

The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly: The Representation of Good Germans, Bad Germans, and German Victimhood in Schindler's List (1993) and Generation War (2013)

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Abstract

This paper discusses the fictionalisation of perpetrators, victims and bystanders in two films about World War II and the persecution and extermination of the European Jews. The first part will focus on the representation of 'good' vs 'bad' Germans, such as the depiction of Oskar Schindler and Amon Göth in Steven Spielberg's Schindler's List (1993). The second part will engage with the depiction of 'ordinary' Germans and German 'victimhood' in the more recent German TV production Generation War (2013). At the core of both lies a tendency to depoliticise and simplify National Socialist genocides and atrocities. While Spielberg 'hollywoodised' his narrative for Schindler's List, a sense of German victimhood similar to that expressed in Generation War is now voiced by popular right-wing movements in Germany with regard both to the German engagement with its National Socialist past, as well as to current events like the so-called refugee crisis.

Keywords: German Victimhood, Holocaust Representation, Schindler's List, Generation War, Depoliticization of Atrocity, Cultural Memory and Identity

Introduction

How difficult it must be to find a reasonable attitude is perhaps more clearly expressed by the cliché that the past is still 'unmastered' and in the conviction held particularly by men of good will that the first thing to be done is to set about 'mastering' it. Perhaps that cannot be done with any past, but certainly not with the past of Hitler Germany. The best that can be achieved is to know precisely what it was, and to endure this knowledge, and then to wait and see what comes of knowing and enduring.

Hannah Arendt (1960)

There is a multitude of literature about the representation and remembrance of National Socialist atrocity, and in particular about the persecution and extermination of the European Jews, in literature, film and theatre. Among the pioneers to study the creative 're-imagining' of the extermination of the European Jews, in the field of 'Holocaust Studies', are Lawrence L. Langer (*The Holocaust and the Literary Imagination*, 1975), Alvin H. Rosenfeld (*A Double Dying*, 1980) and James E. Young (*Writing and Rewriting the Holocaust*, 1988) to name just a few. Following the establishment of the Women's Movement and emergence of Women and Gender Studies in the 1980s and 1990s, the role of gender in 'Holocaust Studies' began to be foregrounded by scholars such as Joan Ringelheim, the director of Oral History at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, and Myrna Goldenberg, co-editor of *Experience and Expression: Women, the Nazis, and the Holocaust* (2003, with Elisabeth Baer). Tim Cole (*Images of the Holocaust*, 1999) and Peter Reichel (*Erfundene Erinnerung*, 2004) trace the interrelation of history and fiction in the form of 'imagined memory' of National Socialist atrocity through theatre, film, and public memory. The ambiguous role of the 'good German' – and in particular his or her representation in post-World War II media – is of interest for many of the scholars already mentioned but has also been the subject of numerous explorations in its own right, for example Pól Ó Dochartaigh and Christiane Schönefeld's essay collection *Representing the "Good German" in Literature and Culture after 1945: Altruism and Moral Ambiguity* (2013).

In this essay, I will explore the representation of Germans in two filmic narratives about World War Two and the extermination of the European Jews. While the (changing) implications of the many representations of National Socialism and its genocides have been scrutinised by a variety of writers and critics, I will focus exclusively on two points concerning the fictionalisation of perpetrators, victims, and bystanders of atrocity that show how these historical narratives can come to express contemporary social and political attitudes. Firstly, I will discuss the representation of 'good' versus 'bad' Germans in the depiction of Oskar Schindler and Amon Göth in Steven Spielberg's 1993 *Schindler's List*. Secondly, I will discuss German 'victimhood' and the concept of the ordinary, moderate German with regard to the German TV production *Generation War* (2013), which constituted a minor media sensation both in Germany as well as abroad: while the miniseries was overall celebrated in Germany, it caused anger and even legal proceedings against the filmmakers in Poland. In both cases, I will also pay specific attention to the way the filmmakers utilise the female body and female sexuality in their narrative-making.

The two films I chose to discuss were produced with twenty years and half a world between them. However, both films are linked in the way in which their depiction of a historic event feeds into dominant cultural discourses, and vice versa; and in their own way, both films were very successful: *Schindler's List* was seen by millions worldwide, while *Generation War* was highly acclaimed in Germany. Both films assume, and were attributed, with a kind of historical authority usually more reserved for documentaries rather than feature films. While *Schindler's List* focuses on a prominent and extraordinary German, based on a historical figure, who undergoes a moral change to goodness, *Generation War* showcases an ensemble of German protagonists, who, essentially start out as 'good' characters and remain so at their core in spite of participating in the horrors of World War Two.

Schindler's List (1993)

Spielberg's *Schindler's List* is one of, if not the, most influential feature film about the extermination of the European Jews. It had long-lasting effects not only on the fictional representation of concentration camps and atrocity, but also on the way a world-wide public engages with historic

sites of atrocity. Annette Insdorf points out that “[w]hile popular movies like *Schindler's List* (...) proved controversial among critics, they played a considerable role in creating awareness of the Holocaust among mainstream film audiences” (Insdorf, 2003, p.248). But the film is also a prime example of what has been termed the ‘hollywoodisation’ or ‘Americanisation of the ‘Holocaust’,¹ as pointed out by its critics like Alvin H. Rosenfeld, who remarked that:

Spielberg has in effect repositioned the terms of the Holocaust “story” away from those favoured by Hilberg and others – the Holocaust encompassing essentially “perpetrators”, “victims”, and “bystanders” – and has placed the emphasis squarely on “rescuers” and “survivors”. *Schindler's List*, after all, is a Holocaust film that focuses chiefly on the Jews who do not die at the hands of the Nazis but who, on the contrary, are actually saved by a Nazi who undergoes a moral conversion to goodness. (Rosenfeld, 1997, p.139)

The artist Art Spiegelman voiced similar criticism in a discussion in 1994, pointing out that “*Schindler's List* refracts the Holocaust through the central image of a righteous gentile in a world of Jewish bit players and extras. The Jews function as an occasion for Christian redemption” (Spiegelman cited in Hoberman, 1994, pp.26-27). Insdorf also notes, more positively, that Spielberg’s focus is indeed not so much on the survivors, but mostly on the rescuer, as an “audience surrogate beyond the oppressed survivor or the criminal – one with whom a viewer would indeed want to identify” (Insdorf, 2003, p.258): the one ‘good’ man Oskar Schindler, and his struggle with his dark double, Amon Göth.

Schindler is introduced as a flawed character – a womaniser, a member of the National Socialist party and a profiteer from war and forced labour, who eventually develops into a ‘good’ capitalist, using his money and influence to save lives. Tim Cole points out how this narrative fits into the contemporary American myth of ‘benign’ capitalism, and draws parallels between Schindler, the successful businessman who uses his fortunes to save Jewish lives, and Spielberg, who uses his

¹ See also David Bathrick’s discussion of the perception of this ‘Americanisation’ – and the differing views on the ‘trivialisation of the Holocaust’ – in Germany and the US with regards to the mini-series *Holocaust* (Bathrick, 2005).

fortunes (made from the profits of this film), to save Jewish memory in the form of the Survivors of the Shoah Visual History Foundation (Cole, 1999).

In a way, Schindler is and remains a conformist throughout the film. He does not question or oppose the system in its entirety, but only in its extremity, and continues to work within the system to save 'his' Jews, to which he is motivated by a blossoming universal humanism, rather than formulated political opinion. This 'unpoliticalness' of the film is further emphasised by its lack of exploration of the political context of World War Two and the persecution of the European Jews, as well as the focus on Schindler's 'moral' flaws – his womanising and cheating on his wife, his excessive drinking and smoking. He overcomes most of these flaws alongside his continual development as a 'rescuer', thus grounding this development within a more universal 'good' vs 'evil' morality tale, rather than a concrete socio-political, historical situation (see also Cole, 1999).

Shohini Chaudhuri points out about *Schindler's List* that "[i]ts unsubtle, Manichean thinking evades what Arendt called 'the banality of evil' (...). It is customary to assume that perverted, sadistic dispositions are what motivated perpetrators of atrocity, setting them apart from 'us'" (Chaudhuri, 2014, p.54). While the audience is thus invited to identify with the slightly flawed, but essentially 'good' Schindler, his opponent Amon Göth is the stereotypical, sadistic, evil Nazi, and in addition, he is also self-pitying, lazy, and vain – easily bribed and easily seduced. In these stark black and white colours, there is little room for a 'banality of evil', with which an audience might be able to (uncomfortably) identify. As Alvin H. Rosenfeld observes, "[i]dentification with such a character as Amon Goeth, who is the incarnation of the murderous passions of limitless evil, is out of the question for most filmgoers" (Rosenfeld, 1997, p.142). Due to this focus on the 'good' German Schindler and his battle with the 'bad' Nazi Göth, even major Jewish characters like Helen Hirsch, forced to serve as Göth's housemaid, only really matter in their relationship to either of the two Germans. In the duration of the film, both Göth and Schindler are shown frequently 'womanising', yet, their relationships with women are very different: Schindler is seen as charming, seducing, and flirting with women (even when he kisses a young woman who clearly resents this), while Göth and his 'mistress' are depicted as inconsiderate of and emotionally indifferent to each other. Thus,

both the protagonist and the antagonist are further characterised through their relationships with women, first and foremost Helen. It is a defining moment when, in the basement of Göth's villa, Schindler tells a fearful Helen that Göth "won't shoot you, because he enjoys you too much". Defining not so much for Helen, who is mostly characterised by her fear of and abuse by Göth, but for Schindler, who, in the same location in which Göth silences, nearly rapes, and brutally beats Helen, consoles her – a further step in his transformation to a 'good' German, and a further differentiation between Göth and Schindler.

The same goes for the depiction of the little girl in a red dress, one of the few occasions of colour in the black-and-white film, during the liquidation of the ghetto, and the later incineration scene, where the girl's dead body resurfaces again. Both scenes are part of Schindler's quest; both are mostly seen through his eyes, the little girl becoming an agent of his transformation. It is Schindler's reaction to the girl's pain that matters, and Schindler's alone. The little girl has no history and no function beyond being Schindler's catalyst. Philip Gourevitch concludes in his review of the film that:

For the most part [the Jews] are viewed either as a silent, cowering mob or as a shrieking, scampering mob. Of course, during the Holocaust Jews were sometimes reduced to such extremes, but hardly all, and never always. (Gourevitch, 1994, p.52)

And this 'silent mob' remains silent even after its 'deliverance'. Towards the end of the film, after the radio announcement of Germany's defeat, Schindler addresses 'his' Jewish workers, stating that "[t]omorrow, you'll begin the process of looking for survivors of your families. In most cases you won't find them. After six long years of murder, victims are being mourned throughout the world". Later, in front of the factory and the assembled survivors, Schindler is given a ring by the grateful Jews, and consequently has a breakdown which constitutes the final act of 'mourning' for the murdered in the film – expressed by the German "member of the Nazi party". Schindler, overcome by grief and guilt, laments his failure to save more, and collapses on the ground, where he is eventually hugged and comforted by some of the Jewish onlookers. It is not their pain with which the historical part of the film concludes, but *Schindler's*, and in the final scene of the film, shot in

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colour, the surviving *Schindlerjuden* place stones on *Schindler's* grave, where it is he, rather than the victims of genocide, who is, quite literally, "mourned throughout the world".

Generation War (2013)

The German TV miniseries *Generation War*, directed by Philipp Kadelbach and written by Stefan Kolditz, first aired in Germany in March 2013 under the more telling title *Unsere Mütter, Unsere Väter* – 'our mothers, our fathers'. The three-part-series was produced by the team Worx production company, headed by Nico Hoffmann. Hoffmann and his collaborators are renowned for so-called 'TV Events' – feature-length television films with a high production value, usually focusing on 'dramatic' moments from German 20th-century history, and often, like in the case of this series, produced for both public and private broadcasters. Screenwriter Stefan Kolditz had already worked with producer Nico Hoffmann on *Dresden* (2006), a TV film in two parts about a German nurse falling in love with an English PoW during the bombing of Dresden. The team of Hoffmann as producer, Kolditz as writer, and Philipp Kadelbach as director, are also responsible for the 2015 remake of the GDR classic *Naked Among Wolves*.

The production team's strong track record of producing German history for a mass compatible market notwithstanding, *Unsere Mütter, Unsere Väter* was announced as a novelty on German screens: finally, a film about World War Two that would show the German side, and depict Germans not as evil sadistic Nazis, but as 'ordinary' human beings. This claim is in itself, not entirely true: since the very first German film productions after the end of the war, German suffering and the experience of the 'ordinary', dutiful German soldier, as opposed to an Amon-Göth-like fascist psychopath, have been very prominent on German screens. As Peter Reichel points out:

The World War – that was Hitler's war, more or less forced upon the Germans and the world. The Wehrmacht – that was the brave, long-suffering, industrious, dutiful, decent German soldiers, in a word, the 'real soldier' on the one, and the evil Nazi on the other hand. (Reichel, 2004, pp.21-22, my translation)

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Generation War's focus on the un-ideological, ordinary German, and his or her journey through the war events, as well as the interlinking with 'educational' projects, not only allowed for the claim of authenticity, but also merged fiction and history. The series was accompanied by TV panels discussing memory culture, and a documentary featuring eye-witnesses whose real-life experiences often mirrored those of the fictional characters. The TV Event's high production value most certainly paid off for the public broadcaster zdf: the trilogy was seen by approximately 7 million spectators, which, according to the *FAZ* newspaper, constitutes a market share of over 24 percent. Compared to the other prime time programmes, the miniseries proved the most popular among the 17-49-year-old spectators with 17.5 percent (*FAZ*, 2013) – which is in itself an unusual outcome for a public broadcaster like the zdf, normally more popular with senior citizens, but struggling to attract younger viewers.

Generation War focuses on the lives of five friends and begins with their last meeting in Berlin in 1941 before they all disperse to their various fates. Wilhelm and Friedhelm are off to the Eastern front and Charlotte is to be a volunteer nurse at a field hospital, while the hedonistic Greta and her Jewish boyfriend Viktor initially remain in Berlin. In 1941, two years into the war, and six years after the establishment of the racist Nuremberg laws, Viktor celebrates with the other four as if there was no political divide between them. At no point do any of the characters voice any kind of inner conflict stemming from the fact that they fight in a war, or support a regime, that also persecutes one of their best friends, stripping him first of his civil and eventually all human rights. When the characters express support or enthusiasm for the regime, they do so out of naivety or duty, but never from political conviction. As Ulrich Herbert notes in his review of the film in the *taz* newspaper:

The problem of the film is its perspective, the view on history – the general and the individual. Five young people who look forwards to life – but then war catches up with them and brings out the worst in them. Before, they were more unpolitical, possibly a little patriotic. These five people, the film makes clear, represent our mothers and father, or our grandparents. (...) The Nazis, on the other hand, are the usual character masks. (...) In this film, the Nazis are not our mothers and fathers, but the others. (Herbert, 2013, my translation).

While the loss of the friends' innocence in the war is thoroughly thematised in the duration of the film, any ideological or indeed anti-semitic motivation is thus far from them: Charlotte might betray the identity of a Jewish doctor posing as a gentile nurse in the hospital, Friedhelm and Wilhelm might take part in war crimes, but due to their friendship with Viktor, the audience knows that the protagonists never really act out of political or ideological conviction. This remains the domain of SS officers in the film, who are more or less as one-dimensional as Göth in *Schindler's List* – as a matter of fact, the protagonists all hardly ever act at all. This tendency has also been observed by David Wildermut, who states that Wehrmacht soldiers in *Generation War* are mostly portrayed as "(...) apolitical, (...) but (...) devoted to the timeless military virtues of duty, courage, and self-sacrifice" and connects their 'lack of agency' to long-standing preconceptions about the 'noble' Wehrmacht (Wildermut, 2016, p.67). Those preconceptions were at least nominally ousted in the 1990s by the *Wehrmachtausstellung* which displayed the very active war crimes and involvement in genocidal campaigns of the Wehrmacht amidst great controversy and public debate. It needs to be noted that *Generation War* does not shy away from showing in graphic detail the increasingly brutal war crimes and atrocities committed by the Wehrmacht soldiers, including the film's protagonists Wilhelm and Friedhelm. Ulrich Herbert rightly points out that there are scenes in the series, for example depicting Wehrmacht soldiers murdering Russian civilians, that have not been shown in a German film in such a way before, and notes that "[o]nly a few years ago, the exhibition 'Verbrechen der Wehrmacht' had first been stormed and then closed because of such pictures" (Herbert, 2013, my translation).

However, the series avoids showing its protagonists as ever actively engaging in the ideology that perpetuates those atrocities. The war happens to these characters, and they are all victims of it, like the bookish Friedhelm, for example, who is mocked by his father for his lack of Prussian, manly qualities, and only joins the Wehrmacht reluctantly and with great humanistic objections. Initially, he suffers from the brutal macho-culture in his unit, is bullied, beaten and ostracised, but in time the brutality he encounters turns him into a ruthless super-soldier, proving his self-fulfilling prophecy that "the war will bring out the worst in us". In Friedhelm's case, the worst is a demoralised, unideological brutality: he kills civilians with his unit as ordered by his superior

officer, just as he later shoots the same officer when he threatens to kill Viktor, upon whom they chanced in a Polish forest. Viktor had escaped a transport to a concentration camp and fought with Polish partisans for a while, until they found out he was Jewish. While his friendship with the German protagonists is not impacted by this, the Polish partisans cast him out, resulting in the confrontation with Friedrich and said officer, and expressing the clearest statements of anti-Semitism in the entire film, which caused great controversy about the series in Poland.

Friedhelm's older brother Wilhelm, on the other hand, starts out as the textbook 'dutiful soldier' adhering, less to National Socialist ideology, than to timeless soldierly qualities such as honour and devotion, favoured by their father and unit. Wilhelm's belief in these qualities is put to the test in moments like the one when he is ordered to execute a fellow Soviet officer as a PoW; however, he of course follows these orders, even against his better judgement, due to his sense of duty. After being wounded and traumatised in battle, Wilhelm deserts his unit by 'mistake' and lives in an abandoned hut for a while, before he is found and sent to a punishment company, in which he survives the war ending up on the more or less right side of history, without any active decision-making on his part. Friedhelm, in contrast, dies in the final scenes of the last film: ordered to hold off advancing Red Army soldiers with a few pre-teen Hitler Youth and elderly men, he is taken aback by the boys' blind fanaticism, and sacrifices himself by running into the enemy fire in order to shock the boys into surrendering.

In some way or other, the series seems to suggest they are all victims of the 'system': Wilhelm, whose trauma saves him from having to make decisions compromising his 'duty', and Friedhelm, whose self-sacrifice saves the Hitler Youth's lives, just as much as Viktor, who lost his freedom, his family, and his home to the system for which Wilhelm and Friedhelm fought. As I have already pointed out, German 'victimhood' has played a substantial part in the public – and familial – discourse about National Socialism and the German genocides since 1945, with the possible exception of the 1960s to 1980s, when the events following the Eichmann and Auschwitz trials, as well as the radical student movements, changed the discourse temporarily to focus on the role of German perpetrators and complicity. As Paul Cooke also notes: "As such, might it not be better to

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view contemporary representations of German victimhood not as breaking previously held taboos, but as simply showing that attitudes have come full circle?" (Cooke, 2006, pp.77-78)

The film's exploration of 'German victimhood' can be most acutely observed with regard to the two female protagonists, Greta and Charlotte. Initially, both collaborate with the National Socialist regime. Charlotte, as I have mentioned earlier, volunteers at a front hospital and betrays a Jewish woman in concealed identity. Her actions are motivated by a naive belief in German duty, while Greta, an aspiring singer and performer, decides to start an affair, both privately and career-wise, with a high-ranking Nazi, out of her own opportunism and desire for fame, as well as in order to procure exit papers for her boyfriend Viktor. In the course of the miniseries, both women drastically change their positions. Greta makes defeatist comments and threatens her Nazi lover with exposing their relationship to his wife, and so, for both reasons, he has her arrested and eventually shot. The possible political dimensions of Greta's actions are therefore downplayed and overshadowed by the private aspect.

Both Greta and Friedhelm, the most conflicted and interesting characters in the film, are killed by its narrative. As the German journalist Wolfgang Michal observes:

The singer, who got too intimate with the Nazis, and the younger brother, who developed from a sensitive outsider to an uninhibited and suicidal front-addict, had to pay with their lives. It is noteworthy that especially those two film-figures have no equivalent eye-witnesses in the accompanying documentary. None of the questioned witnesses speaks about her Nazi-affairs, no witness mentions joyfully committing atrocities. No one would have wanted such parents. Therefore, they did not survive (in the film). (Michal, 2013, my translation)

In their attempt to create a fictionalised national genealogy that enables positive identification with the nation's 'mothers and fathers', who adhere to our own, contemporary moral code, the filmmakers follow a general trend that has already been observed within a more private and familial

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context by Harald Welzer, Sabine Moller and Karoline Tschuggnall in the study *Opa war kein Nazi* in 2002. Welzer and his co-authors conducted intergenerational interviews about memory within a family context. The authors note that in those interviews and conversations, 2,535 stories were told and that

[n]ot a few of them change on their way from generation to generation in such a way that anti-Semites become resistance fighters and Gestapo officers the protectors of Jews. There are reports of shootings in the talks, (...) but all this leaves no trace in the individual interviews with the children and grandchildren – it is as if they have not heard these stories at all. However, they use every hint, even the most remote, that their grandparents have done something “good” to invent versions of the past in which they always act as decent, good people. (Welzer et al, 2002, p.11, my translation)

As those children and grandchildren use that “something ‘good’” to exonerate their parents and grandparents of their complicity or actions in the familial context, *Generation War* exonerates most of its protagonists through their friendship with Viktor, while the un-redeemable Greta and Friedhelm die a tragic, yet heroic death.

Welzer and his co-authors also note that, while the generation that had lived through World War Two tend to emphasise their own suffering in the interviews, the generation of their children and grandchildren follow a similar pattern of foregrounding their grandparents' victimisation. Björn Krondorfer also describes that “one way to forget Jews is to focus on one's own German suffering (...); in this case, the perception of one's own alleged victimhood blinds people to the true victims of the Nazi persecutions” (Krondorfer, 2008, pp.220-221). This tendency can be observed in the character of Charlotte, who comes to represent another archetype of German (female) victimhood. In contrast to Greta, Charlotte only ‘betrays’ her tentative, romantic love for Wilhelm after believing him dead, and embarks on her affair with a doctor out of despair and loneliness, not opportunism or lust. She even begins a friendship with the Ukrainian nurse Sonja, which nearly leads to Charlotte's downfall: When searching for Sonja, she misses the evacuation of the hospital. Both women are captured and nearly raped by Red Army soldiers. Charlotte, however, is saved by

a female officer – the same Jewish woman whom she betrayed at the beginning. After her ordeal, she returns to Berlin, where she is reunited with Wilhelm, and Viktor, in the bar where they had celebrated before, and they all toast their dead friends with the same, solemn look on their faces, united by their experience of suffering. Katherine Stone points out, regarding the filmic treatment of Greta and Charlotte, that in many contemporary films about National Socialism female characters are portrayed as fulfilling a more universal redemptive function, enabled by their experiences of victimhood and aiding. Stone concludes that

They make it possible to imagine that the moral ruination of the nation was not total and that moral rehabilitation was therefore possible. (...) The focus on women in recent films about the Nazi past creates a space for remembering the horrors of war without also needing to reflect on the individual's responsibility for the political events that precipitated it. (Stone, 2016, p.459)

At the core of both approaches – Americanisation and German claiming of victimhood – lies a tendency to depoliticise and simplify National Socialist genocides and atrocities, either by turning history into moralistic fairy tales, like *Schindler's List*, or by redeeming the 'ordinary' German as somewhat removed from, and therefore innocent of, the political atrocities of their immediate surroundings.

Spielberg dramatised the triumph of the benign humanist and politically moderate, but essentially liberal, Schindler, over the sadistic and fundamentalist Göth, shortly after the 'triumph' of the USA over the USSR, at a time when the USA were negotiating their new role as uncontested superpower both globally as well as historically. This is not to imply that *Schindler's List* is to be read as a parable on the so-called Cold War, but rather that the film presents its historical topic of the extermination of the European Jews within a cultural bracket adjusted to the sentiments of its time and place of production. Similar to the United States Holocaust Museum, opened in 1993, the film frames the European-Jewish catastrophe within an US-American context. Alvin Rosenfeld notes that visitors to the museum are "fortified against the terrifying pictures they are about to see" by extracts of the Declaration of Independence and George Washington's famous assurance that the US "gives to

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bigotry no sanction" (Rosenfeld, 2011, p.64). The European catastrophe is thereby transcended with the optimism of a nation that came to consider itself the beacon of the free world and bringer of democracy and liberalism – a narrative that has permeated through American discourse since 1945 and resurfaced strongly, albeit not un-contestedly, after the events of 9/11.

The sense of victimhood in German narratives like *Generation War* is not a new concept as such, although there seems to have been a spate of melodramatic historical narratives in the past two decades, and it has been at the centre of German politics for a while now. A month after the TV premiere of *Generation War*, the right-wing political party AfD, Alternative für Deutschland, was founded. One year later, the racist and islamophobic movement Pegida had its first march in Dresden. Following the AfD's success in the general election in September 2017 and the decision for a grand coalition, the AfD now serves as opposition leader in the German parliament.

The head of the AfD party in Thuringia, Björn Höcke, spoke to the youth organisation of the party in Dresden in January 2017:

The only intention of the bombing of Dresden and the other German cities was to take our collective identity from us. The intention was to destroy us root and branch, to pull out our roots. And, combined with the systematic re-education started after 1945, this has almost been achieved. (...) Until today our state of mind, our mood, is that of an utterly defeated people. We Germans, and I am not speaking about you patriots, who have assembled here today, we Germans, that is our people, are the only people in the world who planted a memorial of shame in the heart of its capital. (...) We need nothing else but a remembrance policy change of 180 degrees! (Höcke, 2017, my translation)

It is a clearly stated point of the AfD's programme to challenge what it terms the "current constriction of the German memory culture on the time of National Socialism" (AfD, 2016, my translation). Of course, those attacks on 'our memory culture and responsibility' are contested and criticised across party lines, in public discussions and media. However, these attacks, which criticise

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the current, public mode of remembrance for enforcing a 'master narrative' of shame on Germans today, also resonate strongly with certain notions of German victimhood that are expressed in mainstream cultural products like *Generation War*, which in turn feed into this very 'master narrative'.

The notion of German victimhood, championed by those new popular right-wing movements, often connects the notion of historical victimhood and the current so-called 'refugee crisis', as an unfair attack on the purity and decency of a unified 'German' body with the symbolic use of the female body. During a speech in autumn 2015, the same Björn Höcke claimed that nightmares become true in Germany "in particular for blond women" due to the so-called refugee crisis, while Frauke Petry, of the same party until 2017, compared the sexualised mass attacks on women in Cologne, during the New Year celebrations in 2016, with the mass rape of German women by Red Army soldiers in 1945 (both quoted in Weiland, 2016). The instrumentalisation of the female body thus features not only in mainstream fictional reimaginings of the National Socialist German past – linked with notions of German 'victimhood' and redemption in *Generation War*, and the character building of the German rescuer Schindler in *Schindler's List* – but also in contemporary narratives, intrinsically weaving past discourses and discourses about the past into contemporary political discussions – and vice versa.

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