A German catastrophe? German historians and the Allied bombings, 1945-2010
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As one of the major symbols of German suffering, the Allied bombing war left a strong imprint on German society. To a much wider extent than is often claimed, the Allied bombings became part of German debates on the Second World War. In both the GDR as well as the Federal Republic before and after 1990 the air war became a topic of public and political interest as well as the subject of many historical accounts. Bas von Benda-Beckmann analyzes the German historiography of the Allied bombings since 1945. He explores how German historical accounts reflected debates on post-war German identity, and whether the history of the air war formed a “counter-narrative” against the idea that the Germans as a collective were guilty of the Nazi crimes.

Bas von Benda-Beckmann is historian at Campus The Hague – Leiden University. His book is based on his PhD research at the University of Amsterdam.
A German Catastrophe?
A German Catastrophe?

German historians and the Allied bombings, 1945-2010

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Faculteit der Geesteswetenschappen
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Preface

The World War II Allied bombings continue to puzzle and challenge anyone who takes a serious interest in them, as a historical and moral problem. In this book I analyze the way German historians have written about the Allied bombings. I critically reflect on their often one-sided moral judgments against the Allied leaders and especially on those historians who have taken the Allied bombings to balance German responsibility for the Holocaust. However, my critical position does not mean that I feel that the bombing of German cities is not problematic from a moral point of view or that I am not affected by the horrible stories of suffering I have encountered while reading these accounts. Because I have personal ties to this history, I am familiar with the stories and memories of people who experienced the bombings. As a small child visiting his grandparents, my father together with his older brother and sisters witnessed the large-scale attack on Kassel from a bomb shelter in October 1943.

However, this book avoids drawing conclusions on the morality of the Allied air attacks. While the reader might readjust or nuance his or her moral view on the Allied bombings after reading about the debates and conflicting perspectives, this is not my primary aim. The present study is motivated by a strong interest in the way Germany has attempted to come terms with Nazism and the Second World
War and sees this historiography as an important and very interesting case from which a new light can be cast on this process.

This book is based on a PhD project, which I started in October 2005 at the University of Amsterdam. The result would not have been possible without the many inspiring exchanges of thought and comments on my research I received from colleagues and friends. In the first place I want to thank my professor Frits Boterman, who has guided me with his wise advice and has kept me sharp and inspired throughout the years.

I would also like to express my gratitude for the inspiring exchanges I have had with different colleagues in the history department of the University of Amsterdam, at the DIA Graduiertenkolleg and various conferences. Among the many, I would especially like to name Ugur Üngor, Vincent Kuitenbrouwer and Willem Melching, with whom I discussed many ideas during lunch, coffee and hallway chats. For their intensive and critical comments on earlier papers, articles and draft chapters of this study, I would especially like to thank Joes Segal, Krijn Thijs, Jörg Arnold, Malte Thiessen and Dietmar Süß. I also thank my dear friend Bart Heideman for designing the cover of this book and Kate Delaney for her editing and correction of the text.

While this study is for an important part based on published material, it would not have been completed in this form without the support of different archives. For their cooperation I thank the Institut für Zeitgeschichte, the Archiv der der Berlin-Brandenburgischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, the Bundesbeauftragte für die Unte-
lagen des Staatssicherheitsdienstes der ehemaligen Deutschen Demokratischen Republic and the Bundesarchiv/Militärarchiv in Koblenz and Freiburg. For their hospitality, time and the interesting conversations I thank Horst Boog and also Matthias Neutzner, who has also given me valuable access to his personal archive. I am also grateful to the family of Olaf Groehler, especially his son Kersten Groehler, who has granted me access to Olaf Groehler’s personal archive.

Finally, I would not have been able to write this book without the loving care, humor, and the serious and less serious comments on my work by my loved ones: my brother Sander; my parents, who long ago awakened my curiosity in history and social issues; Viola, who has been an incredible support in taking care of Alma when I had to work extra hours; my friend Sicco, with whom I can engage in endless conversations over anything, and the history of Nazism in particular; and of course my dear Lies and Alma, who are always there to remind me what I do this for, and little Roosje, who has joined us recently.

Bas von Benda-Beckmann,

Haarlem, April 2010
Introduction: German historians and the Allied bombings

The Allied strategic bombing campaign against Germany has often been described as a “German catastrophe”. Considering the devastating effects of the Allied bombings on the lives of the German population, the popularity of this categorization seems hardly surprising. For many Germans who endured such air attacks the impact was indeed catastrophic. With approximately 380,000 civilian victims, the “Luftkrieg” or “Bomkenkrieg” as it became known in Germany was one of the most direct horrors of war with which Germans were confronted in their own country.\(^1\) The attacks brought loss, suffering and trauma for those who experienced the long nights in the air shelters, who lost friends, families and homes and who witnessed the horrific images of mass death and burning cities. In addition to the mass expulsions from parts of Eastern Europe, especially Silesia, Sudetenland and Eastern Prussia, and the large-scale rape of German women by Soviet soldiers, the area bombing of German cities brought the atrocities of total warfare to the German “home front”, leaving a lasting impression.

Especially since the late 1990s not only the air war itself but also the question of whether the German victims of the air war had been commemorated in

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an appropriate way has become subject of an extensive discussion. Locating the place of the air war in German collective memory has been the topic of academic publications, commemoration ceremonies, press articles, and TV documentaries. The increased interest in the air war followed the publication of two controversial books. In 1999 German writer and literary critic W.G. Sebald stated in his essay *Luftkrieg und Literatur* that there was a complete “lack of memory” about the air war in Germany. According to Sebald, the memory of the horrors of the air war had become a “taboo” because Germans had been primarily concerned with the restoration of their destroyed land and reputation. Therefore they did not confront the deep trauma of the bombing-experience that had had such a devastating impact. The air war, in Sebald’s words, “hardly left a painful trace in German collective consciousness” and was ignored by literary writers as well as by historians.\(^2\) Three years later Jörg Friedrich’s *Der Brand* (2002) attempted to fill this gap in German collective memory, with a vivid description of Germans suffering under the Allied bombings. The strong public response to his book and the discussion it provoked seemed to confirm Sebald’s conviction that until this moment the air war had been subject to a generally accepted public taboo.\(^3\) In the following years, in all sections of the German press and media, from popular historical books to television series, two related questions were passionately discussed. While the moral implications and effectiveness of the Allied air war were debated, the question “whether or not the Germans should regard themselves as victims” became a central issue.\(^4\) This debate coincided with an increased interest in other forms

\(^4\) Especially see: Lothar Kettenacker, ed. *Ein Volk von Opfern. Die neue Debatte um den Bombenkrieg 1940-1945* (Berlin: 2003) and the special issue of German magazine *Der Spiegel* later printed as a volume: Stephan Burgdorff and Wolfgang Bayer, eds., *Als Feuer vom Him-
of “German suffering” like the mass rape of German women by Russian soldiers and the mass expulsions.5

Reflecting on this increased public interest in German suffering, academic studies have sought an explanation for this apparent shift in German historical culture.6 To put this shift into perspective scholars started to search for longer continuities in the way the expulsion and the air war had been remembered, commemorated and interpreted. In his groundbreaking study, Robert Moeller pointed out the strong emphasis on German suffering in the Federal Republic during the 1950s.7 In reaction to Sebald, literary scholars have analyzed the different ways in which German writers had dealt with this traumatic experience.8 Also, different studies have stressed the political exploitation of the bombing of Dresden in East German propaganda.9 More recently, the locally focused research by Jörg Arnold,
Malte Thiessen and Neil Gregor has shown that also in West Germany, the Allied bombing experience became a central reference point for local memory cultures.\textsuperscript{10} These researchers look into urban “memory cultures” of the air war as a complex interplay between different actors, who publicly represent different versions of the past in a variety of forms.\textsuperscript{11} In the light of the great number of contributions to the study of German memory of the air war it is striking, how little attention has been given to the study of historiography. The study of local memory cultures by Thiessen and Arnold has shown that local historiography played an important role in a broader discourse on how the local past was to be remembered and interpreted. Local historians did not only provide factual knowledge about the history of the bombings of cities like Kassel or Hamburg, but often confirmed urban myths and actively connected the history of the bombings to local identity issues. While these local studies indicate that historians of the Allied bombings were heavily involved in a broader discourse on the past, the interplay between historical research and a broader public memory of the bombings has only become subject of serious study in local contexts.\textsuperscript{12} Consequently, general historical accounts on the Allied bombings have largely been neglected as a subject of research. But more importantly, since most local histories have been written by amateur historians, the role of

\footnotesize{Schmidt (Paderborn: 2002) 189-208.}


\textsuperscript{12} Thiessen, \textit{Eingebrannt ins Gedächtnis} 219ff.
professional academic historiography has largely been left out of this discussion.

This is a remarkable lacuna compared to the historiography of the German expulsions. Robert Moeller and Matthias Beer have shown for the 1950s, how historical research on the expulsions was influenced by identity politics and a broader public debate on history. By contrast, studies on the reception of the Allied bombings have mainly focused on the recent public debate, on literary works and local memory cultures. The German historiography of the air war has been part of this discussion only indirectly and has led to different assumptions.

Regarding the German historiography of the Allied bombings two contradictory conclusions have been drawn. In the first place, the historiography of the air war, or the apparent lack of German historical accounts on the air war was discussed in the context of Sebald’s taboo theory. Sebald stated that the German “guild of historians” had, with the exception of some earlier work by Jörg Friedrich “failed to produce a comprehensive or even a basic study” of the Allied bombings. This lacuna in German historiography, according to Sebald, was a central element of the “scandalous deficit” in German memory regarding the air war.


14 Sebald, Luftkrieg und Literatur 76.
On the other hand, various critics have refuted Sebald’s taboo-thesis and indicated the existence of a longer tradition of German historical accounts. Moreover, many contributions to the recent debate conclude that since the 1990s academic historians have approached the Allied bombings in a radically different manner than popular accounts. For example, Stefan Berger and Chris Lorenz both have argued that the recent discourse of German suffering was primarily located in the field of popular memory culture.\(^\text{15}\) In their discussion on the recent interest in German suffering, Berger and Lorenz make a strong distinction between the popular debate and a historical guild, which had largely freed itself from the victim-centered discourse of the 1950s. According to Berger and Lorenz, the recent focus on German victimhood is a discourse that was carried by non-academic publicists like Jörg Friedrich and not by professional historians, who were “not concerned with somehow offsetting German suffering against German guilt”.\(^\text{16}\)

With this, Berger and Lorenz have suggested two things. First, they imply that until recently German historians have addressed German suffering mainly to “balance” German guilt. In his general analysis of the relation of German historians to the Nazi past, Lorenz argues that before 1990 the German historians’ position towards the history of Nazism can be best understood as a tense interrelationship between the way they have dealt with the “German catastrophe” as a tragic history of German downfall and suffering, and with the “Jewish catastrophe” as the history of Jewish suffering and German guilt. Following the conclusions drawn

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by Nicholas Berg in Der Holocaust und die westdeutschen Historiker (2003), Lorenz argued that German historians, while accepting “German guilt” and the Holocaust as important symbolic reference points, before 1990 largely ignored the Nazi genocide as a subject of study.\textsuperscript{17} He also indicates a strong tradition among German historians to “repress” German responsibility for the Holocaust. By distinguishing the Germans collectively from Hitler and a small group of criminal perpetrators, and by balancing the suffering of Jews against the suffering of Germans, both groups were portrayed as equal victims of the Second World War. In this way, discussing German suffering was always under the surface interrelated with the discourse on the Holocaust, either as a form of ignoring the German crimes or as a means to settle scores between what the Germans had done and what they had suffered.\textsuperscript{18}

Lorenz’ and Berger’s second suggestion is that in recent academic German historiography the air war was approached in a different way and that academic historians dealing with the expulsions or the air war no longer tried to balance German guilt against German victimhood. With this they suggest a paradigmatic turning point in 1990, and a clear difference between recent “popular” works like Friedrich’s Der Brand and current academic historical research. Their second conclusion, moreover, does not only indicate a shift in German historiography, but addresses the relationship between popular and academic accounts and the tension between memory culture and historiography since 1990.

\textsuperscript{17} E.g. Nicolas Berg, Der Holocaust und die westdeutschen Historiker. Erforschung und Erinnerung (Göttingen: 2003).

\textsuperscript{18} Lorenz, “Twee soorten catastrofe” 175-207. E.g. the remarks on this relationship by Aleida Assmann, who argues that the discourses on German guilt and German suffering largely exclude each other. It is from this conclusion that she has explained that themes like the Allied bombings for a long time could not form a coherent and commonly accepted narrative: Assmann, Der lange Schatten 184, 185, 199-204; Aleida Assmann, “On the (In) Compatibility of Guilt and Suffering in German Memory,” German life and letters 59, no. 2 (2006) 187-200.
What is missing in the few accounts that have addressed the German historiography of the Allied bombings, is a more detailed analysis of these German accounts, and of the question to what extent both before and after 1990, these accounts reflected a narrative of German suffering. While authors such as Lorenz and Berger have given only a very general impression of earlier works and concentrate on recent developments, I will take their assumptions as a starting point for an examination of the German historiography of the Allied bombings since 1945. I will explore to what degree these German historical accounts were concerned with balancing the suffering of Germans under the Allied bombings with the suffering of the victims of Nazism, and whether the history of the air war formed a “counter-narrative” against the idea that the Germans as a collective were guilty of the Nazi crimes.

After first pointing out which interpretations of the Allied bombings became dominant in the early GDR and Federal Republic I will analyze the process of “professionalization” of this German historiography since the 1970s. Under what circumstances did German academic historians begin to study the Allied bombings and to what extent did their work relate to pre-existing “popular” interpretations? The recent developments characterized by Berger and Lorenz can be analyzed from the perspective of a longer existing relationship between academic historiography, popular accounts and public debates on memory. This also opens a new view on their conclusion that after 1990 a German victim’s perspective no longer dominated German academic historiography of the Allied bombings. Did German historians gradually extract themselves from popular myths and develop a more distanced perspective? And to what degree was such a victim-centered perspective contested and replaced by alternative interpretations?
A German historiography on the air war: considerations on approach and methods

In this book I look for patterns in the way German historiography explained, interpreted and narrated the Allied bombings, and locate the conditions under which certain interpretations and narratives became dominant. This approach exceeds traditional historiography in the sense that it does not focus on monographs by academic historians alone. It regards historiography as a part of a wider discourse, in which different groups and actors take part. Also, it is interested in the degree to which general debates over identity memory and coming to terms with the Nazi past in Germany influenced the representations of the Second World War in the works of German historians.¹⁹

This means that I will also look beyond the historical works, and look into other levels at which this discourse took place. My analysis will therefore include correspondence, lectures, reviews, press articles and interviews with historians and an examination of their personal, political and institutional backgrounds. In the case of East German historians it will also include reports written for the Stasi, which sometimes directly reflected the political significance of historical disputes. Both published and unpublished texts will be used to analyze the way German historians provided the history of the air war with contemporary meaning.

Also, such an approach to historiography includes the work of non-academic historians and acknowledges that amateurs took part in the same historical discourse as professionals. When regarding the historiography of the air war, it becomes clear that this was the work not only of professionally trained and academically based historians but also of “laymen”. As especially Götz Bergander’s Dresden im Luftkrieg (1977) and Jörg Friedrich’s Der Brand (2002) illustrate, many

¹⁹ Berg, Der Holocaust 7-46.
German studies were written by historians who did not hold academic positions, but who nevertheless strongly influenced and interacted with the work of academic historians. Moreover, by discussing non-academic historians like Bergander and Friedrich, the often suggested difference between academic and non-academic approaches can be re-examined.

In my approach to the ways German historians have interpreted the Allied bombings, I also discuss the interrelationship between “memory” and “history”. On the one hand, history and memory can be regarded as distinct ways of approaching the past. While history is engaged in establishing facts and looks for causal relations between different events and for motives, memory focuses on experiences and furnishes these with meaning for the present. While memory is centered on a continuity and connection between the past and the present, history emphasizes the distance between past and present and treats the past as something that can be established in its own right. On the other hand, while such a distinction is useful to understand different ways of approaching the past, it is also important to recognize that these two levels interact with each other. As Ann Rigney has pointed out, the historical discourse necessarily “represents past events at the same time as it considers them retrospectively from a particular distance and reveals their significance for a later public”. Historians therefore are always not only engaged in “establishing facts” but also ascribe meaning to the past retrospectively. Their perspectives and interests are influenced by their political back-


grounds and “horizon of values”.  

The present study does not treat this historiography as a linear process of historical research which gradually develops a higher degree of historical knowledge and insight but poses the question, to what extent is the representation of history also influenced by a memory-discourse, which looks for meaning of the past in the present? It intends to show how the effort to reconstruct the past was influenced by a consideration of what aspects of the past should be remembered and in what ways this past was thought to be meaningful for the present. How did these historians integrate their views on current political and identity-related issues into their historical works on the Allied bombings? Moreover, the question will be asked, to what degree were academic historians more concerned with “history” and amateurs primarily focused on “memory”? Did academic historians gradually reflect a growing distance to the debates over memory?

In my analysis of this historiography I will look into the explicit historical and moral arguments made in these works. Analyzing the way German accounts have explained the Allied bombings also means asking how they have judged the air war morally. The Allied bombings were a highly controversial form of warfare in which many civilians were killed and even during the war they inspired considerable controversy over their morality and legitimacy. Consequently, the question of their moral and legal status has never been absent from the way they have been historically explained and contextualized. On the contrary, the morality of the strategic and political considerations of the Allied leaders has been a central trope in

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this historiography. I will therefore also look into the question of how these historical works judged the morality of the Allied bombings. To what extent was there a general consensus that the Allied bombings were illegitimate and immoral and which arguments and narrative structures supported this point?

Parallel to the explicit moral and historical argumentations in these accounts I will analyze their narrative structure. First, I will examine the role of the different “historical actors”. In the history of the air war, the way central actors, such as the British Chief of Bomber Command Arthur Harris, or the often collectively appearing “German people” were portrayed, form a central element of the interpretations and the moral implications transmitted in these histories. The degree to which such actors were morally denounced or exonerated highly influenced the broader narrative of the Allied bombings.

Secondly, though almost all historical texts follow a chronologic order, the question of where a story begins and where it ends has strong effects on the interpretation of history. In the case of the air war, the temporal dimension seems to be a very relevant factor, which is closely connected to the question of causality. Where were the roots of the history of the air war located? Can they be found in the development of military thought in England and America, the nations that

23 On the analysis of historiography as narratives: Hayden White, *Metahistory: the historical imagination in nineteenth-century Europe* (Baltimore: 1973). More recently historians like Konrad Jarausch, Michael Geyer, Krijn Thijs and Jan Eckel, though not fully subscribing Haydn White’s theoretical conclusions have attempted to define a set of criteria by which specific German discourses on the past can be analyzed. The following criteria are to an important degree based on their work. While this study, as will be argued below, does not fully adopt such a narratological approach, it does accept their premise that historical accounts can also be seen as narratives and that their narrative structure is an important element of their construction of the past in historical texts on history. Jan Eckel, “Der Sinn der Erzählung. Die narratologische Diskussion in der Geschichtswissenschaft und das Beispiel der Weimargeschichtsschreibung,” in *Neue Zugänge zur Geschichte der Geschichtswissenschaft*, ed. Jan Eckel and Thomas Etzemüller (Göttingen: 2007) 201-229; Rigney, *Rhetoric of historical representation*; Krijn Thijs, *Drei Geschichten, eine Stadt. Die Berliner Stadtjubiläen 1937 und 1987* (Köln: 2008) 286-291. Konrad H. Jarausch and Michael Geyer, *Shattered past. Reconstructing German Histories* (Princeton, N.J.: 2003).
were ultimately to execute the massive city bombing of German cities? Or did the Second World War, starting with the German air attacks on cities in Poland, England and the Netherlands, form the beginning of this history?

Thirdly, I will look into the context within which the air war is historically explained. To what extent was the history of the air war related to and contextualized in a broader history of the Second World War? Were the allied bombings seen in a context of German aggression and the crimes committed under the Third Reich? To look more deeply into this problem, I will also analyze the different ways in which German historians in East and West dealt or failed to deal with this broader history of the Second World War. What were the effects for the narrative when specific historical backgrounds of the Second World War were not mentioned? And to what extent did German historians look for “alternative contexts”, like the military history of England and America, to replace the German war aggression as the primary historical framework, from which the massive bombing of German cities could be explained?

In the fourth place, I will specifically examine the functioning of historical comparisons in these accounts. Historical comparisons with other bombings, war crimes and catastrophes have played an important role in applying a broader meaning to the Allied bombings. Such comparisons determine to a significant degree the way the Allied bombings are contextualized both morally and historically. The way the Allied air raids were compared with the German bombings on cities like Rotterdam and Warsaw relates to the question of guilt and responsibility. Also, parallels between the “conventional” attacks on German cities and the atomic bombs that destroyed Hiroshima and Nagasaki, related the air war against Germany indirectly to the postwar threat of a future nuclear war between the
USA and the Soviet Union. But comparisons could also be made with bombings in current conflicts, for example with the war in Vietnam during the 1960s or more recently with the war in Iraq in 2003, which could apply a contemporary political significance to the British and American bombings of German cities. But comparisons with the Holocaust in particular became a sensitive issue that related the air war to the ultimate symbol of German perpetratorship. I will analyze the degree to which German historians at different moments and from different political perspectives suggested moral and historical parallels between the bombings and the Holocaust, and the aims of such a comparison.

*The Allied bombings and the “master narratives” of German national history*

To be able to locate the extent to which these accounts were influenced by identity issues, this analysis also looks at the way the bombings were integrated into different overarching *master narratives* of German history. Since the end of the 1990s the term master narrative has often been used to illustrate the interplay of competing versions of German national history, mainly referring to the relationship between historical perspectives and political legitimacy. In particular, the work of Konrad Jarausch, Martin Sabrow and Michael Geyer has shown that German historical culture can be regarded as a discursive field in which various overarching narratives on German history compete with one another.24 In several volumes on German historical culture Jarausch and Sabrow have applied the terms

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24 This does not mean that a master narrative only refers to a *national* history. Other categories such as class, gender and regional or supra-national territorial spaces can also form the basis of a master narrative. However, the nation as the dominant political entity often serves as the most important starting point for a master narrative. For an analysis of the alternatives to national historical identity see: Chris Lorenz, “Representations of identity: ethnicity, race, class, gender and religion. An introduction to conceptual history,” in *The contested nation. Ethnicity, class, religion and gender in national histories*, ed. Stefan Berger and Chris Lorenz, *Writing the nation series* (Basingstoke: 2008) 24-59.
master narrative and counter-narrative to illuminate general trends in German historical culture and to define the relationship between academic historiography and popular memory culture. Sabrow and Jarausch see master narratives as coherent versions of the past, with a clearly defined perspective, which do not only serve as a starting point for professional historians but are also accepted as a dominant interpretation in the public sphere.25 In *Shattered Past* Konrad Jarausch and Michael Geyer more comprehensively locate different competing narratives of German history. Their study shows that there are different competing versions of the German past and different “counter-narratives” which actively challenged dominant interpretations.26

In their efforts to define a set of elements which are at play in the formation of such master narratives, Jarausch, Geyer and Sabrow look for the different discursive and narrative patterns from which a meaningful story is constructed. On the other hand, in studying the *dominance* of certain narratives, Sabrow and Jarausch not only concentrate on the narrative structures but also on the political function and social power of a specific version of the past. As they rightly point out, it is only through materialization, institutionalization and the conveying through symbols and media that a version of the past gains social and political influence. Dominant perspectives therefore also become part of official “memory politics”, in which a certain version of the past is connected to current political issues and utilized by political elites for the purpose of identity construction in the present.27 Also, as

26 Jarausch and Geyer, *Shattered past*.
they point out, interpretations always have to compete with other versions, and need to be defended and propagated against other narratives. Even though master narratives are defined by their dominance over other versions, often referred to as *counter*-narratives, they rarely have a monopoly over the past.\(^{28}\)

This means that there is always an interrelationship between different and competing versions of the national past, seeking dominance over earlier or other existing versions. In the case of the divided postwar German states, this also means that a narrative of German history had to deal with the postwar political reality in which the German nation was divided into two new German states with two competing political systems. Due to the political division and the discrediting of German nationalism after the war and the Holocaust, East and West German perspectives on the national past not only had a problematic relationship towards earlier historiography that had dominated German historical culture before 1945. It also meant that now two ideologically competing states defined their master narratives in opposition to each other, each claiming to be the “better” Germany.\(^{29}\) But also within East and West Germany a monopoly over the past was never fully reached, and in different degrees master narratives were always contested by counter-narratives, challenging dominant perspectives.

However, as Krijn Thijs has argued, master narratives do not only function as concrete versions of a grand national history. According to Thijs, they can be regarded as dominant frames or models, which manifest themselves not only in general historical overviews but also in smaller histories. Historical narratives deal-

\(^{28}\) Jarausch and Sabrow, “Meistererzählung” 21.

\(^{29}\) Ibid. For a comparative approach to the construction of postwar identity in relation to the national past in East and West Germany see: Mary Fulbrook, *German National Identity after the Holocaust* (Malden: 1999); Jeffrey Herf, *Divided memory: the Nazi past in the two Germanys* (Cambridge MA: 1997).
ing with specific themes and subjects within German history can be seen as case studies in which broader frames of (national) history are represented. The discursive dominance of master narratives manifest themselves not only in historical overviews of national histories but also in historical accounts on specific themes, in the sense that these “smaller” histories confirm or contest dominant versions of the national past. This book therefore intends not only to identify different competing historical perspectives on the Allied bombings, but also to examine them in relation to different master narratives or counter-narratives of German history. For this I will look into the competition between East and West German interpretations, but also analyze to what extent discussions on the air war within the Federal Republic, the GDR and post-unification Germany reflected the more general internal disputes on German historical identity, which to a strong degree dominated German public debate.

In analyzing and comparing historical accounts from Federal Republic, the GDR, and reunified Germany, I first ask, to what extent did historical accounts in the two German states share a specific perspective? To what degree can we locate distinct patterns in the ways in which East and West German historical accounts explained and described the history of the strategic bombing against Germany? Did East and West German historians argue over this specific topic and to what extent can these arguments tell us something about the way the history of the air war was provided with meaning for the present? While trying to locate the different perspectives on the Allied bombings I will also look for continuities. While

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seen from the perspective of these historians the conflicts and debates may have seemed insurmountable, it is interesting to see what parallels can be found in East and West German interpretations. Similarly, in my analysis of the recent historiography in the reunified Germany, I will ask, whether in the latest debate on the bombings continuities of earlier East and West German interpretations can also be found. To what extent were competing narratives of the Allied bombings based on essentially different interpretations of the Allied bombings? Was there, in spite of all the fierce debates, a basic coherent model from which German historians have explained, narrated and valued the history of the Allied bombings as a narrative of German victimhood? And if so, what was the function of this narrative in relation to the way the three postwar German states have tried to “come to terms” with the Nazi past?

In this way the general assumptions made in the recent discussion by authors such as Lorenz and Berger this way can be re-examined. The present book provides a structural approach to examining the degree to which these German accounts indeed formed a narrative of German victimhood before 1990 and whether academic historiography since the 1990s has abandoned such a perspective. But more importantly, it aims to provide a better understanding of the dynamics of these narratives. It shows how discussions on historical backgrounds of bombing became intertwined with moral judgments and at the same time reflected central identity issues of postwar Germany.

The first chapter deals with the early popular historical accounts in the Federal Republic and analyzes how the Allied bombings were related to a broader discussion of German guilt. The second chapter concentrates on East-West debates on the bombing of Dresden during the Cold War, and explores how authors from
the GDR and the Federal Republic perceived the bombing of Dresden from the perspective of the Cold War conflict. The third chapter concentrates on the professionalization of the East and West German historiography of the Allied bombings since the 1970s. Taking the fierce debate between West German historian Horst Boog and East German historian Olaf Groehler as a starting point, this chapter looks at continuities of earlier narratives in professional military historiography and the interrelation between popular and academic accounts. In the final chapter I analyze the recent work of Jörg Friedrich and its impact on German memory culture and historiography. Here, I also explore the recent attempts of historians to break with earlier narratives and integrate the bombings into a history of Nazism in a different way.
1 — Putting the Allies on trial

Historical accounts of the Allied air war in the early Federal Republic, 1945-1970

Introduction

Contrary to the oft-suggested absence of German historiography on the air war, several historical accounts appeared in West Germany in the 1950s and ’60s. While it is hard to determine the extent to which these works were read and influenced popular memory of the Second World War, clues can be found by looking at reprints and editions of works and by looking at the reception of these accounts in national newspapers and popular magazines.31 Another indication is the political call for historical documentation of the air war not only by political pressure groups, but also by the German government. As Robert Moeller and Norbert Frei have pointed out, in the West Germany of the 1950s there existed a broad consensus that German civilians had been among the main suffering parties of the war and could be seen as a community of victims.32 While this argument has been made mainly with regard to the expulsions, this chapter will explore the extent to which the Allied bombings also became a central issue for official memory politics and public debate in the Federal Republic during the 1950s and ’60’s.

31 A good example is the serialization of David Irving’s accounts of the Allied bombings in German magazines. Before they were published as und Deutschlands Städte starben nicht, different chapters appeared in the Neue Illustrierte in 1961. David Irving, Und Deutschlands Städte starben nicht. Ein Dokumentarbericht (Zürich: 1963).
32 Frei, Vergangenheitspolitik; Moeller, War stories.
The main part of this chapter will deal with an analysis of the historical accounts produced during the 1950's and '60's. The chapter will focus on the Allied bombing war in general as well as on West German accounts of the bombing of Dresden, which came to function – unlike West German cities such as Hamburg and Kassel - as the central historical symbol and lieu de memoire for the air war. The authors of books on the Luftkrieg were almost exclusively laymen historians, specialists in military practice and theory, former members of the German civil defense fire brigade or experts in international law. While professional academic historians largely ignored the subject, it was the work of these “specialists” that formed the basis of a later West German academic historiography of the air war. While the personal and political backgrounds of the authors can be helpful in understanding their position, in this chapter I primarily want to pose the question: what kind of narrative do these accounts tell? These works commonly claimed to tell what had happened, to show what the Bombenkrieg “had really been like”. However, the question at hand here is to what extent these historical accounts share more than this basic starting point. This chapter will examine the extent to which these works together form a coherent historical narrative about the Allied bombings. Were there common patterns of interpretation, and if so, what were their basic characteristics? Did these accounts question the Allied bombings from a moral point of view? To what degree were Allied leaders charged on moral grounds and did the accounts also make moral distinctions between the British and American bombings, on the one hand, and the German air raids, on the other?

33 This is, for example, suggested by Hans Rumpf in his book title: Hans Rumpf, Das war der Bombenkrieg. Deutsche Städte im Feuersturm: ein Dokumentarbericht (Oldenburg: 1961).
In the second place I will look at the interplay between different texts and interpretations of the Allied bombings. For this, it is important to see them in relationship with each other and other historical texts and interpretations. From where did these authors draw their information and arguments? First, I will look at the origins of some of the dominant interpretations in postwar historiography and discuss whether continuities and parallels with pre-war German military writings and Nazi wartime propaganda can be found. Second, I will analyze the reception and interplay between these West German texts and British literature. What elements of these English texts were considered to be valid and useful for West German historians?

Finally, I will discuss the West German historical accounts of the Allied bombing in relationship to the general discussions on the Second World War in the early Federal Republic. Is it possible to find overarching argumentative and narrative structures in these historical accounts and how can these be related to more general debates on German guilt and German suffering? How did these works deal with the tension between Germans as perpetrators and Germans as victims, and in what ways did these accounts reflect shifts and developments during the 1950s and ’60’s on German responsibility for war crimes?

1.1 West German historical culture and the Allied bombings in the early Federal Republic

The German catastrophe and the return to the national master narrative

Different studies of the historiography and official memory politics have pointed out that during the 1950s West German historiography was still marked by a tra-
ditional craft of political historians. In the early Federal Republic the historical institutes were dominated by conservatively oriented historians such as Friedrich Meinecke, Gerhard Ritter, Theodor Schieder and Hans Rothfels. These historians were strongly influenced by a historicist view of history. After 1945 nationalist-oriented historians were confronted with the need to acknowledge the responsibility for Hitler’s Third Reich. While this confrontation provoked some discussions on the validity of German nationalism and led to a more critical view of German history, German historians also defended national German traditions and German identity.\textsuperscript{34}

In their attempt to locate and deconstruct different master- and counter-narratives on German history Konrad Jarausch and Michael Geyer have argued in \textit{Shattered Past} that during the 1950s and ’60s a moderate version of the “national master narrative” remained dominant. While before 1945 the national historical narrative had primarily functioned to legitimize the national state, after 1945 conservative historians tried to rescue the national heritage from the association with Hitler, populist nationalism and militarism. In this version of the past, the German national state was still the predominant actor of history. At the same time, Nazism as a phenomenon was to a great degree externalized as something whose roots were to be found largely outside of German national history.\textsuperscript{35} Historians such as Theodor Schieder and Gerhard Richter while dissociating themselves from the extreme nationalism of the Third Reich, regarded the “Hitler-era” as a cata-


\textsuperscript{35} Jarausch and Geyer, \textit{Shattered past} 37-47.
strophic “downfall” of the German nation, the causes of which were to be sought outside of German history as a specific historical phenomenon which could only be explained with universal concepts like the rise of mass politics and modernity, and not by looking at German history. As far as explanations were sought in Germany and German history, as in Die deutsche Katastrophe by historian Friedrich Meinecke, a clear distinction between positive and negative traditions was made. While Meinecke criticized Prussian militaristic traditions, his book at the same time was a passionate plea for the rescuing of the German Geist and the “civil culture of the Christian Abendland” in which it was rooted, and for fundamentally distinguishing this Geist from the “Nazi Un-culture”. Nazism and the war were seen as a catastrophe for Germany, rather than as a catastrophe for its victims.

Though the Nazi crimes were acknowledged and condemned in official memory politics as well as in the first historical accounts of the war, the Second World War and the Nazi regime were generally regarded from the perspective of their catastrophic consequences for Germany, leaving very little room for the perspective of the groups which had been persecuted and murdered en masse under the Nazi rule. The early West German historical works on Nazism and the Second World War often referred to the Nazi crimes in universalizing and metaphoric ways, such as “the catastrophe”, “the terrible fate” or “the unspeakable crimes”, which reflected a general incapability to approach them as a subject of historical research.

36 Berg, Der Holocaust 52-59. Also see: Grosse Kracht, Zankende Zunft 24-29.
38 Lorenz, “Twee soorten catastrofe”. As Robert Moeller and Norbert Frei have pointed out this master narrative corresponded with a general trend in official politics of the past to concentrate on the suffering and hardships the Germans had endured during the war, instead of on that of its victims. Moeller, War stories; Frei, Vergangenheitspolitik.
In the West German memory politics of the 1950s, this perspective on the recent Nazi past led to two closely related arguments, which dominated public and political debates and also strongly influenced the early historiography of the Federal Republic. First, the conviction that Germans had been misled by Hitler and “the Nazi’s”, and thus had become the primary victims of the war prevailed. Secondly, there was a broad consensus over the idea that the Allies had treated the Germans with great injustice after the war, by regarding them as “collectively guilty” for the crimes that were “committed in their name”.

This led to a perspective on recent history that emphasized German suffering, first under Nazism as well as under the different atrocities of the war: the Allied bombings, imprisonment and the massive expulsions of Germans from Eastern Europe. While, on the one hand, on an abstract and symbolic level German responsibility for the Second World War was acknowledged, on the other, politics of the past were dominated by strategies of externalization of Nazism. This became apparent in the massive public defense against the idea of German collective guilt that dominated the 1950s. In parliamentary debates as well as in the press, German politicians and public intellectuals repeatedly argued against the idea that Germans could be held collectively responsible for the Nazi crimes. As Norbert Frei and Helmut Dubiel have pointed out, this was in essence a defense against a position held by nobody. It wrongly suggested that in the Allied policies of “Denazification” and during the Nuremberg trials such a notion of German collective guilt had been the starting point. This “phantom” discussion, however, led to a general national solidarity around the idea of the Germans as a collective of

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victims and formed the basis of a political attitude that pursued the amnesty and reintegration of former Nazi’s.\footnote{Dubiel, \textit{Niemand ist frei von der Geschichte} 71; Frei, \textit{Vergangenheitspolitik} 54-69, 397-406.}

Moreover, the historical culture of the early Federal Republic was characterized by a strong emphasis on the suffering of Germans. While as a symbolic reference point the Nazi crimes were discussed and became part of the historical discourse in the Federal Republic, the victims of Nazi persecution were largely absent from the German political debates on the past, as well as from historical research. In contrast, it was the expulsion of the Germans from the East that gave rise to a powerful interest group, the \textit{Bund der Vertriebenen}, formed in 1951. The efforts of this group and the German “ministry for Expellees and war damaged” led to a large-scale historical documentation project.

The \textit{Dokumentation der Vertreibung der Deutschen aus Ost-Mitteleuropa} (1954-1961) became a crucial project supporting and underlining the politics of the Ministry of Expellees and the League of Expellees, as well as the more general lobby against the division of Germany and the lost Eastern territories.\footnote{Theodor Schieder and Hans Rothfels, eds., \textit{Dokumentation der Vertreibung der Deutschen aus Ost-Mitteleuropa}, 5 vols. (München: 1954-1961). See for analysis of this project and the pressures which brought it about as well as of the political steering of official publications by the ministry of expellees: Moeller, \textit{War stories} 51-87; Beer, “Ein der wissenschaftlichen Forschung” 59-64; Beer, “Im Spannungsfeld” 345-389; Beer, “Verschlusssache” 369-401 and Beer, “Die Dokumentation der Vertreibung” 99-117.} The project formed the first West German large-scale historical research project on the recent past and was led by a prominent commission of historians, including Hans Rothfels and Theodor Schieder and promising junior researchers like Martin Broszat and Hans-Ulrich Wehler. This major historical documentation project, which recorded the damage and horror suffered by German civilians as well as the problems they faced in the aftermath of the war, was an important element in the support for
and representation of the interests of these German victims.

*The “Dokumente deutscher Kriegsschäden”* and the politics of air war history

While the strong West German emphasis on the expulsions during the 1950s is undisputed, it is less clear to what degree the Allied bombings also became part of West German memory politics. In his 1998 article on Sebald’s essay and the role of the air war in German memory Klaus Naumann has argued that there was a strong discrepancy between the political usability of the expulsions and the Allied bombings. Naumann concluded that especially during the Cold War expulsions and the air war were subject to “symbolic strategies” and were divided between the two German states, each claiming the subject that best suited its postwar victim-identity. While the GDR could use the air war as a starting point for a victim-identity which could relate to anti-American sentiments, the expulsions served this purpose in the West.43

However, Arnold and Thiessen have criticized Naumann’s interpretation by pointing out the strong presence of the bombing in local memory cultures. By pointing out that on a local level the Allied bombings became central points of ref-

43 Klaus Naumann, “Leerstelle Luftkrieg. Einwurf zu einer verquerten Debatte,” *Mittelweg* 36, no. 2 (1998) 12-15. In the political climate of the Cold War the Expulsions could handily serve an anticommmunist perspective. Here, Germans appeared as victims of communist aggression in a way that could be easily integrated into the Cold War rhetoric of the 1950s. The expellees symbolized the horrors of the inhuman Soviet regime. The question of “Flight and Expulsion” was directly related to the “German problem”. Moreover, discussions about solving the “German question”, and the claim for eventually regaining the lost German territories in the East and the division of Germany formed a central theme in the political discussions of the 1950s. A broad spectrum of political parties, including the SPD, expected not only an eventual reunification of the Federal Republic and the GDR, but also a return of the Eastern territories such as Silesia and Eastern Prussia. Moreover the problem of integrating the millions of refugees and expellees formed a larger social-political question. The expellees, who had organized themselves under local *Landmannschaften* and more centrally under the *Zentralverband vertriebener Deutschen* and since 1951 the *Bund der Vertriebenen* (League of Expellees), formed an important political force and electoral factor, which had to be reckoned with. E.g. Matthias Stickler, “*Ostdeutsch heißt Gesamtdeutsch*. Organisation, Selbstverständnis und heimatpolitische Zielsetzungen der deutschen Vertriebenenverbände 1949-1972”, Forschungen und Quellen zur Zeitgeschichte 46 (Düsseldorf: 2004); Moeller, *War stories*. 
ference for official memory politics, they argue that the bombings were far more “usable” than Naumann suggests. Like the expulsions, the financial and legal problems of the large parts of the urban population that had lost their homes and goods, as well as rebuilding the German cities, were acute political issues. Nevertheless, it remains a question whether in national memory politics the Allied bombings were regarded to be as important as Thiessen and Arnold imply.

A better idea on the political relevance of the Allied bombings in comparison to that of the expulsions can be accomplished by looking more closely at the position of the “bomb damaged” and their attempt to gain recognition for their problems through historical documentation. The Federal government between 1949 and 1969 included a ministry for expellees, refugees and victims of war damage, which became a stronghold for the recognition of and legal and financial support for “German” victim groups within the government. Though the ministry was primarily concerned with the integration and interests of the 11 million German expellees it also communicated and cooperated extensively with representatives of the “bomb damaged”.

The “League of Air Raid Victims” – the Zentralverband der Fliegergeschädigten, Evakuierten und Währungsgeschädigten (ZVF), founded 1947 – became their most important organ. The ZVF became a national platform for local interest groups

44 Thiessen, *Eingebrannt ins Gedächtnis* 401-402. Jörg Arnold stated that, considering the local memory cultures of Kassel and Magdenburg, Naumann’s conclusions do not “hold up to empirical scrutiny”, for he clearly overstated the supposed neglect of the air-war issue in the Federal Republic. Arnold, *In Quiet Remembrance*? 22-23.

45 For the political influence of the ZVF with regard to social policies and material compensation see: Michael L. Hughes, *Shouldering the burdens of defeat. West Germany and the reconstruction of social justice* (Chapel Hill: 1999).

46 Michael Krause, *Flucht vor dem Bombenkrieg: “Umquartierungen” im Zweiten Weltkrieg und die Wiedereingliederung der Evakuierten in Deutschland 1943-1963* (Düsseldorf: 1997) 234-240. Hughes, *Shouldering the burdens* 133. In 1951 the ZVF had 250,000 members. Hughes points out that the ZVF had little competition as the main representative of the bomb-damaged and organized nearly 5 percent of those who had suffered material losses, due
pursuing political recognition and material compensation. The interest group used its weekly newspaper “Selbsthilfe” to bring its political aims to the public’s attention. Thiessen and Arnold have pointed out that the ZVF had considerable influence on local memory politics in Hamburg and Kassel, but also on a national level the League represented the interests of air raid victims with some success.

Like the expellees, the “bomb damaged” attempted to gain political recognition for their problems by persuading the ministry to fund a historical documentation project similar to the Dokumentation der Vertreibung. Between 1958 and 1964 a five-volume series on “German war damage”, the Dokumente deutscher Kriegsschäden was published, which documented the conduct and consequences of the air war extensively. The project followed a concept similar to the one that had guided the multi-volume series on the German expulsions, which had been published between 1954 and 1961.

Lacking an editing commission of academic historians, the Dokumente deutscher Kriegsschäden primarily reflected the historical interpretation of the ZVF. ZVF representative Karlheinz Kugler became its most important editor and though Minister Theodor Oberländer introduced the series and secretary of state Peter Paul Nahm officially became its general editor, the Zentralverband had a crucial influence in the initiation as well as in the editing and writing process of the


48 Arnold, “In Quiet Remembrance”? 96, 111-112; Thiessen, Eingebrannt ins Gedächtnis 138-139.

Apart from giving the historical backgrounds of the bombings and documenting press coverage and eyewitness reports, a large part of the series was concerned with the legal and material problems faced by Germans “damaged” in the war and its aftermath as well as the “successful” efforts made by the government to support them. In particular, the material compensation which was provided under the Lastenausgleich laws, was extensively documented.

This combination of history, documentation and the strong emphasis on the postwar problems faced by the Germans illustrates the direct political significance of the series. The horrific experience of the air war appeared as a prehistory to the acute problems in the present. The losses and sufferings were presented as an argument for direct political action to support those who were still homeless and faced financial and material problems due to the air war. And the documentation was initiated to acknowledge the “bomb-damaged” represented by the ZVF as a distinct interest group and to provide for further arguments for their political struggle as well as to celebrate the efforts that already had been made.

Compared to the volumes on the expulsion, the Dokumente deutscher Kriegsschäden was a relatively marginal project and there are many clues that suggest

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51 On the history of the Lastenausgleich in public debate and legal development see: Hughes, Shouldering the burdens. Lastenausgleich was the heavily debated and only partly implemented policy of redistributing surviving property among individuals who had suffered material losses during the war.

52 In his introduction to the documentation Nahm emphasized the interests of the damaged German middle classes and the need to integrate the groups that had been damaged, whether by bombings or by expulsion, into the Federal Republic. His orientation was restricted to the present. The historical backgrounds of Second World War and the reason why so many Germans faced these problems were mentioned only indirectly. Nahm focused entirely on the “catastrophic” nature of the present problems. Peter Paul Nahm et al., eds., Dokumente Deutscher Kriegsschäden. Evakuierte, Kriegssachgeschädigte, Währungsgeschädigte. Die geschichtliche und rechtliche Entwicklung Vol 1 (Bonn: 1958 ) Also see the interview “Der gemeinsame Weg” with Nahm by Selbshilfe. Barch B 105/5648 folder 266-271.
that the issue was considered to be of less importance than the documentation of
the expulsions. It did not include an extensive commission of renowned histori-
ans and had a relatively low budget. The volumes were sent to academic libraries
and institutions, historians like Gerhard Ritter and to important politicians, such
as the members of the Bundestag, the governments of the Bundesländer and the
mayor of Berlin. Funding for printing and circulating the voluminous works was
limited as the series was not sold to the public and could only to a minor extent
be provided for press reviews and libraries. The project reflected the ministry’s
affiliation with the interests of the ZVF and their shared interest in providing doc-
umentation, “to provide future generations with historical sources”.54

But the differences with the expulsion project also suggest that the documenta-
tion was a half-hearted gesture towards the “bomb damaged”, who increasingly
felt neglected by the German government in comparison with the expellees. The
desire to copy the expulsion project and the limited success the ZVF experienced
reflected the increasing competition between these two different interest groups.
While the air-raid victims represented by the ZVF had initially tried to cooperate
with the leaders of the expellees, it became increasingly clear that the different
groups competed over the limited funding that the German government was pre-
pared make available for the German “war damaged”. In this process, the expel-
lees successfully gained a dominant political position over the air-raid victims.55

Though the air war was not as absent from West German memory politics as Nau-

53 See the decline in the number of copies provided by the ministry in Barch B
106/027753, e.g. folder 227 ff.
54 See Kugler’s remarks on the Dokumente deutscher Kriegsschäden in: “Ausschnitt aus
dem Fachberater für Vertriebene, Flüchtlinge, Kriegsgeschädigte.” November 1959, Barch
B 105/5648 folder 281-282.
55 Hughes, Shouldering the burdens 165-189.
mann has suggested, the differences in status between the two organizations and their research projects at least indicates that during the 1950s the *Vertreibung* was considered a much more important political issue than the consequences of the Allied bombings.

*Dresden in West German public discourse: Axel Rodenberger, David Irving and Rolf Hochhuth*

However, the presence of the air war in the memory politics and public discourse of the Federal Republic should not be underestimated. While the official volumes of the *Dokumente deutscher Kriegsschäden* did not reach a large audience, several other works on the air war were widely read in the Federal Republic. The most successful of these early West German accounts was Axel Rodenberger’s *Der Tod von Dresden*, published in 1951. Rodenberger’s book was circulated widely, selling more than 250,000 copies, and had considerable impact. It was a highly subjective account, largely based on Rodenberger’s personal experiences and a collection of eyewitness accounts. Presented as a documentation of the actual event, the book consists at least partly of purely fictional characters. Rodenberger’s vague and clearly dramatized work remained a central point of reference in the Federal Republic up until the mid-1960s, and was followed by several other accounts: *Der Hochrote Hahn* (1952) by Hans Rumpf and *...zum Beispiel Dresden* (1964) by Wolfgang Paul. These also offered a similar blend of autobiographic “documentation” of events the authors had witnessed with historical backgrounds and sometimes fictional elements.

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56 Axel Rodenberger, *Der Tod von Dresden* (Dortmund 1952).  
57 Neutzner, “Vom Anklagen zum Erinnern” 146.  
58 Wolfgang Paul, *...zum Beispiel Dresden. Schicksal einer Stadt* (Frankfurt am Main: 1964);
Moreover, during the 1960’s public interest in the Allied bombings began to increase. While most works on the air war had received little attention in Germany, with only Rodenberger’s work achieving considerable circulation, this situation changed in the early 1960s. In 1961, Hans Rumpf published his second account *Das war der Bombenkrieg*, which had considerably larger impact, was translated into English and received attention from popular media like *Der Spiegel* and *Time Magazine*. But it was the work of a previously unknown young British author, David Irving, which generated a wide interest among German readers and led to major press coverage and public debate.59

Irving, born in 1938, was a former history student at London University, who became interested in the Allied bombings during his studies and after a short period of working in the steel industry in the German Ruhr in 1959.60 In the early 1960s Irving started as a freelance historian researching the Allied bombings and specifically the bombing of Dresden. Though David Irving’s work cannot be seen directly as “German” historiography, it is important to include his work in an analysis of German historiography on the air war. The broad reception and impact of his work in Germany show how widely the air war, especially the bombing of Dresden, was discussed in the Federal Republic. In 1963 Irving, in cooperation with German journalists, published a documentary account *Und Deutschland Städte*

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60  David Irving later became notorious for his apologies for Hitler, his denying of the existence of gas chambers in Auschwitz and his claim that Nazi Germany had not attempted to commit genocide against the Jews. For this he was persecuted and tried on different occasions, most notably in Austria in 2005-2006, where he was sentenced to several months in prison. On Irving: e.g.: Richard J. Evans, *Lying about Hitler. History, Holocaust, and the David Irving Trial* (New York: 2001); Deborah E. Lipstadt, *Denying the Holocaust: the growing assault on truth and memory* (London: 1994); Deborah E. Lipstadt, *History on trial: my day in court with David Irving* (New York: 2005).
starben nicht, a collection of short accounts on different German cities, which had partly been circulated in different issues of the popular German magazine *Neue Illustrierte* in 1961-1962.  

The Destruction of Dresden was immediately regarded as the first thoroughly researched work on the bombing of Dresden. Like the original in Great Britain, the German translation *Die Untergang Dresdens*, released in 1964, became a bestseller and was received with great enthusiasm by the German press. Better documented than previous German works, Irving’s book was also written in a relatively detached style from the perspective of a distanced academic. This aura of neutrality and objectivity was further emphasized by the apparent absence of a clear moral denunciation. Irving included a preface by Sir Robert Saundby who avoided assigning responsibility and answered the moral question in general terms: “It is not so much this or the other means of making war that is immoral or inhumane. What is immoral is war itself. Once full-scale war has broken out it can never be humanized or civilized, and if one side would do so it would be most likely to be defeated.” On the other hand, however, the book itself clearly criticized the air war as a largely ineffective and inhumane strategy.

In spite of the book’s academic tone, Irving focused strongly on moral matters and explicit details. More than previous German works had done, Irving integrated eyewitness accounts into a historical narrative that resulted in an often

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61 Irving, *Und Deutschlands Städte* 385. A final note characterizes this work, which was published under Irving’s name, as a cooperative enterprise, which leaned heavily on Irving’s research but was largely written and reworked by its editor Günter Karweina.

62 Examples of this positive reception will be discussed further in this chapter.

63 With several editions of both the English and the German translation David Irving’s *The destruction of Dresden* was at least until Frederick Taylor’s recent *Dresden* probably the best-known and bestselling account of the bombing of Dresden and the air war in general. Different German editions appeared in 1964; 1965; 1967; 1977; 1978; 1981; 1983; 1985; 1990; 1994; 2006.

compelling story of innocent German civilians who became victims of the war. Dresden was described as a “virgin target” and a peaceful city, suddenly exposed to the horrors of war.\textsuperscript{65} British figures like Harris and Churchill, though not explicitly accused of war crimes, still appeared as cynical murderers of innocent civilians. Irving portrayed Churchill as a politician, who forced the strategy of city bombing on his military, even at a time, when almost no military experts still believed that such bombings were effective. Apart from ascribing responsibility to Churchill, the book also claimed to have proof that at least 135,000 people died in Dresden and with this established the idea that Dresden had been a unique example of the destructiveness of the Allied bombings.\textsuperscript{66}

This critical account by a young British researcher sparked a nationwide debate on the background and legitimacy of the bombing and on the motives of its instigators. Irving was quickly invited by leading liberal West German magazines like \textit{Die Zeit} and \textit{Der Spiegel} to write a series of articles on the German V1 and V2 projects.\textsuperscript{67} In subsequent years Irving’s work would repeatedly draw public interest, especially during the 20\textsuperscript{th} anniversary of the attack in February 1965 and after the publication of Rolf Hochhuth’s play \textit{Soldaten} which received its premiere in 1967.

Rolf Hochhuth had become friends with the young historian and used Irving’s historical account as the foundation for his critical play. \textit{Soldaten} followed Hochhuth’s debut \textit{Der Stellvertreter}, with which he had gained international acclaim in

\textsuperscript{65} Ibid. 69-70.
\textsuperscript{66} Also see chapter 2.
\textsuperscript{67} In 1965 Irving published a major \textit{Spiegel}-Series on the German V1 and V2 “retaliation-weapons”. In an editorial in \textit{Der Spiegel} of 27 October 1965, in which Irving published the first part of his series, he was presented as \textit{Der Spiegel}’s “new author”, on whom it promised “to keep an eye”. “Hausmitteilung. Betr. Neue Spiegel Serie,” \textit{Der Spiegel}, 27-10 1965.
1963. This play was one of the first German works to directly address the moral issue of the Holocaust, even though it focused primarily on the moral position of Pope Pius XII, and not so much on the involvement of the German population. Nevertheless, Hochhuth was widely known as a controversial young intellectual and acknowledged as an important critic who managed to provoke a public discussion of the role of the Catholic Church in the history of Auschwitz. Now, in his play and in articles and interviews, Hochhuth felt that it had become time to discuss the moral issues behind the Allied bombing of Germany. Though Hochhuth was not a historian and expressed his views in his dramas as well as in journalist writings, his work nevertheless had a very “historical” character.68 His play Soldaten addressed the central historical arguments, largely following Irving’s The Destruction of Dresden.69

68 Journalist of Die Zeit, Karl-Heinz Janßen, for example, discussed Hochhuth’s role as an historian, showing that it was exactly this position Hochhuth was claiming for himself. Karl-Heinz Janßen, “Hochhuth als Historiker,” Die Zeit, 27-10 1967.
69 Rolf Hochhuth, Soldaten. Nekrolog auf Genf (Reinbek 1967). Irving’s conclusions on the death rate in Dresden were repeated by Hochhuth. It is striking that still in 2000, when such numbers had decades ago been proven to be products of falsification and propagan-
This led him to emphasize the immorality of the Allied leaders. Though Hochhuth also stressed that the British Prime Minister had become a criminal against his will and saw him as a “tragic hero”, he nevertheless raised the question of the “criminality” of the Allied bombings into the public debate in Germany and beyond. In Britain this led to fierce reactions, censorship and even a law suit. British and American critics accused Hochhuth of trying to exonerate the Germans of their historical guilt, focusing on Pope Pius II in *der Stellvertreter* and on Churchill in *Soldaten* instead of on Germans. In an interview by TV-host David Frost Hochhuth and Irving were confronted with heavy attacks.

In Germany Hochhuth’s play initiated a public debate among Germany’s leading journalists and opinion makers, such as Karl Jaspers, *Spiegel* editor-in-chief Rudolf Augstein, *Die Zeit* editor Karl-Heinz Janßen, and Sebastian Haffner. More than Irving’s work Hochhuth’s play was received with mixed feelings. German critics refrained from accusing Hochhuth and Irving of an apologetic perspective, as Frost had done, and generally accepted Hochhuth’s defense that he had been a da, Hochhuth claimed that between 135,000 and a quarter of a million people had died in Dresden. See: Volker Hage, *Zeugen der Zerstörung. Die Literaten und der Luftkrieg: Essays und Gespräche* (Frankfurt am Main: 2003) 179. While here Hochhuth refrained from mentioning David Irving as his main source, in 2005 Hochhuth in an interview with *Junge Freiheit* stated that he had continued to be friends with Irving and bluntly excused his denial of the gas chambers in Auschwitz. Though he stated mild criticisms towards Irving, Hochhuth fiercely denounced what he thought of as “grotesque exaggerations” in the public reactions to Irving: Moritz Schwartz, “Die Würde des Ortes respektieren.” The Schriftsteller Rolf Hochhuth über seinen Vorschlag für ein Bombenkriegsmuseum, David Irving und Winston Churchill,” *Junge Freiheit* 2005. It is typical for Hochhuth that in this interview he also criticized Jörg Friedrich for being one-sided and emphasized that Dresden had been bombed only after Hitler had started the war.

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pioneer in introducing painful questions on the Holocaust into the public debate. Also, most German critics shared Hochhuth’s enthusiasm for Irving’s accounts. While journalists like Augstein and Janßen criticized Hochhuth’s historical arguments and his strong moral accusations as being too thin and ill-argued, in general his play was received as an interesting provocation for discussing the moral position of Churchill and the justifiability of the Allied air war.\textsuperscript{72}

The popularity and wide public coverage of both \textit{The Destruction of Dresden} and \textit{Soldaten} illustrate that there was, especially between 1963 and 1967, a considerable public debate on the morality of the air war. It shows that in this period, the air war was not quite so overshadowed by the Expulsion issue, which had dominated the German debate during the high tide of the Cold War. After the publication of the popular accounts by David Irving, the air war became present not only in local public discussions on the past, but became part of a nationwide debate.

\textbf{1.2. West German historiography and the air war in the 1950s and ’60’s}

\textit{The lost war: Ex-servicemen and the history of the air war}

In spite of this, German academic historians still largely avoided writing about the Allied bombings. While several prominent German historians researched the expulsions, professional historiography largely ignored the air war until the 1970s. Although German bombings of Freiburg and Rotterdam became the subjects of professional historical research, the first West German historical accounts of the

Allied bombings were the work of non-academic military specialists. The reluctance of German historians to deal with the air war raises questions. The major involvement of leading historians in the research on the expulsions shows that German professional historians did not avoid the topic of German victims. Moreover, during the 1950s and '60s the Allied bombings were by no means lacking public interest, nor as would be the case in a later period, were they automatically associated with extreme rightwing revisionism. However, part of this neglect might be explained by a general trend to avoid military history. Wolfram Wette has pointed out that after the war German historians developed an “aversion” to military history, mainly because *Wehrgeschichte* and *Wehrkunde* before 1945 had largely been instrumentalized and exploited for nationalist politics and the defense of German territorial and military claims. Because it was avoided by most academic historians, with few exceptions like Gerhard Ritter or Andreas Hillgruber, military history until the late 1960s was largely left in the hands of laymen and (former) members of the German military, who, as Wolfram Wette has put it, wrote “in the spirit of the Wehrmacht” and along the old lines of nationalist history.

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75 See the Chapter by Wolram Wette on the historiography and myth building about the Wehrmacht: Wolfram Wette, *Die Wehrmacht. Feindbilder, Vernichtungskrieg, Legenden* (Frankfurt am Main: 2002) 195-245.
A similar trend can be seen in the historiography of the Allied bombings. Most of the authors had military backgrounds or were somehow related to the practice of civil defense or fire brigades and most of them were not connected to the universities or academic institutions. Their work not only focused primarily on military aspects, but was also in many respects a continuation of a theoretical and technical discourse on the military use of air power that had started before the Second World War. One of the first German historical accounts of the air war was written by Georg Feuchter, a former officer and air force veteran from World War I, who devoted himself to non-fiction writing on military aviation in the 1930s. He wrote for military professional journals and published several popular military accounts of the air war, most notably Probleme des Luftkrieges (1936 and reedited in 1939) and wrote one of the first German historical accounts of the air war, Geschichte des Luftkrieges (1954).\footnote{Georg W. Feuchter, Geschichte des Luftkrieges. Entwicklung und Zukunft (Bonn: 1954); Georg W. Feuchter, Probleme des Luftkrieges, 2 ed. (Potsdam: 1939). During the war he was editor of the front news-journal of the German air force and from 1944 he became press- and censorship-officer with the executive staff of the Luftwaffe. After the war continued working for the (West-)German air force and remained active as a publicist, writing and editing for specialist journals. “Georg W. Feuchter 60 Jahre,” Flugwelt, no. 5 (1956) 317-318.} In his accounts of the Allied bombings, Feuchter remained almost strictly on the level of technical descriptions and strategic analyses. Feuchter’s distanced and dispassionate style underlined his claim to a fair and balanced analysis. Under the surface, however, a strong identification with the German forces and civilians became clear, especially on the few occasions when Feuchter discussed the defeated Luftwaffe and the moral aspects of Allied air war.

The bitter remarks on the failure of the German air forces to live up to their initial promises are contrasted with an emphasis on their former “heights of glory”; a glory that in Feuchter’s view significantly included the “clearly tactical”
German bombings of Rotterdam and Warsaw.\textsuperscript{77} Feuchter’s bitterness about the miscalculation of the \textit{Luftwaffe’s} choice for tactical air war over strategic bombing suggest the author’s disappointment that the German army had been defeated. For this he blamed the “high command” and the Nazi leaders.

What is interesting here is that Feuchter wrote from a perspective that was very common among former \textit{Wehrmacht} officers, who in the early postwar decades produced a series of memoirs. The underlying question in Feuchter’s book was why Germany had lost the war, and he concluded that the German decision not to develop a policy of “strategic bombing” had been a crucial factor in the German defeat. Feuchter distinguished clearly between the “honorable” army and its incompetent (Nazi) leaders. He contrasted the “honorable” German troops with their incompetent high command (by which he meant although he did not mention by name such “Nazi bonzes” as Goering). His disappointment in the German defeat can be sensed in phrases that refer to the \textit{Wehrmacht’s} initial “glory” and ultimate “failure” (\textit{Versagen}).\textsuperscript{78} His account reflected a strong commitment to the “honor” of the \textit{Luftwaffe}, which had been damaged by the mistakes made by the high commanders and the Nazi leaders. “The troops, their manpower in the air and on the ground and the leaders of the battle units are not guilty of this failure. \textit{The honor of the troops has to be consistently accentuated}”.\textsuperscript{79}

Feuchter’s point of view, in addition to its disappointment in the “lost war”, had, like many other accounts, a very defensive character. Many of the books written by ex-servicemen had in common that they wrote defensively about their

\textsuperscript{77} Feuchter, \textit{Geschichte des Luftkriegs} 139-142.
\textsuperscript{78} Ibid. 105-106, 142.
\textsuperscript{79} Ibid. 105-106. Italics in the original. Similarly: Rumpf, \textit{Das war der Bombenkrieg} 134-135. Rumpf defends the courage and willpower of “our airmen”.
personal roles in the *Luftwaffe* or the German air defense organizations. During the war, the German population had eventually lost faith in both the *Luftwaffe* and the air defense organizations and had increasingly expressed their bitterness towards them. As the reports made by the German *Sicherheitsdienst* (SD) illustrate, these organizations were held at least partly responsible for the suffering of the Germans civilians, whom they had failed to protect. This stigma of mistakes and failure was something many ex-servicemen tried to contest.

This defensive position was clearly present in the memoirs of former German *Luftwaffe* generals like Adolf Galland or Albert Kesselring, who both defended their position as “soldiers” and dissociated themselves from Hitler, while expressing a strong disappointment in the lost war.80 Another good example is former Major General Hans Rumpf, who became one of the most active publicists on the Allied bombing war. Like Feuchter, Rumpf had begun writing on military problems before the war and had made a career within the National Socialist civil defense organization during the 1930s.81 Rumpf became *General Inspector of Fire Prevention* within the *Ordnungspolizei* in 1943. Here he was the main officer responsible for the national fire-fighting units of the German civil defense.82 His writings consisted of articles for professional journals and extreme rightwing periodicals as well as popular histories of the bombings.83 In his historical accounts of the air

83 After the war and also in association with Hampe, Rumpf was actively involved in the public promotion of civil defense measures in the Federal Republic. For examples of
war Rumpf, like Feuchter, naturally approached the subject from a German perspective, often referring to the German military position with the terms “us” and “we Germans.” With frequent references to his personal role in the German civil defense apparatus Rumpf emphasized his strong identification with the German military side. Like Feuchter, Rumpf showed a certain disappointment in the lost war, which had largely been the consequence of the lack of a clear strategy within the Luftwaffe. Rumpf contemplated the failed opportunities of a German “retaliation” bombing force, which might had been able to force the Allies to moderate their attacks.

In his works Rumpf also sought personal rehabilitation both in his role as the head of fire fighting as well as with regard to his high position within the National Socialist Ordnungspolizei. Rumpf dissociated himself from the organization in which he had held a high position and which was a central organ of power for the NSDAP-state by claiming he had heroically saved a Leipzig synagogue from burning down during Kristallnacht in November 1938. He also expressed his admiration for Resistance hero Carl von Goerdeler. But Rumpf spoke euphemistically about the German civil defense organization. He remarked that German civil defense was “well organized” and had made sure that German civilians could face the bombings “well prepared”, which can be seen as a rather blunt euphemism.
considering the effects of the Allied bombings on German society. Rumpf also conveniently ignored the common practice of the Nazi regime to actively withhold information about the bombings from the civilians for propaganda reasons.86

A similar example of an early account of the Allied bombings, written from the perspective of a “military specialist” was Der Zivile Luftschutz im Zweiten Weltkrieg (1963) by former General Erich Hampe, a personal friend of Rumpf, who been responsible for technical help for the armed forces and was one of the first “experts” to evaluate the bombing of Dresden for the Nazi authorities.87 After the war Hampe had continued his career in the Federal Republic as the main initia- tor, and in 1954 first president, of the Bundesanstalt für Ziviler Luftschutz. Hampe’s work is a detailed description and (not surprisingly) a very positive evaluation of German civil defense during the Second World War.88 But more than that, it also is a historical account of the Allied bombings of Germany. Like Feuchter, Hampe focused on the technical and organizational details and wrote in a distanced and unemotional style. However, where Feuchter almost completely restricted his work

86  Rumpf, Der hochrote Hahn 18-26; Rumpf, Das war der Bombenkrieg 126. Whether his story on the Leipzig Kristallnacht is true is possible but may very well be part of a narrative form in which former collaborators, party members or other opportunist euphemistically tended to describe their personal role as “resistance heroes”. See: Harald Welzer et al., “Opa war kein Nazi”. Nationalsozialismus und Holocaust im Familiengedächtnis (Frankfurt am Main: 2002). At least it can be concluded that Rumpf’s supposed dissident actions as a fireman did not stand in the way of his very successful career within the Ordnungspolizei during the war. Rumpf’s apologetic euphemisms on the Nazi civil defense have also been remarked on by Ralf Blank: Ralf Blank, "Die Nacht vom 16. auf den 17. Mai 1943 - “Operation Züchtigung”: die Zerstörung der Mühne-Talsperre", 2006: http://www.wlw.org/westfaelische-geschichte/portal/Internet/input_felder/langDatensatz_ebene4.php?urlID=493&url_tabelle=tab_web-semente.
to the level of strategies and military operations, Hampe’s work was an attempt to write a more comprehensive account. Hampe wrote extensively about the organization of German civil defense and about the social reactions of the German population to the human and material losses.89

The “clean Luftwaffe”

While these authors shared an identification with the German Luftwaffe and military defense against the Allied bombings, they did not all share the same opinion about the military effects of the Allied attacks. In his analysis of the German and Anglo-American strategies Feuchter had concluded that they had been very successful. According to Feuchter, who had been a supporter of the main theorist of strategic bombing, the Italian Giulio Douhet, the Second World War had proven Douhet’s “moderate” followers right. Strategic bombing of Germany’s industrial resources and infrastructure not won the war by itself, as Douhet had claimed, but it had nevertheless been a vital element in the Allied victory. It had been Germany’s strategic failure that it had refrained from using strategic bombing. Germany and especially Hitler had failed to build a strong bombing force capable of inflicting serious damage on the Allied industrial capacity.

For a long time, Feuchter would stand more or less alone in this evaluation in Germany. Though many other German authors who published on the Allied bombings shared Feuchter’s defensive position towards the role of the Luftwaffe, most felt very differently about the military effects of strategic bombing. They stressed

89 Like Feuchter’s, Hampe’s style was distanced. The issue of the human losses caused by the bombings was treated mainly as a statistical and demographical problem, not as an example of immense human suffering. Hampe analyzed the factors of both the different forms of Allied attacks and various reactions of German municipal authorities to these attacks to analyze differences in the death rate figures. Hampe, Der zivile Luftschatz 138-183.
that the bombings had failed to achieve their military goals and, more importantly, had deliberately targeted civilians in an equally futile attempt to break German morale. Perhaps the most elaborate attempt to make this point was *Luftkrieg und Menschlichkeit*, written by international law specialist and former *Luftwaffe* officer Eberhard Spetzler in 1956. Spetzler portrayed the Allied strategic bombing as a complete failure and a violation of international law. Other German authors like Hans Rumpf or Erich Hampe shared Spetzler’s interpretation. While Feuchter had concluded that strategic bombing had been a military success, these historians refuted this position and expressed moral and legal objections against the British and American bombings.91

This perspective was particularly represented in the work of Hans Rumpf. The Allied bombings had not only been senseless acts of terror, but could be seen as deliberate attempts to break the will of the Germans and even – at their peak – as an effort to annihilate the German people. The British bombings had been senseless, not only in their brutality but also in their aim to undermine German war morale. In this the bombings had been totally counterproductive. They had not only strengthened the will of the brave German civilians to endure and resist. But the “night of the murder of Dresden,” in particular, by demonstrating the Allied aim to “exterminate” the Germans as a whole, had forced the German pop-

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91 An important basis for their conclusion that the Allied bombings had been wholly ineffective on the German war industry and on the morale of the German population was a selective reading of the official *United States Strategic Bombing Survey*, issued in 1945. Though the report indeed indicated that the effects in relation to the huge costs and resources had been disappointing, especially before 1943, German authors ignored or rejected the final conclusions of this report that strategic bombing had had considerable impact on German industry and morale. E.g. David MacIsaac, “General introduction,” in *The United States strategic bombing survey Vol. 1*, ed. David MacIsaac (New York: 1978). The selective reading of other British and American accounts will be discussed later in this chapter.
ulation to collaborate with a regime, in which they had long ago lost faith. “One more time Dresden assembled the Germans under the swastika-flag and drove them into the arms of the propaganda, which now more believably than before accentuated the fear –fear of the mercilessness of the terror-attacks, fear of the ratified Morgenthau-plan, fear of the expulsions, fear of the unconditional surrender, fear of obliteration”. Therefore, the “air-terror had not shortened the war but had extended it”.92

Though Rumpf, seemingly willing to differentiate, stated that “both opponents started the bombing-war against each other” before either of them could anticipate the consequences, he left no doubt that the British forces bore the main responsibility for the atrocities of modern air war, and that it had been the German civilians who had primarily suffered.93 And most importantly, the British had started bombing Germany before the Luftwaffe had attacked British cities, a causal relationship that accentuated the fundamental difference between British and German bombings. This perspective is illustrated in Rumpf’s answer to the question who had started the air war: “Only five months later– on 7 September, after German cities (...) had been attacked again and again and warnings had led to nothing, a German counter strike followed with a heavy targeted daytime attack on the market and storage depots, yards and docks – the ‘belly of London’”.94 Likewise, all other German bombings were described in a similarly euphemistic and apologetic manner. The attacks on Warsaw and Rotterdam were even explicitly

93  Rumpf, Das war der Bombenkrieg 13.
94  Ibid. 21.
excluded from the book, since they fell outside of the author’s aim to describe the bombing war against Germany. Coventry was only mentioned briefly to state that the attack had been grossly overestimated in its importance by the British as well as by German wartime propaganda. The attack on London, like all other German bombardments, was regarded as a “justified” reaction to British terror.95

By stressing this causal relationship between the British initiative and German reaction, these German accounts created a dichotomy between an offensive and aggressive RAF and a reacting Luftwaffe. The “British initiative” could only be argued in a very selective interpretation of what defined the bombing of civilians. Only by excluding from this discussion the German attacks on cities like Rotterdam and Warsaw, which had caused considerable damage in residential areas and killed many civilians, could the point be made that the “British” had started the “bombing war”. This image was supported by the choice of specific and distinct terminology for the British and for German attacks. The term “terror-bombing” remained strictly reserved to describe British and later American bombings. Even the infamous “Baedeker attacks” on small and undefended British cities without military importance in 1942 were consistently framed as “Baedeker-” or “retali- nation attacks”, again stressing that this action had not been intentional “terror” but only an unsuccessful attempt to stop the British from pursuing their dreadful terror against German cities.96 Rumpf against stated that these “retaliatory mea-

95 Ibid. 14, 21. Also see: Spetzler, Luftkrieg und Menschlichkeit 265-266 and the even more apologetic remarks by Albert Kesselring playing the role of a dispassionate historian: Kesselring, “Bilanz des zweiten Weltkrieges” 150.
96 The term “Baedeker attacks” refers to the German attacks on British towns such as Bath, Exeter and Canterbury in April and May 1942. The term Baedeker refers to a German travel guide, to indicate that these British cities were selected for German “retaliation” because they were considered to be tourist highlights and not important strategic targets. On the “Baedeker attacks” also see chapter 3.
sures” had been “hugely exaggerated” by war propaganda.97

In terms of spatial structure it is interesting to see, that the distinction between the “humane” German attacks and the “terrorist” nature of the British bombings was explained by situating these strategic differences into two fundamentally different military traditions. Instead of starting the history of the strategic bombing with the outbreak of the Second World War, these accounts most commonly began with the origins of British military theory. While German military theory was rooted in a “continental European tradition” that relied primarily on ground troops and on direct warfare against the military forces of its opponent, the British and the Americans had a different military tradition. The British, in particular, had relied heavily on naval warfare and on indirect force, like the naval blockade during WWI. “Anglo-Saxon” warfare was also heavily influenced by their colonial experiences, in which numerical disadvantage had to be compensated for by superior destructive techniques. This kind of warfare, even before the more inhumane method of strategic bombing had become technically possible, had led to an acceptance of a more ‘total’ warfare that included pressure on enemy civilians as a militarily relevant objective. This had led to the popularity of the concept of strategic bombing in the works of important military thinkers such as Hugh Trenchard and Basil Lidell Hart, and finally to the acceptance of strategic bombing as one of the main strategic pillars of “Anglo-American” warfare during the WWII.98

97 Rumpf, Das war der Bombenkrieg 39; similarly: Franz Kurowski, Der Luftkrieg über Deutschland (Düsseldorf: 1977) 176; referring to Rumpf: Klöss, Der Luftkrieg über Deutschland 19.

Stressing this continuity of military thinking led to the almost total ignoring of the broader history of the Second World War. Not only were the objectives of the Allied bombings simplified as attempts to demoralize and exterminate the Germans, thus denying that the bombings had had important military strategic effects. But the “total war” carried out by Nazi Germany that was in its very essence characterized by genocide against civilians was almost completely ignored. Due to the almost complete lack of historical references to the broader context of the war and the “total” aspects of the land war in these works the Allied bombings were presented as something that had a dimension of its own. Since it was concluded that the bombings had been senseless and counterproductive there was no need to integrate the bombings into the Allied pursuit of the victory. They were actions that stood apart from the war and even had very little connection to the German bombings that had either tactically supported “conventional warfare” over land or in a few cases had been a half-hearted attempt to retaliate and stop the Allied city bombing. Thus the temporal structure of this narrative of the air war greatly influenced the moral conclusions that could be drawn. The “longer” history of British military thinking suppressed the “shorter” history of the German war aggression and made it possible to make moral judgments about Allied military actions without having to discuss the German war crimes.

*The “court case” against the Allies*

Consequently, the West German historical accounts of the bombing war showed little reluctance to answer the question of responsibility with regard to the Allied

99 Also see the remarks on this typical “forgetting” of the broader context of the war started by Nazi Germany by Dietmar Süß: Süß, “Erinnerungen an den Luftkrieg” 21.
bombings. Even though almost all authors were reluctant to use the word “crime” directly and also blamed Hitler and the German leaders for causing the Second World War, the “criminality” of the Allied air war nevertheless became a strong theme in German historiography. A central recurring element was the deeply personalized perspective on the process of decision-making during the Allied bombing offensive. This standpoint reflects an emphasis on the personal roles of figures like Churchill and Arthur Harris.100

German historians Rumpf, Spetzler and Hampe stressed the role of Churchill and Harris as leading military figures, for whom the bombing war represented “something personal”. Rumpf accused Churchill of having been led by a “destructive delusion” and of fighting a “private war” against the Germans. Rumpf concluded: “The decisive historical significance for the emergence, course and outcome of the unrestricted city-bombing politics through air-terror against an enemy non-combatant and unarmed civilian population, which until then had been protected by conventions, is taken on May 11, (1940), when the new British wartime prime minister with clear deliberate action and enormous force set loose the hunt for the German civilian population”.101 Most other accounts painted a similar picture, seeing Churchill’s premiership as a decisive factor in the emergence of city bombing as a central British strategy.102

100 Similarly Andrew Spencer has noted that discussions on Dresden, in public discourse as well as in historiography have been strongly characterized by a “biographic” focus and centered on the role of the decision-making and responsibility of Arthur Harris and Winston Churchill. Andrew John Spencer, “Publizistik und Historiographie über die Zerstörung Dresdens,” in Die Zerstörung Dresdens. Antworten der Künste, ed. Walter Schmitz (Dresden: 2005) 27-41, here: 30-32. As will be further discussed in Chapter 3, East German historian Groehler made a similar observation in 1968: Olaf Groehler, “Der “strategische” Luftkrieg gegen Hitlerdeutschland (Februar 1942-März 1944),” Zeitschrift für Militärgeschichte 7, no. 4 (1968) 439-453, here: 442-443.


102 Both Spetzler and Hampe see the appointment of Churchill as prime minister as the beginning of a new phase in the bombing war: Spetzler, Luftkrieg und Menschlichkeit 251-
Chief of Bomber Command Arthur Harris played a very similar role. Though in some accounts (such as Irving’s *Destruction of Dresden*) Harris was depicted as a character who mainly executed the ideas of his prime minister, in most historical accounts Harris is presented as the main driving force behind the British “terror bombings”. Rumpf and Hampe present him as a ruthless and barbaric officer who had ideas similar to those of Churchill and whose appointment in 1942 marked another important turning point. The British decision to make city bombing and German civilian morale their prime target in 1942 is often ascribed to Harris personally, who was appointed as Chief of Bomber Command almost simultaneously with a shift in British strategic premises. Though both Harris and Churchill indeed played significant roles in the process of decision-making during the war, German historiography often exaggerated the biographical factors to such an extent as to suggest that the strategic bombings had been the “personal” war of Harris and Churchill.103

This emphasis on Harris and Churchill also reflected a traditional approach that was still very dominant in these accounts in which history was seen primarily as a confrontation between “great men”. According to this view, which dominated German historiography in the 1950s, history was, first and foremost, “political” history. Historical events were largely determined by leaders. In this sense, a focus on Allied leaders not only reflected the moral message these works tried to transmit, but was also a natural outcome of a traditional political history.

On the other hand, these accounts did not see the air war as only a history of politics and war, but also as a problem of international law. The accusative tone

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252; Hampe, *Der zivile Luftschutz* 112.
103 Most radically: Rumpf, “Das war vorgeplanter Völkermord”.

also was reflected in the way in which many of these accounts were structured. Various accounts of the air war, take the form of a legal plea or, in other words, a “court case” against the Allies. Typical of this approach is the work of legal specialist Eberhard Spetzler. With a focus on the problems of international law, Spetzler’s account was well received among historians as it underlined the central arguments that were dominant in the documentary-historical and military-technical accounts. Spetzler and, a few years later, the Austrian Maximilian Czesany in his very similar Nie Wieder Luftkrieg gegen die Zivilbevölkerung (1961) concluded that the legal regulations and customary law of air warfare were in need of codification, mainly because these principles had been massively infringed during the Second World War.104

But by structuring these arguments as a legal brief and concentrating on conclusions about the rules of war fare during the Second World War, they turned the comparison between the actions of the German Luftwaffe and those of the British RAF into a legal question. Like most other German accounts Spetzler concluded that the German Luftwaffe had restricted itself to militarily relevant targets and had perceived the use of bombings only as a means to support conventional warfare over land and had therefore not infringed international and military law.105 The bombings of Warsaw and Rotterdam were portrayed as “sheer tactical attacks”. The actions of the Luftwaffe against Rotterdam were even enthusiastically described as an attack that “hardly could have been carried out more correctly”, suggesting explicitly that the German bombers had consciously kept article 27 of

104 Spetzler, Luftkrieg und Menschlichkeit 390-396. Similarly and almost with the same conclusions: Czesany, Nie wieder Krieg 13-29.
105 These legal arguments were present not only in the works that focused explicitly on international and military law, but also formed a recurring argumentative strategy in other West German accounts of the bombing war. E.g. Rumpl, Das war der Bombenkrieg 10, 15, 21.
The Hague Conventions in mind because the bombers had made a specific effort to drop their bombs within the ordered target area.\textsuperscript{106}

That this was a residential area, and methodically attacked by area bombing is left out of the picture. Moreover, as in the works of Rumpf and others, those German attacks that were aimed specifically at the centers and residential areas of British cities were categorized as “reprisals”. Spetzler’s work shows that this term was used not only to understand the causal relationship between British and German bombings, but also to clarify a legal issue. Discussing the lawfulness of the 1942 German attacks on undefended British towns, Spetzler concluded that while principally “this kind of warfare conflicted with military law” the attacks were nevertheless justified by the fact that they were reprisals for British terror. “Such reprisal air attacks were permitted by customary military law (“\textit{nach überkommem-nem Kriegsrecht}”) also against residential areas, the more so as they had been carried out because of similar bombings”.\textsuperscript{107}

Spetzler not only attempted to rehabilitate even those bombings which were exclusively directed at British civilians, he pushed this argument even further by stating that “by claiming its right to reprisals, Germany made clear that it denounced

\textsuperscript{106} Spetzler, \textit{Luftkrieg und Menschlichkeit} 235-238, 247-248. Spetzler’s revisionist standpoint becomes clear in his conclusion that the \textit{Polenfeldzug} had been a “chivalric and humane” war from the German side, while from the Polish side dreadful atrocities had been committed against \textit{Volksdeutsche} (Spetzler even refers to the writings of General Kesselring in a footnote). See 238 (especially note 105 and 106). E.g. Kesselring, \textit{Soldat bis zum letzten Tag} 61.

\textsuperscript{107} Spetzler, \textit{Luftkrieg und Menschlichkeit} 265-266. In his defense of the German bombings Spetzler makes a specific point in phrasing them as “reprisals” and not as “retaliation”. Likewise: Czesany, \textit{Nie wieder Krieg} 93-97. Czesany was a little more reluctant in excusing the German “reprisal” attacks against British cities in 1940 and 1941. Czesany categorized these as “reprisal excess” and as disproportionate countermeasures. However, the point Czesany made is that the British government did not recognize the illegality of these German attacks and with this showed its indifference to the fate of not only the German but even the British civilian population. Therefore, ultimately the British war leaders and government are made primarily responsible for the \textit{Bombenkrieg} even when it was directed against their own people.
the British air war over the ‘Reichsgebiet’ as being in conflict with military law”. According to Spetzler, Germany held an “unaltered commitment” to air war rules, which it had not wanted to infringe in the first place.\textsuperscript{108} Responsibility for the corruption of the air war and for the massive suffering of the Germans lay with the British and American army leaders. Long before the outbreak of the war in 1939 the British had prepared themselves for strategic bombing along the lines of Douhetism and had willfully ignored the essence of The Hague Conventions. During the war and especially during the last phase, “when the war had ceased to be a military problem” the British had engaged in a total warfare against “all reachable civilians” even though they were well aware that this would not in any way contribute to a military victory. Dresden represented the climax of the air terror, an attack on the city of arts and of hospitals: a \textit{Lazarettstadt} without any military significance.\textsuperscript{109}

Spetzler’s central arguments were shared by most other accounts, even though not all these accounts were structured as a legal plea. The significance of the legal status of the bombings was commonly accepted. According to this view, in a legal sense the British bombings were a crime, and the German bombings were not. It had been the British who started the bomber war and along the way had provoked German “reprisals” which were therefore legal. In the air war the Allies had broken every rule and law in the book, while the Germans had made an effort to fight lawfully.

\textsuperscript{108} Spetzler, \textit{Luftkrieg und Menschlichkeit} 266. For a different view on the legitimacy of German bombings of cities like Guernica from the perspective of international law see: Heinz Markus Hanke, \textit{Luftkrieg und Zivilbevölkerung. Der kriegsvölkerrechtliche Schutz der Zivilbevölkerung gegen Luftbombardements von den Anfängen bis zum Ausbruch des Zweiten Weltkrieges} (Frankfurt am Main: 1991); Klaus A. Maier, “Totaler Krieg und operativer Luftkrieg,” in \textit{Das Deutsche Reich und der Zweite Weltkrieg 2. Die Errichtung der Hegemonie auf dem Europäischen Kontinent}, ed. Klaus A. Maier, et al. (Stuttgart: 1979) 43-69. For Maier’s arguments also see chapter 3.

\textsuperscript{109} Spetzler, \textit{Luftkrieg und Menschlichkeit} 317-318.
The German victims

This approach also characterized the descriptions of the German victims of Allied bombing. A commonly shared idea was that the main victims of bombing during the war were the Germans. Even though German bombings were referred to in the formal arguments, their effect on civilians in British and other cities were wholly ignored. While the suffering of German civilians and the loss of cultural heritage were emphasized, descriptions of losses and suffering, resulting from Luftwaffe bombings are absent. The stress on the fundamental differences in the strategy and aims of the RAF and the Luftwaffe implicitly deprived the victims of German bombings of their historical significance. Though the term is not used, they are clearly seen as collateral damage and left anonymous. By focusing on the Allied bombings and by making a strong moral distinction between the tactical Luftwaffe bombings and the British-American terror bombings, German accounts almost exclusively saw “the Germans” as the main victims of bombing during the Second World War, bombings which were described and castigated as dreadful acts of terror against defenseless victims.

Similar to the way the Luftwaffe was presented as a “clean” air force that had no part in “Hitler’s crimes”, the role of the Germans as a people was detached from Nazism. The German historical accounts often emphasized that the Germans had “harvested the hatred, which had been sown by their leaders”. This implied a fundamental distinction between the “leaders” and the “people”, who became their primary victims. In spite of his technical and unemotional approach, the idea that the German population had become victims of the bombings was implicitly evoked, for example, by Hampe’s analysis of the effects the bombings had had on

110 Rumpf, Das war der Bombenkrieg 104.
German morale. He regarded the Allied expectations that the bombings would be able to turn the Germans against their regime as a psychological miscalculation. By pressurizing the Germans the Allies had increased the power of the Nazi regime over the population and had put them under “a double coercion of their own dictatorial system and the assault of the enemy”.111 In this line of argument, “Germans” as a collective were portrayed as victims not only of Allied attacks, but also as victims of the oppressive Nazi rule. “German people” were detached from their regime and from the responsibility for the crimes that were committed under Nazism. The Germans appeared as “double victims” of the Allies and of the oppressive Nazi authorities.

However, while this was a commonly accepted starting point, the early West German accounts show strong differences in the extent to which the German victims of the air raids and their experiences were integrated into the history of the Allied bombing. It is striking that in spite of their often moralistic, denunciatory tone and a clear identification with the German side, the West German military historians during the 1950s rarely described the human consequences of the bombings. Some accounts, particularly Axel Rodenberger’s Der Tod von Dresden, focused on German suffering, but authors like Spetzler, Hampe and Feuchter concentrated on military leaders and strategy. Here the protagonists were the Allied leaders and the attacks, which were seen from the perspective of the German Luftwaffe or the air defense, rather than from that of the civilians who endured the attacks. While, on the one hand, the Luftwaffe was seen as a heroic force which along with the entire German people had tragically become a victim of Hitler’s war, the narrative was more about military heroism and tragedy than about human suffering.

111 Hampe, Der zivile Luftschutz 183.
In this difference between a detached military history or legal pleas and accounts of suffering experienced by German civilians lies a certain tension in the early West German historiography, which became particularly visible in the *Dokumente deutscher Kriegsschäden*. The first volume of this series was introduced by a dry historical overview by Feuchter, who summarized his conclusions of *Geschichte des Luftkriegs*. While Feuchter’s essay had summarized the history of the Allied bombings in a seemingly neutral and distanced tone and basically described the air war as an episode of military history, other parts of the *Dokumente* focused on the morality of the Allied bombings and on the experiences of its victims. The conclusions of the first volume and an included short lecture by president of the German Bundestag Hermann Ehlers (CDU) depicted the bombings as an act of terror against innocent civilians.\(^{112}\)

A supplementary volume of the *Dokumente* entitled, *Aus Den Tagen Des Luftkrieges Und Des Wiederaufbaues. Erlebnis Und Erfahrungsberichte* (1960) adopted this victim perspective.\(^{113}\) This separate volume was a collection of eyewitness accounts, describing the horrors of the bombings in vivid detail. The purpose of these accounts was not primarily to provide factual information but, according to the editors, to show the subjective “experience” of those involved. The volume consisted of accounts by eyewitnesses and reports made by official functionaries as well as published material. The perspective was that of Germans who had witnessed the attacks or had been professionally involved in air defense, fire fighting

\(^{112}\) Ehlers was president of the Bundestag from 1950 to 1954, the same year in which he passed away. See: http://www.bundestag.de/dokumente/textarchiv/2009/23495763_kw06_praesidenten2/index.html. His lecture had originally been delivered to commemorate the bombing of Hamburg in 1952.

or in the registration of casualties and damage. Its main editor Karlheinz Kugler had collected photographs, local press articles and excerpts of available literature, such as Axel Rodenberger’s *Der Tod von Dresden*, Hans Rumpf’s *Der hochrote Hahn*. For eyewitness accounts he drew on contemporary reports of the Hamburg police and the vivid “pathological-anatomic research” that had been published by the physician Siegfried Gräff in 1948. Accounts such as Gräff’s medical and anatomic analysis functioned primarily to demonstrate how horrific death under the bombings had been, but added no historical background or explanation. Gräff’s research into the different direct causes of death and his explicit description of corpses painted a gruesome picture. Further, the volume contained reports that had been collected by the Hamburg police department in the months following the bombing raids of July 1943. The reports told a gruesome tale of people “burning like torches” and offered horrific scenes of children’s severed limbs. Completing the tale were stories of heroic police officers rescuing endangered civilians.

The publication of this supplement illustrates that starting in the early 1960s the perspective of the victims’ experiences came to dominate accounts of the air war at the expense of the earlier perspective of military history. For example, when the *Dokumente* were re-edited and published for a larger audience as a DTV pocketbook in 1963 it was the eyewitness accounts which were selected for inclusion. Also during the 1960s new accounts appeared in which tales of personal suffering were integrated into historical accounts of the air war. In 1961 in *Das war der*...

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114 Siegfried Gräff, *Tod im Luftangriff. Ergebnisse pathologisch-anatomischer Untersuchungen anläßlich der Angriffe auf Hamburg in den Jahren 1943-45* (Hamburg: 1948) Though Nahm officially was involved in the editing, the practical selection of accounts and photographs were undertaken by Kugler. See e.g. the editors’ report of 27-7 1960 in Barch B 105/5648, folder 228-234.

115 The eyewitness accounts collected in the *Dokumente deutscher Kriegsschäden* later were reprinted in a collection by Erhard Klöss in 1963. Klöss, *Der Luftkrieg über Deutschland* 84, 105.
Bombenkrieg, more than in his earlier publication, Rumpf concentrated not only on the military strategy of the Allies or on legal arguments but accentuated the suffering of the Germans and included short descriptions of eyewitness reports.\textsuperscript{116}

The popularity of David Irving’s works, which prominently featured eyewitness accounts of civilian suffering in Dresden, shows the increased public attention for the victims’ perspective of the Allied bombings.

The German accounts in this period reflect a certain ambivalence and a gradual shift in the way German victimhood is described. Though they increasingly focused on German suffering it is striking that these works reflected an ambivalent understanding of the German word \textit{Opfer}, which can refer to both “sacrifice” or to “victim”. The reports by Hamburg policemen, which were included in the \textit{Dokumente deutscher Kriegsschäden} in order to give a detailed view on the bombings experiences, illustrate this double meaning. They told a heroic tale of Hamburg policemen bravely risking their lives rescuing women and children. Some reports recount how in some cases the policemen became injured and had to be forced to stop their heroic work by concerned bystanders. Axel Rodenberger’s \textit{Der Tod von Dresden} (1951) offers the tale of a similar heroic sacrifice: a German doctor (‘Professor X’) who refused to stop operating during the attack on Dresden.\textsuperscript{117}

In these emotional and horrific accounts the witnesses involved appeared as pure victims or heroic figures, who helped or rescued the innocent.

\textsuperscript{116} Rumpf, \textit{Das war der Bombenkrieg} 86ff, 104ff.
\textsuperscript{117} Axel Rodenberger, \textit{Der Tod von Dresden} (Dortmund 1951) 123-124.
England’s Alleinschuld

The portrayal of Hamburg police officers not as perpetrators of Nazi persecution but as heroes illustrated not only the absence of references to German responsibility for war crimes but also the continuity of a perspective on the bombings that originated in the Second World War itself. This became apparent not only in documents, which, like the reports of the Hamburg police in the Dokumente, were written before 1945, but also in many postwar accounts. Many interpretations, descriptions and arguments that were already present in Nazi propaganda were “recycled” after the war, especially in the work of ex-servicemen like Rumpf, Spetzler and Hampe.

Under the pressure of the Allied air raids, the Nazi rule had been increasingly inclined to react publicly and formulate official interpretations. Afraid that the Allied bombings would indeed negatively influence the morale of the Germans and provoke dissatisfaction with the German regime, the propaganda apparatus of the Third Reich considered the Allied bombings as one of its main challenges. It sought to provide the Germans with interpretations of the bombings that confirmed the Nazi ideology and would convince the Germans of the need to trust and cooperate with their regime. In these efforts, the Nazi propaganda was often hybrid and contradictory. But while not all elements were suitable for postwar interpretations, certain central arguments found their way back in German narratives after 1945.\textsuperscript{118}

A good example of the postwar recycling of Nazi narratives was the way in which the Allied and German air forces were distinguished and the British were morally denounced. Though Nazi propaganda often had referred to the Jews as the ultimate instigators of the bombings, it particularly emphasized British responsibility for the injustice and horrors of the air war. This was especially the case in the argumentation that had led to a total moral denunciation of the Allies. In newspapers, “white books”, pamphlets and professional or military journals National Socialist Germany had made a strong effort to denounce the Allied bombings as illegitimate, criminal attacks, while simultaneously painting a heroic and chivalric picture of the German Luftwaffe, which had tried to fight fairly but had been forced to retaliate. A series of propaganda pamphlets was published whose arguments resembled later postwar writings of authors like Rumpf and Spetzler.

As the air war reached its radical phase in 1943, pamphlets such as Englands Alleinschuld am Bombenterror (1943), Dokumente über die Alleinschuld Englands am Bombenkrieg gegen die Zivilbevölkerung (1943) and Reuter fälscht die Luftkriegsschuld (1944) were published. These works were pamphlets in which the development of bombing during the war was summarized, supplemented with collections of documents and quotes from German and British politicians and newspaper articles. The central argumentation in these works was that while Hitler had repeatedly called for a general protection of civilians against air war and had refrained from strategic bombing and from using terror against civilians, the British had willfully

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violated international law.120

In many of these propaganda texts the fundamental strategic differences between clean continental warfare and dirty and criminal British warfare were emphasized, almost exactly along the same lines as would be argued in Rumpf’s accounts in the 1950s and ’60s. For example the linguistic distinction between Anglo-American “terror attacks” and German “retaliation” was not invented by postwar German authors but rooted in Nazi propaganda.121 The term “terror bombing”, the most common description for the Allied actions in the Nazi propaganda, also became the term used to describe the Allied bombings of German cities in the postwar literature.

Though it should be noted that the term also became popular in parts of the international, including British and American, discourse, the continuing use of this term in German historiography is illustrative.122 Another indication for the strong discursive and semantic continuity in which the air war was discussed was that both in Nazi propaganda as well as in postwar historiography the German Wehrmacht and Luftwaffe were categorized with the phrase “humane and chival-

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120 See for example: Auswärtiges Amt, ed. Dokumente über die Alleinschuld Englands am Bombenkrieg gegen die Zivilbevölkerung, Auswärtiges Amt 1943 Nr. 8 (Berlin: 1943); Franz Eher, ed. Englands Alleinschuld am Bombenterror, Volksausgabe des 8. amtlichen Deutschen Weisbuches (Berlin: Zentralverlag der NSDAP, 1943); Dr. Ehmer, ed. Der Bombenkrieg der Briten: amtliche Feststellungen zur Schuldfrage (1943); Gerhard Habermacher and Walther Koerbner, Reuter fälscht die Luftkriegsschuld Schriftenreihe des Instituts zur Erforschung und Froderung des internationalen Pressewesen der Union nationaler Journalistenverbände (Nürnberg: 1944); “Planmäßiger Luftterror. Vom ungezielten Bombenwurf zum bewussten Angriff auf Wohnviertel und Kulturstätten,” Deutsche Luftwacht, Ausgabe Luftwissen: Zeitschrift für Luftfahrtechnik und -forschung mit Mitteilungen der Deutschen Akademie für Luftfahrtforschung 10, no. 6 (1943) 161.
121 See e.g., Eher, ed. Englands Alleinschuld 19, where Eher distinguishes “German retaliatory attacks” from “systematic appliance of air terror against the German civilian population”.
122 Hans Rumpf and Erhard Klöss explicitly stressed that in spite of its first use by Goebbels the term “terror attack” had become a “technical expression” and was most suitable to describe the Allied practice. Klöss also uses the equally charged phrase “ausradieren”: Klöss, Der Luftkrieg über Deutschland 21-22; Rumpf, Das war der Bombenkrieg 39.
ric”, while using the terms “terror” and “murder” to describe the Allied bombings.\(^\text{123}\) This reflects and in which the distinction between a “clean” German army and a “dirty” Anglo-American strategy was implicitly presumed and the “terrorist”

\(^{123}\) For the term “humane and chivalric” or in German “human und ritterlich” see: Spetzler, *Luftkrieg und Menschlichkeit* 238; Eher, ed. *Englands Alleinschuld* 5; Kesselring, *Soldat bis zum letzten Tag* 61.
The intents of the Allies were taken for granted.

These similarities show how faithfully authors like Rumpf and Spetzler were literally recycling arguments and rhetoric of these Nazi pamphlets, which had been used to mobilize hatred against the enemy and to depict the British as the true aggressors of the war. Another illustration of this continuity was their wholly uncritical reading of Hitler’s repeated calls for a restriction of air bombardments. Notably, his speech of 8 November 1940 in which he legitimized his decision for retaliation was accepted by Spetzler and Rumpf as a sincere attempt to limit the dimensions of total warfare. Rumpf stated that Hitler “feared the strategic air war” and called Hitler’s appeals “certainly calculated, but nevertheless serious.”\textsuperscript{124} Rumpf even paraphrased Hitler’s speech by stating (as quoted above) that “only five months later – 7 September, after German cities, including Berlin seven times, had been bombed again and again and warnings had been of no use, did the German counter strike follow”.\textsuperscript{125} Similarly the continuous references to articles in the Hague Conventions of 1899 are a continuation of a rhetorical strategy developed by Nazi propaganda to criminalize the Allied air war.\textsuperscript{126}

There is a certain tension between this picture of a clean and fair Luftwaffe and the also repeated claim by Hitler and Goebbels that with Vergeltungswaffen Germany was willing to exceed the Allied “terror” and Hitler’s famous threat that he would “eradicate” British cities out of revenge. On the other hand, they were

\textsuperscript{124} Rumpf, \textit{Das war der Bombenkrieg} 27.
\textsuperscript{125} Ibid. 21. For Hitler’s speech e.g. see: “England missverstand die deutsche Geduld. Führerrede vom 8. November 1940 vor der Alten Garde zu München” (Auszug) in: Eher, ed. \textit{Englands Alleinschuld} 129-130. Here Hitler stated that “I have waited more than three months, and then one day I gave out the order: now I will take on this battle with the determination with which I have taken on every battle”.
both part of National Socialist propaganda strategy and could easily be combined under the idea of a “counter terror”. Though the Luftwaffe remained unable to find an effective answer to the Allied bombings, the promise of “retaliation” by “Wunderwaffen” such as the V1 and V2 rockets remained an important element of Nazi propaganda.127

Volksgemeinschaft, heroes and victims

Another important element of the Nazi narrative that found its echo in the post-war West German accounts reflected on the German population. Concerned not only to depict the Allied air raids as immoral, Nazi propaganda also wanted to counter their negative impact on German morale, by claiming that the British and American bombings were ineffective. In many articles and pamphlets the Allied bombings were presented not only as a failure in military terms, but also as futile

127 Blank, “Kriegsalltag und Luftkrieg” 436.
attempts to break German morale. The basis for this interpretation was the image of a heroic German Volksgemeinschaft that prevailed under the increasing pressure of Allied “terror”. During the war the official reaction to the increasing Allied air attacks became an important issue for Nazi propaganda, which regarded these attacks as a major legitimacy problem.128 Nazi leaders were aware that the inability of the German Luftwaffe and civil defense to protect the Germans against the growing dangers of bombing or to stop them by “retaliating” with a counteroffensive on British cities had a strong negative impact on the trust of the Germans in their government. For example, the heavy raids on cities like Kassel and Hamburg in 1943 had led to a strong demoralization of the German civilians, who were increasingly losing their faith in a German victory and reacted with cynicism and apathy.129

In reaction to the fear that the Germans were in danger of being negatively influenced by the Allied bombings, the propaganda fanatically emphasized the bravery, loyalty and stubbornness of the German people under the attacks but also sought to collectivize the mourning over the losses. An important reaction of the propaganda-press to this threat of demoralization was a strong emphasis on the bravery and loyalty of the Volksgemeinschaft and a campaign to treat the air war’s victims as heroes. The Nazis ritualized a myth of the German “hero-victim”, who was characterized by loyalty, obedience and the will to sacrifice. In commemora-

tion services, organized in different cities that had suffered heavy attacks, the civilian dead were presented as heroes, who had died with honor in a military battle for their fatherland. During the Third Reich the sacrificial meaning of the word *Opfer* dominated. In the Nazi propaganda the victims of the bombings were celebrated as heroes, who had sacrificed their lives for the greater good. In an article in *Das Reich* following the bombing of Cologne in 1942 the author concluded that “now West Germany demonstrates that a close community’s will to live does allow material damage but does not allow total loss of spirit and character.”

While the sacrificial meaning of *Opfer* dominated the Nazi accounts, the extent of the German suffering received increasing attention in Nazi propaganda, especially beginning in 1943, when it became harder to ignore. Now, the emphasis shifted to the idea that the stubborn *Volksgemeinschaft* was able to face the hardships of the bombing war and move on despite the heavy strains. Also, especially after the raid on Dresden in February 1945, the Nazi press started to explicitly describe the horrific details of the bombings, something they had avoided up till then. Now the supposed Allied objective to erase the Germans as a whole was instrumentalized to extort the Germans to support the Nazi regime at a time when belief in the *Endsieg* was fading drastically. The message presented by the Nazi propaganda was that the Germans had no choice but to keep up their resistance against the enemy, since they could expect no mercy or comfortable peace

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132 Thiessen, *Eingebrochen ins Gedächtnis* 44.

133 See e.g. Neutzner, “Vom Alltäglichen zum Exemplarischen” 110-127.
but were facing annihilation and slavery. In a lengthy and relatively detailed article in *Das Reich*, Rudolph Sparing stated that the Allies through the “murder of Dresden” wanted to enforce the capitulation of Germany in order to subsequently be able to “execute the death penalty to the remaining part of the population”. He concluded with a warning: “Against this threat there is no other solution than that of the fighting resistance”.  

While the willingness of the Germans to sacrifice themselves for the Third Reich drastically decreased in the last phase of the Second World War, a part of the National Socialist ideal of the hero-victim survived. This blurred image of Germans as a heroic *Volksgemeinschaft* and a community of suffering and endurance was also echoed in various postwar West German accounts. Some authors praised the “will to resist” of the German people in a way that resembled the general themes of Nazi propaganda. While General Hampe, in an article for *Ziviler Luftschutz*, gave a very euphemistic view of the “men and women” who had to face the attacks and of the “misled and deluded” German people who “fought an unparalleled battle for their existence”, it was especially in the work of Hans Rumpf that the German civilians under Allied attack appear as heroes. Heavily charged with pathos, Rumpf’s books romanticized the “phenomena of *Leidensfähigkeit* (ability to endure duress/hardship) and *Widerstandskraft* (the power of resistance) of a people confronted with an ultimate exertion in a bombing war of

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134 Sparing, “Der Tod von Dresden”.
135 Behrenbeck, *Der Kult um die toten Helden* 600ff.
which it was the target”. 137 Rumpf continued to praise the “brave steadfastness” of the Germans who were “constantly in a condition ready for air defense” and emphasized that this steadfastness was rooted in the “virtues” of a specific “German Volkscharakter”. In a clearly racially based argumentation that echoed all the central aspects of Nazi propaganda Rumpf suggested that Germans’ “great sense of duty” as well as their “distinct sense for natural resistance against destruction” were the most probable reasons why the Germans had endured the bombings so much more bravely than had other people. 138

The ideal of the Volksgemeinschaft was particularly present in eyewitness accounts of the bombings, in which the heroic sacrifice and terrible suffering described often directly reflected the language of Nazi-propaganda-discourse. Reports of officials not only reflected the official language of the National Socialist regime, but in many aspects, such as their portrayal of individual heroism, these stories internalized a narrative of courage and cohesion that was strongly affected by the ideology of the taunted and brave German Volksgemeinschaft. As the work of Hampe and Rumpf demonstrates, many functionaries who had been involved in air protection or fire fighting tended to portray their own roles in a heroic manner, and while often downplaying their relationship to the regime, they made use of a heroic language to describe their actions, which was very similar to the language of Nazi propaganda.

137 Rumpf, Das war der Bombenkrieg 125.
138 Ibid. 127-129. Though not emphasizing the German “Volkscharakter” explicitly, many other writers similarly described the position of the German people as a mixture of suffering and brave endurance. See e.g. Klöss, Der Luftkrieg über Deutschland 21. Also see the police report written in Hamburg 25-8-1943, in which the reporting officer makes a similar remark when he described the different reactions of Germans and foreign forced labourers to the bombing of Hamburg. He describes the reaction of the German Volksgenossen as “calm”, “brave” and “confident” especially in contrast to the French workers who were “extremely anxious”. See: Klöss, Der Luftkrieg über Deutschland 61.
But by only selectively adopting the National Socialist ideal of the hero victim, the postwar accounts, particularly since the 1960s, depicted Germans as “victims”. Where the Nazi propaganda had portrayed the Germans as a community that supported Hitler and the Nazi state, the postwar accounts often detached the Germans from their regime, by seeing them as victims of both Nazism and the Allied bombings.\(^{139}\) The air war had created a “community of suffering” amongst the Germans that reflected an “open-hearted humaneness” and made the community feel secure. These proud and brave Germans endured all the hardship and were eventually driven into the arms of Nazi propaganda, since the Allies had made clear that they were aiming to erase the Germans as a whole. Thereby, the Allies had not only misjudged the German people (by expecting that they would react just like the weaker “Roman” people of France or Italy) they had also prolonged the war. It had been the Allies with their brutal and immoral plans and practices who had provided the “main arguments” for the Germans to continue to support the Nazi regime.\(^{140}\)

\textit{Occident and the destruction of Europe}

The idea of a bravely resisting ethnic community driven into the arms of its oppressive regime because it had no choice was connected to another central argument in the National Socialist interpretation of the bombings. This was the interpretation in which the Allied bombings were regarded as an attempt to erase the German people and its culture. Thus, they were an attack on the very essence of the Occident and the European “\textit{Kernraum}”. Though the threat of total annihilation

\(^{139}\) Behrenbeck, \textit{Der Kult um die toten Helden} 600.

\(^{140}\) Rumpf, \textit{Das war der Bombenkrieg} 136.
of the German people was more explicitly stated in the final phase of the war, the idea that the British were trying to destroy not only Germany but Europe and its *abendländische* (Occidental) culture had formed a central element in Nazi propaganda since the beginning of the air war. The idea that the Anglo-Americans were deliberately erasing the cultural highlights of the European mainland was emphasized to illustrate that the British and Americans were disgracefully failing in their attempts to attack German military targets. And especially from 1942 onwards, Nazi propaganda increasingly labeled the Allied bombings as cultural barbarism. Dwelling strongly on propaganda battles of the First World War, the Allied bombings were now taken as evidence that the air war represented an assault by un-European barbarians on continental European culture.  

With their bombing campaign the Allies were not fighting a military battle but were pursuing “their detailed plan of the obliteration of Europe”.  

Here again, the Nazi propaganda treated the destruction of old cultural values with ambivalence. On the one hand, Hitler repeatedly denounced Churchill as a cultural barbarian, who did not care about “European cultural values”.  

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141 Nicola Lambourne, *War damage in Western Europe: the destruction of historic monuments during the Second World War* (Edinburgh: 2001) 101-103. Lambourne points out that the German allegations were mirrored by British propaganda, which similarly pointed at the cultural barbarism of the Germans and their destruction of cultural values in British cities: Also see: Dietmar Süß, “Luftkrieg, Öffentlichkeit und die Konjunkturen der Erinnerung,” in *Der Zweite Weltkrieg in Europa. Erfahrung und Erinnerung*, ed. Jörg Echternkamp and Stefan Martens, *Im Auftrag des Deutschen Historischen Instituts Paris und des Militärgeschichtlichen Forschungsamt, Potsdam* (Paderborn: 2007) 207-222, here: 213. This perspective also corresponds with earlier German “Zivilisationskritik”. Since the late 19th century and during the First World War German intellectuals drew a fundamental distinction between *Kultur* and *Zivilisation*. Germany was regarded as representing the essence of European *Kultur* while France and England represented a civilization ideal that was not based on long European cultural traditions but on the ideals of the Enlightenment and the French Revolution. E.g. Barbara Besslich, *Wege in den “Kulturkrieg”: Zivilisationskritik in Deutschland 1890-1914* (Darmstadt: 2000).  

142 Eher, ed. *Englands Alleinschuld* 21.  

other hand, more than once, Hitler and other Nazi leaders celebrated this destruction as a catharsis, which allowed the regime to rebuild Germany according to National Socialist principles. After the large-scale destruction of Cologne in 1942, Joseph Goebbels wrote in his diary that Hitler had pointed out that the attack had a positive side. Hitler cynically stated that the bombings had cleared the city’s structure, which he had planned to destroy himself in order to rebuild the city according to National Socialist ideals.144 Similarly, after the large-scale attack on Dresden in 1945, Robert Ley, the leader of the German Labor Front, celebrated the destruction of the “old civil heritage” of the city’s cultural values. “This way we march into the German victory, without all superfluous dead weight and without the heavy ideal and material baggage of bourgeois culture”.145

However, the German propaganda ministry of Joseph Goebbels was aware that this interpretation was not very popular and preferred an explanation in which anger was expressed over the cultural barbarism of the Allies. Goebbels considered Ley’s article a gross miscalculation and a counterproductive way of handling the Allied bombing war. One day later an article by Rudolf Sparing in Das Reich gave an alternative interpretation of the bombing of Dresden, which replaced Ley’s cynicism with grief and anger over the loss of Dresden’s cultural values. From now on, German propaganda focused on the destruction of Dresden and emphasized the city’s culture and beauty, making it a symbol of the Europeanness of German culture. References to the Europeanness of the German cities under attack and the depiction of Dresden as the epitome of the European and Occiden-

145 Robert Ley in Der Angriff 3-3 1945, quoted in: Neutzner, “Vom Alltäglichen zum Exemplarischen” 121.
tal spirit were explicitly emphasized in the press reactions to the massive bombings on 13 and 14 February. Rudolf Sparing stressed the uniqueness of Dresden’s cultural values by portraying the air war as a threat to the “abendländische Kultur” and claimed that in Dresden “a city of complete harmony” had been “erased from the European sky”.\(^{146}\) Another article summarized the European dimension by stating: “Dresden was not just another German city, it was a European city, and it was common property of the *abendländische Menschheit* (Occidental humanity)\(^{147}\)

The underlying idea was that the Allies had attacked not only the German air forces and German civilians, but that the ultimate target of the “Anglo-American” attacks had been German culture, which meant “European” culture and civilization.\(^{148}\) This perspective, describing the bombings as an attack on European culture reappeared in postwar historiography, especially in those accounts dealing with the bombing of Dresden. Axel Rodenberger’s and Wolfgang Paul’s accounts of the bombing of Dresden explicitly paint that city as the geographic and symbolic centre of the *Abendland*. Rodenberger, for example, stressed the universal and Occidental value of Dresden “one of the most beautiful cities in the world” by claiming that “it was a trusteeship that Dresden exercised, a common property of the *Abendland*, treasured by this city”.\(^{149}\) The idea that the bombing of Dresden was particularly dreadful because that city represented crucial and unique European cultural treasures was also present in most of the more general works on the Allied bombings.\(^{150}\) The Allied bombings and specifically the damage done to

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146 Sparing, “Der Tod von Dresden”.
147 Newspaper article included in one of the copies of Habermacher and Koerbner, *Reuter fälscht die Luftkriegsschuld* that is preserved in the Rara-Leesesaal of the Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin. Here only the date is mentioned, not the original newspaper.
148 Lambourne, *War damage* 106.
149 Rodenberger, *Der Tod von Dresden* 185.
150 Czesany and Spetzler stress the “Europeanness” of Dresden explicitly. Spetzler
architecture and art collections were often presented as a “loss” not only for Germany but for European culture in general. By bombing Germany, according to Hans Rumpf, the Anglo-Americans had brought catastrophe to the “Ancient European family of states”, the European “Kernraum” or “Kernbild” (Core space or core image of Europe). By attacking Dresden the Allies had destroyed many “singular creations of the European spirit”.¹⁵¹

This idea of Germany and especially Dresden as the representatives of old European and Occidental cultural values further stressed the distinction between “humane and civilized” Germans and “barbaric” Anglo-Americans in a way that sometimes closely resembled the picture painted by Goebbels’s propaganda ministry. In addition to portraying Germany as a symbol for the “old Europe,” the propaganda sometimes explicitly depicted the Anglo-Americans as “non-European” barbarians. The comparison between the Allied bombings and the Mongol invasion of Europe during the Early Middle Ages served to confirm this “Asian” image of the bombings.¹⁵² Also in some West German accounts of Dresden, as in the work of Wolfgang Paul and Axel Rodenberger, the postwar city represented the “lost” part of Europe, because, where once it had been the geographic and cultural centre of Europe – in Mitteleuropa, it now lay in the Soviet Zone and painfully represented the division of Germany and of Europe.¹⁵³

reminded the reader that Dresden until then had been “one of the most famous sights of the abendländische Kultur”. Spetzler, Luftkrieg und Menschlichkeit 317. Also see: Czesany, Nie wieder Krieg 134; Kurowski, Der Luftkrieg über Deutschland 349.

¹⁵¹ Rumpf, Das war der Bombenkrieg 33; Rumpf, “Das war vorgeplanter Völkermord”; Rumpf, “Bomber-Harris” 23. A similar stressing of the Europeanness of the destroyed cultural treasures in Germany in: Hampe, Der zivile Luftschutz 199.

¹⁵² Rumpf, “Das war vorgeplanter Völkermord”. Interestingly this comparison was originally used by British Major General Fuller, whom Rumpf cites here. See the paragraph below and: J.F.C Fuller, The Second World War 1939-45. A Strategical and Tactical History (London: 1948) 222-228.

¹⁵³ For an analysis of the anti-Communist rhetoric in the works of Paul and Rodenberger, see chapter 2.
3b Finding crown witnesses: The reading of British historiography in West Germany

Major JFC Fuller

In addition to “recycling” German wartime interpretations the West German historians relied heavily on British-American literature and sources. While the German historians were not part of historical institutions, they nevertheless made an effort to create a historical overview of the bombing war. With many important archives still closed and only very limited access to relevant data, German accounts of the 1950s and '60’s relied strongly- or even primarily- on British and American literature. This initially consisted primarily of memoirs published by British and American military leaders and publicists. In these works important figures like James Molony Spaight, Arthur Harris and Lord Tedder, or relative outsiders and opponents of the strategic bombings like John F.C. Fuller or law-specialist F.J.P. Veale reflected on the bombing war as well as on their personal roles in it. 154 Also, in 1945 the Americans published an official report, the US Strategic Bombing Survey, on the chronology and impact of the Allied bombing offensive against Germany. In 1961 British historians Charles Webster and Noble Frankland published a vast multivolume ‘official’ British history of the bombing war. 155 In 1963 the now notorious David Irving published his bestseller The Destruction of Dresden, in


155 David MacIsaac, ed. The United States strategic bombing survey, 10 vols. (New York: 1978). German scholars’ access to this document, however, was initially limited. Hans Rumpf complained in Der Hochrote Hahn (1952 ) that he had not been granted access to it. In preparing his second work Das war der Bombenkrieg, however, he had been able to study it and included parts in his appendix. (See Rumpf, Das war der Bombenkrieg 173-201). Also: Charles Webster and Noble Frankland, The strategic air offensive against Germany, 1939-1945 4vols. (London: 1961).
which many new documents and photographs were presented for the first time.  

These mainly British military leaders and historians provided the German authors with valuable information. “Citing the British”, however, also had a clear rhetorical purpose, and in this sense functioned as a strategy that had already been practiced during the war. The Nazi pamphlets which had collected documents on the air war had often included quotes from British critics or neutral press which denounced the Allied air war. Several propaganda pamphlets consisted of a collage of quotes which either illustrated British brutality or protested against it.157

Very similarly, after the war, a selective reading of British sources and historiography became a popular rhetorical strategy to underline the conclusions of the German authors. The British works were often portrayed as cynical and propagandistic standpoints that were meant to defend an immoral strategy. Those who defended the British strategy, such as James M. Spaight and Arthur Harris, were quoted to illustrate the cynicism of the British, who even after the war defended the mass murder of German civilians. Sometimes a specific single and isolated argument or statement was repeatedly quoted to underline a certain argument. The most common example is the frequent citing of a comment by J. M. Spaight, a British civil servant in the Air Ministry, who wrote several influential books on legal and military aspects of the air war, that “We (the British BvBB) have started, before the Germans, bombing targets on the German mainland. That is a historical fact”.158 Spaight’s claim served not only as an argument that even British mili-
tary officials accepted responsibility for the air war retrospectively, but also demonstrated the cold arrogance with which the responsible military officials still regarded this initiative as a justifiable act of warfare.

But more important than these defenders of the British bombings were those English writers who criticized ‘their own’ military and political leaders for bombing Germany or provided the German authors with arguments to support ‘their cause’. The occasional protests that were voiced in the British public debate during the war – for instance by the Bishop of Chichester George Bell or by pacifist writer Vera Britain – were often quoted to illustrate that ‘even in Britain’ the strategic bombings were a contested and controversial subject.¹⁵⁹

A similar strategy was pursued in the second supplement to the Dokumente deutscher Kriegsschäden, in which press responses from neutral countries had been collected. These articles mostly criticized the Allied bombings as an immoral strategy, especially after the bombing of Dresden in February 1945.¹⁶⁰ Though the editors of the Dokumente presented these articles as “objective” moral criticisms from a neutral perspective, some of the foreign press, especially the oft-quoted Svenska Morgenbladet and other Swedish newspapers, were heavily influenced and success-

¹⁵⁹ “Quoting the British” was a rhetorical strategy that had been introduced by Nazi propaganda and was continued after the war, when the number of critical British voices increased. See for example: Der Anglo-Amerikanische Bombenkrieg, 12. In addition to British dissident voices, criticism by the press in neutral countries was often quoted as an “objective” opinion. Again, this was a practice started under Nazi propaganda and continued in the Federal Republic. See especially: Peter Paul Nahm and Karlheinz Kugler, eds., Dokumente Deutscher Kriegsschäden. Evakuierte, Kriegssachgeschädigte, Währungsgeschädigte. Die geschichtliche und rechtliche Entwicklung. 2. Beihet: Der Luftkrieg im Spiegel der neutralen Presse (Bonn: 1962) and Klöss, Der Luftkrieg über Deutschland 173-268. Bishop Bell also became a central figure in Rolf Hochhuth’s play: Hochhuth, Soldaten 133-180.

fully manipulated by the German propaganda ministry.\footnote{Neutzner, “Vom Alltäglichen zum Exemplarischen” 115-117; Nahm and Kugler, eds., Dokumente Kriegsschäden 2. Beilheft.}

Even more popular were British accounts, which demonstrated an implicit identification with the German military position. The accounts of international law expert Frederick J.P. Veale and Major General John F.C. Fuller’s, both former supporters of the Sir Oswald Mosley’s British Fascist movement, were particularly popular.\footnote{F.J.P. Veale, Advance to barbarism: how the reversion to barbarism in warfare and war-trials menaces our future (1948/1958); F.J.P. Veale, Die Barbarei entgegen. Wie der Rückfall in die Barbarei durch Kriegführung und Kriegsverbrecherprozesse unsere Zukunft bedroht (Hamburg: 1954); Fuller, The Second World War; J.F.G.-C. Fuller, Der Zweite Weltkrieg 1939-1945. Eine Darstellung seiner Strategie und Taktik (Wien-Stuttgart: 1950).} Major General Fuller had been one of the most important British military theorists and one of the founders of the \textit{Blitzkrieg}-theory. He became known as a great British military theorist, who even before the war had always been skeptical of strategic bombings, but he also had become controversial in Britain for his open admiration of Adolf Hitler.\footnote{Mark L. Urban, Generals: ten British commanders who shaped the world (London: 2005) 241-266. Also see: Higham, Military intellectuals 42-49, 67 ff.}

After the war Fuller wrote \textit{The Second World War 1939-45. A Strategical and Tactical History} (1947) which heavily criticized the Allied bombings. Fuller’s account, like the German works discussed above, relied heavily on the phrases and arguments of Nazi propaganda. It was a vehement moralistic attack on the Western Allies, combined with an apologetic categorization of the Axis powers, whose role he considered to be no more “monstrously unjust” than that of “other heads of state and of other nations in the past”. In Fuller’s view, the war aims of the Western allies were even worse, since the war aims of the Germans at least had been “sane and possible” unlike the British aim of winning the war by undermining German morale and later enforcing political dominance in postwar Europe.\footnote{Fuller, The Second World War 400 ff.} Like Rumpf and others, Fuller
stressed the British initiative in the bombing war, and uncritically quoted Hitler’s claim that he had waited patiently for the British to stop bombing before he ordered German retaliation. Fuller’s account subscribed to the dominant perspective of post-war German accounts on all fronts. Fuller saw the British bombings as nothing less than part of “a general scheme to devastate Germany and terrorize her civil population” and categorized these attacks as a “Mongolized” attack on European civilization, with “slaughterings that would have disgraced Attila”.165

Fuller’s sharply written and explicitly “pro-German” account was very well received in Germany, and not only among rightwing circles. In spite of Fuller’s fascist background, the German translation of Fuller’s book was also positively received by the German liberal press. Der Spiegel of 6-12-1950 for example praised Fuller’s account as a “scientifically (wissenschaftlich) precise account of all battles and combat operations of the Second World War” and especially underlined Fuller’s conclusion on the immorality and uselessness of the Allied bombings.166 Moreover, this book was extensively quoted in almost all German accounts on the Allied bombing war. In the historiography on the Allied bombings, Fuller’s work was repeatedly used to illustrate that “even British military leaders like Major Fuller” acknowledged the British atrocities against Germans. While conveniently ignoring Fuller’s affiliation with the Nazi regime and his implicit apology for and downplaying of Nazi crimes, the German accounts used Fuller as a “crown witness” for the “German case”.167

165 Fuller repeatedly draws parallels to “Asian” invasions, referring to the “invasion of the Seljuks” and Attila and repeatedly labelling the bombings as “vandalism”, “barbarism” and “Mongolized” attacks: Ibid. 223, 228, 317, 395, 408.
167 Fuller was quoted in almost all early non-academic German accounts. See: Feuchter, Geschichte des Luftkriegs 220; Kurowski, Der Luftkrieg über Deutschland, 52, 101; Rumpf, Das war der Bombenkrieg 22,143. Rumpf literally uses the term “crown witness” here; Spetzler, Luftkrieg und Menschlichkeit, on many places e.g. 255 (note 196), 268, 272, 280 (note 349)
as to whether the bombings could be seen as “war crime” were references made
to Fuller or others, who were quoted to answer the question. These selective quo-
tations served the rhetorical purpose of countering possible allegations that Ger-
mans were subjectively arguing from a one-sided German position.168

David Irving

The work of David Irving was more popular and widely known than that of Fuller.
In spite of his more distanced style, Irving’s conclusion lay mostly along the same
lines as those of Fuller and Rumpf. Irving, for instance, drew no clear conclusion
as to whether Dresden really was an “open city” and the attack could be seen as
a violation of The Hague Conventions.169 Also, the strong emphasis on the excep-
tional nature of the destruction and the emotional descriptions of suffering in
The Destruction of Dresden added an extra dimension to the mythological status
of Dresden as “unique” event in human history and as the “greatest bloodbath in
European history”.170

While Fuller was cited as a seemingly impartial military authority, Irving’s
role was different. His work was well received and intensively used in West Ger-
man historical accounts, partly because Irving had managed to provoke much
more attention, but also because he presented new sources and documents. Irving
was seen not only as a young and objective British historian, but also as a talented
researcher, who had provided extra arguments and proof, which underlined the

321, 380-381; Czesany, Nie wieder Krieg 79, 82, 102 etc. Kurt von Tipperlkirch, Geschichte des
Zweiten Weltkrieges (Bonn: 1951) 507.

168 See Rumpf’s remarks on this question: Rumpf, Das war der Bombenkrieg 14.
169 Irving, The Destruction of Dresden 74-75.
170 Neutzner, “Vom Anklagen zum Erinnern” 128-164.
basic conclusions the German authors had drawn themselves. His accounts on the different German cities in *und Deutschlands Städte starben nicht* inspired a whole new generation of local lay researchers.

But Irving’s popularity can at least partly be explained by the extent to which his work confirmed the foundations of the narrative that had already become dominant in Germany. Irving’s emphasis on the senselessness of the destruction was particularly stressed in the German press reactions. The liberally oriented magazine *Der Spiegel*, for example, was very positive regarding Irving’s work and summarized his central thesis: that the destruction had been a “senseless act of terror” without military necessity. Similarly the *Süddeutsche Zeitung* underlined Irving’s central conclusions and called the attack a “gruesome killing of 135,000 men, women and children, which did not even have the slightest military effect”.

The extent to which German authors welcomed and accepted Irving’s conclusions also becomes clear from the correspondence between Irving and Hans Rumpf. Irving contacted Rumpf while he was conducting research for his book, after Erich Hampe had advised him to do so in 1961. In his first reaction Rumpf, while providing Irving with information about his personal experiences as General

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173 In a review for the *Berliner Morgenpost* in 1964, Wolfgang Paul, who had also used Irving’s work for his own account *zum Beispiel Dresden* (1964) credited Irving for pointing out that the bombing had been an attempt to destroy the city completely and was an attack without military significance. Irving, who had established the death rate at 135,000 had also succeeded in making his conclusions known in Great Britain where, according to Paul, Irving’s work had not found disagreement “Dresden: Sodom in Sachsen,” *Der Spiegel*, 19-6 1963, 37-40.

Inspector of fire prevention, also remarked that he had himself tried “to clear up some of the questions associated with the bombing of Dresden” but had “established that there is no solid material left, and apparently there never will be such material”. After Irving had published his account, however, the former General Inspector showed more interest. In a letter in 1963 Rumpf sent Irving a short updated account on the bombing of Dresden, again claiming that was his “final account”, but shortly afterwards asked Irving, as a return favor, for the opportunity to view “unpublished material” Rumpf expected Irving to have. Also Rumpf proposed that he and Irving “summarize our source material together in one combined historical publication on Dresden”, a request Irving never granted.

Apart from praising what was perceived as a neutral and balanced account German reactions recognized the impact of David Irving’s work on the international reception of the bombardment. German press articles often interpreted the positive reviews and the resulting public debate in Great Britain and United States as a sign of British self-criticism and recognition of German suffering. Like Fuller and Veale, Irving came to represent the British recognition of the German side, as the article in Die Rheinpfalz announced: “The English recognize their responsibility”. The little criticism Irving received mainly focused on the point that Irving had been relatively reluctant to answer the question of responsibility in a direct manner. In his review of Irving’s work Hans Rumpf complained that

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175 Hans Rumpf to David Irving, 10-6 1961 in Barch/MA 107/19.
176 Hans Rumpf to David Irving, 28-4 1963 in Ibid.
177 “Warum musste Dresden sterben?”
178 To make this point, different articles pointed at the criticism of David Irving and other British public figures, such as British Labour politician and Minister of Housing and Local Government Richard Crossman, who was quoted for labeling the attack as a “crime against humanity”. “Engländer erkennen ihre Verantwortlichkeit an,” Die Rheinpfalz, 13-2 1965. The same quote in “Sodom in Sachsen” 37.
179 Also see the remarks in Und Deutschlands Städte which claimed to avoid “moral” discussions and implicitly dissociated itself from authors like Hampe and Rumpf. Irving,
Irving’s “moral value judgments often were too one-sided from an insular perspec-
tive” and, though showing appreciation for his work accused Irving of a partial
approval of the Allied air war.¹⁸⁰ More indirectly *Der Spiegel* made a similar point,
concluding that Irving, in spite his far-reaching conclusions, had failed to answer
the “guilt question” in a satisfactory way. And this was exactly what the article
intended to do. Taking Irving’s criticisms of Churchill as a starting point, the arti-
cle voiced a moral critique of the Allied leaders, depicting the air war as a cynical
and senseless act of terror against civilians.¹⁸¹

1.4. The Allied bombing and German guilt

*Catastrophe and crime*

If we consider the overarching narrative of these West German historical accounts,
two dominant themes can be traced: The Allied bombing as “catastrophe”, and
the bombing war as “crime”. The term catastrophe derives from the Greek word
“kata-strophe,” meaning “destruction”. Also, it was also used in Greek tragedy,
where it stands for the tragic end of the hero, who is confronted with his fate. As
a metaphor it often depicts an unexpected phenomenon, which renders people
powerless and confronts them with an irrevocable event. Therefore the metaphor
“catastrophe” emphasizes the effects, more than the causes and backgrounds. Par-
adoxically, the catastrophe itself serves as an explanation for its effects and there-
fore, if not supplemented with secondary explanations leaves the background of

28, no. 3 (1964).
¹⁸¹  “Sodom in Sachsen” 37.

*Und Deutschlands Städte* 385, 398.
the catastrophe open.\textsuperscript{182}

Such an emphasis on the effects and lack of explanations often characterized local commemoration ceremonies. In the Federal Republic the Allied bombings were primarily interpreted as a “catastrophe” while the questions of guilt and responsibility were dealt with only implicitly. Indeed, the frequent use of the word “\textit{Katastrophe}” in West German accounts to describe the effects of the air war on German cities suggests that here too the air war was seen as a “natural disaster” and an act of fate, rather than a result of deliberate human actions. By remembering the Allied bombings either as a catastrophe or a natural disaster, the air war was decontextualized and attention was directed to its effects, to silent mourning and to the admonition that this should “never happen again”. By stressing the powerlessness of Germans and by focusing on the damage, loss and suffering of German civilians the air war became a catastrophic phenomenon, brutally invading in the lives of German families.\textsuperscript{183}

The context of the war was included as only part of this catastrophe, against which the German civilians were passive victims. Only on a metaphoric level were themes like “guilt” “downfall” of relevance. In this sense the air war could be included in a broader narrative which, as is illustrated by Friedrich Meinecke’s book, perceived the Second World War as a “German catastrophe” which not only shifted attention to German suffering but also suggested a certain incapability of finding explanations.\textsuperscript{184}

However, while often referring to the bombings as a catastrophe, most


\textsuperscript{183} Arnold, “\textit{In Quiet Remembrance}”? 86-97, 120-124.

\textsuperscript{184} Lorenz, “Twee soorten catastrofe”.
accounts of the air war focused not only on the catastrophic effects of the bombings but also searched for explanations and a “guilty party”. While, on the one hand, the inherent mechanisms of “war” itself and the Hitler regime were included in the forces who were held responsible, the dominant plot was that here the Allies were to take the primary blame (the *Hauptschuld*). The early West German accounts of the Allied bombings thus were heavily charged with moral and legal accusations and generally lacked a real attempt to historicize the topic from a distanced and disinterested perspective. Emotionally charged and full of legal arguments and rhetoric that bore close resemblance to former Nazi propaganda, these works formed a narrative of the air war, which was heavily influenced by identity issues in the present. While ignoring the broader context of the Second World War and the crimes committed by Nazi Germany, explicit charges were formulated against the Allies in general and especially against British protagonists Churchill and Harris.

While at first glance “catastrophe” and “crime” seem to be incompatible story lines, they often went hand-in-hand. Such a combination of depicting the air war as a catastrophic event while at the same time clearly locating a guilty party lies at the heart of Rumpf’s *Das der Bombenkrieg*. Paradoxically Rumpf made the central argument that the German *Luftwaffe* had not started the air war and had been “wrongly accused” of a guilty role. On the other hand, the bombings were portrayed as a catastrophic disaster, whose consequences seemed to lie largely out of the hands of the British military leaders. In that sense Rumpf called the bombing of Dresden both a “catastrophe” as well as an “orgy of destruction”. In an attempt to solve this contradiction Rumpf pointed at the “inner dynamics” of the air war. According to Rumpf it seemed that this form of bombing war “slipped from the
hands of" the Allied “politicians and their air marshalls” and had become “something autonomous” and uncontrollably raged “like a natural catastrophe”.185

Moreover, in spite of the clear moral denunciation and rhetorical strategy of criminalizing the Allied bombings, the same accounts that voiced these accusations often were reluctant to pass without hesitation the final judgment that these acts were “crimes” (Verbrechen). And though many accounts, especially those of Hans Rumpf and Eberhard Spetzler, followed the line of a historical and legal “court case” against the Allies, eventually even these authors were reluctant to use the word “crime” and sometimes even returned to a moral evaluation in which authors claimed to avoid a “cheap j’accuse”.186 Hans Rumpf repeatedly claimed that he was not intending to “blame” any particular party and that it would be “wrong” to claim that only the British were guilty of the air war, a statement, which contradicted his general argument that Germany was “not guilty” in opening the “unrestricted bombing of cities”. A similar ambivalence is expressed in a review of Spetzler’s Luftkrieg und Menschlichkeit for Neue Politische Literatur by Andreas Hillgruber in 1958. Hillgruber underlined Spetzler’s conclusion that the Allied strategic bombing campaign had been “totally unsuccessful” in destroying the German war economy and in breaking German morale, and he praised Spetzler’s work. On the other hand, Hillgruber seemed to be aware of the strong political and moral charge of Spetzler’s work. He pointed to the political sensitivity of his results, which could, Hillgruber claimed, “contrary to the intentions of the author” easily be misinterpreted, since its results were “favorable” for the “German side” while “very incriminating for the Allied air war practice”. Hillgruber added

185 Rumpf, Das war der Bombenkrieg 10-11, 103-104.
186 Rumpf, “Die Bombenschuld” 42.
that it was important not to forget that Spetzler was focusing only on the air war and did not include “the question of correctness according to international law on other levels of warfare”.¹⁸⁷

A counter-narrative of German guilt: Dresden vs. Auschwitz

But while Hillgruber pleaded for an integration of Spetzler’s conclusions in a “comprehensive perspective on the Second World War”, the absence of this broader historical context in Spetzler’s work was no coincidence. In spite of the reluctance to pass explicit judgment on the Allies, the decontextualization of the Allied bombings was a vital element of the narrative of authors like Spetzler and Rumpf. The question is how the apparent contradiction between the accusative tone and the eventual reluctance to label the Allied bombings as a crime is to be understood. A possible explanation can be found in the political sensitivity of the matter. For clear political reasons in the Federal Republic there was generally a far greater reluctance to formulate moral accusations against the new political partners Great Britain and the United States than against the Soviet Union, which, in the case of the expulsions, was often directly accused of criminal acts. This would explain the reluctance to use the word “crime” as a mechanism of politically motivated self-censorship.

But a closer look at these moral accusations against the British and Americans illustrates that there was another issue at stake. What is surprising is that though Nazi crimes - let alone the crimes committed by the Wehrmacht - were ignored in these works, the idea of “German guilt” is implicitly present in the subtext as a

heavy burden on German identity. It therefore seemed vital, in Hans Rumpf’s words, that “Germany does not, in addition to the otherwise justified feeling of guilt, one that weighs heavily on us, additionally have to carry the weight of unleashing the total air war”.188 Rumpf, though referring to an abstract notion of German guilt, effectively exonerated the Germans as a collective by focusing only on their victimhood caused by Allied destructive will and on the German struggle to cope with the double pressure of Allied attacks and Nazi oppression.189

Though focusing on a clear notion of British and American guilt, the final point these works wanted to make was not so much that the British and Americans were war criminals, but that their guilt deprived them of the right to pass judgment on the Germans. Just as the politically coordinated documentary of the expulsions had been conceived as “showing the other side of the story” and dis-

188 In a 1961 article in *Der Spiegel*, this line was quoted as one of the central points of Rumpf’s work. The idea presented by Rumpf is that however an abstract notion of “guilt” was recognized, it was also regarded as a “burden”. This very typical line of argument in which it is claimed that the burden of guilt is not increased by additional guilt for the bombing war, implicitly suggests that actually the contrary is the case. It is used to balance the question of German guilt, by offering a different perspective on criminality, victimhood, morality and law. Rumpf, *Das war der Bombenkrieg* 21: “Brand-Verächter” 38. A similar argument that suggests that reference to Anglo-American responsibility for violating international law forms some kind of counterweight to the seemingly convenient Allied denunciation of Germany is present in references to the fact that air bombardments had been excluded from the allegations formulated during the Nuremberg trials: Spetzler, *Luftkrieg und Menschlichkeit* 373-375.

189 The mild comments recently made on Rumpf’s work by Thomas Neumann and Ian Roberts miss this crucial point. Both seem to fall for Rumpf’s rhetorical tricks such as his claim that he was not attempting to settle scores or to ‘heroize’ the Germans. However, Rumpf refers to “the German people” strictly in heroizing and victimizing terms. It is therefore questionable, whether Rumpf indeed differed from Friedrich’s *Der Brand* on this point as Roberts concludes. See his comments in Ian Roberts, “Perpetrators and Victims: Wolddietrich Schnurre and the Bombenkrieg over Germany,” *Forum for modern language studies* 41, no. 2 (2005) 200-212, here: 205-206. Also see the very questionable praise of *Das war der Bombenkrieg* as some kind of pioneering work by Thomas Neumann. Neumann portrays Rumpf as “one of the few who had the perspective to include the psychological and mental consequences of the area bombings in a “documentary account”. Neumann obviously misses or ignores the victimizing rhetoric, the close proximity of Rumpf’s work to Nazi propaganda; let alone his apologetic remarks on the German Luftwaffe. See: Thomas W. Neumann, “Der Bombenkrieg. Zur ungeschriebenen Geschichte einer kollektiven Verletzung,” in *Nachkrieg in Deutschland*, ed. Klaus Naumann (Hamburg: 2001) 319-342, here: 328-329.
proving the notion that only the victims of German occupation and Nazi terror had suffered, most early historical works on the Allied bombings seem to have had a similar motivation.\textsuperscript{190}

With this, the narrative of the air war related to a broader discussion on the Second World War. The combination of moral and legal claims and sometimes explicitly voiced indignation about the “one-sidedness” of the Allied “victors’ justice” shows how this narrative on the Allied bombings has to be seen in the context of “politics of the past”, which aimed at a general amnesty and integration of former followers of the Third Reich and a general defense against a supposedly dominant idea of German collective guilt.\textsuperscript{191} Behind the legal pleas against the Allies lay criticism of the way the question of German guilt had been treated by the Western Allies and resentment that an unfair and undifferentiated concept of German collective guilt formed a burden to German identity. While Norbert Frei and Mathias Beer have demonstrated the \textit{Vertreibung} was actively used as a moral “counterweight” to balance allegations of German guilt, the accounts of the Allied bombing war have to be seen in the same light.\textsuperscript{192}

While there is certain continuity in the way the Allied bombings were interpreted in West Germany, a certain shift can be seen from the late 1950s. The popularity of David Irving’s accounts suggests a renewed interest in a moral discussion of German suffering and in a moral questioning of the Allied war meth-

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{190} Again see the work of Mathias Beer and Robert Moeller who argue that especially the \textit{Dokumentation der Vertreibung} reflected a political need for documenting and pleading for the German “side of the story”. Moeller, \textit{War stories} 181; Beer, “Im Spannungsfeld”.
\item \textsuperscript{191} Frei, \textit{Vergangenheitspolitik} 22-23, 305-305.
\item \textsuperscript{192} Moeller, \textit{War stories} 51-87; Beer, “Die Dokumentation der Vertreibung,”; Beer, “Ein der wissenschaftlichen Forschung”; Beer, ‘Im Spannungsfeld von Politik und Zeitgeschichte; Beer, “Verschlusssache”.
\end{itemize}
ods. While the counter-position of accounts like Spetzler’s seemed to be primarily directed against the “victors’ justice” of the Allies, the works of the 1960s increasingly related to an internal German debate over the “guilt question”. While Hans Rumpf, for example, accused the British and Americans of not wanting to recognize their responsibility for the bombing of civilians, he also suggested that such a “taboo” prevailed in Germany, not only because of the traumatic nature of this collective experience, but as the result of a deliberate politics of “silencing”.

Moreover, it is striking that the increased interest in the Allied bombings and many of the more emotional and accusatory accounts of the Allied bombings were published parallel to the increasing debates on German responsibility. Until the late 1950s West Germans had largely ignored the details of the Holocaust and avoided specific discussions about German war crimes. But from the late 1950s, a series of legal trials against German perpetrators marked a graduate shift in this climate. The trial against members of the German Einsatzgruppen in Ulm in 1958, the Eichmann trial in Jerusalem in 1961, the Frankfurter Auschwitz trial, which took place from 1963 to 1965 and the Sobibor trials in Hagen in 1965-1966 brought the question of the Nazi crimes back into the German debate and focused attention on the Holocaust. In West German culture, new literary works by writers such as Günter Grass, Heinrich Böll and others began to address the complicity of Germans in their regime more directly.

The background of these debates on the German genocide and war of anni-

194 Rumpf, Das war der Bombenkrieg 10-13.
195 Fulbrook, German National Identity 67-75 and Dubiel, Niemand ist frei von der Geschichte 81-127.
196 E.g. Günter Grass, Die Blechtrommel (Neuwied am Rhein: 1959); Heinrich Böll, Billiard um halb zehn (Köln: 1959).
Hilation becomes clear in the presence of implicit or explicit comparisons between the Allied bombings and the Holocaust in German accounts of the air war. Immediately after the war, the comparison between the bombings and the Nazi crimes had already become a common defense strategy. For example, in a November 1945 report in which American military leaders reflected on their confrontations with Germans discussing their responsibility for the Nazi genocide, the air war was an often recurring counterargument. As a typical example the report quoted a German who had stated that “For every Jew that died in a concentration camp, several Germans had died by air raids”. A similar argument was also often used by German perpetrators. The notoriously brutal SS Oberscharführer in Sobibor, Karl Frenzel, for example, in his defense during his trial in 1965 made a direct comparison between his position and that of Allied bombing pilots to justify his actions. In contemplating his apparent contempt of having been in the “regrettable” situation of having to serve in an extermination camp, Frenzel stated that he “thought very often about the enemy bomber pilots, who surely were not asked whether they wanted to carry out their murderous flights against German people in their homes in such a manner”.

As the defensive position of Frenzel illustrates, during the new trials against Nazi perpetrators and the debates on extending the statute of limitations (Verjährungsdebatten), this strategy of “balancing” the Allied bombings became popu-
lar. It was also taken over by those who criticized the new focus on German responsibility for war crimes. It was in light of the renewed attention on the Nazi genocide that similar arguments were brought up by German historians of the air war. In his 1959 overview of the Second World War conservative German historian Karl Dietrich Erdmann stated that “next to the names of Belzec, Treblinka and Auschwitz as horrific symbols of radical Evil (...) stands the name of Dresden”. And going even further Hans Rumpf, by writing about Dresden under the caption “Das war vorgeplanter Völkermord” in an article for the extreme rightwing newspaper *Deutsche National und Soldatenzeitung* in 1965, suggested that the Allies had acted in a “genocidal” manner. Rumpf argued that the bombing of Dresden had made clear to the Germans that the Allies were attempting the “Ausrottung” and “physical destruction” of the German people. Rumpf presented the bombings as a private war instigated by Churchill who vengefully wanted to punish the Germans for their support of Hitler.

But apart from these direct equations of the Allied bombings with genocide, which were made by a former Nazi functionary in an extreme rightwing medium, the context of a renewed interest in German responsibility for war crimes was reflected in a new attention to the bombing of Dresden. Though avoiding the direct equation implied by Rumpf’s categorization of the bombing as “Völkermord”, there was a strong tendency in press articles and reactions to the work of David Irving to emphasize the magnitude of Dresden. Calling Dresden “probably the greatest mass murder of human history” and the structural tendency to exaggerate the death figures of the Dresden raid, if not as an explicit “balanc-

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200 Rumpf, *Das war der Bombenkrieg* 141; Rumpf, “Das war vorgeplanter Völkermord”.
ing” of Dresden against Auschwitz, nevertheless have to be understood in light of a public debate in which the singularity of the Nazi crimes became more and more accentuated.\textsuperscript{201} As the narrative of German guilt and the exceptional quality of the Nazi crimes became more dominant, so did the attempts to appropriate Dresden as a comparable crime, in which it had been Germans who suffered the ultimate horrors of war.

**Conclusion**

West German accounts of the air war published in the 1950s and ’60’s show not only a remarkable coherence in narrative elements and argumentation but also reflect a gradual shift in German memory culture. Most historical accounts of the Allied bombings followed a very similar argumentation and drew the same moral and historical conclusions. With the exception of Feuchter’s early account, West German historians were unanimous in their conclusion that the Allied bombings had been largely a militarily senseless act of terror against innocent German civilians. Grounded in a long tradition of Anglo-American strategic thinking, which incorporated civilians as legitimate targets, the British, led by the cynical Arthur Harris and Winston Churchill, had primarily aimed at the German city centers and civilian targets. In contrast, the “clean” German *Luftwaffe* had fought its fights in a “humane and chivalric” way and had done its best to defend the Germans. Almost all German accounts of the air war, maintained that unlike the Allied bombings, the German attacks on cities such as Rotterdam or Warsaw had been purely legitimate tactical attacks.

Often based on legal arguments with references to international law and

The Hague Conventions, these accounts were often structured as a “legal brief” or “court case” against the “Allies” and in favor of the “German side”. In their focus on the distinction between the British and the German air raids the historical context of the Second World War was largely lost and other forms of “total warfare” and the crimes committed by Nazism and the Wehrmacht were ignored. The bombing war was seen as the most elementary moral question of the Second World War. In their efforts to make their “case” against the Allies more strongly, West German historians quoted British critics of the Allied war methods, like John Fuller or David Irving. As “crown witnesses” these authors, who often had a rightwing political background, were cited to show that moral denunciation of the bombing and a positive view of the Luftwaffe was also shared by non-Germans.

When looking at the backgrounds and origins of the central arguments that dominated West German accounts, the degree to which they “recycled” elements of Nazi propaganda is striking. In their effort to morally denounce the Allied bombings, these works often dwelled on earlier themes and historical strategies. In various pamphlets and documentation Nazi propaganda had argued that German bombings were legitimate while the Allies had turned to inhuman “terror attacks”, arguments which were often literally repeated after the war. Also, the idea that the Allies had not only wanted to win the war against Germany, but had attempted to wipe out German culture and the essence of the abendländische Kultur became popular in different West German works on the bombings. Moreover, there were strong continuities in the way the attitudes and position of the German civilians were described. The image of a heroic Volksgemeinschaft, a central element of the Nazi narratives on the air war, was echoed in many postwar works. These portrayed the Germans as a community, which had bravely endured the bombings,
and whose morale, against the expectations of the Allies had not been broken. Bombing had only strengthened their will to resist. The Germans were now seen not as followers of Hitler but as victims of both Nazi terror and the Allied bombings. Along with the Luftwaffe, the Germans as a collective were detached from their regime and seen as its victims. From the 1960s German accounts focused explicitly on civilian suffering under the bombs. As many of the authors of these accounts were ex-servicemen, the early West German historiography on the air war expressed a strong identification with the Luftwaffe. Their accounts not only denounced the Allies but they also clearly distinguished between the brave Luftwaffe officers and their Nazi leaders. In the West German accounts of the Allied bombings the Luftwaffe as well as local police and Nazi civil defense organizations represented the “good” part of Germany and were distinguished from the Nazi leaders who had started the war.

The “court case” against the allies can for a large part be seen as an attempt to find a “counter-narrative” against the narrative of German guilt. While the German war crimes were largely ignored, the broader debate on German guilt was often clearly sensible in the background of these works. Many of the accounts referred to the unjust and one-sided character of the Nuremberg trials and criticized the British and Americans for their biased notion of war crimes. Until the late 1950s, the Cold War and questions such as the integration of German prisoners of war and expellees dominated West German public debate. As the rivalry between the interest groups of the expellees and the bomb-victims illustrates, both the expulsions and the bombings were considered politically relevant issues, but of differing political magnitude.

Although they could not be as easily instrumentalized for anti-communist
propaganda and hence were less popular than the “expulsion-issue”, the Allied bombings nevertheless played a similar role in German memory debates. For West German postwar identity the bombings illustrated above all the one-sidedness of the Allied trials against German war crimes, and the atrocities of the bombings showed that the Germans had suffered immensely during the war. This suffering had been made worse by the lack of recognition and by the injustice of the allegation that the Germans themselves had been responsible for this destruction. This was the issue the German historical accounts discussed above primarily wanted to settle. For all the “guilt” that “weighed” so “heavily” on the Germans, they could not be blamed for the crimes of the Allied city bombings. When it came to the bombing war, the Germans were pure and innocent victims. The questions of responsibility for the “crimes committed by Hitler” were no longer relevant. Especially with the increased attention to the Nazi genocide, due to a new series of trials the subtext of this discussion on German guilt became even clearer. It was in parallel to the new interest in the Nazi genocide that a critical moral perspective on the Allied bombings became increasingly present in German discussions of the war. By explicitly labeling the attack on Dresden as “genocide” in 1965, the year of the Frankfurt Auschwitz trial, Hans Rumpf demonstrated how the issue of the Allied bombings had become a counterargument in a historical culture, in which the Nazi crimes were now part of the public debate.
Dresden and the Cold War

East-West Debates on the bombing of Dresden, 1945-1970

Introduction

As the popularity in the Federal Republic of the accounts by Axel Rodenberger and David Irving illustrates, the attack on Dresden on 13, 14 and 15 February 1945 became the ultimate symbol for the Allied bombings. It was generally regarded to be the most destructive and most senseless raid of the Second World War, after the atomic bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. The special status of Dresden was nurtured with particular care in the GDR. Here Dresden became a historical symbol that could be integrated into the antifascist self-image of the East German state. During the 1950s and '60s, public commemorations of the "Anglo-American" attack became important events, in which the antifascist identity of the GDR was reinforced and completed with a virulent anti-Western message. With Dresden as their main symbol, the Allied bombings were a central element of East German memory culture.\(^{202}\)

East German historical accounts of the Allied bombings, unlike those that appeared in the Federal Republic, focused on Dresden. Dresden became the only city whose bombing was centrally commemorated, and it also clearly dominated

East German historiography on the Allied bombings. Earlier East German accounts focused exclusively on Dresden and general military-historical studies on the air war did not appear until the 1970s with the academic work of Olaf Groehler. Like the historical accounts in the Federal Republic, East German historiography was written primarily by non-academic historians. The authors often were politicians, who had political interest in a specific interpretation of the Allied bombings and in the appropriation of Dresden as an anti-Western political symbol. Politicians and authors who represented official SED-politics were responsible for the historical accounts of the bombing of Dresden. They reproduced minor variations of a politically centralized perspective that remained more or less stable until the end of the GDR. Their accounts contributed greatly to the establishment of Dresden as a central issue of Cold War propaganda.

This chapter will analyze the way Dresden came to function as a Cold War icon, and how this status became apparent in the way the attack was historically

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203 This dominance of Dresden also affected the local memory cultures of other East German cities. In Eastern German memory culture, the bombing of other East German cities which had faced large-scale destruction like Magdeburg, Halberstadt and Nordhausen was remembered and commemorated only on a local level. Arnold has pointed out for Magdeburg, that the emphasis on Dresden and the nationalized memory politics of the SED resulted in an initial delay in annual rituals concerned with commemorating the destruction of other cities. Also the key patterns with which Dresden was commemorated were “imported” and served as a model for other local memories. Arnold, “In Quiet Remembrance”? 114-119. Only after 1980 were a few accounts published on other cities, but most of them retained a local-historical character. Werner Hartmann, Die Zerstörung Halberstads am 8. April 1945: eine Dokumentation, Schriftenreihe der Kreisleitung Halberstadt der SED (Halberstadt: 1980); Hartmut Knitter, “Zum Bombenangriff der Royal Air Force auf Potsdam am 14./15. April 1945,” Veröffentlichungen des Bezirksheimatmuseums Potsdam 17(1969) 200 ff ; Manfred Schröter, Die Zerstörung Nordhausens und das Kriegsende im Kreis Grafschaft Hohenstein 1945, Beiträge zur Heimatkunde aus Stadt und Kreis Nordhausen. Sonderausgabe (Erfurt: 1988). Examples of published research by academic historians on cities other than Dresden are Rudi Hartwig and Manfred Wille, Magdeburg im Feuersturm. Ein Dokumentarbericht. Zur Geschichte der Zerstörung der Stadt durch anglo-amerikanische Bombenangriffe im zweiten Weltkrieg, Magdeburger Schriftenreihe (Magdeburg: 1985). Also see Olaf Groehler’s small work on the bombing of Dessau: Olaf Groehler, Einsatz Nummer 1027. Der Luftangriff auf Dessau am 7. März 1945 Beiträge zur Stadtgeschichte 2 (Dessau: 1986).

204 On Groehler, see chapter 4.
interpreted in East Germany. For this I will first look at the dominant patterns of interpretation in these East German accounts and their role in the official memory politics of the GDR. What historical causes and backgrounds were thought to be of importance in the air war strategy and practice of the Western Allies? To what extent did East German accounts ascribe certain political and moral meanings to this history and to what extent did alternative interpretations develop parallel to the central memory politics of the SED?

In the second part of this chapter, I will examine the interaction between East German interpretations and Western accounts and analyze how these disputes were connected to ideological differences. The previous chapter has shown that in the Federal Republic the search for positive traditions in German history and the debate over German guilt played a central role in the historical accounts of the Allied bombings. It is nevertheless clear that, particularly in the case of accounts dealing with the bombing of Dresden, West German works implicitly or explicitly reacted to and interacted with GDR interpretations. And similarly, East German accounts polemically reflected on West German interpretations.

Two central issues sparked debates between historians from East and West: the assumed anti-Soviet motives behind the attack on Dresden and disputes over the death toll produced by the attack. On these issues, I will look at arguments between East German authors and historians from the Federal Republic, but also explore the role of David Irving. The work of this British researcher was not only important in the West German debate, but also had considerable impact in the East. In the reception of his work in the GDR, moreover, the two central issues in the debate between East and West, the discussion over the number of dead and the role of the Soviet Union, crystallized.
However, the question is, whether, in spite of the disputes over these issues, the East and West German narrative on Dresden and the Allied bombings did not still have a great deal in common. The final part of this chapter will therefore look for the parallels in East and West German narratives, both on the level of interpretation as well as on the level of political meaning. To what extent did accounts from East and West share basic narrative patterns and interpretations in explaining the bombing of Dresden? Did these parallels also lead to overlaps in the way the attack functioned in the identity politics of the time? Did the air war in the GDR also function as a “counterargument” against German guilt? And did anti-Western rhetoric also find reflection in West German accounts?

2.1. East German historical accounts of the attack on Dresden

Dresden and the emergence of the antifascist myth in the GDR

The official GDR commemoration of Dresden paralleled, to a great degree, developments in the Cold War and reflected important changes in the international political position of the GDR.205 During the first postwar years, 1945-1949, the official attitude towards the attack reflected the Communist struggle to monopolize power within the Soviet Zone of Occupation (SBZ). During these immediate postwar years the Soviet Military Administration (SMA) enforced denazification-policies to eliminate Nazi influences in the German administration, economy and society in general. While the effectiveness of these policies is subject to ongoing debate, it is clear that the SMA, with the support of the KPD, used the notion of “antifascism”

to try to impose a new political identity.\textsuperscript{206} The concept of antifascism was used as a demarcation line that separated the SBZ from the recent Nazi past and symbolized a new beginning. Because the Communist notion of fascism encompassed a clear similarity between National Socialism and Western capitalism, antifascism could be used as a “founding myth” for a new socialist German state. Moreover, denazification policies were used not only to remove former Nazis from German society and administration but also to secure the power-position of the Communist Party in the SBZ and to eliminate political opponents.\textsuperscript{207}

During the first years of Soviet occupation, questions of guilt and responsibility for the Second World War were ascribed to the Third Reich. The Allied bombings, together with Germany’s territorial losses and its division into different zones of occupation were presented as the sole responsibility of Nazi Germany itself, as the internal and international interests of the Soviet occupational forces and the KPD dictated against expressing criticism of the Allied war methods. Clear accusations of war crimes directed at the Western Allies were considered to threaten the stability of Soviet rule. In addition, the resentment of formerly persecuted Communists and a general Soviet interest in clearing administration and society of Nazi influences motivated the SMA and the Communist Party to hold “German fascism” responsible for all the suffering the war had brought about.\textsuperscript{208}


This included the bombing of Dresden. In January 1946 Major Broder of the propaganda department of the SMA corresponded with the city administration in Dresden over the commemoration of 13 February 1945. The Soviet authorities recognized the political potential of the Dresden bombing and feared that commemoration ceremonies would possibly generate resentment towards the Western Allies, which the Soviets at this time did not yet want to foster. Public ceremonies marking the bombing were to be limited to local events and the responsibility of fascist Germany was to be stressed. Most of the commemoration speeches and published articles during the first postwar years were reluctant in their accusations of the Western Allies and emphasized the responsibility of the Nazi regime for the destruction of the city.  

One of the arguments used to underline the fascist “guilt” for Dresden was the conclusion that the authorities of the NSDAP had insufficiently provided Dresden’s citizens with air protection. As early as June 1945 the Tageszeitung für die deutsche Bevölkerung published a transcript of the interrogation of Dresden’s Gauleiter Martin Mutschmann. During his questioning Mutschmann was explicitly accused of having neglected the protection of Dresden’s population against the air attacks. Therefore he was “accessory to” Dresden’s “Catastrophe”.  

Another argument through which responsibility was ascribed to the Nazi rule saw the attack on Dresden as a direct result of the war that had been started by Hitler’s Germany. In an article in the Sächsische Volkszeitung on 13 February 1946, Dresden’s first post-

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210 Citation in: Neutzner, “Vom Anklagen zum Erinnern” 132. Also see: Götz Bergander, Dresden im Luftkrieg, 2 ed. (Köln: 1994) 294-295.
war mayor Walter Weidauer claimed that the destruction of Dresden had been “deliberately provoked by the fascist criminals”. Weidauer held the “bandits” of the Third Reich responsible for prolonging a war that had already been lost. According to Weidauer, the fascists, and in a broader sense the Germans in general had not only the concentration camps on their conscience, but also Dresden.\(^{211}\)

For the most part the role of the American and British air forces during the Dresden bombing was not mentioned directly in speeches and articles, although sometimes indirect references to their questionable role were made. Communist leaders in Dresden were aware of the anti-Western potential of a perspective which portrayed the Dresden raid as an unfounded terror-attack. An implicit accusation was hidden in the frequently repeated notion that the Soviet Army had never attacked an “open city” like Dresden.\(^{212}\) But explicit accusations were not yet part of the official speeches. Also the gruesome details and the many deaths the bombing had caused went largely unmentioned.\(^{213}\)

_Wiederaufbau_ was an important theme in commemoration speeches and in press articles and editorials during the first postwar years. The need for rebuilding the destroyed city and for support for the SED’s reconstruction plans made this topic partly a practical question. On an ideological level the focus on reconstruc-

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\(^{213}\) Likewise, two documentary films on Dresden produced by the DEFA in 1946 followed the same pattern in which Hitler’s Germany was held responsible and the need for an “antifascist” reconstruction was propagated. Neutzner, “Vom Anklagen zum Erinnern” 135-137 and Poutrus, “Bomben auf Elbflorenz” 147-148.
tion also fitted in with a positive notion of the emergence of a new “antifascist” Germany. It marked a clear distance from the war and provided a forward-looking perspective. By rebuilding the city that had been destroyed by fascism, the Wiederaufbau itself was presented as an “act of antifascism” and a resolute farewell to East Germany’s fascist past.

As recent studies on the socialist reconstruction plans have remarked, the architectural concepts underlying these plans were somewhat confused. On the one hand, the rubble of Dresden and other cities enabled the new regime to impose its ideals of a “socialist” city. The new regulations and nationalization of property provided the regime with a monopolized situation in which they could realize their plans. As a consequence, many artistically unique buildings that were only partly damaged were demolished to make place for the new designs. On the other hand, however, the reconstruction of Dresden focused on restoring its former architectural style of baroque and 19th-century neo-baroque. The “socialist” concept of an ideal city and a modern and industrialized city reconstruction were in conflict with the ideal that in Dresden the old and unique beauty was to be restored. By the second half of the 1950s the policy of the restoration of Dresden’s historical and architectural highlights had been abandoned for a more “socialist” and future-oriented reconstruction. The Frauenkriche was left in ruins, although plans for its reconstruction initially had been made.


Dresden accuses! Cold War rhetoric

In the late 1940s an important shift took place in East German memory politics. The SED had successfully achieved a strong position of power and as a result the politics of Entnazifizierung lost their former urgency. With many former NSDAP functionaries still imprisoned in Speziallager or fired from their jobs, denazification seemed to have been successfully accomplished. The need for a focus on the immediate past had vanished and the denazification that had started rigorously was changed into a more pragmatic policy directed at integrating the Eastern Germans - including former NSDAP-party members and others who had been actively involved in the Third Reich - into the new socialist Germany. Also, with the growing international tensions and beginning of the Cold War the need for keeping peace with the Western Allies disappeared.

From this background the meaning of “antifascism” began to change, especially after the division of Germany became a political reality with the founding of the Federal Republic and the German Democratic Republic in 1949. The concept of “antifascism” was now increasingly used for anti-Western rhetoric. From now on

the “national heritage” of German culture and over which state was the best preserver of national cultural traditions, and who was best in restoring Germany’s destroyed cultural richness. From the Eastern perspective, fidelity to cultural heritage also was suggested to be the main difference between the East and the West. SED politicians regularly implied that the West did not make the same effort as the GDR to rebuild the destroyed cities, because they lacked the antifascist motivation of the socialist state. In a 1952 speech Walter Ulbricht addressed the West German population with an appeal to “take an example to the Nationalen Aufbauwerk in Berlin and to the reconstruction of Dresden” and take the reconstruction into their own hands. Cited in: Friedrich Reichert, “Zur Rezeptionsgeschichte des 13. Februars 1945,” in Verbrannt bis zur Unkenntlichkeit. Die Zerstörung Dresdens 1945. Begleitbuch zur Ausstellung im Stadtmuseum Dresden Februar bis Juni 1995, ed. Stadtmuseum Dresden (Dresden: 1995) 150-161, here: 154.

216 See e.g. Widera, Dresden 420-427.
217 Neutzner, “Vom Anklagen zum Erinnern” 137. In the SBZ, approximately 200,000 former Nazi officials were fired from their positions, 20,000 teachers were disqualified and 30,000 Germans were tried by Soviet and later German tribunals, and over 500 were executed. See Vollnhals, “Entnazifizierung” 383-386 and Andrew John Spencer, Of Literature and Legend. German Writers and the Bombing of Dresden (Dissertation Ohio State University: 1992) 162.
on fascism and Western capitalism would be openly presented as two examples of “imperialism”, a political form that differed fundamentally from “socialism”. As a result, antifascism was seen not so much as a historical concept for coping with Germany’s own fascist past, but more as a political weapon for confronting the new “fascist” and “imperialist” threat.

This shift had strong consequences for the way Soviet and SED propaganda interpreted the outcomes of the Second World War. While during the first postwar years the victory over fascist Germany had been interpreted as a result of the combined efforts of all Allied forces, now the Soviet Union presented itself as the only true conqueror of Germany. The efforts of the Western Allies and especially the Allied air war were portrayed as having been futile compared to the Red Army’s victory on the Eastern Front. While the Soviet Army had fought persistently in an exhausting land war, the outcomes of the British and American air war had been, according to the new perspective, militarily irrelevant.

The view on the Second World War that became dominant in the GDR and other Communist states held that the Red Army had not only disproportionately contributed to the Allied victory against the Third Reich, but had been consciously sabotaged by the Western Allies. Out of fear of Soviet dominance in Europe, England and America had shifted to a policy aimed at the protection of an Anglo-American sphere of influence in Europe at the expense of the Soviet Union. In this process, according to this interpretation, the Western Allies had even cooperated with Hitler and Nazi Germany in the interest of their shared “imperialist” goals.²¹⁸

²¹⁸ Wierling, “Krieg im Nachkrieg”.

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²¹⁸ Wierling, “Krieg im Nachkrieg”. 
It was this changed attitude towards the recent past that put the bombing war against German cities and especially Dresden at the center of East German memory politics at the beginning of the 1950s. While the SMA at first had tolerated the commemoration of Dresden rather reluctantly, by the end of the 1940s, Dresden was recognized for its propagandist potential. Using the example of Dresden it was possible to demonstrate that the efforts of the Western Allies had been not only militarily insignificant, but also wicked and morally unjustifiable. The initial reluctance to judge the Allied bombings morally and to discuss the validity of the Western Allies’ methods and strategies gave way to a severe anti-Western propaganda offensive that made Dresden into a central point of reference. Whereas commemoration ceremonies and the first written and visual representations of the bombing up until 1949 had received little attention outside of Dresden, now public remembrance of the bombing of Dresden spread throughout the GDR.219

With this expansion, the interpretation of the event changed dramatically. Where the bombings in the first years had been presented as consequences of failed air protection and the aggression of the Nazi state, now the actual perpetrators of the bombing were identified. This new approach toward the Dresden bombing became apparent in 1948, when an article in the Sächsische Volkszeitung stated for the first time that “Anglo-American airplanes” had dropped their bombs on Dresden. From now on the attack would be portrayed as a senseless act of destruction and as a “crime against humanity” committed by the Western Allies against a nation that had already been defeated.220 In 1949 the announcement of the commemoration activities carried the caption: “13 February 1945 – Dresden

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219 Spencer, Of Literature and Legend 88.
accuses”. Although the fascist responsibility for Dresden was still mentioned, now blame was directed at Western Allies because they, like Hitler, had been “willing to murder women and children”.221

With the interpretation of the historical event taking a more aggressive and anti-American character, the scale on which the bombing of Dresden was publicly remembered grew. In 1950 Richard Peter published under the title Dresden – eine Kamera klagt an a bestselling collection of photographs in which pictures of the old Dresden were contrasted with horrific images of ruins and corpses and finally the socialist reconstruction activities.222 In the same year a centrally organized campaign was launched to commemorate the destruction of Dresden on a national level. While previously activities had primarily taken place on a local or regional level, in the 1950 campaign the scale was enlarged.

Various events were organized, press articles were published and new ceremonies were invented to emphasize the significance of the bombing. To pay respect to the catastrophe, in Saxony traffic was brought to a standstill for one minute and in Dresden a march of 100,000 of the city’s citizens was organized at the central event at Karl Marx Platz.223 In the years that followed similar ceremonies were organized and efforts were made to imprint the bombing of Dresden onto the long-term historical consciousness of East Germans. The commemoration was made into an important annual event. Writers Arnold Zweig and Anna Seghers and politicians like Walter Ulbricht and Otto Grotewohl held lectures and up until 200,000 people gathered at the central commemoration ceremony at Karl

223 Poutrus, “Bomben auf Elbflorenz” 149 and Neutzner, “Vom Anklagen zum Erinnern” 140.
Marx Platz. In 1951 textbooks were ordered to include references to the “Anglo-American terror-attacks” and the DEFA produced several films that reflected the new accusatory and anti-Western perspective.

Dresden and the beginning of the Cold War

It was in the context of the rise of Dresden as a symbol for anti-Western propaganda that the first East German historical accounts that explained the attack were published. During the 1950s and 60’s several articles and books on the attack were published that followed similar patterns of interpretation. While these accounts vary from semi-literary accounts like Max Zimmering’s Phosphor und Flieder (1954) to dry historical analyses, they had in common that they directly reflected official memory politics and shared a basic interpretation. According to the East Germans, the actual reason for bombing Dresden had been that the British and Americans wanted to unsettle the future Soviet sphere of influence and at the same time intimidate the Red Army by demonstrating the destructive power of their air forces. This view became the dominant and official interpretation. By bombing Dresden the Allies had not attacked Hitler but Stalin and with this action had initiated the Cold War.

This interpretation had circulated in the Soviet zone since the end of the war and, for example, had been expressed by Victor Klemperer in his diary in April 1947. In the early 1950s various East German authors took the idea as a starting point.

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224 Neutzner, “Vom Anklagen zum Erinnern” 148-149.
226 Victor Klemperer, So sitze ich denn zwischen all den Stühlen. Tagebücher 1945-1949 (Berlin: 1999) 372. On 29. April 1947 Klemperer mentioned a conversation with a man whom he had met during a trip to Chemnitz. “He claimed that it was true and abroad
point for a more thorough analysis. An early example of a relatively dispassionate account was the article “Operation Dresden”, published in 1950 by former Luftwaffe officer Walter Lehwess-Litzmann in the cultural magazine Aufbau. Arguing not so much from political slogans but on the basis of a more distanced historical analysis, Lehwess-Litzmann’s essay can be regarded as one of earliest attempts to work out a Marxist historical perspective on the bombing of Dresden. In a relatively nuanced style Lehwess-Litzmann explained the Allied bombings from an East German perspective, while refraining from the decontextualized anti-Americanism of the official propaganda. The author mentioned not only the “terror bombing”, but also the tactical attacks of the Allied air forces, which were supporting the Western Allies’ invasion of Normandy and argued that terror bombings were only a part of the Allied strategy. Also he pointed out that terror bombings had been initiated by Germany, which made the fascist state primarily responsible.

Beyond these nuances, however, he worked out the two explanations that would remain an important starting point for the East German narrative. In his article Lehwess-Litzmann looked for the Western Allies’ central motive for carrying out the bombing of the largely undefended city of Dresden. According to him, the attack on Dresden had not, as the Allies had claimed, been an effort to end the war quickly. The British and Americans, Lehwess-Litzmann argued, knew by 1945 that “moral bombing” and attempts to enforce a revolt against Hitler were not working. Also, he rejected the idea that the British and Americans had wanted to support the Soviet Army’s advance because they had not attacked relevant mili-

wholly unknown that Dresden had been destroyed by the British and Americans against the objections of the Russians, and that they had done so only for the reason that they did not grant the Russians this city”.  

227 Also see Elizabeth Corwin’s remarks on this essay: Elizabeth C. Corwin, “The Dresden Bombing as Portrayed in German Accounts, East and West,” UCLA Historical Journal 8 (1987) 71-96, here: 76-78.
tary targets in Dresden but the city centre. By bombing the bridges over the Elbe, they had actually slowed the Russians down. Therefore, Lehwess-Litzmann came to the conclusion that the Allied reasons for bombing Dresden had been twofold. They wanted to conclude their work of destruction of Germany, by bombing the last large city that had remained relatively unharmed. More importantly, they had wanted complicate the later reconstruction of what they knew would become the Soviet zone of influence.228

Fascism and imperialism

The idea that Dresden marked the beginning of the Cold War was a vital element in a perspective in which the attack and the Allied strategy were detached from their context of the Second World War. In the light of the virulent anti-Western propaganda of the 1950s, the Allied bombings were, on the one hand, seen as representing continuity and a start of the postwar “aggression” of America and NATO. On the other hand, and in line with the official Communist perspective on the War, the attack on Dresden served to demonstrate the essential similarity between fascism and “Western imperialism”. Dresden was seen as the ultimate proof that the Western Allies had used inhuman methods just like the Nazis. More than in the detached article of Lehwess-Litzmann the continuity of Anglo-American aggression and its similarity with fascism became a main theme in the two most important East German accounts on Dresden that were written during the 1950s and ’60’s: Max Seydewitz Zerstörung und Wiederaufbau von Dresden (1955) and Walter Weidauer’s Inferno Dresden (1965).229


229 Max Seydewitz, Zerstörung und Wiederaufbau von Dresden (Berlin: 1955) Seydewitz,
The first lengthy East German historical account on Dresden was written in 1955 by art historian and former minister president of Saxony, Max Seydewitz: *Zerstörung und Wiederaufbau von Dresden*, a year later re-edited as *Die unbesiegbare Stadt*. The book, based primarily on secondary literature and wild conspiracy theories, had a virulently propagandist tone and strongly denounced the Anglo-Americans and their “inexcusable crime” against the population of Dresden. Following the same arguments as Lehwess-Litzmann, Seydewitz saw the bombing of Dresden in the first place as an attempt to damage the future Soviet zone as badly as possible in order to intimidate and sabotage the Soviet Union. But more than Lehwess-Litzmann had done, Seydewitz pointed to the parallels between American “imperialist” aggression and fascism. With many horrible details and emotional scenes describing the horrific effects of the attack on innocent civilians and the loss of Dresden’s cultural treasures, Seydewitz depicted the attack as an ultimate act of terror that bore close resemblance to the cynicism of the fascist state.

What is interesting is that, even more than Lehwess-Litzmann, Seydewitz did not exclude the crimes committed under Nazism, but integrated the Holocaust as well as the German bombings into the historical context of the Allied bombing of Dresden. At first instance, therefore, the book seemed to suggest that there was a clear hierarchy of crimes committed during the Second World War and that Germany’s fascist rulers were primarily responsible. This was especially apparent in

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the way Seydewitz referred to the Holocaust. Unlike most West German accounts, which had largely excluded the history of Nazi crimes, Seydewitz devoted a chapter to the history of Dresden under Nazi rule. Here Seydewitz addressed not only the persecution of Communists but also Reichskristallnacht which was followed by the gassing and “barbaric mass murder on the Jews, for which there is no comparison in recent history”. Also, Seydewitz stressed that it should not be forgotten that it was the German fascist Luftwaffe, which had begun the air war by bombing cities like Guernica, Warsaw and Rotterdam.

However, with these references to the Nazi crimes the author was not implying that Nazi aggression explained or justified the Allied bombing war against Germany. Seydewitz made it clear that there was “no reason for the Anglo-Americans to do the same thing” and that eventually anti-Soviet motives had led the Allies to bomb Dresden. Seydewitz’s work was an attempt to integrate both the history of the bombing of Dresden as well as the Holocaust into a narrative of continuous struggle between socialism and imperialism and a view of the Second World War that regarded fascism as an instrument of “monopoly capitalism”. Seydewitz stated that it had been the “monopoly capitalists, Junker, imperialists and military elites”, who had “installed” the Nazi government and suggested that there had been “commercial” reasons for the genocidal killings of the Jews. Moreover, while it seems remarkable that he pointed to the Jews as a distinct victim group, an idea that would increasingly be denied in the “antifascist” ideology of the GDR, Seydewitz made sure to honour the official hierarchy of the victims of fascism. Before committing mass murder on the Jews, Seydewitz stressed, the Nazis had

232  Ibid. 42.
233  Ibid. 183.
first imposed a gruesome and “bloody terror” on their political opponents, especially the revolutionary labour movement.234

In addition to this emphasis on antifascism, throughout the book Nazis and other imperialists appeared as two interchangeable political entities, which had cooperated during the Holocaust, but also during the attack on Dresden. Seydewitz’s equation of fascism and imperialism culminated in an obscure conspiracy theory, in which the ultimate coordination of the attack on Dresden was seen as the responsibility of one man, who simultaneously represented capitalism and fascism. Seydewitz’s theory focused on Charles Adolf Noble, a German-born American “industrialist” engaged in the photographic processing business and an active Nazi, who had returned to Germany in 1938 and acquired a camera factory in Dresden. For Seydewitz, Noble embodied the entanglement of fascism with American industrial elites.235 He accused Noble of not only playing a fishy role in the acquisition of former Jewish property, but of being largely responsible for the bombing of Dresden. Noble appeared as a double agent working for the Americans as well as for the Nazi government, but in essence serving the interests of big industry.

Deliberately leaking information about Dresden’s unprotected status and the presence of many refugees, Noble apparently had “directed” the Anglo-American attack on Dresden, with the knowing approval of the Nazi authorities. At the end of the story Noble appeared as an evil genius overlooking the bombardment from his safe villa. Seydewitz summarized: “Sure enough, at Shrove Thursday, Mister


Noble waited for the moment when—punctually, as had been agreed, the “Christmas trees” appeared. Sure enough Mister Noble stood on the patio of his villa and enjoyed the dreadful theatre of the blazing flames. In the Noble-conspiracy Seydewitz’s message became clear. The bombing of Dresden was a joint conspiracy of Nazis and American capitalists. Both of them were directed in their actions by big corporations: Ford, Standard Oil, IG Farben and Krupp and the “Gentlemen of Wallstreet”. The reason for bombing Dresden was their mutual anticommunist interest in destroying the future Soviet Zone of Influence. For this cause Dresden had to be erased from the face of the earth, even though there was no military need for the attack, the city was completely defenseless, and the Red Army had already won the war.

Victims of imperialism

This political mobilization of “Dresden” in the 1950s, which is so clearly illustrated by Weidauer’s account, apart from being suitable for anti-Western and pro-Soviet propaganda, offered East Germans an integrative myth of collective innocence. Since Nazi crimes and Anglo-American crimes shared close similarity, the status of German victims rose in the hierarchy of suffering. Moreover, Dresden as an act of “imperialist aggression” symbolized not only the continuity of American aggression, but also the continuity of German victimhood. The air war was presented as a historical catastrophe and imperialist crime for which the German population bore no responsibility whatsoever. During the war the “normal” Germans had been “double victims”, first of the Nazis and then of the Western Allies. Now in the Cold War, they were—just as in February 1945—victims of the renewed threat.
of imperialist war aggression that could be stopped only by the “peaceful” Soviet Union. By “reconstructing” the destruction caused by “fascists” and “imperialists” and by supporting the antifascist GDR state, the East Germans could take part in the antifascist task of the present. This myth was particularly appealing to the citizens of Dresden and offered a successful vehicle for identification with the Communist regime, a system they had learned to hate and fear under National-Socialist rule. But the collective indulging in the “antifascist” myth of collective victimhood resulted in a willingness to identify with the new Communist system because difficult questions of guilt and responsibility for the crimes committed under Nazi rule could be unproblematically evaded.237

This position was also a central starting point of Seydewitz’s book. Though he mentioned the unique mass murder of the Jews, he especially emphasized that it had been the Germans who had become subject to Nazi terror. In his descriptions of Nazi rule, Seydewitz emphasized that the population of Dresden strongly disliked the political changes that the new regime brought to their city but that their hands were tied. Nazi Germany was a “Zuchthaus” (jail), which held all Germans “under the constant pressure of Gestapo terror”. “And all would be forced by this terror to follow the orders of the Nazi leaders to their doom and Germany’s downfall"238. Here Dresden’s population exemplified the way the German people had first become victims of Hitler’s and later of the Anglo-American terror as Seydewitz concluded: “The destruction of Dresden at the end of the war is only one example of the crimes that the German imperialists, militarists and fascists as well as the Anglo-American imperialists committed against the German peo-

237  Widera, Dresden 415-417; Widera, “Gefangene Erinnerung” 120-121.
238  Seydewitz, Die unbesiegbare Stadt 45-46.
ple during their then still secret cooperation”. In this way, Seydewitz created a clear dichotomy between the “German” victims and the “fascist” and “imperialist” perpetrators that was perfectly adjusted to his Cold War rhetoric. The description of the bombing paints the Dresden civilians, indeed, as absolute victims. Dramatically Seydewitz describes the Dresdners as a collective of poor, disillusioned women, children and refugees, waiting for the already lost war to end. Suddenly and unexpectedly they are attacked in a murderous and barbaric bombardment.

By portraying the Germans and their beautiful cities as complete victims of fascism and imperialism, Seydewitz indemnified not only the Germans as a people, but also the German national culture from any kind of responsibility for or connection with Nazism and the Second World War. While at the same time linking fascism to Anglo-American imperialism, Seydewitz detached Nazism completely from Germany’s “national” heritage. Fascism appeared as the enemy of the German Nation and on several occasions Seydewitz emphasized that Hitler’s fascism had acted against the “national existential interests of the German people” and had been “unable to tie in with the beautiful and rich national cultural heritage”. Here again, Seydewitz pointed to another continuity between fascism and imperialism. Just as he had criticized the Nazis for their disregard of German national interest, he accused the contemporary West German “imperialists” of acting against the “elementary interests of the German people”. By sabotaging the “peaceful unification of Germany” and risking a Third World War, like the Nazis, the West Germans had become “national traitors”.

239 Ibid. 254-255.
240 Ibid. 32, 106-117, 259.
241 Ibid. 259-274.
With this, Seydewitz addressed another central issue in East German memory politics: the confrontation with the Federal Republic. By pointing out the continuity of imperialism in West Germany, the GDR not only saw the Federal Republic as the heir of the Third Reich, but also identified it with the bombing of Dresden. GDR propaganda, for example, connected West Germany’s entrance into NATO in 1955 with the bombing of Dresden. West Germany was now directly identified, not only with its fascist past, but with its present collaboration with the same forces that had destroyed Dresden.\textsuperscript{242}

\textit{Dresden and the atomic bomb: continuities in Anglo-American aggression}

A similar continuity of imperialist war aggression was worked out more thoroughly by former resistance fighter and the first postwar mayor of Dresden, Walter Weidauer in \textit{Inferno Dresden} (1965).\textsuperscript{243} Though the book was very much in line with Seydewitz’s narrative and the 1950s propaganda about the bombers, it was written in a less emotional style and was based on more thorough research and new material and documents, especially regarding the casualty rates. His estimation of the death toll was quite realistic, and the documents and counting method he had organized himself as the leader of Dresden’s postwar administration are still considered to be of value. While he had initially estimated the 25,000 registered deaths to be the actual number, Weidauer now estimated the death toll at 35,000.\textsuperscript{244}


\textsuperscript{244} Weidauer, who already by 1946 had come to the first estimate of 25,000, eagerly showed the Canadian journalist Ross Munro the elaborate statistics produced by the newly
Weidauer’s goal was to unravel the myths and untruths that he felt surrounded the bombing of Dresden. He sharply criticized the huge overestimates of the casualty rates as well as other myths that had spread widely among Western journalists and historians. Weidauer also denounced the “Noble-story” as a fairy tale. He argued logically that the British and American air forces had had no need for an insider directing them to their goal since the weather circumstances were fine and by 1945 the Allies were equipped with navigating devices, sufficient enough to guide them to Dresden. Although Max Seydewitz’s book was not mentioned in the text, nor in the footnotes, it is clear that Weidauer considered Seydewitz’s version of the bombing of Dresden to be lacking. Also in contrast to Seydewitz, the former mayor of Dresden refrained from painting a detailed picture, as he found it “unnecessary” to do so, after so many had already described the “horrors and atrocities”. This was a strategy that clearly was meant to give the book a more academic and distanced aura.245

In spite of these differences Weidauer reproduced an anti-Western perspective that was in essence very similar to the one Seydewitz had produced earlier. In spite of Weidauer’s apparent efforts to give his book an aura of professionalism and to unravel the myths and legends, he quickly made up some of his own. Just like Seydewitz and Lehwess-Litzmann, Weidauer presented the bombing of Dresden as the beginning of the Cold War. “All facts prove, that by destroying Dresden, the English and American governments did not in fact want to hit the Hitlerfaschisten, but

appointed city administration to emphasize its professionalism. Though it is not entirely clear how Weidauer came to add 10,000 to his initial estimate, this number still remains very conservative compared to most others that circulated in the accounts of the bombing during the 1960s. E.g. Neutzner, “Vom Anklagen zum Erinnern” 134. The inconsistency in Weidauer’s counting has been pointed out in: Reichert, “Zur Rezeptionsgeschichte” 160.

245 Weidauer, Inferno Dresden 49-50, 89-98.
in the first place wanted to hit their Soviet Russian allies”, Weidauer concluded.246

Weidauer took this theory, which was widely accepted in the GDR, to another level, by creating a direct connection between Dresden and the present threat of atomic warfare. Introducing his theory, Weidauer argued: “Unlikely as it may sound it is certain: the first atomic bomb was supposed to fall on a German city”. This city was going to be Dresden. Dresden lay in the future Soviet zone of influence and had intentionally been spared for the purpose of experimenting with the new bomb. However, because the development of the atomic bomb took more time than expected and the Red Army had proceeded very quickly, an atomic bombing of Dresden could not be realized, and Churchill had been forced to turn to his only imaginable alternative. To make sure the Soviets wouldn’t reach Dresden as an undamaged city, Churchill had quickly decided to bomb the city with “conventional means”. In this line of argument, the Allied aggression was contrasted with the “heroic” nature of the Soviets. By proceeding so quickly, the Red Army had “saved” Dresden from the atomic bomb.247

The arguments Weidauer could bring up to support his theory were very thin.248 Weidauer quoted some military sources, which supposedly witnessed the planning of an atomic attack on Germany. Weidauer argued that in the fall of 1944 two different plans coincided in the secret preparation of an atomic attack on Dresden. On the one hand, the finished version of the atomic bomb was expected

246 Ibid. 20.
247 Ibid. 69.
248 See e.g. Rolf Dieter Müller i.Z.m. Florian Huber, and Johannes Eglau, Der Bombenkrieg 1939-1945 (Berlin: 2004) 213-216, Groehler, Bombenkrieg gegen Deutschland 187-195. It is noteworthy to mention that the idea of an atomic bomb on Germany is not a complete fantasy of Walter Weidauer. In the recent debate serious historians like Richard Overy have brought up the question of whether Germany might have been the first victim of such an attack had the war lasted longer. See: Richard Overy, “Barbarisch aber sinnvoll,” in Ein Volk von Opfern. Die neue Debatte um den Bombenkrieg 1940-1945, ed. Lothar Kettenacker (Berlin: 2003) 183-187.
in January 1944. At the same time the plan for an “Operation Thunderclap” to end the war with a final bombing offensive was worked out. However possible it may have been that in the headquarters of the British and American forces at some time an atomic attack on Germany had been considered, Weidauer’s claim that Dresden was designated the target for such an attack all along remained wholly unfounded. For example, Weidauer forgot that Operation Thunderclap initially planned for an attack on Berlin, and only by beginning of 1945 was Dresden first mentioned as one of the possible alternative targets for such a concentrated attack. If there had ever been a coinciding of the planned use of the atomic bomb and Operation Thunderclap –for which Weidauer offered no convincing arguments-, by the time that Dresden was considered as a target, it was clear that the bomb would not be ready.

In spite of its obvious propagandistic character, Weidauer’s “atomic bomb” theory was not arbitrarily chosen. It showed the extent to which, as in the case of Seydewitz, the Cold War determined Weidauer’s reference point in his historical representation. Both Seydewitz and Weidauer made the point that, however dreadful it had been, “Dresden” was only a preliminary phase of the “real” and current threat of a nuclear war. This was the reason for still writing about Dresden, as both emphasized in their accounts. The preface stated that Seydewitz had written his book from the perspective of “times of international tension”, in which “cynical Kriegshetzer” were threatening the world with nuclear weapons. This was the starting point for Seydewitz to describe the “barbaric destruction of Dresden” by “those who claim to act in the name of humanity”.249 Similarly, Weidauer stated in a preface to the second edition of his book that reprinting the text was neces-

249 Seydewitz, Die unbesiegbare Stadt 7.
sary because “the big imperialist states of the NATO (...) unscrupulously are preparing an atomic war, to eradicate other peoples but also our people, our cities and towns with new weapons of mass destruction”.250

From a rhetorical point of view this strategy had another result for the way Germans were portrayed. Stressing their potential victimization in the near future also meant the extension of German victimhood into the present of the Cold War. Not only were the Germans the real victims of the Second World War, they were bound to become victims of air terror again in the next conflict. The Germans, due to their geographical and political position, were bound to become the first victim in the future. Just as the air war was taken out of its historical context and was instrumentalized in a debate over history politics, the experience of the air war was similarly de-historicized on behalf of a German postwar identity as a ‘nation of peace’ in the Cold War era. The “historical” accounts were more about political issues of the times in which they were published than attempts to understand and academically analyze the backgrounds, impact and consequences of the British and American strategic bombing offensive during the Second World War.

*Alternative narratives?*

Were there alternative possibilities for remembering the bombing for citizens of Dresden who did not feel comfortable with the harsh political exploitation of the SED? Official speeches and articles left little space for the personal remembrances of what the citizens of Dresden had experienced during 13 and 14 February 1945. While the official perspective focused on accusations towards the *Anglo-Amerikaner* and on the forward-looking ideology of *Wiederaufbau* little space was left in the

public sphere for mourning those lost. On the other hand, the official discourse never wholly monopolized the commemoration of the bombings. On a modest scale, Christian services provided commemoration services with a less political and more religious message. While in the churches, too, a perspective dominated in which Dresden was seen as a collective of innocent victims, here the virulent accusative slogans were replaced by a message of peace, mourning and reconciliation. However, especially when after 1952, the SED sought to increase its control over the churches the discursive space became more limited by the boundaries imposed by the SED-state. From the 1970s on these boundaries seemed to stretch a little. Though the official interpretation of the Allied bombings didn’t change fundamentally, the radical manner with which Dresden was used for anti-American propaganda decreased especially with the détente in the Cold War during the 1970s.

Already by the mid-1960s there were some initiatives in which seemingly a less radical anti-Western attitude was shown. After Dresden had signed a city partnership with “fellow-sufferer” Coventry in 1965, the German city was visited by the reconciliation project, a delegation of British Christian youths and members of the “peace movement”. In Dresden they met with the German Christian organization Operation Sühnezeichen. For six months British youths worked in Dresden to restore the destroyed deaconess hospital. The symbolic event culminated with the handing over of the “nail cross” made of three nails from the destroyed Cathedral of Coventry. Superficially this project seemed to symbolize a shared message of peace and reconciliation between the former enemies, across the boundaries.

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251 Fache, “Gegenwartsbewältigungen” 223-224.
of the Iron Curtain. GDR authorities were initially reluctant but after a period of negotiations, especially by British historian David Irving who was one of the initiators of this project, an invitation to a delegation of youths from Coventry was agreed upon. The GDR authorities came to recognize the potential of such cooperation for informal diplomatic contacts with Great Britain, but more importantly they saw it as a chance to sideline the Evangelische Kirche in Saxony, which was increasingly considered to be an ideological threat to Marxism.

Although initially Operation Sühnezeichen was used as an intermediary between the British church and Dresden’s authorities, the GDR authorities and the Stasi controlled the 1965 event in order to uphold the official GDR perspective on the bombing of Dresden as an act of imperialist terror that was continued in NATO policies and to make sure the Dresden hosts formulated no alternative or dissident perspective. At the same time by accepting a Christian delegation from Coventry the authorities could soothe East German Christians and churches and isolate dissidents like the ministers of Dresden’s Evangelische Kirche, by excluding them from the project. Therefore, for all the idealistic motives of at least the British participants, the reconciliation project did not result in the emergence of an “alternative” or more Christian-based remembrance of the bombing. To the contrary, the

253 It is significant that the initiative for this reconciliation project came from historian David Irving, who had recently published his bestselling account. Following a suggestion made in a reader’s letter in the Guardian, Irving proposed creating a “symbolic act of atonement” in Dresden and sought political support for the project. After first contacting British MP Richard Crossman, Irving got in touch with both Provost Williams of Coventry’s Cathedral and Dresden’s city archivist, with whom he had been in contact during his research. See: Irving’s correspondence with Crossman and Williams as well as with Dresden archivist Walter Lange and Mayor Gerhard Schill. Irving to Richard Crossman, 10-5-1963; Crossman to Irving 17-5-1963; H.C.N. Williams to Crossman 21-5-1963; Crossman to Irving 22-5-1963; Irving to Walter Lange 25-5-1963; Gerhard Schill to Irving; 21-12-1963 Irving to Schill 7 January 1964 in Barch/MA 107/26. Also see: Merrilyn Thomas, Communing with the enemy. Covert Operations, Christianity and Cold War Politics in Britain and the GDR (Bern: 2005) 220.

254 Ibid. 223-238.
event contributed to the cooperation of East German Church leaders with the SED party line and to the isolation of religious and political dissidents. The reconciliation project was used mainly for informal political diplomacy between the GDR and Britain during a period in which official diplomacy was not yet possible.255

Since the late 1960s the contacts between Coventry and Dresden quickly faded, due to the changed international situation. With Willy Brandt’s Ostpolitik and with the signing of the foundation agreement between the FRG and the GDR in 1972 and East Germany’s entry into the United Nations in 1974, the SED lost interest in the Dresden commemoration. Since the GDR’s international isolation had been resolved, there was less need for contacts with organizations like Coventry’s “reconciliation project”. Also, with the reduction in tension in the relationship with the West Dresden as a vehicle for anti-imperialist slogans had lost its political value. After the last mass rally in honor of the attack’s 25th anniversary on 13 February in 1970 no more mass events commemorating the bombing were held until 1980.256 In newspapers and magazines coverage of the yearly commemoration of 13 February decreased dramatically. The anniversary was now mentioned only in smaller articles, instead of being front-page news. That Dresden seemed to have lost its former political functions could also be seen in the changed commemoration practices. During the much more sober rituals that were still being held political speeches were replaced with a silent wreath-laying ceremony.257

Though some publications on the Dresden raid still reflected the traditional anti-Western evocation of a vision of imperialist terror and antifascist Wieder- aufbau, in some cases it became possible to approach the Allied bombings and

255 Ibid. 261-271.
256 Reichert, “Zur Rezeptionsgeschichte” 160. Also see chapter 4.
257 Neutzner, ”Vom Anklagen zum Erinnern” 157-158.
their consequences in a less propagandistic manner.\textsuperscript{258} The less politicized and slightly more internationally oriented attitude typical for the 1970s is also reflected in a catalogue of a 1970 exhibition, which showed visual artistic representations of the bombings of Dresden, Rotterdam, London, Warsaw and Leningrad. The usual fierce anti-imperialist rhetoric was missing. Though the Second World War was still generally referred to as an “imperialist war”, the emphasis was on the admission that the \textit{Luftwaffe} had started the “terror” and had first brought “Hitler's cynical threat” of “erasing enemy cities” into practice.\textsuperscript{259}

The general interest of the citizens of Dresden in the “official” commemoration also had faded through the years. They remembered their experiences of the bombing primarily in a private atmosphere or during religious services, where there had been a longer tradition of a less politicized memory culture that was more focused on mourning than on accusations aimed at the Allies. In the visual

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\textsuperscript{258} For an example of a traditionally virulently anti-Western pamphlet see the memoires of former Dresden Stadtrat Helmut Welz in: Helmut Welz, \textit{Die Stadt, die sterben sollte} (Berlin: 1972) 49-50.

\textsuperscript{259} Dresden Kupferstich-Kabinett der Staatlichen Kunstsammlungen, ed. \textit{Fünf städte mahnen: Dresden- Leningrad- London- Rotterdam- Warschau: zum Gedenken an die Zerstörung Dresdens am 13. Februar 1945: Ausstellung im Albertinum, Februar bis April 1970, Kupferstich-Kabinett der Staatlichen Kunstsammlungen Dresden} (Dresden: 1979) 2-3. Similarly, the 1978 publication of \textit{Schicksale deutscher Baudenkmale}, a documentation surveying architecture that was lost during the air war in East German cities, mentions the Allied bombings in an almost completely depoliticized perspective. In this art-historical compendium (which was also published in the FRG and meant for the West German market) phrases like “terror attacks”, “imperialism” or “Anglo-Amerikaner” were absent, even in the description of the attack on the Dresden. It simply briefly mentioned the chronology of events and the topographical details of the parts of the city that were destroyed. It ignored the human victims and only summarized and documented the destroyed buildings with photographs and architectonic details. The only reminder of the propagandistic language of the 1950s was the emphasis on the East German efforts to restore important parts of Germany’s cultural heritage, but also in a relatively apolitical setting. Eckardt, ed. \textit{Schicksale deutscher Baudenkmale im zweiten Weltkrieg: eine Dokumentation der Schäden und Totalverluste auf dem Gebiet der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik} especially: 372-442. For comparison, see the very similarly composed West German documentation. In the introduction Beseler, the editor, stated that it was meant as a sequel to the East German work, which he praised as “highly deserving”. Hartwig Beseler and Niels Gutschov, \textit{Kriegsschicksale Deutscher Architektur: Verluste, Schäden, Wiederaufbau: eine Dokumentation für das Gebiet der Bundesrepublik Deutschland} vol. Vol. 1-2 (Neumünster: 1988) V.
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arts as well it was possible to express a less politicized perspective. Artists like Wilhelm Rudolph, Christian Hasse and Rudolf Nehmer reflected a more universal pacifist message and were more concerned with mourning the losses than with moral accusations. In a series of sketches and woodcuts Wilhelm Rudolph showed Dresden’s destroyed city landscape in a discomfiting manner. Rudolph’s pictures do not express anger or hatred aimed at the English or Americans, but a deep sense of mourning. A similar personal reflection on Dresden is reflected in the work of poets like Heinz Czechowski and Eberhard Panitz. Czechowski’s poems like “Auf eine im Feuer versunkene Stadt” (1967) expressed the poet’s despair during the destruction as well as his problematic and uneasy attempt to come to terms with his traumatic memories. In his poems Czechowski did not reject the official GDR perspective completely. He shared the image of Dresden as a “unique” instance of destruction and also the more political notion of the continued threat of aggression that the English and Americans had demonstrated in February 1945. However, Czechowski had problems with the self-justified and unproblematic historical interpretation of official GDR memory politics, which he saw as concerned only with anti-Western politics and not with the painful and traumatic memory of the bombing itself.


2.2 East-West debates on Dresden

*Turning the argument around: Dresden as Stalin’s victim*

For the GDR, during the 1950s and ‘60s, Dresden had become a heavily politicized marker of its antifascist identity. In essence, this interpretation was regarded as an element in an offensive against the Federal Republic. While we have seen that...
the history of the Allied bombings played a specific role in the internal West German debate on “German guilt”, the East German anti-Western campaign did not go unnoticed and provoked reactions, which in some cases were characterized by “Cold War” polemics of a similar nature. East and West German authors like Axel Rodenberger, Max Seydewitz and Walter Weidauer increasingly reflected on each others’ work and debated the circumstances of the air raid.

The first point of argument between East and West German historians revolved around the belief that the bombing of Dresden had been motivated by an anti-Soviet political agenda. Like the connections that GDR authors drew between the suffering of Germans under Allied air attacks and the new threat of “imperialist terror”, the Cold War provided West German accounts with a contemporary context in which the bombing of Dresden could be explained. The large-scale GDR commemoration ceremonies and the series of anti-Western accounts caused irritation in West Germany as well as in the United States and Britain. The Cold War often appeared in an indirect manner in West German accounts. It became clear in calls for world peace in prefaces and conclusions, in which the authors often reminded their readers that the real political meaning of the Allied bombings was that they demonstrated the dangers of possible atomic war. The idea formulated in many introductions and prefaces to the historical accounts was that this history should be seen as a “warning sign” and an appeal for world peace. The Dokumente deutscher Kriegsschäden, for example, considered the true relevance of the Allied bombings to be its warning to the peoples of the world about the dangers of a “new world burning”.262 According to the general anticommunist sen-

262  E.g. see: Nahm et al., eds., Dokumente Kriegsschäden, Vol 1. 68. Exactly the same phrase “new world burning” in Rodenberger, Der Tod von Dresden 12.
timents that were dominant in West Germany during the 1950s and '60s some authors did not identify this threat with the British and Americans, but portrayed the Soviet Union as the main potential aggressor. In spite of the fact that the historical accounts formulated explicit moral accusations against the British and Americans, the current danger was recognized as lying in the atomic power of the Soviet Union. Though sometimes the responsibility for the present situation was partly ascribed to the United States, there was no doubt who was the real present threat and enemy. Hans Rumpf even called it the “irony of fate” that the methods once applied by the British “now turned against its former masters and adepts in a much worse form”.

In this light, the narratives circulating in the Federal Republic, like those published in East Germany, suggested a continuity of victimhood. The Germans were presented not only as the “former victims” but also served as the “reminders” of the new conflict. They had already experienced a preview of what a new world war would bring. Similar to Weidauer’s theory that Dresden almost had become the first victim of such an atomic war, West German accounts often made direct comparisons between Dresden and Hiroshima, stressing that this attack had caused “as many” or even more victims than the nuclear attack on the German cities. In a review of David Irving’s *Destruction of Dresden*, *Die Zeit* stressed that “the world’s greatest mass murder in the history of mankind that took place during one single day, probably was not suffered by the population of Hiroshima, as one was inclined to presume earlier, but by the inhabitants of Dresden”.

From a rhetorical point of view this approach had another consequence for

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263 Rumpf, “Das war vorgeplanter Völkermord”.
the way Germans were portrayed. Stressing their potential victimization in the near future also meant the extension of German victimhood into the present of the Cold War. Not only were the Germans the real victims of the Second World War, they were bound to become victims of air terror again in any ensuing conflict. The Germans, due to their geographical and political position, were bound to become the first victims in a future conflict. Just as the air war was taken out of its historical context and was instrumentalized in a current debate over history politics, the experience of the air war was similarly de-historicized on behalf of a German postwar identity as a “nation of peace” in the Cold War era. Both aspects demonstrate that the “historical” accounts were more about political issues of the present than attempts to historically understand and academically analyze the backgrounds, impact and consequences of the British and American strategic bombing offensive during the Second World War.

Another recurring theme in West German accounts is the reference to the GDR propaganda, oppression and failed reconstruction to suggest a direct continuity between the victims of the Allied attack and those of the Communist dictatorship. Paul, especially in his comments on postwar Dresden, expressed such an anti-Soviet undertone. In the last phrase of his book Paul summarized this continuity of suffering by stating: “The city was beautiful, not powerful. Her beauty died; she became an example for death. When she became an example of endurance and survival, she was struck by the division of Germany.” 265 This continuity of suffering also became clear in the frequently echoed criticism on the failed East German reconstruction of former cultural monuments in Dresden. Paul even characterized

265 Ibid. 190-193.
this neglect as Dresden’s “second destruction”.266 A similar argument, though usually less vehement, recurrently served as a starting point for German press articles on the anniversaries of Dresden’s destruction. German newspapers often discussed the anniversaries of Dresden’s destruction by describing Communist deconstruction. Though these articles sometimes also criticized the pace of reconstruction in West Germany, a certain continuity between the city’s destruction and her unfree postwar status was often suggested in the subtext.267

Also, some historical accounts more directly interpreted the bombing of Dresden as a historical case to illustrate the continued German victimhood in the face of Soviet aggression. The most direct way to do this was to make the Soviet Union directly responsible for the bombing of Dresden, a strategy that was pursued by several leading figures in the Allied Air Forces beginning in March 1945, when General George Marshall counteracted the increased criticism of the Allied attack, by stressing that the Russians had pressured the Western allies to bomb Dresden in support of the Eastern Front.268

This would remain a recurring argument in West Germany to counter anti-Western allegations from the GDR. In Germany, this Cold War myth was successfully introduced by Axel Rodenberger in an article for Das Grüne Blatt in 1953 and in a reprint of his book Der Tod von Dresden in the same year. In 1953 the American State Department authorized Rodenberger to make public its official statement that

267 In an article on the Dresden reconstruction in Der Welt, for example, an uneasiness with the reconstruction is formulated as a “lack of lust for life” “which somehow does not make the visitor feel happy about all this”: “Dresden 1960: Wiedergeburt in Gelb, Rot und Rosa,” Die Welt, 13-2 1960. For a similar uneasiness and criticism of the Dresden political commemorations “Dresden trauert, marschiert und tanzt” Süddeutsche Zeitung, 16-2 1960.
the bombing of Dresden had been executed at the request of Stalin.\textsuperscript{269} The argument that the Soviets were responsible fitted Rodenberger’s stereotypical account, though in the first edition Rodenberger had refrained from direct accusations of any specific party and had blamed “war itself” as an abstract phenomenon.\textsuperscript{270} Rodenberger did more than refer to a general threat of a coming atomic war in which “Dresden’s fate could become the fate of many cities”. In addition to alluding to the Cold War threat and in later editions stressing Soviet responsibility, Rodenberger’s book showed stereotypes of uncivilized Russian forced laborers, who, unlike the civilized West European prisoners, had registered the bombing “without sympathy” and only exploited the situation to plunder the possessions of the suffering Germans.\textsuperscript{271}

Apart from Rodenberger’s statement and a few articles, which voiced similar accusations about the Soviets, the official statement of the American State Department had only limited success in the West German accounts and press articles.\textsuperscript{272} Nevertheless, this version lingered on even after 1953 when an official report ordered by the American department of the Air Force established that there was no evidence that the Soviets had directly demanded the bombing of Dresden. This report, researched by historian Joseph Angell countered the allegation that the bombing of Dresden had been a war crime, by stating that the city had been a communication and industrial centre, but also that there was “no doubt that (...) the Russians never did specifically request the bombing of Dresden”.\textsuperscript{273}

\textsuperscript{270} Also see: Corwin, “The Dresden Bombing” 75. Corwin missed Rodenberger’s temporary acceptance of the American anti-Soviet claims.
\textsuperscript{271} Rodenberger, \textit{Der Tod von Dresden} 162.
\textsuperscript{273} Cit. By Overy, “The Post-War Debate” 133. In the early 1960s David Irving also tried to
Irving, Weidauer and the counting of the Dresden dead

In addition to the question regarding who had “ordered” the bombing of Dresden and whether it was meant to support or to sabotage the advance of the Red Army, a second point of controversy concerned the counting of the casualties in Dresden. While the Nazi authorities estimated the number of casualties in Dresden at around 25,000, in its attempt to establish Dresden as the ultimate symbol of Allied war crimes, Nazi propaganda had made efforts to exaggerate these numbers and successfully transmitted grossly exaggerated figures like 250,000 to both the German as well as the neutral press. After the war the death toll became the subject of a debate, which still lingers on, but first became a central point of argument between East and West German historians. The grotesque estimates of the death toll, which had had been circulated under Nazi propaganda, were particularly common in West Germany. Based on the assumption that the city was filled with several hundreds of

find evidence of a Soviet request, in part because he wanted to counter the GDR propaganda. To Irving’s visible frustration, correspondence with historians and eyewitnesses in England and the Soviet Union repeatedly pointed out to Irving that there was no such evidence to be found. Irving had to be satisfied with the conclusion that there though there was “no evidence for a reached agreement” with the Soviet Union, the attack was meant to support the advance of the Red Army and there was no question that the Russians could have suspected and welcomed a large-scale attack on the city. Irving’s irritation with the lack of proof of a Soviet request became most evident in his reaction to MP Richard Crossman’s letter of 12-12-1960. Crossman sent Irving an earlier letter written to him by David Ormsby Gore from 6-8-1957. Ormsby Gore had tried to find such evidence while he was working in the British Foreign office to counter GDR propaganda. However, he had not succeeded in finding written proof and wrote this in his letter to Crossman. When reacting on this earlier correspondence to Crossman, David Irving accused Ormsby Gore of a “lack of homework”, further implying that the British Foreign office had an interest in withholding documents. Crossman’s reply from 6-1-1961 was equally annoyed. “Frankly, I don’t understand what you are getting at in your long letter”, Crossman replied, clearly offended, and stressed that Ormsby Gore had had a strong interest in the finding and making public proof of a Soviet request. To Irving he suggested that he “should not look a gift horse in the mouth”. See correspondence: Irving to Richard Crossman, 25-11-1960 and 27-12-1960; Crossman to Irving, 12-12-1960 and 6-1-1961; David Ormsby Gore to Irving 21-6-1961; Irving to C. Platonov, 14-1-1962; Platonov to Irving, 2-3-1962 in: Barch-MA, 107/2; E.g. Irving, The Destruction of Dresden 95-100.

274 For a reconstruction of how these high figures were spread by Nazi propaganda to foreign media see: Neutzner, “Vom Alltäglichen zum Exemplarischen” 115-117; Bergander, Dresden 152-168.
thousands refugees from Eastern Germany figures of 60,000 up to 300,000 deaths were circulated by press articles and popular works of non-fiction.  

David Irving was the first to claim to have found reliable documents on which an exact calculation could be based. The definitive determination of the Dresden death toll formed a central aspect of Irving’s research, an aspect on which he would continue to work even after the first edition of his book on Dresden had been published. The claim to have determined the grotesque size of Dresden’s death toll formed a crucial element in Irving’s work on Dresden. What becomes clear from his correspondence with eyewitnesses and archives is his dissatisfaction with the estimates provided by Dresden city authorities and GDR historiography, which estimated a death toll ranging from 35,000 to 40,000. In his determination to establish a high number of casualties Irving relied first on the memory of a former local official in Dresden, Hans Voigt, who estimated the total at 135,000, even though he had added that the “dead persons department” he had worked for had been able identify some 40,000 dead. Shortly after the first publication of his book, Irving acquired a new document, which has become known as the Ta
gesbefehl 47 (TB 47), which seemed to establish the number of dead at 202,040.  

275 In Der Tod von Dresden, published 1951 Rodenberger repeatedly pointed out the “uniqueness of annihilation” with which the city was confronted, a claim supported by the grotesque estimates of the death casualties. In his book Rodenberger estimated the death toll at between 100,000 and 450,000: Rodenberger, Der Tod von Dresden 137, 168-172. E.g. Hofmann, “Als Dresden in Trümmer sank” Also see: Neutzner, “Vom Anklagen zum Erinnern” 149-151; Bergander, Dresden 152-167.  

276 Even though this document had been dismissed as a falsification by East German author Max Seydewitz in 1955 – a conclusion Irving was aware of and had previously accepted - Irving changed his mind after he had acquired a copy of the document himself in 1964. This TB 47, which Evans has described as a “carbon copy of a typed-up transcript of an extract of an unknown document” and with good arguments denounced as a wholly unconvincing historical source, came to serve as the basis for Irving’s exaggerations. Evans, Lying about Hitler 149-184.
A remarkable difference between these accounts and GDR historiography is that, though GDR propaganda cultivated Dresden as a singular war crime, it was much more modest in its estimates of the number of casualties of the raid were than West German accounts. Lehwess-Litzmann, Seydewitz and Weidauer estimated Dresden’s death toll much more realistically at 35,000. Weidauer, in particular, made a point of ruling out the possibility that the number could be much higher.277 The exact reason for this difference is hard to find. A possible factor might be that the enormous exaggerations were based on the assumption that Dresden was overfilled with Germans who had fled from the Red Army in Eastern Germany. While these refugees are not wholly ignored by authors like Seydewitz, the sensitivity in the GDR of the issue of the flight and expulsion of Germans by the Russian army might have contributed to the tendency of East German authors not to base high estimates on the assumption that Dresden was crowded with poor refugees from the East, a theme which was quite central to accounts like Rodenberger’s Der Tod von Dresden.278

The more modest estimates also provided the East German authors with an offensive argument to disqualify Western accounts as falsifications and products of Nazi propaganda. The high estimates made by authors like Rodenberger or Irving were taken as a starting point by GDR accounts for a heavy polemic against “bourgeois” accounts of the air war. In particular, Weidauer’s Inferno Dresden was for a large part concerned with challenging these high figures and exposing them as conscious exaggerations. Subtitled “on the lies and legends surrounding

277 Lehwess-Litzmann, “Operation Dresden” 111; Seydewitz, Die unbesiegbare Stadt 157; Weidauer, Inferno Dresden 110-132. Though both Lehwess-Litzmann and Seydewitz assumed that there were many more dead buried under the ruins their estimates were still moderate compared to most West German accounts.
“Operation Thunderclap” Weidauer’s account typifies how East German authors directly challenged and attacked Western historiography. Weidauer fiercely criticized recent accounts by Czesany, Rodenberger and also David Irving. In addition to his fierce criticism of attempts to ascribe responsibility for the raid to Stalin or to in any way dismiss the guilt of the Western allies for this dreadful crime, Weidauer also criticized the tendency to exaggerate the death figures.

At the same time, however, Weidauer maintained the uniqueness of the attack by arguing that Dresden had been foreseen as the first target of an atomic raid. He emphasized that, contrary to what many accounts had claimed, during the attack of 13 February “only” 35,000 people had died, less than at Hiroshima or Nagasaki. However harsh the attack on Dresden might had been, Weidauer kept reminding his audience, it was nothing compared to what a coming war would bring. In this way the special status of Dresden could be preserved while at the same time Western historiography could be criticized for overemphasizing the casualty rates for a revisionist view of German history and to defend the “honor” of German imperialism and militarism. But more strikingly, according to Weidauer, Western accounts tried to excuse NATO actions and to downplay the impact of the atomic bomb by stating that the “conventional” attack on Dresden had been more destructive. Apparently the deal with the dead is profitable for the imperialists; it serves to help to ideologically prepare for atomic warfare.279

Walter Weidauer’s *Inferno Dresden* provided the first serious challenge to Irving’s presentation of TB 47 as the definitive proof of the immense casualty figures. While Weidauer’s book was marked by a strong propagandist style and con-

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tained wild, ideologically charged theories, on the issue of the determination of
the death rate Weidauer drew on a source, whose reliability was increasingly hard
to deny. According to Weidauer, in 1964, he had recovered a copy of the Final
Report of the Dresden city police, which stated that on 10.3.1945, 18,375 dead had
been registered. In 1966 in the West German Federal archive another document,
this one from the Berlin Police department, was discovered, which was dated the
same day as Irving’s TB 47 but confirmed the death toll reported in Weidauer’s
document: 18,375.280 The appearance of these two documents, both proving the
TB 47 document to be virtually worthless, brought Irving to a temporary accep-
tance of these much lower estimates.

On July 7 1966, Irving sent a letter to the Times stating that he wanted to “cor-
rect a mistake”. The “final report” presented by Weidauer showed that the Dres-
den casualties were expected to reach 25,000 by March 1945, which indicated that
the casualties of the Dresden raid were on “much the same scale as in the heavi-
est Hamburg raids in 1943”. Irving stated that he “had no doubt as to this docu-
ment’s authenticity”, and pointed to the second document which confirmed the
authenticity of the “final report”, which was found by the Bundesarchiv the same
year.281 This acknowledgement clearly meant a victory for Weidauer, who cele-
brated Irving’s letter to the Times in the later editions of his book. “It is pleasing
that David Irving dissociates himself” from the “lies and legends” which he had

280 In a letter to Irving, archivist of the Federal Archives Heinz Boberach wrote that
from files from the Reichsfinanzministerium the “Lagemeldungen über Luftangriffe auf das
Reichsgebiet” of the Ordnungspolizei were discovered. Like the TB 47, this file was dated
on 22-3-45 but counted 18,367 registered deaths with a total estimate of 25,000 deaths.
“These figures blatantly contradict the information of the also at 22-3 dated Tagesbefehl”,
281 Irving letter to The Times (July 7 1966). For recent discussions on the Dresden death
toll see: Tagungsbericht HT 2008: Dresden und die unbekannten Toten. 30.09.2008-03.10.2008,
[4 December 2008].
earlier defended and which, Weidauer stressed, originated in Nazi propaganda. And in personal correspondence with Irving, Weidauer even thanked the British historian personally for this gesture.  

David Irving and the GDR narrative on Dresden

Though celebrated as a victory for Weidauer and the East German interpretation, this expression of gratitude also reveals the ambiguous reception of David Irving’s work in the GDR. While East German reviews and commentaries on *The Destruction of Dresden* all criticize elements of this account, it is interesting to see that Irving’s

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282 Weidauer, *Inferno Dresden* 123-124. This comment was added after the second edition of *Inferno Dresden* Weidauer to Irving, 21-11-1966 in Barch/MA 107/35. This gesture not only marks an interesting moment in the struggle of authors from the East and West to establish “the truth” about Dresden to support their interpretation. It also casts light on the position of David Irving in this period. His letter to the *Times* has often been seen as a half-hearted gesture, for instance by Richard Evans, who emphasized that, in spite of this brief statement of self-criticism, Irving in later editions and interviews returned to his old exaggerations of the death toll. Evans has argued that Irving’s search for larger numbers and his refusal to acknowledge more convincing arguments illustrate his willingness to manipulate and distort the historical truth, and thus form a prelude to his later controversial work on the Holocaust. One must ask, however, whether Evans’s evaluation is determined by Irving’s later statements and publications, expressing a direct relationship between the Nazi genocide and the air war, a blunt apology for Hitler’s actions and a denial of the existence of gas chambers. Irving’s high estimates were not higher than those given by most West German accounts and that his moral judgments of the Allied bombings were mild in comparison to most German accounts. As his considerable efforts to correct his earlier statements indicate, in 1966 Irving seems to have been serious in his acceptance of this new information on the casualty figures. This becomes clear not only from his letters to Britain’s leading media but also from his intention to publish the new document, which estimated the number of dead at 35,000 in the German historical journal *Vierteljahreshefte für Zeitgeschichte*. His correspondence with the editors makes clear that he intended to publish the “Final Report” in 1966. After an initial interest in Irving’s contribution the journal turned the piece down, pointing to the poor quality of the copy and stating that the editors regarded the document as only a “preliminary account”. Irving to Helmut Krausnick, 18-10-1966; H. Auerbach to Irving, 4-11-1966; Irving to Auerbach, 8-11-1966, Auerbach to Irving 10-2-1967. In: IIZ ID 90. Also notice that while now the range of 20,000-30,000 dead is more or less established this was far less clear in 1965. Moreover, despite Bergander’s convincing arguments, until very recently esteemed historians such as Hans Ulrich Wehler or Norman Davies have accepted 135,000 as a probable number of victims. See: Norman Davies, *Europe at War 1939-1945. No simple victory* (London: 2006) 29, 125; Hans-Ulrich Wehler, *Deutsche Gesellschaftsgeschichte. Vierter Band. Vom Beginn des Ersten Weltkriegs bis zur Gründung der beiden deutschen Staaten, 1914-1949*. (München: 2003) 933; e.g. Evans, *Lying about Hitler* 171 ff; David Irving, *Apocalypse 1945: the destruction of Dresden* (London: 1995) 244-245.
work was also discussed in positive terms. As in the Federal Republic, the GDR authors welcomed a critical account by a young British author, which confirmed several basic elements of the East German perspective. What becomes clear from the considerable press coverage of Irving’s discussions with East German authors as well as reviews, and remarks by East German authors, is that Irving’s book was regarded as international recognition of the imperialist crimes against the Germans.283 The East German Zeitschrift für Militärgeschichte concluded that the most important contribution of the book was that it showed that the attack on Dresden demonstrated the “military senselessness of the British-American terror attacks”. Furthermore, the review concluded, Irving did not leave any doubt that “reactionary circles” in London and Washington wanted to demonstrate their strength to the Russians.284

For East German authors, as in the West, Irving could be pointed out as a relatively “neutral” outsider, who confirmed that Dresden was a symbol of imperialist terror. However, in the view of the East Germans, David Irving did not go


far enough in his conclusions and “shied away from the consequences” of his doc-
umentation. In their attitude towards Irving, there is a tendency to appropri-
ate the universal message of German suffering of his book for the East German
narrative. East Germans often suggested that Irving, although basically a sensible
author, was restricted by West European “reactionary circles” and afraid to draw
the logical conclusions from his findings. Even Irving’s fiercest East German critic
and competitor Walter Weidauer suggested that Irving’s shortcomings were partly
the result of his dependency on other forces. For example, Weidauer pointed out
that Irving had to confirm to the “anticommunist” demands of his publisher. Wei-
dauer supported this statement by quoting and even printing a copy of a letter
Irving had sent to archivist Walter Lange. In this letter, Irving stated that his pub-
lisher had demanded the inclusion of “one or two references to the supposed bru-
talities of the Soviet army after May 1945”, because his publisher had feared that
the book would appear as a “communist propaganda lie” to the reader.

Irving’s statements, whether true or not were surely also a tactical move to
stay on a friendly basis with the city archives of Dresden. But for Weidauer they
provided the proof that Irving’s account had become subject to reactionary power
politics. More generally the strong interest in the Dresden attack on the part of
West- as well as East German authors shows how important The Destruction of Dres-
den was for both. Moreover, it shows that in a number of basic elements the East
and West German narratives on Dresden were very similar to each other. Just as in
David Irving’s account, Dresden was seen as the ultimate symbol of the suffering

285 Kühne, “Kritik”. Also, the help Irving received from the Dresden city archivist Lange
and the willingness of Weidauer and Dresden Mayor Gerhard Schill to cooperate with
Irving in the organization of a reconciliation project with citizens from Coventry reflect
the political interest of the GDR officials in David Irving’s position. E.g. footnote 254 in this
chapter.
286 Weidauer, Inferno Dresden 126-127.
of innocent Germans, who had become victims of the Nazi regime, of the senseless attacks by the Allied air forces, and of the Cold War conflict between the two super powers.

2.3 Parallels between East and West

A shared Dresden myth

The question therefore arises: how should we in hindsight understand the rivalry over Dresden? While debates raged about the role of the Soviet Union and the size of the death toll, a number of basic interpretations and narrative elements were shared by East and West German accounts, as well as by Irving’s *Destruction of Dresden* and many other non-German accounts of the bombing of Dresden. First of all, Dresden was seen as a singular symbol of war atrocity. Here a city with unique cultural beauty had been completely erased from the face of the earth. Accounts of Dresden’s destruction were always preceded by an (over)emphasis on the absolute beauty of this “Florence of the Elbe”. A second recurring element in the storytelling of Dresden was the characterization of the city as absolutely innocent. Dresden, it was claimed, was a cultural city without industrial or military significance. The inhabitants were women, children and refugees, all of them innocent victims. The third common narrative element was that Dresden’s destruction was seen as absolutely unique and fundamentally different from that of the other bombed cities. Because this city had been destroyed only for its cultural beauty and for the sake of causing as much terror as possible among the “innocent victims”, it stood out as a symbol of a senseless war crime. And because the city apparently had no
connection to the Nazi state and the German war industry Dresden could easily be disconnected from its historical background and from the Nazi war aggression. Dresden became a timeless symbol of terror against innocent civilians.\textsuperscript{287}

By reducing the history of the Allied strategic bombing campaign to this mythical image of the unique destruction of the innocent city of Dresden, certain elements also present in West German interpretations were stressed. As in West German accounts, East German authors interpreted the Allied bombing war as a senseless act, without any effects on the German military potential. Unlike the Soviet Army the Western allies had failed to find means to attack the German army directly and had turned to an indirect “cowardly” method of bombing German civilians. The ultimate symbol for the senselessness of the bombing war was, of course, Dresden. Even more than in the Federal Republic the development of the Allied bombing strategy and especially the American offensive on German oil, communication and military-industrial targets were ignored.

Like the accounts of Rodenberger and Irving, GDR accounts focused primarily on German suffering. This was especially the case in Seydewitz’s \textit{Zerstörung und Wiederaufbau von Dresden}. Seydewitz’s research on the historical background of the bombing of Dresden remained very limited. He reproduced a wide variety of myths and legends, such as the widespread “Tieflieger-myth”, suggesting falsely that the Allied fighter planes had engaged in “strafing”: Allied fighter planes accompanying the bombers were accused of flying low and firing at fleeing civilians. The key element of his book was to give an compelling account of German suffering. In his description of the attack Seydewitz painted a horrific scene on

\textsuperscript{287} Neutzner has labelled this as the “\textit{chiffre Dresden}”. See: Neutzner, “Vom Alltäglichen zum Exemplarischen” 126-127; Neutzner, “Vom Anklagen zum Erinnern” 132.
the basis of eyewitness accounts and his own fantasy. When Seydewitz described
the air raid itself he depicted a deliberate attack on hospitals and cemeteries
and used vivid and ghastly images that included a burning school “from which
screams could be heard”, women ablaze as “human torches” and a “burning baby
 carriage”.288 Also, the Allied strategic bombing campaign was presented as a
crime. It had been a ruthless terror-attack against German women and children for
which the Anglo-Amerikaner were solely responsible. In this way the Western Allies
could be pointed out as the only “guilty party”. The language used to describe the
attacks was charged with dramatic metaphors and horrific images. More directly
than West German accounts, Seydewitz labeled the bombing of Dresden as “mass
murder” and an “inexcusable barbaric crime”. According to Seydewitz, the attack
had been a “brutal act of violence against innocent civilians” and he therefore
denounced the bombing as a “crime against humanity”. The British and Ameri-
cans were depicted as “remorseless murderers of children and their mothers”.289

These explicit moral accusations show that, even more strongly than in the
West German accounts, the GDR authors made use of language and arguments
that were remarkably similar to way this bombardment was exploited by the
NSDAP during the last months of the war.290 The terminology used to describe
the attacks demonstrates the continuity of Nazi propaganda. Not only were such
words as “murder” and “terror attacks” copied in the same uncritical manner as
in the West. The GDR propaganda even allowed the reuse of terms such as anglo-
amerikanische Luftgangster which even more emphatically and directly reflected

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288 Seydewitz, Die unbesiegbare Stadt 86-87, 92-100, 106-118, 135-139.
289 Ibid. 7, 181, 208.
290 This point was made as early as 1977 by Götz Bergander and has recently been
illuminated in the work of Gilad Margalit, Patrice Poutros and Mathias Neutzner.
the terminology invented by Goebbels’s propaganda apparatus.  

What is interesting is that, while the propaganda campaigns of the SED tended to focus on American responsibility for the bombing of Dresden, most East German accounts nevertheless focused on British commanders Arthur Harris and Winston Churchill. *Inferno Dresden* presents the bombing of Dresden as a scheme, instigated and perpetrated by Churchill. The book makes this point not only as a formal argument but also in its detailed description of the British prime minister. Weidauer supported his argument that Dresden was bombed out of anticommunist motives by describing Winston Churchill’s irritation upon learning of the rapid progress of the Soviet Army. While the Red Army’s advance, according to Weidauer, “exhilarated not only the British people, but all the states of the anti-Hitler coalition in East and West”, Churchill was deeply distressed by this progress and looked for ways to sabotage the Russians. Weidauer not only identified Churchill as a main perpetrator of the attacks, but also emphasized his isolated position as a representative of the “reactionary circles”, who acted contrary to the will of the people.

Another continuity was the way in which the mythical status of Dresden as the ultimate symbol of Anglo-American criminality was adopted. The image of Dresden as an innocent and uniquely beautiful city had already been developed under Nazi propaganda. Like the wartime press articles and pamphlets which were issued immediately after the attack the postwar East German accounts portrayed

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Dresden as an innocent victim of ruthless American terror, and consequently perpetuated all kinds of legends and falsifications.

Other aspects of the GDR narrative echoed elements of Nazi propaganda as could be found in West German historiography. As in the West, the assumption that bombing had not only been senseless but even counterproductive by strengthening the mutual bonds between the Germans and their regime, for example, often was uncritically adopted. Former mayor of Dresden Walter Weidauer in his account *Inferno Dresden* (1965) reused this argument by claiming that because of this “militarily senseless, murderous air attack on the civilian population” many Germans “again started to believe in Goebbels-propaganda”.294

Also some GDR accounts repeat the argument that the Allies had attempted to erase German culture in Dresden. This element is especially present in Max Seydewitz’s work. Not only did Seydewitz depict Dresden as a uniquely beautiful city of arts, an image largely created by Nazi propaganda. Seydewitz even portrayed the Allied attack as “cultural barbarism” and as a deliberate attempt to “erase” the unique German national culture. Though he did not directly refer to Dresden as a representation of “Occidental” culture as did some West German authors, the argument that the Allied bombers were attempting a “culturocide” on German culture illustrates another continuity of the wartime narrative.295

*Comparisons between Dresden and Auschwitz*

Another striking parallel was that both East and West German historians writing on the air war in some cases made direct or implicit comparisons not only with

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295 Seydewitz, *Die unbesiegbare Stadt* 118.
Hiroshima, but also with the Holocaust. Examples can be found of accounts from both sides which explicitly put the Allied bombings on the same moral level as the Holocaust.\textsuperscript{296} The question, however, is: to what extent did these comparisons made by different authors serve a similar argument? In the GDR Auschwitz and Dresden were often seen as inherently related symbols of war atrocity. Here it was suggested that the bombings and the Holocaust were two equally horrific manifestations of imperialism. A good example of this linking can be seen in the wreath-laying ceremony at the \textit{Heidefriedhof}, which after 1950 became part of the official commemoration. Here, stone markers in half a circle carried the names of places of Nazi terror like Auschwitz but also commemorated the air attacks on Warsaw, Rotterdam and Dresden.\textsuperscript{297} Similarly, in East German accounts by Zimmering or Seydewitz, the comparison served to add an extra dimension of horror to the air war but also to stress the comparability and close relationship between the methods of fascism and Western imperialism.

This linkage became especially apparent in the novel \textit{Phosphor und Flieder} by the East German novelist Max Zimmering, a Dresden native who lived in exile during the war and described the two phenomena as directly related crimes: “How few guessed, that the death in the German concentration camps was only the brother of the death caused by the Anglo-American flying fortresses. And how few had understood, that the flame of Auschwitz, in which the millions of gassed Jews, Poles, Czechs, Russians, Gypsies and also Germans were burnt, was the sister of the flame that choked and burned Dresden and hundreds of thousands of

\textsuperscript{296} E.g. Elizabeth Corwin, who concludes that German historians tended to avoid such comparisons, especially in the GDR. The following examples however illustrate that this was far less the case than she suggests. Corwin, “The Dresden Bombing” 79, 84.

Dresdners”. Zimmering’s novel focused on the reconstruction of the city and denounced the “crimes” that “Anglo-American imperialists” had committed in his hometown. Zimmering drew a clear parallel between the Holocaust and Dresden and compared Dresden’s “flames” metaphorically with the burning of bodies in the concentration camps.

Seydewitz’s fantasy story about Charles Noble also involved an absolute distinction between perpetrators and victims, who were reduced to wholly exchangeable categories. Just as the perpetrator group consisted of German fascists and Western big industry, the victim group included the persecuted victims of Nazism as well as the German people, who were “under the continuing pressure of Gestapo terror”. To emphasize this shared victim-status Seydewitz began his story by mentioning the “beastly terror” committed by Nazi Germany. Seydewitz’s suggestion that both the mass murder of the Jews in the concentration camps and the bombing of Dresden were committed by the same “secret cooperation between fascism and monopoly capitalism” bore a similar message. Seydewitz did therefore not refer to the Holocaust to inspire contemplation of the guilt and responsibility of the German people but, on the contrary, to emphasize that the citizens of Dresden and the German people in general were part of the same universal “victim community” as the victims of Nazism.

In the Federal Republic, as was seen in chapter 1, it was mostly conservative-oriented authors such as Hans Rumpf and Karl Dietrich Erdmann who suggested comparability between the Holocaust and strategic bombing. Rumpf’s argument

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300 Seydewitz, Die unbesiegbare Stadt 45-46.
that the Allies had committed “planned genocide” (*Völkermord*) bore a different message than that found in the East. Rather than serving to bring general discredit on Britain and America as “imperialist states” or to suggest that these countries resembled the Nazi regime, the comparisons implied by Rumpf and Erdmann challenged the singularity of the German crimes, in the context of the West German discourse on German guilt. Many authors like Rumpf even explicitly stated that it was important to counter the one-sided discourse on German collective guilt to heal old wounds in the “relationship between old war rivals”.

For this reconciliation, acknowledgement of the “genocidal” character of the Allied bombings was needed, not the antagonism propagated by the Cold War slogans of the GDR. These comparisons therefore served not only to add an extra dimension to the hierarchical status of German suffering during the air war but also included an implicit critique of the singular status of the Holocaust as the ultimate symbol of human cruelty and suffering.

Comparisons between Auschwitz and Dresden could therefore carry different political messages and the examples above reflect some clear distinctions between the East and West German narratives. While in the GDR Dresden served to underline anti-Western politics and confirmed the country’s antifascist identity, in the West, Dresden and the Allied bombings functioned primarily as a counter-narrative of German guilt. The question is, however, whether in spite of these discursive differences, the stories did not have more in common. First, it is clear that, while in the GDR Dresden was instrumentalized for current politics of confrontation against NATO, the Federal Republic and the United States, the antifascist interpretation of the bombing also included an almost complete exonera-

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301 Rumpf, *Das war der Bombenkrieg* 12.
tion of the Germans for the crimes committed under Nazism. This interpretation
did not so much define itself as a “counter-narrative" against the idea of German
collective guilt, but simply pointed the finger at Western “imperialism”. By iden-
tifying a guilty party of both past and present crimes, further reflections on the
responsibility of the East German population could be avoided. On the other hand,
the accusations against the Allies often bore elements of anti-Western rhetoric. 
While Gilad Margalit has identified such anti-Western elements in West German accounts as the result of a “gradual Westward dissemination of the Communist
narrative” it is questionable whether this is an accurate conclusion. As chapter 1 has shown, an anti-Western tone was often implicitly present in West German accounts, which reflected not so much parallels to the Communist discourse, but continuities with Nazi propaganda. The proof of British “guilt” in initiating “terror bombing” depicted the Allied bombings as “anti-European” attempts to eradicate the continent’s ancient culture.

The West German left and Vietnam

That is not to say, however, that the rhetoric of GDR propaganda did not influ-
ence the West German discussion. Especially with the growing opposition to the
war in Vietnam leftwing and liberal Germans often adopted a rhetorical strategy
that associated NATO simultaneously with Dresden and Auschwitz. This approach was not limited to West German Communists or the extreme leftwing Rote Armee Fraktion, which in a 1972 Kommandoerklärung, linked Vietnam, Dresden and Aus-

chwitz as three equal examples of imperialist terror. A similar point was also made by playwright Rolf Hochhuth, who after his success with *Der Stellvertreter* had become interested in the Allied bombings and became friends with Irving. As a controversial young intellectual who could claim to have been the “first to represent Auschwitz on stage” in *Der Stellvertreter*, Hochhuth felt free to draw parallels without risking the accusation of wanting to exonerate the German responsibility for the Holocaust. His play *Soldaten* (1967) made a strong moral argument in which Churchill was accused of committing great crimes, while on the other hand explicitly naming the German war crimes and stressing German responsibility for causing the air raid on Coventry. In an article for *Der Spiegel* entitled “Churchill und wohin er führte” Hochhuth drew comparisons with the Holocaust by claiming that Churchill “had on occasions descended to the same level Hitler”.

Two years earlier, in 1965 Hochhuth presented the issue he was working on for his new play in an article for *Der Stern*. Here he described an interview he and David Irving had held with a former “Masterbomber” of the RAF who had participated in the attack on Dresden. In this article Hochhuth argued though differences in the intentions of the perpetrators must be acknowledged, it was important to “combine these two places, Auschwitz and Dresden, where probably more people were burnt than anywhere in the history of the world”. The main reason for this comparison was, according to Hochhuth, that he was feeling doubts about

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304 Hochhuth cited in: Esslin, “Ein Dramatiker”.
305 Hochhuth, *Soldaten* F.e. 18,28, 173ff.
whether the British military leaders truly believed that bombing German city centers would win the war. Hochhuth stressed that he had always believed that this issue was the “main difference between Harris and Eichmann”, “I would say” Hochhuth continued, “Eichmann can’t have believed that gassing Jewish families would bring the ‘Endsieg’ one bit closer. He can’t have believed that”. Then he turned the argument around and asked “And Harris? Without doubt he believed that burning cities would lead to our downfall. But what about the burning of the city’s inhabitants? A General truly believed this?” It was therefore a “matter of life and death” that one day the world would “look on the destroyers of Belgrade and Rostock with the same resentment as one regards the Schergen (crooks) of Treblinka and Auschwitz”.308

While his play Soldaten refrained from drawing such parallels, it clearly portrayed Churchill as a war criminal. Hochhuth’s article in der Stern, however, had been an exceptional example of an equation of the air war with the Holocaust. It was much more explicit than the hints and implicit parallel drawn by Hans Rumpf the same year. On the other hand, it was clear that Hochhuth was coming from another point of view. Instead of limiting the discussion to the German crimes, he had actively pursued introducing subjects that were still hardly discussed in the public debate. It is important to see Hochhuth’s interest in the air war in the context of current political events. Soldaten was not only a commentary on the British actions during the Second World War, but also a direct critique of NATO and American foreign policy in a period in which the war in Vietnam was increasingly

308 Ibid. It is therefore interesting that in 2000 Hochhuth would claim to Volker Hage, that he would “never compare the bombings with the Holocaust”. Hochhuth stated that absolutely no kind of historical comparison should ever be considered. Hage, Zeugen der Zerstörung 184.
attacked by the liberal left in West Germany.\textsuperscript{309} An important theme in the play as well as in his \textit{Stern} article was that, according to Hochhuth, NATO and the United States were still led by the same mentality, in which innocent civilians were ruthlessly murdered for political goals.

By drawing these parallels in his critique of Churchill’s role, Hochhuth also criticized NATO’s atomic weapons and the American bombings in Vietnam. In \textit{Soldaten} a direct comparison was made between American rocket attacks in Vietnam and the German V1 attacks on Britain.\textsuperscript{310} And in his \textit{Stern} article Hochhuth pointed out that it was exactly their significance for the present that had brought him to refer to “Auschwitz and Dresden in the same sentence”. Because of the lack of recognition that the Allied bombings had been criminal and morally wrong the world was facing worse crimes, since the present air forces “take for granted” what had still been disputed during World War II: killing defenseless civilians. Therefore recognizing the Allied bombings had been wrong was a central issue “on which our future depends”.\textsuperscript{311} The Allied air war needed to be compared not only with the Nazi crimes, but also with current NATO policies and the American bombings in Vietnam.

\textbf{Conclusion}

During the 1950s and the '60s Dresden became an important historical symbol that represented not only the history of the Second World War, but also the current “Cold War” between the two power blocs. This was especially the case in the

\textsuperscript{309} Günter Wernicke, \textit{Solidarität hilft siegen!": zur Solidaritätsbewegung mit Vietnam in beiden deutschen Staaten: Mitte der 60er bis Anfang der 70er Jahre} Hefte zur DDR-Geschichte 72 (Berlin: 2001) 23-33.

\textsuperscript{310} Hochhuth, \textit{Soldaten} 30.

\textsuperscript{311} Hochhuth, “Warum musste Dresden sterben?”.
GDR. Here, the British-American attack on Dresden was often linked to current issues, not only in political commemorations but also in historical accounts. In East German historical texts, the bombing of Dresden was interpreted in a manner that confirmed the antifascist self image of the Communist state. Like the West German accounts, and often recycling terminology of Nazi propaganda, the bombing was seen as a singular catastrophe and a dreadful crime against innocent civilians. While these accounts did not completely ignore the role of the German Army in waging a “total” war, which included the bombing of civilians in cities like Warsaw, and stated that “German fascism” was ultimately responsible, they focused on the barbaric crimes committed by the Anglo-Americans. The “criminality” of the attack on Dresden was confirmed by the theory that the Allies had not bombed the city to win the war against Hitler, but had wanted to intimidate and sabotage the Red Army’s advance westward. Thus the attack on Dresden was decontextualized from the Second World War and presented as the beginning of the Cold War. Moreover, the attack showed that both in their anti-Soviet motives as well as in their cruel methods Western imperialism and German fascism were ultimately two sides of the same coin. Directed by the forces of “monopoly capitalism” the “in und ausländische Verderber Deutschlands” had worked together at the expense of the Germans. Moreover, by comparing the attack to current NATO and American foreign policies, the authors used Dresden as an example of the barbaric “fascist” nature of the imperialist states in past and present.

Furthermore, the Cold War heavily influenced the inter-German debate on the bombing of Dresden. The East German accounts deliberately ignited debate on the Allied air war with “bourgeois” historians from the Federal Republic and other parts of the imperialist West and their propagandistic tone often provoked
reactions among Western authors, which sometimes reflected the confrontational atmosphere of the Cold War. The dispute between East and West German authors mainly focused on two issues. In the first place, West German authors reacted to the GDR accounts by turning their argument around by claiming that it had been Stalin, who had ordered the ruthless destruction of Dresden. Moreover, from their perspective Dresden, a victim of Stalinism, had not only been destroyed during the final phase of the Second World War, but afterwards had become a victim of Communism. With this approach, West German authors sought to undermine the basic starting point of the East German anti-Western propaganda.

On the other hand, the East German accounts attacked Western accounts not only for idly attempting to blame Dresden on the Soviet Union but also focused in a second issue. While remaining relatively modest in their estimates of the number of casualties in Dresden East German historians, especially Walter Weidauer, blamed West German historians and David Irving for deliberately exaggerating the number of casualties. According to Weidauer, Western historians not only adopted Nazi propaganda, but wanted to downplay the impact of a nuclear war by overstating the effects of the conventional attack on Dresden. Weidauer not only criticized Western accounts as inaccurate but portrayed their authors as apologists of a coming atomic war.

In spite of this heated dispute, there are many parallels in the East and West German narratives of the bombing of Dresden. In both cases Dresden was seen as the ultimate symbol of the air war. Dresden had been a uniquely beautiful city that had been destroyed in a senseless act of terror against innocent civilians. Moreover, Dresden has been compared to and implicitly or explicitly equated with the Holocaust, by GDR authors like Zimmering and West German conservative authors like
Hans Rumpf, as well as by leftwing liberals like Rolf Hochhuth. The political context in which such a comparison was made and the current issues to which both Dresden and Auschwitz were related could vary greatly. In the GDR this argument was used to underline official anti-Americanism, and in the Federal Republic it often served to relativize the singularity of the Nazi crimes. In spite of these differences there are structural continuities and parallels in both discourses. In both cases anti-Western rhetoric was combined with a tendency to avoid or counter a critical discussion of the responsibility of normal Germans for the crimes committed during the Nazi rule.
A Past becomes History
The professionalizing of military historiography of the air war in the Federal Republic since the 1970s

Introduction

Since late 1970s in both East and West Germany attempts have been made to place the Allied bombings of German cities in a more nuanced historical context. Unlike the situation prevailing in the 1950s and '60s the air war was now researched by professional German historians. In West Germany, Dresden im Luftkrieg appeared in 1977. This book by Götz Bergander (1927), a Dresden native living in the Federal Republic can be regarded as the first critical study of the bombing of Dresden, in which many conclusions that had been drawn in previous studies of Rodenberger, Rumpf and Irving were unmasked as popular, unfounded myths. Apart from this study and a few other thoroughly researched local histories, the devel-


313 Especially the work of Hartmut Schnatz: Helmut Schnatz, Tieflieger über Dresden?: Legenden und Wirklichkeit (Köln: 2000); Helmut Schnatz, Der Luftangriff auf Schwinemünde. Dokumentation einer Tragödie (München: 2004); Schnatz, “Die Zerstörung der deutschen Städte und die Opfer”. Though many local histories narrated the air war along the lines of early West German accounts of authors like Hans Rumpf, in a few cases local studies researched the backgrounds of specific cases on the basis of thorough empirical study
opment of a West German professional historiography on the Allied strategic bombing campaign has for a large part been the responsibility of Horst Boog (1928) a military historian who worked at the Militärgeschichtliches Forschungsamt in Freiburg. After finishing a comprehensive study on the strategic and organizational structure of the Luftwaffe leadership during the Second World War in 1982, Boog became an internationally renowned specialist on the air war and the Allied bombings, who conducted intensive archival research and participated in international academic debates. Though Boog’s work did not result in a monograph on the air war, he delivered several lengthy contributions to the multivolume overview Das Deutsche Reich im Zweiten Weltkrieg (DRZW) in 1983, 1990, 2001 and 2008. Taken together these can be regarded as a comprehensive history of the German and Anglo-American air war and bombing campaigns. Apart from his

and applied source criticism. Generally however, most of the academically funded and local histories, in which existing myths and dominant narratives were critically approached were published after the late 1980s. Examples of local histories of bombed cities of serious “academic” quality are Dieter Busch, Der Luftkrieg im Raum Mainz während des Zweiten Weltkrieges 1939-1945 (Mainz: 1988); Gerd R. Ueberschar, Freiburg im Luftkrieg 1939-1945 (Freiburg: 1990); Johannes Volker Wagner, ed. Vom Trümmerfeld ins Wirtschaftswunderland. Bochum 1945-1955, Veröffentlichungen des Stadtarchivs Bochum (Bochum: 1989). Also: Irmtraud Permooser’s dissertation on the bombing of Munich: Imtraud Permooser, Der Luftkrieg im Raum München (München: 1993).


work for this series, since the late 1970s, Boog has produced numerous academic and popular articles for journals and volumes. With this, Boog became arguably the most important West German expert on the air war and strategic bombing during the Second World War.

In this chapter I will first address some general developments in West German historiography and memory culture, before discussing the work Bergander and Boog and looking at their work and the context of more general debates in West German historical culture. Together with Bergander and a few others like Klaus Maier, Horst Boog was responsible for the emergence of a serious historiography on the Allied bombings in Germany. His work, which was more thoroughly researched than previous German accounts, demonstrates the process of professionalization of the German historiography of the Allied bombings. By focusing on Horst Boog in this chapter I will look at the process of “professionalization” which took place in the historiography of the Allied bombings. Horst Boog will be seen not only as an individual historian, but as a professional who worked in an academic institute. Working for the MGFA and contributing to its most important project, the comprehensive military historical overview Das deutsche Reich im Zweiten Weltkrieg, Boog’s work can only be understood if this academic context is taken into account.

(Stuttgart: 2008) 777-884. Currently, Boog is preparing a compilation of these different accounts in one monograph Luftkrieg über Deutschland 1939-1945. A publication date has not yet been established. See: Ibid. 777, note 1.

With regard to this professionalizing of historiography the work of historians such as Boog or Bergander raises a couple of questions. In the light of the oft-stated argument that during the recent debate “historiography” and “popular memory” represented two wholly different interpretations of the past, an analysis of these earlier works can give us an idea of the extent to which these more academic studies reflect continuities and changes in the earlier West German historical narratives of the Allied bombings. Did these new works challenge the coherence of earlier narratives, or did they only provide them with new material and arguments? In addition to examining their relationship to earlier accounts of the Allied bombings we need to ask how these new accounts on the air war related to new developments in the West German historical trade, such as the emergence of the new “critical-social history” of the “Bielfeld School” and the increasing tension between left-liberal and conservative historians during the 1970s and 1980s. In other words, to what degree did these accounts reflect a more general competition between overarching master narratives of German history within the Federal Republic?

*The Allied bombings in West German historiography since the 1970s*

In many cases the tendencies that have been described for the historiography of the 1950s and ’60s were continued in the 1970s and ’80’s and even dominate many of the recent publications that have followed the increased attention to the history of Allied bombings in Germany.318 However, especially in the Federal Republic,

the political context in which these interpretations of the air war were integrated differed from that of the earlier period. On the one hand, works continued to be published, in which the lost war was mourned and the Allies were condemned as brutal mass murderers. The publications of historians like Franz Kurowski, Maximilian Czesany and similarly oriented historians, were growing more radical and determined in their beliefs. These works were often inspired by David Irving, who was also becoming more radical and losing the positive image he had acquired during the 1960s. Especially after the publication of his new works on Hitler and the Holocaust, which expressed a radical revisionist perspective, and sought to relativize or deny that Nazi Germany and Hitler had planned and executed the extermination of millions of Jews and other minorities Irving lost most of his credibility.\footnote{Especially in: David Irving, \textit{Hitler's War} (London: 1977). E.g. Evans, \textit{Lying about Hitler}.} But Irving's views on Dresden and his exaggeration of the casualty rate became an important inspiration for German historical accounts, which continued to address the Allied bombings along the lines of the accounts of the 1950s and '60s.\footnote{For example, writing for a German public, Polish historian Janusz Piekalkiewicz and Austrian historian Maximilian Czesany even bluntly blamed the British government for the death of the British civilian casualties under German attacks. Czesany claimed that Churchill had "provoked" attacks on London by bombing Berlin and that the British leaders had even been aware of the coming attack on Coventry but had consciously withheld this information from the British public because they did not want to reveal their knowledge of the German secret code ("Enigma" Code), under which the Coventry attack had been coordinated. The responsibility for the civilian deaths in Coventry was thus transferred to the British government who had cynically sacrificed their people for their larger military interests. Maximilian Czesany, \textit{Allieter Bombenterror: der Luftkrieg gegen die Zivilbevölkerung} (Leoni am Stranberger See: 1986) 221-226, 685. Janusz Piekalkiewicz, \textit{Luftkrieg, 1939-1945} (München: 1978) 236. Also see Olaf Groehler's remarks on these unconvincing allegations in: Olaf Groehler, \textit{Kampf um die Luftherrschaft. Beiträge zur Luftkriegsgeschichte des Zweiten Weltkriegs} (Berlin: 1989) 41-51.} The large quantity of local histories and "memory-“ or “documentary-accounts”, often published on the occasion of the various “anniversaries” of the bombings and the end of the war during the 1980s and ’90s focused on a combination of military details, stories of human suffering and on the moral denuncia-
tion of British and American bombing strategy. Military historical and “documentary” overviews of the Allied bombing war continued to describe the story of German suffering and military details in a similar fashion.

However, the context in which these accounts were written had significantly changed. Since the late 1960s the historical culture in the Federal Republic became characterized by a more critical view of German history. During the Fischer controversy 1961, historian Fritz Fischer was heavily attacked by colleagues after arguing that Germany had been primarily been responsible for causing the First World War and thus implying a longer tradition of German expansionism. In German historiography since the late 1960s a new generation of historians like Jürgen Kocka, Hans-Ulrich Wehler and Hans Mommsen, often identified as the “Bielefeld School”, started to challenge the still dominant paradigm of political history together with the “national” perspective, in which Nazism and the Second World War were largely externalized from German history. Historians such as Kocka, Wehler and Mommsen emphasized longer continuities of anti-democratic, authoritarian and expansionist traditions in German history was emphasized and applied modernization theories to explain German history. They argued that Germany had followed a Sonderweg, a separate path into the modern age. Instead of externalizing the Third Reich from national history, these historians looked for explanations for


Parallel to this shift in German historiography, in the Federal Republic a critical view on German history became increasingly influential in public memory culture. This more critical narrative emphasized the undemocratic and “negative” traditions in German history and focused on the suffering that was caused by Germans, rather than suffered by them. The series of court trials during the 1960s had increased the public discussion of the Nazi crimes. But it was especially the broadcasting of the American TV-Series *Holocaust* in 1979 that confronted a mass German audience for the first time with explicit images of suffering of the Jews under German persecution and genocide. *Holocaust* marked an important breaking point in German memory culture, in which the Holocaust became the central point of reference.\footnote{324}{Fulbrook, German National Identity 157ff; Wulf Kansteiner, In pursuit of German memory: history, television, and politics after Auschwitz (Athens OH: 2006) 109-129.} European Jewry was now generally accepted as the main victims-group, and it was increasingly difficult to address German suffering without stressing this relationship. This recognition led to the acknowledgement of a strict hierarchy of suffering in German official memory, which was canonized by Richard von Weizsäcker’s famous commemoration speech to the German parliament in 1985.\footnote{325}{See for an online version of Weizsäcker’s speech the website of the Haus der Geschichte: http://www.hdg.de/lemo/html/dokumente/NeueHerausforderungen_redeVollstaendigRichardVonWeizsaecker8Mai1985/index.html}

However, this critical narrative was never uncontested. The work of conservative historians like Ernst Nolte and Andreas Hillgruber demonstrates a clear continuity in the attempt to externalize the Holocaust and Nazism from German national history and avoid the question of German responsibility. Especially since
the 1970s a clear division between two “narratives” on German history can be identified, which reflect not only political and methodological differences, but which can be seen as pleas for two different master- or counter- narratives of the German national past. The most “paradigmatic” example of this confrontation between historical perspectives, notions of identity and collective memories is probably the *Historikerstreit* (Historians controversy), which was fought out in 1986-1987.\(^{326}\)

Ernst Nolte’s suggestion that the German genocide of the European Jews could be interpreted as a “causal nexus” and a reaction to the Soviet terror regime provoked fierce criticism from leftwing intellectuals such as Jürgen Habermas and historians like Hans Mommsen. In their discussions on the limits of comparative historical analysis, on the nature of fascism and totalitarianism, and the need to historicize the past, interpretations of the past coincided with competing ideas on how the past was to play a role in the present.\(^{327}\)

Though not a central issue, the question of the Allied bombings was not wholly absent from this debate. While Ernst Nolte in his own research and works on the Second World War did not really go into the Allied bombings, he did integrate them as an argument in the two essays that have become notorious for sparking the *Historikerstreit*. In a section of “Vergangenheit die nicht vergehen will” Nolte reflected on the public debate that had emerged around the joint commemoration ceremonies of Chancellor Helmut Kohl and United States President Ronald Reagan at the cemetery of Bitburg in 1985.\(^{328}\) This commemoration had provoked

\(^{326}\) See Berg, *Der Holocaust* 27-35.

\(^{327}\) Große Kracht has pointed out that this made the *Historikerstreit* into a public controversy, which was not only a confrontation between historians with a different political backgrounds and conflicting perspectives but also a public struggle for hegemony between two competing narratives on the past, and thus also struggle determining the limits of the way the past could be interpreted. Grosse Kracht, *Zankende Zunft* 91-114; Berg, *Der Holocaust* 33.

\(^{328}\) Ernst Nolte, “Vergangenheit, die nicht vergehen will. Eine Rede, die geschrieben,
many negative reactions, not in the least because Reagan had explicitly stated that young SS-soldiers buried at Bitburg should be considered “victims” too.\textsuperscript{329} To demonstrate how the discourse on German guilt obstructed comparisons with other crimes, Nolte concluded about the Bitburg debate that fear of the “balancing” (\textit{Aufrechnung}) and comparison of these crimes had blocked the “simple” question, “what it would have meant if in 1953 the chancellor of the Federal Republic had refused to visit the national cemetery in Arlington, arguing that men were buried there that had participated in terror attacks on the German civil population”.\textsuperscript{330}

While Nolte remained somewhat vague about the true meaning of this statement, he suggested that there were grounds for treating RAF pilots in Arlington in the same manner as the SS soldiers at Bitburg. In his other well known article “Zwischen Geschichtslegende und Revisionismus”, Nolte discussed the interpretations of David Irving on the Holocaust that by then were already notorious for their apologetic defense of Hitler and denial of the Holocaust. He argued that in spite of Irving’s weak central argumentation, Irving’s remarks on the Allied bombings should be taken seriously, implicitly suggesting that the Allied bombings had been motivated by a “desire” to annihilate the Germans as a people. Thus Nolte stated that “we cannot simply dismiss Irving’s assertion that the bombing of Hamburg in 1943 (an event that cannot have its origin and cause in Allied knowledge about the Final Solution) was proof of the Allies’ desire to destroy the German

\begin{flushright} aber nicht gehalten werden konnte,” in \textit{Historikerstreit}. \textit{Die Dokumentation der Kontroverse um die Einzigartigkeit der nationalsozialistischen Judenvernichtung} (München: 1987) 39-47. This article originally written for the \textit{Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung} in June 6 1986 would provoke Jürgen Habermas’s polemic reaction and the start of the historians’ controversy.\textsuperscript{329} For an overview see: Ilya I. Levkov, ed. \textit{Bitburg and beyond: encounters in American, German and Jewish history} (New York: 1987).\textsuperscript{330} Nolte, “Vergangenheit, die nicht vergehen will” 42. English translation: \textit{Forever in the shadow of Hitler?: the dispute about Germans’ understanding of history, original documents of the Historikerstreit, the controversy concerning the singularity of the Holocaust/} translated by James Knowlton and Truett Cates, (New Jersey: 1993) citation on p. 20.
civilian population”.

Though Nolte did not explicitly claim to fully support Irving’s “assertion” about Hamburg (Nolte also mentioned the earlier bombing of Coventry as a likely motivation for Hamburg), what is interesting in these two statements is that the moral discussion of the Allied bombings is related more directly to the discourse of the Nazi crimes and thus suggests an equal level on which both could be explained: as a terrible attempt to annihilate innocent victims. Nolte was consciously trying to explore the possibilities and boundaries of placing “Auschwitz in a more comprehensive perspective” and of removing the Third Reich from “historical isolation”. Like many of his other statements, Nolte’s references to the Allied bombings and his implicit equation of the bombings with the Holocaust provoked Jürgen Habermas’s outrage over the fact that Nolte had so freely “balanced Auschwitz with Dresden”. But in the light of their dispute, the air war did not play an important role, nor was it thoroughly discussed during the Historikerstreit.


332 Nolte, “Zwischen Geschichtslegende und Revisionismus?” 25, 33. This argument is also visible in more modest comparisons by Horst Boog who interpreted the air war as a “sin” that stood on the same level as the Nazi crimes, while avoiding more direct comparisons and equations, Boog, “Bombenkrieg” 309. Also see a similar line of argument in Dagmar Barnouw, The war in the empty air: victims, perpetrators and postwar Germans (Bloomington: 2005) 3 ff. The timing of Nolte’s reference to the work of David Irving was significant. In 1985 referring to Irving was completely different than if he had done so during the 1960s. After having been a commonly respected young historian and journalist David Irving had since the 1970s increasingly become notorious for combining a deliberate exaggeration of the Dresden death toll with a clear trivialization and partial denial of the Holocaust. After he started publishing his revisionist ideas in Hitler’s War and had become an important spokesman for extreme rightwing revisionists in the 1980s and ‘90s the “crime” of the air war played a crucial role in his attempts to “diminish” the magnitude of the Holocaust. As Richard Evans pointed out, especially in his public speaking and interviews, Irving made a radical equation between Auschwitz and Dresden, by claiming he “saw very little difference” since in both cases “about 100,000 people had died.” This Week program (28-11-1991) citation in: Evans, Lying about Hitler 181.

3.1. Dresden im Luftkrieg: Götz Bergander

While, on the one hand, both the old and new guard of Germany’s leading historians, with few exceptions, ignored the air war as a historical phenomenon, the competing perspectives that became apparent during the historians’ controversy to a certain extent also were reflected in the work of the few historians, who researched the Allied bombings. With the increased access to the relevant sources and often inspired by new historical research by British and American historians, German professional historians from the late 1970s on began to engage in more serious research on the Allied bombings. Though this aspect of the Second World War was rarely addressed by prominent and “leading” historians in the Federal Republic, historical accounts now appeared that employed a professional methodology of archival research and source criticism. An early example, and in many ways a remarkable book, Götz Bergander’s *Dresden im Luftkrieg* (1977) provided a more critical perspective on German history and nationalist historiography and led to contestation of previous accounts of the air war in some of their central aspects. Götz Bergander operated as a freelancer but his book clearly adopted a professional academic methodology and style. Bergander had witnessed the bombing and had become suspicious of the stories that had been told by authors such as Axel Rodenberger or David Irving.

Bergander undertook a drastic revision on the bombing of Dresden. In his intensive attempt to cut through the variety of historical myths that surrounded

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the Dresden raid, he developed a new approach to the air war, one that focused not only on the bombings themselves, but also, or even more so, on their reception in historiography and public debate. In his study, Bergander not only drew from the results of previous studies by Hans Rumpf, Axel Rodenberger and David Irving as well as from works by the East German writers Max Seydewitz and Walter Weidauer, he approached them critically. Such disinterested and critical research has made *Dresden im Luftkrieg* an internationally recognized standard work. While the book has never been translated into English, Bergander’s conclusions have recently become widespread through Frederick Taylor’s bestselling study *Dresden. Tuesday 13 February 1945* (2004) which largely builds on *Dresden im Luftkrieg.*

In the first place, *Dresden im Luftkrieg* approached the bombing differently than previous German accounts, by applying careful and systematic source criticism. Bergander presented new findings in British, American and German archives with common interpretations, and compared contradicting sources and eyewitness reports. This way, more precisely than before, Bergander was able to determine all sorts of factual details about the chronological proceeding of the raid. Bergander looked at the exact targeting, at the Allied methods and strategy, and tried to determine the still fiercely disputed casualty rate. Taking his factual findings as a lead, Bergander’s book also clearly had a second central element in which Bergander took a position of critical distance towards previously unchallenged elements of the Dresden narrative. Bergander’s book was not only an attempt to

335 Especially Frederick Taylor’s recent bestseller Taylor, *Dresden.* This book draws heavily on Bergander’s work. Also see the positive reception of *Dresden im Luftkrieg* immediately after publication. For example: Bradley F. Smith, “Review of Götz Bergander: Dresden im Luftkrieg.” *The American Historical Review* 83, no. 2 (1978) In Germany Bergander’s work initially only caused minor reactions within the academic historical world, but was positively reviewed by some German publications, for example by *Die Zeit* who praised Berganders book as a “masterpiece” of military history: “Eine Jahrhundertkatastrophe” *Die Zeit*, 1-4 1977, 86.
write a reliable account of the bombing of Dresden, but was set up as a challenge to the various historical myths that surrounded the attack. The starting point of *Dresden im Luftkrieg* was that of correcting an “abused” history. He concluded that “German books and articles often give the distressing suggestion of self pity and gladly ignore that Hitler would not have hesitated a second to erase English cities, had he been able to”.\(^{336}\) Also, David Irving’s book was challenged by Bergander. While praising Irving’s study as thoroughly researched account, Bergander argued that Irving had widely overestimated the number of deaths in Dresden and had repeated many common myths, such as the existence of strafing attacks on German civilians.\(^ {337}\)

Most importantly, Bergander pointed out that contrary to the common belief in Germany, Dresden had indeed been a target of military significance especially as centre of communication and transport and one of the major cities from which supplies were transmitted to the Eastern Front. Dresden had not been an “open” city without any connection to German war industry. Bergander stressed that Dresden was a city of military importance and was regarded as such by the Nazi authorities, a conclusion that recently was again emphasized by Frederick Taylor.\(^ {338}\) Bergander argued moreover that the Dresden raid had not only targeted civilian residential areas but that the RAF had ordered a significant percentage of the aircraft to bomb the hydrogenation plant at Böhlen. The attack was part of a general strategy to support the Red Army. Though Bergander concluded that the

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\(^{336}\) Bergander, *Dresden* 260.

\(^{337}\) Ibid. 142-143; 159-161. Correspondence shows that Irving and Bergander exchanged information and thoughts on a friendly and informal basis. See for example: Götz Bergander to David Irving, 21-10-1966, which clearly illustrates their friendly cooperation.

intensity and the exceptional impact of the attack (which according to Bergander were also due to the exceptionally advantageous weather conditions) were “disproportionate” in relation to the intended military objective, he refrained from any kind of moral judgment towards the British and American army leaders. Instead he held Nazi Germany solely responsible, not only for starting the war and crossing all moral boundaries to conduct a “total” war against civilians, but also for failing in its “obligation” to protect German civilians against enemy air attacks.339 Also, Bergander stressed that the Allied bombings and especially the attack on Dresden indeed had had an important impact on German morale. He stressed that “the bombing offensive posed a real and omnipresent threat to life and personal belongings and thus was the most effective form of psychological warfare.” He backed up his argument by pointing to the various indications of a vast moral impact that could be seen in the reports made by the German Sicherheitsdienst.340

One of Bergander’s main critical points was that the bombing of Dresden had been subject to historical myths from day one and that Nazi propaganda, urban legends and hearsay had only rarely been challenged in historiography to date. Death toll figures had been dramatically exaggerated and all kinds of stories illustrating the exceptional cruelty of the Allies had been circulated. Bergander not only convincingly demonstrated that death toll figures of 135,000 or 400,000 or accounts of “strafing” attacks on civilians were fantasies that could be countered by sober historical arguments, but he also traced the history of these stories. For example, Bergander illustrated how the story of Dresden as a militarily irrelevant target and the figures of 200,000 or more victims had been successfully transmit-

340 Ibid. 236-244, 263.
ted by Goebbels propaganda to the German as well as the international public consciousness.341

Bergander was no less critical of the propagandist abuse of the Dresden raid in the GDR. Just as he questioned Rodenberger’s and Irving’s accounts, Bergander challenged the work of East Germans authors Weidauer and Seydewitz and more generally the Communist propaganda discourse on the attack. According to Bergander, East German authors had shared with West German authors the idea the Dresden was a senseless attack with no military purpose and had similarly upheld legends about the strafing of fleeing civilians. Moreover, especially in the East authors had exploited the attack for Cold War propaganda purposes. Here too, Bergander combined a polemic against GDR authors with a dry analysis of their central argument: the idea that Dresden had been bombed to intimidate Stalin. Bergander concluded that, while the Soviet Union was not directly involved in the planning of the attack, the Russian leadership knew that Dresden had been on the Allied target list. With regard to East German authors, Bergander wanted to refute, in particular, the suggested anti-Soviet motive. His ultimate conclusion was that while it “might be possible” that the Western Allies had wanted to “impress” Stalin, the idea that they wanted to “demonstrate their power” in an aggressive manner was an exaggeration. The Allies had only wanted to support the advance of the Red Army and had had no intentions of challenging Stalin in any way.342 While most of Bergander’s factual conclusions still hold up to recent

341 Bergander challenged the exaggerated death figures ranging up to 400,000 (Rodenberger) that still dominated West German historiography. Bergander argued that on this point otherwise often unreliable accounts by East German authors (35,000) were most probable, and verified the validity of the document that backed this up, a “final report” drawn up by the Dresden Ordnungspolizei in 1945, which had been discovered and first published by Walter Weidauer. Ibid. 152-168.
342 Ibid. 228-234.
research results, this last point has been refuted by the publication of documents reflecting the Allied considerations with regard to “Operation Thunderclap” in the last phase of the strategic bombing campaign. These documents show that the mass bombings in 1945 were at least partly intended to “show the Russians” what the Allies were “capable of” and reflect a more aggressive attitude than is concluded by Bergander.343

This conclusion demonstrates Bergander’s urge to refute those interpretations that became subject to identity politics in East and West Germany. In that sense, *Dresden im Luftkrieg* was a remarkable book because it challenged almost all interpretations in both East and West German accounts. In his historical interpretations as well as in his moral conclusions about the Allied strategy and intentions Bergander’s work comes closer to British and American historiography, like the work of Charles Webster and Noble Frankland and Fredrick Taylor. Bergander was very reluctant to pass any kind of moral judgement in hindsight and his evaluation of the motives behind the attack are arguably more positive than any other German accounts. By doing so, Bergander not only adopted an academic discourse from outside of Germany, but also approached the bombing of Dresden from the more critical narrative on the Second World War, which had become dominant during the 1970s.

While Bergander strictly focused on the history of the Dresden raid and did not refer to the more general debates on the Second World War, there are strong

parallels in Bergander’s polemic against the memory politics of authors like Rumpf and Rodenberger and the debate between liberal and conservative historians and intellectuals, which would find its climax in the Historikerstreit. The strong emphasis on unraveling historical myths as strategies of a nationalist view of history and a tendency to “balance” the bombings with the Nazi crimes, strongly resemble the criticism of liberal intellectuals, who increasingly criticized the various forms of German “mastering the past”. Like Mommsen, Wehler and Habermas’s polemic against the provocative rhetoric of conservatives like Ernst Nolte some years later, Bergander not only presented a different perspective on history, but also argued from a different overarching narrative. Dresden, from Bergander’s point of view, was in the first place an “exploited” history. The history of 13 February 1945 had been used for nationalist and apologetic rhetoric in the West and for anti-Americanism in the East and therefore needed to be unraveled and deconstructed.

Central to Bergander’s point of reference was the recognition that the Third Reich held the greatest responsibility for the Second World War. Any attempts to diffuse this causality led to grave distortions. It is especially in this sense that Bergander’s narrative differs from earlier accounts. Interestingly, in his historical descriptions the broader context of the Second World War was also largely absent, and so were the German bombings of other European cities. However, by interpreting the attack on Dresden as a relevant part in the Allied war against the Third Reich, the implicit isolation of the Allied bombings, which characterized most East as well as West German accounts, disappeared. Without including lengthy passages on the war or German war crimes, Bergander integrated the attack on Dresden into a broader narrative, in which both were naturally the most important elements.
3.2. Horst Boog and the professionalizing of “military history”

In the period following Bergander’s study, different accounts on aspects of the Allied bombing and the air war were published by professional military historians. Apart from some partial studies on Freiburg and Rotterdam by researchers Anton Hoch and Hans Adolf Jacobsen of the Institut für Zeitgeschichte in München, it was the military historians working for the Militärgeschichtliches Forschungsamt (MGFA) in Freiburg, and particularly Horst Boog, who produced the first serious professional military historical accounts of the air war. Growing up in the industrial area of Leuna-Merseberg, Boog personally experienced heavy raids as an adolescent. Though only 16 years old, Boog became involved in the German air defences in the last phase of the war. In 1944, Boog was trained as a glider pilot within the Hitler Youth, and later transferred to the Volkssturm. After finishing school in 1946, Boog took part in an exchange program and received a Bachelors degree in History and Philosophy from Middlebury College in Vermont. While working part time for the US Air intelligence and as a translator and interpreter in Nuremberg, Boog studied History in Heidelberg and received his PhD in 1965.


345 Jacobsen, Fall Gelb; Jacobsen, “Der deutsche Luftangriff auf Rotterdam” ; Hoch, “Der Luftangriff auf Freiburg”. Hoch was the main archivist at the IfZ. On the further involvement of Hoch and Jacobsen in the IfZ, see: Horst Möller and Udo Wengst, eds., 50 Jahre Institut für Zeitgeschichte. Eine Bilanz (München: 1999) 3, 22-26, 45, 74, 222-228, 266, 334 ff.
In 1967 he started as a researcher in the *Militärgeschichtliches Forschungsamt* in Freiburg, where he later became senior air historian and eventually Chief of historical research.\(^{346}\)

In this institute, founded in 1958 as part of the West German defense ministry, the interest in academic military historiography was re-ignited, after university historians had largely abandoned the sub-discipline after 1945. The institute’s early years were characterized by strong tension between the interest of *Bundeswehr* officers in a controlled and positive view of German military history and that of the historians who wanted to be able do historical research according to critical and independent academic standards.\(^{347}\) Though the MGFA, institutionally and in academic spirit, was still close to the political and military institution of the *Bundeswehr*, it was also the place where military history re-emerged as a serious discipline of West German historiography. Under the leadership of Manfred Messerschmidt, since 1970 researchers from the MGFA have produced works of history on the basis of academic methodology and vast archival research including a few very critical accounts of German military history, calling into question the still dominant positive image of the German *Wehrmacht*.\(^{348}\)

However, the MGFA would continue to be characterized by a certain tension between historians who identified with the traditional military historical focus on

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\(^{348}\) Especially the the work of Manfred Messerschmidt and Woflram Wette should be mentioned here. E.g.,Wette, *Die Wehrmacht*. 
leaders, decisions and strategy, and those who regarded such an approach as a backward and nationalist point of view. These tensions also became evident in the preparing of one of the institute’s central publications, the 10-volume history of Germany and the Second World War (Das Deutsche Reich im Zweiten Weltkrieg; from now on DRZW). Published between 1978 and 2008, the series was an ambitious attempt to produce a comprehensive academically grounded overview of all aspects of the military (and later also social) history of the Second World War. However, the series encountered various difficulties. As a conscious attempt to give a West German answer to the East German historical view of the war it was vulnerable to political charges, and because the volumes required teamwork and cooperation among different historians, the project often also led to the sharpening of the internal conflicts at the institute. On sensitive issues, like the German attack on the Soviet Union and the involvement of the Wehrmacht in the genocidal crimes committed during the war there were strong differences of opinion, which sometimes meant that different contributions to the series presented contradicting interpretations. Moreover, there were strong differences between the volumes. While some focused on military operational history, others took a more social and cultural historical approach to the Second World War.

Horst Boog would devote a large part of his academic career to this comprehensive series. After his colleague Klaus Maier had covered the first phase of the air war up until the “Battle of Britain”, Boog would be responsible for all con-

349 MGFA ed, Das Deutsche Reich und der Zweite Weltkrieg, 10 Tl/12 Bd (Stuttgart: 1979-2008); this series will be referred to as: DRZW.
350 Müller, “Das deutsche Reich” 303-320. Müller, who is presently academic director of the MGFA, argues that it was within this institute that during the mid-1980s a heavy debate on the role of the Wehrmacht was fought out, which in many aspects foreshadowed the public controversy on the Wehrmacht-exhibition during the mid 1990s. Also see Wette’s polemic against his “nationalist” MGFA colleagues in: Wette, “Militärgeschichte”.
tributions on the air war afterwards. Apart from his major contributions on the Anglo-American strategic bombing campaign in Volumes 6 (1990) 7 (2001) and 10 (2008), he also coordinated Volumes 5 and 6. Moreover, Boog was engaged in an international academic discourse, lectured inside and outside of Germany and participated in and organized international conferences. For example, in 1988 he organized a major international conference in Freiburg, whose participants included British and American scholars, such as Richard Overy and East German historian Olaf Groehler, who will be discussed later on. Boog also situated his academic findings in a broader international academic field and in reviews commented regularly on new publications. After his retirement from the MGFA, he continued working on the air war. Boog increasingly contributed to more public discussions—sometimes in politically rightwing-oriented periodicals—from the mid 1990’s onwards and especially after the Allied bombing war became a major public theme in the early 2000s.


352 For example in a conference that was organized to mark the 50th anniversary of the German invasion of the Netherlands organized by the Free University of Amsterdam, where Boog spoke among leading Dutch historians such as J.C.H Blom on the “Luftwaffe Operations against the Netherlands”. See: J.P.B. Jonker, A.E. Kersten, and G.N. van der Plaat, eds., Vijftig jaar na de inval: geschiedschrijving en Tweede Wereldoorlog: bijdragen aan het congres gehouden aan de Vrije Universiteit te Amsterdam op 10 en 11 mei 1990 (1990).

353 See the individual papers of the participants in Horst Boog, ed. The conduct of the air war in the Second World War. An international comparison: proceedings of the International Conference of Historians in Freiburg im Breisgau, from 29 August to 2 September 1988 (New York: 1992).

New perspectives on the air war

Boog’s contributions can be seen as important stimuli to professionalize traditional military history, which researched and evaluated the operational and strategic aspects of warfare. He has often been praised for “setting new standards” in the field of operational military history. Comparing the elaborate scholarly writings and vast research of Horst Boog to the unprofessional, heavily moralized and often thinly argued works of the 1950s and ’60’s, there are some obvious and clear differences. Unlike the historical accounts by authors like Spetzler and Rumpf, Boog based his research on extensive empirical research in German, British and American military documents. Where previously, most of the works had been based on British and American secondary literature, Boog extensively researched in British and American archives and approached the air war with an academic style and methodology that looked for a connection to international academic military history. Also he aimed at an international academic audience, discussing international publications of British historians such as Richard Overy. This became apparent in his vast number of references and academic language, but also in his nuanced and more pluralistic analysis of the Allied strategic bombing campaign.

Boog’s work focused on a realistic reconstruction of military organization, strategy and decision-making and on statistical information on death casualties and the effects of bombings on the German war industry. While earlier German
accounts had often uncritically collected information, Boog critically reflected on his sources and made efforts to establish motives of involved actors and the exact results of their actions. He discussed, read and reviewed the major part British and American historiography which appeared during his long involvement with the air war. Also, following the research of Bergander and Schnatz, Boog pointed to the radical overestimation on the death toll of the attack on Dresden, and also underlined their argument that the supposed “strafing” attacks in Dresden had not taken place.357

On the formal interpretative level there were a couple of points where Boog’s evaluation of the air war differed from the earlier works and adjusted the narrative. On the one hand, Boog stressed, that the British strategy of area bombing proved disappointing and had only meager effects on the German war industry, a conclusion shared by most British and American historians. On the other hand, when summarizing the overall military effect of the British-American strategic bombings, he stressed that “while not solely” responsible they still had been “evidently decisive” in the Allied victory. From 1944, according to Boog, the daylight American bombings on German airplane and fuel industry and transportation infrastructure had brought about a “lethal collapse in the German armament industry”.358 Though the American daylight bombing raids were much more effective, British area bombings were “not irrelevant” and had considerable military effect.359 Boog argued that their effects had been especially significant in the indirect sense “that they enforced the concentration of personnel, weapons and mate-

357 Boog, “Strategische Bomberoffensive” 794-797.
359 Boog, “Strategische Bomberoffensive” 872.
rials in the Reich and thus the weakening of the battlefronts on land and sea”. Likewise, Boog’s assessment of the Allied strategy to undermine civilian morale was nuanced. In a 1993 conference paper, for example, he stated that “If the morale of the civilian population is defined as their will to continue to work for the war effort, then German morale was not broken. But it was certainly weakened, as recent studies have revealed, especially in cities suffering heavy attacks”.360

As this argumentation indicates, Boog regarded the theoretical backgrounds, military effects and moral implications of the Allied bombings within the broader context of the Second World War and the military doctrines of the different nations involved in this global war. While previous authors like Rumpf and Spetzler had been primarily concerned with arguing the German case while mostly ignoring the military effects of the Anglo-American bombing as well as the theory and practice of the bombings of the Luftwaffe, Boog applied a more inclusive perspective. “Area attacks did not determine the entire bombing offensive, even considering how terrible the fate of the involved civilians has been. In order to come to a balanced realistic judgment, the bombing war with all its aspects should be regarded as a part of the Second World War”.361 The integration of his accounts of the Allied bombings into the comprehensive series on the Second World War also illustrated this broader perspective.

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361 Boog, “Strategische Bomberoffensive” 871.
The “clean Luftwaffe”

In the process of professionalization German military historiography abandoned its earlier “isolated” focus on the Allied bombings. While authors such as Rumpf and Spetzer only pointed to the bombing of civilians and ignored the broader history of the Second World War as well as the military targets of the Allied strategic bombing campaign, the new professional military historiography approached the subject in a much more nuanced manner. Another difference with earlier accounts is that Boog concentrated on the battles and struggle for air power between Germany and the British-American military powers. In that sense, he largely refrained from giving an emotionally charged view of German suffering and turned the focus away from the German victims. While in the work of Rumpf and Spetzler a one-sided moral denunciation of the Allied leaders dominated, Boog saw the strategic bombings foremost as a military operation, whose context was determined by the Second World War and by longer traditions of military strategic thinking.

The question is, however, to what degree did Boog’s military history also represent a different narrative on the Allied bombings, which, like Bergander’s account, challenged the basic arguments and assumptions of the 1950s discourse. On closer look, a couple of continuities with the historical narrative that was constructed in the 1950s and ’60s can be pointed out. Not only did Boog’s work show strong elements of traditional military history, in the sense that he approached the war from the perspective of strategy and operational warfare, but continuities with earlier works on the air war become evident.

This became especially apparent in the role of the other “historical actors” involved in the air war. Boog’s extensive studies and discussions on the theoretical “doctrines” and operational practices of the Luftwaffe, underlined the strong
distinction between a “tactical” Luftwaffe and a “terrorist” RAF, which already had been established in previous non-academic accounts. Like Rumpf, Spetzler and others, Boog saw a fundamental difference between the German and British-American air forces and stressed that, while the RAF even before the outbreak of the Second World War had already been “oriented towards a strategic terror bombing offensive”, the Luftwaffe had primarily followed a concept of air war based on “classic continental-European” warfare. According to Boog, the strategy and practice applied by the Luftwaffe concentrated on the “tactical” support of ground troops and on “militarily relevant” targets within battle zones.362

Boog especially thought this to be the case with the Luftwaffe bombings up until 1942, even though Guernica, Coventry and Rotterdam had wrongfully “shaped the image of the Luftwaffe as a strategic terror weapon”.363 In spite of this “negative image” the bombings of such cities as Guernica, Rotterdam, Warsaw and Coventry had all been attacks with direct military goals and therefore could not be identified as “terror attacks”. The bombing of the Basque town of Guernica during the Spanish Civil War, for example, had always been seen as the first act of terror bombing, while in reality, Boog argued, the Luftwaffe division under the Command of Von Richthofen had primarily aimed at the bridge and access roads. “Under actual battle conditions” the bombing eventually “looked like a terror attack”, but because of the clear military objective could not be characterized as such. While Guernica for Boog still “could be interpreted as a veiled attempt,


under the pretext of military necessity, to study the effects of (...) attacks on the civilian population” he regarded the Luftwaffe bombings of the first years of the Second World War as military-tactical and “legitimate” attacks.364

Rotterdam and Coventry had, according to Boog, unjustifiably been seen as terror attacks, while this had not been the case. The bombing of Rotterdam had been aimed at a military division of the Dutch army in a clear battlefront in the “Festung Holland”. Also, Boog argued, the bombing of Rotterdam had brought about the capitulation of the Dutch army, thus giving the attack a direct militarily relevant result.365 He argued that the Luftwaffe leadership even tried to call the attack off after the Dutch made an appeal for negotiations. Due to communications, not all the German divisions were informed of the last-minute delay of the attack and went ahead with the bombing.366 Another argument that the attack had not been planned as an indiscriminate bombing of civilians was that

366 The Legal and strategic nature of the bombing on Rotterdam has also led to debate among Dutch historians. While most Dutch accounts supported the idea that Rotterdam had been a clear case of terror, more recently others have pointed out the problematic nature of the term “terror bombing” which had led too easily to the conclusion that this bombing had primarily targeted civilians and a denial that the attack also had a clear military tactical purpose. E.g. Aad Wagenaar, Rotterdam, mei ’40. De slag, de bomen, de brand (Hilversum: 2008); Johannes Leonard van der Pauw, Rotterdam in de Tweede Wereldoorlog (Amsterdam: 2006) 145-156; P.W.M. Hasselton, Het bombardement van Rotterdam, 14 mei 1940. Incident of berekening? (Amsterdam: 1999); A. Korthals Altes, Luchtgevaar. Luchtaanvallen op Nederland, 1940-1945 (Amsterdam: 1984) 32-60; For a critical view on the term “terror bombing” especially: Herman Amersfoort and Piet Kamphuis, eds., Mei 1940. De strijd op Nederlands grondgebied, 2 ed. (Den Haag: 2005) 29-30, 366-37, 380-385. On the Dutch memory-discourse on the bombing of Rotterdam see: Christoph Strupp, “Stadt ohne Herz. Rotterdam und die Erinnerung an den deutschen Luftangriff vom 14. Mai 1940,” in Luftkrieg. Erinnerungen in Deutschland und Europa, ed. Jörg Arnold, Dietmar Süß, and Malte Thiessen (Göttingen: 2009) 27-49.
the German planes had dropped exclusively explosive bombs, while the *Luftwaffe* after Guernica was well aware that to destroy a city large quantities of incendiary bombs were needed. The situation was similar for Coventry, where the armament industry in the city centre had been bombed for military reasons, while the many civilian casualties had been accepted as “the risk of unintended damage”. Also here a fire attack had not been planned, and incendiaries had been used only for demarcation and not to cause a massive fire. Even in the case of Warsaw, where incendiary bombs were “shoveled out” of transport airplanes, he distinguished the “indiscriminate character” that was caused by the “material” conditions of the *Luftwaffe* from the motives and strategic conception of this attack, which again, according to Boog, had not been planned as a terror attack. He argued that the proposal made by Commander Jeschonnek, to order an indiscriminate air raid on Warsaw’s suburbs had been specifically rejected.

Boog detected a significant change in the tactics of the *Luftwaffe* only after 1942. Initially intended as “retaliation” to stop the British from pursuing their bombing offensive against Germany, Hitler ordered in spite of his very limited possibilities to do so, a series of terror attacks on small British cities, which have become known as the Baedeker-Attacks. These attacks, Boog stressed, illustrated the “strategic powerlessness” of the *Luftwaffe* but also marked a change in attitude that was later to be continued with the development of the V-Weapons starting in 1944. This attitude marked the “perversion of the offensive notion (*Angriffsge-danke*)” in the German strategy and the open acceptance of “terror” or “counterterror” as a central form of warfare. Boog therefore concluded that in the course of the war, both air powers were increasingly willing to take the step towards inhu-

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367 Boog, “Der anglo-amerikanische strategische Luftkrieg” 470.
manity, and finally faced each other under the “common denominator of the terror bombing war”. 368

At first glance, this picture of the German strategy and Hitler’s considerations suggests a much more nuanced interpretation than the previous accounts in the style of Rumpf and Spetzler, who had hardly gone beyond stating that Germany had repeatedly called for a restriction of indiscriminate bombing, without giving this broader historical context. Also, Boog’s perspective on the air war was in a certain sense much more inclusive than earlier accounts. Unlike the works of Spetzler, Rumpf and others, Boog’s accounts concentrated extensively on the German bombings of European cities and explained the Allied air war within the context of the Second World War. The emphasis on military strategy, the inclusion of German terror attacks after 1942 and the apparent acknowledgement of the often “indiscriminate effects” of earlier German bombings (such as Warsaw) reflect Boog’s more differentiated historical analysis and he might be inclined to refrain from any making moral distinctions between the Luftwaffe and the Royal Air Force.

A further analysis Boog’s perception of the German Luftwaffe leadership, however, points in a different direction. Though Boog did not refrain from critical remarks about the Luftwaffe leadership, he made a point in depicting the Luftwaffe officers as traditional militaries, who were firmly rooted in the “classic continental-European military traditions” and from their military convictions as well as to their commitment to the “international law of war” and The Hague Conventions largely opposed the use of indiscriminate bombings against civilians. To stress the

idea that the majority of these officers were of a different brand than Hitler, Goebbels, Goering and the occasional Luftwaffe hardliner Jeschonnek. Boog repeatedly stressed that the Luftwaffe leadership had come to its opposition towards “terror bombing” “partly” or “surely also because of humanitarian considerations” and out of respect for international law.369

Thus Boog suggested a clear distinction between these “humanitarian” and “traditional” officers and the pragmatic-opportunistic considerations of Hitler and the image of the Luftwaffe as an instrument of terror that was first only propagated and after 1942 brought to reality by the Nazi leadership. To stress this distinction Boog cited in agreement British historian Geoffrey Best who had claimed that the propagandistic image of the Luftwaffe as a terrorist instrument created by Goering and Goebbels had “embarrassed” the “respectable part” of the Luftwaffe.370 Best’s interpretation underlined Boog’s view of a basically respectable and traditional Luftwaffe leadership, who during the war faced increasing Nazi indoctrination. The Luftwaffe’s “turnaround” towards terror bombing after 1942 was also directly linked to the increased Nazi influence in the Luftwaffe, though Boog stressed that this indoctrination never succeeded to such an extent that one could speak of a “NS-Luftwaffe”.371

Though occasionally lamenting the lack of counterarguments and resistance among the traditional Luftwaffe officers against the ideas of Hitler and the strate-

gic “weaknesses” in the military strategy of the Luftwaffe leadership, Boog consequently maintained a clear distinction between Nazis and “respectable” Luftwaffe officers, occasionally even mentioning their “personal bravery”.\textsuperscript{372} His sometimes highly polemic defense of the Luftwaffe as a “tactical” and “continental European” weapon therefore always bore an implicit and sometimes even explicit moral qualification, arguing that because of the relationship with Hitler’s “criminal war”, the Luftwaffe had been wrongfully seen as being an important instrument of his program of “total war”.\textsuperscript{373}

Throughout his work it becomes clear that the author identifies strongly with the position of the Luftwaffe. In his 1982 account of the German Luftwaffe leadership, Boog demonstrated a strong identification with the Luftwaffe, which at times recalled the work of Feuchter and others. Without trying to justify the war itself – in fact he makes it clear that he opposed “Hitler’s war” – Boog’s close analyses of the “flaws” and “mistakes” made by the Nazi- as well as the Luftwaffe leadership in the strategic use of air force against their enemies nevertheless stem from a “German” perspective.\textsuperscript{374}

His introductory remark that it “probably” was a “general experience, that he who has lost a war is very critical towards himself” and the fact that Boog’s criticisms mainly point towards the Luftwaffe’s history of failures in a lost war point in

\textsuperscript{372} Boog, \textit{Die deutsche Luftwaffenführung} 15.

\textsuperscript{373} Especially see: Ibid. 11-18. Also see Boog’s remarks on the reluctance within the Luftwaffe leadership to “accept the risk of total war” and Boog’s doubt that the strong language of specific official documents that propagated the Luftwaffe as an instrument of total war “reflected the real conviction of the supreme political leadership of the Third Reich and the Luftwaffe”: Boog, “The Luftwaffe and Indiscriminate Bombing” 375.

\textsuperscript{374} To illustrate that Boog himself indeed considered his “perspective” to be specifically “German” also see his introduction, under the title “Harris - A German View” on the publication of Arthur Harris’ “Dispatch on War Operations”. Here Boog made a point of his “German” perspective on the whole, which made him feel “honoured and embarrassed” at the same time. Horst Boog, “Harris - A German View,” in Dispatch on War Operations, ed. Arthur Harris, \textit{Frank Cass Studies in Air Power I} (London: 1995) xxxvii-xlv.
this direction. Boog’s introductory remarks in *Die deutsche Luftwaffenführung* are illuminating. While claiming to write an academically “critical” history of the *Luftwaffe*, Boog exposed some of his more “positive” assumptions in his statement of what his book would “not be about”. He announced that he would not write “only” on the “positive” aspects of the *Luftwaffe* “that existed in the undeniable ability of applying the tactical-operative basic principles (...). Neither will I elaborate on the many brave decisions and examples of personal courage of the General Staff officers – they received more “Knight’s crosses” than other officers- or the high demands that were made on their characters”.  

There are therefore strong continuities of earlier accounts in Boog’s narrative, especially regarding the main historical actors and the temporal structure of his work. In spite of his limited emphasis on the suffering of German civilians, his accounts reflect a clear distinction between “Nazis” and the “British,” on the one hand, and the “respectable” Germans, on the other. The latter group included not only “German civilians” as a collective but also the majority of the *Luftwaffe* staff. By taking the strategic theories and first experiments of British bombings as a central starting point Boog’s narrative also placed the bombings in the same temporal framework as earlier works had done. Like the work of Spetzler Boog’s narrative did not identify German air attacks or in general the outbreak of the Second World War as explanatory factors behind the mass bombing of German cities, but pointed to the theories and ideas of British military leaders.

376  Ibid. 15.
Crimes against Humanity

Moreover, also in his moral conclusions on the Allied bombing in comparison to the German attacks Boog followed the pre-existing West German narrative. In the work of Boog too the military historical narrative of British terror bombings and German tactical attacks led to a clear moral distinction between the British and German air forces. Boog went on to outline the moral distinction between *Luftwaffe* and the British Royal Air Force, a theme which he repeatedly emphasized in several articles, especially those published after his major contribution to Vol 6 of the DRZW-series in 1990s. Most of Boog’s publications make a central argument that the strategic concepts behind British and German bombing were fundamentally different, and that it had been the British, who had started the terror bombing war. Boog pointed out that already during colonial conflicts in the 1920s and ’30s, the British air Force had been oriented towards strategic bombing. In line with the military thinking of theorists like Hugh Trenchard, they had accepted the inclusion of civilians as military targets in a concept of total war. While at the outbreak of the war, the British too had shown a certain reluctance towards “starting” the total war against civilians—out of fear of retaliation as well as for “humanitarian” reasons, they nevertheless had made this first step, after the (according to Boog strictly tactical) bombing of Coventry and Rotterdam had given the British an excuse to practice the strategic concept of indiscriminate bombing that had already dominated the theoretical thinking of the Royal Air Force since the mid-1920s. After a slow shift towards more and more indiscriminate practice, in December 1940 with the bombing of Mannheim the British for the first time bombed a city with the pure intention of causing the maximum number of casualties amongst the civilian population, therefore making this the first “pure ter-
ror attack” of the war. 377

With Mannheim, the RAF introduced a concept of air war that did not need an identifiable military target, but aimed directly at the enemy civilian population in an attempt to demoralize and to bring about the collapse of the regime. This was a strategy that, according to Boog, turned out to be ineffective, but nevertheless would remain the dominant concept of the British air war that would become “a rule” from 1942 onwards.378 In the final phase of the war this concept was also increasingly adopted by the Americans.379

Eventually both the British as well as the Americans had deliberately ignored the “humanitarian settlements of the international laws of land war”.380 Motivated by the idea that the bombing raids until 1944 were the only real “offensive” instrument of the British against the German mainland and out of conviction that the worst “moral” mistake would be to lose the war, the British had ignored the moral and legal restrictions against this kind of warfare that were formulated in The Hague Conventions and elsewhere. Even in the final phase of the war, when the invasion in Normandy had changed Britain’s military position drastically and many leading officers in the Allied armed forces increasingly had raised serious doubt about the effectiveness of indiscriminate attacks on enemy civilians, the “thickhead” Arthur Harris, supported by Churchill had pursued his “soloist” way. This had led to the indiscriminate bombings of German civilians that found their apotheosis in the “annihilation attacks” on Berlin, Dresden, Pforzheim and other cities in 1945.381

379  Ibid. 96.
380  Ibid. 58-59.
Though Boog did not state it so explicitly, he concluded that the Allied bombings were in practice and theory “crimes against humanity” according to international law, whereas the Luftwaffe bombings were, at least until 1942, not.\textsuperscript{382} In an occasional explicit moral judgment, Boog stated that “it (indiscriminate bombing) was, next to the Stalinist and Nazi-Crimes the biggest crime – or most serious sins – of highly industrialized nations this century”, thus directly placing the bombing on the same level as the genocide and mass murder committed in the Soviet Union and the Third Reich.\textsuperscript{383} Thus he adopted another popular strategy of the 1950s and ’60s discourse that made the historical discussion on the backgrounds and effects of the air war into a discussion on morality and (international) law, while on the other hand hinting at a moral equation between Allied indiscriminate bombings and Nazi crimes. Like Spetzler and Rumpf before him, Boog included a “legal” and moral argumentation in his historical analysis in order to emphasize the distinction between the Luftwaffe and the Allied air forces. Boog stated that the examples of Guernica, Warsaw, Rotterdam and Coventry cannot serve to prove the Luftwaffe “guilty of starting the indiscriminate bombing war – and it is only this we are discussing here-, because according to the law at that time, these were permissible tactical and strategic operations”\textsuperscript{384}.

\textsuperscript{382} Boog, “Strategische Bomberoffensive” 874.
\textsuperscript{383} Boog, “Bombenkrieg” 309; Also see (here without direct reference to Communist and Nazi-crimes): Boog, “Harris” xiv and Boog, “Das Ende des Bombenkriegs” 20.
Though his argument maintains that the Luftwaffe had different strategic objectives than the RAF, it is exactly in his moral-legal judgments, where Boog’s arguments at times become most inconsistent. “Terror bombing” thus became more or less synonymous with “illegitimate” (and criminal) status, while on the other hand “tactical bombings” came to mean the same thing as bombings “within the framework of international law”. When discussing the Luftwaffe bombing of Warsaw and Rotterdam, on several occasions Boog stressed that both attacks had included a strong element of “pressure” and even had brought about the capitulation of the Dutch and Polish armed forces. Obviously the “terrorist” aspect of these bombings had played an important role in this outcome, which in itself, according to Boog, legitimized these bombings, for the capitulations were a direct military result. The distinction between this kind of pressure, which had primarily aimed at military targets, but had also, according to Boog, calculated the “not unwelcome side-effect” of a vast number of civilian casualties and the British attempt to bring about the capitulation of Germany with the “Thunderclap” plan, is therefore at best a vague one.385 Though the scale as well as the priority given to civilian or military targets in Dresden or Warsaw might have been different, the mechanisms and military considerations as well as the human consequences attached to them, suggest a far smaller “moral” as well as “strategic” difference than Boog suggests. Witness Boog’s implicit justification of the basically “indiscriminate” bombing of Warsaw by citing the “militarily relevant” outcome of the Polish capitulation and the apparent lack of a specific intent to bomb civilians. The equation of “lawfulness” according to the – obviously quite unclear and incomplete- international

agreements on air bombardments with an almost complete moral justification illustrates Boog’s desire to “clear” the reputation of the Luftwaffe.386

Challenging the narrative of German guilt

In spite of the fact that Boog’s approach to the Allied bombings was much more elaborate and nuanced than the “popular” works of the 1950s and ’60s, his interpretation did not essentially challenge the dominant narrative that had been shaped in the previous decades. Moreover, there also seems to be a continuity in the way Boog related his conclusions on the air war to the more general German debates on the Nazi past. This is especially apparent in his efforts to “correct” the image that the Luftwaffe was primarily responsible for causing the terror attacks on German cities. Since the early 1990s, almost all of his articles and books explicitly express his desire to counter the “assumption” that Germany had initiated the bombing of civilians and promote his arguments that such an assumption was not true. We find not only Boog’s argumentation, but also his assumption of who or what he was arguing against. As was pointed out above, Boog’s interpretation of the Luftwaffe was to a certain degree the same as that represented by the historical accounts of the 1950s and ’60’s. Remarkably, Boog repeatedly suggested the opposite to be the case, for example in an article for the journal Militärgeschichte in 1992. When commenting on two arguments made by the British historian Basil Collier, that the Luftwaffe had not begun the bombing war and had primarily focussed on military targets, Boog argued that these assumptions “up until the 1980s had not been accepted by the German academic and popular military his-

toriography”. Boog, for the obvious reason of lack of proof, did not include any examples of such a German historiography or even references to his statement. It is contradictory as well as telling that Boog even proved himself wrong by later on referring to the works of Spetzler to underline his own arguments.387

A closer analysis of the presupposed “counter-position” Boog seemed to have in mind shows that it was neither the West German military historiography (even though this was at times what Boog suggested) nor British and American literature. Boog repeatedly made a point of stressing that his own conclusions were completely in line with the most prominent British historiography, from the “official” British history of the air war and air defense by Charles Webster, Noble Frankland and Basil Collier to the more recent work of Max Hastings and Richard Overy.388

Without denying that Boog indeed did share some of his ideas with British and American scholars, regarding the implied moral distinction between the German and British bombings, there were nevertheless more differences with British scholars like Overy than with the majority of West German accounts. Boog’s claim can therefore be understood as an argumentative strategy, one that is similar, though undeniably more subtle, than the tendency of citing British authors like Fuller that was common practice among the authors of the 1950s and ’60s. There is no doubt that Boog had a sincere respect for his British and American colleagues and a genuine interest in placing his work in an international academic discourse.

387 Boog, “Der strategische Bombenkrieg gegen Deutschland” 20 (footnote 4). For a similar argument see: Kurowski put it even more aggressively: “Many historians in the world have depicted the crimes that were committed against the Germans. Only German historians were subjected to a position to silence them and to write on the everlasting German guilt for everything”. Kurowski, Massaker von Dresden 156.
But this argumentation also shows that, Boog directed his plea not so much at British and American allegations against Germany, but against a German discourse. By showing that British and American scholars demonstrated a level of “objectivity” that was missing in Germany, Boog reflected an image of German society, which had obviously failed to confront the history of the air war in a distanced and “objective” manner. From the mid-1990s onward, culminating in his recent contributions to the rightwing *Junge Freiheit*, a recurring element of Boog’s work has been a critical polemic against the German culture of “political correctness” and confrontation with German guilt. West German political culture was inclined to “acknowledge its own guilt, preferably a little bit more than too little”, whereas a factual and rational mastering of the past that acknowledges guilt if any but also stresses “positive” aspects or relative “normal” and acceptable behavior was not even taken seriously, according to Boog. The dominant perspective on the *Luftwaffe* was therefore always bound to the automatic conclusion that because Hitler “was a villain”, “everything done in his name and under his regime must have been evil” too. This did not only make an open discussion on the role of the *Luftwaffe* impossible but also blocked a clear recognition of the experience and sufferings of Germans under the Allied bombings. The repression of these traumatic experiences, mainly due to “hypersensitivity” towards any kind of challenge to the notion of German guilt as well as a certain “sinners’ pride” (*Sündenstolz*) had led

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389 *Junge Freiheit* is a newspaper with a “national conservative” political profile and has close ties to extreme right wing political movements like the Republikaner. One of its main issues is a critique of the left-liberal *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* discourse. It openly supports authors like Ernst Nolte and David Irving in their relativation of the Holocaust. On *Junge Freiheit*’s politics of the past see: Alexander Ruoff, *Verbiegen, Verdrängen, Beschweigen. Die Nationalgeschichte der Jungen Freiheit: Auschwitz im Diskurs des völkischen Nationalismus* (Münster 2001). Also see: Jost Wippermann, “Die „Junge Freiheit“: Blockadefreundliche in *Rechtsextremismus. Ideologie und Gewalt* ed. Richard Faber, Hajo Funke, and Gerhard Schoenberger (Berlin: 1995) 163-177.
to a strong taboo on this question.\textsuperscript{390} Boog’s double point here was that when it
came to the air war the “role of victim” should be “reserved” for Germany, while
the traumatized and politically charged culture of mastering the past and a nega-
tive self-image falsely denied the Germans access to this position.\textsuperscript{391}

These positions defended by Boog therefore illustrate how strongly his seri-
ous academic studies also came to function as a “counterweight” to the apparent
dominance of a narrative of German guilt. To show that not everything carried
out “in the name of Hitler” had been evil or unjust, while granting the Germans
a sole right to victimhood when it came to this example of one of the “worst sins”
of modern nations formed the moral background of Boog’s otherwise scholarly
and vastly researched writings. He thus underlined a narrative of German suffer-
ing, which included the distinction between the respectable majority and the Nazi
leadership, as well as a conscious challenge to the dominant narrative of German
guilt. However, the context in which he voiced this critique was different from the
1950s and ’60s. While Rumpf and Spetzler directed their pleas to the Allied victors,
Boog’s critique of German political correctness is formulated as a “counter” argu-
ment, against a narrative which emphasized German guilt and increasingly had
become more dominant since the 1970s. Though not mentioning the Historiker-
streit and the left liberal school of German historians like Wehler and Mommsen
directly, it is clear that Boog’s “counter position” was directed against the liberal
self-critical view of German history, which had not only abandoned the history of
German suffering, but had made it politically suspect in the first place.

\textsuperscript{390} Especially see: Boog, “Bombenkrieg” and Boog, “Das Ende des Bombenkriegs” 19-20.
\textsuperscript{391} See: Schwarz, “Interview Boog”.
In his contributions to Das deutsche Reich und der Zweite Weltkrieg Boog was able to integrate his interpretations into the “official” version of the MGFA. This however did not mean that his conclusions were shared by all his colleagues. An indication that his views were part of the internal controversies can be found in other articles on the Allied bombings. Though not openly criticizing Boog, the leading historian of the MGFA Manfred Messerschmidt, during an international conference on the history of the air war in Freiburg in 1988, gave an interpretation of the air war, which in some important aspects strongly differed from Boog’s position. On the one hand, Messerschmidt saw the Allied bombings as clear violations of international law and morally wholly unacceptable. He argued that the bombing of cities like Dresden and Tokyo and the dropping of atomic bombs could not in any way be justified according to the already existing rules of international law, even though a specific agreement on air war had never been made under The Hague Conventions. The intentional targeting of civilians, without the existence of a “military necessity” to do so, had nevertheless been generally accepted as “illegal”.

Messerschmidt concluded that the actions of the British and Americans air forces had been reflected a belief that by bombing civilians troops could be spared and enemy morale could be undermined, in which “there was no room for any consideration of international law”. In explaining this absence of humanitarian considerations, Messerschmidt pointed to the opportunity that was given to the Allied Air Forces, who for the first time were able to “experiment” with theories of total war and strategic warfare, which had become dominant in military thinking during and after World War I, increasing the “dimension of injustice” only in a “quantitative manner”. Even the final result of winning the war against the
Third Reich could not justify these methods, since they left the enemy population no alternative between “annihilation or capitulation”, which eventually led to an “intensification of injustice” that could never produce a legitimate result.392

While in this aspect Messerschmidt’s perspective resembled that of Boog, he saw the Luftwaffe and its relation to the German war crimes in a different light. Messerschmidt recognized that there were certain strategic differences between the air war conducted by the Luftwaffe and that of the RAF, but on the other hand, he stressed the objective of “terror” had been crucial in German military thinking in general but also in the practice of the Luftwaffe. Even though “terror bombing” would not become as central to German air strategy as it became for the British, terrorizing civilians had remained strongly present in both strategic thinking and in the military practice of the Luftwaffe.393 Also, Messerschmidt drew a wholly different parallel between this German use of air terror and the broader context of war crimes committed by German forces during World War II. Instead of implying a moral and historical equation between British and German war crimes, Messerschmidt distinguished between them both in scale and in motivation. He argued that whereas the Third Reich had disregarded international law out of “ideological motives” leading to “milestones” like the extermination camps, the Kommissar-Befehl (Commissar Order) and the General-Plan Ost, the British and American


393  Both Maier’s and Messerschmidt’s arguments found their way into Groehler’s work after 1990. See his praise for Messerschmidt’s arguments in: Olaf Groehler, Deutsche Städte im Frühjahr 1945 im Bombenkrieg. Versuch einer Motivation und Sinngebung (1990); Conference paper by Olaf Groehler in private collection Mathias Neutzner. Also see Maier’s argument that the strategic differences between Luftwaffe and RAF were only “fictional” from the perspective of the Polish population. Olaf Groehler, “Moralbomben im Zweiten Weltkrieg,” Geschichte, Erziehung, Politik 10 (1994) 577-587, here: 581-582.
disregard of law and humanitarian consideration “monocausally” arose from “scientific and technological” motives.\textsuperscript{394}

While Messerschmidt simply posed an alternative view and did not challenge his colleague Boog directly, Boog received more direct criticism from Klaus Maier. Maier, who had covered the air war in volume 4 of \textit{Das deutsche Reich im Zeiten Weltkrieg}, before Horst Boog had taken over, held a different perspective on the differences between \textit{Luftwaffe} and RAF. Though sharing Boog’s military historical and legal perspective on the Allied bombings, he viewed the role of the \textit{Luftwaffe} rather differently. Maier also distinguished between the different strategic concepts adopted by the British and German air forces and emphasized the extent to which the \textit{Luftwaffe} had integrated elements of “terror” into their concept of tactical bombings. That there was a tension between Boog’s later interpretations and Maier’s view was publicly made clear only in 1998. In a review of Boog’s contribution to the English publication of Arthur Harris’s \textit{Despatch on War Operations}, Maier criticized the “qualifying comparison” Boog had made between the \textit{Luftwaffe} and the RAF, which he found “problematic” and “too uncritical”. Maier stressed that differences between the \textit{Luftwaffe}’s allegedly strictly military operations and the RAF’s “total air war” were “meaningless altogether, seen from the perspective of the victims”. In addition to this argument Maier added that the sparse remaining documents of the \textit{Luftwaffe} gave “sufficient references” pointing towards strong elements of “total warfare” in the planning and conduct of the air war before 1942.\textsuperscript{395}

\textsuperscript{394} Messerschmidt, “Kriegstechnologie” 91-92.
\textsuperscript{395} Klaus A. Maier, “Rezension von: Sir Aurthur Travers Harris, Despatch on War Operations,” \textit{Militärgeschichtliche Mitteilungen} 57, no. 2 (1998) 582-584, here: 584.
Conclusion

The work of the historians Horst Boog and Götz Bergander marks a significant shift in the West German historiography of the Allied bombings. While Bergander to an important degree provided a fundamentally different perspective on the bombing of Dresden, Horst Boog regarded the Allied strategic bombing campaign on the basis of archival research and integrated it into an international academic debate. Their work thus marked a process of professionalization which clearly can be distinguished from the oft-ill-researched and speculative earlier accounts. On the other hand, it is striking to what degree central arguments from these earlier works were continued, especially in the work of Horst Boog.

While not wholly exonerating the German air raids, his works reflect the argumentative structure of earlier accounts, which pointed out that Germany had not started the terror bombing war and that these allegations showed that the narrative of German guilt had distorted a “fair view” of the history of the Second World War. In Boog’s work, as in the 1950s and ’60s accounts of Hans Rumpf and others, the Allied bombings continued to function as a “counterargument” of dominant discourse of German guilt that was perceived as “unjust”.

Moreover, in his institute, Boog represented a view of German military history that identified with the traditions of the German armed forces and opposed the liberal and self-critical view of history. Such a view was represented not only by liberal historians such as Wehler or leftwing colleagues such as Wette, but in Boog’s view had become dominant in German public memory culture. While Rumpf and others had still primarily concentrated on British and American allegations Boog directed his criticism at the liberal German discourse on guilt and Vergangenheitsbewältigung. In this politicized discourse, according to Boog, show-
ing that Germans had suffered from the terror bombings had become a taboo. Because of their political sensitivity the Germans had unjustly ascribed all responsibility for the air terror to Hitler and the German *Luftwaffe* and at the same time had not be able to recognize the scale of their suffering in full. The fixation on Nazi crimes had, on the one hand, deprived the Germans of a true recognition of the British and American responsibility for the suffering of German civilians. And, on the other hand, it had limited any kind of comparison with crimes committed by Nazi Germany.

Considering the apparent difference in opinion on this point, it is surprising how little, apart from Maier’s review, Boog was openly criticized by other West German historians in reviews or articles on the Allied bombings. This might partly be explained by an interest in avoiding harsh public confrontations between colleagues. But the lack of controversy between West German historians on the air war is also remarkable, because Boog’s attacks on “political correctness” represented a position that was very different from that of Messerschmidt or that of Bergander in *Dresden im Luftkrieg*. Boog’s polemic during the late 1980s and ’90s against the German historical culture reflects a different starting point than that of Bergander during the 1970s. Where Bergander had directed his criticism at the revisionist tendencies of nationalist West German authors, whose dominance had slowly begun to fade after the 1960s, Boog aimed his arguments at the “politically correct” discourse, which he felt had become dominant in the Federal Republic. Interestingly, Boog and Bergander never were involved in a mutual debate, generally showed respect for each other’s position and work, and took part in an informal group of West German historians, who came together regularly to discuss the
history of the air war.\textsuperscript{396}

In this sense their mutual interest in a serious and professionalized historiography of the Allied bombings probably helped to direct attention from these different memory positions. But as West German historians they had more in common than a shared professional interest in a detailed determination of the “historical” facts. While historians like Bergander and Boog represented different positions in the context of West German memory debates, they shared a strong antagonism not only towards the East German accounts by authors like Weidauer and Seydewitz, but also towards the work of academic historians in the GDR. While Bergander and Boog were mostly concerned with the confrontation between competing narratives on German history within West German public debate, Boog, in particular, found his most prominent adversary in East German historian Olaf Groehler.

\textsuperscript{396} This Group is known to its participants as the “\textit{Hetchbach-Kreis}”. In addition to Bergander and Boog, the participants included authors like Werner Girbig, Helmut Schnatz and more recently Mathias Neutzner. For examples of Boog’s and Bergander’s mutual references to each other’s work: Bergander, “Vom unattraktiven zum besonders lohnenden Ziel” 45; Boog, “Strategische Bomberoffensive” 791 ff.
4 — “Imperialist Air War”
East German historiography and the work of Olaf Groehler, 1965-1995

Introduction

In this chapter I will analyze the process of professionalization of Air-war historiography in the GDR. In East Germany, Olaf Groehler (1935-1995) was almost solely responsible for the development of an academic perspective on the air war. His major works *Geschichte des Luftkriegs* (1975) and *Bombenkrieg gegen Deutschland* (1990) together with various essays, smaller works and contributions to historical overviews form the output of the research, to which Groehler had committed himself to for almost three decades. His works can be seen as the only real academic approach to the Allied bombing in the GDR. In the academic historical field in the GDR, Groehler was considered to be the absolute expert on the Allied air war and strategic bombings, and was even nicknamed “Bomben-Groehler”.

In this chapter I will analyze Groehler’s perspective on the bombing war in light of the official GDR memory politics and of the position of academic historiography in the GDR. For this I will also elaborate on the institutional framework

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Groehler worked in, considering that he was not only a leading historian at the 
*Zentral Institut für Geschichtswissenschaft*, but as party secretary for the SED and 
informant of the *Staatssicherheit* he played an active part in the academic politics 
of his institute.

His work and position raise a couple of questions. Should his work be regarded 
as a more elaborate repetition of the official view or did his work collide with offic-
ial memory politics? Since on a few important matters the latter seems to be the 
case, the additional question is: to what extent was Groehler’s perspective differ-
ent and how is this difference to be explained? Can one even go so far as to say 
that Groehler created a specific Eastern German academic narrative? Or was it 
possible to provide the official memory politics with historical argumentation and 
documentation? And to what degree did Groehler change his position after the 
collapse of the GDR in 1989/1990?

In the second part of this chapter I will discuss his work in relationship 
with West German historiography by looking at debates between Groehler and 
West German historians such as Götz Bergander and Horst Boog. Did the debates 
between Bergander, Boog and Groehler reflect earlier “Cold War” disputes or did 
a new kind of debate develop on the air war? And to what extent did their old dis-
pute change after 1989? With regard to this question I will try and look beyond 
the differences of opinion that existed between these historians and look for simi-
larities in the way they interpreted the Allied bombings. While they themselves 
seemed to be focused on ideological differences, the question remains to what 
extent they truly provided different narratives of the air war.
4.1. Part of the system: Olaf Groehler

Like Horst Boog, Olaf Groehler (1935-1995) had personally experienced the Allied bombings in his youth and concentrated on this history for the major part of his career. By 1968 Groehler had specialized in the history of the Allied air war and written a major article for *Zeitschrift für Militärgeschichte* on the theory and practices of the Allied bombing campaign.\(^{399}\) In 1972 he defended his Promotion B (Habilitation) on the same topic for the *Zentralinstitut für Geschichte* (ZIG) at the *Akademie der Wissenschaften*. Here he became professor and SED-Parteisekretär in 1981 and in 1986 deputy-acting director of the ZIG.\(^{400}\)

Immediately after 1989 Groehler, like many of his colleagues, had to struggle to defend his position as a former GDR historian. In 1990, when his most important work *Bombenkrieg gegen Deutschland* was published, he was dismissed from his former position and institute. In spite of his entanglement with the SED state, Groehler was one of the few historians who were given a second chance in one of the newly founded East German academic institutes. Respected as a serious historian by quite a few of his West German colleagues such as Lutz Niethammer, with whom he had worked closely during his ZIG-years, he was given the opportunity

\(^{399}\) Groehler, "Der “strategische” Luftkrieg". Groehler began his career working on the invasion in Normandy and the war strategies of the Western Allies and wrote his dissertation on the "The English and American political and military prearrangement of the Second Front" in 1964 at the Humboldt University in Berlin.

to work for the new Forschungsschwerpunkt Zeithistorische Studien (later Zentrum für Zeithistorische Forschung) led by prominent West German historian Jürgen Kocka in Potsdam. Here he stayed until 1994 when he was exposed as a former Inofizieller Mitarbeiter (IM) for the Ministerium für Staatssicherheit (MfS or Stasi) and was dismissed. In 1995 Groehler passed away. During his last years as an historian he was repeatedly attacked by West German as well as East German dissident historians for his political complicity with the GDR state.

The exact nature of Groehler’s involvement with the repression of the GDR dictatorship and the Stasi, however, is complicated. Approached by the Stasi in 1957, he was asked as “IM Ferdinand” to spy on fellow students and colleagues at the military publishing agency Militärverlag, where he worked as a lector. The reports stress that Groehler was clearly “frightened” when the secret agents made clear that they wanted his intelligence on an “interest group” of students, who had recently begun to study the history of Stalinism. While providing the Stasi with some details on the opinions of other students, his information was considered to be of little use to the secret service. In spite of repeated pressure, Groehler’s attitude made it clear to the Stasi that he felt uncomfortable in his position, and was

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consciously reluctant to give information. Groehler avoided confrontations with the agents and repeatedly failed to show up for appointments. After leaving the Militärverlag in 1960 for a position at the Akademie der Wissenschaften, he openly stated that he did not want to continue to cooperate and was relieved from his duties.403

In the mid-1970s, when Groehler had become an important historian at the ZIG and increasingly visited military archives in Western countries, the contacts were revived. Groehler became a member of the SED in 1969 and, after having functioned as a “contact person” for some years, in 1984 Groehler was once again appointed as an IM, now under the name “Ernst”. The MfS regarded him as one of the most productive members of his institute and also as “politically reliable” and an “excellent propagandist”, who as one of the few GDR citizens, who had access to West German military archives, could be of great value to the foreign intelligence. Groehler had to report regularly on his foreign visits and his meetings with Western colleagues.404 In these reports Groehler mainly commented on the political attitudes and academic opinions of foreign colleagues and the workings of institutes. He concentrated on political and academic opportunities of cooperation between East and West German historians. As in his earlier days, he showed a certain reluctance to report deviant behavior or compromising information about his East German colleagues.405


404 See: Vorschlag zur Werbung eines IM, 15-12-1983, MfS AIM/17697/91 Bd. 3, folder 163-218 and Werbungsbericht, 29-4-1984, Ibid., folder 156-157. Groehler’s official assignment was to gather information on Western academics during conferences, their attitudes towards the GDR and its academic institutes, as well as the relationship between East and West German academics.

405 Nicknamed “Ernst”, Groehler was IM for the Haubtabteilung XVIII/5, which his fellow-informants in the ZIG were also part of. On the balance between internal control
Nevertheless, reports on dissenting colleagues were not absent from his works for the Stasi. Groehler’s involvement in the Stasi illustrates that he was strongly integrated into the political and academic system of the GDR. Groehler made a successful academic and political career and being Reisekader, he was allowed to travel abroad and visit archives and conferences in Western Europe. Not only was Groehler Reisekader, one of his main responsibilities as deputy-acting director was the coordination of the foreign travel of the institute’s associates. Because he was the one who gave permission to travel and organized funds, he had influence on the travel possibilities of his colleagues. As a party member and Parteisekretär he was clearly a historian who not only conformed to the regime, but also represented the political conformity of the GDR academic climate. Groehler was convinced of the interdependence and inseparability of politics and history, and also applied political pressure on colleagues, who did not share this view. For example, in a speech to his colleagues at the ZIG in 1981 he emphasized the need to conform to the party politics, of which "especially the neutral (parteilose) associates" had to be convinced.

Moreover, as deputy acting director of the ZIG, Groehler was responsible for administrating the foreign travel of the members of his institute. His position of
dof colleagues and the reports on foreign academics among Groehler’s fellow IM in the Hauptabteilung XVIII/5, see the conclusion drawn by Martin Sabrow for the 1950s and ’60’s. Sabrow concludes that while the MfS mainly demanded that the IM focus on internal political attitudes within the ZIG, the informants emphasized their relationship with Western historiography, mostly out of their personal initiative. Martin Sabrow, Das Diktat des Konsenses. Geschichtswissenschaft in der DDR 1949-1969, ed. Dietrich Beyrau, Anselm Doering-Manteuffel, and Lutz Raphael, Ordnungssysteme. Studien zur Ideengeschichte der Neuzeit. Band 8 (München: 2001) 157-182. In the case of Groehler, it is clear that also from the side of the MfS, his interaction with West German military archives and the MGFA were the primary starting point for his activities, as this was emphasized in his assignment. Vorschlag zur Werbung eines IM, 15-12-1983, MfS AIM/17697/91, Bd. 3, folder 163-218.

406 For example in 1984, Groehler reported on a conflict between two associates the “political-ideological stability of his institute”. But again, here Groehler tended to emphasize the political reliability of his colleagues. MfS AIM/17697/91, Bd 2. folder 121-123.

approving travel applications made him a powerful man in the institute, whose opinion on the political credibility of his colleagues had consequences for their academic possibilities. The MfS files also reflect a certain strategic behavior by Groehler, especially considering the travel possibilities and academic exchange of the researchers of his institute with the West. His politically relevant reports on his visits to important West German historians, conferences and institutes ensured him of a certain freedom to travel and build up an international network. Also, Groehler used his cooperation with the Stasi to represent the interest of his department by addressing the difficulties of East German academics travelling abroad. According to Groehler, his associates faced unnecessary and excessive controls and interrogations about their contacts by the GDR.408

The MfS reports as well as his academic interests and attitude shows that Groehler had a strong interest in a serious academic exchange and made efforts to avoid the stereotypical and shallow historical propaganda that had characterized SED politics of the past. From the mid-1960s on Groehler, while carefully avoiding confrontations with the SED regime, looked for the margins within the system to take part in serious international academic discussions and avoid mere propagandist perspective on history. On more than one occasion Groehler made efforts to find ways to discuss sensitive subjects, especially since the mid 1980s, when the changed political climate allowed some space to discuss previously taboo topics such as the conservative resistance and 20 July 1944 and by 1989 even the Molotov-Ribbentropp agreement of 1939.409 Groehler’s attitude as an historian was

408 Note by “Ernst” (undated) MfS AIM/17697/91, Bd.2, folder 87-88.
409 See for example: Olaf Groehler, “Miszellen. Die Erforschung der Geschichte des zweiten Weltkrieges. Stand und Aufgaben,” Zeitschrift für Geschichtswissenschaft 33, no. 4 (1985) 316-322. Here Groehler called for a positive reevaluation of 20 July 1944 and of new developments in West German social history. Especially the work of historians like Hans Mommsen, according to Groehler brought a “more differentiated and realistic” perspective
characterized by an interest in serious participation in an international academic discussion, a feeling shared by many of his colleagues of the ZIG.

The case of Olaf Groehler illustrates the difficulty of deciding in retrospect how to value modern historical research in the GDR. After 1990 Groehler made strong efforts to adapt to the new situation and published several critical articles on the deficits in East German historiography and memory culture, especially the lack of interest in the Holocaust and the Jewish victims of Nazism.\textsuperscript{410} With regard to his personal role, Groehler later claimed that in spite of the very clear political limitations GDR historians had to work under, he himself had always made an effort to write history “as close to the truth as possible”.\textsuperscript{411} In order to continue to the “bürgerlichen Geschichtsschreibung” of the Federal Republic. Groehler also published his views on 1944 in several print media outlets such as Neues Deutschland in June 26, 1984 and on the East German radio on July 18, 1984. During an international conference in West Berlin on 21-23 August 1989, shortly before the fall of the Berlin Wall and the Communist system, Groehler was also one of the GDR historians who carefully began discussing the Stalin-Hitler pact of 1939 in the context of the 50th anniversary of the beginning of the Second World War. During an international conference organized by the West German Historische Kommission zu Berlin Groehler debated the origins of the Second World War with West German historians like Klaus Hildebrand and Eberhard Jäckel, and also briefly referred to the Pact between Hitler and Stalin. A few days later in East Berlin Groehler organized a similar conference, where according to an internal report of the ZIG, over several issues, like the Hitler-Stalin pact “a free discussion” took place, even though the report soothingly concluded, the “ensured conclusions of renowned East German historians were shared by the large part of the audience”. See the report dated 19-1-1990, ABBAW/ZIG/106. Also see: “Tagungsbericht. Die Entfesselung des Zweiten Weltkrieges und das internationale System,” Informationen der Historischen Kommission zu Berlin, no. 15 (1990) 4-10. Groehler’s unpublished paper for the conference of 21-8-1989, a “Fragespiegel” of the radio interview on 20 July (9-7-1984) and revised concepts for articles on 1944 and the Hitler-Stalin pact in: private collection heirs Olaf Groehler.


411 For examples of Groehler’s discussions about GDR historiography and Groehler’s own position see: Ulrich Herbert and Olaf Groehler, eds., Zweierlei Bewältigung. Vier Beiträge über den Umgang mit der NS-Vergangenheit in den beiden deutschen Staaten (Hamburg: 1992); Schroeder and Staadt, “Die Kunst des Ausstizens” 351-353. Groehler’s IM allegations are also mentioned and Groehler is characterized as an active member of the SED oppression; Also in 1994, Groehler defended his position in discussion platforms and the like: Ralf
writing academic history, Groehler argued, the GDR historians had been forced to operate within the framework of the dictatorship. In practice this meant that they had to be “inconsequent”. They had to ignore crucial politically undesirable questions, while at the same time trying to write as truthfully as possible about their historical subjects.\textsuperscript{412} His West German friend and colleague Lutz Niethammer backed up this interpretation. Niethammer calls Groehler a “\textit{realpolilitischer Diplomat des Geistes}” who engaged in “continual tightrope act” of keeping the authorities satisfied, while at the same time trying to create an open academic discussion within the boundaries of what was possible.\textsuperscript{413} Considering Groehler’s active role in enforcing the “political stability” in his institute, this might be too euphemistic. But at least it is clear that he was by no means considered to be a dissident. Groehler made an academic and political career, published a vast number of books and articles, and being \textit{Reisekader}, he was allowed to travel abroad and visit archives and conferences in Western Europe. His work was generally accepted as being the academic answer to West German historiography and was reviewed mostly positively by Groehler’s GDR colleagues.\textsuperscript{414}

\begin{itemize}
\item Possekel, “Wer schreibt die DDR-Geschichte?” 537-538.
\item Niethammer, \textit{Ego-Histoire?} 275. Also see a similar view on Groehler by his colleague Joachim Petzold: Petzold, \textit{Parteinahme wofür?}
\end{itemize}
Moreover, Groehler regarded history from a Marxist perspective. Like many other East German historians Groehler tried to find an alternative for West German historical narratives. This Marxist philosophy of history saw the writing of history as a complementary component of the political struggle of Marxism. In Marxist historical philosophy historical insight and political interpretations were seen as two sides of the same coin. History therefore always had a political meaning and could never be regarded as something neutral. The ideal of political partiality was therefore preferred over neutral objectivity, which was seen as a naïve “bourgeois” concept that denied the real meaning of history in the class struggle. Historical publications had to fit into this struggle and were always supposed to underline a Marxist interpretation of history. The dominance of the political struggle over historical neutrality also meant that the space for different opinions and academic plurality was limited. Marxist history was meant to give a coherent perspective and inner contradictions were regarded as damaging to its political aims. Censorship and a strong “force of consensus” characterized the academic historiography in the GDR. Publications were censored and differences of opinion were often settled and muted in editorial committees. There was hardly any space for real academic debates and open discussions. Historians – and especially those who wrote about politically sensitive subjects, made careers and were allowed to travel abroad like Groehler – were strictly bound to the premises of a Marxist concept of history.

While it is important to regard Groehler from his institutional and political backgrounds, what is especially interesting for this research is the question of how Groehler’s work on the Allied bombings is to be interpreted. To what extent was

he able to develop a serious academic perspective on the bomber war and in what ways did Groehler’s accounts support or contradict the official SED memory politics? This, of course, is a very complicated matter and touches the difficult problem of determining the possibility of independent historical research within the SED dictatorship. In the first half of the 1990s this problem led to major controversies among historians from the former GDR and FRG and remains an unsolved matter. After the minor scandal surrounding Groehler’s alleged IM activities and his subsequent dismissal from his position, the question of how he is to be valued returned, although not explicitly, in various recent articles on the historiography and postwar perceptions on the Allied bombing war.

New perspectives

Considering his role as a prominent GDR historian Groehler’s perspective on the Allied bombings has often been regarded as a mere extension of the official SED memory politics. This perspective was dominant in the West German reception of Groehler’s work before and shortly after 1989 and recently has been represented by historians writing critically on GDR memory culture. Gilad Margalit and Thomas C. Fox pointed to Groehler to demonstrate how much even the academic historians contributed to the central “East German tropes” and SED propaganda concerning the air war and especially the bombing of Dresden.416 On the

other hand, the recent renewed attention to the Allied bombings has also led to a revaluation of Groehler’s work and particularly of *Bombenkrieg gegen Deutschland*, which was published shortly after the collapse of the GDR. Jörg Friedrich and others who express concern over the apparently limited number of serious historical accounts of the Allied bombings have praised Groehler’s work as an exception to this rule.  

Similarly historians like Richard Overy and Dietmar Süß have also recognized *Bombenkrieg gegen Deutschland* as an important and valuable historical account. A recent publication even characterized the book as one of the 50 “classics in German contemporary history”.  

A closer analysis of Groehler’s work shows that these seemingly contradictory interpretations both are partly valid and not necessarily incompatible. Olaf Groehler wrote academic as well as more popular works, which becomes clear in the absence of annotation in some of his works.  

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418 In a recent article, for example, British historian Richard Overy positively discusses Groehler’s perspective on the bombing of Dresden and stresses that Groehler was “no crude ‘cold warrior’”. Similarly Dietmar Süß praises Groehlers “central contributions” to the social history of the air war that are, in spite of Groehler’s occasional “Marxist distortions”, to be valued as serious and important research. In 2007 *Bombenkrieg gegen Deutschland* was even elected as one of the “50 classics of contemporary history” and praised along similar lines: e.g. Friedrich, Der Brand 543; Overy, “The Post-War Debate” 135-136. Süß, “Erinnerungen an den Luftkrieg” 21; Dietmar Süß, “‘Massaker und Mongolensturm’. Anmerkungen zu Jörg Friedrichs umstrittenem Buch “Der Brand. Deutschland im Bombenkrieg 1940-1945” Historisches Jahrbuch 124 (2004) 521-542, here: 541; Angelika Ebbinghaus, “Deutschland im Bombenkrieg - Ein missglücktes Buch über ein wichtiges Thema,” Sozial.Geschichte 18, no. 2 (2003) 101-122, here: 105-106; Nicole Kramer, “Die deutsche Kriegsgesellschaft im Visier. Olaf Groehlers Klassiker der Luftkriegsforschung,” ed. Jürgen Danyel, Jan-Holger Kirsch, and Martin Sabrow (Göttingen: 2007) 209-212. Besides her praise for this “classic” Kramer however also makes note of the fact that Groehler “could not completely rid himself of old explanatory patterns”.  

419 For instance Geschichte des Luftkriegs and Kampf um die Luftherrschaft, though
he researched the bombing war spans almost three decades. Starting with archives that were available in the GDR (such as the Militärarchiv der DDR) Groehler initially had only limited access to files that were kept in the West, while in his later work he had managed to see most relevant archives in the Federal Republic, Great Britain and the United States.\footnote{For his first publications he visited only the Bundesarchiv in Koblenz for files on the German Ministry of Finance and the Ministry for Armament and War Production. For British and American sources he had to rely on material that was made available by Anglo-American historiography, such as the “official history” by Webster and Frankland. Since the beginning of the 1980s Groehler could also include material from the FRG-Bundesarchiv-Militärarchiv in Freiburg and from the Public Record Office in London and in} obviously based on serious research, wholly lack annotation. In articles and in more serious works such as \textit{Berlin im Bombenvisier} and \textit{Bombenkrieg gegen Deutchland} Groehler did use footnotes quite precisely.

\footnote{For his first publications he visited only the Bundesarchiv in Koblenz for files on the German Ministry of Finance and the Ministry for Armament and War Production. For British and American sources he had to rely on material that was made available by Anglo-American historiography, such as the “official history” by Webster and Frankland. Since the beginning of the 1980s Groehler could also include material from the FRG-Bundesarchiv-Militärarchiv in Freiburg and from the Public Record Office in London and in}
more richly documented and more differentiated than his earlier accounts. This is especially the case with *Bombenkrieg gegen Deutschland*, whose manuscript he had finished largely in the spring of 1988, but was to be published only in the Reunited Germany in 1990. Here, Groehler distanced himself cautiously from some of his former beliefs as well as from the radical propaganda, with which the SED had exploited the Allied bombings for political benefit.421

Still, there is a strong continuity in Groehler’s approach to the Allied air war. Though a certain distance from his GDR past seems to be present in *Bombenkrieg gegen Deutschland* and this work definitely is more balanced and better documented than his previous work, Groehler’s main arguments remained largely the same and are only complemented by new data and documents. Though the specific historical context of his last work should be kept in mind and certain minor developments in Groehler’s thinking can be traced, it was not essentially different from the rest of his work.422

What is interesting in Groehler’s work is that he explicitly connected the importance of determining historical and causal relations and at the same time addressing problems of guilt and responsibility. Both had to be regarded in a differentiated manner, and in relationship to each other. In the introduction to

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422 See for example review Peter Voegeli, who denounces *Bombenkrieg gegen Deutschland* as a clear “Marxist” – and therefore completely irrelevant – historical research. Voegeli, “Bombenkrieg gegen Deutschland”.

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Bombenkrieg gegen Deutschland Groehler stated: “When we look back to what German cities suffered (...) we should preserve a sense of proportion and historical perspective that has been missing here and there in heated discussions. This mainly concerns the question of cause and effect and also the question of guilt and responsibility”.\textsuperscript{423} This connection between the question of guilt and historical causality was central to Groehler’s approach. It resulted in a much more differentiated and elaborate depiction of the historical context of the Allied bombings than other GDR accounts of the bombing war had provided.

The relationship between Groehler’s work and earlier East German accounts is similar to Boog’s position in the Federal Republic. Like Boog, Groehler made an effort to gather factual information on military decisionmaking processes and on technical and statistic issues. Also, he looked for differentiated explanations for the air war in the context of the Second World War. Where previous accounts by Seydewitz and Weidauer addressed the development of air war theory and practice only marginally, Groehler describes them extensively. Like Boog, Groehler traced the British strategy back to military theories of the 1920s. He saw the new concept of total war and the military theories of Guilio Douhet and Hugh Trenchard as important to the decision to undertake the bombing campaign. Contrary to the official propaganda these theoreticians had learned lessons from the First World War and had concluded that to avoid a lengthy stalemate, the enemy hinterland-rather than its military forces should be attacked by heavy bombers. By putting pressure on civilians with bombardments on their residential areas and their economic resources the enemy regime could be undermined.

\textsuperscript{423} Groehler, Bombenkrieg gegen Deutschland 8.
Groehler emphasized that Douhet and Trenchard had foreseen that air war and strategic bombing would determine the war of the future.\textsuperscript{424} He argued that theories like these spread throughout Europe and were received positively in most countries (though not in the Soviet Union) and especially in Britain and Germany. In his major article “Der ‘strategische Luftkrieg’ Großbritanniens gegen Hitler-deutschland”, written in 1968, Groehler argued that the theoretical basis for the British concept of strategic bombing was developed after WWI. At this moment a crisis in Western military theory and the adoption of the new concept of “total war” coincided with the very fast development of military aviation. In Britain, in particular, this led to the increased belief that heavy bombers would be essential in a future war.\textsuperscript{425}

\textit{Who sows the wind, reaps the storm}

While here Groehler drew conclusions similar to those of Horst Boog, there was one crucial point were their interpretations parted. Groehler saw the role of the German \textit{Luftwaffe} in a wholly different light. Though Groehler recognized that ideas of total warfare and strategic bombing on enemy hinterland had spread in Britain and the United States immediately after WWI, he contested the idea that the Western Allies had started mass bombings in practice. In fact this is a point that Groehler made in all his accounts on the topic. Fascist Germany started the practice of deliberate attacks on civilians. Groehler emphasized the fact that German \textit{Luftwaffe} had started bombing cities in Spain, Britain, Poland and the Netherlands, before describing the British and American attacks on Germany. With

\textsuperscript{425} Groehler, “Der “strategische” Luftkrieg” 440.
these deliberate “terror attacks” on Guernica, Warsaw, Rotterdam and Coventry the fascists had consciously crossed new boundaries of warfare and had provoked the Allies to use the same means in return. The main responsibility for the “bombing war” therefore was explicitly ascribed to fascist Germany. In *Geschichte des Luftkriegs* Groehler left no doubt regarding this point. “Because while the British commanders still shivered at the thought of bombing Germany, the Luftwaffe brought death and decay over hundreds of Polish villages, towns and cities.”426 The German air force had already tested the possibilities of strategic bombing when Legion Condor bombed Guernica during the Spanish Civil War, and had also initiated bombing cities at the beginning of World War II. Here Göring’s *Luftwaffe*, in addition to operative cooperation with ground troops, used “terror bombings”. According to Groehler the *Luftwaffe* followed the line of the Douhet-theory and used “terror” to put pressure on the enemy civilian population.427

Groehler denied the idea, first suggested by Nazi propaganda and later often repeated by West German historians, that the German bombings had only been directed at military targets. He emphasized that the death of civilians had not been regarded as collateral damage by the *Luftwaffe*’s command, but had actually been the main target of the German bombers. “Terror bombing” had been an important strategic concept for the *Luftwaffe* that played a part not only in the attack on Poland, but also during the Battle of Britain. Groehler argues that during the air battles over British territory Germany had prepared a “ruthless terrorizing of the British people” in order to demoralize the British and force Churchill’s

426 Groehler, *Geschichte des Luftkriegs* 217. It is also on this issue that Groehler praised David Irving for “pointing to the responsibility of German fascism and militarism”. Groehler, “Der Untergang Dresdens” 557.

427 Groehler, *Geschichte des Luftkriegs* 221.
government to its knees. Also, Groehler rejected an oft-heard idea that the destruction of Rotterdam’s city centre had been the result of “tragic misunderstanding” and clearly perceived this as “planned murder”.428

By its actions, the fascist regime had “caused” the Western Allies to equally shift the moral boundaries of their bombing methods. This causality was closely connected to the question of guilt and responsibility. According to Groehler, it was the Nazi regime which by “causing” the Allied bombings was responsible for the massive deaths that followed them. To illustrate this causal connection between the fascist bombings and the Allied response Groehler often used the metaphor “who sows the wind, reaps the storm”.429 This metaphor (supposedly introduced regarding this topic by Arthur Harris when he witnessed the bombing of the London City in 1940) plays a central role in Groehler’s argument. Groehler’s use of Harris’s metaphor functions as a constant reminder that German fascism was guilty for starting the war and “unleashing” the Allied bombs.

By explicitly holding German fascists responsible for the Allied bombings, Groehler seems to dissociate himself from the official interpretation that since the 1950s had abandoned a focus on the fascist responsibility and had placed the Allied bombings outside of the context of the war against Germany. Groehler never lost sight of the historical context and military significance of the Allied air war. Not only must the Allied bombings be seen as a “reaction” of German terror-bombings, Groehler also denied the dominant idea that the Allied strategic air war against Germany had been militarily insignificant and a result of senseless rage and destructiveness. He stated that while the Allies had overestimated

the outcome and effectiveness of their air forces throughout the war, it could not be denied that the attacks had significantly damaged German military and economic resources and had thus played an important role in the defeat of Germany. Groehler’s conclusion in the 1985 military historical overview Deutschland im zweiten Weltkrieg was therefore: “While individual sectors of the German war industry (especially the chemical industries) were damaged severely, the Air War was not a decisive element in the Allied victory, though it was able to quicken the defeat of the fascist regime”.430

Criticizing Weidauer

In a partly very critical book review on Walter Weidauer’s book Inferno Dresden for Zeitschrift für Geschichtswissenschaft in 1965, Groehler sought to distance himself as a serious historian from some of the more radical propagandist statements and unfounded theories. Though he took Weidauer’s work seriously and praised its many informative assets and especially Weidauer’s “balanced” estimate of the death rate, Groehler also criticized Weidauer’s propagandist pamphlet in a surprisingly direct way. Groehler concluded that, while Weidauer had filled some information gaps and had introduced some interesting points of discussion, “it would have been more beneficial, if the author had expressed some of his statements in a more careful and balanced manner - in spite of all his propagandist aims”.431

When discussing Weidauer’s main thesis, Groehler still remained careful. He called Weidauer’s argument for the theory that the first atomic bomb was meant for Dresden “worthy of discussion”. At another point, though, Groehler was more explicit. It was the absence of historical context and the brusque simplification of Weidauer’s portrayal of the Allied strategic bombing war that troubled him. By reducing the British and American bombings to “a principle of criminal imperialist military strategy” Weidauer “underestimated” the important role the bombings had played as “a component of the efforts of the anti-Hitler coalition against the fascist Axis-Powers”. Groehler called for recognizing the importance of differentiation and chronology. He emphasized that city bombing had mainly been a British strategy and not –as was often suggested in the anti-American climate of the GDR- in the first place an American strategy. The Americans had engaged in “terror-bombing” but only relatively late. While a strategy that focused on military targets had initially also dominated in the British air force, from 1942 on, Bomber Command turned towards a strategy of city bombing. The objective of these bombings was to put pressure on the enemy industrial resources and on its civilian population. An important reason for this new strategy, according to Groehler, was the unwillingness and inability of the British army to open a

432 Considering the vagueness of this statement and the fact that Groehler later emphasized that “Operation Thunderclap” had never been planned to be an atomic attack, it is certainly possible that Groehler was holding back his real thoughts here. E.g. Olaf Groehler, “Annotationen. Walter Weidauer: Inferno Dresden. Über Lügen und Legenden um die Aktion “Donnerschlag”,” Zeitschrift für Geschichtswissenschaft 33, no. 2 (1985) 187-188 and Groehler, Berlin im Bombervisier 41.


434 Groehler clearly had a problem with a simplistic anti-Americanism that blamed the Americans for everything and completely negated their military contribution to the war against Hitler. This also is reflected in his relatively mild and almost friendly descriptions of American politicians like Roosevelt. In his review, Groehler criticizes Weidauer for insufficiently differentiating between the “militant anti-communist” Churchill and “personalities like Roosevelt and Morgenthau”: Ibid. 1447.
“Second Front” in Western Europe, for which the British had sought to compensate by the bombing offence. This way they could make clear not only to Hitler, but also to their ally Stalin that they had at their disposal a strong offensive weapon.435

After Hitler’s failed attempts of the Battle of Britain and the Blitz, the danger of a possible German invasion in England had disappeared. The British army and armament industry could recover, and from then on it increasingly focused on the production of heavy bombers. With this offensive weapon England could demonstrate that it was seriously contributing to the victory over Hitler, without the risk of losing relatively many soldiers in battle. Moreover, according to Groehler, “certain circles” in the British military also wanted to punish the Germans for supporting Hitler. After the bombing of Hamburg during Operation Gomorrah, this strategy of bombing city centers was perfected. The strategy of city bombing was for a while abandoned to prepare and support the Allied invasion in Normandy. When the Western Front and the Allied achievements came to a halt, the British and later also the Americans again turned to the method of massive “terror-bombings” in the fall of 1944, actions that came to a climax in the bombing offensive of 1945. These bombings were in their very essence “inhumane, terrorist and aimed at people”.436

By eventually classifying the Allied bombings as inhumane and terrorist, Groehler expressed a clear condemnation of the bombings. Especially in his descriptions of the final phase of the bombing war from the fall of 1944 onwards, Groehler also used language and terminology that wholly corresponded with the propaganda language of the official SED discourse. When writing about the

436 Ibid. 444-446.
city bombings of the Western Allies, Groehler continuously used such adjectives as “barbaric” and “terrorist”. The bombing of Dresden was described as a “massacre from the skies”.\textsuperscript{437} The terminology in his post-1989 work remained similarly vivid. The memorandum from November 1942 in which Bomber Command declared that the bombing of German civilians would become the central aim of British bombing raids, according to Groehler, was a “vision of horror”. Britain had tried to win the war with “massive terror”, a strategy that had proven to be of very limited effect. Although effects on German morale by 1945 certainly were evident, Groehler stated that a concentration on German armament and industrial resources would have delivered considerably better military results.\textsuperscript{438}

By describing the bombings with this terminology, Groehler clearly integrated the language of the official discourse into his academic work. However, this did not mean he had lost his sense of historical differentiation. While denouncing this specific element in first German, then British and later American strategy, Groehler did not think that the British and American air war and their bombings in general were to be condemned as “terror”. His accusative language was used specifically to emphasize the increasing importance of the focus on civilian morale and city centers in British air war strategy. Groehler pointed at vital documents of the Bomber Command air staff, which showed that from 1942 on, Bomber Command had focused on city centre bombing in order to cause maximum damage to the German civilian population to break their morale.\textsuperscript{439} Groehler used the word “terror” to describe the character of this theory and of the final phase of the

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{437} Groehler, \textit{Geschichte des Luftkriegs} 458; Groehler, “Der "strategische" Luftkrieg,” 446, 450.
\item \textsuperscript{438} Groehler, \textit{Bombenkrieg gegen Deutschland} 294-300.
\item \textsuperscript{439} For example see the documents Groehler printed in the appendix of Groehler, Groehler, \textit{Berlin im Bombervisier} 55-97.
\end{itemize}
bombing war, in which the theory of massive city bombing to cause massive ter-
ror was realized. Since the mass killing of civilians had been a strategic starting
point, according to Groehler, they could be described as “murder” and “massacre”.

This combination of historical nuance and moral judgment meant that
Groehler also remained relatively reluctant to express general moral accusations.
Though he called the bombings “barbaric”, Groehler also pointed out that these
actions had to be seen within a “broader political framework”. The Allies were
confronted with an opponent that had unleashed a “total war” and had con-
sciously provoked the bombing of its own cities. “This does not really justify the
principle (of city bombing, BvBB); but it delineates the unique historically irrefut-
able framework”.\textsuperscript{440}

This approach also had consequences for the “historical actors” involved.
However critical Groehler was of the plans, ideas and decisions of Allied strategists
like Churchill and Harris, he was quite reluctant to pass direct moral judgment
on them individually. Groehler warned that simplistic moral accusations aimed
at individuals held the danger of an overly simplistic intentionalist historical per-
spective. Also it ignored the efforts of these men to win the war against Germany.
The moral position of individuals had to put into perspective when it came to the
bomber-crews that executed the massive bombings in practice. Groehler defended
their position by stressing that: “The pilots (...) did this in the conviction that by
bombing military targets and armaments industry they contributed to the justi-
fied warfare of the anti-Hitler coalition and that this would shorten the war”.\textsuperscript{441}

\textsuperscript{440} Olaf Groehler, “The Strategic Air War and its Impact on the German Civilian
Population” in \textit{The conduct of the air war in the Second World War an international
comparison: proceedings of the International Conference of Historians in Freiburg im Breisgau,
292-293. Also see: Groehler, “Der “strategische” Luftkrieg” 446.

\textsuperscript{441} Groehler, \textit{Bombenkrieg gegen Deutschland} 14.
Groehler’s apparent distance from Weidauer—who was broadly considered to be the authority on the bombing of Dresden—comes across as something quite remarkable and should be explained more explicitly. The question is, whether Weidauer’s lack of objectivity and his ahistorical political standpoints were really fundamentally questioned by Groehler. On closer look, it is clear that Groehler’s emphasis on “German guilt” and his call for historical differentiation did not mean that he dissociated himself from a Marxist perspective on history. A key aspect in better understanding Groehler’s position can be found, by looking more closely at his theoretical approach and at his concept of “guilt” and “responsibility”. For all Groehler’s emphasis on German guilt and the causal connections regarding the initiative of terror-bombings, this is not where his conclusions on responsibility end. Reading his work more carefully makes it clear that Groehler’s reluctance to make general accusations aimed at American and British air forces or even at certain individuals like Harris and Churchill, is somewhat misleading. While they suggest a remarkably balanced and distanced standpoint, it is questionable whether this impression means that Groehler also abandoned the principles of Marxist history writing.

This becomes clear when we regard the role of the main historical actors in Groehler’s narrative. Groehler ascribed the responsibility for the massive and “murderous” bombing of German cities in the final phase of the war not only to the fascists, but also to those who had pursued and promoted the use of “terror-bombing” within the British and American army and government. What is interesting is that this responsible “group” remains almost entirely anonymous. Instead of pointing the finger at individuals he rather refers to “certain circles”,

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“reactionary groups” or “specific elements of imperialist warfare”.⁴⁴² Although between the lines it becomes clear that at least people like Harris, Churchill and Portal were part of these “circles”, the vagueness of this terminology seems to be chosen with care.

It reveals that there was another and perhaps more important reason why Groehler was reluctant to accuse individuals. Groehler wanted to illuminate that these individuals operated within a certain “political framework”. When discussing Churchill and Harris, whom he clearly condemned, Groehler did not so much want to deny their individual responsibility for the planning and execution of the bombing war. Groehler’s point was that their strategy was not a result of personal hatred or ruthlessness, as was sometimes suggested.⁴⁴³ These decision makers in the Western Allied forces wanted to win the war against Germany, but they also had a more far-reaching political agenda.

This political agenda was determined by the politics of “imperialism”. Groehler’s use of the concept of “imperialism” is key to his explanation of the Western Allied warfare. This Marxist concept categorized different non-socialist systems under the same denominator. Capitalism and fascism therefore were seen as two related forms of society and states. While Western European and American states were seen as examples of “bourgeois imperialism”, fascism was seen as a more aggressive form. This did not mean that “Western bourgeois imperialism” and “German fascist imperialism” were seen as natural allies or that they could not be in competition or even at war. But by their oppressive nature, their anti-

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⁴⁴² Groehler, “Der “strategische Luftkrieg” 446; Groehler, Bombenkrieg gegen Deutschland 338, 391.
⁴⁴³ See e.g. Groehler, “Der “strategische Luftkrieg” 443. Groehler refers to the work of Irving, who sees Churchill’s personal motivations as an important driving force behind the British air strategy.
socialism and by the fact that their inner dynamics were created and dominated by Big Industry, they were essentially connected.

In the central theoretical premise of his work, Groehler argued that the German as well as the British and American bombing strategies were grounded in an “imperialist air war doctrine”. This imperialist doctrine differed “fundamentally” from “socialist” strategy, because it accepted the use of terror against civilians as a legitimate method of warfare. While it was significant that German fascists had started the practice of this doctrine the Western Allies came to use same concept in the course of the war. By stressing the “humanity” and “tactical premise” of the Soviet Air force Groehler evoked a propagandist and affirmative perspective on the Soviet Army and ignored the often savage and brutal practices that the Soviet forces had demonstrated on a massive scale during their advance on German territory. This dichotomy between Soviet and “imperialist” methods also resulted in the situation that the Western Allies and Nazi Germany eventually were portrayed as two sides of the same “imperialist” coin. Along the way the Western Allies had descended to the moral depths of fascism. The “reactionary” circles in the Allied Army, politics and industry but above all, “imperialism” as an abstract political entity, had determined British and American war strategy.

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445 Groehler, “Inferno Dresden (1965)” 1447; Groehler, Bombenkrieg gegen Deutschland 180, 227, 336-338, 391. Even after 1989 Groehler kept, apart from some minor corrections, to this interpretation. In a somewhat schizophrenic manner Groehler criticized the way in which the “political abuse” of this topic in East Germany had “undifferentiatedly interpreted the bombing war as an overall expression of imperialist violence” and had “equaled dollar sign and swastika”. Groehler corrected some of his previous interpretations, such as the accusation that the British and Americans had deliberately bombed Eastern Germany more extensively than the West to damage and sabotage the future Soviet Zone of Influence. His theoretical starting point and central approach however underlined exactly this interpretation of the Allied bombing war as an example of “Imperialist warfare”. Groehler, Bombenkrieg gegen Deutschland 393, 450.
The role of certain individuals could therefore be morally wrong, but they could never be made wholly responsible for the dynamics of “imperialist” politics. It was the “system” that generated immoral methods of warfare and provided “fanatics” like Arthur Harris with a framework in which they could pursue their radical ideas. In his valuation of the role of Arthur Harris and Winston Churchill in the British war strategy Groehler’s focuses on this relationship between “individuals” and the “political framework”: “Harris was not the creator of the new strategy of area bombing, but the qualified executor (...) who undisturbed by criticism or objections and in spite of the severe losses and sacrifices the crews of Bomber Command had to endure, (...) stuck to his conviction that the bomber would decide the war in favor of the British empire”. 446 And while Groehler saw Churchill as one of the most important representatives of reactionary imperialism and a supporter of immoral methods of war, he concluded: “Sympathies and antipathies of a bourgeois statesman are by no means sufficient to explain the phenomenon of the air war, because it eventually was determined by forces that root in the domain of politics and economics”. 447

*A social history of German victims?*

In many ways Olaf Groehler was the first German historian to extensively address the social impact of the bombings on the German population. 448 In a lengthy sec-

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447 Groehler, “Der “strategische” Luftkrieg” 443. Groehler’s criticism of Churchill nevertheless was very strong. This was especially the case when Churchill’s call to examine the possibility of the use of gas and biological weapons was mentioned. See: Groehler, *Bombenkrieg gegen Deutschland* 330-334.

448 This is the main reason why *Bombenkrieg gegen Deutschland* was labelled as one of the 50 “classics” in contemporary German history. See: Kramer, "Die deutsche Kriegsgesellschaft".
tion of *Bombenkrieg gegen Deutschland* Groehler described various aspects of “life under the hail of bombs”. Often focusing on subjects that had received little attention previously and employing many new source materials, *Bombenkrieg gegen Deutschland* has been rightly regarded as a pioneering work. Groehler addressed the development and mechanisms of air protection, sirens, and the building of air shelters and bunkers as well as the regime’s attempts to “manage” the air war, by organizing evacuation and housing programs and attempts to compensate Germans who had lost homes and goods. Also, Groehler problematized the possibilities of analyzing German morale. 449

*Bombenkrieg gegen Deutschland* used secret SD reports and other official reports on the opinions of Germans to reflect both on the attitudes of Germans as well as on the regime’s attempts to find ways to influence them. 450 Groehler came to a nuanced analysis of these attitudes and pointed out fluctuations and differences. First, Groehler challenged the assumption that Nazi propaganda had managed to mobilize feelings of hatred among the Germans towards the Allies. Though the propaganda campaigns indeed managed to provoke an increase in negative feelings towards the Allies, this did not lead to a substantial growth in solidarity with the regime or a stronger will to resist, due to strong feelings of hatred of the Allies. Groehler pointed out that the reactions to the bombings were far more differentiated and also varied among different regions. The calls for retaliation, Groehler argued, were often stronger in regions that had not experienced heavy raids themselves, whereas the bombings also provoked a questioning of

449  Groehler also reflected on the methodological limitations of determining morale, stressing that it “cannot be precisely determined, neither qualitatively nor quantitatively”. Groehler, *Bombenkrieg gegen Deutschland* 294-295.

Luftwaffe raids by Germans who had been affected by bombings. Groehler concluded that the strongest moral effects had been achieved in 1943, when the heavily intensified bombing coincided with the defeat of the German Army in Stalingrad and the collapse of the Mussolini regime in Italy.

Groehler stressed that especially after the bombing of Hamburg in the summer of 1943 a general gap between German public attitudes and private opinions began to manifest itself. While in public the will to survive was trumpeted, in private fear, resignation and fatalism dominated. Groehler also illustrated the few cases in which bombing indeed had led to more than private resignation and fatalism. He pointed out that under the “collision of different extraordinary circumstances, which increased in the final phase of the war, this passive attitude broke”. After an attack on Munich-Freimann, mass panic broke out after air warnings. Due to the lack of air shelters in this part of town, the inhabitants repeatedly fled the neighborhood and the fear and panic over the lack of protection was accompanied by fierce criticism of the party and local authorities. After the attacks on Vienna in February 1945, the atmosphere was tense and small-scale riots broke out among workers, who expressed their explicit hostility towards the Nazi leaders and directly blamed them for the Allied bombings. Though these examples remained exceptions, Groehler argued that they represented extreme cases of a general resignation and war fatigue.

In spite of certain innovative aspects in his approach, there is also a strong continuity in the way the German civilians were presented as “historical actors”. Though Groehler continuously stressed the fascist “guilt” for starting the bomb-

451 Groehler, Bombenkrieg gegen Deutschland 296-297.
452 Ibid. 296-303.
ing war, this “guilt” and “responsibility” hardly seemed to apply to the “German people” in general. In his work they appear as “double victims” of fascism and imperialism once more. Though he continuously emphasized that the “Germans had started” the war, Groehler’s actual focus was entirely on German suffering and Allied bombings. In his accounts Luftwaffe bombings were only briefly addressed, and their criminal nature described in only one or two sentences, while the backgrounds and effects of the Allied bombings were given lengthy descriptions.

In Groehler’s work the political concept of fascism became a coercive force that was imposed by the “fascist and imperialist” elites on the German people. The “normal Germans” subsequently were absolved from responsibility for the fascist rule. The German civilians appear as puppets through whom the imperialists played their sick games, not in any way as members of the NSDAP, collaborators or as administrative associates of the fascist state. Instead their status as victims is confirmed in various ways.

First, the Germans civilians and especially the German workers became victims of false expectations of the impact the bombings would have on their morale. The Western Allies put the Germans under increased pressure to bring about a revolt. However, the Germans were so tightly controlled by the fascist terror regime that political resistance was not a realistic option any more. The bombings left the German civilians “no way out of the imperialist war” and made them even more dependent on the fascist state. As a result, the Germans reacted with “passivity, lethargy and fatalism” and had to endure the horrors of the bombings powerlessly.453

453 Groehler, Kampf um die Luftherrschaft 218-219; Groehler, Bombenkrieg gegen Deutschland 294-295.
Secondly, the Germans became victims of the cynical policy of the Nazi administration. Groehler stressed that the Nazis had provided the German civilians with totally insufficient air protection. Air shelters and bunkers held too little space and were opportunistically claimed by party members. Moreover, the authorities deliberately falsified and withheld crucial information about the bombings, and left the civilian population unprepared and uninformed. Thus the Nazi authorities had knowingly contributed to the enormous scale of destruction and killing.\textsuperscript{454}

Finally, by the time that the Allied leaders had lost their belief in a victory brought about by “morale bombing” the Germans civilians had become the victim of anti-communist actions. The imperialist struggle for political dominance in Germany had made the German population into a plaything. Groehler concluded: “Under the perspective of a strategy that was focused on the postwar period, the German Hinterland came to act as an experimental ground, in which the German population played the part of a laboratory animal”.\textsuperscript{455}

While the Germans became victims of different factors: strategic miscalculations and anti-communist power plays in addition to the terror and malfunctioning of the Nazi state, what remained constant was the “victim status” of the German people. The people that were bombed were not responsible for their fate: they were innocent. This judgment was constantly present in Groehler’s work on an implicit level and sometimes was expressed more directly. When discussing the question whether the German people were “punished” for the Nazi crimes, Groehler dismissed the responsibility of the Germans altogether. Rhetorically Groehler asked: “Because if the unlimited area bombings were supposed to

\textsuperscript{454} E.g. see: Groehler, \textit{Bombenkrieg gegen Deutschland} 140, 205.
\textsuperscript{455} Ibid. 391.
be retaliation for these immense crimes (of the extermination camps BvBB) who exactly was it that was being punished? Was it the SS-executioners from Maidanek, Treblinka or Auschwitz or the profit-making directors of IG Farben, who literally made capital of the sweat, blood and death of the concentration-camp prisoners?". This quotation reveals Groehler’s view of the status of the “normal Germans” living in the cities that were bombed by the Allies. These were not the brutal SS men and capitalist profit-makers that together had enabled the rise of the Nazi state. These were innocent victims, who suffered disproportionately and submitted to their fate passively.

The question therefore is, whether a more differentiated perspective on the social responses to Allied bombings basically challenged the victim-centered perspective that had dominated German historiography on the theme. As we have seen, though adding essential differentiations and nuance, following a perspective still dominant in the historiography of the air war, Groehler depicted the Germans largely as a collective of victims. Not only in his military-historical analysis but also in his approach to the social impact of the bombings, he concentrated on their passive position. The Germans described here were subject to Nazi poli-

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456 Ibid. 378.
457 This, however, was also the case for other studies concentrating on the impact of the bombings. Though differentiated in its moral judgment of Allied strategy, Earl Beck’s Under the bombs still strongly focused on the Germans as stereotypical victims. Beck stressed the passiveness of the Germans by showing them as “prisoners of Nazi ideology” and even suggested a Holocaust comparison similar to that given by Jörg Friedrich, by stressing in a chapter title that in its intensifying phase bombing was “achieving Holocaust”. Earl R. Beck, Under the bombs. The German home front 1942-1945 (Lexington: 1986) 26, 30, 55. And a similar suggested comparison in an earlier article: Earl R. Beck, “The Allied Bombing of Germany, 1942-1945, and the German Response: Dilemmas of Judgement,” German Studies Review 5, no. 3 (1982) 325-337. It is therefore not surprising that Beck wrote a relatively positive review of Groehler’s Bombenkrieg gegen Deutschland, stressing that the book “comes very close to the designation of ‘definitive study’”. Though Beck made some critical remarks, he did not address Groehler’s thesis that the final phase of the air war had been determined by anti-Soviet politics: Earl R. Beck, “Review. Olaf Groehler, Bombenkrieg gegen Deutschland (1990),” American Historical Review 97, no. 4 (1992) 1243-1244 1243-1244.
cies and Allied strategy, but, aside from few exceptions, did not appear as actors in their regime. Moreover, they still largely appeared as a coherent “double victim” community, in opposition to their regime. While the reactions of the Germans were differentiated, “the Germans” themselves were not. Very little attention was given to the various groups within this “community”, the regime’s opponents, different regions or even different classes. The emphasis on the passiveness of the Germans’ reactions confirmed their status as victims.458

The beginning of the Cold War

Another parallel with earlier East German accounts can be found in the temporal structure of Groehler’s narrative. While Groehler saw the strategic thinking of theorists such as Douhet and Trenchard and the beginning of the Second World War as central backgrounds for the bombing of German cities he especially focused on the final phase of the Second World War. Groehler’s interpretation of the last phase of the war shows that his notion of the “imperialist doctrine” was explicitly integrated into his historical narrative. According to Groehler the “imperialism” in British and American air strategy was expressed in the fact that the Western Allies were increasingly concerned with postwar power structures. When it became clear that the Allies were going to win the war against Germany, motives that looked beyond this war increasingly influenced Allied strategy. The main force that drove this policy was anti-communism and the desire to impose political dominance in post-war Germany.

458 Also see chapter 5. For examples, compare Groehler’s account to Blank, “Kriegsalltag und Luftkrieg” 433-450.
Groehler motivated this interpretation by analyzing the development of “Operation Thunderclap”, the plan that was originally meant as a massive attack on Berlin and is generally seen as the “blueprint” for the bombing of Dresden. Groehler argued that “Thunderclap” was supposed to have different functions. On the one hand, it was supposed to knock out Berlin as Germany’s economic, military and administrative centre. By doing so, a quick victory should be secured. With this final blow to Germany’s morale the elites and Wehrmacht generals were supposed to be forced to recognize their defeat. Since the first draft of the “Operation Thunderclap” plan was conceived only a few days before the assassination attempt on Hitler on the 20 July, the plan was also meant to bring about a quick settlement with Germany’s new military leaders. One important reason for this was that the British, in particular, wanted some form of central authoritarian rule to stay intact in Germany to prevent the danger of a socialist revolution. Another anti-communist motive was that Thunderclap was meant to be a clear demonstrative sign to Stalin. By turning Berlin into a complete wasteland the Western Allies could claim to have delivered the final blow on Germany, in spite of the fact that the real collapse of the German forces had been brought about on the Eastern Front. More importantly, Berlin would be an example of what the air forces of the Western Allies would be capable of in the future.459

The joint, concentrated strike on Berlin was not put into effect. The exact timing for such an attack did not never arrived, and when the city was bombed on 3 February, the attack, though causing much damage, lacked the concentration necessary for total devastation.460 By February 1945 there was hardly anyone among

459 Groehler, Berlin im Bombervisier 33-42.
460 Groehler, Kampf um die Luftherrschaft 262-263.
the British or American army leaders who still believed that a final blow would cause an immediate victory. Also the plan to bomb Berlin had been postponed after the disappointing attack on 3 February. Still, the desire for a clear demonstrative act remained intact and was ferociously promoted by those “reactionary circles” that had come to the conclusion that after the war the only real opponent of “British and American imperialism” would be the Soviet Union. First Dresden and later other cities like Magdeburg and Pforzheim became the victims of this ruthless first step in the Cold War. Still in 1990 Groehler concluded that “the enormous area-bombing attacks during the spring of 1945 (...) did not only aim at a final wearing down of the (...) fascist regime, but at the same time were supposed to be a demonstration of power as well as a warning and a threat. In the first place these were aimed at the Soviet Union but also at the people of Europe (...).”  

Interestingly (and contrary to the GDR historians and politicians who had made a similar argument) Groehler came up with convincing documents that supported his theory. Not only had an internal directive that preceded the Dresden raid mentioned that an important reason for the attack was to “show the Russians what Bomber Command is capable of”. Groehler showed that this motive had been repeatedly mentioned during the planning of Thunderclap. A draft of the “Thunderclap plan” that was prepared by the Joint Planning Staff on August, 15 1944 clearly stated that the destroyed Berlin could function as a “monument” to remind the Russian Allies of the effectiveness of the Anglo-American bomber force. When visiting Berlin the Russians would see with their own eyes what devastation the strategic bombing had caused, and “what could be repeated at any time”.  

461 Groehler, Bombenkrieg gegen Deutschland 391.
462 Document printed (translated into German, with archival annotation to the original in the Public Records Office) in: Groehler, Berlin im Bombervisier 83-84. Also see: Boog,
Although it was generally accepted that a desire to intimidate the Soviet Union played a role in the bombing of Dresden, in the work of Groehler this became the central argument. Groehler also saw the final phase of the bombing war as a preliminary stage of an atomic war. Though he rejected Weidauer’s theory that Dresden was supposed to have been the first target for an atomic bomb, he put the impact of the Allied strategic bombing offensive almost on the same level. Also the strategy that the Western Allies had chosen by bombing Dresden as a warning sign applied more to postwar atomic strategy than to the anti-Hitler war. Here Groehler saw the main political significance of the Allied bombings, the “many connections to the present” and the current threat of an “atomic world inferno”.

Challenging the GDR narrative?

Seen in this light Groehler’s review of Weidauer’s book and his apparent alternative academic perspective on the Allied bombings remain somewhat puzzling. Groehler seemed to be very critical in his review of Weidauer’s book. Groehler’s remarks certainly have to be placed in the context of the 1960s, when East German historians were increasingly struggling against the attempts of the SED to control academic historiography. Taking Groehler’s institute as a starting point, Martin Sabrow has described the 1960s as a period in which SED control over the academic climate of the ZIG grew and a Marxist view of history became the dominant starting point for the members of the institute. Also, especially in the years 1964 and 1965 when the SED was limiting academic exchanges with West Ger-

man historians, Marxist historians like Groehler were faced with the problem of defining East German historiography as a serious alternative.\textsuperscript{463} In this period, when Groehler had recently stopped his cooperation with the Stasi and was yet to become a member of the SED, his remarks towards Weidauer can be seen as a part of his attempts to become more outspoken. In private notes in 1964, Groehler criticized the official SED memory politics, which equaled fascism with present day capitalism.\textsuperscript{464} While such a view never found its way into his published work, Groehler was certainly critical of a simplistic propagandist approach to the history of the Second World War.\textsuperscript{465}

While such a critical view of East German colleagues would only reappear in Groehler’s publications only after 1989, it is clear that in the rest of his work during the GDR, his views seem to be remarkably differentiated and diverge from the simplistic GDR propaganda. While integrating certain elements of the official discourse he also seemed to contest, sometimes even very explicitly, dominant perspectives that portrayed the Allied bombings as generally militarily insignificant. Moreover, when coming to moral judgment, Groehler emphasized the “fascist guilt” for causing the bombing war, and at the same time put the Allied strategic considerations that led to “terror-bombing” in historical perspective.

Another indication of his relative distancing from the official propaganda is Groehler’s position towards the development of an alternative memory discourse in Dresden during the 1980s. In the beginning of the 1980s East German software engineer Matthias Neutzner, who had increasingly become interested in the his-

\textsuperscript{463} Sabrow, \textit{Das Diktat des Konsenses} 318-341.

\textsuperscript{464} See the citation and interpretation of Groehler’s private notes, dated 11-10-1969 in ibid. 322-323.

\textsuperscript{465} Groehler, “Inferno Dresden (1965)”. 
tory of 13 February, had started interviewing eyewitnesses. He tried to create an exhibition of the results within the Stadtmuseum Dresden in 1985, but encountered unwillingness and was waved off. However, with the help of Groehler, who, by claiming their work was “certainly of interest” to his institute, legitimized the group’s work, Neutzner was able to found a Fachgruppe within the Kulturbund of the GDR in 1987. The Fachgruppe 13. Februar engaged in the collection of eyewitness testimonies and was now able to do so in public and with the help of newspaper ads. These interviews often showed a perspective that was very different even openly contesting the GDR propaganda of the continued imperialist threat of a “new Dresden”. Shortly before the peace demonstrations of 1989 the first exhibition of eyewitnesses to the Dresden raid was held under the title Lebenszeichen. This was continued on 13 February 1992 with a series of exhibitions that started in the Dresden Rathaus and received broad public attention.

Moreover, in cooperation with this group, Groehler initiated a conference on East and West German memory of the air war. Planned for February 1990 Neutzner and Groehler wanted to bring together East and West German historians working on local histories of Allied bombings, including Götz Bergander. However, the fall of the Berlin Wall had a clear effect on the conference. While conceived as an exchange between local historians several politicians and mayors took the conference as an opportunity for pleading for a shared East and West

German memory of the air war. The involvement of Groehler in the work of the *Interessengemeinschaft* during the late 1980s, also indicates Groehler’s interest in a depoliticized memory culture and distance from the propagandist GDR discourse.

On the other hand, a look at his work also makes it apparent that until 1990, Groehler did not try to really contest the central East German narrative, nor the political system he worked in. This becomes apparent in Groehler’s career, which would not have been so successful had his work not been regarded as politically legitimate according to the official political discourse. For example, *Geschichte des Luftkrieges* was not only re-issued several times, it was also used for educational purposes at German military schools. An annual report of the ZIG in 1983, concluded that Groehler’s work had been of an increased political significance “in the light of the constantly aggravating war risk, caused by the NATO politics of armament, confrontation and provocation”. This only confirms how strongly Groehler’s work was integrated into the official East German view on history. In earlier works as well as in *Bombenkrieg gegen Deutschland* Groehler explained the air war not only from the perspective of Marxist-Leninist history. He was interested in an elaborate, academic and historically founded perspective and on a limited level was prepared and able to challenge opinions of SED politicians that he perceived as short-sighted or insufficiently explanatory. On the other hand, he did not challenge the basic historical interpretations of SED memory politics, nor its

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469 The program “Deutsche Städte im Luftkrieg” organized by URANIA, the ZIG and the Gesellschaft für Heimatsgeschichte on 8-2-1990 invited the mayors of Potsdam, Mainz, Würzburg, in private collection Neutzner. As will be discussed in the next chapter, in the following years the air war would become an important historical symbol for the United Germany.


471 Jahresbericht, 1983, ABBAW-ZIG, 716/1, 15.
emphasis on the current moral and political meaning of the air war.472

Groehler’s approach did not challenge the main historical and political aspects of the GDR perspective. By using the theoretical concept of an “imperialist air war doctrine” he underlined the official interpretation that saw “imperialism” as the main driving force behind war atrocities. Just like the official propaganda view Groehler interpreted “Operation Thunderclap” and the bombing of Dresden as a first step in the Cold War, but he did so in a more differentiated way and supported this assertion with far more elaborate arguments. He explained the last phase of the Allied bombings as a change of strategy from a generally legitimate attempt to win the war to a criminal phase in which senseless terror and anti-communist motives became increasingly important. A clear distinction between the “legitimate” side of the Anglo-American bombings and the final phase of terror bombing enabled Groehler to create a differentiated perspective, and at the same time integrate important elements of the dominant East German narrative.

But even though Bombenkrieg gegen Deutschland, which was largely finished by 1988, reflected these views, it is Groehler’s paper, which he presented in February 1990, that shows that he quickly reacted to the political changes. In his lecture for this conference Groehler for the first time openly challenged the GDR narrative, by claiming that he believed that especially in Dresden a harmful propagandist discourse had dominated, which had led to an “equation between dollar sign and swastika”.473 Groehler’s 1990 paper is especially interesting, because

472 Further connecting the political and the historical, Groehler summarized the duties of the institute as follows: “The basic challenge of the Zentralinstitut remains to secure the necessary political and theoretical development by basic historical research on a high theoretical level and with Marxist-Leninist disputability (...) and more effectively (...) contribute to the strengthening of socialist historical consciousness”. Referat Groehler, 16-6-1981 ABBAW-ZIG 572/1c. 189-192.
much more than his book it reflected a radical change of perspective. Groehler here fully concentrated on the abuse of the history of the air war not only found among the West German “rightwing” authors, who tried to “equate Dresden and Auschwitz” but especially in the East German propaganda. A certain sense of self-criticism was implicit when the historian pointed towards GDR historiography and memory culture in general: “But were we wholly free of this? The talk of Allied war criminals and Luftgangster celebrates its harmful and poisoning renaissance in our country”. Groehler continued by claiming that he believed that in the GDR “often a self satisfied, distorted vulgar and hate-evoking use of the past” had obstructed “everyone, who wanted to do justice to” the attack on Dresden.474

In Bombenkrieg gegen Deutschland, which was published in the same year, Groehler would include similar statements.475 However, here his criticisms often were contradicted by the anti-imperialist rhetoric that underlies the basic narrative of the account. What is so interesting in this paper is that Groehler not only criticized the GDR propaganda but also undermined two basic narrative elements which still dominated Bombenkrieg gegen Deutschland. First, while his book still supported the idea that Dresden marked the beginning of the Cold War, Groehler now even contested this central plot by claiming that the “poisonous spirit of the Cold War had led to the assumption among some authors in the GDR and the Soviet Union, that these attacks had anticipated the confrontation between the Superpowers”. Secondly, while in his account an image of the Germans as a collective of innocent victims was still largely intact, now Groehler also termed this as a myth and drew a far more differentiated and critical conclusion. “This German

474 Ibid. 1-4. Groehler would make a similar argument in: Groehler, “Dresden”
475 Groehler, Bombenkrieg gegen Deutschland 14, 450.
Volk had turned into a formless mass of self-centered individuals, who remained true to the authorities, partly out of fear, partly out of conviction, partly out of the lack of perspective.”

4.2. Debates with the West

“Imperialistische Luftkriegshistoriker”

Groehler’s devotion to Marxist-Leninist history explains how, without trouble, Groehler was able to publish his criticism on Weidauer. However, it does not sufficiently explain why he was critical and why he was troubled by the conclusion that Weidauer’s approach was insufficiently “balanced”. Like many other East German historians, Groehler did not feel that political slogans and propagandistic discourse were able to clear the matter satisfactorily. A reason for Groehler’s emphasis on differentiation, historical context and documentation can probably be found in another constant element in GDR Marxist-Leninist historiography. The East German historical discipline perceived its own identity strongly in a constant competition with Western historiography. This competition with the “bourgeois historians” was a strong element in the self-perception of East German historians. Groehler’s work was aimed at these “reactionary” historians, in particular

476 Groehler, Deutsche Städte 1-18. Also see: Groehler, “Moralbomben im Zweiten Weltkrieg” 579.

477 It is clear that Groehler strongly believed in the importance of this competition and interaction. Groehler actively devoted himself to an academic intercommunication with Western historians and, being in a position to travel and organize exchanges, was able to bring this about in practice. It is interesting to see, as is reflected in his reports to the Stasi, that Groehler clearly made a distinction between left-liberal historians such as Lutz Niethammer, Jürgen Kocka and Hans Mommsen, with whom he became friends and organized exchange projects and military historians and institutes like the Militärgeschichtliches Forschungsamt, from whom he maintained a distance. For example see Groehler’s report on a conference in Hagen in 1984, MfS AIM/17697/91 Bd. 2, folder 44-46.
lar. Groehler repeatedly and energetically devoted himself to discussions with “imperialist Air War historians”. For these discussions the more political rhetoric of Weidauer and Seydewitz was insufficient. In private notes Groehler made in 1964 he concluded that in these discussions the DDR side had rightly been scolded for its cut-and-dried opinions and lack of nuance.

In the discussion over the appropriate level on which GDR historians should engage their Western counterparts, Groehler was one of the GDR historians who wanted a serious academic debate with Western historians. Though not challenging the political relevance of the Allied bombing war he wanted the discourse with the West primarily to be based on archival research and sound arguments. As the analysis of the discussions and debates between Groehler and his Western

478 E.g. Groehler, “Der “strategische” Luftkrieg” 439; Groehler, Geschichte des Luftkriegs 265.

479 See the citation and interpretation of Groehler’s private notes, dated 11-10-1964 in Sabrow, Das Diktat des Konsenses 322-323. Here Groehler even doubted the strong connection between capitalism and fascism. This seemingly very dissident thought never found its way into Groehler’s published work. Though he repeated this complaint towards GDR historiography in Bombenkrieg gegen Deutschland, the use of “imperialism” as a comprehensive and inclusive concept that connected reactionary capitalism and fascism remained a central theoretical premise in his work. This evidently shows the intellectual balancing act of Groehler’s obviously not very successful attempt to integrate Marxist history into the Western academic discourse.

480 Historiography is an internal opinion concerning a planned volume on the role of the “German elites” in the planning of the Second World War. This volume, edited by Martin Broszat, was planned as a cooperation between East and West German historians on the issue of German military and social economic elites and their role in the Third Reich. Groehler was one of the GDR historians who had to give his advice on the possible publication of this volume. While Groehler was critical of some East German articles, which failed to give satisfying counterweight to the West German interpretations, and felt that Broszat’s explicit polemic against East German historiography was “unacceptable” and should be more clearly be answered with an East German response. Eventually, Groehler vouched in favor of the publication in both the Federal Republic and GDR. His final opinion was that “the political and academic advantages of such a volume appear to be larger than the unavoidable losses”. However, the volume would eventually fall victim to East German censorship and appeared without the contributions of the GDR historians. See: “Stellungnahme zum Sammelband “Deutsche Eliten” von Historikern aus der DDR und der BRD zum 50. Jahrestag der Entfesselung des zweiten Weltkrieges, 22.12.1988 in private collection heirs Olaf Groehler. Also see Broszat’s sharp criticism of this act of censorship in: Martin Broszat, “Erfolg und Scheitern eines deutsch-deutschen Zeitgeschichts-Dialogs,” in Die deutschen Eliten und der Weg zum Zweiten Weltkrieg, ed. Martin Broszat and Klaus Schwabe (München: 1989) 7-24.
colleagues will elaborate more specifically, it can be assumed that Groehler’s critical distance from Weidauer’s book and from the more propagandistic aspects of official GDR memory politics can be primarily explained by his focus on an academic debate with the West. The East German historical discipline perceived its own identity strongly in a constant competition with Western historiography. This competition with the “bourgeois historians” was a strong element in the self-perception of East German historians.

Groehler’s work can be understood in the context of his discussions with what he called “imperialist Air War historians”. As his work and his numerous essays and reviews on Western historiography illustrate, Groehler energetically devoted himself to the critical discussion of “Western” accounts of the Allied bombings by historians and publicists such as Spetzler, Rumpf, and Irving. By criticizing their positive perspective on the Luftwaffe and the tendency to deny the terrorist nature of bombings of Rotterdam and Warsaw, Groehler accused Western historians of ignoring and denying Germany’s “main guilt” for the introduction of terror bombing into the war. He sharply criticized historians like Rumpf and Spetzler for making fundamental moral distinctions between the Luftwaffe and the Allied air arracks. Strongly politicizing the work of West German historians, Groehler stated that their perspective on the Luftwaffe should be regarded as rhetoric of a “neofascist” movement in the Federal Republic. For him, these works only served a nationalist apology for the Wehrmacht and the Luftwaffe.

On the other hand, he felt that many English and American accounts and

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481 E.g. Groehler, “Der “strategische” Luftkrieg” 439; Groehler, Geschichte des Luftkriegs 265.
such West German exceptions as Götz Bergander’s *Dresden im Luftkrieg* did exactly the opposite and tended to make excuses for the Anglo-American bombings and that denied their “terrorist” nature. By differentiating these Anglo-American and West German dominant views Groehler claimed an intermediate position for himself that was supposed to emphasize his distanced and academic point of view. Groehler was convinced that the tendency of other historians to apologize for either Anglo-American imperialism or fascist imperialism was a strong force distorting the academic interpretations of the bourgeois historians. He wanted to counter these distortions, not by simplistic propaganda but by historical and academic arguments based on a Marxist-Leninist historical perspective.

**Boog and Groehler**

West German historians like Boog and Bergander criticized Groehler in turn. In *Dresden im Luftkrieg* Bergander contested Groehler’s argument that the Dresden raid represented anti-Soviet politics, an argument he attributed to the anti-imperialist propaganda of the GDR. Bergander stressed that the Soviet Army was aware and approved of the British-American plans to bomb transportation centers near the Eastern Front. While, like Irving before him, Bergander found no evidence of an explicit demand from the Soviet side, he stressed that the bombing at least was part of a strategy to support the Soviet army in the East, and not intended to sabotage its advance, as was suggested by Groehler in *Geschichte des Luftkrieges*.

But it was Horst Boog who repeatedly challenged Groehler’s perspective. In

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484 Bergander, *Dresden* 222-235.
a review of *Geschichte des Luftkrieges* Boog countered Groehler’s attack on West German historiography, by denying Groehler any academic value whatsoever. For example, Boog stressed that Groehler’s decision not to include academic references had given him the freedom to set his prejudices free. The book was a textbook example of the “obligatory act of propaganda” typical for academic publications from the “East bloc”. In a general attack on GDR historiography, Boog concluded that it was “especially in the Federal Republic, where today a free and critical-academic military history was being written, which had not, as in *Mitteldeutschland* degenerated to a compliable weapon” in a political-ideological struggle with the West.485

This would be the beginning of a long dispute, in which Boog and Groehler contested each other’s main arguments and narrative. From the late 1970s Boog and Groehler repeatedly met at international conferences.486 During these meetings and in reviews and articles the Cold War debate of the 1950s was repeated in a more academic form. This became especially apparent during an international conference on the “conduct of the air war” organized by Boog in Freiburg in 1988. For this conference, Boog invited Groehler and suggested that he would address the Soviet air war. In his reply, in which Groehler accepted the invitation, however, he insisted on taking part in Boog’s panel on “air war and humanity.”487 While Boog once more stressed that until 1942 the *Luftwaffe* had refrained from terror attacks, Groehler presented himself as the critical historian, who, unlike his

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486  According to Boog in an interview with the author, the first encounter was during a conference in 1978 in Helsinki. Groehler stated that he had known Boog “since the late 1970s”. E.g. Bericht 10-9-1988, MfS AIM/17697/91, Bd.2 folder 345 ff.
West German colleague, acknowledged German guilt. Obviously aiming at Boog, Groehler concluded in his paper, that as before there was a “group of historians” in the Federal Republic, “who tried to deny the historical responsibility of Nazism for starting the terror bombing war”.

While not explicitly citing him, it is apparent that Groehler here implicitly criticized Boog, who in his paper had made the point that the Luftwaffe bombings of Warsaw, Rotterdam and Coventry had not been terror raids.

Groehler did not by any means regard this conference, organized by an academic department linked to the West German Bundeswehr, as a “neutral” academic event. He expressed his sensitivity for the political dimension of his visit to the conference in a lengthy report he wrote for the Stasi. He stressed that for the participating NATO officers, the main perspective was that of what a future air war would look like. Also, Groehler reported extensively on the different political and military attitudes among the participants, who included not only British, American and French and West German military officers but also several former members of the fascist Luftwaffe. It was especially among these Luftwaffe officers that Groehler saw a strong continuity of nationalist attitudes. “Whether they were discussing the fascist Luftwaffe or the Air Force of the Bundeswehr, they were only talking of “we”. In other words: in an unaltered mentality and tradition”. While Groehler concluded that a group of young West German officers clearly dissociated themselves from this perspective, he saw his own lecture on the air war as a politically relevant topic. “My topic”, Groehler reported, “referred directly to the effects of the bombing war on the German civilian population. Here a message

488 Groehler, “The Strategic Air War” 281.
489 In general it can be concluded that while Boog reviewed and cited Groehler, Groehler only indirectly reacted to Horst Boog’s work.
of peace could most clearly be made on the grounds of historical research".490

It is, of course, questionable, whether, as Groehler implied, this political motive was decisive in his choice for this theme. Groehler’s report, like his other reports on foreign visits, reflected in the first place what he thought the Stasi would be interested in and his reports are obviously colored by this consideration. On the other hand, it is clear that Groehler felt more comfortable in a position from which he could criticize “reactionary” West German military historians than having to directly defend Soviet military strategy. It is obvious that he interpreted Boog’s request to address the Soviet air force as an attempt to identify him with the Soviet military position, something he deliberately wanted to avoid. But it is also clear that Groehler wanted to debate the central issue of their dispute, rather than discuss an issue that had never been a central focus in his work.


The polemic between Boog and Groehler was to a certain degree continued after 1989. It is interesting to see how the changed political situation affected their polemic. In a (compared to his earlier one) relatively positive review of Bombenkrieg gegen Deutschland in 1992 Boog, on the one hand, praised the study as a “diverse” account with many new facts and information, but, on the other hand, empha-

490 Bericht 10-9-1988, MfS AIM/17697/91 Bd 2, folder 345-352. Groehler’s acknowledgment and the subsequent message of “peace” gave his work the political significance that was required by his Marxist historical starting point. On the other hand, Groehler, being an East German historian was also regarded with suspicion by his West German hosts. Amused, Groehler concluded in his report that the reactions to his speech were highly interesting, because most of the participants had expected to hear a “plebian tribune” speaking. That Groehler was regarded as a possible threat to national security also becomes clear from his exclusion from the general excursion to an intelligence air squadron at the military air port of Bremgarten, a situation Groehler was neither surprised nor offended by. Also, Groehler stated that he had the “lively impression of being constantly controlled and guarded” by a “friendly gentleman” who he suspected as an West German intelligence agent.
sized Groehler’s entanglement in the East German political system. Highly polemic Boog labeled Groehler a “Reisekader Chef”, referring to Groehler’s privileged position, which allowed him to travel to the West. According to Boog, Groehler’s book “contained many myths and untruths about the old German Luftwaffe” and offered many views, which were “distorted by the ideological blinders of the author”. Here Boog pointed to the still very clear elements of Groehler’s theory on the “imperialist air war”. Boog also criticized other West German historians, who shared Groehler’s conclusions on the bombing of Rotterdam, Coventry and Guernica. Interestingly, it was primarily Groehler’s ideologically charged language and his ideas on the Luftwaffe that Boog criticized rather than his interpretations of the Allied air war. One of Groehler’s central arguments, however, as a Boog’s most recent publication shows, was not refuted by Boog. In discussing the planning of “Operation Thunderclap” Boog concluded that the Allies had “also wanted to demonstrate allied air power to the Soviets”.

In his critical perspective on the Luftwaffe, Groehler found West Germans, such as Klaus Maier, Manfred Messerschmidt or Götz Bergander, who shared his opinion that the Luftwaffe had initiated the conscious bombing of civilians. What is interesting about Groehler’s position in the late 1980s, however, is that, while towards the GDR colleagues and authorities he grounded his view on the air war with the argument that it served the anti-fascist ideology of the GDR, in the context of West German debate he tried to avoid this position. This is already clear

in his position during the Freiburg conference, where he presented himself as a critical historian who acknowledged German guilt. But especially in his critical reflections on the Luftwaffe and on the way the history of the air war had been distorted in the light of memory politics in East and West he successfully could adjust his views to a more critical West German perspective on the air war, which was represented by historians like Bergander, but also by military historians as Klaus Maier and Manfred Messerschmidt. For example, while Groehler in Bombenkrieg gegen Deutschland still criticized Bergander’s work as an attempt to legitimize the “imperialist barbarity”, the criticism on GDR memory politics he included in the introduction are for a large part based on Bergander’s book.494

Especially after 1990 this critical approach to German memory politics would be a main starting point for Groehler to integrate his views on the air war within a broader narrative on German history, now that the old “anti-fascist” myth had lost its validity. As already in his 1990 paper in Dresden, his post-1989 publications are all characterized by a critical commentary on the dangers of a “new patriotism” based on “self pity”, which risked overlooking German responsibility for the Second World War. Considering the similarities in argumentation, this was actually a small step from his earlier critique on the “imperialist air war historians”.495

494 Groehler for example uses the same quotes as Bergander, and also draws a very similar conclusion. See: Bergander, Dresden; Groehler, Bombenkrieg gegen Deutschland.
495 For example see: Groehler, “Moralbomben im Zweiten Weltkrieg” 579; Groehler, “Dresden” 141.
Conclusion: German historical accounts on the air war in the light of personal memory and competing narratives

Once again the role of these historians shows that it is important to see their work not merely as an academic exchange of interpretations but also to see these interpretations in the light of competing narratives and collective memories and in their historical context. While Bergander’s work was academic in tone and perspective, he also worked as a journalist. Moreover, the “professionals” Boog and Groehler also took part in a broader memory discourse by contributing to newspaper articles and interviews and by reflecting on the broader questions regarding the appropriate memory of the air war. Boog’s recent contributions to the right-wing newspaper Junge Freiheit reflect a clear position on the conservative end of the German debate on the appropriate memory of the war. Bergander’s attempts to deconstruct popular myths about Dresden, on the other hand, are also motivated by an aversion to the political appropriation of Dresden by both Communist propaganda as well as rightwing revisionists. Groehler positioned himself as a defender of a critical emphasis on German guilt, first as an anti-fascist, and later in the context of the liberal-left discourse on Vergangenheitsbewältigung.

Moreover, while these historians all concentrated on an academic debate on the air war, because they had been born in the 1920s and 1930s, they had all personally experienced the air war and were at least partly talking from personal experience. And while all try to appropriate the role of the “neutral” historian, their work often reflected the tension between these experiences and their work as historians. While Bergander based his alternative perspective not only on his archival research but also on personal memories that contradicted interpreta-
tions that became dominant after 1945. Boog and Groehler saw their personal experience more problematically. For example, in his introduction to the publication of Arthur Harris’s *Despatch on War operations*, entitled “Harris- A German view”, Boog stated that writing on Harris from the perspective of a German who had experienced the air war as a schoolboy, he felt “honoured and embarrassed at the same time”. On the other hand, Boog continued “as a historian, one should at least be able to try to give a dispassionate, balanced, differentiated and critical account of the past”. A similar argument can be found in the work of Groehler. In *Bombenkreig gegen Deutscherland* Groehler stated that the attacks were a formative childhood experience, in which one had to “confront himself in one way or the other”. Like Boog, Groehler claimed that the goal of his historical account was “to objectify” his own “subjectivity”, “without renouncing his personal concern”.

This implicit notion of a certain partiality, which had to be overcome by historical research illustrates that both historians were aware of the tension and interdependence between their historical accounts and their personal memories. But their perspectives can best be explained in the context of their academic institutions and collective memory discourses, or master narratives on the German pasts. While Bergander’s and to a different degree also Messerschmidt’s perspective can be seen as leading to the pluralistic view on the air war that will be discussed later, some concluding remarks can be made about the historical debate on the air war in Germany up to the early 1990s. The thoroughly researched works of Olaf Groehler and Horst Boog can be seen as the first serious attempts to write compre-
hensive accounts of the Allied bombings and their consequences. Both Boog and Groehler took a certain distance from earlier West German accounts, especially in their contextualization and differentiated analysis of the military effects of the Allied strategic bombings. While earlier accounts had often given a stereotypical denunciatory view in which the entire bombing campaign was considered militarily senseless and a criminal terrorizing of civilians, Boog and Groehler distinguished different phases of the air war, the variety of strategic concepts and aims, and different levels of military effectiveness and moral legitimacy. Sometimes this went hand in hand with a critique of earlier narratives. At times, as is illustrated by his critical review of a popular East German book on Dresden, Groehler even openly criticized certain aspects of the politicized discourse of SED propaganda.

On the other hand, like the work of Boog, Groehler’s accounts reflect continuities with earlier narrative structures. Their work shows how the popular narrative of German suffering was continued in academic historical work from the 1970s and 1980s. Apart from the exceptional study of Bergander and few other articles like Messerschmidt’s essays on air war and international law, even with the professionalizing of air war historiography in the 1970s and 1980s, the basic elements of earlier narratives prevailed. In the work of Boog a certain exaggeration of strategic differences between methods of the RAF and the Luftwaffe continued to lead to a basically one-sided moral denunciation of the Allied air war, in which the trope of “German suffering” formed the core element.

The arguments of both Boog and Groehler are similar to earlier accounts and can be seen as efforts to integrate these narratives into a professional academic historiography. As influential members of their academic institutions they not only provided earlier narratives with more thorough research and more nuanced argu-
ments, but also canonized their versions of the Allied bombings in historical overviews that were developed by the ZIG as well as the MGFA as “official” perspectives on the Second World War. Both historians not only represented personal views on this issue, but represented a more general view on the Second World War. Like earlier works Groehler’s “imperialist air war doctrine” interpreted the history of World War II from the perspective of a political struggle of socialism against imperialism. Imperialism, with fascism as its most aggressive form, was the responsible and “guilty” force behind the Allied bombings. Dresden in effect was a first step in the Cold War and not so much part of the heroic battle against the Third Reich. The “innocent” German people had endured its consequences, just as they would should Western imperialism unleash a nuclear war.

In spite of the fact that in debates Groehler identified himself with the critical West German discourse of German guilt, his accounts until 1990 reflect a perspective on German suffering that bore certain resemblances to earlier GDR accounts but also underlined an image of the Germans as a group of collective innocent victims. The Germans were dissociated from their regime and seen as double victims of the Nazi dictatorship and Allied experimental power politics. Groehler even stressed that in the German cities it was defenseless civilians, not the “henchmen of Maidanek” who were targeted.

The parallels between their narratives are remarkable. In spite of their fierce debates on the role of the Luftwaffe and the “imperialist” motives of the Allies, the work of Boog and Groehler shares some basic narrative elements. The Germans appear as an undifferentiated and passive collective of victims. Moreover, the Allied air forces and their leaders are seen as the driving forces behind a strategy. While Boog emphasized this by making the formal argument that the British
had “started” the air war, in Groehler’s account this focus was different. While he stressed that the Luftwaffe had begun the bombing war and morally criticized the “terror bombing” of Rotterdam and Coventry, the actual focus of his accounts is wholly on the suffering of Germans due to Allied bombings. While he made the argument that the fascist regime and the Luftwaffe were guilty for starting the war, the actions linked to the suffering of German civilians are those of the “imperialist” forces and historical actors like Churchill and Harris. His adoption of the West German discourse on German guilt found its way only to a limited degree into his historical narrative on the air war. Only in a few articles written after 1990, did Groehler, to varying degrees, challenge the basic elements of his earlier narrative.

It was only in studies like Bergander’s Dresden im Luftkrieg, the articles by Manfred Messerschmidt and, as will be argued later on, in new social historical works on the air war, that this narrative of German suffering was contested and problematized. The work of the two central German academic historians working on the air war, however, shows that in terms of central argumentation and narrative structure strong continuities can be located. But while Groehler and Boog still focused on the military history of the air war, in 2002 a new account by Jörg Friedrich turned the perspective wholly toward the suffering experience of the German civilians, and with this opened a wide public debate in the German press and academic discourse on Germans as victims.
Breaking taboos

Jörg Friedrich and the “rediscovery” of the Allied bombings in the United Germany

Introduction

With the ending of the Cold War rivalry between East and West Germany an important context for the interpretation of the Allied air war had disappeared. In the new, united Germany, little place was left for the East German interpretations or the anti-Western propaganda that had accompanied it. After 1990 even the more differentiated views of Olaf Groehler were largely ignored by German historians. Though his West German connections had facilitated an academic position for him, the appearance of Groehler’s monograph Bombenkrieg gegen Deutschland in 1990 was either ignored or dismissed and associated with the ideologically restricted climate of GDR historiography. But more generally, important parameters, which had influenced and colored the interpretations of the Allied air war until the late 1980s disappeared after 1990. On the one hand, the ideological competition between the GDR and the Federal Republic no longer had a current relevance. On the other hand, the threat of a possible nuclear conflict no longer had political significance for the memory and interpretation of the Allied air war.

The disappearance of the Cold War as a context that could give a contemporary meaning to the Allied bombings did not reduce interest in this issue. On the

contrary, during the 1990s in reunified Germany the destruction of Dresden was increasingly commemorated on a national level and public interest in the air war grew rapidly, especially at the turn of the Millennium. W.G. Sebald’s essay Luftkrieg und Literatur (1999) received considerable attention among literary critics and also in press. But the publication of Der Brand (2002) by Jörg Friedrich inspired public interest in the Allied bombings on a previously unseen scale, catalyzing a wave of memory-literature, documentaries and films. Also, the debate following Der Brand generated a new academic interest, both in the history of the air war and in the role the bombing experience had played in German memory culture.

This book and the debate which followed raise different questions. In the first part of this chapter, I will look at Der Brand and analyze the way it interpreted and narrated the Allied bombings. What elements made Der Brand into such a controversial work? Did Friedrich bring a new perspective on the air war or did it “recycle” a narrative that had dominated the West German discourse during the 1950s? To answer these questions, I will include a study of his earlier works, Das Gesetz des Krieges (1993) and Die kalte Amnestie (1984), which, though dealing with Nazi perpetrators and the failure of the postwar international community to bring their crimes to justice, both contain chapters on the Allied bombings.500 While these studies have often been neglected in the many articles and reviews, which try to understand Friedrich’s complex position, integrating these works in an analysis of Friedrich’s perspective on the air war can help to better understand some of the most controversial aspects of Der Brand. In particular, the function of his oft-criticized references to the Holocaust can be clarified by looking at these works. I will

therefore look at *Der Brand* not only as a starting point for a public debate but as a narrative which is characterized by strong continuities, both of Friedrich’s earlier work as of the West German historiography on the Allied bombings.

In the second part of this chapter, I will explore the recent conjuncture in the German popular interest in the air war. I will analyze the impact of Friedrich’s book on both the public debate and place it in the renewed interest for German suffering during World War II. To what extent can *Der Brand* and the discussions that were provoked by it, be understood as the result of a memory culture that underwent important changes after German Unification in 1990? The third part of this chapter deals with the significance of *Der Brand* and the “German victimhood debate” for recent academic historiography. While it is commonly acknowledged that *Der Brand* generated broad public discussion on the air war, its impact on academic research is less clear. This raises two questions regarding the relationship between the narrative represented in Friedrich’s *Der Brand* and recent developments in German professional historiography. First: to what extent do the interpretations in Friedrich’s *Der Brand* represent a general trend in German historiography, or does this book, as some have argued, have to be seen as part of a discourse on German memory, which largely took place outside of academia? The second question is, whether recent historiography has offered an alternative narrative of the Allied bombings and to what extent this narrative can be understood as a reaction to the new public interest in the Allied bombings that was initiated by Jörg Friedrich.
*Remembering German suffering in a United Germany*

During the 1990s, the air war was increasingly discussed in the public discourse, especially in 1995, when the 50th anniversary of the end of the war was commemorated. In his study *Der Krieg als Text* (1998) Klaus Naumann has pointed out that in this year more than in previous years commemorations focused on German suffering from the Allied air war. Naumann argued that for the first time since German unification public commemoration focused extensively on the bombings. German cities in East and West commemorated their destruction during the war, and local, regional and national press all wrote extensively on the history of the bombings and the memory and commemorations.501

What also became clear in the mid-1990s was that the 50th anniversaries of the destructions, commemorated between 1993 and 1995, took place in a different national framework. Before 1990 Dresden had stood out in both German states as the ultimate symbol for German suffering, a meaning that in a sense stood for the whole of Germany and exceeded the East German state. But even though Dresden was remembered in the West as well as in the East, the division of Germany had been a crucial framework for the way the destruction was commemorated and linked to the present. For the first time the Allied bombings were commemorated in the context of a united Germany. This meant that while certain patterns of interpretation were continued, German Unification and other political devel

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501 Klaus Naumann, *Der Krieg als Text. Das Jahr 1945 im kulturellen Gedächtnis der Presse* (Hamburg: 1998) 33-71. Writing his book only a few years later Naumann’s emphasis on 1995 as a “Schwellenjahr” of air war memory seems slightly overstated in retrospect. On the one hand, Aleida Assmann has pointed out that the attention for air war in 1995 was relatively minor compared to the “dam burst” of the “German victims” narrative, which emerged when eight years later Friedrich’s *Der Brand* provoked a much further-reaching debate. On the other hand, looking at local memory cultures Malte Thiessen and others have pointed out that the “boom” of air war memory, with increased public interest in the memory and commemoration had been advancing steadily since 1985: Thiessen, *Eingebrannt ins Gedächtnis* 182-184, 255-373.
opments of the 1990s provided a new context in which the bombings were translated to the present.502

That Dresden had potential to serve as a symbol for united German memory had been immediately recognized by Chancellor Helmut Kohl, who had shortly after the fall of the Berlin Wall laid a wreath at the Dresden Frauenkirche in December 1989.503 Also, already during the 45th anniversary of Dresden’s destruction in 1990, new meaning was attributed to Dresden as a national “united” site of memory. For example, an article in the FAZ, discussing the decision that had been made to reconstruct the Frauenkirche, explained this as a symbolic gesture to give shape to a new perspective on the Second World War and a “chance to leave the horrible experience of the Second World War behind and approach a better future in a United Germany”.504 By 1995, Dresden could manifest itself as a national place of memory. For the commemoration of the 50th anniversary on 13 February 1995 the city organized a series of commemorative activities, with prominent speeches by the Bishop of Coventry and Bundespresident Roman Herzog.

The increasing prominence with which Dresden manifested itself as a national place of memory can be seen as a prelude to the enormous interest in the air war and more generally in the issue of German suffering since the early 2000s. For the debate on the Allied bombings, an important catalyst was Luftkrieg und Literatur (1999), an essay by Winfried Sebald, a German writer and Professor of German literature, who lived in England. It was based on studies and lectures given by Sebald during the 1980s and 1990s on the way German writers had failed to

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502 Naumann, Der Krieg als Text 34-47.
come to terms with the air war.\textsuperscript{505}

Sebald’s thesis was that there had been a general silence surrounding the memory of the Allied bombings in Germany after the war. This had become especially apparent in the absence of literary works on this important subject. Sebald stated that the Germans in their primary concern with the reconstruction of their destroyed country did not face the deep trauma of the bombing-experience that had had such a devastating impact in the lives of so many. The air war, Sebald stated, “hardly left a painful trace in German collective consciousness”. With the rebuilding of the ruins, the memory of their destruction disappeared and the bombing-experience seemed to have been erased from the German memory landscape. When in 2002 Jörg Friedrich published Der Brand he in a sense answered Sebald’s plea, and in interviews Friedrich often confirmed that the air war had earlier been ignored and considered unworthy of discussion.\textsuperscript{506} Sebald, who died 2001 from a car crash and unfortunately missed the impact of Friedrich’s book, had already praised a chapter on the air war in Friedrich’s earlier work Das Gesetz des Krieges (1993) as a single example in which a German historian had described the effects of strategic bombing in an appropriate way.\textsuperscript{507}


\textsuperscript{506} Annette Langer, “Interview mit dem Berliner Historiker Jörg Friedrich: Von guten Massakern und bösen Massakern ” \textit{Spiegel-online}, 27-2 2003. http://www.spiegel.de/sptv/special/0,1518,237918,00.html. While in \textit{Der Brand} Friedrich referred to previous works of Groehler and Boog in this interview Friedrich claimed that \textit{Der Brand} was “the first book devoted to the bombings against Germany and with it to the largest battlefield of the Second World War”.

\textsuperscript{507} Sebald, \textit{Luftkrieg und Literatur} 76, 86-87. In this conclusion Sebald seems to also have been led by a narrow notion of what was to be seen as “appropriate” history writing. His focus on a genuine “form” of memory not distorted by symbolism or political instrumentalization also allowed him to ignore the always present but often politically exploited memory of the Dresden raid, as well as other “political” commemorations on a local as
5.1. Jörg Friedrich’s *Der Brand*

*Jörg Friedrich’s Fire*

Though Friedrich’s *Der Brand* has been thoroughly discussed, this book, its interpretation of the air war, and the reason for its success still raise some unanswered questions. The question for example, as to how *Der Brand* can be placed in the German historiography of the air war, is still disputed. *Der Brand* has a structure that is rather unorthodox for a historical account and in many ways uses narrative forms that are more common in literature than in history. This becomes apparent in the radical identification with the perspective of the German victims, which results in a radical lack of interest shown in *Der Brand* for the role of Germans as “victims, bystanders and perpetrators of Nazi crimes”.

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within the context of the development of the Second World War, it aims to create a “narrative of loss”. Moreover, by structuring the book in chapters with titles such as “weapon”, “strategy”, “land”, “protection”, “we”, “I” and “stone,” Friedrich chose a thematic rather than a chronological approach. Where other accounts more or less tell a chronological story, *Der Brand* manipulates the temporal structure by using flash-backs and flash-forwards, sometimes even time-leaping back to the Middle Ages. Starting with an attack on Wuppertal in May 1943, the book draws the reader right into the climax of the air attacks on German cities. The central starting point in this book is the juxtaposition of an apparently planned “mass killing” by the Allied “weapons” and “strategy” on the one hand, and, on the other hand, the experience of German suffering in its different dimensions (“I”, “we”, “land” and “stone”). With a compelling style unparalleled even by David Irving or any other popular account, Friedrich created a “action-atmosphere” which emphasizes every painful and horrible detail of the Allied air attacks. In quick succession eyewitness accounts are followed by historical and moral considerations on the Allied strategy. Allied strategic ideas and practical conduct are followed by lengthy details of the physiognomic effects of fire bombing on human bodies and horrific images drawn from various eye-witness sources. These again are combined with stunning contemplations on the nature of “the firestorm” created by area bombing and described as “another planet incompatible with life” and the “spa-
tial extension of death”, in which “the victim” is even deprived of his own death, because he “finds himself in a sphere in which life has ceased”.511

Apart from these abrupt changes of perspective and stunning descriptions of human suffering Friedrich’s style also is characterized by the use of charged language, which provoked a direct association with the Holocaust. It was especially the suggestion that Germans had been “ausgerottet” (exterminated)512 and “gassed” by carbon monoxide poisoning in air raid shelters which provoked a direct association with the gassing of Jews in extermination camps.513 The use of words such as “crematoria” for burning air shelters added a similar charge to the book.514

Narrative continuities

Apart from his distinctive style however, Friedrich was travelling “a familiar route” and to a high degree drew on a long continuity of narrative elements and interpretations.515 Jörg Arnold and Ralf Blank have pointed out that Friedrich heavily relied on and re-assembled local historiography, copying their decontextualized and highly local approach.516 But there are also strong parallels with the West

511 Friedrich, Der Brand 84, 194.
512 Ibid. 114, 432.
513 Ibid. 342, 361, 378, 505.
514 Other terminology which evoked such an equation were the use of “bookburning” to describe the destroyed German libraries and especially the use of the word like “Hinrichtungsstellen” (places of execution) and “Massenvernichtung” (mass annihilation) to describe both the practical conduct as well as the intentions of the Allied bombings. Ibid. e.g. 110, 361, 386, 515.
German historiography of the 1950s and 1960s. Though in an interview Friedrich referred to Boog and Groehler as his most important predecessors, in his interpretations, however, *Der Brand* comes closer to the accounts of the 1950s and 1960s.

Like Hans Rumpf, Eberhard Spetzler and David Irving, Friedrich regarded the air war as a completely senseless act of terror against innocent civilians. Friedrich too created a schematic juxtaposition of victims and perpetrators, which was even more emphasized by his stylistic use of universalizing categories such as “the bombardier” on the one side and “the exterminated” on the other.\(^{517}\) As a consequence the Germans appear as sole subjects of annihilation and terror and therefore as a collective of victims, unwillingly drawn into the war and subject to Allied terror as well as to that of their regime, since the population had “no choice between bomb terror and regime terror, but to save itself from both”.\(^{518}\)

Another continuity can be found in the emphasis on the distinction between British and German bombings. While German bombings were not always excused, the *Luftwaffe* bombings were distinguished from the Allied bombings as a phenomenon of a different moral dimension. While not denying Hitler’s dreams of massive terror bombing and the initiative of the *Luftwaffe* in bombing civilians, Friedrich did stress that the Allied strategic bombing was “something completely different”. While the German *Luftwaffe* remained a “tactical weapon for ground support”, strategic bombing aimed to win the war from the air by consciously “erasing” German cities. Somewhat paradoxically Friedrich, on the other hand, did not exonerate the *Luftwaffe* attacks and even stated that the bombing of Rotterdam and Warsaw could have easily been prevented by the Germans, but he

\(^{517}\) Friedrich, *Der Brand* 432. Also see: Süß, “Erinnerungen an den Luftkrieg” 21.

\(^{518}\) Friedrich, *Der Brand* 371.
still clung to the earlier narrative of a moral distinction to stress the uniqueness of British strategy.519

Moreover, the broader context of the Second World War, Germany’s total warfare in Eastern Europe as well as the development of Germany as a national-socialist dictatorship is almost wholly absent. Instead Der Brand focused only on the strategic bombings, concentrating on the British strategy and the effects. As historical context only the centuries-long cultural history of the bombed cities is depicted, not the actual historical developments which led to the outbreak of the Second World War.520 Also as had earlier works, Friedrich traced the origins of the terror bombing to the highly personalized role of certain British military leaders. Though he also saw strategic bombing as a consequence of scientific developments and the inner dynamics of war, Friedrich also pointed explicitly at Harris and Churchill as instigators and “pioneers” of this concept.521

519 Ibid. 64, 70-73. 131-133, 299. Also: Jörg Friedrich, “Die Rechtsnatur der anglo-amerikanischen Bombenoffensive im Zweiten Weltkrieg,” in Der Bombenkrieg und seine Opfer, ed. Bernd Heidenreich and Sönke Neitzel, Polis 39 (Wiesbaden: 2004) 71-81, here: 76-77. It should be noted though that Friedrich made a far less clear moral distinction than for example Horst Boog made. Though Friedrich recognized that Warsaw and Rotterdam had been “defended cities” according to The Hague conventions and that Hitler had initially been reluctant to fully unleash terror bombings on British cities, Friedrich did not deny the strong presence of “terror” in German warfare. He stressed that Hitler had been reluctant to openly bomb civilian targets in Britain only out of fear of retaliation. “The real causers of terror fear its reciprocity”, is how Friedrich explained Hitler’s attitude. Also in Das Gesetz des Krieges Friedrich devoted lengthy attention to the bombing of Coventry, stressing that in spite of the military significance of the armament industry, the city had been chosen as a target because of its easily flammable medieval city centre. “Destruction of military targets went hand in hand with the demoralizing of the civilian population”. E.g. Friedrich, Gesetz des Krieges 53. Friedrich also distinguished the British from the Americans who he claims were led by “humane” considerations. Friedrich, Der Brand 30, 106.


521 Friedrich especially emphasized the role of Churchill and stated that strategic bombing had not been a “private war” of Arthur Harris: Friedrich, Der Brand 61-70, 76, 86-91, 169.
It is therefore not surprising that by reproducing terminology and interpretations from earlier accounts, without reflecting on their meaning and history, various patterns of Nazi propaganda were echoed. Friedrich’s image of the Germans who suffered from the air attacks reflected the image of a cohesive *Volksgemeinschaft* and largely excluded the stories of people not in this community. The stories of Jews, forced laborers and other victims of Nazi terror were excluded from Friedrich’s narrative of suffering. Thus a very problematic image of “the Germans” was transmitted, one that to a high degree reflected the ideal of Nazi propaganda.\(^{522}\)

Moreover, Friedrich often evoked the image of a coherent community of Germans, battered but not broken by the Allied terror. Friedrich interpreted the bombings as a(n) (eventually successful) “test for national cohesion” and used terms like *Zivilgemeinschaft* (civil community), which echoed the propaganda of *Volksgemeinschaft*.\(^{523}\) Though Friedrich stressed that the Germans had lost their trust in Nazi propaganda and reacted with apathy and cynicism, a heroic and sometimes ethnically determined image of the Germans was nevertheless transmitted in the subtext. Not only did Friedrich use language that echoed the ideology of ethnic continuity, referring to “German tribes”, but he also praised German air protection and adopted such propagandistic terms as “*Blutzoll*”, which stressed the heroism and sacrifices of the Germans.\(^{524}\)

In reporting the undisturbed reaction of the people living in Berlin, Friedrich stressed their “their unique and crafty character”. More generally, Friedrich emphasized the Germans’ ability to forget the horrific image

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524  Friedrich, *Der Brand* 463. See the similar term “*Blutopfer*” in: Rumpf, *Das war der Bombenkrieg* 113.
of mass killing as something that “can’t be imagined in a Roman country”.

This presence of stereotypical classifications also point to the continuity of
another trope: that of German culture. Jörg Arnold argued in his review that Frie-
drich focused on the cultural dimension and the impact of local perspective, giv-
ing local cultural history as a point of reference instead of the nation. However,
one cannot conclude that the national perspective was truly abandoned by Frie-
drich. His book radically limited itself to the suffering of German citizens, ignoring
the effects of area bombing in other parts of the world. Interestingly the chapter
“land” focuses not only on the different cultural histories of German cities, trac-
ing them back into the late antiquity and the Middle Ages, but also puts them in
a European context. By doing so, and by supposing a deliberate attack on Euro-
pean cultural heritage, the book clearly echoes early German historiography as
well as Nazi propaganda which suggested that the British and Americans were
not only waging war against the German army but were aiming to wipe out the
essence of European culture.

This image was evoked in two different narrative ways. First, especially in
the chapters “land” and “stone” the long history and beauty of German cities
was illustrated with romantic summaries of cultural history. Interestingly, many
of these short histories, by referring to Charlemagne’s or Napoleon’s empires, or
the Hanseatic traditions stress the European character of German culture. And

525 Friedrich, Der Brand 486. While in the English translation it is suggested that this
view on “Roman countries” belongs to the workers, in the German original Friedrich
suggests that this is his own view by not using the conjunctive form. See for example for the
exact same argument. Rumpf, Das war der Bombenkrieg 128-129. Other racial stereotypes
can be found in his frequent descriptions of charred Germans, who had been “black like
negroes” or having “lips like negroes”. See. Friedrich, Der Brand 434, 483.
526 Arnold, “A narrative of loss”.
527 According to Friedrich the Hansa gave the world “a north eastern Area of civilization”. Friedrich, Der Brand 180.
also in Friedrich’s geographic descriptions “land”, Friedrich described Germany as the centre of “Old Europe”. The effect of these references to the long history of cultural highlights is to create a contrast with the abrupt and harsh descriptions of their destruction. The emphasis on the material and cultural quality of the destruction also suggests that the Allies had tried to commit “cultural genocide” on the Germans.

The other strategy designed to evoke this idea of an attacked “Abendland” was to draw parallels between the air raids and “mongoloid” invasions during the Middle Ages. With phrases similar to those used in Fuller’s account and Goebbels’ propaganda, Friedrich referred to the Huns (“born war criminals”) to suggest that occidental culture was attacked by raging hordes. The bombing of Cologne “marked the way into the world of the battle of the Huns”. Like Rumpf and others, Friedrich claimed that the intention of the British and Americans was out to “historically annul” Prussian militarism. After “the war against Germany’s present” had already been won the last phase of the air raids was, according to Friedrich, an attack on German culture and an attempt to destroy “the roots of the past that had borne the disaster” of the Third Reich.

528 The various digressions to medieval European history form a striking element in this book, which otherwise seemed to focus only on the history of the air war, even ignoring the most elementary context of the history of the Third Reich and the Second World War. Ibid. 179-180, 205. Friedrich for example stated that “The Rhine is Europe’s north-south axis” and “Old Europe was largely the history of the struggles for the Rhine”.

529 Ibid. 137, 257-259. Also see: Moeller, “On the History of Man-made Destruction” 117.

530 Friedrich, Der Brand 524.

531 Ibid. 190. A similar argument was revived by German writer Walter Kempowski. In his mosaic of collected eye-witness accounts Walter Kempowski, Das Echo lot. Fuga furiosa. Ein kollektives Tagebuch. Winter 1945 4 vols. (München: 1999). Kempowski provided another attempt to reconstruct a collective memory of the air war. By simply letting various eye-witnesses “speak for themselves” Kempowski tried to provide a direct and pluralistic perspective, which not only showed German victimhood but included many citations of Hitler and Goebbels to emphasize their responsibility for the suffering. However, Kempowski’s mosaic was a clearly constructed narrative, which failed to wholly detach itself from interpretive patterns, which had been shaped during the war. In an interview with Der Spiegel Kempowski contemplated the destruction of the Frauenkirche in Dresden by
But the most striking characteristic of *Der Brand*, which also led to the strongest criticism are its various references to the Holocaust. The exact function of these references to the Holocaust was still subject to debate even among those who clearly criticized Friedrich for integrating them in his work. While historians Hans-Ulrich Wehler and Hans Mommsen criticized Friedrich for doing this, they interpreted it as a consequence of his emotional engagement and as “slips” or “linguistic derailing”. They saw aspects of Friedrich’s work as problematic but this nevertheless did not prevent them from regarding his work as a great accomplishment. Friedrich’s previous works on the history of the Holocaust gave him the benefit of the doubt for not wanting to suppress this history.\(^{532}\) Other critics however have judged him more harshly. Nicholas Stargardt saw Friedrich’s implicit comparisons as a conscious strategy and pointed at the “danger of trivializing and relativizing the Holocaust”.\(^{533}\) Hannes Heer for example went even further and interpreted Friedrich’s apparent equation of the air war and the Holocaust as a deliberate attempt to relativize the Nazi crimes.\(^{534}\)  

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\(^{533}\) Stargardt, “Opfer der Bomben”.

Such commentaries have not satisfactorily answered the question as to the exact function of the linguistic references to the Holocaust in *Der Brand*. Friedrich’s position and the motives behind his comparisons can be better understood by looking at earlier works by Jörg Friedrich, which have often been ignored. What is interesting is that Friedrich differed fundamentally on one crucial aspect from authors like Spetzler and Rumpf. Unlike these authors Friedrich had engaged extensively in a critical confrontation with German perpetratorship and strongly criticized the “amnesty” that had been granted to former perpetrators. Friedrich wrote several historical studies, which were regarded as very critical comments on German memory culture, with arguments normally associated with the left-liberal discourse of the Federal Republic. In *Freispruch für die Nazijustiz* (1983) and *Die kalte Amnestie* (1984) he strongly criticized the failed prosecution of those who were responsible for crimes committed during Nazi rule and the resulting massive “cold” amnesty. And in *Das Gesetz des Krieges* (1993) Friedrich explored the involvement of the *Wehrmacht* leadership in the genocidal politics of the Third Reich. Though not working for an academic institution and not applying the methodological rules and methods of academic history writing, Friedrich’s works were

535 In reviews especially Friedrich’s contribution to the *Enzyklopädie des Holocaust*, has been mentioned by his defenders to show that Friedrich could not be regarded as someone who denied or suppressed the history of the Nazi crimes. For this encyclopedia Friedrich mainly contributed an article on the trials of Nazi persecutors: Israel Gutman et al., eds., *Enzyklopädie des Holocaust. Die Verfolgung und Ermordung der europäischen Juden* (Berlin: 1993) vol II, 1019-1049. As will be discussed below Hannes Heer has drawn parallels between *Der Brand* and *Das Gesetz des Krieges*. Otherwise, little has been said on the relationship between his earlier works and *Der Brand*.


538 Friedrich, *Kalte Amnestie* .

539 Friedrich, *Gesetz des Krieges*. 
acknowledged as serious contributions to the debate on the trial of Nazi perpetrators in the Federal Republic.540

This does not mean that these earlier works are undisputed. Hannes Heer, one of the initiators of the first and most controversial Wehrmacht exhibition, criticized Friedrich’s problematic view of the Wehrmacht. Unlike most other critics of Friedrich, Heer included a critique of Das Gesetz des Krieges in his analysis of Der Brand. In his polemic against Friedrich, Heer argued that, by claiming the Wehrmacht had merely instrumentalized anti-Semitism, Friedrich suggested that the military leaders did not really associate themselves with Nazi ideology and had recycled the old myth of the “clean Wehrmacht”. The result according to Heer was “flat acquittal” for the Wehrmacht leaders. Moreover, Heer argued that there was a strong connection between Friedrich’s apologetic account on the Wehrmacht and his strong moral condemnation of the Allied leaders. “While in Gesetz des Krieges the participation of the Wehrmacht in the genocide of the Jews and in the partial annihilation of other Slavic population is reconstructed as military operations, in Der Brand the air attacks which pursued military goals are turned into a Holocaust on the Germans”.541

Though Friedrich’s image of the Wehrmacht indeed echoes popular images of the apolitical “clean” Wehrmacht at times, Heer’s judgment is not only too one-sided, but also fails to recognize another continuity in Friedrich’s work.542 First, Heer’s note that Friedrich was “acquitting” the Wehrmacht does not do justice to

541 Heer, Vom Verschwinden der Täter 276-278, 302.
542 Assmann, “(In)Compatibility of Guilt and Suffering” 195-196.
the very critical comment on the role of the *Wehrmacht*, indeed linking it directly to the Holocaust and explicitly describing its participation in the genocide of the Jews and other inhabitants of Europe. Where most historians concerned with the air war largely avoided describing the Nazi crimes in detail, the opposite was the case in Friedrich’s work. Far from downplaying the impact of the crimes committed by Germans under Nazi rule, Friedrich elaborated extensively on the organization and practice of the ethnic politics, crimes, persecution and genocide of the Third Reich. Also Friedrich stressed that Hitler’s “race war” had not been a “secret mission of a crazed swastika-horde” but a “public matter” and an integral part of the “total war” that was fought by the Third Reich.543 With a strong sense for explicit details, Friedrich described the workings and legal status of the German crimes, especially those committed by the *Wehrmacht*.544

What is interesting is that in most of his works that primarily focused on Nazi crimes and their (failed) trials, Friedrich elaborated extensively on the Allied strategic bombings of German cities. Both his major accounts of Nazi crimes contained chapters on the Allied bombings, in which Friedrich denounced these as an illegal, immoral form of warfare that had proved unsuccessful in its aim to break German morale. Also exploring the lawfulness of bombings according to the international law and agreements that had been formalized in The Hague peace conventions, Friedrich drew the conclusion that the British and American bombings could not be seen as a justified or legal method of warfare.545

Though shorter, the style and language with which Friedrich described the Allied bombings in these chapters are remarkably similar to those found in the

543 Friedrich, *Gesetz des Krieges* 169-175, 187-188.
544 Ibid. e.g. 320-351, 412-451, 603-674.
545 Ibid. 18-19, 91-92.
Der Brand. As in Der Brand the writing was heavily charged with pathos and vividly described horrific scenes, which in many aspects resemble the documentary accounts of the 1950s and 1960s by authors like Hans Rumpf and David Irving. Making use of different sources, such as Erich Nossack’s literary account Der Untergang and David Irving’s Destruction of Dresden, in his treatment of the air war Friedrich integrated highly emotional and gruesome stories and details about the impact of the bombings in a polemic moral denunciation of the Allied attitude towards the Germans as a collective.\(^5\)\(^4\)\(^6\) Friedrich summarized the Allied strategy as an attempt to demoralize and at the same time punish the Germans for their support of Hitler, but especially focused on the perspective of the victims. Friedrich described their fear, agony and suffering in the most direct and explicit words available, elaborating on burning corpses, bodies that had become stuck in liquid asphalt and the exact physical workings of a “firestorm”, even describing the sound effects that were created by this storm.\(^5\)\(^4\)\(^7\)

What is puzzling and striking in Friedrich’s work is that while he also explicitly addressed the German crimes, he went much further in his comparison between the bombings and the genocidal practice of Nazi Germany than any of the previous accounts on the bombings. The integration of chapters on Allied bombings in studies that primarily focused on Nazi crimes made the comparison and the suggested equation of the bombings with the Holocaust much more direct. Together with the mass murder of the “Final Solution” Friedrich presented the Allied strategic bombings and the droppings of the atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki as examples of a new stage of warfare, the total “war of exter-

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\(^{546}\) Hans Erich Nossack, Der Untergang (Hamburg: 1948).

\(^{547}\) E.g. Friedrich, Kalte Amnestie 22-24; Friedrich, Gesetz des Krieges 737-741.
mination”. Though Friedrich distinguished the “ideologically motivated” race war against an “imagined” threat from the “punishment” of the Allied terror bombings against the Germans, he regarded both as a means of warfare in the total character of war that made the terror of civilians a central instrument in warfare. The “calculated” and thoroughly planned mass destruction of civilians marked a new level in the totality and criminality of war. Friedrich stressed that the terror bombardments make victims in a wholly impersonal and indiscriminate manner. Where “conventional war crimes” require a certain “encounter between victim and perpetrator (…) extermination (Ausrottung) occurs differently. The air bombardment creates a condition of annihilation of life” Friedrich argued, proving his point by pointing to the high percentage of children among the victims.548

Friedrich’s sense for gruesome and vivid details should therefore not be regarded as a mere fascination with horrific stories, but serves a more specific purpose. It is exactly here where it becomes evident how Friedrich consciously searched for a linguistic proximity to language that is commonly associated with the Holocaust, something that critics have often pointed to when discussing Der Brand. In his short chapter on the bombings in Die kalte Amnestie Friedrich’s linguistic references and comparisons became most explicit. Here, Friedrich not only frequently used terms like Ausrottung and Vernichtung, words that immediately refer to the language used in the Third Reich to describe the extermination of the Jews and other victim groups, but even went so far as to call the area in which the firestorm blazed a “Ghetto” that was “sealed off”.549 Finally, Friedrich even repeatedly stressed that many victims of the bombings perished due to the intoxication

548 Friedrich, Gesetz des Krieges 158-159.
549 Friedrich, Kalte Amnestie 22.
of carbon monoxide, the same cause of death as the prisoners of Nazi extermination camps, thus making a direct equation of the bombings with the gassing of Jews and other victims of Nazi terror: “The fires had created carbon monoxide, that had inexorably and inodrously floated into the bunkers and had turned them into gas chambers. In the extermination camps of Treblinka, Belsec, Sobibor and Hadamar, which worked with carbon monoxide, victims showed the same red discoloring”. Friedrich stressed that the only difference here was that the intoxication of the Germans hiding in air-raid shelters “had not been planned by its causers, but resulted from the spontaneous working (Wirken) of the elements”.

What was Friedrich aiming at with his references to and comparisons with the Holocaust? Far from making an unconscious “linguistic derailing” it seems that Friedrich deliberately made such comparisons and integrated the Allied bombings in a study on Nazi war crimes to make a double point. On the one hand, Friedrich attempted to emphasize as clearly as possible that “formally” the Allies had “participated in the atrocities of the Second World War”. By killing about 500,000 civilians “about the same as the number of Jews, mentally ill, Gypsies and political dissidents coming from the German Reich that died”, the Allies had collectively and indiscriminately punished the Germans for their support of national-socialism “in Nazi-style”. With this the air war was seen as a phenomenon in which no longer was a battle fought but a “space of annihilation” was created. In spite of the dif-

550  Ibid. 17, 24.
551  Ibid. 27; Friedrich, Gesetz des Krieges 162. Also see the interview with Jörg Freidrich available on the website of the Dutch TV documentation on the history of Europe, In Europa, broadcast on VPRO network, 8 December 2008. Here Friedrich reacted to the arguments of one of the program’s researchers, whose family had been persecuted under the Third Reich and who felt that the Germans had gotten “what they deserved”. Friedrich reacted to this by claiming that he knew of only one man, Adolf Hitler, who felt that whole people deserved such a punishment. “In short: this is Nazi thinking, and nothing else”, Friedrich concluded. http://weblogs.vpro.nl/ineuropa/2008/12/08/killed-darlings-jorg-friedrich/ (final clip).

553 Because the Allies did not want to go into their strategic bombings no charges had been made against the responsible German \textit{Luftwaffe} leaders either. See: Friedrich, “Die Rechtsnatur” 77.}

Following this argument the victim-status of the Germans who suffered in Allied air attacks is effectively put on the same level as that of the victims of Nazi terror. Thus the culpability of the Allies approximates the criminality of the industrial killings of racial minorities in the Holocaust. Friedrich took this equation much further than even rightwing authors and former Nazis like Hans Rumpf had done. Still there is a certain tension between this seeming exoneration of German civilians as a collective of victims and, on the other hand, Friedrich’s emphasis on the collaboration of “normal Germans” and \textit{Wehrmacht} soldiers in the Holocaust.

A key to this apparent paradox can be found in looking at Friedrich’s point on the failed trial of perpetrators of this “war of extermination”. An obvious point Friedrich wanted to make is that one reason for the failure of the legal “coming to terms” with the Holocaust is the fact that Allied war crimes were not brought to trial, therefore giving the trials a character of “victor’s justice”.\footnote{Because the Allies did not want to go into their strategic bombings no charges had been made against the responsible German \textit{Luftwaffe} leaders either. See: Friedrich, “Die Rechtsnatur” 77.} Two aspects of the Allied attitude had therefore according to Friedrich contributed to a failure of an appropriate bringing to justice of the Nazi crimes. On the one hand, the Allied bombings in themselves had incorporated the idea that Germans as a collective (including even small children) could be held responsible for the crimes committed in the Third Reich. As such, they had undermined a differentiated notion of indi-
vidual responsibility. Moreover, by ignoring war crimes committed by the Allies, the trials had fuelled the arguments of the defense of Nazi perpetrators that the revolutionary new conditions of the “total war” made a legal judgment according to existing international law impossible. And for the “normal” Germans who were not on trial this attitude contributed to a line of thinking in which Germans could free themselves of responsibility and equate themselves with the Jewish victims of Nazi terror; since according to popular opinion “both Germans and Jews had been made hostage of an act for which they were not responsible. Both, according to this West German legend, had suffered a false collective guilt”.

Aufrechnung? The diverse functionality of Holocaust-comparisons

Based on this argumentation critics of Friedrich have pointed to the continuities between Der Brand and the position of conservative historians like Nolte and Hillgruber. Most of these critics have focused on Nolte’s suggestion that there was a “causal nexus” between Soviet terror and the Holocaust, which he used rhetorically in a plea for a broader perspective on Nazi aggression. It is interesting that while critics have pointed out continuities between Friedrich and the earlier polemics of Ernst Nolte and historic accounts of Rumpf and others, it is particularly Rolf Hochhuth’s position during the late 1960s which resembles that of Jörg Friedrich in the early 2000s. Though Hochhuth recently criticized Friedrich for ignoring the context of the Holocaust too much in Der Brand, their positions have

554 Friedrich, Kalte Amnestie 506; Also see a similar argumentation in Friedrich, Gesetz des Krieges 839, 888-893.
many aspects in common.\textsuperscript{557} Both had a leftwing political background and were active in the anti-Vietnam movement. Both had actively taken part in a debate on German guilt and perpetratorship and belonged to the rather small group of German intellectuals who addressed Nazi crimes and the Holocaust directly. A further parallel is that both managed to provoke a discussion of the air war, which exceeded a conservative and revisionist discourse.\textsuperscript{558} Interestingly, while many of Friedrich’s as well as Hochhuth’s arguments seem to be primarily based on the conservative rightwing discourse of the 1950s, and both relied strongly on David Irving’s \textit{Destruction of Dresden}, their argumentation also clearly echoed the East German narrative, which primarily drew the conclusion that the Anglo-Americans and Nazi Germany had shared a basic mentality in their way of waging war. As in the GDR their equation of Allied bombings and the Holocaust summoned a radical distinction between innocent civilians and the cynical and brutal power politics they were subject to.\textsuperscript{559}

\textsuperscript{557} Schwartz, “Die Würde des Ortes”.
\textsuperscript{558} Also see Fritze’s criticism of German historical culture. Fritze stressed that “‘A \textit{Vergangenheitsbewältigung}’ that because of considerations of ‘pedagogy’ leans towards untruths, only leads to irrationalities and can only cause alienation abroad”. Here, more than in the case of Hochhuth and Friedrich, Fritze’s argument followed arguments of conservative historians during the \textit{Historikerstreit} like Nolte and Michael Stürmer. See the similar argument of the possible foreign alienation caused by a overly fixated focus on the Holocaust in Michael Stürmer, “Geschichte in geschichtslosem Land,” in “\textit{Historikerstreit}” (München: 1987) 36-38.
\textsuperscript{559} They both suggested that there were fundamental moral and historical similarities between the Allied bombings and the Holocaust; both were outgrowths of the modern war of extermination in which warfare was increasingly directed at civilians instead of combatants. Though the Allies and Nazi Germany had different motives, Friedrich and Hochhuth argued, their methods and concepts of warfare had close similarities, as they both attempted to annihilate peoples. This also offers an explanation to the question of why West German intellectuals like Friedrich and Hochhuth, who belonged to the political left, were willing to accept such a problematic view of the Allied bombings. Though not explicitly using such terms as “imperialism” to characterize both Nazism and the Allied leaders, the idea that the Allies had waged a “war of annihilation” just like the Nazis is an underlying aspect of both the GDR narrative and the rhetoric used by Friedrich. This is especially apparent in Hochhuth’s work and articles, in which a direct line was drawn between the war in Vietnam, NATO and the Allied bombing war. Though Friedrich was more reluctant in this matter, and significantly denied any parallels between the Allied bombings and post-Cold War NATO bombings in Yugoslavia and Afghanistan, on another occasion he did
To a certain degree their previous critical contributions to the recognition of German perpetratorship gave both Hochhuth and Friedrich an alibi to approach the sensitive issue of the strategic bombings in a direct manner. It also resulted in a much broader reception of their ideas. Both managed to provoke a public debate on the morality of the Allied bombings and by doing so have repeatedly been accused of Aufrechnung, of deliberately balancing the air war with the Holocaust with the purpose of diminishing the horrors of the Holocaust. In response, however, they claimed that this was not their goal at all.

This ongoing discussion often fails to recognize the nature of the comparisons suggested by Hochhuth and Friedrich and also does not really ask what is exactly meant by Aufrechnung. The word actually implies two things: the first implication is that the hierarchy of suffering as well as the hierarchy in the morality between the Allied bombings and the Holocaust is re-evaluated. By claiming that the proximity between the Holocaust and strategic bombing both in concept and practice is much stronger than commonly accepted, a hierarchy of suffering and of evil is contested. This is what all the various authors who drew parallels between the air war and the Holocaust have in common. They wanted to show, that the air war was (almost) as terrible as the Holocaust. However, this does not explain what the ultimate purpose of this argument is. To understand this we must look at the second implication of the term Aufrechnung, which implies that by demonstrating a moral equality between both “crimes” the “scores can be settled” and Germany can

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be freed of its “negative identity” for which the singular status of the Holocaust is the most important pillar. It is this kind of Aufrechnung, which was central to the argument of Hans Rumpf and Spetzler, who ultimately saw the one-sidedness of moral accusations as the main problem for Germany’s relationship with the world. It is also this argument that Ernst Nolte was making, when claiming that the fixation on the Holocaust kept Germans from putting the air war in perspective.

The question is, to what extent was such an attempt to “settle scores” in order to balance the negative prominence of German guilt also present in the arguments of Hochhuth and Friedrich. Both clearly stated that this was not the case and that they had made important contributions to the recognition of German responsibility for the Holocaust. Friedrich, especially in his earlier works, integrated the narrative of German suffering under Allied bombings in a very critical study of German war crimes and their legal aftermath. Where historians of the air war like Rumpf or Spetzler cautiously blanked out German war crimes, in his earlier works Friedrich focused explicitly on them.

Moreover, there is no reason to assume that Friedrich, for example in his criticism on the one-sidedness of the Nuremberg tribunal, actually argued that the Wehrmacht generals had been wrongly accused or should be exonerated because they had committed crimes similar to the Allied leaders who had not been prosecuted. This demonstrates a certain tension in Friedrich’s narrative. While he often reproduced earlier narrative patterns without any reflection on their meaning, Friedrich was making a different argument. This becomes clear in his use of legal arguments. Like Spetzler and others Friedrich based his moral denunciation of the air war on references to international law, not only arguing that the air war was
immoral but also stressing its illegality. But in the case of Friedrich the argument clearly works the other way around too. Far from exonerating the Wehrmacht-leaders or even the Luftwaffe attacks on Rotterdam and Warsaw, Friedrich stressed their similarity to imply that Allied leaders should have been tried too.

In terms of Aufrechnung Friedrich can therefore, it seems, not be accused of “balancing” the Nazi crimes and the Allied bombings, with the ultimate aim of avoiding any explicit discussion of the former. However, at the same time his perspective was strongly characterized by narrative elements which had characterized the earlier East and West German accounts. First, the Allied strategic bombing campaign was simplified as an attempt to punish and annihilate the German people. And secondly and even more explicitly than others before him, Friedrich stressed that the Allied bombings marked a catastrophe for the Germans that was equal or at least similar to the “Jewish catastrophe” and the fate of other victims of Nazi crimes. Therefore, by recycling a highly problematic narrative of Germans

561 Also see: Friedrich, “Die Rechtsnatur”.
562 What is also striking is that, like Hochhuth, who, in spite of his repeated moral accusations called Churchill a “tragic but great” statesman, Friedrich too seemed reluctant to make this argument explicit. Hochhuth, Soldaten 143-144. Also see: Hochhuth, “Churchill - wohin er führte”. Though his whole work implies the similarity between Holocaust and strategic bombings, and implies that Churchill and Harris should have been tried as war criminals, Friedrich never formulated such an argument explicitly. For example, in an interview with Die Welt Friedrich refused to confirm that he considered Churchill a war criminal and only insinuated that he felt this to be the case. In his answer to the question whether in Der Brand Friedrich was labeling Churchill as a war criminal, he stated that he did not: “Churchill was responsible for the annihilation of half a million civilians, because he wanted to break their morale. The bombing of Coventry cost 568 dead. When the war was already won, and the Allied armies already stood in the Eiffel, in January 1945, the bombing war reached its climax: not to bring victory, but in order to punish the Germans. During the last half year the war, every day on average 1023 civilians fell victim to bombings. Cities like Pforzheim with barely 63,000 inhabitants were destroyed; every third person died. Is this a war crime? This, everybody has to decide for themselves. I take no position on this matter”:”Ein Kriegsverbrechen? Das muss jeder für sich selbst entscheiden"," Die Welt 21-11 2002. http://www.welt.de/print-welt/article264642/Ein_Kriegsverbrechen_Das_muss_jeder_fuer_sich_selbst_entscheiden.html.
563 Also see Chris Lorenz’ argument that the problematic relationship between “German catastrophe” and “Jewish catastrophe” have dominated German memory culture since 1945: Lorenz, “Twee soorten catastrofe”.
as a collective of victims, based on both the East German anti-Western rhetoric as well as on West German rightwing apologetic argumentation, eventually Friedrich too “balanced” the two crimes against one another and placed them on the same moral level. By suggesting the proximity to the Holocaust, the latter becomes “just one example” of modern “wars of extermination”. Implicitly this interpretation also becomes a criticism of a view on the war, which focuses too much on Germans’ guilt and denies their collective status as victims, often using the same rhetoric as those authors who wanted to avoid a discussion on German perpetration altogether. For this Friedrich could draw on East and West German narratives and integrate them in a moralistic narrative of German victims of a cynical and genocidal Allied massacre.

5.2. Der Brand and the new public interest in the Allied bombings

The new German victim’s discourse

Jörg Friedrich’s Der Brand became probably the most influential book on the Allied air war, at least since David Irving’s Destruction of Dresden. It became a bestseller, provoked an enormous response and was heavily debated in both the German and British press. Reactions to Der Brand as well as to a photographic collage by Friedrich, Brandstätten (2003) varied from great praise to harsh criticism. Since its publication, Der Brand has puzzled and divided the critics. Friedrich’s unconventional style and his direct descriptions of suffering appealed to those who like Friedrich himself felt that the air war as a collective experience of suffering had been neglected in Germany. Martin Walser for example praised the book as an

“epic” book of war, “stylistically transcending categories of friend and foe and of perpetrators and victims”. Cora Stephan labeled it an “extraordinary” book and an important “hymn” to the dead. They felt that Friedrich had for the first time found a language and style that was appropriate for the horrible phenomenon.

On the other hand, the stylistic qualities of Der Brand also drew strong criticism. The central critique of Der Brand focused on Friedrich’s linguistic references to the narrative of the Holocaust. In particular, Friedrich’s use of words such as “crematoria” and the suggestion that bombed Germans had been “gassed” and other references to the Holocaust were denounced as inappropriate. Apart from the immediate responses and reviews the book also triggered a strong increase in public attention for the Allied bombings. The first indication of the impact of Der Brand was the enormously increased interest for the air war in the press, popular and local documentary accounts, literature, television-documentaries and films and exhibitions. Through this variety of popular media the history of the Allied bombings, often in the form of emotional and enthralling eye-witness accounts, was brought to a large audience. After the success of Der Brand various local memoirs were published. German magazine Der Spiegel devoted an entire issue to the air war in 2003, which was also published as a volume under the title “Als Feuer vom Himmel fiel”. German public television stations ZDF and ARD launched doc-

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566 See the different accounts reviewed by Jörg Arnold in: Arnold, “Sammelrezension Bombenkrieg”.

567 Burgdorff and Bayer, eds., Als Feuer vom Himmel fiel.
umentaries “Der Bombenkrieg” and “Feuersturm”, in which Jörg Friedrich was given a prominent role as “historical expert”. In 2005 Sebastian Dehnhart in cooperation with Guido Knopp directed an award-winning documentary film Das Drama von Dresden in 2005. These films and documentaries often adopted the popular idea that the air war had been a taboo, giving the word to Friedrich and others to spread their narrative of German suffering.568

*Integrating the victims discourse in the narrative of German guilt*

In the new public interest in German suffering, not everybody was willing to accept such a radical lack of historical context and implicit references to the Holocaust that characterized the work of Friedrich. A considerable part of the following massive series of publications and other forms of representations were concerned with integrating the history of the air war within the parameters of a general view of history, in which at least on a basic level the German responsibility for the Nazi crimes was recognized and addressed. This search for a way to address German suffering, while avoiding “Aufrechnung”, to an important degree characterized leading voices in the new public debate.

What is interesting is that this search had already played an important role in the increasing commemoration of the bombing of Dresden during the 1990s.

568 Like Friedrich’s work documentaries like Das Drama von Dresden and Feuersturm depicted the effects of strategic bombing in highly decontextualized settings. These documentaries show a trend in German history on television to focus on the experience of “normal Germans”, while avoiding a critical reflection on their stories and neglecting basic historical outlines. In a style typical for the big-budget ZDF/Guido Knopp-productions, emotionally charged interviews are followed by short dramatized scenes. These again are followed by computer simulations which show the physical workings of the firestorm, and dramatic voice-over giving basic historical backgrounds. In all, most recent documentary films to a great degree followed the concept of Der Brand, emphasizing the German “loss” without contextualizing it. Das Drama von Dresden (Sebastian Dehnhart 2005); Der Bombenkrieg (ZDF 2002); Feuersturm (ZDF/Spiegel TV 2003). E.g. Sönke Neitzel, “‘Wer Wind sät, wird Sturm ernten.’ Der Luftkrieg in westdeutschen Fernsehdokumentationen,” historicum.net (2003).
Typical of public reactions to the 50th commemoration of 13 February in 1995 was the strong emphasis that Dresden should stand for a collective memory beyond the politicization of GDR politics, moral accusations and “balancing” the air war with the Nazi crimes. Die Zeit for example stated, that “Dresden does not accuse. It does not try to extrapolate itself in regards to Auschwitz. It does not say: we’re even. Dresden calls for reconciliation”.569 Roman Herzog’s speech with a similar message received much positive attention in the German press. In his speech, Herzog, on the one hand, emphasized that remembering Dresden should not lead to “Aufrechnen”, to the balancing of German suffering with the suffering of victims of Nazi crimes and the importance of reconciliation with former enemy Britain. On the other hand, Naumann points out that the emphasis of the commemoration ritual and Herzog’s speech was “self image of a now united nation in commemoration of its own victims of the (air-) war”. Herzog summoned an image of a group of victims, which in spite of their diversity all became equal victims under the indiscriminatory attack. Hereby the Nazi crimes were only referred to in a symbolic way, and not as something that personally concerned the Germans who were commemorating the past as a community of victims.570

Such a position, however, was present not only in official memory politics. While many documentaries, local histories and memory accounts of the Allied bombings approached the Allied bombings from a perspective similar to Friedrich’s, there was also concern to avoid a decontextualized one-sided focus on German suffering. Another attempt to add the context of Nazism to the narrative of German suffering in German history was big-budget TV-drama Dresden (2005)

570 Naumann, Der Krieg als Text 51-54; Fache, “Gegenwartsbewältigungen” 229-231.
made by the ZDF, which scored very high on viewer ratings and was widely discussed in German media. The film demonstrated that the memory of the air war had entered the centre of mainstream discourse on the Second World War, in which the Holocaust could not be totally ignored. The film not only tried to reproduce the fire storm as realistically as possible but it also took some of the criticism of *Der Brand* seriously and with the help of historians Richard Overy and Rolf Dieter Müller included some basic historical background, showed short scenes in which brutality of the Nazi regime was depicted, and addressed the moral dilemmas and discussions among the British army leaders.571

From similar attempts two conclusions can be drawn. First, the concern with avoiding *Aufrechnung* and the evocation of a “victim-identity” showed that the fear that the Allied bombings could be appropriated for rightwing politics had not disappeared. And secondly, that, while challenging rightwing revanchist claims, they were ultimately unsuccessful in attempting to offer an alternative narrative of the Allied bombings. The need for a correction of a rightwing revanchist discourse on the Allied bombings was probably fueled by the fear of increasing attempts by extreme rightwing groups to appropriate the bombing war for their political agenda. Since the late 1990s the bombings had increasingly become an important historical theme for the extreme right, who took the equations sug-

gested by Irving, Friedrich and others one step further by labeling the air war as the “real Holocaust” or “Bomben-Holocaust”, and in the early 2000s organized demonstrations in Hamburg, Dresden and other targeted cities.\textsuperscript{572} These extreme right groups mainly expressed their views during organized memorial demonstrations in Dresden but also on online-discussion-boards, websites and you-tube.\textsuperscript{573} But more generally this rightwing narrative expressed on the internet dwelled on a series of recent extremely pathos-filled and victim-centered popular accounts of the air war spread by the rightwing \textit{Junge Freiheit}.\textsuperscript{574}

In light of these extremist attempts to appropriate the memory of the Allied bombings, official memory politics and liberal media and intellectuals searched to represent the narrative of German suffering, while avoiding the trap of decontextualizing the air war or reproducing an overly simplified image of Germans as

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\item \textsuperscript{572} For example see the article “Der Bomben-Holocaust von Dresden”, 28-1-2005 on the website of the \textit{Deutsche Nationalzeitung}. www.national-zeitung.de.
\item \textsuperscript{574} The references to the terror attacks on German civilians have formed a central element in \textit{Junge Freiheit}’s strategy of historical revisionism. While on the one hand following the argument that the \textit{Luftwaffe} had refrained from terror attacks the air war is directly equated with the Holocaust, and seen as a symbol that even more than the Nazi crimes represents “more than anything else” the horrors and suffering of the Second World War. Ruoff, \textit{Verroff, Verdrängen, Beschweigen. Die Nationalgeschichte der Jungen Freiheit: Auschwitz im Diskurs des völkischen Nationalismus} 103-109. Interestingly though these articles are often based on works of Irving, Friedrich and other recent popular accounts and sometimes even on more moderate accounts of Horst Boog, who recently has contributed to \textit{Junge Freiheit} on different occasions. Also see chapter 3. While Boog and Friedrich certainly do not associate themselves politically with Neo-Nazism, their work and arguments are used by extreme-right publications extensively. Websites of \textit{Deutsche National Zeitung} and \textit{Junge Freiheit} offer articles, interviews with authors and also advertise and sell popular literature on the air war. See: https://www.national-zeitung.de/shop/page/27?sessid=RA9wFXta7I7sr54Bsr6FMu4XdlBKoxlrDPNwF0TeZUbppNtNjYfY5R3apTxlIj&shop_param=; https://www.deutscher-buchdienst.de/index.htm.
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a collectively innocent group. However, what becomes clear from Herzog’s speech as well as from similar attempts in films and documentaries following Der Brand, is that while on a certain level the context of the Nazi crimes and German responsibility are acknowledged, the basic narrative of German suffering was confirmed. The references to the Holocaust here mostly served to bridge the two narratives, but failed to overcome problems that accompany the victim-centered perspective on the Allied bombings. Just as in the work of Friedrich, here the Germans were seen as a closed community of victims, who were clearly dissociated from their leaders and a small group of evil Nazis. That such a failed attempt to integrate these narratives also characterized the attempts of German historians like Rolf Dieter Müller will discussed below.  

Explaining the new debate on German victims

Before continuing with the recent historiography after Friedrich, I will briefly address the intensive discussion of the impact of Friedrich’s book within the context of recent developments in German memory culture. It is evident that the public interest in the Allied bombing, generated by Der Brand was a signal that a shift was taking place in German public memory. Simultaneous with the interest in the Allied bombings, other issues that related to the German victims of the Second World War were discussed with similar intensity. In 2001 Günter Grass published his novel Im Krebsgang, which addressed the fate of the German expellees from East Germany and also generated a massive public interest in the expulsions.  

575 A similar call for a commemoration is visible in the recent commemorative practices in Dresden and especially in the newly rebuilt Frauenkirche. When in 2005 the Frauenkirche was reopened, the tradition of pacifism and the alternative commemorations in which dissidents from the GDR had voiced their protest in silent candle burnings were emphasized. Fache, “Gegenwartsbewältigungen”.  
576 Like the Allied bombings, since the early 2000s, the expulsions were discussed in
Though not as massively as the Allied bombings and the expulsions, the recent interest in German victims also led to new attention to the mass rape of German women by soldiers of the Red Army.\footnote{E.g. the strong public interest in the anonymous diary of a “woman in Berlin”: Anonymia, Eine Frau in Berlin. In 2008 a motion picture based on this book and directed by Max Färberböck came out under the same title.}

The question why such an increased interest in German suffering emerged in the late 1990s has been one of the most discussed issues in recent studies on German memory. While it is impossible to find a single distinct explanation for the new debate on German suffering, it is possible to distinguish several factors that have played a role in this process. First, it is clear that popular media have been important. The appeal of emotional eyewitness-stories of “normal Germans”, describing history from their personal point of view, has been a more general trend in the German media landscape. In this form of “histotainment”, for which the TV productions of Guido Knopp are exemplary, subjectivity and emotionality largely suppress the historical background. Especially during the 1990s, this proved to be a successful formula to reach a large audience and became an increasingly dominant form in which history was represented. Since there had been various TV documentaries on the bombings before the end of the 1990s, the media interest itself does not wholly explain why these documentaries, films and books suddenly met with such resonance and all of a sudden triggered such a lively debate. But the new interest in the personal suffering experiences of “nor-
mal Germans” cannot be understood without this broader development in German historical culture. It is not surprising that topics such as the Allied bombings and the expulsions eventually became part of a historical culture which was primarily concerned with the compelling stories of eye-witnesses.  

German Unification and the Flakhelfer-Generation

Another explanation is that German Unification brought about a change in German historical debates about the Second World War. In the first place the end of the division of Germany and the ideological competition between GDR and the Federal Republic played an important role. After 1990 the old narratives, which had been largely influenced by Cold War politics, had to be replaced with a new meaning. Robert Moeller argues that “once the Wall came down, it was possible for Germans to reflect on what all Germans had suffered, re-examining parts of their past that had been subordinated to Cold War priorities”. The air war and especially Dresden as a “site of memory” provided potential ground for a united memory, which could include East and West German war experience in an inclusive narrative of German suffering. But not only the relationship between East and West Germans had changed after 1990. Reunified Germany had proven its democratic stability and allowed those who had always feared that national unity would allow for revisionism and nationalist sentiments to find a more relaxed and less tense perspective on German history. After the Berlin Republic proved itself as a stable nation strongly embedded in the European Union, the former critical “guardians” of German “Verfassungspatriotismus” opened up for memories, which

578 Assmann, Der lange Schatten 192; Kansteiner, In pursuit of German memory Neitzel, “Wer Wind sät”.
had always been associated with a dangerous German nationalism.580

This “stability” of German national identity was confirmed by the increased discussion on German perpetratorship during the 1990s. In public debate, literature and arts, but also in official memory politics the question of German perpetratorship and the Holocaust became a central reference point. The building of the “memorial for the murdered Jews of Europe” in the centre of the memory landscape of the new German capital Berlin demonstrated the importance of the Holocaust in the official politics of memory. Also, major controversies around Daniel Goldhagen’s *Hitler’s willing executioners* (1996) and the exhibition on the crimes committed by the *Wehrmacht* catalyzed an increasing presence of the Holocaust in the public debate.581

Aleida Assmann argues that before 1990 in West Germany the memory of German suffering was “blocked” from two sides. On the one hand, it was appropriated by rightwing revisionist groups, and, on the other, rejected by a left-liberal group of intellectuals, who associated themes such as Dresden and the Expulsion with the “war-guilt” and apologetic attitude of the generation of their parents.582 Yet as they reached their seventies, these leftwing intellectuals, especially members of the *Flakhelfer*-generation like Grass, Wehler and Mommsen, made a shift

from focusing only on German guilt to now also discussing German suffering. These aging intellectuals now reflect a generational shift which is taking place with the disappearance of the last group of people who had experienced the war themselves. The primary memory of those who have actually experienced the air war is about to be erased, which is the moment in which these carriers of this direct experience call for a final attempt to share their memories. These attempts are made not only by the disappearing generation of eye-witnesses themselves but also by members of the second and third generation, who see this as a final chance to collect and account for the memories of their parents and grandparents.583

In particular, the generation of the *Flakhelfer* who were born roughly between 1926 and 1930 and who were adolescents or young adults during the war, has demonstrated a changed attitude in this process. For historians and intellectuals belonging of the *Flakhelfer* generation, like Walter Kempowski (1929), Günter Grass (1927), and Hans Mommsen (1930) who had also played a part in a critical discourse on the Nazi past, new publications on German suffering meant that they were confronted with personal childhood memories, for which there had been little space in their focus on the question of German guilt. The recent commentaries by historians like Hans Mommsen and Hans-Ulrich Wehler about *Der Brand* reflect an interesting conflict of different narratives. Wehler, on the one hand, expressed a certain uneasiness with the theme and repeatedly warned about a “victim’s cult” and an overly emotional and moralizing discourse. On the other hand, however Wehler stated that the air war had been a neglected theme and the present debate was potentially “liberating”. He stressed that his generation had felt an enormous shyness about talking about their experience during the air war, because of a fear

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583 Assmann, *Der lange Schatten* 24-27, 176, 194.
that would “balance” the attacks with the Nazi crimes. While Wehler still saw a certain tendency among Germans to draw such a balance and criticized Jörg Friedrich for “lack of discipline” in his language, he also pointed to the changed political culture in Germany, which had “stabilized” to such a degree that he did not expect this tendency to dominate the current debate.\textsuperscript{584} Less cautious than Wehler, Hans Mommsen celebrated Friedrich’s account as a breakthrough in the public discussion of a historical theme in German popular culture. Finally had this central historical event and its horrors returned to the German consciousness.\textsuperscript{585}

\textit{German foreign policy and Iraq}

Another significant factor regarding the increased interest in the Allied bombings can be found in recent German foreign policy. With international conflicts in Yugoslavia, Kosovo and later in Afghanistan and Iraq, the new United Germany was increasingly confronted with the question whether or not it should participate in international peace missions and interventions. Here, there is a striking coincidence with the debate on German participation and the shift in the German debate on the Allied bombings. In reaction to the images of the ethnic cleansing and genocide in Bosnia between 1992 and 1995, German foreign policy had shifted towards a position in which it felt that, on the basis of its responsibility as a nation which had committed genocide in the past, now it was obliged to interfere, when a similar crime reoccurred. It was Joschka Fischer’s reference to “Nie


\textsuperscript{585} Though Mommsen was not wholly uncritical of Friedrich, his review was ultimately very positive. Hans Mommsen, “Wie die Bomber Hitler halfen,” in \textit{Als Feuer vom Himmel fiel. Der Bombenkrieg in Deutschland}, ed. Stephan Burgdorff and Christian Habbe (München: 2003) 115-121; Mommsen, “Moralisch, strategisch, zerstörenderisch.”
"wieder Auschwitz" (never again Auschwitz) which led the leftwing government of Schröder and former pacifist Fischer to the decision to interfere in the military air attacks on Kosovo in 1999.

However, regarding the new conflicts in Afghanistan and Iraq, Germany took a different position, and in particular objected to the US intervention in Iraq, a decision that to an important degree reflected German public opinion on this matter. Interestingly, the fierce discussion on the Iraq war coincided with the shift from the discussions on German perpetratorship to an increased focus on German suffering. As Andreas Huyssen has pointed out, where in Kosovo the German experience with its genocidal past provided legitimacy for participation, in the case of Iraq, Germany’s position was now linked to the German victims’ experience. The objection against US air attacks on Iraq was often connected to the notion that the Germans “knew what it was like to be bombed” and based their current political position on their experience as victims during the Second World War.586

Though, interestingly enough, Jörg Friedrich dissociated himself from the argument that the Allied bombings provided an argument to oppose the attack, in the German public debate and also on the level of local commemorations in cities such as Hamburg, Iraq was often mentioned as a current point of reference which showed that the Germans had “learned” from their own suffering-experience. In creating a link between the current air war in Iraq and the Allied bombings, the Germans emphasized not so much their own suffering, but claimed that their experience gave the Germans a better understanding of the horrors of war.

and served as the foundation of their commitment to world peace.587

The debate on the war in Iraq does not in itself explain the new interest in the Allied bombings and it can be argued that this mechanism was not a new phenomenon. Malte Thiessen points out that such an attitude also played a role in the anti-atomic movement of the 1950s and especially in the peace movement in the 1980s, which related the memory of the air war to current calls for peace.588 Also, many East and West German historical accounts of the air war had referred to the threat of a possible atomic bomb. However, because the simultaneous discussion on German suffering and the general German rejection of the Iraq-war concurred, this translation of the air war into the present now became part of a nation-wide discussion. Unlike Friedrich, public intellectuals such as Hans-Ulrich Wehler and Günter Grass related the two issues to make a stand against the Iraq war.589 Also, the Iraq war became a direct reference point for critical studies that explicitly addressed the morality and legal status of the Allied strategic bombing war and concentrated on retrospective criticism of the Allied methods.590

587 Nolan, “Air wars” 25-28 Huyssen, “Air War Legacies” 181-193. Such a position was, for example, taken by Hans Mommsen, who stressed that the strong opposition in Germany to the Iraq war could be explained by the shared experience of the Allied bombings. Mommsen, “Moralisch, strategisch, zerstöerisch” 150.
588 Thiessen, Eingebrannt ins Gedächtnis 134-142. 296-303.
589 Nolan, “Air wars” 26; Huyssen, “Air War Legacies”.
590 Fritze, Moral des Bombenterrors; Hans-Joachim von Leesen, Bombenterror: der Luftkrieg über Deutschland (Kiel: 2005) 32; Christoph Kucklick, Der Feuersturm - Bomben Krieg über Deutschland (Hamburg: 2003) 40-41. This was also the case in Britain and America. In Britain authors like Anthony Grayling explicitly took the bombing of Iraq as a starting point for an objection to the involvement of their country in the invasion of Iraq. More than offering new historical or moral arguments, Grayling’s book, written for a large public, concentrated on retrospective moral criticism of the way Britain and America had sought moral legitimacy for the mass bombing of civilians. A.C. Grayling, Among the dead cities. Was the allied bombing a necessity or a crime? (Londen: 2006). For other recent British and American accounts, in which the Iraq conflict is a central point of reference, see: Keith Lowe, Inferno. The Devastation of Hamburg 1943 (London: 2007); Beau Grosscup, Strategic Terror. The Politics and Ethics of Aerial Bombardement (Londen, New-York: 2006).
An old debate in a new context

The increased trust in German national identity after German Unification and after a period of intense debates on German perpetratorship as well as the fading of the war generation are plausible explanations for the increased public interest in the wartime suffering experiences of normal Germans. This explains in particular the changed position of the last generation who experienced the war as adolescents. Whether it was the reaching of retirement age or an increased trust in German political culture after a longer period of intensive confrontation and debates on German perpetratorship that brought this old guard to new positions is unclear. However, while these intellectuals indeed seem to have made a shift recently, the position of 68ers like Sebald and Friedrich is more problematic. While their books Luftkrieg und Literatur and Der Brand have often been regarded as the product such a shift in German memory culture after 1990, this becomes less certain when we look at Friedrich’s earlier works. Since 1986, Friedrich had been writing on the Allied bombings, drawing more or less the same conclusions as in Der Brand. The same can be said for Sebald, who also started writing on the air war memory in literature during the early 1980s. 591

The recent generational shift and changed conditions in German national identity after 1990 therefore can offer explanations for the increased attention to issues like the Allied bombings. They help explain under what circumstances it became politically opportune to commemorate Dresden or why earlier sensitivities among certain intellectuals had begun to fade. However, it is clear that Sebald and Friedrich had not “shifted positions” after 1990. That they had become interested in the Allied bombings and had begun recycling elements of the 1950s dis-

591 Sebald, “Zwischen Geschichte und Naturgeschichte”.
course during the mid 1980s is significant and shows that especially Friedrich’s argumentation should be regarded within the context of a dispute over the discursive limits within which the Second World War could be discussed in Germany, that culminated in the *Historikerstreit*. This is not to say that Friedrich as a leftwing writer can easily be placed within the group of conservative historians, for his critical writing on the *Wehrmacht* and direct descriptions of Nazi crimes contrasted significantly with the work of historians like Nolte. There are nevertheless strong parallels between their positions, since they shared the tendency to equate the Allied bombings with the Holocaust and reused arguments and narrative elements from the 1950s to counter the idea that Germans had been collectively guilty for the Nazi crimes. The basic elements of the two narratives that had collided during the 1980s were in this way continued during the 1990s.

What had changed, however, is that the degree of sensitivity and polemic atmosphere that had characterized the *Historikerstreit* seemed to have faded. While during the 1980s similar rhetoric had provoked vast polemic counter attacks, now, many more attempts were made to build bridges. Friedrich’s book was, in spite of its limits seen as an opportunity to discuss the Allied bombings as an important topic. The earlier left-liberal polemists like Wehler and Mommsen were to a considerable degree willing to accept basic elements of Friedrich’s narrative and give him the benefit of the doubt in his “linguistic derailing”. Representations of German suffering which, while focusing almost exclusively on German suffering, did not forget to point to or depict the essential symbols of the Nazi crimes and German responsibility, became a common approach. They characterized official commemorations as well as most of the popular representations. While these were often much more cautious than Friedrich, their attempts to integrate the Allied
bombings in a narrative of German responsibility remained problematic. Unable to offer truly different interpretations and narrative forms, they to a high degree adopted Friedrich’s perspective. The narrative of German victimhood now had become a central element in German memory culture.

5.3. *Der Brand* and recent German historiography

This did not mean that the basic tension between two conflicting narratives had disappeared or that issues like the Allied bombings had now become safely integrated in a pluralistic narrative of German responsibility for Nazism. Academic historians, in particular, formulated serious criticism against Friedrich and the new German victims discourse in German memory culture. Interestingly, the historians involved have often regarded their criticism as a conflict between academic history and popular memory. For example, military historians Horst Boog, Richard Overy and Ralf Blank pointed out fundamental academic deficits and superseded interpretations in Friedrich’s account. Some historians trying to understand Friedrich’s role in light of recent developments in German historiography deny his self-acclaimed position as a historian altogether, arguing that *Der Brand* could better be seen as a “novel” and “may not be history at all”. Stefan Berger has taken this issue even further. By emphasizing the non-academic status of Jörg

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593 Boog, “Kolossalgemälde”; Nolan, “Air wars” 28. Jörg Arnold has pointed out that Friedrich’s work primarily narrates popular images of the air war rather than drawing on professional historiography and offering new insights. Arnold, “A narrative of loss”; Arnold, “Sammelrezension Bombenkrieg”. Interestingly some contributors to the debate have turned this argument around. Cora Stephan has praised Friedrich’s independent position outside of the “school of academics”, which according to Stephan was directed by “political correctness” and not by “love for the truth” like Friedrich had been. Stephan, “Wie man eine Stadt anzündet” 97.
Friedrich and other protagonists of the recent debate, he argues that since the 1990s the narrative of German suffering has not been the province of professional historiography.\footnote{Berger, “On Taboos” 210-224; Lorenz, “Twee soorten catastrofe” 199. Also see: Chris Lorenz, “‘Hete’ geschiedenis. Over de temperatuur van de contemporaine Duitse geschiedenis,” \textit{Tijdschrift voor Geschiedenis} 120, no. 1 (2007) 5-19, here: 14.}

This is a far-reaching conclusion that needs some qualification. Different historians have taken Friedrich’s work very seriously as a work of academic history. Prominent German historians like Hans Mommsen, though also expressing some reservations about Friedrich’s style and perspective, have acknowledged his effort in writing a comprehensive account of the air war by “accurately summarizing” the current academic discussion and supplementing it with a compelling account on the suffering of German civilians.\footnote{Mommsen, “Moralisch, strategisch, zerstörerisch”.} More recently, by analyzing the harsh criticisms of \textit{Der Brand}, American historian Charles Maier argued that “critical historians have simply labeled the book demagogic and flawed” and he made a plea for historians to take the issues raised in \textit{Der Brand} seriously.\footnote{Charles S. Maier, “Targeting the city: Debates and silences about the aerial bombing of World War II,” \textit{International review of the Red Cross} 87, no. 859 (2005) 429-444, here: 440-441.} While this does not mean that these historians agreed uncritically with all the conclusions and stylistic aspects of \textit{Der Brand} they have taken it seriously as a historical work and not only as a catalyst for a public debate on memory.

The second reason that this distinction needs differentiation, is that it assumes that a victim-centered perspective was present only in popular accounts like \textit{Der Brand} and no longer characterized professional historiography. However, many German academic historians, though expressing uneasiness with the many deficits and inaccurate information, underlined some of the basic interpretations...
of his work. Both Mommsen and Wehler, for example, restated the idea that the Allied bombings had strengthened the German will to resist and depicted the Allied bombings as a senseless mass killing. It is indeed clear that Friedrich’s narrative particularly resembled the historical accounts of the 1950s and lacked much of the nuance that characterizes the work of military historians, like Boog and Groehler. However, I have pointed out in the previous chapter that there was a strong continuity of the earlier victim-centered discourses in the professional military historiography of Groehler and Boog, both of whom published important works during the 1990s.

Continuities of the victim discourse: Rolf Dieter Müller and Lothar Fritze

A similar interplay can be seen in some other recent accounts by military historians, for example, Rolf Dieter Müller’s account Der Bombenkrieg (2004) that accompanied a documentary series for the Television Channel NDR. Military historian and leading historian of the MGFA Rolf Dieter Müller attempted to bring “military historical research to a wider public” and thus contribute to a more differentiated perspective on the air war in the German public debate. Interestingly Müller’s work, on the one hand, emphasized the need for contextualization. Müller not only questioned that the air war was a “crime” and but also stressed that “to remember the air war, irrevocably led to thinking about the catastrophe, which had been caused by the national socialist war policies”. On the other hand, however, in its structure of main actors and events, the book largely followed older narrative patterns.

Relying heavily on the work of his MGFA-colleague Horst Boog, Der Bombenkrieg centrally revolved around the argument that the indiscriminate bombing
of civilians had been initiated by the British and that the Luftwaffe had initially refrained from terror bombings. Moreover, it also emphasized that the Allied “terror bombings” were aimed at destroying German morale and suggested that this strategy was focused on the wrong target. Rather than attempting to assassinate Hitler, Müller argued, the British put pressure on the German population by planning a large scale attack on Berlin. “In other words: it was not Hitler who was sentenced to death but the population of Berlin”.597 While dissociating himself from Friedrich’s radical victim’s perspective, Müller, by suggesting that in Berlin the Allies had “sentenced” the German civilians “to death” instead of Hitler, made a similar argument.

Even closer to Friedrich’s interpretations was that of Lothar Fritze, historian and political scientist at the University of Chemnitz and associate of the Hannah Arendt Institute in Dresden, who wrote Die Moral des Bombenterrors (2007). While his work, on the one hand, echoed earlier East German anti-American rhetoric, in discussing the air war under the international law, Fritze relied on the work of Horst Boog. Fritze completely followed Boog’s argumentation that the bombing of Warsaw, Rotterdam and Coventry had not violated international law. On the other hand, Fritze clearly distinguished morality from legality and claimed that he “had no idea, how these actions could be legitimized from a moral perspective”. However, as in earlier studies, such a distinction based on the different legal status, did lead Fritze to an almost exclusive emphasis on the Allied bombings and their effects on German civilians and to seeing them as inherently different from the German attacks.598

597 Müller, Huber, and Eglau, Der Bombenkrieg. Especially 84ff, 185ff, 230ff. Significantly, it is Müller’s book that Berger refers to while making his point that recent historiography has dissociated itself from the victim-centered public discourse. E.g. Berger, “On Taboos” 221 (note 51).
598 Fritze, Moral des Bombenterrors 38-40, 81. E.g. Horst Boog’s very positive review of this book. Boog considered Fritze’s work to be a “quantum leap” in German process of
By doing so, Fritze expressed a view on bombing that resembled Jörg Fried-
rich’s perspective to a high degree. Fritze explicitly stated that the Allies had not
only “declared the entire German population as their enemy, from little children
to elderly women, independent from individual actions or personal guilt”. He even
went further in explicitly claiming that the target of the Allies consisted of a col-
lective of civilians, who were either wholly or partly innocent of the Nazi crimes.
In a deeply “inhuman way of thinking”, the Allies had “identified the enemy gov-
ernment with the population it ruled” and had considered the enemy nation as
a “homogenous unity”, which it sought to destroy.599 A central parallel in these
works is that the German civilians were seen as victims of cynical power politics by
the Allies, in which German civilians were ruthlessly identified with their regime
under the general assumption that Germans had been collectively guilty for the
crimes committed by their regime.

Unlike Friedrich, however, Fritze connected his contempt of the Allied bomb-
ings directly with the present conflict in Iraq. According to Fritze the Americans
and British legitimized the bombing campaign against Iraq by referring to the
strategic bombing of Germany. It was because its importance for present con-
cepts of warfare that the morality of the air war had to be re-evaluated, for in
the present situation a “favorable depiction of the Allied warfare in the Second
World War” was used as a “source of legitimacy, which could be tapped from in
any convenient situation”. Because of this it was necessary to point out that nei-
ther legally nor morally could the bombing of civilians be justified. By choosing
Iraq as a starting point, Fritze was seemingly able to overcome some of the prob-

599 Fritze, Moral des Bombenterrors 65-72, 93-94.
lems that had characterized earlier German works that focused on the moral and legal status of Allied warfare. Fritze dissociated himself from rightwing revisionism or any attempts to “consolidate a national consciousness”, but pleaded for a “collective learning” from the recognition that the Allied air war, far from having been a “just war”, continued to lead to the justification of current illegitimate and immoral acts of warfare. It also gives the impression, that after a period of intensive discussion and academic research, the Nazi crimes were “self evident and had no need to be proven once more”. It was now important and legitimate to criticize the Allied war as a “prototype of the just war” and re-examine the air war beyond a discussion of German identity.600

Alternative perspectives: German society and the Allied bombings

The use of such rhetoric in Müller’s and Fritze’s book shows the strong continuities of the traditional military historical approach, which become especially striking in light of Müller’s simultaneous attempt to challenge the problematic narrative of Friedrich’s Der Brand. It moreover demonstrates that even in very recent cases professional historians have not abandoned the victim-centered discourse to the extent suggested by Stefan Berger. On the other hand, however, several German historians have begun to approach issues like the Allied bombings and the expulsions from a different angle. While military historians like Müller and Boog integrated several basic elements of the German victim narrative in a more thorough historical context, many academic historians have dissociated themselves more strongly from Friedrich’s victim-centered perspective.

Fundamental criticism came from a new generation of historians, interested in social history and memory culture. Ralph Blank and Dietmar Süß and American scholars such as Mary Nolan and Robert Moeller challenged Friedrich’s interpretations and called for a more complicated interpretation of the history of the bombing war. They not only criticized Friedrich’s factual deficiencies, rhetoric and style, but also argued for a more fundamental change of perspective in three central aspects. First, critics drew attention to the way the main “characters” were treated. While many critics acknowledged the need to include the experience of German civilians, serious objections were made against the stereotypical image of a coherent German “Volksgemeinschaft”, which dominated these accounts. Critics therefore called for a more pluralistic approach to the experience of Germans, which included a widening of the focus of Allied perpetrators and German victims, by including a focus on the role of the German state. Secondly, critics of Friedrich suggested the widening of the temporal, special and thematic scope of the narrative of the air war. Rather than approaching the air war as an isolated phenomenon, critics called for extending the contexts in which the Allied bombings took place. The Allied campaign should be seen as an integral part of military actions during the Second World War in which the line between civilians and combatants was increasingly blurred. Thirdly, Friedrich was criticized for his lack of reflection on the history of the narrative he tried to represent. By uncritically recycling interpretations rooted in Nazi propaganda and in postwar identity politics Friedrich used problematic terminology and interpretations, which according to his critics, needed to be reflected upon and placed in the context in which they were constructed.601

Though not all critics of Friedrich had themselves done research on the Allied bombings, their call for an alternative interpretation of the air war was not only a reaction to Der Brand but also reflected recent developments in German historiography of the Allied bombings. It is interesting how different developments in social history and oral history since the 1980s have delivered interesting new insights. Though in spite of the long tradition of using eye-witness accounts to illustrate the horrors of the air war, a methodically reflected oral history has rarely been applied in the analysis of this problem, in a few cases the war experience and memories of Germans have become subject of such an approach. For example, in Lutz Niethammer’s research on Ruhr workers and Margarete Dörr’s project on the war experiences of German women, it became clear that the air war had played an important role in the way Germans living in urban areas experienced the Second World War.602

Other impulses came from the study of local social history. By focusing on cities like Hamburg, the question as to the nature of the effects of the bombings on the regular life and local urban community could be researched with more detail and precision than the more general surveys and overviews had been able to give before. In Hamburg, Joachim Szodrzynski, Frank Bajohr and Ursula Büttner started to place the experience of the attack on Hamburg in July 1943 in a wider context of local society during the Nazi period and the Second World War by focusing on the local level.603 In addition to these local studies historians in the 1990s began

603 For example see: Joachim Szodrzynski, “Das Ende der “Volksgemeinschaft”? Die Hamburger Bevölkerung in der “Trümmergesellschaft” ab 1943,” in Hamburg in der NS-Zeit:
to research the various attempts of the Nazi bureaucracy to handle the effects of bombing.\textsuperscript{604} This even found its way into the series of the MGFA, in the 9th volume of \textit{Das Deutsche Reich und der Zweite Weltkrieg} (2004), edited by Jörg Echternkamp and Ralf Blank.\textsuperscript{605} Where the other volumes had been dominated by traditional military history and analyses of military operations, this new part entitled “Die deutsche Kriegsgesellschaft 1939 bis 1945” integrated the military history of air raids with an analysis of their impact on German society.\textsuperscript{606} More recently Dietmar Süß, in his “habilitation” study, took a similar social historical approach in an international comparison between the air war in Germany and Great Britain.\textsuperscript{607}


\textsuperscript{607} Dietmar Süß, \textit{Tod aus der Luft. Deutschland, Grossbritanien und der Bombenkrieg} (München: 2010*) \footnote{Publication date has not been established.}
Differentiating the Germans

To an important degree, these studies contested the victim-centered view, by including other “actors” and perspectives. By looking at the social policies and political measures which the Nazi state developed in reaction to the air war, the history of the air war now not only included passive victims ofbombings but also as active participants and supporters of the Nazi state. Here we find Germans who participated in air defense or even in the public lynching of Allied crew members. A novelty was that the oral and social histories of Blank showed that German victims of the air raids could very well be active participants in the Nazi dictatorship and perpetrators at the same time.608

In concentrating on the experience of women the oral histories presented and analyzed by Dörr in her chapters on the bombing raids and the evacuations offered space for different biographic stories, which narrate the history of the air war in a highly individual but also pluralistic way. They show how gruesome the confrontation with mass death was and how these experiences continued to influence the physical and psychological health of many women. Also these interviews show that the often praised “solidarity” among the Germans, though acts of help and support certainly could be expressed towards neighbors, in extreme circumstances was often limited to one’s own family. The willingness to help each other, mostly excluded strangers, and especially those who were considered outcasts and pariahs by the regime. For example, Dörr showed that women who described Jews or foreign workers, who were excluded from the air shelters, showed very limited

608 E.g. Nolan, “Air wars” 33. It is exactly on this point where these more recent accounts can be distinguished from the social historical reflection made by Olaf Groehler who, as I have argued in an earlier chapter, still largely addresses the Germans as victims of both Nazism and Allied bombings.
empathy for their underprivileged situations.609 These oral histories offered more than a simple collection of individual experiences during the air war, which is also the point where oral history distinguished itself from the growing body of “memory collections”.610

The focus on social structures and individual biographies also led to an increased interest in the impact of the air war on gender relations and family life.611 The air war had specific consequences for the social activities of German women. With their husbands fighting on the fronts, women were often alone in facing the huge challenges and strains caused by the raids, such as homelessness. The situation of being alone in the confrontation with these strains and the resulting increased sense of self-sustainability and independence formed a crucial aspect of the war experience of the female Ruhr workers.612 Moreover, it was on the “home front” where many women and children were mobilized in military institutions. The reality of the frequent air raids and the absence of male popula-


610 Though popular accounts, exhibitions and TV-documentaries showed a renewed interest in the memories of ordinary Germans, using methods similar to those of Jörg Friedrich, eye-witness accounts were used merely to uncritically illustrate the stereotype of terrorized Germans. In some cases, the editors of collected eye-witness accounts, though not using them for an oral history analysis, nevertheless reflected on the nature of their sources. For example see: Horst Matzerath and Brigitte Holzhauser, eds., ... vergessen kann man die Zeit nicht, das ist nicht möglich: Kölner erinnern sich an die Jahre 1929-1945: zum 40. Jahrestag des Kriegsendes (Köln: 1987) 222-223.

611 As recent research by Nicole Kramer points out, the air war had profound consequences for the position of women and also influenced the way women were portrayed by the Nazi propaganda. For many German women, as well as for their children, the experience of bombing raids meant a first real confrontation with the war. About 50 percent of the victims of air attacks were female. Nicole Kramer, “Kämpfende Mütter” und “gefallene Heldinnen” “ in Deutschland im Luftkrieg. Geschichte und Erinnerung. Zeitgeschichte im Gespräch, Bd. 1, ed. Dietmar Süß (München: 2007) 85-98. Kramer is working on a PhD-thesis on this subject.

612 Niethammer, “Heimat und Front” 223; Dörr, Kriegsalltag 299-300.
tion made the Nazi state increasingly dependent on women and children in the organization of air protection. Even before the war, the *Reichs Luftschutz Bund* specifically mobilized women as air aid wardens. Also in other organizations, like the German Red Cross, women played an important role in the organization of the “civil air defense”.

This massive mobilization of Germans in the civil defense is also emphasized in the work of social historians like Ralph Blank. In his lengthy analysis in *Das Deutsche Reich* Ralf Blank pointed out that the idea that Germans in the Reich formed a “Home Front” actively supporting the soldiers at the front, though initially based on a propagandistic idea, increasingly became reality. With the growing intensity of air raids, German women, children and elderly not only were confronted with the violence of war directly, but also became involved in other ways. More and more, the Nazi state relied on these groups to operate its air defense, so that on this level too the Second World War became a “total war”, in the sense that the line between civilians and combatants was fading.613

But there are more aspects in which the reactions to the air war influenced the society of the Third Reich as well as the Nazi crimes. The air war strongly affected power-relations among the leaders of the Third Reich. The increased pressure on the state, which was caused by the Allied bombings, also meant an increased importance of the role of Joseph Goebbels. Not only was the state depending on his ministry of propaganda to manage the public opinion. Goebbels also gained dominance over nearly all organizations charged with the supplying and accommodating Germans who had suffered damage from the air attacks. Also, in these efforts to compensate Germans and provide housing and material

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613 Blank, “Kriegsalltag und Luftkrieg”.
goods, the persecution of Jews and other victims became intertwined with this policy of compensation. Nazi bureaucracy developed a precisely organized system to redistribute furniture and other possessions among members of the Volksgemeinschaft. Germans could get Jewish furniture for free or for very low prices. The origins of these goods were openly addressed and well known by the Germans who made use of them. Though this redistribution of material goods and the provision of houses that formerly had belonged to Jews did not come close to solving the major problems of homelessness Germany was facing, it does illustrate the extent to which the story of the air war and the story of the Holocaust intertwined.614

Another connection can be drawn in the relation between the air war policies and the racial war of Nazi Germany. Michael Krause for example has pointed out that there was a direct connection between the euthanasia actions and the relocation of German hospitals, asylums and health institutions.615

From Nazi propaganda to postwar memory

By questioning the significance of the air war on the relationship between the regime and the German population these historians also reflected on the work-

614  Ibid. 425-429.
615  Though the mass killing of handicapped and psychiatric patients in Operation T4 started in 1939, it increasingly became connected to the growing shortage of health institutions during the war. The shortage of health institutions to accommodate those injured in the air raids was clearly connected to the clearing of asylums for the handicapped and mentally ill and their "evacuation" to euthanasia-institutes like Hadamar, where they were mass murdered. Their emptied institutions were mostly reused to accommodate the Germans who suffered injuries due to air raids and soldiers. Research on the euthanasia actions pointed out that in 1942 and 1943, long after the Aktion T4 had officially been brought to halt, the mass killing continued, now in different places and under a different name. Entire institutions still were “evacuated” to Hadamar and elsewhere. The policy of evacuation of cities, which bore a special risk of air raids, or which like Hamburg in 1943 had been heavily hit, could serve as a scapegoat to veil that so-called evacuation of psychiatric patients actually meant that they would be deported and murdered: Krause, Flucht vor dem Bombenkrieg 146-156. Also see: Ernst Klee, “Euthanasie” im NS-Staat: die “Vernichtung Lebensunwerten Lebens” (Frankfurt am Main: 1983).
ings of Nazi propaganda and re-evaluated concepts that had been invented by the regime. What characterized this new approach is that historians were now deconstructing concepts such as “Home front”, “Total war” and “Volksgemeinschaft”. This approach showed that these terms, while heavily charged with the ideology of Nazi propaganda, simultaneously could help to understand the effects of the massive confrontation with war and violence among Germans living in the Reich. Using not only official reports by the SD and other institutes but also private documents, such as diaries and letters, Joachim Szodrzynski pointed out that the ideal of the “German community” propagated by the Nazi state initially was received quite positively by the Germans. Though this concept automatically meant the exclusion of those who, based on their political or racial characteristics, were considered pariahs, the involvement in this imagined community was very appealing. Membership involved specific advantages and privileges, such as the right to access air shelters and to receive material compensation for losses.616 Social-historical studies showed that the heavy bombing raids of 1943 caused an increasing “erosion” of the Volksgemeinschaft-ideal because the total incapability of the regime to uphold the initial appeal and promise of advantages led to general disillusion. In the heat of the air attacks the ideal of a “Volk” willing to sacrifice itself out of mutual solidarity began to crumble quickly.617


617 In this process, the attitude of the regime towards the German population also began to shift. While the “Volksgemeinschaft” could initially function to integrate Germans in the national-socialist society, now the regime reacted with an increased threat of terror and violence to those who openly challenged the German “Volksgemeinschaft”. Though the increased violence and threat certainly influenced the potential of open protest and resignation, the Germans increasingly withdrew to the private domain and the Volksgemeinschaft made place for a Trümmergemeinschaft, a rubble community. It was during this process that the Germans increasingly dissociated themselves from their
Blank and others reflected on the efforts of Nazi state to respond to the bombings with propaganda, air protection, and social measures, and by the end of the war with increased threats of violence and terror. Especially after 1943, the terror-policies of the Nazi state increasingly affected the “home front”. In reaction to the potential dissatisfaction with the course of the war, the Gestapo and other Nazi organizations began to manifest its indiscriminate terror-regime towards potential resistance and disobedience in the Reich itself. The policy of fear towards the Germans was accompanied by the promise of retaliation and vengeance by the Nazi propaganda, which was often welcomed by the Germans. For a long time the hope for Wunderwaffen (miracle weapons) with the potential for large-scale retaliation, which could stop the Allied air raids for a long time was a dominant factor in the German reactions to the air war. In this sense, according to Blank, the promise of retaliation served as to “stabilize” German society under the bombs. A similar function was filled by the mobilization of lynch mobs to murder Allied pilots, who had been shot down by German air defense.


A good example is the disproportionate punishment of plundering. Suspects of plunder often were executed without trial. And here again those who were excluded from the Volksgemeinschaft, especially forced laborers from Eastern Europe were seen as a big threat and executed at the slightest suspicion: Blank, “Kriegsalltag und Luftkrieg” 387-388. Also see: Dörr, Kriegsalltag 282-283.

Approximately 350 air crew members were lynched in public by Germans. The lynching of airmen was also part of a general mobilization of hatred towards the enemy and part of a deliberately guided part of retaliation-propaganda. But though these murders were officially sanctioned and often staged by Nazi organizations, and only on few occasions by a spontaneous mob, Barbara Grimm pointed out that in some cases, the local population was actively involved. Barbara Grimm, “Lynchmorde an alliierter Fliegern im Zweiten Weltkrieg,” in Deutschland im Luftkrieg. Geschichte und Erinnerung, ed. Dietmar Süß, Zeitgeschichte im Gespräch, Bd. 1 (München: 2007) 71-84.
could help to understand the working of German society during the war and write a history of the Allied bombings in which the German people did not appear as an amorphous collective, but as a differentiated society, a similar approach was applied in the different studies to the memory of the air war. Even more than was the case for Blank’s social-historical works, it was in the field of memory studies that Friedrich’s *Der Brand* triggered various new studies. In the research on local memory cultures of the Allied bombings in cities like Magdeburg, Kassel and Hamburg, young historians like Malte Thiessen and Jörg Arnold not only argued that the bombings had never become a “taboo”. They showed how the bombings were commemorated and connected to current political issues in postwar Germany and pointed to continuities of wartime interpretations and myths in postwar memory. They showed that on a local level the bombings were widely remembered by different groups and could also function as political arguments for current issues. In this process the old ideal of a brave *Volksgemeinschaft*, which collectively bore the strains of a war that took place beyond their power or responsibility, proved a useful theme to construct an inclusive coherent urban identity. And also in the context of international tensions and the 1980s peace movement, the local experience of bombing provided a main historical context. Thiessen and Arnold’s work therefore showed that the history of the Allied bombings locally was a constantly present factor and in the process often was subject to selective interpretations and myth building.  

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Conflicting narratives of Allied bombing

Interestingly these new studies not only corrected errors in earlier historiography or deconstructed popular myths. These social histories and memory studies can be seen as efforts to write a wholly different narrative of the Allied bombings, one that often follows a very different narrative structure. For example, in analyzing the effects of the bombings on German wartime society, the main historical actors are treated differently. Instead of focusing on Allied leaders and the military conduct of strategic bombing Blank, Dörr and others have concentrated on the reactions to the Allied bombings. Their narrative focuses not on Allied perpetrators and German victims, but on German society under Nazi rule. Moreover, by reflecting on the Nazi propaganda apparatus and on different organizations created by the German government to control the social effects of bombing, the Nazi government and leaders such as Joseph Goebbels now appear as important historical “actors” in the history of Allied bombings. It therefore offers a contextualization that exceeds a mere formal acknowledgement of the historical context of the history of the Third Reich, but one that sees them as essentially interrelated.

Another interesting difference in recent narratives is the way they have contextualized the bombings and placed them in a temporal framework. They not only refrain from the suggestion that the Allied bombings share basic similarities with the Holocaust and reflect much more strongly on the historical context of the Second World War and Nazism as the main historical background for this history. But especially the reflection on post-war interpretations and the study of cultural memory have altered the temporal framework from which the bombings are regarded. In the memory analyses of Malte Thiessen Jörg Anrold and others the bombings are not primarily analyzed as a historical phenomenon but as a sub-
ject of collective memory and political appropriation. Though their history starts with the first reactions and interpretations during the war and with the attempts of Nazi propaganda to instrumentalize the bombings for their political aims, it stretches the temporal context to postwar Germany. In the narrative of Thiessen and Arnold the bombings are mainly seen as a central example of the problematic process of coming to terms with the Nazi past in Germany.

Though different in their approach and focus, the social history and memory studies discussed above share a similar overarching perspective. While not denying that the Allied bombings had made many victims, who by no means could be held responsible for the Nazi crimes, nor suggesting that the bombings were moral or a legitimate form of warfare, these historians pushed the discussion of the morality of the decision of Allied leaders to bomb German civilians to the background. Instead they critically reflect on the relationship between the Germans and their regime, or on the way Germans have attempted to repress or avoid addressing their responsibility for Nazism by representing themselves as a collective of victims. Their narrative therefore has a different starting point. It integrates the impact of the air war in the history of a German wartime society, which to a far-reaching degree supported and cooperated with a regime that started a war, and persecuted and mass murdered millions of innocent victims. This history acknowledges the strains and suffering experienced by German civilians, but it does not accept an exclusive focus on these experiences or demand that the victims be collectively labeled as innocent civilians.

It was on the basis of these recent developments in historiography that authors like Süß and Blank built their more fundamental criticism of Der Brand and similar representations of the air war. And it is on this point, where the nar-
ratives of authors like Arnold, Blank and Süß most strikingly collide with those of authors like Fritze and Friedrich. In the history written by Friedrich and Fritze the moral condemnation over the illegitimacy and cruelty of the Allied war methods and empathy with their victims dominate the narrative entirely. This juxtaposition of “those who bomb” and “those who are bombed” determines the narrow historical scope through which the history of the air war is seen. Even the representations of the air war, which like Müller’s Der Bombenkrieg, or the various documentaries and films, approach the bombings less radically from a victim’s perspective, are unable or unwilling to go much further than adding the general context of a war that was started by Germany, under a Nazi dictatorship. They were bound by a narrative of German suffering that had been carried by both academic as well as popular accounts and had determined the limits within which the air war could be discussed in Germany.

In this light it is interesting to look at the arguments with which authors like Friedrich and Fritze have reacted to such criticism. It is striking that the two basic premises of such an alternative perspective on the air war; the contextualization of the German victims and a reflective view on moralistic terminology and selective interpretations, were refuted by authors like Friedrich or Fritze. The refraining from contextualization of German suffering under the Allied bombings and the decision to focus exclusively on the air war was justified by suggesting that the Nazi crimes needed no further explanation, since they had been thoroughly examined and discussed. Moreover, they argued that the bombings posed such a grave moral issue, that all references to the way they had been exploited for propaganda during and after the war, could not significantly change the conviction that a radi-
cal focus on their immorality was the only means to do justice to this history.621

The clear rejection of the significance of the basic elements of the alternative narratives offered by critics such as Süß or Blank marks the central point of conflict of two opposing narratives. In this light it is significant that the recent conjuncture in German public debate triggered by Der Brand offered an important new context for academic studies on the air war. These to a certain degree can be seen as academic reflexes to the massive memory debate after the publication of Der Brand.622 For memory studies, the heightened interest in German suffering and especially the impact of Der Brand brought up new questions about the functioning of the public memory of the air war. It is probably no coincidence that many of these recent projects were initiated shortly after Sebald and Friedrich had sparked a broad public discussion. By commenting on the deficiencies in popular beliefs and offering different “complicated” contexts, such new works also can be seen as the reactions of specialists, who point to the shortcomings of “popular” works, and measure them against academic standards. Moreover, these recent developments fundamentally dissociate themselves from Jörg Friedrich’s narrative, both by deconstructing his historical concepts and interpretations, as well as by analyzing his work in the context of German memory culture.

621 In regarding the air war, according to Friedrich or Fritze, a further differentiation of its victims became irrelevant, because this did not change anything in respect to the inhumanity of the bombings. And equally irrelevant for this perspective was the way in which the air war had been abused for political ideology, from Nazi propaganda, GDR memory politics to postwar nationalist revisionism. Authors like Friedrich and Fritze not only recycled Nazi language, but more strikingly, radically denied any relevance to the way terms like “terror bombing” or “community of suffering” had been rhetorically exploited for ideological purposes. While Friedrich in interviews mostly ignored any question relating to the propagandistic origins of many of the terms he used, Fritze even explicitly stated that any such reflections were “irrelevant” in regards of the “truth” that the air war had been a dreadful crime. Fritze, Moral des Bombenterrors 72, 296. Langer, “Von guten Massakern”; “Ein Kriegsverbrechen?”

622 Especially: Süß, “Massaker und Mongolensturm” and Blank, “Der Brand”. 
However, one could ask, whether in light of the recent public debate on German suffering these academic reactions should be seen only from the perspective of a conflict between academic historiography and popular memory culture. First of all, this presumes that these academic works did not take a position in the debate over German memory. This however is questionable and ignores the fact that these recent studies too reflect ideas on how the Nazi past and the Second World War should be remembered and publically discussed. The presupposition of many of these alternative approaches toward the air war was a critique of a politicized memory culture in which the memory of German perpetratorship was suppressed in favor of a victim-identity. This is apparent not only in the writings of the leftwing polemist Hannes Heer, whose style resembles the rhetoric of leftwing historians during the Historikerstreit most, and who regarded the entire public interest in the air war simply as a victory of conservative memory politics in the search for a collective evasion of German guilt. But the basic outlines of such a critical narrative were also echoed in the more nuanced studies about the memory of the Allied bombings. Mathias Neutzner, for example, clearly identified with the “alternative” commemorations of the bombing of Dresden, which according to Neutzner, have to be seen as evidence of the growing discontent with the Communist state and which focused on private mourning instead of on the construction of political identity.

More distanced, a certain identification with the “personal dimension” of the Germans’ experiences of loss, in contrast with the politicized abuse of these experiences is also notable in the work of Jörg Arnold. Implicitly present in these

623 Assmann, “(In)Compatibility of Guilt and Suffering”.
625 Arnold, “In Quiet Remembrance”? 48, 52.
studies is the idea that a popular memory culture, in which Germans can unproblematically identify themselves as a collective of victims, is problematic, not only because it does not hold up to empirically based history, but also because Germans have a responsibility to recognize their part in the history of Nazism and any temptations to avoid or repress such a recognition is harmful. While this standpoint mostly remains unarticulated, it can be sensed in the critical rejections and deconstruction of such identity construction and the implicit favoring of a perspective on history in which the air war can be discussed without losing sight of and indeed focusing on the interrelationship with the context of German perpetratorship.626

Conclusion

Friedrich’s *Der Brand* captures some of the central problems of the German historiography of the Allied bombing, albeit in a radical way. His book “recycled” the basic narrative elements and arguments that had characterized East and West German historiography of the Cold War and integrated them into a highly emotional and moralistic narrative. His book contained many errors, lacked historical context and made the highly problematic argument that the Allied bombings had to be seen as a form of genocidal warfare, directed at erasing the German people and their rich culture. Just like the Holocaust, the Allied bombings had been an example of the “total” war of annihilation. While Friedrich’s book took rather extreme points of view, it reached a large audience in Germany and beyond. *Der Brand* and the discussion that followed it brought the Allied bombings into the center of German public debate on the Second World War and on its place in Ger-

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626 For instance in Thiessen, *Eingebrannt ins Gedächtnis* 388. Here Thiessen notes, without doubt, approvingly a “gradual differentiation of urban memory” in Hamburg.
man collective memory. Not all of Friedrich’s arguments, and especially not his suggested equation between the Holocaust and the air war, became commonly accepted. Many of the different films, books and documentaries that followed Der Brand were concerned with avoiding the accusation of Aufrechnung and attempted to integrate the history of the air war in the official liturgy of symbolic recognition of German guilt. But nevertheless, the central element of Friedrich’s narrative, which took the suffering of “innocent Germans” as a starting point, and his recycling of interpretations and terminology largely rooted in Nazi propaganda, became common ground in a considerable part of the public debate on the air war as well as in historiography.

The impact of Friedrich’s book cannot be understood without looking at the broader discussions that were taking place in the early 2000s. The sudden massive interest in German suffering, to an important degree stimulated by leftwing intellectuals like Grass or Wehler who had for a long time neglected issues like the expulsions and the air war, led to the idea that finally a taboo had been broken. On the one hand, the increased “stability” of German identity and the disappearance of the Cold War rivalry after German Unification, the search for a shared memory of the war for a United Germany and the long period of critical reflections on the Nazi crimes had taken away the earlier fear that these topics could endanger Germany’s political stability. The fading of the last war generation also led leftwing intellectuals to address issues they had themselves neglected for a long time. This led to a historical culture, in which, more than before, an exclusive focus on the German victims of the Second World War was considered to be legitimate and necessary and no longer endangered a critical reflection on German history.

This does, however, not mean that the discourse on German suffering and
specifically the issues raised by Der Brand can be fully explained by the shift in German memory culture after 1990. Starting to write on the air war already during the 1980s, authors like Friedrich or Sebald were not principally reacting to a historical culture changed by German Unification. Friedrich’s position in particular has to be understood from the continuous conflict between the two competing narratives of German history. Jörg Friedrich’s attempts to equate the air war with the Holocaust and to replace the complicated discussion on individual responsibility of Germans for the Holocaust with a simple division between “Holocaust perpetrators” and “the Germans” as a collective of victims, cannot be understood without looking at the longer tradition in which German intellectuals have sought a counter-narrative against the idea of Germany as a nation of perpetrators. It is therefore not surprising that Friedrich’s first attempts came shortly after the Historikerstreit in the 1980s, when conservative historians like Nolte and Stürmer had in different ways contested this “negative identity”.

But it is also striking that the Allied bombings were narrated and interpreted in the work of Friedrich and in many other accounts in a way that recycled arguments that had a much longer history and partly can be traced back to Nazi propaganda. This narrative was to a high degree accepted in the different popular representations of the air war, but, contrary to what was suggested by authors like Berger and Lorenz, it can also be found in academic historiography. This narrative was only truly contested and confronted with an alternative by a group of historians interested in social history and memory culture. American scholars like Moeller and Nolan as well as German historians like Blank, Süß or Thiessen contested the dominant narrative of the Allied bombings. By differentiating the Germans as a pluralistic society and by reflecting on the processes of interpretation and mem-
ory they provided a narrative that was fundamentally different.

To regard this as a conflict between popular memory and academic history is therefore problematic. It underestimates the extent to which the narrative of Der Brand has roots in a longer tradition of historiography. It also downplays the extent to which, implicit or not, academic historiography reflects competing positions in the discussion as to how the Allied bombings should be represented and remembered, and what significance this has for the place of the Nazi past in German identity. The alternative approach to the Allied bombings, given by social history and memory studies has a broader significance than this. Though carefully, they also function as a critical position in a debate over “German memory”, and like all other participants in the debate, have an implicit idea of how the air war should be seen by the Germans.
Conclusion: The Allied bombings as a German catastrophe

Competing narratives

As one of the major symbols of German suffering, the Allied bombing war left a strong imprint on German society. After 1945, to a much wider extent than is often claimed, the Allied bombings became part of German debates on the Second World War. Contrary to the often proclaimed idea that the memory of the bombings had been taboo in Germany, in both the GDR as well as the Federal Republic the air war became a topic of public and political interest as well as the subject of many popular and academic historical accounts. In both cases this historiography until the 1970s consisted mainly of popular accounts that were written by non-academic authors. To a large extent, East and West German historiography clustered around two competing views on the air war.

The discussions of the Allied bombings reflected a direct competition over the past between East and West German narratives during the Cold War. East German authors integrated the Allied bombing war into the central “antifascist” master narrative of German history and the Second World War. According to this overarching perspective, “Western imperialism” shared basic characteristics with Nazism. Both political systems were forms of imperialism, ruled by “reactionary circles”, which represented capitalist interests of powerful industrialists and made use of similar inhumane methods. Moreover, according to the official East German vision, Britain and the United States had only half heartedly joined an alliance
with the Soviet Union and had left the larger part of the struggle to defeat Hitler to the Red Army. But even before the war ended the Western Allies had already become primarily driven by fear of Soviet influence in Europe and had attempted to frustrate the progress of the Red Army.

The bombing of cities during the Second World War provided a very useful example to support the East German narrative. The massive bombing of civilians seemed to mark an important parallel between the “Anglo-Americans” and the Fascist Germans. Contrary to the “humane” Russians, both Nazi Germany and the Western Allies had conducted the cynical “terror bombings” of innocent civilians. Closely connected to this theoretical starting point was the interpretation that the bombing of Dresden had not been motivated by the will to defeat Nazi Germany through military means, but that bombing this city was an attempt to create chaos in the Soviet sphere of influence, to obstruct the progress of the Red Army, and above all to intimidate the Russians with an immense display of Allied air power. From this view Dresden marked the beginning of the new global conflict between the two Superpowers.

Another level on which the Allied bombings reflected the antifascist master narrative was through ascribing to the bombings a political significance in the present, by suggesting a direct continuity of imperialist aggression and by drawing parallels between the bombing of Dresden, NATO politics and the threat of a future nuclear war. This view on the air war supported the antifascist identity of the GDR in several ways. The implication that “socialism” had never supported area bombing during the Second World War underlined the idea that it was only the imperialist West that threatened the world with a nuclear war and could only be stopped by a strong conglomerate of “peace states”. By drawing parallels
between fascism and Western capitalism and by presenting the German people as a victim of both forces, the GDR was able to externalize the Nazi past, while claiming the legacy of the anti-fascist resistance.

This anti-fascist master narrative was strongly contested by the West German postwar views on history. Here, during the 1950s the concept of totalitarianism to a certain extent served the same purpose of externalizing the Nazi past, by suggesting that the Soviet Union and Nazism shared basic characteristics. In particular, the expulsions from East Germany well fitted the negative image of the Soviet Union and could be exploited for Cold War purposes in the West. But to a certain extent this anti-totalitarian perspective was also reflected in West German accounts of the bombing of Dresden. By ascribing responsibility for the destruction of Dresden to Stalin, or by implying a continuity of suffering for the inhabitants of Dresden, who first faced total destruction and after the war had to endure Soviet occupation, attempts were made to turn the Communist argument around or at least to contest the anti-imperialist claims made by East German propaganda. Moreover, often the Allied bombings were presented as a “warning sign” for a future nuclear war, which was most likely to be started by the Soviet Union.

However, while the “Cold War” conflict therefore played a certain role in the West German historiography of the Allied bombings, it more strongly reflected an inner conflict in the West German process of coming to terms with the Nazi past. Here, two central arguments and story lines can be identified. The first is that of the catastrophe. A view on the air war as a tragic “catastrophe” was represented in West German accounts that focused more on the description of losses and suffering than on historical explanations. The “German catastrophe” emphasized the difficult position of the Germans, who had been terrorized by a criminal regime,
lost a war, and had been laden with immense guilt for crimes “committed in their name”. The bombings were “catastrophic” in the sense that they represented an aspect of the war, which was totally beyond German civilians’ control or influence. Their powerlessness was emphasized by the conclusion that the attempt of the British military leaders to provoke a political uprising by breaking German morale had been a complete failure. The Germans were ruled by an increasingly aggressive dictatorship and could only react with apathy. According to this narrative, the Germans underwent the catastrophe, without being able to change the course of history.

Closely related to this view was the underlying argument of the air war as an Allied war crime. Many of the early West German accounts can be read as “court cases” against the British and American military leaders. These accounts not only described the catastrophe or searched for historical explanation but concentrated on the moral and legal implications of the air war. The criminal character of the Allied bombings was, however, more often only implied, or cloaked by the argumentation that the Allies did not live up to international law, rather than being explicitly labelled as “war crimes”.

It is striking that parallel to the increasing public interest in the Nazi crimes, since the late 1950s many West German historical accounts focus on moral and legal pleas in which the Allied bombings were portrayed as crimes and the German Luftwaffe bombings were, at least in legal terms, exonerated. Here a fundamental distinction between a “clean” Luftwaffe and Wehrmacht as opposed to the Allied bombings as well as to the Nazi leaders and SS was made. A central implication made in these accounts was the idea that Germans had been falsely accused of “collective guilt”. These accounts implied that “neither party” had the
moral position to pass collective judgement on the other. In order to restore normal international relations, it was argued, moral and legal charges should be stopped. The British and Americans should therefore, it was implied, be careful about passing one-sided “victors’ judgement” on the Germans, while seeing their own position only from the perspective of the “just war”. Especially from the late 1950s on, making implicit or explicit comparisons with the Holocaust became an important element in this rhetorical strategy, in which the Allied bombings clearly served to settle scores. Where all the parties were guilty there was no place for one-sided allegations, and where Germans appeared as victims of equally severe crimes, there was no need for them to adopt an identity based on collective guilt. The bombings thus became a central argument in a “counter-narrative” against the narrative of German guilt.

**Historiography of the air war and the question of German guilt**

While the dominant East- and West-German narratives were initially carried mainly by non-academic authors, they also remained dominant in academic historiography after the 1970s, especially in the works of Horst Boog in the Federal Republic and Olaf Groehler in the GDR. Though these historians based their research on a vast study of the archives and differentiated argumentations, which in many ways clearly distinguished them from earlier accounts, they both supported two main lines of argumentation that had become dominant since the 1950s. While Boog continued to argue that the Luftwaffe had been accused of “starting” the “terror bombing war”, Groehler saw the bombing of innocent civilians as an outgrowth of imperialism and tried to point out that the bombing of Dresden had resulted from anti-Soviet motives. This strong continuity illustrates
the power of these earlier narratives and the strong extent to which historical interpretations were related to central identity issues in both the GDR and the Federal Republic. The position of Groehler and Boog illustrates how historical research provided an academic basis and a methodology to consolidate views which had previously been supported only by suggestive arguments and political rhetoric.

Moreover, this continuity with earlier narratives shows that academic historians like Boog and Groehler were not only concerned with a “historical” discourse about establishing facts and causal relations. Though these historians worked in academic institutions and wrote mostly for an academic public, they were nevertheless strongly engaged in a “memory discourse”. They discussed the question as to how these bombings should be remembered and interrogated their political and moral meaning for the present.

The present book shows that a historiography-analysis of the air war tells us more about the relationship between historical interpretations of the air war and the debates on mastering the past and postwar German identity. The historiography and public debates on the Allied bombings can be seen as an example of a historical discussion, in which the central dispute over coming to terms with the Nazi past was fought out. Especially in the Federal Republic, the debate on the Allied bombings cannot be understood outside of the context of a parallel debate on German guilt.

After the 1970s, the public interest in the Allied bombings seemed to fade parallel to a shift towards a more critical view on German history and an increased focus on German responsibility. This resulted in a historical discourse, which centred on the symbolic recognition of German guilt and of the Jews as the main victims group of the Second World War. Caution against “repressing” German
guilt and a fear of offsetting the Holocaust against German suffering, as had been common during the 1950s, made the bombing war a politically charged subject.

This tension seemed to increase, when during the 1980s in German public debates two grand narratives of German history increasingly collided; one that focused on positive traditions in German national history and searched for “normalization” and another, which took the Third Reich as a main reference point and called for a constant process of “working through” the German responsibility for the Holocaust. This conflict, which reached a climax during the Historikerstreit, is vital to understanding the relationship of German historians towards the Allied bombings. While the Allied bombings were largely ignored by the new group of leftwing and liberal historians such as Hans Mommsen and Hans-Ulrich Wehler, they became once again part of the counter-narrative of conservative historians, who saw the increased focus on German guilt and the Holocaust as harmfully one-sided. Ernst Nolte provoked fierce reactions by suggesting a moral equation between the bombings and the Holocaust.

Interestingly, this competition took place not only on the level of public debates on the Holocaust, but also was fought out on the level of professional historiography on the Allied bombings. In particular, military historian Horst Boog railed against the increased dominance of the narrative of German guilt, by repeatedly arguing that for the sake of “political correctness” Germans had either ignored the Allied bombings or ascribed all responsibility to the Luftwaffe and falsely claimed that the Germans had initiated terror bombings against civilians. In this light it is significant that recent statements by Jörg Friedrich and Winfried Sebald, according to which the bombings had been a taboo, were not only incorrect but had long been an important element of a rhetorical strategy argu-
ing that due to a single-minded focus on German guilt the suffering of Germans had been repressed.

But there were also historians working on the bombings who represented another position by criticizing the ways in which East and West German authors had abused the bombings for memory politics and propaganda. In 1977 Götz Bergander’s *Dresden im Luftkrieg* took a critical position towards West German attempts to balance the Nazi crimes with the bombing war and exploit the bombing of Dresden for the cause of rightwing revisionism during the 1950s. But interestingly enough, the fiercest criticism of West German historians who made moral distinctions between the Luftwaffe and the Anglo-Americans, came from GDR historian Olaf Groehler. By accusing West German historians such as Horst Boog of “revanchist motives,” Groehler could integrate the arguments of liberal historians from the Federal Republic into his “anti-fascist” view of the air war. In an attempt to discredit West German military historiography Groehler emphasized that from his perspective, the “German guilt” for the air attacks and the war in general was acknowledged, while his opponents were only seeking to “balance” German guilt.

Therefore, although the Cold War context of their debate had disappeared after 1990, strong continuity persisted especially in the dispute between Boog and Groehler. Groehler could easily adapt to the West German conflict between conservative and liberal historians. While his work after 1990 also included a critique of GDR propaganda and occasionally reflected a hint of self-criticism, his main argumentation against West German attempts to exploit the air war for the rehabilitation of the German Luftwaffe remained topical and easily fitted into a West German liberal discourse on the Second World War. On the other hand, Boog could also integrate his criticisms against “SED chief” Groehler into his more gen-
eral polemic against the West German narrative of German guilt, whose defenders in his eyes were even willing to accept the “communist” propaganda of someone Groehler.

Against the background of this ongoing quarrel, certain parameters for the context of discussing the Allied bombings were certainly changing in the course of the 1990s. In the first place the Allied bombings and especially Dresden provided a potential historical symbol for a shared East-West memory of the Second World War. Secondly, during a series of fierce public debates the participation of “ordinary Germans” and Wehrmacht-soldiers in the Holocaust was widely discussed during the 1990s. Thirdly, the concurrent generational shift, in which the last German wartime generation was past retirement age, sparked a renewed interest in the experiences of normal Germans during the war. In TV documentaries or in documentations of eyewitness reports this generation could be given a final chance to tell their personal stories.

The broad public confrontation with German guilt and the proven political stability of reunified Germany led to a new confidence in German memory, including among leftwing intellectuals. By the early 2000s the expulsions and the Allied bombings were extensively discussed in a broad debate, in which the earlier polarization seemed to have faded. In this new historical climate, intellectuals such as Grass, Sebald and Friedrich, each in their own way, catalyzed a massive discussion and intense public interest in German suffering, in which broad consensus was reached over the need to make issues like the expulsions and the Allied bombings part of German cultural memory. Therefore, many commentators concluded that finally the Germans were able to discuss German suffering beyond a “revanchist discourse” from which the Allied bombings were used to qualify, evade, or “bal-
ance” the Holocaust. The Germans were at last able to discuss their own suffering within a narrative that acknowledged the broader framework of the Second World War and German responsibility for the Holocaust.

Continuities in the German narratives of the Allied bombings

However, the grounds for such a conclusion become less firm when we consider the forms and arguments with which the Allied bombings have been recently discussed in both the public debate as well as in different historical accounts. The present book has shown that, while the polarization and general political sensitivity of the Allied bombings may have diminished, the way this history has been recently narrated and interpreted has not essentially changed. Both in historiography and in the public discussions on the bombings a basic set of conclusions and assumptions prevailed. It can be concluded that, though the discussions on the Allied bombings often reflected many different political positions, there were strong continuities in the way the Allied bombings were narrated.

The parallels are particularly striking when looking at the way these accounts have portrayed and judged the main “perpetrators” of city bombing. Winston Churchill and Arthur Harris appeared as main protagonists, while American military leaders only played a role on the sideline. While some histories emphasize that Churchill had doubts about the morality and effectiveness of city bombing, but was pressured to order the attacks by Harris, others stressed that Harris was merely following orders and pursuing a strategy, which was already commonly accepted before he became chief of Bomber Command in 1942.

Interestingly, also in East German accounts before 1990, in spite of the propagandistic focus on the Americans, Churchill appeared as the main perpetrating
actor, and in this aspect the portrayal resembled West German accounts. On the other hand, in the East Churchill and Harris were also seen as personifications of the anonymous “reactionary circles” that formed the basis of capitalist power-cynicism. In some cases East German historiography even downplayed the role of individuals like Churchill and Harris to emphasize that they were only a small part of the inhumane imperialist system.

After 1990, there was a strong continuity in depicting Churchill and Harris as the persons who were mainly responsible for the mass deaths of German civilians. In Jörg Friedrich’s Der Brand but also in works by Rolf Dieter Müller and Lothar Fritze, Churchill appeared as the main instigator of the Allied bombings. In almost all German historical accounts, with the exception of Bergander’s Dresden im Luftkrieg and a few recent studies that focus on the social history of the Allied bombings, German accounts in both East and West morally denounced the bombing of civilians and explicitly held its main advocates, such as Churchill and Harris, responsible for their consequences.

More disputed was the role of the Luftwaffe as an historical actor. In the Federal Republic, strategic differences between the Allied bombing campaign and the air attacks by the German Luftwaffe were emphasized. By pointing out that the Luftwaffe had used bombings only to support ground actions, a moral distinction was made, leading to different, partly implicit conclusions on the historical and moral status of the Allied bombings. This argumentation summoned an image of a “clean Luftwaffe” which had been wrongly accused of functioning as a criminal instrument of the Nazis.

East German accounts saw the German bombings and the Luftwaffe in a different light. Here, Rotterdam, Coventry and Warsaw were seen as terror attacks
that were equally immoral and had initiated the bombing war against civilians. However, GDR historians argued that this illustrated the extent to which Western Allies had used cruel and immoral methods of warfare similar to those of Hitler’s Germany. Interestingly, however, while making this argument East German accounts of the air war never addressed these German bombings in more than a few lines. While often repeating that the German Luftwaffe started terror bombing of civilians they nevertheless concentrated almost exclusively on the Allied bombings and their victims.

After 1990, both views on the role of the Luftwaffe persisted. On the one hand, often following the work of Olaf Groehler, several accounts show a similar tendency to name Hitler’s Luftwaffe as the instigator of terror bombings, while actually focusing primarily on the Allied bombings. Such a view also became dominant in commemoration practices. On the other hand, military historians like Horst Boog and Rolf Dieter Müller maintained a perspective in which not only the strategic differences between German and British bombings were emphasized but also were connected to a moral distinction between RAF and Luftwaffe. And even in the works of Friedrich and Fritze, who also explicitly denounced the German bombings, the rhetorical argumentation that these German bombings had been “not as bad” and based on different strategic premises, played a significant role in emphasizing the singular victim position of the German civilians.

These different perspectives also had consequences for the temporal and spatial structure of these histories of Allied bombings. The opposing narratives resulted in differences in the way the bombings were placed in time and space. Most East German accounts begin their history of the Allied bombings with short remarks on the Luftwaffe bombings, which imply a causal relationship or at least
make clear that the Fascists started using bombings. Here the Second World War was modelled as a conflict that started as a coalition between Western Allies and the Soviet Union, and ended with a Western betrayal of the Russians. The bombing of Dresden then marked a turning point in Western strategy, in which the “reactionary circles” finally managed to turn the Second World War into a conflict with the Soviet Union. In contrast, West German histories commonly chose the development of the spread of theoretical ideas on area bombing among British military leaders as a beginning, sometimes also reflecting on British strategy during World War I or The Hague Conventions of 1907. The radical distinction between Allied and German bombings led to a strong focus on British military thinking and the first British experiments with area bombings during the 1920s. While these background events also appeared in East German accounts, they were presented as a less important factor in Allied bombing.

In spite of these differences, there remained many parallels in the narratives. Both in East and in West the focus was almost entirely on the effects of bombing in Germany and the planning and conduct by British and American leadership. The accounts largely refrained from placing these events in the wider context of the Second World War. In describing the Allied bombings, both East and West German accounts had in common that they focused on the period after 1942, when bombing to destroy enemy morale became central British policy. This also had consequences for the way the German civilians were addressed. By focusing on the Allied bombings, it was almost exclusively the suffering of Germans that was depicted. While German bombings sometimes were mentioned and even morally denounced, the sufferings of British, Dutch or Polish civilians were largely ignored. The main reference point was that of German suffering, which was often
illustrated with eyewitness reports and vivid descriptions, especially in popular accounts.

A striking parallel between most German accounts of the Allied bombings, both in West and in East, was that the Germans appeared as a collective “double victim” of Nazism and Fascism. They were seen as subjected to a double terror of Allied bombings and repression by the Nazi dictatorship. A similar perspective can be found in Jörg Friedrich’s radical focus on the perspective of the German victims. While lengthy descriptions of horrific details were largely excluded from the professional military historiography of authors like Boog and Groehler, the perspective of the German victims is present in the work of both. Both point to the Germans as the main victims of this form of warfare. The portrayal of Germans as an undifferentiated collective of victims was therefore a central continuity throughout postwar historiography.

Apart from these parallels, many historical arguments were used that show strong continuity with tropes that were already present in Nazi propaganda. East as well as West German books on the bombing of Dresden not only include romantic descriptions of the cultural legacy that was destroyed. But the notion that with the bombing of these German cities a central peace of Europe or the “Abendland” had been erased from history, a propaganda theme introduced under Goebbels’s direction, was continuously present in these accounts. Another continuity in East as well as West German accounts was the way the German civilians were described as a closed community of suffering, which bravely endured the futile attempts of the Allied to break their morale. In their argumentation these accounts show clear continuities of the ideal of a German Volksgemeinschaft, which had been a central element of Nazi propaganda. This continuity was especially striking in the work of
Jörg Friedrich. By entitling chapters “I” and “We”, Friedrich’s book openly identified with the fate of the Germans under the Allied bombings and portrayed them as members of a closed community.

Another continuity can be found in the way the responsibility for city bombing was one-sidedly ascribed to the British and Americans. The trope of “England’s Alleinschuld” had been central to Nazi propaganda and, especially in West German accounts, continued to provide a basic line of argument. This highly influenced the way the bombings were judged morally. In both East and West the Allied bombings were radically denounced as inhumane or criminal acts of warfare.

Interestingly, the strategies to emphasize the moral questionability of the bombings differed in East and West Germany. In the GDR the criminal character of the bombings was explained by the political motive of anti-Communism that lay behind them. In the West authors often concentrated on legal arguments. West German historians wanted to show the immorality of the Allied bombings by pointing at their illegitimacy according to international law. From this point of view they could not only denounce British and American bombings as “war crimes” but also were able to find arguments to portray the German bombings as “military necessities” or as legitimate retaliation.

While East and West German accounts laid different accents in pointing at the immorality of British and American leaders, they shared a common view of the bombings as the main catastrophe of the Second World War. Dresden became an important symbol and in both East and West many attempts were made to emphasize or exaggerate the attack of 13 February 1945 in order to raise its status as a symbol of human suffering. This was often accomplished by drawing historical comparisons. By comparing Dresden with Hiroshima, or by even suggesting
that in Dresden more people had died than after the nuclear attacks on Japanese cities, the suggestion was made that the Germans had suffered more than others from the Second World War. The gross exaggeration of the number of casualties in Dresden by David Irving and West German authors such as Axel Rodenberger have to be seen in this light, as well as the suggestion made by GDR author Wal- 
ter Weidauer that the first atomic bomb had actually been meant for Dresden.

Similarly, different authors such as Max Seydewitz and Max Zimmering in the GDR and Karl Dietrich Erdmann, Hans Rumpf in the Federal Republic drew implicit or explicit comparisons between the Allied bombings and the Holocaust. The idea that the Allied had attempted to “erase” the German people through the deliberate bombing of their cities became an important basis for the attempt to “balance” the Allied bombings against the Holocaust. It is interesting to note that historians and intellectuals from different political starting points were willing to draw parallels between the Allied bombings and the Holocaust. The suggestion that the Holocaust and the Allied bombings shared similarities could lead to different political positions. While especially West-German historians like Erdmann and Rumpf were mainly concerned with avoiding and repressing the issue of Ger- man perpetratorship, others seemed to focus on the air war primarily to criticize the British and American methods of war in current conflicts. The latter position was often represented by intellectuals like Rolf Hochhuth who had contributed to a critical view on the German past and had not wholly avoided painful issues, like the Holocaust.

The suggestion of an essential similarity between Allied bombings and the Holocaust shows that authors like Friedrich shared more with the 1950s histori- ography than the moral denunciation of the Allies. In the view of authors like
Friedrich, the bombings were seen as part of an Allied mentality in which all Germans had been collectively punished for their shared guilt for supporting Nazism. Friedrich implied that this mentality had led to a form of warfare, which sought to annihilate a whole people and its culture. The Allied bombings therefore were presented as a form of genocidal warfare, which bore close resemblance to the Nazi crimes. The notion of German collective guilt had not only led the Allies to an inhumane form of warfare, but had also complicated the process of bringing those responsible for war crimes to justice. Friedrich argues that the unwillingness to acknowledge the Allied war crimes during the Nuremberg Trial had distorted the process of justice so much, that it had also led to a failure in the trials against Germans who were responsible for the Nazi genocide. This illustrates that, while making slightly different arguments, all these implicit or explicit comparisons with the Holocaust in some way contained a critique of the assertion of German collective guilt.

The Allied bombings beyond a German victims discourse?

More recently historians have narrated the Allied bombings in an essentially different way. Social historians such as Ralf Blank and Dietmar Süß emphasize the interrelationship between the Allied bombings and Nazi propaganda and point to the dependence of Germans on their regime. By showing that to a certain degree the persecution and expropriation of minorities was directly related to attempts to compensate Germans for their material losses due to bombings, they unambiguously narrated this history within the context of the Nazi crimes. This has strong consequences for the presentation of the central actors as well as the historical context in which they are placed. The “Germans” now no longer appear as
a collective of innocent civilians but as members of a wartime society. Here, the Germans are portrayed as members of a society that first largely supported and later increasingly lost faith in the Nazi leadership. This approach has shifted the focus from the motives of the British and American generals to the effects and reactions of the bombings on the Germans and their regime. With a focus on the propaganda-apparatus, Goebbels and Nazi institutions were brought into this history as “historical actors”.

Also, these studies have concentrated less on the moral considerations of the Allied leaders. Without exonerating the Allies, their narrative shifts the issue of morality to the relation between the Nazi government and the German population. By showing how Germans adapted to Nazi propaganda and profited from the material compensation by the Nazi government at the expense of Jews and other persecuted groups, the question of morality now directly concerned the German population, who in earlier accounts had appeared as a collective of innocent victims.

Another point in which recent studies have altered earlier narratives, was in the temporal framework from which they regarded this history. By focusing on processes of post-war interpretations and memory, their histories of the Allied bombings do not end in 1945. A focus on memory and reflection on the role of the air war in memory politics in East and West shifted interest from the air war itself to the question what effects the air war had had on the Germans after the war. Such effects were now not only seen in terms of collective suffering and trauma, but also as a starting point for postwar German identity construction. After the pioneering work of Götz Bergander in the late 1970s, such a reflective approach has recently enabled different studies to narrate the story of bombing from the
perspective of its victims, without creating stereotypical images of a community of innocent victims.

By critically reflecting on concepts and interpretations, by differentiating “the Germans” and by pointing to the interrelationship between the German population and its regime, these recent studies have therefore abandoned the “victim’s perspective” in a radical way and offer an alternative narrative to the Allied bombings. This does not only reflect a different methodology but also corresponds to a different position in the German debate on the memory of Nazism. As the critical offensive of authors such as Ralf Blank against the “German victims” discourse indicates, their alternative narrative not only reflects different historical arguments and perspectives but also a different position in the German discourse over memory. These new studies often express an identification with a memory culture that focuses on the recognition of the Nazi crimes rather than on collective German victimhood. Moreover, they share the premise that the responsibility of normal Germans for the Nazi crimes should not be ignored even though they recognize that Germans too had suffered during the war.

In this sense Lorenz’ and Bergers’ conclusions on the recent historiography can be supported up to a certain point. Recently, in the work of various German historians the “victim’s perspective” has been strongly criticized and replaced with a different narrative that broke through earlier stereotypes. However, the idea that such a “victim’s discourse” no longer concerns academic historians since the 1990s has to be nuanced. The continuities of older narrative structures in the views of leftwing historians such as Hans Mommsen or Hans-Ulrich Wehler and in academic military historiography illustrate that the issue is more complex. Though offering at times very nuanced historical perspectives, these historians did not break
with earlier narrative patterns. The works of Rolf Dieter Müller, Olaf Groehler and Horst Boog have often been regarded as differentiated alternatives to authors like David Irving and Jörg Friedrich. The impression has remained dominant that these historians approached the Allied bombings in an essentially different way. But these conclusions fail to recognize the extent to which historical interpretations were intertwined with a discourse over German victimhood. While there are definitely important differences between Friedrich, Müller, Boog, and Groehler, the present book has shown that much more than has been acknowledged until now, they all in some way or the other have written narratives of German victims and Allied perpetrators.

Therefore, while it is important to see the different political, institutional and temporal contexts from which their work originated, the present book has pointed out that their commitment to this narrative of German suffering has led them to share a basic problematic position towards the discussion on German responsibility. In all these works the “German catastrophe” of the Allied bombings to some degree opposes, diminishes or balances “German guilt”. Instead of integrating the Allied bombings into a narrative of German responsibility German historians have done the opposite, either by directly criticizing the “Guilt debate”, by showing that the Germans have suffered as severely as the victims of Nazism, or by portraying them as a collective of victims.

This also indicates the extent to which the Allied bombings continue to touch a sensitive nerve in Germany. The accounts that continue to address the air war from a victim’s perspective and the recent attempts to find an alternative narrative have in common that they are never about interpreting the Allied bombings alone. They also reflect opposing positions within the ongoing struggle of com-
ing to terms with the Nazi past. While the recent debate on German suffering has often been celebrated as a breakthrough in this struggle, this can be seriously doubted. Far more, the present book shows that the balance between the “Jewish catastrophe” and the “German catastrophe” continues to occupy and divide the German historical debate.
Nederlandstalige samenvatting

Een Duitse catastrofe? Duitse historici en de Geallieerde bombardementen, 1945-2010

Het thema van mijn proefschrift is de wijze waarop historici in de DDR, de Bondsrepubliek en het verenigde Duitsland hebben geschreven en gediscussieerd over de Geallieerde bombardementen. Ik heb daarbij gekeken naar zowel wetenschappelijke als populaire geschiedschrijving en analyseer deze werken binnen de context van Duitse academische en publieke debatten over het Nazi verleden. De centrale vraag van mijn boek is op welke wijze deze geschiedschrijving samenhangt met bredere ontwikkelingen in de Duitse omgang met het Nazi verleden en met pogingen vorm te geven aan een Duitse identiteit in de drie verschillende naoorlogse Duitse staten.

In hoofdstuk 1 bespreek ik de vroege West-Duitse historiografie tussen 1945 en 1970. Ik laat hierin zien dat al tijdens de jaren vijftig en zestig de bombardementen een belangrijk symbool voor Duits slachtofferschap werden. Een centrale argumentatie in deze West-Duitse boeken was de redenering dat de Duitse Luftwaffe zich niet had verlaagd tot terreurbombardementen en dat de volledige verantwoordelijkheid en schuld voor de “Bombenkrieg” bij de Geallieerden lag. De Duitsers werden daarbij als belangrijkste slachtoffer van de oorlog gepresenteerd. Dit hoofdstuk laat zien dat in West-Duitsland het debat over de bombardementen in sterke mate werd beïnvloed door de groeiende aandacht voor de Holocaust. Tegen het einde van de jaren vijftig, parallel aan de nieuwe reeks strafprocessen
tegen Nazi misdadigers, nam in West-Duitsland de aandacht voor de Duitse slachtoffers van de bombardementen toe. De bombardementen maakten zo deel uit van een “counter narrative” waarin gepoogd werd te ontkrachten dat Duitsers alleen maar schuldig waren en dat alleen de Joden hadden geleden tijdens de oorlog.

In hoofdstuk 2 bespreek ik de debatten tussen Oost- en West-Duitse auteurs over het bombardement op Dresden binnen de context van de Koude Oorlog. Na de oorlog ontwikkelden zich twee elkaar beconcurrerende interpretaties van het bombardement op Dresden. DDR historici zagen de aanval als een uiting van het “imperialisme” en associeerden de luchtaanvallen tegen Nazi Duitsland direct met de naoorlogse politiek van de Amerikanen en de NAVO. Hier werd het idee dominant dat de Geallieerden Dresden hadden vernietigd om Stalin te intimideren en om chaos te veroorzaken in de Sovjet zone. Tegelijkertijd bestond in de BRD ook de neiging de bombardementen te associëren met de Koude Oorlog. Zo gaven verschillende conservatieve Duitse historici Stalin de schuld van het bombardement op Dresden en beweerden zij dat de Engelsen en Amerikanen pas na Russische druk zouden zijn overgegaan tot het bombarderen van deze stad. Toch laat dit hoofdstuk zien dat er ook een aantal belangrijke parallellen bestonden tussen Oost- en West-Duitse interpretaties. In beide staten werd de aanval op Dresden gezien als een militair zinloze vernietiging van een “onschuldige” stad. Ook was het bombardement in beide staten sterk onderhevig aan mythevorming die tot doel had de symbolische omvang van het bombardement te vergroten.

In hoofdstuk 3 en 4 ga ik aan de hand van Horst Boog en Olaf Groehler, twee historici die het historische debat sterk hebben gedomineerd, in op de professionalisering van de geschiedschrijving in Oost- en West-Duitsland vanaf de jaren zeventig. In hoofdstuk 3 laat ik aan de hand van de West-Duitse militair histo-
ricus Horst Boog zien dat deze weliswaar een wetenschappelijke en gedifferen-
tieerde geschiedschrijving van de bombardementen bedreef, maar dat hij daar-
naast opvallend genoeg grotendeels de belangrijkste vroegere argumentatieli-
nen en narratieve structuren volgde. In zijn centrale argumentatie bleef hij de
Luftwaffe verdedigen als een “zuivere krijgsmacht”. Bovendien is opvallend dat hij
de bombardementen nog steeds als argument aanvoerde, om te laten zien dat de
“schuldvraag” te eenzijdig bij de Duitsers werd neergelegd. Hierbij moet Boog’s
argumentatie geplaatst worden binnen de context van de toenemende confron-
tatie tussen conservatieve en links-liberale historici over de omgang met het Nazi
verleden, die tot een climax kwam tijdens de Historikerstreit.

In hoofdstuk 4 analyseer ik de professionalisering van de geschiedschrijving
in de DDR aan de hand van het werk van Olaf Groehler. Ik bespreek de positie van
Groehler binnen de Oost-Duitse academische wereld en zijn rol als prominente
DDR-wetenschapper en Stasi-informant. Daarnaast analyseer ik zijn perspectief op
de bombardementen in relatie tot het officiële geschiedbeeld dat in de jaren vijftig
vorm had gekregen. Terwijl Groehler zich hierover soms opvallend kritisch uitliet
en net als Boog in een aantal opzichten een veel gedifferentieerder beeld van de
bombardementen gaf laat ik zien dat ook hij in een aantal belangrijke opzichten
eerdere argumentatielijnen bleef volgen. Dresden werd in zijn werk nog steeds als
slachtoffer van een anticommunistische politiek en als begin van de Koude Oorlog
gezien. Dit hoofdstuk bespreekt bovendien de debatten tussen Groehler en Boog
en laat zien dat hierin Koude Oorlogsretoriek sterk domineerde.

Hoofdstuk 5 bespreekt tenslotte de recente discussie rondom het boek Der
Brand van Jörg Friedrich. Zowel in zijn impliciete verwijzingen naar de Holocaust
als in zijn radicale focus op Duitse slachtoffers sloot Friedrich nauw aan bij een
narratief dat de West-Duitse werken uit de jaren vijftig en zestig domineerde. Om zijn positie echter goed te begrijpen moet worden erkend dat Friedrich zich, in tegenstelling conservatieve historici uit de jaren vijftig, intensief met Duits da-
derschap heeft beziggehouden. Desondanks zit er ook in het werk van Friedrich een sterke neiging de bombardementen moreel gelijkwaardig te maken aan de Holocaust en zo de Duitsers als collectief slachtoffer van zowel de oorlog als van hun eigen regime af te schilderen. In het tweede deel van dit hoofdstuk ga ik in op de hernieuwde aandacht voor de Geallieerde bombardementen na 1990. Ik verklaar deze heropleving door een aantal veranderingen in de Duitse herin-
neringcultuur, zoals de Duitse eenwording, de recente generatiewisseling en de afgenomen “historische gevoeligheid” van linkse historici en intellectuelen. Tot slot bespreek dit hoofdstuk de vraag in hoeverre het nieuwe debat over Duits slachtofferschap ook door de geschiedwetenschap gedragen wordt en in hoe-
verre Duitse historici recent een alternatief perspectief op de Geallieerde bombar-
dementen hebben gegeven. Hierin laat ik zien dat, in tegenstelling tot wat vaak wordt aangenomen, ook recent veel wetenschappelijke Duitse historici niet met dit “slachtofferperspectief” hebben gebroken. Slechts een aantal historici heeft het perspectief wel verlegd, door te kijken naar de effecten van de bombardementen op de Duitse oorlogssamenleving en naar de verschillende pogingen tijdens en na de oorlog om de bombardementen voor politieke doelen te gebruiken. De bom-
bardementen worden door hen geïntegreerd in een narratief waarin de betrok-
kenheid van gewone Duitsers bij hun regime centraal staat en niet hun rol als passieve slachtoffers.

In mijn proefschrift trek ik twee centrale conclusies. Ten eerste laat ik zien dat er veel meer over de bombardementen werd geschreven en gediscussieerd
dan vaak is aangenomen. Dit valt te verklaren uit de mate waarin interpretaties
van de luchtbombardementen in alle Duitse staten gerelateerd konden worden
aan actuele politieke en identiteitskwesties en konden worden ingepast binnen
verschillende “master narratives” van de Duitse geschiedenis. Voor 1990 weer-
spiegelden de discussies in sterke mate een ideologische strijd tussen Oost-
en West-Duitsland. Na de Duitse eenwording reflecteren zij een zoektocht naar een
nieuwe gesamtdeutsche identiteit en een afgenomen wantrouwen tegenover de
Duitse omgang met het Nazi verleden. Hoewel er duidelijke verschillen zijn tus-
sen de interpretaties van historici uit de BRD, de DDR en het verenigde Duitsland,
is mijn tweede conclusie dat er tegelijkertijd sprake is geweest van een sterke con-
tinuïteit in de manier waarop zij over de bombardementen schreven. Ondanks
interpretatieve verschillen deelden zij een perspectief waarin de Tweede Wereld-
oorlog in eerste plaats als een catastrofe voor Duitsland werd gezien en niet zozeer
als een catastrofe voor de slachtoffers van het Derde Rijk. Dit uitte zich in het ver-
waarlozen van de historische omstandigheden waaronder Engeland en Amerika
overgingen tot het bombarderen van Duitsland en het handhaven van allerlei ste-
reotype denkbeelden over de bombardementen, die vaak gedeeltelijk zijn te her-
leiden tot Nazi propaganda.

De bombardementen werden steeds afgeschilderd als militair zinloze po-
gingen onschuldige Duitsers collectief uit te moorden. Ze werden op eenzijdige
wijze veroordeeld als een oorlogsmisdaad en de Duitsers komen steeds naar voren
als een collectief van onschuldige slachtoffers, die verder niets met Hitler of het
Nazisme te maken hebben. Ook werd de bommenoorlog vaak impliciet of expliciet
vergeleken met de Holocaust om zo te laten zien dat de Duitsers net zo hadden
geleden als de slachtoffers van het Nazi regime. Alleen in enkele recente studies,
waarin de nadruk op sociaalhistorische en herinneringsculturele vragen is komen te liggen, wordt van dit slachtofferperspectief werkelijk afstand genomen.
Abbreviations

ABBAW    Archiv der Berlin-Brandenburgischen Akademie der Wissenschaften
Barch/MA  Bundesarchiv/Militärarchiv
BdV       Bund der Vertriebenen
DDK       Dokumente deutscher Kriegsschäden
DRZW      Das Deutsche Reich und der Zweite Weltkrieg
IfZ       Institut für Zeitgeschichte
IM        Inoffizieller Mitarbeiter
MfS       Ministerium für Staatssicherheit (Stasi)
MGFA      Militärgeschichtliches Forschungsamt
NSV       Nationalsozialistische Volkswohlfart
RAF       Royal Air Force
SBZ       Sovietische Besatzungszone
SD        Sicherheitsdienst
SMA       Soviet Military Administration
USSBS     United States Strategic Bombing Survey
ZIG       Zentralinstitut für Geschichte
ZVF       Zentralverband der Fliegergeschädigten, Evakuierten und Währungsgeschädigten
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Summary

A German catastrophe? German historians and the Allied bombings, 1945-2010

My dissertation explores the question, how historians in the GDR, the Federal Republic and the United Germany have interpreted and debated the Allied bombings. I analyze academic as well as popular historiography in the context of German academic and public debates on the Nazi past. My central question concerns how this historiography relates to broader developments in the German process of coming to terms with the Nazi past and with attempts to construct German identity in the three post-war German states.

Chapter 1 discusses the early West German historiography between 1945 and 1970. In this chapter I point out that during the 1950s and 60's the bombings became an important symbol of German suffering and victimhood. A central argument in these West German works was that the German Luftwaffe had refrained from “terror bombing” and that hence the whole responsibility and guilt for the horrors of the “bombing war” should be ascribed to the Allies. In this vision, the Germans were presented as the main victims of the war. This Chapter shows that in West Germany, the debate on Allied bombing was affected to a strong degree by the growing public interest in the Holocaust. By the end of the 1950’s, parallel to a new series of court cases against Nazi perpetrators, in West Germany the interest in German victims of the war increased. The Allied bombings became part of a “counter narrative”, in which the idea was contested that all Germans were
guilty and that only the Jews had suffered during the war.

In Chapter 2 I discuss the debates between East and West German authors on the bombing of Dresden. After the war, two competing interpretations of the bombing of Dresden became dominant among German historians. East German authors saw the attack as the result of “Western imperialism” and drew direct parallels between the Allied air attacks against the Third Reich and American and NATO foreign politics after the war. Here, the idea became dominant that the Allies had attacked Dresden with the aim of intimidating Stalin and creating chaos in the Soviet Zone. At the same time, in the Federal Republic authors too saw parallels between the Second World War bombing and the Cold War. Some conservative historians suggested that the bombing of Dresden had followed a request by Stalin. However, this chapter shows that there were also many parallels between East and West German interpretations. In both states the attack on Dresden was seen as a militarily senseless destruction of an “innocent” city. Also in both cases the attack was subject to many myths, with the main purpose of exaggerating the dimensions and severity of the destruction.

In Chapter 3 and 4 I discuss the process of professionalization of East and West German historiography since the 1970’s, by analyzing the work of Horst Boog and Olaf Groehler, who have dominated the historical debate. In Chapter 3 I show by the example of West German military historian Horst Boog that though he approached the air war from an academic and differentiated perspective, his central argument defended the Luftwaffe as a “clean” air force. What is also striking is that, like the earlier works, Boog’s too pointed at the Allied bombings to criticize a one-sided emphasis on German guilt, which he felt had become dominant and was obstructing an open and objective view of the past. This chapter
moreover argues that Boog’s arguments have to be understood in the context of an increasing confrontation between conservative and liberal historians on the way Germany should remember and come to terms with the Nazi past, which reached its climax during the Historikerstreit.

In Chapter 4 I analyze the GDR historiography, using the example of Olaf Groehler. I discuss Groehler’s position within the East German academic climate as well as his role as a prominent historian and Stasi-informer. I analyze his perspective on the Allied bombings in relation to the “official” GDR interpretations. While Groehler sometimes was remarkably critical of earlier East German works and, like Boog, developed a much more differentiated perspective on the bombings, in many ways Groehler too drew on earlier patterns of interpretation. In his work Dresden still was seen as a victim of anticommunist politics and as the actual beginning of the Cold War. This Chapter also analyzes the discussions between Boog and Groehler and points out that in their debates Cold War rhetoric played a prominent role.

Chapter 5 discusses the recent debates that followed the publication of Jörg Friedrich’s Der Brand. I argue that both in his implicit equations between the bombings and the Holocaust as well as in his radical focus on German suffering Friedrich could draw on a narrative that had dominated 1950´s historiography in the Federal Republic. However, it is also striking that, unlike the conservative authors of the 1950´s, Friedrich had intensively studied the history of Nazi crimes. Nevertheless, his work is characterized by a strong tendency to suggest a moral similarity between the Holocaust and the bombings and to portray the Germans as a collective of victims, of the war and of their regime. In the second part of this chapter, I address the renewed public interest in the Allied bombings since 1990.
I argue that this can be explained by various changes in German memory culture, including German reunification, the recent shift of generations and the decreased historical sensitivity among leftwing historians and intellectuals. Finally, this chapter explores, to what degree this new debate on German suffering relates to recent developments in academic historiography. I argue that, contrary to what is often suggested, only a few academic historians have abandoned a “victim’s perspective”. Only a small group of historians have shifted perspective, by concentrating on the effects of bombing on German war society and on the different attempts during and after the war to exploit the bombings for propaganda and the construction of political identity. They have integrated the bombings into a narrative which focuses on the relationship of “ordinary Germans” with their regime instead of one that portrays them as mere passive victims of the war.

In my dissertation I draw two central conclusions. First, I show that the Allied bombings were discussed and became the subject of historical accounts to a much wider degree than is often assumed. This can be explained by the relative ease with which the Allied bombings could be related to current political and identity issues, and could be integrated into the different master narratives of German history. Before 1990 the German debates on Allied bombing to a strong degree reflected the ideological conflict between East and West Germany. After the reunification they reflected the search for a new united German identity as well as a slowly decreasing distrust in the German nation.

My second conclusion is that there is strong continuity in the way German historians have written about the air attacks on German cities. In spite of the interpretative differences historians in the Federal Republic, the GDR, and reunified Germany shared a perspective in which the Second World War in the first
place was regarded as a catastrophe for Germany and not so much as a catastrophe for the victims of Nazi persecution. This resulted in the neglecting of the circumstances under which England and the United States had come to conduct a large-scale bombing campaign against Germany and also led to the persistence of several stereotypical images, which often originated in Nazi propaganda. The bombings were continuously depicted as militarily senseless attempts to eradicate innocent Germans. These works denounce the bombings as immoral war crimes and portray the Germans as a collective of innocence. In several cases the bombing war was implicitly or explicitly compared to the Holocaust, to show that Germans had suffered as greatly as the victims of the Nazi crimes. Only in a few recent studies, which focus on social history and memory culture, has such a victim’s perspective been truly abandoned.