

DEALING WITH THE PAST IN SPACES,  
PLACES, ACTIONS, AND  
INSTITUTIONS OF MEMORY: A  
COMPARATIVE REFLECTION ON  
EUROPEAN EXPERIENCES

AICGS GERMAN-AMERICAN ISSUES

18

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The signs read: "We are all Armenians" and "For Hrant for Justice"



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# INTRODUCTION

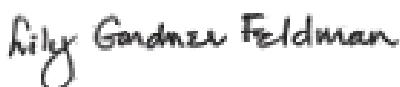
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AICGS is pleased to present four essays that were inspired by an international conference held in Berlin in October 2015: "Dealing with the Past in Spaces, Places, Actions, and Institutions of Memory: A Comparative Reflection on European Experiences." We are grateful to the Stiftung Mercator for funding the project, and to Hans-Christian Jasch, Katharina von Münster, Cengiz Aktar, and Mario Mažić for their thoughtful reflections on how societies confront their difficult pasts. The ideas elaborated in the essays are the authors' own and are not a representation of the Stiftung Mercator or AICGS. The conference and this publication are part of AICGS' broader work on the topic of international reconciliation in Europe and East Asia.

These essays reflect a range of perspectives: historian, journalist, educator, activist. All four authors write from rich personal experiences. All four essays address a variety of psychological, philosophical, physical, and political instruments for facing history: memory, remembrance, commemoration, memorialization. They also identify the danger of the polar opposite of acknowledging the past: forgetting and forgetfulness. Each essay is informed by a question: How to confront history after the Holocaust? How to engage young people in memory work in Germany? How has the debate about history opened up in Turkey? How has the past impacted the generation born just before and during the Balkans wars of the 1990s?

Even though the German case of dealing with the past has been the most advanced and comprehensive, compared to the Balkans and Turkey, like the two other cases it exhibits complexity. In Germany, the Balkans, and Turkey, remembrance and memorialization have been to varying degrees difficult, slow, controversial, politicized, and instrumentalized. In all four cases, civil society actors, including victim groups, have taken the initiative. Public figures, both political and societal, have played important roles in galvanizing citizens and governments into action. The authors emphasize context as explanation for the particular path of remembrance (arduous or smooth), be it domestic politics, the Cold War, or the influence of external actors.

The following essays come to varying conclusions about the robustness of remembrance, but are united in the view that education—both formal and informal, both in the classroom and in other societal organizations—is key in helping the young to both acknowledge difficult history and honor the victims. All four note the institutionalization of remembrance as a way to connect the past and the future, particularly at a time that the witness generation is quickly disappearing.



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## ABOUT THE AUTHORS

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**Dr. iur. Hans-Christian Jasch** is a lawyer and legal historian by training. He holds a PhD in legal history from the Humboldt University in Berlin. He was appointed as director of the Memorial and Educational Site House of the Wannsee Conference in May 2014 following the 2012 publication of a critically acclaimed book on the Nazi state secretary Wilhelm Stuckart, who represented the Ministry of the Interior at the Wannsee Conference. Before starting his assignment as director of the Wannsee Memorial and parallel to his academic research on law and public administration in Nazi Germany, Dr. Jasch worked as a lawyer in the public administration for the German Federal Ministry of the Interior in the field of countering right-wing extremist hate crime and terrorism (2012-2014) and as a seconded national expert on preventing violent radicalization for the counter-terrorism unit of the European Commission in DG Home Affairs from 2007 to 2011. From May 2005 to November 2006, Dr. Jasch was seconded to Rome on the "Bellevue" scholarship of the Office of the German Federal President and the Bosch Foundation and worked in the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and later in the Cabinet of the Italian Minister of Interior, where he dealt primarily with the official dialogue initiative with Islam and on policy initiatives promoting integration. In November 2006, Dr. Jasch moved to Brussels, where he worked as a liaison officer during the German Council Presidency in the Cabinet of Commission VP Frattini.

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# MEMORIALIZATION, REMEMBRANCE, AND ACTS OF COMMEMORATION IN POSTWAR GERMANY

HANS-CHRISTIAN JASCH

## The Importance of Memory, Commemoration, and Memorialization and the Context of Remembrance of Nazi Crimes in Germany

An untranslatable German term was coined after the horrendous crimes committed during the Nazi era: *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*, or dealing with the past. But other than the word “dealing” in English, “*Bewältigung*” actually means to suggest that one can confront, work through, cope with, and eventually “settle” the past. This was of course naïve, wishful thinking or, as the writer and lawyer Bernhard Schlink suggested, a “longing for the impossible.”<sup>1</sup> The sister-word coined in this context, the equally untranslatable *Wiedergutmachung* (literally “to make good again” or repair), which referred to the actions and measures taken after the destruction of the Third Reich to address the consequences of its crimes, is equally naïve. But of course the past is irreversible and the enormous and horrendous crimes committed—in particular the crimes committed against Jews in Europe, which have since been referred to by the rather inaccurate Greek term for a sacrificial burning “Holocaust” or the Hebrew term “Shoah”—have become universally synonymous with a breach of the norms of civilization<sup>2</sup> without precedent in modern times and beyond repair: the murder of approximately 6 million people and the destruction of an entire culture and civilization, in particular in Central and Eastern Europe.

The importance of “remembrance” and memorialization has long been enshrined in the occidental cultures and plays an important role in the Greek-Judeo-Roman-Christian religion(s). The *damnatio memoriae*, i.e., the cancellation of every trace of the person from the life of Rome, as if he or she had never

existed, in order to preserve the honor of the city, was a serious punishment imposed in ancient Rome. It was also used by later rulers to (re-)write history and thus define the past as a legitimization for their actions and claims in the present. In the legal-political tradition, historical legitimization was often central to “prove” the right to rule, the right to a territory, or the right to a throne. Fabricating, inventing, or destroying such a legitimization were commonly used in order to substantiate claims, rally support, and invoke “a just or God-given” cause or a *droit acquis*, a vested right to rule. At the same time, there has been a widespread understanding since antiquity that “overcoming the past” by forgetting past wrongs and cancelling memory and abolishing remembrance could be an important (pre-)condition for future peace and reconciliation (in Latin: *abolitio*).

In religious terms, the abolition of (past) sins is considered as the “road to redemption.” This idea of “letting the past rest” or drawing a line—a *Schlußstrich* or a *punto final*<sup>3</sup>—is reflected in Cicero’s famous words in the Roman Senate after the murder of Julius Caesar on March 17, one year before he was murdered himself in 44 BC: “Omnem memoriam discordiarum oblivione sempiterna delendam” (“All memory to the murderous divides are to be cancelled by eternal forgetting”).<sup>4</sup> It was also common in peace treaties to agree on the “cancellation of past evils” (*abolitio*), as can be shown by the example of the Treaty of Meersen concluded on 8 August 870 AC in the course of the partition of the realm of Lothair II by his uncles Louis the German of East Francia and Charles the Bald of West Francia, the two surviving sons of Emperor Louis I the Pious: “that all past evil be abolished (*abolitio*) between and among us and that all this shall be torn from our hearts with all the evil and anger in such a way, that in the

future nothing will remain in our memory so that there will not be revenge for the evil.”<sup>5</sup>

But there are also more recent examples, such as the Westphalian Treaty of 1648 establishing a new European order, which lasted until the Napoleonic wars and put an end to the murderous Thirty Year (religious) War, which had devastated Central Europe. The Treaty stated that “Both sides grant to each other eternal forgetting and amnesty [*perpetua oblivio et amnestia*] of all that happened since the beginning of war on any place and of any kind committed by the one or the other here or there with hostile intentions.”<sup>6</sup> Similarly, the restoration of the Bourbon monarchy in France also sought to cancel history and commands *l'oubli* (forgetting) in the Charte Constitutionnelle granted by Louis XVIII on 4 June 1814.<sup>7</sup>

Given these historical precedents, it is not surprising that, especially in those countries where change has been brought about by former elites or in negotiation with the former elites, attempts are often made to ignore the past and the wrongs committed in the past. We see this, for example, in the transición in Spain when the dictatorship of Franco was replaced after his death in 1975 by a liberal-democratic constitutional monarchy. The right and the left agreed on a pact of forgetting (“el pacto del olvido”) and an amnesty law was passed in 1977. Only in recent times—after thirty years or one generation—under the socialist Zapatero government and following the initiative of civil society groups such as the Association for the Recovery of Historical Memory (ARHM), individuals such as the controversial investigating magistrate Baltasar Garzón Real, and similar developments in Latin America, do we have a situation where the “foul deeds rise,” bodies from the civil war have become the subject of exhumations,<sup>8</sup> and forced adoptions are investigated.<sup>9</sup>

The situation has been different in Germany than in Spain: regime change was brought about by outside forces after total surrender. However, the reconstruction of a democratic state, in particular in West Germany, was realized—somehow miraculously and with some resemblance to the Spanish case—with the involvement of many of the representatives and the elites of the *ancien régime*, the Nazi regime.<sup>10</sup>

This also affected how and what has been commemorated, especially in the 1950s and 1960s, when generational change broke the chain of continuity. Early postwar history was marked by the efforts of the Allies, in particular the Americans, to denazify, “reeducate,” and democratize Germany. German postwar society and the majority of the German elites, however, embraced a culture of silence and, to a certain degree, impunity when it came to Nazi crimes, with efforts by the German legal system to bring perpetrators to justice only starting on a larger scale in the late 1950s.<sup>11</sup>

Because of its magnitude, unprecedented scale, and European-wide dimension, the Holocaust and other Nazi crimes—the total number of victims, including survivors and enslaved forced laborers, but not counting the victims of the German military aggression, is estimated at 20 million<sup>12</sup>—it was impossible to ignore these crimes. This was also due to intensive efforts during the Holocaust by Jewish organizations in the U.S. to draw attention to the plight of Jews in Europe and to call, among other things, for the bombing of Auschwitz. In this context one might recall the War Emergency Conference of the World Jewish Congress at the end of November 1944 in Atlantic City, where delegates of Jewish organizations from forty U.S. states convened and passed resolutions calling for justice and reparations for the victims in Europe and started to assess the damages.<sup>13</sup>

The most important United Nations (UN) human rights instruments—in particular the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide of 1948—would have been inconceivable without the Holocaust. The Nuremberg trials set an important precedent and shaped how Nazi crimes were perceived and later commemorated. They played a central role in documenting Nazi crimes<sup>14</sup> and in bringing to justice at least some of the major perpetrators.<sup>15</sup> However, the trials did have flaws.<sup>16</sup> Many Germans questioned their legitimacy and considered the trials as victor’s justice.<sup>17</sup> Many of those who had been complicit in Nazi crimes also felt relief: Even crimes against civilians (such as the Holocaust) were considered merely “war crimes” and the responsibility and blame for the commission of such crimes shifted to a few organizations such as the Gestapo and the

SS, without taking into account the intertwined structures of the Nazi state and the complexity of many Nazi crimes, which also involved the civil service, the administration, and the army (the Wehrmacht).<sup>18</sup> This led to “comfortable” legends, which provided the foundation for wide-spread continuity within the elites of the Nazi state and its successor states, in particular the Federal Republic of Germany. These legends coined at Nuremberg by skillful defense teams—who also managed to rally public support, in particular from the churches, to protest the “innocence” of their clients—later “allowed” ordinary Germans to identify with an “honest civil administration,” where people had remained “decent” while simply following orders or with a Wehrmacht that had “fought honorably.”<sup>19</sup>

The Nuremberg trials and the “cosmopolitan” spirit of the immediate postwar years were soon to be overshadowed by the beginning of the Cold War, the recreation of German armies in the East and the West, and the release of those who had not been executed in the mid-1950s.<sup>20</sup> This is one reason why the verdicts passed in Nuremberg—in particular in the U.S. Nuremberg Military Tribunal (NMT) trials,<sup>21</sup> which followed the International Military Tribunal—were in large part ignored in the Federal Republic of Germany until the 1990s. Only when the Cold War ended and other regime changes had been implemented around the world was there a renaissance of the Nuremberg principles leading to the creation of ad-hoc UN courts for crimes committed in the civil war in the former Yugoslavia and the Rwandan genocide, eventually culminating in the establishment of the International Criminal Court in the Hague. In a reunified Germany, eager not to be perceived as a “fourth Reich,” *Erinnerungskultur* (culture of remembrance) then started to become an important element in how the German state perceives itself and likes to represent itself internationally.

Developing a culture of remembrance and memorialization was complex and accompanied by controversy. When West German chancellor Willy Brandt, himself an émigré who had fled Nazi Germany, visited Poland<sup>22</sup> and on 7 December 1970 spontaneously knelt at the Ghetto Monument in Warsaw, this gesture was seen by many Germans as exaggerated and earned him a lot of criticism from the conservative opposition in Germany.<sup>23</sup> Conversely, most of the

outside world interpreted it as a gesture of asking for forgiveness. However, in Poland, where the 1968 nationalist purges had led to a Jewish migration, the gesture was seen with ambivalence.

Still in the 1980s, most of the political elites in Germany regarded grass-roots movements for the establishment of memorials to honor the victims of Nazism with reservation and skepticism, in particular when these efforts also tried to name the perpetrators.<sup>24</sup> Change came slowly after the U.S. television drama “Holocaust” was shown on German TV in 1979 and when, in 1985, German federal president Richard von Weizsäcker marked the fortieth anniversary of the end of World War II with a speech in which he had referred to the defeat suffered by the Third Reich forty years earlier as a liberation. One of the early comprehensive studies on the Holocaust, Raul Hilberg’s book “The Destruction of the European Jews,” which had been published in the U.S. in 1961, was first published in Germany in 1982.<sup>25</sup>

After unification in 1990, German chancellor Helmut Kohl was often regarded as clumsy at best when it came to acts of remembrance, unlike von Weizsäcker, who has been widely praised for his 8 May 1985 speech. Three days before, on 5 May 1985, Kohl had taken U.S. president Ronald Reagan to visit the site of the Bergen Belsen Concentration Camp and afterward to a soldier’s cemetery in Bitburg, where members of the Waffen-SS were also buried. After reunification he also pressed for the remodeling of the “Neue Wache” monument on Berlin’s central avenue Unter den Linden to become the central memorial of Germany. The neoclassical building by the Prussian nineteenth century architect Karl Friedrich Schinkel had served this purpose under three different political systems: the Weimar Republic, when it had been remodeled in 1931 according to plans of the architect Heinrich Tessenow to serve as an “Ehrenmal,” or a memorial for the fallen soldiers of WWI; the Third Reich when it continued to be an *Ehrenmal*; and the GDR, which used it as a sort of homage to Prussia with a regular changing of the guard and National People’s Army soldiers practicing the Prussian goose-step. Without much ado, unified Germany then placed a magnified sculpture of a pieta in the chapel-like sober interior of the Neue Wache. The pieta is a copy of a much smaller original, which

had been sculpted in 1937 by Käthe Kollwitz to remember the loss of her son who died in World War I. Under the inscription: “To the victims of war and the reign of terror” (“*Den Opfern von Krieg und Gewaltherrschaft*”) this Christian-style monument has been perceived as an affront by many victim groups as it seeks to mix a cocktail of remembrance of Holocaust victims, the victims of the Anglo-American air raids on German cities, and the German soldiers—among them many perpetrators of the Holocaust—who died during the war. Furthermore, the term “*Gewaltherrschaft*” can also be read in a totalitarian interpretation to include victims of the German Democratic Republic.<sup>26</sup>

Controversy has also accompanied the creation of a central Holocaust memorial in the new capital of unified Germany, The Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe (*Denkmal für die ermordeten Juden Europas*), which was designed by architect Peter Eisenman and was inaugurated in 2005. The monument, a large field of concrete stelae, resembles a Jewish cemetery. The idea for this monument in a central location just beside the Brandenburg Gate and the U.S. Embassy had been brought forward by a private initiative in order to show that unified Germany was conscious of its historical guilt and would remember the crimes committed in the past. Critics argue, however, that the monument was an act of ingratiation with the victims and a pretentious act of self-expiation. It is not an authentic place of the Holocaust as are the sites of the concentration and death camps, the Wannsee villa, or the nearby Topography of Terror, but an artificial tourist attraction in a central location. Others argued that a central Holocaust monument had to be a mark of shame or a stigma for Germany in order not to become a sham.<sup>27</sup> The artist Horst Hoheisel—known for his counter-monuments—suggested tearing down and pulverizing the Brandenburg Gate (the best-known national monument in Berlin) and leaving the rubble on the empty lot beside it as a monument to the Holocaust.<sup>28</sup> Today Eisenman’s monument is generally accepted as a gesture toward the victims of the Holocaust. Its central location, which draws people visiting the city of Berlin, is also an important symbol of how the Holocaust is perceived in modern-day Germany. It has become—as the German federal president Joachim Gauck remarked on Holocaust

Remembrance Day in 2015—“an integral part” of German “self-perception” with which every generation has to grapple; indeed, as he further noted, “there would be no German identity without Auschwitz.”<sup>29</sup>

This expansion of remembrance has also been reflected on the European or even the universal level since the turn of the millennium: following the Stockholm International Forum on the Holocaust in January 2000, the mass murder of European Jews has even been elevated to an object of remembrance as a central part of European heritage. In the Stockholm declaration, formulated to a large degree by the Israeli historian Jehuda Bauer, the participants underlined: “With humanity still scarred by genocide, ethnic cleansing, racism, anti-Semitism, and xenophobia, the international community shares a solemn responsibility to fight those evils. [...] Our commitment must be to remember the victims who perished, respect the survivors still with us, and reaffirm humanity’s common aspiration for mutual understanding and justice.”<sup>30</sup>

### Addressing the Past through Physical Spaces, Cultural Expressions, and Symbolic Gestures

The twisted road to the commemoration of Nazi crimes in Germany is also reflected in how the past has been reflected upon and addressed in physical spaces in Berlin and in cultural expressions and symbolic gestures adopted in postwar Germany. This will be illustrated with the following examples of the German Resistance and the Holocaust.

#### POSITIVE IDENTIFICATION WITH RESISTANCE: “THE OTHER GERMANY”

The German Resistance Memorial Center is located in the Bendler Block in the center of Berlin, at the historic site of the attempted coup against the Nazi regime on 20 July 1944.<sup>31</sup>

Commemoration of the plotters of the 20 July 1944 coup, the “other Germany,” started relatively early—in 1952—amid a heated public debate about reconstituting an Army in West Germany and the banning of a neo-Nazi party, the Socialist Reich Party of Germany (*Sozialistische Reichspartei Deutschlands*, SRP),

by the German Federal Constitutional Court in the same year. The party had been founded in October 1949 by the former Wehrmacht officer Otto Ernst Remer, who had played a central part in quashing the July 1944 *coup d'état* as the commander of the Großdeutschland battalion, which was stationed in Berlin. Remer's SRP managed to acquire 11 percent of the votes in the elections in the West German state of Lower Saxony in May 1952 and was perceived as a growing danger to the young democratic order that had been established in West Germany. The legacy of the July 1944 plot was highly controversial among Germans. It showed that some Germans had recognized the evil character of the regime and had taken action, risking—and most of them losing—their lives, while the great majority of the German people and the German army had remained passive and mostly loyal to their "*Führer*" and the criminal regime until the bitter end. Honoring the bravery of the plotters could thus provide an anchor for a positive identity derived from the "other Germany," especially for a new German army, but it might also have been considered a source of shame for the majority of the population and the army for having remained inactive and loyal to a criminal regime. Remer played an active part in this controversy. He boasted about his role in crushing the coup d'état in 1944 and accused the plotters of treason. This in turn led to a trial against him—Federal Minister of the Interior Robert Lehr, himself a former resistance member, together with Marion Gräfin Yorck von Wartenberg and Annedore Leber, both widows of members of the resistance movement, pressed charges against him. The prosecutor in this case was Fritz Bauer, district attorney of Braunschweig, who basically built his case on the assumption that an unjust and criminal state such as the Third Reich, which had forsaken its citizens, in no way could have been the victim of treason. The court followed Bauer's arguments and Remer was condemned to three years of prison for having insulted the members of the resistance and thus reviling the memory of the deceased resisters.<sup>32</sup>

Against the backdrop of these events, it is worth noting that on 20 July 1952, on the initiative of relatives of the plotters, Eva Olbricht, widow of General Friedrich Olbricht (one of the resisters), laid the cornerstone for a memorial in the courtyard of the Bendler Block. A year later—just four weeks after the

Soviet Army had deployed tanks to East Berlin to put down an uprising by discontented East Germans on 17 June 1953—Berlin's mayor Ernst Reuter unveiled the monument created by Professor Richard Scheibe: the bronze figure of a young man with his hands bound to mark the fight against "Totalitarian Rule."<sup>33</sup> Two years later, the former Bendlerstrasse was ceremoniously renamed "Stauffenbergstrasse" and on 20 July 1962, a plaque was unveiled in the commemorative courtyard bearing the names of the officers executed there by a firing squad on 20 July 1944.

It was, however, only in 1967 that the Berlin Senate, upon the initiative of a circle of former resistance fighters, resolved to establish a memorial and educational center intended to inform the public about resistance to National Socialism; the center opened a year later. In 1980, the commemorative courtyard was remodeled according to a design by Professor Erich Reusch. The following inscription was engraved in the wall of the entrance to the courtyard: "Here in the former Army High Command, Germans organized the attempt to overthrow the lawless National Socialist regime on July 20, 1944. For this they sacrificed their lives."

Since the late 1980s/early 1990s the German Resistance Memorial Center has expanded to document other resistance groups and forms of resistance against Nazism.

#### COMMEMORATION OF THE HOLOCAUST

The acknowledgement and the commemoration of the Holocaust were in some ways even more complicated than honoring the resistance fighters. The German Jewish Holocaust victims had been neighbors, and during the Third Reich many people took advantage of the fact that Jewish Germans had been forced to relinquish professional positions or profited from the so-called "aryanization," the plunder of Jewish property.<sup>34</sup> In a city like Berlin with a large Jewish community—from which approximately 57,000 people were deported and only 7,500 remained in the city either as spouses of mixed marriages or in hiding—people could hardly claim not knowing about their disappearance. However, efforts of commemoration were not started by the German

majority population, but rather mainly by Jewish associations and/or associations of camp survivors.<sup>35</sup> On 10 September 1950 the newly founded Central Council of the Jews in Germany appealed to German politicians: "Five years after the liberation we are standing in front of the remaining graves and in our thoughts in front of the endless fields of human ash, gone with the wind and fertilizing the soil of Auschwitz, Treblinka. Today, after five years, we are further away than ever, to receive a recognition for the victims in the land which would have the first obligation, to look inward and take it upon itself in humility to expiate for the sacrifice of our community."<sup>36</sup>

#### *The Case of the Wannsee Memorial*

In southwestern Berlin, on the shores of the lake Wannsee, is a large villa that was used between 1941 and 1945 as a guest house for the central police and intelligence agency of the Nazi state, the *Reichssicherheitshauptamt*. On 20 January 1942, upon the invitation of the head of the *Reichssicherheitshauptamt* Reinhard Heydrich, the villa was used for a conference with representatives of other government and party agencies in order to coordinate and implement what was euphemistically referred to as the "*Endlösung*," the so-called "Final Solution of the Jewish question."<sup>37</sup> The minutes of this meeting were retrieved by the U.S. military prosecution in 1946-1947 from the archives of the Foreign Office and used as evidence in the last trial in Nuremberg, the Wilhelmstraße case,<sup>38</sup> in which one of the participants of the conference, the former state secretary of the Reich's Ministry of Interior Wilhelm Stuckart, had been indicted.<sup>39</sup>

After Berlin had been occupied by Soviet forces and the Nazi government was toppled, the villa was handed over to the city of Berlin. At first it was rented to the August Bebel Institute, a Social Democratic training center. In 1952 it became a recreation home for the inner-city district of Neukölln, a working class area and a stronghold of the Social Democratic Party (SPD) that governed Berlin.<sup>40</sup>

Despite the fact that the Wannsee conference had been revealed in the Nuremberg trials,<sup>41</sup> it took several decades before the villa became a memorial. An international initiative to convert the villa into an

"International Documentation Centre on National-Socialism and its Consequences" had been raised in the 1960s after Adolf Eichmann, who had also been a participant at the conference, had been tried and hanged in Jerusalem. The international initiative was headed by the Polish Auschwitz survivor Joseph Wulf, who had been living in West Berlin since the 1950s and had made it his mission to educate the Germans about Nazism, the Holocaust, and its consequences. He had written a series of popular documentary books on the elites of the Third Reich and was a successful publisher who had managed to mobilize international support for his initiative. Among the major supporters were the then president of the World Jewish Congress Nahum Goldmann and the Holocaust survivor and historian Erich Goldhagen. The initiative for the documentation center was, however, not welcomed by everybody.

From 1966 onward, there was a heated debate within newspapers about what would be most needed in West Berlin, which had been surrounded by the Berlin Wall since August 1961: recreation facilities for working class children from the inner city or an International Documentation Centre, which would collect documents about the crimes that had been committed during the Nazi era, in particular documents from the trials that started in West Germany in the late 1950s. Ironically Wulf's critics—among them also the Protestant theologian Heinrich Grüber, who had helped many Jews to survive during the Nazi era and who had been a witness against Adolf Eichmann in Jerusalem—also argued that the creation of such a documentation center would help the extremist right-wing NPD to secure more votes in Berlin. Berlin's Social Democratic mayor Klaus Schütz, who later became German Ambassador in Israel, even said that he would support a documentation center, but that he did not want Wannsee to become "a gruesome place of cult" ("keine makabere Kultstätte").<sup>42</sup> For Joseph Wulf, the public controversy, which often included anti-Semitic attacks against him personally, was deeply disturbing. In 1970 he relinquished the initiative. Four years later, on 10 October 1974, he took his life.

It took almost another decade before the history of the villa as the venue of the Wannsee Conference was officially recalled. A first commemorative plaque,

which was vandalized and later stolen, had been put up on the house in 1972. It was basically due to the initiative of then-mayor Richard von Weizsäcker that the fortieth anniversary of the Wannsee Conference was commemorated with a new plaque. Richard von Weizsäcker was the son of Ernst von Weizsäcker, state secretary in the Foreign Office who had been informed about the Wannsee Conference and who was tried in the Wilhelmstraße trial in 1947-1949. Richard had been part of his father's defense team.

Eventually in 1987 the Berlin Senate embraced the initial idea of the citizens' initiative around Joseph Wulf and decided to convert the house into a memorial, which, however, was not to become the documentation center Wulf had imagined. In 1988, the reconstruction of the villa began. In 1992, on the fiftieth anniversary of the Wannsee Conference, the memorial and educational center opened a permanent exhibition and commenced its educational activities.<sup>43</sup>

#### *Mourning the Holocaust as a Void in Postwar German Society: The Grunewald Ramp*

The difficult road to remembrance can also be exemplified at Bahnhof Berlin-Grunewald, the Grunewald station, which was used as one of the major places from which to deport Jewish Berliners to the East beginning in October 1941. Efforts to commemorate the deportations and thus also point to the significant role of the German railways in making the mass deportations possible, started in 1953 when the "Vereinigung der Verfolgten des Naziregimes (VVN)," an allegedly Communist association of camp survivors,<sup>44</sup> organized a commemorative event, which was then interrupted by West Berlin police.<sup>45</sup> The VVN put up a commemorative plaque, which was one of the first monuments to refer explicitly to the "tens of thousands of Jews who had been deported to the death camps by the thugs of the Hitler regime."<sup>46</sup> It took until the mid-1960s before the commemorative event eventually became accepted and police did not interfere in the ceremony.

A new plaque was unveiled in 1973 and stolen in 1986. On 18 October 1987, the forty-sixth anniversary of the first deportation transport, a new monument was erected by a women's group of the Protestant congregation of Grunewald. In the same

year, the Senate of Berlin called for proposals for a larger monument, which was inaugurated on 18 October 1991. It was designed by the Polish artist Karol Broniatowski and consists of a concrete wall with hollow imprints of human bodies signifying absence and loss and illustrating how the hollow shadows of those who were doomed to die were driven up the ramp to the platform where the trains where waiting to transport people to the ghettos and camps in the East. In 1998, nearly a decade after the fall of the Berlin Wall and the return of the railway area to its new owner, Deutsche Bahn AG, the "Gleis 17" (Track 17) monument was unveiled. It has now become a central *lieu de mémoire* in the official remembrance culture of the Federal Republic, with former journalist Inge Deutschkron, who survived in hiding in Berlin, as one of the proponents for a regular commemoration ceremony in Grunewald.<sup>47</sup> On 27 January 2010, it was visited by the Israeli president Shimon Peres and his German counterpart, the federal president Horst Köhler.

These examples should illustrate that even in response to a crime of the scale of the Holocaust, memorialization and commemoration were far from being self-evident in the country of the perpetrators. In fact, memorialization and commemoration have usually been the consequence of personal initiatives and political opportunities. Shaping history and defining which and in what way historical events will be recorded are still instruments of power, as they were in Roman times. Remembrance remains a struggle, but it has also been a powerful means for shaping and educating civil society in Germany. The confrontation with the crimes of the past can help to assess present developments and to recognize and correct dangerous aberrations, but the past can also be instrumentalized and reinterpreted in ways that are distorting and problematic in order to advance political agendas.

## Notes

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1 Bernhard Schlink, "Die Bewältigung der Vergangenheit durch Recht," in *Vergangenheitsbewältigung am Ende des zwanzigsten Jahrhunderts*, ed. Helmut König/ Michael Kohlstruck/Andreas Wöll (*Leviathan. Zeitschrift für Sozialwissenschaften*, Sonderheft 18, 1998), pp. 433-451.

2 For further reference, see: Daniel Levy/Nathan Sznajder, *Erinnerung im Globalen Zeitalter. Der Holocaust* (Frankfurt am Main, 2001).

3 The Argentinian Ley de Punto Final ("Full stop law") of 24 December 1986 (Law No. 23492), passed three years after the end of the military dictatorship of the Proceso de Reorganización Nacional (1976 to 1983) and restoration of democracy, is a modern-day example of a law which mandated the end of investigation and prosecution of people accused of political violence during the dictatorship and up to the restoration of democratic rule in Argentina on 10 December 1983.

4 Marcus Tullius, "Cicero's auserwählte Reden," ed. Reinhold Klotz (Leipzig, 1838), p. 235.

5 Translation by author. On the Treaty of Meersen, see Rudolf Schieffer, *Die Karolinger*, 5th ed. (Stuttgart, 2014).

6 Translation by author. The Latin text can be retrieved at:

[http://www.pax-westphalica.de/itmipo/pdf/o\\_1648lt-orig.pdf](http://www.pax-westphalica.de/itmipo/pdf/o_1648lt-orig.pdf)

7 The text can be retrieved at:

[https://fr.wikisource.org/wiki/Charte\\_constitutionnelle\\_du\\_4\\_juin\\_1814](https://fr.wikisource.org/wiki/Charte_constitutionnelle_du_4_juin_1814)

8 William Shakespeare, Hamlet, I. 5. In 2008, the Association for the Recovery of Historical Memory (ARHM) initiated a systematic search for mass graves of people executed during Franco's regime, which has been supported since the Spanish Socialist Workers' Party's victory during the 2004 elections by José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero's government. A Ley de la memoria histórica de España (Law on the Historical Memory of Spain) was passed in 2007. The law is supposed to enforce an official recognition of the crimes committed against civilians during the Francoist rule and organized under state supervision the search for mass graves.

9 Investigations have begun into wide-scale child abduction during the Franco years. The lost children of Francoism may reach 300,000, see Giles Tremlett, "Victims of Spanish 'stolen babies network' call for investigation," *The Guardian*, 27 January 2011, <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2011/jan/27/spain-alleged-stolen-babies-network>.

10 For further reference, see Norbert Frei, *Vergangenheitspolitik. Die Anfänge der Bundesrepublik und die NS-Vergangenheit* (Munich, 1996). In this context it is important to recall that one of the first laws passed by the freely elected German Bundestag in 1949 was an amnesty law (Gesetz über die Gewährung von Straffreiheit vom 31. Dezember 1949, BGBl. I Nr. 9, pp. 37-38, [http://www.bgbli.de/xaver/bgbli/start.xavstartbk=Bundesanzeiger\\_BGBI&jumpTo=bgb154s0203.pdf#\\_bgb1\\_\\_%2F%2F\\*%5B%40attr\\_id%3D%27bgb149s0037.pdf%27%5D\\_\\_1454162516599](http://www.bgbli.de/xaver/bgbli/start.xavstartbk=Bundesanzeiger_BGBI&jumpTo=bgb154s0203.pdf#_bgb1__%2F%2F*%5B%40attr_id%3D%27bgb149s0037.pdf%27%5D__1454162516599)), which was followed by other amnesty laws (e.g., Gesetz über den Erlass von Strafen und Geldbußen und die Niederschlagung von Strafverfahren und Bußgeldverfahren vom 17. Juli 1954, in BGBl. I Nr. 21, pp. 202-209, [http://www.bgbli.de/xaver/bgbli/start.xavstartbk=Bundesanzeiger\\_BGBI&jumpTo=bgb154s0203.pdf#\\_bgb1\\_\\_%2F%2F\\*%5B%40attr\\_id%3D%27bgb154s0203.pdf%27%5D\\_\\_1454162277251](http://www.bgbli.de/xaver/bgbli/start.xavstartbk=Bundesanzeiger_BGBI&jumpTo=bgb154s0203.pdf#_bgb1__%2F%2F*%5B%40attr_id%3D%27bgb154s0203.pdf%27%5D__1454162277251)). The end of denazification and the law on Article 131 of the German Grundgesetz (Gesetz zur Regelung der Rechtsverhältnisse der unter Artikel 131 des Grundgesetzes fallenden Personen, BGBl. I S. 307) reopened the ranks of the civil service to former members of the Nazi administration. By the mid-1950s often more than 50 percent of the staff of the federal ministries had been former Nazi Party members, see e.g., <http://www.ifz-muenchen.de/aktuelles/themen/deutsche-kontinuitaeten/>.

11 For further reference, see: Nathan Stoltzfus/Henry Friedlander, ed., *Nazi Crimes and the Law* (German Historical Institute, 2008).

12 Peter Reichel, *Vergangenheitsbewältigung in Deutschland. Die Auseinandersetzung mit der NS-Diktatur von 1945 bis heute* (Munich, 2001), p. 75.

13 For further detail, see the collection of memos at: [http://www.fdrlibrary.marist.edu/\\_resources/images/wrb/wrb0959.pdf](http://www.fdrlibrary.marist.edu/_resources/images/wrb/wrb0959.pdf); Constantin Goschler, *Wiedergutmachung: Westdeutschland und die Verfolgten des Nationalsozialismus* (1945-1954) (Munich, 1992), p. 46 et seq.

14 Michael R. Marrus, "The Holocaust at Nuremberg," *YAD VASHEM STUDIES* 26 (1998), pp. 4-51.

15 Peter Reichel, *Vergangenheitsbewältigung in Deutschland. Die Auseinandersetzung mit der NS-Diktatur von 1945 bis heute* (Munich, 2001), p. 71, highlights that only 5,000 perpetrators were condemned for "war crimes" in the parts of Germany that were occupied by the Western Allies, while the number in the Soviet occupational zone and the GDR was higher, with 13,000 people who were condemned sometimes in "summary trials" such as the infamous Waldeheim trials for "fascist war crimes and crimes against humanity." This is indeed relatively low, when estimating that approximately 500,000 people were involved more or less directly in the Holocaust, and many more in other crimes committed by or in the name of the Nazi state.

16 For a critical assessment of the Nuremberg trials and the willingness of the Allies to acknowledge the particularity of the Holocaust/the crimes committed against Jews, see Donald Bloxham, *Genocide on Trial: War Crimes Trials and the Formation of Holocaust History and Memory* (Oxford, 2001); Kim C. Priemel, Alexa Stiller, ed., *Reassessing the Nuremberg Military Tribunals. Transitional Justice, Trial Narratives, and Historiography* (Oxford et al., 2012).

17 Markus Urban, "Kollektivschuld durch die Hintertür? Die Wahrnehmung der NMT in der westdeutschen Öffentlichkeit," in *NMT. Die Nürnberger Militärtribuale zwischen Geschichte, Gerechtigkeit und Rechtsschöpfung*, ed. Kim C. Priemel/Alexa Stiller (Hamburg, 2013), pp. 684-718.

18 On the role of the civil service, see Hans-Christian Jasch, "Civil Service Lawyers and the Holocaust: The Case of Wilhelm Stuckart," in *The Law in Nazi Germany. Ideology, Opportunism and the Perversion of Justice*, ed. Alan E. Steinweis/Robert D. Rachlin (New York/Oxford 2013), pp. 37-61 and also "Behördliche Abstimmung zur Vorbereitung von Deportation und Völkermord," in *Die Wannsee-Konferenz am 20. Januar 1942. Dokumente, Forschungsstand, Kontroversen*, ed. Norbert Kampe/Peter Klein (Cologne/Weimar/Vienna, 2013), pp. 276-302.

19 For a case study on the defense of the State Secretary of the Interior, Wilhelm Stuckart, see H.C.Jasch, *Staatssekretär Dr. Wilhelm Stuckart (1902-1953) und die Judenpolitik. Der Mythos von der sauberen Verwaltung* (Munich, 2012), pp. 373-451. This was a memorialization narrative which lasted, in the case of the Wehrmacht, until the 1990s, when the Crimes of the Wehrmacht exhibition by the Hamburg Institute for Social Research caused a major and sometimes surprising controversy.

20 For further reference, see Norbert Frei, *Vergangenheitspolitik. Die Anfänge der Bundesrepublik und die NS-Vergangenheit* (Munich, 1996).

21 On the NMT trials, see: Kim C. Priemel and Alexa Stiller, eds., *NMT. Die Nürnberger Militärtribuale zwischen Geschichte, Gerechtigkeit und Rechtsschöpfung* (Hamburg, 2013).

22 Poland was one of the countries that suffered most under German occupation. Approximately 20 percent of the population, or 6 million Poles of which 3 million were Polish Jews, were killed during WWII.

23 See: "Kniefall angemessen oder übertrieben?" *Der Spiegel*, 14 December 1970, p. 27, <http://www.spiegel.de/spiegel/print/d-43822427.html>.

24 Astrid Messerschmidt, "Geschichtsbewusstsein ohne Identitätsbesetzung- kritische Gedenkstättenpädagogik in der Migrationsgesellschaft," *Aus Politik und Zeitgeschichte* Nr. 3-4 (2016), pp. 16-22.

25 Edited by Ulf Wolter and translated by Christian Seeger et al., published by Olle & Wolter, Berlin 1982.

26 Peter Reichel, *Vergangenheitsbewältigung in Deutschland. Die Auseinandersetzung mit der NS-Diktatur von 1945 bis heute* (Munich, 2001), p. 206.

27 For discussion, see *Ibid.*, p. 207 et seq.

28 For further details, see: [https://web.archive.org/web/20070929081112/http://www.zrz-pdm.de/bull/pdf/b3031/3031\\_kirsch.pdf](https://web.archive.org/web/20070929081112/http://www.zrz-pdm.de/bull/pdf/b3031/3031_kirsch.pdf)

29 Bundespräsidialamt, Federal President Joachim Gauck on the Day of

Remembrance of the Victims of National Socialism on 27 January 2015 in Berlin, at [http://www.bundespraesident.de/SharedDocs/Downloads/DE/Reden/2015/01/150127-Gedenken-Holocaust-englisch.pdf;jsessionid=F31C3B45F0B54F4F3A145F1B5C5514A6.2\\_cid379?\\_\\_blob=publicationFile](http://www.bundespraesident.de/SharedDocs/Downloads/DE/Reden/2015/01/150127-Gedenken-Holocaust-englisch.pdf;jsessionid=F31C3B45F0B54F4F3A145F1B5C5514A6.2_cid379?__blob=publicationFile)

<sup>30</sup> Quoted after Daniel Levy/Natan Sznajder, *The Holocaust and Memory in the Global Age* (Philadelphia, 2006), p. 159. The text can be retrieved at: <https://www.holocaustremembrance.com/about-us/stockholm-declaration>

<sup>31</sup> For further details see: <http://www.gdw-berlin.de/en/home/>.

<sup>32</sup> Peter Reichel, *Vergangenheitsbewältigung in Deutschland. Die Auseinandersetzung mit der NS-Diktatur von 1945 bis heute* (Munich, 2001), p. 97-106.

<sup>33</sup> This statue is very similar to an earlier work by Scheibe called "Befreiung" (Liberation). *Befreiung* was created in 1936 to celebrate the "homecoming" of the Saar region to Nazi Germany. Unlike the statue in the Bendl Block, the shackles on *Befreiung* are broken.

<sup>34</sup> Peter Reichel, *Vergangenheitsbewältigung in Deutschland. Die Auseinandersetzung mit der NS-Diktatur von 1945 bis heute* (Munich, 2001), p. 80, calculates that the individual restitution of Jewish property, which was finalized in the late 1960s, amounted to a volume of 3 to 3.5 billion Deutsche Mark. Additionally 4 billion Deutsche Mark was paid for claims against the Reich according to the Federal Restitution Law of 19 July 1957 (Bundesrückerstattungsgesetz) according to a report submitted by the federal government in October 1986.

<sup>35</sup> Reinhard Rürup, "Nationalsozialismus, Krieg und Judenmord. Erinnerungspolitik und Erinnerungskulturen im internationalen Vergleich," in *Materialien zum Denkmal für die ermordeten Juden Europas*, ed. Stiftung Denkmal für die ermordeten Juden Europas (Berlin, 2005), p. 156-171, here p. 167 f.

<sup>36</sup> Quoted after Peter Reichel, *Vergangenheitsbewältigung in Deutschland. Die Auseinandersetzung mit der NS-Diktatur von 1945 bis heute* (Munich, 2001), p. 84.

<sup>37</sup> On Wannsee, see: Mark Rosemann, *The Villa, The Lake, The Meeting. Wannsee and the Final Solution* (London, 2002); Christian Gerlach, "Die Wannsee-Konferenz, das Schicksal der deutschen Juden und Hitlers politische Grundsentscheidung, alle Juden Europas zu ermorden," *Werkstatt Geschichte* Nr. 18 (1997), pp. 7-44; Eberhard Jäckel, "On the purpose of the Wannseeconference," in *Perspectives on the Holocaust. Essays in Honor of Raul Hilberg*, ed. (1995), pp. 39-50.

<sup>38</sup> On the Wilhelmstraßen or Ministries case, see: "Nazi Conspiracy and Aggression," Office of United States Chief Counsel for Prosecution of Axis Criminality, Washington 1946, Vol. VIII.

<sup>39</sup> See H.C.Jasch, *Staatssekretär Dr. Wilhelm Stuckart (1902-1953) und die Judenpolitik. Der Mythos von der sauberen Verwaltung* (Munich, 2012), pp. 373-451.

<sup>40</sup> On the postwar history of the villa, see Gerhard Schoenberger, "Der lange Weg nach Wannsee. Von der Gründerzeitvilla zur Gedenkstätte," *Dachauer Hefte* 8 (1992), pp. 150-163; Gerd Kühl, "Schullandheim oder Forschungsstätte? Die Auseinandersetzung um ein Dokumentationszentrum im Haus der Wannsee-Konferenz (1966/67)," *Zeithistorische Forschungen/Studies in Contemporary History*, Online-Ausgabe, 5 (2008), H. 2, <http://www.zeithistorische-forschungen.de/2008/id=4570>, Druckausgabe: pp. 211-235.

<sup>41</sup> Already in the first trial in front of the IMT the conference was mentioned without a precise date by one of its former participants, Joseph Bühler, a former state secretary to the Generalgouverneur Hans Frank, who was questioned as a witness on 23 April 1946, see "Der Prozeß gegen die Hauptkriegsverbrecher vor dem Internationalen Gerichtshof Nürnberg 14. November 1945 – 1. Oktober 1946," *Amtlicher Wortlaut in deutscher Sprache* (Nürnberg, 1947), Bd. XII, pp. 77 et seq.

<sup>42</sup> Klaus Schütz, "Meine Antwort an Rolf Hochhuth," *Welt am Sonntag*, 5 November 1967, quoted in Gerd Kühl, "Schullandheim oder Forschungsstätte? Die Auseinandersetzung um ein Dokumentationszentrum im Haus der Wannsee-Konferenz (1966/67)," *Zeithistorische Forschungen/Studies in Contemporary History*, Online-Ausgabe, 5 (2008), H. 2, <http://www.zeithistorische-forschungen.de/2008/id=4570>, Druckausgabe: p. 225.

<sup>43</sup> For further information, see: [www.ghwk.de](http://www.ghwk.de)

<sup>44</sup> The VVN increasingly became dependent on the East German Socialist Unity Party, the SED, which led to the creation of other survivor organizations. See Elke Reuter/Detlef Hansel, *Das kurze Leben der VVN von 1947 bis 1953* (Berlin, 1997), p. 189 f.

<sup>45</sup> See Stephanie Endlich/Nora Goldenbogen/Beatrix Herlemann/Monika Kahl/Regina Scheer, *Gedenkstätten für die Opfer des Nationalsozialismus*, Bd. 2 (Bonn, 1999), p. 210.

<sup>46</sup> Gerd Kühl, "Ein vergessener Streiter der frühen Holocaust-Erinnerung: Adolf Burg und der ehemalige Deportationsbahnhof Berlin-Grunewald," *Medaon (Magazin für jüdisches Leben in Forschung und Bildung)* 15 (2014) [http://www.medaon.de/pdf/MEDAON\\_15\\_Kuehling.pdf](http://www.medaon.de/pdf/MEDAON_15_Kuehling.pdf), p. 7 et seq.

<sup>47</sup> She also gave the commemoration speech in 2011:<http://www.inge-deutschkron-stiftung.de/wp-content/uploads/2011/11/Gedenkrede-Inge-Deutschkron.pdf>.



# THE FUTURE OF REMEMBRANCE: ENGAGING YOUNG PEOPLE IN COMMEMORATION

KATHARINA VON MÜNSTER

“Without memory, there would be no civilization, no society, no future.”

*Elie Wiesel*

## Introduction

This essay draws mostly on the experiences I gathered while working for ten years with *Aktion Sühnezeichen Friedensdienste* (ASF), also known as Action Reconciliation Service for Peace, in Israel and the United States, and a number of recent interviews I led with partners and volunteers of ASF.\* The article will focus mainly on the ways young adults, the majority being German, who sign up for a program with ASF, engage in acts of commemoration. Building on that, I will offer some observations and recommendations on the role of youth in the future of remembrance. This is not a comprehensive account of ASF's activities or ways youth can engage in commemoration, but an attempt to offer some insights, ideas, and inspiration.

## Youth and Holocaust Remembrance in Germany and Beyond Today: A Cursory Overview

While it took a number of years after the Second World War, today Holocaust remembrance and education are an integral part of Germany's political culture and education system. There are many ways that youth in Germany learn about the past. All students study the Nazi period, World War II, and the Holocaust at school in history and other classes.

Through talking to youth and educators, it becomes clear that this kind of formal education, though essential to establish basic knowledge, often gives little room for youth to reflect on the historical legacy. What triggers young people to become engaged in remembrance initiatives is often a personal encounter with a survivor, a conversation with a family member,

an extracurricular research project, a film, a visit to a memorial site, a museum workshop, a youth exchange, an international summer program, or some other experience.

Our knowledge of what activates engagement means funding for more informal settings of Holocaust education and remembrance is crucial. And fortunately, as of now, resources are being made available by the federal state, local governments, the European Union, foundations, museums, churches, and others in Germany to sponsor youth programs that focus on commemoration, often combined with tolerance education.

Internationally, Holocaust remembrance and education have gained more importance over the decades. The formation in 1998 of what is today called the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance and the designation in 2005 of January 27 as the International Holocaust Remembrance Day by the United Nations were important symbolic steps toward an international recognition of the need for Holocaust remembrance and with it the continued fight against anti-Semitism, racism, xenophobia, and other forms of intolerance. The history of the Holocaust is taught in many European nations, the United States, Israel, and several other countries. The number of Holocaust museums and memorial sites has grown substantially, especially since the end of the Cold War. The German-based *Gedenkstättenforum* website lists more than 500 entries linking to memorial sites, museums, and remembrance initiatives worldwide.

But, many wonder, more than seventy years after the end of the Holocaust and World War II, what is the

future of all the existing memory projects? Are people and especially the younger generation today at all interested in this history?

When German youth were asked in an opinion poll in 2010 whether they thought it was important to learn about the Nazi past and the Holocaust and commemorate the events, the majority agreed. However, at the same time youth in this study and in general conversations also often complain about hearing too much about the Nazi past or being made to feel guilty or ashamed.

So how can we successfully engage young people in acts of commemoration?

I will now look at the example of *Aktion Sühnezeichen Friedensdienste*, which was one of the pioneers in Germany calling for a confrontation with the Nazi past, years before Holocaust remembrance became an integral part of Germany's political culture.

### Remembering, Learning, Taking Action: The Example of Aktion Sühnezeichen Friedensdienste

#### BACKGROUND

*Aktion Sühnezeichen Friedensdienste* (ASF) was founded in 1958 by members of the Protestant Church who called on Germans to recognize their guilt for Germany's Nazi crimes and the responsibility that comes with this legacy.

The founding document reads as follows: "We Germans started the Second World War and for this reason alone, more than others, became guilty of causing immeasurable suffering to humankind. Germans have in sinful revolt against the will of God exterminated millions of Jews. Those of us who survived and did not want this to happen did not do enough to prevent it."<sup>1</sup>

Convinced that the first step toward reconciliation had to be made by Germans, the founders of Action Reconciliation pleaded that "the other nations, who suffered because of us, will allow us with our hands and with our means to do something good in their countries" as a sign of atonement, reconciliation, and

peace.

The outreach was to be carried out mostly by young adults who were sent to do voluntary service in the countries and with the communities that had suffered under Nazi Germany. In the early years, volunteers engaged mostly in reconstruction activities. ASF volunteers helped to build a facility for mentally challenged individuals in Norway, assisted in the restoration of Coventry Cathedral in the UK, worked on a Kibbutz in Israel, and restored war-torn churches in East Germany.

Later on, the focus shifted from reconstruction activities to engaging directly with victims of Nazi Germany. Volunteers provide social services to Jewish and non-Jewish victims of Nazi persecution or work at Holocaust education centers. Until today, this is a major focus of the activities of ASF in currently thirteen countries in Western and Eastern Europe, Israel, and the United States.

Over the past fifty-eight years, more than 10,000 individuals have participated in ASF programs. Every year around 180 young people are sent off to a year-long service. Another 300 mostly young adults take part in international summer work camps and other programs. The majority of the participants of the year-long service is German, but the organization has grown the number of international participants in the volunteer program by establishing multinational programs in Germany, the UK, and Poland.

#### CONFRONTING HISTORY AND YOURSELF

The ways participants of ASF programs engage in acts of commemoration and reconciliation are manifold. Confronting the continuing legacy of history and especially of the Nazi regime, World War II, and the Holocaust, and the role individuals and society played in it, is a red thread woven into almost all of the programs. Many of the year-long volunteers work with survivors or at museums and memorial sites, thus directly engaging in acts of reconciliation and remembrance. Participants of all programs are encouraged to reflect on how individuals in their families, neighborhoods, and societies acted, and consequently on their own role in shaping today's society. Increasingly this kind of reflection takes place in bilateral or multi-

lateral frameworks offering a variety of perspectives on the impact of historical legacies.

#### LEARNING FROM THE PAST FOR THE PRESENT AND FUTURE

From the beginning, there was a debate in the organization and among the participants over how they could, through their acts, not only contribute to a process of reconciliation, but also try to learn from the past by building a more peaceful and just world in the long term. Soon, programs were added where youth could engage in activities toward that end. Participants work with communities that are being marginalized or discriminated against today like disabled people, homeless individuals, and others. They also engage in initiatives promoting tolerance, human rights, and understanding. Alumni of the programs are encouraged to continue their engagement in society by joining the organization's activities in Germany or helping to facilitate the summer camps.

#### YOUTH ENGAGING YOUTH IN HANDS-ON PROJECTS

Young people often have a leading role as organizers and facilitators in the short-term service programs called summer camps that draw participants from different countries. In more than half of the around thirty annual programs, participants confront the legacy of the Nazi past and participate in efforts of reconciliation in a hands-on approach by helping to clean up and restore Jewish cemeteries in Europe or renovate homes of former forced laborers. Other summer camps offer participants an opportunity to engage in hands-on activities with people who are socially disadvantaged like refugees. Through this action-oriented approach, ASF hopes, participants will "learn to know and understand themselves and others better, are changed, and through this, create something new."

#### REMEMBERING TOGETHER ACROSS BOUNDARIES

Since 2013, ASF has hosted a program sponsored by the German government called Germany Close Up that brings up to 250 young Jewish Americans on educational visits to Germany every year. Participants

experience Germany and discuss aspects of the past and the present with representatives of politics and civil society including German youth. This program, like the summer camps and tri-national volunteer programs, engages young adults in an international dialogue about legacies of the past and its impact on them and their communities.

Deepening and widening the dialogue on remembrance by integrating more perspectives and communities into the discourse is also a focus of the work within Germany. Here, ASF collaborates with migrant groups on programs fostering a more diverse and inclusive dialogue about the culture of remembrance. The summer programs in particular, as well as programs targeting trainees of corporations and workshops developed together with Germans of migrant backgrounds, help to draw a more diverse audience.

#### REMEMBERING, LEARNING, AND TAKING ACTION: WHY YOUTH PARTICIPATE

Motivations for participating in any of the programs are varied. Not everyone who signs up is interested in history from the outset. Having the opportunity to meet people from different backgrounds, travel, work, and do something meaningful is certainly a draw for young people from everywhere. Combining intercultural learning and reflection on the past with concrete action that contributes to reconciliation and building a better society today empowers participants to deal in a positive way with a difficult legacy and take responsibility. Alumni who participated in the programs decades ago still cite their involvement as a very formative experience. When asked, a majority of the participants would recommend others to engage in such activities.

I would suggest, it's the combination of the above-described elements that encourage young people to engage in these types of programs, even more than seventy years after the end of World War II.

## Looking Ahead

*"It takes a lot of courage to study your past, memorize it and live with it, but I think our Third Generation has the power to do it and manage the direction of our shared future."*

Maddie Cook, Germany Close Up participant

### BEING EMPOWERED BY REMEMBERING AND TAKING ACTION TOGETHER

Maddie Cook and her fellow young Jewish American participants of the program were particularly moved by a joint ceremony that the group held with young Germans for the victims of the Holocaust at the memorial site of the former concentration camp Sachsenhausen. This moment of joint commemoration broke down many barriers and united the group, she wrote.

It is moments like this which highlight the need for a continued dialogue about the past across boundaries. It can actually be an "empowering and motivating" experience as this participant wrote. And as alluded to earlier, the historical legacy of the Holocaust and World War II is not only felt in the relations between non-Jewish Germans and Jews, but also in relations between communities across Europe and beyond. And while a fundament of trust has been built over the years, it is not to be taken for granted. As Lily Gardner Feldman has aptly described in her work on reconciliation, this is an open-ended process that needs continued investment from all sides.

That's why we want and need young people to continue taking an active role. And creating the opportunity to engage together with peers from different backgrounds and nationalities also helps to create understanding and awareness, strengthens intersocietal relations, and broadens the alliance of actors committed to remembering and taking responsibility.

### GIVING YOUTH A VOICE

In official commemoration events, like this year's International Holocaust Remembrance Day events at the United Nations or the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, youth is often assigned a passive

role as members of the audience or participants of some side events. "Give youth a voice. Listen to what they have to say," is a statement many educators I talked with subscribe to, when asked how we can continue to engage youth in remembrance initiatives. Many partners of ASF, memorial sites and others, are glad about the fresh and diverse perspectives they get by having a young person on their team. Youth are excited when they have the opportunity to participate in official remembrance events not only as spectators, but maybe even more when they are also asked to take on a more active role.

### THE VOICE OF SURVIVORS

"You will be our Ambassadors of Remembrance," is something I have heard many survivors say to young people. It's a reminder that soon there will be no witnesses of that history among us anymore. However, there are still many with us. And while they might be in their 90s or even 100s, for many survivors it is an important mission to share as long as they are able to. And many young people want to listen to them. So enabling such encounters needs to be a priority. And meeting with a survivor not only gives youth an opportunity to hear a first-hand account that they can later share with others, but also lets them take an active part in the process of reconciliation.

And many survivors will encourage their listeners not only to remember the past, but also to take responsibility for the present and future. It empowers a young person, who cannot change the past, to make a difference in today's world. So in meeting survivors, youth become not only "Ambassadors of Remembrance," but are called on to become Ambassadors of Humanity.

### SHARING AND INSPIRING OTHERS

Youth can and should be at the forefront in making use of Social Media and other creative tools to inspire and engage their peers. And we need established institutions to help in this effort. Bigger organizations can help raise the visibility of the many smaller memory projects out there that often do not gain widespread attention beyond their community. We need more creative ways to collaborate and share experiences and best practices.

Raising the awareness for these types of initiatives will hopefully also help in securing resources. While it looks unlikely that public funding will be decreased dramatically in the near future, the interest from private enterprises to support such efforts seems to be already declining.

So we all need to make an effort to show why it is important to engage in commemoration and highlight the many positive stories of civic engagement for remembrance, reconciliation, and humanity that offer hope and inspiration in a world where currently the voices of intolerance and hatred are becoming louder.

### Conclusion

The coalition of individuals, governments, and civil society initiatives committed to the remembrance of the Holocaust and the continued fight against anti-Semitism, racism, xenophobia, and other forms of intolerance has grown over the past seven decades. Let's make sure that it will continue this way. Let's encourage youth to continue to engage in a dialogue about the past across national, ethnic, religious, gender, social, or other boundaries, and take action together toward building a better, shared future. The future of remembrance lies in all our hands, young and old, and together we can shape the way.

### Notes

\* Over the past ten years, I had the opportunity to meet many young people who engage with ASF and to talk with survivors, second and third post-Holocaust generations, colleagues, and educators about the topic discussed in this article. I am grateful to all of them for their insights. I would also like to thank the participants of the conference "Dealing with the Past in Spaces, Places, Actions, and Institutions of Memory: A Comparative Reflection on European Experiences" and a number of people I recently interviewed while working on this article. Thanks to Robin Axelrod, Holocaust Memorial Center in Michigan; Johannes Behling, ASF volunteer Maison d'Izieu in France; Christine Bischatka, ASF Summer Camp Department Germany; Ines Grau, ASF France; Elke Gryglewski, House of the Wannsee Conference in Berlin; Judith Höhne, International Youth Meeting Center in Oswiecim/Auschwitz; Jan Linzenich, ASF volunteer at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum; Jesse Nickelson, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum; Prettany Overman, ASF volunteer at the Memorial site of former concentration camp Sachsenhausen; Martin Schellenberg, Memorial site of former concentration camp Sachsenhausen; Hannah Sophie Strewe, ASF volunteer at Anne Frank House in Netherlands; Leonie Vandersee, ASF volunteer at AJC Washington; Dominique Vidaud, Maison d'Izieu.

<sup>1</sup> See "History of ARSP in Germany," <http://www.actionreconciliation.org/about-us/history/germany.html>



# MEMORY REVISITED IN TURKEY

CENGIZ AKTAR

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For some time now, Turks are rediscovering or simply discovering their past. How is it that, in such a hermetic society, closely controlled by the state, citizens have dared to challenge the official national narrative which blatantly excludes the painful past and replaces it with selected glories? Discussing memory and further developing policies of memory in a country that is built upon amnesia like Turkey were no easy tasks.

As in all nation-building processes, modern Turkey was conceived through the invention of an artificial nation imposed under duress. According to the national project, non-Muslims were never considered as full citizens. Popular idioms identify them as "Christians," "non-Muslims," or "giaour" (infidels), but seldom as Turks, for they lack the necessary prerequisite of Turkishness: Islam.<sup>1</sup> Ceteris paribus, the label "Turk" is inextricably linked to Islam. Hence even for secularist Turks, Christian missionary activities are dangerous by default, as conversion to Christianity would amount to the destruction of the Turkish nation. As for the devout Muslims, who became the very substance of the new nation, their religious customs and practice were declared incompatible with the secular nature of the "new" nation, and thence excluded from the republican public sphere. Both administratively and ideologically religion was "nationalized" in republican Turkey.

## The Dynamics Behind Change

So how did citizens progressively get rid of such a rather tight—if not dogmatic—framework? Two major dynamics emerge in Turkey through the empowerment of two major social groups. First and foremost, with the election victory of the Justice and Development Party (AKP) in 2002, representing polit-

ical Islam, Sunni Muslims were re-instituted into the public sphere. In essence, with the AKP victory, a re-legitimized Sunni Islam defied the national paradigm of ethnic and cultural homogeneity. Although the actual beginning of the change goes back to 1983, when the late president Turgut Özal formed the first reformist anti-status quo government of Turkey after the 12 September 1980 *coup d'état*, the process perceptibly accelerated with the reformist AKP government.

The second major dynamic is the challenge posed by the Kurdish political movement to the homogeneous Turkish nation by claiming its ethnic and linguistic difference as well as local governance rights. Although the claims have taken a violent turn and were never met, the simple emergence of an ethnically different identity in the public sphere has had an overwhelming effect on the artificial homogeneity of the Turkish nation.

A number of exogenous and endogenous factors have also facilitated the alteration of the national narrative.

First, the end of the Cold War and the emergence of Armenia in the eastern borders were influential events. Although still under Russian influence, Armenia became a factor in Turkey's relations with its eastern neighborhood and also regarding its official "denialist" policy on the Armenian Genocide. While the Turkish-Armenian border remains closed due to Turkey's "kinship policy" with Azerbaijan, the arch-enemy of Armenia, the independence of Armenia on Turkey's eastern border has nonetheless opened up unprecedented opportunities for non-governmental interaction between different groups in both countries.

Another key external factor was Turkey's European Union membership process, which re-began in 1999. As for other candidate countries, the membership criteria, in particular the political criteria, have exerted a major impact on the transformation of Turkey's legal and political environment toward a less authoritarian and more democratic one. Within a relatively more liberal environment, civil society and occasionally state actors and agencies have been able to take positions less determined by the taboos of the national narrative.

A third determinant factor in challenging the national narrative was the precedent work of vanguard activists and academicians courageously defying the national narrative for years, often at the cost of their lives and freedom.

Fourth, the unbearable extent of the hidden truth finally prevailed. To illustrate with a simple figure: the population extradited and/or annihilated between 1913 and 1923 is around 3 million (1.5 million each of Armenians and Greeks) out of a total of 16 million. To hide indefinitely the fate of fellow Armenians, Greeks, Jews, and Syriacs was simply untenable.

Last but not least, the brutal assassination of the Turkish-Armenian journalist Hrant Dink<sup>2</sup> on 19 January 2007 has acted as a major trigger for the surfacing of deep-rooted frustration felt by many, allowing them to speak openly about so many hidden truths.

As a result, all other identities, namely and mainly non-Muslim identities, whether annihilated and chased or unnoticed and disregarded until then, have reappeared in the public sphere induced by these dynamics, and thanks to the emergence of a more liberal environment. One could go as far as to say that a paradigmatic shift about the founding myths of the national narrative is under way. Many in Turkey today realize that the centuries-old Armenian life in Anatolia was annihilated in just a few decades, and the Greeks were forced to leave their ancestral lands. Some also see how the Eastern Christian Churches dwindled to insignificance during the twentieth century. Others learn who the Alevis<sup>3</sup> are and find out about the Muslim-Orthodox exchange of population between Greece and Turkey, while many

acknowledge the existence of Arabs and Kurds who are Muslims but not Turks. Even more accept the visibility of the Sunni Muslim majority in public life. In other words, many in Turkey today realize the need for reconsidering what Turkey really is.

### The Actors and Main Characteristics of Memory Work

Civil society became the driving force behind the critical engagement with Turkey's past and present. Liberal public intellectuals, activists, unorthodox academics, young researchers, some conservative Muslims, Alevis, and Kurds emerge today as the main groups challenging the models of nation and society designed by the early republican elite.

For some time now, Turkish civil society has been taking part in initiatives that go well beyond those launched by the state and the political class, especially concerning policies related to memory, culture, and the environment. These include initiatives and campaigns to draw attention to the situation of non-Muslim as well as Muslim minorities; demonstrations of global scope to promote cultural and artistic potential; and protests requiring a prodigious effort for the protection of nature. These self-examining civil initiatives break mental borders and constitute an in-depth and, of course, long-term work. They thus have a perennial quality and are more substantial than state initiatives.

The state-society quandary is indeed one of the five key characteristics of the ongoing memory work. Society appears as the natural actor of the policies of memory. In order to be perennial, substantial, and coherent, policies of memory need societal dynamics, whatever the capacity of the society to influence the lawmaker is. In the Turkish case, this assertion is even more tangible, for three reasons: First, a society cannot be healed in order to recover its memory by the very actor, the State of the Republic of Turkey, that precisely lobotomized it. Second, large chunks of Ottoman and later Turkish elites have happily adhered to de-memorization works proposed by the official "denialist" narrative in order to justify the massive seizure of property and wealth as well as to excuse the religious/ethnic cleansing of Armenians and Greeks for "holy national interests." And third, a

review of societal sub-consciousness needs to be anchored in the very core of society to bear ethical value, and, equally, not dictated by the cold and selfish interests of a state.

Thus, while slow and lengthy, and understandably forcing the limits of one's patience waiting for a due recognition of century-old crimes committed during Ottoman and early republican eras, the development of policies of memory growing out of a painstaking yet convulsive societal recollection remains a healthy and perennial endeavor.

A second characteristic of the ongoing endeavors is the nascent consciousness about the civilizational loss. Armenians and Greeks formed the spearheads of Anatolian economic activity and were certainly the first bourgeoisie of the Ottoman Empire with their financial and cultural affluence. Whole sections of the economy collapsed after their disappearance. Many regions were never able to recover from the consequences, and among Muslims and Kurds many are starting to realize what the real meaning of the loss was. Recalling the "good memory" by evoking the lost way of life has become a significant part of memory work.

A third characteristic pertains to the trilateral interaction among the Turkish civil society and its Armenian and Greek counterparts as well as the diasporas of both nations. Joint projects are blossoming between these actors, multiplying the impact and adding value to the content of the ongoing memory work.

The fourth characteristic is the reappearance of other buried memories, provoked by the ongoing memory work on non-Muslims. Among the Kurds—many of whose ancestors colluded with the Istanbul government in the massacres of the Armenian Genocide while a few others refused to take part in the killing spree and chose to take home surviving children—they are now starting to publicly acknowledge that many Kurdish families have at least one Armenian grandmother, as mostly little girls' lives were spared. The Kurdish recollection was all the more profound, since the same homogenizing logic was doggedly implemented on them, too, after the Armenians had been annihilated.

As has been the case for the Kurds, many Turkish citizens search for their family roots today. Narratives reemerge about direct and indirect victims of the Armenian Genocide or other non-Muslim pogroms as well as about the righteous (or just) who saved lives or who opposed orders from governmental and/or religious authorities to deport and annihilate their fellow neighbors. Being unable to talk about the victims, one could not speak about the survivors either: Those who had to convert to Islam to stay alive, those who were saved and Islamized by force, or the righteous who defied orders and saved their neighbors in the name of human ethics.

On memory recollection, Muslims who had to take refuge in the Ottoman Empire or had to be deported from the Balkans through the exchange of population with Greece recall their saga, too. Indeed, Muslims have not been able to mourn the atrocities they had to endure and their forced displacement, due to their "voluntary" assimilation and their state-assigned role to become the backbone of the new Turkish nation. Within this framework, memory recall could open up unexpected horizons by reintroducing into European memory these Muslim populations of southeast Europe, despoiled, massacred, and driven out of their homelands over more than forty years, from 1878 onward. Such a reintroduction would also constitute a significant step forward in the relocation of Turkishness within present day European reminiscence, from which it has been excluded as of 1918 at the end of World War I.

A final but key characteristic of the memory work is the fact that it looks irreversible. Search for truth seems contagious, as we will see below in the non-exhaustive list of initiatives and actions.

### A Non-Exhaustive List of Memory Works

We will see over time the tangible consequences of the quest for sense by Turkish society. Already, public actions, perhaps not so numerous, but certainly momentous, are building up at all levels. Unhindered so far by the authorities, they rely basically on citizens' voluntary initiatives. Here is a non-exhaustive list of these memory travails.

#### ACADEMIA AND PUBLISHING:

- Following pioneering publishers like Belge (1977), Aras (1993), and Peri (1997), many publishing houses now make public writings pertaining to the “bad memory,” but also in relation to the rich cosmopolitan past of the Ottoman Empire
- Non-Muslim authors of the late Ottoman era are re-published in Turkish
- Istos, the first Greek publishing house since 1923 is created in 2011
- Following vanguard research work by some scholars, like Taner Akçam, more and more young scholars are now involved in historical research to revisit and challenge the official narrative; scientific research on the works of non-Muslim businessman, craftsman, scientists, and soldiers of the Ottoman Empire is constantly hitting the library shelves
- Following the landmark 2005 conference on Ottoman Armenians held in Istanbul, research and academic meetings on Armenians, Greeks, Jews, Kurds, and Syriacs noticeably increase; one should note in particular two international conferences that took place at the “scene of the crime” in Kurdish land, in Diyarbakir, in November 2011 and in Mardin in November 2012 on the economic and social history of two regions, which brought together the grandchildren of victims and perpetrators to discuss the shared memory; among countless conferences on the fate of non-Muslims, three are particularly noteworthy: the conference on Islamized Armenians in 2013, the conference on the 1964 Expulsion (*Apelasis*) of Istanbul, Imbros, and Bozcaada Greeks in 2014, the conference on destroyed civilization of non-Muslims in 2015
- An increasing number of university chairs is devoted to the language, history, and culture of minorities
- In February 2009, a scholar from the Armenian diaspora, Marc Nichanian, begins for the first time to teach on topics directly related to the genocide at Sabanc University in Istanbul
- Several Greek academics teach history and political science in Turkish universities
- Two Byzantine Studies institutions open in Istanbul in 2015, a first ever
- Syriac community gets the authorization to open a primary school for the first time since the closure of all its schools in 1928
- The Greek primary and secondary school of Imbros resumes its activities in 2015 for the first time since its closure in 1964.

#### INDIVIDUAL AND COLLECTIVE MEMORY SEARCH:

- Many citizens seek, discover, or rediscover ancestors of non-Muslim origin in their families, ancestors who converted or were forced to convert or orphans whose parents and families were massacred; there were over twenty books published as of early 2016 since lawyer Fethiye Çetin, granddaughter of an Armenian orphan girl who was forced to convert, published her bestseller “My Grandmother: An Armenian-Turkish Memoir,” as well as cinematographic testimonies on the genealogy of families and entire tribes, resurrecting the erased data
- Laurence Ritter’s “Les Restes de l’Epée” (The Remains of the Sword)—translated in Turkish as “Kılıç Artıkları”—and Ferda Balancar’s “The Sounds of Silence” books (four volumes)—published by Hrant Dink Foundation Publications—evoke the memory of the Armenian Genocide by Armenian survivors, among them crypto-Armenians of Anatolia who discover or uncover their Armenian identity
- Another groundbreaking publication in Turkish by Hrant Dink Foundation Publications on the proceedings of the conference on Islamized Armenians of 2013.

#### PUBLIC AWARENESS AND VISIBILITY:

Non-Muslim minorities literally discover themselves and are “discovered” by Turkish society. Here are a few examples:

- Through an online “Apology Campaign” in

December 2008 ([www.ozurdiliyoruz.com](http://www.ozurdiliyoruz.com)),<sup>4</sup> 32,454 persons addressed and apologized to Armenians

— Since 2010, public commemorations of the Armenian Genocide have started to take place on April 24 (the day of the beginning of the Genocide in 1915) in various cities, in public places and outdoors; in 2015 commemorations have taken place in more than ten cities and were attended by the representatives of the Armenian diaspora

— Public use of the word “genocide,” while still prohibited by law, is becoming regular

— Since 2005, every year on the anniversary of the pogrom of 6/7 September 1955 against non-Muslim minorities of Istanbul, meetings, commemorations, and various public activities are organized; in 2014 on the occasion of the fiftieth anniversary of the Expulsion of Istanbul, Imbros, and Bozcaada Greeks, an exhibition took place

— No less than seven associations of mutual aid and culture have been created since 2010 by Armenians of Arapgir, Burunkışla, Dersim, Malatya, Sasoun, Sivas, and Vakıflı; Vakıflı is the unique Armenian village in Turkey—the association bearing its name was created in 2000, before the others

— Heartened by recent relative liberalization and a small legal door, non-Muslim minorities claim back the property belonging to their foundations that was confiscated over years during the republican era; a small percentage of claims are met with positive outcomes

— Interaction between Armenians and Turks are taking place in increasing numbers, in Armenia, Turkey, and third countries, the same holds for the Greeks and Syriacs; Armenian diaspora organizations such as Civilitas Foundation, National Congress of Western Armenians, and Yerkir have opened liaison offices in Istanbul

— Names of the Armenian journalists who died during the arrests of prominent Istanbul Armenians on 24 April 1915 are included in the “list of murdered colleagues” held by the Turkish Association of Journalists

— Academic and amateur research on the well-known and anonymous righteous people who saved lives during the massacres are increasing, and a special History Fund is created with the Hrant Dink Foundation to support research

— Studies on the former names of human settlements that have been renamed in Turkish are launched; names are sometimes claimed by the inhabitants themselves and restored by the public authorities (see the Index Anatolicus, a substantial research project accessible online <http://nisanyanmap.com/>)

— Itinerant exhibitions on the life of the Armenians and the Greeks in the Ottoman Empire, based on old postcards, are crisscrossing Anatolia; for the first time a photo exhibition of an Armenian family one hundred years ago took place in Merzifon, a remote Anatolian village by the Black Sea without any disruption

— Since 2013 the Turco-Armenian online platform REPAIR allows the exchange of viewpoints on issues of common concern

— Students from a high school in Istanbul, close to political Islam, decide to twin with an Armenian high school, also in Istanbul, in order to find out about Armenian identity.

#### RELIGIOUS AND CULTURAL DISCOVERY:

— Several works for the restoration of worship monuments and buildings belonging to Armenians (Surp Harch of Aghtamar, Surp Giragos of Diyarbakir, Surp Krikor Lusarevitch of Kayseri, Surp Vortvots Vorodmans of Istanbul, Surp Bedros of Nizip, the Armenian Catholic and Armenian Protestant churches of Sur-Diyarbakir), to Greeks (Agia Marina and Agia Nikola of Imbros, Kaleköy Monastery of Imbros, Taxiarchis of Cunda, Greek Catholic Church of Iskenderun), to Jews (Great Synagogues of Antep and Edirne), and to Syriacs (Syriac Catholic Church of Iskenderun) are undertaken, often by local municipalities

— Masses are celebrated since 2010, after almost a century of interruption, in the Greek monastery of Sumela at Maçka, Trabzon

- For the first time an Armenian cemetery, that of Arapgir, a city with an important Armenian population before 1915, is restored in 2011
- A brand new Armenian chapel, a first worship building since the Armenian Genocide, is erected in 2013 in the cemetery of Malatya, a city where only a handful of Armenians remain
- Epiphany is celebrated since 1922 for the first time in 2016 in Izmir, a city formerly with a sizeable Greek population
- A catalogue of Armenian foundations of Istanbul is published by the Hrant Dink Foundation
- A significant example of an intangible cultural heritage project Houshamadyan broadcasting from Berlin and aiming to reconstruct and preserve the memory of Armenian life in the Ottoman Empire through research, publishes also in Turkish
- A ring of abandoned fountains in Habab (Elazığ), a formerly Armenian village, is restored in 2011; the initially reluctant Kurdish population of the village finally participates in the restoration works
- An international consortium supports the first meaningful restoration works at the ancient Armenian capital city of Ani in the east of Turkey just by the Armenian border
- A cultural heritage project launched by the Hrant Dink Foundation identifies as of early 2016 over 10,000 non-Muslim monuments, still existing or having disappeared all over Anatolia, available online at <http://turkiyekulturvarliklari.hrantdink.org/en/>
- A Centre for the Preservation of the Cultural Heritage was founded by Armenian, Greek, and Turkish civil society organizations
- Itinerant exhibitions on Armenians and Greek architects of Istanbul travel throughout Turkey and abroad
- Armenian and Syriac sections will be part of a newly built Urban Heritage Museum in Diyarbakir
- Numerous movies are shot on the non-Muslims'

saga, and co-productions on shared memory are multiplying like the documentary of film director Serge Avéédikian, "Barking Island," which received an award at the Cannes Film Festival in 2010

### Where Do We Go from Here?

For the civil society of Turkey, remembering its heterogeneity, learning history other than the official narrative, and comparing conflicting memories do not necessarily mean scratching the wounds and having the ethnic/exclusivist/egocentric/nationalistic requests rise from the grave. Re-reading history, mutually opening up the memories to each other mean empathy and acknowledgment of the sufferings that different religious and ethnic groups did not mind inflicting upon one another not only for the sake of nation building, but also for a huge transfer of wealth.

However the re-emergence of national/ethnic/religious identities point to a potential threat on the horizon. The end of a homogeneous nation, together with all that it implies and permits in terms of liberal democracy, produces today a nationalist counter-reaction, exacerbated by the unresolved Kurdish conflict. Thus, next to the ongoing policies of memory, society needs to contain nostalgic and resurgent identity politics.

Turkish society has two assets in order to face the challenge. First, there is now a society acquainted with free speech raising objections, enjoying a relative state of freedom, and slowly abolishing the guardianship of all elites, old like new. Such a society stands against the lies and taboos imposed by the former elite as well as the attempts by the new Islamic elite to impose its rule. Is it easy to control such a society that enjoys democracy and controls its own fate? It should be noted that the change process has not only taken place thanks to the external dynamic or the government's early reformism. The society has paid a substantial price for it, symbolized by the murder of Hrant Dink. Social maturation looks to be Turkey's key asset.

Second, the more the pious Sunni Muslims will realize that the founding national ideology has alienated non-Turks, non-Sunni Muslims, and non-Muslims no less than themselves, the more they, as the majority group,

would assume a lead role in revealing the facts and past pains, addressing injustices, and distancing themselves from this ideology. The process would mean Turkish democracy would be consolidated and would allow more empathy, resulting in a healthy return of memory, neutralizing identity politics and translating them into a new social contract, i.e., a new Constitutional Act.

Finally, although the memory quest of Turkish society is a fundamental step toward an overall mourning and healing *per se*, it cannot suffice for the century-long quest for justice of the grandchildren of non-Muslims. Commemorating officially the memory of victims and reparations and return of seized property should logically derive from the memory work, sooner or later.

### Notes

<sup>1</sup> Beyond the common expression, even court verdicts identify non-Muslim citizens as 'foreigners' as in the landmark decision of the Court of Appeal in 1974 (Decision 8.5.1974 E 1971/2.82 K /505, in Turkish)

<sup>2</sup> Born in 1954, Hrant Dink was the key figure of the Armenianness in Turkey. He privileged democratization as the potential driving force for the recollection of truth, worked relentlessly to create a public consciousness about the atrocities committed against Armenians and other non-Muslim groups through the weekly Agos he launched in 1996 with few friends.

<sup>3</sup> Alevi relates to Shia but remains mainly Anatolian. It is the second most important Islamic faith considered as heretic by the mainstream Sunni Islam.

<sup>4</sup> The full text reads: "My conscience cannot accept the ignorance and denial of the Great Catastrophe that the Ottoman Armenians were subjected to in 1915. I reject this injustice and—on my own behalf—I share the feelings and pain of my Armenian brothers—and I apologise to them."



# A NATIONALIST GENERATION IN A QUEST FOR RECONCILIATION

MARIO MAŽIĆ

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The region of former Yugoslavia survived a series of violent conflicts in the 1990s that devastated virtually all parts of the Balkan socialist federation. Millions of people were displaced, over 120,000 were killed as civilians and fighters and numerous towns and villages were heavily destroyed by the war events. Politically, socially, and economically, the now seven states were deeply changed in the process of transition and conflict.

Today, twenty-five years after the escalation of violence and the start of conflicts in Slovenia and Croatia, the region is still struggling with numerous consequences. This essay will present the influence that the conflict, the violence, and the social and political processes surrounding them have had on the formation of a generation of people born just prior to and during the conflict. This is a generation that I am also a part of.

## Instilling Nationalist Values in the Post-Conflict Generation

The generations who fought the 1990s conflicts predominantly grew up in Yugoslavia in the aftermath of World War II. Their parents and the generation preceding them saw Yugoslavia as a political mechanism bringing together peoples of the Yugoslav area under the values of anti-Fascist struggle and South-Slavic unity. This generation grew up under the Communist Alliance's slogan "Brotherhood and Unity," which later also became one of the central slogans of Socialist Yugoslavia.

Unlike them, the post-1990s conflict generation was growing up in a state of insecurity, ethnic conflict, and extreme nationalism. One's own ethnic community virtually became perceived as a family whereas

other ethnic groups became enemies. Independence of states where certain ethnic groups struggle to be the vast majority became a central political and social value. We grew up singing and praying for our nation's independence and ethnic unity. And it didn't stop there. In our formative years, we sang and prayed against our ethnic groups' enemies: in schools, religious institutions, and our families. My friends and I all had sticker cartoons on our t-shirts and school bags depicting children dressed in Croatian Army uniforms. We as kids did not carry guns, but we were part of the conflict. I, too, waved my pointer and middle fingers as a sign of Croatian victory in the air while performing in a kindergarten choir, at the awe of the packed Crystal Box of Happiness performance hall in Sisak, just a few miles from the front lines of conflict. We played war around our neighborhoods, but we usually played Cowboys and Native Americans since, of course, nobody wanted to be Serbs. "Serb" was a word we used to belittle or offend someone, it didn't really represent an ethnic group in our minds. It was years later that I realized just how effective the nationalist propaganda was among children. Even those of us with moderate parents were a part of the war-morale-boosting hype. After all, we were told that it was for our benefit that our parents were fighting and risking their lives.

As the wars ended and many people returned to their homes, we were supposed to be happy to be back and were supposed to continue normal lives. Of course, we didn't really know what our parents' ideas of normal lives were, but children and youth have an outstanding ability to adapt, so we did. Our imagination enabled us to play in empty and devastated houses in our towns without really thinking who used to live there and why they didn't live there anymore. Very few of us were thinking about that and even

fewer ever asked their parents about it. I did once and the only result that caused was that I was banned from playing in the ruins again as I might get injured in the rubble and debris.

Since critical thinking is an enemy to exclusive ideologies, we were taught in schools how to repeat our teachers' words rather than how to analyze or question them. Usually, the best answered tests were those that followed the lectures and textbooks word-for-word. We were an easy generation to control. We didn't have Internet or friends across national borders. We didn't have money to travel. We consumed what we were offered.

### The Chasm between Reconciliation and Nationalism

Today, the relevant research into political attitudes of youth shows that the generation born after 1985 is more nationalist, religious, and exclusive than the generation that actually fought the conflict. Those of us interested in social and political dynamics were surprised when learning that in countries such as Germany, the youth wanted to know what their parents did during Hitler's rule, and they wanted to critically examine this. But the big difference is that our 1990s political leaders are still seen as heroes of our national and ethnic causes. Their parties are still strong or even dominant political actors in the Balkans.

However, it would be too simple to say that the propagandistic education combined with the lack of critical-thinking development in our formative years are the only reasons for the current state of political attitudes of youth and young adults across the Balkans. There is another reason and it refers to the perceived dominant goals of political engagement and activism.

Of course, everyone publicly stands up against the conflict and violence. Everybody on the political scene claims that they try and work to avoid future conflicts. But somehow, in the Balkans, it seems possible to do this without actually working on reconciliation and on building a sustainable peace.

In part, this is so because in countries like Croatia, a specific war is actually being celebrated. The 1990s

war in Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina is seen as a glorious endeavor that resulted in an independent and sovereign Croatia. We talk and write formal declarations that speak of values and dignity of the Homeland War. On numerous occasions throughout the year, the Croatian public commemorates the fighters and the victories. Civilian victims are being remembered and commemorated far less. We give far more money from the public budget to associations of veterans, commemoration of fighters, and even to defense attorneys of Croatian generals being tried at the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia than we do to mechanisms such as the Administration for the Missing and Disappeared Persons that works on locating and conducting exhumations and identifications of remains of missing persons. We celebrate peace only indirectly, as a result of war, not as a value in itself. Just at the beginning of 2016, a major Croatian publishing company in the field of school textbooks published a call for students to submit papers about Heroes of the Homeland War. They claim the goal of this call is for children to identify people who showed exceptional courage and patriotism. Of course, in a dominant view in order to be a hero, one has to be a fighter. In order to be a patriot, one has to be a nationalist.

Further, this perspective is related to the attitude that reconciliation is not seen as a value or as a desired outcome of the process of neighborhood international relations. Croatian nationalists target calls and organizations promoting reconciliation as Yugo-nostalgic. This is a term used to completely dismiss arguments from peace and human rights activists and the few politicians who dare to talk about reconciliation. It is a simple formula: If you advocate reconciliation, you are Yugo-nostalgic; If you are Yugo-nostalgic, you are not a good Croat.

There is no relevant research into this, but the sentiment often shows how reconciliation is not a desired policy. No politician or party ever successfully campaigned on the notion of regional reconciliation. Like other advocates of reconciliation, the former Croatian president Ivo Josipovic, who supported the coalition of organizations advocating the establishment of a truth commission ("RECOM"), was called red, Yugo-nostalgic, and a Communist during his

second presidential campaign and ultimately lost the election to a candidate running on the idea of national unity and nationalism.

These arguments are usually heard from right-wing politicians, (extreme) nationalists, and other conservative or religious groups. However, it is not necessarily an attitude of moderates and a large part of the electorate. Their reasons for not supporting reconciliation are different. They have been told and they believe that the reconciliation process is over once arms are down and once the state borders are secure and stable. They do not see a need in continuing a process that one cannot see instrumentally. Peace is seen only as the absence of war.

The current Croatian president Kolinda Grabar Kitarović delivered a speech at Columbia University's World Leaders Forum on 1 October 2015 and while she didn't actually say much about reconciliation in her address, she was asked to elaborate on it. Her view was that the Balkan countries are reconciled and she even claimed that these countries, compared with any other region that suffered a conflict and ethnic violence, did much more on reconciliation. Her claim was not based on research or relevant analysis. She based her argument solely on her own experience in Mostar, where she was greeted by people on both sides. How someone can talk about reconciliation as a successful past process and still recognize two sides of a town without seeing the contradiction in adjecto, I am unable to understand. It probably has to do with what George Orwell called "indifference to reality."<sup>1</sup>

This is a clear example of how reconciliation is presented and discussed in Croatia—when it comes up as a topic at all. It is seen as a finished process, a story from the past, the last stage of a historical conflict. This type of collective amnesia is a clear symptom of an unhealthy society, one built on myths. No facts are strong enough to alter the dominant interpretations. Moreover, that kind of a society sees interpretations as facts, while it sees facts as a subjective form. The myths on which our national and ethnic identities are built are seen as foundations of our societies. They are a given and every act of critical overview is futile. And not just that—such acts are seen as attacks on the very nature of statehood. This

is why Balkan human rights activists and reconciliation advocates are often asked if they love their countries. In what I would call a dominant view, any critical overview of one's national history is seen as an act of refusal to acknowledge the legitimacy of the very statehood of his country. This is why, in the dominant view, such activism and advocacy are seen as hostile toward the national cause.

After Croatia joined the European Union in 2013, reconciliation advocacy suffered even more. Membership in the EU is seen as a confirmation that the democracy-building, human rights, and reconciliation processes are finished. Membership is seen as a stamp of approval that Croatia reached a position of a stable, democratic, reconciled, and peaceful society. However, the process of negotiations and reforms that led to the membership has not caused significant social change. The changes were merely institutional, but still formal. This was the minimum that the EU asked for and, at the same time, the maximum that Croatia's leadership was prepared to give.

### A Personal Perspective on Reconciliation Advocacy

My experience with these processes, apart from being from Croatia and living here, comes from my engagement with human rights, justice, and reconciliation advocacy. My engagement, like it often does, started incidentally.

While I was in high school, I was hosting and editing a local radio show for youth in Petrinja. And as my hometown was preparing to host a concert by an extreme nationalist singer, my few colleagues and I read several critical articles about him on the program. We were not used to receiving a lot of reaction to our program since we usually dealt with the kind of light topics that interested youth generally. We talked about the places to go and things to do for fun and learning. We talked about school and music. However, after this show, there were reactions. We heard opinions from our parents, our teachers, and many members of our community. Some of them were mad, some of them even shocked that we would do something like this. Some stopped saying hi. It is a small community, one of those where everybody

knows (about) everybody.

Most of my colleagues at the Youth Initiative for Human Rights (YIHR) today have similar stories to tell. Most remember that point when they were seen as pariahs for the first time. In a way, I believe that it is moments like these that connect us. YIHR, like similar organizations, is a support group of sorts as much as it is an advocacy group. It is a place where those who dared to question the national myths surrounding them find their peers. I often notice when new young people come and join YIHR how they go through this process of testing the limits of what can and should be questioned. We've had people leave for feeling uncomfortable or thinking that we went too far. Everything can and should be questioned, we often say. I believe that the uneasy, uncomfortable feeling comes from fear of moral relativism on one hand and from inability to shake-off the national myths on another. Of course, as every such organization, YIHR is based on values. These are truth, justice, and peace. It advocates a set of values that we believe have to be respected in order for a society to live in peace and stability. We advocate values that are called universal in international human rights documents.

But the process of reconciliation advocacy requires a social analysis which encompasses a process of deconstruction of myths. And this is as much an ethical process as it is scientific (in social science terms). It is as much emotional as it is cognitive. Understanding the process each of us went through from a kid sticking cartoon children in military uniforms on our t-shirts to an individual deconstructing the national myths that were installed in us is key in understanding the technology of social change. And it is social change that advocacy wishes to contribute to.

Here, I would like to offer my perspective, based on self-reflection and the patterns that I noticed in my peers and colleagues. The first step in dealing with a problem, as support groups and psychologists usually say, is recognizing that you have one. We were raised as addicts to nationalism, unaware of our addiction. It is on purpose that I use this analogy to emphasize that this process is not comfortable. It is not easy to bring yourself to question what was imposed as a foundation of your morals and worldview. And it is

even harder to deconstruct it and move on. After all, it is not just our history teachers that shaped us like this. Knowingly or unknowingly, it is also the language and geography teachers. It is even our gym teachers. It is the films and TV programs, it is the books, it is our parents and our neighbors. Ultimately, it is each of us that contributed to the spread of nationalism among our peers. This is not an easy realization in itself. It is the kind of realization that liberates, but leaves a sense of void at the same time.

After realizing this, I started trying to understand to what extent the installment of nationalist values and myths has shaped my persona. This is probably a never-ending process. I still sometimes remember a childhood favorite TV show, toy, or game and then realize just how perverted it actually was.

Realizations like these prompted me to speak out. Realizing that you too contributed, even as a consumer, to dangerous processes that led to horrendous devastation and suffering, leaves a sense of responsibility to act. In my view, reconciliation advocacy is very much a personal process. It is not just a process of social advocacy; it is a process of self-protection too. I wish I had someone tell me that there are valuable lessons in an individual's development that speak about social change.

This is something those of us in my generation who understand it had to learn on our own. This is why we built an organization of youth for human rights. These lessons and realizations are what we have in common and what differentiates us from our parents and our parents' parents.

### Reconciliation as a Process

The major lesson of this realization is that often in advocating reconciliation, it is futile to inform people about the benefits it brings in a way we understand them. What one might see as a social benefit, others might see as an attack on their nation, their ethnic group, and their very worldview. Most of YIHR's resources are thus directed toward education and campaigning to reach as many young people as possible with the kind of information that allows for an alternative insight. Sometimes we don't even refrain from outright provocation toward myths to

encourage others. Simultaneously, YIHR brings young people from various ethnic groups and countries of former Yugoslavia together through various exchange programs.

This might not be the most that we can do, but doing more would resemble the imposition and obtrusion that we were exposed to in our young age too much. The other issue is that, unlike nationalism, reconciliation cannot be imposed. The imposition of values through propaganda and authoritarian education, however, has a long-term effect on social dynamics, should it manage to influence an entire generation like it did in the Balkans. This is where values underpinning exclusive ideologies and non-democratic systems are in an instrumentally better position when compared to values such as human rights and democracy. This is due to the latter being based on a critical examination of social and political processes, as well as on the level of individuals. Critically examining something, unlike just accepting it, takes time.

This is why reconciliation is an ongoing process, and one that takes a lot of time just to become a relevant and influential force in a society. The question we can't yet give an answer to is how much time it takes for the reconciliation process to achieve a threshold that could at least give a substantial contribution to the non-recurrence of violence. It develops faster when political leaders promote it and integrate principles such as critical analysis in public discourse and the educational system in order to support it. Sadly, this is not the case in the Balkans. Here, we experience violent conflicts almost every fifty years. Thus, apart from doing what we can to contribute to reconciliation and stable peace, we surely hope that the next half of this time will be enough to change the attitudes. Unluckily, it is up to my damaged generation to do this.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> George Orwell, "Notes on Nationalism," Polemic (1945), Paragraph 12.





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