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FROM PERPETRATOR TO VICTIM?
GERMANS' SHIFTING MEMORIES OF WAR

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ABSTRACT

This paper explores why narratives of German suffering have emerged long after the end of war, with great intensity and public involvement, and whether this has led to a shift in paradigm from perpetrator to victim status. In a broad overview the paper shows that different phases of political development in the post-war period either prevented or enabled particular memory cultures amongst Germans in the former Eastern and Western part. A process of working through the different layers of social memory allowed an engagement with the memories of the Holocaust and subsequently a re-emergence of the Germans' own suppressed memories of war. It suggests that a process of political transformation into a democratic post-war society finally led to a gradual recognition of their moral failure and historical guilt. The paper concludes by challenging a strict division into victim and perpetrator categories and argues for a co-existence of a variety of different memories of war, provided that the basic historical facts are not blurred.

KEY WORDS

World War II, memory culture, Holocaust, German suffering, taboo, repression, victim – perpetrator construction.

INTRODUCTION

Recent years have seen a number of war-related anniversaries that commemorated the victims of the Nazi tyranny over Europe. Whilst officially the focus on events such as the liberation of Auschwitz or the end of World War II has been on the victims of the Holocaust, an unprecedented parallel debate that concentrates on the suffering of Germans has emerged. At the centre of this ongoing and lively debate are narratives of personal experience linked to two major topics: The bombing of German cities during World War II by the British and American Air Forces[1] and the flight and expulsion of Germans from the eastern parts of Germany (East Prussia, Silesia, Pomerania) as well as other Eastern European countries, such as from Czechoslovakia, Hungary and Poland.[2] Also part of the debate – although to a much lesser extent - is the mass rape of German women by soldiers of the Red Army during the advance on and liberation of Berlin. These debates are particularly interesting in a wider context, as they seem to challenge what was hitherto perceived as a firm victim - perpetrator constellation.

The public discourse on these topics is reflected in a remarkable number of media and best-selling publications, which address the suffering of Germans during and after the war. History books, novels, films, newspaper articles and TV documentaries often claim that, by bringing these topics into the public sphere, political taboos are finally broken. Whilst such assertions are certainly not new to scholars of the era, they seem to stimulate large parts of the general public who wish to learn more about their own and their families' experience of the war

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1 It is estimated that around 600,000 German civilians (including 75,000 children under the age of 14) died and 7.5 million lost their homes during the Allied air raids (Spiegel Special Nr.1/2003)

2 An estimated 14 million people fled their homes or were expelled – 2 million died during the process (Kossert 2009).

period. Undoubtedly, the significance of the debate lies in its intensity and the enormous response these war-related topics have generated across a wide section of society. Whereas in the past such topics would have only aroused the interest of unreconstructed Nazis and right-wing parties on the margins, now public figures of the political mainstream, even intellectuals of the left are involved in shaping the debate. This happens at a time when the majority of the generation that actually witnessed the war have already died. It seems that the longer the war lies in the past, the livelier the debate has actually become: What has been referred to as 'memory mania' by critics (e.g. Harald Welzer) not only includes the first generation of war witnesses but increasingly the second and even the third generations. Many of them feel that their lives have been affected directly or indirectly by the impact of war – and they claim victim status for themselves. As victims they now seek representation and public acknowledgement for their suffering.

In this paper I will explore why this urge amongst Germans to remember has emerged decades after the end of war and why it constitutes an ongoing, seemingly unresolved process. To start with I will refer to some of the key texts that triggered the debate. I will then look at post-war development through the lens of memory in order to show that Germany underwent complex changes at particular periods of time, in public and private spaces, in what were formerly East and West Germany. I will show that the political transformation of Germany since the war is closely linked to the gradual process of working through the different layers of collective memory and will point to some of the questions these debates raise.

THE CURRENT DEBATE

Arguably much of the current debate started with W.G. Sebald's *Zürich Lectures* published in 1999 as *Der Luftkrieg und Literatur.* [3] Born in 1944, Sebald was amongst the first who publicly asked the challenging question why the horrendous experiences of Germans had "scarcely left a trace of pain" in their cultural memory and were hardly represented in post-war German literature (Sebald 2004:10). Suggesting that this was influenced by 'preconscious self-censorship' he observed an individual and collective amnesia and asked whether there was a "fear of looking", even a habit of "looking away" and accuses Germans of blindness towards their history (Sebald 2004:viii, ix).

Shortly after the intense debate over Sebald's views was beginning to fade, Günter Grass addressed the theme of Germans' wartime experiences in his novella *Im Krebsgang* (2002).[4] At its centre are the memories of a woman who had survived the sinking of the former cruise ship Wilhelm Gustloff that was torpedoed by a Soviet submarine towards the end of war, with nearly 10,000 German refugees on board, mainly women and children from East Prussia. With the topic of flight from the former German East, Nobel Prize winning author Grass - famously known as the 'accuser' and the 'German conscience' - entered into controversial territory, one that was hitherto largely occupied by political revisionists and right-wingers. In his view it was an enormous historical neglect ("ein bodenloses Versäumnis", p. 99) to avoid talking about German suffering. His novella addresses the 'taboo topic' and deals with the consequences of amnesia, repression of memory and the reluctance to confront history.

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[3] The English translation was published in 2003 under the title *On the Natural History of Destruction* by Random House.

[4] The English translation appeared as *Crab Walk* in 2002 by Random House.

In the same year as Grass's *Krebsgang* appeared (2002) another publication, this time on the air raids on Germany, provoked a heated debate, not only amongst members of the public but also in academic circles: *Der Brand. Deutschland im Bombenkrieg 1940-45,* by historian Jörg Friedrich.[5] In an unusual style and approach –criticised as unscholarly by some historians - this book blends technical details of the destruction of German cities with the human side of how the inhabitants endured the impact of the Allied bombing attacks. The author confronts his readers with meticulously researched facts, such as the targeted dropping of exactly 1.42 million tons of bombs over Nazi-occupied territory and how these actions led to the wilful destruction of historically grown, culturally rich landscapes - precisely 161 cities and 850 towns. Friedrich also lists the exact number of civilians killed in each city and provides a clear impression of the extent of human destruction. Again in detail, he describes what human remains looked like after being burnt by incendiary bombs at 1500°C and how those who survived these attacks experienced its aftermath. More than any other publication on the topic of German suffering, this nearly 600 page volume was seen as the ultimate challenge to the status quo – its supporters claiming that it opens up a long overdue discussion, on both sides of the Atlantic, of the strategic bombing that "recognises the doers and deeds in clear terms" (Wilms 2007:13)

The above-mentioned publications may not have been taboo breaking, but they were certainly instrumental in paving the way to the controversial debate of a hitherto firmly accepted binary construction of victims and perpetrators. The argument that Germans should not only be seen as perpetrators but also as victims of war implies that there is a perceived inadequacy in the representations of their suffering. To show empathy for the Germans' suffering would therefore be

[5] Interestingly, the book did initially not find a British publisher and only appeared in 2006 as *The Fire: The Bombing of Germany, 1940-1945* by Columbia University Press.

an important step towards acknowledging a gap in the national social memory. Furthermore, this argument has wider implications: it not only hints at a changing identity of the German nation - it also challenges the existing historiography of the Third Reich. Unlike other periods in history that have a relatively firm and undisputed place in the national narrative, the strong involvement of the public has made the Nazi period debatable. This phenomenon may pose an interesting challenge to those academics who are generally more concerned with 'neutral facts' than dealing with contemporary voices. It remains to be seen whether and how the individual and collective memories of those who have experienced the war (and perhaps even those of their descendants) will be incorporated into an authoritative national history of the Second World War and its aftermath.

Drawing on Susan Sontag (2003) who reminds us that individuals and nations tend to be selective in their choice of memories, it can be argued that German collective memory has been highly selective during the post-war period in what it chose to remember and in what it preferred to forget. Germans have created a past they felt comfortable with and, in accordance with Maurice Halbwachs (1992), they created different images that made sense at the time and suited a particular period in time. In this the Germans created their national memory no differently from other communities and nations. However, a salient factor distinguishes their historical selection process: the fact that it is inextricably intertwined with the Holocaust and how it is remembered.

GERMANS AS VICTIMS

The Germans are usually described as emerging from the war as demoralised, a physically and psychologically broken nation (see for example Bessel, 2009), not capable of understanding the extent of crimes committed in their name, and the suffering they had brought over Europe. Hannah Arendt famously captured the

immediate post-war atmosphere on a visit from her New York exile: "Nowhere is this nightmare of destruction and terror felt less and nowhere is it being talked about less than in Germany. Everywhere it becomes apparent that there is no reaction to what has happened … and the indifference with which they move through the rubble finds its equivalent in that nobody mourns the dead; it is mirrored in the apathy in which they react to the fate of the refugees in their midst, or rather don't react. This general lack of emotion (…) is only the most noticeable exterior symptom of a deeply rooted (…) refusal to confront what has actually happened" [6] (Arendt 1993:24). With reference to the physical destruction, German author Alfred Döblin observed on return from his American exile in 1945 that people were going "down the street and past the dreadful ruins as if nothing had happened and ... the town had always looked like this" (cited in Sebald 2004:5).

Arendt's and Döblin's comments read like descriptions of members of a society in shock, blocking out what had happened to themselves and what they inflicted on others. They suggest that, as a nation, Germany was not ready to engage psychologically with the implications of her 12-year Nazi past. All, it appears, that ordinary Germans were capable of was concentrating on their individual post-war survival and on coming to terms with their immense personal losses. Without looking back they soon engaged with the task of clearing the traces of the past, focussing on the new beginning which became later known as the economic miracle ('Wirtschaftswunder'). However, contrary to the claims in the media, that the current debate has a taboo breaking character, memory talk did take place in the immediate post-war era, even though it was mainly restricted to the private sphere and refugee circles. Much of family talk centred on the experience of flight from the advancing Red Army under severe circumstances, of being bombed, and the personal pain endured by families whose fathers, brothers and husbands had

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[6] My own translation from the German edition (1993).

not returned from war, or had only returned from Soviet captivity in the mid 1950s. Such topics formed the core of post-war family narratives and became the leitmotiv of Germany as victim of war. Although politically fuelled by the newly founded refugee organisations in West Germany, these memories remained generally short-lived but, as Grass put it, they remained a topic in the background, ("ein Thema im Hintergrund", Grass 2001:31). Subsequently, the developing Cold War and the division of Germany made it easy, particularly for the West German population, to put the blame on the communist system.

Whilst German narratives focussed on aspects of their own suffering, National Socialism was not confronted and crimes committed in the name of Germany were omitted from national consciousness. Anti-Semitism, race-hatred, concentration camps and mass murder remained taboo topics, treated with collective silence and widespread amnesia. National Socialism was generally regarded as an accident in history by a population that perceived themselves as seduced by the Nazis and therefore, as innocent victims. As a nation they managed to assuage themselves of any responsibility and involvement by blaming Hitler and 'his gang' for the atrocities committed. Robert G. Moeller argues in his book *War Stories* (2003) that, whilst in most occupied countries memories were constructed around patriotism (as in Britain) and anti-fascism (as in France), in West Germany national victims were constructed around the ordinary 'good Germans' personified in expellees or prisoners of war, particularly those POWs who had survived many years under extremely harsh conditions in Soviet captivity. Yet, collective German memory did not include any persecuted groups such as Jews, Socialists or Communists.

Officially the Federal Republic (West Germany) regarded itself as the successor of the Third Reich and, in recognition of the crimes committed, saw their financial payments to Israel as reparation for the atrocities of the Holocaust.

Psychologically though, West Germans were not ready to engage with their guilt and responsibility for the coming two decades and, according to Moeller (2005), they were not even encouraged by the former Allies to do so. The Germans' "looking away" - to use Sebald's phrase - enabled them to busy themselves with their new beginning. The focus now was on rebuilding cities, integrating the millions of refugees, reconstructing the economy and speedy political integration into the western bloc. Within this development the British and the Americans, who were certainly not seen as liberators by all Germans, had now officially been turned into the West Germans' best friends. Accordingly, it was not in the Allies' best interest for the air raids to enter the public sphere. According to Telford Taylor, American prosecutor in the Nuremberg trials, the Allied air raids had been deliberately excluded from the public hearings to avoid any comparisons of German and Allied destruction by bombing (Kucklick 2003). On the other hand the emergence of the Cold War made it easy for the Allied military government to lift their initial ban on the formation of refugee organisations and give them a free reign in pursuing their political activities. In blaming the Communists for their fate as refugees and their loss of home and land, these organisations proved powerful political tools in the ideological fight against Communism. But refugee organisations also played an important role in preserving the West Germans' memories of their old 'Heimat'. Particularly the regular regional meetings of refugees and expellees (Schlesiertreffen, Ostpreußentreffen) provided a forum for many to keep memories alive in the diaspora (Kossert 2009).

This account of West German attitudes provides a stark contrast to those in East Germany where a different memory culture was constructed. With the German Democratic Republic (GDR) being ideologically close to the Soviet Union, the destruction of Dresden and other cities were officially stressed as the acts of the political enemy – the 'imperialist western powers'. Whilst the theme of Allied bombing was kept contained in the West, in the East officially sanctioned text

books taught students that the Allied bombing against the civilian population of Dresden was a war crime: plaques on buildings still bear witness to the ‘Anglo-American terror bombing’ (Frevert 2003). As in West Germany, the East German authorities also de-emphasised the responsibility of German society for the Nazi crimes. However, in line with the view that Fascism was the most extreme form of Capitalism and the GDR was the successor of the German anti-fascist resistance, Nazi crimes were reduced to a class issue. The capitalist interests of the bourgeoisie and aristocracy were blamed for the atrocities whereas workers and farmers, (“Arbeiter- und Bauernstaat”), were the celebrated ‘anti-fascist heroes’ of a better Germany. Hence a whole society was relieved of the accusation of being perpetrators. In accordance with their state's close political allegiance with the Soviet Union, East German citizens were officially not allowed to discuss the new border to the east or the expulsion of Germans from their homes in the eastern parts of Germany, nor from Eastern Europe. Any symbolic link to their pre-war lives disappeared and the process was not to be challenged: names of streets, buildings and railway stations, which carried traditional German names of the East Prussian or Silesian cities were replaced with ideologically more apt names (Kossert 2009). Even linguistic changes were introduced and the terms refugee (“Flüchtling”) and expellee (“Vertriebener”) were soon replaced with the less emotive and more neutral term resettler (“Umsiedler”). This enforced silence on what, for many of the four million refugees in the GDR had become a traumatic experience, was perceived as particularly painful and it took time to accept what the new realities now demanded of them. This included regarding Poland or the Soviet Union as ‘brother nations’ and using the new Polish or Russian names for former German cities such as Stettin or Königsberg. Those who disputed the official view had to expect persecution and harsh punishment. Thus, the achieved unification after 40 years of division provided the space for the elderly to revive their suppressed memories.

CHALLENGES BY THE SECOND GENERATION

The inability to confront war crimes in West Germany lasted for nearly 20 years. It took two major Nazi trials to prompt a change in attitudes held up to then by large parts of society – the Eichmann trial in Jerusalem (1961) and the Auschwitz trials in Frankfurt (1963-1965). Whilst Auschwitz became the symbol for the Nazi extermination policies, the revelations of the extent of the crimes committed also marked a turning point in the way Germans started to look at their past. Their initial refusal to confront their past started to melt, enabling open discussion, which now focussed on questions of involvement and guilt. This gradual development of a moral consciousness in German society has to be seen, however, as part of a general change in German society and politics. It is linked to an increasing trend against early post-war conservatism and marked by the political victory of the Social Democratic Party (SPD) and the election of Willy Brandt as German Chancellor in 1970. His famous gesture of kneeling down in front of the memorial for the Warsaw Ghetto became a moving symbol as the first public gesture of remorse/ repentance by a German state representative. It can also be seen as the beginning of his government's new but controversial 'Ostpolitik'-- a political approach towards the eastern bloc countries that was based on the renunciation of lost German territories and the acceptance of the post-war borders, as agreed upon at the Potsdam Conference in 1945.

The process of facing the past that followed was initiated by the younger generation born during and after the war; who first challenged their parents' complacency and later, German society at large. Known as the '68 anti-authoritarian movement', this part of the second generation was not prepared to accept the personal and structural continuities of the Nazi system, the fact that important members of the Nazi party had been quickly rehabilitated and seamlessly promoted into influential government positions after the war. An

infamous case in the public debate was former navy prosecutor, Hans Filbinger, who had become Minister President of Baden-Würthemberg and Chair of the German Bundesrat. The political establishment was accused of giving priority to economic prosperity over the significance of a thorough judicial coming to terms with the Nazi past. Hence Germany's speedy western-integration and strong anti-Communism was criticised as a strategy to deflect from a proper debate about the involvement of their parents' generation with the Nazi past.

The second generations' declared main aims were to learn from the past and take political responsibility for the future. In this context a much-discussed text at the time was *Die Unfähigkeit zu trauern – Prinzipien kollektiven Verhaltens* (1967)[7] by psychoanalysts Alexander and Margarete Mitscherlich. The husband/wife authors diagnosed the incapacity of the Germans 'to mourn' as a collective failure which had prevented a whole nation from confronting their disgraceful national past. Drawing on Freud, the Mitscherlichs identified mourning as an extensive psychological process of doing 'memory work'. They suggested that it should have included facing guilt and shame as well as binging unwanted experience into consciousness. In this sense the young accused their parents' generation for not facing up to the crimes committed.

Writer Peter Schneider, then a leading figure in the anti-authoritarian student movement, argued that the fundamental blaming of the war generation embodied a radical attempt of the young to distance themselves from the generation of perpetrators (Schneider 2003). In retrospect he sees that such a confrontational attitude did not allow for an open and tolerant dialogue between the generations. He also concedes that a dogmatic black and white view of the guilty and not guilty prevailed amongst the young generation, which prevented them from perceiving

7 The English translation appeared as 'The Inability to Mourn. Principles of Collective Behaviour' in 1975 by Random House.

any shades of grey. This inevitably led to those who did not fit the strict categories of good and evil being collectively ignored. Any talk about the suffering of Germans was silenced, and in the case of the refugees, pushed conveniently into the right-wing corner of the revisionist organisations. A particularly sustained period of psychological blocking out could be observed in relation to the mass rape of German women. [8] The predominant perspective at the time was that, because the German nation had destroyed itself morally, it could only be regarded as a people of perpetrators. Thus, it was politically unacceptable to refer to Germans as victims. To the great pain of the parents' generation, the loss of the Eastern territories, the air raids and the rapes came to be seen as a just punishment for the crimes committed during the Nazi period. Any reference to the deportations instigated by the Poles or Czechs was seen as potentially reactionary and counter productive for the reconciliation process with the political neighbours pursued by the Brandt government.

About 15 years after the Frankfurt trials, it was the American TV series 'Holocaust', screened in West Germany in 1979, that triggered a new perspective on war crimes amongst the wider German population (Frevert 2003). The series' immense success can be attributed to an individualised representation of the Holocaust that appealed strongly to the emotions of its German audience. Although artistically criticised, the depiction of the persecution of Jews in Germany and the occupied countries as a family drama resonated well with the German

[8] Negative attitudes could still be observed by as late as 1992 when left-wing feminist Helke Sander presented her film BeFreier und BeFreite (English title: Liberators take Liberties). It was argued that the film would disturb Gorbachev in his efforts to achieve peace (Spiegel Nr.23/1992). However, recent publications, such as those by the British historian Anthony Beevor (2003), have contributed to bringing this topic into the sphere of public discussion in Germany, this has led to elderly victims of rape now giving testimony.

viewers and led to an unexpectedly strong wave of empathy for the Jewish victims and their suffering. The key to the film's achievement was that the hitherto abstract concept of genocide suddenly became 'real' and personally understandable. Subsequently individual and communal interest in Jews and their history grew, even leading to personal contacts, taking up voluntary work in Kibbutzim or visiting Israel. Local history projects that aimed at tracing Germans' community involvement in the persecution of Jews were set up and memorial projects accompanied the process of remembering (Frevert 2003). Finally, the official government policy of reconciliation with Israel through financial payments found its equivalent in the engagement of ordinary Germans at grass-root level. The Germans' new interest and their opening up to Jews, Jewish history and culture were supported by a strong media involvement, which not only touched personal lives but also stimulated collective debate. Although there were Germans who regarded this as an excessive obsession, possibly to compensate for guilt feelings, for many the history of the Third Reich became almost identical with the history of the destruction of the Jews.

CO-EXISTENCE OF GERMAN IMAGES AS PERPETRATORS AND AS VICTIMS?

The demise of Communism and the subsequent unification of the two German states inevitably resulted in a new collective reminiscing. Since then intensive discussions have revolved around which aspects in the Germans' shared history could best constitute a joint national identity that both parts, the former East and West, could jointly embrace. Not surprisingly, World War II emerges again and again as a strong bonding and unifying theme. Apart from the common language and cultural traditions, the memories of war and its aftermath, be it as expellee or fire-bombed, of having become homeless, or having to deal with the loss of loved

ones, formed a basis which both parts could relate to. And the opening of the borders to east European countries re-enforced this process: Germans from the East and the West used their new opportunities to travel to the areas in which they had once lived but which had become parts of Poland, Russia or Czechoslovakia. To see the places they had retained in their memories again became one of the most gratifying experiences for Germans in the newly re-united country.

However, unification not only re-connected the nation. It also revealed that the years of division, built on antagonistic political systems, had created different memories of the Nazi period. Whilst in West Germany the era of National Socialism and the Holocaust had by then achieved a prominent place in national memory, the East Germans showed a generally much more distant relationship towards this period, not regarding the period as part of their own history. The results of a research project with former East and West Germans suggest that the memories of the older generation in the former GDR consisted of an ambiguous mix between their personal experience of war and the official ideology. This is in contrast to the way the younger generation constructed their memories, which seemed much more shaped by the influence of over 40 years of state doctrine. In accordance with the view that the GDR was the 'better state', keeping up the principles of the German anti-fascist tradition of the Communist Party (KPD), this generation neither expressed feelings of guilt, nor took responsibility for the atrocities of the past. (Faulenbach, Leo, Weberskirch, 2000).

Despite the observed differences between the East and West Germans regarding their attitudes towards the Holocaust, much of the ongoing engagement with the Jewish fate now increasingly includes a debate about the role of all Germans, their actions and behaviour during the war. Since unification the debate has clearly intensified and uncomfortable questions have been posed, such as to what extent the ordinary German population had supported the Nazi system by denouncing

Jews, refusing to help or simply as passive bystanders. A whole series of publications were concerned with responsibility for the collective indifference of the nation. Victor Klemperer's diaries (1995)[9], for example, show painfully that, to survive as a Jew during the war, he not only had to deal with brutal Nazi party members but also with neighbours who showed no compassion. From a different perspective, historian Peter Longerich (2006) challenges the view that ordinary Germans were just innocent bystanders - he demonstrates how they contributed to the crimes by voluntarily serving the Nazi system at the local level or by simply turning their heads away when they had a chance to intervene. A particular role in this painful process of confronting the past could be observed during the exhibition "*Crimes of the German Army*"[10] which toured German and Austrian cities between 2001 and 2004. It aroused heated discussion, not only amongst scholars (in connection with its now acknowledged historical inaccuracies) but also amongst the population at large. This exhibition - based on photographic evidence – managed to dispose of the wide spread belief that the German Army was honourable and 'clean'. Those who visited the exhibition were confronted with very personal questions such as: How much room for decision making within a totalitarian system was there for the individual? How would I have personally reacted under certain circumstances?

In the context of this development towards an engaged involvement with the past it was perhaps not surprising that a strong anti-war position was taken by large parts of the public against any German military involvement in Iraq and Afghanistan, particularly against the bombing of cities in the Middle East. As the media images of the endless mass migration as result of 'ethnic cleansing' during

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[9] The English translation appeared as I Shall Bear Witness: The diaries of Victor Klemperer 1933-41, vol. 1, Trafalgar Square, 1998.

[10] The original title in German: Vernichtungskrieg. Verbrechen der Wehrmacht 1941 bis 1944.

the 1990s in the Balkans had triggered a reappearance of memories of their own plight as refugees, so did the bombing campaigns on Middle Eastern targets: it brought back their memories of fear, loss and homelessness. Expressions of empathy for the suffering of others were now possible and mixed with their wish to find expression for their own experiences. According to Aleida Assmann, the reappearance of the Germans' memories as victim was inevitable. She argues that it "is a distinctive feature of historical trauma to reappear decades later, or sometimes even centuries after a decisive event has occurred". A reason for this lag is due to "trauma's resistance to representation which includes mental blocking and psychic dissociation as well as social and political taboos" (Assmann 2006:187).

Many intellectuals, including individuals involved in the movement of the late 1960s/70s, look back self-critically and comment on the effects of their earlier one-sided perspective. Some now warn against any interference with the dynamics of memory and against new attempts of tabooing it. Günter Grass is a good example of this, when he explores the Neo-Nazism of his character Konrad in *Krebsgang* and suggests that Konrad's attitude is a result of repression and alienation in earlier years. And Cora Stephan who turns the Mitscherlichs' image about the 'inability to mourn' around and welcomes the new chance of the post-war generation to mourn their own losses (Stephan 2003). However, the current memory culture is not without its critics. Some younger German academics (such as psychologist Harald Welzer or historian Norbert Frei) warn against a distortion of history through giving significance to narratives of German suffering. They fear that it might lead to a competition of German and Jewish suffering and that a juxtaposition of the parallel memory discourses –as often detected in Friedrich's work - might establish a symmetry between German victims and victims of Germany.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the re-emergence of suppressed memories of Germans as victims was an inevitable process of history. It can be seen as the result of a variety of factors playing together. The gradual development towards a mature democratic German society together with an acceptance of its responsibility for the Holocaust enabled Germans to work collectively through the layers of their own memories. This process was not only facilitated by internal and external political events (such as unification and the expulsion of Bosnians from Serbia) but also by intellectuals who stimulated public debate. Confronting the past enabled German society to achieve a different attitude towards the suffering inflicted by them but also towards their own pain. Despite strong criticism, the memory debate was therefore largely received positively as an expression of a plurality of voices. An important outcome of the debate is that it has produced a discourse that has expanded a previous black and white view of victims and perpetrators to include a variety of shades of grey. This shift in public discourse is underpinned by trends in current international research that demonstrate some of the complexities and interrelationships between perpetrators and victims (see for example Steinert and Weber-Newth, 2003, 2006). In this context the possibility of the guilty also being the victim has increasingly become accepted. However, an inclusion of the different discourses and voices into a narrative of war must recognise the basic historical constellations and must not be used to relativize, or even excuse, the crimes of Nazi Germany.

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