

GERMAN *VERGANGENHEITSBEWÄLTIGUNG*, 1961 - 1999:
SELECTED HISTORIOGRAPHIC CONTROVERSIES
AND THEIR IMPACT ON NATIONAL IDENTITY

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ABSTRACT

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Focusing on Germany, this study addresses the question how a national community can go about incorporating its crimes against others into its 'national memorial landscape,' a term coined by James E. Young. After the unconditional surrender of Nazi Germany at the end of WWII, Germany had to redefine its national identity, *in light of its National Socialist past*, in order to rejoin the community of democratic nations. This study focuses on that process, which in the Federal Republic of Germany has taken place largely by working through competing interpretations of the National Socialist legacy; a process also known as 'reckoning with the Nazi past' or *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*. The process involves complex relationships between public and private representations and interpretations of the past, scholarly and lay perspectives, academic and popular approaches, political and personal motivations, and individual and collective memories. The resulting 'memory contests' are by definition pluralistic and generally contentious. They deal with competing interpretations of the past, interpretations that are of critical

importance to the self understanding of individuals, groups, and nations. This study focuses on five controversies that not only served as catalysts for reckoning with the recent past, but also significantly shaped German national self-consciousness. They are the *Fischer Controversy* (1961-64), the *Historikerstreit* (1986/87), the *Goldhagen Affair* (1995), the controversy over the *Wehrmachtsausstellung* (1995-99), and the *Walser-Bubis-Debate* (1998/99). Together, these debates about the legacy of National Socialism shaped what has become known as the 'history culture' of the Federal Republic of Germany, with implications for the political culture of the country as well. This study argues that the first and the last contests were bracketing events. They signified a beginning and an end to a particular way of reckoning with the Nazi past. The major themes, namely the role of the past in the present, the role of professional historians in constructing the past, the interplay between public and private memory, and the impact of (competing) conceptions of the past on national identity, were present in all five, but the study demonstrates that they played out differently in each one. The study further argues that while the historicization of National Socialism has probably become inevitable by the end of the twentieth century, it took the process of working through the five catalytic events in order to get to that point. Yet the process traced here does not demonstrate progress nor was it inevitable in the way that it played out; rather, it was complex and 'messy' and is unlikely to be over any time soon, even though the generation that has witnessed WWII first-hand is about to leave the scene. The study concludes that the past, regardless of how riddled with traumatic or criminal events, will remain important as individuals, groups, and nations discover and rediscover their historical roots and negotiate who they are in the world. The focus here is on post-war Germany, yet the

issues connected with forging memorial landscapes that incorporate proud as well as burdening aspects of a national past are applicable beyond the German context.

INTRODUCTION

The master or grand national narrative has largely fallen out of favor with historians. While the profession once embraced as noble task the uncovering of a nation's inexorable path towards democracy, skepticism or outright rejection of this role prevail today. These statements are admittedly generalizing and simplifying a situation that may vary widely from nation to nation, but they nevertheless point to broad trends within western historiography.

The grand national narrative seems to live on in popular culture, nevertheless, from where its impact on historical consciousness and national identity formation may be quite significant, but professional historians are no longer dominating its construction and communication.¹ Rather, the guild has long since abandoned the notion that such a master narrative can or should exist or that it is possible to agree on what it might be.² Fragmentation has replaced consensus within the historical profession. Yet the perceived need for a 'usable' past has not disappeared from the public sphere, as one might infer from popular interest in all things 'historical,' be they documentaries, personal memoirs, historical fiction, movies and television series based on historical themes, museums, or

¹For Germany, one indication of this trend is an opinion survey conducted in 1999, according to which 66% of the respondents gained their information about history from television; 40% each from movies and historical places; only 12% responded that their information about history came from 'lectures.' 16% did not occupy themselves with history. Elisabeth Noelle-Neumann and Renate Köcher, eds., *Allensbacher Jahrbuch der Demoskopie 1998-2002*, Band 11(München: K.G. Saur, 2002), 541.

²See also Stefan Berger, *The Search for Normality: National Identity and Historical Consciousness in Germany since 1800* (Providence, RI: Berghahn Books, 1997), 81.

memorials.³ Public commemorations of historical events also convey the message that ‘the past,’ however defined, remains to hold an important place in the present.

The unabated interest in and need for national identity rooted in history is not all that surprising at the beginning of the twenty-first century, despite or perhaps because of increasing tendencies towards globalization and cultural convergence. Just having emerged from a century of total war, genocide and industrial mass murder, of forced mass expulsion and migration, and of volatile national boundaries and state alliances, a national community’s understanding of its own past seems to be as important as ever, even while that very past is contested at the same time.⁴ Who participates in the construction of such a past, what role, if any, professional historians and other intellectuals play in the process, what is being included and excluded, and how the resulting narratives are being used in the public sphere is neither self-evident nor inconsequential. Furthermore, in the presence of a generation of eye-witnesses and participants, national historical consciousness becomes entangled with personal and collective memory. Moreover, as Konrad Jarausch pointed out, many of the historians engaged in the sub-discipline of *Zeitgeschichte* [the very recent past] find themselves in the crucible between subjective memory and the professional ethic of scholarly rigor and

³Hans Günter Hockerts provided as evidence for this interest, especially via the medium of television, the example of the public television series, *Hitlers Helfer* [*Hitler’s Helpers*] that attracted up to eight million viewers per episode in 1998. As for museums, the *House of History of the Federal Republic of Germany* in Bonn counted one million guests within fifteen months of opening. He also mentioned the motion pictures *Schindler’s List* and *Saving Private Ryan* as examples of history-based media events attracting enormous public interest. Hans Günter Hockerts, “Zugänge zur Zeitgeschichte: Primärerfahrung, Erinnerungskultur, Geschichtswissenschaft,” in *Verletztes Gedächtnis: Erinnerungskultur und Zeitgeschichte im Konflikt*, eds. Konrad Jarausch and Martin Sabrow (Frankfurt: Campus Verlag, 2002), 66, 58.

⁴In an opinion survey in Germany in 1997, respondents put ‘history—the past’ in fourth place in terms of holding a nation together, after ‘language,’ ‘a common state,’ and ‘threat from without,’ in that order. Elisabeth Noelle-Neumann and Renate Köcher, eds., *Allensbacher Jahrbuch der Demoskopie 1998-2002*, Band 10 (München: K.G. Saur, 1997), 494.

appropriate emotional distance.⁵ These various tensions have attracted considerable scholarly attention in recent decades, leading to debates about the complex relationships between national history, historical consciousness, private and public memory, scholarly history and popular memory, and national identity.⁶

While communities striving to construct or strengthen their collective identities with the help of a 'usable past' must confront the complexities just mentioned, the processes involved are especially complicated for nations whose recent history is all but heroic and contains elements that are uncomfortable or traumatic to remember.⁷

Germany, on which this study will focus, provides an excellent albeit not the only

⁵Konrad Jarausch, "Zeitgeschichte und Erinnerung: Deutungskonkurrenz oder Interdependenz?" in *Verletztes Gedächtnis: Erinnerungskultur und Zeitgeschichte im Konflikt* eds. Konrad Jarausch and Martin Sabrow (Frankfurt: Campus Verlag, 2002), 24-25, 28, 34-35.

⁶A few examples from the vast literature on the topic concerning Germany are Aleida Assmann, *Geschichte im Gedächtnis: Von der individuellen Erfahrung zur öffentlichen Inszenierung* (München: C.H. Beck, 2007); Saul Friedländer, "History, Memory, and the Historian: Dilemmas and Responsibilities," *New German Critique* 80, Special issue on the Holocaust (Spring-Summer 2000): 3-15, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/488629> (accessed March 27, 2010); Michael Geyer and Michael Latham, "The Place of the Second World War in German Memory and History," *New German Critique* 71, Memories of Germany (Spring-Summer 1997): 5-40, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/488557> (accessed March 27, 2010); Patrick Hutton, "Recent Scholarship on Memory and History," *The History Teacher* 33, no. 4 (August 2000): 533-584, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/494950> (accessed March 27, 2010); Bill Niven, "On the Use of 'Collective Memory,'" *German History* 26, no. 3 (July 2008): 427-436; Mary Nolan, "The Politics of Memory in the Berlin Republic," *Radical History Review* 81 (Fall 2001): 113-132, <http://0-search.ebscohost.com.library.acaweb.org/login.aspx?direct=true&db=aph&AN=7527718&site=ehost-live> (accessed March 27, 2010); Pierre Nora, "Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Mémoire," *Representations* 26, Special issue: Memory and Counter-Memory (Spring 1989): 7-24.

⁷Robert G. Moeller may have coined the term, 'usable past,' in his article, "War Stories: The Search for a Usable Past in the Federal Republic of Germany" *The American Historical Review* 101 no. 4 (October 1996): 1008-1048, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2169632> (accessed March 27, 2010). As for the place within society of reckoning with a difficult past, see Christian Meier, *Das Verschwinden der Gegenwart: Über Geschichte und Politik* (München: Carl Hanser Verlag, 2001), 88-89. Meier made the point that a lack of openness vis-à-vis the criminal elements in one's national past is widespread. He cited examples such as Turkey's genocide of the Armenians during WWI, Dutch colonial conduct in Indonesia, the role of Vichy-France during WWII, and Japanese conduct in WWII, all of which were still more or less taboo in official national discourse at the time of his writing. One could add examples for other countries, including the United States (*Enola Gay* controversy). According to Meier, Germany's efforts to reckon with its difficult recent past were the exception rather than the norm. R. J. B. Bosworth offered a rare example of comparative historiography of WWII that focused on the divergent approaches in England, West Germany, France, Italy, the Soviet Union, and Japan and demonstrated the linkages between historiography, politics, and ideology. R. J. B. Bosworth, *Explaining Auschwitz and Hiroshima: History Writing and the Second World War 1945-1990* (New York: Routledge, 1994).

example where this is the case. On the one hand, the country's past century included major responsibility for two world wars, the perpetration of unprecedented crimes against humanity, the almost complete destruction of its own territory, and forced migration on a large scale. Yet on the other hand economic recovery characterized the second half of the same century, resulting in Germany currently being one of the most robust and prosperous economies in the world. National reunification, following a peaceful popular revolution in East Germany, as well as a growing leadership role on the world stage round out the image of a nation that has risen from the ashes of its past. Looking back on Germany's development from the perspective of 1994, British historian and writer, Timothy Garton Ash noted "the fantastic distance that Germany has travelled [*sic*] over the last-half century: the distance to civility, legality, modernity, democracy."⁸

One cannot take for granted the development from utter ruin to thriving nation, within a time span of little more than half a century. What was needed to effect this change was not only economic, political, and social reconstruction, but also moral reconstitution. The focus here will be on the latter, a process that in the Federal Republic of Germany has taken place largely by working through competing interpretations of the National Socialist legacy.

Germans use the heady term, *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* for this process, a term that generally translates as reckoning or coming to terms with the past, but that some have interpreted as overcoming or mastering the past. The first meaning implies an ongoing process, while the second understanding refers to the expectation of a successful endpoint. Those who adhere to the latter notion imply that a conclusion is indeed

⁸Timothy Garton Ash, "Kohl's Germany: The Beginning of the End?" *The New York Review of Books*, December 1, 1994, 20, quoted in Berger, *The Search for Normality*, 236.

possible. Once it has been reached, one can draw a final line, or *Schlussstrich*, under the past and Germany can once again be a ‘normal nation,’ however one might want to define such concept. In any case, central to the effort is the need to construct a ‘usable’ past out of the Third Reich and its aftermath. The fact that this has been an elusive goal so far does not seem to make it less of a national obsession. Indeed, as of 2010, there is yet no sign of a *Schlussstrich*; on the contrary, since German reunification there seems to be a renewed sense of urgency about dealing with the National Socialist past.⁹

The literature uses a variety of terms for this phenomenon. *Memory politics*, *memory debates*, *public memory discourse*, *politics of remembrance*, *modes of commemoration*, and *history politics* are a few examples. The German term, *Vergangenheitspolitik*, loosely translated as politics with or about the past, seems to be prevalent. Those who use it attribute it to German historian Norbert Frei. Whatever one may choose to call the process, it involves complex relationships between public and private representations and interpretations of the past, scholarly and lay perspectives, academic and popular approaches, political and personal motivations, and individual and collective memories. The usage of *politics* and *debate* in connection with memory alludes to the fact that there are multiple memories and multiple historical perspectives

⁹Michael Th. Greven and Oliver von Wrochem, “Wehrmacht und Vernichtungskrieg zwischen Gesellschaftspolitik, Wissenschaft und individueller Verarbeitung der Geschichte,” in *Der Krieg in der Nachkriegszeit: Der Zweite Weltkrieg in Politik und Gesellschaft der Bundesrepublik*, eds. Greven and von Wrochem (Opladen: Leske + Budrich, 2000), 9. Greven and von Wrochem attributed some of the renewed conversation to the fact that after reunification West and East Germans, who had been socialized in very different memory-political systems, had to negotiate a new, now common national identity. See also Siobhan Kattago, *Ambiguous Memory: The Nazi Past and German National Identity* (Westport: Praeger, 2001), 9. Others attributed the development primarily to the disappearance of the aging generation of witnesses who were victims, perpetrators, and bystanders. Norbert Frei, *1945 und Wir: Das Dritte Reich im Bewußtsein der Deutschen* (München: Verlag C. H. Beck, 2005), Chapter 3. According to Stefan Berger, there have been signs since 1989 that dealing with the more recent communist past in the eastern part of the country is eclipsing that of dealing with the National Socialist past. For example, just in 1994, one historian counted eight hundred ongoing research projects on the German Democratic Republic. Berger, *The Search for Normality*, 157.

and discourses that their various adherents must negotiate with one another. The postmodern notion of individuals, groups, and nations constructing their memories as well as their pasts is fundamental to an understanding of the political nature of dealing with one's past. In this sense, the past functions as providing meaning for the present. In other words, individuals, groups, and nations instrumentalize the past in response to issues and concerns of the present. It is not surprising that the *process* itself, the question of how *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* has played out at various stages in the life of post-war German society has been as much the subject of debate as the historical events of the National Socialist past themselves. The process has been historicized to the point of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* having matured into a sub-field of historical inquiry in its own right within the broader field of *Zeitgeschichte*, which, in turn is part of modern German history.¹⁰

Germany did not willingly embark on reckoning with its National Socialist past immediately following its unconditional surrender on May 8, 1945. Rather, the occupying forces 'jumpstarted' the process informally by making local populations tour close-by concentration camps and formally with the Nuremberg War Crimes Tribunals.¹¹

¹⁰The Allied Forces gave the first impetus for the institutionalization of *Zeitgeschichte* by proposing the founding of the *Institut für Zeitgeschichtsforschung* in Munich in 1949, with the mandate to research the history of National Socialism. German historians Hans Rothfels and Martin Broszart were its first directors. Half a century later, not only the vast literature on the subject attests to the maturation of the field and its sub-field, but also the encyclopedia, *Lexikon der "Vergangenheitsbewältigung,"* edited by Torben Fischer and Matthias Lorenz and published in 2007.

¹¹German historian Sybille Steinbacher described how the American occupation forces made the population of Dachau view the corpses in the Dachau concentration camp, clear the dead from trains, and bury them. According to Steinbacher, popular reaction to these measures was a mix of disbelief, horror, resentment, and anger (at the Jews), but not much contrition. Sybille Steinbacher, "'...dass ich mit der Totenklage auch die Klage um unsere Stadt verbinde': Die Verbrechen von Dachau in der Wahrnehmung der frühen Nachkriegszeit," in *Beschweigen und Bekennen: Die deutsche Nachkriegsgesellschaft und der Holocaust*, eds. Norbert Frei and Sybille Steinbacher, Dachauer Symposium zur Zeitgeschichte, Bd. 1, 11-33 (Göttingen: Wallstein Verlag, 2001). For similar findings, see Frei and Steinbacher, *Beschweigen und Bekennen: Die Deutsche Nachkriegsgesellschaft und der Holocaust* (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2001), 147-148

Also important in this respect were the wholesale de-Nazification and re-education programs targeted at the entire German population.

While basic survival was foremost on Germans' minds during the immediate post-war years, it soon became obvious that Germany had to redefine its national identity, *in light of its National Socialist past*, in order to rejoin the community of democratic nations. If for no other reasons, *raison d'état* dictated embarking upon the process. West Germany's immediate goal after 1945 was integration into the West. Twenty-five years later, reconciliation and rapprochement with Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union also became hallmarks of West German foreign policy, with the ultimate goal of making German reunification possible. This dual effort—West integration first and then reconciliation with the East—would have been unthinkable without reckoning with National Socialism, under the eyes of an international community whose wounds inflicted by Nazi Germany were still fresh.¹² Thus, political necessity and international weariness made the process not only one that Germany drove herself, but also one that largely occurred under the watchful eyes of the international community.¹³

Reckoning in West Germany took many forms. At first, it primarily manifested itself in official government declarations and commemorations. It became more intense

¹²In East Germany, the process followed a different path. The national socialist past also played a decisive role since the state legitimized its existence as the socialist alternative to fascist Germany. A sense of responsibility for Nazi crimes and an obligation to make amends was not part of the GDR's national identity. For further detail on the dual or double German past, which is not addressed in this study, see Kattago, *Ambiguous Memory*, Chapter 4, and Bill Niven, *Facing the Nazi Past: United Germany and the Legacy of the Third Reich* (London: Routledge, 2002), chapters 2 and 3.

¹³None of the controversies discussed in this paper were German affairs alone, as the wide foreign coverage indicates. There seems to be a keen interest, especially in Europe, the United States, and Israel, in German *Zeitgeschichte*. A considerable number of non-German historians have dedicated their professional lives to it and some count among the most prominent and prolific experts on the topic (Konrad Jarausch, Charles Maier, Ian Kershaw, Geoff Eley, Richard Evans, Saul Friedländer, Raul Hilberg, Omer Bartov, Mary Fulbrook, just to name a few of those who had much to say about the controversies at issue here). Michael Geyer also made the point that the history of WWII will never be the history of the Germans alone. Geyer, "The Place of WWII in German Memory," 38-39.

in the late 1960s as the first post-war generation insisted on answers from their elders. With the aging of the witness or perpetrator generation on the one hand and an increasing interest in everyday history on the other, private memories and family discourse about the war gained importance within an emerging memory culture of the Federal Republic by the late 1980s. Finally, reunification shifted the focus once again, from moral reconstitution to forging a new national identity.¹⁴

There were catalysts for this work of reckoning, some coming from abroad and others from within society. Some of the strongest impulses came from within political circles, usually in connection with anniversaries, and from the popular media. Most notable among the latter was the American television series, *Holocaust*, that has captured German audiences since its first screening in 1979 and prompted widespread preoccupation with National Socialist crimes against the Jews.¹⁵ As a result, the term *Holocaust* became practically synonymous with the murder of the Jews and began to stand for the National Socialist past as a whole, replacing *Auschwitz* as the central metaphor for the historical period.

American historian Atina Grossman referred to these catalytic events as ‘Holocaust moments.’¹⁶ She correctly observed that the history of the Federal Republic

¹⁴There seems to be a historiographic consensus about this standard narrative of the broad phases of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*. The *assessment* of this process is highly contested, on the other hand. Two similar perspectives are provided in Norbert Frei, *1945 und wir* and Mary Fulbrook, *German National Identity after the Holocaust* (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 1999).

¹⁵Twenty million viewers, or about half of the adult population of West Germany, watched the series on television that year. Kattago, *Ambiguous Memory*, 45. See also, Klaus Große Kracht, *Die zankende Zukunft: Historische Kontroversen in Deutschland nach 1945* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2005), 12.

¹⁶Atina Grossman, “The ‘Goldhagen Effect’: Memory, Repetition, and Responsibility in the New Germany,” in *The Goldhagen Effect: History, Memory, Nazism—Facing the German Past*, ed. Geoff Eley (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2000), 89-90. For a good overview of such events since 1945, see Jeffrey K. Olick, “What Does It Mean to Normalize the Past? Official Memory in German

was literally ‘strewn’ with them; however, as we will see, the events were much more than ‘moments.’ Christian Meier’s image of *Wellen* [waves] seems more appropriate as it implies a succession of controversies that literally wash over society and upset the status quo left by the previous one in their wake.¹⁷ The wave image also corresponds with Anne Fuchs’s and Mary Cosgrove’s assertion that these catalysts initiated “memory contests,” which they defined as “highly dynamic public engagements with the past that are triggered by an event that is perceived as a massive disturbance of a community’s self-understanding.”¹⁸ Memory contests are by definition pluralistic and generally contentious. They deal with competing interpretations of the past, interpretations that are of critical importance to the self understanding of individuals, groups, and nations. This study will focus on five such contests or ‘waves,’ all of which have significantly shaped German national self-consciousness from the early nineteen-sixties into the first decade of the twenty-first century. They are the *Fischer Controversy* (1961-64), the *Historikerstreit* (1986/87), the *Goldhagen Affair* (1995), the controversy over the *Wehrmachtsausstellung* (1995-99), and the *Walser-Bubis-Debate* (1998/99).¹⁹

This study will show that the first and the last contests were bracketing events.

They signified a beginning and an end to a particular way of reckoning with the Nazi

Politics,” *Social Science History* 22, no. 4, Special issue: Memory and the Nation (Winter 1998): 547-571, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1171575> (accessed March 27, 2010).

¹⁷Meier, *Das Verschwinden der Gegenwart*, 46.

¹⁸Anne Fuchs and Mary Cosgrove. “Introduction: Germany’s Memory Contests and the Management of the Past,” in *German Memory Contests: The Quest for Identity in Literature, Film, and Discourse Since 1990*, eds. Anne Fuchs, Mary Cosgrove, and Georg Grote (Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2006), 2.

¹⁹*Historikerstreit*= quarrel/debate/controversy among historians; *Wehrmachtsausstellung* = exhibit about Hitler’s war of annihilation against the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia from 1941-1944. The exhibit’s official name was: *Vernichtungskrieg. Verbrechen der Wehrmacht.1941-1944.*

past. The major themes, namely the role of the past in the present, the role of professional historians in constructing the past, the interplay between public and private memory, and the impact of (competing) conceptions of the past on national identity, were present in all five, but played out differently in each one. This study will argue that the historicization of National Socialism has become inevitable, perhaps even desirable, by the end of the twentieth century, but that it took the process of working through the five catalytic events in order to get to this point. This does not mean that the elusive *Schlussstrich* under the National Socialist past has finally arrived; it just means that dealing with National Socialism enters a new phase in which approaches may be appropriate that would have been unthinkable in the early nineteen-sixties or premature in the mid-nineteen-eighties.

All five events happened at critical junctures in the history of the Federal Republic. In a nutshell, the *Fischer Controversy* surrounding historian Fritz Fischer's 1961 ground-breaking study of Germany's war aims in WWI did not directly deal with Nazism or WWII, but nevertheless opened the door for the questioning of historiographic assumptions that had thus far impeded a reckoning with the Nazi past.²⁰ In other words, Fischer's *Griff nach der Weltmacht* was the opening salvo for a process that is still ongoing today, namely the attempt to forge a new national identity in light of a troubled recent past. The last event erupted thirty-seven years later over the speech that playwright Martin Walser delivered in the Frankfurt Paulskirche in October 1998, on occasion of accepting the peace prize of the German book trade. The speech took issue with the public use of Auschwitz as 'moral cudgel' and with the alleged

²⁰Fritz Fischer, *Griff nach der Weltmacht: Die Kriegszielpolitik des Kaiserlichen Deutschland 1914/18* (Düsseldorf: Droste Verlag, 1961).

instrumentalization of shame over the Holocaust for contemporary political purposes. Walser called for reckoning with the Nazi past to become a private affair between the individual and his or her conscience. The speech earned Walser overwhelming public support, but unleashed a six-months controversy in which the German news media played a primary role.²¹ Although the process of reckoning with its National Socialist past has not come to a conclusion yet in Germany, the *Walser-Bubis-Debate* was the most recent event of its kind gripping the entire nation.

If Germans were not ready to reckon with their Nazi past in 1961, and if their general approval of Walser's speech indicated their weariness of doing so in 1999, one wonders what happened in the thirty-seven years between the two controversies. The three events that bridged the gap between the *Fischer Controversy* and the *Walser-Bubis-Debate*, the *Historikerstreit*, the *Goldhagen Affair*, and the controversy surrounding the *Wehrmachtsausstellung*, may provide some clues.

The *Historikerstreit* erupted just a year after the fortieth anniversary celebrations of the end of the war and three years before the unexpected reunification with East Germany. The core issues in this complex debate included the question whether it was appropriate to historicize the Holocaust and study it like any other historical event. Also, would comparing the Holocaust to other modern genocides 'normalize' it (i.e. make it relative or even excuse it), or would one have to continue to treat it as a uniquely horrendous event in history? Underlying these points of contention was the question whether the time had come to draw a closing line under the past and become a self-

²¹Matthias Lorenz, "Walser-Bubis-Debatte," in Torben Fischer and Matthias Lorenz, eds., *Lexikon der "Vergangenheitsbewältigung": Debatten-und Diskursgeschichte des Nationalsozialismus nach 1945* (Bielefeld: transcript Verlag, 2007), 297.

assured, ‘normal’ nation like any other? The *Goldhagen Affair* and the controversy over the original *Wehrmachtsausstellung* happened a decade later, five years after reunification, and coincided with the fiftieth anniversary of the Allied victory over Nazi Germany. The *Goldhagen Affair* broke out over American historian Daniel Goldhagen’s book, *Hitler’s Willing Executioners*, in which he asserted that ordinary Germans took part in the Holocaust willingly and often enthusiastically, driven by an ‘eliminationist anti-Semitism’ that was unique to Germany and deeply rooted in its history.²² The *Wehrmachtsausstellung* was a traveling exhibit depicting German army soldiers committing war crimes and genocide as part of Hitler’s war of annihilation against the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia (1941-1944). It was controversial because it destroyed the popular myth of the ‘clean’ army and allegedly condemned as murderers all who had served as soldiers (as opposed to members of the *Waffen SS*) during WWII.

These three bridging events had in common that they fell into the time span between 1983 and 1995, the long decade replete with fiftieth anniversaries, commemorating events from Hitler’s coming to power to the various assassination attempts on his life, and culminating in the final defeat/liberation.²³ All three were significant in that they prompted discussions among historians and other intellectuals, but also drew in politicians, various opinion makers, and the public. Each one broke taboos, some within historical scholarship, and others in political self-understanding or within the popular memory of the past. They asked new questions or old questions in new ways,

²²Torben Fischer, “Goldhagen Debatte,” in Torben Fischer and Matthias Lorenz, eds., *Lexikon der “Vergangenheitsbewältigung”: Debatten-und Diskursgeschichte des Nationalsozialismus nach 1945* (Bielefeld: transcript Verlag, 2007), 295. Daniel Goldhagen, *Hitler’s Willing Executioners: Ordinary Germans and the Holocaust* (New York: Knopf, 1996).

²³Whether to refer to May 8, 1845 as a day of defeat or liberation was a memory contest in its own right.

and to varying degrees they prompted new scholarship.²⁴ They were not confined to Germany, since the history of National Socialism is not Germany's alone, but the focus of this study will be on German perspectives. All three were public debates that deeply affected German memory, both its collective memory and the personal memories of individuals. Lastly, each of these 'waves' that triggered intense 'memory contests' were as much about the present—and even about the future—as about the past. They had as much to do with current events in the life of the nation as with its recent past. As such, each debate offers a window into German national identity, before and after the watershed events of 1989-1991. They also make clear that at issue are not only the past events themselves, but just as much the manner in which politics, society, and the historical profession research, discuss, remember, and instrumentalize such events from a variety of perspectives and for a variety of purposes. Together, these debates about the legacy of National Socialism shaped what has become known as the 'history culture' of the Federal Republic of Germany, with implications for the country's political culture as well.²⁵

Even though the academic literature about German history contests and memory culture is vast, few scholars have offered conceptual frameworks providing mental roadmaps for negotiating the successive 'waves' of controversies. Estonian political

²⁴For more detail on the kinds of scholarship they opened up, see "Forum: The *Historikerstreit* Twenty Years On," *German History* 24, no. 4 (2006): 586-607.

²⁵Jörn Rüsen, "Was ist Geschichtskultur? Überlegungen zu einer neuen Art, über Geschichte nachzudenken," in *Historische Faszination: Geschichtskultur Heute*, eds. Klaus Füssmann, Heinrich Grüter, and Jörn Rüsen (Köln: Böhlau Verlag, 1994), 5. Rüsen, Professor for General History at the University of Bielefeld, defined history culture as the "practically operative articulation of historical consciousness in the life of a society" [my translation], *ibid.* According to Rüsen, artistic expression, public history, and monuments and commemorations are all part of history culture. Academic history can and does influence it, but has no exclusive hold on it. The term seems to be roughly synonymous with 'memory culture,' used to describe the same phenomenon.

philosopher Siobhan Kattago and German historian Norbert Frei are notable exceptions. According to Kattago, the process has moved through five stages: (1) Occupation and shock, 1945-1949; (2) repression and reparations, 1949-1959; (3) therapeutic mourning, 1960s and 1970s; (4) preoccupation with antifascism and totalitarian theories, 1970s, and (5) normalization and national identity, 1980s to present. In Kattago's analytical framework, these phases coincided with three models of national self-consciousness. According to her, West Germans moved from a "guilty pariah" model of identity in the 1950s to a therapeutic phase of mourning in the 1960s and 1970s, and in the 1980s arrived at the normalization model of national consciousness that still persists.²⁶ According to this scheme, except for the *Fischer Controversy*, the debates at issue here would all fall into the last model of national self-consciousness.

Frei offered an alternative periodization, which, upon closer scrutiny, is not that different from Kattago's. For him, reckoning with the past happened in four phases. The phase of *politische Säuberungen* [political purges] lasted from 1945-1949 and was followed by the phase of *Vergangenheitspolitik* [politics about the past] in the 1950s. *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* [reckoning with the past] followed in the 1960s and 1970s. The last phase was that of *Vergangenheitsbewahrung* [commemoration of the past], which commenced in the 1980s and was still ongoing in 2005, the year of publication of Frei's periodization scheme.²⁷ It remains to be seen which one, if any, of the attempts to establish phases of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* corresponds with this work's proposal of a more thematic, rather than a chronological classification of the 'waves' that swept over

²⁶Kattago, *Ambiguous Memory: The Nazi Past*, 38-48.

²⁷Frei, *1945 und Wir*, 41.

Germany between what this study will call the *Opening Salvo (Fischer Controversy)* and an *End of an Era (Walser-Bubis-Debate)*.

CHAPTER ONE

OPENING SALVO AND END OF AN ERA:

THE *FISCHER CONTROVERSY* AND THE *WALSER-BUBIS-DEBATE*

The reaction to his book surprised no one more than Fritz Fischer, its author.²⁸ In 1964, three years after the publication of *Griff nach der Weltmacht: Die Kriegszielpolitik des Kaiserlichen Deutschland 1914/1918* and during the climax of the ensuing controversy, a journalist asked Fischer whether he had expected his work to be a huge success. “No, I had to offer it like sour beer,” responded Fischer, continuing that most publishers were not interested because he had to admit that the book did not deal with Hitler.²⁹

Nevertheless, the book must have “hit a nerve of German self understanding” since otherwise the reaction to the book would have been inconceivable.³⁰ More publications followed and the controversy broadened. In retrospect, Australian historian and Fischer expert John A. Moses claimed that the dispute over Fischer’s work had had the impact of a revolution.³¹ “Once in a decade or generation,” Moses declared,

²⁸Born in 1908 in Bavaria, Germany, Fischer studied Protestant theology, philosophy, pedagogy, constitutional history and national history at the Universities of Erlangen and Berlin, culminating in two PhDs., one in theology and the other in history. Having served in the German Air Force in WWII and after a period as prisoner of war in U.S. custody, Fischer assumed the chair of medieval and modern history at the University of Hamburg in 1947, where he stayed until his retirement in 1973. He remained active in scholarly research and debate until the early 1990s and died in 1999.

²⁹*Bundesarchiv Koblenz*, Fritz Fischer Papers, N 1422/5, quoted in Große Kracht, *Die zankendeunft*, 47 [translation mine].

³⁰*Ibid.*, [translation mine]. The term, self-understanding, does not ideally capture the German *Selbstverständnis*. In this context the German also means national self-consciousness or national identity.

³¹John A. Moses, *The Politics of Illusion: The Fischer Controversy in German Historiography* (New York: Barnes & Noble Books, 1975), 1.

the world of historians may be startled by the publication of some truly striking piece of research which not only shatters accepted images by revealing new material but also raises new questions about the total validity of earlier methodologies. Such a piece of research is Professor Fritz Fischer's *Griff nach der Weltmacht*³²

What was this bombshell of a book all about and why did it strike such a nerve?

Is it justified to claim that it fired the opening salvo for a German-initiated process of reckoning with the Nazi legacy, even though the book was not about Hitler? Or, to return to Meier's image, was this the event that opened the floodgates to *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*, a process by which successive waves of controversy would wash over the land, upsetting the status quo in their wake? A brief overview of the sociopolitical climate in West Germany during the decade preceding this watershed event is useful in order to appreciate the impact of the book at the time and to understand its heuristic value for the argument of this paper.

The 'long' 1950s brought rapid economic growth and prosperity to West Germany. The integration into the Western political and military alliances and limited rearmament went hand in hand with social conservatism.³³ The decade also became known as the 'years of silence' about the Nazi past, a stance Alexander and Margarete Mitscherlich attributed to repressed mourning and guilt.³⁴ The formulation that

³²John A. Moses, *The War Aims of Imperial Germany: Professor Fritz Fischer and his Critics* (St. Lucia [Brisbane]: University of Queensland Press, 1968), 213.

³³Konrad Jarausch, *After Hitler: Recivilizing Germans, 1945-1995*, Brandon Hunziker, trans., translation of *Die Umkehr: Deutsche Wandlungen 1945-1995* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 120-124.

³⁴Alexander and Margarete Mitscherlich, *The Inability to Mourn: Principles of Collective Behavior*, Beverley Placzek, trans., (New York: Grove Press Inc., 1975), translation of *Die Unfähigkeit zu trauern: Grundlagen kollektiven Verhaltens* (München: R. Piper & Co Verlag, 1967). Others have argued that Germans were not silent about the Third Reich and about the war during the 1950s and early 1960s at all; rather, they conceptualized the era from a Germans-as-victims-perspective within the private sphere. See Peter Fritzsche, "Volkstümliche Erinnerung und deutsche Identität nach dem Zweiten Weltkrieg," in

Chancellor Konrad Adenauer chose for his call for German restitution to Israel, “suffering was brought over the Jewish people in the name of the German people,” may have been symptomatic of the country’s general state of mind vis-à-vis the crimes of its National Socialist past.³⁵ While Germans were willing to acknowledge collective responsibility for making financial amends, personal culpability was not yet a topic. Granted, the publication in German of Anne Frank’s diary in 1950 had helped people identify with an individual Jewish victim for the first time since the war, but it was to take years before individual implication in Jewish suffering became a widely recognized component of German discourse about National Socialism.³⁶ Instead, the Adenauer administration and the public were more concerned with rebuilding the economy and with the repatriation of POWs still in Soviet hands.³⁷ Incidentally, the myth of the ‘clean *Wehrmacht*,’ which was to persist in the popular imagination until the controversy over the *Wehrmachtsausstellung* was to dismantle it in the 1990s, arose as part of the effort to repatriate the German prisoners of war.³⁸ The breakthrough to a new way of thinking

Verletztes Gedächtnis: Erinnerungskultur und Zeitgeschichte im Konflikt, eds. Konrad Jarausch and Martin Sabrow (Frankfurt: Campus Verlag, 2002), 82-89.

³⁵Moeller, “Deutsche Opfer, Opfer der Deutschen: Kriegsgefangene, Vertriebene, NS-Verfolgte: Opferausgleich als Identitätspolitik,” in *Nachkrieg in Deutschland*, ed. Klaus Naumann (Hamburg: Hamburger Edition, 2001), 36; Moeller used a similar quote in “War Stories: The Search for a Usable Past,” 1015-1016.

³⁶Anne-Kathrin Herrmann, “Frühe Zeugnisse Überlebender,” in *Lexikon der ‘Vergangenheitsbewältigung in Deutschland*, eds. Fischer and Lorenz, 41. As Robert Moeller pointed out in “War Stories: The Search for a Usable Past,” Germans in the 1950s did not have ‘amnesia’ about the war; rather, their selective memory cast themselves rather than the Jews into the role of victim (1011-1013).

³⁷Jörg Echternkamp, *Nach dem Krieg: Alltagsnot, Neuorientierung und die Last der Vergangenheit 1945-1949* (Zürich: Pendo Verlag, 2003), 126.

³⁸Konrad Jarausch, “Critical Memory and Civil Society: The Impact of the 1960s on German Debates about the Past,” in *Coping with the Nazi Past: West German Debates on Nazism and Generational Conflict, 1955-1975*, eds. Philipp Gassert and Alan Steinweis (New York: Berghahn Books, 2006), 18.

about the recent past and to new questions directed at that past did indeed not come until *Griff nach der Weltmacht* burst on the scene in 1961, and then only against considerable resistance.³⁹

Fischer's book was not about WWII. Instead, it posed a number of theses about Imperial Germany's policies before and during WWI that challenged contemporary German historiography. For example, Fischer claimed to have uncovered newly available documentary evidence for Imperial Germany's willingness to pursue European hegemony, even by means of war.⁴⁰ More provocatively yet, Fischer alleged that large parts of the German elites, including members of the worlds of commerce, industry, banking, and the Lutheran Church, had actively supported Imperial Germany's efforts to establish itself as a world power. According to Fischer, German unification in 1871 had opened the door to a new nationalism that was conservative-dynastic as well as military and *völkisch* [ethnic]. Economic growth and anti-Semitism fueled this nationalism during the pre-war years. Eventually, it culminated in the dangerous mix of chauvinism and self-aggrandizement that led Germany to risk, even actively pursue, war in order to force its way into a "place in the sun" among the world powers.⁴¹

These well-documented findings struck like a historiographic thunderbolt at a time when a number of conservative German historians were doing their best to help Germans regain a semblance of 'normal' national identity following the physical and

³⁹Christine Nugent, "The Fischer Controversy: Historiographic Revolution or Just Another Historians' Quarrel?" *The Journal of the North Carolina Association of Historians* 16 (2008): 77-114.

⁴⁰For his research, Fischer utilized archives that had become available to German historians for the first time since the Allies had confiscated them after WWII. The Soviets had returned them to East Germany in 1956 and Fischer had been granted access. Prior to the documents' release, German historians had had to rely on memoirs and personal papers.

⁴¹Fischer, *Griff nach der Weltmacht*, 17.

moral collapse of the country after WWII.⁴² This role vis-à-vis the state had deep roots within German historiography, reaching back to Leopold von Ranke who had been instrumental in founding the profession in the late nineteenth century. As civil servants, holding highly respected and powerful positions at German universities, German historians had played the leading role not only in defining German national identity following the founding of Imperial Germany in 1871, but also in disputing Germany's alleged principal war guilt, as expressed in Article 231 of the Versailles Treaty.⁴³ By WWII, the question of Germany's leading role in unleashing WWI had become a historiographic taboo. Indeed, the "myth of German innocence" prevailed well into the 1960s, meaning that it was firmly in place when Fischer introduced his evidence to the contrary.⁴⁴ Gerhard Ritter was the most prominent German historian upholding the Neo-Rankean or 'historist' tradition in German historiography following WWII. Not surprisingly, he became Fischer's most vehement antagonist.⁴⁵

Fischer's research upset a long-held historiographic consensus between the guild and the state, putting the reputations if not life-long achievements of prominent historians at stake in the process. It should therefore not be surprising that some of his antagonists

⁴²Berger, *The Search for Normality*. Chapter 2 provides a useful overview of the role of the profession in Germany until 1960.

⁴³Moses, *The Politics of Illusion*, Chapter 1; Wolfgang J. Mommsen, "Zur Kriegsschuldfrage 1914," *Historische Zeitschrift* 212, no.3 (1971): 608 - 609.

⁴⁴Frederick Hale, "Fritz Fischer and the Historiography of World War One," *The History Teacher* 9, no. 2 (February 1976): 262, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/492292> (accessed March 27, 2010).

⁴⁵The fact that Ritter had a leading role on the editorial boards of German school textbooks well into the 1960s is just one indicator of his influence on national historical consciousness formation in post-war Germany. Ritter's historiographic perspectives are evident throughout a textbook for High Schools from 1963. Gerhard E. Bonwetsch, E. Dittrich-Gallmeister, J. Dittrich, H. Gundel, H. Herzfeld, K. Leonhardt, G. Ritter, F. Schnabel, and E. Wilmanns, *Grundriss der Geschichte für die Oberstufe der Höheren Schulen*, Ausgabe B, Band 3 (Stuttgart: Ernst Klett Verlag: 1963).

did not shy away from labeling him as *Nestbeschmutzer* [one who fouls one's own nest], as Fischer recalled with some bitterness in a retrospective defense of his work.⁴⁶ Against that invective, he shot back that the insights he had offered had

contributed to a painful process of disillusionment about the character of the Wilhelminian Empire and even of the Weimar Republic, a process of distancing oneself from one's own immediate past, which has contributed to self-criticism in the Federal Republic of Germany. This change of thinking has helped move the Germans to achieve a normal and relaxed relationship with their neighbors to the west and to the east (in the latter case against strong traditional hostility!).⁴⁷

Notably, Fischer did not explicitly claim that he had changed the way Germans dealt with their National Socialist past. From the above passage it seems that he did not fully realize in 1988 to what extent his work had served as catalyst for subsequent 'memory contests' over the Nazi legacy. Fischer had done nothing less than change the way German historians looked at historical continuities. He had demonstrated that a critical perspective of one's national past was possible and had argued that it was preferable to the apologetic stance that professional historians had traditionally assumed. His work ultimately called into question the whole notion of the grand national narrative constructed around historical progress and advanced by the nation-state. Eventually, this

⁴⁶Fritz Fischer, "Twenty-Five Years Later: Looking Back at the 'Fischer Controversy' and its Consequences," *Central European History* 21, no. 3 (1988): 209, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4546121> (accessed March 27, 2010). Gerhard Ritter's following publications attested to his side of the controversy and gave a glimpse into the deep rift between the two historians. Gerhard Ritter, "Eine neue Kriegsschuldthese? Zu Fritz Fischers Buch 'Griff nach der Weltmacht'." *Historische Zeitschrift* 194, no. 3 (1962): 646-668; Ritter, "Zur Fischer-Kontroverse." *Historische Zeitschrift* 200, no. 3 (1965): 783-787. Ritter's *opus magnum* provided an appreciation for what was at stake, since Fischer's research questioned much of it: Ritter, *The Sword and the Scepter: the Problem of Militarism in Germany*, translated from the second, revised edition in German by Heinz Norden. Translation of *Staatskunst und Kriegshandwerk: Das Problem des "Militarismus" in Deutschland, 1954-1967* (Coral Gables, FL.: University of Miami Press, 1969-1972).

⁴⁷Fischer, "Twenty-five Years Later," 223. The last sentence alluded to the West integration of the 1950s and 1960s and the *Ostpolitik* of the 1970s and 1980s.

new way of conceptualizing history opened the door for examining how the National Socialist era fit into German history.⁴⁸

Although Fischer's work was not *about* historical method and the role of the historian vis-à-vis the state *per se*, his work raised these issues to the point where in retrospect analysts called it a "historiographic break-through" or a watershed event that completely changed the landscape of post-WWII German historical scholarship.⁴⁹ Fischer himself made sweeping claims about the revolutionary nature of his approach, beyond the content of his subject. For example, he asserted that his books and his teaching "ha[d] not only helped to advance scholarly methodology and historical research, but ha[d] altered the Germans' view of their own past."⁵⁰ In his own perception, he was one of the first German historians to use a social-historical approach, meaning that he did not only look at the state and diplomacy, but also at all the social and economic forces that pressed upon the political leadership prior and during WWI. Fischer further claimed that his books "advanced historical methodology away from [nineteenth-century] 'historicism' [historism] to a social-economic and structuralist view of history," which in turn helped spawn an entirely new school of research [the so-called

⁴⁸This argument is informed by Konrad Jarausch's retrospective of the Fischer Controversy in his "Der Nationale Tabubruch. Wissenschaft, Öffentlichkeit und Politik in der Fischer-Kontroverse," in *Zeitgeschichte als Streitgeschichte: Grosse Kontroversen nach 1945*, eds. Martin Sabrow, Ralph Jessen, and Klaus Große Kracht, 20-40 (München: Verlag C.H.Beck, 2003), especially 33-36.

⁴⁹Jarausch, "World Power or Tragic Fate: The Kriegsschuldfrage as Historical Neurosis," *Central European History* 5, no. 1 (1972): 76. In hindsight, though, some historians have observed that Fischer's approach was still quite traditional in his emphasis on the state and on state documents. For example, Arnold Sywottek argued this in "Die Fischer Kontroverse. Ein Beitrag zur Entwicklung Historisch-Politischen Bewusstseins in der Bundesrepublik," in *Deutschland in der Weltpolitik des 19. und 20. Jahrhunderts: Fritz Fischer zum 65. Geburtstag*, eds. Fritz Fischer, Imanuel Geiss, Bernd Jürgen Wendt, and Peter-Christian Witt (Düsseldorf: Bertelsmann Universitätsverlag, 1973), 38. Emanuel Geiss made a similar argument in *Studien über Geschichte und Geschichtswissenschaft* (Frankfurt am Main: SuhrkampVerlag, 1972), 170.

⁵⁰Fischer, "Twenty-Five Years Later," 221-223.

Fischer School.]⁵¹ Thus Fischer's work challenged a tradition of strong alliances between leading professional historians and the state that had existed for over one hundred years. It would eventually shatter the paradigm or *Geschichtsbild* that the guild had so carefully constructed, before WWI, between the wars, and once again after WWII. This not only invited his colleagues' wrath upon him, but also led to significant political controversy.

Fischer's continuity thesis must have posed the greatest challenge to German national self-consciousness. It questioned the quarantine that post-1945 historiography, with the blessing of the state, had imposed on National Socialism. If there were, as Fischer argued, continuities from Bismarck all the way to Hitler, then it would be impossible to maintain that Hitler, the 'demonic individual,' and his minions had unleashed the catastrophe of WWII upon the German people who, in this scenario, assumed the victim role in the process.⁵² The argument that some of Hitler's policies had deep roots in Imperial Germany and had already played a role before and during WWI was generally not acceptable in the Federal Republic of the 1950s and early 1960s. After all, from a political perspective, it was "a central task of historians [in the Federal Republic of Germany] ... to present an image of German history that would mesh as well as possible with efforts to integrate the Federal Republic into a western European community of nations."⁵³ The order of the day was the rehabilitation of West Germany.

⁵¹Ibid., 221-222. Some have translated the German *Historismus* as 'historism' instead of 'historicism' to distinguish it from the Anglo-American concept of historicism, which is not at all Whig history. See Berger, *The Search for Normality*, 3.

⁵²For more detail on the political implications of Fischer's theses, see Hale, "Fritz Fischer and the Historiography of World War One."

⁵³Frederick Hale, "Fritz Fischer and the Historiography of World War One," 264.

The newly constructed national narrative was to reach back to Bismarck or even Frederick the Great, via Weimar, conveniently leaving Hitler out as ‘aberration’ or historical accident. Fischer’s claim that there was indeed a continuity between Bismarck’s power politics, the war aims of Imperial Germany in WWI, and, by implication, the policies of Nazi Germany in WWII therefore struck a sensitive chord at a time when West Germany strove to construct a new, less war-like image for itself that would make it a more attractive partner of the Western alliance. Professional, political, and public circles did not fully appreciate the explosiveness of this aspect of Fischer’s work until later, when he explicated and radicalized it in subsequent publications.⁵⁴

Apparently, though, political circles understood it well enough by the summer of 1964 when the government tried to foil Fischer’s university lecture series in the United States by withdrawing previously granted travel funds. Eventually, the *American Council for Learned Societies* financed the trip and Fischer was able to present his work to American academic audiences despite official German resistance.⁵⁵ It would be difficult to find a clearer political rejection of Fischer’s work than the one Franz Joseph Strauß, controversial political figure and chairman of the conservative Christian-Social Union (CSU), offered. “A people which has performed an economic miracle,” he argued,

⁵⁴This happened primarily in Fischer’s *From Kaiserreich to Third Reich: Elements of Continuity in German History 1871-1945*, trans. Roger Fletcher, translation of *Bündnis der Eliten: Zur Kontinuität der Machtstrukturen in Deutschland 1871-1945*, 1979 (London: Allen & Unwin, 1986).

⁵⁵Jarausch, “Der nationale Tabubruch,” 20 and 31-32; Imanuel Geiss, “Zur Fischer Controverse—40 Jahre danach,” in *Zeitgeschichte als Streitgeschichte: Grosse Kontroversen nach 1945*, eds. Martin Sabrow, Ralph Jessen, and Klaus Große Kracht (München: Verlag C.H.Beck, 2003), 46. American historians were much more receptive to Fischer’s theses than his German colleagues, as Fischer’s work was more in line with the international than with the German historiography of WWI. As an interesting side note, Jarausch, then a graduate student at the University of Wisconsin, Madison, experienced one of Fischer’s lectures, which prompted him to write his doctoral dissertation on Imperial Chancellor Theobald von Bethmann Hollweg, one of the pivotal German politicians connected with the outbreak of WWI (*ibid.*, 20).

“has the right not to want to be bothered with Auschwitz anymore.”⁵⁶ For Strauß, Fischer was nothing but a “Communist fellow traveler.”⁵⁷

Political and cultural impacts of Fischer’s theses were closely linked. During the ‘silent decade’ of the 1950s, society had not confronted the moral issues of personal responsibility. Yet it was not difficult to connect Fischer’s questions about the role of elites on the eve of WWI with those of elites during the Third Reich and, by extension, about the role that some of those same elites were playing in the Federal Republic of Germany.⁵⁸ Indeed, there had never been a ‘Zero Hour’ or new beginning within the professions, including the historical one; on the contrary, many intellectuals, including history professors, had been able to remain in their positions of power.⁵⁹ Questioning the authority of their parents, their professors, and the state, the emerging student movement found the alleged continuities between the Nazi power structure and the young Federal

⁵⁶Franz Joseph Strauß, quoted in Berger, *The Search for Normality*, 83. Berger quoted Strauß from Matthias von Hellfeld, *Die Nation erwacht. Zur Trendwende der deutschen politischen Kultur* (Köln: PapyRossa, 1993), 75.

⁵⁷Ibid.

⁵⁸If such connections occurred to anyone at the time, they were not openly discussed, or at least I have not been able to find evidence in the literature. Given the political and social climate at the time, however, the thought about possible connections must have added fuel to the attacks against Fischer.

⁵⁹These historians, occupying powerful positions in the German university system, referred to themselves as “*Die Zunft*” or the guild, which implied a monopoly on influence and high barriers for newcomers to join. See also Moses, *The Politics of Illusion*, 111-114. As for the continuity within the guild between the Third Reich and West Germany, see Axel Schildt, “Überlegungen zur Historisierung der Bundesrepublik,” in *Verletztes Gedächtnis: Erinnerungskultur und Zeitgeschichte im Konflikt*, eds. Konrad Jarausch and Martin Sabrow (Frankfurt: Campus Verlag, 2002), 266-268 and Berger, *The Search for Normality*, 40-41. This situation became the subject of a historiographic controversy in its own right in the so-called ‘Historians in National Socialism Controversy’ from 1998 onwards. See Torben Fischer, “Historiker im Nationalsozialismus,” in Fischer and Lorenz, eds. *Lexikon der Vergangenheitsbewältigung*, 299-303.

Republic unbearable.⁶⁰ Twenty years later, the German journalist Ralph Giordano, himself a victim of Nazi persecution, labeled this particular continuity as *die zweite Schuld* [the second guilt/culpability], popularizing the notion with a large readership.⁶¹

In the late 1960s, students were indeed the first group in German society willing to look at the immediate past more critically than their parents had done thus far. They began demanding a ‘reckoning with the past’ that did not shy away from questions of personal guilt.⁶² This generational dynamic demonstrated for the first time what should become apparent during subsequent ‘waves’ of controversies about the Nazi past, namely, that intergenerational issues would inevitably play a role. Intergenerational tension was also at work within the historical guild itself, during this first controversy as well as subsequent ones, pitting those historians who had experienced National Socialism directly against those who had not.⁶³

Although Fischer’s work had far-reaching political and cultural consequences, its most profound legacy might have been having questioned, for the first time, the traditional role of the historian in society. No longer would the historian provide legitimacy to state policies, at least not out of a nationalist loyalty to the state, as had been the tradition of German historicism. Rather, the historian would not shy away from uncovering unpalatable aspects of national history and thereby challenging society and its

⁶⁰Fischer must have had a strong following among students, as he had attracted over one hundred doctoral candidates during his tenure at the University of Hamburg. Jarausch, “Der nationale Tabubruch,” 28.

⁶¹Ralph Giordano, *Die zweite Schuld oder von der Last Deutscher zu sein* (Hamburg: Rasch und Röhning Verlag, 1987).

⁶²For a similar argument along these lines, see Jarausch, “World Power or Tragic Fate?” 76.

⁶³As for the *Fischer Controversy*, Gerhard Ritter and the other critics from within the guild had fought for Germany in WWI, while Fischer was too young to have done so. This difference might have yet been another reason why the older historians still identified with Imperial Germany.

various elites. Thus, the historian's role would still be profoundly political, but he or she would no longer be the handmaiden of the state. On the contrary, historiography could have an emancipatory effect, as Imanuel Geiss, Fischer's most prominent student, claimed it should.⁶⁴ This independence from the state would lead to less uniformity within historiography and to greater plurality of interpretative frameworks of the past. Such plurality or fragmentation became evident once social history in all its iterations came on the scene.⁶⁵ Although Fischer did not single-handedly replace historicism with critical history, the new vision of the role of history in society and of the corresponding responsibility of the historian was the most significant historiographic contribution of Fischer's work.⁶⁶

Looking at the *Fischer Controversy* from a distance of almost fifty years, its timing is not surprising, even against the backdrop of the 1950s and early 1960s. Its emotional climax in 1964 played out at the Berlin *Historikertag* [historians' meeting], a conference that coincided with the fiftieth anniversary of the outbreak of WWI and the twenty-fifth anniversary of the beginning of WWII.⁶⁷ These anniversaries would bring with them a heightened sensitivity for questions of wars' origins and war guilt, but also of historical continuities, national identity, and victimhood. Yet it would take another

⁶⁴Geiss, *Studien über Geschichte und Geschichtswissenschaft*, 194-195. Geiss asserted this new reality in his portrayal of the *Fischer Controversy* as a generation conflict between the "orthodoxy" of the guild and a new generation of historians who finally wanted to assert their right to write their own history, building on the bitter lessons of the past. According to him, the older generation had had its turn, "with results that we all know," *ibid.*, 195.

⁶⁵Stefan Berger posited that the pluralization within historiography that Fischer brought about has remained intact ever since, despite repeated conservative attempts of revisionism during the *Historikerstreit* and after reunification. Berger, *The Search for Normality*, 220, 233.

⁶⁶This argument is informed by Konrad Jarausch's retrospective of the Fischer Controversy in his "Der Nationale Tabubruch."

⁶⁷For a detailed account of that meeting, see Geiss, "Zur Fischer-Kontroverse—40 Jahre danach," 46-49.

twenty-two years for the *Historikerstreit* to break out, the first major controversy about the legacy of National Socialism proper. As we will see, this controversy and the others that followed were quite unthinkable without the preceding debate about Germany's role in WWI. Even though Fischer's *Griff nach der Weltmacht* may not have been 'about Hitler,' his entire body of work and the debate it precipitated turned out to be very much so.

Fast-forward from 1964 to October 11, 1998. The stage from where our second bracket event emanated was none other than the Frankfurt Paulskirche, a place of great symbolism for German national history. It was here that the first publicly elected political body in Germany convened in 1848/49, thirty-one years before the founding of the first modern German nation-state. The Paulskirche has served as national memorial rather than as church and has been used since its reconstruction after WWII for events of national political and cultural significance. The particular event at issue here was the ceremony awarding German playwright Martin Walser the prestigious Peace Prize of the German Book Trade, an international prize that has been given in conjunction with the Frankfurt Book Fair since 1950.⁶⁸ Walser used this exposed platform, in the presence of representatives from various German and international leadership circles, to make a statement, couched as an acceptance speech, that would unleash the most recent major controversy about the role of the National Socialist legacy in German society.⁶⁹

⁶⁸Americans have been among the international recipients: George F. Kennan, Yehudi Menuhin, Paul Tillich, Thornton Wilder, Fritz Stern and Susan Sontag.

⁶⁹Walser was born in 1927 in Wasserburg, Germany. Among his most controversial literary productions in terms of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* are, the essay, "Unser Auschwitz," (1965), the novel, *Tod eines Kritikers* (2002), and his autobiographical novel, *Ein springender Brunnen* (1998), for which he received the award at issue here.

In his speech, titled “Erfahrungen beim Verfassen einer Sonntagsrede,” Walser took issue with the alleged public use of Auschwitz as “moral cudgel” and with what he coined the “instrumentalization of shame” over the Holocaust for contemporary political purposes.⁷⁰ Bemoaning the relentless and ritualized memory culture surrounding the Holocaust in Germany and the politically correct *mea culpa* associated with it in contemporary German discourse, Walser laced his speech with controversial statements, such as “I have had to learn to avert my eyes,” “I don’t have to be able to stand the unbearable,” “I could not live in a world in which amends had to be made for everything,” and “..., I realize that something in me rebels against the relentless representation of our shame.”⁷¹ Instead of the ‘moral cudgel’ that the Holocaust allegedly had become in the political and cultural life of the reunified nation of the 1990s, Walser demanded that reckoning with the Nazi past would once again become a private affair between the individual and his or her conscience.⁷² “Conscience cannot be delegated,” he argued.⁷³ Also stressing that no reasonable person would deny the horror of Auschwitz, Walser further stated that the constant affirmation of shame had political motives, insinuating that such motives revolved around the leftist arguments against German reunification. One could not afford to speak of Germany as a normal nation

⁷⁰Martin Walser, “Erfahrungen beim Verfassen einer Sonntagsrede,” in *Die Walser-Bubis-Debatte: Eine Dokumentation*, edited by Frank Schirrmacher (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1999), 13, 12. Loosely translated, the title of the speech reads, *Experiences While Composing a Sunday [thought-provoking]Address*.

⁷¹Ibid., 8 [first three quotes] and 12 [last quote]. Translations mine.

⁷²Lorenz, “Walser-Bubis-Debatte,” in Fischer and Lorenz, eds., *Lexikon der ‘Vergangenheitsbewältigung*, 297.

⁷³Walser, “Erfahrungen beim Verfassen einer Sonntagsrede,” 9.

without inviting suspicion.⁷⁴ With escalating sharpness, Walser further accused unnamed German *Dichter und Denker* of acting as the official “defenders of national conscience” and as “opinion soldiers,” brandishing “moral pistols” to demand political correctness from the poet.⁷⁵

His ‘Sunday speech’ earned Walser overwhelming public support, not only from the roughly twelve-hundred people filling the Paulskirche on that Sunday morning, but also from the broad public that subsequently weighed in.⁷⁶ The controversy that followed lasted six months and was aired in public via the entire spectrum of the national German news media. Already in 1999, Frank Schirrmacher, co-editor of the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* and author of the *Laudatio* on Walser, published a 682-page collection of documents that had appeared in the press between October 1998 and March 1999.⁷⁷

The public support was not the decisive factor in turning the speech into a veritable ‘wave’ of disputes about the legacy of the Nazi past; rather, the initial reaction by Ignatz Bubis, then chair of the *Central Committee of Jews in Germany* [*Zentralrat der*

⁷⁴Ibid., 9, 11, 12-13. Some leftist intellectuals had argued in the 1980s that Auschwitz forbade German dreams of eventual reunification with the German Democratic Republic, forming once again a full-fledged German nation.

⁷⁵Ibid., 14-15. With *Dichter und Denker*, literally translated as poets and thinkers, Walser referred to German intellectuals. Germany had traditionally prided itself on being a nation of *Dichter und Denker*, referring to Goethe, Schiller, and even Marx, but also one in which modern intellectuals had much to contribute to the public sphere. The slogan made resurgence after reunification, coinciding with the growing self-confidence of the nation (or with the attempt to project a new, positive image of Germany that draws on a less encumbered past than the one associated with the Third Reich). Here Walser probably referred to the criticism he received for not having included anything about the Holocaust in his autobiographical novel, *Ein springender Brunnen/Roman* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1998).

⁷⁶Lorenz, “Walser-Bubis-Debate,” in Fischer and Lorenz, eds., *Lexikon der Vergangenheitsbewältigung*, 297.

⁷⁷Frank Schirrmacher, ed., *Die Walser-Bubis-Debatte: Eine Dokumentation* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1999).

Juden in Deutschland], kicked off what was to become one of the most acerbic and polemic controversies about the legacy of National Socialism to date. Bubis and his wife attended the event in the Paulskirche. They were the only ones not joining in the standing ovation Walser received; rather, they remained seated in protest. A month later, on November 9, 1998, Bubis took the opportunity to offer a public rebuttal in his speech commemorating the sixtieth anniversary of the night of Nazi pogroms against the Jewish community, also known as the *Reichskristallnacht*. In his speech, again in front of an audience of political and intellectual dignitaries and reprinted in full in the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, Bubis placed Walser in a long tradition of those who had tried “to suppress history [and] extinguish memory.”⁷⁸ Carefully mentioning that only he was responsible for what he would say and only Walser was responsible for his earlier speech (as opposed to ‘all Jews’ and ‘all Germans’), Bubis’s main points of criticism focused on Walser mentioning shame repeatedly, but never any of the crimes that had called for shame in the first place. In fact, considering public display of shame as instrumentalization of Auschwitz for contemporary purposes amounted to “intellectual arson.”⁷⁹ Bubis also leveled an accusation of anti-Semitism at Walser, parts of whose speech were “unworthy” of a recipient of a peace prize, but perhaps symptomatic of a

⁷⁸Ignatz Bubis, “Rede des Präsidenten des Zentralrates der Juden in Deutschland am 9. November 1998 in der Synagoge Rykerstraße in Berlin,” in Frank Schirmmayer, ed., *Die Walser-Bubis-Debatte: Eine Dokumentation* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1999), 108-109.

⁷⁹Ibid., 111. The original German is *geistige Brandstiftung*, a provocative label in a country that prides itself on the role of intellectualism and intellectuals in society. The fire imagery has ugly connotations with Auschwitz, but also with arson assaults on asylum hostels that occurred around the time of the controversy. The political purposes for which Auschwitz was allegedly being used that Walser had alluded to may have been the hotly contested Holocaust Memorial that was planned for the center of Berlin. Bubis believed Walser had alluded to the discussions about financial restitution for forced laborers that was raging at the time, which Walser denied. Ignatz Bubis, Salomon Korn, Frank Schirmmayer, and Martin Walser, “Wir brauchen eine neue Sprache für die Erinnerung: Ein Gespräch,” in Schirmmayer, ed., *Die Walser-Bubis-Debatte*, 438-439, 444.

mood of “intellectual nationalism” that had lately arisen in Germany and that desired for Germany finally to become a ‘normal nation.’⁸⁰ Bubis’s concluding statement was most pointed, perhaps to serve as a moral cudgel in its own right, as, according to him, “some would not be able to learn morals any other way.” “We owe it to the victims of the Shoah not to forget about them!” he exclaimed, “He who forgets these victims, kills them once more!”⁸¹ Bubis passed away less than a year later, in August 1999.

It would lead too far to reiterate here the controversy as it unfolded in all its details, but it is nevertheless of interest that the majority of the letters to the editor that Schirmacher reprinted in his documentation sympathized with Walser, regardless in which newspaper the letters had originally appeared. Many writers found that Walser had been courageous to express what they themselves believed but were afraid to say for fear of appearing politically incorrect. A few examples must suffice to convey a common thread among these letters: “You speak my heart!” wrote Astrid Koch in a personal letter to Walser on December 12, 1998. Two days later, Joachim Baron wrote to Walser, “You are completely right: ‘Having to remember!’ has once more to become an individual [affair], an affair of the heart!” On January 23, 1999, Eva Krüger wrote in a letter to the editor of the *Neue Züricher Zeitung*, “This is about us older generation, . . . , finally want[ing] protection from [someone] constantly digging in our wounds and demanding from us to profess guilt publicly. There is no collective guilt.”⁸² These few excerpts represent some of the key concerns Walser’s supporters from the general public voiced.

⁸⁰Bubis, “Rede des Präsidenten des Zentralrates der Juden,” in Schirmacher, ed., *Die Walser-Bubis-Debatte*, 112.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 112 and 113.

⁸²Schirmacher, ed., *Die Walser-Bubis-Debatte*, 407, 465, and 589, respectively [translations mine].

A look at opinion polls from 1989 and 2002 allows the conjecture that they might not have been entirely out of synch with the general public.⁸³ These same issues also became major themes of the controversy: A saturation point had allegedly been reached for public and official commemorations that represented Germany as a nation of perpetrators; mourning and remorse must once again become private affairs; the older generation had done enough to atone for National Socialism and had a right to have its own victim status recognized.

Those who supported Walser, and there were many, expressed directly or indirectly that it was time, almost ten years after the post-WWII epoch had come to an end, finally to put the elusive *Schlussstrich* under the National Socialist past. ‘Enough is enough,’ and ‘it’s time to be a normal nation again,’ many seemed to have heard Walser say in his speech—and they agreed. For our purposes it may not be as important what Walser actually *did* say and what he may have meant with his numerous insinuations as what his audience *heard* him say. He had purportedly spoken only for himself, but had constructed his speech in such a way that it was open to multiple interpretations. This, of course, also made it vulnerable to being misunderstood, as, according to Walser, Bubis and some others obviously had.⁸⁴ Walser had indeed touched a nerve, not unlike Fischer

⁸³The pollsters asked whether the statement was correct that Germans occupied themselves too much with the past, especially with the Third Reich, while not looking towards the future enough. In 1989, 40% of the respondents agreed with this statement while 42% did not. In 2000, by contrast, 47% agreed and 43% did not. This might signal a growing ‘fatigue,’ with reckoning with the past, being stronger in 2000 than eleven years earlier. Noelle-Neumann and Köcher, eds., *Allensbacher Jahrbuch der Demoskopie 1998-2002*, 548.

⁸⁴Walser made additional statements throughout the unfolding controversy. On 28 November, 1998, for example, he stated that his criticism had been directed towards the *media* not towards professional historians and their work. Furthermore, he had never asked for a *Schlussstrich*; instead, he had argued that memory and remembrance were affairs for the individual conscience. Martin Walser, “Wovon zeugt die Schande, wenn nicht von Verbrechen. Das Gewissen ist die innere Einsamkeit mit sich: Ein Zwischenruf,” in Schirmmacher, ed., *Die Walser-Bubis-Debatte*, 252-260. In a conversation with Bubis from 14 December 1998, Walser reiterated that he had never meant to demand a *Schlussstrich*. He had

before him, but in a very different way. As a result, the next wave of reckoning with the Nazi past swept over the land, involving members of the general public, publicists and politicians, and, to a small degree, professional historians in yet another heated debate about the past that still had not ‘passed away,’ to use Ernst Nolte’s formulation from the *Historikerstreit*. This debate proved so important that it eventually found its way into a German history textbook, as was the case with the other four controversies discussed here.⁸⁵

If at the eve to the twenty-first century not even a reunified German nation was able to relegate the National Socialist past to the annals of history, can one still argue that the *Walser-Bubis-Debate* marked the end of an era? Was this controversy indeed the closing bracket, just like the *Fischer Controversy* had been the opening bracket? More ‘waves’ were already on the horizon; the *Walser-Bubis-Debate* was not the last one. The planned Jewish Museum in Berlin was hotly debated, for example, before it was opened in 2001; Walser’s own novel, *Death of a Critic*, rekindled the *Walser-Bubis-Debate* in 2002, and, most recently in 2009/10, the political quarrel over the appointment of Erika Steinbach, controversial president of the *Federation of Expellees* [*Verbund der Vertriebenen*], to the board of the government foundation, *Flight, Expulsion,*

never disputed that the entire nation was responsible. He also maintained that the majority of listeners had understood his message correctly, implying that Bubis and a minority had not been able to do the same. Bubis, Korn, Schirmacher, Walser, “Wir brauchen eine neue Sprache,” in Schirmacher, ed., *Die Walser-Bubis-Debatte*, 438-464, especially 445-447

⁸⁵Bender, Daniela, Michael Epkenhans, Karl-Heinz Gräfe, Rüdiger Fleiter, Andreas Griebinger, Wolfram Lippert, Joachim Rohlfes, Reinhard Sturm, and Martin Thunich, *Geschichte und Geschehen: Neuzeit*. Sekundarstufe II (Leipzig: Ernst Klett Schulbuchverlag, 2005), 246-247. The text presents the students with excerpts from Walser’s speech and Bubis’s response. The assignment asks for students to discuss the two perspectives, based on their own experiences (!) and reflections.

Reconciliation, makes regular appearances in the national press.⁸⁶ There is indeed no indication that such controversies will cease to develop any time soon. Even the recent historicization of East Germany and the fledgling historicization of West Germany, both of which are attracting much professional and general interest, have not rendered the continuing reckoning with National Socialism superfluous.⁸⁷

Comparing the *Walser-Bubis-Debate* with the *Fischer Controversy* may help in shedding light on their respective roles within the broader context of German *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*. Such comparison must include the political frameworks within which the controversies played out and the repercussions on national consciousness as well as the respective roles of the historical profession, the media, and the public.

At the outbreak of the *Fischer Controversy*, there was no German nation, at least not in the conventional form of a nation-state. Germany as a territorial nation-state had ceased to exist with capitulation in 1945. Two separate successor states had replaced Germany in 1949, their common border marking the geographic and ideological divide between East and West that was to persist for forty years. During the first decades following the war, both states were engaged in forming new ‘national’ identities that required historical legitimization via newly constructed grand ‘national’ narratives.

⁸⁶For more information about the first two controversies, see Sabine Offe, “Jüdisches Museum Berlin,” in Fischer and Lorenz, eds., *Lexikon der “Vergangenheitsbewältigung,”* 306-308 and Matthias Lorenz, “Martin Walser: *Tod eines Kritikers*,” in *ibid.*, 310-313. The *Steinbach Affair* is still ongoing and can be followed in the online German national press (<http://www.welt.de>, <http://www.zeit.de>, or <http://faznet.de>).

⁸⁷See also Dietrich Mühlberg, “Vom langsamen Wandel der Erinnerung an die DDR,” in *Verletztes Gedächtnis: Erinnerungskultur und Zeitgeschichte im Konflikt*, eds. Konrad Jarausch und Martin Sabrow (Frankfurt: Campus Verlag, 2002), 217-251 and Axel Schildt, “Überlegungen zur Historisierung der Bundesrepublik,” in *ibid.*, 253-272.

Although in West Germany the narrative was not uncontested, a broad consensus nevertheless existed, including a view of the Third Reich as aberration from the path of German history, the desirability of belonging to the West, and the search for a ‘usable’ past. Many a historian from the older generation saw it as his responsibility to facilitate West Germany’s search for such a past.⁸⁸ As a consequence, Fischer’s challenge to redefine the role of the historian vis-à-vis the state met with cool or outright hostile reactions. Nevertheless, he had opened the door to a new way of looking at the state, and, by extension, at the past, which would prove immensely fruitful to the historiography of the following decades.

The *Walser-Bubis-Debate* took place in a completely different geo-political environment. The German nation-state existed again since 1990, although occupying a substantially smaller territory than the Bismarckian nation-state of 1871. With it came a renewed need for some kind of national identity, however that might be defined. After all, neither identity of the two post-war German successor states would do under the new circumstances. By 1998/99, Germany had developed a degree of self-confidence vis-à-vis the great powers that would have been entirely unthinkable before reunification, not to mention in the 1950s.⁸⁹ A new coalition government of the leftist Social Democrats and the Greens had just taken the helm, bringing a generation of politicians without

⁸⁸Stefan Berger provided an excellent overview of West German historiography between 1945 and 1961 in Chapter 3 of his book, *The Search for Normality*.

⁸⁹According to conservative historian, Gregor Schöllgen, this confidence had been painfully slow in coming initially, partially due to Germany’s relative lack of experience with having a nation-state. Notably, Schöllgen insinuated in his book, *Angst vor der Macht: Die Deutschen und ihre Aussenpolitik* (Frankfurt/Main: Ullstein, 1993), especially Chapter One, that Allied post-war policies vis-à-vis Germany were partially responsible for Germans having forgotten how to pursue the foreign policy of a fully-fledged nation-state. Stefan Berger, by contrast, argued that re-nationalization was apparent right after reunification, not only in politics, but also in historiography (Berger, *The Search for Normality*).

personal experience of National Socialism to power. Under Gerhard Schröder's chancellorship, the *raison d'état* was different from what had driven Chancellor Adenauer: West integration had become a long-established status quo, while the economic reconstruction of the former East Germany now took priority. Economic considerations but perhaps also a more distanced moral perspective on the Nazi legacy may have been among the reasons why Schröder clearly sided with industry in the wrangle about reparation payments to surviving forced laborers of the Third Reich. He did not weigh in on the *Walser-Bubis-Debate* except for the comment that playwrights should be permitted to talk about Auschwitz as moral cudgel while the Federal Chancellor should not. As Gerd Wiegel pointed out, Schröder's statement left unclear whether he regretted this or not.⁹⁰ Another comment, on occasion of an interview with the national newspaper, *Die Zeit*, from June, 1999 conveys Schröder's position quite clearly. "People who do not have their own memories—that pertains to my generation and to those that follow— should be able to run around without guilt complexes."⁹¹ The Federal President, Roman Herzog, by contrast, did address the controversy. On occasion of the day of remembrance of the liberation of Auschwitz, January 28, 1999, Herzog delivered an address that seemed to attempt finding a middle-ground between Walser's complaints about German 'memory culture' and Bubis's accusations of antisemitism.

⁹⁰Gerhard Schröder, cited in Gerd Wiegel, "Eine Rede und ihre Folgen: Die Debatte zur Walser-Rede," in *Geistige Brandstiftung: Die Walser-Bubis Debatte*, eds. Gerd Wiegel and Johannes Klotz (Köln: Papy/Rossa Verlag, 1999), 51. Also telling of Chancellor Schröder's rather unencumbered attitude towards the German past was his call for a Holocaust memorial "to which one would enjoy going" (ibid.). Wiegel cited the Chancellor not directly, but from an article by Werner A. Perger in the national newspaper, *Die Zeit*, from 11 December, 1998.

⁹¹Gerhard Schröder, "Eine offene Republik. Ein Interview mit Gerhard Schröder," *Die Zeit* (June 1999), quoted in Amir Eshel, "Vom Eigenen Gewissen: Die Walser-Bubis-Debatte und der Ort des Nationalsozialismus im Selbstbild der Bundesrepublik," *Deutsche Vierteljahrsschrift für Literaturwissenschaft und Geistesgeschichte*, 74, no. 2 (2000), 358 [translation mine].

Bemoaning the conspicuous absence of the young generation from the public discussion, Herzog concentrated his remarks on “the future of remembering.”⁹² We will encounter the theme underlying this remark, namely the historicization of the Holocaust, throughout the remainder of this study.

This cursory comparison has demonstrated that the geo-political situation in which a community undertakes *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* influences how the process plays out. The political motivation is always central to the process. In the Federal Republic of Germany, both the old as well as the new, such motivation has ranged from striving to earn back the moral respect of desired alliance partners (1950s and 1960s) to demonstrating that the new nation was well on its way to becoming ‘normal’ once more and assuming a more self-assured role on the world stage (1990s onward). A full assessment of Kattago’s and Frei’s periodization schemes in light of our own findings will have to wait until the end of this study, but one certainly can find aspects of Kattago’s ‘guilty pariah’ stage and Frei’s ‘politics with the past’ in the *Fischer Controversy*, as well as the normalization theme in the *Walser-Bubis-Debate*.⁹³

As for the role of the historical profession, the media, and the public, our two controversies could not be farther apart as well. The *Fischer Controversy*, as we have seen, was all about historiography and the role of the historian vis-à-vis the state. As such, it was indeed highly political. This should not be surprising because the members of the guild, with few exceptions, had seen the legitimization of the nation-state as their

⁹²Roman Herzog, “Sich der Geschichte nicht in Schande, sondern in Würde stellen: Rede zum Gedenktag der Befreiung des Konzentrations- und Vernichtungslagers Auschwitz,” in Schirmacher, ed., *Die Walser-Bubis-Debatte*, 600.

⁹³Kattago, *Ambiguous Memory: The Nazi Past*, 38-48; Frei, *1945 und Wir*, 41.

primary reason for being ever since Leopold von Ranke and the historicism of the Prussian School had founded the profession in the late nineteenth century. Questioning that political role, as Fischer did, was political. A historian's scholarly work was the impetus for this controversy which subsequently played out primarily among professional historians, even though the national press gave it some publicity. The controversy profoundly altered the framework within which historians would work for decades to come, although some have argued that historicism never died out completely, but rather raised its head occasionally, only to gain new ascendancy after reunification.⁹⁴ Walser never referenced a particular historiographic school in his speech, but his remarks place him well into the neo-conservative branch of *Zeitgeschichte* that had become more prominent since reunification. We will see later how the tension between the two broad historiographic paradigms surfaced again and again, perhaps even causing the subsequent controversies. The *Fischer Controversy* was, in essence, a historiographic controversy, albeit one that kicked off an entirely new way of reckoning with the Nazi past in society at large. The *Walser-Bubis-Debate* was not, but it is nevertheless unthinkable without the historiographic controversies that bridged the gap between our bracket events.

By comparison, historians remained very much in the background during the *Walser-Bubis-Debate*. German historian Christian Meier and Israeli historian Saul Friedländer—whom we will encounter again in connection with the *Historikerstreit*—were the only ones featured in Schirmacher's initial documentary.⁹⁵ If they took sides at

⁹⁴Berger, *The Search for Normality*, Chapter 4, especially 78-79.

⁹⁵Christian Meier, "Vielleicht gar ein Beitrag zur Erinnerung. Jedes Gedenken an Auschwitz ist unzulänglich: Walser und Bubis leisten Arbeit an der Vergangenheit," in Schirmacher, ed., *Die Walser-Bubis-Debatte*, 203-206; Saul Friedländer, "Die Metapher des Bösen: Über Martin Walser's Friedenspreis-Rede und die Aufgabe der Erinnerung," in *ibid.*, 233-240.

all, which is not easy to determine, it was in an even-handed manner, introducing the historian's scholarly and perhaps rather disengaged perspective into a highly emotional debate. After all, Walser had not criticized the guild as much as he had leveled accusations at 'politics,' the media, and at alleged 'Jewish interests.' As much as the *Fischer Controversy* was a controversy over the role of the historian, this was about society in general, about the present, and about the 'future of dealing with the past,' to take up Herzog's theme once more. One could argue that this most recent 'wave' demonstrated what Martin Sabrow has coined the "creeping disempowerment of the German historical guild" since the days of the *Historikerstreit*, despite, or perhaps because of the cultural "historicization jolt" [*Historisierungsschub*] that happened during the same time span.⁹⁶ Publicists, by contrast, seemed to have taken the helm during this debate, influencing significantly its course in the process, a development that attested to the towering function of the media in society.⁹⁷ Members of the general public were also not afraid to chime in in large numbers. Since Walser had talked about himself, individuals seemed to have felt invited to share their own perspectives and experiences as well. Although this controversy was very much about politics, not unlike the *Fischer Controversy* had been, it was also about individual Germans. As we will see, it had become clear during the various bridging controversies that reckoning with the past pertained to individuals not just to politicians and historians and that the debate would happen in the public sphere and not exclusively within political and academic circles.

⁹⁶Sabrow, Martin, "Der Historiker als Zeitzeuge. Autobiographische Umbruchsreflexionen deutscher Fachgelehrter nach 1945 und 1989," in *Verletztes Gedächtnis*, eds. Jarausch and Sabrow, 126.

⁹⁷For example, former politician Klaus von Dohnanyi, *Spiegel* editor in chief, Rudolf Augstein, and Frank Schirrmacher from the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* played pivotal roles.

Finally, our comparison of the two controversies compels us to look at the respective topics that were at stake. While the *Fischer Controversy* was about political history, political structures, the agency of political leaders, and the role of social elites in foreign policy, at issue in the *Walser-Bubis-Debate* was a very different kind of history. The focus here was on the individual and his or her relationship with the past. It was about memory, both personal and collective. It was about individual conscience, guilt and shame. Just as the *Fischer Controversy* was not really about WWI but rather about a critical stance towards the past in general, the *Walser-Bubis-Debate* was about how, if at all, the past should play a role in forging national identity at a time when there would no longer be those who had witnessed National Socialism first-hand to weigh in. The theme of historicization, first raised during the *Historikerstreit*, had reappeared in full force, but now under very different geo-political and social conditions. One could say that the *Walser-Bubis-Debate* was the last hurrah of a generation of *Zeitzeugen* trying to define the terms under which following generations would view the past.⁹⁸ In this sense one can clearly argue that the era the *Fischer Controversy* had inaugurated what was now coming to an end. Any attempt to deal with the National Socialist legacy after 1999 would take place within completely new parameters.

It would not be fruitful, and it certainly is not within the purview of the historian, to speculate what types of controversies might come next or how Germany might deal with them, given the soon-to-arrive complete absence of a generation of *Zeitzeugen*. Rather, in order to understand the significant differences between our two bracketing events more clearly, we will take a closer look at those major controversies that bridged

⁹⁸*Zeitzeugen*, literally ‘witnesses of the times,’ are those who have lived during the Third Reich, either as witnesses, bystanders, perpetrators, victims, or fellow-travelers. There are several generations of *Zeitzeugen* and it has made a difference in the controversies to which of them the contenders belonged.

the two. We will see that the changes happened gradually rather than overnight, although reunification was a watershed event with profound impact on *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*. Each bridging event or 'wave' lends itself to demonstrating a different aspect of the themes already mentioned. The *Historikerstreit* continued the historiographic debate begun in the *Fischer Controversy*. One cannot fully grasp its significance without taking into account the fault lines running through the historical profession that had developed much earlier and had manifested themselves during the *Fischer Controversy*. The *Goldhagen Affair* demonstrated better than any other the impact of the media, as well as the generational aspect of such controversies, while the controversy over the *Wehrmachtsausstellung* dealt most directly with public vs. private memory. Together, these five debates shed a light not only on how Germany's reckoning with the Nazi legacy has unfolded so far, but also on the corresponding evolution of historical and national consciousness in the Federal Republic of Germany. Furthermore, they reflect quite well the vagaries of modern German historiography over the past century. Lastly, the controversies should be of broader interest as they dealt with subjects of concern for modern history in general. The role of the historian in society is one of those, as is the interplay between historical scholarship and the popular media in shaping historical, if not national consciousness in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries.

CHAPTER TWO

THE *HISTORIKERSTREIT*: A PERFECT STORM

At the time, the *Historikerstreit* may have seemed like a mudslinging contest among cantankerous old men that got out of hand. Before anyone knew what had happened, the controversy had escalated to international proportions. Bruised egos, poisoned collegial relationships, and a burgeoning literature, impenetrable in its sheer quantity and complexity, was all that was left in its wake, or so it seemed.⁹⁹ A closer look, and the benefit of twenty-four years of hindsight, reveal that the dispute that has become known as, somewhat misleadingly, the controversy among historians [*Historikerstreit*], may arguably have been the ‘perfect storm’ among controversies about the place of the National Socialist past in contemporary German society.¹⁰⁰

Such a claim requires explanation, since this controversy neither produced seminal works on the level of Fischer’s *Griff nach der Weltmacht*, nor launched new,

⁹⁹For example, Ernst Nolte, who had been an internationally reputable historian of fascism before the *Historikerstreit*, apparently became increasingly isolated during the affair and seemed to have lost most of his colleagues’ respect by the end of it. Also, during the Historians’ Meeting in October 1986, a discussion of the issues between the main contestants was impossible because Michael Stürmer and Hans-Ulrich Wehler would not be in the same room together. Große Kracht, *Die zankende Zunft*, 111, 109.

¹⁰⁰This debate has been the most thoroughly historicized controversy about Germany’s reckoning with the Nazi past. Several retrospectives exist. A selection includes Dan Diner, ed. *Ist der Nationalsozialismus Geschichte?: Zu Historisierung des Historikerstreit* (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer Taschenbuch Verlag, 1987); Jürgen Elvert, “Nationalsozialismus, Nationalbewusstsein und Deutsche Identität: Eine Erinnerung an den Historikerstreit von 1986,” *Zeitschrift für Geschichtswissenschaft* 45, no. 1 (1997): 47-62; Richard Evans, *In Hitler’s Shadow: West German Historians and the Attempt to Escape from the Nazi Past* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1989); “Forum: The *Historikerstreit* Twenty Years on,” *German History* 24 no. 4 (2006): 586-607; Eckhard Jesse, “Ist der ‘Historikerstreit’ ein ‘Historischer Streit’? Zugleich eine Auseinandersetzung mit der Literatur,” *Zeitschrift für Politik* 35 no. 2 (1988): 163-197; Dominick LaCapra, “Revisiting the Historians’ Debate: Mourning and Genocide,” *History and Memory* 9, no. 1/2 (Fall, 1997): 80-112, <http://0-www.proquest.com.library.acaweb.org/>; Document ID: 593640281 (accessed March 27, 2010); Charles Maier, *The Unmasterable Past: History, Holocaust, and German National Identity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997); Jörn Rüsen, “The Logic of Historicization: Metahistorical Reflections on the Debate between Friedländer and Broszat,” *History and Memory* 9, no. 1/2 (Fall 1997): 113 [no ending page number provided].

innovative approaches to *Zeitgeschichte*. It did not even produce new insights about National Socialism, although analyses of the controversy itself exist in abundance.¹⁰¹ Yet this controversy was about nothing less than how to talk and write about the National Socialist past forty years after the war's end. It was about discourse and semantics just as much as it was about the role of history and of the historian in society. Also at issue was the interplay between history and politics. It was arguably more about the present than about the past. In contrast to the *Fischer Controversy*, this was not a professionally conducted debate among subject specialists about competing interpretations of the recent German past; rather, the rancor of its discourse made the *Historikerstreit* appear more like a '*Hysterikerstreit* [fight among hysterics],' to use Imanuel Geiss's clever play on words.¹⁰² Having been minimally involved in the *Fischer Controversy*, the media in 1986/87 was quick to capitalize on public interest in the controversial and emotional issues at stake. In subsequent controversies, the media would assume an even more prominent role, but this was the first large-scale controversy that played out almost exclusively in the public arena.

It is indeed appropriate to claim that the *Historikerstreit* was more than a 'wave.' For it to break out when it did, upheavals in political culture had to converge with lingering tensions within the historiographic landscape; tensions that the *Fischer Controversy* had brought to the fore and that had not resolved themselves since. Complex international relations embedded in cold war politics and perfect timing with war-related anniversaries further contributed to perfect conditions for a major clash.

¹⁰¹Elvert, "Nationalsozialismus, Nationalbewußtsein und deutsche Identität," 56. For Elvert, this controversy was a continuation of the *Sonderweg* debate that, in his assessment, had dominated West German historiography since the end of WWII.

¹⁰²Immanuel Geiss, *Der Hysterikerstreit: Ein unpolemischer Essay* (Bonn: Bouvoir, 1992).

Before examining each of these factors more closely, a brief introduction of the main points of contention is in order.

In a nutshell, the debate concerned the singularity of Auschwitz and the proper role of history in society. A side debate concerned the appropriateness of historicizing the Holocaust. The first two issues were mainly associated with neo-conservative historians Ernst Nolte, Michael Stürmer, Andreas Hillgruber, and Klaus Hildebrand on one side and on the other the political philosopher from the leftist Frankfurt School, Jürgen Habermas, accompanied by similarly-minded historians. The protagonists of the historicization debate were German historian Martin Broszat and Israeli historian Saul Friedländer. The revisionist argument of the controversy proper, in very broad strokes, went along these lines: if the war of annihilation against the Soviet Union and the murder of the Jews were preemptive actions against a Bolshevik threat and represented a ‘reenactment’ of Soviet atrocities against the Kulaks, and if the Holocaust only differed from earlier genocides in the techniques employed, but was neither new nor unique in recent history, then the Third Reich did not warrant wholesale vilification. Likewise, Germans did not deserve much of the blame heaped upon them. If Germans were not to blame, there was no reason to shun national pride in the Federal Republic. Rather, it was high time to reestablish a healthy national self-consciousness.¹⁰³

¹⁰³For a more nuanced overview consult Große Kracht, *Die zankende Zunft*, 91-115; Ulrich Herbert, “Der Historikerstreit. Politische, wissenschaftliche, biographische Aspekte,” in *Zeitgeschichte als Streitgeschichte: Grosse Kontroversen nach 1945*, eds. Martin Sabrow, Ralph Jessen, and Klaus Große Kracht, 94-113 (München: Verlag C.H.Beck, 2003) and Antje Langer, “Historikerstreit,” in *Lexikon der Vergangenheitsbewältigung*, eds. Fischer and Lorenz, 238-240. Several compilations of original contributions to the debate provide insight into the various players, as well as into the chronology of the controversy: Rudolf Augstein, *Historikerstreit: Die Dokumentation der Kontroverse um die Einzigartigkeit der Nationalsozialistischen Judenvernichtung* (München: R. Piper, 1987); *Forever in the Shadow of Hitler?: Original Documents of the Historikerstreit, the Controversy Concerning the Singularity of the Holocaust*, trans. James Knowlton and Truett Cates (Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press, 1993); Reinhard Kühnl, *Streit ums Geschichtsbild: Die Historiker-Debatte*:

At issue in the historicization debate was Broszat's carefully argued call for subjecting the Holocaust to historical study in order to gain more knowledge about the associated events. Friedländer warned that such an approach was in danger of being appropriated for revisionist purposes, culminating in relativizing the Holocaust and exonerating the perpetrators. Looking at both sub-controversies together, one notices a commonality despite the considerable differences of civility and academic sophistication with which the antagonists conducted them. Both dealt with periodization and contextualization of the Nazi era and of the Holocaust. The perspective from which one examined the period and its central event would have profound implications on the kinds of questions one would ask and on how one would write and talk about the period. Whether one looked at the Holocaust as embedded in a larger historical context or as a unique event made a huge difference. Likewise, examining the Holocaust from the perspective of the present or from within its own time would lead to different assessments. Before returning to this crucial point, a brief examination of the various tensions that created the conditions in which this 'perfect storm' developed might be helpful.

Politically, the early-to-mid 1980s saw a conservative turn, precipitated by the change from the Social Democratic Schmidt government to the Christian Democratic Kohl era, an era that was to last well beyond German reunification.¹⁰⁴ Two events characterized the political culture of Kohl's early years in office better than any other and

Darstellung, Dokumentation, Kritik (Köln: Pahl-Rugenstein, 1987). The correspondence between Martin Broszat and Saul Friedländer about historicization has been published in the *New German Critique*: Martin Broszat and Saul Friedländer, "A Controversy about the Historicization of National Socialism," *New German Critique* 44, Special issue on the Historikerstreit (Spring-Summer 1988): 85-126, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/488148> (accessed March 27, 2010).

¹⁰⁴Chancellor Helmut Kohl headed the German government from 1982 to 1998.

helped prepare the conditions in which the *Historikerstreit* broke out. One has entered the annals of history as the ‘Bitburg fiasco’ and the other revolved around the planning of two German history museums.

‘Bitburg’ has become shorthand for political clumsiness or for a grave mistake of judgment on the parts of Chancellor Kohl and U.S. President Ronald Reagan, depending on one’s position on the political spectrum. The statesmen had chosen May 5, 1989, a few days before the fortieth anniversary of the capitulation of the Third Reich, to stage a grand gesture of reconciliation between the enemies-turned alliance partners, Germany and the United States of America. The military cemetery in the German town of Bitburg was to be the place for the occasion. Unfortunately, members of the notorious *Waffen SS* were buried there alongside German and American soldiers. Despite vehement protests from both sides of the Atlantic, the two heads of state went ahead with the ceremonies, adding, as a gesture of compromise, a short visit to the nearby Bergen Belsen concentration camp. Reagan’s address at Bitburg included the remark, “You know, I don’t think we ought to focus on the past. I want to focus on the future, I want to put that history behind us.”¹⁰⁵ Meant as a conciliatory gesture, perhaps with a subtext of anti-Soviet Western solidarity, the remark nevertheless seemed naïve and politically clumsy. It certainly betrayed obliviousness towards its effect on (American)-Jewish audiences, who had tried in vain to prevent the occasion altogether.¹⁰⁶ Honoring the dead from both sides together and making no distinctions between members of the *SS* and other soldiers,

¹⁰⁵Ronald Reagan, quoted in Bosworth, *Explaining Auschwitz and Hiroshima*, 76.

¹⁰⁶Elie Wiesel, himself a Holocaust survivor and generally considered a moral authority, had been the spokesperson for the American-Jewish opposition against the visit and the location. Herbert, “Der Historikerstreit,” in eds. Sabrow, Jessen, and Große Kracht, *Zeiteschichte als Streitgeschichte*, 97.

appeared to bestow equal victim status upon all. To make matters worse, the sharp criticism ‘Bitburg ‘ provoked from within and outside of Germany in turn led to a backlash from within conservative German circles demanding an end to anti-German feelings.¹⁰⁷ In the eyes of his critics, Chancellor Kohl added insult to injury by addressing the Silesian Expellees at their annual meeting just five weeks after ‘Bitburg,’ emphasizing that the Polish border issue (with East Germany) was still an open question. These actions, as well as the Kohl administration’s push for two new German history museums, fit perfectly well with the government’s attempt to effect the so-called *Tendenzwende*.¹⁰⁸

On the surface, this ‘turn-about of political culture’ was to lead Germans to a more positive national identity, but at the same time it might have been intended to counteract the growing peace movement’s staunch opposition against the current U.S. nuclear policy in Western Europe.¹⁰⁹ Under the Kohl government, the elusive *Schlussstrich* had entered national discourse once again, as were calls for finally

¹⁰⁷Heinrich August Winkler, *Der lange Weg nach Westen: Zweiter Band, Deutsche Geschichte vom ‘Dritten Reich’ bis zur Wiedervereinigung* (München: Verlag C.H. Beck, 2002), 432- 443; Geoff Eley, “Nazism, Politics and the Image of the Past: Thoughts on the West German Historikerstreit 1986-1987,” *Past and Present* 121 (November 1988): 175-176, 186-192, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/650915> (accessed March 27, 2010).

¹⁰⁸These were the years following the controversial stationing of new American nuclear arms on German soil (*Pershing II* missiles) in response to Soviet nuclear missiles (*SS-20*) stationed in East Germany. The Kohl government faced fierce opposition against the weapons from a growing peace movement within the Federal Republic.

¹⁰⁹For a brief overview of the conflict between anti-nuclear protesters and the government, see Hagen Schulze, *Germany: A New History*, translated by Deborah Schneider (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998), 326-328. Jeffrey Herf provided a book-length treatment about the *Tendenzwende*, the political controversies over the Two-Track Decision to station new nuclear missiles in Germany, and the peace movement in the early 1980s. Jeffrey Herf, *War by Other Means: Soviet Power, West German Resistance, and the Battle of the Euromissiles*, (New York: The Free Press, 1991), especially 98-112. Michael Geyer provided additional historical background for understanding the various positions. Michael Geyer, “Der Kalte Krieg, die Deutschen und die Angst: Die westdeutsche Opposition gegen Wiederbewaffnung und Kernwaffen,” in *Nachkrieg in Deutschland*, ed. Klaus Naumann (Hamburg: Hamburger Edition, 2001), 267-318.

becoming a ‘normal nation.’ West Germans were to develop a nationalism that went beyond the constitutional patriotism or *Verfassungspatriotismus* for which the liberal left advocated.¹¹⁰ The new museums, one planned for Bonn and the other for West Berlin, were to help them find positive continuities with their national past and turn away from the shame and guilt that had dominated the official historical consciousness of the post-WWII West Germany state.¹¹¹ Martin Walser did not refer to the *Tendenzwende* in his speech in 1998, but what he demanded seems right out of the mindset Kohl wanted to allow West Germans to develop in the mid-1980s. Echoes of ‘Bitburg’ were still audible in the Paulskirche thirteen years later and across the watershed event of reunification. It was within the sociopolitical climate of the *Tendenzwende*, which Charles Maier aptly characterized as “Bitburg history,” that the *Historikerstreit* erupted.¹¹²

Within the guild of professional historians, the ideological and methodological fault lines that became apparent in the wake of the *Fischer Controversy* had not disappeared during the 1970s, even though critical history had gained hegemony vis-à-vis neo-historism during that time.

¹¹⁰According to Jeffrey Olick, Kohl aimed at portraying West Germany “as a ‘Normal Nation,’ with the same problems as other Western states and a history that included ‘highs as well as lows.’” Olick, “What Does it Mean to Normalize the Past?” 552-553. ‘Normal’ in this context means that the Holocaust, while acknowledged and commemorated, would not overshadow every aspect of the present. Germany, in other words, would no longer be associated exclusively with its National Socialist past, whose central event would not necessarily be the Holocaust. Kohl did not use this particular comparison (neither did Olick), but Germany would be more like the United States which is not generally associated exclusively with slavery or with the first use of the atomic bomb on an enemy nation.

¹¹¹The planned museums were the German Historical Museum, to be completed in time for the 750-year anniversary of Berlin in 1987, and the House of History, planned for Bonn, which was still the capital of West Germany at the time. Kohl appointed Michael Stürmer, who was also one of his political advisers, to the planning committee for the museum, a move that earned him criticism from the left. The *House of History* was to portray the history of West Germany as success story of democracy. Rita Martens and Matthias Lorenz, “Museumsdebatte,” in *Lexikon der Vergangenheitsbewältigung*, eds. Fischer and Lorenz, 263.

¹¹²Maier, *The Unmasterable Past*, 9-16.

As mentioned earlier, for Jürgen Elvert, the *Historikerstreit* was just “another variant of the *Sonderweg* discussion” that had dominated German historiography since WWII.¹¹³ The *Sonderweg* paradigm was not new in German historiography. Heinrich von Treitschke, Friedrich Meinecke, and other historians had originally used it to denote Prussia’s special role for Germany and the world. A different variant of this positive interpretation has reappeared among neo-conservative historians after reunification; however, during the 1970s and into the 1980s, the theory had received a negative connotation and was associated with critical history.¹¹⁴ The general consensus had been that the special path on which Germany had embarked prior to forming its first nation-state had set it off from the rest of western European ‘normal’ national development. Germany had instead pursued a unique and troubled path towards nationhood and modernity, a path that inevitably and tragically led to National Socialism. In other words, Germany’s alleged uniqueness had been a negative one. According to this notion, the country had never achieved a ‘healthy’ nation-state as England and France had and should therefore shy away from pursuing reunification.¹¹⁵ Instead, Habermas and some leftist social historians had argued, the best path for Germany to pursue was to allow a new type of nationalism that was not based on the nation-state but rather on the West

¹¹³Elvert, “Nationalsozialismus, Nationalbewußtsein und deutsche Identität,” 56; the same idea appeared in Stephen Brockmann, “The Politics of German History,” *History and Theory* 29 no. 2 (May 1990): 184, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2505224> (accessed March 27, 2010).

¹¹⁴Berger, *The Search for Normality*, Chapter 5. See also Hagen Schulze, “Die ‘Deutsche Katastrophe’ erklären: Vom Nutzen und Nachteil historischer Erklärungsmodelle,” in *Ist der Nationalsozialismus Geschichte? Zu Historisierung und Historikerstreit*, ed. Dan Diner (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer Taschenbuch Verlag, 1987), 92-93.

¹¹⁵For a thorough discussion of the history of the *Sonderweg* debate, see Brockmann, “The Politics of German History”; Richard Evans, “The New Nationalism and the Old History: Perspectives on the West German Historikerstreit,” *The Journal of Modern History* 59 no. 4 (December 1987): 762-764; Hagen Schulze, “Die ‘Deutsche Katastrophe’ erklären,” in *Ist der Nationalsozialismus Geschichte?*, ed. Dan Diner, 90-93.

German constitution and that was coupled with ‘constitutional patriotism.’ Such a path would also assuage European fears of a resurrected German nation.¹¹⁶ It should not come as a great surprise that neo-conservative historians disagreed.¹¹⁷ For many of them, the world wars and Germany’s post-war division resulted primarily from the nation’s ‘unfortunate’ geographical position, wedged between east and west and ‘encircled’ by enemy nations.¹¹⁸ Yet, most historians (and many politicians), regardless of ideological persuasion, did not consider a peaceful reunification of the two German states a feasible solution to the Cold War during the 1980s and certainly did not foresee this very development a decade later.¹¹⁹

Another point of near-consensus among historians was the notion that the extermination of the European Jews had been unique, even though, as Ulrich Herbert pointed out, German historiography had not yet subjected it to a thorough analysis, as some foreign historians had.¹²⁰ Nevertheless, there was a broad consensus that this event was without precedent in modern history. Consequently, comparing it to other genocides in the twentieth century, as Ernst Nolte proposed, was breaking a historiographic taboo,

¹¹⁶Jürgen Habermas, “A Kind of Settlement of Damages,” in *Forever in the Shadow of Hitler?: Original Documents of the Historikerstreit, the Controversy Concerning the Singularity of the Holocaust*, trans. James Knowlton and Truett Cates (Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press, 1993), 43-44.

¹¹⁷Stefan Berger, in Chapter 4 of his book, *The Search for Normality*, titled “Decades of Post-Nationalism: German Historiography from the 1960s to the 1980s,” provided an excellent overview and analysis of the fault lines among West German historians during this time. *Ibid.*, 77-108.

¹¹⁸The geo-deterministic line of argumentation that had long characterized neo-conservative German historiography, made a reappearance after reunification. Arnulf Bahrings’ conversation about Germany’s future with Dirk Rumberg and Wolf Jobst Siedler is just one example. Arnulf Baring, *Deutschland, was nun? Ein Gespräch mit Dirk Rumberg und Wolf Jobst Siedler* (Berlin: Siedler Verlag, 1991).

¹¹⁹Große Kracht, *Die zankende Zunft*, 115-116.

¹²⁰Herbert, “Der Historikerstreit,” in *Zeitgeschichte als Streitgeschichte*, eds. Sabrow, Jessen, and Große Kracht, 99, 105.

even though comparative analysis of historical events is a widely used historical method. Concerning the Holocaust, however, most German historians considered this approach inappropriate because it might lead to a relativization of the crime, associated with the exoneration of the perpetrators. Critical historians as well as Jürgen Habermas and other leftist participants in the debate suspected that exactly this political and ideological motivation was behind Nolte's call for embedding the Holocaust in a new historical context that would allow comparability.¹²¹ No doubt, such a motivation also appeared to provide the ideological foundation of Helmut Kohl's *Tendenzwende*.

After having argued that a particular alignment along political/ideological and historiographic fault lines made the *Historikerstreit* possible and helped explain its ferocity, it is now time to take a closer look at the documents at the center of this 'perfect storm.'

Two passages in Nolte's essay, originally published in the conservative national newspaper, *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, on June 6, 1986, precipitated the controversy, although Nolte had advanced similar arguments before. It took Kohl's *Tendenzwende*, Nolte's provocative style, and the public forum of a national newspaper to make his future critics take note. According to Nolte,

Is it a notable shortcoming that the literature about National Socialism does not know or does not want to admit to what degree all the deeds—with the sole exception of the technical process of gassing—that the National Socialists later committed had already been described in the voluminous literature of the 1920s: mass deportations and executions, torture, death camps... and public demands for the annihilation of millions of guiltless people who were thought to be "enemies."

¹²¹Ernst Nolte, "The Past That Will Not Pass: A Speech That Could Be Written But Not Delivered," in *Forever in the Shadow of Hitler?* trans. Knowlton and Cates, 18-23.

He also posed a number of rhetorical questions that raised the ire of his critics, asking,

Did the National Socialists or Hitler perhaps commit an “Asiatic” deed merely because they and their ilk considered themselves to be potential victims of an “Asiatic” deed? Was the Gulag Archipelago not primary to Auschwitz? Was the Bolshevik murder of an entire class not the logical and factual prius of the “racial murder” of National Socialism? ... No one murder, and especially not a mass murder, can ‘justify’ another, and we will be led astray by an attitude that points only to the *one* murder and to the *one* mass murder and ignores the other, even though a causal nexus is probable.”¹²²

In the first excerpt, Nolte referred to the deportation of the Armenians in Turkey and the Kulaks (small landowners deemed class enemies) in Bolshevik Russia, inferring that Hitler’s final solution may have been an imitation of those historical precedents rather than a unique and unprecedented event. The second excerpt was no less controversial because Nolte alleged the existence of a causal relationship between Auschwitz and other genocides of the twentieth century. Nolte suggested that the Holocaust might have been a preemptive strike against the Jews in order to prevent them from forcing communist revolution upon Germany and using ‘Asiatic’ torture methods in the process. If this were the case then Germans could absolve themselves from the collective responsibility and guilt that had prevented the development of a positive national identity in post-war West Germany. The burdens of the past would then no longer obscure the path to a new national self-consciousness and to the more self-assured stance among the nations of the world that Kohl so desired.

¹²²Ibid., 21-22. ‘Asiatic deed’ referred to a torture method that allegedly originated in China. Revolutionary Russia had also supposedly applied this method and it was said that Hitler was terrified of Russia using it against Germans in the attack he feared was imminent.

Habermas's rebuttal came quickly, on July 11, but in the leftist-leaning national newspaper, *Die Zeit*. Perhaps he wanted to nip the suspected alliance between historiographic and political revisionism in the bud. In his essay, titled "A Kind of Settlement of Damages: The Apologetic Tendencies in German History Writing," Habermas targeted not only Nolte, but also the other historians mentioned earlier, Andreas Hillgruber, Klaus Hildebrand, and Michael Stürmer. Habermas accused them of neo-conservative, apologetic, and ultimately dangerous revisionism. He castigated Hillgruber primarily for his publication, *Zweierlei Untergang* [Twofold Fall], a booklet that dealt with the destruction of Imperial Germany and the demise of German Jewry.¹²³ The mere fact of having published these two originally freestanding lectures together insinuated a comparison between two very different catastrophes and neglected to distinguish between victims and perpetrators. Hillgruber's subtitle further inflamed criticism. "The Forceful Destruction of Imperial Germany and the End of German Jewry" cast the Allies into the role of aggressor, while the Jews seemed to have disappeared on their own. What Habermas deemed especially objectionable was Hillgruber's call for the historian to identify with the German soldiers and with the German population in the East in order to tell their stories accurately. Furthermore, according to Habermas, Hillgruber had presented the destruction of the Jews almost as an afterthought. Also, Hildebrand attracted Habermas's critique for having supported Nolte's attempt to compare the Holocaust to other twentieth century genocides. Habermas also found Hildebrand's defense of revisionism objectionable. Hildebrand justified this stance with the argument that historians primarily from the victorious

¹²³ Andreas Hillgruber, *Zweierlei Untergang: Die Zerschlagung des Deutschen Reiches und das Ende des Deutschen Judentums* (Berlin: W.J. Siedler, 1986).

nations had so far written the history of the Third Reich and had in the process constructed a “negative myth” of German history.¹²⁴ Finally, Habermas criticized Stürmer for admonishing historians to write ‘usable history’ in order to support patriotism. According to Stürmer, he objected, history should provide a higher meaning to life, not unlike religion had done in earlier times. Stürmer had justified this stance with his by now famous adage that “In a land without history, the future is controlled by those who determine the content of memory, who coin concepts and interpret the past.” Thus, historians should once again dare to play this role.¹²⁵ Summing up his criticism of the conservative historians, Habermas concluded,

No one desires to oppose seriously meant attempts to strengthen the historical consciousness of the population of the Federal Republic. ... But this kind of historicization would not be guided by impulses such as the ones that provided impulses to the revision recommended by Hildebrand and Stürmer and conducted by Hillgruber or Nolte, who set out to shake off the mortgages of the past now happily made morally neutral. ... the one side assumes that working on a more objectified understanding releases energy for self-reflective remembering and thus expands the space available for autonomously dealing with ambivalent traditions. The other side would like to place revisionist history in the service of a nationalist renovation of conventional identity.¹²⁶

In this passage, Habermas advocated historicization of the Holocaust, but not the kind that Kohl and the neo-conservative historians were calling for. Instead, he seemed to have sided on this issue with Martin Broszat. This leads us to a discussion that was somewhat overshadowed by the *Historikerstreit* proper, but nevertheless proved to be

¹²⁴Habermas, “A Kind of Settlement of Damages,” in *Forever in the Shadow of Hitler?*, 38-39.

¹²⁵Michael Stürmer, quoted in Habermas, *ibid.*, 34.

¹²⁶*Ibid.*, 41-42.

more significant, not only for the future of German *Zeitgeschichte*, but also for the argument of this study.¹²⁷

Broszat first advanced his call for the historicization of National Socialism in an essay, originally published in the prestigious journal *Merkur* in 1985.¹²⁸ His article did not attract any attention from non-historians until other arguments, allegedly similar in intent, became points of contention in the *Historikerstreit*. Broszat and the Israeli historian, Saul Friedländer, who had criticized Broszat's standpoint, discussed the concept of historicization once again in 1988, via an exchange of six open letters to one another, summarizing their main arguments from previous publications on the topic. This dialogue is especially poignant because both discussants belonged to the *Zeitzeugen* generation of Nazi Germany. While Broszat had served in the mandatory Hitler Youth, Friedländer had survived the Holocaust hidden under false identity in a French Catholic school.¹²⁹ The exchange would prove to have an enormous impact on the historiographic discussions far beyond the *Historikerstreit*.¹³⁰ The exchange is of interest here since it

¹²⁷ Andrei S. Markovits, "Introduction to the Broszat-Friedländer Exchange," *New German Critique* 44, Special issue on the Historikerstreit (Spring-Summer 1988): 81, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/488147> (accessed March 27, 2010).

¹²⁸ Martin Broszat, "Plädoyer für eine Historisierung des Nationalsozialismus," reprinted in *Nach Hitler. Der schwierige Umgang mit unserer Geschichte: Beiträge von Martin Broszat*, 159-172, eds. Hermann Graml and Klaus-Dietmar Henke (München: Oldenburg Verlag, 1986).

¹²⁹ Martin Broszat, 1926 - 1989, was in 1988 the director of the *Institut für Zeitgeschichte* (Institute for Contemporary History) in Munich and an honorary professor at the University of Munich. Saul Friedländer, born 1932 in Czechoslovakia, taught in 1988 in Jerusalem and Tel Aviv, Israel and held the endowed Holocaust Studies Chair at the University of California at Los Angeles. His parents were murdered in Auschwitz.

¹³⁰ For example, Nicolas Berg, looking back from 2001, surmised that the document might be regarded in the future as the "secret key document of the scholarly historical discussion of the 1990s" [translation mine]. Nicolaus Berg, "Der Holocaust in der Geschichtswissenschaft: Kontroversen und Fragestellungen seit dem 'Historikerstreit'," in *Beschweigen und Bekennen: Die deutsche Nachkriegsgesellschaft und der Holocaust*, eds. Norbert Frei and Sybille Steinbacher, Dachauer Symposium zur Zeitgeschichte, Bd. 1 (Göttingen: Wallstein Verlag, 2001), 117.

addresses various issues of historicization that were present, explicitly or as undercurrent, in every one of our historiographic controversies.

In their letters, both scholars invoked the difficulty of having a fruitful, non-polemic dialogue but also repeatedly welcomed the opportunity for enhanced mutual understanding. Yet their tone occasionally betrayed that this was much more than an academic debate between two historians; rather, the participants dealt with issues cutting to the core of their respective identities. The exchange was as much about questions of historical approach as about personal guilt and loss. Given this reality, one can feel nothing but respect for the level of civility and collegiality that both men were able to maintain; in this alone, their exchange differed markedly from those between the antagonists of the *Historikerstreit* proper.

Broszat conceded that the term, historicization, was ambiguous. For him, it rested on two premises, namely, that one should not exclude the Nazi period from historical understanding and that critical historical understanding, *Verstehen*, “should be clearly distinguished from the concept of ‘*Verstehen*’ in the frame of German historicism [historism] of the 19th century, with its Romantic-idealistic basis and the one-sided pattern of identification bound up with this notion.”¹³¹ Rather, the historical understanding that resulted from proper historicization included “‘insight’ [*Einsicht*]” as well as “empathetic reliving [*Nachvollzug*] of past achievements” and was “charged with the task of preventing historical consciousness from degenerating once more into a deification and idealization of brute facts of power, as exemplified by the Prussian-

¹³¹Broszat and Friedländer. “A Controversy about the Historicization of National Socialism,” 87.

German historical thought of a Heinrich von Treitschke.”¹³² Such historicization would not relativize the Holocaust but would rather provide the necessary balance between “the desire to understand” and “critical distancing.” Still, the “mythical memory” for the victims of Nazi crimes must “be granted a place.”¹³³ In response, Friedländer expressed doubt about the existence of the blockade around National Socialism that Broszat now tried to lift. He also took issue with Broszat’s “mythical memory” of the victims, insinuating that his opponent implied that the victims or their descendants still clung to a non-scholarly, black-and-white, “mythical memory” after all this time. Friedländer further wondered whether Broszat negatively compared Jewish historians who preserved the “mythical memory” of the victims with their German colleagues who advanced a rational discourse about the Holocaust in their work.¹³⁴

Next, the correspondents proceeded to further analyze historicization as a method of historical inquiry. According to Broszat, it should not be a revision of historical insight that questioned the criminal aspects of the Nazi regime, but rather a continuation of research on a new level that overcame the past moral-didactic character of historical inquiry into National Socialism. This also meant lifting the quarantine around the time period from 1933 to 1945. Social history and *Alltagsgeschichte* offered promising methods for doing so. The “mythical memory” with which Friedländer took offence was “precisely a form of remembrance located outside the framework of (German and Jewish) historical science.”¹³⁵ Responding to this, Friedländer took up the theme of social

¹³²Ibid.

¹³³Ibid., 90.

¹³⁴Ibid., 94-95.

¹³⁵Ibid., 101.

history and *Alltagsgeschichte*, insisting that he did not have anything against those methods *per se* but that they did present a shift of focus on both everyday life and on long-range social trends. This carried the danger of relativizing the objects of such historical study. Therefore, the traditional periodization of 1933 to 1945 as a distinct historical entity remained essential.¹³⁶

The third and last exchange brought out more clearly the opponents' personal experiences and their impact on the scholars' work as historians. Broszat allowed, "If I myself had not been a member of the generation of Hitler Youth ... then I probably would not have felt such a need after 1945 to confront the Nazi past so critically.... Affected, yet hardly burdened, the generation of Hitler Youth was both freer than those who were older, and more motivated than those who were younger, to devote itself totally to the learning process of these years."¹³⁷ Friedländer retorted that there was a significant counterpart among the victims to Broszat's German age group, reminding his counterpart and the audience that the Holocaust did not belong to Germany alone. Both cohorts were the last groups still publicly active in their respective countries whose members possessed a personal memory of the Nazi period. Furthermore, he noted, "the dissonance between personal memory and socially constructed memories...is...one of the reasons which give the present debates their peculiar intensity....This also holds true when it comes to the *Historikerstreit*, as the great majority of those involved are part of the age group just mentioned."¹³⁸ One can hear echoes of this argument in the

¹³⁶Ibid., 104-105.

¹³⁷Ibid., 112.

¹³⁸Ibid., 120.

controversy over the *Wehrmachtsausstellung*, that exemplified most clearly this very dissonance. Both historians were well aware of the fact that future generations would construct history and memory of National Socialism in new and different ways. A proper understanding of what historicization meant was therefore of critical importance to Broszat. As we have seen, such proper understanding was still elusive during the *Walser-Bubis-Debate*.

Whether the *Historikerstreit* was indeed the perfect storm, as this chapter has argued, or whether it served primarily as a war of proxy between the political left and right, or whether Geiss's '*Hysterikerstreit*' best captured its essence, it did serve a bridging function between the *Fischer Controversy* and the *Walser-Bubis-Debate*.¹³⁹ It was the first grand dispute about the National Socialist past entirely performed in the public sphere; from then on, these types of controversies were never within professional historians' purview alone. Instead, they became media events. One could say that, at least in this respect, the *Historikerstreit* was the dress rehearsal for the *Goldhagen Affair*.

It also was a dress rehearsal for the struggles over national identity in post-reunification Germany, even though no one realized this at the time. Sooner rather than later, historians had to figure out what public role they were willing to play. The *Fischer Controversy* had upset the long-standing consensus among the German guild about this question; in the mid-to-late 1980s, it had raised its head again. Yet the *Historikerstreit* was not to bring lasting resolution, even though the left 'won.' Reunification was to show how fragile that victory was. As to their role in society, it seems that this dispute helped historians involved in *Zeitgeschichte* realize that their craft was not politically

¹³⁹Ulrich Herbert argued that it served as war of proxy between the political left and right in "Der Historikerstreit," in *Zeitgeschichte als Streitgeschichte*, eds. Sabrow, Jessen, and Große Kracht, 105.

neutral. On the contrary, *Zeitgeschichte*, arguably more than any other historical specialty, is enmeshed in the mentalities of the times in which it is produced. It was therefore almost inevitable that historians either associated themselves with one side or the other. If they did not, then others would do this for them.¹⁴⁰

The concept of historicization of the Holocaust was also discussed for the first time during the *Historikerstreit*, albeit on the sidelines. As we have seen, it struck a sensitive nerve forty years after the end of the war, even though historicization or contextualization is what historians do. The issue was in the open from then on and would remain an undercurrent of every subsequent controversy. Whether one studied National Socialism from the perspective of its final demise or from within the time period itself made an enormous difference. Likewise, how one embedded the period into broader periodization schemes would affect the questions one asked, the sources one selected, and the results of one's inquiry. In this respect, National Socialism as a time period is no different from any other epoch.

The issue of private vs. public memory that would dominate the controversy over the *Wehrmachtsausstellung* and would come to a head in the *Walser-Bubis-Debate* remained on the sidelines during the *Historikerstreit*, but it was nevertheless there. Broszat and Friedländer touched on the theme by acknowledging the impact of their respective biographies on their work as historians. The participants in the *Historikerstreit* proper, mostly older men, also must have found themselves in the crucible between their personal memory and their craft. In this they were no different from those historians

¹⁴⁰It was Habermas who put Hillgruber, Stürmer, and Hildebrand in the same camp with Nolte, even though the perspectives of these historians were quite diverse. A look at the table of contents of the collection of original documents of the *Historikerstreit*, *Forever in the Shadow of Hitler*, indicates that a large number of German (male) historians weighed in and took a stand.

involved in the *Fischer Controversy*. The *Walser-Bubis-Debate* was most likely the last German controversy over the Nazi past in which first-hand personal memory would play a major role.

In conclusion, the *Historikerstreit* demonstrated that West Germany had not at all ‘come to terms’ with the National Socialist past. The fault lines that competing interpretations caused ran deeply throughout society. The *Historikerstreit* brought them out and did nothing to smooth them; on the contrary. This is how Germany approached reunification. That unexpected event would not make it easier to deal with the recent past, as the big controversies of the 1990s, the *Goldhagen Affair* and the controversy over the *Wehrmachtsausstellung* were soon to demonstrate.

CHAPTER THREE

LIGHTS, CAMERA, ACTION! THE *GOLDHAGEN AFFAIR*

That what is correct about the theses of the book, is not new, and what is new is not correct.¹⁴¹

Before people judge, they should read the book: “Then the public will be able to form its own ideas about the quality of the research and the arguments of the critics.”¹⁴²

Less than ten years after the *Historikerstreit* and thirty-five years after the *Fischer Controversy* a book once again was at the center of a national debate about the legacy of the Third Reich. Both authors were academicians. Whereas Fritz Fischer had been a German historian, Daniel Goldhagen was an American political scientist. Fischer’s work had only been indirectly about National Socialism; Goldhagen’s dealt with the Holocaust as the defining event within National Socialism.¹⁴³ Both authors had expected their theses to upset the status-quo of historical scholarship. Fischer had had a sense that his book might raise some eyebrows; Goldhagen, by contrast, was convinced that he had accomplished nothing less than set the record straight on virtually all previous Holocaust

¹⁴¹Reinhard Rürup, “Viel Lärm um nichts? D.J. Goldhagens ‘radikale Revision’ der Holocaust-Forschung,” quoted in Große Kracht, *Zeitgeschichte als Streitgeschichte*, 151 [translation mine].

¹⁴²Daniel Goldhagen, “The Failure of the Critics,” in *Unwilling Germans: The Goldhagen Debate*, ed. Robert Shandley, trans. Jeremiah Riemer (Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1998), 150 [originally published in *Die Zeit*, 2 August, 1996].

¹⁴³Daniel Goldhagen, *Hitler’s Willing Executioners: Ordinary Germans and the Holocaust* (New York: Knopf, 1996). The Siedler Verlag published the German translation under the title, *Hitlers Willige Vollstrecker: Ganz gewöhnliche Deutsche und der Holocaust*. Incidentally, Siedler also published Andreas Hillgruber’s *Zweierlei Untergang*, one of the contested publications in the *Historikerstreit*.

research. In fact, he claimed to have been the first to ‘explain’ the Holocaust.¹⁴⁴ Both authors had initially had some difficulties finding publishers for their manuscripts, both found themselves at odds with the historical establishment, and Fischer as well as Goldhagen attracted a strong following among the young generation. This is where the commonalities end. As we will see, factors other than the different geo-political, social, and historiographic environments in which the authors wrote their tomes explain the differences. In the final analysis, Fischer accomplished nothing less than a paradigm shift within German historiography and thus opened the door for a flood of historical research on National Socialism. In the wake of his work, historians and then the public began to ask new questions of the German past as well as ask old questions differently. Even though Goldhagen raised lingering questions in a new way, he did not effect anything comparable within historiography. His methods and conclusions did not hold up to professional scrutiny and his subsequent publications proved disappointing.¹⁴⁵

Why then, did his first book precipitate a controversy that gripped Germany at a time when historical questions about the second German dictatorship should have been of more immediate interest?¹⁴⁶ What made the *Goldhagen Affair* the ‘phenomenon’ or

¹⁴⁴Goldhagen, *Hitler’s Willing Executioners*. In the introduction, Goldhagen maintained that in order to explain the Holocaust fully, one had to look at it in an entirely new way. He was going to do just that, even though no single previous book had claimed to be able to explain the Holocaust adequately.

¹⁴⁵Daniel Goldhagen, *A Moral Reckoning: The Role of the Catholic Church in the Holocaust and its Unfilled Duty of Repair* (New York: Alfred Knopf, 2002); Goldhagen, *Worse than War: Genocide, Eliminationism, and the Ongoing Assault on Humanity* (New York: Public Affairs, 2009). Reviewers of these works took Goldhagen to task for assuming the role of moral judge rather than historian. They also criticized him for not adding anything new to historical research, just as had been the case with his first publication, *Hitler’s Willing Executioners*.

¹⁴⁶Second dictatorship refers to one-party rule as practiced in East Germany before reunification.

‘effect’ that some observers claimed it was?¹⁴⁷ What made his theses important enough to warrant inclusion in a German history text for high school students, alongside the other controversies at issue here?¹⁴⁸

When Goldhagen’s book came on the scene in 1996, in early spring in the United States and in late summer in Germany, some expected another *Historikerstreit*,¹⁴⁹ while others argued that this was just another controversy of which the Federal Republic had seen so many already. For Atina Grossmann, it was just one more ‘Holocaust moment.’ “As soon as ‘Goldhagen’ fades,” she surmised, “another debate, another controversy, another scandal, moves in to occupy the political economy of Holocaust memory.”¹⁵⁰ We now know that it was indeed not another *Historikerstreit*; yet the controversy was important because it contributed in significant ways to the public discourse about the National Socialist past in post-reunification Germany.¹⁵¹

The momentous geo-political changes that had catapulted Germany into full-fledged nationhood in 1989/90 did not seem to have played as important a role in the *Goldhagen Affair* as they did in the controversy over the *Wehrmachtsausstellung* which

¹⁴⁷Geoff Eley titled the book he edited, *The “Goldhagen Effect”: History, Memory, Nazism—Facing the German Past*; Klaus Große Kracht used the term ‘Goldhagen Phänomen’ to describe the controversy. Große Kracht, *Die zankende Zunft*, 145.

¹⁴⁸The text for high schools, published in 2005, juxtaposed an excerpt from Goldhagen’s book with one from Hans-Ulrich Wehler and asked student to evaluate critically the authors’ theses about anti-Semitism. *Geschichte und Geschehen—Neuzeit*, eds. Bender et al., 197.

¹⁴⁹Hans-Ulrich Wehler, “Like a Thorn in the Flesh,” in *Unwilling Germans?*, ed. Shandley, 104; Volker Ullrich, “A Provocation to a new *Historikerstreit*,” in *ibid.*, 31.

¹⁵⁰Atina Grossmann, “The ‘Goldhagen Effect’: Memory, Repetition, and Responsibility in the New Germany,” in Eley, 89.

¹⁵¹Before the *Goldhagen Affair* ever came to Germany, it had already raged in the United States for several months. Goldhagen’s book also made waves in England, while its publication in France and Israel did not cause much of a controversy. For a comparative analysis of the book’s reception in these countries, see Omer Bartov, “Reception and Perception: Goldhagen’s Holocaust and the World,” in *The “Goldhagen Effect*,” ed. Geoff Eley, 33-87. The Holocaust had truly been internationalized by the 1990s.

was gaining momentum as the *Goldhagen Affair* reached its climax. Quickly it had become clear that this most profound caesura in post-war German history had not brought with it the elusive *Schlussstrich* for the process of reckoning with the National Socialist past. On the contrary, it seems that the legacy of National Socialism had become even more contested after reunification. Germans faced the dual challenges of forging a new national community from quite disparate societies, while at the same time reconciling two sets of divergent national memories and reckoning not with one, but with two recent dictatorships. Despite being occupied with the challenges of reunification, the Nazi past must have loomed quite large on Germans' minds in the 1990s, considering that the year 1995 concluded a twelve-year commemorative cycle culminating in the fiftieth anniversary of the end of WWII.¹⁵²

Yet the *Goldhagen Affair* was an almost entirely west German controversy. Since the former East Germany had never accepted responsibility for the Holocaust, the issues Goldhagen raised may not have been of deep concern to east Germans at a time when they were fully absorbed in the momentous life changes that reunification required. An opinion survey from 1996 shows a striking difference in historical consciousness between east and west Germans. Of those who had indicated that Germany's history differed from that of other countries, for forty-four percent of west Germans it was the Third Reich/National Socialism/Hitler that made it different, while only thirteen percent of east Germans thought so. Twenty percent of west Germans vs. four percent of east Germans

¹⁵²A combined eighty percent of respondents had read about the commemoration of May 8, 1945 or had watched it on television. An additional three percent had participated in person. The ceremonies "deeply touched" fifty-four percent and forty-six percent found them "impressive." *Allensbacher Jahrbuch der Demoskopie 1993-1997*, 528.

believed the Holocaust was special about German history.¹⁵³ The apparently different perception of the role of National Socialism and the Holocaust in Germany's history in east and west may explain the lower interest in the controversy in the east of the country. It probably did not help that Goldhagen's lecture tour bypassed east German cities altogether.¹⁵⁴ The general absence of former East German historians from the debate, with the notable exception of the well-respected scholar of National Socialism, Kurt Pätzold, was probably the result of the former East German guild having either been absorbed into west German historiography, or, more likely, of former East German historians having lost their academic posts in the wake of reunification.¹⁵⁵

Goldhagen's book, although based on his dissertation for Harvard University, differed from standard scholarly fare about the Holocaust in several important ways. First, it concentrated on the perpetrators of the Holocaust instead of on the victims. It gave faces to the thousands of 'ordinary' Germans who, according to Goldhagen, had willingly and enthusiastically carried out the killings of Jewish men, women, and children. Goldhagen claimed to have found an explanation for their actions in their mentality, ideological conviction, and motivation while eschewing other explanatory approaches. In his work, mentality and will replaced structural circumstances and pressures. With this, he positioned himself in the intentionalist camp, opposing structuralist perspectives that had been dominant within social history for decades. This

¹⁵³Ibid., 504.

¹⁵⁴I am referring to 'east German' cities in connection with post-reunification Germany, i.e. cities located in the new federal states, while 'East Germans' refers to those who lived in the German Democratic Republic.

¹⁵⁵Kurt Pätzold taught at the University in Leipzig in 1996. As one of the few voices from the former East Germany and as a subject specialist, he should have been invited to some of the public events associated with Goldhagen's book tour through German cities, but was not.

might explain, at least in part, why Goldhagen attracted the ire of almost an entire generation of German structuralist historians; the same ones whose methodological approaches had emerged from the *Fischer Controversy* and who had ‘won’ the battles with neo-conservative, intentionalist historians during the *Historikerstreit*.¹⁵⁶

Hitler’s Willing Executioners also differed sharply from standard scholarly works in imagery and language that did not shy away from graphic detail. The shock effect this produced had become acceptable in the movie genre and perhaps in fiction, but it had not been part of scholarly discourse about the Holocaust. “No German historian speaks and writes as graphically as Goldhagen!,” exclaimed Wolfgang Wippermann in an article generally sympathetic to Goldhagen’s book, “...the problem is that when Goldhagen delivers his thick and empathetic account of the horrible acts of murder, he does not recoil from describing fictitious scenes in addition to real ones in order to arouse the desired emotional effect in the reader.”¹⁵⁷ Wippermann referred to sentences such as one describing shootings in the woods, “At such close range, the Germans often became spattered with human gore.” While this description was based on an eyewitness account, the account of the murder of patients in a hospital was not. “In all probability, a killer either shot a baby in its mother’s arms, and perhaps the mother for good measure, or, as was sometimes the habit during these years, held it at arm’s length by the leg, shooting it

¹⁵⁶Notably, Nolte, Stürmer, Schulze, Hildebrand, and Hillgruber, who had shared the neo-conservative camp during the *Historikerstreit*, did not weigh in on the *Goldhagen Affair*. Wolfgang Wippermann, *Wessen Schuld? Vom Historikerstreit zur Goldhagen Kontroverse* (Berlin: Elefant Press, 1997), 104.

¹⁵⁷Wolfgang Wippermann, “The Jewish Hanging Judge? Goldhagen and the ‘Self-Confident Nation’,” in *Unwilling Germans?*, ed. Shandley, 229.

with a pistol. Perhaps the mother looked on in horror.”¹⁵⁸ This approach shifted the emphasis of the book from the scholarly arguments to the discourse itself.

How one might talk about the Holocaust had been at issue during the *Historikerstreit*, but Goldhagen’s choice of representation apparently stretched the comfort zone of most German historians beyond the limit. Goldhagen’s style did not seem to bother the general public, on the other hand, a public that had flocked to *Schindler’s List* just two years earlier. On the contrary, those who read his book or packed the halls during his book promotion tour, reacted with the greatest interest and overwhelming support, while the guild, virtually unanimously, rejected the methods and conclusions of their young colleague from the United States.¹⁵⁹

Academic historians had indeed not been this united since the *Fischer Controversy*. A consensus had emerged since the *Historikerstreit* that made historical comparisons acceptable even for the Holocaust. Also, as Wippermann pointed out in his survey of revisionist historiographic trends in the 1990s, putting National Socialism into the broader context of totalitarianism was generally no longer taboo.¹⁶⁰ Still, Goldhagen’s book seemed to unite the guild more than post-reunification revisionism had. This time, the fault lines ran along different paths than during the *Historikerstreit*. Now the guild was in the defensive, wedged between a young, eloquent newcomer from abroad and a public that flocked to him in droves.

¹⁵⁸Goldhagen, *Hitler’s Willing Executioners*, 218, 216, quoted in Wippermann, “The Jewish Hanging Judge?,” in *Unwilling Germans?*, ed. Shandley, 229, 243.

¹⁵⁹The first printing of the German edition of Goldhagen’s book sold out in five days. All in all, the edition sold 360,000 copies. All venues hosting the author’s book tour were filled to capacity. Große Kracht, *Die zankende Zunft*, 171.

¹⁶⁰Wipperman, *Wessen Schuld?*, 10, 21, 27 n. 3.

The media were quick to capitalize on the situation, providing Goldhagen with ample opportunities to disseminate his message. Goldhagen's book promotion tour not only attracted record crowds, but also demonstrated that members of the guild no longer had hegemony over the interpretation of the past. In some historians' eyes, this 'emasculatation of an entire profession' rather than Goldhagen's book itself constituted the *scandalon* that became known as the 'Goldhagen phenomenon.'¹⁶¹ Issues that professionals had formerly discussed primarily among peers, in their academic journals or at their conferences, had moved directly on to the pages of the news media and, more significantly, into public meeting halls. In order to be part of the conversations, historians had to enter the public sphere, via essays or letters to the editor in the news media or in front of television cameras. The academic ivory tower that had been crumbling since the student revolts of the late 1960s had become a thing of the past by the mid-1990s, at least for those involved in the contested field of *Zeitgeschichte*. Whereas historians had seen themselves obliged to take a stand in the *Historikerstreit* in order to avoid professional marginalization, now they needed to step into the limelight of television cameras and compete with Goldhagen, who was apparently much more adept at drawing the audience to his side than were his academic opponents.¹⁶² Goldhagen had irrevocably introduced the show element into public discourse about Germany's troubled past. Taken to its extreme, the 'Goldhagen phenomenon' advanced a development that

¹⁶¹Ruth Bettina Birn and Volker Rieß, "Das Goldhagen-Phänomen oder: fünfzig Jahre danach," in *Geschichte in Wissenschaft und Unterricht* 49 (1998): 81, quoted in Große Kracht, *Die zankende Zukunft*, 170 [paraphrase loosely translated by me].

¹⁶²Volker Ullrich described the humiliating encounter between high-caliber German historians and Goldhagen in several venues during his book tour as 'triumphal procession' for Goldhagen. Volker Ullrich, "A Triumphal Procession: Goldhagen and the Germans," in *Unwilling Germans?*, ed. Shandley, 197-201. The climax of the confrontation with Hans Mommsen, "the doyen of German Holocaust research" that left the historian "beet-red in the face," is especially poignant (*ibid.*, 198, 199).

would eventually lead to clever marketing strategies that lured audiences into ‘histotainment.’¹⁶³ Applied to the Holocaust, such approach is in danger of appearing tasteless and lacking the reverence due to the victims and their descendents.¹⁶⁴

Choreographed approaches can indeed give the appearance of “instrumentalization” of the past for “present [political/economic] purposes,” as Walser would soon complain.¹⁶⁵

‘Bitburg’ did some of that before the *Historikerstreit*, but with Goldhagen, ‘history in the limelight’ seemed to have reached new heights. The backlash came quickly, like with the *Walser-Bubis-Debate*.¹⁶⁶

Although the emphasis so far has been on the novel elements that the *Goldhagen Affair* introduced to the broader process of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*, a closer look at Goldhagen’s arguments, his critics’ objections, and his supporters’ praise is in order to understand why his book invited professional historians’ ire while earning the public’s praise.

Hitler’s Willing Executioners opened with a historical overview of anti-Semitism in Germany and then focused on three case studies: the Hamburg *Reserve Police Battalion 101*, two forced-labor death camps, and a death march. At issue was the reason

¹⁶³The author saw this term used in advertising of historical venues and events during a recent visit in Germany.

¹⁶⁴Norman Finkelstein, outspoken Jewish-American critic of what he calls the Holocaust industry, portrayed the Simon Wiesenthal Center as using “Dachau-meets-Disneyland” museum exhibits. According to Finkelstein, Goldhagen was both a product and a proponent of the Jewish American dominated Holocaust industry. Norman Finkelstein, *The Holocaust Industry: Reflections on the Exploitation of Jewish Suffering* (New York: Verso, 2000), 92.

¹⁶⁵Walser, “Erfahrungen beim Verfassen einer Sonntagsrede,” in *Die Walser-Bubis-Debatte*, ed. Schirmacher, 12.

¹⁶⁶Walser protested more against the instrumentalization of the Holocaust for political (and economic) reasons than against ‘histotainment,’ but those two can have much in common and one can easily use the latter to further the former’s cause.

for the smooth implementation of the Holocaust. In contrast to Christopher Browning, who had also studied *Reserve Police Battalion 101* and who had concluded that the majority of the perpetrators had acted under peer pressure, a threat of severe punishment, and out of a strong sense of obedience to authority, Goldhagen claimed that Germans had perpetrated unspeakable crimes against Jews during the Third Reich willingly and eagerly.¹⁶⁷ According to his findings, their motivation was not fear of reprisal for refusing to kill Jews, but rather an ‘eliminationist anti-Semitism’ whose roots reached back long before Hitler came to power. Thus a murderous ideology was the primary driving factor in the implementation of the Holocaust. With this conclusion Goldhagen established that individual and ordinary Germans were responsible for the Holocaust. In Goldhagen’s perspective, the documentary evidence to this effect thus no longer warranted victim status for ‘ordinary Germans.’ The crimes of the Third Reich were not committed ‘in Germany’s name,’ as had become a platitude in German parlance since Adenauer’s formulation so many years ago, but rather ‘ordinary Germans’ had committed those crimes. In future discourse about the National Socialist past, the active voice would have to replace passive constructions with respect to the perpetrators.

German historians filled the national press with critical reviews, some of them scathing in tone and substance, for weeks, even before the German edition of Goldhagen’s book had appeared in the stores.¹⁶⁸ The defensive tone of many

¹⁶⁷Christopher Browning, *Ordinary Men: Reserve Battalion 101 and the Final Solution in Poland* (New York: Harper Collins, 1992). A study of another Police Battalion appeared in 1998. Edward Westermann, “‘Ordinary Men’ or ‘Ideological Soldiers’? Police Battalion 310 in Russia, 1942,” *German Studies Review* 21 (February 1998): 41-86.

¹⁶⁸Eventually, those contributions filled two volumes. *Unwilling Germans? The Goldhagen Debate*, ed. Robert Shandley, trans. Jeremiah Riemer (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998); *Ein Volk von Mördern? Die Dokumentation zur Goldhagen-Kontroverse um die Rolle der Deutschen im Holocaust*, ed. Julius Schoeps (Hamburg: Hoffmann und Campe, 1996).

contributions, some of which even scolded the young scholar more than criticizing his work, is somewhat startling, but others were well-argued. Methodological shortcomings, including reliance on overgeneralization, oversimplification, monocausal or reductionist explanations, and the lack of comparison, featured prominently in the reviews. Also, Goldhagen's dismissiveness of structuralist explanations and his preference for voluntarist ones invited criticism since it went against the grain of Holocaust research.¹⁶⁹ In such research, the consensus had privileged structuralist explanations, according to which most perpetrators were caught in a web of state terror and in forces of war that did not leave any room for personal choice.

The historiographic *faux pas* of overgeneralization was indeed at the heart of Goldhagen's argument: he had extrapolated from the actions and motivations of the perpetrators in his case studies to 'all Germans.' *Hitler's Willing Executioners* oversimplified in that it neglected to address the extermination of other ethnic groups and of the handicapped. Neither did the author look at collaborators who had played significant roles in implementing the Holocaust in many of the conquered countries.¹⁷⁰ Some critics wondered why Goldhagen had not considered the complexity of the issues that the scholarship of the past decades had addressed.¹⁷¹ Eberhard Jäckel and Hans-

¹⁶⁹For details about this branch of the debate, see A. D. Moses, "Structure and Agency in the Holocaust: Daniel J. Goldhagen and His Critics," *History and Theory* 37 (May 1998): 194-219, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2505466> (accessed March 27, 2010). This is also the universalism (structuralist) vs. particularism (agency/voluntarist) debate.

¹⁷⁰Hans-Ulrich Wehler raised this point in his article, "Like a Thorn in the Flesh," originally published in *Die Zeit* and reprinted in *Unwilling Germans?*, ed. Shandley, 93-107, here 100.

¹⁷¹*Ibid.*, 101.

Ulrich Wehler, for example, took it as arrogance that Goldhagen had dismissed prior research summarily and then made claims of originality.¹⁷²

For Hans Mommsen, Goldhagen's vivid depiction of violence "releases a certain voyeuristic moment that serious Holocaust research has deliberately avoided in its restrained portrayal of the crimes."¹⁷³ Furthermore, historians found Goldhagen's assertion unconvincing and disingenuous that Germans had completely changed since 1945.¹⁷⁴ Finally, some historians accused Goldhagen of having committed a logical fallacy in his argumentation. If German culture, over decades or centuries, had imbued Germans with a murderous anti-Semitism that was qualitatively different from anti-Semitism in any other country, and Germans had appropriated this as part of their acculturation, then how could those same Germans be responsible for their deeds? Was this not a structuralist argument after all?¹⁷⁵

In his concluding verdict, Mommsen stated that "the corrosive sharpness with which Goldhagen charges the Germans with a will to 'demonic anti-Semitism' ... is certainly ill suited to quiet resentments, and it is anything but helpful in gaining a sober confrontation with the past in the light of the present."¹⁷⁶ One wonders if he referred to German historians' resentment against their Jewish-American challenger? Why should Goldhagen's goal have been to quiet that resentment? Perhaps he thought that German

¹⁷²Eberhard Jäckel, "Simply a Bad Book," in *Unwilling Germans?*, ed. Shandley, 88-89; Wehler, "Like a Thorn in the Flesh," in *ibid.*, 102.

¹⁷³Hans Mommsen, "The Thin Patina of Civilization: Anti-Semitism Was a Necessary, But by No Means a Sufficient, Condition for the Holocaust," in *Unwilling Germans?*, ed. Shandley, 194.

¹⁷⁴Wehler, "Like a Thorn in the Flesh," in *Unwilling Germans?*, ed. Shandley, 98-99.

¹⁷⁵Moses, "Structure and Agency," 217.

¹⁷⁶Mommsen, "The Thin Patina of Civilization," in *Unwilling Germans?*, ed. Shandley, 194-195.

historiography needed a bit of a jolt out of its structuralist complacency? Also, what does the present demand that dealing with Goldhagen's thesis would make impossible to attain—a self-assured national identity, perhaps? To be fair, Mommsen and his eminent and experienced colleagues must have found the self-assuredness with which Goldhagen defended his thesis, and especially the accolades he received from the public, quite unsettling. As members of the *Zeitzeugen* generation, separating their professional judgment from their personal engagement in the issues may have posed a special challenge. As historians, they felt dismissed and 'emasculated;' as older Germans, they probably felt unfairly accused. We have seen the interplay between generational identity and professional craft in the *Fischer Controversy* as well. Generational issues also played a role in the *Historikerstreit*, as they would in the controversy over the *Wehrmachtsausstellung*.

Kurt Pätzold, in his role of quasi-outsider within the German guild, observed perceptively that among the reasons for the “lack of self-control” among the critics may have been, besides “injured vanity and rage over ignorance,” critics reacting “not as specialists but as ‘Germans.’”¹⁷⁷ Perhaps he referred to the fact that some critics had not tired of pointing out Goldhagen's youth and his cultural/ethnic identity, as if those had made him too biased for the scholarly pursuit of questions relating to the Holocaust.¹⁷⁸

¹⁷⁷Kurt Pätzold, “On the Broad Trail of the German Perpetrators,” in *Unwilling Germans?*, ed. Shandley, 163.

¹⁷⁸In “Simply a Bad Book,” Eberhard Jäckel referred to Goldhagen as a “capable young man,” who has “robbed himself of any scholarly prestige” with his “failure of a dissertation.” Reprinted in Shandley, ed., *Unwilling Germans?*, 87, 90. In “The Sociologist as Hanging Judge,” Rudolf Augstein made it a point to give Goldhagen's age (35) and his status as “Junior Professor,” in *ibid.*, 47. Andrei S. Markovits, in his contribution, “Discomposure in History's Final Resting Place,” provided many examples where critics have made anti-Semitic remarks in addition to pointing out Goldhagen's and his father's Jewishness. In *ibid.*, 121-123.

Some critics had also demonstrated anti-American sentiments with barbs against the ‘educational system’ that had granted Goldhagen a Ph.D. for such ‘shabby work’ and with comments about the intellectual state of a society that warmly welcomed a book like Goldhagen’s. These comments were also laced with anti-Semitism in that they accused an allegedly Jewish-dominated press in the United States of an overly positive reaction to the book.¹⁷⁹ Clearly, the combination of youth, ethnic and national identity, and academic credentials had added an additional punch to Goldhagen’s theses in the eyes of many members of the historical establishment in Germany. The guild must have indeed felt quite threatened about its continued ability to affect historical consciousness in German society.

Goldhagen was not only the instigator of this controversy, but also played a central role as it unfolded. Newspapers and magazines afforded him ample space to respond to his critics, he gave interviews, appeared at public discussions, and undertook a lecture/book promotion tour through major German cities.¹⁸⁰ In his lengthy piece, “The Failure of the Critics,” originally published in *Die Zeit* just prior to the release of the

¹⁷⁹Hans-Ulrich Wehler, in “Like a Thorn in the Flesh,” wondered what had gone wrong at Harvard [in supervising the dissertation] and concluded that “It is not amusing to witness yet another failure of academe’s system of checks and balances.” In *Unwilling Germans?*, ed. Shandley, 102-103. Frank Schirrmacher, in “Hitler’s Code: Holocaust from Faustian Aspirations,” imputed that Goldhagen must have written for a U.S. audience because his book was so simplistic, concluding that Goldhagen’s book “leaves many questions open, including questions about the intellectual condition of a society that regards such theses as intellectual progress.” In *ibid.*, 45. Hans Mommsen remarked that he (Mommsen) would not have signed off on Goldhagen’s degree. Mommsen, quoted in Michael Klundt, *Geschichtspolitik: Die Kontroverse um Goldhagen, die Wehrmachtsausstellung und das “Schwarzuch des Kommunismus,”* Köln: PapyRossa Verlag, 2000, 36. Ruth Bettina Birn agreed. Norman Finkelstein and Ruth Bettina Birn, *A Nation on Trial: The Goldhagen Thesis and Historical Truth* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1998), 144.

¹⁸⁰Hamburg, Berlin, Frankfurt, Munich; Dresden, Leipzig, or other cities in east Germany were not on the itinerary.

German translation of his book, Goldhagen took his historian critics to task.¹⁸¹ With surprising self-assuredness for a fledgling scholar with only a dissertation under his belt, albeit one that had become an international best-seller virtually over night, he expressed outrage over German scholars having discredited his book. Their purpose in doing so had been, he alleged, to dissuade the German public from reading it or at least from taking it seriously. Emphasizing the scholarly nature and originality of his work, as well as the fact that his critics had thoroughly misunderstood or maliciously misrepresented it, Goldhagen showed some of the arrogance that many historians had found so disturbing. He considered it entirely justifiable to dismiss the work of eminent Holocaust scholars, including Norbert Frei, Klaus Hildbrand, Eberhard Jäckel, Hans Mommsen, Hans-Ulrich Wehler, Robert Browning, and Raul Hilberg. According to Goldhagen, they had failed to ask the right questions by not paying enough attention to the perpetrators, their motives and their numbers.

Bemoaning the *ad hominem* attacks levied against him he argued that they were “sometimes spiced with anti-Semitic and anti-American allusions.”¹⁸² Against the criticism of reductionism he held that “the call for complexity is often the refuge of those who find certain conclusions unpalatable.”¹⁸³ The accusation of monocausal argumentation was another instance of willful misinterpretation. Since several factors had to come together to make the Holocaust possible, it was not necessary to look at other

¹⁸¹Goldhagen, “The Failure of the Critics,” in *Unwilling Germans?*, ed. Shandley, 129-150. He addressed his critics again in his article, “Modell Bundesrepublik: National History, Democracy, and Internationalization in Germany,” in *ibid.*, 275-285 and in his response to those who had written to him, published in *Briefe an Goldhagen: Eingeleitet und beantwortet von Daniel Jonah Goldhagen* (Berlin: Siedler Verlag, 1997), 205-239.

¹⁸²Goldhagen, “The Failure of the Critics,” in *Unwilling Germans?*, ed. Shandley, 131.

¹⁸³*Ibid.*, 136.

European countries that clearly exhibited anti-Semitism. Those countries did not have totalitarian regimes “bent on mass annihilation” and could therefore not have implemented a Holocaust of their own.¹⁸⁴ Goldhagen also vehemently denied having resurrected the notion of collective guilt, as many of his critics argued. Rather, he had done the opposite by emphasizing individual voluntarism and accountability. Furthermore, he took strong exception with those who had questioned his motives on account of his national and ethnic identity and family history.

This particular angle of the debate must have really hit a sensitive nerve with Goldhagen, as his several paragraphs of refutation took on a notably agitated tone.¹⁸⁵ The tone perhaps more than the substance of the arguments flying back and forth between Goldhagen and the German historians made painfully clear how difficult a civilized discourse about the Holocaust still was, across generational divides and more than fifty years after the event (Broszat and Friedländer come to mind who had been able to engage in civilized discourse during the *Historikerstreit*). These two scholars had clearly been emotionally engaged, but their exchange did not come close to the virtual character assassination that Goldhagen and Mommsen inflicted upon one another. The dialog across generational boundaries was difficult even among Germans; apparently, a civil dialog was virtually impossible between a German of the *Zeitzeugen* generation and a Jew whose parent generation had been victims of the Holocaust. Instead of the deeply moving correspondence between Broszat and Friedländer, published in an academic journal, that had left the greatest legacy of the *Historikerstreit*, a disgraceful

¹⁸⁴Ibid., 142.

¹⁸⁵Ibid., 143-144.

confrontation between Mommsen and Goldhagen in front of a packed auditorium became the iconic event of the *Goldhagen Affair*.¹⁸⁶ This, in a nutshell, was the difference between these two waves of disputes about the Nazi past, so close chronologically yet so different in tone and substance from one another.

There were also a few positive reviews from German historians, but the most affirmative echo came from non-historians, including the Jewish American Holocaust survivor and Peace Prize recipient Elie Wiesel and German public intellectual *par excellence*, Jürgen Habermas.¹⁸⁷ Their voices lent the issues Goldhagen had raised additional moral weight. Habermas's and Wiesel's contributions are of interest here because they framed the debate: Wiesel's commentary originally appeared in *The Observer* on March 31, 1996, before the book's translation reached the German market, whereas Habermas's assessment concluded the controversy in Germany eleven months later.¹⁸⁸ Both men were *Zeitzeugen*, Wiesel barely having survived the Holocaust and Habermas barely having been too young for military service. Wiesel asserted, in contrast

¹⁸⁶Volker Ullrich gave a lively account of Goldhagen's public appearances in Hamburg, Berlin, Frankfurt, and Munich, titled, "A Triumphant Procession: Goldhagen and the Germans," *Unwilling Germans?*, ed. Shandley, 197-201. Ullrich recounted Goldhagen's provocative rhetorical question of Mommsen, "Is there anyone here in this auditorium who agrees with Professor Mommsen that the people who were murdering Jews did not know what they were doing?" (199) Mommsen's response came "with his face beet-red and his voice trembling in rage" *ibid.* According to Mommsen, Goldhagen had misinterpreted his statement, but the damage had been done. The audience was firmly on Goldhagen's side and the professor stood humiliated.

¹⁸⁷For example, Julius Schoeps published a tacitly positive review in *Die Zeit*. Schoeps, "From Character Assassination to Mass Murder," in *Unwilling Germans?*, ed. Shandley, 79-86. Ulrich Herbert corrected Goldhagen on many issues, but attested him the merit of having asked 'the right question.' Herbert, "The Right Question," in *Unwilling Germans?*, ed. Shandley, 109-116. British historian, Gordon Craig, agreed with Schoeps on commending Goldhagen for initiating new discussions and new research into the role of the perpetrators. Craig, "Ein Volk von Antisemiten?," in ed. Schoeps, *Ein Volk von Mördern?* 171-175.

¹⁸⁸Elie Wiesel, "Little Hitlers," in *Ein Volk von Mördern?*, ed. Schoeps, 44-47; Jürgen Habermas, "Goldhagen and the Public Use of History: Why a Democracy Prize for Daniel Goldhagen?" in *Unwilling Germans?*, ed. Shandley, 263-273, originally published in *Blätter für Deutsche und Internationale Politik*, April 1997.

to many American historians, that Goldhagen's book had indeed made a considerable contribution to the understanding and transmission of the Holocaust. Predicting a heated *Historikerstreit* about the book in Germany, he recommended that every school class should read it.¹⁸⁹ "Harvard Professor" Goldhagen had undertaken thorough research and had uncovered surprising truths and "overpowering proof" with which many Germans still did not want to reckon.¹⁹⁰ For Wiesel, again disagreeing with many German historians and publicists, Goldhagen's family background strengthened his authority to do research on the Holocaust. After all, he himself shared this motivation with the young scholar and had dedicated his entire life to the same cause. The more poignant was Rudolph Augstein's disparaging remark that Wiesel's support of Goldhagen was unsurprising since he himself [Wiesel] had done "research on nothing else" but the Holocaust, insinuating that this had disqualified Wiesel from being an unbiased reviewer.¹⁹¹ Wiesel attributed the insight to Goldhagen that the Holocaust was neither an accident of German history nor an aberration of the German mentality, but rather that it was an integral component of both factors, as well as their logical consequence. Wiesel wondered, though, if Goldhagen had lived up to his promise to explain how the Holocaust was possible. If one saw the Holocaust in the context of traditional German anti-Semitism, then his logic was convincing. Wiesel's concluding sentence could leave one with the impression that he would not insert himself further in the conversation,

¹⁸⁹Wiesel, "Little Hitlers," in *Ein Volk von Mördern?*, ed. Schoeps, 44.

¹⁹⁰*Ibid.*

¹⁹¹Rudolf Augstein, "The Sociologist as Hanging Judge," in *Unwilling Germans?*, ed. Shandley, 49. Norman Finkelstein, the son of Jewish Holocaust survivors, would agree. In his book criticizing the Holocaust industry, he attacked Wiesel repeatedly and virtually stripped him of any credibility whatsoever. Finkelstein, *The Holocaust Industry*. Apparently, Finkelstein represents a minority position within the American Jewish community.

simply because there was no more to say: “But I belong to the small minority for whom this in its breadth and heaviness incomparable tragedy will remain unexplained forever. And inexplicable.”¹⁹²

Jürgen Habermas, who had played one of the leading roles in the *Historikertreit*, had remained silent in the *Goldhagen Affair* until its very end and effectively offered a kind of closure to the controversy. While his role had been that of staunch critic of the revisionist historians in 1986, and while he had not shied away from serious indictments in harsh tones then, Habermas adopted a conciliatory stance ten years later. He sought to reconcile those who had stood at opposite poles in the debate: Goldhagen vs. the majority of German historians, the historians vs. the majority of the general public, and the generations of the *Zeitzeugen* vs. the *Nachgeborenen* [those who had been born after the Third Reich]. The occasion was the—not uncontroversial—decision on the part of the Board of Trustees of the *Blätter für Deutsche und Internationale Politik* to award the Democracy Prize to Daniel Goldhagen in the spring of 1997, a prize that two leading civil rights activists of the former East Germany had last received in 1990. In his *laudatio*, Habermas cited the justification for the award: “Through the ‘urgency, the forcefulness, and the moral strength of his presentation’ Daniel Goldhagen has ‘provided a powerful stimulus to the public conscience of the Federal Republic’; he has sharpened ‘our sensibility for what constitutes the background and the limit of a German ‘normalization.’”¹⁹³ Normalization, of course, had also been at the center of the *Historikerstreit*, where it had appeared as the issue of historicization and comparability of

¹⁹²Wiesel, “Little Hitlers,” in Scheops, ed., *Ein Volk von Mördern?* 47 [translation mine].

¹⁹³Habermas, “Goldhagen and the Public use of History,” in *Unwilling Germans?*, ed. Shandley, 263.

Auschwitz. Habermas made clear that the Board of Trustees had not intended to enter the discussion about the scholarly merits of the book among historians, but rather, that they meant to honor the book's contribution to the discussion of normalization which had taken on added urgency in the transition from the Bonn to the Berlin Republic. In contrast to his stance during the *Historikerstreit*, Habermas was now careful to award credit to historians who had dedicated their lives to researching the Holocaust, specifically to Hans Mommsen, Eberhard Jäckel, Martin Broszat, Ulrich Herbert, and others.¹⁹⁴ The prize was not awarded for the scholarly merits of the book—and Habermas was careful to point out that he, as non-historian, did not feel authorized to offer such judgment—but rather for the public response it elicited, a justification that was quite controversial. The power of the book was due to the fact that it “address[ed] precisely those questions that have polarized our public and private discussions for the past half century.”¹⁹⁵ The central issue had concerned the primary cause of Auschwitz and the Holocaust: Had it been the structures that a criminal regime had imposed on Germany or had it been the actions of individuals, including Hitler as well as ordinary Germans? Goldhagen had also prompted a public discussion about the usefulness of assigning responsibility for national crimes retrospectively to individuals. This question was linked to the broader issue of the public use of history. Should the righteous condemnation of the older generation follow new revelations of their implications in past crimes? Or, should such revelations call forth a sense of collective liability for the

¹⁹⁴These historians had taken Habermas's side in the *Historikerstreit*. Still, his conciliatory tone here stood in contrast with his divisive stance ten years before.

¹⁹⁵Habermas. “Goldhagen and the Public Use of History,” in *Unwilling Germans?*, ed. Shandley, 264.

inherited past? ¹⁹⁶ Only the latter approach would be a proper use of history in that it would help to “generate an ethical-political process of public self-understanding.” ¹⁹⁷ Here Habermas pointed to what he believed was the real merit of Goldhagen’s book, namely, the connection between political self-understanding and historical awareness. Only a proper awareness of one’s historical inheritance, including the burdens that such legacy brought with it, could provide citizens with the political-ethical compass that was necessary to build a responsible nation. This was, or should have been, at the heart of the debate at hand. By pointing towards individual responsibility of the perpetrators and by showing the connection between culturally determined values and actions, Goldhagen had offered Germans a view of human nature that included the possibility of transformation; a transformation that Habermas maintained had already happened in Germany through political and cultural enlightenment. This, in conclusion, merited the Democracy Prize.

Despite the various perspectives offered so far, one cannot fully appreciate the ‘Goldhagen Phenomenon’ without taking a closer look at public reaction. Without the high level of public interest and support for the young challenger from abroad, the media might not have kept the controversy going as long and German historians might not have reacted with such wounded pride. First, however, it is important to establish that ‘the public’ by no means equaled ‘ordinary Germans.’ Traditionally, the readership of the national press that carried the contributions came from the educated middle class. Also,

¹⁹⁶Ibid., 267. Habermas was careful to distinguish ‘collective liability’ from the ‘collective guilt’ that had been a strong bone of contention among Germans for a long time and whose existence many accused Goldhagen of having revived in his book.

¹⁹⁷Habermas. “Goldhagen and the Public Use of History,” in *Unwilling Germans?*, ed. Shandley, 264.

the majority of those crowding the lecture halls during Goldhagen's book tour were students, that is, a generation born in the early 1970s. Their grandparents might have witnessed the Third Reich first-hand, but even their parents would have been born after the war.¹⁹⁸ For them, it seemed, the National Socialist past had already been historicized. Some observers claimed that Goldhagen had become a 'pop star' for many of them, or even a 'redeemer' of sorts.¹⁹⁹ Norbert Frei explained this curious dynamic thus: "his followers understood Goldhagen as the messenger of a brand-new revelation of the seemingly deep and radical truth about the generation of their fathers and grandfathers."²⁰⁰ Omer Bartov found a good dose of rebellion against their professors in this, as well, whose lectures about the subject matter differed so sharply in methodology, style, and substance from the dynamic, American professor's approach.²⁰¹ While they most likely handled the issues with professional detachment, assuming their own impartiality, and offered mostly functionalist explanatory models, Goldhagen introduced moral issues into the mix, did not hide emotional involvement, and, best of all, offered a simple explanation for the Holocaust. No academician had done that before with this assuredness and clarity. By telling his young audiences that German anti-Semitism had all but disappeared from German society since 1945, Goldhagen indeed made it easy for these young people to adopt what Frei described as 'guilt pride' [*Schuldstolz*]. This word combination does not exist in the German language, but it nevertheless conveys the

¹⁹⁸Bartov, "Reception and Perception," in *The Goldhagen Effect*, ed. Geoff Eley, 48.

¹⁹⁹Norbert Frei, "Goldhagen, die Deutschen und die Historiker. Über die Representation des Holocaust im Zeitalter der Visualisierung," in eds. Sabrow, Jessen, and Große Kracht, *Zeitgeschichte als Streitgeschichte*, 145.

²⁰⁰*Ibid.*, [translation mine].

²⁰¹Bartov, "Reception and Perception," in *The Goldhagen Effect*, ed. Eley, 50.

curious attitude of moral superiority on account of professing guilt for something one could not have done. In this sense, Frei argued, their support of Goldhagen's thesis constituted nothing less than 'historical self-absolution.'²⁰² For members of older generations, on the other hand, this would not work. The only way we can catch a more direct glimpse at public reaction is through a subset of letters that Goldhagen received and authorized his German publisher to make available in book form.²⁰³ It goes without saying that one must approach these sources with due caution. We do not know the criteria that the publisher used, and Goldhagen no doubt approved, to select seventy-seven letters from the more than seven hundred he received over the course of sixteen months.²⁰⁴ The majority are favorable, but not all. The letters' mere existence attests to the impression Goldhagen must have made on those who read his book, saw him on television, or experienced him in person—enough of an impression to take the time to write him personally. No doubt, many expected a personal reply—otherwise they could have submitted letter to the editor of the national news media. Goldhagen did reply, but summarily, at the end of the compilation. Thus he took yet another opportunity to defend himself publicly against his critics.

A quantitative look at the collection shows that the majority of letters whose authors self-identified by age came from members of the *Zeitzeugen* generation (seventy years and older), a much smaller numbers from middle-aged persons (thirty to sixty years old), and none from persons under the age of thirty. Among those from the older

²⁰²Frei, "Goldhagen, die Deutschen und die Historiker," in eds. Sabrow, Jessen, and Große Kracht, *Zeitgeschichte als Streitgeschichte*, 145-146.

²⁰³Goldhagen, *Briefe an Goldhagen*.

²⁰⁴*Ibid.*, 218.

generation, more writers identified themselves as male than as female (ten vs. seven). The same is true for the entire collection (forty-eight from male vs. twenty-three from female writers). Five writers self-identified as Jewish Holocaust survivors. Perhaps not surprisingly, given their public ‘performance’ and possible media bias against them, twelve letters specifically criticized German historians and praised Goldhagen by comparison. One can group the many themes that writers addressed into four broad categories: generational issues, guilt and shame, counter-narratives and self-justifications, and public and academic representations.²⁰⁵ Many correspondents conveyed their or their family’s personal experiences during and after the war to Goldhagen, some wanting to explain or justify German actions and others affirming him in his assessments of ‘the Germans.’ Several apologized to Goldhagen for the treatment he had received from German historians or publicists. The critical reception of the book and Goldhagen’s treatment at the hands of his critics seemed to have caused those writers more shame than the issues the book addressed. Many thanked Goldhagen for his courage to ‘say the truth’ and to defend it in public. The word that appeared over and over again is ‘*betroffen*’ [deeply touched and troubled]. Goldhagen had touched a nerve indeed, but the public reacted differently in response than the guild had.

Despite some common threads and broad trends, the letters show great variety. None is ‘typical’ or representative of the subset. The letter from Freya von Moltke, widow of Helmuth James von Moltke, and former member of the German resistance movement against Hitler in her own right, stands out nevertheless. The Moltkes, of

²⁰⁵Under generational issues, writers addressed memory and their role as *Zeitzeuge*; under guilt and shame, confusion and sadness; under counter-narratives, Germans helping Jews, Eastern European anti-Semitism, life under dictatorship and war, ‘we did not know,’ and national pride; under public and academic representations, the role of German historians.

course, were by no means ‘ordinary Germans’ or representative of ‘the Germans’ during the war, but Ms. Moltke’s letter is nevertheless of interest because it addressed not only the complexity of the issues, but also pointed out the tenuous position of the historian.²⁰⁶

“Yes, you do describe in your book correctly the terrible truth. Yet your attitude is characterized by prejudice,” she wrote, “and that is why some of your conclusions are wrong.” After assuring Goldhagen that she respected his prejudices and even understood them, she urged him to realize that his book was indeed written under their influence.

“Historians cannot avoid letting subjectivity into their writing even when they are convinced of their complete objectivity. And you are no exception.”²⁰⁷ In closing her letter she stated that she would do all that was in her power to see it published, for that was what she owed her friends. Goldhagen may have thought he had found the answer to why the Holocaust had happened, but this letter showed, as many did, that there were no easy answers. Monocausality and generalizations do not serve in historiographic quests for understanding. The complexity of the past and the nagging issue of objectivity get in the way. In Freya von Moltke’s assessment, and probably not only in hers, even for Goldhagen, the historian’s objectivity had remained nothing more than a ‘noble dream.’²⁰⁸

Before we move on to the controversy over the *Wehrmachtsausstellung* that was in full swing by the time Goldhagen received the Democracy Prize, we must ask what

²⁰⁶The von Moltkes founded the *Kreisauer Kreis* in 1940. Her husband was killed in January 1945 in the wake of the assassination attempt on Hitler’s life. Freya von Moltke lived in the United States until her death in early 2010. She wrote her letter to Goldhagen on August 10, 1996. Goldhagen, *Briefe an Goldhagen*, 109-110.

²⁰⁷Freya von Moltke, in Goldhagen, *Briefe an Goldhagen*, 109-110 [translation mine].

²⁰⁸Peter Novick, *The Noble Dream: The ‘Objectivity Question’ and the American Historical Profession* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1988). Some critics, as we have seen, might have described Goldhagen’s quest as nothing more than a dream, but in their eyes it was not even a noble one.

made the *Goldhagen Affair* the bridging event it was within the larger process of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*.

The *Goldhagen Affair* was a caesura in that it demonstrated the increasing internationalization of National Socialism and especially of the Holocaust. The *Historikerstreit* had also received considerable foreign attention, but this controversy had already run its course in the United States before it came to Germany. The *Goldhagen Affair* was an international phenomenon of which the German affair was merely one chapter. German waves of controversy about the National Socialist past would move to the international stage, a development that the increasingly networked communication channels would accelerate.²⁰⁹

While the public had weighed in on the *Historikerstreit*, that controversy had still been a largely academic affair with members of the guild and prominent politicians sparring over the proper use of history in politics. In this scenario, the public was the object of education—at issue was who would dominate the shaping of historical consciousness. The *Goldhagen Affair* brought the public into play in an entirely new way. Goldhagen's book was addressed primarily towards the public, in complete contrast to Fischer's tome so many years ago. Likewise, the public decided who the 'winner' was in this controversy. It was definitely not the guild, nor was it Goldhagen; rather, it was the public itself. We saw a similar pattern with the *Walser-Bubis-Debate*, even though 'the public' applauded arguments then that were diametrically opposed to Goldhagen's. Ever since the 'Goldhagen Effect' had inserted itself in the process of German

²⁰⁹For example, *H-Net, the Humanities & Social Sciences Online* discussion forum offers ample opportunities to discuss virtually every historical subject among participants worldwide (<http://www.h-net.org>).

Vergangenheitsbewältigung, 'the public' became the most important discussant. This shift had consequences for historians.

While it would go too far to expect academic historians to become 'pop stars,' many probably realized that it was high time to assume the role of public intellectual in order to reach the public. The guild was also well advised to recognize younger colleagues within their ranks who were promoting public history in various guises. History workshops, museum exhibits, advisor roles to movie productions, and seats on textbook editorial boards, as well as a role in teacher education would have to become the profession's link with the public. It was quite obvious that the *Goldhagen Affair* had introduced the show element into national discourse about the Nazi past. There were also some innovations in terms of content.

As mentioned earlier, Goldhagen's argument gave entrance for moral issues into the discussion. In fact, one could argue that he had used a 'moral cudgel' against possible German complacency about the Holocaust. While the perpetrators had been 'the others' before, or rather, while they had been no one in particular, now they had become 'ordinary Germans.' The controversy over the *Wehrmachtsausstellung* took this a step farther by suggesting, that not only 'ordinary Germans' had implemented the Holocaust but rather potentially 'all (male) Germans.' The controversy over the *Wehrmachtsausstellung* also extended the shock effect of its revelation by using photo images. One could certainly interpret this as 'moral cudgel,' as many would. Walser, finally, rejected the use of what he considered a 'moral cudgel,' and this time, many members of the public agreed.

CHAPTER FOUR

WAR? NOT WITH GERMAN SOLDIERS! THE CONTROVERSY
OVER THE *WEHRMACHTSAUSSTELLUNG*²¹⁰

Would it stretch our wave image too far to consider the controversy over the so-called *Wehrmachtsausstellung* the tsunami of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*? Perhaps it would; instead, let's settle for 'the controversy of superlatives.' What gripped the nation between March 1995 and October 1999 indeed dwarfed all previous records: no prior controversy about the legacy of the Nazi past had lasted four years; never before had an historical exhibit in Germany—about National Socialism or any other time period— attracted close to one million visitors; no previous controversy had occupied virtually all facets of society, from the federal government down to individual families; none before had prompted accusations of forgery and of treason, had led to litigation and job dismissals, and had included the defamation of the organizers; vandalism and near-riots in the streets had not accompanied historical controversies before. The exhibit also prompted the biggest neo Nazi protest march in the history of post-war Germany. As if that were not enough, this was the first public history event about National Socialism that had incited right-wing extremist protesters to the point of bombing display venues, as happened in 1999 in Saarbrücken.²¹¹ None had had the potential of pitting entire generations of Germans against one another to the extent that the *Wehrmachtsausstellung*

²¹⁰The correct title of the exhibit was *Vernichtungskrieg: Verbrechen der Wehrmacht 1941-1944* [War of Annihilation: Crimes of Hitler's Army, 1941-1944], but it became popularly known as the *Wehrmachtsausstellung* [Armed Forces Exhibit].

²¹¹Lena Knäpple, "Wehrmachtsausstellung," in *Lexikon der 'Vergangenheitsbewältigung,'* eds. Fischer and Lorenz, 289.

did. There also had not been a need before to offer psychological and pastoral counseling to exhibit goers. The impact of their public history project even surprised its creators. “We had expected to hit a nerve in society with this topic,” Walter Manoschek ventured, “but we had not expected to hit a nerve center.”²¹²

While Fischer’s book had hit a nerve within the guild and eventually led to a paradigm shift within German historiography; while the *Historikerstreit* had arguably been the ‘perfect storm’ among controversies about the Nazi past; and while Goldhagen’s book would soon unleash a wave of emotional responses from the public, the *Wehrmachtsausstellung* had even more drastic effects. It destroyed one of the last popular myths associated with National Socialism, the myth of the ‘clean *Wehrmacht*.’ This, in turn, affected the historical consciousness among post-reunification Germans, strengthening the conviction of many that Germany could never again partake in war, not even as part of a military alliance or for peace keeping purposes. Due to international expectations for the reconstituted nation that it shoulder new responsibilities on the world stage, and with crisis looming in the Balkans, this particular ‘memory war’ had indeed far-reaching political consequences. The fall-out from this controversy shaped Germany’s national identity more thoroughly than previous controversies had. Perhaps it was a tsunami, after all.

Yet the controversy over the *Wehrmachtsausstellung* was not only about national identity. It was also about the personal honor and integrity of those who had served in Hitler’s army just as much as it was about the self-understanding of those who served in

²¹²Walter Manoschek, “ ‘Vernichtungskrieg. Verbrechen der Wehrmacht 1941-1944.’ Innenansichten einer Ausstellung,” *Zeitgeschichte* 29 no. 2 (2002): 67 [translation mine].

the *Bundeswehr*, the armed forces of the Federal Republic of Germany. Ultimately, the controversy over the *Wehrmachtsausstellung* was about Germany's future role in the world.

The connection between the representation of the past and the perception of Germany's role in the present (and future) had never been as clear as it was while the *Wehrmachtsausstellung* made its way through Germany and Austria in the mid-to-late 1990s. One would still not be able to appreciate the role of the controversy over the *Wehrmachtsausstellung* within the process of German reckoning with its National Socialist past sufficiently without looking at issues of personal and communal memory that it exposed to public view. This aspect is indeed so important for our overall understanding of the process of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* that it warrants a separate chapter. While the political aspects of the controversy, which will be subject of this chapter, had a profound impact on national identity, the personal and social angles to be examined in Chapter Five can teach us something about the passing on of historical consciousness from generation to generation.

To contextualize the controversy over the *Wehrmachtsausstellung*, a few dates might be helpful. Developed to coincide with the fiftieth anniversary of the end of WWII in May 1995, the traveling exhibit opened in Hamburg on March 5, 1995. Before returning to Hamburg in June and July 1999, it visited thirty-one cities.²¹³ New York City was to be its first stop on foreign soil, but, due to massive criticism, the producers

²¹³On the exhibit's itinerary were the following cities: Hamburg, Berlin, Potsdam, Stuttgart, Wien, Innsbruck, Freiburg, Mönchengladbach, Essen, Erfurt, Regensburg, Klagenfurt, Nürnberg, Linz, Karlsruhe, Munich, Frankfurt/Main, Bremen, Marburg, Konstanz, Graz, Dresden, Salzburg, Aachen, Kassel, Koblenz, Münster, Bonn, Hanover, Kiel, Saargrücken, Cologne, Hamburg, and Osnabrück. Hamburg, where it originated, was the only city that hosted the exhibit twice, in two different venues.

pulled the exhibit and reconceptualized it completely. Allowing the original exhibit to travel throughout the United States was thought to complicate the difficult negotiations over reparations to American Jews for forced labor under National Socialism that were going on at the time.²¹⁴ A second *Wehrmachtsausstellung*, much less controversial than the first, reopened under a new title in Berlin in 2001.²¹⁵

It is important to keep in mind that the controversy over the original exhibit overlapped not only with the negotiations over forced-labor compensation, but also with the *Goldhagen Affair*. The *Wehrmachtsausstellung* hit the scene almost exactly a year before Goldhagen's book was unveiled in the United States, which was also the point at which the German media began paying attention to it. By the time the German translation arrived on the market in fall 1996, the exhibit had already toured several cities, but the controversy did not fully erupt until it arrived in Munich in early spring 1997. By that time, the *Goldhagen Affair* was virtually over but commanded some fresh attention when Goldhagen received the Democracy Prize. Given that their messages were similar in that both pointed at the individual guilt of 'ordinary' German perpetrators, it is likely that the two controversies fed on one another and that many people engaged in both, but the literature yields little insight into possible cross-fertilization.

²¹⁴Hannes Heer, "Vom Verschwinden der Täter; Die Auseinandersetzung um die Ausstellung 'Vernichtungskrieg. Verbrechen der Wehrmacht 1941-1944.'" *Zeitschrift für Geschichtswissenschaft* 50 no. 10 (2002): 896.

²¹⁵Knäpple, "Wehrmachtsausstellung," in *Lexikon der 'Vergangenheitsbewältigung'*, eds. Fischer and Lorenz, 289-290. The second exhibit was titled, *Verbrechen der Wehrmacht. Dimensionen des Vernichtungskrieges 1941-1944* [Crimes of the Wehrmacht. Dimensions of the War of Annihilation 1941-1944]. This second exhibit strove for professional distance and objectivity. It worked more with texts than with images. Some have called it an exhibit of consensus. Since this exhibit did not elicit a controversy, it is not subject of this paper. For more information, consult Heer, "Vom Verschwinden der Täter," 869-898. As of 2004, the successor exhibit has been dismantled and stored in the *Deutsches Historisches Museum* in Berlin.

The controversy was similar to the *Goldhagen Affair* in a number of ways, but also introduced several new aspects to reckoning process. Both *Goldhagen* and the *Wehrmachtsausstellung* took away the long-held popular myth of a minority having committed the crimes of the Third Reich while the majority of Germans were Hitler's victims. The strict division between Nazis and Germans would no longer serve. Both the book and the exhibit broadened the circle of perpetrators to include virtually every German, either through direct participation in or active support of genocide. Furthermore, the book as well as the exhibit argued the case for voluntary action on the part of the perpetrators, emphasizing individual agency over structural explanations. Finally, *Hitler's Willing Executioners* as well as the *Wehrmachtsausstellung* revealed that the Holocaust was not confined to the concentration and death camps, but rather took place to a large degree out in the open, mostly in the conquered Eastern territories.

The *Wehrmachtsausstellung* introduced new elements into Holocaust discourse and representation in that it did not use a book or lectures to disseminate its message but rather a public history venue. The traveling exhibit consisted of about fifteen hundred previously unpublished, small format, and mostly amateur snapshots. The power of the visual material overwhelmed the sparse textual material that accompanied the photos. Not a renowned museum or a prestigious university-affiliated research institute had conceived and sponsored the exhibit, but rather the independent and privately financed *Hamburger Institut für Sozialforschung* [Hamburg Institute for Social Research]. The organizers were not members of the German guild, but rather a historian from Vienna, Walter Manoschek, the historian and movie producer, Hannes Heer, and Jan Philipp Reemtsma, the founder of the Hamburg Institute for Social Research, who also taught at

the University of Hamburg and was heir to a tobacco fortune.²¹⁶ Rather than utilizing museums, the exhibit was mounted in city halls and similarly politically exposed venues. Needless to say, the wrangling over venues became a political controversy in its own right for many municipal and state governments. Thus, while Goldhagen represented a threat to the guild's self-understanding from outside of the country, the team of Manoschek, Heer, and Reemtsma seemed to question the guild's hegemony from within the German context by using an unconventional yet powerful medium, non-traditional sources, and alternative venues. The controversy was also linked with the political process to an extent that only the *Historikerstreit* had approached, but, as will become apparent, for quite different reasons.

The exhibit consisted of three parts. One dealt with the occupation of White Russia from 1941-1944; one with killings of the civilian population during the so-called partisan war in Serbia until 1941; and one with the annihilation practices of the Sixth Army as it advanced towards Stalingrad until 1942. The majority of the photos came from archives in Eastern Europe and Russia. Many had originally been found in wallets of captured and killed *Wehrmacht* soldiers. Others came from private photo albums and from letters that German soldiers had sent home during the war. The snapshots depicted scenes of humiliation of Jews, evictions, shootings, mass graves, public hangings of civilians, emaciated prisoners of war, and on-looking German troops, some posing with

²¹⁶It did not help their reputations with the guild that Heer had had connections to the extreme left in his youth and that Reemtsma had had some dealings with autonomous and radical squatter groups in Hamburg. Reemtsma's abduction during the course of the exhibit added drama to the affair but was unrelated to the controversy surrounding the exhibit. The conservative politician from the CSU (Christian Social Union, the Bavarian branch of the Christian Democratic Union, CDU), Peter Gauweiler, sarcastically remarked that Reemtsma should have used his fortune for the victims of tobacco rather than for the remembrance of Jews, members of the Red Army, and hanged civilians. Heer, "Vom Verschwinden der Täter," 871.

corpses. The victims were men, women, and children of all ages. The images conveyed the utter contempt for human life and the sheer magnitude of the crimes against humanity that characterized the war of annihilation against the Jews, Slavs, and Gypsies.²¹⁷

Not surprisingly, the emotional impact of the exhibit was powerful. Some visitors used magnifying glasses, fearing to recognize a father, grandfather, or uncle in the photos, as did indeed happen.²¹⁸ The sheer force of the images shocked, horrified, devastated, shamed, or infuriated in a way that the spoken or written word could not. The arrangement of the exhibition panels in the shape of an Iron Cross further exacerbated the controversial nature of the exhibit and angered especially veterans, the Iron Cross having had a long tradition in the German armed forces to reward valor in combat.²¹⁹ Many cities found it necessary to offer numerous avenues for visitors to receive support in dealing with their experience. For example, psychoanalytically moderated discussion groups were offered and social workers and clergy stood by for individual conversations. Also, opportunities existed to write anonymous letters to the exhibitors, and extensive accompanying programs with historians, publicists, clergy, and politicians accompanied

²¹⁷Hamburger Institut für Sozialforschung, ed., *Vernichtungskrieg. Verbrechen der Wehrmacht 1941-1944. Ausstellungskatalog* (Hamburg: Hamburger Edition, 1996) [Exhibit Catalog].

²¹⁸Ulrich, Bernd, *Besucher einer Ausstellung: Die Ausstellung "Vernichtungskrieg. Verbrechen der Wehrmacht 1941-1944" in Interview und Gespräch* (Hamburg: Hamburger Edition, 1998), 12, note 9. A person who recognized himself as bystander in a shooting scene of civilians in Pančevo sued Hannes Heer for "besmirching his honor." Hamburger Institute für Sozialforschung, ed. *Eine Ausstellung und Ihre Folgen Zur Rezeption der Ausstellung "Vernichtungskrieg. Verbrechen der Wehrmacht 1941-1944"* (Hamburg: Hamburger Edition, 1999), 186.

²¹⁹Even though the *Bundeswehr* no longer uses it as medal, a rendering of the Iron Cross is its official emblem.

the exhibit in many places. Moreover, guest books offered visitors an opportunity to share their impressions and reactions.²²⁰

As mentioned earlier, the exhibit was designed to destroy the alleged popular myth of the ‘clean *Wehrmacht*.’ This view had persisted in parts of the German public even though historical research had long since established the numerous implications of the military in Nazi crimes.²²¹ According to the myth, the *SS* and other special units had perpetrated the Holocaust, mainly in the concentration camps. The military, on the other hand, had fought a ‘normal’ war on all fronts. ‘Normal’ here meant a war in which soldiers had acted honorably, in obedience to the oath of loyalty they had sworn to Hitler, and in accordance with internationally accepted standards of warfare. Furthermore, the popular association of the Army in particular with the failed attempt on Hitler’s life in 1944 had bolstered its reputation as a haven of civility and courage. Many considered the *Wehrmacht* an organization distanced from the criminal regime, one in which inner emigration and resistance had been possible, at least to some extent.²²²

According to a related popular notion, the common soldier had been the true victim of Hitler’s war yet had managed to cling to traditional military values such as

²²⁰The two books by the Hamburger Institut für Sozialforschung, *Eine Ausstellung und ihre Folgen* and *Besucher einer Ausstellung* describe these programs in depth and offer analyses of the various discussions and interviews with visitors of all generations. The entire collection of guest books is available in the archives of the Hamburger Institut für Sozialforschung.

²²¹Kluntz, *Geschichtspolitik: Die Auseinandersetzung um Goldhagen und die Wehrmachtsausstellung*, 45, 57; Rudolf n, “Zumutungen und Auseinandersetzungen: Reflexionen zur Ausstellung ‘Vernichtungskrieg; Verbrechen der Wehrmacht 1941-1944’ in Linz,” *Zeitgeschichte* 24, no. 11-12 (1997): 347; Omer Bartov, the American military historian, on the other hand, had bemoaned the fact that a connection between the *Wehrmacht* and the Holocaust had been lacking from historical research. Bartov, quoted in Manoschek, “‘Vernichtungskrieg. Verbrechen der Wehrmacht 1941-1944,’” 65. What research there might have been had apparently not made it into public consciousness.

²²²Peter Steinbach, “Zur Mythologie der Nachkriegszeit: Die NS-Wehrmacht als ‘Zelle des Widerstands’ und als Fluchtpunkt der ‘inneren Emigration,’” in eds. Greven and von Wrochem, *Der Krieg in der Nachkriegszeit*, 39.

honor, comradeship, and sacrifice. One indication of this myth's persistence into the 1990s is the fact that forty-one percent of respondents to an opinion survey said they thought about German soldiers in WWII "with admiration," while only eighteen percent indicated negative connotations.²²³ The work of Andreas Hillgruber, one of the historians Habermas had criticized for his alleged revisionism during the *Historikerstreit*, had partially contributed to this myth with his book, *Zweierlei Untergang*. Hillgruber had propagated the thesis that the military had been fighting valiantly and honorably on the Eastern Front to protect the Germans living in the occupied areas from the wrath of the Red Army. The *Wehrmachtsausstellung* sought to shatter this image in the public imagination. By doing so, it implicated the nineteen million German men who had served in the military during WWII. While Goldhagen would argue that most 'ordinary' Germans would probably have acted like the members of *Police Battalion 101*—because they were representative of the population and because the eliminationist anti-Semitism was pervasive among Germans—the *Wehrmachtsausstellung* suggested that virtually every male German probably had, in fact, been implicated in criminal acts, either as witness, bystander, or perpetrator.²²⁴ This was, indeed, powerful and devastating news to the public at a time when there was much concern over forging a new, post-reunification national consciousness. Many would probably have welcomed a

²²³*Allensbacher Jahrbuch der Demoskopie 1993-1997*, vol. 10, eds. Noelle-Neumann and Köhler, 521. Interestingly, more respondents from the old federal states (former West Germany) than from the new states (former East Germany) associated admiration with the soldiers (forty-two vs. thirty-three percent); more respondents over sixty thought with admiration of WWII soldiers than those who were younger (fifty-eight percent of sixty-year-olds vs. twenty-eight percent of sixteen-to-thirty-four-year-olds). Eighty-seven percent of Russians thought of *their* soldiers with admiration.

²²⁴Many families back at the home front were implicated as well in knowing what was happening at the Eastern Front since they received letters and photos from their soldiers, some of which became part of the exhibit.

Schlussstrich at the time of the fiftieth anniversary of the end of National Socialism, especially since five years after reunification there was a sense that the time of ‘post-war’ Germany had also irrevocably come to an end. We will further examine the impact of these attempts to shatter deep-seated myths in the popular imagination in Chapter Five. For now, let’s return to the political fall-out.

The fall-out was considerable, with local, state, and the federal governments, as well as the military establishment entering the discussions. The year 1995 was one in which domestic and foreign policy issues converged to create a situation ripe for controversy. The culmination of the string of fiftieth anniversary commemorations coincided with the fortieth anniversary of the *Bundeswehr* and with five years of German post-war nationhood. A volatile situation in the Balkans had brought the specter of genocide and war to Europe once again, after decades during which the Cold War between the superpowers had imposed relative peace. The reunified Germany found itself in the crucible of these events. No longer was it possible to occupy the sidelines of world politics, but the German population was not generally willing to enter the fray. The ‘vacations from world history,’ first imposed from the outside but subsequently adopted willingly and utilized to the country’s advantage, was irrevocably over by the mid-1990.²²⁵

As a result, Germany had to make difficult and unpopular foreign policy decisions. Whereas the world had expected West Germany not to involve its armed

²²⁵The then-editor of the national newspaper, *Die Zeit*, Theo Sommer, used the image of Germany taking a vacation from world history in an editorial in *Die Zeit* from August 14, 1992. Gregor Schöllgen quoted Sommer as part of arguing for Germany to embrace the power that came with reunification and for the country no longer to be afraid to assert itself on the world stage. Sommer, quoted in Schöllgen, *Angst vor der Macht*, 137.

forces in missions other than the defense of its own territory during the post-war years, in the early 1990s pressures mounted for the united German nation to 'do its share' within NATO and the United Nations. Jeffrey Olick summarized the changed foreign expectations towards Germany aptly: "[u]sually the world condemned and feared any German military activity. Now they demanded it."²²⁶

Reunification and national sovereignty had indeed changed Germany's geopolitical position within Europe and within its alliances. It was therefore no longer possible to claim exemption from participation in military operations. International crises, such as the first and second Gulf Wars, the break-up of Yugoslavia, and the war in Kosovo, forced Germany to review its past policies on military engagement. For example, the United States put considerable pressure on Germany to join the coalition against Saddam Hussein in 1991. This situation was especially complicated since Iraq represented a potentially serious threat to Israel. In response to the dilemma between historically conditioned realities and new foreign policy pressures, Germany had held an intense debate about out-of-area missions. In July 1994, less than a year before the unveiling of the *Wehrmachtsausstellung* in Hamburg, the Federal Constitutional Court [*Bundesverfassungsgericht*] had settled the matter, ruling that such missions were indeed constitutional, as long as they happened within a "multilateral framework" and the Federal Government authorized them.²²⁷ Thus, Germany felt compelled to participate in the NATO IFOR mission in Bosnia-Herzegovina, beginning in December 1995, to enforce the Dayton Peace Accords. This meant that the German military operated, for the

²²⁶Olick, "What Does It Mean to Normalize the Past?" 560.

²²⁷Thomas Berger, "The Power of Memory and Memories of Power: The Cultural Parameters of German Foreign Policy-Making Since 1945," in *Memory and Power in Post-War Europe: Studies in the Presence of the Past*, ed. Jan-Werner Müller (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 93.

first time after WWII, in a country its predecessor army had brutally occupied fifty years before.²²⁸ It is not surprising that this mission was controversial in Germany, not only among the public, but also among opposing parties in the federal government. Beginning in March 1999, Germany also participated in NATO bombing raids against the Serbs in Kosovo—without UN mandate.²²⁹ The impact on popular sentiment of this escalation of military deployment is quite apparent when comparing exhibit guest book entries between 1995 and 1999.

Given Germany's long hiatus from engaging its military in combat beyond its borders, there was considerable domestic opposition against this war. In 2001, only fifty-four percent of respondents to an opinion survey acknowledged that this action represented a legitimate use of the *Bundeswehr*, while ninety-two percent believed that the *Bundeswehr* should be used only if Germany itself was attacked.²³⁰ Eventually, the government under Gerhard Schröder acted upon the popular opposition against out-of-area deployment of German forces. Schröder made himself unpopular with the U.S. President, George W. Bush, by refusing Germany's participation in the invasion of Iraq

²²⁸For a detailed account of these developments, see Jeffrey Lantis, "Action and Engagement: The Bosnian Crisis, 1994-1999," in *Strategic Dilemmas and the Evolution of German Foreign Policy Since Reunification* (Santa Barbara: Praeger, 2002), 107-140. ABC-CLIO eBook Collection, clio.com.library.acaweb.org/reader.aspx?isbn=9780313012587&id=C7751-8 (accessed March 27, 2010).

²²⁹Berger, "The Power of Memory and Memories of Power," 95. Thirty-one percent of the respondents to an opinion survey thought that NATO should not have used military means in Kosovo; forty-two percent believed that air strikes were sufficient (and ground forces too dangerous) and sixteen percent responded that NATO should have used ground forces from the beginning. *Allensbacher Jahrbuch für Demoskopie 1998-2002*, vol. 11, eds. Noelle-Neumann and Köcher, 989.

²³⁰*Ibid.*, 978.

in 2003.²³¹ Nevertheless, Germany did agree to play a non-combat role in Afghanistan, against considerable popular opposition.²³²

Post-reunification Germany carefully and often painfully weighed its international obligations as a sovereign nation and alliance partner against its deeply ingrained commitment *not* to use military power ever again to advance its national goals. With hundreds of thousands of people visiting the exhibit these choices did not become any easier. It would not have been difficult to accuse the organizers of deliberate ‘anti-war-mongering’ for political purposes, as some doubtlessly did.

The political controversy over the exhibit reached its climax in spring 1997 when the federal government rejected the request to mount it in the lobby of the *Bundestag* building in Bonn. In response, parliamentarians felt compelled to debate the issues in the federal *Bundestag* [representative chamber of parliament]. Prior to the debate on March 13, 1997, the governing coalition parties and the opposition parties drew up separate resolutions, all of which urged the political body to take an official stand vis-à-vis the message of the *Wehrmachtsausstellung* as well as towards mounting it in the lobby of the *Bundestag*. As expected, the resolutions differed considerably by party. After an unusually thoughtful and relatively non-partisan debate about the issues, however, the

²³¹Schröder and his liberal-leaning party, the SPD [German Social Democratic Party], made the war the central topic of their election campaign in 2002. The SPD, together with the Greens, won, probably due in large part to their ‘not-with-us’ stance against President Bush’s call to join the ‘coalition of the willing’ against Saddam Hussein.

²³²Fifty-one percent responded that they agreed with the deployment, while thirty-four percent disagreed. *Allensbacher Jahrbuch für Demoskopie 1998-2002*, vol. 11, eds. Noelle-Neumann and Köcher, 990.

body rejected holding a vote as too divisive.²³³ Neither did the parties succeed in composing a joint resolution instead. A second debate ensued on April 24, 1997, at which time representatives voted on the resolution that the governing coalition had submitted. The resolution narrowly carried 301 to 283.²³⁴ The value of the debate did not lie in the resolution that the chamber passed, a resolution that must have been a disappointment for the opposition parties, but rather in the openness, honesty, and personal *Betroffenheit* [being deeply touched and troubled] with which delegates of different generations and party affiliations voiced their standpoints on the issues.

Freimut Duve (from the liberal opposition), Erika Steinbach, and *Zeitzeugen* Alfred Dregger and Otto Graf Lambsdorff (all from the conservative governing coalition) included personal experiences in their remarks, but the really outstanding contributions came from the Social Democrat Otto Schily and the Green Party parliamentarian Christa Nickels. Both were members of the first successor generation, meaning that their fathers and male relatives had participated in the war. Schily turned what began as a typically partisan and polemic debate around and introduced an entirely different tone. He spoke of his uncle who had been devastated by the crimes of the Hitler regime and had committed suicide. He spoke of his brother who had tried, unsuccessfully, to flee the country and then had volunteered for duty at the front lines. He spoke of his Jewish father in law, who had joined the partisans in fighting the

²³³For the texts of the resolutions and a transcript of the debate in its entirety, see *Die Wehrmachtsausstellung: Dokumente einer Kontroverse*, ed. Hans-Günther Thiele (Bremen: Edition Temmen, 1997), 170-223.

²³⁴The resolution had a rather conservative tone, but was clearly a result of political compromise. It condemned right-wing as well as left-wing extremist attacks on the exhibit. It pointed out that WWII had been a tragedy that also had led to millions of German victims. The resolution sought to save the honor of the individual soldier and place the main responsibility for the war with the regime. It gave the exhibit the right to a voice in the debate but affirmed that it was only one voice among many and should not be installed in the *Bundestag*. The complete text is available in *Die Wehrmachtsausstellung*, ed. Thiele, 222.

Wehrmacht. Only this partisan, Schily maintained, who had lost his entire family in the gas chambers, had put his life on the line for an honorable cause. Acknowledging this, he continued, one could not close one's eyes from the horrible photos in the *Wehrmachtsausstellung*, which gave an invaluable contribution to the difficult work of reckoning that still lay ahead.²³⁵

Nickel's statement was no less impressive for her willingness to share very personal thoughts in a highly political and public environment. She spoke of her father who had been present when Kohl and Reagan shook hands at Bitburg. As difficult as it might be to imagine, it seemed that her father had worn his SS uniform to the occasion (what he wore was black and had skulls on the lapels). Nickel, already serving as representative for the Green Party in parliament at the time, had not dared to confront him about it. She had been devastated on the realization of what had happened at the Eastern Front, but also about what apparently had been done to men like her father. Those men had loved life, but they had burdened themselves with unfathomable guilt during that war, a guilt that would have an abiding impact on them, their wives, and their children. She, the daughter of such a man, had loved her father dearly. The one best thing to promote healing would be if parents and children could sit down together and have an honest conversation about what had happened during the war and how it had come to pass. The silence had to be broken. The *Wehrmachtsausstellung* had helped just such conversations along, as difficult as that process was.²³⁶

²³⁵Schily, in *Die Wehrmachtsausstellung*, ed. Thiele, 181-183 [Paraphrase and translation mine].

²³⁶This translated paraphrase cannot adequately capture the eloquence and powerful simplicity of this contribution [translation mine]. For the original, see Nickels, in *Die Wehrmachtsausstellung*, ed. Thiele, 191-193. Chapter Five will deal with the impact of the *Wehrmachtsausstellung* on families.

Unfortunately, the resolution that barely passed after this debate was non-committal and did not come close to reflecting the moral depth with which many of the representatives had addressed the issues. Nevertheless, one can probably consider the fact that the exhibit was able to move to Frankfurt, the Paulskirche, no less, a positive result of the *Bundestag* discussion. Incidentally, Ignatz Bubis and Jan Philipp Reemtsma opened the exhibit at the very place that would see Bubis on the defensive in a few years' time.²³⁷ An American reporter grasped the symbolic significance of the placement in the Paulskirche when he surmised that “[i]f the Americans were willing to deal with a comparable controversy about the use of their atomic bombs, they would have to choose the Independence Hall in Philadelphia as the place to do this.”²³⁸

Political fallout of the *Wehrmachtsausstellung* also affected the self-understanding and image of the *Bundeswehr*. As conscript army, the *Bundeswehr* is an entity that links the state and its foreign policy directly with the people, in their roles as citizen soldiers. Given the volatile foreign policy situation in which Germany found itself in the mid-1990s, and the popular reaction to the exhibit, it is not surprising that the *Bundeswehr* became a player in this controversy. By contrast, the German military had not inserted itself in any of the previous controversies about the legacy of the Nazi past. None of them had dealt with the *Wehrmacht* as a potentially criminal organization and therefore had not affected the *Bundeswehr*.

Not surprisingly, many visitors drew connections between the role of the *Wehrmacht* in WWII and the role that the *Bundeswehr* was to assume in the newly

²³⁷As already mentioned in Chapter One, the first German parliament had met in the *Paulskirche* after the Revolution of 1848, making the location the birthplace of German democracy.

²³⁸Quoted by Bernd Greiner in *Eine Ausstellung und ihre Folgen.*, ed. Hamburger Institut für Sozialforschung, 41.

reunified nation. In Germany, where pacifist and anti-war sentiments had been not only state policy since 1945, but had also found strong support among large parts of the population, an exhibit that openly showed atrocities perpetrated by the military during war operations would strengthen pacifist and anti-military sentiments. Questions about the continuity between Hitler's Army and the *Bundeswehr* had been lingering since the controversial rearmament of West Germany in 1955, although the government had repeatedly confirmed that the *Bundeswehr* did not build on the traditions of the *Wehrmacht*, at least not as an organization. This so called *Traditionserlass* [official pronouncement about the *Bundeswehr* not continuing the traditions of the *Wehrmacht*] had been suspect with parts of the population, however, since former *Wehrmacht* personnel had helped build the *Bundeswehr* in its early years.

Not surprisingly, the *Bundeswehr* did take the defensive vis-à-vis the exhibit, feeling vilified and dishonored by its message, and probably also weakened in terms of its new international role.²³⁹ It is indeed likely that the exhibit further strengthened the resolve of the population to resist any attempt by the United States to draw Germany into the war against Saddam Hussein. Depictions of crimes that 'ordinary' soldiers had allegedly committed during operations in WWII did not lend themselves to preparing the German population for supporting their armed forces in a military operation against Iraq, especially since many Germans considered the second Iraq war as an illegal war of aggression. The tenor of the guest book entries was just that: a categorical *no* to war, under any circumstances, especially not one that used German soldiers or that emanated from German soil.

²³⁹*Bundeswehr* soldiers were allowed to visit the exhibit only as private persons and not in uniform.

What, then, were the military establishment's arguments against the *Wehrmachtsausstellung*? In spring 1997, officials in Bremen attached to their permission to mount the exhibit in the city hall the stipulation to assemble a conference of experts prior to opening day. Bremen sought to avoid what had happened in Munich, where violent clashes on the central square [*Marienplatz*] between right-extremists and exhibit supporters had accompanied the exhibit in city hall. Instead, Bremen wanted to facilitate a respectful dialog about the issues at hand. Using Bremen city hall, a place where many a dispute had been discussed throughout its almost 600-year history, the city invited representatives of politics, the academy, the military, and the public to a symposium in February 1997.²⁴⁰ Hannes Heer, Jan-Philipp Reemtsma, and Walter Manoschek were present, as well as one of their most ardent critics, Günther Gillessen.²⁴¹ Wolfgang Altenburg, Bernhard Gertz, Gottfried Greiner, Ernst Rebentisch, Günter Roth, and Werner von Scheven represented diverse military perspectives.²⁴² A summary of this group's main arguments shall provide some insight into the military reception of the exhibit. As an interesting sidelight, the editors of the textbook, *Geschichte und*

²⁴⁰See Thiele's introductory remarks and Major Dr. Hennig Scherf's welcome to the participants for an explanation of the circumstances of the symposium. Thiele, "Einleitung" and Henning Scherf, "Begrüßung," in *Die Wehrmachtsausstellung*, ed. Thiele, 7-14 and 15-16. In January 1999, the state government of Schleswig-Holstein provided a similar opportunity for dialog between opposing parties in connection with the showing of the exhibit in Kiel. Hans Adolf Jacobsen and Wolfram Wette, *Eine Ausstellung im Streit: die Auseinandersetzung um die Ausstellung des Hamburger Instituts für Sozialforschung "Vernichtungskrieg. Verbrechen der Wehrmacht 1941-1944,"* 15. Landtagsforum (Kiel: Landtag Schleswig-Holstein, 1999).

²⁴¹Gillessen was retired professor from the University of Mainz. In 1997 he worked as journalist for foreign policy for the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*.

²⁴²Altenburg was a former General and past General Inspector of the *Bundeswehr*, in addition to past chairman of the NATO military commission in Brussels; Gertz was chairman of the German *Bundeswehr* Association in Bonn; Greiner was a former Major General; Rebentisch was a retired senior military physician; Dr. Roth was a retired Brigadier General and former director of the Military Research Institute of the *Bundeswehr*; and von Scheven was a retired Lieutenant General.

Geschehen, published in 2005, chose to represent the controversy over the *Wehrmachtsausstellung* using as primary sources excerpts from three contributions to the symposium in Bremen. Students are challenged to assess, based on these sources and on a variety of contemporary materials (posters, letters, military commands, statistics) to what degree one should label the *Wehrmacht*, as well as the *SS*, as criminal organizations.²⁴³

None of the discussants denied that the *Wehrmacht* had indeed let itself be used as the instrument of Hitler's war of annihilation. None denied that atrocities had taken place. All, however, took serious issue with the exhibit. For one, it lacked scientific merit and failed to adhere to scientific norms. It did not aim to discern the truth and was politically motivated.²⁴⁴ The exhibit also levied summary judgments, assigned collective guilt to all soldiers, provoked and shocked, and demonized an entire generation.²⁴⁵ Rather than facilitating dialog between the generations, the organizers provoked defensiveness in *Zeitzeugen* who felt summarily vilified. The moral arrogance and polemic stance of the exhibit's creators, all members of the successor generations, further exacerbated this situation in the minds of the discussants. Instead, the organizers neglected their duty to approach their 'tragic war inheritance' with the utmost delicacy and diligence. Instead of judging hastily, their aim should have been to find historical

²⁴³*Geschichte und Geschehen—Neuzeit*, eds. Bender et al., 219-223.

²⁴⁴*Die Wehrmachtsausstellung*, ed. Thiele, 35, 68, 106. One of the participants, former Major General Dr. Gottfried Greiner, even invoked Leopold von Ranke's dictum of finding how 'it really was' and asserted that the exhibit had failed to do this (*ibid.*, 35).

²⁴⁵*Ibid.*, 35, 67, 70, 104, 106, 119.

truth.²⁴⁶ The exhibit also failed to depict the entire situation in which the *Wehrmacht* and its individual soldiers found themselves. It did not contextualize; it offered no explanations for the depicted situations; it did not provide background for the mentalities of the times, and, most seriously, it did not mention the resistance movement at all.²⁴⁷

All critics bemoaned the effect of the photos. According to them, they were overpowering, without proper explanations and contextualization, shocking, and “left the visitor alone with the emotional effect of the images.”²⁴⁸ This was especially detrimental for the *Zeitzeugen* and for younger visitors who would be tempted to come to the conclusion that “soldiers are murderers.”²⁴⁹ The exhibit did not adequately address the moral predicaments of the soldiers. Soldiers were torn between doing their duty for the Fatherland, honoring their oath of obedience to Hitler, defending home and hearth, averting the wrath of the Red Army, and participating in actions that they may not have deemed moral. Several commentators called this dilemma tragic.²⁵⁰ Von Scheven put it most powerfully when he stated that “as a German, one could call World War II the

²⁴⁶Ibid., 38, 72, 106, 121. According to Roth, “the exhibit contributes only in a limited way to the *understanding* of our history and to an *objective judgment* about it. Rather it sows suspicion and irreconcilability among the generations.” Ibid., 72 [translation mine]. Von Scheven emphasized the tragic nature of the war generation and cautioned successor generations to approach the issues with a caring rather than a judging attitude. Ibid., 121 and 135.

²⁴⁷Ibid., 68-69, 104 - 106, 119-120.

²⁴⁸Ibid., 119, [loose translation mine].

²⁴⁹Ibid., 39. This statement by Greiner alludes to the exhibit, *Soldaten sind Mörder* [Soldiers are Murderers] that ran in 1996/97 in Berlin and other cities. It addressed German atrocities against the USSR and Yugoslavia during the war, as well as the contemporary German involvement in the war in Yugoslavia. Greiner called the two exhibits companion exhibits, although they emanated from different organizations and had different goals.

²⁵⁰Note how Hillgruber’s perspective, so criticized during the *Historikerstreit*, was still visible in these arguments. Hillgruber may not have been that far off, at least not in terms of prevailing opinions within the military establishment.

tragedy of our sense of duty.”²⁵¹ A related criticism of the exhibit was that it neither took into account that the soldiers lived in a totalitarian system and might have feared for their lives, nor that the general mentality of the times understood the war against the Soviet Union as a war of world ideologies, from which only one party could emerge victoriously.²⁵²

Finally, the exhibit failed to address the connection between the *Wehrmacht* and the *Bundeswehr*, which was a multifaceted one, given the fact that former members of the *Wehrmacht* were instrumental in building up the *Bundeswehr* during its first decades of existence. This neglect led to the mostly negative reaction of the *Bundeswehr* to the exhibit. There had been calls for boycotts. In the eyes of visitors, the failure to address the connections probably led to a summary judgment about both organizations, associating the *Bundeswehr* with crimes committed in the *Wehrmacht* and ultimately seeing all soldiers as murderers.²⁵³ The symposium ended with a plenary discussion in which the opponents did not come to any consensus about the exhibit, but nevertheless accomplished what had not happened in Munich, namely a civilized discourse about contentious issues. The organizers had intended to start a conversation about the role of the *Wehrmacht* in Germany’s war of annihilation. Such conversation had indeed happened, in parliament, in Bremen, and eventually also among historians.

At this point one may have wondered if the guild had taken any position during this controversy. For quite some time, university historians apparently did not pay much

²⁵¹*Die Wehrmachtausstellung*, ed. Thiele, 127. The German original reads, “Man kann als Deutscher den Zweiten Weltkrieg eine *Tragödie unseres Pflichtbewusstseins* nennen” [emphasis in original; translation mine].

²⁵²*Ibid.*, 120-121.

²⁵³*Ibid.*, 39, 102-106, 125-135.

attention to the exhibit. Lena Knäpple, in her retrospective about the controversy, explained this with the guild not recognizing Heer and Reemtsma as competent historians.²⁵⁴ Another reason for the guild's initial lack of interest might have been that the exhibit's message did not break new historical ground. Even though there was much research yet to be done about the *Wehrmacht* and especially about the individual soldier, a historiographic consensus did exist about the military's implication in war crimes, especially on the Eastern Front. The American military historian, Omer Bartov, for example had just a few years before published his acclaimed *Hitler's Army: Soldiers, Nazis, and War in the Third Reich*, in which he had established that Hitler had indeed made the *Wehrmacht* the instrument of his policies of annihilation and genocide. Bartov had also been able to show the gradual brutalization of many a soldier serving at the front, which would explain many soldiers' willingness to commit atrocities.²⁵⁵ By the time the *Wehrmachtsausstellung* came on the scene to destroy the 'myth of the clean *Wehrmacht*,' there had not been any such myth among historians for quite a while. Furthermore, the one-sidedness, the lack of contextualization, the emphasis on emotion, the extensive use of photos, and perhaps the very fact that this was public history must have contributed to a general disinterest among academic historians.

By 1999, however, the controversy had attracted some historians' attention. Interestingly, the historian-initiated campaign against the exhibit first came from abroad, with two influential German military historians jumping on the bandwagon.²⁵⁶ The

²⁵⁴Knäpple, "Wehrmachtsausstellung," in *Lexikon der 'Vergangenheitsbewältigung'*, 288.

²⁵⁵Omer Bartov, *Hitler's Army: Soldiers, Nazis, and War in the Third Reich* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991).

²⁵⁶These were Rolf-Dieter Müller from the Militärgeschichtliches Forschungsamt in Potsdam and Horst Möller from the Munich-based Institut für Zeitgeschichte. Together, these historians represented the

criticism concerned the authenticity of the photos. Polish historian Bogdan Musial and Hungarian historian Krisztián Ungváry alleged that a large percentage was mislabeled and did not depict crimes committed by the *Wehrmacht* at all but rather atrocities of the Red Army or partisans. According to them, the exhibitors had willfully forged other photos.²⁵⁷ The international commission of historians who spent a year examining the photos concluded in November 2000 that less than twenty photos did not, in fact, belong in the exhibit.²⁵⁸ But the damage had already been done. The intense media attention given the accusers had undermined the credibility of the entire exhibit in the eyes of the public and the organizers pulled it even before the verdict of the commission had come out. According to Manoschek, there had not ever before been a historical exhibit working with photos that had been as thoroughly scrutinized as to the provenance and authenticity of this material as had the *Wehrmachtsausstellung*.²⁵⁹ As a result of the controversy over the photos, the *Hamburger Institut für Sozialforschung*, much to the chagrin of the original organizers, subsequently developed a ‘sanitized’ version of the exhibit that eliminated the most scandalous aspects of the original and opened it on November 27, 2001 in Berlin.²⁶⁰

arguably most prestigious German institutions dedicated to research of National Socialism, the Holocaust, and military history.

²⁵⁷The media jumped on this controversy, a development that eventually prompted a moratorium of the exhibit and a thorough examination of the authenticity of the photos. Manoschek, “‘Vernichtungskrieg. Verbrechen der Wehrmacht 1941-1944,’ ” 69; Heer, “‘Vom Verschwinden der Täter;” 872-874.

²⁵⁸Heer, “‘Vom Verschwinden der Täter;” 874. Omer Bartov was a member of the commission.

²⁵⁹Manoschek, “‘Vernichtungskrieg. Verbrechen der Wehrmacht 1941-1944,’ ” 69.

²⁶⁰Heer, “‘Vom Verschwinden der Täter;” 874-875, 892. For example, the new exhibit lacked all photos that ordinary soldiers had taken. One could no longer see those scandalous photos depicting grinning soldiers posing with their victims, both before and after the victims’ execution.

German historians, albeit for the most part not members of the guild, took the more sober atmosphere surrounding the successor exhibit as a welcome opportunity for a scientific colloquium about the state of research on the *Wehrmacht*. Significantly, the *Hamburger Institut für Sozialforschung* and the *Institut für Zeitgeschichte München-Berlin* co-hosted the colloquium, with Jan Philipp Reemtsma and Horst Müller jointly welcoming their colleagues. Once again, the exhibit—albeit the second one this time—had brought erstwhile opponents together. The meeting resulted in a book that provided an overview of the state of research on the *Wehrmacht* as of 2005.²⁶¹

Apparently, the original *Wehrmachtsausstellung* had opened up new lines of inquiry for military and social historians. For example, several contributions dealt with the mentalities among common soldiers, something that military historians had previously neglected. Also, the historians seemed more willing to use new types of source material, as, for example, field-post letters.²⁶² Regardless of what many historians might have thought about the scientific merit of the first exhibit, it did prompt them to pay more attention not only to the individual and his agency, but also to the common soldier in general. The guest books that the organizers had made available to visitors also allow us some insight into individual reaction to the messages of the exhibit. Although still relatively little researched, they are gradually becoming historicized in their own

²⁶¹Christian Hartmann, Johannes Hürter, and Ulrike Jureit, eds., *Verbrechen der Wehrmacht: Bilanz einer Debatte* (München: Verlag C.H.Beck, 2005). Incidentally, the majority of the contributing historians did not hold professorships at universities but rather held academic lectureships or worked for the two historical institutes. Most also did not belong to the generation of *Zeitzeugen* but were born in the 1960s. These two facts alone distinguished this group from the historians that had been involved in the other controversies.

²⁶²Ulrike Jureit, “Motive—Mentalitäten—Handlungsspielräume: Theoretische Anmerkungen zu Handlungsoptionen von Soldaten,” in *Verbrechen der Wehrmacht*, eds. Hartmann, Hürter, and Jureit, 163-170; Klaus Latzel, “Feldpostbriefe: Überlegungen zur Aussagekraft einer Quelle,” in *ibid.*, 171-181.

right. As important primary documents, they are indeed, or should be, part of the historiography not only of the *Wehrmachtsausstellung*, but rather of the overall process of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* in Germany.²⁶³

The books from the two showings in Hamburg lend themselves to comparison. Do the entries differ? Presumably, visitors saw the exhibit in 1995 with relatively little preparation; four years later one would assume that they knew what to expect. We do not know how many people went back to see the exhibit for a second time. What we do know is that the percentage of visitors who availed themselves of the guest books was quite low (one volume exists for the 1995 and two volumes for the 1999 exhibits). First, the entries will be examined for connections that visitors made between the historical events they saw depicted and Germany's current military engagement in the Balkans. Chapter Five will look at the same guest books through the lens of memory.

A comparison of the guest books from the showings in Hamburg in March and April 1995 with those from June and July 1999 shows how contemporary political events colored visitors' experience of the exhibit. While only two of thirty-three entries in 1995 made connections between the Nazi campaign against the Soviet Union in WWII and German military policy in the 1990s, in 1999 eleven of the forty-seven entries used the occasion to condemn the deployment of the *Bundeswehr* in out-of-area missions. For the visitors in 1999 more so than for those four years earlier, 'learning from the past' had taken on a concrete meaning vis-à-vis the present.

²⁶³When I worked with them the first time in summer 2007, according to the archivist, very few people had looked at the guest books. In 2009, he said that 'every so often someone took a look.' One of those persons must have been the author of the encyclopedia article about the *Wehrmachtsausstellung*, Lena Knäpple, since she included a couple of general statements about them in her article (*Lexikon der "Vergangenheitsbewältigung"*, eds. Fischer and Lorenz, 288). Yet to my knowledge, the collection of well over one hundred guest books has not been systematically studied.

In 1995, connections visitors drew between WWII and the post-reunification use of the German military were still quite general. According to one visitor, “There is no excuse for any of this! The Germans started the war. All cruelties happened because of that. One should absolutely be against war [emphases in original].”²⁶⁴ For this visitor, the atrocities the German military had committed in WWII provided a sufficient reason for radical pacifism in the present. This visitor did not need to know about atrocities that the other side might have committed, as several other visitors did; s/he did not ask for differentiation or contextualization; rather, for him/her, war was war and as such detestable.²⁶⁵ The second writer was more specific, even in 1995. S/he asked, “And today?! Billions of German Marks for the *Bundeswehr*. Old drill in new uniforms. And nobody objects when ‘our boys’ ‘suddenly’ ‘appear again’ in Turkey, Cambodia, Somalia.”²⁶⁶ Those out-of-NATO-area deployments were peace missions under the auspices of the United Nations, but they were nevertheless new for Germany and shocked many.²⁶⁷ This writer found even peace missions unacceptable for German soldiers, given the message s/he took from the exhibit. Whether Germany might deduce a special

²⁶⁴*Gästebuch der Ausstellung “Vernichtungskrieg. Verbrechen der Wehrmacht 1941-1944” in Hamburg*, March 5 to April 14, 1995, ed. Hamburger Institut für Sozialforschung, [n.p.].

²⁶⁵I will use the somewhat awkward dual-gender pronoun to refer to all entry writers, even though the handwriting often gives clues as to the gender of the writer. Before I was allowed to photocopy entries, contributors’ names were blacked out to assure privacy.

²⁶⁶*Gästebuch der Ausstellung “Vernichtungskrieg. Verbrechen der Wehrmacht 1941-1944” in Hamburg*, March 5 to April 14, 1995, ed. Hamburger Institut für Sozialforschung, [n.p.].

²⁶⁷I do not know what the writer referred to with Turkey, but in Cambodia, the first German soldier was killed as part of a peacekeeping mission in the fall of 1993. For Somalia, s/he probably referred to UNOSOM II, the UN peacekeeping mission in 1992 to 1994. Germany deployed *Bundeswehr* troops to participate in the mission in 1993, a step that was quite controversial. The mission ended in failure. For more information, see Jeffrey Lantis, “Peacekeeping and Humanitarian Relief Operations in Somalia,” in *Strategic Dilemmas and the Evolution of German Foreign Policy Since Reunification* (Santa Barbara: Praeger, 2002), 55-78. *ABC-CLIO eBook Collection*, clio.com.library.acaweb.org/reader.aspx?isbn=9780313012587&id=C7751-8 (accessed March 27, 2010).

responsibility to protect populations around the globe from civil war or genocide and use its military to do so precisely *because of* its Nazi past either had not occurred to this writer or s/he had rejected it.

By 1999, the tone of the entries had changed considerably. For one visitor, the lesson to be taken from the exhibit was simple. “After this exhibit,” s/he wrote, “the only appropriate position is to be for the abolishment and dissolution of the *Bundeswehr*.”²⁶⁸ For this visitor, the exhibit had erased any difference between the *Wehrmacht* and the *Bundeswehr*, if such difference had ever existed in his/her mind. Military equaled military, and war was war. Another visitor was not quite as radical, but demanded that “militarism finally has to be squelched so that something like this can no longer happen; and that it happens in every war through every regular army is only logical. For peace in the entire world [emphasis in original].”²⁶⁹ Another commentator disagreed and remarked sarcastically that the exhibit was “part of the German ‘tradition’ of a permanent tearing apart of oneself [*Selbsterfleischung*]!” What the exhibit lacked for this person was information about past maritime powers (s/he named the Portuguese, Spanish, Dutch and British) who had eliminated entire cultures and peoples over centuries. S/he did not understand why nobody talked about those atrocities any more.²⁷⁰ This person, as some other visitors, would have preferred historical comparisons, not with other atrocities in the twentieth century, but with events further back in history. One suspects that s/he was aware that those comparisons would relativize German atrocities

²⁶⁸*Gästebuch der Ausstellung “Vernichtungskrieg. Verbrechen der Wehrmacht 1941-1944” in Hamburg*, Volume Two, July 1 to July 15, 1999, ed. Hamburger Institut für Sozialforschung, [n.p.].

²⁶⁹*Gästebuch der Ausstellung “Vernichtungskrieg. Verbrechen der Wehrmacht 1941-1944” in Hamburg*, Volume One, June 1 to June 30, 1999, ed. Hamburger Institut für Sozialforschung, [n.p.].

²⁷⁰*Ibid.*

during WWII, just as Habermas had accused Nolte of doing in the 1980s. Apparently, the conditions that had prompted the *Historikerstreit* were still alive and well in 1999. Incidentally, Martin Walser did not use the term *Selbsterfleischung* in his speech nine months earlier in the Paulskirche, but he insinuated a German predilection for doing just that, and, as we have seen, he was tired of it. This visitor might have well agreed with Walser.

The visitors who made direct connections between the past and the present did so criticizing the military policies of the Schröder government. One specifically referred to the ‘Kosovo crisis,’ asking what lessons those living in the present could take from the photos in the exhibit. S/he conceded that everyone would need to form his or own opinion about that but that apparently peoples did not learn from history. Using a somewhat incoherent line of argumentation, this visitor wondered whether it was still necessary to instill a bad conscience in “us Germans.”²⁷¹ Possibly s/he meant to say that since peoples did not learn form history anyway—see the Kosovo crisis—making contemporary Germans feel bad about WWII served no real purpose. Perhaps prompted by this entry, a cluster of commentaries making direct mention of the crisis in the Balkans followed. One writer wondered what might happen when this exhibit was shown in Belgrade “in a few years.” What would “the peace loving people living there say about March 24, 1999, and the war that was begun on that day, with the help of Germans?” How would they judge the Germans then, this being the second time? S/he continued, “Will not the second illegal war in the Balkans and the chain of diplomatic mistakes since

²⁷¹Ibid.

1989 justify an accusation once again?”²⁷² The connection between the two military deployments could not have been any closer than in the mind of this visitor. Apparently, the exhibit had prompted this perspective, or at least reinforced a similar prior notion.

Another visitor was even more direct when s/he wrote, “Now NATO murders again in Yugoslavia. Will we have to wait for an exhibit for 50 [sic] years.”²⁷³ The next writer seemed to have built on this comment when s/he stated how good it was that so many young people saw the exhibit. S/he could not understand that one of the organizers, “notwithstanding this documentation of the crimes of the *Wehrmacht*, supports the war of aggression of NATO against Yugoslavia.”²⁷⁴ Apparently, one of the organizers did not oppose the NATO deployment. In the mind of this visitor, such a stance was entirely incomprehensible in light of the exhibit, meaning that for him/her the war of annihilation against the Soviet Union from 1941-1944 was virtually the same as NATO actions in Kosovo in 1999. Another person pushed even further, concluding, “That was cruel: but even crueler is that this is repeated after 58 [sic] years!! Serbia is being bombed again. Hitler had bombed hardly any hospitals, did not kill babies in Kindergartens and clinics, but today NATO does this. NATO kills children, youth, old people, and the sick (without casualties of its own).” After recounting an interview with two German bomber pilots s/he had seen on television in spring 1999 in which one pilot had said that he had ‘only done his job—like a master baker baking rolls’ and the other had said that his first bombing raid had felt better than when he had been with a woman

²⁷²Ibid. The writer must have referred to NATO air strikes on Belgrade towards the end of May, 1999. This would have just happened a few days before the person saw the exhibit at the beginning of June.

²⁷³Ibid.

²⁷⁴Ibid.

for the first time, the writer continued, “The NATO criminals from today took an exit from morals and ethics. Bill Clinton favors merciless bombardment; morally [illegible], without conscience can be displaced. Libido and rockets, bombs, explosions (instead of orgasms). Are NATO human beings with their new world order!?”²⁷⁵ What is striking about this entry is not so much the writer’s comparison between Hitler and NATO and Hitler and U.S. President Clinton, but the fact that NATO and Bill Clinton are made out to be worse than Hitler and the Nazis. The writer may have forgotten, or had suppressed his/her knowledge of the hundreds of handicapped, the millions of Jewish children, and the uncounted civilian victims in the occupied areas in the East that the Nazi regime had killed for reasons of ‘racial hygiene.’ One wonders whether this visitor felt compelled to transfer the feelings of guilt that the exhibit might have prompted from his/her own group to another. Given the current political situation, the Americans and NATO were convenient targets for blame, especially since NATO had indeed bombed civilians, albeit by mistake. With his/her recounting of the interview of two German bomber pilots s/he did raise one important point, however. Under conditions of war, or given exceptional power, humans can indeed get ‘a rush’ from committing violent acts. They do not necessarily have to be imbued with ‘eliminationist antisemitism’ to kill willingly. Perhaps Goldhagen’s thesis had not been as sound as he had made it out to be, after all. The reasons for this visitor’s need to blame the Americans can of course only be speculation, but it nevertheless is instructive to see what powerful, if perhaps unintended,

²⁷⁵Ibid. The original German of the last sentence is grammatically and orthographically not quite correct. It reads, “Sind NATO Menschen mit ihrer Neue Weltordnung !?” The writer must have referred to the accidental bombing of a maternity hospital in Belgrade just days before, so the television images of that carnage must have been fresh in his/her mind. They were closer to his/her reality than images from a war that happened over fifty years ago. For more information about the Kosovo crisis, see Kathleen Young, “Kosovo,” in *Encyclopedia of Genocide and Crimes Against Humanity*, ed. Dinah Shelton (Detroit: Thomson Gale, 2005), 622-626.

reactions an exhibit aiming for emotional impact can elicit. No wonder, perhaps, that some conservative politicians were so vehemently opposed to the original

Wehrmachtsausstellung.

More nuanced and constructive was another visitor's comment, "...an important exhibit. Especially the examples from the Balkans the German KFOR [Kosovo Force] soldier should see before his deployment, so that he knows which memories Serbs, Albanians, and other Yugoslavian peoples connect with German troops. Our KFOR soldiers now have the great chance, through exemplary conduct during the process of bringing peace to the country, to make amends for part of the historical guilt of their fathers and grandfathers!"²⁷⁶ This writer identified him/herself as sixty-eight years of age. This means that s/he was born in 1931 and could have well belonged to the generation that was utilized in the war effort in their early teens. A twenty-five year old visitor expressed a similar notion when s/he said that "for us younger ones" the exhibit was about "knowing what happened and getting or acquiring a different attitude/insight! And to learn [emphasis in original] from it! To see contemporary happenings (Yugoslavia, etc.) differently, more differentiated. To acquire lessons from it."²⁷⁷

The last person submitting an entry in the 1999 Hamburg guest book relating contemporary and historical military actions was more interested in similarities than in differentiations. S/he wrote, "How similar to one another the photos are: Yugoslavia in 1941 and 1999. Who brings to justice the war criminals Hitler and Göring? Who brings to justice the war criminals Schröder [German Federal Chancellor in 1999] and Fischer

²⁷⁶Ibid.

²⁷⁷*Gästebuch der Ausstellung "Vernichtungskrieg. Verbrechen der Wehrmacht 1941-1944" in Hamburg*, Volume Two, July 1 to July 15, 1999, ed. Hamburger Institut für Sozialforschung, [n.p.].

[German Foreign Minister in 1999]? *Wehrmacht* or *Bundeswehr*. The terror is the same.”

In a different handwriting, just below this entry, someone else posed the question, “Who brings to justice Milosevic??”²⁷⁸

These entries reveal, even though one can certainly not claim that they are in any way representative of what ‘the’ visitors thought about the exhibit, that those who chose to comment via the guest books applied the message about the past to present political circumstances. In some cases, it may have worked the other way around, with the televised images from the bombings in Kosovo coloring the perception of the photos in the exhibit. Whether the producers had intended for visitors to come to the conclusions that our writers expressed must remain an open question. That the emotional power of the photos challenged visitors to take a stand, whether in writing or just for themselves, certainly underscores the responsibility that comes with ‘doing’ public history.

Yet by far a larger number of visitors directed their comments towards issues of memory, their very own memories of the war and its aftermath or memories passed down from grandparents and parents to children and grandchildren. An examination of these voices will further enhance our understanding of the controversy over the so-called *Wehrmachtsausstellung*. It will also help to fully elucidate the exhibit’s multifaceted contributions to the process of reckoning with the National Socialist past in Germany.

²⁷⁸Ibid.

CHAPTER FIVE

“GRANDPA WAS NO NAZI”²⁷⁹:

THE *WEHRMACHTSAUSTELLUNG*,

MEMORY, AND HISTORICAL CONSCIOUSNESS

Soldiers not murderers? My father told me shortly before his death, ‘we all went to war enthusiastically.’ Thank you, now I know why.²⁸⁰

I have waited for this moment for 40 years. Now I see what it meant when my father ‘proudly’ talked about his ‘war experiences’ and there was talk about ‘destroying partisan hideouts’ or ‘smoking them out.’ As a ten-year-old, at family celebrations, I regularly got sick to my stomach when hearing this, now I cannot even eat as much as I want to throw up, [...] ²⁸¹

I am also German, but I was born in Poland. My grandpa was a soldier in the German military. I simply cannot believe that he would have participated in such atrocities.²⁸²

[...] My grandma was raped and made a refugee when she was seventeen—as old as I am now. That should also be shown, in my opinion. [...] ²⁸³

These are just a few of many guest book entries whose authors self-identified as children or grandchildren of the German war generation. Variations of the same

²⁷⁹This is the title from Harald Welzer’s work on the roles National Socialism and the Holocaust play in family memory. Harald Welzer, Sabine Moller, and Karoline Tschuggnall, “*Opa war kein Nazi*”: *Nationalsozialismus und Holocaust im Familiengedächtnis* (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer Taschenbuch Verlag, 2002).

²⁸⁰*Gästebuch der Ausstellung “Vernichtungskrieg. Verbrechen der Wehrmacht 1941-1944” in Hamburg*, March 5 to April 14, 1995, ed. Hamburger Institut für Sozialforschung, [n.p.]. All translations mine. The translations are as close to the originals as possible, including irregular sentence structure.

²⁸¹*Gästebuch der Ausstellung “Vernichtungskrieg. Verbrechen der Wehrmacht 1941-1944” in Hamburg*, Volume One, June 1 to June 30, 1999, ed. Hamburger Institut für Sozialforschung, [n.p.].

²⁸²*Ibid.*

²⁸³*Gästebuch der Ausstellung “Vernichtungskrieg. Verbrechen der Wehrmacht 1941-1944” in Hamburg*, Volume Two, July 1 to July 15, 1999, ed. Hamburger Institut für Sozialforschung, [n.p.].

narratives appear repeatedly. Themes such as the impact of war on family relationships, innocence and guilt, victor and victim status, and the evils of war dominate the entries. Confusion, empathy, and sorrow speak from the texts, but anger and cynicism also come through at times, directly or thinly disguised. Despite the broad range of detail, sophistication, and perspective one finds among the comments, it is nevertheless apparent that each writer brought to the exhibit prior notions about WWII and about the role that his or her family had played before and during the war. It seems that even those visitors who were born after the Third Reich had ‘memories’ of the times. For some members of the first successor generation, those memories remained associated well into adulthood with feelings they remembered from childhood. For grandchildren it seemed especially difficult to reconcile memories of their grandparents with the soldiers they saw in the exhibit, even though they knew that their grandfathers had served in the military during the war.²⁸⁴

Not only the powerful photos and their controversial arrangement, but also the very experience of being in the images’ presence together with other, emotionally engaged persons must have compelled many visitors to reflect upon the notions and memories they had brought with them. Some apparently saw their worst fears and

²⁸⁴When referring to the first successor or children generation, I mean persons whose parents participated in the war but who themselves did not play any active role in the support of war efforts, either because they were too young at the time or because they had not been born yet. This generation includes those born between 1935 and 1965. The second successor or grandchildren generation includes those who associated the war primarily with their grandparents; this generation was born after 1970. This scheme places the children generation between young adulthood and advanced middle age at the time of the exhibit and the grandchildren generation at high school age and younger. Many visitors would have had both parents and grandparents in the war, but generally those who used the guest books mentioned either parents or grandparents not both. Those who were teenagers during the war are counted to the *Zeitzeugen*, even though they may have participated in the war yet also had parents who were active participants. The guest books I examined did not include commentaries that self-identified as *Zeitzeuge* and as a child of the war generation, although there must have been quite a few visitors who fell into that category. Members of this generation would have been born in the 1920s and would have been in their seventies in the 1990s.

suspicions about their family members justified, while others reacted defensively and must have felt compelled to salvage their loved-ones' honor.

Reading the comments one wonders if there were generational delineations among the various entries. Did middle-aged 'children' and teen-aged 'grandchildren' who engaged with and reflected upon the message of the *Wehrmachtsausstellung* react in more or less predictable ways, based on membership in their respective generational cohorts? May it even be possible to discern patterns of how families pass on narratives and memories about the war and about the Holocaust from generation to generation? A theoretical framework within which to analyze the guest book entries will facilitate the process of exploring these difficult yet important issues.²⁸⁵

Theoretical approaches to the study of memory lend themselves to the task. Even though recent *Zeitgeschichte* about National Socialism and the Holocaust is replete with memory studies, seminal works from the broader field of the social sciences make significant contributions.²⁸⁶ The names reappearing over and over in studies that look at National Socialism and the Holocaust through the lens of memory are Maurice Halbwachs, Pierre Nora, and James Young, but also, especially in the German literature, Aleida Assmann, Jan Assmann, and Jörn Rüsen.²⁸⁷ More recently, Harald Welzer has

²⁸⁵For a narrative of the impact of the various post-WWII generations on the reckoning with the National Socialist past in Germany, see Aleida Assmann, *Geschichte im Gedächtnis*, especially Chapter Two, "Verkörperter Geschichte—Zur Dynamik der Generationen," 31-69.

²⁸⁶For a listing of selected works on history and memory, see page 9, note 6.

²⁸⁷For more information about these authors' seminal contributions to the roles of memory in historical consciousness, see Pierre Nora, "Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Mémoire," *Representations* no. 26, Special issue: *Memory and Counter-Memory* (Spring 1989): 7-24, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2928520> (accessed March 27, 2010); James E. Young, "Between History and Memory: The Uncanny Voices of Historian and Survivor," *History and Memory* 9, no. 1/2 (October 1, 1997): 47, <http://0-www.proquest.com.library.acaweb.org/>; Document ID: 593640241 (accessed March 27, 2010); Aleida Assmann, *Geschichte im Gedächtnis: Von der individuellen Erfahrung zur öffentlichen Inszenierung* (München: C.H. Beck, 2007); Jan Assmann, "Kollektives Gedächtnis und kulturelle

expanded on the work of these influential scholars and proposed a ‘theory of memory,’ based on empirical research about National Socialism and the Holocaust in family memory.²⁸⁸ Welzer’s work is especially fruitful for our inquiry since it involved a good-sized sample of multi-generational families and should therefore provide clues about the impact of generational cohort on memory. Before examining Welzer’s study and his conclusions, a brief exploration is in order of the foundations that the French sociologist, Maurice Halbwachs, laid with his seminal work on collective memory.²⁸⁹

Halbwachs’s revolutionary contribution to the understanding of the social dynamics of memory was his delineation among a variety of memory types. As part of his work on the sociology of knowledge, Halbwachs distinguished *autobiographical* memory from *collective* memory, both of which were in turn distinct from what he called *historical* memory. Fundamental to his theory is the notion that memory was inextricably linked with human interaction. Within his scheme, autobiographical memory gives individuals a sense of self, an identity rooted in an individual past. As individuals share autobiographical memories with members of the groups to which they belong, they develop a common sense of identity complete with a shared way of looking at the past

Identität,” in *Kultur und Gedächtnis*, eds. Jan Assmann and Tonio Hölscher (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1988), 9-19; Jörn Rüsen, "Trauer als historische Kategorie," in *Erlebnis—Gedächtnis—Sinn: Authentische und konstruierte Erinnerung*, eds. Hanno Loewy and Bernhard Moltmann (Frankfurt: Campus Verlag, 1996), 57-99.

²⁸⁸Welzer, born in 1958, is a social psychologist and professor at the *Kulturwissenschaftliches Institut Essen* at the University of Witten/Herdecke. His research emphases are memory and tradition research, as well as political psychology.

²⁸⁹Maurice Halbwachs was born in France in 1877. During WWII, German occupation forces committed him to a concentration camp because he had inquired about the murder of his elderly, Jewish parents-in-law. He died in the camp in 1945. One can find more information about his life and his various scholarly contributions in Lewis A. Coser’s introduction to Halbwachs’s book, *On Collective Memory*. Maurice Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory*, edited, translated, and with an Introduction by Lewis A. Coser (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1992), 1-40.

that is unique to the group. This Halbwachs called collective memory. For him, collective memory did not exist in isolation from individuals as some abstract or biologically determined entity. Rather, he explained, “[w]hile the collective memory endures and draws strength from its base in a coherent body of people, it is individuals as group members who remember.”²⁹⁰ Historical memory, finally, evolved from collective memory as larger groups created rituals and places of commemoration of their communal past. Grand national narratives, as expressed in national holidays, national monuments, and in the passing on of traditions would all constitute historical memory within Halbwachs’s scheme. Historians have also referred to the phenomenon of historical memory as historical consciousness, historical culture, or historical identity. National identity would be broader yet than historical memory in that it is more present and future orientated; however, historical memory represents one aspect of national identity.

For Halbwachs, memory in its three manifestations was a sociological category. Memory only existed within relationships among individuals or among groups of individuals. All three manifestations relied on discourse. Since individuals and groups constructed their memories, as many collective memories existed in society as there were groups. Likewise, individuals could partake of a number of different collective memories simultaneously, depending on the various groups with which they associated. Ultimately this meant that there were multiple ‘pasts’ co-existing within larger society, pasts that could easily, and often did, compete with one another.²⁹¹

²⁹⁰Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory*, quoted in Coser, “Introduction,” 22.

²⁹¹For example, the National Socialist past as remembered in Germany differs from that remembered by groups of former victims or their successor generations. Israelis and Poles, by and large, would remember the Third Reich, the war, and the Holocaust differently than most Germans would. Similarly, history as written by victorious powers generally reads differently than history as presented by those who lost wars. Here, we only consider competing pasts within German society.

Applied to the theme of successive waves of controversies over the National Socialist past, Halbwachs's theory illuminates why 'the past' can be so contentious and why 'memory wars' have taken place over the proper understanding and representation of that past. It is also clearer now why discourse played such a prominent role in the controversies, a fact that was especially obvious in the *Historikerstreit* and in the *Walser-Bubis-Debate*.

Halbwachs also argued that memories were fluid, meaning that all three types of memory were subject to continuous change. To him, memory, like the past, was not static or an entity in itself; rather, individuals and groups constantly reconstructed their memories in order to make sense of the past in light of the present. According to Halbwachs, memory in its various iterations served identity, on the individual as well as the group levels. Another important aspect of Halbwachs's scheme is the notion that the individual constructed his or her autobiographical memory within the framework of the group to which he or she belonged. Thus autobiographical memory was always embedded within collective memory. Halbwachs further argued that families, being the quintessential social group, constructed their own collective memories and passed them on from generation to generation.²⁹²

With his emphasis on individuals and groups constructing their past via memory, Halbwachs undermined the notion of the independent existence of 'the' past. For the historian of National Socialism and the Holocaust, as for any historian studying the very recent past, this means that work with *Zeitzeugen* [those who have first-hand experience

²⁹²More information about these concepts of memory is available in Coser's introduction and in Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory*, 41-189. Pages 54-83 deal with collective memory and the family.

of the time period under investigation] would not reveal how events had *really* happened and what the past had *really* looked like, but rather how various individuals and groups used their conception of the past to make sense of their individual biographies and of their group identities.²⁹³ Consequently, in historical research one could speak of a double filter that separated the present from the past, even if *Zeitzeugen* existed: one filter being the perceptions that the historian brings to his or her work and the other being the ways in which memory operates within the individuals he or she queries about the past.²⁹⁴

Postmodern notions of history have led to similar insights about what historical research can and cannot accomplish.

While Halbwachs's theory about memory was visionary at the time, by today's standards it seems rather crude. Even though social scientists, including historians, still appear to consider Halbwachs's work foundational, they have fine-tuned his theory, utilizing new insights from the neurological sciences. Harald Welzer has done this, making his work helpful as we are trying to understand what the guest book entries dealing with memory and family might tell us about the impact of the *Wehrmachtsausstellung* on biographical, collective, and historical memory.

²⁹³Those engaged in oral history would deal with these issues at a matter of course. Incidentally, Halbwachs can also help us understand how the exhibit itself represented a particular construction of the past, based on the perspective of its organizers. This was, as we have seen in Chapter Four, part of the criticism leveled against the exhibit.

²⁹⁴Numerous reflections about this phenomenon exist. Two examples focusing on German research of the recent past [*Zeitgeschichtsforschung*] are Jarausch, "Zeitgeschichte und Erinnerung. Deutungskonkurrenz oder Interdependenz?" in *Verletztes Gedächtnis*, eds. Jarausch and Sabrow, 9-37 and Harald Welzer, *Verweilen beim Grauen: Essays zum wissenschaftlichen Umgang mit dem Holocaust* (Tübingen: edition discord (*sic*), 1997), especially the essay, "Der Mythos von der unbewältigten Vergangenheit. Über ein Interpretament der Zeitzeugenforschung zum Nationalsozialismus," 49-68. Heinz Bude offered reflections about the narrative interview as research instrument in "Der Ort des Interviews," in Hamburger Institut für Sozialforschung, ed., *Besucher einer Ausstellung*, 13-12.

In his book, *Opa war kein Nazi*, Welzer and his co-authors reported on the multigenerational research project, *Tradierung von Geschichtsbewusstsein* [the process of passing historical consciousness on from generation to generation]. The researchers asked what ‘normal Germans’ remembered from the National Socialist past, how they talked to family members about their memories, and how the resulting narratives made their way from generation to generation via communicative processes within families. To answer those questions, research team members participated in forty family conversations and 142 follow-up interviews. These conversations and interviews yielded a total of 2,535 stories.²⁹⁵ Although it is tempting to recount some of the interviews in detail, a summary of the research team’s initial expectations and of their conclusions must suffice.

Based on previous research in a variety of social sciences, the team hypothesized that historical consciousness included a cognitive as well as an emotional dimension. This seemed plausible since the neurological sciences and cognitive psychology had established that human memory used different systems for cognitive and emotional memory.²⁹⁶ The team found the two dimensions manifested in many conversations

²⁹⁵Welzer, Moller, and Tschuggnall, *Opa war kein Nazi*, 11. Curiously, the authors did not include in their report the dates of the conversations, but from a conference presentation by Olaf Jensen about his *Diplomarbeit* [Master’s Thesis], in which he offered a quantitative analysis of the family conversations, one can conclude that the majority of the interviews had taken place by March 1999, coinciding with the final year in which the original *Wehrmachtsausstellung* toured Germany. Olaf Jensen, *Induktive Kategorienbildung – skalierende Strukturierung – Klassifizierung. Qualitative Inhaltsanalyse mit WinMAX am Beispiel von Mehrgenerationeninterviews zum Nationalsozialismus*. Presentation at the Conference *Computerunterstützte Analyse Qualitativer Daten*, (Marburg: October 7-8, 1999), 4, www.maxqda.de/download/maxlit-4.pdf (accessed March 30, 2010). The Volkswagen Foundation sponsored the research project.

²⁹⁶Welzer explained the neurological foundations of memory more fully in his book, *Das kommunikative Gedächtnis: Eine Theorie der Erinnerung* (München: Verlag C.H. Beck, 2002). See especially Chapter Two, “Das Gedächtnis ist erfinderisch. Befunde aus der Neurowissenschaft und der kognitiven Psychologie,” 19-45.

during which older family members recounted memories of a “glorious” time in the Hitler Youth, “with shining eyes,” even though those same persons took a critical stance towards National Socialism at the time of the conversation. Without hesitation, many members of the *Zeitzeugen* generation remembered “the good times” during the Third Reich, indicating that a distinction existed in their minds, albeit an unconscious one, among the feelings they associated with the past and what they knew cognitively about that same past.²⁹⁷ Welzer and his colleagues surmised that this dissonance would play a role in how elders passed down their memories to children and grandchildren, with the emotional aspects of memory trumping the cognitive ones. Consequently, they expected the stories dominating family discourse would differ significantly from what children and grandchildren learned about the National Socialist past through family-external channels.²⁹⁸

Generally, the researchers observed, the more a member of a successor generation knew about the criminal nature of the Third Reich and about the widespread participation of ‘ordinary’ Germans in perpetrating the Holocaust, the stronger was the desire to distance their own family members from personal implication.²⁹⁹ Grandchildren demonstrated an especially strong tendency to cast their grandparents in a positive light. In some cases this meant that in the mind of a grandchild, the grandparent had ‘saved Jews’ or had been a ‘resistance fighter,’ even though the elder had previously recounted a story placing him or her clearly within the camp of bystander or perpetrator. The

²⁹⁷Welzer, Moller, and Tschuggnall, *Opa war kein Nazi*, 10-11.

²⁹⁸Ibid.

²⁹⁹Ibid., 77-78.

Zeitzeuge had left just enough room for interpretation to allow this mutation. Welzer and his team coined the term *cumulative hero-ization* for this process.³⁰⁰ The process could also work as cumulative victimization, morphing the family member from bystander or perpetrator into the role of victim. The more often family members retold a particular event or story, the more obvious the recasting became. The Nazis, by contrast, assumed the role of ‘the other’ in the process. Emotional attachment to family members as well as family loyalty also seemed to color how one generation ‘heard’ the stories of their elders and how they chose to fill the blank spaces those stories left. In addition, members of successor generations demonstrated a tendency *not* to hear certain elements of a story that had clearly been part of the elder’s narrative. Those ‘unheard’ or ‘forgotten’ incidents were invariably elements that would have put the elder in a negative light.³⁰¹

Apparently, the process of cumulative hero-ization or victimization was much more evident with the second than the first successor generation. The greater chronological distance to the past and the generally less conflict-prone emotional relationships between grandchildren and grandparents may have accounted for this difference. Welzer and his team also attributed the dynamic to the extraordinary amount of cognitive knowledge about National Socialism and the Holocaust that existed among the younger German generations, due to repeated exposure in school and to the overabundance of mediated information about the time period. The more factual knowledge they had about the criminal nature of the past, the researchers theorized, the

³⁰⁰Ibid., 64. The German reads, *kumulative Heroisierung*, which means that successive iterations of a particular event in the past turn a person a bit more into a hero with each retelling of the story. By this process, a bystander can morph into a rescuer of Jews or a resistance fighter.

³⁰¹Ibid., 207.

stronger their desire to disassociate their families, and by implication themselves, from that past.³⁰²

Welzer and his colleagues deduced a theory from their findings according to which the historical consciousness of successor generations was an amalgam of multiple sources and influences. They used the terms *Lexicon* and *family album* to clarify the difference between the two main types of influences. The ‘lexicon’ stood for factual information and cognitive knowledge passed on through a variety of family-external channels. Those included school curricula, the media, and, using Jan Assmann’s terminology, the various manifestations of *cultural memory*.³⁰³ Yet the ‘lexicon,’ according to Welzer, was by no means dominant within the individual’s historical consciousness. More important were the stories the individual shared with family members. Those narratives, through continuous repetition and reconstruction, comprised family memory. Notions of emotional attachment and family loyalty imbued family memory. For the process that made family memory possible, Welzer coined the term *communicative memory*. While the ‘lexicon’ was an expression of cultural memory, the ‘family album’ was the product of communicative memory.³⁰⁴ Like a picture album in which family photographs tell the family’s story in chronological as well as in emotional

³⁰²Ibid., 156.

³⁰³Ibid., 52-53, 164, 12-13. Assmann tweaked Halbwachs’s definition of *historical* memory to arrive at what he called *cultural* memory. Both terms denote the images, rites, and places that each culture and each epoch uses to define itself as distinct from other cultures or from other epochs. Historical memory as well as cultural memory represents a public manifestation of large-group identity. The grand national or master narrative would be a major manifestation of both, historical memory and cultural memory. See J. Assmann, “Kollektives Gedächtnis und kulturelle Identität,” in *Kultur und Gedächtnis*, eds. J. Assmann and Hölscher, 12-16.

³⁰⁴Welzer, Moller, and Tschuggnall, *Opa war kein Nazi*, 9-10, 164.

terms, Welzer's 'family album' metaphor denoted unique family memories, condensed into stories that provided identity and meaning.

Welzer and his team concluded from what they heard in the family interviews that the 'family album' trumped the 'lexicon' in terms of influencing an individual's historical consciousness. "Family memory is the primary source of historical consciousness," they stated, continuing, that the cognitive knowledge [*Wissen*] one acquired via history curricula, public history, documentaries and movies was something entirely different than the unquestioned assurance [*Gewissheit*] one soaked up as a member of a memory community about that community's past.³⁰⁵ Perhaps not surprisingly, Welzer and his team found that the Holocaust did not appear in the 'family album' at all. While the Holocaust dominated cultural memory in post-reunification Germany, meaning that it occupied much space in the 'lexicon,' there were only blank spaces in the 'family album' where the Holocaust should have been.³⁰⁶ Victim and hero narratives dominated those spaces instead.

Do Welzer's conclusions provide us with a road map to better understanding the guest book entries dealing with memory and family? If one looked at the *Wehrmachtsausstellung* as experimental design, with the visit itself being the intervention, it would immediately become apparent how different this set up was from Welzer's design. The only evidence of the visit's impact are the entries themselves.

³⁰⁵Ibid., 210. The common root between the German *Wissen* and *Gewissheit* makes clear how closely related the two concepts are. The first is cognitive knowledge while the second denotes emotional knowledge.

³⁰⁶This finding might also help explain Martin Walser's defensive reaction against those aspects of contemporary German cultural memory that he considered 'moral cudgels' (see Chapter One). Walser might have experienced great dissonance between his autobiographical and family memory and the cultural memory that surrounded him, a phenomenon that was probably true as well for many visitors of the *Wehrmachtsausstellung*.

Missing is what individual visitors thought about the issues presented in the exhibit before entering the exhibit hall, although in some cases visitors alluded to this in their commentaries. Also, the guest book entries represent one-way communications; neither family members nor researchers were present to ask follow-up questions. Lastly, as mentioned before, the entries do not allow broad conclusions. Their authors represent but a minute fraction of those who visited the exhibit. Nevertheless, approaching the entries with all due caution and keeping Halbwachs's theory and Welzer's conclusions in mind does shed additional light on the impact of the *Wehrmachtsausstellung* on family memory and on historical consciousness.

The entries chosen to open this chapter demonstrate quite clearly how differently members of the two successor generations reacted to what they saw in the exhibit. Almost stereotypically, the first two writers reacted with cynicism and moral judgment vis-à-vis their parents, while the last two clearly represented the scheme Welzer had observed among grandchildren in his family studies. All four writers, in one way or another, cast themselves or their loved ones as victims: victims of deception, victims of traumatic memories and victims of war itself. Some presented themselves as defenders of those whose victim roles the exhibit did not honor adequately. The entanglement of cognitive knowledge and emotional assurance also comes through clearly in all four entries. For the second person, emotional associations with war stories even manifested themselves in physical reactions. The writer remembered becoming sick to the stomach during childhood upon hearing about the war; as an adult, this writer once again felt like vomiting after having seen the exhibit. The third writer could not reconcile the emotional memory of the grandparent with the knowledge gained from the exhibit.

Another entry exemplifies even more clearly the multi-generational and family aspects of dealing with the National Socialist past. Obviously under the emotional impact of what he had just experienced, this person wrote,

Oh father, why could we never talk about this. For you comradeship, oath, and your 'sprayers' (=cannons, *sic*) were the most important. You never saw, heard, or became aware of anything. I do not only mourn the victims of the madness! I also mourn a non-existent father/son relationship! You would be 85 now, I am 53 ½ and father of three sons and one daughter. May God protect us all. ³⁰⁷

Presumably, the writer had visited the exhibit alone, but emotionally his parents and his children were with him nevertheless. He clearly went as an individual who was inextricably embedded in family relationships. For him, the legacy of the Holocaust was indeed a family matter. Apparently, though, that very subject had been missing from his 'family album,' even though conversations about the war must have taken place between him and his father. The exhibit might have confirmed to this writer how very inadequate those conversations had been for what he needed to know in order to make sense of his family's place in the past. The fact that he closed his entry with introducing his children to his presumably deceased father allows us to venture that this writer left the exhibit resolved to amend or change the narrative that he would pass on to his own children. His reason for doing so would not seem to be primarily to educate them about the Holocaust but rather to develop a closer emotional bond with them than he had been allowed to forge with his own father. If nothing else, the emotionally powerful nature of family memory is apparent in this entry.

³⁰⁷*Gästebuch der Ausstellung "Vernichtungskrieg. Verbrechen der Wehrmacht 1941-1944" in Hamburg*, Volume One, June 1 to June 30, 1999, ed. Hamburger Institut für Sozialforschung, [n.p.].

Another member of the children generation clearly expressed the dissonance s/he perceived between ‘lexicon’ and ‘family album,’ trying visibly to maintain a non-judgmental attitude vis-à-vis his/her “loved ones:”

I would give much for knowing what my father did. I just want to know, not judge. But it is difficult. Really it is unfathomable: He is a loving father and the same person was a pilot of a bomber. That much I know. Thank you for the effort and hard work of researching the exhibit. Without remembrance and acceptance of the past there is no humane future.³⁰⁸

Another visitor simply wrote, “I cannot, and do not want to believe that my father knew of all this.”³⁰⁹ A similar entry assumed more readily that the father might have indeed been implicated, “As the daughter of a possible perpetrator, my heart raced while the pictures and texts had their effects on me. Relief about not having discovered him—but immeasurable shame, shame, shame.”³¹⁰ Yet another writer seemed to have no doubt about the implication of his/her father. This person wrote that s/he had traveled all the way from Bonn to see the exhibit in Hamburg because s/he was no longer able to abide the father’s denial and “settling of accounts [*Aufrechnen*].” The writer went on to explain that his/her father had been born in 1927 and had served as soldier at the Eastern Front.³¹¹ Yet another son or daughter entrusted to the guest book his/her feelings,

I am crying for what happened...Also in my father’s name...he was a committed one. I am still ashamed but one can only soften it a little with the truth, but one

³⁰⁸*Gästebuch der Ausstellung “Vernichtungskrieg. Verbrechen der Wehrmacht 1941-1944” in Hamburg*, March 5 to April 14, 1995, ed. Hamburger Institut für Sozialforschung, [n.p.].

³⁰⁹*Gästebuch der Ausstellung “Vernichtungskrieg. Verbrechen der Wehrmacht 1941-1944” in Hamburg*, Volume Two, July 1 to July 15, 1999, ed. Hamburger Institut für Sozialforschung, [n.p.].

³¹⁰*Gästebuch der Ausstellung “Vernichtungskrieg. Verbrechen der Wehrmacht 1941-1944” in Hamburg*, March 5 to April 14, 1995, ed. Hamburger Institut für Sozialforschung, [n.p.].

³¹¹*Ibid.*

cannot erase it. I was afraid with each photo to recognize my father...but I still looked. Never again war. Never again averting one's eyes.”³¹²

None of these members of the first successor generation attempted to distance their elder from the perpetrators; on the contrary, it is surprising to what extent the children accepted the historical ‘truth’ of the exhibit’s message and were prepared, albeit with sadness, incredulity, shame, or anger to place their parents into the scenes they saw. Welzer did not observe this dynamic at play within the family conversations he and his team witnessed. The physical presence of the elder generation in those conversations and the emotional aspects inherent in family gatherings might have accounted for the difference between what the researchers observed and what comes through in the guest book entries.

The similarities between members of the second successor generation in Welzer’s study and in the guest books are more apparent. All follow the general scheme of the two entries opening this chapter. Not all writers identifying themselves as belonging to the grandchildren generation mentioned their grandparents, but those who did disassociated them from the events they saw in the exhibit. One entry is of special interest. The writer did not go as far as turning his/her two grandfathers into heroes, but s/he nevertheless allowed the perpetrator among the two to morph into a victim during the course of the entry.

Both my grandfathers were in Russia. One as motorcycle dispatch rider and the other in a notorious police regiment whose job it was to fight partisans. The first ‘got around’ as dispatch rider and, if he did not lie to me, saw much that was worse than on these photos. And he was shocked! The second was in a function in which he was responsible for such photos. (As perpetrator). Before and after the war he was a loving father and husband. Why is this exhibit called ‘crimes of

³¹²*Gästebuch der Ausstellung “Vernichtungskrieg. Verbrechen der Wehrmacht 1941-1944” in Hamburg*, Volume One, June 1 to June 30, 1999, ed. Hamburger Institut für Sozialforschung, [n.p.].

the military' and not 'crimes of the war' because the war made my grandfather what he became during the war.³¹³

All phenomena that Welzer observed appear in this entry. The comment seems to come straight from the writer's 'family album.' S/he must have heard the stories of his/her grandfathers' pursuits during the war many times. The grandfathers must have been quite open with their grandchild about what they had seen and done during the war. None of this had made them bad persons in the eyes of the grandchild since one grandfather 'was shocked' at what he had seen and the other had been made a victim of the circumstances. The first successor generation, the writer's parents, must also have contributed to the 'family album,' attesting to the fact that their father had been a 'loving father.' The loving father and husband had crowded out the perpetrator in the grandchild's imagination. The victim motif made this possible; the exhibit had not been able to destroy the image.

Another writer provided comments, thinly concealing a good dose of smugness,

Blessed with the mercy of the late birth (construction year 1958), I had the good luck of having had a grandfather who was one of the few that actively opposed the Nazis. Moreover, my parents brought me up in a liberal, anti-fascist spirit, which hopefully has left political evidence [in my life]. Consequently, the story about the crimes of the *Wehrmacht* is nothing new for me. [...]³¹⁴

We cannot say whether the grandfather's alleged opposition to Hitler was a result of cumulative hero-ization in Welzer's sense or whether it had a historical basis. The writer left unclear whether the information about the grandfather was first-hand or part of the family narrative that the parents had passed on. However that may be, it is clear that the

³¹³*Gästebuch der Ausstellung "Vernichtungskrieg. Verbrechen der Wehrmacht 1941-1944" in Hamburg*, Volume Two, July 1 to July 15, 1999, ed. Hamburger Institut für Sozialforschung, [n.p.].

³¹⁴*Gästebuch der Ausstellung "Vernichtungskrieg. Verbrechen der Wehrmacht 1941-1944" in Hanover*, Volume One, November 1998, ed. Hamburger Institut für Sozialforschung, [n.p.].

writer had no problems reconciling family memory with the message of the exhibit. On the contrary, the exhibit seemed to have reinforced the conviction that the own family had been ‘on the right side’ of history all along. Some of the language in this comment allows one to wonder whether the writer’s socialization might have taken place in the former East Germany. Antifascism was generally not part of West German discourse about National Socialism, while it dominated that discourse in the German Democratic Republic. Where the writer grew up does indeed not matter much for our purposes, except to demonstrate that the cultural framework in which family memory functions affects the images and terminology used in constructing the past.³¹⁵

Comments by members of the *Zeitzeugen* generation are curiously absent from the guest books. The relatively few writers who self-identified as members of the war generation either attempted to correct the exhibit’s message by relating in considerable detail ‘how it really was,’ or they tried to explain why the circumstances had compelled soldiers, perhaps themselves included, to act the way they had. Those writers used familiar discourses of honor, comradeship, fear for one’s life, and the harshness of partisan war to make their points. As one *Zeitzeuge* maintained, “The following must be said: These were the deeds of the communication zone (back area services!) and not those of the real *Wehrmacht* soldier—the front soldier! Those had to fight and hour by hour fear for their lives!” Almost as a post script, the writer added below his entry and in

³¹⁵Welzer referred to this process as cultural framing. According to this theory, those who constructed narratives about their pasts used cultural frames to communicate their stories. These frames might come from popular movies, cultural stereotypes, or from cultural references that all members of a group share and understand. Welzer observed, for example, that some narrators conveyed their war memories using themes taken directly from movies that were familiar to their audiences. For example, plots or scenes from the movies, *Die Brücke*, *Das Boot*, and *Im Westen nichts Neues* were cultural frames that *Zeitzeugen* in Welzer’s study had used to convey their war experiences. Welzer, *Das kommunikative Gedächtnis*, 171-192.

parenthesis, “[I] was at the front for several years and am 100% war disabled.”³¹⁶ Others criticized the organizers for defaming an entire generation of German men, including their own fallen comrades. The few commentators that mentioned children or grandchildren did so only to express relief that successor generations had been spared the horrors of war. The relatively low representation of *Zeitzeugen* in the guest books examined here could be a reflection of the war generation’s waning numbers by the mid-1990s; yet the *Zeitzeugen* generation did not stand entirely on the sidelines during the controversy over the *Wehrmachtsausstellung*.³¹⁷ For example, many expressed their opinions about the survey in letters to newspaper editors. This generation was also well represented in research projects that included interviews and surveys of visitors in various venues.³¹⁸

³¹⁶*Gästebuch der Ausstellung “Vernichtungskrieg. Verbrechen der Wehrmacht 1941-1944” in Hamburg*, Volume Two, July 1 to July 15, 1999, ed. Hamburger Institut für Sozialforschung, [n.p.]. The German term translated as communications zone is *Etappe*.

³¹⁷According to Lena Knäpple’s retrospective, some war participants “admitted guilt” in their guest book entries, but I did not encounter those in the books I examined. Knäpple, “Wehrmachtsausstellung,” in *Lexikon der ‘Vergangenheitsbewältigung,’* eds. Fischer and Lorenz, 288. Hannes Heer, in a retrospective newspaper article ten years after the dismantling of the original exhibit, also cited several admissions of guilt from the guest books, albeit without indicating their exact locations. Hannes Heer, “Die letzte Schlacht der alten Soldaten: Wie die Ausstellung über den ‘Vernichtungskrieg’ der Wehrmacht das Land spaltete,” *Die Zeit*, Politik (Article Series: “Mein Deutschland,” 15. Teil), June 25, 2009.

³¹⁸While systematic research on the guest books does not seem to exist, other forms of reactions to the exhibit (survey responses, interviews, and letters to the editor) have been subject to research on which documentation exists in the literature. Two such studies are, Ilka Qyindeau, “Erinnerung und Abwehr: Widersprüchliche Befunde zur Rezeption der Ausstellung ‘Vernichtungskrieg,’ ” in *Der Krieg in der Nachkriegszeit*, eds. Greven and von Wrochem, 291-306 and Johannes Klotz, “Die Rezeption der Ausstellung ‘Vernichtungskrieg’ in Leserbriefen,” in *Der Krieg in der Nachkriegszeit*, eds. Greven and von Wrochem, 307-323. In 1996, Ruth Beckermann produced a film of the interviews she performed with former *Wehrmacht* soldiers. Ruth Beckermann and Peter Roehsler, *Jenseits des Krieges=East of War* (New York: First Run/Icarus Films, 1996). A book followed two years later. Beckermann, *Jenseits des Krieges: Ehemalige Wehrmachtssoldaten erinnern sich* (Wien: Döcker Verlag, 1998). The book, *Besucher einer Ausstellung*, also shed light on visitors’ reaction to the exhibit, with ample representation of *Zeitzeugen*.

The exhibit designers intended to facilitate conversation among generations, but commentators disagreed to what extent that happened.³¹⁹ Even when it did happen, it was not always conducive to healing, but at times rather confrontational. The ‘wall of silence’—perceived or real—the constructed memories of brotherhood among soldiers, the sense of obligation toward the memory of fallen comrades, and the notion of loved ones at home who ‘knew nothing’ apparently were powerful and difficult to overcome.³²⁰ Cross-generational dialog about as contentious and emotional a topic as National Socialism and the Holocaust seemed to be more difficult among strangers than among family members. The bonds of love and loyalty that Welzer and his colleagues had observed at work in the families of their sample must have played a decisive role in the process of forging a collective memory of the past. That bond must have been less obvious when family members confronted their memories alone, as they generally did in the *Wehrmachtsausstellung*, or when they faced members of other generations who were also strangers.³²¹

³¹⁹Michael Klundt asserted that this dialog did happen. At the same time he criticized that some of it showed tendencies of ‘harmonizing reconciliation’ which was only possible because alleged perpetrators among the discussants were allowed to cast themselves as Hitler’s victims, while the real victims and their descendents were not part of these intergenerational dialogs. Klundt, *Geschichtspolitik: Die Auseinandersetzung um Goldhagen und die Wehrmachtsausstellung*, 46. Bernd Greiner, historian at the Hamburger Institut für Sozialforschung and at the University of Hamburg, disagreed. Greiner, in *Eine Ausstellung und ihre Folgen*, ed. Hamburger Institut für Sozialforschung, 39–40. There seem to have been numerous opportunities for dialog, but apparently such dialog was often divisive rather than congenial.

³²⁰For more detail, see Bernd Ulrich, *Besucher einer Ausstellung*. The book offered analyses of a subset of 131 oral histories that were conducted with visitors in Berlin, Stuttgart, and Potsdam. In his introduction, Bernd Ulrich emphasized that the interviews were not representative of the estimated 21,000 visitors who saw the exhibit in those three venues (ibid., 9). At times, the interviewers’ own biases against the war generation showed through. All interviewers were members of the second successor generation, a generation that by and large had harbored anger against its elders, especially during the upheavals of the late 1960s. We have seen some evidence of this anger in a number of guest book entries from the first successor generation as well.

³²¹Whether communication among strangers might be more ‘honest’ because unencumbered by emotional family entanglements is interesting to ponder, but not at issue here. Social psychologists might be better qualified to pursue this type of question than historians are.

As argued in Chapters Four and Five, the controversy over the so-called *Wehrmachtsausstellung* has shaped the reckoning with the legacy of National Socialism in Germany on multiple levels. This was perhaps nowhere more evident than in the debate the *Bundestag* conducted about the exhibit in March and April, 1997.³²² As politicians, representatives clearly referred to what Welzer called the ‘lexicon’ of National Socialism. As we have seen from the excerpts presented in Chapter Four, however, the ‘family album’ had a powerful presence as well, which is quite remarkable for a political event such as a parliamentary debate.³²³ Even though the deputies had assembled to make a political decision, in full view of the public eye, they nevertheless brought personal and family memories with them which they were not afraid to share freely. In this they were not unlike the exhibit visitors whose comments we have analyzed. Thus, among the controversies we have examined, the one about the *Wehrmachtsausstellung* demonstrates most clearly the resilience yet malleability of ‘the past.’ It also illuminates the multiple forces bearing on historical consciousness. *Wissen* and *Gewissheit* act together, often in competition with one another. Finally, the controversy showed that the insights and attitudes resulting from the complex relationships between the various influences upon historical consciousness often serve as normative guides to action. This was most likely the case for those visitors who expressed opposition to the use of the *Bundeswehr* in the Balkans or in Iraq.³²⁴

³²²See also the discussion of the *Bundestagsdebatte* in Chapter Four, pages 108-111.

³²³I would argue that historical consciousness, in all its complexity, colors all political action, but politicians seldom acknowledge this fact as directly and openly as the deputies did in March and April of 1997.

³²⁴Others could have drawn the opposite conclusion, namely, that Germany had an obligation to send the *Bundeswehr* to areas of crisis in order to prevent civil war from escalating into genocide, precisely

The controversy over the so-called *Wehrmachtsausstellung* demonstrated once more that the past does not just ‘pass away,’ as Ernst Nolte had wished it would during the *Historikerstreit*. The past also does not necessarily undergo the normalization process that Chancellor Kohl and others had hoped it would, even though, as we have seen, the memories of the past have undergone changes in conjunction with broader political, social, and generational shifts.³²⁵ As the last *Zeitzeugen* leave the scene, historical consciousness is likely to continue to change; a process for which Martin Broszat coined the term historicization [*Historisierung*] during the *Historikerstreit* and which historians have debated controversially ever since.³²⁶ Pulling together the various insights from our examination of multiple waves of controversies in a final analysis should also shed some additional light on this process that is ever ongoing, yet so difficult to define or explain.

because of the nation’s National Socialist past. Such arguments may exist in the guest books, but I did not encounter them in the books I examined.

³²⁵To what extent this means that the past itself has changed is a discussion between postmodernists and modernists. Talking about normalization immediately raises the question whether anything is ‘normal’ in history, but, again, this is a discussion for another day.

³²⁶See the discussion of historicization in Chapter Two, pages 62-66.

CONCLUSION

This study has explored the complex relationships between history, memory, historical consciousness, and national identity. James E. Young posed the fundamental issues as questions. “How does a state incorporate its crimes against others into its national memorial landscape?” he asked, and “Under what memorial aegis, whose rules, does a nation remember its own barbarity?”³²⁷

It is noteworthy that instead of using the term grand national narrative, Young spoke of ‘memorial landscapes.’ He had primarily physical places of commemoration in mind, but his landscape metaphor also works for historical consciousness in general.³²⁸ As the case studies examined here have demonstrated, discourse about the past shapes historical consciousness. Consequently, the narratives and images with which communities speak about their past are not unlike public commemorations, memorials, and museums in their roles of shaping and communicating historical identity. Just as physical landscapes consist of diverse geological formations, ‘memorial landscapes’ imply not only a variety of places of commemoration, but also diverse narratives about the past. In this sense, the survey of four decades of reckoning with the legacy of National Socialism has allowed a glimpse not at an emerging grand national narrative, but rather at the unfolding of a national memorial landscape.

³²⁷James Young, quoted in Welzer, *Verweilen beim Grauen*, 20. Quoted from James E. Young, *The Structure of Memory: Holocaust Memorials and Meaning* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1993), 22.

³²⁸Pierre Nora’s concept of ‘places of memory’ also seemed to be broader than physical places of commemoration. Those places would include everything that a national community deemed worthy of remembering. For a summary of Nora’s *Les Lieux de Mémoires* see Kattago, *Ambiguous Memory*, 16-18.

The study has also shed light on the various actors that vie if not for hegemony in the process then at least for a place at the table. For example, from time to time the state seeks a prominent role in forging a national memorial landscape by interpreting the past and by giving the past meaning for the present. While this may be unavoidable yet potentially controversial in respect to state-sponsored commemorations and publicly-financed memorials and museums, it was contested in the memory wars on which this study has focused. The *Historikerstreit* demonstrated the state's ambition most clearly in that 'Bitburg' and Chancellor Kohl's *Wende* provided the controversy's political impetus. The government's decision to deploy German armed forces in out-of-area missions during the controversy over the *Wehrmachtsausstellung* served a similar function. Yet, as we have seen, the state is by no means the only player competing for a role in the process of forging a national memorial landscape.

As the *Fischer Controversy* has demonstrated, professional historians were the ones who initiated a process that led to a profound reassessment of the National Socialist past. As subsequent memory wars increasingly played out in the public limelight, however, the guild slowly faded into the background, only to reemerge during the controversy over the *Wehrmachtsausstellung*. At that point, historians brought to the table what historians do best: they designed public history events that shared insights from academic scholarship with public audiences; they served as experts in the evaluation of primary source material; they conducted oral history research projects, and they used questions raised in the course of the ongoing debate to push the historiographic research agenda forward.

This study has also shown that with each new controversy the work of contemporary historians [*Zeitgeschichtler*] became more difficult and contentious. This was primarily due to the ever more visible and powerful role the media claimed for itself in the process of forging Germany's memorial landscape. While the media's power over the public arena fully came into its own in the *Goldhagen Affair*, the (print) media had already begun its march towards dominating public discourse with the *Fischer Controversy*. The controversy over the *Wehrmachtsausstellung* and its sustained intensity over the course of almost five years are quite unthinkable without the media. Yet one should be careful not to evaluate this development in entirely negative terms. Television and press coverage also made available new channels for historians to reach out to wider audiences. The lines between academic and popular history may have blurred, but new opportunities for two-way communication opened up at the same time. As public discourse rapidly moves to virtual platforms, professional historians may find new challenges and additional opportunities for being part of the conversation.

The public emerged as perhaps the strongest force throughout the five memory contests at issue in this study. While the *Fischer Controversy* had been primarily about the state and about the role of the historian vis-à-vis the state, with each subsequent memory contest the focus on the individual increased; a development that came to a head with the *Walser-Bubis-Debate*. While the first memory war concerned actors and structures on the international and national levels, subsequent ones increasingly focused on individuals. The controversies peeled away, layer by layer, what separated the individual, 'ordinary' person from the crimes of the past. In the end, nothing remained between that past and the individual conscience. To say it differently, the memory

contests moved from the outside in, starting with the state and ending with one of the most personal possessions an individual has, his or her conscience. As German society worked its way from the *Fischer Controversy* to the *Walser-Bubis-Debate*, ‘Hitler-free’ spaces became smaller and smaller until they disappeared almost entirely. Each memory contest managed to dismantle a taboo that the previous one had left intact. By the time the controversy over the *Wehrmachtsausstellung* and the *Walser-Bubis-Debate* gripped the land, potentially everyone was challenged to take a stand—which many did. Some chose defensiveness and anger; others looked for deeper reflection; yet others took political stands vis-à-vis current government policies. Thus, the controversies contributed to the building of a national memorial landscape by dismantling, piece by piece, taboos about National Socialism and about those who had been part of it—virtually all who had belonged to the *Volksgemeinschaft* during the Third Reich.³²⁹ Whereas victims (mostly German victims at first but later also Jews and other victim groups) had crowded the landscape since the early days of post-war Germany, perpetrators and bystanders claimed more space as the waves of controversies swept over the land. Perhaps ironically, the memory wars also followed an opposite trajectory at the same time: from relatively contained discussions among a small circle of historians they morphed into what one can only call public spectacles, beamed via television into virtually every household.

³²⁹*Volksgemeinschaft*, literally translated as the community of the people, had been the term Hitler and the Nazis used for all Germans who were deemed to be fit to be part of that community. This excluded German Jews and many other groups. The statement in the text is not meant to assign collective guilt to all Germans alive during the Third Reich; it just says that the controversies revealed, bit by bit, that virtually everyone who was not victim of Nazi persecution was implicated in the criminal aspects of the Third Reich in some way, perhaps merely as bystander. Expressed differently, it became increasingly difficult to maintain that the Nazis had been “the others.”

It could be tempting to portray this multi-faceted trajectory as progress towards a ‘model,’ ‘correct,’ or ‘enlightened’ approach to reckoning with a difficult past.³³⁰ It was not. Presenting the five controversies as bracketing and bridging events might also have suggested that developments unfolded more or less inevitably and according to plan. The process traced here does not demonstrate progress nor was it inevitable in the way that it developed. As we have seen, the public reacted to each controversy in quite unpredictable ways, depending on the contexts in which the debates occurred. Evidently, the various players did not learn from or matured on account of the memory contests in any systematic way. For example, public reaction to Goldhagen’s thesis was entirely different than the response to Walser’s speech. Indeed, comparing the two leaves one puzzled about the fickleness of public opinion.

Apparently, as taboos disintegrated, as demographics shifted, as historiography advanced, and as the impact of the media changed the rules of the public sphere, the parameters within which memory wars occurred became entirely different ones. This process is likely to continue with unknown implications for controversies yet to come. Even though in 1995 a majority of Germans expressed the opinion that the country had dealt sufficiently with its National Socialist past, and despite the evidence that many seemed to have reached the burn-out stage on *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* at the time of the *Walser-Bubis-Debate*, new memory contests have erupted since then and Germans

³³⁰One does find such assessment in the literature, albeit in respect to the process in general rather than specifically targeted at the controversies we have examined. Interestingly but not surprisingly, these perspectives come primarily from outside observers rather than from within German circles (unless they are made in connection with *Schlussstrich* argumentation or come from the extreme right wing). Daniel Goldhagen, for example, attested Germany model character in terms of reckoning with a criminal past. Klundt, *Geschichtspolitik*, 28. Olick offered a more nuanced assessment, but still referred to the German case as “powerful substantive and theoretical exemplar” that has “provided much of our contemporary vocabulary for thinking about these issues” as other nations have “confronted the legacies of difficult pasts.” Olick, “What Does It Mean to Normalize the Past?” 566-567.

have weighed in.³³¹ Closure is not in sight. How the process has occurred so far neither represents progress nor followed logical rules, and it is impossible to predict how it will continue.

It is easy to overlook one of the more indirect results of reckoning with the legacy of National Socialism, namely the ‘culture of discord’ [*Streitkultur*] that has evolved in the process. Many Germans look upon this with considerable pride, but it has also posed challenges to political leaders and public policy makers. This dynamic was especially obvious while the *Wehrmachtsausstellung* made its way from city to city. The controversy demonstrated that it was possible to instrumentalize National Socialism for present purposes. One could use the past as ‘moral compass’ or, to use Habermas’s terminology, as ‘normative filter’ for deciding contentious issues in almost any area of foreign and domestic policy.³³² In Germany, this has happened with respect to foreign relations with Israel (and with Israel’s enemies), nuclear armament, the use of German armed forces, the handling of asylum cases, policies towards the mentally ill, as well as issues of life and death (capital punishment, abortion, end-of-life practices). The list could go on and would also include issues of how to deal with political dissidents, right-wing extremist groups, and neo-Nazi movements. We have seen this dynamic at play primarily in the controversy over the *Wehrmachtsausstellung*, during which both sides used the past to argue their case. Walser exposed the flipside of the same process by

³³¹Sixty-three percent answered in the affirmative when asked whether Germany had dealt sufficiently [*ausreichend*] with its recent past during the last fifty years. Only thirty percent said no, and seven percent were unsure. *Allensbacher Jahrbuch der Demoskopie 1993-1997*, vol. 10, eds. Noelle-Neumann and Köcher, 529. As for new controversies, one only needs to follow the daily German press to see that topics related to National Socialism, the war, and the Holocaust remain very much alive, as well as controversial, in national discourse.

³³²Klaus Naumann, “Zwischen Tabu und Skanda.: Zur Aufarbeitung der NS-Vergangeneheit in der Bundesrepublik,” *Blätter für deutsche und internationale Politik* 41 no. 9 (1996), 1137.

attacking unnamed groups and individuals for instrumentalizing ‘Auschwitz’ for their purposes. They did not use the Holocaust as ‘moral compass,’ he alleged, but rather as ‘cudgel’ to advance their own economic gain.³³³ In either case, National Socialism has provided the historical backdrop for political action in the present. Discussing the legacy of National Socialism in the public sphere for making political arguments that affect the present has become a regular feature of German political culture.

Does this mean that National Socialism and the Holocaust have been historicized? Long gone are the days when Martin Broszat and Jürgen Habermas argued for subjecting National Socialism, WWII, and the Holocaust to the same scholarly scrutiny as one would apply to the study of any historical subject.³³⁴ Even Ernst Nolte’s plea for contextualizing the Third Reich seems rather anachronistic from today’s perspective.³³⁵ Historiography has come a long way since the days when historicization and contextualization were issues of acrimonious debate. New methodologies have become more widely accepted and new questions have arisen partially as a consequence of working through the controversies. Furthermore, historians no longer need to work as hard as Fischer and his colleagues did to dismantle taboos in the popular imagination

³³³Walser, “Erfahrungen beim Verfassen einer Sonntagsrede,” in *Die Walser-Bubis-Debatte*, 13, 12.

³³⁴Broszat clarified once more in 1988 what he had meant in his plea for the historicization of National Socialism that he had originally published in 1986. Martin Broszat, “Was heisst Historisierung des Nationalsozialismus?” *Historische Zeitschrift* 247, no. 1 (1988): 1-14.

³³⁵Critical reaction against Nolte’s revisionism was justified in the 1980s, but it seems that the need for comparative historiography of National Socialism has become once more acceptable since then.

about the recent past; much of that work has been accomplished in the course of conducting the five memory wars that were at issue in this study.³³⁶

One must wonder, however, if Broszat and others had imagined the kind of historicization that seems to be at work in a young student's reflection on learning about National Socialism in school. In the course of their family interviews, Harald Welzer and his colleagues had asked a twelve-year-old what she thought about her current course of study. "Yes, I find that totally interesting," she responded,

because we have also learned about the Stone Age and the middle ages. First, we learned about the Stone Age, then the middle ages, then it always progressed a few generations, must have some sort of system. So now we have this topic. Yes, it is fun.³³⁷

The student continued to share her considerable factual if spotty knowledge about National Socialism, also mentioning her inability to imagine her grandfather having been alive during the war. For this student, National Socialism, WWII, and the Holocaust were topics just as the Stone Age and the middle ages. Learning about them was fun. This is historicization in all its inevitability. Broszat and those who were concerned about the dangers of relativization associated with historicization might find reassurance in that the history curriculum for German schools addresses the ethical dimensions of

³³⁶Some myths about the past seem to persist among the public, not unlike the one about the 'clean *Wehrmacht*,' despite the evidence historians uncover to the contrary. Just recently, the German newspaper *Welt Online* reported on a historical commission having researched the long-standing notion of low-flying British airplanes hunting defenseless civilians after the bombing of Dresden in WWII. The historians did not find evidence to verify those accounts. Nevertheless, all of the comments accompanying the article expressed disbelief in the historians' report. After all, the writers had heard about these instances and believed them to be true. Once again, the 'family album' trumped the 'lexicon.' Sven Felix Kellerhoff, "Dresden 1945: Bis zu 25,000 Tote, aber keine Tieffliegerangriffe," *Welt Online*, March 17, 2010 (<http://www.welt.de/kultur/article6817372/Bis-zu-25-000-Tote-aber-keine-Tieffliegerangriffe.html>).

³³⁷Welzer, 'Opa war kein Nazi,' 7. I do not mean to imply that 'fun' is bad, even though from an adult perspective, the term seems somewhat jolting in connection with studying about National Socialism and the Holocaust. Here it probably just indicated that the teacher had succeeded in awakening this young student's curiosity about the past, which is to be commended.

National Socialism, WWII, and the Holocaust in addition to providing factual information even in the lower grades.³³⁸ As the coverage of our controversies in current textbooks for High School students has shown, history curricula challenge older students to engage in higher level critical thinking about the issues involved. The assignments also ask students to integrate what they have learned through multiple venues about the time period (using primary sources, movies, and family stories). In other words, National Socialism and the Holocaust are historicized in school curricula, but their treatment makes an effort to convey the time period's moral and ethical dimensions; something that Saul Friedländer (and others) had been concerned about during the *Historikerstreit*.³³⁹

Despite the inevitable historicization that comes with increasing chronological distance from the past, National Socialism and the Holocaust have not become history like any other.³⁴⁰ One could attribute this primarily to the presence of *Zeitzeugen*, but as Chapter Five has demonstrated, the reality is more complicated. If the presence of

³³⁸A textbook geared towards the middle grades dedicated an entire unit to the very issues addressed in Young's question, namely how does a country incorporate its darkest history in its historical consciousness; is there a proper way to commemorate the victims; how does one discern similar threats in today's society? Assignments challenged middle school students to discuss why people might want to repress the National Socialist past; they were to discuss the Holocaust Memorial in Berlin, and they were to conduct internet searches about groups working against right-wing extremist movements in Germany. They were also to research traces of Jewish life and culture in their home towns. Sven Christoffer, Eckard Hanke, Helmunt Heimbach, Arno Höfer, Uli Jungbluth, Klaus Leinen, Peter Offergeld, and Antonius Wollschläger, *Zeitreise 3* (Stuttgart: Ernst Klett Verlag, 2008) 82-89.

³³⁹For a cogent summary and analysis of Broszat's and Friedländer's positions on historicization, see Jörn Rüsen, "The Logic of Historicization: Metahistorical Reflections on the Debate between Friedländer and Broszat," *History and Memory* 9, no. 1/2 (Fall 1997): 113 [no ending page number provided], <http://0-www.proquest.com.library.acaweb.org/>; Document ID: 593643081 (accessed March 27, 2010).

³⁴⁰As some historians have pointed out, historicization of National Socialism has received a boost from the end of communism in Europe which eventually ended German division into two states. After 1990, the Third Reich had become an epoch separated from the present by another distinct epoch, namely that of the two German successor states. Consequently, it has become 'easier' to study National Socialism since reunification. Saul Frieländer, "Martin Broszat und die Historisierung des Nationalsozialismus," in *Mit dem Pathos der Nüchternheit: Martin Broszat, das Institut für Zeitgeschichte und die Erforschung des Nationalsozialismus*, eds. Klaus-Dietmar Henke and Claudio Natoli, 155-171 (Frankfurt/Main: Campus Verlag, 1991), here 160.

Zeitzeugen were the defining factor in rendering history contentious, then it would be only a matter of time until memory wars were no longer necessary. The elusive *Schlussstrich* would follow about eighty years after a controversial event—in the case of Germany, this would be by 2025 at the latest—and successive generations would wonder what all the fuss had been about.³⁴¹ Yet this is not how it works. As many guest book entries have demonstrated, ‘memory’ of the past persists in individuals and groups long after those who have witnessed the past are no longer around. In the process of moving from one generation to the next, stories about the past generally change, but evidently without losing their power in the process. We saw evidence for this dynamic at work in many guest book entries, but one can also detect it in the numerous associations of expellees that still exist in Germany, even though most members of the generation that actually experienced expulsion from the lost German territories have died. Some groups within those organizations, by now surely under the leadership of members from successor generations, still agitate for return of the lost territories. For these descendents, as for children and grandchildren of other victims of war, the ‘family album’ remains a powerful antithesis to the ‘lexicon.’ Given these insights, memory contests are unlikely to cease once the last *Zeitzeuge* has passed on. Just because National Socialism has been thoroughly historicized and just because some young students have ‘fun’ learning about it in school does not mean that it will no longer represent contested history. Neither does it mean that historicization is necessarily identical with relativization; a fear that had still

³⁴¹I am referring specifically to Germany, but my statements have broader applicability. Traumatic events in the history of a group or nation would have similar effects. The Holocaust would be a prime example for this in the case of Israel; slavery, the Civil War, and the legacy of racial discrimination have cast shadows in U.S. society that were longer than the life span of contemporaries; the examples could go on and on.

been very real during the *Historikerstreit*.³⁴² What is probably does mean, at least for the second and subsequent successor generations, is that learning about, talking about, and most likely disagreeing about the legacy of the National Socialist past has become a normal and regular aspect of political life.

When pondering the effects of generational succession on reckoning with the National Socialist past, one might overlook the fact that historians figure in this dynamic as well.³⁴³ Norbert Frei's work sheds light on this important aspect of the historicization process. He has shown how the waning of the *Zeitzeugen* generation among professional historians has affected, and is likely to continue to affect, contemporary history [*Zeitgeschichte*] as an academic sub-discipline in Germany.³⁴⁴ The fact that until recently the study and interpretation of National Socialism has been largely in the hands of members of the *Zeitzeugen* generation is often overlooked. Indeed, several of the controversies at issue here resulted in significant ways from fissures among or between generational cohorts. The *Fischer Controversy* pitted two generations of historians against each other. The *Historikerstreit* was a fight over competing pasts among members of the same generation. The *Wehrmachtsausstellung* became to some extent the

³⁴²The danger of relativization may be just as strong today, if not stronger, than it appeared in the 1980s; today it comes largely from outside of respectable historical circles. One can see extreme right-wing parties and movements fuelling calls for relativization and playing into popular xenophobia and other fears that accompany economic uncertainty.

³⁴³Ralph Jessen offered an analysis of the various conflicts (between historical science, politics, and the public) that resulted from many historians of *Zeitgeschichte* also having been contemporaries of National Socialism. Ralph Jessen, "Zeithistoriker im Konfliktfeld der Vergangenheitspolitik" in *Verletztes Gedächtnis*, eds. Jarausch and Sabrow (Frankfurt: Campus Verlag, 2002), 153-175.

³⁴⁴Norbert Frei, "Farewell to the Era of Contemporaries: National Socialism and Its Historical Examination en route into History," in *History and Memory* 9 no. 1/2 (Fall 1997): 59 [no ending page number provided], <http://0-www.proquest.com.library.acaweb.org/>; Document ID: 593643091 (accessed March 27, 2010). The emphasis here is on Germany, but similar processes would probably play out elsewhere.

controversy it was on account of intergeneration strife among historians. Finally, in the *Goldhagen Affair* generational animosities played out on a transnational level.³⁴⁵

According to Frei, the departure of historians who had also experienced National Socialism first-hand bears both dangers and opportunities for the field of *Zeitgeschichte*. One might fear, he argued, that the absence of “moral restraints enforced by the contemporaries” might open doors for “random [and] gratuitous speculation,” which could replace “serious inquiry and authentic research.”³⁴⁶ A popular market that seems to be ever more interested in scandalous revelations might further accelerate this trend. Frei saw early signs of such developments in the *Goldhagen Affair*.³⁴⁷ On the other hand, with the absence of *Zeitzeugen* among historians and the general public, research would no longer have to take “the reputations and interests of former perpetrators, collaborators, and profiteers” into consideration. Concentration camp research and a social history of ‘Aryanization’ were just two areas Frei saw as potentially benefiting. Researchers were also likely to take closer looks at continuities between the Third Reich and post-war Germany than had been the case so far.³⁴⁸ As the last contemporaries of National Socialism left the scene, Frei reminded us, this period in contemporary history “[was] on the verge of becoming ‘plain’ history, ...” Yet since National Socialism as *Zeitgeschichte* “was never an exclusively German prerogative, so it will remain an international research

³⁴⁵Looking back on the *Historikerstreit* from the perspective of 1997, Frei wrote, “It now seems that the *Historikerstreit* could be described as the protracted political farewell—abruptly ended by German reunification—of a generation of researchers and individuals who had a specific autobiographical agenda and were facing retirement at the start of the 1990s.” Frei, “Farewell to the Era of Contemporaries,” [n.p.], Section II, paragraph 12.

³⁴⁶*Ibid.*, Section III, paragraph 1.

³⁴⁷*Ibid.*

³⁴⁸*Ibid.*, paragraphs 4-6.

topic once it has entered the realm of history.” His article ended with a categorical ‘no’ to a past that might finally pass away. On the contrary, since “[T]he paradigmatic significance of this past has not vanished, whoever hopes that it will do so in the future is hoping in vain.”³⁴⁹ Clearly, historicization is as inevitable as it is welcomed, yet neither relativization nor a *Schlussstrich* are part of the equation.

This is also the point at which to ask if any of the periodization schemes offered in the literature describe adequately the process of reckoning with the past, as viewed through the lens of waves of controversies. Siobhan Kattago’s five-stage scheme as well as Norbert Frei’s four-phase approach seems inadequate in that both treat the entire time span from 1980 to the present as a single stage. For Kattago, the 1980s inaugurated what she called the stage of normalization and national identity.³⁵⁰ Frei referred to those years as *Vergangenheitsbewahrung* [commemoration of the past]. For him, the stage of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* [reckoning with the past] preceded the last stage and had presumably come to an end by the 1980s.³⁵¹

Having looked at four waves of controversies falling between the mid-1980s and the late 1990s allows the fine-tuning of existing periodization schemes. The quest for national identity has certainly been part of each controversy, as has the wrangling over normalization. We have argued earlier that the past itself cannot and should not be ‘normalized;’ first, because there is no such thing as ‘normal’ history and second, because those who have argued for normalization in connection with National Socialism and the Holocaust have generally done so in order to relativize the criminal nature of the

³⁴⁹Ibid., last two paragraphs.

³⁵⁰Kattago, *Ambiguous Memory: The Nazi Past*, 38-48.

³⁵¹Frei, *1945 und Wir*, 41.

Third Reich. We have conceded, however, that the processes of learning about, talking about, and arguing about National Socialism have become normal aspects of German political culture. Frei's commemoration phase has become ingrained in German culture as well, at least in the forms of public discourse and public ritual. Commemoration has become part of the country's memory landscape. Treating the twenty years spanning the time before the *Historikerstreit* until the end of controversy over the *Wehrmachtausstellung* as one single phase, however, does not work. It does not do justice to the social, geo-political, and demographic shifts that have so profoundly affected the course of reckoning with the past during those years. Instead, it may be more appropriate to subdivide the last stage into two separate ones. The 1980s with the *Historikerstreit* would be the era of *discourse debates*, while the 1990s with the *Goldhagen Affair*, the controversy over the *Wehrmachtausstellung*, and the *Walser-Bubis-Debate* would be the era of *memory and conscience debates*. Together, the two eras would converge into the larger stage of *historicization*.

James E. Young's taxing question is still waiting for an answer. It will have to remain open since a finite answer does not exist. A nation cannot declare at a certain point in its history that all has been accomplished, just as it cannot claim at any one time that its national identity has been established and will remain unchanged. Indeed, Young's question is not one that requires a finite answer. Rather, the answer lies in the process itself.³⁵² Individuals, groups, and nations continuously address the issues he

³⁵²After having arrived at this conclusion on my own, I came across a quote by Young that makes me think he would answer his own question as I do. "[T]he best German memorial to the fascist era and its victims may not be a single memorial at all—but simply the never-to-be-resolved debate over which kind of memory to preserve, how to do it, in whose name, and to what end." James E. Young, quoted in Kattago, *Ambiguous Memory*, 171. Quoted from Young, *The Texture of Memory: Holocaust Memorials and Meaning* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1991), 21.

raised as they go through the unending processes of remembering their past, learning about it, debating the past's meaning for their lives, act upon their understanding, and pass on their knowledge and understanding to the next generation. Once a community has accepted the fact that its past includes uplifting as well as traumatic aspects, each generation will 'reckon' differently from the one that came before. In the process, aspects of the past will reveal themselves that no one had been able or dared to see earlier. Historians and the public will ask questions that have not occurred to anyone before. Finally, issues in the present will prompt communities to query the past in new ways. New sources will present themselves. Historians, most likely in collaboration with members of other academic disciplines, will apply new methodologies. The results might change virtually everything, as happened in the *Fischer Controversy*. The past, regardless of how riddled with traumatic or criminal events, will remain important as individuals, groups, and nations discover and rediscover their historical roots and negotiate who they are in the world. This study's focus was on post-war Germany, and we have argued that Germany's case was not exemplary. Yet the issues connected with forging memorial landscape that incorporate proud as well as burdening aspects of a national past are applicable beyond the German context.

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