Germans should finally break the silence and lay claim to their own suffering, something they have done all along. In modern societies, calling something a taboo does not end a conversation but on the contrary introduces issues into the public debate in a sensationalist way. Sebald's claim also implies that there is something fundamentally wrong with German war memories. Yet, we argue that there is considerable controversy, incoherence and awkwardness, but nothing pathological or repressed about the way in which most Germans remember and commemorate the devastation of their cities and the death of civilians during the war.

In developing our argument, we not only agree with but wish to bolster Jeffrey Alexander's and Ron Eyerman's point that a cultural trauma does not directly flow from historical occurrences, however horrible they may have been. Rather, cultural traumas are socially constructed through narratives and other forms of representation. For Sebald, the absence of almost any trace of pain in the memory of the bombing war is something "paradoxical" (Sebald 2004: 4), because he assumes that there is a positive correlation between the magnitude of suffering experienced by a collectivity and the intensity of memories transmitted from one generation to the next. For us, such a correlation exists only to the extent in which a social and political consensus on the meaning of the relevant historical instance of suffering can be constructed and effectively communicated. Yet it is also true that a recognizable instance of massive suffering is always the raw material of cultural trauma. In fact, the most prominent examples of sociological trauma theory have so far been American slavery (Eyerman 2002) and the Holocaust (Alexander 2003: chap. 2). Slavery in the antebellum South was an instance of collective suffering that has been turned into a cultural trauma of successor generations of the same victim group of Afro-Americans. The Holocaust was an instance of collective suffering that has been turned into a cultural trauma of successor generations of the victim group, Jews, as well as for successor generations of (non-Jewish) Germans and other national membership groups who were the perpetrators and bystanders of the Holocaust. Our case study breaks new ground by focusing on an instance of collective suffering—the Allied bombing of German cities during World War II—that has not become a cultural trauma, *not even for the successor generations of the victim group*.[144]

In what follows, we give a short overview of the ways in which the air war has been remembered, memorialized and commemorated in postwar Germany. We begin by rejecting the widespread claim that the memories of German victims, in general, and of civilian bombing victims, in particular, were actively silenced in postwar Germany. Instead, we sketch out the memory matrix that in our view has underpinned and constrained practices of remembrance of the *Bombenkrieg*. We then turn to three case vignettes to shed light on the reasons why the bombings have not given rise to a cultural trauma. First, we highlight the case of Hamburg, which among German cities was hit the hardest by British bombers in 1943. More specifically, we are interested in how the rise of the Holocaust trauma has rendered the remembrance of the firebombing of Hamburg more complex, inconsistent and ultimately non-traumatic. Second, we look at attempts to draw analogies between the high-altitude bombing of German cities and the bombing of other places, in particular Baghdad in the second Gulf War (1990-91). This analogy allowed sections of the German public to mourn the victims of American bombs without explicitly reactivating nationalist or revisionist notions of German victimhood. Third, we briefly explore the memory and commemoration of the 1945 bombings of Dresden, in which neo-Nazi

[144] This is true at least in terms of the cultural trauma theory as proposed by Alexander and Eyerman. In the psychoanalytic sense of the term, traumas might well be transmitted through certain communicative strains and failings from one generation of both victims and perpetrators to the next (see Bergmann and Jucovy 1990).

extremists, who would like to redefine the memory of the bombings as the new cultural trauma of post-reunification Germany, play a major role. The final section summarizes the reasons why we believe that memory projects aiming at the establishment of a cultural bombing trauma in Germany are unlikely to succeed anytime soon.

The German Bombing War Memory Matrix

Since the reunification of Germany in 1990, every major broadcast or publication on the bombing of the country during World War II has been pitched as taboo-breaking. However, there has never really been a taboo on representing the suffering of Germans. In fact, this is a rumor or legend so ubiquitous that it requires explanation. However, like all rumors and legends, the idea of a taboo on representing Germans as victims is based on a small kernel of truth.

Our main point is that what has been forgotten is not the bombing war itself but its many traces in the memories of those who survived and documented it. Artists, in particular, began to draw, paint, wood carve, write about and take photos of the destruction often literally as soon as the dust had settled after the air raids. Ignoring an official ban imposed by the Nazi government, which was later renewed by the Soviet military authorities, more than thirty "rubble photographers" emerged in Dresden alone, some of whom like Kurt Schaarschuch and Richard Peter quickly rose to fame (Kil 1989). As early as 1949, Peter published a much-reprinted collection of photographs under the title *Dresden, eine Kamera klagt an* (Dresden: A Camera Accuses). Around the same time, German "rubble films" depicting the destruction of cities in flashbacks became a genre of its own (Shandley 2001). In 1952, Axel Rodenberger's bestselling memoir *Der Tod von Dresden* (The Death of Dresden) was published. German studies scholars such as Jörg Bernig (2005), Thomas Fox (2006) and Ursula Heukenkamp (2001) have offered overviews of the range of artistic representations of the bombing war experience, listing novels, memoirs, anthologies, films, poems, plays, song texts and audio recordings that have escaped the attention of those who claim that the air war has fallen into oblivion. Especially some of the novels are quite well-known and have also been translated into English, for example Horst Bienek's *Earth and Fire*, Bruno Werner's *The Slave Ship* or Hans Erich Nossack's *The End*—a ruthless account of the 1943 bombing assault on Hamburg that has been praised even by Sebald. More influential have been the diaries and stories of Victor Klemperer and Elisabeth Langgässer, who were both German-Jewish writers. Other works are noteworthy not for the literary quality but for their semi-official status. An example is Erwin Strittmatter's children's story *Tinko*, which was first published in 1954 and became mandatory reading for school children in the German Democratic Republic. Interestingly, one of the most acclaimed contributions has come from abroad: Kurt Vonnegut's semi-autobiographical *Slaughterhouse-Five*, an anti-war satire written by an American soldier who was held as a prisoner of war in Dresden at the time of the air raids. In Germany, this novel has, among other things, been adapted as an opera that premiered in Munich in 1996.

Thus, what we have seen after the war was not a taboo on the remembrance of suffering but rather an irrepressible zeal to give meaning to the harrowing experiences of the recent past. Ulrike Heukenkamp has observed that writers often did not use a vivid, authentic language to describe the experience of being bombed, not because they forgot what had happened, but because part of that experience was a sense of panic, of emptiness, of loss of self that led authors to use clichéd metaphors such as "hell," "inferno" or "Judgment Day" to fix the meaning of the bombings (Heukenkamp 2001: 470-72). She also points out that talking was less easy for the civilian survivors of the bombing war than for the exhausted, defeated and disillusioned soldiers

who returned from the front lines of what they saw as the "real" war. The soldiers were often compulsively loquacious and have left detailed descriptions of their war experiences in the memories of families as well as in literary texts. To the extent it was real, the silencing of civilian bombing victims, a majority of them being women, was the result of the restoration of the patriarchal family order in which men decided about what counts as an experience worth telling and transmitting (Heukenkamp 2001: 470).

Apart from the perceived lack of authenticity in literary representations and the dominance of the memory of front soldiers over the memory of women there is a third factor that has contributed to the notion of silence surrounding the human consequences of the bombing war. West Germans, in particular, were eager to rebuild their cities and their economy and felt that they had no time to look back. Sebald mentions "the unquestioning heroism with which people immediately set about the task of clearance and reorganization" (Sebald 2004: 5). This is something very different from a taboo although it may as well have had a silencing effect on memories. In this context, it is interesting to note that the German will to reconstruction, which in West Germany came close to an industrial ethic of high-performance fanaticism, bore a striking resemblance to the pioneer ethos of Israel. As José Brunner writes, "Hundreds of thousands of Jewish Holocaust survivors found, when they reached Israel after the war, that the pioneer-warrior ethos of the Jewish state left them no room to voice their suffering in the public sphere" (Brunner 2007: 105). Nobody would claim that there was a taboo on remembering the Holocaust in Israel. Yet, as this example illustrates, material and ethical imperatives can have the same consequence of restricting the ways in which collectivities remember their own painful past.

That the immense suffering caused by incendiaries and high-explosive bombs dropped from the sky was not forgotten does not imply that this particular memory fit easily into a larger, agreed-upon frame of public remembrance of World War II. In fact, all the controversies and struggles in recent decades have been about this problem: how to insert the memory of the air war into the larger process of meaning-making in a way that is in harmony with the self-description of Germany as a liberal Western democracy. Before we delve into some of the political struggles over the memory of the bombings, we want to outline the memory matrix that has guided activists and audiences in their attempts to represent those occurrences as broadly meaningful and significant.

We suggest distinguishing four basic positions in recent German memory struggles. Three of these positions share the implicit assumption that there was no alternative to the defeat of Germany and the Axis Powers by the combined military forces of the Allies. Obviously, neo-Nazis beg to differ on this point. But we are not aware of a position saying that the German people was able or willing to overthrow the government of Hitler on its own. There is thus a widely shared conviction that Germany had to be defeated militarily. Let us call this the "Carthage must be destroyed" consensus. A classical early statement of this consensus can be found in the preface to the first edition of Franz Neumann's *Behemoth*: "A military defeat is necessary … More and better planes, tanks, and guns and a complete military defeat will uproot National Socialism from the mind of the German people" (Neumann 1942: ix). Note that Neumann wrote before the emergence of a transnational Holocaust trauma which in retrospect has made the imperative to destroy Nazi Germany by military means even more compelling. Today, German historians and democratic politicians across the board basically agree on the connection that existed between defeating Germany and ending the mass extermination of Jews and others groups (see, e.g., Nolte 2008; see also White 2002). Differences among the following

first three discursive positions emerge only against the backdrop of this taken-for-granted consensus. The fourth position is an outlier, at least for now.

A *just-war position* has been articulated by military historians in Britain and the United States, and continues to influence in particular left-wing memory activists in Germany to this day. This position states that the air bombing of German cities contributed to the defeat of National Socialism and was therefore by definition legitimate.[145]

The *moderate anti-Machiavellian position* says that in pursuing highly legitimate war aims the Allies employed illegimate means such as the indiscriminate bombing of entire cities. Moderate anti-Machiavellians usually refrain from using the term "crime" to describe the bombings. They are often members of the liberal academic and political elites in Germany, and have called for reconciliation and for strengthening international humanitarian law.[146]

A *radicalization of the anti-Machiavellian position* can be observed among those groups who claim that the air bombing of cities did not serve its alleged military purpose. There has been, it is argued, a growing disjuncture between ends and means in the final stages of the war. Radical anti-Machiavellians use the term "crime" to describe the bombings. Yet these groups, too, call for reconciliation and for a moralization of international affairs that goes beyond legal reforms.[147]

A *revisionist right-wing position* has been adopted by those who claim that the bombings were not meant to serve a limited military purpose but were launched to commit genocidal crimes against the Germans. These groups, some of which should be called neo-Nazis, are against reconciliation with the former victors, and in favor of bringing them to what they call "justice."

The foundational moment and organizing principle of this memory matrix is the Holocaust. Although the notion that the bombing of cities might appear legitimate, given the unrelenting aggressiveness of Nazi Germany, had been formulated earlier, as the example of Neumann shows, knowledge about the unprecedented crimes committed in Auschwitz or Treblinka dramatically propelled this argument. In fact, the split that divides the memory matrix between those who acknowledge the military necessity of pain inflicted upon civilians (if to different degrees) and those who indiscriminately reject the air bombings as crimes is congruous with the cleavage between those who in principle acknowledge German responsibility for the consequences of the Holocaust and those who deny it. Our argument in the following sections is

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[145] See, e.g., US Air Force Historical Division, "Historical Analysis of the 14-15 February 1945 Bombings of Dresden." Available at: http://www.airforcehistory.hq.af.mil/PopTopics/dresden.htm. The case for the effectiveness of the Allied bombing campaign has been made, for example, by Gregor (2000). Rolf-Dieter Müller (2004: 229) of the German Military History Research Institute reckons that the air attacks have shortened the war by at least one or two years.

[146] The origins of the anti-Machiavellian position can be found in the moral scruples that surfaced in internal debates in Britain itself during the war, as Sebald (2004: 14-15) has indicated. For details, see Taylor (2004: 360-66, 376-79).

[147] German military historians seem to waver between moderate and radical anti-Machiavellian positions. In a landmark publication, Müller (2004: 231) speaks of "transgressions" during the Allied bombing campaigns, but rejects the term "crime." Yet the multi-volume history of World War II edited by his research institute concludes that the area bombings "massively violated traditional notions of morality" and were a "crime against humaneness [*Verbrechen gegen die Menschlichkeit*]," although not unambiguously illegal in terms of international customary law; in light of the ultimate goal, they were much less effective than the destruction of "key industries and militarily relevant target groups" (Boog 2008: 874-76).

therefore that the memory of the air war on German cities is closely intertwined with struggles over the representation of the Nazi past, and in particular of the Holocaust.

The Bombing of Hamburg and the Rise of the Holocaust Trauma

There can be no doubt that individual experiences of being injured, raped or bombed-out as well as the overwhelming collective experience of the military defeat of Germany led, like all military defeats in history, to "a complete crushing of self-confidence" (Clausewitz 1976: 255) of the vanquished population. As a result, many people, not only Nazi leaders who acted out of a warped sense of honor, committed suicide (Evans 2009: 731-32). This was, of course, an option only for a small minority. Another small minority was mentally prepared to absorb the news of the "ignominy of the concentration camps," as it was called in October 1945 in the headlines of a widely circulating illustrated magazine in Berlin (Kil 1989: 13). The vast majority of Germans, however, was occupied with the tasks of surviving and did not care about the past. At this juncture in history, it was by no means clear how future generations of Germans (and others) would later remember, narrate, and make sense of the war and the unprecedented destruction and suffering it brought upon the world. In spite of the vacuum of meaning Germans found themselves in there was not a situation in which the Allies could have simply impressed lessons and memories on the mind of the German public. Much depended on how Germans themselves would begin to represent and remember their past, including their own experiences during the war.

Let us look first at the example of the port city of Hamburg and the evolving collective memory of its bombing. Hamburg suffered one of the most devastating air raids in the entire war on Nazi Germany when the British Bomber Command under General Sir Arthur Harris launched "Operation Gomorrah" on July 24, 1943. This attack consisted of a coordinated series of "city-busting" night raids, which were supplemented by a smaller number of US Air Force daylight raids against shipyards and submarine pens. Altogether, more than thirty-four thousand people were killed within a couple of days (Thiessen 2007: 12).

Explicitly taking issue with Sebald, the young German historian Malte Thiessen has demonstrated that the postwar memory of the bombing raids, far from being suppressed, served in fact as an important symbolic resource for recreating a new sense of togetherness and local pride among the citizens of Hamburg. While immediately after the war even democratically elected officials continued to use Nazi propaganda terms such as "air terror [*Luftterror*]" (Thiessen 2007: 98) to characterize the bombings, the perpetrator-centered frame was quickly replaced by an almost exclusive focus on victims. From early on, political representatives from all parties, including the Communist Party, called for mourning a generously defined group of victims which included all the civilians killed by bombs, but also German soldiers and the inmates of Hamburg's concentration camp in Neuengamme, where many more people were killed than in Operation Gomorrah (about fifty thousand). Significantly, this emotional and semantic shift from the accusation of perpetrators to the mourning of victims was in no way driven by the British occupying forces in Hamburg, although the German desire to regain a minimum of recognition and good will from their former enemies played a role (Thiessen 2007: 176-77).[148] What is also important is that most Hamburgers did not harbor any resentment toward Britons, a fact that was already noted by Nossack, who was an eyewitness to the air raids

[148] On this subject of "memory diplomacy" see Etheridge (2008), who focuses on private and public actors in both West Germany and the United States in the 1950s, and their converging interests in constructing favorable "prosthetic" memories of Germany.

(Nossack 2004: 34; see also Evans 2009: 466). A perpetrator-centered framing of the bombings would therefore not have resonated with the public.

At the local level at least, a vibrant culture of remembrance emerged that garnered significant public attention. Unsurprisingly, the early memory of the air war was constructed in such a way as to suppress simmering collective feelings of guilt. Germans defined themselves as victims not just of the bombing assault and other horrors, but also as victims of the "hypnotic influence" of Hitler, as a former mayor of Hamburg has put it (quoted in Thiessen 2007: 109). What is indeed surprising and unsettling is that apparently there has not been a one-directional movement toward enlarging the circle of victims to be mourned. Thiessen (2007: 173-74) shows that until 1950 the inmates of Neuengamme, many of whom were shot, starved to death or send to extermination camps in the east, were included in various commemorative performances and discourses, whereas later only German city dwellers were considered worth the tears and thoughts of Germans. This narrowing of the collective memory can be described as a consequence of the early cold war, which led to the marginalization of communist groups, who after the war had played a crucial role in keeping the memory of the concentration camps alive, although without any reference to what was later called the Holocaust.

The cold war pattern of remembering with its heavy emphasis on local bombing victims combined with an inhibition to discuss the motives and strategies of those who were in charge of the air war changed with the rise of a new generation that no longer had any direct experience of the bombings. The new "generational memory" (Eyerman 2002: 11) began to crystallize in the early 1970s. For the first time, officials interpreted the bombing of their city not in the context of the "collapse" of the Third Reich, but as a harbinger of the "liberation" of Germany (Thiessen 2007: 203, 388). This new moral term immediately brought back the memory of Neuengamme, a memory which at that time was already embedded in a much broader narrative about the Holocaust. The Holocaust as a defining memory icon and signifier for what Theodor Adorno (1998: 89) characterized as "a horror that one hesitates to call … by name" emerged in West Germany only in the course of the 1970s.[149] Once established, the Holocaust narrative and the narrative of the liberation of Germany by the Allies reinforced each other, forming a new web of meaning.

In Hamburg, this shift in the mode of remembrance was to a large extent spearheaded by the regional Evangelical Lutheran Church whose leading representatives tried to marry two different narratives. The first insisted on the innocence of the German bombing victims who were described as having been sacrificed and even "crucified," as the Austrian artist Oskar Kokoschka said, who contributed a mosaic ("*Ecce Homines*") to the St Nikolai Church memorial in Hamburg (Thiessen 2007: 230). The second narrative represents German civilians not merely as victims, but also as (knowing or unknowing) accomplices to the evil that ruled Germany. In a speech given on the occasion of the inauguration of the memorial in 1977, the bishop of Hamburg reminded the audience of a plaque hanging at some distance from Kokoschka mosaic. The plaque reads: "Open your mouth for the mute, for the rights of all the unfortunate" (Proverbs 31, 8). Germans, the bishop continued, did not heed the call and ignored the plight of "those people for which we did not open our mouth" (quoted in Thiessen 2007: 232). This way of

[149] The Auschwitz trials in Frankfurt in 1963-65 focused the attention of the public more on the perpetrators than the victims. Michal Bodemann (2002) has argued that a major turning point in the perception of the Jews was the Six Day War in 1967 during which many Germans, including the media, sided with Israel. The Jewish state was compared to Prussia, and citizens in Hamburg, for example, donated blood for Israeli soldiers (see Bodemann 2002: 48-49).

interpreting the past gave a new twist to the perception of the bombings as some kind of divine "punishment," – a perception that was already prevalent among some eyewitnesses (Nossack 2004: 12-14).

Occasionally, this dual innovation of representing the perpetrators of the air war as also being liberators, and the victims as also being accomplices of the same forces Germany had to be liberated from, took the form of what we have called the just-war position. For instance, in 1993 the editor of the influential liberal weekly *Die Zeit*, Gerd Bucerius, described his jubilant mood at the sight and sound of the bomber squadrons. "'Finally,' I kept shouting, 'finally.' In my view, the Allied had waited much too long before battling the world's enemy Hitler" (quoted in Thiessen 2007: 327). To be true, this was quite an exceptional statement that did not resonate with many in Bucerius' generation. To the contrary, the new mode of remembering the war tended to alienate sections of the older generations of Hamburgers, some of which voiced their anger and bitterness in the local media (Thiessen 2007: 334). While these voices were losing influence in the ongoing memory struggles, other voices made sure that the bombing-as-liberation narrative began to slowly disintegrate. At no point, however, did this disintegration affect the memory of the Holocaust which was rather increasingly consolidated as iconic and indisputable. Until the late 1980s we still find the vocabulary of liberation in the official language, usually attenuated by what we have identified as the moderate anti-Machiavellian position. Yet throughout these years the liberation motif had to compete with a radicalization of anti-Machiavellian positions whose advocates claimed that the air war was not an immoral means to a moral end, but did not contribute at all to the moral end of defeating Nazi Germany (see Thiessen 2007: 272-73, 400, 406).

As a result of these trends, the post-reunification period after 1990 offers a mixed picture. Partly in response to the contextualization of the air war and the enlargement of the circle of victims who have been included in the collective memory, public intellectuals and the media rediscovered the "taboo" on remembering German bombing victims. Since then, the term "taboo" has been used in different ways. Some usages are benign. Sebald, for example, only wanted writers to express themselves in an adequate language, and the public to be aware of the horrible things that happened on the ground as a result of the bombings (people getting stuck in the melting tar while trying to run away from the firestorm, etc.). More often, however, the interjection of "taboo" into controversies over collective memory is an expression of resentment against the inclusion of non-German victims in the collective memory, and a response to the growing difficulties of constructing an imagined homogeneous community of victims out of the ruins left behind by the Royal Air Force.

Furthermore, the "taboo" vocabulary is paralleled by a return of the "terror" vocabulary. This is a direct consequence of the radicalization of the anti-Machiavellian position toward the bombing war. Once it is believed that the bombings did not serve any intelligible military purpose, the term "terror" is bound to seep back into public discourse. The terror vocabulary is also a response to the consolidation of the Holocaust trauma which has made it even less legitimate to criticize the ultimate goal of Allied war effort than in the first decades after the war. Once the Holocaust was memorialized as "sacred-evil" (Alexander 2003: 50), victory over its perpetrators became sacred too. Thus, if Germans wish to avoid being symbolically polluted by the evil of the Holocaust, they have to phrase their opposition to the war by rejecting the means chosen by the Allies, or by questioning the relations of means and ends. This is precisely what happened in the 1980s in Hamburg's tabloid papers and later in national mainstream media such as the news magazine *Der Spiegel* which in January 2003 published a series of articles on the

"terror attacks against Germany," calling the assaults on Hamburg and Dresden "climaxes of *Luftterror*" (Thiessen 2007: 400-1).

Although these terms are taken straight out of the dictionary of the Nazi Ministry of Propaganda, we wish to emphasize that the recent critique of the Allied "air terror" has undergone a largely successful process of semantic de-Nazification in the sense that it is no longer part of a strategy to create a harmonious community of heroic sufferers based on the radical exclusion of the Other. The indictment of the Western Allies as perpetrators of terror attacks has not weakened the desire of the city of Hamburg, the vast majority of Germans and mainstream media to be on most friendly terms with the alleged perpetrator nations, and to be recognized as a member in good standing of the Western Alliance and the European Union. The return of a perpetrator-centered frame focusing on the "terror" spread by the Allies did not, for example, affect the planning for the fiftieth anniversary of Operation Gomorrah in 1994, which was organized in close coordination with the British Ambassador to Germany in a "spirit of peace, reconciliation and friendship," as the mayor of Hamburg was eager to emphasize. When Prince Charles of Wales gave an appropriately fair-minded and conciliatory speech at the commemoration, about thirty thousand enthusiastic Hamburgers gathered to celebrate him, waving small Union Jack flags and wearing "Prince Charles" buttons (Thiessen 2007: 372-74).

The Air War as Bridging Metaphor

Over the last decades, the Allied bombing war on German cities became included in the national and collective memory as a horrific and evil event whose relation to the morally worthy ends of the war remains controversial. The moral content of the bombing symbol is thus still contested. Scholars and citizens continue to debate whether the bombings were a necessary evil or a crime, and whether it happened to innocents or to bystanders and accomplices to another horrific and evil event, which is the Holocaust. There is a much controversy about the ranking of evils: for most Germans the air war, unlike the Holocaust, is far from achieving the status of a sacred evil. Still, even as a comparatively weak symbol of evil the bombings serve a moral function. Whenever the media report about the air bombing of other places in other wars, Germans tend to respond to such cues by remembering the bombing of their own cities. The German perception of the 1991 Second Persian Gulf War, code-named "Operation Desert Storm," is a case in point.

When the US-led coalition launched a massive air campaign against Iraq on January 17, 1991, many Germans drew an analogy between Germany's past and Iraq's present. For instance, visitors to the town of Giessen near Frankfurt (where one of the authors of this paper happened to study at that time) could see messages sprayed on official city signs that read "Giessen = Baghdad." During World War II, Giessen offered many industrial targets and was an important link in the German transport system, which is the reason why the city was bombed and almost completely destroyed on the night of December 6, 1944, by American B-17 bombers.

The sprayed message in Giessen was symptomatic for a much broader phenomenon that was new at least in the Western part of the country. Several voices from the peace movement against the Gulf War employed allusions to the German experience of being bombed by the Western Allies as a "bridging metaphor" (Alexander 2003: 67-76) to make sense of and mobilize against the Iraq war. There had of course been other American air wars before, most notably the Vietnam War, which was also opposed on a global scale. However the public controversy over the Vietnam War unfolded without any appropriation of specifically German war memories. Indeed, the perception of this particular war was still (or already) shaped by the fundamental

perpetrator/liberator ambiguity that was about to dominate the public discourse on the World War II bombings of German cities. Artworks such as Wolf Vostell's Pop-art collage "Lipstick bomber" gave expression to this ambiguity which was later completely erased by the German peace movement.

[insert "Lipstick bomber"]

Voices from the peace movement of the early 1990s varied considerably with regard to their level of reflexivity and elaborateness, and did by no means amount to a coherent ideological position. Still, in hindsight the peace movement turned out to be a political actor whose contribution to the ongoing process of German memory-making has been much more salient than its effects on global politics, although spokespersons of the movement attempted to combine precisely these two areas. The popular psychoanalyst Horst-Eberhard Richter, for example, argued that Germany had a special right and duty to push for strictly pacifist policies in the international arena because this country had been the source as well as the site of mass atrocities during World War II. Although the bombing of German cities did not figure explicitly in his argument, Richter gave a telling list of impressions about what he perceived to be the immediate results of the Gulf War: "The enormity of the sacrifice in blood of soldiers and civilians, the misery of those who have been bombed out as well of hundreds of thousands of refugees, the destruction of cities and the landscape, the poisoning of the sea and the toxic oil well plumes engulfing hundreds of kilometers" (Richter 1991: 15). Reading such descriptions it is hard to miss the vague similarity with accounts of what happened to Germany during World War II. This vagueness and ambiguity of Richter's lament was symptomatic for many other texts published in the context of the peace movement at that time.

What is most striking in Richter's account is the blurring of the distinction between victims and perpetrators in the context of the Holocaust and World War II. On the one hand, he clearly distances himself from any attempt to questioning the historical guilt and the political responsibility of Germans for the Holocaust; on the other hand he uses German war memories to seize the moral high ground for Germany as an international actor. Because Germans have suffered so much, so the argument goes, they are uniquely well-positioned to speak up against any war, whereas those who have suffered less are still caught up in nationalist and militaristic mindsets. From the memories of German suffering and victimhood Richter distils a spirit of moral superiority that distinguishes Germany from other, allegedly more traditional nations. The implication of this rhetorical move is that the blurring of the line between victims and perpetrators is matched by an equally problematic blurring of "temporal and spatial boundaries," as Andreas Huyssen (2003: 163) has pointed out. Like many other Germans, members of the peace movement continued to define their identity largely in *temporal* terms, based on the difference between the democratic present and an ominous, highly charged, anti-democratic past. At the same time, however, this repudiation of the past was *spatialized* and turned into a rejection of contemporary nations such as, in particular, the United States of America.[150]

[150] The arbitrariness of these rhetorical stances became obvious when in 1999 the German government successfully enacted a reversal of the analogical framework introduced by the peace movement by deciding to join the Kosovo intervention on the ground that Serbia was planning a "second Auschwitz" against Kosovo Albanians. Here again we saw the spatial localization of an evil retrieved from the collective memory and projected onto a real place which then was bombed by the German Air Force and others (see Heins 2007).

Our reading of the ambiguities of the German peace movement was already reflected by some of the protagonists themselves who felt that the movement was maneuvering in murky waters. Thus, Jörn Böhme, who had been an activist of the peace movement in the 1980s, argued that the attitudes of the German left, and in particular the peace movement, during the Gulf War were fraught with "dilemmas" (Böhme 1991: 215) of the kind discussed above. Every attempt to define an unambiguous pacifist position in Germany, Böhme argued, was marred by an unconscious desire to escape those dilemmas. While mapping out a complex field of mutually contradictory loyalties and self-canceling positions, he also mentioned the memory of the air war, wondering "to what extent the bombing of Dresden and other cities has been tabooed among young Germans, on the ground that the older generation used Dresden to repress Auschwitz, with the consequence that now perhaps the lack of mourning is projected collectively on the people of Iraq as an innocent victim of 'the Allies'" (Böhme 1991: 223). Similarly, Gert Schäfer interpreted the discourse of the peace movement in terms of a "return of the repressed." In a much-quoted essay he noted that "after a long time I heard once again every single air plane, a noise that is normally submerged in the sounds of everyday life. Memories of bombers and attacks by low-flying aircraft returned, memories of nights spent in bomb shelters, of fires, debris, dead people and my child gas mask" (Schäfer 1992: 9). It is important to stress that both Böhme and Schäfer talk about the memories of the bombings in strictly psychological, non-constructivist terms of a "return of the repressed." This is significant because the intrusion of bombing memories into the public discourse it not described as the result of a lifting of a communicative taboo, but as the result of an allegedly natural psychic dynamic.

We reject this interpretation as much as we have rejected the taboo thesis. As far as the public sphere is concerned, memories of the bombing of German cities did not "return" like a jack-in-the-box jumping at us. Rather, these memories were consciously revived by activists, although under inherited symbolic circumstances shaped by previous memory projects. In the early 1980s, for example, activists and the media began to circulate the slogan of the "nuclear holocaust" (Thiessen 2007: 256) to associate the memory of the destruction of Hamburg and other cities with two other evils at once: the cold war threat of nuclear war, and the systematic extermination of the European Jews captured by the rising Holocaust symbol. In this case the resurrection of the memory of the air war was short-lived: it vanished together with the Soviet Union and the cold war constellation, which again makes clear that it is misleading to speak of a past forcing itself onto the present.

We conclude that Dan Diner (1991) was probably right when he interpreted the protests against the Gulf War as an expression of both continuity and change in the parameters of political protest in post-reunification Germany. On the one hand, he commended the peace movement, not the least for the ability of some of its representatives to reflect upon the movement's inherent anti-American ideological grounding. On the other hand, he was concerned about what began to take shape as an effort to mobilize memories of German victimhood in the protest against the US campaign in Iraq, a campaign that should have been judged and criticized on its own terms. In 1990 and 1991 this mobilization was still very much dominated by the ideological debates within the West German left and the peace movement that grew out of it (Böhme 1991; Kloke 2007). Twelve years later, on the occasion of the protests against yet another US-led war in Iraq, however, the memory symbol of "Dresden" could no longer be found occupying a particular position at one end of the ideological left-right spectrum. In hindsight, the German peace movement has indeed earned the dubious credit of having turned the bombing war on Germany into a free-floating symbol that allowed the public to understand

and rally against the successors of the same Allies which had devastated, but also liberated Germany in World War II.

At the same time, though, this symbol, precisely because it is free-floating, should not be regarded as pointing toward an underlying cultural trauma, because it is not really connected to issues of collective identity. Memories can be mobilized in conflicts over the self-definition of the collectivity as well as referred to in struggles over resources that have no inner connection to the issues resurrected from memory (Langenohl 2001). Although most conflicts over memory have both a strategic and an identity dimension, from the point of view of cultural trauma theory the crucial question is whether memory offers a narrative that is directed toward the in-group in such a way as to shape its collective identity (Eyerman 2002: 70). If that is not the case, a memory may still serve as a symbolic capital of sorts that is used to win over an audience for a particular cause. The "achievement" of the peace movement has been the creation of a token of symbolic capital out of the memory of the bombings which now can be used for the public dramatization of issues and for adding moral weight to political arguments and positions, but which cannot be regarded as having any identity-constitutive meaning of its own.

Dresden and the Clash of Memories

More consequential for German memory struggles than any American-led war in recent decades has been the reunification of Germany itself. To be sure, this event did not fundamentally reconfigure what we have called the bombing war memory matrix. In fact, the institutionalization of the Holocaust trauma continued. More memorials to Nazi crimes were unveiled, the most spectacular of them being the Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe in central Berlin which was inaugurated and opened to the public in 2005. Also, empirical research shows that contemporary Germans of all age groups continue to identify Nazism with evil and recognize the Holocaust as "the superlative historical genocide" (Langenbacher 2008: 65). At the same time, however, the inclusion of the former German Democratic Republic strengthened certain forces and trends that were already visible in West Germany. In the communist East, the memory of the bombing war was omnipresent and consciously evoked by the state. Many cities bore the scars of the war into the 1980s, with wastelands of rubble and facades of buildings pockmarked by bullet holes that served as constant reminders of the past. While the relative slowness of reconstruction made sure that popular war memories would linger on, the official public discourse politicized those memories in accordance with the binary cold war logic.

From the mid-1950s onward the East German discourse on the bombing of Germany focused on the eastern city of Dresden which was destroyed on February 13 and 14, 1945, by a highly controversial air campaign called "Operation Thunderclap." The bombing of Dresden was the most catastrophic attack on a German city since Hamburg. Twenty-five thousand people were killed, most of them in the first two out of three night raids carried out by British bombers. Dresden had been a city that prided itself for her rich culture, but also a Nazi stronghold and an important hub for moving military personnel and supplies to the east. Because of its strategic position, the campaign was planned in London as a way to ease the Red Army's advance in Germany (Taylor 2004: 190-92). However, from our perspective, the most interesting aspect of this unforgotten campaign does not lie in such empirical details. The intriguing phenomenon is rather that the bombing almost instantly morphed from a military fact into a powerful moral signifier of evil. As the British historian Frederick Taylor (2004: 372) writes, the destruction of Dresden began "to exercise an independent power of its own, one that could not but affect the Allies' claims to absolute moral superiority." According to Taylor, this transformation must

partly be credited to the efforts of Joseph Goebbels and his Ministry of Propaganda that lost no time manipulating the figure of dead (by adding a zero) and denouncing the raids as a "barbarian" terror attack on an innocent city that represented the epitome of European "culture" without having any military value.

Much of this straightforward coding of the events survived the end of Nazism with only minor permutations. Intellectuals and the government of East Germany offered a narrative of the bombing of Dresden that was based on a small set of symbolic equivalences between the National Socialism and the Western Allies. The perpetrators of the bombings were analogically associated with the Nazis, and victims were represented in analogy to the victims of Nazism (although the Jews were not named). East Germans also perpetuated the myth of the innocence of Dresden as a place of no military or industrial importance where people loved the arts and kept themselves aloof from the demands of politics. Hence the trope of the "senselessness" of the air raids (see, e.g., Kil 1989: 19). For cold war propaganda purposes the attackers were also called "Anglo-Americans," although in this particular case the US Air Force had only been a junior partner in a largely British and Commonwealth operation. However, the role of the United States was seen as particularly frightening in light of the even worse fate that could have befallen Dresden: becoming the target of the first atomic bomb. According to a widely believed story line offered by communist party intellectuals, this possibility was thwarted only by the fast advancing Red Army, which saved the people of Dresden. Although empirically unsubstantiated, this doomsday scenario became a center piece of the East German collective memory of the air war (Taylor 2004: 454-56; Widera 2005).

In short, the East German discourse lifted the assault on Dresden out of the overall context of the war, invested it with immense moral significance and created a salvationary narrative that idolized the Red Army while polluting the British and American air forces as apocalyptically evil.

Dresden	Anglo-American air forces
Victim	Perpetrators
Culture	Barbarism
Communism	Capitalism
peace loving	war mongering
saved by Red Army	threatening annihilation

After reunification, this narrative entered the mainstream of German public culture, where some of its aspects such as the savior role attributed to the Soviet Union have been submerged, while other aspects have affected the collective memory. It is worth noting, though, that the East German discourse did not contradict the core assumption of the West German memory matrix that Germany had to be liberated by foreign armies. On the other hand, the Holocaust did not figure prominently, if at all, in East German memory. The place of the sacred-evil remained empty in East Germany, even if the communist propaganda tried for some time to assign this place to the imperialist West. Yet this assignment was predicated on the changing geopolitical situation and was thus inherently unstable.[151] The atomic bomb also might have been a candidate, but since the Soviet Union also maintained a considerable nuclear arsenal, only

[151] As the cold war was winding down in the 1980s, East German historians like Olaf Groehler softened their critique of the Allied bombing considerably (see Fox 2006).

the actual dropping of two bombs by the US Air Force over Hiroshima and Nagasaki in August 1945 could be referred to as epitomizing modern evil. This, however, was a much weaker symbol than the Holocaust, and did not lead to consequential institutional changes in society and state. The survivors of the nuclear attack were not supported in any concrete way nor did Japan as a victim nation play a particular role in communist foreign policy. East Germany is also not known for ever having opposed nuclear weapons as such.

If East German public discourses after reunification did not radically disrupt the matrix underlying the remembrance of the bombing war, how did they affect collective memory and practices of commemoration as well as the chances for constructing a cultural trauma? To find a preliminary answer, we now turn briefly to the ways in which the destruction of Dresden has been commemorated in recent times in Dresden itself.

After reunification, both Dresden and the province of Saxony, of which Dresden is the regional capital city, were governed by the liberal-conservative Christian Democratic Party (CDU). The new ruling political elite was, of course, determined to promote reconciliation with the West, and made sure that the annual commemoration was organized and scripted accordingly. One of the early steps taken by the city of Dresden was the decision of reconstruct the eighteenth-century Lutheran Frauenkirche (Church of Our Lady). This decision was controversial because the heap of ruins to which the cathedral had been reduced by the 1945 air raids was conserved under communist rule as a war memorial, similar to the ruins of Coventry Cathedral in England which was destroyed by German bombers. Supporters of the reconstruction, who were aware that the removal of the ruins would be interpreted by some as a "sacrilege" (Blaschke 1990), nevertheless argued that it was more important to allow people to forget and to leave behind the horrors of the past of which the dark stones of the ruins were a vivid reminder.

Today, the reopened cathedral is being touted by German as well as British representatives as a transnational symbol of "reconciliation" between former enemies. "Reconciliation" is indeed one of the key words of a commemorative discourse that no longer differs significantly from the discourse on the bombing of Hamburg. In both cities we have seen two different narratives of the air war in recent years, one that describes the air raids as a symbol of the madness of war in general, or even as a symbol of the destructiveness of modernity as such. A former mayor of Dresden, for example, used the rhetorical device of metonymy to contextualize the memory of the bombing. The attack on Dresden was said to be "senseless" and "barbarian," but no more senseless and barbarian than "the entire war," which was started by Germany before taking on a life of its own.[152] This narrative amalgamates the different tactics and strategies used by the Allied and the Axis Powers, as well as their human consequences, into one single emblem of absurdity. In 2005, the city held an event where messages written by victims of war from Dresden, Baghdad, Guernica, New York, Hiroshima, Grozny and other places were read out in public to evoke the idea of a global "community of victims." Around the same time, the mayor of Hamburg gave a commemorative speech in which he interpreted the firebombing of his city not as a consequence of decisions taken by countries which had been attacked before, but as the result of a breach of "the dams of our civilization" that led Europe to abandon herself to the destructive potentials of technology and modernity (quoted in Thiessen 2007: 421-22; for the "dams of civilization" metaphor see Freud 1905: 178). To the extent that it

[152] Address by Ingolf Rossberg, Dresden, February 13, 2006 (on file with authors).

radically downplays the role of agency and responsibility in modern society, this narrative could be called postmodern.

At the same time, there is a second narrative centered on the conviction that historical occurrences such as the bombing of cities should be explained not as expressions of a self-propelling modernity that got out of control, but as consequences of motivated human action. Since the 1980s much of the memory work done in Hamburg, for example, has been inspired by a causal story which regarded Nazi Germany as the source of a violence that finally ***boomeranged***. Hosea 8, 7—"For they have sown the wind, and they shall reap the whirlwind"—was therefore a much quoted reference. This way of distributing causal and moral responsibilities across different actors is by no means alien to the public discourse in Dresden. In February 2009, Helma Orosz, who had been elected mayor only a few months ago, addressed a crowd at the city center emphasizing that "Like Dresden, thousands of other human places had to sink to ashes before the criminal Nazi racket that started the war could be stopped."[153] The day before, she gave a speech at the Heidefriedhof (Heath Cemetery) in Dresden where many of the remains of the bombing victims are buried, insisting that "It was Germany who forced the nations attacked by her to fight back in a life and death struggle."[154] Other representatives of the city have called upon the citizens to remember their former Jewish fellow-citizens who were persecuted and deported from Dresden like everywhere else in German-ruled territories. Recalling specifically the fate of Victor Klemperer, a Jewish citizen and professor of literature who survived the Nazi period in hiding, former mayor Lutz Vogel mentioned that Klemperer had barely escaped Hitler's henchmen: "The air raid on February 13, 1945, had saved his life!"[155] Civic groups including a survivors' association have also invoked the double image of German civilians as victims/accomplices, which corresponds to the perpetrator/liberator ambiguity in the perception of the Allies including their bomber pilots.[156]

The crucial difference between East and West, Dresden and Hamburg, can be gleaned from the fact that there is virtually no commemorative speech by a democratic politician in Dresden that does not address the pervasive counter-discourse produced by extreme right-wing groups in society and their political parties. At the heart of this memory discourse is no longer what Adorno (1998: 90) ridiculed as the "quite common move of drawing up a balance sheet of guilt …, as though Dresden compensated for Auschwitz." Instead of only minimizing the Holocaust by pointing to alleged crimes of the Allies, the new revisionist discourse directly analogizes "Dresden" to the Holocaust by calling the Allied bombing of German cities a "bombing holocaust." This new trope has the advantage of not denying the Holocaust (which is a criminal offense in Germany) but rather treating it as a floating signifier that becomes truly meaningful only when attached to the memories of the air war. The career of the "bombing holocaust" trope can partly be traced back to Jörg Friedrich's bestselling book *The Fire: The Bombing of Germany, 1940-1945*, in which the author establishes two equivalences: he calls the British Bomber Command and the aircrews dropping bombs over Germany "*Einsatzgruppen*"—the official name of the German death squads who rounded up and killed Jews and other groups

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[153] Speech by Helma Orosz, Altmarkt Dresden, February 14, 2009 (on file with authors).

[154] Speech by Helma Orosz, Heidefriedhof Dresden, February 13, 2009 (on file with authors).

[155] Speech by Lutz Vogel, First Mayor, Neumarkt Dresden, February 13, 2008 (on file with authors).

[156] "At the same time the history of the city shows the co-responsibility also of the citizens of Dresden for the inhumane, criminal policies of the National Socialist power holders," says the mission statement of a group of local history activists called "13 February 1945."

throughout Europe; and he equates the basements where people died during the air attacks "crematoria" (Friedrich 2006). Still, Friedrich does not see himself as a right-wing author. He believes that the Allied air war was a unique crime and should not be compared to more recent American wars. Thus, while drawing an analogy between the Holocaust—the systematic extermination of a people which was stigmatized as biologically defective and born evil—and military actions that were (rightly or wrongly) believed to contribute to the defeat of the regime responsible for the Holocaust, Friedrich dissociates other, more recent bombing campaigns from the one launched against Germany. Unlike both the peace movement and right-wing extremists who use the bombing memory as a tool to mobilize people against other wars fought by Germany's former enemies, Friedrich mentions that he even supported the 2003 war in Iraq (see the "Afterword for American and British Readers" in Friedrich 2006: 483).

[insert photos "bombing holocaust" etc]

The right-wing manner of remembrance is passionately rejected by the democratic political parties as polluting the founding ideals of reunified Germany, but also of its newly democratized eastern provinces. It is seen as "disgracing" Dresden and "sullying the memory of its dead."[157] At the same time, local activists admit that the right-wing memory project resonates with sections of the people in Dresden. Whereas in Hamburg we have seen a notable decline of public controversies over the meaning of the air raids on the city as well as over the appropriate mode of remembering them (Thiessen 2007: 457), Dresden has become a veritable cauldron of memory wars. In 2009, the annual "commemorative march" organized by local right-wing extremists attracted more than 6,000 like-minded people from all over Germany and some neighboring countries. Even official events held by the city of Dresden are dominated by these groups. Their countless wreaths, for example, completely drown out the wreaths laid by ordinary citizens or German and British dignitaries at the Heath Cemetery. In the past, some invited British guests like the historian Frederick Taylor had to be protected by security guards while others, for example the Holocaust survivor Ruth Kluger, who is a former professor at the University of California, declined an invitation explaining that she could handle a bunch of right-wing hecklers but not the sight of thousands of neo-Nazis marching on German streets. Unsurprisingly, this disturbing situation has triggered a cycle of counter-mobilizations by left-wing radicals who have begun to stage their own performances on the occasion of the anniversary of the bombings. Some of these groups adopt a provocative, almost carnivalesque version of the just-war position that is perhaps best illustrated by the slogan "Bomber Harris Superstar—Thanks to You from the Red Antifa [Antifascist Action]."

[insert photo]

It is easy to understand why none of the actors involved in the annual Dresden bombing remembrance spectacle achieves what Alexander (2004) calls a "fused performance," which would be characterized by the presence an audience identifying with the actors and by cultural scripts appearing to be true. Understandably, many citizens simply stay physically away from a scene dominated by radical memory activists from the opposite ends of the political spectrum, monitored by helicopters hovering over the city and kept in check by thousands of police officers

[157] Speech by Helma Orosz, Heidefriedhof Dresden, February 13, 2009 (on file with authors).

in riot gear. The mayor of the city of Dresden has meanwhile organized a dialogue with citizens about how future commemorations of the past should look like in a situation where there is little consensus neither about the symbolic text of the commemoration nor about the ways of transforming this text into a convincing and effective performance. Nothing could be more different from this situation of utter cluelessness than the state of affairs in Hamburg where the memory of Operation Gomorrah has been "normalized" (Thiessen 2007: 457) and drained of explosive emotions.

Toward a New Cultural Trauma?

We wish to summarize the findings of our case study with a view to some of the more general issues in the debate on cultural trauma. The Allied bombing of Germany offers an interesting test case for cultural trauma theory. The bombings clearly represent a historical instance of massive collective suffering that was deliberately inflicted on civilians by identifiable actors. There is no question that these occurrences have been traumatic in the clinical and psychological sense of the term. Still, memory projects attempting to translate this original experience into a cultural trauma have failed. The remembrance of the destruction of Hamburg, Dresden and many other German cities and towns does not point to an underlying cultural trauma that fundamentally shapes the collective identity of modern-day Germans. Rather, the memory of the bombing war is a function of another memory: the memory of Germany's wartime atrocities including the Holocaust.

This does not mean that the Holocaust memory has "repressed" that of the air war or put a "taboo" on it. Not only have images of the bombings and their human consequences "crossed the threshold of the national consciousness" (Sebald 2004: 11); today they are now in fact deeply ingrained in the political culture. Our point, however, is that the meaning of the bombing war for the nation cannot be established independently from memory discourses on the crimes of Nazi Germany. The public discourse on the bombings is not about the obvious fact that Germans, too, have been victims of the war; it is rather about whether they deserve a place in the sun of virtuous victimhood which would rule out that they have been perpetrators or accomplices to evil as well. Whenever Germans during World War II are ***obliquely*** represented as virtuous victims, we do not witness a return of repressed memories, but a strategy to exonerate Germans from their responsibility for the Third Reich.

Not the memory of the air war, but the memory of the Holocaust is a cultural trauma for Germans (like for others). This social fact in turn constrains and conditions present and future memory projects. The memory matrix of the bombings is thus organized around a reference point external to the debate over the bombings. Political struggles over the public commemoration of the bombing victims, including all the historically incomprehensible analogies between "Dresden" and "Baghdad," always take place in the shadow of the Holocaust as the negative foundational myth of contemporary Germany.

A cultural trauma serves as filter and organizing center of political perceptions and value-statements which in turn fuel processes of collective mobilization and identity construction. Far from being such a symbolic resource, the memory of the air war in Germany has been more of a ghost light in an ideological swamp. Of course, there is nothing about this memory that makes it impossible to reconstruct the facts of German suffering in such a way as to initiate a cultural trauma process. Alexander overrates the importance of the fact that by winning the war the Allies gained control over the "means of symbolic production" (Alexander 2003: 32-33) so that they could portray the existence of German-controlled extermination camps in a certain fashion. For

the Allied victory did in no way guarantee that one day West Germans would accept the Holocaust as a defining national memory icon. Nor is there any transcendental guarantee—given that the means of symbolic production are quite evenly distributed today—that Germans (or others) will one day abandon this particular memory. However, the obstacles are formidable.

Let us look at the example of the "bombing holocaust." Apart from being obscene, this fairly successful trope highlights the fact that the same groups who deny or minimize the Holocaust have to refer to and affirm the Holocaust as sacred-evil in order to denounce the bombing of German cities. The much less extreme example of Friedrich's *The Fire* also shows that even a drastic and simplified account of Germans as innocent victims of evil perpetrators draws its persuasive power from the Holocaust narrative. Far from making a first step toward replacing or eroding this foundational narrative, Friedrich has actually strengthened what will remain for a long time the central symbol of evil in the Western world.

Obstacles to constructing a new cultural trauma abound as we move from the margins to the center of the public debate. A cultural trauma "demands reparation" (Eyerman 2008: 163). Thus, if the memory of the air war ever crystallized into a cultural trauma, Britain and, to a lesser extent, the United States would have to repair the damage, starting perhaps with a formal apology. But there is evidence that the refusal of British officials including Queen Elizabeth II to apologize for any bombing raid has not caused more than a minor and passing public outcry, not even in Dresden (Taylor 2004: 422). The situation is further complicated by the fact that leading German military historians such as Rolf-Dieter Müller have publicly argued that an "admission of guilt" on the part of Great Britain would be inappropriate; according to him, we should rather be "grateful" for the Allied war effort (Müller 2004: 230). The public debate about whether the area bombing was a "necessary" evil (given the imperative of defeating Nazi Germany) or a "lesser" evil (compared to a nuclear attack) is likely to continue for some more time. But there are no indications of a memory project that is going to replace the double image of German civilians as victims/accomplices, which corresponds to the perpetrator/liberator perception of the Allies, with the kind of polarizing discourse that is required to establish a cultural trauma.

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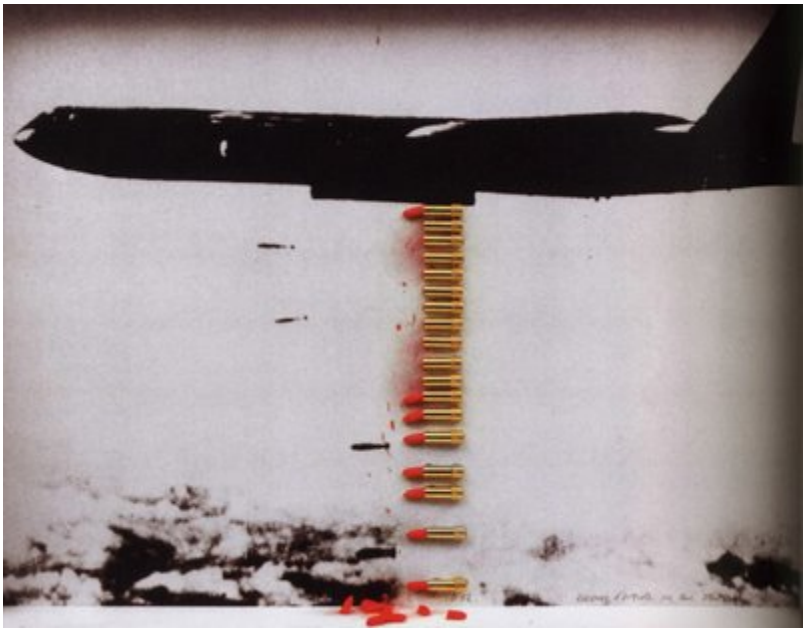

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Traumatic Memory in Generational Perspective

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Abstract

The article attempts to contribute to the recent debate on cultural trauma by 1) adding the historically recent example of post-communist memorizing of communism to the cases of the Holocaust, the American slavery and the German Nazism, around which the debate has particularly evolved, and 2) focusing systematically on the generational aspect of the issue. It defends the analytical value of the concept of cultural trauma, both theoretically (in the first part of the article) and with the help of the empirical example of memory of communism in Czechoslovakia and the Czech Republic (in the second part of the article). It shows how memories and past experience acquire a traumatic nature within the context of a generationally divided discourse of guilt. It especially accentuates two related features of traumatic memory/experience: ambivalence and silencing effect. And it illustrates these two aspects of trauma on the example of postcommunist memorizing of the communist experience. It also attempts to trace sociologically, rather than psychologically, the relevant intervening variables that limit the scope of historical imagination, hindering transferability of the past experience onto the younger generations – and thus contributing to the traumatic character of the contested memories and the heightened sense of generational divide at the same time.

***Keywords*: collective memory, communication of experience, communist past, cultural trauma, generations, post-communism**

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Introduction