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Between German and Eternal Spirit

Kohl's Politics of Historical Memory in Biographical Perspective

ABSTRACT

Widely remembered for his European identity, Kohl's (neo)conservative mission was to normalise (West) German nationalism by promoting a particular historical consciousness. Little is known about the origins of Kohl's historicism, which can be traced to his education at the University of Heidelberg, where he graduated with a PhD in History (1958). The ideological continuity in Kohl's notion of Germany, which was surprisingly stable throughout his career, becomes clearer when taking a close look at his thesis, which was an early attempt to highlight "positive" endurances in German history. It foreshadowed the frequent manoeuvres during his political life to relativise the Nazi past and to convince the Germans and the world that German history was not only an abnormal historical trajectory leading to 1945, but one that had historically fulfilled the Western standards. In Kohl's history-politics, the nation was presented as a legitimate and natural entity, worth being defended against any unnatural cross-currents, like Nazism and communism, to which the entire German nation had fallen victim, before the Federal Republic had emerged as the partial fulfilment of German history on its set path to (re)unification.

Keywords: *politics of memory, Helmut Kohl, nationalism, conservatism, Nazism, Heidelberg*

Introduction¹

Kohl's chancellorship from 1982 to 1998 paralleled a turning point in modern time conception: visions of the future were increasingly dominated by visions of the past.² In Germany, which did not become a nation-state until 3 October 1990, the utopian vision of unity required historical legitimacy, which Chancellor Kohl sought to provide as part of his (neo)conservative *geistig-moralische Wende* (spiritual-moral turn). This legitimacy could be sourced, in Kohl's view, only from the normalisation of German nationalism, which implied the Germans' reconciliation with their national history in connection to the image construction of Germany as an essentially Western nation that nobody had to fear anymore. This quest for normality can be traced biographically from Kohl's educational socialisation during the early years of the Federal Republic, when he graduated with a PhD in History, to his controversial politics of historical memory as head of government. During the heyday of his career, Kohl established himself as prime example of a *Geschichtspolitiker*, in using and producing historical narratives and symbols to legitimise his idea of German nationhood and political ideology.³

His chancellorship can be regarded as the beginning of the normalisation of German and thus Federal Republican identity, of the marginalisation of post-nationalism and constitutional patriotism,⁴ which has been further pursued ever since.⁵ Kohl became the key actor in Hitler's shadow theatre of German memory politics in the 1980s. He represented Franz Joseph Strauß's conservative demand of the Germans to be able to walk upright, "step out of shadow of Hitler [...] and finally become a normal nation again".⁶ This message stood in opposition to the notion of normality represented by the centre-left protagonists during the German *Historikerstreit*, such as Heinrich A. Winkler, who suggested that the Germans should finally get used to their historical position "in Hitler's shadow".⁷ This debate has been well established in German

- 1 This article overlaps with sections in Christian Wicke: *Helmut Kohl's Quest for Normality: His Representation of the German Nation and Himself*, New York, forthcoming 2015; see especially the more extensive chapter 5. I very much thank the anonymous reviewers for their very helpful criticism and suggestions.
- 2 Aleida Assmann: *Ist die Zeit aus den Fugen: Aufstieg und Fall des Zeitregimes des Moderne*, Munich 2013.
- 3 For politics of historical memory, see, for example, Aleida Assmann: *Der lange Schatten der Vergangenheit: Erinnerungskultur und Geschichtspolitik*, Bonn 2007.
- 4 Jan-Werner Müller: *Constitutional Patriotism*, Princeton 2007.
- 5 Siobhan Kattago: *Ambiguous Memory: The Nazi Past and German National Identity*; London 2001, pp. 43–4.
- 6 Franz Josef Strauß: *Mehr aufrechten Gang*, in: *Frankfurter Rundschau*, 14 January 1987.
- 7 Heinrich August Winkler: *Auf ewig in Hitlers Schatten: Zum Streit des Geschichtsbild der Deutschen*, in: *Frankfurter Rundschau*, 14 November 1986, reprinted in Rudolf Augstein

historiography, but with regards to the ongoing attention to the life and politics of Helmut Kohl in the German public, it makes sense to take another look at the linkage between Kohl's educational socialisation and his way of historicising his nation's past.

The first part of this essay primarily looks at his years at the University of Heidelberg in the 1950s. Kohl's memory politics have been analysed by historians in Germany and abroad, yet they have not been contextualised from a biographical perspective. Kohl's thesis, *Die politische Entwicklung in der Pfalz und das Wiedererstehen der Parteien nach 1945* (The political development of the Palatinate and the revival of parties after 1945) sought to highlight the allegedly positive continuities in German politics and conceal the "negative" features of German history. Submitted in 1958, he wrote his thesis within an atmosphere of restoration, renewal and adaptation, overshadowed by the Cold War. Kohl's dissertation reflected this *zeitgeist*. It was an early attempt to exonerate German history: the Western political culture of the Federal Republic was presented not as essentially new, but as a result of valuable, ideological traditions, which had already existed throughout the Kaiser's empire, the Weimar Republic and the resistance movement during the Nazi era. His thesis did not intend to discover the reasons for Nazism, but to support the foundation myth of the West German state, which was part of his personal representation and identity.

The second part further demonstrates Kohl's methods of relativising the Nazi past on the basis of allegedly positive continuities in German history, which reflected his desire to normalise German nationalism and convince all people that German history was not only an abnormal historical trajectory that led to 1945. In Kohl's memory politics, the Cold War and the German division were instrumentalised to present the entire German nation as victims of Hitler and the communists. He suggested that the Germans had suffered enough from Hitler and the perpetual memory of the Nazi crimes. In fact, "the German ideology" was, in Kohl's version of history, naturally opposed to Nazism and communism. Kohl urged the Germans to look at the *longue durée* to realise their liberal heritage and remember their historical entitlement to be united. Instead of getting hopelessly lost in the chaos of their contemporary history, the Germans should let themselves be inspired by the founding fathers of the Federal Republic and look forward with confidence. The Federal Republic was the unfinished fulfilment of German history. Complete forgetting of the Nazi era would thus have

et al. (eds.): *Historikerstreit: Die Dokumentation der Kontroverse um die Einzigartigkeit der nationalsozialistischen Judenvernichtung*, München/Zürich 1987, pp. 256–263; see Richard J. Evans: *In Hitler's Shadow: West German Historians and the Attempt to Escape from the Nazi Past*, New York 1989; Rudolf Augstein et al. (eds): *Forever in the Shadow of Hitler?: Original Documents of the Historikerstreit, the Controversy Concerning the Singularity of the Holocaust*, translated by James Knowlton/Truett Cates, New Jersey 1993.

harmed Kohl's representation of Federal Republican normality. The memory of the Third Reich endowed not only his state and political party with legitimacy, but also supported his personal myth, or what one could call his "autobiographical identity".

Heidelberg Romantic?

In 1946, when Kohl was 16 years old, he saw how his political mentor, the priest Johannes Finck, issued *Persilscheine* to exonerate former Nazis.⁸ To build the Federal Republic, millions of former Nazis were mobilised. The industries had to be reconstructed and their personnel rehabilitated. The chemical company BASF, the lifeline of Kohl's hometown Ludwigshafen, for example, had been important for the Nazi's production of weapons, which had only been possible with help of thousands of forced labourers. This large corporation was crucial to the economic recovery of the city after the Second World War. During his years at university, Kohl himself worked for BASF.⁹ After the completion of his PhD, Ludwigshafen's chemical trade association employed him for ten years, though the employer allowed Kohl to focus primarily on his role in his party and politics.¹⁰ To be politically successful, Kohl socialised with former Nazis: Fritz Ries, who had gained millions thanks to the "aryanisation" of Jewish property and forced labour from the concentration camps, sponsored Kohl's political rise and introduced him to a squad of further dubious sponsors, as Bernt Engelmann has revealed.¹¹ Also later, as CDU chairman, Kohl received thousands from the family of Friedrich Flick, a friend of Heinrich Himmler. Flick had profited greatly during the Holocaust with similar methods as Ries, and was sentenced to prison for seven years, before being released early to rebuild his industrial empire.¹² In Kohl's view of history, however, hardly any German had been a real Nazi; not even his friend, Hanns-Martin

8 Theo Schwarzmüller: *Albert Finck und die Nationalhymne: Eine Lebensreise vom Kaiserreich zur Bundesrepublik*, Annweiler 2002, pp. 88.

9 Helmut Kohl, *Erinnerungen 1930–82*, vol I, Munich 2004, p. 80.

10 Klaus Dreher: *Helmut Kohl: Leben mit Macht*, 2nd ed., Stuttgart 1998, pp. 48–9.

11 Hans-Joachim Noack: *Die stummen Zeugen lagen in einer Kapelle in Auschwitz: Der Einfluß des Unternehmers Fritz Ries um seine Vergangenheit*, in: *Frankfurter Rundschau*, 21 May 1975; Bernt Engelmann: *Großes Bundesverdienstkreuz*, Göttingen 2002 [1974]; Bernt Engelmann: *Schwarzbuch Helmut Kohl – eiserner Kanzler des großen Geldes*, Göttingen 1990.

12 *Mannheimer Morgen*: *Sieben Jahre Gefangenschaft für Flick*, 24 December 1947; *Der Spiegel*: *Nachmittags erschien Frau Weber*, 26 October 1987.

Schleyer, who had been the leader of the *Reichsstudentenwerk* at Heidelberg and an SS officer.¹³ In 1948, Schleyer lied on appeal to a previous sentence about his actual rank at the SS and was consequently exonerated as a “fellow-traveller”.¹⁴

Following his graduation from the *Oberrealschule* in July 1950, Kohl first enrolled at Frankfurt's Goethe University. There he attended lectures in international law given by Walter Hallstein, whom he saw as “an architect of Western integration”.¹⁵ The economist Franz Böhm, who had previously been involved in the Reparations Agreement between Israel and West Germany, also lectured Kohl. He moreover attended lectures by the Social Democrat Carlo Schmid, which, according to Kohl, were so boring that he could only think of the beautiful girls outside the lecture theatre.¹⁶ In 1951, after two semesters, the young politician transferred to Heidelberg, where he subsequently gained a scholarship from the Rockefeller Foundation.¹⁷ Heidelberg was closer to his hometown, the centre of his early political life.¹⁸

Kohl demonstrated loyalty to his alma mater throughout his life.¹⁹ He described Heidelberg's university as “one of the greatest sites in the German cultural landscape”.²⁰ Kohl, who would always try to emphasise the embeddedness of German culture into Europe's occidental culture, believed “there were few places in Europe, where one could perceive the intellectual force and dynamic of the *Abendland* more strongly” than in Heidelberg.²¹ Kohl remembered that there were many older students among his cohort

13 For a biography on Hanns-Martin Schleyer, see Lutz Hachmeister: *Schleyer: Eine Deutsche Geschichte*, Munich 2004; see also Bernt Engelmann: *Großes Bundesverdienstkreuz*, chapter 4.

14 Volker Zastrow: *Aus dem Tod heraus erklärt sich nichts*, review article of Hachmeister's biography on Schleyer, in: *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung (FAZ)*, 12 June 2004, available online at: <http://www.faz.net/artikel/C30000/lutz-hachmeister-aus-dem-tod-heraus-erklart-sich-nichts-30047531.html> (accessed 29 November 2010). Kohl wrote in his memoirs that a few days before Schleyer was kidnapped by the Red Army Faction in September 1977, he had dinner with him in Bonn, see Helmut Kohl: *Erinnerungen*, vol. I, pp. 363, 460.

15 *Ibid.*, p. 79.

16 *Ibid.*, p. 79.

17 Heinz Kimpinsky: *Helmut Kohl glaubt an das “Abenteuer des Lebens”*, in: *Mannheimer Morgen*, 27 August 1966.

18 Helmut Kohl: *Erinnerungen*, vol. I, pp. 80–1.

19 *Ibid.*, p. 106. For the University of Heidelberg after the Second World War, see, for example, Herbert Vogt: *Die Ruprecht-Karls-Universität Heidelberg im Aufbruch: Am glänzenden Fluss des Weltwissens*, Heidelberg 2009; Nicolaus Sombart: *Rendezvous mit dem Weltgeist: Heidelberger Reminiszenzen 1945–51*, Frankfurt a.M. 2000, Steven P. Remy: *The Heidelberg Myth: The Nazification and Denazification of a German University*, Cambridge 2002.

20 Helmut Kohl: *Erinnerungen*, vol. I, p. 82.

21 *Ibid.*, p. 82. For Kohl's abendländisch ideology and Catholicism, see: Christian Wicke: *Helmut Kohl's Catholic Nationalism*, in: Jim Jose/Robert Imre (eds.): *Not So Strange*

at Heidelberg, who had different wartime experiences from his own. However, “what connected us as a great community was the curiosity for an academic curriculum, which had freed itself from the ruinous enmeshment of the German scholarship during the Third Reich.”²² Kohl also assured his readers that the scholars he met had unfailingly “conformed to the *lebendigen Geist* (to the eternal spirit).”²³ The Nazis had replaced the original university motto in 1936 with *Dem deutschen Geist* (to the German spirit).²⁴

The University of Heidelberg has not been shy to flaunt its great tradition with numerous outstanding thinkers.²⁵ The intellectual history of this institution, prior to the Third Reich, mirrored both what Hans Kohn would have described critically as “the German mind”, paving the idiosyncratic path over centuries from idealism to Nazism, and what Peter Watson has recently sought to rehabilitate as “the German Genius”, a country with a highly concentrated intellectual culture that had much more to offer than the dominant ideology between 1933 and 1945.²⁶ In January 1933, Martin Heidegger advised Baden’s Minister of Culture to implement the *Führerprinzip* at the universities of Freiburg and Heidelberg; the first German universities to lose their independence.²⁷ From then onwards, the Nazis and their sympathisers ran the institutions and the fascist student movement was on the rise. In April 1933, Germans “of Jewish race” were dismissed from public service positions.²⁸ Steven P. Remy argued in *The Heidelberg Myth* that “[t]he dominant response of professors who had not been fired was enthusiasm for the new regime and a willingness to adapt to it.”²⁹ Most of them were glad to see the end of the Weimar Republic and were committed to a “national revolution”.³⁰ Unsurprisingly, the intellectual climate changed dramatically: research and teaching was then subject to the idea of the *Volksgemeinschaft* and all academic disciplines had to be in line with the Nazi ideology, its anti-Semitism and

Bedfellows: The Nexus of Politics and Religion in the 21st Century, Cambridge 2013, pp. 98–117. On the role of the Christian Abendland and the politics of westernisation, see, for example, Axel Schildt: *Zwischen Abendland und Amerika*, München 1999.

22 Helmut Kohl: *Erinnerungen*, vol I, 83.

23 *Ibid.*, p. 83.

24 Steven P. Remy: *The Heidelberg Myth: The Nazification and Denazification of a German University*, Cambridge 2002, p. 50. In early 2009, a fundraising campaign under the motto “Dem lebendigen Geist”, for the restoration of the Humanities in Heidelberg’s old town, took place under Kohl’s patronage, see Herbert Vogt: *Die Ruprecht-Karls-Universität Heidelberg im Aufbruch*, p. 64.

25 *Ibid.*

26 Peter Watson: *The German Genius: Europe’s third Renaissance: the Second Scientific Revolution, and the Twentieth Century*, New York 2010; Hans Kohn: *The Mind of Germany: The Education of a Nation*, London 1961.

27 Steven P. Remy, *The Heidelberg Myth*, p. 13.

28 *Ibid.*, p. 16.

29 *Ibid.*, p. 22.

30 *Ibid.*, p. 23.

German expansionism. A chair in folklore was created and regional studies were promoted, which would later affect Kohl's decision to join the History Seminar.³¹ Willy Andreas and Paul Schmitthenner, who had joined the Nazi party in 1934, then dominated the department.³²

Günther Franz, an expert in the Peasant Wars and the Thirty Years' War, arrived in 1935 to join the Heidelberg historians for three semesters. Franz was member of the Nazi party, first of the SA, later of the SS and he finally worked for the SD. In 1937, Franz participated in the *Historikertag* at Erfurt in his SS uniform.³³ He initiated the creation of the Institute for Frankish-Palatine History and Regional Studies, as part of the interdisciplinary field of *Westforschung* (research on Western Europe).³⁴ Heidelberg, as the centre of the Old Palatinate, was regarded as the perfect place for this purpose. The interest in local history, geography, language and folk was overshadowed by the ambition to expand Germany's western borders. Kohl's later PhD supervisor, Walther Peter Fuchs, was also involved in *Westforschung*.³⁵ This background influenced Kohl's later decision to pursue his doctorate with him.³⁶

According to Remy, as little as four per cent of German academics who had been fired after the Nazi takeover returned to their jobs.³⁷ He sceptically recalled the apologetic writing of Gerhard Ritter, who claimed in 1945 that German professors had nothing to do with the Nazis.³⁸ At that time the British and American authorities exonerated the vast majority of Heidelberg's professors, who had kept their positions during the Nazi

31 Ibid., pp. 24 ff.

32 Ibid., p. 38.

33 Astrid M. Eckert: *Kampf um die Akten: die Westalliierten und die Rückgabe von deutschem Archivgut nach dem Zweiten Weltkrieg*, Stuttgart 2004, p. 365.

34 Steven P. Remy: *The Heidelberg Myth*, 39; for *Westforschung*, see for example, Burkhard Dietz et al. (eds.): *Griff nach dem Westen: Die "Westforschung" der völkisch-nationalen Wissenschaften zum nordwesteuropäischen Raum (1919–1960)*, vol. II, Münster 2003; Thomas Müller: *Imaginerter Westen: Das Konzept des "deutschen Westraums" im völkischen Diskurs zwischen Politischer Romantik und Nationalsozialismus*, Bielefeld 2009.

35 Steven P. Remy, *The Heidelberg Myth*, p. 68.

36 Helmut Kohl: *Der lange Atem der Geschichte: Zum neunzigsten Geburtstag des Historikers Walther Peter Fuchs*, in: *FAZ*, 13 March 1995.

37 Steven P. Remy: *The Heidelberg Myth*, p. 141. See also Jürgen Heß et al. (eds.): *Heidelberg 1945*, in: *Verbindung mit Detlef Junker und Eike Wolgast*, Stuttgart 1996; *Themenheft: Nationalsozialismus in Heidelberg (2010) 206:5*, UNiMUT: *Zeitschrift an der Uni Heidelberg*, available online at: unimut.fsk.uni-heidelberg.de/unimut/pdfarch/um206.pdf; for a more general account on historians and Nazi Germany, see also Rüdiger Hohls/Konrad Jarausch (eds.): *Versäumte Fragen: deutsche Historiker im Schatten des Nationalsozialismus*, Stuttgart 2000; Max Weinrich: *Hitler's Professors: The Part of Scholarship in Germany's Crimes against the Jewish People*, Yale 1999 [1946].

38 Steven P. Remy: *The Heidelberg Myth*; Gerhard Ritter: *Der deutsche Professor im Dritten Reich*, in: *Die Gegenwart* 1:1 (1945), p. 23.

era.³⁹ 1945 did not signify a zero hour in German academic culture”, as Remy noted, but “marked the beginning of a series of partial and modified restorations”.⁴⁰ After the downfall of the Third Reich, universities, like churches, were presented as unburdened by the Nazi guilt. Some professors had been arrested, and immediate efforts were taken to locate those, who were not considered as Nazis.⁴¹ A group of academics then met at the home of Karl Jaspers to plan the reconstruction of the university, which reopened in January 1946. Remy observed that most members of Jaspers’ group were born in the 1870s and 1880s. This Wilhelminian generation would have remained suspicious of the new liberal values imported from the West after the Second World War and wished for a neutral, unified nation.⁴² Many Heidelberg professors then tried to justify their Nazi membership and the content of their lectures and publications, drawing a distinction between active and passive party members.⁴³ Jaspers himself spoke of “fellow travellers” and developed different categories of guilt.⁴⁴ Interestingly, Alexander Mitscherlich also belonged to the early core of Jasper’s group. He confronted himself with the details of Nazi crimes during the Nuremberg Doctor’s Trial in 1946, where he documented the cases.⁴⁵ It would take him another twenty years to publish a work with his wife, Margarete, in which they argued that, after the breakdown of the Nazi state, West Germans had suffered a form of collective mental illness from suppressing their memories, and begun to imagine themselves as Hitler’s victims.⁴⁶

- 39 Steven P. Remy: *The Heidelberg Myth*, p. 217; Jürgen C Heß/ Hartmut Lehmann/ Volker Sellin (eds.): *Heidelberg 1945, in Verbindung mit Detlef C. Junker/Eike Wolgast*, Stuttgart 1996.
- 40 Steven P. Remy: *The Heidelberg Myth*, p. 116; Bernd Weisbrod (ed.): *Akademische Vergangenheitspolitik*, Göttingen 2002, pp. 11–35.
- 41 Steven P. Remy: *The Heidelberg Myth*, p. 118; Bernd Weisbrod: *Das Moratorium der Mandarine: Zur Selbstentnazifizierung der Wissenschaften in der Nazikriegszeit*, in: Hartmut Lehmann/Otto Gerhard Oexle (eds.): *Nationalsozialismus in den Kulturwissenschaften: Leitbegriffe, Deutungsmuster, Paradigmenkämpfe, Erfahrungen und Transformationen im Exil*, vol. II, Göttingen 2004), p. 246; for an English version see, Bernd Weisbrod: *The Moratorium of the Mandarins and the Self-Denazification of German Academe: A View from Göttingen*, in: *Contemporary European History* 12 (2003), p. 47.
- 42 Steven P. Remy: *The Heidelberg Myth*, pp. 119–120.
- 43 *Ibid.*, p. 146.
- 44 See Karl Jaspers: *Die Schuldfrage*, Heidelberg 1946.
- 45 See A. Dirk Moses: *German Intellectuals and the Nazi Past*, Cambridge 2009; Alexander Mitscherlich/Fred Mielke: *Das Diktat der Menschenverachtung: Der Nürnberger Ärzteprozeß und seine Quellen: Eine Dokumentation*, Heidelberg 1947.
- 46 Margarete and Alexander Mitscherlich: *The Inability to Mourn: Principles of Collective Behavior*, New York 1967; see also Tobias Freimüller: *Alexander Mitscherlich: Gesellschaftsdiagnosen und Psychoanalyse nach Hitler*, Göttingen 2007.

Kohl first aimed at a career as a lawyer, but quickly realised that this was not his main academic interest.⁴⁷ He opted for a major in History and minor subjects in Public Law and Political Science. Instead of finishing his undergraduate degree, he went directly into his doctorate. In his memoirs, Kohl portrayed himself as a student with very broad interests, taught by an intelligentsia of diverse backgrounds, all committed to the Federal Republican project. Kohl remembered the teaching of sociologist and economist, Alexander Rüstow, whose theories influenced the idea of the social market economy, and who would have impressed him the most at the beginning of his studies.⁴⁸ He later also listened to the economist, Erich Preiser, who he saw as a mastermind of this economic system. He read the studies of the conservative psychologist Willy Hellpach, and he visited the seminars of the medical scientist, Viktor von Weizsäcker. Kohl found Hans von Eckhardt to have “great entertainment value”, and he informed himself about Soviet politics at the empty seminars of Waldemar Gurians. He also liked the classes of the Francophile Swiss historian, Rudolf von Albertini, who invited the students to his home for some pasta.⁴⁹ The former Nazi, Erich Maschke, taught him modern history and the former *émigré*, Alexander von Rüstow, introduced him to economic history and neoliberal theory. He learned political science from Theodor Eschenburg, a national-conservative, and also from Arnold Bergstraesser, who had gone into exile because of his Jewish decent. Alfred Weber, who had left his position at Heidelberg in protest against the Nazi government, was also one of Kohl's lecturers.

Kohl's higher education took place in an atmosphere of reconstruction and rejuvenation. In the *Curriculum Vitae* attached to his dissertation, Kohl listed 6 teachers, who he felt were most influential during his time at Heidelberg. Among the four historians were *Doktorvater* Fuchs, Fritz Ernst, Johannes Kühn, and Werner Conze. In addition, Kohl mentioned the political scientist, Dolf Sternberger, and the lawyer, Walter Jellinek.⁵⁰ Jellinek (1885–1995) was an expert on administrative law and international law. He held the chair in public law at Heidelberg from 1929 until he was dismissed because of his Jewish background.⁵¹ Sternberger (1907–1989), who would later coin the concept of *Verfassungspatriotismus* (constitutional patriotism), was

47 See Kohl's Curriculum Vitae attached to his PhD thesis: Helmut Kohl: Die politische Entwicklung in der Pfalz und das Wiedererstehen der Parteien nach 1945 (PhD Thesis in History submitted to the University of Heidelberg 1958), unpublished, Bibliothek des Niedersächsischen Landtags.

48 Helmut Kohl: *Erinnerungen*, vol. I, p. 83.

49 *Ibid.*, pp. 83–84.

50 Helmut Kohl: *Die politische Entwicklung in der Pfalz*.

51 *Juristische Rundschau*: Walter Jellinek zum Gedächtnis, 10 January 1955, p. 373; Hans Klein: Jellinek, Walter, in: *Neue Deutsche Biographie* 10 (1974), pp. 394, 394–395, available online at: http://www.deutsche-biographie.de/artikelNDB_pnd118711997.html (accessed 29 November 2010).

married to a Jewish woman. The liberal journalist was banned from his occupation in 1943. In 1947, he was appointed as co-founder of the new discipline of Political Science at Heidelberg. Until 1948, he edited *Die Wandlung*, a journal which aimed at the intellectual and moral renewal of German society.⁵²

In 1957, Kohl was accepted into the seminar of Sternberger, who employed him at the Alfred-Weber-Institute as a research assistant. Kohl teased Sternberger's group by calling them a "red bunch of assistants".⁵³ However, Sternberger's assistant, Bernhard Vogel, was also part of this group. Vogel would later become a high-ranking Christian Democrat.⁵⁴ Sternberger himself represented a new form of conservatism, as he later wrote in reaction to the changes brought about with 1968: "constitutional conservatism, rights conservatism, freedom conservatism, even state conservatism" are acceptable, only nation-conservatism should be excluded from the political culture of Federal Republic.⁵⁵ Sternberger, in contrast to Habermas (who popularised Sternberger's idea of *Verfassungspatriotismus*), had never turned away from the prospect of (re)unification.⁵⁶ Kohl contributed to Sternberger's research on candidates for the following Bundestag elections.⁵⁷ Kohl's focus, however, was limited to the liberal and conservative politicians in the state of Rhineland-Palatinate. Erwin Faul, who worked with Kohl on the research project, explained: "within the conflict between the scientific quest for illumination and the reason of his party, Kohl would have thoroughly decided in favour of the latter one".⁵⁸ As with his PhD, this work in political science was of quasi autobiographical character. Kohl described the surroundings of his *Heimat*, where the young politician knew many of the subjects of his thesis.⁵⁹ Sternberger introduced the work of his students as homage to representative democracy: "the great

52 For the history of this journal see Monika Waldmüller: *Die Wandlung: Eine Monatsschrift*, published by Dolf Sternberger/Karl Jaspers/Werner Krauss/Alfred Weber, Marbach a. N. 1988.

53 Rupert Breitling: *Im Seminar*, in: Werner Filmer/Heribert Schwan: *Helmut Kohl*, Düsseldorf/Wien 1985, S- 67.

54 Helmut Kohl, *Erinnerungen*, vol. I, p. 101.

55 Dolf Sternberger: *Darf man heute konservativ sein?*, in: *FAZ*, 7 October 1970.

56 Stefan Berger: *The Search for Normality: National Identity and Historical Consciousness in Germany since 1800*, Oxford/New York 2007, p. 83.

57 Karlheinz Kaufmann et al.: *Die Auswahl der Bundestags-Kandidaten 1957 in zwei Bundesländern*, in: Dolf Sternberger (ed.): *Politische Forschungen*, vol. II, Cologne 1961.

58 Erwin Faul: *Heidelberger Jahre*, in: Werner Filmer/Heribert Schwan: *Helmut Kohl*, pp. 68–73, 70.

59 For a discussion of Kohl's concept of *Heimat*, see Christian Wicke: *A Romantic Nationalist?: Helmut Kohl's Ethnocultural Representation of his Nation and Himself*, in: *Nationalism and Ethnic Politics* 19:2 (2013), pp. 141–162.

masses are powerless to propose, but powerful to decide. However, because of their great number they were unable to decide quickly, the authority to propose needs to elude the masses. That is why they need parties.”⁶⁰

Kohl expressed commitment to this ideal in his dissertation on the (re)formation of political parties. In his dissertation he defended the choice of his topic: “because in a representative democracy, the fortune of a whole people depends greatly on the quality and character of individual parties”.⁶¹ While the political scientist, Sternberger, and law lecturer, Jellinek, can be regarded as “unburdened”, the historians had all engaged with the Nazis to varying degrees. None of them were self-critical about their role before 1945, as Eike Wolgast noted.⁶² Ernst (1905–1963) was a member of the SA and of the *NS-Dozentenbund*. He replaced Franz in 1937.⁶³ Ernst had been the co-director of the Frankish-Palatine Institute for *Westforschung*. One could regard him as an extremely right-wing conservative, who accepted the Nazi rule, without being a “thoroughbred” Nazi himself.⁶⁴ After the War, Ernst became prorector at Heidelberg. He remained conservative, remarkably nationalist, though at the same time anglophile.⁶⁵ In 1960, he admitted that Heidelberg University had enjoyed special protection by the Nazis but rejected Heidelberg’s reputation “to be the most radical university in the sense of the Nazi party”. This image, according to Ernst, was “by no account in accordance with its interior”.⁶⁶ This historian sought to relativise the collaboration and improve the stigmatised image of his workplace as a Nazi stronghold.

Conze (1910–1986), one of the most controversial historians in the Federal Republic, came to Heidelberg in 1957. During the Nazi era, he worked in the fields of *Volksgeschichte*, emerging in the 1920s and 1930s, the so-called *Ostforschung* (that is research on ethnic Germans in Central and Eastern Europe) and *Volks- und Kulturbodenforschung* (geopolitical research on German ethnicity). Conze proposed the reorganisation of Polish agrarian society, including the purging of Jews from towns and cities. He was also an enthusiastic soldier in the Second World War. After the

60 Dolf Sternberger: *Begriff des Politischen*, Frankfurt a.M. 1961, p. 49.

61 Helmut Kohl: *Die politische Entwicklung in der Pfalz*, p. 161.

62 Eike Wolgast: *Geschichtswissenschaft in Heidelberg 1933–1945*, in: Hartmut Lehmann/Otto Gerhard Oexle (eds.): *Nationalsozialismus in den Kulturwissenschaften*, p. 168.

63 For a very concise outline of Franz’s ideology see Wolfgang Behringer: *Bauern Franz/Rasse-Günther: Die politische Geschichte des Agrarhistorikers Günther Franz (1902–1992)*, in: Winfried Schulze/Otto G. Oexle (eds.): *Deutsche Historiker im Nationalsozialismus*, Frankfurt a.M. 2000, pp. 114–141.

64 Steven P. Remy: *The Heidelberg Myth*, pp. 69–70.

65 Eike Wolgast: *Geschichtswissenschaft in Heidelberg 1933–1945*, in: Hartmut Lehmann/Otto G. Oexle (eds.): *Nationalsozialismus in den Kulturwissenschaften*, vol. I, p. 165.

66 Fritz Ernst: *Die Wiedereröffnung der Universität Heidelberg 1945–1946: Aus Anlass des 70. Geburtstags von Karl Heinrich Bauer am 26. September*, in: *Heidelberger Jahrbücher* 4 (1960), pp. 1–28.

War, Conze thought that coming to terms with the Nazi past was unnecessary. The academics of the Third Reich reshaped their ideologised approaches in response to the requirements of the new politics. Conze became the co-founder of the Association for Modern Social History (*Arbeitskreis für moderne Sozialgeschichte*).⁶⁷

Kohl's later teacher Kühn (1887–1973) left Saxony for Heidelberg in 1949.⁶⁸ The diaries of Viktor Klemperer, who often met privately with Kühn and his Jewish wife in Dresden, provided revealing insights into the political attitude of his former friend. During personal conversations at the beginning of the Nazi rule, Kühn already expressed anti-Semitic and anti-communist positions, believing in a typically “German character” that should be reflected in the political system. He saw great opportunities for the German *Volk* in Hitler's dictatorship.⁶⁹ Klemperer was disappointed, not only about Kühn's pro-government attitude, but much more because he knew him as a rational historian with a sense of justice.⁷⁰ In 1936, Klemperer was so appalled by a propagandistic article Kühn had written about Frederick the Great that his friendship turned into hostility.⁷¹ Klemperer perceived the writings of his friend to be a betrayal of historical science against Kühn's better knowledge. In 1940, Kühn disclosed his commitment to the Nazi ideology with his writing “about the meaning of the present war”.⁷² In 1947, he published a critique of the Rankian understanding of history. History would not show “how it essentially was”, but celebrate “the marriage between the sources and the creation of the mind”.⁷³ Notwithstanding this (perhaps justified)

67 Steven P. Remy: *The Heidelberg Myth*, pp. 228–30; Ingo Haar: *German Ostforschung and anti-Semitism*, in: Ingo Haar/Michael Fahlbusch: *German Scholars and Ethnic Cleansing: 1919–1945*, Oxford 2005, pp. 1–27; see also Ingo Haar: *Historiker im Nationalsozialismus: Deutsche Geschichtswissenschaft und der „Volkstumskampf“ im Osten*, Göttingen 2000; Jan Eike Dunkhase: *Werner Conze: Ein deutscher Historiker im 20. Jahrhundert*, Göttingen 2010; Thomas Etzemüller: *Sozialgeschichte als politische Geschichte: Werner Conze und die Neuorientierung der westdeutschen Geschichtswissenschaft nach 1945*, München 2001; Götz Aly: *Theodor Schieder, Werner Conze oder die Vorstufen der physischen Vernichtung*, in: Winfried Schulze/Otto G. Oexle: *Deutsche Historiker im Nationalsozialismus*, pp. 172–4, 177–8.

68 Professorenkatalog der Universität Leipzig: Prof. Dr. phil. Johannes Gotthelf Wilhelm Kühn, available online at: http://www.unileipzig.de/unigeschichte/professorenkatalog/leipzig/Kuehn_257/markiere:K%C3%BChn (accessed 15 October 2011).

69 Victor Klemperer: *Die Tagebücher 1933–1945: Kommentierte Gesamtausgabe*, edited by Walter Nowojski with collaboration from Christian Löser, Berlin 2007, pp. 133, 177, 338–9, 369, 450–1.

70 Victor Klemperer: *Die Tagebücher*, pp. 277, 1702.

71 Victor Klemperer: *Die Tagebücher*, pp. 751–2, 1671, 1657–8.

72 Johannes Kühn: *Über den Sinn des gegenwärtigen Krieges* (Schriften zur Geopolitik 19), Heidelberg 1940.

73 Johannes Kühn: *Die Wahrheit der Geschichte und die Gestalt der Wahren Geschichte*, Oberursel 1947, p. 68.

revision of the traditional understanding of history in Germany, opportunists, like Kühn, had a genuine interest in obscuring historical developments. German academics, as much as many capitalists and politicians, carefully sought to avoid any distortion to the process of normalisation, which Kohl would seek to promote throughout his political career.

Kohl felt closely connected to his PhD supervisor.⁷⁴ Laurenz Müller saw in Fuchs a “committed Nazi”.⁷⁵ Fuchs, like Franz, took his doctorate at Marburg under the supervision of the Nazi Wilhelm Mommsen. He then followed Franz, who wanted Fuchs for political reasons to move to Heidelberg. Müller discovered considerable anti-Semitism in their exchange of letters.⁷⁶ He, moreover, mentioned that the *NS-Dozentenbund* at Marburg encouraged Fuchs to work with Franz at Heidelberg.⁷⁷ In his memoirs, Kohl emphasised Fuchs’ important expertise on Ranke: “From my point of view, Leopold von Ranke, the leading historian of the nineteenth century [...] is certainly not outdated”, Kohl asserted.⁷⁸ For the ninetieth birthday of his supervisor, Kohl wrote in 1995 – in contradiction to his usual presentation of national history and unification as being something predestined – that “history is not the consequence of inescapable fate or supposedly historical laws, but the result of the thinking and actions of individuals”.⁷⁹ In this article, Kohl also sought to emphasise that Fuchs’ work went beyond national history, as it still accounted for “the consciousness of a common European heritage”.⁸⁰ Kohl argued that “for us Germans, Europe is a – if not *the* – question of destiny (*Schicksalsfrage*)”.⁸¹ Unified within the West, Germany had eventually found “its place, where it belongs according to its history – on the side of freedom, on the side of those states that want to design the world of the twenty-first

74 Helmut Kohl: *Erinnerungen*, vol. I, p. 106.

75 Laurenz Müller: *Diktatur und Revolution: Reformation und Bauernkrieg in der Geschichtsschreibung des „Dritten Reiches“ und der DDR*, Stuttgart 2004, pp. 127–131, 288–320; see also Michael Stürmer on Walther Peter Fuchs in Jens Hacke/Julia Schäfer/Marcel Steinbach-Reimann: *Interview with Michael Stürmer, Neubeginn und Entwicklung der deutschen Geschichtswissenschaft in den 1950/60er Jahren*, Berlin 25 March 1999, online available at: <http://hsozkult.geschichte.hu-berlin.de/beitrag/intervie/stuermer.htm> (accessed 22 January 2010).

76 Laurenz Müller, *Diktatur und Revolution*, pp. 302–3.

77 Laurenz Müller, *Diktatur und Revolution*, p. 318; Fuchs considered the reformation to have played a greater role in German Peasant War than previously thought. His and Franz Günther’s study was published in 1942, see Walther Peter Fuchs/Günther Franz (eds.): *Akten zur Geschichte des Bauernkrieges in Mitteldeutschland*, Jena 1942.

78 Helmut Kohl: *Erinnerungen*, vol. I, p. 100.

79 Helmut Kohl: *Der lange Atem der Geschichte: Zum neunzigsten Geburtstag des Historikers Walther Peter Fuchs*, in: *FAZ*, 13 March 1995.

80 *Ibid.*

81 *Ibid.*

century in the spirit of human dignity and constitutional democracy”.⁸² *Westforschung* during the Nazi Reich, as once undertaken by Fuchs, however, aimed at a different unification of Europe than envisaged within the Treaty of Maastricht (which Kohl, in turn, presented as in line with the aims of the national movement of Hambach Festival in 1832).⁸³

Fuchs had to get special permission for Kohl to enter his postgraduate degree, because the young politician had failed to take enough courses.⁸⁴ His dissertation was thus carefully monitored.⁸⁵ Kohl collected party documents, got access to private archives and interviewed local politicians. Especially Finck’s collection was especially crucial for his work, but members from other parties also supported him.⁸⁶ This topic had the great advantage that Kohl could network with other politicians during his research.⁸⁷ Fuchs later remembered about the dissertation of his famous student that he had managed to trace back “the guiding ideologies of several leadership groups” to “the Weimar time, pre-war Germany and the Bismarck-Reich”.⁸⁸ Kohl’s thesis was an early attempt to normalise German history, trying to prove that Germany’s liberal political culture was not as new as it seemed: These men and women had largely rejected National Socialism; after the breakdown of the Hitler Regime they took over the heavy responsibility for the reconstruction of their Heimat, coming from the prisons and concentration camps, or from the outer or inner emigration. So the *Landräte*, chief mayors, and mayors in the Palatinate after 1945, were, almost without exception, Weimar members of the Social Democratic Party, Centre or Bavarian Peoples’ Party, the Communist Party, the German Peoples’ Party or the German Democratic Party.⁸⁹

Kohl paid most attention to the Social Democrats and the Christian Democrats. For him, the SPD was then another example of the positive continuities in German history. He emphasised the tradition of this movement that had not ceased to exist under the Nazi regime, and stressed their patriotic attitude: the rejection of collective guilt accusations, the refusal to see the new state as the successor of the Third Reich, and the demand to remove the four zones of occupation.⁹⁰ His own party received even more attention. Kohl stressed Christian legacy, highlighted the permanence of political Catholicism and told the story about Finck’s vicarage. He also claimed there

82 Ibid.

83 Ibid.

84 Walther P. Fuchs: Cum Laude, in: Werner Filmer/Heribert Schwan: Helmut Kohl, pp. 73ff.

85 Jürgen Busche: Helmut Kohl: Anatomie Eines Erfolgs, Berlin 1998, p. 33.

86 Helmut Kohl: Erinnerungen, vol. I, pp. 98–99.

87 Eckhard Henscheid: Helmut Kohl: Biographie einer Jugend, Zurich 1985, p. 126.

88 Walther P. Fuchs: Cum Laude, p. 77.

89 Helmut Kohl, Die politische Entwicklung in der Pfalz, 56.

90 Ibid., pp. 120ff., 132ff.

was a Christian “defence front” in the Third Reich.⁹¹ Among the goals of the CDU were restoring the good reputation and trustworthiness of the German people, the demand for German unity, no systemic de-nazification, and opposition to any form of separatism.⁹² Although Kohl put great emphasis on continuities, he tried to draw his readers’ attention to the immediate post-War atmosphere after the “breakdown”: the feeling of having “escaped by the skin of one’s teeth” and having the unique chance to begin afresh would have been predominant in the post-war climate.⁹³ The underlying argument of his thesis is that West Germany’s political culture was not revolutionary, but quintessentially the historical continuation of what had been artificially suppressed by the Nazis.

Sean Forner recently sought to offer a differentiated picture of post-war intellectual life in the Federal Republic, ranging across different ideological currents. Forner focused on a group of “engaged democrats” who represented a kind of cultural realism, between the cultural pessimism of the Weimar period and the cultural optimism after the Second World War. These democratic intellectuals had, according to Forner, recognised both the dangers and the opportunities in the German representation of culture through a relatively balanced retrospective.⁹⁴ Kohl’s profile, however, fits even better in Dirk Moses’s previously established ideal-typological model in which Kohl’s generation, the 45ers, within their particular cultural as well as geopolitical context, had a consensual answer to the Nazi past: “the Federal Republic as a project of consolidation and reform”.⁹⁵ The members of generation, born approximately between 1918 and 1930, experienced the Nazi state as youngsters and dominated the political culture of the Federal Republic from 1970 to 1998.⁹⁶ They were sandwiched between the Wilhelminian parents, who had been in charge during the Weimar Republic and Nazi Germany, and the 68ers, who would challenge the authority of the forty-fivers and question the legitimacy of the Federal Republic – with which the forty-fivers had so strongly identified. On the dichotomous spectrum of Moses’ model, with the “German Germans” on the one hand and the “non-German Germans” on the other, Kohl’s way of historicising German history would fall under the category of the German Germans who pursued an “integrative republicanism”, which “based the new state on positive cultural and intellectual continuities, whether that of the German

91 *Ibid.*, pp. 77–8.

92 *Ibid.*, pp. 63ff., 77 ff., 88ff.

93 *Ibid.*, p. 80.

94 Sean A. Folmer: Reconsidering the ‘Unpolitical German’: Democratic Renewal and the Politics of Culture in Occupied Germany, in: *German History* 32:1 (2014), pp. 53–78.

95 A. Dirk Moses: German Intellectuals and the Nazi Past, p. 64.

96 A. Dirk Moses: The Forty-Fivers: A Generation Between Fascism and Democracy, in: *German Politics and Society* 17 (1999), pp. 94–126.

cultural nation or liberalism”.⁹⁷ Within this sibling rivalry, Kohl and the German Germans had been opposed to the Habermasian post-national faction, who pursued a “redemptive republicanism” that focussed on the discontinuity in German history.⁹⁸

According to Moses, many history students had then been interested in the causes of what happened between 1933 and 1945, and in ensuring that a repetition of it would be impossible.⁹⁹ Moses also found that the dissertations of the forty-fiver generation criticised the intellectual traditions in Germany.¹⁰⁰ However, Kohl did not demonstrate any interest in historical explanations of how the catastrophe had happened, and rarely expressed any critique of Germany’s political tradition. His PhD was an early attempt to construct an image of normality of his nation, his region and himself. The politician used this case study of the Pfalz, his home region, to contribute to the Federal Republican foundation myth, and to represent a patriotic image of his profession. Kohl’s case would thus demonstrate an example of his generation who were not thoroughly sceptical of German history, but of following the model of their teachers who lectured in a relatively uncontested environment of historical enquiry. – It is worth remembering that the Fischer Controversy did not occur before the early 1960s, when Kohl had already submitted this thesis. Fischer’s then pointed to the aggressive, imperialist tendencies in German society that had triggered the First World War.¹⁰¹ This major attack of the unity of German historiography stood in conflict with Kohl’s belief in the positive continuities in Germany’s political culture.

Because Fuchs was not permitted to conduct Kohl’s entire examination in History, his friend Fritz Ernst helped out; Sternberger examined in Politics; and the former Nazi Ernst Forsthoff in Law. The examiners agreed that Kohl passed with *cum laude*, the third best possible result.¹⁰² Later, however, in the federal government, he would be top of the class for sixteen years, without renouncing the Heidelberg spirit of the 1950s, which had reconciled the “German” and “eternal spirit”.

97 A. Dirk Moses: *German Intellectuals and the Nazi Past*, p. 71.

98 For further discussion of Kohl’s generational representation, see Christian Wicke: *Helmut Kohl’s Quest for Normality*, chapter 3.

99 A. Dirk Moses: *German Intellectuals and the Nazi Past*, p. 57.

100 A. Dirk Moses: *German Intellectuals and the Nazi Past*, p. 66.

101 Konrad H. Jarausch: *Der nationale Tabubruch: Wissenschaft, Öffentlichkeit und Politik in der Fischer-Kontroverse*, in: Martin Sabrow et al. (eds.): *Zeitgeschichte als Streitgeschichte: Große Kontroversen seit 1945*, München 2003.

102 Helmut Kohl: *Erinnerungen*, vol. I; Werner Filmer/Heribert Schwan: *Helmut Kohl*, pp. 61ff., 105; Ernst Forsthoff was the author of *Der Totale Staat*, Hamburg 1933.

Positive History

In May 1966, Kohl – then chairman of the CDU Rhineland-Palatinate – wrote an editorial under the question *Angst vor der Geschichte?* (Fear of History?) for the local newspaper of his hometown.¹⁰³ Kohl reacted against a collective shame, which he saw as a hindrance preventing Germans from finding “a new and lasting national self-image”. He therefore called for Germans to “search for our place in history”. This article represented a rhetoric, which resembled the demand for a national revival of his later chancellorship: the “youth in Germany has a right to rethink the notions of the nation and fatherland and to grant them a place in the life of the *Volk*, or to newly determine this place”. Yet, the “continuity of German history” was the centre of his attention. Kohl had to recognise that one could “not avoid dealing with the time from 1933–1945. It is impossible, yes it would be dishonest, to delete this time from our experience of history”. However, he neither denied the necessity of “what one today embraces with the terrible catchword *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*”. Kohl suggested not only dealing seriously with “the causes and effects of the Third Reich”, which he was in fact reluctant to do more thoroughly, but also with “the democratic tendencies visible before 1933 that became the primary political reality in Germany after 1945”. Ultimately, he was striving for a more relative view of the Nazi past as an accidental episode within the positive history of a normal nation:

We remain Germans in our whole history [...] This past includes images of horror and guilt, like Auschwitz, Buchenwald and Treblinka. But it also includes the men and women of the 20th July, the students of the White Rose in Munich, images such as the Wartburg in Eisenach or the Cathedrals in our country, in Trier, in Worms, in Mainz or Speyer. These are figures and images we do not have to be ashamed of, which were consistent, especially in times of political confusion. We would be bad democrats, if we did not wish to be good patriots and to consider the whole of German history.¹⁰⁴

The 68ers also evoked historical continuities in German society, though – contrary to Kohl – with more negative connotations. For them there was no zero hour; they saw the fascist structures maintained by their parents’ generation. In 1968, Kohl reacted against their agitation in another local editorial: “we have to deal with a generation that [...] criticises their fathers, because they have no sympathy for the fateful involvement during the time of the Third Reich”.¹⁰⁵ He thus asked the youth to show some “stronger

103 Helmut Kohl: *Angst vor der Geschichte?*, in: *Die Rheinpfalz*, 7 May 1966.

104 *Ibid.*

105 Helmut Kohl: *Wie soll es nun weitergehen?*, in: *Die Rheinpfalz*, 22 June 1968.

interest in the personal, familial, and professional situation of their fathers” and to pose the question of whether they had been motivated, not by opportunism, but by “the concern about the security of their family, about the education of their children, who have become so critical”. According to him, one should not forget that some were “seduced” into following the Nazis, even if they had done so with genuine conviction. And, Kohl argued, now “millions of citizens, who are sincerely committed to our democracy, even if they were members of the NSDAP”. He always exonerated himself from suspicion by adding that the notions of collective guilt should be firmly rejected by “those, who could not get enmeshed due to reasons of age”.¹⁰⁶

Five days after Kohl had been elected as federal chairman of the CDU in 1973, he gave a speech in Berlin to celebrate the Day of German Unity in commemoration of the 1953 uprising in the GDR: “do we Germans not have any reason to be proud of these women and men?”¹⁰⁷ By exploiting the Cold War atmosphere, Kohl defended the FRG’s appropriation of these people as national heroes.¹⁰⁸ He criticised those West Germans, who viewed them merely as rebels against the working conditions in the GDR and used the national day to justify the then utopian idea of unification under Federal Republican formulas. He historicised the 1953 uprising as one episode within a series of glorious events, of Germany’s infinite stream of national history. The German nation was undying, and would be utterly freedom-loving: “on 17 June 1953 – only nine years after the [attempt to assassinate Hitler on] 20 July 1944 – Germans stood up once more against thralldom and bondage, risked their lives to win freedom, and fought for a humane life.”¹⁰⁹ Kohl went further back in time and connected 1953 to the national movement of the first half of the nineteenth century: “this spontaneous will for freedom was connected with the demand for the state unity of Germany”.¹¹⁰ Any aversion to this historical truth would threaten “the moral quality of our country”. Nobody should turn the back on the nation’s past, or question the essential moments in national history: “we must not allow for this [...] We have to learn from this development that a *Volk* cannot live without history, that a *Volk* that questions itself loses its identity and cannot find it when it denies its own history”.¹¹¹ By the early

106 Ibid.

107 Helmut Kohl: Der 17. Juni 1953: 20 Jahre Danach, speech delivered at CDU/CSU Event, Berlin-Charlottenburg Sporthalle, Berlin, 17 June 1973, KAS/HK/2/293.

108 Edgar Wolfrum argued that the uprising of the 17 June 1953 initially received much international attention and was increasingly historicised as a national event in the Federal Republic over the following years. See: Edgar Wolfrum: Der 17. Juni 1953 und Europa, 14 June 2013, available online at: <http://www.bpb.de/geschichte/zeitgeschichte/deutschlandarchiv/172185/der-17-juni-1953-und-europa> (accessed 23 September 2013).

109 Helmut Kohl: Der 17. Juni 1953: 20 Jahre Danach.

110 Ibid.

111 Ibid.

1970s, it became apparent that a certain pattern and routine had developed in Kohl's nationalist rhetoric, revealing authoritarian tendencies, in the sense that "one cannot remove oneself from this common history. Who does that [...] removes himself from the solidarity of our *Volk*".¹¹²

Kohl reassured at the assembly of the Danzig expellees that "we will only be able to give an answer to [the German] question [...] when we finally again find a clear relationship with our own history".¹¹³ This answer could not be found by any socialist, because "German history is not a series of class struggles. It is a chain of great achievements, but also terrible aberrations".¹¹⁴ No German was allowed to escape national history: "it is the history of all Germans, the history of the German nation. It unites us, even if we are today divided".¹¹⁵ However, Federal Republican history was the blossom of German history, overshadowing its wilted outgrowth in the East. In celebration of the 25th anniversary of the Basic Law, Kohl recognised that: "twenty-five years in the life and history of a *Volk* are only a brief period".¹¹⁶ Yet, he remarked proudly, "the Federal Republic of Germany has existed almost twice as long as the Weimar Republic and more than twice as long as the so-called Millennial Reich". At this occasion it became once more evident that Kohl's assumption of historical continuity was always something positive, and differed from the notion of a negative *Sonderweg* trajectory. To foster the image of German normality, Kohl insisted that the national history of German democracy was something older than the FRG itself.¹¹⁷ "History", in general, was something predominantly national as well as positive for him, whereas negative exceptions only confirmed this rule: "1918/19, 1933 and 1945 [...] stand for deep slumps within the historical continuity of our *Volk*". And make the positive connection between 1849 and 1949 perfect, he argued:

We know today that the text of the Frankfurt constitution of 1849 accompanied some fathers of the Basic Law within all meetings of the parliamentary council. This attests a piece of the democratic and republican tradition in our country, which in its substance consists of the achievements of a political culture in Germany that developed over centuries.¹¹⁸

112 Ibid.

113 Speech delivered at Tag der Danziger at Rhein-Mosel-Halle in Koblenz, 5 May 1974, KAS/Kohl/Reden, unedited manuscript.

114 Ibid.

115 Ibid.

116 Helmut Kohl: Das Grundgesetz – Verfassung der Freiheit, speech delivered at Frankfurter Paulskirche, Frankfurt a. M., 23 May 1974, in: Peter Hintze/Gerd Langguth (eds.): Helmut Kohl: Der Kurs Der CDU, Reden und Beiträge des Bundesvorsitzenden 1973–1993, Stuttgart 1993, p. 68.

117 Ibid.

118 Ibid.

Towards the end of the decade, when Kohl was asked during a public TV discussion in The Hague about the *Berufsverbot* in the FRG, which sought to ban left-wing public servants, including teachers and professors from their profession, he defended this law by working a politically slanted version of history, blaming communists and Nazis equally for the collapse of the Weimar Republic in 1933. In reply to suggestions from the audience, which recalled that the collapse had also been caused by the CDU's predecessor, the Catholic Centre party, and other conservative forces, Kohl sidestepped the issue by claiming that his party rose from the anti-fascist resistance movement. He also argued that former Nazis had been needed to rebuild West Germany as a bulwark against the Communist regime in the GDR, which he loosely equated to the Third Reich.¹¹⁹ It is noteworthy that Kohl repeated this falsification of history during his first policy statement as Chancellor at the Bundestag.¹²⁰ Kohl thus portrayed the German mainstream of the Weimar period as victims of Nazis and communists, and the contemporary mainstream as equally democratic. Past Nazism was turned into an analogy of past and contemporary communism. This was another method of overhauling history with the aim of representing the German nation as essentially normal, while they were still subject to anomalous constraints.

Nevertheless, Kohl was not able to exclude the important and negative discontinuity of Nazism from his memory selection; the Third Reich was itself an indispensable and national *lieu de memoire*: "the common experience of haughtiness and guilt, of misery and suffering, binds all Germans together and also keeps awake the awareness of their unity".¹²¹

To endow the people with a greater sense of heroism and glorification, however, it was more important to Kohl to highlight the positive examples in history, such as "Graf Stauffenberg and his friends, as well as all those Germans, who risked their life against the tyranny on 20 July 1944 and thereafter". Naturally, only the FRG – and not the GDR – could make a legitimate claim to be the successor of this resistance, as "they did not want to replace the brown dictatorship by another".¹²² Kohl pursued this apologetic historicism further in the introduction to a book by the *Forschungsgemeinschaft 20. Juli e. V.*, which appeared for the 40th anniversary of the 20 July plot. In the introduction he presented the resistance as a mass movement across genders, classes and regions. The Nazi revolution had failed, in Kohl's opinion, because "Hitler did not succeed in dragging the German nation into the abyss of his immorality and cynicism". The

119 Reinhard Appel interviewed Helmut Kohl in The Hague, in: *Bürger fragen, Politiker antworten*, ZDF, 22 February 1974, KAS/HK/SII-2.

120 Helmut Kohl: *Koalition der Mitte: Für eine Politik der Erneuerung* (Policy Statement to the Bundestag, 13 October 1982), in: *Reden 1982–1984*, Bonn 1984, pp. 9–49, 47.

121 Helmut Kohl: *Bericht zur Lage der Nation im geteilten Deutschland* (Report to the Bundestag, 15 March 1984), in: *Reden 1982–1984*, p. 348.

122 Helmut Kohl: *Zur Lage der Nation im geteilten Deutschland*, pp. 348.

resistance of the German nation had “saved the German history from its perversion through the dictator.”¹²³ He warned that nobody in the world should forget that the majority of the Nazi followers in Germany acted within exceptional circumstances.¹²⁴ And irrespective of the large support for Nazism, “the resistance against Hitler belongs to the entire German *Volk*”. History was nothing subjective: “neither must anyone withdraw from the accountability, which history enjoins on the present; nor must anyone deny the gratitude or conceal the gratification for exemplary action and good tradition.”¹²⁵ Stauffenberg’s attempt served as evidence that Germany was not a rogue nation; he had heralded German normality. This date “presented the actual Germany, its patriotic tradition and its values, which from 1933 to 1945 were misused by the National-Socialists in an unimaginable way.”¹²⁶ It stood for “the rehabilitation of the German name in the world and, therefore, for the precondition for a return and reintegration of the German *Volk* into the community of nations.”¹²⁷ Stauffenberg was for Kohl the personification of German normality within an unusual period of disorder.

In Kohl’s historical narrative, the Federal Republican state and the ideology of his party were legitimate outcomes of German history, to which he attributed a certain universality, naturalness, determination and inalienability. However, the generational challenge to his idea of German history did not leave him in peace. As Chancellor, Kohl was still nervous about the lack of historical empathy of his younger contemporaries in West Germany, who had “lost this continuity in history”.¹²⁸ They had failed to understand the essence of the republic, which emerged in opposition to Nazism and communism, “because the older generation had allowed that the experiences of the history of our *Volk* got lost, yes got stolen. Today we pay the piper”. Kohl thus proclaimed that the eighties would be the phase when historical awareness must be reintroduced to the German mind.¹²⁹ West German society should, in his view, remember the great achievement of the difficult but golden age of (re)construction after the downfall of Hitler’s regime. Kohl saw himself as a messenger of this *zeitgeist*, and praised “this great generation of founders of the Federal Republic of Germany [...] the fathers and mothers of the republic”.¹³⁰ He remembered his fascination, which

123 Helmut Kohl: Introduction, in Theodor Heuss et al. (eds.): Gedanken zum 20. Juli 1944, Forschungsgemeinschaft 20. Juli e.V., Mainz 1984, p. 11.

124 Ibid., p. 17.

125 Ibid., p. 12.

126 Ibid., pp. 12–13.

127 Ibid., p. 16.

128 Helmut Kohl: Kontinuität und Fortschritt, speech delivered at Deutscher Bankentag on 2 April 1985, in: BPA (Bundespresseamt) Bulletin, No. 37, p. 314.

129 Ibid.

130 Ibid.

had also led to his dissertation project, “that these men from the first hour believed in the future – and that, although they came from the nothingness, from the zero hour, although they had their back to the wall”.¹³¹

The zero hour, however, stood in Kohl’s version of history not for a total break but a total renewal of Germany’s political culture. “We live within the stream of the history of our country. We cannot cancel what was yesterday and the day before, it lives with us – as a burden, but also as greatness, and at the same time as chance of our *Volk*”, he philosophised at the *Bankentag* in 1985.¹³² He called upon his audience: “let us source some energy from those, who then served as examples [...] [M]aybe something operated during those days, that we overlook too easily in our daily grind, and that is now threatened to be lost.”¹³³ However, Kohl forgot his historical tact in the punch line of his speech, when he mentioned the prayer of Dietrich Bonhoeffer, who had been imprisoned in the Concentration Camp Flossenbürg:¹³⁴ “this man, facing the gallows, was able to feel continuity in himself, to carry it and to communicate it, felt faith in God, and [...] in the future. What was possible in the Concentration Camp Flossenbürg, should also be possible today at the *Bankentag*.”¹³⁵

Unlike those, who saw in Kohl’s rhetorical escapades a lack of historical consciousness, Michael Stürmer, insisted on the historical awareness of his employer and his anticipation of a national revival already prior to his chancellorship.¹³⁶ The conservative historian was employed as Kohl’s advisor since 1980.¹³⁷ This appointment was representative of Kohl’s commitment to stimulate a more positive national identity through relativising negative aspects of history. For Stürmer the nation was the primary reference of modern identity and the nation-state should serve as the foremost reference in historical writing.¹³⁸ And what Kohl had tried to do in politics for decades, his advisor sought to do in academia and the media: promoting a normalisation of German nationalism, encouraging reconciliation with the past, and emphasising that Germany’s national history was older than the Third Reich.¹³⁹ Stürmer, moreover,

131 Ibid.

132 Ibid.

133 Ibid.

134 Ibid.

135 Ibid.

136 Michael Stürmer: Der Enkel Adenauers, in: Werner Filmer/Heribert Schwan: Helmut Kohl, pp. 279–285, 281.

137 Prof. Dr. Michael Stürmer: Historiker im Gespräch mit Dr. Michael Schramm, Bayerischer Rundfunk, Alpha-Forum, 18 March 1999, available online at: www.br-online.de/download/pdf/alpha/s/stuermer.pdf (accessed 29 November 2010).

138 Michael Stürmer: Nationalstaat und Klassengesellschaft im Zeitalter des Bürgers – Ein Versuch, Stuttgart 1981, p. 477.

139 Michael Stürmer: Geschichte in einem Geschichtslosen Land, in: FAZ, 25 April 1986, reprinted in Rudolf Augstein et al. (eds.): *Historikerstreit*, pp. 36–38; Michael Stürmer:

saw history as “a political science”.¹⁴⁰ He knew that every regime has used history to legitimise itself and that historians were able to deconstruct and reproduce political myths.¹⁴¹ Like Kohl, Stürmer feared the acquisition of German history, in particular Prussian history, by the GDR and recommended East Berlin's *Geschichtspolitik* as an example for the West German officials.¹⁴² Stürmer's method of relativising the past, moreover, was principally based on his assumption of Germany's geopolitical position between East and West (*Mittellage*), which had exposed the nation inescapably to its historical trajectory.¹⁴³ He, therefore, shared some of Kohl's obsession of reinforcing that “no German *Sonderweg* can emerge out of our country in the middle of Europe.”¹⁴⁴ Eventually, Kohl must have made Stürmer very happy: Stürmer was certain that the future power-holders in a “land without history” were the ones who “fill the memory, coin concept and determine the content of history”. Those in power would be the ones who “give history to the land” and help people out of their “loss of orientation” and “search for identity”.¹⁴⁵ Kohl saw himself exactly in the role to fulfil his duty.

Kohl presented himself as incarnation of German normality, the late-born son of innocent Catholic parents in the Palatinate, who could radiate his national pride, without being associated with the alleged *Sonderweg* traditions. This representation, however, caused concern when it was commuted as national self-absolution. Kohl's first great *éclat* as Chancellor occurred during his travel to Israel in early 1984, when he conflated his personal myth with the symbolisation of a blameless German nation as a whole. Kohl's infamous proclamation of the *Gnade der späten Geburt* (grace of late birth) at the Knesset then made his desire to personify normality most apparent.¹⁴⁶ Kohl staged his own life as an ideal reflection of Germany's recent history. He portrayed

Was Geschichte wiegt, in: FAZ, 26 November 1986, reprinted in Rudolf Augstein et al. (eds.): *Historikerstreit*, pp. 293–296.

140 Jens Hacke/Julia Schäfer/Marcel Steinbach-Reimann: Interview with Michael Stürmer, *Neubeginn und Entwicklung der deutschen Geschichtswissenschaft in den 1950/60er Jahren*, Berlin, 25 March 1999, available online at: <http://hsozkult.geschichte.hu-berlin.de/beitrag/intervie/stuermer.htm> (accessed 29 November 2010).

141 Jens Hacke/Julia Schäfer/Marcel Steinbach-Reimann: Interview with Michael Stürmer.

142 Michael Stürmer: *Preußens Erbe an die deutsche Geschichte*, in: FAZ, 14 October 1981; Stefan Berger: *The Search for Normality*, pp. 87, 94.

143 Michael Stürmer: *Die Grenzen der Macht: Begegnung der Deutschen mit der Geschichte*, Berlin 1992.

144 Helmut Kohl: *Zur Lage der Nation im geteilten Deutschland*, p. 358.

145 Michael Stürmer: *Geschichte in einem Geschichtslosen Land*, reprinted in Rudolf Augstein et al. (eds.): *Historikerstreit*, pp. 36–38.

146 The notion of *Gnade der späten Geburt* was developed by Günter Gaus and initially had a different meaning, see *Der Spiegel: Verschwiegene Enteignung: Wer erfand die Wendung von der “Gnade der späten Geburt”?*, 15 September, 1986; Helmut Kohl: *Besuch in der Knesset*, in: *BPA Bulletin* 13, 25 January 1984, p. 112; Kohl used the concept of “grace of late birth” a long time before he caused this controversy, see Klaus Harpprecht: *Klaus*

his generation as victims of the Nazi era, too young to be guilty. In an attempt to represent “new Germany”, and a “normalisation” of relationship between the FRG and Israel, he enacted the impression that he felt justifiably free from any feelings of guilt. His own biography was intended to serve as an example that notions of collective guilt were invalid: “I speak as someone who could not become guilty in the Nazi-time, because he enjoyed the *Gnade der späten Geburt* and the good fortune to come from a special parental home.”¹⁴⁷

This idea was not new: already in 1970, he introduced himself as “someone who was born too late to sin”.¹⁴⁸ Also Frank Hermann’s early propagandistic biography for Kohl’s first candidature as Chancellor in 1976 stressed his generational belonging, assuring that it would not have been the suppression, but the conscious remembrance that turned his cohort into a “Sceptical Generation”.¹⁴⁹ Hermann confirmed Kohl’s self-image of someone, who had the fortune to be born late enough “to not to be directly involved into the Hitlerian war machinery, but also old enough, to grasp the context of the devilish automatics”.¹⁵⁰ But as the major German representative in the world, such statement would be liable to much greater domestic and international outcries than in his previous roles, which had lacked this degree of representation. It is, however, surprising, that the ethnic nationalist aspect of Kohl’s controversial speech at the Knesset attracted comparatively little attention, as he stated, perhaps somewhat cryptically: “one cannot secede. One carries the blood of the family and genes. Everything also flows into the later generation. Therefore, it is clear that one confronts the history here.”¹⁵¹

Kohl was also criticised at this time for travelling with the controversial Austrian author Kurt Ziesel (b. 1911). Ziesel had joined the Nazi movement in 1931, and worked as a journalist for the *Völkischer Beobachter* and as a propagandistic poet.¹⁵² Kohl defended Ziesel in referring to the fact that Ziesel, as chairman of the *Deutschland-Stiftung*, had awarded the *Konrad-Adenauer-Preis* to Kohl’s friend Axel Springer for his special achievement in German-Jewish relations.¹⁵³ To maintain the image of normality,

Harprecht im Gespräch mit Dr. Helmut Kohl, Ministerpräsident von Rheinland-Pfalz, interview with Helmut Kohl, ZDF Dialog, BPA press review, 23 April 1970.

147 Helmut Kohl: Besuch in der Knesset.

148 See Helmut Kohl: Klaus Harprecht im Gespräch mit Dr. Helmut Kohl.

149 Frank Hermann: Helmut Kohl: Vom Kurfürst zum Kanzler: Person, Politik, Programm, Stuttgart 1976, pp. 47–51.

150 Hermann: Helmut Kohl, p. 47.

151 Helmut Kohl: Besuch in der Knesset.

152 Jürgen Hillesheim/Elisabeth Michael (eds.): Lexikon nationalsozialistischer Dichter: Biographien, Analysen, Bibliographien, Würzburg 1993, pp. 465–474.

153 Deutsche Presse-Agentur: Kohl wirft SPD wegen Kritik an Ziesel-Mitreise Heuchelei vor, 9 February 1984.

Kohl told Federal Republican history like a Parable of the Prodigal Son: former Nazis were rehabilitated as good, liberal citizens. Yet, Kohl substantially lost credibility in Israel.¹⁵⁴ He would spend the rest of his political life justifying his message:

How I was defamed for the sentence of the 'Grace of late Birth'! They twisted my words. This sentence had then raised cheers in the Knesset. What does it say? With a few words: the one, like me, who was at the beginning of the Nazi dictatorship three and by the end of the War fifteen years old, was still too young to get enmeshed in guilt, but already old enough to experience and observe the dread of the dictatorship and the misery of the war. My own memory of such events goes back until the years 1938/39. The conversations of my parents about the *Kristallnacht* I have in vague memory – I then felt that there is something terrible happening.¹⁵⁵

Beyond his permanent fear of damaging the *Westbindung*, Kohl suffered from a national inferiority complex, which further instigated him to stage himself internationally as the embodied normality. Kohl was thus disappointed when his government failed to convince the Western Allies to issue an invitation to the fortieth D-Day ceremonies in Normandy in June 1984. As compensation Mitterrand agreed to meet Kohl at the battlefields of Verdun. Mitterrand explained on TV that this was an attempt “to fix historical memory” as “Europe cannot be made without a good Franco-German accord.”¹⁵⁶ The resulting image of Kohl and Mitterrand joining hands, this emotional gesture of reconciliation, can be counted as one of the high points in Kohl's chancellorship. Through joint remembrance, Kohl and Mitterrand honoured the soldiers killed on both sides, irrespective of their roles as victims or offenders. They issued a joint declaration at Verdun, which stated that both countries had learned their lesson from history, Europe would be their common cultural home, and both nations had become friends.¹⁵⁷

154 Der Spiegel: Kohl hat in Israel Glaubwürdigkeit verloren, 13 February 1984, pp. 7, 13.

155 “Ich stelle mich in eine Ecke, wo man gar nicht bemerkt wird: Wider den linken Neo-Wilhelminismus oder vom Segen der Diskretion: Christdemokratische Kulturpolitik zieht der glanzvollen Geste die sachliche Arbeit vor”, in: FAZ: Ein Gespräch mit Helmut Kohl, 17 September 1998; see also Helmut Kohl: Erinnerungen, vol. I, p. 22, 43–45.

156 Stanley Meisler: Mitterrand, Kohl Join in Commemoration of Battle of Verdun, in: International Herald Tribune, 24 November 1984.

157 BPA Bulletin 108: Ein Zeichen des Friedens im Geist der Brüderlichkeit: Gemeinsame Erklärung des Bundeskanzlers und des französischen Staatspräsidenten in Verdun, 25 September 1985, p. 953.

Kohl subsequently planned another “Verdun” with the US President, Ronald Reagan, at the Kolmeshöhe military cemetery near Bitburg.¹⁵⁸ The US government supported Kohl’s quest for normality, which for both, Reagan and Kohl, involved Germany’s unconditional Westernisation.¹⁵⁹ This time, however, Kohl’s vision suffered a setback when it transpired that forty-nine SS Soldiers were buried at this garden of remembrance. This controversial event is well documented. Reagan’s “visit was intended symbolically to wipe away the last moral residues of probation under which the Federal Republic still labored”, as Charles Maier critically put it.¹⁶⁰ On 18 April, the US President stated at a press conference: “those young men are victims of Nazism also [...] They were victims, just as surely as the victims of the concentration camps”.¹⁶¹ When they visited the military cemetery Kohl thanked Reagan to join him in paying “homage to all victims of war and tyranny, to the dead and persecuted of all nations” and for turning Bitburg into “as symbol of reconciliation and of German-American friendship”.¹⁶² At the US airbase near Bitburg, Reagan confirmed the friendship, stating that the Third Reich was “one man’s totalitarian dictatorship” and sustained Kohl’s portrayal of the Germans as victims: “we can mourn the German war dead today as human beings, crushed by a vicious ideology”.¹⁶³ One should “walk out of that shadow” of the past.¹⁶⁴

In his famous speech at the Bundestag on 8 May 1985, the West German President, Richard von Weizsäcker (CDU), sought to compensate for Kohl’s insufficient “historical tact” that had then been perceived as result of the public controversies concerning his *Geschichtspolitik*. Weizsäcker emphasised the meaning of the 8th of May as the day when the Germans were liberated from the Nazis, defined Hitler as major evil, praised the German resistance, and concealed the fact that the conservative elite wanted Hit-

158 Geoffrey H. Hartman (ed.): *Bitburg in Moral and Political Perspective*, Bloomington 1986, see also Richard J. Jensen: *Reagan at Bergen-Belsen and Bitburg*, Texas 2007.

159 US Ambassador Richard Burt spoke about this matter at the German-American historical conference in Nuremberg on 23 May 1986 under the title “Jenseits der Stunde Null: Die Schaffung einer staatsbürgerlichen Kultur im Nachkriegsdeutschland“, cited in Hans Mommsen: *Suche nach der “verlorenen Geschichte”?* *Bemerkungen zum historischen Selbstverständnis der Bundesrepublik*, *Mercur*, in Rudolf Augstein et al. (eds.): *Historikerstreit*, pp. 156–173, 167.

160 Charles S. Maier: *The Unmasterable Past: History, Holocaust, and German National Identity*, Cambridge 1988, p. 10.

161 Richard J. Jensen: *Reagan at Bergen-Belsen and Bitburg*, p. 62

162 Address by Chancellor Helmut Kohl to German and American Soldiers at Bitburg on the 5 May 1985, in: Geoffrey H. Hartman (ed.): *Bitburg in Moral and Political Perspective*, pp. 256–7.

163 Remarks of President Reagan at Bitburg Air Base on the 5 May 1985, in: Geoffrey H. Hartman (ed.): *Bitburg in Moral and Political Perspective*, pp. 258–259.

164 *Ibid.*, pp. 260–261.

ler's coming to power.¹⁶⁵ Weizsäcker's speech was well received internationally, though it did not fundamentally differ from Kohl's message at Bergen-Belsen two and a half weeks before: Kohl had already instrumentalised the commemoration of the liberation of Bergen-Belsen, on 21 April 1985, in an attempt to appease the wave of critique crashing against his revisionist tendencies before his visit to the camp with Reagan. Kohl then deviated from the demand to bring the debates about German guilt to a final close (*Schlußstrich*).¹⁶⁶ Such an end was envisaged shortly after by Ernst Nolte in his article about "the past, that won't go away".¹⁶⁷ As Kohl argued that "totalitarianism, as it had asserted itself after 30 January 1933, is not an unrepeatable lapse, not an accident in history", he was in conflict with previous attempts to represent German history as something overly positive.¹⁶⁸ Kohl concluded this speech by quoting the rabbi Bal Shem Tov: "in remembrance lies the secret of redemption",¹⁶⁹ and he thanked the Americans for "liberating Europe and ultimately the Germans too, from Hitler's tyranny".¹⁷⁰

In April 1986, Kohl contributed to the persistence of the negative memory on the Bitburg controversy when he supported his "old personal friend", Kurt Waldheim, during the Austrian federal election.¹⁷¹ The World Jewish Congress had accused Waldheim of being a confidant and accomplice of the Nazi crimes in the Balkans – this left Kohl unmoved. Kohl called Waldheim "a great patriot," valued his "achievements for the civilised world" and encouraged the Austrians to vote for him.¹⁷²

165 Der Spiegel: 8. Mai war eine Befreiung, 8 May 2005, available online at: <http://www.spiegel.de/politik/deutschland/0,1518,354568,00.html> (accessed 29 November 2010); for an English translation see Richard von Weizsäcker [President of the Federal Republic of Germany]: Speech delivered at the Ceremony Commemorating the 40th Anniversary of the End of the War in Europe and of National Socialist Tyranny in the Deutsche Bundestag, Berlin, 8 May 1985, in: Geoffrey H. Hartman (ed.): *Bitburg in Moral and Political Perspective*, pp. 262–273; see also Peter Reichel: *Politik mit der Erinnerung: Gedächtnisorte im Streit um die nationalsozialistische Vergangenheit*, revised edition, Frankfurt a.M. 1995, pp. 247–254.

166 Helmut Kohl: *Das Geheimnis der Erlösung heißt Erinnerung*, 21 April 1985, in: Helmut Kohl: *Die Unentrinnbare Gegenwart der Geschichte*, Bonn 1988.

167 Ernst Nolte: *Die Vergangenheit, die nicht vergehen will*, in: FAZ, 6 June 1986, reprinted in Rudolf Augstein et al. (eds.): *Historikerstreit*, pp. 39–47.

168 Helmut Kohl: *Das Geheimnis der Erlösung heißt Erinnerung*, p. 14.

169 *Ibid.*, p. 18.

170 Address by Chancellor Helmut Kohl to President Reagan during the Visit to the Former Concentration Camp at Bergen-Belsen the 5 May 1985, in: Geoffrey H. Hartman (ed.): *Bitburg in Moral and Political Perspective*, p. 252.

171 Harry Schleicher: Kohl macht sich für Waldheim stark: Empörung in Israel und Österreich, in: *Frankfurter Rundschau*, 28 April 1986.

172 Deutsche Presse-Agentur: Scharfe Kritik an Kohls Äusserungen im österreichischen Wahlkampf, 27 April 1986.

In terms of foreign policy, the kind of relativisation of the past Kohl had pursued in The Hague caused again significant repercussions in October 1986, when he compared Gorbachev with the Nazi propaganda minister Goebbels. In this interview with the US magazine *Newsweek*, Kohl severely insulted the Soviet government in the *Newsweek* interview, when he frankly gossiped about his future friend, Gorbachev: "I'm not a fool. I don't consider him to be a liberal. He is a modern communist leader, who understands public relations. Goebbels, one of those responsible for the crimes of the Hitler era, was an expert in public relations, too." Moscow expected an apology and froze important diplomatic relations.¹⁷³ Interestingly, Kohl then drew another correct, but somewhat bizarre parallel in history, when he assured the *Newsweek* reporters that more people had voted for him than for Hitler.¹⁷⁴ (It was only in July 1989 that Kohl explicitly admitted on French television that his comparison between Goebbels and Gorbachev was a "mistake".¹⁷⁵)

Despite all criticism, Kohl caused a similar row in 1987. The Moscow government had then already frozen important contacts with Bonn over Kohl's Gorbachev-Goebbels gaffe. Kohl, however, decided to further pursue his historical relativism during an election campaign in Dortmund, accusing the GDR of keeping "more than 2000 German compatriots as political prisoners in prisons and concentration camps".¹⁷⁶ While there were indeed a large number of political prisoners in the GDR, journalists speculated whether this inappropriate terminological comparison would have been another slip, or was actually intended by the educated historian.¹⁷⁷ Kohl reacted to these negative responses at rally in Kiel a few days later: he referred to the human rights violations of in the East Bloc and assured the West German electorate that his "party would never accept that one speaks of normality in the middle of Germany, where there is none. We are miles away from normality as long as people, who try to move from one part of Germany to the other, get shot".¹⁷⁸

Kohl's historicism was no "slip". His way of historicising the German past has been evident since the submission of his PhD at the age of twenty-eight. Kohl has never just aimed at a "healthy" national identity per se. His historicism was also highly ideologised. He aimed, unsuccessfully in this instance, at legitimising a particular notion of German history, his own power base and his (auto)biographical image normality,

173 BPA: Nachrichtenspiegel/Inland II (press review), 3 November 1986.

174 Der Spiegel: Ich bin von mehr Leuten gewählt worden als Hitler, 10 November 1986.

175 Deutsche Presse-Agentur: Kohl: Goebbels-Vergleich war ein Irrtum, 6 July 1989.

176 Joachim Westhoff: Kohl: Die DDR hält Landsleute in KZ gefangen, in: Westfälische Rundschau, 5 January 1987; John England: Kohl Stirs New Row With Concentration Camp Jibe at East, in: The Times, 6 January 1987.

177 Hannoversche Allgemeine Zeitung: Entgleisung, 6 January 1987.

178 Deutsche Presse-Agentur: Kohl spricht von "unsinnigem und unseligem Regime" in der DDR, 10 January 1987.

flanked by Nazism and communism. Kohl's crude comparison was thus a conscious attack against the GDR. It was part of his liberal nationalist quest for normality, which sought to distinguish the Federal Republican keynote from any un-German variation on the national concord.

After the (re)unification, Kohl visited Buchenwald in June 1991, which had by then turned into two sites of commemoration, one for the victims of Nazism and one for the victims of the Soviet Special Camp Number 2, which operated from 1945 to 1950. This place was ideal for Kohl's memory regime: Kohl dedicated six wooden crosses to the victims of the "communist terror dictatorship", while at the same time commemorating the victims of the Nazi concentration camp.¹⁷⁹ With the dissolution of the GDR, Germany's totalitarian past doubled. The culture of "coming to terms" with the Nazi past was supplemented with the new "coming to terms" with the Stasi past, which became the foundation myth of the Berlin Republic.¹⁸⁰ On 17 June 1996, Kohl acted as co-founder of the Bürgerbüro Berlin e.V., which sought to account for the dictatorial GDR past.¹⁸¹ Prominent historians, like Hans-Ulrich Wehler and Heinrich A. Winkler, who had been concerned with the conservative quest for Germany's exoneration from the Nazi burden in the 1980s, have subsequently become worried about a decline of public memory of the GDR's illegitimacy.¹⁸² Sabine Moller's study about Kohl's *Geschichtspolitik* well demonstrated that the effects of Kohl's efforts in the 1980s to blur the lines in the victim-offender assessment of the Nazi era did not come to a halt with Germany's (re)unification.¹⁸³ Nonetheless, Stephen Brockmann, who posed the question as to whether Kohl's "vision of normalization" had been realised,

179 Siobhan Kattago: Ambiguous Memory, p. 126; Peter Monteath: Buchenwald Revisited: Rewriting the History of a Concentration Camp, in: International History Review 16 (1994), p. 267.

180 Jürgen Habermas: Die Normalität einer Berliner Republik, Frankfurt a. M. 1995.

181 Information accessible on the homepage of this organisation Bürgerbüro e.V., at: <http://www.buergerbuero-berlin.de/> (accessed 29 November 2010).

182 Florian Gathmann: Von einem Schlusstrich kann keine Rede sein, interview with Hans-Ulrich Wehler, in: Der Spiegel, 17 August 2007, available online at: <http://www.spiegel.de/politik/deutschland/0,1518,500046,00.html> (accessed 12 July 2011); Florian Gathmann: Die DDR war vom Anfang bis zum Ende eine Diktatur, interview with Heinrich August Winkler, in: Der Spiegel, 20 May 2009, available online at: <http://www.spiegel.de/politik/deutschland/0,1518,625785,00.html> (accessed 12 July 2011); Hans-Ulrich Wehler: Entsorgung der deutschen Vergangenheit? Ein polemischer Essay zum Historikerstreit, Munich 1988; Heinrich August Winkler: Auf ewig in Hitlers Schatten: Zum Streit des Geschichtsbild der Deutschen, in: Frankfurter Rundschau, 14 November 1986, and in: Augstein, Historikerstreit, pp. 256–263.

183 Sabine Moller: Die Entkonkretisierung der NS-Herrschaft in der Ära Kohl: Die Neue Wache, Das Denkmal für die Ermordeten Juden Europas: Das Haus der Geschichte der Bundesrepublik Deutschland, Hannover 1998.

wrote in 2006: “Since Auschwitz is now generally recognized in the western world, and by Germany itself, as the greatest national crime in human history, it is exceedingly difficult to build a conventional national identity that is based on it.”¹⁸⁴

Kohl’s quest for normality has thus been a utopian undertaking. And still, both his endeavour to relativise the Nazi past and the intervals of its instrumentalisation for political purposes were part of Kohl’s political era, which will continue to occupy scholars of German nationalism.

Conclusion

With respect to historical studies of nationalism, two methodological insights arise from this case: first, biography helps better understand the linkages between socialisation and representation, personally and nationally. Second, biography helps comprehend the linkages between political ideology, visions of the past, and nationalism. Both of them are worth further exploration.

Helmut Kohl’s rise to power was sustained by his continuous utilisation of history for the public representation of his nation and himself. He used history to legitimise his personal nationalism and political ideology, which aimed at a normalisation of national identity in Germany, liberated from the notion that German history had followed an abnormal *Sonderweg* outside of the West. The nation was, in Helmut Kohl’s public speeches and writing, a fixed entity in the stream of history; any degradation of this unit was a-historical, unnatural and an aberration from the universal norm of the modern world. Therefore, Kohl demanded that the Germans should rediscover their “historical consciousness” to be able to realise their actual essence, like other nations in the West had realised theirs. The world and the Germans themselves should finally recognise that German history had been much more positive than generally thought. In order to improve the reputation of his nation and to discourage the Germans in employing an overly critical and post-national idea of Germany, Kohl thus sought to neutralise the memory of Nazism.

In order to encapsulate German history in a new image of German normality, Kohl sought to relativise the Nazi past. This way of historicising German history can be traced back to the key argument of his PhD thesis from 1958, which sought to emphasise positive continuities in Germany’s political culture beyond the *Betriebsunfall* of the Third Reich. The 45ers’ university education was conducted in an atmosphere that floated between sanitising the Nazi past, practical reconstruction, and a renewal of

184 Stephen Brockmann: “Normalization”: Has Helmut Kohl’s Vision Been Realized?, in: Stuart Taberner/Paul Cooke (eds.): *German Culture, Politics, and Literatur Into the Twenty-First Century: Beyond Normalisation*, Woodbridge 2006, p. 21.

the political culture in the Federal Republic. Former Nazis had important functions in not-so-new West German society, including academia, while the Cold War worked like a magic potion for Germans against the potential ideological anomie after the collapse of the Third Reich. Kohl's thesis contributed to the Federal Republican foundation myth, and also to his personal myth. He presented himself as politician, who stood in Germany's liberal traditions, which outweighed – and was clearly distinct from – the Nazi episode. His PhD endowed him with confidence to step onto the political stage as an expert in history, someone who had understood the fate of the Germans.

To counter the image of German peculiarity, he sought to construct and represent a German *Normalweg* of older, democratic traditions, which had been grown since the Hambach Festival and the Paulskirche Parliament, and had blossomed in the Federal Republican constitution. Kohl placed special importance on the zero hour as it legitimised his representation, though he denied the assumption that 1945 constituted a complete break in Germany's national history. The discontinuity of the Third Reich was used to justify the historical continuity of liberal traditions in Germany. Ultimately, in Kohl's interpretation of German history, there were hardly any "real" Nazis except for Hitler and the closer circle surrounding the *Führer*. In this narrative, Germans had always been overall a good people; the millions of Hitler's followers had been merely "seduced"; and those who had subsequently contributed to the morally superior, Federal Republican success story were automatically rehabilitated. The FRG was the primary verification of Germany's affirmative historical course towards the West. The compatriots, especially the youngsters, should not hesitate to be proud of their history, to become familiar with their grand past and thus realise themselves to be a nation. Kohl's own autobiographical representation complied with this idea of Germany. He thought of himself as the paragon of normality, the guiltless German, who had seen the failures of the Nazi Reich and witnessed the transition to Federal Republican superiority.

Kohl's idea of German history was formed in the post-war context of the Cold War, which helped him further relativise Nazism against its totalitarian counterpart, communism. But this method created blockages on the road to normality and brought the historical tact of the educated historian into doubt. Kohl frequently tested the elasticity of the socially acceptable boundaries in the FRG and caused several major scandals, most prominently when he presented all Germans as the victims of Nazism instead of co-offenders. However, although Kohl sought to exonerate the Germans from the burden of the past, he did not reject the basic necessity of an abstract remembering of the historic crimes that were caused "in the name of the Germans". Without this memory, Kohl's quest for normality would have lost its means of existence.

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