

James Madison University
JMU Scholarly Commons

Masters Theses

The Graduate School

Spring 2014

Haunted by Hitler: German film of the 2000s and the discourse of Germans as victims

Christopher John Carlberg
James Madison University

Follow this and additional works at: <https://commons.lib.jmu.edu/master201019>

 Part of the [History Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Carlberg, Christopher John, "Haunted by Hitler: German film of the 2000s and the discourse of Germans as victims" (2014). *Masters Theses*. 167.

<https://commons.lib.jmu.edu/master201019/167>

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the The Graduate School at JMU Scholarly Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Masters Theses by an authorized administrator of JMU Scholarly Commons. For more information, please contact dc_admin@jmu.edu.

Haunted by Hitler
German Film of the 2000s and the Discourse of Germans as Victims
Christopher John Carlberg

A thesis submitted to the Graduate Faculty of

JAMES MADISON UNIVERSITY

In

Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

For the degree of

Master of Arts

Department of History

May 2014

Acknowledgements

My sincere appreciation to Susanne Glaesner of Losheim in Germany for helping me identify which German films to study as well as locating and shipping me a copy of *Die Flucht* when I was unable to track one down in the U.S. Danke schön!

To Dr. Jessica Davidson, Dr. Michael Gubser, and Dr. Emily Westkaemper—thank you for providing unique and valuable insight to my work that I would have otherwise missed. Your comments and questions pushed me to approach my analysis from new perspectives and made my thesis stronger and more succinct in the process.

Without the mentorship and guidance of Dr. Christian Davis, I may still be searching for a thesis topic. His constructive and timely feedback transformed my often scattered ideas into a clear and coherent paper while also fostering the growth of my self-confidence as a student of history. Many thanks for your collaborative direction.

Much gratitude to my parents, John and Carrie Carlberg, for always supporting my endeavors and for instilling the belief that I can achieve any goal I set for myself.

Last, but certainly not least, I could not have completed this project—or grad school—without Bryce Hayes. He inspired and nurtured me throughout the process, and he always knew I would succeed, even when I questioned whether or not I could. Thank you for your unconditional support and choosing to be my partner in life.

Table of Contents

| | |
|--|-----|
| Acknowledgements..... | ii |
| Table of Contents | iii |
| Abstract | iv |
| Introduction..... | 1 |
| 1. Germans as Direct Victims of the Third Reich..... | 39 |
| <i>Sophie Scholl – Die letzten Tage</i> (2005)..... | 42 |
| <i>Napola – Elite für den Führer</i> (2004)..... | 52 |
| <i>Der Untergang</i> (2004) | 61 |
| 2. Germans Suffer Soviet Retribution for Nazi Aggression | 84 |
| <i>So weit die FüÙe tragen</i> (2001)..... | 86 |
| <i>Anonyma – Eine Frau in Berlin</i> (2008) | 98 |
| <i>Die Flucht</i> (2007)..... | 112 |
| Conclusion | 134 |
| Bibliography | 155 |

Abstract

In the culture of official commemoration honoring the many victims of Nazi persecution there arose an older way of thinking about the National Socialist past following Germany's reunification, one that identified Germans themselves not only as perpetrators and collaborators but also victims. Popular film constituted an important medium contributing to this way of thinking during the first decade of the twenty-first century. Looking at six German films made between 2001 and 2008, this project focuses on several questions: How did these German films reflect and shape public discourse about the National Socialist past, both inside and outside of Germany? To what degree did they portray Germans themselves as victims of National Socialism? How did these interpretations fit into ongoing discussions about the Nazi past within Germany? And, how did audiences, critics, historians, and public officials react to the films and further affect the discourse of German suffering? By presenting audiences with portrayals of the German wartime experience, the six films depicted German suffering in a number of ways. The theme of German victimhood mirrored and contributed to wider discursive trends that had reemerged and gained acceptance within German society in the second decade after reunification. The discourse showed that the Nazi past remained a point of contention within Germany and among the country's neighbors and allies. Yet, foregrounding German suffering in narratives of the National Socialist past at the expense of the persecuted victims sparked impassioned response and debate, highlighting the complexities of coming to terms with the National Socialist era in reunified Germany.

Introduction

In May 2005, the Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe opened in the heart of Berlin, a memorial that historian Tony Judt called “the most impressive” of all European Holocaust memorials.¹ Though German journalist Lea Rosh and historian Eberhard Jäckel planted the seed for what would eventually become the Berlin Memorial in the late 1980s, the idea would struggle to establish roots and germinate for over a decade before blossoming into a physical reality some fifteen years later. The fall of the Berlin Wall and subsequent German reunification initially forestalled Rosh and Jäckel’s initiative. But once Chancellor Helmut Kohl endorsed the project in 1992, the lengthy creative process to realize the memorial began. Multiple committee hearings, architectural competitions, and heated debates occurred throughout the 1990s before the German parliament settled on the site’s location and design. Following several years of construction, the Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe finally welcomed its first visitors in the spring of 2005. The abstract monument consists of 2,711 gray concrete *stelae*, or pillars, that vary in height: it is situated across more than 200,000 square feet in the center of reunified Germany’s capital city. Beneath the array of *stelae* sits an information center that engages visitors with the story of the Holocaust and its victims. According to Rosh, the Berlin Memorial was built “to commemorate what took place, to honor the victims and to give them back their names.”² Germany appeared to have come to terms with its National Socialist past and the suffering exacted upon those persecuted by the Nazi regime. But had it?

¹ Tony Judt, *Postwar: A History of Europe since 1945*, (New York: Penguin Press, 2005), 826.

² “Five years on, Berlin Holocaust Memorial is a landmark of remembrance,” *Deutsche Welle*, May 10, 2010, *Deutsche Welle Online*, <http://dw.de/p/NKG9>, Accessed October 10, 2013.

Although the Memorial exemplified the tremendous distance that Germans had traveled since the late 1940s in accepting responsibility for the horrors of the Holocaust and Nazi wartime aggression, its opening coincided with the reemergence of an older discourse about the National Socialist past: one that identified the German people not only as perpetrators and collaborators, but also victims.³ Following the reunification of East and West Germany in 1990, film served as an important medium stoking the resurgence of this older perspective.⁴ How did German films produced in the second decade after reunification reflect and shape public discourse about the National Socialist

³ For an overview of the European cultural and political landscapes in the aftermath of World War II, see Tony Judt, *Postwar: A History of Europe since 1945* (New York: Penguin Press, 2005). A comparative analysis of the two different approaches to National Socialist memory taken by East and West Germany is the subject of David Herf's *Divided Memory: The Nazi Past in the Two Germanys* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997) and Mark A. Wolfgram's "*Getting History Right*": *East and West German Collective Memories of The Holocaust and War* (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 2011). In "Germans as Victims?: Thoughts on a Post-Cold War History of World War II's Legacies" *History & Memory* 17, no. 1 (2005), 147-194 and "War Stories: The Search for a Usable Past in the Federal Republic of Germany" *The American Historical Review* 101, no. 4 (1996), 1008-1048, Robert G. Moeller discusses German victimhood and *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*, the West German process of coming to terms with the National Socialist past. Charles S. Maier details the historian's debate, which took place in West Germany during the 1980s, in *The Unmasterable Past* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1988). For studies on memorialization in reunified Germany, see Paul B. Jaskot and Gavriel D. Rosefeld, editors, *Beyond Berlin: Twelve German Cities Confront the Nazi Past* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2008), Gilad Margalit, *Guilt, Suffering, and Memory: Germany Remembers Its Dead of World War II*, trans. Haim Watsman (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2010), and Michael Meng, *Shattered Spaces: Encountering Jewish Ruins in Postwar Germany and Poland*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2011). Bill Niven and Ruth Wittlinger respectively address the legacies of the Third Reich in reunified Germany in *Facing the Nazi Past: United Germany and the Legacy of the Third Reich* (London; New York: Routledge, 2002) and *German National Identity in the Twenty-First Century: A Different Republic After All?* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010). Linking sexuality to memory of the Nazi past and the Holocaust in Germany concerns Dagmar Herzog in *Sex After Fascism: Memory and Morality in Twentieth-Century Germany* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005). Reconciliation between the nation and its past makes up the content of Jennifer Lind's *Sorry States: Apologies in International Politics* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2008).

⁴ Frank Bösch explores films dealing with the National Socialist past in "Film, NS-Vergangenheit und Geschichtswissenschaft: von 'Holocaust' zu 'Der Untergang'" *Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte* 55, no. 1 (2007), 1-32. Similarly, Owen Evans addresses the return of the past in contemporary German film in "Memory, Melodrama and History: The Return of the Past in Contemporary Popular Film in Germany," *European Studies* 30, no. 1 (2013), 241-269. The problem of Germans as victims versus perpetrators is the focus of "'Der Untergang' (2004): Victims, Perpetrators, and the Continuing Fascination of Fascism," *German Monitor* 67, no. 1 (2007), 247-261 by Paul Cooke. Robert R. Shandley offers an examination of the immediate postwar German films in *Rubble Films: German Cinema in the Shadow of the Third Reich* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2001). *Hitler – Films from Germany: History, Cinema and Politics since 1945* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), edited by Karolin Machtans and Martin A. Ruehl, presents a collection of essays looking into the relationship between film and politics within Germany.

past inside and outside Germany? In particular, to what degree did the films portray Germans themselves as victims of National Socialism? How did these interpretations fit into ongoing discussions about the Nazi past within Germany, which, beginning in the mid-twentieth century in West Germany, gradually rejected the notion that Germans were equally as victimized by the Third Reich as Jews, Gypsies, Poles, Russians, political dissidents, homosexuals, and people with mental and physical handicaps? Furthermore, how did audiences, critics, historians, and public officials react to the films and how did their responses affect the discourse of German victimization?

In several films engaging with their wartime experience, Germans themselves appeared as victims of National Socialism. Such depictions invited both criticism and praise and resulted in heated discussions and debates, highlighting the complexities involved in *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*, or coming to terms with the past. The impact of these films on the discourse of Nazi victims signified how popular film influenced the processing of the National Socialist past in Germany, which continues into the twenty-first century. The films also showed how the Nazi era remains a source of contention for Germany as well as several of its neighbors and allies, such as Poland, Russia, and Israel. By situating non-Jewish Germans as victims alongside those directly persecuted by Hitler and the Third Reich, filmmakers often exploited the National Socialist past in order to generate interest and attract audiences. The films thus appeared to some as an appropriate avenue for younger generations of Germans to engage with the wartime experiences of their ancestors without refuting or supplanting existing narratives built upon a long, layered interpretation of the Nazi past.

Six German films released in theaters or shown on German television between 2001 and 2008 constitute the main primary sources around which this project is framed. Each film presented Germans as victims of National Socialism and thus contributed to the reemergence of an older way of thinking about the relationship between ordinary Germans and the crimes of National Socialism. The six films can be broken down into two thematic subsets. The first subset portrays Germans as the direct victims of Nazi violence and terror: it includes *Der Untergang* (2004), *Sophie Scholl – Die letzten Tage* (2005), and *Napola – Elite für den Führer* (2004). *Der Untergang* traces the last days of World War II in Berlin as the Third Reich collapsed. Citizens and soldiers of all ages are painted as victims of Hitler's war machine. In *Sophie Scholl*, the story of the well-known anti-Nazi activist is recounted. Executed for standing up against the Nazis, Scholl and her story tell a heroic tale while also offering a message that German citizens were scared into submission. Ignoring his father's protests, a German teen enrolls in a National Socialist training school to gain access to a better way of life in *Napola – Elite für den Führer*. His illusions are shattered when confronted with the evils committed by the Nazi party, perhaps an allegory to postwar German identity and collective memory as victims of the National Socialist past. The second subset of films consists of *Die Flucht* (2007), *So weit die Füße tragen* (2001), and *Anonyma – Eine Frau in Berlin* (2008): they depict German citizens and soldiers as indirect victims of National Socialism as a result of the suffering they endured at the hands of the Soviet Union and Red Army. *So weit die Füße tragen* chronicles a German soldier's confrontation with a cruel Red Army lieutenant and journey from prisoner of war to freedom. He suffers Soviet wartime retribution and separation from his family during his years-long escape. Similarly, the 2007 German

television miniseries *Die Flucht* follows a group of German refugees as they flee an advancing Red Army en route to Bavaria from their homes in East Prussia. Along their trek, they become victims of Soviet attacks and rape as well as resistance from Bavarian citizens as they attempt to reestablish themselves upon their arrival in Bavaria. *Anonyma – Eine Frau in Berlin* depicts German victimization through rape committed by Soviet soldiers and the fight for survival in the aftermath of the Soviet attack on Berlin. Together, these six movies provide an example of the different ways film portrayed Germans themselves as victims of National Socialism.⁵

Why look to cinematic interpretations of the German wartime experience in relation to the reappearance of the discourse of Germans-as-victims? As a popular art medium, film is arguably more accessible to a wide audience than political or academic debates, both inside and outside of Germany. The main goal of a film is to achieve a certain amount of economic success through entertainment that appeals to a broad audience. But as dramatic interpretations, historical films based on actual people and experiences are inherently false. Actors are not the actual historical figures, and dramatic scenes do not provide documentary evidence of their experiences. Yet despite inaccuracies and misrepresentations, films contribute to the formation of collective memory and thus impact the ongoing discussions over how Germany should address its National Socialist past. In addition, as historian Owen Evans maintains, no matter their deficiencies, “popular films can be viewed as meaningful contributions to debates about a

⁵ Recognizing there are important connections between victimization and gender in Nazi Germany, it is important to note that this study focuses mainly on Germans in general unless otherwise noted. For specific discussions of the relationship between National Socialism, gender, and victimization, see *Mothers in the Fatherland: Women, the Family, and Nazi Politics* by Claudia Koonz (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1987), *Women in Nazi Germany* by Jill Stephenson (Harlow, UK; New York: Longman, 2001), and *Women, Gender and Fascism in Europe, 1919-1945* edited by Kevin Passmore (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2003).

nation's cultural memory...[they] have a role to play, warts and all, alongside other narratives. Critics are entitled to highlight the flaws of such films, and thereby invite correctives: it is part of the dynamic of negotiation and constructing cultural memory.”⁶ German films that engage with the National Socialist past are therefore important not only because they present audiences with interpretations of the German wartime experience but also because they prove that *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* continues outside academic and political circles.

Furthermore, the digital age makes film and television more widely available through technology and facilitates the medium's ability to impact historical reconstruction. As noted historian Sabine Hake argues, historical films often augment historical reality, and the greater ease of access to these movies through DVDs and Internet video channels, in addition to theaters and television, provides them with increased reach. The potential for a larger audience, in turn, raises the influence film can exert on cultural memory and historical knowledge. Hake likens this process to the creation of a “new historical consciousness,” which, according to her, accompanied a generational change in approach to the National Socialist past. In a wave of backlash against the West German generation that came of age in the late 1960s, often referred to as the ‘68ers, the younger generation of Germans maturing at the turn of the twenty-first century sought a more generally accessible, interactive, and bottom-up approach to history. Hake posits that this approach countered the academically focused critique of German politics and culture employed by the ‘68ers. As a result, the public sphere, once dominated by intellectuals, literary critics, and journalists, moved “toward a multi-tiered

⁶ Evans, “Memory, Melodrama and History,” 248-64.

system that includes the official culture of commemoration and a decidedly populist approach to the politics of history and memory.”⁷ That film works as an agent of reconstruction—both in terms of history and cultural memory—provides further evidence of the medium’s significance. In films of the 2000s, portrayal of Germans illuminates the process of historicization.

After establishing the ability of popular cinema to influence historical discourse and memory, the task for this project became singling out specific German films that engaged with the Nazi era and showed Germans as victims. As mentioned earlier, the six films selected for this project fall into two thematic groups—one where Nazis directly victimize Germans and one where Germans suffer from National Socialism indirectly because of Soviet retribution for wartime aggression. While Holocaust and rubble films play an important role in German historical cinema and therefore cultural memory, they typically provide a different picture of the discourse of Nazi victimization.⁸ Their influence on historical discourse is important, though, and related secondary sources help to contextualize the general role film plays in discussions of the past. As with most sources, the films discussed in the following analysis contain faults. They offer emotionally charged and decidedly subjective versions of the past. Despite these problems, however, audiences connected to the experiences of on-screen characters, which consequently provided the films an opportunity to impact the discourse of German

⁷ Sabine Hake, “Entombing the Nazi Past: On *Downfall* and Historicism,” in *Hitler – Films from Germany*, ed. Machtans and Ruehl, 119-20.

⁸ Whereas Holocaust films focused on the experiences of Jewish suffering under Nazi rule, rubble films, as defined by historian Robert R. Shandley, placed Germans against the background of destruction and chaos left by Allied bombings and National Socialism’s defeat as they began the process of piecing their lives back together. These films were specifically German-made between 1946 and 1949, and Sandley argues that while the films often lacked a strong narrative voice, they “take the *mise en scène* of destroyed Germany as a background and metaphor of the destruction of German’s own sense of themselves.” Shandley, *Rubble Films*, 2.

victimization. The films chosen for this project were also selected because of their release dates. Arriving roughly 60 years after the war's end, all six theatrical or television premieres roughly coincided with the planning, creation, or dedication of the Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe in central Berlin, which itself served as an impetus for renewed discussion in Germany about the National Socialist past and Hitler's victims. The emergence of films that foreground German suffering during the war at about the same time as the creation of the Memorial shows the continuing complexity of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*.

To help situate the films in ongoing discussions about Nazi victims, public speeches, debates, newspaper articles, critical reviews, and interviews offer timely commentary. The major sources for these documents are the news outlets of *Berliner Zeitung*, *Deutsche Welle*, *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, *Der Freitag*, *The Guardian*, *Spiegel*, *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, *Die Welt*, and *Die Zeit* as well as the German Historical Institute's online collection. Consequently, these sources also offer reactions, both foreign and domestic, to the controversial portrayals of Germans themselves as victims of National Socialism. Foreign reaction to these films is of particular interest for two reasons. First, a discussion of how Germans approached their own victimization during National Socialism cannot be divorced from international pressures. Second, as former opponents and victims of Nazi aggression, Germany's neighbors and postwar allies have a unique interest in the ways Germans process their National Socialist past, because they fear a resurgence of militant nationalism and revanchist claims in Eastern Europe. The response of foreign critics and audiences as reported in Germany is therefore integral to the overall discourse being analyzed for this paper.

The historiography on the changing memory landscape among Germans after World War II is vast. As East Germany became communist, the official state line prevented scholarly exploration of German responsibility for atrocities committed by the Third Reich. It separated Germans from Nazis and focused on the destruction of fascism.⁹ West German historiography initially downplayed German guilt in the early years after the war. Historians pardoned Germany from starting World War I and labeled World War II an anomaly in an otherwise admirable history. Most foreign historians, on the other hand, laid the blame for both world wars on Germany. Why the disconnection? As historian Jennifer Lind notes, “Amnesia in 1950s West German historiography was likely exacerbated by the fact that many German academics had either tacitly or overtly supported Hitler’s regime and had dodged denazification.”¹⁰ Nevertheless, West German historians thought that the Third Reich constituted a colossal mistake, an experimental accident. They argued that compared to a long history of great men and achievements, Hitler and the Nazi experience were anomalous.

In the late 1960s and throughout the 1970s, a generational shift further opened the Nazi past for discussion in West Germany. New generations of scholars replaced former Nazis, soldiers, and agents of Hitler’s regime and weakened their hold on historical investigations of the recent past, which had not yet honestly investigated the National Socialist past or the complicity of German citizens in the Holocaust.¹¹ The *Historikerstreit*, or historians’ debate, of the 1980s was an important debate about coming to terms with the National Socialist past in West Germany and the question of who could

⁹ Herf, *Divided Memory*, 111, 383.

¹⁰ Lind, *Sorry States*, 113-4.

¹¹ Wolfgram, “*Getting History Right*,” 23.

be afforded victimhood status. Charles S. Maier confronts these debates in *The Unmasterable Past: History, Holocaust, and German National Identity*. Conservative and leftist historians disagreed over how West Germany should address its Nazi past, particularly in terms of the Holocaust. Conservative historians thought ‘normalizing’ the Holocaust was the best option. In such an approach, historians equalized the Holocaust with atrocities such as the Armenian Genocide and Stalinist Purges and placed it as just another event in German history. Leftist historians argued that the Holocaust was unique in design and practice; therefore, historians should not place the Holocaust on equal footing with other atrocities. Leftist historians also feared a resurgence of German nationalist sentiment would emerge as a result of ‘normalizing’ the Holocaust.¹² The *Historikerstreit* illuminated the changing attitudes among West German historians and influenced much of the later historiography. Historians and politicians no longer employed a single, unified approach to the Nazi past.¹³

Following reunification, historians concerned with the National Socialist past presented new interpretations that often challenged the previously established historiography. In academic circles and among the German populace, according to Lind, a trend to look past Hitler and the SS as the sole executors of the Holocaust and other

¹² Maier, *The Unmasterable Past*, 16-9.

¹³ Debates over cultural memory and the National Socialist past extended beyond Germany and resulted in a number of additional historical works. *The Politics of Memory in Postwar Europe*, edited by Claudio Fagu, Wulf Kansteiner, and Ned Lebow, features essays on wartime memory in Austria, France, Germany, Italy, Poland, and Switzerland (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006). Peter Novick explores the popularity and pervasiveness of Holocaust discourse in 1990s American culture in *The Holocaust in American Life* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1999). Similarly, Alan Mintz shows how American popular culture impacted memory of the Holocaust in *Popular Culture and the Shaping of Holocaust Memory in America* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2001). The legacy of France’s wartime complicity is the subject of Henry Rousso’s *The Vichy Syndrome: History and Memory in France since 1944*, translated by Arthur Goldhammer (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1991). Aurora Morcillo offers a collection of essays in *Memory and Cultural History of the Spanish Civil War: Realms of Oblivion* that look at how Spain has remembered its civil war (Leiden: Brill, 2013).

Nazi atrocities reemerged following the publication of works like American historian Daniel John Goldhagen's *Hitler's Willing Executioners* in 1996. Increased focus on the complicit behavior of Germans not directly involved with the Nazi party further weakened the claim that Germans stood by innocently, unaware of the crimes committed in Hitler's name.¹⁴ The result, argues historian Bill Niven, was that the engagement with and presentation of the National Socialist past grew "more inclusive" after reunification. This meant a fuller recognition of the extent of Nazi atrocities and acknowledgment of a wider range of victims.¹⁵ Furthermore, according to Jeffrey Herf, who examines the political divergence between the two Germanys following the war, West Germany's more open, democratic government allowed historians and politicians to debate and discuss the relationship between German memory and the Nazi past. This legacy informed the political atmosphere following reunification.¹⁶

Several histories of Nazi Germany written after 1990 discuss the changing trends of commemoration during the 1990s and 2000s. Tony Judt maintains the collapse of communism and the Soviet Union opened several new avenues in Eastern Europe for discussion of the Holocaust and its lasting impacts. Increased discussion, in turn, paved the way for memorials that more readily recognized Jewish suffering.¹⁷ This process preceded and coincided with increased international interest in Jewish heritage sites in Germany and Poland, which had largely fallen to ruin after the war. Michael Meng explores these *Shattered Spaces* and the ways different groups of people have engaged

¹⁴ Lind, *Sorry States*, 148.

¹⁵ Niven, *Facing the Nazi Past*, 5.

¹⁶ Herf, *Divided Memory*, 334.

¹⁷ Judt, *Postwar*, 803-8.

and dealt with the ruinous Jewish landscape.¹⁸ The essays collected by Gavriel D. Rosenfeld and Paul B. Jaskot in *Beyond Berlin* point out the differences of commemoration practices and the related discourse between Berlin and other German cities, where memorials and historical preservation efforts emphasized German victimhood and often downplayed or ignored Nazi atrocities.¹⁹

Other narratives approach Germany's relationship with its National Socialist past through cultural historical lenses. For example, according to Dagmar Herzog, memory, meaning, and understanding of the National Socialist past in Germany has been negotiated and renegotiated throughout the twentieth century.²⁰ Combining cultural, political and memory histories, Gilad Margalit examines the remembrance of fallen German soldiers and victims of Allied bombings through their memorials and the discussions related to them in the public, media, arts, and culture. He maintains that despite the gradual acceptance of responsibility and guilt for the suffering caused by Nazi persecution, Germans have retained a sense of suffering, passed down through families by oral traditions. Whereas the concept of German victimhood gradually met resistance prior to reunification, the discourse of Germans as victims of the National Socialist past is now accepted in Germany.²¹ Following a similar combined approach, Mark A. Wolfgram provides a comparative analysis of the ways in which East Germany and West Germany differed in their exploration of the Holocaust and World War II. Some of Wolfgram's conclusions reinforce established ideas. For example, the democratic West

¹⁸ Meng, *Shattered Spaces*, 10.

¹⁹ Jaskot and Rosenfeld, *Beyond Berlin*, 14-5.

²⁰ Herzog, *Sex after Fascism*, 1.

²¹ Margalit, *Guilt, Suffering, and Memory*, 293.

gradually allowed a more open and honest confrontation with the past than did the communist East. Also, generational turnovers proved key turning points in approaches to the Third Reich. Wolfgram further introduces two other findings: the prevailing social and political environments shape how movies, newspapers articles, literature, and television programs deal with the past, and “the ethnocentrism of death will often, if not always, mute empathy and identification with members of other groups.”²²

The study of German film and its relationship to the National Socialist past enjoys its own rich historiography. A number of the volumes introduced above include a discussion of the impacts the American television series *Holocaust* had on West German politics and society after it first aired in 1979.²³ Adding to these works are Herman Lübbe and Stephen Pagaard, who address how the *Holocaust* series contributed to the confrontation with Nazi atrocities. Lübbe maintains that processing the past through film facilitates a progressive forgetfulness as cinematic interpretation supplants historical reality, while Pagaard links popular films, like *Schindler's List* (1993), to an increased awareness of Nazi crimes through their increased use in school curriculums.²⁴ German historian Frank Bösch offers an analysis of American and German movies, documentaries, and television series between the late 1970s and 2004 that depict the Holocaust or Nazi era. He explores their impact on public opinion and the symbiotic relationship that developed between film and historical scholarship, in which historical

²² Wolfgram, “*Getting History Right*”, 21.

²³ In particular, historians Tony Judt (*Postwar*), Gilad Margalit (*Guilt, Suffering, and Memory*), Bill Niven (*Facing the Nazi Past*), and Mark A. Wolfgram (“*Getting History Right*”) tie the *Holocaust* series to changing West German approaches to the National Socialist past and shifting the focus of discourses of victimhood to Jewish victims.

²⁴ Herman Lübbe, “Der Nationalsozialismus im deutschen Nachkriegsbewußten,” *Historische Zeitschrift* 236, no. 3 (1983), 579-99. Stephen Pagaard, “German Schools and the Holocaust: A Focus on the Secondary School System of Nordrhein-Westfalen,” *History Teacher* 28, no. 4 (1995), 541-54.

trends of the time often influenced cinematic themes.²⁵ Karolin Machtans and Martin A. Ruehl present a set of essays that explore the layered relationships between German films, history and politics. The featured articles highlight how motion pictures have influenced wartime myths and memories of Hitler.²⁶ Other pieces, like Owen Evans' "Memory, Melodrama and History: The Return of the Past in Contemporary Popular Film in Germany," Elizabeth Heinman's "Gender, Sexuality, and Coming to Terms with the Nazi Past," and Paul Cooke's "'Der Untergang' (2004): Victims, Perpetrators and the Continuing Fascination of Fascism" look at the role films play in contextualizing the National Socialist past in Germany. Evans holds popular history films as meaningful and important contributions to processing the legacies of the Nazi era, Heinman adds that such films often perpetuate gendered stereotypes based on Third Reich ideologies, and Cooke argues that unlike the films of the 1970s and 1980s, which sought to hold the country responsible for helping Hitler, *Der Untergang* represents a shift in using film as a way to more realistically view the past.²⁷ These important secondary works provide key context for the broader discussion of how German films of the 2000s have impacted the discourse of Germans as victims of National Socialism as well as how the films analyzed below fit into Germany's cinematic traditions.²⁸

²⁵ Bösch, "Film, NS-Vergangenheit und Geschichtswissenschaft," 1-32.

²⁶ Karolin Machtans and Martin A. Ruehl, editors, *Hitler – Films from Germany: History, Cinema and Politics since 1945*, (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012).

²⁷ Owen Evans, "Memory, Melodrama, and History: The Return of the Past in Contemporary Popular Film in Germany," *European Studies* 30, no. 1 (2013), 241-69; Elizabeth Heinman, "Gender, Sexuality, and Coming to Terms with the Nazi Past," *Central European History* 38, no.1 (2005), 41-74; Paul Cooke, "'Der Untergang' (2004): Victims, Perpetrators, and the Continuing Fascination of Fascism," *German Monitor* 67, no. 1 (2007), 247-61.

²⁸ Several regional studies outside of Germany also focus on the contribution of popular film to cultural memory. For example, in *Spanish Cultural Studies An Introduction: The Struggle for Modernity* edited by Helen Graham and Jo Labanyi (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995, 304-10), Peter Evans links 1960s and 1970s Spanish films to collective memory in "Cinema, Memory, and the Unconscious." Marsha

The six films selected for this project must also be situated within a wider debate about German victimization that began well before these films were released. When the war ended in 1945, National Socialist sentiment did not immediately vanish—even if the Nazi party did—nor did Germans immediately begin the process of engaging with the legacies of the Third Reich.²⁹ Directly following the war politicians confronted a population that largely supported, participated in, and fought for National Socialism while also surviving the destruction caused by war. Allied bombings decimated much of Germany’s urban landscape, leaving millions of Germans without homes and killing more than 500,000. Soviet and Eastern European retribution for Nazi atrocities led to the repossession of lands originally part of Germany or taken during Nazi Germany’s eastward expansion. Retribution also resulted in the execution of ethnic Germans living outside of German borders. Many refugees attempting to return to Germany froze to death or died from starvation. Millions of German soldiers suffered in Soviet prisoner of war (POW) camps, and according to some data, the number of women raped by Red Army soldiers during their advance towards Berlin numbered close to two million.³⁰ Germans also faced the constant threat of separation from their families and loss of loved ones as well as having to rebuild familial and social relationships in the aftermath of

Kinder analyzes how film contributed to the recreation of Spanish identity in *Blood Cinema: The Reconstruction of National Identity in Spain* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993). *Confronting the ‘Dirty War’ in Argentine Cinema, 1983-1993: Memory and Gender in Historical Representations* by Constanza Burucúa uses film as a lens through which to examine cultural memory (Woodbridge, Suffolk, UK; Rochester, NY: Tamesis, 2009).

²⁹ Evans, “Memory, Melodrama and History,” 242.

³⁰ Lind, *Sorry States*, 105.

wartime separations and death.³¹ These experiences fostered the view among Germans, at least in the years directly following World War II that they, too, had suffered as a result of Nazi tyranny. As a result, the newly established governments of both East and West Germany created narratives that largely excused ordinary Germans from culpability for Nazi crimes. Separating Germans from National Socialism allowed for the evasion of responsibility for and direct confrontation with the Holocaust and the Nazi past while perpetuating the view that Germans also suffered Nazi aggression and terror.³²

In addition, the Allies initiated denazification procedures designed to eradicate National Socialism in the occupied zones during the years directly following World War II. They successfully instituted educational reforms, removing any trace of National Socialist doctrine from textbooks and curriculum. Spearheaded by the Americans, the Nuremberg Trials labeled Hitler and the Nazis as aggressors and racists. The Allies also established that the Holocaust was aimed at exterminating the Jews and would not have succeeded without the cooperation of the Nazi government and army. But the political elite, as well as the public, resisted and resented the Allied attempts at denazification.³³ They denied having supported Nazism and placed the blame for the crimes committed during the National Socialist period solely on Hitler and a few select Nazi officials. Politicians and historians perpetuated this notion throughout the immediate postwar period by labeling Hitler and the Nazi officials as evildoers who had imposed their will on the German people. As historian Raul Hilberg comments in his memoirs:

This was the time when those—like survivors—who were plagued by memories, were told to forget what had happened, and when the

³¹ Herzog, *Sex after Fascism*, 55-6.

³² Judt, *Postwar*, 822.

³³ Lind, *Sorry States*, 106-7.

Nuremberg trials were conducted not so much to understand Germany's history as to conclude unfinished business in order that Germany might be reconstituted with a clean slate in the North Atlantic community of nations confronted with the threat of communism.³⁴

The Allies and Germans differentiated German citizens from Nazis, which allowed Germans to establish themselves as the first victims of Hitler and the Third Reich and encouraged the German public to evade responsibility for Nazi atrocities.³⁵

As the Cold War deepened, combative ideologies separated East from West, and political division laid the foundation for opposing approaches to wartime memory. In East Germany, the communist government equated Nazi fascism with capitalism. With the rise of the communist state in the east, capitalism had been allegedly defeated. Yet capitalism remained in the west. The East German government therefore saw West Germany as the continuation of fascism and emphasized confronting its fascist neighbor rather than focusing on the National Socialist past. The official state line thus prevented scholarly exploration of German responsibility for atrocities committed by the Third Reich, and anti-Semitism persisted in the East because communists considered Jews to be representatives of the capitalist west.³⁶

Subsequently, the East German government took specific action to shape collective memory and direct discussion of the past. For example, POWs returning to East Germany in the late 1940s and early 1950s were directed to deliver anti-fascist, anti-

³⁴ Raul Hilberg, *The Politics of Memory: The Journey of a Holocaust Historian*, (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 1996), 69-70.

³⁵ Michael Butter, "Hitler Wars: Guilt and Complicity from Hirschbiegel to Harald Schmidt," in *Hitler – Films from Germany*, ed. Machtans and Ruehl, 168-9.

³⁶ Herf, *Divided Memory*, 111, 383.

democratic, and anti-capitalist messages to the East German public.³⁷ They were considered “resettlers,” because while detained they had received Soviet antifascist education and directives to spread the communist message. The government tasked the POWs with convincing the public that the Nazi legacy existed in the west.³⁸ Additionally, East Germany’s more liberal views towards sex, supported by the Soviet-influenced communist government, aimed to create an emotional bond between young people and socialism. In an otherwise restrictive society, sex became an arena for personal freedom and expression. Attitudes towards sex aligned with East Germany’s approach to National Socialism, which was antifascist, anticapitalist, and antidemocratic. Contrary to West Germany, which promoted conservative sexual behavior as antifascist and therefore linked liberal behavior to the Nazi regime, East Germany paired love with sex and severed coming to terms with the National Socialist past from sexuality.³⁹ East Germany placed the responsibility for the Nazi past not on itself but its Western counterpart, and whereas West Germany eventually began paying restitution to Jewish survivors and Israel, East Germany paid the Soviet Union.⁴⁰

In contrast, the western-aligned political environment of West Germany fostered a gradual acknowledgement of German complicity in the Holocaust and National Socialism and led to the slow abandonment of the Germans-as-victims discourse.

Vergangenheitsbewältigung, a word encompassing the process of coming to terms with the National Socialist past, began life in West Germany during the postwar period. West

³⁷ Frank Biess, “Pioneers of New Germany: Returning POWs from the Soviet Union and the Making of East German Citizens, 1945-1950,” *Central European History* 32, no. 1 (1999), 145.

³⁸ Robert G. Moeller, “Germans as Victims?: Thoughts on Post-Cold War History of World War II’s Legacies,” *History & Memory* 17, no. 1 (2005), 161.

³⁹ Herzog, *Sex after Fascism*, 187-94.

⁴⁰ Judt, *Postwar*, 822.

Germany's relationship with this process was often messy, uneven, and complicated. Some faced the past with honest confrontation while others avoided it altogether. Part of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* included discussions over how to rebuild Germany after the war. Government officials often debated how new construction should look, what should be done with surviving Third Reich architecture, and how memorials, monuments, and museums could appropriately commemorate the National Socialist era.⁴¹ The process of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* along with a pro-Western government and the rebuilding of infrastructure, cities, families, commerce, and a normal way of life after the war allowed many West Germans to avoid the National Socialist past and normalize relations with neighbors in the aftermath of Nazi aggression.⁴²

Early West German history, under the direction of Allied denazification efforts, acknowledged Nazi aggression and atrocities, but focused more on German suffering through the experiences of ethnic Germans who were refugees, expellees, or POWs. Politicians often labeled POWs returning from the East as "expellees," because they had suffered the brutality of the communists before being returned to the West. The POWs thus became victims of the East, their service to the Third Reich subordinate to their internment experience after the war.⁴³ To foster the memory of German suffering, textbooks painted a romantic picture of Germany's history, which emphasized ancient history and disengaged with the realities of the recent past. If they addressed the Holocaust at all, textbooks communicated that the majority of the German public was

⁴¹ Jaskot and Rosenfeld, *Beyond Berlin*, 1.

⁴² Lind, *Sorry States*, 101-2; Herzog, *Sex after Fascism*, 178.

⁴³ Moeller, "Germans as Victims?," 161.

unaware of the mass executions taking place in their neighborhoods. Germans thus became victims of misinformation, misinterpretation, and misrepresentation.⁴⁴

In the discourse of the National Socialist past, German suffering remained a key element during Konrad Adenauer's chancellorship. Adenauer, the first chancellor of West Germany, focused on economic and political reforms to move beyond the National Socialist past, divorce West Germany from National Socialism, and separate West Germans from Nazis. His efforts effectively reduced the influences of earlier denazification efforts, allowing some former Nazis and sympathizers to remain in politics and education. The chancellor did, however, take political and diplomatic action to avoid resurgence in nationalism.⁴⁵ He believed a decentralized Germany that politically, economically, and morally aligned itself with the West would prevent the return of National Socialist sentiment. But Adenauer also recognized that Germany would have to take responsibility for the atrocities committed by the Nazis.⁴⁶ As a result, in the early 1950s West Germany began paying restitution to victims in Germany, Israel, and other western-aligned locations. Support for reparations divided along party lines. Socialists supported reparations because they believed in German "contrition" for Nazi atrocities and called for continued vigilance in refusing to forget. Conservatives and the public remained focused on German victimization. Adenauer therefore relied on leftist politicians to pass the reparation bill in the face of public opposition and resistance from his own conservative party, the Christian Democratic Union (CDU).⁴⁷ The chancellor's

⁴⁴ Lind, *Sorry States*, 112-3.

⁴⁵ Lind, *Sorry States*, 108-11.

⁴⁶ Herf, *Divided Memory*, 219-20.

⁴⁷ Lind, *Sorry States*, 108-9.

efforts would eventually lead to an approach to the past that increasingly focused on the victims of Nazi atrocities rather than Germans themselves while simultaneously excusing the majority of Germans from Nazi crimes.⁴⁸ By paying reparations to German Jews and creating positive relations with Israel, Adenauer took the initial steps in *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* and initiated appropriate measures that would not alienate the German public and political elite.⁴⁹

Change bubbled to the surface during the 1960s when high-profile war criminal trials threw into question German avoidance of complicity with the Holocaust. A movement among university students challenged the innocence of ordinary Germans, demanding a “more sophisticated historiographic approach” that “downplayed the role of individual actors and highlighted social, cultural, and ideological factors instead.”⁵⁰ Fostered by the support of the new Social Democratic leadership during the 1960s and 1970s, West Germany began the slow process of tearing down the wall built around the Nazi past. For the first time, prominent political leaders commemorated the anniversary of the Third Reich’s surrender to Allied forces. The discourse related to the victims of National Socialism started to change. Chancellor Willy Brandt openly blamed German postwar suffering on Germany’s wartime aggression, a message that differed from those delivered by earlier administrations. Discussion turned towards forging a German identity that incorporated the country’s darkest hours. Rather than avoid the crimes committed by the Third Reich, Germans gradually began to face their complicated levels of complicity. Guilt and shame entered the language of Germany’s relationship to its wartime past. By

⁴⁸ Robert G. Moeller, “War Stories: The Search for a Usable Past in the Federal Republic of Germany,” *The American Historical Review* 101, no. 4 (1996), 1034.

⁴⁹ Lind, *Sorry States*, 108-11.

⁵⁰ Butter, “Hitler Wars,” in *Hitler – Films from Germany*, ed. Machtans and Ruehl, 169.

the mid-1960s, concentration camp exhibits began exploring the Holocaust much more critically, questioning the role German citizens played in the execution of Hitler's Final Solution. Interest in Jewish suffering grew, and reparations to victims and survivors continued.⁵¹

Whereas Adenauer reversed some of the Nuremberg judgments and avoided charging further Nazis with criminal behavior, the political regime of 1963 brought Auschwitz-Birkenau personnel and *Einsatzgruppen* death squad members to trial. The explicit testimony given at these trials shocked West Germans, which in turn inspired historians and authors to refocus their explorations of the Nazi past. To that end, debates about the statutes of limitations for murder arose. The Social Democrats fought for extending the statutes while in the minority during the 1950s, but the CDU, then in the majority, prevented any changes. Once in power, however, and with growing support from politicians on both the left and right, the Social Democrats successfully extended and ultimately removed the statute of limitations on murder. This approach shifted away from the idea of German victimhood, highlighting instead the atrocities Hitler committed against Jews. East Germany and Israel both pointed out, however, that former Nazis still occupied high-ranking political positions in the West German regime.⁵²

The Auschwitz trial that took place in Frankfurt am Main between 1963 and 1965 challenged the way the younger generation thought about their parents, National Socialism, and the Holocaust.⁵³ Greater engagement with Nazi atrocities thus filtered into West German education. The lack of serious teachings about the National Socialist era

⁵¹ Lind, *Sorry States*, 126-9.

⁵² Lind, *Sorry States*, 128-9.

⁵³ Herzog, *Sex after Fascism*, 129.

resulted in a generation of German school children disconnected from the world and experiences of their parents. More honest confrontation with the past led to the creation of new textbooks and culminated with the 1968 student and cultural movement. The so-called 68ers wanted to tear down the façade of suffering and naïveté constructed by their parents and forge a more open confrontation with West Germany's historical legacy, including an exploration of the Nazi past and crimes committed in the name of Hitler and National Socialism. Changes in historiography followed suit, moving towards German guilt and away from German suffering. As historian Jennifer Lind remarks, victimhood status slowly receded among Germans themselves at the same time as the discourse faced increased criticism: "As official remembrance of the Nazi era grew apologetic, West German historians, in addition to the rest of society, began to remember and atone for past atrocities."⁵⁴ Active engagement with the memory of the Holocaust and Jewish suffering took center stage in the discourse of Hitler's victims.⁵⁵

In the 1980s, conservatives moved to normalize West Germany's National Socialist past. The normalization process sought to put the Nazi era into greater historical context, both in terms of Germany's national history and its relationship to the outside world as the geographically disadvantaged center of Europe. This process included Chancellor Helmut Kohl's attendance at the 1984 fortieth anniversary memorial services in Normandy and a ceremonial visit to Bitburg in 1985, in which Kohl, joined by United States President Ronald Reagan, spoke of honoring fallen *Wehrmacht* soldiers. Both actions sparked controversy, domestically and abroad. Why should Germany participate in honoring the D-Day invasion and fallen German soldiers when it was Germany that

⁵⁴ Lind, *Sorry States*, 129-30.

⁵⁵ Wolfgram, "Getting History Right," 23.

had acted as aggressor? Protestors argued that public commemorations like these, when attended by high-ranking political officials, effectively reduced the importance of the Holocaust. Though the conservatives openly acknowledged the suffering exacted upon the Jews by the Nazis, they felt the only way to release the Germans from their collective guilt and shame was to reduce the primacy of the Holocaust and focus on a more positive history. Conservative intellectuals published opinion pieces that incited a heated debate with liberal intellectuals who had helped change the way West Germans saw the Nazi period. The result was the *Historikerstreit*.⁵⁶

Increasing debate over the memorialization of Germany's wartime past accompanied the *Historikerstreit*. During the 1970s and 1980s, Jewish tourists sought ties to their past in cemeteries and synagogues, but many ancestral sites in East and West Germany had fallen into ruin. Increased interest in heritage led public officials and communities to rehabilitate cemeteries and synagogues into memorials and museums. This led to a renegotiation of commemorative space and of criteria for defining victim status as well as a shift in the historicization of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*.⁵⁷ As historian Sabine Hake observes:

Historicization is a process of visual and narrative reconstruction, a reworking of images and feelings that needs the release of its affective investments into social interactions and cultural practices in order to realize its full meanings. This revisionist process shares with the historical celebrations, anniversaries, and monuments of the late nineteenth century, a fundamental dependence on *Öffentlichkeit* (public sphere or publicity) in producing both a new historical consciousness and a different understanding of public affect.⁵⁸

⁵⁶ Lind, *Sorry States*, 131-4.

⁵⁷ Meng, *Shattered Spaces*, 5-7.

⁵⁸ Hake, "Entombing the Nazi Past," in *Hitler – Films from Germany*, ed. Machtans and Ruehl, 119.

Because memorials began reconciling memory with history, Holocaust memorialization marked an important turning point in German attention to its Nazi past.

The call for normalization motivated some political elites to refocus energy toward the discourse of national guilt and apology. For example, shortly after Reagan and Kohl visited the Bitburg Memorial, President Richard von Weizsäcker (CDU) spoke on May 9, 1985 to commemorate Nazi Germany's surrender to the Allies. In his speech, von Weizsäcker highlighted the extreme suffering that Jews had experienced. In addition, the President recognized a host of other Nazi victims, some of whom had not been previously mentioned, such as Soviets, Poles, Sinti/Roma, people with physical and mental disabilities, and homosexuals. He called for Germany to face its past directly and without 'embellishment or distortion.' By the end of the 1980s, honest engagement with the Nazi past was no longer a sole initiative of the left. Conservatives joined their liberal counterparts in honoring the people persecuted by the Third Reich rather than prominently situating Germans among the victims of Hitler. The culture of remembrance and acknowledgment built between the 1960s and 1990 created an international awareness of West Germans having come to terms with their dark past and focusing on the victims of Nazi persecution. This allayed fears in Europe of the impending German reunification.⁵⁹

When East and West reunited in 1990, there was not "an immediate and unfettered political and cultural reckoning with the past," and reunified Germany continued to apologize for the aggression and atrocities carried out by the Third Reich.⁶⁰ Reparations payments expanded to include victims living in the former East Germany as

⁵⁹ Lind, *Sorry States*, 134-42.

⁶⁰ Evans, "Memory, Melodrama and History," 242.

well as Holocaust survivors living in Israel and the United States. The government also negotiated agreements with the Czech Republic, Poland, Belarus, Russia, and the Ukraine, while establishing initiatives to extend future contrition to Albania, Bulgaria, Hungary, Slovakia, and the republics of the former Yugoslavia. Furthermore, the German government in conjunction with several German companies agreed to pay reparations to wartime forced laborers.⁶¹

Germans who publically challenged the acceptance of guilt and atmosphere of apology often drew sharp criticism. In a 1998 speech, award-winning author Martin Walser spoke against the Berlin and Auschwitz Memorials as constant reminders of German guilt, which made escaping the shadow of National Socialism impossible.

Walser spoke against the use of history as a means of forcing Germans to face the past.

Accepting a literary honor, he said:

I myself have never felt it possible to escape the side of the accused. Sometimes, when it seems I can't look anywhere without being attacked by an accusation, I must talk myself into believing, and thereby gaining some relief from the burden, that a routine of accusation has arisen in the media...No serious person denies Auschwitz; no person who is still of sound mind quibbles about the horror of Auschwitz; but when this past is held up to me every day in the media, I notice that something in me rebels against this unceasing presentation of our disgrace. Instead of being grateful for this never-ending presentation of our disgrace, I begin to look away...Conscience, left to itself, creates enough illusion. But when it is commanded publicly, only illusion rules.⁶²

⁶¹ Lind, *Sorry States*, 143-5.

⁶² Martin Walser, "Experiences while Composing a Sunday Speech (1998)," ed. Thomas A. Kovach and Martin Walser, *The Burden of the Past: Martin Walser on Modern German Identity: Texts, Contexts, Commentary*, (Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2008), German Historical Institute. http://germanhistorydocs.ghidc.org/sub_document.cfm?document_id=3426, Accessed January 12, 2013.

Walser stirred the pot of public discourse by objecting to the instrumentalization of the Holocaust as a constant reminder of German guilt.⁶³ Ignatz Bubis, a prominent leader of the German Jewish community who heard Walser from the audience, responded negatively. Attacking the speech, Bubis stated that, “We take pleasure in the biographies of Goethe, Schiller, Beethoven, or Bismarck. All of this is part of German history. But it also includes Hitler and Himmler. One cannot search out only the pleasant sides of one’s history and repress the unpleasant ones.”⁶⁴ In reunified Germany, challenging the importance of the Holocaust met fierce resistance, Walser’s example included. Public discourse built barriers defending the importance and primacy of the Holocaust so that the Nazi atrocities carried out against Jews remained at the center. As Walser and conservatives came under attack for their viewpoints, politicians understood that if they did not support a Berlin memorial, they would be branded right-wing extremists working against the good of the German nation.⁶⁵

Eventually, as the initial political and social ramifications of reunification started to fade and the new millennium approached, considerations of the victims of National Socialism took new shape. As Bill Niven suggests in *Facing the Nazi Past*, a single Germany forced the country to face its National Socialist history as one; therefore, approaches to German memory of the Nazi past broadened and allowed for a growing number of groups to receive victimhood status. He states that “there is now a broader awareness of the true extent of National Socialist criminality and of the range of

⁶³ Niven, *Facing the Nazi Past*, 180.

⁶⁴ Ignatz Bubis, “Speech Commemorating the Night of the Pogrom of November 9, 1938,” trans. Thomas Dunlap, *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, (November 10, 1998), German Historical Institute, http://germanhistorydocs.ghi-dc.org/sub_document.cfm?document_id=3427, Accessed January 12, 2013.

⁶⁵ Lind, *Sorry States*, 146-7

victims.”⁶⁶ The change in approach culminated in a proliferation of memorials in which the many victims of the Third Reich were commemorated. More appropriate attention was given to the Jewish victims of Nazi Germany.⁶⁷ While debate continued to surround memorialization, Germany moved away from ambiguous acknowledgement of the Holocaust toward honest and open confrontation.

At the same time, however, feelings of German victimhood resurfaced following reunification. Germans again considered themselves victims of the Third Reich and National Socialist past.⁶⁸ When elected Chancellor in 1998, Gerhard Schröder set out to establish a Germany in which the Nazi past played an important role in the present but did not define the recently reunified country. Picking up where the conservatives left off during the 1980s, Schröder and the Red-Green coalition government encouraged the normalization of the past. With this process came the resurgence of a discourse that had almost completely faded—that Germans themselves had suffered under the Third Reich and were Hitler’s victims, too. Just a decade earlier, in the late 1980s, such discourse would have met fierce opposition, both from inside and outside of Germany.⁶⁹ But now, the inclusion of Germans in the discussion of Nazi victimization gained wider acceptance because proponents of increased attention to the German wartime experience grew more widespread and outspoken. And while the government sustained official recognition of Jewish suffering, exploration of the German experience under Hitler’s regime filtered into politics, history, commemoration, and the arts.

⁶⁶ Niven, *Facing the Nazi Past*, 5.

⁶⁷ Judt, *Postwar*, 826.

⁶⁸ Margalit, *Guilt, Suffering, and Memory*, 3.

⁶⁹ On an international scale, the Stockholm International Forum on the Holocaust, which was held in 2000, helped the normalization process, because the participants removed from Germany sole responsibility for the Holocaust. Evans, “Memory, Melodrama and History,” 242-3.

One of the most obvious ways in which the National Socialist past impacted the official discourse of victimization in reunified Germany was in German-Israeli relations. After reunification, West German diplomatic traditions took root because West Germany had built a relationship with Israel since the mid-1950s and East Germany had not.⁷⁰ The Holocaust and Nazi past consequently informed any German-Israeli interaction. As such, visits to the Israeli legislature, the Knesset, by German presidents represented the clearest influence of the past on public discourse. Note the language employed by parliamentary president Johannes Rau in his address to the Knesset in 2000:

Before the people of Israel I pay humble tribute to those who were murdered, who have no graves at which I could ask their forgiveness...I ask forgiveness for what Germans have done – for myself and my generation, for the sake of our children and children’s children, whose future I would like to see at the side of the children of Israel...We Germans, too, will be accompanied for all time to come by the images of the murders for which Germans bear responsibility...The perpetrators may take their personal guilt with them to their graves. But the consequences of a guilt that shook the very foundations of human morality must be borne by the generations to come...⁷¹

The words Rau used clearly indicated the power of the past on German-Israeli relations. When president Horst Köhler addressed the Knesset during a state visit in 2005, his speech retained much of the same language employed by Rau. Like Rau, Köhler focused on Germany assuming responsibility for the victimization of European Jews by combating resurgent anti-Semitism and relying on new generations to remain committed to a certain subdued respect for the National Socialist past.⁷² If questioning dominant

⁷⁰ Herf, *Divided Memory*, 280-7.

⁷¹ Johannes Rau, Speech in the Knesset, (February 16, 2000), Knesset.gov.il, http://www.knesset.gov.il/description/eng/doc/speech_rau_2000_eng.pdf, Accessed January 12, 2013.

⁷² Horst Köhler, Address to the Knesset in Jerusalem, (February 2, 2005), Der Bundespräsident, http://www.bundespraesident.de/SharedDocs/Reden/EN/HorstKoehler/Reden/2005/02/20050202_Rede.html, Accessed February 8, 2013.

threads of official victim discourse within Germany was difficult, German-Israeli relations dictated that anything less than the motions made by Rau and Köhler would be near impossible.

To the outside world, the Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe in Berlin symbolized Germany's recognition of the atrocities carried out by the Nazis. The inauguration of the memorial coincided with the sixtieth anniversary of Hitler's demise, the dissolution of the concentration camps, and the liberation of interned and German people alike. Speaking at the opening of the Berlin memorial, Bundestag President Wolfgang Thierse stated, "The decision, made by parliament with a large, cross-party majority on June 25, 1999, was preceded by an intensive, ten-year-long debate prompted by a group of citizens from within society and carried forth by their unwavering commitment to this day."⁷³ The debates, many of which were extensions of the *Historikerstreit* and the call for a conciliatory memorial, made clear that publicly confronting the National Socialist past must somehow extend beyond just the Holocaust. Thierse then went on to say that, "[The memorial] does not refute all the arguments that have been leveled against it. It does not assert a monopolistic claim to commemoration; the information center makes reference to the actual sites where the murderous events took place and to other commemorative sites."⁷⁴ Thierse addressed, in particular, the debate over how the memory of the Holocaust should fit into the public memory of the National Socialist era. He directly acknowledged the discourse of Germans suffering that

⁷³ Wolfgang Thierse, "Speech at the Dedication of the 'Memorial for the Murdered Jews of Europe,' May 10, 2005," trans. Thomas Dunlap, German Historical Institute, http://germanhistorydocs.ghi-dc.org/sub_document.cfm?document_id=3430, Accessed January 12, 2013.

⁷⁴ Thierse, "Speech at the Dedication of the 'Memorial for the Murdered Jews of Europe,' May 10, 2005."

reemerged following reunification while emphasizing that Jewish victims remained the focus of official recognition.

The theme of Germans as victims of National Socialism moved beyond public debate over commemoration and entered the arts. Three particular works of literature impacted this discourse after reunification: Bernhard Schlink's *Der Vorleser* (*The Reader*, 1995), W.G. Sebald's *Luftkrieg und Literatur* (*On the Natural History of Destruction*, 1999) and *Im Krebsgang* (*Crabwalk*, 2002) by Günter Grass. All three books focus to a certain degree on German suffering under Hitler and the Third Reich. *Der Vorleser* explores the relationship between victim and perpetrator through the character of Hanna Schmitz, who became complicit in Nazi atrocities because she was illiterate. Schlink asks readers whether or not people who carried out National Socialist crimes can also be victims.⁷⁵ *Im Krebsgang* tells the story of the sinking of the *Willhelm Gustloff* by a Soviet submarine. Aboard the ship were thousands of German refugees from East Prussia fleeing the Red Army. The book interprets how a family confronted and processed the sinking throughout the postwar period.⁷⁶ While recognizing Jewish suffering, the German public connected with this victimization narrative. As historian Gilad Margalit notes, "Many German readers viewed the book as an epic portrayal of their suffering."⁷⁷ In his work, W.G. Sebald takes issue with postwar avoidance by Germans of the effects caused by the Allied bombings of Germany, which left many Germans homeless, injured, or dead.⁷⁸ Grass, Schlink, and Sebald effectively helped to

⁷⁵ Bernhard Schlink, *The Reader*, trans. Carol Brown Janeway, (New York: Pantheon Books, 1997).

⁷⁶ Günter Grass, *Im Krebsgang*, (Göttingen: Steidl Verlag, 2002).

⁷⁷ Margalit, *Guilt, Suffering, and Memory*, 260.

⁷⁸ W.G. Sebald, *On the Natural History of Destruction*, trans. Anthea Bell, (New York: The Modern Library, 2004).

move the discussion of Germans as the victims of the Third Reich from its heritage as a conservative platform in the 1980s to a mainstream, non-partisan, and public discussion following reunification.⁷⁹

Cinematic interpretations of the Nazi era began shortly after Germany's surrender in 1945. The German films of the immediate postwar period, often referred to as rubble films, focused on the German experience in the aftermath of destruction. Crumbling urban landscapes provided the backdrop of stories designed to help the German public rebuild their lives.⁸⁰ In East Germany, the communist government centralized the film industry in 1952, turning the Deutsche Film AG (DEFA) into the official state production company. The regime planned to use cinema as a tool in its reeducation efforts aimed at the East German public. Before coming under the wing of the government, DEFA produced a number of films that depicted life during the Third Reich. The films minimally addressed Jewish victimization through vague implication or subtle hints. When Jewish characters figured into these storylines, they did so in secondary supporting roles with focus placed on non-Jewish Germans. The DEFA productions of the 1950s and 1960s largely delivered the established antifascist directives, blaming capitalism and the West for the rise of anti-Semitism as well as the Third Reich and placed the origins of both squarely on West Germany. Some also explored the struggle Germans faced living under Hitler's regime. By doing so, the DEFA films helped separate Germans from Nazis and propagate the government's message that the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG) was the successor state to Nazi Germany.⁸¹

⁷⁹ Margalit, *Guilt, Suffering, and Memory*, 251.

⁸⁰ Shandley, *Rubble Films*, 185.

⁸¹ Wolfgram, "Getting History Right," 50-5.

The 1950s and 1960s introduced few films approaching the National Socialist past. One of them, *Der letzte Akt* (*The Last Ten Days*), debuted in West German movie theaters in 1955. The film, like *Der Untergang*, chronicled the final days of Hitler within the bunker beneath a crumbling Berlin and marked the first attempt by a German-language film to feature a fictionalized Hitler as its main subject. To produce a positive counter-point to the monstrous image of Hitler, the filmmakers introduced two story lines that portrayed Germans as the victims of Nazi aggression and Hitler's refusal to give up. The first story-line involved a citizen boy named Richard. Along with his family, Richard would die in an underground shaft when the area flooded. Captain Wüst featured in the second story line as a fictional soldier who had earned an iron cross for his military service. As a message to the German public, Captain Wüst issued a warning as he died that in the future, Germany needed to be aware of political and military dangers and never again allow another Hitler to rise to power. Critics and West German audiences rejected the production, protesting that the time was not yet right to explore the relationship between the FRG and its National Socialist past. How could the German people move past their Nazi history if they were subjected to such emotional turmoil at the movies? The poor box office performance of the film supported this claim, providing economic support to the argument that Germans were not ready to engage with their various roles within the Third Reich.⁸²

A shift in cinema occurred with the generational changeover of the late 1960s and early 1970s. West German films of this period broadly became known as the New German Cinema, because they broke with the cinematic traditions of the 1950s. Critics

⁸² Michael Tötenberg, "'Hitler's Shadow Still Looms Over Us': G.W. Pabst's *The Last Ten Days* as Film and Event," in *Hitler – Films from Germany*, ed. Machtans and Ruehl, 56-62.

heralded the films for their striking artistic qualities and often showered them with awards. Most of the New German Cinema efforts avoided exploration of the Nazi past for aesthetic reasons but provided new methodologies that future filmmakers would adopt.⁸³ A trend to reengage with the National Socialist past emerged in West German films during the 1970s and 1980s. Popular works about the Nazi era released during this time period brought into question West Germany's 'self-understanding' of its relationship with the legacies of the Third Reich. This paralleled the shift in the discourse of victim status away from Germans themselves and onto the people persecuted by the Nazis. Hans-Jürgen Syberberg's film *Hitler – Ein Film aus Deutschland (Our Hitler, 1978)*, for example, presented Hitler and National Socialism as integral to postwar German identity. To do so, Syberberg portrayed Hitler as part of the West German psyche, separating the Führer from the accepted imagery of a madman who had browbeaten his way into power. Likewise, Syberberg emphasized that Nazism was not "a temporary aberration."⁸⁴ Instead of showing how their former leader victimized Germans, the film suggested that Germans, through action or inaction, aligned more with criminal than victim. It was the people, after all, who allowed Hitler and National Socialism to become the official representatives of Germany.

Things changed much more drastically following the airing of the American miniseries *Holocaust* on West German television in 1979. The time to engage audiences with the horrors of the Holocaust and the National Socialist past appeared to be right. The show created what Americans today refer to as 'water cooler' moments, inspiring

⁸³ Wolfgram, "Getting History Right," 97.

⁸⁴ Thomas Elsaesser, "Our Hitler: A Film by Hans-Jürgen Syberberg," in *Hitler – Films from Germany*, ed. Machtans and Ruehl, 72.

discussion among colleagues and friends the following day. As historian Mark A. Wolfgram reveals, the public response created debate over “Germany’s past, the overcoming of the past, the meaning of the past for the present, the lack of information in school textbooks, and so forth.”⁸⁵ Though not a German production, the *Holocaust* miniseries helped to expand recognition of Jewish suffering in West Germany and reduce the acceptance of German victimization. These changes filtered into politics, historiography, memorials honoring the victims of Nazi aggression, and subsequent films. While *Holocaust* cannot be given full credit for the changing attitudes towards the National Socialist past, the film made an indelible impression.

During the 1980s, the Third Reich era increasingly became the subject of West German films, and filmmakers turned to melodrama as the method by which to depict the past. Melodramas tend to focus on exploiting emotional connections between audiences and on-screen characters. West German Filmmaker Rainer Werner Fassbinder, for example, employed the approach to portray human relationships, events, and emotions in such a way that audiences could easily interpret and identify with them. In Fassbinder’s films, focusing on dramatic human elements created an avenue by which the audience could emotionally connect to the characters and stories, making them melodramatic. The films thus added a public “psychological” layer to the established official historiography, and Fassbinder’s employment of the melodrama to show “history from below” made audiences active agents in the discourse of the National Socialist past.⁸⁶ The emotional connections and reactions to historical melodramas ensured that the genre would become

⁸⁵ Wolfgram, “*Getting History Right*,” 85-6.

⁸⁶ Evans, “Memory, Melodrama and History,” 246-7.

a staple in post-reunified German historical films, as evidenced by all six films detailed in this project.

The impacts of the melodrama lasted past 1990, as films produced in the first decade after reunification focused on appeasing German audiences. As a result, they were largely popular in nature and differed from pre-1989 cinematic trends, which sought “socio-political harmony” in their approach to the past.⁸⁷ Throughout the early 1990s and first decade of the 2000s, cinematic productions about the National Socialist past formed two categories: “heritage” or “nostalgia” films and “historytainment” docudramas made for television. The heritage films often depicted Germans themselves as victims of circumstance in which National Socialism played a supporting role to the main story lines. On the other hand, the historical docudramas of television focused on the larger, overarching story of the Nazi past in which people, known or unknown, represented the more universal struggles associated with the times.⁸⁸

The films of the 1990s and first decade of the 2000s coincided with another important generational shift. Where the 1968ers (historical antagonists, conservative elites, and their post-ideological children and grandchildren) emphasized the earlier generation’s involvement in National Socialism by assigning the Germans responsibility for Nazi atrocities, the generation at the turn of the twenty-first century returned to historicization. Instead of asking how and why the Third Reich rose and fell, some Germans concerned themselves mainly with what happened. This refocusing of historical inquiry assisted in bringing back the discussion of Germans as victims.⁸⁹ The popular

⁸⁷ Evans, “Memory, Melodrama and History,” 242-3.

⁸⁸ Hake, ““Entombing the Nazi Past,” in *Hitler – Films from Germany*, ed. Machtans and Ruehl, 114.

⁸⁹ Hake, “Entombing the Nazi Past,” in *Hitler – Films from Germany*, Machtans and Ruehl, editors, 120.

historical films of the early 2000s reflected this shift by presenting what Sabine Hake calls a “therapeutic historiography,” which aimed at helping to heal the German people and nation by offering methods by which the past could be normalized and therefore mastered. In other words, *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* continued through cinema. By immersing themselves in the National Socialist past from the German perspective, the films of the 2000s directed attention to the ongoing debates over the influence of the Third Reich on contemporary German society, blurred the lines between perpetrator and victim, and provoked questions about the level to which the Nazi era should be normalized. The films represented a return to direct confrontation with the Nazi past that had momentarily subsided during the 1990s; therefore, according to historian Owen Evans, they contributed to changes in cultural memory.⁹⁰

This project fits in the historiographies recounted above and contributes to the exploration of the discourse about Hitler’s victims as well as that which focuses on the relationship between film and the National Socialist past within Germany. While most current studies stop their analysis with *Der Untergang* because of its relatively recent release, this project expands the discussion by interpreting more recent films as important contributions to the discourse of Germans suffering. For much of the scholarship focusing on *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* and changing approaches to the National Socialist past, film plays a supporting role. In other instances, the narratives concerned with the Nazi era tend to interpret them within cinematic frameworks rather than historical ones. Doing so largely relegate the analysis of film’s impact on the broader discourse of victimization to the periphery of the discussion. By determining how films in

⁹⁰ Evans, “Memory, Melodrama and History,” 244-5, 265.

the 2000s portray Germans as the victims of Nazi terror and aggression in addition to how they fit into the wider discussion of victimhood, the following analysis seeks to determine the influence of popular film on contemporary discourse.

This research project will analyze the ways in which film interacts with the resurgent Germans-as-victim discourse in three subsequent chapters. The first chapter examines the three films portraying Germans as direct victims of National Socialism (*Der Untergang*, *Sophie Scholl – Die letzten Tage*, and *Napola – Elite für den Führer*) and determine their relationship to the discourse of Germans-as-victims occurring in Germany during the 2000s. The second chapter follows the same format, shifting to the second set of three films depicting Germans as indirect victims of National Socialism (*Die Flucht*, *So weit die Füße tragen*, and *Anonyma – Eine Frau in Berlin*). In addition to addressing German responses to the films, both chapters include the reactions of various foreign critics and audiences as reported by German sources along with their impact on the discourse of German victimhood. The conclusion ties together the analysis of the two chapters, interprets the relationship between the six films and the discourse of German suffering, and shows how the ongoing discussions of German victimhood continue in Germany today.

Germans as Direct Victims of the Third Reich

Domestically and abroad, German film saw renewed popularity and critical acclaim during the first decade of the 2000s. Films like *Nirgendwo in Afrika* (2001), *Der Untergang* (2004), *Sophie Scholl – Die letzten Tage* (2005), and *Das Leben der Anderen* (2006) earned Academy Award nominations for Best Foreign Language Film. In Germany, *Der Untergang* received several awards at the 2005 Bavarian Film Festival, including prizes for producer Bernd Eichinger and actor Bruno Ganz as well as the audience award for best film, while *Napola – Elite für den Führer* (2004) earned Dennis Gansel the Director's Award.¹ *Sophie Scholl* garnered two awards at the Berlin Film Festival for director Marc Rothemund and actor Julia Jentsch, taking home similar prizes at the European Film Awards in December of 2005.² Critic Gérard Lefort partly credited the revival to German cinema's increased exploration of the country's past. Citing *Sophie Scholl – Die letzten Tage* as an example, Lefort maintained that Marc Rothemund's production successfully balanced the story of German civilian resistance to the Nazi regime with historical skepticism and primary source analysis. Lefort wondered if the time had arrived for German filmmakers to reflect on the decades of shame and remorse created by two of the most notorious dictatorships of the twentieth century—National Socialism and communism. Miritto Torreiro, another critic, added that German cinema's reengagement with its history facilitated important debates necessary to the continuing

¹ "Filmfest mit Bier und Käsebrod," *Die Welt*, January 16, 2005, *Die Welt Online*, <http://www.welt.de/print-wams/article120436/Filmfest-mit-Bier-und-Kaesebrot.html>, Accessed January 23, 2014; "Ovationen für Filmemacher und Schauspieler," *Die Welt*, January 15, 2005, *Die Welt Online*, <http://www.welt.de/kultur/article364471/Ovationen-fuer-Filmemacher-und-Schauspieler.html>, Accessed January 23, 2014.

² "Julia Jentsch erhält Europäischen Filmpreis," *Die Welt*, December 3, 2005, *Die Welt Online*, <http://www.welt.de/kultur/article182161/Julia-Jentsch-erhaelt-Europaeischen-Filmpreis.html>, Accessed January 24, 2013.

process of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*.³ Yet some German filmmakers, like Wim Wenders, protested the resurgent interest in the National Socialist past, criticizing *Der Untergang* for superficially approaching the Nazi era. Even so, Hitler and the Third Reich sold movie tickets, and Wenders found this distressing.⁴ These varied reactions to the recent upswing in German films about the Nazi past show the degree to which the films themselves became part of the resurgent discourse of Germans as the victims of National Socialism.

Motivated by interest in the German experience during the war, younger generations of filmmakers without direct experience of National Socialism turned to film to explore their historical and familial ties to Nazism. According to a 2004 article in *Der Spiegel* newsmagazine, this temporal disconnect allowed the *Spätgeborenen* to shed personal guilt and responsibility, which often proved a difficult stumbling block for previous generations. Fascinated by the hardships their forbears faced as the war turned against Germany, the *Spätgeborenen* began to see their parents, grandparents, and great-grandparents as victims of National Socialism alongside those directly persecuted by the regime.⁵ When *Sophie Scholl – Die letzten Tage*, *Napola – Elite für den Führer*, and *Der Untergang* arrived in theaters near the opening of the Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe in Berlin and sixtieth anniversary of the fall of the Third Reich, they provided audiences with slightly different perspectives on the Nazi past. But all three fed into a

³ As defined in the introduction, *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* refers to the process of coming to terms with the National Socialist past in Germany. “Zeigt uns mehr davon!,” *Die Zeit*, May, 11, 2006, *Zeit Online*, http://www.zeit.de/2006/20/Kinoumfrage_xml, Accessed January 8, 2014.

⁴ “Kino in Hochform,” *Die Welt*, February 20, 2005, *Die Welt Online*, <http://www.welt.de/printwams/article123876/Kino-in-Hochform.html>, Accessed January 23, 2014.

⁵ For this analysis, the term *Spätgeborenen* represents the generations of Germans born during the 1970s and later. “Patriotische Bauchschmerzen,” *Spiegel*, November 29, 2004, *Spiegel Online*, <http://www.spiegel.de/spiegel/print/d-38017032.html>, Accessed January 23, 2014.

growing fascination with National Socialism among the German public, which eagerly anticipated and engaged with books, films, television programs, and artwork that explored the German experience during the Third Reich. Why this markedly renewed attention to the Nazi past? In one of Germany's leading newspapers, *Die Zeit*, journalist Jens Jessen attributed the focus to a desire among the *Spätgeborenen* to determine how they would have reacted had they been alive then. Jessen posited that this reengagement with the German experience, if steered correctly by the arts, education, politics, and scholarship, could end the identification of Germans as victims of National Socialism and further the ongoing process of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*.⁶

Unfortunately, the recent films distorted the Nazi past as much as they educated audiences about it. As the following analysis of *Sophie Scholl*, *Napola*, and *Der Untergang* and their related discussions shows, the reemerging discursive trend to see Germans as among the victims of National Socialism found its way into popular film, sparking continued discussion and perpetuating the sentiment. This set of films depicts the ways in which Germans directly suffered National Socialism. Along with their reactions, they also communicated how contentious and important the issue of contextualizing the German wartime experience remained, especially in relationship to the groups of people specifically targeted by Nazi violence. By focusing on the experiences of people not directly persecuted by the Third Reich, the films threatened to create sympathy not only for the German people but also for Hitler and the Nazis, sparking heated debate in turn. Furthermore, blurring the lines between victim and perpetrator signaled a more individualized approach to the National Socialist past, and

⁶ "Im grellen Zirkus des Gedenkens," *Die Zeit*, March 23, 2005, *Zeit Online*, <http://www.zeit.de/2005/13/Hitler/komplettansicht>, Accessed January 9, 2014.

questions concerning the German wartime experience replaced those focused on Nazi atrocities. Instead of asking about the extent of Nazi crimes, how Germans themselves were complicit in those crimes, and how the general population could allow Hitler and the Third Reich to commit such atrocities, *Sophie Scholl*, *Napola*, and *Der Untergang* sought to understand what life was like for Germans living through the National Socialist period.

Sophie Scholl – Die letzten Tage premiered atypically in the middle of the afternoon, after which actress Julia Jentsch unveiled a bust of Scholl in the atrium of Ludwig-Maximilians University, honoring the anti-Nazi protestor's courage against an oppressive regime and sacrifice in the name of freedom.⁷ Director Marc Rothemund's *Sophie Scholl* built on the narrative established in the 1982 film, *Die Weiße Rose*, which largely introduced Scholl's tragic story of resistance to audiences. The story of Sophie Scholl, as seen through the eyes of director Marc Rothemund, thus created a challenge for subsequent generations of German youth. Based on new documentary evidence uncovered in 1989, including transcriptions of the interrogation of Hans and Sophie Scholl, the 2005 film invited audiences to consider what they would do were they in Sophie's position.⁸ A theological element added a dimension of German spiritual suffering not seen in many other popular films dealing with the National Socialist past.⁹

⁷ "Filmpremiere mit Gefühl," *Die Welt*, February 27, 2005, *Die Welt Online*, <http://www.welt.de/print-wams/article124243/Filmpremiere-mit-Gefuehl.html>, Accessed January 23, 2014.

⁸ "Berlinale 2005: Sophie Scholl – Die Letzten Tage," *Die Zeit*, February 16, 2005, *Zeit Online*, http://www.zeit.de/2005/07/Kritik_4, Accessed January 18, 2014.

⁹ "Jugend mit Gott," *Berliner Zeitung*, February 23, 2005, *Berliner Zeitung Online*, <http://www.berliner-zeitung.de/archiv/marc-rothemunds-film-zeigt-sophie-scholl-als-fromme-maertyrerin-mit-dunklen-beats-jugend-mit-gott,10810590,10260934.html>, Accessed January 23, 2014.

The story of the young White Rose members offered an alternative interpretation of German complicity in which not all German citizens followed along with the National Socialist regime. Yet, as passive resisters they suffered the wrath of political persecution, and for audiences, Rothemund's film offered a glimpse at this type of victimization.

With American jazz music playing in the background, *Sophie Scholl – die letzten Tage* opens with the following statement: “This film is based on historical facts from previously unreleased interrogation transcripts and eyewitness interviews.”¹⁰ It's nighttime as Sophie bundles up in her coat and traverses the cobbled streets. In a matter of steps, she arrives at an unmarked door, enters, and goes downstairs where a young man is busy typing. Sophie reads part of his work aloud, and the audience learns that the publication challenges the leadership of Hitler, citing the needless losses of more than 300,000 soldiers sent to die battling the Russians at Stalingrad. Sophie then begins stuffing dozens of envelopes with the anti-Nazi pamphlets, stamped and addressed for distribution throughout the city. When asked what to do with the leftover stack of leaflets, Sophie's brother, Hans, responds that he will take them to the university. Sophie volunteers to help, aware of the inherent danger of their plans.

The next morning, dressed as university students, Sophie and Hans set out for campus with their pamphlets. Knowing that lectures were currently underway, they cautiously enter the main hall of the central building. They unload their suitcase of pamphlets at strategic locations throughout the hall and on multiple floors. In a last minute decision, they head to the top floor and place the remaining leaflets there. As a school bell rings, Sophie pushes a stack of leaflets off the ledge, and they rain down to

¹⁰ Translated from: “Dieser Film beruht auf historischen Fakten, bisher unveröffentlichten Verhörprotokollen und neuen Interviews mit Zeitzeugen.” *Sophie Scholl – Die letzten Tage*, Directed by Marc Rothemund, Broth Film and Goldkind Filmproduktion, 2005.

the atrium below. Quickly, they join the throngs of students leaving classes, hoping they had escaped notice. But they had not.

Caught in the act, Sophie and Hans are taken to the local Gestapo headquarters for further questioning. Inspector Mohr, in charge of Sophie's interrogation, asks her a number of typical queries—her birthday, her father's name, her occupation, her address—before posing the larger question about her admitting to pushing the papers off the ledge from the top floor of the hall. When asked why she would do that, Sophie replied that she simply pushed them off the banister as a prank. She admits to the inspector that she behaved stupidly and meant no harm. Mohr informs Sophie that her action falls under special wartime law in which she could be sentenced to death or a labor camp for committing treason. The inspector implores Sophie to speak the truth. After a volley of accusations and denials, the inspector tells Sophie that no evidence of the pamphlets was found in her suitcase and Hans had corroborated her story. Shortly thereafter Sophie is taken back to the front desk where she is told she can sign her release form. Before the processing is complete, however, a phone call comes in, and an administrator whisks Sophie back to Mohr's office.

The Gestapo inspector confronts Sophie with incriminating evidence found in the apartment she shares with her brother. Mohr turns the desk lamp on Sophie, transforming it into a spotlight. He pulls his briefcase up from the floor and takes a pistol from inside. He wonders if Sophie has seen this weapon before. She has, as she admits her brother owns a similar pistol. Mohr then questions why so many stamps were found in her apartment. His patience with Sophie, kept under control up until this point, erodes, and he wants to know who needed 140 stamps and why. Sophie confesses that she bought some

stamps a few weeks earlier, but the 140 found in the desk were her brother's. Sophie repeatedly denies any involvement, saying she knows nothing of the distribution of these letters.

Eventually, having gotten a confession from Hans, Mohr reads the statement to Sophie. Hans thinks Germany will lose the war and objects to the way Germany treated foreigners living in Nazi-occupied territories. Sophie soon learns that Hans' fingerprints were found on the copy machine used to duplicate the leaflets and that he admitted to the entire operation on his own. Mohr still believes she was involved, though, as Sophie lived with her brother and accompanied him to campus earlier that morning when they were caught distributing flyers. After several contemplative moments, Sophie confesses to helping her brother and states her pride in doing so. Initially Mohr disbelieves that she wrote the leaflets, citing a Gestapo investigation that had determined an intellectual male most likely wrote them. Sophie is determined to keep her accomplices, outside of her brother, free from prosecution from the Nazis. As a result, every time Mohr asks who did what, Sophie just says she and her brother were responsible. The implication of admitting guilt sinks in for Sophie, but the interrogation continues, Mohr attempting to ascertain names of anyone else involved.

The next day Sophie returns to Mohr's office. She contends that prior to Hitler's rise to power the German people enjoyed the freedom of speech as protected by law. Mohr wonders what people would do without law—how would they know the difference between right and wrong? Sophie thinks conscience dictates the difference, not an arbitrarily chosen law. Mohr disagrees, arguing that his job is to weed out those who consider themselves outside the law. Sophie retorts that laws inevitably change while

conscience stays constant, and her conscience tells her that Germany will have to forever deal with Hitler's legacy if the youth do not rise up in protest, remove him from power, and lay the foundation for renewed intellectualism in Europe. Sophie brings up the persecution of the Jews, based on reports of extermination camps from soldiers returning from the east and her eyewitness account of a Jewish teacher from her hometown on whose face local Nazis were told to spit. Mohr replies by attacking her education, saying Jews chose to leave the Reich after bringing misfortune to Germany. Finally, with Sophie's life on the line, Mohr implores her to admit that she knew not what she did when helping her brother and abandon the White Rose ideals, but Sophie cannot because of her conscience. She confesses she would do it all again, if only for her fellow Germans' sake.

The next morning, Sophie discovers that fellow White Rose member Christoph Probst has been captured and also accused of high treason. She takes the news poorly, because Christoph has three children, the youngest a newborn. On top of that, his wife suffers from fever following childbirth. Sophie soon learns the charges against her: treason, troop demoralization, and aiding the enemy. As a last hope, she prays to God for salvation. Then she meets her court-appointed counsel, who asks her if she has any questions. All she thinks to ask is what would happen to her parents. The counselor tells her that the fate of her parents lies in the hands of others. Sophie chastises the man, saying he should have more information for her as her lawyer. She quickly discerns, however, that her court-appointed lawyer cares not for Sophie. He criticizes her and her brother for thinking that they did not have to fit in with the rest of the German *Volk*.

The next day at the show trial, Sophie proudly admits no shame in distributing the leaflets at the university. The judge finds the leaflets a poor use of a scarce commodity and full of dirty lies. With steely resolve, Sophie continues confessing that she and Hans wanted to inform the German people of the senseless murder of Jews and non-Germans being carried out all around them, arguing Germans should end the war before the Allies end it for them. Furthermore, Sophie says that Hitler's 'master race' desires peace and wants to listen to their conscience again. Many of the Nazi officials attending the trial look down, appearing uncomfortable with the truth of Sophie's words. In this scene, the director implies a degree of unwilling cooperation with the Nazi regime. The judge, on the other hand, personifies the Nazi regime itself as he pushes forward unabated, reaffirming that total war will bring ultimate victory to Germany and that Germans will emerge stronger than ever before. Sophie counters that many disagree with his assessment; they just have not the courage to speak up. In her closing statement, Sophie looks the judge in the eye and tells him he will soon be standing where they are now, prosecuted by the war's victors. The court subsequently sentences Christoph, Hans, and Sophie to death and charges them with the costs of the trial.

Prior to her execution, Sophie receives a visit from her parents. Their exchange is emotionally charged as they say goodbye to one another. Sophie comforts her parents, asking them not to worry and admitting she would do the same all over again. Her father consoles her by saying she did the right thing and conveys his pride in her and Hans. Sophie's mother whispers to Sophie that she will never again see her daughter walk through the door. Sophie says they will see each other once more in eternity, to which her

mother remarks not to forsake Jesus. Sophie tells her mother to do the same. With a final hug goodbye, Sophie exits the room.

Back in her cell, the prison priest comes to read Sophie her last rites. Together they pray for Sophie's forgiveness. He sends her to her execution promising that God is with her. Sophie's execution comes first, and the prosecutor reads the final judgment, announcing that Sophie is to be executed at 5:00 PM on February 22, 1943. The guards take her into the next room and place her body into a guillotine. The scene fades to black just as the blade drops, and Sophie is beheaded. Hans and Christoph meet the same fate as Sophie, but the audience only hears the men entering the room and the swish of the guillotine. Before the final credits roll, the film reports that the *Volksgerichtshof* sentenced seven members of the White Rose movement to death and harshly punished twelve others. The audience then learns that the sixth pamphlet published by the White Rose movement made its way to England through Scandinavia, and using airplanes, the Allies dropped millions of copies over Germany in the middle of 1943. The title of the leaflet read: "A German leaflet: Manifesto of the Munich students."¹¹

Sophie Scholl – Die letzten Tage thus placed viewers in the moments leading up to Sophie's arrest, the interaction between her and the Gestapo inspector, and her trial before Roland Feisler, the so-called 'blood judge' and president of the *Volksgerichtshof*.¹² The film provided audiences little background information on Sophie, Inspector Mohr, or the White Rose movement. Audiences saw how the Nazi legal system worked, with little

¹¹ Translated from: "Ein deutsches Flugblatt: Manifest der Münchener Studenten." *Sophie Scholl – Die letzten Tage*, Directed by Marc Rothemund, Broth Film and Goldkind Filmproduktion, 2005.

¹² According to the German Historical Museum Online, the Nazis created the *Volksgerichtshof*, or People's Court, to persecute political opponents of the regime. "Der Volksgerichtshof, 1933-1939," <http://www.dhm.de/lemo/html/nazi/innenpolitik/volksgerichtshof/index.html>, Accessed February 14, 2013.

hope of freedom or a fair trial. Sophie Scholl was clearly a victim of National Socialism, a young woman who understood how mentally strong she needed to be in order to mask her fear when surrounded by zealous Nazi officials, mostly men.¹³ The movie reintroduced the story of Scholl to audiences and asked them to confront the dilemma of accepting responsibility as perpetrator or identifying as one of Hitler's victims.¹⁴ In addition, *Sophie Scholl* aimed at creating an empathetic connection between the film's heroine and audiences, in Germany and abroad. Following their execution, Christoph, Hans, and Sophie were considered traitors and despised by students, university officials, and Munich residents. This resentment lasted for decades. Even in the 1960s, when leftist university students sought a commemoration of the White Rose victims, they met accusations of disturbing the peace from the administration and community.¹⁵ This reality played no part in Rothemund's film about Scholl's final days. In a certain way, resisters like Sophie were thus double victims, of the regime and the German public at large, even if the movie failed to address this.

The transcripts from Sophie Scholl's interrogation partly inspired director Marc Rothemund to make *Sophie Scholl*. Sophie's conviction in denying her involvement through five hours of intense questioning impressed him, as did the Scholl siblings' intense efforts to convince the Gestapo that the White Rose organization consisted of no one else. In a *Deutsche Welle (DW)* article, Rothemund said that, "We wanted the

¹³ "Die ehrliche Hochstaplerin," *Die Zeit*, February 10, 2005, *Zeit Online*, http://www.zeit.de/2005/07/K-S_Scholl/komplettansicht, January 18, 2014.

¹⁴ Paul Rutschmann examines the legacy of Sophie Scholl in both film and history in an article for the *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television*. He argues that some historical episodes contain enough drama to preclude the need to add fictional elements when translating such stories on film. Paul Rutschmann, "The White Rose in Film and History," *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television* 27, no. 3 (2007), 371.

¹⁵ "In unser alle Auftrag," *Die Zeit*, February 24, 2005, *Zeit Online*, http://www.zeit.de/2005/09/Sophie_Scholl/komplettansicht, Accessed January 18, 2014.

audience to bind themselves to a single character and identify with her.” Thus, according to *DW*, the director followed the trends established by other contemporary German filmmakers by engaging with the German experiences of National Socialism rather than exploring broader explanations for the past. *DW* reported, therefore, that German audiences were still adjusting to the cinematic trend to ask what happened rather than why it happened when *Sophie Scholl* hit theaters. Furthermore, filmmakers sought to confront audiences with questions of personal reaction. Screenwriter Fred Breinersdorfer commented in the article that, “The first generation who lived through the war felt guilty and hopeless. The second generation was more analytical and pedagogical. But the new generation sees the Nazi period in more personal terms, and they ask things like, ‘What would I have done in that situation? Would I have had the courage to resist?’”¹⁶ Beyond portraying the specific experiences of well-known German resisters, *Sophie Scholl* presented audiences with philosophical questions of morality, which were aimed directly at the *Spätgeborenen* generation.

Without bearing responsibility or guilt for the National Socialist past, Rothemund told *Berliner Zeitung* that his generation retained the responsibility for keeping the crimes of the Nazi era in the consciousness of German society. This provided him with further impetus to turn Scholl’s story into a movie. Though Rothemund recognized that his generation bore no blame for atrocities carried out by Nazis, they still needed to shoulder that responsibility for future generations. In addition, the topic of National Socialism proved particularly pressing for the director because of a rise in neo-Nazism. By exploring part of the German experience of resistance during National Socialism, he

¹⁶ “Anti-Nazi Film Gets Warm Reception,” *Deutsche Welle*, February 14, 2005, *DW Online*, <http://www.dw.de/anti-nazi-film-gets-warm-reception/a-1489347>, Accessed January 23, 2014.

hoped to inspire audiences to stand up for what is right and counteract the rash of neo-Nazis elected to German government in the 2000s.¹⁷ Portraying Germans as the victims of Hitler served as a reminder that while many supported the Führer and facilitated Nazi rule, the entire society suffered as a result.¹⁸ Similarly, when asked why a trend to interrogate the Nazi past through film resurfaced during the first half of the 2000s, screenwriter Breinersdorfer maintained that the need or desire to engage with the National Socialist past ebbed and flowed. The trauma of the period persisted whether or not the arts would take renewed interest in the topic, and film became one of several ways to approach the past for audiences with rekindled interest in the legacy of the Third Reich.¹⁹ But because *Sophie Scholl* focused on the victimization of German resisters, the film reinforced existing notions of how Germans themselves suffered under National Socialism.

An article appearing in *Die Zeit* several years after the film's release questioned why Germans continued to remember and celebrate the life of Sophie Scholl. The fascination with Scholl, according to the article, persisted largely because Germans

¹⁷ As *Der Spiegel* reported in January of 2005, Germany faced threats from right-wing extremists in the National Democratic Party of Germany (NPD), which was seen by many as a neo-Nazi political faction. Having recently won seats in Saxony's state government and ahead of the sixtieth anniversary of the end of WWII, the NPD confronted German society with anti-Semitic rallies and propaganda that promoted renewed nationalism and attacked Nazi Germany's 1945 surrender to the Allies. The national government and several opposing political parties struggled with how to deal with the NPD, some arguing for outlawing the party and others maintaining the party's right to exist in a democratic society. "The Threat of the NPD: Rise of Right-Wing Party Evokes Ghosts of Past," *Der Spiegel*, January 31, 2005, *Spiegel Online International*, <http://www.spiegel.de/international/spiegel/the-threat-of-the-npd-rise-of-german-right-wing-party-evokes-ghosts-of-past-a-339604.html>, Accessed March 4, 2014.

¹⁸ "Unser Blick auf die Nazi-Zeit ist frei von Schuld," *Berliner Zeitung*, February 12, 2005, *Berliner Zeitung Online*, <http://www.berliner-zeitung.de/archiv/unser-blick-auf-die-nazi-zeit-ist-frei-von-schuld,10810590,10257632.html>, Accessed January 23, 2014.

¹⁹ "Sophie Scholl – Die letzten Tage: die erste Pressekonferenz," *Berliner Zeitung*, February 14, 2005, *Berliner Zeitung Online*, <http://www.berliner-zeitung.de/archiv/-sophie-scholl---die-letzten-tage---die-erste-pressekonferenz-wann-werden-uns-endlich-einmal-nette-nazis-gezeigt-,10810590,10258174.html>, Accessed January 23, 2014.

questioned whether or not they would have handled the situation similarly. Her story, told again and again, offered a ray of hope in an otherwise dark time when most Germans went along with Hitler and the Nazis. But, although Scholl certainly performed heroic acts in the face of Nazi oppression and persecution, the vision Germans created of her grew mostly out of cinematic dramatizations and not reality. Scholl initially followed along with the National Socialists, willfully attending the Nazi controlled university in Munich. Her liberal father often criticized Hitler's unrealistic goals and brutish methods, and her mother also felt no sympathy for the regime. Sophie joining the Nazi youth organization for girls could perhaps be seen as a form of rebellion against her parents, *Die Zeit* proposed. Not until later, when university instructors propagated that the duty of German women was to produce babies for the country, the war, and Hitler, did Scholl appear to question the regime's ideology. As her anti-Nazi sentiment grew, she became more impulsive and daring as a member of the White Rose movement. The article thus posed another question about Sophie's resistance: was it pre-meditated as the movie would have audiences believe, or was it a result of her youthful, rebellious nature?²⁰ Even if Sophie's commitment to the White Rose movement fulfilled a youthful proclivity for challenging authority, however, Rothmund's film succeeded in presenting Scholl's victimization and that of the family and friends she left behind.

Whereas *Sophie Scholl* focused on the experiences of a young German woman rooted in actual events, *Napola – Elite für den Führer* took a fictional look at life in a Nazi political academy for boys. Dennis Gansel's film about school and fascism centered

²⁰ "Sophie Scholl," *Die Zeit*, November 12, 2009, *Zeit Online*, <http://www.zeit.de/2009/47/Vorbilder-Scholl>, Accessed January 18, 2014.

on an unlikely friendship between two students from vastly different backgrounds. Friedrich, the son of a factory worker, joined a National Political Academy (Napola) as a way to escape working class life despite his father's objections and distrust of Nazis. Albrecht, on the other hand, was the son of a local governor. His father completely bought into National Socialist ideals and expected his son to follow suit. In school, the two teenage boys aligned more closely with the father of the other—Friedrich developed an enthusiasm for the opportunities provided to him by the Napola while Albrecht, failing in almost every way to fulfill his father's expectations, rebelled against the racist and violent Nazi teachings. Due to the cruelty experienced while attending the academy, Friedrich realized his mistake, and friendship proved stronger than social opportunities.²¹ More victims of their situation than anything, the students at the Napola were subjected to National Socialist doctrine in the Third Reich's goal of sustaining its ideology.

The film starts in Berlin during the late summer of 1942. After watching Friedrich Weimer excel at boxing, an instructor from a nearby Napola praises the teenager for his skills. He invites Friedrich to tryout for the academy. The next day, Friedrich attends the tryouts, impressed by the facilities and propaganda posted about the room. Along with several other applicants, Friedrich is then subjected to Nazi health inspection and several fitness tests. When asked why he wants to join Hitler's academy, Friedrich replies that he wants to serve the "Führer, Volk, und Vaterland." Having passed all of the requirements, the administrators offer Friedrich admittance to the Napola.

When he tells his father that he wished to go to the Napola as a way to rise above his station, his father will have none of it. He forbids Friedrich from attending the elite

²¹ "Macht durch Handeln!," *Die Zeit*, March 13, 2008, *Zeit Online*, <http://www.zeit.de/2008/12/Film-Die-Welle>, Accessed January 18, 2014.

school, wanting no connections between his family and the Nazis. But Friedrich enjoyed his taste of what life could be like and still sees the academy through eyes clouded by his desire to reap the rewards and opportunities such an education would provide him. So, one night while his family sleeps, Friedrich slips out the door and hitchhikes to the Napola. He leaves a letter for his parents, apologizing for leaving and telling his mother that the academy is his only ticket to a better life. The letter also warns his father against following him, because Friedrich would inform the school officials what his father had to say against the academy.

Once at the Allenstein Napola, Friedrich immediately takes a liking to his new surroundings. The school uniform, consisting of black pants and coat over a brown shirt with a red swastika armband, impresses him. At the opening rally, the headmaster welcomes the students, assuring them that no matter their background—whether the son of a farmer or factory owner—all of the boys are now equal. He informs them that they will lead the Thousand Year Reich as the regime's elite, and the school will polish the boys like diamonds. When final victory is achieved, they can then fill needed administrative roles not only in Austria and Germany but also in Moscow, London, Washington, and Cape Town. Friedrich smiles as he joins in singing a patriotic anthem promising faithfulness to Germany and the dawning of a new era.

After a few weeks of training, Friedrich's first boxing match arrives. To win, he must knock his opponent out. When Friedrich has the other boy practically beat, he hesitates before swinging the final knockout punch. His trainer yells to swing the final punch, and many of his classmates egg him on. Friedrich swings, knocking his opponent out, and is declared the winner. The crowd of boys erupts in applause, and the academy's

teachers congratulate him on his fine performance. His newfound friend, Albrecht, looks disappointed by Friedrich's behavior and does not applaud his victory. Following the match, Albrecht asks Friedrich if other ways to win existed and whether or not he felt pity for beating his opponent. Friedrich replies that his opponent would have done the same if roles were reversed, but Albrecht's questions of morality lead Friedrich to contemplate the repercussions of his actions.

The cruel brutality and apathy of the instructors and floor directors is clear in their treatment of those who do not live up to expectations. During one of the training exercises where the boys learn to arm and throw hand grenades, a visibly nervous boy drops a grenade. Siegfried, humiliated for repeatedly wetting his bed and afraid of retribution, runs forward and dives atop the live grenade. It explodes, spraying bits of Siegfried all over the other students standing nearby. The boys suffer the loss of their comrade and friend, who transformed into a hero in his effort to save twenty others. At Siegfried's funeral, Albrecht's father, Heinrich, tells the boys they all should have done the same. Their bodies are no longer their own, because they belong to Hitler and Germany. According to Heinrich, sacrificial death is an honor befitting a proper German man defending his people, country, and Führer.

One day, Heinrich shows up at the school to enlist the boys in finding several Russian POWs who had escaped into the nearby woods, acquiring weapons along the way. While trudging through the snowy woods, Albrecht, Friedrich, and a few others meet the Russian escapees and fire their weapons when the POWs try to run away. As they advance and find them on the ground, dead or dying, they discover the POWs are actually unarmed children. Albrecht breaks down, repeatedly saying they should not have

shot them. In response to their experience, Albrecht speaks out against his father for inciting the boys to chase after and kill unarmed prisoners. He realizes then that the evil he should be fighting against is the Nazis. When confronted by his father, he refuses to recant. Trapped between ignoring his conscience and suffering his father's retribution, Albrecht commits suicide during a training exercise the next day. Faced with choosing to act in accordance with the National Socialist doctrine, Albrecht refuses to give in, electing to die in an act of resistance. His choice weighs heavily on Friedrich's conscience.

Shortly thereafter, the championship-boxing match between Friedrich and a Potsdam student takes place. As the fight begins, Friedrich finally realizes the evil in which he has been taking part in the name of self-preservation and advancement. When victory appears to be his, Friedrich lowers his arms and allows his opponent to defeat him while school officials, Albrecht's father, and his fellow students watch. In Albrecht's honor, Friedrich challenges the system by refusing to fight and stand up against tyranny. He is then dismissed from the Napola. In the end, he regrets allowing himself to be seduced by the Nazi doctrine as well as the violence and cruelty it promotes.²²

Napola – Elite für den Führer depicted Germans as victims of National Socialism in a number of ways. Boys who failed to achieve the school's expectations suffered public humiliation and punishment. For example, after catching Siegfried wetting the bed numerous times, an instructor forces him to carry his mattress outside, hold it above his head in the pouring rain, and stand in plain sight of the student body. The scene evoked sympathy for Siegfried, because the director took multiple opportunities to highlight the

²² *Napola – Elite für den Führer*, directed by Dennis Gansel, Olga Film GmbH, 2004.

boy's suffering by placing him in the background of several shots. The film also implied such German boys sometimes saw suicide as their only option to overcome the emotional and physical pain inflicted by Nazi officials. Similarly, young men like Albrecht, who realized and spoke out against the Third Reich as an empire of evil, faced retribution for voicing their opinions. Albrecht's decision to drown himself further supported the implication that suicide provided a viable solution to the threats of National Socialism. *Napola* also showed how the proliferation of death impacted the lives of the students. Characters mourned the loss of Albrecht and Siegfried, in many ways because their deaths seemed senseless and unnecessary. In addition, several boys received news of their fathers dying in action. In one particular scene, a pastor approaches two young boys and informs them of their fathers' deaths. Gansel employed this somber scene to show how Germans lost their men to the violence of war. Often, those who stood up to the regime faced the same fate as the persecuted. As *Sophie Scholl* also conveyed, victims extended beyond main characters to include friends and family around them. Some students attracted by the *Napolas* as a way to access opportunities unavailable otherwise eventually found themselves tricked by the lies told to them in order to carry out the orders of those above them.

While the elite school initially seemed well intentioned to Friedrich, his innocence was shattered when the boys were commanded to search nearby forests for escaped Russian POWs and hunt them down in stereotypical Nazi fashion. This incident provoked questions of morality among the main characters, ultimately leading to redemption for Friedrich, when he refused to let the intoxicating opportunities available through the

National Political Academy turn him into a thuggish Nazi.²³ In a 2005 interview, *Napola* director Dennis Gansel admitted that making the film revolved around his own coming to terms with the past. For Gansel's grandfather, who taught at one of Hitler's *Napolas*, the opportunities provided him by joining the National Socialist party attracted him and therefore served as the motivation behind Friedrich's character. He wanted to understand why his grandfather joined the Nazi party and taught at one of the elite academies. Additionally, the growing popularity of the National Democratic Party of Germany (NPD) and actions of neo-Nazi extremists in Germany during the 2000s troubled him, much as it had Marc Rothemund. Gansel thus used *Napola* as a vehicle to explore how the elite Nazi academies could lure teenage boys into the Nazi party. Rather than connecting with a character rebelling against the system, which would have been an easy feat according to Gansel, the director created Friedrich so that audiences could understand how young German men were "seduced by the system." That Friedrich turned away from National Socialism in the end conveyed that Germans had a choice then as much as they did in 2005 as neo-Nazi activities threatened German society.²⁴

News outlets offered a number of reasons why *Napola* attracted German audiences, looking beyond the film's portrayal of human suffering. One possible reason was based on the film's production value and marketing, which including assertions of authenticity based on the author's expertise.²⁵ Another possible reason was because the film focused on the German wartime experience of youth rather than adding to the canon

²³ "Patriotische Bauchschmerzen," *Spiegel*, November 29, 2004, *Spiegel Online*, <http://www.spiegel.de/spiegel/print/d-38017032.html>, Accessed January 23, 2014.

²⁴ Brad Balfour, "New York State Interviews 21: Dennis Gansel," *Generator 21* 428, November 10, 2005, <http://generator21.net/g21archive/nystate56.htm>, Accessed January 23, 2014.

²⁵ "Das faschistische Subjekt," *Die Zeit*, September 16, 2004, *Zeit Online*, <http://www.zeit.de/2004/39/Hitler-Filme/komplettansicht>, Accessed January 16, 2014.

of Holocaust narratives. Many Germans felt stories of the persecuted victims had all been told, while theirs had largely been ignored. The movie showed how the elite schools prepared young men and boys for the Final Victory by instilling them with the National Socialist doctrine. Gansel pointed out to *Spiegel* that one could remain a decent person despite the environmental circumstances, or at least die a heroic death in the name of the German people and Nazi victims. The news outlet labeled Gansel's view as naïve and presumptuous, attributing this trait to a generational deficiency of conscience, not having to carry around the psychological weight of experiencing National Socialism and its postwar impacts.²⁶ The story from inside one of Hitler's elite political academies therefore spoke to people looking for a slightly different perspective of the Nazi past with which they could possibly identify.²⁷

Response to the film varied. Some critics accused Gansel of producing a formulaic boarding school drama that used the National Socialist past more as a backdrop than an actual thematic element. They compared the superficiality of *Napola* to the existentially probing films of the 1970s and 1980s, which explored the psychological and sociological ramifications of the Nazi era in postwar Germany. Accordingly, *Napola* paled in comparison. Because of the director's relatively young age of 31, critics thought Gansel unprepared to adequately approach the subject in his film, in which German youth teetered on the edge of a free-will choice between victim and perpetrator.²⁸ In essence, many believed Gansel oversimplified the National Socialist past. But not all found the

²⁶ "Napola – Elite für den Führer," *Der Spiegel*, January 10, 2005, *Spiegel Online*, <http://www.spiegel.de/spiegel/print/d-38915685.html>, Accessed January 23, 2014.

²⁷ "Patriotische Bauchschmerzen," *Der Spiegel*, November 29, 2004, *Spiegel Online*, <http://www.spiegel.de/spiegel/print/d-38017032.html>, Accessed January 23, 2014.

²⁸ "Eine kleine Polit-AG," *Die Zeit*, November 4, 2004, *Zeit Online*, http://www.zeit.de/2004/46/Eine_kleine_Polit-AG/komplettansicht, Accessed January 23, 2014.

film distasteful. At the Tribeca Film Festival, a Jewish woman who had seen the film told Gansel that his movie helped her understand why Germans enthusiastically participated in such a violently racist institution. She saw how the regime attracted Germans by promising them a better life and connected with the suffering attached to those choices.²⁹ Like Rothmund with *Sophie Scholl*, Gansel wanted to ask audiences what they would have done if caught in a similar situation.

But had Gansel adequately addressed the experience of attending an academy? Historical consultant Hans Müncheberg, writing for *Der Freitag*, criticized *Napola* for not accurately portraying the levels to which the elite schools victimized their students. For example, one of Friedrich's roommates, Siegfried, repeatedly lost control of his bladder. School officials ridiculed and reprimanded Siegfried for what they considered abhorrent behavior. Yet they let him remain at the school, where he eventually sacrificed himself by jumping on top of a live hand grenade that another student had armed and dropped. He chose this fate rather than face continued harassment and was then honored for performing his duty to the collective student body. These scenes, though obviously a dramatization, imparted too much sympathy upon the Nazi instructors, who would have most certainly kicked Siegfried out of the *Napola*, or worse, according to Müncheberg. Similarly, the physical, racial, and academic admittance tests done for these schools were much more intense than the film led audiences to believe. Müncheberg thought these historical inaccuracies threatened to perpetuate a false narrative of the National Political Academies and Nazi regime by failing to explore more fully the complexities of the

²⁹ Balfour, "New York State Interviews 21: Dennis Gansel."

system.³⁰ Despite these critiques, however, *Napola* added a layer of German victimhood to the larger discussion by incorporating the suffering of young German men and boys, who often lacked opportunities for social advancement when not participating in the Nazi system but also found the Napolas to be extensions of Nazi oppression and violence.

Two weeks before the fall of the Führerbunker in April 1945, Josef Goebbels spoke to his fellow Nazis, saying that a beautiful film, in color, would one day show how the Germans bravely lived and fought through weeks of constant attack.³¹ He asked them whether or not they would like to play a part in this story so that 100 years later, when this film would inevitably come, they could be seen as having played integral parts in the Third Reich's ultimate victory.³² But Goebbels had it wrong. Filmmakers took only 60 years to construct such a film in *Der Untergang*. And as for showing how brave and honorable the Nazi leaders were, Goebbels got that wrong, too. As *Die Welt* critic Hans-Georg Rodek noted, the film presented its portrayal of the last weeks of the Third Reich as historically accurate but failed to address how and why these men and women became notorious villains. Who were the people that followed Hitler and the Nazis so willingly? Without attempting to answer these perplexing questions, *Der Untergang* showed, according to Rodek, just how far German film and approaches to the Nazi past had come

³⁰ "Die Geschichte der Geschichte," *Der Freitag*, January 14, 2005, *Der Freitag Online*, <http://www.freitag.de/autoren/der-freitag/die-geschichte-der-geschichte>, Accessed January 23, 2014.

³¹ The Führerbunker was a concrete bomb shelter built beneath the city of Berlin to protect Adolf Hitler and serve as the center of operations for the National Socialist government in the case of emergency. As the Russian Army began their attack of Berlin in early April 1945, Hitler, along with his closest advisors and personal staff, had already retreated to the bunker. They remained there until the Russians overran German defenses later that month.

³² "'Der Untergang', in Farbe," *Die Welt*, August 12, 2004, *Die Welt Online*, <http://www.welt.de/print-welt/article333603/Der-Untergang-in-Farbe.html>, Accessed January 18, 2014.

in 30 years by exploring Hitler's humanity for the first time.³³ The film also explicitly placed German suffering at the forefront of German wartime experience as the city of Berlin crumbled around them. With its controversial representation of the last weeks of Nazi Germany, *Der Untergang* stirred up intense response and debate about sympathy for Hitler, the Nazis, and the German people, much more so than either *Sophie Scholl* or *Napola*.

Der Untergang opens and closes with interview clips from *Im toten Winkel – Hitler's Sekretärin*, a 2002 German documentary released in the United States as *Blind Spot: Hitler's Secretary*. Traudl Junge, one of Hitler's secretaries, serves as the subject of the documentary and as a central figure in *Der Untergang*. She is, as one would expect, visibly old in the interview, reminiscing about her time serving as Hitler's secretary during the final months of the war. The living Junge expresses remorse for participating in Hitler's Third Reich. She grapples with having consented to willingly serve Hitler despite her lack of enthusiasm for National Socialism. She conveys anger with herself for choosing to serve the regime and claims to have been surprised by news of the six million Jews and countless others murdered by the Nazis. She thereby disconnects her personal past from those committing atrocities in the name of Hitler and the Third Reich by saying that her unawareness of the murders pardoned her from personal guilt. Only later, when confronted by a memorial honoring Germans who protested against the Nazi regime, did Junge question her innocence. She admits that had she wanted to, she could have discovered far more about what was happening in Nazi Germany.

³³ “‘Der Untergang’, in Farbe.”

The dramatization begins in 1942 with Junge, at age 22, entering Hitler's service. The movie quickly moves forward two-and-a-half years into 1945, with the Red Army bearing down on Berlin. Crisis has fallen on Hitler and the German war machine, and defeat appears imminent. Military officials struggle to confront a volatile Hitler with this reality. In the face of starvation and defeat, the dictator orders the abandonment of supply depots throughout Berlin and leaves citizens and soldiers to fend for themselves. Out of a sense of duty to the German people rather than Hitler, however, several soldiers defy the Führer's orders and stay to help those left behind. Later, at a meeting discussing military results and options, Hitler loses his temper when top advisors suggest Germany back down in the confrontation with Russia and pursue political surrender with the western Allied forces. He refuses to surrender, committing to fight until the bitter end. Hitler tells those around them they cannot concern themselves with civilians. He believes German people have shown their weakness by letting the Russians enter Berlin. He therefore feels no obligation to leave them with anything on which to survive if the Third Reich should fall. Like the Führer, Reich Minister of Propaganda Joseph Goebbels feels no sympathy for the German soldiers fighting a losing battle. He thinks that their belief in eventual victory should be enough to sustain them despite inadequate weaponry and supplies.

The struggle over what to do and where to go affects everyone in the Führerbunker except Eva Braun, Hitler's companion and future wife. Determined to stay with him and improve morale, she orchestrates a lavish party with drinking, feasting, and dancing. She, too, understands their inevitable defeat but refuses to give in. Others are not quite as upbeat in the face of impending doom. The young Traudl Junge speaks of their situation as like a bad dream from which there is no waking. Shortly thereafter, a bomb

explodes near the building, disrupting the festivities and upsetting the grand charade. In the wake of this brush with reality, Hitler's top advisors gradually start leaving the bunker. They know that Germany will eventually lose the war and hope to save their own lives. When he learns of the attempt by his close personal advisor and one of Nazi Germany's most highly decorated commanders, Heinrich Himmler, to surrender to the Western Allies, Hitler feels his betrayal is complete.

With Berlin completely encircled by the Russian Army, Hitler places his last hopes on a desperate attempt by the severely depleted armies to overtake the Russians. He and his advisors realize there is no escape from the bunker other than through a military victory over the Russians; however, Hitler's officers also understand that the armies and air force exist only as fragments of the Führer's imagination, shadows of their former numbers and strength. Reports flood in that the armies on which Hitler placed all hope have no chance of achieving the dictator's directive. In the face of an impossible counteroffensive, Hitler refuses to surrender to Nazi Germany's enemies.

Those remaining inside the bunker await the end of the war as the constant shelling of artillery gets louder and louder. In the quiet tension, a shot emanates from inside Hitler's private residence. Hitler and Eva Braun have committed suicide. Their bodies are carried outside, doused with gasoline, and lit afire. Nazi officers salute their Führer one last time. Traudl Junge and Peter find a bike and ride it through the lines of Russian soldiers occupying Berlin. The sun peeks through the clouds as hope for the future returns to the two characters and the German people as well. The war is over.³⁴

³⁴ *Der Untergang*, directed by Oliver Hirschbiegel, Sony Pictures Home Entertainment, 2005.

Like *Sophie Scholl* and *Napola*, *Der Untergang* paints Germans themselves as the victims of National Socialism in a number of ways. The film reaffirmed Hitler's false faith in Nazi Germany's final victory and proclivity for maniacal outbursts of anger at even his closest advisors. The message conveyed to audiences implied that not only did Germans suffer because of Hitler's refusal to accept the reality around him, but so did those who were compelled to stay or chose to remain at his side, like Junge. Families were torn apart. Young boys and old men futilely fought to save Berlin, partly on Hitler's orders and partly to save themselves. Food and medical supplies were in limited supply even before Hitler ordered them to be burned. Outside of Berlin, cities like Dresden, Chemnitz, and Potsdam suffered Allied fire bombings, because Hitler refused to surrender despite impending defeat. Joachim Fest, the German historian upon whose work *Der Untergang* was partly based, told *Spiegel* that, "Never before had the fall of a regime sacrificed so many lives, destroyed so many cities and devastated so many regions."³⁵ Much of the foundation for *Der Untergang*, then, appeared to be based on historical truth.

But *Der Untergang* necessarily employed methods of fictionalization to increase the film's commercial appeal. By doing so, *Die Welt* posited that the film built on a legacy to view the National Socialist era through the lens of popular culture, which invited comparisons of the German production to a Hollywood blockbuster. As the article pointed out, such productions typically sacrificed artistic integrity and historical accuracy for special effects and melodrama in search of mass appeal. The reliance on

³⁵ Translated from: "Niemals zuvor sind im zusammenbruch eines Reiches so viele Menschenleben ausgelöscht, so viele Städte vernichtet un ganze Landstriche verwüstet worden." "Im Bunker des Bösen," *Der Spiegel*, August 23, 2004, *Spiegel Online*, <http://www.spiegel.de/spiegel/print/d-31900129.html>, Accessed January 23, 2014.

manufacturing a sense of realism used in *Der Untergang* echoed similar methods employed by such Hollywood films as *Saving Private Ryan* and *The Thin Red Line* where the line between fact and fiction often blurs. Even though filmmakers appropriated this Hollywood style framework to produce a historical movie targeted to popular audiences, *Der Untergang* nevertheless conveyed to audiences how the National Socialists victimized the Germans without raising questions of the German populace's guilt and complicity.³⁶ German historian Klaus Neumann noted that by relegating mention of the suffering endured by Soviet soldiers and civilians from all over Europe, and concentration camp prisoners to the end credits, the film highlighted German suffering above that experienced by persons persecuted by Nazis. In this relative elevation of the German experience, Neumann found *Der Untergang* most problematic. He argued that filmmakers should have offered further insight to why Germans fervently supported Hitler until his demise rather than completely avoiding German complicity with the Nazi regime. As a result, Neumann concluded that, "*Downfall* subtly implies a symmetry between German victims and the victims of Nazi Germany" and, therefore, "is simply superfluous."³⁷

The theme of victimhood appeared perhaps most provocatively in one of the most disturbing scenes of the film. Frau Goebbels enters her children's sleeping quarters, where they are reading a nighttime story. With the help of a doctor, she administers a sleeping draft to her six children, telling them it's to help them stay healthy in the

³⁶ "Das Ende des Schwarzweiß-Phantoms," *Die Welt*, February 10, 2005, *Die Welt Online*, <http://www.welt.de/print-welt/article340445/Das-Ende-des-Schwarzweiss-Phantoms.html#>, Accessed January 23, 2014.

³⁷ Klaus Neumann, "*Downfall*: Almost the Same Old Story," *Rouge* 6, 2005, *Rouge Press Online*, <http://www.rouge.com.au/6/downfall.html>, Accessed April 17, 2014.

dampness of the bunker. When one of the girls, Helga, refuses to ingest the medicine out of fear, Frau Goebbels restrains the girl's head and forces open her mouth so the doctor can pour the medicine down her throat. Helga futilely resists as long as she can, but gives in eventually. Having successfully drugged all six children, Frau Goebbels then wishes them a good night's sleep and leaves them in the darkness of their cement room. She returns to the sleeping children a short time later, and one by one Frau Goebbels inserts a cyanide pill into each child's mouth, killing her own children.³⁸ By denying her children the chance to live in a Germany free of National Socialism, Frau Goebbels chose ideology over life. The children, in a way, symbolized the German conscience, unable to combat the oppressive influence of the Nazi party. While *Sophie Scholl* also introduced this idea, *Der Untergang* did so much more forcefully, and the murder of the children therefore represented the killing of German innocence, in which fanatical Nazi leaders misled the German public.

One of the dangers in portraying Germans themselves as among Hitler's victims was that doing so threatened to contradict the audience's recognition of suffering endured by those persecuted by the Nazi regime. For example, the narratives of suffering retained in *Der Untergang* focused on examples of German victimization. As an article in *Der Spiegel* pointed out, the scenes in which Hitler's policies left German citizens and soldiers to die elicited feelings among some moviegoers that reflected those induced by scenes of Jewish suffering in films like *The Pianist* (2002) and *Shoah* (1985). Anne McElvoy, German correspondent for London's *Evening Standard* and *Der Spiegel* contributor, faulted this comparison, however, because the typical German experience

³⁸ *Der Untergang*, directed by Oliver Hirschbiegel, Sony Pictures Home Entertainment, 2005.

during the Nazi era differed drastically from the typical Jewish experience. Still, in *Der Untergang*, Germans living in Berlin and suffering the fate of Hitler's failing war were divorced from the leaders residing in the relative safety of the bunker. McElvoy thought this separation effectively absolved the German people from guilt and established them as innocent. Historians of National Socialism presented things differently, assigning much of the blame for Nazi aggression on the German people in addition to National Socialists.³⁹ And as German talk shows discussed whether or not the film could help people understand and sympathize with Hitler, McElvoy believed the empathy would go to the German people instead as a result of Hirschbiegel's film.⁴⁰

From its inception, *Der Untergang* seemed a risky gamble. Attempting to portray Hitler and the Nazis as relatable human beings and Germans as victims of National Socialism understandably sparked intense debate. Film director Oliver Hirschbiegel reasoned that he hoped to confront audiences with a different perspective on German history. Hitler lost many of his advisors in the last days of the Third Reich, and the movie highlighted the abandonment of the leader by many Nazi officials. Left behind by those he trusted the most, the Führer spent his final days isolated and lonely, which made Hitler seem much more human than collective memory acknowledged. At the same time, however, Hitler's disillusion led to the destruction of Germany.⁴¹ When their film debuted in Germany during September of 2004, director Hirschbiegel and screenwriter

³⁹ Mark A. Wolfgram discusses how the German people came to be seen as complicit accomplices to Nazi aggression and violence through changes in discourse following the war throughout "*Getting History Right*": *East and West German Collective Memories of the Holocaust and War* (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 2011).

⁴⁰ "Film: Das Gespenst im Bunker," *Der Spiegel*, December 14, 2004, *Spiegel Online*, <http://www.spiegel.de/jahreschronik/a-331463.html>, Accessed January 23, 2014.

⁴¹ "Controversial Hitler Film Opens Across Germany," *Deutsche Welle*, September 17, 2004, *Deutsche Welle Online*, <http://www.dw.de/controversial-hitler-film-opens-across-germany/a-1331328>, Accessed March 21, 2013.

Bernd Eichinger touted *Der Untergang* as the first German-made film to chronicle the final days of Adolf Hitler and the Third Reich. They promoted the film as historically authentic. Newspapers, historians, and critics alike attacked these claims and provided ample evidence refuting the truthfulness of these statements.⁴² *Die Welt*, for example, reported that three major productions had tackled the subject before, a 1955 West German film, *Der letzte Akt*, most notable among them.⁴³ Nevertheless, the filmmakers staked much of the film's success on such claims. They also invested heavily in the production, further evidence supporting their faith in the film's potential.⁴⁴ The gamble ultimately paid off. The movie spent its first four weeks as the number one film in Germany, and throughout its domestic run, *Der Untergang* grossed just over \$39 million, roughly 45 percent of the movie's international total sales.⁴⁵ Compared to *Sophie Scholl's* domestic take of \$7.4 million and *Napola's* \$3.4 million, *Der Untergang* performed exceptionally well, and one could cite the controversial subject of the film along with its effective marketing campaign, albeit historically misleading and false, as the forces propelling the film to success.⁴⁶

⁴² Johannes von Moltke discusses these shortcomings in his journal article, "Sympathy for the Devil," *New German Critique* 102, vol. 32, no. 3 (2007), 24-5.

⁴³ "Fußnoten," *Die Welt*, April 4, 2005, *Die Welt Online*, <http://www.welt.de/print-welt/article563355/Fussnoten.html>, Accessed January 23, 2014.

⁴⁴ At 13 million Euros, *Der Untergang* remained one of the most expensive films produced in Germany as of June 2011. "Die teuersten deutschen Filmproduktion," *Die Welt*, June 26, 2011, *Die Welt Online*, <http://www.welt.de/kultur/article13444046/Die-teuersten-deutschen-Filmproduktionen.html>, Accessed March 18, 2013.

⁴⁵ *Downfall*, Box Office Mojo, <http://www.boxofficemojo.com/movies/?page=intl&id=downfall.htm>, <http://www.boxofficemojo.com/movies/?page=intl&country=DE&id=downfall.htm>, Accessed March 27, 2013.

⁴⁶ *Sophie Scholl – Die letzten Tage*, Box Office Mojo, <http://www.boxofficemojo.com/movies/?page=intl&id=sophiescholl.htm>, Accessed January 25, 2014; *Napola – Elite für den Führer*, Box Office Mojo, <http://www.boxofficemojo.com/movies/?page=intl&id=beforethefall.htm>, Accessed January 25, 2014.

Critical and audience reaction to *Der Untergang* predictably varied within Germany. Many moviegoers found the film thought-provoking and cause for anxiety, sitting in contemplative silence while the end credits rolled. In an interview for *Die Zeit*, German author Maxim Biller proclaimed *Der Untergang* a great movie, because instead of idolizing and humanizing Hitler, the movie, in fact, perpetuated the dictator's evil image. When asked about the possibility of Hitler ever becoming more human and less monster-like, Biller responded with: "No. Hitler will always remain a villain. There is no possible way to make him out to be a man."⁴⁷ But historians and several film critics like Ernst Klee, sharply criticized Hirschbiegel's film for whitewashing the Nazi leaders by sidestepping their crimes. Some viewers thought *Der Untergang* succeeded at approaching Hitler as a human being without demonizing him or mitigating his criminality. And teenage filmgoers caught a glimpse of how their grandparents fell for Hitler. Others compelled neo-Nazis to see the film, because it showed just how cowardly the Nazis leaders were.⁴⁸

Writing for *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, reviewer Frank Schirmmacher thought the film accomplished something novel, because screenwriter and producer Bernd Eichinger had successfully reinvented Hitler's persona. For the first time, Eichinger's image of Hitler existed without the baggage of postwar, anti-Nazi political influence. Schirmmacher further argued against the film's detractors, many of whom claimed that *Der Untergang* offered nothing new to the modern understanding of the

⁴⁷ Translated from: "Nein. Hitler wird für immer ein Bösewicht bleiben. Es wird nicht gelingen, aus ihm einen Menschen zu machen." "Mir fehlen die Juden," *Die Zeit*, February 2, 2005, *Zeit Online*, http://www.zeit.de/2005/05/gespraech_joffe/seite-33, Accessed January 9, 2014.

⁴⁸ "Reaktionen zum 'Untergang': 'Der Film war Wahnsinn'," *Der Spiegel*, September 17, 2004, *Spiegel Online*, <http://www.spiegel.de/kultur/kino/reaktionen-zum-untergang-der-film-war-wahnsinn-a-318482.html>, Accessed January 23, 2014.

National Socialist past. That was not the point of the film, Schirmmacher said. Instead, the film raised awareness of what Hitler's final days were actually like and inspired a reawakening among Germans to explore this part of their historical reality. Schirmmacher went on to say that, "The movie forces us to look in the mirror with a sense of 'normalcy' and is thus an important work of art as well as historical processing."⁴⁹ He went so far as to call the film a masterpiece in a review published in January of 2005.⁵⁰ Schirmmacher received the message Eichinger and Hirschbiegel set out to deliver: collective memory focused on the public images of Hitler and the Nazis created by Nazi-era propaganda and subsequent analysis, ignoring their behavior in private, intimate settings. Filmmakers and politicians, fearful of offending Holocaust and concentration camp survivors and their families, often avoided engaging with the German experience in the last years of the twentieth century.

Other German reviewers heavily criticized the film. In *Die Zeit*, Wim Wenders railed against *Der Untergang* for misleading audiences into believing that it spoke with authority on Hitler's final days. Filmmakers led filmgoers to believe that because they had based *Der Untergang* on the historical scholarship of Joachim Fest and the eyewitness testimony of Traudl Junge, the film was historically accurate. Wenders, a filmmaker himself, challenged such claims because the film unsuccessfully combined the two conflicting narratives of the Traudl Junge's naïveté and Joachim Fest's professional expertise. He argued that had filmmakers focused on either Junge's story or that of the historian instead of combining the two into one single narrative, the film would have

⁴⁹ "Die zweite Erfindung des Adolf Hitler: 'Der Untergang', Drehbuch Bernd Eichinger," *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, September 14, 2004, *faz.net*, <http://www.faz.net/-gqz-pi43>, Accessed March 21, 2013.

⁵⁰ "Ein Meisterwerk!," *Die Zeit*, January 20, 2005, *Zeit Online*, http://www.zeit.de/2005/04/Ein_Meisterwerk_, Accessed January 16, 2014.

been much more acceptable. The double suicide of Hitler and Eva Braun also infuriated Wenders because Hirschbiegel pushed the pivotal scene off screen. The film left the audience with only bunker inhabitant reaction to the gunshot rather than engaging viewers directly with the suicide. He equated Hitler turning his back on the German people to the filmmakers turning their back on the audience. Wenders asked: “Why give this man such an honor, when the film honored none of the others?”⁵¹ The reviewer added to these criticisms *Der Untergang*’s lack of opinion towards the wider impact of National Socialism or Hitler. Victims of the Holocaust appeared only in closing credits and right before short bios on what happened to several of the film’s real-life characters. The fates of the abusers and victims became one. Instead of crediting *Der Untergang* with contributing to an understanding of Hitler and the German wartime experience as other critics had, Wenders faulted the film for not respecting the tradition of separating abusers and victims.⁵²

In his assessment of the film and the trend to reengage with the National Socialist past in film, opinion writer Georg Seesslen noted that *Der Untergang* lasted too long and blurred the boundaries between fiction and reality. By not differentiating between the two, the film fostered the growth of Hitler and Nazi mythologies. Building on the recollections of Junge and the works of Fest, Eichinger did just that, said Seesslen. The resulting depiction of Hitler and the Nazis, compounded upon countless other interpretations, appeared almost authentically perfect while containing little substantive content beneath the surface. *Der Untergang* left no questions unanswered, according to

⁵¹ “Tja, dann wollen wir mal,” *Die Zeit*, October 21, 2004, Zeit Online. http://www.zeit.de/2004/44/Untergang_n/komplettansicht. Accessed March 27, 2013.

⁵² “Tja, dann wollen wir mal,” *Die Zeit*.

Seesslen, because it asked nothing new. The film placed the main perpetrators in isolation while many around them fled before the Red Army. Only in Hitler's death did the German people earn their freedom, observed the reviewer, yet Eichinger failed to consider the fall of fascism as their release. So, at the end, the Red Army posed an entirely new threat to the German people, their suffering passing from one political regime to another. The author thus posited that the deeper one looked into *Der Untergang*, the more its façade of reality slipped away, and at its core, the film told the unchallenging stories of Hitler's isolation and resulting German victimization.⁵³

For journalist Jens Jessen, though, *Der Untergang* helped prove that Germans could approach Hitler from numerous perspectives regardless of accuracy or intention. Focusing on the dictator made ridding German memory and society of the Führer's ghost impossible and brought the Nazi leader closer to people in 2004 than he was to Germans during the war. Jessen equated Hitler with addictive drugs, so that any magazine or book with Hitler on the cover would sell no matter its content or thesis. As a result, Hitler's legacy became increasingly immortalized through the fictional media arts of film, literature, and television. This mass media attention to Hitler created a marketable product not only for domestic audiences but foreign ones as well. In so doing, popular culture perpetuated the idea that Hitler defined Germany. But using National Socialism as a backdrop trivialized the regime's ideology and violence and translated into a lack of empathy for the German people. In turn, this shift decriminalized the German experience and made Germans themselves into victims. In the end, Jessen posited that separating

⁵³ "Das faschistische Subjekt," *Die Zeit*, September 16, 2004, *Zeit Online*, <http://www.zeit.de/2004/39/Hitler-Filme/komplettansicht>, Accessed January 16, 2014.

German perpetrators from German victims would allow future generations of Germans to better grapple with their guilt through collective memory.⁵⁴

Even before *Der Untergang* entered theaters, a fear existed among filmmakers, critics, and historians that the film would redefine the National Socialist past, trivializing Hitler and the Nazis and solidifying the discourse of German victimhood as appropriate. As *Der Freitag* commented, this fear grew in part because of the television miniseries *Holocaust* and its impact on West German society after airing in 1979. The series helped to fundamentally alter the way West Germans engaged with the legacy of the Third Reich, and by 1990, discussion of the victims of National Socialism centered on Jews. In the first decade after reunification, that trend continued. With *Der Untergang*, people feared that showing Hitler as relatable would relativize the dictator and change how Germans engaged with their Nazi past.⁵⁵ A year after the film debuted, the Koblenz Landau University released the results of a psychological study validating fears held by several of the film's critics, such as Wim Wenders. Students who had seen *Der Untergang* generally considered Hitler to be just another person and exhibited a much less negative attitude towards him and the Nazi past than the students who had not yet seen the film. *Der Untergang*'s focus on the victimization of the Germans likely produced these results, and the worst fears of the film's detractors appeared to be realized. Furthermore, by 2005, schools had incorporated *Der Untergang* into the classroom curriculum to help teach history to teenagers. As reported by *Die Zeit*, this increased the possibility of further trivialization of the Nazi past if the film's content was

⁵⁴ "Was macht Hitler so unwiderstehlich?," *Die Zeit*, September 23, 2004, *Zeit Online*, http://www.zeit.de/2004/40/01_leit_1_40, Accessed January 16, 2014.

⁵⁵ "Hitler im Vorstadtkino," *Der Freitag*, October 15, 2005, *Der Freitag Online*, <http://www.freitag.de/autoren/der-freitag/hitler-im-vorstadtkino>, Accessed January 23, 2014.

not appropriately discussed following student viewings. As an educational tool, *Der Untergang* could prove harmful to German students if the difference between historical reality and dramatic interpretation not clearly communicated.⁵⁶

The success of *Der Untergang*, especially in international markets, largely depended on the film's aggressive marketing campaign, which capitalized on the sixtieth anniversary of Nazi Germany's capitulation.⁵⁷ Foreign response to *Der Untergang* touted its originality and critically praised it for unblinkingly approaching the Nazi past from the German perspective. Yet foreign critics and audiences lacked exposure to the rather frequent and more appropriate approaches made by German filmmakers to the National Socialist past. As a result, they held culturally misinformed views about *Der Untergang*'s significance to German history and to German films dealing with the Nazi past.⁵⁸ Still, Germany's recent spate of films exploring the country's history met varied feedback abroad, just as it did domestically. On the eve of the 2005 Academy Awards, the team behind *Der Untergang* hoped to take away the Oscar for Best Foreign Language Film. *DW* reported how the film received mixed reviews upon its release in the months leading up to the awards ceremony. Critics and audiences on one side raved about the film, calling it one of the best war movies ever made. They thought the heightened attention to historical details combined with superb performances to produce an important cinematic work that offered unique insight to Germany's dark past. Contrarily, others found that *Der Untergang* and its portrayal of the Third Reich's final days sought to create sympathy for

⁵⁶ "Hitler harmlos," *Die Zeit*, November 10, 2005, *Zeit Online*, http://www.zeit.de/2005/46/Hitler_harmlos/komplettansicht, Accessed January 8, 2014.

⁵⁷ "Was macht...Blondi?," *Der Freitag*, September 10, 2004, *Der Freitag Online*, <http://www.freitag.de/autoren/der-freitag/was-macht-blondi>, Accessed January 23, 2014.

⁵⁸ Neumann, "*Downfall*: Almost the Same Old Story."

Hitler's top advisors and establish Germans themselves as the victims of National Socialism. *DW* reported that this posed a specific problem for Americans, because they feared that disentangling Germans from responsibility for their Nazi past threatened to open the door for resurgent National Socialism in Germany.⁵⁹

Some international audiences and critics, like those attending the Toronto Film Festival in 2004, found little noteworthy in Eichinger's Hitler biopic that distinguished it from others about Che Guevara, Alfred Kinsey, or Ray Charles. Their indifference provided evidence that the filmmakers' marketing strategies had not yet translated to some North American markets. Attempting to portray the human side of Hitler proved a non-issue. In places like Belgium and Austria, the film produced some reaction, validating marketing efforts in parts of Europe. In Vienna, *Der Untergang* sparked political commentary in the city's newspaper, *Der Standard*, which considered the film an affront to traditional interpretations of the National Socialist past that denounced Nazi crimes and recognized the suffering caused by related atrocities. In England, France, and the United States, on the other hand, *Der Untergang* prompted no such political commentary. Instead, reviewers concurred that the film followed mainstream movie formulas, and though Ganz's portrayal of a humanized Hitler impressed them, the film was, nevertheless, long and boring. *The Independent* even went so far as to compare the film to Monty Python pictures, finding the film more comedic than dramatic. Furthermore, rather than posing a moral dilemma, foreign reviewers noted, the film merely fit into a wider set of mainstream projects that maintain Hitler's infamous image

⁵⁹ "German Film Aims to Gatecrash Oscar Party," *Deutsche Welle*, February 25, 2005, *Deutsche Welle Online*, <http://www.dw.de/german-film-aims-to-gatecrash-oscar-party/a-1499718>, Accessed January 23, 2014.

while allowing Germans to present themselves to the outside world as victims of the Third Reich and escapees of the shadows of their National Socialist past.⁶⁰

Reporting on *Der Untergang*'s reception in France, *Die Welt* showed that polarized response to the film extended beyond Germany's borders. The news outlet compared French audiences to those in Britain and the United States by noting that the people of France do not define Germany by its wartime past. Accordingly, many French people viewed *Der Untergang* as a long, over-stuffed melodrama more fit for television than the cinema. After all, *Die Welt* reported, Hitler was just another historical figure for many French people. Their hope was that *Der Untergang* marked the return of German art films, long absent in the minds of the French. Instead, they failed to see the film in such a light, equating it to overproduced Hollywood fare—a pure commercial venture, historically worthless and politically harmless. Others, like Claude Lanzmann, a French filmmaker and magazine editor, called *Der Untergang* “perverse.” He argued that any attempt to understand Hitler's psychology risked excusing him of Nazi atrocities, and by offering no reference to what he engineered as Führer of the Third Reich, the film created a dangerous image of Hitler for audiences without such understanding.⁶¹

Alfred Gosser, one of France's top German historians, disagreed with Lanzmann and notable German critics of *Der Untergang*, such as Wim Wenders. Gosser believed that the film proved important, because it showed how fanatical those around Hitler were. The movie made clear that many of the Führer's top advisors preferred death to life when

⁶⁰ “Ein vorzeigbarer Hitler,” *Die Zeit*, September 23, 2004, *Zeit Online*, http://www.zeit.de/2004/40/Untergang_International, Accessed January 16, 2014.

⁶¹ “Ein Drama wie bei Shakespeare,” *Die Welt*, January 6, 2005, *Die Welt Online*, <http://www.welt.de/print-welt/article362244/Ein-Drama-wie-bei-Shakespeare.html>, Accessed January 23, 2014.

faced with the prospects of a world without Hitler and National Socialism. The French newspaper *Le Monde* sought to situate *Der Untergang* within the ongoing debate in Germany about patriotism and nationalism, historians' studies of the destruction of German cities by Allied bombings, and the reemerging trend for Germans to consider themselves victims rather than criminals during this part of their history. *Die Welt* reported that *Le Monde* was not quite able to reach a conclusion in this regard, as the French newspaper thought *Der Untergang*, while depicting Hitler as both mad and compassionate and without taking a critical stand on National Socialism, was suitable for mass audiences.⁶²

Poles, who suffered greatly throughout World War II, responded to *Der Untergang* with general distaste, according to an article in *Der Freitag*. Young crowds found the movie impressive upon its theatrical release but thought it should not play in Poland at all. 18 year-olds harbored no living memory of the war and Nazi occupation, yet Polish collective memory of Hitler and World War II informed their conceptions of them. They consequently balked at the idea of a sympathetic portrayal of Hitler and the other Nazis occupying the Führerbunker. Sentimentality held no place in the discussion of Adolf Hitler. Seeing him as anything other than evil constituted an illegal act of emotional reality and blurred the lines between victim and perpetrator. Even more criminal in the minds of Poles was the way the film skirted around the issue of those who suffered most under Hitler's National Socialist regime. The filmmakers saved mention of the millions of murdered Jews, so-called degenerates, and political dissidents for the end

⁶² “‘Ein Drame wie bei Shakespeare.’”

credits, essentially relegating them to a historical footnote.⁶³ The film largely excused Germans themselves from responsibility for Nazi aggression and violence by portraying them as victims of the Third Reich's crumbling war effort. Furthermore, Witold Kulesza, head of Poland's Institute of National Memory, charged the film with initiating a German self-discovery of nationalism, while the film critic of the *Wyborcza Gazette* accused *Der Untergang* of sentimentalizing the National Socialist past. Likewise, Feliks Tych, director of the Warsaw Jewish Museum, criticized the film for painting other Nazi officials in a positive light. Not all reviewers saw the film as achieving such high levels of influence, however. Polish filmmaker Andrezej Wajda, for example, urged Polish audiences not to worry too much about the film, arguing that it would leave no lasting impact and soon be forgotten.⁶⁴

When *Der Untergang* originally released, Israeli cinemas chose not to screen it. Officials feared that by humanizing Hitler along with his top officials and showing Germans as victims of National Socialism, Hirschbiegel's film would effectively trivialize National Socialism and hurt the feelings of Holocaust survivors. After a successful test screening with little protest, however, Lev Cinemas decided to offer the film to Israeli audiences, arguing that refusing to accept the film amounted to censorship by not allowing people to engage with the movie on their own terms and form their own opinions in response.⁶⁵ Israeli audiences documented by *Deutsche Welle*, which included

⁶³ "Die Kinder von Medea und Magda," *Der Freitag*, November 19, 2004, *Der Freitag Online*, <http://www.freitag.de/autoren/der-freitag/die-kinder-von-medea-und-magda>. Accessed March 21, 2013.

⁶⁴ "'Untergang' löst Kontroverse in Polen aus," *Die Welt*, November 6, 2005, *Die Welt Online*, <http://www.welt.de/print-welt/article350705/Untergang-loest-Kontroverse-in-Polen-aus.html>, Accessed January 23, 2014.

⁶⁵ "Israel: Hitler-Film darf ins Kino," *Der Spiegel*, April 13, 2005, *Spiegel Online*, <http://www.spiegel.de/kultur/gesellschaft/israel-hitler-film-darf-ins-kino-a-351084.html>, Accessed January 23, 2014.

several Holocaust survivors, found *Der Untergang* less controversial than the heated debates in Germany led them to believe. Rather than connecting with a humanized version of Hitler, Israelis felt that the environment of suffering outside the bunker provided grounds for sympathy. While Berlin crumbled above ground and the German people struggled to survive, Hitler remained indifferent and thus inhumane. And though Israeli audiences believed that German people deserved their fate, they recognized that many Germans suffered on account of Hitler and the Nazis.⁶⁶

To varying degrees, all three of the films discussed above show Germans themselves as the victims of National Socialism and contributed to the larger resurgent discourse concerned with the German wartime experience. This trend returned after fading into the background during Germany's long process of exploring the Nazi past. German survivors of the war saw themselves as the direct victims of Hitler and his authoritarian regime. As Germany began the rebuilding process following the war, Germans counted themselves among those victimized by Hitler and National Socialism and continued to do so in the first years after dividing into East and West.⁶⁷ Public discourse during the 1970s and 1980s brought Jewish suffering to the foreground, signaling a shift of collective memory in West Germany.⁶⁸ The second wave of victimhood discourse placed German citizens as victims of their history, often unable to honestly engage with their multi-layered wartime experience. Following reunification in

⁶⁶ "Hitler Film Gets Critical Approval in Israel," *Deutsche Welle*, May 23, 2005, *Deutsche Welle Online*, <http://www.dw.de/hitler-film-gets-critical-approval-in-israel/a-1592012>, Accessed January 23, 2014.

⁶⁷ Robert G. Moeller, "Germans as Victims?: Thoughts on Post-Cold War History of World War II's Legacies," *History & Memory* 17, no. 1 (2005), 157.

⁶⁸ Robert G. Moeller, "War Stories: The Search for a Usable Past in the Federal Republic of Germany," *The American Historical Review* 101, no 4 (1996), 1034.

1990, the trend to view Germans as victims of the Nazi past resurfaced alongside continued acknowledgement of others persecuted by Hitler's Final Solution.⁶⁹ These currents of German victimization persisted in collective memory discourse into the early 2000s. This coincided with discussion over Holocaust memorialization. In spite of heated debate over which groups should receive memorialization, the German government went ahead with plans to build a specifically Jewish memorial. *Sophie Scholl – Die letzten Tage*, *Napola – Elite für den Führer*, and *Der Untergang* arrived in theaters near the opening of the Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe in Berlin and the sixtieth anniversary of the war's end. The films thus played to German audiences already immersed in the competing discourses of victimhood, commemoration, and the German wartime experience.

As cinematic interpretations of the past, these three films were not isolated in challenging earlier currents of Germans-as-victims discourse. When the American produced *Holocaust* miniseries aired in Europe in 1979, critics panned the production for reducing German history to a mere soap opera. They lambasted filmmakers for turning the incomprehensibility of the Holocaust into a historical event capable of being understood. Despite these critical issues, over half of West Germany's adult population tuned in to watch, and the series shifted collective memory discourse by placing the Holocaust at the center. The impact of the miniseries, argues Tony Judt, pushed the German government to eliminate the Statute of Limitations for murder and resulted in the historian's debate, or *Historikerstreit*, of the 1980s.⁷⁰ In general terms, the

⁶⁹ Gilad Margalit, *Guilt, Suffering and Memory: Germany Remembers Its Dead of World War II*, trans. Haim Watzman, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2010), 293-294; Eric Langenbacher, "Changing Memory Regimes in Contemporary Germany?" *German Politics and Society* 21, no. 2 (2003), 46+.

⁷⁰ Tony Judt, *Postwar: A History of Europe since 1945*, (New York: The Penguin Press, 2005), 811.

Historikerstreit focused on what role the Holocaust should play within Germany's history.⁷¹ The *Holocaust* miniseries ultimately changed collective memory by turning West German attention to the Jews. Jewish suffering, though constantly bubbling beneath the surface, boiled to the top. *Sophie Scholl*, *Napola*, and *Der Untergang* also instigated a shift in discursive trends by reinforcing the sense of German victimhood and asking audiences to ponder how they would act if placed in similar situations.

In the end, the filmmakers portrayed the inner conflict of Sophie Scholl, Friedrich Weimer, and Traudl Junge by disconnecting those people from Nazism. Like Bernd Eichinger and Oliver Hirschbiegel, Marc Rothemund and Dennis Gansel worked under the assumption that their films would capture the essence of what life was really like for Sophie Scholl and teenaged boys living in Nazi Germany. And like *Der Untergang*, *Sophie Scholl* and *Napola* portrayed their characters as struggling to grapple with the reality of moral depravity amid desires to obey a sense of duty to family, friends, or the country. The films presented them as Germans within the system, ones that were not true National Socialists. White Rose co-conspirators, Napola students, Hitler's secretaries, and even Nazi interrogators hid beneath an obligation to higher authority, and many internally wrestled with their commitment to National Socialism.⁷² In a 2004 interview with *Die Welt*, Bruno Ganz, who portrayed Hitler in *Der Untergang*, raised one of the eternal questions related to the National Socialist past: why did so many decent and honorable Germans choose to follow a tyrant such as Hitler? If a relatively modern

⁷¹ Charles S. Maier, *The Unmasterable Past*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1988), 16-9.

⁷² "Heute in den Feuilletons: 'Lust an Gewalt und Waffen'," *Der Spiegel*, February 24, 2005, *Spiegel Online*, <http://www.spiegel.de/kultur/gesellschaft/heute-in-den-feuilletons-lust-an-gewalt-und-waffen-a-343431.html>, Accessed January 23, 2014.

society did it once, could it not happen again?⁷³ And so, part of the appeal of movies that engage with the German wartime experience was that audiences hoped to piece together a little part of the puzzle of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* and determine how Germans fit into the categories of victim and perpetrator.

⁷³ “Die Diktion ist mir verfügbar geworden,” *Die Welt*, September 11, 2004, *Die Welt Online*, <http://www.welt.de/print-welt/article339753/Die-Diktion-ist-mir-verfuegbar-geworden.html>, Accessed January 18, 2014.

Germans Suffer Soviet Retribution for Nazi Aggression

In a March 2007 article for *Der Spiegel*, journalist Henryk M. Broder identified two major taboos in German society in the early twenty-first century. The first involved Germany's relationship with Israel. Broder sensed that people could not openly criticize Germany's friendly and often conciliatory policies towards Israel. Such behavior was seen as impertinent and disrespectful of the legacy of the Holocaust in the context of German-Israeli relations. The subject of German suffering during World War II constituted the second taboo. Yet Broder noted both taboos represented perceptions rather than reality, the second taboo often invoked as justification for films to portray Germans as victims of National Socialism.¹ Since at least the 1950s, many films, documentaries, and novels explored the ways in which Germans suffered during and after the war. Each time, authors and filmmakers boasted about their own courageous attempt to look at the German wartime experience. Broder argued that Günter Grass did so with his novel, *Im Krebsgang* (2002), crediting Grass with claiming to have uncovered the story of the *Wilhelm Gustloff* and the ship's sinking. He then used the event as a jumping off point for a tale of German suffering and the resulting moral quandaries posed by portraying Germans themselves as victims of their past. Broder noted that the television miniseries *Die Flucht* carried on this tradition in 2007 by presenting the story of German refugees escaping the advancing Red Army, though told more as an adventure than an accurate historical account. Broder wrote in his commentary: "No one denies Germans the right to grieve for their dead. The Germans have reasonable grounds to consider themselves the

¹ "Der ewige Tabubruch," *Der Spiegel*, March 12, 2007, *Spiegel Online*, <http://www.spiegel.de/spiegel/print/d-50828278.html>, Accessed January 30, 2014.

first victims of Nazism. If they do, however, they must celebrate May 8 as a day of liberation. But that would be a real taboo worthy of breaking.”²

Much in the way Broder noted, the filmmakers of *So weit die FüÙe tragen*, *Anonyma – Eine Frau in Berlin*, and *Die Flucht* claimed their movies were breaking taboos about the National Socialist past by focusing on German wartime experiences. Like *Sophie Scholl*, *Napola*, and *Der Untergang*, then, *So weit die FüÙe tragen*, *Anonyma*, and *Die Flucht* depicted Germans themselves as victims of National Socialism. Whereas the three films of the previous chapter focused on the German experience living within the Third Reich, the three films analyzed in this chapter portray how Germans suffered the animosity of the Red Army as retribution for Nazi aggression. Following the format of the first chapter, here, in Chapter Two, synopses of and reactions to the three films show how the films contributed to the discourse of Germans themselves as victims of National Socialism. The discussions and debates surrounding *So weit die FüÙe tragen*, *Anonyma*, and *Die Flucht* highlight the perception among some of the *Spätgeborenen* that a need existed to reengage with the experiences of non-Jewish Germans as they confronted the reality of Nazi Germany’s collapse. Ultimately, this false sense of taboo breaking, perpetuated by filmmakers and supporters of the films but questioned by historians and critics, disconnected the films from the historiography of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* by attempting to reassert taboos long debunked by scholarly analysis. As a result, the films further clouded the differentiation between victim and perpetrator. But as historical entertainment and despite historical inaccuracies, *So weit die*

² Translated from the original German text: “Niemand will es den Deutschen verbeiten, um ihren Toten zu trauren. Die Deutschen hätten auch gute Gründe, sich als erste Opfer der Nazis zu verstehen. Dann aber müssen sie darauf bestehen, den 8.Mai als Tag der Befreiung zu feiern. Das ware ein echtes Tabu, das es verdient hätte, gebrochen zu werden.” “Der ewige Tabubruch,” *Der Spiegel*, March 12, 2007, *Spiegel Online*, <http://www.spiegel.de/spiegel/print/d-50828278.html>, Accessed January 30, 2014.

Füße tragen, *Anonyma*, and *Die Flucht* still impacted cultural memory and justified for German audiences the portrayal of Germans as among Hitler's victims alongside those directly persecuted by the Nazi regime.

So weit die Füße tragen follows the story of a German soldier on his escape from a Siberian labor camp to his home in Bavaria. The movie begins with the Red Army taking prisoner a group of German soldiers fighting on the Eastern Front and transports them to the far shores of Siberia. Among the men is Clemens Forell, who the audience meets as he bids farewell to his wife and daughter in Bavaria during the summer of 1944. The film quickly moves to July of 1945 with the German soldiers aboard a Soviet railcar. As the train speeds towards Siberia, a narrator communicates that the men have been sentenced to 25 years in a Soviet forced labor camp, Forell included. Frost and snow cover the walls of the railcar and the men appear cold and miserable. They struggle for warmth and survival, scraping the sides of the boxcar to turn frost into drinkable water. News of the capture and trans-Siberian transfer of Forell does not make its way back to Germany. Clutching a letter from the Red Cross, Forell's daughter Lisa runs to her mother who opens the envelope, learning that the organization knows nothing of Forell's whereabouts but also has not uncovered his body. In a nearby church, Lisa prays to a statue of the Virgin Mary, asking for the safe return of her father.

Once the train reaches its destination, the Russian soldiers force the German soldiers to march to their labor camp and new home—a Siberian coal mine. During the precarious trek across a frozen body of water, one German prisoner succumbs to the cold, stumbles, and falls. In reaction, one of the Soviet soldiers fires several warning shots into

the frozen lake. This spooks the leading horse, which rears up and breaks through the weakened ice. Men and supplies slip into the water, and when one German attempts to help another one struggling in the water, a Russian soldier holds him back and the struggling German sinks to his death. After a long, hard march, the poorly outfitted German soldiers reach the labor camp. Forell notices almost immediately the camp features no fences or guard towers. When he mentions this to a fellow soldier, the man says that because the camp lies north of the Arctic Circle, the Russians need no man-made deterrents to keep the soldiers from escaping. The climate makes escape by foot rather impossible, especially without the necessary means.

In a scene conveying the direness of the situation, one young soldier admits to hiding a letter intended for his mother. A camp commander orders him to remove his clothing and stand naked in the frigid cold. When Forell motions to give his coat to the young soldier, the Russian commander, Lieutenant Kamanev, tells Forell to keep his coat on. The Germans, with the exception of the boy stripped of his clothes, are then forced to turn and march into the mines not far away. The boy is not seen or heard from again. Once in the mine, the Russian soldiers command that the Germans prepare for delousing. They inspect the Germans for any signs of poor health and shave their bodies, faces, and heads to eliminate germs and disease. The scene evokes the same sense of fear and cruelty created by Holocaust films like *Schindler's List* (1993), in which Nazi officials corral their Jewish captives into a concentration camp, strip them of their clothes, determine which men and women could work, and cut their hair before forcing them into

manual labor. The film subtly equates the German prisoners of war to those captured and imprisoned by the Nazis.³

The story then advances to 1949. When the camp's power generator fails, Lt. Kamanev tasks Forell with fixing it because the files list the German soldier as a mechanic. In the exchange, Kamanev learns that Forell speaks a little Russian and recognizes the skill as useful for survival. Within a matter of seconds, Forell diagnoses the problem, fixes the machine, and restores electricity to the camp. In a moment of desperation and with a window of opportunity, Forell attempts his first escape from the Siberian camp. Quickly caught by guards, Forell is brought before Kamanev, who tells Forell that he will never leave the labor camp and will die there like everyone else. The Lieutenant sends Forell back to the mines, where his fellow captives await his return. Reentering the mine, the remaining German prisoners follow the Lieutenant's orders by beating and kicking Forell in an attempt to discourage future attempts to escape. Eventually, one of the German men in the mine declares Forell has had enough. The camp doctor, also a German POW, then takes the injured protagonist to the infirmary and nurses him back to health under the orders of Lieutenant Kamanev.

While helping Forell recover, the doctor tells Forell that he can aid an escape by helping him plan and prepare and providing him with the necessary supplies. According to the doctor, the only chance to escape the labor camp would be while still in the medical building. If Forell were to return to the mines, he would most likely never leave again and escape would prove practically impossible. The doctor offers to help Forell by outfitting him with a map, rations, winter gear, general advice, and a pistol. Then, in the

³ *Schindler's List*, Directed by Steven Spielberg, Universal Studios and Amblin Entertainment, 1993.

dark of night, Forell slips out of the infirmary, finds the stashed supplies hidden behind a rock, and makes his escape northward. The seemingly endless winter envelopes Forell as he struggles to find his way, suffering hallucinations and shortages of food. The growth of long hair and beard signifies the passing time, so that when Forell stumbles upon a single tree for the first time in many days of wandering through the desolate, frozen landscape, the audience can empathize with Forell's struggle and restored sense of hope. Meanwhile, Kamanev realizes that Forell escaped and is determined to recapture the escapee, and the main contest between protagonist and antagonist is solidified.

Once out of the tundra, Forell meets a number of men and women, who help Forell along his way. He first encounters two wilderness men in the forests of western Siberia, Semyon and Anastas, who dig for gold in the summer and hunt during the winter. They warn Forell of a looming snowstorm and offer him shelter. Denying their assistance, Forell trudges through the storm, battling snow, wind, and falling trees—one of which topples over on him. Semyon and Anastas come to the rescue, bringing Forell to their cabin in the woods for protection. When asked his name, Forell responds with Pjotr. Semyon recognizes it as fake but approves of the alias and distrust of strangers. Forell stays with Semyon and Anastas through the rest of the winter, only leaving them when greed leads Anastas and Semyon to betray him. Semyon, having shot and killed Anastas for stealing his gold, feared Forell would do the same. When Forell offers to carry a bag pack for Semyon to alleviate his exhaustion, Semyon reacts by alleging that Forell only wants to steal his gold and pushes Forell down a steep hill, knocking the protagonist unconscious. The cry of nearby wolves eventually wakes Forell, and he makes a run

through the snow for a tree while the wolves pursue him. The tree fails to hold the weight of a man, snaps, and Forell falls to the pack of wolves.

When Forell wakes again, he is in the home of a native family and being nursed back to health after the wolf attack. He remains in the encampment until one of the native men hears an announcement in a nearby village that the Soviet police were searching for an escaped German spy going by the name Pjotr. When Forell learns of this, he knows he must leave the village to protect those who saved him. The native people provide Forell a dog to assist with hunting and traveling before taking him to the forest and sending him on his way.

Forell soon finds himself traveling through Russia with his companion dog. It is now the summer of 1951, and Kamanev is still in pursuit. Seven years had passed since he last saw his wife and daughter, and he continues working his way back home to them. At one point, the dog runs ahead, barking frantically with Forell following at a run. He crests a hill to find a Soviet logging camp, his position given away by the barking dog. Forell turns to head back into the forest when a man points a gun at Forell and commands him to stop. The Russians take Forell in for questioning, and fearing for his safety, Forell informs the camp commander that his name is Pjotr Ivanovich, a Baltic prisoner who recently completed his years of forced labor. He goes on to say that he is headed for Chita, some 800 kilometers away. When the commander asks for papers, Forell says that they are being sent to the town of Chita to prevent him from running away. The commander buys the story, assigns Forell to a train headed for Chita, and tasks him with working the brakes and keeping freeloaders off the train. His luck appears to be changing.

But Kamanev learns of Forell's whereabouts. He and a number of Red Army soldiers await Forell's arrival at the train station in Chita. As soon as Forell realizes his precarious position, Forell manages to escape once again, but not before the dog attacks Kamanev, who then wrestles with the dog before shooting it and giving Forell the time needed to get away. On the run, Forell stows away in the back of a Red Army supply truck. When one of the tires goes flat, the driver searches the truck bed for tools and a spare tire and discovers Forell hiding beneath a blanket. Threatened by the soldier, Forell defends himself by striking out against the driver, ultimately killing him.

After another marked lapse in time, Forell finds himself wandering a market somewhere near the Iranian-Russian border. Destitute, Forell is offered a chance to freshen up at the home of a local resident. Arriving at the stranger's home, Forell learns the man is a Polish Jew whose brothers died in concentration camps. The man can tell that Forell escaped a labor camp, and a poignant interaction transpires in which the Jewish man asks, "Were you in a camp?" ("*Waren Sie in Lager?*") Despite Forell being German, the Jewish man offers to help secure him a passport and travel papers so that he may leave the Soviet Union. Forell asks the man why he would do such a thing, to which the man responds by asking what Forell did when the Nazis killed so many of his Jewish brethren. Forell says that not all Germans knew what was happening to the Jews. The man agrees, citing that as a soldier, Forell only had his orders to follow and needed to protect German women and children.

The Jewish man then leaves Forell in his home, telling the POW to stay there while he retrieves the passport and paperwork needed for crossing into Iran. Upon his return, the Jewish man finds Forell cleaned up and dressed in disguise and comments that

people have to learn to trust one another again. Once more, Forell questions why the Jewish man would go to such lengths to help him. The man again responds with a question, asking Forell if he had a bad conscience for not helping the Jews when he had the chance. The Jewish man then tells Forell to think on that and figure out his conscience on his own.

By this time, Kamanev has figured out where Forell has been and where he is heading. So, while Forell successfully arrives at the Iranian border in August of 1952 and is given permission to cross, he comes face-to-face with the Soviet Lieutenant as he crosses the bridge between the Soviet Union and Iran. Kamanev steps aside, allowing Forell to pass into Iran and announcing his victory over the escaped POW. Once in Iran, Forell is imprisoned, and by December of 1952, he awaits execution for being considered a Russian spy. Forell has told the Iranian officials his impossible story from the beginning and in its entirety, which they understandably suspect as false. But before carrying out the death sentence, the Iranians bring in Forell's uncle to verify whether or not Forell is who he says he is. When Forell enters the room where his uncle sits with the Iranian official, he immediately recognizes him. His uncle, on the other hand, appears unsure as he comments that he has not seen Forell since 1937. With a family photo album in hand, Forell's uncle asks Forell to identify some of the photographs. When Forell correctly points out a picture of himself in his army uniform as one he gave his mother for her birthday in 1939, the uncle is convinced that the POW and suspected Russian spy truly is his nephew. By Christmas of 1952, Forell returns home, surprising his family by

showing up for the holiday service in the very church where his daughter had prayed to a statue of the Virgin Mary more than seven years earlier.⁴

Throughout *So weit die FüÙe tragen*, Germans appeared as victims of National Socialism in several different ways. Most obviously, Forell struggled to survive the harsh winter climate of Russia. Throughout his journey, the film frequently cut back to Forell's wife, daughter, and recently born son to show their relentless hope of his return. Without any news to the positive or negative, they kept their spirits up and wished for his safe return. As with all families awaiting the return of soldiers off fighting wars, the German family at home suffered the long absence of their husband and father as well as not knowing if he survived. The retribution of the Red Army for Nazi aggression also provided a source of German suffering in the film. Imprisoned in a forced labor camp with little hope of escape, Forell experienced hard physical labor and emotional distress, two aspects often connected to concentration camp inmates in other films and later likened to the experience of Jews by the Polish man Forell met in southern Russia. The exchange between Forell and the Polish man alluded to the psychological suffering caused by the persecution of the Jews and living with that reality in the postwar world. During their interaction, the Jewish character posed the question that Germans would face after the war: could blind obedience to a political regime excuse German soldiers and people from their responsibility for the persecution of Jews? The resulting discussion implied that Germans, though complicit in the victimization of European Jewry, also suffered because of National Socialism and Nazi expansionist aggression because they were often compelled to follow Hitler's orders.

⁴ *So weit die FüÙe tragen*, Directed by Hardy Martins, B&C Filmproduktion GmbH, Cascadeur Filmproduktion GmbH, and KC Medien, 2001.

In February of 2000, actor Bernhard Betterman, who played Clemens Forell in *So weit die FüÙe tragen*, sat down for an interview with *Der Spiegel*. He told the magazine that the new movie differed from its 1959 television predecessor by focusing more on Forell's suffering on the run in contrast to that of his family at home as well as the similarities in experience and motivation shared by the captor and escapee. Even though Josef Martin Bauer's book, published in 1954 with the same title, contained outdated language and imagery, the framework clearly provided filmmakers inspiration for the modern reinterpretation. What Betterman found fascinating about the page-to-script transformation was the POW's inherent will to survive and how powerful hope could be. He also noted that those who experienced the war and its aftermath shared little of their experiences with younger generations. His grandfathers, for example, both ended up prisoners of war in Russia but spoke nothing of the time they spent there in the years after the war. Similarly, his parents avoided discussing the National Socialist past.⁵ Movies like *So weit die FüÙe tragen* thus became a way for younger German generations to engage with the stories and wartime experiences of the older generations. They also provided actors, like Betterman, the opportunity to more fully explore their family's history.

Not all shared Betterman's perspective, however, and response to the film tended to be critical. The *Berliner Zeitung* criticized filmmakers for staging the film of German suffering as a Cold War spectacle with much pomp and circumstance but without

⁵ "Meine Großväter haben geschwiegen," *Der Spiegel*, February 28, 2000, *Spiegel Online*, <http://www.spiegel.de/spiegel/print/d-15807592.html>, Accessed January 30, 2014.

significant depth.⁶ In the struggle to survive on his epic journey across more than 14,000 kilometers, Forell became a victim-turned-hero and a German *Wehrmacht* soldier that audiences could root for, an aspect *Der Spiegel* found problematic. In addition, the reviewer from *Der Spiegel* thought the film based on the best-selling book by Bauer strained under its two-and-a-half hour running time, which only more clearly highlighted the superficiality of the narrative. The problem stemmed not from the subject matter, but from the director's lack of deeper analysis into the characters and their stories.⁷ At issue, then, was the film's tendency to provide audiences with two-dimensional characters without offering much historical contextualization, not how Germans themselves were portrayed as victims of National Socialism.

The problem of historicization appeared in other commentaries. Film reviewer Rainer Rother also thought the film lacked historical importance and emotion. While the critic felt *So weit die Füße tragen* benefited from its adventurous story and shooting locations, having been filmed in Belarus, Siberia, Uzbekistan, and Germany, the film remained a gamble because of its source material. Rother attributed the risk of the production to the massive technical undertaking of the 14,000 kilometer get away rather than the story itself, which focused on Clemens Forell's incredible escape from a Soviet POW camp. The resulting film, according to Rother, featured overbearing environments and a forced emotional perspective that were imposed on audiences. If that were not enough to make the film problematic, Rother additionally found the narrative a simple

⁶ "So weit die Füße tragen," *Berliner Zeitung*, December 27, 2001, *Berliner Zeitung Online*, <http://www.berliner-zeitung.de/archiv/so-weit-die-fuesse-tragen,10810590,9961644.html>, Accessed January 31, 2014.

⁷ "So weit die Füße tragen," *Der Spiegel*, December 22, 2001, *Spiegel Online*, <http://www.spiegel.de/spiegel/print/d-21057527.html>, Accessed January 30, 2014.

connect-the-dots framework, shuffling Forell from point A to point B to point C without adequately engaging with the context and impacts each experience had on the main character. For Rother, the story came together much too neatly like a connect-the-dots diagram. The reviewer cited the switching back and forth between Forell in Russia and his daughter at home in Bavaria as an example of how Martins simplified the story into one of German suffering for audiences. But by ignoring Forell's wartime actions, the movie transformed the soldier into a victim and the Soviet soldiers into brutish victimizers. What the film needed to be more successful, said Rother, centered on contextualization and the development of a story about Forell's wartime experience alongside that of his suffering wife and children at home in Germany. Because the characters appeared so neat and clichéd, the return of Forell at the movie's end forced an emotional response, argued Rother. The underlying tale of victimhood therefore overpowered the two-dimensional characters.⁸

Not all found the film to be overly superficial. As pointed out in a December 2001 article in *Die Welt*, the original 1959 film aired on television when Germany was still recovering from the war—a nation with a wounded soul, concerned with finding lost soldiers and forging a new beginning in the aftermath of World War II. The article maintained that one could not understand the emotion and happiness portrayed in the final scene of *So weit die FüÙe tragen* without the films and documentaries from the 1950s. During that decade, the experience of exile and displacement plagued many German families. By the end of the twentieth century, however, such stories felt out of place and time for many Germans. As *Die Welt* reported, Martins' movie brought the

⁸ "Seht ihr, wir sind imposant!" *Die Welt*, December 27, 2001, *Die Welt Online*, <http://www.welt.de/print-welt/article494542/Seht-her-wir-sind-imposant.html>, Accessed January 30, 2014.

postwar period of adjustment back to the attention of the German public, and the time had come after years of dealing with or avoiding the German wartime experience to stop politicizing the Nazi era. Doing so effectively turned the National Socialist past into an ideology of itself, argued *Die Welt*, complete with its own political influence and agenda. Ignoring history, however, was also not the answer. Instead, the article recognized that the descendents of displaced Germans and expellees once again enjoyed a sense of home in Germany, a current “anchor in space and time.”⁹ *So weit die FüÙe tragen* thus helped bring a part of the German wartime experience back into the forefront of cultural memory and reestablish the discourse of Germans themselves as victims of National Socialism.

So weit die FüÙe tragen, as a conventional adventure film, pushed the topics of fascism and war to the background in order to explore Clemens Forell’s journey from a Siberian labor camp to his Bavarian home. Because they based their film on a popular book of the 1950s, filmmakers blamed the movie’s lack of engagement with historical context on their source material. They concerned themselves with Forell’s personal experiences in the moment rather than showing how Forell behaved during the war and how the Soviets captured him. While noting the film’s technical merits and realistic environments, *Die Zeit* critic Georg Seesslen criticized the filmmakers of *So weit die FüÙe tragen* for not substantively developing characters beyond Forell’s struggle to get back to Germany. Seesslen argued that not exploring Forell’s larger role in the war ultimately portrayed Germans as the victims of a situation they placed themselves into. Furthermore, the news outlet challenged filmmakers to master their subjects in addition to their craft in order to piece together stories that would be technically impressive and

⁹ Original German text as printed: “...en Anker in Raum und Zeit.” “Knick in der Zeitachse,” *Die Welt*, December 31, 2001, *Die Welt Online*, <http://www.welt.de/print-welt/article495054/Knick-in-der-Zeitachse.html>, Accessed January 30, 2014.

rich in narrative while also offering an in-depth exploration of their characters. Film must, according to critic Georg Seesslen, marry history and entertainment through emotion in order to appropriately address the how and why of the past.¹⁰

One of the glories of film for *Der Freitag* contributor Matthias Dell is its ability to transport an audience back in time, when life seemed simpler and the world more beautiful. For Germany, however, looking back at the twentieth century often contradicted this romantic notion of the past. Instead of a dream world, therein lay a nightmare. Yet historical melodramas like *Anonyma – Eine Frau in Berlin* attracted large audiences precisely for that reason.¹¹ German wartime experience and suffering still enticed filmmakers in 2007, reported *Die Welt*. In June that year alone, movie studios planned to produce 19 movies dealing with some aspect of the past. Long considered a topic too sensitive for discussion in relationship to Nazi atrocities, the mass rapes carried out by the Red Army placed *Anonyma* alongside other recent films focusing on German themselves as victims of National Socialism.¹²

The film begins in April of 1945 with the Russian Army encircling Berlin and advancing quickly. As a journalist, the main character of *Anonyma – Eine Frau in Berlin* announces she has traveled Europe for 12 years, from Moscow to London and Paris. She tells the audience her name is unimportant, because she represents one of thousands of

¹⁰ “Verduss der Mitte,” *Die Zeit*, Decemer 27, 2001, *Zeit Online*, http://www.zeit.de/2002/01/Verduss_der_Mitte/komplettansicht, Accessed January 31, 2014.

¹¹ “Russen sehen sich an,” *Der Freitag*, October 23, 2008, *Der Freitag Online*, <http://www.freitag.de/autoren/der-freitag/russen-sehen-dich-an>, Accessed February 6, 2014.

¹² “Nazis sind überall, von Berlin bis in die Eigernordwand,” *Die Welt*, June 7, 2007, *Die Welt Online*, http://www.welt.de/welt_print/article926664/Nazis-sind-ueberall-von-Berlin-bis-in-die-Eigernordwand.html, Accessed February 6, 2014.

women who lived through the war's end in Berlin. The movie flashes back to well before the Russian onslaught. While preparing for an evening soiree, Anonyma's husband, Gerd, tells her that Germany correctly chose to push through Poland into Russia. At the party, Anonyma enthusiastically toasts the war effort and the Nazi regime as well as the German men fighting and about to fight the war abroad. The reality of war has not yet come to Berlin.

The film then cuts to a few years later. The Red Army blasts its way into Berlin, shrouding the city in the dust of exploding artillery and crumbling buildings. German civilians run through the streets, searching for shelter from the rain of debris. A shell explodes, destroying a building and a woman with it. Anonyma weaves her way through the rubble to an underground shelter. A man guarding the entrance warns entering civilians not to bring in weapons, because the Russians will shoot them if they do. An elderly woman comments that no one cares if they live or die. Another man complains about the Russians and their lack of sympathy for the poor, suffering German citizenry. The people taking shelter are booksellers, musicians, and widows. But that matters not, for they all must watch fellow Germans die and fight for a single jar of jam. Berlin, they say, is lost.

Pulling to a stop near the shelter, a division of the Red Army announces that all weapons must be turned into them. Seconds later, a German resistance force fires on the Russians from above; however, by this time, the Russians outnumber the Germans, and Red Army soldiers easily run through the buildings, quickly eliminating any German soldier still fighting and even some that are unarmed. With the *Reichstag* practically in sight, the Russians are ordered to stop and secure the flanks of other advancing units. One

soldier breaks into the shelter, shouting at the frightened Germans. Anonyma, who speaks Russian, asks what they want. The soldier invites them to come and eat, for the war is over. Two women exit the shelter, nervous and scared. Despite a tense exchange with a Soviet infantryman, they secure some potatoes without injury.

The Red Army, having liberated Berlin, celebrates its accomplishment. As soldiers retrieve women from the shelter for their own pleasure, Anonyma asks one why he would take an unwilling woman. The soldier replies by saying that those too willing are dirty. This momentary interaction allows the captive woman to run off, leaving Anonyma alone with the Russian soldier. She lures him into the back of the shelter, seeming to imply that she will help him. Instead, she shuts him into a room deep inside the underground shelter. She then seeks out a Russian commander for help, but all he says is that the soldiers are clean, implying the Germans having nothing to worry about. In the next scene, a different soldier grabs Anonyma and takes her off screen before raping her. Following this encounter, a widow from the shelter offers her a room in a relatively spared apartment. Anonyma is one of many German women living in the same building who suffer rape by Soviet soldiers. One fellow victim comments that she met a Russian soldier who told her that if the Red Army commits only half of the crimes against the German people that the German soldiers had against the Russians, no Germans would survive the war's end.

Russian soldiers raid the apartment building many times, all the residents scattering to avoid them. Soldiers rape most women they catch, no matter their age. The near continuous raids start to take an emotional toll on the residents, and one woman resorts to hanging herself. Others hide. Anonyma, on the other hand, refuses to hide or

run away, which only results in multiple rapes by multiple soldiers. Eventually, she decides to take more control of her situation by determining who takes her from that point on. She goes to see a Russian major and informs him of the raids and rapes. She tells him it is his duty to help her, but he seems not to care. So Anonyma turns to a lieutenant, asking him to help with traps set in the apartment. He agrees because she consents to have sex with him. The Russians come to the house, the lieutenant included, bringing food and alcohol. They joke, laugh, and have a generally good time. She and the lieutenant spend the night together, on her terms. The next day, the major visits the house unexpectedly. Anonyma prepares to have sex with him, undressing so that the major can see how she has been beaten and bruised. He turns and leaves.

The raping of German women continues, and Anonyma narrates that the German women were now practically Russian, adding that their husbands would not want them because they had been spoiled. The lieutenant returns sporadically and without much interest in Anonyma's well being, not the protector Anonyma wished him to be. Back at the Red Army encampment, soldiers brag about their conquest of German women and treasures. The major overhears their discussion, visibly troubled by their behavior. The next morning, the major returns to Anonyma's apartment with as big a breakfast any of the residents had seen or eaten in months. When one of the soldiers boasts about his feats, another tells him to be quiet and stop being rude to their German hosts. They drink to a new friendship between Russia and Germany, interrupted by a bevy of Red Army soldiers storming the complex in search of a young, armed German man who had stolen food. One of them in particular starts harassing several residents before the major orders him to stop. He asks Anonyma if anyone lives above them, to which she replies no. The

soldier refuses to believe her, damning her, Germany, and Berlin. On his way out, he grabs a middle-aged German man and beats his head against the wall. The major responds by beating the Russian soldier, but returns to see Anonyma. He asks her for a drink and kisses her before wrapping her in an embrace. She has found her protector.

Gradually, a new relationship forms between the soldiers and the apartment residents. The major dotes upon Anonyma, and she learns much about him. As the war continues, the German women begin taking specific soldiers as protectors, much like Anonyma, so they do not face multiple rapes from a bevy of soldiers. In a moment of vulnerability and without Russian soldiers in their presence, the women of the building sit around a table, chatting as friends, drinking wine, and joking about their situation and the various physical and emotional inadequacies of their Russian protectors. They survive by turning their situation into one more bearable.

In a tense scene, one of the residents seeks out Anonyma for help. She takes her to a different apartment where several Russian soldiers crowd around a table. The soldier asks Anonyma to translate for him as he recounts how German soldiers killed all of the children in his village when they invaded. They stabbed the children, grabbed them by the feet, threw them against the wall, and smashed their skulls. Anonyma exits the building, sitting on top a pile of rubble. There she contemplates what the soldier has just told her. When she meets up with the major again, he asks her what is wrong. She does not have time to reply before he runs off. News arrives that Hitler has committed suicide. Shortly thereafter, a German commander announces Hitler's suicide via loudspeaker and implores the Germans to stop fighting, because further resistance would only prolong the

suffering of Berlin's citizens. That night, the Russians celebrate their victory over Germany.

The war is over. More information surfaces about the German Wehrmacht's wartime behavior. Anonyma, cognizant of Nazi racial ideology, admits to not wanting to hear those facts now. She realizes, however, that war changes everything, even words. Love is not what it was. Just as Anonyma starts coming to terms with the possibility that Gerd would not return and she could live the rest of her life with the Russian major, he gets transferred elsewhere and Gerd returns. She confesses all to Gerd, handing him her diary to read. He notes her lack of shame, telling her she will never be clean again. She bikes off to fare the Russian major well. Before parting, she asks him, "How do we continue living?" ("Wie sollen wir leben?") The two part ways. Back at her apartment, she and Gerd struggle to put some order back into their lives. The war changes lives, and two days later, Gerd leaves. Anonyma admits she is not surprised. She goes about her days, attempting to normalize her life as the dust of war settles. The film closes by informing audiences: "When the original diary of *Anonyma – Eine Frau in Berlin* first appeared in Germany in 1959, the public rejected it. It disgraced German women. Shocked by the reaction of other women, the author prohibited further publication until her death. Even then she requested to be unnamed."¹³

The discussion of the sexual violence suffered by German women at the hands of Red Army soldiers proved a long lasting taboo in many respects because the Russian soldiers had experienced enormous suffering throughout the war. In addition, German

¹³ Translated from the original German text: "Als das Tagebuch Anonyma 'Eine Frau in Berlin' 1959 erstmals in Deutschland erschien, traf es auf empörte Ablehnung. Es sei eine Schande für die deutsche Frau. Von der Verachtung ihrer Zeitgenossen geschockt, hat die Autorin jede weitere Veröffentlichung bis zu ihrem Tode untersagt. Und auch danach sollte ihr Name ungenannt bleiben." *Anonyma – Eine Frau in Berlin*, Directed by Max Färberöck, Constantin Film Produktion, 2008.

men blamed the rapes on the German women and suffered the sexual violence as bystanders. Women, in turn, internalized their experiences, suffering two-fold. When people asked about those experiences in the postwar years, then, German women often refused as the pain of silence was, in ways, easier to bear in silence and alone than out loud among the condemnation of husbands, fathers, and brothers.¹⁴ Even in the West where one could talk about the rapes of countless women more openly, guilt and shame proved more powerful, and embarrassment prevented women from discussing their experiences. Harald Jähner, contributor for *Berliner Zeitung*, praised Hoss' performance as *Anonyma* as well as the film's ability to differentiate between Red Army ethnicities. Rather than lumping all troops as a uniform group, *Anonyma* distinctly identified several populations that made up the Soviet army, including Mongolians, Uzbeks, and Kazakhs. Another important aspect noted by Jähner was the film's honest showing of the German men who survived the war and refused to forgive their wives for being raped. Whether intentionally or not, they caused more suffering for the German women. Most importantly, perhaps, the author maintained that the movie changed how young Germans viewed the older generations in Germany.¹⁵ *Anonyma* communicated how the violence and aggression of the Nazi state turned against the Germans as the war came to an end.

Deutsche Welle reported *Anonyma – Eine Frau in Berlin* as the first German movie to center on the rape of German women during the final months of World War II. While the book upon which the movie was based received a negative response when it

¹⁴ "Die Bitterkeiten der Befreiung," *Der Freitag*, May 7, 2010, *Der Freitag Online*, <http://www.freitag.de/autoren/magda/die-bitterkeiten-der-befreiung>, Accessed February 6, 2014.

¹⁵ "Du. Ich. Abend.," *Berliner Zeitung*, October 22, 2008, *Berliner Zeitung Online*, <http://www.berliner-zeitung.de/archiv/max-faerberboecks--anonyma--nach-einem-tagebuch-ueber-die-vergewaltigungen-in-berlin-1945-du--ich--abend-,10810590,10594672.html>, Accessed February 6, 2014.

was first published in 1959, the 2003 reprint met wide success and became a bestseller. Before 2003, rape victims seldom shared stories of their experiences, especially in former East Germany where criticism of the Red Army was prohibited. In response to the 2008 cinematic interpretation, *DW* noted the film's mixed reviews. Some complained that the film was too sentimental and trivialized the past. Others complemented it for raising awareness of German women's wartime suffering and reasserting the alleged taboo into the discourse of collective memory. To address questions about the film's focus on sexual abuse committed by Soviets, *DW* pointed out that rape also occurred in the western territories occupied by the British, French, and Americans. Mass rape, however, was "particularly acute under [the] Soviet Army," and politician Jochen-Konrad Fromme commented, "63 years after the war, the fate and suffering of hundreds of thousands of German women is being acknowledged for the first time."¹⁶

Despite the dearth of media portrayals of the day-to-day experiences of German women during the last few months of the war, anyone growing up in postwar Berlin knew the signs left behind by the city's destruction, as *Der Spiegel* reported in October of 2008. Clues such as splintered doors, messages scrawled out in lipstick and hidden beneath carpeting, and awkward silences among older women hinted at experiences involving Russian soldiers. Women frequently appeared uncomfortable if conversation ever turned to the Red Army's Berlin arrival in the spring of 1945.¹⁷ When originally published in 1959, the diary sold poorly largely due to this general distaste among Germans to revisit

¹⁶ "Movie Sheds Light on Forgotten Post-War Rape Victims," *Deutsche Welle*, October 23, 2008, *Deutsche Welle Online*, <http://www.dw.de/movie-sheds-light-on-forgotten-post-war-rape-victims/a-3733531>, Accessed February 6, 2014.

¹⁷ "Taschenbuch-Bestseller: Rückkehr in die Ruinen," *Der Spiegel*, October 27, 2008, *Der Spiegel Online*, <http://www.spiegel.de/kultur/literatur/taschenbuch-bestseller-rueckkehr-in-die-ruinen-a-586859.html>, Accessed February 6, 2014.

that particular part of their past.¹⁸ The author of the book on which the movie was based, thought to be Marta Hillers, worked as a journalist for Nazi newspapers during the war. After the initial publication of the diary, the German people shied away from stories of sexual abuse and consequent victimization. Hillers therefore wished to remain anonymous, even in death, because of the taboo on wartime rape.¹⁹ Another reason the diary fared poorly upon its initial release, according to an article in *Die Zeit*, was because German women thought of their suffering as a form of penance for Germany causing the war. So, when victimization and suffering became politicized, responsibility for Nazi crimes and guilt for German aggression superseded personal experiences. Admitting or communicating grief beyond personal recognition then became socially unacceptable, and Germans avoided talking about their personal wartime experiences.²⁰ When Hillers died in 2001, her autobiography was reprinted in 2003 to popular acclaim, remaining in much estimation as the most authentic depiction of the mass rapes that took place among German women near the war's end.²¹

Nina Hoss, who played the lead role in *Anonyma*, shared her thoughts on the wartime experience of Berlin women in a 2008 interview with *Berliner Zeitung*. She talked about the relationship between German suffering and breaking down the walls of shame and embarrassment built up around memories of rape. Hoss said the film was not

¹⁸ "Vergewaltigungsdrama 'Anonyma': Tränen in rauchenden Trümmern," *Der Spiegel*, October 22, 2008, *Der Spiegel Online*, <http://www.spiegel.de/kultur/kino/vergewaltigungsdrama-anonyma-traenen-in-rauchenden-truemmern-a-585709.html>, Accessed February 6, 2014.

¹⁹ "ZDF zeigt Zweiteiler über Massenvergewaltigungen," *Die Welt*, May 6, 2010, *Die Welt Online*, <http://www.welt.de/fernsehen/article7498212/ZDF-zeigt-Zweiteiler-ueber-Massenvergewaltigungen.html>, Accessed February 6, 2014.

²⁰ "Flieh, wenn du kannst!," *Die Zeit*, December 16, 2008, *Die Zeit Online*, <http://www.zeit.de/2008/44/Rezension-Anonyma>, Accessed February 6, 2014.

²¹ "ZDF zeigt Zweiteiler über Massenvergewaltigungen," *Die Welt*, May 6, 2010, *Die Welt Online*, <http://www.welt.de/fernsehen/article7498212/ZDF-zeigt-Zweiteiler-ueber-Massenvergewaltigungen.html>, Accessed February 6, 2014.

about making Germans out to be victims. Rather, the film attempted to open lines of dialogue and encourage women to start talking about their wartime experiences. She also mentioned that the taking of Berlin represented an important victory for the Russians. They felt intense anger towards the Germans for atrocities committed against them earlier in the war. For Red Army soldiers, Berlin represented the ultimate prize of victory. Many soldiers saw the rape of German women well justified, and through scenes of sexual assault, the film communicated the psychological trauma inflicted upon the Soviets by Germans. Yet the rapes of women happened during this great time of mass suffering, and Hoss urged they must be talked about. She therefore hoped the film would incite debate and make audiences think about how war impacted the lives of women, not only in the German case highlighted in *Anonyma*, but in all women's experiences during all wars.²²

As with *So weit die Füße tragen*, the response to *Anonyma* featured criticism based on a perceived lack of historical contextualization and character analysis. For example, an article in *Der Freitag* maintained that what people saw was not as much a translation of the 2003 reprint of a Berlin woman's 1945 diary as it was trivializing and stereotyping of both Germans and Russians. Contributor Matthias Dell argued that by not directly engaging with the acts of rape on screen, Färberböck missed an opportunity to be thought-provokingly authentic, even if such violence would make audiences uncomfortable. Instead, history filled the film's background, always present but never truly challenging perceptions thereof.²³ Similarly, critic Joachim Kronsbein called

²² "Reißt alle Tabus wieder," *Berliner Zeitung*, October 23, 2008, *Berliner Zeitung Online*, <http://www.berliner-zeitung.de/archiv/die-schauspielerin-nina-hoss-ueber-massenvergewaltigungen-und-anonyma--reisst-alle-tabus-nieder,10810590,10594988.html>, Accessed February 6, 2014.

²³ "Russen sehen sich an," *Der Freitag*, October 23, 2008, *Der Freitag Online*, <http://www.freitag.de/autoren/der-freitag/russen-sehen-dich-an>, Accessed February 6, 2014.

Färberböck's cinematic interpretation of *Anonyma* a disappointment. The diary offered elaborate details about the Berlin woman's experience with the Red Army, and Kronsbein found the tale a little too elaborate. This caused Kronsbein, historians, and some filmgoers to question the book's validity. Kronsbein continued criticizing Färberböck for not allowing the audience to emotionally connect with the characters, arguing the director only engaged with them superficially and thus produced artificial characters and emotions. In contrast to the book, the film over-dramatized the relationship between Anonyma and the Russian major, which Kronsbein compared to a bizarre German-Russian Romeo and Juliet love tragedy. As the film wound to an end and Anonyma faced her future with her husband recently returned from fighting, Kronsbein felt the storytelling possibilities just beginning to open up. That was the German experience he longed for. He wanted Färberböck to explore how men and women learned to incorporate their disparate wartime experiences into their postwar lives in the face of loss, Allied occupation, and reconstruction.²⁴

Other reviewers questioned the larger trend to portray Germans as the victims of National Socialism. Bert Hoppe, writing for *Berliner Zeitung*, placed *Anonyma* among the dozens of other films and works of literature released during the 2000s that focused on German suffering. Hoppe credited Günter Grass' novel *Im Krebsgang* with initiating the renewed trend to explore German wartime victimization. He criticized literary and cinematic interpretations of the Nazi past for ignoring important historical context and scholarly research. He also challenged the claims made in films and books regarding the number of women raped. *Anonyma* presented that more than 100,000 Berlin women were

²⁴ "Vergewaltigungsdrama 'Anonyma': Tränen in rauchenden Trümmern," *Der Spiegel*, October 22, 2008, *Der Spiegel Online*, <http://www.spiegel.de/kultur/kino/vergewaltigungsdrama-anonyma-traenen-in-rauchenden-truemmern-a-585709.html>, Accessed February 6, 2014.

raped during the Soviet onslaught and occupation as incontrovertible truth. Without sufficient evidence to back up these claims, Hoppe said the number was too high. In terms of total rape victims, experts waffled between tens of thousands of rape victims and two million. Several Soviet soldiers testified they were under strict orders to treat civilians kindly. Yet Hoppe conceded that psychological demoralization and pent-up aggressive anger most likely led to soldier brutality. He nevertheless questioned the accuracy of reported numbers, subsequently finding the whole issue of widespread rape problematic. Hoppe then went on to equate assertions of Red Army mass rape with the continuation of Nazi propaganda, which he thought carried on a legacy of demonizing Russian people and therefore prevented serious, in-depth discussion of German as victims.²⁵

Not all found the attention to German suffering in *Anonyma* a critical issue. According to Hubertus Knabe, an author and director of the Hohenschönhausen police museum in Berlin, the historical fear of such discussions, and of rebranding German perpetrators as victims, had previously prevented the exploration of German women, children, and old men as victims of Soviet retribution and counterattack. Few people wanted to hear these stories during the postwar period, so the German women who suffered rape, left alone with their memories, internalized their experiences. Furthermore, potential Soviet war crimes were not up for discussion because of the horrible suffering exacted upon Russians by Nazi aggression. But rapes occurred regardless, Knabe reporting that five percent of babies born in Germany during the first half of 1946 had Russian fathers. He noted that the motivation to sexually abuse German women came

²⁵ “Ursachen der Gewalt,” *Berliner Zeitung*, October 29, 2008, *Berliner Zeitung Online*, <http://www.berliner-zeitung.de/archiv/neuere-forschungen-zeigen--es-gab-keine--systematik--hinter-den-massenvergewaltigungen-1945-ursachen-der-gewalt,10810590,10596244.html>, Accessed February 6, 2014.

from a sense among soldiers that they had been promised an opportunity to avenge their own suffering, but Stalin directed Red Army soldiers to treat the German people gently. The Soviet dictator feared that gruesome attacks against the German populace would motivate the *Wehrmacht* to continue fighting and lengthen the war. Yet a sense among soldiers that they had earned the right of revenge had already been established, so assaults continued. For Knabe, equating rape with retribution for crimes committed by Germans in Russia justified the behavior of some Red Army soldiers and also provided filmmakers a contextually appropriate avenue by which to approach German suffering. The reviewer thus praised *Anonyma* for its portrayal of the German and Soviet wartime experiences in Berlin during the war's final months.²⁶

Like Knabe, *Die Zeit* critic Evelyn Finger applauded *Anonyma* for its depiction of the confrontation between the citizens of Berlin and soldiers of the Red Army. In one of the film's most positive reviews, Finger called *Anonyma* a great film that succeeded at depicting German women as victims of rape without "demonizing" Soviet soldiers. She said that Färberböck ably captured the psychological effects imposed on the women of Berlin while the Red Army occupied the city. Recognizing *Anonyma* as one of the several recent German war films portraying Germans themselves as victims of National Socialism, Finger argued the film succeeded where other films had not. In particular, the movie made no hypocritical claims that it broke taboos or a politically induced silence. Instead, the film helped audiences understand why Germans were silent on the topic to begin with: men and women did not want to know what happened to one another during

²⁶ "Als die Russen kamen," *Berliner Zeitung*, October 25, 2008, *Berliner Zeitung Online*, <http://www.berliner-zeitung.de/archiv/aus-anlass-des--anonyma--films--ueber-die-sowjetischen-massenvergewaltigungen-in-deutschland-als-die-russen-kamen,10810590,10595464.html>, Accessed February 6, 2014.

the war, physically, emotionally, or psychologically. For Finger, *Anonyma*'s greatest accomplishment was that it matched the tone of the book on which it was based. She hoped the film would end the debate over the book's authenticity as she felt the intricate details mattered little when compared to the human experiences of German women and Russian soldiers, which she thought *Anonyma* captured.²⁷

In 2010, one of Germany's television channels, ZDF, nationally broadcasted *Anonyma – Eine Frau in Berlin*. *Die Welt* considered the topic of the more than two million German women raped by the Red Army one of the last great taboos regarding the National Socialist past for German families, even though the film was released in theaters two years earlier. As the newspaper reported, Max Färberböck and Catharina Schuchmann based their screenplay for the film on the diaries of a Berlin woman who meticulously wrote down her experiences with Red Army soldiers and rape between April and June of 1945. The translation from book to film met tempered criticism. The relationship between Anonyma and a Russian commander blossomed into one of mutual respect and unspoken love. In exchange for her company, the major supplied Anonyma with protection. *Die Welt* printed a review of Färberböck's film, commending his effort to approach the time and subject with authenticity while offering nothing more than a fictionalized version of the book. The reviewer commented that documentaries airing alongside the film provided audiences with important supplementary information about

²⁷ "Flieh, wenn du kannst!," *Die Zeit*, December 16, 2008, *Die Zeit Online*, <http://www.zeit.de/2008/44/Rezension-Anonyma>, Accessed February 6, 2014.

the German experience, proving that rape continued to pose significant problems in family dialogues about the past.²⁸

For decades, Germans who lamented their own suffering as they fled from the advancing Red Army met resistance because of the wider Nazi victimization of Jews, Soviets, Poles, Sinti/Roma, homosexuals, political dissidents, and people with mental or physical handicaps. Times began changing in the 2000s as Germans sought out representations of their wartime experience. The popularity of the miniseries *Dresden*, which aired on German television in 2006 and centered on a love affair between a member of the British Royal Air Force and a German woman amid the Allied bombings of the city, encouraged public television network ARD to produce another miniseries about the German wartime experience: *Die Flucht*. Screenwriter, producer, filmmaker, and historian Gabriela Sperl told *Berliner Zeitung* that she wanted the program to show how Germans refused to admit their impending defeat while the Nazi regime collapsed around them.²⁹ More than 13 million viewers tuned in to watch the second half of *Die Flucht* miniseries in March of 2007, a slight increase over the roughly 11 million who saw the first part. According to an article in *Die Welt*, viewership reached about 30

²⁸ “ZDF zeigt Zweiteiler über Massenvergewaltigungen,” *Die Welt*, May 6, 2010, *Die Welt Online*, <http://www.welt.de/fernsehen/article7498212/ZDF-zeigt-Zweiteiler-ueber-Massenvergewaltigungen.html>, Accessed February 6, 2014.

²⁹ “Die Stunde der Frauen,” *Berliner Zeitung*, March 2, 2007, *Berliner Zeitung Online*, <http://www.berliner-zeitung.de/archiv/historisch-korrekt--manchmal-zu-distanziert--der-zweiteiler--die-flucht--die-stunde-der-frauen,10810590,10459796.html>, Accessed February 6, 2014.

percent of the overall market, making *Die Flucht* the most watched and successful program on the public television network in ten years.³⁰

The miniseries begins in Germany during the summer of 1944. Lena, the countess of Mahlenberg, and her daughter Victoria make their way from Berlin to their native East Prussia. She wants to reconcile with her terminally ill father, Berthold von Mahlenberg. Eight years earlier, the two parted ways when Lena left East Prussia to raise her illegitimate daughter rather than marry Heinrich von Gernstorff, to whom Lena had long been betrothed. Upon their return to East Prussia, Berthold initially receives them poorly, holding on to old feelings and prejudices. To prove that she is a good daughter, Lena takes over management of the estate during the war and gets wrapped up in the practices of the nobility. One of the other nobles, Heinrich's brother, Ferdinand of Gernstorff, just returning from the East Front, deplores the ideological blindness of the German population. Traumatized by atrocities carried out by the *Wehrmacht*, he openly criticizes the behavior of German soldiers to the dismay of his brother and Nazi authoritarian father, Rüdiger. At the same time, a confident Lena rebels against the absurd commands of the military, committed to the rights of prisoners of war and forced laborers. She therefore wrestles with whether or not to marry Heinrich, but Ferdinand's suicide prevents a wedding.

Meanwhile, the battlefield moves closer to East Prussia. For Germany, tides turn and the war is as good as lost. Like most in that environment, Lena ignored the truth and inevitability of German defeat. But François Beauvais, a French POW working on the

³⁰ “‘Die Flucht’ wird zum Blockbuster für die ARD,” *Die Welt*, March 6, 2007, *Die Welt Online*, http://www.welt.de/welt_print/article747734/Die-Flucht-wird-zum-Blockbuster-fuer-die-ARD.html, Accessed January 31, 2014.

Mahlenerg farm, continues bringing attention to the approaching catastrophe. Between the two unlikely companions, a timid connection develops.

The second half of *Die Flucht* starts in January of 1945. The people remaining in East Prussia have little choice at this point. In order to survive, they must flee from the rapidly approaching Red Army. Berthold has a change of heart, forgives Lena, and transfers responsibility for the survival of their residents to her. The army has failed in their blind obedience to Hitler to evacuate the civilian population ahead of the Soviet attack, and although the *Wehrmacht* is ordered to punish and execute anyone attempting to escape East Prussia, Lena breaks out for the west in the dead of winter, leading the Mahlenberg tenants on a long trek with an uncertain future. The refugees, consisting mainly of women and children, face a merciless winter en route to Bavaria. In addition to caring for the well-being of those entrusted to her, Lena desperately searches for her daughter Victoria, who escaped earlier by hiding among the refugees following François.

Soon the Red Army soldiers invade East Prussia, looting villages and raping German women. In their forced retreat, the fanatical *Wehrmacht* soldiers mercilessly execute all remaining prisoners of war and deserters. Having left their homes behind, the Germans of East Prussia face difficult weather conditions and Russian retribution for Nazi aggression. A disillusioned Rädiger and his wife, Sophie, help reunite Lena with Victoria and François after a dramatic incident in which the refugees come under attack by the Red Army on their flight across a frozen lagoon. Several wagons led by horses and carrying the East Prussians' possessions sink through the weakened ice. A number of the escapees lose their lives after falling into the frigid water as well. Shortly thereafter Heinrich reappears along with his *Wehrmacht* unit. Despite current events, Heinrich

remains doggedly loyal to Nazi Germany. He thus joins the refugee trek as their uniformed companion and protector.

On the long and arduous path towards the west, Lena and François develop an ever-evolving relationship under the watchful eyes of Lena's husband-to-be, Heinrich. Lena's friend, Babette, warns her of the likely consequences of the pairing of Lena and the French POW. Acknowledging the reality of the situation and François' best chances for survival, Lena sends him away. In the spring of 1945, the East Prussian refugees finally arrive in Bavaria. After the grueling and deadly march, they meet resistance from Bavarians as they attempt to find new homes. Seemingly unwanted, the old social order of nobility dissolves. Lena finally decides against marrying Heinrich, who, unwavering in his loyalty, still believes in the ideology of the Nazis. Leaving her past behind, Lena tries to build a future out of the ruins of war, one day meeting François while he is working for the Allies in administering postwar Germany.³¹

How did *Die Flucht* show Germans as victims? The East Prussians who chose to flee westward left their established homes along with most of their possessions behind. After the war, they were unable to return to the east, in large part because the victorious powers redrew the map of Europe. The Allies divided up the lands acquired by Nazi expansion along with some territories part of Germany before the war and placed them inside neighboring countries, like Poland, Czechoslovakia, and the Soviet Union. Even before leaving East Prussia, the German people came under attack from both the Red Army and the *Wehrmacht*. As retribution for the physical and emotional destruction caused by the German invasion of Russia, Soviet soldiers pillaged German communities

³¹ *Die Flucht*, Directed by Kai Wessel, TeamWorx Produktion für Kino und Fernsehen GmbH, 2007.

and raped German women. The *Wehrmacht* received orders to resist and execute any soldier contemplating retreat. This particularly impacted the men in the eastern lands. Some chose to end their own lives rather than surrender to the Soviets or suffer the disgrace of cowardice attached to evacuation. On the journey to Bavaria, *Die Flucht* highlighted the difficulties German civilians faced during their escape. The harsh winter cold, constant threat of attack, and loss of friends and loved ones made the already difficult flight worse. On top of the emotional and physical demands related to the westward march, the Germans found themselves unwanted once they finally arrived in Bavaria. There, local residents received the refugees with general dislike and contempt. All struggled to come to terms with their new reality: the Third Reich had failed the German people, even if some fanatics, like Heinrich, failed to believe their own downfall. *Die Flucht* essentially showed how Germans themselves suffered because of the Nazi regime's imperialist and racist policies that landed them sandwiched between the Allied powers as the war came to a close.

The filmmakers behind *Die Flucht* marketed the miniseries as one of that year's most important television events. Director Kai Wessel told *Die Welt* that when creating the miniseries, he first and foremost thought about what the people experienced at the time, how they gave up everything as they fled, and how they left their homeland forever. Wessel admitted to having no previous knowledge of the German experience of expulsion and escape, despite his grandmother hailing from East Prussia. So, when screenwriter Gabriela Sperl presented him with her script for *Die Flucht*, Wessel developed an interest in exploring this part of German history; a part he thought had largely gone ignored based on his own lack of knowledge. Wessel falsely noted that the

subject of German victimhood went relatively unexplored, because many considered the theme superfluous during the time of rebuilding in the postwar period.³² The turn of the twenty-first century brought with it a renewed trend to reexamine the German wartime experience. In 2001, the ARD aired *Hitler's letzten Opfer (Hitler's Last Victims)* and ZDF showed *Die große Flucht (The Big Flight)*, while Günter Grass' novel, *Im Krebsgang (Crabwalk)*, examined how the sinking of the *Wilhelm Gustloff* impacted a fictional German family after the war. When asked why he claimed the topic of German suffering had been avoided for so long, Wessel could not come up with a distinctive answer. He thought perhaps studies mainly focused on German guilt and complicity rather than suffering. He also blamed the avoidance on equating the promotion of German expellee demands with far-right politics. Leftists and centrists wished to distance themselves from those on the right, so they denounced German victimization as a torch bared by the political right and neo-Nazis. Wessel thus hoped *Die Flucht* could help break this perceived taboo by disentangling wartime suffering from politicization.³³

In response to *Die Flucht*, *Die Welt* published some testimony taken during the 1950s. Germans who had survived the escape from East Prussia spoke to the Federal Minister of Expellees and Displaced Persons of their experiences. Hildegard Gabriel told officials the expellees were not allowed to discuss their expulsion. An East Prussian *Gauleiter*, or regional Nazi party leader, remembered requesting approval for his evacuation plans in August of 1944, well in advance of the Red Army's impending

³² Historian Robert G. Moeller, for example, details how Germans considered themselves as victims of National Socialism directly following the war and how that theme return post reunification in "Germans as Victims?: Thoughts on a Post-Cold War History of World War II's Legacies," *History and Memory* 17, no. 1-2 (2005), 145-94.

³³ "Deutsches Leid ins Bild gerückt," *Die Welt*, February 18, 2007, *Die Welt Online*, http://www.welt.de/wams_print/article722348/Deutsches-Leid-ins-Bild-gerueckt.html, Accessed February 5, 2014.

attack. German high command refused, informing Koch that any consideration of fleeing would be considered treason. By the end of August, refugees from territories further east started to arrive in East Prussia, and on January 12, 1945, the borders came under attack. The testimony contained many stories of the struggles Germans faced on the journey westward along the Baltic Sea—against the cold, against the wet, against the ice, and away from the Russian Army. Many of these particular refugees arrived in Schleswig-Holstein on March 28, 1945, exhausted and worn from their journey. When the Russians eventually made their way to Rössel in Schleswig-Holstein, their retribution continued in the form of rape, property destruction, and execution. As hard as they tried, *Die Welt* conveyed that the East Prussians could not escape the war.³⁴

Die Flucht centered on the destruction of the world of East Prussian nobility, as *Die Welt* pointed out. The filmmakers based their film on the works of historians Alexander Fürst Dohna-Schlobitten and Christian Graf von Krockow as well as documentary evidence of the expulsion taken during the 1950s. The article argued that because filmmakers approached expulsion from a documentary style point of view and depicted the suffering of Germans at the end of the Second World War, they broke several political and social taboos. But by using a fictionalized narrative, filmmakers could explore this part of the German wartime experience without posing serious moral dilemmas, like situating characters within their National Socialist context or identifying them as Nazi perpetrators. One way *Die Flucht* succeeded in avoiding such a conundrum revolved around a lack of positive male figures. Kellerhoff noticed that most men in the film appeared as ambivalent characters, whether soldiers or old men. Only the French

³⁴ “Weg durch das Tal des Todes,” *Die Welt*, March 3, 2007, *Die Welt Online*, http://www.welt.de/welt_print/article743756/Weg-durch-das-Tal-des-Todes.html, Accessed February 5, 2014.

POW, François, provided audiences with a sympathetic male character. Otherwise, the strong figures were all women: Lena, her daughter Victoria, and Sophie von Gernstorff. Kellerhoff maintained the film could not replace more serious analysis of the events taking place during the winter of 1945. He cited many scholarly books, documentaries, and exhibits that successfully explore the expulsion of Germans from the East, and hoped honest analysis and discussion of German expellees' suffering could continue, calling *Die Flucht* the first major feature film in many years to adequately deal with the subject and promote it for further exploration.³⁵

Much of the *Die Flucht*'s success was based on its ability to make a connection with audiences, especially those that lived through the flight from the east and their descendants. Author and *Die Welt* contributor Cosima Lutz eagerly anticipated the miniseries for that reason. After watching the first part, she was curious about the program's historical accuracy. She contacted her mother, who at the age of seven left her home in Silesia with her family and trekked westward. Lutz's mother confirmed that she experienced many similar hardships faced by the characters in the program. She warned her daughter the second half promised to be much more challenging for the characters and therefore the audience, too. Following their conversation, Lutz inferred that *Die Flucht* must have depicted the expulsion fairly accurately. Had it contained historical or emotional inaccuracies, her mother would not have endured the first half of the miniseries.³⁶ For Cosima Lutz and her mother, *Die Flucht* provided a point of discussion about Germany's past and a way for the Cosima to learn about her mother's life.

³⁵ "Die Stunde der Frauen," *Die Welt*, March 2, 2007, *Die Welt Online*, <http://www.welt.de/fernsehen/article741584/Die-Stunde-der-Frauen.html>, Accessed February 5, 2014.

³⁶ Silesia was a central European territory that currently lies along the border of Poland and the Czech Republic. "Wie die Flucht aus Schlesien wirklich war," *Die Welt*, March 5, 2007, *Die Welt Online*,

While Lutz's mother seemed drawn to *Die Flucht*, the risk of triggering unhappy memories prevented others from watching the miniseries. While on the phone one evening, journalist Romanus Otte learned that his mother could not bear to watch *Die Flucht*. For her, the memories of her own experience of fleeing remained too painful, and the film promised to be too difficult to watch. When she asked him how the film was, Otte told her that, "Well made, convincingly told, balanced, impressively filmed, but not brutal. But it really was not based on my experiences."³⁷ This led him to write his mother a letter, discussing how the film changed his view of the past. He remarked that the time was right for such a film to appear, because the film sparked important discussion about the long-standing taboo over German suffering. He felt ashamed not knowing what the expulsion was like for his parents and grandparents, wondering why he had not listened more to his grandmother while she was still alive. When considering why suffering remained a hotbed for debate, Otte admitted that in the past, most Germans focused on Nazi perpetrators, and, even more than survivors, wished to avoid the truth of their parents' and grandparents' wartime experience and likely Nazi involvement. They wanted to move beyond their historical legacy. In so doing, however, Otte maintained that they failed to understand the sacrifices made by family members. He closed his letter

<http://www.welt.de/fernsehen/article746233/Wie-die-Flucht-aus-Schlesien-wirklich-war.html>, Accessed February 5, 2014.

³⁷ Translated from the original German text: "Gut gemacht, schlüssig erzählt, ausgewogen, beeindruckende Bilder, hart, aber nicht brutal. Doch wirklich berührt habe er mich nicht." "Brief an meine Mutter zu 'Die Flucht,'" *Die Welt*, March 11, 2007, *Die Welt Online*, <http://www.welt.de/debatte/kolumnen/Freiheit-die-ich-meine/article6056582/Brief-an-meine-Mutter-zu-Die-Flucht.html>, Accessed February 6, 2014.

by imploring his mother to watch *Die Flucht* one day, if only so that she might open up to him and tell the story of her own experience.³⁸

Understanding the experiences of the older generations of Germans also motivated actor Maria Furtwängler to play the lead role of Lena von Mahlenberg in *Die Flucht*. She told *DW* that she hoped *Die Flucht* would inspire dialogue between younger and older generations about the past. Germans two or more generations removed from the war could learn much from their ancestors' experiences.³⁹ Furthermore, in an interview with *Die Welt*, Furtwängler noted that the flight of the refugees had not been adequately covered during her education, and she knew little of their story. She was, however, familiar with the requests of expellees to receive official recognition of their suffering and the fears among foreign governments that refugees sought to reacquire lost territories. Like Romanus Otte, Furtwängler thought the time was right to further engage in the discussion of German suffering through the experiences of the expellees. She hoped *Die Flucht* would encourage long-silent Germans to share stories of their wartime experiences, particularly the women raped by the victors. Careful not to place too much stock in German suffering, Furtwängler noted that the miniseries focused on individual suffering as an extension of the Soviet response to Nazi war crimes. She also thought that East Prussian women inadvertently found themselves wrapped up in the effects of losing the war. During most of the war years, the war seemed to take place far away for women. Men, on the other hand, witnessed the horrors of war first hand, many losing their lives in

³⁸ "Brief an meine Mutter zu 'Die Flucht,'" *Die Welt*, March 11, 2007, *Die Welt Online*, <http://www.welt.de/debatte/kolumnen/Freiheit-die-ich-meine/article6056582/Brief-an-meine-Mutter-zu-Die-Flucht.html>, Accessed February 6, 2014.

³⁹ "Debate Ensues After WWII Drama Shows Germans as Victims," *Deutsche Welle*, March 5, 2007, *Deutsche Welle Online*, <http://www.dw.de/debate-ensues-after-wwii-drama-shows-germans-as-victims/a-2374468>, Accessed February 6, 2014.

battle.⁴⁰ An inter-generational dialogue about the German wartime experience thus seemed to be lacking, particularly when involving escape and expulsion.

Along with Furtwängler, Nico Hoffman, one of the series' producers, thought *Die Flucht* an important bridge between generations of Germans. In a March 2007 interview, Hoffman commented that former historical taboos had started to fade, thus allowing the filmmakers to engage with memories that once proved too painful or internationally sensitive. He noted that the film inspired audiences to reflect inwardly on the German experience during the last months of the war, when the Third Reich crumbled from inside and out. When the miniseries aired, the generation of Germans entering their 30s held no personal connections to the expulsion itself, and *Die Flucht* offered them an avenue to engage in an inter-generational dialogue about the older generation's personal experiences during the expulsion. Hoffman said, "People want to understand their own family's history even when it involved suffering."⁴¹ Other miniseries, like *Stauffenberg*, *Nicht allen waren Mörder* (*Not All Were Murderers*), and *Dresden*, also showed Germans as victims, stories that up until the 2000s rarely got made. Throughout much of the postwar twentieth century, the producer mentioned that Germans were often saddled with guilt or sought atonement for their country's wartime aggression. In light of the international fears incited by the film, Hoffman thought it important to communicate that *Die Flucht* should not be viewed as a revanchist work, nor was the film meant to inspire

⁴⁰ "Wir können von preußischen Werten lernen," *Die Welt*, March 2, 2007, *Die Welt Online*, <http://www.welt.de/fernsehen/article741448/Wir-koennen-von-preussischen-Werten-lernen.html>, Accessed February 5, 2014.

⁴¹ Translated from the original German text: "Die Menschen wollen nur die Anerkennung ihrer eigenen Lebensgeschichte, auch wenn sie mit Leid gekoppelt ist." From the article "Das ganze Ausmaß des Schreckens zeigen," *Die Welt*, March 3, 2007, *Die Welt Online*, <http://www.welt.de/vermischtes/article743117/Das-ganze-Ausmass-des-Schreckens-zeigen.html>, Accessed February 5, 2014.

revanchist movements. Instead, the film was important because it portrayed the German experience as lived, which necessarily included crimes committed by the *Wehrmacht*. One problem with the film's version of the past stemmed from what *Die Welt* noted as a tendency among audiences to equate historical entertainment with history itself. Hoffman disagreed, however, saying that rather than posing as legitimate lessons in history, fictional programs served as doors to historical topics and themes, inspiring audiences to engage with the legacies of their own past. And when academic historians like Hans Mommsen, Peter Steinbach, and Richard Overy criticized *Die Flucht*, Hoffman found their reaction puzzling. They should acknowledge the point, according to Hoffman, that *Die Flucht* was a television program and not an academic manuscript.⁴²

The recognition and discussion of German wartime suffering found some support within German society. In an example of selective memory reminiscent of director Kai Wessel, *DW* reported that Germans had long avoided the topic following the war's end, which made *Die Flucht* unique. For some, the fact that the miniseries focused on the flights from the east earned it high praise. Among the Germans praising the film for its thematic elements was a German Protestant church leader, Margot Kässman. Debate over the German avoidance of this part of their history centered on comparing the sufferings of ethnic groups or nationalities to one another. Who suffered more – Jews or Soviets? Poles or Soviets? Poles or Jews? Can Germans themselves fit into this discussion? This bid for victimhood prompted Kässman to comment that, “No one wants to offset one side's suffering against the other...But reconciliation will only be possible when those guilty

⁴² “Das ganze Ausmaß des Schreckens zeigen,” *Die Welt*, March 3, 2007, *Die Welt Online*, <http://www.welt.de/vermischtes/article743117/Das-ganze-Ausmass-des-Schreckens-zeigen.html>, Accessed February 5, 2014.

acknowledge their crimes and victims get a chance to tell their stories.”⁴³ In essence, Kässman advocated for the recognition of German suffering as a way to engage with the past rather than as a way to devalue the suffering of other peoples. Along with a return to seeing Germans as the victims of National Socialism, then, Kässman returned to a discourse popular in the immediate postwar period as Germans divorced themselves from Nazis. In this line of defense, Nazis were guilty and responsible for wartime crimes and atrocities while the German people were innocently and unwittingly caught up in something they did not understand.

Exploring the German experience through individual suffering found proponents beyond Kässman. According to *Die Welt*, nearly one in three Germans either knew someone who fled the eastern lands ahead of the Red Army or experienced the flight themselves. Roughly 24 percent of Germans under the age of 30 could link their families’ past experiences to the relocation of refugees, two million of which lost their lives between 1944 and 1945. Despite these statistics and the far-reaching impacts of the expulsion, journalist Sven Felix Kellerhoff asked whether or not a fictional television series could show the suffering of the German people, ultimately acknowledging they could and should. He commended director Kai Wessel for approaching *Die Flucht* without weighing the film down with questions of morality. Instead, Kellerhoff thought Wessel honestly depicted the experiences of Germans and Russians alike, where the definitions of victim and victimizer existed in gray areas. Kellerhoff cited as examples the scenes in which the *Wehrmacht* executed prisoners of war before retreating, the Russian attack resulted in numerous civilian deaths, Red Army soldiers raped women,

⁴³ “Debate Ensues After WWII Drama Shows Germans as Victims,” *Deutsche Welle*, March 5, 2007, *Deutsche Welle Online*, <http://www.dw.de/debate-ensues-after-wwii-drama-shows-germans-as-victims/a-2374468>, Accessed February 6, 2014.

and some German men not wanting to fight any longer or fearful of the Red Army chose to end their lives instead.⁴⁴ Beyond merely depicting Germans as victims, then, *Die Flucht* also showed Germans as perpetrators and as existing somewhere between the two designations.

Der Spiegel contributor Nicolaus von Festenberg also praised the film, saying the two-part ARD miniseries succeeded in partly reclaiming a positive German reputation related to the country's wartime history. Expulsion and escape spent a long time as topics of taboo in Germany, and for good reason according to Festenberg. There had to be respect for the victims of Auschwitz and for the 20 million Soviet victims of Nazi wartime aggression. The leftist aversion to engage with the experiences of German wartime suffering also contributed to the sensitivity among various groups to evade the discourse of Germans-as-victims. Filmmakers understood this ever-present problem and therefore wanted to avoid showing Germans as innocent victims of the Red Army while also depicting the difficulties people faced when fleeing the east. While cut and dry scenes of evil conveyed a sense of reality, Festenberg found the film's portrayal of the gray areas between perpetrator and victim poorly defined, resulting in rather unbelievable characters. The good remained unquestionably good while the bad stayed bad, no one behaving in a way that would betray their morally defined characters. And while movies could not replace history, Festenberg argued they could approach the past in novel and useful ways. The job then resets on the viewer to differentiate between historical truth and cinematic fiction.⁴⁵

⁴⁴ "Die Stunde der Frauen," *Die Welt*, March 2, 2007, *Die Welt Online*, <http://www.welt.de/fernsehen/article741584/Die-Stunde-der-Frauen.html>, Accessed February 5, 2014.

⁴⁵ "Adel verdichtet," *Der Spiegel*, February 26, 2007, *Spiegel Online*, <http://www.spiegel.de/spiegel/print/d-50666745.html>, Accessed February 6, 2014.

Not all response to *Die Flucht* was positive. Historian Michael Stürmer argued that the alleged claims by reporters and filmmakers that *Die Flucht* broke taboos about showing Germans themselves as victims of National Socialism were false. He thought such remarks disregarded the work previously conducted by others, historians included. He especially criticized marketers, because they justified the making of *Die Flucht* by exaggerating the film's attempt to break through taboos that Stürmer thought no longer existed. At war's end, Germans considered themselves willing or unwilling instruments of the Third Reich and viewed the Allied powers as saving them from their misjudgments in following Hitler, according to Stürmer. While some praised *Die Flucht* as an important step in *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*, particularly because the film balanced the criminality of Nazis with atrocities committed by the Red Army, Stürmer saw the whole production as an overhyped, misdirected attempt to force German suffering to the surface of the discourse of National Socialist victims.⁴⁶

Christan Buß, writing for *Der Spiegel*, charged *Die Flucht* with perpetuating dangerous stereotypes. The film showed men as selfish, weak, and fearful, stubbornly holding onto their ambitions to the point of death. Women appeared strong and selfless, able to emotionally handle the suffering brought unto them by war. For Buß, *Die Flucht* offered further proof that German film and the Third Reich did not pair well with one another. He thought proper films required someone the audience could root for, a hero of sorts, but searching for such figures in Germany's National Socialist past proved troublesome, because they did not exist or should not be highlighted in the face of Nazi atrocities. As such, *Die Flucht* continued the legacy of showing East Prussians as

⁴⁶ “‘Die Flucht’ – besonders vor einigen Wahrheiten,” *Der Freitag*, March 16, 2007, *Der Freitag Online*, <http://www.freitag.de/autoren/der-freitag/die-flucht-besonders-vor-einigen-wahrheiten>, Accessed February 6, 2014.

stereotypically bound by a sense of duty to obey authority, allowing them to appear heroic despite their attachment to National Socialism. Buß also critiqued *Die Flucht* for perpetuating the stereotype of a simple East Prussian worldview in which the categories of good and evil could be easily defined. The film's main characters thus came out of their experiences untouched by the emotional turmoil of guilt related to Germany's responsibility for wartime aggression. The stereotypes extended beyond East Prussians, noted Buß. *Die Flucht* played on common misconceptions of Soviet discontentment by introducing a Russian character that would rather live under Nazi German rule than communist Soviet rule.⁴⁷ One of the largest obstacles to portraying Germans as victims of National Socialism, particularly in the case of escape and expulsion, resulted from the threat such discourse placed on Germany's eastern neighbors.

Because the film blurred the lines between victim and perpetrator and focused on the German refugee experience, the film instigated skeptical response from outside of Germany. Whereas German officials touted the miniseries as an integral part of dealing with the National Socialist past, Polish Prime Minister, Jaroslaw Kaczynski, issued concerns about the historical dramatization. He thought the drama revisionist and a threat to the stability of Poland and Europe as a whole, saying "Any attempt to revise the history of World War Two needs to be watched carefully."⁴⁸ The *Berliner Zeitung* reported that the Russian president asked Maria Furtwängler to apologize for speaking out against the rape of German women by the Red Army. He felt her speech dishonored

⁴⁷ "Zweiteiler: 'Die Flucht': Go West, Gräfin!," *Der Spiegel*, March 2, 2007, *Spiegel Online*, <http://www.spiegel.de/kultur/gesellschaft/zweiteiler-die-flucht-go-west-graefin-a-469480.html>, Accessed February 6, 2014.

⁴⁸ "Debate Ensues After WWII Drama Shows Germans as Victims," *Deutsche Welle*, March 5, 2007, *Deutsche Welle Online*, <http://www.dw.de/debate-ensues-after-wwii-drama-shows-germans-as-victims/a-2374468>, Accessed February 6, 2014.

the memory of the men who risked their lives to liberate Europe from National Socialism and free the German people from Hitler's oppressive regime. This exchange prompted journalist Klaudia Wick to observe a generational trend among the *Spätgeborenen*, or those that were born after 1970, to explore the National Socialist past in search of the German experience. These historical explorations often engaged with suffering, focusing on the representation of ancestors as victims rather than perpetrators. The paradox, according to Wick, was that the Germans brought much higher levels of suffering to Soviets in numbers alone, leaving roughly 20 million dead and the land ruined, not to mention the millions of Jewish victims killed in concentration camps. Wick thought Furtwängler would have been better to recognize the suffering of the Germans as a result of Nazi aggression and in relation to atrocities rather than focusing on an isolated individual experience largely disconnected from its historical context.⁴⁹

The issue of the German expulsion created a specific discourse and debate between Germany and Poland about how to present this part of the two countries' shared past. A traveling exhibit from Poland that explored authoritarianism and dictatorship was set to visit Berlin in 2006. The exhibit focused on Polish victims of the Holocaust and Soviet oppression while also planning to incorporate the Polish experience living under German rule after the invasion. This aspect threatened to jeopardize the exhibit's visit to Berlin. At issue was the experience of German refugees who, ahead of the advancing Red Army, fled East Prussia. As *Die Flucht* made audiences aware of the expulsion and rekindled interest in the cultural memory thereof, even if over dramatically, the Polish government disliked the use of the word *Vertreibung*, or expulsion, in reference to the

⁴⁹ "Falscher Eindruck unter den Spätgeborenen erweckt," *Berliner Zeitung*, March 10, 2007, *Berliner Zeitung Online*, <http://www.berliner-zeitung.de/archiv/falscher-eindruck-unter-den-spaetgeborenen-erweckt,10810590,10462160.html>, Accessed February 6, 2014.

German experience. Germans equated the term with their own victimization, which Poles found problematic when contextualizing the aggression and atrocities caused by Germany. Historian Peter Steinbach, director of the German Resistance Memorial in Berlin, viewed the possible delayed opening of the Polish exhibit in Berlin with concern. He commented that the German public supported an exhibit about European dictatorships, and Poland should not be deterred in their quest to confront German audiences with this portion of their shared history. Expulsions resulting from such political autocracies were integral in the creation of European societies. Steinbach argued that the Polish perspective would be new for Germans born in the last 30 years and therefore an important way for the public to engage with its National Socialist past.⁵⁰

German talk show host Sabine Christiansen also fueled the debate between Germany and Poland. Following the broadcast of *Die Flucht*, Christiansen held a panel discussion entitled “Flucht, Vertreibung – Versöhnung?” (Escape, Expulsion – Reconciliation?) After showing guests one episode of the ARD miniseries, Christiansen facilitated a discussion about German-Polish relations with officials from both countries. To get the Polish perspective, Christiansen invited Marek Cichocki, who at the time served as advisor to the President of Poland. Speaking for Germany was Egon Bahr, the former West German Foreign Minister credited by *Die Welt* with easing West German relations during the Cold War. Cichocki and Bahr disagreed on a number of topics, Cichocki at one point commenting on his status as an outsider: a Polish official on a German talk show, debating with a former German politician before a German audience.

When the League of Expellee’s president Erika Steinbach’s name entered the

⁵⁰ “Geschichtsbild, aus dem Boden gestampft,” *Die Welt*, March 7, 2006, *Die Welt Online*, http://www.welt.de/welt_print/article749695/Geschichtsbild-aus-dem-Boden-gestampft.html, Accessed January 31, 2014.

conversation, Cichocki remarked that the problem concerning the discourse over the expulsion at war's end revolved around how to talk about it, not if such conversation was possible. Steinbach and the League of Expellee's controversial Berlin exhibit dealing with the expulsions portrayed in *Die Flucht* prompted headlines in Poland as an attempt by the Germans to revise history. And while Cichocki found *Die Flucht* interesting, he worried that telling the story from an individual point of view threatened to weaken or even eliminate the historical context. He thought presenting Germans themselves as victims of this time period overlooked the bigger picture. Yes, German people fled from the advancing Red Army, but the question remained why did they need to? That point figured heavily into the contextualization of *Die Flucht* regardless of the film's perspective, and Cichocki felt it paramount to the wider discussion and understanding. For Bahr, however, Cichocki's comments frustrated him. He responded by saying, "History is history, it is not possible to alter it. All we can do is accept it."⁵¹ Bahr went on to argue that Germany and Poland should ally with one another more strongly, remarking that Poland had nothing more to fear from its western neighbor. Yet *Die Welt* reported that Poland and its people remained skeptical. Christiansen then stepped in, bringing Tatjana Dönhoff, one of the writers behind *Die Flucht*, to the discussion. Dönhoff added that worrying about who did what to whom in the past had little to do with contemporary Europe's present and future, Poland included. Regardless of the past, according to Dönhoff, "One cannot disregard personal suffering."⁵²

⁵¹ Translated from the original German text: "Die Geschichte ist die Geschichte, sie ist nach trüglich nicht mehr zu ändern und wir können sie nur akzeptieren." From the article "Sabine Christiansen auf der Flucht," *Die Welt*, March 5, 2007, *Die Welt Online*, <http://www.welt.de/fernsehen/article746197/Sabine-Christiansen-auf-der-Flucht.html>, Accessed February 5, 2014.

⁵² Translated from the original German text: "Persönliches Leid kann man nicht aufrechnen." From the article "Sabine Christiansen auf der Flucht."

Between twelve and fifteen million Germans fled their eastern homelands as the war came to an end, finding new homes in northern and western Germany after leaving their established communities in the east. *Die Flucht* highlighted the suffering of German civilians amid fictitious individual stories, like that of Lena von Mahlenberg. Following the escape, 15.5 percent of the escapees ended up in Lower Saxony, while 7.2 percent found themselves in Schleswig-Holstein, according to *Die Welt*. The influx of refugees drastically increased local populations, further straining the infrastructure and resources of war-torn Germany. As the permanence of the relocated Germans became clear, tensions rose as residents had to make room for the expellees. Quoting a 1946 study, *Die Welt* reported that many refugees suffered malnutrition during and after their journey, and even after the physical impacts of the expulsion were overcome, psychological effects often lasted decades. To support this claim, the news outlet looked at a study conducted by the Psychological Institute of the University of Hamburg in 1999. According to the study's findings, 62 percent of refugees still suffered psychological trauma in ways similar to posttraumatic stress disorder with high levels of anxiety, disturbing dreams, and vivid flashbacks. Their research also determined that 82 percent of expellees went hungry while on the run, as many as 70 percent nearly died from artillery shells or bombs, and more than half confessed to having been raped by Russian soldiers.⁵³ In this case, *Die Welt* appeared to support the trend among the arts during the 2000s to reengage with the National Socialist past by highlighting the ways in which Germans suffered, just short of labeling them victims.

⁵³ "Die Flucht in eine ungewisse Zukunft," *Die Welt*, March 4, 2007, *Die Welt Online*, <http://www.welt.de/regionales/hamburg/article745742/Die-Flucht-in-eine-ungewisse-Zukunft.html>, Accessed January 31, 2014.

In a March 2008 article for *Der Freitag*, journalist Fritz Wolf took a skeptical look at entertainment based on history, or what he termed “histotainment.” During the first decade of the twenty-first century, Wolf noted that German film, literature, and television increasingly began to engage with collective memory and present people with an opportunity to relive the nation’s past through popular culture. Even though the works fell into the genre of historical fiction, audiences looked to them for historical truth. Movie production companies subsequently found history attractive not because they wanted to explore the past with accuracy and preciseness, but because they attracted large audiences and produced emotional responses that were, at times, also political. Wolf thought media productions served as a mirror for National Socialist memory revisionism, sometimes even acting as an agent of revision. He still thought that the popularity of historical film possessed some merit. Despite their fictional narratives, the movies offered lessons about the past as well as the German experience; however, the question remained for Wolf, what role should “histotainment” play in historical education? After all, the marriage of history and entertainment often produced revised or completely reinvented versions of the past. Defending history through politics, concluded Wolf, thus became more urgently needed than ever.⁵⁴

For filmmakers, actors, politicians, and audiences, films that engage with the National Socialist past posed a specific set of problems. That *So weit die FüÙe tragen*, *Anonyma – Eine Frau in Berlin*, and *Die Flucht* portrayed Germans themselves as victims of National Socialism and subsequently caused much debate and discussion proved as much. Despite their political and moral quandaries (or perhaps because of

⁵⁴ “Nachstellungen überall,” *Der Freitag*, March 14, 2007, *Der Freitag Online*, <http://www.freitag.de/autoren/der-freitag/nachstellungen-uberall>, Accessed February 6, 2014.

them), the films garnered large audiences. By combining history with entertainment, these three films joined a long list of German films that encouraged the exploration of past experiences and cultural memory. And even if their historical accuracy missed the mark and did not truly break social taboos, they prompted a new generation of Germans to question their distant connections to the past and search for representations of the wartime experiences of Germans themselves.

Conclusion

As journalist Andreas Tzortzis noted in a January 2005 article for *Deutsche Welle*: “At a time in Europe when English princes are wearing Nazi uniforms at costume parties and Jewish groups are sounding alarm at an increase in Anti-Semitism, the need to sensitize current and coming generations is obvious. To do that in a way that doesn’t alienate young Germans, or blame them in any way, has been one of the country’s most difficult challenges.”¹ Popular films that deal with the German wartime experience provided one way to satisfy this need. By engaging with the National Socialist past from the non-Jewish German perspective, *Sophie Scholl – Die letzten Tage*, *Napola – Elite für den Führer*, *Der Untergang*, *So weit die Füße tragen*, *Anonyma – Eine Frau in Berlin*, and *Die Flucht* offered general audiences, and particularly the *Spätgeborenen*, a new wave of cinematic interpretations of Germany’s history. The films allowed people to see how their ancestors’ experiences fit alongside those of the targeted victims of National Socialism, despite the gradual acceptance among German historians, politicians, and people of responsibility and guilt for the suffering caused by Nazi persecution. In fact, most of the films depicted German suffering while also acknowledging that many Germans supported Hitler’s Third Reich. The theme of German victimhood within these six movies thus mirrored and contributed to the discursive trends that had reemerged and gained acceptance within wider German society in the second decade after reunification.²

¹ In the mid-2000s, paparazzi captured images of England’s Prince Harry dressed in a Nazi brown-shirt costume, complete with swastika armband. The photographs caused considerable controversy, and Harry was criticized for his insensitive disregard of the crimes and atrocities committed by the Third Reich. “Keeping the Holocaust relevant,” *Deutsche Welle*, January 26, 2005, *Deutsche Welle Online*, <http://dw.de/p/6A6V>, Accessed February 19, 2014.

² Gilad Margalit, *Guilt, Suffering, and Memory: Germany Remembers Its Dead of World War II*, trans. Haim Watzman, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2010), 293.

Between the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1990 and the turn of the twenty-first century, Germany achieved great strides in official recognition and memory of the demons of its past. The Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe opened in the heart of Berlin in the spring of 2005, for example, and provided evidence of Germany's acknowledgement of the suffering caused to the Jewish victims of the Holocaust. To many people, both inside and outside the country, Germany appeared to have come to terms with its Nazi past. Today, the memorial continues to symbolize the great distance the country has traveled in confronting the crimes connected to the Third Reich's historical legacy. Sachsenhausen Memorial and Museum offers another example of Germany's long process of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*. These facilities commemorate their evolving history from Nazi-era concentration camp to Soviet POW internment camp to a site of neo-Nazi vandalism following Germany's reunification. Located slightly north of Berlin in what was to become East Germany, the Sachsenhausen concentration camp was liberated by Russian and Polish soldiers in 1945. During their occupation, the Soviets transformed the location into a special camp of their own and added to the numerous casualties caused by the Nazis between 1936 and 1945. Following the abandonment of the camp by the Soviets in the 1950s, East German officials decided to turn Sachsenhausen into a memorial. After completion of the memorial in 1961, the site became the Sachsenhausen National Memorial, which commemorated the communist victims of fascism until reunification. A museum was added in 1993, and today the Sachsenhausen Memorial and Museum looks back at the camp's history, attending to the horrors committed by the Nazi administration as well as the experiences of those imprisoned by the Soviets.³ The memorial thus incorporates all of its previous

³ Brandenburg Memorials Foundation, *Memorial and Museum Sachsenhausen*,

incarnations, presenting the various experiences inside the camp as well as its life as a National Memorial under the communist regime of East Germany. The memorial also commemorates a 1992 neo-Nazi arson attack by retaining the scars left behind by burnt barracks as an educational tool to inform visitors of the dangers of persistent anti-Semitism. By changing and adapting to cultural and political influences, the Sachsenhausen memorial brings the Holocaust and survivor experience into the present by juxtaposing postwar and current events against the commemoration of Nazi atrocities.⁴

Germans began to expand the categories of victims to again include ordinary Germans at the same time that German society demonstrated a heightened awareness of German culpability for Nazi crimes. After the two Germanys reunited, they struggled to merge together their disparate historical experiences and forge a new mutual identity based on shared politics, culture, economics, and history. Reunification therefore prompted Germans to revisit the National Socialist past, but because East and West Germany had processed their pasts differently based on dichotomous political experiences, they brought often-conflicting views with them upon reunification. The vast historiography on the changing landscape of German postwar memory showed that whereas West Germany gradually allowed an open and honest confrontation with its Nazi legacy, East Germany saw the past through the communist regime's lenses of anti-fascism and anti-capitalism. The official version of the Third Reich, while acknowledging atrocities committed by the Nazis, thus focused on communist political victims, and the East German state government often highlighted Soviet and German

bg.de/gums/en/index.htm?sess=b2426e6704eeb4036ec6d830e38c17f9, Accessed February 20, 2014.

⁴ "Survivors recall liberation of Sachsenhausen concentration camp," *Deutsche Welle*, April 21, 2010, *Deutsche Welle Online*, <http://dw.de/p/N0YI>, Accessed February 20, 2014.

suffering at the expense of Jews, Poles, Sinti/Roma, homosexuals, and people with mental and physical handicaps.

In the second decade following reunification, films like the six recounted above explored the National Socialist past from a German perspective, which focused on the experiences of non-Jewish Germans during and immediately following the Second World War. From such perspectives, Germans themselves often appeared as victims—of the Nazis, of the Soviets, of the situation, and of their own lack of moral conviction to confront Hitler’s regime. Many of the filmmakers argued that their films offered audiences unique perspectives of the German wartime experience through individual narratives. They also frequently claimed to break social taboos by portraying the rape of German women for the first time or exploring the final twelve days inside the bunker from a German point of view for the first time. But postwar books and films engaged with the German experiences of rape and life in the Führerbunker prior to the 2000s, and historians such as Robert G. Moeller, Jeffrey Herf, Jennifer Lind, and Gilad Margalit, for example, contested filmmakers’ claims. They detailed how the initial focus on the victimization of the German people gradually gave way to acknowledgement and full recognition of Nazi crimes, a tradition established in West Germany that continues in post-reunified Germany. The engagement with the National Socialist past thus changed between the late 1940s and into the 1980s, and analysis of the victims of Nazi crimes shifted from Germans themselves to those directly persecuted by the Third Reich.⁵ With

⁵ Robert G. Moeller, “Germans as Victims?: Thoughts on Post-Cold War History of World War II’s Legacies,” *History & Memory* 17, no. 1 (2005), 147-194; Jeffrey Herf, *Divided Memory: The Nazi Past in the Two Germanys*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997); Jennifer Lind, “Not Your Father’s Fatherland” in *Sorry States: Apologies in International Politics*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2008); Gilad Margalit, *Guilt, Suffering, and Memory: Germany Remembers Its Dead of World War II*, trans. Haim Watzman, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2010).

the exception of *Sophie Scholl – Die letzten Tage*, which explored morality and conscience through scenes of Sophie’s interrogation and trial, the films largely evaded questions of morality and ignored themes of guilt and complicity by focusing on specific German wartime experiences in which National Socialism provides a background element. Much of the controversy surrounding the films revolved around this evasion and ignorance. Critics, audiences, public figures, and historians alike discussed and debated the popular medium’s place in the discussion of the National Socialist past. Should they engage with the narrative of Germans as victims? Could they do so without acknowledging the wider suffering caused by Nazi atrocities? Do films that foreground German wartime suffering at the expense of that experienced by people directly persecuted somehow justify innocence for the German people? What role do fictional films play in German historical education? Is there an appropriate way for mass media and historiography to come together? The debates caused by *Der Untergang*, *Sophie Scholl*, *Napola*, *Anonyma*, *So weit die Füße tragen*, and *Die Flucht* centered on these and other moral conundrums. And at the heart of the discussion was the controversial idea that Germans themselves were victims of National Socialism.

Although Oliver Hirschbiegel’s *Der Untergang* focused primarily on Hitler’s final days in the *Führerbunker*, the film interwove scenes from war-torn Berlin with scenes from within the bunker. Shown mostly from the perspective of Traudl Junge, one of Hitler’s personal secretaries who spent the war’s final days among the Nazi elite, *Der Untergang* offered a glimpse at how Hitler could seduce the German people, especially women like Junge. In the film, his behavior vacillated between maniacal and sympathetic. He treated his dedicated secretary with respect and dignity while berating

several of his high-ranking officials, many of whom Hitler believed had betrayed him when they called for Germany's surrender to the West. In these scenes, party officials and willing collaborators often suffered the wrath of Hitler. But such scenes followed traditionally held notions of Hitler's behavior towards his closest advisors. One moment, they could be trusted and reside within Hitler's inner circle, but suspicion alone quickly changed their status. According to debates and critiques, part of the problem with *Der Untergang* was its depiction of the Nazi elite as the victims of Hitler. While the Führer may have berated and abused his close advisors, many thought such assertions dangerous because the film sidestepped deeper analysis of the elite's role in the Nazi war machine. Another issue, of course, was that the Nazi elite represented just that, the elite—not ordinary German civilians and soldiers. So, in one respect *Der Untergang* did not challenge existing attitudes towards the National Socialist past. And whereas Hitler and Josef Goebbels generally came across as evil incarnate, despite moments of kindness and compassion, they were not victims. Contrarily, the character of Junge represented the innocence and naïveté of what filmmakers interpreted as assumedly good Germans caught up in a terrible situation. Like many other Germans, as the historiography of the postwar period highlighted, Junge participated in the Nazi regime because she felt she had little choice otherwise. Once in Hitler's service, she simply carried out the Führer's orders. She never questioned her larger role in the Nazi regime, nor did she question Hitler's ideologies, motivations, and crimes until much later in life. The real Junge admitted as much during the portions of *Der Untergang* that featured snippets from the documentary based on her memoirs. This divorced Junge from responsibility for the crimes and atrocities of Nazi Germany. In a way, then, the movie portrayed Junge and

Germans like her as unimpassioned Third Reich participants, disillusioned with the regime but unable or unwilling to initiate change within Germany. German audiences, particularly those of the younger generations, could leave the film having received a message that the German people were not to blame for Nazi crimes, that some unwillingly cooperated with Hitler, and that the German people became victims of National Socialism.

Germans also suffered aboveground in *Der Untergang*. With the Red Army closing in on Berlin, Hitler ordered the abandonment and destruction of supply depots and infirmaries throughout the city. Some Nazi officials in the film protested Hitler's decisions, because following orders would effectively doom the civilian population to starvation and death. Hitler responded by blaming the German people for Nazi Germany's impending defeat. Their weakness, according to *Der Untergang*'s depiction of Hitler, allowed the Soviets to break through Berlin's defenses. Hitler therefore believed they should suffer the consequences of their own shortcomings without further support from the Nazi administration. Furthermore, as the war raced to an end, Germany's armed forces (*Wehrmacht*) faced massive personnel shortages. Young boys and old men living in Berlin were consequently drafted to defend the capital of the Third Reich. With little training, these inexperienced civilian soldiers died in great numbers in the streets outside the bunker while Hitler demanded continued resistance from within. The film focused on a young boy by the name of Peter to represent the drastic situation. After receiving an iron cross medal from Hitler for bravery and courage, Peter committed himself to defending Berlin despite his parents' protests. In a scene towards the climax of the film, the reality of Germany's eventual defeat sunk in for Peter, and he appeared lost,

an innocent boy swallowed up by the horrors of war. While willfully participating to begin with, he gradually realized that Hitler and the Nazis cared little for the survival of the German people when the tides of war had turned against them. Peter could thus be seen as a metaphor for the German people, caught up in the machinations of war without awareness of the broader implications of National Socialist ideologies and practices. So, when Peter and Junge rode a bike into the sunlight together, they signaled a new beginning for themselves and the German people while reinforcing notions that women and children represent innocence and naïveté. The scene conveyed that Hitler and the Nazis now occupied the past and Germans were finally free from their tyranny, and because it offered audiences a glimpse of sunshine for the first time, the closing scene underscored this sense of hope.

Sophie Scholl – Die letzten Tage provided audiences with an example of the regime's violent persecution of non-violent resisters and society's support of such punishment. Arguably containing some of the most historically accurate scenes in the six films analyzed, *Sophie Scholl* relied on recently uncovered transcripts from the interrogations and trial as the basis for the film's dramatic narrative. Scholl, along with her brother Hans and fellow members of the White Rose movement, wrote, published, and distributed anti-Nazi pamphlets in an attempt to counter the lies of official propaganda. They wanted the German people to know how the war was really being carried out in the east and how the government continued to persecute people it deemed sub-human and treasonous. Caught and convicted for breaking the arbitrary laws of the Third Reich, Scholl ultimately lost her life for protesting the regime. Her story offered audiences validation that Germans who chose to oppose National Socialism did so at the

risk of their own lives. Much like the case of Traudl Junge in *Der Untergang*, the character of Sophie Scholl and the story of her execution provided audiences a way to justify German compliance with the Nazi regime and minimize their responsibility for National Socialist crimes and atrocities. In addition, the interaction between Inspector Mohr and Scholl communicated the freedoms lost by the German people under Nazi rule, identifying another way in which the Third Reich victimized Germans themselves. Scholl passionately argued for the freedom of speech as an inalienable human right, relying on the strength of her own conscience to support her behavior. Mohr, though intellectually moved by his interrogation of Sophie, repeatedly maintained that for a government to be effective, especially during times of war, it had to eliminate dissention because noncompliance would inherently threaten the government's legal authority. Conscience, therefore, belonged to the law of the land and collective society rather than the individual, and the movie equated Germans' wartime morality with the National Socialist judicial system, which far from being fair and just was based on racist and authoritarian ideologies.

The freedom of speech was not the only right challenged by the Nazi regime in *Sophie Scholl*. Less overtly, the film also touched on the Third Reich's antipathy towards religion. Out of loneliness and with nowhere else to turn, Scholl sought God for strength and guidance in her situation, clinging to the belief that God would save her. These scenes highlighted the ways in which the political and legal systems of the Third Reich had forsaken some of the German people. Unable to rely on National Socialism for moral guidance or turn to friends and neighbors in complete confidence, Germans like Scholl were forced to seek other avenues of emotional support in their opposition to the regime.

Religion and faith represented alternatives that Hitler could not take away or destroy, no matter how hard he might try. More overtly, *Sophie Scholl* showed how the Nazi judicial system lacked impartiality and the right to a fair trial. During the scene within the *Volksgerichtshof*, the arbitrariness of the laws and their interpretation shone through. The court convicted the three White Rose members for planning to commit treasonous acts. Their leaflets, while denouncing the regime, called for resistance but did not constitute an act of resistance alone. Scholl talked about the suffering inflicted upon Jews and children suspected of mental illness, too. During her interrogation and the discussion of conscience, Scholl cited a time when Nazi officials came to the children's ward where she worked as a nurse. The Nazis rounded up the children with mental and physical challenges and took them away, never to be seen again. The officials, other nurses among them, eased the children's sense of tension by leading them in a familiar song. The boys and girls followed along, thinking the adults were leading them somewhere better. Similarly, while at nursing school, one of the teachers was removed from his position because he was Jewish. Like the children, he was never seen alive again. The National Socialists' blatant disregard for basic human rights motivated Scholl to engage in anti-Nazi protest and provided a pathway by which Germans could see themselves as their victims. Those who protested the Nazi regime faced political, judicial, and social persecution. *Sophie Scholl* showed that the White Rose resisters received no support from the student body at the time of their arrest. Their silence symbolized that many—if not most—Germans cooperated with Hitler and the Nazis willingly. Rothemund's film informed audiences that Germans clearly knew and supported the persecution of German resisters alongside Jews and the so-called degenerates.

Whereas *Der Untergang* focused on the population of Berlin and Hitler's personal staff and *Sophie Scholl* looked at an individual Nazi resister, *Napola – Elite für den Führer* portrayed the Third Reich's beguilement of German youth by examining the experiences of teenaged boys attending an elite political academy. In the film, the regime promised young boys that the Napola would provide them access to a wealth of opportunities unreachable by average German people. Friedrich, the film's main character, believed the propaganda and elected to run away from home to join the closest Napola against his father's wishes. While at school, Friedrich initially found the institution enthralling, enjoyed his newfound sense of belonging, and bought into the National Socialist doctrine. Not all was as promised, however. He quickly learned of Nazi cruelty, as school and local officials subjected students to public humiliation, harsh training exercises, and strict expectations. In the case of *Napola*, then, German youth became the victims of Nazi education and indoctrination. Students identified as incapable, either by the school or themselves, often found few ways to escape their emotional and physical suffering. Those with the strength to voice opposition to the regime faced military deployment, and in an act of defiance, one student chose suicide over accepting a post on the Eastern Front. Here, too, Germans themselves enjoyed few options outside of accepting National Socialism and following Hitler's dictatorship. They became, in essence, not only victims of Nazi education and indoctrination but also victims of brutish oppression and their own disillusion with the Third Reich.

While *Der Untergang*, *Sophie Scholl*, and *Napola* focused on German suffering directly under the Third Reich, *So weit die FüÙe tragen*, *Anonyma – Eine frau in Berlin*, and *Die Flucht* showed how Germans suffered Soviet retribution. Before initiating its

offensive against the city of Berlin, the Red Army advanced through German territories in the east, destroying much of the remaining German army and displacing millions of German people. The television miniseries, *Die Flucht*, provided audiences with a depiction of this German refugee experience at the end of the war. Focusing on East Prussian expellees, *Die Flucht* showed Germans as the victims of Hitler's refusal to accept inevitable defeat and Soviet retribution for crimes committed in Russia by the *Wehrmacht*. As the Red Army's impending invasion became clear, leaders in East Prussia requested permission to evacuate the area ahead of an attack. Berlin headquarters denied this request, threatening arrest and execution for anyone who contemplated surrendering East Prussia to the Soviets by fleeing. Germans thus became victims of the Hitler's adherence to the false hope of Final Victory, a commonality shared with *Der Untergang*'s portrayal of a disillusioned Hitler. Sandwiched between Nazi persecution and Soviet retribution, German civilians and soldiers living and fighting in the east struggled to maintain their position right up until the war made its way into East Prussia and forced them to flee in the dead of winter for survival.

Additional suffering plagued the westward flight of the German expellees throughout *Die Flucht*. Grabbing as many of their possessions as possible, the East Prussians left their homes and livelihoods behind in order to escape the Soviet onslaught. Embarking on the westward journey in January, the refugees faced bitter winter conditions that hampered their escape efforts and endangered their survival. The Soviet soldiers' previous experiences in Russia, in which the *Wehrmacht* exacted incomprehensible cruelty upon soldiers and civilians of all ages, informed much of the Red Army's behavior on their westward march. As a consequence, they looted what was

left behind and laid waste to the land, much as German soldiers had done while attacking the Soviet Union. As residents fled for the *Vaterland*, the Red Army chased them down with artillery and airplanes, inflicting intense emotional and physical suffering while also killing numerous refugees. Against the odds, many of the characters in *Die Flucht* eventually made their way to Bavaria, but found little refuge there. Residents resisted their arrival, questioning their loyalty to the Third Reich for abandoning the eastern territories. The newcomers also presented additional competition for the limited resources available to the German population at this point in the war, further exacerbating tensions between the Bavarians and East Prussians.

On top of struggling to survive and establish new lives in the West, many of the German women suffered sexual assault by members of the Red Army. When Soviet soldiers caught up to the refugees at home or on the run, they raped countless women in another example of Red Army retribution. So, *Die Flucht* portrayed Germans themselves as victims of National Socialism on multiple levels. They suffered at the hands of the Nazi regime, which denied their requests to evacuate East Prussia ahead of the pursuing Red Army. They suffered the permanent loss of their homes as they finally chose to flee, abandoning possessions and generations of memories. They suffered the extreme weather conditions only winter could provide. They suffered almost constant attack by the advancing Soviets, who killed a number of the refugees and raped German women. And once in Bavaria, they suffered at the hands of their fellow German civilians, who wanted nothing to do with the East Prussians and offered them little to no assistance once they finished their cross-country trek.

Die Flucht was not alone in depicting the rape of German women by Red Army soldiers. *Anonyma – Eine frau in Berlin* centered on such assaults through the viewpoint of a German journalist who kept a diary of her wartime and immediate postwar experiences. Amid the rubble of a defeated Berlin, the film showed German survivors as forced to live in close proximity to the Soviet victors. With nowhere else to turn, they often relied on the Red Army for food and protection following the collapse of the Third Reich. Sexual assaults began almost immediately after the Soviets arrived in Berlin and occurred on a frequent basis throughout the period of cohabitation, and the film purports that nearly two million German women suffered rape by Red Army soldiers during this time. In addition to showing the obvious suffering caused by rape, *Anonyma* portrayed the citizens of Berlin as victims of a Nazi regime unable to protect and provide for them. German women also suffered separation from their husbands, fathers, and brothers, many of whom returned changed by wartime experiences profoundly different from those of the women left in Berlin. In the example given by *Anonyma*, the main character could not overcome the disparity of wartime experiences between her and her husband despite her early enthusiasm for Germany's conquest of Eastern Europe. Following the Soviet arrival, she found a soldier with whom she forged an intimate relationship to protect herself from repeated rape. When her husband reappeared after the war, he was confronted by this reality. But because he could not see past his wife's infidelities, despite their origins, he left *Anonyma* once again, this time by choice. The victimization of German women through rape was therefore twofold – through the act itself and through the psychological and emotional suffering that lingered beyond the assault.

So weit die FüÙe tragen, while taking place in the first years after the war, provided further portrayals of German suffering as an outcome of Soviet retribution for Nazi crimes and aggression. After taking German soldier Clemens Forell to prison toward the end of the war, the Soviet Union transferred the POW to a labor camp in eastern Siberia. The film subsequently traced his escape and difficult journey from the camp across 14,000 kilometers of the Soviet Union back to his family in Munich. During the film, Forell faced punishment in the camp for attempting to escape, harsh winter conditions upon his initial escape, an attack by wolves, constant pursuit by the camp commander, and imprisonment in Iran after successfully reaching the Russian border. Throughout these challenges, the film sporadically cut back to his family in Germany. Each time, Forell's wife and daughter sought news of his whereabouts and wellbeing, but none came. Yet they continued to pray for his safe return. As the years ticked by, however, their hope started to fade and their lives carried on without their husband and father, accepting the probability they might not see him again. When Forell finally made his way back home in the early 1950s, the family had suffered nearly a decade of his absence. *So weit die FüÙe tragen* thus portrayed the separation of German families and the resulting emotional suffering as a way in which Germans appeared as the victims of National Socialism.

Most of the films also highlighted the specific suffering German women endured during and immediately following the war. While *So weit die FüÙe tragen* focused primarily on the experiences of German men, the film showed women as suffering the absence of men who went to fight the war. As Clemens Forrell struggled to make his way back to Bavaria, his wife and daughter anxiously awaited news of his condition or

whereabouts, reminding audiences that German women often faced the real possibility they might never see their husbands or fathers again. *Sophie Scholl*, on the other hand, painted the portrait of a strong female resister who clung to notions of moral consciousness while facing Nazi persecution and execution. Scholl thus stood as a counterpoint to the naïve, innocent character of Traudl Junge in *Der Untergang*, who never questioned her allegiance to Hitler or the Third Reich. Junge's naïveté, as noted earlier, justified her wartime choice to serve Hitler by an innocence typically reserved for female characters. Through the characters of Eva Braun and Magda Goebbels, *Der Untergang* also depicted women as blind devotees of Hitler and National Socialism, for whom death was preferable to a world without Hitler. In *Anonyma*, Red Army soldiers repeatedly raped the main character, a form of wartime victimization shared by many women but not unique to the liberation of Berlin—soldiers of many armies throughout history have similarly attacked the women of conquered lands. Because the film opened with *Anonyma* celebrating Nazi Germany's ideologies and aggression, however, her suffering appeared as punishment for her support of Hitler and his policies. Like *Anonyma*, *Die Flucht* presented women as the victims of the situations in which they found themselves. In the face of extreme obstacles, such as winter weather and attack from the Red Army, Lena von Mahlenberg assumed responsibility for her family and neighbors by leading them from East Prussia to Bavaria. While engendering German suffering, the films made clear that reframing the research questions upon which this project was based could produce an entire thesis-length analysis of the role popular film plays in creating, reflecting, perpetuating, and altering the discourse of gender victimization.

In the end, all six of these films offered audiences examples of German wartime suffering. But in so doing, they left out important reference to the larger National Socialist narrative, distorting the Nazi past while educating audiences about it and often failing to provide adequate contextualization for the characters' experiences. Even films, like *Sophie Scholl* and *Die Flucht*, that attempted to situate their stories within the contextual framework of the time frequently downplayed or ignored the crimes and atrocities committed by Hitler and the Nazis that, with the exception of *Anonyma*, got the characters into their situations in the first place. This lack of contextualization repeatedly came up in critiques of the films, and commentators often argued that to understand the experience of German suffering required understanding of the suffering they had caused others. Still, the focus on the German wartime experience fit into the ongoing discussions about the Nazi past within Germany, in which a trend to reengage with the discourse of Germans themselves as having suffered because of National Socialism resurfaced in the years after reunification as further evidenced by Günter Grass' *Crabwalk*, Bernhard Schlink's *The Reader*, and W.G. Sebald's *On the Natural History of Destruction*. What the discourse and reaction surrounding the films made clear was a perception among filmmakers that the *Spätgeborenen* had to rely on the arts to learn about the German wartime experience. Of course, the work of historians throughout the postwar period showed that not to be true. Yet interviews with screenwriters, directors, and actors, along with political commentaries and talk show debates, continually identified a disconnection between the generations of Germans born after 1970 and their parents and grandparents. Many felt it their duty to tell the stories of their grandparents before they died out, often characterizing their education about the German wartime experience as lacking or non-

existent. Others, such as League of Expellee president Erica Steinbach, thought the films promoted awareness and recognition of the German refugee condition during and after the expulsion from the eastern territories. And still others, like Marc Rothemund and Dennis Gansel, wanted to confront audiences with morally ambiguous scenarios and force them to think about how they would personally respond in a similar situation. Would they be as brave as Sophie Scholl and stick to their convictions despite the threat of execution? Would they abandon their family in search of opportunities provided by cruel and oppressive institutions? When faced with the realization that the Nazis were the evil with which the good people of the world should fight against, what would they do?

Reaction to the films showed that Germans continued to question their relationship to the Third Reich in the early 2000s and that answering the moral queries posed by the films and filmmakers is not a simple process. While the films added to the resurgent discourse of Germans themselves as victims of National Socialism, they also highlighted the complexities of German life under Nazi rule, which included a certain level of suffering both directly from the regime and because of its aggressive policies. Response to the films also showed how the National Socialist past remains a source of contention between Germany, its neighbors, and its allies. Acknowledgement of the German refugee experience through a national documentation center, for example, appeared to Polish politicians and critics as a stepping-stone to revanchist movements, and the focus on non-Jewish German suffering without the context of Holocaust experiences could be seen by audiences the world over as historical misrepresentation, or worse—historical revisionism. The resulting criticisms from Polish politicians and journalists revealed a recurring nervousness among Poles about the National Socialist

past and fear that foregrounding the German suffering that resulted from the policies of the Hitler dictatorship could effectively alter cultural memory and allow history to repeat itself. Concurrent events such as the murder trial of neo-Nazi terrorist Beate Zschäpe as well as the anti-immigrant writings of bank executive Thilo Sarrazin and anti-Israeli poetry of Günter Grass only strengthened such fears.⁶ On the flipside, the films defenders argued that the movies helped move *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* forward by broadening the understanding of the National Socialist past and better incorporating the German wartime experience into the historical narrative. Like many of the filmmakers, those praising the films often thought they helped teach the *Spätgeborenen* generations what life was really like for Germans themselves during and after the war despite inaccuracies. They maintained that audiences did not require explicit reference to wider Nazi atrocities

⁶ Between 2000 and 2006, nine men of Turkish or Greek descent and one German policewoman were murdered. Following a botched robbery and the subsequent suicides of two National Socialist Underground (NSU) members, a third, Beate Zschäpe, surrendered and admitted to killing ten people, detonating two bombs in areas inhabited by migrant workers, and committing 14 armed robberies. The country was shocked. The scandal, according to *DW*, offered proof that Germans had not adequately dealt with their National Socialist past and had not done enough to keep racist extremism in check. Supposing that modern Germans could not commit crimes based on racism, Germans engaged in the most dangerous form of xenophobia by allowing the NSU to carry out hate crimes unchecked in modern-day Germany. “Will Germans get answers at a neo-Nazi trial?” *Deutsche Welle*, May 5, 2013, *Deutsche Welle Online*, <http://dw.de/p/18Qiz>, Accessed February 19, 2014. Thilo Sarrazin’s 2010 best-selling book, *Deutschland schafft sich ab (Germany Abolishes Itself)*, centered on Jews and Muslims and argued that the two groups were preventing economic prosperity in Germany. Many critics, domestic and foreign, viewed the work as perpetuating dangerous stereotypes and adding fuel to the fires of hatred already burning in Germany. Still, Sarrazin refused to recant and instead defended his book, maintaining that immigrant workers strained German society, threatened to destroy German culture, and therefore needed greater national attention. “Central banker sets off a storm with controversial book release,” *Deutsche Welle*, August 31, 2010, *Deutsche Welle Online*, <http://dw.de/p/OzPv>, Accessed February 19, 2014. In April of 2012, famed German author Günter Grass published a poem titled *Was gesagt werden muss (What Must Be Said)* in the *Süddeutsche Zeitung* that challenged Germany’s relationship with Israel while also suggesting that a nuclear-armed Israel posed an imminent threat to Iran and world peace. German and Israeli responses oscillated between complaints of anti-Semitism and a general lack of knowledge about tensions in the Middle East. The president of the Berlin Academy of Art sided with Grass in challenging the perceived taboo that Germans could not protest Israel without fear of being labeled an enemy of the state. And, as one might expect, Iran welcomed Grass’ poem for its loud support and bringing international attention to Israel’s nuclear capabilities, which Iran also felt threatened the stability of the region. ⁶ “Günter Grass’s Israel poem provokes outrage,” *The Guardian*, April 5, 2012, *The Guardian Online*, <http://www.theguardian.com/books/2012/apr/05/gunter-grass-israel-poem-iran>, Accessed February 19, 2014.

because people processed the films with a built-in knowledge of the past. Furthermore, the films honored the lives and memories of the oldest German generations yet still living, which had entered their twilight years. What the differing perspectives on the films did not reveal was a master narrative about the legacy of National Socialism. Instead, they reflected just how fractured and contested the Nazi past remains—not only for European Jews, Soviets, Poles, Sinti/Roma, homosexuals, and political dissidents but also for the German civilians who faced numerous hardships themselves, even while many explicitly collaborated or implicitly cooperated with Hitler. Along with academic historians, who typically view the past as open for reexamination, *Sophie Scholl*, *Napola*, *Der Untergang*, *So weit die FüÙe tragen*, *Anonyma*, and *Die Flucht* conveyed that the National Socialist past remains fascinating for filmmakers and audiences alike.

The trend to explore the German wartime experience through film continues. In the spring of 2013, television station ZDF aired a three-part series titled *Unsere Mütter, unsere Väter* (*Our Mothers, Our Fathers*) to much success and reaching audiences of more than seven million. Through its depiction of the roles Germans themselves played in Nazi Germany as citizens and soldiers, the film carried on the tradition built by films of the 2000s. Once again, cinematic interpretations of the Nazi past offered audiences versions of the German wartime experience based on interpretations of actual people, events, and experiences. Once again, Germans themselves appeared as among the victims of Hitler and the Third Reich. Once again, controversy over scenes depicting German suffering arose within Germany and without, particularly when ZDF announced plans to show the film in foreign countries.⁷ Since the war's end, Germans have sought a variety

⁷ "German war drama stirs up controversy abroad," *Deutsche Welle*, February 6, 2014, *Deutsche Welle Online*, <http://dw.de/p/1B3lj>, Accessed March 7, 2014.

of ways to process their relationship to the National Socialist past. Film fulfilled, and continues to fulfill, a piece of that search, a piece of the puzzle that is *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*. Whether or not they achieved historical accuracy mattered little. Audiences identified with the history portrayed in the films regardless of their attention to historical truth and connected with themes they understood as real lived experiences, whether by their parents, grandparents, or great-grandparents. As massive memorials like Sachsenhausen and the new holocaust memorial in Berlin show, the remembrance of the millions of Jewish, Polish, and Soviet victims of Nazism is now a permanent feature of the commemoration landscape in Germany. Germans also understand that the Third Reich targeted political dissidents, homosexuals, Sinti/Roma, and people with disabilities, causing generations of Europeans, no matter their political leanings, ethnicity, or religion, to suffer the ultimate victimization of death. It seems clear that historical knowledge and education provided audiences with enough contextualization to place the German wartime experience within the larger narrative of the National Socialist past, which had transitioned to recognize Nazi crimes and atrocities by the turn of the twenty-first century. The films did not negate the suffering exacted upon targeted victims of Nazi aggression and ideology. Nor did they repudiate and weaken the sense of responsibility among Germans for the legacy of the Nazi past built by previous generations. Instead, the films highlighted just how important and contentious the discussion of the National Socialist past remained and remains. *Sophie Scholl – Die letzten Tage*, *Napola – Elite für den Führer*, *Der Untergang*, *So weit die Füße tragen*, *Anonyma – Eine Frau in Berlin*, and *Die Flucht* sparked impassioned response and debate by showing audiences how Germans lived through and experienced

National Socialism, perpetually haunted by Hitler and the Third Reich, even now in the twenty-first century.

Primary Sources

- Anonyma, Max Färberböck, and Catharina Schuchmann. *Anonyma – Eine frau in Berlin*. Directed by Max Färberböck. Constantin Film Produktion, 2008.
- Balfour, Brad. “New York State Interviews 21: Dennis Gansel.” *Generator 21* 428, November 10, 2005. <http://generator21.net/g21archive/nystate56.htm>. Accessed January 23, 2014.
- Bauer, Josef Martin, Bastian Clevé, Hardy Martins, and Bernd Schwamm. *So weit die FüÙe tragen*. Directed by Hardy Martins. B&C Filmproduktion GmbH, Cascadeur Filmproduktion GmbH, and KC Medien, 2001.
- Breinersdorfer, Fred. *Sophie Scholl – Die letzten Tage*. DVD. Directed by Marc Rothemund. Broth Film and Goldkind Filmproduktion, 2005.
- Bubis, Ignatz. “Speech Commemorating the Night of the Pogrom of November 9, 1938.” Translated by Thomas Dunlap. *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, November 10, 1998. German Historical Institute. http://germanhistorydocs.ghidc.org/sub_document.cfm?document_id=3427. Accessed January 12, 2013.
- Eichinger, Bernd. 2005. *Der Untergang*. Released in the United States as *Downfall*. DVD. Directed by Oliver Hirschbiegel. Culver City, CA: Sony Pictures Home Entertainment.
- Fuerstenau, Marcel. “Five years on, Berlin Holocaust Memorial is a landmark of remembrance.” *Deutsche Welle Online*, May 10, 2010. <http://dw.de/p/NKG9>. Accessed October 10, 2013.
- Gansel, Dennis and Maggie Peren. *Napola – Elite für den Führer*. Directed by Dennis Gansel. Olga Film GmbH, 2004.
- Glötz, Peter. “The Arming with Identity.” Translated by Thomas Dunlap. *Die falsche Normalisierung, die unmerkliche Verwandlung der Deutschen 1989 bis 1994, Essays*. Frankfurt am Main: Surhkamp Verlag, 1994: 42-50. German Historical Institute. http://germanhistorydocs.ghi-dc.org/sub_document.cfm?document_id=3422. Accessed January 12, 2013.
- Grass, Günter. *Im Krebsgang*. Göttingen: Steidl Verlag, 2002.
- Herzog, Roman. “Speech to the Bundestag in support of a Day of Commemoration for the victims of National Socialism, January 19, 1996.” *Lessons from the Past, Visions for the Future*. Introduction by Steven Muller. German Issues, 18: 11-18. American Institute for Contemporary German Studies, Johns Hopkins University.

<http://www.aicgs.org/site/wp-content/uploads/2011/11/herzog.pdf>. Accessed February 8, 2013.

Hilberg, Raul. *The Politics of Memory: The Journey of a Holocaust Historian*. Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 1996.

Kohl, Helmut. "Berlin Remains the Focal Point of the German Question." *Süddeutsche Zeitung*. October 29, 1987. Translated by Allison Brown. German Historical Institute. http://germanhistorydocs.ghi-dc.org/sub_document.cfm?document_id=1158. Accessed January 12, 2013.

Köhler, Horst. Address to the Knesset in Jerusalem, February 2, 2005. Der Bundespräsident. http://www.bundespraesident.de/SharedDocs/Reden/EN/HorstKoehler/Reden/2005/02/20050202_Rede.html. Accessed February 8, 2013.

Neumann, Klaus. "Downfall: Almost the Same Old Story," *Rouge* 6, 2005, *Rouge Press Online*, <http://www.rouge.com.au/6/downfall.html>, Accessed April 17, 2014.

Rau, Joahannes. Speech in the Knesset, February 16, 2000. Knesset.gov.il. http://www.knesset.gov.il/description/eng/doc/speech_rau_2000_eng.pdf. Accessed January 12, 2013.

Schlink, Bernhard. *The Reader*. Translated by Carol Brown Janeway. New York: Pantheon Books, 1997.

Schröder, Richard. *Germany, Difficult Fatherland*. Translated by Thomas Dunlap. Freiburg am Breisgau: HERDER Spektrum, Vol. 4160, 1995: 19-25. German Historical Institute. http://germanhistorydocs.ghi-dc.org/sub_document.cfm?document_id=3421. Accessed January 12, 2013.

Sebald, W.G. *On the Natural History of Destruction*. Translated by Anthea Bell. New York: The Modern Library, 2004.

Seligmann, Rafael. "Sealed Stone." Translated by Thomas Dunlap. *Welt am Sonntag*. December 19, 2004. German Historical Institute. http://germanhistorydocs.ghi-dc.org/sub_document.cfm?document_id=3655. Accessed January 12, 2013.

Sperl, Gabriela. *Die Flucht*. Directed by Kai Wessel. teamWorx Produktion für Kino und Fernsehen GmbH, 2007.

Thierse, Wolfgang. "Speech at the Dedication of the 'Memorial for the Murdered Jews of Europe,' May 10, 2005." Translated by Thomas Dunlap. German Historical Institute. http://germanhistorydocs.ghi-dc.org/sub_document.cfm?document_id=3430. Accessed January 12, 2013.

Walser, Martin. "Experiences while Composing a Sunday Speech (1998)." Thomas A. Kovach and Martin Walser, editors. *The Burden of the Past: Martin Walser on Modern German Identity: Texts, Contexts, Commentary*. Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2008: 88-94. German Historical Institute.
http://germanhistorydocs.ghidc.org/sub_document.cfm?document_id=3426.
 Accessed January 12, 2013.

Newspapers and Online Collections

| | |
|---------------------------------------|----------------------------|
| <i>Berliner Zeitung</i> | <i>The Guardian</i> |
| <i>Deutsche Welle</i> | <i>Der Spiegel</i> |
| <i>Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung</i> | <i>Süddeutsche Zeitung</i> |
| <i>Der Freitag</i> | <i>Die Welt</i> |
| <i>German Historical Institute</i> | <i>Die Zeit</i> |

Secondary Sources

Biess, Frank. "Pioneers of New Germany: Returning POWs from the Soviet Union and the Making of East German Citizens, 1945-1950." *Central European History* 32, no. 2 (1999): 143-180.

Bösch, Frank. "Film, NS-Vergangenheit und Geschichtswissenschaft: von 'Holocaust' zu 'Der Untergang.'" *Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte* 55, no. 1 (2007): 1-32.

Burucúa, Constanza. *Confronting the 'Dirty War' in Argentine Cinema, 1983-1993: Memory and Gender in Historical Representations*. Woodbridge, Suffolk, UK; Rochester, NY: Tamesis, 2009.

Cooke, Paul. "'Der Untergang' (2004): Victims, Perpetrators, and the Continuing Fascination of Fascism." *German Monitor* 67, no. 1 (2007): 247-261.

Evans, Owen. "Memory, Melodrama and History: The Return of the Past in Contemporary Popular Film in Germany." *European Studies* 30, no. 1 (2013): 241-269.

Evans, Peter. "Cinema, Memory, and the Unconscious" in *Spanish Cultural Studies An Introduction: The Struggle for Modernity*, edited by Helen Graham and Jo Labanyi. New York: Oxford University Press, 1995: 304-10.

Fagu, Claudio, Wulf Kanseiner, and Ned Lebow, editors. *The Politics of Memory in Postwar Europe*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2006.

Fest, Joachim. *Inside Hitler's Bunker: The Last Days of the Third Reich*. Translated by Margot Bettauer Dembo. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2004.

- German Historical Museum. "Der Volksgerichtshof, 1933-1939."
<http://www.dhm.de/lemo/html/nazi/innenpolitik/volksgerichtshof/index.html>.
 Accessed February 14, 2013.
- Hampton, Mary N. and Douglas C. Peifer. "Reordering German Identity: Memory Sites and Foreign Policy." *German Studies Review* 30, no. 2 (2007): 371-390.
- Heinman, Elizabeth. "Gender, Sexuality, and Coming to Terms with the Nazi Past." *Central European History* 38, no. 1 (2005): 41-74.
- Herf, Jeffrey. *Divided Memory: The Nazi Past in the Two Germanys*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997.
- Herzog, Dagmar. *Sex After Fascism: Memory and Morality in Twentieth-Century Germany*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005.
- Hoffman, Eva. *After Such Knowledge: Memory, History, and the Legacy of the Holocaust*. New York: PublicAffairs, 2004.
- Jaskot, Paul B. and Gavriel D. Rosefeld, editors. *Beyond Berlin: Twelve German Cities Confront the Nazi Past*. Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press: 2008.
- Judt, Tony. *Postwar: A History of Europe Since 1945*. New York: The Penguin Press, 2005.
- Kinder, Marsha. *Blood Cinema: The Reconstruction of National Identity in Spain*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993.
- Koonz, Claudia. *Mothers in the Fatherland: Women, the Family, and Nazi Politics*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1987.
- Langenbacher, Eric. "Changing Memory Regimes in Contemporary Germany?" *German Politics and Society* 21, no. 2 (2003): 46+. *Literature Resource Center*. Web. 2 December 2012.
- Lind, Jennifer. *Sorry States: Apologies in International Politics*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2008.
- Lübbe, Herman. "Der Nationalsozialismus im deutschen Nachkriegsbewußten." *Historische Zeitschrift* 236, no. 3 (2005): 41-74.
- Machtans, Karolin and Martin A. Ruehl, editors. *Hitler – Films from Germany: History, Cinema and Politics since 1945*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010.
- Maier, Charles S. *The Unmasterable Past: History, Holocaust, and German National Identity*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1988.

- Margalit, Gilad. *Guilt, Suffering, and Memory: Germany Remembers Its Dead of World War II*. Translated by Haim Watzman. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2010.
- McLean, Iain and Alistair McMillian. *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Politics*. 3rd Edition. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009. Oxford Reference Online. <http://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/acref/9780199207800.001.0001/acref-9780199207800-e-870?rskey=4zcoHf&result=1&q=national%20socialism>. Accessed February 14, 2013.
- Meng, Michael. *Shattered Spaces: Encountering Jewish Ruins in Postwar Germany and Poland*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2011.
- Mintz, Alan. *Popular Culture and the Shaping of Holocaust Memory in America*. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2001.
- Moeller, Robert G. "Germans as Victims?: Thoughts on Post-Cold War History of World War II's Legacies." *History & Memory* 17, no. 1 (2005): 147-194.
- Moeller, Robert G. "War Stories: The Search for a Usable Past in the Federal Republic of Germany." *The American Historical Review* 101, no. 4 (1996): 1008-1048.
- Morcillo, Aurora, editor. *Memory and Cultural History of the Spanish Civil War: Realms of Oblivion*. Leiden: Brill, 2013.
- Morina, Christina. "Instructed Silence, Constructed Memory: The SED and the Return of German Prisoners of War as 'War Criminals' from the Soviet Union to East Germany, 1950-1956." *Contemporary European History* 13, no. 3 (2004): 323-343.
- Niven, Bill. *Facing the Nazi Past: United Germany and the Legacy of the Third Reich*. London; New York: Routledge, 2002.
- Neumann, Klaus. *Shifting Memories: The Nazi Past in the New Germany*. Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2000.
- Novick, Peter. *The Holocaust in American Life*. New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1999.
- Pagaard, Stephen. "German Schools and the Holocaust: A Focus on the Secondary School System of Nordrhein-Westfalen." *History Teacher* 28, no. 4 (1995): 541-554.
- Passmore, Kevin, editor. *Women, Gender and Fascism in Europe, 1919-1945*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2003.

- Postone, Moishe and Eric Santner, editors. *Catastrophe and Meaning: The Holocaust and the Twentieth Century*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2003.
- Rousso, Henry. *The Vichy Syndrome: History and Memory in France since 1944*. Translated by Arthur Goldhammer. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1991.
- Rutschmann, Paul. "The White Rose in Film and History." *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television* 27, no. 3 (2007): 371-390.
- Shandley, Robert R. *Rubble Films: German Cinema in the Shadow of the Third Reich*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2001.
- Stephenson, Jill. *Women in Nazi Germany*. Harlow, UK; New York: Longman, 2001.
- Stern, Fritz. *The Politics of Cultural Despair: A Study in the Rise of the Germanic Ideology*. New York: Anchor Books, 1965.
- von Moltke, Johannes. "Sympathy for the Devil: Cinema, History, and the Politics of Emotion." *New German Critique* 102, vol. 32, no. 3 (2007): 17-43.
- Wittlinger, Ruth. *German National Identity in the Twenty-First Century: A Different Republic After All?* New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010.
- Wolfgram, Mark A. "Getting History Right": *East and West German Collective Memories of The Holocaust and War*. Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 2011.
- Zitelmann, Rainer. "Reunification and German Self-Hatred." Translated by Thomas Dunlap. *Deutschland-Archiv*. 25, 8 (1992): 811-820. German Historical Institute. http://germanhistorydocs.ghi-dc.org/sub_document.cfm?document_id=3418. Accessed January 12, 2013.