

MEMORY, NARRATIVE, AND WAR CRIMES: HOW FAR-RIGHT GROUPS IN JAPAN
AND GERMANY RELATE TO THEIR COUNTRIES' PAST ATROCITIES

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ABSTRACT: Both Japan and Germany are currently experiencing an uptick in far-right sentiments and movements. Though on the surface the groups may seem to have similar aims, such as bolstering nationalism and normalizing xenophobia, the far-right in Japan and Germany differ in their relationships to history. Both countries committed atrocious war crimes during World War II, and both countries were held accountable on an international scale through the novel use of war crimes trials. But the historical facts of the two trials were different, and out of each trial came a different narrative and thus a different cultural identity. I argue that the trials themselves served as a lens through which Japanese and Germans could view themselves and their country, and the differences in the trials produced different cultural memories that could be used by reemergent far-right movements to relate to, learn from, and appropriate their countries' pasts in different ways. This research attempts to provide a synthetic account that brings together two bodies of literature: cultural memory and far-right movements. Ultimately, I argue that the different methods of historical revisionism used in Japan and Germany's far-right scene can be

explained by the differences in the postwar trials of the 1940's.

“There is one indisputable fact: there was no massacre at Nanjing.” -Satoru Mizushima, director of 2008 film *The Truth About Nanjing*¹

“N.A.Z.I. natürlich anständig zuverlässig intelligent” writing on a T-shirt of a participant in a far-right political rally/rock concert. Translates to: *N.A.Z.I. naturally decent reliable intelligent*

¹ Isabel Reynolds, “Japanese filmmaker says ‘Nanjing never happened’,” Reuters, December 14, 2007, <https://www.reuters.com/article/uk-japan-china-nanjing/japanese-filmmaker-says-nanjing-never-happened-idUKT24924820071214>.

Introduction

While both of the above statements are recognizably from far-right actors in Japan and Germany respectively, there is a notable difference in the ways in which each group relates to its own country's history: Mizushima denies it, while the shirt wearer celebrates it. This is the question that this research will attempt to answer: How do far-right groups that emerge in countries with a history of atrocities remember and appropriate their country's past? What accounts for the differences in approaches in Germany and Japan?

The modern far-right in Germany can be characterized by a reimagination of history and attempts to reposition themselves in relation to the past. There is very little effort by far-right groups in movements to distance themselves - discursively, symbolically or otherwise - from Nazis and Nazi-era politics. In fact, German far-right groups often enthusiastically and outwardly align themselves with the regime that was internationally and unilaterally condemned after the war.

In contrast, Japanese far-right groups will make concerted efforts to assert that the crimes that Japan allegedly committed during WWII were fabricated by the West in an attempt to undermine Japanese sovereignty. The modern far-right in Japan can be characterized by a reconstruction of history. Much of the sentiments from the far-right are steeped in a kind of historical revisionism that attempts to rewrite historical events. Rooted in a distrust of and contempt for the international community, much of the narrative is based in denying the facts of history.

I contend that these divergences in tactic and understanding stem from the post-war trials of the 1940's. Aside from the historical fact of the trials, the narratives that were created in both Nuremberg and Tokyo served as a lens through which people could view their country and their involvement. These trials, that both Germany and Japan went through but that looked very different between the two countries, informed the historical narrative, cultural memory, and national identity. Thus, the grounds from which far-right movements and groups in Germany and Japan arose were different, producing movements that utilized different forms of historical revisionism and with different relationships to history.

The literature on collective memory, specifically in countries like Japan and Germany that hold legacies of wartime atrocities, is extensive. There is also a growing body of literature on current global far-right movements. What has yet to be studied is the link between the two. This paper attempts to examine the ways in which the differing processes of institutionalizing a national memory that is informed by wartime atrocities in Japan and Germany influence the birth of far-right movements that appear to be focused on historical revisionism.

Contextualization

The purpose of this research is to explore the links between atrocity, memory, and emergent far-right movements in Japan and Germany. It is not within the scope of this research to offer a definitive or comprehensive narrative about the wartime activities of Japan and Germany, but an overview is necessary for proper contextualization.

German Context

Adolf Hitler and the Nazi Party rose to power in January 1933.² The Holocaust took place from 1933 until 1945, when the Allied powers defeated Germany in World War II. During this time, the discrimination, persecution, and genocide of groups deemed to be inferior got increasingly direct and violent. Almost all European Jews were affected, and an estimated six million Jews were murdered throughout Germany and their collaborating states.³ Given the unprecedented scale of crimes committed during this war, high-level Nazis were brought to the international stage to answer for their actions at the Nuremberg Trials.

One of the most important contextualizing factors of this era that helps to explain how the Nuremberg trial connects to re-emergent far-right sentiments is the sheer number of Nazi party members. Although a popular conception of the Holocaust is that it was planned and executed by a small number of “pathological criminals,”⁴ the truth is that the Holocaust was made possible by hundreds of thousands of ordinary people with varying degrees of support for Hitler and his political party. The reasons for this are vast. The concept of the Holocaust “bystander” has been widely studied, but the consensus appears to be that the actions of Nazi Germany would not have been possible, or at least not as successful, were it not for so many Germans that remained passive or complicit.

There is, of course, a wide range of actions that can fall into the bystander category. The train conductor hired to transport Jews to concentration camps, the neighbor that bought up

² Holocaust Encyclopedia, “The Nazi Party,” United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, June 25, 2020, <https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/article/the-nazi-party-1>.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Georg Bönisch and Klaus Wiegrefe, “Nazi Atrocities, Committed by Ordinary People,” Spiegel International, March 18, 2008, <https://www.spiegel.de/international/germany/everyday-murder-nazi-atrocities-committed-by-ordinary-people-a-542245.html>.

homes once owned by Jews and made a fortune, the churches that lent their support to the Third Reich, and ordinary voters that saw in the Nazi party not a means of legitimizing anti-Semitic and xenophobic beliefs, but rather a party that promised economic benefits and a revitalization of the nation: there is a range in human behaviors and desires that led to complicity in the worst genocide in human history. What's more is that there are many examples of ordinary people becoming more or less radicalized as the reign of the Third Reich continued.⁵

It is not the aim of this research to decide how much blame ought to be placed on the huge army of "ordinary people" whose actions or inactions might have led to or aided the Holocaust. But what is of interest to this research is how this context framed the Nuremberg Trials for the rest of Germany.

During the postwar trials, perpetrators accused of aiding and abetting a genocide commonly stressed the "cog in a machine" argument. Often biased towards banality, the accused denied being ideologically connected to the genocide, even if their work or their passivity did in fact make the Holocaust possible.⁶ In the end, those arguments did not hold. 12 Nazis were sentenced to death by hanging by the conclusion of the trials. Hermann Goering, Hitler's second in command, was also sentenced to death but died instead by suicide just before his execution.⁷ Three defendants were sentenced to life in prison, four were given decades long

⁵ Victoria J. Barnett, "The Changing View of the 'Bystander' in Holocaust Scholarship: Historical, Ethical, and Political Implications," *Utah Law Review* no. 4 (2017): 633-647.
<http://dc.law.utah.edu/ulr/vol2017/iss4/1>.

⁶ Michael Mann, "Were the Perpetrators of Genocide 'Ordinary Men' or 'Real Nazis'? Results from Fifteen Hundred Biographies," *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* vol. 14, no. 3 (Winter 2000): 331-366.
https://www.google.com/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=&ved=2ahUKEwiDz-jmsb2AhUPHDQIHaiwDoY4ChAWegQIAhAB&url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.sscnet.ucla.edu%2Fsoc%2Ffaculty%2Fman_n%2FDoc3.pdf&usq=AOvVaw38zznw8xK8OsDAwin3xaZf.

⁷ "Nuremberg Trial Verdicts," United States Holocaust Memorial. Accessed March 20, 2022. Museum.
<https://www.ushmm.org/learn/timeline-of-events/after-1945/verdicts-international-military-tribunal>

prison sentences, and only three were acquitted. Even if defendants were sincere in their insistence that they were not actively trying to further a genocidal agenda, the international community did not see this as an appropriate defense.

Whether or not these accounts ought to be taken seriously is not of paramount importance in this research. The fact of the German context before and during the war is that the Nazi party encompassed a wide range of people, and the Holocaust was serviced by a wide range of actors. Conservative estimates indicate that around 20 to 25 million Germans knew about the Holocaust while it was happening.⁸⁹ Many others likely did not. So when the Nuremberg Trials commenced and the international community came together in an attempt to punish the people responsible for such a horrific era in human history, the contrast between the 22 Nazi leaders on trial and the vast web of Germans that were involved in the actions of the party in some way was stark. If ordinary Germans felt, like many Nazi defendants asserted, that they were simply following orders or going about their daily lives in a largely self-interested way, in other words without the implicit knowledge of and support for the genocide, seeing the international condemnation of recognizable authority figures likely took from them their sense of comfort in their complacency.

After the truth of what happened in concentration camps was made clear to Allied forces, troops from the US, France and Britain would order German citizens to walk through the nearby camps, forcing them to see with their own eyes the death and destruction done by their nation.¹⁰ And the truth about the aims and actions of the Third Reich only became more clear and accessible after the Nuremberg Trials ended. The questions surrounding complicity, the line

⁸ David Crossland, "Book Urges Germans to Quiz Dying Nazi Generation," Spiegel International, April 11,

⁹ , <https://www.spiegel.de/international/germany/feature-on-historical-research-into-a-german-family-s-nazi-hi-story-a-826633.html>.

¹⁰ Barnett, "The Changing View of the 'Bystander'," 633-647.

between bystander and perpetrator, legal liability and the general confusion about how to move forward from a historically unprecedented era of murder and chaos all contributed to cultural and political instability after the fall of the Nazi party, characterized by occupation, economic restructuring, and a scramble for identity in a post-war context.

Japanese Context

During the early years of the 20th century, Japan was a warfare state with ample arms and a professional military with numerous successful wars under its belt.¹¹ Starting young, Japanese citizens were educated in a way that valued military sacrifice above nearly all else.¹²

Perhaps equally crucial to the formation of the cultural context of Japan at this time was the emperor. The Japanese Constitution of 1889 restored power to the emperor and ushered in a new sociopolitical era, one in which the creation of a “rich country and a strong military” (fukoku kyōhei) was of paramount importance.¹³ Along with material changes that resembled the science and technology of the West, a nation-wide ideology of country-as-family (kazoku kokka) was instituted.¹⁴

These two phenomena - war glorification and emperor-based nationalism - seemed to converge in the classroom. While young Japanese children were inundated with curricula about militarism and the power of the Japanese army,¹⁵ their classrooms were also serving as places of worship. Beginning in 1891, Japanese schools were required to display photos of the emperor

¹¹ Saburo Ienaga, “The Glorification of War in Japanese Education,” *International Security*, vol 18, no 3 (1993-1994): 113-133, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2539207>.

¹² Ienaga, “The Glorification of War,” 115.

¹³ Kōichi Mori, “The Emperor of Japan: A Historical Study in Religious Symbolism,” *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies*, vol. 6 no. 4 (1979): 547, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/30233221>.

¹⁴ Mori, “The Emperor of Japan,” 547.

¹⁵ Ienaga, “The Glorification of War,” 115-116.

and empress and regularly recite the Imperial Rescript on Education.¹⁶ Youth in Japan were strategically and purposefully groomed for a total worship of their nation. In contrast to the prewar and WWII era in Germany, which saw some mix of passive and enthusiastic involvement with national politics, the Japanese were fully committed, perhaps because the children that grew up with specific and direct indoctrination into the nation-as-family ideology were military-aged adults by the time the war began.

The culture of war glorification and the uniquely Japanese ideology that placed the emperor at the head of household and thus the heart of the nation made for a particular sociopolitical climate that was all but decimated after the war. It's true that many Japanese people did not want war on account of their *honne* (true feeling), but *tatemae* (the principles one avows in public) took precedent and made for a population that was cooperative in the war effort.¹⁷ This paid off in terms of the successful capture of Nanjing by the Japanese army on December 13, 1937.¹⁸ During the occupation, the Japanese army committed mass murder, rape and destruction of the city on an amazing scale. Some 300,000 civilians were killed, and tens of thousands of Chinese women were forcefully involved in a system of sexual slavery.¹⁹

After the Allied powers defeated Japan, the country went from a military state to a peace state.²⁰ The United States occupied Japan and began dismantling so many of the institutions that made the country a military power and rewrote the constitution to reflect more docile values. This is the context in which Japan faced an identity crisis in the postwar years and the soil from which the far-right movement emerged.

¹⁶ Mori, "The Emperor of Japan," 548.

¹⁷ Mori, "The Emperor of Japan," 552.

¹⁸ "Nanjing Massacre," USC Shoah Foundation, <https://sfi.usc.edu/collections/nanjing-massacre>.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ienaga, "The Glorification of War," 116.

Trials

After the end of WWII, both Germany and Japan faced international condemnation in the form of trials for their crimes against humanity. The origins of these trials came from the London Agreement of 1945, wherein the Allied Powers decided upon a novel method of ending wars: with prosecutions.²¹ At the time of these trials, there was little to no legal basis for an international tribunal of this kind, but given the scale of atrocities and the disruption that WWII had on global order, the political pressures were enough to legitimize both Nuremberg and the International Military Tribunal for the Far East (hereafter the IMTFE).²²

International judicial rulings like the ones laid down in these two postwar trials are certainly not without conflict. Though often purported to do so, trials do not operate outside of the confines of politics nor do they exist in a vacuum. The challenge of translating atrocities of such an amazing scale into courtroom proceedings is bound to invite complications in the administration of justice. Moreover, though the purpose of an international trial is to produce a definitive and intractable judgment, they also serve as a way of shaping narratives surrounding the events and actions that are on trial. At Nuremberg and the IMTFE, the outcomes of the trials had massive impacts not only on international law, but also on the societies that had to deal with a changing sense of nationhood given the international condemnation that was handed to them.

Nuremberg

On October 18th, 1945, representatives from the United States, the USSR, France, Great

²¹ Timothy Brook, "The Tokyo Judgment and the Rape of Nanking," *The Journal of Asian Studies*, vol. 60, no. 3 (2001): 674, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/2700106>.

²² Jeremy Colwill, "From Nuremberg to Bosnia and Beyond: War Crimes Trials In the Modern Era," *Social Justice*, vol. 22, no. 3 (1995): 111-128, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/29766896>.

Britain and Northern Ireland gathered in the Grand Conference Room of the Allied Control Authority Building in Berlin. General Nikitchenko, the primary member for the USSR and president for the session at Berlin, officially began the International Military Tribunal for Germany, otherwise known as the Nuremberg Trials. Each member of the Tribunal declared their allegiance to justice in their native language, and thus began perhaps the most important international trial in history.

The Nuremberg Trials were groundbreaking in the sense that there was no existing legal basis for the trials to take place. It was the scale and magnitude of German atrocities during WWII that provided enough political need for a new kind of process through which the international community could formally condemn these crimes against humanity.²³ Perhaps one of the most interesting aspects of the nature of the trial was the application of international law to individuals for the very first time, a move that was undeniably significant and certainly not without protest. And yet, it informed the entirety of the trial.²⁴ Chief Justice Stone, one of the prosecutors in the trials, famously asserted that crimes of this scale “are committed by men and not by abstract entities.”²⁵ With that as a baseline, individuals were tried for a myriad of crimes, many of which were novel in international law. Articles 7 and 8 found that individuals were not immune to punishment, even if their orders came from a higher entity such as the state.²⁵

Contrary to other theories of criminality and punishment (see, for example, Hannah Arendt’s *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil*), this meant that individuals have a

²³ Colwill, “From Nuremberg to Bosnia,” 111-128.

²⁴ Telford Taylor, “The Nuremberg Trials,” *Columbia Law Review*, vol. 55, no. 4 (1955): 488-525, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1119814>.

²⁵ International Military Tribunal, Trial of the Major War Criminals, 1945-1946, https://www.loc.gov/collections/military-legal-resources/?q=pdf/NT_Vol-I.pdf.

²⁵ Ibid.

responsibility to understand what they are being asked to do and act accordingly. Individuals, according to Stone, have duties that “transcend the national obligations of obedience imposed by the individual state.”²⁶ The implications of this are far reaching - an individual cannot cite “following orders” as a defense for actions that constitute crimes against peace. Individuals can and will be held responsible.

Another crucial piece of the nature of the trial was the dichotomy between a small number of high ranking Nazis facing trial for the egregious nature of the crimes associated with the Holocaust, and the German public, many of whom were members of the Nazi party but certainly did not take part in the scale of atrocities that were being tried in Nuremberg. The Nuremberg trials served as a lens through which so many “ordinary” Germans could view their political affiliations. The trials of course did not set out to condemn all Germans involved with the Nazi party, and Justice Jackson seemed to agree that the many Nazi party members were not the real defendants in the case.²⁷ This, combined with the consensus that individual Nazi leaders were guilty of committing crimes against humanity, informed the popular conception of the past for many Germans. Identities needed to be reformed and recreated for many Germans that had their sense of self tied to a political party and version of Germany that no longer existed after the trials.

Despite legal questions surrounding the legitimacy of the world’s first international war crimes trial,²⁷ the outcome was widely accepted by the international community.²⁸ And perhaps more importantly, the discursive outcomes of the trials seemed to affect younger Germans as

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁷ See: Telford Taylor *The Nuremberg Trials*, Kim Christian Priemel *Beyond The Saturation Point of Horror: The Holocaust at Nuremberg Revisited*, David Luban *The Legacies of Nuremberg*, etc.

²⁸ Taylor, “The Nuremberg Trials,” 488-525.

they aged into a world without the presence of a Nazi party.²⁹ Not only did the trial offer Germans a solidified narrative about the facts of the atrocities that occurred during the Third Reich, but it also succeeded in convincing many Germans that Nazism, in theory and in practice, was over.

International Military Tribunal for the Far East

On May 3rd, 1946, 28 Japanese citizens and accused war criminals gathered in a Tokyo court and listened with translating headsets as an indictment was read. The accused were charged with 55 charges of crimes against peace, crimes against humanity and conventional war crimes. For the next two and a half years, the Tribunal attempted to meter out “stern justice” to the war criminals present. There were several key factors that were at play at the International Military Tribunal for the Far East that resulted in the disparate and unsolidified narratives given to the Japanese people, the impact of which is still felt today.

The first to note is that Emperor Hirohito, the figure that authorized many of Japan’s wartime activities, was strategically exonerated by General MacArthur of the Supreme Command of Allied Powers.³⁰ Hirohito represented important American interests in the region that would only gain value during the Cold War years, and MacArthur believed that indicting him would destabilize their occupation of Japan and other critical control points in the Pacific.³² But the decision by the Americans not to indict him left a noticeable gap in the array of war criminals on trial. The consequences of this decision rippled throughout not only Japanese

²⁹ Brook, “The Tokyo Judgement,” 673-700.

³⁰ Stephanie Lawson and Seiko Tannaka, “War memories and Japan’s ‘normalization’ as an international actor: A critical analysis,” *European Journal of International Relations*, vol. 17, no. 3 (2010): 411, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1354066110365972>. ³² Brook, “The Tokyo Judgement,” 676.

society, but the international community as well. Without any condemnation of Hirohito's actions and complicity, a collective animosity directed towards the imperial government wasn't developed. In Germany, the Nuremberg Trials' solid condemnation of the Nazi party gave younger generations of Germans the opportunity to reject that era of German history and direct hatred towards their older family members that participated in Nazi era crimes. Many took this opportunity. But in Japan, the lack of representation of condemnable figures from the Shōwa era, which Hirohito would have provided, meant that young Japanese were not moved to reject the imperial government in the same way that Germans were moved to reject the Third Reich. This part of Japanese history was not complicated by the trial. In fact, the strategic move by the Americans led large swaths of younger generations of Japanese people to unite themselves in a hatred of the trial instead of their leader.³¹

This is one key difference between the IMTFE and Nuremberg Trials - the widespread and largely agreed upon condemnation of Hitler and other high ranking Nazi officials during the Nuremberg trials left little room for sympathy, and instilled within the collective memory of younger generations of Germans a sense of shame directed towards the actions of their ancestors during the Third Reich.³² But in the absence of a judgment handed down for Emperor Hirohito, the narratives offered to the Japanese population did not necessarily include condemnation of their leaders.

The second important aspect of the IMTFE was the nature of the defense. The explicit goal of the trial was to announce a definitive judgment about what happened from the 1931 Manchurian invasion to the time of Japanese surrender in 1945, and what appropriate

³¹ Brook, "The Tokyo Judgment," 676.

³² Brook, "The Tokyo Judgment," 676.

consequences would be. The trial itself was instrumental in validating the existence of war crimes themselves, but the relationship between the prosecution and the defense was fertile ground for the production of a contested narrative of history. Instead of negotiating the terms of punishment, the defense was instead predicated on denial of the atrocities, or at least of their purported severity. By carefully cross-examining witnesses and focusing attention on small discrepancies, the defense attempted to convey that there were larger inaccuracies in the narrative.³³ Of course, the defense was ultimately unsuccessful and accused war criminals were charged, albeit with relatively light sentences given the scale of the crimes. But perhaps in the long term this strategy was effective. If the ultimate goal of the trial was to create a solid and agreed upon narrative of what happened during the war, then the defense was able to prevent that from happening. By allowing the defense team a platform to question not only the truth about Japan's wartime atrocities but the legitimacy of the trial in general, there could be no intractable solidification of facts. This is an issue that has consequences for everyday Japanese society and has strongly impacted the formation of a post-war cultural memory, the details of which will be discussed in the next section of this paper.

The final piece of the IMTFE that informed the historical fact of the trial was race. The trial was explicitly controlled by the United States,³⁴ a country with an imperialist and colonial past. As such, the judicial values that were reflected in the trial certainly stemmed from Anglo-American understandings of law and order.³⁵ For the Americans, the trial offered several key

³³ James Burnham Sedgwick, "Memory on Trial: Constructing and Contesting the 'Rape of Nanking' at the International Military Tribunal for the Far East, 1946-1948," *Modern Asian Studies*, vol. 43, no. 5 (2009): 1241, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40285010>.

³⁴ Colwill, "From Nuremberg to Bosnia," 116.

³⁵ Michelle Glazer, "Americans on the Defense Team in the Tokyo War Crimes Trials, 1946-1948: Understanding the Mentality Behind Defending the 'Enemy'," 2017, <https://ecommons.cornell.edu/bitstream/handle/1813/49730/Americans.pdf?sequence=3>.

³⁸ Colwill, "From Nuremberg to Bosnia, 116.

opportunities that the country had been waiting for. First, it was an opportunity for the US to demonstrate the inherent feral and barbaric nature of Japan that was a necessary justification for the dropping of the atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki mere months before.³⁸ Next, the occupation of Japan and the strong hand that the Americans had in dictating a new constitution and restructuring power dynamics in the country, combined with the fact that there was only one chief prosecutor (an American) at the trial allowed for the US to continue to revel in their ongoing project of promoting democracy worldwide. Watershed moments like the Tokyo Trials offered an international stage upon which the United States was able to prove that the everlasting and unencumbered mission of promoting the American way of life in countries all across the globe is a virtuous goal.

That the United States, a country with a long history of imperialism and interventionism, played the most important role in a trial that would determine who among the indicted Japanese officials would live and who would die is not an unimportant anecdote. The racial dynamics simply cannot be ignored. And combined with the lack of accountability for Emperor Hirohito and the lack of consensus on the facts of wartime activities, the narrative given to the Japanese people was suspect at best. The kind of power dynamics that inevitably exist between prosecutor and defendant, winner and loser, good and evil, often invites backlash or contestation surrounding the legitimacy of the narrative created by the trial.³⁶ This disparate and malleable narrative greatly informed cultural memory in the years to come.

³⁶ Sedgwick, "Memory on Trial," 1231.

Differences in the Trials

The Nuremberg and IMTFE trials did not greatly differ in the laws used to convict war criminals and hand down international justice, but their impacts varied significantly and for many reasons. The IMTFE failed to produce a singular, agreed upon narrative for Japanese people, and was unable to solidify facts about Japanese war crimes in a meaningful way. In contrast, the Nuremberg trials instilled within the German people disgust with the previous leadership era and began a wave of national guilt.

Memory

These narratives most certainly had an impact in the coming years. The trials were both producers of narrative as well as sites for contestation. The memory of those trials has rippling effects on how people see themselves in relation to their community and their country. Memory is a part of the individual experience, but also exists within the broader frameworks of cultures and nations. Sociologist Maurice Halbwachs, one of a few preeminent scholars to theorize about the idea of a collective memory, played an important role in shifting the discourse around collective memories from the field of biology into a more culturally based framework. He argued that recent memories, such as those that an individual recalls, are in fact one piece of a larger body of thought that is specific to a group.³⁷ He explains a kind of dialectical relationship between the discourse of individuals and the formation and reformation of cultural memories: individuals remember events discursively, subconsciously aligning their discourse with the set of ideas or narratives from the society or group to which they belong, and in turn they announce their group membership and give meaning to the cultural memory itself.

³⁷ Maurice Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory*, ed. and trans. Lewis A. Coser (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1992): 52.

The study of cultural memory, then, is a study of groups: what they are, how they define themselves, who is included and what is their opposite. Cultural memory is intimately related to nationalism and nationhood. Specific interpretations of the past that are institutionalized in a society, whether through agreed upon times or spaces for remembrance, legislation, physical spaces, public education, etc. can be instrumental in the production of a national identity. And in terms of group definitions and belonging, discourse is the tool. There is a circular relationship between discourse and nationalism: nationhood is defined by discourse, and discourse defines the nation in return.³⁸

But not all groups map onto the confines of a nation; cultural memories can also exist in and be instrumental in solidifying other, smaller communities and groups. Astri Erll asserts that memory studies can be usefully refocused on the scale of a family, building off of Maurice Halbwach's framework.³⁹ Erll uses Halbwach's assertions from his original book, *Les cadres sociaux de la mémoire*, to push the idea that contemporary memory studies ought to include and take seriously the scale of the family, instead of solely the nation.

Problems with Cultural Memory

The idea of cultural memories, and memories as tools with which to study history in general, is of course not without problems. Memories are fickle, ever changing, and in many cases imperfect. Especially on the scale of a group, society or even a nation, events are often

³⁸ Jon E. Fox and Cynthia Miller-Idriss, "Everyday nationhood," *Ethnicities*, vol. 8, no. 4 (2008): 536-563, [10.1177/14687968080888925](https://doi.org/10.1177/14687968080888925).

³⁹ Astri Erll, "Locating Family in Cultural Memory Studies," *Journal of Comparative Family Studies*, vol. 42, no. 3 (2011): 303-318, <http://www.jstor.com/stable/41604447>

mythologized in memory in order to serve a certain purpose.⁴⁰ And it must be noted that reconstructed or misremembered events in memory often skew positive. In the recollection of an event that is important or significant to a group, a cultural memory is reflexive in that it illuminates the group's own self-image, and this usually means that memories will paint the group in a more positive light than the original event might have shown.⁴¹ This is not incidental. If purely the result of cognitive and narrative imperfections, altered memories should be more or less symmetrical in the balance between skewing positive and skewing negative, but epistemological errors that undermine a group or make them look worse in history are exceedingly rare. Thus, the tendency of cultural memories to become more and more positive over time is an act of self-deception.⁴²

Cultural memory is characterized by the temporal distance from everyday events.⁴³ Whereas individual, everyday memories are often orally communicated or simply remembered in passing, cultural memories are collective, institutionalized, and shared. Perhaps most important to note about cultural memory is its lasting impact on members of a society. Of course, memories are never entirely fixed, and it is the production and reformulation of these memories that has the ability to influence current societies in their identities and their actions in the future.⁴⁴

⁴⁰ Alon Confino, "Collective Memory and Cultural History: Problems of Method," *The American Historical Review*, vol. 102, no. 5 (December 1997): 1387, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/2171069>.

⁴¹ Jan Assman and John Czaplicka, "Collective Memory and Cultural Identity," *New German Critique*, no. 65 (Spring-Summer 1995): 125-133, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/488538>.

⁴² Roy Baumeister and Stephen Hastings, "Distortions of collective memory: How groups flatter and deceive themselves." In *Collective memories of political events: Social and psychological perspectives*, edited by J. W. Pennebaker, D. Paez, & B. Rimé, 277-293. Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Inc.: 1997.

⁴³ Assman and Czaplicka, "Collective Memory," 129.

⁴⁴ Philippe C. Schmitter and Marc Blecher, *Politics as a Science: A Prolegomenon* (New York: Routledge, 2021), 8.

The nature of memory is important for this research. While there may be issues in relying on memory for historically accurate and unbiased accounts of past events, this is not the problem but rather the point. This research is interested in the ways in which memory is used as a tool, however imperfect or generalizing, to support ideologies or aims.

Memory in Japan and Germany

In all, a collective, cultural memory is instrumental in shaping and being shaped by the identities of group members that ascribe to it. In the case of celebrated memories, such as America's independence from the British, the lasting impact of this event is seen in the American dedication to freedom and individualism, as well as the often cheerful and exciting events that commemorate July 4th every year. But not all collective memories are positive ones. During World War II, both Japan and Germany committed internationally recognized crimes against humanity. Moreover, they were defeated by the Allied powers. Both were forced to undergo a kind of reckoning with the past that was informed by watershed trials. These trials acted as a method of solidifying certain facts and allowing for others to be up for debate or interpretation. The outcomes of the trials created a narrative memory of the wartime atrocities in each country, and each was forced to deal with that memory in the years that followed.

In the cases of Germany and Japan, the methods of formation and reformation of cultural memories that Hawlbachs described were slightly different. Instead of individuals subconsciously aligning their own memories with the narratives and discourses handed to them by the group to which they belong, the international community handed down a narrative after WWII for individuals and groups to muddle within. In Germany, the Nazis no longer had the kind of group-informed cultural memory because it was decidedly condemned after the

Nuremberg Trials. So if individuals were sympathetic to the Nazis (and many were), their cultural memories were not only shaped by those group ideas, but also by the internationally agreed upon narrative that Nazis should no longer exist. Where does an individual go when their group memories cannot be accessed anymore?

In Japan, the complications to cultural memory were even more muddy. The nature of the International Military Tribunal for the Far East was such that the Japanese people were handed a narrative that was less solidified than the story that was agreed upon after the Nuremberg Trials. This meant that far-right actors and sympathizers did not have their group identity so decidedly destroyed, just condemned albeit in a less decisive and mutually agreed upon way. And so the ideas and narratives of that group shifted to include suspicion about the international community and rage at the humiliation.

When an individual lives their life in a certain national, social and political context, they grow attached to specific cultural norms and stories. Narrative is a powerful tool; indeed it can inform and shape one's identity. But when that narrative is upset, altered or destroyed, people are left with a void. If young Germans grew up in households that were broadly supportive of Hitler and the Nazi party, believing wholeheartedly that Nazi Germany was the true Germany and was gloriously fighting for national pride and honor for the country, the years following 1945 would be shocking. If young Japanese children grew up with the all-too-common suspicion and resentment of Koreans and Chinese and then watched the international community try and execute their leaders for the occupation of Nanjing, their narrative understanding of self and country would be shaken. But the need for narrative and the need for belonging doesn't disappear when the previously accessible modes for filling that need are changed.

The ways in which individuals and groups move on from a broken narrative, especially if it was broken by an outside force, are varied and can reveal much about the culture of a community. In this case, the war crimes trials were the outside force that broke the collective narrative that many Germans and Japanese felt they were a part of. These watershed moments allowed for a specific kind of international narrative-making that is rarely seen in previous or modern situations. It is rare that such a wide range of people get to rewrite a story together. For many prosecutors in the trials, it wasn't a revision of history but rather a solidification of facts accessible to all that could inform humanity as it moves out of an era of war. But for those people that were influenced by cultural contexts and the powers of storytelling, this revision was not only an upset to how people viewed their countries, but how they viewed themselves.

Historical Revisionism as an Exercise in Cultural Memory

What is of interest to this research is the ways in which cultural and collective memories impact far-right movements. Connected to the broken narratives that left many Germans and Japanese searching for a new mode of understanding themselves and their countries is the modern day renaissance of far-right sentiments and actions. Both far-right scenes include efforts to revise, revisit, or reconstruct history as it was influenced by the post-war years and trials.

There are several possible explanations for the timing of this far-right resurgence, and though it is not within the scope of this research to decide which is the true reason, several factors are certainly at play. The first is the advent of the media. Though many far-right groups decry the biases of the "mainstream media," ultra-nationalism festers in digital communications

technology, especially in chat rooms and forums.⁴⁵ Alternative platforms that have fewer hate speech regulations than social media sites such as Twitter are very popular sites for dispelling information, tactics, ideas and other radicalizing resources. A second explanation is the changing international landscape. The ideology of populism has existed in many forms, but has taken a strong rightward turn since the end of WWII.⁴⁶ Moreover, left-wing politics have become less viable as political centrism becomes more competitive in electoral races around the world.⁴⁷ Changing political circumstances have left many feeling alienated from traditional politics, and right-wing and fringe groups are there, waiting with open arms, for the curious, the disgruntled, and the otherwise unsatisfied. Whatever the reason, it is clear that far-right groups are on the rise globally.

As was stated earlier, cultural memories exist on various scales. I contend that far-right groups, or the far-right scene as a whole, is organized around cultural memories, and they are instrumental to the cause of these groups. It seems to me that many of the tactics, discourses and actions of modern far-right movements in these two countries are efforts to repair the breaking of cultural memories that happened as a result of the post war trials.

Rightist sentiments dominated WWII. The Nazis pushed for a strong and weaponized nationalism that placed humanity in a hierarchy. In Japan, a cultural glorification of war and the right-wing influence of the powers that be made for a savioristic view of Japan. Far-right actors and movements in Germany and Japan are currently seeing a renaissance of these kinds of views.

⁴⁵ Karoline Ihlbæk, Tine Figenschou and Birgette Haanshuus, "What is the relationship between the far right and the media?" *Center for Research on Extremism*, (September 2020): <https://www.sv.uio.no/c-rex/english/groups/compendium/what-is-the-relationship-between-the-far-right-and-the-media.html>.

⁴⁶ Ralph Schroeder, "Digital media and the rise of far-right populism," in *Social Theory after the Internet: Media, Technology, and Globalization*, 60-81. London: UCL Press, 2018.

⁴⁷ Anthony Pahnke, "How the far right got a stranglehold on the West," Al Jazeera, March 31, 2021, <https://www.aljazeera.com/features/2021/3/31/how-the-far-right-got-a-stranglehold-on-the-west>.

In terms of far-right political actors, the relationship between discourse and nationhood is key. Groups, whether the scale of a neighborhood or a religious movement, are ways of understanding the world.⁴⁸ They use available narratives to understand their positioning in larger society; Nations are constructed and shaped by narrative, and narrative is an incredibly powerful weapon for fringe groups that wish to make their views and opinions heard within the mainstream. In a sea of available narratives, far-right groups in Japan and Germany have had success in using historical revisionism and cultural memories to make theirs more salient than others.

To illustrate the importance of historical revisionism in far-right movements, let us look at an example. On December 7th, 1941, Japanese military forces attacked Pearl Harbor. This is true and unable to be refuted. But the stories about this event that are told by the United States and Japan differ greatly. The United States has remained steadfastly committed to the idea that Japan's attack on Pearl Harbor was unprovoked, uncalled for, and knowingly vicious. That narrative was the one that informed the United States' decision to enter WWII, seemingly because there was no other option after such a horrific attack. Memories of this incident certainly informed the U.S.-Japan relationship for decades and in part justified the occupation of Japan after 1945.

The story of Pearl Harbor is different in Japan. From their perspective, the Japanese presence in China worried the United States, and so the United States punished Japan with economic sanctions, leaving Japan no other option than to go to war. Japanese rarely see themselves as aggressors in Pearl Harbor, which is in stark contrast to the American story of that fateful December morning. And the victim mindset of Japanese was all but solidified with the

⁴⁸ Rogers Brubaker, *Ethnicity without Groups* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004), 7-27.

nuclear bombs dropped in Hiroshima and Nagasaki. How could the Japanese be anything other than a victim in a war that culminated in the novelly horrific destruction of hundreds of thousands of lives? The Japanese held onto this story with white knuckles - Emperor Hirohito said in his surrender speech that the reasons why Japan had to declare war on the U.S. and Great Britain were for both the self-existence of the Empire and the stability of East Asia.”⁴⁹

Which story is more accurate? It might well be impossible to say. But the validity of each story is less important than the ways in which they are used. Japan’s modern far-right is characterized by a reconstructive view of history, with a desire to confront and correct the international community’s insistence on Japan as aggressor, and to reclaim a utopian and powerful version of Japan that supposedly existed before the meddlesome influence of Western powers. Revisiting stories such as Pearl Harbor is one way of doing that. If the international community is wrong in their telling of the events of Pearl Harbor, what else might they be wrong about? If the United States claims to be victimized by Japan, why is that more believable than the other way around? Telling stories and revisiting historical events is one way of bolstering skepticism and ultimately nationalism, and the far-right in Japan is familiar with and comfortable using this tactic.

The far-right in Germany similarly uses narratives and historical revisionism to bolster their ideology, but in ways that differ from Japan. Instead of attempting to correct narratives that they feel to be false or misleading, the German far-right venerates aspects of the Nazi era for which they were so decidedly condemned. For example, neo-Nazi leaders in the 1990’s attempted to create an annual gathering in Winsiedel that would celebrate the life of Rudolf

⁴⁹ Emperor Michinomiya Hirohito, “Gyokuon-hoso,” or “Jewel voice broadcast,” August 15, 1945, **quoted in** Denny Roy, “Pacific War Rashomon,” in *The Pacific War and Its Political Legacies* (Westport: Praeger Publications, 2009), 131.

Hess.⁵⁰ Hess was Hitler's Deputy Führer, a longtime loyalist to the Nazi party, and was found guilty at the Nuremberg Trials for conspiracy and crimes against peace.⁵¹ Despite his conviction at the Nuremberg Trials and his known association with and neurotic admiration for Hitler, reemergent far-right groups in Germany have attempted to resurrect his image and reclaim Hess as a kind of hero.

The attempt failed. By 1992, 2,500 participants gathered to march in honor of Hess, which was enough for state authorities to be alerted to the event. Authorities banned the annual march, and every year since have monitored the area with a massive police presence.⁵²

Unlike Japan, German far-right actors are not necessarily trying to distance themselves from the decided narrative surrounding the Third Reich and the Nazi party. In 1998, a neo-Nazi leader published an article about the movement, saying that "the average citizen is not even annoyed by professed national socialists because they have become used to us."⁵³ There is no effort here to create space between modern far-right actors and the national socialists of the 1930's and 1940's. There appears to be no shame. Instead of trying to correct a story told about the Nazi era, far-right actors in Germany are deliberately and publicly aligning themselves with Nazis and Nazi-era beliefs.

The kind of historical revisionism used by the Japanese far-right differs from that used by Germany's far-right. Japanese rightist movements are dedicated to reconstructing history,

⁵⁰ Fabian Virchow, "Performance, Emotion and Ideology: On the Creation of 'Collectives of Emotion' and Worldview in the Contemporary German Far Right," *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography*, vol. 36, no. 2 (2007): 147-164, 10.1177/0891241606298822.

⁵¹ "Rudolf Hess," United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. Accessed February 11, 2022, <https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/article/rudolf-hess>.

⁵² Virchow, "Performance, Emotion and Ideology," 153.

⁵³ Hamburger Sturm, 1998, 5 (19): 8-9, **quoted in** Fabian Virchow, "Performance, Emotion and Ideology: On the Creation of 'Collectives of Emotion' and Worldview in the Contemporary German Far Right," *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography*, vol. 36, no. 2 (2007): 147-164, 10.1177/0891241606298822.

specifically the history that is felt to be authored by the West. But in Germany, there is no real attempt to correct the narrative laid down about the Nazi party, but rather to reposition themselves in relation to their country's past, and to see their history as a point of pride rather than a marker of national shame. But both are attempting to influence or construct a kind of cultural memory. In Japan, far-right groups are trying to restore nationalism and pride in Japanese culture by asserting that the destruction of the WWII-era Japanese identity was a malicious plot by international actors rather than a true consequence for the actions of an otherwise utopian state. By tapping into peoples' memories of a Japan that wasn't so demonized and dominated by the West, far-right groups are attempting to recreate a strong nationalism that would inevitably include a degree of isolationism and xenophobia. In Germany, far-right groups are revisiting the cultural memories that were formed and reformed after 1945. After Germany's defeat in WWII, many were forced to reckon with their own political allegiances, knowing that the entire international community had unilaterally condemned the Nazis. Today, far-right groups are trying to revitalize the original cultural memory, in which so many Germans were united in their support of Hitler and the Nazi party, and to reclaim that sense of Germanness, despite or regardless of the international condemnation of that period of German history. Where Japan's historical revisionism is reconstructive, Germany's is focused on optics and challenging the narrative rather than the facts.

Far Right in Germany

The 1945 Potsdam Agreement attempted to completely destroy any and all traces of National Socialism.⁵⁷ Part of this goal was accomplished by the Nuremberg Trials, wherein an internationally agreed upon narrative was given to the German people and several Nazi officials

were executed and imprisoned. But extremism is a resilient force; trying to completely extinguish the flame of the far-right is a nearly impossible task. The far-right has and continues to operate within multiple spheres in modern Germany.

Much of the far-right sentiment that has been present since the end of WWII has some discursive or symbolic linkage to Nazi Germany. Evoking the Nazi era through slogans, visual symbols such as clothes or performative rallies relies on a specific kind of cultural memory. By venerating the actions of specific Nazi officials or more generally the era of the Third Reich, groups are able to participate in historical revisionism. In this case, historical revisionism takes place in the careful restructuring of historical narratives, in which Nazi leaders that were internationally condemned for their heinous crimes were actually heroic, powerful, and brave. Slogans such as “glory and honour for the Waffen SS” evoke a parallel power for the modern far-right by aligning them with historical groups that displayed unfettered power over their enemies.⁵⁷ But this power only exists if the groups are able to convince themselves and others that the Waffen SS and other Nazi party members are not the international war criminals that the

⁵⁷ Lee McGowan, “Right-Wing Violence in Germany: Assessing the Objectives, Personalities and Terror Trail of the National Socialist Underground and the State’s Response to It,” *German Politics* 23, 3 (2014): 196-212, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09644008.2014.967224>.

⁵⁸ Virchow, “Performance, Emotion and Ideology.” Nuremberg Trials found them to be. This was and continues to be the project of Germany’s far-right.

Two Germanys

The splitting of Germany into East and West in 1949 by the same countries that delivered the judgment at the Nuremberg Trials was an important moment in the division of ideology and nationhood. The Berlin Wall was erected in 1961, and represented the beginnings of a stark

political and cultural distinction between East and West Germany. Each side of the wall toiled in the post-war reality of living in a country with an egregious past.

In West Germany, this manifested as countercultural movements in which young people railed against older generations' compliance and passivity with the cruelty of the Third Reich.⁵⁴ Groups such as the Socialist German Student League gained political prominence, opposing state repression and shedding light on West Germany's failure to prosecute Nazi criminals effectively.⁵⁵ The 1970s saw a rise in left-wing violence inspired by globally famous revolutionaries such as Che Guevara.⁵⁶ Young Germans in the west co-opted the language of the Nuremberg Trials to not only bolster their frustrations and shame surrounding the Nazi era, but also to criticize other events they saw as international crimes, such as the civil rights movement in the United States and the colonization efforts of the British Empire (Betts, p. 63). Through media expansion and globalization, knowledge of the "Third World" and the human rights issues present there became increasingly available in West Germany.⁵⁷ Moreover, universities in West Germany had a significant population of international students, which further integrated West Germany's young people with larger issues that were occurring on a global scale.⁵⁸ International discourse and the availability of global news made for a political climate in which West Germans were not only ready to reckon with their state's history, but energized to do more and to ensure the proper punishment of crimes against humanity. This only intensified in the later period of

⁵⁴ Lothar Probst, "German Pasts, Germany's Future: Intellectual Controversies Since Reunification," *German Politics and Society* 30 (1993): 24, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/23736347>

⁵⁵ Timothy Brown, "'1968' East and West: Divided Germany as a Case Study in Transnational History," *The American Historical Review* 114, 1 (2009): 69-96, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/30223644>

⁵⁶ Alan Rosenfeld, "'Anarchist Amazons': The Gendering of Radicalism in 1970s West Germany," *Contemporary European History* 19, 4 (2010): 351-374, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/40930578>

⁵⁷ Brown, "'1968' East and West: Divided Germany as a Case in Transnational History."

⁵⁸ Brown, "'1968' East and West: Divided Germany as a Case in Transnational History."

⁶⁴ Probst, "German Pasts, Germany's Future," 23.

West Germany, when more and more Germans became aware of the true extent of German war crimes during the Third Reich.⁶⁴ Art and pop culture provided a platform for revolutionary thinking to enter the mainstream, and many Germans were radicalized from it.⁵⁹ In general, the political climate in West Germany was characterized by internationalism, student radicalization, a dramatic increase in art and popular culture as revolutionary tools, and dealing with the memory of the Third Reich by demanding sweeping changes locally and globally.

In East Germany, the political system put in place was such that oppositional parties were forbidden. But far-right movements seldom ask for permission to exist, and it was perhaps the atmosphere of orderliness and authoritarianism in East Germany that meant that groups with extreme political views that at times directly venerated Hitler and the National Socialist party to be evergreen.⁶⁰ The German Democratic Republic (GDR) was clear in their commitment to denazification, and banned many symbols from the Third Reich, including swastikas. But this kind of repression made for fertile soil from which reactive subcultures could grow. Young people in East Germany would push back against the the government's disinterest in freedom of speech by vandalizing buildings with swastikas, not necessarily because of a deep admiration for the Nazi regime, but as a means of rebelling against a restrictive government.⁶¹ What's more is that the particular contrast between East and West Germany's politics lent itself to East Germany largely offloading the guilt for Nazi-era war crimes onto West Germany.⁶² Eastern Germany lacked a clear and robust denazification education program: the average GDR citizen knew about

⁵⁹ Brown, "'1968' East and West: Divided Germany as a Case in Transnational History."

⁶⁰ Gideon Botsch, "From Skinhead-Subculture to Radical Right Movement: The Development of a 'National Opposition' in East Germany," *Contemporary European History* 21, 4 (2012): 557, doi:10.1017/S0960777312000379.

⁶¹ Eric Brothers, "Issues Surrounding the Development of the Neo-Nazi Scene in East Berlin," *European Judaism: A Journal for the New Europe* 33, 2 (2000): 45-50, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/41443483>.

⁶² Probst, "German Pasts, Germany's Future."

the Holocaust only in brief, and many did not know the specific horrors inflicted on Jews.⁶³ The East was not, however, completely devoid of the kind of radical student movements that were characteristic of West Germany, but they existed on a much smaller scale. Compared to the thousands of radical students in the West (68ers), the numbers in East Germany only hovered around 200 to 300.⁷⁰

Reunification and the Aftermath

In November of 1989, Germany's international frontier opened and the two Germany's were reunified. This reunification, and particularly the collapse of East Germany, was fertile ground for far-right activity as unemployment levels rose and people, especially young men, searched for a sense of belonging.⁶⁴ Moreover, the creation of a German state that was once again whole sparked a sudden and strong wave of nationalism.⁶⁵

Early groups such as the skinheads of Eastern Germany were less political than is often believed. In fact, the skinhead scene itself spans several other subcultures and varies ideologically.⁶⁶ But still, some more organized factions of this broadly spanning subculture did in fact radicalize and represent early far-right groupings in Germany. What mostly began as groups of frustrated youths and rowdy football fans only became more politically inclined towards the end of the 1980s, when more coherent groups solidified and named themselves in ways that

⁶³ Brothers, "Issues Surrounding the Development of the Neo-Nazi Scene in East Berlin."

⁷⁰ Brown, "'1968' East and West: Divided Germany as a Case in Transnational History," 85.

⁶⁴ McGowan, "Right Wing Violence in Germany."

⁶⁵ Botsch, "From Skinhead-Subculture to Radical Right Movement."

⁶⁶ Meredith Watts, "Aggressive Youth Cultures and Hate Crime: Skinheads and Xenophobic Youth in Germany," *American Behavioral Scientist* 45, 4 (2001): 600-615, <https://doi.org/10.1177/00027640121957376>.

recall the National Socialist party or earlier racist predecessors.⁶⁷ One such example is the Berlin-based Lichtenberg Front. Two years after this group's founding in 1986, the group renamed itself The 30 January Movement, harkening back to the date of the Nazi party's rise to power in 1933.⁷⁵ According to one of the main founders of the movement, Ingo Hasselbach, it was the first neo-Nazi party in East Germany.⁶⁸ The group, along with many West German neo-Nazis, participated in the 1987 attack on the Zion Church, in which 30 to 40 neo-Nazis stormed into the building, hit attendees, and shouted such racist aphorisms such as "Jewish pigs" and "Skinhead power."⁶⁹ This was an event that raised the profile of right-wing activity throughout Germany,⁷⁰ specifically because of the East-West contact of far-right individuals and groups that became clear after the attack.⁷¹

The 30 January Movement and other organized far-right groups did not disappear after this public attack. In fact, after young people were released from prison, many joined the National Alternative (Nationale Alternative, NA).⁷² This was the eastern counterpart of the German Alternative (Deutsche Alternative, DA). The NA operated as a paramilitary group, running training camps and strictly following their code of defense.⁸¹ The goals of the group were lofty, calling for a more centralized and organized nationalist movement. The NA organized the first Central German Comradeships (mitteldeutsche Kameradschaften) in 1989 that brought

⁶⁷ Botsch, "From Skinhead-Subculture to Radical Right Movement."

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Mike Dennis & Norman Laporte, *The Stasi: Myth and Reality*, 1st ed. (New York: Routledge, 2003), 1-288.

⁶⁹ Anja Maier, "Die Nacht Der Nazis in der Zionskirche," taz.de, September 27, 2008, <https://taz.de/!822447/>.

⁷⁰ Gareth Dale, *Popular Protest in East Germany*, 1st ed. (New York: Routledge, 2005), 126-127.

⁷¹ Botsch, "From Skinhead-Subculture to Radical Right Movement."

⁷² Expert Witness Hajo Funke's official statement in the trial of David Irving, "David Irving, Holocaust Denial, and his Connections to Right Wing Extremists and Neo-National Socialism (Neo-Nazism) in Germany," Holocaust Denial on Trial, <https://www.hdot.org/funke/#>, accessed Dec 2021. ⁸¹ Ibid.

together east and west far-right nationalists to attempt to build an official national socialist organization. The next year, they created the first east-west militia camp.⁷³ Still, their power was short-lived. By 1992, both groups were essentially dissolved, but their rightist sentiment lingered.

Official entities began to take note. The German Federal Office for the Protection of the Constitution has paid close attention to these often disparate and somewhat unorganized groups of young people as the number of violent acts increased in the early 1990s.⁷⁴ The National Socialist Underground (NSU) is a particularly stark example of early far-right political action following the reunification of East and West Germany. Between 1999 and 2011, the NSU was responsible for several acts of violence and nine racially motivated murders.⁷⁵ Established in 1999 by three individuals that were former members of the National Democratic Party (Nationaldemokratische Partei Deutschlands, or NPD), the NSU went undetected for nearly 14 years, silently carrying out multiple assassinations, armed robberies and bombings that targeted immigrant communities.^{76,86}

Modern Political Parties

Today, there are several active far-right political parties that are recognized as legitimate in the state. The Alternative for Germany (Alternative für Deutschland, or AfD) is perhaps the

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Watts, "Aggressive Youth Cultures and Hate Crime."

⁷⁵ McGowan, "Right Wing Violence in Germany."

⁷⁶ Daniel Koehler, "Right-Wing Extremism and Terrorism in Europe: Current Developments and Issues for the Future," *PRISM* 6, 2 (2016): 84-105, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.2307/26470450> ⁸⁶ McGowan, "Right Wing Violence in Germany," 202-203.

most prominent. Formed in 2013,⁷⁷ the rise of this opposition party represents an important shift towards a more normalized and omni-present far-right camp in Germany.

The reasons for this are murky. The simple explanation might be the temporal distance between the current generation of Germans in power and the salience of guilt for those Germans that had to deal with the immediate aftermath of the Holocaust and the Nuremberg Trials. As Dresler-Hawke and Liu say, “identity salience and identity valuing are intimately connected in culture-specific contexts where groups are jostling for political power and other resources.”⁸⁸ The sociopolitical context in which older generations of Germans were understanding themselves was undoubtedly one steeped in shame and guilt regarding their country’s actions. But younger Germans are dealing with new issues. In 2015, almost 500,000 people applied for asylum in Germany, and the response of then-chancellor Angela Merkel was “We can do this!”⁷⁸ This perceived altruism landed Germany squarely in international discourses once again, this time very positively.⁷⁹ No longer steeped in the international consensus of German villainy, this was perhaps the perfect cultural moment for a new far-right party to gain popular legitimacy. Another possible explanation for the normalization of far-right sentiments in the German government is an overcorrection to the collective guilt (*Kollektivschuld*). Björn Höcke, a leader in the AfD, said in 2017 that Germany needed to completely abandon their “politics of remembrance.”⁸⁰ He

⁷⁷ Chase, Jefferson, and Rina Goldenberg. 2019. "AfD: What You Need To Know About Germany's Far-Right Party". *Deutsche Welle (DW)*.

<https://www.dw.com/en/afd-what-you-need-to-know-about-germanys-far-right-party/a-37208199>. ⁸⁸ Dresler-Hawke, Emma, and James H. Liu. "Collective shame and the positioning of German national identity." *Psicología Política* (2006).

⁷⁸ Chris Hasselbach, “Five years on: How Germany’s refugee policy has fared,” DW, August 25, 2020, <https://www.dw.com/en/five-years-on-how-germanys-refugee-policy-has-fared/a-54660166>.

⁷⁹ Hasselbach, “Five years on.”

⁸⁰ “Outrage over German populists’ call to end Nazi guilt,” Euractiv, January 18, 2017, <https://www.euractiv.com/section/justice-home-affairs/news/outrage-over-german-populists-call-to-end-nazi-guilt/>.

specifically referenced the Holocaust memorial in Berlin, complaining that the centrality of such a monument is also placing defeat at the center of Germany's identity. His speech concluded with a standing ovation from the crowd.⁸¹ It is understandable that a country with such ingrained distaste for their own past might feel as though the culture of shame is too much to handle. But many organizations in Germany responded to this speech feeling as though it was a gross overcorrection. The Central Council of Jews accused Höcke of "trampling on six million Jewish Holocaust victims murdered by the Nazis."⁹³

Just four years after its formation, the AfD gained enough votes to be elected to the Bundestag. The AfD was the first shamelessly and openly far-right party to be elected to the German government since 1945. As of late 2021, the right-wing populist party holds 82 seats in the German Bundestag,⁸² wielding considerable influence.

In their political programme, the AfD espouses nationalist ideals that harken back to the days of the Third Reich with astonishingly similar tones. Section 3.4 of the manifesto deals with criminal justice, and reads: "Untreatable alcoholics, incurable drug addicts, and the psychologically ill, who pose a serious threat to society, should not be placed in psychiatric wards, but held in protective custody."⁸³ Nearly 80 years earlier in 1933, the Nazi regime passed the "Law for the Prevention of Offspring with Hereditary Disease," and included several key sections that read remarkably similar to the AfD's manifesto. "Anyone who is suffering from a hereditary disease can be sterilized by a surgical operation, if, according to the experiences of

⁸¹ Euractiv, "Outrage over German populists' call."

⁹³ Ibid.

⁸² Deutscher Bundestag, "Distribution of seats in the 20th German Bundestag," accessed February 2022, <https://www.bundestag.de/en/parliament/plenary/distributionofseats>.

⁸³ "Manifesto For Germany: The Political Programme of the Alternative for Germany," published by Alternative für Deutschland, accessed February 2022, https://www.afd.de/wp-content/uploads/sites/111/2017/04/2017-04-12_afd-grundsatzprogramm-englisch_web.pdf.

medical science, it is to be expected with great probability that his offspring will suffer from serious hereditary physical or mental defects,” the law reads. This includes people with various psychological disorders and “deficiencies” as well as people suffering from alcoholism.⁸⁴

Though the AfD does not in their manifesto call for action as radical as sterilization, the call for spatial separation through protective custody as well as the insistence that psychiatric help is an inappropriate and insufficient intervention is a disturbingly similar view on these portions of the population. Further, Section 3.7 speaks to the issue of organized crime. “The majority of offenders in the field of organized crime,” reads the manifesto, “are foreign nationals.

Deportation of this group of people needs to be simplified.”⁸⁵ The insistence that criminals are by and large foreigners and the call for their deportation harkens back to similarly xenophobic comments made by Hitler in his own manifesto, *Mein Kampf*. “All who are not of good race in this world,” Hitler writes, “are chaff.” (Hitler, p. 269). Of course, the “good race” in this situation is referring to white people, Aryans more specifically. The xenophobia and general distaste for non-Germans implied by the AfD’s manifesto has its roots in the Nazi ideology. The tenor of this and many other quotations from *Mein Kampf* are similar to the AfD’s suggestions with how to deal with criminals and the ill.

Today, many AfD politicians walk a thin line of appealing to the most voters while also holding populist, racist and otherwise xenophobic beliefs. But in 2019, the party’s success in elections across Germany showed that lawmakers with histories of blatant racism and far-right

⁸⁴ “Law for the Prevention of Offspring with Hereditary Diseases,” Virginia Holocaust Museum, July 14, 1933, <https://www.vaholocaust.org/law-for-the-prevention-of-offspring-with-hereditary-diseases/>.

⁸⁵ “Manifesto For Germany,” Alternative fur Deutschland, https://www.afd.de/wp-content/uploads/sites/111/2017/04/2017-04-12_afd-grundsatzprogramm-englisch_web.pdf.

sentiments actually do quite well in this political context.⁸⁶ The “Flügel” is the far-right extremist wing of the AfD, and it is estimated that 20% of all AfD politicians were members in 2020.⁸⁷ The hostile and extreme nature of this group has flagged the attention of Germany’s Office for the Protection of the Constitution (BfV), a domestic intelligence agency that investigates potential activity that threatens the German state. The “Flügel” was flagged specifically because of its brand of racism and nationalism, and has since promised to disband. It is unclear if the wing is still active today.

There are other political parties with active membership but no seats in the Bundestag. There is the National Democratic Party of Germany (Nationaldemokratische Partei Deutschlands, or NPD). The official political website of the party proudly asserts that the NPD is the country’s oldest nationalist party and “one of the few patriotic organizations not yet banned by the government.”¹⁰⁰ The party formed in 1964, and spent its early days fighting for reunification of the country and resisting foreign occupation.⁸⁸ From 1967 to 1968, the party was elected to seven state legislatures, but narrowly missed the 5% popular vote requirement to be elected to parliament in 1969.⁸⁹ According to a 2013 Constitutional Protection Report

⁸⁶ Melanie Amann et al, “The AfD’s Ongoing Slide toward Right-Wing Extremism,” Spiegel International, September 12, 2019, https://www.spiegel.de/international/germany/german-populist-afd-party-continues-slide-to-extremism-a-1_286286.html.

⁸⁷ Benjamin Hindrichs, “Der „Flügel“ verschwindet – das stärkt die Rechtsextremen in der AfD,” Krautreporter, March 30, 2020, <https://krautreporter.de/3286-der-flugel-verschwindet-das-starkt-die-rechtsextremen-in-der-afd>.¹⁰⁰ “History of the National Democratic Party,” English Homepage of the National Democratic Party of

Germany (Nationaldemokratische Partei Deutschlands), <https://www.npd-sh.de/sprachen/1%20%20english.php>, accessed Jan 2022.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ Manfred Schreiber and Yung Ping Chen, “Ideology of the National Democratic Party of Germany,” *Journal of Thought*, vol. 6, no. 2 (1971): 88-104, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/42588238>.

(Verfassungsschutzbericht), the NPD received 1.3% of the nationwide votes, down 0.2 percentage points from 2009.⁹⁰

Neo-Nazism, Holocaust Deniers, and the Extremes

Neo-nazism in general is less of an organized movement and more of a decentralized aspect of a larger right-wing scene in Germany.⁹¹ Of course, there are stark examples of neo-Nazis that vehemently deny the existence of the Holocaust or outwardly praise National Socialism and the triumphs of the Third Reich, but these people and groups do not adequately represent the modern reemergent far-right as a whole. Still, their actions deserve attention.

Perhaps the most famous Holocaust denier is Ernst Zündel, a German-born man that fled to Canada in order to avoid mandatory enlistment in the West German *Bundeswehr*.⁹² While he was there, he founded Samizdat Publishers and went on to produce literature that focused on lionizing Hitler, glorifying the Third Reich, and denying the Holocaust. He was convicted and extradited back to Germany after publishing hate speech, but his spirit lives on in the Zundel site website where his supporters continue his legacy and express solidarity.⁹³

One of the reasons as to why hardcore Holocaust deniers lack the kind of legitimacy necessary to producing real political change is that their fundamental beliefs are contradictory

⁹⁰ "Verfassungsschutzbericht 2013," Bundesministerium Des Innern, https://www.bmi.bund.de/SharedDocs/downloads/DE/publikationen/themen/sicherheit/vsb-2013.pdf?__blob=publicationFile&v=1, accessed Feb 2022.

⁹¹ Lee McGowan, "Right-Wing Violence in Germany: Assessing the Objectives, Personalities and Terror Trail of the National Socialist Underground and the State's Response to It," *German Politics*, vol. 23, no. 3 (2014): 196-212, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09644008.2014.967224>.

⁹² Jason Tingler, "Holocaust Denial and Holocaust Memory: The Case of Ernst Zündel," *Genocide Studies International*, vol. 10, no. 2 (2016): 210, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.2307/26986049>.

⁹³ "Ernst Zundel," Auschwitz-Birkenau Memorial and Museum, <https://www.auschwitz.org/en/history/holocaust-denial/ernst-zundel/>, accessed Jan 2022.

¹⁰⁷ Brothers, "Issues Surrounding the Development of the Neo-Nazi Scene in East Berlin."

and delusional. Many of these groups and cultures assert that the Holocaust did not happen (or at least did not happen in the way that many purport), while also venerating Nazi officials that made the Final Solution possible.¹⁰⁷ Moreover, Holocaust deniers cannot reasonably be neo-Nazis, because aligning oneself with the Nazi party necessarily means aligning oneself with the planning and execution of the Holocaust by the Nazis.

Far Right in Japan

The *uyoku dantai* (右翼団体), or right-wing groups in Japan, are diverse. They vary in structure, goals, and methods. But a common thread links them together. Japan's far-right is based on a distrust of international affairs and a dedication to the idea that Japanese sovereignty is being attacked.⁹⁴

Japan's cultural nationalism is reconstructive, rather than creative (*saikochikugata nashonarizumu* rather than *sozogata nashonarizumu*) (Yoshino, 1992)^{95,96}, and focuses largely on a sense of nationhood that largely relies on returning to a version of Japan that never existed in the first place. This means that much of the nationalism espoused by right wing groups is focused on the incorrectness of the previous narrative. Largely, this is connected to the war crimes trials of the 1940s. The aftermath of the International Military Tribunal of the Far East was contentious: the nature of the trial, including the tactics of the defense, the lack of non-American chief prosecutors, and the obvious absence of Emperor Hirohito for strategic purposes, resulted in a narrative that was fuzzy. Questions of Japanese sovereignty continued in the

⁹⁴ Matthew Penney, "A Nation Restored: The Utopian Future of Japan's Far-Right," *Mechademia: Second Arc*, vol. 10 (2015): 98-112, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.5749/mech.10.2015.0098>.

⁹⁵ Yoshino Kosaku, *Cultural Nationalism in Contemporary Japan* (London and New York: Routledge, ⁹⁶), **quoted in** Satoko Suzuki, "Nationalism Lite? The Commodification of Non-Japanese Speech in Japanese Media," *Japanese Language and Literature* vol. 49, no. 2 (October 2015): 509-529, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/24615149>.

decades following the trials, only stoking the skepticism that was already present. The renewed 1960 security pact with the United States seriously undermined Japanese sovereignty by bolstering their dependence on Western states.⁹⁷ The nationalism that followed, then, was focused on denouncing that narrative, claiming that the “American-authored” postwar history of Japan is illegitimate.¹¹¹

Lobbying Groups and Battles over Education

Nippon Kaigi (The Japan Conference) is one of the largest nongovernmental organizations and lobbying groups in Japan.⁹⁸ Established in 1997, the group remained largely unknown to the public for years, despite wielding major influence over elections and policymaking.⁹⁹ The first organized rally of the group took place in November of 1997, where the group’s leader gave a speech criticizing the ways in which Japanese history is being taught, learned and spread.¹⁰⁰ Nippon Kaigi supports a variety of causes, including educational reform, increasing patriotism and stoking nationalism. According to the group itself, there are six principles that dictate the actions of the organization:

- 1) Respect the Imperial Family, the center of a unified Japan, and nurture compatriotism.

⁹⁷ Alexis Dudden, “Memories and Aporias in the Japan-Korea Relationship,” *The Asia-Pacific Journal | Japan Focus*, vol. 8, no. 3 (2010): 1-15. ¹¹¹ Penney, “A Nation Restored,” 98.

⁹⁸ “Right side up,” *The Economist*, June 4, 2015, <https://www.economist.com/asia/2015/06/04/right-side-up>.

⁹⁹ Tawara Yoshifumi, “What is the Aim of Nippon Kaigi, the Ultra-Right Organization that Supports Japan’s Abe Administration?” *The Asia-Pacific Journal | Japan Focus* vol. 15, no. 1 (2017): 1-22, <https://apjif.org/-Tomomi-Yamaguchi--Tawara-Yoshifumi/5081/article.pdf>.

¹⁰⁰ Tomomi Yamaguchi, “The “History Wars” and the “Comfort Woman” Issue: The Significance of Nippon Kaigi in the Revisionist Movement in Contemporary Japan” In *The Transnational Redress Movement for the Victims of Japanese Military Sexual Slavery: The transnational redress movement for the victims* edited by Pyong Gap Min, Thomas Chung and Sejung Sage Yim, 233-260. Berlin, Boston: De Gruyter Oldenbourg, 2020. <https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110643480-013>.

- 2) Promote a new Constitution based on our nation's true characteristics.
- 3) Protect the sovereignty and honor of our independent state and realize responsible politics that serve peace and order.
- 4) Revive tradition in education and nurture young people to grow up with pride and love for their nation.
- 5) Cultivate a spirit to protect the nation and to provide it with enough defensive power to secure its safety and contribute to world peace.
- 6) Widen the understanding of the world, aim to co-exist (with others) and contribute to promoting the nation's status in the global community and (to building) friendship (with other nations).¹⁰¹

The group is also very successful in their mobilizing efforts - in the early 2000s, Nippon Kaigi collected 3.6 million signatures in support of reforming education laws to include mandatory lessons in patriotism for Japan's youth.¹¹⁶ This kind of activism, combined with their well-funded strategic communications campaigns, means that this group is able to wield amazing influence and can reasonably make their views known.

The makeup of Nippon Kaigi is varied. Politicians, academics, lobbyists, communications specialists and activists have all been involved in the group with varying degrees of support. Inoguchi Kuniko, a Japanese politician and internationalist whose work on gender issues has gained traction is a particularly interesting case. In 2015, Inoguchi signed a letter of support for the accompanying two books about false and exaggerated narratives surrounding Japanese crimes during WWII.¹⁰² Though she stated that she doesn't believe in the

¹⁰¹ David McNeill, "Nippon Kaigi and the Radical Conservative Project to Take Back Japan," *The Asia Pacific Journal | Japan Focus* vol. 13, no. 4 (2015): 1-5, <https://apjff.org/-David-McNeill/4409/article.pdf>.

¹¹⁶ "Right side up," *The Economist*.

¹⁰² McNeill, "Nippon Kaigi," 1-2.

project of rewriting history, she did admit to being a member of the Nippon Kaigi.¹⁰³ It's not obvious whether her disavowal for the very thing that Nippon Kaigi is predicated on is true or not, but what is clear is that even political scientists with a history of defending women's rights in Korea and abroad can be implicated in this neonationalist group.

Another lobbying group, albeit less popular, is Nippon Kominto (Imperial Subjects Party). Made up of dedicated ultranationalists, they espouse support for the emperor and decry regular Japanese political parties.¹⁰⁴ The group famously launched a brutal campaign against Noboru Takeshita, the secretary-general of the ruling Liberal Democratic Party of Japan who ran for presidency in 1987. Takeshita ran on a platform of generational change, separating himself from the longtime LDP leader Kakue Tanaka, promising that he could act as a new leader for Japan.¹⁰⁵ The Nippon Kominto supported the traditional values of Tanaka and painted Takeshita as disloyal in a loud campaign throughout Tokyo.¹⁰⁶ Loyalty is of paramount importance to this rightwing lobbying group, and they are not afraid of shows of violence to get that point across. In 2004, Nippon Kominto drive a bus into the Chinese consulate in Osaka, resulting in no injuries but several arrests.¹⁰⁷ Acts like this one, although uniquely direct, are recognizably the work of the far-right because of the common distaste for China and the international community.

The hatred for other countries and the dedication to preserving traditional Japanese values is only one aspect of these groups. Another issue that many lobbying groups take issue with is

¹⁰³ McNeill, "Nippon Kaigi," 1.

¹⁰⁴ William D. Hoover, "Historical Dictionary of Postwar Japan." In *Historical Dictionaries of Asia, Oceania, and the Middle East*, 146, Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2018.

¹⁰⁵ Uldis Kruze, *Shin Kanemaru and the Tragedy of Japan's Political System* (New York: Springer, 2015) 65-67.

¹⁰⁶ Kenneth Szymkowiak, *Sokaiya: Extortion, Protection and the Japanese Corporation* (Oxfordshire: Routledge, 2015).

¹⁰⁷ "China indignant at Japanese right-wing attack on Consulate General in Osaka," People's Daily Online, June 25, 2004, http://en.people.cn/200404/23/eng20040423_141323.shtml.

how Japanese children are educated about their own country. History textbooks have been a battleground in Japan for years. The Atarashii Kyo kasho o Tsukuru Kai (Japan's Society for Textbook Reform) is a preeminent group pushing for a recall of current history textbooks in Japan and replacing them with ones that offer narratives of Japan and its history that are less "masochistic."¹⁰⁸ The group's website does not acknowledge Japan's role in colonizing other Asian countries, or at least doesn't admit fault or criminality in Japan's actions.¹⁰⁹ In 2001, a new textbook endorsed by the group was put in schools, albeit in small numbers.¹¹⁰ The textbooks offer a narrative consistent with historical revisionism: they decry the postwar education that has allegedly been forced upon Japan by outside forces and instead promote a patriotic and nationalistic view of history.¹¹¹

There is, of course, pushback against this overt promotion of uncritical patriotism and nationalism in Japan's schools. The Japan Teachers Union (JTU) is one such arena for critique. The JTU was formed in 1947 and carried the slogan "Do not send out students to war again," referencing the kind of breeding ground for military idolization and patriotism that schools were in the prewar period.¹¹²

¹⁰⁸ Kitazawa Takuya, "Textbook history repeats itself," *Japan Quarterly* vol. 48 (Jul-Sep 2001): 51-57, <https://www.proquest.com/openview/4f6328af9ba54ac9cc7f6255faf6a7b6/1>.

¹⁰⁹ Yi Gyu Soo, "The Historical Recognition of Japanese Neo-Nationalism," *International Journal of Korean History* vol. 17, no. 2 (2012): 109-130, <https://ijkh.khistory.org/upload/pdf/17-2-5.pdf>.

¹¹⁰ Alexander Bukh, "Japan's History Textbooks Debate: National Identity in Narratives of Victimhood and Victimization," *Asian Survey* vol. 47, no. 5 (2007): 683-704, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1525/as.2007.47.5.683>.

¹¹¹ Gyu Soo, "Japanese Neo-Nationalism."

¹¹² Yuka Kitayama, "The rise of the far right in Japan, and challenges posed for education," *London Review of Education* vol. 16 no. 2 (2018): 250-267, <https://doi.org/10.18546/LRE.16.2.06>.

Society for the Dissemination of Historical Fact

The Society for the Dissemination of Historical Fact is a volunteer-based website dedicated to contesting the narratives of Japan's involvement in crimes against humanity during WWII. The chairman of the site, Hideake Kase, is a diplomat and prominent writer that is known for his promotion of historical revisionism. He is also chairman of the Alliance for Truth about Comfort Women (ATCW), which has frequently sent delegations to the United Nations to protest the narrative surrounding "comfort women," which can more accurately be described as sex slaves, in China during WWII. Kase and other academics delivered an open letter to JAPAN Forward regarding the Concluding Observation of the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD) meeting in September of 2018, stating that the CERD was profoundly biased and inflammatory towards Japanese people.¹¹³ Similar strains of thought are found in published articles for The Society for the Dissemination of Historical Fact.

The first sentence of the mission statement on the website states that "The historical facts of modern Japan, especially where they concern relations with neighboring nations, remain largely unknown to the English-speaking world."¹¹⁴ Already, this espouses some of the hallmarks of far-right ideology, namely the idea that the rest of the world either doesn't understand Japan's culture and history, or that it is deliberately misrepresented. From an overview of the material, it is clear that much of the blame for this is placed on China, with a particularly negative attitude towards the English-speaking world that so readily accepts their "propaganda."

The site has both "Articles of Historical Fact" and "Review of English Language Books."

¹¹³ Hideaki Kase, Hidemichi Tanaka, and Eiji Yamashita, "Open Letter of Protest to the Chairman of the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD) on Concluding Observations on the Combined Tenth and Eleventh Periodic Reports of Japan on September 26, 2018," Japan Forward, October 8, 2018, <https://japan-forward.com/japanese-academics-open-letter-to-u-n-rights-body-cerd-report-bears-distinct-ideological-bias/>.

¹¹⁴ Society for the Dissemination of Historical Fact, "Mission Statement," accessed Feb 2022.

The former page includes many subcategories, including “Comfort Women,” “Japan & Jews,” “Tokyo Trials (International War Tribunals for the Far East),” and “War Crime.” For the purposes of this research, each article will not be analyzed in detail. Rather, two particularly telling pieces will be reviewed.

On the issue of “comfort women,” which appears to be one of the most pressing issues in the mind of Hideake Kase, the website has archived 108 articles. Lee Woo-yeon, an author of several articles on the site, wrote a piece entitled “At long last, the false theory of ‘forced abduction of comfort women’ is collapsing.” In the article, Woo-yeon references Harvard Professor Mark Ramseyer’s 2021 article about contractual sex that was published in the *International Review of Law and Economics*. The article generated much criticism, specifically aimed towards Ramseyer’s contention that the relationship between comfort women and comfort stations was contractual, and therefore not the same as sexual slavery. Woo-yeon disputes these criticisms, appearing to side with Ramseyer. Woo-yeon states that critics, “do not understand the difference in contractual cultures between that of European and American countries, where contracts are written, and that of Korea, where people tend to make oral contracts.”¹¹⁵

He goes on to argue that the original testimonies given by former comfort women confirmed that the system did not include any information about force, coercion, or kidnapping, but that as the issue became a political one, the women changed their stories. Woo-yeon claims that the women's stories lack consistency, and that only the stories most damning towards Japan were internalized and spread by the international community. The main methods by which

¹¹⁵ Lee Woo-yeon, “At long last, the false theory of ‘forced abduction of comfort women’ is collapsing,” Society for the Dissemination of Historical Fact, accessed 22 February, 2022, <http://www.sdh-fact.com/essay-article/1652/>.

Korean women became a part of the comfort women system, he argues, were parents trafficking their children for money, and voluntary prostitutes.

On the topic of American Culture and the Tokyo Trials, Ikeda Haruka has a chapter of a book available entitled “Verdicts at the Tokyo Trials induced by neutral, third-party American missionaries.”¹¹⁶ The chapter includes three sections. The first is “Fictitious view of history held by American Missionaries.” In this section, Haruka claims that the popular narrative of the Nanjing Incident is fabricated by American missionaries who were seen as neutral witnesses at the Tokyo Trials, but were in fact supporters of the Chinese Army and spread rampant propaganda not related to actual eyewitness accounts. Haruka states that the view that the American missionaries represented credible and neutral witnesses at the Tokyo Trials is “utterly fantastic.”¹¹⁷ Instead, he suggests that Mr. Shields, an English businessman who was a member of the International Committee but did not testify at the trials, can offer a more partisan account of Nanjing. Haruka quotes an anonymous source that asserted that Shields felt that Japan was justified in rejecting the International Committee for the Nanking Safety Zone, and that the committee was in fact very partisan.

The second section is “Existence of forged papers.” In it, Haruka claims that “A Report of a German Eyewitness,” a document submitted by the French Prosecution in the trials,¹¹⁸ is a “well-made forgery.”¹²⁰ The document, Haruka says, was important for the American missionaries because they could use it to assert that incidents took place outside of Nanjing and

¹¹⁶ Ikeda Haruka, “Verdicts at the Tokyo Trials induced by neutral, third-party American missionaries,” in *Primary Historical Sources Reveal the Truth about the Nanjing Incident* (Society for the Dissemination of Historical Fact: no date), 1-8.

¹¹⁷ Haruka, “Verdicts at the Tokyo Trials,” 2.

¹¹⁸ Trial of the Major War Criminals before the International Military Tribunal, Vol. 24 (November 14, 1945):

¹¹⁹ , RF-282 - RF-283, https://www.loc.gov/rr/frd/Military_Law/pdf/NT_Vol-XXIV.pdf.

¹²⁰ Haruka, “Verdicts at the Tokyo Trials,” 3.

away from the homebase of the missionaries themselves. It seems as though Haruka is trying to insinuate that the American missionaries needed this document to have plausible deniability in their own involvement, though he doesn't say so outright. Instead, he ends the section by saying that "the existence of these forged documents created at that time of the so-called Nanjing Incident proves that the Nanjing Incident was in fact fictitious."¹²¹

The final section is called "Issues related to burials and population matters." This section problematizes the Tokyo Trials' use of burial records that found proof of a massacre at Nanjing. Based on issues with reporting, selective submission to the trials, and witnesses, Haruka asserts that the burial record is unreliable. Haruka goes on to claim that the population of Nanjing, an issue brought up by the defense at the trials, was dismissed by Chief Justice Webb. Haruka quotes from unnamed sources and suggests that the population of Nanjing was stable throughout the time, proving that a massacre did not occur. Moreover, he suggests that the prosecutors at the Tokyo Trials deliberately dismissed this defense because it would fly in the face of an already established narrative of Nanjing.

Both of these articles touch on some of the most common issues taken by the far-right in Japan. They reflect a frustration with international narratives and seem to suggest that these stories, of mass executions at Nanjing, of sexual slavery, and of the nature of the trials, are fabricated and made to demonize Japan. The underlying theme is a need for historical revisitation. The far-right seeks to "correct" the narratives espoused by international actors and reclaim a sense of Japanese superiority.

¹²¹ Haruka, "Verdicts at the Tokyo Trials," 5.

Zaitokukai

The Citizens League to Deny Resident Foreigners Special Rights (Zaitokukai) was the first hate group in postwar Japan.¹²² Formed in 2007 by Sakurai Makoto, the group claims to have over 12,000 members operating primarily online.¹²³ The core motive of the group is responding to, illuminating, and ultimately ending the perceived “special privileges” given to Koreans in Japan.

The origins of this fear of and distaste for Japanese Koreans has a long history. In 1910, Japan annexed Korea in an impressive show of force, raising Japan to the status of a world power.¹³⁸ But WWII, the American occupation, international agreements that decidedly undermined Japan’s sovereignty, and an increasingly vilified North Korea have stoked deep anti-Korean sentiments as well as a general divide between Japan and other international actors.¹²⁴ The Zaitokukai group is a descendent of these escalating tensions.

Though the group is primarily active online, they do hold protests and gatherings to share their neo-nationalist message. In August of 2010, members of this and other far-right groups gathered in Tokyo to protest the Fuji Television company’s “overabundance of South Korean TV dramas.”¹²⁵ Like other Zaitokukai protests, this one was loud, outwardly racist, and full of offensive slogans.

Like many online far-right groups throughout the world, the Zaitokukai is particularly attractive to young Japanese people, and has active social media profiles and blogs that showcase

¹²² Daiki Shibuichi, “Zaitokukai and the Problem with Hate Groups in Japan,” *Asian Survey* vol. 55, no. 4 (2015): 715–738, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1525/as.2015.55.4.715>

¹²³ Matthew Penney, “‘Racists Go Home!’ ‘Go Crawl Back to the Net!’ - Anti-Racism Protestors Confront the Zaitokukai,” *The Asia-Pacific Journal | Japan Focus*, vol. 10, no. 146 (2012): 1. ¹³⁸ Dudden, “Memories and Aporias,” 1.

¹²⁴ Dudden, “Memories and Aporias,” 2.

¹²⁵ Penney, “‘Racists Go Home!’” 2.

previous demonstrations.¹²⁶ But what sets this group apart from something like the numerous far-right channels on reddit, 4chan and other online hubs is that the Zaitokukai has publicly and frequently made explicit calls for violence.¹²⁷ The message is not vague: slogans from 2013 included “Murder the Koreans!” and “AIDS infected Korean whores get out!”¹²⁸

Perhaps most frightening is the saliency of the group’s goals. In a YouTube clip capturing a Zaitokukai event in 2013 that has since been removed for violating the platform’s policy on hate speech,¹²⁹ a young girl shouts into a microphone and says “We will start Tsuruhashi Massacre like the Nanjing Massacre!”¹³⁰ Thanks to reporting in *Shukan Bunshun*, the public learned that the girl is a 14 year old middle school student whose father is an active Zaitokukai member and far-right nationalist.¹⁴⁶ At only 14 years old, this young girl had internalized the messaging of neo-nationalists in Japan, so much so that she felt emboldened to fearlessly scream her views in Tsuruhashi, a largely Korean district in Osaka. Her father, an active participant in Zaitokukai activities, expressed support for his daughter and her cause, essentially saying that her views were not alarming, and in fact predictable given that Koreans “burn our flag and took Takeshima from us by force.”¹³¹

¹²⁶ Tessa Morris-Suzuki, “Freedom of Hate Speech; Abe Shinzo and Japan’s Public Sphere,” *The Asia Pacific Journal | Japan Focus*, vol. 11, no. 1 (2013): 3.

¹²⁷ Dudden, “Memories and Aporias,” 10.

¹²⁸ Penney, ““Racists Go Home!”” 1.

¹²⁹ YouTube video, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GrxOVbkMG-A>.

¹³⁰ Jackie Kim-Wachutka, “When Women Perform Hate Speech: Gender, Patriotism, and Social Empowerment in Japan,” *The Asia-Pacific Journal | Japan Focus*, vol. 17, no. 1 (2019): 1-2. ¹⁴⁶ Penney, ““Racists Go Home!”” 2.

¹³¹ Quoted in Penney, ““Racists Go Home!”” 2.

Political Parties

Like Germany, Japan has several far-right political parties that have legitimacy in the government and represent a rightward shift from the top. Since 1955, the Liberal Democratic Party has dominated the Diet (Japanese parliament).¹³² The party, especially under Shinzo Abe, has made clear their nationalist ideology, specifically referencing international relations and the revision of the constitution that the US oversaw after WWII.¹³³ That the ruling party of Japan is not necessarily subtle with their promotion of nationalism ought to point to a legitimization of right-wing ideology that flows through Japan.

There are other explicitly right-wing parties in Japan that hold less political power than the LDP but are nonetheless informative of the modern political climate. The Nippon Ishin no Kai, or the Japan Innovation Party, recently secured its place as the third largest party in the House of Representatives.¹³⁴ The party was formed in 2015 and has a small but strong support population in Osaka, where the party was formed and where Ichiro Matsui, the party's leader, is also mayor.¹³⁵ Nippon Ishin no Kai advocates for constitutional reform and greater autonomy for local governments, as well as a renewed commitment to traditional culture and values.¹³⁶ Though many argue that the party is not explicitly far-right, that sentiment is not universal. Naoto Kan, former Prime Minister, said on Twitter that Nippon Ishin no Kai's "eloquence reminds me of

¹³² Akira Nakamura, "Party Politics in Japan," *The Brookings Review* vol. 6, no. 2 (1988): 30-34, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/20080027>.

¹³³ Kitayama, "The rise of the far right," 250-267.

¹³⁴ Yasutoshi Tsurumi and Yumi Shibamura, "What's behind Japan Innovation Party's major breakthrough in general election?" *The Mainichi*, November 2, 2021, <https://mainichi.jp/english/articles/20211101/p2a/00m/0na/043000c>.

¹³⁵ "Ichiro Matsui to remain at helm of Japan Innovation Party," *Nikkei Asia*, November 27, 2021, <https://asia.nikkei.com/Politics/Ichiro-Matsui-to-remain-at-helm-of-Japan-Innovation-Party>.

¹³⁶ Lorenzo Costantini, Members' Research Service, "Japan's politics in the run-up to the elections," European Parliamentary Research Service, December 2014, [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/ATAG/2014/545700/EPRS_ATA\(2014\)545700_REV1_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/ATAG/2014/545700/EPRS_ATA(2014)545700_REV1_EN.pdf).

Hitler when he rose to power in Germany at a time of confusion after World War I.”¹³⁷

A final important political party to note is Jisedai no Tō, or The Party for Future Generations. It is a young party, formed in 2014, and has had minimal success in upsetting the power of the LDP, but has successfully gained seats in the Diet as an outright neonationalist party. The party’s platform is one of neoconservatism, supporting constitutional reform and crackdowns on immigration policy, as well as a decrease in the rights and benefits of foreigners in Japan.¹³⁸ Perhaps most striking about their policy platform is the way that the latter mirrors the stated goals of the Zaitokukai. The party went into the 2014 election as Japan’s fifth largest party, but lost 17 seats and thus a significant amount of negotiating power when it came to forming coalitions with the LDP to get their policy priorities across.

Connecting the Dots

The story of Japan and Germany is one of both convergence and divergence. Two countries that committed atrocities during WWII, two international trials to decide the fates of war criminals and understand more clearly the details of the events that occurred, leading to two completely different national consensuses surrounding complicity and identity. And yet, out of those disparate narratives came similar far-right resurgences, both of which focused on historical revisionism relating to their countries’ wartime activities.

But the far-right movements in Japan and Germany are not the same, even though they ramped up at a similar time and call attention back to the same era. It’s possible to assume that

¹³⁷ “Former PM Naoto Kan under fire for comparing Nippon Ishin to Hitler,” The Japan Times, January 26, 2022, <https://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2022/01/26/national/kan-hitler-tweet/>.

¹³⁸ Robert J. Pekkanen and Saadia M. Pekkanen, “Japan in 2014: All about Abe,” *Asian Survey* vol. 55 no. 1 (2014): 103-118, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1525/as.2015.55.1.103>.

the differences in Germany and Japan ultimately boil down to differences between Germans and Japanese. But that logic rests on a form of cultural essentialism that misses the nuances of existing in an international context. To be sure, there are various social and political differences between Germany and Japan that are informed by different cultural norms, but I believe that the culmination of the last great international conflict by trials that informed nearly every aspect of international law and organization in the years that followed is a much more compelling point. The differences in the far-right's relationship with history in Japan and Germany are too intimately tied to the nature and fact of the trials to assume that culture is the reason for any divergence.

Conclusion

This research set out to provide a synthetic account that brings together two bodies of literature: cultural memory and far-right movements. It is clear that Germany and Japan differ in the ways in which they learn from and appropriate the eras of their history that were characterized by ultra-nationalism and atrocity. I argue that the differences in the post-war trials, both in their context and form, accounts for the two different methods of relating to history that are present in Germany and Japan.

The far-right in Germany and Japan differ in their uses of history. Japan takes the approach of divorcing themselves from what they deem to be an international attempt at writing history in such a way that Japan is villainized. Their relationship with their history is reconstructive. By contrast, the far-right in Germany seems to be more focused on dispelling the implications of history, contesting the narrative rather than the facts. In this way, their relationship with history is more re-imaginative.

It is clear that narratives matter in terms of how they drive culture, politics, social organizations and more. They can also be weaponized. Germany's far-right has rallied around Nazi figures like Rudolf Hess, flipping the story from a negative one to a hero's tale, Japan's Society for the Dissemination of Historical Fact writes captivating stories about the supposed buried truth surrounding Nanjing, and more. These stories generate a sense of group belonging among those who are committed to a cultural memory that goes against the grain.

This research can offer insight into the rise of far-right movements globally by considering the impact of narrative-making and memory in far-right groups and actions. Far-right sentiments are on the rise globally, not just in Japan and Germany. Pieces of this argument can certainly be extrapolated. For example, the different forms of historical revisionism can be seen in other countries as well. In the United States, the flying of confederate flags, particularly in the South, compliments Germany's reimaginative historical revisionism in the sense that this outward facing pride for a period in American history that normalized the owning and selling of other human beings does not include an effort to rewrite the past. Flying the exact same flags that were used by Confederate armies during the Civil War, where the South fought for states' right to continue the practice of slavery, suggests that these rightist sentiments and commitment to the flag are attempting to embrace a differing narrative of that period of history: The South did fight in the Civil War, but not because of racism or a belief in slavery, simply for a different political system in which states have the most rights.

By contrast, segments of the Turkish population regularly participate in the kind of historical revisionism that is seen in Japan's far-right movements. The Ottoman Empire began an ethnic cleansing of the Armenian people in 1915 in modern-day Turkey. Turkish resentment towards the Armenians became increasingly intense, one manifestation of which was the

proliferation of nationalist groups such as the Young Turks. An estimated 1.5 million Armenians were killed.¹³⁹ However, the Turkish government regularly denies that a genocide took place. With similar tactics that far-right Japanese groups use, denial of the killings as well as ostracization and dehumanization of Armenians contribute to a culture in which Turkish nationalism is able to flourish. Turkish children are not taught of the genocide, and journalists have been threatened or prosecuted when speaking about the Armenian genocide. Turkey, like Japan, is attempting to reconstruct their nation's history.

Of course, these cases are not perfect mirrors to Japan and Germany. But recognizing the different methods of relating to and appropriating history, especially a contentious history, is useful in understanding the political right in a more nuanced way. More research into these cases is needed to comprehend the process by which rightist actors came to understand their countries' histories.

It's true that the crimes committed during WWII were horrific beyond belief and defied the logical assumptions of the limits of human behavior. It follows that the war needed to end with war crimes trials, the likes of which had never been seen before. It also follows that we focus particular attention to the countries that committed atrocities during this era, studying the specifics of how the world got to a place like this one, where genocide and terror were commonplace. But there are other countries in the world that have also committed acts of horrendous atrocity on various scales, and most have never had their version of Nuremberg or IMTFE. It's impossible to predict how the modern political climate of any one country would look had the international community weighed in on the severity and appropriate punishment for

¹³⁹ Katie Bedrossian, "The Armenian Genocide and Acts of Denial," Human Rights Pulse, April 24, 2021, <https://www.humanrightspulse.com/mastercontentblog/the-armenian-genocide-and-acts-of-denial>.

the variety of crimes committed by countries. But based on this research and the links it shows between narrative and meaning, meaning and identity, identity and far-right activity, it is reasonable to assume that things might look different.

It follows too that the proliferation of the far-right in Japan and Germany might have happened differently or less intensely were it not for the trials. The nature of the IMTFE bolstered distrust of the international community, which relates directly to the growing xenophobia seen in Japan today. Similarly, the solidification of facts at Nuremberg meant that future Germans would struggle with reconstructing their nation's history, but repositioning themselves in relation to the past and reimagining the narrative was a viable option which can be seen by acts such as venerating criminals of the Third Reich or the harkening back to Nazi-era laws in modern and established political parties.

More research is needed to understand more fully the links between memory and identity, the direct links between ordinary people and international events such as the war crimes trials of WWII, and the personal relationships of far-right actors and their countries' history of atrocity. But this research is a starting point to think about those ideas. Synthesizing the two bodies of literature and bringing in historical research about the war crimes trials, both their form and function, serves as a lens through which to view identity and how it morphs and changes. By providing this account, I have hoped to provide a new way of thinking, one that is nuanced about the links between memory, atrocity, identity, historical revisionism and the reemergence of far-right movements. Far-right movements and sentiments are on the rise globally, and some have proven to be violent and dangerous. There is value in understanding and contextualizing these groups, and linking the modern far-right with the historical processes that led to their creation and proliferation is a necessary way of doing so.