


RESEARCH ARTICLE

# Adaptive politics, or countering the myth of German transformation after 1945

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## Abstract

International Relations (IR) accounts of the post–World War II international order often claim that after its defeat, Germany ‘transformed’ from a fascist, militaristic, and racist state into a model liberal democracy, facilitating its full rehabilitation and integration into Western institutions and alliances. Yet a closer examination of post-war German domestic and international politics challenges this account: denazification was widely reviled, survivors faced ongoing persecution, and a retooled antisemitism asserted itself in international diplomacy. This article offers the concept of adaptive politics to capture how collectively held beliefs, identities, policies, and conduct travel across incisive political events like defeat in war, occupation, and genocide, outlining the complex concurrence of continuity, adaptation, and change in their aftermath. Drawing on theories of sovereignty, biopolitics, racism, and antisemitism, the article tracks the unfolding of West German adaptive politics in the immediate post-war period, focusing on efforts to exonerate perpetrators, modifications of racism and antisemitism, and the role of the trauma diagnosis in debilitating survivors. By sanitising this history, IR scholarship positions the post-war liberal international order, and the international politics of the West more broadly, as entirely disconnected from the disordered conduct associated with Nazism.

**Keywords:** antisemitism; Cold War; Germany; liberal international order; racism; trauma

## Introduction

Few dates are as overdetermined as 1945. In many descriptions of the post-war order, 1945 signifies not only the defeat of the Axis powers but the conclusive routing of fascism, the dawn of American global hegemony, the triumph of market capitalism in the West, and the consolidation of the liberal international order. Yet in this ‘rather agreeable account of Europe’ and the West,<sup>1</sup> 1945 also functions as a barrier, quarantining the disorderly international conduct of Nazi Germany and the Axis powers behind a temporal barricade. Scholars of the period paint the post-war liberal international order in stark contrast to this dangerous, albeit now safely defeated entity: not fascist but democratic, not militaristic but committed to collective security, and repudiating ‘biological racism’, now roundly discredited, as an instrument of governance.

International Relations (IR) scholarship has played a significant role in crafting 1945 as a mythical turning point after which fascism, racism, colonialism, and other ostensibly outdated and defeated modes of international politics were fully and finally discredited. 1945 thus stands alongside other mythical IR turning points like 1648 and 1919, stylised as moments of spontaneous

<sup>1</sup>Tony Judt, *Postwar: A History of Europe since 1945* (New York: Penguin Press, 2005), p. 5.

eruption of the principle of sovereignty and the discipline of International Relations.<sup>2</sup> Yet while the myths of 1648 and 1919 have been undermined by critical scrutiny, the myth of 1945, and especially the role of German ‘transformation’ in ringing in a new global order, have received much less attention.<sup>3</sup>

A closer engagement with West German<sup>4</sup> domestic and foreign policy during the post-war period, particularly its treatment of the victims and perpetrators of Nazism, complicates the account of transformation. Although West Germany underwent Allied-mandated denazification and enacted restitution and compensation programmes for many survivors of Nazism, its politics remained deeply coloured by the racial and nationalist precepts of the Hitlerian state, which were adapted to fit into the new post-war context. Denazification was ended and in part reversed by the Allies, while survivors were once again victimised in and through the compensation process. The politics of post-war West Germany is marked by these lines of continuity and change, which are modulated to fit into a changed post-war geopolitical context.

The notion of German transformation is most commonly invoked to explain how a former pariah state could be so quickly and successfully integrated into the post-war liberal international order. It also plays a role in scholarship explaining how order is maintained in the international system, as well as in Foucauldian biopolitics literatures. German transformation is characterised in these accounts as a complete break with the past: beliefs, forms of conduct, and individuals associated with Nazism are deemed to be discredited, replaced, or made irrelevant in West German post-war politics, while ‘revulsion’ at the immediate past is seen to establish the principle of ‘never again’ as a firm guideline for its political conduct. Instead, this article proposes the concept of ‘adaptive politics’ to grapple with the complex concurrence of continuity, evolution, and change characterising German post-war politics. Adaptive politics describes how collectively held beliefs, identities, policies, and conduct travel across large-scale, incisive political events such as defeat in war, occupation, regime change, genocide, and revolutionary upheaval. While the narrative of transformation posits that beliefs, identities, policies, and conduct undergo a profound change – attitudes shifting from racist to anti-racist, politics from fascist to anti-fascist, and so forth – adaptive politics charts a more complex process whereby continuity, adaptation, and change coexist in an uneasy alliance. In the German case, it brings into view how defining elements of Nazism, such as racism and antisemitism, extreme nationalism, and a biologised view of the human, both endure and adapt in the post-war setting.

The concept of adaptive politics builds on theories of sovereignty, biopolitics, racism, and antisemitism, including Sylvia Wynter’s account of adaptive ‘truths-for’ knowledge,<sup>5</sup> the Frankfurt School’s conceptualisation of ‘secondary antisemitism’ in post-war West Germany,<sup>6</sup> and

<sup>2</sup>Benjamin de Carvalho, Halvard Leira, and John M. Hobson, ‘The big bangs of IR: The myths that your teachers still tell you about 1648 and 1919’, *Millennium: Journal of International Studies*, 39:3 (2011), pp. 735–58.

<sup>3</sup>On 1945 as watershed moment, see Peo Hansen and Stefan Jonsson, *Eurafrica: The Untold History of European Integration and Colonialism* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2014); Robert Vitalis, *White World Order, Black Power Politics: The Birth of American International Relations* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2015); Olivia Umurerwa Rutazibwa, ‘From the everyday to IR: In defence of the strategic use of the R-word’, *Postcolonial Studies*, 19:2 (2016), pp. 191–200; John M. Hobson, ‘Unmasking the racism of orthodox International Relations/International Political Economy Theory’, *Security Dialogue*, 53:1 (2022), pp. 3–20.

<sup>4</sup>This article focuses on West German post-1945 politics because the argument of ‘transformation’ is made by IR scholarship with reference to the Federal Republic. For a discussion of post-1945 politics in East Germany and Austria – the other ‘successor states’ of the Third Reich (Günther Jikeli, ‘A model for coming to terms with the past? Holocaust remembrance and antisemitism in Germany since 1945’, *Israel Journal of Foreign Affairs*, 14:3 (2020), pp. 427–46) – see Constantin Goschler, *Schuld und Schulden: Die Politik der Wiedergutmachung für NS-Verfolgte seit 1945* (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2005), pp. 361–411; and Brigitte Bailer-Galanda, *Wiedergutmachung kein Thema: Österreich und die Opfer des Nationalsozialismus* (Vienna: Löcker, 1993).

<sup>5</sup>Sylvia Wynter, ‘Unsettling the coloniality of being/power/truth/freedom: towards the human, after man, its overrepresentation – an argument’, *CR: The New Centennial Review*, 3:3 (2003), pp. 257–337.

<sup>6</sup>Lars Rensmann, ‘Guilt, resentment, and post-Holocaust democracy: The Frankfurt School’s analysis of “secondary antisemitism” in the group experiment and beyond’, *Antisemitism Studies*, 1:1 (2017), pp. 4–37.

Jasbir Puar's and Lauren Berlant's reworkings of sovereignty in the mode of debilitation and slow death.<sup>7</sup> From this theoretical vantage, the article elucidates both the 'secondary antisemitism' at work in the Adenauer administration's conduct in international negotiations and the routine, non-spectacular production of harm wrought by an unreconstructed, racialising paradigm of trauma, which facilitated the debilitation of survivors. Through the lens of adaptive politics, I draw out how incomplete denazification and widespread amnesties signalled a form of continuity, while existing antisemitic beliefs adapted to the new socio-political landscape. Psychiatric knowledge of trauma adapted in a different way, fitting the 'new' symptoms presented by Holocaust survivors back into an 'old' diagnostic framework.

The analysis is based on a review of historical literature on West German post-war politics, as well as the apparatus which made up its compensation practice, including the legislative framework, the administrative steps of the application procedure, and the medico-scientific paradigms informing the psychiatric exams which applicants had to undergo as part of the claims process. Here, I draw both on existing historiographical literature as well as primary psychiatric source material on trauma and its mid-century cognates, i.e. hysteria and neurosis, including textbooks, journal articles, and psychiatric expert assessments. The analysis focuses on the period between 1947 and 1969, thus extending from the first restitution laws issued by the Allied occupation forces in 1947 until 1969, the limit for filing repetition claims under the federal compensation framework.

Germany's flawed reckoning with its recent past in the post-war period raises serious questions, from the nature of Germany's (re)integration with the West, to Allied complicity in failed denazification, to the wider ramifications of IR's diagnosis of a post-war transformation. The article engages with these questions by demonstrating how epistemic and practical legacies of Nazism endured but adapted to the post-war context. The concept of adaptive politics thus offers a framework to address a range of vexing problems troubling IR scholarship: first, it offers an empirical corrective to rose-tinted accounts of German reintegration into the post-war liberal order. By confronting 'transformation' with the multiple adaptations of Nazism in West German politics in the post-war period, the notion of 1945 as a mythical turning point in 20th-century international politics is seriously undermined. Second, it raises the question why IR scholarship places such emphasis on the notion of transformation in the first place. The prominence of the trope of German post-war transformation across IR accounts suggests that it does important work in positioning the international politics of the West as entirely disconnected from the kind of disordered international conduct associated with Nazism. As Tarak Barkawi and Mark Laffey write, 'the Holocaust sets the standard for what is considered unacceptable behaviour in international society and invokes the category of "humanity" in a Eurocentric fashion by ignoring previous Western imperial genocides in the colonies'.<sup>8</sup> If Germany had to transform to (re)join the ranks of the West, any links with the disordered politics it embodies, from racism to (colonial) wars of conquest, are decisively severed. Further, Germany's fundamental 'modernity' is quietly affirmed, as it was able to transform quickly and not remain mired in 'transitional' phases like more 'backward', 'Third World' states.<sup>9</sup> Nazism and the Holocaust are thus presented as brief aberrations from the path of liberal modernity of an essentially 'modern' state.<sup>10</sup>

The article proceeds as follows: the first section reviews IR accounts of German transformation in the immediate post-World War II period and discusses other IR strategies of affirming the myth

<sup>7</sup>Jasbir K. Puar, *The Right to Maim: Debility, Capacity, Disability* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2017); Lauren Berlant, 'Slow death (sovereignty, obesity, lateral agency)', *Critical Inquiry*, 33:4 (2007), pp. 754–80.

<sup>8</sup>Tarak Barkawi and Mark Laffey, 'The postcolonial moment in Security Studies', *Review of International Studies*, 32:2 (2006), pp. 329–52 (pp. 340–1).

<sup>9</sup>Beate Jahn, 'The tragedy of liberal diplomacy: Democratization, intervention, statebuilding (part II)', *Journal of Intervention and Statebuilding*, 1:2 (2007), pp. 211–29.

<sup>10</sup>Zeynep Gülşah Çapan, 'Writing international relations from the invisible side of the abyssal line', *Review of International Studies*, 43:4 (2017), pp. 602–11 (p. 606).

of 1945 as a watershed moment. The second section lays out a theoretical framework for conceptualising not transformation but adaptation, drawing on engagements with sovereignty, biopolitics, racism, and post-war antisemitism to grapple with a German politics which simultaneously persecuted and formally compensated the victims of Nazism. The third section presents a case study of post-war West German adaptive politics by examining how its troubled engagement with the past shaped both its domestic and international politics. This politics was influenced both by Allied demands to demonstrate contrition and issue compensation, as well as the adaptation of racist and antisemitic practices in the routine setting of administrative and medical procedures. The conclusion deliberates the implications of German adaptive politics for IR theorising of international order.

### IR accounts of the post-war order and the narrative of German ‘transformation’

The notion of German transformation is a common theme in IR scholarship, stretching across theoretical schools and epistemological and ontological commitments. Three concerns appear to invoke the narrative of German transformation: how to deal with the ‘German problem’, how to understand the maintenance of order in the (post-war) international system, and how to conceptualise changes in biopolitical security practices.

The German problem refers to a contradiction between German endowment in terms of population size and industrial output on the one hand and European security needs on the other, or the question of ‘whether Germany could be peacefully and successfully integrated into the European state system on terms acceptable both to Germany and her neighbors.’<sup>11</sup> First raised in the context of Prussia’s expansionist wars in the 1860s, it reappeared twice over the course of the 20th century. In the years immediately following the defeat of Nazi Germany, many observers feared renewed German aggression and viewed it as still caught within a ‘matrix of totalitarianism.’<sup>12</sup> The German problem was seen as best addressed by containment.<sup>13</sup> Yet after German reunification in 1990, as some predicted a ‘normalisation’ of German power and renewed striving for superpower status,<sup>14</sup> many demurred: Germany, they argued, was no longer a threat to European peace, stability, and economic integration but a ‘consummate team player’ who was fully committed to multilateralism in trade and international politics, and to the regulation of force through international norms and alliances.<sup>15</sup> While imperial and Nazi Germany may have pursued a *Sonderweg*, or unique path, to Western modernity through authoritarianism, economic protectionism, and military aggression, contemporary Germany was a “gentle giant” whose power had been ‘tamed’ and its identity ‘internationalized.’<sup>16</sup>

In these literatures, the resolution of the German problem derives in significant measure from European integration and the multilateralisation of German power and sovereignty in the 1950s. Authors point to membership in the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC, 1951), which internationalised control over West German heavy industry, and the European Economic Community (EEC, 1957), which pooled decision-making over important policy sectors among

<sup>11</sup>James Sperling, ‘Neither hegemony nor dominance: Reconsidering German power on post Cold-War Europe’, *British Journal of Political Science*, 31:2 (2001), pp. 389–425 (p. 389).

<sup>12</sup>Sigmund Neumann, ‘The new crisis strata in German society’, in Hans Joachim Morgenthau (ed.), *Germany and the Future of Europe* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1951), pp. 25–39 (p. 26). For an early, narrow account of German transformation, see Hans Joachim Morgenthau, ‘Germany: The political problem’, in the same volume, pp. 76–88 (p. 86).

<sup>13</sup>G. John Ikenberry, *After Victory: Institutions, Strategic Restraint, and the Rebuilding of Order after Major Wars* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2019), p. 206.

<sup>14</sup>Mary N. Hampton, ‘The past, present, and the “perhaps” is Germany a “normal” power?’, *Security Studies*, 10:2 (2000), pp. 179–202 (p. 182).

<sup>15</sup>Andrei S. Markovits and Simon Reich, *The German Predicament: Memory and Power in the New Europe* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1997), p. 2.

<sup>16</sup>Peter J. Katzenstein, ‘United Germany in an integrating Europe’, in Katzenstein (ed.), *Tamed Power: Germany in Europe* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1997), pp. 1–48 (quoting Bulmer p. 296; p. 48).

members. The Bonn–Paris Conventions, which were signed in 1952 and entered into force in 1955, spelled out the conditions for German rearmament, accession to NATO, and the (partial) return of its sovereignty, including a renunciation of nuclear weapons and the subordination of military command to NATO.<sup>17</sup> Yet as the following sections will show, negotiations over German sovereignty and rearmament were directly linked to questions of compensation, with the weight of this expectation felt keenly by members of the Adenauer administration.<sup>18</sup> Yet in the IR literature on the resolution of the German problem through multilateral institutions, the role of compensation is almost entirely ignored.<sup>19</sup>

But German transformation is not traced to multilateral institutions alone. For some, it also derived in part from the lessons of history applied in the immediate post-war context. Steve Marsh points to a German ‘reinvention’ after the war driven by ‘revulsion against the past’ and a linking of ‘realpolitik, the military, authoritarian leadership, extreme nationalism, and the Holocaust’ in the minds of the German people.<sup>20</sup> Similarly, Hanns Maull describes the principle of ‘never again’ as one the ‘first lesson[s] drawn from the Nazi period,’ meaning ‘no more concentration camps, no more genocide, no more coddling up [*sic*] to dictators, and no more human-rights abuses.’ Instead, Germany’s foreign policy would be guided by ‘pacifism, democracy, and respect for human rights.’<sup>21</sup> Thomas Berger makes a related argument, locating the cause of Germany’s transformed ‘political military culture’ in a post-war shift. At this moment, following the material and ‘moral defeat’ of Nazism, the German people ‘accepted’ and ‘incorporated’ the ‘Allies’ antimilitary message ... into the institutional structure of the democratic political order.’<sup>22</sup>

Others querying the causes of Germany’s post-war transformation highlight the anti-fascist credentials of the young Federal Republic. Thomas Banchoff points to a combination of international context, institutional constraint, and identity to explain Germany’s changed foreign policy but also describes Adenauer and Kurt Schumacher, the first post-war Chancellor and social democratic leader of the opposition, respectively, as ‘ardent anti-fascists’ who ‘insisted that Germans break with their authoritarian habits and embrace parliamentary democracy once and for all.’<sup>23</sup> ‘Unrepentant Nazis’ and the radical right in the early post-war context are deemed ‘politically insignificant.’<sup>24</sup> Jeffrey Anderson traces Germany’s commitment to Europeanisation not only to ‘hard-headed instrumental calculations’ regarding foreign trade and the regaining of its sovereignty, but to the fact that ‘the total military defeat of the Nazi dictatorship had removed not only fascists from the postwar picture, but also those wedded to Germany’s authoritarian past’. As a result, ‘postwar Germany was not just a truncated version of its former self but a new polity.’<sup>25</sup>

A second set of literatures invoking the narrative of German transformation focuses on problems of international order. Some neorealist accounts point to a German transformation to explain its repositioning in the international system after World War II. Rather than naming its defeat

<sup>17</sup>Katzenstein, ‘United Germany’, p. 46; Sperling, ‘Neither hegemony’, p. 423; Ikenberry, *After Victory*, p. 197.

<sup>18</sup>See, for instance, Ernst Féaux de La Croix and Helmut Rumpf, *Der Werdegang des Entschädigungsrechts unter national- und völkerrechtlichem und politologischem Aspekt* (Munich: Verlag C.H. Beck, 1985), pp. 142, 145–6, 152.

<sup>19</sup>For an exception, see Sperling, ‘Neither hegemony’, p. 414 footnote.

<sup>20</sup>Steve Marsh, ‘The dangers of German history: Lessons from a decade of post–Cold War German foreign and security policy’, *Perspectives on European Politics and Society*, 3:3 (2002), pp. 389–424 (pp. 412, 391).

<sup>21</sup>Hanns W. Maull, ‘Germany and the use of force: Still a “civilian power”?’’, *Survival*, 42:2 (2000), pp. 56–80 (p. 66).

<sup>22</sup>Thomas Berger, ‘Unsheathing the sword? Germany’s and Japan’s fractured political-military cultures and the problem of burden sharing’, *World Affairs*, 158:4 (1995), pp. 174–191 (p. 179); see also Thomas U. Berger, ‘Norms, identity, and national security in Germany and Japan’, in Peter J. Katzenstein (ed.), *The Culture of National Security: Norms and Identity in World Politics* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), pp. 317–56 and Markovits and Reich, *German Predicament*, pp. 31–2.

<sup>23</sup>Thomas F. Banchoff, *The German Problem Transformed: Institutions, Politics, and Foreign Policy, 1945–1995* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1999), p. 37. While it would be inaccurate to label Adenauer as a fascist, his statements on ‘world Jewry’ in cabinet meetings were certainly antisemitic (see section ‘Post-war West Germany’s politics of adaptation’).

<sup>24</sup>Banchoff, *German Problem*, p. 42.

<sup>25</sup>Jeffrey J. Anderson, ‘Hard interests, soft power, and Germany’s changing role in Europe’, in Peter J. Katzenstein (ed.), *Tamed Power: Germany in Europe* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1997), pp. 80–107 (p. 83).



alone as the cause, both Kenneth Waltz and Robert Gilpin indicate that Germany underwent a more substantive change: for Waltz, defeat ‘changed their national character’,<sup>26</sup> while Gilpin names Germany as the paradigmatic example of a challenger state which underwent ‘religious, political, or social transformation’ after defeat.<sup>27</sup> John Ikenberry and Charles Kupchan use the examples of Germany and Japan to illustrate the role of elite socialisation in hegemons ‘exert[ing] control over other nations’ and maintaining their power in the international system. They describe socialisation as a ‘component of hegemonic power ... work[ing] at the level of substantive beliefs’, with elites in secondary states adopting the norms set by the hegemon.<sup>28</sup> Both Germany and Japan are named as successful examples of such socialisation, with a positive impact of US occupation ‘on the character of German postwar institutions and the political values that guided German behavior at home and abroad.’<sup>29</sup> Finally, David Edelstein uses the German case to enumerate the factors that contribute to a successful military occupation. While ‘no population enjoys being occupied’, the Western Allies were able to ‘offer ... valuable protection against another threat’, namely the Soviet Union.<sup>30</sup> This led to acceptance of the occupation and its ultimate success, transforming Germany ‘from fascist, militaristic, and highly nationalistic enem[y] into democratic and peaceful all[y].’<sup>31</sup>

The idea of German transformation also appears in Foucauldian biopolitics and security studies literatures. In Foucault’s accounts of the mid-century transition from biopolitics to governmentality, which he traces, *inter alia*, from Nazi to post-war Germany, ‘biological racism’ disappears in 1945. While he identifies a culmination of racist dividing practices in the Holocaust, they appear to have been erased entirely from Adenauer’s Germany, where life is ‘made to live’ instead via interventionist social policies.<sup>32</sup> Foucauldian security studies literatures, in turn, lean on this account to theorise the emergence of novel security practices in advanced liberalism. They extend Foucault’s analysis of mid-century governmentality to the late 20th century, suggesting that the concept of ‘life’ has been reconceptualised as complex, adaptive, and emergent in the wake of the molecular and information revolutions.<sup>33</sup> As already prefigured by the disappearance of race in Foucault’s account, Foucauldian IR scholarship premises this late 20th-century emergence on the mid-20th-century transformation preceding it, in which ‘biologized social doctrines’ were ‘radically discredited by the genocidal racism of the Nazi regime.’<sup>34</sup> With traditional racism thus seen as no longer relevant, security practices in late liberalism are viewed entirely through Foucault’s governmentality lens, emphasising security practices premised on logics of freedom rather than coercion and control.<sup>35</sup>

<sup>26</sup>Taylor, quoted in Kenneth Waltz, *Theory of International Politics* (Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley, 1979), p. 87.

<sup>27</sup>Robert Gilpin, *War and Change in World Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), p. 199.

<sup>28</sup>G. John Ikenberry and Charles A. Kupchan, ‘Socialization and hegemonic power’, *International Organization*, 44:3 (1990), pp. 283–315 (p. 283).

<sup>29</sup>Ikenberry and Kupchan, ‘Socialization’, p. 303. For a discussion of the role of international institutions in transforming Germany’s status in the post-World War II order, see Ikenberry, *After Victory*, chapter 6.

<sup>30</sup>David M. Edelstein, *Occupational Hazards: Why Military Occupations Succeed or Fail* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2008), p. 35.

<sup>31</sup>Edelstein, *Occupational Hazards*, p. 22. For a similar argument about the use of force bringing about German transformation, see Martha Finnemore, *The Purpose of Intervention: Changing Beliefs about the Use of Force* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2019), p. 147.

<sup>32</sup>Michel Foucault, *Society Must Be Defended. Lectures at the Collège de France, 1975–76*, trans. David Macey (New York: Picador, 2003), pp. 254–5; Michel Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1978–79*, trans. Graham Burchell (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), p. 144; see also Ann Laura Stoler, *Race and the Education of Desire: Foucault’s History of Sexuality and the Colonial Order of Things* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1995), p. 25.

<sup>33</sup>Michael Dillon and Andrew W. Neal, ‘Introduction’, in Michael Dillon and Andrew W. Neal (eds), *Foucault on Politics, Security and War* (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), pp. 1–18; Michael Dillon and Julian Reid, *The Liberal Way of War: Killing to Make Life Live* (London: Routledge, 2009); and Julian Reid, ‘Life struggles: War, discipline and biopolitics in the thought of Michel Foucault’, in Michael Dillon and Andrew W. Neal (eds), *Foucault on Politics, Security and War* (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), pp. 65–92.

<sup>34</sup>Dillon and Reid, *Liberal Way of War*, p. 49.

<sup>35</sup>Wendy Larner and William Walters, *Global Governmentality: Governing International Spaces* (London: Routledge, 2004); Peter Miller and Nikolas Rose, ‘Governing economic life’, *Economy and Society*, 19:1 (1990), pp. 1–31; Nikolas Rose,

Alison Howell and Melanie Richter-Montpetit have shown that this leads to a view of security governance as being deracialised – ‘everyone is (potentially) dangerous and, therefore, vulnerable to the punitive and/or lethal dimensions of liberal power’.<sup>36</sup> Against this background, the importance of the narrative of German transformation in Foucauldian IR scholarship becomes clear: through the defeat of Nazism, racism loses its salience as a biopolitical dividing practice and thus paves the way for an entirely new genre of security *dispositifs* later on.

The case study presented in the following sections will trouble this account, demonstrating that German domestic and foreign policy in the 1950s and early 1960s cannot in good faith be described as guided by a simple ‘revulsion’ against Nazi crimes or an immediate endorsement of ‘never again.’ What is more, it will draw out how negotiations with Israel and the Jewish Claims Conference, directly relevant to the terms of Germany’s post-war Western reintegration, were shot through with anxious paranoia over a perceived conspiracy of ‘global Jewry’, believed by members of the Adenauer administration to undermine German rehabilitation. Finally, it will show how racialising medical paradigms of trauma remained powerfully effective in the post-war era, leading to the debilitation of survivors. While Germany had joined Western institutions like NATO and the ECSC by 1955, and the German problem was thereby largely considered resolved, its ‘political values’, ‘national character’, and the conduct of its institutions were not suddenly transformed.

This history is not unknown, with a vast literature detailing both the inconclusive process of denazification and the unkind treatment meted out to survivors by the compensation bureaucracy. At times, this is even alluded to in the IR literature.<sup>37</sup> Yet this reservoir of evidence has failed to make a dent in the assessment of West Germany as ‘transformed’ during its first post-war decade. Why then does this narrative continue to be so powerful?

Much of it has to do with resolving uncertainty regarding Germany’s membership of ‘the West’, as well as severing any links between the Nazi Holocaust and Western colonialism. This uncertainty concerns Germany’s dual status in the late 19th and early 20th centuries as both a European colonial power and deeply conservative authoritarian monarchy. As a coloniser, it joined other European powers in the ‘scramble for Africa’, fuelled by racist and social Darwinist consensus on the inherent superiority of white Europeans over Black Africans – which placed Germans firmly among white Europeans.<sup>38</sup> Yet its militarism, nationalism, and resistance to democratic reforms – and not least its status as Central power in World War I – appeared to pit it against other (Western) European states.<sup>39</sup> This *Sonderweg*, or ‘special path’ thesis of German history, casts German development as aberrant compared to the ‘normal’ embrace of liberal democracy undertaken by other, Western European states. Mid-century apprehension of Germany as an aggressive rogue state reflects similar concerns.<sup>40</sup> Yet Cold War pressures brought about the formal rehabilitation and reintegration of Germany by 1955,<sup>41</sup> and with the passing of time, IR scholarship by and large came to view German transformation as a *fait accompli*. Here, the ostensible speed and comprehensiveness of German transformation serves to resolve the long-standing equivocation over Germany’s status and quietly affirms its fundamental ‘Western-ness’ and ‘modernity’. Another expression of this sentiment, besides the ‘transformation’ literature, can be found in the modernisation and democratic transition paradigms, where the ability to transition from dictatorship to democracy is seen to

‘Government, authority and expertise in advanced liberalism’, *Economy and Society*, 22:3 (1993), pp. 283–99; and Nikolas Rose, *Governing the Soul: The Shaping of the Private Self* (London: Free Association Books, 1999).

<sup>36</sup> Alison Howell and Melanie Richter-Montpetit, ‘Racism in Foucauldian security studies: Biopolitics, liberal war, and the whitewashing of colonial and racial violence’, *International Political Sociology* 13:1 (2019), pp. 2–19 (p. 12).

<sup>37</sup> See Markovits and Reich, *German Predicament*, p. 36; Berger, ‘Unsheathing’, p. 179; and Sperling, ‘Neither hegemony’, p. 414 footnote.

<sup>38</sup> Neil MacMaster, *Racism in Europe: 1870–2000* (Houndmills: Palgrave, 2001), pp. 33–40.

<sup>39</sup> Jürgen Kocka, ‘Asymmetrical historical comparison: The case of the German *Sonderweg*’, *History and Theory*, 38:1 (1999), pp. 40–50.

<sup>40</sup> John Gerard Ruggie, ‘Multilateralism: The anatomy of an institution’, *International Organization*, 46:3 (1992), pp. 561–98; Ikenberry, *After Victory*, chapter 6; Morgenthau, ‘Germany’, p. 86.

<sup>41</sup> Ikenberry, *After Victory*, pp. 194, 197, 207–8, 265.

differ sharply between ‘the West’ and ‘the rest’: while Germany and Japan are repeatedly invoked as examples of successful transition, recently decolonised states are portrayed as floundering, remaining mired in ‘transitional’ phases marked by instability and ‘hypernationalism’.<sup>42</sup> This suggests that Germany and Japan could transform because they were already ‘modern’, while Nazism, in the case of Germany, appears as merely an aberration from the path of liberal modernity for what had always been a fundamentally ‘Western’ nation.<sup>43</sup>

The narrative of transformation also draws a bright line of distinction between the genocidal crimes of Nazi Germany and the conduct of other European colonial powers. By ‘transforming’, the narrative suggests, Germany (re)joined a West which had always already been democratic and dedicated to the ideals of liberal humanism. Yet in the indelible words of Aimé Césaire, ‘before they [Europe] were its victims, they were its accomplices ... they tolerated that Nazism before it was inflicted on them ... they absolved it, shut their eyes to it, legitimized it, because, until then, it had been applied only to non-European peoples.’ Nazism was the imperial ‘boomerang’ come home, ‘appl[ying] to Europe colonialist procedures which until then had been reserved exclusively for’ colonial subjects.<sup>44</sup> The narrative of transformation sidesteps this shared lineage by casting ‘the West’ as always already opposed to Nazism and having no truck with its racist, eugenic, and genocidal practices. In short, by casting Germany as ‘transformed’, all that is unsavoury about this shared history is placed behind the temporal barricade of 1945.

The narrative of German transformation thus serves to uphold an IR myth of 1945 as a watershed moment, comparable to the IR myths of 1648 and 1919. While the former tells a tale of redemption and renewal and affirms the fundamental morality of the ‘West’, the latter offer simplified and misleading origin stories of the sovereign state and the discipline of IR, respectively.<sup>45</sup> Each of them engage in a sovereign gesture of abstraction, translating ambiguity, contingency, and indeterminacy into neat periodisations and tales of spontaneous emergence.<sup>46</sup> Yet the narrative of German transformation isn’t the only IR strategy for banishing unsavoury histories into obscurity. Robert Vitalis charts how American IR rewrote its disciplinary history and identity in the Cold War, refashioning what had formerly been a discipline of ‘race relations’ and colonial administration into a policy-facing field of knowledge responding to US national security interests growing from the Cold War.<sup>47</sup> To accomplish this feat, IR scholarship not only invented a disciplinary origin story which elegantly sidestepped the discipline’s ‘ideological commitment’ to white supremacy and the context of empire which were integral to its founding but also adapted its post-1945 terminology to a non-racial register to justify (continuing) international hierarchy.<sup>48</sup> This dynamic is mirrored in the scholarship on European integration. As Peo Hansen and Stefan Jonsson have demonstrated, the roots of European integration stretch to the interwar period, when European elites sought to restore their global influence after the Great War while countering the perceived threat to white supremacy posed by rising powers in the East. These goals were encapsulated in the utopian vision of ‘Eurafrica’, which promised to harness Africa’s resources by linking Europe’s colonial territories to the European heartlands.<sup>49</sup> When the European Economic Community (EEC),

<sup>42</sup> Jahn, ‘Tragedy’, pp. 213–14. More than a geographic description, ‘the West’ is routinely extended to liberal-democratic and capitalist states like Japan, Australia, and New Zealand. Notably the ‘transformation’ literature often mentions Japan alongside Germany as ‘transformed’ after 1945. See Edelstein, *Occupational Hazards*, p. 22; Finnemore, *Purpose*, p. 147; Ikenberry and Kupchan, ‘Socialization’, p. 303.

<sup>43</sup> Çapan, ‘Writing’, p. 606.

<sup>44</sup> Aimé Césaire, *Discourse on Colonialism* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1972 [1950]), p. 36; see also Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (New York: Schocken Books, 2004 [1951]).

<sup>45</sup> Carvalho et al., ‘Big bangs’.

<sup>46</sup> Sankaran Krishna, ‘Race, amnesia, and the education of International Relations’, *Alternatives*, 26:4 (2001), pp. 401–24; Richard K. Ashley and R. B. J. Walker, ‘Conclusion: Reading dissidence/writing the discipline. Crisis and the question of sovereignty in International Studies’, *International Studies Quarterly*, 34 (1990), pp. 367–416.

<sup>47</sup> Vitalis, *White World Order*, pp. 118–19.

<sup>48</sup> Robert Vitalis, ‘Birth of a discipline’, in David Long and Brian C. Schmidt (eds), *Imperialism and Internationalism in the Discipline of International Relations* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2005), pp. 159–81 (pp. 160, 164).

<sup>49</sup> Hansen and Jonsson, *Eurafrica*, pp. 42–50.



the precursor to the European Union (EU), was founded in 1957, it comprised the colonial territories of its founding members and continued to shape hierarchical relations through 'licensed patronage' of Africa by Europe beyond decolonisation.<sup>50</sup> Yet the EU's colonial origins have been erased from official Brussels accounts, which instead emphasise post-World War II reconciliation, while the historical and IR scholarship on European integration largely sidelines the enduring legacy of the Eurafrican idea.<sup>51</sup> Like the narrative of transformation, these IR strategies project a sanitised image of European and IR disciplinary history while presenting racial and colonial continuities as obsolete.

The following section offers a theoretical framework for the concept of adaptive politics in post-war West Germany.

### Theorising post-war adaptation

'Transformation', in the IR accounts discussed above, implies a complete break with the past: for many, the beliefs, forms of conduct, and individuals associated with Nazism were discredited, replaced, or made irrelevant in West German post-war politics. When IR scholars use the shorthand of 'transformation', they refer, in part, to these processes to explain the resolution of the German problem, certain problems in the maintenance of international order, and the discrediting of racism as a tool of governance. This is the case despite differences in use: while some refer directly to a German post-war 'transformation',<sup>52</sup> others use different terminology to describe a fundamental change in German beliefs, identity, policies and behaviour.<sup>53</sup> At times, only a specific aspect of Germany is deemed transformed, such as its former militarism or foreign, security, and economic policy,<sup>54</sup> while others point to a more encompassing transformation of German state conduct and identity.<sup>55</sup> Yet, overwhelmingly, they concur that those characteristics which had marked out Nazi Germany (and to a lesser degree, imperial Germany) as a rogue state in the early post-war period had been removed or overcome.

Adaptive politics in the German context signals several concurrent processes: alongside elements of continuity owed to incomplete denazification and large-scale amnesties, existing beliefs adapted to a new socio-political context. Meanwhile, psychiatric knowledge of trauma was adaptive in a different way, fitting new symptoms into an old diagnostic framework. This gives rise to a paradoxical political terrain marked by silence, refusal to engage with the past, secondary antisemitism, the debilitation of survivors, and disavowal of complicity or culpability on the one hand, and the renunciation of Nazism and the compensation of (some) of its victims for the sake of reintegration with the West on the other.

Failed denazification and amnesties for war criminals constituted an element of continuity from the Nazi to the post-war era. According to Norbert Frei, West Germany's 'policy for the past' (*Vergangenheitspolitik*) during its founding years was characterised by a 'triumph of silence' over the recent genocide and the exoneration and reintegration of convicted members of the Nazi party, Nazi officials, and war criminals.<sup>56</sup> As a result, this politics aimed to support 'not the victims of Nazism, but those considered the "victims" of its overcoming'.<sup>57</sup> By contrast, compensation for the

<sup>50</sup>Hansen and Jonsson, *Eurafrica*, p. 254.

<sup>51</sup>Hansen and Jonsson, *Eurafrica*, pp. 259–69.

<sup>52</sup>Anderson, 'Hard interests', p. 84; Banchoff, *German Problem*, p. 23; Edelstein, *Occupational Hazards*, p. 22; Finnemore, *Purpose*, p. 147; Katzenstein, *Tamed Power*, pp. 2, 296; Morgenthau, 'Germany', p. 86.

<sup>53</sup>Berger, 'Unsheathing', p. 179; Dillon and Reid, *Liberal Way of War*, p. 49; Foucault, *Birth*, p. 144; Gilpin, *War and Change*, p. 199; Ikenberry and Kupchan, 'Socialization', p. 303; Maull, 'Use of force', p. 66; Marsh, 'Dangers', abstract; Waltz, *Theory*, p. 87.

<sup>54</sup>Berger, 'Unsheathing'; Banchoff, *German Problem*; Maull, 'Use of force'; Morgenthau, 'Germany'.

<sup>55</sup>Katzenstein, 'United Germany', p. 2; Edelstein, *Occupational Hazards*, p. 22.

<sup>56</sup>Norbert Frei, *Adenauer's Germany and the Nazi Past: The Politics of Amnesty and Integration* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), p. xiv.

<sup>57</sup>Frei, *Adenauer's Germany*, p. xii.

survivors of Nazism was widely perceived as a condition imposed by the victors for an end to Allied occupation, the granting of sovereignty, and German reintegration with the West. The role of the Western Allies in this process – from ending denazification to granting favourable terms for debt forgiveness and war criminals’ amnesties – permitted Germans to ‘reject and externalize all personal guilt’ while adapting antisemitic conspiracy theories to the post-war context.<sup>58</sup>

Contrary to declarations of an immediate discrediting of racism and embrace of ‘never again’ politics, antisemitism was carried over to the post-war order in an adaptive form, with Frankfurt School theorists coining the term ‘secondary antisemitism’ to grapple with the evolved expressions of German antisemitism in the immediate post-war era.<sup>59</sup> Based on a series of focus-group discussions, these scholars observed that many Germans, especially those with strong nationalist attachments, still held and openly expressed antisemitic beliefs. While these beliefs mirrored and extended age-old antisemitic tropes, participants in these discussions wielded them to ward off and suppress feelings of guilt over the Holocaust. For instance, the image of the ‘Money Jew’ was updated to cast Jewish survivors, both in Germany and the exiled diaspora, as ‘profiteers from the Holocaust who exploit the past for their own benefit ... and especially for material gain.’<sup>60</sup> Frankfurt School scholars also noted that Germans frequently inverted relations of victim and perpetrator, portraying themselves as having undergone extreme hardship during the war and after, while blaming Jews for calling attention to the crimes of the Nazis. Hence, this kind of antisemitism ‘after Auschwitz’ can also be understood as antisemitism ‘because of Auschwitz.’<sup>61</sup>

Psychiatric notions of the aetiology of trauma marked an element of continuity: the fundamental understanding of trauma as caused not by external shock but by a combination of bodily ‘inferiority’ and psychic ‘desire’ for personal gain dates back to the early years of the 20th century. This paradigm remained dominant throughout the Nazi period and survived into the post-war era largely unscathed.<sup>62</sup> Psychiatric diagnosis of trauma took on a pivotal role in German post-war politics, as it was one of the few avenues open to survivors to claim compensation. This knowledge was adaptive too, but in a different way: by aligning diagnostic observations with dominant scientific assumptions about the importance of heredity, it served to preserve a dominant epistemic order.

According to Sylvia Wynter, adapting scientific observations to a framework set by certain deeply held assumptions is one of the fundamental mechanisms by which dominant orders are reproduced.<sup>63</sup> This proceeds through so-called ‘adaptive truths-for’, or epistemic formations which project authorship for human-made inequalities onto a non-human entity, like the cosmos, a deity, or processes of ‘Evolution/Natural Selection together with the imagined entity of “race”.’<sup>64</sup> Medieval astronomy is one notable example of ‘adaptive truths-for’ being mobilised to preserve the dominant order, as the measurements of the movements of the sun and planets had to be reconciled with the premises of Platonic astronomy, which not only ‘knew’ the planets to circle around the earth but subtended a Christian-theocentric cosmology.<sup>65</sup> A contemporary example is the attribution of global racialised inequalities to ‘the imagined agency of Evolution and Natural Selection and, by extrapolation, [to] the “Invisible Hand” of the “Free Market”.’<sup>66</sup>

<sup>58</sup>Jikeli, ‘Model’, p. 429; Rensmann, ‘Guilt’.

<sup>59</sup>Rensmann, ‘Guilt’.

<sup>60</sup>Rensmann, ‘Guilt’, p. 22.

<sup>61</sup>Rensmann, ‘Guilt’, p. 6.

<sup>62</sup>Bessel A. Van der Kolk, Nan Herron, and Ann Hostetler, ‘The history of trauma in psychiatry’, *Psychiatric Clinics of North America*, 17:3 (1994), pp. 583–600; Laura Jung, ‘Unfit to bounce back: On the martial politics of resilience in WWI–Weimar Germany and austerity Britain’, *International Political Sociology*, 17:4 (2023), p. olad017.

<sup>63</sup>Wynter makes a larger argument about not just scientific knowledge but conceptions of ‘Self, Other, as well as (our) social, political, and organic worlds’ being known and reproduced through the mechanism of sociogeny (‘Unsettling’, pp. 268–70). Here, I focus on the role of psy-knowledges as part of the ‘human’ sciences in the mid-20th century.

<sup>64</sup>Wynter, ‘Unsettling’, pp. 269, 273.

<sup>65</sup>Wynter, ‘Unsettling’, pp. 271–2, 278.

<sup>66</sup>Wynter, ‘Unsettling’, p. 317.

In the German post-war context, psychiatric knowledge must be counted among the adaptive 'ethno-knowledges', apprehending its object of inquiry – the human psyche – in 'genre-specific adaptive terms' which served to reproduce the order of 'Man' as biological being.<sup>67</sup> The fundamental truth, or 'descriptive statement', which structured the (re)production of scientific knowledge in this period is an understanding of 'Man' as both Darwinian and Malthusian, or as both 'eugenically selected' and financially autonomous 'Breadwinner'.<sup>68</sup> Human biology thus comes to be known as encoding differential aptitude, ability, and capacity to succeed in a competitive global marketplace. In the German case, this meant that psychiatric observation of Holocaust survivors bearing the physical and mental scars of genocide, expressed via symptoms they could often link directly to experiences in the camps, did not lead psychiatrists to the obvious conclusion – namely, that Nazi persecution had caused them. Instead, they sought to 'save the phenomena' and adapt them, reinterpreting symptoms to fit within the nomenclature of a biocentric and Malthusian episteme.<sup>69</sup> The notion of 'constitution' served to biologise symptoms, while the attribution of 'pension-seeking behaviour' placed them in a register of economic competition.

The deployment of psychiatric knowledge as an adaptive truth-for in compensation politics meant that the victims of Nazi persecution were once again made targets. Yet in the post-war democratic context, this unfolded in a biopolitical modality of debilitation, which designates forms of injury, ill health, and exhaustion that have been made chronic through the systemic denial of curative resources – be they medical services and treatment, decent standards of living, safe working conditions, or a living wage. As Jasbir Puar argues, debilitation is often mandated by one's position within racialising and geopolitical regimes of power and exploitation and is thus the result of a 'foreclosing [of] the social, cultural, and political translation to disability'.<sup>70</sup> Notably, the field of debilitation emerges at the interstices of 'exceptionalised' and 'exceptionalising' politics of disability, which parses injured populations into 'the disabled' on the one hand, and 'the debilitated' on the other. 'Disability', notes Puar, 'is not a fixed state or attribute but exists in relation to assemblages of capacity and debility, modulated across historical time, geopolitical space, institutional mandates, and discursive regimes'.<sup>71</sup> In the post-war German context, certain segments of the population – former Wehrmacht soldiers and Nazi dignitaries who were injured or suffered a loss in status over the course of the war and the defeat of the Nazi regime – were capacitated through recognition of their injury, expressions of collective solidarity, and financial compensation. By contrast, the victims of Nazism were *debilitated*: despite bearing the braided physical and psychological traces of persecution, genocide, and frequently exile, they were barred from accessing the means to translate this condition into the 'privileged category' of disability by the endurance of a biologicistic medical paradigm of trauma and the persistence, albeit adaptation, of antisemitic views in West Germany.<sup>72</sup>

Debilitation unfolds in the temporality of slow death, which 'prosperes not in traumatic events ... like military encounters and genocides ... but in temporal environments whose qualities and whose contours in time and space are often identified with the presentness of ordinariness itself, that domain of living on'.<sup>73</sup> The harm that was inflicted by West German politicians, medical professionals, and administrators working in the compensation apparatus unfolded through routine medical and bureaucratic procedures operating in accordance with long-established medical paradigms of trauma. The diverse instruments of debilitation which were deployed in this setting – drawn out application procedures, humiliating encounters with medical practitioners, as well as the precarisation resulting from denied pension and compensation payments – functioned as a form of attrition

<sup>67</sup>Wynter, 'Unsettling', p. 314.

<sup>68</sup>Wynter, 'Unsettling', p. 316.

<sup>69</sup>Wynter, 'Unsettling', p. 272.

<sup>70</sup>Puar, *Right to Maim*, p. xiv.

<sup>71</sup>Ibid.

<sup>72</sup>Ibid.

<sup>73</sup>Berlant, 'Slow death', p. 759.

of health, well-being, and vitality, or a form of injury blunted to the extent that it appeared ordinary, non-exceptional, and was rarely perceived as a cause of scandal.<sup>74</sup>

The lens of adaptive politics thus begins to unpack the government of post-genocidal populations in a complex setting characterised both by failed denazification and adapted antisemitism, as well as recent democratisation and the compensation of the victims of Nazism. It grapples with the routine, non-spectacular production of harm through psychiatric diagnostic practice, enabling an adaptive form of racial persecution. The following section examines this politics empirically.

### Post-war West Germany's politics of adaptation

Post-war West Germany was not transformed but pursued a politics of adaptation, retooling age-old antisemitic conspiracy theories while complying with Allied demands for a reckoning with the past. I first outline West German adaptive politics with reference to its contentious denazification policies and pursuit of amnesties for war criminals. I then offer the case of Jewish Holocaust survivors seeking compensation via the so-called health damages pension as one of the foremost expressions of this post-genocidal adaptive politics.

#### *Germany's 'policy for the past' from 1947–55*

Immediately after the war, the Allies implemented denazification programmes in all occupied zones which sought to remove members and active supporters of the Nazi party from eminent positions in politics, culture, the press, the judiciary, business, and academia. Initially, these purges were so comprehensive that they led to the collapse of public administration in some regions due to the sheer number of incriminated officials. However, the racial ideology of Nazism and tacit support for the regime's worldview remained widespread in post-war Germany, and denazification programmes rapidly lost support among Germans, who viewed them as excessive and arbitrary.<sup>75</sup> By 1947, denazification was terminated (and in part reversed) by the Western Allies under the twin pressures of rebuilding the economy and intensifying bloc confrontation, leading to the reinstatement of heavily implicated and convicted individuals.<sup>76</sup> This failure was mirrored in the make-up of West German governing elites, with 15–20 per cent of top civil servants in Bonn, the West German capital, being drawn from former Nazi ministries, and cabinet members of the Adenauer governments maintaining close ties to far-right and nationalist interest groups.<sup>77</sup> The premature conclusion of denazification also allowed most ordinary Germans to forgo any examination of personal complicity in Nazi crimes, thus amplifying the 'convenient lie' that only a small number of high-ranking Nazis, most of them dead by either execution or suicide, were culpable, thus making any further reckoning with the past unnecessary.<sup>78</sup> The matter of compensation, in turn, became a vehicle for the expression of a secondary antisemitism which cast these payments as a way for 'world Jewry' to extort Germany and exact financial benefit from the Holocaust.<sup>79</sup> Contrary to claims of a 'new polity' born from an anti-fascist purge, former Nazi party members remained in their posts in Germany's institutions.

<sup>74</sup>Cf. William G. Niederland, *Folgen der Verfolgung: Das Überlebenden-Syndrom. Seelenmord* (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 1980); Kurt R. Eissler, 'Die Ermordung von wievielen seiner Kinder muß ein Mensch symptomfrei ertragen können, um eine normale Konstitution zu haben?', *Psyche*, 17:5 (1963), pp. 241–91.

<sup>75</sup>Michael Brenner, 'Wider den Mythos der "Stunde Null": Kontinuitäten im jüdischen Bewusstsein und deutsch-jüdischen Verhältnis nach 1945', in Julius Schoeps (ed.), *MENORA: Jahrbuch für deutsch-jüdische Geschichte* (Munich: Piper Verlag, 1992), pp. 155–81; Dagmar Herzog, *Cold War Freud* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), p. 98; Christian Pross, *Wiedergutmachung: Der Kleinkrieg gegen die Opfer* (Berlin: Philo Verlagsgesellschaft mbH, 1988), p. 21; Cornelia Rauh-Kühne, 'Die Entnazifizierung und die deutsche Gesellschaft', *Archiv für Sozialgeschichte*, 35 (1995), pp. 35–70, (pp. 43, 59–63).

<sup>76</sup>Rauh-Kühne, 'Entnazifizierung', pp. 57–8.

<sup>77</sup>Rauh-Kühne, 'Entnazifizierung', pp. 65–6; Pross, *Wiedergutmachung*, pp. 64, 68–70.

<sup>78</sup>Jikeli, 'Model', p. 429.

<sup>79</sup>Rensmann, 'Guilt'.

Reparations and compensation, although largely absent from IR accounts of the German problem's ostensible resolution, were directly relevant to Germany's post-war rehabilitation. In the crucible year of 1952, negotiations over the reinstatement of German sovereignty and rearmament – through the General Treaty [*Deutschlandvertrag*] and European Defense Community (EDC) Treaties, respectively – ran in parallel with talks over foreign debt and compensation. The linkage between these disparate concerns was brought into stark relief when High Commissioner McCloy signalled to Adenauer that a collapse in the negotiations with Israel would jeopardise the other agreements.<sup>80</sup> These Agreements took effect, in slightly modified form, in 1955, formally lifting the occupation status, reinstating (partial) sovereignty, and setting the terms for German accession to NATO. Yet even in these Agreements, the obligation to compensate the survivors of Nazism remained.<sup>81</sup>

Adaptive politics found expression in foreign policy as Germany sought to negotiate a reparations agreement (which would become the Luxembourg Agreement of 1952) with Israel and the Jewish Claims Conference, a group representing non-Israeli Jews. Concurrent negotiations with Germany's creditors in London loomed large over the talks with Israel, with the German government indicating that any agreement depended on a favourable outcome in London. Germany's blatant prioritisation of a deal in London temporarily brought the talks with Israel to the brink of collapse.<sup>82</sup> Indeed, German reticence in the Israeli negotiations stemmed considerably from its own financial precarity and uncertain future. Yet records of cabinet meetings show that misgivings over the power and nefarious intent of 'world Jewry' played a significant part. In a cabinet meeting on 5 April 1952, Adenauer interrupts Franz Böhm, one of the delegates to the reparations talks, declaring 'there's no point in going through the numbers, the Jews will cheat us anyways.'<sup>83</sup> In July, after a deal had been reached with the Claims Conference, Adenauer underlined the importance of the Agreement with 'emphatic reference to the great economic power of Jewry in the world.'<sup>84</sup> Echoing this sentiment, Ernst Féaux de la Croix, assistant to finance minister Schäffer, later wrote in his 1985 memoir that German government officials deemed reparations to be 'the price that American Jewry exacted of its president for allowing him to take the Federal Republic as a partner into the community of Western nations.'<sup>85</sup> Schäffer himself had, in the run-up to the talks, deplored the 'sky-high expectations of world Jewry' which Germany could not fulfil given its other commitments.<sup>86</sup> Meanwhile, Justice Minister Dehler railed against the United States, which 'under the name of a Jewish politician, Morgenthau, pursued a politics ... which squeezed the German economy.'<sup>87</sup> To be sure, 'world Jewry' (*Weltjudentum*) was generally used to refer to the Claims Conference as the representatives of non-Israeli Jewish claimants. Nevertheless, this term – not neutral in the first place – was mobilised as an updated antisemitic trope of a duplicitous, powerful, and greedy global cabal scheming to cheat Germany out of its post-war regeneration. When Germany finally made an offer that was acceptable to the other side, this was largely motivated

<sup>80</sup> Adam Tooze, 'Reassessing the moral economy of post-war reconstruction: The terms of the West German settlement in 1952', *Past and Present*, 210:6 (2011), pp. 47–70 (p. 59).

<sup>81</sup> Stipulated in Chapter 4 of the Convention on the Settlement of Matters Arising Out of the Occupation (*Überleitungsvertrag*).

<sup>82</sup> Kai Von Jena, 'Versöhnung mit Israel? Die deutsch-israelischen Verhandlungen bis zum Wiedergutmachungsabkommen von 1952: Der Hintergrund der jüdischen Ansprüche', *Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte*, 34:4 (1986), pp. 457–80 (p. 471)

<sup>83</sup> Von Jena, 'Versöhnung', p. 470.

<sup>84</sup> Michael Wolffsohn, 'Globalentschädigung für Israel und die Juden? Adenauer und die Opposition in der Bundesregierung', in Ludolf Herbst and Constantin Goschler (eds), *Wiedergutmachung in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland* (Munich: Oldenbourg Wissenschaftsverlag, 1988), pp. 161–90 (p. 180). See also Ernst Féaux de la Croix and Helmut Rumpf, *Der Werdegang des Entschädigungsrechts unter national- und völkerrechtlichem und politologischem Aspekt* (Munich: Verlag C.H. Beck, 1985), pp. 127, 146, 148–50.

<sup>85</sup> Féaux de la Croix and Rumpf, *Werdegang*, p. 10.

<sup>86</sup> Wolffsohn, 'Globalentschädigung', p. 164.

<sup>87</sup> Wolffsohn, 'Globalentschädigung', p. 164; see also Féaux de la Croix's lamenting of German victimisation at the hands of the Israelis over the scheduling of the negotiations (p. 156) and the 'Jewish press' (pp. 158–9).



by pragmatism and US pressure, not any internalisation of ‘never again’ as a principle of foreign policy.<sup>88</sup>

A reluctance to take any responsibility for Nazi-era war crimes also impacted the talks over German rearmament. By 1951, the United States was urgently casting about for an arrangement which would bring West Germany into the Western security alliance on terms agreeable to the French. Yet during the negotiations, Germany repeatedly leveraged its new pivotal role on the geopolitical stage to extract concessions for its convicted war criminals. Without these concessions, it was argued, getting the Germans ‘ever again to bear arms for any cause’ would be impossible.<sup>89</sup> The Adenauer government also passed several laws to exonerate and reintegrate war criminals. These measures, while framed as aiding low-level participants and curbing ‘excesses’ of denazification, also returned Gestapo officers to their posts in public administration and exculpated participants in the 1939 Kristallnacht.<sup>90</sup> Rather than internalising the sobering lessons of its recent history in the process of rearmament and establishing a clean break with fascism in the build-up of its institutions, Germany pragmatically translated Cold War pressures into criminal amnesties.

These contradictions begin to outline the adaptive politics of post-war Germany under the Adenauer administrations: on the one hand, compensating the victims of Nazism was a condition set by the Allies for German reintegration with the West. Adenauer recognised the importance of this and offered terms acceptable to Israel and the Claims Conference, leading to the Luxembourg Agreement in 1952. On the other, these negotiations were riven by secondary antisemitism, and the failure of denazification accounted for Nazi party members remaining in their posts across German administration, industry, as well as its governing elites and intelligentsia.

### *Compensation, racialisation, and debilitation: Adaptive politics from 1956–69*

These dynamics played out sharply in the adjudication of compensation claims, where adaptive ‘truths-for’ in psychiatric diagnosis of trauma led to a debilitation of survivors. IR accounts, which have ignored this aspect of Germany’s post-war history, speak of a transformation of its national character, institutions, and domestic and foreign policies. Yet Germany’s compensation politics paint a different picture. There was hardly a trace of ‘never again’ in the treatment of survivors, who were debilitated through multiple instruments of attrition. The institutions charged with compensation, from parliament to medical experts and the compensation bureaucracy, treated survivors in a manner which can only be described as petty and cruel. While the overt language of racism may have receded, it remained violently effective, as biologising discourses of ‘constitutional’ inferiority continued to attach to Jewish bodies. Differently to the genocidal Nazi politics which had preceded it, the racial persecution in the post-war, adaptive mode played out predominantly in the temporality of slow death – ordinary, everyday medical encounters and administrative decisions, rarely rising to the level of scandal as they were sanctioned by established medical paradigms and parliamentary oversight.

The legislative framework of compensation produced debilitation by constructing the labouring, self-sufficient subject as the proper object of compensation, over and above the survivor of genocidal violence. Generally speaking, post-war compensation and restitution legislation privileged material and economic harm over physical or psychic injury.<sup>91</sup> For instance, while the restitution of stolen material assets had already begun to be addressed under Allied occupation, unpropertied survivors of the Holocaust only became eligible through the *Bundesentschädigungsgesetz* (BEG, or Federal Compensation Law) of 1956, which entitled claimants to a health damages pension if their earning capacity had been reduced by at least 25 per cent as a direct result of Nazi persecution. The

<sup>88</sup> Tooze, ‘Reassessing’, pp. 58–9; von Jena, ‘Versöhnung’, pp. 473–4, 477; de la Croix and Rumpf, *Werdegang*, pp. 145–6.

<sup>89</sup> David Clay Large, *Germans to the Front: West German Rearmament in the Adenauer Era* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996), p. 116. See also Frei, *Adenauer’s Germany*, chapter 8.

<sup>90</sup> Norbert Frei, *Vergangenheitspolitik: Die Anfänge der Bundesrepublik und die NS-Vergangenheit* (München: Verlag C.H. Beck, 1996), pp. 18–20.

<sup>91</sup> Goschler, *Schuld und Schulden*.

health damages pension thus became the only means to seek compensation for a large number of survivors, with the diagnostic recognition of persecution-induced incapacitating mental or physical harm functioning as an important pathway to a recognised claim.<sup>92</sup> Further, pension sums were calculated to reflect the percentage of lost earning capacity, not the fact of persecution per se, such as forced exile, deportations to a concentration camp, or killed relatives. Where such instances were compensated, it was through a single lump sum payment. For instance, confinement in a concentration camp or ghetto was compensated through a lump sum of 150 DM (Deutsche Mark) per month spent in detention – a figure considered low even by mid-century standards.<sup>93</sup>

In an address to the German parliament in September 1951, Adenauer gave assurances that compensation would be enacted ‘in a spirit of true humanity’. The conduct of public servants would be free from racist discrimination and grounded in human rights principles.<sup>94</sup> Yet the 1956 BEG was highly restrictive in its eligibility. The law specified that only those persecuted on ‘racial, political, religious, and ideological grounds’ were eligible, leaving out victims of Nazi anti-disabled sterilisation and ‘euthanasia’ campaigns.<sup>95</sup> The criminalisation, incarceration, and coerced medical ‘treatment’ of homosexuals continued seamlessly, with the notorious Nazi-era version of paragraph 175 remaining in force. In some cases, homosexual men detained in concentration camps by the Nazis were asked to repay the costs for accommodation and meals.<sup>96</sup> A number of survivor groups, although formally eligible, were barred from seeking compensation altogether: for instance, in a 1956 Federal Court decision, Romany survivors were denied compensation on the grounds that their deportation had not been the result of racial persecution but a necessary police operation against an ‘asocial’ and ‘criminal’ group.<sup>97</sup> No compensation was offered to hundreds of Black children and young adults – the mixed-race children of Black French colonial troops stationed in Rhineland after World War I and white German women – who were forcibly sterilised following an executive order in 1937, and Federal German courts declined to pursue criminal charges against two perpetrators.<sup>98</sup>

Jewish survivors also faced steep obstacles in filing their claims. Claimants of the health damages pension had to undergo an extensive medical exam in which psychiatrists and, if necessary, other medical specialists catalogued all their health complaints. Claimants living in Germany were sent to doctors selected by the compensation bureaucracy, while those living abroad were examined by so-called *Vertrauensärzte* (trusted doctors), usually Jewish-German emigrés, appointed by the German embassy. These doctors then produced a written expert opinion in which they first detailed the total extent of the claimant’s impairment (expressed as a percentage of reduced earning capacity) before determining whether this reduction was the direct result of persecution. Thus, while the final decision lay with the local German compensation office, these expert opinions carried great weight: claimants were only eligible for a pension if a doctor diagnosed a persecution-based impairment of at least 25 per cent.<sup>99</sup>

<sup>92</sup>Pross, *Wiedergutmachung*, pp. 134–5.

<sup>93</sup>Pross, *Wiedergutmachung*, p. 101.

<sup>94</sup>Konrad Adenauer, ‘Regierungserklärung des Bundeskanzlers in der 165. Sitzung des Deutschen Bundestages zur Haltung der Bundesrepublik Deutschland gegenüber den Juden’, *Konrad Adenauer* (27 September 1951), available at {[www.konrad-adenauer.de/seite/27-september-1951](http://www.konrad-adenauer.de/seite/27-september-1951)}.

<sup>95</sup>Hans Günter Hockerts, ‘Wiedergutmachung in Deutschland 1945–1990: Ein Überblick’, *Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung* (7 June 2013), available at {<http://www.bpb.de/apuz/162883/wiedergutmachung-in-deutschland-19451990-ein-ueberblick?p=all>}.

<sup>96</sup>Christian Köhne, ‘Homosexuelle und die Bundesrepublik Deutschland: Gleichberechtigte Mitmenschen?’, *Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung* (7 September 2018), available at {<http://www.bpb.de/geschichte/zeitgeschichte/deutschlandarchiv/275113/homosexuelle-und-die-bundesrepublik-deutschland>}.

<sup>97</sup>Martin Feyen, ‘“Wie die Juden”? Verfolgte “Zigeuner” zwischen Bürokratie und Symbolpolitik’, in Norbert Frei, José Brunner, and Constantin Goschler (eds), *Die Praxis der Wiedergutmachung: Geschichte, Erfahrung und Wirkung in Deutschland und Israel* (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2009), pp. 323–55.

<sup>98</sup>Gisela Tascher, ‘NS-Zwangssterilisationen: Handeln auf Befehl des Führers’, *Deutsches Ärzteblatt*, 113:10 (2016), pp. A-420 / B-353 / C-53.

<sup>99</sup>Pross, *Wiedergutmachung*, pp. 134–5.

Survivors were debilitated through a prolonged, opaque, and often cruel applications process which was frequently concluded by either the death of the applicant or a denial of their claim on spurious medical grounds. Applications took many years to process. Between 1956 and 1965, approximately 19 per cent of claimants died before a decision had been reached.<sup>100</sup> Further, the overall rate of rejections was high: between 1956 and 1965, approximately 30 per cent of health pension claims made from abroad, and 50 per cent of domestic claims, ended in a negative decision. Data from 1966 shows that one-third of successful claims had only been approved after a successful appeal in court. Taken together, up to 55 per cent of claims (both rejected at the initial stage and later approved in court, as well as outright rejected) were unsuccessful.<sup>101</sup>

Even for successful applicants, the pensions awarded were low. A typical pension for a middle-aged man diagnosed with a 50 per cent impairment was 243 DM (approximately 650€ in 2022).<sup>102</sup> Setting an impairment at 50 per cent implied that a claimant needed to supplement half of their required income. However, for many survivors, symptoms were so debilitating that they could only work in controlled environments like their home or in the presence of a family member. Many were susceptible to panic attacks, insomnia, an inability to concentrate, and fear of crowds and loud noises, meaning that most forms of work were unsuitable for them. In some cases, Holocaust survivors were employed as unskilled labourers in empathetic environments – like American Jewish hospitals – which accommodated their disability and frequent absences.<sup>103</sup>

By contrast, traumatised returning German prisoners of war (POWs) seeking to claim a veterans' pension – disbursed via a different legal mechanism than Holocaust survivors – were often diagnosed with hunger dystrophy, an organic degenerative disorder. This allowed doctors to assign these patients' symptoms an organic basis that post-traumatic symptoms alone did not possess. Consequently, their pensions claims could be approved more frequently.<sup>104</sup> The differential treatment of German POWs and Holocaust survivors not only echoes the exoneration of perpetrators unfolding in parallel to the extended persecution of survivors but also highlights the parsing of the injured into those who, due to recognition, medical treatment, and pensions, were capacitated to claim the status of 'disabled', while those who, through the aggravation of harm at the hands of medical practitioners and denial of claims, would be subjected to the slow death of debilitation.<sup>105</sup>

Despite Adenauer's assurances of an end to racist discrimination, the application process itself was a key site for an adaptive racial and antisemitic persecution of survivors. Many of those who underwent this process experienced it as retraumatizing. Emigrated Holocaust survivors were understandably reluctant to re-engage with the nation that had murdered their relatives and were wary of once again submitting to the procedures and judgement of the German medico-scientific apparatus. Many dreaded the appointments with German doctors whose opinions and actions during the Nazi era they could only guess, and who wielded so much power over the outcome of their application.<sup>106</sup> Psychiatrists charged with assessing the extent of a claimant's impairment through Nazi persecution often treated survivors in a demeaning manner. Testimonies collected by dissident psychiatrists relay the cruel treatment of survivors at the hands of examining psychiatrists and compensation officials. For instance, Jakob B., a German Jewish man suffering from heart disease, severe depression, and anxiety following his detention in a Gestapo prison and Theresienstadt concentration camp, was accused of having 'no interest' in getting better. Jakob B. had been repeatedly hit over the head with a truncheon, leading to recurring dizzy spells and chronic anxiety. But

<sup>100</sup> Pross, *Wiedergutmachung*, p. 144.

<sup>101</sup> Pross, *Wiedergutmachung*, pp. 144–5. Note that these figures refer to *all* health damages claims, not only those resulting from psychological stress.

<sup>102</sup> Pross, *Wiedergutmachung*, p. 136.

<sup>103</sup> Niederland, *Folgen der Verfolgung*, pp. 16, 68, 117.

<sup>104</sup> Svenja Goltermann, *Die Gesellschaft der Überlebenden: Deutsche Kriegsheimkehrer und ihre Gewalterfahrungen im Zweiten Weltkrieg* (Munich: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, 2009), p. 212.

<sup>105</sup> Puar, *Right to Maim*, p. xiv.

<sup>106</sup> Helmut Paul, 'Neuere Studien zum Thema', in Helmut Paul and Hans-Joachim Herberg (eds), *Psychische Spätschäden nach politischer Verfolgung* (Basel: S. Karger, 1967), pp. 78–146 (p. 127).

the examining doctor noted with disapproval that Jakob B. had failed to undergo psychotherapeutic treatment earlier (which Jakob B. couldn't afford). 'If he did, he would have been forced to stand on his own two feet again, and would no longer have been able to live at the public's expense.'<sup>107</sup> Another psychiatrist alleged that a claimant, Frau C., conveyed a 'contrived affectation' and played up her symptoms. Frau C. emitted cries – sighs, belches, and barking sounds – whenever she recalled events in the camps, which included beatings with a rifle. The guard had forbidden her to utter any sound, threatening that the beating would continue until she absorbed it in total silence.<sup>108</sup> Unsurprisingly, diagnostic encounters often resulted in breakdowns and walk-outs.<sup>109</sup> For the émigré psychiatrist Kurt Eissler, the treatment of survivors constituted 'renewed abuse'.<sup>110</sup> Other dissident psychiatrists relay similar experiences, which they characterise as the exacerbation of psychic harm through interaction with the German compensation bureaucracy.<sup>111</sup>

Debilitation through medico-psychiatric examination was enabled by psychiatric knowledge of trauma functioning as an adaptive 'truth-for', which meant that the governing biologically grounded view of the human remained unchallenged and continued to shape medical and psychiatric paradigms. In German compensation practice, this played out via the so-called governing paradigm of trauma. This paradigm posited that in a normal patient, the effects of psychic trauma ceased shortly after the event, and if symptoms persisted or became chronic, this was assumed to result not from the trauma itself, but from a person's 'constitution'.<sup>112</sup> Constitutional weakness, it was argued, led patients to succumb to their symptoms in hopes of securing a pension instead of mustering the willpower to overcome them. This paradigm had formed German (and indeed, international) medical and administrative consensus since the 1920s and was widely utilised as an instrument of discipline, enforcing a return to work for workers and soldiers who had become incapacitated in their line of occupation or service.<sup>113</sup> Notably, the ruling paradigm expressed a biologicistic, and at times racial, view of the human, as it centred the notion of 'constitution' in conceptualising an inclination to long-term incapacitation. According to Wilhelm Jacob, a post-World War II reformist physician, the concept of '*Anlage*' (constitution), while notoriously imprecise, was commonly understood to signify '*Erbanlage*', or *hereditary* constitution.<sup>114</sup>

This adaptive medical discourse fit the 'new' symptoms of Holocaust survivors into the 'old' diagnostic paradigm of constitution, thereby producing Jewish patients as biologically prone to breakdown. Reference to it can be found in innumerable rejections of claims for health damages pensions, and it was repeatedly affirmed as standard medical practice in government publications.<sup>115</sup> In a text commissioned by the German Ministry of Labour in 1960, the authors – five high-ranking psychiatrists and medical experts – reiterate the core principle of the ruling paradigm of trauma, namely that in the case of so-called accident neuroses, not the 'damaging event' but the

<sup>107</sup>Hans March, 'Die Schicksale zweier Juden und ein Beispielgutachten', in Hans March (ed.), *Verfolgung und Angst in ihren leiblichen Auswirkungen* (Stuttgart: Ernst Klett Verlag, 1955), pp. 176–7.

<sup>108</sup>Niederland, *Verfolgung*, pp. 120–2.

<sup>109</sup>Wilhelm Jacob, 'Zur Beurteilung der Zusammenhangfrage körperlicher und seelischer Verfolgungsschäden in der gutachtlichen Praxis des Entschädigungsverfahrens', in Hans-Joachim Herberg (ed.), *Die Beurteilung von Gesundheitsschäden nach Gefangenschaft und Verfolgung* (Bielefeld: Nicolaische Verlagsbuchhandlung Herford, 1967), pp. 66–72 (p. 68).

<sup>110</sup>Eissler, 'Ermordung', p. 265.

<sup>111</sup>William G. Niederland, 'Psychiatric disorders among persecution victims: A contribution to the understanding of concentration camp pathology and its after-effects', *The Journal of Nervous and Mental Disease*, 139:5 (1964), pp. 458–74 (p. 470).

<sup>112</sup>Karl Bonhoeffer, 'Vergleichende psychopathologische Erfahrungen aus den beiden Weltkriegen', *Der Nervenarzt*, 18:1 (1947), pp. 1–4.

<sup>113</sup>Van der Kolk et al., 'History of trauma'; Jung, 'Unfit'.

<sup>114</sup>W. Jacob, 'Erb- und Umwelteinflüsse bei "Anlageleiden"', in Hans-Joachim Herberg (ed.), *Spätschäden nach Extrembelastung* (Bielefeld: Herford, 1969), pp. 29–35, 20, emphasis added. See also Eissler, 'Ermordung', p. 289.

<sup>115</sup>Walter Ritter von Baeyer, Heinz Häfner, and Karl Peter Kisker, 'Zur Frage des "Symptomfreien Intervalles" bei erlebnisreaktiven Störungen Verfolgter (Erfahrungen aus zwei Begutachtungen)', in Helmut Paul and Hans-Joachim Herberg (eds), *Psychische Spätschäden nach politischer Verfolgung* (Basel: S. Karger, 1967), pp. 188–216 (pp. 52–5, 202–5); Niederland, *Folgen der Verfolgung*, pp. 55, 220.

promise of a pension is the generative cause of symptoms. While they acknowledge ‘extreme’ cases where such symptoms might persist, such as concentration camp detention and Nazi persecution, they frame these instances as extremely rare.<sup>116</sup> The well-known ‘Kretschmer Gutachten’, an expert opinion solicited in a 1955 court case and subsequently distributed by the compensation administration among its branch doctors, warns against awarding pensions to ‘pension neurotics’ because this ‘financial windfall would destroy their will to health.’<sup>117</sup> The ‘Ammermüller-Wilden’, a standard 1950s reference work for psychiatrists and administrators working on compensation cases, illustrates how adaptive knowledge functions as a means of ‘sav[ing] the phenomena,’<sup>118</sup> as symptoms linked by claimants to their persecution are traced back by psychiatrists to their constitution. We learn of a Jewish World War I veteran, addicted to opioids following a combat injury, who makes a claim based on three years of concentration camp detention and subsequent chronic exhaustion, nerve damage, and coronary disorder. His claim is rejected on the grounds of his ‘mental abnormality’ and pre-existing (read: constitutional) ‘openness’ to substance abuse.<sup>119</sup> Elsewhere, the claim of a survivor of Bergen-Belsen camp suffering from severe anxiety and depression is rejected with reference to ‘constitutionally induced reactions of a psychopathic personality.’<sup>120</sup>

The compensation politics of post-war West Germany revealed not transformed institutions, national character, and revulsion towards the crimes of the Nazis, but an adaptive politics which combined a legal framework for compensation and expressions of contrition with evolved forms of persecution. Within the constitutional framework of the Basic Law prohibiting discrimination on the grounds of race, racist discrimination adapted, finding expression through medical paradigms of trauma and unfolding in the temporality of the ordinary, i.e. through adaptive ‘truths-for’ knowledge and the denial of claims. Survivors were largely denied the necessary resources to translate the lasting traces of genocide into a disabled, ‘capacitated’ body and were subjected to a biopolitical governmentality of debilitation. Despite Adenauer’s acknowledgement of Nazi violence and support for compensation, Germany’s conduct did not signal a clean break with the past.

## Conclusion

This article has offered a critical re-examination of the oft-asserted ‘transformation’ of Germany post-1945, challenging the prevailing narrative within IR which neatly packages the period into a tale of redemption and renewal. An analysis of West German post-war domestic and international politics, focusing on its treatment of the victims and perpetrators of Nazism, paints a more complex picture of a nation grappling with its recent Nazi past, albeit not through a radical transformation but through a process of adaptation. The account of adaptive politics laid out here corrects IR’s focus on transformation by engaging with the complexities and contradictions of post-war politics: high-level statements of contrition and comprehensive compensation legislation were co-articulated with silence, a refusal to engage with the past, and adaptive racism and antisemitism. This adaptive politics was expressed both in international diplomacy and domestic legislation, as well as through the mundane, everyday bureaucratic and medical procedures by which racist and antisemitic beliefs were translated into the post-war period.

Yet beyond an empirical oversight, the narrative of post-war transformation plays an important role for IR scholarship. For one, it is invoked to explain a series of post-war developments, including the resolution of the ‘German problem’, the maintenance of order in the international system,

<sup>116</sup>Gustav Bodechtel, Fred Dubitscher, Hirt, Friedrich Panse, and Gustav Störing, ‘Die “Neurose”—Ihre Versorgungs- und sozialmedizinische Beurteilung’, in Bundesminister für Arbeit und Sozialordnung (ed.), *Schriftenreihe des Bundesversorgungsblattes* (Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer, 1964), pp. 3–16 (p. 6).

<sup>117</sup>Bodechtel et al., ‘Neurose’, p. 7.

<sup>118</sup>Wynter, ‘Unsettling’, p. 272.

<sup>119</sup>Hermann Ammermüller and Hans Wilden, *Gesundheitliche Schäden in der Wiedergutmachung* (Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer Verlag, 1953), pp. 229–31.

<sup>120</sup>Niederland, *Folgen der Verfolgung*, pp. 180–97.



and changes in biopolitical security practices. In all cases, while post-war West Germany certainly differed drastically from its predecessor, the IR accounts discussed above go too far in identifying a ‘transformation’ and often imply a clean break with Nazi beliefs and institutions which is not borne out by the historical record. Additionally, the narrative of transformation contributes to IR’s stylisation of 1945 as a radical turning point. Deployed in this way, German ‘transformation’ not only serves to quarantine disorderly international conduct within the confines of the Axis powers, now safely defeated, but draws a sharp line of distinction between Western liberalism and the discredited practices of Nazism, i.e. (biological) racism, (ethno)nationalism, and colonial wars of conquest. At the same time, the narrative of transformation quietly affirms the fundamental modernity of Germany because, as opposed to ‘Third World’ states, it was able to transform into a liberal democracy so quickly. Nazism and the Holocaust are thereby cast as an aberration from the path of modernity for what had always been an essentially ‘Western’ state.

There are two principal avenues to extend this analysis: the first is to critically examine the post-war international order through the lens of adaptive politics. While the article’s discussion of IR scholarship demonstrated how it serves to distance the post-war liberal international order from Nazism and similar disorderly international conduct, their epistemic and practical linkages must be the subject of further enquiry. Such an endeavour would understand Nazism and European (settler) colonialism as emerging from a shared genealogy of white, European claims to global supremacy, and would examine how the discrediting of Nazism – alongside an enduring but perhaps adapted enforcement of a global ‘colour line’ – contributed to the construction of the post-war liberal international order. A second avenue of enquiry might examine other instances of democratic transition and post-genocidal reckoning through the lens of adaptive politics, considering whether and how claims of transformation gloss over structural, epistemic, and practical continuities and adaptations. With theorising largely focused on either continuity of orders or radical transformation, adaptive politics may begin to outline the messy, inconclusive, and contradictory politics which follow incisive events like war or large-scale atrocities.

In closing, an engagement with West German adaptive politics in the immediate post-war era enables critical reflection of IR’s historicisation of the mid-century period as well as of its theorisation of transition, specifically the continuities and adaptations of racism, antisemitism, and colonialism. Only through such critical engagement can the discipline grapple effectively with this legacy, a task once again made urgent by the resurgence of this politics around the globe today.

**Video Abstract.** To view the online video abstract, please visit: <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0260210524000883>.

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