



The Jewish Question in the German Question

Author(s): Anson Rabinbach

Source: *New German Critique*, Spring - Summer, 1988, No. 44, Special Issue on the Historikerstreit (Spring - Summer, 1988), pp. 159-192

Published by: Duke University Press

Stable URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/488151>

REFERENCES

Linked references are available on JSTOR for this article:

https://www.jstor.org/stable/488151?seq=1&cid=pdf-reference#references_tab_contents

You may need to log in to JSTOR to access the linked references.

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at <https://about.jstor.org/terms>



JSTOR

Duke University Press is collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *New German Critique*

The Jewish Question in the German Question

by Anson Rabinbach

Bitburg and the *Historikerstreit* are the most recent reminders that the Nazi past continues to resonate in contemporary West German politics. The topos of the “singularity” of the Holocaust in these highly public confrontations with the past demonstrates, moreover, that the “Jewish Question” in today’s Germany is simultaneously a sovereignty question. Since 1945, every expansion of German sovereignty has, at least symbolically, been linked to a particular image of the Nazi past. The symbolic value of the “Jewish Question” in the history of the Federal Republic of Germany is to hold German sovereignty in escrow. Conversely, each reevaluation of the past on the part of Germans opens for Jews a new chapter in the equally permanent link to their own collective nightmare. Since 1945 there has been what Dan Diner, writing in the first Jewish-German intellectual journal since Weimar, *Babylon*, described as a negative symbiosis between Germans and Jews, a “kind of opposing commonality.”¹

Yet in all the furor over the new historical revisionism, the deeper reasons for the emergence of a new “strategy of oblivion” have largely escaped critical scrutiny. It is not sufficient to moralize about the “mis-use” of comparisons, or to invoke the phrase “relativization” to impart a sense of their injustice vis-à-vis the victims.² The attempt to eradicate the burden of the past by means of a casuistry of comparative genocide, the symbolic reconciliation of the German and American

1. Dan Diner, “Negative Symbiose: Deutsche und Juden nach Auschwitz,” *Babylon Beiträge zur jüdischen Gegenwart* 1 (1986): 9.

2. Judith Miller, “Erasing the Past: Europe’s Amnesia About the Holocaust,” *New York Times Magazine* 16 November 1986: 30.

“fallen” over Waffen-SS graves, or even the failed parliamentary attempt to promote a national “day of mourning” for all “victims” of the Nazi era, cannot simply be attributed to a calculated effort to close the door on a history that has now entered its fifth decade. It is an oversimplification to point to the deep division between “the Jewish desire to remember and the German desire to forget,” to explain this state of affairs.

The *Historikerstreit* demonstrates that the Nazi crime against the Jews has always belonged to the political discursive topography of the postwar Federal Republic, and that a closer examination of this persistence of the Jewish Question reveals that every stage in the emergence of West German sovereignty has been linked to the question of responsibility for the German past. There have been three major turning points in the postwar German confrontation with the legacy of Nazism. The first occurred in September 1951, when Konrad Adenauer delivered his famous declaration on reparations to the Parliament, a prelude to the financial reparations treaty (*Wiedergutmachung*) concluded between the Federal Republic of Germany and representative Jewish organizations both inside and outside Israel and ratified by the Parliament on March 18, 1953. The second occurred in 1958/1959 and coincided with the SPD’s turn towards NATO at a time when public displays of anti-Semitism demonstrated the apparent failures of the very limited denazification of the postwar era. The third occurred at Bitburg, and reflected the Kohl government’s attempt to counter a Green variant of German nationalism and symbolically “normalize” political relations with the U.S. and the Western alliance. Bitburg raised a series of crucial issues for the Kohl government’s strategy of overcoming the past, which subsequently took the public form of the *Historikerstreit* in the fall of 1986.

Each of these turning points coincided with a major shift in the domestic and international situation of the Federal Republic. The first took place when the Adenauer government, in light of the intensification of the Cold War and the “hardening” of the postwar settlement, abandoned the hope of reunification and the “provisional” character of the Federal Republic in favor of integration in the Western Bloc. The second came at the end of the Adenauer era and, in the context of *detente*, prepared the way for a broader coalition government including the Social Democrats and the subsequent opening of *Ostpolitik*. The third phase, which is hardly over, marks both the acceptance of the consequences of the East treaties, and an attempt to create for the first

time a German national identity whose ultimate character — e.g., whether it is pro- or anti-American, West German, German, or Middle European — still remains open to question.

Guilt Questions

The German confrontation with the past in the immediate postwar years recently became the subject of an intense debate provoked by Hermann Lübbe, a prominent neo-conservative philosopher. Lübbe challenged the conventional view that the absence of a moral renewal so desired after 1945 by German intellectuals like Karl Jaspers, and so frequently met with by indifference or hostility among the populace, was traumatic for the subsequent history of the Federal Republic. His rationale is that “a certain silence was the social-psychological and politically necessary medium for the transformation of our postwar population into the citizenry of the Federal Republic of Germany.”³

If old Nazis quietly returned to their old jobs, careers, and positions of authority in the governing elite, this “continuity of personnel” was, he asserts, only part of the necessary work of breaking with the past politically. The restoration of normality did not require an “explanatory and analytic overcoming of National Socialism” but rather a practical tolerance of individuals, an “asymmetrical discretion,” e.g., mutual acceptance of one another’s past.⁴ Despite the silence of the postwar epoch, there was a “complete discrediting of National Socialist ideology, in particular in its racist *Lebensraum* expansionist core ideas.”⁵ The positive side of this decision for “integration” over “exclusion” was a fundamental consensus in the FRG about the anti-Nazi nature of the new state and its democratic foundation.

While Lübbe is not completely wrong, his overly optimistic version of the events in question is nevertheless intended to justify some of the worst aspects of the postwar era and deliver a rationale for the moral vacuum that this “silent mastery of the past” produced. There *was* a practical and political decision for “integration” over “denazification” in the first years of the Federal Republic, a political process that also involved the triumph of a view of Nazism which emphasized its criminal aspects at the expense of its broad popular basis and deep social roots in

3. Hermann Lübbe, “Der Nationalsozialismus im Deutschen Nachkriegsbewußtsein,” *Historische Zeitschrift* 236 (1983): 585.

4. Lübbe, “Der Nationalsozialismus” 587.

5. Lübbe, “Der Nationalsozialismus” 584.

German history and tradition. Even in the wartime debates among German émigrés, we can see the formation of this deep division between the advocates of the “outlaw theory” of the Nazi criminal elite, and the antifascist view of Nazism as a broadly supported social system.⁶ The Nuremberg trials, which were the institutional analogue of the outlaw theory, did not challenge the “continuities” of personnel in postwar German society, whereas the antifascists supported a thorough-going denazification, coupled with a reconstruction of German society. In its official Stalinist variant, antifascism became the ideology of the SBZ (Soviet Zone of Occupation). In the West, the antifascist option was linked to the political “road not taken,” Kurt Schumacher’s attempt to create a unified socialist and democratic Germany independent of the superpowers.⁷ The actual denazification process was unsystematic and often unjust, punishing lesser functionaries while more serious criminals and corporate elites were courted. It gave rise to much cynicism, and was powerfully parodied in Ernst von Salomon’s famous novel, *Der Fragebogen* of 1951.

There can be no doubt that the moral no-man’s land experienced by Germans after 1945 also reflected, to no small degree, the real difficulties of drawing lines of demarcation between different kinds of participation in the Nazi system of domination, between different social strata, between different kinds of acts, and ultimately between different levels of motivation. Hans-Ulrich Wehler has argued plausibly that given the large number of potentially guilty individuals who might or might not have been caught in the net of a general “purge” of anyone who collaborated with the Nazis, or who, without the “party book,” still sympathized with their aims, the price of denazification in the immediate postwar era might have been nothing short of a social and cultural civil war.⁸ Even if one does not accept Lübke’s questionable characterization of the postwar course of events as a positive contribution to the political stability of the FRG and the integration of the Nazi “fellow travellers” into the

6. Peter Steinbach, “Nationalsozialistische Gewaltverbrechen in der deutschen Öffentlichkeit nach 1945,” *Vergangenheitsbewältigung durch Strafverfahren? NS-Prozesse in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland*, ed. Jürgen Weber, Peter Steinbach (Munich: Günter Olzog Verlag, 1984) 18.

7. Peter Brandt and Herbert Ammon, eds., *Die Linke und die nationale Frage* (Hamburg, 1981) 36, 37. See the discussion of this option in Ferenc Feher, Agnes Heller, “Eastern Europe under the Shadow of a New Rapallo,” *New German Critique* 37 (Winter, 1986): 20-23.

8. Hans-Ulrich Wehler, “30. Januar 1933 — ein halbes Jahrhundert danach,” *Aus Politik und Zeitgeschichte* 4-5 (1983): 45.

political culture of postwar democracy, the difficulties that would have arisen from a general denazification cannot be minimized. Gustav Heinemann's remark that if the finger points at one's contemporaries, the other fingers point at oneself, is sadly apt.⁹ Even before the end of the war, Hannah Arendt reflected with astonishing prescience on the moral dilemma that such a general confrontation with the past might entail:

Just as there is no political solution within human capacity for the crime of administrative mass murder, so the human need for justice can find no satisfactory reply to the total mobilization of a people for that purpose. Where all are guilty, nobody in the last analysis can be judged.¹⁰

Relegated to the limited justice of Nuremberg, by the end of the 1940s, German guilt became, to borrow Jaspers' words in *Die Schuldfrage*, largely a "metaphysical question." For Jaspers metaphysical guilt referred to an injury to the "solidarity of human beings with other human beings," which occurs "when I am present where injustice and crime occur."¹¹ Hannah Arendt's 1946 letter to Jaspers further articulated the difficulty with that conception:

It appears to me that in what you call metaphysical guilt not only is the "unconditional" (*das Unbedingte*) located, where in fact no earthly judge can be recognized any longer, but also that solidarity which (in the words of Clemenceau, "*L'Affaire d'un seul est l'affaire de tous*") is the political basis of the Republic.¹²

Jaspers' desire for what he later called "a moral-political revolution" remained unfulfilled. At best, it was a matter of individual remorse, subject to the inner justice that Jaspers' existentialism superbly executed. At worst, it was subject to the exorcism of the popular ethics of the *Stammtisch*. To be sure, there were efforts to realize Jasper's ideal, for example, in the attempt of Evangelical theologians and leaders like

9. Quoted in Martin Hirsch, "Anlaß, Verlauf und Ergebnis der Verjährungsdebatten im Deutschen Bundestag," *Vergangenheitsbewältigung durch Strafverfahren?* 40.

10. Hannah Arendt, "Organized Guilt and Collective Responsibility," *The Jew as Pariah: Jewish Identity and Politics in the Modern Age*, ed. Ron H. Feldman (New York: Schocken, 1978) 230.

11. Karl Jaspers, *Die Schuldfrage: Zur politischen Haftung Deutschlands* (Munich: Piper, 1946) 48.

12. Hannah Arendt-Karl Jaspers *Briefwechsel 1926-1969*, ed. Lotte Köhler and Hans Saner (Munich, Zurich: Piper, 1985) 91.

Martin Niemöller and Gustav Heinemann to provide a “self-accusation before God” in the *Stuttgarter Schuldbekennntnis* of October 1945.¹³ But Heinemann himself bemoaned the lack of resonance produced by these noble — though by contemporary standards extremely mild — efforts when he wrote in 1950 that that “which we experienced in hubris and catastrophe, in judgement and grace, was not an occasion for a reversal and renewed reflection.”¹⁴ More characteristic was the tortured rhetoric with which returned émigré intellectuals were received, as when the Mayor of Frankfurt greeted Max Horkheimer’s ascendancy to the rectorship of the University as “the crowning of our own duty of reparation (*Wiedergutmachungs-Pflicht*).”¹⁵ Lübke’s arrogant observation that the moral critique of Nazi past was “elitist and intellectual” has a ring of truth, especially to the extent that it participates in the very moral expatriation of the guilt question to the province of the spirit that it condemns. Little wonder the majority of the population lived, so to speak, in a state of moral amnesia between “criminal” and “metaphysical” spheres of guilt.

Wiedergutmachung

In this context, the Reparations Treaty of 1953 assumed inordinate importance. It is often overlooked that the single most important consequence of the reparations debate in the new Republic was discursive: It distinguished between war crimes, crimes against humanity and the crimes committed against Jews, and so retroactively created a moral hierarchy. It should be recalled that the Nuremberg tribunal distinguished only crimes against humanity (murder, slavery, extermination, deportation) from other “war crimes” (reprisals, political murder or acts of individual murder in the last phase of the war). As late as the mid-1960s, German courts often did not distinguish “war crimes” from Nazi crimes *per se*.¹⁶ Moreover, in the cultural climate of the immediate postwar years, the crime against the Jews was almost never mentioned

13. A. Boyens, “Das Stuttgarter Schuldbekennntnis vom 19. Oktober 1945 — Entstehung und Bedeutung,” *Vierteljahreshefte für Zeitgeschichte* 4.19 (1971): 374-397; Karl Jaspers, *Die Schuldfrage* 31-40.

14. Cited in Diether Koch, *Heinemann und die Deutschlandfrage* (Munich: C. Kaiser, 1972) 45.

15. Rolf Wiggershaus, *Die Frankfurter Schule: Geschichte, Theoretische Entwicklung, Politische Bedeutung* (Munich: Hanser, 1986) 497.

16. Cf. Heinz Arzt, “Zur Abgrenzung von Kriegsverbrechen und NS-Verbrechen,” *NS-Prozesse: Nach 25 Jahren Strafverfolgung*, ed. Adalbert Rückerl (Karlsruhe, 1971) 164.

and, if it was, then euphemistically and metaphorically. The strong taboo against any descriptive phrase was broken by Theodor Heuss, the Republic's first President when, speaking to the *Gesellschaft für christlich-jüdische Zusammenarbeit* in Wiesbaden in December 1949, he said: "it makes no sense to talk around these things: the horrible injustice that has been done to the Jewish people must be brought to speech."¹⁷

For Adenauer, *Wiedergutmachung* — achieved despite the opposition of many in his own party, much of the left, the occupation powers (including the U.S.), and within Israel — represented the most potent symbol of regained German respect in the world. Although by 1951 West Germany had already become a partner in the Western Bloc, Adenauer saw in the reparations treaty a fundamental precondition for any further extension of West German sovereignty.¹⁸ Adenauer's persistent and successful efforts to negotiate a reparations treaty with the Jewish World Congress and with Israel was clearly undertaken in the hope of "overcoming the unimaginable bitterness which the National Socialist crimes against the Jews has called forth in the world and among all those of good will."¹⁹ The desire for such a tangible symbol was not one-sidedly German. Herman Gray, chairman of the foreign-affairs bureau of the American Jewish Committee, noted at the time: "Germany is about to become a member of the western world, while the Jews still wait for an almost dramatic event, for a symbolic act."²⁰

At the same time, however, the universally lauded reparations declaration and the accompanying statement of responsibility, which Adenauer delivered to the German Parliament on September 27, 1951, also coincided with the progressive decriminalization of Nazism in the early years of the Federal Republic. Adenauer's promise that anti-Semitism and "racially inflammatory propaganda would be met with heavy sanctions," was an act of state without popular support (as public opinion polls demonstrated, only 11% favored the treaty, more than

17. Theodor Heuss, "Wir dürfen nicht vergessen," *Neue Zeitung* 9 December 1949.

18. Hans Keilson, "Die Reparationsverträge und die Folgen der Wiedergutmachung," *Jüdisches Leben in Deutschland seit 1945*, ed. Micha Brumlik et al. (Frankfurt am Main: Jüdische Verlag bei Athenäum, 1986) 125. As Michael Wolffsohn points out, it is a historical legend that Adenauer was pressured by the US to adopt the treaty. Michael Wolffsohn, *Ewige Schuld? 40 Jahre Deutsch-Jüdische-Israelische Beziehungen* (Munich: Piper, 1988) 22f.

19. Konrad Adenauer, *Erinnerungen 1953-1955* (Stuttgart: DVA, 1965). Cited in Keilson, "Die Reparationsverträge" 125.

20. "Die Tat wird die Probe sein," *Berliner Allgemeine*, 28 September 1951.

21. Wolffsohn, *Ewige Schuld?* 27; *Deutschland und das Judentum: Die Erklärung der*

half rejected it).²¹

The reparations question linked — inextricably it now seems — the “German Question” to the “Jewish Question” for the first time. The symbolic significance of the reparations issue was not only that the material settlement indicated the willingness of the new German state to assume direct responsibility for the Nazi crimes against the Jews, but — and this was a source of the Communist opposition at the time — it created a normative precedent restricting the issue of responsibility to the Jewish crime alone, bracketing out all other claims of reparations.

Efforts to compensate other victims of the Nazis, Gypsies, subjects of medical experimentation, eugenics, and especially those who had been in concentration camps as a result of resistance activities were largely thwarted (with the singular exception of the 20 July plotters).²² The reparations treaty served a dual purpose: Internationally, it demonstrated the Federal Republic of Germany’s desire to participate in the community of nations as an independent, militarily strong, post-Nazi state. Domestically, it focused the Nazi past on the singular crime against the Jews which could be accentuated and pursued in the present, thereby consigning all other questions of the Nazi era — especially the issue of former Nazis — to the periphery.

Adenauer’s genius was to find the Jewish Question useful, where his political colleagues saw only a permanent source of embarrassment. Almost overnight, the crime against the Jews was transposed from a taboo to a politically overloaded symbol of the entire Nazi complex. Even more important, the permanent postponement of the question of reunification was compensated for by the permanent postponement of the Nazi question. The settlement of the “Jewish Question” was a presupposition for a crucial decision concerning the German Question, the primacy of west-integration over reunification. Indeed, the debate on reparations coincided with Adenauer’s decision not to accept the famous Stalin-note of 1952 offering to exchange unification for a declaration of neutrality.²³

Bundesregierung über das deutsch-jüdische Verhältnis, ed. Presse- und Informationsdienst der Bundesregierung (Bonn: 1951), which includes press summaries and the text of Adenauer’s speech.

22. Alfred Grosser, *Western Germany from Defeat to Rearmament* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1955) 214.

23. Adenauer believed that were he to postpone the treaties negotiated with the occupying powers for a consideration of the Russian offer, he would not be permitted to reopen the negotiations. On the Stalin note and its connection to the debates on foreign

Adenauer was able to carry off this masterstroke in the face of negative public opinion and a divided elite, because he made the confrontation with the past a precondition for the expansion of German sovereignty. The reparations treaty was also a social contract *among* Germans: the abandoned Nazi question was replaced by the new “consensus” on The Jewish question about which there could be no statute of limitations [this was implicit] or public debate.²⁴ Ironically, it was conservative political elites who did not permit the *Schlußstrich* to be drawn under the Nazi epoch, despite their recognition that this was ardently desired by the vast majority of Germans in that era. The discovery of the Jewish question as a way of distancing the present German government from the past created a peculiar situation which necessitated that German leaders be *more* philosemitic than their constituents, legislate political morality and prohibit anti-Semitism by strict sanctions, perpetuating a deep disjuncture between public professions of responsibility and popular attitudes. If the famous paragraph 131 permitted the reintegration of former Nazis into the civil service, the reparations declaration sanctioned the substitution of the Jewish Question for the Nazi question.²⁵ The implicit power accorded to the Jewish Question (the reverse side of the taboo, we might say) also produced what Saul Friedländer described as a negative form of Jewish power in contemporary Germany: the power of absolution.²⁶ That this power would eventually become the source of resentment was not hard to predict.

The reparations settlement circumscribed the discourse of National Socialism within a version of “metaphysical guilt” in which the state assumed moral responsibility for its legal predecessor. On the other hand, the antifascist concept of political responsibility broadly defined (in the 1950s addressed by left intellectuals like Grass, Böll, Andersch) was exiled to West German literary culture.

Politically, the antifascist alliance of 1945 was broken by the imperatives of the Marshall Plan and the Cold War. The moral substance of

policy, see Hans-Peter Schwarz, *Adenauer: Der Aufstieg: 1877-1952* (Stuttgart: DVA, 1986). Also see Andreas Hillgruber, *Deutsche Geschichte 1945-1982: Die “deutsche Frage” in der Weltpolitik* (Stuttgart, Cologne, Mainz: Kohlhammer, 1984) 52.

24. Andrei S. Markovits, “Germans and Jews: An Uneasy Relationship Continues,” *Jewish Frontier* April 1984: 15.

25. Jack Zipes, “The Vicissitudes of Being Jewish in West Germany,” *Germans and Jews Since the Holocaust: The Changing Situation in West Germany*, ed. Jack Zipes and Anson Rabinbach (New York, London: Holmes and Meier, 1986) 32.

26. Saul Friedländer, “Some Present-Day German Struggles with Memory,” lecture, Jewish Museum, New York, 31 March 1986.

the antifascist critique of the “fascist” e.g., populist, dimension of National Socialism was instrumentalized in the official ideology of the East which substituted the doctrine of capitalist conspiracy for a recognition of popular support. The Cold War further undermined the “anti-fascist” option: In the eyes of the majority of citizens, the Stalinist dictatorship in the SBZ/GDR mirrored the Hitler dictatorship, while for the KPD and the SED the continuity of personnel apparent in the West confirmed the diagnosis of no decisive break with the past. To the extent that these mutually exclusive perceptions were subsequently concretized in alternative historical narratives, totalitarian theory and fascism theory, future historiographical controversies were already anticipated.

Jews in the Jewish Question

It is important to recognize that from the “Jewish standpoint,” the reparations treaty and Adenauer’s speech to the Bundestag were key moments of recognition for the generally underplayed and often ignored reality that the Jews were in fact “different” from other victims of National Socialism by virtue of the sheer number of Jews exterminated, and the special status afforded them in the apparatus of mass murder. If the antifascist option was defeated politically, its more lasting achievement may have been the premature levelling of distinctions among the victims of National Socialism — sometimes even (especially in the GDR) to the exclusion of Jewish victims. From the “Jewish point of view” therefore, the reparations treaty restored a proper perspective to National Socialist criminality, but not without consequences. Moreover, as Saul Friedländer points out, from the founding of the State of Israel, the “catastrophe” was coupled with images of “redemption”/“rebirth”/“heroism.” But the official commemoration of the *Shoah* as part of Israeli national politics only began shortly after the reparations demand was put forward.²⁷ In this sense, the “singularity” postulate of the Holocaust implicit in the reparations treaty served *both* West German and Israeli legitimization purposes — but for different reasons.

The reparations treaty also greatly enhanced the importance of the newly founded West German Jewish communal organizations which were soon enlisted for symbolic purposes. During the occupation, the German-Jewish presence in Germany was a community in the process

27. Saul Friedländer, “Die Shoah als Element in der Konstruktion israelischer Erinnerung,” *Babylon: Beiträge zur jüdischen Gegenwart* 2 (July 1987): 13.

of dissolution — “living on packed suitcases.”²⁸ Even the new arrivals from the East considered themselves a community in transit. Until 1949-50, the international Jewish organizations like the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee still saw the existence of Jews in Germany as temporary, providing material relief and assistance in relocating the displaced persons (DPs) abroad, mostly in Israel.²⁹ Only after 1952 was there growing recognition that Germany, rather than becoming a “land without Jews,” was instead becoming the destination of a surprising number of Jews, with the majority (two-thirds) not originally of German origin.³⁰ The post-reparations climate not only favored a higher profile for the Central Council of Jews in Germany, founded as the umbrella organization of the Jewish communities in 1950, but increasingly placed official Jewish representatives in the position of attesting to the positive efforts of the CDU/CSU state in fulfilling its moral obligations and offering a concrete testimonial of tolerance.³¹

The attitude of these Jewish communities remained ambivalent. Linked by religion and an orientation toward Israel, their relation to the German environment was largely reserved for ritualistic events like the “Brotherhood Weeks” organized by the “Society for Christian-Jewish Cooperation.”³² The conservatism of these official Jewish organizations, especially in regard to the various scandals involving former high level Nazis in the political hierarchy of the FRG, attests to their dependence on the political patronage of the West German “consensus.”

The Crisis of Vergangenheitsbewältigung: 1958/59

By the late 1950s, the unexpected popular resonance of the dramatization of the *Diary of Anne Frank* and other cultural events dealing with Nazism, and the spontaneous Bergen-Belsen pilgrimages organized by the Hamburg journalist Erich Lüth in 1957, were among the first signs that a new confrontation with the Nazi past was taking shape. The desecration of Jewish cemeteries and synagogues in December 1959 seemed to underscore the multiple sins of the Adenauer years. Significantly, the

28. Monika Richarz, “Juden in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland und in der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik seit 1945,” *Jüdisches Leben in Deutschland* 15.

29. Richarz, 16, 17.

30. Richarz, 18 and Zipes, 28.

31. See Hans Jakob Ginsburg, “Politik danach — Jüdische Interessenvertretung in der Bundesrepublik,” *Jüdisches Leben in Deutschland*, 110, 111; and Y. Michal Bodemann, “Staat und Ethnizität: Der Aufbau der jüdischen Gemeinden im Kalten Krieg,” in *Jüdisches Leben in Deutschland* 62.

32. Bodemann, “Staat und Ethnizität,” 63.

CDU/CSU proposed that the Federal Republic should respond with new laws against “popular incitement” (*Volksverhetzung*), but the SPD opposed granting any “special protection” to German-Jews, a situation ultimately resolved by a political compromise in favor of a national program of political enlightenment.³³

The crisis of “Vergangenheitsbewältigung” (mastering the past) in 1958/59 occurred, like the reparations treaty, against the backdrop of a crucial turning point in the global situation of the Federal Republic. The reopening of the German Question was at first the consequence of a brief moment of “estrangement” between Germany and the USA. By mid-1958, Adenauer’s domestic popularity had peaked and new divisions emerged among the Western powers, especially in regard to European fears of the American “nuclear guarantee.” Adenauer reacted negatively to the American view of Germany as a “shield” against the Soviet threat (the Radford Plan). He resolutely opposed a proposed four-power conference in Geneva on the German Question backed by Britain and France, fuelling renewed domestic debate on the future of Germany. The SPD sided with the Western Europeans in their support for a policy of “nuclear free zones” and “disengagement,” creating new anxieties of a return to Schumacher’s vision.³⁴ But the end of 1959 saw first the collapse of the Geneva Conference, Khrushchev’s ultimatum unleashing a new Berlin crisis, and in November, the decisive turn of the SPD toward NATO and the Western alliance at Bad Godesberg. By the end of the year, reunification was no longer on the agenda.

The breakup of the Adenauer epoch, coupled with the “hardening” of the German situation into a permanent reality, required a more extensive confrontation with the past acceptable to the SPD as a member of the new national consensus. Especially for those SPD leaders who, like Willy Brandt, had been part of an antifascist tradition, the narrow mastery of the past achieved by the CDU/CSU in the early 1950s was inadequate. The Adenauer consensus on the Jewish Question was not overturned. But the fifteen-year public evasion of Nazism was terminated, and historical efforts to confront Nazism were restored to the national (and educational) curriculum. In February 1959, Adenauer himself spoke of the need “to devote particular attention to historical education about the recent past,” and, in response to the widely perceived “educational emergency” German school authorities attempted

33. Hans-Peter Schwarz, *Die Era Adenauer 1957-1963* (Stuttgart: DVA, 1983) 210.

34. Hillgruber, 70, 71.

to eradicate the scourge of “historical illiteracy.”³⁵ The question of guilt was superseded by the discourse of repression. If reparations substituted policy for pedagogy, the *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* turned pedagogy into national policy.³⁶

The cultural mastering of the past which took place after 1959 was also accompanied by a juridical dimension which began when West Germany empowered a Ludwigsburg agency (*Zentrale Stelle der Landesjustizverwaltungen zur Verfolgung national-sozialistischer Gewaltverbrechen*) to prosecute Nazi “crimes of violence.” (Though the Ludwigsburg center was set up in 1958, the Eichmann trial in 1961 was the real impetus.) By the time of the Auschwitz trials in the mid-1960s, the juridical process served a double purpose. It demonstrated the government’s resolve — in the face of strong opposition from the “grace lobby” in Parliament — to prosecute the most serious Nazi offenders. At the same time, however, it further narrowed the definition of criminal acts to those committed against Jews and certain other victims (most recently, the euthanasia victims), but still largely excluded all political victims, Gypsies and homosexuals. The juridical process paralleled the reparations precedent in confirming the distinction between the Holocaust and other (apparently lesser) Nazi crimes, a distinction affirmed on the Israeli side by the Eichmann trial which prosecuted him solely for “crimes against the Jews.” Much of the public debate in the 1960s concerned the statute of limitations (*Verjährung*) on Nazi crimes which was scheduled to expire in 1960, but was extended (only for first degree murder), first to 1965, and subsequently to 1979, when the statute itself was finally abolished.³⁷ The

35. Konrad Schilling, “Beitrag zur Behandlung von Judentum und Antisemitismus im Oberstufenunterricht,” *Geschichte in Wissenschaft und Unterricht* 11. (1960): 135. Occasionally the language of the past pokes through even when its very opposite was intended, as when Erich Lüth wrote of how some knowledge on the part of the “young primitives” who desecrated the cemeteries “might have immunized them against the bacillus of anti-Semitism and made them unfit to carry the anti-Semitic infection.” Erich Lüth “Anti-Semitism,” in *The Politics of Postwar Germany*, ed. Walter Stahl (New York: Praeger, 1963) 194.

36. A study of the impact of the anti-Semitic vandalism on public opinion conducted by the Institute for Social Research in Frankfurt confirmed that anti-Semitism and indifference accounted for a high proportion of public opinion (16% openly anti-Semitic; 41% indifferent). See Peter Schönbach, “Reaktionen auf die antisemitische Welle im Winter 1959/60,” *Frankfurter Beiträge zur Soziologie* (Frankfurt am Main: Europäische Verlagsanstalt, 1961).

37. Hirsch, “Verjährungsdebatten” 40-50. Significantly, Karl Jaspers’ campaign — documented in his *Wohin treibt die Bundesrepublik?* — in the mid-1960s for a distinction, not recognized by German jurisprudence between “ordinary” murder and crimes

narrow definition of Nazi crimes in the courts further accentuated the detachment of the crime against the Jews from the general complex of Nazism in the 1960s.

When, in 1959, T. W. Adorno published his famous essay, "Was bedeutet: Aufarbeitung der Vergangenheit?" ("What Does Coming to Terms with the Past Mean?," first given as a lecture to the *Gesellschaft für christlich-jüdische Zusammenarbeit*), he articulated a principle that motivated much of what was said in the decade to follow: "I consider the persistence of National Socialism *in* democracy as potentially more threatening than the persistence of fascist tendencies *against* democracy."³⁸ The relation of the past to the present in Germany is marked by pathological evasions, euphemisms, by "a loss of history." "The eradication of memory" was a defense against "the superior power of unconscious processes." For Adorno, the broad popularity of the Nazi regime was rooted in a "national vanity beyond measure" the "collective narcissism" of the masses, while its false "working through" was an "empty and cold forgetting." The past, Adorno concludes, can only be mastered when "its causes in the present are overcome."

The great evasion of the postwar years revealed a deep psychic debility, the inability to work through or "master" the past, a pathological time-bomb, which Alexander and Margarete Mitscherlich later diagnosed in *The Inability to Mourn* as a latent explosive potential for irrational behavior.³⁹ Denial and "flight from memory" characterized one aspect of the syndrome of repression, while social and behavioral continuities with an illiberal past marked the other aspect. Above all, the social-psychological potential hidden in an authoritarian character structure, the latent persistence of anti-Semitism and antidemocratic attitudes — these are, in Adorno's often quoted *summae*, the tropes of the new democratic and antifascist consensus that emerged in the late 1950s and early 1960s.

To be sure, none of this seriously challenged the Adenauer consensus

against humanity, was unsuccessful, a testimony to the popularity (revealed by the polls) of a statute of limitations on *all* wartime crimes. See Karl Jaspers, "Für Völkermord gibt es keine Verjährung: Gespräch mit Rudolf Augstein (1965)," Karl Jaspers, *Provokationen: Gespräche und Interviews*, ed. Hans Saner (Munich: Piper, 1969) 122-146.

38. Theodor W. Adorno, "Was bedeutet: Aufarbeitung der Vergangenheit," in *Erziehung zur Mündigkeit*, ed. Gerd Kadelbach (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1972) 10-28. An English translation appears as "What Does Coming to Terms with the Past Mean?" in *Bitburg in Moral and Political Perspective*, ed. Geoffrey Hartman (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986) 114-129.

39. Alexander and Margarete Mitscherlich, *The Inability to Mourn: Principles of Collective Behavior*, trans. Beverley R. Placzek (New York: Grove Press, 1975) xvii.

on the subject of the personal histories of former Nazis in government service, nor did it attempt to reintroduce the issue of denazification. The object of this critique was the repression of the first decade and a half, a “capitulation before history.”⁴⁰ The model of a psychoanalytic “overcoming” of a historically situated repression distinguishes the new antifascist discourse of the 1960s from the moral and judicial preoccupations with “guilt” in the late 1940s and early 1950s. The repression is double: on the one side, the repression of the antifascist tradition and the Nazi question, on the other, the persistence of deep structures of psychological identification with authority, resentment towards the Jews, or a regressive subservience to outmoded national ideals.

The renewal of the antifascist discourse in the early 1960s shifted the emphasis to the subjective elements of the Nazi past which resonated in the present — anti-Semitism, authoritarianism and (to a far lesser extent) nationalism. In marked contrast to the narrow juridical emphasis on the criminal side of Nazism, the new *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* highlighted its more quotidian aspects.

If the reparations issue placed guilt in German hands, so to speak, the new antifascist discourse internationalized it. Writing in 1957, the historian Martin Broszat pointed to this aspect of the discussion when he noted, “National Socialism cannot be understood solely as a consequence of German history.”⁴¹ A 1963 colloquium on the problem of education and the Nazi past under the title “Autoritarismus und Nationalismus: Ein deutsches Problem?,” for example, carried the subtitle “*Der Hitler in uns*” and saw authoritarianism and nationalism as “two particularly easy to observe symptoms” which in “milder form, have a tendency to resonate in Germany.”⁴² This emphasis on the continuities with the past often overemphasized universal characteristics present in, but hardly specific to, Nazism (including anti-Semitism) at the expense of the uniquely radical elements of Nazism. Most of the contributors to the symposium, with the exception of the historian K. D. Bracher, failed to distinguish between Nazi authoritarianism and authoritarianism *tout court*. Horkheimer, for example, oversimplified

40. Hermann Heimpel, *Kapitulation vor der Geschichte* (Göttingen: 1956).

41. Martin Broszat, “Aufgaben und Probleme zeitgeschichtlichen Unterrichts,” *Nach Hitler: Der schwierige Umgang mit unserer Geschichte*, ed. Hermann Graml and Klaus-Dietmar Henke (Munich: Oldenbourg, 1986) 16.

42. *Autoritarismus und Nationalismus — Ein deutsches Problem? Bericht über eine Tagung veranstaltet vom Institut für staatsbürgerliche Bildung Rheinland-Pfalz*, Politische Psychologie 2 (Frankfurt am Main: Europäische Verlagsanstalt, 1963) 11.

the thesis of Hellmuth Plessner's *Die verspätete Nation*, claiming that National Socialism, "did a series of things, which were done earlier in other countries and only because they occurred too late [in Germany], were they bound up with so much awfulness."⁴³ Horkheimer argued that recognizing the psychological and social affinities between pre- and post-Nazi realities would expose the hypocrisy of "indignant talk of demonic forces which secretly serves as apology: that which has irrational origins is removed from rational penetration, and is magically turned into something that simply has to be taken for granted."⁴⁴ Rejecting the "metaphysical guilt" of the 1950s existentialists was meant to remove Nazism from the sphere of impenetrability, but at the risk of domesticating it and minimizing its horror.

The core of postwar critical theory was a therapeutic model of historical discourse — it was both enlightenment about the past to redeem the present, and enlightenment about the present to redeem the past. As early as 1960, the historian Hans Tietgens questioned the consequences of directly linking historical memory to a psychoanalytic model of repression and cure, "history as panacea, as *medicina mentis*."⁴⁵ Even though this course appears necessary as a reaction to the repression of the preceding decade and a half and contributed to a remarkable change in the intellectual makeup of entire generation, its overarching image of Nazism did not adequately establish those aspects of Nazism which were *not* present in the present. If "barbarism," as Adorno wrote in his "Erziehung nach Auschwitz" (1966), "persists as long as the conditions which produce that regression also persist to a significant degree," how can we distinguish between barbarism and the persistence of its possibility?⁴⁶

Adorno always insisted that the categorical imperative of contemporary civilization is to prevent the recurrence of Auschwitz. But the therapeutic model of redeeming the past by transforming the present constituted a symbolic displacement of the past *into* the present. Ultimately (and it would be a gross exaggeration to blame Adorno for this) the

43. *Autoritarismus und Nationalismus* 64. Significantly, Adorno's unpublished contribution to the conference was a reprise of *The Authoritarian Personality*.

44. Max Horkheimer, *Vorträge und Aufzeichnungen 1949-1973, Gesammelte Schriften* 8, (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer, 1985) 127.

45. Hans Tietgens, "Unbewältigte Vergangenheit — Auseinandersetzung mit der Zeitgeschichte als Aufgabe der Erwachsenenbildung," *Kulturarbeit* 4 (1958): 73-76; Hans Wenke, "'Bewältigte Vergangenheit' und 'Aufgearbeitete Geschichte' — zwei Schlagworte, kritisch beleuchtet," *Geschichte in Wissenschaft und Unterricht* 11 (1960): 66-70.

46. Theodor W. Adorno, "Erziehung nach Auschwitz," *Erziehung zur Mündigkeit* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1972) 88.

struggle against contemporary “fascisms,” e.g., in the Federal Republic, Greece, Mozambique or Israel, became a surrogate for the missing antifascism of the postwar generation. Along with the distinction between past and present, those between the personal and the political, the psychological and the historical also became blurred. In the dark night of the Freudian-Marxist critique, all fascists are black.

The New Left: Belated Antifascism

The German New Left, with its characteristic anti-authoritarianism, obsessive focus on pedagogy, and alienation from parents made the “theory of fascism” part of the cultural style of a generation. A psychoanalytically informed antifascism, in contrast to the state ideology of orthodox Marxism in the East, challenged the moralizing attitudes of the Adenauer era, characterized in an influential book by Wolfgang Fritz Haug as “helpless antifascism.”⁴⁷ The antiauthoritarian movement accomplished a sustained demolition of the postwar Federal Republic’s deeply embedded conservatism (as well as a kind of cultural integration with the West). But the antifascism of the 1960s also further extended the dissociation of the Nazi Question and the Jewish Question constructed by the Adenauer consensus. The antifascism of the 1960s displaced the Jewish Question by a largely unconscious strategy of marginalization:

- 1) by emphasizing the “repression” of those elements of fascism *not* included in the “singularity” postulate: especially anti-communism, antiliberalism and authoritarianism;
- 2) by emphasizing the continuities of the authoritarian personality in the pre- and postfascist epoch;
- 3) by emphasizing the elements of continuity between the structures of fascism and contemporary capitalism;
- 4) by establishing a historically valid lineage for the New Left with the overwhelmingly Jewish antifascist (and non-Stalinist) intellectuals of the 1920s and 1930s, a kind of *ersatz* genealogy to a generation of resistance;
- 5) by reducing fascism to a set of universal characteristics, and by subsuming anti-Semitism under a variety of possible ideological prejudices, e.g. racism, anticommunism etc.

47. Wolfgang Fritz Haug, *Der hilflose Antifaschismus: Zur Kritik der Vorlesungsreihen über Wissenschaft und NS an deutschen Universitäten* (Frankfurt am Main, 1967) Reprinted in W. F. Haug, *Vom hilflosen Antifaschismus zur Gnade der späten Geburt* (Berlin: Argument, 1987).

Rudi Dutschke articulated the fundamental principle of this complex when he wrote that the “character basis of fascism was not overcome by the external defeat of fascism in Germany, but was transformed, essentially unbroken, into anticommunism.”⁴⁸

Until the 1967 Arab-Israeli war, the '68 generation was largely sympathetic to Israel, and, in their rejection of the blackout of history that was the underside of the official *Wiedergutmachung*, shared the Frankfurt School's view of Auschwitz as emblematic of the horrors of Nazism. Not long after the Six Day War, the situation was reversed: German conservatives, previously cool towards Israel, warmed to recent military successes, and old enthusiasms were reignited by the new “desert fox,” Dayan. The left did a *volte-face*, identifying with the Palestinians and viewing the state of Israel as the consequence, not of Nazi genocide, but of “the political economy of imperialism.”⁴⁹ For the German New Left in the 1970s, racism and fascism were omnipresent, Nazism and anti-Semitism anachronistic and historically obsolete forms of these universal evils. The tragic theater of the 1977 Deutsche Herbst with its hypernervous state apparatus and its ascetic and self-denying radical martyrs was an all too real enactment of the “missing” antifascist moment in the culture of postwar Germany (also evident in Italy and Japan). The macabre dance of death in the early 1970s was not a consequence of any “new fascism,” but of the illusions of a postfascism which played itself out “behind the backs” of the protagonists. The identification of the West German Left with the Palestinian cause was motivated less by authentic solidarity with the oppressed than by the “giant exculpation” derived from a symbolic displacement of blame onto the victims.⁵⁰ This tragic course reached its apotheosis in the absorption of the West German RAF in the machinery of Arab terrorism and the infamous “selection” of Jewish passengers in the airplane hijacking at Entebbe in 1976.

48. Uwe Bergmann, Rudi Dutschke, Wolfgang Lefèvre, Bernd Rabehl, *Rebellion der Studenten oder die neue Opposition* (Reinbek bei Hamburg: Rowohlt, 1968) 58.

49. See for example Horst Stemmler, Walmot Falkenberg, “Der Konflikt im Nahen Osten,” *Neue Kritik* 42/43 (August, 1967): 68. A notable exception is the remarkable “Joint Declaration by 20 Representatives of the German Left, Concerning the Middle East Conflict,” (1967) drafted by Ernst Erdös and Michael Landmann, and signed by Ernst Bloch, Iring Fetscher, Helmut Gollwitzer, Walter Jens, Alexander Mitscherlich, Uwe Johnson, Martin Walser, Günter Grass, Ludwig von Friedeburg and others.

50. See Susann Heenen, “Deutsche Linke — Linke Juden und der Zionismus,” *Die Verlängerung der Geschichte: Deutsche, Juden und der Palästina-Konflikt*, ed. Dietrich Wetzell (Frankfurt am Main: Verlag neue Kritik, 1983) 109.

Totalitarianism vs. Fascism

To sum up, by the 1970s the divided legacy of 1945 had created an extraordinary situation. On the one side, there was an official policy of Jewish reparations and prosecuting crimes against the Jews as a sign of the anti-Nazi consensus of the postwar era. On the other, a belated antifascism emphasized the failures of the postwar state to confront both past and present manifestations of "fascism." This divided legacy of German post-Nazi history was reflected in the explosion of research and scholarship that emerged after the crucial turning point of 1958/59.⁵¹ The intense conflicts over the problem of fascism versus totalitarianism "divided the spirits" over the Nazi past in the 1960s. The proponents of totalitarianism theory were the quasi-official guardians of the cultural imperatives of the Cold War — an interpretation officially mandated by the German *Länder* for educating students "in the characteristics of totalitarianism and the chief aspects of Bolshevism and National Socialism."⁵² The theorists of fascism, on the other hand, with few exceptions (notably the Heideggerian Nolte) were concerned with demonstrating the "contingent relations between fascism and capitalism"; the class basis of fascist systems of power, and the "primacy of politics," e.g., the temporarily detached [*verselbständigt*] character of the dictatorship within the overall structure of "bourgeois hegemony."⁵³ The theorists of totalitarianism saw in the concept of "fascism" an "attempt to completely repress the anticommunist critique of dictatorship through antifascist argumentation"; the theorists of fascism saw in "totalitarianism" a category of "comparative techniques of power," which "unified the new with the one-time, but at this stage, politically and globally extinct, enemy."⁵⁴ Ironically, in both versions the present (totalitarianism/communism — fascism/authoritarianism) was encapsulated in the past, and in both versions the Nazi past was "relativized" by comparison to a contemporary political reality.⁵⁵

By the mid-1970s, there was a good deal of dissatisfaction with the

51. On the early confrontation with Nazis see Jean-Paul Bier, "The Holocaust, West Germany, and Strategies of Oblivion, 1947-1979," in *Germans and Jews Since the Holocaust* 191.

52. On this point see Pierre Ayçoberry, *The Nazi Question: An Essay on the Interpretations of National Socialism*, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Pantheon, 1981) 137.

53. For a survey of this approach see Anson Rabinbach, "Towards a Marxist Theory of Fascism: A Report on Developments in West Germany," *New German Critique* 3 (1974): 127-154.

54. Cited in Eike Hennig, *Bürgerliche Gesellschaft und Faschismus in Deutschland: Ein Forschungsbericht* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1977) 56-59.

fascism/totalitarianism controversy even on the part its protagonists. The dispute dissipated into a more genteel debate on historical method: the problem of elites versus structures (intentionalists vs. functionalists), or the “history of everyday life” versus more social scientific, quantitative history. By the 1980s at least a *modus vivendi* among historians in West Germany seemed to be emerging: traditionalists pursued more orthodox themes, e.g. political history, diplomatic history with conventional methods, while more liberal social historians pursued newer directions, e.g. women’s history, labor history, regional history with more innovative methods. Yet as the *Historikerstreit* demonstrated, this division of labor also revealed serious elisions on both sides.

The emphasis on the *singularity* of the Nazi regime and its destructiveness became increasingly significant for the traditionalists, while, for social historians, the blander, more quotidian and private aspects of life in the Nazi era became more salient.⁵⁶ The “everyday” historians saw the problem of resistance not in terms of isolated acts of public opposition, as did historians in the 1950s, but as a continuum of behaviors which ranged from private griping to sabotaging the economic and military efforts of the regime.⁵⁷ If for the traditionalists the events that followed mirrored Hitler’s view of the world, the social historians saw Nazism through the mirror of those who experienced it as participants, each with their respective distortions. This set the stage for a decisive confrontation between these two competing “historical pictures”: Hitler and his personal rule without the social dimension of Nazism; the social history of the Third Reich in which Hitler and his policies play only a peripheral role. That a major historical debate erupted at precisely the moment this bifurcated vision of the past reached a crisis point is no coincidence.

The Jewish Question in German Politics in the 1980s

A new orientation toward the “Jewish Question” in the German politics of the 1980s began, not with the Kohl government’s “*Wende*”

55. Both conceptions are largely indifferent to the victims of the “annihilatory impulses” of the regimes in question. Saul Friedländer, “Nazism: Fascism or Totalitarianism?” in *The Rise of the Nazi Regime: Historical Reassessments*, ed. Charles S. Maier, Stanley Hoffmann, and Andrew Gould (Boulder: Westview, 1986) 25-34.

56. See for example, Martin Broszat, “Alltagsgeschichte der NS- Zeit,” in *Nach Hitler* 131-139.

57. For an extended discussion see Mary Nolan, “The *Historikerstreit* and Social History” in this issue. Also see Martin Broszat, “Widerstand: Der Bedeutungswandel eines Begriffs der Zeitgeschichte,” *Süddeutsche Zeitung* 22/23 November 1986: 7.

of 1982/3, but with that of Helmut Schmidt in 1980. The government of Schmidt and Hans-Dietrich Genscher was the first to abandon the symbolism of guilt in its dealings with Israel and to pursue a policy of “normalization” in the Middle East. According to Michael Wolffsohn, Schmidt’s confrontation with Menachem Begin over arms sales to Saudi Arabia in May 1981 more a matter of style than substance — but it was the first real break with the symbolism of the Adenauer (and Brandt) eras.⁵⁸ It was Helmut Schmidt, not Helmut Kohl, who, on a return flight from Israel in April 1981, said that “German foreign policy can and will no longer be overshadowed by Auschwitz.”⁵⁹

The Schmidt government’s acceptance of the 1979 NATO “double decision” to station Cruise and Pershing missiles in Europe, rallied large parts of the German left and the peace movement around the antimissile campaign, strengthening neutralist overtones, especially among the Greens (although the actual demand for immediate withdrawal from NATO did not occur until May 20, 1986). The peace movement created a deep anxiety among many European conservatives (and some liberals as well, especially in France) about the emergence of a “Rapallo Complex” — the nightmare of a neutralist, nationalist, pacifist and *mitteleuropäisches* Germany untethered from the West and “wandering between two European worlds.”⁶⁰ Although it is not true that the German peace movement was a movement for national reunification by other means, as some critics have argued, it contributed to a renewal of “middle-European thought” at all points on the German political spectrum, from Peter Glotz in the SPD to the neonationalist right.⁶¹ The Greens are above all a generational phenomenon, offering a new West German cultural identity unencumbered by the past, and an affront to the political style of the old governing elites. Significantly, the Greens have also been highly ambivalent on the Jewish issue: the “embarrassments” of the 1985 Green Israel trip and the anti-Peres demonstrations, both characterized by “negative cliché-thinking,”

58. Wolffsohn, 42.

59. Wolffsohn, 42.

60. For a detailed examination of all aspects of this problem see *New German Critique* 37 (Winter, 1986), “Special Issue on the German Question,” especially Sigrid Meuschel, “On the Eruption of the German Volcano,” 127-135.

61. Peter Glotz, “Ein Instrument der Entspannung,” *Rheinischer Merkur/ Christ und Welt* 45 (31 October, 1986): 3; Karl Schlögel, *Die Mitte liegt ostwärts: Die Deutschen, der verlorene Osten und Mitteleuropa* (Berlin: Siedler, 1986) and Hans-Georg Betz, “‘Deutschlandpolitik’ on the Margins: On the Evolution of Contemporary New Right Nationalism in the Federal Republic” in this issue.

contrast sharply with Joschka Fischer's generally excellent *Zeit* articles and speeches and the Green parliamentary proposal for a national survey of anti-Semitism in 1986.⁶² Nevertheless, in light of the Fassbinder affair and the "lack of inhibition" evident in a number of periodicals on the "alternative scene," it was the West German left that first expressed a new attitude towards the "Jewish Question" in the mid 1980s.⁶³

Normalization über Alles

The Bitburg affair linked the Jewish Question to the German Question as intensely as only the Adenauer reparations treaty had done before in the history of the Federal Republic of Germany — with reversed symbolism. The reparations treaty placed the Jewish Question *above* the German Question insofar as it singled out the uniqueness of the Holocaust as opposed to all other crimes and insofar as it declared it to be apart from all other aspects of Nazism. Thus, it became part of the collective conscience of the Federal Republic. The Bitburg wreath — despite, and perhaps even more intensely, because of the last-minute Belsen visit (interpreted as a mere concession to American Jews) — demonstrated that the Kohl government was the first to abandon the *singularity* postulate and to publicly relativize the Holocaust in relation to all other suffering inflicted by "the war." At Bitburg, the German Question (the NATO partnership) was placed *above* the Jewish Question. It was now world Jewry that persisted in "memorializing" the Holocaust, when three-fourths of all Germans favored the visit. Germans were reacting against their "victimization" by the Jewish monopoly on the moral capital of suffering which held the present hostage to the past. The Greens, to their credit, were the only party in Parliament to oppose the visit, a reversal of their previous ambivalence towards this aspect of Nazism.

The triumph of the Kohl government consisted not only in forcing

62. On the Greens and the Jewish issue, see Andrei S. Markovits, "Was ist das 'Deutsche' an den Grünen? Vergangenheitsaufarbeitung als Voraussetzung politischer Zukunftsbewältigung," *Die Grünen: letzte Wahl?* ed. Otto Kallscheuer (Berlin: Rotbuch, 1986) 146-164; Joschka Fischer, "Wir Kinder der Kapitulanten," *Die Zeit*, 10 May 1985; "Grosse Anfrage des Abgeordneten Ströbele und der Fraktion Die Grünen zum Antisemitismus in der BRD," 27 February 1986, Drucksache 10/5551; and the commentary by Klaus Hartung in the *Tageszeitung*, 28 February, 1986, which criticized the Greens for their "saturated anti-anti-Semitism and routinized concern."

63. On the Fassbinder Controversy see *Die Fassbinder-Kontroverse, oder das Ende der Schonzeit*, ed. Heiner Lichtenstein (Königstein, Athenäum, 1986); Special Issue on the German-Jewish Controversy, *New German Critique* 38 (Spring/Summer 1986); and on the German left and the Jews, Jessica Benjamin and Anson Rabinbach, "Germans, Leftists, Jews," *New German Critique* 31 (Winter, 1984): 183-195.

an American president into an embarrassing choice between an ally and a (largely Democratic) American constituency, but in further isolating and *Judaizing* the memory of the Holocaust. If this symbolism was not clear at the time, the Chancellor reemphasized it a few days later when he said that reconciliation "is achieved when we are able to mourn for human beings, independent of whatever nationality the murdered, the fallen, the dead once belonged."⁶⁴ If the postwar world inverted "victims" and "perpetrators," subordinating the guilt of Germans to the power of the Jews over atonement and sovereignty, the only solution, he proposed, was full equality for both.

The road to Bitburg was paved with a series of calculated fiascos, carefully planned situations in which the German Chancellor proved his identification with German public opinion by getting attacked in the liberal and international press. During his 1984 visit to Israel, for example, Kohl astonished Israelis with a plethora of well placed *faux pas*, which the *FAZ* described alternatively as "disgraces," "blunders" and "embarrassments."⁶⁵ Speaking with pride of his "grace of belated birth" (*die Gnade der späten Geburt*), he asserted the independence of his generation from the moral obligations of previous German generations toward Israel. The second prelude to Bitburg was Kohl's summer 1985 appearance (he was the first German Chancellor to do so) at a convention of *Heimatvertriebene*, a group of ultraconservative exiles from Silesia, where he spoke under a "revanchist" banner proclaiming "Silesia Remains Ours." With these more spectacular events, the wider CDU/CSU campaign to reassert traditional "typical German virtues" was personified by the Parliamentary Chairman Alfred Dregger's 1984 speech which condemned the Nazis for undermining the "spiritual substance" of the German nation and creating "a trauma of self-evaluation" through their "revolutionary attitudes."⁶⁶ The reopening of the "German Question" on the left created new anxieties about a neutralist Germany governed by a left coalition hostile to the U.S. and produced a strong sentiment in CDU/CSU government circles that the moment was opportune for their own public ritual. Combined with fears of a party to the "right of the CDU," as occurred with the emergence of the populist Bavarian *Die Republikaner*, the

64. Cited in Carl-Christian Kaiser, "Für den Schaden ist gesorgt," *Die Zeit*, Nr. 19 10 May, 1985: 4.

65. Y. Michal Bodemann, "Die 'Überwölbung' von Auschwitz: Der jüdische Faktor in der Mythologie der Wende-Republik," *Ästhetik und Kommunikation: Beiträge zur politischen Erziehung* 56 (1984): 45.

66. Bodemann, "Die 'Überwölbung' von Auschwitz," 44.

Jewish Question once again provided a convenient occasion for a re-assertion of West German sovereignty.⁶⁷

For Kohl's loyalty to Reagan in the missile debate, and for signing on to SDI, the Chancellor requested and received Reagan's support for the visit to a military cemetery at Bitburg where there were 49 Waffen SS graves (it is still unclear whether Kohl knew of them at the time). At a political level, the visit was a *quid pro quo*. At a symbolic level, the Bitburg visit was intended to demonstrate the end of the German guilt requirement, and at the same time (perhaps less intentionally), to contribute to the "Napoleonization of the Wehrmacht" — the myth of a positive, anti-Soviet German military effort on the Eastern front. As Dregger highlighted in his letter to the Congressional opponents of the visit, "he had defended the . . . town of Marklissa in Silesia against attacks by the Red Army" and his brother, a "decent young man" had died on the Eastern front in 1944.⁶⁸ Peter Glotz, SPD General Secretary, summed up Dregger's [and Kohl's] intentions when he wrote: "Your letter is infused by the idea that the Americans would do well to forget the past, because we are now allies and support the policies of the present American administration. That idea is morally corrupt."⁶⁹ An important ideological pillar of the German right for decades, the last phase of the German defeat (the defense against red barbarism) was incorporated *ex post facto* into the first phase of the Cold War.

For the Reagan administration, the Bitburg visit was a public relations debacle ("he who lives by the photo opportunity, dies by the photo opportunity").⁷⁰ For the Kohl government, the real meaning of the event was expressed by President Reagan, not at the graveside ceremonies, but some weeks earlier on April 18, 1985 when he said that those buried there were no less "victims of Nazism, even though they were fighting in the German uniform. . . ."⁷¹ This is exactly what Mr. Dregger embellished several months later, when he delivered his even more important parliamentary speech on behalf of a national holiday for "victims" of the Third Reich, which in its idiom (*Volks-trauertag*) recalled the era it wanted to forget. Bitburg was a return to

67. See Betz in this issue.

68. Cited in *Bitburg and Beyond: Encounters in American, German and Jewish History*, ed. Ilya Levkov (New York: Shapolsky, 1987) 95.

69. *Bitburg and Beyond*, 104.

70. Witticism attributed to Fred Siegel.

71. *Bitburg and Beyond*, 39.

what Raul Hilberg called “a nebulous collective innocence.”⁷²

Less than a week after Bitburg, the 8th of May, President Richard von Weizsäcker delivered his now famous speech to the German Parliament, a speech widely praised for its refusal of any gesture of normalization: “Whoever closes their eyes to the past, will be blind to the present.”⁷³ It was not only the far right but the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* that was “uncomfortable” with the frequent unflattering contrasts between Kohl’s and von Weizsäcker’s performance. As *Die Zeit* pointed out, von Weizsäcker’s view of history was closer to Willy Brandt’s in its emphasis on the connection between “May 8, 1945 and January 30, 1933” than to Kohl’s condemnation of “the dictator.”⁷⁴ Given Bitburg’s highly charged public reversal of the reparations postulate, it is not at all remarkable that precisely these issues were raised in the “*Historikerstreit*”: 1) the German “desire” for normality and equal partnership in the Western alliance vs. the “abnormality” of German history and limited sovereignty; 2) the place of the singularity of the Holocaust in German, and in global history; 3) the distinction between “victims and executioners,” between “*schlußstrich* and remembrance.” As Hans Mommsen noted, the government was on the right course “to open the Pandora’s box and provide a free space for apparently obsolete nationalist strivings, without being in the position of being able to control the spirits that it evoked.”⁷⁵

The Historikerstreit

The extraordinary controversy which erupted in the summer/autumn of 1986 was the first atmospheric test of the fallout from Bitburg. Unlike scholarly debates which sometimes rise to the level of public scrutiny, this one originated in, and was conducted between, two of Germany’s major newspapers, the conservative *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, and the liberal Hamburg weekly *Die Zeit*. Eventually, hardly any German periodical with serious pretensions failed to comment on

72. Raul Hilberg, “Bitburg as Symbol,” *Bitburg in Moral and Political Perspective*, 19.

73. *Eine Rede und ihre Wirkung: Die Rede des Bundespräsidenten Richard von Weizsäcker vom 8. Mai 1985*, ed. Ulrich Gill and Winfried Steffani (Berlin: Verlag Rainer Röhl, 1986) 180. Less frequently acknowledged is the negative reaction to the speech within CDU/CSU circles, especially among the rightist organizations of *Heimatvertriebene* who interpreted the speech as a public declaration of disinterest in their “legal rights” in the East. Herbert Czaja, “Recht auf die Heimat — für alle? Kritische Fragen zur Rede — ein Jahr danach,” *Eine Rede und ihre Wirkung* 94.

74. Gunter Hofmann, “Der Präses und der Populist,” *Die Zeit*, 31 May 1985: 3.

75. Cited in Hofmann, “Der Präses und der Populist” 3.

it, and most major West German intellectuals weighed in on one side or the other. No historical controversy in the entire postwar period — including the famous debate on Germany's role in the First World War in the 1960s — produced such ferocious polemics. Nolte's public musings on how "the so-called annihilation of the Jews during the Third Reich was a reaction or a distorted copy and not a first act or an original" became a scandal because they brought to public discourse what had previously been beer hall fare and sanctioned these views in one of Germany's leading newspapers. Nolte himself acknowledged that he had bridged the gap between the German "*pays légal*" and the "*pays réel*." To make matters even clearer, the argument was taken up and extended by one of the *FAZ*'s leading editors, and Hitler biographer, Joachim Fest.

The course of events is by now familiar. The *Historikerstreit* was provoked by the appearance in the *FAZ* in June 1986 of Nolte's infamous article, where he wondered in print why "more than anything else it was the memory of the 'Final Solution' which contributed to that past which would not go away."⁷⁶ Nolte also wondered if there were not "interests" at play here, like those of the "persecuted and their descendants in a permanent status of select (*herausgehobenen*) and privileged existence." But the most "original" aspect of Nolte's by now well-known new "questions" about the past concerned the historical origins of the Nazi crime against the Jews:

Did not the National Socialists, did not Hitler perhaps commit an "Asiatic" deed only because they regarded themselves and those like them as potential or real victims of an "Asiatic" deed? Was not the Gulag Archipelago more original than Auschwitz? Was not the "class murder of the Bolsheviks the logical and factual *prius* of the "racial murder" of the National Socialists?

Nolte provided a more detailed version in an article entitled "Between Myth and Revisionism," which appeared in English in 1985.⁷⁷ There he traced the various "annihilation therapies" that led to the Holocaust from the French Revolution. But his main argument is that

76. Ernst Nolte, "Vergangenheit die nicht vergehen will," *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 6 June 1986.

77. Ernst Nolte, "Between Myth and Revisionism? The Third Reich in the Perspective of the 1980s," *Aspects of the Third Reich*, ed. H. W. Koch (New York/London: St. Martin's, 1985) 17-38.

Auschwitz is not primarily a result of traditional anti-Semitism. It was in its core not merely a 'genocide' but was above all a reaction born out of the anxiety of the annihilating occurrences of the Russian Revolution. . . . It was more horrifying than the original because the annihilation of men was conducted in a quasi-industrial manner.⁷⁸

Fest contended that Nolte never challenged the "singularity of the National Socialist annihilatory action," but he took up the cudgel against the singularity argument even more emphatically.⁷⁹ For Fest, the singularity argument rested on four claims: 1) that Hitler committed crimes against "guiltless" victims; 2) the abstract, mechanical, and administrative character of the crime against the Jews; 3) that the crime against the Jews occurred against the backdrop of a highly developed culture, and "a century long growing German-Jewish symbiosis;" 4) that Hitler's motives were radically different from the humanist aspirations that could be traced to the foundations of Communism, despite the sufferings and death which it produced. None of these, he claims, constitute "uniqueness": 1) what distinguishes a Nazi victim from a Communist victim is that in the one "a biological rather than a social being" is determined to be worthy of death; 2) Stalin's crimes were not realized in any less administrative fashion; the "shot in the nape of the neck" is not qualitatively different from gas; 3) the cultural argument "perpetuates the old Nazi distinction, according to which there are higher peoples and people at a more primitive level"; 4) there is little to be gained from distinguishing a "corrupt humanity" from a "rotten worldview." Fest concludes: "the thesis of singularity . . . stands on weak ground."

We cannot here examine all of Fest's claims in which truth, half-truth and nonsense congeal. Eberhard Jäckel provided an eloquent refutation, above all that it astonishingly excludes Hitler's often repeated desire to exterminate the Jews as "race" from the list.⁸⁰ "I maintain," he writes,

that the National Socialist murder of the Jews was unique because

78. Nolte, "Between Myth and Revisionism?" 36.

79. Joachim Fest, "Die geschuldete Erinnerung: Zur Kontroverse über die Unvergleichbarkeit der nationalsozialistischen Massenverbrechen," *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* 29 August 1986: 23.

80. Eberhard Jäckel, "Die elende Praxis der Untersteller: Das Einmalige der nationalsozialistischen Verbrechen," *Die Zeit*, 38 12 September 1986: 3.

never before did a state decide and proclaim with the authority of its responsible leader that a specific human group should be killed . . . and then translate this decision with all the possible means at the disposal of the state.

It should simply be said that in Fest's "generalized balance sheet," the obsessive desire to overthrow the singularity postulate with comparisons to Cambodia, Algeria, Vietnam and "millions of dead of this century" cannot but throw the limelight on the suspicion that, as Fest himself seems to admit, "this is nothing but an effort to derive exoneration for oneself from crimes everywhere in the world."⁸¹ The point, however, is not that the "relativization" of the Holocaust pursued by Nolte and Fest should absolutely be refuted on scholarly grounds, but rather to understand what it proposes in terms of the legal and historical consensus established around the singularity postulate in post-war German politics. Nolte and Fest proposed, for the first time, a discursive strategy for reversing the reparations precept established in the Adenauer era, and this is why their efforts caused a public uproar.

Nolte's essay coincided with the publication of a small volume consisting of two essays by the Cologne historian Andreas Hillgruber, entitled *Two Kinds of Collapse: The Destruction of the German Reich and the End of European Jewry*.⁸² Hillgruber never explicitly relates the two essays, which deal with the collapse of the German Army on the Eastern front and with the 'Final Solution' in the East. Nevertheless, the effect of their juxtaposition is strikingly clear: the first essay laments the final days of the German army and the consequences of the Russian conquest as a German national "catastrophe," the second is a dry and ascetic account of the Nazi crime against the Jews in light of recent historical works on anti-Semitism.⁸³ Placed together, it is difficult to escape the conclusion which appears on the book jacket, "that the amputation of the Reich in favor of a greater Poland was a war aim of the allies long before Auschwitz." The destruction of the German Army, the terror unleashed by the Soviet Army, and the complicity of the allies in dismembering the eastern part of Germany are all tragic consequences of the blind anti-Prussianism of

81. Fest, "Die geschuldete Erinnerung" 23.

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

83. The second essay was an expanded version of his concluding remarks at the 1984 International Congress "Mord an den europäischen Juden im Zweiten Weltkrieg" in Stuttgart.

the allies, independent of Hitler's crimes.

Several weeks after Nolte's essay appeared, Jürgen Habermas reacted in *Die Zeit* under the title, "A Kind of Settlement of Damages."⁸⁴ In addition to Nolte and Hillgruber, Habermas charged two other historians, Klaus Hildebrand of Bonn, and Michael Stürmer of Erlangen, with "apologetic tendencies in German historical writing." Professional historiography, Habermas claimed (quoting Stürmer), was "driven forward by collective and largely unconscious desire for the provision of inner-worldly meaning." Hillgruber's book is an example of such an enterprise, especially insofar as he believes that the historian "must identify with the concrete fate of the German population in the east and with the desperate and costly struggle of the German eastern army and of the German navy. . . ." Nolte, however, as Habermas recognizes, "is made of different mettle than Hillgruber." Via a laudatory review by Hildebrand, who praised Nolte for removing the history of the Third Reich from its "seemingly unique character," Habermas discovered Nolte's earlier essay. There Nolte repeated one of the most scurrilous neo-Nazi propaganda clichés (first propounded in historical circles by David Irving), the alleged September 1939 "declaration of war" by Chaim Weizmann, then President of the Jewish Agency, calling for Jews to support Britain and the democracies, which according to Nolte, "might justify the consequential thesis that Hitler was allowed to treat the German Jews as prisoners of war and by this means intern them."⁸⁵ "In this context of terror," Habermas adds, "the destruction of the Jews appears then to be only the regrettable result of a nevertheless understandable reaction to that which Hitler must have perceived as a threat of destruction."⁸⁶ Habermas does not deny that there are good grounds for a historicizing distance. But what the new historical revisionism — along with the plans laid by the Kohl government for two new historical museums, a German Historical Museum in Berlin and a House of the History of the Federal Republic in Bonn — promises is "to *shake off* the debts of a successfully de-moralized past."

Much of the attention paid to the historical debate has been focused on Nolte's strategy of "relativization." Several critics, like the liberal historians Heinrich August Winkler and Jürgen Kocka have underscored

84. Jürgen Habermas, "Eine Art Schadensabwicklung," *Die Zeit* 29 11 July 1986 in this issue of *New German Critique*.

85. Nolte, "Between Myth and Revisionism?" 28.

86. Habermas, "Eine Art Schadensabwicklung."

this aspect of the debate, pointing out, as Kocka writes, that a comparative approach “should not repress the singularity of German development through comparison with Stalin and Pol Pot; it remains important, dangerous and shameful.”⁸⁷ At the same time, there has been considerably more sympathy for Hillgruber and Stürmer than for the “eccentric” Nolte and Fest.⁸⁸ As Winkler noted, despite Hillgruber’s “pronounced sympathies for the Prussian Junkers and the military,” he and Stürmer are “no relativizers à la Nolte, and don’t deserve to be thrown into the same pot with him.”⁸⁹

Given the particular symbolism of the singularity postulate in postwar German political discourse, the reversals enunciated by Fest and Nolte take on special significance. Moreover, if we include Stürmer’s appeal for a positive historical continuity in the construction of German identity and Hillgruber’s clever dissociation of the postwar fate of Germany from the crimes of National Socialism, the divergent strands in the conservative assault on previous attempts to find a postwar consensus is apparent. The *Historikerstreit* is a departure from *both* the meta-physical guilt and the antifascist discourses.

I would, however, take issue with Winkler’s conjecture that “the deeper reasons for the national apologetic wave” can be found in the “call for German reunification.” There is, of course, a distinction between the “identity creating” purposes of Stürmer and Hillgruber and the moral-political exonerations of Nolte and Fest. Hillgruber does not relativize the crime against the Jews, but changes its contextual meaning. The argument of *Two Kinds of Collapse* is directed against the West for its role in destroying the continental status of Germany as a nation; It is an appeal to consider the German claim to its eastern territories independent of Hitler’s crimes. The novelty in Hillgruber’s approach, and what few commentators on the debate have noticed, is that he is among the first to openly criticize the Western alliance for the fate of postwar Germany, and to restate the German Question in new terms. Hillgruber introduces the novel thesis that since the decision to divide Germany and “dismember” East Prussia was a Western capitulation to Stalin, and since

87. See Jürgen Kocka, “Hitler sollte nicht durch Stalin und Pol Pot verdrängt werden,” *Frankfurter Rundschau* 23 September 1986: 10, and Heinrich August Winkler, “Auf ewig in Hitlers Schatten: Zum Streit über das Geschichtsbild der Deutschen,” *Frankfurter Rundschau* 14 November, 1986: 20.

88. See for example, Gordon Craig, “The War of the German Historians,” *The New York Review of Books* 15 January 1987: 16-19.

89. Winkler, 20.

the terms of the allied defeat of Germany might only be justified as a response to the crimes against the Jews, postwar Germany is the victim of wartime power politics. After the myth of Yalta, the myth of Teheran.

Hillgruber argues that the division of Germany and its loss of global political status as a “failed world power” (*gescheiterte Grossmacht*) was a consequence of anti-Prussian (not expressly anti-Hitler) war aims of the allies. In World War II, the legitimate “core” of the desire for revision (of Germany’s eastern borders and its *Untertan* role in world affairs) in the Weimar Republic was perverted by the “Hitler Reich.”⁹⁰ The German catastrophe is the end of a “power politically fully sovereign great power German empire,” and the “unconscious retreat of the majority of Germans in the postwar years from their nation.”⁹¹ The “German Question,” in short, has to be separated from its subversion by Hitler. The defense of the nation is divorced from the catastrophic policies of the leader.

Conclusion

The German historical controversy has revealed two new strategies of mastering the past: one which relativizes and denies the singularity of the Holocaust by reducing it to a phenomenon of the “age of tyrants,” and a second, far more sophisticated strategy which places the burden of responsibility on Hitler, does not deny his crimes, but relegitimizes German “national identity” and the role of Germany as a continental Middle European power (Stürmer/Hillgruber). This distinction between the relativizers and the proponents of a new historical paradigm for German national identity also seems to conform to the divisions within the Kohl government. The more conservative elements of the CDU/CSU, Strauss, Dregger Co. have been absolutely “uninhibited” about removing Germany from “the shadow of Hitler and his crimes,” as Strauss put it.⁹² But, the neoconservative and modernizing thrust of the CDU/CSU is more concerned with marginalizing the right wing

90. Andreas Hillgruber, “Deutschland und die Deutschen — ‘Gescheiterte Grossmacht’ — gescheiterte Nation?” in *Die Last der Nation: Fünf Beiträge über Deutschland und die Deutschen* (Düsseldorf: Droste, 1984) 17.

91. A clue to Hillgruber’s attitude can be found in an earlier essay when he cites the “*finis Germaniae*” verdict of the World War I General Groener, and quotes revealingly: “Unconsciously we strove for world domination . . . before we secured our continental position.” Andreas Hillgruber, “Revisionismus” — Kontinuität und Wandel in der Außenpolitik der Weimarer Republik,” *Die Last der Nation*, 59.

92. *Der Spiegel* 5 January 1987: 25.

and thus offers, in the vein of Hillgruber and Stürmer, a new and “positive” image of German history which does not pretend to historicize the crimes of Hitler out of existence, but rather reasserts the continuities between the political “*kleindeutsch*” aims of Bismarck and the Middle European status of Germany as a world power, despite its subversion by Hitler’s “grasp for world domination.” Indeed, this view of German history is not concerned with the old dreams of reunification or reconquest, but rather with establishing, at least “in the realm of dreams,” as Heine put it, a revindication of the historical status of Germany as a European power, in the face of a realistic assessment of its contemporary political possibilities. As Hans Mommsen has pointed out, much of what has occurred in the recent debate on national identity has been part of an attempt to expand German economic, military sovereignty within the parameters of NATO.⁹³ In fact, one legacy of Bitburg is not necessarily a strengthening of conservative aspirations towards Middle Europe, but rather their abandonment, and the recognition that the chances for any reopening of the German Question are far brighter on the left than on the right. The CDU/CSU has had to abandon the claim to reunification without saying so, and, in this situation has chosen the return to the symbol of nationhood — national history — in the absence of its potential for realization. When Stürmer argues that “no people can in the long run live without historical identity,” it is this compensatory nationalism, and not a return to the old conservative motifs of the past, that is at stake.⁹⁴ The Jewish Question has once again emerged as the implacable object in the path of this newly constructed identity.

The *Historikerstreit* was, as Charles Maier put it, “a dispute over the controlling public discourse of the Federal Republic.”⁹⁵ It demonstrated the extent to which the writing of history in West Germany has been part of a broader cultural and political discourse on the past. The controversy has also brought about a number of important reversals. As Mary Nolan shows, one consequence has been to call into question some of the arguments of the “history of everyday life,” especially in its more “normalizing” aspects.⁹⁶ As Saul Friedländer and Dan Diner argued, the attempt of everyday life history to rehabilitate the German

93. Hans Mommsen, “Suche nach der ‘verlorenen Geschichte?’” *Merkur* September/Oktober, 1986: 865.

94. Michael Stürmer, “Was Geschichte Wiegt,” *FAZ* 26 November 1986: 1.

95. Charles Maier, “*Jenseits des Historikerstreits*: The Significance of the *Historikerstreit*,” in *German Politics and Society* 13 (February 1988): 5.

96. See Nolan, “The *Historikerstreit* and Social History.”

“private sphere” during the Third Reich created an “innerworldly” habitus which brackets out the larger world — and its crimes.⁹⁷ To the extent that younger, more liberal historians have emphasized the normality of daily existence, they have no doubt fuelled the claims of those, like Hillgruber, who insist that only the Nazi elite or Hitler personally should bear sole responsibility for Germany’s postwar fate. The *Historikerstreit* has frequently reversed conservative and liberal arguments: whereas in the past the left generally focused on the continuities of German elites and traditions, conservatives have now emphasized the continuities between pre-National Socialist and post-1945 German culture. The so-called “*Stunde Null*” of 1945 has migrated from right to left. Habermas, for example, reinterprets 1945 as a potentially positive moment of “release from a past centered on national history,” and in departure from the traditions of the German left of ’68, has argued for the positive ramifications of this caesura in German identity. Habermas’s explicit praise for the “unreserved opening of the Federal Republic to the political culture of the West” as “the great intellectual achievement of the postwar period,” is directed against the nebulous politics of “*Mitteleuropa*” which enjoyed a brief, but significant popularity on the left in the mid-1980s. His appeals to the moral dimension of politics as an antidote to nationalist nostalgia owe more to Arendt and Jaspers than to Marx and Horkheimer. In light of the prominent Greens Joschka Fischer and Otto Schily’s recent cautious turn toward the Western alliance, the *Historikerstreit* may signal a change on the left as well.

To judge by the chorus of negative responses to their joint venture, Nolte and Fest have suffered what might be described as a significant defeat.⁹⁸ The “vulgar relativization” they proposed has not become *salonfähig*. Politically, the Kohl government has taken a far less adventurous tack. For the time being, conservatives have retreated to a different arena for assertions of “normalcy.” As Manfred Wörner, the new German Secretary General of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization

97. See Saul Friedländer, “Überlegungen zur Historisierung des Nationalsozialismus,” *Ist der Nationalsozialismus Geschichte?: Zu Historisierung und Historikerstreit*, ed., Dan Diner (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer, 1987): 34-50; Dan Diner, “Zwischen Aporie und Apologie: Über die Grenzen der Historisierbarkeit des Nationalsozialismus,” *Ist der Nationalsozialismus Geschichte?* 62-73.

98. See Hans-Ulrich Wehler, *Entsorgung der deutschen Vergangenheit? Ein polemischer Essay zum “Historikerstreit”* (Munich: Beck, 1988). Nolte unrepentently defends himself in *Das Vergehen der Vergangenheit: Antwort an meine Kritiker im sogenannten Historikerstreit* (Berlin: Ullstein, 1987).

said of his ascension to the post, “it is my impression that from the outside this is regarded as a slice of normality. And it is important to us that it means that we are a normal nation like any other.”⁹⁹

However, the opening of public discourse to the arguments of the neonationalist right is not insignificant.¹⁰⁰ The creation of a national historical tradition in which Hitler and the crime against the Jews no longer occupies a prominent place cannot be discounted for the future. Whether Jürgen Habermas is right that Germans can be satisfied with a “post-conventional identity,” or whether, as Wehler argues, the vast majority is less than preoccupied with questions of identity, cannot be decided with any certainty.

The *Historikerstreit* has demonstrated that the “Jewish Question” will not easily disappear from the landscape of West German politics. It underscores a central fact of the postwar history of the Federal Republic of Germany: every expansion of German political sovereignty has been accompanied — at least subjectively — by a debate about the “Jewish Question.” The linkage between Hitler’s crimes and German sovereignty continues to be paramount in the cultural construction of German identity. Since 1945, the German Question and the Jewish Question have been inseparable.

99. James Markham, “The New NATO: A Pronounced German Accent,” *The New York Times* 1 August 1988: A4.

100. See Betz.