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**“...NOT BY THE GERMAN PEOPLE, BUT IN THE NAME
OF THE GERMAN PEOPLE”.
ADENAUER AND THE NARRATIVE OF THE CENTRE GROUND***

INTRODUCTION

The end of the Second World War plunged German society into a profound identity crisis. The downfall of the *Reich*, the partition of Germany, the towns in ruins, millions of people killed or expelled and the troubling knowledge of the crimes of the Nazi Empire on the one hand, the hatred and contempt of foreign nations on the other – all this forced Germans¹ to confront the question of who they were and what should become of them and their country. Against this background, Konrad Adenauer emerged as the most important politician of the West German population. Without being himself the author of the narrative that was shared by many leading public figures, he became the most influential advocate of a historical account that corresponded to the convictions of broad swathes of post-war society.² Together with Adenauer, citizens of the Federal Republic might dream that Germany could take up again where the country had left off before Hitler seized power. He also made it easier to satisfy people's general desire to distance themselves from the Hitler era, because he was known to have suffered persecution under National Socialism. His influence upon Germans' self-perception at that time can scarcely be exaggerated.

For all Adenauer's efforts to keep the Nazi period out of public debates, he is in no doubt that the crimes had been committed. However, he ascribes them not to the Germans but to Hitler. They had been committed “not by the German people but in the name of the German people”, just as if Hitler had not been able to rely on the Germans' widespread approval and their willingness to take part. Adenauer used this ano-

¹ In this essay the expressions “the Germans” or “the German people” refer, as they do for Adenauer, to that portion of the German population that is of German origin in the sense of having German ethnicity. This generalizing mode of speaking corresponds to Adenauer's own usage. It does not imply, however, that Adenauer's statements about “the Germans” apply to all Germans in every instance.

² For the support given to this narrative by the intellectual, political and social elites of the time, see Edgar Wolfrum, *Die Bundesrepublik Deutschland, 1949-2000* (Stuttgart, 2005), 218-225.

dyne formula in order to free Germany from the stain of the Nazi period and to restore it to its historical position as a great power. This narrative can be termed a narrative of the centre ground in the sense that it corresponded to the thinking of the broad centre ground of German society.

Up to now no explicit, comprehensive analysis of the development of Adenauer's narrative has been forthcoming, one that involved an engagement with his key speeches covering the whole of the post-war period down to his death in 1967. Analysis of individual speeches has been linked either to more general, comparative questions or else to the exploration of specific issues. None of these studies starts out from the realization that Adenauer's changing political utterances follow a fundamentally consistent pattern.³ The present study is based on the scrutiny and evaluation of virtually all of Adenauer's letters, speeches, addresses, interviews and articles published since 1945, as well as on a number of hitherto unpublished documents.⁴ Care has been taken to distinguish between Adenauer's public statements and his personal remarks made in private. A further object of study will be the way in which the evident discrepancy between his public and private statements in the immediate post-war period altered with the passing of time.

So as to make a meaningful selection of texts, four key historical periods over the entire twenty years have been singled out to highlight Adenauer's attitude towards the German past. This will make it possible to review his statements overall. The first ten months following the end of the war (1945-46) are the period in which Adenauer gives clear expression to the guilt of the German people. Between 1949 and 1953, during his first period of office as Federal Chancellor, Adenauer tried to "draw a line" under the past. This prompts an examination of his first Government Policy

³ See, for example, Helmut Dubiel, *Niemand ist frei von der Geschichte: Die nationalsozialistische Herrschaft in den Debatten des Deutschen Bundestages* (Munich, Vienna, 1999), 42-49; Ulrich Baumgärtner, *Reden nach Hitler: Theodor Heuss – Die Auseinandersetzung mit dem Nationalsozialismus* (Munich, 2001), 119-126; Frank Stern, *Im Anfang war Auschwitz: Anti-Semitismus und Philosemitismus im deutschen Nachkrieg* (Gerlingen, 1991), 299-339; Robert G. Moeller, "Deutsche Opfer, Opfer der Deutschen: Kriegsgefangene, Vertriebene, NS-Verfolgte, Opferausgleich als Identitätspolitik," in *Nachkrieg in Deutschland*, ed. Klaus Naumann (Hamburg, 2001), 29-58. Phillip Gassert advances the proposition that there was no "hushing up" and "repression" during the Adenauer period, but thinks that discussion of "Socialism and its consequences always followed along particular lines, albeit hedged around in a variety of ways so that certain aspects were generally underplayed." Phillip Gassert, "Zwischen Beschweigen und Bewältigen: Die Auseinandersetzung mit dem Nationalsozialismus in der Ära Adenauer," in *Epoche im Widerspruch: Ideelle und kulturelle Umbrüche der Adenauerzeit (Rhöndorfer Gespräche vol. 25)*, ed. Michael Hochgeschwender (Bonn, 2011), 183-205, 202.

⁴ Source materials worthy of special mention include the editions of Adenauer's letters and table talk published in the *Rhöndorfer Ausgabe*, the records of the Federal Party Executive of the CDU, Adenauer's Memoirs, the records of the *Bundestag*, the bulletins of the Press and Information Office of the Federal Government, as well as the collection of Adenauer's speeches in Konrad Adenauer, *Reden, 1917-1967, Eine Auswahl*, ed. Hans-Peter Schwarz (Stuttgart, 1975). In addition, the relevant documents in the *Bundesarchiv* (BArch), the Foreign Office Archives (*AAPD*), the Archive of the Stiftung Bundeskanzler-Adenauer-Haus (StBKAH) and the Archiv für Christlich-Demokratische Politik der Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung (*ACDP*) were consulted.

Statement of 1949 and his reparations policy. In 1959-60, the vandalizing of Jewish property forced Adenauer to revert publicly to the question of anti-Semitism. In 1966, as former Chancellor, Adenauer visited Israel. His trip there enables us to draw up the balance-sheet of his life's work and provides some insight into the background of his narrative of history.

The focus of the present study rests on the clarification of the intellectual content of Adenauer's statements about German history and their place in his overall view of history. His various utterances – regardless of the tactical calculations called for by particular situations – must be examined and evaluated as an essential, independent element of his actions as a politician, while attempts to trace his statements back to his motives and intentions remain very much in the background. In fact, such attempts are restricted here to general, often ideologically based attitudes that determined his views over the longer term.

This study has been conceived as a contribution to the reconstruction of the intellectual foundations of the politics of the Adenauer era, and in particular of Adenauer's policies towards the past as explored above all by Norbert Frei and towards Adenauer's reparations policy as has been described by Constantin Goschler, among others.⁵

CHAPTER ONE: GUILT AND RECONSTRUCTION. EARLIEST SPEECHES AFTER THE END OF THE WAR. THE CUSTODIS LETTER

As early as May 1945, the American Military Government reinstated Adenauer in his old post of Mayor of Cologne. From the summer of 1945 on, he became politically active in the *CDU*, which had been newly founded following various regional initiatives. On October 1, 1945 he gave a speech to the Cologne City Council, calling on people to join in the hard labour of rebuilding the city. On February 23, 1946 he wrote a letter to his boyhood friend Bernhard Custodis, setting out his views on the complicity of the Germans in Nazi crimes. On March 1, 1946 he was elected chairman of the new party for the British Zone. As the new leader, he gave his first speech to a 4000-strong audience in the Great Hall of the University of Cologne.

In the City Council speech, Adenauer described the “apocalyptic conditions” and the “indescribable misery” into which the city's inhabitants had been plunged by the war and praised the “courage and confidence” people had shown in launching themselves on the “hard and stony path” of reconstruction so as to “create a new life for themselves”.⁶ He continues:

⁵ See N. Frei, *Vergangenheitspolitik: Die Anfänge und die NS-Vergangenheit* (Munich, 2012). Constantin Goschler, *Schuld und Schulden: Die Politik der Wiedergutmachung für NS-Verfolgte seit 1945* (Göttingen, 2005).

⁶ Ansprache des Oberbürgermeisters vor der von der britischen Militärregierung ernannten Kölner Stadtverordneten-Versammlung, 1. Oktober 1945 [Address by Mayor Adenauer to the Cologne Town Council appointed by the British Military Government, October 1, 1945], in: Adenauer, *Reden*, 79-81, 80f.

“The guilty, those responsible for this unspeakable suffering, this indescribable misery are those accursed men who came to power in the ill-starred year of 1933. It was they who dishonoured the German name throughout the entire civilized world and covered it with shame, who destroyed our Reich, [and] who... plunged our misguided and paralysed people into the depths of misery”.⁷

Here Adenauer contrasts the “misguided and paralysed people” with the “accursed men”. For devout Catholics the “accursed men” are devils, angels who have turned away from God; they are not human beings, but the misbegotten sons of Hell. Adenauer thereby interprets National Socialism as an event outside the realm of human responsibility. On this Catholic view, the Germans are creatures who have been led astray, victims of “tempters”, a people guilty of venial sins.⁸ A striking feature of this passage is what Adenauer blames “the accursed men” for. They have destroyed the German *Reich* and dishonoured the German name throughout the entire civilized world and covered it with shame. For Adenauer as for the Germans the catastrophe means the destruction of the *Reich* and its reputation, not the annihilation of millions of Jews and others. He is already thinking in terms of the continuity of the state, the restoration of the *Reich* and the honour of the nation.

Four months after his city council speech, Adenauer wrote to his school friend, the Roman Catholic priest Bernhard Custodis. In the meantime, the major war crimes trial had begun in Nuremberg and the discussion of guilt had reached Germany.⁹ Karl Jaspers’ Heidelberg lectures on *The Question of Guilt* served as an important stimulus in these debates, perhaps even for Adenauer.¹⁰ In his letter to his

⁷ *Ibid.* We already find here the central motif of Adenauer’s narrative as expressed in the later formula that the crimes were committed “not by the German people, but in the name of the German people” and that the Germans were victims of a desecration of their name.

⁸ According to Catholic teachings, venial sins refer to sins committed without full knowledge of wrongdoing or under compulsion or that are trivial in themselves. See Michael Waldmann, “Sünde,” in *Lexikon für Theologie und Kirche*, vol. 9, ed. Michael Buchberger (Freiburg i. Br., 1937), Columns 895-905, 898f. Venial sins can be forgiven following specific acts such as fasting, alms-giving and prayer. Not even a confession is required. See P. Franco Beatrice, “Sünde V: Alte Kirche,” in *Theologische Realenzyklopädie*, vol. XXXII, ed. Gerhard Müller (Berlin, New York, 2001), 389-395, 390. On the role of the Catholic Church in the post-war era and the early years of the Federal Republic, see S. Weichlein, “Antikommunismus im westdeutschen Katholizismus,” in *Der Antikommunismus in seiner Epoche. Weltanschauung und Politik in Deutschland, Europa und den USA*, eds. Norbert Frei and Dominik Rigoll (Göttingen, 2017), 124-138.

⁹ See Knud von Harbou, *Als Deutschland seine Seele retten wollte: „Die Süddeutsche Zeitung“ in den Gründerjahren nach 1945* (Munich, 2015), 75-77, 80-82. Of fundamental importance is Heidrun Kämper, *Der Schuldiskurs in der frühen Nachkriegszeit: Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte des sprachlichen Umbruchs nach 1945* (Berlin, New York, 2005), 138-179, 277-379.

¹⁰ Even before the end of the war Adenauer was well informed about Nazi crimes since he regularly listened to the news on foreign stations and maintained good contact with friends abroad, politicians of the Weimar parties and especially the Catholic Church. His most important contacts during the war were the Swiss Consul General in Cologne, Franz-Rudolf von Weiss, and the Dutch businessman Wim J. Schmitz. See Hans-Peter Mensing, ed., *Adenauer im Dritten Reich* (Berlin, 1991), 647; Hanns Jürgen Küsters, ed. et al., *Adenauer: Teegespräche, 1955-1958* (Berlin, 1986), 295-297; Hanns Jürgen Küsters, ed. et al., *Adenauer: Teegespräche, 1959-1961* (Berlin, 1988), 500. See also Hans-Peter Schwarz, *Adenauer: Der*

friend he accepts the idea of the guilt of the German nation with a clarity that is not to be found in his later statements:¹¹

“In my opinion, the German people has incurred a great guilt for the events in the concentration camps....The German people entered into the spirit of Nazi propaganda. It let itself ...be brought into line almost without any resistance and in part actually with enthusiasm. It is here that its guilt lies. Moreover, people knew about the great cruelties that were being perpetrated in the concentration camps, even if they were not aware of their fullest extent. They knew that the Gestapo, our SS and to some extent also our regular troops had treated the civilian population in Poland and Russia with unprecedented cruelty. The anti-Jewish pogroms in 1933 and 1938 were conducted in the full light of day”.¹²

Adenauer accuses the German population of having tolerated the crimes of the regime despite having known about them. They let themselves be dragged into line without offering any resistance and in part with enthusiasm. From the vantage point of the criminal code, these accusations lack force. They refer rather to the political and moral failings of the Germans and to the guilt that springs from those failings in a way that cannot be encompassed by the law. This is the true guilt of the Germans, one that has not been fully grasped to this day and is obscured rather than illuminated by concepts such as “follower” [*Mitläufer*] or “looking the other way”. With their enthusiasm the Germans, and this is implicit in Adenauer’s remarks, conferred a legitimacy on the regime and with their exaggerated sense of duty they helped to make the Nazis’ crimes possible. We can infer from the drift of Adenauer’s words that if only the population had withdrawn their allegiance to the Nazis, the regime might have found it harder to act as it did and some crimes at least might have been prevented. The radical nature of Adenauer’s comments can be seen in what he writes about the Roman Catholic bishops: they too had incurred guilt, Adenauer writes, since they “might have been able to prevent many things from happening. But they took no action and that is inexcusable”. Had they as a consequence of their protest “landed in prison or in concentration camps”, it would have done “no harm”.¹³

The letter ends with two observations of programmatic importance for the development of Adenauer’s narrative. The first reflects on what might have happened if the Church and “the section of the German population that had not directly succumbed to National Socialism” had raised their voices. “At the very least”, Adenauer writes, “they would appear better justified in the eyes of foreigners and especially of posterity”. And on the failure of the clerics, he notes: “None of that actually happened and

Aufstieg 1876-1952 (Munich, 1994), 407, 437. We must assume that his knowledge of the Nuremberg Trials of the major war criminals was significantly enhanced by the regular accounts of the proceedings in the press and the daily radio reports.

¹¹ This has been confirmed by Rudolf Morsey in an email to the present writer on May 8, 2018.

¹² Adenauer an Pastor Dr. Bernhard Custodis, 23. Februar 1946 [Adenauer to Pastor Dr. Bernhard Custodis, February 23, 1946], in Hans-Peter Mensing, ed., *Adenauer: Briefe, 1945-1947* (Berlin 1983), 172-173, 172.

¹³ *Ibid.* 173.

so it is best to say nothing.”¹⁴ His insight into the nature of German guilt, an insight he would never again formulate so explicitly, leads Adenauer to the conclusion that it is better to say nothing so as not to be shamed in the eyes of foreign countries and posterity.

In his speech at the University of Cologne, Adenauer reveals some basic elements of his world view and of the programme of the *CDU*. Here too he is concerned with the German past. However, there is already a certain distancing from the positions adopted in the Custodis letter.¹⁵ He still speaks of “crime upon crime on the greatest possible scale”, but he has ceased to speak of the “crimes of the people”, referring instead to “crimes among the people”. Even this admission is weakened by the way in which German guilt is contrasted with such German attributes as “courage and sense of duty”,¹⁶ which were also highly rated by the Nazis. The way in which Adenauer describes the conduct of the Germans in their current wretched situation now sounds more like an absolution:

“The German nation endures this hardest period of its history with heroic fortitude, stamina and patience, with a patient fortitude that is stronger than any hardship. I have often felt ashamed to be a German since 1933, ashamed to the depths of my soul. Perhaps I knew more than many others about the abominations committed against Germans [sic] by Germans, and the crimes against humankind that were planned. But now, now I once again feel proud to be a German. I am prouder than I ever was before, even before 1933 or before 1914. I am proud of the strength of character with which the German nation endures its fate, proud to see how each individual puts up with his lot and does not despair, how each person strives to survive and rescue those close to him from this misery and to help them to reach a better future”.¹⁷

This is followed by a lengthy discourse on the intellectual causes of the “catastrophe”,¹⁸ which paints the Germans as the victims of enticement. The history of past guilt turns into a history of the victims of the war and the heroes of reconstruction, a reinterpretation that dominated Germans’ view of themselves long after 1945 and permeated both public and private narratives.

The basic features of the picture that Adenauer painted of the German past and the role of the Germans in it were already laid out in the first few months after the end of the war. We already begin to see the outlines of the clear distinction between his

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ Referring to these three texts, Baumgärtner speaks of Adenauer “oscillating” between “the acceptance and the repudiation of guilt”. Baumgärtner, *Reden nach Hitler*, 123, 125. This judgement is the consequence of an excessively brief time frame in which the general development of Adenauer’s narrative of the past fails to become sufficiently transparent.

¹⁶ Grundsatzrede des 1. Vorsitzenden der Christlich-Demokratischen Union für die Britische Zone in der Aula der Kölner Universität, 24. März 1946 [Declaration of Principles by the Chairman of the Christian-Democratic Union for the British Zone in the Great Hall of the University of Cologne, March 24, 1946], in Adenauer, *Reden*, 82-106, 83.

¹⁷ *Ibid.* 84. The importance to Adenauer of strict discipline, the readiness to make sacrifices and hard work is something he will also emphasize in connection with his Israel visit in 1966. See Chapter Five.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

private statements about National Socialism and German guilt on the one hand and his public statements on the same subjects on the other. Adenauer had definite views but this did not prevent him from adjusting his stance to suit a particular audience. His maxim, as formulated in the Custodis letter, of saying nothing in order to appear “better justified” will remain a fixture and will surface again a few years later along with his policy of a resurgent Germany that will resume its place among the European great powers.¹⁹

Over and above the substance of Adenauer’s picture of the German past in his initial statements after the war, the three texts examined here also contain structural features that act as pointers to the future. They reveal the basic pattern of his narrative stance, which takes the form of pairs of contrasting concepts, such as the contrast between shame and pride in his Cologne speech. This enables him to erect a barrier separating the Germans from the Nazis and their crimes. In the years to come, Adenauer’s self-confirming narrative of the past will be increasingly shaped by the way he charged keywords in his speeches with meanings which already imply their opposite.

CHAPTER TWO: THE TRULY GUILTY AND THE INNOCENT. ADENAUER’S FIRST GOVERNMENT POLICY STATEMENT IN 1949

In his first period of office as Federal Chancellor from 1949 to 1953, Adenauer sought to draw a line under the past. This involved, among other things, the repeal of the Occupation Statute, an understanding with the Jews²⁰ about reparations and, on the domestic plane, “a policy relating to the past” (Frei), in other words an amnesty for Nazi perpetrators, the release of war criminals and the reintegration of former Nazi officials. Adenauer’s narrative of the past undergoes further development in connection with these projects.

In his First Government Policy Statement of September 20, 1949 Adenauer made a decisive retreat from the position he had adopted in the Custodis letter. Whereas in 1946 he still spoke of the guilt of the German people and reminded his addressee of society’s overall political and moral responsibility for the misdeeds of the Nazis, he

¹⁹ In a speech to the National Committee of the *CDU* on October 11, 1954, in the context of the imminent conclusion of the Paris Treaties, which would largely restore the sovereign authority of the Federal Republic, Adenauer stated: “We have already won our battle for the status that a great power must possess. We shall then have every right to say that we have once again become a great power...the goal that we have set ourselves will soon be achieved.” G. Buchstab, ed., *Konrad Adenauer: “Wir haben wirklich etwas geschaffen”*, *Die Protokolle des CDU-Bundesvorstands 1953-1957* (Düsseldorf 1990), 258. On the politics of the rise once more to the status of equality in the Western Alliance, see H. A. Winkler, *Der lange Weg nach Westen: Deutsche Geschichte, Vol.2, vom “Dritten Reich” bis zur Wiedervereinigung* (Munich, 2000), 166.

²⁰ By “Jews”, considered from a German perspective, Adenauer understood a group of Others – from an ethnic, religious and, especially since the Nazi era and in the light of their persecution, also a historical point of view. In connection with reparations, the concept refers to the totality of Jews as represented by Israel and the Jewish Claims Conference.

now focused his attention in the question of guilt exclusively on the criminal liability of individuals.

“The denazification process has led to much unhappiness and done much damage. (“Quite right!” in the Centre and on the Right) Those who are truly guilty of the crimes committed during the National-Socialist era and the war should be severely punished (Heckling from the KPD). But for the rest, we should stop drawing a distinction between two classes of people in Germany (Cheers from the Right), between those who are irrepachable and those who aren’t. We must put an end to this distinction as soon as possible. (More cheers)”²¹.

According to Adenauer, the war and the post-war period had been such testing times for many people and had brought so many temptations, that “we have to show understanding for numerous misdemeanours and offences”. This being the case, the Federal Government “is considering introducing an amnesty” and intended to intercede with the Allied military courts to induce them to amnesty war criminals. It was determined “to let bygones be bygones wherever this seemed defensible, in the conviction that many people had paid the price for what subjectively speaking was not a very grave guilt”.²²

Adenauer is relating a story of innocence in his Policy Statement. He introduces it by reminding us of the “misfortune” endured by Germans who had been called to account by the Allies for their involvement in National Socialism. And yet the denazification process meant less of a disaster for the Germans than for their victims because the murder of millions of innocent people had gone unpunished while as a rule the Germans could find themselves “exonerated”.²³

²¹ Erste Regierungserklärung von Bundeskanzler Adenauer, 20 September 1949 [First Government Policy Statement by Federal Chancellor Adenauer, September 20, 1949], in Adenauer, *Reden*, 153-169, 163.

²² *Ibid.* N. Frei stresses that the Federal Government conveyed the impression that the law would be confined to “the years of transition and the years of economic upheaval”. In the process it obscured the fact “that its essential thrust amounted to exempting Nazi criminals from punishment” and had nothing more urgent to do than “to ease the situation of an entire army of minor and not so minor Nazi perpetrators”. Frei, *Vergangenheitspolitik*, 37-39. The effect of the law overall was to amnesty around 800,000 cases liable to punishments of up to six months imprisonment, call a halt to ongoing trials and remit sentences of up to one year. Tens of thousands of National Socialist criminals were presumably the beneficiaries, including those who had taken part in the Night of Broken Glass pogroms of November 1938. The amnesty amounted to an endorsement of the “mentality of drawing a line under the past” that had “grown up in parts of post-war German society from 1946/47 and continued to grow further”. It was the “entry point into a rapidly escalating process of delegitimizing the prosecution of Nazi crimes – expanding into increasingly comprehensive demands for further amnesties right down to the unabashed call for a ‘general amnesty’ that would include even the war criminals of the very worst sort”. *Ibid.* 53.

²³ Adenauer himself played a role in such exonerations. In 1948 he wrote to a Denazification Office about an official with whom he had only professional contact up to 1933 and about whose activities after 1933 he knew nothing: “Mr Kühn was a highly competent official and of excellent character. I have very clear memories of him. I cannot imagine that Mr Kühn could have done anything during the Nazi period that might have incriminated him.” Bescheinigung für Dr. Walter Kühn, Berlin Steglitz, 22. April 1948 [Statement on behalf of Dr Walter Kühn, Berlin Steglitz, April 22, 1948], in H.-P. Mensing, ed., *Adenauer: Briefe, 1947-1949* (Berlin, 1984), 217.

In Adenauer's eyes the truly guilty parties included the Nazi leadership and the leading members of the Party and the terror apparatuses whom earlier in his speech to the Cologne City Council in 1945 he had described as “accursed men”. He also included the murderers and killers actually involved in committing the crimes, people who “already had criminal records and had carried out actual crimes”.²⁴ He regarded them as “ordinary” criminals. Adenauer's notions of the perpetrators are defensive concepts, formulated from the point of view of the middle-class background to which he himself belonged. They imply, conversely, that people from this milieu may well have been led astray, but they cannot have been “truly guilty”.

In the case of the second pair of concepts Adenauer operates with in his policy statement, those who are “irreproachable” and “those who can be reproached”, he changes his perspective from guilt to one of attitude. By those he calls politically irreproachable, he means people who like himself kept their distance from the National Socialists and refused to join the Party. In contrast, the category of those who can be reproached must be thought of as including the “convinced Nazis” – the followers and careerists. And since there is no law against “attitudes”, the group of those who are open to reproach must be held to be innocent according to Adenauer's narrow view of the criminal law's conception of guilt.²⁵ This means that within the brief timespan that had elapsed since the Custodis letter, the political and moral guilt of the German people in the crimes of National Socialism and its atrocities had been erased from Adenauer's narrative of history.²⁶

After his comments on the amnesty, Adenauer moves on to the question of right-wing radicalism and anti-Semitism in the Federal Republic and from there to relations with Jews:

“Ladies and gentlemen, the fears that have been expressed particularly in the foreign press about subversive right-wing activities in Germany are undoubtedly greatly exaggerated. (“Hear, hear!” on the right) I greatly regret the fact that by spreading the loutish speeches of certain persons in German and foreign newspapers they have been given an importance that they have never had in Germany... We condemn these [anti-Semitic] tendencies in the strongest possible terms. We think it is unworthy and in fact incredible that after everything that happened in the era of National Socialism there should still be people in Germany who wish to despise or persecute Jews simply because they are Jews”.²⁷

²⁴ Adenauer in conversation with the British military journalist Liddell Hart on June 9, 1952 in Hanns Jürgen Küsters, ed., *Adenauer: Teegespräche 1950-1954* (Berlin 1984), 315-320, 316. On Adenauer's concept of the perpetrators, see also Frei, *Vergangenheitspolitik*, 256f.

²⁵ This can be illustrated with reference to the Federal Minister and former Nazi expert on Eastern Europe Theodor Oberländer. On April 26, 1960 Adenauer stated at the CDU National Committee that despite his “deep-brown” mentality, Oberländer had not lost his “honour”, in other words, he had remained decent even while working as an expert for the Nazis. See Günter Buchstab, ed., *Adenauer: “...um den Frieden zu gewinnen”*. *Die Protokolle des CDU-Bundesvorstands 1957-1961* (Düsseldorf, 1994), 660.

²⁶ Helmut Dubiel speaks of the “lack of reflection” in the Government Policy Statement: “[I]f we can say that any moral evaluation has slipped into this reference to the past, it is not one that displays any self-criticism on the part of the Germans...”. Dubiel, *Niemand ist frei von der Geschichte*, 42f.

²⁷ Erste Regierungserklärung [First Government Policy Statement], 163f.

Adenauer is speaking here of the activities of subversive right-wing radicals and the anti-Semitic endeavours of particular individuals.²⁸ He is however less concerned by right-wing radicalism and anti-Semitism than by its resonance in the press²⁹ and the consequent damage to the reputation of Germany, especially abroad. His comments here turn out to be an attempt to defend Germany's reputation. He does not waste a single word on the still prevalent anti-Semitic attitudes at the heart of German society, which are not reported in the newspapers.³⁰ This latent problem would require a public debate, which Adenauer had always sought to avoid since the revival of his own political career after the end of the war.³¹ With his comment that "it is incredible" that there should still be Nazis and anti-Semitism in Germany, he seeks to create the impression that the Germans of 1949 no longer had anything in common with the Germans of the period 1933-1945. His claim that right-wing radical utterances are "loutish" plays down the importance of Nazism and anti-Semitism by comparing them to those of badly behaved children who cannot be held responsible for their actions.

Overshadowed by his concern for the reputation of Germany, Adenauer's hints of the misdeeds of the Nazi era are easily overlooked. In all of his Policy Statements he remains silent about the terrible crimes committed against the Jews and others. His phrase "everything that happened under National Socialism" enables him to treat the Holocaust as an extremely remote "event". He reduces it to a hazy, anonymous occurrence from a long-forgotten era neither capable of explanation nor in need of one. The whole paragraph turns out to be an attempt to expunge the Holocaust from the memory of the public. Adenauer will assert a little while later that it is high time to put an end to research into the past. "A new chapter of history has literally begun."³²

²⁸ Among the people referred to here, we may mention Otto Ernst Remer, a leading member of the Deutsche Reichspartei, as well as Werner Naumann and the members of the "Gaulleiter Kreis". Both were officials of the NSDAP or else officers in the SS or the Wehrmacht, self-declared National Socialists and anti-Semites, who attempted after the war to revive the National Socialist movement. For further information about Remer and Naumann, as well as their aspirations and the actions of the Federal Government in its dealings with these personalities, see Frei, *Vergangenheitspolitik*, 326-396.

²⁹ It is unclear just which press reports Adenauer has in mind here.

³⁰ W. Bergmann, R. Erb, "Wie antisemitisch sind die Deutschen? Meinungsumfragen, 1945-1994," in *Antisemitismus in Deutschland: Zur Aktualität eines Vorurteils*, ed. Wolfgang Benz (München, 1995), 47-63, 50f.

³¹ As early as his Statement of Principles-speech in the Great Hall of the University of Cologne, on March 24, 1946 he makes no mention of either the word "Jew" or the concept of anti-Semitism.

³² Ansprache vor dem Vorstand und den Vorsitzenden der Kreisparteien der CDU Rheinland und Westfalen in Bonn, [Speech to local CDU representatives of the Rhineland and Westphalia in Bonn, January 13, 1951], in Adenauer, *Reden*, 216. The fact that it was possible even at that time for a politician to adopt a completely different stance towards the German past can be seen from a speech given by Theodor Heuss, the President of the Federal Republic, on the occasion of the inauguration of the memorial to the victims of the Bergen-Belsen Concentration Camp on 30 November 1952. He spoke with unremitting frankness about the crimes and rebutted attempts to gloss over their horrors and consign them to oblivion with the words: "We knew about these things" and "No one can absolve us from this shame". Theodor Heuss, "Diese Scham nimmt uns niemand ab," *Bulletin des Presse- und Informationsamtes der Bundesregierung* 189 (December 2, 1952): 1655-1656, 1655f.

The effort of drawing a picture of the country that no longer has anything to do with the crimes of National Socialism results in the Government's Policy Statement referring only to the German victims. Adenauer reminds his listeners of the victims of the war, the POWs, the “tragedy”³³ of the expulsions, the partition of the nation, the loss of freedom as a result of the occupation, the “disaster” of denazification and the unwarranted accusations from abroad. His silence implies that the republic should begin with a “clean” balance sheet. Guilt and debts should be written off as far as possible so that the Germans “can arise once more”.³⁴ Thus Adenauer's chancellorship begins on the one hand with a line drawn under the past and on the other hand with the Germans' perception of themselves as a nation of innocent victims.³⁵

Adenauer's remarks on National Socialism and anti-Semitism did not pass uncontested.³⁶ Kurt Schumacher, the leader of the *SPD* found fault with Adenauer for saying too little about the Jewish victims. You can't “be against Nazism without remembering the victims of Nazism”. Despite his criticism he too played down the Holocaust. He expressed the opinion that these crimes involved “a terrible tragedy for the Jews”, because of which the German nation had been “dishonoured”.³⁷ No less disturbing is Schumacher's definition of anti-Semitism, which he characterized as “ignorance of the great contributions of German Jews to the German economy, to German intellectual life and to German culture, as well as to the struggle for German freedom and German democracy.” He concludes by expressing his regret that there are no Jews to help with the German recovery: “The German people would be better off today if these powers of the Jewish mind and Jewish economic potential were available to help with the rebuilding of a new Germany.”³⁸

³³ Erste Regierungserklärung [First Government Policy Statement], 166. Adenauer took the word from a remark of Churchill's.

³⁴ Erklärung der Bundesregierung [Federal Government Statement], Deutscher Bundestag, 1. Wahlperiode, 18. Sitzung. Bonn, den 24. und 25. November 1949, 472-476, 476.

³⁵ Moeller writes: “Acknowledgement of their losses unified West Germans: it became central to defining the Federal Republic as a nation of victims.” Robert G. Moeller, *War Stories: The Search for a Usable Past in the Federal Republic of Germany* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London, 2001), 22.

³⁶ See Kristina Mayer, *Die SPD und die NS-Vergangenheit, 1945-1990* (Göttingen 2015), 112f.

³⁷ Aussprache über die Erklärung der Bundesregierung [Debate on the Statement of the Federal Government], Deutscher Bundestag, 1. Wahlperiode, 6. Sitzung. Bonn, Mittwoch, den 21. September 1949, 31-56, 36. Dubiel calls it a “memorable” or indeed “peculiar” idea that “‘German honour’ of all things might provide the appropriate framework for German reflections on guilt”. In Dubiel, *Niemand ist frei von der Geschichte*, 44.

³⁸ Aussprache über die Erklärung der Bundesregierung [Debate on the Statement of the Federal Government], 37. In the course of a discussion with Ben Gurion on March 14, 1960, Adenauer noted that there were indeed parallels between German and Israeli “reconstruction”, but did not go so far as to assert that the Germans missed the murdered Jews in their *own* efforts at reconstruction. Unterredung zwischen Adenauer und Ben Gurion am 14. März 1960 im Waldorf Astoria Hotel in New York [Talks between Adenauer and Ben Gurion on March 14, 1960 in the Waldorf Astoria Hotel in New York], 2-4, in StBKAH III, 88. See also Adenauer's assertion in his statement “Mein Verhältnis zum jüdischen Volk” [My relation to the Jewish People], in StBKAH I/02.37.

Ten years later, at the turn of 1959 to 1960, when Jewish institutions in Germany were daubed with graffiti and anti-Semitism became a national scandal, Carlo Schmid, as spokesman of the *SPD*, would take up a clear position in opposition to Adenauer and his policy of “sweeping anti-Semitism in Germany under the carpet”, to cite Schmid’s own words, and hold Adenauer’s policy responsible for the wave of anti-Semitic attacks.

CHAPTER THREE: ATTEMPTS TO DRAW A LINE.
THE REPARATIONS AGREEMENT OF 1953

In Adenauer’s attempts to “draw a line under the past”, the question of the reparations due to the Jews acquired crucial importance. The problems this raised preoccupied German policymakers throughout the entire parliamentary term. Adenauer first spoke publicly on the issue in November 1949. In September 1951 the Federal Government first adopted a position on the “unspeakable crimes committed in the name of the German people”.³⁹ When the treaty was submitted to the *Bundestag* for ratification in March 1953, Adenauer described it as “the conclusion of the Nazi chapter”.⁴⁰

On November 11, 1949, just a few weeks after his first Government Policy Statement, Adenauer granted an interview to Karl Marx, the editor of the *Allgemeine Wochenzeitung der Juden in Deutschland*. He described the relation of the Germans to the Jews as “a matter for the Jews”.⁴¹ He talked about his Jewish friends, the contribution of Jews to German culture, his offer after the war to rebuild synagogues, Jewish hospitals and schools. He had found it hurtful that the Jews had responded with bitterness and had rejected his offerings with the words: “We no longer have need of these things in Germany.” Adenauer spoke of many things, especially of his own positive attitude towards Jews, but avoided addressing the question of the deep-seated anti-Semitism in Germany and above all the genocide of the Jews. This pattern of talking about himself, while remaining silent about the Germans would be repeated in his future statements about the relations of Germans to Jews.

When asked what Germany understood by reparations, he replied: the German people are determined “to right the wrong done to the Jews in their name by a criminal regime, as far this is at all possible”. In particular, “the Federal Government would

³⁹ Erklärung der Bundesregierung (Haltung der Bundesrepublik gegenüber den Juden) [Statement by the Federal Government (Attitude of the Federal Republic towards the Jews)], Deutscher Bundestag, 1. Wahlperiode, 165. Sitzung. Bonn, Donnerstag, den 27. September 1951, 6697-6700, 6698.

⁴⁰ Erste Beratung des Entwurfs eines Gesetzes über das Abkommen vom 10. September 1952 zwischen der Bundesrepublik Deutschland und dem Staate Israel [First Consultation on a Draft Law on the Agreement between the Federal Republic of Germany and the State of Israel], Deutscher Bundestag, 1. Wahlperiode, 252. Sitzung. Bonn, Mittwoch, den 4. März 1953. 12092-12096, 12092.

⁴¹ Bekenntnis zur Verpflichtung. Interview der “Allgemeinen” mit Bundeskanzler Dr. Adenauer von Karl Marx [Commitment to Obligations. Interview of the “Allgemeine” with Federal Chancellor Dr. Adenauer, by Karl Marx], in: *Allgemeine Wochenzeitung der Juden in Deutschland*, Düsseldorf, 25 November 1949, 1 (4. Jahrgang, Nummer 33).

make every effort to make good the economic damage inflicted on Jewish citizens” and it intended to “provide Israel with DM10 million worth of goods for reconstruction...as a first signal that the wrongs done to Jews all over the world by Germans have to be atoned for.”⁴² The Israelis saw this offer as an insult.⁴³

From the very outset, Adenauer did not conceive of reparations as an act of atonement for one’s own crimes, for that would have been to acknowledge the guilt of the German people. In his view Hitler bore the sole responsibility. Post-war Germany, according to Adenauer, simply accepted liability for something of which it was not guilty. Furthermore, the settlement at the forefront of his mind concerned the material damage to Jewish citizens, in other words, German Jews, even though these constituted only a small percentage of the total number of Jewish victims.

Following the interview, the dialogue with the Jewish side was broken off for a long time.⁴⁴ Karl Marx complained to Thomas Dehler, then Minister of Justice, that Adenauer had not even kept his promise “to distance himself from all past events”.⁴⁵ However, the Allies, and especially the Americans, made it unmistakably clear to the Germans that they had to come to an arrangement with the Jews and with Israel, if the country wished to be readmitted to the comity of nations.⁴⁶ On September 27, 1951 Adenauer made a statement in the German *Bundestag* in which he sought to dispel the “doubts” about “the attitude of the Federal Republic towards the Jews” that had been expressed here and there on the “world stage” and that “the relation of the Jews to the German people was to be put on a new and healthy footing”. Adenauer pointed to the Basic Law which made it illegal to discriminate against anyone “on the grounds of his origin, race, [or] religion.” He conceded, however, that it was necessary for the attitudes that had given rise to the provisions

⁴² Bekenntnis zur Verpflichtung [Commitment to obligations], 1. Adenauer had refused Marx’s request for an interview on a number of occasions. See Yeshayahu A. Jelinek, “Political Acumen, Altruism, Foreign Pressure or Moral Debt: Konrad Adenauer and the Shilumin,” in *Tel Aviver Jahrbuch für deutsche Geschichte* vol. XIX, eds. Sh. Volkov, F. Stern (Gerlingen, 1990), 77-102, 80.

⁴³ Jelinek, “Political Acumen”, 80. Even President Heuss rejected Adenauer’s offer “with particular vehemence”, since it would inevitably create the “terrible impression” that “we wanted to redeem the blood guilt of the murders of six million by the payment of ten million D Mark”. Yeshayahu A. Jelinek, ed., *Zwischen Moral und Realpolitik: Deutsch-israelische Beziehungen, 1945-1965, Eine Dokumentensammlung* (Göttingen, 1997), 137.

⁴⁴ A. Jelinek, “Political Acumen“, 81.

⁴⁵ Marx an Bundesjustizminister Dehler am 11. November 1950 [Marx to Bundesjustizminister Dehler on November 11, 1950], in BArch B 136/5862.

⁴⁶ See A. Jelinek, *Zwischen Moral und Realpolitik*, 16-18; Jelinek, “Political Acumen”, 79-82. In his speech to the Federal Committee of the *CDU* Adenauer said in connection with the concluding of the Reparations Agreement in 1952: “I was told by an American in a very influential position that if the Federal Government were successful in negotiating this agreement with Israel, this would be a political event for the Federal Republic of Germany that would be on a par with the German Treaty and the Treaty on the European Defence Community.” *Ansprache vor dem Bundesparteiausschuss der CDU in Bonn*, 6. September 1952 [Address to the Federal Committee of the *CDU* in Bonn, September 6, 1952], in Adenauer, *Reden*, 263-280, 267.

of the Basic Law “to become the common property of the people as a whole”.⁴⁷ On the subject of the Nazi past, Adenauer said:

“In its overwhelming majority, the German people abhorred the crimes committed against the Jews and did not take part in them. During the Nazi period the German nation had many people who went to the aid of their fellow Jewish citizens at great personal risk, whether for religious reasons, for reasons of conscience or from a feeling of shame at the dishonouring of the name of Germany. In the name of the German people, however, unspeakable crimes were committed that oblige us to make moral and material reparation...”⁴⁸.

This contrast between the many and the few, which corresponds to the contrast between the innocent and the guilty, confirms the relative proportions characteristic of Adenauer’s historical narrative. “The Germans” had not been involved in committing the crimes. These crimes were committed simply – “note the carefully chosen use of the passive voice”⁴⁹ – “in the name of the German people”. The statement serves “to exculpate the overwhelming majority of the German people rather than constituting a concrete admission of guilt or responsibility”.⁵⁰ The Chancellor is silent about the fact that as late as the early 1950s the broad majority of German society was still predominantly anti-Semitic or else somewhere between neutral and negative.⁵¹ Instead, he refers to the small group of active anti-Semitic agitators whom he would like to see punished in a court of law.

There followed lengthy, fraught negotiations between the Federal Government and Israeli representatives.⁵² Although Adenauer accepted Israeli demands in a letter to Nahum Goldmann in December 1951, he subsequently gave in to his Finance Minister Fritz Schäffer and Josef Abs, the leader of the German delegation to the London debt negotiations, who both argued that Germany would be ruined financially by the concessions to Israel.⁵³ Not until the talks threatened to founder, resulting in severe

⁴⁷ Erklärung der Bundesregierung (Haltung der Bundesrepublik gegenüber den Juden) [Statement by the Federal Government (Attitude of the Federal Republic towards the Jews)], 6697-6698. In the words of the German historian Frank Stern: “This declaration in all its aloof non-involvement reads like an obligatory exercise, a perfunctory reaction to foreign policy exigencies. ... Thus it is not any sense of guilt or consciousness of responsibility, no anti-Semitic incidents or nationalist tendencies which constituted the prelude to the declaration – but rather the realpolitik of foreign-policy considerations.” Stern, *Im Anfang war Auschwitz*, 325.

⁴⁸ Erklärung der Bundesregierung (Haltung der Bundesrepublik gegenüber den Juden) [Statement by the Federal Government (Attitude of the Federal Republic towards the Jews)], 6698.

⁴⁹ Moeller, *Deutsche Opfer*, 36.

⁵⁰ Stern, *Im Anfang war Auschwitz*, 326.

⁵¹ The Institut für Demoskopie established the following figures for 1952: “demonstratively anti-Semitic” 34%, “emotionally negative” 34%, “reserved” 18%. See Bergmann and Erb, *Wie antisemitisch sind die Deutschen?*, 51.

⁵² Of fundamental importance for the negotiations with Israel, see Kai von Jena, “Versöhnung mit Israel? Die deutsch-israelischen Verhandlungen bis zum Wiedergutmachungsabkommen von 1952,” *Vierteljahresshefte für Zeitgeschichte* 34 vol.4 (1986): 457-480. See also Jelinek, *Zwischen Moral und Realpolitik*, 15-36.

⁵³ Adenauer does not by any means start out from the morally compelling necessity of sticking to the assurances he had given to Goldmann. His worries about the German budget and German foreign debts led

damage to Germany's reputation, did Adenauer resolve to accept Israel's conditions. At the same time, it emerged that Germany would be able to finance the annual reparations payments.⁵⁴

On September 6, 1952, two days before the cabinet was due to reach a decision on the treaty and four days before the treaty was to be signed, Adenauer gave a speech to the members of the Federal Party Executive Committee of the *CDU*, a forum of around 100 party leaders from the Federal Party and the *Land* organizations. He now conceded that “a considerable proportion of the German people...had taken part in the atrocities of National Socialism against the Jews”. He went even further and admitted that „anti-Semitic tendencies are stirring once again in the German people”.⁵⁵ But “God forbid” that this should come to light among the public. Adenauer feared scandal and public debate. He feared for Germany's reputation, a decisive factor in all his reflections on the past. Adenauer's wish was “that the past between Jews and Germans should be relegated to the past”. If the cabinet were to block the treaty, that would be a “catastrophe” that would go beyond the realm of the political.⁵⁶

“It would cause grave damage to all our efforts to obtain foreign credits once more. Let us be clear that the power of the Jews in economic matters is as great as ever so that this reconciliation with Jewry – the expression is perhaps somewhat exaggerated – is an absolute necessity for the Federal Republic both from a moral standpoint, a political standpoint and an economic standpoint”.⁵⁷

Adenauer had hitherto taken great care to avoid admitting to the existence of a still virulent anti-Semitism and to a historical guilt on the part of the German people. Now, in the presence of the party leadership, he spoke quite openly in order to overcome the considerable resistance in the *CDU* to concluding the treaty. He made it perfectly clear. If Germany wished to be accepted into the community of states once again and to obtain access to the international credit markets, if it wished to achieve reconciliation “with Jewry”⁵⁸ and did not wish to jeopardize its own reputation, the treaty must

him to drag out the negotiations and exert pressure to reduce Israeli demands. He warned his negotiating team to make sure “that the Israeli representatives didn't swindle us. At issue were not reparations but an indication of conciliation”. Niels Hansen, *Aus dem Schatten der Katastrophe: Die deutsch-israelischen Beziehungen in der Ära Konrad Adenauer und David Ben Gurion. Ein dokumentarischer Bericht* (Düsseldorf, 2002), 180.

⁵⁴ For Adenauer's attitude, see Jena, “Versöhnung”, 466-477. Adenauer argued that “a failure of the reparations negotiations would deal a palpable blow to Germany's credit throughout the world and itself lead to the feared shrinking of the economy”. *Ibid.* 473. See also 228. Kabinettsitzung am 17.6.1952 TOP C (‘Kabinettsprotokolle’ der Bundesregierung online).

⁵⁵ Ansprache vor dem Bundesparteiausschuss der *CDU* in Bonn [Address to the Federal Committee of the *CDU* in Bonn], 266.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.* 267.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

⁵⁸ Adenauer cultivated essentialist notions of “Jewry”. In an interview with the *Spiegel* following his visit to Israel, he said the issue was not simply a matter of “giving satisfaction for what had been done to the Jews. No, to have worldwide Jewry against you is a terrible thing.” “Und das Heimweh der Leute nach Deutschland“, Interview Hermann Schreiber mit Konrad Adenauer [Interview of Hermann

be signed. The plain language Adenauer employed here served to discipline the party and to show its members just what was at stake.

On September 10, 1952 the Reparations Agreement was finally signed in Luxemburg by Adenauer and the Israeli Foreign Minister Moshe Sharett.⁵⁹ In March 1953 it was ratified by the *Bundestag*. Adenauer took the opportunity to give it yet one more global interpretation. With this treaty

“the Federal Government now reaches the solemnly promised conclusion of what is for every German the saddest chapter of our history. This action is a necessity if only for reasons of morality. Undoubtedly, far from all Germans were National Socialists, and there were even many National Socialists who disagreed with the atrocities that were committed. Nevertheless, this act of reparation by the German people is necessary. For the misdeeds were committed by the misuse of the name of the German people.... We wish to make good the damage that has been done as far as that is possible, as far as it lies within our powers. The name of our fatherland must be restored to the standing that befits the historical achievements of the German people in both culture and the economy”.⁶⁰

From this point on Adenauer regarded the subject of National Socialism as closed. Closed too was the question of guilt, and to all intents and purposes the punishment of Nazi perpetrators ground to a halt. Closed, too, was the question of moral guilt. In its place we have the category of “those open to reproach”, from which nothing need follow. With the reparations to Israel, the obligations towards the victims had also come to an end. And finally, anti-Semitism itself was thought to have been overcome. In a word, the past between Jews and Germans was now firmly in the past. Once ratified, the Agreement moved onto the credit side of the moral balance sheet. For a while, it looked as if Germany had moved “out of the shadow of catastrophe” (Hansen).

Schreiber with Konrad Adenauer], SPIEGEL, 21/1966 of May 16, 1966, 41. Although Adenauer had Jewish friends and had sympathized with Zionism since the 1920s, he shared numerous anti-Semitic stereotypes with the majority of Germans. He thought of Jews as rich, powerful and deceitful. Jelinek writes: “Adenauer was not completely free of a certain modicum of racial prejudice toward Jews.” Jelinek, “Political Acumen”, 96. For Adenauer’s anti-Semitism more generally, see Hansen, *Aus dem Schatten der Katastrophe*, 241-245.

⁵⁹ At the same time, it is noteworthy how differently the two sides interpret the process. Whereas Adenauer lauds the Agreement in his prepared text as “a work of peace and peacemaking”, the Israeli Foreign Secretary Moshe Sharett, while fully acknowledging the step taken by Germany in accepting its responsibility, reminds us of the unprecedented “campaign of annihilation” waged against the Jewish people for which “scarcely any act of atonement is conceivable” and which has left a “terrible wound” that is still open. Jelinek, *Zwischen Moral und Realpolitik*, 205 f. Adenauer refused to listen to Sharett’s speech on the grounds, according to Blankenhorn, that it was too redolent of “the Old Testament”. Michael Wolffsohn, “Globalentschädigung für Israel und die Juden? Adenauer und die Opposition in der Bundesregierung,” in *Wiedergutmachung in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland*, eds. Ludolf Herbst and Constatin Goshler (Munich 1989), 161-190,190.

⁶⁰ Erste Beratung des Entwurfs eines Gesetzes über das Abkommen vom 10. September 1952 [First Consultation on the Draft Law concerning the Agreement of September 10, 1952], 12092.

CHAPTER FOUR: RETURN OF THE REPRESSED.
THE VANDALIZING OF JEWISH PROPERTY IN LATE 1959/EARLY 1960

On Christmas Eve 1959 the Cologne synagogue was defiled by members of a neo-Nazi gang. In the days and weeks that followed, there were over 700 anti-Semitic acts of vandalism against Jewish property in the Federal Republic and abroad. These events signalled a twofold turning point in the history of the German process of “coming to terms with the past”. On the one hand, it became plain that what had been successfully repressed had now returned and on the other, the hegemony of Adenauer’s narrative of the centre ground was now called into question in the *Bundestag*.

Public reaction to these events both in Germany and abroad was one of shock. At a special Cabinet meeting on January 6, 1960 Heinrich von Brentano, the Foreign Minister, reported that the reaction to these events “is becoming increasingly menacing”.⁶¹ For the Federal Government the events were a catastrophe, since they jeopardized Germany’s reputation as a country that had undergone purification. A report from Tel Aviv claimed that “[t]he public reaction in Israel to the wave of swastikas” in Germany was a “feeling of outrage and anger”.⁶² The Foreign Office summed up the reports from German embassies abroad with the statement “No event in Germany since the end of the war has preoccupied the public in the majority of countries of the free world as much as the current wave of anti-Semitic incidents.”⁶³ Disconcerted by the damaging response, Adenauer spoke about the events on German TV on January 16, 1960.

His speech bore the title *Im deutschen Volk hat der Nationalsozialismus keine Wurzel* [*National Socialism has no roots in the German people*]. This formula may mean that National Socialism *no longer* has any roots in the German nation today. But it can also be understood to mean that National Socialism never had roots in the German nation. Just as if National Socialism had always been alien to the Germans, Adenauer makes both claims: “In the National Socialist era the greater part of the German nation served the dictatorship only because they were forced to do so.” Today there remain only the “few incorrigibles”, who can “achieve nothing”.⁶⁴ Adenauer’s statement begins with the passage:

⁶¹ Protokoll der Sondersitzung des Bundeskabinetts, 6. Januar 1960 [Minutes of the Special Session of the Federal Cabinet, January 6, 1960], in BArch B136/36292.

⁶² Presse- und Informationsamt der Bundesregierung an BM der Justiz, 3. Februar 1960, Anlage [Press and Information Office of the Federal Government to the Federal Minister of Justice, February 3, 1960], in BArch B 141/3179.

⁶³ Auswärtiges Amt an alle diplomatischen und berufskonsularischen Auslandsvertretungen, 10. März 1960 [Foreign Office to all diplomatic and consular representatives abroad, March 10, 1960], in BArch B 136/4369.

⁶⁴ “Im deutschen Volk hat der Nationalsozialismus keine Wurzel”, Erklärung von Konrad Adenauer im Fernsehen zur Schändung der Synagoge in Köln, 16. Januar 1960 [“National Socialism has no roots in the German people”, Televised statement on the desecration of the synagogue in Cologne, January 16, 1960], in Adenauer, *Reden*, 409-410, 410.

“The desecration of the synagogue in Cologne, a synagogue at whose official opening I had taken part as Federal Chancellor only a few months previously, was carried out by the very perpetrators who on the same night also desecrated the Memorial to the Victims of National Socialism. These acts of desecration have provoked a wave of indignation against the perpetrators here in Germany, while in other countries they have provoked a wave of hatred against Germans in general and in particular against the Germany of today”.⁶⁵

Adenauer works with strong contrasts. On the one side, we have the Chancellor who enters the fray in support of the Jews and the Germans who condemn the acts of desecration. On the other side, stand the perpetrators and the foreigners he refers to elsewhere as “adversaries abroad”. On the one side, we have the “wave of indignation”, on the other side, “the wave of hatred”. Adenauer attempts to counter criticism from abroad by telling the story of his own relations to Jews.

“My family and I were also victims of National Socialism. Suffice it to say that my name was put on the National Socialists’ death list on four separate occasions and it was almost a miracle that I was able to come through those years alive. And my relation to the Jews? Well, there were two Jews who were the first to offer me financial help when my family and I found ourselves in great financial need during the Nazi years. They knew what my attitude to the Jews had always been. Since becoming Federal Chancellor, I have made every effort to conclude the Reparations Agreement with Israel. My aim was to proclaim to the whole world that today’s Germany rejects anti-Semitism absolutely”.⁶⁶

As previously in the case of reparations, Adenauer speaks of himself in order to say something about the Germans. He produces a “cover story”. At the same time he tries even more vehemently than in his First Government Policy Statement to trivialize the anti-Semitic attacks. They were, he said, due “almost entirely to the loutish behaviour” of uneducated youths “without any political basis”. He advised the Germans that “if you come across any such lout, punish him on the spot and give him a thrashing.” If this didn’t help, the state would make use of “all the power at its disposal”⁶⁷ to guarantee the safety of Jews in Germany. Elsewhere he attempts to find scapegoats and to create the impression that these attacks had been organized by communists.⁶⁸ Speaking to the French Ambassador Couve de Murville, Adenauer stressed that the anti-Semitic attacks “had been supported by Soviet Russia” and that they were “not very significant”. “The German populace utterly rejects them and dismisses them as the acts of hooligans.”⁶⁹

⁶⁵ *Ibid.* 409.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

⁶⁷ *Ibid.* 409f.

⁶⁸ On the attempts by the *Bundestag* to trivialize the graffiti as the acts of young hooligans or to put the blame on “communist wire pullers”, see Shida Kiani, “Zum politischen Umgang mit Antisemitismus in der Bundesrepublik: Die Schmierwelle im Winter 1959/1960,” in *Erfolgsgeschichte Bundesrepublik: Die Nachkriegsgesellschaft im langen Schatten des Nationalsozialismus*, eds. Stephan A. Glienke, Volker Paulmann, Joachim Perels (Göttingen, 2006) 115-145, 124-130 (hooligans), 116-124 (communist wire pullers).

⁶⁹ Aufzeichnung eines Gesprächs zwischen Bundeskanzler Adenauer und dem französischen Außenminister Couve de Murville, 6. Januar 1960 in Bonn [Notes on a conversation between Federal Chancellor Adenauer and the French Foreign Minister Couve de Murville, January 6, 1960 in Bonn], in: StB-

Shortly thereafter, on February 2, 1960, Adenauer was invited by Nahum Goldmann to a ceremony of remembrance in the former concentration camp of Bergen-Belsen.⁷⁰ The speech he gave there was delivered to a predominantly foreign audience, representatives of Jewish organizations and the diplomatic corps:

“In this solemn hour we commemorate all the victims of the National Socialist dictatorship and remember their relatives with the deepest sympathy. We remember especially today and at this hour all those relatives who regard themselves as members of the Jewish faith. We remember them full of the deepest compassion and I must confess to you that I am deeply moved by my memory of all the misery and all the wretchedness that prevailed in this region for years on end...In recent weeks there have been events in Germany that we deeply regret”.⁷¹

Adenauer concluded with the emphatic assertion that “there was no better place and no better time” to vow “to do everything to ensure that every human being – regardless of the people, the nation and the race to which he or she belongs – should be able to live on earth [!] and enjoy safety and freedom in the future.”⁷²

Adenauer’s speeches demonstrate his skill in addressing very different audiences on the same issue while adapting their tone and content very considerably, but simultaneously sticking to his narrative according to which the great majority of Germans remained innocent of National Socialism and had nothing to do with the recent acts of vandalism. In his telling they continue to be the victims. Whereas previously they were victims of the National Socialist past, the war and the expulsions, now, in 1960, they had become victims once again, this time of the damage to their own reputation.

On February 18, 1960 a debate on the anti-Semitic incidents took place in the *Bundestag*. The Government statement, presented by Gerhard Schröder, the Federal Minister of the Interior, signalled a change of emphasis with his suggestion that the political education of the young had to be given greater prominence in the battle against anti-Semitism. He suggested that the problem lay less with the schools than with the parents. Thus he was pointing to the anti-Semitic attitudes still widespread in the perpetrator generation. However, the conclusions he came to continued along the same track as Adenauer’s “coming to terms with the past”. The task was “to press on undeterred on the new path they had been following for fifteen years”. Germany could not “adopt the standard of real or alleged failure in the face of totalitarian National

KAH, III/88. The White Book of the Federal Government of February 1960 speaks of an unscrupulous “campaign” on the part of communists. The SED is said to have resolved to deploy groups of activists “to deface Jewish memorials in a number of cities in the Federal Republic with Nazi emblems”. Bundesregierung, ed., *Die antisemitischen und nazistischen Vorfälle. Weißbuch und Erklärung der Bundesregierung* (Bonn 1960), 52, 54. Adenauer had earlier maintained that anti-Semitic incidents were communist-inspired, for example on March 17, 1959 in an interview with Walter Lippmann and Helen Byrne Lippmann, referring in all likelihood to the desecration of the Düsseldorf Synagogue in January 1959. See Küsters, *Adenauer: Teegespräche, 1959-1961*, 31.

⁷⁰ Nahum Goldmann, *Staatsmann ohne Staat: Autobiographie* (Köln, Berlin 1970), 348f.

⁷¹ Konrad Adenauer, “Das jetzige Deutschland achtet alle Rassen und Völker,” *Bulletin des Presse- und Informationsamtes der Bundesregierung* 23 (February 4, 1960): 213.

⁷² *Ibid.*

Socialism” and “in the light of the lethal threat of communism ... what was needed was for everyone to stick together in the defence of the democratic rule of law”. This called for “reconciliation and tolerance... throughout the nation as a whole.”⁷³

In the ensuing debate, disagreement broke out between government and opposition on the question of how politics and society in Germany should deal with their own past and present. Carlo Schmid, the spokesman for the *SPD*, regarded the anti-Semitic attacks as proof that Adenauer’s policy of underplaying the crimes and his heedless pardoning of officials of the Nazi regime had failed. The recent anti-Semitic incidents had brought something to light that “had been swept under the carpet hitherto”. The perpetrators evidently believed that “they could expect to find a certain resonance among the German people”.⁷⁴ Because the Government contained people who “were not just formally members of the Nazi Party but had advocated and propagated its ideology with especial zeal”, the young graffiti writers “were justified in feeling vindicated”.⁷⁵

Schmid’s argument amounts to the assertion that in a country where until recently misanthropic beliefs and attitudes were deeply embedded in broad sections of the populace, it could not be assumed that there had been a change of heart, particularly if the political leadership failed to initiate a social debate and the majority of influential figures from the old regime were able to continue in their careers without interruption.

“What we have to do in this House”, Schmid said in response to the Government, “is not primarily because of the impact on opinion abroad of the misdeeds and the stupidities of recent weeks. We have to do it for the sake of making a reality of democracy here at home.”⁷⁶ But what democracy really is, was a matter of disagreement between government and opposition. Schmid emphasized the importance of social context and hence of convictions firmly anchored in society:

“Democracy means... being convinced that every inhabitant of our country has the same right to respect and dignity as every other and that this dignity is protected if and only if inalienable rights exist not just formally but also because they have become realities in the surrounding society in which he lives.... One becomes a democrat when one creates space for someone who is felt to be ‘other’, so that he can freely develop his own potential according to his own ideas of himself...”⁷⁷

It would be wrongheaded, Schmid said, to see the problem “as if we were supposed to grant ‘tolerance’ to certain minorities, the Jewish minority for example.” Nor was it a question of having to provide Jews with protection: “They shouldn’t be ‘protected’; they should be able to live.”⁷⁸ The right of Jews to live, however, couldn’t be

⁷³ Erklärung der Bundesregierung über die antisemitischen Vorfälle [Federal Government Statement about the anti-Semitic incidents], Deutscher Bundestag, 3. Wahlperiode, 103 Sitzung, Bonn, den 18. Februar 1960, 5575-5582, 5581f.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.* 5582.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.* 5584f.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.* 5585f.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.* 5583.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.* emphasis in the original.

guaranteed solely by the state, its laws or its police. It was rather the task of society as a whole to guarantee the right to live of every part of the population in their relations with one another.⁷⁹

Schmid's speech did not go down all that well with the Government parties. The *FDP* member of the *Bundestag* Elisabeth Lüders wanted the debate to come to an end: “It is now fifteen years since the horrors and I hope that this will be the last, the very last time that any one of us is compelled to come and address the entire House on this subject.”⁸⁰ This hope is one that fits in with the entire thrust of Adenauer's own beliefs. Just how firmly anchored was his own conviction that the past has to be left behind could be seen six years later during his visit to Israel in 1966 during which the differences in the way Germans and Jews saw matters became unmistakably visible.

CHAPTER FIVE: THE VISIT TO ISRAEL OF 1966

In May 1966 Adenauer travelled to Israel in response to an invitation from David Ben Gurion, the former Prime Minister. Adenauer had resigned from the office of Federal Chancellor in 1963, in March 1966 he had also given up the chairmanship of the *CDU*. Germany and Israel had established diplomatic relations in 1965. Israel now organized a nine-day programme of visits, receptions and honours for the former Chancellor. Ben Gurion described him as one of “the greatest statesmen of our time”.⁸¹ The majority of Israeli newspapers praised Adenauer's achievements in connection with reparations and his support of the state of Israel; large sections of the public cheered him in the streets. There were also some critical voices, reminding people of the Globke case and Adenauer's refusal to pursue an honest policy of self-

⁷⁹ *Ibid.* 5584. Schmid's speech makes it clear that Adenauer's idea of democracy was fundamentally different from his. For Adenauer a state is a democracy if it possesses a democratic constitution and the organs of state are ready and willing to ensure that the laws are upheld. He concedes that the norms of society are “effective only if the attitude that has given birth to them becomes the common property of the entire people.” *Regierungserklärung zur Haltung der Bundesrepublik gegenüber den Juden* [Statement by the Federal Government (Attitude of the Federal Republic towards the Jews)], 6698. But this does not become reflected in his practical dealings with the Nazi past in which he relies essentially on repression rather than on the public and on debate in society.

⁸⁰ *Erklärung der Bundesregierung über die antisemitischen Vorfälle* [Federal Government Statement about the anti-Semitic incidents], 5590.

⁸¹ Rede David Ben Gurions beim Mittagessen im Kibbuz Sde Boker zu Ehren seines Gastes Dr. Konrad Adenauer, 9.5.1966, [David Ben Gurion's speech at a Luncheon in the Kibbuz Sde Boker in honour of his guest Dr. Konrad Adenauer, May 5, 1966] in *StBKAH*, I/6.52. The Israeli Foreign Minister described Adenauer as “one of the most illustrious political personalities in Europe and throughout the world”. Address by the Foreign Minister at a Luncheon in Jerusalem in Honour of Dr. Adenauer on May 4, 1966, in *StBKAH* I/6.52. Nahum Goldmann, the President of the JWC, called Adenauer “one of the greatest statesmen and personalities of our generation”. Rolf Vogel, ed., *Der deutsch-israelische Dialog: Dokumentation eines erregenden Kapitels deutscher Außenpolitik*, Teil 1 *Politik*, Vol. 1 (Munich, New York, London, Paris 1987), 307.

purification in the Federal Republic. There were vociferous demonstrations against the “unwanted guest”, which were broken up by the police with some violence.

For Adenauer, the Israel visit was the summation of a core element of his life’s work. “From the very outset”, he said, reconciliation with Israel and the Jews had been a “major goal”⁸² of his policy, along with reconciliation with France. Reconciliation with France would help to achieve a peace settlement in a unified Europe; reconciliation with the Jews and with Israel would restore Germany’s reputation as a respected and equal member in the community of nations.⁸³

After the war Adenauer was in contact with large numbers of Jews: from Germany, from international Jewish organizations and from Israel itself. But never had he been confronted so directly with the immediacy of the past as in Israel. He visited *Yad Vashem* and experienced there “this profound interpenetration of the terrible fate of the Jews of the Hitler era with everyday life in Israel”.⁸⁴ Adenauer, who often seemed to stand above events, was deeply moved. As in a magnifying glass, the combination of public honour and personal emotion gives us new insight into the contours and interconnections of Adenauer’s view of history and the way in which as Chancellor he dealt with the legacies of history, insights that previously could only be guessed at.⁸⁵

The encounter became explosive as early as the second day of his visit. The Israeli Prime Minister Levi Eshkol made a speech at a dinner to welcome the German guest. The explosion was triggered by two sentences missing from the official version of the speech published subsequently.⁸⁶ Eshkol began by reminding those present of the genocide: “We have not forgotten. We cannot forget the terrible mass murders. We have lost six million of our people.” And turning to Adenauer, he went on: “Your place is among those who have striven to wipe out the shame of the Nazi era.” This was followed by the sentences that triggered the explosion:

⁸² Konrad Adenauer, “Bilanz einer Reise: Deutschlands Verhältnis zu Israel,” in *Adenauer: Die letzten Lebensjahre, 1963-1967, Briefe und Aufzeichnungen, Gespräche, Interviews und Reden*, ed. Hans Peter Mensing, vol.2 (Paderborn, Munich, Vienna, Zurich, 2009), 240-245, 240.

⁸³ See Günter Gaus in Conversation with Konrad Adenauer. Interview broadcast on 29.12.1965 by ZDF, here 27:00-28:09. Downloaded from youtube.com on November 21, 2017.

⁸⁴ Adenauer, “Bilanz einer Reise”, 242.

⁸⁵ Adenauer told SPIEGEL-Reporter Hermann Schreiber: “Here I have experienced more profound emotions than in many phases of my life hitherto.” “Und das Heimweh der Leute nach Deutschland”, 40.

⁸⁶ See the records of the StBKAH I 16/52 and the account given in Vogel, *Der deutsch-israelische Dialog*, 310-312. The speech with the disputed two sentences was handed to the press shortly before the meeting. It is questionable whether Eshkol actually used those sentences in his speech or whether he merely wanted to. Different opinions exist on this matter. On the one hand, Anneliese Poppinga claims that Adenauer was confronted with the sentences for the first time only after Eshkol had already delivered his speech. See Hanns Jürgen Küsters, ed., *Adenauer, Israel und das Judentum, Rhöndorfer Gespräche* vol. 20 (Bonn, 2004), 185f. This agrees in all essentials with Adenauer’s own statements in “Und das Heimweh der Leute nach Deutschland” and with Nahum Goldmann’s account in Goldmann, *Staatsmann ohne Staat*, 347. A different version can be found in Ari Rath in Küsters, *Adenauer, Israel und das Judentum*, 182.

“Israel is waiting for new signs and proofs that the German people recognizes the dreadful burden of the past. Reparations represent only a symbolic restitution for a bloody robbery. There is no atonement for the atrocities and no comfort for our grief”.⁸⁷

These two sentences in particular made Adenauer think his life’s work was in doubt. According to Goldmann’s subsequent report, Adenauer was furious. He is said to have told Eshkol, “Prime Minister, what you think is of no concern to me and what you think of me does not interest me in the slightest. I represent the German people. You have insulted them and so I shall take my leave tomorrow morning.”⁸⁸ The official version of Adenauer’s reply, cobbled together by concerned German and Israeli diplomats, states:

“National Socialism killed as many Germans as Jews. I have no words with which to excuse this; I have seen and heard much that the average person has not heard. I can say only that we have done everything and have delivered every proof and that we are making every effort to overcome this time of atrocities that we cannot unmake. But we should now leave it all to the past. I know how hard it is for the Jewish people to accept this. But if good will goes unrecognized, no good can come of it”.⁸⁹

With the observation that Germany had provided every proof, the Chancellor is alluding to the reparations. He had always understood them as an attempt to draw a line under the past. The historical disgrace is incompatible with the Chancellor’s image of history and of the nation. The Germans, after all, were themselves victims of the Nazis. In Israel, Adenauer’s victim thesis was expanded far beyond his earlier statements. In his view the Germans were just as much victims of the Nazis as were the Jews and they too, he says elsewhere, were victims of the war of annihilation.⁹⁰

⁸⁷ Quoted from Hans Peter Schwarz, ed., *Akten zur Auswärtigen Politik der Bundesrepublik Deutschland 1966 Band 1:1. Januar bis 30. Juni 1966* (München 1997), 588, footnote 9.

⁸⁸ Goldmann quotes from Hansen, *Aus dem Schatten der Katastrophe*, 827. Adenauer had asked Pauls, the German Ambassador, to have the plane readied for the return flight.

⁸⁹ Vogel, *Der deutsch-israelische Dialog*, 311. Contrast Theodor Heuss in his address in Bergen-Belsen in 1952: “[The peoples] will never forget what has been done to them, they can never forget it; the Germans must never forget.” Theodor Heuss, “Diese Scham nimmt uns niemand ab”, 1655.

⁹⁰ Hermann Schreiber asked Adenauer: “Question: You have said repeatedly that the National Socialists had killed as many Germans as Jews. By ‘Germans’ did you mean Germans killed in action or victims of the Nazi terror regime? Answer: Victims of the Nazi terror regime! And not just here at home but in other countries too. Take Russia, for example. Do you know how many dead there were in Russia, and not just in battle? Fifteen million dead.... Question: But those were Russians!? Answer: Russians, Poles and so on – and five million severely wounded.... Question: Do you believe that the Israelis can accept the comparison between Germans killed by the Nazis and the Jews killed by the Nazis? Answer: No, naturally, they think only of the Jews.” Unkorrigiertes Manuskript, Interview Dr. Adenauer / Herr Schreiber (DER SPIEGEL), Freitag, 13. Mai 1966, 11.00 Uhr im Bundeshaus [Uncorrected manuscript, Interview between Dr Adenauer and Herr Schreiber (of DER SPIEGEL), Friday, May, 13 1966, 11.00 in the Parliament in Bonn] in: StBKAH I/ 02.37. The edited version appeared as a SPIEGEL interview “Und das Heimweh der Leute nach Deutschland”.

In the *Bilanz einer Reise* [*Balance Sheet of a Visit*] that was published a month after his visit to Israel, Adenauer plays down his altercation with Eshkol. It was purely a matter of “difficulties” with “certain formulations” that Eshkol “had wished to use” in his speech and their importance should not be exaggerated. Eshkol had been compelled to make allowances for his “not exactly uncomplicated” coalition partners. Above all, however, “we have to understand” that the past still lives on “in the shape of the survivors of the death camps and of the many Israelis who in some cases had lost all their relatives”. “Mr Eshkol and I finally found a solution and the incident was cleared up”.⁹¹ Adenauer’s judgement here shows the extent to which he refused to face up to reality. His remark that Eshkol „had wished to use” certain formulations points to his wish that he could make unsaid statements that had actually been uttered. In the same way, his view that the matter had been “cleared up” reveals Adenauer’s wishful thinking. It is based on the illusion that the memory of the past can be “wiped out” (Adorno), as if the altercation had been no more than a misunderstanding between two politicians.

Adenauer must have realized in Israel that his assumption that reparations had led to reconciliation was not reciprocated by the Jewish side as he might have wished.⁹² As early as 1953 he had called the reparations a “sign of reconciliation”⁹³ – as if it were up to the Germans to offer reconciliation to the Jews. In Israel he took up the theme of reconciliation once again on the occasion of his acceptance of an Honorary Fellowship of the Weizmann Institute on May 3, 1966:

“And I am so deeply moved because it has fallen to me to make a contribution towards reconciliation. That was the goal of my work from my very first day as Federal Chancellor: To bring about reconciliation, with Jews, with Israel and with worldwide Jewry as a whole. That was my primary concern and it sprang from a feeling of deep, inner obligation...”⁹⁴

To the *Spiegel* he said in an interview on May 13, 1966:

“Reconciliation? – I don’t think so. That is not something Jews can do. I understand that absolutely. ...For example, look at this Major Riese. He was sent to Switzerland in 1934 by his parents who were living in Germany. Both his parents were sent to the gas chambers. That this continues to have an effect on a man like this is surely something we can understand”.⁹⁵

⁹¹ Adenauer, “Bilanz einer Reise”, 242.

⁹² Israeli politicians too spoke of “reconciliation” on various occasions, but without the implications that the concept had for Adenauer. They were concerned more with closer relations than with the restitution of a fundamentally unimpaired relationship. See Hansen, *Aus dem Schatten der Katastrophe*, 60, 69f., 266.

⁹³ *Ibid.* 180, see also 123, 266, 829.

⁹⁴ Vogel, *Der deutsch-israelische Dialog*, 308.

⁹⁵ Unkorrigiertes Manuskript, Interview Dr. Adenauer / Herr Schreiber [Uncorrected Manuscript, Interview between Dr. Adenauer and Herr Schreiber]. The Israeli Major had been detailed to accompany Adenauer. Adenauer is fully aware of the problematic nature of the concept of reconciliation. In the draft version of “Bilanz einer Reise”, the concept of reconciliation has been replaced in four places by such terms as “understanding” and “good human relations”. Instead of “reconciliation with Israel” we find the

Apart from the fact that Adenauer reduces the catastrophe of an entire nation to individual psychic traumas, he constructs the relationship as one between equals and not as a relationship based on guilt. Neither side can find it easy, he says, to recover from the terrible things that have happened. He does not realize that the fact of genocide has destroyed the trust that is the precondition for nations to live together. To restore that trust it would be necessary for the Germans to accept their own history. But that is exactly what the great majority refused to do even twenty years after the Holocaust. Adenauer made an essential contribution to this. Even in his *Bilanz einer Reise* he still writes that the terrible things “were done to the Jews, not indeed by the German people but by Germans acting in the name of the German people.”⁹⁶

During his visit to Israel, there were repeated opportunities for Adenauer to make comparisons between the situations of Israel and Germany and to make recommendations. These referred not just to the past and the number of victims on both sides, but also to the present. For instance, in the mid-1960s, by which time the Germans were already replete with prosperity, he recommends that they should show some of the discipline and self-sacrifice of the Israelis with regard to their reconstruction of their economy and their state:

“We can learn much, indeed very much from the Israelis. Above all, you can see there how a people must live when its liberty and physical existence are under constant threat, when it finds itself under unremitting pressure from the threats of hostile neighbours and yet despite its difficult situation it has to build a functioning state and a viable economy. Such a people must be united in its goals, it must maintain strict discipline, it must work hard and forgo much by way of consumption and comfort. It must be prepared to make sacrifices for lengthy periods of time and have a great love of its country and the common cause. All of this is something you experience wherever you go in Israel.”⁹⁷

Conversely, he dispenses advice to the Israelis, saying that in their “wonderful task” of building Israel “they should find consolation for what has been done to them”.⁹⁸ Evidently, he has in mind the German experience in which a burdensome past is easier to bear if you just concentrate on the task of reconstruction.

Adenauer’s last great journey abroad assumes central importance in the context of his policy towards the past. It leaves him with the impression that it may be too soon for reconciliation between Germans and Jews, but that Germany may be able to find relief from the pressure of coming to terms with its past by drawing closer to Israel.

plain expression “relations between our countries”. Konrad Adenauer, “Bilanz einer Reise“ (Entwurf), in: ACDP 07-001-10010.

⁹⁶ Adenauer, “Bilanz einer Reise”, 240f.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.* As early as the exchange with Ben Gurion in the Waldorf Astoria Hotel in New York, Adenauer had expressed his great “admiration” for the “reconstruction of Israel”, for “what had been achieved there, as well as for [Israel’s] courage, strength of purpose and ambition”. Unterredung zwischen Adenauer und Ben Gurion am 14. März 1960 [Exchange between Adenauer and Ben Gurion on 14 March 1960 in the Waldorf Astoria Hotel in New York], S.2f. See also Adenauer’s remarks in his statement “Mein Verhältnis zum jüdischen Volk” [My relation to the Jewish People].

⁹⁸ Vogel, *Der deutsch-israelische Dialog*, 312.

From quite early on, the “off-shoring” of the process of coming to terms with the past can be seen on the level of international relations. Whereas in his first Government Policy Statement presented to the German Parliament he makes no mention of the Holocaust, but calls for the end of denazification, he shortly afterwards does address Jews directly and tells the *Allgemeine Wochenzeitung der Juden in Deutschland* of his willingness to make reparations. He appears to find approval for his attitude in Israel when Abba Eban, the Israeli Foreign Minister, says that strengthening Israel is “the most efficient way, the way of logic and morality”⁹⁹ to do justice to German obligations towards the Jews. But Adenauer does not realize that this has nothing to do with drawing a line under the past.

CONCLUSION

The historical picture that emerges from Adenauer’s statements about the Nazi era and the image of “the Germans” that Adenauer paints against this background can be expressed in the succinct formula that the misdeeds of the regime had been committed “not by the German people but in their name”. It signifies that the Germans were not responsible for them and that the rule of the Nazis had no backing in the German people but had been usurped. In these few words we see the kernel of a historical narrative that was the general consensus for a long time in West German politics and accorded with the desire of the German people to leave the National Socialist era behind.¹⁰⁰ The function of this narrative was to segregate National Socialism from German history and deflect the accusation that the German people shared in the moral and political guilt for the crimes of the Nazi regime. The political intention underlying this narrative was, as Adenauer constantly reiterated, to restore the reputation of Germany.

Internally consistent though his narrative was, it remained subject to certain changes and varying emphases. In the first few years after the end of the war Adenauer still struggled with the question of guilt and strove to establish a narrative “beyond guilt”. He emphasized on the one hand that the Germans too were victims of persecution, war and expulsion. On the other hand, he drew a distinction between the “truly guilty” parties whom he still described in religious terms as “accursed men” in 1945, and the great majority of people who had indeed done wrong but who had not really incurred any guilt. They had acted either out of ignorance or from a supposed need to obey orders in an emergency or else from “love of country”.

⁹⁹ Address by the Foreign Minister at a Luncheon in Jerusalem in Honour of Dr. Adenauer.

¹⁰⁰ As recently as 1985, Federal Chancellor Kohl used the formulation that the crimes had been committed “in the name of the Germans”. Helmut Kohl, “Ansprache im ehemaligen Konzentrationslager Bergen-Belsen am 21. April 1985,” in *Erinnerung, Trauer, Versöhnung. Ansprachen und Erklärungen zum vierzigsten Jahrestag des Kriegsendes*, ed. Presse- und Informationsamt der Bundesregierung (Bonn, 1985), 13-24, 20 and 22. In his case, it was a residual version of the old form of words in which the crucial question of who had committed the atrocities was ignored. At the same time, it makes it very clear to us that the most urgent concern of more than a few politicians was with Germany’s reputation and the besmirching of its good name/damage to its good name.

Adenauer's very first period in office as Chancellor was marked by his intention to “draw a line under the past”. He strove to achieve this internally by trying to keep the past out of the discussion and externally by acceding to Jewish demands for reparation. Whereas in his first Government Policy Statement he passes over the genocide of the Jews in silence, he emphasizes shortly afterwards that Germany had a moral obligation to reach an agreement with the victims.

Initially Adenauer's narrative appeared not to provoke disagreement. But by the time of the mass anti-Semitic attacks of 1959/60, the past began to catch up with him. He reacted to this by denying the existence of widespread anti-Semitic attitudes in the German population and by claiming that National Socialism had no roots in Germany, either in the present or even in the past. Adenauer's picture of history was put to an even sterner test during his visit to Israel in 1966. When the Prime Minister of Israel stated that the Holocaust could not be forgotten, Adenauer saw doubt cast on his entire life's work and responded by asserting that National Socialism had killed as many Germans as Jews. His words indicate not just that he felt offended by the supposed rejection of his efforts, but at the same time they can be seen as the product of a growing narrow-mindedness and rigidity in his own historical narrative, in which his consciousness of German guilt increasingly fades and he becomes ever more intent on representing Germany as a country without a shameful past.

From the outset, Adenauer's narrative follows a formative pattern. It consists essentially of a continually growing contrast between key binary-coded terms and leads finally to a sharp distinction between Germans as victims and Nazis as perpetrators. If he began early in 1946 by setting up a contrast between his irrepressible feeling of pride and his deep sense of shame and hence between the courageous work of reconstruction and the guilt of the past, by 1949 this has developed into a contrast between the truly guilty and the innocent. In the case of reparations he detaches the majority of the German people from the Hitler regime. In connection with the anti-Semitic acts of vandalism he contrasts the Germans who reacted with indignation to the desecrations with the hatred felt abroad “of Germans in general”. Adenauer's statements in Israel represent the extreme hardening of his historical and moral attitudes, since he now compares German victims to the Jewish victims of German crimes without further discrimination.

Adenauer's narrative is shot through with fundamental convictions that he brought with him before stepping once more onto the political stage after the war. They include ideas about the honour and greatness of the nation that were a legacy of the German Empire, an authoritarian view of the state based on the traditions of the authoritarian state as well as the Roman Catholicism that had helped to shape him from childhood and the anti-communism that was the product of his experience of the collapse of the old order after the First World War. The idea of the honour of the nation always becomes relevant for him when “German prestige abroad” is at stake. His authoritarian view of the state relieves the Germans of their share of the blame for the misdeeds of the Nazis. The same thing may be said of the Catholic Church's distinction between mortal sin and the venial sins that are pardonable because of the ignorance, the er-

rors or the seduction of the sinner and the “lesser nature” of his deed. And lastly, we must also include anti-Communism among the fundamental beliefs Adenauer used to exculpate the Germans. When massive anti-Semitic attacks took place in 1959/60, he gave it as his view that these incidents had been orchestrated by Communists.

Adenauer’s narrative was able to prevail in the centre ground of society after the war because it was based on fundamental convictions that Adenauer shared with the Germans. The Chancellor and his voters may be said to meet one another halfway on this plane. Notwithstanding this, the narrative remains Adenauer’s and hence an integral part of the policy towards the past driven by him with the aim of drawing a line under the past. As a consequence this narrative resulted in preventing broad sections of the German population from gaining an insight into their own failure and their complicity in the crimes of the National Socialist regime. This in turn blocked the democratization process in the centre ground of society so effectively that its deficiencies are still visible today.

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ABSTRACT

The study reconstructs the development of the historical narrative that Konrad Adenauer communicated in his public statements about National Socialism and the role of the Germans in it. It can be expressed in the succinct formula that the misdeeds of the regime had been committed “not by the German people but in their name”. In these few words we see the kernel of a historical narrative that was the general consensus for a long time in West German politics. Up to now no explicit, comprehensive analysis of the development of Adenauer’s narrative has been forthcoming, one that involved an engagement with his key speeches covering the whole of the post-war period down to his death in 1967.