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Memory Cultures 2.0: From *Opferkonkurrenz* to Solidarity.

Introduction

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MEMORY CULTURES 2.0: FROM *OPFERKONKURRENZ* TO SOLIDARITY

INTRODUCTION

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The post-war German concept of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* has been contested in recent years. Prompted by appeals for Germany, like Britain and other European nations, to revisit its own colonial past,¹ the question of whether the Holocaust should play a singular role in future memory culture has emerged as one of the most controversial issues in recent debates. Should it retain its unique status in German memory as the country engages with hitherto neglected layers of its colonial history? Why are these histories thought of as binary – even competing – rather than as historically entangled, thereby suggesting a hierarchy of victimhood, an *Opferkonkurrenz*, when it comes to forms of commemoration? What connections are there between colonial atrocities and the Holocaust, and what can the former teach us about the latter? How should the memory landscape change in an increasingly diverse and multicultural society, in which different minoritized groups relate differently – or not at all – to Germany’s past and demand their own forms of commemoration?

I would like to thank the contributors to the round table in this special issue, as well as Christina von Hodenberg, Matthew Vollgraff, Angela Davies, and Jozef van der Voort, for critical comments on previous drafts of this introduction.

¹ Early criticism and activist pressure on Germany to engage with its colonial pasts came from initiatives, collectives, and projects such as Initiative Schwarze Menschen in Deutschland (ISD Bund e.V.), Berlin Postkolonial e.V., Savvy Contemporary, No Humboldt 21!, and Barazani.berlin, where some long-standing activists are still involved in these matters today. See also Helma Lutz and Kathrin Gawarecki (eds.), *Kolonialismus und Erinnerungskultur: Die Kolonialvergangenheit im kollektiven Gedächtnis der deutschen und niederländischen Einwanderungsgesellschaft* (Münster, 2005).

While *Opferkonkurrenz*,² the focus of this special issue, has a long history in the aftermath of the Holocaust, the question of which groups saw themselves as victims at what moment in time is not straightforward. German perpetrators and fellow travellers of the Holocaust, for example, initially saw themselves as victims of the war—a view which held sway for decades. Germans denied guilt by presenting themselves as oppressed by the system of Nazi rule. What is now read as an attempt at German self-victimization, however, can be better understood in terms of the continuous construction of a larger historical narrative. The Federal Republic of Germany (FRG) and the German Democratic Republic (GDR) both indirectly encouraged competition for the status of victim within the framework of *Opferkonkurrenz* during the post-war period, not least because the state distributed welfare money to victims. Victims, however, were clearly hierarchized. The early FRG, for example, privileged German ‘victims’ over foreigners, soldiers over civilians, and men over women.³ In the GDR, communists were privileged over Jews and other victims. As the category of victim expanded

² The term *Opferkonkurrenz* has also been widely used for the competition between Western and Eastern European memory cultures with respect to the Second World War in the last two decades. In the round table in this special issue, Patricia Piberger and Hannah Tzuberi show that what we understand as victimhood today was not yet fully formed in the years after the Second World War, when ‘identitarian victimhood’ as a concept did not exist. See Jean-Michel Chaumont, *Die Konkurrenz der Opfer: Genozid, Identität und Anerkennung*, trans. Thomas Laugstien (Springe, 2001), originally published in French as *La concurrence des victimes: Génocide, identité, reconnaissance* (Paris, 1997). On *Opferkonkurrenz*, see also Aleida Assmann, *Das neue Unbehagen an der Erinnerungskultur: Eine Intervention* (Munich, 2013; 4th edn 2021), 142–80. The expansion of the category of victimhood was initially unconnected to the National Socialist memorial context. See Svenja Goltermann, *Opfer: Die Wahrnehmung von Krieg und Gewalt in der Moderne* (Frankfurt am Main, 2017).

³ For the hierarchies of victimhood, see Robert G. Moeller, *War Stories: The Search for a Usable Past in the Federal Republic of Germany* (Berkeley, 2001); Wulf Kansteiner, ‘Losing the War, Winning the Memory Battle: The Legacy of Nazism, World War II, and the Holocaust in the Federal Republic of Germany’, in id., Richard Ned Lebow, and Claudio Fogu (eds.), *The Politics of Memory in Postwar Europe* (Durham, NC, 2006), 102–46, at 109–10; Anna Schnädelbach, *Kriegerwitwen: Lebensbewältigung zwischen Arbeit und Familie in Westdeutschland nach 1945* (Frankfurt am Main, 2009); and Norbert Frei, *Vergangenheitspolitik: Die Anfänge der Bundesrepublik und die NS-Vergangenheit* (Munich, 1997; paperback

in post-war Germany (especially in the FRG) in response to demands by LGBTQ, Sinti and Roma, Black, and disability rights groups, different notions of plurality prevailed.⁴ Yet who was included in this conversation and on what premises, and what role did the German state play in organizing supposed hierarchies in these transformations and reconfigurations? It is therefore important to understand the diversification of Nazi victims in the memorial context since the 1980s in connection with the formation of the notion of passive victimhood, the rise of trauma, and newly emerging concepts of victimhood.⁵

In 2019 we organized a round table in London which approached different forms of commemoration not as exclusive, but as mutually informative, looking at how colonial history, the Second World War, and the Holocaust intersect. At the time, these were pressing questions for the UK: calls had been made for institutionalized forms

2012); published in English as *Adenauer's Germany and the Nazi Past: The Politics of Amnesty and Integration*, trans. Joel Golb (New York, 2002).

⁴ More generally on post-war memory culture, see e.g. Moeller, *War Stories*; Edgar Wolfrum, *Geschichtspolitik in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland: Der Weg zur bundesrepublikanischen Erinnerung 1948–1990* (Darmstadt, 1999); Harald Welzer, Sabine Moller, and Karoline Tschuggnall, *'Opa war kein Nazi': Nationalsozialismus und Holocaust im Familiengedächtnis* (Frankfurt am Main, 2002); Alon Confino, *Germany as a Culture of Remembrance: Promises and Limits of Writing History* (Chapel Hill, 2006); A. Dirk Moses, *German Intellectuals and the Nazi Past* (Cambridge, 2007); Martin Sabrow (ed.), *Der Streit um die Erinnerung* (Leipzig, 2008), 9–24; Frei, *Vergangenheitspolitik*; Frank Biess, *Republik der Angst: Eine andere Geschichte der Bundesrepublik* (Reinbek bei Hamburg, 2019); and Ulrich Herbert, *A History of Twentieth-Century Germany*, trans. Ben Fowkes (New York, 2019), esp. part IV.

⁵ Patricia Piberger and Felix Axster, 'Multidirektionale Erinnerung: Wege aus der Erinnerungskonkurrenz', workshop held as part of the conference 'Blickwinkel: Von Strippenziehern & Terroristen. Ressentiments gegen Jüdinnen und Juden und Muslim*innen in der postnationalsozialistischen Gesellschaft', 7–8 Dec. 2020, organized by the Bildungsstätte Anne Frank (Frankfurt am Main) in co-operation with the Stiftung 'Erinnerung, Verantwortung und Zukunft' (EVZ), the Bundeszentrale für Politische Bildung (BPB), the Zentrum für Antisemitismusforschung der TU Berlin, the Akademie für Islam und Wissenschaft in der Gesellschaft (AIWG), and the Gesellschaften für Christlich-Jüdische Zusammenarbeit. See the report at [https://www.bs-anne-frank.de/fileadmin/content/Tagungsbericht_Blickwinkel_2020.pdf], accessed 28 July 2022. With thanks to the workshop organizers for sharing content.

of commemoration, monuments, and museums regarding Britain's historical involvement in slavery, colonialism, and their legacies, and the country had also embarked on the project of creating a National Holocaust Memorial.⁶ Our event was informed by Michael Rothberg's *Multidirectional Memory*, published in 2009, which argues that Holocaust remembrance also has the potential to open up routes for commemorating different victimized groups and contested national pasts (though the opposite can be true as well).⁷ What does it mean, for instance, if formerly persecuted groups themselves become problematic actors, such as when Jewish exiles from Nazi Germany found refuge on land that was originally owned by indigenous populations, as in Australia? How does colonial history in South Asia intersect with that of forced migration from Europe since the 1930s? Creating a dialogue between scholars of the Holocaust, colonialism, and the British Empire—Avril Alba, Yasmin Khan, and Tom Lawson respectively—to reflect on national and transnational legacies, we published the round table in 2020.⁸

While this is thus not the first time that the *GHIL Bulletin* has contributed to discussions on the future of memory cultures, the context of this debate has changed considerably since our 2020 publication. Although the topic hit a nerve, we as organizers could not predict that Germany would see a number of debates about the memory of the Holocaust and colonialism—some of them divisive and acrimonious—which continue to this day. One key event was the release of the German translation of Rothberg's *Multidirectional Memory* in 2021,⁹ which, despite having been published in English twelve years earlier, was controversially discussed in the German media. While our round table was perceived by readers as a straightforward scholarly contribution that moved research forward by building on Rothberg's

⁶ David Tollerton, "A New Sacred Space in the Centre of London": The Victoria Tower Gardens Holocaust Memorial and the Religious–Secular Landscape of Contemporary Britain', *Journal of Religion & Society*, 19 (2017), 1–22.

⁷ Michael Rothberg, *Multidirectional Memory: Remembering the Holocaust in the Age of Decolonization* (Stanford, Calif., 2009).

⁸ Stefanie Rauch (ed.), 'Multidirectional Memory? National Holocaust Memorials and (Post-)Colonial Legacies', *German Historical Institute London Bulletin*, 42/1 (2020), 2–25.

⁹ Michael Rothberg, *Multidirektionale Erinnerung: Holocaustgedenken im Zeitalter der Dekolonisierung*, trans. Max Henninger (Berlin, 2021).

framework, the German reception of Rothberg's book laid bare the gulf between contemporary international research and its translation into public history and debates on memory culture.

The German reception of this book cannot be detached from the wider discussions on collective memory that surrounded it in post-war Germany, which had slowly intensified since 2019.¹⁰ They touched on the centrality and comparability of the Holocaust,¹¹ its relationship with colonial history, its meaning today for national identity, domestic and foreign politics (in particular, Germany's relationship with Israel), the governance of Jewish-Muslim relations, and definitions of antisemitism. These debates had become more frequent since the legally non-binding 2019 Bundestag resolution declaring the Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions (BDS) movement and criticism of the state of Israel to be inherently antisemitic.¹² In recent years, the

¹⁰ For a different contextualization of the debate, see Michael Rothberg, 'Lived Multidirectionality: "Historikerstreit 2.0" and the Politics of Holocaust', in *Memory Studies*, special issue on 'Mnemonic Wars' (forthcoming, 2022).

¹¹ See e.g. Michael Rothberg and Jürgen Zimmerer, 'Enttabuisiert den Vergleich! Die Geschichtsschreibung globalisieren, das Gedenken pluralisieren: Warum sich die deutsche Erinnerungslandschaft verändern muss', *Die Zeit*, 4 Apr. 2021, at [<https://www.zeit.de/2021/14/erinnerungskultur-gedenken-pluralisieren-holocaust-vergleich-globalisierung-geschichte>], accessed 27 July 2022, on the reluctance to think about the Holocaust in comparative terms. Most recent claims seem to accept comparison, but only to prove the uniqueness of the Holocaust. For the reluctance to compare between racism, antisemitism, and Islamophobia in public debate, see Farid Hafez, 'Public and Scholarly Debates on the Comparison of Islamophobia and Anti-Semitism in Germany', *Kirchliche Zeitgeschichte*, 32/2 (2019), 277–90.

¹² The 2019 Bundestag resolution: 'BDS-Bewegung entschlossen entgegen-treten—Antisemitismus bekämpfen' meant the end of funding for projects that directly or indirectly support the BDS campaign; see [<https://www.bundestag.de/dokumente/textarchiv/2019/kw20-de-bds-642892>], accessed 27 July 2022. In an effort to create awareness of the potential marginalization of disregarded voices and the oppression of cultural diversity and critical perspectives, the decision was opposed by Initiative Weltoffenheit, who stressed reliance on a 'public sphere that allows for disputatious and controversial debates in accordance with the norms of the German constitution.' See the full statement at [<https://www.gg53weltoffenheit.org/en/statement/>], accessed 27 July 2022. Unlike the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance definition of antisemitism, the more recent Jerusalem Declaration detaches criticism

German state has introduced different measures to define the terms of these debates, and these have had fundamental consequences for the actions of institutions, initiatives, and individuals.¹³

In 2019, for instance, the Jewish Museum Berlin, which had initiated programmes to encourage Jewish–Muslim dialogue, was accused of transforming itself into a forum for BDS.¹⁴ In 2020, Germany saw the Mbembe Debate, in which a German Free Democratic Party politician accused the Cameroonian historian and theorist Achille Mbembe of antisemitism—a charge that has since been levelled at a number of intellectuals, academics, artists, and journalists, and which in a number of cases has itself led to racist and antisemitic discrimination.¹⁵ The of Israel from antisemitism. See ‘The Jerusalem Declaration on Antisemitism’, at [<https://jerusalemdeclaration.org/>], accessed 27 July 2022.

¹³ These include the appointment of Felix Klein as *Beauftragter der Bundesregierung für jüdisches Leben in Deutschland und den Kampf gegen Antisemitismus* (Federal German government commissioner for Jewish life in Germany and the fight against antisemitism) in 2018.

¹⁴ See the letter of 21 Dec. 2019 from Yasemin Shooman, former director of the Jewish Museum’s Academy Programme, to Jürgen Kaube of the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, in which she sets the record straight, at [<https://rat-fuer-migration.de/richtigstellung-yasemin-shoومان-faz-artikel/>], accessed 27 July 2022.

¹⁵ The assumption that these accusations curtailed marginalized voices—in this case Mbembe as a Black and African voice in Germany—was not adequately discussed. For an interpretation of the Mbembe Debate, see ‘Forum: The Achille Mbembe Controversy and the German Debate about Antisemitism, Israel, and the Holocaust’, *Journal of Genocide Research*, 23/3 (2021), 371–3. For an overview of articles, see Serdar Güneş, ‘Wer zuerst . . . sagt, hat gewonnen: Die Achille Mbembe Debatte—Eine Artikel-liste’, *Serdargunes’ Blog*, 18 May 2020, at [<https://serdargunes.wordpress.com/2020/05/18/wer-zuerst-x-sagt-hat-gewonnen-die-achille-mbembe-debatte-eine-artikelliste/>], accessed 27 July 2022. The most recent example is an ‘antisemitism debate’ in relation to *documenta fifteen*, curated by the Indonesian collective *ruangrupa*. This debate was initiated by a right-wing blog long before any artworks were put on display, and at the time of writing has not been settled. For an overview, see Hans Eichel, ‘Jetzt geht es immer weniger um die Kunst, die auf der *documenta fifteen* gezeigt wird’, *Frankfurter Rundschau*, 18 July 2022, at [<https://www.fr.de/kultur/kunst/jetzt-geht-es-immer-weniger-um-die-kunst-die-auf-der-documenta-fifteen-gezeigt-wird-91674434.html>], accessed 29 July 2022, and Eyal Weizmann, ‘In Kassel’, *London Review of Books*, 4 Aug. 2022.

discussion in 2021 evolved in particular from Dirk Moses's essay on 'The German Catechism',¹⁶ which argues that the Holocaust's uniqueness provides the moral foundation of official (state-led) German identity, from which a specific responsibility for Jews and the state of Israel is derived. This also ties it to broad definitions of antisemitism. The result, Moses claims, is a tacit but binding 'catechism'—a dogma—as a result of which institutions, the media, establishment intellectuals, and government bodies in Germany become the gatekeepers of memory culture. Moses argues that challenges to these points, including those that reflect pluralistic Jewish viewpoints, are subject to public censure; however, this observation was largely ignored in the media debate that followed. Instead, media responses to the essay focused on the uniqueness of the Holocaust—a framework that invites competitive victimhood—rather than engaging with other key points, such as the plea to consider more inclusive histories that are under-represented precisely because of the lack of diverse voices. These latter points were soon confirmed by the homogenous media debate which, ironically, largely denied the existence of such a 'catechism'.¹⁷ As it evolved, the debate was also driven not primarily by historians, but by journalists, so it seems inaccurate to call it a *Historikerstreit*.¹⁸ While it returned, albeit from a very different

¹⁶ The essay by the historian and comparative genocide scholar Dirk Moses was published on the website *Geschichte der Gegenwart*, 23 May 2021, at [<https://geschichtedergegenwart.ch/the-german-catechism/>], accessed 27 July 2022. For an overview of the debate, see Serdar Güneş, 'Holocaust, Historikerstreit, (Post-)Colonialism, Memory Debates', *Serdargunes' Blog*, 4 June 2021, at [<https://serdargunes.wordpress.com/2021/06/04/a-debate-german-catechism-holocaust-and-post-colonialism/>], accessed 27 July 2022. See also Jürgen Habermas, 'Der neue Historikerstreit', *Philosophie Magazin*, 60 (2021), 10–11.

¹⁷ While the controversy initially featured contributions from a wide range of international and diverse scholars on a US blog, including authors who had a personal stake in the issue, these voices were quickly sidelined in the monolithic and less nuanced media debate within Germany itself. See the *New Fascism Syllabus Blog*, May–Aug. 2021, at [<http://newfascismsyllabus.com/category/opinions/the-catechism-debate/>], accessed 27 July 2022.

¹⁸ This suggests a resumption of the original *Historikerstreit* ('historians' debate') as initiated by the German historian Ernst Nolte in 1986, which centred on the singularity of the Holocaust. See *Forever in the Shadow of Hitler? Original Documents of the Historikerstreit, the Controversy Concerning the Singularity of the Holocaust*, trans. James Knowlton and Truett Cates (Atlantic Highlands, NJ,

angle, to the questions that had prompted the original *Historikerstreit*, including that of the Holocaust's singularity, the debate was also fundamentally different in that it questioned the status of memory culture in Europe's increasingly diverse societies. It also highlighted a current crisis in public history, marked by a widening gap between historical research, memory culture, and public debate. This will present a particular challenge in Germany in the coming years, prompting pressing questions about what the future institutional venue should be for nuanced public debates undergirded by historical research, and what role we as historians should play in them.

At the heart of this discussion – on a meta-level that is rarely mentioned – is not simply the question of singularity and who deserves to be remembered by the dominant memory regime, but also that of who gets to speak and be heard, and can do so without taking a risk. The German dogma of 'never again' has slowly produced a climate of fear, according to some, in which only those who belong to the majority, and those with secure posts, have the privilege of expressing their thoughts freely. However, for historian of Islamic art Wendy Shaw these issues are not unrelated to Germany's difficult past:

If my colleagues are the *Nachwuchs* of the Nazis it was not because of their birth as Germans, but because many had not rethought the nature of authority and exclusion and replaced the white-patriarchal hierarchy at the heart of universities with a working system of diversity and inclusion.¹⁹

That said, there are larger structural issues that directly impact on how memory cultures are discussed. The #IchBinHanna debate that highlighted the precarious working conditions in German academia, for example, was a frequent and pivotal point of discussion between

1993); Rudolf Augstein et al., *Historikerstreit: Die Dokumentation der Kontroverse um die Einzigartigkeit der nationalsozialistischen Judenvernichtung* (Munich, 1987); Kansteiner, 'Losing the War'; and Charles S. Maier, *The Unmasterable Past: History, Holocaust, and German National Identity* (Cambridge, Mass., 1988).

¹⁹ Wendy M. K. Shaw, 'Cannibalising the Foundations of Western Civilization', in Staci B. Martin and Deepra Dandekar (eds.), *Global South Scholars in the Western Academy: Harnessing Unique Experiences, Knowledges, and Positionality in Third Space* (New York, 2021), 77–91, at 85.

the editor and authors of the round table included in this special issue, all of whom are early or mid-career and non-tenured academics.

Yet how new were these discussions, and to what extent was the media debate simply a pushback against changes that were already happening? The criticism that Holocaust commemoration has become too ritualized and lost its moral significance to contemporary forms of discrimination has been expressed for some time.²⁰ Others have called for more serious engagement with different victimized groups and for their demands to be heard.²¹ Existing forms of commemoration, so the criticism goes, mainly grant absolution to those whom Sinthujan Varatharajah und Moshtari Hilal call *Menschen mit Nazihintergrund* (people with a Nazi background), an epithet deliberately chosen to make rhetorically visible a group of actors who have gone largely unremarked over the decades, despite dominating the politics of commemoration.²² However, just as the Legacies of British Slavery project has looked into the economic benefits which racial systems of exploitation bring for the ruling classes in Britain, this aspect has recently

²⁰ According to Robert Meister, the end of the Cold War turned the Holocaust into a closed and unreachable event. See Robert Meister, *After Evil: A Politics of Human Rights* (New York, 2011). For more recent critical approaches to memory culture, see Max Czollek, *Desintegriert Euch!* (Munich, 2018); Susan Neiman, *Learning from the Germans: Confronting Race and the Memory of Evil* (London, 2019); Mohamed Amjahid, 'Die deutsche Erinnerungsüberlegenheit', *SPIEGEL Kultur*, 6 Mar. 2021, at [<https://www.spiegel.de/kultur/holocaust-gedenken-die-deutsche-erinnerungsueberlegenheit-a-056d10a7-2b3c-4383-804e-c2130ed6581d>], accessed 27 July 2022; Natan Sznaider, *Fluchtpunkte der Erinnerung: Über die Gegenwart von Holocaust und Kolonialismus* (Munich, 2022).

²¹ See Sultan Doughan and Hanan Toukan, 'How Germany's Memory Culture Censors Palestinians', *Jacobin*, 16 July 2022, at [<https://jacobin.com/2022/07/germany-israel-palestine-antisemitism-art-documenta>], accessed 27 July 2022.

²² See Instagram post by Moshtari Hilal, posting as mooshtariiii, 15 Feb. 2021, at [<https://www.instagram.com/tv/CLU2dZiqvMG/?igshid=131w2jn283o89>], and the playlist of videos on YouTube at [https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLSMnbltgwLfmhgAK6NBvwhHGDFI-VAhJ_], both accessed 27 July 2022. See also Michael Rothberg, "'People with a Nazi Background": Race, Memory, and Responsibility', *LA Review of Books*, 20 May 2021, at [<https://lareviewofbooks.org/article/people-with-a-nazi-background-race-memory-and-responsibility/>], accessed 27 July 2022.

become a point of discussion in Germany that is likely to invite deeper research in future.²³

As even the current German president Frank-Walter Steinmeier has recently concluded, memory culture is not fit for purpose in a post-migration Germany whose migrant groups have their own modes and forms of commemoration that are entangled with German history in myriad ways.²⁴ Recent research has also argued that memory culture has not put a stop to the discrimination and violence that has been going on since 1945. In fact, there has been a troubling correlation between the ‘ritualization of Holocaust remembrance and the rise of the far-right’, as participants in a recent conference pointed out.²⁵ One group of victims is thus remembered at the expense of others – in particular Muslim immigrants – creating competing forms of commemoration.²⁶ It begs the question of what lessons can be drawn

²³ See Centre for the Study of the Legacies of British Slavery at [<https://www.ucl.ac.uk/lbs/>], accessed 27 July 2022; David de Jong, *Nazi Billionaires: The Dark History of Germany’s Wealthiest Dynasties* (London, 2022).

²⁴ Speech by Bundespräsident Frank-Walter Steinmeier, ‘Festakt zur Eröffnung der Ausstellungen des Ethnologischen Museums und des Museums für Asiatische Kunst der Staatlichen Museen zu Berlin im Humboldt-Forum’, Office of the Federal President Berlin, 22 Sept. 2021, at [<https://www.bundespraesident.de/SharedDocs/Reden/DE/Frank-Walter-Steinmeier/Reden/2021/09/210922-Humboldt-Forum.html>], accessed 27 July 2022.

²⁵ The conference, entitled ‘Hijacking Memory: The Holocaust and the New Right’, was held at the Haus der Kulturen der Welt in Berlin, 9–12 June 2022. See details at [https://www.hkw.de/en/programm/projekte/2022/hijacking_memory/start.php], accessed 27 July 2022, and the conference report by Joshua Leifer, ‘The Challenge of Defending Memory in Germany’, *Jewish Currents*, 7 July 2022, at [jewishcurrents.org/the-challenge-of-defending-memory-in-germany], accessed 27 July 2022. See also Valentina Pisanty, *The Guardians of Memory and the Return of the Xenophobic Right*, trans. Alastair McEwan (New York, 2021).

²⁶ See the interview with Sultan Doughan in this issue. See also Michael Rothberg and Yasemin Yildiz, ‘Memory Citizenship: Migrant Archives of Holocaust Remembrance in Contemporary Germany’, *Parallax*, 17/4 (2011), 32–48; Esra Özyürek, ‘Export–Import Theory and the Racialization of Anti-Semitism: Turkish- and Arab-Only Prevention Programs in Germany’, *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 58/1 (2016), 40–65; ead., ‘Rethinking Empathy: Emotions Triggered by the Holocaust among the Muslim-Minority in Germany’, *Anthropological Theory*, 18/4 (2018), 456–77;

from that history if it is not repurposed for current struggles against inequality.

Opferkonkurrenz will be employed here as an analytical term to be historicized and scrutinized—as a framework constituting German politics that often continues to force minoritized groups to position themselves in relation to dominant state perceptions of what constitutes victimhood. Relationships between groups, as the contributors show, are excluded and ignored by this state dramaturgy. Yet the current situation is more nuanced, as Steinmeier’s speech showed. While German governance may exclude and ignore solidarity, it has also been observed that the state has become increasingly interested in overcoming competition. This has become visible in the context of the Holocaust Memorial in Berlin, and in the funding of groups that encourage solidarity between victim groups.

The authors writing in this special issue will explore pathways from Jewish studies, memory studies, European and colonial history, anthropology, and art history. The special issue combines two dynamic formats: interviews and a round table. It opens with an interview with Michael Rothberg on the pitfalls of using victimhood as a concept, his reflections on the two years since the publication of our last round table, and the argument of his new book, *Memory Citizenship: Migrant Archives of Holocaust Remembrance*, co-authored with Yasemin Yildiz. The centrepiece is a round table on *Opferkonkurrenz* with commentaries and responses by Manuela Bauche, Patricia Piberger and Hannah Tzuberi, and Sébastien Tremblay, who have published and presented widely on this topic, and who all generously shared input in conceptualizing this special issue.²⁷ This is followed by an interview

and Anna-Esther Younes, ‘Fighting Anti-Semitism in Contemporary Germany’, *Islamophobia Studies Journal*, 5/2 (2020), 249–66.

²⁷ For their recent and forthcoming publications, see e.g. Manuela Bauche, ‘Die Figur des “Mischling” in der Deutschen Anthropologie (1900–1945)’, in Matthias Böckmann, Matthias Gockel, Reinhard Kößler, and Henning Melber (eds.), *Erinnerung, Politik, Solidarität: Internationale Debatten und Perspektiven* (Berlin, forthcoming); Manuela Bauche, Danna Marshall, Volker Strähle, and Kerstin Stubenvoll, ‘Geschichte der Ihnstraße 22: Remembering the Kaiser Wilhelm Institute for Anthropology, Human Heredity, and Eugenics’, in Michelle Gordon and Rachel O’Sullivan (eds.), *Colonial Paradigms of Violence: Comparative Analysis of the Holocaust, Genocide, and Mass Killing* (Göttingen,

with Sultan Doughan about her research on questions of citizenship and religious difference in contemporary Germany, with an emphasis on relations between Jews and Muslims.²⁸ The special issue closes with a conversation with classicist Jaś Elsner, who approaches the topic of *Opferkonkurrenz* through physical sites of memory culture, taking Berlin's Humboldt Forum and Museum Island as prisms through which to look at questions related to competing forms of commemoration. All contributors reflect on where memory culture could go in the future and see grounds for both pessimism and optimism. Can we historicize solidarity while also living it today, for example, in the research we do and in the approaches we choose? How can we analyse memory discourses while participating in German civil society? How can we frame research on the past historically when interpretations of history are at the centre of the current debates? What are the material repercussions of these debates for intellectuals in Germany, and what conditions do they face?

One aim of this special issue is to complicate and refine notions of *Opferkonkurrenz*. While this is deployed as an analytical framework, the authors also problematize any notion operating with clear-cut categories of perpetrator and victim that defy lived realities.²⁹ Current discussions focus on the assumption that victimhood is inherently competitive—something that the authors in this special issue challenge. While competition between different views of history was key to the formation of German Holocaust memory, neither competition nor solidarity are inherently positive or negative. One could, for instance, regard homonationalist queer alliances against Muslims as a

2022), 255–64; Hannah Tzuberi, “Reforestation” Jews: The German State and the Construction of “New German Judaism”, *Jewish Studies Quarterly*, 27/3 (2020), 199–224; Sébastien Tremblay, ‘Homosynchronism and the Temporal–Memory Border: Framing Racialized Bodies, Time, and Mobility in German Queer Printed Media’, *SCRIPTS Working Papers*, 21 (2022), at [<https://www.scripts-berlin.eu/publications/working-paper-series/Working-Paper-21-2022/index.html>], accessed 26 Sept. 2022; and id., ‘Visual Collective Memories of National Socialism: Transatlantic HIV/AIDS Activism and Discourses of Persecutions’, *German History* (9 Sept. 2022), at [<https://doi.org/10.1093/gerhis/ghac045>].

²⁸ See also Sultan Doughan's publications on this topic as cited in her interview.

²⁹ Michael Rothberg, *The Implicated Subject: Beyond Victims and Perpetrators* (Stanford, Calif., 2019).

case of solidarity at work. In other words, solidarity can lead to exclusion while competition can also lead to inclusion.

Historically speaking, it is also worth mentioning that victimized groups did not necessarily subscribe to *Opferkonkurrenz*. Instead, they often came together to put questions of victimhood at the heart of their lived realities in post-1945 Germany, as this special issue shows. The contributions illustrate how victimhood morphed into a valued asset which went hand in hand with power, including a desire for minoritized collectives. Since the 1990s, such collectives have had to fight for state recognition of their victimhood—sometimes against each other, sometimes with joint agency. Either way, these struggles resulted in collective agency. Looking at such historical alliances can also illuminate and support educational purposes today. Recent research has shown, for instance, that engagement with the Holocaust can have a strong pedagogical and inclusive function if other victimized groups, including recent Muslim immigrants, are allowed to express empathy through their own experiences of victimhood.³⁰ Victimized and minoritized groups did, indeed, often compete with each other, but there was always room for solidarity between Jews, Muslims, Black people, queer people, and other minoritized groups. This is hardly reflected in current debates. Why have these histories of alliances been neglected in historiography and public debate, and whom did this erasure serve? What were the conditions governing this solidarity? In other words, what spaces were available for minoritized groups? Such groups themselves not only rejected simple categorizations, but have also expressed this rejection more publicly over the years.

The fact that memory culture is increasingly being questioned should also invite us to examine its history in more depth. The new demands for a more inclusive memory culture with respect to the Holocaust and other atrocities have unsurprisingly affected previous

³⁰ See anthropological studies such Özyürek, 'Rethinking Empathy' and Jonathon Catlin, 'A New German Historians' Debate? A Conversation with Sultan Doughan, A. Dirk Moses, and Michael Rothberg', *Journal of the History of Ideas: Blog*, 2–4 Feb. 2022, at [<https://jhiblog.org/2022/02/02/a-new-german-historians-debate-a-conversation-with-sultan-doughan-a-dirk-moses-and-michael-rothberg-part-i/>], accessed 27 July 2022.

political generations who felt the need to defend older models of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*, in themselves a remarkable achievement. On the other hand, more recent research has addressed the intergenerational silence in post-war West Germany—a fact that undermines the persistent myth of a 1968 generation that thoroughly confronted and came to terms with the Nazi past.³¹ This, as well as the continued presence of Nazi perpetrators in institutions, including universities, and society raises the question as to whether memory culture itself needs to be revisited. This is not to question its achievements, first and foremost the recognition by society that atrocities in the past were morally wrong. The question is more how this recognition of failures in the past failed to be translated into anti-racist and anti-antisemitic practices in the present. Like public resistance to the idea of continuities between colonialism and the Holocaust,³² the idea of post-war continuities defies normative frameworks of memory culture, for they rely on the idea that the end of the Second World War represents a moment of historical rupture. Although the idea of 1945 as *Stunde Null* (zero hour) is obsolete as a concept, it will also be necessary to fill the gaps in the research on racism and antisemitism in post-war Germany, a field that has been slowly growing in recent years. This will present opportunities to examine memory cultures against the backdrop of tacit—that is, supposedly unnoticed—ideological continuity. The recent antisemitic and racist attacks in Halle in 2019 and Hanau in 2020 are stark reminders of this. In this context, it is necessary to remember that *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*—a term with overtones of mastery and control, which was used ironically when it was first coined—was opposed to ‘real’ *Vergangenheitsaufarbeitung*. This ‘ironic edge’³³ was lost over time,

³¹ Christina von Hodenberg, *Das andere Achtundsechzig: Gesellschaftsgeschichte einer Revolte* (Munich, 2018), 45–76. See also Welzer, Moller, and Tschuggnall, ‘Opa war kein Nazi’; Ulrike Jureit and Christian Schneider, *Gefühlte Opfer: Illusionen der Vergangenheitsbewältigung* (Stuttgart, 2010); Robert Gildea, James Mark, and Anette Warring (eds.), *Europe’s 1968: Voices of Revolt* (Oxford, 2013); and Anna von der Goltz, *The Other ‘68ers: Student Protest and Christian Democracy in West Germany* (Oxford, 2021).

³² See e.g. Jürgen Zimmerer, *Von Windhuk nach Auschwitz? Beiträge zum Verhältnis von Kolonialismus und Holocaust* (Münster, 2011).

³³ Kansteiner, ‘Losing the War’, 102.

replaced by a self-congratulatory memory culture which at times obscured knowledge about historical continuities that were instead seen as clear-cut ruptures.³⁴ In other words, the 'self-satisfied arrogance intrinsic to the culture of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*'³⁵ was not necessarily accompanied by an immediate and thorough epistemic denazification (for example, in the humanities and history writing itself) or political solutions for the constant discrimination and violence against minorities in post-war Germany.

Yet one model need not entirely replace the other. Instead, we can turn to history and look at how memory culture itself can be historicized and framed differently. This would entail considering frictions and the transformation of memory culture not as a sudden move towards more pluralistic forms of commemoration, but as a logical continuity and adjustment of an already ongoing process in which minoritized communities, including those from the Global South, while never fully escaping discrimination, have always had agency.

This special issue therefore focuses on the historical trajectory of *Opferkonkurrenz*—yet also looks at how it relates to positive histories of solidarity between victimized groups in post-war Germany, foregrounding Jewish, Black, queer, and other under-represented voices from an interdisciplinary historical angle and thereby pluralizing memory culture itself against the backdrop of normative and state-governed templates of commemoration. The authors examine the genealogy of governing moral paradigms. Was *Opferkonkurrenz* the result of memory assemblages inherited from perpetrators, or did it derive from other social and cultural regimes of the post-war era? As the German state and its drive for rehabilitation proceeded from perpetrator to beneficiary, from antisemitism to anti-antisemitism, to what extent did *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* inform, impact on, and even encourage *Opferkonkurrenz*?³⁶ *Opferkonkurrenz* might not even be possible without the implementation of Holocaust remembrance and the legal codification of human rights after the Holocaust. When,

³⁴ See e.g. Heide Fehrenbach, *Race after Hitler: Black Occupation Children in Postwar Germany and America* (Princeton, 2005); ead., Rita Chin, Geoff Eley, and Atina Grossmann, *After the Nazi Racial State: Difference and Democracy in Germany and Europe* (Ann Arbor, 2009).

³⁵ Kansteiner, 'Losing the War', 102.

³⁶ See also Meister, *After Evil*.

for example, has the fight against antisemitism been a result of this longing for rehabilitation, or even of aggressive racism framed as rehabilitation? Was self-sacrifice on the altar of *Opferkonkurrenz* an essential condition of integration into the German idea of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*? That is, was inclusion only achieved when collectives entered the memorial arena in a competitive mode? What examples are there of solidarities standing against this tide – against the centring of the emotions of the perpetrators’ descendants?

Finally, *Opferkonkurrenz* has also been indirectly addressed in Germany’s most recent antisemitism debate concerning the global art exhibition *documenta fifteen*, which is still running at the time of writing. In a speech addressing the Bundestag to apologetically explain and rebut accusations of antisemitism, Ade Darmawan of *ruangrupa*, the Indonesian collective that curated *documenta fifteen* with the objective of showcasing positions from the Global South, explained the artwork that lay at the centre of the controversy by pointing to the global dimensions of antisemitism that have returned to haunt Germany. The problematic iconographical elements, they explained, were the result of antisemitism that lived on as a colonial legacy and had become ‘deeply embedded in Indonesian history and visual language’. Dutch colonial officers—it is crucial to know that the Netherlands were occupied by the Nazi regime in 1940—‘introduced originally European antisemitic ideas and images to portray Chinese in the way Europeans have portrayed Jews, and to draw a connection. This in a shocking and shameful way has come full circle in the artwork.’³⁷ This history continued when Western secret services supported a violent and genocidal regime in 1965, which also entailed Germany’s complicity in Suharto’s dictatorial rule.³⁸ The ‘boomerang’ effect of antisemitism reflected in the artwork has since undergone a

³⁷ Speech by Ade Darmawan (*ruangrupa*) in the Committee on Culture and Media, German Bundestag, 6 July 2022, at [<https://documenta-fifteen.de/en/news/speech-by-ade-darmawan-ruangrupa-in-the-committee-on-culture-and-media-german-bundestag-july-6-2022/>], accessed 27 July 2022.

³⁸ One of the earliest contributions to consider the global context of the history of colonialism and Nazism was by Monique Ligtenberg and Bernhard C. Schär, ‘Eine Debatte über das koloniale Konstrukt’, *Die Wochenzeitung*, 30 June 2022, at [<https://www.woz.ch/-c8e4>], accessed 27 July 2022.

variety of interpretations, possibly with more to come.³⁹ This shows the urgent need for histories that interrogate the differential, dialectical effects of colonialism, including ‘exported antisemitism’, on entangled ethnic and social groups on a global scale. For the German context it would entail pluralizing the history of Nazism beyond a parochial framework.

Darmawan ended his speech by explaining that the Global South is not a separate entity, but one that has ‘been living door to door’ with Europe for centuries.⁴⁰ Scholars, too, in particular historians of Black Europe, have rejected misleading juxtapositions between the Global North and South, stressing historical entanglement not just in the colonies, but also within Europe itself, where minority groups have also formed alliances.⁴¹ Germany’s long history of migration, and in particular the arrival of different multireligious Middle Eastern communities over time, yields vast potential to move from models of *Opferkonkurrenz* to those of alliance—past and present—by showing how historical events are inextricably entangled. This aspect is addressed in the interview with Sultan Doughan. A particularly pertinent case in this context is the entanglement—rather than comparison—between the Holocaust and the Nakba, the destruction of the Palestinian homeland and society in 1948. While historical research has indeed moved this particular field of inquiry forward in recent years, it has only tentatively been discussed in public debate, stressing that German responsibility must also extend to Palestinian

³⁹ See Michael Rothberg, ‘Learning and Unlearning with Taring Padi: Reflections on Documenta’, *New Fascism Syllabus Blog*, 2 July 2020, at [<http://newfascismsyllabus.com/opinions/documenta/learning-and-unlearning-with-taring-padi-reflections-on-documenta/>], accessed 27 July 2022; A. Dirk Moses, ‘The Documenta, Indonesia, and the Problem of Closed Universes’, *New Fascism Syllabus Blog*, 24 July 2022, at [<http://newfascismsyllabus.com/opinions/documenta/the-documenta-indonesia-and-the-problem-of-closed-universes/>], accessed 27 July 2022; Weizmann, ‘In Kassel’.

⁴⁰ See speech by Ade Darmawan.

⁴¹ See e.g. Fatima El-Tayeb, *European Others: Queering Ethnicity in Postnational Europe* (Minneapolis, 2011), German translation published as *Anders Europäisch: Rassismus, Identität und Widerstand im vereinten Europa* (Münster, 2015); Sharon Dodua Otoo, *Dürfen Schwarze Blumen Malen? Klagenfurter Rede zur Literatur 2020* (Klagenfurt, 2020), 19–21.

displacement and its victims inside and outside the country.⁴² While the Holocaust is not the sole reason for the foundation of the state of Israel—the global persecution of Jews, from Germany to the Arab world, preceded the Holocaust—it would hardly have taken place without the European colonial powers that ruled the region through French and in particular British mandates. This makes it necessary to take a closer look at European colonial legacies in relation to Holocaust remembrance rather than approaching them separately. In other words, these are parts of the same history, not separate ones. A particular challenge will be to impart the deeper knowledge gained by historical research to public history, which will itself then impact memory culture. The following contributions offer a diverse history of ideas for such an undertaking, underlining the power asymmetries at the core of German memorial debates, while focusing on moments of unity and disunity in the public sphere. In the process, they point to new opportunities in writing about memory culture and its historical trajectory by not simply interrogating it, but also reshaping and further pluralizing future memory culture(s).

⁴² See Bashir Bashir and Amos Goldberg (eds.), *The Holocaust and the Nakba: A New Grammar of Trauma and History* (New York, 2019); Sa'ed Atshan and Katharina Galor, *The Moral Triangle: Germans, Israelis, Palestinians* (Durham, NC, 2020); and Charlotte Wiedemann, *Den Schmerz der Anderen begreifen: Über Erinnerung und Solidarität* (Berlin, 2022).

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