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Joanna Andrychowicz-Skrzeba PhD
Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, Mission in Poland, Warsaw, Poland

THE FEDERAL REPUBLIC OF GERMANY AND THE HISTORY OF THE LAST DECADES: OUTLINE AND OBSERVATIONS

Abstract
The article aims to present concisely and chronologically the most critical stages of the formation and evolution of the Germans' historical consciousness and identity after the end of the World War II. This process was based on how German society dealt with the National Socialist dictatorship (the focus of this paper) and the communist dictatorship of the Socialist Unity Party (*Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschlands*, SED). Multiple factors have, over the years, contributed to how the Germans' have dealt with their past and to the increasing awareness of this nation of its initially ineffaceable guilt and responsibility for the memory of World War II, as well as its homicidal role in this war. Among them were the post-war acceptance and integration of the "expellees" in both German states, the gradual confrontation of German society with the subject of the Holocaust itself and its mass-scale nature (for instance through touting the Nuremberg and following trials of war criminals and their assistants), and holding public debates on challenging issues related to the past (not imposed from above, but resulting from the needs of German society—for example some disputes between historians, the Walser-Bubis debate). Literary works often inspired the latter (for example, Günter Grass's "Crabwalk," Jörg Friedrich's "The Fire") and exhibitions presented in Germany (for example, on the crimes of the Wehrmacht). These considerations are a form of introduction

to the second part of this article presenting the most important conclusions from an analysis, conducted by the author in 2014, of public speeches of prominent German (and Polish) politicians from the period 1989–2011 on subjects related to history. Its results confirmed that prominent German politicians are conscious of the guilt of Germans' fathers and grandparents—not only for the outbreak of World War II, but above all for the Holocaust and crimes committed against a number of national, ethnic, and other groups—and they admit it. However, it is noticeable that the Germans' knowledge about the criminal occupation of Central and Eastern Europe and the role of Poland in the overthrow of communism and the reunification of Germany is low and insufficient from the Polish perspective, among others.

Keywords: historical consciousness, dealing with the past, dealing with National Socialism, dealing with the SED dictatorship, history in Germany, German guilt, German responsibility, politicians and history

Introduction

There is a widespread conviction in the Federal Republic of Germany that the Germans have already successfully dealt with their difficult past, and that the way in which it happened can serve as a model for others. Certainly, the transition from the National Socialist dictatorship through Communism in the German Democratic Republic (GDR) to today's democracy in a united Germany was, to a large extent, possible by dealing with the past. This process, however, was not entirely successful. Twenty years after the turn of 1989/1990, the general public was informed that the staff of the Federal Ministry of Foreign Affairs was deeply entangled in the Holocaust (*Steinmeier Kritisiert* 2010). We also have learnt that the executioner of Warsaw's Wola district, SS-Gruppenführer Heinz Reinefarth, the commander of the German (and attached) military, SS and police units that murdered tens of thousands of civilians at the beginning of August 1944, never faced trial, and even made a political career in the German state of Schleswig-Holstein (Hörbelt 2018, p. 252). It is clear that other comparable situations have occurred. However, despite certain shortcomings in the transformation process, the determination of German society and its elites to rebuild German consciousness and identity has been considerable.

A German common understanding of history could not be formed at a time when Germany was divided into two separate states with separate territories, social systems, and different political positions during the Cold War. In the 1950s and 1960s, the GDR did not allow such "dealing" with war events. The ruling *Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschlands* party (SED), while indoctrinating society in the spirit of Marxism and Leninism, created a "monopoly of truth" concerning the interpretation of history (Eckhard 2006, p. 29). The party leadership and state authorities tried to erase the problematic parts of German history. The resulting representation of history was, therefore, one-sided (Bock 1999, p. 84). Germany was presented as the heir of the Third Reich and it was supposed to be responsible for the consequences of the war. Therefore, dealing with the past prior to 1989/1990 was successful only in West Germany, on which this paper is based (although briefly). In this context, the term "Germany" will be used in the following text to refer to the Federal Republic of Germany.

The Evolution of German Historical Consciousness

The year 1945 was a turning point in the history of Germany, the "zero hour", which according to many, did not start German history but was only the beginning of a new chapter in its history. It started a great breakthrough, not only in the German economy or the development of democracy but above all in the German consciousness and the construction of their own identity. In addition, the German reunification in 1990 was another breakthrough moment as it was then that, according to many commentators, Germany finally became a "normal" country—the period of penance for crimes of the past came to an end (Wóycicki 1999, p. 15).

The question of guilt and responsibility for the tragedy of 1939–1945 was not an obvious matter in German society after the war. After 1945, Germany presented itself as a nation that had been deceived by a criminal government. Hitler was willingly blamed for all the crimes. The division into "we" and "they" became natural. This distinction ran between Hitler and his supporting organisations such as the criminal NSDAP

and SS command, and the exploited, credulous German society (Assmann 2006, p. 238). The guilt in German society was not present in the beginning because the country itself had to cope with its victims. Specifically millions of "expellees" from the East (former German territories transferred to Poland and the USSR, and from Czechoslovakia) who came to Germany and were ruminating their harm. The challenges of their integration in Germany and the post-war focus on the struggle for material existence were not conducive to changes in historical consciousness. The Nuremberg trials in the years 1945–1949 had a significant impact on this awareness; in the three western occupation zones, a total of about 5000 people were sentenced, 806 death sentences were issued, and 486 people were executed (Wóycicki 1999, p. 13).

The acceptance of denazification was very high in German society immediately after the war; for example in March 1946, 57% of Germans were satisfied with the process. Later, however, the level of this acceptance started to decrease considerably and in May 1949, it sank to only 17%. What Germans criticised were various methods of denazification in the zones, and, among other criticisms, inconsistency exhibited as leniency towards cases of serious crimes and more important people while holding average citizens accountable. Ernst von Salomon's book *Die Fragebogen* [The Questionnaire], published in 1951, derided denazification methods. It has become a bestseller and has significantly increased the negative attitude towards the denazification of many Germans (Lexicon 2009, p. 19).

In the 1950s, the most critical element of recollections was the subject of "German victims," mainly the "expelled" and Wehrmacht soldiers, some of whom were kept in Soviet captivity until 1955. The victims of German politics were hardly mentioned at all (Schwelling 2008, p. 108).

In the 1950s and 1960s, the subject of civil and military resistance against National Socialism was more and more discussed. After the war, its participants were considered traitors in Germany. It was not until the 1950s that Germans began to admit their participation in the opposition with pride (Steinbach 2000, p. 132).

The turn of the 1950s was full of events that had a visible impact on German society. For example, the role of The Central Office of the State Justice Administrations for the

Investigation of National Socialist Crimes (*Zentrale Stelle der Landesjustizverwaltungen zur Aufklärung nationalsozialistischer Verbrechen*), established in 1958, was to investigate Nazi crimes that had not been prosecuted until then. The problem was that the investigations were conducted by different public prosecutor's offices having jurisdiction over the crime scene or the place of residence of the perpetrator. For this reason, no one was tackling the question of the crimes committed by unknown perpetrators or outside West Germany. In addition, until the 1960s no distinction was made between war crimes and crimes committed outside the battlefield (such as in ghettos, concentration camps, labour camps). This lack of distinction was associated with the rejection of the prosecution of Nazi criminals by a large part of German society (Steinbach 2000, p. 67).

The trial of Adolf Eichmann, who during the World War II organised the mass deportations of Jews and other groups of victims to concentration and death camps, and who was in hiding from the end of the war until 1960, began in Jerusalem a year later. Eichmann was sentenced to death, and executed in June 1962. The importance of this trial was not due to the sentencing of a specific person, but rather due to the information about the Holocaust that was revealed during the trial. The accusing party used many images from concentration camps and the Warsaw Ghetto (to a more considerable extent than during the Nuremberg trials) to confront world public opinion with the size of the crimes against Jews. All over the world, but especially in Israel and Germany, the Eichmann trial contributed significantly to the Holocaust becoming part of the collective memory. In addition, it was attempted during the trial to show the Jews not only as a nation of victims but also as a nation ready to resist. In Germany, the Eichmann trial had a massive impact on public opinion and left its mark on both politics and justice. It also brought about further numerous trials against Eichmann's collaborators in Germany (Steinbach 2000, p. 125).

The Auschwitz trial (1963–1965), which took place in Frankfurt am Main against the staff of the concentration camp Auschwitz, was one of many other trials pending in the German courts. Unlike many other events, it put both

the Holocaust and Nazi extermination policy in the spotlight. The media has played a significant role here. This trial also inspired artists to exhibit plays on the subject, such as *Die Ermittlung* [The Investigation] by Peter Weiss or photographic exhibitions. During no previous trial against Nazi criminals, have crimes been so thoroughly and extensively worked out. The excuses of the perpetrators, including memory loss and their demonstrations of innocence, sharply contrasted with the painful confessions of the victims (Steinbach 2000, p. 130).

The 1960s were a turning point in Germany also for another reason. The rebellion of young people at the end of the 1960s (1968) in West Germany, which was a rebellion of children against the past and the guilt of their parents, showed that it was impossible to permanently erase history from the public consciousness, but rather that it is necessary

Quadriga on the top of the Brandenburg Gate, Berlin (Johann Gottfried Schadow, 1793). Berlin, Germany. 2010. © Franciszek Dąbrowski

to deal with it (Eckhard 2006, p. 30). The emergence of such an emotional movement and its high level of engagement showed the changes taking place in the historical consciousness of the Germans—the feeling and complex of guilt began to be its essential elements. Auschwitz has become a symbol of a great crime, but also of a sense of universal threat. It was during this period that the Germans became extremely critical of themselves (Eckhard 2006, p. 20).

In the 1970s and 1980s, the Holocaust became an important topic in the media, and this changed the general approach to the problem of guilt in German-Jewish relations. A symbolic gesture of Chancellor Willy Brandt—kneeling at the Warsaw Ghetto Heroes Memorial in 1970 and the policy of *détente* itself were evidence of a new attitude towards the past represented by the social-democratic government in Germany (Wóycicki 1999, p. 19). The American television series *Holocaust* by Marvin Chomsky (1979), informed general public in German society about the crimes of Nazism and made a considerable contribution to the dissemination of the subject of the Holocaust. The screening of the show was accompanied by journalistic controversy, but it reinitiated the subject of the murder of Jews in the German social consciousness. It also led to the "flooding" of Germany with literature and films about the Third Reich and the spread of the term *Holocaust* (Lexicon 2009, p. 243).

With the change of government in 1982, when Helmut Kohl took office as Chancellor, a "political breakthrough" took place. In a sense, it meant the politicisation of the process of dealing with the past to some extent, but also an attempt to redirect the German memory in new ways. In a speech given in the Knesset in 1984, Kohl stated that he was not to blame for the events of the Nazi regime because he had received "the grace of late birth." A public debate has been launched in Germany on the subject of this statement, as well as on the very term "the grace of late birth," referring to the rejection of collective guilt (Lexicon 2009, p. 226). Kohl's actions were motivated by the need to deepen national historical awareness and to restore "normality" to German society. The Chancellor intended to present the continuity of history—including the period before Nazism and the success of Germany in achieving democracy afterwards (Eckhard 2006, p. 32). Kohl's policy has led, among other things, to the establishment

of two museums devoted to the country's history: the House of History of the Federal Republic of Germany (*Haus der Geschichte der Bundesrepublik Deutschland*) in Bonn and the German Historical Museum (*Deutsches Historisches Museum*) in Berlin. The delay in final recognition the eastern border of Germany (between Germany and Poland) was, to a large extent, caused by political internal German "games". Kohl was afraid of losing the support of potential voters, especially those who fled and were "expelled" from the eastern territories of the former German Reich. The treaty between Poland and Germany approving the border between was signed in 1990. (Lexicon 2009, p. 273).

On May 8, 1985, on the occasion of the 40th anniversary of the end of the World War II, Richard von Weizsäcker, President of Federal Republic of Germany, said these important words during his speech in Bundestag:

> "The great part of our contemporary population was then [during the war] in their childhood, or not even born yet. They cannot admit their own guilt for the crimes that they did not commit. No feeling person expects them to wear penitential clothes only because they are Germans. However, their ancestors have left them this grievous legacy. We all, guilty or not, young or old, must take on the past. We are all affected by its consequences and held responsible for it. […] Forty years were necessary for the complete change of the then responsible generation of fathers. […] The new generation has grown into the political responsibility in our country. The young ones are not responsible for things that happened back then. However, they are responsible for what will happen in history as a result of this." (Weizsäcker 1985).

This speech has had a significant public impact. It was when Weizsäcker also called 8 May the "day of liberation" ("*Der 8. Mai war ein Tag der Befreiung*") and not—as until that moment—the day of Germans' defeat.

After 1989, public and academic attention focused on the reunification of Germany and dealing with the SED regime. At the end of the 1990s, the topic of "dealing" with the National Socialist past started to be discussed in detail (Eckhard 2006, p. 41).

The open debates in Germany made the public aware of what actually happened during the times of the Third Reich and the involvement of German society. A little later, the nature of the debate was changed, and it concentrated on whether the penance for their father's guilt should still be performed. These debates have shaped German historical and national consciousness to a great extent. One such discussion, the so-called *Historikerstreit* [historians' strife] held in the 1980s concerned the position of National Socialism in the history of Germany and the social and historical approach to the subject of the Nazi past (Eckhard 2006, p. 33). Historians and publicists took part in the 1986 debate, which was prompted by an article in *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* entitled *Vergangenheit, die nicht vergehen will* [The Past that Doesn't Want to Pass Away] by the German historian Ernst Nolte (Nolte 1986). Jürgen Habermas replied to Nolte's article in *Die Zeit*, and the debate gathered its momentum (Habermas 1986).

Another extremely important debate concerned Daniel Goldhagen's 1996 New York-issued book *Hitler's Willing Executioners: Ordinary Germans and the Holocaust*. The book began an intense historical and political discussion in Germany, focusing on the question: were all Germans guilty? Goldhagen's position that Germans were already imbued with anti-Semitism in the 19th century at the latest, and that average Germans also became involved in the Holocaust, reached the young generation in particular (Eckhard 2006, p. 28).

In 1998, a dispute broke out in Germany over the German writer Martin Walser's speech at St. Paul's Church in Frankfurt am Main to mark his award of the German booksellers' peace prize. In his words, Walser criticised the fact that the German people were then still blamed for its own tragedy, more than half a century after the end of the war. Ignatz Bubis, then chairman of the Central Council of Jews in Germany, harshly reacted to his speech (Jabłkowska 2008, p. 66). The discussion took on a national character and summed up the German settlement controversies of the 1980s and 1990s. It tried to determine what the universal memory of the Nazi era should look like. The debate was joined by, among others, historians and publicists. Walser's speech provoked protests from some young people who demonstrated their convictions by wearing

banners with the slogan: "To think about Germany is to think about Auschwitz." (Wóycicki 1999, p. 32). Nevertheless, there were also numerous voices that praised the "freeing power" of Walser's words—at last, he openly said what had always been hidden so far (Lexicon 2009, p. 298).

Public debate in Germany on history, historical consciousness, and historical memory also includes texts such as Harald Welzer's books, especially *Opa war kein Nazi* [Grandpa Wasn't a Nazi] published in 2002, as well as the entire *Väterbücher* [father's books] series. These were autobiographical or autobiographical novels telling the story of families in which the figure of the father played a key role. Very often, these memoirs were written by famous writers or columnists belonging to the generation of the year '68, who in the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s accounted for the history of their parents. Such works include the memories of Niklas Frank, *Die Reise* [Trip] by Bernward Vesper, the son of the Nazi writer, Will Vesper. Uwe Timm and Martin Pollack, on the other hand, had a much calmer approach to family history. They rather tried to analyse the causes of the involvement of fathers, mothers, brothers, and grandparents in National Socialism in broader social and psychological contexts (Jabłkowska 2008, p. 62).

The work of Günter Grass, who often dealt with history in his books, also had a significant influence on the shaping of German historical identity. Furthermore, while initially Grass believed that Germans would never be able to wash away their responsibility for the tragedy of the World War II, in his book *Im Krebsgang* [Crabwalk] published in 2002 he already took a different approach to the question of German guilt and brings the Germans closer to the victims. It shows a breakthrough in the way Grass looked at the problem of the "escape and expulsion" of the Germans after 1945. He called the silence of his generation about the fate of the expulsed and "expelled" from East Prussia shameful negligence (Neuhaus and Hermes 1991, p. 11). The book, like the events in the former Yugoslavia (mass murders on ethnic grounds), opened a new chapter in the discussion on the identity of a united Germany (Żytyniec 2008, p. 142). The novel *Im Krebsgang* provoked a discussion in which the most crucial question was to what extent, and if at all, it is possible to talk about

German flag on
the Bundestag building.
Berlin, Germany. 2019.
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German suffering 60 years after the end of the World War II (Lexicon 2009, p. 350).

In 2002, shortly after the publication of *Im Krebsgang*, Jörg Friedrich's book *Der Brand* [Fire] was published, and it caused equally intense emotions. In his account of the bombing of German cities by the Allies, Friedrich reflects on the motivations of the British and Americans, and describes in great detail the suffering inflicted on the German civilian population (Husson 2008, p. 199). Friedrich's book helped to open a new chapter on wartime history from a German perspective—which had always been closed. In this discussion, the controversy was not due to giving brutal facts, but the way in which they were described and assessed. To a large extent, it was about the choice of words in the text, namely the transfer of terminology associated with the Holocaust to other traumatic experiences, including German ones. For example, he called shelters "crematoria," the death of German victims—"extermination," and finally recognized that the German victims were subject to the Holocaust (Assmann 2006, p. 251).

Historical exhibitions have also left their mark on the identity and historical consciousness of German society. In 2005 an exhibition entitled *Flucht, Vertreibung, Integration* [Escape, expulsion, integration], see (*Flucht* 2005) was opened at the House of the History of the Federal Republic of Germany. It was then presented in Berlin and Leipzig. The exhibition referred to a popular term in 20th century Germany—the "age of expulsions." On the one hand, it attempted to document other expulsions; on the other, its main themes were the "expulsions" of the Germans and their integration into the societies of West and East Germany after 1945. Poland accused the organisers of the exhibition of not emphasising the difference between the expulsions from, for instance, the former Czechoslovakia, Poland, and Hungary (Weger 2008, p. 101).

The second major exhibition was presented in Berlin in 2006 by the head of the Federation of Expellees Erika Steinbach under the title *Erzwungene Wege. Flucht und Vertreibung im Europa* [Forced Paths. Escape and expulsion in 20th century Europe], see (*Erzwungene* 2006). While the authors stressed its "European character," the Polish (and Czech) side found it problematic due to insufficient information on the context, circumstances, and consequences of the deportations

of Germans after the World War II and to its repetition of stereotypes and erroneous information (Weger 2008, p. 102).

It is worth noting that another exhibition of significant influence on the German consciousness was the one organised by the Hamburg Institute for Social Research. The exhibition entitled *Vernichtungskrieg. Verbrechen der Wehrmacht 1941–1944* [War of Annihilation. Crimes of the Wehrmacht 1941 to 1944], see (*Vernichtungskrieg* 1996), was opened in 1995 to inform the public about the active role of the Wehrmacht in the process of mass murder and crimes against civilians (Jews, Sinti and Roma, Soviet prisoners of war, Eastern Europeans). Although the exhibition aimed to show the crimes of the Wehrmacht, there were voices in the discussion pointing out, i.a., that the existence of the opposition was not mentioned, for example, the group around Stauffenberg. The exhibition provoked highly emotional reactions in Germany that since 1996/1997 have even developed into a social scandal (Lexicon 2009, p. 288). Later, the creators of the exhibition started to be accused of national treachery. The German states' parliaments (*Landtagen*) have also debated whether or not to allow exhibitions to be shown in the regions. It should be added that two historians—Krisztián Ungváry from Hungary and Bogdan Musiał from Poland—pointed out that some of the photographs presented in the exhibition did not show the crimes of the Wehrmacht, but, among others, the crimes of the Soviet secret service NKVD. The exhibition presented even more shortcomings when it comes to its accuracy (Lexicon 2009, p. 289).

Work is currently underway to create a Centre Against Expulsions (*Zentrum gegen Vertreibungen)*—which is controversial, primarily from the Polish point of view—and a permanent exhibition as part of its structure. The project, especially in the years 2003–2009, triggered a bitter and emotional Polish–German conflict. For instance Erika Steinbach, a member of the CDU and chairwoman of the Union of Expellees, said that the Centre should be built in the "historical and spatial proximity" of The Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe in Berlin, and that "in fact, the themes of Jews and expellees complement each other. In both cases, racial delusions will also be a topic at our Centre." —this was

Entrance to the German Parliament (Bundestag). Berlin, Germany. 2010.
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quoted after (Mieszko-Wiórkiewicz 2006; Husson 2008, p. 97). The Polish President Aleksander Kwaśniewski said: "Have the centrist politicians in Berlin forgotten whose politics led to displacements?" (Aleksander Kwaśniewski, "*Przeciw Europie narodowych animozji*" ["Against a Europe of National Animosities"], *Rzeczpospolita*, September 15, 2003). Polish Prime Minister Leszek Miller said in the Polish Parliament:

> "It is feared that the next generations will get the misleading, harmful impression that the only victims of the World War II were, on the one hand, Holocaust victims and, on the other, German resettlement victims." (*Stenographic record of September 11,* 2003);

Polish President Lech Kaczyński said in an interview for *Der Spiegel*:

> "The fact is that such a centre certainly leads to a relativisation of guilt—especially as we have been feeling a new intellectual climate in Germany over the last five or six years that is worrying us: There are trends emerging that relativise what happened between 1939 and 1945." (Kaczyński 2006a).

German historical consciousness and national identity has considerably evolved over the years. Looking at today's approach to history in Germany, it is visible that they are not trying to escape from difficult subjects. The memory of National Socialism, the World War II, and the Holocaust has become evident since German reunification. Museums, memorials, monuments, films, anniversaries (and so on) that refer to the Nazi past of the country are already accepted and supported by the state as elements of cultural heritage. The intense debates that took place in the 1990s led to a broad consensus that critical commemoration cannot be ended but must become a permanent component of political culture. This led to the recognition of the Nazi past as part of German identity (Kirsch 2005, p. 67). At present, however, two trends are confronting each other in Germany—a return to "normality", namely a positive understanding of national history, and remembrance of indisputable crimes (Jabłkowska 2008, p. 73).

Meanwhile, dealing with the SED dictatorship's past is now facing obstacles in Germany. The people of Eastern Germany understood reunification to be more of absorption of the GDR by Germany than a union of equal partners. As a consequence, dealing with the Communist past was understood by the citizens of the former GDR as something imposed on them rather than stemming from any real civic need. The Peaceful Revolution of 1989 became the founding myth of a reunited Germany. However, there is still no consensus on the position of the 40-year-old GDR period in common German history (Jabłkowska 2008, p. 73). In this context, an important topic in Germany is the problem of the "double past" based on the competition of the memory of the dictatorships that affected Germany (National Socialist and Communist). Therefore, with the reunification of Germany in 1990, Germany became responsible for dealing with the heritage of both dictatorships. When settling the SED dictatorship, the method of dealing with National Socialism was taken as a model, however, it was assumed that settling the SED dictatorship would take less time. In the first place, the intention was to punish the perpetrators and rehabilitate and compensate the victims. Between 1990 and 2005, 74,000 investigations were underway, but only a small proportion of the perpetrators were prosecuted, which, together with lenient penalties, was a source of disappointment for the victims (Kaminsky 2018, p. 150). Another challenge was to include the memory of the crimes of the Communist dictatorship in the commemoration of the victims of National Socialism. It was important that there should be no specific competition, nor should any memory overshadow the other one (Kaminsky 2018, p. 151).

German reunification opened the way for discussion on, among others, the introduction of the Law on the Stasi Records and the powers of the authorities working with these records; on how to treat the heritage of communism and socialism in the country and on the evaluation of the GDR as a state (Reuschenbach 2018, p. 189). As a result of the mass destruction of files by employees of the security apparatus and in fear of abuse (for example, exposing either oppositionists or the ruling circles as secret collaborators of the security service), the German Bundestag was obliged to enact a law enabling access to files in the unification treaty.

The Office of the Federal Commissioner for the Records of the State Security (*Bundesbeauftragter für die Unterlagen der Staatssicherheit*), led by Joachim Gauck (Krüger 2010), was created for this purpose.

After the reunification, Ravensbrück, Sachsenhausen, and Buchenwald, where Nazi concentration camps were located and which were after the war used as special Soviet camps, became important places. Eventually, in the 1960s, they were established as the GDR's national monuments and memorials of the Nazi crimes (Reuschenbach 2018, p. 189). The controversy concerned not only the financing of memorial sites but also the future equilibrium of remembrances of both dictatorships in German society. In 1992 the Bundestag set up a research committee on dealing with the past and consequences of the SED dictatorship in Germany (*Die Enquete-Kommission "Aufarbeitung von Geschichte und Folgen der SED-Diktatur in Deutschland"*); this had a considerable impact on the debates on museums and memorial sites in Germany (Reuschenbach 2018, p. 191). Based on the preliminary results of its work, the Bundestag set up another research committee, where much attention was paid to the comparability of the memory

Frederick the Great Monument (Christian Daniel Rauch, 1839; removed to Potsdam 1950, restored 1980). Berlin, Germany. 2010. © Franciszek Dąbrowski

of the National Socialist regime and the SED dictatorship. In relation to the memorial sites dedicated to the double past, it was decided to use the so-called "Faulenbach formula" thus preventing the relativisation of Nazi crimes by the crimes of Stalinism and underestimating the latter by pointing to Nazi crimes (Reuschenbach 2018, p. 194). These rules apply, among others, to sites such as the Buchenwald Foundation and the Buchenwald Memorial (the Nazi concentration and then Soviet special camp; *Stiftung und Gedenkstätte Buchenwald*), the Brandenburg Memorials Foundation (with the Nazi concentration and then Soviet special camp Sachsenhausen and the Ravensbrück Nazi concentration camp; *Die Stiftung Brandenburgische Gedenkstätten*), Topography of Terror Documentation Center (*Die Stiftung Topographie des Terrors*), the Saxon Memorial Foundation (*Die Stiftung Sächsische Gedenkstätten*), The Berlin-Hohenschönhausen Memorial (*Die Stiftung Gedenkstätte Berlin-Hohenschönhausen*), and so on.

History in Public Speeches by Politicians

When discussing German historical awareness, it is worth recalling that in 2005–2007, Poland often accused the Germans of trying to shift their responsibility to other nations, and put themselves in the role of victims (recalling the tragedy of the "expelled" and civilians during the bombing of German cities in 1941–1945). Such an impression may indeed be reinforced by film productions—for example, the ones presenting German resistance to the system as a natural and universal matter. Among them are, for instance, *Sophie Scholl* (2005), *Valkyrie* (2008), or the three-part TV-series "Generation War" (*Unsere Mütter, unsere Väter*, 2013). If you add, for example, an article from the German *Spiegel—Der dunkle Kontinent* [Dark Continent] in 2009, the emotional reactions in Poland are all the more understandable. This is because the article points to more than 200,000 German helpers of Hitler in the murder of Jews—from Ukraine, Latvia, Romania, Hungary, Poland, Netherlands, France, Norway, and Italy (Bönisch, Friedmann, Meyer, Sontheimer, and Wiegrefe 2009). The then frequent statements of the representatives of the Polish ruling party (PiS, Law and Justice) inspired research to verify whether the

above accusations were justified. President Lech Kaczyński, among others, was one of those who spoke on the subject:

> "The German army suffered enormous losses at the front, and there were the resettlements from today's western Poland. These resettlements were certainly a very tragic event and the heavy bombardment of German cities was even more tragic. But it is, for example, not the same as the heavy bombardment of our cities." (Kaczyński 2006a);
> "The problem of history was raised by the Germans, not by the Poles—a kind of revisionist program, when it comes to evaluating who was a victim of the World War II posing the problem of the expelled, that is, people who were displaced. It is not a Polish matter, but German. It is obvious that we do not want a situation in which it turns out that the main victims of the war, except of course of the Jews, which we do not question, were the Germans […]. Germany does not somehow raise the issue of the bombings during the World War II, during which many completely innocent children and women died. However, they raise the issue of the resettlement of their population—that was not decided by Poland, but the Allies, i.e. USA, England, Soviet Union and Great Britain [*sic*]. Secondly, apart of the upheaval of the resettled people—they are alive. This is the reason why we are in some historical strife, but it was caused by the changes in Germany, not in Poland." (Kaczyński 2006b);

Prime Minister Jarosław Kaczyński:

> "The unprecedented thing is that the term »Polish concentration camps« is used and the subject of Polish complicity, or even of guilt for the Holocaust is being discussed. There were no »nationless Nazis«, so the term »Nazis« should not be used. These people were Germans. Today it is necessary to remember who was the executioner and who was the victim." (*Polish Press Agency Communique* 2006);

Minister of Foreign Affairs Anna Fotyga:

> "[…] We will not allow Nazi German death camps to be called »Polish death camps« and Poland to be accused of cooperation with the Nazi regime." (*Stenographic record of May 11,* 2007).

I have analysed the public speeches of German (and Polish) politicians—presidents, chancellors (and prime ministers), and foreign ministers—in my doctoral thesis (the later part of this article is primarily based on my findings). A very extensive body of research material covered all available and transcribed public speeches. During the researched period—from 1989 to mid-2011—five presidents, three chancellors, and five foreign ministers held offices in Germany—more data on the research and extensive presentation of results are available in (Andrychowicz-Skrzeba 2014). The following points can be drawn from the analysis of their public speeches in terms of references to Polish, German, or shared Polish–German history.

The first observations can be made on a semantic level. There is a visible difference between the discourse on "expulsions" in Poland and Germany. The Polish politicians do not generally refer to the resettlement of Poles as "expulsions." They use the terms "resettlement" (*przesiedlenie*) or "deportation" (*deportacja*). In turn, researched German politicians always use the term "expulsions" (*Vertreibungen*) when referring to the German context. In the context of the forced displacement of the Polish population, they never do so and use the term "resettlements" (*Umsiedlungen*) instead. In addition, in the context of National Socialism and German crimes, German (but also Polish) politicians rarely use the term "Germany" or even "Nazi Germany," and very often the general term "regime".

The frequency of referring to topics related to history depends, among others, on the occurrence and celebration of (round) anniversaries of some events. Germany celebrates far fewer anniversaries of historical events than, for instance, Poland; the fact that may be related to the negative history of the country and its own sceptical attitude towards it. The sense of patriotism is a complicated phenomenon in Germany (incomparable to the patriotism in Poland); this was influenced by the period of the Third Reich and National Socialism. The first two stanzas were deleted from the national anthem in order to break with the infamous past as much as possible, and most Germans are still reluctant to display the national flag. One of the few situations in which German national feelings were shown was the 2006 World Cup in Germany when they bravely and proudly displayed their national colours. German patriotism was not associated with anything inappropriate

then, and it turned out to be a joyful, positive, and connecting emotion. National symbols—the anthem and the flag—were then widely and publicly used. Although there has not yet been a complete "opening" of German society, a new approach to national symbols can be observed to a certain extent. This may testify to the Germans' return to "normality" (Zalewski 2009, p. 23). However, it seems that, especially in recent years, Germany has been focusing more on positive anniversaries in its history, such as the attempt to assassinate Hitler in 1944, the GDR's June uprising of 1953, the fall of the Berlin Wall and the reunification of Germany.

While German politicians relatively rarely referred to historical issues in their public speeches during the period in question, one of the most frequently discussed topics, besides the turn of 1989/1990, was the period of the World War II. An interesting subject is a reference to the victims of National Socialism. When referring to the victims of concentration camps and persecution during the World War II, German politicians usually use the following order: Jews, disabled people, Catholics, Protestants, believers, and non-believers. Sometimes it looks different: Jews, Sinti, and Roma, Russians, Christians, trade union members, socialists, disabled people, minorities. Surprisingly, Poles are often not mentioned among the victims as a separate group (distinguishing them, for example, from the group of "Christians"). On the other hand, German politicians add in this context that many Germans were victims of the war—they lost their lives in the camps, during the escape from the approaching frontlines, "expulsions" and bombings. While many groups, including Poles, are not named, the Germans are a group that is usually named. People listening to this kind of speech may have the impression that the victims are restricted to Jews, Sinti and Roma, and, quite so, Germans.

One of the issues discussed in the statements of Polish and German politicians is, naturally, the question of compensations from Germany for those of the ten million forced labourers who survived the war. This topic was present in the public debate in Germany between 1998 and 2000. In the speeches examined, politicians did not refer to the negotiations themselves, but only discussed the need to pay compensation and, after it happened, how important it is that these payments were made.

Mainly in the years 2005–2007, Poland often accused Germans of rejecting their guilt and sense of responsibility for the crimes committed. A study by the author of this paper demonstrated that German politicians always throughout this period openly acknowledged Germany's guilt, see (Andrychowicz-Skrzeba 2014). There were no speeches of prominent German politicians concerning the World War II or the "expulsions" of the Germans, in which there was no acknowledgement of the crimes committed by the Germans and no sense of German responsibility for the negative role of their country in the 20th century. Many German politicians recall when talking about Germany's responsibility that numerous Germans are recognized as "Righteous Among the Nations". Furthermore, almost all German politicians mentioned the German resistance to Hitler, and sometimes added that a broader, patriotic opposition could not have developed in a totalitarian society. It seems that such information was added as if to soften what had been said before—for example in speeches by Klaus Kinkel, Minister for Foreign Affairs, at the Bundestag sitting on July 22, 1994:

> "It is precisely because Germany has been a violator of peace in the past that it is morally and ethically obliged to engage in the defence of peace today fully." (*Stenographic record of July 22,* 1994);

Minister for Foreign Affairs Hans-Dietrich Genscher, during the sitting of the Bundestag on September 6, 1991:

> "The significance of the change in our relationship with Poland can be seen by everyone conscious of the sorrowful past of our both nations over the past hundred years: the consequences of the policy of violence directed against Poland by Hitler's Germany, but also the suffering experienced by Germans." (*Stenographic record of September 6,* 1991);

Chancellor Angela Merkel at the University of Warsaw on March 16, 2007:

> "Infinite pain and suffering were inflicted on Poland in the German name. During the entire period of National Socialism

> and the World War II, which began with the German invasion of Poland, more than 6 million Poles lost their lives because of the Germans." (Merkel 2007).

The issue of "expulsions" has been thematised by all German politicians. In fact, it was always added in the speeches from the period covered by the survey that the first war refugees were Poles, and sometimes (rarely) that Poles were also forced to leave their homeland at the end of the war. It was frequently repeated that German crimes could not be compared with the "expulsions" of Germans and that one must oppose those who want to see in the memory and suffering of the "expellees" a kind of compensation of wrongs or even an expression of revanchism. German politicians have often stressed that it was the Nazi policy of violence that led to the "expulsions"—for example, German president Roman Herzog:

> "[…] Czech President Vaclav Havel rightly said that the expulsions of the Germans were not punishment but revenge. But that's not all. Above all, however, they were an instrument of Soviet expansionary policy that pushed nations and states back and forth on the map to establish the power of the Soviet system in the middle of Europe." (Herzog September 8, 1996);

German President Johannes Rau:

> "Two generations ago, during the war started by Germany, 15 million Germans were also expelled from their homeland. They suffered great abuse." (Rau 2003).

Thematising "expulsions" may give the impression that German politicians are trying to emphasise the role of Germans as victims of the war's wickedness. This is, however, not a new topic that has suddenly come up in recent years. The subject of "expulsions" was present in the public speeches of German politicians in every year of the period 1990–2010. Another subject, this time showing the atrociousness of the German civilians' suffering, is the subject of bombing German cities, often mentioned by German politicians—but not only in recent years. This topic was frequently discussed in 1991, 1993–1996, and 1999–2005 (Andrychowicz-Skrzeba 2014, pp. 287–487).

The second important topic for German politicians is the post-war period until the turn of 1989/1990. In this context, when referring to history, all German politicians have taken up the topic of the GDR uprising in 1953. This event was the strongest anti-Communist rising that happened there. The fall of the Berlin Wall and the reunification of Germany are, of course, very common topics. All German politicians have stressed the significant contribution of the nations of Central and Eastern Europe in overcoming the division of Germany and Europe. It is worth noting that the majority of German politicians do not treat Solidarity exceptionally, as the main force behind the overthrow of communism. It is almost always mentioned together with movements in Hungary and Czechoslovakia, for example by President Richard von Weizsäcker:

> "Our appreciations go to the civil movements and nations in Hungary, Poland, and Czechoslovakia. People in Warsaw, Budapest, and Prague set an example." (Weizsäcker 1990);

President Johannes Rau:

> "The citizens of the GDR won their freedom by themselves […]. They have written the history of German and European freedom—like Poles and Hungarians, Czechs and Slovaks before and with them." (Rau 1999);

Chancellor Angela Merkel:

> "But what could not yet be achieved by the people's movements in the GDR in 1953, in Hungary in 1956 and in Czechoslovakia in 1968, was achieved by Solidarity […]." (Merkel 2007).

German politicians have relatively frequently pointed out that the Germans helped Poles during martial law (1981–1982). In this context, Polish and German politicians manifest different attitudes towards the role played by Mikhail Gorbachev in the overthrow of communism. Polish politicians usually do not mention him. German politicians, on the other hand, stress that he was a reformer who put Soviet politics on a different track, supporting the collapse of communism and the reunification of Germany. In addition, German politicians have evoked very

often the events in Budapest in 1956 and Prague in 1968 and the fact that Hungary, by opening its border to refugees from the GDR, had contributed to the fall of the Berlin Wall.

Therefore, despite the frequent accusations appearing in Poland concerning the alleged forgetfulness of the Germans about their history and their willingness to relativize their own guilt for the World War II, it is not possible to fully confirm the validity of such presumptions. This theory, repetitively propagated in Poland that the Germans have more often been mentioning their own sufferings in recent years has not been fully confirmed. German politicians do not generally include completely new topics in their statements, and simply, at different times, the emphasis is put on different things. They have been talking about their suffering since 1990. The tendency to recall their own injustices, especially in places where they had previously been talking about their guilt, is visible in both Polish and German politicians.

The thesis of incomplete knowledge of the West, including Germany, about Poland can be confirmed. A proof of this is the fact that Poles are not mentioned as victims of Auschwitz and of the Nazi regime, and that the roles of Poland, Hungary, and Czechoslovakia in the overthrow of communism are presented as basically equal. While in Germany the elites all agree that the crimes of the Third Reich and its victims must be remembered, this usually applies only to the Holocaust, and to a much lesser extent, to crimes committed against the other citizens of occupied Europe. This strong focus on the Holocaust has resulted in the overshadowing of other Nazi crimes. Knowledge and awareness of the Germans of the consequences of the war in Poland are increasing slowly, but they still are limited. This situation is related, among other things, to Germany's lack of interest in Poland, and thus to insufficient information about it in the context of their collective Polish–German history in their education system, as well as to the above-mentioned focus on the Holocaust. To understand how difficult it is to educate Germans about history, it is sufficient to be conscious of the problems connected with the social multiculturalism in their country. However, looking at the problems that the German have already solved, one can get the impression that they have managed to deal. Since the Germans are aware of this, it is perhaps right for them to believe that they are entitled to look back on the wrongs done to them.

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Quadriga on the top of the Brandenburg Gate
(Johann Gottfried Schadow, 1793).
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