

'The *Historikerstreit* is much more than an academic exercise. It is part of a larger controversy about the political uses of history and the relationship between historical consciousness and identity.' (Nolan, 1998, p. 53)

Discuss this claim with particular reference to the arguments of Habermas, Hillgruber, Nolte and Stürmer.

The *Historikerstreit* was a debate about the singularity of the Holocaust and the impact of remembrance of Germany's Nazi past on national identity in the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG) in the present. The debate was initiated in July 1986 with the publication of Habermas's article *Eine Art Schadensabwicklung*, in which he isolated and criticized supposed 'apologetic tendencies' in Andreas Hillgruber's book *Zweierlei Untergang: Die Zerschlagung des Deutschen Reiches und das Ende des europäischen Judentums*, and Ernst Nolte's and Michael Stürmer's publications in the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* (FAZ), as well as in confrontations with the Nazi past in the FRG more widely. Numerous articles were published in the *FAZ* and *Die Zeit* newspapers as the debate escalated throughout 1986 and into 1987. The public nature of the debate meant that it was in many ways a continuation of a trend of increased confrontation with the Nazi past, which had started in the 1960s with the student movements and had continued throughout the 1970s and 1980s when the 1979 television screening of *Holocaust* and the 1985 French documentary film *Shoah* had brought memories of the Holocaust more decidedly into the public sphere (Travers, 1991, p. 247). However, the arguments of Hillgruber, Nolte and Stürmer formed part of a conservative reaction against this supposedly left-wing concentration on the Nazi past. Changes in the political climate since the election of Kohl and the Christian Democratic Union (CDU) in 1982 had contributed to an increasing perception that Germany's Nazi past was being overemphasised (Evans, 1989, p. 15). The arguments of Hillgruber, Nolte and Stürmer seemed to coincide with the efforts of Conservative politicians, through

events at Bitburg in 1985 and plans for two national history museums, to lessen the burden of the Nazi past and bolster a new West German patriotism as part of an assertion against the German Democratic Republic (GDR). Their arguments were not only interpreted as politically driven attempts to serve these goals but also seemed to serve political ends given the volatile context of renewed Cold War tensions. This study argues that though the *Historikerstreit* did genuinely deal with historical questions about whether the Holocaust was unique or whether parallels could be drawn with other genocides, the way in which these arguments were raised and the political context they were raised in meant that the dispute was undoubtedly part of a wider debate about the political uses of history, in which politicians and historians, both conservative and liberal, sought to instrumentalise historical consciousness to support very different models of identity in the present.

There are many respects in which the *Historikerstreit* was an academic exercise that questioned understandings of the Nazi past. Nolte (1987a, p. 39) criticized what he regarded as an exceptional *Nicht-Vergehen* of Germany's Nazi past, given that all other historical periods pass and lose their potency for the present. In stating (1987b, p.34) 'Auch das Dritte Reich kann und muß ein Gegenstand der Wissenschaft sein...' he seemed to echo the call of historian Martin Broszat for a historicisation of the Nazi period to facilitate analytical, academic study which refrained from emotional condemnation (Nolan, 1988, p. 60). Furthermore, in placing Nazi persecution in the context of other genocides the debate raised questions about whether the Holocaust was singular or comparable with other modern atrocities. Comparison is often utilised in historical studies to identify common elements in different historical situations, but is primarily used to identify the singular aspects (Bloch cited in Maier, 1998, p. 70). Whilst Nolte's

comparisons emphasise the similarities between the Holocaust and other genocides, comparison is a legitimate feature of academic debate, and there have, for example, been numerous comparative studies of fascism (see Kallis, 2003). Furthermore, Habermas published his criticism in reaction to apparent 'apologetic tendencies' which he felt were monopolising the past. By warning that in their desire to bolster national identity his 'opponents' sought 'den aufklärenden Effekt der Geschichtsschreibung [zu] scheuen und einen breitenwirksamen Pluralismus der Geschichtsdeutungen ab[zu]lehnen,' Habermas (1987a, p. 73) sought to defend the existence of diverse interpretations of the past which keep the lines of academic debate open.

Although these elements illustrate that there were academic aspects to the debate, even without considering the specific arguments involved in the dispute it is evident that the *Historikerstreit* differed considerably from other academic and historical debates. By publishing their opinions in national newspapers (*Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* and *Die Zeit*) rather than in academic journals or periodicals, the participants secured a large audience for their views. Thus they did not solely intend to stimulate academic debate but also sought wider public resonance. Furthermore, Nolte had already advanced some of his most controversial ideas in earlier works. In his 1974 *Deutschland und der Kalte Krieg* he wrote that in Vietnam the USA 'nichts Geringeres ins Werk setzten als ihre in Grund noch grausamere Version von Auschwitz' and that, seen from the right perspective the destruction of the Jews could be likened to atrocities in Russia and was

nichts anderes...als der zweite und ohne den ersten nicht verständliche...moderne Versuch, Probleme, die mit der Industrialisierung zusammenhängen durch die Beseitigung

einer großen Menschengruppe zu lösen' (cited in Wehler, 1988, p. 15).

The reiteration of these arguments in the national press indicates that there was more at stake than academic advances, especially given that the debate did not entail any new research findings (Diner, 2000, p. 222).

Furthermore, the language used by the participants was not that of carefully considered academic writing; rather it was provocative and seemed intentionally controversial. Nolte (1987a, p. 39) wrote that the Nazi past '...wie ein Richtschwert über der Gegenwart aufgehängt ist,' whilst the title of Hillgruber's work was also problematic as Habermas (1987a, p. 66) highlighted: 'Die 'Zerschlagung' verlangt einen aggressiven Gegner, ein 'Ende' stellt sich gleichsam von selber ein.' However, as Meier (1987, p. 210) stated in a keynote speech to the Conference of German Historians, the title *Ende des Judentums* may have been inappropriate, but Habermas's phrase the 'Vertreibung der Kulaken durch Stalin' was perhaps equally belittling. Phrases like 'Beobachten wir zunächst den Kölner Zeithistoriker Andreas Hillgruber bei seiner Gratwanderung' (Habermas, 1987a, p. 63) seem just as 'unacademic' as Nolte's 'Richtschwert über der Gegenwart'. There were also other ways in which the participants did not adhere to tacit academic conventions. Nolte raised questions:

Vollbrachten die Nationalsozialisten, vollbrachte Hitler eine "asiatische" Tat vielleicht nur deshalb, weil sie sich und ihresgleichen als potentielle oder wirkliche Opfer einer "asiatischen" Tat betrachten? War nicht der "Archipel GULag" ursprünglicher als "Auschwitz"? War nicht der "Klassenmord" der Bolschewiki das logische und faktische Prius des "Rassenmords" der Nationalsozialisten? (Nolte, 1987, p. 45)

and criticized the dismissal of such questions as products of the Cold War, when in fact 'sie beruhen auf schlichten Wahrheiten' (Nolte, 1988, p.43), and yet he provided little empirical evidence to show they were based on fact. In this he neglected the second fundamental step in academic debate: 'Frage aufzuwerfen - wie klug oder obskur sie auch sein mögen - ist eine Sache. Sie empirisch und interpretatorisch überzeugend zu beantworten, ist der unabdingbare zweite Schritt' (Wehler, 1988, p.43). Furthermore, Hillgruber (1986, p. 23) felt that he had to identify with a specific historical actor and that the historian could only identify with German soldiers and inhabitants in the East. However, Habermas (1987a, p. 64) contended that historians should not take on the position of historical actors; they should view history from their own perspective which facilitates a critical distance. Historical identification is a problem facing all historians but few adopt the views of historical actors. They aim to make actions in the past 'verstehbar' but not 'verständlich' which would imply sympathy with those actions (Peacock, 2001, p. 102). In advocating the viewpoint of the population and soldiers in eastern Germany Hillgruber aims to make their acts 'verständlich' which arguably goes unnecessarily beyond attempts at academic understanding.

The way in which the *Historikerstreit* developed and became increasingly personalised also differentiates it from other academic debates. During the debate Meier (1987, pp. 207- 8) condemned the presence of personal animosity: 'Jedenfalls soll man die Meinung des Gegners, nicht ihn selbst bekämpfen,' and reminded historians of the acceptable limits of debate: 'Es geht auch nichts an, dass Historiker sich weigern, Räume zu betreten, in denen bestimmte andere Historiker sich aufhalten - um nicht in die Versuchung zu kommen, ihnen die Hand zu geben.' It is therefore evident that although the *Historikerstreit* did address academic issues it

also differed from other academic debates; the public nature of the debate, the language used, and the lack of adherence to academic 'conventions' indicate the debate was much more than an academic pursuit.

This indication is confirmed by the actual arguments raised which created a view of the past which could be utilized to aid national identity in the present. As we have seen Nolte (1987a, p. 39) argued that contrary to other historical periods Germany's National Socialist past would not pass. A continuing potency meant it could not be left to historians to analyse but served as a 'Schreckbild, als eine Vergangenheit, die sich geradezu als Gegenwart etabliert.' This 'Nicht-Vergehen' was detrimental to an understanding of the period since it prevented it from being contextualised and seen in all its complexity (1987a, p. 42). This call for a 'normalisation' of the Nazi past appears similar to Broszat's call for historicisation. Broszat wanted studies of National Socialist rule to provide 'not just a history of the dictatorship, but a history of the Nazi era' (Nolan, p. 60) as a whole, which analysed the overarching structures and aspects of society which had been changed by National Socialism, and also those aspects which had remained largely constant. In contrast to this Habermas (1987a, p. 73) argued that Nolte and others, 'möchten eine revisionistische Historie in Dienst nehmen für die nationalgeschichtliche Aufmöbelung einer konventionellen Identität.' Nolte's aim behind 'normalisation' was therefore not primarily to enable rational understanding, but to prevent memory of the Nazi past from negatively influencing the West German present. This aim is shown in his claims that the 'Nicht-Vergehen' of the Nazi past was detrimental and led to a persistent fear that Germany would become the site of a Third World War, and that the Holocaust was increasingly incomprehensible now that Germany was a humanitarian nation (Nolte, 1987a, p. 40). For Nolte, then, 'normalisation' would

counteract the detrimental influence of memories of the Nazi past in the Federal Republic.

In addition to arguing for a 'normalisation' of the Nazi past Nolte's arguments (1987a, p. 45) also relativised that past by claiming that, apart from the technical process of gassing, everything the Nazis did to the Jews had already done by the bolshevists in Russia. This reduction of the difference between the Holocaust and genocide in Russia to a procedural technicality would mean that German atrocities were no graver than other atrocities. Nolte's (1987a, pp. 41, 43, 46) emphasis on the 'deportation' of the Armenians, and 'genocide' in Vietnam and Afghanistan presented the Holocaust as just one of many mass exterminations in the modern world which were all part of a 'witch-hunt' in society following the ruptures in history caused by the Industrial Revolution. The result of this was that 'embedded in the context of twentieth century genocide, the Final Solution and the state and society responsible for it seem neither unique nor singularly evil' (Nolan, 1988, p. 72). Nolte (1987a, pp. 45-6) also claimed that Nazi terror was caused by fear and the belief that Germany would become a victim of a Russian 'Asiatic deed'. This implies that Nazi atrocities had a rational, if not justified cause, independent of tendencies within Germany. Hillgruber's work similarly reduced the burden of the past by identifying the Holocaust as part of a broader trend of mass resettlements in the twentieth century. Hitler's actions were extreme but they were nevertheless part of this process (Evans, 1987, p. 776-777). This means that according to Hillgruber (1987, p. 66-7) Turkish genocide of the Armenians, the mass expulsion of the Greeks from Asia Minor, the Holocaust, and Allied initiated displacement in Eastern Europe following World War II were part of the same process. In claiming that the Holocaust did not differ significantly from other genocides but even had common origins Nolte and Hillgruber

consequently refuted the presence of a unique German burden. Therefore, the arguments raised in the debate were undoubtedly significant in themselves, but from Habermas's critique it is evident that 'It is the political consequences of a given historical interpretation that trouble him, not the interpretation itself' (Torpey, 1988, p. 10). The controversy lay in the intentions behind Nolte and Hillgruber's arguments, and the use their revised view of the past could be put to in the present.

In his criticism, Habermas (1987a, p. 65) argued Nolte and Hillgruber's arguments were designed to answer Michael Stürmer's calls for a historical consciousness that could positively aid national identity. Stürmer identified a search for identity in the FRG, and claimed that an emphasis on the negatives of the past stopped the FRG playing the role in Europe which its economic success and central geographical location justified (Travers, 1991, p. 251). He therefore called for a unified, positive view of history as a basis for national identity and social integration (Wehler, 1988, p. 10; Habermas, 1987a, p. 73). For him, control over memory was fundamental, since 'in geschichtslosem Land die Zukunft gewinnt, wer die Erinnerung füllt, die Begriffe prägt und die Vergangenheit deutet' (Stürmer, 1987, p. 36). So for Stürmer historical consciousness was directly related to present national identity. Nolte and Hillgruber's arguments provided a view of the past which could fulfil this purpose. Whilst it is arguable that it was only Habermas who connected the views of Nolte and Hillgruber with those of Stürmer, and that they did not intend to utilise historical consciousness for national identity, nonetheless Nolte's argument that a preoccupation with the Nazi past detracted from present issues and resulted in negative representations of the Federal Republic illustrates that identity undoubtedly concerned him. Despite criticising Stürmer's 'sinnstiftende Historie' Habermas also used the *Historikerstreit* to promote his own model of national

identity, a 'postkonventionelle Identität', based on commitment to the democratic, liberal Enlightenment culture of the West, rather than the German past or any 'deutsch-national eingefärbte Natophilosophie' (Habermas, 1987a, p. 75). For Habermas the Holocaust meant that the only acceptable patriotism for the FRG was a 'Verfassungspatriotismus', rooted in a commitment to and identification with the democratic political order and Basic Law of the German Constitution (Habermas, 1987a, p. 75; Weber- Nicholson, 1989, p. 257). Both Stürmer and Habermas advocated commitment to the West, but whereas Stürmer believed this should take the form of commitment to NATO, Habermas saw rejection of a German *Sonderweg* in favour of the democratic path of the West as paramount (Evans, 1989, p. 112). Therefore, although Habermas was advocating a break with past German traditions and Stürmer wanted an identity rooted in the past, both models show that the debate was fundamentally concerned with the question of national identity and the effect of the Nazi past on it.

The significance of the arguments raised in the *Historikerstreit* is all the more profound given its context and wider controversies about the political uses of history in the mid 1980s. Habermas (1987b, p. 243) not only linked the ideas of Hillgruber, Nolte and Stürmer, he also identified all three with increasing attempts to instrumentalise history for national identity since the election of Kohl's CDU in 1982. Kohl and numerous other Conservative politicians showed a desire to put the past behind them. The Bavarian Minister President, Franz Josef Strauss, had called for Germany to 'emerge from the shadow of the Third Reich' to become a normal nation and prevent twelve years of National Socialism detracting from a 'great German past' (Evans, 1989, p.19). Habermas (1987b, p. 244) cites Alfred Dregger, leader of the CDU parliamentary fraction in the Bundestag's calls for a basic

patriotism and to prevent 'Vergangenheitsbewältigung' being misused to make the Germans 'zukunftsunfähig'. These sentiments were also central to Reagan's visit to the military cemetery at Bitburg in 1985. The visit, like Nolte's calls for normalisation, aimed to allow Germans to put the past behind them, with Reagan specifically criticising an unnecessary feeling of guilt which had been imposed on the Germans (Evans, 1989, p. 17). Bitburg 'was to have symbolized the end of Germany's pariah status and return to the fold of political normalcy', (Wolin, 1989, p. xiii) though emphasis on West Germany's cooperation and economic and military compatibility with the West implied that on one side at least the Germans had been fighting the correct enemy all along (Habermas, 1987b, p.245). Bitburg effectively 'turned the victory of the anti-fascist coalition over Hitler into the betrayal of democracy before Stalin' (Eley, 1988, p. 176). This use of history as a weapon against the East is also implicit in Hillgruber's (1986, p. 21) identification with the German *Wehrmacht* against '...die drohende Orgie der Rache der Roten Armee', or Nolte's claim that Nazi atrocities arose from the threat of Russian bolshevism. Habermas (1987a, p.71) highlights Cold War considerations by stating that Nolte claimed Nazi crimes were an answer to '(heute fortdauernde) bolschewistische Vernichtungsdrohungen', whilst he explained Auschwitz through an "'asiatischen" Bedrohung durch einen Feind, der immer noch vor unseren Toren steht'. This meant both the *Historikerstreit* and wider confrontations with the past not only sought to 'normalise' the past to aid West German identity, but also to define this identity specifically in opposition to Communism in the East. This was particularly important given that prior to the détente which shaped the end of the decade, under Reagan and Thatcher the 1980s witnessed a renewed escalation of Cold War tensions, including US plans to deploy Pershing II missiles in the FRG, and military support for

freedom movements in Afghanistan, Cambodia and various third world countries against the Soviet Union (Garthoff, 2004, p. 187).

The arguments of Hillgruber, Nolte and Stürmer could therefore be seen as the intellectual expression of political desires to 'normalise' the Nazi past and anti-communism.¹ Conservative politicians and conservative historians were linked through Habermas's criticisms and direct links between characters in the debate and the government. Stürmer had served as an advisor to both Kohl and Franz Josef Strauss, (Heuser, 1990, p. 429) and historians were involved in government plans for a Museum of the History of the Federal Republic in Bonn and a German History Museum in Berlin. Klaus Hildebrandt, who also attracted Habermas's criticism, was a member of the planning committees for both museums (Mommsen, 1986, p. 15). The plans for these museums actually prompted Habermas's attack when he was asked to speak at a hearing on the issue by Social Democrats in the Bundestag. He decided not to speak directly on the museum's debate but on wider 'apologetic tendencies', and it was this speech which was printed as *Eine Art Schadensabwicklung* (Heuser, 1990, p. 430). The museums formed a significant part of government attempts to promote national identity. Mommsen (1986, p. 14) claims that the government planned the museums '...in der Erwartung, dass eine stärkere historische Rückbesinnung die Verbundenheit mit Staat und Verfassung erhöhen und das gesamtdeutsche Nationalbewusstsein beleben werde.' Fulbrook (1999, p. 1) identifies national identity as a human construct which is partly 'embodied in and transmitted through institutions', which must include museums, and Berger (1997, p. 205) also emphasises the role of museums in re-nationalizing German identity and forming

¹ It should be noted that Habermas's criticisms also served political ends as the debate coincided with the beginning of the campaign for the January 1987 elections and Evans (1987, p. 782) claims that 'Habermas's attack on conservative historians was timed not least as a contribution to the SPD effort in the electoral campaign.'

historical consciousness through the presentation of fixed national images and specific views. The Berlin museum in particular was concerned with identity and was designed to present West Germany internationally and counterbalance the Museum of German History in East Berlin (1986, p. 17). The GDR itself was drawing on aspects of Germany's recent and more distant past, such as Luther, Scharnhorst, Bismarck, Frederick the Great and the 20.July plotters to forge a positive identity (Evans, 1987, p. 781; Broszat, 1988, p. 309). There was however also concern that the museums would minimise any reference to the Nazi past. The Bonn museum was only intended to represent developments since the founding of the FRG, and only public pressure forced the inclusion of the Weimar Republic and National Socialism in the museum plans (Mommsen, 1986, p. 14). Whilst the government was seeking to utilise historical consciousness to foster national identity through museums which sought to emphasise the positive aspects of German history (and possibly to sideline memory of the Nazi past), historians contributed through their involvement in the museum plans and the formulation of arguments in the *Historikerstreit*, which normalised and relativised the atrocities of the Third Reich, using rhetoric strikingly similar to that of politicians. This shows that the *Historikerstreit* was inextricably linked to wider contemporary controversies about the political uses of history and the desires of Conservative politicians to utilise historical consciousness to foster national identity.

Nevertheless, it would be misleading to claim that it was only Conservative politicians and more right-wing historians who favoured a search for identity. There were also similar sentiments on the left - the Secretary of the Berlin SPD, Peter Glotz, stated 'the need to take bearings and self-knowledge, but also self-confidence and pride from one's own history is not automatically right-wing'

(Heusen, 1990, p. 423). However, as only one of the sixteen members of the Commission for the Berlin Museum was an SPD member it was unlikely they would heavily influence the model of identity it promoted (Mommsen, 1986, p. 18). Therefore in the museums debate, just as in Habermas's article, it was 'not the search for an identity as such that was questioned' (Heusen, 1990, p. 423) but rather what form that identity should take and who should shape it.

This issue of who would control the conception of the museums reflects aspects of the politics of the *Historikerstreit* as a whole, which were concerned with developments in German historiography and the question of whose view of history would gain ascendancy. In reference to the museums debate Habermas quotes Jürgen Kocka (1987a, p. 72): 'Am Ende wird entscheidend sein, welche Personen die Sache in die Hand nehmen...' and although it is impossible to outline the intricacies of German historiography here in great detail, the arguments raised by Hillgruber, Nolte and Stürmer have been regarded as a reaction against a perceived dominance of leftist views of the past and historiography. The student movements and neo-marxist theories of the 1960s had prompted an increased confrontation with the Nazi past and challenged selective memory (Fullbrook, 1999, p.119). That Nolte opposed this is evident in his questioning 'ob bei jenem Nichtvergehen der Vergangenheit auch Interessen im Spiel waren oder sind, etwa die Interessen einer neuen Generation im uralten Kampf gegen "die Väter" oder auch die Verfolgten und ihrer Nachfahren' (Nolte, 1987, p. 41). An increased national confrontation with the past was accompanied by a proliferation of local history, school projects, competitions and local museums. Nolan claims this shows that the interest in the past which Stürmer saw necessary for national identity did exist, however the problem with these initiatives was that they largely came from the left and would not facilitate an

overarching identity. Consequently Bitburg, the museums debate and the arguments put forward by Hillgruber, Nolte and Stürmer on a national level were designed to counteract a perceived dominance of leftist methods and views of history at a local level (Nolan, 1988, pp. 62-3). The *Historikerstreit* was then part of wider reactions against left-wing views of the past, but was also concerned to an extent with challenging developments in German historiography and a perceived dominance of left-wing methods. The link with wider issues in German historiography may explain why Habermas's criticisms, coming from an outsider, and a left-wing philosopher at that, provoked such a response and were often dismissed as personal slander (Mommsen, 1987, p. 187; Wehler, 1988, p. 105). It may also help to explain why the debate was largely polarized between left-wing and conservative academics who were often associated with the government.

However, whilst these divisions were important, to reduce the *Historikerstreit* to a struggle between left and right-wing historians would be a simplification which neglects the importance of the specific political climate in which it occurred. There were furthermore many overlaps between left and right-wing historians. Nolte sought to normalise the past and detract from a concentration on the Holocaust, but developments in left-wing historiography had, perhaps unwittingly, had the same effect. The spread of *Alltagsgeschichte* had shifted attention from the Holocaust to normal aspects of everyday life under Nazism. Broszat's historicisation was fiercely criticized by Friedländer as potentially resulting in normalisation, and in identifying with the German soldiers and civilians on the Eastern front Hillgruber was actually practicing his own 'history from below' most widely advocated by the left (Nolan, 1988, p. 52; Baldwin, 1990, pp.16-21).

The *Historikerstreit* then was a controversial, heated debate which grew from academic issues but was not solely an academic exercise. The parallels drawn by Hillgruber and Nolte between Nazi atrocities and other mass exterminations relativised the Holocaust and seemingly invalidated the idea of a unique German burden. However, it was the intentions behind these arguments, the language the participants used, and the public nature of the debate which ultimately caused the debate to escalate as it did. The comparisons made by Hillgruber and Nolte, and Nolte and Stürmer's calls for a 'normalisation' of the past had fundamentally different motivations to earlier calls for historicisation. In relativising and normalising the past, conservative historians could create a historical consciousness which could be utilised for national identity as called for by Stürmer and many Conservative politicians. These arguments alongside events such as Bitburg and the plans for two national museums meant that the *Historikerstreit* was fundamentally concerned with attempts to create a normalised view of the past; a historical consciousness that could be politically instrumentalised to serve a positive present national identity, which in the 1980s Cold War context would specifically affirm the Federal Republic's position in the West and strengthen its identity in opposition to the GDR. Diner (2000, p. 222) claimed that subsequent reunification has revealed the 'underlying concern [of the controversy] - in anticipation of the political process of unification - with the problem of German identity.' The *Historikerstreit*'s 'search for normality' and the desire to overcome a German 'gesamtnationale Katzenjammer' (Berger, 1997, p. 1999) have continued, and in many ways been pursued more urgently in united Germany by a number of new-right, mainstream conservative historians, and other intellectuals like Martin Walser, as part of a 'Normalisierungs-Nationalismus' (Berger, 1997, p. 14). This 'search for normality' has seen attempts to

present a revised view of Nazism as part of a 'European civil war' (a view predominantly presented by Nolte), or as 'value-free modernisation', as well as a renewed emphasis on German victimhood and opposition to Hitler (Berger, 1997, p. 141). This continued relativisation and normalisation of the Nazi period for present ends is a measure of just how far the *Historikerstreit* was also inextricably linked to the political uses of history and the relationship between historical consciousness and national identity. Although in 1987 it may have seemed that Habermas and his supporters 'triumphed', in effect, 'the fires allegedly put out by the *Historikerstreit* are still smouldering in the ruins of the Cold War divisions of Germany' (Berger, 1997, p. 256). The questions the *Historikerstreit* raised about whether German national identity should be based on a concept of 'constitutional patriotism' or more historically rooted nationalism, and what role the legacy and memory of the Nazi past would play in that identity have remained extremely potent into the new millennium.

4,301 words excluding references

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