From the family to the nation; exploring generational memory and political identity in post-war West Germany

Anna Howard

Abstract

Memory allows generations to define themselves as a group by producing shared collective and cultural experiences, which forms a generational identity. This article explores the example of post-war West Germany, where it is possible to see memories of the second world war shaping generational attitudes and creating conflict. These conflicts often begin at the micro level within the family and can then extend out into wider society, generating social and political change. The second world war meant polarising views and attitudes towards the German nation came to the fore. This was particularly prominent between the older generation who could remember the first world war, and the younger generation born during or just before the second world war. During the 1950s, West German society remained largely silent about the legacy of Nazism. This changed by the late 1960s as the younger generation began to question their families and the West German government and institutions for their silence surrounding the Nazi regime. They began to criticise their parents and grandparents generation for their complicity in the rise of Nazism, consciously reject their attitudes, and position their generational identity in direct opposition. The changing attitudes towards the nation and the growing acknowledgement of the German past is reflected in the art, culture and politics that developed from the 1960s. While acknowledging the nation as a central organising political feature, this article also highlights the necessity to move beyond the homogenising national lens. This allows for a more transnational approach that would lead to an increased plurality in memory studies. The study of post-war West Germany enables a better understanding of conflict between generations, the impact of physical structures such as war memorials and the immensely complex relationship between memory and political identity.
Introduction

Memory powerfully shapes political identity, as all human consciousness is mediated through memory. Interpretations of the past, the present and expectations of the future are all affected by our individual, collective and cultural memories. These interpretations serve to inform and shape political identity, particularly the identity of generations and generational experience. Using inter-generational conflict in post-war West Germany as a case study, this article will argue that memory allows generations to define themselves as a group, by producing shared collective and cultural experiences, which forms a generational identity. This group identity is often constituted around, and with reference to, national identity. The family home is a focal point for the transmission of memory, as family members communicate with one another and are thus able to define their generational identity in relation, and in contrast, to others. Such generational dynamics often extend to wider society and can cause huge social and political change.

The memory of the Second World War served to shape political identity, especially in regard to national identity and patriotism. The generation who had been too young to fight in the Second World War began to criticise the older generations. This was specific to their parents’ and grandparents’ generation that had been witness to, and facilitated, the rise of National Socialism and the mass persecution of Europe’s Jewish population. With this, a generational rupture took place. Political and social attitudes diverged powerfully, with ideals surrounding the ‘nation’ providing a focal point of conflict between the older and younger generations. It is necessary to acknowledge that this article does make generalisations regarding families, generational attitudes and identity and conflict in West Germany, as the length of the piece requires some simplifications. Nevertheless, a distinction can be made between the adolescents of the post-World War One era in Germany and those in the post-World War Two era in West Germany, as these generations ‘remembered’ the wars in different ways.
Memory studies provides a particularly insightful lens through which to observe post-war West Germany and illuminate the social and political conflict between generations. Generations are composed of individuals who self-consciously belong to a certain social group that remembers events and experiences together. Through this process of remembrance, generations may change and transform the meanings attributed to such events. In the space of a mere 20 years, Germany lurched from a democratic republic to a totalitarian state at war to a country divided in two. When such immense social and political upheavals occur during the lifetime of overlapping generations, the meanings attributed to past events, symbols and ideas often become fragmented (Wydra 2018, 5-34). For example, concepts such as national glory and sacrifice became defunct to much of the younger generation in post-World War Two West Germany. Generations may then use elements of cultural memory and play on them, responding to certain events by remembering them in a certain way. Memorials serve as a particular point of focus for this phenomenon, as their construction and the meanings attributed to them change. This is especially visible over the course of the twentieth century and the transition from the remembrance of the First World War to the Second World War.

**Memory**

The existence of a collective memory was first postulated by Halbwachs (1992, 38) who argued that the only possibility for individuals to be able to remember is by placing individual thought within social frameworks. It is through people’s membership of a social group, particularly kinship, religious or class affiliations, that individuals are able to acquire, to localise, and to recall their memories. The obvious downfall of Halbwachs’ argument is the contention that all memory is social, thus placing a great emphasis upon oral history. It is certain that individual memories do exist, and personal remembrance will vary. Nevertheless, shared memories and images of the past are used by generations to identify themselves with others. Images of the past do commonly legitimate a present social order, and the participants of the society or community must presuppose a shared memory (Connerton, 1989, 3). This helps to create certain group political identities. This can clearly be seen in the shared memories of the two world wars between generations in West Germany. As
Pierre Nora argues, generations are ‘communities of remembrance’ that preserve a foundational event, which creates a self-conscious generation (Wydra 2018, 5-34).

It is necessary to refine Halbwachs’ concept of the ‘collective’, which Assmann J (2011a, 213) does by delineating it into that of ‘communicative’ and ‘cultural’ memory. Communicative memory is the images of the past that are negotiated and handed down within groups from grandparents to grandchildren and in everyday communication. Cultural memory is the accumulated residues of the past that constitutes the knowledge which helps a group become aware of its unity and peculiarity. (Assmann J. 2011a, 213). Therefore, communicative memory is that which informs everyday memory and identity, shaping generational identity within families and wider society, allowing one generation to distinguish itself from another. Cultural memory, however, lies outside of everyday memory and is used to distinguish broader forms of political identity, such as national identity. Cultural memory is maintained through cultural formations, such as texts, rites and monuments, and institutional communication, such as recitation, practice, observance (Assmann J. 2011a, 213). The cultural heritage of a society is established through stable formations, such as monuments, images and rituals as well as writings. It is therefore cultural memory that often allows a certain group in society to become visible to itself and others.

There is a clear disparity between all individual memories and what becomes collective and cultural memory. Often, small groups in society, whose members have directly experienced traumatic events, such as veterans or survivors groups, have a chance to shape the national memory. However, this is only if they command the means to express their visions and if this meets with compatible social or political objectives and inclinations among other important social groups, such as political elites (Fogu & Kansteiner 2006, 290). Social groups, institutions and dispositions of power can shape public memory. Indeed, Kriegel and Hirsch (1978, 23-38) assert that the very concept of generation is fundamentally elitist, referring not to a certain interval of time but instead to an ‘energy field’ that provides a framework for the preservation of experiences that are held to be
crucial and worth remembering. A generation is then formed by a system of references that are established in retrospect and accepted as a system of collective group identification. (Kriegel & Hirsch 1978, 23-38). As can be seen throughout history, such labels of identification are often created by social and political elites. Those in power are more capable of choosing and defining the memories that generations will come to self-reference and define themselves by. Despite this, it would be wrong to suggest that all collective memories are necessarily coterminous with the interests of elites.

It is true, however, that forgetting is just as much a part of memory as remembering is. Indeed, Assmann A (2011, 334) is correct to argue that the process of forgetting is part of social normality. Remembering is the exception, which requires precautions to ensure the continuation of memory. These precautions often take the shape of cultural institutions. Assmann A (2011, 335) postulates a separation of memory in the form of a canon and an archive. The canon is the ‘active, working memory’ of a society which defines the cultural identity of a group, often by specifically excluding those deemed to not belong. (Assmann A. 2011, 337). In contrast, the archive functions as a reference memory of society, serving to counterbalance the restrictions of the working, active memory (Assmann A. 2011, 337). These active and passive realms of cultural memory, the canon and the archive, are not completely separate but are instead subject to mutual influx. This allows for the necessarily changeable and ubiquitous nature of memory.

**Transmission of memory in the family**

Memory can be created, enforced and changed within certain spaces. Social spaces and cultural rules are interconnected as both indicate who may communicate with whom, how, when, where and under what conditions (Connerton 2009, 31). This ultimately influences the creation and production of memories. The home and the family have been particularly emphasised points of collective memory by scholars such as Assmann J (2011a, 213) who highlights the role of the family as a crucial unit for the transmission of memory. Images of the past are often handed down from
grandparents to parents to children. The role of the family and the house in post-World War Two West Germany was deeply important, as many families did not speak to one another about the events of the war, particularly those of the Holocaust, leading to a more widespread silence in society. It was, indeed, the communicative silencing that Assmann J (2011a, 213) emphasises, that led to such a widespread amnesia in West German society around the events of the Holocaust. Welzer et. al. (2011, 344) also explored the patterns and mechanisms of memory transmission in families regarding the Nazi past in West Germany. They argued that the memory of the Nazi past is shaped by family dynamics and, in contrast to Assmann, even when particular pasts are explicitly acknowledged by grandparents, grandchildren do not always assimilate that knowledge into their conception of familial identity (Welzer et. al. 2011, 344). Indeed, should a member of the familial community, such as the grandfather, emerge as someone with whom ‘wrong’ memories are associated, thus threatening the unity of family memory, the result was often a denial of the past. (Welzer et. al. 2011, 344). It was therefore not only communicative silencing that led to a widespread amnesia in West German society around the Holocaust, but also the fact that such memories would drastically alter familial identity, and therefore must be ignored.

In contrast to the concept of communicative silencing, Hirsch postulates the existence of ‘postmemory’, arguing that it describes the relationship of the second generation to powerful, often traumatic, experiences that took place before they were born, but were nevertheless transmitted so deeply that they seem to constitute their own personal memories. (Hirsch 2008, 103-138). He also emphasises the importance of the family as a space of transmission. Indeed, postmemory is not an identity position but instead a ‘generational structure of transmission’ that is deeply embedded in all forms of consciousness mediated through memory (Hirsch 2008, 103-138). The role of photography can be highlighted as a key medium of postmemory. Family photos and the familial aspects of postmemory, unlike public images, would diminish the distance and bridge the separation between past and present, thus facilitating an identification between the members of different generations. (Hirsch 2008, 103-128). Family relationships reinforce collective memories, and individualise them to
become more personal, forming generational identity. It is therefore clear that some of the conflicts that can be seen at a wider level within West Germany were taking place at the micro level within many German families. The Nazi era and the horrors of the Holocaust were passed down to the younger generation, despite often having no real memory of the regime. The refusal to accept familial responsibility for Nazi crimes and the denial of culpability meant that the silence within West German families extended out into the West German nation.

**Generations and conflict**

The interactions and the conflict between those who had not reached adolescence during the Second World War years and the older generation produced paradigmatic shifts in West Germany from the 1950s to the 1980s. It is particularly important that the generation who came to criticise their parents’ generation for the silence surrounding the Holocaust and Nazi past were children during the Second World War. Scholars have emphasised the critical nature of age in determining the experiences that are formative in developing political identity. The generational identity created by the events a group experiences during its youth is assumed to have a decisive influence upon the later attitudes and actions of its members (Schuman & Scott 1989, 359-381). Mannheim (1953, 298) concurs, arguing that the impressions one gains in early life remain the most predominant and influential. The older generation, which had held responsibility during the Nazi regime and experienced the immediate aftermath of the war as adults, had to cope with the charge of collective guilt levelled at Germany by both the outside world and the next generation. It was only with the second generation, those born just before or even during the war and who would grow up during the 1950s and 1960s who developed a greater sensitivity to the defeat of 1945. They then fought most fiercely against national greatness and patriotic glory, which had been sacred and meaningful to their parents and grandparents (Wydra 2018, 5-34). This younger generation thus came to define and reference itself by directly opposing their parents’ generation, most importantly rejecting ideals of national glory and patriotism.
The 1950s in West Germany can most appropriately be characterised as a period of ‘communicative silence’ about the most troublesome aspects of the burden of the past; a silence that was often accompanied by cries of German victimhood (Kansteiner 2006, 108). A self-defensive strategy was developed in order to deal with Nazism, including the demonization of Hitler and his entourage while simultaneously avoiding any inquiry into a more general responsibility for the horrors of the Nazi rule. Such a self-centred victim identity can be seen to have developed to help the German population come to terms with the nation’s division, large scale destruction and foreign occupation. Due to this refusal to confront the past, there was significant continuity in the immediate post-war Germany. The 1951 Reinstatement Act saw former Nazi civil servants re-employed and given full pension credits for their years of service under the Third Reich. The renewed film industry recycled the stars and aesthetics of the Nazi cinema. The educational system dutifully reformed the curriculum and issued new textbooks but for the most part, teachers simply opted out of teaching contemporary history. In both the public and the private sphere, the ‘cordon sanitaire’ around Nazi crimes was well maintained (Kansteiner 2006, 111). Nazi crimes and personal involvements remained carefully protected taboo subjects and adolescents quickly recognised that the topic had the potential to disrupt and destroy the ‘thin veneer of normality’ that was consciously maintained in many German households. (Kansteiner 2006, 111).

All of the leading political figures of early post-war political life in West and East Germany came of political age between 1900 and 1930. They experienced Nazism, World War Two and the Holocaust in their mature, not their formative, years. Due to this, they interpreted the aftermath of the war on the basis of long-held beliefs. This can be seen in Chancellor Adenauer’s election campaign featuring the slogan ‘No experiments’. Former Nazi party members were rehabilitated into Adenauer’s Germany and manufacturers who made capital during the Nazi era used it to rebuild and restructure. Some political leaders, however, were vociferous in their disagreement with such a tactic. The SDP leader, Schumacher, was vocal in his belief of the need for Germany to face its past and deal with legacy of Nazism. The electorate opted for Adenauer’s approach instead.
Schumacher’s politics and attempts to acknowledge the Nazi crimes conflicted with his interests in the electoral struggle for power (Herf 2002, 188). Even after stability had been restored to West Germany, the Chancellor of Germany from 1966-69 was Kurt Georg Kiesinger, who had been a member of the Nazi party himself; hardly suggesting the German nation was confronting its past. Germans spoke of their own suffering during the war and a rhetoric of victimhood dominated. It was therefore not until the 1960s, when a successor generation asked difficult questions about the Nazi past, that the minority political traditions of memory of the first post-war decades found a broad audience for the first time. Chancellor Willy Brandt, a life-long opponent of Nazism, was elected and in 1970 knelt before the Warsaw Ghetto memorial to demonstrate a personal remorse for the crimes of the regime. It was therefore not an ‘amnesia’ that spread across post-war West Germany, but rather a selective memory. The constraints upon an open, public discussion and remembrance of the Nazi past, however, did not necessarily govern individual memory. Instead, it is correct to emphasise that silence is not at all synonymous with oblivion (Goltermann 2010, 93). The recent German past weighed heavy on the nation, despite a lack of acknowledgement for the first two decades after the war ended.

The silence of the 1950s did come to be undermined by a coalition of antifascists who had been effectively marginalised in public after 1948. Alongside this was a new generation who remembered the Nazi era but were too young to have been complicit in any crimes, particularly those who had been socialised in the Hitler Youth, and so remained a distance away from personal memory (Kansteiner 2006, 112). Educational reforms began to be implemented, though still selectively, by a new cohort of educators who began to teach about the Nazi era, because this coincided with their own curiosity about the Germany of their childhood and adolescence. This clearly shows that memories from the formative years of life shape interests and beliefs. More probing insights into the Nazi past began in art and media as well, such as Günter Grass’s ‘The Tin Drum’ which illustrated how the rise of fascism and the racist policies of the regime were absorbed and supported by a distracted German citizenry. The 1960s also saw many highly publicised trials, including the infamous
Eichmann trial held in Israel. The trials began to generate a discussion of Nazi crimes and the distinction began to blur between the evil Hitler, his inner circle and the average German. The trials widely publicised the crimes of the Nazi regime and raised awareness of the suffering of its victims. One of the most important trials, the Auschwitz trial from 1963-65, provided a name for the Nazi genocide and exposed it as one of the central characteristics and objectives of the Nazi government (Kansteiner 2006, 113). Beyond these nation-wide events, the younger generation began to mediate the passage from a careful and conscious silencing of the Nazi past towards a more open confrontation with its legacy.

The nation and shame

One of the most powerful contrasts between the generations in West Germany in the post-war era was the attitude towards the nation and conceptions of national identity. As Wydra (2018, 5-34) argues, carriers of personal memories attribute different meanings to mnemonic signifiers depending on their position in the generational chain. This generational conflict can be observed in West Germany by the older generation continuing to perceive the nation as a point of glory, as opposed to those who became adults in the period after World War Two seeing it as shameful. The past of the Third Reich contributed massively to the young middle class searching for personal meaning. They often did this by seizing onto political ideals that stood in complete opposition to those of the Nazi era. Elias (1996, 229) argues that after a period of ‘almost boundless over-elevation of the national ideal’, the younger generations saw themselves burdened with the stigma of a nation not only defeated in war, but also responsible for barbaric acts of violence. For the younger generation, the strategy for exoneration from such stigmas was to turn towards an ideology that directly opposed and undermined that of the preceding years and generations. With the help of a contrary creed, much of the younger generation looked towards absolving themselves from the grim associations of the Nazi period, and finding a new sense of meaning in order to define themselves in opposition to the older generations (Elias 1996, 230).
The growing conflict between the younger generation and the older generations took the form of student protests in the late 1960s. Admittedly, these protests were a phenomenon that passed across much of Europe, not only West Germany. However, a contributing factor to the protests was that many of the students in German universities in the 1960s were the first generation of the post-Hitler era and believed that their parents’ generation were responsible for the period and its crimes. Many of the West German universities were overcrowded, outdated and academics from the Nazi era remained in their posts. West German students popularised a rhyming slogan ‘Unter den Talaren, Muff von 1000 Jahren’ (‘under the university gowns, the musty smell of a thousand years’), which was a direct reference to the need to acknowledge, condemn and destroy all traces of Hitler’s ‘thousand-year Reich’ (Waller, 2015, 203). Clearly, much of the younger generation felt the Nazi past was being silenced, and as a result, not addressed.

The younger generation just born during the Nazi period often opposed what they perceived to be a lukewarm version of a democratic republic established after the Second World War. Due to this, they rejected what their fathers and grandfathers had, in the 1920s, regarded as being most sacred and meaning-bestowing. Nevertheless, because of the consequences of the defeat and long duration of the reconstruction, the debate among the younger, rising generations about the attitudes and ideals of the ruling older generations was postponed until the 1960s and onwards. For the young middle-class groups, it was the ideals of their parents, such as nationalism, that were tainted and which they desperately wanted to distance themselves from (Elias 1996, 257). It is important to acknowledge that this rejection of the nation cannot be construed as wholly organic. As Feindt et. al. (2014, 24-44) emphasise, memory is deeply ‘entangled’. Indeed, every act of remembering sees an individual inscribed in multiple different ways, and in different social frames. This ultimately means that there exists simultaneous, but different, interpretations of the past (Feindt et. al. 2014, 24-44).

There exists, then, a genuine entangledness and intertwining of interpretations and actors. This can be observed in the young generation in West Germany. The young generation both entered into a conflict with the older generation while also remaining sensitive to what the outside world appeared
to think of them. There was an undeniable element of shame and guilt; the inescapable fact of being judged by the outside world and the younger generation attempted to rectify this. As a collective, this generation did not become critical of its national identity and unending patriotism all by themselves, it was partially imposed on them by the outside international world.

The ‘nation’ itself remains a central, organising feature in memory studies, but by moving away from the traditional national lens, scholars could unveil a new complexity. One of the current challenges for memory studies is the move away from the nation-state as the main frame of memory and towards transnational frames (Feindt et. al. 2014, 24-44). Although memory scholarship does expose plurality, attention to complex and overlapping conflicts can get lost. This is particularly true when the homogenizing nature of the nation-state lens, uniting varied narratives, is transposed on the supranational level (Feindt et. al. 2014, 24-44). This has often meant that the social and cultural power and resources of political elites have only too often obscured the polyphony of memory conflicts, with a national narrative taking precedence. The nature of collective and national memory as mutable and everchanging, makes memory itself susceptible to be influenced by politicians, journalists and historians. Therefore, ‘high politics’, such as presidential speeches and other symbolic gestures by national representatives ‘matters enormously for memory.’ (Müller 2002, 21). Thus, moving the scholarly debate on memory away from the lens of the nation-state could allow a greater variety of interpretations of the past to come to the fore.

**Memorials and remembrance**

Memories can only be passed down beyond the death of a particular generation with great effort. As Assmann J (2011b) emphasises, communicative memory is limited and in order for certain memories and experiences to be remembered beyond a few generations, societal institutions are necessary to form cultural memory. The formation of cultural memory tends to occur through the construction of symbolic figures and monuments to which memory attaches itself (Assmann J. 2011b, 37). It would clearly be a mistake to take the study of memory as serving to provide an access point to allegedly
real events rather than interpretations of a past. Memorials, importantly, are not manifestations of memory but instead representations that will be interpreted differently. Indeed, memorials can conceal the past as much as they cause us to remember it. Connerton (2009, 29) is correct to argue that the relationship between memorials and forgetting is reciprocal, as the threat of forgetting begets memorials and the construction of memorials begets forgetting.

The nation, and its representation, has been key in memorials, particularly to those of soldiers and other victims of war. The remembrance and veneration of the dead can be seen as an attempt to find meaning in mass death. More than this, commemoration can be seen as an act of citizenship; to remember is to confirm community and identity. Winter (1995, 80) argues that this form of collective affirmation in wartime allowed individuals and families to identify with their larger outside community. Thus, soldier cemeteries and memorials for the missing can be seen to ‘fuse every fallen citizen with the identity of the nation.’ (Koselleck 2018, 218). As the nation becomes embedded in memorials, they become a site of cultural memory. As cultural memory serves to keep the foundational past alive in the present, this connection provides a basis for the identity of the remembering group. By commemoration, recalling history, and re-enacting special and important events, groups and communities are able to constantly reaffirm their own image (Assmann J. 2011b, 38). The memory of the dead is a paradigmatic way of establishing the community; whether the monument is huge war memorial, or an anonymous tribute to the unknown fallen soldier, group identification is unmistakable (Assmann J. 2011b, 47). It is therefore clear that cultural memory, in the form of monuments, contributes towards establishing a recognisable group identity.

War memorials and monuments have been constructed since wars first began. There has, however been a transition in the nature of war memorials in the twentieth century, particularly from the remembrance of World War One and World War Two. The mass death of both soldiers and civilians in World War Two meant that traditional languages and representations of remembrance and mourning could not reflect the level of loss experienced. The Neue Wache in Germany became a
memorial site after the First World War. In 1993, Helmut Kohl’s cabinet decided to redesign the memorial as the ‘Central Memorial of the Federal Republic of Germany for the Victims of War and Tyranny’. The building contained a version of a statue by Kollwitz, the ‘Mother with Her Dead Son’. The statue depicted the figure of maternal mourning, which abstracted the German grief to a universal level. The quasi-religious symbolism in the memorial illuminates particular elements of cultural memory, with the use of Pietà, a subject in Christian art depicting the Virgin Mary cradling the dead body of Jesus. The use of the Pietà instead of a soldier enlarges the memorial function to include all victims of the war, whether civilian or military, East or West, Nazi or not. It neatly avoids the issue of division and defeat, instead highlighting national victimhood (Kattago 1998, 86-104).

Historian Reinhart Koselleck criticised the memorial, arguing that when the statue was enlarged it was transformed into the central symbol of national mourning; conflating national grief and military honour, while also downplaying the historical context of German victimhood (Kattago 1998, 86-104). Moreover, the victimhood in a national monument implies a lack of agency and that all Germans were in some way victims. Emphasising the victims in a national monument neglects to address the perpetrators and instead ‘induces an institutionalised forgetfulness.’ (Kattago 1998, 86-104). The message depicted by the Neue Wache therefore reflected the attitude of many West Germans immediately after the war; a desire to forget the past and absolve themselves of responsibility.

Memorials are undoubtedly constructed with the purpose of remembrance, but forgetting does also become a central aspect of their existence (Connerton, 2009, 29). Young (2011, 372) goes as far to suggest that once we assign monumental form to memory, we have to some degree divested ourselves of the obligation to remember. By allowing and enabling memorials to do our memory-work for us, we become that much more forgetful. A memorial or monument is ultimately subject to the political, social and cultural realities and aesthetics of the time. A monument constructed by a totalitarian regime will reflect the political intentions of the leading elites; thus the monument has increasingly become ‘the site of contested and competing meanings.’ (Young 2011, 374). Therefore,
though the memorial is thought to guarantee the transmission of memory beyond death, Koselleck (2011, 369) is correct to argue that such institutions are not capable of such a task in their own right.

Conclusion

Generations react to and use one another to define their own generational identity. As Mannheim (1953, 301) emphasises, generations are in a state of constant interaction, and this is indeed necessary for the transmission of cultural heritage and knowledge. War is undoubtedly one of the most disruptive events that can happen within a society, and causes profound social and cultural change. Mannheim (1953, 310) suggests that the quicker the tempo of social and cultural change, the greater the chances that particular generation location groups will react to changed situations and produce their own individual generational identity. The Second World War proved to be a formative event in West Germany for those born just before or during the war. The war had profound consequences for West Germany; occupation by the victorious allies, mass rebuilding and international alienation and disgust towards the German nation. This led to the younger generation to react in particular ways against the ideals of their parents and grandparents generation, which they perceived to have facilitated the rise of National Socialism. In this way, the memory of the Second World War allowed the younger generation to define itself, in opposition to the older generations and around the political identity of the nation.

The family, as emphasised by Assmann (J 2011a, 213) and Halbwachs (1992) is a focal point for the transmission of memory. There was undoubtedly a ‘communicative silence’ in West Germany after the Second World War, with older generations refusing to openly talk about the Holocaust and the Nazi regime that they had lived through. Nevertheless, silence is not synonymous with oblivion, and the memory of Nazism remained in the background of German culture. With the end of occupation and the slow revival of Germany, political and social realities allowed the Nazi past to begin to be discussed. Grandparents began to talk to grandchildren, though such memories would often remain separated from the familial identity should the ‘wrong’ memories be associated with revered family
members. The shame imposed upon the German nation by the international community for the devastation of the war and the horror of the Holocaust led to the younger generation rejecting the ideals of national honour and patriotic glory that were held so dearly by the post-World War One generation. This shows the entangled nature of memory emphasised by Feindt et. al. (2014, 24-44) as the younger generation did not come to reject such ideals purely out of opposition to their parents and the effects they could witness from the war, but also as a result of the international opinion of Germany and the expectation to feel guilt and shame in the nation.

The memorials and monuments to the Second World War in West Germany did not always reflect such shame. The statue in the Neue Wache conflated the German soldier with the German civilian and also with the victims of Nazi persecution. Though memorials may be representations of memory and structures built to ensure remembrance, forgetting is also inherent within memorials. The intentions behind memorials and monuments cannot be ignored. Political, social and cultural realities and aesthetics must always be considered when observing these national monuments which are meant to depict national memory. It is due to this that Feindt et. al. (2014, 24-44) and Müller (2002) were correct to argue that a move away from the national is the next challenge to memory studies. This may open up the scholarly debate, moving it away from memory as centred around the political identity of the nation and expose a polyphony of memory conflicts previously undiscovered.

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