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**RECONSTRUCTION OF A LOST PAST:
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ABSTRACT

This thesis explores remembrance around an example of memorialization called *Stolpersteine* through a critical lens at a time when memory studies are on the rise and develops various critiques of the project. It poses the following questions to a memory and art project that has been ongoing since the 1990s: How can we remember the problematic past? How can we commemorate the millions who have been exiled, massacred, or sacrificed? What shortcomings and politically erroneous perspectives emerge in a re-enactment of the past in memory when there have been losses in the ability to articulate in the aftermath of disasters? This study begins by outlining the concepts of memory, history, and memorialization, then aims to consider some of the debates in these fields. Through a discussion of the historical turns and contradictions in how Germany remembers the past, a background summary of the quest for memorialization and the phenomenon of the *memory boom* that started due to this process is presented. the Stolpersteine project – the most widespread, decentralized, globally recognized monument which started in Germany and then spread to many other countries – is discussed from development to execution. Through critical analysis of the Stolpersteine project, this study aims to question whether treating monuments, places of memory, objects of memory, and public interactions with them as if they are independent of the social regimes of remembrance produces misleading results.

Keywords: Genocide, History, Memory, Monument, Stolpersteine.

ÖZET

Bu tez, hafıza çalışmalarının yükselişte olduğu bir dönemde gerçekleşen *Stolpersteine* isimli hafızalaştırma örneği etrafında hatırlamayı eleştirel bir mercekten inceliyor. 1990'lardan bu yana devam etmekte olan bir hafıza ve sanat projesine şu soruları yöneltiyor: Zor bir geçmişi nasıl hatırlayabiliriz? Sürgün edilen, katledilen ya da kurban edilen milyonları nasıl anabiliriz? Felaketlerin ardından ifade edebilme yeteneğinde eksiklikler yaşanırken, geçmişin hafızada yeniden tasarlanmasında ne gibi eksiklikler ve politik olarak hatalı bakış açıları ortaya çıkar? Bu çalışma; alandaki bazı tartışmaları ele alarak hafıza, tarih ve hafızalaştırma kavramlarının altını çizerek başlıyor. Almanya'nın geçmişi hatırlama biçimindeki tarihsel dönemeçler ve çelişkiler hatırlatıldıktan sonra, hafızalaştırma arayışlarının ve bu sürece bağlı olarak başlayan *hafıza patlaması* olgusunun arka plan özetini sunuluyor. Almanya'da başlayıp daha sonra birçok ülkeye yayılan en yaygın, merkezsiz ve küresel çapta tanınan bir anıt modeli olan Stolpersteine projesi, gelişiminden uygulamasına kadar ele alınıyor. Bu çalışma, Stolpersteine projesinin eleştirel analizi yoluyla, anıtları, hafıza mekânlarını, hafıza nesnelerini ve bunlarla kamusal etkileşimleri hafıza rejimlerinden bağımsızmış gibi ele almanın yanıltıcı sonuçlar doğurup doğurmadığını sorgulamayı amaçlamaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Anıt, Hafıza, Soykırım, Tarih, Tökezleme Taşları.

INTRODUCTION

In the aftermath of war, disaster, genocide, and massacres, coping with traumatic pasts and trying to exist despite them is a challenge. The effort required to coexist with a problematic past involves searching for meaning in its remnants, knowledge, and in what has been carried into the present. To live with the intolerability of the past, it is sometimes necessary to suppress it. At other times, it becomes the subject of confrontation processes and public discussion. However, this is not just a dichotomy of the two categorical outcomes of forgetting and remembering. Each discussion of the present and past brings with it several critical questions and possibilities.

First, it is essential to underline that all acts of remembering and forgetting are collective; that is, they have the power to shape common attitudes and, as a result, are of great interest. At this core, engaging with the past is about determining a policy of remembering, thus forgetting, and creating a social consensus on the past for the continuation of coexistence. The lines of tension from the desire to eliminate traumatic pasts are where these pasts will be positioned and how they will be processed in everyday life. One of the most critical debates that have continued to this day, after Auschwitz as a concentration and extermination camp, is the question of how to remember a genocide in which millions of people were brutally murdered, tortured, and victimized, which in turn, according to Diner, led to a “breakdown of civilization,” and a “shattering of ontological innocence” (Diner, 2011, p. 13). Another question that follows is how to explain this brutal and evil past to future generations, and this is precisely the crisis in pedagogical approaches to Holocaust education in Germany.

Silence about the genocide in the context of German society was abandoned, particularly in the 1960s, and the visibility of catastrophic images, memories of concentration camps, data on the genocide process, and various other models of

memorialization increasingly began to appear in the public sphere. It is questionable, however, whether such a sharp periodic turn towards engagement with the past could be considered entirely innocent. Adorno's concept of "working through the past" (2020, pp. 59-60) – "*Aufarbeitung der Vergangenheit*" – does not refer to a treatment of the past, but to leaving behind what has happened in the past, closing the subject, and erasing it from memory. Many attempts at remembering also construct modes of forgetting but are careful enough not to make it explicit. In this respect, it is worth considering what an interest in or orientation toward remembering might correspond to and how it might be critically addressed.

The Stolpersteine project, one of several memory-art works in Europe, offers a significant opportunity to analyze the politics of memory in Germany and to consider new possibilities for remembering. The installation project, which began in the 1990s in Germany along with many other works dealing with the past, was initially banned but later gained the authorities' agreement. Today, these memorial stones, numbering nearly 90 thousand, have spread beyond the borders of Germany, from Ukraine to France. The memorials provide information on the names of the victims, their birth and death dates, and the camps where they were murdered, and are usually placed in front of the buildings where the victims last lived. The project is worth examining from multiple tangible and intangible angles: The form of the memorial, the research phase, archival policies, and its model of memorialization on the one hand, and the relations it fails to establish with the public, its spatial positions in cities, the boundaries between its official form and amorphous remembrances on the other. From there, questions regarding its method, one that does not point out the perpetrator, anonymizes victims' stories while naming them, and offers a prosthetic testimony, are invoked. Where does the Stolpersteine project stand within the canonical framework of remembrance? In the aftermath of a mass experience of violence and catastrophe such as genocide, what should be the grammar, form, and method of memory work? The political basis of the project, the problems of victim-centered remembrance, the shortcomings of archival policy, the promises of the stones to the public, and its troublesome aspects will be analyzed. I note that the common point of all these memorials is that they spread the hope that

stories of past violence “will never happen” again and hope that this discussion will contribute to future struggles for democratizing collective memory. I hope that the Stolpersteine project will encourage us to think about and critically engage with frames of memory and offer models for new possibilities of remembering and the work of confronting the past. Critical analysis of remembrance works contributes more to the democratization of memory than an always affirmative attitude.

This study aims to critically examine a memorial project, the Stolpersteine. Extensive academic literature research on the concepts of memory and history has been conducted to redefine the boundaries of both concepts within the geographical boundaries of the project, and includes an exploration of their connections and commonalities. Throughout this research, the project’s archive was analyzed, and all content was reviewed. News reports, articles, and columns on the Stolpersteine were examined in depth, questions were posed to the project in line with its conceptual framework, and answers were sought. Each answer led to more questions; some could be answered, others could not. And as some questions had the potential to shift the focus of the study, even though they were asked within the thesis, their answers were postponed for later studies. The interdisciplinary approach at all stages of this study is the product of a significant effort. Although an affirmative approach to the project marked the early stages of the research, a critical line was adopted as it progressed.

CHAPTER ONE

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

1.1. HISTORY

1.1.1. History as a Way of Knowing

To make the past a subject of study and deepen this discussion, I would like to explore the concepts of history and memory and clarify some of the ideas around them. Discussing these two concepts enables us to answer whether one should keep a distance from particular projections of remembrance and especially why post-genocide historiography cannot be fully trusted. The two fundamental concepts of the field of remembrance, memory, and history, encountered in connection with a variety of disciplines, will be reconsidered in terms of their limits, possibilities, and methods. It is possible to argue that the past lies at the center of both concepts, and both shape the past into a narrative mold. However, the relationship each concept has with the act of remembering differs in method and aspects. The concepts of history and memory both deal with the past, but first, they find their place in the semantics of the present, because it is only in the present that the past can be rendered as narratable. The narrated past must have a certain distance from the present to convince all that it is past and thus behind us. According to Henri Bergson, “If there be memory, that is, the survival of past images, these images must constantly mingle with our perception of the present and may even take its place.” (1991, pp. 65-66). As a result of the accumulated piling up of the past, the image of the past is also changed, deformed, and re-presented. History plays the role of image-changer of the past, “both the whole of the facts making the historical universe—*res gestae*, the literality of the events—and a discipline (history writing) that is a critical discourse on the past” (Traverso, 2017, p. 56). One characteristic that differentiates history from other disciplines is its productivity; it updates a projection of the past each time with the discourse it produces and the images to which it refers. However, this constant adaptation also raises questions about how the past is represented. The past is what is no longer ‘here,’ but history makes sense

of it 'here' and with the tools of the present. Specific techniques are required to create something in our reality as an objective existence.

According to French philosopher Michel Foucault's genealogical perspective, the claim that history is an objective science that tells the truth is incorrect. Since history is a form of knowledge in which power intervenes, the process of writing history is laden with patterns of power (Foucault, 2010). History, including the technique of power, aims to "control and domesticate the past in the form of knowing" (Poster, 1982, p. 119). Undermining the claim of objectivity of knowledge, Foucault argues that it is produced precisely by power in a historical context. The practice we call historiography, then, will incorporate the signs of given power relations, bringing the past together around a complete schema that is compatible with the framework of the official narrative, producing "reconstruction, contextualization, and interpretation of what has happened," and "a textual recreation of the past" (Traverso, 2017, p. 56). The history written by those who dominate knowledge production may change its form and discourse in another historical period within a different context and institutional structure. What is interesting, however, is that although there are numerous examples where we can observe this shift, the claim of the historical narrative to be universal and objective remains unbroken.

The "interaction between memory and history" stems from the fact that "the primary function of history" is to respond to the public demand for knowledge; the development of this demand "is nourished by memory" (Traverso, 2017, p. 56). The historical institution that responds to the request is "based on a given regime of historicity," which is "the experience and perception of the past that shapes a society at a given moment" (Traverso, 2017, p. 57). Therefore, since the relationship established with the past will also change with changing regimes of historicity, the answers will also change to the questions of whether the past has a "violent" or "heroic" memory, or how these two can co-exist, and how history can suppress these memories together or individually. Foucault's genealogical perspective brings together "the discursive field with the field of non-discursive power relations" and

tends to explain the changes in the discursive field with non-discursive power (Keskin, 2011, p. 16). Historical discourse, one of the places where the productivity of history is tested, is the site of the concentration of power.

The knowledge-power relations behind historical discourse underline the fact that it is a nomological power. Specific regimes of knowledge that keep societies under control, like *nomos* in its power to govern humans, need a historical discourse and knowledge of the past. Examining the relationship established with the past within a certain period will also reveal how the past is controlled and how discourses function. Foucault approaches historiography as the practice of organizing the available data, and he points out that history –instead of longer time units, ‘periods’ or ‘centuries’ – “tends towards phenomena of rupture, of discontinuity” (2010, p. 4). At this point, Foucault focuses on the system of relations behind history and its materials and invites us to consider the field of history through discontinuity as a new temporality. Discontinuity, “both the given and the unthinkable,” displaces the traditional holistic approaches and causalist understanding of history in looking at the past; it develops approaches that see “dispersed events, decisions, accidents, initiatives, discoveries” as the “raw material” of history. (Foucault, 2010, p. 8). The Western project of creating a universal history and narrating the accumulation of the past in an inclusive way is also transforming what ‘meaning in itself’ is into meaning for everyone (Castoriadis, 2013, p. 288). It does so precisely by employing the tactic of getting together the raw materials of history on a temporal ground. Based on this understanding, the change, fragmentation, and fragmentability in the material of history enable the historian to distinguish the immunity offered by his epistemological neutrality. It undermines the claim of universalization from the very beginning and creates several interruptions in history. This gaze distances us from grand historical narratives and heroism and directs us to look at the local, at the exceptional, at the outside of the frame. If an analysis can be made of history, it can only be done in the light of the knowledge obtained from there.

In the period in which Foucault calls his understanding of history “archaeology,” he says that history moves forward with ruptures. He looks at these ruptures when

dealing with historical periods through an archaeological excavation. The use of the archaeological method also enables him to make a discourse analysis through the normalization of discourse. The normalization constructed in expressions creates a landscape of power that we encounter in many fields and disciplines. With this method, Foucault focuses on narrative strategies that change over historical periods and what is left out of time. However, unlike genealogy, archaeology now includes a document-oriented study:

History now organizes the document, divides it up, distributes it, orders it, arranges it in levels, establishes series, distinguishes between what is relevant and what is not, discovers elements, defines unities, describes relations. The document, then, is no longer for history an inert material through which it tries to reconstitute what men have done or said, the events of which only the trace remains; history is now trying to define within the documentary material itself unities, totalities, series, relations. (Foucault, 2010, p. 7)

Documents considered to be historical material tend to reconstruct the past by drawing their power from a traditional understanding of history: “undertook to ‘memorise’ the monuments of the past, transform them into documents, and lend speech to those traces which, in themselves, are often not verbal, or which say in silence something other than what they actually say, (...) history is that which transforms documents into monuments.” (Foucault, 2010, p. 7). In this sense, archaeology replaces the discipline of history. This alternative approach to history points to the fact that history can contain different truths simultaneously. This method can analyze the packet of history and build meaningful commonalities among partial phenomena that feed one another to counter politics and social energy. This is one of the important points where Foucault breaks with the traditional historical understanding that there is no single, universal reality. There are different realities in different periods, hence realities that manifest as ways of knowing, periodic epistemes.

Another critical issue Foucault emphasizes is how discourse is determined and the role of knowledge regimes in this process. In retrospect, it should also be recognized that the discursive regimes, each made up of certain practices, closely influence the study of memory. Regimes of knowledge that create new discursive unities by linking statements or institutions that have affinities with each other reconstruct the subject each time. To illustrate, if we consider the discipline of law, the codes, legal principles, and court decisions of a judicial system create a unity of legal discourse in a given society. As in a close example, although Turkey is cohabited by multiple ethnic groups, the crime of *denigrating the Turkish nation* in Turkey's penal code leads to a unity of discourse that ignores the principle of equality, while simultaneously fostering hostility towards other ethnic groups in Turkey, and creating an element of pressure on the subject, also merging with nationalist historical discourse. The main goal of discursive unities is to establish encompassing relations with the past and thereby consolidate their non-discursive power, so as to make us think that this discourse is not about a particular moment in history. It is precisely in such instances that resistance against power lies in listening to the voices of those singularities that the discourse suppresses or ignores. Different discourses and the voices of the other that cannot make their way into unified discourses enable a hybrid appearance of this discursive universe, posing a threat to those in power. While doing genealogy, Foucault examines the system of exclusion discourse orders and gives more importance to one of its parts, the will to truth, than to other discourses of exclusion. That is because this "great system of exclusion governing discourse" is much more established and accepted than others, such as "prohibited words" and "the division of madness." (Foucault, 2010, p. 219). The dominant motivation in the study of the past is the creation and presentation of a single truth. The search for a single truth and the hierarchies that the verifiability of it will establish between discourses continues to permeate historical narratives. However, the study of memory has to focus on how the truth of the past is remembered rather than what it is.

1.1.2. On the Wings of the Angel of History

Where Foucault dismantles historical discourse and crystallizes its power, a question of how we connect past and present catastrophes is raised, taking us to another address in the philosophy of history. In his much-studied ninth fragment, the cultural historian and critic Walter Benjamin reaches back to the painting *Angelus Novus*, his life's companion, and draws parallels between the angelic figure in the artwork and the metaphor of the angel of history, reflecting on the angel's relation to the past (2012, p. 42), presenting "an icon of catastrophic modernity" (Boym, 2021, p. 60):

A Klee painting named 'Angelus Novus' shows an angel looking as though he is about to move away from something he is fixedly contemplating. His eyes are staring, his mouth is open, his wings are spread. This is how one pictures the angel of history. His face is turned toward the past. Where we perceive a chain of events, he sees one single catastrophe which keeps piling wreckage and hurls it in front of his feet. The angel would like to stay, awaken the dead, and make whole what has been smashed. But a storm is blowing in from Paradise; it has got caught in his wings with such a violence that the angel can no longer close them. The storm irresistibly propels him into the future to which his back is turned, while the pile of debris before him grows skyward. This storm is what we call progress. (Benjamin, 2007, p. 257).

As Klee's artwork indicates that the past can only be remembered with the images of ruins left behind, it also opens the door to the representation of a "man who has lost his connection with his past and is no longer able to find himself in history" (Agamben, 1999, 67). The past, which we see as the sum of events, is a single catastrophe for the angel of history. Benjamin's passage contains a fundamental critique of "progress," defining it as "a storm" (2007, pp. 257-258). The angel of history "cannot see forward" and "looks backward" "in order to grasp its surroundings." This is because "time does not exist as a homogeneous, spontaneously progressing thing." In this sense, for instance, perceiving an

experience of mass violence in history as an “extraordinary situation” would make it unavoidable (Gandler, 2007). Just as the storm is intrinsic to progress, so is catastrophe the end result of history, of enlightenment thinking.

Looking at the past and searching for its present and future is a political necessity. “To seize hold of a memory” means to historicize the past, not by treating it as it was experienced, but as it shines in moments of danger (Benjamin, 2007, p. 255). In other words, memory is the image of the past in which we can find ourselves at the very moment of danger; by inviting that image into the present, it plays with the continuity of history and can momentarily place us on the threshold between the past and the present. The understanding of history that Benjamin criticizes lays out successive events like a chain in a cause-and-effect relationship. Does this linear direction, one-dimensional history structure not allow rulers to establish hegemony over it? Therefore, this progressivist understanding, embedded even in our acts of thinking, remembering, and expressing, offers a ground for domination. Accepting that history is based on causes and effects leads us to approach historical phenomena from a positivist perspective, which is related to the fact that history has an ideological role of hiding “the tropes of power behind a naive epistemology” (Trouillot, 1995, p. 6). It is precisely from this perspective that Benjamin cautions against historiography that sympathizes with the victors by pointing to the possibility of the past being the tool of the rulers. The understanding of history he proposes is a modeling of counter-history: “to brush history against the grain” (Benjamin, 2007, p. 257). According to Löwy, “to write history *à contre-sens*” (in the opposite direction) through this understanding is to “refuse any ‘affective identification’ with the official heroes” (2005, p. 56). Therefore, there is a need for a new move that can go beyond the frameworks of official history, where the connection of the oppressed and the ignored with the past will be different from that of the victors, and various practices of remembrance can enable this.

The gaze of the angel of history offers a method of remembering that can see the past and past catastrophes in their entirety. However, instead of making a holistic narrative out of them, it breaks them down into fragments but still deals with them

about one another. In my opinion, this is what Benjamin points to in his analysis of Marcel Proust when he thinks of memories settling in smells:

[T]he materials of memory no longer appear singly, as images, but tell us about a whole, amorphously and formlessly, indefinitely and weightily, in the same way as the weight of his net tells a fisherman about his catch. (Benjamin, 2007, 214).

The past, where the gaze of the angel of history lingers, helps him to see the present amidst the ruins. It should be noted that the insistence on narrating the past from the perspective of the oppressed, and in this respect, the insistence on narrating what happened as it happened, corresponds to the dominant mode of history production. This search raises another question that must be recognized in studies on the past: How can violence be told and remembered without reproducing violence? “There is no document of civilization which is not at the same time a document of barbarism,” and “barbarism taints also the manner in which it was transmitted from one owner to another” (Benjamin, 2007, p. 256).

1.2. MEMORY

1.2.1. Others’ Past, Transforming Memories

Susan Sontag, who opposed the American attack on Vietnam, felt the need to remind us of history’s claim to “objectivity and integrity” after the encounters she had during her two-week visit to Hanoi, the capital of Vietnam. The Vietnamese understanding of history has been shaped by what they say and what we want to hear from them. In Vietnam, historiography was about developing common attitudes, connecting past-present-future, and using historical references and analogies (Sontag, 2021, pp. 261-262). This approach also rejects linear historiography and creates a collective framework around the similarities that can be drawn with other nations’ colonial practices or acts of violence, all of which provided some clues to the dynamics of Vietnam’s politics of remembrance. But what patterns enabled the Vietnamese to engage with the past in this way? Rather than simply accepting the Vietnamese people’s tendency to find connections

between the past and the present, between their geographies and others' geographies, a memory study focuses on how this tendency emerged, in which periods it became collective, and the moments and axes that fall outside this tendency, where no similarity can be established. It tends to communicate with those outside the whole, with otherness, with those attacked by the universal-holistic claim, that is, with discontinuities.

Bringing other pasts to light, causing cracks in historiography, rejecting the linear method that dominates the discipline of history, revealing the “flashes up at the instant” (Benjamin, 2007, p. 255), moments of the past offer new patterns in the understanding of history. Therefore, the way to overcome the historical knowledge that dominant historiography puts in front of us as a package is to reject it by searching for the present in the past, to allow past images to make interruptions in the present, to turn remembering into a “state of emergency” (Benjamin, 2007, p. 257), to allow a past full of ruins to overturn present continuities; it offers us a new working method.

The potential to transform the present and create disruptions in holistic discourse and understanding is one factor driving the cultural and political focus of memorialization studies. Historian Pierre Nora, who conceptualizes “realms of memory” (*les lieux de mémoire*) treats memory as a dynamic field and adds that this field is open to “the dialectic of remembering and forgetting” (2022, p. 21). In other words, memory does not only remind but also involves forgetting and causing to forget. In moments of remembering, some are made to forget, which can even be a policy. While memory relates to the present, history is treated as “the imagining of the past” (Nora, 2022, p. 21). While history is a discipline in which the past and what is no longer possible produce symbols with nationalist-statist motivations, memory is more concerned with those who cannot be heroes, with amorphous memories, are closer to building commonalities and creating fusions between groups. “Memory is a frame rather than a content” (Nora, 2022, p. 10); hence, it needs strategies and modes of use.

Benjamin's angel of history could overlap fragments of the present and the past and construct connections between these two modes of time. These merging sequences will also problematize the potential of the contemporary context to transform the relationship with the past (Neyzi, 2014, p. 1), as is often emphasized in the increasing number of remembering studies in recent years. In oral history studies, it is noticed that past events and memories can change over time and that there are even significant distances between the past event and what is remembered. It can be explained by the fact that the act of remembering, which has a reconstructive aspect, designs a new memory each time and is interwoven with contemporary contexts. Another methodologically emphasized point in oral history studies is that in moments when truth and fiction are intertwined in the recollections, and it is not possible to determine which of these is fiction, it may be more functional to focus on how memories and the perception of the past are transformed, rather than looking for "the way it really was" (Benjamin, 2007, p. 255). Hence, Dori Laub's objection to invalidating a witness statement that contradicts historical information (Neyzi, 2014, p. 55). The following is the testimony of a former female prisoner of Auschwitz whose testimony was consulted in the Fortunoff Video Archive for Holocaust Testimonies at Yale University: "We saw four chimneys going up in flames, exploding. The flames shot into the sky, people were running. It was unbelievable." (Laub, 1992, p. 59).

As a member of the Sonderkommando, she, like other members of the group – also known as the Canadian commando – was among those who removed the bodies from the gas chambers and carried them to the disposal site. Some of these prisoners led the only uprising in Auschwitz history, known as the Sonderkommando Uprising. On October 7, 1944, female prisoners working in the munitions factory – Roza Robota, Regina Safirsztain, Ella Gartner, Estusia Wajcblum – had accumulated small amounts of explosive powder over a long period and, during the resistance, rebels blew up the facility with this powder. Her witness testimony (Guterman and Shalev, 2007, pp. 202-203) of this moment of the uprising, in which prisoners who tried to escape by cutting the barbed wire were killed, and hundreds of prisoners were massacred, four female prisoners working in the munitions

factory were tortured but did not give the names of those resisting and were executed while shouting the slogan “Be Strong and Courageous” and the crematorium was destroyed, was questioned by historians months later at a conference. Laub describes the moment of the explosion, which caused a leap in the witness’s account, as follows: “A dazzling, brilliant moment from the past swept through the frozen stillness of the muted, grave-like landscape with dashing meteoric speed, exploding it into a shower of sights and sounds.” (Laub, 1992, p. 59).

It is a moment of the incomplete uprising summoned in the witness’ mind. For the prisoners of Auschwitz, that uprising was also a unique signal of liberation, breaking the silence for a moment. The historians at the conference, on the other hand, argued that only one chimney was blown up in the uprising, not four, and that the testimony of this witness should be disregarded because of her misremembering. They did not think it appropriate to attach any particular significance to the attempted uprising, which historically did not lead to any change in the course of the genocidal plan. Laub, one of the psychoanalysts who interviewed the female witness, disagreed:

The woman was testifying, not to the number of the chimneys blown up, but to something else, more radical, more crucial: the reality of an unimaginable occurrence. One chimney blown up in Auschwitz was as incredible as four. The number mattered less than the fact of the occurrence. The event itself was almost inconceivable. The woman testified to an event that broke the all compelling frame of Auschwitz, where Jewish armed revolts just did not happen, and had no place. She testified to the breakage of a framework. That was historical truth. (Laub, 1992, p. 60).

Historians rejected the idea that “she was testifying not simply to empirical historical facts, but to the very secret of survival and of resistance to extermination” (Laub, 1992, 62). Laub argues that these silences of witnesses and the moments when they cannot speak should be considered as much a part of their testimony as

their oral testimonies and criticizes historians for downplaying these silences. Throughout history, the walls of Auschwitz, which the victims and victimizers could not tear down, could be torn down for a moment precisely in the memory of the witness, having witnessed that possibility even if it did not materialize. Laub pointed to the dialectical relationship between the known and the unknown, between what the witness or we know and what we cannot know, as witness accounts that are different from what objectively happened make us think about the reasons for that difference. For the positivist discipline of history, a witness statement such as the one in the example is unreal. In contrast, memory is open to considering the differences and different sensations in these narratives as its material. In memory studies, there is a promise to go beyond the kind of historical sources accepted by the positivist understanding of history and find other sources, others' pasts, to discover the autonomy of narratives. In this sense, memory develops new forms and languages to relate to the past in that it can offer a new moment of encounter with the past, colliding images of the future and the past and clarifying how historical narratives come into contact with society. The diversity in the repertoire of memory enables the abandonment of chronological history and leads to deviations and multifaceted mobilizations in certain historicities. Moreover, the narratives of the past are completed anew in each act of remembering. Memory work is an endeavor that can never be completed and is understood through the constant realization of pasts embedded in the present tense. However, Laub's example should also be considered more specifically in terms of post-Holocaust politics of remembrance. While relations with the past are always anchored in a contemporary context, what kind of witnessing, remembering, and memorializing is possible in the aftermath of profound destruction when the context is severely damaged? To answer this question, it is necessary to identify the epistemological approach to which the tools for studying the past adhere. While questions such as how the Holocaust could have happened and how it can be understood, how the regime of denial reinforced itself, and whether the inadequacies of testimony can be compensated for remain unanswered even today, Laub has made a profound contribution that makes us realize that this is a crisis in

the first place. Indeed, Laub's critique of the positivist historians' method of testimony becomes more understandable in the context of the epistemological crisis caused by the Holocaust. The necessity to remember this epistemological crisis is the warning point that the Holocaust experience should be seen as a sociological "laboratory" and that looking at it in "non-laboratory" conditions is impossible. (Bauman, 1997, p. 30).

1.2.2. Remembering by Forgetting

The fundamental misconception in discussions of memory is that remembering is generically treated as the opposite of forgetting. Whereas the various acts of remembering, at the limits where they produce references to the past and remind us of it, involve forgetting about it. The formation and presentation of memories suppress other memories or exclude them from this remembering. Therefore, when an activity of remembering is organized, it is inevitable that forgetting also comes into play. Georges Didi-Huberman, a counter-art historian, points out that the memories of Auschwitz have been forgotten in post-Holocaust practices of remembrance (2018, pp. 23-26), a warning that is also concerned with observing everyday objects, the world around us, familiarities precisely through specific lenses, realizing their witnesses, and subjecting the positions they take part into critical scrutiny. Remembering the Holocaust, the most systematic catastrophe of the 20th century, will lead to the erosion of memory, the violation of the right to the truth during reproduction, the prominence of images that will suppress the lived experience of the catastrophe, and the commodification of victims' stories as an industrial operation. It is essential not to absolutize a single model of remembering, a single narrative of the past, but to recognize that each memory intersects with other pasts or possibilities. Otherwise, the memory boom manipulates what memory and its functions are. For memories that intersect with each other, the universe of the imaginary grows in these clusters of intersections, Traverso's (2020, p. 94); the example of how the memory of Auschwitz became the common affective reference of the movements opposing the Algerian war, even when memories of genocide were not yet of an official character, should be reconsidered.

Maurice Halbwachs, who contributed to the development of memory studies, states that memory is a product of “collectivity,” that “individuals remember with social frames,” that “place themselves in the group’s perspective,” that “group memories are also realized in individual memories,” and that “remembering often needs others” (2022, pp. 17-19). Although Halbwachs does not reject individual recollections, he always underlines their social character. In fact, as a follower of Durkheim’s sociology, Halbwachs is quite inclined to analyze the past regarding the social division of labor. According to Halbwachs (2019, p. 30), even if our memories are individual, they are with others; they are reminded to us by others. What he means here should not be understood as others giving us reminders but as the construction of oneself through the other. The others in his memory, and the unifying nature of remembering make him think that he is not alone when walking alone in London (Halbwachs, 2019, p. 30). Based on the London experience, he explains that publicized traces or contacts can create shared recollections; for this, the remembering subjects do not even need to know each other. The act of remembering, as he states, has qualities that unite, bring together, and collectivize. Halbwachs also assigns images and testimonies the role of capturing a group dynamic, developing shared memories, and constructing a common past. What Halbwachs does not emphasize, however, are singularities, interactions among them, various states of agency, and states of in-betweenness where the distinction between correct and incorrect is blurred. Halbwachs’ relation to memory is that only a remembrance built on social consequences will maintain the unresolved tension between the individual and the social (Olick, 2020, pp. 29-30). Jan Assmann focuses on the course of the dialectic between the individual and the collective: The part depends on the whole and derives its identity from it, but the whole only makes sense through the unity of the parts (Assmann, 2015, p. 140). Another problem with Halbwachs’ approach to memory is that in today’s temporality and media culture, the collectivity he presents is rather fixed and rigid (Huyssen, 2020, p. 324). At a time when even small groups cannot operate together, how will the boundaries, size, and form of collective remembering be defined?

Benjamin uses the expression “the weaving of his memory, the Penelope work of recollection” (Benjamin, 2007, p. 202) when describing the weaving of memory as a web in Marcel Proust’s novel *À la recherche du temps perdu*. Accordingly, Penelope, the wife of Odysseus in ancient Greek mythology, tells her suitors that she will not marry until she completes the tulle she is weaving during Odysseus’ absence, but, to buy time until her husband returns, she weaves the tulle during the day and dismantles it at night:

[F]or the remembering author is not what he experienced, but the weaving of his memory, the Penelope work of recollection. Or should one call it, rather, a Penelope work of forgetting? Is not the involuntary recollection, Proust’s *memoire involontaire*, much closer to forgetting than what is usually called memory? And is not this work of spontaneous recollection, in which remembrance is the woof and forgetting the warf, a counterpart to Penelope’s work rather than its likeness? For here, the day unravels what the night was woven (Benjamin, 2007, p. 202).

In my view, the act of sewing and removing the Penelope veil is, on the one hand, suggestive of the lines of tension between remembering and forgetting and, on the other hand, a metaphor for the fact that remembering comes involuntarily and suddenly, that is not part of a democratic program, that does not have a specific political goal, is more prone to forgetting. For this very reason, not every act of remembering can be attributed great significance; some of them will themselves invest in forgetting. On the other hand, the sovereigns’ invitations to remember are intended to increase the effectiveness of their power. From Benjamin’s perspective, remembrance as a counter-political and counter-cultural move is worth embracing. Therefore, the primary goal is to determine the politics of remembrance. On the other hand, in Benjamin’s quote, the fact that the sewing of the tulle, which is analogized with remembering, is used as an excuse for rejected marriage proposals constitutes a powerful metaphor for the turn to fetish objects as a substitute for the unattainable, which may also be a reference to the shift of axis in memory studies. Is the aim really to remember, to confront, to promote democratic values, or to

satisfy, to convince the public of an idea? This question can serve as a litmus test when looking at memory work.

1.2.3. Shared Memories and Remembrances

Michel Foucault's conceptualization of counter-memory as "a transformation of history into a totally different form of time," "metaphysical and anthropological model" (Foucault, 1980 p. 160) of memory emphasizes the plurality and layered structure of memory through the stories of the subaltern that are articulated. While Foucault's reading of counter-memory examines history as a knowledge of the truth, it also positions counter-memory as a site of resistance. Against the manipulation of memory by hegemonic discourses, it is necessary to think of counter-memory as a range of possibilities. One of the crucial determinations of memory is that collective memory provides a commonality of space and time and an identity (Assmann, 2015, p. 43). Shared memories of the past ensure the survival of collective identities and determine the future of this collectivity (Smith, 1999, p. 10). Being together as a group requires determining who we are, how we relate to each other, what we are to each other (Castoriadis, 2013, p. 258), our positions in moments of agency, where we are positioned in power relations - so that a common frame of remembrance can emerge. Collective memory identifies the group's belongings with images and enables it to define itself with common references. The character of a community is determined by the similarities within it and the differences between it and other communities. Similarities create a common space as well as delineate the boundaries of differences. The visualization of the past makes a memory that is stronger and more performative than pure-memory while designing forms that oscillate "between fiction and delusion" (Ricoeur, 2020, p. 71). The imagination of memory makes designs for the remembering subject, setting up a fascinating stage with the presence of the present (Ricoeur, 2020, pp. 72-73). These images can be images of collective mourning, violence, and conflict; they can also be images that point to togetherness, hope, and solidarity.

The perceptions, memories, beliefs, and values of individuals and communities, their long-term patterning produces a structure of relations and processes that is independent of those beliefs and perceptions, one which can provide a framework for the socialization of successive generations of ethnic and national members and for the regulation of their interests through myths of ethnic descent and symbols of territory and community (Smith, 1999, p. 14).

Nora likens the concept of memory to a “Möbius strip” (2022, p. 38) as it contains “hybridity” and “drifts.” This means that to remember is not to pull something out of history, but to re-experience it each time, to realize that it does not have a fixed form. One of the points that distinguish memory from history is ‘the will to remember’ (Nora, 2022, p. 38). The maturation of this will encourage the memories of those who have been subjected to state violence, those who have been ignored, the victims, and their demands to be remembered. On the other hand, memory is, from the very beginning, “boundless, collective, plural and individualized” (Nora, 2022, p. 22). For Nora, the fact that “memory is frame rather than content” (2022, p. 10) explains the politics of remembrance that dominates political culture today. Moreover, the creation of sites of memory, with the halo it has given to “space as the root of the sense of continuity” (2022, p. 19), has enabled the struggle to confront the past to acquire a new component: discovering sites of memory as part of the struggle, holding on to them, keeping various memories together in those sites and building connections with the present. Just like the intertwined urban-memory-confrontation struggle of the Armenian youth who opposed the demolition of the former Armenian orphanage Kamp Armen in Tuzla district of Istanbul on May 1, 2015, which lasted for days around the location and later turned into a strong voice in various centers of Istanbul. However, as will be seen, those who opposed the demolition of Kamp Armen have created a will to reveal the memory of the orphanage so that their action can be transformed into a remembrance, and this will become a natural symbol of the effort to confront the past.

1.2.4. The Memory of Forking Paths

History claims to contain as a single mold the narratives of societies' pasts that cannot be brought together under the same umbrella; memory, on the other hand, recognizes that it is impossible to put the past in such an all-encompassing package. Memories open up like a fan, expand and discover new layers as they expand:

[T]o open the fan of memory never comes to the end of its segments; no image satisfies him, for he has seen that it can be unfolded, and only in its folds does the truth reside; that image, that taste, that touch for whose sake all this has been unfurled and dissected (Benjamin, 1986, p. 6).

While the memories of groups can have an expanding horizon of remembrance by establishing dialogues with each other, history will be stuck between temporal slices. But even if it remains in such a compression, it continues to be the mortar of nationalist ideologies and the progressive understanding of history. Political scientist Benedict Anderson, reflecting on how nationalist ideology can sustain itself, puts into circulation the concept of "imagined communities": "The nation is an imagined political community-and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign" (2006, p. 6).

One pillar of this design is to construct common pasts as a constitutive element – by reminding or forgetting: "The essence of a nation is that all individuals have many things in common, and also that they have forgotten many things" (Renan, 2018, p. 251). As a product of design, the nation, with its history, narratives, and symbols, presents a complete project of identity creation. Halbwachs, while demarcating the boundaries between memory and history, points out that history is whole and unique, whereas memories can be very diverse (2019, p. 102). At this point, the uniqueness of history corresponds to the claim of universality, in fact, the claim of truth. For this reason, history education does not consider that the same historical periods may be prepared with opposite axes in another national curriculum. Collective memories, on the other hand, both establish the bonds of place and time (Halbwachs, 2019, p. 103) and are nourished by the unity of plurals,

pointing out that memories can be diverse. In concluding this section, it should be noted that the most fundamental feature that distinguishes memory from history is that it does not have a limiting framework, on the contrary, it always has the potential to expand and disperse.

In his story, *The Garden of Forking Paths* (1941), Jorge Borges opens the door to different universes of possibility and leads the reader along forking paths. This drift will take separate paths, meetings, intersections, and divergences on the grounds where different time sequences are folded. The expression ‘to various future times, but not to all’ in the story is “the image of bifurcating in time, not in space” (Borges, 1995, p. 43). The one-dimensional time layer familiar in fictional texts is abandoned this time because the protagonist’s typical choice of giving up one option while choosing another evolves to different options beginning to appear together simultaneously. Multiplying and bifurcating times and possibilities emerge, and opposing entities in different time universes are together this time. What was heroic in another time universe has now become pathetic. It is difficult to keep track of which one is real; throughout the story, we keep coming across labyrinths, paths, illegal crossings, dissimilarities, and formlessness. Here, memory is the garden itself, with its forked paths. For example, there is a single date of May 8, 1945, in all the agendas, but on that date, the memories of the people differ from each other, defined as “paradox situations” (Diner, 2011, p. 37) where “extraordinarily complex patterns of recollection and memory emerge” (Diner, 2011, p. 37). The liberation of the surrender of Nazi troops in France and the celebration of this liberation in French colonized Algeria coincide with the massacre of tens of thousands of Algerians after the Algerian flag was unfurled for the first time. Moreover, these two events are closely linked: In France, the liberation from the genocidal Nazi troops was celebrated, while in Algeria, those who were instrumental in this liberation were able to inflict genocide on another people and the Setif Massacre took place; the aftermath of this massacre triggered the Algerian independence movement. In this case, I think the difficult question is how it is possible to remember the Setif Massacre within plural memories. While searching

for an answer to this question, the indifference of two people who are indifferent to each other in the face of the narration of the past in volume 3 of Proust's *In Search of Lost Time* titled *The Guermantes Way* is thought-provoking in the sense that even if they live in the same social world, share similar contexts, and speak a common language, they cannot have a common vocabulary for the 'exchange of social memories' (as cited in Connerton, 2019, p. 12).

Another important role of memory studies is that they can contribute to both judicial activities and social transformation by integrating with the demand for justice. In societies experiencing conflict transformation, it will be observed that justice mechanisms are in an intense relationship with the demand for memory and memorialization tools. Especially in the restoration of social peace, memory, "as a concept that represents the small history of those who cannot lay claim to the big history" (Sancar, 2021, p. 65), will strengthen democratization efforts in fragmented societies, repair our relations with the grounds of confrontation, and invite the possibility of intergenerational justice, which includes being responsible to future generations. The bringing together of the struggle for memory with justice will bring various tools into use: publicized archives, shared testimonies, civil society's involvement, legal contributions by all interested parties through the institution of *amicus curiae* (friend of the court) in judicial proceedings demanding reckoning with the past. While all these opportunities will lead to the development of a climate of memory in the field of law, since they will also lead to the simplicity of reducing the problem to the law and the judiciary, common grounds of cooperation with social and political institutions must be created. The diversity of methods, tools, and possibilities in the field of memory can only be understood through the metaphor of "forking paths."

1.3. MEMORIALIZATION

1.3.1. Museum as a Stage for History

Another concept that I would like to dwell on very briefly in this study is memorialization. Uncovering past experiences of agency, giving voice to witnesses, and reflecting on difficult pasts will bring about political responsibilities for citizens and lead to new insights in civic ethics. The motivation of members of society to remember their pasts and create shared histories can lead to the discovery of a new political climate and civic attitudes, enabling some lessons to be learned from the past and made transferable across generations. On the other hand, remembrance practices include an invitation to political responsibility that extends from the past to the present. Moreover, the fact that this invitation creates a ground for everyone to take responsibility for their own actions provides a potential concrete outcome of the effort to remember. Since the 1980s, there has been a quantitative increase in the number of studies focusing on the past, emphasizing the ruptures rather than the heroism of the past, which we call the “memory boom” or “memory conjuncture” (Sancar, 2021, p. 62). With the dissolution of the periods of silence that began immediately after major disasters, military dictatorships, and those caused by coercive governments, the means of remembering have diversified extensively, strengthening memory studies. According to Mithat Sancar, this interest in memory is not because of fantasies of the future or the transition to a new century, but because of accumulated painful experiences (2021, p. 63).

It is possible to consider the period of intensified memorialization as a global moment of remembrance for the victims of the Holocaust. Historically, this period coincides with both the rise of the memory of the Holocaust in the public sphere (Traverso, 2018, p. 94) and a generation of defeat in which Marxism lost ground and anti-imperialist mobilizations weakened (Traverso, 2018, p. 95). Especially since the 1990s, social researchers have turned to the past and social memory, some other groups through artistic production, and others through spatial practice. Objects of remembrance, memory-art works, archives, as well as interdisciplinary

and trans-local scales supported studies on the past. In fact, the addresses where the counter-movements of this period emerged and turned into a demand for memory were also the breeding grounds for knowledge of the past. Throughout the 19th century, “popular nationalist enthusiasm” (Anderson, 2006, p. 114) for the “nation-building policies of the new states” was manufactured by educational, historical, and cultural institutions. It was in these institutions that the interest in remembrance that crystallized in the 1990s first made its presence felt. Just as national historical narratives have contributed to the continuity of nation-state nationalism and created a legacy of shared memories, many memory studies have tended to establish permanent and lasting bonds through rhetoric. It is precisely these bonds that establish each of these groups as “a soul, a spiritual principle” (Renan, 2018, p. 261). This feeling is nourished by both “the possession in common of a rich legacy of memories” and “present consent, the desire to live together, the will to perpetuate the value of the heritage that one has received in an undivided form” (Renan, 2018, p. 261).

Using abstraction to understand the dynamics of remembering in groups, Renan likens it to “an everyday plebiscite” (2018, p. 262). To exist as a group is constantly searching for new commonalities, similar meanings, emotional ties, heroic narratives, and nostalgic associations. In a way, memorialization practices accompany these searches and play a role in constructing new meanings and bonds. Some memory works, on the other hand, disrupt society’s comfortable and static relationship with the past, unleash a counter-energy, contribute to the existing political volatility, and create internally divided and conflicted subjects where they disrupt. It is precisely the tense character of memorialization that can turn into an insistence on creating brand-new belongings and symbols. Because remembering cannot have a linear route, it can use simple and ordinary memories and narratives that extend into the every day, that spread from the every day to the surroundings. What is memorialized and how it is memorialized, the places or times that memory studies focus on, and the channels through which the efforts to make the untellable tellable are fed: They not only contribute to the comprehensibility of a historical period but also make the present familiar by bringing the every day into a kind of

laboratory environment by offering cultural, political and social critiques of that period interval.

Museums, as cultural institutions where groups construct their own meanings, assume the role of ideological and cultural catalysts in the process of post-modern historiography by constructing a spatial aura different from other institutions. Moreover, museums are such multi-elemental structures that their ceremonial architecture is completed with their ideological functions (Duncan, and Wallach, 2022). It is possible to evaluate the codes of action presented to the audience in museums as ritual transmission, which is frequently used in spatial memorialization practices. Bourdieu and Darbel point out that even small details in museums reinforce oppositions such as exclusion and belonging, and that the inviolability of objects in museums, together with the divine silence in the spaces, sanctify the museum experience, and that even the discomfort of furniture in museums references asceticism (2022, p. 140). This arrangement also establishes the inviolability of the past that museums process. However, no museum is so innocent. Adorno's reminder at this point is quite justified:

When some well-intentioned person advised Mahler to darken the hall during the concert for the sake of the mood, the composer rightly replied that a performance at which one didn't forget about the surroundings was worthless. (Adorno, 1997, p. 173).

This is because museums design a whole new experience, often forgetting or manipulating the pasts, even ignoring the time we are in, they make us believe in. Historian Corry Guttstadt notes that in the Terror Háza Múzeum in Budapest, antisemitic perpetrators are presented as victims, murders committed by fascist groups of Hungarian origin are bracketed as anti-Soviet, the agency is ignored, and perpetrators and victims are confused (Guttstadt, 2015). Hungarian Jews objected to this officialized policy of remembrance and revision of history and chose not to participate in yearly commemorations. On the other hand, the official commemorations also ignored the responsibility of the Hungarian authorities in the genocide process. French historian Annette Wieviorka is among those who objected

to the museumization of the Auschwitz Camp in Poland. Some of the former inmates continue to live in the campsites that were turned into museums and give a “human” touch to the places they inhabited. In other words, a spatial arrangement that softens the visit experience for camp visitors has been experienced by those who continue to live in those camps. Auschwitz was therefore both the target and the stage for state intervention (Wieviorka, 2006, p. 194).

1.3.2. Memory-ization as Belongingness

Jean Amery problematizes the human need for home, suggesting that the politics of memory, remembrance, national histories, and even historiography can be a substitute for home. The promise of “next year in Jerusalem” made by the participants of the Passover rituals is more than a promise, and this rhetoric, which is embedded in the traditional discourse, invites all the stateless to a homeland by assuming the function of establishing a common bond with Jerusalem:

‘Next year in Jerusalem,’ the Jews have promised themselves for generations during their Passover ritual, but it wasn’t at all a matter of really getting to the Holy Land; rather it sufficed to pronounce the formula together and to know that one was united in the magic domain of the tribal God Yahweh. (Amery, 1998, p. 44)

The memories of nations draw the borders of the homeland, and at this point, it should be considered that the storytelling that lies at the etymological root of the word history is about building rather than telling. According to Trouillot, the duality in the word history points to the fact that “people are involved in history as both agents and storytellers,” expressing both “what is” and “what is said to be” (Trouillot, 2015, p. 30). As the meaning and context of the past is constructed in the present, how is it possible today to deal with the past and no longer see it as an obstacle? For a long time, various branches of the social sciences have tried to answer this question by developing methods of dealing with difficult pasts. Where it has failed, perhaps, is that it has not been able to prevent state violence from changing its form just when it had set out with such a goal in mind. Remembering

and focusing on what and how we remember is a much more comprehensive issue than engaging with the past and its objective information and data. Amery's treatment of remembering in terms of human statelessness (1998, pp. 57-58) suggests another layer: To what extent is it possible for the future, for possible futures whose borders remain blurred, to form the basis of today's work of remembering? In a moment when the past is confiscated, and the present is in exile, can remembering also be determined by possible future contexts? For people who had confronted the "existential misunderstanding" (Amery, 1998, p. 50) of both belonging to a homeland and being purged from it, what made the past so memorable was the ability it gave to imagine a possible future home. The homeland of the stateless would now be established at the borders of a homeland ideal that extended into the future. Therefore, it is possible to argue that memory studies both mark the current conditions and evoke certain possibilities for the future.

1.3.3. Nostalgic Memories

Nostalgia, another concept that permeates the fields where the past is studied, is explained as "longing" for "what no longer exists" or "for what never existed" (Boym, 2021, p. 14). Tarkovsky says this longing "stems from a general sadness about the whole of existence" (Tarkovsky, 2008, 182). He describes nostalgia as "the name of this ominous feeling of dependence that binds man to his own past, this disease that becomes more and more unbearable every moment" (Tarkovsky, 2008, 184). The concept of nostalgia is more preoccupied with "its own fantasy" (Boym, 2021, p. 14) and carries moment-selective interventions that purge the past of crimes and agency. Of course, what we are talking about here is not an understanding of nostalgia that dismantles its fantasy, makes a place for itself from the ruins, and turns to fragments. Instead, as a means of diversion, it mourns the end of the past and deals with it through a single aspect. Just as the popular nostalgia for the 1990s in Turkey is subjected to a political purification by recognizing that time not as a period of dark murders but as the peak of pop culture and secular entertainment life. After this purification, what we see when we look back at the past is "a person who has lost his memories, his amnesia, trapped in an imaginary

existence,” “falling out of time,” “losing the ability to connect with the visible world” (Tarkovsky, 2008, 44). Historian Enzo Traverso, while identifying the danger of the ‘thingification’ and ‘aestheticization’ of the past (2019, p. 10), points to the risks of today’s memory studies, such as surrendering to the nostalgic understanding of the past, romanticizing the past, and lacking a claim, goal or force to confront the perpetrators. Nostalgia’s detachment from reality and its mesmerizing aspect is fueled by the desire to capture the lost past.

Today, as we see the results of the industrialization of memory as well as culture, the investment in destinations of ‘dark tourism’ or ‘sadness tourism,’ as an example, causes a loss of motivation, that memory struggles are futile while injustices continue to escalate unabated. Here we have to think about the relationship of memory work to the struggle for justice or its potential to approach the problem of justice regarding where the responsibility to remember is in our lives. The phenomenon of manipulating memory work through industrialization has once again come to the fore with the recent crystallization of the selfie craze at the Holocaust Memorial Site in Berlin. Artist Shahak Shapira’s *Yolocaust* project was an objection to this very trend: the threat of manipulation. Andreas Huyssen takes this debate to another level and argues that the phrase “approach to history as a trauma” does not sufficiently recognize the political layers of memory discourse (2020, p. 325) and that an ethical and political debate cannot be conducted independently of the way the Holocaust is commodified in the films, museums, and documentaries that deal with it. Therefore, there is no projection of memory outside the politics of remembrance that turns Holocaust museums into a stage. What would be as ludicrous as telling individual museum visitors what is expected of them in the space would be to condemn the various attitudes of visitors while failing to focus on the politics or the official narrative regime of the space that allows it. For instance, instead of reacting to visitors who take selfies in a museumized concentration camp and abuse the weight of that space, it would be more effective to focus on what canon of remembrance allows this to happen in that space. Through collective memory studies, “records of the past which are inconsistent with the myths, which undermine them – records of a past which has become awkward and

embarrassing, a past which people for one reason or another do not wish to know about” (Burke, 1997, p. 59) begin to work.



CHAPTER 2

POLITICS OF MEMORY IN GERMANY

2.1. HISTORIOGRAPHY

2.1.1. Axes in Historiography of Germany

Rewriting history in the aftermath of the Holocaust meant rewriting the history of Europe and the world because the experience of totalitarianism that sacrificed millions of people had irrefutable regional and global consequences. The Holocaust “has taken on a central importance here, as a foundational event against which Western democracies, and not just the Federal Republic of Germany, have symbolically defined themselves” (Wölfel and Clarke, 2011). It has always been pointed out that in the aftermath of traumatic experiences such as fascism and state violence, historiographies can evolve and, in their attempt to understand structures and dynamics, can tend towards legitimizing them (Traverso, 2021, p. 98). It is thought-provoking in this respect that the concept of fascism has been rendered invisible in the historiographical process over time. ‘Unnaming’ is the most common deformation of ‘remembering’ after experiences of mass violence: On the one hand, recalling memories; on the other hand, blurring them, placing them in ambiguity. While post-genocide historiographical studies in Germany experimented with various routes, institutionalizing these studies under the name of the Holocaust would coincide with the acceleration of memory studies worldwide. The urge to remember globally makes Holocaust memory a trans geographical field of study. According to Diner, it was precisely the “claim to Europeanness” that led various components of Europe – albeit partially – to “the dark side of memories of the Second World War” through “ritualized political remembrance of the Holocaust” (Diner, 2011, 37). The truth that met this claim was the absence of Jewish people within society being felt as a “phantom limb” throughout Europe; that this lack itself could serve as a “springboard” (Wieviorka, 2006, p. 17) for the European project.

Tracing the past in Germany is tense in many ways: With the maturation of new historiographical approaches to the Holocaust, the temptation to reduce it to Hitler (Traverso, 2021, p. 100) has been partially abandoned. However, it is possible to observe that this temptation persists and that some reflexes, especially in educational and cultural institutions, may be linked to this legacy of denial. Historiographies that spatially limit the sphere of influence of the genocide and confine it to the history of a particular geography were also overcome in time. According to Traverso, there are five debates about post-genocide historiography: whether Nazism was a kind of anti-Bolshevism, drawing the boundaries of historiography that differ according to the epistemological position of the historian, determining the responsibilities of ordinary citizens, how to deal with historians who served Nazism and compromised with the regime, and lastly, dismantling the thesis that the army and soldiers were not involved in the crimes of Nazism (2020, pp. 106-109). Sancar divides the politics of the past in Germany into two periods: the period of silence and repression and the period of remembrance and reckoning (2021, p. 173). Although the Nuremberg Trial, which took place in the first period, the period of silence, put the leading executives of the Nazi regime on trial, it is argued that this trial narrowed the responsibility for the genocide and created the image of a “deceived German folk” (Sancar, 2021, 175). In addition, discourses that underestimate what happened, produce antisemitism, emphasize the rationale of ignorance, and produce irrational justifications for the genocide are also put into circulation. The appeal of these discourses is that they hope for much from the fact that the genocide is told more and becomes more publicly known. Throughout the 1950s, the silence on the history of the genocide in cultural products and public events created a spontaneous consensus, and it will even be debated whether this silence was conducive to democratization. The fact that in the immediate aftermath of the war, the realization of the terribleness of the war that had ended had evaporated in the late 1940s and early 1950s is explained as things numbing the instinct to remember (Diner, 2011, p. 7). This numbing effect creates a new political unity based on denial, creating excuses not to confront and take responsibility, such as how emphasizing the bad past might direct citizens to evil even more today. On

the other hand, the unchanging position of dominance of those who collaborate with the crime of genocide, or those who are complicit in it, is also a factor in these individuals or groups organizing this orientation in order to protect themselves.

2.1.2. Transferring Responsibility

The German jurist and writer Bernhard Schlink explains the stagnation of confronting the past in Germany in the 1950s with the weight of war and destruction and the search for a new beginning and construction (2019, p. 84). However, with the publicization of the testimonies of the genocide, albeit limited, in courtrooms, it can be said that the silence on the genocide past had to come to an end and the phase of suppression began. The prominent motivation of the suppression of the past was to normalize the genocide, and the most plausible tactic for this was to accept the crimes committed as belonging to a certain group: A group of evil rulers had used the power of the state to deceive the population and caused this great atrocity. Instead of treating the genocide as a collective crime, explaining it with furious rulers was also an obstacle to the division of public responsibility. Therefore, after the end of the silence, the tensest part of Germany's relationship with the past will be identifying the perpetrators. The trials of the Nazi regime also served this purpose; since it was impossible to put a whole people on trial in a court of law, great significance was attached to the trial of a group, and the responsibility of an ordinary citizen was closed to discussion. The student movement of 1968, which had an impact worldwide, did not hesitate to point out the crimes committed by the previous generation while protesting against colonialism. In the 1960s, the desire to talk about the genocide developed as a demand for a younger generation but was met with objections, further organizing the struggle against forgetting. The 1990 reunification of East and West Germany was a moment of rupture in relation to the past; talking about the past is no longer jarring for the new German system, which is precisely why the idea of a new Germany is needed. However, over time, especially in the 2000s, the functions of remembrance efforts also began to change, resulting in a banalization (Schlink, 2019, p. 127). On the other hand, talking about the Second World War without the genocide, as well as different historical interests

that postponed the Second World War while talking about the genocide, led to various accusations against the political actors of the period or allied states (Diner, 2011, p. 9). However, perhaps to overcome this tension and accusatory culture, history-based reasoning is abandoned and replaced by a moralizing discourse embellished with an indiscriminate notion of victimhood (Diner, 2011, p. 9). However, in the aftermath of the genocide, individual and collective responsibilities should have been identified, and social mechanisms, judicial apparatuses and administrative methods should have been put in place accordingly. If this had been the case, many responsible or complicit people would not have continued to hold social positions.

2.2. THE CHALLENGES OF FACING THE PAST

2.2.1. Reactions to Holocaust Narratives

In Germany, the increase in the number of memorials, museums, oral-visual narratives, comparisons, sites of memory, and public interest in memory has had an effect of not caring enough about the genocide and even getting bored of talking about it on the new generation. The third generation has been characterized by a distanced approach to the past and even a cynical relationship with it: such as the introduction to Wieviorka's book titled "Again?" (2006, p. 11), which is the reaction to every new attempt to remember Auschwitz. Thus, the second generation's anger at the first generation for their responsibility in the genocide becomes the third generation's uneasiness with the second generation.

The political climate, rather than various methodological approaches that determine how the past can be studied, has influenced the memory regime in Germany. After World War II, the unification of East and West Germany, which began with the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, was based on a political consensus, but it also had cultural implications. Foremost among these was the goal of creating a social memory that would place the experience of the past genocide within a specific framework. This required an official historiography, appropriate educational curricula, cultural productions, and public activities that catalyzed that

historiography. Since the unification of East and West Germany, the inflation in commemorative work to mark a collective German memory turned the city into a memory laboratory. In Germany, where millions of people were sacrificed and an entire people turned into perpetrators, the need to come together around a common past to make democratic citizenship possible again came to the fore because what West Germany remembered and what East Germany remembered were filtered through different contexts and contained contradictions and contradictions. On the other hand, the burden and trauma of the past became an obstacle to discussing the future. In this sense, the unification process also triggered the crisis of remembering again and in other ways: “the fact that the old is dying and the new cannot be born” (Gramsci, 1996, pp. 32-33). Although Gramsci's identification of this crisis coincided with the period of fascism, the direction and impact of the crisis were also current to the crisis of the time of remembering at the post-genocide period. For with crisis, according to him, “morbid phenomena of the most varied kind come to pass” (Gramsci, 1996, p. 33); the effect of the crisis of memory is the same and, consequently, the possibility that some phenomena may be morbid due to this crisis should be included, that various recollections can be just as morbid. The cultural practices, commemorative activities, and memorials built in Berlin, one of the cities where the East-West German divide was most acute, had a more significant social impact than the text of political unification: “These memorials generally attempt to fulfill three functions: to mourn and commemorate the dead, to educate their audiences, and to politically and socially represent contemporary German citizens” (Harjes, 2005, p. 139).

The question “Has Germany really come to terms with its past?” (Mueller, 2010), with its inherent objection, was precisely that routinized practices of remembering lead to degeneration and that a consensus on the past is not always enough. It is questionable to what extent memorials and memory works were able to break free from the founding myths of a nation and whether they tended to deny their own agency. Strikingly, the actual Holocaust memory in Germany was created not by a physical monument, but by the debates that preceded its construction. Highlighting the weighty stories of the past risked becoming an obstacle to this unification, but

it was only later that the ground was discovered for talking about the weight of the past in a new narrative, invested in a shared effect. In this narrative, instead of suppressing the past, the aim was to talk about it more, to confine and frame narratives about the past within certain narrative patterns. Monuments, memory sites, memory stops, museums were built, and all these social (and political) actors were presented to the public as a sign of confrontation. At the same time, a united Germany showed that it both confronted its past and packaged and shelved knowledge from the past. Demonstrating this confrontation could even turn into a form of marketing, as studies of the past would demonstrate how democratic the ideal of the new Germany was. In order to pacify Germany's antifascist memory, which was very much alive, and thus to prevent collective possibilities, certain contexts had to be constructed, and speech had to be supported and publicized as much as possible. The start date of the Stolpersteine project is also significant in that it comes at this very time, because this installation work, which was initially designed as a guerrilla artwork, was able to receive support from official institutions and gain legal status over time. However, it is debatable to what extent it can access the critical perspective opened up by memory studies.

In the critical gaze that is meant to be directed towards memory studies in Germany, such as Stolpersteine, Foucault's objection to the thesis of the continuity of history should be remembered. Accordingly, accepting that the past and past experiences lead to the present and establishing such a continuity equation would mean ignoring the power relations in the background. When we remove the critical perspective from monumentalization and memorialization efforts, what remains are precisely the policies that explicitly or implicitly construct this continuity, and it is precisely because of them that an acceptable narrative of the past will be supported rather than prohibited. While these narrative forms scratch the sense of community, instead of learning from the past and taking ethical and political responsibilities today, they will work in the form of being content with the present because of the past and, especially for the younger generations, being fed up with the interest in the past.

2.2.2. Vergangenheitsbewältigung - Confronting the Past

According to Schlink, the German use of the concept of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*, which means dealing with the past, stems from a longing for the impossible and aims to reduce its weight on the present by organizing the past (2019, p. 79). Therefore, *vergangenheitsbewältigung* is the representation of the past by harmonizing it with individual and collective biographies (Schlink, 2019, p. 82). Germany is much more capable of memorializing its past in public than other countries. Thanks to the courage of the second generation of Holocaust survivors, combined with the 1968 movements (Agazzi 2005, p. 11), the victims were being spoken about, and the visibility of non-discourse practices, especially public memorials, was increasing. Moreover, the official support of various projects and efforts after the fall of the Berlin Wall by the Federal Government and the Berlin Senate triggered this explosion. As a result of the change in the relationship with the past after the 1980s, the heroic narratives, historical achievements, revolutions, and utopias of the past are replaced by stories of victims and violent experiences. Talking about what had not been talked about until then attracted certain attention. However, it is worth reflecting on the relevance of this interest not so much in terms of motivations such as remembering, taking responsibility, and confrontation, but instead in terms of whether violence, which has never been experienced in such magnitude before, turns into a spectacle. Traverso notes that the past must acquire a sacrificial identity to gain public recognition (2018, p. 97) and that the memory of the Holocaust in Germany is a substitute for the memory of anti-fascism. The new era in Germany, also described as the 'reunification process,' called for a 'normalization,' suppressing an uneasy relationship with the past. At the same time, the political division of East and West Germany divided memories, and the unification in 1989 was to signal a culture of shared memory. The most symbolic example was a memorialization question that reached the German Bundestag around the question, "How would a divided nation reunite itself on the bedrock memory of its crimes" (Young, 2002, p. 65). For instance, controversial for some was whether it was "a Memorial to Europe's

murdered Jews as a great burial slab for the twentieth century, a hermetically sealed vault for the ghosts of Germany's past" (Young, 2002, p. 70).

In Germany, above all discussions of the past, the question was how a central monument could keep the memory of the Holocaust alive and provide a representational ground for it. "A finished monument would, in effect, finish memory itself" (Young, 2002, p. 70). There was also a concern about whether the genocide past would be left behind with such a monument. Moreover, would the new Germany be established free of all these past agencies? To what extent would the memorial reflect the tensions in Germany's memory politics, or would it be a perfunctory response that signaled the end of these tensions? It was precisely a lack of memory that fueled this debate: The genocide past was being memorialized without determining how to confront the past. One end of this debate goes back to a proposal to build a memorial at Birkenau Camp in 1957. During that time, artists from various countries submitted proposals at the call of the International Auschwitz Committee, but the question in the mind of Henry More, the head of the jury, would later become a fundamental debate: Is it possible to "create a work of art that expresses the emotions generated by Auschwitz" (Wieviorka, 2006, p. 197)? Criticisms of the memorial proposals were that they failed to explain the experiences of the victims, that they symbolically denied the past reality of the camp, that they showed only a limited part of the suffering, and that they failed to carry the burden of the camp's memory. In the end, none of these projects were accepted, and then another brand new monument was unveiled on May 16, 1967, sparking another controversy. The monument that was presented was not the same as the one that was unveiled, and the change in the monument was, according to James Young, "suspiciously ideological" (as cited in Benschoten, 2012, p. 65). The monument's composition of two parents and a child reveals an image in opposition to Poland's memory regime: It "suggested children, who could not have been killed as political prisoners, but only as Jews" (as cited in Benschoten, 2012, p. 66). Because, in fact, until then, the memory in Poland was that the Auschwitz camp was a system based on political prisoners; in other words, the fact that an ordinary

Jewish family could have been imprisoned in those camps simply because they were Jewish was covered up. The representation in the memorial designed for the camp, then, should not contradict the regime of memory and should invest in the persuasiveness of the official narrative. As evidence for this criticism, a survivor of the camps pretended that there were no Jewish individuals in the camps, and in a speech that cleansed the past of peoples, racism and antisemitism were not mentioned, while he could talk about the victims brought to the camps from all European countries (Wieviorka, 2006 p. 204). The words of those who speak of the existence of Jewish people in the camps are not visible, and a process of remembrance and memorialization is organized that opens serious spaces for antisemites. It was only in the 1980s that the Jewish victims of the camps and antisemitic violence came to the fore. Auschwitz is, therefore, a site with two layers of memory: It is both a place of the perpetrator and a place where the struggle for memory (Wieviorka, 2006, p. 219) is carried out.

The public debate on the idea of a Holocaust memorial in central Germany was one of the most important debates of the 1990s. What started as a goal to build the national Holocaust Memorial for the victims of the Holocaust later became The Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe. The memorial raised questions about the extent to which it was possible to represent the victims in a single monument:

Are they redemptory, part of a mourning process, pedagogical, self-aggrandizing, or inspiration against contemporary xenophobia? To what national and social ends will this memorial be built? Just how compensatory a gesture will it be? How anti-redemptory can it be? Will it be a place for Jews to mourn lost Jews, a place for Germans to mourn lost Jews, or a place for Jews to remember what Germans once did to them? (Young, 2002, p. 73).

Even the naming of the memorial ignored the non-Jewish victims. The other side of the debate was the motivation for connecting with the memorials. Gerhard Schröder's description of the Holocaust memorial as a "memorial which one enjoys visiting" (Mueller, 2015, p. 214) points to the need for a critical perspective in

memory studies. Although the memory of the Holocaust offers an opportunity for public dialog, it is considered that the connection between the past and the future has not been constructed in these studies. “The process of memorialization and remembrance in Germany, particularly in the capital city of Berlin, has also been a process of nation (re)building.” (Gould and Silverman, 2013, p. 792).

2.2.3. Narrative Patterns of the Holocaust

Andreas Huyssen, a cultural critic, identifies an obsession with the past rather than a loss of memory (1999, p. 181) in post-1980 memory-oriented studies. While problematizing the tendency towards the monumentalization of the past in the new temporality created by the pace of everyday life and the flow of information and images, the question can be asked how the desire to express memory with fixed and permanent objects such as stone can be interpreted since it is relevant to our subject. At this point, Huyssen adds that the criticism of the monumentalization of the past and its display in museums has also been transformed over time, especially as it has a deceptive effect in postmodern temporality. The changes in the cultural world through the media and the phenomenon of speed at the center of these changes suggest that the permanent form of monuments is not a ‘thingification’ but a field of ‘exploiting new possibilities in a hybrid monument-media culture’ (Huyssen 1999, p. 184). In the case of genocide, the contemporary problem is not forgetting, but rather the quantitative density of genocide images and narratives, which is characterized as excessive in everyday functioning. Therefore, the erection of more memorials will not solve the problem of remembering the Holocaust (Huyssen, 1999, p. 185), and may even be seen as confining the memory of the Holocaust to certain forms. Huyssen invites us to rethink the public function of the monument as a model of commemoration and memorialization of the past; the fact that monuments reach beyond their own borders towards other works and discourses on genocide and push us towards reading other stories may exist as a criterion for solving the problem of remembrance. In other words, we are talking about a memorialization process that can be a solution to the problem of remembrance to the extent that it can establish links with otherness and break the monotony. For

Huyysen, creating an environment of public dialog and preserving the tensions between the stories of the victims and the integrity of the Holocaust is a measure to prevent the monument from freezing.

Italian historian Enzo Traverso emphasizes that historians made changes in the writing of the genocide caused by the fascist Mussolini regime in Ethiopia between 1935 and 1936, but these changes failed to penetrate the Italian collective memory (2020, p. 41). While this emphasis points to the fact that memory is a discipline that cannot be completely filled by historiographical activities, the gaps in memory, the cracks that are not filled, make us accept once again that history is not a whole, but rather consists of parts (Sarlo, 2012, p. 86). The gaps between the remembering itself and the remembered permeate the narrative and its sources. However, the main problem with Holocaust memoirs and memorializations is first and foremost that by bringing these works together by resorting to a categorical nomenclature, a total category is provided, and this attempts to manipulate its own emptiness. Another example of this, according to Traverso, is the phenomenon of anonymous and nameless victims in Germany. There are acts that are indisputably criminal, but the exact identity of the victims cannot be known, because they are only “a people” and their identity as victims is heavily weighted over their names. Referring to them as victims as a whole does not initiate a struggle against their sacrificial nature, but rather acknowledges this fact and makes their sacrificial nature an everyday knowledge. Moreover, another similar point in the same history is that the perpetrators are also anonymous, and moreover, this anonymity will serve to whitewash the perpetrators. Numerical calculations that reduce the Holocaust or the catastrophe to groups of people whose subjects are obscured will be one of the obstacles to addressing the Holocaust or the catastrophe as a political issue. The tendency to explain the effects of the Holocaust in numbers is to underline that it is not rational, but what we miss in saying this is the fact that it is precisely the result of rationalism. About Stolpersteine, it should be remembered that just like describing horror in numbers, visualizing it with plaques of the names of the victims

- the fact that says the least about who they were or their experiences - can likewise be a product of a tendency that should be distanced from.



CHAPTER 3

STOLPERSTEINE

3.1. REVIEW OF THE PROJECT

3.1.1. Overview of the Stolpersteine

Gunter Demnig, an artist-activist, was born in Berlin in 1947 and has studied art in Kassel since 1971. He has participated in activism against the Vietnam War and engaged in campaigns commemorating the victims of the genocide since the 1990s, and prepared the draft of the Stolpersteine project in 1993. He studied at the Berlin University of the Arts and later at the University of Kassel, academically specializing in urban spaces and historical artifacts. As an artist, Demnig emphasizes the encounter of art with public space rather than confining it to museums and galleries. His best-known work, Stolpersteine is dedicated to the victims of the genocide. Demnig carried out projects before Stolpersteine, such as “Duftmarken Cassel-Paris (1980), Blutspur Kassel-London (1981), Ariadne-Faden Kassel–Venedig (1982), Landschaftskonserven (1984) and Flaschenpost Kassel–New York” (Stolpersteine in Berlin, n.d.). Demnig, who created a memory project titled *Duftmarken Cassel-Paris*, covered a distance of 818 kilometers on foot, walking for 21 days. During this performance, he left permanent traces on the road with paint. Demnig’s other projects also took place in public spaces and enabled various encounters. In these artworks, it can be observed that memory is the focal point, and leaving a trace is a goal.

In Germany, memory art projects began to receive a great deal of attention in the 1990s, bringing the challenges of the past back onto the public agenda. The typical quest of this period is how to remember the victims of genocide and what kind of politics this remembrance should be based on. The most extensively discussed process from these quests was selecting a monument model for murdered European Jews. While trying to respond to this quest through monument designs, a problem of representativeness emerged. Other ideas for the creation of the collective memorial were developed as precursors to the Stolpersteine project: Paving a

kilometer of a busy highway with special cobblestones, forcing drivers to reduce their speed on a section of the road dedicated to the victims of genocide (Überschrieben, Rudolf Herz and Reinhard Matz-1997), using guerrilla tactics in an urban neighborhood at night to replace cobblestones with other stones inscribed with the names of the victims (2146 Steine - Mahnmalegen Rassismus, Jochen Gerz-1990), the projection of photographs of victims' families on the facades of Berlin apartment buildings (Shimon Attie's Writing on the Wall-1991), the affixing of plaques with the names and occupations of former residents of a Berlin apartment building who perished during the genocide (Christian Boltanski's Lost House-1990), etc. However, Demnig's Stolpersteine project differs from the monument ideas that had been prominent up to that point in that it has no spatial focus, is decentralized, and is not subject to time pressure. In 1996, Demnig installed the first Stolpersteine in Berlin Kreuzberg illegally without obtaining permission from any local or central governing authority. Gunter Demnig's Stolpersteine project deviates from the prevalent concept of a monumental structure. As part of the project, 10-centimeter-wide cubic platinum stones were placed in front of the houses, typically the last residences of Holocaust victims and survivors. Today, Stolpersteine are installed in Germany and many other countries, including Austria and Slovenia. The project became so popular that even in a German soap opera series, *Lindenstraße*, controversially scripted Demnig's installation of Stolpersteine. The popularization of The Stolpersteine was furthered in another series in which the character names were taken from the names on the stumbling stones in front of the building where the series was filmed that called Tatort (2014). Although Demnig objected to this, his objection does not seem to be coherent. In Munich, Germany, the project was banned by the City Council in 2004. The decision was prompted by the objections of Charlotte Knobloch, a Holocaust survivor and representative of the Jewish community, and other critics. Knobloch, the former president of the Central Council of Jews in Germany, and head of the Munich Jewish community, "has long opposed to stumbling block memorials," "called them an insult to the victims" "for passerby to step on the names of Jews that were murdered in the tragedy." (Weinthal, 2018). Other criticisms are that they

“suppress the perpetrators,” that the victims are presented as a “mystery” for future generations, but that “the culture of remembrance is more than a good feeling,” that politicians use it in a “misleading way” to showcase their fight against antisemitism and that we “cannot see the perpetrators.” (Weinthal, 2018). For some visitors, it is impressive that one “must bow before a victim,” if they “want to read the stone” (Apperly, 2019), like the memorable kneeling of former German Chancellor Willy Brandt in front of the Monument to the Warsaw Ghetto Heroes.

3.1.2. Placing the Stolpersteine

The title on the stones is grammatically constructed as a third-person singular hidden subject. Each stone bears the title “*Hier Wohnte*” (Here lived), followed by the victim’s name, dates of birth and death, and information about the camp where they were killed. If the stones are placed in front of a place other than the victim’s last residence, the title on the stone may change, such as ‘studied here’ or ‘worked here.’ It should be noted that the sentence is constructed according to a non-specific and invisible subject. There are no other details about those whose names are written and what their similarities, if any, mean. It is not revealed whether the victims were members of the same family, how they were related to each other, their neighborhood relations, or their occupations. Demnig’s tactic suggests that he is trying to prove his epistemologically neutral position by opting for a more limited aspect addressed to the victims rather than going into details.

On the project’s official website, Demnig explains that he does not remember how he chose the names but clarifies that they are not connected to any antisemitic references:

But what is certain is that he chose the name before knowing there would be more than one installation. He liked the double meaning of the German word because he wanted to provoke people into ‘stumbling’ mentally. Contrary to what certain online sources claim, Gunter Demnig did NOT want to create a link to a certain antisemitic expression used in Nazi Germany that he did not even know. (Stolpersteine, n.d.)

Some of the stones ironically contain historically constructed antisemitic hate speech, marked with the word so-called and enclosed in quotation marks, reminding the viewers that these discriminatory expressions are for specific groups. It can be assumed that the reason behind bringing hate speech back to the agenda through this project is to prevent these expressions from being forgotten and to leave a note about the past in good faith. The project's organizing team looked closely at racist and discriminatory expressions and everyday attitudes to understand an era. Far more critical than initiating a debate, these statements reproduce the linguistic equivalent of antisemitism, inviting us to look at the victims through the eyes of the perpetrators. The Holocaust represents the culmination of centuries of religious, economic, and national anger against its Jewish populations (Bauman, 1997, p. 53), but it cannot be explained by antisemitism alone (1997, p. 55). Antisemitic context does not sufficiently explain the potential of the societal and political mechanisms that regulate the behavior of those who obey orders or remain silent (Bauman, 1997, p. 56). However, encountering expressions resembling hate speech on stones direct an examination of the Holocaust as a product of antisemitic anger alone. Such interpretations go beyond explaining the Holocaust and recall the historian Raul Hilberg's question, "Wouldn't you be happier if I could show you that all the perpetrators were crazy?" (Bauman, 2003, p. 82). Creating any composition that removes being unknown of destructive violence, justifying that rationalizes and renders violence intelligible which means to "domesticate the past in the form of knowing" (Poster, 1982, p. 119), tends to soothe the unease of not knowing.

Traverso (2021, p. 125) draws attention to the tendency to give a special status to the collective memory of the Holocaust's dark legacy. According to this, it is not possible to compare the Holocaust with other genocides. Studying the Holocaust requires going beyond the analytical categories used in genocide studies and using different tools besides disciplines such as politics and law. Nazi antisemitism "is not just a discourse or ideology, but a set of designs that construct a collective identity, an image, a culture, and social practices" (Traverso, 2021, p. 125). The context that distinguishes the Holocaust, that excludes it from the category, forces efforts to remember and memorialize it to construct different layers.

Commemorating the Holocaust without considering cultural practices, images, and everyday attitudes, or designing a remembrance based solely on the victims, would equate it with other examples of state violence and mass atrocities. Such an orientation toward the past, memory, and remembrance displaces the truth that must be adhered to. From this perspective, what Stolpersteine can tell is a single and limited surface, and there is a need for other practices of remembering that intervene in this limitation, but moreover, a critical remembering that does not prioritize the interest of states. The Stolpersteine project is about remembering the Holocaust in the most generalized connotations and surrounding Europe's Holocaust experience with a restricted narrative, neglecting its proper gravity. We should add that the non-discursive powers of monuments, symbols, and images intervene in a discursive order that emphasizes speaking by multiplying narratives; memorial stones are also part of this category.

The Stolpersteine, which give the project its name, first appear in sacred texts as a religious metaphor under the name stumbling block/stone. In the Tanakh, the stumbling stone is a kind of prophetic element that will punish the people of Israel for disobeying God's commandments (Tanakh, 2014, Isaiah 8:14). Similarly, in the Bible, stumbling stones are set up for non-believers, and if they rebel or make mistakes, they will stumble on these stones as punishment and be publicly shamed (English Standard Version Bible, 2001, Romans 9:32, 9:33, 1 Peter 2:8). According to religious references, each stone will be a rock of salvation for the devout and a stone of stumbling for the unbelievers. The act of stumbling, which in sacred texts calls for obedience to religious commands and punishes those who do not, is reappropriated in Demnig's project, this time in the memorialization of the victims of genocide. The visitor-memorial relationship built around the Stolpersteine in the public space recalls the performance of cemetery visits with the effect of "the absence of the deceased's bodies": "Many visitors treat them almost identically to graves: by placing stones, flowers, lanterns, and even flags or child's toy" (Krzyżanowska, 2015, p. 478). This is a relationship that creates a contradiction with religious institutions, even though it has ties to religious sources in its name: for "both the Judaic tradition (which does not allow graves without burial and those

being buried) and (...) by the Christian one (where walking on graves is seen as an act of profanation).” (Krzyżanowska, 2015, p. 478).

Conceptual artist Demnig’s naming of his project Stolpersteine is also a reminder of another hate speech that has become part of the routine in Germany: “There must be a Jew buried here” – this was a discourse as a substitute for blasphemy, that “speaks volumes about the antisemitism of the time,” “commonly uttered by some Germans before World War II when they stumbled over a stone in the German capital” (Dumont, 2021). Since the early Christian era, antisemitism has been institutionalized through the demonization and ridicule of Jewish identity, through specific discourses that were produced, and through the entrenchment of these discourses around understandings that “held Jews responsible for all bad things” (Arslanyan, 2015, p. 99).

The references that draw our attention to the nomenclature of the stones also remind us of the problem of the nomenclature of the Holocaust. As Giorgio Agamben underlines, the word “Holocaust,” etymologically based on the ancient Greek word *holocaustos* (ὁλόκαυστον), derived from “holos” (whole) and “kaustos” (to burn), is most commonly used in the sense of “completely burnt” (Agamben, 1999, p. 28). This nomenclature is also used in Christian teaching for sacrificial narratives. According to the Hebrew language, “olah” (עֹלָה) is used instead of Holocaust and describes sacrifices made in loyalty to God. Agamben points out that there has been a “semantic migration” in this concept, which is closely linked to the culture of sacrifice in “vernacular languages” (1999, p. 30). Moreover, it should be noted that “it also continues a semantic heredity that is from its inception antisemitic” (Agamben, 1999, p. 31). He does not use the concept of Holocaust precisely for this reason, namely the connection he establishes between the crematorium and the altars that the concept of Holocaust refers to in some usages and the continuation of the reference to antisemitism. At the same time, however, the word also suggests that genocide is reduced to an exceptional historical event and closes the door to processes of confrontation from the outset. In the aftermath of a genocide in which millions of people were subjected to various atrocities, how common references,

which are not at all unrelated to the genocide, stumble the relationship with the past when defining that genocide with a concept, when naming a memorialization project that focuses on the victims after the genocide, needs to be studied separately.

Even if these discourses are abandoned over time, they will continue to weigh heavily on the collective unconscious. Although Demnig says that he does not know where the idea for the Stolpersteine project matured and does not remember where the name came from, it is possible to read the emergence of the project concerning the traces of the discriminatory and antisemitic past filtered through the collective unconscious of the Jewish people. Therefore, I believe that the method, forms, and objects used in remembering the victims of such a genocide can also be the subject of a psychoanalytic study. According to Maurice Blanchot, the Holocaust is “that the genocide of the Jews was not just an annihilation, but an annihilation of their annihilation” (as cited in Robbins, 1987, p. 252) and “the unknown name, alien to naming” (2017, p. 74). While the Holocaust itself is indescribable, even naming it is impossible, the stones ironically envision a universe of remembrance that can be memorialized with names. In the face of the “danger of catastrophe finding meaning,” how can a memory project cope with the “absence of meaning” and the “vanishing meaning” (Blanchot, 2017, p. 65)? Instead of the Stolpersteine method, I believe that we should think about the possibility of remembering which do not look for the genocide outside of us, which first ponder on its linguistic equivalents, and which examines memory, that focuses on how it is remembered, that look at its fragments.

3.1.3. Stolpersteine as Memorialization

The motivation for Demnig’s project is based on a quote from the Talmud: “A person is not forgotten until his or her name is forgotten” (Kingsley, 2019). At this point, the memorial stones, which have been placed in nearly 2000 places in Europe from Germany to Ukraine, numbering up to 90 thousand as of January 2022, are not only the products of history but also the producers of that history, just like oral history narratives, memory objects, and memory sites. In light of this, the history

constructed by the Stolpersteine focuses on two points: It both constitutes an indicator of the mass destruction that occurred during the Holocaust and marks the geographies where the Holocaust was experienced. The project's focus is that each victim was actually 'there,' that too many people were victimized in the genocide, and that the geographical boundaries of this experience were not confined only to some areas of Germany. Regarding the project, some argue that when a pedestrian stops in front of the memorial stones, they interrupt the movement of the street and at that moment "create a memorial performance that evokes the missing body of the victim" (Hernández-Grande, 2020). Are the memorial stones made to remember the victims of the genocide, or are placing these memorial stones, encountering and bowing before them, reading their inscriptions with sadness, beginning to notice the memorial stones as one walks through the city, sponsoring them, a performance of remembering? The possibility of the performativity of the Stolpersteine should be considered in terms of the fact that they create a visualization that will be permanently imprinted in the minds of the viewers, even if they have short-term encounters with them. These visuals, monument stones, and names of victims scattered around give a surface to the phenomenon of the victim; on the other hand, they also penetrate emotions. They do not just say, "This is the neighborhood of victims," and give themselves away; they make people stumble but do not make them fall. While commemorating a genocide that claimed the lives of millions of people, it does not hope that one will fall; it continues to protect comfort in the face of the victims. The act of stumbling is the promise of remembering and holding on to memories, but it is the presence of the memorial stones that performs it. No one stumbles or staggers with these stones, but their name gives them performative power: we are to stumble not by its presence but by its name.

The memorial stones are "an example of a counter-memorial" in the way they are remembered; they "do not announce their presence in the monumental monument style; they draw their power from their subtlety" (Gould and Silverman, 2013, p. 797). While monumental memorials attempt to signify huge historical narratives with a masculine spectacle, the counter-memorial focuses on non-traditional, non-official, and alternative perspectives. In this respect, Demnig's stones reach the

centers or back streets of the city to expose social shame; they do not resort to historical glorification; they are counter-monuments because they produce criticism in all respects. The place the project is realized is not the camps where the horrors of genocide took place; it is the front of every household where the violence did not occur directly but its effects reached. The open-endedness of the project and the fact that it processes historical knowledge on a micro level by including the names of the victims leads to a more effective dialogue environment than monuments that gather history in a single center. The various locations of the memorial stones and the possibility that they could appear at any time create “a cumulative process of noticing in which the viewer begins to detect more Stolpersteine, possibly after accidentally stumbling upon the first one” (Ward, 2020). Once the viewer’s attention has been drawn to these stones, the images of the Stolpersteine will accumulate as the viewer’s attention is drawn to these stones, which will turn into a search, leading to the monumental stones being given more meaning within the city’s rhythm. Thanks to the project, everyday citizens (...) become part of the memorialization of Germany’s past (Gould and Silverman, 2013, p. 797): in two ways: amateur historians as researchers and viewers who complete each monument.

The most important social impact of the project is that it can create an interruption in the flow of everyday life: It establishes a kind of barrier that stops the inhabitants of the city for a moment and prompts them to remember the victims of a past process of agency, which is the goal of the project in order to move towards a process of confrontation/remembrance. Through the potential to create neighborly relationships, the Stolpersteine in public spaces will connect us with others who are viewing or experiencing them, leading to a commonality or a sense of community between them and us. In the “community allied against the rumble of the world,” we communicate not only through “signals, abstract entities” but also with “things.” (Lingis, 1994, pp. 12-13). Remembering, in turn, brings into contact with things, objects of remembrance, and meanings shared through effect. People create a sense of community by complementing each other, developing shared memories, common goals and emotions, and building connections and commonalities; because “the existence of every being summons the other or a plurality of others” (Blanchot,

1988, p. 6) and in this way, “meaning in itself” into meaning for everyone (Castoriadis, 2013, p. 288). However, the possibility of community emphasized at this point is that of those who do not belong to a common culture or identity of groups with ambiguous categories and fluid boundaries. A sense of commonality can lead individuals to take political positions and responsibilities towards the evil organizations of the past and present in the face of authorities that tend to rule in isolation from each other. In categorizing the formation model of this community, it should not be overlooked that it is based precisely on an instantaneous, reflexive, dispersing-re-gathering ground. In other words, it is not a community of those who have similar cultural codes in a settlement, of those who are already physically familiar with each other; it is a community of those who are familiar without ever seeing, who anticipate their closeness, who know that they will have similar tendencies, who are aware of other’s existence. According to Sontag, “every age” reinvents projects of spirituality as “blueprints, terminologies, attitudinal designs” that “resolve painful structural contradictions,” “integrate human consciousness,” and “aim for transcendence” (2021, p. 13). This project has a role to fill the gaps in the age, re-mystify what has been demystified, and complete what is incomplete. Is it possible to think of this sense of community provided by Stolpersteine that Sontag also mentions as a “spiritual project?” The memory-works, which sets out to soothe the unrest of the past, will be able to find the peace it seeks in shared emotions and in a state of ‘being us’ that constantly searches for itself and will be able to think about many questions that it cannot find answers to precisely around this community. Awareness of being in the same positions as others in the face of a problematic past and experiencing similar emotions underlines that one is not alone. Although a news report on the Stolpersteine states that half of the residents were involved in the research process and that this process “made” the “building feel like a community” (Apperly, 2019), this example is unfortunately exceptional. Actually, unlike other models of monuments in Germany, the Stolpersteine have a substantial possibility of long-term socialization as they are not limited to a specific location or moment. Facing that remembering is not limited to specific moments, official ceremonies, or dates but can also be possible in the everyday, the ordinary, the

sudden allows for an alternative and critical rejection of the framework of remembrance trapped in official commemorative politics. In order to create a culture of memory that has clear political lines and can prevent the official narrative from becoming public discourse, we first need to organize the demand to remember.

The placement of the victims' names in public spaces, in front of their former settlements, signifies the city panorama before the mass destruction. As we remember the traces of the Holocaust in cities such as Berlin, Frankfurt, and Hamburg, where hundreds of thousands of people of Jewish descent lived before the Holocaust, we wonder whether this memorialization, in which the names of the victims are restored, will compensate for the injuries of the past in the ideal of a 'multicultural Germany.' Since realizing this ideal cannot be achieved through the complete suppression of the past, the attempt arises it by allowing the past to be among us through memory work based on victims' names, "negotiate local identity of a place/space with those living in the present," and "thereby reconnecting those who lived there in the past with present inhabitants" (Krzyżanowska, 2015, p. 479). Arguing that the inclusion of names in our lives liberates them from their existence and gives them a command in the world, Bachmann (1989, p. 68) says that we are "faithfully" attached to names by the weight of "the randomness of names" and "the feeling that we and our worlds are nameless" (1989, p. 70). This faithfulness invites us to remember a past catastrophe: renaming, gaining the name, and inscribing the name to the public. A city that follows the victims' names can invite the discussion of a new vision of society by underlining the loss that can no longer be recovered.

For this reason, it is argued that "Stolpersteine can build multicultural communities around the common cause of collective memory" (Harjes, 2005, p. 148) and foster unifying feelings for a shared identity. To the extent that this marking with the memorial stones does not directly refer to the fact that the settlement is a site of genocide and does not emphasize the repressed history of violence behind the landscape, can it be considered a positive example in the work of confrontation and democratization because of the potential of the romanticized act of remembrance?

Could it be that Stolpersteine prepare an urban proposal in dialogue with the victims who will never return to those streets again, as if they were still living together?

3.2. CRITICISM AGAINST THE PROJECT

3.2.1. Stumbling When Remembering Victims

Although the project's motto is 'One victim, one stone' and states that it includes all victims of National Socialist rule (queer men, Roma, Jewish people, homeless people, disabled people, and so on.), there is a short information on who the victims of the genocide were. Moreover, the names of "asocial" and "work-shy" victims began to be inscribed on the memorial stones much later (Apel, 2013, p. 189), and debates about the "victim selection policy" continued for a long time. For example, some victims would not be monumentalized by Demnig because he considered that their lives were not an example (Apel, 2013, p. 189). This selective remembering in the process of identifying the victims whose names are memorialized on the stones is perhaps one of the essential stumbles in engaging with the past: "whose lives are mourned, and whose lives are considered ungrievable" (Butler, 2009, p. 38). In addition, it should also be asked by whom the victims' names are commemorated and by whom the monumentalization is carried out. According to whose criteria of "exemplary life" are the victims selected for monuments? What acceptable behavior will be performed for the victims whose names are recalled, and how can the hegemony built by this selective remembering be broken? Should the names of those who sided with the perpetrators, who stood out with lumpen attitudes, who failed to stand in solidarity with the victims, who acted out of fear or panic, who initially remained silent or even tried to collaborate with the Nazi regime, but then all these efforts were in vain they could not escape being victimized, be kept alive on memorial stones or recognized as victims? Another manifestation of victim selectivity is hidden in memories that condoned discrimination, especially against queer men. This can be observed in the homophobic memories of Holocaust survivors or witnesses' descriptions of "same-sex desire in camps and ghettos" as "disgusting" and "wrong" (Hájková, 2020). We

should also take this opportunity to note that a policy of remembrance that does not tend to define the victim status for those who have been subjected to violence in the past according to social norms and that recognizes that “every life is precious and can be mourned” (Butler, 2009, p. 38) is a necessity for an imagination of a democratic society.

Another axis related to the Stolpersteine is the lack of attention to the stories of the victims, to local knowledge, to the experience of genocide in that settlement, and thus the lack of space for other stories to speak to each other. The Stolpersteine do not provide a truthful answer to the question of who the victims of the genocide are, but rather the tens of thousands of names in the public sphere may even be exerting a force to reinforce general assumptions. While public practices of remembrance that collectively consider the impact of the Holocaust on various groups face marginalization, the memorial stones, instead of transforming this tendency, seem to align with it. Instead of resisting such marginalization, they avoid it by focusing on names. In this sense, it is necessary to rethink whether a remembrance limited to the expressions on the memorial stones fulfills its requirements. The fact that the memorial stones, the output of Demnig’s project, are uniform in form, designed in the exact dimensions, and even the font and size are the same should be read as symbolizing the established tendency to generalize about the victims of the genocide and to treat them in a single category. The person looking at the Stolpersteine does not realize that those whose names are inscribed could be disabled, queer, or even homeless people because the representations of victims designed by the commemorative frame are also products of normativity. Moreover, this practice of remembrance does not make those who see them ask or seek answers to questions such as why, for example, disabled people became the target of the regime and were eventually exterminated *en masse* or how the policies of biopower that feed on the phenomenon of biological threat operate. Even if a public monument has a limited sphere of verbal expression that is “stark and factual, as opposed to sentimental” (Ward, 2020), opening a public debate around it serves a highly complementary function.

The anthropologist Marc Auge argues that the now vaguely used concept of ‘duty to remember’ does not belong to victims or witnesses (Auge, 2021, p. 73). Remembrance should be the responsibility of the perpetrator bloc rather than the relatives of victims, victims, or those who have suffered horrors. Rather than being invited to remember, concentration camp survivors should “be asked to endure the memories they carry” and to “distance themselves from the unbearableness of the experience” (Auge, 2021, p. 73). Auge discusses the memorialization strategy of official memory with the risk of aestheticizing death and horror. From this point of view, what needs to be questioned in the Stolpersteine project is whether a victim-oriented memorialization, insofar as it fails to point to the perpetrators, gives the task of remembrance back to the victims and their relatives. The project team had no political problem with producing a geometrically aestheticized product: “Each stone is an artwork in itself, which meets aesthetic standards; the stones together and the people involved in their installation as a whole form a social sculpture (inspired by Joseph Beuys)” (Stolpersteine, n.d.).

Furthermore, where does the project invite future generations to remember and assert the will to ‘never again’ in the face of new experiences of violence? Historian Annette Wieviorka, in seeking answers to the questions her daughter Mathilde posed to her about the Holocaust and the questions that followed, underlines the indifference of those who saw their Jewish neighbors being arrested and put on deportation trains, as well as the active participation of a hundred thousand people in the genocide when it came to responsibility (Wieviorka, 1999, p. 57). This “indifference” may even become a reward over time in the lives of the silent majority. Schlink notes that the perpetrators of the genocide were not ostracized from society but continued to be respected and accepted in various social roles (Schlink, 2019, p. 86). Moreover, the fact that the perpetrators could not be ostracized from society made the second generation of the genocide complicit in the crime. Gunter Grass, who realized his guilt when the leader of the group called *Hitler Youth*, which he joined voluntarily when he was still a child, took the blame for the genocide, says that the guilt he did not feel at the time of the event turned into shame over time, that he lived with a crime that would never lose its relevance,

that the shame committed could never be measured, and that he struggled with the question “could you have realized what was happening to you at the time?” (Grass, 2020). Although Grass cannot answer this question, “the cruelty of the disaster is that it is realized after it has already happened” (Didi-Huberman, 2022, p. 7). In today’s conditions, all non-victims must develop a politics of remembrance that will keep us alert to our potential to be perpetrators, which poses a danger for both the present and the future. When working on the victims of the genocide, commemorative work that does not point to the perpetrator, that does not call for the will to establish the grounds for genuine confrontation, that examines the victim as a single category, that stereotypes both the victim and the perpetrator, and that all hegemonic memorialization will have a one-way result, will turn into a kind of anniversary ceremony. These are much more likely to paralyze rather than strengthen society’s will to hold society accountable and place the burden on the victims’ relatives. Didi-Huberman makes a distinction at this point: “The commemoration of a past catastrophe in the consensual ceremonies of memorial sites is different from the commemoration of it in the present to illuminate future catastrophes” (2022, p. 10).

In remembering the Holocaust, it is necessary to recognize the broad spectrum in which the singularities of the victims are taking place, to reflect on the challenges faced by the survivors, to recognize that genocide denial persists in various forms, and to note that victim identity is a much more layered topography than is commonly believed. Creating an archival memorial to the victims of genocide by utilizing various sources would undoubtedly be a meaningful step toward preserving the memory. In historical genocide narratives, there are places where the victim stories cannot connect, and it is as if the victims are treated as groups ready to be killed. Although the artist Demnig explains that he has a multi-identity memorialization perspective by saying that the victims of the Holocaust are not only Jewish, Stolpersteine cannot convince the average viewer of this. Because the regime of memory that processes the Holocaust tends to reduce the genocide to a single identity, when we encounter the memorial stones, we end up directly identifying them with Jewish identity. Although names are inscribed on each stone

to distinguish them from one another, in the landscape of the stones as a whole, destinies are knotted in a single point; the claim of uniqueness is unclear and leading to create a genetic relationship between them that is difficult to acknowledge fully: “Demnig uses his infinitely replicable format to show something singular, but as the stones are seen as part of his project, they merge to form a more clichéd, familiar image of the (Jewish) victim.” (Osborne, 2014).

The most dangerous aspect of this cliché is that because of the devastating impact of the Holocaust, the cultural heritage of Jewish populations cannot be discussed, preventing engagement with the loss of Jewish culture and putting pressure on the history of Jewish identity on a European scale. Treating them as a people whose past was taken away and turning them into mere victims does nothing but mitigate the effects of the devastation caused by the Holocaust. One of the main conceptual errors and methodological shortcomings of Holocaust education in Germany is that it is centered around a singular Jewish identity, as is the case here. Failure to resolve this has resulted in younger generations avoiding the study of the Holocaust, not being able to relate to the subject, finding it tiresome to refer to the Holocaust in many subjects, and hate speech against Jewish populations being incorporated into the everyday language without hesitation (Yetkin, 2012). The historiography that focuses only on the victims and reproduces repetitions of the victimization of a group can directly or indirectly create space for motivations that strengthen opposing discourses and actions. Other related problems are that students will “not be exposed to Jewish identity and culture” within the educational system, “the motivations of the perpetrators are not examined,” “the mechanisms that made the genocide possible” are not investigated, there is a “lack of critical perspective” that does not lead students to “guilt-defense reflexes,” “methodological disconnect,” the framing of Jewish people as a victim community, not as living groups, as in the image-making policy of the stones (Bunch, Canfield, and Schöler, 2011).

The focus of the Stolpersteine project is on the victims of the genocide, whereas in the present tense, where the denial of genocide continues, updating the field of this lens could strengthen ties with the past. Demnig excludes such an option from the

outset, bracketing the victims of the genocide and turning their names into objects of commemoration. Some Jewish groups criticize the placement of the victims' names on the sidewalks for trampling on these names, which should be respected (Goebel, 2010). Although this criticism creates a certain sacredness and myth through the victims' names, it would mean that their relatives have objections to this work. It is also criticized that the commemoration engages with the traumatic past by triggering a traumatized group and intensifying their experience of trauma. Therefore, it cannot be said that there is a complete consensus on this commemorative object and act of remembrance.

Moreover, for a group that is emotionally close to the victims, these stones erode the memory of the victims, causing disrespect towards them. In her video work *The Magic of the Photo that Remembers How to Forget* (2018), Palestinian visual artist Noor Abuarafteh invites us to distrust images. In her video work *The Magic of the Photo that Remembers How to Forget* (2018), she traces the artists left out of the frame by the art historical canon and uses a photograph of them together, but instead of showing this photograph, she makes us imagine it and asks the following question: "Whom do we believe, the image or someone's embodied memory?" and it will be realized while searching for the answer: "a distort in evidence, as we learn how the discourse of the powerful can transform how we see images." (Khaldi, 2023). The fact that what is seen is subject to the structuring of a hegemony leads to the conclusion that what surrounds the memory may also be the same apparatus of power. This can be read as not expecting too much from the memory or the object of memory alone, not falling under its spell, and not compromising our capacity to approach it with a critical perspective. This can be read as not expecting too much from memory or simply from the object of memory, not falling under its spell and compromising our capacity to approach it critically, and through all this, recognizing the erosion of memory. How can we say that instead of uncovering the ruined legacy of the Holocaust, the forms of remembrance, which in Germany has turned into a political advertisement and corresponds to the authorities' quest to rid themselves of the burden of the past, offer a model of counter-memory? Is writing the history of victims the same as writing their names in the urban space? The

redirection of counter-political energy to acceptable addresses for authorities instead of a critical gaze that addresses regimes of historicity and underlines the political, social, and cultural attitudes that made the Holocaust possible expands the boundaries of invisible spaces.

3.2.2. The Research Process of the Stolpersteine

Demnig's project is not only an installation and artwork; it is also based on documentation and archival work. These memorial stones, placed in specific locations in the city, are the outputs of the project's research process. However, before the information about the victims is translated into stone form, the project takes place during research. Research sources include the International Tracing Service, the German Federal Archives, as well as locally based organizations. But there is no doubt that there is a hierarchy regarding verifiability. The information gathered for the Stolpersteine to be placed in Germany is cross-checked with the information in the Memorial Book of the Federal Archives for the Victims of the Persecution of Jews in Germany. While the concentration camps, the perpetrators of the genocide, aim to leave no trace, we cannot speak of the reliability of the information and archives that have survived, and the research process for such work carries the same insecurity.

Given that this kind of memorialization also offers "a way of knowing and an episteme" (Sontag, 2021, p. 47), how can we accept that the culture of remembrance produced by the Stolpersteine aligns with democratic imaginaries? Can it be argued that a project that shies away from collectivization and bases its hesitation on the risk of damaging the veracity of the knowledge expressed in the monuments is not similar to the crises of 'knowing' experienced by monumentalizations around official history? For example, in contrast to the monopolization of the working process by a single person and his team, highlighting the names of the victims and anonymizing the team itself, would the fact that we hear the names of the members of the team not so often elevate each of them to a godlike status? The absence of any explanation about the monuments and their surroundings leads to them

experiencing an interlocutor problem: “It thus depends on an audience that is generally well educated, or at least somewhat curious and investigative” (Harjes, 2005, p. 147). According to Walter Grasskamp (*Unerwünschte Monumente*), “Whenever people (...) do not get enough clues to come up with some kind of interpretation, they become annoyed about the uninvited intrusion into their daily lives.” (Harjes, 2005, p. 147). Without adequate knowledge of the project’s historical background and conceptual framework, it is difficult for a viewer to connect with the conceptual discussion of the monument, even if they interact with it.

The failure to collectivize the workings of the project – Demnig claims that these processes do work, but no examples or records have been found – suggests that another factor that can be as dangerous in memory work as the state’s policy of forgetting is the remembrance itself. The most challenging part of memorialization is the inability to adequately utilize the possibilities that formal differences and diversity of forms can provide for this experience of remembering. A polymorphous narrative would prevent the representation of victims from pointing to a certain unity and limiting all their existence other than being victims, thus damaging their singularity. It is part of the totalitarian concept to render the differences between victims subjected to various perpetrators invisible and label them in a single category. This kind of remembering, which fits in with the memory regime in Germany, “might produce a deceptive sense of totality, throwing into the shadows, even into oblivion, stories, details and unexpected points of view that keep the intellect active and the memory digging” (Hartman, 1996, p. 319).

Although Demnig’s call for his project included collecting information about the victims and conducting detailed research, not content with oral testimonies, another difficult part is that the information/documents or testimonies obtained during this research cannot be publicized, and the process is stuck between the researcher and the project team. While researchers or activists who want to memorialize the victims’ names base their efforts on various kinds of research, these researchers cannot nurture a public dialogue ground to be open to interpretation. However, we

can say that the fact that research is being done for memorials encourages everyone to write micro-histories (Apel, 2013, p. 184). In the face of such a massive act of violence in which millions of people were killed, personal stories create a central focus (Ward, 2020), allowing others to build relationships around these stories. However, instead of personal stories with specific gravitas to enable fundamental interactions, highlighting only the victims' names tends to anonymize them. In response to why there is a separate stepping stone for each victim, it is said that the fascist regime tended to erase memories and reduce victims to numbers. To reverse this, they restored names (Stolpersteine, n. d.). "Formulaic and iconic, Demnig's Stolpersteine are recognizable as a kind of shorthand for Holocaust victims that arguably eclipses the individuals it claims to commemorate." (Osborne, 2020, p. 77). However, the fate of a memorial consisting of unrecognizable names, whose stories are unknown and unrecognized, cannot offer an antidote to 'mind-numbing numerical data curiosity' (Huyssen, 1999, p. 187) or a "cold approach" (Ward, 2020) to the victims. Contrary to the study's claim, the lack of unforgettable encounters in real life, and the failure to organize demand for confrontation within the chronology of the memorial stones themselves, have left the stones unattended in their locations. Demnig's methodology reveals an understanding in which the historian's subjectivity becomes invisible behind objective narratives. Instead of seeing the ruins in the present, he constructs his own objectivity by shifting the focus to the victims' general information as a point of agreement.

3.2.3. Stolpersteine as a Place

Another debate about the project is whether the areas where the stones are placed are public, according to the project's description of the address, the stones are 'usually near the entrance or under the house number' (Stolpersteine, n.d.). If we consider the places where the stones were placed as entirely public spaces, it would certainly be meaningful for those who know this background to understand the placement of them as a counter-sign against the policies of excluding Jewish people from public spaces in Germany as early as the 1930s. They also attempt to "make up for that spatial discrimination" against Jewish individuals and offer victims

“their permanent space, in a public sense yet also in relation to their private place of living (home/house) which they were also eventually deprived of” (Krzyżanowska, 2015, p. 480). However, in order to prevent this discrimination, two questions need to be answered: Does giving victims back their spatial memories of their places of belonging in this way render the question of compensation for their wrongfully confiscated property moot? Therefore, does the process of moral and spatial restitution coincide with the demand for material and legal restitution? Another fundamental question arises as to whether at least a symbolic and moral restitution can be completed: Is the front of a residential area or apartment building as public as the sidewalks, or can it be considered a semi-private space? The inability of the inhabitants of the buildings in front of which the stumbling stones are placed to connect with them or establish an interpretive “context” and “ritualized” collective memory has sometimes even led to the organization of “negative reactions” (Harjes 2005, p. 147). Thomas Hirschhorn argues that in the Netherlands, the placement of monuments to Gramsci, Spinoza, Bataille, and Deleuze outside official memorial sites creates the possibility of a counter-hegemonic archive (Foster, 2020, p. 46) precisely because it points to the marginal position of visiting philosophers in that country. Stolpersteine, on the other hand, are monuments that have taken their place in almost every corner of the city. Precisely because of their ubiquity, instead of causing an emotional gap or crack in the city as a whole, they constitute an example of archiving that has become the routine of the city in order to fill those gaps.

For this reason, it is doubtful to what extent this kind of memorialization, which spreads throughout the city, which is an integral part of it, which does not problematize it, and to which no objection to the integrity of the city can be presented, will create a counter-hegemony. However, it is known that narratives about the Holocaust are more fragmented and hollower than other narratives (Sarlo, 2012, p. 86). Recognizing this helps to distinguish how the gaps are filled with linguistic, discursive, subjective, and social processes (Sarlo, 2012, p. 87). How does treating the Holocaust as free from tensions, oppositions, or gaps in the narrative translate the knowledge of genocide into today’s world? While states have

injected their policies of forgetting into remembrance activities, it is also necessary to think about what past processing corresponds to within the present conditions. While states present confronting difficult pasts as a form of prestige, could it be that rituals or practices that officially demonstrate this make space for a definition of 'us' that belongs to the state itself? According to Adorno, "the defensive unwillingness in the Federal Republic to confront the past (...) indicated not the persistence of fascist tendencies against democracy (e.g., neo-Nazi groups) but of fascist tendencies within democracy" which "are much more insidious" (Olick, 1998, p. 548). Then such a process of remembrance must be organized so that fascism and the fascist mentality in democracy can be fought and the insidious program crystallized.

Narratives, discourses, remembrances, and practices that cannot be counter-hegemonized have the function of being the cultural aspect of hegemony. Suppose a political focus advertises the rhetoric of confronting the past as a presentation of superiority, virtue, and achievement. Is it possible to consider this confrontation genuine and think the victims are not instrumentalized? In this case, the spatial codes of the monuments and the urban coordinates in which they are located become more critical than we can imagine. The stones spread throughout the city, covering the front of many buildings. Thus the public space will be considered that the choice of such a widespread habitat as the project site may have strengthened the impact of the project: "Such widespread examples of monuments can connect to a feeling of incomprehensibility due to their abstraction and being seen as an example of contemporary urban design" (Ward, 2020).

The stones placed within the project's scope invest emotionally in a nostalgic connotation in the urban space, even though they do not tend to establish ties with each other. In *Invisible Cities*, Calvino states that "what makes a city a city is the relationship between the size of the space it occupies and what happened in its past" and that the city expands by "absorbing what remains of memories like a sponge" (Calvino, 2009, p. 60). The memory formed from these memories will appear as "singular and narrative patterns" on the city routes. The feeling of nostalgia

strengthens residents' relationship with the city; imagining the city, urban objects, and urban spaces with nostalgic references is like squeezing this sponge. This is not only a dream but also the suppression of memory with nostalgic longings. The plan to nostalgize the pre-genocide past with memorial stones that include the names of the victims of the genocide is a way of accepting the legacy of the genocide as it is and living in indifference to the truth without fighting it. While nostalgia involves covering up past crimes and the tendency to let go of the burden of the past, the question is what precisely one longs for in nostalgia: "another time, or a better life?" (Boym, 2021, p. 14). A time when the Holocaust did not pass through our lives, a time when no one was a victim or a perpetrator, a time when there was no weight of having to face the knowledge of genocide? Nostalgicizing something functions to normalize its inherent tensions, make it a fantasy, and tempt it away from critical thinking (Boym, 2021, p. 17). When do the names of the former inhabitants of a city whose tens of thousands of people were massacred in the genocide appear in various parts of the city? Is it out of nostalgia for the old story of that place, or is it to strengthen the possibilities of coming to terms with the perpetrators? Just as memory sites are open to visitation, "nostalgia opens time to visitation" (Boym, 2021, p. 16). In this respect, the Stolpersteine project, informed by a nostalgic understanding of history, envisions a universe of remembrance that will change "the past's elusiveness and uncanniness" (Boym, 2021, p. 123).

3.2.4. Settlement of the Stolpersteine

The project presents an installation mold ready to spread. As soon as it settled in the determined address, the Stolpersteine became a regional fixture. However, memorialization practices and counter-monuments often refuse to establish static ties with space because a format fixed in the area can cause stereotypical attitudes or rituals for a limited group.

The settledness of a monument creates "religious rituals similar in form and content to those in a museum" (Duncan and Wallach, 2022, p. 53). In this respect, the seductive effect of the "iconographic program" on the viewer, which is the subject

of museum criticism, is also encountered in the project of the Stolpersteine. When the urban space is considered an open-air museum, the density of the stones around the city – which also means the weight of the names of the victims – increases the effect of ritualization and, thus, ceremonially, even if it cannot have a collective character. Just as museums are based on a politics of history and classification. This politics influences the functioning of the museum and interrupts the circulation of the dominant narrative; the stumbling stones, on the contrary, are products that fall outside historical politics as a failure to classify. Obviously, in regular contact with the stumbling stones, the stumbling reactions to this iconographic representation of the victim are orchestrated: putting oneself in the victim's shoes, deep sadness, and reflexes of repression. Showing such a sorrowful past breaks the alliance of collective memories with emancipatory options by packaging a persuasion that also makes the present and the present preferable. According to Duncan and Wallach (2022, p. 65), “a symbolic exchange occurs between the visitor and the state in museums,” “producing a visitor's consent of loyalty to the state in exchange for spiritual wealth.” In the Stolpersteine project, thousands of stones scattered all over the city will bring the audience-citizen closer to the state as proof that the state is confronting the past and allocating enough support for this confrontation. As a result, the stones are placed with official permission, and this process can transform into gratitude towards authorities. By looking at the suffering of others and previous generations, the spectator re-affirms their relation to the violence in the past and may even feel gratitude that no one today is exterminated in concentration camps because of their pathological relationship with reality. In this way alone, we can say that monuments will only make sense for a particular generation and that the meaning of their presence in the space for future generations will lag behind even today.

Does the Stolpersteine project cause memory inflation, spreading across cities, streets, and neighborhoods, expanding remembrance for a moment and making it ephemeral, or does it increase the magic of remembering by collectivizing remembrance? According to one view, Stolpersteine shocks passing pedestrians, acknowledging the victims in this space, but once the pedestrian crosses the

sidewalk, he or she will forget them again (Hernández-Grande, 2020). According to Huyssen, people are increasingly willing to listen to other people's stories and look for grounds between the self and the other that fit multi-layered and plural narratives (2022, p. 290). This kind of listening-hearing quest is based precisely on the claim that museums and comprehensive data banks are spaces of forgetting because, in these spaces, the sense of the past is appropriated in asynchronicity so that recollections are ephemeral and momentary. Likely, the Stolpersteine will also lead to this recollection with their fixity, dullness, immobility, and external relations with the city and the public.

Moreover, the needed stories are not found in these stones, so it is not even possible to say that they tend to fill the void of remembrance. The opposite of an ephemeral remembrance does not derive its permanence from constant repetition, like writing stories on stones. Any memorialization work that points out that remembering always contains a lack of recollection can give us the motivation to build communities that strengthen their democratic imagination while remembering their past in a way that brings us together with the other shows the limits of narrative, transforms itself and leaves a certain margin that remembrance may not be free from power relations.

The fact that the stumbling stones can be recognized in public can be considered in conjunction with the concept of "studium," only for a certain group of educated individuals do these stones make sense. Just as in the photographs, "an average affect" and "certain training" (Barthes, 1982, p. 26) will help us to grasp exactly what the stones mean. The placement of these stones has a meaning for those who are familiar with Germany's past experiences, who are aware of the political atmosphere in post-1990 Germany, who can discern why the duty of remembrance is necessary, who are aware of their civic responsibilities, who know that the victims of the Holocaust belonged to a wide variety of backgrounds. For others, however, the stones are meaningless and invisible.

To recognize the studium is inevitably to encounter the photographer's intentions, to enter into harmony with them, to approve or disapprove of

them, but always to understand them, to argue them within myself, for culture, (from which the studium derives) is a contract arrived at between creators and consumers. (Barthes, 1982, p. 28).

What Barthes says about photographs can also be applied to Stolpersteine, that is, image-making objects and all other monuments. Therefore, in order to overcome the indifference of the audience, the studium must be taken into account, that is, a program that prioritizes collective-based, local confrontations and prepares the public for these stones, where the Stolpersteine installation can be meaningful, must be put into action. Otherwise, the names of the victims and the dates of their deaths will become a repetition for those who already remember them, while the rest of society continues their lives without stumbling. In this sense, the project has no plan to make its embeddedness visible; the stones are left to their own fate.

3.2.5. Crisis of Context in Stolpersteine

As the Stolpersteine project is based on a conceptual art-based installation, it allows for a discussion of the function of the exhibition. The limits of the material and visual impact of the project are also based on a crisis of context. The project incorporates a “metamorphic and unstable nature,” whereby the installation expands the scale of the “playground,” “fragmenting and reconstituting it” (Ranciere, 2023, p. 35). Although they can appear from anywhere in the city, the stones are invisible to their inhabitants and have the disadvantage of an extremely limited viewpoint in size, its dimensions can “be interpreted as not claiming control of the city-zens space of habitat” (Krzyżanowska, 2015, p. 477). Their physical possibilities cannot provide an actual act of stumbling. “After being erected and unveiled, memorials fade quickly from public and private consciousness. This is especially true of the small, inconspicuous Stolpersteine.” (Apel, 2014, p. 191).

The limitation of the material impact of the study is also under a crisis of semiotic context. Square plaques can be associated with their “angularity” “with ‘harsh,’ ‘technical,’ ‘masculine,’ ‘objectivity,’” while “roundness” can mean “emotional,” “fluidity,” “organic” (Abousnnouga and Machi, 2013, p. 46). Natalia

Krzyżanowska notes that if one looks closely at the plaques, they are not exactly geometric in form, as their corners are rounded (2015, p. 477). I claim that this is only a detail of their material aspect. Once a square form is chosen, the fact that the corners are rounded becomes irrelevant; the relation of a fixed form with straight edges to masculinity and authority is a topic worth discussing further.

Although the project is based on establishing a spatial context of the genocide by referring to the former settlements of the victims, the spatial connection is with the space of the past, not with the area trying to keep up with the daily rhythm of the present. This may be one of the reasons why city dwellers or tourists often fail to notice these stones; they are obscured in today's urban rhythm. If this project enables a representation in itself, then it should be able to problematize whether this representation has a neutralizing effect. A project that proposes to erect monuments for the victims of a genocide in which millions of people were murdered and thousands of people were victimized will not be able to erect monuments for all victims and victimizers. Despite Demnig's best efforts, the number of memorials he has been able to pitch to date has not reached a hundred thousand, and it is physically and temporally impossible for a project to include all the victims, the victimized, or the harmed. Even if possible, there is no archive where this information could be researched and tracked. It is also a financially impossible project to complete as it would cost hundreds of millions of Euros, with each stone costing approximately 120 Euros. There is no information or trace of the project addressing the impossibility of its completion, and it is worth questioning not only the fact that the project will not be completed but also the extent to which it has been completed and how its incompleteness can be processed.

My argument is that while for any viewer the victims cannot be precisely counted and the impact of the memorials on everyday life impossible to measure, the urban appearance of the stumbling stones can make the victimization of genocide understandable only in terms of these stones. By directing the uncountable population of genocide victims to become countable in their locality, the project presents a significant dilemma that fails to articulate the 'impossible': It frees the

genocide from being talked about in the shadow of numbers while at the same time narrowing the boundaries of the horror that was lived. The fact that memorials invite the consequences of the catastrophe to be detectable suggests that confronting genocide, addressing complicity, cannot happen through locally focused struggles, that we are dealing with a huge and complex regime of memory, and that these can lead one to despair in the face of the vastness of the limits of agency, rather than strengthening a collective stance of remembrance.

3.2.6. The Ability to Stumble After Disaster

Didi-Huberman argues that while war is horrible, it is also narratable, and the experience of war will penetrate the linguistic field because of the meanings it gives to speech and discourse (2022, p. 11). The desire to verbalize also leads to the consequences of narrating what we have seen, presenting the fact that it happened as an absolute, and seeing it as a means of proof. The most problematic aspect of transforming disasters into a narrative is that they are confined to linguistic boundaries and absolutized as far as they are told. After a catastrophe that interferes with linguistic integrity, the victim cannot restore this catastrophe to a narrative or linguistic integrity, resorting to the denial of the compromised linguistic integrity to return to normalcy (Nichanian, 2018, p. 28). Undoubtedly, the loss of linguistic integrity and the differentiation in expression do not lead to the same consequences between disasters whose consequences have been or are being confronted and those that have not. The effort to remember and talk about the traces of the catastrophic past in its entirety within a schema of the present, the enthusiasm to narrate and express it, is inherent in denial precisely because it suppresses its inexpressible aspects and raises the desire to return to normal as soon as possible. Because the catastrophe is such a moment that not only cannot be dealt with as a legal matter but also acts that cannot be judged by the law, which is beyond the scrutiny of the discipline of law: “A non-juridical element of truth exists such that the *quaestio facti* can never be reduced to the *quaestio iuris*” (Agamben, 1999, p. 17). Therefore, research that reduces the search for memory and confrontation after the Holocaust to law and documents leads to the consequences of not being able to understand and

explain it fully. In addition, it will lead to results such as not being able to reveal the experiences fully, and the discipline of law can organize a process in which only a limited number of perpetrators and acts are tried and punished within its unique system. However, instead of making the truth comprehensible, these trials narrow it and produce a more general sense of relief by abusing the truth. Robert Serviatius, the lawyer of Adolf Eichmann, one of the actors of the genocide, in his defense during the trials, states that “Eichmann feels guilty before God, not the law.” (Agamben, 1999, p. 23). The perpetrators’ inability to feel guilty before the law reveals the extra-legal dimension of what happened, but this dimension also justifies the laxity of the social struggle against the perpetrators. In his letters written in Cairo, Artin Arslanyan, one of the witnesses of the violence against Armenians in 1909, clearly expresses his inability to tell the whole story as a mute witness of the events (2015, p. 91). Arslanyan’s helplessness stems from the unparalleled violence that makes it impossible to describe his experiences.

There is something “fascinating” about horror, that “gives a fatal pleasure” (Wievorka, 2006, p. 11); looking at its remains, turning to its images instead of frightening, makes us wonder, attracts appetizers, and arouses desire. Constant exposure to shocking things will produce habituation and indifference over time as a protective mechanism (Sontag, 2004, p. 83). Those repeated encounters with images will lead the gaze to turn away, not to want to know; the knowledge of the objects will no longer cause new fears and arousals, or, very similarly, each experience will produce generic effects. The various recollections that aestheticize violence sometimes present an attractive program – “the attraction of wanting to see something agonizing” (Sontag, 2004, p. 96). The “spectacle of the suffering of others” (Sontag, 2004, p. 99) and the turning towards it and becoming indifferent to it turn citizens into “consumers of spectacularized violence” (Sontag, 2004, p. 111). This can be achieved through images of brutality and the Stolpersteine, which draw attention to victim situations - regardless of Demnig’s intentions. After all, it is not only the producer who determines the mission of these stones but also the audience that completes it, the people who interact with it or not. Is it not

conceivable, then, that the search for the traces of the victims of a genocide in which millions of people were sacrificed no longer leads to shock but to fascination?

Finally, moving image artist Hito Steyerl is in favor of developing a radical critique against certain montage practices that create ideological articulation “through images and sounds” and does not hesitate to confront the “populist forms” that emerge from the “search for the consensus of images” (Steyerl, 2017, p. 46). Steyerl also considers what his critique of the politics of the moving image might mean in terms of the articulation of protest, which suggests that all juxtapositions and mergers cannot create a commonality, that this articulation cannot invoke the notion of ‘the people,’ and that, on the contrary, it will trigger separations, divisions, and disassociation. When such a narrative totality cannot be technically constructed between images, how can it be built between thousands of memorial stone blocks via a memory project? The most common tendency in rethinking memorialization in the aftermath of the Holocaust is to examine the catastrophe at a macro level, to understand it in terms of statistical data, and to commemorate it by pointing out how much destruction it caused in the lives of so many people. This general accounting has a defocusing effect on the transformation of the everyday, on agency, on the idea that agency is not an extraordinary evil. Moreover, the unity of these images, objects, and expressions operate a repressive device reminiscent of (Lacan’s) “blind spot” (Steyerl, 2017, p. 46), which “creates a field of visibility” while itself being “visible as a screen.” Therefore, I argue that the Stolpersteine project, which excludes commemorative practices that cannot be shaped, unified, or fixed, although spatially decentralized, this form of remembrance, which is managed, approved, and accepted from a single center, aims to create a kind of consensus, to present a harmonic narrative pattern, and to create a populist format of remembrance. For the project to be equal to its initial goal, I think there is a greater need for options that expose its blind spot, that decentralize memorialization as much as the monument, that can bring together different words, representations, and forms instead of establishing a common word for millions of victims and presenting a uniform representation. Arslan argues that the “post-disaster” constitutes a narrative genre that is “open to connections” and that the ability of this

genre to offer a “commonality of gaze” can invoke new grounds (2021). It is the same genre that can transform Jean Amery’s resentment towards Germany, which has begun to take steps towards normalization after the end of the Nazi regime, into a language and thought that distances itself from the past, “creating cuts in the fabric of social consensus” (Arslan, 2020, p. 238) and turning this attitude into a commonality. Unlike the method of the Stolpersteine project, a culture of memory that is in constant search, that cannot be fixed, routinized or banalized, will need to be created “against any kind of fiction or linguistic construction that would trivialize the catastrophe,” “making the catastrophe completely comprehensible” (Arslan, 2020, p. 241).

3.2.7. The Testimony of the Stolpersteine

In the collective memory of post-genocide Europe, “representations of the 20th century’s moments of evil and crimes against humanity” are embodied in the “witness figure” (Traverso, 2020, p. 14). Nevertheless, the atrocities are so great that there is an inevitable crisis of creating an objective, unambiguous, contradiction-free testimony that can tell it ‘as it happened’ that can fully convince that it happened. The Nuremberg trial, which took place in Nuremberg, Germany, in 1945-1946, where 24 officials guilty of genocide were put on trial, also played a role. However, it will be seen that there are examples of an unending search for witnesses not only in the field of law but also in cultural studies. Among the founding objectives of the International Military Tribunal (IAM), where the Nuremberg trials were held, was the documentation of the crimes committed, the creation of records, and the collection of testimonies and evidence. In this way, future generations, in particular, will be presented with evidence to convince them of the atrocities that occurred during the genocide. This is why, in the aftermath of disasters, it becomes difficult to understand the witnessing authority and unravel its complex structure. However, all that is necessary for judicial power and the courts is the testimony of the witnesses, who convince us that testimony is possible and explainable. The general task of criminal courts is to determine the guilty party of the crime by cross-examining the witness statements, the statements of the accused,

the concrete evidence, the material elements, and by choosing the pros and cons and to reach the guilty party based on the criminal act. Therefore, a witness either exists or does not exist: Either the witness makes truthful statements and enables the determination of material facts, or they negatively affect the proceedings by making false statements. However, no court considers how the witness perceives that they are a witness and how differences in sensation and perception affect testimony.

We have to deal with the new forms of post-catastrophe witnessing in the context of the debates that witnessing in Auschwitz has brought about. It should be taken into consideration that this debate is not only about witnessing in the camps but also about the aftermath of the camps, remembering the camps, and looking at the victims. According to Agamben, testimony can form the basis for the will to survive in the camp, while “the only reason to live is to ensure that the witness does not perish.” (1999, p. 15). Not mentioning the testimony or talking about Auschwitz may be a survival tactic preferred precisely to eliminate the testimony. Courts examining testimony focus on the words, not non-verbal testimonies or silences, or the witness’s silence cannot be interpreted as an answer to the question posed by the court. Sometimes testimony is a consolation for a sense of guilt that victims can only feel and should not belong to them.

Pointing to two etymological origins of the word testimony in Latin, Agamben analyzes the words *tertis* and *superstes*. While *tertis* means “a third party,” *superstes* is “a person who has lived through something” (1999, p. 17). The etymological origin alone suggests that at least two types of witnessing are possible: witnessing an event or process from the inside or the outside. This distinction turns testimony into a line of tension in the case of concentration camps, one of the leading centers of genocide. “Bearing witness to it from the inside” means witnessing “from the inside of death” who experienced the atrocity, who were slaughtered and killed; witnessing it from the outside requires distancing oneself from reality “since the ‘outsider’ is by definition excluded from the event.” (Agamben, 1999, p. 35). The victims will not be able to testify, and the testimony

of the accidental survivors will be open to all kinds of suppression reflexes. As a matter of fact, the image of concentration camps seen by outsiders does not visualize the extent of the atrocities. In this case, testimony is an “event without witnesses” (Agamben, 1999, p. 35); as Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub put it:

There were no witnesses, no victims, perpetrators, or bystanders who could count as witnesses and therefore that the Holocaust, as an event without a trace, ‘without a record,’ really was unique and unprecedented in ways barely short of the mystical (Goodhart, 1992).

The point here is that witnessing is not only about observing the moment of genocide from inside or outside: Certain connections, objects, and things within the everyday are also witnesses to genocide. What is meant is that since genocide continues as a process, the post-genocide, a pillar of the concept of genocide, permeates the everyday, and the present time is kneaded with the knowledge of genocide. Stolpersteine, then, bears witness to its processing in memory in the post-genocide period, to the frenzy of remembrance, to the return of the names of the victims to their places of resettlement, to the knowledge of the genocide that establishes or fails to establish links with the everyday. In this context, the place of testimony is not only the camps and the time of testimony is not only the genocide process, and a memorialization work can also be involved in the testimony of the past event. Claude Lanzmann’s *Shoah*, a 9-hour and 26-minute documentary, focuses on how the genocide permeates the present and how it is recalled in traumatic memory through the director’s interviews with survivors of the camps instead of including archival footage or documents of the genocide. As a method, the film proposes to record testimony in moments when images lack the power of representation and to think about how those moments are remembered, and it offers a new surface of witnessing: to witness the process of witnessing.

The witness’s recollection of their testimony is more complicated than one might think, as the memories expressed can “become clichés,” “taken from experience and filtered through the mind to become smooth and flawless” (Levi, 1996, p. 19). For survivors, testimony will repeat the pain of reproducing the complicated past

each time, and they may turn to create substitute narratives that will soothe their pain. For it is neither possible to “repair humiliation” (Levi, 1996, p. 20) nor to regain “a sense of trust in the world that was shaken by the first blow (...) and completely collapsed under torture” (Amery, 1988, p. 40). Nichanian’s observation that “access to documents of the period,” “visual witnesses,” and “accounts of how it happened” would be irrelevant in the witness-unavailable-event (2018, p. 32) is precisely related to the “elimination of the witness” in the face of the experience of violence. In such a moment, the survivors’ narratives open the door to witnessing the impossibility of witnessing. It is pointed out that “the transformation of the event into an object of history will not be possible with archives” (Nichanian, 2018, p. 39) because individual testimonies will not match each other, and singular testimonies cannot be bracketed. The Stolpersteine, where limited information about the victims of the genocide is shared, can be considered as a monument of the testimony of the city: a warning monument dedicated to witnessing it that repeats the knowledge of the genocidal past (Wieviorka, 2006, p. 200). Rancier argues that the practice of installation transforms the artist into an archivist by “bearing testimony (...) about a shared history and world,” while, as in the case of various installation examples, it enables the artist to “summarize” or “illustrate the idea” of a period (2023, pp. 34-35). The Stolpersteine project is also about the genocidal experience of the neighborhoods, cities, and buildings where the stones are placed. They can be recognized as the testimony of those left behind and the victimization of the inhabitants of that city. But this testimony is directed not to the experience of the victims or survivors in the camps but to the fact that they were exterminated and persecuted. In the case of the Stolpersteine project, what needs to be asked is how the outside of the camp, the normal, the ordinary flow of life, can contain testimonies, while what happens in the camps cannot be witnessed.

In the discussion of testimony, it should be recognized that how an event is represented, articulated, or remembered is as much the surface of a possible testimony as the event itself. For example, the victims of an experience of perpetration, while articulating their testimony of that perpetration, also become witnesses to the formation and change of certain axes of its transmission over time;

in other words, the witness who is alive in the present is the one who lives, and their testimony space expands as they live. Witnessing also invites us to witness the transformation in the witness articulations of their testimonies; what is articulated is never just a moment locked in the past.

Participating in the memorialization, narration, and memorialization of a period and experiencing the politics of remembrance also involves testimonies and thresholds that cannot be witnessed. In general, narratives, memorials, and museums present themselves as pure witnesses of the period from which they emerge and underline at every turn that they are at an equal distance to both sides. The desire to take refuge behind neutrality stems from leaning on the power of not belonging to either side, of not being trapped in ongoing dichotomies. Here, being a third party can construct testimony as objective data and give it a halo of inviolability. Thus, while presenting itself as a public witness, a monument may also be grounding the spatio-temporal-emotional unshakability of its existence. That monument is not precisely what is seen from the outside, nor can it be seen from the inside in terms of what it represents; it is beyond the visible. While the question to be answered is how an event that is impossible to witness can be remembered and memorialized, the Stolpersteine project does not make us ask this question; on the contrary, it processes the data it obtains, returns the victims to various parts of the city, strives to place more, and does not object to the assumption that witnessing, for catastrophe, is possible.

The positions of the witness in the power relations of the time in which the testimony takes place are inherent in the testimony itself; therefore, it is necessary to focus on the witness and the testimony through the filter of this relationship. For those who survived the Auschwitz concentration camps, the authority of testimony elevates the witness to an almost iconographic position and confines the witness statements to certain spheres of speech and representation – as if a perfect and complete testimony is possible within a holistic schema. Moreover, the politics of testimony matures as Auschwitz begins to be talked about; it allows survivors or outsiders to speak on behalf of the victims, recognizing that the camps and the

atrocities can be imagined. A testimony that comes to the ground of narratability only through the identity of the victim or perpetrator, excluding all other experiences (even unique experiences and otherness), misses that the witness will attain this quality in the present as much as in the past. The “memory paradigm of the Western world” reduces the experience of genocide to a “binary conflict” between perpetrators and victims (Traverso, 2018, p. 41), a reduction that applies not only to genocide but also to other experiences of violence. Such a site of conflict can function to negate the mechanisms of genocide in the first place. Although the witness needs an experience from the past, the time the testimony is spoken will need a present that will define the past.

The “conceptual confusion” (Agamben, 1999, p. 19) caused by the Auschwitz trials led to a long postponement of the study of genocide. Moreover, these trials led to an approach as if there was a problem that could be solved and that it could be solved within the judicial system. After the courts have solved the problem, bringing it up repeatedly will be understood as if there is a desire to create unrest. In the aftermath of past experiences of violence, the tendency to manipulate the material aspects of the incident by putting it on a legal basis has been a standard method. However, such trials do not produce great results except for providing the opportunity to problematize the judiciary itself. In this context, when examining post-genocide memory work, it is necessary to consider whether this seductive function of the law has infected the remembrance activities. Some symbolic trials that produce discourses such as “they have already been tried,” “what was necessary was done,” “the guilty were punished,” etc., can cover up the horror of the genocide and lighten the burden of the past, paralyzing the efforts of confrontation. There should be space for recollections that do not reproduce these discourses and do not attempt to complete the missing testimony. Stolpersteine, on the other hand, creates a “time of remembrance” in which its viewers, those who recognize its traces in the city, those who can distinguish it in the speed of the metropolis, feel conscientiously relieved by remembering the victims of the past for a moment. Moreover, these commemorations may convince the viewer that remembering has a redeeming aspect. Unfortunately, the Stolpersteine project is far from producing arguments to

the contrary because, in Germany's policy of remembrance, genocide memorials are the product of a totalizing, gap-filling perspective that makes us leave the past behind.

What witnesses cannot and will not adequately describe is the horror itself. In this sense, the moments that remain of the survivors of the camps are not the moments when they are unable to speak, unable to focus, tongue-tied, are not the whole setup stops or freezes, but perhaps the moments when the situation crystallizes. In turn, the unexpected relationship between some of the prisoners in the camps and the camp staff, the fact that they play football games together and the times when they communicate for a moment as if they were side by side in another context, are outside the expected narrative: "Other men of the SS and the rest of the squad are present at the game; they take sides, bet, applaud, urge the players on as if, rather than at the gates of hell, the game was taking place on the village green" (Levi, 1989, p. 55). In processes of traumatic violence, it is worth mentioning that the perpetrator and the victim get closer to each other and develop other kinds of relationships instead of the usual ones.

This match might strike someone as a brief pause of humanity in the middle of an infinite horror. Like the witnesses, I view this match, this moment of normalcy, as the true horror of the camp. For we can perhaps think that the massacres are over – even if here and there they are repeated, not so far away from us. However, that match is never over; it continues uninterrupted. (Agamben, 1999, p. 26).

The Stolpersteine project also constructs a ground of encounter that allows for this moment of normalcy. The project team's will to confine the research process, to prevent the monuments from diversifying stylistically, and to present a single form is intended to distract the viewer from contemporary contradictions. For this reason, the perpetrators and those associated with them who come into contact with these memorials inscribed with the victims' names perpetuate the will to deny the genocide. In light of this, the stones are nothing more than an artificial setting for dialogue where victims can meet the perpetrators at the same level.

Nichanian warns that testimony cannot be taken as “historical evidence” and memory studies cannot “use testimony as a document” (2018, p. 111) in search of evidence. Testimony in the aftermath of a disaster is only the witness’s witnessing of their death (Nichanian, 2018, p. 37). Because normatively, what is expected from the institution of testimony is to prove the catastrophe that has befallen and to pass it on to future generations in the best way possible. The will to genocide and denialism (2018, p. 39), which witnesses cannot resist, will result in the victims being obliged to prove the catastrophe, with consequences that will obscure the disaster’s lasting impact on the victims. Nichanian’s objection to the testimony is also related to its sublimation in various forms and the effort to aestheticize it rather than being content with raw testimony (2018, p. 116). The testimony of survivors of traumatic experiences of violence is a testimony that disrupts the integrity of language and the capacity to speak of loss (Nichanian, 2018, p. 88). Therefore, remembrance work that points to the deformation of testimony, to the mutual modification of testimony, should not allow for the development of a coherently functioning model of memorialization, and if it does, we should doubt it.

3.2.8. Stolpersteine as Archiving

Archive is a written or visual storage and filtering center with a decisive, supportive, and direct structuring function of memory. According to Foucault, the archive is not limited to being a “place;” it “is first the law of what can be said, the system that governs the appearance of statements as unique events” and “grouped together in distinct figures, composed in accordance with multiple relations, maintained or blurred in accordance with specific regularities” (Foucault, 2010, p. 129). The metaphor for Foucault that points to the power of archives today as the address that organizes knowledge is *stars*; “which seem close to us shining brightly from afar off, while others that are in fact close to us are already growing pale.” (Foucault, 2010, p. 129). This paradox, that what is physically closer is experienced conceptually farther away, can be read with the possibility that the archive can establish links with utopias that have ended and become a substitute for vanished hopes for the future. What is difficult to understand about the archive is that its

boundaries cannot be defined, it cannot constitute a unity on its own, and it carries the weight of its concept. But more importantly, the archive is precisely the product of a knowledge regime, from which it derives its ability to determine the knowledge to be stored, classified, selected, and presented. What has been lost or neglected in the archive cannot be determined on its own, but can be recognized by certain patterns; therefore, the archive cannot reveal what belongs to the past objectively. Archival materials can only make sense if they are explained with specific epistemic rules; for example, to show an archive from a certain period, it is necessary to determine who did the archiving, by whom it was transmitted to the present day, what the institutions, conditions, and contexts of the period in which the archive was preserved were, what the cultural and political climate and power relations of the archived period were like.

Derrida says that “arkhe,” the etymological root of the concept of the archive, is used in the sense of both “commencement” and “commandment” (Derrida, 1998, p. 1); such a strong connection provides it with the ground of absoluteness. The connotation of command in the origin of the archive would justify the emphasis on its nomological power and law-making function. In the meantime, the Latin words “archivum” or “archium” are also linked to the origin of the word archive: “initially a house, a domicile, an address, the residence of the superior magistrates, the archons, those who commanded” literally. (Derrida, 1998, p. 2). The direction of these origins of the word shows us the linguistic proximity of archiving’s relation to authority. In fact, Derrida supports Foucault’s views on the archive, pointing out that it can be a product of certain hierarchies and “the fever of authority and the need to establish official memory” (Liang, 2015): “There is no archive without a place of consignment, without a technique of repetition, and without a certain exteriority. No archive without outside.” (Derrida, 1998, p. 11). The Stolpersteine project is both the product of an archive and an invitation to archiving. By bringing the genocide archives to the streets, it takes the archival outside the inaccessible offices and databases and publicizes them. However, it neglects that the archive is inherent to power and insists on being faithful to the knowledge it receives from the

official archive. The Stolpersteine model denies its outside, the exteriority in which it takes place, and acts as if the knowledge it contains is absolute and unique.

Derrida's juxtaposition of the archive and the notion of continuity challenges the assumption that the archive is always static and fixed, pointing out that it is constantly being reproduced and reinterpreted and, therefore, like memory, dynamic. "The archive always works, and a priori, against itself." (Derrida, 1998, p. 12). Moreover, Derrida will also think of the archive in terms of the death drive and pleasure within Freud's psychoanalytic theory: While archiving points to the destruction of the past, like the death drive, the creation of the archive will trigger pleasure. These impulses can be explained as the motivations to intervene in the disappearance of the past, to claim it, or to seize it. In particular, repetition, the desire to re-experience the past, is another aspect of the archive's tension. The contradictions and deficiencies within the archive allow for new searches for meaning in knowledge systems. In this sense, the archive is as "much pre-production as it is post-production" (Foster, 2020, p. 40), i.e., it draws attention to the commencement of the "lost or displaced" in its orientation towards creating historical knowledge. The thought-provoking aspect of archival art is in treating "archival materials as found yet constructed, factual yet fictive, public yet private" (Foster, 2020, p. 41) while designing archival architectural integrity based on their hybridity. Demnig's archiving policy, I would argue, provided a release from the horror of the genocide, on the one hand, to be fully informed, to know it fully, to comprehend it, and on the other hand, to atone for the guilt of not being able to prevent it. The memorial stones point to more than the fact that the genocide happened, but how it is remembered in German society and how it is part of the daily routine. Translating the knowledge produced over the victims into stone form and placing them in the city also spatializes the archival knowledge.

For Derrida, the relief of *Gradiva*, which was discovered during the excavations in Pompeii and had mythological connotations, helps to think about the impossible testimony of the archive. The past no longer exists, but traces of the past are tried to be captured in the present around *Gradiva*'s footsteps. *Gradiva*'s footprints are,

therefore, a sign that she has been there, but they also mean that she is no longer there in the present. The testimony of the archive will replace the void created by not being able to witness Gradiva's presence by following her footsteps:

The possibility of the archiving trace, this simple possibility, can only divide the uniqueness. Separating the impression from the imprint. Because this uniqueness is not even a past present. It would have been possible, one can dream of it after the fact, only insofar as its iterability, that is to say, its immanent divisibility, the possibility of its fission, haunted it from the origin. The faithful memory of such a singularity can only be given over to the ghost. (Derrida 1995, p. 65)

Although Gradiva's footprints have given her a certain permanence, those traces can be recalled to the universe of the present, to the testimony of the present, with the "iterability" provided by the archive. The testimony that could not be realized in the past will develop new connections for those left behind. "Contemporary German memory culture is determined by the desire of subsequent generations to understand that which they came too late to witness" (Osborne, 2014). The Stolpersteine, then, are not the work of witnessing from the inside, but of being unable to witness, of bringing a lost past to the ground of representation. In this context of impossibility, the lives pointed to by the stones placed by the artist Demnig are prosthetic (Osborne, 2014); Demnig traces a belated testimony as a kind of fetish object. But simultaneously, like the Gradiva symbol, "caught between the exceptional and the uniform, singularity and ubiquity" (Osborne, 2014).

The fact that the archivist is also loyal to the politics of remembrance is often overlooked in archival studies, and archives, which can have highly manipulative contents, are included in a specific hierarchy, especially in historiography. In this respect, the archive carries the key to sovereignty that is difficult to shake. The archive's accumulative and evidentiary function overrides the function of deciding what and how to remember and the politics of knowledge. Therefore, the interventions, layers of meaning, and attempts to control the past that archival

knowledge undergoes will be neglected (Levi, 2014). Foucault states that the records and recording mechanisms that constitute archives are a substitute for the mechanism of confession-pardon in the Christian faith (2022, 27) and that the common point between the ritual of forgiveness, which is set to “say everything to erase everything,” and recording is to add discourse to the everyday. When we examine it with the aspect of power that mobilizes, makes to talk, provokes (2022, 36), keeps records, creating record storages that will lead to document inflation, archiving can be realized with the provocation of power. Verne Harris, an archivist working for the Nelson Mandela Foundation, argues that the archive offers *a cross-section of a cross-section of a cross-section* of social memory (2018, p. 13) as a result of the narrowing of the universe of records by rulers in authority in studies on difficult pasts. Therefore, while the social expectation of the archive is that it will reveal the past, remind the forgotten, and play a role in the processes of confrontation, in reality, the archive only marks a limited space and research that is not interested in how the archive has been able to come to the present and what it preserves and how it preserves it will be stuck in a space occupied by the archive.

The archive as a whole cannot be the truth itself, and the expectation of its uniqueness must be recognized as futile. Rather than seeing archives as a rescued space and clinging to them for salvation, looking at the conditions from which the archive emerged can point to a much more fundamental role of memory. According to Harris, the channels opened by the archive are as capable of distorting images as they are of transposing them (2018, p. 14). In South Africa, how sources that stand out as the “voice of the voiceless” can be included in archival policy has been the subject of lengthy debates, and the focus has mainly stood on the possibilities of opening the archive collectively. Approaching the archive with a positivist paradigm without opening the grounds for publicizing knowledge and organizing strong rights struggles on those grounds directs to its absoluteness. However, this is not the only problem with this paradigm. It is also the organization of a process that blocks the social channels the archive is open to and which are opened by the archive. Instead of positioning the archive as the site of a process of social memorialization, the positivist paradigm considers it as a result and endpoint,

presenting a past framed by ready-made answers and whose boundaries and universe are determined. To what extent are those archives that contain the victims' information reliable and to what extent did they survive the violence of the genocide? It should also not be forgotten that the Stolpersteine project, which perpetuates the act of placing stones for the victims, originates from the same place as the impulse to archive and carries similar expectations. Rather than talking about a catastrophe in which archival materials are incapable of expressing and reflecting on its lasting effects, directing all efforts towards archiving leads to a manipulation of the truth.



CONCLUSION

Following the era of catastrophe, interest in the past leads to an increase in memory work and the maturation of various forms of remembrance. The global demand for remembrance that developed in the 1990s was broadly welcomed because it accompanied processes of confrontation. Although remembrance efforts have helped to end the silence about what happened in the past, talking about genocide in the German context does not mean that the denialist understanding has disappeared. Even if the practice of denial visibly has disappeared, it also takes on other forms. The projection of remembrance sought under the united Germany model after the fall of the Berlin Wall was symbolized by several memorial projects. The Stolpersteine, which “is a kind of atlas or archive of deportation” (Osborne, 2014) was initially illegal but later granted permission and support, also came to the fore with its decentralization and created a representation of the victims. Although Stolpersteine as a project has become widespread and spread across the city, it has approached it with ready-made response templates instead of opening the door to a localized struggle for confrontation by establishing ties with grassroots movements. In this respect, it should be noted that there are strong motivational similarities with progressive historiography, which presents the past in specific packages. The most problematic consequence of this approach, as is familiar from other debates, is that it treats the genocide only as a problem of the public not knowing and not learning; telling and teaching more will increase awareness ultimately, according to this approach, preventing new violence from occurring. Here, it is important to remember Wendy Brown’s astute conclusion. The attempt to prove materially that the Holocaust happened, to seek objective data for it, to develop positivist explanations for it, and to concretely show its objective causes, is “at least as dubious as the Holocaust denial” (2010, p. 174). Without changing the established view of the past, of the catastrophe, of the Holocaust, it is impossible to move away from the policy of denial.

When we examine the Stolpersteine project as an example of memory art based on archival work, we see that they do not undertake the task of shattering hegemonic

historical narratives about the Holocaust, nor do they strengthen the option of writing a new history. At this point, this kind of memorialization method, which does not examine the phenomena, historical and political developments that led to the Holocaust, which is content to explain with limited results without investigating the causes, overlaps with the pedagogical mistakes developed in Holocaust education. Therefore, it appears that one of the difficult issues for the project team to agree on is the need for the collectivization of archival work. It should be added that the permission mechanism, which enables people outside the project team to engage with the project, has a rigid and hierarchical connotation. The team is far from taking a critical look at its own working process and its divine position in the process of remembering. Demnig alone was able to decide that his work, which he claimed to have designed and collectivized based on a social need, would become a popular cultural material. However, Demnig could have been expected to have a much more limited say over the memories of the victims.

While there is an option to go beyond the boundaries of authority figures in terms of the space occupied by the memorial stones, their publicity and everydayness, to create a new habitat for oneself there and to take the capacity of authorities to intervene in that habitat in their hands, the fact that this cannot be done is a negative point related to the memory policy of the project. Identifying the perpetrator's name, which is also an important point in terms of the politics of apology and forgiveness, requires a clear side for a forgivable ground. However, in the Stolpersteine project, the perpetrator is not only absent, but also anonymized and eliminated. For the public, various practices around these stones provide an opportunity to develop behaviors to get rid of the guilt of the past and, moreover, “the dirt of Nazi history removed in a gesture of cathartic exertion” (Osborne, 2014).

One should also be skeptical of the Stolpersteine project's policy of shifting the social focus from the grounds of confrontation and truth to archives and archiving. After all, these memorial stones are placed in the first place to prove tens of thousands of deaths, and the main motivation is to show what the Holocaust caused around the names of victims on the stones. What is absent from these stones, what

the project does not focus on, is mourning; once the ability to mourn has disappeared, there is no point in the victims' names being visible in public. The comfort of dialoguing with the victims, that is, with those who can no longer speak and narrate, is that they cannot respond to any of the calls addressed to them, they cannot object to what is said about them, to rhetorical manipulations. It should be noted that there are studies that, while they explore the historical conditions of genocide, do not address the question of how people could be involved in such a collective crime, a product of modernity.

Despite all critiques, the Stolpersteine project is valuable in that it highlights once again the difficulties of researching the Holocaust, and in that, it prompts us to discuss what memory and archival policies should look like by bringing them into the public domain. For instance, considering the implications, looking at history through the eyes of the victims can lead us away from problematic models of memorialization. Instead of monuments that are placed as a symbol of national virtue, the need for memory studies that create real encounters, that make us discuss, that collectivize, and that nourish a democratic culture to re-emerge every time. The slogan “Never Again” is shyly chanted after each instance of mass violence.

In the wake of a mass experience of violence and catastrophe such as genocide, these discussions make us rethink the politics, pedagogical approaches, and curation forms of memory studies. To maintain the conviction that memorialization, as a demand that organically develops out of local and collective confrontation efforts, will directly contribute to social democratization, it is necessary to look at memory studies from a critical distance. What strengthened my critical position against the Stolpersteine project was looking at its frame of memory for “the idea of Germany” the project invested in – in the hope that stories of past violence “will never happen” again – and a personal hope that this discussion will contribute to future struggles for the democratization of collective memory. Instead of the rigid form of the Stolpersteine, the potential of a memory work that cannot be fixed in one place, that spreads everywhere instead of belonging, but then can also destroy itself, that does not fill in everywhere while pointing to the gaps of the non-existent,

and that re-examines the problematic aspects of the project would be much more effective. The Stolpersteine would be a monument to the impossibility of placing the names of millions of victims in the public sphere, a monument to the fact that such a project can never be completed. Instead of its original goal of commemorating the victims and memorializing their memory, it can transform into a memorial stone that opens up discussion of a new dimension of confronting the Holocaust and remembering the victims. It can choose to reinforce that there are dilemmas, contradictions, and challenges in the ongoing struggle to confront the past in its various forms, rather than actually stumbling over them.



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