Introduction

Innocence and the Politics of Memory

Jonathan Bach

Global Studies, The New School

Benjamin Nienass

Political Science and Law, Montclair State University

*I*nnocence is central to German memory politics; indeed, one can say that the German memory landscape is saturated with claims of innocence. The Great War is commonly portrayed as a loss of innocence, while the Nazis sought, in their way, to reclaim that innocence by proclaiming Germany as the innocent victim. After World War II, denazification and courts established administrative and legal boundaries within which claims of innocence could be formulated and adjudicated, while the “zero hour” and “economic miracle” established a basis for a different form of reclaiming innocence, one roundly critiqued by Theodor W. Adorno in his essay “What Does Coming to Terms with the Past Mean?”¹ In the 1980s, Chancellor Helmut Kohl’s famous pronouncement of the “grace [*Gnade*] of a late birth” (also translatable as “mercy,” “pardon,” or “blessing”) became the touchstone for a resurgence of war children’s (*Kriegskinder*) memory. In the 1990s, the myth of the Wehrmacht as largely innocent of atrocities was publicly challenged. Today, right-wing critiques that cast Holocaust remembrance as a politics of shame draw upon tropes of innocence, of German air war victims and post-war generations, while right-wing images of migrants are cast in classic forms of threats to the purity of the “national body” (*Volkskörper*).² The quickening pace of contemporary debates over Germany’s colonial past pointedly questions the innocence of today’s beneficiaries of colonialism, drawing attention to the borders and contours of implication.

This special issue highlights the role of innocence in post-war German public memory. In this introduction, we argue that the politics of memory rests in significant ways on a politics of innocence. A politics of innocence calibrates who can be remembered—and how—through the construction of a hierarchy of empathic value based on degrees of purity. These constructions, in turn,

become the basis for action in the present and future. Miriam Ticktin has shown the politics of innocence at work in the field of humanitarian intervention, where the projection (or withholding) of moral purity onto designated Others enables interventions in their name, be they refugees, migrants, casualties of violence, or even non-human actors such as animals or the environment.³ Our focus is narrower but concurs with her framing of innocence as fundamentally about policing the boundaries of purity, and hence identity. As such, the politics of innocence sets important parameters within which memory work unfolds.

Theorizing Myths of Innocence

By invoking myths in the title of this issue, we aim to convey a dual meaning that can be read across the following articles. First, the articles discuss specific narratives of innocence in the German context that serve mythical functions by addressing questions of group identity and embodying “ideals to which members of the group aspire.”⁴ These myths are not dependent on their truth value, because even if they rely on notions of a shared past, that vision of the past is mostly aspirational. The critical reaction to such narratives is, most commonly, to scrutinize them for factual errors and then debunk them for falsification of a specific history. This remains an important critical endeavor. But equally important is to understand such quests for innocence as attempts to delineate, in the first place, what counts as political and thus contestable, who counts as worthy of recognition, and who can be held accountable.

Second, the articles show collectively how innocence itself functions as a myth (independent of the specific case), acting to conceal what Michael Rothberg has called our implication in structural and historical injustices.⁵ Innocence, especially when juxtaposed to guilt in a binary way, empowers subject positions to claim a space seemingly unencumbered and unimplicated by those complex causalities that fit uneasily into individualistic and legalistic notions of responsibility. The myth of innocence thus brackets implication; yet in so doing, it implicates its subjects even more—innocence and implication are intertwined.

Memory can be a powerful resource in laying bare this entwining of innocence and implication, but it can also be employed to divert attention from it. The politics of innocence thus intersects with the politics of memory in complex ways, which these articles seek to bring out. We highlight here three particularly salient analytical intersections, although there are surely many

more. First, and perhaps most obviously, is the identification of innocence with the figure of the victim, or, more accurately, with the figure of the vulnerable body that, by dint of its vulnerability, is at risk of becoming a victim. Whether through self-identification with the victim (e.g., “playing the victim card”), or as a rallying cry for the heroic protection or rescue of the victim, the innocent subject invites justification for action against the threat in the present, while the conferral of victimhood is essential for determining who from the past is deemed worthy of commemoration.⁶

Second, the politics of innocence is not about absolute states of being but about the transition into or out of them—specifically, the state of losing innocence or regaining it. This has a decidedly temporal dimension, for innocence is less a present condition than something either already lost and needing to be regained, or at risk of loss and needing to be protected. Innocence is thus connected to nostalgia for a lost past, whether an earlier era or one’s own childhood, and to the desire to redeem that loss through setting the terms of action in the present and for the future. This applies not only to historical pasts, but also to subjects in the present, such as children or Others, who appear with reduced historical agency and onto whom innocence can be projected as a form of displacement.⁷ Innocence thus functions as a kind of horizon, a place that can only be displaced. The force of innocence lies in its latent promise of redemption, whether through the heroic defense of innocent others or the defeat of Others in defense of the innocent self.

Third, the legal meaning of innocence is neither wholly separate from nor identical with its moral sense. Rather than allowing for a neat split between its dual meanings—as evidence-based exoneration in law and as prelapsarian virtue in the moral imagination—the concept slips uneasily between them. Modern legal systems, after all, start from a presumption of innocence that metaphorically places all who are worthy of being judged in the position of losing their innocence, while seeking special protections for “vulnerable” (morally innocent) populations. The key point here is the productive ambiguity between positivist and moral senses of the concept. In German, the word for innocence is literally “un-guilt” (*Unschuld*). This is, importantly, not necessarily the same as non-guilt. The prefix “un” in German, as in English, works both to reverse meaning (guilty/not guilty, i.e., innocent) and to indicate absence. It is in this latter sense that, morally speaking, the absence of innocence works as a kind of original sin that is different from ordinary guilt. Theologically speaking, those who are marked by sin require grace to redeem their innocence, perhaps even the grace of a late birth. Nobody is truly innocent, yet to be (or be seen as) devoid of the capacity—indeed, the desire—for innocence is to be marked as evil.

This special issue critically explores how post-war and post-unification German narratives about the past navigate these intersections of memory politics and the politics of innocence.⁸ The cases are not presented in order to expose “one more” blind spot within Germany’s memory regime, but rather to show how each case is part of the wider, incomplete, and often contradictory process of acknowledging collective responsibility. This process lies both at the heart of Germany’s famous *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*, or coming to terms with the past, and the urgent questions of implication that are motivating social justice movements across the globe today. Thus, while the five articles focus on a German landscape of memory in which innocence plays a central role, they also speak to wider concerns about reckoning.

Following a chronological arc from 1945 up to the present, the articles start with what we might call foundational post-war innocence in Mikkel Dack’s critical re-examination of denazification narratives, based on recently declassified archives. Susanne Baackmann then explores the trope of childhood innocence in German literature and public discourse through an analysis of the novel *Fliegeralarm* (Air Raid Warning), which takes us from war’s end through the Kohl era and into the early reunification period. From there, Susanne Veas-Gulani shows us how Dresden’s narratives of its fateful firebombing became the foundation for post-unification right-wing politics, and Florian Helfer charts the changing presentation of the colonial past in German history textbooks. Jonathan Bach’s article rounds out the collection, drawing on the dual meaning of innocence as both the absence of guilt and the purity of intention to explore how the Prussian past figures in Berlin’s new museum and cultural center, the Humboldt Forum. Let us briefly set the stage for each of these.

The (W)ages of Innocence

It is hard to conceive of a less innocent age than that of the Third Reich and World War II. It is precisely against this background of depravity and death that innocence appears starkly as a means to confront, evade, or negate moral failings. As Mikkel Dack shows in his article on denazification, the ubiquitous use of questionnaires (*Fragebögen*) to determine culpability under the Nazi regime unintentionally, if predictably, created a giant mechanism for renarrating individual lives in ways that emphasized one’s innocence. This special issue starts with Dack’s article because it captures a key moment that allowed post-war narratives about resistance and victimhood to be forged. Even more to the point, it illuminates the workings of innocence as a strategy

of remembrance. The denazification questionnaires were decidedly political: they sought information about people's past politics to politically position them within the emerging post-war era. Yet for thousands of individuals who filled out the forms and who were neither heroic resisters nor high-level criminals, the safest move to ensure a place in the new political order was to present oneself as non-political, as someone dragged into the fray by coercion, exigency, or lack of understanding.

In an attempt to purify the pool of civil servants and professionals by removing those identified as Nazis, the occupying powers created the opportunity for many Germans to omit from their biographies any sign of complicit knowledge or dedication to the cause. Thus, the most common category became the infamous "passive follower" (*Mitläufer*, or "those who went along"), claiming a mantle of relative innocence in the face of forces presented as beyond their control or understanding. Dack's case study shows how the relationship between a politics of memory and a politics of innocence is dialectical. The search for innocence is not served simply by an absence or silencing of memory and historical reckoning. Instead, it requires an active mythologizing on the part of its subjects. This, in turn, is driven by the occupation force's need to classify different degrees of perpetrators, which ironically creates the categories and boundaries that allow for the deflection of responsibility.

The individual-level appeals to innocence that Dack describes are an evasive maneuver, motivated undoubtedly out of self-preservation, but Dack raises the question of their effect at a mass societal level when thousands of people come to internalize, painstakingly document, and mutually support similar stories and, importantly, propel them into subsequent generations through family lore. In this way feigned innocence acquires the force of truth, whether or not it accurately reflects people's self-justifications under fascism. This normalization of feigned innocence, however, blocks "honest soul-searching" and disables discussions of reckoning, with lasting echoes.⁹ Dack is showing us an Ur-moment of post-war innocence when these ego documents of denazification formed a web of plausible interpretations that largely evaded, rather than confronted, implication and complicity.

One relatively practical implication was that the myths of innocence that took shape through the questionnaires created a space in which people could indeed resume and continue life. A more unsettling implication is that the lack of reckoning helped institutionalize denial as a foundational element, elevating German suffering and sowing doubt about the corrosive extent of totalitarianism.¹⁰ Ironically, perhaps, the complex obfuscation of the questionnaires also formed the basis, decades and generations later, for descendants to doubt their family member's personal motives and find that their suspicions

could not be conclusively laid to rest, resulting in a raft of contemporary books about fathers, grandfathers, and others “who went along.”¹¹ This goes far beyond Dack’s article, but poses questions not only of innocence as a strategy of remembrance, but of how the memory of this strategy, decades later, fits in our contemporary theorization of implication.

The denazification questionnaires present us with a kind of banality of (not) confronting the past, conjuring images of white collar workers from all walks of life poring over the *Fragebogen*’s minutiae, bending questions and answers in their carefully constructed narratives of self-witnessing (*Selbstzeugnis*). This pretense of distance from the evil of fascism is vigorously rejected in the next article, where Susanne Baackmann, grappling with the popular trope of the *Kriegskind* (war child), gives voice to the likely children of the very men who filled out these forms. This voice is channeled through the West German writer Gisela Elsner’s quasi-autobiographic 1989 novel *Fliegeralarm* (Air Raid Alarm), where childhood innocence is savagely turned on its head among the hail of propaganda and bombs that accompanied war’s end in Nuremberg. In the novel, a gang of pre-school children create a game of “concentration camp” in grotesque mimesis of their monstrous adult world, including persecuting, and, seemingly accidentally, killing, a neighborhood (Christian) child bullied into the role of the Jew. The children avoid reckoning with this (on one level) unintended death when an air raid conveniently destroys the body. The enemy bomb becomes a literal and metaphoric shield behind which innocence can be protected and projected such that, as Baackmann writes, “there simply is no ‘innocent’ transcendent space from which to delineate the victim/perpetrator imaginary.”¹²

The significance of Elsner’s novel, shows Baackmann, lies in its bridging role between the memory politics of Chancellor Helmut Kohl’s era, in which debates raged about the “normalization” of the Nazi past, and the post-reunification era, in which German victimhood acquired a new cultural, historical, and political value. Elsner was an avowed opponent of reunification and committed suicide in 1992, but her novel, written as a contemporary critique of Helmut Kohl’s 1980s West Germany, seems like an anticipatory critique of a kind of nostalgia for innocence that, for Baackmann, characterizes post-reunification *Kriegskinder* literature. Baackmann shows how this innocence is inextricably tied with Kohl’s catchphrase of the “grace of a late birth,” which captures precisely the ambiguous intersection of innocence’s legal and moral imaginaries. Kohl’s first use of it, in a historic 1983 speech to the Knesset in Israel, clearly implies a form of exculpation: “I speak before you as one who *could not* be caught up in the guilt of the Nazi era because he had the grace of a late birth and the good fortune of an exceptional parental home” (emphasis added).¹³

Seeing the late birth as a form of grace is not trivial, especially in the context of Kohl's strong Catholic beliefs, since he sees his generation as the force for post-war regeneration, arguably under the sign of God's grace.¹⁴ The connection between childhood, grace, and innocence is reinforced through this formulation in which children, unlike adults, need not earn grace because they automatically embody it—innocence (of being) leads to innocence (of guilt). This association is what Elsner in *Fliegeralarm* systematically and unmercifully dismembers, as she shows how the children deftly stage and instrumentalize their innocence to stake out a world in which they are the masters of the symbolic order. They might not fully understand this order as adults do, but they understand that innocence works as a switch between agency in the adult world (where innocence appears as a form of crass manipulation of their trusting parents) and agency in the children's "real" world, defined by the absence of innocence rather than the presence of grace. This world is cruel, hierarchical, and charged, simultaneously a reflection of the "real" adult world and an inversion of the adult's imagination of the child's imagination.¹⁵ When the bomb "saves" them from facing their actions, it opens a route to a more general salvation found in the safety of one's own suffering. This is the route Elsner decries in what she sees as the unsuccessful post-war attempt to start anew, refracted through Baackmann's analysis of the *Kriegskinder* literature.

If a single bomb shields the children in *Fliegeralarm* from betraying the performance of their innocence, Susanne Veas-Gulani's following article escalates the interplay between bombing and innocence to a national scale in her analysis of the legacy of Dresden's decimation. The bombing of Dresden over three days in February 1945 is legendary, so much, she argues, that it has taken on mythic dimensions, allowing the destruction to be invoked in the service of very different ideological goals. Most recently it is the far right who has, with considerable success, appropriated the emotional and historical force of the bombing, especially in the guise of the PEGIDA movement and the political party Alternative for Germany (AfD).¹⁶ Understanding their path to increased social acceptance (the AfD is, as of this writing, the second largest political party in Saxony) requires, in her analysis, grasping how the bombing's ideological instrumentalization over the decades decontextualizes the event and makes it available for appropriation.

In Dresden's politics of innocence, she shows how it is not only the air war victims whose innocence sanctifies the city, but the innocence of the city itself that sanctifies the nation. In its internationally famous guise as a once-and-future Baroque wonderland personified through its skyline, Dresden itself becomes the victim, signifying both a more innocent past and the need to

protect the present against another future loss of innocence. This is exculpatory and anticipatory innocence, to borrow the framework from Bach's article on the uses of the Prussian past, with a hard edge: Dresden-as-victim makes its preservation and restoration a metonym for the German nation as a whole. Dresden has famously taken on the mantle of a peace city in ways similar to Hiroshima, and all parties agree that peace is essential to prevent future destruction and to allow for a redemption of the past. But what exactly poses a threat to peace has been pried open to debate by the new right, who identify external (e.g., Islam) and internal (e.g., "elites") enemies as the current locus of threat. This argument gains momentum by building on, rather than against, the layered invocations of innocence that coalesce in Dresden, from the city's violated innocence as a site of culture and beauty to the many forms of victimhood at play: of National Socialism, of the air war, of state socialism and its modernist "second destruction" of the city, of rapid reunification and gentrification, of know-it-all Westerners and sell-out Easterners.

It is among these multiple layers that Veas-Gulani shows how imbricated things become—the right-wing PEGIDA movement adopts the rituals of the East German opposition (e.g., Monday night demonstrations, chants of "We are the people"), while the AfD presents itself as the true protector of German history from those who, in the words of AfD leader Björn Höcke, make it look "terrible and ridiculous."¹⁷ Right, left, and center seek to claim the city as a monument, holding rituals and counter-rituals on the anniversary of the bombing at key sites. Seeking to displace right-wing usurpation of the anniversary, anti-right-wing activists commemorate both bombing victims and deported Jews with white roses, the symbol of student resistance to the Nazis, in an attempt to uphold the German memory consensus. This symbolic jumble plays into the hands of the AfD and the new German right who, unlike crude neo-Nazis whose glorification of the Third Reich is of limited appeal, find wider resonance by denouncing such acts as part of a German cult of guilt (*Schuld kult*).

This denunciatory argument appears in different variations. In one, the presumed singular focus on the fascist past in public commemoration is holding back the German nation, as exemplified by Björn Höcke's depiction of the Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe as a "monument of shame." Veas-Gulani argues that Dresden's glorified past lends itself to this desire for a past free of guilt and for a positive connotation of the nation. In others, a somewhat subtler argument emerges: In a clever reversal, the new right argues that ritualized memories now foreclose an honest reckoning with the goals and effects of public memories, a task they claim falls to them as a new source of ideology critique. In its most paradoxical form, this critique helps its authors claim status as the primary guardians of an anti-totalitarian post-war

consensus, by attacking one of its central sources, the politics of regret.¹⁸ Through this strategy the populist right actively attempts to “externalize illicit memories” to their political enemies.¹⁹ With psychoanalyst Christopher Bollas, we could call such a dual strategy of negation and projection an act of “violent innocence,”²⁰ a “self-idealizing defense that denies one’s own aggression and projects it onto an other.”²¹

This act of projection is central to the dynamic depicted by Vees-Gulani. In her analysis of why PEGIDA and the AfD have been so attractive to Dresdeners—and why, in turn, Dresden is attractive turf for right-wing mobilization—she claims that its self-image as a city of peace, its active refusal to be associated with a Nazi past, and the seemingly resilient xenophobic politics of PEGIDA are not to be understood as contradictions. It is the very conviction of upholding the city’s legacy as a symbol of peace while protecting Dresden’s and Germany’s identity against perceived threats from the outside that makes increasing numbers of Dresdeners, if their voting choices are an indication, receptive to attacking the West “as fascist and war-mongering,”²² and more likely to express disappointment in the mainstream parties. The incrimination of others as a defense mechanism reached its apex in February 2020 when AfD members refused to join the events of the 75th anniversary of the Dresden bombings because, they claimed, mainstream parties would instrumentalize the memory of Dresden’s suffering *against* the AfD. The AfD thus presented itself as both victim and defender of victims. The narrative of Dresden as a city of peace and its right-wing appropriations, Vees-Gulani shows, turn on a politics of innocence.

Shades of Innocence

The right-wing discourses in Dresden simultaneously attack and appropriate Germany’s memory politics consensus, creating a dynamic that fits Bollas’s characterization of “violent innocence” as a fog that undermines moral clarity. Violent innocence is less about denying the authorized interpretation of events than about disabling them in ways that invert established meanings, causing uncertainty about one’s own powers of judgment. Its tactics include, among other things, what Bollas calls the militarism of “a fine-print mentality.”²³ We saw this in Dack’s article when denazification questionnaires blurred the moral and legal meanings of innocence through a micro-approach to culpability, and it reappears in a very different way in the next article by Florian Helfer, who takes up the representation of colonialism in school textbooks after reunification.

The “fine-print mentality” found in the textbooks is the bracketing of colonialism to the thirty-odd years in which the newly constituted German empire claimed its “place in the sun” through the “acquisition” of formal colonies in the South Pacific, China, and Africa. Helfer shows how over time, despite the predictable persistence of colonialist epistemologies in the textbooks, they came to include portrayals of German colonialism “as ‘exceptionally brutal’ and ‘cruel,’”²⁴ and to use the term “genocide” to describe the 1904–1908 slaughter of the Herero and Nama in German Southwest Africa (today’s Namibia). Yet at the same time that German innocence is challenged through these representations, colonialism itself is mostly restricted to the teaching unit leading up to World War I, making it “a marginal phenomenon within the greater context of the power constellations”²⁵ of power politics.

Innocence, Ticktin writes, leaves “no space in between” guilt and innocence; since it is “about purity, it does not allow for gradations—for being partly innocent.”²⁶ This holds well for the children in Elsner’s novel and the right-wing attacks on the “cult of guilt” in Dresden. But both Dack’s case of the questionnaires and Helfer’s case of the textbooks operate through gradations, whether through the fine-grained categories of the denazification authorities or the positioning of German colonialism in the shadow of other European (particularly British and French) empires. Innocence, in these cases, is calibrated in part by a logic of comparison. The textbooks’ discussions of colonialism (reflecting wider social norms) are situated in the kind of comparative atrocity framework that, if similarly applied to public discussions of National Socialism and the Holocaust, would be largely unacceptable and thus regarded as scandalous.²⁷ This raises questions about how a politics of innocence works not only against but through gradations. In the case of colonialism, we see this take the form of a double movement. German atrocities are first located in the context of a larger European colonial project in which Germany played a diminished and copycat role (due to its latecomer and earlier-leaver status), yet at the same time colonial responsibility appears only in the national context of the direct relations between specific empires and “their” colonized. The second move—limiting responsibility to national containers—nullifies discussion of European responsibility as a whole implied by the first.

The Dialectics of Innocence

The question of where German responsibility for colonialism begins and ends is also at the center of Jonathan Bach’s look at the Humboldt Forum, the final article in the issue. The Forum is perhaps best known for its planned

ethnographic museums with artifacts from Asia and Africa, whose provenance raise the question of how to delineate the contours of innocence, echoing Helfer's case. Yet unlike the textbooks, which are dealing solely with representations, the museums are dealing with objects and human remains that carry their own complex histories and meanings, and that occupy distinct legal, moral, and spatial realms. Thus, even if an artifact is shown to have been legally acquired, the very history of the ethnographic museum raises questions about acquisition under conditions of injustice and the structural role of such museums in the larger European colonial project. To focus only on Germany's 30 years of formal colonies and on the legal conditions at the time of acquisition appears, for those seeking to decolonize the museum and society at large, as a version of fine-print mentality.

Bach explores the interplay of innocence as exculpatory (focused on the past) and anticipatory (focused on the future) through two examples: the legacy of the historical imperial castle's cabinet of curiosities and the elevation of the Humboldt brothers, especially Alexander von Humboldt, to patron saints. Following a more fine-print approach, the Humboldt Forum's leadership is inclined to analytically separate collecting and exploration from the injustices of colonialism, acknowledging their intersection mainly in cases where there is evidence of unlawful acquisition. This distinction is, for critics of the Forum, at best dubious and misses the point of decolonial critiques. Yet despite incommensurable positions and different motivations, both the leadership and critics increasingly converge on the need to rethink the representation and role of colonial objects in the present.

The Humboldt Forum's exhibit planning and its attendant debates, Bach shows, both affirm and challenge the classificatory and hierarchical impulses associated with the colonial gaze. Bach's article thus concludes with the observation that the myths of innocence at play in the Forum are driven by a tension. Exculpatory myths close down discussion by imitating an imagined innocent era frozen in time, bracketing its failings and extolling its virtues. Anticipatory myths seek a reboot of the present in the hopes of capturing the sense of possibility of an era that is not yet fully formed. Both can be misguided, but can also serve as a point of critique for the other. The larger point, reinforced in this introduction, is that myths of innocence are always open to appropriation in a dynamic, dialectical process with an uncertain outcome.

Each of the cases in this issue thus shows a different point in the dialectic, so to speak, and each contains elements of its own critique. The denazification questionnaires allowed individuals to affirm their relative innocence, yet also laid the groundwork for a mass denial of complicity that haunts society to this day. The war children's memoirs cannot fully escape Elsner's nagging

reminder in her own quasi-autobiographical account that innocence is an adult's imagination and fantasy, one exploited by children and adults alike. The new right in Dresden dresses its mythic invocations of nationalist purity with claims to ideological critique that force wider discussions about the purposes, forms, and effects of public memory. The textbook writers and museum curators inch cautiously forward in a dialectic in which the belated recognition of colonial injustice confronts the Eurocentric frameworks in which they function, and which perpetuate the very myths they seek to address.

Common to all of the cases is the deployment of innocence to police boundaries of purity while also remaining malleable, simultaneously uncompromising and surprisingly versatile. Innocence is a quality that can be conferred and revoked, thereby allowing it to be used strategically, manipulatively, and even contradictorily to confront, evade, or negate moral failings. In all these cases, and in all these ways, a politics of innocence sets the parameters for a politics of memory.

JONATHAN BACH is a Professor of Global Studies at The New School in New York. His recent work examines the politics of memory in everyday life, material culture, and changing urban space in Germany and China. He is the author of *What Remains: Everyday Encounters with the Socialist Past in Germany* (2017), and co-editor of *Re-Centring the City: Global Mutations of Socialist Modernity* (2020) and *Learning from Shenzhen: China's Post-Mao Experiment from Special Zone to Model City* (2017).

BENJAMIN NIENASS is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Political Science and Law at Montclair State University. His research on the politics of memory has appeared in the *Review of Politics*, *Politics & Society*, *Globalizations*, the *German Studies Review*, the *Latin American Research Review*, and many other journals, as well as in several edited volumes. He is also the co-editor of *Silence, Screen, and Spectacle: Rethinking Social Memory in the Age of Information* (2014) and of special issues in the journals *Memory Studies*, *Social Research*, and the *International Journal of Politics, Culture, and Society*.

Notes

1. Theodor W. Adorno, "What Does Coming to Terms with the Past Mean?," in *Bitburg in Moral and Political Perspective*, ed. Geoffrey H. Hartman (Bloomington, 1986), 114–129.
2. This word was used by AfD representative Peter Boehringer in 2016. See Sebastian Leber, "Das sind die abenteuerlichsten Rechtfertigungen der AfD," *Der Tagesspiegel* (17 July 2019), <https://www.tagesspiegel.de/themen/reportage/tabubrueche-und-skandale-das-sind-die-abenteuerlichsten-rechtfertigungen-der-afd/24595264.html>.
3. Miriam Ticktin, "A World without Innocence," *American Ethnologist* 44, no. 4 (2017): 577–590.
4. Benjamin Nienass and Ross Poole, "The Limits of Memory," *International Social Science Journal* 62, no. 203–204 (2012): 89–102, here 93.
5. See Michael Rothberg, *The Implicated Subject: Beyond Victims and Perpetrators* (Stanford, 2019).
6. Of particular relevance here is the literature on Germans as victims, which has grown in the early twenty-first century. See, inter alia, Bill Niven, ed., *Germans as Victims: Remembering the Past in Contemporary Germany* (New York, 2006); Helmut Schmitz, ed., *A Nation of Victims? Representations of German Wartime Suffering from 1945 to the Present* (New York, 2007); Robert Moeller, "Germans as Victims? Thoughts on a Post–Cold War History of World War II's Legacies," *History and Memory* 17, no. 1–2 (2005): 147–194; Mary Nolan, "Germans as Victims during the Second World War: Air Wars, Memory Wars," *Central European History* 38, no. 1 (2005): 7–40.
7. See Ticktin, "A World without Innocence."
8. The articles collected here have their origins in a panel on "Myths of Innocence" at the German Studies Association Annual Conference in Portland, Oregon, 4 October 2019.
9. See Mikkel Dack, this issue.
10. This finding was underscored by the Frankfurt Institute for Social Research's controversial "group experiment" in the 1950s. See Theodor W. Adorno, *Guilt and Defense: On the Legacies of National Socialism in Postwar Germany*, trans., ed., and with an introduction by Jeffrey K. Olick and Andrew J. Perrin (Cambridge, MA, 2010). For a different take on the problematic some decades later, see Alexander Mitscherlich and Margarete Mitscherlich, *The Inability to Mourn: Principles of Collective Behavior* (New York, 1975).
11. Just in the last few years, see, for example, Angelika Bammer, *Born After: Reckoning with the German Past* (New York, 2019); Nora Krug, *Belonging: A German Reckons with History and Home* (New York, 2018); Roger Frie, *Not in My Family: German Memory and Responsibility after the Holocaust* (New York, 2017); and Derek Nie-mann, *A Nazi in the Family: The Hidden Story of an SS Family in Wartime Germany* (London, 2015). For analytical approaches, see Harald Welzer, Sabine Moller, Karoline Tschuggnall, et al., *Opa war kein Nazi: Nationalsozialismus und Holocaust im Familiengedächtnis* (Berlin, 2002). See also Mary Fulbrook, *Reckonings: Legacies of Nazi Persecution and the Quest for Justice* (New York, 2018).
12. See Susanne Baackmann, this issue.
13. "Ich rede vor Ihnen als einer, der in der Nazizeit nicht in Schuld geraten konnte, weil er die Gnade der späten Geburt und das Glück eines besonderen

- Elternhauses gehabt hat." In Norbert Frei, *1945 und wir: Das Dritte Reich im Bewusstsein der Deutschen* (Munich, 2005), 189n22, which includes Kohl's later comment that he was misunderstood. One could also surmise an element of survivor guilt in Kohl's choice of the phrase, given that his older brother had been killed in the war while still a teenager.
14. In contrast and in a more Lutheran vein, the originator of the phrase, the journalist and diplomat Günter Gaus, warned in his usage that grace is not its own reward. See "Verschwiegene Enteignung: Wer erfand die Wendung von der 'Gnade der späten Geburt'?", *Der Spiegel* (14 September 1986), <https://www.spiegel.de/politik/verschwiegene-enteignung-a-976d7e96-0002-0001-0000-000013519977?context=issue>.
 15. This is the phrase used by Michael Taussig, riffing on Walter Benjamin, to show how secrecy, truth, and power fold in on each other. See Michael Taussig, "The Adult's Imagination of the Child's Imagination," in *Aesthetic Subjects*, ed. Pamela R. Matthews and David McWhirter (Minneapolis, 2003), 449–468.
 16. PEGIDA is an acronym for Patriotische Europäer gegen die Islamisierung des Abendlandes (Patriotic Europeans Against the Islamization of the Occident), founded in 2014 in Dresden by Lutz Bachmann.
 17. See Veas-Gulani, this issue.
 18. Jeffrey K. Olick, *The Politics of Regret: On Collective Memory and Historical Responsibility* (New York, 2007).
 19. Julian Göppfharth, "Memory and Illiberalism: Populist Far-Right Memory in Germany," in *Handbook of Memory Activism*, ed. Yifat Gutman and Jenny Wüstenberg (forthcoming).
 20. Christopher Bollas, *Being a Character: Psychoanalysis and Self Experience* (London, 2013), 165–192.
 21. Nancy Caro Hollander, "Psyche, Ideology and the Creation of the Political Subject: A Summary," *Psychotherapy and Politics International* 6, no. 1 (2008): 30–32, here 31. See also David Gadd and Rose Broad, "Troubling Recognitions in British Responses to Modern Slavery," *British Journal of Criminology* 58, no. 6 (2018): 1440–1461.
 22. See Veas-Gulani, this issue. We note how her argument implies a form of false consciousness, in which the willful denial of Dresden's own complicity in the Nazi past is the condition of its post-war identity as a city of peace and culture. One could conclude that Dresdener's must face the truth of their own complicity if they are to break the spell of the myth of their innocence (which is enabling the new right). This, in turn, implies the existence of an innocent moment before the fall, but when would this have been? Perhaps, Veas-Gulani's analysis implies, there never was a moment of innocence, raising interesting and difficult questions about what reckoning looks like in the absence of innocence.
 23. Bollas, *Being a Character*, 191.
 24. See Helfer, this issue.
 25. Ibid.
 26. See Ticktin, "A World without Innocence," 584, 588.
 27. See, for example, the most recent set of debates around Achilles Mbembe, informed by the "specter of comparison" (as Michael Rothberg puts it) that regularly haunts post-war Germany's memory politics. See Michael Rothberg, "On the Mbembe Affair: The Specters of Comparison," *Latitude*, Goethe Institute, May 2020, <https://www.goethe.de/prj/lat/en/dis/21864662.html>.