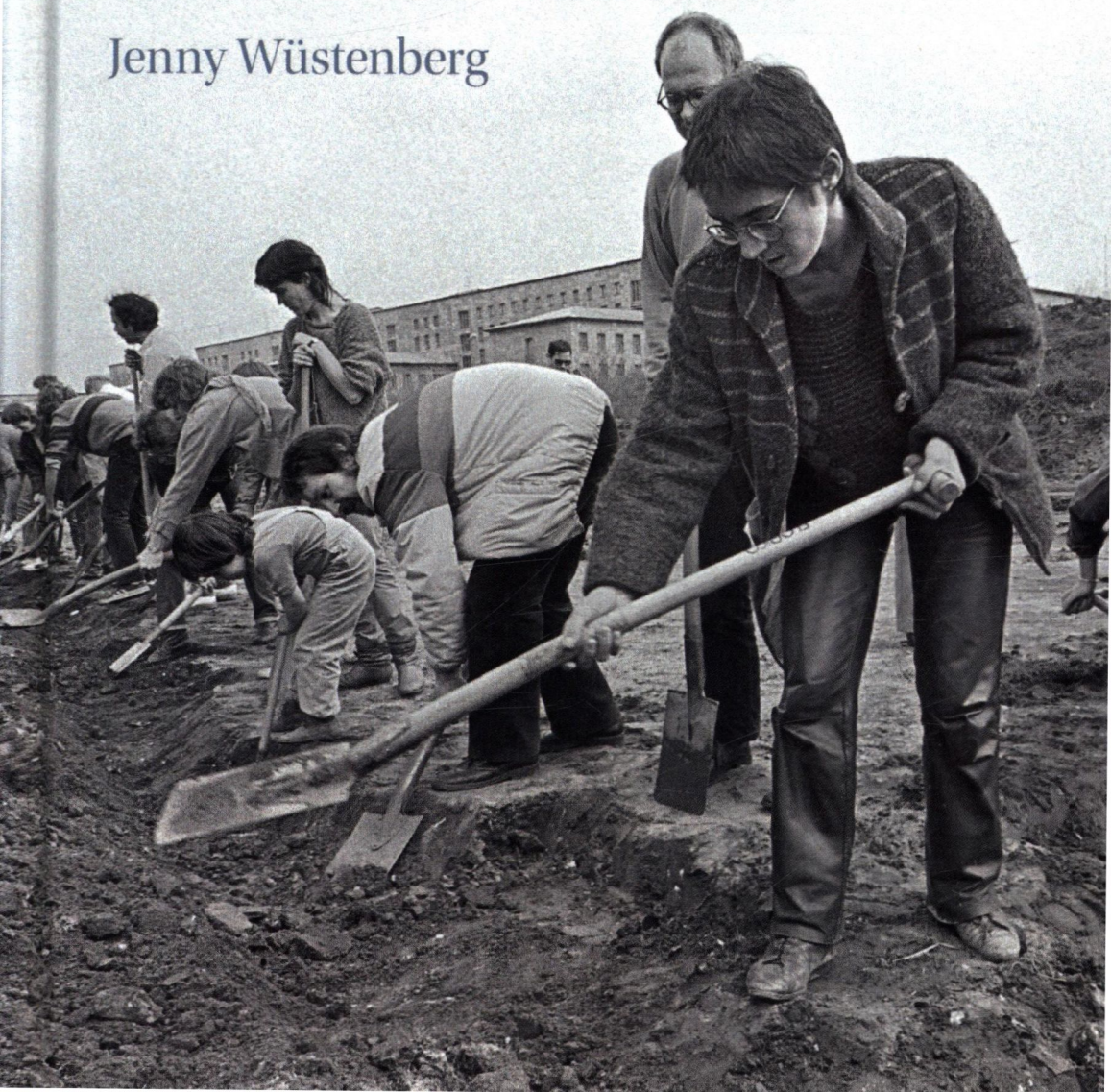


# Civil Society and Memory in Postwar Germany

Jenny Wüstenberg





"Emphasizing the role of memory activists in civil society – and their entanglement with state institutions and actors – Jenny Wüstenberg makes a compelling case for the force of contentious memories in reshaping the landscape of democratic remembrance. Her bottom-up approach brings memory agency to the fore and provides a necessary new perspective on a history we thought we already knew: the development of the public memory of National Socialism, the Holocaust, and communist repression in the postwar Federal Republic of Germany. *Civil Society and Memory in Postwar Germany* is important reading for all scholars in memory studies, Holocaust studies, and German studies."

**Michael Rothberg**, *author of Multidirectional Memory: Remembering the Holocaust in the Age of Decolonization*

"Where does memory come from, and where does it take place? In contrast to conventional approaches that emphasize either the state as a producer of memory or the private sphere as the location of non-state memory, Jenny Wüstenberg's important book highlights the neglected role of memory activists. This book is a truly significant contribution to the literature, both about Germany and about memory politics, providing nuanced interpretations and novel theoretical insights. A major accomplishment!"

**Jeffrey Olick**, *Department of Sociology, University of Virginia*

**Jenny Wüstenberg** is DAAD Visiting Assistant Professor of Politics at York University in Toronto. She is the co-founder of the Memory Studies Association.

Cover illustration: Members of the "Aktives Museum Faschismus und Widerstand in Berlin e.V." stage a symbolic excavation in May 1985 at the site of Berlin's Gestapo headquarters (today the Topography of Terror Memorial). © Hans Peter Stiebing, Berlin

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*York University, Toronto*



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## Civil Society and Memory in Postwar Germany

Blending history and social science, this book tracks the role of social movements in shaping German public memory and values since 1945. Drawn from extensive original research, it offers a fresh perspective on the evolution of German democracy through civic confrontation with the violence of Germany's past. Told through the stories of memory activists, the study upends some of the conventional wisdom about modern German political history. An analysis of the decades-long struggle over memory and democracy shows how grassroots actors challenged and then took over public institutions of memorialization. In the process, confrontation of the Holocaust has been pushed to the center of political culture. In unified Germany, memory politics have shifted again, as activists from the former East Germany have brought attention to the crimes of the East German state. This book delivers a novel and important contribution to scholarship about postwar Germany and the wider study of memory politics.

Jenny Wüstenberg is DAAD Visiting Assistant Professor of Politics at York University in Toronto. She is the co-founder of the Memory Studies Association.



For Ben Scott





## Preface

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My fascination with memory and particularly with the complex politics surrounding the competition between various “pasts” is rooted in narratives about my own family during the Nazi era. My mother’s father was a committed member of the Nazi party and pressured his wife to have numerous children, ultimately resulting in her death in childbirth. She posthumously received the “Muttersverdienstkreuz” (mother’s cross for accomplishments) by the Nazis. As I was growing up, my mother grappled with this legacy, which shaped her commitment to anti-authoritarian pedagogy – as a parent and as a professor at the University of Applied Sciences in Frankfurt. My paternal grandfather, by contrast, escaped from Nazi Germany to England after his father – a trade union leader – was murdered by Nazi thugs in 1933. He then met my British-Jewish grandmother, who followed him to Australia after he was deported there on a ship called the *Duneera* along with other German and Italian refugees suspected of disloyalty. Resettling in England after the war, he never wanted to return to Germany. This background no doubt compelled my father to become a specialist on migration. Overall, our family’s stories and their contradictions underpinned my parents’ attitude toward politics and compelled them to be part of critical social movements – the milieu within which I grew up. Attending high school in Frankfurt am Main after the fall of the Berlin Wall, I was exposed to some key debates about memory, most importantly those about the crimes of the Wehrmacht and about Daniel Goldhagen’s surprise bestseller *Hitler’s Willing Executioners*. I believe that these experiences and family narratives laid the groundwork for my interest in memory and my skepticism toward straightforward readings of the conflicts involved.

The field research for this book was carried out during numerous trips to (and a period of residence in) Germany between 2005 and 2016. During this time, I frequented archives and libraries, undertook site visits, and practiced participant observation at public hearings and expert conferences on memorialization. Above all, I conducted over ninety “semi-structured” in-depth interviews with academics, government officials,

memorial staff, members of parliament, artists, and, of course, memory activists. The largest part of the interviews were conducted in Berlin, but I also traveled to other cities for interviews, conferences and site visits, including to Hamburg, Stuttgart, Pforzheim, Weimar, Dresden, Erfurt, Magdeburg, and Jena (among others).<sup>1</sup>

I analyzed transcripts or notes of my interviews, archival materials, and other documents with the help of the qualitative software package *Atlas.ti*.<sup>2</sup> Whenever possible, I sought to “triangulate,” that is, to corroborate information by using different types of evidence. Taking a cue from writings on “process-tracing,”<sup>3</sup> I worked to understand and explain the chronology of relevant events, how they were linked together, and how they led to certain outcomes. The processes of meaning-making that surround memory activism cannot be directly “observed” in an interview. As Joe Soss writes “the interview, in a sense, stands outside the stream of interactions we seek to understand and, thus, offers only an indirect basis for accessing them.”<sup>4</sup> For this reason, the emotional investments, the contradictions, jealousies, and varying accounts given by interviewees are crucial to provide clues about what memory means in the interaction between different agents. The question that I try to answer is not necessarily “Who is right?” when there are contradictory accounts, but what sorts of politics result from these different understandings and how they impact what memory means to democratic practice. A commitment to democratic practice is ultimately what motivated this study and I believe that memory activism plays a crucial role in this – even in those cases when I fundamentally disagree with some of my interviewees’ views and politics.

<sup>1</sup> All translations from German, unless otherwise noted, are my own. With one exception, all interviews were conducted in German.

<sup>2</sup> See Lewins and Silver, *Using Software in Qualitative Research. A Step-by-Step Guide*.

<sup>3</sup> George and Bennett, *Case Studies and Theory Development*.

<sup>4</sup> Soss, “Talking Our Way to Meaningful Explanations. A Practice-Centered View of Interviewing for Interpretive Research,” p. 139.

## Acknowledgments

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This book has been in the works for a long time and through several stages of life. Accordingly, numerous people deserve acknowledgement for help and encouragement along the way is long. First, I would like to express my sincere thanks to my interview partners and the many competent staff of archives and libraries. Without their generosity of time and insight, this project would have neither been possible nor as intellectually and personally rewarding. Speaking to those involved in memory initiatives and institutions and hearing about their passion and commitment never failed to reinvigorate my own enthusiasm for this project. In particular, I would like to thank Jürgen Karwelat, Diethart Kerbs, Thomas Lindenberger, Andreas Ludwig, Sonja Miltenberger, and Gisela Wenzel (*Berliner Geschichtswerkstatt*), Michael Heiny (*Marburger Geschichtswerkstatt*), Christine Fischer-Defoy and Kaspar Nürnberg (*Aktives Museum*), Thomas Lutz and Ulrich Tempel (*Topographie des Terrors*), Gerd Koch and Beate Meyer (*Geschichtswerkstatt Hamburg-Eimsbüttel*), Detlef Garbe (*Gedenkstätte Neuengamme*), Christian Albroscheit and Gisela Rüdiger (*Gedenkstättenverein Leistikowstrasse Potsdam*), Volker Römer (*DDR Museum Pforzheim*), Renate Bauschke (*Arbeitskreis Bürger gestalten ein Mahnmahl, Hannover-Ahlem*), Peter Boeger (*Erinnerungs- und Begegnungsstätte Grenzkontrollpunkt Dreilinden-Drewitz*), Jochen Voit (*Stiftung Ettersberg Erfurt*), Carl-Wolfgang Holzapfel (*Vereinigung 17. Juni 1953*), and Benjamin Baumgart (*Union der Opferverbände Kommunistischer Gewaltherrschaft*) for generously providing me with material and images, answering additional questions and inviting me to events.

This project was made possible through financial support from the University of Maryland, College Park graduate student fellowship program, an American Institute for Contemporary German Studies AICGS/DAAD summer fellowship in 2006, and a postdoctoral fellowship at the Free University's Berlin Program for Advanced German and European Studies from 2012 to 2013. The Berlin Program, with its fellows and its coordinator Karin Goihl, made for an especially productive environment

within which to carry out the final phase of field research and discuss results. York University in Toronto and the *Deutscher Akademischer Austauschdienst* (German Academic Exchange Service) have provided a fabulous environment to wrap up the manuscript during my time as a DAAD Visiting Assistant Professor here.

My thanks go to the many individuals who shared comments and gave me advice over the years. In particular, Professor Martin O. Heisler was always ready to provide encouragement and read many draft chapters thoroughly. Professors Ken Conca and Jeffrey Herf also offered indispensable guidance from different perspectives. Professors Miranda Schreurs and Vladimir Tismaneanu accompanied me throughout graduate school. Professor Jim Hollifield has been a mentor from my earliest graduate school days. Professor Martin Will allowed me much freedom to write while working with him as part of the "Independent Academic Commission at the Federal Ministry of Justice for the Critical Study of the National Socialist Past." In addition, various discussants and participants in countless conferences and workshops made helpful suggestions on different incarnations of the project. I would also like to thank Lewis Bateman, John Haslam, and Sarah Lambert of Cambridge University Press for their editorial advice and support. Two anonymous reviewers provided extremely constructive and encouraging feedback.

Sylee Gore, Amy O'Hanlon, and Professor Jennifer Dixon all provided feedback on Chapter 1, and I thank them for doing such a thorough job in a short amount of time. Jennifer's comments were especially astute. Many friends, but most importantly Professors Christina Morina and Jennifer Sciubba, provided both substantive and practical counsel throughout, for which I am very grateful.

My family deserves a lot of credit for providing logistics and comfort. My adopted grandmothers, Ruth Nowak and Gisela Hermann, became a regular audience for my research findings during weekly coffee visits in Berlin-Lichterfelde. My parents, Stephen Castles and Wiebke Wüstenberg, encouraged me throughout research and writing. A very special thank you goes to my mother for kindling my interests in politics and history early on, for giving me so many opportunities to explore them, and for unflagging practical support. In fact, this study would not have been possible without the love and energy with which my mother took care of my kids (and me) on both sides of the Atlantic.

I began this research project as a graduate student in Political Science at the University of Maryland. I finish it now as a Toronto-based scholar and a mother of three. Though the juggling of parenting, research, writing, conferencing, or transatlantic flights is never easy, the combination certainly makes life more rewarding and fun. I thank my daughters for



allowing me to leave on research trips without too much complaining, for many much-needed breaks from writing and for giving me a healthy perspective on the importance of academia. Their comments and questions on memorials we visited together also provided some comic relief when the weight of thinking about what was being remembered there threatened to overwhelm me.

Since we met almost twenty years ago, my husband Ben Scott has read and discussed with me most of what I have written – and this book is no exception. He accompanied the entire process – discussing with me the first ideas, planning field research, listening to interview war stories, and helping to manage all the ups and downs of the writing and editing process. He came along for portions of the research or encouraged me from afar. In the final stages, he was a huge source of strength and he proofread the entire manuscript patiently. Very often he took on more than his fair share of family and household obligations – but still found the time to be the most interesting guy I know. All along, he got the balance right between support, motivation, humor, and stress reduction. I could not have asked for more and it is only logical to dedicate this book to him.

## Abbreviations and German Terms

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ABM	Arbeitsbeschaffungsmassnahmen (government subsidized positions)
ABR	Arbeitskreis Berliner Regionalmuseen (working group of Berlin local museums)
AG	Arbeitsgruppe (working group)
AGN	Arbeitsgruppe Neuengamme (Working Group Neuengamme)
AIN	Amicale Internationale de Neuengamme (main survivors group at Neuengamme)
AK	Arbeitskreis (working group)
AL	Alternative Liste (West Berlin branch of the Green Party)
APO	ausserparlamentarische Opposition (nonparliamentary opposition)
ASF	Aktion Sühnezeichen/Friedensdienste (Action Reconciliation/Service for Peace) in West Germany
ASTAK	Anti-Stalinistische Aktion (Anti-Stalinist Action) – group that runs Stasi Museum in Berlin
ASZ	Aktion Sühnezeichen/Friedensdienste (Action Reconciliation/Service for Peace) in East Germany
BdA	Bund der Antifaschisten (Union of Anti-Fascists)
BdV	Bund der Vertriebenen (League of Expellees)
BGF	Bundesministerium für gesamtdeutsche Fragen (Federal Ministry for Pan-German Questions)
BGW	Berliner Geschichtswerkstatt (Berlin History Workshop)
BKM	Bundesbeauftragte(r) der Bundesregierung für Kultur und Medien (Federal Commissioner of the Federal Government for culture and the media)
BpB	Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung (Federal Agency for Political Education)

BRD	Bundesrepublik Deutschland (Federal Republic of Germany)
BStU	Bundesbeauftragte(r) für die Unterlagen des Staatssicherheitsdienstes der ehemaligen Deutschen Demokratischen Republik (Federal Commissioner for the Records of the State Security Service of the German Democratic Republic)
BSV	Bund Stalinistisch Verfolgter (Association of those Persecuted by Stalinism)
Bundesland	State of the Federal Republic of Germany
Bundestag	Federal Parliament
Bürgerbewegung	(citizens' movement) refers to East German opposition movement of the 1980s
Bürgerkomitee	(citizens' committee) refers to oppositional governing committees that sprang up during the revolution of 1989
BVN	Bund der Verfolgten des Naziregimes (Association of the Persecuted of the Nazi Regime)
CDU	Christlich Demokratische Union (Christian Democratic Union party)
CID	Comité International de Dachau (International Committee of Dachau)
DDR	Deutsche Demokratische Republik (German Democratic Republic)
DGB	Deutscher Gewerkschaftsbund (Confederation of German Trade Unions)
DHM	Deutsches Historisches Museum (German Historical Museum)
DPs	Displaced persons
e.V.	eingetragener Verein (legally registered association)
FDJ	Freie Deutsche Jugend (Free German Youth – East German communist youth organization)
FDP	Freie Partei Deutschlands (Liberal Party of Germany)
Förderkreis	Support association
Förderverein	Support association
FRG	Federal Republic of Germany
GDR	German Democratic Republic
GDW	Gedenkstätte Deutscher Widerstand (Memorial to German Resistance)
Gedenkstätte	Memorial (also <i>Gedächtnisstätte</i> ) – usually an institution, rather than merely a monument

IBA	Internationale Bauausstellung (International Building Exhibition)
KPD	Kommunistische Partei Deutschlands (Communist Party of [West] Germany)
KUD	Kuratorium Unteilbares Deutschland (Council for an Inseparable Germany)
LpB	Landeszentrale für politische Bildung (State Agency for Political Education)
LStU	Landesbeauftragte(r) für die Unterlagen des Staatssicherheitsdienstes der ehemaligen Deutschen Demokratischen Republik (State Commissioner for the Records of the State Security Service of the German Democratic Republic)
Mahnmal	Monument (in the sense of a monument that warns or admonishes)
MdB	Mitglied des Bundestages (member of the federal parliament)
MEP	Member of the European Parliament
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
Neues Forum	New Forum, key East German opposition group
NKVD	Soviet service (abbreviation based on the Russian acronym). Its successor was the KGB.
NSMs	New social movements
OdF	Opfer des Faschismus (Victims of Fascism)
OdN	Verband der Opfer der Nürnberger Gesetze (Association of Victims of the Nuremberg Laws)
PDS	Partei des demokratischen Sozialismus (Party of Democratic Socialism, emerged from SED, now called Die Linke after a merger with a West German party)
RAF	Rote Armee Fraktion (Red Army Faction), radical left-wing terrorist organization, operating in the 1970s to 1990s.
SBZ	Sowjetisch besetzte Zone – zone occupied by Soviet forces
SDS	Sozialistischer Deutscher Studentenbund (Socialist German Student Association)
SED	Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschlands (Socialist Unity Party of Germany)
SEW	Sozialistische Einheitspartei West-Berlins (Socialist Unity Party of West Berlin)