

New German Identity: Reworking the Past and Defining the Present in

Contemporary German Cinema

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The end of imperialism was the birth of nationalism, a wave of rising consciousness that swept over the conquered areas of the world and brought them to their feet with a defiant cry, “We are a Nation!” These new nations, almost all multiethnic states, struggled in defining themselves, found themselves locked in civil wars over what the citizen of this nation looked like and who s/he was. The old nations, locked in a Cold War, looked on, confident in their own national cohesion and unity. But the end of the Cold War proved to be the birth of complicated new identity concerns for Europe. Yugoslavia splintered in terrible ethnic conflict. France rioted over the expression of religious affiliation. Germany tried desperately to salvage the hope that brought down the Wall and stitch itself back together. For Germany the main questions of identity linger, not only who is a German, but what does it mean to be German?

In the aftermath of the great upheavals in Germany’s recent past, the Second World War and the fall of the Third Reich, German films did their best to ignore these questions of identity and the complications of the past. But in the late 1960s and throughout the 1970s, a New German Cinema arose that sought to work through the complex issues of West Germany: the legacy of the Nazi Past, American occupation, the Berlin Wall and divided Germany, the radicalism of the time period in a global context, and the civil rights movements, particularly the women’s movement. These films, directed by eminent figures such as Rainer Werner Fassbinder, Werner Herzog, Wim Wenders, Margarethe von Trotta, Volker Schlöndorff, Helke Sander and Helma Sanders-Brahms, resurrected German films and brought them to international attention and acclaim with their difficult and jarring styles. The consistently combative approach of these films and their generally dense handling of the subject matter meant that by the 1980s attendance of German films in the theaters had reached a record lows (Halle 2002, 13).

By the 1980s new filmmakers and audiences were tired of the defiantly anti-commercial style of the *Autorenfilme* (auteur cinema) and moved towards more profitable and entertaining movie-making, encouraged by a restructuring of the public funding system for filmmaking. The collapse of the Berlin Wall on November 9, 1989 and the unification of the German Democratic Republic (GDR) with the Federal Republic shook Germany up once again, threatening to send it back to a period of willful ignorance. However what mostly characterized films of the 1990s was transition. Initially movies continued with the middle-class entertainment model of the 1980s, with a smattering of films that approached more difficult and complex topics, primarily World War II and the Nazi Regime, but also began to broach topics of minorities in Germany, though in simplified ways.

The late 1990s became a prelude to the movies of the 2000s, films that no longer sought to ignore the inconvenient complications of the past, both Nazi and Stasi, or the realities of ethnically diverse present. In their efforts to explore these issues, discussions that deal directly with the question of German identity, these new directors do not play ball with the concept of auteur cinema or commercial cinema, but rather work within the new realities of film financing. These filmmakers are able to produce movies that attract an audience, and thereby future funding, without sacrificing the aesthetic and intellectual goals. The new millennium has meant a new movement in internationally acclaimed German filmmaking not seen since the 1970s, but with the broad appeal of the Golden Age of German cinema during the Weimar Republic.

This paper examines these most recent additions to the canon of German Cinema and how these films handle issues of Germany's WWII and GDR past as well as the reality of large populations of non-ethnic Germans contributing to an increasingly colorful fabric of nationhood. The idea of using visual media to discuss identity formation in nations is briefly discussed first,

followed by consideration of Germany's national position. From there the films will be discussed, beginning with WWII topic films, then East Germany topic films and ending with films discussing multi-ethnic or immigrant experiences. The concluding paragraphs of this paper will explore (in)consistencies across these films. Additionally synopses of the films examined in this paper are to be found in the appendix.

### **National identity and the role of visual media**

Benedict Anderson's definition of a nation as "an imagined political community...both inherently limited and sovereign" (1991, 6) changed the way the academic community thought about nations and nationalism. If a political community is only as cohesive as the shared imaginings of the people within that community, then it is critical for political elites to be able to dominate discourse on the nation in order to control and direct it. As the size of a nation grows, in both population and geographical space, the more difficult it becomes to ensure a unified understanding of the history, customs, and characteristics of the nation. Fortunately the advance of telecommunications technology greatly simplified this task. Telegrams and print media allowed news of events within the community to spread faster, but also kept this nation informed of the activities and characteristics of other communities. The difficulty with print media was that it could not reach the illiterate. This problem was overcome by radio and aural media, which had the added benefit of being broadcast from a single point over a large territory, thus ensuring central and uniform messages. Additionally, these messages could be broadcast over foreign nations to influence their understanding of this nation.

The ultimate development came with visual media – films, theaters and the all-powerful television. Visual media have the same advantages of aural, in that they can be broadcast from a

single point over a large area and are not met with the complication of reaching an illiterate populace.<sup>1</sup> Visual media trumps aural and print because it requires the least amount of critical attention on behalf of the recipient. One cannot read and fully absorb a book or newspaper without focusing on what is being read. One cannot listen to the words of a broadcast and simultaneously be thinking of something else, without sacrificing some comprehension of what is being done. This is because these media deprive the other senses and as a result the brain must remain finely attuned to the particular source of stimulation. Yet because a television provides both audio and visual stimulation, it precludes the need for extra discretion by the brain. A person can even stop listening to the television and focus on another activity but will still be able to follow the action flashing across the screen even though s/he may not be consciously aware of it. When this viewing and listening activity is taken to a movie theater the effects are heightened, because all other stimuli that the brain automatically searches for have been removed. There is no light or sound except for that coming from the screen and for this reason the brain readily accepts all things with which it is being bombarded.<sup>2</sup>

What does this mean for the nation? A nation is made cohesive by the conceptions of its community. The community must be able to identify itself with particular characteristics and at the same time be able to recognize that there are other nations that do not share these specific characteristics. What better way to help a community identify itself than by visualizing its image on a television, the same image that will be sent to every television within the community?

Members of the community can then see themselves (i.e. other members of the community)

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<sup>1</sup> There is the complication of being able to afford a radio or television set. Fortunately a single device can be shared by an entire extended family or village and the costs wouldn't be as high as providing the instructors, materials and space for literacy education. Gamal Abdel Nasser is a good example of a leader who promoted the use of radio and television broadcasts as a way of teaching the population, especially in the rural areas of Upper Egypt, about health standards and farming practices, among other things.

<sup>2</sup> This situation of relative sensory deprivation is ideal for techniques of so-called brain-washing. Indeed a combination of drugs and forced watching of specific film clips was precisely the way Stanley Kubrick presented the correction of Alex in *A Clockwork Orange* (1971).

engaged in activities common to this people, speaking the same language, dressing in similar clothing and adhering to a value system shared by the community. Thus the nation is no longer abstract, but presented on the screen for everyone to see. People do not even need to be explicitly told that these characteristics and virtues are theirs and are good. Cognitive schemas predispose people to the assumption that people who look like them or behave like them are good. The values of a community can be continuously reaffirmed and the resulting actions perpetuated without explicit articulation. Indeed if the leaders of a nation were to list the behaviors and values that members were to uphold, it is more likely that, in the face of such confrontation, members of the community might resist. Passive or implicit direction lacks the perceived hostility of direct address and is therefore less critically received, provided it is even consciously noticed by the recipient.

I should say now that I do not subscribe to the notion that people are merely empty vessels waiting to be filled with whatever information or prescriptions of behavior are poured into them by the media and those who direct them. People are intelligent discerning animals responsible for their own actions. However it is the norms of a society that determine which actions, behaviors, thoughts etc. are good or bad. These norms are just an aspect of the cultural identity that is promulgated to support discourse on the national identity. Power holders may be able to effectively distribute persuasive models of identification, but it is ultimately up to the individual to accept these norms as her/his own. While it is not impossible to act against norms or societal expectations, it is difficult, even for individuals that have been educated to be critical, particularly because the consequences can be ostracism from the community.

Fortunately, even if people were these “empty vessels” there are always multiple national identity discourses in competition. Identity is in constant flux because individuals are

continuously experiencing new people, things, events and ideas that cause them to reflect on how this new information fits with past information. People are not necessarily consciously aware of the way they compare, contrast and organize information, but these processes have been psychologically studied.<sup>3</sup> What this further means is that individuals and groups participate in the negotiation of personal and group identities and among these is the national identity. Differences of generation, political ideologies, race, gender, orientation, class and religion all affect the way people define their identity. Yet a nation must be able to supersede all these smaller identities and produce a coherent image of self or it risks balkanization and civil hostilities.

### **German Nationalism and German Cinema**

Germany came relatively late to statehood. Principalities and Free cities had been the order of the day until economic integration followed by political alliances made it clear that a unified German Empire would be better suited to protecting its interests. What is considered to be modern Germany as a state did not materialize until 1871. The transformation of Silesians, Saxons, Bavarians, Swabians, Prussians, etc. into Germans did not occur because of economic interests alone. Common linguistics, regions, religions and tribal histories facilitated the construction of an Ur-Deutsch identity that made it possible for citizens of principalities to see themselves as part of an original German linguistic tribe. Furthermore a long history of successful and renowned artists in literature and music became a source of common cultural pride. The dominance of Prussia also meant that traits seen to be characteristic of Prussians

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<sup>3</sup> Studies done on priming by D.L. Schachter and L. A. Cooper, 1993. "Implicit and explicit memory for novel visual objects: Structure and function." *Journal of Experimental Psychology: Learning, Memory and Cognition* 19(5) 995-1009. Mere-exposure effect studies done by J.G. Seamon, P.C. Williams, M.J. Crowley, I.J. Kim, S.A. Langer, P.J. Orne, and D.L. Wishengrad. 1995. The mere exposure effect is based on implicit memory: Effects of stimulus type, encoding conditions, and number of exposures on recognition and affect judgments. *Journal of Experimental Psychology: Learning, Memory and Cognition* 21(3) 711-721.

began to be seen as German characteristics, such as penchants for orderliness and cleanliness, a strong sense of duty and adherence to rules, and a straight-forward manner that borders on brusque.

The fervency of a German nationalist spirit is (dis)credited with two World Wars. Imperial nationalism during the First and Second World Wars ended up leaving Germany with nothing but the shame of having brought about so much destruction. At the same time it is important to note that national fervor helped to bring Germany back out of its slump in the interwar years. Despite the negativity associated with nationalism has been a fantastic motivator in Germany, indeed it is so strong that Germany has had to either divide itself or subsume itself to supra-state controls so as not to threaten its neighbors. While Germany remains timid in vocalizing a national consciousness, the old glory of the flag does proudly wave during World Cup soccer matches.

German Cinema has been distinct and influential since the end of the Wilhelmina era. From Germany came the distinct style of Expressionist filmmaking, which later influenced American *film noir* and the horror genre, as well as the New Objectivity, a style of filmmaking devoted to examining objective and peripheral details. German produced one of the world's best documentary filmmaker, Leni Riefenstahl. Germany continues to create unique genres such as the Mountain film and the Heimat film, both of which cater to the Romantic and Naturalist tastes in Germany. 1962 saw the signing of the Oberhausen Manifesto, an agreement among young aspiring filmmakers to learn new styles of filmmaking not tainted with the manipulative techniques of propaganda. From this signing the New German Cinema movement was born, followed by the Women's film movement, fashioned along similar principles. Decades later



German comedies would flourish, particularly romantic comedies, and the need for Hollywood films would diminish, though so would the internationally critical acclaim for German films.

At this time that international acclaim has returned following a renaissance in German filmmaking that has produced commercially and intellectually viable films. Studies have been done on post-wall or reunification cinema in Germany, with a variety of interpretations of the meaning and motivations of these films. For some scholars, an attachment to New German Cinema and its anti-commercial approach has led to an easy dismissal of post-wall cinema.<sup>4</sup> While there are many valid criticism of post-wall cinema for its simplification and stereotyping, these studies tend to over-value an auteur approach to filmmaking in addition to ignoring the subtlety that is now the preferred method of message transfer. The films that I am examining fall into three general categories dealing primarily with topics surrounding WWII, East Germany and minority or migrant populations and have all been released since 1999, a full decade from the fall of the Wall.

## **National Socialism and WWII**

World War II and the policies of the Nazi government left an indelible mark on all of Europe. All but five European countries were occupied by Germany. Britain, one of the exceptions, was relentlessly bombarded by German airplanes. Eleven million people, 6 million of them Jewish, were systematically exterminated. Tens of millions of others died in battle or as a result of the war. Countries and economies were destroyed, all after a relatively short interlude from the First World War which had caused the similar destruction and disrupted the lives of an entire generation. Germany's position as aggressor in both conflicts makes their experience post

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<sup>4</sup> In particular see Eric Rentschler 2000 "From New German Cinema to the Post-Wall Cinema of Consensus" in Mette Hjort and Scott Mackenzie (eds.) *Cinema and Nation* London: Routledge.

World War II quite different from that of the victorious Allies. The German people were faced with their own complicity in the Nazi regime and the atrocities it committed. They were forced to accept their own guilt and an occupying force as the remaining elements of National Socialism were purged. In addition, the German people in the Soviet sector traded one dictatorship for another and were cut off from the West.

The German psyche, once again shattered by an incomprehensible war, needed to find ways of understanding what had occurred and what effect this had on being German. The Nazis had a very straight forward method of identifying German-ness and non-German-ness. Germans were Aryans, Aryans were not Jews and so Jews were not Germans. This definition was difficult for the great number of German Jews who, being fully acculturated, privileged a German identity over a Jewish one.<sup>5</sup> Post-war identity construction would need to recreate coherent German-Jewish identities. The aspects of German national character also had to be determined, as well as what role the German people had as indifferent bystander or willing participant in the crimes. Surely it would be better to speak of the many literary and musical geniuses of Germany, and not such characteristics as duty and obedience, which facilitated the acceptance of a dictatorship. As Sabine Hake notes in her discussion of the history of German cinema, films made immediately after the war, such as Wolfgang Staudte's *The Murderers are Among Us* (*Die Mörder sind unter uns*, 1946) did not explicitly indicate the Nazis as perpetrators and almost never identified the Jewish community as victims. This remains true in the New German Cinema, which has no difficulty identifying Nazi guilt but does not clearly define any Jewish victims.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> This privileging of national identity over Jewish as a result of stronger acculturation is part of the reason for the lack of enthusiasm on the part of Western European Jews for the establishment of a Jewish State in Palestine. Western European and Scandinavian Jews saw themselves as German, Danish, Dutch, French or British and did not see any need for them to have another country. This was not the case for Eastern European Jews whose experience had been marked primarily by ghettos and pogroms.

<sup>6</sup> See R. W. Fassbinder's *The Marriage of Maria Braun* (*Die Ehe der Maria Braun*, 1979) or Helma Sanders-Brahms *Germany, Pale Mother* (*Deutschland, Bleiche Mutter*, 1980), two films in which the lives of non-Jewish Germans are chronicled during and after WWII with ample discussion of Nazism but no reference to the victims in

Germans were not only unsure of how to proceed with their own lives under the weight of guilt and victimization that it was initially inconceivable to attempt to represent what had occurred during the Third Reich. Setting aside the initial issue of guilt, directors had to consider which way was appropriate to depict the atrocities of the camps, the social pressures of the rallies, and the complete destruction of the war, among other topics. Representing life during the regime ran the risk of glorifying what was for some a very positive time. Attempts to address the suffering of Germans would be seen as undermining Jewish deaths or apologizing for the Nazi Regime. Additionally, in what ways could the horrors of the camps and the persecution of the Jews be shown without reinforcing myths? The emphasis the Nazis placed on visuals for the promotion of the regime made all depictions of the period circumspect. Germany went through a period of awkward and shamed silence that would only seriously and critically begin to break in the 1980s.

A biographical approach to WWII and the Third Reich seems to have aided the depiction of the events. A filmic interpretation of a biography allows for the use of creative license in presenting events and enabling the director to make necessary modifications to serve the interest of his/her thesis. Additionally, the film has the authoritative voice of historical accounts which serve to justify and reinforce authenticity and perceived truth of the film. Each of the four films I discuss here is based on auto/biographies and historical records, though they remain remarkably distinct in style, approach, topic and tone.

Koepnick identifies a genre of film that emerged in the late 1990s particularly as “heritage cinema,” characterized by its tendency to “privilege setting over narrative, mise-en-scene over editing” (2007, 49). *Aimée & Jaguar* (1999) is a prime example of this style where a simple melodramatic plot is made into a nostalgic piece as the main characters attempt to leave

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the camps.

behind the terrible realities of their lives in war ravaged Berlin. Felice in particular wears posh clothing and fur coats and seems the driving force behind her friends' outings to the theater or clubs. The women's lives are easier for them to bear while at the same time the audience is better able to relate to the characters when it can partake in their joy and not just their suffering. As Jewish lesbians these women must maneuver the streets within the constraints of curfew and without arousing the suspicions of the officers at every corner. Their precarious situation is emphasized in a dramatic scene in which Lotte, running late to catch up with the others, is shot by soldiers attempting to stop her. The girls have to continue walking without looking back, knowing that should they show interest or concern, they will be in danger too. Yet the bond between Lilly and Felice means the past is not simply traumatic but contains positive experiences to be remembered and cherished.

Koepnick critiques the "Heritage Cinema" for not showing the experience of Jewish exiles abroad, which was remedied in 2001 with Caroline Link's *Nowhere in Africa*. Though the Redlich family, particularly Jettel, must adjust to a much lower income, the family does not suffer materially during the film. Kenya is an exotic landscape where the horrors of war and persecution are blunted into religious exclusion rather than annihilation. The main difficulty for the Redlichs is in how they negotiate a sense of self as German-Jewish refugees in the British colony of Kenya.

At the outbreak of the war, all Germans, including the Redlichs, are rounded up to prevent them from aiding Hitler. Yet the Jewish community is able to lobby for their release, considering the anti-Semitism of the Nazi Regime. In this way a sense of non-German is promulgated first by the Nazis and then reaffirmed by the British. The only identity that Jettel and Walter have to fall back on is Jewish, something they had never previously identified

themselves as. Regina however grows up in Kenya and becomes attuned to the customs and rhythms of the people. Jettel eventually settles into her life on the farm and forgets Germany. Walter however cannot do this. He fights for the British and when presented with the opportunity to return to Germany insists upon going “home.” While the family does return together, their friend, another German Jew named Süßkind utterly rejects the notion of going to Germany. He no longer sees himself as German, but neither does he have any ties to Kenya, leaving him without a sense of self rooted in belonging.

The film also demonstrates the anti-Semitism of the British in the colony. Typically this is shown affecting Regina for religious reasons, which is odd because neither Regina nor her parents regularly practice religion, let alone indicate whether they are even faithful. The anti-Semitism is complicated by the racist comments and behaviors of Jettel when she first arrives. She treats the cook Owuor, who functions as a sort of guide for the family, as a less than human slave, refusing to speak to him in Kiswahili. Jettel refuses to let Regina wander off the area she has delineated as safe and constantly warns her against eating or playing with the Kenyan children for fear of illness.

The civilian experience of WWII is also covered in these films. *Aimée & Jaguar* shows the constant issue of rationing and unexpected air raids. Lilly has the stress of raising four boys while her husband is gone for weeks at a time fighting the war. Her relationships with Nazi party members keep her and her family safer by affiliation. This is not without its dangers and it means she must tread a thin line. An unexpected visit from her parents during a tryst puts them at risk when her father insults the Party, unaware that her lover is present.

*Downfall* (2004) also includes scenes that depict civilian or popular responses to the war. The specter of WWI is raised in the form of a father, astonished at the sight of his son and other

children in the Hitler Youth actually fighting in the streets against the Soviet forces. The father attempts to convey to them the absolute pointlessness of their task, because they will not stop the Soviets, they will only die. Behind his words is a clear understanding of the slaughter of warfare, an experience he would have had twice. The father speaks for the German people damaged by both wars, not only through the physical destruction of their towns, but by the psychological impact these made.

*Downfall* and *Sophie Scholl* (2005) do not have the lightheartedness or the distance of *Aimée & Jaguar* and *Nowhere in Africa*. They are biographical films which seek to provide context to historical persons and characterize them in a concrete and individualized manner that does not rely on general abstracted imagery. Specific issues are raised that without offering excuses, seek to explore possibilities. *Downfall* shows the tensions between the career soldiers and those who are merely party members, the same tensions that occur in any government whenever political people associated with a party are brought in and start changing the rules. There is also the legacy and humiliation of World War I, which makes it exceptionally difficult for these proud soldiers to accept the possibility of surrendering to the Allies, again. In *Sophie Scholl*, the specter of the Eastern Front and Stalingrad is a central motivator for the White Rose's resistance and the beginning of the end for the German armies.

Ancient German virtues (*Tugenden*) which emphasize stalwart loyalty, faith and duty, regardless of notions of self-preservation, play a significant role in both films. They provide reasoning for the large number of suicides that occurred in the bunker by those close to the Führer. They also convey the apocalyptic way in which Hitler viewed the end of Germany, harkening back to ancient myths of a *Götterdämmerung*, a twilight battle of the Gods signaling the death of the world. All the characters in *Sophie Scholl* are imbued with this dramatic sense

of *Tugenden*. Thus, Inspector Mohr, who interrogates Sophie cannot help but be impressed by her self-control and loyalty to her co-conspirators, and even openly remarks that if such students were on the side of National Socialism then Germany would be winning by sheer strength of will.

Because these values are considered so important to German identity and national character, they are denied any presence on the side of the Nazis in *Sophie Scholl*. The court proceedings are a sham, a travesty of justice. The judge does not even feign impartiality as he openly mocks and hurls insults at the defendants. In this courtroom, both the prosecution and the defense have nothing to add to the accusations the judge screams forth and the defiant comments of the students. Conviction is not passed down by a jury, nor even really deliberated by the Judge, who pronounces sentence within the same breath as his accusations. The trial is not entirely “for show” however, because the Party cannot risk public presence in the courtroom and so stuffs the chairs with officers and party members for the appropriate display of public ridicule and denouncement.

The last days of the Third Reich are not nearly as honorable as Sophie Scholl’s. *Downfall* however is also interested in profiling a particular person, Adolf Hitler. Bruno Ganz plays Hitler as a truly multidimensional man and this reality is discussed by Traudl and Eva Braun in the film. Traudl, who feels very responsible toward Hitler, expresses her amazement at how kind and caring Hitler can be and then how suddenly he will switch into this almost hysteric cold-hearted man, who Eva promptly dubs, Der Führer. Indeed this is evident in the film, as we see Hitler as a vegetarian, who is very devoted to his dog and to his staff whom he treats with respect and generosity. These soft spoken moments are then punctuated with venomous diatribes against “the Jews,” out of touch remarks about the viability of the armed forces, and outbursts of

rage at the defection and betrayal of those of the highest rank. He is a man, twisted and warped by his own hatred and grandiose delusions, but pathetic in his desperation as everyone around him deserts him at the most difficult time.

This movie, without making the attempt to excuse what happened, works to provide a more detailed picture of the time, particularly of that most terrifying figure, Adolf Hitler. The aim of the film is to furnish a context, to have an opportunity to consider what it may have been like for those in the bunker, particularly as everyone begins to kill themselves at the end. Importantly, the film does not end with the suicide of Hitler nor is the moment of surrender even shown, but instead it is Traudl and the young boy's escape through Soviet lines. Germany did not end with the Third Reich, but found a new beginning. However a new Germany requires an understanding of the past, with all of its complications and indictments, and above all that is what this film seeks to convey, a critical memory of the past.

Though presenting issues of merit, *Sophie Scholl* belongs to the “dozens of movies that engage in a desperate effort...to undo Germany's bad history by presenting good stories about German subjects as victims...or as heroes of the resistance” (Schindler 2007, 197). Here Germans are seen as victims of the regime and the war as well, while the true victims, Jews, Gypsies, homosexuals, Poles, and others, are excluded from the film entirely. *Downfall* also falls into this category because of its focus on the perpetrators and bystanders (Traudl). While this film does demystify the Nazi regime and provides a concrete and straightforward depiction of the figures without resorting to the type of caricatures that damage the integrity of the medium, it also moves the bystander, Traudl, into the place of the victim, by presenting her as an innocent witness for the audience to identify with. This is further encouraged by the absence of the true victims of the regime. While the real Traudl condemns what she sees as her own active



participation at the end of the film, the realization of her guilt occurs not when she connects to Jewish victims, but to the German resistance member Sophie Scholl. Thus while film text does not ultimately accept Traudl as an innocent, it avoids showing any of the victims sent to the camps.

*Aimée & Jaguar* and *Nowhere in Africa* are also problematic in their depictions. While they do not continue in “reproducing the abstract and thus forgettable image of the victim without identity” (Schindler 2007, 193), they do maintain a degree of separation from the actuality of the Holocaust. In these films the Jewish main characters are not dehumanized<sup>7</sup> but individualized through close-ups and monologues. However these characters are either entirely removed from any type of Jewish signifier or they are uprooted from the setting of Germany. Though signifiers of Jewishness can be counterproductive by reinforcing a sense of otherness, it is equally undesirable to exclude any markers and thereby render Jewish Germans indistinguishable from non-Jewish Germans. The audience is only aware of Felice, Lotte and Klärchen’s Jewishness because the characters say so in the course of the film. While the family in *Nowhere in Africa* does participate in Jewish traditions while in Africa, it is indicated that this was almost never the case while living in Germany. Furthermore as Kopp (2002) indicates there are no non-Jewish Germans that are depicted in the Africa sequence of the film, thus preserving a simplified character identity. The inability to depict both non-Jewish and Jewish Germans without resorting to discriminatory stereotyping indicates that a distinct Jewish identity cannot harmonize itself with a German identity.

The events of the Holocaust are also removed from the settings of both films or referred to in abstract ways. The Redlichs are removed from the situation in Germany by their move to

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<sup>7</sup> See Schindler 2007 for a more specific discussion of the way that later German films distanced the audience from the Jewish victim in the same manner that Nazi films dehumanized Jews to justify the actions against them.

Kenya so that the only news they receive of the acts being committed against the Jews are through the disembodied voice on the radio and letters. Rather than entangling itself in the difficulties of depicting the atrocities, *Nowhere in Africa* settles for softened symbolic references to the internment of Jews in the camps and their deaths by unseen hands.<sup>8</sup> Images of the camps are also avoided, but referred to in *Aimée & Jaguar*. In the beginning of the film, Felice picks up the hat of a little girl with a bright yellow star on her jacket and places it affectionately on the little girl's head. It is clear from the gathering of other people wearing stars and their belongings that they are being deported, though nothing is explicitly stated and the event is not remarked upon by any characters in the film. Additionally though we know that Felice is ultimately sent to the camps and that Lilly even visited her there, this visit and the camps are not shown on the film. Evidently while there have been impressive changes in the filming of WWII and related topics, there are still taboo like zones that cannot yet be broken at this stage in filmmaking.

### **East Germany and the Divided Past**

With little announcement the Berlin Wall went up suddenly in August 1961 and it came down just as suddenly in November 1989. Germany no longer faced certain atomic annihilation as the DMZ between capitalist and communist Europe. Families separated by the borders could visit each other whenever they wanted without the stress of travel papers and searches. Finally the last scar of WWII was removed from the landscape. While there was initially a great rejoicing over the unity of Germany, it soon became clear that everything was no that simple. The memories of a dictatorship do not quickly fade and though the West was anxious to remove all signs of a divided nation, the East clearly had issues to discuss, now that it had the freedom to

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<sup>8</sup> In her article, Kopp (2002) provides a more detailed discussion of the various representations of Nazi crimes through the experiences of the Redlichs.

discuss them. East German industry had rotted under inefficiency. Anger toward the members of the old regime turned them into targets, particularly the members or informers for the Stasi. After the initial excitement for a capitalist system, when the realities of unemployment loomed, there emerged a backlash of *Ostalgie* – literally eastalgia – and its wave of “selective reminiscing about the ‘good old days’” (Taylor 2006, 445)

Because *Sun Alley* (1999) is an adolescent coming of age story about life in the GDR, it is often seen as one of the many eastalgalic films of the 1990s. To be sure the film is exaggerated, over the top, absurd and distinctly German in its humor. The film mocks the border guards, the *Wessies* (slang for Westdeutscher – West German), parents, the socialist propaganda in school and the overly serious attitude with which the Little Republic takes itself. The director intended to create a film which would show West Germans that East Germans led normal lives and did normal things just like them. This idea of normal is entirely skewed by the Cold War, but it is important to note that East Germans are put in the position of a minority that needs to assimilate into the majority capitalist society. *Sun Alley* is then an attempt to reaffirm the unique heritage of East Germans and to confirm its validity as a community.

However it would be incorrect to dismiss the film as Berghahn (2006, 97) does as a purely nostalgic film that does not continue the legacy of DEFA’s critical Eastern cinema. Yet as Allan (2006) demonstrates a more careful reading of the film indicates otherwise. Micha’s rewriting of his life story in the forged diaries demonstrates the manner in which the past is reworked in light of present circumstances. In Micha’s case, he needs to demonstrate a consistently critical perspective on the SED regime in order to woo Miriam. This act as well as Alex’s efforts to reconstruct the GDR for his mother (and himself) in *Good Bye Lenin!* (2003) both press the point that “memory and the construction of personal and political histories are

conditioned by the needs of the present” (Allan 2006, 115). Both films are self-consciously aware of the role that they as media play in representing the past in the present and determining the relationship between the two.

*Sun Alley* in its verification of a unique East German experience also subverts the stereotypes of the East that the West has. For example, Uncle Heinz is convinced that the SED has made everything contraband and so he smuggles in various commodities easily available for Easterners. Micha and Mario play the role of starving oppressed children for the benefit of the tourists on the buses as they run after them screaming “Hunger! Hunger!” Both instances play into the preconceived notions of West Germans about East Germans and life in East Germany. *Good Bye Lenin!* also works to undo stereotypical depictions of East and West. As a comedy, the film does rely upon stereotypes of West Germans as greedy, material exploiters. However the film contradicts this perspective in the form of Denis, Alex’s co-worker from the West. Denis is generous and kind in helping Alex protect his mother by recording the news broadcasts and the two of them become best friends. Furthermore, Christiane embodies an ideal sense of duty, loyalty, love, generosity and particularly compassion to her fellow man that contradicts images of Easterners as lazy complainers.

Some of the dark realities of life in the GDR are referred to in *Good Bye Lenin!* and *Sun Alley*. Alex attends a peaceful demonstration against the SED regime that is violently broken up by police in the beginning of the film. Micha’s best friend Mario joins the Party, because this is necessary to gain access to good jobs, services and commodities. Micha increasing criticism leads him to see this act as a betrayal of friendship and trust. Wuschel gets shot by the over-eager border guard as he tells him to halt and show his papers. Wuschel falls to the ground apparently dead (and certainly recalling famous incidents of such deaths at the border) but to

everyone's great relief (except Wuschel's) the contraband Rolling Stones album he was hiding under his jacket took the bullet for him.

*The Tunnel* (2001) provides a comparison scene that is terrifying in its visual sensory deprivation for the characters in the scene and cinematically impressive for the symmetry of its composition. Fritz, who joined Harry's team in digging, meets her fiancé Heiner every day as he builds the wall. Tragically Heiner hears about Harry and is concerned that he will lose Fritz, so he attempts to climb the fully built and guarded wall. Fritz hears the guard yelling stop, the gun shots and Heiner's whimpering as he tries desperately to scale the wall despite his clearly fatal wounds. The camera moves back and forth over the wall at showing Fritz and Heiner trying to communicate and support the other through the wall. It is an absurdly tragic moment because American soldiers arrive to keep the peace on their side of the wall but will do nothing about the man dying on the other side. It is a callous moment for both East and West.

*The Tunnel* maintains a sense of symmetry in its filming of what happens on both sides of the Wall. The meticulous digging and organization of labor is contrasted with the slow building of the Wall and the efforts of the Col. Krüger to uncover what Harry plans on doing. The occasional celebrating of the men digging is contrasted with Vitorrio's imprisonment and torture, Carola being blackmailed into informing on Lotte and in general the constant hounding of citizens by the Stasi.

*The Lives of Others* (2006) is entirely focused on this issue of Stasi surveillance and informants. Taylor finds the Film refreshing because it shows that the GDR "was a society where brother was encouraged to betray brother, husband to betray wife....people who in any decent society should have been able to trust each other" (2006, 446). Not only does the film show how being an informant destroys interpersonal relationships, it also conveys the power of

corruption, the repression of artistic creativity and voice and in short the stifling grip of the autocratic state. The film also goes through the Stasi files on informants and victims that were made public in 1992 after considerable debate on the issue. Furthermore the film is very post modern in its reflexivity, demonstrating the level of involvement and commitment one feels when watching total strangers, a feeling of identification that all directors rely on for their films.

*Good Bye Lenin!* and *The Lives of Others* are both films that are more cynical in their treatment of the GDR because the criticism within the stories does not come from outspoken opponents or West Germans, but from inside the family of a dedicated comrade and from among the ranks of the Stasi. *Good Bye Lenin!* is less a film about East Germany, though it contains much of the same attitude of mocking and ironic humor at the old system as *Sun Alley* does, and more a film about reunified Germany. Expectations were high when the Wall came down. One of the biggest results was unemployment in the East. Alex is able to continue working with televisions, but his sister Ariane drops out of school and works for Burger King. The supermarket and the streets become a feast for the eyes as marketing becomes important in this new capitalist society. In trying to maintain a GDR for his mother, Alex says he creates the kind of GDR he always wanted to live in, a society that is responsible to its citizens, but respectful of their rights. While it is clear that Alex does not want the GDR back, he also does not want the heartless consumption that he sees coming in from the West.

Ariane represents the generation of young East Germans who eagerly embrace the opportunities presented by the West. She immediately adopts Western fashion trends, accessories, jobs and a West Berliner boyfriend. Ariane rejects her East German identity and moves quickly to establish a new western all-Germany identity. In contrast, the older occupants of the building, Herr Ganske, Frau Schäfer and Herr Mehlert, have little chance of advancing in

the capitalizing society and so are constantly complaining about the downsides to reunification. For them “unification means the obliteration of their past identity as GDR citizens.”(Allan 2006, 120). Alex occupies a middle path, seeming to represent the sentiments of the reformist factions within the GDR that were pushing for reunification and who “aimed to build a collaborative rather than a competitive society” (Taylor 2006, 430). He works to create the most authentic atmosphere for his mother not only because he loves her but also because he needs to be able to let go of not only her but the GDR he intimately associates with her. Transitioning into a new western All-German present means that he must be able to retain the uniqueness of his East German past.

Post-wall cinema about the old East is an effort to simultaneously condemn and affirm the values of the GDR. While there were undeniable false imprisonment, torturing, blackmailing, misuses of authority and suppression of rights, the socialist ideals of egalitarianism and the reality of employment are difficult for those who lived there to forget. The West is well trained in dismissing all aspects of the East, but the *Ossies* know a different and more complicated history and need to maintain the opportunity to sift through their past, salvaging some aspects and discarding others.

### **Guest Workers and Refugees: The Multi-Ethnic German**

In his book *Citizenship and Nationhood in France and Germany* (1992), Rogers Brubaker argued that the type of nationalism present in a society would inform the citizenship laws of that society. His two archetypes were France and Germany, representing quintessential civic and ethnic nationalism, respectively. From this he demonstrated that France’s citizenship laws were primarily motivated by a philosophy of *jus soli*, generally indicating that individuals

born in France were French citizens, regardless of parentage. By contrast Germany's citizenship laws were founded on a principle of *jus sanguinis*, meaning that any individual of German parentage, regardless of country of birth were to be considered German citizens. The converse of this was also true, that individuals of non-German parentage born and raised in Germany would not automatically be granted German citizenship.

Brubaker supports his argument regarding Germany with the *Grundgesetz* (Basic Laws) issued in 1949, in which Article 116 indicated a right of return for any ethnic Germans in other countries. This law was established to provide a home for Germans in what was now Soviet territories as well as indicate the new West German openness to Jews and others who had fled the Nazi Regime or been stripped of citizenship by it. Also included in the *Grundgesetz* was Article 16 which at that time established the most liberal policy in Europe for the reception of persecuted persons and the granting of asylum. West Germany further expanded its policies starting in the mid 1950s to recruit young men to leave their homelands and come and work to sustain the economic miracle. Active recruitment of so-called guest-workers continued until the early 1970s at which large communities of guest-workers and their families were already settled. Despite its initial policy of great openness, West Germany found itself housing visibly diverse communities, such as Turks or African refugees, as well as culturally distinct groups from places in Eastern Europe. For a country united in a sense of ethnic German identity, this was an abrupt and drastic change.

Films in the 1970s began to look at the issues arising from minority populations in Germany. Though these films did present the xenophobia and racism that guest workers faced from native Germans, they did not consider the characters, which were typically Turkish as



individuals, but rather as representations of wider issues.<sup>9</sup> By the 1980s films about minorities were able to be filmed by members of minority populations. Yet even in these films, and those directed by white Germans, Turkish culture in particular would be represented as backward and incapable of integrating itself into German society, which was the undisputed goal. This was frequently signified by the plight and oppression of Turkish women by their husbands, fathers and brothers.<sup>10</sup>

After the Wall fell, the newest generation of directors emerged with a new type of film handling minority or immigrant populations. Characters in these films take on hybridized forms of identity that allow them to adapt to different situations and groups. This is evident in Sibel (*Head-On*, 2004) who plays the role of quiet and dutiful Turkish daughter when in the company of her parents as evidenced by her absence from discussions of her marriage, but quickly adopts the looser moral code of German society as soon as she has married Cahit, as evidenced by her alcohol consumption and extramarital affairs. This is also the case with Ana (*Fraulein*, 2006) who speaks German and Serbo-Croatian and easily interacts with the Swiss she meets in clubs and bars and the Serbs, Bosnians and Croats she interacts with at the cafeteria.

These characters refer to an ideal situation of acculturation without rejection of heritage or traditions. This is the ultimate harmony achieved in *Fraulein* by Ruza and Mila with Ana's help. Ruza rejected her Serbian identity in order to be successful in Switzerland. She never talks about Serbia, has no pictures or memorabilia in her home, and speaks to all her employees and customers in her accented German, even though many of them speak Serbo-Croatian. Mila on the other hand is counting the days until she can return to Croatia, even though she has been

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<sup>9</sup> R.W. Fassbinder's *Katzelmacher* (1969) and *Ali: Fear Eats the Soul* (*Angst Essen Seele Auf* 1974) are both instances in which the foreigner is the impetus for the study of the German characters in the film. The foreigner remains abstract, flat and exotic throughout the film.

<sup>10</sup> Examples of such films include Tevik Baser's *40 square meters of Germany* (*40 Quadratmeter Deutschland* 1986) and *Farewell to a False Paradise* (*Abschied vom falschen Paradies* 1989), Jörg Gföhrer's *The Lowest of the Low* (*Ganz Unten* 1986), and Helma Sanders-Brahms's *Shirin's Wedding* (*Shirins Hochzeit* 1975).

living in Switzerland for years and has raised her children there. She considers her situation temporary, so much so that she feels no inclination to involve herself further in the business of the cafeteria. The last scenes of the film are of Ruza opening her hidden box of memories and posting the pictures on the walls of her apartment and of Mila telling her husband that she does not want to leave Switzerland because her children and friends all live here. Ana's own fluid identity encourages the women to embrace their bi-national identities rather than adhere to an "either-or" policy, and they are happier for it.

Embracing of multi-ethnic identity is not the sole order of the day. In *Head-On* Cahit fully acculturates himself into German society, to the extent that Sibel's brother comments on how poor his Turkish is. By all indicators given in the film, Cahit was perfectly well adjusted in Germany, with a German wife and a job. The death of his wife seems to have sent his life into a tailspin. When the film begins Cahit is a filthy, suicidal, violent drunk with a bad temper. Through Sibel, Cahit begins to clean up and ultimately returns to Turkey and the village of his birth. Similarly, while Sibel is able to move in both worlds back in Germany, she desires a more German lifestyle, which is incompatible with her family's values and this forces her to flee to Turkey. Sibel's Germanness is incompatible with Turkey and puts her on the verge of self-destruction, until through her Turkish boyfriend and daughter, she is able to negotiate a new moderate Turkish identity in Istanbul.

So far these examples give the impression that minorities do not face issues with the majority or native population. Small incidents in *Head-On* indicate otherwise, such as the clinic doctor's conversation with Cahit in which he says "*your* names have beautiful meanings more often than *ours*," (emphasis added) indicating that despite Cahit's high acculturation the doctor still considers him to be an "other." These are the little condescensions, on par with

compliments or surprise at a person's ability to speak German, which are shown culminating in *Otomo* (1999).

Otomo is faced with the blatant hatred or the outright ignorance of white ethnic Germans, and all gradations in between. Those in the unemployment office are openly mocking, hostile or talk about him as if he can not understand. The police officers make racist comments and in the final confrontation speak in slurs and instantly resort to aggressive tactics. Heinz, though defending Otomo against the racism of his fellow officers, is just as convinced of Otomo violence and guilt as the other officers. Rolf, Heinz's partner and an aspiring rapper, automatically addresses Otomo in English, not even considering that he may speak German. Only Gisela and Simone, a woman and her granddaughter who offer Otomo some respite from his flight, see him as a person with needs and feelings, and appreciate his difference without treating him like a stranger. Otomo's silence is supremely frustrating but the audience has the feeling that after so many years he knows that nothing will change no matter what he says.

Otomo is technically an asylum seeker and because of this he does not have a permit to work, which is one of the reasons he is having such difficulty in Germany. The experiences of expatriate communities unable to legally work are also looked at in *Fraticide* (2001). On the whole, the movie is terrible and riddled with clichés, but it does point out some important aspects of exiled communities. The director, Yilmaz Arslan, and the "good guys" in the film are Turkish Kurds. The Kurdish exile community in Germany has interests in remaining in peripheral or bad living conditions in Germany to facilitate lobbying for the German government's support of an independent Kurdistan. This is alluded to by Azad when representatives from the community organizers come to ask for Semo's body as a powerful symbol for a demonstration about the communities sufferings in Germany. Azad accuses them of only being interested in their

demonstrations and not in the real reason for Semo's death and for furthermore not ever coming around until something tragic and irreversible has occurred. Though the exile community does provide support, Azad and Ibo remain on the fringes of society by their own desire not to become involved and potentially corrupted by Germans.

*Fratricide* also makes the connection between wealth and moral corruption. Semo becomes obsessed with earning money in Germany, but to do this he becomes a pimp. Azad cannot engage in activities he finds morally abhorrent, so he earns meager amounts as a barber in the bathrooms of various Turkish operated establishments. This is also true of the Turkish parents of Ahmet and Zeki, who operate a small produce store but have strong moral convictions as opposed to their sons, who wish to maintain their more extravagant lifestyles through illegal but easy money ventures and are depicted as brutal and amoral men. These characters are seen as corrupted by German wealth, but they are never seen interacting with any Germans except for the social workers and police officers they have to deal with.

While *Fratricide* plays on inter-ethnic rivalries and tensions, *In July's* road trip through Eastern Europe is evidence of a different sentiment. In this case linguistic differences are hardly a barrier for Juli and Daniel as they make their way southeast to Istanbul. Despite being robbed of all his money and his passport, Daniel does not seem to condemn any of the people he meets. They meet have pleasant and bizarre encounters with people in each country and land after land seems to blend into the next creating an impression of one large, different but harmonious Europe. This a similar impression left by *Fraulein* in favor of plurality.

Ultimately these films demonstrate the complexities of the multi-ethnic experience in Germany. They respect and understand the tug of different traditions and examine these experiences from the perspective of the person who lives them. While stereotyped and

depersonalized characters and clichés remain (*Otomo* and *Fratricide*), the goal of these films is to explore the multi-ethnic identities and determine a cohesive way of expressing them. Some films see the answer in a simultaneous embracing of both past heritage and present nation, with the former enriching the latter (*Fraulein*). Yet a balance of this is difficult to find and failure seems to mean the destruction of the individual, necessitating an “either-or” policy (*Head-On*) or more radically, a return to the original or authentic heritage (*Head-On* and *Fratricide*). Regardless, these films and the people they represent can no longer be ignored or swept aside by the larger white ethnically German population.

## Conclusion

Schindler and Koepnick describe the Germany created by Fatih Akin as “one of ongoing flux and ceaseless becoming, of performative self redress and transformation....they [Akin’s characters] think of their identity as something inevitably multiple and inconsistent, as something structured by a logic of addition and parallelism rather than a rhetoric of either-or” (2007, 6). If there is one thing that these films have demonstrated thus far it is that they are constantly evolving the meanings and layers of identity in the German context. While it is interesting the extent to which these recent films have gone in exploring new aspects of Germany’s past and present, there are still considerable silences that exist.

Immigrant and immigrant-born directors seem to have an easier time grasping multiple layers of identity and place this and the related issues of space and belonging into a more coherent film. Ethnic German directors still have difficulty in visualizing a Germany beyond the homogeneity that existed in the Weimar Republic. It remains impossible for a Jewish German, who readily identifies her/himself as Jewish to be on screen with a non-Jewish German, without

some exaggerated process of differentiation and “Othering.” Furthermore it seems the sense of collective guilt and the resistance to that feeling of guilt continues to prevent directors from depicting the Holocaust without symbols.

The silence that surrounds minorities in WWII cinema also occurs in films taking place in East Germany or East Berlin. Despite the fact that the SED also encouraged foreign workers to gain skills in the GDR and the fact that communists or socialist persecuted in other countries, such as the Chileans, where granted asylum in GDR, their presence is not recognized in any of these films. It seems unlikely that a strong sense of the international community of workers has obliterated the concept of ethnic or national differences in the Old East, particularly considering the success the Neo-Nazi party has had in these areas. Rather the absence of these other socialist brothers has more to do with a persistent conception of German history as solely belonging to ethnic Germans.

This is not a rule only adhered to by white ethnic Germans. The films that focus primarily on minority populations also fail to address, reference or acknowledge Germany’s history. This is perhaps understandable for Yilmaz Arslan, who was born in Turkey, though he has lived in Germany since he was seven years old. Even Fatih Akin, born and raised in Hamburg, does not attempt to incorporate German history in his films. German landscape, cities, provide the setting while traditional Turkish bands play across the river from the Blue Mosque or the legend of the birth of the Kurdish nation is acted out. Yet Germany’s history will receive no mention, as though by mutual agreement minority populations are excluded and exclude themselves from a historic claim to Germany.

This raises that other identity question for Germans, that is, what does it mean to be German? The fact that multi-ethnic Germans are not expressing an acceptance past German guilt

as their own seems to indicate lingering negativities about a sense of German nation-ness. There remains in German cinema a preoccupation with the past and a strong sense that only a truthful recognition of the past enables people to move forward. This is certainly the message to be garnered from Tom Tykwer's *The Princess + The Warrior* (2000). Sissi was born in the asylum and kept trapped there by the death of her mother, which she thought was an accident. When she finds out the actions were deliberately taken by Steini in his possessive obsession with Sissi, she is able to leave. In learning the truth about her mother's death Sissi is able to separate herself from the asylum and pursue her own future. Bodo must also accept that though he did have a part to play in upsetting his wife, her suicide after their fight was not his fault. Bodo is ultimately able to accept that what happened when he left the restroom was out of his control, but that he must take a decisive hand in his own future and choose to move forward.

Perhaps this is the message that has already been accepted by minority groups living in Germany. They know quite well that neither they nor their parents hold any responsibility for the atrocities committed by the Nazi regime or the division of Germany that occurred in 1949. They can then accept what has occurred in the past and move forward without the burdens. Why then does this become so complex for ethnic Germans who by sheer passage of time are just as not responsible as their multi-ethnic countrymen? As new generations of filmmakers emerge one can only hope these questions will be addressed in the films of this coming decade. Certainly one hopes that people of diverse backgrounds will become interested in seeing their community story projected onto the screen and work towards expanding the scope of discussion in nation film. If there is one thing that all of these films share, it is the recognition that nothing in life, from filmmaking to history making is an individual process and success only occurs through collaboration.





### Appendix - The Films

*Aimée & Jaguar*. 1999. Dir. Max Färberböck. With Maria Schrader, Juliane Köhler and Johanna Wokalek. German with English subtitles. Color. 125 min. Zeitgeist Films. Based upon the recollections and story of Lilly Wust, the film is primarily a love story, set during World War II, but framed by events of the present day. In the present two old women, Lilly and Ilse, unexpectedly meet and recount their stories of the woman they loved, Felice, who died in the concentration camps. As lesbian Jews Felice and her friends Lotte and Klärchen are in great danger remaining in Berlin. Under alias Felice works for a newspaper and continues to live her life to the fullest regardless of the threat from Nazi persecution and the bombs that fall on Berlin. Lilly is the wife of a soldier and she passes her time while he is away fighting with various Nazi party members. A chance encounter at a theater precipitates their forbidden love that brings Lilly into a new world of open-mindedness and independence. But Felice's commitment to Lilly prevents her from saving herself by escaping from Germany with her friends. When the two of them are eventually discovered by the Gestapo, on their trail after Lotte is discovered without her papers, Felice is sent to a concentration camp. Lilly cannot be without her, and visits her there and as a result, Felice is shipped out to Treblinka and certain death. Lilly and Ilse reconcile their past with the knowledge that it was more important for Felice to live boldly and risk death than to hide to save her life.

*Downfall (Der Untergang)*. 2004. Dir. Oliver Hirschbiegel. With Bruno Ganz, Alexandra Maria Lara, Corinna Harfouch, Ulrich Matthes, Juliane Köhler and Heino Ferch. German with English subtitles. Color. 156 min. EOS Entertainment. Set during the last days of World War II as the Soviet Army makes its inexorable advance on Berlin, the film shows the

rapid unraveling of life within Hitler's Bunker and in the wreckage of surrounding Berlin. The film focuses on the recollections of Traudl Junge, Hitler's personal secretary, but also takes a more distanced omniscient perspective that follows various high ranking officers as well as average German citizens and of course, the Führer himself. Interviews of Traudl Junge bookend the film in which she describes her own eventual revelations about her involvement or lack thereof, particularly the moment when she realized that Sophie Scholl was her age. These interviews, which occur without introduction, provide the frame inside of which the film is to be understood, that is that choices were made each step of the way, whether secretary, SS officer or private citizen, and that no excuses or qualifications will excuse actions or failure to act. The film is unsentimental and supremely powerful in its depiction of the characters, events and most importantly the context of those final days in 1945.

*Fratricide (Brudermord)*. 2005. Dir. Yilmaz Arslan. With Erdal Celik, Xevat Gectan, and Nurretin Celik and Bulent Buyukasik. Turkish, Kurdish and German with English subtitles. Color. 92 min. Koch Lorber Films. A film about Kurdish refugees from Turkey who have moved to Germany and the conflict they get into with the second-generation Turks living there. Azad has come to Germany with the money his older brother Semo sent him, with the intention of earning money and sending it back to his parents and sister in Turkish Kurdistan. But Germany has corrupted Semo and Azad rejects him, instead taking the young Ibo, whose parents were killed, under his wing. On the subway they run into Zeki and Ahmet and his vicious pit bull that scares Ibo. Azad politely asks them to rein the dog in, and the brothers take this as an affront and threaten to kill the boys, who quickly exit the tram. Later, when Ahmet and his dog come across all three Kurdish boys and try to start a fight, Semo stabs him in the gut and his own

dog guts him. What follows is an uninspiring and crude revenge film, focused on both brothers taking turns killing each other for what has been taken from them.

*Fraulein (Das Fräulein)*. 2006. Dir. Andrea Staka. With Mirjana Karanovic, Marija Skaricic and Ljubica Jovic. German and Serbo-Croatian with English subtitles. Color. 81 min. Media Luna Entertainment. A Swiss co-production that tells the story of three women of different generations from the former Yugoslavia who now live and work in Switzerland. Ruza is a middle-aged Serbian woman who owns and operates a cafeteria frequented by other Eastern immigrants. She runs a tight ship, insisting on speaking only German to her workers, who are all immigrants and maintaining a strictly professional relationship with all customers. Mila is a generation older and ethnically Croatian. She and her husband dream of building a house in Croatia, but since he cannot work because of an injury, Mila works at the cafeteria to make the money to put towards construction of the house. Her children and many other family members also live in Switzerland, but Mila does not wish to stay. Along comes Ana, a young Bosnian woman, who happens upon the cafeteria and hearing familiar speech just begins working. Ana, who is terminally ill with leukemia, begins to shake things up in the cafeteria and especially in Ruza's life. After having catalyzed new perspectives and really new lives for both Ruza and Mila, Ana continues on her way.

*Good Bye Lenin!* 2003. Dir. Wolfgang Becker. With Daniel Brühl, Kathrin Sass, Chulpan Khamatova and Maria Simon. German with English subtitles. Color. 121 min. Columbia TriStar Home Video. Another comedy set in the GDR, but during the end of the East German republic. Christiane Kerner has been devoted to the GDR ever since her husband fled to

the West. Alex Kerner is devoted to his mother, so when she falls into a coma while the change occurs and wakes up with a weakened heart post-wall, he is determined to hide the truth from her to keep her from relapsing. Alex re-creates East Germany for his mother, though this proves increasingly difficult as commodities and fashions are quickly overtaken by their flashier West German counterparts. Alex even tapes false news casts to create the impression of a lasting GDR. His involvement in the hoax is complex and a source of controversy for his girlfriend Lara and his sister Ariane.

*Head-On (Gegen die Wand)*. 2004. Dir. Fatih Akin. With Birol Ünel and Sibel Kekilli. German and Turkish with English subtitles. Color. 121 min. Strand Releasing. The third feature from director Fatih Akin and winner of the prestigious Golden Bear at the Berlin International Film Festival, the first German film to win the award in 20 years. The movie follows Cahit, a Turkish guestworker who has long been acculturated into German society and Sibel, the German-born daughter of Turkish immigrants who wants desperately to escape the oppressive traditions of her family. The two meet in a psych clinic after having tried (unsuccessfully) to kill themselves and Sibel begs Cahit, who is considerably older than her, to marry her so she can escape her parents and older brother. Cahit eventually agrees and two strangers eventually find companionship and love in each other. Until Cahit unintentionally kills a lover of Sibel's in a provoked jealous rage and is imprisoned. Sibel's disgrace being exposed she flees to Turkey to escape death at her brother's hands. There she finds herself in the same self-destructive stagnation in which Cahit found himself in Germany after the death of his wife Katharine. When Cahit is released from prison he goes back to Turkey to find Sibel, who is now well adjusted with a daughter and a boyfriend, presumably the cab driver who saved her life.

Cahit returns to his home village, but Sibel does not meet him at the bus station. Ultimately, both lives are rehabilitated and returned to their “native” Turkey.

*In July (Im Juli)*. 2001. Dir. Fatih Akin. With Moritz Bleibtreu, Christiane Paul and Mehmet Kurtulus. German with English subtitles. Color. 99 min. Koch Lorber Films. A charming romance road-trip movie. Juli sees Daniel pass by her kiosk everyday and is determined that he is the right one for her, despite his awkwardness and timidity. In pursuit of love, they travel across Europe to Istanbul, where Daniel wants to meet Melek, who on account of the “future” Juli read him, is supposed to be his match. They meet many people from different walks of life and different levels of communicability during their travels. Eventually Juli and Daniel are split up just before they reach Turkey. Daniel meets Isa, a Turkish-German who is bringing his dead uncle back to Turkey and they cross the border, with a pit stop in prison, together. Daniel again meets Melek, who is going to the border with her uncle’s birth certificate to give to her boyfriend, who she was supposed to meet under the bridge along the river in Istanbul. Daniel now aware that Melek and Isa are in love and that he is in love with Juli, goes to the spot under the bridge to find her and of course she is there. Both couples then drive back to Germany together.

*The Lives of Others (Das Leben der Anderen)*. 2006. Florian Henckel von Donnersmarck. With Martina Gedeck, Ulrich Mühe and Sebastian Koch. German with English subtitles. Color. 137 min. Sony Pictures Home Entertainment. The feature film debut of director Florian Henckel von Donnersmarck and winner of that year’s Academy Award for Best Foreign Language Film. At the center of the film is Capt. Gerd Wiesler, an interrogator and

instructor for the Staatsicherheit Dienst (State Security Service) commonly known as the Stasi. His superior, Lt. Col. Anton Grubitz is trying to get in good with the Minister of Culture, Bruno Hempf and to do this agrees to put a popular playwright, Georg Dreyman under surveillance. Minister Hempf's motivations are not removal of anti-party sentiments, but the removal of Dreyman, who is an obstacle in his affections for actress Christa-Maria Sieland, Dreyman's girlfriend. As Wiesler listens to Dreyman's life and observes the circumstances of surveillance, he begins to doubt the party he serves and eventually risks his career, which is all he has, to protect Dreyman. The main action of the film occurs a few years prior to the end of the DDR, but movie continues into the united Germany with Dreyman's realization that he was bugged and his accessing of his surveillance files, a point of great controversy in Germany.

*Nowhere in Africa (Nirgendwo in Afrika)*. 2001. Dir. Caroline Link. With Juliane Köhler, Merab Ninize, and Sidede Onyulo. German and Swahili with English subtitles. Color. 141 min. Columbia TriStar. Though taking place during the Third Reich and with action motivated by the Nazi Regime, this film actually occurs in Kenya, the colony of refuge for the Redlichs and other Jewish-Germans who have fled Germany. The movie was a great success popularly and critically in Germany and abroad, having won many of German film awards and the Oscar for Best Foreign Language Film as well. Walter Redlich leaves Germany for Kenya and then sends for his wife Jettel and daughter Regina to join him. The family leaves behind all their relatives and their upper-middle class lifestyle for hard work and little gain. The movie showcases the growth and development of the family members through their experiences in Kenya, which makes it possible for them to return to Germany despite what has occurred there.

*Otomo*. 1999. Dir. Frieder Schlaich. With Isaach De Bankolé, Eva Mattes, and Hanno Friedrich. German with English subtitles. Color. 85 min. ArtMattan Production. A fictionalization of the last day of Frederic Otomo's life. At 6:14 AM on August 8, 1989 in Stuttgart Otomo, a refugee from Cameroon, gets in a scuffle with a tram worker. Otomo runs from the scene and the tram worker presses charges with the police. Three hours later, Otomo on a bridge surrounded by police who have been pursuing him throughout the city. He lashes out and stabbing and killing two cops before he is gunned down by police. The film explores what happened before and after the tram incident, to attempt to provide a context to what seemed to be exceedingly unprovoked and irrational behavior. The movie is an effort to confront the blatant racism in Germany and the problems inherent in the refugee and guest worker policies.

*The Princess + The Warrior (Der Krieger + die Kaiserin)*. 2000. Dir. Tom Tykwer. With Franka Potente and Benno Fürmann. German with English subtitles. Color. 135 min. Sony Pictures Classics. Franka Potente stars as Sissi, a nurse at the Birkenhof asylum whose life is saved by Bodo, a former soldier and petty criminal. After her near death experience and full recovery Sissi is determined not to allow life to return to the sad state it was for her at the asylum, where she was born and currently lives. Bodo and his brother Walter are planning a bank heist, with the intent to use the money to leave Germany and the painful memories that have severely disrupted Bodo's psychosis. The heist goes wrong and Walter is shot, but Sissi, who happens to be in the bank, helps both men to escape and hides Bodo at the asylum. Through each other, both characters are able to reconcile the pasts that haunt them and lead new meaningful lives together.

*Sophie Scholl: The Final Days (Sophie Scholl: Die Letzten Tagen)*. 2005. Dir. Marc Rothemund. With Julia Jentsch, Alexander Held, and Fabian Hinrichs. German with English subtitles. Color. 120 min. Zeitgeist Films. It is a film about those who, in full knowledge of the great threat to their lives, chose to resist and challenge the Nazi government. Due to the availability of new documents about the arrest and trial of the members of the White Rose, the film makes Sophie's story available to a new generation of moviegoers. The movie follows Sophie's movements and perspective exclusively, beginning with the evening before the fateful morning at the University, her imprisonment and interrogation by Inspector Mohr, and the show trial by the virulent Judge Freisler and execution five days later. Julia Jentsch plays the title character with poise, integrity and above all a firm conviction that what she does is right, regardless of whether she lives or dies. Ultimately this is what has made Sophie and the White Rose stand out through history, the presence of such courage and strength in a handful of university students.

*Sun Alley (Sonnenallee)*. 1999. Dir. Leander Haußmann. With Alexander Scheer, Alexander Beyer, Katharina Thalbach, and Teresa Weißbach. German. Color. 101 min. Beta Film. A hilarious comedy about adolescents growing up near a border crossing in the Sun Alley, a street that was divided by the Berlin Wall. Micha is your average awkward teenager in 1970s East Berlin. He is obsessed with all things American and determined to date Miriam, the most beautiful girl in his class. He spends his days hanging out with his friends as West Germans heckle their activities from a platform overlooking the wall. Micha's family is just as embarrassing as we remember our own. His father delights in every opportunity to cheat the government while his West Berlin uncle continues to smuggle non-contraband into the East. His



sister has a new boyfriend in each scene and molds herself to the appropriate persona. When his mother is not trying to escape to the West she is trying to promote the family's good socialist values to the neighbor across the hall who everyone thinks works for the Stasi. Micha's friend Wuschel spends the entire film trying to buy *Exile on Main Street* on the black market. The entire gang dances, gets hassled by the border guards and police, and in general simply live their lives.

*The Tunnel (Der Tunnel)*. 2001. Dir. Roland Suso Richter. With Heino Ferch, Nicolette Krebitz, Sebastian Koch, and Alexandra Maria Lara. German with English subtitles. Color. 188 min. Avatar Films. Originally produced as a TV mini-series it made its way to theaters. It is an amalgamation of many stories about tunnels that were dug underneath the Wall to transport people out of East Berlin. The protagonist, Harry Melchior, is a world-class swimmer and outspoken opponent of the East German government. When the Berlin border closes in 1961, Harry just makes it out, but swears to his sister, Lotte, that he will get her and her daughter out of the East. Harry's best friend Matthis has also managed to escape through the sewers, though his wife Carola was captured by the Stasi, and released under condition of informant. Harry, Matthis, Vittorio and Fred immediately begin plans to construct a tunnel in order to secret their loved ones under the border. Soon many others join and the film follows the difficulties of safe and secret tunnel construction, the slow building of the Wall, and the harassment of Lotte by a Stasi Col. Krüger determined to keep East Germans from defecting. Ultimately the group is successful, but not without losses and many harrowing moments of near discovery.

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