A German catastrophe? German historians and the Allied bombings, 1945-2010
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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 Unter-
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 Mathias 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