

# **History of the Screen and the Book: The Reinvention of the Holocaust in the Television and Historiography of the Federal Republic of Germany**

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## **Introduction**

The broadcast of the television mini-series Holocaust in 1979 marked the painful beginning of the media age for Germany's historians. For the first time a media event called into question the historians' self-image and professional pride and the impact was particularly severe because it occurred on the sensitive terrain of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* (overcoming/mastering the past). Especially during the 1960s, historians had contributed their fair share to the collective challenge of working through the legacy of Nazism. In the process, they had only rarely found themselves at odds with interpretations of Nazism proposed by politicians, writers, and other intellectuals. The attempts to inform and educate Germans about the Nazi genocide through perpetrator trials, plays, books, films, and TV programs had not been perceived as incompatible with historical research and writing. But the surprising reception of Holocaust by German audiences forced German historians to acknowledge that their tacit educational ambitions, which were an integral yet rarely explicitly developed part of their professional identity, had never been realized in the reception of their own work. The intellectual interests and moral impetus which had informed scholarly reflections about the history of the "Final Solution" had not transcended a relatively small community of intellectuals. In addition, and more important, Holocaust had uncovered

collective interests in historical identification which were beyond the reach of scholarship, especially the scholarship of contemporary history created in the 1970s. To be sure, politicians, writers, and even television executives were also confounded by the reactions of the German audience. However, while other members of Germany's cultural elite could find refuge in political debates, administrative squabbles and aesthetic condemnations, the historians had been beaten to the punch on their home turf, i.e., the interpretation of the past for contemporary guidance and enlightenment.

The inattention to historical programming among historians resulted from long-standing prejudices against the new mass medium but also reflects the slow development of an 'independent' historical vision on television. Like other intellectuals historians had been reluctant to acknowledge television's contribution to Germany's postwar culture. Delayed by the war television only became a mass medium in the 1960s. The ARD, the first national network, went on the air in 1957 and the ZDF, the second channel, followed only in 1963. Even after the new medium had become an essential part of everyday life, television hardly qualified as an independent, original cultural institution in the eyes of its intellectual critics. For example, despite remarkable salaries, most German authors refused to write for television because they did not want to sully their reputation. Such snobbery reflected intellectual prejudice as well as the aesthetic immaturity of the new medium. Only gradually public television came into its own and developed formats and contents which were structurally incompatible with other cultural products and which defined and satisfied new standards of popular taste. Historical programming is a case in point. While the historical documentaries of the 1960s were little more than simplistic, illustrated history lectures, the television of the 1980s featured fast, visually attractive, colorful, expensive historical fiction about everyday life in Nazi Germany which

corresponded to similar developments in other spheres of Germany's historical culture but which, because of its mass appeal, made television the primary channel of Vergangenheitsbewältigung during the decade before unification. This heyday of historical reflection via television ended relatively suddenly in the 1990s because commercial television, which had been introduced on a national scale in 1984, came to dominate the German television market. The ensuing competition for market shares and ratings killed off a whole range of established public television genre, including high quality historical fiction. To date no other medium has filled this gap and it is unclear if today's television audiences would even appreciate continued historical prime time coverage. As a result, by default, historians are once again the primary professional arbiter of historical interpretation although this 'victory' has not increased the reach and impact of their work.

The rise and fall of public television has turned three decades of public television monopoly into a distinct chapter in the history of the German media. From the early 1960s through the late 1980s the institutional infrastructure and the conditions of television production and reception remained remarkable stable. The two networks ARD and ZDF could implement their patriarchal vision of responsible national television unimpeded by any commercial competition. Since then said conditions have changed so rapidly that the era of ARD and ZDF appears truly historic. It is only appropriate that scholars have begun to offer comprehensive assessments of this era and that we continue this critical review with a close look at public television's contribution to the challenge of Vergangenheitsbewältigung. The following analysis of the historiography of German public television surveys the status of historical programming in the era of public television before focusing on the representation of the Holocaust in the Programs of the ZDF between 1963 and 1993. Subsequently the electronic vision of the

Holocaust is compared to parallel scholarly reconstructions and explanations of the history of the “Final Solution.” The structural and chronological comparison of these two different narrative reinventions of the Nazi era reveals the underlying patterns of West Germany’s historical culture which cut across different intellectual environments and media contexts. On the other hand, the comparison also illustrates that selective avoidance and partial confrontation with the legacy of the Holocaust have produced different, media specific strategies, despite an astonishing congruence with respect to timing and interpretive emphasis.

### **German Public Television and the Representation of History**

Historical programming has always been a relatively marginal field of the German television landscape. In this respect, the status of television history corresponds to the equally marginal status of professional historical writing within the context of the German print media. However, this parallel should not deflect from the fact that both types of historical representation operate on a very different scale. Within the context of Germany’s historical culture, i.e., all channels of discourse which contribute to the reinterpretation of the past, television history reaches a much more diverse and larger audience than its academic counterpart. Therefore critics like Anton Kaes have concluded that “the mass media have become the most effective (and least acknowledged) institutional vehicles for shaping historical consciousness.”<sup>1</sup>

History on television is predominantly distributed through a limited range of television genres. As indicated in below diagram, the qualitatively and quantitatively most relevant

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<sup>1</sup> Anton Kaes, *From Hitler*, 196

programs with historical focus belong to the categories of information and serious fiction.<sup>2</sup> The great majority of all systematic approaches to the topic of Nazism can be classified either as historical or educational documentaries, as docu-plays<sup>3</sup>, or as serious fiction, both original and adapted. The most notable exception are war movies which have contributed a fair share to the media image of Nazism. Occasionally the topic has also been systematically addressed in other genres, such as

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<sup>2</sup> To date, there have been few attempts at providing a systematic classification of German television genres. Although the history of German television programs has been primarily written as histories of different technical genres like TV play, documentary, magazines, movies, etc., few scholars have systematically investigated the development and application of television genres in West Germany. For notable exceptions see Gebhard Rusch, "FernsehGattungen in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland: Kognitive Strukturen im Handeln mit Medien," Hickethier, *Institution*, 189-321; Gebhard Rusch, "Cognition, Media Use, Genres: Sociopsychological Aspects of Media and Genres: TV and TV-Genres in the Federal Republic of Germany," *Poetics* 16 (1987), 431-469; Siegfried Schmidt, "Towards a Constructivist Theory of Genre," *Poetics* 16 (1987), 163-205; Siegfried Schmidt, "Umriss einer Mediengattungstheorie," Kreuzer/Helmut, *Bausteine*, 7-13; Siegfried Schmidt, "Mediengattungen, Berichterstattungsmuster, Darstellungsformen," Klaus Merten/Siegfried Weischenberg (eds.), *Die Wirklichkeit der Medien: Eine Einführung in die Kommunikationswissenschaft* (Opladen: Westdeutscher Verlag, 1993); and Knut Hickethier, "Gattungsgeschichte oder gattungsübergreifende Programmgeschichte? Zu einigen Aspekten der Programmgeschichte des Fernsehens," *Studienkreis Rundfunk und Geschichte* 8 (1982), 144-155. For our purposes the best survey of German television genres has been proposed by Udo Michael Krueger who puts particular emphasis on the content matter of television programs and therefore comes closest to considering programs from the perspective of reception rather than production or criticism, Krüger, *Programmprofile*, 201, 253.

<sup>3</sup> In Germany the category docu-play gave rise to an interesting case of genre dispute. From 1964 to 1987, the ZDF featured an independent program division in charge of docu-plays (*Dokumentarspiel*), a particular type of television play which blends fictitious and factual elements and which the ZDF administrators and journalists sought to establish as an independent TV genre.<sup>3</sup> At least for some time the programs produced as docu-plays were quite popular with the audience, although there is no indication that viewers actually perceived these programs as an independent genre. Most certainly, however, many administrators and journalists in other stations in Germany as well as the media critics never accepted the new type of programming in the terms defined by the ZDF. On the history of the division for docu-plays in the ZDF see F.A. Krummacher, *Die Hauptredaktion Dokumentarspiel im Programm des ZDF: Referat vor dem Fernsehausschuss Spiel und Musik am 2. April 1976* (Mainz: typescript, 1976). Consequently, the docu-play, represents an interesting case of genre dispute which, in this case, ended with the rejection of the initial innovation. The ambivalent reality-value of docu-plays contributed to their demise in the 1970s as other documentary genres and styles exposed the former's fictitious elements. For the same reasons docu-plays have also caused some of the most extensive legal and political controversies in the history of the ZDF, such as the Lebach case of 1972/73. The ZDF had produced a docu-play about a spectacular murder case in 1969 which was banned from broadcast after a public debate and a protracted legal battle between one of the involved criminals and the ZDF. In the end, the Federal Constitutional Court ruled in favor of the plaintiff ranking the protection of his private sphere and his future social reintegration above the viewers' information and entertainment interests. A summary of the case and a bibliography of the literature it produced can be found in Prüsse, *Geschichte*, 247-251. The position of the ZDF whose representatives were very critical of the court's decision are summarized by Ernst Fuhr, "Persönlichkeitsrecht und Informationsfreiheit," *ZDF-Jahrbuch 1973*, 89-97.

**Figure 1: Television Genres Classification**

<u>Non-Fiction</u>		<u>Fiction</u>		
<u>Information</u>	<u>Entertainment</u>	<u>Serious Fiction</u>	<u>Action</u>	<u>Light Fiction</u>
-news	-variety shows	<b>-critical</b>	-thriller	-comedy
-political	-quiz shows	<b>films</b> based	-crime	-slapstick
-economic	-game shows	on original	-adventure	-sitcom
-regional	-music	scripts	-western	-fantasy
<b>-historical</b>	-sports	<b>-critical</b>	-horror	-musical
-cultural	-children's pro.	<b>literary</b>	<b>-war</b>	-sexfilm
-science	-church serv.	<b>adaptations</b>	-spy	- 'Heimatfilm'
<b>-educational</b>	-talkshows	-experimental	-historical epic	-romance
-advice		films	-science fiction	-melodrama
-infotainment		<b>-docu-plays</b>		-satire
-ads		-classical		-popular
		theater		theater
		-experimental		
		theater		

Technical Genres Non-Fiction:  
 magazine, feature, documentary,  
 interview, discussion

Technical Genres Fiction:  
 movie, TV play, TV series, theater play

interviews, talk shows, theater performances, children's programs, and satire, to name just a few.

In addition, the topic is of course omnipresent through marginal references and as historical foil in all types of television programming. This applies in particular to news programs and political and cultural magazines which often invoke historical themes and Nazism in their regular coverage. However, none of these marginal references will be considered here; the analysis is limited to programs which were produced as independent units and clearly identified as such in TV guides and other publications.

In quantitative terms historical programs and programs on Nazism represent only a small share of overall programming. During the first ten years of national television in West Germany,

from 1958 to 1967, all historical programs aired by ARD and ZDF amounted to only slightly more than 5% of prime time. The majority of these five percent were dedicated to contemporary German history, especially the history of Nazism. During these ten years an average of 1.7% of prime time, i.e. a total of about 160 shows and the equivalent of approximately 1,200 minutes of airtime per year, dealt exclusively with the events and the impact of the Third Reich. If measured against the complete output of the stations, the extent of historical programming appears even less significant; in 1965 and 1966, for instance, only circa 3% of the airtime of ARD and ZDF combined can be classified as historical programs.<sup>4</sup> Unfortunately, there are no conclusive statistical data for later years. Some short term studies indicate that the percentages increase significantly around important anniversaries.<sup>5</sup> Also, since the late 1960s a large number of historical programs have been distributed through the third channels of the ARD, which have consistently reserved a higher percentage of airtime for this type of coverage than either of the national public channels.<sup>6</sup> In contrast, the introduction of commercial television has not increased historical programming; the private stations have only very rarely featured historical programs other than war and action movies.<sup>7</sup>

The need for a better understanding of the development and the impact of historical representations on television was raised by historians and specialists of the theory and didactics of history in the aftermath of the broadcasting of *Holocaust* in West Germany in 1979.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> All figures are calculated on the basis of data provided by Feil, *Zeitgeschichte*, 22-42, 153-160; and Hickethier, *Institution*, 406-418.

<sup>5</sup> See for example the quantitative analysis of the representation of the 40th anniversary of the founding of the Federal Republic in the programs of ARD and ZDF provided in Wolfgang Becker/Siegfried Quandt, *Das Fernsehen als Vermittler von Geschichtsbewusstsein: 1989 als Jubiläumsjahr* (Bonn: Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung, 1991), 15-27.

<sup>6</sup> Krüger, *Programmprofile*, 229.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 230.

<sup>8</sup> See especially Wolfgang Protzner/Brigitte Hoppert, *Geschichtsbewusstsein aus der Glotze? Eine Bestandsaufnahme der fachdidaktischen Diskussion zum Thema "Geschichte und Fernsehen"* (München: tuduv,

Unfortunately, these initiatives have led to few tangible results; apparently most West German historians and theorists of history felt uncomfortable with a medium so far removed from their own discursive practices and their social and political focus. Television scholars were equally reluctant to study the historiography of television because they only very rarely considered historical programs as a separate type of television programming. If at all they have analyzed representations of history on television in the context of the development of various technical TV genres, like documentaries, docu-plays, movies, and television plays. Also, in the few cases that scholars have approached the question of historical representation they have rarely crossed the border between fact and fiction and compared historical documentaries and historical fictions.<sup>9</sup> Therefore the literature on television plays<sup>10</sup>, docu-plays, movies<sup>11</sup>, and documentaries<sup>12</sup> includes

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1986); see also "Geschichte in den Medien: Die Podiumsdiskussion des Würzburger Historikertages 1980," *Geschichtswissenschaft und Massenmedien* 1 (1981), 35-54; Bodo Borries, "Geschichte im Fernsehen und Geschichtsfernsehen in der Schule," *Geschichtsdidaktik* 3 (1983), 221-238; Karl Dietrich Bracher, "Geschichte und Medium: Gedanken zum Verhältnis von Fernsehen und Geschichtsbewusstsein," *Aus Politik und Zeitgeschichte* 2/23/1980, 3-9; Thomas Berger, "Kann man Geschichte aus der Glotze lernen?," *Journal für Geschichte* 6 (1984), 9-15; Achatz Müller, "Geschichte im Fernsehen," Klaus Bergmann et al. (eds.), *Handbuch der Geschichtsdidaktik*, 3rd ed., (Düsseldorf: Schwann, 1985), 761-765; and Karl Friedrich Reimers/Hans Friedrich (eds.), *Zeitgeschichte in Film und Fernsehen: Analyse, Dokumentation, Didaktik* (München: Ölschläger, 1985). Among the many immediate reactions of historians to *Holocaust* see especially Mommsen, "Haben die Historiker versagt?"

<sup>9</sup> In most cases, references to historical programs on television are either included in studies of specific genres or they provide analyses of specific programs or series. For notable exceptions see especially Feil, *Zeitgeschichte*; and Guido Knopp/Siegfried Quandt (eds.), *Geschichte im Fernsehen: Ein Handbuch* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1988); Ulrich Kröll, "Geschichte im Fernsehen der Bundesrepublik: Durchbruch zum massenhaften Geschichts-konsum," Ulrich Kröll (ed.), *Massenmedien und Geschichte* (Münster: Regensburg, 1989), 105-128; Becker/ Quandt, *Das Fernsehen*; Rolf Schörken, "Geschichte, vom Bild her gedacht: Geschichte im Fernsehen," Rolf Schörken, *Geschichte in der Alltagswelt: Wie uns Geschichte begegnet und was wir aus ihr machen* (Stuttgart: Klett Cotta, 1981), 203-219; Joan Kristin Bleicher, "Geschichte im Fernsehen: Zwischen Dokumentation und Identifikation," *TheaterZeitschrift* 12 (1993), 23-35; Knut Hickethier, "Das Programm als imaginäres Museum: Geschichte und Gegenwart in Kino und Fernsehen," *TheaterZeitschrift* 12 (1993), 9-22; and Walter Förster, "Das Medium und die Zeitgeschichte," *Studienkreis Rundfunk und Geschichte* 5 (1986), 335-342.

<sup>10</sup> Besides Hickethier, *Fernsehspiel*; and Hickethier, "Kunstanspruch;" see also Knut Hickethier, *Fernspielforschung in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland und der DDR 1950-1985* (Bern: Lang, 1989); Knut Hickethier (ed.), *Deutsche Verhältnisse: Beiträge zum Fernsehspiel und Fernsehfilm in Ost und West* (Siegen: SFB 240, 1993); Irmela Schneider (ed.), *Dramaturgie des Fernsehspiels* (München: Fink, 1980); Anna Luise Heygster/Dieter Stolte (eds.), *Wirklichkeit und Fiktion im Fernsehspiel* (Mainz: Hase & Koehler 1982); Irmela Schneider, "Das Fernsehspiel: Wie es war, ist und sein könnte," Kreuzer/Prümm, *Fernsehsendungen*, 25-52; Tony Schwaegerl, *Das deutsche Fernsehspiel von 1936 bis 1961: 25 Jahre deutsches Fernsehspiel* (Erlangen: PhD thesis, 1964); Peter Rüden (ed.), *Das Fernsehspiel* (München: Fink, 1979); Nierhaus, *Fernsehspiele*; and Eva Maria Russ, *Das Fernsehspiel der siebziger Jahre: Untersuchungen zu unveröffentlichten Manuskripten* (Frankfurt: Lang, 1990).



important, albeit rather fragmented insights into the representation of Nazism on West German television. As a result the systematic study of television histories began only in recent years.<sup>13</sup>

### **The ZDF-Programs on Nazism**

Between 1963 and 1993 the ZDF broadcasted on impressive number of programs which deal with the Nazi past and its postwar legacy. In the period of 31 years the station aired 1,217 shows totaling over 87,000 minutes of airtime. Even after deducting all reruns the numbers still stand at 942 programs with over 65,000 minutes. With hindsight it is most surprising how consistently the ZDF has addressed the topic of Nazism. The data reveal some fluctuations in overall output from year to year, which has to be in part attributed to the fact that more shows tend to be aired around important anniversaries and that the topic of Nazism is sometimes handled by specialized producers and journalists who conclude only one project on the topic every two to three years.

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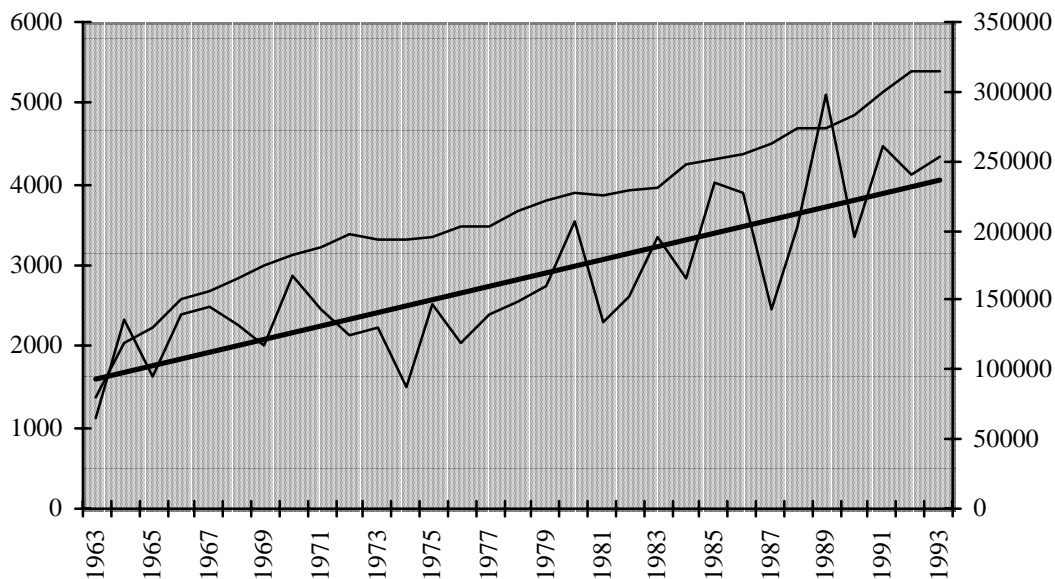
<sup>11</sup> See especially the work of Irmela Schneider, "Ein Weg zur Alltäglichkeit: Spielfilme im Fernsehprogramm," Schanze/Zimmermann, *Künste*, 227-301; Irmela Schneider, *Film, Fernsehen und Co: Zur Entwicklung des Spielfilms in Kino und Fernsehen* (Heidelberg: Winter, 1990); Irmela Schneider, "Überlegungen zur Periodisierung des Spielfilm-Programms im Fernsehen," Kreuzer/Schanze, *Fernsehen*, 64-75; and Hartmut Winkler, *Deutliche Vorlieben: Wie gehen die Filmredaktionen bei ARD und ZDF mit der US-amerikanischen Filmgeschichte um?* (Siegen: SFB 240, 1990).

<sup>12</sup> On the development of feature and documentary on West German television see Peter Zimmermann, "Geschichte von Dokumentarfilm und Reportage von der Adenauer-Ära bis zur Gegenwart," Ludes/Schumacher/Zimmermann, *Dokumentarsendungen*, 213-324; Heinz Heller/Peter Zimmermann (eds.), *Bilderwelten, Weltbilder: Dokumentarfilm und Fernsehen* (Marburg: Hitzeroth, 1990); Peter Zimmermann (ed.), *Fernseh-Dokumentarismus: Bilanz und Perspektiven* (München: Ölschläger, 1992); Heinz Heller (ed.), *Reihen und Aspekte des Dokumentarfilms im Fernsehen der Gegenwart* (Siegen: SFB 240, 1994); Cornelia Bolesch, *Dokumentarisches Fernsehen: Ein Werkstattbericht in 48 Portraits* (München: Ölschläger, 1990); Hans Helmut Hillrichs/Hans Janke (eds.), *Die entfernte Wirklichkeit: Journalistisch-dokumentarische Programme im Fernsehen* (Mainz: Hase & Koehler, 1985); Rüdiger Steinmetz/Helfried Spitra (eds.), *Dokumentarfilm als "Zeichen der Zeit: Vom Ansehen der Wirklichkeit im Fernsehen* (München: Ölschläger, 1989).

<sup>13</sup> See Frank Bösch, "Das 'Dritte Reich' ferngesehen: Geschichtsvermittlung in der historischen Dokumentation," *Geschichte in Wissenschaft und Unterricht* 50/4 (1999), 204-220; Judith Keilbach, "Fernseh-Geschichte: Holocaust und Nationalsozialismus im amerikanischen und im bundesdeutschen Fernsehen," Elisabeth Domansky/Harald Welser (eds.), *Eine offene Geschichte: Zur kommunikativen Tradierung der nationalsozialistischen Vergangenheit* (Tübingen: diskord, 1999), 118-144; and especially Christoph Classen, *Bilder der Vergangenheit: Die Zeit des Nationalsozialismus im Fernsehen der Bundesrepublik Deutschland 1955-1965* (Wien: Böhlau, 1999).

Despite these fluctuations, however, programs on Nazism have very closely followed the general expansion of ZDF airtime; the station has consistently dedicated between 1% and 1.5% of its program to the task of educating and informing its viewers about Germany’s problematic past and about contemporary

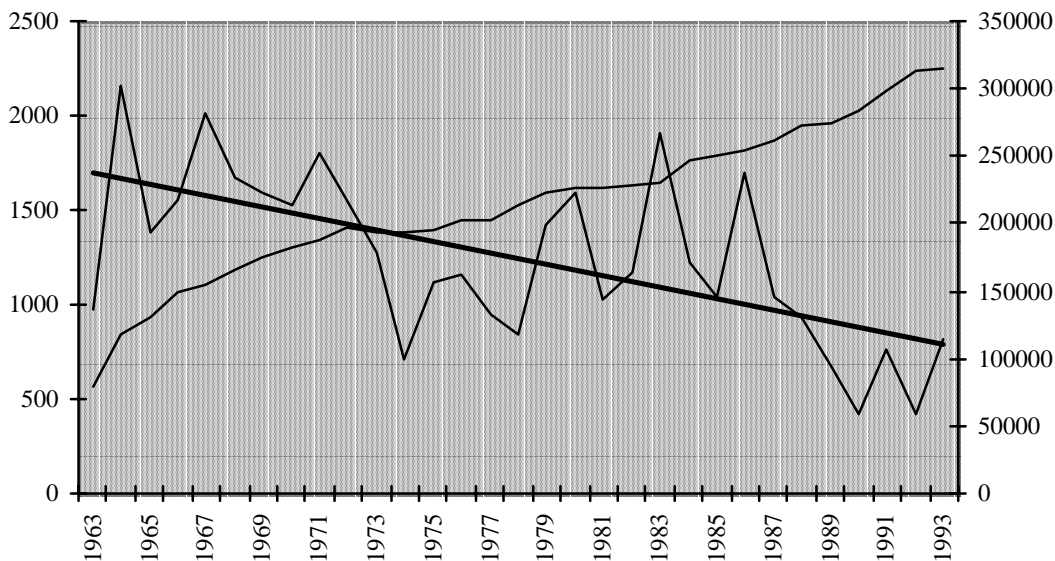
**Graph 1: Total ZDF Output + all ZDF Programs on Nazism**  
(minutes/year)



efforts of mastering its legacy. Each year the ZDF produced or purchased between 30 and 50 programs on Nazism with an average length of 71 minutes each. Statistically the viewers could expect one program on the topic every nine days. Since the station’s administration has never developed any guidelines regarding the quantity of historical programming in general and of programming on Nazism in particular, the figures attest to the editorial staff’s continuous commitment to the project of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*.

The positive results of the first quantitative analysis of ZDF programming have to be qualified immediately, however, when considering the corresponding data for prime time only, i.e., the time between the end of the main evening news broadcast and 10 pm.<sup>14</sup> Any show placed before 7:30 pm or after 10 pm reaches only a small fraction of television households. Since the

**Graph 2: Total ZDF Output and ZDF Prime Time Programs on Nazism**  
(minutes/year)



ZDF, as its public service competitor, has more than tripled its overall output and even more than tripled its editorial and production staff over the last 30 years, the internal competition for prime time programming slots has also gradually intensified. In this increasingly competitive climate

<sup>14</sup> The ZDF has redefined its prime time hours several times during its history in attempts to adapt to viewers' needs and capture a larger share of the prime time audience. The most significant change occurred in 1973 when the ZDF pushed forward the beginning of prime time from 8 pm to 7:30 pm. Since viewers reacted very positively the decision enhanced the station's profile, increased its audience share, and effectively expanded the most valuable air time by 30 minutes. As important as this change might be it also illustrates the severe limitations which program makers encounter when they try to make their productions available to large audiences.

the programs on Nazism have not fared badly but they lost some ground. In the 1960s when the ZDF did not offer much programming in the afternoon and late night, prime time programs on Nazism averaged more than 1,500 minutes per year. In the 1990s, as the great majority of ZDF air time lies outside the coveted two and a half hours after the evening news, prime time programs on Nazism have dropped down to less than 1,000 minutes per year. While the volume of programs on the history of WWII and the Third Reich has kept pace with the gradual expansion of the total output of the station, the prime time share dropped considerably over 31 years.

Since all television producers, writers, and journalists want to see 'their' program in prime time and lobby internally for that objective, the drop in prime time share can hardly be attributed to a lack of commitment among the personnel most closely associated with a given project. Rather, the drop is the outcome of a whole array of political decisions on the level of department heads and higher ranking administrators who ultimately decide about the prime time line-up. In the end, these decision making processes have clearly come to favor other topics than Nazism although they have not prevented productions on the topic in general. The prime time figures and the figures for overall programming indicate that the station's politics had the net effect that with increasing distance to the Nazi past main stream audiences were confronted less and less frequently with their troublesome history while at the same time historically interested viewers among retirees, youths, intellectuals and other minorities who consume television off the beaten tracks of prime time programming have had more and more opportunities to satisfy their historical curiosity; in short, over the decades, Nazism has become a more marginal, special-interest topic.

As already mentioned, there is no indication that these developments are the result of systematic, long-term reflections and decisions about the purposes of historical education and entertainment via television. The categories of historical programs and more specifically programs on Nazism do not coincide with any of the program parameters which are used for internal program analyses and evaluations, for program planning, or for the purpose of allotting personnel and budgetary resources. Therefore, the quantity and quality of historical programming are the outcome of many factors including a vague yet pervasive awareness for the importance of the topic of Nazism, attempts to respond to general societal trends, and efforts to repeat past successes while coordinating all programming initiatives and avoiding repetitive coverage. In addition, the actual programs are influenced by considerations which are not directly linked to the topics under discussion such as real and perceived political and budgetary limitations.

The prime time figures, unlike the general data on the representation of Nazism in the ZDF, also indicate that the efforts of coming to terms with the past via television have evolved in four quantitatively quite distinct phases. Two periods of engagement and two periods of disengagement with the past stand out in retrospect. During the 1960s and early 1970s the ZDF offered on the average more than 1,600 prime time minutes of historical programming on Nazism per year. While these figures were never reached again, the years from 1979 to 1987 mark a similarly active phase in the television coverage on the history of the Third Reich with marks of approximately 1,400 minutes per year. On the other hand, during the second half of the 1970s and since 1988 prime time programming on the topic was markedly reduced reaching amounts of only 1,000 and 600 minutes respectively.

To a large extent these developments have to be attributed to external factors beyond the control of any single station. Following the saturation of the television market all public service stations in West Germany experienced serious budget problems in the 1970s. With the delay of a couple of years, after all program reserves had been used up, the financial crisis influenced program quality. The ZDF had to reduce the percentage of expensive, self-produced or commissioned programs and fill the gaps with cheap imported US-productions which naturally did not address specifically German topics, like the problems of Nazism and its legacy. Likewise, since the late 1980s, the public stations tried to respond and preempt the rise of their commercial competition by offering more entertaining prime time fare which was only possible at the expense of more serious subject matters. In addition, the lull in historical coverage in the 1970s and the 1990s has also been influenced by political events, like the crisis caused by the rise of left-wing political terrorism in the Federal Republic during the 1970s and the collapse of the Berlin wall in 1989, events which prompted the media to focus on more present concerns and prevent or delay the development of new programs on Nazism.

However, while these economic and political events have set the parameters within which the process of coming to terms with the past could unfold on the screen the different phases outlined above also reflect substantial transformations in the media representation of Nazism which were brought about by factors more closely linked to the evolution of the Federal Republic's historical culture. From the first to the second phase of engagement the programs on Nazism have undergone important changes in terms of subject matter, historical focus, television genres, and television aesthetics. While some of these changes are television, or perhaps even ZDF specific, many mirror developments in other sphere of Germany's historical culture and are linked to common generational patterns, in this case generational transformations among

television makers and television audiences. Thus the following analysis of the structure of the ZDF programs about the history of the “Final Solution” gives insights into the social construction of historical meaning on the level of intellectual production and, more indirectly and far less tangible, also popular reception. This analysis is based on the assumption that the visions of Nazism offered to German prime time viewers represent one of the best source of information about the evolution of the collective memory of the Nazi past in West Germany.

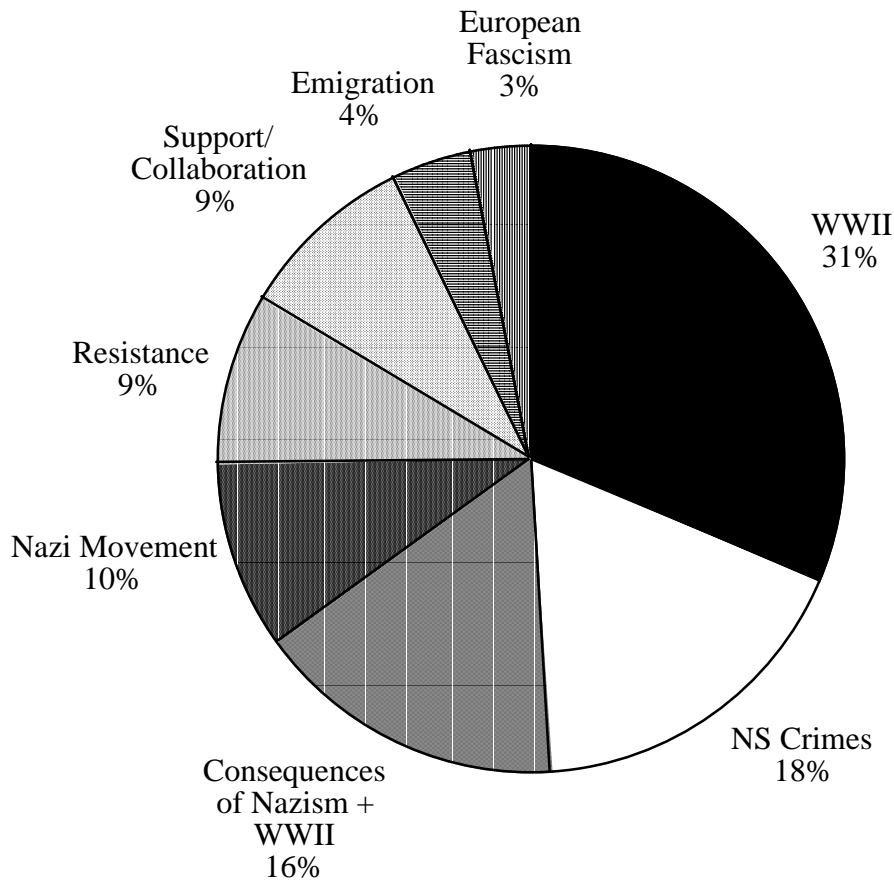
The programs of the ZDF on the history of the Nazi era during the years from 1963 to 1993 cover a wide variety of subjects reaching from a large contingent of almost 350 programs on the topic of WWII to a small segment of less than 30 shows on European Fascist movements outside of Germany. However, three major topics make up over 60% of all programs on the history of the Third Reich. The most frequently covered topic of WWII, which amounts to almost 1/3 of the sample, is followed by two segments of roughly equal size which are dedicated to the topics “Nazi Crimes” and “Consequences of Nazism” respectively. Next in line is a block of three subjects which each reflect approximately 10% of the station’s total output on the topic; these subjects are the “Nazi Movement,” “Resistance to Nazism,” and “Support/Collaboration with the Regime.” The end of the list consists of two themes, “Emigration from Nazi Germany” and the already mentioned contingent on “European Fascism,” both of which have only rarely been addressed by the producers and journalists of the ZDF.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Although this line-up changes only slightly when we focus on prime time programming, some of these changes are worthwhile noticing. On the level of overall programming the topic Nazi Crimes surpasses the theme Consequences of Nazism by more than 1,300 minutes. In prime time, however, the order is reversed with both categories staying close to the 6,000 minutes mark. A similar reversal occurs among the topics which form the second block and which each amount to approximately 10% of the programs on Nazism. While on the level of general programming programs on Nazi Movement exceed the categories of Resistance and Collaboration by over 600 minutes, on the level of prime time the theme Resistance tops the other two topics by the same margin. Thus, in both cases the potentially more disturbing topics are less frequently addressed during prime time where they tend to be quantitatively outranked by themes of which it is safe to say that they are less problematic to German viewers. Inquiries into the aftereffects of Nazism and WWII which include coverage of the German reconstruction efforts are

**Graph 3: Topics of ZDF Programs on Nazism and WWII**

(percentage shares based on total minutes per topic)



Apparently, producers, and possibly also viewers displayed a strong tendency to recall the events of the 1930s and 1940s in terms of the military confrontation between Germany and the

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certainly easier to come to terms with than explorations into the history of the “Final Solution” and other Nazi atrocities. Similarly, it is certainly more pleasant to learn about the German resistance, however futile, than to ponder the problem of the widespread support which the Nazis enjoyed all over Germany. At the same time, the significance of these tendencies should not be exaggerated. The quantitative differences between general programming and prime time programming are a relatively small. In general, the comparison reveals the overall consistency with which the ZDF has addressed the topic of Nazism.



Allies. In comparison, some of the key elements of the Nazi period have received considerably less and insufficient attention. That applies in particular to the subject of the Nazi movement and the Nazi state which has clearly not been one of the foci of West German television. Thus, the core of the Nazi phenomenon has been left strangely unexplored, at least in the context of the ZDF program. Also, it should be noted that in quantitative terms the ZDF appears to provide a strangely 'balanced' rendition of the Nazi era by giving the same amount of air time to the topics Nazi Movement, Support/Collaboration, and Resistance respectively. This balanced view might be justified for didactic reasons but it hardly reflects the historical constellation during Nazism. The figures raise the question if the ZDF coverage tends to inflate the importance of resistance to Nazism while paying insufficient attention to the extensive passive support and acquiescence in the face of Nazi policies of persecution and genocide.

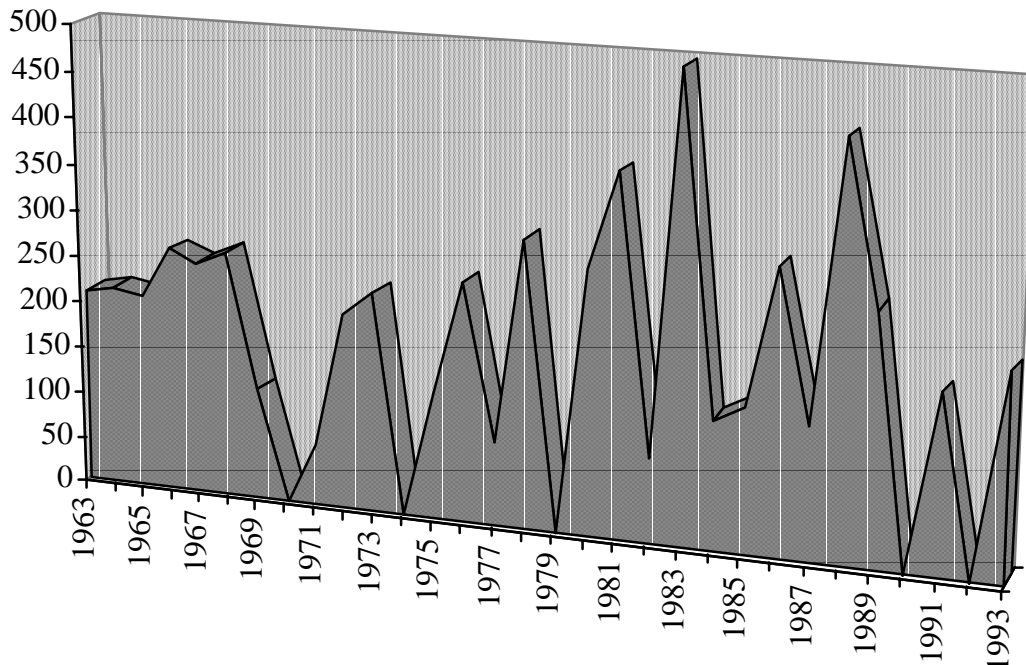
On the other hand, it has to be emphasized that television has paid considerable attention to the most horrific aspect of the Nazi era, i.e. the topic of the Holocaust and other Nazi crimes. At least in quantitative terms the ZDF has engaged quite aggressively with the most troublesome legacy of Nazism making the Nazi crimes the second most frequently covered topic in overall programming. Finally, the topical survey indicates that German television has put particular stress on the task of relating past and present and situating its viewers vis-à-vis the Nazi past by emphasizing its historical consequences. In this respect, West German television producers seemed to have been particularly concerned with the task of spelling out the relevance of the topic for the citizens of the Federal Republic by contextualizing and historicizing Nazism. Apparently, television, unlike other spheres of Germany's historical culture, has more directly addressed the question of what it means to live in a post-Nazi society.

## The Holocaust and other Nazi Crimes in the Programs of the ZDF

The ZDF has represented the Nazi crimes with considerable consistency during prime time. In 31 years there have only been five years during which the topic was not scheduled during prime time: 1970, 1974, 1979 (the year *Holocaust* was broadcast by the ARD), 1990, and 1992. On the average, viewers could expect one prime time program every six weeks. The periods of greatest interest in the topic coincide with the two phases of engagement identified above. In the 1960s,

**Graph 4: Historical Development of ZDF Prime Time Programs  
on NS Crimes**

(prime time minutes per years)



during the first six years of the station's existence, the yearly prime time coverage on Nazi crimes never dropped below 200 minutes. In addition, the subject ranked among the station's top priorities in the 1980s when it reached its all-time maximum of almost 500 prime time minutes in 1983. However, both periods differ substantially with regard to the type of coverage that was offered to prime time audiences. In the 1960s programs were fairly evenly divided between shows that focused on the "Final Solution" and shows which explored other aspects of the Nazi crimes, in particular the concentration camp universe<sup>16</sup>, and the persecution of German dissidents.<sup>17</sup> In contrast, during the 1980s, almost 80% of the programming consisted of productions which concentrated on the persecution of the Jews in Nazi Germany, and, even more specifically, on the anti-Jewish policies prior to the Holocaust.

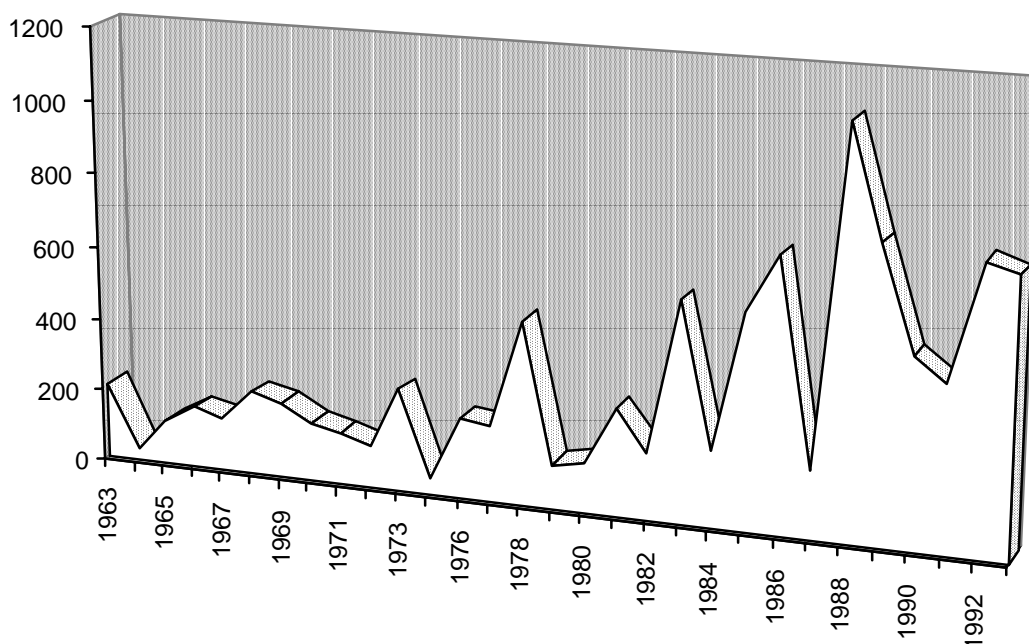
### **Graph 5: Development of ZDF Programs about the Holocaust**

(minutes per year)

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<sup>16</sup> See for example *Frau in der Baracke*, 12/15/64; *Zwei Halbzeiten in der Hölle*, 6/21/65; *Die Passagierin*, 10/24/66; *Biskuit*, 5/14/71; *Das siebte Kreuz*, 1/10/72; and *Appell*, 11/27/72.

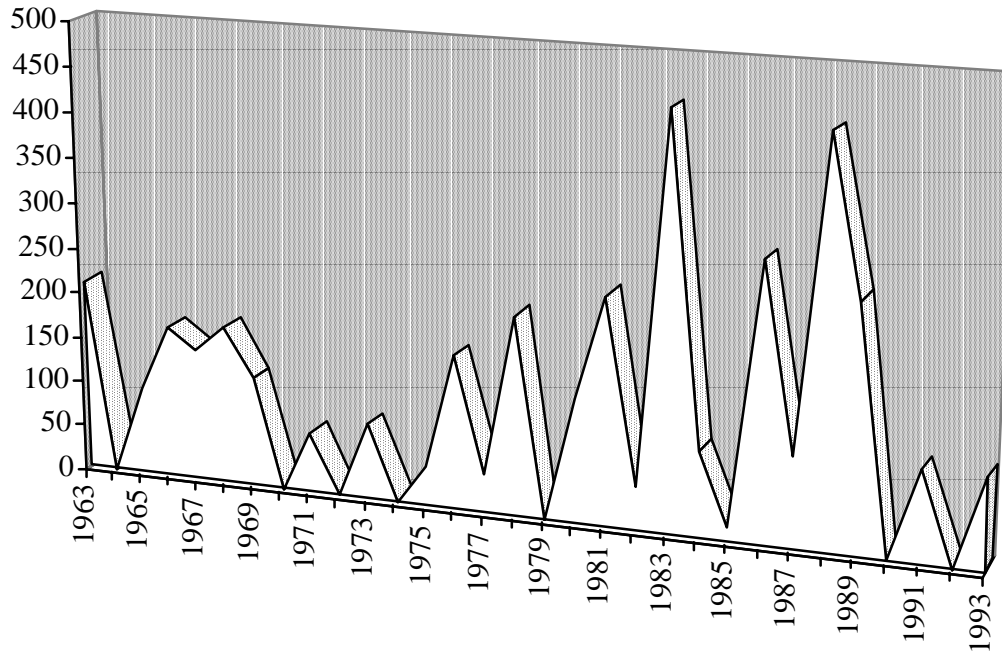
<sup>17</sup> See in particular *Der Röhm Putsch*, 6/30/67; *Eine Gefangene bei Stalin und Hitler*, 1/26/68; and *Die Weltbühne: Geschichte einer Zeitschrift*, 5/5/68.



The quantitative development of Holocaust programming indicates that the topic has been pursued on the modest scale of 200 minutes per year since the ZDF's inception. West German television did not discover the topic of the "Final Solution" in the 1980s after the broadcast of *Holocaust*. At that point, the topic had been part of the regular television fare for over 15 years. But the figures also illustrate that 1978 marked an important turning point. The station's output doubled within a year and since the early 1980s an annual average of over 500 minutes of air time has been dedicated to the history of the "Final Solution." An additional look at the development of prime time figures confirms and further illuminates these findings. In prime time the development of Holocaust coverage has evolved parallel to the phases of engagement identified above. Whenever the topic of Nazism figured prominently in the ZDF prime time line-up, a considerable share of air time was dedicated to Germany's most troublesome past. Like the

**Graph 6: Development of ZDF Prime Time Programs about the Holocaust**

(prime time minutes per year)



representation of Nazism in general the representation of the Holocaust appears to have developed in four phases. After several years of consistent coverage in the second half of the 1960s, the topic all but disappears from prime time during the early 1970s. Subsequently, narratives about the Holocaust return to prime time where they reach an all-time high in 1983 and 1988 respectively. Never before and never since have the media engaged with the legacy of genocide and the Nazi anti-Jewish policies with the same intensity. Finally, in the early 1990s, the subject is quite suddenly relegated from prime time into more marginal programming slots. The outpour of Holocaust related material continues but it is only offered to small audiences which consume television outside of prime time.

The qualitative data correspond very well to qualitative transformations in the representation of the Holocaust on German television which also developed in four relatively

distinct phases that should be summarized before a closer look at each subcategory of Holocaust narratives. During the 1960s, when the topic of the Nazi crimes became an important topic in the political culture of the Federal Republic, the ZDF contributed to the task of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* with two distinct types of programming. On the one hand, the station aired a number of German produced philosemitic programs which (re)introduced viewers to Jewish history and Jewish customs. These goodwill documentaries and features summarized centuries of Jewish German culture and visited the few remaining Jewish communities in an effort to combat postwar anti-Semitism. The programs clearly acknowledged the facts of the “Final Solution” but they did not focus on the crimes themselves. Instead, German television makers undertook modest repair efforts aimed at improving future German-Jewish relations.

The second type of programs from the 1960s imported movie productions from Eastern Europe. These superb, self-critical feature films told stories of failed rescue efforts and coincidental survival which addressed the traumatic legacy of the Holocaust in formerly occupied Eastern Europe. Directors like Andrzej Wajda and Jiri Weiss explored and criticized the population’s unwillingness and inability to protect their Jewish fellow citizens from Nazi persecution. In their countries of origin these films had a strong self-critical edge but introduced into the German context they inadvertently supported the problematic conclusion that the German population, like their eastern counterparts, had no recourse against the Nazi policies and deserved the status of an occupied nation. The films were personalized, expressionistic allegories of failed solidarity and ironic twists of fate under extraordinary circumstances. Rather than providing accurate histories of the Nazi crimes they explored the moral dilemmas created by tragic events which befell the countries from abroad. In addition to goodwill features and ‘displaced’ allegories of persecution the programs of the 1960s include an exceptional

celebration of German rescue efforts and, even more surprising, a very early 1964 television play about profiteers of the aryanization of Jewish businesses in postwar Germany. In general, however, the programs avoid any direct and/or self-critical engagement with the history of the “Final Solution.” At a time when German historians had already begun their study of the perpetrators and the bureaucracy of genocide, television images of the “Final Solution” were still ‘out of focus;’ they provided only indirect and deflected glimpses of the Holocaust.

Ulrich Herbert has called the 1970s the second phase of repression of the Nazi legacy in the Federal Republic which followed the silence of the 1950s and the first wave of research and debate in the 1960s. Although his remarks were primarily directed at the historiography and political culture of the decade, they also aptly summarize the television coverage of the period. The few programs of the 1970s highlighted fictitious and factual stories of successful rescue operations and thus focused on the most reassuring aspect of the history of the Holocaust.

The prominence of the non-Jewish helpers on the ZDF screen ended quite suddenly with the onset of the survival paradigm in 1978. The first wave of survival narratives consisted of documentaries and features which developed the dialectic of suffering and survival on the basis of individual case studies. Television makers interviewed survivors in Germany but also ‘imported’ them from all over the world. Since this first wave commenced in 1978 and the programs in question had been planned and in production for at least one year, the beginning of the survival syndrome can not be attributed to the media event Holocaust. The phenomenon resulted from a confluence of generational and political factors which produced similar paradigms of Holocaust narratives in a number of national cultures, especially Israel, the United States and, most surprisingly, West Germany.

However, the second wave of survival narratives was directly linked to the success of *Holocaust* in 1979. Starting in 1983 the ZDF featured an impressive string of commissioned and purchased expensive Holocaust fiction which represents the station's political and aesthetic answer to *Holocaust*. The series of vivid, fictitious renditions of the everyday histories of Nazi anti-Semitic policies comprises an impressive inventory of some of the best visual Holocaust fiction ever produced. Beginning with the ZDF production of Feuchtwanger's *Geschwister Oppermann* it included subsequent ZDF mini-series like *Die Bertinis*, a highlight of the station's 38 year history, and *Die Durchreise*, a far less sophisticated but equally successful narrative of persecution and survival during Nazism. In addition, the ZDF aired and helped produce acclaimed German feature films such as *David*, and *Regentropfen*, and purchased international television bestsellers like *The Winds of War*, *Der Schrei nach Leben*, *The Story of Simon Wiesenthal*, *Playing for Time* as well as US movies like *Sophie's Choice*.

Unlike the Holocaust coverage of earlier decades which featured a narrow range of subject matter and genre types, the apex of Holocaust programming in the 1980s presented a wider spectrum of stories and program types. In the course of two decades the representation of the Holocaust on German television had become a complex multi-layered process. In addition to the dominant survivor narratives the ZDF produced a new round of philosemitic goodwill programs and continued the celebration of altruistic rescuers. But more important was the onset of two new types of Holocaust stories which, on a modest scale, called into question the dialectic of suffering and survival.

Especially in the late 1980s ZDF administrators broadcast a number of accounts of failed survival, both fictional and factual, which highlighted the physical and psychological pain of survival and thus effectively undercut the more conventional redemptive message of the



dominant paradigm. Furthermore, some shows appeared in the margins of prime time which were dedicated to the victims of the “Final Solution” rather than its survivors. However, it should be emphasized that this was an important yet rare phenomenon that illustrates to what extent the victims and their memory have been left unrepresented. Finally, the programs of the 1980s also featured the first sustained effort to engage with the perpetrators of the “Final Solution” on the television screen. During the 1980s and early 1990s perpetrator studies only filled a small fraction of the airtime dedicated to the Holocaust and they frequently remaining in marginal programming slots. Nevertheless, these first perpetrators stories prepared for the most recent transformation in Holocaust coverage offered to German audiences. In the aftermath of the Goldhagen phenomenon German television makers have finally made the deed and motives of the perpetrators a primary focus of inquiry.

However, the hitherto last phase of Holocaust coverage had already begun in the late 1980s; it was not characterized by new subject matter but was side effect of the overall transformation of Germany’s television landscape. As commercial networks, which were first licensed in 1984, started to attract large market shares, their public service competitors rose to the challenge by banishing less popular topics and programming formats from their prime time line-up. As a result, historical programming in general and Holocaust subjects in particular have almost completely disappeared from early evening program slots. Since the late 1980s the history of the “Final Solution,” including the most recent wave of perpetrator studies, are aired in the afternoon and late night hours which severely limits their overall ratings.

#### Philosemitic Television

A considerable share of the programs about Nazi programs and Nazi genocide has been concentrated in the month of March on the occasion of the annual Week of Brotherhood which -- initiated and organized by the societies for Christian-Jewish cooperation and endorsed by state and federal governments -- have been a prominent part of the Federal Republic's cultural and political calendar since 1950. Modeled after similar traditions in the US, the societies and the Week of Brotherhood were designed to further Christian-Jewish dialogue and reconciliation. These initiatives express the philosemitism of West Germany's political culture: "they are almost state institutions, they represent the official good will."<sup>18</sup> The public service stations have reflected this official philosemitism and occasionally broadcast educational reports about Jewish culture and traditions and about the loss which Germany suffered by having murdered German and European Jewry.<sup>19</sup> At times such programs include "pathos-laden proclamations of the exceptional importance of German Jews in the arts, literature, philosophy, medicine, journalism, etc."<sup>20</sup> But as with all philosemitic representations, the well-intended efforts could easily backfire and reinforce traditional anti-Semitic stereotypes. For instance, after having watched the 1968 ZDF feature *Die Juden von Prag* a reviewer came to the conclusion that "[a]gain and again one has to admire the achievements of the Jews, their intelligence, and the unwavering, tenacious consistency with which they pursue their aims."<sup>21</sup> In light of such highly ambivalent language printed in one of West Germany's leading TV guides the value and the impact of

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<sup>18</sup> R. Geiss quoted in Burgauer, *Zwischen Erinnerung und Verdrängung*, 104; see also Stern, *Whitewashing*, 310-326.

<sup>19</sup> See for example the ZDF programs *Die Juden von Prag: Bericht über ihre tausendjährige Geschichte*, 10/11/68; *Jiddisch: Die deutsche Sprache der Juden*, 10/26/69; *Juden am Rhein*, 4/20/73; *Juden in Deutschland 1: Spur des Leidens: Vom Ghetto zum Vernichtungslager*, 3/26/78; *Was gewejn...es war einmal: Reise durch alte jüdische Zentren 1-3*, 6/17+19/85 and 7/1/85; *Denk ich Ostern an Deutschland: Juden erinnern sich an ihre christlichen Mitbürger*, 4/11/90; and *Unter der Last der Jahrhunderte gebeugt: Die Gräber der Juden*, 11/20/90.

<sup>20</sup> Walter Fabian, "Pathetische Proklamationen," *epd/Kirche und Rundfunk*, 10/15/88; see also Susanne Wankell, "Nur abgefragt," *FUNK-Korrespondenz*, 10/21/88; and Joachim Hauschild, "Letzte Zeugen," *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, 10/13/88.

programs designed in the spirit of reconciliation are dubious at best. In addition, the scheduling of German-Jewish reconciliation programs sometimes clearly revealed their status as more or less compulsory exercises in philosemitism:

It's eerie: During Saturday prime time Kristina Söderbaum [a very popular German actress during the 1930s and 1940s, WK] is given ample opportunity to kiss all her life acquaintances for the purpose of general entertainment, but when the Week of Brotherhood tops the calendar we encounter meaningless, unorganized interviews broadcast during the witching hour, interviews which conjure up an unimpaired and apparently unperturbed cultural consciousness and feature a great finale during which the spirit of Buber's Bible commentary floats victoriously over the mass graves.<sup>22</sup>

The philosemitic programs played an important role in the 1960s and occasionally returned to the screen during the 1980s. They included short references to the Holocaust for the explicit purpose of creating sympathy for Jewish culture and Israeli politics. The well-intended, practical repair work of the goodwill programs were followed by repair efforts of a very different kind. The Holocaust stories of the 1970s, which celebrated successful rescue efforts, were more generally designed to restore hope in humanity, perhaps especially German humanity.

## Rescuers

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<sup>21</sup> Anonymous reviewer of the ZDF feature *Die Juden von Prag*, 10/11/68 in *Gong* 44 (1968).

<sup>22</sup> Quote from "Alles nur Schicksal," *Badische Zeitung*, 3/8/78, a review of "Es verfolgt mich bis auf den heutigen Tag: Ein deutsch-jüdisches Schicksal," 3/6/78 aired after 11 pm.

While representations of the Holocaust from the victims' perspective have been a regular feature on German television, especially during the second phase of engagement since the late 1970s, ZDF programs have rarely focused on the actions and reactions of the perpetrators, bystanders, or the few individuals who actively rescued Jews. However, although they are few in number, the rescue narratives dominate the small sample of Holocaust stories which reach prime time audiences during the first half of the 1970s. Most of the rescuers who appeared on the ZDF screen were non-Germans, including the Swedish diplomat Raoul Wallenberg who saved many Jews in Hungary before the end of the war but was then imprisoned by the Soviets and disappeared in the Gulag.<sup>23</sup>

For obvious reasons the representation of rescue operations of Jews undertaken by Germans is a particularly problematic issue. On the one hand, television programs which highlight the exceptional courage and integrity of Germans who helped Jews might convincingly convey the obligation for human solidarity and resistance in the face of such blatant crimes as genocide. Also, such programs could show by way of concrete examples that the possibility to act upon this obligation was not as impossible as many contemporaries of Nazism generally assumed or argued after the fact. Finally, the programs could even help to extend the deserved recognition and monetary compensation to surviving rescuers who were generally ignored by West Germany's historical culture -- probably precisely because their very existence called into question some fundamental defense strategies.<sup>24</sup> On the other hand, any representation of this

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<sup>23</sup> The Canadian documentary *Lebendig begraben: Das ungeklärte Schicksal des Raoul Wallenberg*, 3/7/85 was co-authored by the son of one of Wallenberg's charges and deals more with Wallenberg's postwar fate than his rescue efforts. For other examples of unsuccessful attempts to save Jews in occupied countries see the East European movies *Der neunte Kreis*, 11/20/63; and *Romeo, Julia und die Finsternis*, 11/15/65; and the theater production *Eli: Mysterienspiel vom Leiden Israels*, 3/8/70.

<sup>24</sup> The lack of acknowledgment and financial support for surviving rescuers was appropriately pointed out in a 1972 ZDF documentary *Wer ein Menschenleben rettet...: "Judenhelfer:" damals gefährdet -- heute vergessen?*, 3/22/72.

topic had carefully to avoid the impression that the purpose of the program was “to provide sedatives for the German conscience.”<sup>25</sup>

The problems with the depiction of German rescuers were already aptly illustrated by the production history one of the earliest representative of the rescue genre, the 1968 ZDF docu-play *Feldwebel Schmid*. The play is based on the factual case of a German NCO who provided Jews with fake identity papers in the Vilna ghetto and who was court-martialed and executed in 1942.<sup>26</sup> The ZDF editorial staff tried to avoid the impression that *Feldwebel Schmid* followed a self-congratulatory or self-defensive agenda by diligently researching the historical accuracy of the play<sup>27</sup> and by hiring the young Israeli director Nathan Jariv and the Jewish writer Hermann Adler who was himself an eyewitness of Schmid’s actions in Vilna. In the end this strategy did not work out and raised more problems than it solved, in part because of the extremely difficult personality of the scriptwriter who could not provide an acceptable script.<sup>28</sup> Even after another writer had been involved, the script was still not satisfactory. At same time, however, the production could no longer be stopped because of political considerations: “The Israeli ambassador in Bonn as well as the German ambassador in Tel Aviv strongly support this ZDF project.”<sup>29</sup>

Under these circumstances it is not surprising that the final result was unconvincing. The play which was broadcast on March 22, 1968 still contained historical inaccuracies, many

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<sup>25</sup> Hellmut A. Lange, “Dank an den Lebensretter Feldwebel Schmid,” *Schwäbische Zeitung*, 3/29/68.

<sup>26</sup> *Feldwebel Schmid*, 3/22/68;

<sup>27</sup> The ZDF historian and editorial staff member Dr. Neubauer carefully researched the factual accuracy of the script and found numerous mistakes and misrepresentations, see his internal reports about the script addressed to Werner Murawski, the director of the section docu-play, dated 8/10/66 and 1/31/67.

<sup>28</sup> Hermann Adler showered his ZDF contacts with letters and ultimately distanced himself from the finished product; for one of many examples see Adler’s letter to Werner Murawski dated 12/22/67.

<sup>29</sup> Letter of Hans Günther Imlau to the ZDF director general, Karl Holzamer, dated 7/24/67.

stereotypes, and stilted dialogues.<sup>30</sup> One reviewer even came to the surprising and certainly unintended conclusion that the play “thoroughly disproves the assumption that one could have resisted more vigorously or saved more Jews under Hitler.”<sup>31</sup> Thus, the program illustrated what the playwright Adler had expressed very succinctly during the production process: “The contemporary Federal Republic is certainly opposed to the gassing of Jews... But it also does not really know what to do with people like Anton Schmid.”<sup>32</sup> The dilemma illustrated by the docudrama *Feldwebel Schmid* helps us to understand why the German media have shown such reluctance to represent German resisters to the Holocaust and why Oskar Schindler type stories have not flourished in Germany earlier. Faced with the moral dilemma between inappropriate self-defense and moral education and operating on politically treacherous ground between anti- and philosemitism, television and other media decided to leave the topic unrepresented -- until it was conveniently raised abroad and imported with *Schindler's List*. The absence of this type of story in Germany's historical culture certainly also explains the extraordinary success of the movie with the German audience.<sup>33</sup> In Germany, *Schindler's List* introduced a new type of Holocaust story which, coming from abroad, could be enjoyed without qualms because its origins could not be linked to any self-serving moral agenda.

### The Survivor Paradigm

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<sup>30</sup> See the reviews by Klaus Hamburger, “Nachgespielte Vernichtung,” *FUNK-Korrespondenz*, 3/29/68; and “Ein Fall von List,” *Vorwärts*, 4/5/68.

<sup>31</sup> “Packendes Dokumentarspiel von ‘unbewältigter Vergangenheit,’” *Funk-Uhr* 14 (1968).

<sup>32</sup> Letter of Hermann Adler to Werner Murawski dated 12/22/67.

<sup>33</sup> *Schindler's List* was seen in Germany by over six million people between March 1994 and May 1995, *Filmecho* 7 (1995), 28.

From the late 1970s, even during the yearly Week of Brotherhood, German viewers have encountered Jews primarily as victims or, more precisely, as survivors of the Holocaust. The survivors' perspective informs approximately 60% of all ZDF programs on the history of the "Final Solution." Many of the stories of survival focus on the victim's escape from the grasp of the Nazi bureaucracy, for instance by changing identities<sup>34</sup> or by going into hiding.<sup>35</sup> Another set of programs describes how Jewish victims survived the camps.<sup>36</sup> These programs include some of the best known visual representations of the Holocaust such as *Sophies Entscheidung* (*Sophie's Choice*), *Spiel um Zeit* (*Playing for Time*), or *Recht, nicht Rache: Die Geschichte des Simon Wiesenthal* (*Justice not Revenge: The Story of Simon Wiesenthal*). In the context of German television the programs stand out because they are among the few shows which visually recreate the camp universe and also feature excellent performances by such accomplished actors as Meryl Streep, Vanessa Redgrave, and Ben Kingsley. In general, the programs on survivors and escapees, including the aforementioned artistic highlights, convey the triumph of survival as much as they attest to the horror of the camps. The programs focus on the exception; they deal with survivors not the 'average' victims who did not live to tell their stories; they present and invite identification with the exceptionally lucky, resourceful, cunning, and gifted individuals who, in the fictitious world of Holocaust films, are often also blessed with exceptional virtue; the figures represented by Streep, Redgrave, Kingsley, and others tend to be individuals of "extreme

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<sup>34</sup> For stories of changed and mistaken identity see for example *Nur ein Tropfen Blut*, 11/6/65; *Flucht in das Gefängnis*, 3/16/66; *Samson*, 11/6/67; *Der alte Mann und das Kind*, 10/8/73; *Hiobs Revolte*, 3/11/84; and *Menschliches hinter den Schlagzeilen: Die Abenteuer des Hitlerjungen Salomon*, 12/3/91.

<sup>35</sup> Stories about survival in hiding are related for instance in *Der Humanist*, 6/19/70; *David*, 3/7/83; *Zuflucht: Berliner Juden im Versteck*, 3/2/86; and *Die Bertinis: Chronik einer Hamburger Familie 5: 1944/45*, 11/8/88; *Durchreise: Geschichte einer Firma 5: 1944-45*, 3/11/93.

<sup>36</sup> *30 Jahre nach Auschwitz*, 1/26/75; *Spiel um Zeit: Das Mädchenorchester in Auschwitz*, 3/9+10/81; *Der Schrei nach Leben 2*, 11/19/86; *Recht, nicht Rache: Die Geschichte des Simon Wiesenthal 1*, 11/20/89; and *Sophies Entscheidung*, 3/8/92.

integrity.”<sup>37</sup> In addition, many of the Holocaust stories broadcast by the ZDF, especially the prominent prime time shows, feature suspenseful narratives which contain the horror by means of action-driven adventure stories. One example of this type of coverage is the 1983 French/Canadian coproduction *Der Schrei nach Leben* which is based on the memoirs of the survivor Martin Grey and which was aired by the ZDF in 1986: “In the Warsaw ghetto, in Treblinka, during Martin’s escape through the countryside -- always the same picture: individuals who are unconcerned by the dangers which surround them and who are suddenly confronted with difficult ‘problems’ -- just like in any run of the mill adventure film... Everything is geared towards suspense.”<sup>38</sup>

The tendency towards glorification and suspense is particularly noticeable in prime time fiction about the history of the “Final Solution,” especially in US made mini-series and international coproductions. But similar strategies of representation also inform many factual programs about the Holocaust in which the very presence of survivors signals the exceptionally positive development of their life story -- exceptionally positive, of course, only in the context of the history of the Holocaust. Also in the realm of factual programming survivors’ tales and interviews form a very specific genre which is based on a peculiar contract with the viewer who, in watching the program, agrees to listen to accounts of extreme brutality in combination with accounts of exceptional fortune and/or courage. In most cases the visual evidence on the screen, i.e., the survivor, attests primarily to the fortuitous part of the story, the fact of survival.<sup>39</sup> The

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<sup>37</sup> This characterization of the representation of Fania Fenelon in *Playing for Time* by the film critic Anette Insdorf applies to the representation of many Holocaust survivors on television; Anette Insdorf, *Indelible Shadows: Film and the Holocaust*, 2nd ed. (New York: Cambridge UP, 1989), 20.

<sup>38</sup> Thomas Thieringer, “Psychoschocker,” *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, 11/21/86, review of *Der Schrei nach Leben* which premiered in Germany on the ZDF channel on 11/17+19+23/86.

<sup>39</sup> For examples of such ‘standard’ stories of victimization and survival see *Wiedersehen mit Laupheim*, 4/12/68; *30 Jahre nach Auschwitz*, 1/26/75; *Herbst der Welt: Samuel Bak -- ein Maler aus Israel*, 2/8/76; *Es verfolgt mich bis auf den heutigen Tag: Ein deutsch-jüdisches Schicksal*, 3/6/78; *Wenn ich wieder ins Leben zurückkehre: Fania*



personal history of Simon Wiesenthal which was often represented in ZDF programs is an apt illustration of the binary structure of most survival stories.<sup>40</sup> The narrative of Wiesenthal's ordeal in the Nazi camps is always juxtaposed to his exceptionally successful postwar 'career.' The viewers encounter a highly articulate, determined, intelligent individual who has fought back and almost single-handedly brought to justice hundreds of Nazi criminals: "For large parts of the program Wiesenthal came across as a lively conversationalist, a Viennese story teller who swiftly enumerated a number of atrocities and presented his gallery of arrested Nazi criminals."<sup>41</sup>

The redemptive narrative structure inherent in many survivors' stories was not only used by television journalists who approach survivors but also by survivors themselves when they brought their stories to the screen. Already in 1975, several years before the onset of the survivor paradigm, Karel Vreba produced a documentary entitled *30 Jahre nach Auschwitz* to mark the 30th anniversary of the liberation of the camp. The documentary exemplifies the didactic problem inherent in the survival paradigm which has been very succinctly expressed in a review by Walter Jens:

For the inmates of Auschwitz who produced the film the reminiscing documentation might indeed be a work of liberation and working through, a work which confirms their solidarity in the very process of production. But how have younger generations absorbed the film, generations for whom the "ramp of Auschwitz" is a textbook term like the "ballroom of Versailles"? Did for them the horror prevail over the atmosphere of cops

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*Fenelon und die Jahre nach Auschwitz*, 3/9/81; ... *damit es nie wieder geschieht: Die Überlebenden des Holocaust in Israel*, 7/21/81; *Aber vergessen, das kann ich nicht: Ein jüdischer Kulturkritiker erinnert sich*, 10/24/83; *Schreiben und Überleben: Das ungewöhnliche Leben der Krystyna Zywaslka*, 10/20/85; *Im Zeichen des Feuers: Zur Verleihung des Friedensnobelpreises an Elie Wiesel*, 12/10/86; see also below section

<sup>40</sup> *Beschrieben und vergessen: Simon Wiesenthal oder Ich jagte Eichmann*, 3/2/78; *Zeugen des Jahrhunderts: Simon Wiesenthal im Gespräch mit Guido Knopp*, 12/6/82; *Sonntagsgespräch: Simon Wiesenthal*, 11/8/87; *Recht nicht Rache: Die Geschichte des Simon Wiesenthal I+2*, 11/20+21/89.

and robbers, of camaraderie and adventurous escape?... I am afraid that the decision to let the old *Auschwitzer* follow their memories was not a very good idea, at least not from a didactic point of view. The well-known story pattern -- do you remember, buddy -- trivialized the past for the viewer in front of the screen.<sup>42</sup>

### ‘Failed’ Survival

Only few ZDF programs succeeded in undercutting the binary structure of the survival paradigm by constructing stories against the grain of the genre, stories which use the survivors to elicit and capture on film powerful reflections of pain in their faces, their gestures, and their language without offering narrative space to stories of escape and rescue. Such productions need exceptional skill and/or a certain amount of violence, for instance the type of violence which is involved in the decision to film survivors of the Holocaust who live on as severely handicapped individuals<sup>43</sup>, or the type of violence involved in attempts to destroy a survivor’s composure in order to bring to the surface visible reflections of abuse and guilt.<sup>44</sup> But for obvious reasons few German journalists have employed such interview strategies which is one reason why the

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<sup>41</sup> “Simon Wiesenthal: Ein Eiferer für die Gerechtigkeit,” *Neue Züricher Zeitung*, 3/12/78; see also “Kritisch gesehen: Simon Wiesenthal,” *Stuttgarter Zeitung*, 3/8/78.

<sup>42</sup> Momos (=Walter Jens), “Jenseits von Auschwitz,” *Die Zeit*, 1/31/75.

<sup>43</sup> Guido Knopp made this decision in his 1992 documentary *Kinder des Feuers: Die Zwillinge von Auschwitz*, 3/15/92; Knopp’s accomplished documentary focuses on Mengele’s atrocious experiments with twins in Auschwitz by representing the victims’ physical and psychological trauma as they overcome their own resistances and express their painful memories in front of the camera. The program raises the ethical question if “one may today expose the 50 to 60 year old victims of the sadistic ‘twin research’ ... to the flood light and the camera for the purpose of documentation?” (Klaus Hamburger, “Ehe die Steine schreien,” *FUNK-Korrespondenz*, 3/19/92); see also Marcus Hertneck, “Schreckensweg ohne Ende,” *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, 3/17/92. However, Knopp made the mistake of adding sound effects to original silent footage from Auschwitz, see Manfred Riepe, “Synchronisierte Bilder,” *Frankfurter Rundschau*, 3/17/92.

representation of survivors in the programs of the ZDF is dominated by heroic figures and suspenseful plots. One notable exception is Hans-Dieter Grabe's 1972 documentary *Mendel Schainfelds zweite Reise nach Deutschland* in which the author interviews an ordinary survivor with due restraint during the latter's trip from Norway, his country of residence, to West Germany where his ability to make a living and his entitlement to increased reparation payments will be assessed in a number of medical exams.<sup>45</sup> The portrait captures "one's own helplessness when confronted with a survivor whose life failed through no fault of his own"<sup>46</sup> a feeling which is hardly conveyed by such accomplished survivors as Simon Wiesenthal.

The ordinariness of victimization and survival is also expressed in one of the ZDF's most celebrated TV plays, the 1988 production *Die Bertinis*. The author and director Egon Monk transformed Ralph Giordano's partly autobiographical and very successful, albeit conventional and at times nostalgic novel with the same title into a didactic TV play which chronicles the history of an Italian/German/Jewish family from the late 19th century to the year 1945.<sup>47</sup> The play, like the book, focuses on the family's fate during the Nazi period. As partners in a so-called interracial marriage -- the mother is Jewish -- the couple and their sons are safe from deportation until 1945 but they still experience the same gradual expulsion from society as all Jewish victims of the regime. In the end, when the mother is threatened with deportation, the family goes into hiding and survives in the flooded basement of a bombed out building until

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<sup>44</sup> This strategy was employed especially in Claude Lanzmann's *Shoah*. There are no examples for such aggressive interview strategies in the ZDF sample.

<sup>45</sup> *Mendel Schainfelds zweite Reise nach Deutschland*, 3/17/72.

<sup>46</sup> Wolfgang Ruf, "Portrait eines Menschen," *epd/Kirche und Rundfunk*, 3/25/72; see also Friedrich Weigend, "Mendel Schainfelds zweite Reise nach Deutschland," *Stuttgarter Zeitung*, 3/20/72.

<sup>47</sup> Ralph Giordano, *Die Bertinis* (Frankfurt: Fischer, 1982); the novel sold almost 140,000 copies between 1982 and 1988, 56,000 of which were purchased immediately before and after the broadcast of the TV play on 10/31/88 and 11/1+6+7+8/88 (internal ZDF memo of Claus Henning Voss dated 1/11/89); see also Egon Monk's script published as ZDF (ed.), *Die Bertinis: Ein ZDF-Fernsehfilm von Egon Monk nach dem Roman von Ralph Giordano* (Frankfurt: Fischer, 1988); and *Spiel im ZDF* 11 (1988), 8-9.

Allied troops arrive in the city. In contradistinction to the usual prime time fare on the Holocaust, Monk realized a slow, obsessively precise and detail-oriented play with at times heavy-handed didactics. By means of incremental repetition Monk chronicles the increasing danger and the mounting depression as the Bertinis are kicked out of school, threatened by the Gestapo and abandoned by their social environment. The distancing camera work, the slow pace, the repetitive structure, and interspersed original news clippings and photos systematically undercut easy identification and narrative suspense. The viewers are asked to reflect upon the story and its historical context: “They have to pay attention and work in front of the screen to an extent which they are certainly not used to.”<sup>48</sup> Not surprisingly, some critics have admonished Monk’s distanced style and the resulting lack of emotional involvement: “Nobody shed any tears about them [the Bertinis, WK]. The viewers could observe their fate without any feelings as if they were stenciled figures in a picture book which precisely depicts historical reality but never grasps the emotional truth.”<sup>49</sup> Perhaps because of the systematic distanciation and despite extensive advertisement<sup>50</sup> the mini-series reached only the slightly disappointing average rating of 20% of all television households.<sup>51</sup> Nevertheless, Monk has developed an alternative concept to the usual prime time representation of the Nazi era and of survivor stories and realized his

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<sup>48</sup> “Die Bertinis: Egon Monks filmische Version,” *Neue Züricher Zeitung*, 11/12/88. Monk, as a student of Brecht, has written and realized a classic didactic play: “Monk integrated all cinematographic tools for the purpose of political enlightenment” (Dietrich Leder, *Kölner Stadt-Anzeiger*, 11/10/88); see also Dietrich Leder, “Denkform,” *FUNK-Korrespondenz*, 11/18/88; “Kraft der Askese,” *Frankfurter Rundschau*, 11/10/88; and Brigitte Söhngen, “Für Kopf und Herz: ein grosser Film,” *Reihnische Post*, 11/10/88.

<sup>49</sup> “Kritisch gesehen: Die Bertinis,” *Stuttgarter Zeitung*, 11/10/88; see also “Telekritik: Die Bertinis,” *Badisches Tageblatt*, 11/10/88.

<sup>50</sup> In addition to the ‘normal’ advertisement the TV play became the reason for a serious conflict between two of Germany’s foremost filmmakers. Eberhard Fechner who had originally signed on for the project and had already finished a script could not finish the project because of failing health and agreed to be replaced by Egon Monk. However, while Fechner was under the impression that Monk would realize his script, Monk wrote and directed his own adaptation of the novel; see Dieter Feder, “An den ‘Bertinis’ zerbrach eine Freundschaft,” *Gong*, 8/14/87; and *Stern TV Magazin*, 1/26/89; see also the letter by Monk addressed to Fechner dated 3/7/89 and Fechner’s response of 3/20/89 which did not lead to any resolution. Fechner died in 1992.

concept with never matched consistency. Although he also idealized the main protagonists -- the father is depicted much more critically in the book<sup>52</sup>-- Monk captured the everyday life of the Nazi persecution from the victims' perspective without turning them into heroes or sublating their suffering through a suspenseful narrative.

Although Monk systematically understated the emotional impetus of the narrative at least one potential viewer anticipated the film with considerable anxiety. Ralph Giordano excused himself from the first showing of the TV play to the press: "I have had a strange and unexpected experience. The anticipation of being confronted with a visualization of the [sic] family history has caused in me a deep uneasiness... Over the period of 40 years I became used to the book and the process of working on it. Although that process also represented a difficult confrontation with my life story it became familiar to me as a permanent companion. Somehow the film is a very different case -- I have the feeling that it will trouble me much more than the book ever did."<sup>53</sup>

In comparison to the numerous survivors' stories the ZDF sample contains only very few programs in which one of the main protagonists perishes during the pogroms or the "Final Solution" and none of these programs reaches into the abyss of the extermination camps. A number of productions construct narratives similar to the Anne Frank story; they chronicle the development of the Nazi anti-Jewish policies from the perspective of the victims and their failed attempts to escape deportation but refrain from actually depicting deportation and death itself --

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<sup>51</sup> The ratings improved from 17%, over 19%, 21%, and 21% to 22%; see GfK-Fernsehforschung, *Nationaler Wochenbericht*, week 44 and 45, 1988.

<sup>52</sup> Sigrid Schniederken, "Trugschluss," *FUNK-Korrespondenz*, 11/18/88.

<sup>53</sup> Letter of Ralph Giordano to Gyula Trebisch (one of the producers of the TV play) dated 9/19/88.

although they also indicate that the protagonists do not survive the Holocaust.<sup>54</sup> These TV fictions correspond to two documentaries which try to reconstruct the fate of victims in “a microstudy of the great crime” by uncovering the hidden traces and memories of members of a local Jewish community.<sup>55</sup> The documentaries are limited to postwar interviews and postwar footage of the victims’ hometown and a few original photos; they also refrain from representing death in the camps, visually or otherwise.

One of the most accomplished fictional accounts of Jewish suffering during Nazism in the ZDF sample also keeps the greatest distance from the events of the “Final Solution.” Over a period of four years Egon Monk scripted and directed the TV adaptation of Lion Feuchtwanger’s 1933 novel *Die Geschwister Oppermann* in very much the same way that he later employed in *Die Bertinis*: an analytical, slow, clearly structured visual narrative interspersed with original photos and documents.<sup>56</sup> Broadcast on the 50th anniversary of the Nazi rise to power the film narrates the events of 1932/33 from the viewpoint of the members of an upper-class Jewish-German family who lose the family furniture business in the early months of 1933 to a Nazi competitor. While some members of the family manage to escape abroad the company’s director survives incarceration and torture as a physically and psychologically broken man and his son, a high school student, decides to commit suicide rather than publicly apologize for an allegedly un-

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<sup>54</sup> This small group of programs includes a 1987 BBC remake of the *Diary of Anne Frank* broadcast by the ZDF in the afternoon in four parts under the title *Das Tagebuch der Anne Frank*, 9/3+10+17+24/88; the movie *Regentropfen*, 6/13/83; and the excellent TV plays *Hiobs Revolte*, 3/11/84 and *Martha und ich*, 11/17/91.

<sup>55</sup> The two programs are *Cäsar, Cäsar: Erinnerungsversuche in Rendsburg*, 3/5/90 and the children’s program *Dawids Tagebuch: Ein jüdisch-polnisches Kinderschicksal*, 3/4/91; quote from Fritz Wolf’s review of *Cäsar, Cäsar*, “Verkürzte Nahsicht,” *epd/Kirche und Rundfunk*, 3/14/90; see also Sigrid Schiederken, “Erfülltes Vermächtnis,” *FUNK-Korrespondenz*, 3/9/90; “Cäsar, Cäsar,” *Frankfurter Rundschau*, 3/7/90; and Christian Hörburger, “Rendsburg,” *Tagesspiegel*, 3/7/90 who argues that “today detailed research about the provinces provides salutary shocks which are no longer caused by reports from Majdanek, Treblinka or Auschwitz.” The script of the documentary was published as *Dokumentarfilm-Protokoll: Cäsar, Cäsar! Erinnerungsversuche in Rendsburg* (Mainz: ZDF, 1990).

<sup>56</sup> *Die Geschwister Oppermann 1+2*, 1/30+31/83. The script was published as ZDF (ed.), *Fernsehfilm “Die Geschwister Oppermann* (Frankfurt: Fischer, 1982); see also *Das Fernsehspiel im ZDF 39* (1982), 31-34.

German paper about German history. In his study of every-day persecution during Nazism Monk succeeded in showing that “the reality of the Third Reich can be adequately depicted, that the horror was and is not beyond comprehension, and that the crimes are representable because they do not exceed the scale of human behavior.”<sup>57</sup> The question remains if Monk would have been so successful and so optimistic about our abilities to understand and represent the Nazi crimes if he had dealt with the representation of mass genocide.<sup>58</sup> Nevertheless, his TV play is one of very few programs which focus on and invite the viewers’ identification with the fate of the many victims who did not return and which does not foreground the exceptional experiences and perspective of the survivors.

In all television programs about survival and victimization the core of the Holocaust, the mass murder committed by the *Einsatzgruppen* and in the death camps has only rarely been represented graphically.<sup>59</sup> Thus Alain Resnais’ classic documentary *Nacht und Nebel* which was broadcast once by the ZDF in 1978 has remained one of few television programs which explore this core although the film fails to point out the victims’ ethnicity.<sup>60</sup> With regard to *Nacht und Nebel* Ilan Avisar has argued that “the power of this film is that despite the employment of rich

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<sup>57</sup> Egon Monk in an interview with Karl Prümm, “Was unsere Zeit noch in Bewegung hält,” *epd/Kirche und Rundfunk*, 2/5/83. The film received rave reviews; see for some of many positive reviews Karl Prümm, “Weder abstrakt noch gefühlsselig,” *epd/Kirche und Rundfunk*, 2/9/83; “Beklemmend,” *Frankfurter Rundschau*, 2/2/83; Peter Steinbach, “Das Lehrstück von der grossen Illusion,” *Bild-Zeitung*, 2/2/83; and K.H. Kramberg, “Repräsentanten einer Zeit,” *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, 2/2/83; see also the internal ZDF review of Monk’s script by Elke Gilliotte-Redlich dated 6/25/80. Marta Feuchtwanger was also very pleased with the TV play, see her letter to the ZDF dated 2/23/83. Incidentally, *Die Geschwister Oppermann* was the first German production ever to be broadcast in Israel, see “Israel sah deutschen TV-film,” *Badische Neueste Nachrichten*, 2/16/83.

<sup>58</sup> An earlier attempt by the Polish director Aleksander Ford to represent some of the core events of the Holocaust by chronicling the fate of a prominent victim had not been very successful. The film *Der Märtyrer*, a German/Israeli coproduction, told the story of the Polish pedagogue Janusz Korczak who accompanied the children in his orphanage in the Warsaw ghetto to Treblinka, although he could have stayed behind. The overly sentimental film broadcast by the ZDF on 3/8/76 painted a simplistic, heroic picture of Korczak; see Marcel Reich-Ranicki, “So war es nicht,” *FAZ*, 3/10/76; and Elisabeth Bauschmid, “Das Grauen heruntergespielt,” *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, 3/10/76; see also two other programs on Korczak aired by the ZDF: *Janusz Korczak: Zur Verleihung des Friedenspreises des Deutschen Buchhandels 1972*, 9/18/72; and *Zum 100. Geburtstag von Janusz Korczak*, 7/26/78.

and complex cinematic language, the message is enhanced while avoiding the effect of pleasing aesthetics or the special gratification of indulgence with profundities, two standard reactions to works of art that in the case of the Holocaust threaten to desensitize or deflect the beholder's consciousness."<sup>61</sup> In the light of this analysis one should include among the film's achievements that it systematically undercuts the narrative pleasure of adventure and survival stories which dominate the television coverage on the topic.

### A Genocide without Perpetrators?

According to its television image in Germany the Holocaust was a crime without perpetrators and bystanders. German television has undertaken considerable efforts to give faces and voices to the survivors but it never sought to identify the people who committed the crimes or watched the catastrophe unfold and remained passive. To some extent the lack of television coverage is the outcome of obvious practical problems. Very few perpetrators and bystanders would have been willing to make potentially incriminating and/or morally damaging statements in front of the camera. But the editorial staff never tried to counteract the lack of factual programming by producing television fictions which addressed the question what kind of people and for what reasons either committed pogroms and genocide or watched silently.<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> The most notable exceptions are *Der Schrei nach Leben 2*, 11/19/86; *Recht, nicht Rache I*, 11/20/89; and *Die Passagierin*, 10/24/66.

<sup>60</sup> *Nacht und Nebel*, 11/9/78.

<sup>61</sup> Ilan Aivisar, *Screening the Holocaust: Cinema's Images of the Unimaginable* (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1988), 17.

<sup>62</sup> Television has much more aggressively pursued the more general question why the German people voted for the Nazis and supported the regime, especially during the early phase of the regime when its hold on power had not yet been firmly established. The majority of these programs are television fictions which study the Nazi rise to power and which clearly illustrate that similar fictions could have been produced about the more specific question of the public reactions to the Holocaust.



In the context of studies of the judicial attempts of coming to terms with the past critics have often argued that the court decisions illustrate German society's "peace with the perpetrators." This critique may underestimate the modest, albeit selective achievements of the German judiciary and might also imply an actively pursued conspiracy of reconciliation when the process at hand should be more accurately described as a general, dispersive, and diverse inability and unwillingness to face the problem of the criminals and the criminal potential in the midst of modern German society. Either way, the unwillingness to deal with perpetration and passivity is reflected in all spheres of Germany's historical culture, including television. Already in 1965 a reviewer of the Czech movie *Romeo, Julia, und die Finsternis*<sup>63</sup> argued that "the effectively directed psychological study of the victims obstructs our view of the perpetrators."<sup>64</sup> This critique applies to 31 years of ZDF programming although it was only very rarely expressed. Therefore, Barbara Sichtermann's exceptionally insightful and lucid commentary about the interdependence between the TV images of the victims and the lacking TV explorations of the perpetrators, written in the context of the 1988 broadcast of *Die Bertinis* deserves to be quoted at length:

The saga of the victims invites us to identify with them. It creates compassion for the innocent whose position we share with sympathy. Yet we are not entitled to this position. Other kitchens than the kitchen of the Bertinis could be opened to our eyes by way of television: for instance the kitchen of the teacher *Speckrolle* or the kitchen of the dutiful registrar. The teacher is a convinced Nazi who harasses the Bertini sons because he wants to present to his Führer a school free of Jews and 'racial bastards.' The registrar is obligated to add the surname Sarah to Lea Bertini's passport; he feels that there is

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<sup>63</sup> *Romeo, Julia, und die Finsternis*, 11/15/65.

something wrong with this procedure but he has his instructions. These people, the accomplices and opportunists, also had children and worries and convictions, fears and hopes; they could also be introduced as central figures from whose perspective the audience could consider the events. But in this respect there is still a powerful taboo because these people were the majority of our people, these people were we ourselves. ... The television play can present subjectivity, unfamiliar experiences which touch us deeply. So far these have been the experiences of the victims whose fate only very few of us shared. If television wants to critically reflect the past, including the NS past, the perpetrators have to begin to appear on the screen, as subjects and not as caricatures. In *Holocaust* there was such a figure -- the Nazi named Dorf.<sup>65</sup>

Only a handful of ZDF programs, predominantly from the 1980s, probe deeper into the gray, undefined collective of perpetrators who normally appear on the screen. Two of the productions which try to give a face and a personality to specific Nazi criminals deal with the case of Klaus Barbie and French attempts to come to terms with collaboration.<sup>66</sup> The other programs on perpetrators focus on Gustav Franz Wagner who for some time was the head of the Sobibor extermination camp<sup>67</sup>, the exciting circumstances of the Eichmann operation told from the viewpoint of the Israeli officer in charge of the mission<sup>68</sup>, and the Wannsee conference of 1942<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> Christian Crull. "Dosierte Kritik," *Frankfurter Rundschau*, 11/19/65.

<sup>65</sup> Barbara Sichtermann, "Das Tabu," *Die Zeit*, 11/11/88.

<sup>66</sup> An informative ZDF documentary which refrained from any commentaries on the state of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* in France was aired on the occasion of the opening of the Barbie trial in May 1987; *Der Fall Barbie: Spuren eines Kriegsverbrechers*, 5/11/87. The ZDF also broadcast Marcel Ophüls' acclaimed documentary *Hotel Terminus: Leben und Zeit des Klaus Barbie* in a substantially reduced format and late at night on 3/26+28/90.

<sup>67</sup> *Meinungen über Gustav Franz Wagner*, 6/24/79.

<sup>68</sup> *Ich habe Eichmann entführt*, 2/1/81. The program on the capture of Eichmann is the only show on the perpetrators of the Holocaust which was aired during prime time.

But only one of the programs, the 1976 documentary *Dr. W. -- ein SS-Arzt in Auschwitz* by the Dutch journalist Rolf Orthel<sup>70</sup>, penetrates the moral enigma presented by the Nazi perpetrators and reconstructs the conflicted personality of Eduard Wirth who volunteered for selection duty, but occasionally also helped inmates, and committed suicide in 1945. Through interviews with the family and former acquaintances Orthel traces the “psychological mechanisms of repression and derealization which enabled all of them to continue their normal lives after the atrocity”<sup>71</sup> and which also enabled Wirth to live through Auschwitz. Unlike any other program on the “Final Solution” the documentary presents the events from the perspective of the perpetrators and their social environment, makes it possible to identify with their point of view, and delivers a critical yet complex understanding of the banality of evil.

The silence about the perpetrators on the screen is even surpassed by the silence about the German bystanders of programs and deportations. The programs which deal with bystanders of the Holocaust are primarily non-German productions which observe the persecution of the Jews through the eyes of helpless bystanders or reluctant and unsuccessful helpers in occupied countries.<sup>72</sup> Only one program in the sample features an initially indifferent and later indecisive and therefore ineffective German helper and this program became the victim of cold war politics. Konrad Wolf’s movie *Sterne*, produced in East Germany in 1959, tells the story of a German NCO in Bulgaria who falls in love with a Jewish girl from Greece who, en route to Auschwitz, is incarcerated in a local camp. The soldier can not bring himself to cooperate with partisans who

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<sup>69</sup> *Der Holocaust-Befehl: 50 Jahre nach der “Wannsee-Konferenz*, 1/19/92.

<sup>70</sup> *Dr. W. -- Ein SS-Arzt in Auschwitz*, 9/12/78. The documentary on Eduard Wirths was included in the late night line up on short notice, which is also true for two other perpetrator programs: *Die letzte Station*, 1/11/64; and *Der Holocaust-Befehl*, 1/19/92.

<sup>71</sup> “Man muss das sehen und hören!,” *epd/Kirche und Rundfunk*, 9/18/76; see also Momos, “Schatten eines Mörders,” *Die Zeit*, 9/17/76; Christian Bienfait, “Schlichte Beschreibung,” *Die Welt*, 9/14/76.

<sup>72</sup> This category includes such famous movies as *Das Geschäft an der Hauptstrasse*, 11/21/66; *Bittere Ernte*, 3/8/87; *Auf Wiedersehen Kinder*, 11/6/89; see also *Tagebuch eines Italieners*, 3/13/84.

might be able to free the girl. Only after the departure of her convoy he finally joins in the resistance movement.<sup>73</sup> Although the rights to the movie were acquired by the ZDF as early as 1963 and although the station's editorial staff in charge of acquisition had repeatedly recommended its broadcast<sup>74</sup>, the movie was only aired by the ZDF in 1992 because the public service stations of ARD and ZDF had agreed to "keep their distance from productions from the Soviet Union and other countries which participated in the occupation of Czechoslovakia" in 1968 and therefore the ZDF returned the television rights to *Sterne* in the same year.<sup>75</sup> Although *Sterne* concludes with a politically correct East German happy ending it is an exceptional production in the context of Germany's historical culture. No other program in the ZDF sample specifically addresses the problem of the indifference of the German population in the face of the systematic persecution of European and German Jewry.

German television only sporadically engaged more closely with the problem of the perpetrators of the Holocaust but it even more consistently kept its peace with the bystanders who for many years also happened to be the majority of television's constituency. The ZDF never confronted its viewers with their own problematic behavior during Nazism and instead invited them to identify with the victims who, according to most stories on the screen, were victims of a small collective of ruthless, ideologically motivated but otherwise strangely undefined Nazi thugs and bureaucrats. Through television German audiences could learn about the victims' suffering and feel empathy with their fate, an empathy which had been so sadly missing during the persecution itself. However, while audiences were offered the opportunity to

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<sup>73</sup> The ending of the movie which shows the soldier joining the partisans was removed prior to the release of the film in West Germany but ultimately added before *Sterne* was aired by the ZDF on 9/23/83, see internal memo of Dieter Krusche to Herrn Brüne dated 8/14/64 and letter from Klaus Brüne to Beta Film GmbH of 6/10/65. *Sterne* was broadcast by the ZDF in an exceptionally unfavorable time slot, after 11:20 pm.

<sup>74</sup> See internal evaluations of the movie (Urteil der Spielfilmkommission) dated 10/13/72 and 11/7/74.

identify with the victims after the fact, television journalists never tried to induce the next step; they never created programs which focused on their viewers' actions, or their viewers' forefathers' actions, in light of the newly gained sympathy and respect for the survivors.

### The Other Victims of Nazism

The topic Nazi Crimes is clearly dominated by contributions about the "Final Solution" and about the anti-Jewish policies which preceded genocide; more than 2/3 of all programs in this category are dedicated to these topics, followed by a substantial number of shows on the concentration camps and a small number of programs on other Nazi crimes, for instance the killing of the mentally ill. In comparison to the extensive coverage of the Holocaust, other Nazi crimes which represent important elements and phases of the murderous social and racial cleansing operations of the Nazi state have been neglected. This applies in particular to the systematic persecution of the mentally ill, gypsies, homosexuals, and to the brutal treatment of the many forced laborers brought to Germany from all over Europe. In 31 years of programming only very few productions have been broadcast which focus on the history of these crimes. The ZDF has for instance aired only 3 programs about "Euthanasia" and not a single production

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<sup>75</sup> Letter of Klaus Brüne to Beta Film GmbH dated 4/10/68; see also internal memo of Gerhard Prager to Klaus Brüne dated 6/16/67.

which details the persecution of gay men in Nazi Germany.<sup>76</sup> While the life style and the traditions of gypsies living in Germany has been the subject of a handful of cultural features these programs either fail to mention their suffering in the Third Reich or refer to it only in passing.<sup>77</sup> Only one late night feature concentrates specifically on the crimes committed against gypsies during Nazism and chronicles the insufficient compensation which they have received from the West German government.<sup>78</sup> In quantitative terms the fate of forced laborers in Nazi Germany has also received little attention; only three ZDF programs were dedicated to this topic.<sup>79</sup> However, the slim sample includes the exceptional feature film *Das Heimweh des Walerjan Wrobel*. Coproduced by the ZDF and directed by the documentary film maker Rolf Schübel the movie chronicles the authentic case of a 16 year old Polish forced laborer who, suffering from homesickness, sets a harmless fire in the hope of being

### **Graph 7: Topics of ZDF Programs on NS Crimes**

(percentages based on minutes per topic)

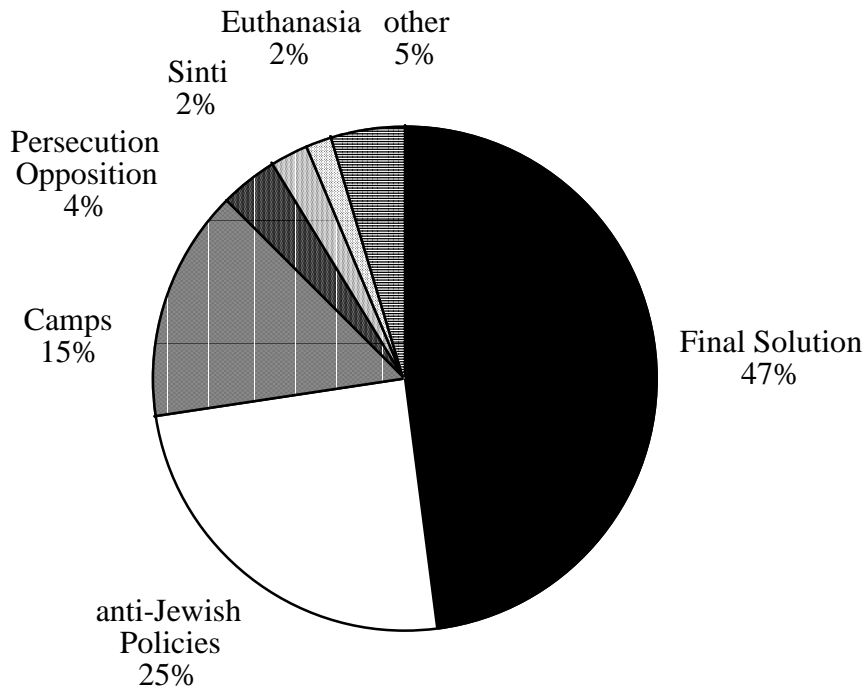
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<sup>76</sup> On the killing of the mentally ill see *Aktion T4*, 1/5/64; *Das Hospital der Verklärung*, 9/23/80, the self-critical Polish movie deals with questionable medical experiments undertaken by Polish doctors prior to the arrival of German personnel; and *Grafeneck: Die Zeit des Lebens*, 6/4/84 which only includes marginal references to “Euthanasia.”

<sup>77</sup> See in particular *Hilflos zwischen zwei Welten*, 4/7/64; *Söhne des Windes: Zigeuner in Detschland*, 8/20/73; *Lustig wär das Zigeunerleben: Über die Zigeuner im Film und ihre Realität*, 9/30/80; *Zigeunerleben*, 8/12/85; *Lustig ist das Zigeunerleben?: Deutsche Sinti -- Unbekannte Lebenswelten*, 7/13/93.

<sup>78</sup> *Das falsche Wort: Wiedergutmachung an Zigeunern (Sinte) in Deutschland?*, 6/25/89.

<sup>79</sup> *Eine Liebe in Deutschland*, 12/9/85; *Zwei Mütter*, 1/24/92; and *Das Heimweh des Walerjan Wrobel*, 10/24/93.



sent home as punishment, but is sentenced to death on the basis of a retroactively applied Nazi law and executed in 1942. With excellent casting, careful selection of scenery, and slow, unobtrusive camerawork the “film captures the viewer’s feelings with quiet intensity.”<sup>80</sup> Unlike the large majority of ZDF programs on Nazism the film convincingly and accurately illustrates by way of a concrete example how zealous, indifferent, or reluctant, but always efficient law enforcement officers and judges contribute their share to the exploitation, disciplining, and murder of the ‘non-Aryan’ population.

The only other sizable portion of the ZDF programs on Nazi crimes deals in general terms with the concentration camp universe without identifying any particular group of victims.

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<sup>80</sup> “Das Heimweh des Walerjan Wrobel,” *Abendzeitung München*, 10/23/93; see also Peter Hoff, “Mord im Namen des Volkes,” *Neues Deutschland*, 10/25/93; Roland Timm, “Wie die Nazis sich um ihre eigenen Gesetze nicht scherten,” *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, 10/23/93.

On a smaller scale this contingent reflects the same topical emphases as the programs on the “Final Solution.” The programs inform about survival strategies in the camps<sup>81</sup>, tell suspenseful stories of escape and resistance<sup>82</sup>, and generally privilege the exceptional perspective of survivors over the viewpoint of victims who did not survive.<sup>83</sup> Only very few of the programs manage to avoid these redemptive plot structures and take the time and the effort to tell a story of survival “with the necessary degree of calculated simplicity which provides a protective layer for the inherent aesthetic problem of meaningfully narrating something whose meaning eludes us.”<sup>84</sup> In addition, as in the case of the Holocaust stories, the perpetrators and bystanders are generally absent.<sup>85</sup>

### The Window to the World of Persecution

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<sup>81</sup> See for example *Frau in der Baracke*, 12/15/64; *Biskuit*, 5/14/71; *Sie gaben nicht auf: Überlebensversuche im Konzentrationslager I+2*, 12/10+17/78.

<sup>82</sup> See for instance *Zwei Halbzeiten in der Hölle*, 6/21/65; *Das siebte Kreuz*, 1/10/72; *Die Flucht*, 8/30/85; *Morituri*, 4/7/91.

<sup>83</sup> For programs on exceptional survivors see especially *Zeugen des Jahrhunderts: Eugen Kogon*, 12/27/82; *Die Stubenälteste von Block 7*, 3/8/87; *Und trotzdem...: Das Leben der Eva Busch*, 1/10/93; and compare to Wajda’s more accomplished fictional study of the vicissitudes of survival in *Landschaft nach der Schlacht*, 12/11/72.

<sup>84</sup> In this case the notable exception is *Schicksal bleibt stumm*, 2/23/93 in which the author Barbara von Poschinger presents excerpts of her long conversations with an almost 80 year old woman whose life was characterized by poverty, physical abuse, and institutional violence -- including incarceration in a concentration camp for which she received a small compensation shortly before her death in 1991. Perhaps because her life story undercuts any conventional interpretation of the experience of survival it took many years to find the necessary funding; quote from Paul Ingendaay, “Denkt von mir, was ihr wollt: Eine alte Frau erzählt,” *FAZ*, 2/25/93; see also Knut Hickethier, “Illustrierende Bilder,” *epd/Kirche und Rundfunk*, 3/3/93; Klaus Hamburger, “Ungeheurer Klage laut,” *FUNK-Korrespondenz*, 2/26/93; and Brigitte Spitz, “Geschichte von unten,” *Frankfurter Rundschau*, 2/25/93.

<sup>85</sup> The exceptions are *Mein Grossvater: KZ-Aufseher Konrad Keller*, 7/25/82 in which the youthful author talks and shows more about his anti-fascist posture than the life and personality of his grandfather (see Hildegard Dörre, “Halbherzige Spurensuche,” *Westfälische Rundschau*, 7/27/82); and Andrzej Munk’s famous unfinished film *Die Patriotin*, 10/24/66 which the ZDF editorial staff and the reviewers did not classify as a movie about the persecution of the Jews but as a film about the concentration camp Auschwitz. In general, even in the early years of the ZDF, programs about the “Final Solution” and anti-Jewish policies were always clearly identified as such and therefore there is surprisingly little overlap between these topics. *Die Passagierin* represents also an exceptional case in the ZDF sample because the fragment presents the events from the perspective of the former female guard who recalls



The ZDF programs about Nazi anti-Jewish policies represent an interesting case of ethnic colonization. In general the principle of ‘national sovereignty’ rules in German public television, i.e., specific ethnic/national perspectives are introduced into the West German television context through film or television imports from the respective countries may that be France, Britain, Poland, etc. However, from the beginning, first on a very modest scale and then more and more frequently, the ZDF produced or commissioned programs which reflected the actual and/or perceived perspective of Jewish victims and survivors of the Holocaust. In the absence of a viable Israeli film industry which could produce programs suitable for German audiences, the ZDF, as its public service competitor, filled this gap with German programs -- especially during the second phase of engagement. This type of hybrid programming, German productions from a Jewish perspective represent the only case in the history of German television historiography in which an important program category and ethnic perspective is almost completely founded on an act of cultural appropriation.<sup>86</sup> As we have seen, these programs have been a vital addition to Germany’s television landscape because they exposed German viewers to an historical perspective, however constructed and belated, which had been insufficiently represented in Germany’s historical culture for many years. On the other hand, the identification with the victims of the Holocaust by German producers and possibly also German audiences appears problematic considering that the German media never sufficiently and self-critically explored the motives and experiences of the perpetrators and bystanders of the “Final Solution.”

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two versions of her behavior in Auschwitz. Unlike his German colleagues, Munk clearly wanted to represent and understand the mind set of the perpetrators.

<sup>86</sup> On a few occasions German producers also explored episodes in the history of other nations during WWII, for instance the politics of Vichy (see, for instance, *Der Opportunist oder vom Umgang mit den Besatzern*, 4/12/78) and the anti-Communist aspirations of the Soviet officer corps (see, for example, *Der Überläufer: Dokumentarspiel zum Fall Wlassow*, 8/19/77).

The representation of Nazi crimes in the ZDF programs can be roughly summed up in the following way. The programs do not present the perspective on the crimes which was most familiar to the contemporaries of Nazism among the viewers, i.e., the perspective of bystanders and perpetrators. Instead, television selectively supplied the point of view of the victims projected after the fact; it conducted an imaginary dialogue with the survivors and thus, at least on a symbolic level, circumvented the very result of the mass murder which made a real dialogue and a possible reconciliation with the victims impossible. By means of television Germans have seen some images of persecution which they or their forefathers have themselves witnessed, for instance the pogroms of 1938, or the deportations of Jewish citizens. But more often television brought eyewitness accounts and real and reenacted images of scenes which even most contemporaries have never seen with their own eyes: Jews in their embattled homes, Jews in hiding, Jews on their way to the ghettos and camps, the foreign world of the concentration camp universe, and survivors interviewed in foreign countries. Television became the window to the hidden world of persecution. It satisfied the curiosity born from the desire to see what one has only heard or read about. In comparison, some crimes which did occur close to home right under the eyes of German citizens, 'Euthanasia,' the abuse of the forced laborers and POWs, the local camps all over the country, these visually more familiar and maybe also more threatening images are not reproduced on television. Most important, these events are never represented from the perspective of the German population in ways which urge viewers to identify with that population's point of view and deal with the legacy of silence.

After the broadcast of the unfinished movie *Die Passagierin* by the Polish director Andrzej Munk one reviewer made a peculiar comment: "Auschwitz is in Poland and the Polish directors including Munk can apparently not get over this fact" ("Die Passagierin," *Rheinpfalz*,

10/26/66). The reviewer's noticeable relief over the fact that Auschwitz is indeed in Poland suggests that proximity between one's every-day life and the sites of the former crimes which implies, among other things, a degree of visual familiarity with realistic filmic renditions of the crimes, is a potentially very disturbing experience. In the case of Poland the proximity is particularly troublesome and Polish directors have indeed spent considerable efforts on working through this visual familiarity. In the same vein Ralph Giordano's reaction to the visualization of his autobiographical novel cited above suggests that the familiar images are potentially more disturbing than the unfamiliar ones, however gruesome they may be. This factor might explain the carefully selective vision of the Nazi crimes offered in the programs of the ZDF: Crimes without perpetrators in visually unfamiliar surroundings and/or represented from unfamiliar perspectives.

### **The Representation of the Holocaust in German Historiography**

Reviewing concentration camp research in 1998, the German sociologist Wolfgang Sofsky concluded that "historiographical academic discourse avoids irritation and destruction of historical meaning by rigidly concentrating on facts. Skeptical against large-scale interpretations it tends to focus on research of single case studies."<sup>87</sup> As a result, historians sidestep typological and comparative research projects and are ill equipped to deal with transnational comparisons of camp systems, genocides, and other forms of modern violence which represent the most important challenge to Holocaust studies in the new century. In the case of the Holocaust,

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<sup>87</sup> Wolfgang Sofsky, "An der Grenze des Sozialen: Perspektiven der KZ-Forschung," in Ulrich Herbert/Karin Orth/Christoph Dieckmann, *Die nationalsozialistischen Konzentrationslager: Entwicklung und Struktur* (Göttingen: Wallstein, 1998), 1141-1169, 1141-2.

German historians could not completely avoid interpretive irritation, but they have worked tirelessly to regain historiographical equilibrium and have succeeded in recent years in containing the Holocaust's disruptive potential within conventional historiographical methods and strategies of representation. The process took five decades and several generations of scholars. In addition, at the height of internal strife and methodological insecurity in the 1980s, this surprisingly speedy resolution of the crisis of interpretation must have appeared highly unlikely to all participants.

The history of Holocaust studies in Germany is divided in four, relatively clearly defined phases. From the end of World War II until 1957 the "Final Solution" was not a central research topic for German historians. Subsequently, for a over a decade, German historiography produced an impressive record of empirical work about the Nazi genocide of European Jewry, especially its administrative implementation. During the third phase, from 1972 through 1980, the topic was again marginalized and only surfaced in very few publications before it became the subject of heated theoretical debates and, commencing in the mid-1980s, the focus of a new and still ongoing wave of Holocaust research.<sup>88</sup>

The notion of the Holocaust's singularity played a crucial role in the tumultuous debates of the early 1980s. In other national settings the overdetermined notion of the Holocaust's uniqueness has been employed to provide cohesion and purpose to a whole range of Jewish causes<sup>89</sup>, to help frame ambitious, yet misguided research projects<sup>90</sup>, or to defend the discipline of

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<sup>88</sup> Ulrich Herbert, "Der Holocaust in the Geschichtsschreibung der Bundesrepublik Deutschland," Ulrich Herbert/Olaf Groehler, *Zweierlei Untergang: Vier Beiträge über den Umgang mit der NS-Vergangenheit in den beiden deutschen Staaten* (Hamburg: Ergebnisse, 1992), 67-86; Ulrich Herbert, "Vernichtungspolitik: Neue Antworten und Fragen zur Geschichte des Holocaust," in Herbert (ed.), *Nationalsozialistische Vernichtungspolitik 1939-1945: Neue Forschungen und Kontroversen* (Frankfurt: Fischer, 1998), 9-66.

<sup>89</sup> Peter Novick, *The Holocaust in American Life* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1999); Tim Cole, *Selling the Holocaust: From Auschwitz to Schindler's List* (New York: Routledge, 1999).

Holocaust studies against non-academic revisionists as well as academic critics.<sup>91</sup> None of these objectives were decisive when German historians temporarily adopted the notion of the Holocaust's uniqueness in the early 1980s before it was effectively dismantled after the Historians' Debate of 1986/87. Faced with unusual and harsh methodological and political disagreements in a discipline which tended to share a common mission, German historians imported the uniqueness concept as a metaphorical crutch; it helped them define common ground despite severe internal divisions and align themselves with interpretive tastes in other Western countries, especially Israel and the US. At the same time, at least in Germany, the theoretical debates, including debates about the singularity of the Holocaust, "represented a sustained refusal to confront the events [of the Holocaust] directly and unprotected."<sup>92</sup> Unfortunately yet understandably, the generation of German historians who dominated the profession during the 1970s and 1980s and who had themselves been adolescents in the Third Reich could not bear to study the Nazi atrocities with the same detachment and the same ability to look into the abyss of genocide as their younger colleagues today.

Judging from the perspective of the year 2000 the history of German Holocaust studies reflects a cumbersome and protracted process of rhetorical and methodological normalization. The exceptional efforts required for this process are ingrained in the very language of German Holocaust historiography. Before German historians concluded their historiographical reconstruction process in the 1990s, they went through phases of rigid empiricism, during which

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<sup>90</sup> This applies especially to the work of Steven Katz, *The Holocaust in Historical Context*, vol. 1 (New York: Oxford UP, 1994) who has embarked on a multi-volume study of genocide in world history with the a priori determined objective to prove the historical uniqueness of the Holocaust; see Berel Lang's review "The Second Time? The Fifth? The Question of Holocaust-Uniqueness," Lang, *The Future of the Holocaust*, (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1999), 77-91.

<sup>91</sup> Gavriel Rosenfeld, "The Politics of Uniqueness: Reflections on the Recent Polemical Turn in Holocaust and Genocide Studies," *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* 13/1 (1999), 28-61.

<sup>92</sup> Herbert, "Vernichtungspolitik," 21.

they ignored doubts about the adequacy of their methods for the study of the Holocaust, as well as periods of ruthless self-criticism of the very foundations of their discipline. The notion of the Holocaust's uniqueness is one of the most visible signs of this identity crisis. It called into question traditional linguistic protocols for doing history and the referential illusion sustained by conventional historiographical prose.

### Postwar Silence and the Prototypes of Holocaust Studies

When a new generation of university professors in unified Germany surveyed the works of their teachers and predecessors in the 1990s they inevitably came to the conclusion, as Ulrich Herbert in 1992, that, "taken as a whole, the West German contribution to empirical research about the persecution and destruction of European Jewry is quite small."<sup>93</sup> Much more work had been undertaken in Israel, Poland, and the US. This situation has changed in recent years, primarily due to the impressive achievements of this new generation whose members have diligently combed the archives for new insights about the origins and development of the "Final Solution." In contrast, the historians of the immediate postwar era faced a relative dearth of archival material, but also in other respects they were singularly ill prepared for a thorough and sustained empirical analysis of the history of the Holocaust. As we know now, many academics, including many historians, who returned to their jobs after 1945, had heavily invested in the "Nazi revolution" and were part of the functional elite which organized and implemented the military occupation, the economic exploitation, and the ethnic cleansing of occupied Europe.<sup>94</sup> In

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<sup>93</sup>Herbert, "Holocaust," 81.

<sup>94</sup> For the recent debates about German historians during National Socialism see Winfried Schulze/Otto Gerhard Oexle, eds., *Deutsche Historiker im Nationalsozialismus* (Frankfurt: Fischer, 1999); see also Wulf Kansteiner,

addition to such personal/ideological legacies, which stood in the way of historiographical inquiry into the Nazi crimes, German historians also lacked the necessary methodological and philosophical prerequisites. As Martin Broszat put it, “for the language and thought style of historicism, permeated with elevated notions about History, ... the mass executions and gas chambers represented a serious lapse in style, which one tried to leave behind as quickly as possible.”<sup>95</sup> But even intellectuals and academics who clearly acknowledged the terrible legacy of the Nazi period felt that the best response and most urgent task consisted of building democratic institutions. Therefore, they also refrained from further inquiry into the history of the Holocaust. As a result of all these factors, the academic publications of the postwar period present a very unbalanced picture. German historians addressed the history of the “Final Solution” primarily in collections of sources and short essays.<sup>96</sup> On the other hand, they spent considerable efforts on researching the history of the bourgeois resistance against Hitler to counter any real or alleged charges of German collective guilt.<sup>97</sup>

The historians’ initial unwillingness to inquire about the Holocaust reflects a similar reluctance in West Germany’s public sphere. While academics limited themselves to the production of marginal texts, the wider public engaged with the Nazi crimes through two important books, i.e., the *Diary of Anne Frank* and Eugen Kogon’s *Der SS-Staat*.<sup>98</sup> However, the former never touches upon the abyss of the death camps and the latter focuses primarily on the

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“Mandarins in the Public Sphere: *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* and the Paradigm of Social History in the Federal Republic of Germany,” *German Politics and Society* 52/17 (1999), 84-120.

<sup>95</sup> Martin Broszat, “Holocaust und die Geschichtswissenschaft,” Broszat, *Nach Hitler: Der schwierige Umgang mit unserer Geschichte* (München: Oldenbourg, 1986), 271-286, 284.

<sup>96</sup> See for example the sources about the history of the “Final Solution” published in the *Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte*: “Der Gerstein-Bericht,” VfZ 1 (1953), 177-194; “Denkschrift Himmlers über die Behandlung der Fremdvölkischen,” VfZ 5 (1957), 194-198; and “Der Generalplan Ost,” VfZ 6 (1958), 281-325; and Walter Hofer, *Der Nationalsozialismus: Dokumente 1933-1945* (Frankfurt: Fischer, 1957), 267-312.

<sup>97</sup> Regina Holler, *20. Juli 1944: Vemächtnis oder Alibi?* (München: Saur, 1994), 69-87.

concentration camp universe and dedicates only a few pages to the Nazi genocide of European Jewry. This tacit agreement between academics and the educated public should not simply be construed as repression or denial; after all, the facts of the “Final Solution” had been very well publicized through the media in the immediate postwar years.<sup>99</sup> The general avoidance of the topic in the late 1940s and early 1950s is more accurately described as a desire not to engage with the details of a shameful legacy which was quite well known in more general terms.<sup>100</sup> In subsequent decades, as historians probed more deeply into the history of the Nazi genocide, they frequently developed explanations and theories which did not penetrate into the public discourse about the Nazi past. Nevertheless, in terms of timing, academics and the public appeared to be quite in sync. The two most fruitful phases of Holocaust studies in Germany, in the 1960s and 1980s respectively, coincided with intense public concern about the Nazi legacy in the Federal Republic.

The few scholarly texts which address the Nazi crimes in the postwar years attest to the profound helplessness of its authors who tried to extract some meaning from the crimes at a time when West German society had not even found a common linguistic denominator for Nazi genocide. Their quest for moral repair work certainly fit the climate of the times. In the political realm the extraordinary nature of the Holocaust was only very indirectly reflected in a self-indulgent pathos of national moral crisis. Politicians primarily concerned themselves with the extraordinary challenge which the Nazi past represented for the recovery of Germany’s moral and political standing in the world. Even the few political leaders and intellectuals, who honestly

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<sup>98</sup> *Das Tagebuch der Anne Frank* (Frankfurt: Fischer, 1957, originally published in 1949); Eugen Kogon, *Der SS-Staat: Das System der deutschen Konzentrationslager*, 3rd ed. (Frankfurt: Verlag der Frankfurter Hefte, 1949, 1st ed. 1946).

<sup>99</sup> See for example Dagmar Barnouw, *Germany 1945: Views of War and Violence* (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1996).

<sup>100</sup> Norbert Frei, “Auschwitz und Holocaust: Begriff und Historiographie,” in Hanno Loewy (ed.), *Holocaust: Die Grenzen des Verstehens: Eine Debatte über die Besetzung der Geschichte* (Reinbek: Rowohlt, 1992), 101-109.



reflected about the Nazi crimes or had themselves survived the camps, shared this hope for national revival.<sup>101</sup> Kogon, for instance wished that his study of the concentration camp universe may help “Germany to recognize itself: its noble as well as its horrible traits so that its contorted, disfigured face regains equilibrium.”<sup>102</sup> In a similar vein, Alexander Mitscherlich and Fred Mielke, who edited an important collection of documents about Nazi “euthanasia” and human experiments in the camps, declared that their objective was “not indictment but enlightenment, not ostracism but the blazing of a new trail -- a common path into the future that may, in all our misery, at least spare us from self-abasement.”<sup>103</sup> Such metaphorical excursions are rare exceptions in otherwise strictly scholarly texts but they illustrate that the events under description retained a surplus of meaning which could not be expressed in conventional academic prose.

Like all subsequent Holocaust scholars, the authors of these two extraordinary texts emphasized the need for extensive, truthful inquiry into the Nazi crimes as the only possible path towards redemption: “Only the truth can liberate us.”<sup>104</sup> In this respect, especially in the case of Kogon, the texts reflect the very origins of all histories of the Nazi crimes. For decades the history of the camps was primarily written by survivors, not historians: “[A]lready during their time of incarceration the inmates had felt strongly about their responsibility to inform posterity about the monstrous events which surpassed common experience and conventional morality.”<sup>105</sup> This experience motivated the first texts about the camps but it also represents the closest empirical equivalent to the notion of uniqueness.

Even in other respects, the texts already anticipated future strategies for scholarly

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<sup>101</sup> Jeffrey Herf, *Divided Memory: The Nazi Past in the Two Germany's* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1997).

<sup>102</sup> Kogon, *SS-Staat*, 392.

<sup>103</sup> Alexander Mitscherlich/Fred Mielke (eds.), *Doctors of Infamy: The Story of the Nazi Medical Crimes* (New York: Schuman, 1949), 151.

<sup>104</sup> Kogon, *SS-Staat*, viii; see also Mitscherlich/Mielke, *Doctors of Infamy*, 153.

<sup>105</sup> Herbert/Orth/Dieckmann, *Die nationalsozialistischen Konzentrationslager*, vol. 2, 19.

*Vergangenheitsbewältigung* (coming to terms with or mastering the past). Speaking as a sociologist, Kogon already stressed in 1946 that research about the camps should not deal with “parts, experiences, and this and that, but the *whole system*.” -- a dictum which could serve as a motto for most of the research undertaken in the 1960s.<sup>106</sup> Mitscherlich/Mielke, even more ahead of their times, concluded that the deeds of doctors without mercy represented “the alchemy of the modern age, the transmogrification of subject into object, of man into thing against which the destructive urge may wreak its fury without restraint.”<sup>107</sup> This insight into the pathology of the modern era contains in a nutshell the critical impetus which has informed much of German Holocaust research since the late 1980s.

A closer look into the first laboratories of West German academic memory work reveals ‘prototypes’ of future rationalizations and research strategies but it also reveals severe terminological and conceptual helplessness vis-à-vis the Nazi crimes. Completely unselfconsciously Kogon still heralded the “extermination [Ausmerzung] of methodological mistakes” in his third edition and Mitscherlich/Mielke tried to capture Auschwitz’ specificity by declaring it to be “on a cosmic scale, like a shift in the climate.”<sup>108</sup> In subsequent decades the quest for language commensurate with the events would produce more symbolic language and occasionally involve the whole discipline, as, for instance, during the Historians’ Debate. However, although German historians finally found names for the genocide of European Jewry -- first “Auschwitz” and later “Holocaust” --, their more ambitious attempts to agree about its historical meaning and philosophical significance proved unsuccessful. Due to its inherent structural limitations historiography never found appropriate metaphorical language which could

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<sup>106</sup> Kogon, *SS-Staat*, viii.

<sup>107</sup> Mitscherlich/Mielke, *Doctors of Infamy*, 152.

<sup>108</sup> Kogon, *SS-Staat*, vi and Mitscherlich/Mielke, *Doctors of Infamy*, 151.

do justice to the feelings of the contemporaries of Nazism. Therefore, historiographical normalization could only conclude after the generations' departure from the profession.

### The Historiography of Sobriety

The silence of the postwar era ended in the late 1950s and early 1960s when the legacy of the Nazi crimes and the question of postwar German anti-Semitism was raised through a number of scandals and trials. A wave of anti-Semitic graffiti in 1959/60, the Eichmann-Trial in Jerusalem in 1961, and later the Auschwitz-Trial in Frankfurt in 1964/65, among other incidents, caused and indicated important transformations in West Germany's historical culture and, among other effects, also gave rise to philosemitic television. For the first time since the immediate postwar years the question of how to come to terms with Nazism topped the national political agenda.<sup>109</sup>

A new generation of historians, who had been young adults at the end of the war, participated in this turning point. Several specialists in the area of contemporary history, mostly associated with the Institut für Zeitgeschichte in Munich, wrote expert opinions for German courts to assist in legal disputes about restitution to victims of the Nazi regime and about reinstating former civil servants who had lost their positions during the Allied occupation. In addition, especially in the 1960s, they supported renewed efforts to bring Nazi perpetrators to trial.<sup>110</sup> Their research for the courts formed the core of the first systematic German inquiries into the development of the "Final Solution" and the concentration camp universe. Although many results of their work have

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<sup>109</sup> Werner Bergmann, *Antisemitismus in öffentlichen Konflikten: Kollektives Lernen in der politischen Kultur der Bundesrepublik 1949-1989* (Frankfurt: Campus, 1997), 187 ff.

<sup>110</sup> Norbert Frei, "Der Frankfurter Auschwitz-Prozess und die deutsche Zeitgeschichtsforschung," Fritz-Bauer Institut (ed.), *Auschwitz: Geschichte, Rezeption, Wirkung* (Frankfurt: Campus, 1996), 123-136. The expert opinions have been published in Institut für Zeitgeschichte (ed.), *Gutachten des Instituts für Zeitgeschichte*, 2 vols.

been confirmed and remain valid to this date, the research of 1960s was restricted by the needs of the courts. In their efforts to help determine guilt and innocence historians focused on administrative decision making processes and especially the role of the highest echelon of the Nazi leadership. As a result, the victims of the Holocaust never appeared on the historiographical field of inquiry and the close connections and interdependencies between the various Nazi campaigns of ethnic cleansing, racial warfare, and mass killings eluded historical scrutiny. Nevertheless, in comparison with the previous and the following decade, the 1960s were exceptionally productive: “Until the early 1980s very little was published which displayed the same thoroughness and analytical sophistication.”<sup>111</sup>

The historians who initiated research about the Holocaust in Germany in the 1960s hoped that their work would help “restore our people’s moral integrity not only in the eyes of the world but also and especially in our own eyes.”<sup>112</sup> But this interest in furthering collective “catharsis” for the purposes of improved “national self-respect” was only very rarely spelled out in the margins of their texts.<sup>113</sup> In principle, they decidedly condemned “general, moralistic and cultural critical reflections” after Auschwitz which they identified as the deplorable, “popular style of emotional *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*.”<sup>114</sup> Instead they declared categorically that “for the intellectual confrontation with National Socialism and its era we in Germany require neither emotions nor moralistic revival movements but rational work based on reason and common sense.” For this purpose they wholeheartedly embraced the “rigor of legal proceedings” because

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(München: Institut für Zeitgeschichte, 1958 and 1966); and Hans Buchheim et al., *Anatomie des SS-Staates*, 2 vols. (Olten: Walter, 1965).

<sup>111</sup> Herbert, “Holocaust,” 75

<sup>112</sup> Wolfgang Scheffler, *Judenverfolgung im Dritten Reich 1933-1945* (Berlin: Colloquium, 1960), 5.

<sup>113</sup> Martin Broszat (ed.), *Kommandant in Auschwitz: Autobiographische Aufzeichnungen von Rudolf Höss* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Verlagsanstalt, 1958), 14.

<sup>114</sup> *Anatomie des SS-Staates*, vol. I, 5,7.

it offered the “necessary standard for rationality.”<sup>115</sup> In their desire to understand the political and organizational preconditions for genocide, and to reveal the anatomy of the SS-State and its mechanisms of power, the historians produced texts which were superficially devoid of any emotions but which, in terse language and in close reading of the documents, inadvertently reproduced the style of said documents and its rationality of genocide. They revealed more historical empathy for the mechanisms of power which facilitated genocide than for its victims. This style of engagement is illustrated by Uwe Dietrich Adam’s path-breaking study of 1972 which ends with the awkward, tautological conclusion that “the forces and tendencies which characterized Hitler’s totalitarian state can only be explained -- as the catastrophe of Germany and of Jewry prove -- through the internal tensions and dynamics of said state.”<sup>116</sup> Occasionally, however, the texts reveal how many questions remained unaddressed and unanswered in the rational historiography of the Nazi era. The texts inadvertently illustrate the uncomfortable proximity between genocidal rationalization and rational historiographical explanation. In his 14 page introduction to Rudolf Höss’ memoirs Martin Broszat helplessly and obsessively admonishes Höss’ propensity for “book-keeping, terse and exacting,” “shocking,” “apathetic,” “unbearable,” and “shameless rationality” (Sachlichkeit) without being able to counter it with anything else but terse, exacting, historical prose.<sup>117</sup>

Through their contributions to the court proceedings the historians helped establish Auschwitz as the first generally accepted name for the Nazi genocide. However, committed to a “pathos of sobriety” they declined to participate in the search for suitable metaphors and

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<sup>115</sup> Ibid., 8.

<sup>116</sup> Uwe Dietrich Adam, *Judenpolitik im Dritten Reich* (Düsseldorf: Droste, 1972), 360-361; see also H.G. Adler, *Der verwaltete Mensch: Studien zur Deportation der Juden aus Deutschland* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1974) In his voluminous study, already concluded in 1971, the survivor of Theresienstadt reconstructs every detail of the deportation of Germany’s Jews in the name of historical objectivity but reserves his empathy for the demise of the liberal constitutional state under the rule of law, xxix-xxx, 1038.

philosophical concepts.<sup>118</sup> As a result, the scholarship of 1960s unraveled the mechanisms of power but had nothing to say about the uniqueness of the Holocaust, let alone the emotional aspects of its legacy. For historians, the ‘natural’ flight into historical objectivity had effectively cut them off from other realms of German historical culture. Kogon could still be scholar and popular author in one; the scholars of the 1960s communicated largely among themselves and the courts. But even for the contemporaries of Nazism who had embraced the discourse of sobriety there remained an emotional surplus lodged within the legacy of the Holocaust; they still perceived an incommensurability between the methods of representation and the subject matter of their work. This discrepancy explains the historians’ subsequent flight into metaphor, first through theoretical skirmishes and then through a temporary adoption of the negative simile of uniqueness.

### Flight into Theory

In the wake of the student movement West German historiography about the Nazi past took a theoretical, non-empirical turn. The student activists “attempted to effect a break with the National Socialist past which was cultural as well as political, one which also affected those value spheres and areas of life that had not been transformed fundamentally following 1945.”<sup>119</sup> To this end they emphasized and criticized the lines of continuities that linked the Third Reich and the Federal Republic, especially in terms of personnel and economic structure. They denounced that the German elite had persevered after 1945 and that the capitalist order,

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<sup>117</sup> Broszat, *Kommandant*, 10,14,18,20,21.

<sup>118</sup> Klaus-Dietmar Henke/Claudio Natoli (eds.), *Mit dem Pathos der Nüchternheit: Martin Broszat, das Institut für Zeitgeschichte und die Erforschung des Nationalsozialismus* (Frankfurt: Campus, 1991).

especially 'big business,' had survived unscathed. On the basis of this Marxist inspired consensus about the persistence of German fascism the theorists of the student movement engaged in increasingly esoteric, divisive, and confusing discussions about the precise nature of the fascist phenomenon.<sup>120</sup>

The debates among the student activists had little direct impact on German historiography, but a number of younger professional historians, who had finished their university training in the 1960s, shared some of the political concerns and theoretical reference points with the student rebels. These historians were only slightly younger than the first group of Holocaust historians; they belong to the age cohorts of the Hitler Youth generation. As young academics in a rapidly expanding university system they wanted to partake in sociocultural reforms by transforming West German academia from the inside out. In their attempts to break with the methodological and philosophical traditions of the discipline they and their older colleagues spent considerable time discussing the merits and limitations of competing historiographical models for the study of Nazism. As a result, the historiography of the 1970s remains memorable for the heated debates, including *ad hominem* attacks, among academics who subscribed to different theoretical frameworks, methodologies, and philosophies of history.

One topic of discussion was the question whether Nazism is best understood as a brand of fascism, and should be studied within the context of the history of other fascist regimes, or whether it is more accurately categorized as a totalitarian system and should be compared to the

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<sup>119</sup> Moïse Postone, "After the Holocaust: History and Identity in West Germany," Kathy Harms et al. (eds.), *Coping with the Past: Germany and Austria after 1945* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1990), 233-251, 236.

<sup>120</sup> Heinrich August Winkler, "Die 'neue Linke' und der Faschismus: Zur Kritik neomarxistischer Theorien über den Nationalsozialismus," in Winkler, *Revolution, Staat, Faschismus: Zur Revision des historischen Materialismus* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1987), 65-117.

Soviet Union.<sup>121</sup> These questions had already been discussed in other countries before they were addressed in Germany. In all these settings the debates served the purpose to displace the theory of totalitarianism which had been the dominant view of 20th century history in the West and “the official ideology of the Federal Republic from 1955 to 1975.”<sup>122</sup> In addition, as a result of attempts to reform their conservative discipline, German historians came to interpret the political history of Nazism and its prehistory from incompatible philosophical vantage points. The majority camp followed the conventional notion that ‘Men make history’ and therefore studied the motives, ideologies and actions of the Nazi leadership. But a very vocal minority, mostly members of the Hitler Youth generation, developed an alternative research agenda which was based on an eclectic assemblage of neo-Marxist theory, sociological classics, and Anglo-American social history. The new paradigm can be somewhat simplistically summarized by the slogan ‘not men but structures make history.’ This ‘functionalist’ approach, as it came to be known, proved particularly productive for the study of 19th century Germany and the prehistory of the Nazi era.<sup>123</sup> Applied to the political history of the Third Reich it yielded detailed studies of the power structure of the Nazi bureaucracy. Its authors emphasized time and again that political outcomes were primarily the result of competition and cooperation between a multitude of state and party agencies. In their eyes the catastrophic policies of the Nazi government could not be satisfactorily explained through the intentions of the leaders -- even if their intentions fit some of the outcomes very nicely. Rather, each statement and document had to be interpreted according to its position and ‘career’ within the complex, polycratic governmental structures of the Third

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<sup>121</sup> For a summary of the debate see Ian Kershaw, *Der NS-Staat: Geschichtsinterpretationen und Kontroversen im Überblick*, 3rd ed. (Reinbek: Rowohlt, 1999), 39-79.

<sup>122</sup> Wolfgang Wippermann, “Post-War German Left and Fascism,” *Journal of Contemporary History* 4/1 (1976), 192.

<sup>123</sup> Georg Iggers, “Introduction,” Iggers (ed.), *The Social History of Politics: Critical Perspectives in West German Historical Writing Since 1945* (Leamington Spa: Berg, 1985), 1-48.



Reich.<sup>124</sup> This structuralist or functionalist view of history has been labeled social history by its practitioners. However, at least with regard to the history of Nazism the new paradigm provided little insight into the social fabric of Nazi society but offered a very productive, alternative understanding of political processes and political history before and during Nazism.

### Flight into Exceptionality

The theoretical turn in German historiography during the 1970s produced little empirical, comparative work and, at least initially, offered no new insights into the history of the “Final Solution.” In fact, German historians engaged in “wars of interpretations on an outdated, thin empirical basis.”<sup>125</sup> Like the work of the 1960s, the abstract debates about fascism and totalitarianism, and intention and structure, rendered invisible the victims. In addition, unlike earlier historiographical efforts, the theoretical discussions obstructed the view of the perpetrators of the Nazi crimes.

In the context of the theoretical discussions of the 1970s, German historiography underwent a process of trifurcation. A steady production of monographs about the history of the “Final Solution” continued the tradition of the historiography of sobriety. As new sources became available and as German historians spent less time studying the collapse of the Weimar Republic and the first years of the Nazi regime, and focused instead on the period of World War II, new publications about the *Einsatzgruppen*, the death camps, and the war of extermination on

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<sup>124</sup> Kershaw, *NS-Staat*, 112-147.

the Eastern front considerably advanced the German historiography of the Holocaust.<sup>126</sup> On a second historiographical scene academic historians were effectively challenged by the rise of the history of everyday life (*Alltagsgeschichte*). Its practitioners, located in the margins or even outside academia, rewrote the history of Nazism from the perspective of the postwar generations. Finally, the public debates about the appropriate definition of Nazism quickly evolved into a semi-independent, third arena of historiographical practice. Especially for Germany's established academics the participation in political and polemical exchanges became a frequent, even routine undertaking. Not surprisingly, the rise of metaphor began and ended on this third level of historiographical practice. The public struggles provided the perfect outlet for representational interests which remained unaddressed in more conventional historiographical texts. In the early 1980s the debates focused again on the divide between functionalists and intentionalists, but this time specifically applied to the "Final Solution."

During the increasingly hostile exchanges of the 1970s the opposing camps seemed to agree on little more than "the central role of anti-Semitism in National-Socialist ideology and politics."<sup>127</sup> Despite radically different ideas about political practice and decision-making processes in the Third Reich the consensus was reflected in monographs and handbooks at the time. But the consensus about the centrality in the "Final Solution" was merely stated in

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<sup>125</sup> Herbert, "Vernichtungspolitik," 21.

<sup>126</sup> Helmut Krausnick/Hans-Heinrich Wilhelm, *Die Truppe des Weltanschauungskrieges: Die Einsatzgruppen des Sicherheitsdienstes und des SD 1938-1942* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Verlagsanstalt, 1981; Eugen Kogon et al. (eds.), *Nationalsozialistische Massentötungen durch Giftgas* (Frankfurt: Fischer, 1983); Militärgeschichtliches Forschungsamt (ed.), *Das Deutsche Reich und der Zweite Weltkrieg*, 6 vols. (Stuttgart: Deutsche Verlagsanstalt, 1979-1988).

<sup>127</sup> Otto D. Kulka, "Singularity and Its Relativization: Changing Views in German Historiography on National Socialism and the 'Final Solution'," *Yad Vashem Studies* 19 (1988), 151-186, 151; Otto D. Kulka, "Major Trends and Tendencies in German Historiography on National Socialism and the 'Jewish Question,'" Yisrael Gutman/Gideon Greif (ed.), *The Historiography of the Holocaust Period* (Jerusalem: Yad Vashem, 1988), 1-51.

passing; with few exceptions the Nazi crimes were not the subject of original research.<sup>128</sup> This equilibrium might have continued for a while if the academic experts had not been shaken by the broadcast and reception of the television mini-series *Holocaust* in 1979. Leading representatives of the profession conceded that the historians “may have paid too little attention to the problem of the ‘Final Solution’ and the task of distributing their insights to the wider public.”<sup>129</sup> The surprising popular interest in Holocaust history was met with a surge of publications which powerfully illustrated that academic self-criticism was quite appropriate. The ensuing flood of books “consisted only of old classics and rapidly penned Holocaust products.”<sup>130</sup> At the same time the publications also played an important role in introducing the concept of the Holocaust’s uniqueness to Germany.<sup>131</sup> As a result of such unusual public scrutiny at home and abroad Germany’s historians went to work. However, instead of hitting the archives, they did what they had done best for over a decade; they focused on one of the few original contributions to German Holocaust studies in the 1970s and began a theoretical discussion about the merits of functionalist and intentionalist interpretations of the origins of the “Final Solution.”<sup>132</sup>

In two programmatic essays Martin Broszat and Hans Mommsen stressed that the Holocaust was the outcome of the gradual radicalization of Nazi anti-Jewish policies in response to the failure of alternative plans for the removal of European Jewry.<sup>133</sup> They maintained that

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<sup>128</sup> For such exceptions see for example Falk Pingel, *Häftlinge unter SS-Herrschaft: Widerstand, Selbstbehauptung und Vernichtung im Konzentrationslager* (Hamburg: Hoffmann und Campe, 1978); and Christian Streit, *Keine Kameraden* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Verlagsanstalt, 1978).

<sup>129</sup> Hans Mommsen, “Holocaust und die Deutsche Geschichtswissenschaft,” Gutman, *Historiography*, 79-97; see also, less equivocally Broszat, “Holocaust,” 271.

<sup>130</sup> Konrad Kwiet, “Zur historiographischen Behandlung der Judenverfolgung im Dritten Reich,” *Militär-geschichtliche Mitteilungen* 27/1 (1980), 149-192, 151.

<sup>131</sup> See for instance Elie Wiesel’s widely circulated critique of *Holocaust* in which he re-emphasized the singularity and inexplicability of the Holocaust, Wiesel, “Die Trivialisierung des Holocaust: Halb Faktum und halb Fiktion,” Peter Märtesheimer/Ivo Frenzel (eds.), *Im Kreuzfeuer: Der Fernsehfilm Holocaust* (Frankfurt: Fischer, 1979).

<sup>132</sup> Kershaw, *NS-Staat*, 148-206; and Michael Marrus, *The Holocaust in History* (New York: Meridian, 1987), 31-46.

<sup>133</sup> Martin Broszat, “Hitler und die Genesis der ‘Endlösung’: Aus Anlass der Thesen von David Irving,” Broszat, *Nach Hitler*, 187-229 (originally published in 1977); Hans Mommsen, “Die Realisierung des Utopischen: Die

genocide resulted from a combination of general central policy decisions and local *ad hoc* initiatives by competing agencies which tried to ‘solve’ the increasingly chaotic conditions in the ghettos and camps in occupied Eastern Europe. According to their assessment, Hitler was kept informed and supported the radicalization towards mass murder -- often *post factum* --, but he did not design nor micro-manage the Holocaust himself as historians had conventionally assumed. For both authors, these conclusions indicated that the political and moral responsibility for the “Final Solution” was shared by many officials, including many members of traditional elites, and could not be limited to Hitler and the top Nazi leadership. These ideas were vigorously debated and resulted in important transitions in the German historiography of the “Final Solution.”

When the different methodological perspectives were brought to bear on the decision-making processes concerning the Holocaust, it became quickly apparent that the prior formulaic consensus about “the central role of anti-Semitism in National-Socialist ideology and politics” would not survive close examination. Not surprisingly, the representatives of the opposing schools of thought could not agree on the role of Hitler, Nazi ideology, and German bureaucracy in the Holocaust. In this situation of increasing division and public scrutiny the German professoriate enlisted help from their Israeli colleagues and appropriated the idea of the Holocaust’s uniqueness as a temporary, politically correct abstract consensus. Both the recognition of irreconcilable differences and the adoption of new metaphorical common ground were illustrated by an important international conference in Stuttgart in 1984. As the participants from Germany, Israel, and the US engaged in fruitless discussions of smaller and smaller minutiae in hopeless attempts to resolve larger philosophical and methodological differences, some of the scholars from Israel became increasingly skeptical about this particular style of

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‘Endlösung der Judenfrage’ im ‘Dritten Reich’,” Mommsen, *Der Nationalsozialismus und die deutsche Gesellschaft*

academic *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*. Yehuda Bauer asked the assembled experts: “Don’t we run away from ourselves? Don’t we try, albeit of course subconsciously, to look away from the cruel reality of the most terrible mass murder in history and focus instead on easily digested, abstract conceptualizations?”<sup>134</sup> and Saul Friedlander voiced uneasiness about the surreal efforts to deal with the mechanics of mass murder in strictly academic fashion over the course of several days.<sup>135</sup> It is not incidental that these two scholars have provided two of the best, albeit very different, definitions of the Holocaust’s singularity and have played an important role in relating this notion to their German colleagues.

In the late 1970s and early 1980s the Holocaust became a cornerstone of American Jewish identity and was enlisted for a whole range of Jewish and non-Jewish political objectives. As a result, the idea of the Holocaust’s uniqueness was embraced by the Jewish community while it was simultaneously employed and contested by other ethnic groups in their struggles for publicity and self-validation. Bauer “was the most prominent and outspoken proponent of uniqueness in this period”<sup>136</sup> and he has forcefully stated his position ever since: “[N]ever before in human history has a well-organized state, representing a social consensus, tried to murder, globally, every single member of an ethnic or ethno-religious group as defined by the perpetrator, for purely ideological reasons that bore not the slightest relation to reality.”<sup>137</sup> This empirical definition has to be differentiated from Friedlander’s insistence on the Holocaust’s incomprehensibility: “Paradoxically, the ‘Final Solution,’ as a result of its apparent historical

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(Reinbek: Rowohlt, 1991), 184-232 (originally published in 1983); see also Adam, *Judenpolitik*.

<sup>134</sup> Yehuda Bauer, “Auschwitz,” Eberhard Jäckel/Jürgen Rohwer, *Der Mord an den Juden im Zweiten Weltkrieg* (Frankfurt: Fischer, <sup>2</sup>1987), 164-173, 172.

<sup>135</sup> Jäckel/Rohwer, *Mord*, 242.

<sup>136</sup> Rosenfeld, “Politics of Uniqueness,” 35.

<sup>137</sup> Yehuda Bauer, “A Past That Will Not Go Away,” Michael Berenbaum/Abraham Peck (eds.), *The Holocaust and History: The Unknown, the Disputed, and the Reexamined* (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1998), 12-22, 16; see also Yehuda Bauer, *A History of the Holocaust* (Danbury: Watts, 1982), 332.

exceptionality, could well be inaccessible to all attempts at a significant representation and interpretation. Thus, notwithstanding all efforts at the creation of meaning, it could remain fundamentally irrelevant for the history of humanity and the understanding of the ‘human condition.’”<sup>138</sup> Elaborated over the years with “a peculiarly authoritative custodial voice” Friedlander’s “defense of the historical and moral centrality, as well as the ultimate inexplicability, of the Holocaust” has proven particularly appealing to German historians.<sup>139</sup>

Since the early 1980s the notion of the Holocaust’s uniqueness has become a standard framing device in German historiography, at least for one generation of scholars. Especially members of the Hitler-Youth generation, the German contemporaries of Bauer and Friedlander, have habitually introduced their publications by acknowledging their belief in the historical singularity of the “Final Solution.” The metaphor is used on both sides of the intentionalist/functionalist divide. Scholars who approach the study of the Holocaust from such different vantage points as Hans Mommsen and Eberhard Jäckel nevertheless consistently agree on its exceptional nature.<sup>140</sup> In addition, the status of the Holocaust as “the singular most monstrous crime in the history of human kind” is also routinely stated in new surveys.<sup>141</sup> But the agreement was never unanimous. Andreas Hillgruber repeatedly suggested that the large number of perpetrators and more or less informed bystanders gives us reason “to think beyond the

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<sup>138</sup> Saul Friedlander, “The ‘Final Solution’: On the Unease in Historical Interpretation,” Friedlander, *Memory, History, and the Extermination of the Jews of Europe* (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1993), 102-116, 113; see also Saul Friedlander, “Some Aspects of the Historical Significance of the Holocaust,” *The Jerusalem Quarterly* 1,1 (1976), 36-59.

<sup>139</sup> Steven Aschheim, “On Saul Friedlander,” *History and Memory* 9/1+2 (1997), 11-46, 11.

<sup>140</sup> Hans Mommsen, “Realisierung des Utopischen,” 184; Mommsen, “Der Weg zum Völkermord an den europäischen Juden,” Bernd Faulenbach/Helmut Schütte (eds.), *Deutschland, Israel und der Holocaust: Zur Gegenwartsbedeutung der Vergangenheit* (Essen: Klartext, 1998), 19-30, 19; Eberhard Jäckel, “Die Entschlussbildung als historisches Problem,” Jäckel/Rohwer, *Mord an den Juden*, 9-17,9; Jäckel, “The Holocaust: Where we are, where we need to go,” Berenbaum/Peck, *The Holocaust and History*, 23-29, 26.

<sup>141</sup> Wolfgang Benz, *Der Holocaust* (München: Beck, 1995), 7; see also Wolfgang Benz, *Dimension des Völkermords: Die Zahl der jüdischen Opfer des Nationalsozialismus* (München: Oldenbourg, 1991), 8; and Peter

historical singularity of the events” and Martin Broszat had doubts about the usefulness of metahistorical categories stipulating the singularity of any event, including the “Final Solution.”<sup>142</sup> Very soon after being adopted by German historians under exceptional circumstances, the notion of uniqueness was exposed as little more than a useful political tool during the Historians’ Debate and, finally, quite unceremoniously discarded by Germany’s most recent crop of professional historians.

### The Historians’ Debate

In mid-1986, the philosopher Jürgen Habermas delivered a frontal attack against a number of well-established conservative historians. Habermas argued that conservatives had violated the prior consensus stipulating that “after Auschwitz we can only create national self-confidence by selectively appropriating our more suitable traditions” through rigorous self-critical examination.<sup>143</sup> Instead, he claimed, conservative historians now engaged again in “reviving a sense of identity naively rooted in national consciousness,” an aim that Habermas found clearly expressed in the programmatic editorial essays of the historian Michael Stürmer.<sup>144</sup> For

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Longerich, *Politik der Vernichtung: Eine Gesamtdarstellung der nationalsozialistischen Judenverfolgung* (München: Piper, 1998), 17.

<sup>142</sup> Andreas Hillgruber, “Der geschichtliche Ort der Judenvernichtung,” Jäckel/Rohwer, *Mord an den Juden*, 211-224, 223; see also Hillgruber *Zweierlei Untergang*. Martin Broszat embraced the idea of the Holocaust’s metahistorical quality in Stuttgart (Jäckel/Rohwer, *Mord an den Juden*, 64) but repeatedly voiced doubts before and afterwards; see for example Broszat, “Genesis,” 195; Broszat, “Plädoyer,” 159 as well as Christian Meier, “Der Historiker Martin Broszat,” Henke/Natoli, *Pathos der Nüchternheit*, 11-38, 27-30.

<sup>143</sup> Rudolf Augstein et al., *Historikerstreit: Die Dokumentation der Kontroverse um die Einzigartigkeit der nationalsozialistischen Judenvernichtung* (München, 1987), 165. For an extensive contextualization of the Historians’ Debate see Wulf Kansteiner, “Between Politics and Memory: The *Historikerstreit* and West German Historical Culture of the 1980s,” Richard Golsan, ed., *Fascism’s Return: Scandal, Revision, and Ideology since 1980* (Lincoln, 1998), 86-129; for a recent interpretation of the Historians’ Debate from a psychoanalytical perspective see Dominick LaCapra, *Representing the Holocaust: History, Theory, Trauma* (Ithaca, 1994), 43-67; and LaCapra, *History and Memory after Auschwitz* (Ithaca, 1998), 43-72.

<sup>144</sup> *Historikerstreit* (see note 54), 73.

Habermas, such efforts of national identity construction were supported by Stürmer's colleagues, Ernst Nolte and Andreas Hillgruber, who advanced the cause in a number of short texts addressed to lay audiences. Nolte helped by denying the historical singularity of Auschwitz, which he characterized as a reaction to and imitation of similar events in the Soviet Union and thus "a mere technical innovation."<sup>145</sup> Hillgruber lent support to the conservative campaign by considering the last phase of war on the eastern front exclusively from the viewpoint of the German troops, which, he argued, resisted heroically to save the German population from the Red Army's wrath. For Habermas such histories amounted to apologetic tendencies toward the Third Reich.

The criticized historians responded quickly and dismissed the charges in equally personal attacks. With short delay Habermas' supporters, especially prominent liberal historians, joined the battle and restated his critique. In his initial intervention Habermas argued that the criticized historians supported each other's efforts, yet he never clarified whether he alleged any conscious conspiratorial activity, or if he merely described a disconcerting discursive formation. His supporters were less circumspect. For many commentators on the left, the scandal, as defined by Habermas, fit their favorite paranoid fantasy of a right-wing conspiracy at the center of West Germany's conservative establishment. They therefore joined the battle against the "new revisionism" without much ado. After the initial exchange of polemics, both sides ceased to engage in further debate, let alone any constructive discussions. Since the conservative camp, with few exceptions, refused to continue the debate, the great majority of the articles reflected the liberal point of view.

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<sup>145</sup> Ibid., 71.



Although the question of the Holocaust's historical singularity was not Habermas' single or even primary focus (he spent more time and effort on the critique of conventional national forms of historical identity), the uniqueness and comparability question became the overriding concern of most commentators.<sup>146</sup> Very few of the commentators were in any position to add new material to the discussion concerning, for instance, new research about the Soviet Union and other genocidal regimes. Therefore, the Historians' Debate soon turned into a repetitive acclamation of the historical singularity of the Holocaust.<sup>147</sup> The tacit agreement about the central importance of anti-Semitism had become an explicit, widely shared metaphorical dictum. On the basis of this result it is not surprising that the liberal camp declared victory. It seemed as if the conservative cultural trend had been resoundingly defeated. However, with hindsight, the Historians' Debate is much better understood "as the protracted political farewell -- abruptly ended by German unification -- of a generation of researchers and individuals who had a specific autobiographical agenda and were facing retirement at the start of the 1990s."<sup>148</sup>

While liberal historians and their supporters enjoyed this success, the relativization of the concept of exceptionality was already well underway. A number of initiatives and research strategies called into question the simplistic notion of singularity which had triumphed during the Historians' Debate. These initiatives included the social historians' own emphasis on the importance of modern social structures and bureaucracies which was continued by younger historians in their own research about the interdependence of Nazism and modernity, and new

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<sup>146</sup> Nicolas Berg, "'Auschwitz' und die Geschichtswissenschaft: Überlegungen zu Kontroversen der letzten Jahre," Berg, Jess Jochimsen, Bernd Stiegler, ed., *Shoah: Formen der Erinnerung* (München: Fink, 1996), 31-52, 37-8.

<sup>147</sup> See for example Eberhard Jäckel, "Die elende Praxis der Untersteller: Das Einmalige der nationalsozialistischen Verbrechen lässt sich nicht leugnen," Rudolf Augstein et al., *Historikerstreit: Die Dokumentation der Kontroverse um die Einzigartigkeit der nationalsozialistischen Judevernichtung* (München: Piper, 1987), 115-122; and Hans-Ulrich Wehler, *Entsorgung der deutschen Vergangenheit: Ein polemischer Essay zum 'Historikerstreit'* (München: Beck, 1988), 100.

research on the perpetrators of the Holocaust. However, most important was the rise of *Alltagsgeschichte*. Increased interest in the history of everyday life, both within and outside academia, produced a wave of publications which provided vivid and tangible details about life in the Third Reich to generations whose members had no personal memories of the period. Designed as critical antidotes to abstract debates and lofty discussions about high politics and administrative structures, many contributions to the history of everyday life inadvertently overemphasized the seemingly normal, unproblematic daily routines of the contemporaries of Nazism.<sup>149</sup> On the other hand, *Alltagsgeschichte* also illustrated the pervasiveness of racism and anti-Semitism in Nazi Germany. Although *Alltagsgeschichte* was initially not focused on the Holocaust, many local and regional studies finally gave voices and faces to the victims of the Nazi policies of persecution and extermination, including its Jewish victims. A fitting example is the work of Monika Richarz who edited autobiographical writings of German Jews about life in Nazi Germany and broke with the historiographical convention which had represented “the Jews as nameless, passive victims of an all-powerful machinery of destruction”.<sup>150</sup>

At the end of a long phase of theoretical discussions and a short phase of the reign of metaphor, the notion of uniqueness received a last enthusiastic, over-the-top endorsement of truly epic (and epigonic) proportions: “Auschwitz is a no-man’s-land of understanding, a black box of explanation, a vacuum of transhistorical significance which absorbs all historiographical attempts of interpretation. Only *ex negativo*, only through constant efforts to understand the futility of

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<sup>148</sup> Norbert Frei, “Farewell to the Era of Contemporaries: National Socialism and Its Historical Examination en route into History,” *History and Memory* 9/1-2 (1997), 59-79, 69.

<sup>149</sup> Not surprisingly this new social history was vigorously criticized by practitioners of the ‘old’ social history for its methodological naiveté and lack of theoretical foundations; see for example Franz Josef Brüggemeier/Jürgen Kocka (eds.), *Geschichte von unten -- Geschichte von innen: Kontroversen um die Alltagsgeschichte* (Hagen: Fernuniversität, 1985).

<sup>150</sup> Monika Richarz, *Jüdisches Leben in Deutschland: Zeugnisse zur Sozialgeschichte 1918-1945*, vol. 3 (Stuttgart:, 1982), 7, 40.

understanding, can we begin to grasp the break in civilization that this event represents. As a radical extreme case and absolute measure of history this event can very likely never be historicized.”<sup>151</sup> Dan Diner’s metaphorical firework might be the most elegant and self-confident endorsement of the incomprehensibility claim but it does not ring true any longer, precisely because it misses the element of self doubt which had accompanied the language of his predecessors.

### Self-Confident Empiricism

In the late 1980s and 1990s, partly in response to earlier overly theoretical discussions, a new generation of historians returned to the search of historical evidence, especially, but not exclusively in the recently opened archives of Eastern Europe. Many of the younger historians had absorbed or even participated in the wave of everyday history and they studied the Holocaust from a similar methodological vantage point. In addition to their interest in concrete empirical data, they resurrected conventional historiographical research and writing strategies which had been dismissed by the first generation of social historians. Some of the best works of the late 1980s and 1990s provide regional studies of the origins of the “Final Solution” in occupied Eastern Europe. The authors seek to understand what concrete, local factors contributed to the development of genocidal policies and how these local factors interacted with political directives

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<sup>151</sup> Dan Diner, “Zwischen Aporie und Apologie: Über Grenzen der Historisierbarkeit des Nationalsozialismus,” Diner (ed.), *Ist der Nationalsozialismus Geschichte: Zur Historisierung und Historikerstreit* (Frankfurt: Fischer, 1987), 62-73,73; see also Diner, “Perspektivenwahl und Geschichtserfahrung: Bedarf es einer besonderen Historik des Nationalsozialismus?,” Walter Pehle (ed.), *Der historische Ort des Nationalsozialismus* (Frankfurt: Fischer, 1990), 94-113; and Diner, “Gedächtnis und Methode: Über den Holocaust in der Geschichtsschreibung,” Fritz-Bauer-Institut, *Auschwitz*, 11-22.

from Berlin.<sup>152</sup> In addition to this methodologically conventional regional emphasis, historians have frequently chosen traditional biographical approaches and narrative formats.

These trends and recent advances in Holocaust studies in Germany are exemplified by the extra-academic research undertaken under the auspices of the Hamburg Institute for Social Research. Unlike their academic colleagues, its members and affiliates have kept alive the political ambitions of the student movement and the polemical tone of earlier debates. The proponents of the so-called Hamburg school set out to document the political economy at the center of the “Final Solution.” They contend that an intermediate layer of academically trained professionals designed and implemented the genocidal policies of the Nazi regime in the name of modern Western science, especially economics. In their opinion the Holocaust has to be interpreted within the overall context of state-of-the-art population policies which entailed large scale deportations and relocations as part of far-flung plans to reform the political, economic, and ethnic map of Eastern Europe. The attempted realization of these plans, including the insufficiently prepared relocation of ethnic Germans from the Soviet Union, set off a chain reaction of failed social engineering which led to ethnic cleansing and genocide. Furthermore, they are convinced that the professional ‘ethos’ and worldview of this planning intelligentsia is alive and well in Western academia, including German historiography.<sup>153</sup> Not surprisingly, their work has met harsh criticism from academic historians, including their generational peers, who

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<sup>152</sup> Walter Manoschek, *“Serbien ist judenfrei:” Militärische Besatzungspolitik und Judenvernichtung in Serbien 1941/42* (München: Oldenbourg, 1993); Dieter Pohl, *Von der “Judenpolitik” zum Massenmord: Der Distrikt Lublin des Generalgouvernements 1939-1944* (Frankfurt: Lang, 1993); Thomas Sandkühler, *“Endlösung in Galizien: Der Judenmord in Ostpolen und die Rettungsinitiativen von Berthold Beitz 1941-1944* (Bonn: Dietz, 1996); Christian Gerlach, *Krieg, Ernährung, Völkermord: Forschungen zur deutschen Vernichtungspolitik im Zweiten Weltkrieg* (Hamburg: Hamburger Edition, 1998).

<sup>153</sup> Most recently, members of the institute mounted a controversial exhibit about the involvement of the Wehrmacht in ethnic cleansing and genocide which has been more successful in undermining the persistent myth of the chivalrous German army than 20 years of scholarship, Hamburger Institut für Sozialforschung (ed.), *Vernichtungskrieg: Verbrechen der Wehrmacht 1941-1944* (Hamburg: Hamburger Edition, 1995).

pointed out, among more polemical responses, that material unearthed by Götz Aly et al. might attest to *post factum* rationalizations of Nazi policy rather than decision making processes.<sup>154</sup>

Nevertheless, the work is an important part of recent interest in the administrative and political personnel which realized the Holocaust. It finally addresses questions which should have been but could not be asked by their predecessors after 1945.

While these recent studies are clearly rooted in the tradition of *Alltagsgeschichte*, they also address research problems and ethical questions which were explicitly and implicitly raised in the writing of their structuralist predecessors. Their students have zoomed in on the functional elites of the Nazi regime and researched how administrators, party officials, and academics constructed the “Final Solution.” The best recent works, for instance, Ulrich Herbert’s 1996 study of Werner Best, combine an essentially biographical format with a systematic exploration of the structures and worldviews which shaped the generation of young, successful Nazi functionaries.<sup>155</sup> The study illustrates that German historians have finally overcome the sterility of the functionalist-intentionalist debates with their rigid, seemingly irreconcilable theoretical alternatives. Scholars like Herbert contend that the dynamics of violence which led to the Holocaust were motivated by racial anti-Semitism as well as ambitions for economic modernization and colonization steeped in the tradition of modern Western imperialism. The perpetrators’ ‘irrational’ ideological objectives, their seemingly rational, utilitarian interest in social engineering, and their desire to solve pressing organizational and administrative problems

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<sup>154</sup> Wolfgang Schneider, *Vernichtungspolitik: Eine Debatte über den Zusammenhang von Sozialpolitik und Genozid im nationalsozialistischen Deutschland* (Hamburg: Junius, 1991); see also Norbert Frei, “Wie modern war der Nationalsozialismus?,” *Geschichte und Gesellschaft* 19 (1993), 367-87; Axel Schmidt, “NS-Regime, Modernisierung und Moderne: Anmerkungen zur Hochkonjunktur einer andauernden Diskussion,” *Tel Aviver Jahrbuch für deutsche Geschichte* 23 (1994), 3-22; and Michael Burleigh, *Ethics and Extermination: Reflections on Nazi Genocide* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1997), 169-182.

<sup>155</sup> Ulrich Herbert, *Best: Biographische Studien über Radikalismus, Weltanschauung und Vernunft 1903-1989* (Bonn: Dietz, 1996).

caused by mass scale deportations resulted in a gradual process of radicalization, a process which differed significantly in various local settings and among various groups of perpetrators.<sup>156</sup> Moreover, with regard to the bystanders, Herbert has reached the alarming conclusion that acceptance of genocide did not require ideological fanaticism or mass hysteria, as recently alleged by Goldhagen, but that wide-scale, “escalating indifference” to the plight of minorities assured popular consent.<sup>157</sup>

The innovators of German Holocaust studies might differ in tone and emphasis but they agree in their rejection of the singularity metaphor as useless and counter-productive. Again, Ulrich Herbert: “The study of the genocide does not just reveal information about the historically unique situation and the specific German society of the 1930s and 1940s; rather it remains a contemporary, pressing, and depressing concern, not just, but especially here in Germany. These questions will keep us busy for quite some time even beyond all short-term, topical debates and excitement. In that process the insistence on the events’ incomprehensibility is as unproductive as any recourse to monocausal and seemingly radical explanations.”<sup>158</sup> Not surprisingly, Götz Aly has been even less tempered in his criticism. He rejects the left liberal “feuilleton wisdom” which posits the Holocaust as inexplicable because this approach “opens no avenues for reflection and unnecessarily restricts one’s focus” in research as well as teaching.<sup>159</sup> Instead, he argues that the Holocaust is accessible to analysis by conventional historiographical methods partly because the conventional rules of state bureaucratic procedure applied to the “Final

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<sup>156</sup> Herbert, “Vernichtungspolitik,” 27.

<sup>157</sup> *Ibid.*, 65.

<sup>158</sup> *Ibid.*, 65.

<sup>159</sup> Götz Aly, “Wider das Bewältigungs-Kleinklein,” Loewy, *Grenzen des Verstehens*, 42-51, 43; see also Götz Aly et al., “Editorial,” *Beiträge zur nationalsozialistischen Gesundheits- und Sozialpolitik* 5 (1987), 7-9, and Aly/Heim, *Vordenker der Vernichtung*, 11.

Solution.”<sup>160</sup> Therefore he concludes: “The deed and the crime is (sic) unique. However, Auschwitz is part of European as well as German history. Only when one has fully understood this context is it possible to talk meaningfully of the ‘limits of understanding.’ The Holocaust was not a ‘reversion to barbarism,’ nor a ‘break with civilization,’ still less an ‘Asiatic deed.’ But it was also far from being a ‘historical black hole,’ somehow beyond language, poetry and historical understanding, but rather a possibility inherent in European civilization itself.”<sup>161</sup> Finally, the cause of the Holocaust’s uniqueness, in Germany as well as in the US, did not profit from the fact that its most recent high-profile proponent, Daniel Goldhagen, presented a methodologically problematic interpretation of perpetrator history. With renewed self-confidence into the methodological integrity of their discipline German historians, in agreement with their colleagues abroad, unanimously rejected Goldhagen’s thesis.<sup>162</sup> However, they also abandoned the search for metaphorical language suitable for the representation of Holocaust history.

The second generational turn-over in the discipline since the end of the war has reduced the personal stakes involved in the study of the Nazi crimes and it has produced another generation whose members are eager to differentiate themselves from their teachers. In the process, the new historians have shed the cumbersome theoretical instruments and metaphorical language which their predecessors employed to study the “Final Solution.” Recent histories of the Holocaust published in Germany illustrate this professionalization and methodological normalization in German historiography in general and Holocaust studies in particular. In the

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<sup>160</sup> Götz Aly, *‘Final Solution:’ Nazi Population Policy and the Murder of the European Jews* (New York: Oxford UP, 1999), 245, 253.

<sup>161</sup> Götz Aly, “The Planning Intelligentsia and the ‘Final Solution’,” Michael Burleigh (ed.), *Confronting the Nazi Past: New Debates on Modern German History* (New York: St. Martin’s, 1996), 140-153, 153; see also Aly/Heim, *Vordenker der Vernichtung*, 492.

wake of everyday history and microhistory German historians have retained their international perspective but they have methodologically reverted to a methodological stance which preceded not just the debates of the 1970s but even the Nazi period. Fully and seriously engaged in *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*, German historians have again embraced the comforting illusion that their texts are a transparent reflection of the empirical record, that they are simply telling the facts. With hindsight, the historiographically volatile 1970s and the subsequent short reign of metaphor appear just as ripples in a sea of historiographical normality and self-confidence. The notion of the Holocaust's singularity temporarily postponed this inevitable return to business as usual and gave rise to unusual and unusually productive historiographical introspection and in this way attested to the extraordinary challenge which the historicization of events like the Holocaust pose to an academic discipline.<sup>163</sup>

It might take another generation of scholars (although hopefully not another event like the Holocaust) before the unacknowledged implicit premises of the historian's craft are again tested in such stringent fashion. In the meantime, a new consensus seems to have emerged in the discipline, a consensus which is ripe with underlying assumptions about modernity, human nature, and historical continuity and which has eliminated the historical and anthropological distance between us and the Nazi perpetrators that German historians worked so hard to maintain for over 30 years: "Perpetrator research forces one to accept the unwelcome insight that the transformation of human beings into mass murderers requires little time and will power. Neither long biographical adaptation nor time consuming indoctrination appear necessary."<sup>164</sup>

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<sup>162</sup> Johannes Heil/Rainer Erb (eds.), *Geschichtswissenschaft und Öffentlichkeit: Der Streit um Daniel J. Goldhagen* (Frankfurt: Fischer, 1998).

<sup>163</sup> The symbolic, generational change of the guard was theatrically enacted at the Historikertag of 1998 when the new generation did not directly attack their just retired teachers but instead exposed the collaborative behavior of the teachers' teachers during the Third Reich, Kansteiner, "Mandarins in the Public Sphere," 102-109.

<sup>164</sup> Sofsky, "KZ-Forschung," 1154.



## Conclusion

If the term collective memory should make any sense for the study of representations of the past it is crucial to define the sociological base of any given representation and its historical development as precisely as possible. We need to know the size of the collective which produced or embraced a particular explanation of the past and we have to try to determine the 'shelf life' of the strategies of representation under observation. Such questions are raised and partly answered by a comparative study of historical cultures which highlight the fact that the sociological depth and historical persistence of specific representations of the past vary greatly. On the other hand, the study of diverse channels of historical representation within one national culture reveal parallels in timing and patterns of representation which apply to texts accepted as history by very different constituencies.

Clearly, in terms of sociological depth, historiography and television operate on very different scales. Scholarly writings in an important subdiscipline like the history of Nazism are closely read by fellow specialists, possibly selectively perused by colleagues in other fields, and the main results of the new publications distributed to the educated public through the national press. The potential readership of works of academic history can be generously estimated at 15% of the population in a country like the Federal Republic. Beyond this circle historical research, its written fall-out, and even intellectual debates about its methods and conclusions can only count on complete indifference. The historians' debate provides a perfect example; as intellectuals were up in arms committing entertaining character assassinations, the larger public remained ignorant about the issues under discussion. The debate did not cross over into other

channels of historical representation, especially the electronic media. As a result of its limited reach and medieval rituals of recruitment, the core audience of academic history forms a fairly homogenous group of male intellectuals within relatively narrow age limits. Therefore, with respect to the topic of Nazism, the transformation of interpretive tastes and methodological preferences can be safely attributed to shifts in the generational composition of the profession.

Obviously the case is more complicated with television. On the side of production the makers of historical representations form an even tighter network of experts than their academic counterparts. The few people who are routinely involved in the development of history for television, either inside the networks or as independent producers, are the first and possibly most critical audience of each other's work. Yet, these discussions are carefully hidden from public scrutiny and the makers of television history never get involved in public intellectuals strife which could undermine their trustworthiness in the eyes of their viewers. Also, unlike in academia, most productions are the result of team work which makes it impossible to gauge the creative contributions of specific individuals and age groups, especially when considered from outside the station. Furthermore, since public television is such a high stakes political game, all programs, including those in the realm of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*, reflect the interpretive priorities of the major political forces in the country. Such pressures are only rarely acknowledged in writing, but efficient self-censorship, in tune with the political status quo, belongs in the tool box of every successful television maker. Finally, again in contradistinction to academia whose practitioners write for each other, the perceived or real interests of the television audiences play an important role in the production process. The fact the television history reaches by far the largest audiences of any historical representation makes the study of television such an important and frustrating endeavor for the study of collective memory. In the

absence of effective qualitative viewer research, which reveals the opinion of different audiences with respect to specific productions after their screening, the available evidence allows only negative conclusions. Thus ratings and other viewer responses clearly indicate that the representation of the Holocaust in the programs of the ZDF has never reached the historical pain threshold of any significant segment of the audience. None of the programs have provoked extraordinary protests by phone or mail and none have been the target of audience boycott. Or, to put it differently, we might not know the interests of the audiences but we can deduce that their interests have not been violated by the histories they encountered on the screen. Finally, to push the negative reasoning to its limits, it is difficult to imagine that such major paradigm shifts like the onset and sustained broadcast of the survivor narratives has not shaped the collective memory of the Holocaust, especially among the majority of viewers who do not systematically consume history in any other way. Therefore, it is safe to assume that many television consumers remember the Holocaust primarily in terms of survivor testimony and survivor fiction.

Further speculation about the interests and historical ‘pain threshold’ of German audiences can be based on a closer look at the media event *Holocaust* in the Federal Republic in 1979, now considered within its proper media context. The series is not part of the sample under discussion because it was originally broadcast by West Germany’s regional television stations and then aired again in the national channel of the ARD in 1982.<sup>165</sup> *Holocaust* tells the fictional story of two families during the Nazi era. It interlaces the fate of the middle class Jewish family Weiss with the rapid professional and social advancement of the family of an unemployed German lawyer who joins the SS in 1935. With the exception of the son, all members of the

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<sup>165</sup> Holocaust was aired simultaneously by all regional public service stations, i.e., by all third channels, on January

Jewish family die during the Nazi persecution while the lawyer Dorf becomes an efficient technocrat who serves Heydrich during the implementation of the “Final Solution” and commits suicide in 1945. *Holocaust* received some of the highest ratings which were ever recorded for a program about the Nazi past in the Federal Republic; an average of 36% of all television households watched the four part series.<sup>166</sup> More important, *Holocaust* caused an unprecedented emotional outpour from the viewers.<sup>167</sup> All public service stations, including the ZDF<sup>168</sup>, were flooded with phone calls and letters in which viewers expressed their sympathy for the victims and survivors, confessed to their prior ignorance about the events of the “Final Solution,” and often even acknowledged their responsibility for having failed to resist the Nazi anti-Jewish policies. All these reactions were expressed in very emotional language. It seemed that Germans had for the first time emotionally grasped what tremendous suffering had been committed in their name. *Holocaust* is one of the few moments in the history of German television in which viewers wrote media history. Many politicians, television administrators, and reviewers who had anticipated the broadcasting of the ‘soap opera’ with reservations and relegated it to the third channels scrambled to catch up with the audience and revised their positions to cohere with public opinion.<sup>169</sup>

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22, 23, 25, and 26, 1979.

<sup>166</sup> Uwe Magnus, “‘Holocaust’ im Spiegel der Teleskopie,” *Media Perspektiven* 2 (1979), 77-80.

<sup>167</sup> On the reactions to *Holocaust* see in particular Friedrich Knilli/Siegfried Zielinski, *Betrifft “Holocaust:” Zuschauer schreiben an den WDR* (Berlin: Spiess, 1983); Heiner Lichtenstein/Michael Schmid-Osbach, *Holocaust: Briefe an den WDR* (Wuppertal: Econ, 1982); Hauke Brunkhorst/Gertrud Koch/Hans-Joachim Lissmann, *Holocaust: Impulse, Reaktionen, Konsequenzen* (Frankfurt: Johann Wolfgang Goethe-Universität, 1980); Märtshheimer/Frenzel, *Kreuzfeuer*; Ahren et al., *Lehrstück*; and Dieter Prokop, *Medien-Wirkungen* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1981), 98-187.

<sup>168</sup> Especially on the first two days of the broadcast of *Holocaust* the ZDF received many calls by viewers who did not get through to the public station in Köln; see “Protokoll des Telefondienstes” dated 1/22 and 1/23/1979. Calls to the ZDF continued during the following days as the media event was discussed in the ZDF’s political magazines; see for example *Länderspiegel*, 1/27/79; and *Bonner Perspektiven*, 1/28/79.

<sup>169</sup> This change of mind was openly admitted by the critic of the *FAZ*, Sabina Lietzmann, after the surprising success of *Holocaust* in the US; see Lietzmann, “Die Judenvernichtung als Seifenoper,” *FAZ*, 4/20/78; and compare Lietzmann, “Kritische Fragen,” *FAZ*, 9/28/78.

On the basis of the analysis of the ZDF programs on Nazism it is now for the first time possible to situate *Holocaust* within its wider media context. In some respects *Holocaust* is an excellent representative of the historical programming during the second phase of engagement. The series provided historical fiction about the “Final Solution” from the perspective of everyday life. Like no other single program it defined the parameters for the new emotional approach to the visual representation of Nazism which invites direct identification with the protagonists on the screen. On the other hand, *Holocaust* clearly surpassed the limitations which are characteristic of all historical programming about the Third Reich which has been aired by the ZDF. Unlike the great majority of the programs about the “Final Solution” which we have considered above *Holocaust* fosters identification with the victims of genocide and not its survivors. In addition, and in the German context maybe even more important, the US mini-series confronted the German viewers with the frame of mind and the motivations of the perpetrators of the “Final Solution.” The fictional character of the shy opportunist Dorf is presented in such a way that the decisions of the Nazi criminals become understandable and that the viewers can at least temporarily sympathize with their point of view. In the context of German television this representation of the perpetrators is truly exceptional -- at least if we take the ZDF programs as our yardstick.

The direct juxtaposition of the victims’ and the perpetrators’ point of view made *Holocaust* a unique media event and very likely also caused the emotional reactions of so many viewers. To my knowledge no other program has been aired on German television which encouraged such an emotional investment with the Nazis’ perspective and which at the same time provided a ‘safe haven’ for the emotional surplus which this experience might have created. In other words, the emotional identification with the victims, which *Holocaust* achieved in the

eyes of many commentators, was accomplished and enhanced by a displaced identification with the perpetrators which Germany's historical culture has in general systematically avoided. The television series represents one of very few moments in German media history in which audiences explored the problem of becoming perpetrators.

This interpretation of the media event *Holocaust* suggests that German viewers were more willing and interested in dealing with the legacy of perpetration and opportunism than the ZDF television makers, who so carefully circumvented the topic in their coverage. In 1989, after the broadcast of the HBO production *The Story of Simon Wiesenthal* by the ZDF<sup>170</sup>, Heinz Ungreit, the ZDF's program director still argued that "the success of *Holocaust* could not have been replicated by German programs; it could only be continued by US productions. We Germans would not have produced *Holocaust* in the way that it was done, but we put on the air what the Americans offer."<sup>171</sup> In light of the ZDF's record and the success of *Holocaust* such deference is problematic. German television should have tried to appropriate at least the subject matter of *Holocaust*, if not necessarily its aesthetics.

The analysis of the production of television histories does not lend itself to fine-tuned generational models of explanation which nicely fit the development of academic historical tastes. In addition, the more internationally oriented television historiography has imported and supported interpretive paradigms which never experienced much of 'career' in German academic historiography. This applies in particular to the survivor paradigm that was only temporarily and indirectly acknowledged by German historians while they considered the uniqueness of the Holocaust. Nevertheless, both channels of historical representation have evolved roughly parallel since the beginning of the ZDF coverage in the 1960s. Most perplexing is the temporary

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<sup>170</sup> *Recht, nicht Rache: Die Geschichte des Simon Wiesenthal 1+2*, 11/20+21/89.

disengagement with the topic of the “Final Solution” in the 1970s which appears as a general phenomenon in all historical media. Less perplexing but equally intriguing is the selective avoidance of particular aspects of Holocaust history over several decades. To varying degrees, more pronounced in television than historiography, the representations of the Holocaust fail to cast direct light on the perpetrators of the “Final Solution.” For many years, instead of looking directly at the crimes and the criminals the historians have studied the administrative apparatus of genocide, and television executives only occasionally dedicated airtime to the question of perpetration. Even more disconcerting is the prolonged silence about the German bystanders of the deportation and murder of European Jewry. Historiography and television have failed to probe into the legacy of acquiescence which must have been painfully familiar to most professionals in the business of history through the 1970s. The reluctance to face the perpetrators and their motives has been overcome in recent years in academia as well as television as the methods and perspectives of *Alltagsgeschichte*, which gradually yet thoroughly recast historical practice in all media since the late 1970s, have finally been applied to the history of genocide. But an equally systematic inquiry into the question of civil obedience is still badly needed.

All these parallels with regard to strategies of representation and choice of subject matter suggest a powerful divide between contemporaries of Nazism and subsequent generations whose members have no conscious memories of the Nazi era. As long as the contemporaries of Nazism dominated the business of historical reflection they predominantly concerned themselves with important yet limited historical repair work, for instance through philosemitic programming and support of the prosecution of specific types of Nazi perpetrators. The representations of the

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<sup>171</sup> “Recht, nicht Rache: Die Geschichte des Simon Wiesenthal,” *tele-express*, 11/22/89.

Holocaust facilitated **by** contemporaries of Nazism **for** contemporary of Nazism stopped always short of considering the concrete involvement in the Nazi crimes of 'one's own kind,' i.e., one's family and colleagues. Only the historiographical revolution of *Alltagsgeschichte*, erected on the foundation of the student movement and designed to meet the historical needs of subsequent generations, gradually, with considerable delay, reached these most disturbing questions. After spending considerable time and effort on imagining what it might have felt like to live in a Nazi society and to be a Jewish victim of Nazism, at least the historians of the postwar generations have relentlessly exposed the collaborative involvement of their academic predecessors and the everyday life of racist persecution. Television makers have never reached this level of self-reflection and, as a result of the commercialization of German television, will never be in a situation to confront large audiences with insight into the everyday life of Nazi perpetration and indifference. In this respect the revolution of *Alltagsgeschichte* has been outpaced by the inevitable restructuring of the German television landscape. Or, to put it differently, the diversification of the television market has aborted a new, and potential very productive round of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* on the screen before it could ever take off.

In the end, the comparative study of historical rationalization of past guilt also highlights what *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* is all about, and, possibly, should be all about. Generations of German intellectuals and consumers have spent an extraordinary amount of time and effort, of elaborate avoidance and selective confrontation, to advance a state of normalization and historicization. For academic historians this normalization entails the study of the Nazi past and the Holocaust with the conventional tools of their trade which are applied to every conceivable aspect of that past in a productive yet routine manner and which result in ambitious, complex historical narratives addressed to an international community of scholars. For television makers



and audiences such normalization results in the marginalization of historical representation in off-peak hours directed at specific, historically-minded minority audiences. Even this development, however disappointing and didactically premature, marks the normalization of the German media in the context of the development of international media markets.