

**\*\*\* DRAFT: NOT FOR DISTRIBUTION OR CITATION WITHOUT  
THE PERMISSION OF THE AUTHOR\*\*\***

*“History and Memory in German-Israeli Relations: Varieties of  
Expression”*

*Dr. Lily Gardner Feldman, American Institute for Contemporary German  
Studies/Johns Hopkins University: [lgf@aicgs.org](mailto:lgf@aicgs.org)*

For the George Mason University conference on  
“Facing a Violent Past: Dealing with History and Memory in Conflict  
Resolution, April 22, 2016

### **Introduction**

History and memory,<sup>1</sup> specifically regarding the Holocaust, have indelibly defined the German-Israeli relationship since 1949. Over the last seven decades, the two partners have publicly introduced history and memory in a variety of ways: as acknowledgement of and responsibility for historical crimes; as acts of commemoration at memorial sites; as remembrance speeches on anniversaries of Holocaust events; and as negative backdrop for positive activities that underscore the friendship and partnership of contemporary German-Israeli relations. The first three expressions are direct examples of the role of history and memory in current ties, whereas the last is a more indirect manifestation.<sup>2</sup> The first three speak to the moral motivations both Germany and Israel bring for the partnership, whereas the fourth reflects pragmatic thinking by Germany and Israel.

This paper examines the similarities and differences between the German and Israeli official approaches - between perpetrator and victim - to history and memory. Rather than analyzing these issues through the seven-decade life of the German-Israeli “special relationship,” the paper focuses on activities in 2015, in which the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the end of World War II and the Holocaust and the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of diplomatic relations between the two countries coincided. While commemoration and remembrance have a long history in post-war Germany and in Israel, the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the end of World War II and the Holocaust was underscored by leaders because of a dwindling generation of witnesses. Foreign Minister Steinmeier, for example, observed at the anniversary of the liberation of Sachsenhausen: “ [I]t is getting ever more difficult to keep this memory [of the Holocaust] alive as, unfortunately, ever fewer survivors of the National Socialist terror remain to recount their experiences themselves.”<sup>3</sup> Conceptually, the analysis is informed by notions of history found in literature on reconciliation.

### **Varieties of Concepts: History and Memory in Scholarship**

There is a rich literature on reconciliation that privileges ideas about history and memory. Concepts can be classified according to disciplinary perspectives: religion, philosophy, social psychological approaches, legal perspectives and political science/history.<sup>4</sup>

## Religion

Truth-telling, a fundamental ingredient for reconciliation in religious writing, involves confronting the past. Bernhard Moltmann highlights the “mutual acknowledgment of historical experiences” as a “central element of reconciliation.”<sup>5</sup> Donald Shriver counters the traditional notion of “forgive and forget” by arguing that “forgiveness begins with memory.”<sup>6</sup> Yet, his notion of memory is contingent:

[Persons and societies] must remember in such a way that future access to the memory is personally and publicly possible, but so as to drain the memory of its power to continue to poison the present and the future.<sup>7</sup>

Nigel Biggar offers a similar, conditional sense in his two-stage rendition:

The initial part of forgiveness...does not involve forgetting the injury...The final part of forgiveness...does involve a commitment on the part of the victim to “forget” the injury...[This] cannot be a promise never to remember. It can, however, be a resolve at least not to allow the memory of past injury to jaundice future relations with resentment.<sup>8</sup>

The absolute requirement of truth-seeking and truth-telling - the full and unvarnished facts - would seem to fly in the face of this condition of selective memory, which allows the perpetrator to define the terms of remembering.

While there is much theological rhetoric about “never forget,” the preferred resentment-free, selective memory can transform into amnesia

over time. The danger of forgetting on the part of the perpetrator is built into the religiously-based notion of reconciliation, which presupposes that the perpetrator is “liberated” from his past acts through forgiveness. Liberation from the past, which means preference to the perpetrators’ perspective, can result in self-forgiveness according to Geiko Müller-Fahrenholz, who uses the example of Chancellor Kohl’s honoring of SS officers at the Bitburg cemetery to show the dismal consequence of insufficient attention to the victims.<sup>9</sup>

Contrary to Biggar’s belief, the likelihood of the victim remembering in an unfiltered way is strong, as Geraldine Smyth has recognized in the Northern Ireland case: “Things that lie buried do not necessarily decompose.”<sup>10</sup> Müller-Fahrenholz, diverging from the mainstream, elaborates on the role of honest, deep, and active memory in forgiveness and reconciliation, and on the notion that “time does not heal.”<sup>11</sup> Foreshadowing the political perspective, Müller-Fahrenholz argues for an “economy of collective memory.” A common past is arrived at through joint efforts to develop a narrative and “disentangle” history, in which the victims’ stance is primary.<sup>12</sup> He further suggests that political actions should follow symbolic gestures that validate the victims, such as Chancellor Brandt’s bended-knee sign of atonement to the martyrs of the Warsaw Ghetto. Presaging social-

psychological views, Müller-Fahrenheit believes that this type of historical work and concrete action will allow for healing.<sup>13</sup> Despite the engagement with the past advocated by Smyth and Müller Fahrenheit, temporal considerations are not a primary concern of much of the theological literature.

### Philosophy

Unlike theologians, philosophers like Seidler, Kodalle and Dwyer do not view forgiveness as the essence of reconciliation, so there is more emphasis on an active past.

Crocker's first ingredient for reconciliation - truth-telling about the past - seeks two primary goals: full knowledge about past events and complete public accessibility to history. Truth-telling, which he deems an absolute requirement for all of his three forms of reconciliation (thinner, fuller, and thicker), appears in other philosophical thinking on improving relations between individuals and societies. To the extent that Klaus-M. Kodalle deems forgiveness legitimate, he, like Elisabeth Seidler, suggests it must distinguish between the perpetrator and his acts. The perpetrator can be excused through amnesty and forgetting whereas the act itself must never be forgotten. Susan Dwyer's model of "narrative revision" and "narrative

equilibrium” fundamentally addresses the past in a complex process in which the “disruptive event” of history is woven into the new narrative.<sup>14</sup>

### Social Psychology Approaches

The past plays a similar role for Nicholas Tavuchis that it does for theologians. He notes that apology entails recall of the offending or harmful event, but then the past is overcome.<sup>15</sup> Other observers are more nuanced, but still want to achieve “closure” and tidy up the past, by “coming to terms with” it or making it into a shared history. Rosa Sevy and John Torpey go so far as to suggest that “reconciliation ... is more about the future than it is about the past.”<sup>16</sup> Daniel Bar-Tal and Gemma Bennink, for example, suggest that “[a]cknowledgement of the past implies at least recognizing that there are two narratives of the conflict,” but go on to argue that a “joint committee of historians ... [can] establish one agreed account of the past events.”<sup>17</sup> Wolf Schmidt’s formulation of “largely concurring interpretations of history” and Donna Hicks’ sense of “mutually tolerable interpretations of events” may be more realistic.<sup>18</sup> While one interpretation of history may be the outcome, we should elevate the jointness of effort in the process of confronting history. It is the absence of jointness that may account for the reality described by Kriesberg in the Israeli-Palestinian context: Israeli Jewish historians have

revisited their interpretations of why Arabs left during Israel's 1948 War of Independence but have found no resonance in the broader society.

### Legal Perspectives

Three avenues for confronting the past, or what Rachel Sieder calls “memory politics,”<sup>19</sup> emerge in the literature: public acknowledgement by perpetrators of the past regime's crimes and their role in them; repudiation of the past system; remembrance and commemoration. They are central to legal thinking about reconciliation as noted by Martha Minow: “The question...is not whether to remember, but how.”<sup>20</sup> The first two occur in the immediate aftermath of a repressive regime or armed conflict, whereas the third is a long-term project of reconciliation. The literature is most concerned with the first avenue, which involves absolute disclosure publicly, as José Zalaquett insists:

[It] is not sufficient that well-informed citizens have a reasonably good idea of what happened...The important thing is that the truth is established in an officially sanctioned way, in a manner that allows the findings to form part of the historical record of the nation and that establishes an authoritative version of events.<sup>21</sup>

Having what Minow terms “a coherent, if complex, narrative” means neither forgetting nor sanitizing history nor the absence of later debate, but rather entails Juan Mendez' formulation of the “establishment of undeniable facts” and the “stamping out of ‘impermissible lies’” which allows

“interpretations of history...over those widely agreed upon facts.”<sup>22</sup> Kader Asmal et al. couple agreement and diversity regarding history by suggesting that “inevitable and continuing conflicts and differences stand...within a single universe of comprehensibility.”<sup>23</sup> Amy Gutmann and Dennis Thompson stress even more the need for contention: “Reconciliation is an illiberal aim if it means expecting an entire society to subscribe to a single comprehensive moral perspective.”<sup>24</sup> Surely, however, there should be boundaries, not just to facts, but also to interpretation. To avoid debate crossing over into denial or giving priority to perpetrator views as time passes, we could argue that in the final analysis victims’ views must take precedence, as Asmal et al. imply when discussing violence by both the South African government and by the ANC:

[Insisting on] evenhandedness between an atrocity (apartheid) and its opposite (the resistance) ... is to equate the deliberate evils of the Nazis with the mistakes of the resistance to them.<sup>25</sup>

As a basis for reconciliation, repudiation of the past goes further than acknowledgement of the facts; according to Asmal et al, perpetrators must recognize that the old system was “not just...a ‘mistake,’[but]...was deliberately evil.”<sup>26</sup>

Political Science and History

The affective part of the process of reconciliation begins with acknowledgement of past crimes, misdeeds or injustices. Apology, part of what Peter Brecke and William J. Long call a “reconciliation event,” is often the initiation of this process.<sup>27</sup>

Forgiveness is central to this perspective’s discussions of history and the past, but observers differ as to its nature and role. Charles Maier, Jean Bethke Elshtain and P.E. Digeser differentiate between religious and political forgiveness, and see a role for the latter, with Digeser adding a specific condition: “If the minimum demands of justice have not been met, the transgressor should not and perhaps cannot be politically forgiven.”<sup>28</sup> Unlike spiritual forgiveness in the religious perspective, political forgiveness does not mean liberation from the past, for as Digeser argues: “[F]orgiving is not forgetting. Forgiving requires recalling and understanding the past, whereas forgetting involves letting go of the past.”<sup>29</sup> In arguing against amnesia, Elshtain uses the term “knowing forgetting” to characterize the relationship between political forgiveness and the past:

I have in mind a way to release present-day agents from the full burden of the past, in order that they not be weighed down by it utterly. Forgetting in this case, does not mean that one falls into radical present-mindedness and the delusion that the past counts for nothing; rather, one assesses and judges just what the past does count for in the present – how much it should frame, shape, and even determine present events.<sup>30</sup>

To highlight the importance of memory in political forgiveness, “knowing remembrance,” which combines Anne Sa’adah’s “limits of forgetting” with her “limits of memory” and which approximates Schwan’s “mindful remembering,” might be a better choice of term.<sup>31</sup> Sa’adah also outlines a contained, realistic sense of forgiveness, a position advanced by James McAdams in his discussions of compromises in the four arenas of justice the West German government pursued (criminal, disqualifying, moral, and corrective). Pure forgiveness that eliminates the past, in Sa’adah’s view, is not possible in democratizing states.<sup>32</sup>

Gesine Schwan, Elazar Barkan, and Brecke and Long share the centrality of memory for reconciliation, but possess a more traditional notion of forgiveness, bound up with questions of guilt.<sup>33</sup> They also consider empathy of the perpetrator for the victim central to the process of forgiveness. Schwan and Barkan find post-war West Germany deficient in its expressions of guilt. Brecke and Long view forgiveness as central to internal reconciliation, but find it lacking in international cases.<sup>34</sup>

The political/historical literature evaluates not only whether, but how to confront the past. Debate and contention about history, or what Maier calls “contrapuntal history,” defines political reconciliation.<sup>35</sup> Digeser allows us to differentiate between victim and perpetrator viewpoints in contending

history, and thereby to avoid the danger of moral equivalence, by distinguishing forgiveness from “excusing, justifying, and condoning.”<sup>36</sup> McAdams and Sa’adah both deem confrontation and dialogue regarding the past a prerequisite for reconciliation and democratic health in post-1989 Germany, as does Schwan for post-1945 Germany.<sup>37</sup> Facing the past does not preclude consideration of the future, as Maier, Schwan, and McAdams all note.<sup>38</sup>

To sum up, in the literature on reconciliation, “history” appears in different forms. The literature of religion suggests what I call “selective” or “contingent” history and in extreme cases offers no role for memory. Philosophical studies focus on “revision” of the previous narrative. Social psychology talks about “shared” history, about making narratives converge. Law highlights “contending” histories. Political science and history offer the notion of “knowing forgetting” and “contrapuntal history.”

### **Varieties of Tools: History and Memory in Practice**

Building on the thinking outlined above, six themes emerge from the commemorative practices undertaken by Germany and Israel in 2015, the special anniversary year: 1) the fundamental acceptance of historical facts

and Germany's role as perpetrator; 2) the suffering of the Jewish victims; 3) the relationship between past and future; 4) the purpose of remembrance; 5) the role of young people; and 6) the nature of contemporary German-Israeli relations. Two dimensions of the scholarly literature's contribution to understanding history's role in reconciliation are not totally apparent.

Forgiveness is not part of the Israeli response to German efforts concerning the past, but magnanimity and gratitude are. Contestation over history is also not present in German-Israeli official interaction over history, but it is a factor in parts of German society.

#### Acknowledgement of the Acts and the Perpetrators

Foreign Minister Steinmeier's language of acknowledgement was stark and detailed at Sachsenhausen in April 2015:

The plans for Sachsenhausen themselves make us shudder. Here, the aim was to achieve "functionality", as well as the best architecture for realizing barbarous objectives. Symmetrically designed prison huts and watchtowers aimed to achieve total control and surveillance. A novel topography of terror was thus created. And it was from here, from Sachsenhausen, that the terror was directed bureaucratically as this became the hub of the entire concentration camp system from 1938. This place...bears witness to the terror of a machinery in which inhumane crimes were planned and routinely administered according to functional criteria.<sup>39</sup>

At Auschwitz in January 2015, the universal symbol for horror and inhumanity, Chancellor Merkel used fewer words, but they were just as

incisive: “We remember all those who were persecuted, tortured, tormented, expelled and murdered by Germans during National Socialism.”

The chancellor also committed Germany to eternal remembrance: “Crimes against humanity are not time-barred. We will always have the responsibility of ensuring that the knowledge of these atrocities is passed on, and of keeping the memories alive,”<sup>40</sup> a promise echoed by Foreign Minister Steinmeier at Sachsenhausen: “Memory has no expiry date.” President Gauck also suggested the resilience of the past’s shadow: “[R]emembrance of the victims of the Nazi regime has become an integral part of our self-perception.”<sup>41</sup>

If history is defining for Germany, for Israel it is indelible and collective, as demonstrated every year in April on Yom Hashoah (Holocaust Martyrs’ and Heroes’ Remembrance Day) in the ceremonies at Yad Vashem, broadcast on television, and the registering of a two-minute siren across the country that stops all activity. The commitment to remember is unstinting and collective: “Today, seventy years after the liberation of the death camps, we stand before you [the Holocaust survivors] and we swear an oath and a promise, ‘All of us, each and every one of us, have a number tattooed on their arm.’”<sup>42</sup>

Detailed descriptions of the horror suffered are ubiquitous in Israeli speeches, for example in President Rivlin's address to the UN on International Holocaust Remembrance Day in January 2015:

The Jews were next. We, the members of my people, were next. In the valley of death of Europe it was the Jewish people who were the victims of methodical, brutal, perverted and murderous extermination. Six million, one third of my nation, about a million and a half of them children, were killed, slaughtered, suffocated, gassed to death, buried alive, burnt, massacred, died from hunger, from thirst, from disease, and other gruesome kinds of death, in the most horrifying crime ever committed in the history of the human race.<sup>43</sup>

In committing Israel to eternal memory, Prime Minister Netanyahu in his October 2105 trip to Germany also acknowledged Germany's path of remembrance: "We'll never forget the horrors of the past, and I appreciate the fact that you do not, you [Chancellor Merkel] and Germany...do not forget the horrors of the past."

### Recognizing The Victims

In their focus on the past in 2015, German leaders have identified a range of victims: Jews, Roma, Sinti, political prisoners, homosexuals, mentally and physically challenged individuals, slave and forced laborers, civilian populations, prisoners of war. Of all the emphases, the Holocaust has been the priority for commemoration and remembrance, suggesting a hierarchy of victims, especially in 2015 when the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of German-Israeli diplomatic relations also took place.

The Israeli emphasis has centered principally on Jewish victims as a unique target, but with recognition that other groups have been victims of war crimes or mass slaughter since the Holocaust, for example in Cambodia, Bosnia, Rwanda, Nigeria, Sudan, Syria.

Speeches and statements have highlighted the victims in two ways: explicit recounting of what happened to the victims, and inclusion of surviving victims in the commemorative ceremonies. So, for example, the German foreign minister read to an audience of survivors from the diary of a young inmate at Sachsenhausen and described the medical experiments perpetrated on the young. Again to personalize and reinstitute the dignity of the victims, President Gauck recounted on International Holocaust Remembrance Day the experience of a witness who did not survive. And at Dachau in May 2015, Angela Merkel addressed first the survivors and then recited the details of what occurred at Dachau in facts and figures. She stressed the centrality of the victims' depictions and memories:

It is extremely fortunate that people like you are willing to share your life stories with us. The boundless suffering inflicted on you by Germany during the Nazi era is essentially beyond comprehension. Your stories are, then, even more important, because they make possible an approximation of what actually happened.<sup>44</sup>

Survivors are a main feature of Israeli commemorations, exemplified by Prime Minister Netanyahu's reference on Yom Hashoah in April 2015: "Today I met in my office an 85-year-old Holocaust survivor, Abraham Niederhoffer. Abraham was born in Romania. When he was 12 years old he witnessed the brutal murder of his relatives."<sup>45</sup> Survivors are a personal link between the past and the present. The more general connection between past and present was also made frequently in 2015 by German and Israeli leaders.

### Past and Present and Future

For German leaders, the imprint of the past is deep and a guide for the present and future; commemoration is a conscious effort to link past and future. Referencing his predecessor in the presidency, Joachim Gauck intoned: "Roman Herzog...insisted that remembrance had to continue forever. Without remembrance, he said, evil could not be overcome and no lessons could be learned for the future." Gauck suggested the service the past could provide: "Remembrance days bring a society together in reflection on the shared past. For whether we like it now or not, formative

experiences leave their traces – in the actors and in the witnesses, but also in future generations.”<sup>46</sup>

At Auschwitz, Chancellor Merkel offered a similar perspective on the inextricable connection between past and future and a sense of responsibility: “[M]emory remains alive across generations...from it we can draw lessons for the future... for we must not forget...We owe [this] to the many millions of victims.”<sup>47</sup>

Invoking President von Weizsäcker’s iconic speech thirty years earlier, Foreign Minister Steinmeier specifically linked May 8, 1945 to the present and future: “And so May 8 1945 does not stand for the liberation of Germans from the past, but rather it is a liberation that helps us face up to the past and learn from it. So that we can shoulder responsibility, consciously aware of our past.”<sup>48</sup>

Israeli leaders such as President Rivlin also characterized the past and the future as dualities:

Not just today, but every day, we walk the depths of the valley, extruded between two mountains. The mountain of memory commands us, the Jewish people, to remember. Remember the sounds. Remember the sights. Remember the names. And yet the mountain of vision and rebirth, of construction and creation, calls on us to step into the future.<sup>49</sup>

He underscored that the passage to the other side of the valley was taken with Germany:

Together with the people of Germany, we will mark a long journey – a journey which has brought us from the unforgettable horrors of the past, to the shared values of the present, and with cooperation and friendship, will lead us to a promising future.<sup>50</sup>

Beyond the general connections among past, present and future, Israeli and German leaders drew specific lessons and purposes for the contemporary world.

### Purpose

German commemorations have devoted much time and space, as indicated above, to the principal lesson of confronting the past: to avoid a repetition of history through acknowledgment, memory and understanding, summed up in "Never again war, never again Auschwitz" (Nie wieder Krieg, nie wieder Auschwitz).<sup>51</sup> This fundamental goal has given rise to several related, practical purposes at home and abroad.

President Gauck referred on January 27, 2015 to his country's "credo," which Germany "[affirms] today when we stand up against every form of exclusion and violence and when we offer a safe home to those who are fleeing persecution, war and terror...[W]e in Germany must work to

reach a new understanding of the coexistence of different religious and cultural traditions.”<sup>52</sup>

Foreign Minister Steinmeier asked at Sachsenhausen in April 2015: “[W]hat does this responsibility mean in practice?” And he answered: “[I]t means standing up to injustice, to all forms of xenophobia and discrimination.” He also identified an international purpose related to peace: “Our foreign policy commitment to tackle [global] crises and to work to achieve an international order in which rules of the game foster peace and understanding also stems from the awareness of our German past.”<sup>53</sup>

At Auschwitz and Dachau Chancellor Merkel drew the same lessons of promoting tolerance as the essence of democracy and international cooperation as the life-blood of the global arena. At Sachsenhausen in 2015, Foreign Minister Steinmeier noted the framework of Europe that enabled this German post-war path - a context to be nurtured and not forgotten.

For Israel, too, “never again” was a primary motivation for remembrance, memory and commemoration, but with less universal and more specifically Jewish concerns. At the Track 17 memorial in Berlin, from which 55,000 Jews were sent to their death, President Rivlin identified the contemporary challenges that must be met with vigilance because of the past:

In a world flooded with barbaric terror and hatred. In a world, where tensions between cultures and ideologies grow stronger. The battle against anti-Semitism and fundamentalism, requires us to be alert and decisive. We must remember, democracy alone does not make us immune to nationalism and fascism...here on Platform 17 we must commit to look hatred in the eye.<sup>54</sup>

Already a few years earlier, Prime Minister Netanyahu's remarks regarding the purpose of remembrance focused on Israel's security, for example in his address at Auschwitz:

The lesson [from the Holocaust] for us, for the Jews, is clear. We cannot be complacent in the face of threats of our annihilation. We cannot bury our heads in the sand or assume that others will do the work for us...From this place, from Auschwitz-Birkenau, I, the Prime Minister of Israel...say to all countries of the world: the State of Israel will do all that it must do in order to prevent another Holocaust.<sup>55</sup>

In 2015, he would identify on numerous occasions, for example in meetings with German leaders, the main challenge to Israel - Iran:

We have spent not only this meeting [with Foreign Minister Steinmeier] but so many other meetings talking about what we perceive as the greatest threat to Israel's security, to the stability of the region and to the peace of the world. And that is Iran's quest for nuclear weapons.<sup>56</sup>

Under these circumstances, and given the Holocaust, he argued, for Israel "there is no room for weakness."<sup>57</sup>

The German and Israeli lessons drawn from the past should be conveyed to all citizens but especially to young people.

The Young

In his May 1985 speech on the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the end of World War II, President von Weizsäcker articulated an important understanding of how Germany viewed young people's role in confronting the past, a notion that would remain as an assumption in the next thirty years:

The vast majority of today's population were either children then or had not been born. They cannot profess a guilt of their own for crimes that they did not commit. No discerning person can expect them to wear a penitential robe simply because they are Germans. But their forefathers have left them a grave legacy. All of us, whether guilty or not, whether old or young, must accept the past. We are all affected by its consequences and liable for it.<sup>58</sup>

This combination of placing responsibility, not guilt, on the young, and preferring the notion of legacy over burden is evident in President Gauck's words on January 27, 2015:

Future generations will certainly seek new forms of commemoration. And while the Holocaust will not necessarily be among the central components of German identity for everyone in our country, it will still hold true that there is no German identity without Auschwitz. It is part and parcel of our country's history.<sup>59</sup>

The importance of maintaining places of barbarity as memorials and registering victims' memories as an obligation to the young was foremost in Chancellor Merkel's observations at Dachau:

[Victims'] indelible and moving descriptions are of particular help to young people to allow them to connect bare facts and figures to faces, to names and to individual life stories...Places of memory like this [concentration camp] are so important...As places of learning for future generations, they carry the responsibility to keep alive and convey the knowledge of what happened – especially when the time

comes that there are no witnesses, no survivors of National Socialism... We will always remember – for the sake of the victims, for our sake and for the sake of future generations.<sup>60</sup>

And, on the anniversary of the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the outbreak of World War II in Poland, Foreign Minister Steinmeier demonstrated Germany's commitment to current and future younger generations on the victims' side by speaking at the first ordination of rabbis (trained in Potsdam) in Wroclaw since World War II:

Dear graduates, for us, your trust is at the same time a blessing and a responsibility. When you will go on to guide communities following your ordination, you are most cordially welcome. You will shape Jewish life, life which is an integral part of our shared European culture and identity. We will not leave you to do so alone. We do not want Jewish communities to be sheltered minorities in need of protection, we want them to be part of everyday life at the heart of our society.<sup>61</sup>

For Israel young people are the link and the bridge between past and future, suggesting an unceasing chain, as President Rivlin indicated on Yom Hashoah in April 2015:

My brothers and sisters, Holocaust survivors. We will continue to walk in the spirit in which you led us for 70 years. We will continue to impart the memory of the Holocaust, from generation to generation, as it is tattooed in our flesh.<sup>62</sup>

In Germany in May 2015, for the anniversary of diplomatic relations he emphasized the importance of the youth congress as a central event of the

celebration, noting that young people's appreciation of the past was one of several activities:

The youth congress is made up of 300 Israelis and Germans between the ages of 18-30, who have taken part in partnership projects in a range of fields in arts and culture. During the meeting, which focused on the realities of life in Israeli society, Holocaust remembrance in Israel, among other socio-economic issues, the participants presented some of the projects to the two Presidents.<sup>63</sup>

The German-Israeli Future Forum provides opportunities for German and Israeli youth to jointly develop projects, thereby structurally connecting the next generation of leaders. The topic of cementing ties between the young was high on the agenda of President Rivlin's meeting with Chancellor Merkel.

In his statement to the young people he and Chancellor Merkel met with, Rivlin reminded them of their solemn responsibility to be the connective tissue between past and future:

You, the youth, are the future of the world, you who are learning what happened in the past, while looking at the future, out of a concern that fractures be healed, and lessons be learned...[You] provide both peoples with the ability to look to the future, not by ignoring the past, by learning from it.<sup>64</sup>

The extensive ties between young Israelis and young Germans are part of a robust network of cooperation, collaboration and partnership between the two countries, considered a "miracle" after the Holocaust.<sup>65</sup>

## Contemporary Ties

In the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary year of German-Israeli diplomatic relations during 2015, German and Israeli officials used numerous occasions to extol the virtues of their cooperation and partnership.<sup>66</sup> Extensive governmental ties span many fields - economics, science, the environment, foreign policy, defense – and were showcased in the sixth annual set of cabinet consultations in February 2016 (postponed from 2015) which brought key ministers together. Germany and Israel have such a bilateral, high-level and intimate discussion and decision-making forum with few other countries.<sup>67</sup> Their “special relationship” is also conducted in the EU, where Germany is frequently the advocate for Israeli interests.<sup>68</sup>

The statements and speeches delivered by German and Israeli leaders emphasize two dimensions of the relationship: its character and its foundation beyond the Holocaust. Both sides stress the relationship is marked by a deep friendship. For example, in the cabinet consultations in February 2016, Prime Minister Netanyahu averred: “When we are in Germany, we know we’re among good friends. I don’t say that as a perfunctory remark; I say it from the heart and from the mind. We appreciate deeply your friendship, the constancy of your friendship... .”<sup>69</sup> Chancellor

Merkel also recognized a robust friendship: "...I am confident that our friendship will become even stronger in coming decades and that our peoples will continue to nurture these relations and move them forward actively in full awareness of the responsibility history has placed upon us, and our shared values."<sup>70</sup>

While viewing the partnership as a friendship, President Rivlin insisted that it not be seen as compensation for the Holocaust, but "is built on shared values, and an understanding that the lessons of the past must drive us toward a better future."<sup>71</sup> Deeming close relations compensation might lead Germans to see a path to forgiveness, but for Israelis that is decidedly not the case: they insist only the murdered victims of the Holocaust or G-d on Yom Kippur can grant forgiveness. Reconciliation is always mutual, so what do Israelis proffer instead of forgiveness? Israelis have shown magnanimity, forbearance, a sense of trust and a willingness to be connected when logically they could have refused to engage with Germany. German leaders have recognized this Israeli gesture, for example in President Gauck's words when President Rivlin visited Germany: "I convey my thanks for the trust the leaders of Israel placed in the leaders of Germany fifty years ago." Foreign Minister Steinmeier went even further about the catalytic role of magnanimity: "[The relationship] became possible

because the country of the persecuted reached out a hand to the country of the persecutors – hesitant at first, and then determined.”<sup>72</sup>

Both sides do not view the friendship based on shared values, magnanimity and a joint commitment to securing the existence of the state of Israel (on the German side by selling essential submarines to Israel) as purely harmonious. Whereas history is neither contending nor contrapuntal between Germany and Israel, the contemporary relationship is. Foreign Minister Steinmeier has noted that “friendship...allows us to speak frankly with one another;” and President Gauck emphasized that “it is also important to debate the issues over which we disagree.”<sup>73</sup> The major disagreement and contention have been over Israeli policy toward the Palestinians. Concordant with other EU member states, Chancellor Merkel has been consistently critical of Israeli settlement policy, saying, for example, that Israeli actions were a matter of major “concern.” Foreign Minister Steinmeier has characterized Israeli plans for new settlements as “disruptive” to the peace process.<sup>74</sup>

Disagreement and criticism are much more pronounced in the German public. German public opinion has a long history of being ambivalent concerning reconciliation and drawing lessons from the past.<sup>75</sup> In a 2013

survey by the Bertelsmann Stiftung, on the question of “putting the past behind us,” 55% of Germans agreed with the statement, with 42% disagreeing (interestingly the numbers for 1991, were 60% agreeing and 20% disagreeing). Their attitude toward Israel was ambivalent, with 46% expressing a good opinion of the Jewish state and 42% having a poor opinion. Regarding German attitudes specifically toward the Israeli government, the negative figures were much higher: 62% of Germans had a poor opinion with only 19% expressing a good opinion.<sup>76</sup>

In contrast to the negative opinions of the German public regarding Israel, Israeli opinions of Germany have been positive: 68% of Israelis deemed the relationship good, with only 24% holding negative opinion. 63% expressed positive attitudes toward the German government with only 18% disagreeing. The German government’s response to the Holocaust through history and memory work appears to resonate much more with the victim state than with the land of the perpetrators.

### **Conclusion**

At the official level, Germany and Israel display many similarities concerning the treatment of history and memory in remembrance and commemoration in 2015, with differences being ones of degree and not in kind. Germany as perpetrator and Israel as victim agree about the historical

fact of the Holocaust, thereby exemplifying social psychology's notion of a "shared history." While the Holocaust is the centerpiece, both sides frequently cite the positive, "miraculous" partnership that developed after 1949, suggesting the relevance of philosophy's notion of a "revised narrative." With the absence of the *motif* of forgiveness and of "selective history," theology's relevance is limited. The idea of "contending histories" and "contrapuntal history" in law and political science/history is not germane for history and memory *per se* in German-Israeli relations, but it does apply to the conduct of contemporary relations that are based on the past.

The key question for the future of memory and history in German-Israeli relations will be the role and engagement of young Germans and young Israelis as the witness generation disappears. President Gauck's words when receiving a doctoral degree at the Hebrew University in December 2015 speak to the complexity of the relationship young people will inherit:

On the one hand, it is true to say that the past will not go away. It continues to exist in our relationships, less and less as an element of division, but permanently woven into the fabric of our interaction. It is something that has not been entirely removed, and that probably never can be entirely removed. On the other hand, the past alone can no longer determine the present and the future. It can no longer undermine the trust that has been established. It can no longer prevent dialogue which is now resilient and able to withstand controversy.

And thousands of young Israelis now no longer have to justify the fact that they regard Berlin an attractive city in which to live, work and study.<sup>77</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> Uniquely in the German-Israeli case, the two terms can be used interchangeably as both relate to established historical facts. In other examples of Germany's international reconciliation, for example with Poland and Czechoslovakia/the Czech Republic, memory refers to the interpretation of facts and involves contestation over history.

<sup>2</sup> Elsewhere, I have referred to "history" expressed in 3 ways: "acknowledgement of grievances," "the past as stimulus" and "the past as present." See Lily Gardner Feldman, *Germany's Foreign Policy of Reconciliation: From Enmity to Amity* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2012), pp. 12-14.

3. Federal Foreign Office, "Speech by Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier on the 70th anniversary of the liberation of the Sachsenhausen concentration camp," April 19, 2015 at:

[http://www.auswaertiges-  
amt.de/EN/Infoservice/Presse/Reden/2015/150419\\_Sachsenhausen.html](http://www.auswaertiges-amt.de/EN/Infoservice/Presse/Reden/2015/150419_Sachsenhausen.html).

<sup>4</sup> Even though there is little strict legal thinking on reconciliation, the term "legal perspectives" is still used because it involves fundamentally issues of justice; and it seeks a rule of law framework in transitional societies.

Very few historians have concerned themselves with reconciliation. They are grouped together with political scientists as they share a similar approach to contemporary history.

<sup>5</sup> Bernhard Moltmann, "Die unversöhnlichen," 2002, p. 127

<sup>6</sup> Donald Shriver, *An Ethic*, 1995, p. 7. This traditional notion was particularly evident in the earlier work on reconciliation, for example in Assefa, quoted in Sampson, "A Study," 1987, p. 9.

<sup>7</sup> Shriver, "Where and When," 2001, p. 28.

<sup>8</sup> Nigel Biggar, "Forgiveness in the Twentieth Century," 2001, p. 215.

<sup>9</sup> Reuter, "Ethik und Politik," 2002, p. 20; Müller-Fahrenholz, *Vergebung Macht Frei*, p. 67.

- 
- <sup>10</sup> Marie Smyth, "Putting the Past in its Place: Victimhood and Reconciliation in Northern Ireland's Peace Process," in Biggar, *Burying the Past*, 2001, pp. 127-28.
- <sup>11</sup> Geiko Müller-Fahrenhoz, *Vergebung Macht Frei*, p. 41.
- <sup>12</sup> Müller-Fahrenhoz, *Vergebung Macht Frei*, pp. 40-63.
- <sup>13</sup> Müller-Fahrenhoz, *Vergebung Macht Frei*, pp. 39-45.
- <sup>14</sup> Susan Dwyer, "Reconciliation, 1999," p. 89.
- <sup>15</sup> Nicholas Tavuchis, *Mea Culpa*, pp. 6-8.
- <sup>16</sup> Robert L. Rothstein, "In Fear of Peace: Getting Past Maybe," in Rothstein, *After the Peace*, p. 16; Louis Kriesberg, "Reconciliation," p.15; Rosa Sevy and JohnTorpey, "Commemoration, Redress, and Reconciliation." pp. 1, 9.
- <sup>17</sup> Daniel Bar-Tal and Gemma H. Bennink, "Nature of Reconciliation," pp.10, 24.
- <sup>18</sup> Wolf Schmidt, "Peace Making by Storytelling," in Daniel Bar-On, *Bridging the Gap*, p.14; Donna Hicks, "The Role of Identity Reconstruction in Promoting Reconciliation," in Helmick and Petersen, *Forgiveness and Reconciliation*, p. 146.
- <sup>19</sup> Rachel Sieder, "War, Peace, and the Politics of Memory in Central America," in Alexandra Barahona, *The Politics of Memory and Democratization* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), p. 185.
- <sup>20</sup> Martha Minow, *Breaking the Cycles* p. 16.
- <sup>21</sup> José Zalaquett, "Confronting Human Rights," p. 7.
- <sup>22</sup> Martha Minow, *Between Vengeance and Forgiveness*, p. 58; Mendez, "National Reconciliation," p.33.
- <sup>23</sup> Kader Asmal, Louise Asmal and Ronald Suresh Roberts, *Reconciliation Through Truth: A Reckoning of Apartheid's Criminal Governance* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1997), p. 46.
- <sup>24</sup> Amy Gutmann and DennisThompson, "The Moral Foundations," p. 32.
- <sup>25</sup> Asmal, Asmal and Suresh, *Reconciliation Through Truth*, p. 7.
- <sup>26</sup> Asmal, Asmal and Suresh, *Reconciliation Through Truth*, p. 6.
- <sup>27</sup> Brecke and Long, *War and Reconciliation*, p. 6.
- <sup>28</sup> Digeser, *Political Forgiveness*, p. 6.
- <sup>29</sup> Digeser, *Political Forgiveness*, p. 11.
- <sup>30</sup> Elshtain, "Political Forgiveness," p. 43. Schwan borrows Hinderk Emrich's term "correct forgetting" to articulate a similar idea (*Politics and Guilt*, p. 186).
- <sup>31</sup> Sa'adah, *Germany's Second Chance*, pp. 37, 46; Schwan, *Politics and Guilt*, p. 186.
- <sup>32</sup> McAdams, *Judging the Past*, pp. 8, 21; Sa'adah, *Germany's Second Chance*, pp.53-55.
- <sup>33</sup> For treatment of guilt without reference to reconciliation in the German and Japanese cases, see Ian Buruma, *The Wages of Guilt. Memories of War in Germany and Japan* (New York: Farrar Strauss Giroux, 1994).
- <sup>34</sup> Brecke and Long, *War and Reconciliation*, pp. 28-32, pp. 111-13.
- <sup>35</sup> Maier, "Doing History," pp. 274-75.
- <sup>36</sup> Digeser, *Political Forgiveness*, p. 27.
- <sup>37</sup> McAdams, *Judging the Past*, pp. 21, 122-23, 166-68, 187-88; Sa'adah, *Germany's Second Chance*, pp. 3-4, 72-73, 100-101; Schwan, *Politics and Guilt*, chapter 7.
- <sup>38</sup> Maier, "Zu einer politischen Typologie," p. 116; Schwan, *Politics and Guilt*, p. 8; McAdams, "Transitional Justice after 1989," pp. 59, 64.
- <sup>39</sup> Federal Foreign Office, "Speech by Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier on the 70th anniversary of the liberation of the Sachsenhausen concentration camp," April 19,

---

2015 at: [https://www.auswaertiges-amt.de/DE/Infoservice/Presse/Reden/2015/150419-BM\\_Sachsenhausen.html](https://www.auswaertiges-amt.de/DE/Infoservice/Presse/Reden/2015/150419-BM_Sachsenhausen.html).

<sup>40</sup> Die Bundeskanzlerin, “Rede von Bundeskanzlerin Merkel anlässlich der Gedenkveranstaltung des Internationalen Auschwitz-Komitees zum 70. Jahrestag der Befreiung des Konzentrationslagers Auschwitz-Birkenau am 26. Januar 2015,” at: <http://www.bundeskanzlerin.de/Content/DE/Rede/2015/01/2015-01-26-merkel-auschwitz.html>.

<sup>41</sup> 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>.

<sup>42</sup> Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs, “President Rivlin: Holocaust Martyr’s and Heroes’ Day, April 15, 2015.

<sup>43</sup> Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs, “President Rivlin addresses UN General Assembly: International Holocaust Remembrance Day,” January 28, 2015.

<sup>44</sup> Die Bundesregierung, “Rede von Bundeskanzlerin Merkel bei der Gedenkveranstaltung zum 70. Jahrestag der Befreiung des KZ Dachau am 3. Mai 2015,” at: <http://www.bundesregierung.de/Content/DE/Rede/2015/05/2015-05-04-merkel-dachau.html>.

<sup>45</sup> Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs, “PM Netanyahu: Holocaust Martyrs’ and Heroes’ Remembrance Day,” April 15, 2015.

<sup>46</sup> 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>.

<sup>47</sup> Die Bundeskanzlerin, “Rede von Bundeskanzlerin Merkel anlässlich der Gedenkveranstaltung des Internationalen Auschwitz-Komitees zum 70. Jahrestag der Befreiung des Konzentrationslagers Auschwitz-Birkenau am 26. Januar 2015,” at: <http://www.bundeskanzlerin.de/Content/DE/Rede/2015/01/2015-01-26-merkel-auschwitz.html>.

<sup>48</sup> Federal Foreign Office, “Speech by Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier on the 70th anniversary of the liberation of the Sachsenhausen concentration camp,” April 19, 2015 at: [https://www.auswaertiges-amt.de/DE/Infoservice/Presse/Reden/2015/150419-BM\\_Sachsenhausen.html](https://www.auswaertiges-amt.de/DE/Infoservice/Presse/Reden/2015/150419-BM_Sachsenhausen.html).

<sup>49</sup> Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs, “President Rivlin: Holocaust Martyr’s and Heroes’ Day, April 15, 2015.

<sup>50</sup> Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs, “President Rivlin on State Visit to Germany,” May 10, 2015.

<sup>51</sup> As a slogan, this phrase was articulated by then Foreign Minister Fischer in April 1999 concerning Germany’s decision to participate in the war against Serbia. See: Nico Fried, “Ich habe gelernt: Nie wieder Auschwitz,” May 19, 2010, at <http://www.sueddeutsche.de/politik/fischer-ich-habe-gelernt-nie-wieder-auschwitz-1.915701>.

<sup>52</sup> 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>.

<sup>53</sup> Federal Foreign Office, “Speech by Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier on the 70th anniversary of the liberation of the Sachsenhausen concentration camp,” April 19, 2015 at: [https://www.auswaertiges-amt.de/DE/Infoservice/Presse/Reden/2015/150419-BM\\_Sachsenhausen.html](https://www.auswaertiges-amt.de/DE/Infoservice/Presse/Reden/2015/150419-BM_Sachsenhausen.html).

<sup>54</sup> Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs, “First Day of President Rivlin’s State Visit to Germany,” May 11, 2015.

<sup>55</sup> Prime Minister’s Office, “PM Benjamin Netanyahu’s Speech at the Opening of the Permanent Exhibition in Block 27 at Auschwitz-Birkenau,” June 13 2013.

<sup>56</sup> Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs, “PM Netanyahu meets with German FM Steinmeier,” May 31, 2015.

<sup>57</sup> Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs, “PM Netanyahu: Holocaust Martyrs’ and Heroes’ Remembrance Day,” April 15, 2015.

<sup>58</sup> The English version, a translation by the German Foreign Office, is available at:

[http://www.lmz-bw.de/fileadmin/user\\_upload/Medienbildung\\_MCO/fileadmin/bibliothek/weizsaecker\\_speech\\_may85/weizsaecker\\_speech\\_may85.pdf](http://www.lmz-bw.de/fileadmin/user_upload/Medienbildung_MCO/fileadmin/bibliothek/weizsaecker_speech_may85/weizsaecker_speech_may85.pdf).

<sup>59</sup> 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>.

<sup>60</sup> Die Bundesregierung, “Rede von Bundeskanzlerin Merkel bei der Gedenkveranstaltung zum 70. Jahrestag der Befreiung des KZ Dachau am 3. Mai 2015,” at:

<http://www.bundesregierung.de/Content/DE/Rede/2015/05/2015-05-04-merkel-dachau.html>.

<sup>61</sup> Auswärtiges Amt, “Rede von Außenminister Frank-Walter Steinmeier bei der Ordinationsfeier des Abraham-Geiger-Kollegs in Breslau,” September 2, 2014, at:

[http://www.auswaertiges-amt.de/DE/Infoservice/Presse/Reden/2014/140902-BM\\_Geiger\\_Kolleg.html](http://www.auswaertiges-amt.de/DE/Infoservice/Presse/Reden/2014/140902-BM_Geiger_Kolleg.html).

<sup>62</sup> Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs, “President Rivlin: Holocaust Martyr’s and Heroes’ Day, April 15, 2015.

<sup>63</sup> Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs, “First Day of President Rivlin’s State Visit to Germany,” May 11, 2015.

<sup>64</sup> Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs, “President Rivlin meets with Chancellor Merkel and FM Steinmeier,” May 12, 2015.

<sup>65</sup> Chancellor Merkel in the meeting with young people, quoted in *ibid*.

<sup>66</sup> For analysis of the highly significant societal connections between Germany and Israel in all spheres, see Gardner Feldman, *op. cit*.

<sup>67</sup> Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs, “Israel and Germany hold Inter-governmental Consultations,” February 16, 2016; “PM Netanyahu and Chancellor Merkel issue Joint Statement at the Inter-governmental Consultations,” February 16, 2016.

<sup>68</sup> For the German-Israeli relationship in the EU, see Lily Gardner Feldman, “Defining Dualities: Context, Content and Comparison in German-Israeli Relations in the Framework of Europeanization” in Alfred Wittstock, ed., *Rapprochement, Change,*

---

*Perception and Shaping the Future: 50 Years of German-Israeli and Israeli-German Diplomatic Relations* (Berlin: Frank & Timme, 2016).

<sup>69</sup> Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs, “Israel and Germany hold Inter-governmental Consultations,” February 16, 2016.

<sup>70</sup> Bundeskanzlerin, “Angela Merkel on 50 Years of German-Israeli Relations,” May 11, 2015.

<sup>71</sup> Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs, “First Day of President Rivlin’s State Visit to Germany,” May 11, 2015.

<sup>72</sup> Federal Foreign Office, “Speech by Foreign Minister Steinmeier at the launch of the German-Israeli series,” January 15, 2015.

<sup>73</sup> Steinmeier, *ibid.*; Gauck quoted in Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs, “First Day of President Rivlin’s State Visit to Germany,” May 11, 2015.

<sup>74</sup> Bundeskanzlerin, “Pressekonferenz zu den 5. Deutsch-Israelischen Regierungskonsultationen in Jerusalem, February 25, 2014; Frank-Walter Steinmeier, quoted in Haaretz, February 24, 2014.

<sup>75</sup> Gardner Feldman 2012, chapter 2.

<sup>76</sup> Stephan Vopel/Bertelsmann Stiftung, “Germany and Israel Today. United by the Past, Divided by the Present?” February 3, 2016 at:

[http://www.rgre.de/fileadmin/redaktion/pdf/dt-israel\\_konferenz\\_Leipzig/BS\\_DuI\\_Infographic\\_en\\_160202\\_Vopel\\_3\\_.pdf](http://www.rgre.de/fileadmin/redaktion/pdf/dt-israel_konferenz_Leipzig/BS_DuI_Infographic_en_160202_Vopel_3_.pdf).

<sup>77</sup> Bundespräsidialamt, “Federal President Joachim Gauck on receiving an honorary doctorate from the Hebrew University of Jerusalem,” December 6, 2015.