caused disturbance in response to the exhibition on the Wehrmacht crimes. The difference was that in one case, a German author from the Hamburg Institute for Social Research fouled his own nest and in the other case a young American of Jewish origin took the prosecutor’s role.

The book confronted society with its war image and made an average citizen look at him or herself in the mirror of history. The author’s thesis disturbed all those who attributed the whole guilt for National Socialism to state institutions and major officials of the Third Reich. The credo of the American author is doubtlessly controversial, which does not mean that the book is not worth attention. Goldhagen proved: “In the light of the ubiquitous demonizing, racial antisemitism in the public sphere, in their communities and among their countrymen, given, just as

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521 Ibidem, p. 410.

522 D.J. Goldhagen, op. cit.

crucially, the long history of an intense, culturally born antipathy and hatred of Jews, and given the long support *prior to Nazism* of major German political, social and cultural institutions for the eliminationist antisemitic worldview, it is hard to justify, either theoretically or empirically, any conclusion but that a near universal acceptance of the central aspects of the Nazi image of Jews characterized the German people.”<sup>523</sup>

A part of society was indignant at the fact that Goldhagen did not attach the Nazi mass murder to ‘Hitler’s clique’ but evaluated it as a ‘national project’ of the Germans, a result of individual choices by the citizens. The author’s method of selecting material and his argumentation were seen as very problematic by historians. Murderous anti-Semitism was imputed absolutely to the whole nation. The American political scientist did not manage to convert other scientists to his theory because he did not provide evidence for the specificity of German anti-Semitism in comparison to other European countries. The research method of the author of *Hitler’s Willing Executioners* was criticised by many prominent historians, also outside the German-speaking area.

However, regardless of the expert opinion, Goldhagen’s book was a media event similar to the Wehrmacht exhibition. Sociologists were provided with rich material to look for correlations between the edition of an academic, historical book and its public reception. It is not often that a long, difficult 700-page academic work about the dark side of Germany becomes a subject of media interest, of meetings, conferences and many publications. Before the German edition was released, a press debate had already been taking place in Germany. Within several months, from the beginning of 1999 until the autumn of that year, about 700 newspapers texts and radio or television broadcasts appeared. In April 1996, *Die Zeit* announced “a new historical dispute.” Despite methodological mistakes, the rooms in which meetings with the author were held were bursting at the seams. The greater the academic distance between the historians was, the more the crowds of interested audience grew.<sup>524</sup>

A new debate about collective guilt broke out. The term immediately provoked self-defence. The young scientist from Harvard was liked by his peers due to his friendly and open attitude. The success of the book is sometimes explained by referring to its unconventional presentation of historical facts. Critics, on the other hand, used such terms as “pornography of horror” and “voyeurism”. They

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523 Ibidem, p. 442.

524 An anthology of the first texts of the debate was edited by J.H. Schoeps (ed.), *Ein Volk von Mördern? Die Dokumentation zur Goldhagen-Kontroverse um die Rolle der Deutschen im Holocaust*, Hamburg 1996; M. Heyl, *Die Goldhagen-Debatte im Spiegel der englisch- und deutschsprachigen Rezensionen von Februar bis Juli 1996. Ein Überblick*, “Mittelweg 36”, (1996) 4, p. 41-56.

deplored the fact that the debates on the memory of National Socialism during the meetings with the author were reduced to the level of a talk show. However, some critics admitted that Goldhagen, using an unusual form, managed to “push back the veil and, after a break of half a century, make the terrible be tangible.”<sup>525</sup> Goldhagen decreased the distance between the past and the present; he allowed Germans to come closer to the heart of the problem.

The first reactions of the German press were aggressive. A defensive community quickly emerged. Goldhagen’s “pamphlet” was rejected as non-academic. Henry M. Broder argued that Goldhagen, as a son of a Jew who survived the Holocaust, was not able to write objectively. He perceived Goldhagen’s work more as an act of revenge commissioned by his father.<sup>526</sup> *Frankfurter Rundschau* found Goldhagen’s book to be mostly a provocation. It was suggested that the leading media on the East coast of the USA, dominated by Jewish journalists, deliberately strengthened Goldhagen’s position to cast the Germans in a negative light.<sup>527</sup>

The Goldhagen phenomenon presented a question to which there is no clear answer: how to reach the reader and the viewer with important knowledge? How to interest them? Does one have to shock to gain a wider audience? The reflection about the historian’s role returned. What are the social functions of historians? What tools should they use to keep pace with new media? Regardless of the methodological mistakes, the book sparked off emotions and debates that made up an important element of the learning process. Germans, particularly the intellectual elites, were surprised with the response to Goldhagen’s book and its popularity, particularly that despite the well-founded criticism of experts, there were a lot of positive opinions and even cases of repentance, understanding one’s guilt and discovering the sense of responsibility after many years. Numerous letters sent to the author are the evidence of this.

Scientists and journalists took part in the debate on Goldhagen’s theories.<sup>528</sup> The researchers who rejected the theory of ethnic anti-Semitism in Germany long before the Holocaust as a distinguishing feature of the nation were right. References and comparative research were missing. The anti-Semitism of Poles, the French and other nations in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century was no different from that of the Germans, if not more extreme. Those who rejected any confrontation with guilt warned against the destruction of the German national identity and popularisation

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525 F. Schirmacher, *Hitlers Code*; *FAZ* 15.04.1996.

526 H.M. Broder, *Ich bin sehr stolz*; *Der Spiegel* 20.05.1996.

527 M. Arning, R. Paasch, *Die provokanten Thesen des Mister Goldhagen*; *Frankfurter Rundschau* 12.04.1996.

528 Among the analyses of the Goldhagen phenomenon, one of the most important ones was written by the Polish Germanist, Joanna Jablkowska, *Zwischen Heimat und Nation. Das deutsche Paradigma? Zu Martin Walser*, Tübingen 2001.

of “historical myths of evil” without providing historical context. Generational sensitivity emerged.<sup>529</sup> What dominated in the reception of Goldhagen were the aspects of nation and morality. The historian Christian Meier searched for an explanation for the positive reception of Goldhagen’s book by young Germans. “They may feel offended”, he wrote, “because they feel they do not bear the responsibility as descendants.”<sup>530</sup>

Goldhagen’s theories have been very fairly and objectively compared with German historiography by Dieter Pohl,<sup>531</sup> who presents the theses of the American researcher against a background of deep analysis of literature about the Holocaust. Pohl considers the public rejection of the book to be an exaggeration. In reworking his dissertation into a book, Goldhagen fiercely criticises the existing literature. Pohl accepts Goldhagen’s argument that German academic papers lack or pay minimal attention to the crimes committed by minor perpetrators: those outside the high-ranking Nazi elites and SS or SA circles. It is also impossible to deny that perpetrators willingly decided to commit genocide. They represented a cross-section of the society. However, to answer the question of how ‘quite ordinary Germans’ decided to take part in the crime, one needs a sound argument. Yet, Goldhagen tries to prove a false theory that Germans had for centuries kept a specific image of the Jews that was different from the image of the Jews of other nations. According to the author, the consequence of the long-lived anti-Semitic prejudices was an “eliminationist anti-Semitism”, which meant that the Germans, who were well informed about the mass murders, welcomed the final solution as a “national project”. Goldhagen decided that the German people had accepted the deportation of Jews just as they accepted the Nurnberg Laws, although they had soon learned the purpose of this deportation. Such logic led the Harvard researcher to the uncompromising conclusion that every German had been a potential murderer of Jews. However, the hypothesis of monocausal motivation cannot be proved without comparative studies. Although it is true that individual motives of action were anti-Semitic, Goldhagen has not proved that the average German was a potential murderer. The awareness of massacres and gassing was not equal to acquiescence. Nazi murderers found assistants and associates in Europe, which does not mean that whole nations qualified as potential executioners of the Jews.

Goldhagen’s work was based mostly on American research and publications that supported his thesis. Pohl believes that the author’s greatest weakness is that

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529 About the response to Goldhagen’s book, see e.g. R. i. B. Vogt, *Goldhagen und die Deutschen. Psychoanalytische Reflexionen über die Resonanz auf ein Buch und seinen Autor in der deutschen Öffentlichkeit*; *Psyche* 51, 1997, pp. 494-569.

530 C. Meier, *Auszug aus der Geschichte*; *FAZ* 27.12.1996.

531 D. Pohl, *Die Holocaust-Forschung und Goldhagens Thesen*; *Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte* 1, 1997, pp. 1-48.

he did not discuss the criteria that led him to his theory. The study of individual motivation of action belongs to one of the most difficult branches of historiography and provides an opportunity for speculation. On the other hand, the author provided a lot of interesting material about death marches. He went beyond the thesis of the purely bureaucratic and institutional character of the murder.<sup>532</sup> One of the perhaps unintended achievements of the book is showing that Eastern Europe of the period 1939-1945 still provides a field for exploratory analyses.

In the second phase of the debate, after the release of the German edition of the book, when the first attacks were over, press disputes took a more sober tone. Positive elements of the book were also noticed. The American historian Saul Friedländer wondered about the questions asked by Goldhagen in his work: "What people were they, these 'ordinary perpetrators'? What motives were behind their actions?" Those who did not accept Goldhagen's thesis, such as Jan Philipp Reemtsma, concluded that the provocation of the American researcher was that the key problem of his book was freedom in making decisions and the assumption that the decision to commit crimes was made voluntarily.<sup>533</sup> Goldhagen was liked at face-to-face meetings. Polite and attentive to the panellists, the young American stood opposite the older historians who were losing authority and credibility in the eyes of the audience. Goldhagen asked simple questions during the meetings: What did the perpetrators think of their victims? Were they convinced that what they were doing was right? How did they come to the decision to commit a crime? The author wanted the audience to concentrate on the perpetrators. He demonstrated that perpetrators were not robots, but particular individuals with particular biographies.

Summing up the debate, Volker Ulrich asked about the reasons for the different responses to the book from academicians and the public. Was the media alone responsible for its positive reception? He immediately replied that media popularity and academic reputation were not necessarily mutually exclusive. Contrarily to most historians, Ulrich believed that the debate on Goldhagen's book was not unproductive for science. It would be hard to disagree that it became an important source of questions about the historical identity of the Berlin Republic.<sup>534</sup> It also

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532 For discussion, see *Ein Volk von Dämonen?*; *Der Spiegel* 21, 1996, pp. 48-58; "Ich bin sehr stolz" Henryk M. Broder über Goldhagen, *Vater und Sohn*, ibidem, pp. 58-71; *Todbringende 'Humanisten'*. Rudolf Augstein zur *Geschichte des Holocaust und zu den neuen Thesen*, "Der Spiegel" 33, 1996, pp. 40-41; "Riesige Mehrheit". *Die deutsche Übersetzung glättet Goldhagens Thesen*, ibidem, pp. 42-49; *Was dachten die Mörder? Der US-Politologe Daniel Jonah Goldhagen über den Streit um sein Holocaust-Buch und das Bild der Täter*, ibidem, pp. 50-55.

533 J.P. Reemtsma, *Die Mörder waren unter uns*; *Süddeutsche Zeitung* 24./25.08.1996.

534 V. Ulrich, *Eine produktive Provokation. Die Rolle der Medien in der Goldhagen-Kontroverse*, in: M. Sabrow, R. Jessen, K. Große Kracht (eds.), *Zeitgeschichte als Streitgeschichte*, München 2003, pp. 152-170.



demonstrated that in the reunified Germany, cleanly cutting off the National Socialist past was not an option.

Norbert Frei, a distinguished historian in the studies of the politics of memory, explained the media success of Goldhagen's book in terms of the extraordinary plasticity and simplicity of expression, unusual in case of academic literature on the Holocaust. Goldhagen perfectly met the readers' expectations and touched "the nerve of time".<sup>535</sup> Moreover, Goldhagen's interpretation differed from the ongoing dispute in Germany between intentionalists and structuralists about the perpetration and execution of criminal policy.<sup>536</sup> To what extent was the controversy surrounding Goldhagen's work inspired by the media? In long, lazy summers the media usually look for refreshing sources. With extraordinary speed, Siedler Verlag released Goldhagen's book and sold 80,000 copies in one month. By 2003, the total circulation reached 363,000, of which 80,000 were the pocket edition. These marketing activities by the German publishers could incorrectly suggest that there had never before been an interesting book about the Holocaust on the German market. The 'triumphal march' of Goldhagen through the biggest cities was even more spectacular; it turned out that the big philharmonic halls were too small to accommodate everybody who was interested. It is hard to give a clear answer to the question of the consequences of the debate for historical science, the interest in anti-Semitism and further learning. The reaction to Goldhagen's thesis demonstrated the strength and possibilities of the media. It also showed that the event allowed readers to become aware of their own image and interpretation of the Holocaust.

A pretext for the new release of the debate was the speech Goldhagen gave in March 1997 on the occasion of receiving the Democracy Prize (Demokratiepreis) for his book. The prize was funded by a leftist-intellectual magazine, *Blätter für deutsche und internationale Politik*. The author was honoured for, as it was argued, "the penetrating quality and the moral strength of his presentation", which "has provided a powerful stimulus to the public conscience of the Federal Republic".<sup>537</sup> In his speech, Goldhagen acknowledged the Federal Republic of Germany as a positive "model" of reckoning with the past to be followed by other nations going through a democratic transition. The researcher who pilloried the whole German nation of the time of National Socialism and accused it of "eliminationist

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535 N. Frei, *Goldhagen, die Deutschen und die Historiker. Über die Repräsentation des Holocaust im Zeitalter der Visualisierung*, in: M. Sabrow, R. Jessen, K. Große Kracht (eds.), op. cit., pp. 138-151.

536 See e.g. U. Herbert, *Vernichtungspolitik. Neue Antworten und Fragen zur Geschichte des "Holocaust"*, in: idem (ed.), *Nationalsozialistische Vernichtungspolitik 1939-1945. Neue Forschungen und Kontroversen*, Frankfurt a. M. 1998, pp. 9-66.

537 Eulogy of J. Habermas: *Geschichte ist ein Teil von uns; Die Zeit* 14.03.1997.



anti-Semitism”, spared no praise for contemporary Germany: “I do not know any other country that has dealt so openly and consistently with infamous and terrible chapters of its own history.”<sup>538</sup> The speech was met with applause, but also criticism. Those who compared the speech with the book concluded that as the American author found anti-Semitism to be the key national project of the Germans in such an easy and generalising manner, he also estimated without much reflection that the Germans after 1945 became democrats in an exemplary manner. Some were suspicious about Goldhagen’s lack of moderation – in this case, in his praise of the Germans. Are they really model students of democracy and dealing with the past?<sup>539</sup>

Unexpectedly for both sides of the argument, the prizewinner’s speech sparked off a new, qualitatively different dispute. Helmut König sees in Goldhagen’s work two transitions of the Germans: from ordinary Germans to Hitler’s executioners and from supporters of dictatorship to convinced democrats. He asks, not without irony, how it is possible that people with murderous instincts, “untouched by Western culture”, after doing their murderous business, returned home and became diligent, zealous democrats.<sup>540</sup> Goldhagen talked about “internalisation” and Europeanisation of German politics after 1945. His adversaries asked whether converting Germans to democracy was a result of learning from history or only an expression of opportunism and adjustment. Another dispute following Goldhagen’s speech concerned the most complex and difficult to interpret problem: how Germans released themselves from the ideology of National Socialism and converted to democracy. The problem of the recognition of similarities and differences between public behaviour and private thought remains a problem not only for the academic field. Behaviour is always externalised and the motives for actions is unknown. The results of sociological and psychological research are not always clear. Public communication can be controlled more than individual consciousness. Contrary to Jasper’s expectations, who assumed that the work on the past should be directed inwards and moral reflection and internal purification should be a prelude to the renewal of a person who would afterwards become a model citizen of a democratic state, the reality set another direction. The reason of the new state and politics determined the course of events without waiting for

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538 D. Goldhagen, *Modell Deutschland. Nationalgeschichte, Demokratie und Internationalisierung in der Bundesrepublik*; *Blätter für deutsche und internationale Politik* 4, 1997, p. 429.

539 J.P. Reemtsma, *Eine ins Lob gekleidete deutliche Mahnung. Daniel Goldhagens “Modell Bundesrepublik” und das Echo*; *Blätter für deutsche und internationale Politik* 6, 1997, pp. 690-695.

540 H. König, *Über die Differenz zwischen Bewusstsein und Verhalten in Deutschland. Noch einmal zu Goldhagen*; *Leviathan* 1, 1998, pp. 92-108.

moral and spiritual renewal of citizens. In this regard, Helmut König is right to ask how wide the gap between institutions and consciousness can be so as not to destroy the democratic order. The debate on Goldhagen's theses and speech has demonstrated that most debaters did not doubt the stability of democratic institutions but only, sometimes, the change in German historical identity.

Some researchers called the controversies over Goldhagen a "new historians' dispute".<sup>541</sup> However, it is hard to agree with such an opinion. The character of the first dispute was different, as well as the actors and the fronts of the controversies. Admittedly, both debates had common points of reference. Both in the 'historians' dispute' and in the Goldhagen controversy, the subject was the uniqueness and particularity of the genocide on the Jews. In both cases, the controversial question regarded the place of the Holocaust in German political self-understanding. However, the Goldhagen controversy took place in the reunited Germany, when the postwar generation constituted a vast majority of the population. The political shift in Germany and in Europe and the generational change illustrated a new dimension of the politics of memory. The Goldhagen controversy was not only about methodology and the defence of historians but about all the Germans, about the political sensitivity of the Federal Republic of Germany.

The radical tone of German reviews and criticism, sometimes lined with impatience about a young researcher from Harvard trying to teach Germans what they should do with their past and how to do their morality homework, is particularly interesting when compared with the tone of 'ordinary' citizens, for whom Goldhagen's book was a discovery. The letters addressed to the author of *Hitler's Willing Executioners* were gathered in the over 200-page volume published by Siedler Verlag. They were not only letters of commendation but also critical and offensive to the author of the book. The vast majority of them shared amazement, horror and the question why the authors of the letters had not known about the events described by the American. They were not interested in the methodology of the work or the historian's research tools. The criminal activities of police battalions, the description of the situation of the Jews in the 'labour' camps, the Golgotha of death marches – they all were a discovery for these people (educated people, judging by the form of their expression). They represented war, postwar and the youngest generation. Many of them expressed gratitude, some of them also a feeling of a great shame. The letters were one of the faces of the Republic.

Among the authors there were active participants in the war and bystanders who repressed from memory what they had experienced in the Third Reich. Now they could confess anonymously: "I've realised I escaped from the sense of guilt

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541 See e.g. A. Helle, *Kein ganz gewöhnlicher Streit: Zur Zeitgebundenheit der Goldhagen-Debatte*; *Leviathan* 2, 1997, pp. 251-270.

although I did not deserve this escape. Like most Germans, I have never honestly taken a clear position and until now I have never really had an opportunity to deal with the legacy of the Holocaust without ambivalent feelings. Therefore, I consider what you have done to be right. The fact I did not want to hear about it before now tells me that I have been moving away from me what I should not repress". Someone observed: "You are accusing all of us. (...) I do not want to criticise the accusation (...) but those who have not yet acknowledged their guilt will not listen to you".<sup>542</sup> Many letters contained positive declarations: "Your book has taught me a lot". The book also inspired discussions among family circles. "You are still young and you lack the experience of these times (...) Your one-sided assessment of my nation will catch up with you one day as one needs to pay for everything in life that does not follow the law of love."<sup>543</sup> Some wrote about a "shock therapy" that the book provoked. "Your book hits the centre, the heart of the dark times and I hope that you will continue to provoke people to think and feel".<sup>544</sup> The book made people reflect on the subject: "I accuse myself and my compatriots of not opposing the pogroms from the beginning but, out of indifference and then fear, we did nothing or very little. Perhaps we were paralysed by the war events."<sup>545</sup>

### Martin Walser: Holocaust as a "moral bludgeon"

Another dispute about the interpretation of the past, which also became a debate on German identity, was sparked off by Martin Walser, one of the country's most prominent contemporary prose writers. A representative of the *Flakhelfergeneration* (generation of male Germans drafted as teenagers to man anti-aircraft batteries at the end of WW II) and a young volunteer in the Wehrmacht, Walser was an intellectual and authority in the 'old' FRG, was involved in public life and took the "pulse of Germany". His speech upon accepting the Frankfurt Book Fair Peace Prize on 11 October 1998 in St. Paul's Church (German: Paulskirche) in Frankfurt am Main passed into history both because of its content and the response it elicited.<sup>546</sup>

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542 *Briefe an Goldhagen, eingeleitet und beantwortet von Daniel Jonah Goldhagen*, Berlin 1997, pp. 21-26.

543 *Ibidem*, p. 32.

544 *Ibidem*, p. 68.

545 *Ibidem*, p. 123.

546 Martin Walser, *Experiences while Composing a Sunday Speech*, in: M. Walser, T.A. Kovach, *The Burden of the Past: Martin Walser on Modern German Identity: Texts, Contexts, Commentary*, Camden House 2008, p.88-94 German documentation of the debate, see: F. Schirmacher (ed.), *Die Walser-Bubis-Debatte. Eine Dokumentation*, Frankfurt a. M. 1999.

Walser spoke of the German reckoning with the Holocaust in a way that drifted away from formally adopted standards. He violated a taboo and broke rules of political correctness by analysing his own conscience. “Everyone knows the burden of our history, our everlasting disgrace. There is not a day in which it is not held up before us. Could it be that in doing so the intellectuals who hold it up before us fall prey for a moment to the illusion that, because they have labored once more in the grim service of memory, they have relieved their own guilt somewhat, that they are even for a moment closer to the victims than to the perpetrators? A momentary alleviation of the merciless confrontation of perpetrators and victims. [...] No serious person denies Auschwitz; no person who is still of sound mind quibbles about the horror of Auschwitz; but when this past is held up to me every day in the media, I notice that something in me rebels against this unceasing presentation of our disgrace. Instead of being grateful for this never-ending presentation of our disgrace, I begin to look away. [I would like to understand why the past is being brought up in this decade more than ever before.] When I notice something in me rebelling, I try to seek out the motives of those holding up our disgrace, and I am almost happy when I believe I can discover that often the motive is no longer keeping alive the memory, or the impermissibility of forgetting, but rather the exploiting of our disgrace for present purposes.”<sup>547</sup>

Walser concluded that Auschwitz “is not suited to become a routine threat, a means of intimidation or moral bludgeon that can be employed on any occasion, or even a compulsory exercise”. He wanted to demonstrate the consequences of a situation in which some people take responsibility for the conscience of others. He protested against the ritualisation of memory that “has the quality of lip service”; against the situation in which a German who says that his nation “are a perfectly normal people” falls under suspicion. The effect of such a state of affairs, according to Walser, is the Holocaust Memorial in Berlin, which will contribute to “paving over the centre of our capital to create a nightmare the size of a football field”, and will bring a “monumentalisation of our disgrace”. The writer opposes the public reckoning with guilt in the belief that “everyone is alone with his or her conscience. For this reason, public acts of conscience are in danger of becoming symbolic. And nothing is more alien to conscience than symbolism, however well-intentioned.” Walser gives himself the right to “inward solitude”. He wants to “confront the soldiers of public opinion” when they, with “moral pistol extended, force the writer into the service of opinion”.<sup>548</sup>

Walser’s words amazed many, as he had presented a different attitude in his text published in 1965, about the Auschwitz trials. At the time, Walser criticised the German way of perceiving Auschwitz and asked himself and his compatriots

547 M. Walser, *Experiences*, op. cit., p. 89.

548 *Ibidem*, p. 90.

many uncomfortable questions. He wrote: “We want to escape this history. And the justice system is supposed to help us achieve this. And what do we do with the sufferings of the ‘inmates’? Since we cannot succeed in creating any kind of meaning for them that could satisfy us, our instinct takes refuge once more in the idea of retribution. (...) We shy away from the effort of taking Auschwitz into our consciousness as a senseless murder that can never be atoned for. (...) Our well-established distance from the ‘devils’ and ‘beasts’ allows us to consume the glaring quotations as fodder for our own asocial nature, which we keep hidden. We can allow ourselves to do this all the more easily since we bring to the victims our entire powerless sense of regret. And the justice system will fulfill its social task, after all, and take care of the matter legally.”<sup>549</sup>

Ignatz Bubis, the Chairman of the Central Council of Jews in Germany, responded to Walser’s words on 9 November 1998, in the synagogue in Rykestraße, Berlin, on the anniversary of the Night of the Broken Glass. Bubis said: “Whoever is unwilling to address this part of history, and instead prefers to deflect his thoughts or forget, must be aware that history can repeat itself. His shame was there, full stop, and will not disappear by wanting to forget, and it is ‘intellectual arson’ if anyone sees in it an instrumentalisation of Auschwitz for present purposes. (...) We cannot dispense with showing films about the shame just so that Mr. Walser and others can remain undisturbed and find peace of mind, and so that the impression of instrumentalisation does not arise. (...) One can hold different opinions about the Holocaust memorial in this form or that, and one can oppose the erection of such a memorial in the first place. But in no case is one allowed to call the design a nightmare, even with poetic license, and most certainly not a monumentalisation of shame. The shame was monumental and is not made such only by a memorial. (...) We owe it to the victims of the Shoah in order not to forget them! Whoever forgets these victims murders them a second time!”<sup>550</sup>

The debater who defended Walser, Klaus von Dohnanyi, a politician, journalist, intellectual, former mayor of Hamburg, social democrat, the son of a member of a resistance movement against Hitler and a person honoured for German-Jewish dialogue, intended to reconcile the warring parties. First, he reminded his listeners: “He who in these days truly wants to belong to this country with its tragedy and its whole history, he who really understands his Germanness seriously and sincerely must be able to say: we took racism to the point of genocide, we committed the

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549 M. Walser, *Our Auschwitz*, in: M. Walser, T.A. Kovach, *The Burden of the Past*, op.cit, pp. 5-19.

550 I. Bubis, *Odpowiedź Walserowi*, in: *Spór o niemiecką pamięć. Debata Walser–Bubis*, Warszawa 1999, p. 79-82. Translation based on: T. Dunlap, *Ignatz Bubis, the Chairman of the Central Council of Jews in Germany, warns against Relativizing the Holocaust (November 9, 1998)*, [http://germanhistorydocs.ghi-dc.org/docpage.cfm?docpage\\_id=3558](http://germanhistorydocs.ghi-dc.org/docpage.cfm?docpage_id=3558)

Holocaust, we waged a war of annihilation in Russia. To speak with Walser, these crimes are therefore our own personal disgrace. Not Germany, the abstract nation; not the German Reich, the state organisation; not the other Germans; no, it was we ourselves.” Dohnanyi’s intentions failed. The clumsiness of his words polarised the dispute even more when he addressed the Jewish community: “Jewish citizens in Germany should of course also ask themselves if they would have behaved more courageously than most of the other Germans if after 1933 ‘only’ the disabled, the homosexuals or the Roma had been dragged away to death camps. Everyone should attempt to answer this question honestly for himself”.<sup>551</sup>

The debate, due to harsh and untactful words, took the form of mutual attacks and went beyond the merits of the matter. An intensive exchange of open letters occurred in the press. Dohnanyi suggested that the consciousness of a German and of a Jew were two different stories. “I believe”, he addressed Bubis, “that as a chairman of the Central Council of Jews in Germany you could handle your non-Jewish countrymen in a more delicate manner, as we all can get hurt.”<sup>552</sup> Ignatz Bubis immediately replied: “There is one thing you share with Walser: you are both easily hurt and you both look for peace of mind. I should provide you this peace by handling the non-Jewish compatriots in a more delicate manner, because everyone can get hurt. I cannot offer you that as neither because of you nor because of Walser will we give up memory, even routinised memory. One more thing. How would it be if you handled your Jewish compatriots with more delicacy because we are also easily hurt?”<sup>553</sup>

The reaction to the writer’s speech is in short referred to as ‘Walser-Bubis Debate’, although many scientists, journalists, and representatives of German and Jewish elites of the Federal Republic participated in it. Aleida Assmann reminds us that before Walser’s speech provoked so much passion, ten years earlier Siegfried Lenz, also awarded the Peace Prize of the German Book Trade, had asked: “Does history still appeal to us, does it even concern us, now that we lean over it dispassionately as over a herbarium and without slight dismay we observe what happens there?”<sup>554</sup>

What happens when the public are no longer interested despite the media’s best efforts? It goes to scientists. While during the historians’ dispute the

551 K. von Dohnanyi, *Przemówienie pokojowe. Niezbędna skarga Martina Walsera*, trans. Z. Wóycicka, in: *Spór o niemiecką pamięć*, op. cit., p. 86.

552 K. von Dohnanyi, *Można nas zranić. Dohnanyi odpowiada Bubisowi*, trans. A. Buras, in: *Spór o niemiecką pamięć*, op. cit., p. 93.

553 I. Bubis, *O spokoju ducha. Bubis odpowiada Klausowi von Dohnanyi*, trans. A. Buras, in: *Spór o niemiecką pamięć*, op. cit., p. 95.

554 A. Assmann, 1998 – *Między historią a pamięcią*, trans. M. Saryusz-Wolska, in: *Pamięć zbiorowa i kulturowa. Współczesna perspektywa niemiecka*, op. cit., p. 144.

discussion and the exchange of arguments and blows ran among professionals, this debate was triggered by two authorities, public persons representing the same generation, but with completely different life experiences. Both were German citizens. Ignatz Bubis, a Holocaust survivor who lost almost his entire family, represented the Jewish community. He was for many years a member of the Central Council of Jews in Memory and its chairman from 1997 to his death in 1999. Walser's and Bubis' interpretations of the memory of the Holocaust demonstrate insurmountable differences in how the victims and the perpetrators remember. Each of the adversaries spoke in the name of their own group of war participants and the emotional character of their words manifested the kind of sensitivity that stimulates public opinion. The former had enough of remembering the Holocaust, the latter wanted to be the guard of memory.

Two different discourses collided. One of them was an introverted moral discourse with a "pose of persecuted innocence"; another one emphasised the necessity of a symbolic representation of the Holocaust. One of the debaters, Karl Heinz Bohrer, a literary critic and a journalist, explains the emotional reaction of Martin Walser and Dohnanyi as a "conflict between private self-awareness and public uncertainty". Bohrer found Walser's speech innocent as much as scandalous. "If there is no memory of certain issues and if the carrier of this memory is not the national self-awareness (...), there is no potential for a culture of shame, which means that there is no certainty regarding the memory of the Holocaust."<sup>555</sup> The main factor that sparked off the dispute was not as much the content of Martin Walser's speech as its rhetoric. Most of the debaters who took the writer's side criticised only the form of his utterance, impropriety of the metaphors and impatience sometimes turning into aggressiveness. Although Walser's speech was called a "demagogic" or "rhetorical masterpiece", it was also defended as the statement of a writer and a person who believed that his writings and attitude after the war manifested his stance on the Holocaust and did not have to prove it again. Bubis' defenders criticised Walser for taking the role of a victim who waits for compensation for being constantly forced to sprinkle ashes on his own head. Walser found advocates in writers: Günter de Bruyn, Monika Maron, Rainer Kunze and *Der Spiegel* editor Rudolf Augstein. The journalists Klaus Harpprecht, Robert Leicht, Henryk M. Broder and many scientists took Bubis' side.<sup>556</sup>

Richard von Weizsäcker took the role of an intermediary, writing: "it is wrong when memory is overused. However, when memory ends, so does peace of mind. (...) Honest confrontation with the past lawlessness, for which young people bear

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555 K.H. Bohrer, *Kultura winy i kultura wstydu oraz zanik pamięci historycznej*, trans. J. Jabłkowska, in: *O kondycji Niemiec*, op. cit., pp. 556-566.

556 See: J. Jabłkowska, L. Żyliński, *Rozrachunek z narodowosocjalistyczną przeszłością a tożsamość niemiecka*, in: *O kondycji Niemiec*, op. cit., pp. 7-48.



no personal responsibility whatsoever, but the consequences of which they need to responsibly handle, is possible and necessary, also for them, for the youth. What they need for themselves and for others is a strong fundament of trust. All three debaters spoke in good faith. One has to respect their conscience as well the conscience of any other person. However, we will not rise to the terrible burden of the committed crime by defending our sensitivity.”<sup>557</sup>

Another media event was Martin Walser’s lecture at the University of Duisburg on 27 November, during which the author refuted all the objections. He confessed that after his Frankfurt speech he received over 1,000 letters, mostly sympathising with his intentions. Walser rejected criticism and the arguments of scientists and journalists as unfounded and accused them of falsely interpreting his words in order to assign to him the desire to cut off from the past. “The one who reads literary texts as weather forecasts or stock market news can easily misunderstand the meaning they convey. (...) I believe that I receive these reprimands and insinuations because I cannot use the jargon adopted to the subject of dealing with the past and blessed by moral authorities.”<sup>558</sup>

A conciliation debate was organised on 13 December 1998 by the editors of *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*. Along with the main adversaries, Frank Schirrmacher and Salomon Korn were also invited. Bubis retracted the sharpest formulations. He said that what hurt him most was that “young people are encouraged to feel accused and manipulated while watching them [he is referring to the films with scenes from concentration camps: author’s note].” Walser did not change his opinion and in the final phase of the meeting expressed the need to find a new language of remembering: “The majority of Germans, one could critically say: the silent majority, have not found a common language to speak about the past.”<sup>559</sup>

Finally, György Konrád, another intellectual of Jewish origin, spoke. His words deserve the greatest respect. “A man, even if he wants, cannot release himself from painful memories. However, if he is confronted with them more often than it is bearable or acceptable, he will react with alienation and growing indifference. Although he will not deny what is painful – the disgrace – he will react to a professional shame with raised brows and, finally, a refusal. Facing horror cannot be an everyday experience or it will become a part of the vulgar consumption of horrors. The ability to repent is not given to us, we need to prepare for it; the

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557 R. von Weizsäcker, *Ten spór staje się niebezpieczny. Czy Walser musiał prowokować?*, trans. A. Krzemińska, in: *Spór o niemiecką pamięć*, op. cit., pp. 102-103.

558 M. Walser, *O czym świadczy hańba, jeśli nie o zbrodni*, trans. X. Dolińska, in: *Spór o niemiecką pamięć*, op. cit., p. 125.

559 *Potrzebujemy nowego języka pamięci* (transcript of a discussion organised by FAZ), trans. J. Bogusławska, in: *Spór o niemiecką pamięć*, op. cit., p. 162, 188.



Sunday of the Dead or the Day of Atonement are only once a year. Repentance needs ritual, theatrical and cathartic extraordinariness. Overuse leads to wearing out, to unreliability. (...) We need to respect individual differences concerning our threshold of excitability". He concluded that the compulsion to remember puts Jews and Germans into "one cell". Konrád, a Hungarian writer of Jewish origin who managed to avoid deportation to a camp, was able to keep incredible distance and give objective assessment. "The dispute between Mr. Martin Walser and Mr. Ignatz Bubis", Konrád commented, "originated from verbal exaggeration and clumsy sentences; it created ulcers, it is swelling and it has to burst. (...) Ego and sensitivity grow with age; they have to be respected among all the participants of the dispute."<sup>560</sup>

Generational exchange contributed to worsening of the problem of memory. Psychologists speak about the long phase of the latency of war trauma that passes on to children. It also involves perpetrators, whose political and moral responsibility is taken only now, by contemporary generations. Now that the period of direct experiencing of German history has ended, the debate between Walser, Bubis and their intellectual and moral advocates gains a new dimension. "The subject of observation changes together with generational change. Pure past that escaped experience emerges from the current past of the saved. (...) When a memory dies, not only does the distance grow but also its quality changes. Soon only documents will speak, enriched by images, films and notes."<sup>561</sup>

The speeches of the two protagonists can be seen from different perspectives. Aleida Assmann, who does not look for the arguments 'for' and 'against', is interested in the forms of communicating subjective memory. She only observes that Walser speaks about the impossibility of communicating radically different experiences. He defends the right to understand the past in his own way but he cannot join the new form of retrospection and memory. He cannot translate it into contemporary language and he does not want to falsify the past. It is impossible to communicate the "innocence of memory" because the fundamental transformation of values between the Third Reich and the democratic German state removed this innocence. The biographies of people born 1918-1933 were particularly marked with the way of socialisation. "It was the matter of a particular year of birth that someone was entangled into historical events to a particular extent, which made him or her unavoidably guilty in any case. Different criteria apply to people born in 1924 than to those born in 1927 and yet different ones to people born in 1930. The

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560 G. Konrád, *Wolność wspomnienia. Przyczynek do sporu między Martinem Walserelem a Ignatzem Bubisem*, trans. S. Urzeńska, in: *Spór o niemiecką pamięć*, op. cit., pp. 195-196, 203.

561 R. Koselleck, *Nachwort*, in: C. Beradt (ed.), *Das dritte Reich des Traums*, Frankfurt a. M. 1994, p. 117, after: A. Assmann, op. cit., p. 151.

three-year difference makes the first group a generation of guilty young soldiers, the second, a ‘sceptical’ *Flakhelfer* generation and the third, an ‘impartial white generation’.<sup>562</sup>

Everyone had his or her own interpretation of Walser’s speech and the following dispute. His words did not fall on deaf ears. Although Walser claimed to speak only in his own name, he in fact spoke as a winner of the Peace Prize of the German Book Trade, at the “spiritual and moral podium of the German nation”. Both Walser and Bubis referred to the hundreds of letters they received from their sympathisers. Walser claimed that the authors were people who wanted to express their gratitude for him saying aloud in public what they “had only whispered up until now.” There were people who, like him, did not accept the public language that focused on victims and perpetrators and “offered clichés” and who called the language of state ceremonies and anniversaries fossilised and routinised. Andrzej Szczypiorski said in his interview for *Der Spiegel*: “When Ignatz Bubis says something, everyone feels paralysed. In Germany a Jew can cross the street at a red light and no one says a word. This is not normal as this is not authentic.”<sup>563</sup>

On the other hand, Bubis and his advocates understood this attitude as a release from the burden of history: if people do not want to remember, they do not have to. The concern of the representative of the Jewish community in Germany is easy to understand. Does Walser’s attitude mean that the youth can remember whatever they want, that they should not be suggested anything, reminded of anything or rebuked? If state ceremonies are not suitable for shaping the conscience of the young generations, as the writer falsely suggested, and if everything about the Nazi times has been written and said, should this chapter of history be locked in a national archive? What if, after bystanders and participants in the Nazi politics leave the stage, the next generation wants to be so free from memory that they will discard any reminder of the times of annihilation as the “moral bludgeon”?

The dispute released new emotions mostly because the speeches of the main adversaries accumulated the most important controversies of the German culture of memory: the question of ‘cutting off from the past’, guilt and responsibility, shame and disgrace, patriotism and identity and the discrepancy between public memory in social communication and official rituals and symbols on the one hand, and private experiences and remembering on the other.

The Walser-Bubis debate cannot be interpreted without taking into account Walser’s entire attitude towards German-Jewish relations. Although Victor Klemperer’s diaries, published in 1995, did not spark off a debate as intense as the one between Walser and Bubis, they certainly became an important intellectual

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562 H. Bude, *Bilanz der Nachfolge. Die Bundesrepublik und der Nationalsozialismus*, Frankfurt a. M. 1992, p. 81.

563 *Der Spiegel* 14.12.1998, p. 183.

event in the Federal Republic of Germany. The German-born Romance philologist, who avoided deportation thanks to his Aryan wife and the bombing of Dresden, did not write about the Holocaust in his diaries but described with philological precision (over 1,600 pages) the day-to-day life of National Socialist Germany from the perspective of the Jews pushed into oblivion.<sup>564</sup> Martin Walser analysed Klemperer's diaries from 1989. Therefore, when the author of the diaries was posthumously awarded the Geschwister-Scholl-Preis, there was no doubt about Walser as his laudator. The laudation caused understandable outrage. It said more about Walser than Victor Klemperer. "The one who perceives everything", Walser said, "as a road that can only end in Auschwitz demands that German-Jewish relations culminate in unavoidable catastrophe in all circumstances. To me, it seems absurd; to say nothing of the fact that it would mean there are no successful developments in German-Jewish relations. The migration statistics contradict this. Germany is, even when the accusers of the horrible Germans do not want to admit it, the country of immigration also for the Jews."<sup>565</sup>

There are many indications that Martin Walser represented the group of German intellectuals who, feeling burdened with guilt, attempted to equate themselves to Holocaust survivors, such as Klemperer or Bubis. They wanted to have the same right to sensitivity. However, what should such sensitivity be called, or is it merely irritability that interprets every mention of genocide as an attack on personal freedom?<sup>566</sup>

## Mourning as the conscience of history?

The Walser-Bubis debate again placed on the agenda the problem of how one should handle guilt and shame and what forms the mourning should take. The central question was whether one can still be in mourning a few decades after the Holocaust. Is it even possible for the executioners of National Socialism to be in mourning: the mourning of Germans for the death of Jews, Poles, and Russians? Only in the 1990s, after many struggles in the search for a positive identity, did the discussion about the forms of expressing mourning become possible. After the generational conflict in the 1960s, when the younger generation started expressing

564 V. Klemperer, *Ich will Zeugnis ablegen bis zum letzten. Tagebücher 1933-1945*, in: W. Nowojski, H. Klemperer (eds.), Berlin 1995.

565 M. Walser, *Das Prinzip Genauigkeit. Laudatio auf Victor Klemperer*, Frankfurt a. M. 1996, p. 34.

566 See e.g. L. Rensmann, *Enthauptung der Medusa. Zur diskurshistorischen Rekonstruktion der Walser-Debatte im Licht politischer Psychologie*, in: M. Brumlik, H. Funke, L. Rensmann, *Umkämpftes Vergessen. Walser-Debatte, Holocaust-Mahnmal und neuere deutsche Geschichtspolitik*, Berlin 2000, pp. 28-126.

their mourning for the victims, Dan Diner asked: “was the lament over the inability to mourn instead directed at the loss of one’s own relations? Did the mourning perhaps concern those who belonged to the collectivity of the perpetrators?”<sup>567</sup>

Margarete Mitscherlich-Nielsen defines mourning as a “spiritual event in which an individual learns to slowly deal with loss through a constantly repeated, painful process of remembering in order to be later able to adopt an active approach to people and issues.”<sup>568</sup> Mourning is not a state but a process in which an individual suffers after losing someone he or she identified with. This process includes external actions (ceremonies, rituals) as a response to the experienced suffering as well as internal ‘working through’ the loss by remembering. Sigmund Freud, whose work *Mourning and Melancholia* is quoted by psychologists and therapists, assumed that there was a relationship of love and intimacy between the mourner and the mourned: thousands of ties that intensified the meaning of loss and resulted in shock and, in consequence, depression.

How to extend individual mourning to the collective, to the whole society? The mourning of an individual is limited by the time frames of his or her lifespan. The universal pain of the world carries the experiences of wars, great cataclysms and tragedies. Mourning related to a particular event and time can be specifically historical. It can be renewed and transferred but it will never become a direct experience. Its universality depends on the extent of identification of a generation with the tragic experience.<sup>569</sup> Mourning changes its character in a national perspective. In the case of a nation, the generational proximity of fathers, children and their descendants becomes an abstract community defined by historical symbols that needs extensive work on elaborating a common system of values. The extermination of Jews was an event that completely destroyed the continuity of norms and values in the national consciousness and identity of Germans. Many researchers attempt to define the conditions in which historical mourning is possible. Rüsen understands it as “a cultural practice which subjectively realizes an (objective) loss of one’s own self-esteem that has thus been brought about by negative historical experiences. At the same time, this cultural practice refers to the fact that the collective self, the nation, in a new (transformed) way can be re-established by reclaiming the loss.”<sup>570</sup> Therefore, mourning consciousness is understood as a work on one’s own consciousness, on oneself and not on the victim.

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567 D. Diner, *Negative Symbiosis: Germans and Jews after Auschwitz*, in: P. Baldwin (ed.), *Reworking the Past...* op. cit., p. 260.

568 M. Mitscherlich-Nielsen, *Die Notwendigkeit zu trauern; Psyche* 33, 1979, p. 982.

569 J. Rüsen, *Mourning by History – Ideas of a New Element in Historical Thinking; Historiography East and West*, vol.1, issue 1, 2003, pp. 13-38.

570 *Ibidem*, p. 27.

Just as memory is a social phenomenon, mourning has a social dimension. Establishment of the days of mourning and national memory is often a more or less successful attempt to extend mourning rituals to the whole society. A triumphant state often manifests itself in 'proud' mourning of the death of 'the sons of the nation'. When a collective publically confesses to mourning in symbolic acts, an 'ethnic' selection of the dead is often a threat. One can clearly see in the history of German memory the periods when victims, the subjects of mourning, were differentiated and selected: Jews, gypsies, the Sinti and Roma, homosexuals. How much time was needed to notice Poles and Russians? The subject of mourning remains a problem. The constantly repeated 'us' is an imagined unity that can fall apart any moment.<sup>571</sup>

After numerous scandals related to dealing with the past, doubts and questions about the policy of mourning still arise. If mourning is primarily an emotional state, how to control the empathy of a nation and create a mourning community considering that belonging to a state means natural contradictions and conflicts of interests? Today, not only time distance is an obstacle to 'adequate' mourning. Micha Brumlik believes that 'authentic' mourning of Holocaust victims is impossible.<sup>572</sup> How can one mourn those who had been excluded from the national community? Directly after the war, German society did not feel any loss except the loss of the loved ones. Culprits and bystanders would have been able to mourn if they had been ready to put themselves in the dock, make serious self-criticism and cross the border of the national self. These conditions of mourning proved impossible to meet.<sup>573</sup>

The obstacle was the monstrous number of murdered victims of the Third Reich politics. Mourning millions was unimaginable. Therefore, the attempts to individualise and remember particular people were ineffective. The lack of material evidence, of individual graves, was another obstacle to the mourning practice. Historical relics on the grounds of former concentration camps performed only a substitute, symbolic function.

Disputes over the official forms of mourning, although limited to intellectual circles, intensified in the reunited Germany. Some warn against emotionalisation

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571 See e.g. B. Liebsch, *Trauer als Gewissen der Geschichte?*, in: B. Liebsch, J. Rüsen (eds.), *ibidem*, pp. 15-62.

572 M. Brumlik, *Trauerrituale und politische Kultur nach der Shoah in der Bundesrepublik*, in: H. Loewy (ed.), *Holocaust. Die Grenzen des Verstehens. Eine Debatte über die Besetzung der Geschichte*, Reinbek b. Hamburg 1992, pp. 191-212; see also e.g. C. Schneider, *Jenseits der Schuld? Die Unfähigkeit zu trauern in der zweiten Generation*, 'Psyche' 47, 1993, pp. 754-774; M. Rutschky, *Trauerarbeit*, in: K. Bittermann, G. Henschel (eds.), *Das Wörterbuch des Gutmenschen. Zur Kritik der moralisch korrekten Schaumsprache*, Berlin 1994, pp. 153-159.

573 S. Korn, *Brüchige Selbstdefinition*, in: *idem, Geteilte Erinnerung. Beiträge zur "deutsch-jüdischen" Gegenwart*, Berlin 1999, pp. 115-119.

of public opinion, others search for pedagogic means for the politics of mourning through the combination of rational thought and emotions. Is mourning even necessary if there are so many political, cognitive and aesthetic forms of dealing with history? Imre Kertész, a Jewish-Hungarian writer who survived Auschwitz, explained that the contemporary mourning of the Holocaust was not a reaction to a personal loss but a conscious social decision to support certain values: “A viable society must maintain and continuously renew its knowledge and awareness of itself and its conditions. And if we decide that the grave, black memorial service of the Holocaust is an indispensable part of this awareness, then this decision must be based not on some notion of compassion or contrition but on a living value judgement. The Holocaust is a value, because through immeasurable sufferings it has led to immeasurable knowledge, and thereby contains immeasurable moral reserves.”<sup>574</sup>

Jan-Holger Kirsch, dealing with the problem of the form and content of historical mourning in the context of the Holocaust Memorial in Berlin, assumes that public mourning should allow for personal and individual disputes and ambivalence. It is hard to disagree with the author when he formulates the necessary criteria of mourning as a social phenomenon. In order to achieve balance between aesthetic, cognitive and political dimensions of historical culture, according to Kirsch, three essential conditions must be met. Historical mourning:

- needs aesthetics that extend the range of communicated and communicating forms.
- needs cognitive strategies, most of all historical knowledge, that cannot be limited to the academic field.
- adopts a perspective of political present and future in order to prevent the recurrence of similar crimes; however, it cannot be downgraded to a substitute political means.<sup>575</sup>

Andrzej Leder, the Polish philosopher of culture, claims that “there is no accounting for mourning. Mostly because mourning is like an element, like a great wave that drowns everything. There is no accounting for a flood. However, one can describe its course. Similarly, one can describe the wave of mourning.”<sup>576</sup> In the particular case of the Germans, it turns out that the mourning has been discussed for decades. The debate on the idea of a central monument for the Holocaust victims – the longest debate in the reunited Germany – has again revealed the contradictions and difficulties along the way for the nation that deals with the past to achieve balance.

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574 I. Kertész, *The Holocaust as Culture*, London, New York, Calcutta 2011, p. 77.

575 J.-H. Kirsch, *Trauer und historische Erinnerung in der Berliner Republik. Überlegungen aus Anlaß der Mahnmalsdebatte*, in: B. Liebsch, J. Rösen (eds.), *op. cit.*, p. 354.

576 A. Leder, *Żaloba a demokracja, czyli co właściwie powiedział Perykles*; *Przegląd Polityczny* 100, 2010, p. 22.

## Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe – a symbol of mourning or disgrace?

From the moment that the journalist Lea Rosh came up with the idea of putting up a Holocaust monument in 1988, to June 1999 when the decision to build was made, the most spectacular debate in Germany was held, fuelled and controlled by the media. Even the length and intensity of the disputes and the fact that different professional groups participated in them makes one ask about the motives and sources of inspiration for the memorial. The idea of a central symbol divided society to the same degree to which its historical memory and the biography of its members were differentiated. The subject of the dispute was not only the idea but also the artistic form of the memorial and its ideological, moral and artistic connotations. The issue of the central symbol of memory of the victims of genocide in the capital of the reunited German state touched the most sensitive spot of the nation. Such a memorial publically questioned the identification model of the Germans. For many, it was a threat to their identity. What memorial was going to be erected in the heart of the city: a symbol of German disgrace, shame, atonement or a declaration of the opposition to evil? Over the course of the debate, various strategies for and against the memorial developed and the argumentation was often mutually exclusive.<sup>577</sup>

There were concerns that the monumental iconography in the centre of the capital of the FRG might bring revival of neo-Nazi movements, and whether this stone element of the German landscape would deepen the sensitivity of the passerby or only create an illusion of common memory. Some perceive monuments as a chance to socialise memory; others, like Robert Musil, who claimed that “there is nothing in this world as invisible as a monument”, express fear that a monument takes the responsibility for the past away from the people. Artists involved in designing monuments to the Nazi victims often reject traditional forms, believing that the memory of such dramatic events cannot tolerate cheap pathos. However, regardless of artistic orientation, the most important concern is who we are, why we want to remember and what our questions are. “The impact of Holocaust memorials does not depend on a measured distance between history and its material representation but on the combination of individual and collective memory; on the mental process that leads minds that are reflecting on the past to a reflection on the present.”<sup>578</sup> In 2002, the Cologne sociologist Alphons Silbermann

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577 For the most comprehensive analysis of the rich material about the debate see: J.-H. Kirsch, *Nationaler Mythos oder historische Trauer? Der Streit um ein zentrales “Holocaust-Mahnmal” für die Berliner Republik*, Köln, Weimar, Wien 2003.

578 J.E. Young, *Pamięć i kontrapamięć. W poszukiwaniu społecznej estetyki pomników Holocaustu*, “Literatura na Świecie” 1-2, 2004, p. 289.



published the findings of a study about the meaning of Auschwitz to the second and third generation of Germans. 72% regarded remembering it as very important, 18% as not so important and 9% as completely unimportant.<sup>579</sup> These results are also an element of German political culture today.

Rosh, as a leader of the citizen initiative ‘Perspective Berlin’, certainly did not expect the avalanche she started. Due to her public activity she managed to involve 27 prominent personalities from the world of politics, journalism and art (e.g. Willy Brandt and Günter Grass), who signed the claim addressed to the Berlin Senate, to the governments of federal states and the federal government. The text, published on the 56<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Hitler’s seizure of power on 30 January 1989, reads: “A half a century has passed since the Nazis came to power and since the murder of the Jews of Europe. But on German soil, in the country of the perpetrator, there is still no central site of remembrance to recall this singular genocide, and no memorial that remembers the victims. This is shameful.” The authors suggested that such a site should appear in the former Gestapo headquarters, headquarters of the Ministry of Security of the Reich, “the headquarters of murder in the capital of the Reich.” Construction of the memorial was “an obligation for East and West Germans.”<sup>580</sup>

Criticism of this idea came from various sides. One of the first objections was raised by the Central Council of German Sinti and Roma, who feared that Germany wanted to divide the victims of Nazism into first and second class. Waves of interest and discussions were stimulated by the successive stages of preparation for the implementation of the project, following the competition to design the memorial. The number of sides in the conflict was increasing. Architects, art historians, artists and writers joined the debate. There were also provocations. Hort Hoheisel, an artist known for the so-called ‘negative-form monument’, suggested that the Brandenburg Gate should be torn down, pulverised and the dust spread over the site of the proposed memorial. It was an expression of opposition to routine commemorations and a signal of the hopelessness of finding an artistic form for the genocide. As Salomon Korn commented, “another form of destruction cannot be an artistic symbol of the Holocaust.”<sup>581</sup>

The announcement of the first competition in 1994, which did not result in the selection of a project, aroused great interest. 1,500 people participated in it. Simultaneous to the dispute about the artistic form of the memorial, there was another debate taking place, involving wider circles of public opinion about the central place of the Holocaust memorial. The most outstanding people of politics,

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579 A. Silbermann, M. Stoffers, *Auschwitz: Nie davon gehört?*, Berlin 2000, p. 230.

580 After J.-H. Kirsch, op. cit., p. 86.

581 S. Korn, *Rozdarty Reichstag. Gdy sztuka przedstawiać ma barbarzyństwo: Planowany pomnik Holocaustu w Berlinie i narodowa tożsamość*, in: *O kondycji Niemiec*, op. cit., p. 532.



science, art and religion participated in expert meetings, seminars and television debates. The fate of the memorial was uncertain until the very last moment. Even in 1998, during the Bundestag electoral campaign, the Social-Democrat Minister for Culture, Michael Naumann, preferred the idea of completely abandoning the memorial project. In February of that year, a group of historians, journalists and writers cast a veto, justifying it as follows: “We cannot see how an abstract installation of oppressively gigantic proportions could create a place of quiet mourning and remembrance, of warning or meaningful explanation. Every work of art or inscription that does not concern all the victims of the National Socialist racial madness of the people in power is artificial and is in clear dissonance to the sites of authentic history, testimony and memory.”<sup>582</sup> Günter Grass and Walter Jens, who supported the initiative of building the memorial at first, were among signatories of the open letter.

The year of the elections, 1998, was the decisive phase of the discussion. Shortly before the Bundestag elections on 27 September 1998, Chancellor Helmut Kohl again expressed his support for the erection of the memorial. Was he motivated by the fear of the world’s opinion when he observed: “We would be condemned by the whole world if we now said: let’s leave it if it’s so difficult”? However, the world did not expect this step from the Germans. Even the Jews approached the idea cautiously.

Many of them believed that there was no optimal form of expressing mourning for the murdered Jews with dignity. Intellectuals wondered whether German politicians would accept their responsibility: “Will they have enough class and courage for the difficult, ‘negative’ identification with the future central memorial of the Holocaust? (...) This is about the frankness and credibility of the Germans, which they would prove by their will to erect an uncomfortable, national memorial of the Holocaust, against the crimes committed by their own nation but also against their seemingly unshakeable identity.”<sup>583</sup> One of the fiercest critics was György Konrád, who feared that political and aesthetic overtones would dominate the monument’s message. He warned against narcissism and criticised the excess of rituals, reverence, wasted ideas, materials and space. “If the memorial is expected to express the grief of the German nation, the robust mass of material deters rather than convinces anyone. Doesn’t this image include the same jaded immensity as the vision of great Germania? Anyway, the memorial expresses a political intention (...) it is an alibi”.<sup>584</sup>

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582 *Frankfurter Rundschau* 5.02.1998, after: J.-H. Kirsch, op. cit., p. 99.

583 S. Korn, *Rozdarty Reichstag*, op. cit., pp. 534-535.

584 G. Konrád, *Ein jüdischer Garten für alle*, in: U. Heimrod, G. Schlusche, H. Seferens (eds.), *Denkmalstreit – Das Denkmal? Die Debatte um das Denkmal für die ermordeten Juden Europas. Eine Dokumentation*, Berlin 1999, p. 1157.

Conceptual difficulties were accompanied by questions about the main message of the memorial and doubts concerning its envisaged meaning. How to express regret and shame, how to honour the victims with dignity and, at the same time, declare responsibility for the burden of history? How – if at all – should the memorial warn future generations and provide a universal memento for all dictatorships and threats? Every interpretation immediately met a counter-interpretation. Many expected the memorial to be a substitute cemetery, a mourning Pietà of a nation on bended knee before its victim. However, Salomon Korn warned his readers against quasi-religious commemorations, noting the danger of blurring the contrasts between different communities of memory. While the Jewish community remembers and cares about the memory of the murdered in their family and nation, “in the case of the descendants of the perpetrators, the memory of the victims of Nazi mass murders must always include the memory of the crimes committed by one’s own nation and the questions of their causes and consequences”.<sup>585</sup> Thus, Korn suggested that the memorial should combine two essential functions: be a symbol of honour and memory of the victims, and a warning against the acts of the perpetrators.

The memorial was intended by its initiators and supporters to be a preventive measure, a warning and a moral message against anti-Semitism, xenophobia, hatred and violence. Constantly recurring acts of violence and brutality towards minorities and the revival of extreme rightist groups only confirmed the initiators’ belief. During a debate in the Bundestag in 1996, the participants pointed out that the memorial should be the ultimate gesture of the reconciliation with German history and recognition of German guilt. An SPD deputy, Peter Conradi, suggested as much in saying that the Germans wanted to build a memorial that “will bring back the crimes and victims of these crimes that were committed not by strangers but by the Germans: the planned and cruel murder of European Jews. It was not a foreign power but our compatriots, our neighbours, our fathers and grandfathers.”<sup>586</sup> The debaters observed that Auschwitz was a founding myth of the Federal Republic of Germany. As the President of the Bundestag, Wolfgang Thierse, noted during the parliamentary debate in 1999, the memorial would be built “not for the Jews – German or other – but for us.” With regard to the dedication of the memorial, Thierse stated: “If I opt, with full conviction, to narrow the addressee, it results from the fact that the organised murder of the Jews was central to the National Socialist racial madness. Auschwitz symbolises the apogee of centuries of hatred for the Jews. Considering this fact, we should and we have to take a decision today, which in no case means underestimating the other victim groups: Sinti and

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585 After: J.-H. Kirsch, *op. cit.*, p. 131.

586 Stenographische Berichte 9.05.1996, p. 9064.

Roma persecuted for their political beliefs, homosexuals and the handicapped. We are obliged to commemorate their fate in an appropriate and dignified manner.”<sup>587</sup>

The memorial was also interpreted as a manifestation of the German work on history and their success in the learning process. “If we, Germans, openly face the Nazi crimes, we can (...) also remember the great achievements in German history and meet our neighbours and the world humbly but without complexes. Humbly, because we have been tested by history more than other nations and we know we have failed because the Germans organised and committed the greatest crimes in the history of humankind. Without complexes, because we are ready to bear permanent responsibility for this part of history, when we remember, commemorate and warn others against racism and nationalism and when, through this experience, we recognise our interests and take our responsibility towards the world.”<sup>588</sup>

The dedication of the memorial brought no fewer controversies than the decision to build it. The debate concerning to whom the memorial should be dedicated aroused the emotions not only of the main initiators but also such organisations as the Central Council of Jews in Germany and the Central Council of German Sinti and Roma. Although a part of the survived victims believed so, the debate did not concern only the hierarchisation and classification of the victims of National Socialism. The memorial was intended to be dedicated mostly to the Jewish victims. The main argument was the power of anti-Semitic thinking as the central element of the Nazi crime. The historian Eberhard Jäckel observed that the basis of this argumentation was that “the persecutions and murders of the Jews were the central target for National Socialists. This was the core of National Socialism. The other reason is that together with murdering the Jews, the culmination of the centuries of anti-Semitism has been reached. These arguments do not apply to the Roma.”<sup>589</sup>

The alternative proposals indicated the need to honour the Jews and the Roma as the victims of the racist policy, and all the groups of victims of the Nazi regime. The question whether the persecution of the Jews and the Roma could be equalized was the matter of dispute. ‘Perspective Berlin’, the originator and main advocate of the memorial, stated that the mourning of the murdered Jews, Roma, political commissars of the Red Army, and starved Polish forced labourers should not be classified. There were few voices demanding commemoration of the forgotten victims of social Darwinism and anti-Slavism as the supporting ideologies of Nazism.

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587 Deutscher Bundestag, Stenographische Berichte 25.06.1999, p. 4086.

588 K. von Dohnanyi, *Gemeinsinn und Zivilcourage. Die Vergangenheit in der Zukunft Deutschlands*; *Merkur* 54, 2000, p. 1071.

589 J.-H. Kirsch, op. cit., p. 168.

The conclusive debate was held in the Bundestag in June 1999. The dedication ‘The Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe’ gained the acceptance of the majority. The decision was complemented with a general comment about the necessity and obligation of the Federal Republic to also honour the memory of other victims. Some CDU/CSU deputies submitted a proposal of a change: “The Federal Republic of Germany places a memorial to the murdered European Jews and all the victims of the National Socialist crimes against humanity in the centre of Berlin.” In the end, the shorter version was chosen. On 25 June 1999, the Bundestag approved the construction of the memorial, devoting DM 54,000,000 for this purpose. The parliamentary resolution reads: “The Federal Republic of Germany will erect a memorial to the murdered Jews of Europe in Berlin. With the memorial we intend to honour the murdered victims, keep alive the memory of these inconceivable events in German history, warn all future generations never again to violate human rights, defend the democratic constitutional state at all times, secure equality before the law for all people and to resist all forms of dictatorship and regimes based on violence. (...) The Federal Republic of Germany remains committed to commemorating and honouring the other victims of the Nazi regime.”<sup>590</sup>

Before the memorial was built in 2003-2005 as per Peter Eisenman’s design,<sup>591</sup> a debate had been held on the form of commemoration, the function of the memorial as a symbol and carrier of memory and the interpretative possibilities of the artistic style. It is impossible to depict the whole debate and categorise hundreds of opinions. The interest was huge. The fact that in the centre of the German capital, 2,711 concrete slabs or ‘stelae’, arranged in a grid pattern and covering a site of 19,000 m<sup>2</sup> and the fact that other, smaller memorials were planned to commemorate the other victims of Nazism elicited conflicting emotions. Until the very end, many preferred a museum, an educational place instead of an ‘artificial’ form of commemoration, which the memorial was considered to be. The proposal of a monumental construction due to the enormity of the crime aroused numerous objections from the beginning. The opponents of the memorial as a form of expressing mourning believed there was a danger that the monument would lose its meaning and message with time. They also pointed to the problems resulting from the constant changes in forms of the media of memory and the static character of the memorial. After years of the temporary Bonn Republic,

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590 Deutscher Bundestag, Drucksache 14/1569.

591 In 1995, the project by Christine Jakob-Marks was rejected in the first competition. In another competition, started in July 1997, the project by the architect Peter Eisenman and the sculptor Richard Serra was chosen. The latter withdrew in 1998, manifesting his protest against the imposed changes.

one could observe an illusory longing for a lasting, positive symbol of the Berlin Republic.

Some expected that the art would express what words were not capable of. Others doubted the power of artistic expression. They voiced concerns about changing history into fossils and bronze casting. There were doubts whether a stone block would communicate mourning, shame, guilt and knowledge of the past. Historians were sceptical about abstract forms of expression that everyone could understand in their own way – even incorrectly. Salomon Korn expressed the expectations of those who wanted the memorial to be set primarily in modern times: “The more we try to create memorials with universal application, the more we separate ourselves from our present, everyday life (...) Only a resignation from problematically ‘durable’ memorials opens the possibility of a stronger link between memorials perceived as temporary works with our everyday reality.”<sup>592</sup> Standards were set for the art that were impossible to achieve. It was expected to simulate authenticity. Many debaters preferred a museum or a meeting, discussion point to a monument. No monument can answer the question of how Auschwitz was possible, Günter Grass argued. “No, the memorial must be a home that will expose and explain (...) how the unimaginable genocide happened.”<sup>593</sup>

Together with Eisenman’s memorial project, a museum project was also approved; the symbolism of art was to be combined with an educational function. Pedagogy was expected to support artistic expression. Peter Eisenman designed his project as a new idea of memory: a memorial that does not express a target, a road or an end. He wanted every visitor to empathise with a lonely, persecuted Jew. “People will notice”, the architect explained, “that the special experience here is different from any other famous place. We want to give people, perhaps for a moment, a feeling of what it could be like if they were in a no-win situation, if the ground was shaking under their feet, if they were isolated from their environment. We do not want to indicate guilt or anything like that. We want the visitors to remember the elementary personal experience they had here.”<sup>594</sup>

The concrete blocks are intended to give the possibility of individual contemplation and personal experience. What some disputers praised, that is, the openness and focus on individual experience, “the real monument of democracy”, was criticised by others who noted a deficit of content, abstractness, the lack of a clear addressee. There were accusations that the monument might as well be dedicated to the victims of car accidents and AIDS, not only Nazism. Negative

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592 S. Korn, *Geteilte Erinnerung. Holocaust-Gedenken in Deutschland*, in: U. Borsdorf, H.T. Grütter (eds.), *Orte der Erinnerung. Denkmal, Gedenkstätte, Museum*, Frankfurt a. M., New York 1999, p. 236.

593 G. Grass, *Der lernende Lehrer*; *Die Zeit* 20.05.1999.

594 After: J.-H. Kirsch, op. cit., p. 289.

prognoses were multiplying. Martin Walser spoke of a “stone horror” that would inevitably provoke defamatory comments. Helmut Schmidt expressed his concern that the memorial would become a meeting point for neo-Nazis and the dregs of society. The proposed symbolic found more critical comments than positive opinions.

The over decade-long debate had an undeniable importance in shaping the identity of the Berlin Republic. Critical questions have emerged, the most important of which is how a democratic society can build a new, lawful state on the basis of the memory of a crime. For the first time in history, a nation has built a monument not for its heroes, but a monument-warning for future generations that reminds them of crimes committed by their ancestors. Regardless of the criticism, this act can be considered a manifestation of maturity of the nation-state that wanted to accept the historical legacy of the Bonn Republic and declare that the memory of the Holocaust can be an element of the reason of state of the Berlin Republic. Berlin, which some feared would revive the ghosts of the past, wanted to demonstrate that it is also a city of common grief and confession. The decision to build the monument can be perceived as proof that the declaration of belonging to the German nation and a sense of pride are not contradictory to a confession of guilt and the feeling of responsibility for the past.

The debate on the Holocaust memorial was also an element of another dispute about the new media of memory in the reunited Germany. This dispute concerns not only a new dimension of the aesthetisation of memory but also the question of the best way to stimulate the imagination and minds of future generations in the times without witnesses of National Socialism. After years of disputes, the Holocaust Memorial in Berlin provoked another storm and brought questions about its function in historical education. Each of the monument form functions had its supporters and opponents. Does the memorial release individuals from their obligation to remember? Is a dialogue between the passerby, visitor and monument possible? Can only the one who experienced hell create something authentic?

Without doubt, authentic historical sites (museums and documentation centres on the grounds of the former concentration camps) speak to one’s imagination more powerfully. However, neither a museum nor a monument can guarantee memory if the visitor, the citizen, is not interested.<sup>595</sup> The art historian Stefanie Endlich argues against those who believe that a monument can deal with the problem of memory, commenting as follows on the project: “The monument presents only a part of the dialogue in politics and culture, workplace and public opinion. This

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595 S. Korn, *Holocaust-Gedenken: Ein deutsches Dilemma; Aus Politik und Zeitgeschichte* 3-4, 1997, pp. 23-30.

dialogue can be at best strengthened, widened, changed or complemented with necessary anxiety, but it can never be replaced.”<sup>596</sup>

The influence of a monument is limited by time. Its shape is impacted by particular generations and the climate of the times. The Jewish community approaches the problem of commemoration differently from other nations. This results from the fact that it sees a mythical connection between the annihilation of European Jews and the origin of the Israeli state, which was perceived in a way as a deliverance from disaster. The commemoration of the Holocaust in the country where Nazism was born, in the centre of its capital, has a different meaning and significance, which explains the length and intensity of the disputes. Moreover, the new generation of artists set new canons for the art of commemoration, sceptically approaching the monumentality in art in previous years.

Today in the Federal Republic of Germany, there is a growing belief that sites of memory must gain a nationwide character so they can be rooted in the consciousness of all citizens. Time forces conceptual and perspective changes. Researchers who focus on the future warn us that the multiplicity of memorials does not necessarily mean acceptance or social reflection. The remaining problem is how to handle the memorial-museums on the grounds of the former concentration camps. A necessary element is education that goes beyond the museum walls: an idea of open museums woven into the international context. Therefore, a concept is required for a concentration camp memorial museum that would widen the horizons of memory and provide emotional reflection, academic documentation, aesthetic representation and pedagogic education. This task is incredibly ambitious and equally difficult to accomplish.<sup>597</sup>

Universalisation of the Holocaust became the basis of a new foreign policy of the FRG. As a result of new military conflicts in Europe and in the world and the suggested analogies between them and World War II, the Holocaust in many debates was no longer considered a unique and particular event that was attached only to Germany. A universalised historical experience becomes an abstract past, ousted by the barbarities of the late 20<sup>th</sup> and the early 21<sup>st</sup> centuries. “11 September provided an offer of universalisation. Saddam Hussein and Osama bin Laden are presented as monsters similar to Hitler.”<sup>598</sup>

Visitors to the commemoration sites are the subject of researchers’ interest. Viola Georgi conducted a study among multiethnic students. She wanted to find differences in the perception of the racist policy of National Socialism between

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596 After: *ibidem*, p. 26.

597 For rich source documentation on the works of the Bundestag committee on museums after the reunification, see: P. Reichel, *Politik mit der Erinnerung. Gedächtnisorte im Streit um die nationalsozialistische Vergangenheit*, München, Wien 1995.

598 *Ibidem*.

the youth of German and foreign origin. Is there any particularity about the perception of the Holocaust among the children of immigrants? Does the German past influence the decision about citizenship? On the basis of interviews with immigrant children aged 15-20, Georgi distinguished four kinds of historical consciousness:

- A tendency to identify with the persecuted Jews. A young Indian said: “The colour of my skin is like the Star of David”. A girl was afraid that “as a Muslim German I will experience what the Jewish Germans did”<sup>599</sup>;
- A tendency to connect the discrimination currently experienced by one’s family with the history of persecutions under the German occupation;
- Identification with the Germans perceived as a chance for a better life; defending Germans against accusations. A young Turkish girl identified herself with Germany so much that she forgot about her Turkish roots. During a visit to the Theresienstadt concentration camp she saw herself as a member of “the nation of perpetrators”. It may be assumed that she considered this identification an entry ticket to the present community through belonging to the community of the guilty;
- Interpretation of the Holocaust as a universal experience of nations.

### How much past in the future?

In 1998, alongside the new government of SPD and the Greens, a new generation of politicians came to power. The Germans faced new challenges. They decided to replace the Deutsche Mark, a symbol of economic prosperity, with the Euro. The government moved to Berlin. All these events were happening in the atmosphere of awaiting the new century and millennium, bringing the hope of a new turning point. To mark the new beginning, Chancellor Gerhard Schröder also wished to demonstrate the difference in the style of governing. The new style was to be defined by objectivity, lack of pathos and pragmatism. Schröder wanted to demonstrate to the world the maturity of the ‘normal’ nation. On 10 November he spoke of the self-awareness of the Germans as a “mature nation that does not have to feel superior or inferior, a nation reconciled with its history and responsible for it, but also looking ahead. Our neighbours in Europe also know they can trust

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599 V. Georgi, *Wem gehört die deutsche Geschichte? Bikulturelle Jugendliche und die Geschichte des Nationalsozialismus*, in: B. Fechner, G. Köbler, T. Liebertz-Groß (eds.), *Erziehung nach Auschwitz in der multikulturellen Gesellschaft*, Weinheim 2001, cyt. za: C. Leggewie, E. Meyer, “Ein Ort, an den man gern geht” *Das Holocaust-Mahnmal und die deutsche Geschichtspolitik nach 1989*, München, Wien 2005, p. 340.



us the more we, Germans, trust ourselves. In the past, the danger was always the imbalance of national consciousness that led to extremism and conflicts.”<sup>600</sup>

Defining the tasks of the reunited Germany in the globalised world, the Minister for Foreign Affairs, Joschka Fischer, wondered whether the German dilemma lay in the discrepancy between two objective facts of the German position: the strategic power of Germany and the power of collective memory, which he believed was the source of the outside distrust. Answering himself, Fischer asserted that the Germans had drawn correct conclusions from history and excluded the possibility that Germany would become isolated. Fischer understood and highlighted that post-totalitarian nations had to construct their identity by integrating their whole history. The epoch of triumphalist constructions of nation has ended. Is this a model approach expected to be an ‘export commodity’, as some claim, or already a ‘normality’?

New expectations of the world towards Germany in the face of escalating conflicts around the world forced the Federal Republic to make decisions that involved reflection and politics of memory. In 1999, for the first time since 1945, Germany took part in a war, in the former Yugoslavia, without a UN mandate. In a society dominated by pacifist thought, there was a growing discrepancy between the necessity, forced by key German allies, of taking responsibility for global safety and distancing from military means of solving conflicts due to the German past. In political circles there was also no consensus about the role of historical argumentation.

The war in the south of Europe had far-reaching consequences. It also served current politics. Chancellor Gerhard Schröder, visiting Bundeswehr soldiers in Kosovo in 1999, said that German involvement in the operation contributed to the fact that “historical guilt and historical crime committed in the name of the German nation” could be replaced by a new image of Germany and helped “make good some of the German historical guilt in that region.”<sup>601</sup>

The involvement of the Bundeswehr in peacekeeping missions outside NATO borders and also those administered by the UN evoked different associations in Germany and abroad. The question whether Germany was already a normal nation returned. For a *Tageszeitung* journalist, the Bundeswehr involvement in Afghanistan was the first military intervention that was free from historical references and repercussions: “a war without Hitler”. “The postwar epoch has finally ended. What began on 9 November 1989 is now accomplished: the normalisation of Germany. Thus, rhetoric use of the Nazi times has been waived forever. (...) Only the red-green coalition could administer the involvement in the Kosovo

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600 “Weil wir Deutschlands Kraft vertrauen”. *Regierungserklärung von Bundeskanzler Gerhard Schröder*, ‘Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung’ 11.11.1998.

601 *Ibidem*, p. 104.

war so peacefully.”<sup>602</sup> The journalist considered this fact to be the culmination of the German *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*. For a part of the intellectual elite, the Bundeswehr participation in this war put an end to certain symbols of memory and let the past become history.

For Matthias Arning, this was “the end of humility of the Federal Republic. The exhibition did its work. (...) Maybe it would be better not to keep it secret that together with the thesis of the Wehrmacht exhibition, the Republic found itself in a new reality. This reality regards involvement in the name of human dignity – anywhere in the world – as a special testament of German history (...) including military involvement anywhere in the world.”<sup>603</sup>

Should the memory of the presence of the Wehrmacht soldiers in the area of former Yugoslavia during World War II discourage Germany from any armed intervention, or on the contrary, be a form of redress and prevention of escalation of the conflict? The reaction of the people and press commentaries leave no doubt that the memory of National Socialism had a significant role as a symbolic point of reference for evaluating such events as the massacre in Srebrenica in July 1995, the war in Kosovo, Afghanistan or any interventions of the antiterrorist coalition after 11 September 2001.

Andrei Markovits and Simon S. Reich expressed this essential dilemma of the new German nation state when they affirmed: “The Germans are caught between the Scylla of collective memory, which will not permit it to exercise power in a normal manner, and the Charybdis of contemporary exigencies, which demands German acceptance of its responsibilities in Europe and maybe even the world.”<sup>604</sup> They accepted the ‘normality’ of the sovereign state. On the other hand, Jürgen Habermas was one of the intellectuals who did not consider the framework of the nation state to be sufficient. He believed that the reunification of Germany would be a joyful date as long as the year 1945 was treated as a lesson and warning. He postulated that the republican spirit spread all over Europe. From the position of a leftist radical, he warned Germany at the dawn of reunification against “life fictions”, such as the slogan of the Adenauer period: “We are all democrats.” “If it is the case that a second life fiction has been developing since 1989, then it is not so much the illusion that we always wanted reunification, but rather that we ‘have finally become normal again’. A sense of relief lies behind the ambiguous formula of ‘bidding farewell to the old Federal Republic’.”<sup>605</sup>

602 S. Reinecke, *Krieg ohne Hitler*; *Tageszeitung* 8.11.2001.

603 M. Arning, *Ende der Bescheidenheit*; *Frankfurter Rundschau* 29.11.2001.

604 A.S. Markovits, S. Reich, *The German Predicament: Memory and Power in the New Europe*, Ithaca 1997, p. 7.

605 J. Habermas, *The Second Life Fiction of the Federal Republic: We Have Become ‘Normal’ Again*, *New Left Review* I/197, January-February 1993.

The forecasts predicting that, alongside the disappearance of the “old Federal Republic”, the chapter of dealing with the history of National Socialism would finally close were wrong. In the early 1990s, there were some opinions that “German crimes will never be forgotten or denied by the Germans but will become museum exhibits; they will no longer absorb the consciousness and control political behaviour.”<sup>606</sup> The last two decades have been a continuation of the disputes held in the 1990s. The key question, it seems, is whether the new nation state had a significant impact on the character of dialogue with the Nazi past. Today, a declaration of belonging to the German nation certainly does not conflict with a confession of historical guilt and political and moral responsibility. As Clemens Albrecht concludes: one should “interpret the history of coming to terms with the past as a history of re-nationalisation of the Federal Republic. Not because the Federal Republic developed a nationalist habitus comparable with the one of the imperial Reich, but because through the work on the past as the basis of the legitimisation, a new national consensus was searched for and found: an agreement on what it means to be a German. To be a German (...) means to struggle with the National Socialist past.”<sup>607</sup>

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606 Compare e.g. J. Gross, *Begründung der Berliner Republik. Deutschland am Ende des 20. Jahrhunderts*, Stuttgart 1995.

607 C. Albrecht, *Die Dialektik der Vergangenheitsbewältigung oder: Wie die Bundesrepublik eine Geschichtsnation wurde, ohne es zu merken*, in: idem et al. (eds.), *Die intellektuelle Gründung der Bundesrepublik. Eine Wirkungsgeschichte der Frankfurter Schule*, Frankfurt a. M., New York 1999, p. 570.



# Chapter 5

## Days of Remembrance

### 1. Memory as a ritual

Rituals have always been a part of humankind. In everyday language, the term is used synonymously with a ceremony. Sociology defines a ritual as “a social action of the dramaturgic category, always taken by a social group or in its name and always because of socially important occasions. It communicates messages of key significance for a group. From a sociological point of view, the most important functions of a ritual are communication, confirmation and symbolic performance of the social order. (...) Rituals provide symbolic, perceivable and communicable expression of abstract ideas.”<sup>608</sup>

The custom of festive commemoration of events that are important for a community can be traced back to the oldest pagan times. Their rhythm was determined by nature. Indigenous communities adjusted their rituals to the cycles of nature that they wanted to follow. However, only nature knows cyclical repetitions – history does not. Mircea Eliade saw an imitation of the divine act of creation in this regular rhythm of festivals, “the periodic renewal of the world”. “This eternal repetition of the cosmogonic act, by transforming every New Year into the inauguration of an era, permits the return of the dead to life and maintains the hope of the faithful in the resurrection of the body.”<sup>609</sup> The social need for cyclical repetition of rituals has been the subject of interest and various interpretations of great philosophers since the earliest days. Plato believed that festivals are given to people from compassionate gods as a kind of recompense. According to Sigmund Freud, festivals are an escape from everyday life; they also include a theological context. In Émile Durkheim’s theory, similarly, ritual is an antidote for everyday routine. Communities, by referring to sacrum, make social ties strong and coherent. Festivals are spectacles and the culture of celebration and commemoration has always combined secular and spiritual elements.

Christian culture adopted the festive ceremonials of ancient Greece and Rome. Mysteries, processions, parades, sermons and speeches, which integrated

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608 *Encyklopedia socjologii*, vol. 3, Warszawa 2002.

609 M. Eliade, *The Myth of the Eternal Return: Cosmos and History*, New York 2005, p. 62.

people over the centuries at a local and universal level, permeated national and state culture. Secular ceremonies used religious accessories despite competing against churches. The processes of secularisation after the French Revolution and the emergence of nation-states made political memory the dominant element of festivals. Demonstration of common tradition and identity was no longer sufficient. National history worked as a substitute religion. When the memory of the past becomes only a symbol of identity, no one is interested in the historical truth. Myths and legends justifying national unity are valued. Nations need constant renewal of their ideological fundamentals and festivals of memory provide a wide forum in which communication rituals are actualised and beautified and the ugliness of events is blurred. When what remains are only ruins of the community of memory, an illusion of such community must be created. History may be then monumentalised, selected, dismissed or belittled.

The modern state as the organiser of remembrance days introduced a new quality. Today, political needs determine the holiday calendar. Totalitarian systems mastered most efficiently the technique of raising masses and using historical anniversaries as the most important propaganda tool. The Blackshirts in Italy, the Brownshirts in the Third Reich and the Stalinist system: they all adapted religious rituals. The flutter of brown banners, the participation of uniformed troops in church services, and the cult of fascist and Nazi ‘martyrs’ signalled the sacralisation of politics. State ceremonies had a fundamental role in shaping and strengthening totalitarian systems.

Experts in Italian fascism agree that the content and form of the celebrations manifested the rapprochement of anti-liberal Mussolini’s authoritarianism and the interests of the Vatican. The catholicisation of fascism and the achievement of social and political ideals within the framework of the existing system were the objective of the Church. Religious elements permeating the celebrations of fascist holidays, for example on the anniversary of the ‘March on Rome’, was intended to manifest the success of the Vatican.

Lutz Klinkhammer from the German Historical Institute in Rome came to the conclusion that what happened in the 1930s was “both the Christianisation of fascism and the fascistisation of Italian Catholicism.”<sup>610</sup> The political ambitions of the fascist state permeated the sphere of religion and the fascist ‘liturgy’ of rituals and gestures used religious symbolism. For obvious reasons, freedom was a potential danger to the Church in the achievement of their objectives. To accomplish them, the Church needed the understanding and support of the state for Christian schools, families and ethics. A pluralistic model of society with a multiplicity of offers tempting people

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610 L. Klinkhammer, *Mussolinis Italien zwischen Staat, Kirche und Religion*, in: K. Hildebrand (ed.), *Zwischen Politik und Religion. Studien zur Entstehung, Existenz und Wirkung des Totalitarismus*, München 2003, p. 89.

was an equal enemy of the fascist state and the Church. Therefore, despite different motives of action on this political-ethical front, the roads of the fascist and Nazi state and the Vatican met and a bridge was being built.

Every power introduces new symbols, also using elements of old traditions to create founding myths. The creation of a socialist consciousness was the overriding objective of the official celebration of new public holidays in the states of the Soviet Bloc. Their main message, however, was the exclusion of ideological enemies. It was not a historical novum. When in April 1617, Protestant states of the Reich celebrated the first centenary of the Reformation, Pope Paul V announced a special 'Holy Year' to ask God to "expel heresies". Protestant sermons demonstrated that the papacy could be equated to the Antichrist. After the Napoleonic Wars, the background to the German remembrance days was the image of Napoleon as a 'Satan', 'tyrant' and 'tormentor of the nation' and the image of the French as 'deceitful sinners' and 'liars'.

Rituals and celebrations of days of remembrance are analysed here in the context of the politics of memory of National Socialism in Germany. Political ritual is the subject of diverse opinions and interpretations in public and academic debate. It has as many supporters as harsh critics. In the context of the work on the memory of the recent past, political rituals have two functions: an integrative and penitential one. They can also delegate a problem. In ritual staging, the problem is not as important as the form. A ritual should create the sense of unity even without compliance. The aim is political identification. Ritual also provides the sense of belonging and sometimes has a therapeutic value without the necessity of explaining the essence of the problem.

Rituals related to the celebrations of memory days in Germany usually face criticism. Most of all, they are accused of schematism. The dominating belief is that as memory fades with time, actions are taken to revive and sustain it; however, these are 'empty gestures' that 'put people to sleep'. They are called 'rituals of power', 'rituals of protest', 'rituals of mist', 'the art of appearances'. The press complains that rituals deprive society of sensitivity; they are only a rite, devoid of reflection but usually promoted by the media. There are many theories in political and social sciences that interpret the symbolic dimension of politics and expose the staging and instrumentalisation of a subject or a problem. Researchers agree that permanent elements of a ritual are:

- Formality, staging, aesthetics – rituals are carefully directed shows with fixed rules, organisational forms and concerns about the aesthetic element;
- Repetition pattern – rituals must be regularly repeated and develop means, forms and places that will be repeated according to a particular rhythm;
- Collectivity – rituals assume a minimum of social consensus, they need social participation;

- Expression, communication – participants of rituals should express emotions;
- Condensation and ambiguity – a limited number of symbols must show many meanings and interact with each other. Therefore, rituals are ambiguous and variable for different interpretations of the situation.<sup>611</sup>

Regardless of the criticism and objections, rituals perform significant political functions in the state and society. They order the political environment, they justify and confirm the world of values and images, they bind people cognitively and emotionally, they should regulate and solve symbolic conflicts and work through unsolvable problems. Days of remembrance celebrated on the occasion of great historical anniversaries in the late 20<sup>th</sup> and early 21<sup>st</sup> centuries demonstrated how countries, nations, and particular communities of memory involved diverse and rich resources to manifest their historical identity. They also demonstrated how rich artistic means were used and how much drama and political rapprochement or conflicts of interest anniversary rituals may include.

The interest in historical anniversaries is generated by turning points. 1918, 1945 and 1989 were more than political shifts. Every new system and its political representatives created a new order, starting from the modification of the calendar of holidays and festivals. In Poland and the countries of East-Central Europe, democratisation and privatisation of memory started with the turn of 1989/1990. Under the new conditions, the state and the nation lost the monopoly on the politics of memory. Alongside the main actors determining the canons of historical consciousness, numerous communities of memory demonstrated their own fascinations and historical projections. They share language, religion, common past (e.g. Lemkos), and inhabited territory (Kashubians, Silesians). The end of the Cold War initiated many processes that resulted in the eruption of new national anniversaries. The fall of the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia, the division of Czechoslovakia, and the emergence of new states in these territories started processes of writing history anew. Together with a new historiography there was a need to manifest new days of remembrance.

The explosion of interest in the relationship between history and memory is manifested in the expansion of literature on the subject: new theoretical and methodological works. Days of remembrance, as one of the most important kinds of rituals, are the subject of research in the fields of anthropology, cultural and literature studies, sociology and history. Thus, they are also worth the interest of political science. There are still unanswered questions about the political context of new and old national days and their political meaning. In a globalised world of

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611 R. Wesel, *Gedenken als Ritual: Zum politischen Sinn 'sinnentleerter Rituale'*, in: W. Bergem (ed.), *Die NS-Diktatur im deutschen Erinnerungsdiskurs*, Opladen 2003, pp. 17-40.



mass society, does the arithmetic of anniversaries triumph over historical truth? What political intentions and interests hide behind national rituals and festive celebrations?

The attractiveness of days of remembrance that were promoted to the status of national holidays lies mostly in the convergence of interests. National holidays, regardless of their character, provide a platform where elementary needs and the interests of rulers and subjects, governments and citizens, states and societies meet. Nations and their political representatives need symbols. As Ernst Cassirer observed: “No longer in a merely physical universe, man lives in a symbolic universe. Language, myth, art, and religion are parts of this universe. (...) Hence, instead of defining man as an animal rationale, we should define him as an animal symbolicum.”<sup>612</sup> The position of the memory of the past in the process of democratic transition in Poland and other countries of East-Central Europe makes one consider the thoughts of the German philosopher who wrote: “art and history are the most powerful instruments of our inquiry into human nature”. Whoever wants to possess the world of culture must conquer it over and over again by restoring historical memory.<sup>613</sup>

Days of remembrance are the most essential political symbol of a state. Emotions and political messages are presented through them. The ritualised character of holidays serves this purpose; the activities and conventions are regularly repeated, most often annually. Their official message is conveyed in speeches, laying of wreaths and other regular elements of national rituals. Days of memory thematise events that societies have experienced together. Their most important political functions are integration, identification with the political system, manifestation of loyalty and stability of the political order. They have a fundamental role in the political culture of countries. If political culture is one of the media between an individual and the system of power then political symbols, which is what days of remembrance are, hold a central position in it. They express the fundamental concepts and rules of the political activities of a community. Their role is not only interpreting history and providing it with contemporary meaning but also searching for relationships between generations and times, between present, past and future.

Cyclical reconstruction and performance of historical events provides nations, particularly those burdened with dramatic experiences, with a sense of continuity.<sup>614</sup>

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612 E. Cassirer, *An Essay on Man: An Introduction to a Philosophy of Human Culture*, New Haven, 1944, pp. 24-26.

613 Ibidem, p. 206.

614 See e.g. M. Kaase, *Massenloyalität*, in: M.G. Schmidt (ed.), *Westliche Industriegesellschaft. Wirtschaft – Gesellschaft – Politik*, München 1983; E. Fehrenbach, *Über die Bedeutung der politischen Symbole im Nationalstaat*; *Historische Zeitschrift* 213, pp. 296-357;

States whose cultural continuity has been repeatedly interrupted in last centuries feel a greater need than 'old' European democracies to confirm their historical identity by looking for the elements of continuation. Their commemorative passion has a double dimension: they look for reckoning with the Nazi, fascist or communist history and break all the taboos of memory created by ideological dictatorships.

Days of remembrance are a medium through which communities and nations construct their image and articulate their cultural belonging. Periodical commemoration through an anniversary ritual is an act of authenticating the present by reference to the past in the name of the future. Societies and states need constant renewal of the ideological fundamentals of the reality they live in. Historical anniversaries offer a forum in which diverse interests clash or correspond with each other. They are one of the most important instruments of the politics of memory and forgetting. As the past cannot be changed, the attention of political actors focuses on memory, which can be moulded as easily as plasticine. Every turning point involves announcing a new list of national heroes and traitors.

After years of ideological uniformity, the 1990s brought an explosion of visions and interpretations of the past that compete with each other on the local, regional, national and global market of memory. Commemorating events that are important for a society and that have been elevated to the rank of political national holiday primarily serve an integrative function. A holiday is expected to unite what the everyday divides. Anniversary celebrations provide an illusion of national unity. On such a day, representatives of competing political groups join in parades and manifestations, demonstrating their staged agreement to the audience, in line with political correctness.

Political ritualisation of the past is the subject of numerous controversies. Symbolic acts serve different functions. They are intended as an element that organises memory. They are also subject to political instrumentalisation and staging. They manifest and represent the current order and they are expected to demonstrate the coherence and consistency of a group in the process of commemoration of the past. Official mourning ceremonies to celebrate past actions or express regret meet cultural needs. It is difficult to decide whether rituals are right or wrong. Their efficiency can only be measured in the symbolic dimension. Struggles over political correctness of rituals in an area burdened with emotions, as in the case of National Socialism, sometimes have a turbulent course. Rita Süßmuth, the President of Bundestag, pointed out the problem of rituals saying: "Memory that is not cherished by people quickly becomes a simple ritual. Introducing a day

of remembrance is one thing, filling it with content is different task that must be performed again and again.<sup>615</sup>

Regardless of criticism, rituals confirm social community. Émile Durkheim was right to conclude that they are significant “by the very fact of uniting, they are mutually comforted; they find a remedy because they seek it together. The common faith becomes reanimated quite naturally in the heart of this reconstituted group.”<sup>616</sup> Historical anniversaries attach symbolic value to particular periods of time and, most importantly, organise collective identity. “In the public sphere, both in primitive and postmodern societies, the calendar of holidays is an important fundament of identity.”<sup>617</sup> Great historical turning points demand redefinition of a community. Their important function is to legitimise the current political order. Days of remembrance are an important tool in the struggle for power and control over the social and political reality. Not only do they manifest state representation and historical orientation but they also are an important tool for manipulation, propaganda and mobilisation of public opinion. With this tool, every authority can modify the memory of the past. Political jubilees in the institutionalised culture help direct and strengthen the selected memory, which is particularly important in times of relativity and unpredictability of the future. In the long process of German dealing with the Nazi past, it is easy to notice that ritualisation and symbolisation of the past can also facilitate society’s collective silence.<sup>618</sup>

Gaining citizens’ loyalty is the main condition of a democratic state. Anniversary celebrations reveal historical interests and public emotions. Participants in public rituals have an opportunity to actualise or modify the existing norms and values. Thus, the role of intellectual elites in society is very significant. In times of electronic communication, historical memory and its celebrations also become a commodity in the consumption market. The growing strength of the media helps control public opinion and decide on the selection of historical content.

The classic function of rituals gains a new meaning when it refers to rituals related to the memory of National Socialism in Germany. How to celebrate the memory of a criminal activity of the representatives of one’s own nation? What

615 *Ansprache der Bundestagspräsidentin Rita Süßmuth zum Gedenktag für die Opfer des Nationalsozialismus*, ‘Bulletin Presse- und Informationsamt der Bundesregierung’, 29.01.1998, p. 89. For more, see: R. Wesel, *Gedenken als Ritual: Zum politischen Sinn “sinn entleerter Rituale”*, in: W. Bergem op. cit.

616 E. Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life*, New York 1976, p. 346.

617 E. Hałas, *Symbole publiczne a polska tożsamość. Zmiana i niejednoznaczność w kalendarzu świąt*, “Kultura i Społeczeństwo” XLV, 3-4, 2001, p. 50; idem, *Transformacja w wyobraźni zbiorowej*, in: P. Sztompka (ed.), *Imponderabilia wielkiej zmiany. Mentalność, wartości i więzi społeczne czasów transformacji*, Warszawa, Kraków 1999.

618 W. Benz, B. Distel, *Erinnern oder Verweigern – Das schwierige Thema Nationalsozialismus*, Dachau 1990; H. Schlaffer, *Gedenktage; Merkur* 43, 1989, pp. 81-84.

rituals are appropriate to commemorate the victims of Nazism? How to mourn? Commemorations of various historical anniversaries in recent years have shown how difficult it is to keep the balance of thoughts, words and forms and expressions, how easy it is to hurt the victims, how valuable tact, sensitivity and an appropriate choice of words are. An example of the discrepancies in the assessment of the proper form of celebration was the case of Philip Jenninger, the President of the Bundestag, whose speech on the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the pogrom of Jews on 10 November 1988 was considered a scandal and violation of the correctness of political ritual. Other examples are the meeting of chancellor Helmut Kohl and the US President Ronald Reagan in Bitburg, and the months of debate on Martin Walser's speech.

The political rituals of memory in the country that was the homeland of Nazism integrate people in a different way. They must be simple and politically correct and they must not break the established convention. The memory must remain alive – it cannot freeze and become only a ritual. No politician, however, is able to suggest how to make the form and content of a ritual sound authentic and what to do to prevent a ritual becoming an empty gesture. Collective commemoration of dramatic events strengthens the group. However, do the days of remembrance for the Holocaust victims that were murdered in the occupied countries bring moral renewal and comfort to the Germans and integrate them? The culture of commemoration as an element of political culture and rituals of memory developed over the postwar era under the influence of political conditions and transitions. They are still endangered; they can also be intentionally provocative. Meetings of heads of states in cemeteries and at mass grave sites can also be interpreted as a violation of a taboo. Where victims and culprits repose in one cemetery, the idea of equality of all before death arouses controversies, criticism and accusations of moral abuse. German political rituals attempt first of all to carry the message of reconciliation.

Conservative authors criticise some political penitentiary rituals in Germany. Hermann Lübke is sceptical about the widespread political culture of repentance: "The civil German tendency of penitence is very bloated. It occasionally becomes Pharisaic and tends to criticise those who manifest the joy of confessing guilt in a less expressive manner."<sup>619</sup> Lübke is not isolated in his objections and commentaries. In times when the media create new symbols and strategies of reckoning with the past we often encounter a kind of 'media routine'. One may be concerned whether officially approved rituals of confessing guilt, penitence, purification or reconciliation perform a substitutional function, clear conscience,

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619 H. Lübke, *'Ich entschuldige mich'*. *Das neue politische Bußritual*, Berlin 2001, p. 22.

allow Germans to escape from the shadow of Hitler and release themselves from the memory of Auschwitz.

During a debate on the symbols of guilt and penance, Jan Philipp Reemtsma, the co-author of the exhibition about the crimes of the German Wehrmacht, noted that rituals unite people but do not demand their unanimity. "Suffering is private. Suffering is manifested in the public sphere through law and ritual (...) In a ritual, one demonstrates that he or she acknowledges suffering as a fact but not that he or she participates in it. Public acknowledgment of suffering is not insignificant. But it is nothing more than stating that it exists. A person who suffers, who participates in a ritual, must accept that the ritual is there also in order to ease the potentially dangerous gestures of suffering. One often easily forgets about this difference between the sphere of law and ritual."<sup>620</sup>

After World War II, Germans faced the dilemma of deciding which historical events should be commemorated and which rituals should accompany the anniversary ceremonies. They have had difficulties with the anniversary dates again and again because almost all historical dates carry complicated content. The nature of holidays is that they are festive while Germans after the criminal war could only be in mourning. How to reconcile different feelings and expectations so that commemorations would not be a staging devoid of content, but an opportunity for reflection and extending knowledge?

## 2. 8 May: dialectics of defeat and liberation

On 8 May 1945, in their last report, the high command of the German Wehrmacht stated: "Since midnight the guns have fallen silent on all fronts. On the orders of the Grossadmiral, the Wehrmacht has abandoned a struggle which had become hopeless. It brings almost six years of heroic fighting to an end. It brought us great victories, but also heavy defeats. The German Wehrmacht has finally lost to a powerful superior force. True to his oath, the German soldier, with the highest possible commitment to the people, achieved much that will remain unforgotten. The Homeland supported him to the last with all means to hand despite the heaviest sacrifices. The unique achievement of the Front and Homeland will find its laudatory appraisal in later impartial reviews."<sup>621</sup>

From an objective and subjective perspective, defeat and liberation had a different dimension. Wolfgang Soergel, sitting in a prisoner-of-war camp in

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620 J.P. Reemtsma, *Nathan schweigt. Die Dankrede zum Lessing-Preis; Die Zeit* 28.11.1997.

621 W. Lüdde-Neurath., *Unconditional Surrender: A Memoir of The Last Days of the Third Reich and the Dönitz Administration*, London 2010, p. 151.

Scotland wrote in his diary on 8 May 1945: “Adolf Hitler is dead. They’re still fighting for Chemnitz. In tattered pieces of newspaper, I read of civil war in the place where I am looking for you. Will I ever see you again? In late April, National Socialist concentration camps were liberated by British troops (...). The reality is much worse than the whisperings and murmurings of recent months (...). It is not in gallant defeat that we went down, we are seen as a band of murderers whose masks have been torn off.”<sup>622</sup> Many feared punishment and searches for the guilty. An SPD sympathiser, an employee of the municipal gas company, wrote in his diary on 9 May 1945: “Since tonight, 0.01, ceasefire after six years of murders. Now we all stand as if we were criminals. Now we are guilty of what these 10,000 at the top did. Us, it is us who should be aware of everything. It is always the little man.”<sup>623</sup> However, the most important strategy for the majority was survival. Although the feeling of an end was dominant, one had to continue living. Major and minor criminals, the guilty and the innocent, the persecuted and those who lived through the war in relative stability: they all searched for an optimal strategy of survival.

German allies did not suffer their defeat on the same day. Japan laid down arms on 14/15 August 1945. The downfall of Mussolini and surrender of Italy took place on 8 September 1943 and marked the end of the monarchist and fascist regime, which was soon replaced by occupation by the German army, whose separatist surrender was dated 2 May 1945. Self-liberation of northern Italian cities was achieved on 25 April. In Europe, 8 May was a day of self-pity for every nation. It is the most important day for veterans and their victory. For the French, 8 May was controversial. The day of the liberation of Paris – 15 August 1944 – was the most important date and most significant symbol. In 1959, General Charles de Gaulle, as the liberator of Paris and the president of the state, decided that the German surrender should not be celebrated in France. The day of memory was moved to the second Sunday of May. Giscard d’Estaing went further and suggested that official commemorations be withdrawn in the name of German-French friendship, which exposed him to the criticism of the public opinion. Veterans, communists and representatives of the resistance movement protested. The ambiguity of this day of memory in France was related to the Vichy regime and collaboration. England endeavoured to show restraint. Margaret Thatcher

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622 Citation after: the speech of the President Horst Köhler: *Wir trauern um alle Opfer, weil wir gerecht gegen alle Völker sein wollen*; FAZ 9.05.2005. Translation after: [http://www.bundespraesident.de/SharedDocs/Reden/EN/HorstKoehler/Reden/2005/05/20050508\\_Rede.html](http://www.bundespraesident.de/SharedDocs/Reden/EN/HorstKoehler/Reden/2005/05/20050508_Rede.html)

623 *Kölner erinnern sich an die Jahre 1929-1945. Zum 40. Jahrestag des Kriegsendes herausgegeben von der Stadt Köln*, ed. Historisches Archiv by Horst Matzerath, in cooperation with Brigitte Holzhauser, 3 ed., Köln 1987, p. 283.

claimed that the anniversary was not intended to highlight military victory but to honour the victims. On this occasion it was impossible to forget the English politics just before the war. However, regardless of the politicians' intentions, war veteran organisations in the victorious areas of Europe got their Victory Day and the occasion to remember days of glory.

From the very beginning, Germans had a problem with how to refer to 8/9 May. Should it be 'the end of the war', 'catastrophe', 'capitulation', 'collapse', 'the zero hour', or 'the new beginning'? None of the terms could satisfy everyone and each evoked divergent associations, a different vision of history, different memories, different constructions of identity and a different ideology. The term 'catastrophe' suggests that the outcome of war was a stroke of fate, which weakens human responsibility. The word 'capitulation' needs to be specified. Capitulation for whom? Before whom? What emotions come with the term? On the other hand, the terms 'zero hour' and 'the new beginning' define the caesura of an era and assume a moment of absolute silence and emptiness, when unburdened and free people start everything from the beginning. Declaring 'the zero hour' signifies an attempt to erase time and thus means concealing the truth. "The unconditional surrender as the new beginning is absurd since the idea of the thousand-year Reich cannot disappear overnight: it is still alive. Such a manifestation is equivalent to an attempt to dismiss the facts, for example the German annihilation strategy. Then the perpetrators and the bystanders would have to recognise how much they had been submitted to mad leadership."<sup>624</sup> In the recent past, the question as to who was liberated in 1945 has become an object of reflection. Liberated from what and what for? How many Germans interpreted the capitulation as liberation? Was it liberation only from the inhumane war or from Hitler, who several years earlier had been worshipped as a providential spirit? Or was it liberation from one's pangs of conscience?

What did the end of war mean? This question has remained disputable for many decades and resulted in a mythology of the end of the war. Not only did the two states differ in their interpretations, there were also internal differences. They concerned the communist resistance movement, the 'self-liberation' of the concentration camp in Buchenwald and the role of the Red Army as an armed organ of the communist forces. The term 'liberation' of Germany remained controversial in the official rhetoric until the speech of the President Richard von Weizsäcker in 1985.

The Germans wanted to be excused by the grace of the calendar once more. On 8 May 1949, there was a third reading of the constitution in the Bundestag. In 1985, there were attempts to associate 8 May with the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of German

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624 A. Eckstaedt, *Nationalsozialismus in der 'zweiten Generation'. Psychoanalyse von Hörigkeitsverhältnissen*, Frankfurt a. M. 1989, p. 496.



membership in NATO. However, none of the attempts to associate 8 May with another event was successful. History did not let Germans forget what had left an imprint on the experiences of millions of people. The Dachau prisoner and the member of the French resistance movement, Joseph Rován, wrote in 1992 that the end of tyranny must be quick and bloody. The magnitude of hatred cannot be overcome by law.<sup>625</sup> The world waited for the punishment of the responsible for unexampled crimes and suffering. Germans, liberated from the power of the Nazi regime but overwhelmed with the consequences of war, mostly interpreted the end of the war as a defeat.

Konrad Adenauer, who was Mayor of Cologne in 1917-1933 and between 4 May and 6 October 1945, found suitable words in his appeal to Cologne citizens in August 1945: “The misery that we are afflicted with, the material, spiritual and ethical poverty, is atrocious. If we want to step back from the precipice from which we fell, we need to find out what pushed us there. Who sows the wind reaps the storm. Live by the sword, die by the sword! These are true words. We bear the blame for our misery; we need to realise that. Some sinned in their deed, others by passive observation, as if they were blind or did not want to see. Still others, who would have the power to intervene and stop the evil and madness when it was still possible, did not do it.”<sup>626</sup>

On the threshold of the postwar reality, earlier forms of commemorating historical events and anniversaries turned out to be useless. What united Germans before – the Reich, race, nation, revolution – became a collection of worn out and useless slogans. The rhythm of commemorations of the days of memory demands restoring and recalling history. Yet no one in the German land wanted to remember what the date of 8 May meant. Every historical anniversary was related to the necessity of evaluating political consequences. It forced Germans to look the victims in the eye.

The end of the war was experienced differently in the army, in concentration camps, and in the civilian life. The NSDAP officers and Nazi officials responded to the total defeat differently from average citizens. Representatives of the new power soon became ‘the winners of the defeat’. The end of the war has different dimensions and cannot be reduced to one day. For historical reflection, the important question is what happened before and after 8 May 1945. Was it the end of war or the end of National Socialism and the nation-state? Was it a new beginning or a restoration? There are many different answers to these questions, as the war caesuras were different for the different countries that participated in the war. It was only after the turn of 1990 that the long suppressed feelings and

625 J. Rován, *Das Erbe der Tyrannei. Kurzer oder langer Prozeß? Wie nach dem Ende eines Unrechtsregimes mit den Verantwortlichen zu verfahren ist*; FAZ 8.08.1992.

626 K. Adenauer, *Kölner, Kölnerinnen!; Verwaltungsblatt der Stadt Köln* 25.08.1945.



convictions of Central-East European countries regarding their liberation by the Red Army manifested. The questions of expulsions were widely publicised. From a historical perspective and in people's minds, the end of the war was only after the division of Germany and Europe was overcome.

The answer to the question whether 1945 should be identified with defeat or liberation impacted on further interpretations of the past time. The sense of emptiness and belief in the 'zero hour' let the Germans strengthen in their conviction that the Nazi state had been just an episode, an unfortunate derailment of German history and that after the complete collapse there would be a completely new beginning. This legend found followers in many political and social circles. The 'new beginning' brought hope and distance from the past barbarity.

As time went by, the term 'zero hour' was attached different meanings in everyday speech: both positive and negative. One spoke of "the grace of the zero point" as of the expected, positive discontinuation of history. In 1961, a newspaper announced that 1945 was a defeat, but not a 'zero year': "We faced defeats in 1918 and 1945. They belong to the fate of the nation as well as victories; also in the integrated and ideologised world. However, history knows no quiescence, no zero hour, but only rises and falls"<sup>627</sup>.

Many intellectuals and politicians observed the ambivalence of the term. "It includes both an image of the total collapse and undermining of the current development of Germany, and a hope for a completely new beginning related to this radical discontinuation", wrote the historian Christoph Kleßmann, aware of the ambivalent legacy of the Federal Republic of Germany, which did not have "a completely new beginning."<sup>628</sup> Günter Grass, speculating on whom the 'zero hour' concerned, suggested numerous lines of historical continuity: "The zero hour concerned neither professors, nor judges, nor Globke, the Secretary of State, nor Minister Oberländer nor any of the many Filbingers."<sup>629</sup> Intellectual elites mostly rebutted the myth of the 'zero hour' as simplification that did not fulfil the function of historical caesura. Thus, some believed that the term 'new beginning', marked by the emergence of the Federal Republic of Germany, was more justified.

## The German Federal Republic: the day of liberation

In the first years of the German Federal Republic, a tradition of memory of the end of the war had not been yet established. The date 8 May was not treated as

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627 *Die Allgemeine Sonntagszeitung* 5.03.1961.

628 C. Kleßmann, *Die doppelte Staatsgründung. Deutsche Geschichte 1945-1955*, Göttingen 1982, p. 37.

629 G. Grass, *Geschenkte Freiheit. Versagen, Schuld, vertane Chancen; Die Zeit* 10.05.1985.

an occasion for collective learning. Politicians ignored this day and the public did not see any reason why remembering the defeat should be promoted to the rank of a celebration. Time was needed to make this anniversary the subject of a deeper and more profound reflection. For a long time, this anniversary was treated in the Bonn Republic as a demonstration of political difference from East Germany, where this day was treated as a ‘liberation day’.

From the very beginning in East Germany, this day was an element of the antifascist reason of the state as ensured by the communists in the Soviet zone. The monumental memorial in Treptower Park was the most prominent symbol of liberation and the place of annual ceremonies in East Berlin. It was also the central commemorative site, which marked the Soviet appropriation of the victory. As early as 1946, the Soviet authorities announced a competition for the most important commemorative site in Berlin. On 8 May 1949, a memorial to the Soviet soldiers was officially unveiled, marking the 4th anniversary of the end of the war. The triumphal arch at the entrance to the park honours the soldiers who, according to the inscription, “died for the freedom and independence of the socialist homeland”. The route to the major memorial is lined with 16 white marble sarcophagi, ornamented with reliefs from the ‘Great Patriotic War’ and with inscriptions of citations from Joseph Stalin. The main elevated memorial shows a thirty-metre tall statue of the ‘Liberator’, a soldier with a sword in one hand, as an archetype of the angel of vengeance, and a child in the other arm. The soldier is squashing the swastika with his boot. The visiting route is similar to the Way of the Cross.<sup>630</sup>

On 8 May 1954, The Befreiung memorial was unveiled in the Sachsenhausen concentration camp. The memorial shows a relief of a Red Army soldier with a camp prisoner in his arms. The dominant message is to remind Germans to whom they owe their liberation. On 8 May 1960 on Unter den Linden, the Neue Wache building (The New Guard House), the work of K. Friedrich Schinkel, reconstructed from war debris, was rededicated as a memorial to the victims of fascism and militarism. On the 20th anniversary of the GDR, the symbolism of the Neue Wache was changed, namely a grand stone national emblem of East Germany was added and urns with soil from concentration camps and battlefields were placed before the eternal flame. All these efforts served to remind that the communist fight against fascism was not in vain but resulted in victory.

8 May served the purpose of monumentalising and canonising the heroics of the Soviet soldiers. The commemorative sites in East Germany were created on the Soviet initiative and according to their pattern. It was the representatives of

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630 For more, see: H. Adam, *Erinnerungsrituale – Erinnerungsdiskurse – Erinnerungstabus. Politische Denkmäler der DDR zwischen Verhinderung, Veränderung und Realisierung; kritische berichte* 3, 1992, p. 10-35.

the Red Army who, in November 1967, opened the Museum of Unconditional Surrender of Fascist Germany in the Great Patriotic War of 1941-1945. In 1972, a commemoration site was opened on the Seelow Hills (Seelower Höhen). It was intended to remind the visitor about the ‘The Victor’s Fighting Route’ of The Red Army, which in early 1944 lost 30,000 soldiers. It was also meant to confirm the ‘camaraderie of arms’ between the East German and Soviet soldiers. The commemorations of 8 May created favourable conditions to strengthen the East German interpretation of history, highlighting that the major glory of victory and the burden of losses are accredited to the Soviet Union, while simultaneously marginalising the role of the Western allies. The year 1945 was believed to be a caesura, just as 1917 once was: socialism finally overcame the fascist tyranny and German guilt obliged them to eternal gratitude and friendship with the liberator. Thus, 8 May as a celebration of victory was also a celebration of socialism.<sup>631</sup> The Nazi racist policy and its victims did not constitute a point of reference. The centre of attention was on the suffering of the civilians in the last months of the war and the bombed city of Dresden. These facts were used as political arguments. As in 1953, Lothar Bolz, the head of the National-Democratic Party of Germany (NDPD) in the GDR assured, “We owe the ruins of our cities and the corpses buried beneath them to America and England. What keeps our nation alive (...) and gives it strength to rebuild we owe to the Soviet Union”.<sup>45</sup> When Günter Paulus, a German historian, had the courage to say in 1965 that “liberty came to us Germans not as a friendly goddess with a palm twig in her hand” but “it drove in tanks into our streets”, “it knocked on our door with the butt-ends of guns”, the text was rejected by state censorship as “historically inappropriately formulated” and “politically unacceptable.”<sup>632</sup>

In April 1950, the interim house of parliament established 8 May and 7 October as official national holidays in East Germany. The May commemorations in East Germany, as well as the entire historical policy of the SED state, were a manifestation of friendship with the Soviet Union and at the same time a performance condemning the political reality of West Germany. To illustrate, a demonstration took place on 8 May 1955, in which 200,000 people participated and whose aim was to condemn West Germany, which had become a NATO member on 5 May. The celebrations of Liberation Day were always an occasion for a political update of the past. In 1970, when Willy Brandt spoke in the Bundestag on the occasion of the anniversary of the war ending, *Neues Deutschland* saw

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631 B.-A. Rusinek, *Ende des Zweiten Weltkriegs lokal, regional, international. Forschungsstand und Perspektiven*, in: idem (ed.), *Kriegsende 1945. Verbrechen, Katastrophen, Befreiungen in nationaler und internationaler Perspektive*, Göttingen 2004, pp. 7-26.

632 After: M. Sabrow, *Geschichte als Herrschaftsdiskurs. Der Fall Günter Paulus; Initial* 4/5, 1995, p. 60.

“pure revanchist ideology in all fragments of his speech.”<sup>633</sup> Several years later, on the 28th anniversary of the German capitulation, it was yet again stressed that East German citizens were the victors of 1945. That is to say, “the wheel of history has been turning forward on East German territory and it will keep turning forward.”<sup>634</sup> In 1965, on the anniversary of 8 May, the American war in Vietnam was condemned. Thus, historically, anniversaries were an occasion to mobilise the masses and gain support for the SED and its “peace mission in the world”, as well as to express opposition to the Western powers, which were a threat to peace.

Ritualised celebrations enriched with the elements of current political conflicts between the East and the West were becoming a ceremony in which National Socialism was a marginal attachment devoid of content. Anti-fascism solved everything without explaining anything. It was an ideology of compensation, legitimisation and separation from the past. The circle of perpetrators was narrow. Shame, guilt, sorrow were not suitable for the feelings of the victor. The 8 May had a strong position in the political calendar of the GDR. It contained all the East German mythology. The culture of memory staged entirely by the state left no space for a debate. Central organisation ensured the presence of the party and the general public, but not authentic participation. In both German states, metaphors were used to obscure the real meaning of the past. While on 8 May 1965, Walter Ulbricht spoke of the “swampy growth of German imperialism”, Gustav Heinemann in 1970 spoke of the “dark hours of the gloomy era”.

It was as late as on the 40th anniversary of the war ending that a change of climate could be felt in East Germany.<sup>635</sup> The memories of the Allied air raids on Dresden, which had been forgotten for some time, came to the fore. The anniversaries were celebrated also in Christian churches, despite the fact that the sermons and public appearances of the more important church officials were censored. The public could watch documentaries that showed the end of the war in a more realistic way. There was also a new international perspective and the celebrations were accompanied by appeals for peace. In Torgau on the River Elbe, a “coalition of reason and realism” was presented, in which 60 US war veterans met with 100 former Red Army soldiers to exchange their war memories 40 years later.

In the whole history of East Germany, the efforts to maintain the progressive tone and victorious atmosphere remained in sharp contrast with the authentic tenor of the day of German capitulation. The celebrations did not call for grieving over the

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633 After: J.-H. Kirsch, *“Wir haben aus der Geschichte gelernt”*. *Der 8 Mai als Politischer Gedenktag in Deutschland*, Köln, Weimar, Wien 1999, p. 66.

634 Ibidem.

635 For press analysis concerning information about 8 May celebrations see: M. Mederacke, W. Schaff, *Der “Tag der Befreiung” in der DDR 1985. Die Berichterstattung des “Neuen Deutschland”* “Deutsche studien”, XXIV, März 1986, pp. 88-94.

victims of National Socialism. They imposed an atmosphere of pompous triumph, which was not consonant with the authentic feelings of the older generation, who remembered the burden of the defeat and its consequences. Therefore, despite tremendous propagandist efforts and expenses of the government, the Soviet perspective of commemoration remained foreign to the general public, particularly because personal contacts between the GDR and USSR citizens were limited.

### The Federal Republic of Germany: day of mourning or celebration?

The West German state had a problem with 8 May from the beginning. The democratic public opinion could not remain indifferent towards the ambivalence of this date. On the one hand, the SPD deputy Walter Menzel stated: “On this day the time of terror, human humiliation and German humiliation ended. Low, very low did Germany fall after 1933. Thus, here and from this place we want to clearly highlight the responsibility of National Socialism for what happened; it is the only one to blame for the disaster that befell Germany and the world. On 9 May 1945, a new chapter of our history began.”<sup>636</sup> On the other hand, on 8 May 1949, when the Parliament enacted the constitution, the future first president of the FRG, Theodor Heuss (FDP), noted the ambivalence of the date, saying: “In fact, 8 May 1945 remains the most tragic and problematic paradox of history for all of us. Why? Because we were simultaneously saved and destroyed.”<sup>637</sup>

In the FRG, the term ‘liberation’, which was associated with GDR propaganda, was initially avoided. Chancellor Konrad Adenauer perceived this date as “the beginning of the division of Germany.” Politicians and society agreed to search for positive tradition. Therefore, on 8 May ten years later, the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Friedrich Schiller and the cultural unity of the German nation were at the centre of interest. The 1950s were not a good time for state commemorations due to the common expectation of amnesty and ‘clearance’ of the denazified. On 8 May 1955, only the speech of the president of the Bundestag, Eugen Gerstenmaier, was broadcast on the radio. A speech that was important for the climate of the times was given by the historian Hans Rothfels on 9 May 1955 at the University of Tübingen. The scholar, who emigrated in 1938 and after the war was a co-founder of the Institut für Zeitgeschichte in Munich, despite mentioning the necessity of revealing the truth of the past, highlighted the patriotism of the Wehrmacht and the size of the expulsions of Germans from Eastern areas.

The 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the war ending was something of a breaking point. The perspective of perceiving the year 1945 and the political consciousness were

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636 After: J.-H. Kirsch, *Wir haben aus der Geschichte gelernt*, op. cit., p. 48.

637 T. Heuss, *Die großen Reden. Der Staatsmann*, vol. 1, Tübingen 1965, p. 86.

slowly changing. Sections of the elites asked critical questions. Great ideologies were ousted but parting with National Socialism did not automatically lead to clearing consciences and building a better world.<sup>638</sup> The uncertainty remained whether to celebrate liberation or to mourn. What lesson should be learnt from history: was it an end or a new beginning? Until 1965 there was no place for central commemorations and official speeches of the government representatives on this occasion. Chancellor Ludwig Erhard was the first to speak to the citizens of his nation via radio and television. Rejecting the idea of appointing 8 May the day of national memory, Erhard said in 1965: “If defeating Nazi Germany had led to the elimination of lawlessness and tyranny from the world, all humankind would have had a reason to celebrate 8 May as the day of memory of the liberation. We know, however, how far the reality is from this ideal.” The chancellor pointed to the painful consequences of the war for Germany, particularly the division of the nation and the necessity of reconstructing unity. He wanted society to be proud that the FRG was considered a reliable partner of the Western community. “The Germans cannot become a politically neutral country of little rank and deprived of history. They did not refuse to cooperate in global politics and they want to continue to help shaping a positive history of the world.”<sup>639</sup>

In the 1960s, different cultures of memory already co-existed. However, Bonn politicians rejected the invitation of the Soviet embassy to celebrate “the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the victory of the Soviet nation in the Great Patriotic War” together. At the same time, the first congress of the NPD in Hannover was organised; the programme included a demand for ending the trials of war criminals and reclaiming Eastern lands. Simultaneously, at the University of Frankfurt, the political scientist Wolfgang Abendroth pointed to the far-reaching consequences of 8 May. “When the German Wehrmacht surrendered 20 years ago, the German nation was liberated. Thus, this day should be seen not only as the ending of World War II and the criminal regime but also as the day of a new beginning for Europe and for Germany. The German nation was liberated from the Third Reich but it did not liberate itself. That is why on this day the process started of the division of Germany into two states belonging to two different systems.”<sup>640</sup> Although this day was almost unnoticeable in the public culture, there were symptoms of change of the official interpretation of the ambivalent anniversary. Together with the faintly

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638 P. Sethe, *Zwanzig Jahre danach*; *Die Zeit* 7.05.1965.

639 *Bulletin des Presse- und Informationsamtes der Bundesregierung* 11.05.1965, pp. 641-642. A comprehensive list of sources on 8 May 1945 as the liberation and defeat, see T. Eitz, G. Stötzel, *Wörterbuch der “Vergangenheitsbewältigung”*. *Die NS-Vergangenheit im öffentlichen Sprachgebrauch*, Hildesheim, Zürich, New York 2007, pp. 115-134.

640 After: P. Reichel, *Politik mit der Erinnerung. Gedächtnisorte im Streit um die nationalsozialistische Vergangenheit*, München, Wien 1995, p. 278.

emphasised but audible demand to acknowledge 8 May as a day of liberation, a necessity was observed to deepen and popularise the knowledge about the origin of National Socialism. Without understanding the core of the Nazi ideology and politics, it would be hard to imagine authentic commemorations of the capitulation of the Third Reich and the interpretation of 8 May that would guarantee learning from history.

Together with the change of political climate, the climate of commemorations was also changing. In speeches and rituals, one could see an evolution of the historical culture, new means of expressions and, most of all, establishment of civic awareness in a democratic state. Willy Brandt's government planned the first official ceremony on the occasion of 8 May in the Bundestag. Although neither Brandt nor Heinemann described 8 May as the day of liberation, part of the CDU/CSU deputies critically approached the plans of the government and the president of the Federal Republic. They did not want "to cherish the capitulation" or commemorate one's own defeat. *Allgemeine Sonntagszeitung* commented on the situation the day before the anniversary: "The new federal government of Brandt and Scheel wants to redefine this day: from the day of capitulation to the day of liberation of Germany. (...) In the West, a part of the German nation was liberated and a part was not. In the East, on the other side of the wall and the barbed wire, not only was not a part of the nation liberated, but it moved from one totalitarianism into another. (...) One thing is certain: on 8 May Germany was not liberated."<sup>641</sup>

Official speeches focused on positive mobilisation of society but politicians differed in what they highlighted. On 8 May 1970, Chancellor Willy Brandt made a statement in the Bundestag in the name of the government. He believed the meaning of the anniversary was recognition of what had happened years ago. "A nation must be ready to look at its own history. Only he who remembers what happened yesterday will understand what is happening today and will predict what may happen tomorrow." The overall tone of his speech, however, was influenced by contemporary reality and a concern with not omitting any group or milieu of the Germans who suffered losses during and after the war.<sup>642</sup>

President Gustav Heinemann, speaking to the diplomatic corps on 6 May, interpreted this moment as a "painful, difficult beginning", the positive result of which may only be discernable over the course of two decades. He explained that the German nation and National Socialists are two different sides of a coin and all the evil of the Nazi times had already been explained in most part. Therefore, what remains is "memory of these brave people who through all the period of the Nazi regime tragically and unsuccessfully resisted the state of lawlessness, which

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641 After: J.-H. Kirsch, op. cit., p. 121.

642 *Bulletin* 9.05.1970, pp. 591-592.



remains a valuable and powerful legacy of the thus gloomy period.”<sup>643</sup> The speech focused on the positive achievements of the Germans. After “countless dark hours”, it was time for citizens to make a significant effort to build a democratic society with the cooperation of “homeless and impoverished expellees.”<sup>644</sup>

Although SPD politicians perceived 8 May as a chance for a new political order, they rejected the metaphor of the ‘zero hour’. In 1970, the representative of social democrats, Volker Hauff, said: “Today, for the first time since the beginning of the Federal Republic, a governmental statement was made on 8 May. Thus, the meaning of 8 May 1945 was clearly documented. Considering all the suffering that World War II and its ending had brought, this day was a chance for the new, democratic, legal and state orientation in Germany. (...) Europe was in ruins but many people breathed a sigh of relief. However, hope was not commonly shared. The war ending did not bring safety and peace to the world. There was no ‘zero hour’, a true new beginning.” As the youngest SPD deputy, Hauff highlighted the problem of peace in Europe and around the world. He wanted to convince the international environment that Germany wanted good neighbourly relations and to be “a country of peace.”<sup>645</sup>

Richard von Weizsäcker from the CDU stated that one cannot “come to terms” with the past and that 8 May was not a day of celebration for the Germans. Some wanted to commemorate it with silence, some just respected it. Gradually, adequate words were being found to describe the neglects of the policy of memory in the postwar period. Egon Franke (SPD), the Minister for Intra-German Relations, spoke of the atrocities of the camps and warned against using resistance movements as a comfortable alibi. He also referred to many living Germans and their moral discredit. He warned against instrumentalisation of the Nazi past for the purpose of the conflict between the two German systems. He also reminded his listeners that many people behaved as though they wanted to win the war even after it had ended in 1945.<sup>646</sup> Another representative of the SPD, Volker Hauff, was one of the few to assert that the process of learning and drawing conclusions from history was not a closed chapter but was continuing and should continue. Lieselotte Funcke (FDP) referred to individual fates of different victims of the war and Nazism.

The politicians, however, despite ideological differences and focusing on different aspects of the problem, did not go beyond slogans and did not have the courage to confront the German defeat and suffering with the experiences of the victims of Nazi politics in Europe and around the world. Cautiousness to avoid hurting the feelings of voters was noticeable in almost every speech.

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643 Ibidem, p. 589.

644 Ibidem, pp. 589-590.

645 Ibidem, pp. 594-595.

646 Ibidem, p. 596.



Before anyone mentioned the liberation of other nations from foreign rule, “terror and fear”, German victims were exposed: the widows, refugees and expelled. Jews were beyond the scope of interest of the main politicians. Almost everyone highlighted the achievements of the young republic in consolidating democracy, integrating millions of the expelled and building fundamentals of international peaceful order.

A further step towards deeper reflection on the meaning and consequences of the defeat of the Third Reich was taken on the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary, on 6 May 1975 in the Schloßkirche of the University of Bonn, when President Walter Scheel opposed the system of National Socialism. The liberation from “war, murder, bondage and barbarism” in 1945 had come from outside. He reminded his listeners that the tragedy had begun not in 1939 but 1933 and that Hitler had been elected by the nation.<sup>647</sup> “Therefore, 8 May is not a day of celebration but self-reflection. (...) It is about our attitude to ourselves. Only if we do not forget can we again be proud to call ourselves Germans.” In contrast to Gustav Heinemann’s speech five years earlier, Walter Scheel spoke in the first person plural, referring to all Germans, of the responsibility and compliance in the criminal machine.

Public opinion was divided. Some believed a defeat should not be cherished and that guilt and shame did not deserve honouring. Others thought that they had already had their democracy lesson. Critical observers of the culture of memory noticed a still-existing gap between academic achievements and political representation regarding the evaluation of 8 May and the character of the anniversary celebration. Political parties ignored anniversaries as an opportunity for deeper reflection. Eugen Kogon was one of the few who treated 8 May 1945 as “liberation through defeat” and the anniversary as a pretext for reckoning with National Socialism and warning Germans against escaping from their history. Kogon asserted that National Socialism was still present and “true normalisation can succeed only when the enlightenment work in the Federal Republic produces some results.”<sup>648</sup>

Later texts evaluating the evolution of anniversary rituals draw attention to the public’s lack of interest in the topic. However, alongside official speeches, there were also events inspired by trade unions and youth organisations that gathered tens of thousands of people. In 1980, great demonstrations were organised on the 8 May anniversary in Munich, Hannover and Mannheim and were attended by around 50,000 people. They were a protest against nuclear arms.

Some events that occurred in the turbulent political climate of the 1980s made the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the end of the war a breaking point in the history

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647 *Bulletin* 7.05.1975, pp. 549-553.

648 E. Kogon, *Befreit durch Niederlage. Dreißig Jahre deutscher Wiederaufstieg*; *Frankfurter Hefte* 5, 1975, pp. 7-14.

of reckoning with the Nazi past. Many internal and external factors contributed to it. In 1985, the Federation of Expellees increased tension with its decision to hold a congress under the motto “Silesia remains ours”. After an intervention, the motto sounded no less provocative: “40 years of expulsions: Silesia remains our future in a Europe of free nations”. The leaders of the federation wanted to use the anniversaries planned throughout Europe to move German suffering to the centre of commemoration of the victims of World War II.

While the anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz did not occupy the attention of public opinion, 13/14 February – the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the bombing of Dresden – was commemorated in a very spectacular way. Leading newspapers and magazines expatiated on the senselessness of war barbarity. Some newspapers speculated about the number of victims of the bombing, others criticised the celebration of German self-pity. The initiative ‘Cultural Scientists for Peace and Disarmament in East and West’ rekindled the memory of Dresden, Hiroshima and Nagasaki, demanding liquidation of nuclear weapons and arsenals.

The anniversary of the liberation of the Bergen-Belsen camp on 21 April gathered around 5,000 people. The speeches made before and during the commemorations became an important carrier of memory but also political confessions, to which many participants in public life refer even today. Chancellor Helmut Kohl listed all the victim groups for whom the camp was the last station in life. For the first time, he drew attention to the mass death of Soviet prisoners of war. He also did not hesitate this time to call 8 May 1945 “the day of liberation”. He asserted that Germans had learned their lesson from history.<sup>649</sup>

Preparations for the May commemorations in Europe demonstrated that, 40 years after the war, the powers that be differed in their sensitivity towards the past. They also confirmed that current politics impose the form and content of rituals of memory. Western victors celebrated together in Normandy. The chancellor of the FRG was not invited. However, leaders of the powers responsible for Germany asserted that they would not make any gesture that could, in the words of the French President François Mitterrand, hurt the “souls and hearts” of their German friends.

Two events dominated the debate on the 8 May anniversary: Bitburg and the anniversary speech of President Richard von Weizsäcker. Visiting the USA in November 1984, Helmut Kohl mentioned that he would like the May anniversary of the war ending in 1985 to become an opportunity for the Americans and the Germans to make a mutual “gesture of peace and reconciliation (...) over the graves.”<sup>650</sup> The words spoken by the German chancellor during the Washington press conference were unequivocal. Kohl asserted that two-thirds of currently

649 *Bulletin* 23.04.1985, pp. 349-352.

650 After: P. Reichel, *Politik mit der Erinnerung. Gedächtnisorte im Streit um die nationalsozialistische Vergangenheit*, München, Wien 1995, pp. 281-282.

living Germans either could not have consciously experienced the war ending or were born after 1945. At the end of March, the President of the United States, Ronald Reagan, referred to these words when he explained his withdrawal from the anniversary ceremonies in Dachau: "I believe (...) that there are very few German people alive that even remember the war. (...) They have a feeling, a guilty feeling that's been imposed upon them, and I just think it's unnecessary. I think they should be recognized for the democracy that they've created and the democratic principles they now espouse."<sup>651</sup>

When the news about the planned visit of Reagan to Bitburg, where both the American soldiers and the members of Waffen-SS were buried, reached the public opinion, outrage was expressed not only by American Jews. American war veterans also greeted the news with consternation. The headlines of American newspapers pilloried the plans of their President. Journalists wrote about the "obscenity" of the visit and "saving the honour of the SS." 200 members of the US congress, called by Elie Wiesel, protested against the planned visit. In the FRG, reactions were diverse. On the one hand, the leader of the CDU/CSU fraction, Alfred Dregger, in his letter to American senators who demanded cancellation of the Bitburg visit, suggested that in 1985 the Germans and the Americans stood together against a common enemy, as it was in 1945. He wrote: "On the last day of the war, on 8 May 1945, I, who was at the time 24 years old, with my battalion defended the Silesian city of Marklissa against the attack of the Red Army. (...) My only brother Wolfgang died in 1944 on the Eastern Front in the Kurland region under unknown circumstances. He was a decent young man, as were most of my fellow soldiers. If you demand that your President not perform the noble gesture planned at the military cemetery in Bitburg, then I must regard it as an insult to my brother and the soldiers who fought with me. (...) I ask you if you regard the German people, who were subjugated by a brown dictatorship for twelve years and who have been on the side of the West for forty years, as an ally?"<sup>652</sup> German Christian Democrats did not protest. At the same time, on 28 April 1985 in the Beethovenhalle in Bonn, during the manifestation of the Federation of Expellees (Bund der Vertriebenen: BdV) Dregger stated: "[we need to understand that] Hitler's and Stalin's concentration camps, the expulsions of the Germans and Poles from Eastern areas of their countries, millions of victims among German soldiers and their adversaries were a part of the same, single catastrophe that destroyed Europe and Europeans from the inside, and ravaged and divided the continent."<sup>653</sup>

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651 After: U. Schiller, *Die Schuld hat ihr Kanzler*; *Die Zeit* 19.04.1985.

652 *Frankfurter Rundschau* 23.04.1985.

653 *Ohne Hitler hätte es die Verbrechen nicht gegeben*; *Frankfurter Rundschau* 8.05.1985.

The extreme right considered the US President more pro-German than his eternal critics, the “Israel lobbyists”, communists, labour unions, SPD, Greens and the Evangelical Church. Rightists accused them all of “brainwashing”, destroying national dignity and spreading “the complex of guilt.” Before the meeting at the military cemetery was held, politicians exchanged their arguments. The debate illustrated, amongst other things, the main interpretations of collective memory and forms of their expression. Contemporary questions, such as the position of the FRG in NATO, were also at the centre of the debate. Is 40 years of stable democracy not enough to trust the West German partner? In what ways should Germany’s own victims and the victims of German crimes be honoured? What is the function of mass media in the memory of the Nazi past?<sup>654</sup>

The Minister-President of Rhineland-Palatinate, Bernhard Vogel, and the Mayor of Bitburg, Theo Hallet, expressed the belief that the Chancellor should not change his mind. Those who rest in the cemetery should not be selected. Alois Martes, Minister of State at the West German Foreign Ministry had a similar opinion. The tabloid *Quick* wrote about the “Jewish lobby that opens German wounds”. It published letters by readers, who lamented that after such a long time, “international Jewry” was not ready for “honest reconciliation” but professed and propagated “hatred and revenge” towards the Germans.<sup>655</sup> Kohl explained in his interview for *Time* that cancelling the visit in Bitburg “would deeply hurt the feelings of our nation.” A quick poll conducted by the Institut für Demoskopie Allensbach on 8 and 9 May demonstrated that 70% of citizens believed that the US President’s visit to the military cemetery would be a “beautiful gesture of reconciliation”, while 12% had a different opinion. The vast majority of German society considered 8 May mostly to be a warning against war.

The meeting of the chancellor of the FRG with the US President, which took place in the middle of the global economic crisis, passed into history as ‘the Bitburg controversy’ or ‘the Bitburg scandal’. In his speech, President Reagan connected the past and the present saying: “Four decades ago we waged a great war to lift the darkness of evil from the world (...) But the struggle for freedom is not complete, for today much of the world is still cast in totalitarian darkness.” The president referred to the two generals attending the ceremony, Matthew Ridgway and Johannes Steinhoff, as “two former war heroes”, “each among the bravest of the brave”.<sup>656</sup> The ceremony at the cemetery where 2,000 Wehrmacht soldiers rested next to 49 members of the

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654 W. Bergmann, *Die Bitburg-Affäre in der deutschen Presse. Rechtskonservative und Linksliberale Interpretationen*, in: W. Bergmann, R. Erb, A. Lichtblau (eds.), op. cit., pp. 408-428.

655 After: P. Reichel, op. cit., p. 284.

656 *Bulletin* 7.05.1985, p. 420.

SS was interpreted by some commentators as “rehabilitation of nationalism.”<sup>657</sup> “Reconciliation over the graves” focused on the present. Both leaders intended to cherish the memory of the war victims and highlight the American-German alliance; the problem of the victims of the criminal politics of the Third Reich was moved to the background. An alternative form of demonstration was the meeting of Christian and Jewish participants on 5 May in Berlin-Plötzensee, the site of executions of the Nazi victims. On 7 May, the members of the European Parliament met in the area of the former Struthow camp in Alsace.

The media opinions on the anniversary ceremonies were consistent with the ideological orientation of a particular newspaper. Right-wing press (*Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung, Die Welt*) commented positively on the Bitburg meeting and criticised its opponents. Ronald Reagan’s visit was perceived as a demonstration of the Western alliance with the German partner, directed against Moscow. American realism gained acceptance, as well as the fact that the US was more interested in the present than in the historical defeat of Nazism. It was emphasised that the West looked forward and the East looked backward. Party interests and current disputes got involved in the historical context. The opponents of the Bitburg meeting were stigmatised as allies of Moscow who did not want to close the past chapter and did not represent the will of the majority.<sup>658</sup> Left wing and liberal newspapers (*Süddeutsche Zeitung, Frankfurter Rundschau*) were against the Bitburg visit and their commentaries were critical. The West German Chancellor was accused of not “working through historical deficits”. The staging of the German-American alliance at the military cemetery was considered not credible enough, as “reconciliation cannot be forced.”<sup>659</sup> The American press castigated Reagan. “Normalisation” of history released conservative values: nationalism was recovering. In the eyes of the Americans, Bitburg became a symbol of uniting perpetrators and victims and their common responsibility.

Jürgen Habermas was uncompromised and observed a few significant moments in the scenario of the ceremony. “The aura of the military cemetery in Bitburg served to mobilize historical consciousness through national sentiment. The juxtaposition of Bitburg and Bergen-Belsen, of SS graves and the mass graves

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657 More on the subject, see: M. Brumlik, *Das Öffnen der Schleusen. Bitburg und die Rehabilitation des Nationalismus in der Bundesrepublik*, in: G.M. Hafner, E. Jacoby (eds.), *Die Skandale der Republik*, Hamburg 1990, pp. 262-273.

658 Compare e.g. H. Kremp, *Dies war der Tag des Präsidenten; Die Welt* 6.05.1985; *Ein Tag der Würde – Reagan und Kohl blicken nach vorn; Die Welt* 6.05.1985.

659 See e.g. L. Arnsperger, *Bitburg über alles? Präsident Reagans Besuch auf einem deutschen Soldatenfriedhof erregt Amerika; Süddeutsche Zeitung* 23.04.1985; R. Leicht, *Nicht nach Bitburg!; Süddeutsche Zeitung* 27.04.1985; P. Diehl-Thiele, *Dunkle Schatten über der Waffen-SS; Süddeutsche Zeitung* 30.04.1985.

from the concentration camp took away the singularity of Nazi crimes. And finally the handshake of the veteran generals in the presence of the American president could confirm that we Germans had always been on the right side in the struggle against the Bolshevik enemy.”<sup>660</sup>

The commemorations of the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the war ending in the FRG passed into history mainly due to the speech of President Richard von Weizsäcker in the Bundestag. Over 2,000,000 copies of the text of his speech were printed and distributed by 1994, that is, the end of the second term of his presidency. It would be hard to find a speech in modern political history that had such considerable repercussions. Weizsäcker’s speech, which the Israeli ambassador Yitzhak Ben Ari called “the most elevated moment of the German postwar history”, is almost a canon in the process of education and evolution of the German culture of memory.

In the face of the atmosphere, polarised by the events preceding 8 May, the President was expected to deliver a clear message. Weizsäcker did not fail. “The 8th of May was a day of liberation. It liberated all of us from the inhumanity and tyranny of the National Socialist regime. (...) There is truly no reason for us today to participate in victory celebrations. But there is every reason for us to perceive 8 May 1945 as the end of the aberration in German history, an end bearing seeds of hope for a better future. (...) 8 May is a day of remembrance. Remembering means recalling an occurrence honestly and without distortion so that it becomes a part of our very beings. This places high demands on our truthfulness”.<sup>661</sup> Weizsäcker’s speech is one of the most often quoted political texts, not only in Germany. This is mainly because the FRG president found the appropriate words and tone to express the feelings of Germans related to the war ending in the most honest and objective way. It would not have been in any way possible directly after the capitulation of Germany in 1945.

Contrary to most anniversary ceremonies, Weizsäcker clearly pointed out German perpetration and positioned events dramatic for Germans and related to the war ending in a historical context: “we must not separate 8 May 1945, from 30 January 1933.” He listed all victim groups, observing also that “perhaps the greatest burden was borne by the women of all nations. Their suffering, renunciation and silent strength are all too easily forgotten by history. (...) In the years of darkness, they ensured that the light of humanity was not extinguished.” He also asked his compatriots to look inside themselves: “Who could remain unsuspecting after

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660 J. Habermas, *A Kind of Settlement of Damages (Apologetic Tendencies)*,” trans. Jeremy Leaman, *New German Critique* 44 (1988), pp. 25-26.

661 R. von Weizsäcker, *8 maja 1945 – czterdzieści lat później*, trans. J. Jabłkowska, in: *O kondycji Niemiec*, op. cit., p. 325-326. English translation of the whole speech: <http://deferred-live.net/muse/ariUploads/pdfs/speechRichardvonWeizsacker.pdf>

the burning of the synagogues, the plundering, the stigmatization with the Star of David, the deprivation of rights, the ceaseless violation of human dignity? Whoever opened his eyes and ears and sought information could not fail to notice that Jews were being deported. The nature and scope of the destruction may have exceeded human imagination, but in reality there was, apart from the crime itself, the attempt by too many people, including those of my generation, who were young and were not involved in planning the events and carrying them out, not to take note of what was happening. (...) All of us, whether guilty or not, whether old or young, must accept the past. We are all affected by its consequences and liable for it." Weizsäcker used the anniversary to speak up for the Eastern countries: "If we think of what our Eastern neighbors had to suffer during the war, we will find it easier to understand that accommodation and peaceful neighborly relations with these countries remain central tasks of German foreign policy".<sup>662</sup>

Many commemorations of 8 May were held all over Germany. They were accompanied by religious ceremonies that highlighted the moral and spiritual character of historical reflection. The central ecumenical service took place in the Cologne Cathedral. Although Cardinal Joseph Höffner mentioned the complicity of Christians, he immediately added that a lack of faith was the underlying cause of the guilt: "Without many years of the collapse of faith in God and without the gagging and silencing of conscience, this evil and destructive Nazi power rush would not have been possible."<sup>663</sup> Politicians and intellectuals closer to the left criticised the earlier silence as well as speaking of 'German catastrophe' and 'zero hour'. Günter Grass considered 8 May 1945 to be a caesura of political and moral significance. He observed, however, that the unconditional surrender took place on 30 January 1933.<sup>664</sup>

The SPD organised a central commemoration ceremony in Nuremberg, hosting a delegation of people who survived the bombings of Coventry, Rotterdam, Leningrad and Warsaw. The Greens sent their delegation to Auschwitz on 8 May. Antje Vollmer said in her speech: "We are not only the children of the capitulants. (...) We are also the children of the perpetrators, children of the bystanders. We are also the children of those who were not strong enough to oppose National Socialism. (...) And we ourselves? We also stopped asking our parents about their past. The silence covered everything like fog."<sup>665</sup>

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662 Ibidem, p. 328, 334.

663 *Frankfurter Rundschau* 9.05.1985. See also: J. Höffner, *Frage nach Schuld ruhen lassen*; *Süddeutsche Zeitung* 9.05.1985.

664 *Geschenkte Freiheit. Versagen, Schuld, vertane Chancen*; *Die Zeit* 10.05.1985.

665 Die Grünen im Bundestag (ed.), *Dokumentation, Was wir verdrängen, kommt wieder*, Bonn 1985, p. 2.



Interviews about the German capitulation, conducted by the Institut für Demoskopie Allensbach in March 1985, were mostly intended to demonstrate the personal feelings of the generation born before 1933. What did 1945 mean to them? One-third of the men and one-fifth of the women answered that the dominant feeling at the time had been a sense of defeat. A majority, 58%, experienced that day as liberation, as well as 54% of the refugees from the East. Two-thirds of the respondents experienced the entrance of victorious powers into the divided occupational zones of Germany. The Americans were evaluated most positively, and the Russians most negatively (67%). One-third of the interviewed claimed that 8 May had not changed much in their lives, while 50% felt that “the world suddenly collapsed.” The world remained most stable for the Bavarians; for only 23% the day was a “collapse” and 41% claimed that “not much has changed.”<sup>666</sup>

Every major anniversary evoked contradictory feelings and was a subject of controversy both in the media and academic debate. The journalist Norbert Seitz discredited the ceremonies in 1985, accusing the government of the inability to “commemorate such an anniversary.”<sup>667</sup> In his opinion, the commemorations lacked questions and reflection on whether an enemy can be treated as a liberator. What and who were liberated? What did this date change? Heinrich Böll’s words were most categorical, when in 1985 he presented his compatriots with a choice: “You, Germans, will always be recognised by whether you will treat 8 May as a day of defeat or liberation.”<sup>668</sup>

The quest for a symbolic commemoration of National Socialism faces persistent difficulties. At the same time, it creates an opportunity to deepen knowledge and to find answers to previously unsolved problems. The conflict of symbols during the commemoration of the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the end of the war: on the one hand, the Bitburg controversy, on the other, the speech of President Richard von Weizsäcker, demonstrate that disputes about the past reveal different norms and values. Their exposure creates a new material for debate. As the German political scientist summed up: “In short, collective identity is formed and changed in the learning process, which takes an unpleasant form of a permanent scandal; but otherwise this process is impossible.”<sup>669</sup>

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666 E. Noelle-Neumann, *Ein Volk, gebeutelt und gezeichnet. Erinnerungen der Hitler-Generation an Krieg und Nationalsozialismus*; *Die Zeit* 10.05.1985.

667 N. Seitz, *Zum Vierzigsten*, in: N. Seitz (ed.), *Die Unfähigkeit zu feiern. Der achte Mai*, Frankfurt a. M. 1985, pp. 9-23.

668 H. Böll, *Brief an meine Söhne oder: Vier Fahrräder*; *Die Zeit* 15.03.1985.

669 K.O. Hondrich, “*Das Leben ist ein langer ruhiger Fluß...*” *Vergangenheitsbewältigung in Deutschland*, in: C. Stephan (ed.), *Wir Kollaborateure. Der Westen und die deutschen Vergangenheiten*, Reinbek b. Hamburg 1992, p. 34.



## In the reunited Germany

The ten years that separated the 1985 commemoration of the end of the war from the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 1995 set a completely new framework and background for the evaluation and interpretation of this important caesura for Germany and Europe. The means of communication and cultural conditions in Germany changed. The fears, hopes, disputes and reflections on the shape of the new, reunited Germany generated questions about the future of the Berlin Republic. How much will it inherit from the achievements of the Bonn Republic? What and how much will the East Germans bring? Contrary to expectations, the past of the GDR did not push the Nazi past into oblivion. On the contrary, the latter gained in importance. The publishing market was flooded with memoirs as it was almost the last opportunity for perpetrators and victims to mark their participation in the anniversary commemorations. Events in the Balkans and in Chechnya demonstrated a new dimension of barbarity, which, after the experiences of World War II, seemed unimaginable in Europe. Commemorations of the liberations of concentration camps took place in the shadow of the massacre in Rwanda and the threat of a severe conflict in the former Yugoslavia. Former prisoners returned to the sites of their torment. The ceremonies were attended by 5,000 people in Buchenwald, 6,000 in Ravensbrück, 5,000 in Dachau and 18,000 in Sachsenhausen.

The study conducted in April 1995, just before the May anniversary, on the circumstances of the war ending did not bring surprising results. 69% of the citizens of the old states of the federation acknowledged the significant role of the USA in ending hostilities, while 87% of the citizens of the new states attached the leading role to the Soviet Union, considering it the main actor and catalyst in the war.<sup>670</sup>

The 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the bombing of Dresden was marked with an extraordinary ceremony. The ecumenical service included prayers for Chechnya, Afghanistan and Bosnia. The presence of the Bishop of Coventry and the Metropolitan of Saint Petersburg gave universal character to the historical event. The leftist banners – “German perpetrators are not victims” – were intended to disturb the religious ceremonies. Fears of demonstrations by rightist extremists extorted moderation and political correctness. The main speech of President Roman Herzog in the Kulturpalast was given in the tone of reconciliation between all the victims. All wars in general were condemned. According to the critics, the speech was a kind of “requiem to the country” and the national community of 1945 was pictured as “the community of victims”. However, Herzog distinguished perpetrators from victims saying: “We want to face the past together: wherever

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670 *Allensbacher Berichte* 9, 1995.

Germans were perpetrators but also wherever they were victims.<sup>671</sup> The majority of the German press considered Dresden to be the symbol of “pointless destruction.” Newspapers published accusations against the air war, sympathy for “innocent victims” and references to moral values. Klaus Naumann criticised press commentaries for their dominating “apocalyptic metaphors” and equalising German victims of the bombings with the Jewish victims of the Holocaust. He also disapproved of universalisation and lack of differentiation of the victims. He wondered why one asked with such intensity about the wrong of the war ending but never of why the Germans had started the war.<sup>672</sup>

Before the central ceremonies started, there was another press debate, which, however, did not bring anything new to the ‘liberation or defeat’ dilemma. The majority of public opinion considered the appeal ‘8 May 1945 – Against Forgetting’ to be provocative. It warned against one-sided interpretation of the date and reminded that 8 May “was the beginning of the horror of expulsions, new oppression in the East and the beginning of the division of our country.”<sup>673</sup> Left intellectual circles were not the only ones to condemn the appeal. The association ‘Against Forgetting – For Democracy’, which gathered both SPD and CDU representatives, had their say: “Whoever says 8 May was the beginning of the terror of expulsion certainly forgets the terror that expelled a six-digit number of Germans from their homeland for racist and political reasons. The appeal is a ‘new attempt to equalise the violence committed against the Germans after 1945 with heinous crimes committed in the name of Germans against Jews, Poles and many other European nations’.”<sup>674</sup>

For the first time, the anniversary had a significant, international character. The commemorations were intended to demonstrate the equalisation of sovereign states and to document that former enemies were now partners. The invitation of France, Great Britain, the USA and Russia was political. The enemies during the war demonstrated partnership and friendship with the reunited Germany 50 years later. The list of speakers and the order of speeches were subjected to political calculation. After disputes and negotiations it was agreed that one

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671 *Bulletin* 16.02.1995, p. 93.

672 K. Naumann, *Deutsche Pietät; Blätter für deutsche und internationale Politik* 40, 1995, p. 81.

673 The appeal *8 Mai 1945 – Gegen das Vergessen* was published by FAZ on 7 April 1995. Among the 300 signatories were the editor Herbert Fleissner, the historian Karlheinz Weißmann, the FDP politician Alexander von Stahl, former Minister of Internal Affairs Friedrich Zimmermann (CSU), current Economic Cooperation and Development Carl-Dieter Springer (CSU) and other representatives of the right wing of the Christian-Democratic Party.

674 After: T. Eitz, G. Stötzel, op. cit., p. 131.

of the main speakers in the Bundestag on 28 April 1995 would be the Polish Minister for Foreign Affairs, recipient of the Peace Prize of the German Book Trade, Władysław Bartoszewski. For most of the German deputies, it was the first opportunity to familiarise themselves with the newest history of their Eastern neighbour. The Polish diplomat found the right words to illustrate how German occupation had scarred the collective consciousness of Poles. The attendance of the Polish politician and his speech was significant. He very clearly noted that the Germans were the last victims of the Nazi politics. Himself a victim of Nazism, and later communism, he was a convincing witness and commentator for the National Socialist era. It was the first time that a Polish politician and historian spoke before the highest political assembly and presented the dramatic intertwining of the history of Poland and Germany without blurring the cause-effect relationship: “As a nation particularly affected by the war, we experienced the tragedy of forced expulsions and the violence and crimes related to them. We remember that they also affected the German population and that Poles were also the perpetrators. (...) I cannot list victims and perpetrators together in the same breath. I think the distinction between them is in the best interest of all of us”. Władysław Bartoszewski noted common tasks of the neighbours: “The common history of Poles and Germans is difficult. We need to catch up with the time lost on distrust, contempt, hostility and wars as soon as we can. This is how I understand the mission of today’s democratic Poland, of its government and of my own, with regard to Germany.”<sup>675</sup>

Bartoszewski, the President of the Bundesrat Johannes Rau and the President of the Bundestag Rita Süßmuth all asserted – like Weizsäcker ten years earlier – that 8 May 1945 cannot be separated from 30 January 1933. The politicians spoke in the second part of official ceremonies, which took place in Berlin in the Schauspielhaus. The speech of President Roman Herzog focused on the German way to democracy. He honoured German citizens: “Today, German democracy stands firmly on two strong legs: on the patient West German effort of rebuilding and the ability to learn following 1948 and the East German revolution of 1989.

Before Germans joined the commemorations of the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the end of the war, the publication of disputes about the commemorations shed a new light on the problem of the hierarchy of victims. The reunification of Germany provided a new framework for exposing the memory of the last months of the war. Moreover, new international circumstances emerged.

Released from ideological confrontation, the former victorious Allies could commemorate the anniversary of the fateful events together – Western and Eastern

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675 *Historia dla przyszłości*. Parts of the speech of Minister of Foreign Affairs Władysław Bartoszewski delivered at the special session of the Bundestag and the Bundesrat in Bonn, *Gazeta Wyborcza* 29.04.-1.05.1995.

anti-Nazi coalition partners, the winners and the defeated. Reunited Germany, a partner in the Atlantic Alliance, a reliable neighbour, became a fully fledged participant in the celebrations in the world opinion.

Did the Germans feel the same way? What made them expose the bombings of German cities, rapes of German women and expulsion from the Eastern territories as the main subject of the war catastrophe? For decades, East Germans were deprived of the possibility of expressing feelings and the suppressed sense of injustice. While bombings could be one-sidedly ascribed to Western imperialists, rapes and expulsions had to remain taboo subjects. One could only either write positive things about the socialist allies of the Warsaw Pact, or not write at all. Contrary to popular opinion, these subjects were not taboo for West Germans and they were never forgotten. German victims were commemorated at every possible occasion. There was no official political speech in West Germany in the past 60 years in which the expellees and refugees were not the main symbol of German victimhood. They were present in memoirs, belles-lettres, films and academic papers. However, they were not the subject of a wider social debate. In the first postwar decades, Germany could not afford to make its own suffering a subject of national debate. Only the temporal distance and the trust gained in the world let Germans stand in the first line of victims. The explosion of literature, films and interest in the events of the last months of the war from the perspective of German victims demonstrated deep contradictions between the official image of the past and individual memory, a cherished image of one's own suffering.

The intensity of memories of German victims of bombing, rapes and expulsions resulted mainly from demographic reasons. The 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the war ending (assuming that significant, major anniversary celebrations take place every 10 years) was the last opportunity for the explosion of individual suffering and focusing the attention of the German nation and the international community on the Germans themselves. After years of debates on the Holocaust and making the problem of German guilt a subject of various and many-sided forms of commemoration, the time came to display German suffering. Once they honoured the victims of the Nazi politics, the Germans focused on themselves, particularly since the multiplying conflicts in Eastern and Southern-Eastern Europe demonstrated that Germany did not have monopoly on violence. Mass murders and expulsions in the former Yugoslavia at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century confirmed the belief that tendencies towards violence are not the specific genetic reserve of certain nations. Rather, conditions create cells that spread in the national body. If the international community observes the barbarities committed in the civilised world, why should it not hear of German suffering? Such a way of thinking could be read between the lines of some speeches, such as those by Erika Steinbach,

president of the Federation of Expellees, which made the subject of expulsions even more political.<sup>676</sup>

The 21<sup>st</sup> century explosion of frozen experiences of the trauma of bombings and sufferings caused by the events in the last months of war and after the war has an explanation. German memory of dramatic experiences is an important element of their historical consciousness. It will not disturb the balance in the culture of memory as long as it is free from resentment and antagonism. These conditions can be met when the history of German suffering is set in historical context and with a reliable depiction of the cause-effect relationships.

At the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, some works were published that became a prelude to a wide-ranging debate. The work of the writer and literary scholar Winfried Georg Sebald, published in 1999, was devoted to the air war on German territory.<sup>677</sup> The author analysed postwar literature in the search for traces of “family secrets” related to the experience of bombing, and concluded that they are absent in the memory of the greatest German writers. Aleida Assman noted the opinions of American readers in response to the reviews of the American edition of Sebald’s book. Someone who experienced the Coventry blitz felt “shocked and offended” by Sebald’s book. Another reader accused the author of using Nazi rhetoric and a way of reckoning with the past that cannot be accepted: “Hamburg, Dresden and Berlin will be forever trumped by Auschwitz, Sobibor and Buchenwald.” The author of the letter expects Germans to commemorate only the Holocaust in public and keep their own suffering in the cocoon of private memory.<sup>678</sup>

In 2002, books with very different attitudes to the expulsions were released: those of Klaus Rainer Röhl, Günter Grass and Jörg Friedrich on the subject of bombings.<sup>679</sup> While the book by Grass, the laureate of the Nobel Prize in Literature, was a document of memory without revisionist allusions, Röhl’s work, with the preface written by Erika Steinbach, was a falsified and instrumentalised version of the past. He wrote: “57 years after the end of World War II, we mourn the victims of the Nazi regime almost every week in almost every German town. The suffering of many millions of innocent victims can never be forgotten. This is right. But this public mourning is a divided mourning. Many millions of innocent

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676 For more in the subject of the idea of the Centre Against Expulsions and wider context of Erika Steinbach’s speeches, see Zbigniew Mazur’s works, e.g. *Centrum przeciwko Wypędzeniom (1999-2005)*, Poznań 2006.

677 W.G. Sebald, *On the Natural History of Destruction* New York 2003.

678 A. Assmann, *Der lange Schatten*, op. cit., p. 187.

679 See e. g. K.R. Röhl, *Verbotene Trauer. Ende der deutschen Tabus*, München 2002. Before the commemorations of the 60th anniversary, G. Grass’ book was released: *Crabwalk*, Orlando; Austin; New York; San Diego; Toronto; London 2002.; J. Friedrich, *The Fire: The Bombing of Germany, 1940-1945*, New York 2006.

Germans were also victims of the war against Hitler's total regime. They were murdered and expelled; most of them by the no less totalitarian system of Stalin's regime. There are no commemorations, ceremonies or hours of silence for these millions of German victims. And this is wrong. Wrong, wrong, wrong.<sup>680</sup>

In contrast to Sebald's and Grass' works, the book by 44-year-old Friedrich about Allied air raids caused much controversy. *The Fire: The Bombing of Germany, 1940-1945* instantly became a bestseller. The book does not dazzle its readers with scientific novelty. The way in which it reconstructs the facts is focused on evoking emotions. The interest in reunited Germany in the subject raised by the book, right before the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the events, is fully understandable. The Allies bombed over 1,000 towns, dropping about 1,500,000 bombs, resulting in the death of 600,000 people. The treasures of German culture were ruined. The tone of Jörg Friedrich's book leaves no doubt that it "opens the account of destruction and wrongs", as *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* commented. German suffering was placed at the centre. Contrary to the author's words that his role was limited to organising facts and that value judgements were not his intention, the book, if only for its rhetoric, is a one-sided accusation. Proportions have been completely lost. The book makes the reader conclude that Germany was the first and most affected victim of mass raids. Friedrich presents Allied air raids as "a war of attrition" against German civilians, German civilisation and culture. The terminology used by Friedrich equalises Holocaust victims with German victims of Allied bombings. The author uses terms that the Nazis used referring to Jews or Slavs to reconstruct facts. The victims of raids were "exterminated", the British air force was called "Einsatzgruppen" (squads responsible for killing Jews during the war), cellars where people hid and suffocated in toxic fumes were called "execution sites" where victims were "gassed". The author writes about "murder orders" and "ecstasy over the destruction of Germany".<sup>681</sup> Friedrich also describes the "Holocaust" of German victims. It is impossible to escape the impression that with the help of the language of description, the author intentionally confronted the victims and moved the German victims to the foreground. The mostly academic debate on Friedrich's book was not about facts, which were unquestionable and known for years, but the way of presenting them, their interpretation and evaluation.

The debate on Günter Grass' book had a different character. *Crabwalk*, the fictionalised history of 'Wilhelm Gustloff', a German ship sunk on 30 January 1945 by Soviet torpedoes, which resulted in the deaths of about 10,000 people, conveys an important message. As the author noted, "history is not a virgin territory" if it becomes collective memory through witnesses, if a son gets interested in it,

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680 K.R. Röhl, op. cit., p. 9.

681 See: J. Trenkner, *Naród z przeszłością. Eseje o Niemczech*, Poznań 2004, p. 21.

if a grandson claims it. The work of the Danzig-born Noble laureate had wide repercussions in Poland. While the German reception – disregarding literary criticism and discussion – was dominated by the belief that Grass' book broke a taboo of silence about German suffering and was a moral compensation for years of silence about the postwar tragedy of German civilians, the reception abroad was more diversified. Polish intellectuals carried out a deep analysis of Grass' book. Although exposing its political and moral aspects and accusations of opportunism were common, there were also deep and insightful discussions that were worthy of interest.<sup>682</sup> In the editorial discussion of *Przegląd Polityczny*, Ewa Nawrocka highlighted universal problems raised by Grass, free from emotions and resentments; that is, the question of individual, family, generational and collective memory. How does literature deal with memory and forgetting? Grass' interlocutor refers to the words of Maria Dąbrowska, who, in her *Szkice z podróży (Sketches from Journey)*, about a trip to the GDR in 1955), "used a Faustian concept" to describe her conversation with the devil in a castle chamber in Wartburg. The devil made her realise that "the excess of bearing the weight of undisclosed matters is rotting inside us, and then states of horror, despair and hopelessness bordering on madness emerge, and threaten us with a breakdown."<sup>683</sup> In the words of the Polish writer, Nawrocka found the meaning of the message conveyed by Grass, who noticed the danger of silencing the facts that betray the reality".

Grass confessed in the editorial discussion that dealing with the past is the essence of literature. "In our times there is a dispute about which past should be cleared of debris, which past is the right one. Our consciousness does not separate, does not divide past, present and future. Our thinking is a combination of all these three orders. Literature allows us to deal with all this. In addition to individual memory, there is also collective memory as a postulate or thesis. Collective memory is troublesome, especially for the older generation."<sup>684</sup> Grass believes his task is to expose difficult subjects, because avoiding them, according to him, will not weaken "murderous emotions." "It seems to me that some things need to be called by name, because only then can an opportunity arise to reduce and stop what is wrong in our emotions. Literature can reveal different truths."<sup>685</sup>

8 May revealed itself in 2005 in new conditions and a new political climate. The great historical debates of the 1980s and 1990s that changed the political culture of the Berlin Republic were over. The 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the war ending

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682 Gdańsk *Przegląd Polityczny* devotes much attention to Günter Grass. Ewa Nawrocka, in an impressive style, led an editorial discussion around the author's book *Crabwalk*. See: *Przegląd Polityczny* 61, 2003, pp. 104-111.

683 *Ibidem*, p. 107.

684 *Ibidem*, p. 108.

685 *Ibidem*, p. 110.



was preceded by events that created new material that provoked disputes over memory. The number of publications and commemorations of the bombings of German towns was unexpected, which was thought-provoking for the critically thinking Germans and, most of all, for their neighbours in East Germany. The commemorations in the capital of Saxony were attended by 80,000 people. They were a manifestation under the slogan “No more war”. However, there were also clashes both with demonstrating neo-Nazis carrying banners stating “bombing holocaust”, and with the leftists. Historians and journalists resumed the dispute whether the bombings of German towns at the end of the war were reasonable from a military point of view. Emotions were also raised due to Frederick Taylor’s book *Dresden: Tuesday, 13 February 1945*, published on the occasion of the anniversary. The author demonstrates that Dresden was not an innocent city but a seat of munitions factories and an important transport hub, thus justifying the reasoning behind the military attack.

The commemorations of the anniversary in the 21<sup>st</sup> century had an exceptionally international character. Former President Richard von Weizsäcker expressed satisfaction in the *Berliner Morgenpost* that “we speak together with our neighbours about a common Europe, about a common and difficult chapter of the past and about the need for reconciliation that results from it”. Chancellor Gerhard Schröder, accompanied by German veterans, was the first German chancellor to be invited to the Victory Day celebrations in Moscow, where 2,500,000 war veterans and 7,000 soldiers paraded. In an interview for *Komsomolskaya Pravda*, Schröder asked the Russian nation for forgiveness. The world was reminded that the Soviet Union, with 27,000,000 victims, had paid the highest price for the victory over Germany. Both politicians, Gerhard Schröder and Vladimir Putin, focused on the present. For the German chancellor, the visit to Moscow was a symbol of the completed stage of reconciliation and overcoming the past in the relations with Russia. He wanted to mark the end of the post-war era.

At the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century in Moscow, this meeting demonstrated a European ‘community’ of the reconciled, now partners and allies. The focus was on the future. The Russian leader demonstrated closeness between the Germans and the Russians. In 2005, the fact that the German chancellor could officially visit the Ljublino cemetery at the outskirts of Moscow did not cause confusion. At the cemetery, 569 soldiers of different nationalities were buried, including 486 Germans. They all died after the war as internees, labour armyists or in POW camps. It was important for the veterans to meet the former Wehrmacht soldiers and participants in the ‘Great Patriotic War’, who sixty years ago stood on opposite sides of the front and now sat at one table. The Russian President commemorated the tragedy of German families who lost their loved ones on the Eastern Front



and the German Chancellor spoke of Putin's family, who barely survived the Leningrad blockade.<sup>686</sup>

The general public agreed with politicians that Germans deserved to celebrate 8 May as "a day of democracy". Sharing this belief, the Mayor of Berlin, Klaus Wowereit (SPD), asked residents to actively oppose any extremists who might see the anniversary as an opportunity to demonstrate revisionism. Democracy was expected to defend itself by democratic means. The capital of Germany expressed its political credo with a 33-kilometre long chain of lights, demonstrating against war and political radicalism. Thanks to democracy, six different demonstrations took place in Berlin on 8 May 2005, including e.g. 3,000 neo-Nazis, who met at the Television Tower, leftists heading towards Alexanderplatz, and crowds of celebrating guests at the Brandenburg Gate.

Central commemorations took place in the Bundestag. President Horst Köhler tried to keep balance between commemorating the past and highlighting the present and the future. He observed that there should be no "cutting clear with the past." "It is with horror and shame that we Germans look back on the Second World War that Germany unleashed and on the Holocaust, the brutal perversion of all civilized values perpetrated by Germans. We remember the six million Jews murdered with diabolical energy (...)." At the same time, he pointed out that Germans today have reasons to be proud of their country. "Looking at the journey we have made since 1945, we also recognise the strength we can muster. This gives us courage for the future."<sup>687</sup> Whatever the president had said, it would have been compared to the already canonical speech of Weizsäcker from 20 years earlier. Press commentators evaluated his speech as a "not very stimulating" and including "a somewhat exaggerated sense of pride".<sup>688</sup> Left-wing newspapers observed that the president devoted too much space to the appraisal of the FRG achievements, which did not particularly correspond with the character of 8 May anniversary.

In a text written for *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, Chancellor Gerhard Schröder put emphasis on the European context. The 2014 European Union enlargement, when 10 countries – mostly post-communist – became new members, was an impulse for common involvement in strengthening European stability. In 2004, the chapter of the dual history of the Old Continent ended. The chancellor noted that "the sense of liberation came too late to the Germans, much too late. (...) An average German searched for the causes of the last war not in the deeds of the Nazi regime but in the events that led to expulsion of Adam and Eve from the Garden of Eden." Schröder thanked such countries as France, which after the war shook hands with

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686 D. Brössler, N. Fried, *Die Parade der Versöhnten*; *Süddeutsche Zeitung* 10.05.2005.

687 *Bulletin* 8.05.2005, Regierungonline.

688 K. Kister, Köhler, *das Volksgewissen*; *Süddeutsche Zeitung* 9.05.2005.

the defeated Germany. He appealed for authentic integration of Europe, in which the new Eastern European members would be welcome without prejudice. He also highlighted the sense and significance of the European community in the face of current challenges.<sup>689</sup>

The texts accompanying the May celebrations also included critical comments. A *Süddeutsche Zeitung* journalist deplored that “not the victims of German crimes but German victims of bombings, expulsions and flights” were at the centre of German attention at the time. He referred to the words of Hans-Christoph Seebohm, the Federal Minister of Transport in Adenauer’s government, from the Deutsche Partei (German Party), who had once said: “Methods that the leadership of National Socialism used against the Jews, which we condemn with bitterness, are the same as those used against German expellees.”<sup>690</sup>

In the wave of anniversary commemorations, reflections and questions concerning the political maturity of the Germans arose. Can 8 May be a day of celebration? What justifies the festive atmosphere? What cannot be forgotten? Extensive memoirs were published alongside commentaries interpreting and evaluating historical events. The emphasis depended on the ideological orientation of a newspaper. The conservative *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* reminded its readers that, after the fall of the Nazi regime, a “new regime of terror” started in East Germany. The text was swarming with examples of crimes committed against the Germans. The list was long: from the orgy of rapes and “countless hordes of plundering Russians” to the acts of brutality of shooting German prisoners of war. The author, the scientific director of the Berlin-Hohenschönhausen Memorial, gave an interpretation of events that completely blurred the sense and meaning of the capitulation of Germany. The history of German suffering was written in a historical vacuum. One can read the main thesis of the author in his conclusion that the demarcation line of the past century goes not “between Hitler and his opponents but between democracy and dictatorship. Only due to Western allies did freedom win – first in West Germany and then, after the victory of the Peaceful Revolution, also in the East. It was not 8 May that brought liberation to East Germany, but 9 November 1989, when the wall collapsed and so did the SED regime.”<sup>691</sup>

Debates on the character of commemoration of 8 May in Germany cannot be summarised with one conclusion. Subsequent generations find new forms of commemoration. What distinguishes the 21<sup>st</sup> century rituals of memory from the

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689 “Wir stehen erst jetzt am Ende einer langen Nachkriegszeit”, *Gedenken an den 8. Mai 1945: Bundeskanzler Gerhard Schröder über den 60. Jahrestag der deutschen Kapitulation*; *Süddeutsche Zeitung* 7/8.05.2005.

690 H. Prantl, *Die Flucht vor der Geschichte*; *Süddeutsche Zeitung* 7/8.05.2005.

691 H. Knabe, *Tag der Befreiung?*; *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* 10.05.2005.

rituals of the two German states is the fact that Germans do not commemorate the anniversary in isolation. This does not mean that European memory is common. However, mourning for the dead, the murdered and the lost is common. It is worth noting the reflection of the German researcher Reinhard Koselleck, who tries to answer the question of what the “community of mourning” is: “Because the mourning for a countless number of brutally murdered people combines what is only outwardly separate: the variety of personal memories deriving from equally varied experiences. This community of mourning unites us or should unite us. Until now, the commemoration sites and anniversary ceremonies have been organised according to the criteria of the SS. Their deadly hierarchy once segregated victims and became the basis of their liquidation. Will this camp order of industrial murder still be the border that divides our memory? What seems possible from a cause-and-effect perspective, and necessary from a moral point of view, is not enough to preserve the mourning without which we would not be able to bear all the differences between us.”<sup>692</sup>

Today, East and West Germans remember the consequences of the defeat of 8 May 1945 together. They try to merge asymmetric memories and correct false theses. Christa Wolf had already observed in November 1989, during the Peaceful Revolution, that “the small group of anti-Fascists that governed us transferred their feeling of victory over Fascism to the people as a whole, for practical reasons, at some moment which cannot be pinpointed exactly. The ‘winners of history’ stopped confronting their real past, the past of the collaborators, of the seduced, of the faithful believers during the Nazi period. (...) Their deep-seated bad conscience made them unfit to resist Stalinist structures and attitudes (...)”<sup>693</sup>

Assuming that most important commemorations are held every 10 years, 2005 ended the period when commemorations were attended by major participants in the events. The flood of memoirs, more or less selected documents from both parts of Germany and both parts of Europe, make us realise that we will have to live with these contradictory images of capitulation and liberation of Germany that are difficult to harmonise and integrate. The images of the hell of destruction and historical liberation, of humiliation and poverty and of hope and optimism have to coexist with each other. Reunification of Germany also means acceptance and integration of different perspectives of the German postwar history.<sup>694</sup>

Society has become more critical. Politicians and spiritual leaders are expected to say the words that will go beyond humdrum routine. Helmut König clear-headedly evaluates the condition of memory expressed in political speeches:

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692 R. Koselleck, *Dziewiąty maja pomiędzy pamięcią a historią*; *Borussia* 39, 2006, p. 180.

693 C. Wolf, *The Author's Dimension: Selected Essays*, Chicago 1995, p. 301.

694 See: C. Kleßmann, *Konturen einer integrierten Nachkriegsgeschichte; Aus Politik und Zeitgeschichte* 18-19, 2005, p. 3-11.

“50 years after the war ending we reached a stage when memories of crimes are not burdened with risk. Not only do they not cost anything; they bring profit. Remembering promises personal and political benefits that are much greater than resistance to the guilt and shame that must be overcome”.<sup>695</sup> European integration brings an important message for the Germans and their neighbours. The unification of Germany and the unification of Europe means also, as the former President of Germany Richard von Weizsäcker observes, “unification in history, that is, the necessity to understand and incorporate into one’s own system of moral values the experiences of the other side, also those which we lack.”<sup>696</sup>

### 3. The Night of Broken Glass – The Holocaust as an identity dilemma

The recent history of Germany includes a few turning points in the political and moral biography of the country. A special date, which expresses further ambivalence in German history, is 9 November. This day cumulates the highs and lows of the German nation. In 1848, the leader of the liberal movement, the poet Robert Blum, was executed, which marked the end of the democratic revolution as a part of the Spring of Nations. In 1918, the monarchy collapsed. In 1923, it was the date of the Munich Putsch, a failed attempt by Adolf Hitler to seize power. In 1989, the Berlin Wall fell, opening the possibility of democratic reunification of Germany. The events of the night of 9/10 November 1938, euphemistically called ‘the Night of Broken Glass’, cast a shadow on the commemoration of this historical date. According to the Jewish calendar, the ninth day of the eleventh month commemorates an important event in the history of Israelis. 2,500 years ago, the first temple was destroyed, followed by another one in 70 AD. In the anti-Semitic policy of the Third Reich, the events of the November night in 1938 were a breaking point that started an open process of destruction of German Jews; its final stage was Auschwitz.

A day in a calendar becomes a historical date when it marks a breaking point or continuation in the history of a country and a nation. The German philosopher and cultural scientist Peter Sloterdijk considers 9 November a German collusion with their political fate. This day is “imbued with an atmosphere of transcendence

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695 A fragment of Helmut König’s speech at a special meeting of the Aachen City Council 8 May 1995, quoted by A. Wöll, *Der 8. Mai 1945 in der öffentlichen Rede der Bundesrepublik*, *Psychosozial* 20, issue II, 1997, p. 126.

696 *Historia i pamięć: 8 maja 1945-1985-2005. Z Richardem von Weizsäckerem, Konstantinem Sadowskim, Markiem Ferro i Adamem Krzemińskim rozmawia Reinhard Höppner*, *Dialog* 71, 2005, pp. 56-57.

and also, sometimes, by an eerie or abysmal and ambiguous quality". From the beginning, Germans had a problem with commemorating the anniversary of the Night of Broken Glass. It resulted from the ambiguity of the name and the date of commemoration. Each of the popular names brought different emotions: 'the night of disgrace', 'the November pogrom', 'the German night' 'the night of the Jews', 'the night of Walpurgis', 'the crystal night of the Reich', 'the night of broken glass'. Moreover, the Jewish calendar of memory differed from the German one. The pogrom started in the early hours of 10 November. Those who claimed that the events took place at the night 9/10 November were more likely to believe in their insidious character. The version according to which the acts of vandalism happened during the day could not release the citizens, neighbours, from responsibility, from silent witnessing. Why was 9 November such an important date for the Jewish community that decided to return to Germany after the war? Years later, why did the Germans join the commemorations of the Night of Broken Glass?

The plans of the Nazi Reich did not include a detailed vision or schedule of the 'solution to the Jewish question.' The first acts of organised terror were boycotts, exclusion from jobs, developing limitation of access to the public sphere, deprivation of basic laws and of human dignity, and isolation in the world of fear: none of them revealed the whole dimension of human tragedy to German society and world opinion. The first 'legal' boycott of Jewish shops was introduced on 1 April 1933. In 1935, two measures were adopted: the Reich Citizenship Law and the Law for the Protection of German Blood and German Honour, later known as Nuremberg Laws, which led to biological isolation of the Jews. After their introduction, the Nazi publication *Der Stürmer* wrote: "The Christian's duty is to hate the Jews" and "who fights the Jews, fights the devil."

There were events in the background of the November pogrom – a rehearsal for the 'final solution of the Jewish question' – that Hitler and his officials used as a pretext to wage an open war against the Jewish world. After the Anschluss of Austria, Reinhard Heydrich, chief of the Reich Main Security Office, sent a special unit to Vienna for the "development of the Jewish question". Attacks on Jews and vandalism were common. The term 'cold pogrom' began to be used in early autumn. Poland, fearing the return of the Jews fleeing persecution, issued a law on 31 March 1938 depriving Polish citizens living abroad of their citizenship. It involved Polish citizens scattered throughout the world who had not maintained contact with the country or "were detrimental to it."<sup>697</sup>

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697 J. Tomaszewski, *Ustawa o pozbawieniu obywatelstwa z 31 marca 1938 r.*, in: idem (ed.), *Historia – prawo – polityka*, Warszawa 1990; K. Jonca, *'Noc kryształowa' i casus Herschela Grynszpana*, Wrocław 1998.

Without waiting for the implementation of Polish decisions, the German government decided to apply restrictions against Polish Jews residing in the territory of the Reich. On 26 October 1938, Heydrich imposed a law prohibiting the residence of Polish Jews in Germany. As part of 'Polenaktion' on the night of 27/28 October, police authorities deported about 17,000 Jews, directing them to the vicinity of border crossings. Many of them had emigrated before World War I and did not know the Polish language. Surprised, deported into the unknown in sealed trains and unloaded on foreign soil, some stayed in Zbąszyń in extremely primitive conditions until June 1939. They became stateless.

The crowd of several thousand Polish Jews sent away across the border to Zbąszyń included the family of the tailor Sendel Grynszpan, who had hitherto resided in Hanover. His daughter Esther Beile informed her brother Herschel Grynszpan, who escaped deportation by staying with his aunt and uncle in Paris, about the dramatic conditions in which their family lived: "Perhaps you've heard of our great misfortune", Esther wrote. On 7 October the seventeen-year-old Herschel fired a fatal shot at the Secretary of the German Embassy in Paris, Ernst vom Rath. He testified later: "When reading the postcard, I became aware of the danger in which my parents were. I decided upon an act of revenge and protest against a representative of the Reich, without the intent to kill anyone; but I wanted to cause an *éclat* that could not be ignored by the world."<sup>698</sup>

Reports of the assassination in Paris coincided with the commemoration of the fifteenth anniversary of the assassination attempt on Hitler. According to the annual tradition, Hitler spoke in the Munich beer hall Bürgerbräukeller to the old guard. After the march along the same route as the putschists of 1923, a meeting was held in the Old Town Hall, gathering all prominent members of the governing party. Although the November pogrom is one of the best documented events in the history of Germany, the details of the evening of 9 November and the decision regarding anti-Jewish actions are still only a subject of allegations (the detailed role of party leaders in the development of the pogrom was the subject of hearings before the International Military Tribunal in Nuremberg).

Most witnesses agree that it was Joseph Goebbels who gave the order for the pogrom that night.<sup>699</sup> His close associates were Heinrich Himmler, head of the German police and the Reichsführer of the SS, and chief of the secret police (Gestapo), Heinrich Müller. Local police received a confidential order given by Heydrich but issued by Himmler to launch the "demonstration against the Jews." The Criminal Police force (Kripo), the Order Police (Orpo), the SS and SA and

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698 The correspondence between the Grynszpans can be found in the Potsdam Archive, after: R. Thalmann, E. Feinermann, *Die Kristallnacht*, Frankfurt a. M. 1987, p. 41.

699 See e.g. W. Hofer, *Der Nationalsozialismus. Dokumente 1933-1945*, Frankfurt a. M. 1957, pp. 272-273.

other formations were appointed to launch the operation. Detailed instructions outlined the method of terror. The representatives of local services learned from Heydrich's order that "only such measures are to be taken that do not endanger German lives or property", "in commercial streets, particular care is to be taken that non-Jewish businesses are completely protected against damage"; "As soon as the course of events during the night permits the release of the officials required, as many Jews in all districts – especially the rich – as can be accommodated in existing prisons are to be arrested. For the time being, only healthy male Jews who are not too old are to be detained. After the detentions have been carried out, the appropriate concentration camps are to be contacted immediately for the prompt accommodation of the Jews in the camps".<sup>700</sup>

According to Nazi propaganda, the November pogrom was the explosion of "people's anger", a "spontaneous uprising". The German and the world's public opinion were to be witnesses to the act of "the revenge of the nation". The Nazi press received instructions to state that the events of 9/10 November were a reasonable response to the assassination in Paris. *Der Westdeutsche Beobachter* wrote on 8 November in the morning edition: "Whoever needs murder as an allowed 'means of demonstration' to support a murderous campaign of lies can no longer count on any protection. Criminals in future will be treated as criminals". On the same day, *Völkischer Beobachter* declared that "not only do the shots in the German Embassy in Paris begin a new chapter in the attitude toward the Jewish question, but they can also be a signal to those abroad who have not yet realised that only the international Jew stands in the way of the agreement of nations". *Der Angriff* warned on 9 November that "this wickedness leads to a clear request to take severest action against the Jews." The Jews were to suffer collective punishment for Herschel Grynszpan's act, because, in the words of Goebbels, "Jewry shot at the German nation".

The 'German Night' was planned and carefully directed. Organised spontaneity was expressed in the acts of terror lasting from the first hours of the 9 November night until the late evening of 10 November. The squads of SS and SA men, dressed in civilian clothes, spurred into battle by alcohol, and armed with crowbars, axes, guns and lists of Jews and a record of their most valuable assets, went to the city streets to destroy, burn, humiliate and kill. In those days, synagogues were burning, flats and shops were being demolished and their Jewish owners were intimidated, beaten and finally murdered in all regions of the Reich. Everything was accompanied by the omnipresent sound of breaking glass, storefronts, windows, dishes and porcelain. Reports by local authorities and the police, city chronicles and the press precisely registered the events of the day. Therefore, local

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700 See e.g. W.-A. Kropat, "Reichskristallnacht". *Der Judenpogrom vom 7. bis 10. November 1938 – Urheber, Täter, Hintergründe*, Wiesbaden 1997, pp. 91-92.



archives preserved the documentation of the havoc, the list of victims' names as well as accurate records of the material used for arson and the work of destruction. The larger the city, the greater the lawlessness. Anonymity made it easier to vent the accumulated aggression.

Vandalism did not provide enough satisfaction. That is why acts of violence, brutality and humiliation against the Jews were committed almost everywhere. In Baden-Baden, the SS men forced about sixty Jews to march through the city to a synagogue, where they were forced to read excerpts of Hitler's *Mein Kampf*, sing Nazi songs and chant: "We are a dirty, lazy nation." Security Service reported on 12 November from Tyrol that "the boiling soul of the German nation is directed against the Jews" as a response to the "cowardly murder in Paris". A *Sicherheitsdienst* report from Tyrol summarised the results of the "operation", reporting dispassionately: "Three Jews killed. They are Richard Graubart, Karl Bauer and Richard Berger, the board of the Israeli religious community. Wilhelm Bauer is in hospital with severe head injuries (...). After destroying their flat, the married couple Popper were thrown into the river Sill; however, they climbed out onto the shore. The man is among the arrested."<sup>701</sup> For entertainment and to satisfy the lowest instincts of the mob, in some towns the Jewish inhabitants were thrown into rivers, or dipped in the moat. In Bremen at 05:00, a group of seven broke into a flat of the well-known Dr. Adolf Goldberg and shot him and his wife to death in their bedroom. In Esslingen, an orphanage became the site of fanatical attacks by the SS and SA. According to the local report, the opposing teachers and educators had to be taught "little lessons." Some of the children escaped, and the perpetrators destroyed everything that was within reach. Books, scrolls of Torah and commemorative plaques were thrown to the burning pile. The head of the orphanage, Theodore Rothschild, and his wife were later sent by the Gestapo to the Theresienstadt camp.<sup>702</sup>

While the concerned international opinion reported on the German St. Bartholomew's Night and the foreign press wrote about "the most terrible wave of anti-Semitism" since Hitler's seizure of power, the German press counted the number of German cities "liberated from the Jews", informed about the "common indignation of the population", and the admirable discipline of German citizens. "Despite the justified outrage at the Jewry, which has the blood of some German residents on its conscience, the population demonstrated great discipline",

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701 The documentation of the pogrom, see e.g. H.-J. Döscher, *"Reichskristallnacht" Die November-Pogrome 1938, mit zahlreichen Abbildungen und Dokumenten*, Frankfurt a. M. 1990; W. Pehle (ed.), *Der Judenpogrom 1938. Von der "Reichskristallnacht" zum Völkermord*, Frankfurt a. M. 1988; M. Brumlik, P. Kunik (eds.), *Reichspogromnacht. Vergangenheitsbewältigung aus jüdischer Sicht*, Frankfurt a. M. 1988.

702 H. Metzger, *Kristallnacht*, Stuttgart 1978, p. 25.



reported *Bamberger Volksblatt* on November 11. *Schlesische Zeitung* wrote on the same day that “it is important to notice that in all cases, despite the destruction, breaking windows and door grating, there was no looting as an expression of the justified, great anger. These acts were not an expression of low instincts (...), but only showed the Jews that our patience has come to an end.”

The pogrom staged by the Nazi authorities did not result in widespread social applause. The image created by orchestrated witness accounts in the official press substantially differed from the memories of the victims. The reactions of nearest neighbours, average citizens and the crowd also varied. While some bystanders expressed embarrassment, others spat on the convoys of the arrested. Ambassadors and consuls of foreign countries reported on the scenes of horror and great humiliation of the victims. The foreign press did not hide her indignation over the behaviour of the Gestapo.

Generally, the events of 9 and 10 November were regarded as the punishment of Jews for the murder of vom Rath; they were considered justified and German citizens understood why the attacks had taken place. However, their execution, in the form of meaningless destruction of the property that was considered German, was met with disapproval. Many believed that instead of destroying valuable goods, it would have been better to distribute them among needy Germans. Such behaviour was considered conflicting with the economic situation and with budgetary restrictions. Concerns were expressed that the terror that poured into the streets would result in a negative image of the state and nation in international opinion. The wilfulness of destruction, brutality, abuse, criminal energy, thievery, participation of school pupils in the looting: they all could impair trust in the party and the state of law and anarchise the German community. One can read between the lines of the reports by the police, mayors and other officials that the local community was moderately critical about the pogrom in order not to be suspected of favouring the Jews, and thus not to expose oneself to the authorities. There was a conspiracy of silence. Candid views were rarely revealed. The fear was omnipresent.

A Wroclaw Jew, Walter Tausk, watched the events and recorded in his diary that the acts of vandalism were also committed by teenage boys. “The opinion of the mature audience was divided; the general attitude was against the events (...). The street filled to the brim with the mob and the crowd discussed intensively, in part delightedly, from children to old people. But despite that, the terrible sadness of all; most thought it was wrong”. Near the smouldering ruins of the synagogue, Tausk “met decent people here and there who were very upset and communicated with their eyes (...) I was right in the middle of the Middle Ages”. He recalls police cars patrolling busily, carrying arrested Jews, and coarse rows of people

screaming “hang” every time.<sup>703</sup> One thing was certain. No one could say: “I haven’t seen anything.” The terror was spreading across the streets, it became omnipresent, impossible to hide.

Historians agree that, generally, people assessed the pogrom negatively, which had nothing to do with their sympathy for the Jews. It was the lawlessness that met with criticism. Some feared that the forms of brutal terror and paroxysms of hatred could cause a reaction that would be contrary to the intentions of the government: it could arouse pity and sympathy for the Jewish population. At the same time, anti-Jewish legislation was accepted uncritically in the belief that what is sanctioned is the law, therefore it must be right. The dominating feeling was fear for one’s own safety and fear that what happened to the Jews today may happen to us tomorrow.

A similar opinion was shared by the clergy, who assumed that since the synagogues were burning, churches could also be set on fire. The Christian leaders in Germany were silent; they decided to wait. The community of Churches, with few exceptions, plunged into self-pity. Loyalty to the government made many blind and paralysed by fear of taking action. After the pogrom, the representative of the moderate orientation of the Evangelical Church, Bishop Theophil Wurm, turned to the Minister of Justice, Franz Gurtner Reich, asking him to do anything that could restore the authority of law and order in the country. At the same time he asserted that “I can say from years of experience that there is hardly any group more free from the Jewish spirit and more willing to involve themselves in the problems of the nation and the country than Evangelical priests”. He could also boast that thirty years earlier as the head of a mission in Stuttgart he had led an effective fight “against the invasion of Jewry”.<sup>704</sup> The Catholic *Bamberger Volksblatt* stated on 14 November: “The whole Jewry should know that if ever again in the Reich or anywhere in the world a German is attacked by a Jew, the revenge will be completely different.” In Thuringia, on the Day of Atonement, 16 November, an announcement was made by the National Council of the Church about the “struggle against the ravages of the Jewish spirit”. Bishop Martin Sasse announced to the national clergy and the faithful that “National Socialism recognised the danger in time and with full responsibility declared the fiercest struggle for the German community against the Jewish-Bolshevik impiety. The task of the German Church is to faithfully stand in battle on the side of the Führer with the sense of Christian conscience and national responsibility”.<sup>705</sup> Only a few, such

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703 W. Tausk, *Dżuma w mieście Breslau*, Warszawa 1973, pp. 185-187.

704 G. Schäfer, *Dokumentation zum Kirchenkampf. Die Evangelische Landeskirche in Württemberg und der Nationalsozialismus*, vol. 6: *Von der Reichskirche zur Evangelischen Kirche in Deutschland 1938-1945*, Stuttgart 1986, p. 116.

705 *Aufruf des Thüringischen Landeskirchenrates zum Bußtag*; *Der deutsche Christ* 48, 1938.

as Dietrich Bonhoeffer, expressed condemnation of Nazi practices. Bonhoeffer underlined words of a psalm in his Bible under the date of 9 November: “They set your sanctuary on fire; they profaned the dwelling place of your name, bringing it down to the ground. (...) How long, O God, is the foe to scoff? Is the enemy to revile your name forever?”<sup>706</sup>

For the Nazi government, the lack of open resistance or protest from the public was seen as complicity and acceptance of the Nazi policy towards the Jewish population, which gave the authorities an opportunity to accelerate and intensify the measures to solve the ‘Jewish problem’. The party had a free hand in the policy of the separation of sub-humans from supermen. The Jewish apocalypse revealed a new face. Pogroms, practiced since the Middle Ages, developed a qualitatively new dimension. More sophisticated methods, using modern means of violence, marked another stage in the history of the Germans and the Jews. The Night of Broken Glass showed the entire spectrum of human behaviour under the conditions of dictatorship. It also meant a symbolic and actual death of Jewish citizens in the centre of the educated population of large cities.

The November night had its continuation. The two days of terror were followed by further restrictions. On 12 November, Hermann Göring held a meeting, gathering approximately a hundred top officials of the Nazi state. Decisions taken at the meeting had a fundamental importance for the future fate of Jews in Germany. First, they had to remove all traces of the pogrom at their own cost. The victims were obliged to pay contributions of one billion Reichmarks, later raised to 1.75 billion, the so-called penitential tax. Wolfgang Diewerge, a high official in the Ministry of Propaganda, provided ‘evidence’. He found that after a few years of the National Socialism rule, 199 Jewish millionaires still lived in the capital of the Reich, and 695 Jews possessed assets worth more than 300,000 Reichmarks.<sup>707</sup>

The Jews became a subject of lawlessness in the state of law. Aryianisation of economy was equal to complete exclusion of Jews from production, craft, services and trade. The process of ‘de-Jewification’ covered all areas of life. The Jewish population was deprived of property and savings and “time and territorial constraints” were imposed. This euphemistic name actually meant that Jews were excluded from science, culture and entertainment. They were not allowed in public places and anywhere outside after 20:00. Parks and forests were provided with the warning signs: *Waldesluft verträgt nicht Judenduft. So wie der Floh saugt Blut in Massen, verseucht der Jud’ die Menschenrassen* [Forest air cannot tolerate the Jewish smell. Just as the flea sucks blood, the Jew contaminates the human race]. When the war broke out, Jews were obliged to adopt the names of Israel and

706 E. Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer. Bilder aus seinem Leben*, München 1986, p. 229.

707 W. Diewerge, *Anschlag gegen den Frieden. Ein Gelbbuch über Grünsplan und seine Helfershelfer*, München 1939, p. 91.

Sarah; tenant protection was abolished, which was equivalent to the mass evictions of Jews from their homes; access to food became limited for Jews, and driving licenses were revoked. A pamphlet published on 4 December 1939 in Heidelberg reported with satisfaction: “The fact that Jews drove cars along German streets and used roads built by the hands of German workers had long been considered a provocation by German people. This situation, borne with incredible patience by the German nation, has finally come to an end. A German will now have more opportunities to get to know his homeland and gain new energy for work with the use of a car – the work of the German spirit and German hands.”<sup>708</sup> The next step of the stigmatisation of the Jews – the obligation to wear the Star of David – completed the work of dehumanisation. Moral death was the last Station of the Cross before the extermination.

The November Pogrom was a rehearsal for the Final Solution. Nazi propaganda did everything it could to increase the sense of danger from the Jewish race and to justify the need to defend against it. “The world Jewry declared war against the Reich”, Alfred Rosenberg explained in late March 1939, in his speech to the Sudeten Germans. The release of “Jewish parasites”, in which Germany had the leading role, was “in the interests of European nations”.<sup>709</sup> Alongside the intensification of the Nazi extermination, Nazi newspapers were intensifying the propaganda campaign. The leading propaganda organ, *Der Angriff*, wrote in an introductory comment on 30 May 30 1943: “He who praises the Jews has the character of a pig; he who offends them is a man of honour (...) Leave your proverbial German kindness. Compassion can no longer find a place in your heart. A Jew wants to destroy you, and Jehovah wants to devour you.”

The Katyn massacre was used as another pretext for the propaganda campaign. In the article entitled ‘The Jewish desire to murder’ of 22 April 1943, *Westdeutscher Beobachter* presented Katyn as a modern form of Jewish ritual murder. “One thing is certain – the Jews desire the blood of non-Jews.” Goebbels ran the anti-Jewish campaign until the very end. On 5 June 1943 in the Berlin Sportpalast he gave a speech that was the peak of the anti-Semitic campaign. He bluntly specified the objectives of German politics when he said: “Ridding all Europe of Jewry is not a matter of morality, but rather a question of international security. (...) Just like a potato beetle destroys potatoes, the Jew destroys nations and peoples. There is only one solution: to radically deal with the danger. (...) The international Jew is the mortar that holds the enemy coalition together.”<sup>710</sup>

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708 P. Sauer, *Dokumente über die Verfolgung der jüdischen Bürger in Baden-Württemberg durch das nationalsozialistische Regime 1933-1945*, vol. 2, Stuttgart 1966, p. 67.

709 After: P. Longerich, *Die Deutschen und die Judenverfolgung 1933-1945*. “Davon haben wir nichts gewusst!”, München 2006, p. 143.

710 *Deutsche Allgemeine Zeitung*, 6.06.1943.

The memory of the Holocaust is an important element of German identity but the route to integrating the memory of the Holocaust in German consciousness, first in a divided and then in a reunified state, was long and filled with difficulties. As it was put by Friedrich Nietzsche, “‘I have done it’ – says my memory. ‘I cannot not have done it’ – says my pride and remains adamant. At last, memory yields.”<sup>711</sup> Christian von Krockow writes about a double person and his split conscience in the Third Reich. After the war, the situation was similar. In Germany there was a deep silence. Busy treating their wounds and rising from the ruins of their homes, Germans were not willing to dwell upon the biblical question: “Where is your brother Abel?” Have they even noticed the disappearance of their Jewish fellow citizens?

Initially, those Jews who had survived the Holocaust could not imagine returning to German soil. It seemed that after Auschwitz the Jewish communities in Germany would be something unnatural. Robert Weltsch spoke on behalf of many when in 1946, after his visit to the defeated Germany, he wrote, “We cannot expect that there will be some Jewish people who would want to live in Germany. Here it smells of human bodies, gas chambers and torture rooms. Yet, there are still a few thousand of them living in Germany. (...) These remaining Jewish quarters need to be liquidated as soon as possible. (...) Germany is not the land for Jews.”<sup>712</sup> Similar words, filled with resignation, were spoken by Rabbi Leo Beck after he was liberated from the Theresienstadt concentration camp in 1945, “For us, Jews from Germany, a certain epoch in history came to an end. Such an epoch ends when hope, faith and trust need to be buried for good. We believed that the German and Jewish spirit would meet on German soil and this marriage would be a blessing. It was an illusion. The epoch of Jews in Germany has ended for good.”<sup>713</sup>

In the late forties, about 15,000 Jews lived in Germany. Although anti-Semitism was officially condemned, the results of surveys conducted among different social groups prove otherwise. It is estimated that after signing the reparations agreement, about 5% of the former German Jewish population returned to their former homeland. The first survey conducted in the American zone in December 1946 demonstrated that the Holocaust had not marked a fundamental turning point in social attitudes towards the Jews. The research showed that 18% of the population

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711 F. Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, London 1990, p. 59.

712 After: M. Richarz, *Juden in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland und in der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik seit 1945*, in: M. Brumlik, D. Kiesel, C. Kugelmann, J. Schoeps (eds.), *Jüdisches Leben in Deutschland seit 1945*, Frankfurt a. M. 1986, p. 14.

713 After: T. Gidal, *Die Juden in Deutschland von der Römerzeit bis zur Weimarer Republik*, Gütersloh 1988, p. 426.

identified their attitude as “strongly” anti-Semitic, 21% as anti-Semitic, and 22% of the responses were classified as racist.<sup>714</sup>

Becoming fully aware of what happened between 1933 and 1945 – one’s own complicity, responsibility, shame, regret and guilt – involves the sphere of feelings and consciousness. Confrontation with the ‘Jewish problem’ required a revision of many centuries of prejudice and mental habits; a reflection on the sources of anti-Semitism and a rejection of the teachings of the Catholic Church on Judaism. The postwar period was not favourable to the process of reflection on such a complex and conscience-burdening problem. The famous theologian and philosopher of religion, Romano Guardini, wrote in 1952: “It seems as if the conscience of the community was stunned by such terrible happenings which loom in their minds untackled and dangerous”.<sup>715</sup>

The first years after the war lacked the appropriate language, form and ritual to commemorate the November pogrom. How to commemorate the event that was a stigma, that signified shame and disgrace, that involved people acting on behalf of and in the alleged defence of the German nation? The division of Germany divided the tradition and culture of memory. The hierarchy of importance of holidays and commemoration was completely different for the GDR and FRG authorities. November in East Germany was reserved as a month of commemorating the October revolution (1917) and the November revolution (1918). Jews did not fit into any of the official definitions of the victims of fascism. However, the successive anniversaries of Kristallnacht were used as an occasion to launch attacks on Western imperialism and the revisionist West Germany.

The political interdependencies between East Germany and Israel, the ideological approach to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and lack of contact with ecumenical circles abroad limited the necessary change of reasoning and reckoning with the past. The very few Jewish communities that still functioned in East Germany were ascribed the role of ‘Zionist agencies’. The Israeli-Palestinian conflict had a negative impact on the attitude towards Jewish people. The commemorative culture was determined by the propaganda of the SED state. For example, on the anniversary of the Jewish pogrom, there was a lot of information in the GDR about anti-Semitic incidents and ‘fascist elements’ in the neighbouring West Germany. The commemorations were limited to local ceremonies organised by the Jewish communities and attended by the local authorities. They were accompanied by assurances that racism, militarism, imperialism and anti-Semitism were “eradicated with their roots” in the “state of workers and peasants”. When, in

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714 W. Bergmann, R. Erb, *Wie antisemitisch sind die Deutschen? Meinungsumfragen 1945-1994*, in: W. Benz (ed.), *Antisemitismus in Deutschland. Zur Aktualität eines Vorurteils*, München 1995, p. 50.

715 R. Guardini, *Germany’s Unexpiated Guilt*, *AJR Information* 3/1953, p. 1.

1955, the German History Museum was opened in East Berlin, the SED Politburo entered the Jewish pogrom in the official calendar of state commemoration.

The GDR authorities emphasised that their attitude to Israel, describing it as an “aggressive state”, had nothing to do with their attitude towards the Jews. The East German media frequently stressed that they would not be blackmailed by references to Auschwitz. “One more word about the guilt-burdened conscience of the Germans: it exists and it first appeared as a healthy reaction to the crimes of fascism. It is not a problem that has concerned the GDR for a long time.”<sup>716</sup> The responsibility for Auschwitz and Majdanek was accredited to the ruling class of West Germany. Thus, the reports from the opening of Eichmann’s trial in Jerusalem were understood as referring to the other German state. “The supporters (of Nazism) prevail and govern in West Germany. It is not a coincidence. The Bonn State is based on the same grounds as the imperialist Nazi state. Their regime, which is preparing a new mass murder, needs the old mass murderers. (...) The collaborators and henchmen of Eichmann today in the Bonn state enjoy even higher positions than they once did in the Nazi state.”<sup>717</sup>

From the beginning, the GDR authorities ignored the religious and racist nature of the Jewish persecutions. The directives, for instance those laid out in a circular of the Berlin Municipality social department from 25 June 1945, stated: “Only the one who, risking his life, actively participated in the fight against the Nazi regime; only the one who remained faithful to his anti-fascist beliefs in prison and in a concentration camp, can be regarded as a ‘victim of fascism.’ (...) Thus, it has been decided that Jews, cross-breeds, Bible scholars, critics, and the majority of those who compromise the defensive capability of our country cannot be enlisted in the narrowly defined category of the ‘victims of fascism’.”<sup>718</sup> However, this view had to be quickly revised, since it was remembered that 160,000 Berlin Jews had been deported to concentration camps and only 6,000 returned, including 87 children.

The first anniversary ceremonies took place in a narrow circle of the Jewish communities with the participation of the Central Committee of the Association of the Persecutees of the Nazi Regime (VVN). They were attended by Jewish communists, including Juliusz Meyer, Leon Löwenkopf, and Leo Zuckermann. The binding formula of the commemorations was defined by the historian, Walter Bartel, who belonged to the executive authorities of the Berlin VVN. In his 1948

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716 This opinion of Albert Reisz from September 1975 r. is quoted by P. Dietmar, *DDR und Israel (I) Ambivalenz einer Nicht-Beziehung*; *Deutschland Archiv* 7, 1977, p. 738.

717 *Der Henkersknecht des deutschen Imperialismus*; *Neues Deutschland* 2.06.1962.

718 After: A. Timm, *Der politische und propagandistische Umgang mit der “Reichskristallnacht” in der DDR*, in: J. Danyel (ed.), *Die geteilte Vergangenheit. Zum Umgang mit Nationalsozialismus und Widerstand in beiden deutschen Staaten*, Berlin 1995, pp. 214-215.



speech, delivered in the German Theatre, he claimed that the Jewish pogrom of 9 November 1938 had to be seen in the context of 9 November 1918: “Kristallnacht resulted from the failure to eliminate the power of the generals, Thyssen and Krupp.”<sup>719</sup>

It was not until 1956, on the initiative of the Evangelical Church, that more attention was paid to the anniversary of Kristallnacht. On the 18th anniversary of the Jewish pogrom, Provost Heinrich Grüber, the Vice President of VVN, and since 1949 the plenipotentiary of the Evangelical Church in Germany for the East German government, appealed to the German youth to clean the Jewish cemeteries and in this way to wash off at least a fraction of the “great German guilt”. However, the initiative was not introduced for various reasons. Until 1978, the ‘Night of the Broken Glass’ remained on the margin of the commemoration of the Bolshevik revolution. As academic literature about the Holocaust and memoirs started to appear, more importance was attached to commemoration rituals. They were also used to highlight “the achievements of the GDR” and distance East Germany from West Germany, where – as it was constantly reminded – the “cult of Hitler and anti-Semitic incidents” were flourishing. On the 50th anniversary of the pogrom, and a year before the fall of the Berlin Wall, representatives of Israel were invited to the anniversary celebrations for the first time.

In November 1956, the prime minister Otto Grotewohl spoke of the reparations paid by West Germany as the “so-called reparations used by Israel in their fight against the independence movement in the Middle East”. He also demanded that West Germany should not support the “bastion of imperialism”.<sup>720</sup> The same year, on the anniversary of the pogrom, *Neues Deutschland* reported that “hundreds of faithful soldiers of Hitler as well as fascist murderers and arsonists are manipulating the navigation equipment of Bonn’s NATO machinery.”<sup>721</sup> The responsibility for the pogrom was ascribed to the fascists whose descendants lived in Bonn and Munich; they were said to “profane the good name of Germany”. The commemorations were combined with the agitation against “still strong and insolent National Socialist forces in the FRG.” Connecting the anniversary with current politics deprived the commemorations of all credibility.

In the 1960s, the commemorative culture in real socialism developed its own dynamics. Commemorative sites were opened in the former concentration camps. They were intended to authenticate the “aura of the anti-fascist martyrdom”. They were also a conscious act of the offensive propaganda against West Germany, the ideological enemy. On the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Kristallnacht, the communist party stated the necessity of taking action “against anti-Semitism, whose main,

719 Ibidem, p. 216.

720 I. Deutschkron, *Israel und die Deutschen. Das schwierige Verhältnis*, Köln 1983, p. 190.

721 *Das Unkraut rechtzeitig jäten*; *Neues Deutschland* 10.11.1956.



imperialist culprits in West Germany today wear a worn coat of innocence that hides their imperialist conspiracy with the current Israeli leaders.<sup>722</sup>

Despite the difficulties and constraints imposed on the Jewish communities, the East German Evangelic Church managed to gradually earn a narrow margin of freedom for commemorating the anniversary of the November pogrom and for reconciliation with the Jewish community. The Synod of the Evangelical Church in Greifswald made appeals to the media for moderation and restraint in reporting on the current problems concerning Israel and Jews. Some newspapers received letters from Christian-Jewish working groups protesting against the grotesque presentation of the situation in the Middle East.

An opportunity for a wider debate on difficult topics was provided by the regional Kirchentag in Leipzig in 1978, on the 40th anniversary of the Night of Broken Glass, and in 1983, the Year of Luther. "Luther and the Jews" were the subject of a statement issued by the East German Evangelical churches, in which it was stated that: "there is no reason to worship Luther as a hero. (...) Against his intentions, Luther's critique of the Jewish religion intensified the contempt for Jews. This had calamitous consequences for our nation."<sup>723</sup> In the last decade before reunification, there was room for a wider dialogue between the churches and Judaism and its representatives.

The situation of Jews, their living conditions and degree of self-organisation were one of the factors determining the relations with the general public in both German states. When, after Stalin's death, the political climate in East Germany improved, people of Jewish origin, such as Alexander Abusch, Albert Norden, Gerhard Eisler, Hilda Benjamin, Hermann Axen and Friedrich Karl Kaul gained high positions in the party and in the state. Since that time, as 'victims of fascism', they received support in maintaining their religious practices and caring for their cemeteries.<sup>724</sup> The East Berlin Jewish community received 150,000 German marks annually to maintain the Berlin-Weißensee cemetery, the largest cemetery in Europe. In 1980, when 800 Jews lived in East Germany and about 27,000 in West Germany, the cemetery contained 115,000 graves, the maintenance and care of which required a huge amount of effort and financial aid.

The Jews in East Germany expressed support for the official policy of the state. The East German attitude towards Israel defined the position of the modest East German Jewish community towards the Jews in the world. A representative

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722 *Klage und Ausweg. Matinee zum 30. Jahrestag der "Kristallnacht"; Neues Deutschland* 11.11.1968.

723 H.-D. Peter, O. Schröder (eds.), *Vertrauen wagen. Kirchentage in der DDR im Lutherjahr 1983*, Berlin (Ost) 1984, p. 65.

724 L. Mertens, *Juden in der DDR. Eine schwindende Minderheit; Deutschland Archiv* 11, 1986, p. 1192.

of the Jewish community explained the lack of contact with the international Jewish diaspora and Israel saying, “This is naturally a painful issue for us. Most of us have friends and relatives there. But we also have relatives and friends in the USA, and the relations between East Germany and the USA are disheartening for us. After all, we are a socialist state and Israel is capitalist state, which makes harmonious relations difficult. We have to be realistic and support the policy of our state”.<sup>725</sup>

When the FRG was established, two different tendencies started to develop. Radical, neo-Nazi organisations appeared in political and social life and many people burdened with the cooperation with the Nazi state returned to public life. However, some social circles and organisations reacted to radical slogans and cases of desecration of Jewish cemeteries with a need to oppose and demonstrate different trends.<sup>726</sup> While in 1949 the question “What is your attitude towards the Jews?” was answered “demonstrably anti-Semitic” by 10% of those sampled, “reserved” by 15%, “tolerant” by 41% and “explicitly friendly” by 6%, in 1952 34% declared a negative attitude, 18% reservations, 23% tolerance, and 7% a friendly attitude.<sup>727</sup>

Overcoming anti-Semitism was the main condition and criterion of the moral renewal of the emerging German state for the occupational powers. Shortly before the Bundestag elections in 1949, the U.S. High Commissioner in Germany, John McCloy, said to the representatives of Jewish communities in the FRG that “the world will carefully observe the new West German state. The decisive test will be whether its leaders create an atmosphere in which the Jews and other minorities will feel safe. (...) The lives and welfare of the Jews in Germany will be the touchstone of the democratic development of the state.”<sup>728</sup>

The end of anti-Semitism as an official state ideology was not equal to a radical change in social attitudes. It took a couple of difficult years for West Germany to

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725 Herbert Singer quoted by L. Mertens, op. cit., pp. 1196-1197.

726 Adolf Diamant registered 431 acts of vandalism at cemeteries in West Germany between 1945 and 1980. See: A. Diamant, *Jüdische Friedhöfe in Deutschland – eine Bestandsaufnahme*, Frankfurt a. M. 1982, p. 204. Rainald Becker and Alexander W. Vennekel estimate their number at 503. Compare: R. Becker, A.W. Vennekel, *Schändungen und Zerstörungen jüdischer Friedhöfe in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland nach 1945*, Duisburg 1985, quotation after: M. Neiss, *Diffamierung mit Tradition – Friedhofsschändungen*, in: W. Benz (ed.), *Antisemitismus in Deutschland. Zur Aktualität eines Vorurteils*, München 1995, p. 149.

727 *Ist Deutschland antisemitisch? Ein diagnostischer Beitrag zur Innenpolitik, Herbst 1949*, Institut für Demoskopie Allensbach 1949, p. 39 oraz *Jahrbuch der öffentlichen Meinung 1947-1955*, Allensbach 1956, p. 128.

728 Za: E. Sterling, *Judenfreunde – Judenfeinde. Fragwürdiger Philosemitismus in der Bundesrepublik*; *Die Zeit* 50, 1965, p. 30.

sign the Reparations Agreement with Israel in 1952.<sup>729</sup> During the early stages of the West German state, 31% of citizens were against any reparations for the living German Jews. When in 1952 the Germans were asked about their opinion on the Reparations Agreement with Israel, 11% declared a positive attitude and 44% found the reparations unnecessary.<sup>730</sup> At the same time, 23% of the sampled West German citizens did not believe in German guilt for the outbreak of World War II and pointed at treason and sabotage of foreign forces as the causes of all the evil and the defeat. 21% of society thought that the Jews were to blame for what had happened to them in the Third Reich. Social attitudes were changing slowly. To the question asked in 1963, “Would it be better for the Germans if there were no Jews in the country?”, 19% of those sampled answered “yes, it would be” (37% in 1952) and 34% said “no, it would not be” (20% in 1952), while 47% answered they did not know (43% in 1952).<sup>731</sup>

When it comes to the memory of the Holocaust, the democratisation of West German society encountered political, psychological, economic and cultural obstacles. The anniversary of the November disgrace was commemorated occasionally and locally. Before the memory of the extermination became an important part of German identity, only a small group of intellectuals wondered if the negative and dramatic past could be the foundation of positive German self-identification. How should a day of shame be commemorated? What language should be used to commemorate a day of mourning?

High-ranking bishops warned the clergy against using remarks regarding the issue of the deportation and extermination of Jews in sermons, religion lessons or conversations. The pogrom was remembered occasionally, during the unveiling of commemorative plaques or the reconstruction of synagogues. When Chancellor Konrad Adenauer gave an interview to a Jewish magazine on the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Kristallnacht, in which he spoke of “terrible acts of the Nazis”, it was primarily a gesture of duty towards Israel. The first major anniversaries were held in synagogues and Jewish cemeteries and attended by few people. President Theodor Heuss reminded of the duty to remember in his letter written in 1958 to the Central Council of Jews in Germany: “This infamy left a burning memorial. The flames were extinguished long time ago, but their sullen embers left shame for decades.”<sup>732</sup>

Successive governments sought proper semantics, tone and formula of commemoration. All the terms applied in public discourse, such as community,

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729 N. Sagi, *Wiedergutmachung für Israel. Die deutschen Zahlungen und Leistungen*, Stuttgart 1981.

730 *Jahrbuch der öffentlichen Meinung 1947-1955*, op. cit., p. 130.

731 *Jahrbuch der öffentlichen Meinung 1955-1967*, Allensbach 1967, p. 96.

732 *Die Kristallnacht als Mahnung; Süddeutsche Zeitung* 10.11.1958.

nation or revolution, had been abused. It took several decades until the debate about the extermination policy of the Reich became a source of historical, political and moral education. All the institutions responsible for shaping the political and spiritual culture of society had to join the debate to ensure the credibility of the rituals of memory. It was important in the situation when memory of negative stereotypes, lasting for centuries and preserved in literature, was still vivid.

The attitude to Kristallnacht resulted from the entire process of reckoning with the past, the current political climate and political interests. The first decade of commemoration was at a local and regional level and the initiative was taken by Jewish communities. Spectacular cases of anti-Semitism on the one hand, and the 'Action Reconciliation Service for Peace', initiated by Lothar Kreyssig on the other, defined the atmosphere of everyday life in the Bonn Republic. On the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary, ceremonies were held in 33 cities. For the first time, on 9 November, the President and Chancellor of Germany issued a letter to the Central Council of Jews in Germany, which, also for the first time, had the opportunity to make a public statement. In the 1960s, the commemorations became institutionalised and the date of 9 November was permanently incorporated into the political calendar.

1978 was the year of a cultural turning point. The 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary brought, amongst other things, an increase in commemoration ceremonies and in the number of actors involved in the celebrations. Alongside rituals such as prayer, placing of wreaths, and speeches, new accents appeared: politicisation and emphasis on education, enlightenment and the aesthetic dimension of memory. The organisation of political marches and silent marches with torches began. Large cities organised whole weeks of commemoration with numerous educational events. The anniversary was no longer limited to speeches by prominent politicians; there were also social initiatives and approximately 3,000 events aimed at dissemination of knowledge about the Holocaust.

The fiftieth anniversary of the pogrom finally had a nationwide character. It was celebrated in Bonn and the Bundestag was the main organiser. However, the commemorations were accompanied by a scandal, caused mainly by the President of the Bundestag, Philipp Jenninger. His speech to the German Parliament cost him his position. Some members of parliament – leftists, Greens and liberals – walked out during their President's speech. The fervour of emotions did not leave space for rational discussion and answers to the questions posed. Why exactly did Jenninger incur anger? Who did he hurt: the Germans or the Jews? The media accused the President of not including words of mourning or sympathy and not using the proper tone in his speech. However, on 13 November 1988, the Tel Aviv newspaper *Yedioth Ahronoth* claimed that Jenninger had spoken the truth. He "confronted the Germans with a mirror in which they did not want to recognise themselves." The President did not speak from the perspective of the victims,

but the perspective of the national community, perpetrators and bystanders. His listeners were stricken by the lack of personal commentary and the rational, dry tone. Jenninger changed the prevailing rules of the rhetoric of commemoration days. However, it is unclear whether his intentions dishonest when he said: “The public, for the most part, remained passive; that was the attitude in regard to anti-Jewish actions and measures in the following years. Only a few joined in the rioting – but there was no rejection, no resistance worthy of mentioning. Reports speak of consternation and shame, of pity, yes, even disgust and horror. But only very few were sympathetic, gave practical solidarity, assistance or help. All saw what happened, but the majority of them looked away and said nothing. Also the churches were silent”<sup>733</sup>.

Was it an outrageous speech, as *Die Tageszeitung* claimed, “a rare combination of a superficial presentation of history, an attempt to justify the Nazi policy and fascination by it”?<sup>734</sup> *Frankfurter Rundschau* called the speech “demoralisation”. *Frankfurter Allgemeine* remained moderate, describing the speech as “controversial”. The London *Times* considered it to be factual, accurate and precise. Jenninger spoke less of the victims but more about the Germans and their duty to remember. *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*, discussing the reactions of the MPs and commentators, described them as participants in a mourning spectacle “who seem to be hardly able to think rationally” and wrote of the “complex disability of postwar Germany to deal properly with its terrible past and to show quiet solicitude towards the dark side of history.” Marion Gräfin Dönhoff said: “It seems (...) as if, in a house mourning for a murdered family member, one delivered a speech about a historical process instead of sharing the despair and grief with those gathered.”<sup>735</sup>

In the reunited Germany, 9 November again became a problem. In search of a new symbol, a new national holiday, a discussion broke out about how to combine the date of mourning and reflection with joyful festivities, and the memory of the pogrom of Jews with the memory of the victorious revolution of the GDR citizens. The proposal to make 9 November a new national holiday was rejected. Have Kristallnacht and the Holocaust become an integral element of German fate? The reality of the reunited Germany must provide answers to this question. Today, disputes about the culture of memory involve various options and refer to current events related to the right of asylum, the issue of migration or acts of terror against strangers. A wave of anti-Jewish excesses after the reunification of Germany and the revival of neo-Nazi movements caused social reaction, which

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733 <http://www.apnewsarchive.com/1988/Excerpts-of-Speech-By-Philipp-Jenninger/id-2b7ddc60d10bd9fa38fff1c234f78eac>

734 O. Tolmein, *Jenninger vom Faschismus fasziniert*; *Tageszeitung* 11.11.1988.

735 M. Gräfin Dönhoff, *Ein verfehltes Kolleg*; *Die Zeit* 18.11.1988.

resulted in an increased commitment to history education. According to the assurances of politicians and intellectuals, the memory of the Holocaust should remain alive. However, all official rituals will be futile if they are not accompanied by intellectual and moral reflection and sensitivity to the question of human rights in the world.

Doubts still remain. The FRG President Roman Herzog expressed them in Bergen-Belsen in 1995 saying: "I am not certain that we have yet found the correct forms of remembrance. (...) the fact that fifty years have passed since the end of the Nazi regime must not mean the end of remembering. (...) We need a living form of remembrance. It must express sorrow about suffering and loss, but it must also encourage constant vigilance in the struggle against any reoccurrence, and it must avert future danger. I support all measures that indelibly imprint in the hearts of our children and our children's children their responsibility for democracy, freedom and human dignity. Anything that simply peters out under the weight of short-term excuses is a waste."<sup>736</sup>

#### **4. The war against Poland in German oblivion**

In Polish-German history, World War II is the deepest and most durable turning point that marked the mutual perceptions and defined the relationship between the two nations for decades. Poland, which was the first victim of Nazi aggression and the first to mount armed resistance, which survived the longest occupation and suffered heavy losses, had the right to expect that the crimes would be punished, the perpetrator would admit its guilt, and Poland's martyrdom and heroism would be recognised by the world. The victims expected that the awareness of the size of the tragedy would become a basis of education and moral renewal for the German people. The difference between Poland's expectations and the attitude of the majority of German society and their culture of memory hindered mutual understanding, became a source of distrust and, as a consequence, led to conflicts that are still present in the relations between the two nations.

Over the course of the seventy years that have passed since the outbreak of the war, the official German culture of memory has accepted the responsibility of their own state and nation for the consequences of this breakdown of civilisation. Germans have found the means and forms of commemoration of the victims of the Nazi policy in the Third Reich. The memory of the Holocaust has become the founding myth of the Berlin Republic. In anniversary speeches, particular victim

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736 [www.bundespraesident.de/dokumente/-,2.11994/Rede/dokument.htm](http://www.bundespraesident.de/dokumente/-,2.11994/Rede/dokument.htm); <http://www.aicgs.org/site/wp-content/uploads/2011/11/herzog.pdf>

groups are mentioned. Jews have unquestionable priority in this respect. For the last 20 years, Sinti and Roma have been mentioned in second place, followed by homosexuals and victims of medical experiments. In addition to the Holocaust Memorial in Berlin, other memorials are planned to commemorate crimes against gypsies and sexual minorities.

Debates on the hierarchisation of victims and suffering lead nowhere and can only relativise the crimes. However, one should ask why the politics of Nazi Germany in the occupied Poland, which brought unprecedented destruction of the Polish intelligentsia, devastated the country and caused untold suffering and losses, has remained beyond the sphere of interest of the German neighbour. Although this subject is analysed increasingly often by historians, it has not yet reached the cultural memory of the Germans. The German media have not found anything worth presentation or education in the six-year occupation of Poland. Why has the first victim of the war been the last to enter the German calendar of memory? There are numerous reasons.

### In the clutches of prejudice and propaganda

When, on the eve of the signing of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact on 22 August 1939, Hitler spoke in Obersalzberg to the High Command of the Wehrmacht, he did not need to look for reasons for starting the war. His words were received with great applause: “destruction of Poland in the foreground (...) for the present only in the East I have put my death-head formations in place with the command relentlessly and without compassion to send into death many women and children of Polish origin and language. (...) Poland will be depopulated and settled with Germans. (...) Be hard, be without mercy, act more quickly and brutally than the others. The citizens of Western Europe must tremble with horror. That is the most humane way of conducting a war. For it scares the others off”.<sup>737</sup> In the opinion of civil and military authorities of the Third Reich and in the minds of the vast majority of the German population, 1 September 1939 did not mark the beginning of the great war – it was only settling a score. What was a disaster for The Second Polish Republic, the Third Reich considered a minor episode, regulation of borders, preventive measures in defence of the beset nation.

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737 After: C. Kleßmann (ed.), *September 1939. Krieg, Besatzung, Widerstand in Polen*, 8. ed., Göttingen 1989, pp. 16-17. Translation of the first speech after: *From Documents on British Foreign Policy: 1919-1939*. E. L. Woodward and Rohan Riftle (eds.); 3rd series (London: HMSO, 1954), 7:258-260 and of the second speech after: [http://library2.lawschool.cornell.edu/donovan/pdf/Batch\\_2\\_pdfs/Vol\\_IV\\_8\\_06.pdf](http://library2.lawschool.cornell.edu/donovan/pdf/Batch_2_pdfs/Vol_IV_8_06.pdf)



From the first days of the Weimar Republic, all political forces recognised the provisions of the Treaty of Versailles as the greatest disgrace to the honour of the nation. The German political elite considered the revival of Poland a flaw in the body of the old Reich. “The old and never-extinguished Polish longing, more sentimental before the war, has now become real” – reported von Bülow to the emperor at the end of World War I, and Wilhelm II noted in the margin: “They will pay with their heads.” On 11 September 1922, the General of the Reichswehr, Hans von Seeckt, wrote to the first Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Weimar Republic, stating that “the existence of Poland is intolerable and incompatible with Germany’s vital interests. She must disappear and will do so through her own inner weakness and through Russia – with our help.”

The prejudices against Poles, most strongly rooted in bourgeois and intellectual circles, were easy to nourish after 1918. Diplomats, civil servants, scientists, members of the Reichswehr, industrialists, political parties and numerous organisations for cultivating Germanness in the East did everything to make the nation aware of the loss of lands. No government of the Weimar Republic wanted to accept the new Eastern border.<sup>738</sup> The Polish state – perceived as a “bastard of Versailles” and a “temporary formation” that was created at the expense of Germany – was presented by the Reich propaganda as a class enemy.

German public opinion was attacked with continuing reports of “Polish terror and cruelty” to the German minority in Poland. Hitler’s crew could refer to the resentments and calumnies to justify their superpower ambitions. The belief in cultural superiority of the ‘master race’ was affirmed for the purposes of Germanisation and colonisation policy of Prussia. The image of Asia and its peoples as born slaves, which was reinforced by the Western philosophy, proved to be useful. Free Europe, equated with Western civilization, was presented as antithesis of the despotism of slave Asia. Montesquieu wrote of it: “the genius of the Tartar or Genae nation has always been similar to that of the empires of Asia. The peoples in the latter are governed by the cudgel; the Tartar peoples, by the lash. The spirit of Europe has always been contrary to these mores; and what the peoples of Asia have always called punishment, the peoples of Europe have always called great offence”.<sup>739</sup> Hegel wrote of Asia: “for what is most remarkable in it, this land has not kept for itself, but sent over to Europe”.<sup>740</sup> The features associated with Asia were later ascribed to the Eastern part of Europe.

The image of Poland as the embodiment of “Slavic unproductiveness”, a nation of low self-esteem unable to exist independently, justified the need for the

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738 See the extensive analysis: H.-A. Jacobsen, *Vom Wandel des Polenbildes in Deutschland (1772-1972)*; *Aus Politik und Zeitgeschichte* 21, 1973, pp. 3-21.

739 Montesquieu, *The Spirit of the Laws*, Cambridge 1989, p. 282.

740 W.G. Hegel, *The Philosophy of History*, Dover Publications 2004, p. 101.



German master.<sup>741</sup> Invectives developed in popular culture, such as “verminous Slavs”, had their culmination in the words of Hitler, who, on 6 August 1942, on the wave of victories, asserted from his headquarters in the Wolf’s Lair: “A ridiculous 100 million Slavs we will absorb or displace.”<sup>742</sup>

The anti-Slavism of Nazi Germany was based on the images of Poland, strengthened by school textbooks, as a country inhabited by half-Asians “who feed on sloppy food and live in holes”. “These wildlings, who demonstrate a very low level of culture, did not know iron or tillage. These Slavic hordes could not develop due to their primitive culture. They lived like slaves.” “If we glance again at (...) the growth of the long-settled population of the inferior through excess of births, of the population which for more than five hundred years has become an anthropological mixed race and from lack of immigration has remained of high Polish blood, the predominant influence of German culture – sometimes strong, at other times weaker, now gigantically strong again – over the entire life, the relation between culture and ‘native tongue’, between religion and ‘native tongue’, then we come to an understanding of the mentality of the Upper Silesian people, then we understand the German victory.”<sup>743</sup> Peoples of little worth did not deserve attention; thus, knowledge of Poland was negligible or falsified.

People who were far from Nazism were also affected by prejudice or ignorance. The icon of the anti-Nazi resistance movement, Claus von Stauffenberg, a participant in the September Campaign of 1939, described Polish citizens in a letter to his wife as an “unbelievable rabble”; “a folk that only feels good under the knout. The thousands of prisoners will be used well in our agriculture. The Germans can derive benefits from it because they are diligent, hardworking and undemanding”. In another letter, one can read: “It is essential that we begin a systemic colonisation in Poland. But I have no fear that this will not occur”.<sup>744</sup>

The outbreak of World War II did not arouse widespread enthusiasm, as it was in the case of World War I. However, acceptance of Nazi politics was possible due to belief that had existed since the beginning of the Weimar Republic: that Poland’s existence, as a “temporary state” and “peace-disturbing formation”, was against German interests. Already on 15 March 1921, Hitler argued in *Völkischer*

741 See e.g. J. Sobczak, *Propaganda zagraniczna Niemiec weimarskich wobec Polski*, Poznań 1973; M. Laubert, *Nationalität und Volkswille im preussischen Osten*, Breslau 1925.

742 J. W. Borejsza made this statement the title of his book: “*Śmieszne sto milionów Słowian...*” *Wokół światopoglądu Adolfa Hitlera*, Warszawa 2006.

743 R. Mantau, *Heimatkunde der Freien Stadt Danzig*, Danzig 1924, p. 31 i 32; W. Volz, *The Economic-Geographical Foundations of the Upper Silesian Question*, Berlin 1921, pp. 73-74.

744 After: T. Szarota, *Moralni zwycięzcy. Refleksje z okazji 60. rocznicy Powstania Warszawskiego i zamachu pułkownika Stauffenberga na Hitlera; Dialog* 68, 2004, p. 77.

*Beobachter*: “Who takes Upper Silesia away from the Germans, deprives 15 million people of the chance to live. In this case, our nation has only one choice: die of hunger (...) or resist.”<sup>745</sup> On 19 September 1939, in his speech delivered in Danzig, the Führer explained the need to revise the Versailles provisions as the necessary condition for restoring world peace. He considered the case of Danzig a “victim to the insanity of the time” (Versailles) and the Polish state “a product of this insanity”, “at the expense of reason and economic opportunity”.<sup>746</sup> All the governments of the Weimar Republic and the political administration of the Third Reich spread a sense of historical injustice. Propaganda did its best to spread the image of Poland as a non-democratic country, governed by the cudgel and terrorising the German minority.

1 September did not find its place in the collective memory of the Germans. The beginning of the war in German literature, culture and media after 1945 was connected with the aggression against the Soviet Union, particularly the Stalingrad defeat. The events perceived as one’s own suffering were most deeply rooted in cultural memory. Literature and particularly film presented images of German war prisoners that evoked widespread sympathy: dressed in rags, with frostbitten limbs, led by “Asian barbarians”.

The aggression of 1 September 1939, ‘the Campaign of 18 days’ in the Nazi rhetoric, was perceived as a defensive war and settling the score. Well-staged provocations eventually made Poles be considered responsible for the outbreak of war, together with the Jews. The wide range of arguments intended to justify the war as a historical necessity in defence of peace was supported by prejudices that emerged in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, particularly in the elite of Prussian occupiers. Prussian plans for colonisation and Germanisation were explained by the features ascribed to the Polish nation, which easily appealed to the public. Thus, Polish striving for independence was “Polish lawlessness”, and the defence against purchase of lands was “Polish cunning”, “greed”, and “falsity”, reinforced by the “Jewish villainy”. In order to reinforce the idea of German cultural superiority and the mission in the East, numerous scientific arguments were found that demonstrated the inability of Eastern peoples to live independently. The Third Reich adapted old myths, adding a more dynamic dimension to them. Poles were promoted from the position of national enemy to the rank of racist enemy. The Wehrmacht soldiers were expected to follow the old colonisation track, carrying civilisation and cultural goods to Asian savages.

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745 A. Hitler, *Sämtliche Aufzeichnungen 1905-1924*, eds. E. Jäckel, A. Kuhn, Stuttgart 1980, pp. 350-351.

746 M. Domarus, *Hitler. Speeches and Proclamations 1932-1945. The Chronicle of a Dictatorship*, vol. II: *Untergang (1939-1945)*, Wauconda 1990 (orig. Würzburg 1963), p. 1802.

The old discrepancy between the Prussian reason of state and Polish striving for independence was completed by the Nazi propaganda with the image of Poles as the eternal enemy, standing in the way of acquiring necessary living space.<sup>747</sup> In the abovementioned speech in Danzig on 19 September 1939, Hitler only confirmed what popular literature and school education had established: that the German march in the East was a re-establishment of the natural order, a blessing, a return to the old lands of German settlement, cultivated with the effort of German sweat and blood. Once more it was proven a self-evident truth that only he who himself is creatively endowed in the cultural sphere is also able to secure true cultural achievement in the long run. Fifty additional years of Polish mastery would have sufficed to restore these lands to that barbarism out of which Germans had brought them with arduous industry and diligence.<sup>748</sup>

After the September Campaign, on 24 October 1939, German journalists received guidelines such as: "It must be made clear even to the German milkmaid that Polishness equals subhumanity. (...) There is no reason to publish deeper considerations and leading articles about the lack of culture in Poland. (...) It is enough if this becomes a leitmotiv and, from time to time, appears in the forms of existing concepts such as 'Polish economy', 'Polish ruins', and so on, until everyone in Germany subconsciously sees any Pole, whether farm worker or intellectual, as vermin."<sup>749</sup>

Poland did not count as an interesting political actor in postwar West Germany. The Soviet Union remained the victor, a superpower with a significant position in the balance of forces. The 'hot' war had not yet ended when the Cold War started, in which the Eastern neighbour was considered a new enemy. Both German states found themselves in the camps of victors, with the blade of confrontation directed against one another. The border with Poland was far from Bonn. Therefore, in

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747 There is extensive German literature presenting the origin of prejudice. See e.g.: M. Broszat, *Zweihundert Jahre deutsche Polenpolitik*, München 1963; M. Lammich, *Das deutsche Osteuropabild in der Zeit der Reichsgründung*, Boppard a. Rhein 1978; D. Friedrich, *Das Bild Polens in der Literatur der Weimarer Republik*, Frankfurt a. M. 1984; C. Kleßmann (ed.), *September 1939. Krieg, Besatzung, Widerstand in Polen*, Göttingen 1989; H.-A. Jacobsen, M. Tomala (eds.), *Vom Polenbild in Deutschland*, in: *Wie Polen und Deutsche einander sehen. Beiträge aus beiden Ländern*, Düsseldorf 1973, pp. 175-203. For Polish literature on the subject, see: T. Szarota, *Niemcy i Polacy. Wzajemne postrzeganie i stereotypy*, Warszawa 1996; T. Kranz (ed.), *Die Verbrechen des Nationalsozialismus im Geschichtsbewußtsein und in der historischen Bildung in Deutschland und Polen*, Lublin 1998.

748 M. Domarus, op. cit., p. 1802.

749 After: E.C. Król, *Propaganda i indoktrynacja narodowego socjalizmu w Niemczech 1919-1945. Studium organizacji, treści, metod i technik masowego oddziaływania*, Warszawa 1999, p. 542.

politics and in public memory, Poland was treated as a satellite element of the hostile chain of communist states; an ‘occupier’ of the Eastern German lands, guilty of depriving more than 10,000,000 Germans of their homeland. The ‘disgrace’ of Versailles, a dominant motif in the German interwar propaganda, was replaced with the Potsdam ‘injustice’. The refusal to recognise the Oder-Neisse line and the support for loud manifestations of the associations of WWII refugees in Germany filled the public sphere, facilitating the suppression of the responsibility for the wrongs done to Eastern neighbours and the reversal of the roles of victim and perpetrator. Germans turned out to be political victims. Poles were left with nothing more than moral satisfaction. The border of ‘friendship’ with East Germany was impassable and the lack of contact meant the lack of the dialogue of memory.

The complete isolation of Poland as a result of the ideological confrontation disabled personal contacts. Therefore, German knowledge was almost exclusively a result of negative stereotypes, the influence of pre-war literature, propaganda, the education system and family memories. Nazi propaganda would not have been so efficient if it had not referred to the wide repertoire of prejudice and myths preserved in the collective mind.

Libussa Gräfin Fritz-Krockow, who experienced the defeat of the Reich in her Pomeranian estate, presented the widespread opinion of the Russians and Poles. This perception, however, conflicted with her expectation of how conquerors should look. They should be “tall and erect, proudly decked out, with medals and oak-leaf insignia”. She was therefore surprised by the image of “those stooped, ragged conquerors, with their weapons held by lengths of string”, and with a “furtive glance”. However, while she would have had some understanding for the Russians and their “conquerors’ rights”, she could not accept Poles as victors but only as “camp followers.” Therefore, “Their seizure had a different character. There was something cold and furtive about it, almost sneaky, which made it seem far more sinister than naked force.”<sup>750</sup>

The six-year occupation of Poland, the unprecedented predatory policy, pacifications, roundups, street executions, and extermination of the population, particularly the intelligentsia, remained for decades beyond the scope of interest of the Germans. The exhibition about the crimes of the Wehrmacht, which sparked off a great debate in the reunited Germany, covered the period starting from the attack on the Soviet Union. Besides, the term ‘occupation’ (Besatzung) was reserved in the collective memory for the period 1945-1949 in Germany – the division into occupation zones by the victorious powers.

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750 C. von Krockow, *Hour of the women*, Harper Collins Publishers, 1991, p. 96.

Ignorance conduced to the perpetuation of negative stereotypes. The findings of a 1963 study on the attitudes towards the eight Eastern European nations, conducted on 1,300 German students aged 13-15, gave reasons for reflection. Russians and Poles took the top ranking for most negative associations. The “distinguishing” characteristics of Poles listed by the children were: “dirty”, “lazy”, “cruel”, “sneaky”, “mean”, “cheeky”, and “lying” (for comparison, the Hungarians were recognised as “brave”, “passionate”, “musical”). A few years later, students of Hamburg schools who were asked to compare the French, Russians and Poles confirmed the main findings. Poles were classified as “primitive”, “brutal”, “unpredictable”, “boorish”, “cold”, “unfriendly” and “insidious”. Poland was perceived by the youth as a small, insignificant neighbour of Russia. Despite negative associations, Russia existed in German consciousness as a superpower that defeated the great German army. Poles, on the other hand, were attributed all traditional prejudice about the “verminous” Slavs who “need a master”.

The unambiguously negative evaluations of Poles are primarily the result of the isolation of the Eastern Bloc and the lack of contact between the two nations in the first decades after the war. The rejection of Poles “because they are Slavic” and the descriptions of the “abuse of the Germans”, and their “persecution” indicate the effectiveness of the pre-war and war propaganda. The knowledge of German students about Poles was often limited to comments overheard at home: “They have a thieving nature, demanding land that never belonged to them (they want to come up to the Elbe), are dirty and lazy (...). Rural streets in Poland are devoid of all beauty and cleanliness, while when they belonged to Germany, they were clean and decent.”<sup>751</sup>

The absence of Poland and other victims of the extermination and racist policy of the Third Reich in German politics impacted on the political education of the whole postwar generation. The rich sources of school essays about Nazi politics, written by 3,042 students aged 10-23 and gathered by researchers between 1976-1977, confirms the theory that 30 years after the war, the work on memory and the process of dealing with the Nazi past was still in its infancy.<sup>752</sup> Poland was rarely recognised as the first victim of German aggression. Students’ inability to date the war, suggesting it took place in ‘1939-1965’ or ‘1945-1949’, were not rare. The

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751 H.E. Wolf, *Stellungnahmen deutscher Schüler zu osteuropäischen Völkern*; *Kölner Zeitschrift für Soziologie und Sozialpsychologie* 3, 1963, p. 496. Compare also: K.-C. Becker, *Einstellungen deutscher Schüler gegenüber Franzosen, Polen und Russen – Ein Beispiel zum Problem des Ost-West Gefälles der Vorurteile*; *Kölner Zeitschrift für Soziologie und Sozialpsychologie* 4, 1970, pp. 737-755.

752 D. Boßmann (ed.), “*Was ich über Adolf Hitler gehört habe...*” *Folgen eines Tabus: Auszüge aus Schüler-Aufsätzen von heute*, Frankfurt a. M. 1977. Citations from the chapters (among others): *Hitlers Ämter, Politischer Werdegang, Der Zweite Weltkrieg*.

dominating belief was that the war started with the attack on the Soviet Union. There were also opinions that “the attack on Poland was planned well”, “Hitler gave the order to attack France and Poland in 1945” or “He wanted to restore freedom to Germany so he started the war against Poland.” A few believed that the German army had won a great victory over Poland because “Poles thought that German tanks were made of tar paper” and expressed their regret: “Poland, East Germany, Russia etc. used to belong to us. We lost almost a half of it only because Hitler was so greedy.”<sup>753</sup> The authors of the essays admitted that they acquired knowledge of recent German history mostly from their family homes.

Reversing the roles of victim and perpetrator was an element of the strategy of moving facts that did not suit the new identity into oblivion. Poland was perceived as the occupier of the Eastern German lands. The central question of the public narration was not “What have we done to others?” but “What have others done to us?”. WWII refugee associations provided constant tension. In 1956, the Standing Conference of Federal State Education Ministers passed the recommendations for ‘Eastern Studies’ (Ostkunde), which determined German education for years. “The German East must be well-known and familiar to the Germans, particularly the youth. Its achievements must be rooted in German historical consciousness. The Germans should treat these lost lands as their homeland, a part of their nation.”<sup>754</sup>

‘Ostkunde’, as the principle of teaching during the Cold War, cherished the image of the East as a lost paradise, arousing a feeling of injustice caused by Poles. “The East, formerly the land of German hope and German work, which served all the nations and united them in the Western community of fate, has been broken. It has become the border territory of Asia.”<sup>755</sup> Revisionist terminology and treating Western Polish lands as areas under temporary Polish administration did not provoke reflection on the fate of the occupied nations. On the contrary, it referred to the pre-war rhetoric and helped to keep a state of emergency and temporality in the centre of Europe. Both German states and the whole of Europe got involved in the confrontational ideology: West German politics was dominated by anti-communism and East Germany by anti-imperialism. The negation of the postwar reality by West Germany and the communist dogmatism of East Germany and Poland were an insurmountable obstacle to the rapprochement of the conflicted nations. In 1951, only 8% of the West German population opted for the recognition of the Polish border, while 80% were against. It wasn’t until August 1969 that 34% of German citizens recognised the possibility of reconciliation with Poland.

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753 Ibidem.

754 G. Berndt, R. Strecker (eds.), *Polen – ein Schauermärchen oder Gehirnwäsche für Generationen. Geschichtsschreibung und Schulbücher. Beiträge zum Polenbild der Deutschen*, Reinbek b. Hamburg 1971, p. 13.

755 F. Gause, *Deutsch-slawische Schicksalsgemeinschaft*, Würzburg 1953, p. 291.

The debate on German responsibility for the Third Reich politics was hindered by the attitude of the leaders of the associations of the expellees, financially and politically supported by successive Christian Democratic governments. The suffering of those ‘expelled from their homeland’ was calculated on the strength of electoral votes. Successive generations of politicians refer to the ‘Charter of the German Expellees’, proclaimed on 5 August 1950, as an illustration of the desire for peaceful coexistence in Europe. The charter reads, for instance: “Conscious of their responsibility before God and men, conscious of their adherence to the Christian Community of the Occident, conscious of their German origin, and realising the common task of all the nations of Europe, the elected representatives of millions of expellees, having carefully deliberated and searched their conscience, have resolved to make public a Solemn Declaration to the German people and to the entire world (...) We, the expellees, renounce all thought of revenge and retaliation. Our resolution is a solemn and sacred one, in memory of the infinite suffering brought upon mankind, particularly over the past decade.”<sup>756</sup>

In October 2000, during the ceremony commemorating the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the proclamation of the ‘Charter of the German Expellees’, Chancellor Gerhard Schröder welcomed the last living co-author of the Charter, Dr. Rudolf Wagner. Wagner, who was welcomed as one of the heralds of ‘conciliation instead of revenge’, had once executed expulsions before he became a victim himself. As a member of the SS, he used to work for the Resettlement Commission, which, in 1940, according to the Hitler-Stalin act, resettled Germans from Bukowina to the annexed territories of Western Poland. Other co-authors of the Charter were Herbert von Bismarck from ‘Pommersche Landsmannschaft’ (an association for those expelled from Pomerania) and a Baltendeutsche (Baltic German) Axel de Vries. Both belonged to the avant-garde of the German emigrants who ‘expelled themselves’ from their homeland. On 18 October 1939 in *Revaler Zeitung* A. de Vries admitted: “Today the first German steamer with German emigrants is leaving the harbours of our German cities. (...) We are leaving this country because we are called by the German nation, which we are from, which is the same blood as ours, which has a new mission for us. The faith in the German nation and its Führer guides us more than ever and gives meaning to our future and our new tasks.”<sup>757</sup>

None of the politicians referring to the Charter on the occasion of historical anniversaries ever critically looked at this document, which blames “the past

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756 *Erklärungen zur Deutschlandpolitik. Eine Dokumentation von Stellungnahmen, Reden und Entschliefungen des Bundes der Vertriebenen – Vereinigte Landsmannschaften und Landesverbände*, cz. I: 1949-1972, oprac. W. Blumenthal, B. Fassbender, Bonn 1984, p. 17-18. English version: <http://www.bund-der-vertriebenen.de/derbdv/charta-en.php3>

757 After: O. Köhler, *Der Amoklauf der Erika Steinbach. Der Bund der Vertriebene und seine Vergangenheit; Blätter für deutsche und internationale Politik* 10, 2010, p. 62.



decade”, not Nazi Germany, for the war and which demands that the nations of the world be conscious of their responsibility for the fate of German expellees “who have suffered more than all others from the hardship of our times”. The expellees – not the Jews killed in gas chambers, not the prisoners of concentration camps, not the victims of street executions and tortures in occupied Europe – were presented as the main victims of the war. The rights of the Jews, Slavs or Roma to their lands were not mentioned. Yet, the expulsion of Germans was considered a violation of God’s law: “We have lost our homeland. The homeless are strangers on the face of the earth. Almighty God himself placed men in their native land. To separate a man from his native land by force means to kill his soul. We have suffered and experienced this fate. We, therefore, feel competent to demand that the right to our native land be recognised and be realised, as one of the basic rights of man, granted to him by the grace of God”. The postwar reality lacked reflection on the potential for revenge, which the expellees renounced five years after the war. Who would it have been against: the victorious Allies, the nearest neighbours? What would the course of events have been if the world had not resigned from the retaliation against the defeated Germans?<sup>758</sup>

### On the way to the dialogue of memory

Where politics proved helpless, and with the two ideological fronts frozen in hatred, the first steps towards reconciliation came at the initiative of ordinary people. Anonymous actors, without the support of any institution, demonstrated courage, which they drew from “the power of the Christian faith”. The Christian communities of Germany and Poland come closer together on the basis of their common beliefs. Representatives of the pastoral circles of the GDR and the FRG found partners and caring hosts in the editorial team of *Tygodnik Powszechny* magazine, then the Club of Catholic Intellectuals, and people connected with *Znak* and *Więź* magazines. Günter and Brigitte Särchen, exposing themselves to the GDR security police and without the support of their bishops, started to act step by step and to cooperate with the Polish Catholic elites, described in the Stasi documents as “right-wing Catholic functionaries”. German volunteers of reconciliation undertook initiatives to “demonstrate their repentance by their deeds”. They confessed years later that during the ice age of German-Polish relations, they wanted to express their attitude to Polish people on behalf of other Germans. The Särchens perceived their first journey from Magdeburg to Poland

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758 For more, see: M. Brumlik, *Wer Sturm sät. Die Vertreibung der Deutschen*, Berlin 2005; Z. Mazur, *Centrum przeciw Wypędzeniom (1999-2005)*, Poznań 2006.



in 1960 as their “Golgotha” and dreamed of the “salvation” and “resurrection” of both nations waiting at the end of it.<sup>759</sup>

Interpersonal contacts, little steps taken by the members of Pax Christi, Bensberger Kreis, the Action Reconciliation Service for Peace (ARSP), who were overwhelmed with a sense of guilt, led to reconciliation in dialogue. In 1958, a few years before the letter sent by Polish bishops to their German counterparts, Dr. Lothar Kreyssig, the founder of ARSP, appealed to Germans: “We still do not have peace yet, mainly due to the lack of sufficient reconciliation. (...) Let us ask the nations who have suffered violence from us to allow us, as a sign of reconciliation, to do something good with our hands and using our resources. Let us start with Poland, Russia and Israel, the countries to which we have done the most harm.”<sup>760</sup> Before the first groups came to Poland to “face the burden of their past”, German pastoral circles took the first step “inwards”, to the “internal conversion and reflection”.

This was the time when the idea of ‘pilgrimages’ to Auschwitz, Majdanek and other camps emerged; another initiative was the Anna Morawska Seminar. Erich Busse, a minister of the Presbyterian Church and an organiser of peace services in autumn 1989 in Berlin, was 18 years old when in 1968 he went to Poland for the first time. He was moved by the kindness of the people and their lack of hatred. He learned internal autonomy from the history of Poland, which he taught both to himself and his countrymen. Before he became one of the founders of the Peaceful Revolution in East Germany, he had asserted at the site of the former Auschwitz concentration camp: “To me, there is no difference between the barbed wire in the concentration camp and the barbed wire at the Berlin Wall. But this is logical and fair. It was the Germans who first surrounded other people with barbed wire. And barbed wire returned to Germany, as the war did. And now we are surrounded by a barbed wire in our own country.”<sup>761</sup>

Another milestone in the relationship with Poland was a memorandum entitled ‘The Situation of the Expellees and the Relationship of the German People to their Eastern Neighbours’ published by the Evangelical Church in Germany (EKD) on 1 October 1965. In his interview, Archbishop Bolesław Kominek said that “the memorandum of the Evangelical Church courageously initiated a dialogue and encouraged us to write our letter.” The evangelical document read: “Only the acceptance of God’s dispensation opens the way to new tasks. However, this acceptance must be expressed by the expellees together with the whole nation,

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759 G. and B. Särchen, *Adres: Mietek Pszon, Kraków*, in: *Polacy i Niemcy pół wieku później; księga pamiątkowa dla Mieczysława Pszona*, ed. W. Pięciak, Kraków 1996, p. 36.

760 F. Magirius, “*Znaki Pokuty*” – *próba bilansu*, in: *Polacy i Niemcy pół wieku później*, op. cit., p. 44.

761 E. Busse, *Moja Polska*, in: *Polacy i Niemcy pół wieku później*, op. cit., p. 66.

guided by the solidarity of one, great community of sin and responsibility.” The authors of the memorandum appealed to the German “duty to keep peace” and acknowledged the expulsion of Poles and other nations.<sup>762</sup> Although the text referred to elementary rights to recognise the realities of postwar Europe, neither politicians nor society were ready for such pragmatics. The document of the Evangelical Church triggered a heated discussion in Germany. There were public calls to withdraw from the Church, the authors of the memorandum were offended and threatened with death, and there were also arson attacks. The letters by the members of the Federation of Expellees to the Evangelical Church, gathered by Eberhard Stammler, expressed anger and indignation. One of the authors, a religion teacher, wrote: “I am asking who are these hacks that want to make themselves judges of our bitter pain, talk about ‘God’s anger’ with naivety bordering on sheer arrogance, and try to prove it scientifically and theologically?”<sup>763</sup> Marion Gräfin Dönhoff, who defended the right of the members of the Evangelical Church to express their opinion on Ostpolitik, aptly summarised the objectives of the memorandum: “it wants to destroy illusions, determine the factors of which one should remember and analyse them, and make us realise certain moral requirements”. This necessity, *Die Zeit* commented, resulted from the fact that parties, politicians and associations of the expellees had not yet performed the tasks that were appointed to them.<sup>764</sup>

Polish public opinion is not aware of the reaction of German Catholics to the letter by Polish bishops from 18 November 1965. In 1966, during the 81<sup>st</sup> Katholikentag (Catholics’ Day) in Bamberg, a ‘Declaration on the Exchange of Letters between the Polish and the German Bishops’ was published. It read for instance: “German Catholics, who demand respect for the rights of their nation (...) solemnly pledge that they will do everything in their power to ensure that the German people respect the right to national existence of the Polish people. We are painfully aware that, in the past, German politicians treated these rights of the Polish people as an object of trade in someone else’s interest or their own. If, however, such thoughts revive in our nation, we will immediately and vigorously oppose them.”<sup>765</sup> The support of some representatives of the expellees was the modest achievement of this initiative.

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762 After: E. Heller, *1965 – rok przełomu*, in: *Polacy i Niemcy pół wieku później*, op. cit., p. 316.

763 Ibidem, p. 318.

764 After: H. Hild, *Jakie było oddziaływanie Memoriału Niemieckiego Kościoła Ewangelickiego (EKD)?* in: *Od nienawiści do przyjaźni. O problemach polsko-niemieckiego sąsiedztwa*, F. Pflüger and W. Lipscher (eds.), Warszawa 1994, p. 12.

765 *Auf Dein Wort hin*, 81. Deutscher Katholikentag Bamberg 1966, ZdK, Paderborn 1966, p. 189.

Without the small group of people who shared hope and built the foundations of understanding, the German-Polish political rapprochement would not have been possible. The turning point, initiated by the social democratic government of Willy Brandt, was a treaty between West Germany and Poland and the symbolic gesture of humility by the German Chancellor: kneeling down at the monument to victims of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising. Brandt later confessed: “At the abyss of German history and the weight of millions of murder victims, I did what humans do when words fail them. Now, twenty years later, I cannot express it better than one of the commentators did: ‘Then he kneels, the one who doesn’t need to, for all those who do need to but don’t kneel there – because they dare not or cannot or cannot dare’.”<sup>766</sup>

The Peace of Westphalia of 1648 decreed “perpetual oblivion and amnesty” as a prerequisite of peace.<sup>767</sup> Does such a principle promote democracy and social peace? How do political decision-makers, researchers and intellectual elites deal with the Westphalia message? In the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, a group of pacifists wondered how to effectively oppose all war. In response to World War I, German reformers of the educational system designed a project of a “new education of new people”. However, the idea of the reconciliation of nations through education turned out to be a utopia. The activity of the World Association for Education Renewal, founded in 1927, failed in the confrontation with the massive agitation of the Nazi propaganda.

German education and memory of the Nazi policy towards Poland reached the public opinion late and with great difficulties. The first official commemoration of what had been done to Poles was as late as 1979, on the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the outbreak of the war. Many ceremonies were held, for which social democratic politicians set the tone. Politics of memory was an element of the Eastern policy; opening the door to the East had to lead to noticing the history of the neighbour. The Presidium of the SPD issued a statement on the occasion of the anniversary that read: “When it comes to the outbreak of the war, the guilt is historically obvious. (...) The German nation paid for the crimes of National Socialism with millions of victims and the division of its homeland. Europe was also divided. (...) No compensation can really give satisfaction to what has been committed against millions of people in the German name. Without the magnanimity of tormented nations and the forgiveness of those who have survived hell, there would have been

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766 W. Brandt, *Przyklęknięcie w Warszawie*, trans. Ł. Gałęcki, in: *Od nienawiści do przyjaźni*, op. cit., p. 72.

767 Christian Meier, in his latest book, *Das Gebot zu Vergessen und die Unabweisbarkeit des Erinnerns. Vom öffentlichen Umgang mit schlimmer Vergangenheit*, München, 2010, refers to many examples from Middle Ages and modern times when peace treaties and regulations that ended military conflicts included an order to forget and grant amnesty.

no beginning for the German nation.”<sup>768</sup> On the eve of the anniversary, Chancellor Helmut Schmidt delivered a speech broadcast by the television channel ZDF, in which he spoke of the moral debt and obligations of the future generations to the Polish nation. *Bergedorfer Zeitung* quoted the chancellor: “1 September is a date that influences our entire life. (...) There is no other event from which we can learn so much.”

President Karl Carsters, a Christian Democrat, also gave a speech on television and radio. However, he cared more about honouring German war veterans than Poland. The speech built up the image of the war as a product of blind fate, and soldiers on the fronts of World War II as the defenders of the homeland. “Germans burdened themselves with great guilt. (...) There is an agreement in our nation in this matter. However, it would seem unfair to me if I did not also mention a division of views in our nation on a certain subject. Some people, particularly those of the younger generation, are not ready to ascribe honourable ways of thinking and acting to those who fought and suffered on fronts and died by the millions. They lack the experience of internal conflict faced by German soldiers at the time. Most of these soldiers believed that they fought for their homeland but also knew or felt that by doing so they supported the system of lawlessness with which they did not identify themselves. Those who lost their lives deserve to be commemorated with honour as well as many German civilians who lost their lives in their country. (...) I believe, however, that we should not only look at our country. The world today is filled with oppression and violence. People are maltreated. We cannot be indifferently silent about it.”<sup>769</sup>

On the occasion of the anniversary, the Evangelical Church of West Germany, together with the Union of Evangelical Churches of East Germany issued a statement entitled “A Word for Peace” about German responsibility for the war and its consequences and an appeal for détente.<sup>770</sup> The statement by West German Catholic bishops invoked the shared responsibility of the entire German nation and included a self-critique of the Church. The Presidium of Pax Christi went further, referring to the not very glorious words of the German bishops who had asked Catholic soldiers to sacrifice everything to fulfil their “duties” towards the Reich and Führer.<sup>771</sup>

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768 *Erklärung des SPD Präsidiums zum 40. Jahrestag des Ausbruchs des Zweiten Weltkrieges; Sozialdemokratischer Pressedienst* 167, 31.08.1979.

769 K. Carsters, *Bundesrepublik hat sich der Friedenspolitik verschrieben; Der Tagesspiegel* 1.09.1979.

770 *Gemeinsame Kundgebung der evangelischen Kirche in Ost und West anlässlich des Kriegsbeginns vor 40 Jahren; Deutsches Allgemeines Sonntagsblatt* 26.08.1979, p. 9.

771 *Die Erklärung der deutschen katholischen Bischöfe und des Pax-Christi-Präsidiums zum 40. Jahrestag des Beginns des Zweiten Weltkrieges; Frankfurter Rundschau* 4.09.1979, p. 10.

The German memory of the war has undergone deep metamorphosis for the last 70 years. It has become an integrated element of the democratic identity of the reunited German society. This process involves both the political and symbolic sphere. The majority of the representatives of the associations of the expelled co-created German-Polish partnerships of cities, communes, schools and parishes. The new situation does not mean that awareness and memory of German aggression and the occupation of Poland no longer antagonise the two nations. Pluralism and democratisation of memory are a relatively new phenomenon for Poles. It is hard for them to accept the fact that there may be discrepancies between collective memory and individual images of the past. The period when there was one obligatory canon of perceiving the past is over. For instance, Poland's reckoning with its own past demonstrates differences in implementing politics of memory with respect to German and Russian aggression.

The plurality of interpretations and visions poses a challenge for the authorities and intellectual elites on both sides of the border. The experience of the last 20 years demonstrates that there is no universal recipe for shaping the culture of memory. It appears that educational effects are disproportional to the huge effort by various German NGOs in realising hundreds of programmes of meetings between the Polish and German youth to help them learn about German-Polish history. The 1994 study shows that visits to concentrations camps do not always increase young people's sensitivity. 83% of young Germans said that concentration camps as sites of memory were important for general education, but only 7% admitted that the visit prompted them to reflection.<sup>772</sup>

Although reunited Germany and democratic Poland did much to increase and develop knowledge of the recent history of their mutual relations, the effects of these efforts are still highly unsatisfactory. The recent study by Jörg-Dieter Gauger demonstrates some deficiencies and shortcomings.<sup>773</sup> The author, a coordinator of 'Arbeitsgruppe Gesellschaftspolitik' (Working Group on Social Policy), Deputy Head of the Department of Scientific Services in the Konrad Adenauer Foundation and a professor of Bonn University writes about deficits in school textbooks. He explicitly asserts that "graduates of German schools are usually illiterate with regard to knowledge of Eastern European countries." However, one would be wrong to think that the author laments the level of knowledge of German students about Poland. His main subject of concern is not the lack of education about the Nazi policy on Polish lands but the fact that "eight centuries of German presence in the East and its historical role have been crossed out from our collective memory.

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772 After: R. Barlog-Scholz, *Historisches Wissen über die nationalsozialistischen Konzentrationslager bei den deutschen Jugendlichen*, Frankfurt a. M. 1994.

773 J.-D. Gauger, *Deutsche und Polen im Unterricht. Eine Untersuchung aktueller Lehrpläne/Richtlinien und Schulbücher für Geschichte*, Schwabach 2008.

German schooling facilitates the decrease in this knowledge”. The author would like the subject of German colonisation of the East to be obligatory “in all types of schools.”<sup>774</sup>

Democratic transformations in Central and Eastern Europe had more consequences than the end of the Cold War, which benefited Germans the most. Having regained democracy, Poland and other countries of the former Soviet Bloc became new, important actors in the sphere of the politics of memory. Sixty years after the war, when the young German generation wants to be proud of the achievements of their country and look to the future without complexes, sovereign Poland can finally speak aloud about the most painful and dramatic chapter of its history. Non-simultaneity and asymmetry of remembering and the need to tell the truth about the crimes, their consequences and the necessity of redress became a source of political conflicts, which have influenced contemporary relations between the two nations.

Politics of memory slowly kept up with the difficult politics of normalisation. The calendar of German holidays only recently found a place for the Eastern neighbour. The acknowledgement of the anniversary of 1 September and its recognition in public opinion was a logical consequence of a complete reorientation of the German-Polish relations. As there was no taboo for various social, academic and cultural initiatives, politics could not remain indifferent about the most difficult questions.

Chancellor Kohl, in his speech on the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the outbreak of the war and on the eve of the reunification of Germany, still used the old rhetoric. Helmut Kohl’s speech on 1 September 1989 in the Bundestag was in the transitional period, when Poland already had a democratically elected government but the fate

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774 After: T. Strobel, *Deficyty w nauczaniu historii w Niemczech*, *Dialog* 83, 2008, pp. 69-71. Culture and education were always the apple of the eye of the Federation of the Expellees. The activities of the federation were systematically supported by West German authorities. Federal and state authorities are obliged to care about the cultural tradition of former German lands, according to Paragraph 96 of the Federal Law on Refugees and Exiles of 1953. The SPD/Green coalition, when they came to power in 1998, changed the profile of research and museum institutions dealing with the cultural heritage in the East. They were released from the influence of the associations of the expellees and opened to contacts and cooperation with Eastern neighbours. The new policy met with strong protests by the organisations for the expellees and Christian Democratic politicians, as Helmut Kohl’s government had increased financial support for the culture of the expellees from 3 million DM (1.5 EUR) to €23 million in 1998. These resources were then used to create 30 job positions in offices for culture in the associations for the expellees. In 2000, the new government cut the aid to €20 million and in 2004 the budget decreased to €14.8 million. After: J. Lepiarz, *Kwitujący krajobraz pamięci. Rząd Schrödera wspiera badania nad historią Niemców w Europie Środkowej i Wschodniej*; *Dialog* 68, 2004, pp. 89-90.

of Germany and Europe was still uncertain. Listening to the Chancellor's speech, it would be hard to determine when the war had begun. The outbreak of the war was presented as the beginning of German misfortunes. Poland was low on the list in the hierarchy of victims. The words of mourning and sorrow at the suffering of innocent people were directed primarily to the "victims inside our own nation": "We express our sorrow at the victims of lawlessness and oppression, which the Nazi dictatorship brought to the Germans and to the world; at the innocent victims on the fronts of war and homeland; at the victims of expulsions."<sup>775</sup> The West German Chancellor condemned the Ribbentrop-Molotov pact as the "cynical game of two dictatorships" and admitted, in the middle of his speech, that Poles had been done a great harm "in the name of Germany and from the German hands". However, he also immediately formulated the conditions of reconciliation, which included "full truth" about the fact that "over two million Germans, innocent people, lost their lives as a result of refuge and expulsion. The loss of their homeland left deep wounds in many millions of our countrymen." The entire, long speech in the Bundestag gave the impression that Poland was only a distant backdrop of the political campaign of the government.

On 1 September 1999 in Germany, the anniversary of the invasion of Poland coincided with great historical debates and the government moving to Berlin. Poland had just become a member of NATO, in Germany nearly a million people visited the exhibition on the crimes of the Wehrmacht, and German economic institutions were preparing a fund to compensate victims of forced labour in the Third Reich. The conditions that emerged allowed Martin Menzel, the sailor who had fired the first shots from the battleship *Schleswig-Holstein* in the early morning of 1 September 1939, to ask for forgiveness; defenders and aggressors shook hands in a gesture of reconciliation.

Through common accents in their ceremonies, sovereign Poland and reunited Germany sent a signal of willingness to reach an agreement and reconcile. German President Johannes Rau, who had participated in Polish anniversary ceremonies at the cemetery in Palmiry ten years earlier, met Polish President Aleksander Kwasniewski on the bridge joining Frankfurt (Oder) with Slubice to signalise that all divisions had been overcome. In his Westerplatte speech, Rau found the right words to address Poles, who, due to their tragic past, were very interested in building good neighbourly relations. On 1 September, the Berlin Philharmonic featured Krzysztof Penderecki's *Polish Requiem*. The Polish and German Presidents of the Parliament, Maciej Plazynski and Wolfgang Thierse, delivered speeches before the concert.

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775 *Bulletin* 2.09.1989, pp. 733-740.



The culture of memory in the 21<sup>st</sup> century focuses on anniversary rituals. The ubiquity of new media, developing specialisation and professionalization of social engineering with respect to public ceremonies, all influence the character, content and form of the staging of memory. The rhythm of the commemoration of the war is marked by great anniversaries. Therefore, the year 2009 featured anniversaries of important events for Germany and Europe and was a special occasion for celebration. The jubilees that fell in the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century overlapped: the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the outbreak of World War II, the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Federal Republic of Germany and the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the fall of the Berlin Wall. They all symbolised the fates of Germany and Poland: the war of attrition against Poland and ‘Solidarity’, the Polish independence movement that largely contributed to the reunification of Germany; tragic and happy moments. Thus, the direction and screenplay of the celebrations and the balance of emphasis in official speeches were the subject of lengthy negotiations and preparation. Were Polish expectations satisfied?

Different narrative communities came to the fore. For the first time, Germany commemorated the anniversary of the outbreak of the war as a partner of Poland within the European Union. Many celebrations accompanying the anniversary were cooperatively prepared by both sides. For German authorities, it was important to remove the negative atmosphere resulting from the dispute over the Centre Against Expulsions. Chancellor Angela Merkel attended anniversary ceremonies in Westerplatte together with Polish authorities. She found the right words to communicate the truth: “No country has ever suffered as much suffering in its history as Poland under German occupation. (...) Here in Westerplatte I commemorate the fate of the Poles who suffered under criminal German occupation. I commemorate the Holocaust of European Jews (...) I bow my head before the victims. We know that we cannot undo the atrocities of the Second World War. The scars will always remain visible but it is our duty to accept responsibility for what happened. In this spirit, Europe has transformed itself from a continent of horror and violence into a continent of freedom and peace. (...) In the process, we Germans have never forgotten this: that Germany’s partners in the East and West have smoothed this path through willingness for reconciliation. They have extended the hand of reconciliation to us Germans. Yes, it is a miracle that in this year we do not exclusively think back to the abysses of European history seventy years ago. It is a miracle that we can also think of the happy days (...)”<sup>776</sup>

Although the federal government did not organise any official commemoration, many wide-range initiatives were launched. Frank-Walter Steinmeier, the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Vice-Chancellor, published a text together with his Polish



counterpart, Radosław Sikorski, on the occasion of 1 September. Both ministers referred to the past but also highlighted the significance of mutual reconciliation and agreement for the benefit of the future.<sup>777</sup> Alongside ritual ceremonies, there were also events whose importance is not to be underestimated. One of them was an exhibition in the German Historical Museum in Berlin, commissioned by the FRG government: ‘Germans and Poles – 1.9.39 – Despair and Hope’. The exhibition was opened by the Minister for Culture and the Media, Bernd Neumann, and his Polish counterpart.<sup>778</sup> The exhibition was prepared by Polish and German historians. This significant project was intended to disseminate knowledge of World War II and its consequences in German society, particularly among the youth. When, in 2004, a German magazine called *Geo Special* conducted a poll about mutual German-Polish relations, it turned out that Poles considered the outbreak of World War II to be the most important historical event of the last century while Germans put the reunification of Germany first and the end of World War II second.<sup>779</sup> Thus, the organisers of the exhibition documented the attack by Nazi Germany on Poland not as the ‘campaign of 18 days’ but as military aggression and cultural war waged against the Slavic race. The exhibition presents the war in the background of the Polish-German relations that had preceded its outbreak and acknowledges its consequences. It destroys certain myths and fills in the blank spots.

On 25 August 2009, the two Episcopacies signed a joint statement calling for cherishing memory in the spirit of truth and reconciliation and directing attention to the collectively built future. For the first time, all German media devoted a lot of attention not only to the outbreak and the origin of the war, but also to the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact and its consequences for the whole region of Central and Eastern Europe. The German channel Phoenix TV broadcast a documentary entitled ‘The Forced War – 1 September 1939’, as part of the series ‘Our century’. Public Television broadcast the ceremony in Gdansk as well as its own program: ‘The attack on Europe – how World War II began.’ Public radio transmitted many accounts and reports concerning the origin and the outbreak of war.

Recent years have demonstrated that it is impossible to leave the shadow of the past without a dialogue of memory. Respect for a neighbour and a partner needs reciprocity: listening and understanding. It is a requirement for human dignity. The foreign policy of a state or an institute of memory cannot order or teach wise memory. Reconciliation through listening to the other side must come

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777 The text was published in *Gazeta Wyborcza* and *Süddeutsche Zeitung* 1.09.2009 (*Die Zukunft hat schon begonnen*).

778 For a detailed review see: B. Kerski, *Pamięć i refleksja. Niemieckie Muzeum Historyczne w Berlinie prezentuje wystawę “Niemcy i Polacy – 1 września 1939 – Otchłań i nadzieja”*; *Dialog* 88, 2009, pp. 10-11.

779 *Poznajcie sąsiada!*; *Dialog* 68, 2004, p. 9.

from the people. It is an individual act, as the initiatives of lay Christian elites were. It involves understanding and compassion for the suffering and injustice of other nations in respect of historical truth. The function of memory is important: why we remember and what for, as there is no such thing as good or bad memory – there are only good or bad motives for reviving it.<sup>780</sup> The effects of the work on memory depend on how open and civil a society is; how much it is prepared for a partner debate on the past that cannot be forgotten. Centuries of experience suggest moderate optimism. As the British historian Eric J. Hobsbawm aptly observed: “Unfortunately, we hardly ever learn anything from history. Either because people are too stupid and do not know enough or because they do not want to know. However, even if we do learn something from history, the future will be different from what we expected. We can conclude at most that the 21<sup>st</sup> century entitles us to be optimistic to some extent. If humankind got through such a century, it can presumably bear everything. Therefore, despite catastrophes, the world is changing for better. I may not be right, though.”<sup>781</sup>

As a national community, the Germans wanted to undertake various roles in the past, in Europe and in the world. The future can confirm the moderate optimism of the British researcher only when the Germans, as well as other nations, limit their roles to only one – the one that is defined by the community of responsibility.

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780 An important voice in the debate, see: M. Berek, *Gutes oder schlechtes Erinnern? Die Notwendigkeit des Politischen in der Erinnerungskultur*, in: H.-H. Hahn, H. Hein-Kircher, A. Kochanowska-Nieborak (eds.), *Erinnerungskultur und Versöhnungskitsch*, Marburg 2008, pp. 71-85.

781 E.J. Hobsbawm, an interview for *Die Zeit* 10.07.2003.

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# Zusammenfassung

Der Nationalsozialismus ist zwölf Jahre lang das ideologische Fundament der Politik des Hitler-Reiches gewesen. Auseinandersetzungen über die Erinnerung an ihn beschäftigen die Deutschen nun schon fünfundsechzig Jahre. Dieser lange Zeitraum der Befassung mit der Vergangenheit, der Akzeptierung oder der Zurückweisung der Darstellung der für Europa und für die Deutschen selbst höchst dramatischen Geschichte der Neuzeit wird oft die zweite Geschichte des Nazismus genannt. Die Geschichte der Erinnerung an die kollektiven Vorstellungen, an ihre Evolution und an ihre Rolle im Prozess der Herausbildung einer eigenen Identität wird in den Humanwissenschaften nach Pierre Nora als *histoire au second degré* bezeichnet.<sup>782</sup>

Die Untersuchung der Erinnerung der Deutschen ist ein Forschungsgegenstand verschiedener wissenschaftlicher Disziplinen, der Kunst, der Medien und der Politik; denn zum ersten Male in der Geschichte vollzieht sich auf offener Bühne eine Abrechnung eines Volkes mit seiner eigenen Geschichte. Hier sind wir Zeugen eines spezifischen Experiments, bei dem die jeweiligen Generationen der Deutschen an einem Prozess beteiligt sind, der voller Widersprüche ist und bei dem sie mit sich selbst wie auch mit der Außenwelt konfrontiert werden. Auf den Charakter dieses Prozesses wirken u. a. die Generationenfolge sowie die Veränderungen der innenpolitischen Gegebenheiten und der internationalen Konstellation ein.

Die Besonderheit dieses Phänomens und die Faszination, die es auf immer weitere Kreise der mit ihm befassten Forscher und Medien ausübt, erklären sich u. a. aus der Tatsache, dass wir trotz zahlreichen Kriegen und barbarischen Akten, die sich in der Geschichte der Menschheit ereignet haben, keinen allgemein akzeptierten Maßstab haben wie etwa das Metermaß von Sèvres bei Paris, nach dem man beurteilen kann, wie die Gemeinschaft, in deren Namen es zu den Gewalttaten und Verbrechen gekommen ist, sich mit dem angerichteten Bösen auseinandersetzen sollte, welche Untaten sie wie lange in ihrem Gedächtnis tragen sollte und welche Formen der sichtbaren Erinnerung ihr zugestanden werden können. Längst haben sich die Vorstellungen und Erwartungen, dass die

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782 Zur Verbreitung dieses Begriffs in der polnischen wissenschaftlichen Literatur hat das internationale Projekt des Centrum Badań Historycznych Polskiej Akademii Nauk w Berlinie (Zentrum der Polnischen Akademie der Wissenschaften für Geschichtsforschung in Berlin) Polnisch-deutsche Erinnerungsstätten beigetragen, das auf Initiative von Prof. Dr. hab. Hans-Henning Hahn und Prof. Dr. hab. Robert Traby unternommen worden ist.

Abkehr vom Nationalsozialismus gemäß der religiösen Devise: Schuldbekentnis, Reue, Wiedergutmachung, Verzeihung und Versöhnung verlaufen sollte, als eine idealistische Utopie erwiesen. Wie sollte man den verbrecherischen Charakter des Nazi-Systems darstellen, wie über ihn debattieren? Wie kann man nach Auschwitz noch ein Deutscher, ja ein deutscher Patriot sein? Wie sollte man sich zu einer Schuld bekennen, die einen auf immer und ewig stigmatisiert? Wie kann man eine Demokratie auf den Trümmern der Diktatur und ohne eine gesicherte Mehrheit überzeugter Demokraten errichten?

Die Deutschen und ihre führenden Politiker haben 1945 vor Herausforderungen gestanden, deren Charakter und Ausmaß niemand hätte voraussehen können. Die lange Strecke ihrer Flucht vor der Geschichte und ihrer Rückwendung ist von Anfang bis heute ein Feld für Auseinandersetzungen gewesen, deren eigentliche Natur sich nie wird restlos bestimmen lassen. Denn dieser Weg hat sein Ende noch nicht erreicht. Der Evolutionsprozess der Gedächtniskultur und -politik der Deutschen dauert an. Ihn kennzeichnen Gegensätze subjektiver und objektiver Natur, die seinen Verlauf von Anfang an begleitet haben:

Schon in der ersten Phase der semantischen Definition der Grundkategorien auf dem Gebiet der Abrechnung mit der Vergangenheit haben sich leidenschaftliche Auseinandersetzungen ergeben. Alle Begriffe wie Täter, Opfer, Schuld und Sühne, Entnazifizierung, Stunde Null, Überwindung der Vergangenheit, Niederlage und Befreiung haben die öffentliche Meinung polarisiert. Keiner der Begriffe hat sich als zureichend erwiesen, für keinen hat man einen gemeinsamen Nenner finden können – die Scheidelinien in der deutschen öffentlichen Meinung lassen sich mit einem einzigen Kriterium nicht erfassen.

Ein Abgrund hatte sich aufgetan zwischen dem unterdrückten, verdrängten oder unbewussten Gefühl der Schuld und der Verantwortung der deutschen Gesellschaft einerseits und den Erwartungen der Einzelpersonen, Gruppen, Nationen und Staaten, die der Politik des Dritten Reiches zum Opfer gefallen waren, andererseits. Die einen strebten nach Vergessen und der Hinwendung zu neuem Aufbau – die anderen verlangten eine Bestrafung der Täter und Mitgefühl für ihr Leiden und ihre Verluste. Die Gefühle der Opfer und die der Täter lassen sich nicht auf einen gemeinsamen Nenner bringen. Im Jahre 1945 war das Hitler-Reich untergegangen, nur das Volk war bestehen geblieben und musste sich dem begründeten Vorwurf der ganzen Welt stellen, den es in der Geschichte bis dahin nicht gegeben hatte: Völkermord.

Diejenigen, von denen man eine Ehrung der Opfer und Mitgefühl für sie erwartete, blieben ratlos. Bis dahin hatte man von der Verhaltenskultur in Trauerfällen immer eine Konzentration auf die eigene Einbuße und auf die Kriegsoffer verstanden. Der Tod für das Vaterland gab der nationalen Identität ihren Sinn. Die Geschichte kennt bisher keinen Fall der Trauer eines Volkes oder

Staates, in dessen Namen die Verbrechen begangen worden sind, über die Opfer der anderen Seite. Wie sollte man seine Trauer über den Verlust gemeinsamer Werte zum Ausdruck bringen? Wie sollte man die beweinen, die man vorher aus der Gemeinschaft der Deutschen ausgeschlossen und zu Untermenschen erklärt hatte? Schließlich: Hatten die Deutschen ein Recht, ihre eigenen Verluste und Einbußen zu beklagen? Die historische Erfahrung mit Trauerbekundungen zeigt, dass man diese leicht manipulieren kann und dass man mit ihrer Hilfe die Massen mobilisieren und Abwehrreaktionen auslösen kann.

Das Gedenken der verbrecherischen Natur und Politik des Nationalsozialismus wird charakterisiert durch die ständig gegebene Asymmetrie zwischen der offiziellen Politik des deutschen Staates mit den dort üblichen Riten gegenüber der Vergangenheit und der individuellen Sinnggebung, zwischen der politischen Korrektheit mit dem Gebot der Moral und dem privaten Bedürfnis des Vergessens. Dieser Dualismus ist eine Quelle von Spannungen und Konflikten.

Die Debatten, die in den beiden deutschen Staaten wie auch im wiedervereinigten Deutschland zum Thema der Vergangenheit ausgetragen worden sind, lassen deutlich erkennen, dass der einzelne Bürger keine Rechtfertigung der Diktatur versucht, sondern sich allein für sein eigenes Leben interessiert. Die Strategien, mit denen die Zeugen und Statisten des Dritten Reiches sich von dem Vorwurf ihrer Beteiligung am Nazi-System zu befreien suchen, ergeben sich aus dem Wunsch, ihrer Stigmatisierung als Menschen mit einer falschen Biographie, die in einer falschen Zeit gelebt haben, zu entgehen.

Bis heute ist die Frage nach dem Preis, den man für den Aufbau eines neuen Staates zu zahlen hätte, sowohl unter den Deutschen als auch unter den Bürgern anderer Staaten, ungelöst. Die Meinungsverschiedenheiten berühren die Grundsätze des Aufbaus demokratischer Strukturen in Westdeutschland nach dem Kriege. Ein Teil der deutschen Intellektuellen sieht in dem kollektiven Schweigen nach 1945 ein Element einer erfolgreichen politischen Strategie, ein unentbehrliches Instrument bei der Geburt der deutschen Demokratie.

Die kollektive Erinnerung ist einer der wichtigsten Aktivposten bei der Legitimation der politischen Struktur eines Staates und bei der Herausbildung seiner Identität. Die deutsche Nachkriegsdemokratie brauchte eine positive Identität, die es den Bürgern ermöglichte, sich auf der Basis der Werte eines demokratischen Staates zu integrieren. Auf welche Vergangenheit aber sollte man sich berufen, wenn Völkermord und Vernichtungskrieg in die Geschichte der letzten zwölf Jahre eingetragen worden waren? Eine negative Erinnerung war in den ersten Nachkriegsjahren mit der Schaffung eines positiven Bildes des neuen Staates unvereinbar. Entgegen den Erwartungen einiger Idealisten wurden nicht die geistige Erneuerung und eine moralische Gewissensregung der Deutschen die *conditio sine qua non* für die Errichtung der Fundamente des demokratischen

Staates, sondern – im Gegenteil: Der Staat, seine Institutionen und die bürgerliche Werteordnung schufen die Grundlage für die Freiheit im Innern und eröffneten eine Möglichkeit, der Geschichte ins Gesicht zu sehen und sich mit ihr abzufinden.

Auf der Frage, vor der sich viele Intellektuelle fanden, wie man die geistige Substanz der Deutschen wiederherstellen sollte, lastete von Anfang an eine Ambivalenz von Geist und Politik. Zum Ausdruck brachte sie in eindrucksvoller Weise der Schriftsteller Günter Kunert, der auf der Suche nach seinem Bild Deutschlands schrieb: Das Wort Deutschland kommt schwer über meine Lippen, es verursacht ein pelziges Gefühl im Mund. ... Die Bezeichnung erweist sich als eine Art Gefäß, das mit Widersprüchlichkeiten, alten und neuen, vollgestopft ist. Untrennbar vermengt sie Heinrich Heine und Heinrich Himmler, Weimar und Buchenwald, grandiose Meisterwerke der Kunst und zugleich den Tod als Meister aus Deutschland. Reich an Künstlern, reicher an Verdrängungskünstlern.<sup>783</sup>

Der Außerordentlichkeit des Nationalsozialismus entspricht nicht eine Außergewöhnlichkeit der Erinnerung. Die gemeinsame Erinnerung bestimmt nämlich weniger das Minimum des Inhalts als das Maximum der Symbolik. Die Deutschen konnten nicht plötzlich wie Phoenix aus der Asche wiedererstehen als Bürger mit dem Bewusstsein ihrer Verantwortung für die politischen Konsequenzen der verbrecherischen Politik des Dritten Reiches. Eine Abrechnung mit der eigenen Verwicklung in das Nazi-System erforderte vor allem die Kenntnis und das Verstehen der Entstehung, der Entwicklung und der Konsequenzen des rassistischen Systems. Dazu war eine gewisse zeitliche Distanz erforderlich, ein Wechsel der Generationen, eine neue Sprache in der Erziehung und ein neues Bewusstsein. Die Schwierigkeit, mit dem Gewicht der Verantwortung in einem demokratischen Staat fertig zu werden, ergibt sich aus der Notwendigkeit einer tieferen Reflexion, damit die Überwindung des Unrechtsstaates nicht die Grundsätze des Rechtes verletzt und die Demokratisierung der antidemokratischen Strukturen der Gesellschaft nicht die Wertschätzung der Demokratie nimmt.

Die Außenwelt erwartet eine Harmonisierung, Eindeutigkeit und die Vereinheitlichung des Erinnerungsbildes der Jahre 1933 – 1945, die auf dem Schicksal Europas und der Welt gelastet haben, wenn auch die Erinnerung in der Demokratie heterogen ist. Die Kultur der gemeinsamen Erinnerung ist im demokratischen Staat eine Streitkultur. Die Deutschen selbst sind sich nicht sicher, ob sie Akrobaten sind oder Meister der historischen Abrechnung mit der Vergangenheit.

Zu einer ständigen Belebung und Pluralisierung der Erinnerung trägt quantitativ wie qualitativ das Anwachsen der wissenschaftlichen Literatur und der

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783 G. Kunert, *Notgemeinschaft (Dezember 1988)*, in: F. Barthélemy, L. Winckler (Hrsg.), *Mein Deutschland findet sich in keinem Atlas. Schriftsteller aus beiden deutschen Staaten über ihr nationales Selbstverständnis*, Frankfurt a. M. 1990, S. 33.

veröffentlichten Erinnerungen sowie – im Rahmen der jeweiligen Archivbestände – der Dokumentationsquellen bei. In den speziellen Untersuchungen zum Holocaust hat sich die bisherige Formel der Debatte über das Verbrechen erschöpft. In den neunziger Jahren hat sich gezeigt, dass die Dichotomie der Bewertungen und der Interpretationen der Verbrechen im Sinne einer schematischen Einteilung in Intentionalisten und Strukturalisten den Forschungsergebnissen vieler wissenschaftlicher Disziplinen sowie den weitläufigen Interessen in der Literatur, der Kunst und den Medien nicht gerecht wird.<sup>784</sup> Gleichzeitig mit der Entwicklung der Forschungen erweist sich ständig wieder die ganze Komplizität der Motivationen und des Täterverhaltens im System des Nationalsozialismus. Es gibt dafür kein einheitliches, abschließendes Interpretationsmodell. Die Erinnerung an die Naziverbrechen muss sich die neuen Erkenntnisse über die Geschichte der Naziverbrechen aneignen und dabei die miteinander verzahnten Forschungsrichtungen sowie die Aspekte und Kontexte der verschiedenen Lebensbereiche im Dritten Reich und in den besetzten Gebieten berücksichtigen.

An der Schwelle des XXI Jahrhunderts besteht die deutsche Gesellschaft aus Menschen, von denen 95% entweder erst nach 1945 geboren worden sind oder während des Krieges weniger als 20 Jahre alt gewesen sind. Die heutige und die künftige Narration der Deutschen wird daher nicht mehr sein als eine rekonstruierte Erinnerung an die Zeiten der Endlösung. Auf der Tagesordnung der öffentlichen Debatte stehen Themen und Fragen, die von einer Generation gestellt werden, die eine andere Sprache und andere Formen der Erinnerung an die Vergangenheit suchen wird. Auch die Geographie der Erinnerung wird sich wandeln. In Deutschland bildet sich eine multikulturelle Gesellschaft heraus, deren immigrierte Glieder sich mit der negativen Seite der deutschen Geschichte nicht zu identifizieren brauchen. Wird diese neue Gesellschaft eine gute Trägerin und Hüterin der Erinnerung sein? Die Universalisierung und Globalisierung der Erinnerung ist unvermeidlich – die kollektive Erinnerung unterliegt einer dauernden Transformation.

Ständig werden neue Akteure Mitglieder der konkurrierenden Erinnerungsgemeinschaften: zunächst die Länder Ostmitteleuropas, die nach ihrer Befreiung von dem Korsett der Konfrontation des Kalten Krieges daran erinnert haben, dass sie eine Würdigung ihrer an Dramatik und Demütigungen reichen Geschichte erwarten. Nach und nach ergreifen ethnische Gruppen, Minderheiten oder Völker das Wort, die bisher keine Möglichkeit gehabt hatten, ihre Stimmen im Konzert der Meinungen zur Geltung zu bringen. Gesellschaften, die gegen Ende des 20. Jahrhunderts Landsleute in Massenmorden und Gewalttaten verloren haben, für

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784 Näheres s. P. Longeric, *Tendenzen und Perspektiven der Täterforschung*, *Aus Politik und Zeitgeschichte* 14 – 15, 2007, S. 3 – 7 sowie H. Mommsen, *Forschungskontroversen zum Nationalsozialismus*, *Aus Politik und Zeitgeschichte* 14-15, 2007, S. 14-21.

die etwa die Namen Srebrenica und Ruanda stehen, wollen nicht als Opfer zweiter Klasse angesehen werden. Die Entwicklung neuer zwischenmenschlicher Kommunikationstechniken bereichert die Kultur der Erinnerung um neue Formen der Kommemoration, was wieder neue Streitfragen aufwirft. Wir leben schließlich in einer Zeit, in der die Maßstäbe der Erinnerung und des Vergessens einer Revision von Grund auf unterliegen.

Die Auseinandersetzung der Deutschen mit ihrer Vergangenheit im Sinne einer Anerkennung des Wesens und der Auswirkungen des Nationalsozialismus und seiner Mechanismen zur Verführung der Massen ist ein Prozess, bei dem es vor allem um seine Auswirkungen auf die Gegenwart geht. Die kollektive Erinnerung birgt ein enormes politisches Potential. Deswegen hängt die Qualität des Dialogs der Bürger der Bundesrepublik Deutschland mit ihrer Vergangenheit in hohem Maße von der Führungsqualität ihrer Behörden und der politischen Klasse ab. Wenn auch in der intellektuellen und politischen Reflexion selten die Frage auftaucht, ob der Mensch - und wenn ja, welcher - im Stande ist, bewusst und rational Schlüsse aus der Vergangenheit zu ziehen, hatten sich doch die Deutschen nach 1945 mit der Frage auseinanderzusetzen, wer bereit ist, die Verantwortung für das traumatische Erbe des Nazismus zu übernehmen und in welcher Weise er das tun sollte.

Das Buch, das wir hiermit in die Hände unserer Leser legen, stellt einen Versuch dar, die Wege und Unwege der deutschen Auseinandersetzungen mit ihrer nazistischen Vergangenheit zu verfolgen. Es behandelt gewiss nur einen kleinen Teil des hoch komplizierten Problems, das angesichts seiner Vielschichtigkeit von einem einzelnen Autor gar nicht abschließend erfasst werden kann. Die eigentliche Absicht, die uns durch das Dickicht der Autoren, Themen, Institutionen, Ereignisse und Bezeichnungen führt, ist über die Gründe nachzudenken, warum die deutsche Abrechnung mit der Vergangenheit ein von so vielen Widersprüchlichkeiten geprägter Prozess geworden ist, ein Weg voller Stolpersteine und Minen in politischer, intellektueller und ethischer Hinsicht. Damit hängt die Frage nach der Spezifik der kollektiven Erinnerung der Deutschen angesichts der Natur und der moralischen Verfassung des Menschen zusammen, der sich und seine Nation mit einem unvorstellbaren Verbrechen konfrontiert sieht.

Von diesen Prämissen ist die Struktur dieser Arbeit bestimmt worden. Sie bietet Raum für eine Einführung, die der Klärung der Terminologie und der theoretischen Bestimmungsfaktoren dienen soll, auf die sich unsere Überlegungen über die gemeinsame Erinnerung stützen. Das Buch führt den Leser chronologisch durch die Etappe der Besatzungszonen: von 1945 bis 1949, durch die Teilung der Erinnerung in den beiden deutschen Staaten: von 1949 bis 1989 und den Zeitraum seit der Wiedervereinigung Deutschlands 1990.

Der letzte Teil ist den Erinnerungsritualen gewidmet, die vor allem in Gedenktagen zum Ausdruck kommen: Wie sieht deren Inhalt aus, ihre Choreographie, wem dienen sie und welche Funktionen erfüllen sie? Als Beispiele dienen die Veranstaltungen zu drei Jahrestagen. Deren Auswahl wurde von der Überzeugung bestimmt, dass jeder von ihnen an Ereignisse erinnern soll, die die Identität und die politische Kultur der Deutschen maßgeblich beeinflusst haben. Die Erinnerung an den 8. Mai 1945 bringt die ganze Ambivalenz zum Ausdruck, die einerseits die Befreiung und andererseits die Niederlage im Bewusstsein unserer westlichen Nachbarn mit sich bringen. In der Erinnerung an die Reichskristallnacht vom 9. November 1938 kumulieren sich Emotionen und die Notwendigkeit, sich mit dem größten Trauma auseinanderzusetzen: dem Holocaust. Die Wahl des Jahrestags des 1. September 1939 führt u. a. zu der quälenden Frage, warum das polnische Volk, das als erstes dem Zweiten Weltkrieg zum Opfer gefallen war und überhaupt nur mit Mühe wahrgenommen wird, in der kollektiven Erinnerung der Deutschen an letzter Stelle rangiert.

Die Untersuchung endet nicht in irgendwelchen Schlussfolgerungen. Denn die Thematik dieser Arbeit ist noch nicht an ihrem Ende angelangt. Der Dialog mit der Vergangenheit – nicht nur der der Deutschen – bleibt eine offene Frage. Jede Generation führt in ihn ihre Probleme und Zweifel ein, sucht eigene Wege, um sich mit der Geschichte abzufinden. Von den künftigen Generationen, ihrer Reife und ihrem Mut wird es abhängen, ob die Erinnerung an den Nationalsozialismus eine drückende Last bleibt oder ob sie zu einer Befreiung führt.

*Übersetzung: Eberhard Schulz*





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