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.

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Bas von Benda-Beckmann,
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