1 Speaking of war and memory

> Never again do we want to send our sons to the barracks. And if again somewhere this insanity of war should break out, and if fate should want it that our land becomes a battlefield, then we shall simply perish and at least take with us the knowledge that we neither encouraged nor committed the crime. Carlo Schmid (1946)[1]

When, several decades after Carlo Schmid's impassioned plea, the Germans[2] were confronted with the question of war, they seemed to follow his lead. They seemed to want nothing to do with war. Many objected strongly to the 1991 Gulf War; thousands took to the streets. Most prominently, Foreign Minister Hans-Dietrich Genscher asserted that war could not under any circumstances be a means of politics,[3] a view that was shared by opposition politicians.[4] This forceful rejection of war in general and the Gulf War in particular was often illustrated, underlined and justified with references to and memories of the Second World War. In his statement on the Gulf War Chancellor Helmut Kohl mentioned, first of all, the Germans' experiences of war, their memories and their resulting ability to understand the suffering of people caught up in war.[5] These experiences, Kohl asserted, 'have been deeply ingrained in the memory of our people as a whole'.[6] Later, when the Federal Republic of Germany

[1] Carlo Schmid, *Erinnerungen* (Bern 1979), p. 490, quoted in Donald Abenheim, *Reforging the Iron Cross: The Search for Tradition in the West German Armed Forces* (Princeton: Princeton University Press 1988), p. 43. Carlo Schmid was one of the 'fathers' of the Basic Law (the constitution of the Federal Republic of Germany).
[2] The notions of 'the Germans', 'German' and 'Germany' are used with some (self-)irony in this book. Evidently, none of these are homogeneous, circumscribable entities; it is superfluous to repeatedly draw attention to this by putting them in quotes.
[3] 'Die Deutschen an die Front', *Der Spiegel*, 04/02/91, 19.
[4] Heidemarie Wieczorek-Zeul (SPD) in Deutscher Bundestag, *Plenarprotokoll*, 12/2, Bonn, 14/01/91, 41; Willi Hoss (Bündnis/Die Grünen) in Deutscher Bundestag, *Plenarprotokoll*, 11/235, Bonn, 15/11/90, 18849.
[5] Deutscher Bundestag, *Plenarprotokoll*, 12/3, Bonn, 17/01/91, 46.
[6] Ibid. All translations from the German are mine unless otherwise noted. (Translations below from German novels are likewise mine, and not from the standard published translations.)

(FRG) had to decide whether the country would itself use military force, the Second World War became a common point of reference in the debate. Memories of the Second World War were asserted with confidence and represented as relevant to choices about the use of force today.

This book explores ways of speaking about war and memory in order to tease out how, on the one hand, they produce a particular reality within which political choices must be made, and how, on the other hand, they simultaneously provide the opportunity to question and undermine this reality and its production. Although memories of and other references to the past are usually called upon with conviction, and in order to underline the certainty of what is claimed, recourse to memory involves uncertainty. Expressing memories of the Second World War in Germany is fraught with difficulties; they are always contested, problematic, ambiguous. It is puzzling, therefore, that this past was alluded to as shared and apparently uncontroversial. In other words, there is an intriguing discrepancy between the confidence with which the past is spoken about in debates concerning the use of the military instrument and the profound uncertainty as to what is (to be) remembered that becomes apparent when particular articulations of Second World War memories and wider public debates surrounding them are examined.

How to remember the Second World War is frequently a topic of controversy in Germany, for example around occasions of official commemoration, around cultural representations and around historians' claims. This book explores some of these debates and demonstrates that the invocations of memory by politicians to support their positions on Bundeswehr deployments rest on shaky grounds, inasmuch as what they assert as obvious is actually questionable. Although this is important, it is not a new insight. That German politicians keep referring to Second World War memories *even though* their controversiality is obvious raises the question as to what such references accomplish. The superficial answer is that the angst over its militaristic past allowed the FRG to free-ride on other countries' provision of military security.[7] This explanation, however, ignores the fact that the past also figures prominently in arguments that support a more assertive military role for the FRG. There is therefore a case for looking beyond the alleged instrumentality of particular versions of memory. In claiming any memory, and indeed in making other references to the past, a host of unspoken assumptions are made, and this has political implications. This is here examined by reading claims to memory in

[7] Thomas U. Berger discusses and dismisses this argument: *Cultures of Antimilitarism: National Security in Germany and Japan* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press 1998), pp. 2f.

public debate together with a particular 'site of memory':[8] representations of the Second World War in novels. This site of memory is attractive in this context for at least three reasons: firstly, novels articulate Second World War memories which might challenge – or be used to challenge – accepted versions of memory. Secondly, unlike politicians' claims, novels reflect upon what it means to articulate memories in the first place. Thirdly, although novels depict the past and sometimes are indeed offered as testimony, they do not claim to represent an existing reality; rather, they are thought to invent the world they depict. Thus attention is drawn to how articulating memories – the very act of invoking the past as if it already existed – *produces* a reality.

It is noticeable that memory – certainly in the German debates at issue here – comes to be invoked when intractable questions are confronted. This is another way in which the recourse to memory involves uncertainty. Whether it was 'responsible' for Germans to continue to refuse using military power or whether, on the contrary, they were to deploy their military to help people in distress was, despite the conviction with which either answer was often claimed to be obviously right, a thorny issue. This was accentuated by what was at stake: not only the lives of German soldiers and non-German civilians but also, or so politicians and intellectuals claimed, a potential 'militarisation' of German policy, with all the consequences that might have. The past is invoked precisely when we do not know what to do. Yet, crucially, memory cannot deliver the certainty that is desired. It does not offer clear 'lessons' that may be applied simply. The point is not, however, that we must 'get away' from the past and look for alternative modes of addressing the situation; rather, questions of politics and ethics are characterised precisely by the failure of knowledge to deliver a resolution. Thus, in this particular case, even if Germans could determine the 'right' way to remember the past, this would not tell them what to do. Similarly, even if we could determine what Germans think they know about their past, this would not mean that we would understand their political choices. In other words, the reflections on memory in this book do not offer 'knowledge' as a solution to political problems. Indeed, the argument here is not about expanding areas of certainty; rather, it shows just how uncertain what we think we know is. This has implications for the present book as a piece of academic work. Inasmuch as the book does produce something we call 'knowledge', it is important to be clear about the inevitable gap between that and the political problems at issue, for knowledge is never sufficient

[8] The term is Jay Winter's: *Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning: The Great War in European Cultural History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1995).

when we face an ethico-political question and what is needed is a decision. The responsibility of scholars then lies in acknowledging this gap and the irresolvability of uncertainty.

This book explores some key debates on war memories and offers detailed readings of seven novels which depict the German experience of the Second World War. Although the argument revolves around the politics of war in Germany, most of the book does not concern itself directly with the debates on whether and in what way the FRG should deploy its military.[9] Indeed, it deliberately moves away from the seemingly coherent arguments about the significance of the past for the present and towards the bewildering complexity that emerges from examining articulations of memory. Doing so raises questions not merely about the Germans' memories of the Second World War and their political implications but also about our understandings of truth, ethics, subjectivity, emotion and time. This first chapter sets out the context.

Speaking of war and memory: political debate

The 1991 Gulf War raised the question of war for the newly unified FRG. Using military force was bound to be a problematic proposition, given that the last war was remembered as such an unmitigated disaster. Indeed, throughout the Cold War the FRG had maintained armed forces expressly in order not to use them.[10] Therefore widespread opposition against the war might have been expected, but the fierceness and passion with which it was rejected was perhaps surprising: after all, the FRG was not making any direct military contribution. Yet thousands demonstrated against the war, prompting Michael Schwab-Trapp to comment that Germany seemed to be 'identical' with the peace movement.[11]

Politicians shared the people's consternation that the celebration of the end of the Cold War had so quickly been superseded by what many in Germany saw as the very worst. On the day after US fighting commenced, Hans-Jochen Vogel of the SPD noted in a speech to the Bundestag that he had been a soldier half a century earlier: 'With many of my generation I know what war means. The images of that time are in front of our eyes . . . We feel and suffer with the victims in the entire region, with the people who are dying there.'[12] Otto Graf Lambsdorff of the FDP made

[9] These debates are explored in detail in Zehfuss, *Constructivism*.
[10] See Detlef Bald, *Militär und Gesellschaft 1945–1990* (Baden-Baden: Nomos Verlagsgesellschaft 1994), p. 91.
[11] Michael Schwab-Trapp, *Kriegsdiskurse: Die politische Kultur des Krieges im Wandel 1991–1999* (Opladen: Leske und Budrich 2002), p. 98.
[12] Deutscher Bundestag, *Plenarprotokoll*, 12/3, 17/01/91, 47f.

the same gesture: 'Herr Vogel has mentioned it: Herr Dregger and I, we all belong to those who have still personally experienced the last war. We know what we are talking about. None of us wish that the younger people have this experience: war is not the father of all things, it is the father of all horrors.'[13]

Articulations of Second World War memories continued in later debates, when the issue was whether the Bundeswehr should participate in operations abroad. In 1995, speaking about the German contribution to enforcing the peace treaty in Bosnia-Herzegovina, Chancellor Kohl noted that '[i]n many families, also in our own, the memory of the terrible, bitter experiences of the Second World War is still alive'.[14] On the same occasion Elisabeth Altmann of Bündnis90/Die Grünen (hereafter the Greens) referred to her early childhood experience of war: 'I was born in 1943. The first years of my life I spent mostly in the air-raid shelter.'[15] The Bundestag representative for Bosnia, Freimut Duve, when addressing the people's situation there, noted that many members of parliament had had experience of six years of war and hence knew what war meant.[16]

Whilst some politicians invoked war memories mainly to appeal to their audience to imagine the Bosnians' suffering, others explicitly linked them to their position on the question of Bundeswehr deployment. Günter Verheugen of the SPD noted that many of his parliamentary colleagues had experienced the Second World War and the immediate postwar years, and 'know what the German people thought as a consequence of the experience of a terrible war: Away with the weapons!'[17] Jens-Uwe Heuer of the PDS contextualised his opposition to the government's plans with his own memory: 'I belong to that generation that consciously experienced the Second World War as a youth. In the old Federal Republic it was called the generation of the Flak [anti-aircraft battery] assistants. At the time we said after the war: Never, never do we want to carry arms, never again do we want war.'[18] His colleague Gerhard Zwerenz similarly spoke of being in the war and his feeling, as a result, of a 'lifelong unforgettable culpability' that made it impossible for him to agree to any war.[19]

Schmid referred to war as an 'insanity' in which Germans never again would want to have any part; they would, he said, be prepared simply to die if war were to engulf their country as long as they could take with them 'the knowledge that [they] neither encouraged nor committed the crime'. Schmid's words of 1946 reflect the shock at the time about the horror

[13] Ibid., 51.
[14] Deutscher Bundestag, *Plenarprotokoll*, 13/76, Bonn, 06/12/95, 6632.
[15] Ibid., 6670.
[16] Deutscher Bundestag, *Plenarprotokoll*, 13/48, Bonn, 30/06/95, 3996.
[17] Ibid., 3988.
[18] Deutscher Bundestag, *Plenarprotokoll*, 13/76, 06/12/95, 6672.
[19] Deutscher Bundestag, *Plenarprotokoll*, 13/48, 30/06/95, 3997.

and destruction of the Second World War, but scholars still identify a strong aversion to war amongst Germans. According to Omer Bartov, Germans see any war as hell.[20] Richard J. Evans observes that the 'bitter experience of the destructive effects of war has left the Germans with a strong and healthy distaste for military adventurism'.[21] And Thomas U. Berger asserts that '[i]n the case of Germany, many contend that the legacy of the Holocaust and other Nazi atrocities has inflicted such deep wounds on the German psyche that large sections of the population are unwilling to once again sanction the use of force in the name of the nation and the state'.[22] Indeed, at the time of unification Chancellor Kohl cited 'never again war' together with 'never again dictatorship' as principles that were fundamental to the Basic Law.[23]

The Germans' allegedly negative attitude towards war is, in view of their past, perhaps understandable. It was an intended outcome of re-education after the Second World War. However, after the end of the Cold War it quickly became a nuisance,[24] for it translated into opposition against international military operations to which 'friends and partners' desired a Bundeswehr contribution.[25] In other words, the German aversion to war came to be out of sync with partners' expectations. Hence politicians and analysts alike asserted the need for the FRG to become more 'normal',[26] to be less focused on and inhibited by the past. Apparently, this happened: from Somalia via Bosnia to Kosovo and Afghanistan the Bundeswehr participated in ever more war-like operations. Therefore the point-blank refusal to contemplate any involvement in the war against Iraq beyond permitting the USA to use their bases on German soil and fly through German airspace looks like a relapse – and one that can be explained away as an election gambit: Chancellor Gerhard Schröder made a populist decision in refusing to participate in an unpopular war. Until then, the FRG had after all been, or so it appeared, on a trajectory

[20] Omer Bartov, *Germany's War and the Holocaust: Disputed Histories* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press 2003), p. 12.
[21] Richard J. Evans, 'The New Nationalism and the Old History: Perspectives on the West German *Historikerstreit*', *Journal of Modern History* 59 (1987), 796.
[22] Berger, *Cultures of Antimilitarism*, p. 3.
[23] Deutscher Bundestag, *Plenarprotokoll*, 11/228, Berlin, 04/10/90, 18019.
[24] Actually, it turned out to be a nuisance much earlier, in the early 1950s, when rearmament was at issue. See Abenheim, *Reforging the Iron Cross*; Berger, *Cultures of Antimilitarism*, Chapter 2.
[25] See Zehfuss, *Constructivism*, Chapter 2.
[26] See, for example, Klaus Kinkel, 'Verantwortung, Realismus, Zukunftssicherung', *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 19/03/93, 8; William Horsley, 'United Germany's Seven Cardinal Sins: A Critique of German Foreign Policy', *Millennium: Journal of International Studies* 21 (1992), 225; Franz-Josef Meiers, 'Germany: The Reluctant Power', *Survival* 37 (1995), 82–103.

towards a less historically anguished approach to the use of force. Wolfram Wette claimed that the German contribution to the operation against the Taliban was the first 'war without Hitler' and that it therefore represented a certain normalisation.[27]

Yet the FRG's participation in increasingly war-like operations does not in itself mean that Second World War memories have become less significant in the context of imagining and debating war. Although references to this war have perhaps become less frequent in Bundestag debates on military deployments, they have not disappeared. In the debate over the deployment of Bundeswehr troops to Afghanistan, Foreign Minister Joschka Fischer recalled the destruction that the Second World War had brought to Germany and that was still visible on the Reichstag in which he was speaking. He also referred to the 'never again war' principle and its importance.[28] Friedrich Merz of the CDU/CSU noted the memories of the older generation and their significance to the question of war,[29] and Kerstin Müller of the Greens talked about the 'historical lessons of the catastrophe of Nazi rule and the world war'.[30] 'Historical concerns' also featured in relation to the question of a possible Bundeswehr deployment to Lebanon.[31] Reports of the waning of memory, or of any loss of the significance of this past in political debate, appear premature.

Whilst the memories often led to invoking the 'never again war' principle,[32] some argued that the point was *not* to avoid war at all costs but rather what was conceptualised as 'taking responsibility'. According to Foreign Minister Klaus Kinkel, it was precisely because Germany had 'broken the peace in the past [that] it is morally–ethically obliged to participate in the defence of peace with all its power now'.[33] Hence Germans had to help people who suffered under dictatorship and oppression, even militarily. This meant that 'never again Auschwitz', the other lesson from

[27] Wolfram Wette, 'Ein Hitler des Orients? NS-Vergleiche in der Kriegspropaganda von Demokratien', *Gewerkschaftliche Monatshefte* 45 (2003), 239. Chancellor Gerhard Schröder represented the operation as not really a war; he explicitly noted that it involved neither participating in air strikes nor deploying combat troops on the ground. Friedrich Merz (CDU/CSU), however, described it as the 'most dangerous deployment' of the Bundeswehr so far. Deutscher Bundestag, *Plenarprotokoll*, 14/198, Berlin, 08/11/01, 19285 and 19288.

[28] Deutscher Bundestag, *Plenarprotokoll*, 14/198, Berlin, 08/11/01, 19293f.

[29] Deutscher Bundestag, *Plenarprotokoll*, 14/202, Berlin, 16/11/01, 19859.

[30] Ibid., 19869.

[31] See, for example, Ralf Beste et al., 'Abenteuer Nahost', *Der Spiegel*, 21/08/06, 27.

[32] See, for example, Alice H. Cooper, 'When Just Causes Conflict with Acceptable Means: The German Peace Movement and Military Intervention in Bosnia', *German Politics and Society* 15 (1997), 100; see also Zehfuss, *Constructivism*, Chapter 3.

[33] Deutscher Bundestag, *Plenarprotokoll*, 12/240, Bonn, 22/07/94, 21166.

that past, had come to be in tension with 'never again war'.[34] The need to stand up against oppression and dictatorship in the world was an alternative interpretation of the significance of the past for the present and one that could be used to support Bundeswehr participation in international missions. This view increasingly gained ground, especially after the Federal Constitutional Court ruled in 1994 that deployments abroad were not in conflict with the Basic Law. Arguably, the controversial 1995 decision to contribute to a rapid-reaction force in Bosnia constituted a turning-point; later parliamentary decisions in favour of deployments commanded larger cross-party support.[35] This decision is, moreover, of particular interest because Kinkel's speech recommending it to parliament offered a reframing of Second World War memories that was to prove powerful.

Supporting the deployment to Bosnia meant overcoming, or interpreting away, two implications of Second World War memories. Firstly, war in general was remembered as horrible and therefore as something to be avoided; secondly, the war in the Balkans was recalled as particularly cruel. Therefore, or so the argument went, it would be counterproductive and indeed outright dangerous to deploy German soldiers there. This idea that Bundeswehr soldiers could not be sent to the Balkans where Wehrmacht troops had caused havoc during the Second World War was termed the 'Kohl doctrine'.[36] The following statement by Hermann-Otto Solms of the FDP captures the gist of it: 'There must not be under any circumstances any deployment of German troops in the area of the former Yugoslavia – neither on the water nor on the ground nor in the air. This is imperative if only for historical reasons.'[37] The reasoning behind the Kohl doctrine was not necessarily concern for the wounds that might be ripped open for people in the former Yugoslavia at the sight of German troops but rather a fear of escalation and worries about the safety of German soldiers.[38]

In order to overcome both the general rejection of war and its own promise not to deploy soldiers to the Balkans, the government did not downplay Second World War memories but instead reframed them. In June 1995 the UN Security Council issued a mandate for an additional

[34] Cooper, 'When Just Causes Conflict', 104.
[35] Robert H. Dorff, 'Normal Actor of Reluctant Power? The Future of German Security Policy', *European Security* 6 (1997), 56 and 65.
[36] Josef Joffe, 'Abschied von der "Kohl-Doktrin"', *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, 16/12/94, 4.
[37] Deutscher Bundestag, *Plenarprotokoll*, 12/151, Bonn, 21/04/93, 12941.
[38] Klaus Kinkel, 'Peacekeeping missions: Germany can now play its part', *NATO Review* 42/5 (1994), 3–7; 'Länger verheddern', *Der Spiegel*, 02/10/95, 37; 'Wir haben eine neue Rolle übernommen', interview with Volker Rühe, *Der Spiegel*, 16/10/95, 24.

rapid-reaction force to enable UNPROFOR troops already stationed in the former Yugoslavia to fulfil their mission; the Federal Government decided to contribute to the protection and support of this force.[39] In the Bundestag debate about this decision Foreign Minister Kinkel delivered a crucial speech in which he construed the proposed operation as analogous to the Allied 'liberation' of Germany in 1945.[40] Kinkel made it clear that he saw the decision which the Bundestag was about to make as one of historical significance. For him, there was only one possible outcome: 'We want to and have to show solidarity.'[41] In Kinkel's argument the need to contribute to the deployment was based not least on the need to show solidarity with friends and partners, with the countries that had been carrying the burden of casualties in an effort to help other human beings, in particular France and Great Britain, and with those 'innocent' people who were dying cruel deaths in the former Yugoslavia.[42] This claim that solidarity necessitated participating in the operation was embedded in a narrative of the past which comes to its dramatic head in the Allies' liberation of Germany. Kinkel argued that Germans had 'a political and moral obligation to help, also and particularly in view of [their] history'.[43] Crucially, he stressed that the Germans had been freed from Nazi dictatorship by the Allies' use of military force; this had made the new democratic beginning possible. He claimed that what had been forgotten too quickly was that the Germans had not liberated themselves from the regime.

This argument links the deployment under discussion to the duty to oppose oppression and, significantly, represents today's Bundeswehr troops as analogous to the Allied liberators. The parallel created in Kinkel's speech between the heroic liberators and the Bundeswehr is presumably designed to break the more obvious link that had previously been significant: that between Wehrmacht and Bundeswehr. Kinkel had to overcome the Kohl doctrine which entailed implicit reference to the Wehrmacht's conduct on the Eastern front and in the Balkans in particular. Kinkel's argument shifts the focus from the barbarity of the German war to the goodness of the Allied war. Crucially, this shift was apparently successful in terms of justifying the FRG's use of military force:

[39] The cabinet decision is printed as 'Europäische Truppe schützen und stützen', *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, 27/06/95, 5. See also 'Deutsche "Tornados" sollen in Bosnien zum Schutz der europäischen Eingreiftruppe eingesetzt werden', *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, 27/06/95, 1.

[40] See also Chapter 2. For a detailed analysis of this speech and its use of norms, see Zehfuss, *Constructivism*, Chapter 3.

[41] Deutscher Bundestag, *Plenarprotokoll*, 13/48, 30/06/95, 3956.

[42] Ibid., 3955f. [43] Ibid., 3957.

Germany's liberation by the Allies was invoked time and again to underline the need to intervene militarily in situations of human rights abuse and dictatorship.[44] Kinkel himself deployed the same argument again, in relation to Kosovo, in 1998.[45]

Thus, despite the claim that Germans are irretrievably biased against war owing to their past, Second World War memories are used to argue both *for* and *against* war. To put it differently, the same memories that were invoked to reject war were crucial in constructing the possibility of using force abroad. Examining more closely the phenomenon of the Germans' contextualisation of war in relation to their memories of the Second World War, it becomes clear that – far from necessarily biasing them against war for all time – war memories have been used all along to argue both for and against German contributions to military operations.[46] Once Kinkel's argument is made, this is not surprising, for although the Second World War was a catastrophe for Germany, it also eventually made possible a new democratic beginning, at least in the FRG. In other words, the experience and memory of the war are deeply ambiguous. On the one hand, there are the memories of defeat, destruction and suffering; on the other, the Allied liberators – retrospectively speaking – 'brought' peace, freedom and prosperity. Following Kinkel's reframing of the Second World War the Germans, crudely put, had to fight now, because liberation from the Nazi regime had only been achieved through war and outside intervention. They had to be ready to liberate others from oppression and war by violent means, just as the Allies had liberated them. This argument is problematic. Firstly, it assumes that it is possible to end oppression and indeed war itself through war. Secondly, and more fundamentally, the political reasoning is removed from the actual case at hand and instead related to Germany's relation to its past. In other words, the argument is not about the wars in Bosnia or Kosovo; rather, it is about the Germans' role and experience in the Second World War and their alleged meaning for military policy today. Elsewhere I have objected to this argument because of this focus on the self.[47] However, by simply rejecting the argument as problematic an opportunity is lost to examine its implications. Hence I here approach the issue by taking seriously what is said regarding the past and Germans' memories.

[44] See Werner Schulz (Bündnis90/Die Grünen) in Deutscher Bundestag, *Plenarprotokoll*, 13/76, 06/12/95, 6665; Guido Westerwelle (FDP) in Deutscher Bundestag, *Plenarprotokoll*, 14/187, Berlin, 19/09/01, 18310.
[45] Deutscher Bundestag, *Plenarprotokoll*, 13/248, Bonn, 16/10/98, 23129.
[46] For a detailed analysis of this phenomenon, see Zehfuss, *Constructivism*, Chapter 3.
[47] Ibid., p. 219.