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## The Third Reich in East German Film: Defa, Memory, and the Foundational Narrative of the German Democratic Republic

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**THE THIRD REICH IN EAST GERMAN FILM: DEFA, MEMORY, AND THE  
FOUNDATIONAL NARRATIVE OF THE GERMAN DEMOCRATIC  
REPUBLIC**

A Thesis Presented

by

JAIMIE L. SQUARDO KICKLIGHTER

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## **ABSTRACT**

**THE THIRD REICH IN EAST GERMAN FILM: DEFA, MEMORY, AND THE  
FOUNDATIONAL NARRATIVE OF THE GERMAN DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC  
DEGREE DATE**

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This study will explore how East German films released from the 1940s to the 1980s played a central role in both reinforcing and chipping away at the national foundational narrative of the German Democratic Republic. This narrative looked back at the memory of the Third Reich and classified communists as heroes, Nazis as villains, and the majority of Germans as dangerously apolitical while also emphasizing the contemporary Cold War division between the east and the west. This thesis argues that DEFA films utilized the memory of the Third Reich to support, question, and expand this dynamic foundational narrative which remained malleable and contested throughout the state's existence.

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## INTRODUCTION

### THE EAST GERMAN FOUNDATIONAL NARRATIVE AND DEFA FILM

This study will explore how East German films released from the 1940s to the 1980s played a central role in both reinforcing and chipping away at the national foundational narrative of the German Democratic Republic (GDR). Throughout its history, the GDR relied on a foundational narrative to sustain its legitimacy. With roots extending back well into the nineteenth century, when socialism was just evolving, this narrative assumed the shape that it would retain after the Soviet invasion and occupation of Germany by the Allied powers. The East German narrative, which was created during and after the Second World War, was based primarily on the notion of antifascism. Unable to make a unique claim to German history and traditions, it categorized Germans and outsiders to fashion a story of good versus evil and emphasize the superiority of East German communism.

In the GDR's foundational narrative, the communists occupied prime heroic status as active opponents of Nazism who had resisted this dangerous movement from its inception. During the Weimar Republic the communists considered the socialists to be enemies and referred to them as "social fascists." This division lost relevancy after the Second World War with the forced assimilation of German socialists in the Soviet zone into the communist SED (hence, Socialist Unity) Party, which became the ruling party of the GDR. Historic conservatives such as Junkers, nationalists and militarists, as well as the upper class in general likewise received an unflattering classification as both capitalist supporters of and political abettors to the Nazi regime, who had mistakenly believed they

could control Nazi leaders while still seeing their conservative aims accomplished. The arch-enemies lowest on the ladder, predictably, were members of the National Socialist Workers Party (Nazis) as the emerging German conservative movement that paralleled contemporary fascist movements in Italy and Spain. This movement stood in direct opposition to communism and led Germany and the world into genocide, a major war, and defeat. In the antifascist narrative, the majority of Germans- all those who were not rich capitalists or committed to a political movement- were considered politically unschooled and thus ignorant of the forces battling all around them; members of the apolitical middle class that managed quite well in peacetime, for example, were prime targets for being led astray, either politically or by the seductive powers of consumer capitalism. Once the Nazis led Germany to the brink of ruin, the Soviets emerged as saviors to redirect Germany to the communist path.

In the 1950s, an east/west dichotomy would become embedded in this narrative as a central component. According to this dichotomy, each side exhibited specific characteristics and the east stood out as the clear winner. Once the Nazis had led Germany to the brink of ruin, the narrative went, the Soviets emerged as saviors who had made terrible sacrifices in order to redirect Germany onto a righteous path towards building a new socialist society. The narrative excluded the other British, French, and American wartime allies, identifying the Soviets as the sole saviors of Germany. The west, led by the United States of America, and the western part of Germany that would later become the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG) became associated with capitalism's most sinister qualities, including greed, immorality, and detrimental individualism. In an economic system that worshipped the profit motive, it was easy for



people to lose their sense of right and wrong. Individuals lost sight of what was truly important, focused only on their own welfare, and neglected the larger community. The GDR's foundational narrative placed the industrious, community-oriented, socialist east in opposition to its western capitalist enemies. In the east, all citizens worked hard and received benefits from the state in exchange for their toil. However, people did not simply work because they had to; according to the narrative, they enjoyed the sense of self-worth that resulted from working and took comfort in the idea that they were improving their community.<sup>1</sup>

The memory of the Second World War and its aftermath occupied a central place in the GDR's national imagination, as both a traumatic past experience and a key factor in shaping the GDR's sense of identity and foundational narrative. From immediately after the war to the twilight of the GDR, filmmakers at the *Deutsche Film Aktiengesellschaft* (DEFA) created films about the experience of the Second World War that simultaneously presented a story about the past, engaged with key aspects of the foundational narrative, and reflected issues of importance in the present. Early rubble films, for example, dealt with reconstructing the built environment and family relationships as they exposed real postwar problems, such as the crisis in masculinity, the emergence of crime and the black market, and political transitions and power dynamics. Following the formal establishment of the FRG and the GDR as two distinct German states in May 1949 and October 1949 respectively, DEFA films set up comparisons between east and west in which the east always stood out as the clear positive choice.

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<sup>1</sup> See Jeffrey Herf, *Divided Memory: The Nazi Past in the Two Germanys* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997), 14-16 for detailed description of emerging East German antifascism. Herf's discussion also has an eye to how this emerging ideology led to the future "marginalization of the Jewish question" in the GDR (page 16).

Although all of the DEFA films in this study explore the memory of the Third Reich to interrogate the state's foundational narrative, they approach the topic in various ways and collectively represent a dynamic memory of the past.

Memory scholarship influences the approach of this study and the ways in which it analyzes these films. Maurice Halbwachs' work *On Collective Memory*, originally published in 1925, outlines a central principle of this study. Halbwachs argues against a static conception of memory and in favor of a dynamic view of individuals constantly engaging their memories as well as the contexts of those memories.<sup>2</sup> The present study similarly takes a dynamic view of memory, but does so in terms of national rather than individual memory. In their publication *The Work of Memory*, Alon Confino and Peter Fritzsche identify memories as potentially dangerous with the power to complicate narratives and confuse identity.<sup>3</sup> Some films considered here will exemplify this danger factor by using stories set in the past to raise questions about the contemporary GDR or its origins. On the flip side, many of these films depict stories that uphold the state's foundational narrative, at least in part, demonstrating Paul Connerton's point in his work *How Societies Remember* that the past can function to legitimize the present.<sup>4</sup> As far as the division between east and west that became embedded in the foundational narrative during the 1950s and is reflected in DEFA films, Iwona Irwin-Zarecka finds an "us

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<sup>2</sup> Maurice Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory*, ed. and trans. Lewis A. Coser (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992). Chapters four and five in particular describe the dynamic nature of memory.

<sup>3</sup> Alon Confino and Peter Fritzsche, *The Work of Memory: New Directions in the Study of German Society and Culture* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2002). For a specific discussion about the potential danger of memories see the Epilogue.

<sup>4</sup> Paul Connerton, *How Societies Remember* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 2. The first chapter talks in more detail about how present consciousness bases itself on the memory of the past.

versus them” mentality to be a necessary element in community construction in her work *Frames of Remembrance*.<sup>5</sup>

Some memory scholars have focused specifically on DEFA film, as this study does. In her work *Film and Memory in the East German State*, Anke Pinkert conducts a broad survey of DEFA films. She finds that DEFA films reveal both a serious and continuous attempt to critically consider the past.<sup>6</sup> Daniela Berghahn’s study *Hollywood Behind the Wall: The Cinema of East Germany* examines what she terms “national themes” in DEFA films. With this term she means themes that arose in the specific social and cultural context of the GDR and therefore would likely not have appealed to an international audience.<sup>7</sup> The state’s foundational narrative fits into this category as yet another “national theme.” In their work on memory, these scholars characterize one of the most human of activities, remembering the past, as an ongoing process. The memories themselves change with time and are capable both of influencing the present and being influenced by the present. DEFA films selected for this study affirm this dynamic vision of the memory process in their use of stories involving the memory of the Third Reich to continuously contemplate the state’s foundational narrative.

Conceptualizations of the GDR in scholarship have gradually embraced the complexities of the state and sought to depict its contradictory nature. Until relatively recently, totalitarian theory drove much western scholarship about the GDR. Proponents of totalitarian theory viewed the GDR as a dictatorship comparable to the previous Third

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<sup>5</sup> Iwona Irwin-Zarecka, *Frames of Remembrance: The Dynamics of Collective Memory* (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 1994), 60.

<sup>6</sup> Anke Pinkert, *Film and Memory in East Germany* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2008). This argument informs her entire study, but she lays it out broadly in the introduction, especially pages 7-13.

<sup>7</sup> Daniela Berghahn, *Hollywood Behind the Wall: The Cinema of East Germany*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2005). She discusses “national themes” specifically on pages 7-8.

Reich. They characterized the GDR as a repressive state coercing compliance from its citizens and limiting individual capacity for action.<sup>8</sup> Other studies still identify the GDR as a dictatorship, but recognize the complicated nature of politics and authority. Mary Fulbrook, for example, tends to use binaries such as “coercion and consent,” “paternalism and paranoia,” and the concept of a “participatory dictatorship” to emphasize the variety of forces at work in the GDR. While she views the SED and the Ministry for State Security (commonly known as the *Stasi*) as powerful forces that almost always effectively kept order, she notes several instances, particularly 1953, in which revolts threatened the state leadership.<sup>9</sup> Konrad Jarausch, a leading scholar of East Germany, has conceptualized the GDR as a “welfare dictatorship.” This concept “emphasizes the basic contradiction between care and coercion,” “recalls the ideological goals of socialism,” and “entails an unambiguous critique of communist repression,” also highlighting the inherent contradictions in East German socialism and seeking to fully represent its complexity.<sup>10</sup> More recently, scholars still recognize that coercion played a role in maintaining stability in the GDR, but new studies have broken away from viewing the state from a strictly top-down political angle and have focused more on *Alltagsgeschichte*, or daily life under socialism, to demonstrate the many ways in which people took part in shaping their lives and their surroundings. For example, Judd Stitzel’s study *Fashioning Socialism* examines the consumer and fashion culture of the GDR to explore the everyday reality of securing clothing in East Germany, thereby

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<sup>8</sup> See, for example, Klaus Schroeder, *Der SED-Staat: Partei, Staat und Gesellschaft 1949-1990*, (Munich: Carl Hanser Verlag, 1998), 632-633, which describes the SED as holding total control in the GDR.

<sup>9</sup> See Mary Fulbrook’s *Anatomy of a Dictatorship: Inside the GDR, 1949-1989* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), and her other study *The People’s State: East German Society from Hitler to Honecker* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005).

<sup>10</sup> Jarausch, Konrad H., “Care and Coercion: The GDR as Welfare Dictatorship,” in *Dictatorship as Experience: Towards a Socio-Cultural History of the GDR*, ed. Konrad H. Jarausch, trans. Eve Duffy (New York: Berghahn Books, 1999), 60.

illuminating the impact of the GDR's politics of consumption on individuals.<sup>11</sup> Another trend in current scholarship on the GDR is to measure the state's modernity. *Socialist Modern*, for instance, analyzes topics of everyday life in the GDR from consumption to architecture to sexuality. It argues that "the structural features of the economy, social life, and gender relations, as well as the look and styling of East German material culture" made the GDR a modern state.<sup>12</sup> This perspective goes beyond simply discovering everyday realities and emphasizes that they emerged from a nonwestern, non-capitalist, but still modern, society. Scholars continue to discover new sources in formerly inaccessible East German archives and posit new ways of studying the GDR.

Shortly after occupying eastern Germany the Soviet authorities permitted the reopening of German theaters and authorized the beginning of German film productions. Contrary to popular perceptions of the Soviets as repressive and the Americans as permissive, this early artistic freedom in the Soviet zone did not find a parallel in the American sector which forbade German productions for much longer and only allowed Germans to enjoy imported foreign films or classics deemed harmless by the occupiers. In many ways DEFA had large shoes to fill. The UFA film company before the war had become something like "Germany's Hollywood," as Europe's most successful film studio.<sup>13</sup> Because UFA entertained the Third Reich and frequently dealt with themes perceived by the new socialist elite to be bourgeois, DEFA felt the double pressure of matching UFA's success while addressing socialist themes.<sup>14</sup> Early DEFA films most

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<sup>11</sup> Judd Stitzel, *Fashioning Socialism: Clothing, Politics, and Consumer Culture in East Germany*, (Oxford: Berg, 2005).

<sup>12</sup> Katherine Pence and Paul Betts, "Introduction," *Socialist Modern: East German Everyday Culture and Politics*, ed. Katherine Pence and Paul Betts (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2008), 12.

<sup>13</sup> Joshua Feinstein, *The Triumph of the Ordinary: Depictions of Daily Life in the East German Cinema, 1949-1989* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002), 20.

<sup>14</sup> See Feinstein, 19-27 for an excellent narrative of DEFA's founding.

frequently presented antifascist narratives that rejected both Nazism and capitalism while emphasizing the value of work and socialism in founding a new German society. Antifascism served as a major filmic theme throughout the GDR's existence, but did not prevent DEFA films from exploring other genres or contributing valuable productions to world cinema.<sup>15</sup> Stagnation haunted the DEFA studios in the early 1950s, largely because filmmakers felt unsure about what the state expected from their films. At this time the state sought films in line with "socialist realism," or films that would present a triumphant depiction of socialism and everyday lives within the system. Following Stalin's death in 1953, however, more possibilities emerged and some of the most well received DEFA films came out of this atmosphere.<sup>16</sup> With the construction of the Berlin Wall in 1961, artists believed they would have even greater freedom in producing films. The Eleventh Plenum of 1965 crushed these hopes as the state condemned productions that had bravely explored contemporary issues and banned twelve films that year and the next.<sup>17</sup> Films of the 1970s included historical films, entertainment films, and genre films that attempted to attract larger audiences while avoiding controversy. Productions from the 1980s displayed a renewed interest in exploring the German past, but also reflected a larger presence of female filmmakers.<sup>18</sup> In the wake of German unification, DEFA films

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<sup>15</sup> East German films covered every genre from science fiction to romantic comedies. One of the best known DEFA films, *Jacob the Liar*, was nominated for an Academy Award while some productions, like *Solo Sunny* and *The Legend of Paul and Paula* still receive recognition as two of the best German language productions.

<sup>16</sup> Feinstein, 29-36; Seán Allan, "DEFA: An Historical Overview," in *DEFA: East Germany Cinema, 1946-1992*, ed. Seán Allan and John Sandford (New York: Berghahn Books, 1999), 6-11.

<sup>17</sup> Allan in *DEFA: East Germany Cinema, 1946-1992*, 11-13; Feinstein, 151.

<sup>18</sup> Feinstein, 194-195, 250, 255.

no longer appealed to a broad audience. The privatization of theaters in the former East Germany sounded the death knell for DEFA, and its studios were sold off in 1992.<sup>19</sup>

Historians and film scholars alike have investigated German film from its beginnings to the present. In his significant work *From Caligari to Hitler*, Siegfried Kracauer presented one of the first studies of German film in which he applied a sociological framework to the study of German films from the Weimar era to the Third Reich.<sup>20</sup> While his view of Weimar films as forerunners of fascist films has largely been discarded by scholars, his linkage of the political sphere to film production and his reading of films as revealing a national mentality influenced later works about German film. Seán Allan and John Sandford's edited volume *DEFA: East German Cinema 1946-1992* was among the very first substantial English language works written about DEFA film history. Particularly valuable given the limited discussion of DEFA film in English is Barton Byg's chapter which provides an international context for DEFA film and relates it to other filmic practices and time periods.<sup>21</sup> Daniela Berghahn also offers a broad look at East German cinema in her book *Hollywood behind the Wall*. She suggests looking both eastward and westward in analyzing DEFA film to account for its unique position between Soviet communist ideology and western, specifically German, heritage. Looking at the experience of fascism and war, both Robert R. Shandley and Anke Pinkert recognize the important, albeit limited from a modern perspective, critical engagement with the Nazi past in postwar films. Shandley's book *Rubble Films* focuses on the

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<sup>19</sup> Allan in *DEFA: East Germany Cinema, 1946-1992*, 18-19; Pinkert, *Film and Memory in East Germany*, 204-205.

<sup>20</sup> Siegfried Kracauer, *From Caligari to Hitler: A Psychological History of the German Film*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1947).

<sup>21</sup> Barton Byg, "DEFA and the Traditions of International Cinema," in *DEFA: East Germany Cinema, 1946-1992*, ed. Seán Allan and John Sandford, 22-41.

immediate postwar films produced by DEFA from 1946-1949 and argues that they represent the first step to engaging the problematic past, even though they shy away from examining perpetration itself.<sup>22</sup> In her work *Film and Memory in East Germany*, Pinkert looks more broadly at postwar memory as revealed through film and finds that DEFA films depict a wide range of emotions rather than remaining silent about the past. These scholars acknowledge the centrality of the National Socialist experience in shaping later DEFA stories and themes.

Films make excellent sources in studies about memory such as this one. As one of the most affordable and accessible entertainment options, films reach large audiences and have the potential to encourage discussions about the past.<sup>23</sup> Filmmakers working in the DEFA studios did not enjoy the same level of artistic freedom as directors in societies without heavy state supervision of the cultural sphere. The SED always had the power to prevent films from being made or to cancel their release. In questionable cases, state surveillance informed state leaders about new films and their production processes. However, the level of official supervision varied and at times studio leaders and individual directors enjoyed greater freedom in creating films.<sup>24</sup> State supervision was always a reality, but the level of control remained inconsistent. Far from making these films weak sources, their location between the political and popular realms places them firmly within the wider discussion of the past.<sup>25</sup> This study does not seek to examine audience reactions to the films in question, but rather examines the films as creative

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<sup>22</sup> See the Conclusion in Robert R. Shandley, *Rubble Films: German Cinema in the Shadow of the Third Reich*, (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2001) for a more detailed discussion of this theme.

<sup>23</sup> Roy Rosenzweig and David Thelen, *The Presence of the Past: Popular Uses of History in American Life* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), 23, 97. Although this work focuses on Americans' engagement with history, many of its observations apply beyond the borders of the United States.

<sup>24</sup> Joshua Feinstein, *Triumph of the Ordinary*, 40-41.

<sup>25</sup> Anke Pinkert, *Film and Memory in East Germany*, 7.



representations of the past with implications for the time in which they were made. These DEFA films demonstrate an ongoing interest in the memory of the Third Reich and the centrality of this memory in shaping the contemporary GDR.

This thesis examines DEFA films from the 1940s to the 1980s in four chapters. In chapter one I look at two films from the 1940s: *Somewhere in Berlin* (*Irgendwo in Berlin*, 1946, dir. Gerhard Lamprecht) and *Rotation* (1949, dir. Wolfgang Staudte). These films demonstrate the formation of a foundational narrative by beginning to distinguish desirable qualities which would come to be associated with the east from undesirable attributes that would later be considered western. They also provide a vision of progress to recover from the trauma of war. Chapter two considers two films from the 1950s, *Destinies of Women* (*Frauenschicksale*, 1952, dir. Slatan Dudow) and *Lissy* (1957, dir. Konrad Wolf), to examine the consolidation of the foundational narrative demonstrated by the films' glorification of socialist qualities and communism. These two films also integrate women into the narrative, largely through their specific focus on consumption. Chapter three explores three films from the 1960s to reveal how up and coming filmmakers portrayed the foundational narrative in new ways. *The Second Track* (*Das Zweite Gleis*, 1962, dir. Joachim Kunert) considers the presence of fascist guilt within the GDR while *The Adventures of Werner Holt* (*Die Abenteuer des Werner Holt*, 1964, dir. Joachim Kunert) and *I Was Nineteen* (*Ich War Neunzehn*, 1968, dir. Konrad Wolf) suggest that other avenues besides communism might allow one to arrive at antifascism. DEFA films from the 1970s were primarily historical, entertainment, or genre films. Even those with plots set in the Third Reich focused more on human drama than on

critically considering the memory of the past.<sup>26</sup> For these reasons, this study skips to

films from the 1980s in chapter four. This chapter focuses on *The Fiancée (Die Verlobte,*

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<sup>26</sup> On the whole, DEFA films from the 1970s avoided plots that involved the Third Reich choosing instead historical, contemporary, or fantastic settings for their stories. Historical films frequently used their setting in the distant past as a means of reflecting contemporary difficulties. Sometimes these films even took place outside of Germany to further distance them from the present and hide the relevancy of their critiques. Konrad Wolf's 1971 film *Goya, or the Hard Way of Enlightenment (Goya oder der arge Weg der Erkenntnis)*, for example, takes place in Spain during the Inquisition but depicts a man struggling with his loyalty to the state. Similarly, the 1974 film *Till Eulenspiegel* directed by Rainer Simon takes place in medieval times and tells the story of a man who succeeds in tricking the prince for his own benefit. Such films question state authority from the safety of a distant time or place.

Entertainment films, like love stories and comedies, also form a key category of 1970s DEFA films as filmmakers sought to increase attendance figures and produce films that the audience would enjoy. (See Joshua Feinstein, *Triumph of the Ordinary*, 214-215.) Egon Günther's 1971 film *Her Third (Der Dritte)* tells a love story in which a woman, Margit, wins the affections of her colleague. The film sheds light on the experiences of East German women as well as providing an entertaining plot. One of the most popular East German films, *The Legend of Paul and Paula (Die Legende von Paul und Paula)* directed by Heiner Carow was released a year later in 1972. This film also tells a contemporary love story, albeit a tale of a controversial relationship between a woman and a married state official. Audiences greeted this film enthusiastically and it became one of the most popular ever produced in the GDR. Arguably the single most popular film ever released by DEFA, Konrad Wolf and Wolfgang Kohlhasse's 1979 film *Solo Sunny* follows a young woman living in East Berlin who is eager to become a successful singer. Critics and audiences alike recognize this film as a classic. These entertainment films avoided deep criticism and simply aimed to please audiences with a winning story set in the contemporary GDR.

The third category of films common in the 1970s is the genre films, particularly science fiction films and westerns. Herman Zschoche's 1972 film *Eolomea* tells the story of a space mystery in which spaceships are disappearing. A later production, Gottfried Kolditz's *In the Dust of the Stars (Im Staub der Sterne, 1976)* also takes place in space but adds a hip twist. In this plot, a spaceship lands on a planet that it believes needs help but the crew ends up attending a party. Westerns, or *Indianerfilme* produced in the GDR took place in the United States but depicted the Americans as the antagonists. *Apaches (1973)* directed by Gottfried Kolditz, for example, depicts the extermination of a Native American tribe by an American geologist. Another *Indianerfilm* called *Blood Brothers (Blutsbrüder, 1975)* directed by Werner W. Wallroth tells the story of an American soldier who chooses to side with the Native Americans as the American army attacks and attempts to relocate them. These genre films represent categories still popular among many viewers today. Although they sometimes incidentally served the GDR's political aims, as in the anti-Americanism that permeated the *Indianerfilme*, they sought chiefly to entertain audiences like the entertainment films.

A minority of films made in the 1970s did involve plots set in the Third Reich, but this group does not appear to have approached the topic in such a way as to comment on the foundational narrative or to have received much attention. Some of these films focus only minimally on the memory of the Third Reich. One portion of the series *Aus Unserer Zeit* called *Die Zwei Söhne (1970 dir. Helmut Nitzschke)*, tells the story of a woman who delivers her son to the Red Army, but the series moves on to consider later times for the remaining episodes. *Schüsse in Marienbad* (directed by Ivo Toman, Václav Gajer, and Claus Dobberke, 1973) focuses on a murder case and only secondarily discusses antifascism. Other films take place outside of Germany, rendering a link to the GDR difficult. For example, *Meine Stunde Null (1970, dir. Joachim Hasler)* focuses on a German soldier who turns against the war effort and collaborates with the Soviets with whom he later becomes friends. This film takes place on the east front rather than in Germany. *Schwarzer Zweiback* directed by Herbert M Rappaport (1972) similarly takes place in the Soviet Union and also does not appear to have made much impact. *KLK an PTX- Die Rote Kapelle (1970, dir. Horst E. Brandt)* provides a valuable look at the resistance, but issues later arose as to the communist credentials of the group making the film too unwieldy to include in this study. Most films released in the 1970s that address the Third Reich present entertaining stories about human drama. *Am Ende der Welt* (dir. Hans Kratzert,

1980, dir. Günther Rücker and Günter Reisch), *Your Unknown Brother* (*Dein Unbekannte Brüder*, 1981, dir. Ulrich Weiß), and *Jadup and Boel* (*Jadup und Boel*, 1981/1988, dir. Rainer Simon). *The Fiancée* ushers in the decade with a traditional tale of heroic communist antifascist resistance while *Your Unknown Brother* depicts problems the resistance as weak and hints at a contemporary problematic topic of state security. *Jadup and Boel* takes place in the contemporary GDR but in a society still very much affected by the postwar experience. It questions the state's origins by examining the taboo topic of postwar rape and connects this discussion to contemporary problems. The final section, a conclusion, comments on general trends represented in these films and how their use of memory and perceptions of the foundational narrative change with time. Throughout the chapters, this thesis argues that these films offer a critical and dynamic view of the problematic past and the foundational narrative formulated to legitimize the current state.

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1974) focuses on a friendship and the fate of the friends. *Mann Gegen Mann* (dir. Kurt Maetzig, 1976) tells the story of a love triangle following the war. *Eine Handvoll Hoffnung* (dir. Frank Voge, 1978) addresses grief and suicide. Ralf Kirsten's *Ich Zwing Dich zu Leben* (1978) portrays a father's attempt to protect his son from military service by hiding him in the woods. Perhaps the best known film on this theme from the 1970s, *Jakob der Lügner* (Jacob the Liar, dir. Frank Beyer, 1975) presents the dramatic tale of a concentration camp inmate trying to lift his fellow prisoners' spirits. While these films provide compelling stories, the ways in which they remember the past are based on entertainment rather than reflection. Although valuable for other reasons, the film culture of the 1970s contributes little to the discussion of the GDR's foundational narrative which emerged again in 1980s films.

## CHAPTER 1

### BUILDING SOCIALISM WITH *SOMEWHERE IN BERLIN* AND *ROTATION*

Germany lay in ruins at the end of the Second World War. With all of its leaders dead, imprisoned, hiding, or completely discredited, Germany found itself completely at the mercy of the invading Allied powers: the United States, Great Britain, the Soviet Union, and France. The situation in the east appeared especially dismal, as the invading Red Army applied total destruction, wiping out everything in its path and completely dismantling the remaining industrial base of this part of the nation.<sup>27</sup> Each occupying power established its own zone of occupation. Berlin, located in the eastern part of Germany, was also divided into four zones within the larger Soviet zone. Germans who experienced this postwar upheaval found their lives totally altered. Women outnumbered men following the death and imprisonment of many men serving in the *Wehrmacht*, the German military. Allied bombing raids destroyed strategic locations related to the war effort, but also targeted civilian towns like Dresden in some notorious instances leaving communities and families torn apart. Unlike the aftermath of the First World War, no revanchist movement took root following the Second World War because of the absolute nature of the destruction engulfing Germany and its inhabitants.<sup>28</sup>

In such an atmosphere survival became a key concern for the larger German population. Simply finding food to eat and to feed one's family proved to be a tremendous feat amid the destruction and chaos. Without markets from which to buy food

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<sup>27</sup> Jochen Laufer, "From Dismantling to Currency Reform: External Origins of the Dictatorship, 1943-1948," in *Dictatorship as Experience*, 76.

<sup>28</sup> Konrad H. Jarausch, *After Hitler: Recivilizing Germans, 1945-1995*, trans. Brandon Hunziker (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 62.

or access to currency, the black market emerged to fill this void and bartering frequently replaced valid transactions. Heating, too, was in short supply making for a few brutal winters in the years immediately following the war. The total number of displaced persons in Germany following the Second World War represents the highest instance of displacement in European history.<sup>29</sup> Many people lost their homes and resorted to wandering in search of any kind of shelter. Other Germans who had lived in the east gave up everything to flee to the west in the hopes of receiving kinder treatment by the western Allies than the Soviets. Soviet soldiers quickly earned a reputation for brutality, unleashing violence against the Germans in their zone of occupation and engaging in mass rape of German women. In other cases, especially in the western zones, fraternization between German women and occupying foreign soldiers that was at least theoretically not based on force emerged.<sup>30</sup> In exchange for sex, German women got basic needs like food and shelter as well as protection. Living to see another day became top priority in the atmosphere of violence and scarcity following the war.

The traumatic experience of war itself caused men to return home broken and weakened both physically and mentally, leading to an emasculation of German society. Allied control left no doubt as to the total extent of German defeat, rendering the war pointless and contributing to a spirit of dejection. Learning that they could not protect their wives and female relatives from rape by the Soviets compounded this crisis of masculinity.<sup>31</sup> Rubble women, or *Trümmerfrauen*, working to clear the rubble and provide for their families to compensate for absent or wounded men became a common

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<sup>29</sup> Shandley, *Rubble Films*, 18-19; Jarausch, *After Hitler*, 35, 80-81.

<sup>30</sup> Uta G. Poiger, *Jazz, Rock, and Rebels: Cold War Politics and American Culture in a Divided Germany*, (Berkeley, University of California Press, 2000), 35-37.

<sup>31</sup> Fullbrook, *The People's State*, 27; Jarausch, *After Hitler*, 32.

sight and a familiar concept in the postwar era with mythological significance extending well into the Cold War. These women stepped into incredibly active roles, often taking care of household work while securing provisions for themselves and their families singlehandedly.<sup>32</sup> Children ran wild in the dangerous ruins and family structures often crumbled. Like the Nazis, the emerging East German leadership paid a great deal of attention to winning the loyalty of the youth. The formal organization of the *Freie Deutsche Jugend* (Free German Youth or FDJ) quickly followed the end of the war, taking place in March 1946, over three years before the official establishment of the GDR.<sup>33</sup> Instilling socialist principles and, above all, loyalty to the state in children from a young age would remain a constant focus from the postwar era throughout the history of the GDR.

Tensions between the Soviet Union and the western Allies, especially the United States, appeared early after the Second World War. Each side in the conflict feared the other, and Germany became the site of a power struggle in which the Soviet Union and western Allies favored rebuilding to bolster their own economic and political strength against the other side. This growing division awoke the Soviet Union's desire to maintain a strong presence in its eastern zone. Quickly, the Soviet occupiers transitioned from a policy of inflicting widespread destruction to one of limited property seizure in an effort to facilitate rebuilding in the east. The Soviet Union made such decisions concerning the destruction and seizure of German property unilaterally with the aim of maintaining their presence as a counterbalance to the western powers. In addition, the Soviet Union never accepted any proposed plans for currency reform presented by the other powers but

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<sup>32</sup> Judd Stitzel, *Fashioning Socialism*, 50-51.

<sup>33</sup> Feinstein, *Triumph of the Ordinary*, 22.

instead opted to implement its own currency solution.<sup>34</sup> When the *Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschlands* (Socialist Unity Party or SED) emerged after forcing the socialists to join the communists for greater party strength in 1946, the development of the Soviet zone according to socialist principles and subject to the authority of the Soviet Union grew clear. The SED displayed dictatorial tendencies fairly early on, beginning to limit freedoms already following the 1946-1947 elections.<sup>35</sup> Soviet authorities in the eastern zone, aware of the mass popularity of Nazism in the Third Reich, asserted authority which they portrayed as benevolent over East Germany and maintained an authoritative state government, answerable to the Soviet Union, for the duration of the GDR's existence.

### **Introduction to Films**

Another key difference that emerged in the Soviet zone involved the resumption of German film production. Each occupying power held control over cultural production in its zone. While the Americans chose to import Hollywood films and screen older German films approved by the occupiers, the Soviets decided to permit German directors to pick up their cameras again quickly following the end of the war. These directors working in the Soviet sector enjoyed a level of tolerance greater than that of the other zones.<sup>36</sup> The first DEFA films premiered in 1946 and were filmed amid the actual rubble engulfing postwar Germany, usually Berlin. Predictably, their directors experienced the Second World War as adults and represent the first generation that would produce films in the GDR. The plots of these films consider contemporary problems like reintegrating

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<sup>34</sup> Jochen Laufer, "From Dismantling to Currency Reform: External Origins of the Dictatorship, 1943-1948," in *Dictatorship as Experience*, 74-84.

<sup>35</sup> Jarausch, *After Hitler*, 114, 134-135.

<sup>36</sup> Shandley, *Rubble Films*, 11-18.

returning soldiers and reestablishing order in the home. Some, like *Rotation*, also contemplate how the Third Reich was possible. Yet even these early DEFA releases reflect the foundational narrative already taking shape that would dominate discourse in the GDR from its official formation in 1949 until its demise in 1990.

Postwar DEFA films, like *Somewhere in Berlin* (*Irgendwo in Berlin*, 1946, directed by Gerhard Lamprecht) and *Rotation* (1949, directed by Wolfgang Staudte), begin the process of identifying values like industry and community as desirable and attaching problems to other values such as greed and individualism. In the 1950s, these positive attributes would be classified as socialist while the negative ones would be linked to capitalism, reflecting the solidification of Cold War division. Marking various traits in this way thus provides the basis of the foundational narrative beginning to take shape at this time. Looking forward, both films end with an image of progress which will ensure a future distinct from the traumatic past. Relationships have been repaired, order and authority are restored, and the characters have a clear sense of how to proceed. Explicitly or implicitly, the memory of the Third Reich provides the context for this change and the therapeutic function of marking the past as a finished chapter.

### **Somewhere in Berlin**

Set in Germany's war-torn capital, *Somewhere in Berlin* depicts daily life in the rubble of Berlin. It primarily focuses on the boys of the city, like Gustav, Willi, and Captain who play war games in the rubble. It also examines the reemergence of family life as Gustav's father, Herr Iller, returns from the war. As one of the earliest DEFA films, *Somewhere in Berlin* uses the rubble to represent the threatening disorder engulfing the postwar society. Herr Waldemar, a thief, particularly demonstrates this threat when he



takes advantage of the rubble to quickly hide after stealing a wallet. The rubble also leads to the death of Gustav's friend, Willi. Left without parents after the war, Willi lives under the detrimental influence of Herr Birke who promotes danger and immorality when he supplies fireworks to the local boys in exchange for stolen food. Eager to prove his courage to his playmates, Willi attempts to climb a wall left partially standing in the rubble, falls from a great height, and later dies as a result of his injuries. Captain grows frustrated with the return of adult authority and leaves with Waldemar, presumably to pursue a life of crime. The boys who are left join Gustav's father in clearing out the rubble at the end of the film to get his business up and running, suggesting a return of order. This vision of progress reflects beneficial qualities like work and community that would shortly become associated with socialism. It demarcates these traits from undesirable attributes like greed and individualism which would soon be seen as capitalist.

The film's opening scene confronts viewers with the dangerous postwar environment and the problem of greed. Amid the ruins, Waldemar's pursuers struggle to navigate the uneven terrain and see into the distance. When Waldemar selects a hiding spot in a garage, the rubble hides him from his pursuers. The dialogue around the woman whose wallet has been stolen emphasizes the atmosphere of want and identifies Waldemar's greed and concern with his own well-being at the expense of others as a serious problem. After the woman tells the authorities that her wallet contained 900 marks, another woman in the crowd remarks that one could buy a lot of vegetables with that amount of money. For most people, then, basic needs like vegetables take precedence over any sort of luxury purchases. This woman's longing for vegetables suggests that she

cannot obtain the food she needs, making theft a serious impediment to survival, especially for those with less than 900 marks in their wallets. Thus, after only the first scene the film has already presented an atmosphere in need of taming and marked greed and individualism as undesirable qualities, setting the stage for the presentation of positive alternative qualities that will eventually become associated with East German socialism and a vision of progress.

In addition to enabling thievery, the rubble presents an ideal environment for the war games played by the neighborhood boys and enables other illegitimate economic transactions. The rubble contributes so much to the postwar chaos that it “becomes a player,” taking on a sinister role rather than merely serving as a setting.<sup>37</sup> The boys pretend to be soldiers, using firecrackers as weapons and seeking shelter in the rubble as if it were a battle site. Herr Birke supplies the firecrackers in exchange for food which the boys have stolen from their parents. These illegitimate transactions highlight the prevalence of bartering and black market profiteering in postwar Germany, as Birke profits from these underhanded exchanges based on theft. Like Waldemar, Birke acts on greed to ensure that he remains well fed while the boys’ parents lose portions of their valuable food supply. The war games themselves also cause problems by posing dangers to the boys and to the neighborhood itself. In one instance, a firecracker breaks Herr Eckmann’s window and destroys his painting after nearly missing Eckmann himself. Even after the police attempt to halt the distribution of firecrackers and Eckmann warns the boys about the dangers of playing war, they persist in their games. Taming the environment and restoring order in the home appear to be the necessary precursors to suppressing greed and eliminating danger.

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<sup>37</sup> Shandley, *Rubble Films*, 120.

Things change with the return of Herr Iller, a German soldier arriving home after years away at war. He runs into his son, Gustav, who does not realize that Iller is his father until he brings him home and sees his mother's reaction. The GDR's foundational narrative never provided a strong blanket condemnation of all German soldiers, classifying them neither as guilty enablers of Nazism nor as innocent victims. Rather, it viewed the majority of Germans as apolitical and therefore susceptible to Nazism. Many Germans found themselves living in poverty and unable to find work in the 1920s and 1930s as a result of the worldwide depression and the aftermath of the First World War. In this situation, many Germans accepted life under Nazism because of the economic security it brought them rather than on the basis of political convictions. The returned soldiers in *Somewhere in Berlin*, not ideologically committed to Nazism or socialism and traumatized as a result of the war, provide a sympathetic look at the crisis of masculinity that resulted from wartime trauma, defeat, and postwar chaos. Iller no longer fits into his old clothes because he returns from the war undernourished and has no incentive to reopen his garages and resume his work.<sup>38</sup> Although he is clearly dejected, Iller copes far better than Herr Timmel who stands at the window waiting for his presumably fallen comrades to return, unable to sleep because he is so traumatized from war. Rather than taking the lead in postwar reconstruction, these former soldiers must rely on others. Timmel's mother takes care of him and tries to provide emotional support so that he will recover. Meanwhile, Gustav tries to motivate his father to rebuild the garages. While Iller remains unmotivated to work, the neighborhood youth continue to run rampant and chaos prevails. By focusing on a father, male guardians, and rowdy boys, the film restricts the action to the male actors. Even the one female child present, Lotte, faces the boys' refusal

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<sup>38</sup> Shandley, *Rubble Films*, 122.

to include her and symbolically takes Iller's jacket at the end of the film so that he can participate in the rebuilding process.<sup>39</sup> This focus on masculinity ignores rubble women, but rather depicts traditional male power in the interest of restoring order which hinges on the returning father reclaiming his authority.

Work provides the needed solution to the crisis of masculinity, the problem of wild youth, and the dangerous landscape. Gustav firmly believes that if his father would only resume his work in the garage that things would return to normal. The rubble assumes its most threatening role when Gustav's best friend Willi attempts to climb the ruins of a building, falls from a great height, and dies shortly afterwards as a result of his injuries. After this event Gustav reaches a point of desperation and confides his woes to his Uncle Kalle who had not gone away to war. He and Kalle together hatch a plan and gather all of the boys to begin clearing away the rubble around Iller's garages. When Iller sees the effort, he immediately cheers up, feels a new sense of purpose, and jumps in to help. At the film's end Iller takes a dominant role, removing his jacket and supervising the boys' work. This symbolic return of masculine authority is coupled with the conquest of the problem of the threatening rubble, as Iller moves in to dominate and tame the landscape. He diverts the energy of the neighborhood boys, presenting an ideal solution to the problem of disorder and enabling progress. The conclusion of the film affirms the value of community, work, and industry as positive alternatives to greed and individualism, setting the stage for the future association of negative capitalistic values

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<sup>39</sup> Anke Pinkert erroneously states that all of the youth are male in *Film and Memory in East Germany*, 44. Although she overlooks Lotte's presence, her point about the action centering on male characters is certainly accurate.

with the west and positive socialist qualities with the east in the GDR's foundational narrative.<sup>40</sup>

The film's emphasis on the necessity of overcoming current hardships and progressing also reflects its specific historical point in time. Strictly concerned with the postwar environment, *Somewhere in Berlin* avoids any engagement with the memory of Nazism and the Second World War. A brief insight into Timmel's psychological trauma is the only depiction of this war given in the film. This strategy of avoidance suggests that the memory of the war remained both wrapped up in the present and was still too raw to digest.<sup>41</sup> Many Germans who were still living in the rubble likely experienced little change in their daily lives. If anything, the presence of four occupying powers probably served as a constant reminder of the war and created the sensation that the conflict had not yet completely ended. Films released only a few years later, like *Rotation*, would take up the task of depicting the war experience itself, but at this early date postwar problems monopolized critical attention.

From the first scene *Somewhere in Berlin* identifies greed and disorder as serious problems in postwar Berlin. Waldemar steals with ease, using the rubble to hide, and the neighborhood boys play dangerous war games after they steal food and exchange it for fireworks. Male guardians either encourage the boys to misbehave, as Herr Birke does, or act as a substitute father like Uncle Kalle. Yet only Iller, the true father, has the power to reestablish order. Willi's death from scaling a wall left standing among the rubble and the

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<sup>40</sup> Jeffrey Herf, *Divided Memory*, 37; In *Anatomy of a Dictatorship*, 23-30, Mary Fulbrook identifies "paternalism and paranoia" as driving the state. Her discussion of paternalism in particular fits with the symbolic reclaiming of authority by the father in this case.

<sup>41</sup> Another DEFA film, *The Murderers are Among Us* (*Die Mörder sind unter Uns*, 1946, directed by Wolfgang Staudte), did address the memory of the war in its postwar setting. Yet this film also represents the postwar chaos as a continuation of wartime troubles, specifically the unresolved conflict between Hans Mertens and his former commander, thus also presenting the war as contemporary and raw.

sight of the neighborhood boys working to clear the rubble away from his garages motivates Iller to work again. He establishes his masculine authority over both the landscape as the rubble is cleared away and over the youth working under his supervision. Dominating the challenging postwar environment serves as the sole focus of this film which neglects the experience of the war itself. The film's resolution exemplifies a socialist vision of progress based on the value of work and community while simultaneously demonstrating problems associated with greed and individualism that would later become identified with capitalism by the GDR's antifascist narrative.

### **Rotation**

Another early post-war film, *Rotation*, tells the story of a German family living under National Socialism from its onset until the end of World War II. It fits into a wider pattern of DEFA films produced during the late 1940s that took as their subject the everyday experience of fascism, in this case by investigating the experience in a typical German home.<sup>42</sup> The film opens in the 1920s with Hans Behnke and his girlfriend, Lotte, beginning their relationship. When they discover that Lotte is pregnant, they marry and Hans struggles to find a job because of the mass unemployment of the Great Depression. After finally landing a job, Hans is pressured to join the Nazi Party in order to secure his position and continue to provide for his family. He never accepts the party's ideological platform, in contrast to his son Helmut. After being bombarded with Nazi ideology in school and through the Hitler Youth, Helmut internalizes ideas of German superiority and supports Hitler. When Hans helps print anti-Nazi leaflets at the request of his communist brother-in-law and destroys a picture of Hitler, Helmut turns his father over to the state.

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<sup>42</sup> Christiane Mückenberger, "The Anti-Fascist Past in DEFA Films," in *DEFA: East German Cinema, 1946-1992*, ed. Seán Allan and John Sandford, 59.

The two mend their differences at the end of the film, although Lotte's death in a bombing raid leaves the family permanently altered. In the final scene of the film, Helmut and his girlfriend appear in a repetition of the beginning of Hans and Lotte's relationship. The closing commentary emphasizes that the past will not repeat itself, thus ensuring a future free from the threat of National Socialism for Helmut and his girlfriend. *Rotation* implies that this break from the past, which eastern viewers should infer to be socialism, represents a step forward from fascism. In this way, the film sets up the trajectory of progress that became central to the foundational narrative.

Hans' situation emphasizes the danger of apolitical attitudes, a core component of the GDR's foundational narrative. Most Germans, according to this narrative, were easily led astray by the Nazis because of their lack of political awareness and education, and thus their inability to analyze their world in socialist terms. By emphasizing the danger of remaining apolitical, the narrative presents loyalty to socialist principles and, after its establishment in October of 1949, the East German state, as the righteous path.<sup>43</sup> Because only a small percentage of Germans identified as communists previously, this new perspective translated into the cultivation of a new loyalty. Hans joins the Nazi Party not because he believes in its goals and its vision but because only party membership will earn him job security. Behind closed doors he mocks the party's practices and sympathizes with his Jewish neighbors, the Solomons, who are eventually deported. Because Hans joins the party solely to provide for his family and later assists the resistance, the film presents him as a sympathetic character despite his formal affiliation with the Nazis. Paul, Lotte's brother, acts as a foil for Hans. He is a devoted communist

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<sup>43</sup> Harry Blunk, "The Concept of 'Heimat-GDR' in DEFA Feature Films," in *DEFA: East German Cinema, 1946-1992*, ed. Seán Allan and John Sandford, 206.

who remains opposed to the Nazis until they murder him. Hans appears to redeem himself when he switches sides, albeit after Paul pressures him into doing so. This switch allows fluidity between the various groups in the antifascist narrative, something that would occur far less commonly later as characterizations became more fixed, but still not permanently sealed.<sup>44</sup> At the end of the film, Helmut's turn away from Nazism acts as another example of this fluidity. Such an elastic portrayal of the various groups represented in the antifascist narrative and opportunities for switching sides, which would not completely disappear but often took on a less political overtone later on, suggests the ongoing nature of the process of securing support for communism and the continued development of what would become the GDR's foundational narrative.

Unlike *Somewhere in Berlin* which restricts its focus to contemporary concerns, *Rotation* confronts Nazi ideology and the experience of living in the Third Reich. The three years separating *Rotation* from *Somewhere in Berlin* appear to have provided sufficient time for the war to become distinct from contemporary life. The film's examination of Nazi ideology in particular, an examination that represented a major step in confronting the legacy of Nazism at the time, presents a critical view of the recent past. Scenes demonstrating state officials feeding Helmut and other children official party teachings, like the superiority of the Aryan German, openly acknowledge the most problematic aspects of the Nazi party's ideological teachings.<sup>45</sup> However, the damaging effect of Nazi ideology is presented in such a way that it could resonate with socialism.

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<sup>44</sup> Daniela Berghahn, *Hollywood Behind the Wall*, 74; Pinkert, *Film and Memory in East Germany*, 93, identifies Hans as an antifascist, but this strict label misses the importance of his switch.

<sup>45</sup> Harry Blunk, "The Concept of 'Heimat-GDR' in DEFA Feature Films," in *DEFA: East German Cinema, 1946-1992*, ed. Seán Allan and John Sandford, 206, speculates that the growing temporal distance from the actual event shaped this decision; Pinkert, *Film and Memory in East Germany*, 91, emphasizes how significant the film's look at Jewish victimization was for the time by discussing how conflicts broke out among western viewers still harboring prejudice against Jews, even though the discussion appears very limited today.



Its most damaging effect is the destruction of communities that it causes. Helmut's commitment to the Nazi Party's teachings divides him from his father as he places loyalty to the state above commitment to his family. The wider community also suffers when authorities deport the Solomons, formerly neighboring tenants in the apartment building. Early in the film Hans gladly assists the Solomons when they have trouble with their door and pleasantly converses with them. He and his family watch out the window in disbelief as the Solomons climb into a truck bound for almost certain death. As a divisive force, Nazi ideology in this case tears families and communities apart. Both east and west recognized this division as one of the most troublesome aspects of Nazism, but in socialist terms it violates the vision of the community as a safe and fulfilling space. The film's focus on the value of community corresponds with the SED's effort to build its loyalty base, particularly by winning over former members of the Social Democratic Party (SPD).<sup>46</sup> Just as the film emphasizes the need for unity and harmony within the community, the SED sought to cultivate political unity in the GDR through wider party loyalty. While the film provides an honest portrayal of some of the grimmest aspects of Nazi teachings, it privileges the foundational narrative's emphasis on the value of collectivism over problematic historical realities by highlighting the harmful effect of Nazism on communities.

The end of *Rotation* in some ways serves a similar function to *Somewhere in Berlin*'s conclusion. After Hans returns home from prison and the war has ended, Helmut visits his father to offer a sincere apology which Hans quickly accepts. Although Lotte has died in the final days of the war, Helmut and Hans have satisfactorily repaired their

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<sup>46</sup> Mario Keßler and Thomas Klein, "Repression and Tolernace as Methods of Rule in Communist Societies," in *Dictatorship as Experience* ed. Konrad H. Jarausch, 113.

relationship. Like *Rotation*, this film imagines the shapers of the future to be male, a development which sets the stage for later films in which “paternal transmissions” fostered the inclusion of “the postwar daughter.”<sup>47</sup> With harmony restored in their home the film shifts to focus on Helmut’s future. The final scene shows Helmut enjoying a romantic outing with his girlfriend that mirrors the beginning of Hans and Lotte’s relationship. The dialogue emphasizes that although Helmut appears to be following exactly in his father’s footsteps, the future will not simply repeat the past. This optimistic ending emphasizes progress sure to come like the conclusion of *Somewhere in Berlin*. Although it does not focus on rebuilding specifically, it communicates the will for progress and thus, implicitly, for rebuilding.

Its focus on change and progress stems from the film’s historical context. Released only four years after the war and created by a director who experienced the Third Reich as an adult, *Rotation* reflects a society in transition. The span of time separating the film from the Third Reich and the fact that its director experienced this era as an adult enables the film to undertake a critical contemplation of the Third Reich. However, the events it depicts are still so recent as to require a preoccupation with the necessity for change, looking forward to a new type of society within a new nation. Visions of progress such as those represented in these two films allow for a specific type of transition from Nazism to socialism in which socialism emerges as a result of lessons learned from experiencing the Third Reich, as a type of consciously selected alternative system. It reflects the “misery theory” vision of German history as a long “chain of errors” which resulted in Hitler and National Socialism, necessitating a clean beginning

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<sup>47</sup> Pinkert, *Film and Memory in East Germany*, 103-104. A later film, *The Second Track (Das Zweite Gleis)*, 1962, directed by Joachim Kunert) provides an example of this type of transmission, at least before the father’s problematic past comes to light.

through “socialist rebirth.”<sup>48</sup> The foundational narrative of the GDR relies upon the positive image of socialism as compared with the past experience of fascism, and *Rotation*’s emphasis on change and progress at the end of the film facilitates such a comparison.

With hindsight, it is clear that this transition really marked a change from one dictatorship to another, albeit a new dictatorship of a very different nature- something Konrad Jarausch calls a “welfare dictatorship.” This description recognizes the repression inherent in the GDR’s dictatorial system, but also addresses its ideological aims like providing care for its citizens.<sup>49</sup> Although some scholars have chosen to directly compare the Third Reich and the GDR to emphasize similarities, the two governments implemented vastly different visions.<sup>50</sup> Nazism stipulated care for only those citizens deemed worthy of membership in the German nation in a patriarchal, militarist environment. East German socialism, on the other hand, valued including all members of the community under the umbrella of state care and at least theoretically supported total equality in its rejection of class and inherited privilege of any type. Despite these stark differences, both states were effectively dictatorships. The film’s title and ambiguous ending leave open the possibility of reading the postwar transition as a change from one dictatorship to another, although it does not openly suggest this either. The title, *Rotation*, clearly suggests a turn but how far of a turn is not clear. Ambiguous and vague, the commentary at the end of the film envisions a future different from the past but Helmut’s

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<sup>48</sup> Siobhan Kattago, *Ambiguous Memory: The Nazi Past and German National Identity* (Westport: Praeger Publishers, 2001), 85.

<sup>49</sup> Jarausch, “Care and Coercion: The GDR as Welfare Dictatorship,” in *Dictatorship as Experience: Towards a Socio-Cultural History of the GDR*, ed. Konrad H. Jarausch, 60

<sup>50</sup> During the Cold War and afterwards, western scholars tended to view the GDR and the Third Reich as more similar than different, emphasizing the repressive governments of both. This practice has come to be known as “totalitarian theory” and is rejected by most recent studies that emphasize the differences between the two societies.

exact repetition of his father's actions from the beginning of the film undermines this point. This combination of factors at least leaves open the possibility that the "rotation" alluded to is a full circle turn back to a similar beginning. Although 1949 seems early for such a critical reading of the film, people already began to see dictatorial tendencies in the SED's style of government as early as 1946-1947, and at least by 1948 making this view at least possible fairly early after the war's end.<sup>51</sup> This potential reading of *Rotation* questions the foundational narrative's presentation of socialism as a thoughtful response to Nazism and opposing style of government.

### **Discussion**

These two postwar films represent key issues and currents of thought, specifically shaped by their temporal proximity to the Third Reich, that would shape the foundational narrative of the GDR. First, they begin the process of distinguishing "good" qualities like community and industry from "bad" qualities like individualism and greed. As Cold War tensions grew, those qualities portrayed as positive would come to be associated with socialism and the east while the attributes designated as negative would be connected with capitalism and the west. Situating these capitalist qualities in stories about the Third Reich also plays the important function of linking Nazism with capitalism, a connection that would allow for depictions of the west as the successor to the Third Reich. Both films also end with a vision of progress that clearly differentiates the emerging socialist society from Nazism. For *Somewhere in Berlin*, progress consists of cleaning up, reestablishing order, and resuming work. It focuses strictly on postwar challenges,

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<sup>51</sup> Jarausch, *After Hitler*, 114, talks about the limitations of "freedom of opinion" following the 1946-1947 elections. In *Anatomy of a Dictatorship*, 25, Fulbrook identifies 1948 as marking the beginning of obvious Stalinist tendencies in the SED.

suggesting that the experience of war remained so tied up with the present that it defied critical representation. *Rotation*, released later, recognizes the importance of defining political values to ensure change in the future. This film also necessitates change, but unlike *Somewhere in Berlin* it dares to examine the recent past which appears further removed in the film's consciousness.<sup>52</sup> Finally, it is significant that both films ignore the presence of women to depict rebuilding as a male activity. Even in *Rotation*, which does not address the process of reconstruction, the mother does not survive leaving only the men to carry on. While this focus on industry supports the foundational narrative by glorifying work, it also crosses the line into myth by neglecting the work of women.<sup>53</sup>

On a broader level, these films also use the memory of the past to create an image of a distinct and novel present. Their common emphasis on progress and the future identifies the present as a time of change. *Rotation* depicts the National Socialist past in detail to explore the problems of the past and emphasize the necessity for change. Although *Somewhere in Berlin* does not specifically explore the past, it articulates complications that have resulted from that past like disorder and traumatized returning soldiers which would suffice to evoke memories of the past in a contemporary audience. This approach to memory seeks to depict the present as new, but still relies upon the past as a basis for comparison making memory a mandatory component to their visions of

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<sup>52</sup> Both films, however, base their vision of the future explicitly or implicitly on the experiences of the past, a tendency discussed by Paul Connerton in *How Societies Remember*, 6-7.

<sup>53</sup> Mark Fenimore, *Sex, Thugs, and Rock 'n' Roll: Teenage Rebels in Cold-War East Germany* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2007), 45-49, and Fulbrook, *The People's State*, 156, discuss how the image of the *Aufbaugeneration* (those who built a new society) replaced the heroic image of the rubble women. This trend seems to be reflected very early in the film *Somewhere in Berlin*. Donna Harsch, *Revenge of the Domestic: Women, the Family, and Communism in the German Democratic Republic* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007), 43-44, offers a reminder that the rubble woman herself was a myth, as some women worked both before and after postwar reconstruction in other types of demanding situations and some women resisted taking up work after the war.

progress.<sup>54</sup> Memory thus provides both vital contextual information for understanding progress and the starting point for improvement. Psychologically, the optimistic note on which both films end suggests that memory performs another function in helping contemporary audiences recover from the trauma of the past by assuring them of imminent change. Considering these memory functions along with the films' work laying the groundwork for the GDR's foundational narrative, the memory of the traumatic past appears to be a critical factor in the forging of a new national identity.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> Connerton, *How Societies Remember*, 6-7.

<sup>55</sup> Confino and Fritzsche, *The Work of Memory*, 174.

## CHAPTER 2

### STABILIZING SOCIALISM WITH *DESTINIES OF WOMEN AND LISSY*

The late 1940s and early 1950s mark a particularly tense time in the Cold War as the Soviets and western Allies failed to agree on a united policy for Germany and increasingly disagreed among themselves. In 1949, Germany was formally divided into two states: the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG or West Germany) established in May and the German Democratic Republic (GDR or East Germany) founded in October. Authorities in the GDR felt eager to ensure the perception of their state both as a legitimate entity and as the morally superior of the two German states. The Soviets and SED leaders worked to shore up East Germany's economy and to create a positive image of the new state and Soviet leadership. They sought to impress both the outside world and citizens of the GDR who might leave for the west and drain the state of much needed labor. Industrial production policies formed one of the most ambitious aspects of the first Five Year Plan implemented in 1951, with its goal of doubling the GDR's industrial output by 1955. The reduction of private property in favor of collectivization began in earnest in 1952, setting the GDR on a distinctly socialist course early on.<sup>56</sup>

Capitalism and Americanism took on increasingly negative connotations inside the GDR which positioned itself in opposition to both. The Gladow Trial of 1950, for example, associated images of American gangsters and the "Wild West" with the thievery and lawlessness of the East German criminal Werner Gladow. His swift execution suggests that these associations with American imagery effectively assisted in

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<sup>56</sup> Harsch, *Revenge of the Domestic*, 64.

condemning Gladow.<sup>57</sup> According to the GDR's foundational narrative, Nazism represented the most developed form of capitalism. A link therefore existed between the Third Reich and the FRG, which GDR authorities portrayed as another type of fascist state. They concerned themselves more with their capitalist neighbor than their Nazi past, although the terms of condemnation remained strikingly similar as its object shifted.<sup>58</sup> Cold War tensions quickly divided east from west and encouraged the GDR to make economic adjustments in the hopes of achieving successful socialism while attaching negative connotations to western capitalism as it existed in the FRG.

As postwar living conditions gradually improved, but food and other goods remained very scarce in the east, peoples' desire for consumer goods emerged as a major issue in the GDR. How its citizens handled these issues could potentially affirm the new nation's success or represent its failure. In light of continued hardships and socialist rejection of materialism, the GDR continued to frame correct socialist consumption as providing for "needs" rather than "wants." Such framing of the topic did not succeed in diminishing the public's desires and expectations which rose throughout the 1950s. Even though the state gave in to consumers' desires for more luxurious goods as time progressed, GDR leaders continued to depict socialist consumption as a means of satisfying citizens' needs rather than allowing successful individuals and businesses to profit at the expense of others, a situation which they identified as defining the capitalist west.<sup>59</sup>

Consumption thus became a distinguishing factor separating the socialist east from the capitalist west in discourse and in practice. This issue fit into the GDR's

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<sup>57</sup> Poiger, *Jazz, Rock, and Rebels*, 48.

<sup>58</sup> Herf, *Divided Memory*, 163-4.

<sup>59</sup> Stitzel, *Fashioning Socialism*, 13-14.



foundational narrative which necessitated making sharp distinctions between west and east in terms of economic systems, emphasizing the good of socialism over the evil inherent in capitalist systems. As they poured their energy into stressing economic differences between east and west, state leaders consistently felt threatened with the close proximity of western affluence. In the early years of the GDR, women especially held an image as being susceptible to seduction by western style consumption.<sup>60</sup>

Demographically, women continued to outnumber men long after the Second World War ended. Their numbers alone gave the SED incentive to attempt to appeal to the female population of the GDR. In 1950 the SED granted women formal equality under the law and even ensured benefits for single mothers.<sup>61</sup> This measure would have been unthinkable in the FRG (and most of the western world) at the time and reflects another divide between the east and west developing over issues related to gender and sex. Whereas morality represented the distinction between contemporary society and the Nazi past in the west, anti-capitalism performed this function in the east. As a result of this unconcern with traditional morality coupled with socialism's egalitarian values, premarital sex and single mother households became permissible in the east which gladly used such tolerance to paint the GDR as a happy, freer, and fairer society.<sup>62</sup> Yet traditional gender views in which women, as the "weaker sex," exercised less sound judgment and were more easily led astray than men continued to shape attitudes towards East German women, especially with regard to consumption. GDR leaders worried that women might act irrationally and "shift their families' buying power in unpredictable,

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<sup>60</sup> Stitzel, *Fashioning Socialism*, 17.

<sup>61</sup> Harsch, *Revenge of the Domestic*, 40-41, 62.

<sup>62</sup> Dagmar Herzog, "East Germany's Sexual Evolution," in *Socialist Modern*, ed. Katherine Pence and Paul Betts, 72-73.

frivolous directions on the basis of whims or fashion.”<sup>63</sup> Given that women still headed many households because of absent, injured, deceased, or unstable husbands, this idea appeared all the more threatening to state leaders hoping for a smooth economic transition to socialism and stability. DEFA directors Slatan Dudow and Konrad Wolf used the female experience as a lens through which to explore issues of consumption that became so critical to fostering the east/west divide.

### **Introduction to Films**

Films released in the 1950s like *Destinies of Women* (*Frauenschicksale*, 1952, directed by Slatan Dudow) and *Lissy* (1952, directed by Konrad Wolf) contribute to the creation of an east/west dichotomy upon which the GDR’s foundational narrative depended. Both films condemn capitalistic greed and materialism, and *Destinies of Women* goes one step further to glorify a culture of industry over capitalist-style consumption. Female characters play central, title roles in both films and enable a consideration of consumption. Seduced by material items, these characters slip into immorality and only realize their wrong after they encounter major consequences. Not only their “feminine weakness” but also their lack of political convictions allows these characters to act on materialistic greed before they switch sides to choose communism over Nazism or capitalism. Taken together, the films use the theme of consumption to convey a message about the east’s superiority over the west and identify undesirable qualities like materialism and individuality with both Nazi Germany and western capitalism.

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<sup>63</sup> Stitzel, *Fashioning Socialism*, 17.

Both films rely on the memory of the past in shaping their stories. *Destinies of Women* presents a plot set in the present but refers to characters' pasts while *Lissy* takes place entirely before the end of the Second World War. Their use of memory performs the political function of strengthening the Cold War division between east and west. Together, they depict communism and the east as the moral, progressive alternative to earlier fascism and the contemporary west. Memory also legitimates the antifascist origins of the GDR. Both films represent communism as the historic moral response to Nazism and the basis for the current socialist society. In the context of these 1950s DEFA films, the memory of the Third Reich provides a point of comparison between east and west and glorifies the origins of the GDR.

### **Destinies of Women**

*Destinies of Women* offers a symbolically gendered view to affirm the superiority of the socialist GDR by comparing it with its western neighbor. Slatan Dudow, the director, was persecuted by the Nazis during the Second World War. Soviet authorities actively recruited him "in their efforts to de-Nazify the industry," most likely because of his credentials as a communist filmmaker active since the Weimar Republic.<sup>64</sup> The film is set in the postwar era but references the wartime experience of characters like Barbara and Hertha who participated in the communist resistance. Conny, a womanizer from the western part of Berlin, takes advantage of women for money and companionship and leaves them as soon as a new opportunity presents itself. Even though he enjoys many affairs, Conny refuses to acknowledge fathering any children and leaves their mothers struggling. Eventually he realizes the fulfillment of his greatest ambition and moves in

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<sup>64</sup> Berghahn, *Hollywood Behind the Wall*, 13-14; Feinstein, *Triumph of the Ordinary*, 20.

with a wealthy baroness to fully enjoy a bourgeois lifestyle in her luxurious home. He lives decadently, which appears in its clearest form when he and the baroness attend a jazz club. This club appears to be a hub of immorality, as the dancers lose themselves in the music with exaggerated body movements, emphasizing the view of many East German authorities that jazz symbolized the decadence, even degeneracy, of the west, particularly the United States.<sup>65</sup>

Meanwhile and most importantly, his former lovers find satisfaction in the east, and each for a different reason. Barbara completes her studies and earns a job as a judge where she enjoys equal status with the men around her. Anni goes to the east to work so that she can earn money and because the state provides services like daycare to help her raise her child as a single mother. Renate, too, chooses the east after her materialist greed leads her astray and she winds up in prison. Early in the film, she determines to buy an expensive dress to impress Conny. Her brother catches her stealing money from their mother to finance the purchase, and Renate accidentally kills him in their ensuing struggle. In the east, Renate gains employment during her time in prison and meets her future lover. Conny symbolizes capitalist greed throughout the film as he consistently seeks to benefit himself at others' expense, while the women he has hurt find the east to be welcoming for various reasons. Qualities that the GDR would continue to associate with the west and the east find clear expression in this film.

One central theme of *Destinies of Women*, consumption, leads to a specific comparison of capitalism and socialism. Dresses act as a specific symbol of consumption in the film. Conny's constant refrain to the women he dates is a suggestion of a certain colored dress that would suit her nicely. Renate's act of consumption when she steals the

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<sup>65</sup> Poiger, *Jazz, Rock, and Rebels*, 19.

dress takes on western traits because it reflects a superficial desire, is conspicuously intended to attract others' notice, and satisfies a wish rather than a true "need."<sup>66</sup> The film ends with the conquest of immoral western consumerism. During her work Anni succeeds in designing a practical yet fashionable dress which eastern stores begin to sell. This dress closely resembles the one that Renate hoped to buy yet performs a totally different function. This eastern product is economically produced, affordable, and widely available unlike the overpriced western dress. In addition, this dress in the east links production and consumption in socialist fashion by emphasizing how Anni's role in the workplace led to its production. When Conny awakens his girlfriends' desires for consumer items he opens up a comparison between capitalism and socialism. A western dress reveals impracticality and decadence of capitalism while an eastern dress affirms the socialist value of industry.

In its direct comparison of the east and the west, *Destinies of Women* portrays the east as progressive. The film's focus on women echoes the East German rhetoric on gender equality and plays a major role in creating this image. The SED actively targeted female support early on and officially granted women formal legal equality in 1950.<sup>67</sup> Each woman in the film who winds up in the east takes up an occupation. Renate and Anni do factory work, while Barbara reaches the top of the career ladder as a judge. In the FRG, which continued to privilege the traditional family structure in which the husband worked and the wife stayed at home, this opportunity would have been nearly impossible. Anni, a single mother with a child born out of wedlock, still receives assistance from the state and contributes ideas at the workplace although she would be

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<sup>66</sup> Stitzel, *Fashioning Socialism*, 13-14.

<sup>67</sup> Harsch, *Revenge of the Domestic*, 62.

seen as immoral and undeserving of aid in the west. The movement of these women from west to east shown in the film reverses the contemporary problem of migration from the east to the west that drained the GDR's labor pool and ultimately led to the construction of the Berlin Wall. This trend illuminates a political objective of the film to encourage GDR residents to remain in the east. However, the persistence with which easterners continued to move west up until the construction of the Berlin Wall prevented such movement suggests that this attempt was unsuccessful. Because the progressive claims of the East German state rested on fostering equality and eliminating class, women serve as ideal vehicles to represent socialist progress as a traditionally underprivileged and subordinate group. By representing the GDR as progressive and the FRG as a land of decadence and greed, the film distinguishes the east from the west along the lines of the GDR's foundational narrative.

*Destinies of Women* does more than just contribute to an east-west comparison in which the east emerges as the clear winner, however. Although the film's plot takes place after the Second World War, a couple of the characters bring antifascist pasts to the story. Hertha Scholz most clearly represents the virtue of antifascism and its continuity in shaping the course and values of the GDR. By virtue of her place in the adult generation, her self-sufficiency, and her unwavering dedication to communism, Hertha serves as a role model for other women, especially when she gives a political speech over the radio which captures the attention of a young girl, Christel who is listening. Christel lived with Hertha after the war as an orphan until her mother showed up alive, and Hertha's words exercise a "socialist maternal transmission" as her values influence this young girl.<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>68</sup> Pinkert, *Film and Memory in East Germany*, 115; Berghahn, *Hollywood Behind the Wall*, 184 identifies the generational difference between Hertha and the other women in the film.

Barbara also alludes to her past as an antifascist resistor, but unlike the strong and dedicated Hertha, Barbara's weakness in falling for Conny and bourgeois attributes call her antifascism into question.<sup>69</sup> Despite Barbara's weak characterization, Hertha's positive image affirms the righteousness of communism and antifascism. A later film by Konrad Wolf called *Lissy* would similarly use a female character to privilege socialist values and affirm the GDR's noble origins.

### **Lissy**

Lissy, the main character of the film *Lissy*, comes from a working class background but finds her life changed in the early 1930s. After becoming pregnant out of wedlock, Lissy marries Alfred Fromeyer, or Freddy, who loses his job shortly thereafter. Struggling to support his family and desperate to find work, Freddy joins the Storm Troopers (*Sturmabteilung* or SA) and comes to accept Nazi ideology and antisemitism. Lissy directly benefits from Freddy's new position because they can now afford a luxurious lifestyle. Until her brother's death, Lissy accepts these benefits and her connection with the Nazis. As in *Destinies of Women*, consumption is a central theme in this film which identifies materialism and greed as driving Lissy's passive support for the Nazis. Paul, her brother, is also a member of the SA but holds communist values. When the Nazis murder him, Lissy turns away from the movement which she now regrets being a part of, leaves her husband, and presumably joins the communist resistance.

At the film's beginning neither Lissy nor Freddy hold strong political beliefs, although Lissy comes from a family with communist sympathies. Their lack of conviction enables both of them to support the Nazi Party, although to different degrees.

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<sup>69</sup> Pinkert, *Film and Memory in East Germany*, 120.

Freddy's support grows strongest, as he eventually embraces Nazi ideology and blames the Jews for his unemployment. Lissy does not express such views, but still passively supports the party by accepting her nice apartment and fancy possessions, all paid for by Freddy's party position. The couple also socializes with other party members and entertains friends from the party in their home. Freddy's motivations echo Hans' situation in *Rotation*. Taken together, these two films depict masculine political apathy coupled with unemployment as presenting a particularly dangerous scenario, which socialism's guarantee of work for all theoretically remedies. The appeal for Lissy is merely materialistic and reflects the contemporary fear that women would more easily succumb to irrational, materialist inclinations. Like *Rotation*, this film bolsters the foundational narrative by providing specific examples, albeit set in an earlier time period, of the dangers of political apathy. However, the characterization of Lissy's brother, Paul, works against the specific image of communist resistance depicted in the antifascist narrative. The communists, represented by Paul, act as passive characters.<sup>70</sup> Paul is murdered after revealing his political beliefs, not as a result of any grand action of resistance. Although his political loyalty is laudable and represents courage, it is still a private admission rather than a public act of resistance. While Lissy and Paul's support for Nazism reveals the danger of political apathy that constituted a key cornerstone of the antifascist narrative, the film's depiction of the communist resistance itself reduces the movement to a problematic passive role.

The specific way in which the film portrays Nazism reflects socialist values and a critique of capitalism. While socialism promoted care for all and expected every citizen to work, capitalism privileged individual profit fostering greed, selfishness, and

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<sup>70</sup> Berghahn, *Hollywood Behind the Wall*, 76.



individualism according to the narrative. Freddy and Lissy both accept Nazism, but Lissy's materialism poses a graver concern than Freddy's anti-Semitism in the film. Freddy never considers his own actions, so his problematic internalization of Nazi ideology goes almost completely without comment. On only one occasion does someone criticize his antisemitism, and this occurs when Lissy accuses him of talking like a Nazi early in the film. During the final scene Lissy reflects on her motivations for supporting the Nazi Party. She regrets her actions, admitting that greed drove her decisions and blinded her judgment. However, the fact that she switches allegiances before the war's end ensures her status as a sympathetic character. By attributing greed, materialism, and individualism to Nazi supporters, the very same qualities that it associated with western capitalism, the film also strengthens the link between fascism and capitalism which formed a key part of the GDR's founding narrative. The plot unfolds during the Third Reich, but the warning against Lissy's characteristic greed and materialism mirrors contemporary criticism of the west. Through its vilification of traits defined as capitalistic, the film implicitly portrays the west as threatening and links Nazism with western capitalism.

Despite the active role already being taken by the SED to win over support from the female population and formal legal equality of women, Lissy's portrayal in the film follows the view of feminine weakness in capitalist society. In melodramatic fashion, Lissy represents a connection between "female desire (both for her Nazi husband and the commodities he provides) and the seductions of Nazi Germany."<sup>71</sup> This image of materialism as a force of seduction works particularly well with a female character whose

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<sup>71</sup> Barton Byg in his chapter "DEFA and the Traditions of International Cinema," in *DEFA: East German Cinema, 1946-1992*, ed. Seán Allan and John Sandford, 30, connects *Lissy* with a broader trend of the melodrama.

moral weakness and frivolity conform to traditional sexist views and lead her to desire a life of luxury. Freddy certainly enjoys his new life made possible by virtue of his party membership, but appears to value the change because he derives self-worth both from his job and from his ability to provide for his family. Consumption alone explains Lissy's happiness, and she seems to be truly under the spell of the new luxurious goods surrounding her. Although Lissy's weakness serves the foundational narrative by criticizing greed and materialism and linking Nazism with western capitalism, her characterization as a traditional, weak woman undermines the GDR's early claims of egalitarianism.

*Lissy* primarily supports the foundational narrative by vilifying materialism and warning against political apathy. Seduced by the opportunity of a luxurious lifestyle, Lissy forgets her working class roots and passively supports National Socialism. Her weak connection to communism enabled this transition. The eastern view of the west as a scene of senseless luxury, decadence, and individualism connects with this image of the Third Reich, specifically the characteristics that it awakens in Lissy. While this line supports the narrative, the depiction of Lissy and the passive role of the communists weaken some claims made by the GDR that informed this narrative. The film depicts Lissy traditionally, endowing her with feminine weakness. This old-fashioned view undermines the egalitarianism which involved integration of female East Germans and which the GDR trumpeted as evidence of its progressiveness and superiority. Communism stands as the clear correct choice in the film, but the passive role played by communists like Paul weaken the image of antifascist resistance informing the narrative. Despite the weak portrayal of the communists and old-fashioned depiction of Lissy, the

film offers a strong condemnation of materialism and makes a convincing case for adopting socialist political views.

### **Discussion**

Both *Destinies of Women* and *Lissy* use female characters to depict the experience of war and its aftermath in such a way that stresses the importance of commitment to communism and the superiority of the GDR to the west. The characters in *Destinies of Women* embody either capitalist or socialist qualities. Conny represents capitalism because he is materialistic and greedy. By the film's end, however, his former lovers have internalized socialist qualities like the value of industry and community. Set after the war, the film uses the theme of consumption to open up a specific east/west comparison. The same dress takes on very different qualities depending on its location in the west or east. Whereas in the west the dress is overpriced, out of reach, and awakens greed, the same dress in the east is economically produced, affordable, and easily accessible. Hertha's character also plays a key role by linking the principles of the GDR with the antifascist resistance during the Second World War. The political views which she defines such as gender equality identify the GDR as a progressive alternative to the capitalist west. *Lissy* takes place earlier during the Third Reich but also addresses the communist resistance and the danger of political apathy and greed. Like Renate, Lissy's greed leads her astray by causing her to passively support the Nazis. After the Nazis murder her brother who remained committed to the communist cause, Lissy admits her guilt, regrets her selfishness, and appears to commit herself to the resistance. In both films, the women begin with a weak commitment or none at all to the communist cause, but they come to realize the righteousness of the movement either as an alternative to

Nazism or to western capitalism. Commodities and luxury in particular represent capitalistic greed and individualism. As the women in these films make the morally correct choice of embracing communist values, their weaknesses reveal the shortcomings of capitalism.

In terms of memory work, *Destinies of Women* and *Lissy* build on films from the 1940s. While those earlier films used the memory of the past to provide a vision of change, these two films draw on the National Socialist past to define the relatively new East German state which resulted from that change. These 1950s films glorify the wartime antifascist resistance as the basis for the relatively new East German state, particularly through Barbara who untiringly works to improve conditions in the east on the basis of socialism and Lissy who recognizes the communist resistance as the moral choice. In addition to depicting the origins of the GDR, memory contributes to fostering a sense of “us versus them” which Iwona Irwin-Zarecka has identified as a critical component in community formation.<sup>72</sup> *Destinies of Women* in particular performs this function by symbolically comparing the east and the west and portraying the east as the better choice. While not all viewers would have agreed with this conclusion, the film still works to solidify the Cold War division. The memory of antifascism that it utilizes directly serves this political goal, suggesting that not only does memory influence the present but that current conditions determine how the past gets remembered.<sup>73</sup> *Lissy*, which is actually set in the past, portrays fascism as awakening a similar materialism and selfishness as that identified with the west in *Destinies of Women*. Taken together, the films use the memory of the past as represented in *Lissy* to link the Third Reich with the

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<sup>72</sup> Iwona Irwin-Zarecka, *Frames of Remembrance*, 60.

<sup>73</sup> Confino and Fritzsche hint at this point when they recognize the power of political competition to influence the memory of the past. See their *The Work of Memory*, 8.

FRG in *Destinies of Women*. This depiction reflects the “two line theory,” which gained ground in the later 1950s. It identified the GDR as the “highpoint of German history” and the FRG as “the continuation of the reactionary element,” offering an intellectual justification for Cold War division.<sup>74</sup> Memory as presented in these films affirms the noble communist origins of the GDR and continues the work of differentiating the east from both the fascist past and the west, which takes on the role of successor to the Nazi state.

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<sup>74</sup> Brinks, *Paradigms of Political Change: Luther Frederick II, and Bismarck, The GDR on Its Way to German Unity*, trans. Gordon W. Smith (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 2001), 134, 146.

### CHAPTER 3

#### EXPLORING SOCIALISM WITH *THE SECOND TRACK, THE ADVENTURES OF WERNER HOLT, AND I WAS NINETEEN*

The 1960s was one of the most tumultuous decades in the history of the GDR. In August 1961, the East German state shocked the world by constructing a formidable barrier between the east and west. The Berlin Wall would separate families and friends for the duration of the Cold War, as the GDR refused to allow travel to the west for most people. Labor concerns motivated the construction of the Berlin Wall in large measure, as the workforce of the GDR moved to the west and drained the state of much needed labor. At this point the division of what had been one Germany into two German states seemed to be permanent. Many East Germans resented this imposition, but no concerted oppositional movement emerged.<sup>75</sup> With the barrier's completion, the GDR considered itself to be "fully established," a development which led to heightened stability.<sup>76</sup> Officially, the Wall stood as a protective measure to exclude harmful external influences now that the GDR had developed satisfactorily, rather than an imposition forcing East Germans to stay put, a less pleasant truth. While the Berlin Wall restricted the mobility of East Germans, many residents of the GDR, particularly artists and filmmakers, thought that the existence of this barrier would foster a sense of security among state authorities and lead to greater freedom. For a couple of years, this view appeared accurate. Youth policy also changed as the state admitted that it had not taken the concerns of youth

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<sup>75</sup> Fulbrook, *Anatomy of a Dictatorship*, 190-191.

<sup>76</sup> Thomas Lindenberger, "Creating State Socialist Governance: The Case of the Deutsche Volkspolizei," in *Dictatorship as Experience*, ed. Konrad H. Jarausch, 139; Fulbrook, *Anatomy of a Dictatorship*, 192-193, notes that stability was both domestic and international.

seriously and decided to place a greater emphasis on modernization.<sup>77</sup> Unfortunately for East Germans pleased by these changes, they were not to last long.

The second half of the 1960s was marked by heightened restrictions, tensions, and conflict within the wider communist bloc. After 1965, the state reversed its tolerant attitude regarding youth, replacing its short-lived openness with “a higher degree of surveillance and mistrust.”<sup>78</sup> Tensions emerged within the GDR leadership as a result of Walter Ulbricht’s attempt to make East German socialism more participatory while still maintaining the party’s firm control. By 1966, however, Erich Honecker and his supporters began to curb these reforms in favor of maintaining the status quo.<sup>79</sup> The new East German constitution ratified in 1968 conveyed a perception of communism as a permanent system with its provision that the GDR would only allow German unification on socialist terms.<sup>80</sup> Just as the SED made it clear that reforms would not take place in Germany, the Soviet Union used its authority to curb the reform initiative in the wider communist bloc. During the Prague Spring of 1968 Czechoslovakia experimented with reform, allowing greater freedom of expression and going so far as to consider reinstating a multi-party democracy. The Soviets moved in to crush the movement, but enjoyed the support of the SED and a significant majority of the East German population.<sup>81</sup> After some attempts at experimentation in the GDR and the Soviet bloc, the

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<sup>77</sup> Dorothee Wierling, “Youth as Internal Enemy: Conflicts in the Education Dictatorship of the 1960s” in *Socialist Modern*, ed. Katherine Pence and Paul Betts, 162.

<sup>78</sup> Dorothee Wierling, “Youth as Internal Enemy: Conflicts in the Education Dictatorship of the 1960s” in *Socialist Modern*, ed. Katherine Pence and Paul Betts, 175.

<sup>79</sup> Monika Kaiser, “Reforming Socialism?: The Changing of the Guard from Ulbricht to Honecker during the 1960s,” in *Dictatorship as Experience*, 330-333.

<sup>80</sup> Alan McDougall, *Youth Politics in East Germany: The Free German Youth Movement 1946-1968*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 206.

<sup>81</sup> Alan McDougall, *Youth Politics in East Germany*, 213-221.

authorities stamped out reformist initiatives and traditional communism appeared to be permanent.

### **Introduction to Films**

Some filmmakers, like Joachim Kunert, benefitted from the temporary increased toleration of the early 1960s. His 1962 film *The Second Track* (*Das Zweite Gleis*, 1962), for example, took place in the contemporary GDR but featured characters with pasts of complicity under Nazism. Only three years later, the Eleventh Plenum of 1965 demonstrated the state's movement away from permissiveness in the arts. The state banned almost every film created during that year, twelve films total, much to the surprise of directors who thought they had gained greater freedom of expression. Films like *The Rabbit Is Me* (*Das Kanninchen bin ich*, 1965, dir. Kurt Maetzig) dealing with contemporary society (like *The Second Track* had done) struck an especially sensitive nerve with the state. Although these filmmakers considered themselves to be loyal to the state, they sought to accurately represent problems of contemporary society in their films.<sup>82</sup> As Germans' temporal distance from the Second World War grew and a new generation came of age, a "searching encounter with the causes and consequences of the Nazi regime" emerged that would play a major role in shaping the East German film culture of this decade.<sup>83</sup> Filmmakers at work in the 1960s grew creative in their imaginings of the Third Reich and its consequences, "creat[ing] space for diverging cinematic imaginaries of 1945 as a historical turning point."<sup>84</sup>

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<sup>82</sup> Feinstein, *Triumph of the Ordinary*, 151, 157-158; Berghahn, *Hollywood Behind the Wall*, 142-143.

<sup>83</sup> Konrad H. Jarausch and Michael Geyer. *Shattered Past: Reconstructing German Histories*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003), 8-9.

<sup>84</sup> Pinkert, *Film and Memory in East Germany*, 147.



All three of the 1960s films considered in this chapter think about the foundational narrative in new ways. On the most basic level, each of these films recognizes Nazism as the ultimate evil which necessitated change. Beyond this commonality their different approaches become apparent. *The Second Track* implies that fascist guilt could enter the GDR. It questions the foundational narrative's characterization of the west as the only haven for Nazis. The other two films, *The Adventures of Werner Holt* (*Die Abenteuer des Werner Holt*, 1964, dir. Joachim Kunert) and *I Was Nineteen* (*Ich War Neunzehn*, 1968, dir. Konrad Wolf), overtly support the foundational narrative by exposing the problems of historic militarism and identifying the Soviets as beneficent liberators. Beneath the surface, however, they subtly question the foundational narrative's rigid identification of communism as the only path to antifascism and suggest that nonpolitical personal experiences might have influenced people to turn against the Nazis. Although each film supports the foundational narrative on some level, they involve a creative imagining of the past to obviously or subtly raise questions about the limitations of that narrative.

The particular ways in which these films use memory supports their divergent functions. In *The Second Track*, the action takes place in the contemporary GDR but the older characters remember flashbacks of the past which drive the plot. Memory plays an active role as it catches up with all of the characters, even the younger characters who experience the past vicariously through Frau Runge's story. The memory of the past disrupts the present in the film, which also involves a serious questioning of the GDR's depiction of itself as free of fascist guilt. The other two films take place in the past and present personal stories. The individual memories they present support some basic tenets

of the foundational narrative, particularly its view of militarists and historical conservative groups as sharing responsibility for the Nazi disaster and its identification of the Soviets as liberators. Yet they also suggest that personal experiences rather than political affiliation might have led individuals to arrive at antifascism. The obvious presence of memory in *The Second Track* facilitates a more overt critique while its less clear place in the other two films goes hand in hand with their limited questioning of the foundational narrative.

### **The Second Track**

Joachim Kunert's 1962 film, *The Second Track (Das Zweite Gleis)*, features two young main characters, Vera and Reissner (referred to by his last name throughout the film), who have been deceived by the preceding generation. The perpetrators in this case are those adults closest to them, Vera's father Walter and Reissner's co-worker and literal partner in crime, Runge. Vera grows up believing that her mother died in a bombing raid. But when her father encounters his former neighbor, Runge, a cycle of events begins which ultimately exposes the truth. Walter fails to report Runge for stealing, and as a result of his failure to act in this instance he becomes haunted by his own past complicity in the Third Reich. Meanwhile, Runge recognizes Walter as his former neighbor, despite Walter's adoption of a new name, and determines to prove his true identity. Vera and Reissner investigate for themselves, meet Frau Runge, and learn that Walter exposed a Jewish refugee living in his garage and turned in his own wife for hiding this man. In the ultimate act of evil in the film, Runge shoots this Jewish man as he tries to flee. Walter, who is repentant by the end of the film, accepts the necessity of owning up to his past. Runge, on the other hand, redirects a train to hit and kill Reissner in an attempt to keep

his own prior act of Nazi fanaticism concealed. The film concludes with a shot of Vera leaving the train yard with her father following her, suggesting that the two will repair their relationship now that the truth has come out.

The release of *The Second Track* followed the construction of the Berlin Wall by only one year, and its subject matter reflects the new climate of apparent state security and tolerance fostered by the Wall's existence. Specifically, it reveals the perception of greater permissiveness in its daring subject matter involving complicity in the Third Reich by characters now living in the GDR. Its success in getting through the censors as a film set in the contemporary GDR suggests that its release was timed perfectly, most likely by mere chance, to take advantage of this temporary change before the Eleventh Plenum three years later. Before that time, however, *The Second Track* utilized the temporary atmosphere of toleration to explore shortcomings in the workers ideal and notions of continued guilt. Its director, Joachim Kunert, was born in 1929 and experienced the Third Reich as a child. His films reflect his membership in the next generation of DEFA filmmakers and look at Nazi Germany in a new way. Rather than telling typical stories of antifascism, Kunert examines the past in order to raise questions about the present, in the case of *The Second Track*, or about the status of communism as the only legitimate opposing force to Nazism as in his later film *The Adventures of Werner Holt* (*Die Abenteuer des Werner Holt*, 1964, dir. Joachim Kunert).

*The Second Track* takes place in the GDR, but the characters' actions under National Socialism drive the plot. A flashback to Nazi Germany, perhaps the most crucial scene in the film, reveals Walter's complicity in the crimes of the Third Reich and Runge's unquestionable guilt. Viewers see Walter expose a Jewish refugee (and his own

wife for hiding this man) and Runge shoot the fleeing Jew in the back. Like the other DEFA films that take the Third Reich as their subject, Nazism is still the ultimate evil. However, this film complicates the GDR's claim that only the west harbored Nazis because its own antifascist foundation eliminated any connection to Nazism. Both Walter and Runge bring their guilt into the GDR. Walter's past actions haunt him when he covers up Runge's involvement in a theft and is reminded of his complicity in the Third Reich. Runge, on the other hand, shows no remorse and takes great care to hide his past, even going so far as to kill Reissner when he fears exposure. Not only does the film imply a continued existence of fascist guilt in the GDR, but it also places guilt in the workplace. Given the state's depiction of the workplace as the ultimate site of pure communism, this image of fascism infiltrating the East German workplace appears especially problematic. Walter's character in particular raises questions about the separation of communism from Nazism. He is a good worker who has won the respect of his boss, yet he also conceals his complicity in the Third Reich. According to the GDR's foundational narrative that painted East German communism as a clean break from Nazism, this combination would have been impossible. The film's extension of fascist guilt into the sanctity of the East German workplace questions the clear separation between communism and Nazism depicted in the state's foundational narrative.

Another key theme in *The Second Track* is the generational split, evident in the growing division between Vera and Reissner as young East Germans and Walter and Runge as members of the older generation who have betrayed the younger characters' trust. Vera, for example, learns that her father betrayed her mother for hiding a Jewish refugee and directly caused her death which he had previously blamed on an Allied

bombing. Likewise, Reissner discovers that his partner in crime, Runge, believed in the antisemitism of Nazi ideology and shot the Jewish man hidden in Walter's workshop. Unlike many other films released around this time, antisemitism plays a major role in the film's "intergenerational narrative."<sup>85</sup> Neither Walter nor Runge have owned up to their complicity in the Third Reich and both men live and work in the GDR as though they carry no guilt. Because of the previous generation's unwillingness and inability to confront their guilt, their "ghosts" continue to haunt the succeeding generation now realizing that lies shaped their childhoods and questioning their relationships with parents and mentors. Eric Santner identifies a pattern applicable to this situation in which members of the GDR's second generation, born to parents who were adults during National Socialism, first perceived their parents as victims, but at adolescence began to view them as guilty.<sup>86</sup> At the end of the film, after Runge has killed Reissner, Walter follows Vera out of the crime scene at a distance. The manner in which he follows her suggests the possibility of repairing their relationship, but the distance between them implies the difficulty of this process.

While the GDR's antifascist foundation narrative implied unity in antifascism, Walter and Runge carry fascist guilt into the GDR which performs the opposite function, division. According to the antifascist narrative, the GDR's founding marked an end to fascist guilt in the east. As the successor to the Third Reich, according to the narrative, only the west harbored former and current Nazis while Germans living in the east joined together to become good, socialist citizens united under communism. *The Second Track* undercuts this view by emphasizing continued guilt and generational division. Walter and

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<sup>85</sup> Pinkert, *Film and Memory in East Germany*, 146.

<sup>86</sup> Eric L. Santner, *Stranded Objects: Mourning, Memory, and Film in Postwar Germany*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990), 38-39.

Runge both bring their guilt as previous supporters of Nazism into the supposedly secure, communist state. Furthermore, they have even infiltrated the sanctity of the communist workspace without having first admitted to their pasts or faced any consequences. In contrast to the narrative which identified antifascism as the glue holding together GDR society, Walter's earlier fascist complicity divides him from his daughter Vera. On a broader level, both Walter and Runge represent the guilt of the older generation which leads to a significant division between them and younger East Germans symbolized by Vera and Reissner. This guilt constitutes a major obstacle that goes unresolved at the end of the film. Although the ending leaves open the possibility of reconciliation, it makes clear the difficult journey involved in this scenario. Although *The Second Track* is not the first film to represent how characters' pasts can influence their lives in the GDR, its discussion of extended guilt carried into the East German state represents the topic in a new and more complex manner. Other films released in the 1960s would continue this trend of viewing the Third Reich and Second World War in new ways and questioning the fixed nature of the antifascist narrative.

### **The Adventures of Werner Holt**

*The Adventures of Werner Holt* (*Die Abenteuer des Werner Holt*, 1964) also by Joachim Kunert tells the story of a young man who follows his friend and joins the German military during World War II. When Werner Holt prevents Gilbert Wolzow's expulsion from school, the two classmates become close friends. Both Werner and Gilbert come from imperfect homes: Werner's parents are divorced and Gilbert lives with his mother whose anxiety about Gilbert's father who is missing at the eastern front repulses her son. After the two join the German military ostensibly to enjoy a swell time

as officers, Gilbert grows ever more zealous in his support of the German war effort while Werner begins to question the purpose of the war. The friendship terminates when Holt deserts his unit, which is now commanded by Gilbert, in the last days of the fighting. Werner sees Gilbert hanged at the end of the war, shoots all those responsible for his former friend's execution, and flees the scene.

Gilbert comes from a militarist, upper-class family and is determined to join the military like his other male relatives. Both his father and his uncle are officers in the German army. When his father dies, Gilbert takes the news in stride and appears disgusted at his mother's sadness, expecting the wife of an officer to show more resilience. As he talks with Werner about enlisting, Gilbert clearly anticipates enjoying a privileged position in the military. His words reflect his view that he will quickly work his way up the chain to become an officer and enjoy the thrill of commanding troops and leading battles. This wealthy, privileged group of militarist Germans accepted the Nazis' rise to power, thinking that the party held their own conservative values at its core and that its ideological excess could be tamed. In essence, this group expected to control the Nazis and use them to their own advantage.

For Gilbert, his family history of aristocratic privilege drives his decision to enlist. Werner, on the other hand, enlists only after Gilbert convinces him. Only high school aged, the two characters are still very young to be blamed for joining the movement on account of undeveloped political views. Gilbert's motivations stem from his desire to join the military and follow in his family's footsteps rather than from any commitment to the Nazis. Werner also does not feel any political or ideological attachment to the Nazis, but simply goes along with his friend. His father might have provided a good, moral example

for Werner, but the two are estranged since Werner's parents divorced. Werner believes that his father's antifascism, which cost him his job with I.G. Farben when he refused to assist in the mass murder of Jews, led to the divorce. When his father tells him about the killing of Jews, Werner refuses to believe it until he sees concentration camp prisoners on a forced march at the end of the film. Gilbert and Werner enlist in the military for different reasons. Their actions reveal problems like militarism and the privilege enjoyed by the traditional upper class as well as the refusal to believe accounts about the horrific actions of the Nazis, but their youth prevents a serious criticism of their undeveloped political views.

As the Second World War goes on, Werner develops an opposition to the war that grows ever stronger until its end. Gilbert's attitude especially troubles Werner. On various occasions during their service together, Werner sees Gilbert disregard the value of other peoples' lives, like when he orders that a father and daughter be taken hostage and then killed or when he shoots a German soldier attempting to desert out of fear. Werner consciously opposes Gilbert's order to shoot the father and daughter, choosing instead to let them escape. The film depicts the last weeks of fighting as especially futile. Even though fanatics like Gilbert insist on punishing deserters, other soldiers like Werner recognize that the war is lost no matter what the German army does.

Judging by the negative reactions among East Germans to the state's attempt at forming a military force, the National People's Army or NVA, Werner's antimilitaristic attitude reflects a deep-seated sentiment among the population of the GDR. Young men found themselves effectively coerced by FDJ and state leaders to join the NVA which



would likely have failed without such measures.<sup>87</sup> In 1962 the GDR introduced national conscription which led to an increased interest in military history. Militarism would thus have been a current issue around the time of the film's release.<sup>88</sup> Like antiwar films produced elsewhere, such as the classic *All Quiet on the Western Front*, Kunert's film takes a clear antiwar stance. Considering the GDR's overt antiwar position, at least in principle if not in practice, this line appears to complement the foundational narrative which linked militarism with imperialism and identified these as western, hence undesirable, traits. It portrays war as a futile activity resulting in senseless violence, unnecessary hardships, and needless loss of life.

In a significant way, *The Adventures of Werner Holt* also supports the aims of the GDR and its foundational narrative. The film identifies Nazism as a breeding ground for inhumanity and associates it with militarism and violence. Similarly, the GDR identified its militarism as one of the most problematic aspects of Nazism. It depicted western, capitalist imperialism as the successor to this militarist tradition. Kunert's antiwar sentiment, then, fit into East German ideological dogma. However, the film is far from being a "conventional conversion story" because of the manner in which Werner comes to oppose the Nazis.<sup>89</sup> Complications to the GDR's antifascist narrative arise in the specific circumstance of Werner's turn against the Nazis. According to the state's representation of its own beginning, communism alone fueled an antifascist resistance and, with the help of the fellow communist Soviets, shattered the Nazi movement.

However, in the film Werner turns against the Nazis simply because of the inhumanity he

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<sup>87</sup> Fulbrook, *Anatomy of a Dictatorship*, 135; Dorothee Wierling, "Youth as Internal Enemy" in *Socialist Modern*, ed. Katherine Pence and Paul Betts, 158-159; Poiger, *Jazz, Rock, and Rebels*, 73.

<sup>88</sup> Jan Herman Brinks, *Paradigms of Political Change*, 139.

<sup>89</sup> In *Film and Memory in East Germany*, 146, Pinkert identifies this film as telling a traditional antifascist story.

witnesses during his military service by people like Gilbert rather than because of a commitment to communism. Only later, after he has effectively distanced himself from any patriotism and lost faith in both the war itself and the reasons for fighting it, does he realize the accuracy of his father's account of the Nazis as murderous. Even though he recognizes that his father was right, he does so because he witnesses the victimization of the Jews and not because he has accepted communist principles. Other characters similarly turned against Nazism on the basis of morality in earlier films, like Hans Behnke in *Rotation*. However, even in these instances the implication of a socialist future was always present, something missing from this film. Nevertheless, this aspect constitutes only a subtle, yet meaningful, critique. While the film supports the foundational narrative's depiction of Nazism as evil, it deviates from the idea that communist antifascism alone enabled opposition to the Nazis.

### **I Was Nineteen**

Konrad Wolf offered a semi-autobiographical view of the last days of World War II in his later film *I Was Nineteen* (*Ich War Neunzehn*, 1968). Gregor, the main character, moved from Germany to the Soviet Union with his parents at a young age. Now, as a member of the Red Army, he invades his former homeland and struggles with his identity as a native German. His knowledge of the language and the country earns him a quick promotion as the commander of Bernau. After that assignment, Gregor travels with another Soviet officer to serve as a translator in the peace negotiations at the Spandau Fortress. Throughout his military service in Germany, Gregor struggles with his identity as a native German when Germans continuously ask him where he is from and his Soviet comrades try to express their appreciation for German culture.

Following the Eleventh Plenum of 1965 by only three years, *I Was Nineteen*'s setting in the past made it a safer bet with the censors, although this appears to be an incidental benefit rather than a conscious decision.<sup>90</sup> Another coincidental advantage is the film's reinforcement of the image of the Soviets as liberators. Wolf, after whom the character Gregor is modeled, did in fact serve in the Red Army. By offering a true representation of his experience, the film also manages to remain focused on the Soviet Union's role in ending the war without having to address the role of the western Allies. The "psychological processes" driving the plot serve as a reminder that many viewers in 1968 would not have experienced the war directly.<sup>91</sup> Older adults would have recognized the scene describing the Sachsenhausen concentration camp from its original context in the film *Death Camp Sachsenhausen*, a film showing the reality of the death camps to German audiences shortly after the war. However, younger people in the GDR expressed confusion about the insertion of footage from *Death Camp Sachsenhausen* into the film. Rather than recognizing it as actual footage, they tended to consider the executioner to be a bad actor and failed to grasp the significance of this clip.<sup>92</sup> This inability to relate to this clip serves as a reminder that 23 years had passed since the war's end by the time *I Was Nineteen* premiered in movie theaters. Relatively limited in its timeframe, the film exposes the viewers to Gregor's emotions to make the memory of the war's end more real and accessible. Younger audiences could still relate to Gregor's identity confusion without having experienced the war themselves, especially considering the atmosphere of

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<sup>90</sup> Anthony S. Coulson, "Paths of Discovery: The Films of Konrad Wolf," in *DEFA: East German Cinema, 1946-1992*, ed. Seán Allan and John Sandford, 181.

<sup>91</sup> Berghahn, *Hollywood Behind the Wall*, 77-78. Berghahn also emphasizes that *I Was Nineteen* marks a new approach to antifascism by serving as a prequel of sorts, ending where the traditional antifascist film would begin.

<sup>92</sup> Anne Barnert, *Die Antifaschismus-Thematik der DEFA: Eine Kultur- und Filmhistorische Analyse*, (Marburg: Schüren, 2008), 206.

uncertainty as young East Germans became aware of their own problematic (pre)national past. Uniquely but unintentionally well-suited to meet with official approval, *I Was Nineteen* uses Gregor's identity crisis as a means of understanding the complex emotions of war and making the experience accessible for those with no direct memory of the Second World War.

Wolf's characterization of the Soviets as liberators lines up with the GDR's own vision of its foundation. Gregor and his fellow soldiers in the Red Army secure the surrender of the remaining Nazis, liberating Germany from National Socialist rule. Although tensions arise between the Germans and the Soviets, the Soviets refrain from harming any Germans unless they are attacked. When Gregor and Wadim visit Spandau Fortress seeking an official surrender from the German officers encamped there, they make every effort at accommodation in their negotiations. At great personal risk they enter the fort to make a personal plea for German surrender and allow the officers time to reach a decision. When the Germans decline to surrender, the Soviets still agree to a temporary cessation of hostilities. Fortunately, the Germans decide to surrender before fighting resumes. Perhaps the most intense confrontation occurs between two women when Gregor's female comrade in the Red Army expresses her anger towards the young German woman seeking shelter and assistance. She has no pity for this German woman because she sees her as guilty of massive devastation in the Soviet Union. The German woman resists this accusation since she did not personally participate in the Soviet Union's destruction. Gregor watches the confrontation silently, seemingly unable to contribute, as these women express the complicated emotions surrounding war and its aftermath. Even in her anger, the Soviet woman relies on words alone to convey her

anger. She even reluctantly allows Gregor to decide if the woman may stay in the safety of their base. The German woman's request subtly references the mass rape of German women, as she seeks safety in the Red Army's official quarters and tells Gregor that she would rather sleep with one man than risk brutal assault by many. This reference, although brief, boldly touches on a topic that remained taboo throughout the GDR's existence. Yet the Soviet woman's remarks about the atrocities committed by the Germans imply the acceptance of retributive violence. Her proposed justification for the Red Army's brutality tempers the boldness of the film's reference to the postwar mass rape.<sup>93</sup> Overall, restraint and good nature characterize the Red Army in the film which supports the GDR's emphasis on the Soviet's role as liberators. Even its daring implication of Soviet brutality falls short of accounting for the historic reality because of the excuse which follows it.

Much like *The Adventures of Werner Holt*, this film depicts a struggle with Nazism that does not fit neatly into the antifascist narrative. Gregor wrestles with his own identity as a native German living in the Soviet Union and serving in the Red Army as it invades Germany.<sup>94</sup> He does not perceive an ideological struggle between German Nazism and Soviet communism, but rather faces inner conflict regarding his own identity as a German. At the beginning of the film, Gregor seems to be just another Soviet soldier. He rides in the back of a truck with his comrades and speaks to his commander in Russian. Very quickly, however, he speaks with a local and faces the puzzled half-

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<sup>93</sup> Pinkert, *Film and Memory in East Germany*, 163-166. This confrontation in the film demonstrates a difficulty identified in Dominick LaCapra's *History and Memory after Auschwitz*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998), 69 which prevented Germans from expressing their own grief without it being considered "balancing the books."

<sup>94</sup> Berghahn, *Hollywood Behind the Wall*, 77, identifies a concern with the psychology shaping characters' views about fascism as driving many of Konrad Wolf's films.

question, half-statement, “You are a German?” Gregor’s reluctance to answer reveals the conflicted nature of his identity. The very next day, a German officer refuses to believe that Gregor is with the Russian army because he can only hear his voice over the phone and does not see his uniform. Despite the quickness of everyone else to identify Gregor as a German, he consistently avoids confirming their observations and even reacts sharply when his comrade praises German culture. At some points in the film Gregor acts indifferently or hostile towards the Germans. He does not allow the homeless young woman to sleep in the safety of the Soviet headquarters and shows no emotion when his female comrade labels the other woman as guilty of horrendous acts in the Soviet Union simply because she is German. Gregor’s angriest outburst occurs at the end of the film when a group of determined SS men fire on his camp of Soviet soldiers and Germans who have surrendered, killing one of his Soviet friends. After shooting back at the Germans as they retreat, Gregor yells at them and warns them that the Soviets will catch them.

Despite these moments of indifference or rejection, Gregor does not always cast his German identity to the side. While he assists with surrender negotiations, Gregor meets a German officer from his own hometown, Cologne. The officer treats him kindly, and Gregor parts ways with the phrase “Aufwiedersehen in Köln!” suggesting his openness to returning to Germany. Later, at the dinner hosted by the Soviet soldiers for the antifascist concentration camp prisoners, one of the antifascists remembers Gregor and his family. Gregor does not remember this man, but no matter how insistently he states that he does not remember, this man still associates Gregor with his life in Germany. One of the most pivotal scenes occurs when Gregor encounters a blinded

German soldier. The soldier hears Gregor talk, assumes he is another German soldier, and asks him about the war effort. Rather than correcting this man, Gregor goes along with the conversation and even gives him a cigarette. When the moment presents itself, Gregor cannot bring himself to deny his own Germanness. He may have moments of doubt, but these scenes identify Gregor's German identity as an inescapable part of him.

*I Was Nineteen* presents a different account of the Second World War than some of Konrad Wolf's more traditional films like *Lissy*. Its depiction of the Soviet soldiers supports the GDR's imagining of its own foundation after Soviet liberation. This theme of liberation played a critical function in the GDR's national imagination. It freed Germans from collective guilt by describing them as oppressed and powerless, in need of an outside rescuer that could end seemingly unwelcome domination. Kind and restrained, the Red Army treats the Germans respectfully and uses peace to bring about the German army's surrender. This image ignores the violence and brutality that characterized the Red Army's invasion in reality. Despite this affirmation of the GDR's origins, the film deviates from the state's strict view of the path to antifascism. Rather than follow the foundational narrative's formulaic depiction of communism as the one successful path to antifascism, Gregor's struggle takes place on a personal level. For him the struggle between his role as a native of Germany, a country under Nazi rule, and a member of the Red Army of the communist Soviet Union evokes uncertainty regarding his identity, not his political convictions which receive no mention in the film. Like *The Adventures of Werner Holt*, this film places "emphasis on the youth, innocence and vulnerability" of Gregor, whose young age and inexperience appears to excuse his lack of political

conviction.<sup>95</sup> Wolf's film, based on his own experience, views the Soviets as responsible for the end of the war and peace but suggests that the struggle between communism and Nazism played out on a personal level, not just within the political arena. The originality displayed by these films in their exploration of various ways through which individuals might arrive at antifascism challenges the description of memory of the war in the east as "static."<sup>96</sup>

### **Discussion**

These three films remember the Third Reich in such a way as to question and stretch the foundational narrative. *The Second Track*, released right after the construction of the Berlin Wall, provided a bold look at fascist guilt within the safety of the GDR. This approach goes against the narrative's claim that only the west harbored Nazis. To increase the boldness of this claim, the ending of the film does not bring about a resolution to the conflict. This is a big change from the optimistic, conclusive endings from many 1940s and 1950s DEFA films like *Somewhere in Berlin* and *Destinies of Women*. Two other DEFA films from the 1960s, *The Adventures of Werner Holt* and *I Was Nineteen*, reimagine the journey to antifascism. This claim is only a subtle deviation from the antifascist narrative but has important implications for the limitations inherent in such an account which identified one method only as leading to antifascism. More obvious themes in these films, however, do support the narrative. *The Adventures of Werner Holt*, for example, offers an antimilitarist view that vilifies old conservative groups that allowed the Nazis to come to power. *I Was Nineteen* depicts a positive view

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<sup>95</sup> <sup>95</sup> Anthony S. Coulson, "Paths of Discovery: The Films of Konrad Wolf," in *DEFA: East German Cinema, 1946-1992*, ed. Seán Allan and John Sandford, 177.

<sup>96</sup> See Confino and Fritzsche, *The Work of Memory*, 223-224. Here, the authors argue that the eastern memory of the war was static when compared with the western one. Although this study does not consider the west's memory, it argues that eastern memory was in fact dynamic.



of Soviet liberation, which fits in with the grand, new beginning imagined by the narrative. All three films depict the Nazis as the ultimate villains. *The Second Track*, released before the Eleventh Plenum, appears more daring in its claims than the other two films which present personal encounters with Nazism itself.

Memory figures into these films in different ways. *The Second Track* is one of only two films included in this study that is set in the present with characters who flashback to the past. In both cases, this technique leads to a contemporary critique. Memories constitute a disruptive force in this film. They shake up the present by haunting the older characters and eventually catching up with everyone. Although the younger characters cannot share in these memories firsthand because of their age, Frau Runge conveys them across the generational divide by revealing the older characters' pasts to Vera, and Reissner. The other two films, *The Adventures of Werner Holt* and *I Was Nineteen*, present individual memories. Although Werner remembers the past throughout the film, he remembers from later in the Third Reich rather than from within the GDR. His and Gregor's memories (used to reflect Konrad Wolf's own memory of the war) explore the events leading up to the GDR's founding and perform an affirmative function regarding the resulting nation. Werner's account supports the foundational narrative's claim that conservatives bore a large share of the responsibility for allowing the Nazis to come to power. Gregor's story depicts the Soviets as liberators which was a cornerstone of the foundational narrative because it validated the GDR's implementation of Soviet-style communism while also framing the East German state as a new beginning after a traumatic past. Memory enters these films in less obvious ways than in *The Second*

*Track*, but all three affirm some basic aspects of the foundational narrative while pushing the boundaries in overt or subtle ways.

## CHAPTER 4

### REIMAGINING SOCIALISM WITH *THE FIANCÉE, YOUR UNKNOWN*

#### *BROTHER, AND JADUP AND BOEL*

Most GDR citizens in 1980 would have been flabbergasted to learn that German unification loomed ahead by only slightly less than a decade. The division of Germany into the GDR and the FRG had become accepted as normal, both by citizens of the GDR accustomed to the Berlin Wall and the division it represented and by the international community who accorded the GDR the highest level of legitimacy it would receive at this time. Hindsight reveals that tensions began to emerge after what some scholars argue was the point of highest stabilization, the early to mid- 1970s.<sup>97</sup> The course of events that began around this time would eventually lead to the GDR's demise, but did this so gradually as to be almost imperceptible until the late 1980s. Even after the borders between east and west were rendered meaningless because of Hungary's decision to open its own borders, some GDR leaders deluded themselves into thinking that with reform the state might survive. The variety of factors originating in the late 1970s that contributed to disillusionment with the state ensured that this would not be the case.

Aspects of ordinary life increasingly demonstrated contradictions in state ideology and practice or struck East Germans as plain frustrating. Although the state professed to care for all of its citizens, housing remained in dismally short supply with young couples frequently unable to secure an apartment of their own and families occupying insufficient space. If permitted to own a vehicle, families had to wait years for a car that would pale in comparison to western models (although it would become

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<sup>97</sup> Fulbrook, *Anatomy of a Dictatorship*, 141-2.

nostalgically fashionable later) after the opening of the border. The state's claims of gender equality also rang false for many women struggling to balance work and family obligations or observing the scarcity of women working in higher level positions.

*Eingaben*, or letters of complaint written by GDR citizens to the government, reveal frustrations on topics like these and suggest that East Germans' expectations were not being met.<sup>98</sup> The state's egalitarian claims grew weaker in a wider sense at this time when it stopped assisting underprivileged groups with an education and a good job. Earlier, these tactics helped reduce the traditional upper classes and likely fostered genuine loyalty to the state among the lower and middle classes. Now that it had already recruited one generation of loyal officials, however, the new hierarchy based on political loyalty rather than inherited wealth reproduced itself leading to another type of privilege.<sup>99</sup> As the 1970s and 1980s progressed, these contradictions continued to build.

Many East Germans lived with daily frustrations, but a few took an active role in opposing the SED and state authority. Dissent sprang from a variety of locations, from youth to Protestant leaders. Acts of rebellion on the part of youth appear the most unsurprising and do not only occur in socialist dictatorships. However, the distance from young people in terms of their weak or nonexistent connection to the antifascist foundational narrative of the state posed a grave threat. Some women actively opposed the SED, leading events like demonstrations and vigils and in some cases forming vast networks to coordinate ideas and efforts. Most prior dissent lacked coordination, allowing the state to quickly and effectively crush rebellion, so these techniques represented a significant change. The state's strategy of funneling the politically unreliable into careers

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<sup>98</sup> Fulbrook, *The People's State*, 271-277.

<sup>99</sup> Ralph Jessen, "Mobility and Blockage during the 1970s," in *Dictatorship as Experience*, ed. Konrad H. Jarausch, 349-352.

within the Protestant churches backfired at this time as the church became an important hub of discontent. Church leaders organized events where attendees could meet and discuss problems affecting the GDR, presenting another opportunity for coordination.<sup>100</sup> Enough dissent accumulated to ensure the end of the GDR with the opening of the east-west border, first in Hungary and then in Germany itself. Only with the GDR's final demise did its foundational narrative also crumble.

By this point in the GDR's history a new generation had come of age that lacked a first-hand connection to the Third Reich and life under Hitler. They received their education in socialist schools, often participated (voluntarily or otherwise) in FDJ activities, and relied upon their teachers and parents for any knowledge about Nazism as they grew up under Walter Ulbricht and Erich Honecker rather than Adolph Hitler. While the older generation continued to "cling to the reorientation that had been the drama of their youth," namely the traumatic experience of Nazism and war, their experience growing up under socialism shaped the worldview of young East Germans and created a growing generational divide in the GDR.<sup>101</sup> Because the state's foundational narrative relied so heavily upon the image of a heroic antifascist resistance, this division had the potential to pose a major problem. Not only did young East Germans not remember the context of stories about antifascist, communist heroes, but their concerns which centered on life under socialism meant that they often did not care about such stories. Young East Germans had only a vicarious connection to the Third Reich as they depended on their parents, or perhaps even their grandparents, to convey a sense of that experience.

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<sup>100</sup> Fulbrook, *Anatomy of a Dictatorship*, 203-206, 212-213.

<sup>101</sup> Karl Mannheim, "The Sociological Problem of Generations," 179, [http://mediaspace.newmuseum.org/ytjpressmaterials/PDFS/ARTICLES\\_ABOUT\\_THE\\_GENERATION/01\\_The\\_Sociological\\_Problem.pdf](http://mediaspace.newmuseum.org/ytjpressmaterials/PDFS/ARTICLES_ABOUT_THE_GENERATION/01_The_Sociological_Problem.pdf) [accessed April 21, 2013].

## Introduction to Films

Generational change also impacted the situation at the DEFA film studios as younger directors began to produce films alongside the older directors. Günter Reisch and Günther Rucker, for example, were both born in the 1920s and portrayed a fairly traditional view of antifascist resistance in their film *The Fiancée* (*Die Verlobte*, 1980). Ulrich Weiß, born nearly 20 years after Reisch and Rucker, also addresses the theme of communist resistance in his film *Your Unknown Brother* (*Dein Unbekannter Bruder*, 1981) but raises questions about the antifascist narrative in his telling. Growing divisions between old and young demonstrated one example of destabilization, but many others existed as well.

DEFA filmmakers in the 1980s revisited the end of the Second World War, the antifascist resistance, and the liberation brought about by the Soviets upon which the later GDR would base its legitimacy. These filmmakers complicate their treatment of this theme, perhaps reflecting “the deformation and dissolution of GDR society.”<sup>102</sup> Ironically, these films were released at a time when many filmgoers would have no personal memory of the time period depicted and arguably when conditions began to decline in earnest in East Germany. Two key films, *The Fiancée* and *Your Unknown Brother* both follow antifascist communist resisters during the Third Reich. Created by older directors Günter Reisch born in 1927 and Günther Rucker born in 1924, *The Fiancée* glorifies these antifascists as heroes in a traditional manner and affirms the foundational narrative. *Your Unknown Brother*, released a few years later by a younger director Ulrich Weiß who was born in 1942, also depicts the communists as the

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<sup>102</sup> Christiane Mückenberger, “The Anti-Fascist Past in DEFA Films,” in *DEFA: East German Cinema, 1946-1992*, ed. Seán Allan and John Sandford, 75. This idea supports the vision of memories as potentially dangerous discussed in Confino and Fritzsche, *The Work of Memory*, 240-247.

protagonists but subtly raises questions about life in the GDR. Another film, *Jadup and Boel* (*Jadup und Boel*, 1981/1988, dir. Rainer Simon) address the immediate postwar era to raise concerns about contemporary society. Like *Your Unknown Brother*, this film is the product of a younger director, Rainer Simon who was born in 1941, and presents such a critical view of the GDR's foundation and contemporary situation that authorities prevented its release until 1988. With the passing of time, these films about communist resistance and the postwar era move from supporting the GDR's foundational narrative to adopting an increasingly critical view of the state.

The use of memory in these films shapes the specific nature of the questions they raise. Memory issues become most apparent in the first two films of this chapter, *The Fiancée* and *Your Unknown Brother*, when they are considered together. These two films remember the same event, communist antifascist resistance, in very different ways. Whereas *The Fiancée* glorifies the communist resistance in line with the GDR's foundational narrative, *Your Unknown Brother* demonstrates the movement as suffering from internal weaknesses that ultimately rendered it ineffective. These two divergent, almost oppositional, memories coexisted and demonstrate the ongoing negotiation of this memory. Because the image of the antifascist resistance formed a central part of the foundational narrative, this memory issue suggests that certain aspects of the narrative remained weak or undefined. *Jadup and Boel* involves a conscious use of memory as the characters, especially Jadup, remember the postwar era from their temporal location in the contemporary GDR. His memories lead him to question the state's origins, which appear to be based on deceit rather than liberation in light of Boel's rape. The many contemporary critiques embedded in the film suggest that these troublesome and

unresolved origins still weaken the state. While *The Fiancée* and *Your Unknown Brother* demonstrate the continuous contestation of the antifascist resistance in modern memory, *Jadup and Boel* relies on the memory of the past to question the origins of the GDR and explain, at least in part, contemporary weaknesses.

### **The Fiancée**

*The Fiancée* tells the story of Helle, an antifascist resistor arrested by the Nazis for her activities. At the beginning of her prison sentence Helle is faced with solitary confinement, appalling living conditions, and scarce food. When she moves out of solitary confinement she finds herself among prostitutes and hard criminals. Her love for her fiancé, Reimers (known by his last name), and commitment to the communist cause helps her get through her time in prison. She also receives a work assignment that allows her to be active, helping to pass the time. Eventually Helle performs her work so well that the guards talk to her individually and even call on her to train a new worker, Elsie. Although the guards warm up to her, Helle never accepts Nazism as she most clearly demonstrates when she refuses a handshake offered to her by one of the guards. Reimers visits Helle in prison periodically and the two remain committed to one another. At the very end of the film, the authorities arrest Reimers and take him away to be executed as Helle's time in prison nears its end.

Fully in line with the GDR's foundational narrative, *The Fiancée* glorifies communist resistance with a "melodramatic love story" and portrays antifascists as heroes.<sup>103</sup> Helle and Reimers consciously choose to actively oppose the Nazis even

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<sup>103</sup> Barton Byg, "DEFA and the Traditions of International Cinema," in *DEFA: East German Cinema, 1946-1992*, ed. Seán Allan and John Sandford, 30, notes the similarity regarding melodrama between *Lissy* and *The Fiancée*.



though the authorities target them for nothing else besides their resistance. Brave and moral, the two pay a high cost for their actions. Helle suffers through ten years of miserable imprisonment only to see the man she loves sent to his execution shortly before her release. Reimers pays the ultimate price, losing his life for continuing his resistance after Helle goes to jail. The film's focus on Helle appears to be quite progressive in terms of gender, fully conferring hero status upon a female character. Unlike those characters from earlier films so easily led astray because of their lack of political convictions, Helle and Reimers remain committed communists. Even after becoming fully immersed in the monotonous routine of prison life, Helle still takes an active interest in the course of the war and continues to hope for a Nazi defeat. One daring aspect of the film is its recognition of the Hitler-Stalin Pact, which admits a former link between the communist Soviet Union and Nazi Germany and subtly questions the view of the Soviets as the moral opponents of Nazism.<sup>104</sup> This rigid characterization of communists as good and Nazis as bad neatly fits the various roles outlined by the foundational narrative.

The workplace functions as another key means of incorporating socialist views into the film. Rather than depicting work in such a way as to offer a contemporary critique, the film depicts work as a welcome distraction for Helle, even if it sometimes presents minor frustrations, thereby retaining the foundational narrative's value of industry. Helle's imprisonment appears more tolerable to her after she receives a work placement helping with the laundry, a position that improves her life but does present some hardships. Karen Ruoff Kramer points out how the banned films from 1965 take a view of work particularly relevant in the GDR by portraying the work experience and socialization positively while also subtly criticizing disorganized planning and production

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<sup>104</sup> Berghahn, *Hollywood Behind the Wall*, 80.

characteristic of the GDR.<sup>105</sup> Such a view appears to have carried over into *The Fiancée*, for Helle takes a liking to some of her fellow workers and appears genuinely relieved to be out of solitary confinement. However, the wardens insist that the washers continue hanging laundry outside even when foul weather threatens and in one case rain ruins an entire day's work. East German viewers could likely relate to this type of work experience in which co-workers provided valuable companionship but impracticalities often hindered effectiveness. Overall, however, *The Fiancée* offers a positive view of the workplace and even makes their ruined work into a comical situation as everyone curses and runs outside. Although its portrayal of the workplace would have likely reminded many viewers of difficulties with socialist working conditions, the film stops short of turning this reminder into a serious critique. It turns instead to a comical, endearing portrayal of the workplace that still fits with the foundational narrative's value on industry and work.

The film's most obvious support for the GDR's foundational narrative comes from its heroic depiction of communist antifascists who resisted the Nazis during the Third Reich. Helle and Reimers represent the communists glorified in this national story that bases the GDR's formation and legitimacy on this resistance. While its depiction of difficulty in the workplace could have formed the basis of a serious contemporary critique in the film, it portrays such problems good-humoredly so that any audience member who did associate Helle's work with their own would be most likely to laugh about the situation. By portraying these imperfect working conditions as a minor issue

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<sup>105</sup> Karen Ruoff Kramer "Representations of Work in the Forbidden DEFA Films of 1965," in *DEFA: East German Cinema, 1946-1992*, ed. Seán Allan and John Sandford, 144-145. The critique offered in *The Fiancée* seems much subtler and would likely have gotten through slightly more relaxed censors in the 1980s.

fully compatible with idealistic communism, the film supports the GDR's legitimacy. It suggests that minor problems do not detract from the supreme goal of communist morality. The image of the foundational narrative in *The Fiancée* is overwhelmingly one of support.

### **Your Unknown Brother**

Like *The Fiancée*, Ulrich Weiß's 1982 film *Your Unknown Brother* tells the story of antifascist resistance during the Third Reich. Arnold Clasen, the main character, resisted Nazism in Germany as a young adult. After his release from prison, he works as a projectionist under the direction of a National Socialist boss, Heidemarie, and hesitates to resume his antifascist activities. He becomes particularly worried when his usual partner Stefan is replaced by Walter, whom Arnold suspects is a spy. Meanwhile, Arnold establishes a working relationship with Renate and falls in love with her but doubts the possibility of a happy ending for the two of them. When Stefan reassures Arnold of Walter's loyalty, Arnold trusts Walter but ends up proven correct in his initial suspicion when he is arrested once again.

On the surface, the film appears to firmly support the foundational narrative by glorifying the communist resistance. The young characters actively resist Nazi rule at great personal risk much like Helle in *The Fiancée*. Arnold, Renate, and Stefan, the major young characters, dedicate themselves firmly to the communist resistance struggle. Stefan has committed acts of resistance against the Nazis and must go into hiding. Arnold continues his antifascist efforts, assisted in some cases by Renate. Major characters of the older generation who lack their political convictions and thus accept the Nazis include Richard Deisen, Heidemarie, and Dr. Stammberger, Renate's father. Deisen joins the

Nazi Party early on only to lose his money to the high taxes they impose. Heidemarie embraces Nazi ideology and truly appears fanatical in this regard when she measures Arnold's head to judge his racial purity. Dr. Stammberger withdrew from the Social Democratic Party and has at least accepted if not welcomed the Nazi leadership. The one character who straddles the generational boundaries is Walter. After being caught as a communist resistor, Walter agreed to spy on the communists for the Nazis in order to escape punishment. Once he begins working with Arnold, however, he attempts to break away from his role as a spy but is coerced into continuing to serve the Nazis. Daniela Berghahn has suggested that Walter's character, in blurring the typically clear distinction between victim and perpetrator, actually undermines the antifascist narrative.<sup>106</sup> Reluctant to continue working for the state but uncommitted enough to join the communist resistance, Walter represents the divide between the younger communists and their parents and bosses who have accepted Nazi authority and straddles the normally rigid characterizations in the foundational narrative.

Walter's situation in which he is coerced into spying on the resistance hints at the contemporary issue of state surveillance. The *Ministerium für Staatssicherheit* (Ministry for State Security or Stasi for short) included about 85,000-100,000 official staff and maybe as many as 180,000 other individuals who unofficially collaborated with the Stasi. Its size outnumbered by far even the repressive apparatus of the Gestapo active in Nazi Germany.<sup>107</sup> Targets of this vast network found their careers halted or ended, educational opportunities limited, travel opportunities curtailed, and perhaps even wound up in

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<sup>106</sup> Berghahn, *Hollywood Behind the Wall*, 84-85. She also suggests that he may be intended as Arnold's alter-ego.

<sup>107</sup> Maier, *Dissolution: The Crisis of Communism and the End of East Germany*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), 47; Fulbrook, *Anatomy of a Dictatorship*, 48, 52.

prison.<sup>108</sup> Just as the Nazis coerce Walter into spying, many East Germans were threatened with ruin unless they gave the state information, thus becoming part of “a network of corrupting complicity.”<sup>109</sup> Methods employed against the unfortunate targets of the Stasi included surveillance, tapping phones, and maybe threatening friends or family members to get helpful information. The Stasi coordinated with party and state despite its massive size, relaying information to state officials and working in coordination with other state groups. For those not wholly committed to the regime, the Stasi represented a real threat and contributed to “a climate of fear and suspicion.”<sup>110</sup> At the time of *Your Unknown Brother*’s release, the exploits of the Stasi would have been well-known by many. The prevalent theme of espionage in the film would likely have been associated by many in the audience with the Stasi, either because it represented a more recent and larger instance of spying or, for many, because they had no direct experience with the Third Reich. Although the audience knows that authorities have coerced Walter into spying on the communist resistance, which he appears to have come to respect, his actions receive firm condemnation at the end of the film. When authorities arrest Arnold for a second time, his resistance group confronts Walter with the repercussions of his actions which have likely cost Arnold his life. Even though Walter complied only reluctantly, the film dismisses any rationale for spying as insufficient and roundly condemns the practice.

Another problematic claim made by the film in terms of the foundational narrative is the weakness of the communist resistance. Other films like *The Fiancée* show communist characters facing punishment, but *Your Unknown Brother* ends with the

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<sup>108</sup> Maier, *Dissolution*, 47.

<sup>109</sup> Maier, *Dissolution*, 47.

<sup>110</sup> Fulbrook, *Anatomy of a Dictatorship*, 53-54.

image of an effectively broken resistance group whose members still at large appear to be losing faith in their chances for success. On the one hand their tribulations glorify the actions of the resistance up to that point and elevate the heroic stature of the communists who have sacrificed so much for their beliefs. It also represents the group as having a strong sense of community and genuinely caring for its members, much the same image that the socialist state would later emphasize. However, implicit in their dejection at the end of the film is the historically accurate but officially downplayed idea that the communists failed in some way, both to form any major opposition and to maximize participation in their movement. This ending hints at some troublesome realities about the communist resistance during the Second World War. The failure of the communists and socialists to come together because of historic opposition to one another despite their similar goals limited the strength of antifascist resistance.<sup>111</sup> While the film does not explicitly mention this specific reason for weakness, it concludes with a view of a defeated resistance, unsure how to proceed and feeling that their efforts have been futile. The communists still stand as the clear protagonists and face great risks to earn a heroic image, but the movement's weakness detracts from the grand portrayal of antifascist resistance central to the foundational narrative.

On the surface, *Your Unknown Brother* appears to tell a story about a heroic group of communist resisters during the Third Reich who make great sacrifices for their political beliefs. A couple of subtle critiques, perhaps perceived by some viewers who had experienced direct personal encounters with the Stasi or studied the (unofficial) history of the communist movement, undermine some aspects of the GDR's foundational

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<sup>111</sup> Alan L. Nothnagle, *Building the East German Myth: Historical Mythology and Youth Propaganda in the German Democratic Republic, 1945-1989*, (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1999), 97-100.

narrative. The action takes place in the Third Reich, yet the theme of espionage calls to mind the Stasi operating in the contemporary GDR more effectively than the Gestapo ever did in Nazi Germany. While the antifascist narrative relied upon a firm separation of the socialist GDR from its fascist predecessor the Third Reich, state-sanctioned spying directly links the two regimes. In addition, the film closes by depicting a weakened, nearly defeated communist resistance. Walter's betrayal of the movement by relaying information to the state, albeit reluctantly, has cost the resistance one of its most valuable members and left the group in a state of inaction. The film's depiction of weakness in the communist resistance hints at the historic division between the communists and the socialists that prevented a formidable oppositional movement from taking shape.

Although this is historically accurate, the film problematically closes with the image of the broken communist resistance group, not the image of heroic opposition to the Nazis upon which the foundational narrative depended so heavily. *The Fiancée* also ends on a somber note, but Helle is experiencing expected sadness at her fiancé's death as a result of his political principles whereas the communist group has faced betrayal and division, problems from within that reflect poorly on the movement itself. It appears that the state picked up on criticism implicit in the film because authorities withdrew the film from the Cannes Film Festival and received it coldly.<sup>112</sup> Although it is set within an acceptable framework of heroic communist resistance to the Nazis, the theme of espionage and weakness of the movement both work against the foundational narrative.

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<sup>112</sup> Seán Allan, "DEFA: An Historical Overview," in *DEFA: East Germany Cinema, 1946-1992*, ed. Seán Allan and John Sandford, 17; Feinstein, *Triumph of the Ordinary*, 254.

## **Jadup and Boel**

Rainer Simon's film *Jadup and Boel* (*Jadup und Boel*, 1981/1988) addressed the memory of the postwar era, but did so by setting the plot in the contemporary GDR in a town suddenly reminded of its postwar history. When Frau Martin's house collapses, Jadup finds a book that he once gave to her daughter, Boel. Frau Martin and Boel came to the town as refugees and Jadup treated Boel kindly but failed to notice her attraction to him. After being raped, most likely by a Soviet soldier, Boel left town never to be heard from again. Jadup, now the mayor, finds himself shaken by his sudden memory of Boel and blames all of the questions following the rape, questions intended to prove that her assailant was not a Soviet soldier, for driving Boel away and perhaps even killing her. The town's gossip surrounding Jadup's connection to Boel's story and Jadup's distant attitude strain his marriage. Meanwhile, Jadup's son Max continues to take part in his FDJ and History Club activities while beginning to realize his own romantic feelings towards an unconventional schoolmate, Edith. The state chose not to release this film until 1988, well after its completion.

From the outset *Jadup and Boel* raised suspicions. The Stasi monitored its production, and the film was scheduled for release in 1981. After two years of negotiations, state authorities finally banned the film which did not make it to the public until 1988 as the GDR neared its final end.<sup>113</sup> This particular case also "provides tremendous insight into the nature of the collaboration that existed between top studio management and the secret police."<sup>114</sup> In preventing this film's release, the Stasi acted as

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<sup>113</sup> Berghahn, *Hollywood Behind the Wall*, 137.

<sup>114</sup> Feinstein, *Triumph of the Ordinary*, 243.



a “nerve system” that “transformed the public sphere into one of negotiated bargains.”<sup>115</sup> It reacted to perceived threats against the GDR’s stability, particularly the film’s temporary critiques, in deciding against releasing *Jadup and Boel*. Unlike other films produced at this time that are set in the Second World War, *Jadup and Boel* focuses on contemporary life but looks back at the immediate postwar situation to illuminate shortcomings of the GDR.

The contemporary setting of *Jadup and Boel* differentiates this film from the previous titles. Several scenes show Jadup’s memories of the postwar era and of Boel, but the vast majority of the film takes place in the GDR in the early 1980s where the characters are still affected by these memories. From the beginning, the film adopts a boldly critical attitude towards contemporary conditions. During a roof raising ceremony, for instance, a nearby building crumbles to the ground. Furthermore, Edith tells Max that she can quote Jadup’s entire speech in advance and claims that nothing new ever happens. One key scene in the film depicts the many hardships encountered at stores that would have been so familiar to East German viewers. Jadup grows frustrated when the salesclerk cannot tell him when the clothing he wants will arrive. She claims that she does not know what will be in stock until the items are unloaded off the truck. The long line of shoppers behind Jadup suggests the widespread nature of such troubles securing goods and necessities in the GDR.<sup>116</sup> The speech given by Jadup in connection with the *Jugendweihe* ceremony offers the most blatant criticism. In his discussion about the impossibility of solving life’s question, Jadup targets “one of the fundamental problems

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<sup>115</sup> Mary Fulbrook characterizes the Stasi as both a nervous system and brain in *Anatomy of a Dictatorship*, 53. Charles Maier discusses the transformation of both the public and private spheres by the Stasi in *Dissolution*, 49.

<sup>116</sup> Stitzel, *Fashioning Socialism*, 145-148.

of real existing socialism in the GDR: the denial of irresolvable problems and a sense of stagnation.”<sup>117</sup>

Guilt drives Jadup’s preoccupation with his memories of Boel in large measure. Jadup pressured Boel to identify her rapist and free the Soviet soldiers from suspicion. An early believer in the East German-Soviet friendship underlying the formation of the GDR, Jadup later realizes that this pretense of friendship prevented Boel from receiving justice and drove her away from town. Perhaps this revelation drives his controversial *Jugendweihe* speech in which he urges the children to continue asking questions and not to seek ultimate answers. For if Jadup had followed his own advice years earlier, he would not have pressured Boel to definitively clear the Soviet soldiers from suspicion. The timing of *Jadup and Boel*’s production would have made its focus on the experience of women more problematic. In the GDR’s later years, the state perceived “emerging collective identities,” including women, to be a threat against socialism’s claim to represent its entire citizenry satisfactorily and a competing source of identification.<sup>118</sup> Considering the active role played by women in bringing down the GDR, these fears appear to have been well founded.<sup>119</sup> A film like *Jadup and Boel* dealing with the female postwar experience reminded the state of this growing threat which may explain its prolonged delay and eventual banning. Boel’s experience ultimately leads Jadup to question a key aspect of the GDR’s formation and thus its very legitimacy.

As a result of its contemporary setting, *Jadup and Boel* does not tell a story set in the past, but involves a plot overwhelmingly set in the current day to comment on contemporary conditions in a critical manner. Unlike other films released in the 1980s

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<sup>117</sup> Berghahn, *Hollywood Behind the Wall*, 137.

<sup>118</sup> Maier, *Dissolution*, 40.

<sup>119</sup> Fulbrook, *Anatomy of a Dictatorship*, 216-217.

which at least accept the vision of the GDR's noble antifascist origins in part, *Jadup and Boel* criticizes the resulting society and questions its very foundation. Problematic aspects of everyday society such as housing and consumption receive negative, albeit accurate attention, as people really did have trouble securing adequate housing and finding basic goods in stores. The strongest thread of the plot goes further and questions the very foundation of the Soviet-German friendship and the view of the Soviets as heroic liberators which formed a key thread of the foundational narrative of the GDR and played an affirmative function regarding the state in earlier films like *I Was Nineteen*. In *Jadup's* view, it was this forced friendship and false view that led authorities to ignore Boel's rape and resulted in this memory that continues to haunt his community. By critiquing the origins of the GDR, the film attacks the foundational narrative at its base and connects a shaky beginning with serious contemporary problems.

### **Discussion**

After *The Fiancée* opened the decade with a typical antifascist tale, *Your Unknown Brother* and *Jadup and Boel* posed significant questions about the foundational narrative. Helle's experience in *The Fiancée* gives a standard example of heroic resistance, commitment to communism, and noble suffering. The love story entwines Helle's commitment to communism with her love for Reimers. With this approach her communism appears nothing short of devotional, and she remains faithful in love and in politics. *Your Unknown Brother* explores the same theme, antifascist resistance, but hints at historical weaknesses that affected the movement. Although accurate, these weaknesses within the movement defy the foundational narrative's depiction of the communist resistance as grand and heroic. These weaknesses combined with the theme of

state surveillance give the film real disruptive potential. *Jadup and Boel*, however, pushes the envelope the most of the three films. Like *The Second Track*, this film has a contemporary setting with characters who are haunted by their memories, although here it is the memory of the postwar era that drives the story. When the troubles of the past reemerge, they pose serious questions about the foundational narrative's vision of the origins of the GDR. In particular, the film questions the image of the Soviets as liberators and suggests that silence and/or lies rather than liberation led to the founding of the GDR. After a gap in the 1970s, these DEFA films dating from the early 1980s (although released later in the case of *Jadup and Boel*) demonstrate a renewed interest in examining the origins of the GDR in terms of central issues within the foundational narrative.

The use of memory in these three films shapes the specific ways in which they reexamine the foundational narrative. Taken together, *The Fiancée* and *Your Unknown Brother* present two very different memories of the same event. *The Fiancée* depicts a version of the past emphasizing the heroism, devotion, and sacrifice of communist antifascists that is fully in line with the foundational narrative and the contemporary state's desired memory of the past. *Your Unknown Brother* complicates this picture by subtly including some problematic historical realities which hint at weaknesses within the communist movement. These two divergent memories of the same event reveal that the past was still being negotiated even at this late stage in the GDR's history.<sup>120</sup> *Jadup and Boel* incorporates memory on an obvious and active level as the characters themselves perform the act of remembering. Because the past has not been acknowledged or discussed let alone resolved, its memory has only grown more detrimental with the

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<sup>120</sup> Maurice Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory*, 47. Here Halbwachs recognizes that individuals constantly reproduce memories of earlier points in their lives. The differences in memory between *The Fiancée* and *Your Unknown Brother* suggest that the same thing may happen with national memories.

passing of time.<sup>121</sup> The characters, particularly Jadup, remember a traumatic time of transition which one would expect to involve some complicated memories. However, the integration of these memories into the present depicts the contemporary GDR as inherently flawed because of its unresolved past. The negotiation of memory between *The Fiancée* and *Your Unknown Brother* and the conscious implementation of memory in the present in *Jadup and Boel* pose major questions about the legitimacy of the state's story and hence questions the existence of the state itself.

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<sup>121</sup> See Iwona Irwin-Zarecki, *Frames of Remembrance*, 77 for a discussion of how unresolved memories may become more problematic with the passing of time. Dominick LaCapra also argues that unresolved memories tend to reappear later in *History and Memory after Auschwitz*, 10.

**CONCLUSION**

**INTERACTIONS BETWEEN FILMS AND THE FOUNDATIONAL  
NARRATIVE OVER TIME**

Many westerners tend to view films produced under communist dictatorships as one-sided and inherently propagandistic in their support for the state. DEFA films shatter this view as they represent varying levels of artistic freedom and restrictions and offer critical commentary about the past and the present. Even their support for the state frequently exposes contradictions. As a traumatic past that will likely never be overcome, the Third Reich and its aftermath formed a major theme for DEFA filmmakers. Oftentimes directors used plots set in Nazi Germany or the postwar era to support or question the state's foundational narrative or explore tensions between the GDR and its western neighbor. According to the foundational narrative, the communists heroically resisted the evil Nazis while most Germans, who were in the dangerous situation of lacking strong political convictions, supported the Nazis to varying degrees. This antifascist resistance led directly to the founding of the East German state which based its society on communist principles like collectivism, egalitarianism, and the value of industry. Western capitalism, portrayed as the successor to the Third Reich constituted a major postwar threat to the GDR by privileging opposing values like individualism, materialism, and profit. Many DEFA films engage with this foundational narrative based on antifascism through stories set in Nazi Germany, the battlefield of the Second World War, or the war's aftermath. Although many films do provide support for this account of the state's origins, they utilize various approaches to consider the GDR's foundation and

often raise questions, implicitly or boldly, about the foundational narrative or contemporary conditions.

Most DEFA films covered in this thesis supported the GDR's foundational narrative in whole or in part. Rubble films equated progress and a restoration of order with socialist values like work and community. Films released in the 1950s used the topic of consumption to open a comparison between the east and west. *Destinies of Women*, released in 1952, offers a clear engagement with Cold War tensions. It depicts life in postwar Germany and portrays the socialist east as the better, more progressive alternative to the capitalist west. *Lissy*, released five years later, examines Lissy's motivations for supporting the Nazis to condemn capitalist values like greed and materialism, linking these western qualities with Nazism to emphasize the continuity between fascism and capitalism. 1960s films grew more adventurous in their considerations of the German past. Films like *The Adventures of Werner Holt* and *I Was Nineteen* continue to tell stories about characters who turn away from Nazism, but posit varying reasons for this move like wartime inhumanity and identity struggles. Some DEFA films released in the 1970s considered the experience of life in the Third Reich, but did so in such a way as to avoid direct engagement with the antifascist narrative or received minimal attention. In the early 1980s filmmakers turned back to stories of the communist resistance which found its strongest validation in *The Fiancée*. Other than *Jadup and Boel*, a 1981 film banned until 1988 that offered harsh criticism of contemporary society and the GDR's origins, DEFA films about the Third Reich offered support for the GDR's foundational narrative in various ways and sometimes alongside subtle or overt criticisms.

After the rubble films which provided the strongest support for the state's story of its origins, DEFA films began to incorporate some questions about the antifascist narrative to varying degrees and in different ways even as they almost always supported its key points. Even *Rotation* released in the same year as the GDR's official formation in 1949 provides the possibility of a critical reading questioning the true level of change to be expected in the new society after the war. In the 1950s, *Destinies of Women* characterized Barbara insufficiently, suggesting that despite her history of antifascist resistance she still succumbed to western seduction. *Lissy* similarly displayed a weak communist resistance when the single communist hero, Paul, gets murdered for expressing his views rather than committing some heroic act of resistance. Films from the 1960s raise the question of the GDR's purity and suggest alternative routes to antifascism than simply communist ideology. *The Second Track*'s recognizes that even good workers in the socialist state might carry fascist guilt. Later, *The Adventures of Werner Holt* and *I Was Nineteen* identify other routes besides communism to opposition of the Nazis. Werner Holt comes to oppose the Nazis because of the inhumanity he sees during his service with the German military, while Gregor in *I Was Nineteen* views personal rather than political struggles as offering a route to antifascism. *The Fiancée*, released in 1980, ushered in the decade with a story supportive of the foundational narrative, which would be seriously questioned by films released shortly thereafter. *Your Unknown Brother* reminds viewers of the state surveillance carried out by the Stasi, one of the most notorious aspects of the East German state, and also hints at weaknesses in the historic antifascist resistance movement. *Jadup and Boel* portrays one of the harshest critiques of the GDR, as it examines the problem of postwar rape committed by the Soviets to



question the connection between the GDR and the Soviet Union, the very foundation of the East German state. It identifies various weaknesses in the GDR like availability of goods and a sense of stagnation, and traces the roots of current problems to the state's origins. Throughout the GDR's history, films provided criticism of the GDR's vision of its own origins and occasionally used this theme to critique contemporary society. Many films supported certain aspects of the foundational narrative and questioned or criticized others simultaneously.

Over the course of its 45 year existence, many changes impacted the DEFA film studios and its productions, causing fluctuations in the level of state interference and encouraging filmmakers to explore various topics. Reconstruction and progress served as the major themes of early postwar films that emphasized the newness of the society to come and envisioned a restoration of normality. Films from the 1950s dealt with Cold War tensions between east and west, targeting consumption as a key example to demonstrate the superiority of the socialist east. The directors of these films came from the older generation of DEFA filmmakers and had experienced the Third Reich firsthand. Gerhard Lamprecht (director of *Somewhere in Berlin*), Wolfgang Staudte (director of *Rotation*), and Slatan Dudow (director of *Destines of Women*) were all born in 1906 or earlier and form the oldest group of DEFA directors. They would have experienced the Third Reich as adults and generally affirm the GDR's foundational narrative with relatively contemporary plots. Konrad Wolf, director of both *Lissy* and *I Was Nineteen*, was born in 1925 and significantly younger than these older directors. While he depicts a story of communism leading to antifascism in *Lissy*, his film *I Was 19* provides a personal story about a character struggling with his identity in light of the horror of

Nazism. Joachim Kunert who directed *The Second Track* and *The Adventures of Werner Holt* as well as Günther Rucker and Günter Reisch who co-directed *The Fiancée* were born within a few years of Wolf. *The Second Track* raises obvious questions about the foundational narrative when it makes the bold claim that fascist guilt might have infiltrated the GDR. However, *The Adventures of Werner Holt* also contests this traditional view of antifascism by depicting a scenario in which a young man comes to oppose Nazism because of his personal experience in wartime rather than commitment to communism. *The Fiancée* marks an end to the gap of the 1970s in which few films addressed the memory of the Third Reich, but reverts to a traditional presentation of communist resistance. A couple of the youngest filmmakers in the GDR, Ulrich Weiß (director of *Your Unknown Brother*) and Rainer Simon (who directed *Jadup and Boel*) were born in 1942 and 1941 respectively, too late to really remember the Second World War. Their films offer the most overt critiques of the foundational narrative. Weiß questions the effectiveness of the communist resistance while also hinting at espionage as a link between Nazi Germany and the GDR. Simon goes a step further, criticizing the conditions of silence and repression that characterized the GDR's founding and connecting this illegitimate beginning with various contemporary problems. With the passing of time East German directors grew gradually bolder in questioning the GDR's vision of its foundation in stories about the Third Reich, the Second World War, or the postwar era.

Memory plays a critical function in each film considered in this study. The raw and largely undigested memory of the Third Reich in *Somewhere in Berlin* and *Rotation* drives their portrayal of disorder and emphasis on the need for progress. *Destinies of*

*Women* and *Lissy*, released during the 1950s, utilize memory to depict the east as the positive, progressive alternative to the capitalist west. Although it does not visually show the characters' pasts, *Destinies of Women* relies on the memory of characters like Hertha who were committed antifascists during the Third Reich to establish the noble origins of the GDR. *Lissy* remembers the Third Reich as displaying some the same undesirable qualities like materialism and individuality which would later be associated with the capitalist west. Joachim Kunert and Konrad Wolf use memory in their 1960s films to creatively explore the foundational narrative. Memory plays an active role in *The Second Track*, haunting the characters until their complicity under the Nazis becomes clear. It is their inability to escape from their memories that really leads to the questioning of the GDR citizens' antifascist credentials. *The Adventures of Werner Holt* and *I Was Nineteen* present individual memories which subtly suggest that people might have arrived at antifascism through personal, nonpolitical means. This methodology questions the foundational narrative's representation of communism as the exclusive path to antifascism. In the early 1980s, *The Fiancée* and *Your Unknown Brother* depicted the antifascist resistance in different ways and reveal the ongoing contestation of the memory of the past. *Jadup and Boel* follows in the footsteps of *The Second Track* by implementing memory on an obvious level through characters who are haunted by the past. It challenges the vision of Soviet liberation with the memory of Boel's rape, suggesting that in reality the GDR's foundation rested on a lie which permanently weakened the state. As the justification for and prequel to the GDR's existence, the memory of the Third Reich continued to interest filmmakers working in the DEFA studios. By presenting memories of the time of National Socialism, the films informing

this study interact with the GDR's foundational narrative to support, question, expand, and contest it over the course of the state's existence.

An exploration of a single topic addressed in these films, the Third Reich and its aftermath, reveals the dynamism of DEFA film. Throughout the GDR's history, these films used this theme to engage with the state's foundational narrative, sometimes offering support for various planks in the story and other times raising questions or implying criticism of the same narrative. Each generation of directors appears to have grown more creative in exploring the memory of the Third Reich and more daring in criticizing the foundational narrative. Although postwar films tended to strongly support the idea of the GDR's origins arising from communist antifascism and representing a better alternative to the capitalist west, films in the 1960s posited routes other than communism capable of leading to antifascism and by the 1980s directors raised serious questions about the communist resistance and the legitimacy of the state. These stories about the Third Reich represent not only a continued attempt to deal with the past, but also a means of examining contemporary conditions in the GDR. Collectively, they demonstrate a dynamic engagement with the past and reveal tensions surrounding the foundational narrative of the GDR.

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