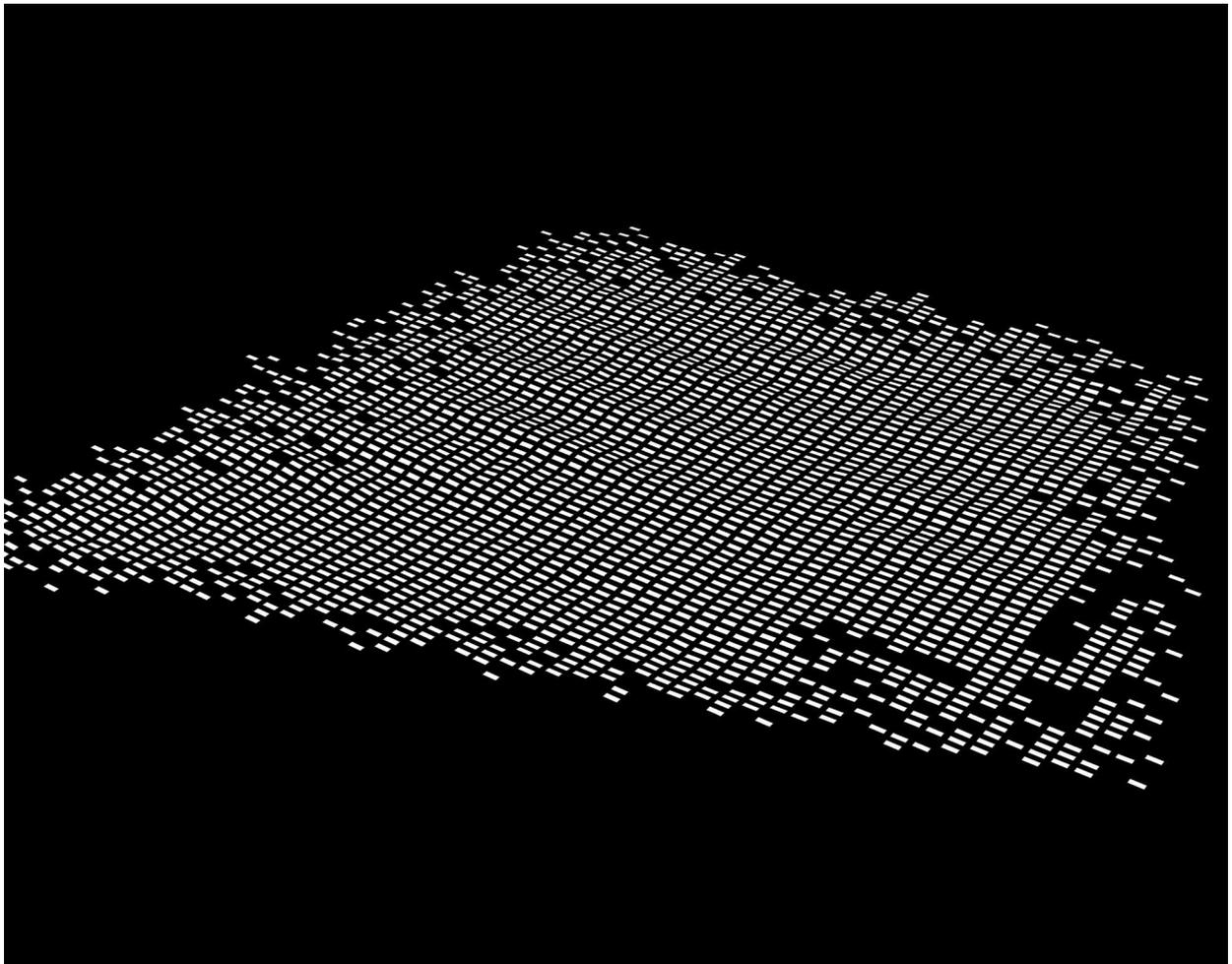


Understanding Holocaust ‘Singularity’:  
The Memory Sought vs. the Memory Achieved between the *Historikerstreit*  
and the ‘Catechism’ within the German Federal Republic

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<sup>1</sup> Peter Eisenman. “Berlin Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe,” *Eisenman Architects*  
<https://eisenmanarchitects.com/Berlin-Memorial-to-the-Murdered-Jews-of-Europe-2005>

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**Introduction:**

In 1986, roughly thirty years after the end of the Second World War, a coalition of conservative German historians spearheaded by Andreas Hillgruber and Ernst Nolte attempted to re-envision the Nazi era through comparisons with Stalinism. By specifically targeting the rationale for the Eastern Front, conservatives spun loosely related narratives that painted German actions as regrettably necessary to prevent a “threatened orgy of revenge,” and even more damningly, considered the Holocaust an unfortunate by-product of the Soviet Union’s development<sup>2</sup>. Amidst this Nazi-sympathetic reframing, an underlying nationalist theme was always present within these historians’ writings: the idea that continual atonement for the Holocaust had hindered German progress and identity<sup>3</sup>. These historians’ sentiments would spark the *Historikerstreit*, or ‘Historians Debate,’ in which the more progressive wings of the scholarship rallied to refute the proposed revisionism of Hillgruber, Nolte, and their colleagues. After this successful discrediting of the claims linking the crimes of Nazism and the Soviet Union among reputable researchers, the German scholarship on this period shifted greatly. In particular, the ‘singularity thesis’ was solidified, or notion that the Holocaust was inherently historically unique. Accompanied by the effects of German reunification four years later, historians pivoted to the discussions surrounding memory and identity that now dominated the nation’s cultural landscape. With this new focus, they looked to Germany’s broader memory

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<sup>2</sup> Ernst Nolte. “The Pass that Will Not Pass: A Speech that Could Be Written but Not Delivered.” *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* ( June 6th, 1986)

<sup>3</sup> Hans-Georg Betz. “Politics of Resentment: Right-Wing Radicalism in West Germany,” *Comparative Politics* Vol. 23 Issue 1 (City University of New York, 1990) 45-60

culture, examining *how* exactly the Holocaust should be memorialized, and within the last decade, how the memory of said event *interacts* with other German atrocities<sup>4</sup>.

Thirty-six years later, the scholarship is still divided on the answer to these two central questions. While the topic of proper memorialization has stayed consistently relevant in the time since the *Historikerstreit*, in 2021 Professor A. Dirk Moses catalyzed a renewed discourse related to the historical contextuality of the Holocaust. Through his controversial rebuke of the ‘German Catechism’ - in his view a set of religious-like tenants surrounding the Holocaust that permeate German state policy and memory culture - Moses became the figurehead of a coalition within the scholarship questioning if the impositions of ‘singularity’ after 1986 were all inherently positive<sup>5</sup>. Moses contends that although valiant in their inception, these tenants sideline the memory of other national atrocities, specifically those committed as part of the German imperial project. In particular, this thesis discusses the historical background and cultural implications of two of his major arguments: first, his contention that “The Holocaust is unique because it was unlimited extermination solely on ideological grounds, distinguished from the limited and pragmatic aims of other genocides”; and following, that the [Holocaust] “was thus a civilizational rupture and the moral foundation of the [German] nation”<sup>6</sup>.

My thesis follows a tri-part structure. First, I chronicle the arguments present within the *Historikerstreit* in an effort to explain why there was vehement pushback regarding historical contextualization of the Holocaust, and subsequently analyze why the ‘singularity thesis’

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<sup>4</sup> David B. Clark, Marcus A. Doel, Francis McDonough. “Holocaust Topologies: Singularity, Politics, Space,” *Political Geography*, Vol. 15 (?July - September 1996)

<https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0962629896000273#section-cited-by>

<sup>5</sup> Jonathan Catlin. “A New German Historians’ Debate? A Conversation with Sultan Doughan, A. Dirk Moses, and Michael Rothberg (Parts 1-2).” *The Journal of the History of Ideas* (February 2nd, 2022)

<https://jhiblog.org/2022/02/02/a-new-german-historians-debate-a-conversation-with-sultan-doughan-a-dirk-moses-and-michael-rothberg-part-i/>

<sup>6</sup> A. Dirk Moses. “The German Catechism.” *The New Fascism Syllabus* (May 23rd, 2021)

<http://newfascismsyllabus.com/opinions/the-catechism-debate/the-german-catechism/>.

emerged. Secondly, I examine the political climate and ideological intentions surrounding the creation of the German Federal Republic's leading monument to the Holocaust, the 'Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe'. I argue that this monument embodies a transformation of the singularity thesis's functionality within Germany's memory culture as it broke out of the insular academic sphere. Finally, I dissect the validity of the criticisms Moses levied at contemporary German memory in the 'Catechism Debate'. I examine the notion of uniqueness 'displacing' forms of colonial memorium as a third and final transformation of singularity - with a particular focus on the memory of the Herero and Nama Genocide of 1904-1908 in German South West Africa. I will also examine counterarguments against the totality of Moses's conclusions; contentions which question whether expanding memorialization to include acknowledgment of colonial atrocities has to result in the seeming reduction of Holocaust memory, and how the reimagining Moses proposes actually creates visibility for the marginalized memories and peoples he claims to support.

This approach represents a novel contribution to studies of German historiography and memory, as I track the change over time between the two aforementioned debates in an effort to categorize the main shifts in the perceived purpose of Holocaust singularity. Thus, the significance of this thesis is presented, as it attempts to analyze if any ideological changes should be implemented regarding the singular memory of Germany's polarizing crimes.

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## Chapter I: The *Historikerstreit*, Ambiguity, and Singularity

“He hits two flies with one swat: The Nazi crimes lose their singularity in that they are at least made comprehensible as an answer to the (still extant) Bolshevist threats of annihilation. The magnitude of Auschwitz shrinks to the format of technical innovation and is explained on the basis of the [threat] from an enemy that still stands at [the] door” - Jürgen Habermas<sup>7</sup>

When U.S President Ronald Reagan visited the Federal Republic of Germany in May, 1985 for the 40th anniversary of the Second World War’s closure, he planned to tour Bitburg Cemetery at the behest of Chancellor Helmut Kohl. It was known beforehand that the cemetery contained the graves of 49 *Waffen-SS* Stormtroopers, and as such the leader’s impending visit stirred global controversy. Prominent Jewish community leaders appealed to President Regan asking that he alter courses, such as Auschwitz survivor Elie Wiesel’s statement urging him “to do something else, to find another way, another site” and reiterating that it wasn’t “[his] place,” which should instead be “with the victims of the SS”<sup>8</sup>. On April 30th, five days before the scheduled tour, Reagan stood his ground in a press conference, affirming his desire to attend Bitburg, and further stating that “with reference to [soldiers] who are in the cemetery...[they] have long since met the supreme judge of right and wrong...[and] whatever punishment or justice was needed has been rendered by one who is above us all”<sup>9</sup>. Within Reagan’s statement,

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<sup>7</sup> Jürgen Habermas. “A Kind of Settlement of Damages: The Apologetic Tendencies in German History Writing,” *Die Zeit*, 1986. Taken from *Forever in the Shadow of Hitler?: Original documents of the Historikerstreit, the Controversy Concerning the Singularity of the Holocaust* (Humanities Press, 1993) 41

<sup>8</sup> Andrew Glass. “Reagan Visits German War Cemetery, May 5, 1985.” *Politico* (May 5th, 2018) <https://www.politico.com/story/2018/05/05/this-day-in-politics-may-5-1985-565776>.

<sup>9</sup> David Hoffman. “Visit 'Morally Right' Reagan Says of Bitburg,” *The Washington Post* (April 30, 1985) <https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/politics/1985/04/30/visit-morally-right-reagan-says-of-bitburg/e5794dde-c363-45dd-a6e0-b6f7511f86b7/>.

the President claimed that his visit had no intention of endorsement on grounds that the SS soldiers had already faced judgment from ‘one who is above us all’ - God - for their crimes, with his use of ‘long since’ implying that this judgment happened far in the past, and was thus a solved issue that didn’t warrant the controversy. Therefore an assumption is present within Reagan’s language surrounding Bitburg; that Nazism was a past which had already been ‘judged’.

Chancellor Kohl’s official statements danced around the same premise. Giving a speech at the U.S airbase in Bitburg the same day as the cemetery visit, Kohl remarked that the tour signaled “a widely visible and widely felt gesture of reconciliation”<sup>10</sup>. While not as openly jarring as Reagan’s justification of already passed judgment, Kohl’s implication of ‘reconciliation’ still signaled his belief in a degree of finality regarding attitudes surrounding the war.

A crucial detail to complete this story is that the leaders ended up slightly acquiescing to public outcry akin to Weisel’s, making an impromptu stop to the Bergen-Belsen concentration camp the morning of the Bitburg ceremony, which provided memorial to an estimated 52,000 Nazi victims<sup>11</sup>. However this effort to ‘soften the blow’ did not remedy the implications of Reagan’s April 30th conference, and certainly did not absolve the pair from scrutiny. It instead further muddied the waters by both recognizing German perpetrators or other nationalistic entities, while only leaving room to acknowledge the regime’s victims at the bare minimum capacity. For example, as Reagan stated at Belsen, “never again”<sup>12</sup>, in the same breadth Kohl,

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<sup>10</sup> Helmut Kohl. “Speech at U.S Air Base in Bitburg” (May 5th, 1985) from “Transcript of Speech by Kohl at U.S Airbase,” *New York Times*

<https://www.nytimes.com/1985/05/06/world/transcript-of-speech-by-kohl-at-us-air-base.html>

<sup>11</sup> Authorial Staff at the Bergen-Belsen Memorial. “Bergen Belsen Memorial-History”, *Gedenkstätte Bergen Belsen* (October 27, 2021)

<https://bergen-belsen.stiftung-ng.de/en/history/>

<sup>12</sup> Andrew Glass. “Reagan Visits German War Cemetery, May 5, 1985,” *Politico* (May 5th, 2018)

<https://www.politico.com/story/2018/05/05/this-day-in-politics-may-5-1985-565776>.

during the Bitburg ceremony, insisted that the homage being paid to “the dead buried [at Bitburg]” was homage “to all victims of war and tyranny, to the... persecuted of all nations” - of which the 49 SS soldiers were supposedly included<sup>13</sup>.

For West Germany, the mid 1980s marked the beginning of a more heightened discussion surrounding national identity and historical memory than what had already permeated the fractured Nation since its partitioning at the end of World War 2. Indeed, it is strikingly clear that Reagan and Kohl’s actions tapped into a zeitgeist fomenting among conservative West Germany that would serve as the driving force behind challenges to Germany’s memory culture. This zeitgeist claimed to seek a new German national identity, one which aimed to cast off the ‘burden’ of Nazism, and to reimagine - through a highly apologetic lens - the rationale, severity, and responsibility associated with Germany’s immense crimes<sup>14</sup>. Thus this thesis opens with an anecdote on the Bitburg Controversy as it spawned a climate of heightened attitudes towards Germany’s future and past, a climate in which revisionist politicians and historians felt comfortable echoing the muddled ‘duality of intention’ displayed by Reagan and Kohl.

One such historian was Andreas Hillgruber, who in April of 1986 published a work titled *Two Kinds of Destruction: The Shattering of the German Reich and the End of European Jewry*. This was a collection of two essays - one a detailed and impassioned thesis discussing the fall of Germany’s Eastern Front to the Soviet Union, and the second a modest analysis dedicated to the Holocaust<sup>15</sup>. Hillgruber’s publication sent ripples throughout the West German historical scholarship, eliciting a full public forum where debates over German memory culture and the

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<sup>13</sup> Helmut Kohl. “Speech at U.S Air Base in Bitburg” (May 5th, 1985) from “Transcript of Speech by Kohl at U.S Airbase,” *The New York Times*.

<https://www.nytimes.com/1985/05/06/world/transcript-of-speech-by-kohl-at-us-air-base.html>

<sup>14</sup> Hans-Georg Betz. “Politics of Resentment: Right-Wing Radicalism in West Germany.” *Comparative Politics*, Volume 23, No. 1 pg. 49 (1990)

<https://doi.org/10.2307/422304>.

<sup>15</sup> J. M Markham. “German book sets off New Holocaust Debate,” *The New York Times* (September 6, 1986) <https://www.nytimes.com/1986/09/06/books/german-book-sets-off-new-holocaust-debate.html>

nature of the Holocaust played out across countless national journals and newspapers, dubbed the *Historikerstreit*. While there were over ten contributors to these debates, this thesis will limit its scope to the discussion of primarily five authors: Hillgruber and his like-minded colleagues Ernst Nolte and Michael Stürmer - and two opposed, Jürgen Habermas and Eberhard Jäckel<sup>16</sup>. Though Stürmer and Nolte authored earlier articles in the conservative paper *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* that are credited as part of the *Historikerstreit*, the publication of Habermas's July 1986 article "A Kind of Settlement of Damages" in the liberal paper *Die Zeit* is seen as the beginning of open hostilities among these scholars<sup>17</sup>.

An already highly respected philosopher in the West German sphere for his prominent public intellectualism and work such as his 'Communicative Action' and 'Discourse' theories, Habermas picked up on the intensifying conservative zeitgeist after Bitburg<sup>18</sup>. With the intention of addressing the "apologetic tendencies in the writing of modern German history," Habermas identified three main arguments in Hillgruber and his colleagues' work, which he characterized as 'apologetic' since they all sought to simultaneously extend subtle charity to the German Reich while downplaying the severity of the Holocaust<sup>19</sup>. The theses that Habermas outlined are categorized in this paper as 'Romanticization,' 'Comparison,' and 'Memorium', and are as follows: the conservatives argued that 1) despite the "desperate and sacrificial" efforts of the German army, Germany faced a 'tragic' defeat with the collapse of the Eastern Front that led to

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<sup>16</sup> James Knowlton and Truett Cates. *Forever in the Shadow of Hitler?: Original documents of the Historikerstreit, the Controversy Concerning the Singularity of the Holocaust* (Humanities Press, 1993) v-ix

<sup>17</sup> J. M. Markham. "German book sets off New Holocaust Debate," *The New York Times* (September 6, 1986) <https://www.nytimes.com/1986/09/06/books/german-book-sets-off-new-holocaust-debate.html>

<sup>18</sup> James Bohman and William Rehg. "Jürgen Habermas," *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Stanford University, August 4, 2014) <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/habermas/>.

<sup>19</sup> Jürgen Habermas. "A Kind of Settlement of Damages: The Apologetic Tendencies in German History Writing," *Die Zeit* (July 11th, 1986). Taken from *Forever in the Shadow of Hitler?: Original documents of the Historikerstreit, the Controversy Concerning the Singularity of the Holocaust* (Humanities Press, 1993) 34-36

Soviet “brutality”<sup>20</sup>; 2) there was a “causal nexus” between the Holocaust and Soviet development, and that the genocides of Stalinism lead to the inevitability of the Holocaust<sup>21</sup>; and 3) due to an inability to move past the Nazi era, Holocaust memory had a “progressive strangulation” on German national progress<sup>22</sup>. Habermas’s rebuke serves as a quintessential microcosm of the central arguments contained within the ‘Historian’s Debate,’ and as such it will be the main point of examination when discussing the ideologies and legacy of the *Historikerstreit*.

Immediately moving to address the conservatives’ first implication of ‘Romanticization’ from the start of his work, Habermas described an intellectual “tightrope” Hillgruber walked between reframing German efforts in the Eastern Front and acknowledgement of the Holocaust - a heightened ‘duality of intention’ - and one that displayed his clear prioritization of the former<sup>23</sup>. For instance, in Hillgruber’s *Two Kinds of Destruction*, Habermas notes the subtitles of the essays which include the “Shattering of the German Reich”, and the “End of European Jewry”. Habermas points out that for something to be ‘shattered’ there is a violent connotation - even for the action to have an “aggressive opponent”. In contrast, he comments on the apathetic tone of the second title which leaves the impression that European Jewry ‘ended’ in part “on its own,” phrased in a way that expresses a degree of inherency<sup>24</sup>. Habermas’s intention here is to show that from the very onset, Hillgruber’s main concern was not with the Holocaust.

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<sup>20</sup> Andreas Hillgruber. *Two Kinds of Destruction: The Shattering of the German Reich and the End of European Jewry* (Berline: Siedler, 1986)

<sup>21</sup> Ernst Nolte. “The Pass that Will Not Pass: A Speech that Could Be Written but Not Delivered,” *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* (June 6th, 1986). Taken from *Forever in the Shadow of Hitler?: Original documents of the Historikerstreit, the Controversy Concerning the Singularity of the Holocaust* (Humanities Press, 1993) 22

<sup>22</sup> Michael Stürmer. “History in a Land without History,” *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* (April 25th, 1986)

<sup>23</sup> Jürgen Habermas. “A Kind of Settlement of Damages: The Apologetic Tendencies in German History Writing,” *Die Zeit* (July 11th, 1986). Taken from *Forever in the Shadow of Hitler?: Original documents of the Historikerstreit, the Controversy Concerning the Singularity of the Holocaust* (Humanities Press, 1993) 34-35

<sup>24</sup> Jürgen Habermas. “A Kind of Settlement of Damages: The Apologetic Tendencies in German History Writing,” *Die Zeit* (July 11th, 1986). Taken from *Forever in the Shadow of Hitler?: Original documents of the Historikerstreit, the Controversy Concerning the Singularity of the Holocaust* (Humanities Press, 1993) 37

So if Hillgruber's focus when discussing the war's Eastern Front wasn't the Holocaust, which only continued to ramp in severity and zeal as the Nazi's began to falter, what, or whom, was at the forefront<sup>25</sup>? His focus emerges in the form of a patriotic German soldier - one who is distinctly *not* from the SS - but whose actions heroically stave off the threat of the Soviet Union for as long as possible, an evil which is framed as equitable if not more malevolent than the Nazis. Habermas argued that Hillgruber pushed his audience to identify with this archetypal German soldier, specifically, to identify him as a vanguard against "orgies of revenge...mass rapes, random murders, [and] forced deportations," valiantly fighting against the impending monster of the Soviet Union in an effort to "hold open the escape route to the West" for German citizens<sup>26</sup>. Moreover, Habermas highlighted that Hillgruber did not validate the perspectives of any other group besides these German soldiers, thus presenting German action as not only as moral, but also necessary in the East.

Habermas viewed this interpretation as problematic primarily because it was meant to generate de facto sympathy towards Germany. By contrast, the Soviet Union is depicted as an entity capable of immense horror, with the exception of their liberation of the concentration camps. Habermas claims that for Hillgruber, the destruction of the concentration camps was the dismantling of a *Nazi* apparatus, not a German apparatus<sup>27</sup>. However outside of these specific actions against the *Nazi's*, the Soviet Union's other actions against *Germany* fall under the 'barbarity' of the aforementioned direct quotation - rapes, murders, deportations, etc<sup>28</sup>.

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<sup>25</sup> United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. "Deportation of Hungarian Jews," *United States Holocaust Memorial Museum*.

<https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/timeline-event/holocaust/1942-1945/deportation-of-hungarian-jews>.

<sup>26</sup> Andreas Hillgruber. *Two Kinds of Destruction: The Shattering of the German Reich and the End of European Jewry* (Berline: Siedler, 1986)

<sup>27</sup> Jürgen Habermas. "A Kind of Settlement of Damages: The Apologetic Tendencies in German History Writing," *Die Zeit* (July 11th, 1986). Taken from *Forever in the Shadow of Hitler?: Original documents of the Historikerstreit, the Controversy Concerning the Singularity of the Holocaust* (Humanities Press, 1993) 37

<sup>28</sup> Andreas Hillgruber. *Two Kinds of Destruction: The Shattering of the German Reich and the End of European Jewry* (Berline: Siedler, 1986)

Habermas's analysis of Hillgruber's logic reveals two implications of intense romanticization surrounding the German state during the war; primarily it suggests a total detachment of the 'normal' Germans from the actions of select Nazi SS - thus a detachment of normal Germans entirely from the Holocaust - and emphasizes the necessity of the German soldiers who fought on the Eastern Front. Habermas held that the aforementioned distinction made, between perpetrators and bystanders, between 'Nazi' and 'German', was made in order to imply that Nazism was thus the work of a few 'bad apples', and not indicative of the general public's otherwise 'valiant' role in the war.



<sup>29</sup>The Ivanhorod *Einsatzgruppen* photo, sent back home from an unknown German on the Eastern Front, Ivanhorod Ukraine, 1942. Men to the right are seen digging their own graves, as a woman uses her body to shield her child before execution. This photo perfectly encapsulates the 'valiant' war in the East.

With his readers' heart-strings being tugged at the rosy, patriotic descriptions of necessary German 'protection' in the East, one might assume Hillgruber framed the subsequent discussion of the Holocaust in a similar light. This is not the case, and Habermas utilized the same juxtaposition he outlined when discussing the titles of Hillgruber's work to make his

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<sup>29</sup> Robert Fisk. "Ukraine, 1942. What Are We Seeing?," *The Independent* (The Independent Digital News and Media: November 19, 2011) <https://www.independent.co.uk/voices/commentators/fisk/robert-fisk-ukraine-1942-what-are-we-seeing-6264646.html>

apathy towards the event incredibly evident. The emotionally charged rhetoric of the first essay is replaced by what Habermas called “the frozen language of bureaucracy”<sup>30</sup>. This is because in the second section - in “The End” - there were no emphatic descriptions of individual accounts in the camps, of the horrors that Jewish people endured, or the intensity and abundance of the murder. The rhetoric is instead mechanical and unfeeling. He continued to compare excerpts from the two sections, not only to hammer home the blatant tonal shift, but to show the ‘bureaucratic’ elements of the rhetoric. Looking at an example, he quoted Hillgruber’s description of the Reich’s mobile death squads in the East - the *Einsatzgruppen* - as “stationary successor organizations”, a description which works hard to obfuscate the squads’ real goal, akin to how a politician uses drawn out, seemingly confusing phrases to mislead their voters<sup>31</sup>.

By simultaneously praising German soldiers in the East and positing the Holocaust as solely a *Nazi* perpetrated crime, Hillgruber invoked nationalistic pride while reassuring his German audience that it was ok to feel that pride, as the Holocaust was not their fault. Combined with an extremely apathetic and purposely confusing account of the Holocaust itself, for Habermas, it is clear that Hillgruber’s intention was to sideline Holocaust memory in the consciousness of the Federal Republic, hence the charge of demonstrating “apologetic tendencies”.

Whereas Hillgruber kept ‘*Germany*’ and the Eastern front separate from ‘*Nazism*’ and the Holocaust in an effort to repress memory of the Reich’s genocide, his colleague Ernst Nolte, with the same endgoal in mind, took a different approach. Unlike Hillgruber, Nolte does not

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<sup>30</sup> Jürgen Habermas. “A Kind of Settlement of Damages: The Apologetic Tendencies in German History Writing,” *Die Zeit* (July 11th, 1986). Taken from *Forever in the Shadow of Hitler?: Original documents of the Historikerstreit, the Controversy Concerning the Singularity of the Holocaust* (Humanities Press, 1993) 37

<sup>31</sup> Jürgen Habermas. “A Kind of Settlement of Damages: The Apologetic Tendencies in German History Writing,” *Die Zeit* (July 11th, 1986). Taken from *Forever in the Shadow of Hitler?: Original documents of the Historikerstreit, the Controversy Concerning the Singularity of the Holocaust* (Humanities Press, 1993) 37

differentiate between Germany and Nazism, instead using the term ‘the Third Reich’ in his arguments and viewing it as a unified state. This was done to better allow a direct comparison of one state to another, which was the foundation of Nolte’s position.

Habermas viewed Nolte’s position as one of intense revision, as it aimed to reconstruct the history of the Third Reich in an effort to remove the ‘uniqueness’ attributed to the regime in contemporary historiography. Nolte looked to accomplish this through putting the Nazi regime - and specifically its crimes - within the ‘context’ of other 20th century totalitarian transgressions . While this categorization of Nazism may seem fitting, Habermas argued that the timeline Nolte constructed was framed such that it subtly “erased” the Reich’s crimes amongst the “labyrinth” of other historical events<sup>32</sup>. Summarizing Nolte’s position, Habermas outlined the beginning of the development of Bolshevism and the Soviet Union, a process that Nolte saw as a “revolt against cultural and social modernization”, and from which he believed every event of 20th century totalitarian terror could be traced back too<sup>33</sup>. Due to all these atrocities having roots in the “gulags” of the Soviet Union, he thus asserted that these events all held intrinsic similarities. From this position, Nolte felt justified to strip away the ‘unique’ nature of the Third Reich and its crimes, and in turn reduced the Holocaust to just another incident born out of the trajectory that the Soviet Union’s formation began; as Habermas quotes, from Nolte’s perspective, the “annihilation of the Jews during the Third Reich” was a “reaction or a distorted copy” of a previously perpetrated act<sup>34</sup>. The issue that Habermas saw with categorizing the Holocaust as a

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<sup>32</sup> D. B. Clarke, M. A. Doel, & F. X. McDonough. “Holocaust Topologies: Singularity, Politics, Space,” *Political Geography* Vol. 15 (July-September, 1996) 461

<https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/0962629896000273#section-cited-by>

<sup>33</sup> Ernst Nolte. “Between Myth and Revisionism: The Third Reich in the Perspective of the 1980s,” *Aspects of the Third Reich* (London: Macmillan, 1985) 30-31

<sup>34</sup> Jürgen Habermas. “A Kind of Settlement of Damages: The Apologetic Tendencies in German History Writing,” *Die Zeit* (July 11th, 1986). Taken from *Forever in the Shadow of Hitler?: Original documents of the Historikerstreit, the Controversy Concerning the Singularity of the Holocaust* (Humanities Press, 1993) 39

progression of the “Gulag Archipelago”<sup>35</sup> - Nolte’s term for the string of Stalin-era work camps - was that it significantly reduced the magnitude and severity of the Holocaust by fitting an otherwise unthinkable event into an easily explainable timeline; by turning it into just another misstep borne out of the Bolshevik’s ‘cultural revolt’.

This point leads into the assertion Habermas took the most issue with; namely the notion that since the Soviet Union formed the origin point for a ‘degenerative revolt’, it was therefore not just comparable to, but *culpable* for the ramifications such a revolt ‘brought about’. Nolte thus argued that the Holocaust and the Reich’s other crimes were some of these ramifications, as because the Nazis supposedly had ‘reason’ to believe the Soviet Union posed a genuine “threat of destruction”, such a reaction from Germany was ‘tragic’ but ‘logical’<sup>36</sup>. Habermas saw this as Nolte’s attempt to, like Hillgruber, shift the blame off of the German people for the crimes of the Third Reich. Further, Habermas criticized Nolte’s idea of Soviet culpability because it wholly removed German agency from the inception of the Holocaust. He held that if - like Nolte suggested - the Holocaust or other totalitarian atrocities were ‘bound’ to happen due to the Soviet Union’s formation, it thus shifted the role of Germans from that of orchestrators to cogs set on an imminent and ‘understandable’ path<sup>37</sup>.

Thus Habermas validated Nolte’s inclusion under the banner of promoting “apologetic tendencies.” Like Hillgruber, Habermas saw his end goal as the diminishment of the Holocaust in contemporary West German memory culture. However rather than attempting to overshadow

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<sup>35</sup> Ernst Nolte. “The Past That Will Not Pass: A Speech That Could Be Written But Not Delivered,” *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* (1986). Taken from *Forever in the Shadow of Hitler?: Original documents of the Historikerstreit, the Controversy Concerning the Singularity of the Holocaust* (Humanities Press, 1993) 22

<sup>36</sup> Ernst Nolte. “Between Myth and Revisionism: The Third Reich in the Perspective of the 1980s,” *Aspects of the Third Reich* (London: Macmillan, 1985) 30-31

<sup>37</sup> Jürgen Habermas. “A Kind of Settlement of Damages: The Apologetic Tendencies in German History Writing” *Die Zeit* (July 11th, 1986). Taken from *Forever in the Shadow of Hitler?: Original documents of the Historikerstreit, the Controversy Concerning the Singularity of the Holocaust* (Humanities Press, 1993) 39-41

the Holocaust with patriotic and ‘sacrificial’ imagery of German soldiers on the East, Nolte sought to bury the Holocaust amongst an interwoven timeline of other 20th century atrocities. As for the shirking of blame, Habermas viewed Hillgruber as placing it ‘above’ instead of Nolte’s more brazen perspective of placing blame squarely on an outside force.

The last historian Habermas addressed within “A Settlement” was Michael Stürmer, who has been excluded from the discourse thus far because the subtle attacks on Holocaust memory he conducted during the *Historikerstreit* were directed at trends in German historiography rather than historical interpretations. Thus when Habermas countered Stürmer’s thesis of ‘Memorium’, he framed it as an attack on the shaky intellectual foundation from which conservatives as a whole approached history. Habermas began this analysis by quoting Stürmer’s 1986 essay collection *Dissonances of Progress*, in which he defined his outlook on German history as one that should be “propelled by collective...unconscious drives towards the inner endowment of higher meaning”<sup>38</sup>. Breaking down this proposition, if history is ‘propelled’, it thus has constant forward movement, and if it is ‘collective[ly] unconscious,’ it thus has inherent characteristics known by all citizens. Tying the two together, Stürmer’s history is one that was perpetually pushed forward - either knowingly or subconsciously - in tandem by a nation’s people, due to the transcendent understanding this process achieved. It is this point of “higher meaning” that Habermas took special interest in. He extrapolated that for Stürmer, this “meaning” was a supposed reaffirmation of - and in Germany’s case *rediscovery* of - national identity, and further claimed that Stürmer presented this notion of history not just as a ‘natural’ process, but as an *imperative* process that had to be pushed for. Therefore, Habermas posited that Stürmer

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<sup>38</sup> Michael Stürmer. *Dissonances of Progress: Essays on History and Politics in Germany* (Munich: Piper, 1986) 128

presented his understanding of national history as extremely positive, subsequently implying that anything against such an idea was negative.

Stürmer made a slight qualification following his proposition, stating that the historical process he outlined must still be “work[ed] out according to scholarly methods”<sup>39</sup>. However, Habermas implied that while Stürmer was not ‘opposed’ to scholarly methods ‘checking’ his vision of history, it was clearly framed to be in tension with this process, not congruence. This inference was supported by Stürmer’s own work that same year, as in another publication he stated that due to current historiography, there was a “progressive strangulation of history” that was “seriously damaging [ ] culture”<sup>40</sup>. So why would a forward-moving, incredibly favorable historical understanding, supposedly be in conflict with established historical methodology?

While Stürmer did not mention the Holocaust directly, given the timing of his writings, Habermas understood the theoretics he discussed to be directed right at its memory. Indulging a potential scenario by filling in the blanks with the context Hillgruber and Nolte discussed, Stürmer’s proposition can be seen as such; German history had to be pushed forward past Nazism and the Holocaust by the collective efforts of its citizens, due to a necessary cementing of national identity lost in the wake of the war. This outlines a core belief that the conservatives held, which understood the persisting memory of the Holocaust as a ‘burden’ or ‘imposed punishment’ that had to be ‘solved’ for Germany to regain its sense of ‘self’<sup>41</sup>. Returning to Stürmer’s position, the tension Habermas identified becomes clear. Habermas argued that the

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<sup>39</sup> Michael Stürmer. *Dissonances of Progress: Essays on History and Politics in Germany* (Munich: Piper, 1986) 128

<sup>40</sup> Michael Stürmer. “History in a Land without History,” *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* (April 25th, 1986)

<sup>41</sup> Michael Stürmer. “History in a Land without History,” *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* (April 25th, 1986)  
Ernst Nolte. “The Past That Will Not Pass: A Speech That Could Be Written But Not Delivered,” *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* (1986). Taken from *Forever in the Shadow of Hitler?: Original documents of the Historikerstreit, the Controversy Concerning the Singularity of the Holocaust* (Humanities Press, 1993) 18

conflict between “higher meaning” and “demythologization” appeared precisely because ‘scholarly methods’ surrounding Holocaust studies pulled the curtain back on the romanticized, religious qualities Stürmer ascribed to the ‘reclamation’ of Germany’s national identity<sup>42</sup>.

Therefore, Habermas viewed that the history Stürmer advocated for was a self-imposed “tightrope” between glorified nationalistic inklings and factual methodology, of which Stürmer believed the former was much more important<sup>43</sup>.

Concluding the close discussion of the arguments Habermas outlined within “A Settlement”, it is clear that he believed the conservative historians mentioned all sought to diminish the importance of Holocaust memory within the Federal Republic. Exemplifying the duality of intention seen back in Bitburg, the conservative coalition attempted to slowly erode the importance of the Holocaust within Germany’s memory culture, pushing an extremely charitable interpretation of the Third Reich and its nationalism, while simultaneously trying to strip the Reich’s crimes of any contemporary weight through only referencing them at the bare minimum capacity. The end goal of this process was a hope that Germany ‘would overcome’ its ‘negative’ legacy and embrace a reformed national identity; one accompanied by a ‘proud’ history, and one unburdened by a “past that [would] not pass”, which like Reagan originally uttered, they believed had already ‘been judged’<sup>44</sup>. However it is critical to note that in the arguments Habermas examined, the historians sought to *diminish* - not *deny* - the existence of the Holocaust. This distinction is the reason why it was necessary to outline Habermas’s rebukes, as

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<sup>42</sup> Jürgen Habermas. “A Kind of Settlement of Damages: The Apologetic Tendencies in German History Writing,” *Die Zeit* (July 11th, 1986). Taken from *Forever in the Shadow of Hitler?: Original documents of the Historikerstreit, the Controversy Concerning the Singularity of the Holocaust* (Humanities Press, 1993) 35

<sup>43</sup> Jürgen Habermas. “A Kind of Settlement of Damages: The Apologetic Tendencies in German History Writing,” *Die Zeit* (July 11th, 1986). Taken from *Forever in the Shadow of Hitler?: Original documents of the Historikerstreit, the Controversy Concerning the Singularity of the Holocaust* (Humanities Press, 1993) 35

<sup>44</sup> Ernst Nolte. “The Past That Will Not Pass: A Speech That Could Be Written But Not Delivered,” *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* (1986). Taken from *Forever in the Shadow of Hitler?: Original documents of the Historikerstreit, the Controversy Concerning the Singularity of the Holocaust* (Humanities Press, 1993) 18

his insights offer a clear picture of the space 1980's German conservatives occupied; a space which still acknowledged that the Holocaust was a dire crime, but left it ambiguous as to *who* exactly caused it, *why* it specifically happened, and *how* it should be remembered. Due to this imposed ambiguity, conservatives like Hillgruber and Nolte were thus able to posit 'intellectual' arguments that looked to adversely affect the memory of the Holocaust, while avoiding the charge of Holocaust Denial. From this, Habermas's intention within "A Settlement", and the overall aim of progressives in the *Historikerstreit*, can be understood as an attempt to combat this ambiguous space; their strategy being the cementation of the 'Singularity Thesis' of Holocaust Memory.

While posting his own rebuke of Nolte and another conservative - Joachim Fest's - claims, Habermas's colleague Eberhard Jäckel, in his September 1986 essay "The Impoverished Practice of Insulation: The Singular Aspect of National-Socialist Crimes cannot be Denied", provided a concrete definition of this thesis. Jäckel stated that:

"...the National-Socialist [Nazi] murder of the Jews was unique because never before had a nation with the authority of its leader decided and announced that it would kill of as completely as possible a particular group of humans, including old people, women, children, and infants, and actually put this decision into practice, using all the means of governmental power at its disposal"<sup>45</sup>.

Jäckel's definition was not the end-all-be-all, and amongst progressives there existed variations of the justification for singularity. However the tenants that he outlined within the excerpt above provide an adequate synopsis of the general points, which could be seen even amidst slightly differing variations. Per this definition, the aspects that produced uniqueness were 1) the announcement of total annihilation by the leading body of government; 2) an actual fulfillment

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<sup>45</sup> Eberhard Jäckel. "The Impoverished Practice of Insulation: The Singular Aspect of National-Socialist Crimes cannot be Denied," *Die Zeit* (1986). Taken from *Forever in the Shadow of Hitler?: Original documents of the Historikerstreit, the Controversy Concerning the Singularity of the Holocaust* (Humanities Press, 1993) 76

of said annihilation; and 3) the inclusion of all members of a societal group in the annihilation - specifically women, children, and the elderly. In essence, positing that the particular characteristics of the Holocaust had not been demonstrated before it, nor after it in equivalent severity or scope. Following this reasoning, the ‘Singularity Thesis’ further stipulated that because it had no equivalent, the Holocaust could not - and in most cases *should not* - be compared to any other historical event, in an effort to fully preserve its memory. Therefore seeking to protect remembrance, singularity created a situation where the Holocaust existed as an event ‘outside of history’, as if in a sealed glass box<sup>46</sup>.

Why then did progressive’s see the affirmation of this thesis as the solution to the challenges of contemporary conservatives? The answer to this question can again be found in the idea of ambiguity. Habermas and his colleagues felt that if the Holocaust continued to be contextualized alongside other historical scenarios, that an element of uncertainty would always be present due to the nature of interpretation that accompanies such analysis. This was specifically apparent given the disingenuous comparisons and casualties between Nazism and the Soviet Union peddled by the likes of Nolte. Therefore the Singularity Thesis was championed as a way to solidify *one* interpretation of the Holocaust’s nature, thus ceasing the possibility for questions of ambiguity to arise; to cement that even amidst the contrasting claims of historians, that, like Jäckel states in the title of his piece, “the singular nature of [Nazi] crimes [could] not be denied”.

The strategy of elevating and reaffirming the Singularity Thesis was deemed academically victorious by the historical scholarship of the Federal Republic, as by the end of the *Historikerstreit* in December of 1986, Hillgruber, Nolte, and their associates had been thoroughly

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<sup>46</sup> D. B. Clarke, M. A. Doel, & F. X. McDonough. “Holocaust Topologies: Singularity, Politics, Space,” *Political Geography* Vol. 15 (July-September, 1996) 460-461. Retrieved October 24, 2022, from <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/0962629896000273#section-cited-by>

discredited as the apologists Habermas originally claimed they were<sup>47</sup>. However, though singularity seemed to progressives like the obvious path given the countless perceived attacks on Holocaust memory, it did come with an inherent tradeoff. Such a tradeoff presented itself by either allowing “non-uniqueness” and having the Holocaust be erased “inside of history,” or affirming “uniqueness” and “erasing” the Holocaust from traditional historical continuity<sup>48</sup>. The latter won out, and was seen by the progressive participants of the *Historikerstreit* as the most surefire way to protect an intact, non-revisionist memory of the Holocaust - though as will be seen, placing the event in an aforementioned ‘glass box’ would have its reverberations.

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<sup>47</sup> A., Port. “Holocaust Scholarship and Politics in the Public Sphere: Reexamining the Causes, Consequences, and Controversy of the Historikerstreit and the Goldhagen Debate: A Forum with Gerrit Dworok, Richard J. Evans, Mary Fulbrook, Wendy Lower, A. Dirk Moses, Jeffrey K. Olick, and Timothy D. Snyder,” *Central European History*, Vol. 50, Issue 3 (2017) 375 - 403

<sup>48</sup> D. B. Clarke, M. A. Doel, & F. X. McDonough. “Holocaust Topologies: Singularity, Politics, Space,” *Political Geography* Vol. 15 (July-September, 1996) 461  
<https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/0962629896000273#section-cited-by>

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## Chapter 2: Singularity Takes Shape

“To the extent that the myths or ideals embodied in a nation’s monuments are the people’s own, they are given substance and weight by such reification and will appear natural and true; hence an inescapable partnership grows between a people and its monuments. It is precisely this point, however, that a critical approach to memorials might rescue us from a complicity that allows our icons of remembrance to harden into idols of remembrance. For memorialization occurs not merely within these icons, but between the events and the icons, and then again between the icons and ourselves” - James E. Young<sup>49</sup>

While the Federal Republic’s progressives emerged intellectually victorious in the *Historikerstreit* and affirmed the preference towards singularity within the scholarship, outside the scholarship, a different picture emerged. The conservative zeitgeist that the Bitburg incident demonstrated - one that sought foremost to establish a ‘renewed’ German national identity - was still alive and well after the concluding qualms of the *Historikerstreit* were published. Further, one of the main obstacles conservatives saw obstructing this identity continued to be seen as the “erzwungene Unfähigkeit”, or the ‘forced inability’, to “escape the shadow of the past”<sup>50</sup>. A question emerges then as to why, given the high profile forum that had just taken place across multiple news publications, and which ended in the discrediting of countless conservative historians, did such argumentation continue to exist?

An explanation for this trend emerges when looking at the effect the political climate of the late 20th century had on the Federal Republic’s relationship with its historiography, and subsequently its memory-making projects. The physical product of this intersection was an

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<sup>49</sup> James E. Young. *Writing and Rewriting the Holocaust: Narrative and the Consequences of Interpretation* (Bloomington and Indianapolis, Indiana University Press, 1988) 189

<sup>50</sup> Hans-Georg Betz. “Politics of Resentment: Right-Wing Radicalism in West Germany,” *Comparative Politics* Vol. 23 Issue 1 (City University of New York, 1990) 49

exemplification of the ‘Singularity Thesis’ - Berlin’s monument, the “Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe”. Through viewing the purpose that key players involved in the monument’s creation believed it would achieve, it becomes apparent how - and *why* - the concept of singularity was tangibly engraved into the wider national consciousness. However, critical retrospectives on the monument after the final project was chosen raised the question of if it really worked towards eliminating ambiguity - the original goal of Holocaust ‘uniqueness’, and voiced skepticism regarding the underlying intentions of the monument’s main benefactors. Ultimately, the purpose of this section is to utilize the deliberations around the Berlin Memorial in an effort to analyze how the perceived purposes of Holocaust singularity shifted when going from the insular academic discourse of the *Historikerstreit* to Germany’s broader public and political spheres.

The initial inception of the monument that would become the “Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe” came about amid a political climate still rife with conservative challenges aimed at sidelining Holocaust memory. This trend was primarily because though conservative-leaning historians became discouraged to posit diminishing views on Holocaust memory after the *Historikerstreit*, conservative-leaning politicians did not. After the debate’s conclusion in 1987, the messaging of the Federal Republic’s “radical right” leaning parties continued to espouse the necessity of reaffirming and ‘defending’ a German national identity. They saw a major proponent of achieving this goal being the elimination of the ‘burden’ created from a - to again quote the aforementioned Michael Stürmer - perceived “progressive strangulation” of German history. These were not new points, yet despite facing rebukes during the *Historikerstreit*, they not only continued to be pushed by politicians, but proved to contribute towards *success*. For example, in the European Parliament's June 1989 elections, West German parties of the “radical right” such

as *Die Republikaner* (the Republicans) and the *Deutsche Volksunion* (German People's Union) gained momentum, with these gains being especially relevant for the *Republikaner* as they passed the five-percent threshold<sup>51</sup>, stealing seats away from the majority party (and the party of Chancellor Kohl) at the time, the *Christlich Demokratische Union Deutschlands* (Christian Democratic Union; CDU)<sup>52</sup>. Now of course in the scope of Germany's entire electorate for 1989, these gains were miniscule, however they are indicative of the fact that even in a post-*Historikerstreit* Federal Republic, introducing challenges to Holocaust memory through bemoaning the 'burden' of negative history was still popular enough to form a point in the platforms of political parties, and more importantly, see success with voters.

Moving away from the 'radical right-wing', even among the more centrist politicians of the Christian Democratic Union, the messaging echoed aspects of the conservative's historical interpretations<sup>53</sup>. The most blistering example of this in the post-*Historikerstreit* climate was a 1988 speech from CDU member and then-President of the Bundestag Philip Jenninger. Jenninger delivered a speech on the 50th anniversary of the November 1938 Kristallnacht Pogrom, which even for the most charitable of readers was incredibly tone-deaf. Near the end of his speech he asked a series of rhetorical questions, posing if it wasn't true that Hitler had been "chosen by Providence, [as a] Fuhrer such as is given to a people once every thousand years", and if the Jewish people had not "deserved being put back in their place" with propaganda that

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<sup>51</sup> Greg Taylor. "The Constitutionality of Election Thresholds in Germany," *International Journal of Constitutional Law* Vol. 15 Issue 3 (Oxford University Press, July 2017)

<sup>52</sup> Hans-Georg Betz. "Politics of Resentment: Right-Wing Radicalism in West Germany," *Comparative Politics* Vol. 23 Issue 1 (City University of New York, 1990) 45

- Betz used statistics pulled from a March 1989 poll conducted by the newspaper *Der Spiegel* (The Mirror) as a background to the increase in radical conservative votership; The actual numbers he provides in "Politics of Resentment" for the June 1989 elections are far right gains across all parties: 9%; *Republikaner*: 7.1%; *Deutsche Volksunion*: 1.6%.

<sup>53</sup> Eric Solseten. "Christian Democratic Union/Christian Social Union," *Germany: A Country Study* (U.S Library of Congress GPO, Washington 1995)  
<https://countrystudies.us/germany/159.htm>

“corresponded in essential points to their conjectures and convictions”. Within his speech Jenninger was seemingly not only praising Hitler as a leader so special that Germans just had to follow him, but also *blaming* Jewish people for the events that befell them. Following these questions, Jenninger ended his speech with an awkward call to action, stating “whoever says that everything wasn’t so - or not completely so bad, he is making an attempt to defend where there is no defense”, but as with the promise of ‘never forgetting’ that precluded Reagan and Kohl’s ceremony at Bitburg, this pledge rang hollow<sup>54</sup>. Jenninger’s speech was labeled ‘unfortunate’ in hindsight, as some claimed that he had simply conveyed his ideas incredibly poorly and had intended to rebuke the objectively horrid ideologies it appeared he was endorsing<sup>55</sup>. Though regardless of intent, the speech still outwardly demonstrated a continuing impression from the tone of conservative historians; a more sympathetic view of Germany, and a more apathetic view of Jewish victims.

The rhetoric coming out of politics that surrounded German history in the last years of the 1980s - both from party platforms and individual politicians - showed that the general consciousness of the Federal Republic had not been wholly pierced by the intellectual gains progressives made during the *Historikerstreit*. However, this climate changed abruptly by the emergence of arguably the most impactful political event Germany saw in the last half of the 20th century - reunification.

By the time the Berlin Wall fell in November of 1989, reunification was all but imminent due to the collapse of the German Democratic Republic’s (East Germany’s) economy and the

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<sup>54</sup> Philip Jenninger. “Kristallnacht 50th Anniversary Speech.” Bonn, West Germany (November 10th 1988)  
<https://apnews.com/article/2b7ddc60d10bd9fa38fff1c234f78eac>

<sup>55</sup> Richard Cohen. “Don’t Blame Jenninger.” The Washington Post (WP Company, November 20, 1988)  
<https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/opinions/1988/11/20/dont-blame-jenninger/e86ba63e-fce0-4bf4-9435-277eefba7a8f/>

volume of East German citizens pouring into the West. Having long been a policy aim of his CDU government, Chancellor Kohl capitalized on the Wall falling to deliver a rallying cry for reunification, arguing in his “Ten Point” speech later that month that German division had “always been the division in Europe”, and emphasized how unifying Germany would not only “work[ ] towards a condition of peace”, but also allow “the German people [to] regain their unity in free self-determination”<sup>56</sup>. However, the Wall falling raised concerns from a vocal progressive minority - including Habermas and author Günter Grass - who were skeptical of the Federal Republic’s goals, citing a perceived conservative agenda of “neonationalist aggrandizement”<sup>57</sup>. Grass, a socialist and eventual Nobel Peace Prize winner who grew up under the Nazi regime, exemplified this progressive trepidation towards unity. In a January 1990 opinion piece “Don’t Reunify Germany”, Grass exclaimed that there “can be no demand for a new version of a unified nation” that had “filled the history books...with suffering, rubble [ ] millions of dead, and the burden of crimes that can never be undone”<sup>58</sup>. This statement encapsulated the central fear among progressives in relation to reunification; that it would realize the German nationalist identity that conservatives had pinned at for so long, and such an identity would lead to Germany again “assert[ing] itself...against the western liberal democratic tradition”<sup>59</sup>. For historiography, this translated into a fear that out of newfound nationalism, Germany would not just move past, but gradually *forget* altogether the weight of its crimes, evident in Grass’s correlation between ‘a unified nation’ and an anticipated disregard for the ‘history books’ Germany had filled.

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<sup>56</sup> Helmut Kohl. “Ten Point Plan for Overcoming the Division of Germany and Europe” (November 28th, 1989) accessed through *German Documents in History*

[https://ghdi.ghi-dc.org/docpage.cfm?docpage\\_id=118](https://ghdi.ghi-dc.org/docpage.cfm?docpage_id=118)

<sup>57</sup> Diethelm Prowe. “Kohl and the German Reunification Era,” *The Journal of Modern History* Vol. 74. No. 1 (University of Chicago Press: 2002) 122-123

<sup>58</sup> Günter Grass. “Don’t Reunify Germany,” *The New York Times* (January 7th, 1990)

<sup>59</sup> Sergio Pistone. “Habermas and German Reunification,” *The Federalist* Vol. 2 (1990) 155

Even in sight of these protests, Germany became officially whole again on October 3rd, 1990, with the reinstatement of Berlin as the nation's capital following suite quickly after<sup>60</sup>. However, Kohl's government had not entirely disregarded the criticisms coming from the left, and sought a way to quell rhetoric, such as Grass's, that evoked fears of totalitarianism and criticized reunification policy. Thus it was amid this environment - one which was post-*Historikerstreit* yet continued to see politicians allude to the conservative's positions, and one which saw Germany reunified yet continued to deal with references to the Nazi past - that an opportunity presented itself. An opportunity that Kohl and the CDU saw as a way to "achieve a national consensus" on the role of the Holocaust in the newly-unified Germany's memory culture, and subsequently alleviate fears that reunification's nationalism would bring about a reduction in the memory of its memory<sup>61</sup>. Such an opportunity was the proposition of a Holocaust memorial on German soil, a monument that would ultimately become the "Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe".

Now this section of the thesis will take time to briefly chronicle the main points relating to the memorial's creation process, from inception to inauguration, to set up a foundation from which to discuss the perceived purpose and aims those involved thought it would achieve. The idea for a national German memorial to the Holocaust was initially formulated in 1988 and formally petitioned in January 1989 by the citizens' action group *Perspektive Berlin*, an initiative led by the previously discussed *Historikerstreit* historian Eberhard Jäckel and journalist Lea Rosh. Though the action group did not have a set spot or design in mind upon publishing the original 1989 petition, the one clear stipulation of said petition was to construct a "conspicuous

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<sup>60</sup> Authorial Staff at Nato. "German Reunification," *NATO*  
[https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/declassified\\_136311.htm](https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/declassified_136311.htm).

<sup>61</sup> Peter Carrier. "Berlin: the Monument for the Murdered Jews of Europe and the Promise of Consensus, 1988-2000," *Holocaust Monuments and National Memory: France and Germany Since 1989* (Berghahn Books: 2005) 100

monument”, specifically in Berlin, which should convey the significance of the Holocaust through its “artistic form”<sup>62</sup>. The initiative gained traction, and by 1992 it reached the Berlin Senate, which - with input from *Perspektive Berlin* - approved a designated location for the eventual memorial between the Brandenburg Gate and Leipziger Plaza. Moving to 1994, Chancellor Kohl officially declared his support for the creation of a Holocaust Memorial in Berlin, and subsequently initiated an architectural contest in 1995 to determine a design for said monument<sup>63</sup>. Kohl was the deciding factor in this competition, and he utilized that power to withhold judgment on choosing a project, eventually canceling the competition altogether. This was a move that he claimed was due to an inability to agree on which design to choose, though critics theorized at the time that the real reason was the Chancellor’s desire to appease multiple political and interest factions unhappy with the proposals. Further developments occurred the following year when after Kohl’s cancellation of the initial architectural contest, a special committee was set up within the Bundestag in 1997 to expedite the decision making process. This committee produced a new competition beginning in July of 1997, and to judge the entries, a jury - the *Findungskommission* (Findings Commission) - was established from experts and community members across multiple fields and backgrounds in the hopes of avoiding another ‘stalemate’. The jury settled on the combined design of the American architect Peter Eisenman and artist Richard Serra, which at the time was conceptualized as a “Field of Remembrance” composed of massive, imposing stone pillars<sup>64</sup>. Finality was temporarily derailed one last time

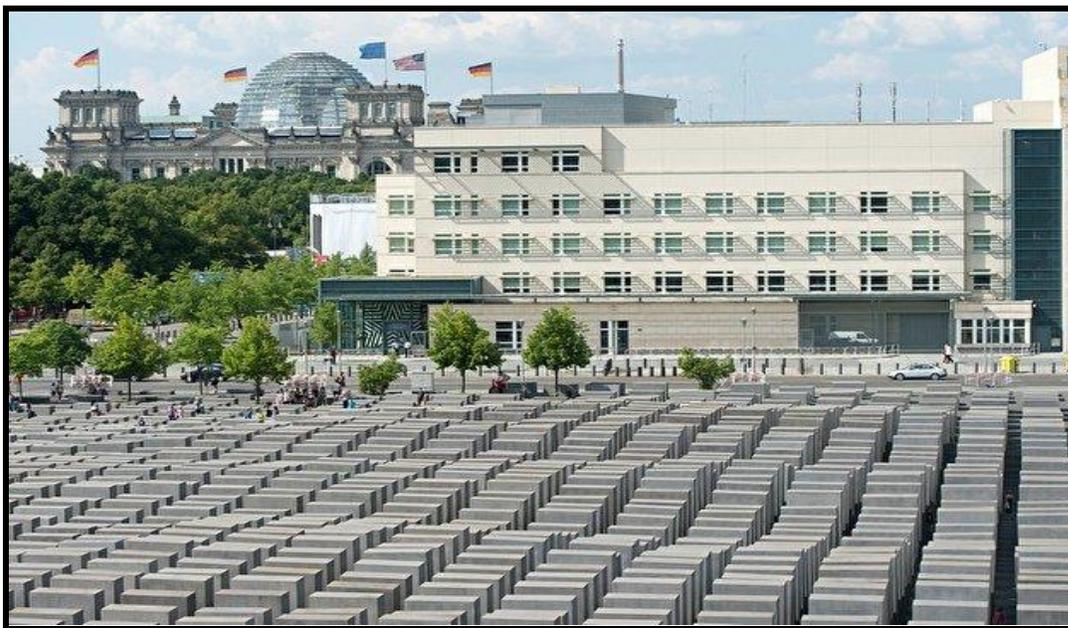
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<sup>62</sup> Peter Carrier. “Berlin: the Monument for the Murdered Jews of Europe and the Promise of Consensus, 1988-2000,” *Holocaust Monuments and National Memory: France and Germany Since 1989* (Berghahn Books: 2005) 116-117

<sup>63</sup> PBS Frontline. “Germany's Memorial - Germany's National Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe | a Jew among the Germans | Frontline,” *PBS. Public Broadcasting Service*  
<https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/germans/memorial/cron.html>.

<sup>64</sup> PBS Frontline. “Germany's Memorial - Germany's National Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe | a Jew among the Germans | Frontline,” *PBS. Public Broadcasting Service*  
<https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/germans/memorial/cron.html>.

when Kohl lost his reelection bid for Chancellor in 1998, but a concluding decision was again reached when the issue of determining consensus was given to the Bundestag, which re-officiated Einsenman's design as the chosen concept in a 1999 vote<sup>65</sup>. It took six more years for the work to be finished, but in May of 2005, more than fifteen years after *Perspektive Berlin's* original petition, Berlin's "Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe" was unveiled.



- Aerial view of the stone columns of the "Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe" in Berlin, with the Reichstag Building in the background.<sup>66</sup>

Looking from the pre-*Historikerstreit* German political sphere, through the debate's effects, and finally to the large-scale decision to even erect a massive Holocaust memorial in the first place and its eventual completion, there is a clear shift in perspective for Germany's

<sup>65</sup> Edmund L. Andrews. "Serra Quits Berlin's Holocaust Memorial Project," *New York Times* (June 4th, 1998) - Serra dropped his name from the concept and from collaboration with Einseman altogether in 1998. He alluded to his rationale being the compromises the German government was imposing on the design. Since the final design thus came under the sole authorship of Einsenman, he will be the name prominently featured when discussing authorial intent.

<sup>66</sup> Authors at Berline.de. "Holocaust Memorial," *Berlin.de*  
<https://www.berlin.de/en/attractions-and-sights/3560249-3104052-holocaust-memorial.en.html>.

memory culture as a whole. Using Chancellor Kohl as an example, in 1985 he commemorated the Holocaust's perpetrators *and* victims during the Bitburg incident, but by 1998, was in full support of Einsanman's approved design, singing the monument's praises as an indicator of German "core of [Germany's] self understanding as a nation", of which the Holocaust was central<sup>67</sup>. Now while Kohl was only one person, the change in perspective he publicly expressed between 1985 and 1998 can be understood not just as a shift in the importance of Holocaust memory to him individually, but a general shift in the CDU's platform, and thus for the entire German political sphere. Similarly, the fact that Rosh and Jäckel's proposition for a Holocaust memorial succeeded locally in Berlin, and then gained such national recognition that it was overseen by Kohl and the Bundestag, both affirms the political shift just discussed, but also signifies a perspective change in the German public. This can be seen from the success of citizens' action groups that repeatedly petitioned for the monument, such as *Perspektive Berlin* and the organization that succeeded it, 'Support Group for the Construction of the Murdered Jews of Europe', as these were initiatives that wholly originated from the citizen body<sup>68</sup>.

These shifts, both in the political and public sectors, can be understood as an acceptance of singularity's dominance within Germany's memory culture, past the academic victory of the *Historikerstreit*. Changes that were thus reflected in the Berlin memorial, seen as a way - cemented in stone - for Germany to always be reminded of, and more crucially have no way to trivialize, the historically unique horror of its 'everlasting shame'. However, the decision to trend towards uniqueness was not uniform. When looking at the reasoning for the memorial, the two

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<sup>67</sup> Peter Carrier. "Berlin: the Monument for the Murdered Jews of Europe and the Promise of Consensus, 1988-2000," *Holocaust Monuments and National Memory: France and Germany Since 1989* (Berghahn Books: 2005) 147 - "Kohl Rules Out Trust", *Berliner Zeitung* (September 1998)

<sup>68</sup> Peter Carrier. "Berlin: the Monument for the Murdered Jews of Europe and the Promise of Consensus, 1988-2000," *Holocaust Monuments and National Memory: France and Germany Since 1989* (Berghahn Books: 2005) 105

most prominent visions of purpose were the monument as a tool of omnipresent repentance, and one of unity for the recently reformed Germany.

The first vision was held heavily by the two aforementioned spearheader's of *Perspektive Berlin's* initial campaign, Eberhard Jäckel and Lea Rosh. The pair stated in the early stages of development that if Germany continued not to "possess a central memorial [to the Holocaust]", the nation would continue to suffer lasting "disgrace"<sup>69</sup>. They saw the monument's installation as a necessary demonstration of national penitence, and believed that the presence of such a monument would exhibit a concise and comprehensive acknowledgment of guilt. This acknowledgment is precisely what they saw as missing from the contemporary national consciousness, as the post-*Historikerstreit* German political environment still saw the persistence of Holocaust-diminishing rhetoric, such as Jenninger's speech. In light of this belief, the pair helped lobby for the location that the Berlin City Council approved near the Brandenburg Gate, the relevance of this location being that it was in direct view of the Reichstag, the building which housed the Bundestag, and the aforementioned Gate, the "most famous symbol of German nationhood"<sup>70</sup>. As such, the monument was positioned to be at the literal heart of Germany's political life and national spirit, making it so German political workings would be perpetually reckoning with the Holocaust<sup>71</sup>. Therefore from the perspective of those who petitioned the monument's original campaign, the memorial would act as a way - cemented in stone - for Germany to always be reminded of, and more crucially have no way to trivialize, its 'everlasting shame'.

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<sup>69</sup> Peter Carrier. "Berlin: the Monument for the Murdered Jews of Europe and the Promise of Consensus, 1988-2000," *Holocaust Monuments and National Memory: France and Germany Since 1989* (Berghahn Books: 2005) 119

<sup>70</sup> Luke Harding. "Berlin's Jewish Memorial Halted After Firm Linked with Nazi Gas," *The Guardian* (October 27th, 2003).

<sup>71</sup> Peter Carrier. "Berlin: the Monument for the Murdered Jews of Europe and the Promise of Consensus, 1988-2000," *Holocaust Monuments and National Memory: France and Germany Since 1989* (Berghahn Books: 2005) 105

However, in addition to instigating a *national* sense of guilt, there was another underlying motivation for citizens' such as Rosh and Jäckel to advocate for the Berlin memorial: their *own* guilt and a need to *do* something about it. An important note about *Perspektive Berlin* and its original petition is that those advocating for the memorial were all non-Jewish Germans - and though Jewish communities had influence and were consulted frequently, the project was still started, and ultimately helmed by non-Jewish Germans<sup>72</sup>. Going a step further, Rosh even advocated, though unsuccessfully, for the monument itself to be physically constructed exclusively by non-Jewish Germans. The stipulations regarding the monument that came from Germans outside the Jewish community are indicative not just of the desire to instigate reckoning on the national level, but also on the personal. Yes, Rosh, Jäckel, and their peers wanted the German nation to bear penance for its crimes by constructing the monument, but under that broad notion was first and foremost the need for *individual* penance. Thus, the 'singularity thesis' and its implications for Germany's memory culture became an appealing ideology for non-Jewish citizens that felt a personal guilt over the Holocaust. In supporting the erection of a memorial that looked to represent the unquestionable horror of Germany's 'everlasting shame', such support therefore acted as a way to calm the conscience of non-Jewish German citizens; to make them feel like they 'did something', and would therefore be 'free' of guilt, as with individual penance came the expectation of individual absolution<sup>73</sup>. Therefore, the underlying reason singularity gained prominence among the non-Jewish German public, and the reason the

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<sup>72</sup> Peter Carrier. "Berlin: the Monument for the Murdered Jews of Europe and the Promise of Consensus, 1988-2000," *Holocaust Monuments and National Memory: France and Germany Since 1989* (Berghahn Books: 2005) 105-106

<sup>73</sup> Living and writing this paper from a U.S perspective, the closest equivalent to the example discussed in the paper would be the inception of a monument to African-American Chattel Slavery helmed and stipulated mostly by White Americans. Now importantly, this is said not to trivialize the efforts of non-Jewish Germans or other non-Jewish groups involved in Holocaust commemoration or studies, or say that such work should exclude non-Jewish groups. It is voiced because in this specific instance, the monument existed more as something to calm the guilt-ridden, not the victims.

Berlin monument was favorable with said public, can both be derived in part from individual desires for a sense of exoneration.

For the second vision, one of its primary propagators was Chancellor Kohl and those directly associated with his policy aims. Within Kohl's philosophy regarding the monument, he did overlap with Jäckel and Rosh on the view of it as a symbol of guilt reconciliation - but only to the extent that the monument was the final act of *reconciliation* after which Germany could 'progress' forward, not *penance*. This was because Kohl, similarly to understanding Germany's division as the 'fracturing' in Europe, saw the Holocaust as the 'fracturing' in Germany, and sought a way to bridge the previously independent memory cultures of the Federal Republic and the Democratic Republic into a cohesive *German* memory. Therefore to him, the proposed monument would affirm 'Germany's individual understanding'<sup>74</sup> by establishing a national sense of guilt, but a guilt that in being formally acknowledged through the erection of the monument, would thus be a guilt that could be moved past from in the interest of "normaliz[ing] German self-determination"<sup>75</sup>.

Thus in the political sector, the reason singularity emerged as the leading philosophy of remembrance was due to its favorability. As Kohl and the CDU's platform became intrinsically linked with reunification when it became evident that such a process was plausible, openly supporting Holocaust uniqueness was seen as politically beneficial. This is because the 'Singularity Thesis' "killed two birds with one stone" so to speak. As it was a progressive ideology, the German government's broad acceptance of it appeased those like Habermas and Grass who doubted unification and feared what Holocaust memory would look like under a

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<sup>74</sup> Peter Carrier. "Berlin: the Monument for the Murdered Jews of Europe and the Promise of Consensus, 1988-2000," *Holocaust Monuments and National Memory: France and Germany Since 1989* (Berghahn Books: 2005) 147 - "Kohl Rules Out Trust", *Berliner Zeitung* (September 1998)

<sup>75</sup> Peter Carrier. "Berlin: the Monument for the Murdered Jews of Europe and the Promise of Consensus, 1988-2000," *Holocaust Monuments and National Memory: France and Germany Since 1989* (Berghahn Books: 2005) 120

reunified Germany<sup>76</sup>. However Kohl's government also believed that in affirming singularity physically through the Berlin monument, the national consciousness could 'progress' from the Holocaust since something had clearly been done to show remorse. This forwarded Kohl's idea of establishing a reformed national identity and an accompanying unified memory culture that incorporated both East and West Germany. Therefore, the political acceptance of singularity, and the reason the monument gained such political traction, can be understood as utilizing a largely progressive vehicle to accomplish a largely conservative goal, in turn catering to both groups while furthering the CDU's own goal of positive consensus on reunification. Notably, this strategy was successful, as Habermas himself declared in 1998 that the monument signified "that memory of the Holocaust [was] a fundamental element of the ethical-political self-understanding of [Germany]"<sup>77</sup>.

However, behind both the purposes of the public and political sphere's discussed above, something was notably absent: a desire to firstly memorialize and educate about the actual *victims* of the Holocaust. The shift towards uniqueness outside of the scholarship in the 1990's happened not out of scholarly consensus or a belief that it would be beneficial for awareness, but primarily for personal or political motivations that existed outside of simply protecting Holocaust memory. This resulted in a monument that - while supposedly embodying all of these grandiose ideals of guilt and national understanding - was deeply confused on exactly what it sought to achieve.

A critic that picked up on this confusion was historian James E. Young. Young, already a distinguished historical author and professor by the 1990s, was invited to serve on the

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<sup>76</sup> Günter Grass. "Don't Reunify Germany," *The New York Times* (January 7th, 1990)

<sup>77</sup> Jürgen Habermas. "What no Other Nation has Ever Attempted", *Berliner Zeitung* (December 18th, 1998) 13-14 - As quoted in Peter Carrier. "Berlin: the Monument for the Murdered Jews of Europe and the Promise of Consensus, 1988-2000," *Holocaust Monuments and National Memory: France and Germany Since 1989* (Berghahn Books: 2005)

*Findungskommission* that the Bundestag created in 1997 to reach a consensus on the Berlin Memorial's design - and was the only Jewish member who sat on the commission<sup>78</sup>. This unique insight, combined with research topics focused on genocide and memorialization allowed for Young's commentary on the monument to encapsulate the broader discussions the scholarship was having both in the imminent completion of the monument, and after its unveiling - and as such his perspective will serve as a vantage point to understand these larger arguments. The first of these perspectives being an echoing of the aforementioned confusion on intention, expressed in a journal he wrote for a 2002 issue of *The Public Historian* entitled "Germany's Holocaust Memorial Problem - and Mine". In this journal, Young outlined what he saw as the 'essence' of the monument's dilemma, stating that he feared the finished project would act as a "great burial slab [akin to a] hermetically sealed vault for the ghosts of Germany's past". Upon this 'slab', its purpose would not be to "incit[e] memory of murdered Jews", instead functioning as a place upon which Germans could "dutifully *unshoulder* their memorial burden", and "move freely [into] the twenty-first century"<sup>79</sup>. Thus, Young voiced the belief that the memorial's main purpose appeared to be for contemporary Germans, *not* the Jew's that gave name to the project. However, further beyond this worry, he posited a concern regarding what he saw as the "interactable question" at the heart of Holocaust memory - or the ability to continually reflect and educate on the event. Roughly ten years prior to serving on the *Findungskommission*, Young argued in his work *Writing and Rewriting the Holocaust* that memorials could not simply serve as "idols of remembrance" that wielded an implied synecdoche<sup>80</sup>, but had to actively engage the

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<sup>78</sup> Authorial Staff of University of Massachusetts Amherst. "James E. Young," *UMass Amherst* <https://www.umass.edu/english/member/james-young>

<sup>79</sup> James E. Young. "Germany's Holocaust Memorial Problem - and Mine," *The Public Historian* Vol. 24 No. 4 (Fall 2002: University of California Press on behalf of the National Council for Public History) 70

<sup>80</sup> Synecdoche - a figure of speech by which a part is put for the whole  
 Authors of Merriam-Webster. "Synecdoche Definition and Meaning," *Merriam-Webster Dictionary* <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/synecdoche>

public that perceived the monument - acting instead as an “icon” that fostered constant, and importantly *unfinished* reflection<sup>81</sup>. Cut back to 2002, and the Berlin monument appeared to be hardening into one such idol. Young viewed that supporters such as Kohl and Rosh advocated for the project on the performative basis that it would “finish memory”, meaning that while logically they stipulated that the Holocaust needed to be commemorated, Young felt the monument would not instigate continual interaction regarding *why*<sup>82</sup>. But then why did he feel the monument lacked this ‘interactable question’? The answer can be understood through examining how the memorial’s expression of singularity ultimately misconstrued the original intention of the thesis’s purpose.

Now recalling the *Historikerstreit*, singularity emerged as a solution to fight bad-faith comparisons to the Holocaust in a way to trivialize its memory; as a solution to the ‘zone of ambiguity’ conservatives argued from, solidifying one interpretation within the scholarship. However by the time singularity had been adopted outside the academic sphere, it was understood just as a tool to express severity - severity of guilt, of scale, and of necessary recompense. Thus, such a monument that adhered to the broader interpretation prominent by the 1990s reflected this shift, conveying the tone of severe atonement, but not educating on why the Holocaust should be viewed as a singular event, or even how the event *was* so severe, relying on the observer, and most of the time the historical laymen, to fill in the gaps.

Examples of this existed in the physical aspects of the memorial. Firstly, within the name itself, “Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe”, a layman could ask ‘Jews from which country? murdered where? murdered how?’ and most importantly, ‘murdered by whom?’.

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<sup>81</sup> James E. Young. *Writing and Rewriting the Holocaust: Narrative and the Consequences of Interpretation* (Bloomington and Indianapolis, Indiana University Press, 1988) 189

<sup>82</sup> James E. Young. “Germany’s Holocaust Memorial Problem - and Mine,” *The Public Historian* Vol. 24 No. 4 (Fall 2002: University of California Press on behalf of the National Council for Public History) 71

Secondly, the stone pillars that incorporate most of the monument do not bear the names of any victims, the names of any perpetrators, or any writing at all for that matter - instead appearing simply as nameless stones that give only the impression of nameless graves. Lastly, the most telling indicator of an overall lack of, as Young put it - memorialization “between the events and the icons, and then again between the icons and [viewers]”, within the Berlin Memorial was the lack of a prominently visible education center. The initial proposal was to solely include Einsaman’s stone pillars, but Germany’s Minister of Culture, Michael Naumann stipulated that for the project to move forward, a ‘*Orte de Information*’ (place of information) had to be included. The project was revised to adhere to Naumann’s request, and while a step in the right direction, the finished product placed this center UNDER the memorial field, obscuring the only direct mention of the Nazis and the Holocaust<sup>83</sup>. Now to use these three points as direct criticisms, there is a degree of historical laymanship assumed that realistically would be uncommon within the German citizen body. However, regardless of the probable information viewers would have upon visiting, the fact remains that the memorial itself was poised to provide almost *no* educational material on the subject matter it was supposedly commemorating, and even with the addition of the ‘place of information’, the center was put unnecessarily out of the way. All of these aspects provide evidence for the notion that this memorial was understood to express ‘singular’ severity, not protect a ‘singular’ interpretation; serving in the words of prominent German historian Reinhart Koselleck, as “a sacrificial mark” first, and a recognition and education of victims second<sup>84</sup>.

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<sup>83</sup> James E. Young. “Peter Einsaman’s Design for Berlin’s Memorial to the Murdered Jew’s of Europe: A Juror’s Report,” *(Re)Visualizing National History: Museums and National Identities in Europe in the New Millenium* (University of Toronto Press: 2008) 206

<sup>84</sup> Reinhart Koselleck. “Who can be Forgotten? The Holocaust Memorial Hierarchizes it’s Victims,” *Die Zeit* No. 13 (March 19th, 1998) 2



<sup>85</sup>Entrance into the Information Center of the “Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe”, barely visible above the height of the pillars, and with no clear sign as an indicator (a sign does exist, but it is written on a pillar and in small font). The image is taken from a tripadvisor review aptly named “Don’t Miss the Underground Room”, indicating how unassuming and out of the way actual observers found the information center to be.

Thus to circle back to Young’s idea of idols and icons, what differentiates the two? - the knowledge the monument presents. An idol is something that is worshiped instinctually, while to become an icon, there is an implied understanding shared between individuals and the representation - there is “an interactable question” that can repeatedly be worked. But in the case of the “Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe”, even if a viewer comes to the site with the idea that this space commemorates the 6 million Jewish lives lost at the hands of the Nazi Regime, important knowledge is omitted. As while amongst the concrete pillars it’s easy to visualize that a graveyard is being simulated, when discussing the Holocaust, and *specifically* a monument to the Holocaust on the soil of the perpetrating nation, a monument should conceptualize how, as one *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* author put it in 1998 “[individuals] went into the gas”<sup>86</sup>. That is to say, representations of the murder process and the human effect it

<sup>85</sup> Karthik Prasannan. “Don’t Miss the Underground Room,” *Trip Advisor* (August 14th, 2012) [https://www.tripadvisor.com/ShowUserReviews-g187323-d617423-r137192769-The\\_Holocaust\\_Memorial\\_Memorial\\_to\\_the\\_Murdered\\_Jews\\_of\\_Europe-Berlin.html](https://www.tripadvisor.com/ShowUserReviews-g187323-d617423-r137192769-The_Holocaust_Memorial_Memorial_to_the_Murdered_Jews_of_Europe-Berlin.html)

<sup>86</sup> Jens. “In letzter Minut,” *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* (February 7th, 1998) As quoted in Peter Carrier. “Berlin: the Monument for the Murdered Jews of Europe and the Promise of Consensus, 1988-2000”, *Holocaust Monuments and National Memory: France and Germany Since 1989* (Berghahn Books: 2005) 147

had on the lives of real people should be apparent; it should give faces to the faceless number 6 million. Such is the case with the glass boxes of items the SS confiscated at the Auschwitz-Birkenau Memorial Museum, and through decentralized memorials like the *Stolpersteine* Stumbling Stones, which mark houses where Nazi victims were deported.



<sup>87</sup> Glass cases of human hair taken from deported victims, displayed at the Auschwitz-Birkenau Memorial Museum



<sup>88</sup> *Stolpersteine* Stumbling Stones commemorating deported victims who died in the Theresienstadt and Sachsenhausen Concentration Camps.

Within these two forms of memorial, enough informational material is provided to kickstart “memorialization...between the events and the icons, and then again between the icons and [the viewer]” - and while viewers are still in control of the conversations around this difficult

<sup>87</sup> Pawel Sawicki. “Gallery/Exhibits - Evidence of Crimes,” *Auschwitz-Birkenau Memorial Museum* <https://www.auschwitz.org/en/gallery/exhibits/evidence-of-crimes,1.html>

<sup>88</sup> Photo: Carsten Koall “Stolpersteine,” as cited in - Alex Cocotas. “Blow up the Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe,” *Tablet Magazine* (April 21, 2017) <https://www.tabletmag.com/sections/arts-letters/articles/memorials-yom-hashoah>.

memorialization, the monuments give them the tools necessary, something which is not the case with the barren slabs of the Berlin monument.

So if these projects have, as Young would say, “interactable questions” that can initiate discussion, why then is the same not present within the “Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe”? I argue that it is precisely because the understanding of Holocaust singularity, and thus the understanding of the monument’s purpose, is inherently different for the Berlin Monument. While the other examples affirmed a vision of singularity to explain why humanity should ‘never again’ be subjected to such an event, Berlin’s memorial represented a performative singularity that saw the Holocaust as unique solely because of the severity of the atonement required, and to clear individual or national consciousness. This line, between a desire to educate and a desire to renounce burdens, explains why Berlin’s “Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe” appears more as an idol aimed at ‘finalizing’ Holocaust memory instead of a tool to continually inform. Subsequently, the memorial is indicative of the larger shift in the functionality of the Singularity Thesis, as it transformed from one with the intention of protecting historical memory into a performative notion utilized simply to project German guilt. This shift towards an established ‘German Catechism’ is precisely what A. Dirk Moses would sharply rebuke roughly 20 years later.

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### Chapter 3: The ‘Catechism’ and the Colonial

“Is the centrality of Holocaust memory, at the expense of colonial violence in other parts of the world, a crucial factor in [said memory’s] marginalization?...The Holocaust’s uniqueness is sometimes utilized as a rhetorical tool to avoid historical wrongs. But it is unclear if it is the cause of this evasion, or merely a symptom” - Udi Greenberg<sup>89</sup>

When the idea of Holocaust ‘singularity’ rose to academic prominence during the *Historikerstreit*, it was understood as the most direct way to refute the attempts of conservative historians’ to obfuscate Holocaust memory as part of the rehabilitation of a proud German national identity. It was seen as a way to rebuke the bad-faith comparisons of the specific Holocaust framework conservatives were parroting, one that reduced Germany’s agency and indirectly shifted blame on the Soviet Union, while simultaneously sidelining the prominence of remembering Germany’s actions. In essence, the Singularity Thesis was introduced as both a reactive measure to protect Holocaust memory from the specific scholarly threats of 1986, and as a proactive measure to ensure such threats - specifically ones coming from comparison - would not be repeated. Though a transition happened when the idea of singularity broke out past the academic sphere, as the public and political sectors of the 1990s primarily saw uniqueness as a means to accomplish their own goals. This broader version of singularity wore the veneer of genuine remembrance, but as seen from the analysis of the “The Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe”, it served the aim of performative Holocaust ‘closure’ more so than Holocaust memoriam.

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<sup>89</sup> Udi Greenberg. “Does Holocaust Memory Still Matter?,” *The New Fascism Syllabus* (May 28th, 2021) <https://newfascismsyllabus.com/opinions/the-catechism-debate/does-holocaust-memory-still-matter/>.

In the 2020s, a new debate over Holocaust memory emerged between progressive coalitions, centered mainly on the place of colonial atrocities in Germany's memory culture. Aptly dubbed a 'Second Historian's Debate', this discourse returned to the validity of contextualizing the memories of other events alongside the Holocaust, but in a vastly different setting compared to the deliberations of Soviet culpability in 1986<sup>90</sup>. The purpose of this section is therefore to synthesize the modern notion of Holocaust singularity examined during this 'Second debate' in an attempt to interpret the ideological changes between the original *Historikerstreit* and the contemporary arguments being raised. It should be noted that this section does not aim to produce a definitive answer on whether the Singularity Thesis was effective overall, or suggest what the future of Holocaust contextualization should look like. It aims rather to interrogate the effects of the Singularity Thesis on Germany's memory culture. In particular - in an effort to analyze if the initial understanding of protecting historical memory that predicated the thesis's introduction continues to be what is achieved.

The 'Second Debate' begins in May 2019, when the Bundestag passed a resolution decrying the 'Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions' (BDS) movement, an initiative created to express solidarity with Palestine in the face of Israel's colonial aggression, as anti-semitic<sup>91</sup>. Fast forward a year later, and Cameroonian postcolonial scholar and Witwaterstrand Professor Achille Mbembe was one of the guests invited to speak at the 2020 version of Germany's *Ruhrtriennale*<sup>92</sup>. *Ruhrtriennale* is an annual German festival held in Bochum since 2002 that

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<sup>90</sup> Jonathon Catlin. "A New German Historians' Debate? A Conversation with Sultan Doughan, A. Dirk Moses, and Michael Rothberg (Part I)," *Journal of the History of Ideas* (February 2, 2022) <https://jhiblog.org/2022/02/02/a-new-german-historians-debate-a-conversation-with-sultan-doughan-a-dirk-moses-and-michael-rothberg-part-i/>.

<sup>91</sup> Milo Rau. "Nothing Can Be Changed until It Is Faced ~ No State Should Be Exempt from Criticism," *Dutch Art Institute*

<https://dutchartinstitute.eu/page/15787/nothing-can-be-changed-until-it-is-faced-~no-state-should-be-exempt>.

<sup>92</sup> Wits Institute for Social and Economic Research. "Achille Mbembe," *University of the Witwaterstrand* <https://wiser.wits.ac.za/people/achille-mbembe>.

hosts art and speaking panels from countless nationalities to represent global trends and produce provocative introspection. Each iteration of *Ruhrtriennale* has an art director who expresses a certain vision for the program, and for the 2018-2020 event, director Stephanie Carp had the vision to invite speakers from the “Global South” with a focus on “European self-criticism”<sup>93</sup>. Mbembe was poised to give the opening speech of the festival’s 2020 installment - though upon realizing that Mbembe had signed a BDS petition, he was branded as anti-semitic in accordance with the 2019 Bundestag resolution and accused of ‘trivializing the Holocaust’ by the German Government’s newly-appointed Commissioner for Jewish Life in Germany and the Fight against Antisemitism, Felix Klein<sup>94</sup>. Following these charges, Mbembe was dropped from *Ruhrtriennale*, with the rationale for why he was deplatformed setting off a furor within Germany and abroad<sup>95</sup>. In multiple petitions and open letters, countless German scholars, artists, and cultural figures accused the 2019 resolution of being utilized against individuals such as Mbembe to - in other words - “distort, malign and silence marginalized positions, in particular those which defend Palestinian rights or are critical of Israel”<sup>96</sup>. In this view, Mbembe was not truly sidelining the Holocaust as the German government charged, and was simply criticizing Israel’s policy<sup>97</sup>.

Enter Australian historian and New York City College Professor A. Dirk Moses, who in response to the Mbembe scandal, published a divisive opinion piece to the online journal *History*

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<sup>93</sup> Kultur Ruhr GmbH. “About the Ruhrtriennale,” *Ruhrtriennale - Festival der Künste 21,22,23*  
<https://www.ruhrtriennale.de/en/about-the-ruhrtriennale#2018-2020-504>.

<sup>94</sup> Federal Ministry of the Interior and Community. “The Federal Government Commissioner and His Role”, *Federal Government Commissioner for Jewish Life in Germany and the Fight against Antisemitism*  
<https://www.antisemitismusbeauftragter.de/Webs/BAS/EN/federal-government-commissioner/commissioner-and-role/commissioner-and-role-node.html>.

<sup>95</sup> It should be noted that the 2020 installment of *Ruhrtriennale* was not held formally due to the COVID-19 pandemic, but that did not halt debate.

<sup>96</sup> Assorted Petition Authors. “Nothing Changed Until Faced,” Open Petition Against the 2019 Bundestag Resolution (2020, December 17) - 1578 signatures as of April 2023  
<https://nothingchangeduntilfaced.com/>

<sup>97</sup> Milo Rau. “Nothing Can Be Changed until It Is Faced ~ No State Should Be Exempt from Criticism,” *Dutch Art Institute*  
<https://dutchartinstitute.eu/page/15787/nothing-can-be-changed-until-it-is-faced-~-no-state-should-be-exempt>.

*of the Present (Geschichte der Gegenwart)* on May 23rd, 2021, entitled “The German Catechism”<sup>98</sup>. Subsequently, Moses’s piece ignited a series of articles posted between May 25th - June 18th, 2021 on the crowd-sourced journal the *New Facism Syllabus*, a scholarly-run platform with the aims of discussing and preventing neo-facism and authoritarian tendencies<sup>99</sup>. This string of articles<sup>100</sup>, labeled the ‘Catechism Debate’ or the ‘Second Historian’s Debate’ as part of *New Facism Syllabus* offers a comprehensive window into contemporary understanding of both Holocaust singularity and contextualization.

To understand the ‘Catechism’, this analysis will first turn to Moses’s original piece. In his response, Moses takes immense issue with the German government’s use of anti-semitic charges to intimidate critics of Israel. Yet he also expands his argumentation past the 2020 deplatforming of Mbembe in order to outline what he interpreted as a burgeoning ‘Catechism’ in relation to the Holocaust within Germany’s memory culture. Now a catechism is defined literally as “a summary of religious doctrine often in the form of questions and answers”<sup>101</sup>. However Moses utilized the term as an analogy. In his view, the contemporary environment surrounding Germany’s Holocaust remembrance was equitable with a set of pre-established, unchanging truths that could not be questioned, similar to a scripture. Moses established five components of his ‘Catechism,’ including two which deal directly with Holocaust singularity. They are as follows:

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<sup>98</sup> The City College of New York. “A. Dirk Moses,” *The City College of New York*  
<https://www.cuny.cuny.edu/profiles/dirk-moses>

<sup>99</sup> Editorial Board. “The Catechism Debate.” *The New Fascism Syllabus* (August 23, 2021)  
<http://newfascismsyllabus.com/news-and-announcements/the-catechism-debate/>.

<sup>100</sup> Moses’s original May 23rd article, though not published on the *New Facism Syllabus*, is included in this debate - and was republished on the *New Facism Syllabus* as the starting point of the message board.

<sup>101</sup> Editors of Merriam-Webster. “Catechism Definition & Meaning,” *Merriam-Webster*  
<https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/catechism>.

1. “The Holocaust is unique because it was the unlimited *Vernichtung der Juden um der Vernichtung willen* (exterminating the Jews for the sake of extermination itself) distinguished from the limited and pragmatic aims of other genocides. It is the first time in history that a state had set out to destroy a people solely on ideological grounds.
2. It was thus a *Zivilisationsbruch* (civilizational rupture) and the moral foundation of the nation.
3. Germany has a special responsibility to Jews in Germany, and a special loyalty to Israel: “*Die Sicherheit Israels ist Teil der Staatsräson unseres Landes*” (Israel’s security is part of Germany’s reason of state).
4. Antisemitism is a distinct prejudice—and was a distinctly German one. It should not be confused with racism.
5. Anti-Zionism is antisemitism.”<sup>102</sup>

Here Moses reasserts the basis of the ‘Singularity Thesis’, outlining the Holocaust as an event unique and without parallel in history. His second point however, breaks new territory, as he argues that *because* the German perpetration of the Holocaust is understood as isolated in its characteristics, that it was a “civilizational rupture”, and therefore any iteration of the German state going forward *needed* to have its “moral foundation” formulated around it.

From this position, Moses viewed the creation process of the Berlin memorial as embodying a negative shift in regards to singularity, where said thesis began creating more issues for Germany’s historical memory than it solved. The largest of these ‘issues’ for Moses was Germany’s acceptance of the Holocaust as “a sacred trauma that [could not] be contaminated by profane ones – meaning non-Jewish victims and other genocides – that would vitiate it’s [memory]”<sup>103</sup>. Setting aside the heavy religious analogies, Moses suggests that because of the intense degree Germany feels it must *perform* Holocaust commemoration, this commemoration *pushes out* the remembrance of other atrocities. He argues that the Singularity Thesis was thus transformed into an exclusionary tool to keep the memory of other atrocities out of Germany’s

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<sup>102</sup> A. Dirk Moses. “The German Catechism,” *Geschichte der Gegenwart*, (May 21st, 2021) <https://geschichtedergegenwart.ch/the-german-catechism/>.

<sup>103</sup> A. Dirk Moses. “The German Catechism,” *Geschichte der Gegenwart*, (May 21st, 2021) <https://geschichtedergegenwart.ch/the-german-catechism/>.

national consciousness, in an effort to keep Holocaust memory “pure”<sup>104</sup>. Further, Moses questions how - with the memory of their trauma purposely obfuscated - increasingly prominent demographics such as Afro-Germans can relate to the “sacred trauma” of the Holocaust. With uniqueness mandating the exclusion of continuity, and therefore eliminating the potential relatability Germany’s diverse populations could have with the Holocaust’s memory, Moses argues that “for increasing numbers of [ ] Germans, the catechism does not reflect their lifeworld”<sup>105</sup>. Moses contends that this lack of reflection has led Holocaust singularity to create a “hierarchy of suffering” within Germany; a construct that in light of its blindness to colonial trauma, ranks “degrees of humanity” in accordance with race, with the humanity of groups like Afro-Germans and African colonial victims at the bottom. In light of these negative effects, Moses concludes that Holocaust Singularity “has outlived its usefulness”, stipulating that it is “time to renegotiate [its imposition]” so that “victims of the German state and [contemporary] Germans of all kinds” are respected within the nation’s memory culture<sup>106</sup>. The specific incident Moses uses to demonstrate his qualms is a colonial event in Germany’s past that predates Nazism by roughly two decades - the Herrero and Nama (Namibian) Genocide in the the then-German colony of Southwest Africa (*Deutsch-Südwestafrika*).

In 1904, Prussian military commander Lothar von Trotha ordered a war of annihilation against the Herero and Nama peoples after they rebelled against German rule, and employed the use of the German *Schutztruppe*, or colonial military<sup>107</sup>. This ‘war’ was fought primarily between 1904-1905, with the genocide continuing up through 1908 since after the ‘fighting’, the Herero

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<sup>104</sup> A. Dirk Moses. “The German Catechism,” *Geschichte der Gegenwart*, (May 21st, 2021) <https://geschichtedergegenwart.ch/the-german-catechism/>.

<sup>105</sup> A. Dirk Moses. “The German Catechism,” *Geschichte der Gegenwart*, (May 21st, 2021) <https://geschichtedergegenwart.ch/the-german-catechism/>.

<sup>106</sup> A. Dirk Moses. “The German Catechism,” *Geschichte der Gegenwart*, (May 21st, 2021) <https://geschichtedergegenwart.ch/the-german-catechism/>.

<sup>107</sup> Elise Papa. “Postcolonial Debates in Germany - An Overview,” *African Sociological Review*, Vol. 21 No. 2 (2017; CODESRIA, Dakar, Senegal) 4

and Nama peoples that eluded capture were forced into the Omaheke Desert where German authorities still ruthlessly pursued them. Those Herero and Nama that did not die directly fighting against the *Schutztruppe* were subject to countless horrors in captivity, including deportation to ‘concentration camps’ where forced labor, starvation and disease ran rampant, as well as medical experimentation and mutilation induced by the recent prominence of eugenic racial pseudo-science<sup>108</sup>. It is estimated that only around 20% of the Herero and under 50% of the Nama survived the atrocities, making it one of the most horrific colonial crimes when measured in the percentage totality of the extermination<sup>109</sup>. The German government’s actions in their colony are seen as the first genocide of the 20th century, and have long been established within the post-colonial and genocide wings of the historical scholarship to at least have *some*, if not countless continuities to the Holocaust. This notion of putting the two events into a consistent timeline is known as the ‘Continuity Thesis’, also known as the ‘Windhoek to Auschwitz framework’<sup>110</sup>.

Historian and Cornell University professor Isabel Hull illustrates this theory within her book *Absolute Destruction: Military Culture and Practices of War in Imperial Germany*<sup>111</sup>. Hull outlines that “agitation groups” within early 20th century German politics, not bound like the government by the reality of actually delivering on their claims, supported a more expansive

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<sup>108</sup> Authorial Staff of the USHMM. “Herero and Nama Genocide,” *United States Holocaust Memorial Museum* <https://www.ushmm.org/collections/bibliography/herero-and-nama-genocide>.

<sup>109</sup> Elise Papa. “Postcolonial Debates in Germany - An Overview,” *African Sociological Review*, Vol. 21 No. 2 (2017; CODESRIA, Dakar, Senegal) 4

<sup>110</sup> Authorial Staff of the USHMM. “Herero and Nama Genocide,” *United States Holocaust Memorial Museum* <https://www.ushmm.org/collections/bibliography/herero-and-nama-genocide>;

Mads Nielsen. “From Windhoek to Auschwitz? the Colonial 'Sonderweg' and Transcolonial Approaches”, *History Matters* (March 19, 2019)

<http://www.historymatters.group.shef.ac.uk/party-politics-realignment-brexit-american-civil-war-teach-anything-2/>; Jürgen Zimmerer. *From Windhoek to Auschwitz: On the Relationship Between Colonialism and the Holocaust* (Taylor and Francis Group: May 25th, 2019)

<sup>111</sup> Authorial Staff in the Cornell History Department. “Isabel v. Hull,” *Cornell University - Research and Innovation* (2020, February 3)

<https://research.cornell.edu/researchers/isabel-v-hull>

colonial project that “the transform[ed] [German foreign policy] into [policy that was] dynamic, high-stakes...and ultranationalistic”. She goes on to state that although initially a vocal but fringe minority, the propaganda work of these groups combined with the outbreak of the Herero and Nama ‘conflict’ in 1904 contributed to the German government “los[ing] control over the national arena” and facing “enormous pressure” for “colonial expansion, arms increases, and war”<sup>112</sup>. From this perspective, the genocide produced by Germany’s colonial project can be understood as the product of extreme public opinion, one that while initially outside the bounds of government, became increasingly involved with making actual policy, eventually pushing said policy, as Hull states, “toward total, violent military solutions”<sup>113</sup>. Similarly, the Nazi party of the 1920s and 30s came to power as a product of extreme populism taking over government policy, promising hyper-militarism, grandiose world prestige, and eugenic ethnic superiority - all seeds planted initially planted by the colonial agitation parties of the early 20th century. Hull thus implies that a ‘nationalistic culture’, produced from the German government’s inability to check extreme political minorities, is at the heart of continuity between the Herero and Nama genocide and the Holocaust. She argues that the German government’s gradual capitulation to ultranationalistic populism during the Herero and Nama Genocide laid the groundwork for the nascent Nazi Party’s success three decades later, and undeniably helps explain “the drift towards final solutions”<sup>114</sup>.

Therefore with the two events broadly understood in the scholarship to have some connection, where does Moses believe the legitimacy of his contention lies? He believes that there is a lack of this consensus’s actual application to German memory culture. While linkage is

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<sup>112</sup> Isabel V. Hull. *Absolute Destruction: Military Culture and the Practices of War in Imperial Germany* (Cornell University Press, 2005) 105-106

<sup>113</sup> Isabel V. Hull. *Absolute Destruction: Military Culture and the Practices of War in Imperial Germany* (Cornell University Press, 2005) 192

<sup>114</sup> Isabel V. Hull. *Absolute Destruction: Military Culture and the Practices of War in Imperial Germany* (Cornell University Press, 2005) 192

generally accepted academically, Moses posits that comparison and continuity regarding the two events are absent in practice, with commemoration of the Herero and Nama Genocide event being almost entirely invisible in the German national conscious.

Now there is a large swatch of evidence to support Moses's notion that the memorialization of the Herero and Nama Genocide has been displaced within Germany. Firstly, the German government did not formally recognize the event as a genocide until 2021, a recognition that was accompanied by a €1.1 Billion payment to the standing Namibian government. While framed as a "conciliatory gesture", this payment has been noted as a performative "crafty discursive transformation" of funds that would already have gone to the Namibian government per a 1990 support agreement<sup>115</sup>. Secondly, the skulls of Herero and Nama victims taken back to Germany in the 20th century for eugenics 'study' had remained there despite outcry from Namibian officials, only recently being returned in 2018<sup>116</sup>. While the practice of withholding objects taken during colonialism is not a uniquely German issue, and can be seen constantly with the debates surrounding European institutions such as the British Museum, the issue of maintaining the skulls was distinct in that their retention stood to legitimize them as objects taken during 'scientific field work' and not as objects of genocide. Finally, there continues to be no memorial remembering the victims of the Herero and Nama Genocide inside Germany. Instead, within the Columbiadamm Friedhof Cemetery of Berlin's Neukölln Borough, there is a monument to the German *perpetrators* of the atrocities. The memorial, named the

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<sup>115</sup> Marina Adami. "Germany Recognizes Herero and Nama Genocide," *POLITICO* (May 28, 2021)  
<https://www.politico.eu/article/germany-recognizes-colonial-herero-nama-genocide/>;

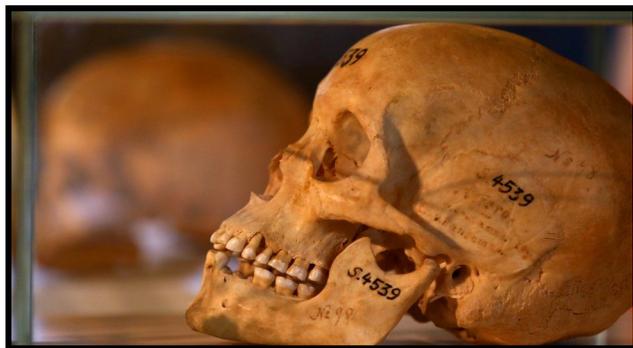
Zoe Samuldazi. "In Absentia of Black Study," *New Fascism Syllabus* (May 31st, 2021)  
<https://newfascismsyllabus.com/opinions/the-catechism-debate/in-absentia-of-black-study/>

<sup>116</sup> Reporting Staff of the BBC. "Germany Returns Skulls of Namibian Genocide Victims," *BBC News* (August 29, 2018)

<https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-45342586>.

‘Herero Stone’, was erected in 1907 and commemorates seven dead members of the *Schutztruppe* who died during the ‘campaign’ within Germany’s colony. Now over the years there have been attempts to qualify the monument, with the most recent being a plaque added in 2009 by the German government to express a degree of remorse. However this plaque did not mention the event as a genocide, and is baffling given that it’s a small add-on to a more pronounced monument recognizing the perpetrator’s efforts<sup>117</sup>.

<sup>118</sup>Skulls taken from victims of the Herero and Nama Genocide via posthumous body mutilation. Such mutilation was done in the name of Eugenics research to prove the inherent inferiority of African peoples. These skulls were taken back to Germany for ‘study’, and were only recently returned to Namibia in 2018.



<sup>119</sup>The vandalized ‘Herero Stone’, a memorial to seven German *Schutztruppe* who died in the ‘Campaign in South-West Africa’ (*Feldzüge in Südwestafrika*), found within the Columbiadamm Friedhof Cemetery, Neukölln Borough of Berlin, Germany



It is clear that the Herero and Nama Genocide has never been a priority of the German government, and despite a slight

<sup>117</sup> Marina Manoukian. “How Not to Memorialise Genocide”, *Slow Travel Berlin* (January 8th, 2022) <https://www.slowtravelberlin.com/the-herero-stone-and-the-namibia-plaque/>.

<sup>118</sup> Reporting Staff of the BBC. “Germany Returns Skulls of Namibian Genocide Victims,” *BBC News* (August 29, 2018) <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-45342586>.

<sup>119</sup> Marina Manoukian. “How Not to Memorialise Genocide,” *Slow Travel Berlin* (January 8th, 2022) <https://www.slowtravelberlin.com/the-herero-stone-and-the-namibia-plaque/>.

change in recent attitudes, still holds almost no place in Germany's memory culture. Though this raises a question in regards to Moses's main assertion within "the Catechism": is this displacement and invisibility really connected to Germany's Holocaust remembrance?

Two responses to "The German Catechism" posted on the *New Fascism Syllabus* encapsulate the trepidation felt regarding the totality of Moses's polemic claims, and provide valid counterpoints regarding the issues he raises.

The first of these articles was written by Udi Greenberg, an associate history professor at Dartmouth University with a focus on imperialism and decolonization, entitled "Does Holocaust Memory Still Matter?"<sup>120</sup>. Despite the jarring title, Greenberg does not seek to truly ask the validity of continuing Holocaust memory within his piece, but to look at - through the lens Moses suggests - how the historical and political intersections of such memory affect "confronting [Germany's] long history of violence and exclusion"<sup>121</sup>. Greenberg largely expresses agreement with Moses on the notion that this 'long history', specifically one that engages with the colonial period, is vital in informing historians on the trends that influenced Nazism's rise in the early 30s and 40s and the Holocaust's characteristics.

However, where Greenberg expresses skepticism is Moses's implication that Holocaust memory itself is responsible for the fact that such continuity is not broadly expressed. Regardless of the uniqueness enforced by Germany's memory culture, he posits that it is potentially dangerous to "dismiss[ ] people's serious and at times brave efforts to confront their society's crimes" under the pretense that all commemoration of the Holocaust is derived from 'performative intention'. For Moses, the 'Catechism' has warped Germany's entire memory

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<sup>120</sup> Dartmouth Department of History. "Udi Greenberg," *Dartmouth University*  
<https://history.dartmouth.edu/people/udi-greenberg>.

<sup>121</sup> Udi Greenberg. "Does Holocaust Memory Still Matter?," *The New Fascism Syllabus* (May 28th, 2021)  
<https://newfascismsyllabus.com/opinions/the-catechism-debate/does-holocaust-memory-still-matter/>.

culture into a negative environment, but because of this viewpoint, Greenberg posits that Moses walks a thin line between criticizing the way in which Germany currently exhibits its remembrance of the Holocaust, and the importance of the event's actual memory. Though Greenberg's largest direct contention to 'the Catechism' and its ability to displace other forms of memory is the 'all or nothing' mentality Moses approaches the subject with; that either the Holocaust stays singular to Germany's memory culture and continues to act as an exclusionary force, or that colonial atrocities are highlighted more at the expense of the Holocaust's prominence. As to return to the quote that opens this chapter, "Is the centrality of Holocaust memory, at the expense of colonial violence in other parts of the world, a crucial factor in [said memory's] marginalization?"<sup>122</sup>. Interpreted another way, this question can be reframed to ask *why* then - given Moses's suggestions - if more focus is placed on colonial violence, is there the implication of diminishing Holocaust memory? To return to one of Moses's own points within "the Catechism", he criticizes a "hierarchy of suffering" that he believes The Singularity Thesis produces, in which the Holocaust is placed firmly at the top where it disregards colonial atrocities<sup>123</sup>. Through his question, Greenberg voices concern that what Moses is advocating for risks the continuation of this 'hierarchical' form of memorialization. Instead of the Holocaust firmly trouncing other memories, it instead competes with them, and they in turn vie with the Holocaust. In light of Greenberg's skepticism, a final question is then produced: '*why* can't these memories coexist?'

The second counter argument this paper will examine from *The New Fascism Syllabus* focuses on the perspective of the Namibian people themselves - a piece entitled "In Absentia of

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<sup>122</sup> Udi Greenberg. "Does Holocaust Memory Still Matter?," *The New Fascism Syllabus* (May 28th, 2021) <https://newfascismsyllabus.com/opinions/the-catechism-debate/does-holocaust-memory-still-matter/>.

<sup>123</sup> A. Dirk Moses. "The German Catechism," *Geschichte der Gegenwart* (May 21st, 2021) <https://geschichtedergegenwart.ch/the-german-catechism/>.

Black Study” by German colonial researcher Zoé Samudzi<sup>124</sup>. Samudzi’s piece mainly consists of a discussion surrounding the interconnected histories of German colonialism and Nazism through the idea of ‘racial scalarity’. She defines this term as the “possibl[ity] for race to produce space as for space to mediate race”, or in other words - for racializing theories to warp societal standards around a need for justifying said theories<sup>125</sup>. Through this concept, Samudzi holds that the racializing policies produced by German empire to justify Herero and Nama dehumanization informed the creation of the Nazi’s own dehumanizing policies towards Jewish populations. She therefore expresses agreement with Moses regarding the importance of continuity between colonial dehumanization and the Holocaust, stating that it is necessary to gain a better understanding of both events.

However Samudzi, like Greenberg, expresses a degree of skepticism regarding ‘the Catechism’. Samudzi’s critiques address Moses’s question of relatability in a more diverse German demographic. While Moses expresses the desire to elevate recognition of colonial trauma to connect populations such as Afro-Germans to the memory of the Holocaust, Samudzi charges the ‘Catechism Debate’ with containing a “glaring absence” of “Black study and of Black people themselves”. She argues that this void is illustrated by “abstract treatments of African[s] as [solely] subjects of historical contemplation”, supporting this assertion by charging Moses with only expressing “meaningful acknowledgement” of the Herero and Nama genocide out of a desire to “claim causality” with the Holocaust<sup>126</sup>. Thus due to the memory of the Herero and Nama genocide only being present “in absentia” to support Moses’s larger contentions with Germany’s contemporary Holocaust memory, Samudzi does not see how Moses’s argument

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<sup>124</sup> Authorial staff of the Funambulist Magazine. “Zoé Samudzi,” *The Funambulist Magazine* <https://thefunambulist.net/network/zoe-samudzi>.

<sup>125</sup> Zoé Samudzi. “In Absentia of Black Study,” *New Facism Syllabus* (May 31st, 2021) <https://newfascismsyllabus.com/opinions/the-catechism-debate/in-absentia-of-black-study/>

<sup>126</sup> Zoe Samuldazi. “In Absentia of Black Study,” *New Facism Syllabus* (May 31st, 2021) <https://newfascismsyllabus.com/opinions/the-catechism-debate/in-absentia-of-black-study/>

actually contributes toward building a national understanding of Germany's colonial victims, or how it helps contemporary Afro-Germans find a place in Germany's memory culture. Like Greenberg, a final question can be derived from Samudzi's critique: '*how* does this tangibly help marginalized demographics become more visible?'

Thus returning to the question posed before discussing Moses's counterarguments: is colonial memory's displacement and invisibility really connected to Germany's Holocaust remembrance? There seems to be a zone of general agreement between the authors this thesis has examined from the 'Second Debate'; being that the prominence of singularity, or of "sentimentalism attached to...genocide uniqueness", has made it challenging for historical continuity that includes the Holocaust to be implemented - and thus one could say argue yes. However where Moses sees the Holocaust as an exclusionary "sacred trauma", the polemic nature of his claims raise warranted skepticism; skepticism on the risks of categorizing it in such a severe manner, and around invoking the Herero and Nama Genocide, among other colonial atrocities, only in their relation to the Holocaust.

Potential resolutions for this skepticism appear in the arguments of memory scholar and UCLA Professor Michael Rothberg, recognized in the German historical scholarship for his pieces relating to Holocaust memory and decolonization<sup>127</sup>. Rothberg's theory on memorial continuity was influential in laying the foundation for Moses's instigation of the 'Catechism Debate,' and he has thus become associated with Moses's positions. However Rothberg offers a much less polemic and leveled approach to amend Germany's memory culture, one that

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<sup>127</sup> Authorial Staff at the Promise Institute for Human Rights. "Michael Rothberg," *UCLA Law* (The Promise Institute for Human Rights: 2022, October 6)  
<https://promiseinstitute.law.ucla.edu/profile/michael-rothberg/>

addresses the competition and marginalization expressed by the counterarguments levied at Moses.

In his piece “Between Auschwitz and Algeria: Multidirectional Memory and the Counterpublic Witness,” Rothberg advocates for historical continuity of the Holocaust, specifically using the October 17th, 1961 French massacre of Algerians in Paris at the end of the Algerian War for Independence<sup>128</sup>. He posits that because “too much emphasis on the Holocaust is said to block other traumas from view,” and simultaneously that “adoption of Holocaust rhetoric to speak of those traumas” is refuted as “relitaviz[ing]...and deny[ing] the Holocaust’s uniqueness,” a new approach is necessary. What he suggests is his theory of ‘Multidirectional Memory,’ which is as follows:

“[The belief that] interference, overlap, and mutual constitution of seemingly distinct collective memories...[help] constitute the public sphere as well as the various individual and collective subjects that articulate themselves in it”<sup>129</sup>.

In essence, Rothberg posits that the interaction of ‘distinct’ memories does not detract from their individual importance, claiming that it instead assists in broadening the interconnected historical understanding that ‘individuals’ and ‘collectives’ have with their national - or global - memory culture.

With regards to the Holocaust, Rothberg argues that the application of this theory will have positive ramifications in his subsequent work, “From Gaza to Warsaw: Mapping Multidirectional Memory”. Firstly, he holds that the acceptance of an interwoven historical memory that includes the Holocaust will work to eliminate “competitive memory based on a

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<sup>128</sup> Ahmed Rouaba. “How a massacre of Algerians in Paris Was Covered Up,” *BBC News* (October 16, 2021) <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-58927939>

<sup>129</sup> Michael Rothberg. “Between Auschwitz and Algeria: Multidirectional Memory and the Counterpublic Witness,” *Critical Inquiry* Vol. 33 No. 1 (University of Chicago Press: Autumn, 2006) 161-162

zero-sum game...[in which] memories crowd each other out”. Here, the implication is not simply the reverting of Moses’s “hierarchy of suffering” at the expense of Holocaust memory, but an elimination altogether of the notion that highlighting one event *has* to mean the reduction of another. Rothberg claims that competition is unnecessary, as the “result of memory [interaction] is not less memory, but more,” citing how the Holocaust can help understand events such as the slave trade and vice versa. Thus within a framework that discards memory competition, Rothberg doesn’t just see equal coexistence as possible, but also beneficial. Secondly, Rothberg argues that his theory of ‘Multidirectional Memory’ assists the link between “collective memory and group identity”. In “refus[ing] the zero-sum game” and embracing memorial interconnectedness, Rothberg believes that “marginalized and oppositional social groups” are thus given the means to “articulate their own claims for recognition and justice”<sup>130</sup>. Therefore in comparison to Moses, who frames Namibian victims and Afro-Germans only in terms of their relation to Holocaust memory, Rothberg argues that the reciprocal relation between the Holocaust and the traumas of said African demographics must also be made clear. With such recognition, Rothberg argues that there is a tangible path for marginalized groups to demand a visible position within Germany’s memory culture.

Rothberg’s theory of ‘Multidirectional Memory’ provides integral and applicable context to Moses’s ‘Catechism,’ filling in some of the missing pieces sought by his critics on the *New Facism Syllabus*. But regardless of the extent that the ‘Catechism’ interpretation is proven ‘right’ or ‘wrong’ in the coming years, the arguments discussed from the ‘Second Debate’ still provide a window into the complex and contentious position that Holocaust singularity continues to occupy within German Memory Culture.

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<sup>130</sup> Michael Rothberg. “From Gaza to Warsaw: Mapping Multidirectional Memory,” *Criticism - Transcultural Negotiations of Holocaust Memory* Vol. 53 No. 4 (Wayne State University Press: Fall 2011) 523-524

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**Concluding Remarks:**

This thesis has chased the ideological transformation of Holocaust singularity in the German Federal Republic - from its inception, through its seeming contortion, and finally arriving at an impasse of uncertain contestation. The insular concerns of memorial protection that defined the late 1980s and the *Historikerstreit* passed when uniqueness broke into Germany's broader memory culture, where it was continually brought into new settings to fulfill the desired purposes of the political and public sectors. An observable eagerness was present amongst the different German parties who sought to define these new aims, as regardless of shrouded self-serving or genuinely benevolent intentions, the drive to confront and atone for Nazism propelled singularity to the forefront of German memory culture. Singularity's continuing centrality is what produced the eruption of scholarly debate over Holocaust memorialization and continuity with colonial atrocities. This present discourse has thus revealed the uncertainty at hand within German historiography.

There is a contemporary consensus that Holocaust singularity has adversely shifted from the initial intentions of the *Historikerstreit*. However it has been practiced for so long, and is attached to such unfathomable destruction, that it is thus hard to enact new, sweeping changes to the role it plays. This recognized dissonance - between the memory intended and the memory actually achieved, is the source of uncertainty, and should therefore be understood as the point of interrogation for current scholars of German historiography and memory. To maneuver this impasse, the scholarship can question if the Singularity Thesis's role as a broad form of national memory continues to be a realistic one, given the varying purposes different Germans populations demand of it. Further, it can move to ask what then - if the memory singularity achieves is not realistic or satisfactory in light of the modern German nation - a satisfactory

interpretation would look like? In answering these two queries, a foundation would be established from which scholars could evaluate the changes deemed necessary to bring singularity forward once more, in the hopes of becoming a more flexible and inclusive doctrine that serves the diverse intricacies of the modern German nation.



<sup>131</sup> Treblinka Memorial Grounds, Muzeum Treblinka, Poland

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<sup>131</sup> Giovanni Carrieri. "Memorial at Treblinka II," *Giovanni Carrieri Photography* (May 16th, 2018)