The End of Memory? German-American Relations under Donald Trump

This article examines recent dynamics of collective memory in German-American Relations. After an introduction which outlines the importance of history and memory for bilateral relations, we trace the evolution of collective memories of the two countries and identify the key filters through which they evaluate each other. We then identify the key characteristics of German-American relations since the advent of Donald Trump to the American presidency. This is followed by an analysis which examines Trump's use and abuse of history and memory and what that means for his foreign policy in general and German-American relations in particular. In view of the way Donald Trump has taken the subjective nature of collective memories to an extreme by largely disconnecting these memories from their historical context at the same time as extensively referencing his own history and experience, we argue that we might be witnessing the end of memory, in particular the end of memory's direct impact on political discourse and policy.

All bilateral relationships are filtered through the lens of the past. This is certainly the case for the U.S.-German relationship. Indeed, history and memory have been especially important for this relationship, particularly from the U.S. side towards Germany, given the role of the U.S. in militarily defeating Germany twice in the 20th century and then defending the Federal Republic during the Cold War. Moreover, the rise of Holocaust consciousness after the 1970s created another layer of memory through which Germany was perceived. But, what about the present—almost 75 years since the end of WWII and with a very different president now in the White House?

First, what exactly do we mean when we speak of 'the past'? Most obviously, there is history, a narrative recording of the chronology of previous events with explanations provided for the forces or personalities propelling such events. Although the study of history clearly has its merits when examining bilateral relations, a focus on collective memory provides an important additional dimension for an understanding of the mindsets of political elites which provide the basis for their bilateral relationship. As Andrei Markovits and Simon Reich have pointed out, 'history is about cognition and knowledge, collective memory is about

experience and feeling. If history is a matter of the past, collective memory is most definitely a phenomenon of the present.'[1] Or, to follow Pierre Nora, memory is emotionalized and motivating—the living past—whereas history encompasses the cold, dry facts with less influence on policymaking.[2]

Collective memories—shared interpretations of a particularly poignant past filtered through the values and worldviews of the present —are important influences in a variety of political arenas including foreign policy and various bilateral relationships. Most generally, as constructivist IR scholars have argued, memories are ideas that affect the identities and values dominant in a political culture. Specifically, foreign policy makers are impacted by the memories and cultural environment that surround them. Memory helps to create the lens through which a problem or an actor are perceived. Indeed, since 'all consciousness is mediated through it',[3] collective memory plays a pivotal role in opinion and policy formation. It acts as a mechanism that provides orientation for groups, nations and states, helping to explain and make sense of the world and supplying standards for evaluating a range of moral issues.[4]

Memory also helps to prime what historical analogies a policy maker might utilise to respond to an issue in the present and the abiding lessons those historical experiences are said to teach.[5] For example, the strong Western response to the Russian intervention in Crimea in 2014 was clearly affected by parallels drawn to aggressive German expansion in Europe in the 1930s, particularly the Sudetenland issue, and the lessons (such as the dangers of appeasement) drawn from them.[6] Likewise, U.S. policy makers during the Vietnam War were deeply influenced by the memory of the Korean War, which, in turn, was impacted by the memory of 'Munich' in the 1930s.[7] More generally, the widespread postnationalism on the European continent and the strong Franco-German relationship are deeply conditioned by the memory of what happened when nationalism was rampant a century ago and the lessons

derived from it.

Furthermore, there has always been a difference between official policies and diplomatic ties and the attitudes of people towards the other side. Sometimes the two dimensions are in sync and sometimes the tendencies evolve differently. For example, there has been positive sentiment and a pool of goodwill of (West) Germans vis-à-vis Americans over the postwar period, even though relations were sometimes better and sometimes worse (depending on the chemistry between leaders or specific policy disputes). At times, anti-American sentiment has surfaced—but sometimes this did not align with official policy (the NATO 'double-track' decision) and sometimes it did (opposition to the 2003 invasion of Iraq when Germans and their government said no[8]) Alternatively, despite the continuing animosity of many Americans towards Germans after WWII—a critical frame that was strengthened as the country was increasingly seen through the Holocaust prism after the 1970s—U.S. policy was consistently supportive of (West) German interests. Yet, since the turn of the millennium there seems to have been a trend towards warmer attitudes at least at the level of public opinion,[9] even though policy disagreements have occurred over Germany's lack of support for the invasion of Iraq, for example, leading Condoleezza Rice to suggest to 'Punish France, Ignore Germany and Forgive Russia'.[10]

THE EVOLUTION OF COLLECTIVE MEMORIES

This article looks at the impact of collective memories on the German-American relationship. As with any bilateral relationship, history and memory matter—but here the relationship is rather complex and asymmetric. Germany with its by now well-developed culture of contrition operates in a very high memory context. There is overwhelming evidence over the

70+ years of the Federal Republic that the concerns of memory and the lessons from the past have conditioned virtually every major international decision—from rearmament in the mid-1950s, to reunification, the expansion of the European Union and to the establishment of the Euro.[11] For example, former Chancellor Helmut Kohl repeatedly stated that the EU and the euro were necessary to forever overcome a negative historical inheritance. In a famous interview from 2002, he noted: 'Nations with a common currency never went to war against each other. A common currency is more than the money you pay with.' Moreover, 'I wanted to bring the euro because to me it meant the irreversibility of European development ... for me the euro was a synonym for Europe going further.'[12]

The United States and especially policy makers, by contrast, have appeared much less influenced by such concerns. Instead, explanations of American policy decisions approximate what realist IR scholars have asserted—calculated self-interest in the context of international anarchy and hegemonic U.S. power. Nevertheless, memory does matter even in the ever future-oriented USA, but in less conditioning ways than in Germany—the filter of memory is more general and modified by other (realist) considerations. This has been increasingly apparent since the turn of the millennium and appears particularly the case with the current Trump administration.

The US Memory Filters towards Germany

Although we are primarily concerned about the German-American relationship in recent decades and the present, in light of the deeply conditioning and lingering impact of history and memory, more remote periods should be considered. In the 19th century, there was almost no bilateral relationship to speak of (Germany only unified in 1871). Perhaps one could better describe a variety of multilateral relationships between various German states (like Prussia or

Austria-Hungary), but certainly without the unified impact of a France or Britain. A big exception was immigration. For many in the German lands, America with its vast, unsettled frontier represented the new world, a land of opportunity. Already at the time of the founding there were significant German communities and there were even discussions about making German an official language—something early leaders like Benjamin Franklin resisted.[13] A surge of immigration after the failed revolutions of 1848 attested to this strong draw. Over the 19th century 7 million Germans emigrated to the U.S.

Even today, there is a sizeable proportion of the U.S. population that claims German ancestry. In 2014 this was still the largest group at about 14 per cent of the population (a quarter of whites).[14] In 1980, they were 23 per cent of the total population but 28 per cent of whites. In 1900, 9 per cent of Americans were first or second generation German immigrants, the largest group by far.[15] Of course, immigrants had very different reasons for coming to the U.S. and had varying attitudes towards their home country. But, at many points in time, this group has been a factor in U.S. policy and the bilateral relationship. The German-American community was a reason for the late entry of the U.S. in WWI, for the lengthy period of isolationism and even appeasement in the 1930s, and then arguably it was a force behind the staunch defence of the Federal Republic during the Cold War.

It is an open question what (if any) influence such people exert over the bilateral relationship today. One might speculate that this is a moderating force (because of lingering positive sentiments towards one's ancestors' homeland) when policy makers contemplate a harsher stance toward contemporary Germany. Another moderating force is German investment and related jobs in the U.S. today. By some estimates 672,000 U.S. jobs are supported by German affiliates, making Germany the third largest foreign employer.[16] Moreover, about half of these jobs are in the manufacturing sector—a major rhetorical focus of the Trump administration—and also largely situated in the deep red states of the South.[17] Despite the

current $68 billion trade deficit that the U.S. has with Germany, and which Trump has repeatedly criticized, these commercial ties are broad, deep, and mutually beneficial. Merkel certainly tried to convey this point by bringing numerous CEOs of German companies to her first meeting with Trump at the White House in March 2017.

Germany also impacted higher education in the U.S., and thus influenced elites. The Humboldtian research university (first adopted at Johns Hopkins University) became the model for the modern American university. German influence in various disciplines was strong until WWII—an influence that continued with the numerous emigrés from the 1930s onwards. Today, strong investments by the German government (through the DAAD--the centres of excellence) and generous opportunities for exchanges and research have solidified the relationship and created not just venues but a reservoir of intercultural understanding if not good will influencing U.S. elites. For example, Obama's last chief of staff, Denis McDonough, spent a year in Germany on a Bosch Fellowship. The more general cultural and political infrastructure especially in the U.S. capital—German Marshall Fund of the United States, German Historical Institute, Atlantic Council, Bertelsmann and the political foundations—are active players in many policy discussions. There are Goethe Institutes in six cities and DAAD offices in two.

From the American side, the Federal Republic has long been viewed through the lens of Nazism, World War II and the Holocaust. In a 2015 Pew Survey, 47 per cent (51 per cent in the 18-29 group) of Americans, but only 20 per cent of Germans thought WWII and the Holocaust were the most important events in U.S.-German relations; 20 per cent of Germans but only 3 per cent of Americans said the Marshall Plan. Meanwhile, 35 per cent of Germans and 28 per cent of Americans said the fall of the Berlin Wall was the most important historical event.[18]

Interestingly, this framing was less pronounced during the (earlier) decades of the Cold War. During that time, the FRG was often seen as a front-line state, the last free bulwark against the communist menace, and likely the first victim of an invasion from the East (the Fulda Gap). West Germany was weak and vulnerable and needed U.S. protection. Brian Etheridge calls this the Cold War narrative, in contrast to the world war/Holocaust version.[19] It was also true that 10 million U.S. servicemen were stationed in Germany over these decades, creating a familiarity with the country.[20] One could even point to relatively benign depictions of WWII-era German and Nazi soldiers (Hogan's Heroes, The Great Escape). There was more focus on the battles and conventional military history (the Rommel/Desert Fox fetish) and less on the anti-Semitic, racist and genocidal core of the Nazi project. There appeared to be official and popular-culture support for the (long) Adenauer era differentiation of Germans from Nazis with the assertion that the criminals were in fact dead or imprisoned. The myth of the 'clean' Wehrmacht lasted on both sides of the Atlantic until well into the 1990s.[21] Certainly, there was a degree of mistrust, particularly at first, in light of several hundred thousand U.S. battle deaths in the two world wars. Even if the draconian Morgenthau Plan did not come to pass, many policy makers and citizens agreed with Lord Ismay, 1st NATO secretary general, who described the intent of the Atlantic alliance 'to keep the Russians out, the Americans in and the Germans down'. Indeed, U.S. policy makers pursued a strategy of 'dual containment', worried not just about the communist threat from the USSR, but also a resurgent or even neutral Germany.[22] U.S. policy makers also insisted that the Basic Law of the Federal Republic contain certain institutional and policy safeguards that would preclude a repetition of the past, namely strong federalism and a decentralized fiscal system.[23] The renunciation of chemical and nuclear weapons and severe constraints on the deployment of the Bundeswehr (after 1955) were also strongly supported by U.S. policy makers.

Nevertheless, such concerns were not filtered through the lens of the Holocaust, but rather more traditional realist concerns about power, resources, and war-making capacity.

The Nazi and Holocaust framing of Germany and the U.S.-German relationship really came to the fore towards the end of the Cold War and the reunification of Germany. Part of this was due to the rise of Holocaust consciousness and the Americanisation of the Holocaust, dating to the 1970s.[24] Popular culture was crucial in this process, exemplified by the airing of the NBC miniseries *Holocaust* in 1978. The Bitburg Affair in 1985, where Helmut Kohl and Ronald Reagan attempted to celebrate the 40th anniversary of the end of WWII at a military cemetery containing the graves of members of the SS became an international incident, condemned by a vote of the U.S. Congress.[25] The movement to establish a Holocaust Memorial Museum started with Jimmy Carter and was opened in 1993 by Bill Clinton—the 'year of the Holocaust' when Schindler's List also was released. Memorials and museums are found across the country today and the Holocaust has also become a mandatory part of many secondary school curricula in the various states.[26] Increased attention over the 1990s towards debates in Germany about this memory were push and pull factors in the greater salience of the Holocaust filter utilised towards Germany.

More recently, there is evidence that a more positive filter, less encumbered by the past, has arisen among Americans. This is marked by a respect for recent German achievements—the culture of contrition, Germany's soft power, soccer, the strong economy and export prowess. Certain aspects of the German model have been especially lauded—vocational training (even by Trump), the ability to maintain a vibrant manufacturing sector, low inflation, sound public finances and relatively little debt. Especially after Merkel's shift in policy regarding the refugee crisis in 2015 and then after Trump's victory in November 2016, there was much praise at least from the centre and left for Germany and Merkel being the last bastion of liberal, Western values. Some even tout her as 'the leader of the free world'.[27]

Another development over the last few years is that beyond a bipartisan consensus on some issues, e.g. both Democrats and Republicans have criticised German trade surpluses and other related policies (artificially low value of the Euro to boost German exports), the most vehement criticism now appears to come from the right. Previously, criticism of Germany came from the left, i.e. criticism of inadequate coming-to-terms with the past, the perceived lack of sensitivity towards any xenophobic attack or politician, allegations of political-cultural continuity with the Nazi past. With the image of Germany transformed—now into a liberal icon—a lot of the most vehement criticism has come from the right—the so-called alt-right, which promotes 'America First' via Breitbart, for example.[28]

German Filters towards the US

Such distinct phases of perception are not as evident on the German side. Throughout the postwar period, Germans have had divided, even contradictory attitudes towards the U.S. For example, the adult generations of the 1950s and 1960s were fairly pro-American and Atlanticist and there was much goodwill towards the U.S.—thanks to the Berlin Airlift (with the raisin or candy bombers), the nuclear/security guarantee, the Marshall Plan and more general U.S. support for rehabilitating the FRG as quickly as possible and integrating it into NATO and other organisations. JFK was treated as a hero during his trip to the FRG and West Berlin in 1963, when he gave his famous 'Ich bin ein Berliner' speech. Reagan at least partially rehabilitated his war-mongering image in Germany with his famous 'Mr. Gorbachev, tear down this wall' speech almost exactly 30 years ago, while also reaffirming western solidarity.[29]

Another high point of good will surrounded the process of German reunification. U.S. policy makers, especially President George H.W. Bush and Secretary of State James Baker were steadfast supporters. They helped to assuage the concerns of other allies like France, Britain and the USSR. Right before formal unification on October 2, 1990, Bush stated:

> The United States is proud to have built with you the foundations of freedom; proud to have been a steady partner in the quest for one Germany, whole and free. America is proud to count itself among the friends and allies of free Germany, now and in the future. Our peoples are united by the common bonds of culture, by a shared heritage in history. Never before have these common bonds been more evident than in this past year as we worked in common cause toward the goal of German unity. Today, together, we share the fruits of our friendship.[30]

Helmut Kohl, speaking for many Germans, returned the admiration stating that 'George Bush was for me the most important ally on the road to German unity.'[31]

But there was always an underbelly of criticism—and not just from Frankfurt School intellectuals who disdained 'Americanisation' as crass, standard-less, consumerist drivel.[32] After all, the U.S. was a victorious and occupying army with bases around the country. The U.S. Air Force had helped to destroy many German cities not too long before. The generation that experienced this remembered. And of course the late 60s—just 20 years after the founding of the FRG—saw much leftist criticism of U.S. 'imperialism'—in Vietnam, Iran and the 'Third World' more generally. The peace movement of the 70s and early 80s was often explicitly anti-American, for example in its opposition to the NATO 'double-track' decision. Similar opposition occurred in the early 2000s over the Bush administration's decision to invade Saddam Hussein's Iraq.[33]

Despite Barack Obama's high level of personal popularity, there were many tensions in the U.S.-German relationship during his presidency. German and European policy makers understood that the so-called 'pivot to Asia' would decrease American security assets in and attention to Europe.

U.S. policy makers also disagreed with German policy responses to the financial and especially the Euro crisis.[34] Paul Krugman spoke for many U.S. policy makers in 2013 when he pointed out Germany's contribution to the crisis: 'Yet Germany has failed to deliver on its side of the bargain: To avoid a European depression, it needed to spend more as its neighbors were forced to spend less, and it hasn't done that … Germany's trade surplus is damaging.'[35] Tensions persisted when the German government broke with allies and failed to join the action against Libya in 2011. Then, in 2013, news broke that the U.S. National Security Agency (NSA) had been spying on German leaders like Angela Merkel. This reminded many Germans of their totalitarian history with attitudes to secret service tapping being very much influenced by the collective memory of this history. By 2014, only 35 per cent of Germans expressed trust in the U.S., compared to 74 per cent when Barack Obama took over.[36]

The last years of the Obama era became a high point of comity—indeed at times Obama was (much) more popular in Germany than at home. Merkel and Obama developed a particularly close collaboration and friendship, forged in the joint effort to manage and solve various crises, such as post-2014 Russian aggression, the Euro crisis, the Paris Climate Agreement, and the Iranian nuclear deal. During one of his last trips to Europe in April 2016, President Obama described the bilateral relationship with particularly warm words:

> On behalf of the American people, I want to thank Angela for being a champion of our alliance. And on behalf of all of us, I want to thank you for your commitment to freedom, and equality, and human rights, which is a reflection of your inspiring life…I have to admit that I have developed a special place in my heart for the German people…And as always, I bring the friendship of the American people. We consider the German people, and all of our European allies, to be among our closest friends in the world.[37]

GERMAN-AMERICAN RELATIONS IN THE TRUMP ERA

German-American relations under the 45th president have entered, at the best, a phase of uncertainty, and, at the worst, a nadir. As David Frum, former speech-writer to George W. Bush opined: 'The spinal column of the Western alliance is the U.S.-Germany relationship, and Trump has undermined it since Day One.'[38] Given the wild swings in policies and tweets from Donald Trump, assessments of the state of relations change rather frequently. Early in the campaign in October 2015, Trump was very critical of Merkel: 'They're going to have riots in Germany … I always thought Merkel was, like, this great leader. What she's done in Germany is insane.'[39] In December 2015, he said she was 'ruining' Germany with her refugee policy.[40] Then in August 2016 he stated that 'Hillary Clinton wants to be America's Angela Merkel, and you know what a disaster this massive immigration has been to Germany and the people of Germany. Crime has risen to levels that no one thought would [sic] they would ever see.'[41]

This came after he expressed great respect—albeit with a degree of bitterness—for her: 'Germany's like sitting back silent collecting money and making a fortune with probably the greatest leader in the world today, Merkel … She's fantastic … highly respected.'[42] During their first meeting at the White House in March 2017, the tensions were palpable. There were allegations that Trump did not shake Merkel's hand when asked and that he presented her with a 'bill' for what Germany owed the U.S. for providing security.[43] But then, not much later, Trump was talking about the excellent chemistry he had with her. In May 2017, Trump criticised Germany again at the NATO meeting and G7 Summit and then in a variety of tweets. Germany was 'bad, really bad,' German automobile exports were unfair (singling out BMW) and Trump asserted once again that the country owed the U.S. money for security. Newspaper headlines spoke of Merkel and Trump 'hating' each other.[44]

Trump has also made unsettling comments about the European Union, probably the most important German foreign policy precept. He supported Brexit and asked publicly, which

member state will be next to leave. Yet, at other times he has said: 'The EU, I'm totally in favour of it. I think it's wonderful, if they're happy. If they're happy – I'm in favour of it.' But then he went on: 'You look at the European Union and it's Germany. Basically a vehicle for Germany. That's why I thought the UK was so smart in getting out.'[45]

Before the G20 Summit in July 2017, he pointedly visited Poland, where he was feted by the ruling national-conservative Law and Justice Party. He reiterated the dominant narrative of Polish history: 'What great spirit. We salute your noble sacrifice and we pledge to always remember your fight for Poland and for freedom… Your oppressors tried to break you, but Poland could not be broken.' Although he did finally affirm the Article 5 guarantee and committed to Western values such as freedom of speech, gender equality, and the rule of law, he also conceived of the West in terms that do not align themselves easily with the more universalist or postnational manner dominant in Germany:

> Americans, Poles, and the nations of Europe value individual freedom and sovereignty. We must work together to confront forces, whether they come from inside or out, from the South or the East, that threaten over time to undermine these values and to erase the bonds of culture, faith and tradition that make us who we are. If left unchecked, these forces will undermine our courage, sap our spirit, and weaken our will to defend ourselves and our societies…The world has never known anything like our community of nations. We write symphonies. We pursue innovation. We celebrate our ancient heroes, embrace our timeless traditions and customs, and always seek to explore and discover brand-new frontiers.[46]

Finally, most explicitly, he points out the central role of history and memory, even though he does not elaborate on the specifics:

> Our own fight for the West does not begin on the battlefield -- it begins with our minds, our wills, and our souls. Today, the ties that unite our civilization are no less vital, and demand no less defense, than that bare shred of land on which the hope of Poland once totally rested. Our freedom, our civilization, and our survival depend on these bonds of history, culture, and memory.[47]

The views of Trump's former advisor and chief strategist, Stephen Bannon also matter, even though he was forced to resign from these formal roles in August 2017. Overall, Bannon

thinks the European Union is a threatening example of 'globalism' and was thus a strong supporter of Brexit. In his widely quoted 2014 Vatican speech he noted:

> I think strong countries and strong nationalist movements in countries make strong neighbors …That is really the building blocks that built Western Europe and the United States, and I think it's what can see us forward … the world, and particularly the Judeo-Christian West, is in a crisis … [Europeans want] sovereignty for their country, they want to see nationalism …They don't believe in this kind of pan-European Union.[48]

Merkel responded to Trump's election victory with her usual aplomb, although a sharper edge was evident in the message:

> Germany and America are bound by common values — democracy, freedom, as well as respect for the rule of law and the dignity of each and every person, regardless of their origin, skin color, creed, gender, sexual orientation, or political views. It is based on these values that I wish to offer close cooperation, both with me personally and between our countries' governments.[49]

Her then Vice-Chancellor and current Foreign Minister Sigmar Gabriel was harsher: 'Trump is the trailblazer of a new authoritarian and chauvinist international movement. … They want a rollback to the bad old times in which women belonged by the stove or in bed, gays in jail and unions at best at the side table. And he who doesn't keep his mouth shut gets publicly bashed.'[50]

Months and several awkward meetings later—including the NATO Summit when Trump would not formally support Article 5 or the G7 Summit in Italy in May 2017 where he pushed another leader out of the way and expressed misgivings about the Paris Climate Agreement, Merkel stated at a campaign rally: 'The time in which we could fully rely on others is a bit in the past … I have experienced that in the past several days. And, because of that, I can say now that we Europeans truly have to take our fate into our own hands.'[51]

Although it is difficult to predict how the situation will develop, the negativity and equivocations from the White House have had a deleterious impact in Germany. A Harvard University study of media coverage of Trump's first 100 days showed that Germany's public

television channel was the most critical with 98 per cent of stories coded as negative.[52] Germans have also had a more unfavourable view of the U.S. compared to other Europeans in 2016: 57 per cent of Germans had a favourable view, versus 63 per cent of French people or 61 per cent of British people.[53]

Trump's negative comments about NATO, the European Union, and Germany's trade surplus have created much consternation. In February 2017, 78 percent of Germans viewed Trump with concern, whereas only 58 per cent took the same position towards Putin's policies.[54] By late June 2017, confidence that the U.S. president would do the right thing regarding world affairs had plummeted to 11 per cent of Germans versus 86 per cent at the end of Obama's presidency. There were similar declines in many other countries, and only increases in Israel (slight) and Russia.[55] Representatives of the Trump administration have also been met with public ridicule—such as when Ivanka Trump tried to defend her father's treatment of women in Berlin in April 2017, when Commerce Secretary Wilbur Ross was allegedly cut off for going over his allotted time when addressing a CDU group in June 2017, and during protests in conjunction with the G20 Summit in Hamburg in July 2017.[56]

UNDERSTANDING TRUMP?

There does not seem to be a foreign policy area that is important to the Germans that has not been unsettled or discredited by the Trump administration—the European Union, the Euro, NATO, the UN (Trump deemed it an 'underperformer' and wants to eviscerate U.S. funding[57]), policy towards Russia,[58] Iran, the Middle East more generally, climate/environment, trade and TTIP.[59] But, how can we understand Trump and the policies of his administration? And how does he view history, which historical periods, events and

phenomena does he invoke to formulate and substantiate 'his message'? And, of course, what collective memory strands do politicians and the press resort to in order to evaluate President Trump and what he stands for? What key collective memory strands is Trump tapping into, promoting or even creating?

The key text (of twelve books on business and politics) here is *The America We Deserve*, published in 2000 when Trump contemplated running for the presidency for the Reform Party.[60] As is the case with many texts allegedly authored by politicians, we do not know, of course, how much or how little of the content can actually be attributed to Trump himself. We have to assume however, that the texts reflect his views at least to a degree. Much of what he wrote in this book—for instance on immigration, tax policy or a dystopian view of contemporary America—has also been expressed since he became president. For instance, he lauds his family: 'I haven't been as successful in my marriages as my parents were, but marriage is not the only family value that matters. The importance you give to your relationship with your kids is a family value.' (25) His political self-image and basis of his appeal is also evident: 'But I'm also bringing a perspective to politics that most politicians don't have. I've built a multi-billion dollar empire by using my intuition.' (35)

Trump has little to say about the past and what he does say is couched in his life-history. He does seem to be particularly drawn to the Great Depression (character-building), the 1950s (the golden age), and the 1970s (decadent decline): 'I will never forget the 1970s, when reckless regulators were running the show—make that horror show.' (45) In a section called 'Our Next Comeback,' he lauds the American dream and his father and grandfather: 'In those days you didn't hoof it down to the welfare line when hard times hit, you hit the bricks looking for work.' (42) All of this prefigures his 2016 campaign slogan 'Make America Great Again,' harkening back to the mythical golden age of the 1950s,[61] or even Theodore Roosevelt in the early 20th century—a time of rapid industrialization and growth and great

fortunes (the robber barons).[62] Regarding German history, at various points, he expressed disagreement with positive comments Pat Buchanan made about Hitler around that time: 'Hitler was a monster and it was essential for the allies to crush Nazism … My grandfather was German. But I am proud of the vital role the United States played in defeating the Third Reich.' (17). Trump subsequently reconciled with Buchanan, who has actually said that his ideas (economic nationalism) have finally triumphed with the 45th president.[63]

His thinking on foreign policy is also outlined. He notes: 'In the modern world you can't very easily draw up a simple, general foreign policy … We deal with all the other nations of the world on a case-by-case basis. And a lot of those bystanders don't look so innocent.' (111)

He also articulated criticism of NATO:

> Pulling back from Europe would save this country millions of dollars annually. The cost of stationing NATO troops in Europe is enormous, and these are clearly funds that can be put to better use. Our allies don't seem to appreciate our presence anyway. We pay for the defense of France, yet they vote against us at the United Nations and choose the side of the North Koreans, the Libyans, and other rogue nations. (142-143)

His policy flip-flops as president are also prefigured and grounded in at least a vague conception of history:

> But, ultimately, I don't think that we should abandon Europe completely … His [Buchanan's] recommendations of appeasement toward the Nazi regime sounds exactly like what liberals said about Hitler in the '30s and what liberal today are saying about rogue states like North Korea. If you applied the same doctrine of appeasement to domestic criminals, you'd be giving murderers and armed robbers stern reprimands and setting them free. (143)

His views on trade have also barely changed. He sees the world in martial, zero-sum terms. Everything is deal–making and he proclaims a unique skill set in this regard: 'Frankly, there are many aspects of trade where my negotiating skills could be useful.' (147)[64] Moreover:

> It's become cliché to say that business, especially trade, is like war …. But cliché or not, it's true. Germany and Japan were our enemies in World War II, and for decades afterward each was a powerful competitor in trade—tough in peacetime as each had been in war. (Though both have fallen on lean times recently, they will become worthy adversaries again.) We didn't make the best possible trade deals with them. We're not making smart deals now … the core of these problems is that we don't

> know how to negotiate. We don't know how to get what we want out of the people we're sitting across the table from. (146)

There is a constant tendency to define the world in Manichean terms. Americans are always the good guys and there is a constant need to have bad guys, some 'worthy adversary', opponent, enemy, or 'other'—illegal Mexican immigrants, North Korea, China, the European Union, or perhaps now Germany. Trump also seems to always require a dramatically staged 'feud'—previously with Rosie O'Donnell, during the campaign with a gold star family and with 'Morning Joe' journalists Mika Brzezinski and Joe Scarborough. He also seems to have problems with facts, for instance that trade deals are negotiated with the EU and not individual member states like Germany, and he has flirted with conspiracy theories (birtherism) and conspiracy theorists (Alex Jones).[65]

One of the references most frequently used by Donald Trump has been 'America First' which relates to the isolationist, anti-Semitic group which pushed for America to stay out of the Second World War. It had also been used as a slogan by Woodrow Wilson and more recently by Pat Buchanan. Trump has used the phrase extensively during his election campaign but also during his first few months in office.

Just like America's other allies, German politicians reacted with concern at the suggestion that the United States wanted to withdraw from its international role. As Robert Kagan has pointed out, the phrase gained more prominence after the Iraq and Afghan wars and the financial crisis to the point that it became a 'national phenomenon'. According to Kagan, there was a transition away from considering the United States as an 'indispensable nation', as Bill Clinton had phrased it, already under President Obama with Trump's election representing a 'decisive break' from this internationalist tradition.[66] As one commentator put it, '[t]he history that haunts them [the Europeans] is that of the 1930s, when a self-absorbed America stood by as Europe fell to fascism and war.'[67] It was the lessons learnt from the

1930s, however, that led Washington to design ‘a new, US-led global order’ after the Second World War.[68]

In a press statement on the outcome of the US presidential elections – and presumably in response to Trump’s use of the slogan ‘America First’ during the election campaign – Merkel pointed out that the importance of the outcome of presidential elections went far beyond the United States. She emphasized that those who govern this large country carry responsibility which can be felt nearly everywhere in the world. Addressing concerns that had been raised during the campaign about Trump’s lack of democratic credentials, Merkel asserted that the bond between Germany and America was based on common values – the appreciation of which can clearly be seen to have arisen out of the experience of Germany’s totalitarian pasts. It was only on the basis of these values that Merkel offered the new President Trump close cooperation.[69]

As it turns out, Trump has shifted his position in the meantime considerably from describing NATO as obsolete to confirming its significance for transatlantic relations and peace and stability (for example during the British Prime Minister Theresa May’s visit to Washington in January 2017, in a telephone conversation with Merkel on 28 January 2017, and in his 6 July 2017 speech in Warsaw[70]). He also explicitly dismissed the idea of being an isolationist in a press conference with Angela Merkel.[71]

Trump thus seems to have used references to ‘America First’ only as soundbites to mobilize his following rather than actually evoking a particular memory or message. Without paying much attention to the historical context of the slogan, he thus seems to have disconnected memory from history altogether, giving it a life of its own in the process.

The past that does seem to play a role in President Trump’s understanding of the world is the one that goes right up to his inauguration as President, that is the bad past from which he wants to ‘liberate’ the American people. With his slogan ‘Make America great again’, he has

frequently also referred back to a better past, however, being quite nostalgic about this past, without ever really pinpointing to when this past was. Particularly in his inaugural address, President Trump evokes images of a liberation from an oppressive past of the American people, some kind of oligarchy, which he describes as an 'American carnage' which 'stops right here and stops right now'. He speaks of a 'great national effort to rebuild our country and to restore its promise for all of our people', promising to transfer power from Washington and 'giving it back to you, the American people'. In his view, 'January 20th 2017, will be remembered as the day the people became the rulers of this nation again' and American will be made 'great again.'[72]

References to a better past seems to have persuaded some Americans. According to Anne Applebaum, Trump's appeal to the working class was cultural since he promised them to bring back the kinds of jobs their fathers had and 'by implication, the whiter, simpler, post-war world when America had no real economic competition.'[73]

But how has the Trump administration handled America's traditional collective memory strands? On 27th January, Holocaust Memorial Day, Trump managed to make a widely criticised statement in which he omitted to mention the millions of Jews that were killed in the Holocaust.[74] Interestingly, although Trump in his usual outspoken manner criticised Germany and Angela Merkel for her refugee policy, Germany's trade surplus and for using the EU as a vehicle to advance Germany's economic interests and Germany (also more widely, Europe) for a lack of burden-sharing in terms of defence, and although it would have been very easy, he has not made use of German history, in particular the Nazi past, to underline his views. Besides the Warsaw speech discussed above, the one memorable time that former press secretary Sean Spicer referred to the Nazi past was a very unfortunate one when – after the poison gas attack in Syria – he claimed that not even somebody as

despicable as Hitler had sunk to using chemical weapons during World War II and referred to concentration camps as 'Holocaust centres' (for which he later apologized).

In the bilateral relationship, Trump also does not allude to a common history. In the joint press conference with Angela Merkel during her visit to Washington in March 2017, he emphasized that the two countries share the 'desire for security, prosperity and peace.'[75]

Angela Merkel, however, right at the beginning, undertakes an excursion into the past:

> Let me look back into the past. We, the Germans, owe a lot to the United States of America, particularly as regards the economic rise of Germany. This was primarily due to the help through the Marshall Plan. We were also able to regain German unity after decades of the United States standing up for this, together with other allies, and standing by our side during the period of the Cold War. And we are gratified to know that today we can live in peace and freedom as a unified country due to that.[76]

In order to get a fuller picture, it is also important to consider the references to history the world around Trump has used to assess him and his policies. There is no doubt that his election victory has very much been assessed with references to totalitarianism. His advent to power has been described as 'the end of the west', 'the end of the liberal era' and 'a new fascism coming to power' and Trump himself has been described as 'not a democrat' but a 'fascist' with parallels being drawn to Mussolini and Hitler. His advent to power has also been described as the beginning of a new 'authoritarian era'.[77]

In his column in the Washington Post, Robert Kagan, in a piece called 'This is how fascism comes to America', on 18 May 2016 issued the following warning:

> This is how fascism comes to America, not with jackboots and salutes (although there have been salutes, and a whiff of violence) but with a television huckster, a phony billionaire, a textbook egomaniac 'tapping into' popular resentments and insecurities, and with an entire national political party – out of ambition or blind party loyalty, or simply out of fear – falling into line behind him.[78]

When Barack Obama made his last phone call as American President to Angela Merkel, this was interpreted as not just a goodbye but described as him 'handing over his baton. The German Chancellor isn't just the leader of Europe, she is now the de-facto leader of the free

world.'[79] Trump's travel ban, the attempt to stop people arriving from countries with a predominantly Muslim population, confirmed his illiberal stance and the concern that America was turning into an inward looking country which discriminated against people based on their religion. A title page of the news magazine Der Spiegel in early February 2017 which showed the American President beheading the Statue of Liberty expressed this criticism. The cartoonist himself said that the image represented 'the beheading of democracy' and that he wanted to compare Islamic State and Donald Trump, saying 'both sides are extremists'.[80]

Also drawing on this dichotomy, when Angela Merkel visited the American President in March 2017, the New York Times described it as 'an awkward encounter that was the most closely watched of his young presidency' which took on 'an outsize symbolism': 'the great disrupter confronts the last defender of the liberal world order.'[81]

A lot of Trump's views go against everything Merkel stands for considering that she grew up in a totalitarian regime: his dismissive views of the press, his plans to build a wall, his illiberal stance that does not accommodate diversity. As one commentator put it, 'Trump is no doubt Merkel's idea of a nightmare US president. Growing up in the communist bloc, she always saw America as a key repository of western values.'[82] Particularly Trump's plan to build a wall between the US and Mexico is clearly unlikely to evoke pleasant memories of the German Chancellor who grew up in the GDR.

Trump's attack of the media (or in his words, 'the fake news media') as the 'enemy of the American people' reminds observers of a phrase commonly used by authoritarian and totalitarian regimes to discredit its critics. The term 'enemy of the people' ('Volksfeinde') has been used by dictatorships throughout history to describe and discredit political opposition as 'the enemy within' and to justify its fights against these 'internal enemies'.

Trump's attack of the press as 'the fake news media' also brings to mind the term 'Lügenpresse' ('lying press'). It is probably best known for the way the Nazi regime dismissed the free press as using their outlets to spread lies. The term Lügenpresse has more recently also been resurrected by the Islamophobic Pegida movement and the AfD in Germany to discredit the critical press.[83]

Whether Trump is actually aware of the historical connotations, is unsure. In either case, it is worrying. His appointment of Stephen Bannon – even though he was not part of the administration for long - who is widely known as right-wing and anti-Semitic as his advisor and chief strategist who even became a member of the Principals Committee of the National Security Council initially (he was removed from that already in April 2017), was certainly of concern and supported the evocation of references to totalitarianism and fascism.

According to the BBC correspondent Jenny Hill, the anniversary of the Reichskristallnacht ('Night of the Broken Glass') and the fall of the Berlin Wall – 'and all that they represent of this country's past – explain, partially at least, why Germans were so repulsed by Donald Trump's election rhetoric and why so few (4 per cent by one poll's reckoning) wanted him in the White House.'[84]

THE END OF MEMORY?

Trump does not appear to have the standard provision of references to history available to him like other politicians. He seems to use historical references at face value, for example, 'America First' – probably not realising that the isolationist stance associated with the term did not work well in the past. But overall, there are not many references to history at all. Trump and his team do not seem to have much awareness of history and of the presence as

having evolved from history. Maybe he does not need to use collective memory (or maybe he just cannot because his historical knowledge is very restricted) because he is not afraid to use blunt messages. Whereas other politicians use collective memories to make their case and substantiate their arguments, he just says directly what he thinks and does not seem to see the need for making a case by evoking particular memories or historical parallels.

Maybe Trump has just taken the use of collective memory to an extreme. He uses references to history as soundbites which help him mobilise his followers. This is also what other politicians do, albeit in a more sophisticated way. They use collective memory strands in a kind of 'pick'n'mix' or 'bricolage' way to make their points. Trump has just taken this further by disconnecting it pretty much altogether from the historical context—in a rather postmodern, 'floating signifier' fashion. (It has been pointed out that Trumpism is appropriating and inverting the identity politics and concepts of the left).[85]

Rather than employing collective memory strands to make his point, he seems to reference his own history and experience in his politics. As one source told the Guardian in the context of the ill-fated G7 summit on Sicily in May 2017: 'Every time we talked about a country, he remembered the things he had done. … Scotland? He said he had opened a club. Ireland? He said it took him two and a half years to get a licence and that did not give him a very good image of the EU.'[86] Maybe the use of personal rather than collective memory is to be expected from somebody with a personality that has frequently been described as narcissistic.[87]

Perhaps there is more going on here, though. Perhaps we are witnessing the end of memory, specifically, the end of memory's direct impact. Germans may no longer actively remember the support of the U.S. against the communist threat. And perhaps Americans, Trumpistas in particular, are no longer seeing Germany through a Cold War or Holocaust lens. Perhaps this is the ultimate moment of normalisation—cold, hard reason; self-interest; deals. Indeed,

much has been made of Trump's ahistorical, deal-based leadership style. This was perhaps best summed up by two advisors, stating that Trump has

> a clear-eyed outlook that the world is not a 'global community' but an arena where nations, nongovernmental actors and businesses engage and compete for advantage. We bring to this forum unmatched military, political, economic, cultural and moral strength. Rather than deny this elemental nature of international affairs, we embrace it … we delivered a clear message to our friends and partners: Where our interests align, we are open to working together to solve problems and explore opportunities … In short, those societies that share our interests will find no friend more steadfast than the United States. Those that choose to challenge our interests will encounter the firmest resolve.[88]

The contrast with Merkel and other European leaders could not be stronger. This is a rather Nietzschean moment—Umwertung aller Werte—where what has been said or thought about the other is now inverted. It was not that long ago that observers fretted deeply about parallels to Weimar in Germany—during the wave of xenophobic violence in 1992 for instance, or when the unemployment rate spiked in the 1990s first in eastern Germany and then in the western regions as well (sick man of the euro). Now there is a small library full of such analyses of the U.S. and Trump.

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